



● **TRADE NEGOTIATIONS**

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman

Whether it is UAE, Australia, EFTA area, UK now and with the US and European Union negotiations are going on and should come to a conclusion sooner. So emphasis is being made for getting more free trade agreements signed

● **MONETARY POLICY**

SEEKING ORAL APPROVAL RISKS POLICY CREDIBILITY AND UNDERMINES TRANSPARENCY

Should MPC vote on stance?

THE LAST TWO monetary policy statements, in April and June, reflect some critical fine-tuning under the new chairperson, Sanjay Malhotra. One, the bullet on monetary policy stance under the sub-head “Monetary Policy Decisions” has been dropped. The words “the decision” make a comeback in the text, replacing its plural “these decisions” as seen in the February statement. The new-look statement places this in the last section, “Rationale for Monetary Policy Decisions”, although it isn’t part of the “Decisions”. Two, there’s no mention if the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) members voted on the stance. The MPC meeting’s minutes revealed the stance was no more part of the monetary policy “resolution”, and therefore, of the operational framework. Accordingly, members did not vote on “stance” although they continued “extensive discussion” and submitted views in writing.

These changes are substantive and convey the impression that “stance” has been relegated to a lower pedestal as a lever to achieve the medium-term inflation target.

Chairperson’s discretion

What is the legal basis for such critical changes? The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Act, 1934, does not mention “stance” anywhere. Section 45ZI (10) requires MPC members to vote for a proposed “resolution”, 45ZI (11) to specify reasons. Though the Act does not specify what “resolution” should include, 45ZB (3) mandates the MPC to determine the policy rate, implying this certainly be a part. It is the rules, Section 5(i)d of the RBI Monetary Policy Committee and Monetary Policy Process Regulations, 2016, that state the resolution shall include the policy repo rate, and at the discretion of chairperson, any other monetary policy measures including those relating to the operating framework of monetary policy.

Evolution

The role and significance of “stance” was not so clear in October 2016 when

RENU KOHLI

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flexible inflation targeting (FIT) began. In the very first statement, the sentence on “stance” was upfront in para 1, immediately after the bullet on repo rate, stating: “The decision (referring to repo rate) of the MPC is consistent with an accommodative stance...”. Para 10 presented voting outcome — all six members voted in favour of the monetary policy “decision”, the singularity most likely referring to rate action and not including “stance”. However, the meeting’s minutes clearly mentioned that “stance” was part of the resolution on which members voted; curiously, none recorded it in their written statement. It was in the December 2016 and February 2017 MPC minutes that we first traced Michael Patra recording his vote for rate and stance, both.

A forensic scan of MPC policy statements and minutes suggests it was rather slow in recognising that transparency required members to clearly state that policy rate and stance were both part of the operating framework with voting rights on each. We found a clear sentence — para 20, MPC minutes, February 2017 (2nd meeting) stating “the committee decided to change the stance from accommodative to neutral”. The subsequent, April 2017 (3rd meeting) MPC statement, para 21, stated the “MPC decided to keep the policy rate unchanged while persevering with a neutral stance”.

Evidently, the MPC had a say in both rate and stance. While sentences about the MPC’s decision on “stance” became a regular feature, ambiguity in language about voting persisted. For instance, the June

2017 disagreement of member Ravindra Dholakia with a consensus view wasn’t clear if he voted against the policy rate decision or stance or both!

Full clarity came in the October 2018 statement which showed separate voting on policy rate and stance. Further refinement in the February 2019 statement transitioned to an independent bullet on “stance” like the repo rate; correspondingly, “the decision” was substituted by plural “these decisions” for both. In October 2024, para 1 featured under “Monetary Policy Decisions”, displaying complete clarity in thinking and communication.

Winning credibility

Thus, it is evident that “stance” was viewed as integral to the “operating framework” from the very beginning and the first chairperson, Urjit Patel, used his discretionary power to make it part of the “resolution” on which all members voted. In fact, voting outcomes on the “stance” from beginning are succinctly documented by the RBI in Reviewing Monetary Policy Framework, 2020-21 (Table III.2). His successor, Shaktikanta Das, continued that practice.

Unfortunately, we do not know what has triggered the current changes. Under the IT framework, both short-term policy rate and “forward guidance” combine to deliver the maximum punch. In fact, many central bankers have been increasingly leaning towards “forward guidance” to influence future expectations — the insight is that economic decision-taking depends not only on the cur-

rent short-term rate but also on future rate expectations. Forward guidance is therefore subjected to extensive market scrutiny; emerging literature makes finer distinctions if it’s Delphic or Odyssean! The monetary policy stance embedded in policy statements is the most critical piece of forward guidance. Members take extreme care in crafting the statement on stance, which embodies the committee’s views on macroeconomic developments and its policy orientation, viewed as superior to market assessments. Removing that statement from the policy resolution and framing short-term repo rate as the only decision-making tool in the operating framework to achieve the medium-term inflation target may not be a fair understanding of how it operates.

Central banks work hard to gain credibility and win confidence among markets, businesses, and individuals to be able to influence their decisions. The architects of IT framework have formulated this in terms of an independent institution and a multi-member decision-making process with transparency and effective communication. Imagine a situation where more than two members voted in favour of repo rate decision but expressed strong reservations on policy stance. Even though not a majority, their views are critical from a market perspective. Market expectations begin to form immediately following the governor’s address; those might change after the minutes are made public. The situation could get more complicated if these two hypothetical members expressed their views publicly in between.

Conclusion

Denying voting rights to members on policy stance and not making it public would be like walking back from a successful, eight-year learning process. It carries the risk of policy credibility and undermining transparency. The chairperson should consider if there is merit in restoring the previous format. More importantly, all stakeholders must debate if RBI rules should be amended to put voting on stance on a firmer footing as the second review of FIT framework is due in a year.

Ceasefire or not, the world is swimming in oil

AFTER THE WAR, the hangover. While hysteria about the closure of the Strait of Hormuz gripped the oil market for the last few days, the reality couldn’t be more different: a wave of Persian Gulf crude was forming. Now, the swell is heading into a global oil market that’s already oversupplied — hence Brent crude trading below \$70 a barrel on Tuesday.

The Northern hemisphere summer, which provides a seasonal lift to demand, is the last obstacle before the glut becomes plainly obvious. Oil prices are heading down — quite a lot. If anything, the Israel-Iran “12-Day War” has worsened the supply/demand imbalance even further — not just for the rest of 2025, but into 2026 too. On the demand side, geopolitical chaos is bad for business — let alone tourism. Petroleum consumption growth, already quite anaemic, is set to slow further, particularly in West Asia. But the biggest change comes from the supply side: The market finds itself swimming in oil.

Ironically, one of the countries pumping more than a month ago is Iran. Hard data is difficult to come by, as Iran does its best to obfuscate its petroleum exports. Still, available satellite photos and other shipping data suggest that Iranian production will reach a fresh seven-year high above 3.5 million barrels a day this month, slightly up from May. That bears repeating: Iranian oil production is up, not down, despite nearly two weeks of Israeli and American bombing.

Reading between the lines, President Donald Trump has made two things clear: He doesn’t want oil prices above \$70 a barrel, and he still thinks Washington and Tehran can sit down to talk. So it’s very unlikely that the White House will tighten oil sanctions on Iran, an issue where Trump is very similar to former President Joe Biden: Lots of talk, very little action.

Across the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates are all pumping more than a month ago. True, a large chunk of the increase was expected after the OPEC+ cartel agreed to hike production quotas. Still, early shipping data suggests exports are rising a tad more than expected, particularly from Saudi Arabia.

Petro-Logistics, an oil tanker-tracking firm used by many commodity trading houses and hedge funds, estimates that Saudi Arabia will supply the market with 9.6 million barrels a day of crude in June, the highest level in two years. The firm measures the flow of barrels into the market, offsetting stockpiling moves, rather than wellhead output (the latter is OPEC’s preferred measure).

“Looking at the first half of the month, there has been a large rush of oil flowing out of the Persian Gulf region,” Petro-Logistics head Daniel Gerbert tells me. Data covering the first couple of weeks of June show strong exports from Iraq and the UAE, two countries that typically cheat on their OPEC+ output levels. The risk here is more, not less.

And then there’s US shale output. In May, the American oil industry was on the ropes, with crude approaching \$55 a barrel. At those prices, US oil production was set to start a gentle decline in the second half of the year and fall further in 2026. The recent conflict that drove crude to a peak of \$78.40 a barrel handed US shale producers an unexpected opportunity to lock-in forward prices, helping them to keep drilling higher than otherwise. Anecdotal, I hear from Wall Street oil bankers that their trading desks saw some of the largest shale hedging in years.

With shale, small price shifts matter a lot: The difference between booming production and declining output is measured in a fistful of dollars, perhaps as little as \$10 to \$20 a barrel. At \$50, many firms are staring at financial calamity and production is in free-fall; \$55 is survivable; \$60 isn’t great, but money still flows and output holds; at \$65, everyone is back to more drilling; and at \$70 and above, the industry is printing money and output is soaring.

In the oil market, history is a good guide. Look at what happened after the first Gulf War in 1990-91, or the second one in 2003. Amid the carnage, oil keeps flowing — often in greater quantities. When the conflict ends, the flow increases further. The Iran-Israel conflict isn’t over yet. The ceasefire is, at best, tentative. And other supply disruptions may change the outlook. But, right now the world has more oil than it needs.



DHANENDRA KUMAR

Chairman, Competition Advisory Services India LLP

AS INDIA RAPIDLY climbs the global economic ladder, overtaking Japan to fourth position, its ambitious goal of attaining 500 gigawatt (Gw) renewable energy (RE) capacity by 2030 stands as a critical pillar in its economic growth as well as climate leadership. However, goals in the renewable sector face significant challenges. A case in point is the looming expiry of the Inter-State Transmission System (ISTS) charge waiver. We have already arrived at the point when the waiver expires. There are uncertainties in financial projections, jeopardising nearly ₹5 lakh crore in investments and potentially stalling India’s rapid clean energy ascendance.

The ISTS is the national high-voltage transmission network that facilitates the movement of electricity across states, crucial for integrating power generated from large-scale RE projects. Traditionally, using this network incurs ISTS charges — fees for transmission and losses during transfer ultimately borne by the consumer.

Recognising the need to accelerate clean energy development, the ministry of new and renewable energy introduced waivers exempting eligible RE projects — commissioned before June 30, 2025 — from these charges. This policy has helped in making renewable power competitive. It enables commercial and industrial consumers to procure green energy via open access or operate captive plants more economically while strengthening

Make in India by lowering the entry barrier for manufacturers seeking affordable and clean power.

However, the phased expiry of this waiver on June 30 poses hurdles to the sector’s growth. July onwards, developers will start paying 25% of ISTS charges, increasing each year by 25%. Beginning July 2028, these charges will have to be paid by developers in their entirety.

The industry is already facing formidable challenges. Critical projects have been stalled by prolonged litigation raising environmental concerns, specifically related to the conservation of the Great Indian Bustard. Approval delays from bodies like the Central Electricity Authority and connectivity operationalisation delays from the Central Transmission Utility of India have compounded issues. Numerous RE developers who applied for connectivity in early 2023 received operationalisation dates beyond the ISTS waiver deadline, jeopardising their projects’ economic feasibility.

Without the waiver, the sector faces stark roadblocks — tariffs may surge, affecting RE competitiveness. This could hamper India’s industrial decarbonisation and compromise the global competitiveness of its exports, particularly in sectors

where energy costs and carbon intensity are critical factors.

There could be several practical solutions to this problem. The foremost is a milestone-based ISTS waiver extension beyond June. This approach may include projects that have achieved specific development milestones — such as applying for connectivity by June 2023, financial closure by June 2024, acquisition of at least half the required land, and confirmed equipment orders — and may automatically qualify for an extended waiver period until June 2026.

Further, the government may consider automatic extensions for projects delayed by transmission issues or force majeure events without necessitating cumbersome case-by-case evaluations. A clearly defined extension policy may streamline approvals and enhance investor confidence, thereby reducing bureaucratic overhead.

Additionally, extending ISTS waivers to hybrid RE projects integrating battery energy storage systems could bolster grid stability and utilisation, promoting dispatchable and firm renewable energy. This hybridisation may be useful to address intermittency concerns and ensure robust grid integration of renewable sources.

It is also important that the incremen-

tal financial impact of these proposed extensions on the national transmission pool is modest. According to recent industry analysis, the cost of extending the waiver is projected to be merely 4 paise per unit, which translates to only 0.61% of the total cost of power supply. This modest investment could unlock substantial economic and environmental dividends — as it would facilitate the addition of approximately 40 Gw of RE capacity over the next two years — further strengthening India’s global leadership in RE adoption.

The government has previously acknowledged the need for further waiving this charge for projects delayed by force majeure or transmission provider issues. Extending the ISTS waiver with clear, milestone-based criteria would help attain India’s non-fossil fuel capacity target by 2030. It would help safeguard committed investments, ensure continued RE growth, and align with India’s ambitious energy and climate goals. A timely government intervention to address these systemic delays will help sustain investor confidence and enable quicker financial closures.

India has already achieved worldwide respect for its stellar achievements in solar, wind, hydrogen, and hybrid projects as well as for marching ahead with sustained momentum. It is important that all the hurdles are effectively taken care of so that the momentum is not lost or slowed and the ambitious 2030 targets are met.

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Karnataka, A.P. CMs to launch block in Tirumala

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

In a significant move, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu are set to jointly inaugurate a newly developed VIP block, a *kalyani*, and a temple on the Karnataka Choultry premises on Tirumala in September.

The event marks a major step towards improving facilities for devotees from Karnataka visiting the hill shrine of Lord Venkateswara in Tirumala, according to Muzrai Minister Ramalinga Reddy. The Karnataka government has taken the initiative to renovate and expand the Karnataka choultrys on Tirumala, which were reportedly neglected for several years.

Airspace open but flight disruption to West Asian countries continues

Many foreign carriers continue to be cautious, cancelling, rescheduling, or re-routing many services to avoid regions considered risky; 18 flights from Kochi, eight from Thiruvananthapuram, and 16 from Bengaluru were cancelled

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Though West Asian countries reopened their airspaces on Tuesday morning after a night-long shutdown in anticipation of fresh attacks by Iran on U.S. airbases, the flight services to and from the country, especially to and from Kerala, to various West Asian destinations continued to be impacted by the cascading effect of the disruption of flight services during an entire night.

For instance, Air India Express has been operating around 900 flights to 13 destinations in West Asia with peak traffic at night.



A scene at Calicut International Airport on Monday following the cancellation of flights to various Gulf destinations. SAKER HUSSAIN

Grounding of the entire services at night will have a consequential impact on other services as these aircraft are redeployed on other routes.

However, Air India Express, the airline that operates the highest number of flights to West Asian destinations from the country, especially from Kerala,

said in a statement on Tuesday that it was gradually “resuming its operations on the Delhi-Muscat, Mumbai-Muscat, Kozhikode-Muscat, Kozhikode-Riyadh, and Jaipur-Jeddah routes”.

Heavy congestion
Although airspaces were reopened, many foreign carriers continued to be cautious, cancelling, rescheduling, or re-routing many services to avoid areas considered risky. Eighteen flights from Kochi were cancelled on Monday night, while eight flights to West Asia from Thiruvananthapuram were cancelled.

Though the easing of

airspace restrictions brought a temporary relief to the passengers, it caused a sharp rise in airfares to India.

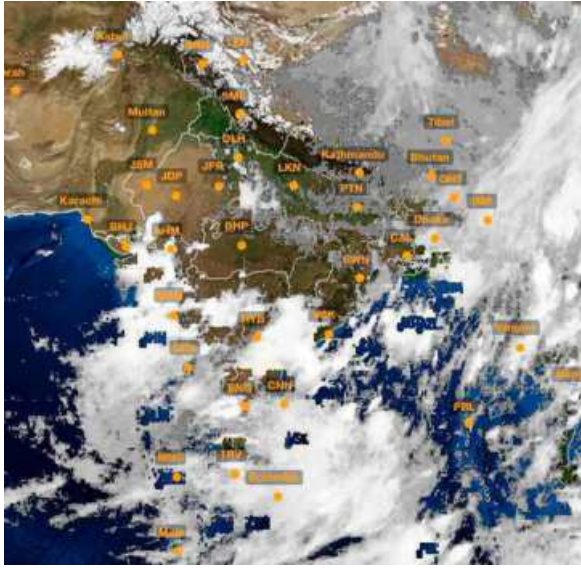
16 flights cancelled
Due to the closure of certain airspaces in West Asia, several flights have been cancelled from the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) in Bengaluru.

The cancelled flights include six arrivals and 10 departures. Some of these flights were scheduled to arrive and depart on July 23 and 24.

In addition to the cancellations, five international flights were diverted to Bengaluru. (With Bengaluru inputs)

WEATHERWATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 19.00 HRS)

Forecast for Wednesday: Heavy/very heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Sikkim, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Konkarn & Goa, Karnataka and Kerala

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	1	34.8	27.0	Kozhikode	12	33.0	24.4
Ahmedabad	2	30.9	26.0	Kurnool	—	33.5	25.9
Aizawl	2	32.4	20.8	Lucknow	—	37.5	27.6
Allahabad	—	34.8	27.4	Madurai	—	38.0	26.1
Bangaluru	—	27.2	21.0	Mangaluru	10.8	29.6	23.3
Bhopal	0.8	30.0	24.6	Mumbai	42	30.9	23.4
Bhubaneswar	0.1	32.6	25.8	Mysuru	5	29.2	21.2
Chandigarh	10	32.8	27.2	New Delhi	4	36.3	28.2
Chennai	—	36.8	28.0	Patna	—	34.3	28.0
Coimbatore	—	32.5	23.0	Port Blair	53.4	29.5	22.8
Dehradun	3	32.0	24.6	Puducherry	—	36.0	26.2
Gangtok	9	21.3	18.4	Pune	9	31.5	22.2
Goa	25	29.3	24.5	Raipur	1.6	29.9	25.0
Guwahati	14	33.5	26.1	Ranchi	45	30.4	22.8
Hubballi	—	27.0	23.0	Shillong	2	25.2	18.5
Hyderabad	—	31.2	24.0	Shimla	—	26.2	21.6
Imphal	0.4	28.7	24.0	Srinagar	—	35.5	22.4
Jaipur	46	33.9	25.7	Thiruvananthapuram	—	31.8	26.0
Kochi	0.4	30.4	25.8	Vijayawada	3	31.4	25.8
Kohima	—	25.2	19.4	Visakhapatnam	8	29.3	25.2
Kolkata	—	34.5	27.4				

Pollutants in the air you are breathing						Yesterday
CITY	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	10	63	43	37	63	Good
Bangaluru	12	33	17	42	153	Good
Chennai	15	24	24	60	88	Good
Delhi	39	55	38	90	159	Good
Hyderabad	6	8	84	88	93	Good
Kolkata	10	40	24	32	32	Good
Lucknow	7	40	62	53	88	Good
Mumbai	37	4	4	76	92	Good
Pune	—	56	73	37	61	Good
Visakhapatnam	10	70	38	61	89	Good

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Air Quality Code: Poor Moderate Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Teach lessons on Emergency in schools: Arlekar

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar has advocated for the inclusion of lessons on the Emergency on the school curriculum.

He was speaking at the launch of two books, *Democracy Enchained: Nation Disgraced and Shah Commission: Echoes from a Buried Report*, authored by Goa Governor P.S. Sreedharan Pillai here on Tuesday.

In a thinly veiled barb at General Education Minister V. Sivankutty, Mr. Arle-



(left) Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar (left) with Goan counterpart P.S. Sreedharan Pillai at an event to launch two of the latter's books on Tuesday. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

kar said it was up to the government to decide whether to include content on the constitutional role

of Governors on the syllabus. He, however, stressed the need to prioritise the history of Emergency.

“Let the next generation know what happened [during the Emergency]. Let them understand who destroyed democracy and were responsible for the atrocities in the country. All such adversities should be recorded on our curriculum,” he said.

Andhra Pradesh Governor S. Abdul Nazeer said: “The Emergency is a watershed moment that not only tested the resilience of India’s democratic institutions, but also left indelible scars on the collective memory of its citizens”.

Siddaramaiah seeks Murmu’s nod for Bills

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday met President Draupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan to discuss the Bills awaiting the President’s assent, and requested her to clear them. “Seven Bills have not received the assent, and I came here to request the passage of the Bills. The President informed me that the Bills

are not with her, but in the departments concerned. I have requested her to get the Bills from the departments and clear them,” the Chief Minister told presspersons in Delhi, after the meeting.

The Bills awaiting Presidential assent include significant legislative measures spanning education, mining taxation, public procurement transparency, and administrative reforms.

Grim reminder



Posters featuring old photos exhibited at an event to mark 50 years of the 1975 Emergency organised by Citizens for Social Justice, at the Town Hall in Bengaluru on Tuesday. K. MURALI KUMAR

15th-century lamp discovered in Karnataka temple

The Hindu Bureau
MANGALURU

An antique lamp, believed to be from the 15th century, with very rare Shaiva and Vaishnavait sculpture carvings, has been discovered in the Anantapadmanabha temple at Perdurur in the Udupi district of Karnataka.

“It is a rare blend of Shiva and Vishnu, and reflects the daily rituals of both the cults in the temple,” said T. Murugeshi, a retired Associate Professor of ancient history and archaeology, Mulki Sunder Ram Shetty College, Shirva, Udupi.

The lamp was donated by Basavannaras Banga to the temple in 1456 CE. This is mentioned in a stone inscription in the inner *prakara* of the temple. “With this epigraphical refer-



The antique lamp with rare Shaiva and Vaishnavait sculptures found at the Anantapadmanabha temple in Udupi. The other side of the lamp shows Brahma holding a sacred book.

rence, it is very clear that the lamp belongs to the 15th century,” the historian said on Tuesday.

“This single piece of lamp has two faces, and has narrative sculptures of a *Puranic* story. On the first

face, Lord Shiva is seen in a dancing pose as Nataraja with four hands. On his left is a man beating a drum. To the drummer’s left is Parvati seated on a bull, and Ganapati on his vehicle (rat). On the right side

of Nataraja, the Bringi playing tala is seen. Khadga Ravana seated on a woman (Goddess Mari) is also seen. On his right, Kumara is seated on a peacock,” the historian said.

“This depiction very clearly narrates the story of the *Pralaya Tandava* (destructive dance) of Lord Shiva,” Mr. Murugeshi said.

“On the second face of the lamp, from the right side, Brahma is shown holding a sacred book in his left hand, and his right hand is in ‘*abhaya mudra*’. Next is Indra holding the ‘*vajra*’ in his left hand. But the content of his right hand is unclear. At the centre, Anantapadmanabha is standing with four hands. Very interestingly, he holds *Uddarane* (spoon) and *shankha* (conch). On his left, Agni holds fire in his

right hand, and Varuna holds conch in his left hand,” Mr. Murugeshi pointed out.

Different headgear
“All five figures are seen in ‘*Samabhang*’ pose and have different headgear. It narrates that the gods, out of fear (because of the destructive dance of Lord Shiva), went to Vaikunta, the abode of Narayana, and prayed for the protection of the three worlds. Lord Anantapadmanabha, the protector of the three worlds, makes Lord Shiva calm. At the centre of the lamp’s round base, Garuda is depicted in a standing pose. Behind, Lord Shiva is seen seated in *Anjalimudra* in a calm and peaceful posture and prays to Lord Anantapadmanabha,” he said.

File affidavit on steps to curb black magic, sorcery: Kerala HC

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

With the State government stating that it was not enacting any legislation to curb black magic, the Kerala High Court on Tuesday asked whether it endorsed the practice of black magic and sorcery. It directed the Home Secretary to file an affidavit within three weeks in this regard, in a public interest litigation petition filed by the Kerala Yukthi Vadhi Sangam, an organisation leading campaigns against black magic, witchcraft, sorcery, and other social evils.

It sought a court directive in the nature of recom-

mendation, suggestion, judicial advice or a reminder call to the government and other respondents, pointing out the urgent need to enact a statute like the ones passed in Maharashtra and in Karnataka to curb such practices.

In an affidavit, a Deputy Secretary of Home said the government had proposed a Bill - The Kerala Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices, Sorcery and Black Magic Bill, 2022 - based on a report of the Law Reforms Commission. But after deliberations, the Council of Ministers decided on July 2023 not to proceed with the Bill.

Telangana govt. to bring in AI to speed up industrial clearances

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The Telangana government is in the process of incorporating Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools into its famed Telangana Industrial Project Approval and Self-Certification System (TG-iPASS), the industrial approval system that in the 10 years since introduction has been instrumental in helping attract multi-million dollar investments to the State, while serving as a model for others.

Industries and IT Minister D. Sridhar Babu announced the decision to integrate AI into the TG-iPASS during an interaction with a delegation of French business representatives that met him at the Secretariat in Hyderabad on Tuesday. The AI integration is to enhance transparency and speed in clearances, he said, without elaborating further, as per a press release from the Minister’s office.

The State government statistics show that as many as 27,592 projects involving an investment of ₹3,02,330.96 crore were approved under TG-iPASS from the time of launch in 2014-15. More than 1.89 lakh jobs are to be generated by the approved projects. The approval system was one of the earliest and important policy decisions of the previous BRS government.

The latest announcement on integrating AI into the system assumes significance in the backdrop of the Congress government’s emphasis on transforming the State into a hub for emerging technologies.



Nuclear spectre

Israeli and U.S. actions against Iran amount to nuclear brinkmanship

After a 12-day intense missile barrage and air attacks following Israel’s illegal aerial attacks on Iran, the two countries finally announced a ceasefire on Tuesday. Ostensibly conducted as a “pre-emptive” strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities, the Israeli attacks graduated into a full-fledged war that also involved U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear installations. These attacks, in blithely ignoring the dangers of radioactive leakage, and their subsequent responses, point to the stark nature of a fragile international order now threatened by escalating nuclear risks from West Asia to Ukraine and even the Indian subcontinent. The attacks on Iran might have damaged its nuclear installations and, in particular, its uranium enrichment capabilities. Yet, this naked aggression was against a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and a country that had willingly subjected its facilities to international scrutiny. Iran had also signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with the P5+1 (nuclear-armed states plus Germany) to ensure that its nuclear capabilities remained peaceful, only for it to be rendered meaningless after the U.S. withdrew from it during President Donald Trump’s first term. These attacks now create a new dynamic, wherein Iran is compelled to seek nuclear weapons by withdrawing from its commitments – its parliament is now mulling a bill to exit the NPT – and use them as a deterrent. Meanwhile, any step Iran takes to do so could be used to justify further aggression by Israel and the U.S., thereby rejecting international laws and the NPT’s nonproliferation norm.

Israel’s hypocrisy is stark. It remains a non-signatory to the NPT and refuses any oversight of its undeclared, but known, arsenal. This raises the possibility that it values nuclear weapons not for deterrence but for their destructive potential. U.S. protection emboldens it to pursue destructive policies in Gaza and illegal wars in West Asia. Combined with the Russian threat to use nuclear weapons to deter conventional aggression by NATO following its Ukraine invasion, these actions reveal how the renewed “competition among the great powers” and their cynical understanding of deterrence are dismantling global stability. The idea of nuclear disarmament is in tatters as the nuclear-weapon states continue to expand and modernise their arsenals, while non-proliferation is under threat as other countries turn to nuclear weapons to safeguard themselves. Without a renewed diplomatic impetus to re-establish international norms on conflict, a stronger push for disarmament among all nuclear-armed states, and a firm commitment to uphold the NPT, the world risks sliding into a new era of nuclear brinkmanship that could prove more dangerous than the Cold War’s darkest moments.

Woman at the helm

The new IOC president will have to navigate the labyrinth of world sports

The first African and the first woman head of the largest, most powerful sporting organisation on the planet, Kirsty Coventry, 41, broke new ground in more ways than one when she formally took charge of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on Monday. Also the youngest president since Pierre de Coubertin, the founding father of the modern Olympic Games, and hand-picked by outgoing IOC president Thomas Bach, Kirsty was largely seen as a symbol of continuity with Bach, now IOC honorary president for life, remaining the power centre. But in the last three months since her election, the handover period, those working with her at the IOC headquarters in Lausanne shared the belief that she was her own person. While there is likely to be continuity in some areas, Kirsty’s experiences, as a white woman athlete in racially tense Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe and a Minister in Emmerson Mnangagwa’s cabinet, indicate that she is likely to be a lot more consensual and humane when compared to the strict Bach. It means that she is unlikely to rush into decisions on complex issues be it protecting female athletes, transgenders in women’s sports, the scourge of doping, the relevance of the Olympic movement, attracting new sponsors and maintaining a balance between traditional competitive sports and experimenting to bring in new audiences, something that has not always worked, as evident with breakdancing in Paris.

Off the field, it will be an eventful eight years for one of Africa’s most decorated Olympians. There will be big decisions to make including the possible return of Russia to the Olympic fold. In the run-up to the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles, she will have to deal with U.S. President Donald Trump a lot more. The political uncertainties and global conflicts will force her to do a lot more than administering only world sports. The Russia-Ukraine war and growing hostilities in West Asia could have a bearing on the hosting rights for the 2036 Olympics, something that also brings Indian interests into the equation. On Monday, IOC member Nita Ambani was among the closest allies of Kirsty during and after the formal ceremony. A two-day closed-door session with IOC members to exchange ideas and opinions will be crucial to gauge initial impressions. The political situation, in the immediate context, may also have a bearing on the possible bids by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, two countries with deeper pockets than any and with growing interest to host the Games. With little experience in navigating the complex administrative labyrinth of world sports, Kirsty would be hoping to make a splash with her dive into the deep end.

West Asia has been reset with the bombing of Iran by Israel and the United States. It has been done with the tacit or open approval of almost all countries in the region and beyond. The Europeans have been their usual contradictory noisy self, but made no difference to what is unfolding in West Asia. Even Russia and China, which signed, with much fanfare, Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreements with Iran in January 2025 and March 2021 respectively, were silent spectators. It is not that all these countries were helpless. They made a conscious decision not to interfere when Iran and its proxies are being dismantled in the region.

The reality now

Now with the so-called Iranian nuclear threat being rendered ineffective, West Asia is faced with a sole dominant nuclear power – Israel. The region has 40,000 American troops stationed on its soil in addition to numerous air and sea assets. They will make sure that there is no more military challenge to Israel. West Asia will now live with this reality.

Initially, the Gulf and other countries of West Asia feared, probably rightly, Iran and its proxies as much as the Israelis. The Iranian strategic and military depth in the region, when seen through the prism of its political ideology, made it the predominant threat in the region. In some ways, the presence of an aggressive Iran made the Gulf countries soft pedal, and even make compromises on many other issues which the region has been plagued with, including Palestine. They needed Israel and the U.S. to balance their vulnerability *vis-à-vis* Iran, which only encouraged Israel to go all the way out to dismantle the Iranian proxies, both state and non-state actors, in Lebanon, Syria and Gaza. The threat has receded except perhaps for the Houthis in Yemen and the militias in Iraq. In the meantime, the Gulf countries have been busy building bridges with the U.S. administration and waiting to operationalise Abraham Accords, which normalised their relations with Israel. They have made U.S. President Donald Trump happy by doling out goodies. But, with the cutting down of Iran to size in West Asia, do they relish the prospect of an Israel without any checks? Probably not. Can they do something at least now?

Iran has hit back. Its missiles have targeted U.S. military bases in Qatar – the biggest U.S. base in West Asia with 10,000 personnel, and in Iraq. Iran claimed proportional retaliation in that the number of missiles used was equal to the number of bombs the U.S. used to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities. This represented a dangerous



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While the U.S.’s announcement of a ceasefire between Israel and Iran is a surprising voice of reason, for the rest of the world, what matters is only ‘de-escalation’

escalation, violating the territorial integrity of one of its own “brotherly” countries, Qatar, and with the situation threatening to spiral out of control. The retaliation was not entirely unexpected.

For Iran’s leadership, it is an existential crisis. For the Supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the leadership, surrendering or keeping quiet in the face of these attacks are not options if they must survive politically.

They know that the end game is regime change to dismantle their theological foundation and political ideology – an ideology which threatens everyone in the region. To that extent, the war with Iran is still a work-in-progress for Israel and the U.S. They will not stop until they do a “Syria” on Iran. But there is no alternate “regime” waiting to take their place. Consequently, for their own good, the Gulf states need to step up now to prevent an Iraq- or a Libya-like collapse, which will destabilise everyone in the region. Destabilising regimes in the region has only given a fillip to Islamic fundamentalism and to terrorist organisations such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda.

As one spat ends another crisis begins

The dramatic announcement by the U.S. of an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Iran is a surprising voice of reason, at a time when reason has become the biggest casualty in West Asia. After retaliation for the U.S. bombing and proving to the world – and more importantly to its people – that it will not be cowed down, the ceasefire call gives Iran a way out to back down. Let us not forget that Israel too has been hit hard though the western media has played it down. The fact that Iran was ready to hit American bases in the Gulf would have weighed on the U.S. to pressure Israel to stop.

It is also a wakeup call for the Gulf leadership that they are not immune. Hopefully, this should stop Iran from making good on other threats such as closing the Strait of Hormuz or exiting the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The focus shifts back to the nuclear deal, where both the U.S. and Iran may well be in a mood to find a solution. It is time for the Gulf states to support this process, even if it is late, to save the region from further conflagration.

While this spat sputters to an end, the next crisis in West Asia is in the making. With the long-cherished dream of Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu realised under Mr. Trump – to take out Iran’s nuclear programme – his domestic political fortunes have been revived dramatically. There are hardly any obstacles now for him to realise his “Eretz Israel” dream – the promised land from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean Sea. This is the New Middle East

The need for gender equity in urban bureaucracy

India is in the midst of a profound urban transformation. By 2050, over 800 million people, about half the population, will live in cities, making India the largest driver of global urban growth. As cities expand spatially, economically and demographically, they are rewriting the social contract of a modern India and shaping the future of its democracy and development.

In the last three decades, progressive constitutional reforms have advanced gender equity. The 73rd and 74th Amendments mandate 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Governments (ULGs), further strengthened to 50% by 17 States and a Union Territory. Today, women comprise over 46% of local elected representatives (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2024), as a rising presence of mayors and councillors.

However, the bureaucratic apparatus that implements their decisions remains overwhelmingly male. While women’s representation in grass-root politics has increased, administrative cadres (city managers, planners, engineers, police) exhibit a stark imbalance, limiting the ability of cities to respond equitably to all citizens. As we invest in highways, metros, and smart cities, we overlook a foundational aspect of inclusive development – gender equity in bureaucracy.

The bureaucratic gender gap

Despite more women entering the civil services, the urban administrative architecture remains male-dominated. As of 2022, women constituted just 20% of the Indian Administrative Service (IndiaSpend-2022), with even lower representation in urban planning, municipal engineering and transport authorities. In policing, only 11.7% of the national force are women (Bureau of Police Research and Development-2023), and often confined to desk roles.

This gap is cause for concern. In cities, the engagement of women is different. They rely more on public transport, make multi-stop journeys for work and caregiving, and depend on neighbourhood-level infrastructure. An Institute



Karthik Seshan

is Senior Manager, Policy and Insights, Janaagraha

In India, while women’s representation in grass-roots politics has increased, administrative cadres tell a different story

for Transportation and Development Policy and Safetipin study found that 84% of women in Delhi and Mumbai used public or shared transport; it was 63% for men. Yet, urban planning prioritises mega-projects over safe, accessible, neighbourhood-level mobility. A 2019 Safetipin audit across 50 cities found over 60% of public spaces were poorly lit. With few women in policing, community safety initiatives often fail to resonate with women.

This underrepresentation is not superficial; it affects outcomes. Women officials bring perspectives shaped by lived realities. Studies by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations and UN Women show that they prioritise water, health and safety, and improve public trust in law enforcement through empathetic enforcement. Gender-sensitive design requires gender-diverse institutions.

Missed opportunity in gender budgeting

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), which integrates gender considerations into public finance, is a promising but underutilised tool in India’s urban governance. Introduced globally in the 1990s, GRB recognises that budgets are not neutral and can reinforce inequities if left unchecked.

India adopted a Gender Budget Statement in 2005-06, with Delhi, Tamil Nadu and Kerala leading efforts. Delhi has funded women-only buses and public lighting; Tamil Nadu applied GRB across 64 departments in 2022-23, and Kerala embedded gender goals through its People’s Plan Campaign. Yet, studies by UN-Women and the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy show that most such efforts suffer from weak monitoring and limited institutional capacities, especially in smaller cities. For many ULGs, GRB remains tokenistic, overlooking essentials such as pedestrian safety or childcare in urban planning.

In contrast, countries such as the Philippines mandate 5% of local budgets for gender programmes; Rwanda integrates GRB into national planning with oversight bodies; Uganda mandates gender equity certificates for fund approvals; Mexico ties GRB to results-based

map which Mr. Netanyahu waved before the UN General Assembly to 193-member states – a map without Gaza or the West Bank. Israeli plans to annex them very soon and certainly before the U.S. presidential elections in 2026. If his main ultra-right coalition ministerial colleagues Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich are to be believed, and there is no reason why they should not be, this annexation will happen this year. All state and non-state actors, which can potentially oppose the move, have been defeated or chastised. The U.S. is also in sync with Mr. Netanyahu in his ambitions. The question will then boil down to these: After its annexation of Palestinian territories, will Israel continue to be an apartheid state by choice to preserve its Jewishness, where the Palestinians will not enjoy equal citizenship and remain second class citizens? Or it will become a genuine democracy by giving the Palestinians equal rights as its Jewish citizens. History indicates that it will be the first.

While the opposition to this annexation should come from countries within the region, the Gulf leadership has almost given up pushing Israel for a Palestinian state or even stopping the Gaza war as the price to pay for regional stability and integration with Israel and the outside world, their noisy protestations within and outside the UN notwithstanding. However, if they think that peace and security will be restored by annexing Palestinian territories or even status quo of occupation retained (56,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, those displaced, face daily threats, starvation and displacement, while people in the West Bank are driven out of their homes to make way for Jewish settlers), they may be forced to rethink their strategy.

India’s stand

Expectedly, India has neither made pronouncements on the Israeli preemptive strikes on Iran nor taken an active role – just as it has not in other wars elsewhere. Israel was one of few countries to stand by India during Operation Sindoor. However, India’s joint initiatives with Iran, including Chabahar port connectivity, are equally important. India’s stakes in the region are high and it is doing all it can to minimise the impact. India has, tongue in cheek, called for a “de-escalation”, giving the same advice to warring parties which it received during Operation Sindoor from many parts of the world, asking India and Pakistan to de-escalate. It was a case of equating the aggressor and the aggressed. It matters no more to the world, whether one is right or wrong or whether international law or territorial integrity have been violated, as long as the warring sides “de-escalate”.

budgeting; and South Africa pilots participatory planning to anchor GRB in lived realities. These are not just fiscal reforms but also a reimagining of citizen-centric governance in cities.

Building inclusive cities requires moving beyond political quotas to ensure women’s presence in bureaucracy. This demands systemic reforms in recruitment, retention and promotion across administrative and technical roles. Affirmative action, through quotas and scholarships in planning and engineering, is key to dismantling structural barriers.

Globally, countries as varied as Rwanda, Brazil, and South Korea show the impact of representation. Rwanda boosted maternal health and education spending; Brazil prioritised sanitation and primary health care; South Korea’s gender impact assessments reshaped transit and public spaces and Tunisia’s parity laws gave women more technical roles, improving focus on safety and health. The Philippines uses gender-tagged budgeting to fund gender-based violence shelters and childcare. Gender-balanced bureaucracies are not about fairness alone. They are essential for building safer, equitable, responsive cities.

The cities we deserve

As India aspires to become a \$5 trillion economy, its cities must also aspire to be more than economic growth engines. They must become spaces of inclusion and equity. Gender must be mainstreamed into planning and implementation through mandatory audits, participatory budgeting, and linked evaluation. GRB should be institutionalised across ULGs, supported by targeted capacity-building.

Representation must also translate into agency, and help dismantle glass ceilings. Local gender equity councils and models such as Kudumbashree offer templates, especially for small and transitioning cities. Women are already reshaping governance as elected leaders. They must now shape how cities are planned, serviced and governed. When cities reflect women’s lived experiences, they work better for all. To build cities for women, we must start by building cities with women.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stop and ponder

The conflict in West Asia highlights the urgent need for global diplomacy over destructive warfare. While a ceasefire brings temporary relief, the damage, both human and geopolitical, is deep. World leaders must prioritise dialogue, not destruction, and avoid

using nuclear threats. The United Nations and powerful nations should take stronger and neutral steps to prevent future escalations.

Arpita Uplana,
Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh

Junior colleges

There is an urgent need for

the reintroduction of junior colleges (classes 11 and 12) in Chennai as a part of educational reforms in Tamil Nadu. With increasing pressure on students to excel in competitive examinations such as the JEE and NEET, the current higher secondary school system fails to offer the

specialised focus necessary for students to thrive in their respective fields. In Maharashtra and Telangana, the junior college system has proven successful in allowing students to specialise early in their chosen stream. The current model in Tamil Nadu, which integrates both

general schooling and higher secondary education in a single system, limits students’ ability to focus on subjects most relevant to their academic careers. The Tamil Nadu government already has a strong educational foundation and a robust schooling system. However,

to compete at the national and international levels, it is essential to empower students with the right tools for success.

Vivek M. Jain,
Chennai

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

When counsel is questioned

On June 12, the legal community in India was jolted by an extraordinary move. The Enforcement Directorate (ED), while investigating the issue of ESOPs (employee stock ownership plans) to the former chairperson of Religare, summoned senior advocate Arvind Datar, to answer questions about an opinion he gave to Care Health Insurance. When this drew strong protests from the legal fraternity, the ED withdrew it. About a week later, it summoned Pratap Venugopal, another senior advocate. This raises pressing questions about the professional autonomy of legal counsel: can a lawyer be summoned merely for giving advice, without any allegation of collusion?

The core legal issue
Even incorrect legal advice cannot justify summoning an advocate unless there is prima facie evidence of conspiracy. This is not merely about courtesy; it is foundational to the rule of law. Under the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), 2023, which replaced the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, communications between legal advisers and their clients are privileged. Section 132 of the BSA protects advocates from being compelled to disclose confidential communications except with the express consent of the client. In this case, there has been no suggestion, even obliquely, of any inducement or involvement of the senior advocate in the ESOPs issue. Issuing a summons then is not only unwarranted but a misuse of statutory powers. The right to counsel is hollow if lawyers can be dragged into investigations merely for having advised a client. The chilling effect is obvious: few will offer candid advice, especially on sensitive matters. The Bar Council of India's Rules under the Advocates Act, 1961, say advocates must advise in accordance with the law, without fear or favour. The privilege protecting this function is not



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personal indulgence; it safeguards the administration of justice. The summons, even if swiftly retracted, reveal growing unease within the legal fraternity about the creeping encroachment of executive agencies into domains that must remain insulated from investigative whim. At stake is not simply the dignity of particular lawyers, but the institutional equilibrium between the Bar, the bench, and the executive. In a constitutional democracy, the independence of the legal profession is not merely aspirational; it is structural. Advocates have a duty both to court and to clients. Summoning advocates who have rendered advice, without any allegation of fraud or complicity, seriously undermines that independence. The strongest rebukes came from the legal fraternity. Bar associations saw this not as an isolated procedural misstep, but as a threat to the integrity of the profession. Today, it is a senior advocate in a corporate context. Tomorrow, it could be a criminal defence lawyer being asked why he advised silence. Courts have consistently held that advocates must be protected from harassment for discharging professional duties. Wrong legal advice is not evidence of culpability. In the absence of specific statutory override, investigative agencies must respect the boundary between legal advice and culpable conduct. Those who serve the law should never be made to fear it. Yet, the present trend portends just that. If the act of rendering legal advice, particularly in commercial, regulatory, or politically sensitive contexts, invites investigative scrutiny, the deterrent effect on candid legal counsel will be profound. At one level, the damage is psychological: it sows doubt about whether lawyers can safely advise on matters involving statutory discretion or executive action. At another, it encourages self-censorship, deterring independent counsel from cases

The right to counsel is hollow if lawyers can be dragged into investigations merely for having advised a client

where that advice may later be questioned not in court, but by an investigative agency. This has consequences for corporate governance, criminal defence, constitutional challenges, and public interest litigation. Over time, the class of advocates willing to act without deference to political or prosecutorial power will shrink. That will weaken not just the Bar, but the rule of law itself. What would remain is a profession that is either silent or pliant. *That* is not a Bar worthy of a constitutional democracy.

Call for restraint and reform
This episode compels a systemic reassertion of the boundaries between legal counsel and executive investigation, especially under coercive statutes such as the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002. There is an urgent need for judicial clarification – possibly through a declaratory ruling – affirming that lawyers cannot be summoned merely for professional advice, without evidence of unlawful complicity. Such a ruling must reaffirm what is implicit in the constitutional architecture: that legal counsel is protected expression and its downstream use does not make the adviser an accomplice. Bar Councils too must act. They must assert the Bar's privileges and engage with investigative agencies institutionally to prevent recurrence. Silence will likely be read as acquiescence. Parliament may consider statutory reinforcement of advocate-client privilege, recognising that a lawyer's role is not inherently suspect, even when misused by a client. Without this, every opinion on a controversial matter may be under the shadow of future suspicion. The ED may have misread the law. But its decision to withdraw the summons after an outcry revealed that it may still choose to test the limits of professional tolerance. The legal community must draw a line – clearly, constitutionally, unhesitatingly.

The troubled waters of Godavari

The Centre would do well to be unbiased while dealing with inter-State disputes

STATE OF PLAY

B. Chandrasekhar
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A fresh row has erupted between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh over the Polavaram-Banakacherla Link Project. The project, which will divert 200 tmc ft of Godavari water to the Krishna and Penna basins, aims to provide drinking and irrigation water to the drought-hit Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. The Andhra Pradesh government has already submitted the pre-feasibility report on the project to the Central Water Commission (CWC). The CWC has now asked the State to now furnish a detailed project report (DPR). In addition, the Centre has offered to fund 50% of the total cost of the project, which is an estimated ₹80,000 crore, as part of the interlinking of rivers; the remaining will be financed through borrowing beyond the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) limits. This has upset Telangana as the Centre had reduced the State's borrowing limits under the FRBM Act citing the State's off-budget borrowings to complete the Kaleshwaram project on time. Both the Congress, which is in power in Telangana, and the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), which is in the Opposition, believe that the project violates the State's riparian rights regarding Godavari waters as well as the provisions of Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014. But the two parties are also busy blaming each other for "allowing" Andhra Pradesh to plan the project. The other significant Opposition party in the State – the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – has remained

largely silent. This is possibly because the BJP government at the Centre has the support of the Telugu Desam Party, the ruling party of Andhra Pradesh. This, the Telangana government believes, has given the Andhra Pradesh government the advantage of getting things done with quick approvals from the Centre. Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and Minister for Irrigation N. Uttam Kumar Reddy squarely blamed the previous BRS government for Andhra Pradesh's decision to take up the Godavari diversion project. They cited the first apex council meeting of September 21, 2016, as evidence. That was when the then Chief Minister, K. Chandrasekhar Rao, had stated that 3,000 tmc ft of Godavari water discharges into the sea on average annually and could instead be utilised if there was an "understanding" between the two States. The BRS objected to this argument saying Mr. Rao had also "raised objections over the diversion of water from the Godavari to the Krishna without prior consultation of Telangana" during the same apex council meeting. Former Minister for Irrigation, T. Harish Rao, said that the Congress is deliberately misleading the people. He alleged that Andhra Pradesh was conspiring to divert Godavari waters to claim rights on it in the future by seeking re-allocation of water by the Goda-

vari Water Disputes Tribunal. He termed the Congress government's "soft approach" to the project as a "mortgaging of Telangana's water rights" and said that this was "Mr. Revanth Reddy's 'gurudakshina' to his political mentor N. Chandrababu Naidu". Mr. Rao said that just as the late Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy had diverted Krishna waters from Srisailem to the non-basin (Penna) areas by expanding the Pothireddy-padu Head Regulator, now Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu was diverting Godavari waters at the cost of Telangana's riparian rights. Mr. Naidu emphasised that the project is essential. Arguing that the Godavari has ample surplus water, he asked why Telangana should object to the use of water that was anyway flowing into the sea. The BRS in turn demanded to know why the Andhra Pradesh government had objected to the Kaleshwaram project if ample water was indeed available in the Godavari. The President of the Telangana Retired Engineers' Association, M. Shyamprasad Reddy, suggested that the Centre carry out the appraisal of the Polavaram-Banakacherla Link Project only after protecting the rights of the people of Telangana by giving permissions/clearances/approvals to all the ongoing and contemplated projects in the Godavari basin. The former chief engineer also suggested that the Centre additionally allocate more than 200 tmc ft of water in the Krishna basin in lieu of the diversion of Godavari water to other basins. Water-sharing is a sensitive issue and is linked to the economy and regional sentiments. The Centre would do well to be as unbiased as possible when dealing with inter-State water disputes.

Two billion people don't have safe drinking water

For billions, this can mean hours spent collecting water. For almost a million, it means dying from disease

DATA POINT

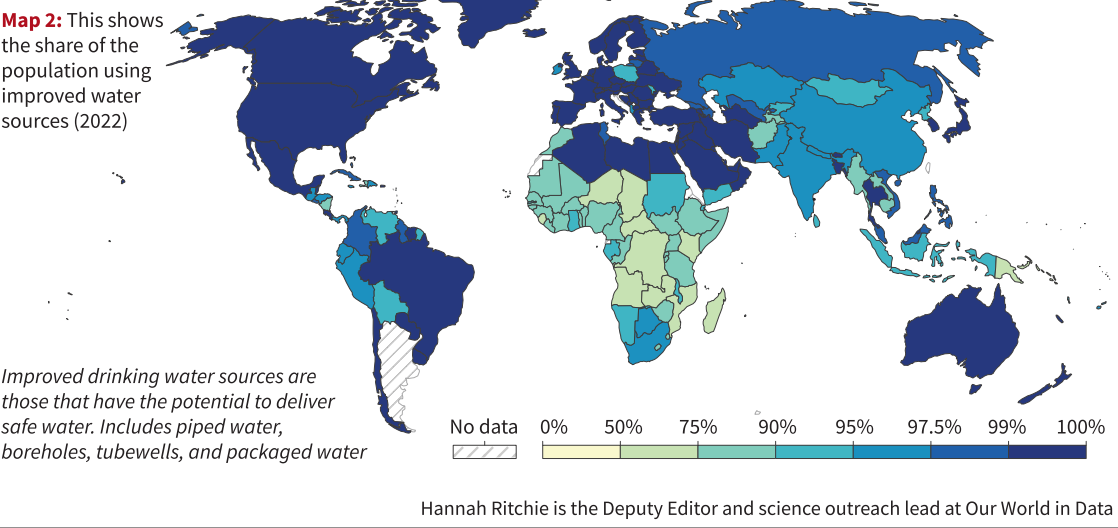
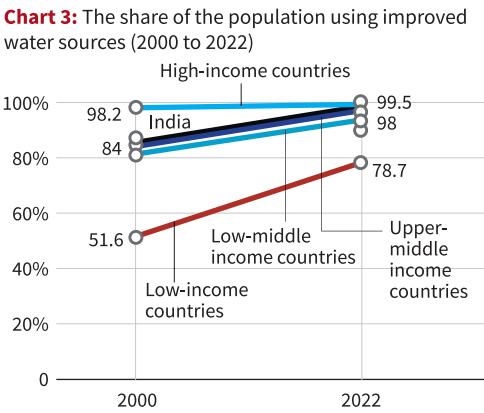
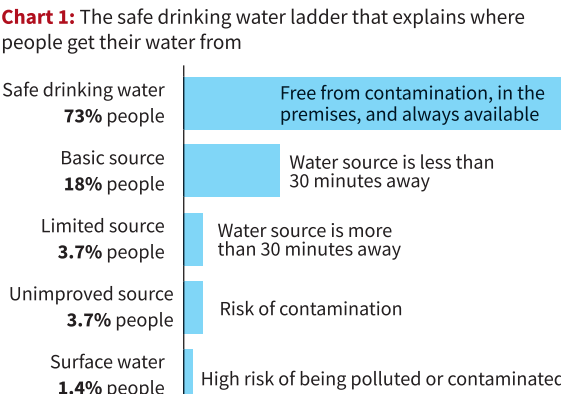
Hannah Ritchie

In the time it would take me to write the next sentence, I could get up, walk to the kitchen, and pour myself a glass of clean water. I've never had to worry about whether that water would make me sick. Almost six billion other people in the world share this reality. They have safe drinking water in their homes. That still leaves two billion people without. If people don't have safe water, what are they drinking? Before we get into it, it is important to understand how levels of drinking water services are defined and how many people fall on each 'rung' of the ladder. This is summarised in **Chart 1**. For someone to have 'safe drinking water', their water source needs to meet three criteria: it needs to be free from contamination, located at home, and available whenever needed. Again, this is the reality for almost six billion people. So, what are the other two billion drinking? If you had asked me in the past, I might have guessed that they were collecting water from streams or lakes. The world was binary: you either had safe piped water or were collecting it from a river. But that is not the reality: only around 156 million people get their water this way (1.4% of the global population). Around three-quarters of the two billion people do have access to a piped water source or protected well that is probably safe to drink. But it is either not located in their home, is not always available, or there is no guarantee it is completely contamination-free. That usually means they must travel to get there. 'Safe drinking water' became the main indicator of progress on clean water only in 2017. Before that, the focus was on the number of people who had access to an

'improved water source'. An improved water source can potentially deliver safe water: it is a protected pipe, spring, borehole, or other system that probably delivers safe water. The problem is that it doesn't guarantee the water is safe at the point of consumption. Imagine you collect a bucket of water from a pipe an hour from home. It might be safe when you collect it, but once you have trekked back and left it sitting in the heat for the rest of the day, there is no guarantee that it is free of pathogens when you drink it the next morning. That is the key point here. 95% of the world uses an improved water supply. As **Map 2** shows, the majority in every country does, even in the poorest countries. Many countries have rapidly increased this share in the last few decades. In **Chart 3**, you can see the change in the share of the population with improved water across countries income-wise. Countries can quickly increase access to a (probably) clean piped, spring, or borehole source. The biggest challenge is getting those pipes into each individual household and making sure that the source is completely contamination-free. This often means expanding a single community-shared pipe into a whole water network. But to get universal access to safe drinking water, this is what the world will need to do. Unsafe water leads to more than 8,00,000 deaths every year. This is because it can lead to the spread of diarrheal diseases, such as cholera or dysentery, and other diseases, including polio and hepatitis. It can also lead to malnutrition, which is attributed to half of all childhood deaths. These deaths tend to be concentrated in lower-income countries where fewer people have safe water to drink. In some of the worst-off countries, more than 5% of all deaths are attributed to unsafe water.

Water woes

The charts are sourced from "Two billion people don't have safe drinking water: what does this really mean for them?", published at OurWorldinData.org (OWID). The text on the left is an abridged version of the story that appeared on OWID



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 25, 1975

Gold bank on model of unit trust suggested

Bombay, June 24: Mr. Shantilal Sonawala, President of the Bombay Bullion Association, told pressmen here to-day that a "gold bank" should be set up to mobilise the stock of gold. He said that the gold bank could be run on the model of the Unit Trust. It could issue a certificate of unit expressed in terms of the quantity of gold deposited with the bank. "The unit may be say 10 gms of gold. One can purchase this unit against deposit of gold. The bank is under obligation to return this gold either on demand or after a stipulated period as may be discussed and finalised," he suggested. "When the bank accumulates such gold, it deposits the same with the Central Bank here in India with the Reserve Bank and gets a loan on liberal terms. The bank invests this loan money in securities, shares or other productive investments on the line of the Unit Trust of India to get a fair return on such capital. The bank declares the dividend to its gold depositors from such earnings," he added. Mr. Sonawala also wanted the Government of India to formulate a policy for exporting gold. From statistics available, he said, India had a stock of 4,500 tonnes equivalent to 144 million ounces of gold valued at Rs. 22,000 crores. As regards the export of silver, Mr. Sonawala said that about 150 million ounces of silver had been exported out of India till the end of 1974. The figure included official as well as unofficial exports. Thus they had been left with a stock of about 2,600 million ounces of silver.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 25, 1925

International Railway Congress

London, June 24: At the International Railway Congress, Major General Freeland said the experience in India showed that light railways were necessary for opening up the country, but he thought there was little chance of development at present, unless the cost of material and labour were reduced. Heavy lines were at about the limit of development under the existing conditions and the best way to secure increased traffic was the building of more feeder lines.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The increase in area burned by forest fires in Brazil in 2024

62 In per cent. Brazil experienced historic fires last year, particularly in the Amazon, the largest tropical rainforest on the planet that is key to absorbing greenhouse gases. The fires razed 30 million hectares last year, a 62% jump compared to the 18.5 million hectares burned on average. AFP

People who have been arrested in Turkey due to links to Erdogan foe

158 Turkish police on Tuesday arrested more than a hundred members of the military suspected of links to Fethullah Gulen, who was accused of masterminding a failed 2016 coup, the public prosecutor's office in Istanbul said. Authorities have detained close to 26,000 people. AFP

The Netherlands' latest military aid package to Ukraine

175 In million euros. The Netherlands will provide Ukraine with 100 drone-detection radars and 20 medical evacuation vehicles as part of a new aid package, the Dutch Defence Minister said. The nation has pledged about 10 billion euros for Ukraine since early 2022. AFP

Number of persons arrested in Indonesia in drug crackdown

285 The head of the National Narcotic Agency, Marthinus Hukom, said the crackdown, launched between April and June across 20 provinces, also uncovered money laundering schemes by two drug syndicates and confiscated assets worth more than 26 billion rupiah. AP

Number of Indians evacuated from Iran and Israel

3,170 India evacuated over 1,100 citizens from Iran and Israel amid ongoing tensions between the two countries. It brought back 594 Indians from Israel, using C-17 heavy-lift aircraft of the Indian Air Force. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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U.S.'s heavy duty attack on Iran's nuke sites

Apart from the B-2s and the bunker busters, were other weapons used in the recent military strike by the U.S. against Iran? Why are the B-2s maintenance intensive? Why were the Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) 'bunker buster' bombs needed? Is the U.S. already manufacturing new stealth bombers?

EXPLAINER

Dinakar Peri

The story so far:

In June 21, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. military carried out precision strikes on three key Iranian nuclear facilities, mainly Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan. He further stated that the strikes were a “spectacular” military success and that Iran's key nuclear enrichment facilities have been “completely and totally obliterated”. The key part of these strikes were conducted by the B-2 Spirit stealth bombers which dropped GBU-57 bunker busters to penetrate the Fordow enrichment facility located deep inside a mountain, that was beyond the capability of Israel. Later on Sunday, U.S. Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth and Gen. Dan Caine, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff detailed the strikes carried out by the U.S. Central Command (Centcom) under ‘Operation Midnight Hammer’.

How were the strikes carried out?

After proceeding quietly and with minimal communication for 18 hours from the U.S. to the target area, the first of the seven B-2 Spirit stealth bombers dropped two 30,000 lb GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) ‘bunker buster’ bombs at the Fordow site at approximately 6:40 p.m. EDT, Gen. Caine told media houses. The initial mission package also included several decoy aircraft that flew west over the Pacific Ocean as “a deception effort known only to an extremely small number of planners and key leaders here in Washington,” he stated.

“The U.S. employed several deception tactics – including decoys – as the fourth and fifth generation aircraft pushed out in front of the strike package at high altitude and high speed, sweeping in front of the package for enemy fighters and surface-to-air missile threats”, according to Gen. Caine. “Following the initial strike on Fordow, the remaining B-2s went on to deploy their ordnance, eventually totalling 14 MOPs hitting the targeted areas,” he said noting that this was the first operational use of the GBU-57 MOP.

In addition to the MOPs, a U.S. submarine launched more than two dozen Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles at key infrastructure targets at the Isfahan site, bringing the overall total of precision-guided weapons employed during the operation to approximately 75. “Initial battle damage assessments indicate that all three sites sustained extremely severe damage and destruction,” Gen. Caine stated, although later in the day several U.S. officials expressed doubts on the extent of damage to the Fordow facility.

What is a B-2 stealth bomber?

The U.S. Air Force (USAF) operates the country's bomber fleet which consists of 114 B-1 Lancers, 21 B-2 Spirit and 137 legacy B-52 aircraft. Of these, B-2 is the only fully stealth aircraft while the B-1 has some stealth features. Each B-2 costs over \$2 billion, the most expensive aircraft ever, and so only 21 aircraft were built. One B-2 crashed in 2008 while another was damaged in 2022, and with the repair work deemed prohibitive, it is set to be retired soon. This leaves only 19 B-2 aircraft in active inventory.

The B-2 has always inspired awe with its bat-like shape, and has been extensively showcased by Hollywood. It is a dual-capable multi-role heavy bomber,

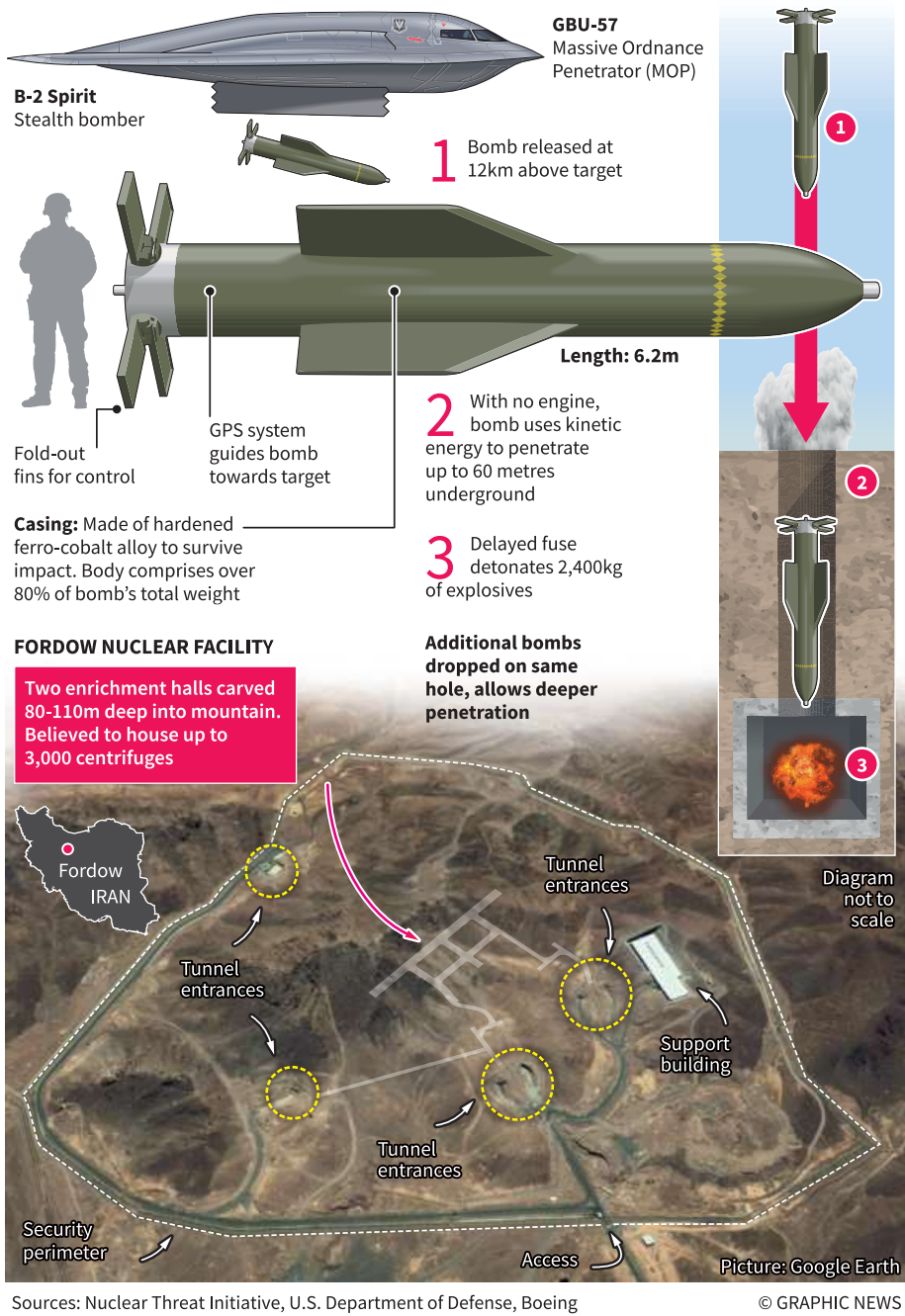


Sleek design:

A B-2 stealth bomber flies over the Washington Monument, on July 4, 2020. AFP

High intensity weapons

The nuclear fuel enrichment site at Fordow is located 60 miles south of Iran's capital Tehran in the mountainous region close to the city of Qom. The facilities are buried deep underground, estimated to be 80-90m deep, to withstand Israeli airstrikes. That's why there was a need for the GBU-57 MOP and the B-2 Spirit that can carry it



FORDOW NUCLEAR FACILITY

Two enrichment halls carved 80-110m deep into mountain. Believed to house up to 3,000 centrifuges

Additional bombs dropped on same hole, allows deeper penetration

powered by four engines. According to the USAF, the B-2's low observability is derived from a combination of reduced infrared, acoustic, electromagnetic, visual and radar signatures. “These signatures make it difficult for sophisticated defensive systems to detect, track and engage the B-2,” the USAF states. The B-2 made its first flight in 1989 and began operations in 1997. With a crew of two, it can carry a payload of 40,000 lb, has an un-refuelled range of 6,000 miles and a service ceiling of 50,000 feet. It is 69 feet long, 17 feet high and has a wingspan of 172 feet, half the length of a football field.

For Sunday's mission, the B-2s flew 37-hours non-stop, from their home base to the target location and back, re-fuelling several times mid-air, making it the

second longest mission ever. The B-2s hold the record for the longest air combat mission in history. As per its manufacturer Northrop Grumman, in 2001, six B-2s were the first to enter Afghan airspace for a record setting 44-hour mission. According to an article in the *New York Post*, the B-2 pilots “have their cockpits outfitted with mini refrigerators and a microwave oven to keep their crew fed and alert” and also have a toilet and enough space for one person to lay down and rest.

A March 2025 report of the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) states that the USAF continues to modernise the B-2. Northrop Grumman was awarded a contract in 2024 of up to \$7 billion to maintain and improve B-2

stealth and communications capabilities, engines, and displays through 2029.

The B-2s are extremely maintenance intensive. According to a detailed account in *The Atlantic* on the B-2s employed in Libya in 2018, 100 hours of maintenance were required for every hour of flight. This is mainly because the advantage of stealth is B-2's edge, and it is achieved by design and radar-absorbing materials. To maintain them, the aircraft needs temperature controlled hangers to protect against changes in temperature, humidity, and dust.

Why was there a need for 'bunker-busters'?

The nuclear fuel enrichment site at Fordow is located 60 miles south of Iran's capital Tehran in the mountainous region close to the city of Qom. The facilities are buried deep underground, estimated to be 80-90m deep, to withstand Israeli airstrikes. Iran acknowledged its existence only in 2009. That's why there was a need for the GBU-57 MOP and the B-2 Spirit that can carry it. It also meant that the U.S. had to officially enter the Israel-Iran conflict which began on June 13, when Israel started bombing Iranian nuclear and military facilities.

The GBU-57 MOP, according to the USAF is a weapon system designed “to accomplish a difficult, complicated mission of reaching and destroying our adversaries' weapons of mass destruction located in well protected facilities.” It is more powerful than its predecessor, the BLU-109 and the GBU-28. According to USAF, a total of 20 MOPs were contracted. The B-2 Spirit is the only aircraft in the USAF capable of employing the 20.5 ft, 30,000 lb MOP which is guided by GPS to reach and destroy targets. Given the weight, each B-2 can hold two MOP bombs.

According to a 2012 CRS report, the GB-57 has a penetration capability of up to 200 feet underground before exploding. “By some reports, it was expected to penetrate as much as 200 feet through 5,000 psi reinforced concrete, and 25 feet into 10,000 psi reinforced concrete,” it states. The *New York Times* quoted a senior U.S. official who stated that the strike on the Fordow site did not destroy the heavily fortified facility but has severely damaged it, taking it “off the table.” The person noted that even 12 bunker-busting bombs could not destroy the site.

What next?

This mission was not, and has not been, about regime change, Mr. Hegseth said. “The president authorised a precision operation to neutralise the threats to our national interests posed by the Iranian nuclear program and [in support of] the collective self-defense of our troops and our ally, Israel.” However, it is unclear whether the objectives of fully neutralising the nuclear enrichment facilities of Iran has been accomplished. Moreover, the whereabouts of the enriched uranium are unknown, as per U.S. officials.

A next generation bomber, the B-21 Raider, a dual-capable penetrating-strike stealth bomber, is currently under development. The B-21 is similar to the B-2, but slightly smaller, with a distinctive beak domed centre. According to a USAF fact sheet, the B-21 has been designed with an open systems architecture to allow for faster new software integration. With a plan to make them enter service in the next few years, the USAF is looking at acquiring a minimum of 100 aircraft at an average unit procurement cost of \$550 million.

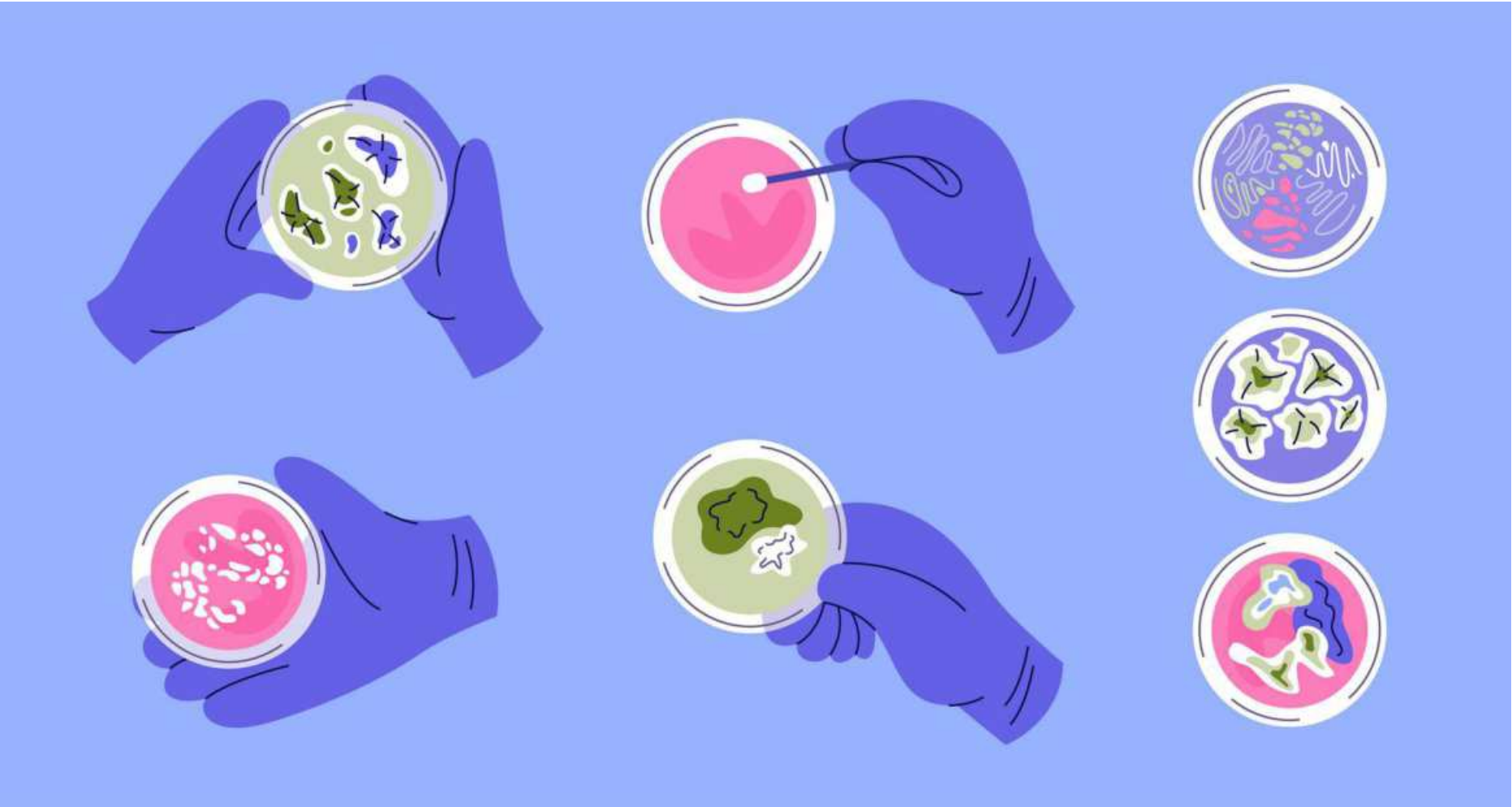
THE GIST

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PULSE-CHECK



For representative purposes. GETTY IMAGES

Widely used fungicide found to be driving C. tropicalis infections

‘Candida tropicalis’, an important fungal pathogen in India and in many other parts of the world, has been found using chromosome alterations to resist common anti-fungal drugs such as fluconazole and voriconazole

D.P. Kasbekar

Candida tropicalis is an important fungal pathogen in India and many parts of the world. Its infections are associated with a mortality rate of 55-60%. Anti-fungal drugs called azoles, such as fluconazole and voriconazole, are used to treat its infections. But there is a growing concern in medical circles that clinics are seeing an increasing number of infections by strains of *C. tropicalis* that exhibit high resistance to these drugs. What is driving this alarming increase in drug resistance?

A paper published recently in PLoS Biology by researchers from Fudan University in Shanghai has provided the answer. They found that an azole-related fungicide called tebuconazole widely used by farmers and gardeners, and which can accumulate and persist in the environment has driven the increase in azole-resistant *C. tropicalis* infections seen in clinics.

The team also found that tebuconazole-resistant strains exhibited aneuploidy – meaning their chromosome number showed differences from the normal chromosome count for the organism. Such deviation from the normal chromosome complement is known as ploidy plasticity.

Deviating from normal ploidy

In the human body, most cells have two sets of the genome: thus they are diploid. One set of 23 chromosomes comes via the father’s sperm and the other set of 23 from the mother’s egg. When we, in turn, make eggs or sperm, a process called meiosis ensures only one set of chromosomes each of the 23 pairs is

transmitted to them. Eggs or sperm are the only haploid cells in us – meaning they each have one copy of the genome. When a sperm fertilises an egg to make the zygote, diploidy is restored. The zygote then develops into the baby.

On rare occasions, meiosis isn’t as efficient and produces sperm or eggs that contain one copy more or one copy less of one or more chromosomes. Such eggs and sperm are said to be aneuploid. Aneuploidy can have serious consequences.

A zygote with three copies instead of two of the smallest chromosome leads to the development of Down syndrome. These individuals have delayed development, characteristically aberrant physical features, and mild to moderate intellectual impairment. Aneuploidy for any of the other chromosomes almost invariably ends in prenatal death. In short, humans don’t tolerate ploidy plasticity well – nor do most other animals, plants, and fungi.

For a long time, *C. tropicalis* was also thought to be a diploid organism. Thus, finding that in most tebuconazole-resistant strains the ploidy was altered surprised the researchers.

Enhanced resistance to anti-fungals

The team started with five different *C. tropicalis* strains that were susceptible to tebuconazole and also to clinically-used fluconazole and voriconazole. They exposed the strains to incrementally more tebuconazole concentrations from 0.125 to 16 micrograms/millilitre in liquid medium, then grew them on tebuconazole-containing semisolid media in Petri plates. Finally, they picked 35 tebuconazole-resistant colonies. All these colonies exhibited cross-resistance to

fluconazole and voriconazole.

The tebuconazole-resistant strains showed slower growth than their progenitor strains in the absence of antifungals. But in the presence of antifungals, they grew much better. It seems the resistant strains had traded cell growth for antifungal resistance.

The researchers found that the ploidy of tebuconazole-resistant strains ranged from haploid to triploid (that is, three copies of the genome). Those identified as diploid or close to diploid were found by more detailed analyses to, in fact, be segmental aneuploids: they carried duplications or deletions of some chromosome segments.

The duplicated chromosome segments carried genes whose overexpression was known from other studies to increase resistance to azoles. For example, several TBZ-resistant strains had duplications of a chromosomal segment carrying a gene named TAC1, which encodes a protein that helps the cell to produce more of another protein named the ABC-transporter. The ABC-transporter pumps toxic compounds such as the azoles out of the cell.

Conversely, other segmental aneuploids showed haploidisation, that is, deletion of one copy of a segment of another chromosome that carried the HMG1 gene. The overexpression of HMG1 decreased the biosynthesis of a chemical in cell membranes named ergosterol.

Previous studies had shown that in budding yeast, HMG1 overexpression led to lower synthesis of ergosterol and a lower resistance to fluconazole – whereas reduced expression of HMG1 stimulated ergosterol synthesis and elevated resistance to fluconazole. Thus, although the aneuploidies created imbalances in

the *C. tropicalis* genome that reduced their growth rate, they enabled the strains to better resist antifungals.

The researchers also verified that the strains with altered ploidy were more virulent than the progenitor strains in mice treated with fluconazole.

An unanticipated haploid

Another unexpected bonus from the new study was the discovery that tebuconazole-resistant strains included stable haploid strains of *C. tropicalis*. The haploid cells were able to undergo mating. These serendipitous findings now provide researchers a useful tool for future genetic analyses.

The researchers recovered a haploid cell from among the tebuconazole-resistant strains generated in the laboratory. They wondered whether any of the 868 *C. tropicalis* strains recorded in clinical visits around the world might include any haploids (that is, naturally haploid rather than as an abnormality). They examined publicly available genomic sequences of these strains and found that two of them, isolated from Spain, were indeed haploid.

In conclusion, the research showed that the reckless use of triazole antifungals in agriculture can unwittingly promote the emergence of pathogenic strains showing cross-resistance to azoles of clinical importance. Further, some of the resistant strains were haploid, like our sperm and egg cells, and could likewise mate and hence be capable of introducing their resistance mechanisms into new genetic backgrounds.

This exemplifies the prophetic warning: “sow the wind, reap the whirlwind”.

D.P. Kasbekar is a retired scientist.



KEYWORD

What is a percentile?

C. Aravinda

On June 14, the results of the NEET-UG were declared. Among over 22 lakh candidates, Mahesh Kumar stood out with a score of 686 out of 720. Yet, his percentile was reported not as 100 but as 99.9999547. This number may seem puzzling. Why is the national topper in the country not awarded a 100th percentile?

Percentage vs percentile

A percentage is a straightforward measure of how much a student scores out of the total possible marks. For example, Mahesh’s 686 out of 720 translates to roughly 95.27%. Based on the questions answered, it is an absolute measure, showing how much a student knew. A percentile, on the other hand, is a relative measure. It tells us how a student performed compared to others. A 99 percentile means the student did better than 99% of the test-takers. It doesn’t say how much the student scored, but where they stand in the crowd. This distinction becomes crucial in exams where lakhs of candidates participate. A mark of 640 might land in a higher percentile one year and a lower percentile the next year simply because the overall performance of the cohort changes. Percentiles help admission authorities compare students by relative performance.

How percentiles are calculated

The basic formula used to calculate percentile is: Percentile = {Number of candidates scoring less than you} divided by {Total number of candidates}*100. This is why even the top ranker doesn’t get a 100 percentile. For Mahesh, the number of candidates scoring less than him is 22,09,317 out of 22,09,318 (including himself). When multiplied by 100, that fraction gives a value that is very marginally below 100. This explains the seven-decimal-place result: 99.9999547. It also means that the 100 percentile is mathematically impossible under this formula. You can get very close, but never exactly 100. Interestingly, while a 100 percentile is impossible, a zero percentile is theoretically allowed. The lowest scorer, who performs worse than everyone else, will have zero candidates below them. This gives: Percentile= {0} divided by {Total candidates}* 100 = 0

One fascinating implication of the percentile system is that it reveals the scale of competition. If a student’s percentile is 92.8571428, the number of digits after the decimal (in this case, seven) can hint at the total number of test-takers. This is because: Total number of candidates (approximately) = {}divided by [{1 - ({Percentile}/100)}]. A high degree of decimal precision is used to differentiate between students who are extremely close in performance. For example, a difference of 0.00001 in percentile could separate thousands of candidates in a large exam like NEET.

Across the world, many tests adopt percentile scoring systems. The GMAT, used for MBA admissions, reports raw scores and percentiles. The SAT and GRE also use scaled scores derived from statistical normalisation, often converted to percentiles for easier interpretation.

Implications and clarity

In tightly packed score ranges, even a half mark can create a significant shift in ranks. Percentiles, with their precision, reveal that shift clearly. A score of 95% may be in the 98th percentile, and 85% may be in the 70th percentile, depending upon the clustering of candidates. Percentiles, though abstract, paint the most accurate picture of where you stand, not just what you scored. In a country where aspirations often run higher than available seats, one’s percentile shows the narrative of competition, effort, and performance relative to lakhs of others. It offers a clearer understanding that victory lies not in perfection in competitive exams but in being ahead of the rest.

Dr. C. Aravinda is an academic and public health physician.

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

THE DAILY QUIZ

English writer George Orwell was born on this day in 1903. Here is a quiz on one of the most well-known and prolific writers of the 20th century

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1

Here is an easy one. Where was Orwell born?

QUESTION 2

Orwell is best known for his two books. One is an allegorical novel and another, a dystopian novel. Name both.

QUESTION 3

In this memoir by Orwell, he accounts his personal experiences and observations while fighting in the Spanish

Civil War. What is it called?

QUESTION 4

In which context is the term ‘Orwellian’ used?

QUESTION 5

What was Orwell’s birth name? How did the name George Orwell come about?

QUESTION 6

In this work, Orwell wrote about the importance of precise and clear language, arguing that vague writing can be used as a powerful tool of political manipulation. In the essay, Orwell provides six rules for a writer. Name the essay.



Visual question:

In 1984, Orwell and this author (in the picture) were honoured with the Prometheus Award for their contributions to dystopian literature. Name the author and his book for which he got the award. AP

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

1. The world would be an unbalanced place if it allowed the United States of America to rule alone over our canal...” This Nicaraguan leader who wrote this in his manifesto. **Ans: Augusto Sandino**
2. This country was invaded by the U.S. under ‘operation just cause’. **Ans: Panama**
3. The Gulf of Tonkin resolution laid the groundwork for U.S. intervention in this country. **Ans: Vietnam**
4. “Richard Nixon and this person allowed the Khmer Rouge to grasp golden opportunities”, a Khmer Rouge official said. **Ans: Henry Kissinger**
5. Name the U.S. Navy vessel that sank in Havana harbour in Cuba. **Ans: USS Maine**
Visual: Name this character and the country. **Ans: John Rambo; Afghanistan**
Early Birds: Sukdev Shet| Tito Shiladitya| Sandeep| Yastika Jain| Pranab Biswas

J&K: Probe ordered after theft accused paraded shirtless on police vehicle

ARUNSHARMA
JAMMU, JUNE 24

ACCUSED OF stealing, a 24-year-old man from Kashmir was apprehended by police from the premises of a government hospital in Jammu Tuesday morning, and allegedly paraded shirtless on the

bonnet of a police vehicle. He was made to wear a garland of slippers and had his hands tied behind his back. After a video of the incident went viral, Jammu SSP Joginder Singh ordered a departmental inquiry into the matter.

The man was identified as Ishraq Ahmed of Pampillan in Uri tehsil of Baramulla district.

SALUTE THE SOLDIER

BORDER SECURITY FORCE



**CONSTABLE
RAM PATI RAI**
30.06.1969 -
25.06.1993



**CONSTABLE
HARISH
KUMAR RAI**
01.01.1969 -
25.06.1993

Director General and all Ranks of Border Security Force remember its gallant Jawans Constables Ram Pati Rai and Harish Kumar Rai on their Balidan Diwas. On this day, they sustained grievous injuries in an IED blast in Srinagar area, J&K and made ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

BORDER SECURITY FORCE



CONSTABLE LAKHWINDER SINGH
02.02.1969 - 25.06.1995

Director General and all Ranks of Border Security Force remember its gallant Jawan Constable Lakhwinder Singh on his Balidan Diwas. On this day, he sustained fatal bullet injuries in counterpart firing in area of FDL Mazmoon, J&K and later succumbed to his injuries.

INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE (ITBP)



**SI/GD
Jayendra
Prasad**
Vill.- Sema
Distt.- Tehri
Garhwal
Uttarakhand



**Constable/GD
Jomon P.G.**
Vill.- Pallipuram
Distt.-
Alappuzha
Kerala



**Constable/GD
Nand Ram
Vill.- Hanskoti**
Distt.- Chamoli
Uttarakhand



**Constable/GD
Bibhuti Roy
Vill.- Charai
Khola
Distt.- Dhubri
Assam**



**Constable/GD
Ajay Lal
Vill.- Thirpak**
Distt.- Chamoli
Uttarakhand



**Constable/GD
Sarvesh Kumar
Vill.-
Haibatpura**
Distt.- Jhansi
Uttar Pradesh

ITBP salutes its bravehearts of 8th Battalion, who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty on this day during a rescue & relief operation at Kedamath, Uttarakhand in 2013.

INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE (ITBP)



**Sec. In
Command
Nitya Nand**
Vill.- Chaubepur
Distt.- Kanpur
(Uttar Pradesh)



**Inspector
Bhim Singh**
Vill.- Bobiya
Distt.- Kathua
(J & K)



**Sub. Insp.
Satish Kumar**
Distt.- Bhiwani
Vill.- Dudhwa
(Haryana)



**Constable
Pawan Shasi
Kant Ramesh**
Vill.- Betavad
Distt.- Dhulliya
(MH)



**Constable
Sanjiv Kumar**
Vill.- Patnari
Distt.- Ballia
(Uttar Pradesh)



**Constable
K. Vinyang**
Vill.- Chinna
Bandapalli
Distt.- Chittoor,
(AP)



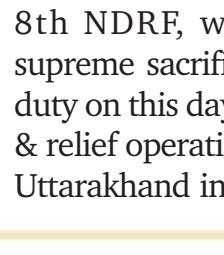
**Constable
Santosh Kumar
Paswan**
Vill.- Bhakara,
P.O.- Satgawan
Distt.- Koderna,
(Jharkhand)



**Constable
Ahirao Ganesh**
Vill.- Badala
Distt.- Jalgaon,
(MH)



**Constable
Bassavaraj
Yaragati**
Vill.- Jagapur
Distt.- Gadag,
(Karnataka)



**Constable
Bassavaraj
Yaragati**
Vill.- Jagapur
Distt.- Gadag,
(Karnataka)

ITBP salutes its bravehearts of 8th NDRE, who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty on this day during a rescue & relief operation at Kedamath, Uttarakhand in 2013.

‘Serving Op Sindoor does not grant immunity’: SC to dowry death convict

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

THE SUPREME Court Tuesday told a man convicted of killing his wife over dowry, who while seeking exemption from surrendering claimed to have participated in Operation Sindoor, that being part of the operation does grant him “immunity from committing atrocity at home”.

The bench, which was presided over by Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, and also comprising Justice Vinod Chandran, was hearing an appeal by Baljinder Singh challenging a Punjab and Haryana HC order upholding his conviction and sentencing for 10 years by a trial court in Amritsar.

Justice Bhuyan made the remark as the counsel appearing for Singh said, “I can only leave with one line, I am a participant in Operation Sindoor. For the

past 20 years, I have been a Black Cat commando posted, my lord, in Rashtriya Rifles.”

Singh had also filed an application seeking exemption from surrender pending a final decision on this appeal pending before the SC. Rejecting this, Justice Bhuyan, however, highlighted that the petitioner has been convicted of a serious offence and such an exemption is granted only for lighter sentences.

“It’s a gruesome manner, the manner in which you strangled your wife. Exemption is for when the sentence is of 6 months, 3 months, 1 year,” the judge said.

Singh’s counsel contended that the two witnesses on whose testimony his client was convicted, were related to the deceased. However, the bench refused to grant exemption to Singh from surrendering, but issued a notice on his appeal, and allowed him two weeks to surrender.

SALUTE THE SOLDIER

CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE FORCE



**Veer Balidani
Lance Naik
Ramphal**
96 Bn.
10-3-1961 To
25-6-1997

96 Battalion of CRPF was deployed in Nagaland to counter the activities of insurgents, who posed a serious threat to peace in the region. On 25 June 1997, insurgents opened indiscriminate fire on a CRPF patrol in Dimapur. The troops swiftly retaliated, triggering a fierce encounter that forced the insurgents to flee. During the exchange, Lance Naik Ramphal, while courageously stepping out of cover to pursue an insurgent, sustained grievous injuries. Undeterred, he continued to fire until he succumbed to his wounds. His valour and supreme sacrifice in the line of duty will always be remembered by a grateful nation.

CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE FORCE



**Veer Balidani
Constable
Abhay Kumar
Mishra**
72 Bn.
5-4-1982 To
25-6-2006

A heavily armed group of around 500 Maoists launched a massive attack on the camp of a company of 72 Battalion of CRPF at Jhumra Pahar, Jharkhand. Vastly outnumbered, the CRPF troops put up a resolute defence, engaging in a fierce overnight gunfight. Despite repeated attempts, the Maoists failed to breach the camp and were eventually forced to retreat into the jungle. During the encounter, Constable Abhay Kumar Mishra, whose gun position came under intense fire, retaliated with exceptional courage. Though injured, he continued to fight and played a key role in repelling the attackers before attaining martyrdom in the line of duty.

CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE FORCE



**Veer Balidani
Constable
Pradeep
Sikdar**
161 Bn.
7-3-1984 To
25-6-2006

Police. While laying the cordon, Constable Pradeep Sikdar spotted movement in a suspected house and alerted his team. In response, the militant opened indiscriminate fire, injuring him. Despite being wounded, he took position and retaliated, killing the terrorist and injuring another, who managed to flee. He was evacuated but succumbed to his injuries, attaining martyrdom in the line of duty. The operation led to the recovery of an AK-56 rifle and the arrest of the injured terrorist from Soura Hospital.

CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE FORCE



**Veer Balidani
Constable
Sidha Gouda
Patil**
128 Bn.
1-7-1971 To
25-6-1999

128 Battalion of CRPF was deployed in Pulwama district, Jammu & Kashmir, for anti-terrorist operations at a time when militancy was at its peak. On 25 June 1999, while on an area domination patrol, the troops were ambushed by militants firing from inside nearby houses. The CRPF retaliated swiftly and advanced with determination, forcing the militants to flee through narrow lanes. In the fierce exchange, Constable Sidha Gouda Patil, who led from the front with exceptional courage, sustained grievous injuries and attained martyrdom. His gallant sacrifice will always be remembered with pride and gratitude.

INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE (ITBP)



**Asstt. Sub-Insp.
Ram Singh**

ITBP salutes its braveheart Asstt.SubInsp. Ram Singh of 8th Battalion, who laid down his life in the line of duty on this day in Uttarakhand in 2022.

Resident of : Vill.- Kumharo Ka Bass, Distt.- Jhunjhunu State- Rajasthan.

French woman alleges rape by events mgmt employee in Udaipur

PARUL KULSHRESTHA
JAIPUR, JUNE 24

A 30-YEAR-OLD tourist from France has filed a rape complain against an employee of an events management company in Rajasthan’s Udaipur.

According to the FIR, the alleged incident took place on June 22, and an FIR was filed around 11 pm the following day.

The woman has said that she arrived in Udaipur from Delhi on June 22.

She has alleged that while she was having dinner at a cafe, a man, who police say works with an events management company, came to her table and struck up a conversation before suggesting that they go for a ride in his car.

In her complaint, she alleged, “I arrived in Udaipur by bus from Delhi. I was there for leisure. At night, my friends and I went for dinner. A bit later in the evening, a man came to our table. He proposed we go outside for a smoke,

and then took me on a drive.”

“I requested him several times to go home (to my hotel), but instead he drove me to his apartment. There, he started to ask me for a hug, which I refused. My phone was off. I asked several times to recharge my phone, but he didn’t give me a cable, so I couldn’t find the address of my hotel. Then he hugged me and started to touch me, while I was saying ‘no’ clearly... I started to cry, and he raped me. I was crying all along. When he was done, I begged him to take me home. He started by saying no, but eventually he drove me back around 6 am,” she alleged.

After reaching the hotel, she met her friends, who took her to the police station.

Superintendent of Police, Udaipur, Yogesh Goyal identified the accused as one Siddharth. “We have conducted a medical examination and recorded statements of people known to her. The accused is still absconding, and the police are trying to find him. We are hopeful that we will

catch him soon. The victim, along with other French women, was visiting the city, while the accused works at an events management company,” said Goyal.

Former Chief minister Ashok Gehlot criticised the state government over the incident.

“The rape of a French woman in Udaipur is exposing the deteriorating law and order situation in Rajasthan to the entire world. Women across the state feel unsafe, but the BJP government remains indifferent,” the Congress leader posted on X.

“The rape of the French woman occurred at a time when the United States recently issued a travel advisory for its female travelers, urging caution in six Indian states due to rising crime incidents, specifically citing the rapid increase in rape cases. Let’s hope Rajasthan does not become part of such an advisory in the coming days,” the Congress leader added.

BJP leaders are yet to react on the incident.

After killing of undertrial in lock-up, security set to be ramped up at Delhi court

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

AFTER AN undertrial was killed allegedly by two other inmates inside a lockup at the Saket Court in Delhi on June 5, authorities last week decided to ramp up the security measures at the court. Officials said that “integrated security equipment” is being installed at three gates.

Aman, the undertrial who was killed in a lockup in the court premises while waiting for a hearing on June 5, was lodged in Tihar Jail and was facing trial for a 2017 murder. He was killed after an altercation allegedly broke out between him and Jitender, a fellow inmate, with whom he had an old animosity, said police. “...The work with respect to the installation of integrated security equipment, scheduled to be commenced at Gate numbers 1, 2, and 6, w.e.f. 13.06.2025 with anticipated completion during the ensuing summer vacation,” read a circular.

FROM PAGE ONE Starting with Bihar, fresh electoral rolls

rolls “including preparation of electoral rolls afresh”. As per the order, the EC had exercised this power 13 times before – from 1952-56 to 2004.

“Therefore, the Commission has now decided to begin the Special Intensive Revision in the entire country for the discharge of its constitutional mandate to protect the integrity of the electoral rolls; However, since the General Elections to the Legislative Assembly in the State of Bihar is expected in later part of this year, hence the Commission has decided to conduct Special Intensive Revision in the State of Bihar,” it said.

The EC order said the last intensive revision in Bihar was in 2003, with the qualifying date of January 1, 2003. For the upcoming exercise, the Electoral Registration Officers in Bihar would take that as “probative evidence of eligibility, including presumption of citizenship unless they receive any other input otherwise. Any person whose name is not recorded in the 2003 Electoral Roll for the purpose of registration in the electoral roll is required to submit from amongst a wide range of eligible government documents as prescribed for establishing their eligibility to be an elector.”

As per the instructions issued by the EC to the Bihar Chief Electoral Officer, the process will start from Wednesday, ending with the publication of the draft roll on August 1, followed by a month for filing claims and objections till September 1. The final electoral roll is scheduled to be published on September 30.

According to the EC, all electors will be required to submit a pre-filled enumeration form

with required documents either to the respective Booth Level Officers or upload the same onto the EC’s app.

The EC issued the instructions to Bihar authorities Tuesday, with the objective that all eligible citizens are enrolled in the electoral roll, no ineligible person is included and there is complete transparency in the deletion and addition of electors, the EC said in a statement.

“The last intensive revision for Bihar was conducted by the Commission in the year 2003. Various reasons such as rapid urbanisation, frequent migration, young citizens becoming eligible to vote, non-reporting of deaths and inclusion of the names of foreign illegal immigrants have necessitated the conduct of an intensive revision so as to ensure integrity and preparation of error-free electoral rolls. The BLOs shall be conducting house-to-house survey for verification during the process of this intensive revision,” the EC said.

It said the Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) do verify that the electors being enrolled are eligible as per Section 23 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950. But, now the EC was introducing a new measure – uploading the documents submitted by the electors, for instance as address proof, on the EC’s app ECINET.

“Now, to ensure complete transparency, it would be necessary that the documents on the basis of which such satisfaction of ERO is arrived at, are also uploaded in ECINET as the current level of technology enables so. However, these documents shall be accessible to authorised election officials only

keeping in view the privacy issues. In case of any claims and objections raised by any political party or an elector, the AERO would inquire into the same before EROs’ satisfaction is arrived at. Under Section 24 of the Act, an appeal against the order of ERO can also be made to the District Magistrate and the Chief Electoral Officer,” the EC said.

This move comes at a time when the commission is facing questions from the Opposition, including recently from Congress leader and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, regarding the purity of the electoral roll in some states.

“While all efforts shall be made by the Election Commission of India that the revision process is carried out in a smooth manner causing minimum inconvenience to the electors, ECI shall be seeking active involvement of all political parties in the process by appointing their Booth Level Agents (BLAs) in all polling booths. The active participation of BLAs would ensure that discrepancies, if any, are resolved at the preparation stage itself, thereby reducing the instances of filing claims, objections and appeals,” the EC said.

As per the instructions issued by the EC, the EROs will print out pre-filled enumeration forms for all existing electors as on the date of the order. The BLOs will then take these forms and distribute them to the electors through home visits. The forms will also be available on the ECI website and ECINET app. The BLOs will help the electors fill the forms and collect the completed forms, along with required documents, it said. The electors can

also upload the filled forms and documents online. “Draft Electoral Roll to be prepared of all electors whose EF (enumeration form) have been received,” it said.

As of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Bihar had 7.72 crore registered electors. The EC instructions state that the BLO will have to make at least three visits to collect the filled forms and that any deletion should not be done without conducting the statutory inquiry. EC sources, however, said that the electors whose forms are not received in the prescribed time frame will be deleted from the draft roll. They will have the opportunity to file an appeal.

Meanwhile, the EC issued another set of instructions to states Tuesday, changing the protocol for dealing with the EVMs and VVPATs in which the votes cast during the pre-polling mock poll is somehow not deleted or the slips not removed. So far, such machines were set aside and not counted if the margin of victory of the winning candidate was more than the number of votes. This, EC sources, led to a mismatch between the total votes polled and votes counted.

Now, the EC has instructed CEOs to keep such machines aside and count them on a separate table. The mock poll votes as recorded in the mock poll certificate would be subtracted to arrive at the candidate-wise count for these machines as well. The presiding officer and polling officer of the polling station concerned will face disciplinary action if the mock poll is not erased from the control unit of the EVM or VVPAT slips of the mock poll are not removed, the EC said.

Climate finance: India takes lead in cornering developed nations

AMITABH SINHA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

IN A small but important victory in climate negotiations, developing countries led by India have managed to force a reopening of discussions on the obligations of developed nations to “provide” finance, and not just make efforts towards “mobilising” financial resources, for climate action.

The issue of climate finance was sought to be settled last year at the COP29 meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan, where developed nations had agreed to mobilise a sum of at least USD 300 billion per

year from 2035. The figure is three times the amount that developed countries are currently obligated to raise, but well short of the USD 1.3 trillion a year that is the assessed minimum requirement of the developed countries.

At the ongoing annual climate talks in Bonn, Germany, a formal ‘consultation’ was held on the issue Monday after developing countries made a united push-back, seeking inclusion of a dedicated agenda item to discuss the obligation of the developed countries under the 2015 Paris Agreement to provide financial resources to developing countries.

The Paris Agreement obligates

the developed nations to both “provide” finance (Article 9.1) as well as “take the lead in mobilising climate finance” (Article 9.3). The two are related but independent obligations. One does not replace, or take precedence over, the other.

The promise to mobilise USD 300 billion a year from 2035 side-steps the obligation under Article 9.1. The developing countries had been extremely dissatisfied with last year’s outcome in Baku, with India calling the USD 300 billion amount “abysmally poor”. Later, India had also said that it would be forced to temper the ambition of its future climate action if adequate amounts of climate finance

were not provided for.

In the run-up to the Bonn climate talks, which began last week, India enlisted the support of other developing countries in demanding that a separate agenda item be opened to discuss the implementation of Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement. The developed nations argued that the matter was already being addressed through various existing strands of negotiations on climate finance. The issue shut down the talks for two days last week.

During the formal consultation, held as a compromise, country after developing country highlighted the failure of the developed nations to deliver on their finance commitments. Expressing deep concern at the lack of adequate financial resources being made available, India said the inability of the developed nations to fulfil their obligations was resulting in an erosion of trust. It said Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement was not just a moral imperative, but a legal obligation and a commitment flowing directly from Article 4.3 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

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GLOBAL TENDER NOTICE
Online Tenders are invited through E-Procurement Mode for the following requirements from reputed manufacturers directly or through their accredited agents in India as required for NMDC Ltd, BIOM Kirandul Complex, BIOM Bachel Complex and DIOM Donimalai Complex.
Tender No.HQMM/1100001648/449, Dt.23/06/2025
NMDC/Head Office / Material Management/25-26/ET/204 / [TRACK DOZER 850 HP]

Description of Equipment	Qty (No.)	Display of Tender Documents Period	Last date & time for submission of offer	Earnest Money Deposit
Track Dozers - Capacity-850HP, with Cost CAP for 6 years/ 12,000 hours.	10	Draft Tender 23/06/2025 To 30/06/2025 Final Tender 05/07/2025 To 16/07/2025	16/07/2025 02.30 PM	Rs. 25 Lakh or 29,100 US Dollars

Complete Tender document is available in website : www.nmdc.co.in, <https://www.msstcecommerce.com/eproc/> & <http://eprocure.gov.in>.Any corrigendum(s) to the above tender will be uploaded only on MSTC Portal / NMDC website and will not be published in newspapers. Prospective bidders should visit MSTC Portal and NMDC website, regularly from time to time to take note of corrigendum, if any. For further details logon to Tender Section of our website: www.nmdc.co.in.

General Manager (Materials)

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LIMITED
(Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala 147001)
Corporate identity Number U40109PB2010SGC033813
Website: www.pspcl.in | Mobile No. 96461-55525

Short Term E-Tender Enq. No. 7713/P-3/EMP-13052 dated 24.06.25

Dy. Chief Engineer/ Headquarter (Procurement Cell-3) GGSSTP, Roopnagar invites E-Tender ID No. 2025 POWER 143155 1 for the Procurement of Spares for Chicago Make Air Compressor Model: HN2T-180LP & HX2T 60 NP installed at DFAH system at GGSSTP, Rupunagar. For detailed NIT & Tender Specification please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 24.06.25/03.00 PM onwards.
Note:- Corrigendum & addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

No. 502/PB RTP-71/25

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LIMITED
(Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala 147001)
Corporate identity Number U40109PB2010SGC033813
Website: www.pspcl.in | Mobile No. 96461-55525

E-Tender Enq. No. 7712/P-3/EMP-13048 dated 24.06.25

Dy.Chief Engineer/ Headquarter (Procurement Cell-3) GGSSTP, Roopnagar invites E-Tender ID No. 2025_POWER_143131_1 for the Procurement of Various size of ceramic lined orifices and bend for pulverized fuel pipe installed at Stg-II & III GGSSTP Ropar.
For detailed NIT & Tender Specification please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 24.06.25/01.00 PM onwards.
Note:- Corrigendum & addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

No. 480/PB RTP-69/25

THE BRAITHWAITE BURN AND JESSOP CONSTRUCTION COMPANY LIMITED
(A Government of India Enterprise)
Regd. Off.: 27, Rajendra Nath Mukherjee Road, Kolkata - 700 001 Phone No. (033) 248-5841-44; E-Mail: info.bbjconst@bbjconst.com; Website: www.bbjconst.com

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDERS
e-Tenders are invited, UNDER THE TWO-BID SYSTEM, from reputed Agency(ies) towards Modernization of Gubbi Railway Station of Amrit Bharat Station Scheme under Chief Project Manager, Gati Shakti, Bengaluru Division, South Western Railway.
e-Tender No. : eNIT/GS-ABSS/GUBBI/091T-11-2025 Dated 25-June-2025.
Tender documents may be downloaded from <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app> and/or www.bbjconst.com (Tender ID: 2025_BBJC_865956_1). Sealed e-Bids (Two-Cover System) can be uploaded in e-procurement portal up to 15:00 hrs. on or before 05-July-2025 and opening of e-Tenders (Technical) will be on 07-July-2025 at 15:00 hrs. "Corrigendum", if any, would appear only on the BBJ's website & e-Procurement portal and not to be published in any newspaper.

OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER, CANAL CIRCLE, BURLA, DIST- SAMBALPUR, PIN-768017
Email:-aceccburla12@gmail.com

No. CCB-W- 1226 /Dated. 23.06.2025

Corrigendum to e-Procurement Notice No. ACECCB-01/2025-26 & Bid Identification No. ACECCB-01/2025-26

In partial Modification to the e-Procurement Notice No. ACECCB-01/2025-26 published on dated 23.06.2025 under Bid Identification No. ACECCB-01/2025-26 by Additional Chief Engineer, Canal Circle, Burla, it is to notify the following changes.
The class of contractor previously mentioned as "A" & "B" class is now changed to "A" Class.
All other terms & Conditions remain unchanged

Sd/-
Additional Chief Engineer,
Canal Circle, Burla

OIPR- 32460/11/0015/2526



MARCH 1971: Indira is re-elected.

APRIL 1973: A N Ray is appointed CJI, superseding the three senior-most SC justices.

APRIL: Bihar student leaders invite JP to lead struggle against state govt.



JUNE 12, 1975: Allahabad High Court's Justice Jagmohanlal Sinha disbars Indira as MP; Janata Front wins Gujarat Assembly elections.

JUNE 25: JP calls Indira to step down; President signs Emergency Proclamation.



JUNE 30: MISA is amended: it is no longer necessary to disclose to an arrested person the reasons for their arrest.

NOVEMBER 7: SC upholds Indira's election from Rae Bareilly LS seat.

JANUARY 1976: Parliament postpones LS elections for a year.

APRIL 19: Police open fire in Turkman Gate in Delhi as mobs resist Sanjay Gandhi's slum clearance and mass sterilisation drives.

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER: The 42nd Amendment is passed.

NOVEMBER 5: LS passes resolution extending its term by a year.

JANUARY 1, 1977: Biju Patnaik sends proposal to Indira for a settlement with Opposition.



MARCH 16-20: LS elections are held; Indira loses in Rae Bareilly; Janata Party secures a majority in LS.

The blank editorial from the June 28, 1975, edition of *The Indian Express*, which refused to bend to pre-censorship by the government.

A BRIEF TIMELINE

Events leading up to the Emergency, and how it unfolded

JANUARY 1974: Students in Gujarat agitate to remove Congress Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel; the govt is forced to resign in March.

MAY 8: George Fernandes calls a countrywide railway strike.

NOVEMBER: Indira-JP talks on removal of Bihar CM break down.

JUNE 24: SC grants only a partial stay in Indira disbarment petition.



JUNE 26: JP, Morarji Desai, A B Vajpayee, Chandra Shekhar, others arrested; the press is censored around the country.

JULY 4: RSS, Anand Marg, Jamaat-e-Islami, and Naxalites banned.

AUGUST 5: India's election law is amended to make sure SC reinstates Indira as MP.

JANUARY 31: Karunanidhi's government in Tamil Nadu is dismissed.

MARCH: Janata govt in Gujarat is toppled; Charan Singh is freed.

APRIL 28: SC rules that the right to move courts on fundamental rights will be suspended during an Emergency.

JUNE 10: George Fernandes is arrested.

DECEMBER 4: Charan Singh, Biju Patnaik meet Indira's MoS, Home Affairs, to work out an agreement with the govt.

JANUARY 18: Indira announces LS elections in March; Morarji Desai is freed.

JANUARY 20: Janata Party formed.

MARCH 21: Emergency is lifted.

MARCH 24: Morarji becomes Prime Minister.



FROM COOMI KAPOOR'S 'THE EMERGENCY'

EMERGENCY & ITS LESSONS

The 21-month period from June 25, 1975 to March 21, 1977 saw the government of Indira Gandhi suspend civil liberties, curtail press freedom, make mass arrests, cancel elections, and rule by decree

VIKASPATHAK
NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

THE EMERGENCY was imposed exactly 50 years ago on June 25, 1975. The 21-month period, one of the darkest chapters in the history of the Indian republic, saw the suspension of civil liberties, curtailment of press freedom, mass arrests, the cancellation of elections, and rule by decree. Here's a brief history.

Historical & social context

Indira Gandhi rode to power on an electoral landslide in 1971, but her government was rocked by crisis after crisis. Expenses incurred during the 1971 India-Pak war, droughts, and the 1973 oil crisis buffeted the Indian economy, causing hardship for the people. Corruption, misgovernance, and state excesses sowed further discontent.

In February 1974, the Navnirman (Regeneration) students movement forced Congress Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel to resign over corruption allegations. This inspired a students' movement in Bihar which saw socialists and right wing organisations coming together to form the Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti.

Jayaprakash Narayan, a Gandhian and hero of the Quit India Movement, eventually took the reins of this movement. His call for "sampoorna kranti (total revolution)", first made on June 5 at Patna's historic Gandhi Maidan, brought Bihar to a standstill.

Earlier, in May 1974, socialist leader George Fernandes had led an unprecedented strike of railway workers that paralysed the Indian Railways for three weeks.

Over the course of 1974 and early 1975, the JP Movement reverberated across the country. JP himself toured the country, much like Mahatma Gandhi during the Independence Movement, and channeled popular discontent against Indira.

"*Sinhasan khaali karo, ke janata aati hai* (Vacate the throne, for the people are coming)," was JP's rallying call during his rallies.

On June 12, 1975, Justice Jagmohanlal Sinha of Allahabad High Court convicted Indira of electoral malpractice and struck down her election to Lok Sabha from Rae Bareilly.

As demands for her resignation grew louder, President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed signed the Proclamation of Emergency late on the night of June 25. Electricity to newspaper offices was cut off, and people were informed of the Proclamation by Indira herself, through an address broadcast on All India Radio at 8 am on June 26.

Indira's rule by decree

The Emergency, which lasted until March 21, 1977, saw the Indira's government use special provisions in the Constitution to impose sweeping executive and legislative consequences on the country.

The federal structure was converted into a *de facto* unitary one. State governments were not suspended, but they were effectively brought entirely under the Centre's



President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed signed the Proclamation of Emergency on the PM's advice on June 25, 1975. *Express Archive*

control. Parliament made laws on subjects in the State List, and the President, with parliamentary approval, modified constitutional provisions on the allocation of financial resources between the Union and states.

Almost all opposition leaders, including JP, were imprisoned. Roughly 1.12 lakh people were detained under draconian laws like the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act (COFESA), and Defence of India Act and Defence of India Rules (DISIR).

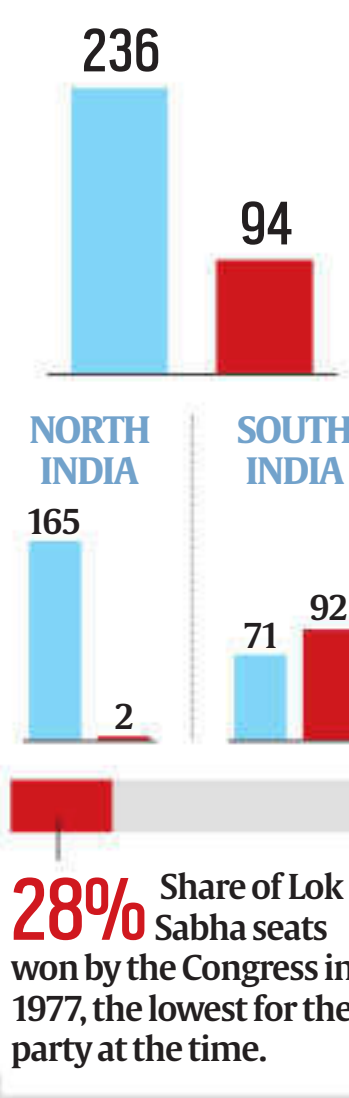
With the Opposition in jail, Parliament passed a slew of Constitutional Amendments. The 42nd Amendment of 1976 took away the judiciary's right to hear election petitions, widened the authority of the Union to encroach on State subjects, gave Parliament unbridled power to amend the Constitution, and made laws passed by Parliament to implement directive principles of state policy immune to judicial review.

Fundamental rights, including the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a), were curtailed. Newspapers were subjected to pre-censorship. More than 250 journalists, including Kuldeep Nayar of *The Indian Express*, were jailed.

While most newspapers bent, some like *The Indian Express* resisted the Emergency, fought the regulations in court, and published blank spaces on their pages instead of

CONGRESS, BEFORE & AFTER EMERGENCY

■ 1971 Lok Sabha election
■ 1977 Lok Sabha election



pre-censored stories. As this newspaper's former proprietor Ramnath Goenka once said: "The hard fact is that if we went on publishing, *The Indian Express* may be called a paper, but cannot be a newspaper".

On the pretext of addressing the issues that ailed India, Indira's son Sanjay Gandhi pushed a "five-point programme", which included family planning and clearance of slums. In April 1976, bulldozers moved to clear the slums near Turkman Gate in Delhi — as locals protested, police opened fire and killed many.

Family planning targets, especially in North India, led to forced sterilisations. Government officials were forced to submit to the surgeon's knife before arrears of pay were cleared. Truck drivers could not have their licences renewed without a sterilisation certificate. Sometimes, people were simply picked up from their homes or the streets to meet sterilisation targets. During one such drive on October 18, 1976, police fired on people protesting forced sterilisations in Muzaffarnagar, UP, killing at least 50.

In 1976, the year Lok Sabha elections were set to be held, Parliament extended its term by a year.

Emergency lifted, Indira routed

For no apparent reason, Indira decided to lift the Emergency early in 1977. Some say she was convinced she would win the next election; others believe better sense prevailed.

As it happened, Indira and her party were routed in the election of 1977. The Janata Party

— the product of the merger of the Jana Sangh, Congress (O), the socialists and Bharatiya Lok Dal — came to power, and Morarji Desai became India's first non-Congress PM.

Many Constitutional changes effected during the Emergency were reversed. While the provision itself was retained, the Janata government made it very difficult for a future PM to repeat Indira's actions.

Judicial review of a Proclamation of Emergency was made possible again, and it was made mandatory for such a Proclamation to be passed in both Houses of Parliament by a special majority — a majority of the total strength of the House and not less than two-thirds of members present and voting — within a month.

The 44th Amendment replaced the words "internal disturbance" as a ground for the imposition of Emergency with "armed rebellion".

Emergency's enduring legacy

The post-Emergency Parliament saw the coming together of the social forces behind the Jana Sangh and the socialists — the Hindutva upper castes, and the Lohiaite agrarian and artisanal castes.

The Janata government appointed the Mandal Commission to look into OBC quotas, which eventually propelled the rise of the OBCs in North India.

The Emergency also gave India a crop of young leaders who would dominate politics for several decades — Lalu Prasad Yadav, George Fernandes, Arun Jaitley, Ram Vilas Paswan, and many others.

Most importantly, the Emergency marked the beginning of the end of the Congress' one-party hold over the country. While the collapse of the Janata experiment in 1979 demonstrated the limits of anti-Congressism at the time, the Emergency set in motion political forces and processes, which in many ways culminated with the decimation of the Congress in 2014.

How Indira used the Constitution to subvert democracy

APURVA VISHWANATH
NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

THE imposition of the Emergency and most of what happened then were seemingly within the legal framework.

For instance, the Emergency was declared on June 25, 1975, under Article 352 of the Constitution, which at the time allowed such a proclamation on grounds of "internal disturbance".

Indira Gandhi's decision to continue as Prime Minister, despite the Allahabad High Court on June 12, 1975, disbarring her as a Member of Parliament for election malpractices, was also legal — the Supreme Court allowed her to remain in the post, granting a conditional stay on the HC order on June 24, 1975. The HC itself had granted a 20-day stay on its verdict to allow the Congress to pick its leader.

Indira's move to take the matter of imposing the Emergency directly to the President, circumventing the Cabinet was also seemingly lawful. Rule 12 of the Government of India (Transaction of Business) Rules, 1961 allowed the PM to bypass other rules and take actions that could be later ratified by the Cabinet. The Cabinet was informed the morning after the Emergency was proclaimed.

But all these seemingly legal steps heralded a dark chapter in modern Indian history, which was marked by a severe erosion of democratic rights and constitutional norms. This happened due to a combination of weaponisation of laws, subversion of judicial independence, and disregard of the rule of law. Constitutional scholars now outline these themes as predictable precursors to how democracies die.

The Emergency module

WEAPONISATION OF LAWS: The most glaring excess of the Emergency era was the illegal detentions. Nearly 1.11,000 persons were detained under preventive detention laws, including 13,000 associated with Opposition parties.

Historian Granville Austin in his book, *Working a Democratic Constitution*, noted that Indira had approved the list of those who were to be arrested in sweeping pre-dawn raids on June 26, 1975, even before the President's Proclamation was published in the official Gazette. These detentions were made primarily under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), 1971, which allowed indefinite incarceration without disclosing the grounds of arrest to the detainee.

In August 1975, through the 39th Amendment to the Constitution, MISA was placed under the Ninth Schedule to the Constitution, which meant it could not be challenged in courts. By doing so, a valid law was weaponised to arbitrarily arrest political detractors.

The Amendment placed the election of the President, Vice President, Prime Minister, and Speaker beyond the jurisdiction of courts. This was done in anticipation of the Supreme Court's ruling in the appeal against the Allahabad HC order disbarring Indira from Parliament.

SUBVERTING JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE: Judicial appointments became a proxy for the battle for control of the Constitution. Judges who fit the government's idea of a "committed judiciary" were appointed. The government tinkered with the seniority rule for appointment of the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

For instance, in 1977, Justice M H Beg was appointed CJI, overlooking Justice H R Khanna, the senior-most judge. Justice Khanna was the lone dissenter in the 1977 *habeas corpus* case in which the SC had upheld the suspension of civil liberties.

EROSION OF THE RULE OF LAW: The selective or unequal application of laws was seen in the way courts were asked to give the state a pass for its ex-

PROVISIONS THAT WERE WEAPONISED BY THE GOVT OF THE EMERGENCY

AS IT READ IN 1975, Article 352 of the Constitution allowed the President, on the advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the PM, to declare an Emergency if the security of India or any part of the country was threatened by "war or external aggression or internal disturbance".

THE EMERGENCY OF 1975 was declared on the grounds of "internal disturbance". In its press note, the government said certain persons were inciting the police and armed forces to not discharge their duties — an apparent reference to JP's call to the police to not follow orders that were "immoral".

ARTICLE 358 FREES THE STATE of all limitations imposed by Article 19 ("Right to freedom") as soon as an Emergency is imposed. Article 359 empowers the President to suspend the right of people to move court for the enforcement of their rights during an Emergency.

cesses, especially in cases of arbitrary arrests. Those who were arrested had no such rights or the benefit of the doubt.

The Constitution was amended when Opposition leaders were in jail. The passing of the amendments paid lip service to legislative norms, but in spirit, the idea of democratic lawmaking was violated.

EXECUTIVE AGGRANDISEMENT

The slogan "Indira is India and India is Indira" was heard widely during the Emergency. The fusing of personality and state, or party and state, is recognised as a marker of democratic backsliding. Even in its 1975 ruling, the Allahabad High Court agreed with the charge that Indira had used state machinery to facilitate her election campaign — a fusing of personality and state.

Lessons from the module

Democracy is a legal construct that is held together through collective adherence to constitutional requirements that ensure accountability and the rule of law. They are drawn from the functioning of the political Opposition, an independent judiciary, a free press, and a robust civil society.

Tom Ginsburg, co-author of *How to Save a Constitutional Democracy* (2018), has noted that while democracies "innovate" on constitutional design, "authoritarians copy". For example, India's Constituent Assembly abolished untouchability in 1950, at a time when the Jim Crow laws continued to be constitutionally enforced in several states in the United States, and only the US military was segregated through an Executive Order in 1948.

On the other hand, authoritarian playbooks are often repeated, from undermining judicial independence, giving into majoritarian impulses, and ultimately eroding the rule of law.

Elected leaders can gradually subvert the democratic process to increase their power, according to American political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (*How Democracies Die*, 2018).

The striking aspects of the Emergency module, however, are the intensity of democratic decline in a short period and the restoration of democratic values. Therefore, lessons in unravelling the authoritarian playbook are worth repeating.

WHAT THE SHAH COMMISSION FOUND

On May 28, 1977, two months after coming to power, the Janata government appointed a commission of inquiry under former Chief Justice of India J C Shah to look into allegations of abuse of power, subversion of the law, and other excesses during the Emergency. The Commission received 48,500 complaints, and examined 890 witnesses. It published two interim reports and a final report in 1978. Here's what the Shah Commission found.

1.2 lakh*

Number of detentions made during the Emergency, including 34,988 under MISA and 75,818 under DISIR. The most detentions were made in Uttar Pradesh (31,863) and Maharashtra (15,672).

1.5 lakh*

Number of structures that were demolished in Delhi as a part of Sanjay Gandhi's demolition drive. There were 4,039 complaints of demolitions elsewhere. Six people were killed in police firing at Turkman Gate in May 1976.

1.1 crore*

Number of sterilisations carried out between 1975 and 1977 against a target of around 67 lakh. There were 1,774 reports/complaints of deaths linked to sterilisations. The actual number was likely much higher.

8.5 to 1

Ratio of AIR's coverage of the government and Opposition parties ahead of the 1977 Lok Sabha elections; in December 1976 alone, AIR bulletins gave 2,207 lines to Congress spokespersons compared to 32 lines to the Opposition.

25,962

Number of government employees, at the Centre and in states, who were "prematurely retired". Only 14,187 retirements were reversed later.

*Rounded to closest decimal point
COMPILED BY ANJISHNU DAS



The Indian **EXPRESS**

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

NEVER AGAIN

Emergency's stain reminds us that the only bulwark against authoritarianism is listening to the objector, not cheerleader

TODAY, JUNE 25, a nation pauses to remember the time when an elected government brought constitutional democracy to a halt. It is a sobering day of commemoration of a slide into the dark, and a moment to say "never again". It is for that reason, too, that the day of promulgation of the Emergency is an occasion to celebrate the Opposition — with a big 'O' and a small 'o'. It includes the politicians who went to jail, standing up, in 1975-77. This, even as the Bench went down on its knees and large sections of the Press crawled, making the blank editorial on this page and journalists of *The Indian Express* in prison an exception. Today, it encompasses those who question the dominant common sense, the lonely dissenter, and the rebel with a cause; the political party that articulates an alternative to the dominant idea and established policy; the student on campus who objects; and the institution that protects its sense of purpose, no matter who is in power. The Emergency was an assault on all of these. The Indira Gandhi government came down on the right to oppose, undermined institutional checks on the abuse of power, and corroded processes of accountability. That is why, 50 years later, it remains a thick and dark stain on the body politic. Gestures of penance, like the overruling by a former Chief Justice of India, 41 years later, of an Emergency-era verdict given by his father — one of the four judges on a bench which decreed that a person's right to not be unlawfully detained can be suspended by the state — are not enough. A collective reckoning is still incomplete.

The fuller reckoning must acknowledge that the work of democracy is not yet done. And that the onus is on the leaders of institutions, it cannot be cavalierly passed on to "the people," or frittered away in partisan jostling and election slogans. Much has changed since Mrs Gandhi imposed the Emergency and withdrew it nearly two years later. But a dangerous set of ideas that were set in motion then, when the nation was not yet 30 years old, have had a troubling after-life. Some have got a disquieting new lease of life, 50 years on — be it the demonisation of the Opposition, the over-reach of preventive detention, viewing those who ask questions with suspicion, the undermining of judicial independence, the genuflection by sections of the media, or the constant search for the "enemy" within. In the battle between fear and trust, fear wins more not less.

Yet, there are substantive ways in which democracy is stronger today. After missing a step during the Emergency, the judiciary recovered its balance; civil society has grown more vibrant; technology has created echo chambers but also broken down walls and amplified voices long silenced; the federal frame, reinforced by strong regional parties, has acquired resilience. Some, though not all, monitorial institutions have gathered respect, and electoral-political mobilisations have empowered neglected constituencies. And yet, at the same time, a democracy carrying the burden of accumulated cynicisms and waning idealism is also coming under pressure from new forces. Public discourse is being shaped by the anonymised forces of othering and hate, allowing lies to fly and assisting in short-circuiting due process. Let this day, then, be marked with a sense of humility, and an acknowledgement: The Emergency is long over, mercifully. But a politics and governance that ensure it never happens again are, and should always remain, work in progress. The stain of 1975-1977 should never be whitewashed — let it remain visible lest we forget.

A FRAGILE PAUSE

Tel Aviv and Tehran would do well to step back and consider the high costs of failing to contain the conflict

NOTWITHSTANDING ITS fragility, the ceasefire between Israel and Iran is a promising development. When the US bombed Iran's nuclear facilities on June 22, a big concern was the absence of an off-ramp — a face-saver for Iran, after which de-escalation could become a serious possibility. Yet, US President Donald Trump's declaration of a ceasefire came just hours after Iran announced a missile attack on a US base in Qatar. Remarkably, the US President thanked Iran on social media for giving advance notice — a move he claimed helped avoid the loss of any Qatari or American lives. While tensions between Washington and Tehran appear to be easing, the actual signatories of the Trump-brokered deal have continued to exchange fire. Each belligerent, however, may now have a victory story to sell to its domestic audience: The US has said it has "obliterated" Iran's nuclear programme. Israel can say it has weakened a major regional adversary, and Iran can say it pushed back against stronger countries.

Even though both Iran and Israel have confirmed it, the future of the ceasefire remains uncertain. Both Tel Aviv and Tehran would do well to consider the high costs of failing to contain the conflict. Iran, in particular, has suffered extensive losses — its air force and air defences have been severely damaged, oil depots burned, and key military leadership eliminated. Though Tehran refrained from closing the Strait of Hormuz, the global economy remains hostage to the stability of the region. With Gaza still under siege, a failure to de-escalate risks the conflict spilling into neighbouring countries like Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, potentially fuelling a rise in militancy and extremism. A surge in displacement and refugee flows would deepen instability in a world strained by wars in Africa and Eastern Europe.

The case for peace could hardly be stronger. In the long term, Iran should prioritise transparency and diplomacy over clandestine activities with respect to its nuclear programme. In light of how easily its air defences were overwhelmed, the worst scenario is that Iran — like North Korea — may now conclude that the best way to protect itself is a nuclear deterrent. Israel, on its part, should resort to diplomacy, and not military adventurism, to have its security concerns addressed in any lasting way.

ATTENTION, PLEASE

Donald Trump's oddly bureaucratic sign-off is certainly curious and, perhaps, welcome

DONALD TRUMP HAS worn many hats — real estate tycoon, reality TV star, politician. Through it all, he has exhibited two traits. First, Trump knows how to grab attention. Second, what he lacks in syntax and vocabulary, he makes up for with a brazen confidence that often crosses into rudeness. From "huge", "big", "best ever" and "amazing" to "Sleepy Joe" and "Crooked Hillary" — his speeches and social media posts (often in all caps, with multiple exclamation marks) have stuck to this pattern. Now, on Truth Social, the US President has taken to ending his posts with the phrase, "Thank you for your attention to this matter!"

Apart from the exclamation mark, this latest Trumpism lacks all the hallmarks of his unique style. It has a whiff of bureaucratise, of the dry sign-offs of middle management communiques and emails from HR. Memes are mocking the contradiction of his online diatribes with the staid, pro forma ending. Take his post on June 24, in which he wrote about having "obliterated" Iran's nuclear facilities, the reaction and the path to peace. There's no need to end such a post with gratitude for attention: After all, Trump announces the fate of wars, students and immigrants, and international climate pacts on social media. Whether people want to or not, they are paying attention.

Even before he took office, there were apprehensions about Trump's maverick attitude to institutions, precedents and mores of democracy. Optimists hoped the office would temper Trump's worst tendencies. There has been little evidence of that — except for the recent expressions of gratitude. It's not much, really. But some politeness is better than none at all.



SUHAS PALSHIKAR

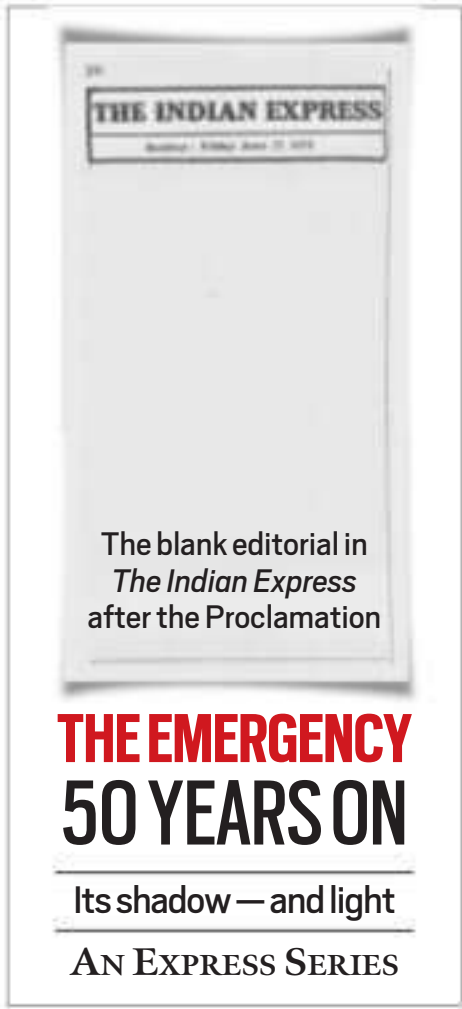
BESIDES POLITICAL REPRESSION, the Emergency of 1975-77 was characterised by comical news bulletins reporting how everything was in good shape. Today, as the Emergency is being remembered, the name and image of the Leader are as ubiquitous as 50 years ago. From *vikas* to the well-being of cheetahs, everything happens thanks to the Leader. This similarity should make us sombre about commemorating the 50th anniversary of that moment.

Indira Gandhi's Emergency was, in most part, for the sake of her personal authority. However, as we remember that episode — and we should indeed remember it — stopping at the personal level would be a mistake. Democracies often operate within the dialectic of the personal (political leadership) and the institutional, hanging perilously between an expression of popularity and that abstract thing called the rule of law.

Therefore, the act of "remembering the Emergency" should go beyond criticism of the past to introspection about the present. For one, we should ask what made the Emergency possible — how was it possible to persecute citizens? We should also ponder over the possibility of democracy being suspended again: Has the experience made our democracy more sabotage-proof? Or does the memory help us make sense of the politics of undermining democracy — a more contemporary purpose?

Any analysis of the Emergency must begin with 1971. Election outcomes in a democracy are often enigmatic. The voter and the victor diverge in the meanings they attach to the outcomes. In 1971, Mrs Gandhi won a handsome victory. The slogan Garibi Hatao caught the imagination of a country whose economic growth had stagnated and failed to deliver. But following that victory and more so after the Bangladesh War, Mrs Gandhi must have concluded that the voters looked upon her as a benefactor, a saviour and, more particularly, as indispensable. This feeling was at odds with the protests that erupted in Bihar and Gujarat. The overall gloom that took over the country post-1973 was also in stark contrast to Mrs Gandhi's idea of her destined role.

The vagueness of the constitutional pro-



The texture of politics and public contestations has altered dramatically since 2014 — all protests are labelled anti-national or urban naxal, and like the foreign hand of the Emergency, the hand of Soros has become the pretext to attack any difference of opinion. These labels are used to liberally invoke draconian laws, particularly the UAPA. Above all, more than during the Emergency, the judiciary has submerged itself in the logic of the political executive.



VIRENDRA KAPOOR

WE CAN EXPECT the 50th anniversary of Indira Gandhi's Emergency to be marked with special events. The ruling party, whose stalwarts were at the receiving end of Mrs Gandhi's ire in the 21-month dictatorial interregnum will, predictably, go to town recalling the dirty deeds of the then Prime Minister and her wayward son, Sanjay. He was virtually the country's de facto ruler in that dark period.

The BJP, for obvious political reasons, keeps the memory of the Emergency alive. Congress, on the other hand, likes to behave as if it never happened. A larger consensus on Mrs Gandhi's actions to cling to power in the wake of her election being set aside by the Allahabad High Court has eluded the political class to this day. Fear, an all-enveloping fear, was the currency of the Emergency. As Jagannath Rao Joshi, the Kannadiga Jana Sangh stalwart with dancing eyes and an always smiling visage, loved to put it, "Emergency is like a rabid dog, nobody knows who it will bite next... That is the key to fear."

Go back to the news pages of the time. You will find no dearth of notables, especially the so-called left-liberals, rationalising the frontal assault on the Constitution, blaming the Opposition for bringing it on itself. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Emergency was a culmination of a series of events, which severely undermined the institutional structures of the constitutional system.

Mrs Gandhi had sponsored the official Congress candidate for President, N Sanjiva Reddy, only to ensure the victory of her hand-picked nominee, V V Giri. Till then at least, such a betrayal was unheard of in a democracy. Her megaphones pressed for a "committed judiciary". She used the levers of power to intimidate and blackmail several party stalwarts during the 1969 Congress split. Some of them were either forced to stay neutral — recall Mohan Lal Sukhadia, the tallest Congress leader of Rajasthan at the time — or felt obliged to

vision made it possible to formally declare an "emergency". The organisational weakness of her "new" Congress and the concentration of power in the office of the Prime Minister also facilitated the declaration. While the media's timidity has been commented on, we do not give adequate attention to the swiftness with which the civil and police bureaucracies succumbed to the logic of authoritarianism, rejecting the rule of law in favour of rule by diktat of the popular leader. That's not to mention the Supreme Court, which acquiesced to the interpretation of the Constitution dished out by the political executive. Here was a template for a diversion away from democracy.

Mrs Gandhi's defeat and the subsequent amendment to the emergency provision created an impression that "democracy" had won — or, less poetically, that possible sabotage in the future was now averted. And true enough, India has not seen another such amateur attempt to divert the political process away from democracy.

In other words, the Emergency template has been discarded — but has it really? Conflating partisan interests with the national interest, pushing the judiciary to fall in line and above all, converting the police and the bureaucracy into weapons against citizens are the core pathways copied from the 1975-77 template.

There are striking similarities between then and now. The over-reading of election outcomes — not just in 2014 but subsequently, too — is one. There is no doubt the outcome was a clear rejection of Congress. No doubt each election since 2014, but 2014 in particular, was a spectacular victory for Narendra Modi. But these facts are understood and presented as a second Independence and are being etched into history as the dawn of Amrit Kaal. Megalomania apart, the texture of politics and public contestations has altered dramatically since 2014 — all protests are labelled anti-national or urban naxal, and like the foreign hand of the Emergency, the hand of Soros has become the pretext to attack any difference of opinion. These labels are used to liberally invoke draconian laws, particularly the UAPA. As they did during the Emergency, the bureaucracy and the police have happily joined the battle on behalf of the political executive. Above all,

FEAR WAS THE CURRENCY

Indira Gandhi mistakenly thought a disorganised Opposition would pose no threat

throw their lot in with her. She benefited immensely from the Machiavellian counsel of her key advisors, who had endeared themselves to her when she was politically inexperienced and clueless.

Among them was P N Haksar who, as her principal secretary, rendered her great assistance in neutralising the Syndicate challenge. Outside the government was Romesh Thapar, another Oxbridge-type progressive-leftist who had the PM's ear, holding her hand till weeks after the imposition of the Emergency. Haksar and Thapar need special mention because both would be mercilessly cast aside when Sanjay Gandhi came to rule the roost and shed his mother's leftist-liberal baggage.

Aside from stifling the voice of the Opposition that felt doubly buoyed by the voiding of her election, the Emergency yielded precious little for Mrs Gandhi. She could have brazenly continued as PM. Instead, a morally wounded Mrs Gandhi used the sledgehammer of Emergency to quell the challenge from a motley group of leaders whose appeal was confined essentially to a few urban centres.

A couple of weeks after the Emergency, most senior Opposition leaders were jailed and a few thousand RSS-Jana Sangh activists were detained. Finding little dissonance in society at large, she is said to have commented, "kucch to hua nahi, chutt-putt incidents *ke ilava*". Such was the enormity of her crime against the nascent republic that she had feared the worst, not reckoning with the reality that the poor and hungry masses everywhere have little time for such exotic concepts as freedom and fundamental rights.

For evidence, scan the Western world, where native populations in country after country are supporting authoritarian leaders even as they look with an unconcealed hostility towards the immigrants who are supposedly the cause of their plight. Mrs Gandhi had been cleverly marketed as the messiah of the poor in a coun-

try where nearly two-thirds of the population lived below the poverty line. Bank nationalisation and the abolition of privy purses were painted as part of "*garibi hatao*" whereas the wicked Opposition was concerned only with "Indira *hatao*".

She could have merrily persisted with the Emergency indefinitely but for her need to quell the trenchant rebukes emanating from Western capitals and media. As a senior Delhi Jana Sangh leader would often say to me in Tihar jail, "*Arre Viren ji, aap to abhi jawan ho, aap kyon yahan padey ho... hum ko to yeh yahan hi maregi*." Misled by the surface calm in the country, her advisers thought a disorganised and demoralised Opposition would pose no threat.

However, her gravest mistake was not to have foreseen the popular anger in the countryside, especially in the north and the west, against Sanjay's forced *nasbandi* programme. Rumours and fears of "impotence" from sterilisation magnified the anti-government mood in the hinterland. The Muslim voter went against Congress in the 1977 poll, sealing the fate of the mother-son duo.

Make no mistake: The mandate was anti-*nasbandi*, not anti-Emergency. Otherwise, a relatively more literate south would not have helped Congress still win 150-odd seats: There was hardly any forced sterilisation south of the Vindhyas. The spectacular return of Mrs Gandhi along with Sanjay and his young stormtroopers in the 1980 elections ought to have removed any doubt that constitutional norms and proprieties hold value for ordinary voters. The collective will is a reflection of our lowest common denominator, of our overriding socio-economic concerns. And that is true not only of India but a host of other Western democracies, including, nay especially, the US.

The writer is a senior journalist who has worked with The Financial Express and The Indian Express

The writer, based in Pune, taught political science



THE IDEAS PAGE

Democracy’s early warning system

Now beset by a rising tide of strong-armed rulers and demagogues worldwide, democracy is also the best check on their unrestrained power. Those who resisted the Emergency understood this



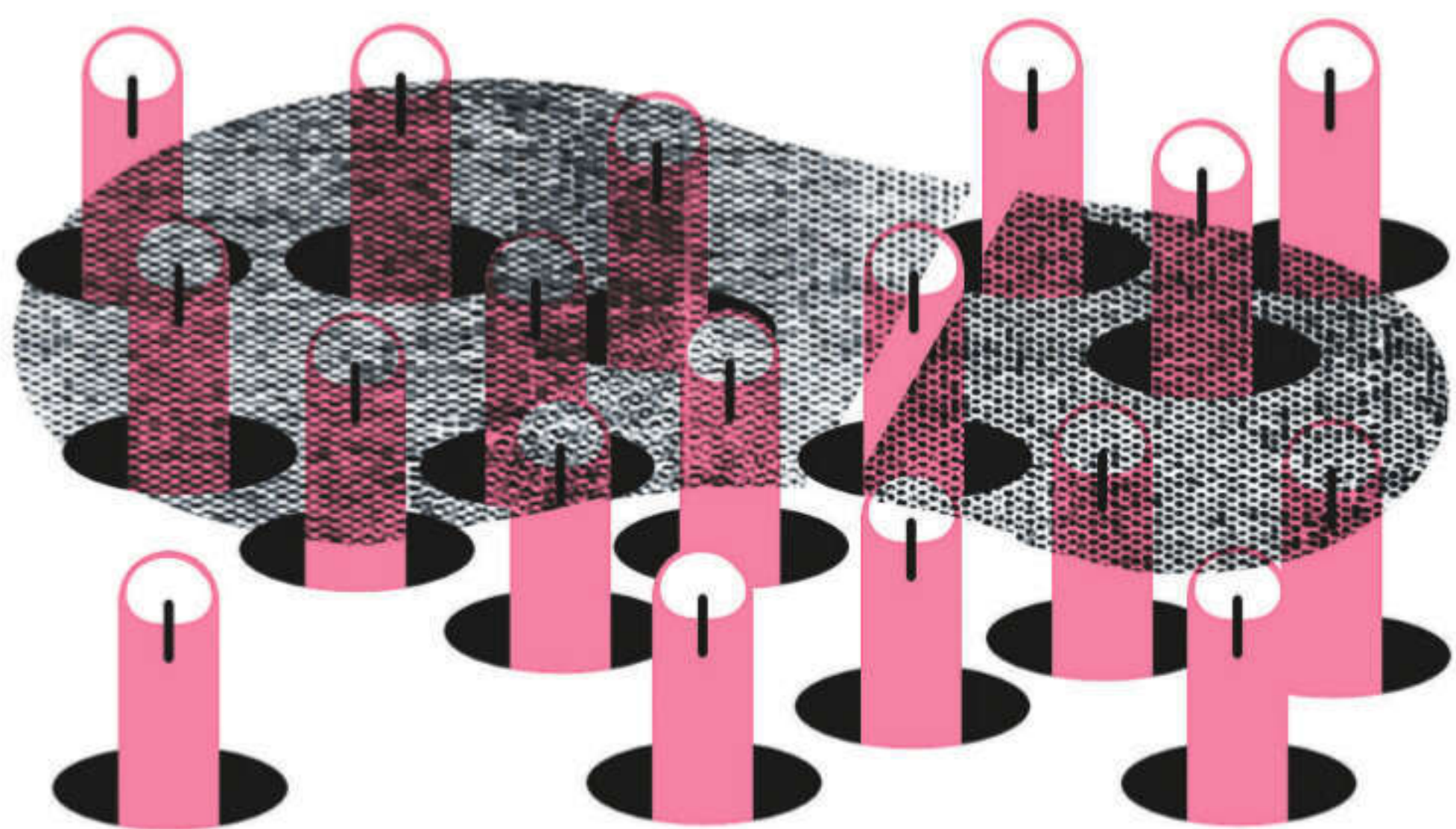
JOHN KEANE

AMIDST THE WORSENING global commotions, triggered by factors ranging from imperial power rivalries, unending wars, border closures and trade and tariff disputes to pandemics, genocides, extreme weather events, collapsing banks and citizen disaffection, a sinister trend is everywhere gaining traction and seemingly getting the upper hand: A new kind of despotism with thoroughly 21st-century characteristics is everywhere on the rise.

To speak of despotism is admittedly to invite confusion and controversy and to risk mental confusions. It’s an old word with a complicated and chequered history. Long out of fashion — these days “autocracy” and “authoritarianism” are the fashionable but mistaken political buzzwords — despotism has often been dismissed as an emotionally charged and fuzzy word laden with Orientalist prejudices against non-Europeans. But when suitably revised and carefully deployed, despotism is an indispensable keyword for making sense of the new global threats to democracy posed not only by politics as different as Russia, Iran, China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Cuba, and Vietnam, but also by the flourishing attacks on power-sharing democracies led by demagogues and their admirers in countries such as Viktor Orbán’s Hungary, Claudia Sheinbaum’s Mexico, Benjamin Netanyahu’s Israel and Donald J Trump’s America.

This worldwide growth of despotism ought to puzzle and worry every thinking person. Considered as a type of rule, as a way of handling power, despotism defies the laws of political gravity. It’s a peculiar type of pseudo-democratic government led by rulers skilled in the arts of manipulating and meddling with people’s lives, marshalling their support, and winning their obedience. Despotism feeds upon the voluntary servitude of its subjects. Those who think the word despotism is a synonym for repression, fear and raw force are profoundly mistaken. Despotism is not solely understandable through similes of hammers and nails; it requires thinking in terms of the attraction of metal filings to magnets.

In practice, the aspiring architects and established rulers of the new despotism are masters of seduction, deception and subjugation. They calibrate their use of violence and manage, using a combination of slick means, including rigged election victories, to win the submission and loyalty of the ruled. Oiled as well by government handouts, rampant patronage, bags of money, legal trickery, and endless media talk of defending “the people” against its foes, despotism nurtures the docile subservience of its subjects, including important sections of the middle classes, skilled and unskilled work-

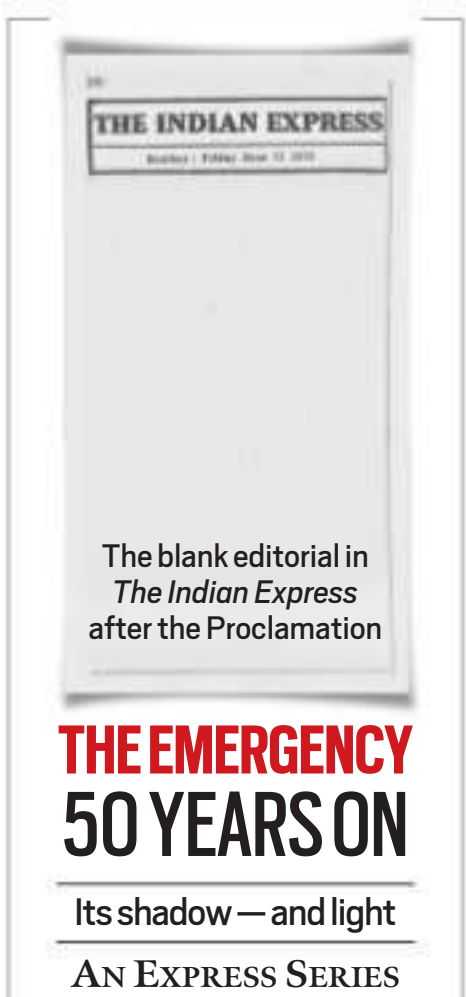


CR Sasikumar

ers and the poor. The result: The triumph of top-down pyramids of power that manage to win millions of supporters at home and admirers and friends well beyond the borders of the states they rule.

What’s especially worrying is that the spirit of despotism is contagious. Despots and demagogues hunt in packs. Their promiscuity knows no limits. Consider the recent grand show moment when an aspiring despot was greeted with open arms and gifts by his more seasoned counterparts: Donald J. Trump’s whirlwind May 2025 tour of West Asia. In Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar, the all-American demagogue was showered with the honour and recognition he has long craved. Lavish F-15 fighter jet escorts. Lavender and red carpets, mounted camels and women’s hair flipping welcome ceremonies. Riders on white horses and Tesla cybertrucks sporting stars and stripes. Grand marbled halls, dazzling crystal chandeliers, the highest civil decorations, including a pure gold necklace connoting luxury and appreciation, the world’s tallest building, more than half a mile high, lit up with an image of the American flag. A campaign-style rally at the region’s largest US military base in Qatar. The deliverables? Trillion-dollar business and defence contracts signed by cupidity in the presence of greed and fame. Plans (with Saudi Arabia) to establish a joint nuclear energy programme. A preliminary agreement (with the UAE) to import the most advanced AI chips. A lavish gift (from Qatar) of a luxury jet — all in confirmation of the point that in these times of turbulence, despots must fly together in safety and solidarity.

There’s growing awareness among journalists, intellectuals and citizens that such displays of despotism and bromance power are threatening the spirit and substance of the freedoms and promises of democracy. In these troubled times, this raises the old question: What’s so good about democracy? The shortest answer: To



Those who think the word despotism is a synonym for repression, fear and raw force are profoundly mistaken. Despotism is not solely understandable through similes of hammers and nails; it requires thinking in terms of the attraction of metal filings to magnets.

be a democrat is to believe that democracy is much more than popular self-government based on free and fair elections. It is to recognise the need to rein in any form of power that harms lives by bringing hardship, sorrow and indignity. Democracy is a shape-shifting way of protecting humans and their biosphere against the corrupting effects of unaccountable power. This is its radical potential: Democracy is the defiant insistence that people’s lives are never fixed, that all things, human and non-human, are built on the shifting sands of space-time, and that no person or group, no matter how much power they hold, can be trusted permanently, in any context, to govern the lives of others. This was surely the wisdom and sentiment motivating those people from many walks of life who bravely resisted Indira Gandhi’s Emergency rule between June 1975 and March 1977. They understood that democracy is a means of damage prevention. It’s an early warning system, a way of enabling citizens, and whole organisations and networks, to sound the alarm whenever they suspect that others are about to cause them harm, or when calamities are already bearing down on their heads.

The German anti-philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously complained that democracy stands for the disbelief in rule by elites. It does, and for good reason. Democracy brings things back to Earth. It serves as a reality check on unrestrained power exercised by strong-armed despots and demagogues backed by “the people”. It is the best means so far invented of ensuring that those in charge of organisations don’t stray into cuckoo land, wander into territory where misadventures of power are concealed by lies, silence and weaponised nonsense.

The writer is professor of Politics at the University of Sydney. His latest book is Thinking About Democracy in Turbulent Times: Sorbonne Lectures (2025)

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“There is no denying that Israel, having started the war based on a false claim that Iran was on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons, bears primary responsibility for ending it.” — THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Lessons must be passed on to young

Emergency showed how Indian democracy could be threatened, and what must be done to protect it



M VENKAIAH NAIDU

FIFTY YEARS AGO, a state of Emergency was imposed for 21 months by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, shaking the nation to its very core. This act proved to be the gravest threat our democracy has faced since India overthrew the colonial yoke. The Emergency remains a singular inflection point marking a shift towards authoritarianism in our political system and a critical moment in the lives of political leaders, activists, and the people.

The disturbing crackdown on and imprisonment of Opposition leaders, the complete clamping down on civil liberties and curtailment of all fundamental rights, including the right to free speech and the right to assemble for peaceful protests, were unprecedented dictatorial measures. The clampdown on press freedom, including censorship, and attempts to curb the independence of the judiciary, among other grim developments, were pointers to a dangerous trend.

For today’s generation, the Emergency, which shook the foundations of India’s democratic structure 50 years ago, may seem like a distant chapter in history. Young people today must be educated about this dark phase that threatened to change the fundamental nature of Indian democracy.

Let us first understand the extreme conditions that can potentially force the President to declare a National Emergency. Under Article 352 of the Constitution, the President can declare a National Emergency, when the security of the country, or any part of it, is threatened by war, external aggression or armed rebellion. As we know, there were no such triggers in 1975.

The Nav Nirman student movement in Gujarat and the student agitation by the Bihar Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti (supported by the highly respected Gandhian socialist Jayaprakash Narayan, popularly known as JP), raised the level of popular anger against the ruling Congress, especially among the youth. As the anti-corruption movement snowballed into a massive countrywide campaign, JP called for “total revolution” in June 1974.

JP urged students, peasants, and workers’ unions to bring about non-violent change in Indian society, and his popularity began to grow with each passing day. As these protests were brewing, on June 12 1975, Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court declared Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s election to the Lok Sabha invalid on account of electoral malpractices. With this landmark judgment, the court unseated Mrs Gandhi from the Lok Sabha and banned her from contesting elections for an additional six years.

Mrs Gandhi went to the Supreme Court in appeal. On June 24, the Supreme Court stated that Mrs Gandhi could continue as Prime Minister pending the resolution of her appeal, but barred her from voting in parliamentary proceedings. Desperate to cling to her position, Mrs Gandhi took the unprecedented step of imposing a state of Emergency through a proclamation issued

by President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed on June 25 under Article 352 (1) of the Constitution of India, citing prevailing “internal disturbance.”

The government suspended fundamental civil liberties, including free speech, freedom of the press, and habeas corpus. Censorship was swiftly imposed, and media outlets critical of the regime were forcibly shut down. In a particularly shocking move, power supply to newspaper offices was abruptly cut off, silencing dissent overnight. Opposition stalwarts like Jayaprakash Narayan, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, Morarji Desai, George Fernandes, Jyotirmoy Basu, Charan Singh, J B Kripalani and many others, were detained.

Exercising unbridled power, Mrs Gandhi used the 42nd Amendment to extend the terms of the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies from five to six years. The original five-year term was later reinstated by the 44th Amendment.

The government employed harsh preventive detention provisions nationwide to suppress dissent. Opposition leaders were detained across the country, and activists and students were held for an indefinite period. I was a young student leader at the time, and was arrested and kept in detention for nearly a year and a half in the erstwhile undivided Andhra Pradesh. Some of the prominent Opposition leaders in AP, such as Tenneti Viswanadham and Gouthu Latchanna, among others, were jailed.

Looking back, I see the seventeen-and-a-half-month period of my incarceration as a turning point in my journey. Had I not been jailed during this time for my student activism, I would probably have become a lawyer to fulfil my mother’s wishes. The Emergency changed the course of my life and career in one stroke.

Organic protests by Opposition parties and students erupted against the Emergency, building up a powerful movement of resistance. The media, to a large extent, buckled and came in for severe criticism. Notable exceptions were *The Indian Express* under the fiery Ramnath Goenka, *The Statesman* headed by C R Irani and Nikhil Chakravarty’s *The Mainstream*. L K Advani’s famous words to journalists after the Emergency had been lifted come to mind: “You were asked only to bend, yet you crawled.”

The historic general elections of 1977 constituted a watershed moment because they brought about a major transition reflecting the will of the people. The Janata Party’s triumph brought an end to the Emergency and was a victory for democratic ideals, reaffirming the supremacy of the ballot. It underscored the power of democratic participation as a peaceful and effective means of achieving change — in this case, by overthrowing a powerful dictatorial regime. This is perhaps the most glowing example of the power of the ballot in our recent history.

The lessons we learnt from this darker era must be passed on to India’s younger generation. They must be firm in standing up to safeguard democratic principles, protect civil liberties, and ensure a foolproof system of checks and balances. Let us not forget that the role of the judiciary and media freedom also came under the lens during this draconian phase. The Emergency reminded us that “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty”.

The writer is former Vice President of India



DEVENDRA FADNAVIS

FIFTY YEARS AGO, on June 25, 1975, India entered a dark chapter in its history. To call this a “golden jubilee” would be a misnomer; a jubilee celebrates something good. Instead, we mark five decades since the Congress party trampled on the Constitution, institutions, and democracy itself. Old days should never be forgotten; they continuously empower us to fight.

The seeds of discontent were sown in 1973 when engineering students in Gujarat protested against fee hikes. By 1974, the Chief Minister was forced to resign. Voices began to rise against an oppressive family rule. The “JP Movement” emerged in 1974 with student protests in Bihar that greatly distressed the government. That same year, George Fernandes led a significant railway strike. Amidst this rising tide of dissatisfaction, a pivotal moment arrived in 1975: The Allahabad High Court ruled that Indira Gandhi had won her election against Raj Narain through corrupt practices. She appealed to the Supreme Court, receiving a partial stay that allowed her to remain a Member of Parliament but barred her from participating in Lok Sabha proceedings. The events that followed dealt a severe blow to democracy.

On June 25, 1975, a rally was underway at Delhi’s Ramlika Maidan. Jayaprakash Narayan had ignited a struggle against the Gandhi family, corruption, and anarchy, declaring a “Total Revolution”. The rally saw a large presence of leaders, but two stood at its centre stage: Jayaprakash Narayan and Atal Bihari Vajpayee. During this rally, there was a fervent demand for Mrs Gandhi’s immediate

resignation, with Ramdhari Singh Dinkar’s poem, *‘Sinhaan khali karo ki janata aati hai’,* reverberating through the crowd.

However, the next morning was starkly different. News of the imposition of the Emergency reached the nation through newspapers and radio. Most prominent leaders were arrested. All political activities were suspended. Democracy had been murdered while the country slept. As days and months passed, the times changed. Schools and colleges became instruments of government propaganda. The media was entirely under state control; news and editorials faced stringent censorship. Only a handful of newspapers dared to oppose, and with many journalists arrested, most publications surrendered to the government. Many IAS officers slavishly followed Sanjay Gandhi, and no one dared to utter a word of dissent. Even the Supreme Court curtailed freedom of expression and fundamental rights. Aggressive leaders like Fernandes continued their protests while evading arrest, but when his brother was tormented, he, too, was eventually apprehended.

The Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) allowed arbitrary imprisonment without trial. Laws were enacted that prevented recourse to courts — even if a police officer shot someone out of personal vendetta. One Supreme Court judge opposed this, but the other four remained silent. The judge who upheld the spirit of Babasaheb Ambedkar later resigned. The Constitution was torn to shreds merely to satiate the ego of a single family. The Congress party never accepted the vision of the Mahamanav and

Bharat Ratna Babasaheb Ambedkar during his lifetime, and during the Emergency, they sought revenge on the sacred Constitution he had given to the nation. Over 3,00,000 people were imprisoned, leaving countless families destitute. Socialists, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and the Jana Sangh were at the forefront of this movement. Only two parties supported the Emergency: The Communist Party of India and the Shiv Sena. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) also took an opposing stance.

The Emergency shattered many families. Many lost their loved ones. With the primary earner imprisoned, numerous families fell into debt and faced severe financial crises. Many had their property confiscated, and countless businesses and livelihoods were permanently destroyed. The exploitation was immense, both mentally and economically. Speaking from personal experience, I was just five years old. My father, the late Gangadharrao Fadnavis, was also arrested. My only opportunities to see him were when I went to deliver his lunch to prison or when he was taken for a medical examination. Being separated from my father for such a long period at a young age filled me with rage.

Today, after Operation Sindoor, the Congress party should be ashamed of its stance. Interestingly, just about three-and-a-half years before the Emergency, India had fought a war with Pakistan. At that time, as the Jana Sangh president, respected Atal Bihari Vajpayee ji had declared support for Mrs Gandhi.

After the Emergency was lifted, a massive rally was again held at Ramlika Maidan, with

slogans like “Indira Gandhi *murdabad*, Atal Bihari Vajpayee *zindabad*”. However, Atal ji calmed the crowd. After the Emergency, the importance of the legislature, executive, and judiciary was further underscored. People understood the profound significance of democracy more clearly, and their faith in the Constitution deepened. Had those leaders not struggled, our country might have succumbed to dictatorship, mirroring the present state of Pakistan.

The democracy we cherish today exists because of the leaders who fought 50 years ago. Remembering those leaders today is even more crucial than remembering the Emergency itself. The more the stories of exploitation by the Gandhi family and Congress come to light, the stronger our democracy will become. The central government has enjoined upon all state governments and Union Territories to observe June 25 as “Constitution Murder Day”, marking the 50th anniversary of the imposition of the Emergency. This commemoration is slated to be a year-long event across the country. We are currently showcasing these harrowing tales of the Emergency through exhibitions in every district of the state, and everyone should visit them. We will also honour families who struggled during the Emergency and fought for the restoration of democracy with certificates of appreciation. The state government has also decided to provide stipends to these families. This is our sacred offering to the temple of democracy. Future generations must understand this history.

The writer is Chief Minister of Maharashtra

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AN IMPENDING CRISIS

THIS REFERS TO the report, ‘Asia warming nearly twice global average, hit hard in 2024: WMO’ (*IE*, June 24). The finding that Asia’s warming rate in 2024 was nearly double the world average over the 1991-2020 period comes as no surprise. Accelerated warming is manifesting in a high recurrence of extreme weather events, upending lives. The disappearance of glaciers on Asian mountains bodes ill for the world’s most populous region, especially towards its future water security. With the global climate action plan hit by the US exit, the whole of Asia has been left more susceptible to an impending climate disaster.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

FAIR UMPIRE

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘When trust is shaken’ (*IE*, June 23). Rahul Gandhi’s allegations against the ECI highlight the need for restoration of credibility and transparency in its working. AAP’s charges regarding voter lists should be probed by a Supreme Court judge. The inclusion of the CJI on the committee that selects ECs will make it look like a fair umpire. The ECI must not shy away from sharing information with voters.

SH Quadri, Bikaner

CRITICAL FOR INDIA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Critical blockage’ (*IE*, June 24). Critical minerals have acquired such a crucial role that any disruption in their supply chains can impact the economies of diverse countries. One country’s dominance in refining them demands that urgent attention be paid to concepts like friend-shoring and near-shoring. For India, measures like the National Critical Minerals Mission and joining global institutions like the US-led Mineral Security Alliance are crucial and timely. However, it is crucial that India invest in R&D and capacity building in the sector.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

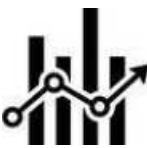
THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Critical blockage’ (*IE*, June 24). Critical minerals have acquired such a crucial role that any disruption in their supply chains can impact the economies of diverse countries. One country’s dominance in refining them demands that urgent attention be paid to concepts like friend-shoring and near-shoring. For India, measures like the National Critical Minerals Mission and joining global institutions like the US-led Mineral Security Alliance are crucial and timely. However, it is crucial that India invest in R&D and capacity building in the sector.

Rajwardhan Rana, New Delhi

Data dilemmas

Base year change, overhaul of IIP, CPI welcome

In a recent interview to this newspaper, Minister of State for Statistics and Programme Implementation Rao Inderjit Singh said that a new series for GDP, IIP (index of industrial production) and CPI (consumer price index) would be released in about a year’s time. The base year will move from 2011-12 to 2022-23 in the case of GDP and IIP, and from 2012 to 2024 in the case of CPI.



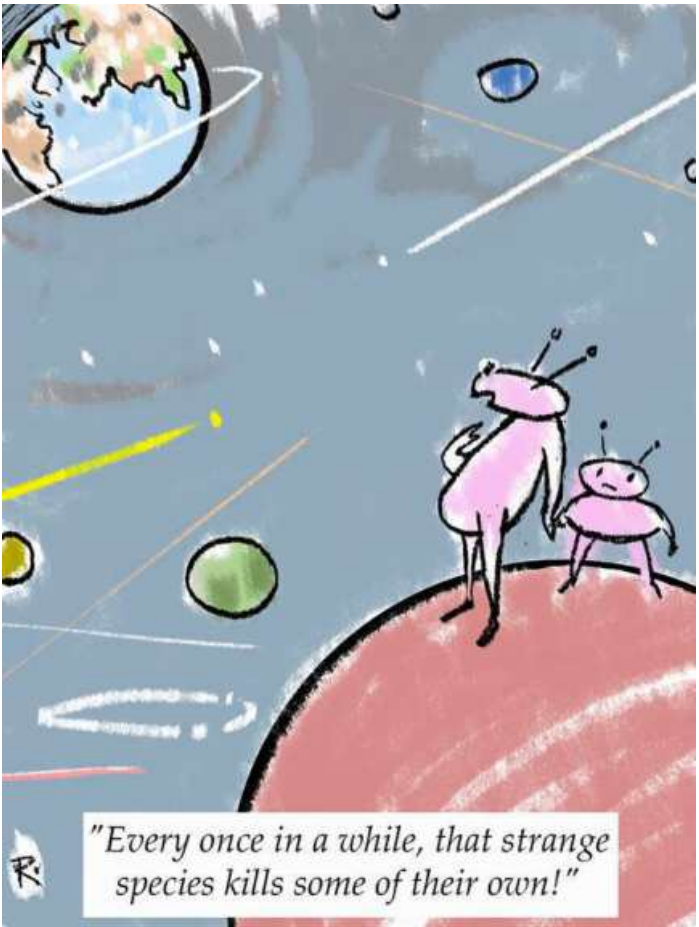
In addition, the composition of CPI (407 items) and IIP (over 830 items) will undergo a revision as well, with weights being changed, new items introduced and presumably outmoded ones eliminated. Output and price indices need to be adjusted periodically, and more frequently perhaps than once in a decade, to align with structural changes in the economy. The CPI and IIP are beset with distortions. As per the Minister, the weights in CPI will be adjusted in accordance with the findings of the Household Consumer Expenditure Survey 2023-24. In that case, weights for cereals in the CPI may be reduced, as HCES points to monthly per capita expenditure of 4 per cent (of total expenditure) on cereals in urban India and 5 per cent in rural India, against the CPI’s cereals weight of 12.35 per cent and 6.59 per cent for rural and urban areas, respectively.

What complicates matters is the free food component, which has been ‘imputed’ in the HCES, for which prices should be zero. If cereals inflation is overstated, it is possible that eggs, milk and milk products, beverages and fruit are underestimated. There is also the issue of collecting price data for online and offline transactions. Unchanged expenditure weights over time do not capture price elasticity. In the case of IIP, its composition of over 830 items does not capture technological changes. The use of the wholesale price index to convert production values into physical quantities implies that the WPI too requires scrutiny. The use of 2022-23 as a base year seems, on balance, a reasonable choice for GDP series and IIP, but it is odd that 2024 will be the base year for CPI.

Ideally, the three indices should have the same base year for easy comparison of output, investment (the new capex survey will make a difference), prices and employment (monthly labour data) data. Yet, FY23 was a relatively normal year, after two preceding abnormal years thanks to Covid. It recorded a growth rate of 7.6 per cent and a slightly high inflation rate of 5.4 per cent. But this could look different once the revised series is released. On the GDP figures, there is an old debate over whether Ministry of Corporate Affairs database accurately estimates organised sector output, even as data on unorganised sector has improved with the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Enterprises. The use of GST data should help overcome many data gaps, especially in services. The Annual Survey of Industries must be given due importance. Finally, the series revisions will, hopefully, put a stop to years of wrangling over data quality. The use of technology to gather and update data can make a difference.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



MSMEs need to cut emissions

URGENT ISSUE. Given their contribution to exports, MSMEs need incentive-based climate finance to meet global standards



ABHINAV BANKA
GOPAKUMAR KU
AKANKSHA CHOUDHARY

In response to the need for sustainable growth, the government has officially set 2070 as the target year for achieving net-zero carbon emissions, which must be balanced with the country’s demographic transition while achieving self-sufficiency in domestic production. This optimisation function finds the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector as a vital component, contributing 30 per cent to the total GDP, 35 per cent to manufacturing output, and 45 per cent to overall exports, while employing 20.39 crore in the last four years.

This, however, comes with various measurable and non-measurable costs since MSMEs rely on traditional labour-intensive methods, resulting in higher resource consumption, which is affecting their profitability and competitiveness. Naturally, this constrains the adoption of energy conservation policies. This challenge is not unique to India. The SME Climate Survey 2024 has reported that 52 per cent of MSMEs worldwide have identified limited access to finance as the primary factor preventing them from taking climate action.

ENERGY CONSUMPTION
India has over 6,000 MSME clusters. Per the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) estimates, there are about 180 energy-intensive MSME clusters, consuming approximately 40 per cent of the overall energy consumption by industrial MSMEs in 400 clusters. The MSMEs in the steel re-rolling sector have an average specific energy consumption (SEC) that is 30 per cent higher than that of large-scale industries in the country; in glass and refractory industries, the SEC ranges from 3.8 GJ (gigajoule) per tonne to 7 GJ per tonne, whereas the international standard stands much lower at 3.27 GJ per tonne. In the paper industry, the SEC for Indian MSMEs is marginally higher at 0.251 TOE (tonne of oil equivalent) per tonne against international standards at 0.22 TOE per tonne. The emissions by MSMEs in the brick industry are 66-84 million tonnes of CO₂, which is roughly 2.5 per cent of total emissions in India.

Unsustainable emissions may present a major challenge to the long-term



STUMBLING BLOCK. Unsustainable emissions may present a major challenge to the long-term viability of the MSME sector SIVA SARAVANAN S

viability of the MSME sector. Given their significant contribution to exports, their operations are increasingly subject to scrutiny under global carbon standards, such as the European Union’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). As a result, compliance with sustainable production processes is becoming even more critical for ensuring continued access to international markets.

Globally, industries are increasingly being brought under the scope of energy efficiency and sustainable finance requirements through taxonomies, regulations, and capital markets. These instruments rely on robust disclosure data and a well-established climate information infrastructure. Whereas in India, according to the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), in 2019, only a small number of MSMEs conducted energy audits and reported their emissions. The absence of

The absence of market-linked emission policies for MSMEs removes any incentive or obligation to adopt sustainable practices or disclose emissions data

market-linked emission policies for MSMEs removes any incentive or obligation to adopt sustainable practices or disclose emissions data. In contrast to SEBI’s BRSR framework, which mandates the top 1,000 listed companies to report both direct and indirect emissions, MSMEs face no formal disclosure requirements. This challenge is worsened as 99 per cent of MSMEs are classified as ‘micro’ enterprises; these are largely informal and lack the technical capacity to measure or report their emissions.

With financial institutions increasingly insisting on adopting ESG norms and green lending practices, the absence of emissions disclosure by MSMEs can further hinder their access to capital, including traditional bank loans, ultimately impeding investments in better technologies and sustainable practices.

Under the existing framework, reporting can be advanced through two key channels. First, the BRSR framework can serve as an entry point by encouraging large corporations to disclose the emission intensity of their supply chains. Since the framework already requires reporting on procurement from MSMEs under Principle 8, this provision can be expanded to include voluntary disclosures on the environmental

Rate rationalisation will improve GST system

Some rates need to reassessed, key sectors must be brought under GST, and appellate tribunal should be operationalised

Saurabh Agarwal

Goods and Services Tax (GST) completes eight years on July 1, 2025. Introduced to streamline the indirect tax regime, GST replaced multiple Central and State levies with a unified tax structure. By eliminating the cascading effect of taxes, it laid the foundation for a common national market — realising the vision of “One Nation, One Tax.”

Among the key achievements, the most significant is the expansion of the taxpayer base. Registered taxpayers rose from 67.83 lakh to 1.47 crore as of August 2024, reflecting deeper formalisation of the economy. This has been accompanied by a rise in monthly GST collections, which are consistently nearing ₹2 lakh crore.

Another success has been the significant digital enablement. GST has streamlined critical processes such as registration, return filing, tax payments, and refunds. Further, the implementation of e-way bills, e-invoicing, and invoice matching has improved compliance and reduced evasion. The next phase focuses on litigation management. The gradual move towards electronic issuance of notices and queries through the portal with virtual hearings (a move towards

faceless assessment), marks a shift towards a more efficient and transparent dispute resolution framework.

An often-overlooked contributor to GST’s success has been the proactive role of the GST Council. Since inception, it has issued circulars, FAQs, and sector-specific guidance to address industry concerns and ease implementation. Yet, challenges around classification and rates persist. Additionally, key sectors still remain outside the GST net, retrospective amendments to safeguard revenue, and the absence of a functional appellate tribunal adds complexity for taxpayers.

PRIORITISE GSTAT
As GST enters its ninth year, operationalising the GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) becomes a structural priority. While significant progress has been made, the tribunal is not yet functional. A fully operational GSTAT is critical for faster and more effective dispute resolution.

As adjudication reforms take shape, attention must also turn to tax design. While the GST Council is considering a shift to a three-rate slab structure, product categorisation also needs re-evaluation.

As consumer behaviour evolves, several goods previously considered



REFORMS. Tweak GST regime

luxury or discretionary are increasingly seen as essential. For instance, many food products (such as butter, ghee, and packaged items), toiletries, and personal care products taxed at 12 per cent and 18 per cent merit reclassification. Two-wheelers and air-conditioners taxed at 28 per cent serve critical needs. Re-evaluating the tax slab for such items could enhance affordability and align tax design with present-day realities, without significantly affecting revenue collection.

Another area requiring policy attention is the GST treatment of life and health insurance. Insurance penetration in India remains low, and rising healthcare costs make adequate coverage essential. Reducing GST on term and health insurance from 18 per cent to 5 per cent or nil could help

impact of sourced inputs. And second, this can be achieved through the government’s Public Procurement Policy 2012 (amended in 2022), which mandates 25 per cent of government procurement from MSMEs, a figure that has increased to up to 40 per cent in recent years. Linking the procurement process to GHG emission disclosure can incentivise sustainable practices by the MSMEs. In both cases, the burden of compliance can be mitigated through targeted support from either the government or corporations, such as the provision of smart meters and CO₂ monitors, enabling MSMEs to directly measure their Scope 1 emissions.

Since limited access to capital is a key barrier preventing MSMEs from advancing climate action, policies linking green initiatives with capital access and disclosure can be more effective. It is important to emphasise that the goal is to incentivise access to finance by encouraging sustainable practices rather than penalising non-compliance. For example, designing credit guarantee schemes linked to green initiatives or lower emissions can encourage MSMEs to strive towards lower emissions, reporting, and also access to capital. This will create a data repository for the banks to verify any possibility of greenwashing.

LEVERAGE AI
Also, there is a need to leverage AI and create Digital Public Infrastructure, where dedicated simplified portals need to be developed, which can use the annual reports and financials of MSMEs to approximate emissions and the related cost of reduction — example, BIS led Project Viridix, where climate data is extracted from corporate disclosure documents using natural language processing techniques. Advancements and innovations in measurement, compliance, and maintenance databases are increasingly important, especially as governments move towards implementing carbon trading strategies.

The draft Climate Finance Taxonomy for India, currently open for public consultation, includes provisions for the MSME sector based on a proportionality approach. However, before applying thresholds and standards to assess their alignment with the taxonomy, it is essential to establish a robust GHG emissions database for MSMEs, something that the proposed approaches could help enable.

Banka is an IES officer in the Ministry of Finance, Gopakumar and Akanksha are Assistant Professors at School of Liberal Arts, IIT Jodhpur. Views are personal

✉ **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to bleditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to ‘Letters to the Editor’, The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Project loan norms

This refers to ‘Investment booster’ (June 24). The final RBI guidelines on project loans reducing standard provisioning to just 1 per cent for infrastructure and residential projects and further to 0.4 per cent upon project commencement are steps in the right direction. However, these measures only partially address the core issues faced by commercial banks in extending long-term project finance. Project loans are inherently complex, with multiple uncertainties across the life-cycle. Given that project finance demands advanced risk

assessment and structuring skills, banks must focus on building internal capabilities. This includes recruiting professionals with domain expertise and offering competitive compensation structures to attract and retain talent. Only then can banks afford to prioritise project lending over relatively safer working capital or retail loans.

Srinivasan Velamur
Chennai

Disruption of Hormuz

This refers to ‘Disruption of Hormuz may offer opportunity for India’s refiners’ (June 24). The Israel-Iran

war is taking several twists and turns, placing the countries depending on oil imports in a problematic situation. The closure of Hormuz sea route will badly affect many countries. Though India has built a large number of large underground oil reserve storage facilities, these would cater to the oil demands of the country only for a few weeks. If the conflict continues, the oil supply chain would definitely get hit.

RV Baskaran
Chennai

Inclusive health insurance

The article ‘Health insurance must

be inclusive’ (June 24) has not come a day too early. The government should mandate standardised insurance products across insurers, ensure reasonable and rational pricing aimed at affordability, and stipulate sales and after-sales practices to ensure timely honouring of commitments to foster reliability. All campaigning for ‘insurance for all’ would result in suboptimal outcome with the existing portfolio of products and level of service standards both in health and life insurance alike.

Jose Abraham
Vaikom, Kerala

Medical expenses

The rise in life expectancy means there are more older people with age related illness, needing more medical attention. The civic and state hospitals are in no position to handle the number of patients and more turn to private hospitals for treatment. The treatment in private hospitals is prohibitively expensive and most cannot afford it. Instead of trying to make health insurance accessible to everybody, the government’s 18 per cent service tax has made it more expensive.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

Defining rural India

Census 2027 must base it on development levels

Rajiv Ranjan Prasad

The Census 2027 offers a unique opportunity for revisiting the parameters and indicators for demarcation of rural and urban areas in India. In fact, the policies for rural and urban development in the past have not been appropriately aligned with the real time availability of physical and spatial infrastructure and social services in these areas. Availability of these real data based parameters would create enabling ecosystem to catalyse rapid socio-economic transformation of rural and urban areas.

Firstly, what exactly constitutes rural and urban areas is important. A natural definition of rurality is to define it by exclusion, as that which is not urban, where urban is defined on the basis of population agglomerations.

In the 2011 Census, the definition of urban area adopted is as follows:

- (a) All statutory places with a municipality, corporation, cantonment board or notified town area committee, etc.
- (b) A place satisfying the following three criteria simultaneously:
 - (i) a minimum population of 5,000;
 - (ii) at least 75 per cent of male working population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits; and
 - (iii) a density of population of at least 400 per sq. km. (1,000 per sq. mile).

An area is considered 'Rural' if it is not classified as 'Urban' as per the above definition.

The existing urban-rural classification systems suffer from significant deficiencies as they do not help in formulation of development indicators which can be used for identifying and delineating development deficits.

Policies and programmes can be better targeted when rural and urban definitions are combined with key demographic, economic, educational, or health care provider characteristics.

Data used to conceptualize the rural definition in India have no direct and corresponding relationship with rural development policy formulation. Rurality is merely a construct that does not stand-up to empirical testing.

Some countries consider the availability of services for defining urban area.

In Honduras, for instance, an area is considered urban if it has 2,000 residents and is equipped



UPLIFTING. Rural India PERIASAMY M

with infrastructure for health, education, and electricity. This definition is relevant from the standpoint of poverty analysis because poverty is usually associated with the absence of these services.

Using variables like population density and the distance to a major city, a Latin American rurality metric was developed.

Limited, exclusionary conceptualisations of urban and rural boundaries fail to measure socio-economic realities.

Overcoming contradictions and attaining complementarity will be made possible only by reorienting policies around an awareness of socioeconomic trends as well as widely recognised developmental approaches and concepts.

Poverty rates are positively associated with greater rural distances from successively larger metropolitan areas. More remote rural communities have more inelastic labour supply, hitting growth and development.

Welfare decreases rapidly as access to urban centres gets worse. Thus, understanding the spatial dimension of socio-economic processes in rural areas is important.

Policy formulation for rural development would become more effective if we adopt a broader definition of rural area by including population data as well as status of physical, economic and social infrastructures that are necessary for poverty reduction and for living a dignified life. There is perhaps an urgent need to revise the static concept of rurality and develop a dynamic definition of rural area which should be reviewed periodically.

Policymakers should identify the demographic and economic changes which affect the character of a rural area. Rural development should focus on people-based policies, relying on spatial equilibrium processes.

The writer was with the National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad



AASHEERWAD DWIVEDI

In a world shaken by conflict, pandemic, and populism, the golden era of globalisation appears to be in retreat. The once-celebrated flows of capital, goods, and information now stutter under the weight of fragmented politics and deepening geopolitical divides.

As trust in the post-war liberal consensus is eroding, the financial infrastructure underpinning global trade is being reimagined. A quiet but significant transformation in this context is in the architecture of money. As nations race to redefine their monetary sovereignty in a digital age, two competing infrastructures have emerged: Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) and Stablecoins.

While much of the world, led by China and India, is making rapid strides in deploying CBDCs, the US is making a deliberate strategic bet on stablecoins. Far from being a neutral technological preference, this choice reflects a geopolitical calculus as stablecoins could be the digital-age scaffolding that sustains the hegemony of the US dollar.

Stablecoins are digital tokens pegged to fiat currencies, most commonly the dollar, and backed by reserves typically held in short-term US government debt. The two dominant players — USDT (Tether) and USDC (Circle) — collectively account for over \$150 billion in circulation and are growing in usage across crypto markets, cross-border payments, and decentralised finance ecosystems.

What makes these instruments geopolitically significant is not just their popularity or technical architecture, but their reserve mechanism. When a user in Nigeria, Brazil, or Turkey buys a stablecoin pegged to the dollar, they are not just gaining access to a digital token — they are effectively channelling funds into US Treasury bills.

In other words, stablecoin adoption abroad generates demand for US debt, reinforcing the global appetite for dollar-denominated assets.

To understand the full implications of this shift, one must look to the past. After the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in the 1970s, US had forged a new financial regime based on 'petrodollar recycling'. Oil-exporting



GETTY IMAGES

PROS AND CONS. Stablecoins offer stable store of value and low-cost cross-border transfers. But they also weaken local monetary policies

countries, flush with dollars from energy exports, reinvested their surpluses in US assets, especially Treasury securities. This created a self-reinforcing loop: as the world demanded oil, it demanded dollars; and as it accumulated dollars, it reinvested them in US debt, funding America's deficits and lubricating the global financial system.

Simultaneously, the rise of 'eurodollars' — US dollars held outside American banks, especially in European and offshore markets — fuelled an offshore dollar system that operated independently of US domestic monetary controls. These dollars formed the liquidity backbone of global finance, free from US regulatory constraints but dependent on the dollar's credibility.

Stablecoins combine these two forces — and add a third. Like petrodollars, stablecoins channel foreign demand into US financial markets, particularly government debt. Like eurodollars, they exist largely outside the formal American banking system. But Stablecoins can go further by adding programmability — the ability to embed

Stablecoin adoption outside the US generates demand for US debt, reinforcing the global appetite for dollar-denominated assets

financial logic directly into money.

A stablecoin can trigger an automated payment when goods arrive at a port, split proceeds among multiple parties, or interact seamlessly with smart contracts. In doing so, they don't just mimic money; they redefine what money can do.

Why would the US, the issuer of the world's reserve currency, forgo the opportunity to create its own digital dollar through a central bank digital currency? The answer lies in geopolitics.

China has launched its Digital Yuan (e-CNY) to advance its Belt and Road ambitions and circumvent dollar-dominated payment rails like SWIFT. India, too, has launched the ₹ (Digital Rupee), with wide pilot programmes across retail and wholesale segments. These countries see CBDCs as instruments of sovereignty, resilience, and soft power. If successful, they could erode dollar's grip on international finance.

Rather than play catch-up, the US appears to be outsourcing innovation to the private sector. By encouraging dollar-backed stablecoins, the US is betting that a decentralised, programmable, market-driven financial layer can extend the reach of the dollar in a digital age — without ceding control to the state.

This is not a gamble without risk. Stablecoins, unlike CBDCs, are

vulnerable to issuer default, regulatory arbitrage, and financial contagion. The collapse of algorithmic stablecoins like TerraUSD (UST) in 2022 reminded the world that not all pegs are stable. But the leading stablecoins today — those backed by high-quality liquid assets like US Treasuries — offer a model that blends dollar stability with digital agility.

For countries in the Global South, stablecoins offer both opportunity and challenge. On one hand, they provide access to a stable store of value, low-cost cross-border transfers, and financial services otherwise out of reach. In places with inflationary domestic currencies and capital controls, stablecoins act as lifelines to the global economy.

On the other hand, they risk reinforcing the dollar's dominance at the expense of local monetary policy. If people prefer dollar-stable digital tokens over local currency, it can lead to a phenomenon known as crypto-dollarization, weakening central banks' control over credit, inflation, and exchange rates.

The question, then, is not whether stablecoins will rise — they already have. The real question is who controls them, what rules govern them, and whose interests they serve.

The writer is Assistant Professor (Economics), Faculty of Management Studies, University of Delhi

STATISTALK.

Compiled by Dhurairvel Gunasekaran | Graphic: Visveswaran V

Most shunned popular index stocks by active fund managers

Fund managers of actively managed mutual fund schemes prioritize companies with strong financials, healthy growth prospects, and attractive valuations when selecting stocks. Despite inclusion in major indices, managers often underweight or avoid certain constituents through strategic positioning. Among Nifty 50 stocks, HDFC Bank remains the most favoured, held by 457 active equity funds, while Adani Enterprises is held by only 32 active funds as of May 2025. Fund managers typically avoid stocks with weak fundamentals, governance concerns, or cyclical headwinds. Additionally, sector rotation strategies and valuation concerns drive selective stock picking. Here are the most avoided stocks across the large-, mid-, and small-cap indices:

Least preferred Nifty 50 stocks

Number of active funds holding the stock

Adani Enterprises	32
JSW Steel	65
Asian Paints	80
Wipro	81
JIO Financial Services	83
Nestle India	92
Adani Ports and Spec Eco Zone	99
Tata Consumer Products	99
Dr. Reddy's Laboratories	109
Grasim Industries	118
Most favoured stock (HDFC Bank)	457

Least preferred Nifty Midcap 150 stocks

Number of active funds holding the stock

Adani Total Gas	1
Tata Investment Corporation	1
IREDA	2
Rail Vikas Nigam	3
Cochin Shipyard	4
The New India Assurance Company	6
Yes Bank	6
Mangalore Refinery And Petrochemicals	7
SJVN	7
Bank Of Maharashtra	9
Most favoured stock (Coforge)	176

Source: ACEMF Portfolio data as of May 30, 2025

Only 689 actively managed equity related funds were considered. Index funds ETFs and arbitrage funds were excluded.

Least preferred Nifty Next 50 stocks

Number of active funds holding the stock

IRFC	2
Adani Green Energy	8
Bajaj Housing Finance	9
Macrotech Developers	14
Adani Power	18
Punjab National Bank	28
Bajaj Holdings & Investment	29
Adani Energy Solutions	33
Indian Oil Corporation	34
Canara Bank	42
Most favoured stock (Interlobe Aviation)	258

Least preferred Nifty Smallcap 50 stocks

Number of active funds holding the stock

Reliance Power	1
Natco Pharma	5
Ramkrishna Forgings	7
Tejas Networks	7
Aegis Logistics	8
Himadri Speciality Chemical	9
Hindustan Copper	10
NBCC (India)	10
HFCL	11
IIFL Finance	12
Most favoured stock (Multi Commo. Exc. Of India)	142

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 25, 2005

HLL has begun climb back up: Banga

Lack of business up-trend seemed to weigh down investors at the AGM of Hindustan Lever Ltd (HLL) here on Friday, as they wished the company's incoming and outgoing chairmen well. Mr M.S. Banga said, "When you run up a hill fast, you do tend to slow down a bit. We have been re-equipping ourselves for the steeper slope that you see in the market today. Let me assure you, we have no intention of slipping down that hill. We have begun the climb back up."

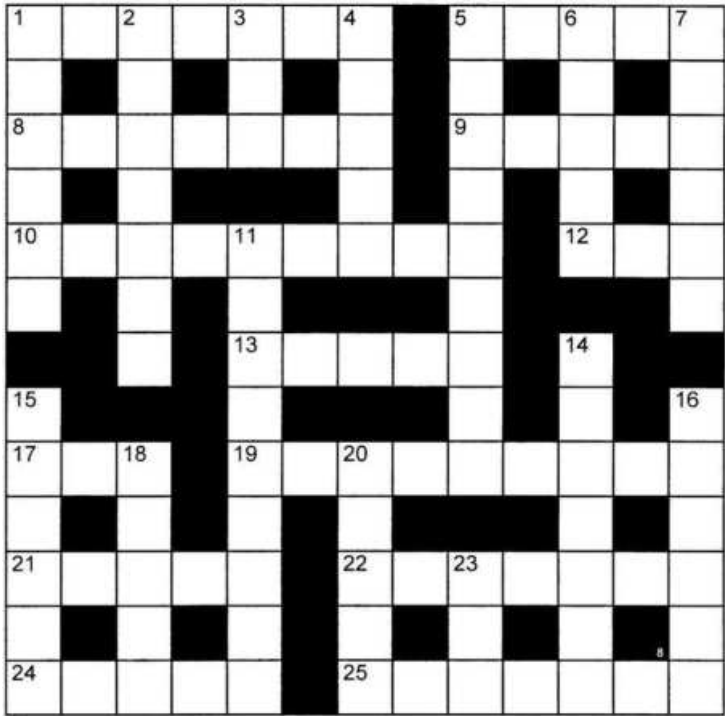
RBI group proposes further deregulation of forex market

A group appointed by RBI has recommended that Indian resident entities should be permitted to cancel and rebook all forward contracts freely, irrespective of their tenor. The Internal Technical Group on Forex Markets said foreign currency rupee-swaps booked to hedge genuine foreign currency exposures may also be permitted to be rebooked on cancellation.

Bill to enable banks to file returns on foreign contributions

The Government may mandate commercial banks to file returns with the Union Home Ministry on all foreign contributions flowing into the accounts held by NGOs and other associations.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2725



EASY

ACROSS

- 01. Bestowed (7)
- 05. Meeting for debate (5)
- 08. Go on too long (7)
- 09. Up, out of bed (5)
- 10. Instrument indicating tempo (9)
- 12. To solidify (3)
- 13. Concise, compact (5)
- 17. Used to be (3)
- 19. Interposed (2,7)
- 21. Non-verse writing (5)
- 22. Be submitted to (7)
- 24. Paces (5)
- 25. Ten squared (7)

DOWN

- 01. Tends horse (6)
- 02. Was put on one's guard (7)
- 03. Sailor (3)
- 04. Australian wild dog (5)
- 05. Food stuffing (9)
- 06. Takes chances (5)
- 07. Very little (6)
- 11. Unfancied racehorses (9)
- 14. One clipping sheep (7)
- 15. Purloins (6)
- 16. Wrap up, encompass (6)
- 18. Push rudely (5)
- 20. To redden with embarrassment (5)
- 23. Greyish brown (3)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- 01. I give you that: it's allowed (7)
- 05. Discussion meeting taking shape around university (5)
- 08. Did too much jogging as the play went on too long? (7)
- 09. Has got up and is seen among the last three children (5)
- 10. It gives musician time to enter room with maestro first (9)
- 12. Is determined to layout the examination questions (3)
- 13. Concise way in which ester is produced (5)
- 17. Used to be an adage that got reversed (3)
- 19. When surrounded with twine, been able to sort it out? (2,7)
- 21. Poet's first flower was not in verse (5)
- 22. Must suffer, for example, round and about (7)
- 24. One takes them walking to a higher level? (5)
- 25. A number that divided the county (7)

DOWN

- 01. Men who marry one prepares for the special occasion (6)
- 02. Was made watchful by it being altered thus (7)
- 03. Blackjack? (3)
- 04. The row will disappear with the dog when it's wild (5)
- 05. Compel team to change the stuffing (9)
- 06. Takes a chance on getting the right skis sorted out (5)
- 07. It's very small, the menu it makes up (6)
- 11. They may be dark horses, the cads! (9)
- 14. One cutting fleeces from the rear: he's adapted to it (7)
- 15. Pinches the spoilt beer (6)
- 16. Men lose their head and collapse: take them in your arms! (6)
- 18. It's half over when she is around and push comes to it (5)
- 20. Redden, as will lost leader in the outback (5)
- 23. Go after one for payment but sound finished (3)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2724

ACROSS 1. Sapid 4. Despair 8. Outre .9. Airship 10. Cub 11. Reticence 12. Teem 13. Acre 18. Introvert 20. Ems 21. Tangled 22. Throb 23. Ejector 24. Eyrie

DOWN 1. Scotch thistle 2. Potable 3. Dreary 4. Drafts 5. Struck 6. Ashen 7. Reprehensible 14. Clearer 15. Collet 16. Header 17. Statue 19. Tense

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Fifty years ago, tryst with fear

The Emergency tested India’s engagement with democracy. Though scarred, the nation survived

Fifty years ago, this day, India received a rude jolt when the Union government declared a national Emergency, that led to a suspension of constitutional rights, including civil liberties, and imposed authoritarian rule on the country. The 21 months that followed were a deeply lacerating time for a people who were building a republic on the foundations of the legacy of the national movement and the Constitution that gave legal sanctity to its ideals. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, singled by the Allahabad High Court verdict that convicted her of electoral malpractices, declared her election null and void, and disqualified her from holding elected office for six years, chose the shroud of the Emergency to stay in office. A pliant President, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, did not object and the country slipped into a long night. Power supply to media offices was cut that night so that newspapers could not report the events underway. Politicians from Opposition parties, trade union leaders, and Sarvodaya leader Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), were arrested that night and organisations including the RSS, Ananda Marga, and Jamaat-e-Islami banned. A few such as Socialist Party chairman George Fernandes went underground to organise a pushback. An estimated 35,000 people were arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act and 76,000 people were held under the Defence of India Act and Rules during the Emergency months.

The government had its way with the Emergency because the institutions expected to provide the checks and balances failed to challenge the subversion of the Constitution. Like the President’s office, the Supreme Court, except one judge, Justice HR Khanna, cowed before an imperial prime minister and her coterie that unleashed a regime of fear by weaponising legal provisions, suppressing free speech, and imprisoning the regime’s opponents. Well-intentioned public policies such as population control measures to anti-corruption and black marketeering provisions turned into symbols of State repression and instruments to jail people. The administration used its publicity arms to claim that all was well with the nation and its citizens. JP, ailing and in jail, was the moral hand that guided the resistance to the Emergency. The political dynamic unleashed by Indira Gandhi saw a coming together of the Opposition parties, and even dissenters within the Congress party, which led to her defeat in 1977.

The Emergency marked a rupture in independent India’s history. Political India was never the same thereafter, but the restoration of democracy following the massive mandate for the Janata Party was a redemptive action that instilled faith in the power of vote among citizens. The Emergency tested India’s tryst with democracy; unlike most other post-colonial nations, it survived the fire, with scars.

New paradigm in India-Canada ties

The commemoration of the bombing of Air India flight 182 jointly by India, Canada and Ireland for the first time on the 40th anniversary of the tragedy that claimed 329 lives is an important moment in recognising the international character of terrorism, and the need for a global response to the problem. It is significant that India sent a delegation to the event in Ireland led by Union minister Hardeep Puri, who emphasised the need for deeper cooperation with Canada to counter extremism and terrorism.

Over the past four decades, Canada largely treated what was the worst act of aviation terrorism till the 9/11 attacks in the US as an incident to be mourned by India, though a majority of the fliers were Canadian citizens of Indian-origin. Most of those involved in the carnage got away because of a botched investigation by Canadian authorities. The recent past has made Canada reckon with the downing of Air India flight 182 as a tragic moment and a violent act against its own citizens, and thereby, its sovereignty. That is a powerful foundation that can be used by Ottawa during its ongoing reset of its relations with New Delhi, with a beginning having been made through the recent meeting of prime ministers of the two countries. While India and Canada must surely focus on trade, investment, supply chains and technology to give a boost to bilateral relations taken to a low point by the row over the killing of a Khalistani activist, there must be a substantive dialogue on security issues of concern to both sides, including the threat posed by cross-border, ideology-driven terrorism.

Détente and discord: Tehran’s dilemmas

The war with Israel will force hardliners and reformists in Iran to reconcile their positions

Twelve days after Israel launched an attack on Iran’s top military command and nuclear and ballistic missile sites, the two countries tentatively agreed to a US-backed ceasefire that may yet unravel. The US strike on Iran’s three nuclear sites and US President Donald Trump’s deliberate ambiguity around Washington’s objectives vis-à-vis Iran — whether it wanted to end Iran’s nuclear programme or force a regime change in Tehran — restricted Iran’s choices. But by launching missiles into Israel, Iran signalled its readiness for a war of attrition while keeping open the option of a diplomatic off-ramp.

Iran’s ruling elite now faces a reckoning over whether they should abandon their anti-American geopolitical project in favour of defending ‘Iran-zamin’, the historical nation of Iran. The Islamist hardliners, who have dominated the security apparatus and consolidated political power by claiming security legitimacy, and the reformist liberals, who have sought to normalise Tehran’s international relations, including with the West, will struggle to reconcile their visions of the future.

Many analysts have argued that the last time Iran fought such an existential war was in the 1980s with Iraq. Saddam Hussein, with the support of most

of Iraq’s neighbours and both the Cold War superpowers, the US and the erstwhile USSR, had invaded the newly established Islamic Republic. Iran fought the eight-year war with virtually no allies except Syria. When Ayatollah Khomeini accepted the UN resolution on a ceasefire, calling it more deadly than “drinking from a poisoned chalice”, he gave up the goal of the “export of (Islamic) revolution” to preserve the new republic. Subsequently, Khomeini established the new doctrine that the system’s survival was a supreme value, and above any religious or ideological concern. Amid confrontation with the US, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which played a dominant role in the Iran-Iraq war, was put in charge of a deterrence strategy based on cultivating a network of non-State allies (Hezbollah in Lebanon, for instance) and a robust missile industry and a nuclear programme.

Hardliners and reformists differed on the scale and purpose of Iran’s nuclear programme. The former saw it as crucial to maintain a distance from the West. In contrast, the reformists have used it as leverage to draw the West, especially the US, into serious negotiations aimed at normalising diplomatic relations. Following Trump’s withdrawal from the nuclear deal in 2018 and Israel’s covert campaign of sabotage of nuclear facilities and scientists, Tehran incrementally scaled up nuclear activity, primarily to gain negotiation leverage. Still, it didn’t cross the

nuclear threshold, mainly fearing military attack by the US and/or Israel. Also, it has been reluctant to embrace the fate of North Korea, isolated from the international community and delinked from the global economy. That would have extracted a massive social cost and put unsustainable pressure on the domestic polity. Hassan Rouhani, during his 2013 presidential campaign, had successfully rallied the Iranian masses when he famously declared that the “centrifuges should spin, but that people’s lives should run too,” and reached a nuclear agreement, from which the Trump Administration withdrew in 2018.

Israel’s targeting of nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, followed by US strikes on nuclear sites, have left Iran with stark choices. Tehran’s defensive doctrine has been about avoiding a full-blown war with the US. Any serious Iranian attack on the US bases

or attempt to close the Strait of Hormuz would have invited a forceful response from Washington. Further, Iran was keen to avoid damaging its ties with Gulf neighbours, who have tried to distance themselves from the US and Israeli aggression. However, a lack of response to the most flagrant attack by the US ran counter to the declared Iranian strategy of “threat against threat, aggression against aggression”. Moreover, Tehran responded positively to a US-backed ceasefire with Qatar acting as an inter-



Israel’s targeting of nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities and the destruction of civilian infrastructure have left Iran with stark choices. AFP

mediary, just hours after its largely symbolic strikes aimed at America’s Al Udeid base in Qatar.

While the extent of damage sustained by Iran’s nuclear sites remains unclear and the whereabouts of its stockpile of highly enriched uranium that Tehran claims to have moved to safety in anticipation of strikes are unknown, Iranians will have to debate the future of their nuclear programme. Iran’s nuclear capability lies in its broad knowledge base, including the expertise to build advanced centrifuges. Therefore, even the destruction of physical infrastructure does not guarantee the end of Iran’s nuclear programme. Tehran’s reformist-led government has correctly portrayed the attack on its nuclear installations as a direct threat to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and highlighted the failure of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to condemn the strikes. Such framing underscored Tehran’s effort to mobilise diplomatic support at the international level. Foreign minister Abbas Araghchi’s diplomatic outreach with Iran’s neighbours during a meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in Istanbul and

then with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, created diplomatic momentum towards a ceasefire.

Iran’s hardliner-dominated Parliament is considering a Bill to end cooperation with the IAEA and acting on Iran’s right to withdraw from the NPT as a legal response to the US attacks. To begin the withdrawal process, Iran must submit notice to the other parties to the treaty and the UN Security Council three months in advance, which will then seek to influence the withdrawing party. Iran may utilise this as the remaining leverage for diplomacy with the West, especially if Russia and China take an active role. The hardliners in the security establishment look poised to question the utility of diplomacy with Washington and may brace for a lasting confrontation with Israel. Finally, the future will depend on whether the current détente holds. A lasting ceasefire may provide elbow room for diplomacy, and ensure peace and stability in the region.

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How the Emergency left India’s judiciary bruised

There is a misconception that judicial activism in India emerged after the withdrawal of the National Emergency (1975-1977). In the true sense of the phrase, it was inaugurated in the *Golaknath* case (1967) when the Supreme Court held that Parliament cannot curtail the fundamental rights of the people as enumerated under part 3 of the Constitution. The Court, in *Golaknath*, demarcated the limits of legislative majority. This was, perhaps, the first direct judicial effort to distinguish constitutional democracy from conventional democracy where legislative majority alone matters. *Golaknath* was a constitutional assertion over political whims and fancies, which, indirectly, negated idolatry in politics.

Then came the seminal judgment in *Kesavananda Bharati* (1973) that evolved the basic structure doctrine. It said that Parliament cannot alter the basic structure of the Constitution by invoking the legislative process. Many ideas like secularism, republicanism, free and fair election and rule of law were, thereafter, indicated as basic features of the Constitution by way of various judicial pronouncements. The doctrine resembled the eternity clause in the German Constitution on the inalterability of the constitutional tenets. It tried to stall the legislative onslaught instigated by personal or political interests.

It was the thin majority that evolved the *Kesavananda Bharati* principle (the doctrine of basic structure) that irked the powerful regime under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The challenge the judgment posed against an aggrandising executive and parliamentary majoritarianism prompted the executive to meddle with the affairs of the judiciary. Three judges — justices JM Shelat, KS Hegde and AN Grover — who decided against the regime under Mrs Gandhi had to resign when their junior on the Bench, Justice AN Ray, who ruled in support of the regime, was elevated as the country’s Chief Justice.

Thus, the seeds of political and judicial turmoil during the Emergency were sown much prior to its formal declaration. The fissure between the executive and judiciary was essentially a case of the most dangerous branch of the government crushing “the least dangerous branch”, as Alexander Hamilton famously described the judiciary. During the Emergency, a committed judiciary came into being and the judges often chose an approach opposite to what the majority in *Kesavananda Bharati* outlined.

The independence of the judiciary became a myth and what JAG Griffith explained in *The Politics of the Judiciary* (1977) was proved right. According to Griffith, when judges are confronted with direct political situations, “they act in broadly similar ways” and “behind these actions lies a unifying attitude of mind, a political position, which is primarily concerned to protect and conserve certain values and institutions”. When the judges (except Justice HR Khanna) declared that fundamental rights could be suspended during the National Emergency, the “political position” of the Court exposed itself, which practically annihilated the Constitution during those days. Again, the Court, while setting aside the Allahabad High Court verdict that disqualified Prime Minister

Indira Gandhi’s membership of the Lok Sabha, validated the retrospective amendments to the election laws. The amendment absolved her from the consequences of “corrupt practices” as found against her by the Allahabad High Court.

Constitutions across the world are only an effort to reduce, if not to end, the evils of State power. The constitutional text, on its own, would not be able to carry out this function in the absence of a political climate that ensures the working of the Constitution. Indian politics has often not only failed the people but also the Constitution. Liberal thinker Murray Rothbard in *Anatomy of the State* (1974) lamented that “of all the numerous forms that governments have taken over the centuries, of all the concepts and institutions that have been tried, none has succeeded in keeping the State in check”.

The contemporary judicial reality across the world is more dispiriting. In a 2020 paper titled *Abusive Judicial Review: Courts against Democracy*, David Landau and Rosalind Dixon wrote: “In some cases, courts have upheld and thus legitimated regime actions that helped actors consolidate power, undermine the Opposition, and tilt the electoral playing field heavily in their favour.” They also found that “clever authoritarians often do their manipulation well before elections have actually been held, by consolidating power, stacking key institutions such as courts and electoral commissions, and harassing opposition parties and leaders”. Countries like Russia, Brazil, Poland, Hungary, Ecuador, Philippines, Venezuela have demonstrated that populist autocracies can weaken the courts. Bad political ambience can only create an equally bad court system, despite our expectations to the contrary.

Though there were many unconventional judgments in social action litigations after the Emergency, where the Supreme Court as an institution tried to regain its glory that was lost during the tough times, they hardly challenged the functional edifice of the executive or legislature. They could not have done so. As such, India, like any other democracy, should guard against the fragility of its judiciary.

Such vigilance might yield better results sometimes, as illustrated by the postscript to *Kesavananda Bharati* case. In October 1975, the then Chief Justice of India AN Ray constituted a 13-member Bench for considering a review of the *Kesavananda Bharati* judgment. It was done without any reference by any Bench and was based only on the directives of the CJ. Lawyer Nani Palkhivala objected to these aberrations and argued against revisiting the radical judgment. Justice Murtaza Fazl Ali asked Palkhivala if the *Kesavananda Bharati* judgment was against Palkhivala’s clients would he have asked for a review. Palkhivala’s reply was that had it been the case, there would be no Supreme Court by then where he could have come! Ultimately, the Bench was dissolved and the judgment retained.

The history of the Emergency years offer significant lessons for the country’s democracy. The most important one being that the Constitution survives only when its institutions remain vigilant, and not with rhetoric.

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{ MARK RUTTE } SECRETARY-GENERAL, NATO

We are not living in happy land after the Berlin Wall came down. We are living in much more dangerous times and there are enemies who might want to attack us

What the nuclear power vision needs for take-off

India’s quest for non-fossil fuel power generation has led to renewed enthusiasm for nuclear power. The budget for the current fiscal announced plans to have 100 GW nuclear capacity by 2047. Apart from this, India is also targeting setting up five small modular reactors (SMRs) by 2033 for which the required research and development would be executed.

SMRs are typically small reactors, in the range of 250-300 MW, whose components can be assembled at site. There are many advantages of SMRs, the most important being that they can be ramped up and down to smoothen the grid on account of intermittency of renewable generation, lowering the need for coal-based generation as the stabiliser. There are other benefits too, for example, lower gestation lag, smaller exclusion zone, usability in the off-grid mode, among others. SMRs are well suited for providing captive power to industries that need steady, high voltage power. SMRs are functioning in countries such as Russia and China though capital costs at present are prohibitively expensive for the Indian context. The design for SMRs is yet to be standardised but available literature seems to suggest that India is most likely to adopt the pressurised heavy water reactor (PHWR) technology.

While India’s nuclear mission plans to rope in the private sector, the current laws need to change for this to happen. The government has proposed amending the Atomic Energy Act 1962. Will the private sector only be a part equity provider or will it be allowed to operate the plant as well? Further, will foreign players also be allowed to invest? Many things will only be clear when the Act is amended.

Globally, private sector participation in nuclear plants is a mixed bag. In the US, there are private players who are operators as well, under strict regulatory oversight. In Finland, there’s the Mankal model — a cooperative where multiple companies can collectively invest in a nuclear plant. In France, the public sector leads the way and a similar situation also exists in some other countries that have varying degrees of private participation. In the UK, under the regulated asset based (RAB) model, a guaranteed return is provided to private investors in nuclear power.

In India, the amendment of The Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act 2010 is also under consideration, to make it less stringent in terms of liabilities stemming from a nuclear accident. At present, the Act states that each incident will

cost the operator ₹1,500 crore, over and above any other liability payable under any other Act. Liability laws were made stringent because of incidents such as the Bhopal gas tragedy. Accidents such as the Fukushima disaster further convinced the law makers that it was a step in the right direction. But the need to attract private investment has prompted a rethink here.

Beyond amendments in the two Acts, galvanising the private sector for nuclear sector roles will need resolving many other issues. After all, the vision is to scale up from 8 GW to 100 GW in the next 22 years. This means we need to add about 4 GW every year from now till 2047. The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) has announced a target of 50 GW. This still leaves half the envisioned capacity to be met by new entities. Providing a guaranteed return as done for other generators where tariffs are fixed on a cost-plus route may not be enough. The government may have to provide tax benefits, green bonds, and even viability gap funding (VGF). Another critical issue will be the supply chain. Apart from domestic feedstock extraction and management, procuring uranium from abroad will always

be a headache given geopolitical uncertainty. Nuclear waste disposal, including sustainability and liability on safe disposal of nuclear waste, needs careful detailing.

Most importantly, proliferation of nuclear energy can only take place under a strict regulatory regime that is currently lacking in India. The regulatory institution in India is the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), but is subordinate to the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). Thus, the Commission is the supreme body for nuclear matters. Ideally, the AERB should be above the AEC so that it can review decisions taken by the Commission. That will need a rejig of the underlying legal structure. Finally, India will have to take a view whether it should continue to have a single-part tariff for the nuclear sector (like renewable generation) or have a two-part tariff as in the case of conventional generators (like coal), since, otherwise, nuclear plants may get left out in the merit order dispatch regime. Capital cost of SMRs and imported reactors are going to be high, leading to high generation tariffs.

The nuclear power vision needs to consider a gamut of factors before generation takes off.

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The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Ceasefire in peril

Israel-Iran trust deficit persists

US President Donald Trump seems to have started believing that a truce is a low-hanging fruit simply waiting to be plucked by him anytime, anywhere. Just a month and a half after he announced to the world that India and Pakistan had agreed to a ceasefire at America's behest, he made a similar declaration regarding the Israel-Iran conflict. But things were quickly back to square one as Israel and Iran persisted with hostilities amid a glaring trust deficit. Frustrated at the ceasefire violations by both sides, Trump admitted that he was "really unhappy" with Israel. And he even warned Tel Aviv, for a change, to mend its ways and see reason. The million-dollar question is: Will Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu listen to his friend Trump and exercise restraint, which has never been his strong suit?

The US President is desperate to ensure that the Israel-Iran agreement survives. If it collapses, his gambit of ordering airstrikes on Iranian nuclear sites would be exposed as a monumental blunder. Tehran's retaliatory missile attack on a US military base in Qatar has perhaps made Trump realise that he has bitten off more than he can chew. That explains his overzealousness to make the two sides agree to a "complete and total ceasefire". Netanyahu has claimed that Israel has achieved all of its war goals in the 12-day operation against Iran, including removing the threat of Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. The Iranian leadership, which has undoubtedly been hit hard, faces the onerous task of reasserting its legitimacy and dominance.

Sustainable peace in the region hinges on Israel and the US keeping their foot off the pedal. As of now, regime change in Iran seems to have been put on the back-burner. This gives Iran an opportunity to quietly pick up the pieces. Much will depend on how long a badly bruised Tehran takes to recover and pose a fresh challenge to Israel.

Shift towards girls

With son preference, India bucks global trend

GLOBAL attitudes towards gender preference are undergoing a subtle but significant shift. As recently reported by *The Economist*, the centuries-old tilt in favour of boys is fading. Worldwide, the number of excess male births — once as high as 1.7 million in 2000 — has fallen to around 2 lakh in 2025. It signals a dramatic reversal in reproductive choices. In South Korea and China, sex ratios have returned to normal or even begun showing signs of daughter preference. Why this shift? Girls are increasingly seen as more dependable caregivers, stronger academic performers and more likely to remain connected to family. Women now earn more bachelor's degrees than men in many nations. Adoption and IVF data in western countries show a clear slant towards choosing daughters.

India, however, presents a more complex picture. While official data suggests that the country's child sex ratio has improved — particularly due to legal crackdowns on sex-selective abortions and awareness campaigns — pockets of deep-rooted son preference persist. According to the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21), about 15 per cent of Indian parents still express a desire for sons over daughters. Skewed child sex ratios remain a concern in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. Moreover, India's daughter preference, where it exists, is often conditional. Girls may be valued for emotional support or household stability, but not necessarily given equal access to nutrition, education or inheritance. Cultural practices like dowry and the assumption that daughters "belong to another family" continue to marginalise girls in rural and urban poor communities.

The global movement towards gender parity must not bypass India. Policy interventions must go beyond birth statistics. Promoting girl education, enforcing equal property rights, eliminating dowry and ensuring social security for the elderly independent of their children's gender can help pave the way towards equity.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, THURSDAY, JUNE 25, 1925

Question of Indian unity

IN an article titled "Are we ready?" which appears in the current issue of *Young India*, Mahatma Gandhi once again discusses the baffling question of Indian unity. He has been asked by several prominent political workers and public organs to call an all-parties conference. The reply that he gives is that if he gets a requisition, say, from Mr Jinnah, Sir Mahomed Shafi, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai, Srinivas Sastri, Sir Surendranath, the orthodox non-Brahmin leaders, CY Chintamani, Dr Sapru and others, he will gladly call the conference. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in the position thus taken by the Mahatma. To call a conference for a definite purpose without at least some reasonable chance of that purpose being furthered by it is to throw away both time and labour. But there is one thing which the Mahatma appears to us to forget. It would be reasonable to expect a requisition from the individuals and parties he names, only if there already is a prior agreement among them. As a matter of fact, it is as much with the object of bringing them together as of bringing them on the same platform with the Swarajists and the No-changers that the all-parties conference is needed. The more reasonable course for the Mahatma, therefore, if he is himself in favour of an all-parties conference, is not to make the calling of such a conference conditional upon his getting a requisition from the persons named by him, but to ascertain from them either himself or through a suitable intermediary whether they are prepared to participate in such a conference.

Freedom was the first casualty in 1975

Sharp polarisation and fragmentation of political life became an enduring legacy of the Emergency



KRISHNA KUMAR
FORMER DIRECTOR, NCERT

FIFTY years later, the strangeness of that first week of the Emergency is still vivid. That is perhaps because no one — not even very elderly people — had any experience of that kind. Nor did anyone imagine it to be what it became within a short while.

Why it was imposed has been quite clear, but why it was withdrawn 21 months later continues to be a matter of speculation. It is hard to separate the Emergency from its architect, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Her own enigmatic personality can be seen reflected in the path she chose. In the social sciences, especially history, students are told that dramatic events should be examined independently of the protagonist. It is hard to do this in the case of the Emergency.

In those days, the summer months of May and June were sacrosanct. They brought relief to the young and their teachers from routine life and studies. The college where I was teaching closed on May 1, but I didn't go home. I had an interesting travel assignment. I used to write for *Dinman*, a Hindi news weekly. Its editor, Raghuvir Sahay, asked me to travel to Bihar and send my write-ups on the student movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan. I returned from Bihar in early June and headed home. Nothing I had seen in Bihar presaged something ominous coming soon.

At home in my small town, a friend suggested that we should stage a play involving the children in our neighbourhood. I had recently purchased and read *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery. It was a short,



DEFIANT: Jayaprakash Narayan was among the top leaders who were imprisoned during the Emergency. PH

highly imaginative novel, and its allegorical narration seemed suitable for children. It was full of easy dialogues, so it posed no difficulty in preparing a quick script for performance. We had no resources apart from the great enthusiasm in our team to pick up different roles — pilot, prince, soldier, snake and so on — and memorise their lines. Within two weeks, we were ready to set up a poster for a single-evening performance. Then, suddenly on the morning of June 26, we learnt that something called the 'Emergency' had been declared.

What it might mean for the nation was one thing, but it seemed irrelevant for our play, scheduled for June 28. A senior resident of our neighbourhood told us that for a public gathering we must take prior permission from the police. My parents thought we should cancel the play. All this sounded bizarre, but my friend and I decided to go to the superintendent of police (SP). We had absolutely no idea how our little play had anything to do with the Emergency.

It puzzled me to this day, but the SP looked serious and somewhat grim when he asked me to

In his farewell editorial, legendary cartoonist Shankar Pillai wrote that humour can't exist without freedom.

summarise Saint-Exupery's novel. While doing so, my naive thoughts vanished and I realised in a flash that the allegory could have political connotations for a police officer: I did my best, but when the officer said, "Let me read your script," I was worried. There was no photocopying in those days. All we had was a handwritten copy. I hesitated to part with it, but I had no choice. The officer saw my hesitation and said, "You can collect it in

the evening today."

We had a sizeable gathering of parents, and among them, I was later told there were two policemen. Our play went well, but on my return to Delhi, I realised that the world had changed. The most visible difference was in the newspapers. No one had imagined how a crude regime of censorship could begin at such a speed. Legendary cartoonist Shankar Pillai declared the closure of his magazine, *Shankar's Weekly*. In his farewell editorial, Shankar wrote that humour can't exist without freedom.

Sycophancy, on the other hand, needed no encouragement. The declaration of the Emergency was wrapped in obvious subterfuge, but even the boldest voices could not point this out, thanks to censorship. Ways to justify were invented without any concern for plausibility. Respectable author and journalist Khushwant Singh wrote that trains were now running on time. How that could justify the abrogation of basic rights, no one could ask.

While Jayaprakash Narayan was in jail, his senior Gandhian counterpart, Vinoba Bhave, said the Emergency was like

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

My interest is not in the capture of power, but in the control of power by the people. — Jayaprakash Narayan

Best foot forward in the worst of times

CHAMAN LAL

THE morning of June 26, 1975, was typically hot and humid. The summer vacation in government schools of Punjab had begun a few days earlier: I was working as a Hindi teacher at Government High School, Poohla, in Bathinda district. Rather than going back to my hometown Rampura Phul, I stayed in Bathinda to spend time with my friends.

We chatted till 2 am on the rooftop before going to sleep. Around 5 am, a commotion woke me up. Still half asleep, I saw a policeman and greeted him. For a moment, I thought he was my friend's father, who was also a cop. However, he turned out to be someone else. He and his colleagues had come to pick up a professor-turned-'Comrade'. I was not on their list, but was still taken along to the police station.

Newspaper hawkers were shouting: "Emergency lag gayi" (Emergency has been imposed). I saw a frail person being taken away by cops. He was chanting the slogan, "Indira Gandhi *murda*bad!" Later, I found out that he was a CPM activist. We came across newspapers at the police station and realised what a big blow had been dealt to India's body politic. Four of us were presented before a magistrate on June 27. We were charged under Sections 107 and 151 of the IPC for allegedly disturbing peace by raising slogans and taking out a procession against the government. We were promptly remanded in judicial custody at the Bathinda Central Jail.

The people arrested in July, when PM Indira Gandhi's 20-point programme was announced, included leaders of the Shiromani Akali Dal, Jana Sangh, CPM and trade unions. Former ministers Bahramji Das Tandon and Balwant Singh were also brought to the Bathinda jail and kept in a special ward. In one barrack, there were 64 prisoners. Half of them slept on stone beds and the rest on the floor.

'Comrade' used to play chess with the ex-ministers. Family meetings were allowed every week. I got big-sized copies of novels — mostly in Hindi — by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Vrindavan Lal Verma, Prem Chand and other eminent writers. I had applied for admission to the newly launched PhD course in Hindi at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and had received a telegram to appear for the interview. My father tried to secure bail for me on the basis of that telegram, but his plea was declined. In 1976, I was selected, but was denied admission in view of the police report.

I was shifted to the Patiala Central Jail on medical grounds. In the prison, Prem Singh Chandumajra (who went on to become a prominent Akali leader) was kept in a special ward along with Chandra Shekhar (who later served as the PM), Akali stalwart Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Jana Sangh MP Yagya Dutt Sharma.

Finally, I was bailed out on January 27, 1976. I had got myself transferred to a school in Patiala district. As I had been suspended with effect from June-end 1975, I used to go to school once a month to receive suspension allowance. Punjab University offered me a golden chance to improve my MA (Hindi) marks. I secured the first division in MA in 1977 and was able to join JNU. Thanks to my allowance and the money earned from translation work, I completed my PhD in 1982.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Shades of Emergency

Refer to 'An undecared Emergency today? Not quite'; the article offers a thoughtful perspective on India's evolving political landscape. While avoiding alarmist comparisons with Indira Gandhi's era, it highlights the growing centralisation of power in the PMO and the misuse of ED, CBI and governors to suppress dissent. However, incidents like bulldozer justice and vigilante action are disturbingly reminiscent of the Emergency era's excesses. Despite fair elections and occasional judicial assertion, media pliability and shrinking space for criticism remain worrisome. Constitutional values must be upheld to protect democratic processes.

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

Time for BJP to introspect

Refer to 'Fillip for Oppn'; no party can brush aside the verdict given by the public in the bypolls held for five Assembly seats. Undoubtedly, the results are a big boost for Arvind Kejriwal after a humiliating defeat in Delhi. His never-say-die spirit has proved all those wrong who had written him off. It's time for the BJP to introspect as anti-incumbency has begun to show its face in Gujarat. A foothold in the southern states is still a far cry for the BJP. A lone win in Kerala is a big face-saver for the Congress. In the upcoming Assembly elections in Bihar, no party should anticipate a win by sticking to the old approach. Now, no party should expect to rest on past laurels but will have to recalibrate its strategy according to the requirements of the people. Preferences of voters change with time.

YOGINDER SINGHAL, LADWA

Dynamic nature of democracy

With reference to 'Fillip for Oppn'; the recent byelections have indeed sent a significant message. The Opposition's win in four out of five seats suggests a shift in voter sentiment, potentially indicating dissatisfaction with the ruling party's performance or policies. Operation Sindoor may not have resonated with voters as expected. The Congress defeat in Ludhiana, attributed to a wrong choice of candidate and infighting, highlights the importance of

strategic decision-making and party unity. Internal conflicts and strategic decisions play a crucial role in electoral outcomes. These election results serve as a reminder of the dynamic nature of democracy and the need for political parties to adapt and respond to voter concerns.

CAPT AMAR JEET (RETD), KHARAR

INDIA must regroup

The results of the byelections in four states have provided a number of political lessons. The BJP juggernaut can be contained if the INDI alliance sets its house in order. The Congress will have to accept the AAP's potential to be a national-level force for the Opposition. Regional parties will have to eschew their prejudices and lend a helping hand to AAP supreme Arvind Kejriwal, who displays adaptability whenever needed.

DV SHARMA, MUKERIAN

AAP heaves sigh of relief

Refer to 'Bypoll boost'; after the massive loss in Delhi, the Aam Aadmi Party got a chance to test the voter's mood in the bypolls. If the Ludhiana West result is any indication, then AAP can heave a sigh of relief. Though bypolls and state elections may not go the same way, this is one win AAP would have wanted badly. In the next year and a half, the AAP government in Punjab can not only set the narrative in its favour but fulfil its promises and work for the masses in the state so that it can regain their trust.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

Carefree childhood days

Apologies of 'Back to simpler days, if only for a day'; the writer's reflections were deeply moving. The vivid memories of childhood joys, school assemblies and monsoon mischief brought alive my own cherished moments. Such pieces not only reconnect us with our roots but also serve as a gentle reminder of what truly matters — a sense of belonging, pleasant memories and giving a meaning to your life. Such heartfelt and relatable reflections resonate with readers across places and ages.

SUNITA SIKRI, YAMUNANAGAR



The Tribune chronicle of India's darkest hours

Political Dharma



THE fundamental question raised by Mr Justice Krishna Iyer — but not answered by him — in his judgement on Mrs Gandhi's appeal is: What is political propriety or democratic dharma? These, he said, are polemical issues on which judicial silence was the golden rule. Read along with his other observation that the tidal wave in favour of the petitioner could not breach the legal dykes of the Supreme Court, it is perhaps the most eloquent silence in a judgement which otherwise, as the judge has admitted, was a departure from the usual practice of brevity. No doubt, it is always and everywhere the proper judicial approach to shy away from political thickets and view problems with institutionalised blinkers. At the same time, it must be said to Mr Justice Iyer's credit that he did not lose sight of the integral yoga of law and society, because life was larger than law. On the other hand, he also had no hesitation in rejecting Mr Palkhiwala's plea for private justice and accepting the contention of Mr Raj Narain's counsel that justice between two private persons was alien to an election litigation, even though "at first flush" he was disposed to prolong the absolute stay granted by the High Court. In the result, his verdict has pleased both sides, in varying degrees and for different reasons.

The jubilation in the opposition camp is evidently greater, because Mrs Gandhi's plea for an absolute stay has been rejected, and she has only been given a conditional stay. The Congress is pleased — at least so it says — that Mrs Gandhi has been permitted to continue as Prime Minister anyhow. It is impossible to conceive of a British Prime Minister sitting in the House of Commons without the right to vote or the right to take part in proceedings in the capacity as a member. Yet this is precisely the tragedy which Mrs Gandhi is being forced to endure. One does not really know whether Mr Jagjiwan Ram was kidding when he said that there was nothing wrong in it, and advanced his own case as a conclusive example. "I am a member of the Lok Sabha, but I cannot vote in the Rajya Sabha, even though I can participate in its proceedings." The two things are not on par. Mr Jagjiwan Ram can at least vote in the Lok Sabha whereas Mrs Gandhi cannot vote anywhere. Mr Justice Iyer has said that, for the moment at any rate, the question is only of academic interest because Parliament was not in session. Far from it. It is very much a live issue politically, and it goes right into the heart of the democratic dharma on which Mr Justice Iyer chose the golden rule of silence. India is not an "academic" democracy, but very much a living, pulsating and high-kicking one. The case for her resignation has only become stronger, not weaker, after the Supreme Court's conditional stay of the High Court order, and those who refuse to see this fact are no friends of hers. In one passage of his judgement, Mr Justice Iyer has observed: "In politics, 'red in tooth and claw', power lost is not necessarily followed, after legal victory, by power regained."



Fifty years ago, *The Tribune* captured the darkness at noon that unfolded with the Emergency, the mass arrests and clampdown on civil liberties, offering a rare insight into India's most controversial constitutional crisis.

PRESIDENT DECLARES EMERGENCY

"Threat to Security from Internal Disorder"
NEW DELHI, June 26 (PTI, UNI)
The President has declared a state of emergency to forestall internal disturbances threatening the security of India. The President signed the order declaring the emergency at about 7 this morning. Earlier, the Cabinet met at 6 am and considered the situation and approved the recommendation of the President for the declaration of emergency.

ers of the Punjab Government and the state Congress. Mr Zail Singh, Chief Minister, said in a press statement here today that he welcomed the step because for quite some time an atmosphere of violence was being created to shake the confidence of the people in democratic institutions and processes.

676 Arrested All Over Country
NEW DELHI, June 26 (UNI)
As many as 676 arrests were made today throughout the country in the context of the new proclamation by the President to cope with the internal security of the country. The highest number of arrests — 450 — were made in Madhya Pradesh, according to the Principal Information officer of the Government of India.

Step Taken To Preserve Unity, Says Zail Singh
FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH, JUNE 26
The proclamation of emergency in the country has been welcomed unanimously by lead-



OPPN UPS THE ANTE

Raj Narain to File Appeal
NEW DELHI, JUNE 22 (UNI)
Mr Raj Narain, on whose election petition the Allahabad High Court has set aside the election of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to the Lok Sabha, has stated in an affidavit that he will also file an appeal against the High Court's judgement on the points which have been decided in favour of Mrs Gandhi. In Para 3 of counter-affidavit of Raj Narain in reply to the application for directions scheduled to come up before Justice VR Krishna Iyer, the vacation Judge of the Supreme Court, along with Mrs Gandhi's application for

absolute stay of the operation of the judgement and the order of High Court, it is stated that "on the opening of the court, Respondent No 1 (i.e. Raj Narain) will also file an appeal against that part of the judgement of the High Court which has been decided against Respondent No 1."

Gandhi's Rejoinder To Raj Narain's Affidavit
NEW DELHI, JUNE 22 (UNI)
In her rejoinder to the counter-affidavit of Mr Raj Narain, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has stated that the Supreme Court had the power to grant "absolute and unconditional stay" in any case, and it was wrong to say that the court had fol-

lowed any "practice" of granting only limited stay orders in election cases. The rejoinder said it was wrong to say that it would not be in public interest if a person who had been found guilty of corrupt practices by a High Court was allowed to function in a high public office.

Oppn Rally Urges PM to Resign
NEW DELHI, JUNE 22 (PTI)
A well-attended Opposition rally today demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the wake of the Allahabad High Court judgement.



QUICK CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

ACROSS

- Seize by violent assault (5)
- Remain where one is (4,3)
- Throw slowly in high arc (3)
- Officer on merchant ship (5,4)
- To clash (7)
- Tiny swarming insect (5)
- Paltry (6)
- Single thread (6)
- Large strong storage box (5)
- Baffled (2,1,4)
- Gradual increase in sound (9)
- Badly (3)
- To the same extent (7)
- Comical (5)

DOWN

- Call for (7)
- Everything considered (2,7)
- Civilian clothes (5)
- General view (6)
- Seek to achieve (7)
- Leguminous vegetable (3)
- Subject of discourse (5)
- Extremely severe (of laws) (9)
- Visual (7)
- To exhibit (7)
- To no avail (6)
- Recurrent round (5)
- Haughtily reserved (5)
- Large flightless bird (3)

Yesterday's solution
Across: 1 For openers, 8 Kudos, 9 Intrude, 10 Erratic, 11 Atlas, 12 Indoor, 14 Studio, 17 Waste, 19 Scruple, 21 Tornado, 22 Agency, 23 Golden mean.
Down: 2 Ordered, 3 Onset, 4 Evince, 5 Extract, 6 Scull, 7 Set store by, 8 Keep in with, 13 Overall, 15 Diploma, 16 Ashore, 18 Sprig, 20 Realm.

SU DO KU

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

V. EASY

FORECAST

CITY	WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY	
	MAX	MIN	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	31	27		
New Delhi	34	27		
Amritsar	31	28		
Bathinda	38	27		
Jalandhar	31	27		
Ludhiana	33	25		
Bhiwani	34	27		
Hisar	34	27		
Sirsa	38	30		
Dharamsala	26	23		
Manali	24	21		
Shimla	23	18		
Srinagar	34	21		
Jammu	36	26		
Kargil	32	09		
Leh	20	08		
Dehradun	31	27		
Mussoorie	23	18		

TEMPERATURE IN °C

GLIMMER OF PEACE, BUT CRUCIAL ISSUES CONTINUE TO FESTER

BY now, the world has got used to the shifting policy positions of Donald Trump. So when the narrative sharply changed on his Truth Social account from the bravado of having “completely and totally obliterated” Iran’s nuclear weapons programme on Sunday night, to the Monday announcement of a “complete and total ceasefire” ending the 12-day Israel-Iran war, it was not difficult to digest. The world heaved a sigh of relief with a pause on the strikes that were threatening not only West Asia, but the rest of the world too. While all parties to the conflict—the US, Israel and Iran—declared victory, the rest of world hoped for a lasting peace. Israel quickly affirmed Trump’s call for ceasefire. Iran was more guarded, but its calibrated ‘attack’ with prior warning on US facilities in Qatar indicated Tehran was also ready to take an off ramp.

The hopes were briefly belied on Tuesday as Israel and Iran resumed attacks on each other within hours of the official start of the ceasefire. Through the day, Trump became increasingly agitated, especially with Israel, for continuing to “unload” bombs. After Trump’s public rebuke, Benjamin Netanyahu promised to refrain from more strikes. The world is still hoping for the warring parties to keep their word as their short-term goals seem to have been met. For Trump, his claim of ending Iran’s nuclear ambitions without sacrificing American lives has lifted his domestic stock. Netanyahu has scotched dissent at home. Iran, too, has demonstrated that it is no pushover.

However, for the long term, most of the contentious issues remain unresolved. Despite the US’s claim of forging ‘peace with strength’, regional calculations may have moved a few steps back. Tehran has threatened legal action against the International Atomic Energy Agency chief, whose role would be crucial for any new nuclear deal to be placed on the table. The nuclear non-proliferation treaty seems to be in tatters now, with Iran poised to exit. Despite American and Israeli claims, it is not clear what has happened to Fordo’s enriched uranium and centrifuges. Meanwhile, the Gaza imbroglio drags on without resolution, with the European Union’s foreign policy chief promising action against Israel if things do not improve. Long-term solutions to the region’s many conflicts seem as distant today as they were before the strikes. For now, the world will settle for a ceasefire.

HATE CRIME BILL NEEDS BALANCED EXECUTION

THE Karnataka government intends to take on the new-age maladies of hate speech, hate crimes and fake news with two bills. The Karnataka Misinformation and Fake News (Prohibition) Bill proposes to make the spreading of fake news a non-bailable, cognisable offence. Meanwhile, the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention and Control) Bill, modelled along a similar national law, defines hate crime as an act that “causes harm, incites violence, or spreads hatred based on identity markers such as religion, caste, gender, sexual orientation, tribe, language or disability”; hate speech is defined as “any form of communication—verbal, written, visual or digital—that is intended to promote hostility or incite harm”. The former bill would include content shared on digital media and make social media platforms, telecom operators and internet service providers liable to face legal action, with up to three years in prison and a fine of ₹5,000. Spreading fake news online could invite prison terms of up to seven years and a fine of up to ₹10 lakh.

It is commendable that the government is taking on the hydra-headed monster called fake news, which feeds on itself and has become the cause of much social discord. The law aims to suppress prejudice, and could have a sobering effect on fringe political elements whose vitriolic speeches lead to sharp divisions. “Hurting religious sentiments” has become an oft-used phrase while targeting certain communities or castes, and is interpreted at will. The new laws are likely to bring in clear definitions of hurt and hate, and aid law-enforcing agencies in discerning malicious cases.

While it is almost impossible to filter through the vast folds of social and other media, the proposed laws give district authorities sweeping powers to crack down on offenders. They are expected to face resistance on the grounds of protecting the freedom of speech. A balanced implementation would be essential, as the laws could be misused against honest expression and as a political tool. The drafts exempt artistic works, academic research, factual journalistic reporting and religious discourse, provided the content does not incite violence. It is laudable that the government is making a concerted effort to rein in communalism and foster an atmosphere of positivity.

QUICK TAKE

COUNTRY OF POTHOLES

INDIANS have a strange fascination for notching up some of the oddest world records. Carrying on the tradition, the Delhi government promised to set one for fixing the largest number of potholes in a day—a whopping 3,400. More than showcasing the new state administration’s alacrity, it reveals the terrible condition of the national capital’s roads. During 2018-22, accidents triggered by potholes resulted in 5,626 fatalities across the country. Manmohan Singh’s lament in the late 2000s that, despite all the economic progress, India could not build world-class roads holds true even today. Of the enduring troika of poll-time promises, politicians have failed most glaringly in delivering *sadak* (roads). Time to take them to task.

A spectacular display of strategic autonomy in world politics appeared on Sunday at the United Nations Security Council emergency session after the US-led strikes on Iranian nuclear sites. Pakistan joined hands with Russia and China to propose a resolution demanding an “immediate and unconditional ceasefire”. While the draft resolution did not explicitly name the US or Israel, it condemned the attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities.

To pass, the resolution requires the backing of at least nine members—which it has reportedly secured—but also not attract any veto by the permanent members. That proviso makes it a non-starter, since the US won’t censure itself. Nonetheless, it is an astonishingly assertive display of strategic autonomy by Pakistan within a week after the lunch hosted by US President Donald Trump for Pakistan’s army chief General Asim Munir at the White House and their one-on-one conversation.

Trump has a way of intimidating people positively or negatively. He could not find time to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of G7 summit last week, but instead invited him to the White House. Trump probably intended to get Modi and Munir together, which would have been a feather on his cap as a ‘mediator’. So typical of Trump! But Modi preferred to visit ‘Mahaprabhu’s land’, Odisha.

How does Gen Munir get away with such blatantly provocative ‘multi-alignment’—to borrow External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar’s coinage? The answer is that the exceptional hospitality Munir received at the White House did not cloud his firm judgement about the highest importance of Islamabad acting—and be seen as acting—as Iran’s best friend in the neighbourhood at such a time of trial and tribulation in that country’s 2,700-year history, when it faces an existential threat from the US-Israel juggernaut.

Alas, India lacks such clarity of mind about the importance of Iran. Some 30 years ago, the UN arena in Geneva witnessed another diplomatic pirouette involving Pakistan and Iran, when Iran killed an Organisation of Islamic Cooperation resolution sponsored by Pakistan at the UNHRC condemning India’s alleged human rights violations in Kashmir. Iran was responding to an Indian request made personally by Jaishankar’s then predecessor, the late Dinesh Singh. I had accompanied Singh on that historic mission—“historic” because Prime

With its embrace of the Israeli regime, India is undoing decades of diplomatic efforts and alienating old friend Iran. Meanwhile, Pakistan is displaying strategic autonomy while repositioning itself

INDIA ADVOCATES MULTI-POLARITY, OTHERS PRACTISE IT

M K BHADRAKUMAR

Former diplomat



MANDAR PARDIKAR

Minister Narasimha Rao had ordered such a diplomatic initiative on the basis of a meticulous assessment that the OIC resolution had a good chance of getting approval at the UNHRC, which, we feared, might lead to the reopening of Kashmir file at the Security Council in New York. Neither Boris Yeltsin’s Russia nor Bill Clinton’s America was a dependable friend at that time.

Rao, our only statesman who draws comparison with Jawaharlal Nehru in sheer erudition, took that audacious decision since he was a scholar-politician-diplomat himself who spoke Persian and was deeply immersed in Iran’s history to comprehend the subtlety and sophistication of the Iranian mind—and its intense desire for a close relationship with India. Fortunately, in Singh, too, we had a rare foreign minister who genu-

inely believed in India’s independent foreign policy and strategic autonomy. Indeed, Rao and Singh made a great combination as statesmen. Although neither wasted time spinning airy geo-strategies to educate their peer groups in western capitals, they were real practitioners of what Joseph Nye would call ‘smart power’ in politics.

Suffice to say, not only did Iran support us, but they also arranged an impromptu meeting for Singh with China’s foreign minister Qian Qichen, who happened to be in Tehran on that day. To our great delight, Qian, who was a politburo member too, told Singh that Kashmir was a backlog of colonial history and a purely bilateral issue between India and Pakistan that ought to be resolved by the two countries directly, without external interference—effectively reject-

HEARING THE CALL OF THE VALLEY

AKSHAY ROUT

Former Director General, Election Commission of India

were imposed by the authorities, the two elections last year had the semblance of a choice made by the people, of the people and for the people. After the process, there were no grievances from any candidate, winner or loser, or even the ever-intrusive J&K watchers. There were no complaints about unnecessary detention or high-handedness.

These were no consolation elections either, customised for any constrained zone. The ‘gold standard’ of election management was equally applied. Ensuring accuracy of the electoral roll, strict enforcement of the model code, capture of money and drugs, facilitation of voters including home voting for the needy, webcasting of polls—each bit meticulously



Following the Pahalgam attack, Kashmiris united in an unprecedented manner to condemn terrorism. It highlighted the social cohesion and empowerment reflected in last year’s Lok Sabha and assembly elections. It shows that Kashmiris’ yearning for empowerment can’t be easily doused now

followed. Not taking away from the special sensitivity about the Union Territory, the elections were like anywhere in India. The achievement would look taller if seen against the complex background of bifurcation of the erstwhile state, abrogation of Article 370 and delimitation of constituencies that preceded the polls.

However, the electoral process is not the main point of discussion. Both the character and outcome of the two elections was a collective yearning for peace and

progress, that went much beyond voting action—a rejuvenation of the force of the people who themselves led the process, writing a chapter of vindication. The Election Commission described the exercise as “underscoring a renewed spirit of civic participation and hope for a new era with people deciding their own future”.

The assembly election made it clear that the people of the valley have taken responsibility for their own lives, veering away from the gun and choosing peace and progress instead. Citizens were, in a way, giving a reply to the elements of dissonance and sabotage both inside and outside the country. The consensus among political parties for holding the elections suggested a unity of purpose.

While being a battleground of political ideas, polls do create a social cohesion that is valuable. Stability and energy generated by free and fair elections can galvanise a whole community to push forward development and reconstruction. J&K elections have created a resounding trail of community strength that can overcome shocks like the Pahalgam massacre and jumpstart normalcy.

A level of normalcy is ordinarily a prerequisite for conducting elections. At the same time, elections augment normalcy and add to its quality and endurance, by endowing it with legitimacy. Jammu and Kashmir has accrued this capital which should help it see through aberrations like Pahalgam in a social and political sense and help buttress security even while the state may have its arsenal in paused readiness.

The terror attack was a manifest attempt to disrupt peace and distract people, especially the youth from the democratic and developmental path they so decisively chose through the two elections. The good thing is that the successful conduct of elections has fortified the polity and the society of Kashmir against these and other challenges, big or small, present or future. Hopes born out of the democratic churning of 2024 are likely to keep growing; not to be doused by odd voices or acts of insinuation and skepticism from outside or within.

(Views are personal)

ing the OIC’s *locus standi* in the matter. Thus it was that India, Iran and China synchronised their watches over the Kashmir question on a fateful day in 1994 in Geneva.

India has come a long way since then. Today, India finds itself in deep embrace of Israel—Iran’s sworn enemy whose principal credential is that it is a Trojan horse of American interests in the West Asian landscape. There are question marks over Iran’s medium- and long-term prospects as a Zionist entity. Unless a radical rethink takes place in Israel to create the propitious conditions necessary for its regional integration, it faces an uncertain future. But there are no signs of a rethink under Israel’s present leadership.

Delhi’s performance has been dismal—India’s strategic ties with the US have been virtually hollowed out. After desperately seeking an opportunity to meet up with Trump, four months later we find it expedient to spurn his invitation to lunch with him. India’s relationship with China remains frozen; the time-tested friend Russia feels alienated as we fraternise, as if intentionally, with Russophobic countries of Europe from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean that makes no sense. Iran, of course, cannot be happy with the centrality we ascribe to Israel in our West Asian strategy.

As for Pakistan, it is on excellent terms with all three superpowers today as well as Iran, which is destined to be a hugely important regional power overlooking several surrounding regions. Pakistan teaming up with Russia and China at the UN Security Council in support of Iran signifies not only a display of bold thinking, but a sign of Pakistan’s coming of age to position itself as a key player in the emerging multipolar world order.

Certainly, one factor that attracted Munir to Trump would have been his perceived familiarity with Iran’s key decision-makers. Indeed, Pakistan-Iran relations are passing through a period marked by warmth, mutual trust and mutual respect. Munir even accompanied Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to Tehran recently and they were received by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

If only India had stuck to its independent foreign policies in West Asia, it would have had a significant role today in the historic transformation of its extended neighbourhood that we are witnessing. It is a sad situation when Iran’s surge is in the cards and Pakistan hopes to create synergy out of it.

(Views are personal)

MAIL BAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Diplomatic delusion

Ref: *Red lines crossed, a region on the brink* (Jun 24). In a world fractured by intermittent wars and countries posing as false mediators, conflicts are being catalysed by corporate greed. Diplomacy has been reduced to a misnomer, a disguise and a paper tiger.
R Sampath, e-mail

Kerala’s anti-incumbency

Ref: *Kerala bypoll only one to buck trend of incumbents winning* (Jun 24). The anti-incumbency factors are too strong for the LDF to ignore. Though a few administrative measures introduced by the government are welcomed, increases in taxation are not taken kindly. Backdoor appointments and party leaders’ arrogance are also the talking points.
Mohan Kunnakat, Palakkad

Inclusive Olympics

Ref: *New Olympics chief faces stiff challenge* (Jun 24). Coventry’s elevation brings hope for a more inclusive and balanced Olympic movement. With her being at the helm, countries like India can look forward to a more equitable platform and aspire to fulfill their hosting dreams.
Rajakumar Arulanantham, Tirunelveli

Emergency dissenters

Ref: *Three lessons for today from Emergency 1975* (Jun 24). The author’s statement that no one in the Congress questioned Indira Gandhi for her decision is incorrect. Prominent leaders like Jagjivan Ram, H N Bahuguna and Nandini Satpathy left the party in opposition and founded ‘Congress for Democracy’. It later merged with the Janata Party.
N A Joseph, Kottayam

Parallel laws

Ref: *Protect data, businesses too* (Jun 24). The DPDP Act’s lack of clarity on data processing in subsidiaries located in blacklisted countries raises significant operational challenges for MNCs. India should adopt a transparent, risk-based framework like the EU. This will additionally ensure legal predictability in cross-border data operations.
Avinashiappan Myilsami, Coimbatore

Practising ideals

Ref: *Lesson from a conversation* (Jun 24). Mere tributes and celebrating reformers do not serve any purpose. If only every citizen practised and followed the crux of what transpired between Mahatma Gandhi and Narayana Guru on caste discrimination and non-violence, our country would be the most harmonious land.
Sanath Kumar T S, Thrissur

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One year of NDA govt: AP on the development path

THE Telugu Desam Party (TDP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in Andhra Pradesh completed one year in office earlier this month. It assumed charge under the leadership of Nara Chandrababu Naidu as Chief Minister on June 12, 2024, following a stupendous victory in the Assembly elections on June 4. As IT Minister and TDP general secretary Nara Lokesh said at the meeting on Monday, it was a historic mandate indeed with the NDA coalition comprising TDP, Jana Sena and BJP, winning 164 out of 175 seats that were up for grabs. With the NDA government completing one year in office, it's time for a reality check. Unlike YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, who squandered a golden opportunity as a first time chief minister after winning the 2019

polls, Naidu seems to be tapping his vast experience to put the state on a rapid developmental path. Into an enviable fourth term and 16th year as chief minister, he took several measured decisions that would do a world of good to Andhra Pradesh. In the last one year, he brought marquee IT companies like TCS and Cognizant to Visakhapatnam, which his government wants to transform into a technology hub on the lines of Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

The latter owes its phenomenal success in the information technology (IT) space to Naidu who wants to replicate the same in Andhra Pradesh. But there is a rider here though. If Naidu is serious about laying a solid foundation for a Hyderabad-like megapolis in Amaravati, he should focus on developing IT

and industrial sectors in the Greenfield capital. Without the presence of employment-generating sectors, Amaravati will never grow into an urban agglomeration. In India, there are very few cities that can boast economies of scale. Mumbai, New Delhi, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad fall into that elite category of cities that generate a lion's share of revenues for their respective states. Andhra Pradesh also needs a similar metropolis for it to tap the fruits of urbanization. It is to be seen how Naidu handles this. He said recently that in the last one year, the state had attracted investments to the tune of Rs 9.34 lakh crore with a potential to generate 8.5 lakh jobs. Among the major investors is steel giant Arcelor-Mittal, which is investing a whopping Rs 61,000-crore on the first phase of

a steel plant. Nara Lokesh played a key role in getting many investments to the State. The government also put the construction of Amaravati capital on fast track.

But how did Naidu, known for his pro-development stance, perform on the welfare front in the first year? His government increased social security pensions to Rs 4,000 from Rs 3,000 per month immediately after coming to power. The government implemented the Talilki Vandanam scheme with Rs 8,745 crore for this year. But the government needs to do a lot more on the welfare front. Promises like free bus travel to women, financial assistance to farmers and unemployment allowance are still pending. Of course, implementing all the welfare schemes that have been promised will require

huge funds. For a state reeling under a debt burden of around Rs 10 lakh crore, it's not easy to allocate massive funds for welfare schemes. However, the state government can greatly reduce the financial burden of the welfare schemes by plugging in leakages and confining the benefits to people or families which are genuinely in need. Nevertheless, the NDA government has put Andhra Pradesh on a developmental path while it made a tight rope walk when it came to welfare schemes in the first year in office. Further, using police excessively might not go down well with people. However, support from Jan Sena and BJP came in handy. But sustaining this momentum for the next four years holds key for the NDA coalition to retain power in the state in 2029.

LETTERS

Appeasement politics back in Karnataka

THIS refers to your editorial 'Appeasement politics resurfaces in Karnataka'. The Congress government is openly indulging in appeasement policy vis-à-vis minorities only to nurture a safe vote bank, even at the cost of antagonizing other communities. This has become a fixed and ineradicable trend wherever Congress is in power. In the recent by-elections in Kerala's Nilambur, the Congress (UDF) candidate won with the support of Jamaat E Islami. This is a pan India trend for the party, about which neither the family nor the party leadership is ashamed of. The Siddaramaiah government insists on four per cent of government contracts and fifteen per cent reservation in housing to the community. The freebies are eating into the vitals of the state's economy, causing discomfiture for people as the government is left with no option but to raise revenue from other sources, like imposing a heavy burden on the public even as several ongoing infrastructure development projects are in disarray.

K R Parvathy, Mysuru

Congress relying on vote bank politics

A PROPOS, 'Appeasement politics resurfaces in Karnataka' (THI, June 24), the Congress-led Karnataka government, headed by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, has emerged as an unabashed champion of minority appeasement, especially the Muslim community. In defiance of the BJP's relentless criticism, Siddaramaiah continues to pursue overtly pro-Muslim policies with a partisan edge, raising questions about governance neutrality. From reservations to welfare schemes, the administration's approach often appears calibrated more for electoral arithmetic than for equitable development. The underlying objective is transparent—the consolidation of a loyal vote bank. Identity politics has taken centre stage in Karnataka, eroding the idea of inclusive governance. The overt tilt towards minority-centric initiatives, while ignoring broader developmental priorities, has polarized public discourse. In a state marked by socio-religious diversity, this brand of politics risks deepening communal divides. The Congress strategy may yield short-term electoral gains, but it sets a dangerous precedent for majoritarian resentment and fragmented polity in the long run.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru-56

English is integral to everyone's life

LET us all be proud and not ashamed of English. People's representatives should think twice before making bizarre statements regarding languages, especially English. The beauty of English is its brevity. English coaching centres are all over the country and the courses and subjects are taught in English. Cricket and golf are from the west; Pizza from Italy, bread and cake are from the west and like Pongal, bread toast is our breakfast item. Anything is welcome if it serves its purpose. We Indians are broad-minded and very accommodating. English proficiency is helping our youth to prosper across professions. As English makes for a resourceful link language, we should make English a compulsory subject, including in places where 'people are ashamed of English'.

Kantamsetti Lakshman Rao, Visakhapatnam

Chase away drugs

THIS has reference to the news reports on drug menace. The fact is that drugs, fake medicines and adulterated food are sold openly in the country. When their availability is known, youth, including school children, patronise them and in no time become addicts. Police personnel can easily trace the manufacturers, sellers and distributors dealing in the banned substances. Authorities need to apply the three criminal laws to punish the culprits as only then can there be positive progress towards a drug-free society.

Gudipati Shanti Priya, Secunderabad-11

Address the unemployment crisis

THE latest survey statistics present a bleak picture as regards unemployment in India. It has been rising steadily all these years, points out the survey. There should be a restriction on the number of students medical and engineering colleges, among others, can enrol in an academic year. The bane of today's unchecked enrolment is leading to a situation where engineering graduates and medics don't have jobs forcing them to take up jobs in fields that have nothing with their academics. Thrust should be on skill-oriented training for youth and employment should be commensurate with skills.

Dr T Ramadas, Visakhapatnam

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

CM meets Sitharaman, seeks pro-growth tax devolution

NEW DELHI: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday met Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to seek the Centre's support for a pro-growth approach in tax devolution among states by the 16th Finance Commission. During the meeting, Siddaramaiah briefed Sitharaman on Karnataka's significant losses under the 15th Finance Commission award, an official statement said.

The state's share in tax devolution declined from 4.713 per cent to 3.647 per cent -- a reduction of over 23 per cent. Karnataka was also denied Rs 11,495 crore in special grants, resulting in a total loss of Rs 80,000 crore during the award period.

The chief minister attributed this decline primarily to the over-reliance on the income-distance criterion, which received 45 per cent weightage under the 15th Finance Commission. Karnataka has requested the 16th Finance Commission to reduce the weightage for income-distance by 20 percentage points and reallocate it to fiscal contribution -- the state's share in national GDP. The state has also proposed discontinuing Revenue Deficit Grants in their current format, arguing they contradict fiscal discipline principles outlined in the FRBM framework.

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

Justice's haven: Courtrooms of dignity and cooperative spirit

APOLOGIST



CR SUKUMAR

THE decision of the Telangana High Court Bar Association (THCBA) to convene a general body meeting to address a judge's alleged humiliation of advocates and imposition of heavy costs has sparked debate, highlighting the delicate balance between judicial authority and advocates' dignity.

As a journalist-turned-advocate with over three decades of experience, I examine this issue with a commitment to uphold the integrity of both the Bar and the bench. This analysis explores the propriety of the Bar's actions, conduct of the judge, and the broader implications for judicial independence, professional ethics, and justice administration, advocating dialogue and mutual respect to preserve the legal system's sanctity.

Context and controversy:

The Bar Association's call for a general body meeting stems from allegations that a Telangana High Court judge humiliated advocates with derogatory remarks and imposed substantial costs perceived as punitive. Such actions, if true, undermine judicial decorum and advocates' dignity, as they are officers of the court entitled to respect. Imposition of heavy

Bar's call for general body meeting on conduct of bench

costs, often seen as disproportionate, fuels perceptions of judicial overreach, prompting the Bar to respond collectively.

From the Bar's perspective, convening a general body meeting is a legitimate step to protect advocates' dignity and ensure a conducive working environment. However, the bench may view this as an attempt to pressure the judiciary, potentially threatening judicial independence enshrined in the Indian Constitution. This tension requires a balanced examination of the roles and responsibilities of both sides.

The Bar's grievance: Legitimacy and limits:

Advocates operate under pressure, balancing client interests, court expectations, and ethical duties. A judge's humiliating conduct — sarcasm, personal remarks, or dismissive gestures — erodes morale and impairs effective representation. The Supreme Court has emphasized advocates' right to dignity, supporting the Bar's role in safeguarding these principles. If the judge's actions have consistently crossed into personal affronts, the Bar's decision to convene a meeting is a reasonable step to consolidate grievances and seek redress.

However, the Bar must ensure its response is proportionate and respectful. Sensationalized discussions or confrontational rhetoric risk undermining judicial authority.

The Supreme Court, in *C. Ravichandran Iyer v. Justice A.M. Bhattacharjee* (1995), cautioned against actions that erode judicial independence and deprecate coercive



The Supreme Court, in *C. Ravichandran Iyer v. Justice A.M. Bhattacharjee* (1995), cautioned against actions that erode judicial independence and deprecate coercive resolutions or protests, which disrupt justice delivery and harm litigants. Instead, the Bar should channel grievances through institutional mechanisms, such as representations to the Chief Justice or the Bar Council, maintaining professionalism and restraint.

resolutions or protests, which disrupt justice delivery and harm litigants. Instead, the Bar should channel grievances through institutional mechanisms, such as representations to the Chief Justice or the Bar Council, maintaining professionalism and restraint.

Conduct of the bench: Decorum and accountability:

Allegations of humiliation and heavy costs warrant scrutiny of judicial conduct. The Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct (2002) mandate judges to treat advocates with courtesy and respect. Derogatory remarks, if substantiated, violate these standards and erode public confidence. Similarly, heavy costs must be justified by clear procedural lapses, as arbitrary orders deter access to justice, contravening Article 39A of the Constitution.

Judges, however, face im-

mense pressure managing heavy caseloads. The power to impose costs, upheld by the Supreme Court, deters frivolous litigation or ensures compliance. If the judge's costs were reasoned and addressed specific misconduct (e.g., deliberate delays), the Bar's objections may lack merit. Conversely, capricious or targeted costs justify concerns, necessitating accountability.

Judicial accountability follows established protocols, such as the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, or in-house procedures led by the Chief Justice. The Bar's public meeting risks bypassing these channels, appearing confrontational. A balanced approach involves presenting specific instances of improper behaviour to the Chief Justice, supported by court records, to trigger internal review without public escalation.

Balancing Bar and bench:

The way forward

Bar and bench are interdependent pillars of justice, requiring mutual respect to function effectively. The former must protect advocates' dignity but exercise restraint to preserve judicial authority. The bench must uphold decorum while remaining open to constructive criticism.

The Supreme Court in *C. Ravichandran Iyer v. Justice A.M. Bhattacharjee* (1995) emphasized that Bar Associations should raise concerns confidentially with the Chief Justice, avoiding public pressure that could amount to contempt. The Telangana High Court Bar Association's decision to convene a general body meeting to address the alleged humiliation of advocates and imposition of excessive costs by a judge is justified, provided it has first exhausted institutional remedies by making representations to the Chief Justice with specific evidence of such conduct, thereby demonstrating a responsible and measured approach to seeking redress while upholding advocates' dignity.

To resolve this impasse, both the Bar and bench may consider the following steps:

Dialogue over confrontation: The Bar should request a private meeting with the Chief Justice to present evidence of the judge's conduct professionally, deferring public meetings until institutional channels are exhausted.

Judicial introspection: The Chief Justice should review allegations, examining court records to assess the judge's conduct. If warranted, coun-

selling the judge can address concerns while preserving authority.

Training and sensitisation: Workshops on courtroom etiquette and conflict resolution, facilitated by the National Judicial Academy or Bar Councils, can foster mutual understanding.

Transparent costs framework: The High Court could adopt guidelines for cost imposition, ensuring proportionality and reasoned orders, as suggested in *Sanjeev Kumar Jain v. Raghubir Saran Charitable Trust* (2012).

Strengthening trust: Regular Bar-Bench forums can preempt conflicts, reaffirming a shared commitment to justice.

Conclusion:

The Telangana High Court Bar Association's call for a general body meeting reflects the legitimate concerns about a judge's alleged humiliation of advocates and heavy costs but risks escalating into confrontation. The Bar should pursue institutional mechanisms, such as representations to the Chief Justice, while the bench must uphold decorum and justify costs transparently. The Telangana High Court's collegium, led by the Chief Justice, should seize this opportunity to evolve institutional mechanisms for monitoring judicial decorum periodically. By prioritising dialogue and mutual respect, the Bar and bench can ensure the courtroom remains a sanctuary of fairness and dignity, strengthening the legal system's integrity for all.

(The author is former Senior Editor, *The Economic Times*, and currently practicing as an Advocate at Telangana High Court)

Nurturing technocrats for a future of choice over compulsion

DR KIRAN RAVULAKOLLU

WE are witnessing a profound transformation on how we define careers, capability and success. The age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation and global digitalization has blurred the boundaries between disciplines, thereby redefining the very purpose of education.

For the next generation of technocrats, a "job" is no longer an obligatory outcome—it is a deliberate choice. Education must now prepare them not just to survive in this new landscape, but to shape it. This calls for nothing less than a fresh rethink of our higher education ecosystem, particularly in engineering and technology. As educators, academic institutions, and national stakeholders, we must rise to meet this moment—not with incremental change, but with visionary reforms.

Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang has rightly pointed out, "You are not going to lose your job to AI, but you are going to lose your job to somebody who uses AI". It is critical to realise the adaptation of AI towards strengthening them in a way to use them.

Jobs to empowerment:

For decades, the goal of engineering education in India was largely linear: secure a degree, land a job, and build a career. While this model served the needs of a growing industrial economy, it no longer aligns with the realities of a digital, automated, and globalized world.

The future of work will be defined by harnessing AI, innovation, and interdisciplinary thinking as echoed by Emily Rose in her 'Future of work trends 2025'.

Young technocrats must be empowered—not programmed—to explore entrepreneurship, research, and socially meaningful ventures.

This shift cannot happen within the confines of a traditional, exam-centric, lecture-heavy educational model. We must transition toward experiential learning, project-based evaluation, and interdisciplinary exploration.

As educators, our role is no longer limited to delivering content. We must now act as mentors, facilitators, and enablers of curiosity and courage. Across universities, the faculty should be moving from a content delivery model to one that emphasizes critical thinking, crea-



tive problem-solving, and innovation.

To truly groom future-ready technocrats, we should embed entrepreneurship, AI/ML training, design thinking, and ethical technology use into the curriculum from the very first year. Creation of innovation labs, interdisciplinary research centres, startup incubators, and global industry partnerships to offer our students not just knowledge—but a launchpad is critical for Gen Z and Alpha generation students. To be architects of transformation, our vision should be clear, precise and futuristic.

Educators must also evolve through continuous learning. Faculty development programs that focus on emerging technologies, pedagogical innovation, and global best practices must be

a priority. We must prepare ourselves before we can prepare our students for a future defined by complexity.

Engineering education must nurture an inquiry-driven mindset. At MNR, we are actively fostering undergraduate research culture through structured research mentorship, early exposure to publication opportunities, and participation in national and international competitions.

Simultaneously, entrepreneurship must move from being an "option" to a mainstream academic pathway. Our entrepreneurship cells support students with ideation labs, pitch practice, market analysis tools, and exposure to real-world investors. This culture of applied learning helps students see themselves not just as profes-

sionals—but as innovators, employers, and contributors to national development.

Policy with purpose:

The Government of India (GOI) has a pivotal role to play in this transformation—and in many ways, it has already laid a strong foundation. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a bold and progressive blueprint that embraces flexibility, multidisciplinary education, and research-based learning. It encourages multiple exit points, credit-based systems, and the integration of vocational and academic streams. Policies of GOI should be more of flexible, adaptive and futuristic.

However, implementation is key. To bring NEP to life in engineering education, government-academic-industry collaboration must be scaled up. There must be sustained funding for R&D at the institutional level, simplification of research grants, and stronger incentives for faculty-driven innovation.

Moreover, initiatives like Startup India should be more deeply integrated into university ecosystems—particularly in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities—so that innovation is

democratized and not limited to elite institutions. The vision is clear: We must build a generation of technocrats who are job creators, not job seekers—leaders who use technology not just to automate tasks, but to solve human problems, drive inclusion, and power India's future.

This transformation is not the responsibility of one stakeholder—it is a shared mission. Educators must ignite minds. Institutions must create ecosystems. The government must continue to provide visionary frameworks and sustained support.

As we at MNR University, aligned ourselves to the new age realities and beyond that, every educational institute should think about futuristic education.

We shouldn't prepare students for the next exam or the next interview—we should prepare them for the next era.

All said and done, the future belongs not to those who follow existing paths but to those who create new ones.

(The writer is Dean of School of Engineering & Technology, MNR University)

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON DILJIT DOSANJH CONTROVERSY

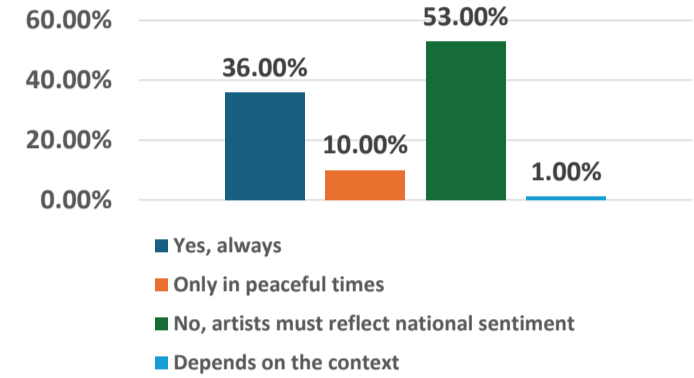
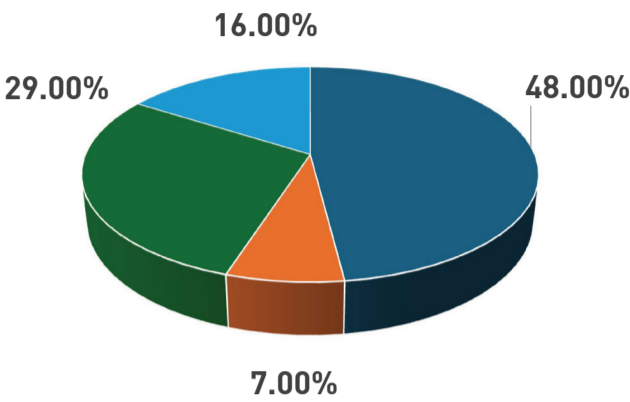
36% believe art and artists should be beyond borders, religion and politics

Amid rising Indo-Pak tensions following the Pahalgam terror attack, Diljit Dosanjh's upcoming Punjabi film 'Sardaar Ji 3', featuring Pakistani actor Hania Aamir, has sparked intense backlash. Key industry bodies, including the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) and the All Indian Cine Workers Association (AICWA), have condemned Dosanjh's decision. FWICE President B.N. Tiwari called the move disrespectful to Indian sentiments and soldiers' sacrifices, questioning Dosanjh's loyalty for choosing Pakistani talent over Indian artists. Tiwari stated that a formal ban on Dosanjh's future films and songs is likely, escalating tensions within the entertainment industry over cross-border collaborations.

Q1.▶

Do you think the outrage over Diljit Dosanjh working with a Pakistani actress is valid?

- Yes, completely justified
- Somewhat understandable
- No, it's exaggerated
- Not at all, art should not be politicised



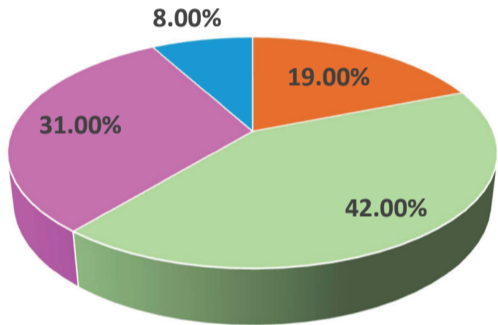
◀Q2.

Should art and artists be beyond borders, religion, and politics?

Q3.▶

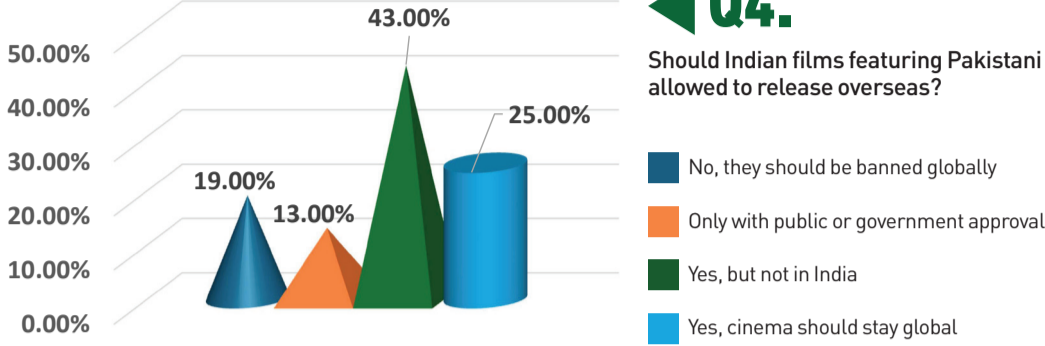
Has this controversy changed your opinion of Diljit Dosanjh?

- Yes, I now view him negatively
- Somewhat disappointed
- No change at all
- I respect him more now



◀Q4.

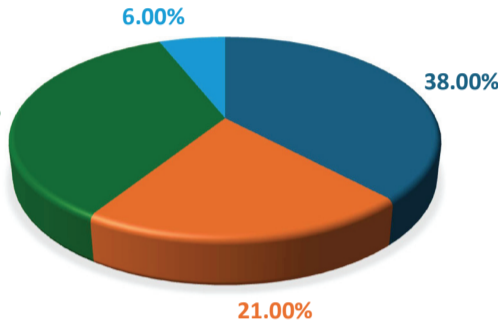
Should Indian films featuring Pakistani actors be allowed to release overseas?



Q5.▶

Do you feel creative choices should be influenced by social media sentiment?

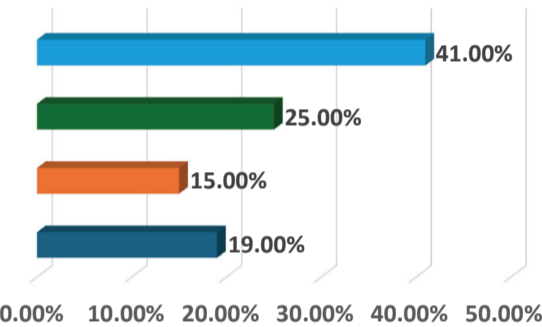
- Yes, public opinion matters
- Sometimes, depending on the issue
- No, creators need artistic freedom
- Not sure



◀Q6.

Will this controversy affect your decision to watch Sardaarji 3?

- Yes, I will skip it
- Maybe, still thinking
- No, I will watch it
- I wasn't planning to watch it anyway



Audit of Air India HQ put off

CONTINUED FROM P1

day night after latter targeted the US camp in Qatar.

Following the tensions escalating in the Middle-East, Air India has cancelled several of its flights.

Sources said the decision was taken by the DGCA as many of the airline officials were busy in handling the situation. The Air India in a statement said it has cancelled several of its international flights in wake of the escalating tension in Middle

East region.

Source said that the DGCA will soon commence the audit when the situation returns to normal.

The Air India has been facing scrutiny from the DGCA following a tragic aircraft involving its A1171 Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner on June 12 in Gujarat's Ahmedabad killing more than 270 people, including 241 out of 242 people on board.

On June 19, the DGCA ordered the immediate removal of three senior Air

India officials, including a divisional vice president, from all responsibilities related to flight crew scheduling and rostering

The Air India has been assisting the DGCA, AAIB, and the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) in their probe to ascertain the cause of crash of its London Gatwick flight.

The government had already ordered a probe and the AAIB, DGCA and MoCA are investigating the reasons for the crash.

DGCA surveillance of airports finds violations

CONTINUED FROM P1

to the entities concerned for taking corrective actions within seven days.

Two teams led by the Joint Director General carried out the surveillance during night and early morning hours at major airports, including Delhi and Mumbai airports.

In a detailed statement about the surveillance findings, DGCA listed multiple cases wherein the reported defects reappeared many times on the aircraft indicating ineffective monitoring and inadequate rectification. "Ground handling equipment such as baggage trolleys... were found unserviceable; Line maintenance

stores, tool control procedures were not followed," it said.

During maintenance of aircraft, the work order was not followed, DGCA said and added that the unserviceable thrust reverser system and flap slat lever were not locked.

"During maintenance, safety precautions found not (to have been) taken by AME (Aircraft Maintenance Engineer) as per AMM (Aircraft Maintenance Manual); at places, AME was not attending to the snag rectification; defect reports generated by the aircraft system, were not found recorded in the technical logbook," the statement said.

Also, DGCA found that

several life vests were not properly secured beneath their designated seats in aircraft and the corrosion-resistant tape on the right-hand side winglet's lower blade was found to be damaged.

At an airport, centre line marking of a runway was observed faded and the rapid exit taxiway, green centre light were not unidirectional. The obstruction limitation data was found to have not been updated for last three years and no survey has been performed despite many new construction around the vicinity of aerodrome, DGCA said.

However, names of the airports were not disclosed. "A number of vehicles in

the ramp area were found without speed governors. These vehicles were withdrawn by cancelling there AVP and drivers ADP were suspended," the statement said.

Further, the regulator said a simulator was found not matching with the aircraft configuration and that the software was not updated to the current version.

Besides, a domestic flight of a scheduled carrier was held up due to worn tyres and it was released only after the required rectification was done, it added.

DGCA emphasised that it has initiated a focused assessment of the aviation ecosystem to strengthen safety measures across the sector.

Air India flights to Middle East resume

CONTINUED FROM P1

Tata Group-owned carriers -- Air India and Air India Express -- have restarted flights to cities in the Middle East.

Officials said Air India is operating Delhi-Dubai flight and Air India Express is operating Delhi-Muscat service.

On Tuesday, Air India said it will progressively resume flights to the Middle East as airspaces are gradually reopening in the region and most of the operations will resume from June 25.

Spirit of cooperation

CONTINUED FROM P1

and residents, as well as address Haryana's concerns about managing excess water flow.

The Yamuna water-sharing agreement, a decades-old point of contention, was also a focal point of the conversation. Both Chief Ministers expressed satisfaction with the progress made toward a mutually agree-

able framework, with plans to finalize the DPR to ensure equitable water distribution. This development builds on earlier efforts, such as the February 2024 agreement facilitated by the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, which aimed to address water distribution to Rajasthan's Shekhawati region, including Sikar, Churu, and Jhunjhunu.

Crackdown on mafia

CONTINUED FROM P1

in Kurukshetra, who defied gangster threats to bid for a vend, and the killing of another contractor, Virender Singh, in Jind on June 20. These high-profile cases, coupled with reported firing incidents in Rohtak and Yamunanagar have created a climate of fear among contractors.

Chief Minister Nayab

Singh Saini's, responding to the crisis, has directed the Haryana Police to adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward offenders. "Anyone exploiting the public, issuing threats, or engaging in illegal extortion must face stringent legal consequences," stated a senior police official. The government's resolve was further underscored by the transfer

of several police officers to ensure impartial action and bolster security for liquor traders. A high-level meeting chaired by Director General of Police Shatrughan Kapoor and attended by Excise and Taxation Commissioner Ashima Brar emphasized enhanced vigilance in four districts particularly affected by gangster activity.

Wanted man shot dead

CONTINUED FROM P1

criminal linked to multiple high-profile cases, including murders and extortion in Haryana and arms-related offenses in Delhi. Vohra was allegedly involved in the killing of liquor traders Pankaj Malik, Virender Rana, and Arjun Rana outside a gym in Haryana's Kheri Lakha Singh village on December 26, 2024, as well as the murder of contractor Shantanu in Kurukshetra on June 15, 2025.

With a reward of Rs 2 lakh on his head, Vohra had become a significant target for law enforcement in the region.

As per the police, the encounter took place in the early hours of Tuesday near Dera Mandi, following a tip-off from the Haryana Police Special Task Force (STF) about Vohra's movements in south Delhi. Acting on precise intelligence, a joint team of Haryana STF and Delhi Police laid a trap near the Kishangarh area of the Delhi-Haryana

border. When confronted, Vohra opened fire on the police, leading to a retaliatory shootout. Vohra was critically injured and later declared dead at a nearby hospital. Two sub-inspectors—one from Haryana Police and one from Delhi Police—sustained bullet injuries and are undergoing treatment at a south Delhi hospital.

The chief minister's recent directive to "uproot gangsters and mafias" has galvanized the state's police force, with the Haryana STF intensifying its operations against organized crime.

Vohra's criminal record paints a picture of a hardened criminal deeply entrenched in the Kala Rana-Noni Rana gang's operations. Known for orchestrating violent crimes across Haryana, Punjab, and Delhi, he was a prime suspect in the murder of liquor businessman Shantanu in Shahabad, a case that had drawn significant attention due to its brazen nature.

Pak don tries to extort money

CONTINUED FROM P1

rounds were fired outside their home by two men on a motorcycle, as captured on CCTV footage.

Jatinder, the NRI targeted in the threats, has been living in Portugal for the last 15 years with his two brothers, with whom he runs a restaurant business. Their families are based there, while their parents and grandmother continue to live in Jalandhar. At the time of the incident, only the elderly members of the family—his parents and grandmother—were at home. Thankfully, no one was injured in the attack.

Charanjit Kaur told police she recognized the caller's photo as Shehzad Bhatti's, which appeared on her phone screen. She added that the same family had received a similar threat a year ago and had filed a police complaint at the time, but no significant action had followed.

Further tension came to light as a chilling au-

dio conversation between Bhatti and Jatinder surfaced on Tuesday. In the recording, Bhatti is heard demanding extortion money and threatening to orchestrate attacks in both Jalandhar and Portugal. When Jatinder refused, Bhatti declared, "First, I will kill your father," to which Jatinder retorted defiantly, "If you come, come prepared." The call quickly spiralled into an abusive argument before being disconnected.

Bhatti also released a video on social media showing the gunmen firing outside Jatinder's Jalandhar home, reinforcing fears of transnational criminal targeting.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Manpreet Singh confirmed the recovery of four spent bullet casings from the scene. "The firing occurred outside the home of an NRI who had received an extortion threat from a man identifying himself as Pakistani don Shehzad Bhatti," he said.

"We are now examining the viral audio and video evidence as part of the investigation."

The DCP added that the family's Portugal-based restaurant had also been mentioned as a potential target by Bhatti. While the attackers remain at large, Jalandhar Police say they are actively pursuing leads and taking the case very seriously, given the international dimension and possible gangland connections.

The police have registered an FIR, and senior officers from the Police Commissionerate have visited the crime scene for further assessment. However, no arrests have been made so far.

The attack has raised fresh concerns about the reach of overseas gangsters and the vulnerability of NRI families back home. Authorities are now looking into whether this is part of a larger pattern of organized cross-border intimidation.

'No hideout is safe for terrorists'

CONTINUED FROM P1

in the last 11 years than earlier, he said, adding that the country is on the path to becoming the world's third-biggest economy.

He said, "Narayana Guru envisioned a society free from all forms of discrimination. Today, by adopting the saturation approach, the country is working to

eliminate every possibility of discrimination." Missions like Skill India are empowering the youth and making them self-reliant, he said, stressing that he remembers the social reformer every time he takes big decisions for the betterment of the deprived, exploited and backward sections of society.

In a swipe at previous gov-

ernments, he said despite decades of independence, millions of citizens were forced to live in extremely difficult circumstances until over a decade back.

Crores of families lacked shelter and lakhs of villages had no access to clean drinking water, while even minor illnesses could not be treated due to lack of health care, he said.

IS THERE A CHINA THREAT IN CHAGOS ISLANDS?

OPINION

UPAMANYU BASU

In October, 2024 the United Kingdom and Mauritius had announced the restoration of sovereignty of Chagos Islands to Mauritius. The deal had been severely criticized over potential security concerns for the British as well as Western countries, given the strategic location of the islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Last month, in May 2025, The British Government finalized the deal of transfer of sovereignty, which was announced by Prime Minister Keir Starmer. Starmer, while talking about the strategically important US base of Diego Garcia stated, “The strategic location of this base is of utmost significance to Britain”. This being said, under the terms of agreement, while sovereignty is transferred, the United Kingdom will continue to retain the military base of Diego Garcia, with a 99-year lease. The lease will be for more than \$100 million annually, which is justified by citing Britain's defence and national security priorities. This arrangement aims to balance the long standing issue of decolonization claims in the Global South, while ensuring that the strategic position of the islands remains operational for the United Kingdom vis-a-vis the United States.

ABOUT THE DEAL BETWEEN UK AND MAURITIUS

The Chagos Islands stretches over 60 remote islands, situated in the heart of the Indian Ocean. These islands have been under British sovereignty since 1814, where the British formally took possession

from France. Later, in 1965, the Chagos Islands were incorporated under the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) where the United Kingdom agreed with the United States to create a military base on one of the islands i.e Diego Garcia. In 1968, Mauritius gained independence but the United Kingdom had retained control over the BIOT. This was followed by a horrific episode of forced displacement of thousands of Chagossians, who were forced to leave the island and shift to the mainland of Mauritius or Seychelles. It was late in 2019, when the International Court of Justice cited that the continued British occupation of the archipelago was illegal and ordered the United Kingdom to hand it back. Substantial negotiations began when the United Kingdom started its open talks with Mauritius as recently as 2022, to finally agree to sign the historical agreement last month.

From a strategic point of view, Diego Garcia remains central to the Western security architecture and any form of change in the regional dynamics challenges the overall securitization of the Indian Ocean Region. The access to the Chagos Islands, allows key players like the United States to provide a security blanket in IOR against an ever rising China.

Though details remain classified, the presence of B-2 nuclear capable bombers and other strategic assets in the region, suggests the likelihood of nuclear infrastructure further reinforcing the geopolitical relevance of this island.



The key Diego Garcia base is in the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean.

WHY IS CHINA INTERESTED?

The real concern in this Indo pacific roulette, is an assertive China waiting for an opportunity to extend its influence. The Indian Ocean remains a critical transit route for China in order to engage with Africa, Middle East or any littoral states across this ocean. Although China is new in this region, it has established diplomatic relations with major island nations including Maldives, Seychelles, Madagascar as well as Mauritius. Beyond diplomatic presence, China remains a consistent player in the region's military architecture. In 2014, China first deployed submarines in the region under the pretext of anti piracy missions. However, these missions opened additional capacity for Beijing to engage with these island states in a range of verticals from infrastructural to logistical support, thereby enhancing its strategic depth.

China views the Indian Ocean as a “continuous zone” and remains determined in increasing the number of military facilities in the region apart from Djibouti. Any diplomatic opening in the region is likely to be met

with swift Chinese outreach, with its financial clout to secure strategic assets in the region. The 2022 China-Solomon Islands Security Agreement showcases the growing influence and ambition China has in the larger Oceania. For this reason, regional powers must stay alert to the shifting of balances and what Beijing is capable of in the IOR.

WHAT IS INDIA'S POSITION?

India's historical stance with respect to Chagos Island Was rooted in its larger opposition to militarizing the entire Indian Ocean. This posture had to change considering the evolving geopolitical conditions in the region, where the Indian Ocean Region became a backyard of great power rivalry. New Delhi remains aware that in order to counter China, the United States' presence in Diego Garcia is a necessity.

India has consistently supported Mauritius' sovereignty claim over Chagos, while citing the need for states to defend their territorial integrity. New Delhi acknowledges the geostrategic importance of the islands and the need for pragmatic

balancing between principles and strategic interest. While India positions itself as the net security provider in the region, an assertive China cozying up with Mauritius is problematic. China has already capitalized on the shifting landscapes in the neighborhood by extending support to the newly formed and politically fragile governments of Bangladesh and Maldives, both of which have considerable alignment towards Beijing at this point. The China factor in the larger Indian Ocean Region hence needs to be acknowledged. New Delhi has been particularly resolute in balancing diplomacy and strategic interest with Mauritius, but in order to counter Chinese investments, it needs more friends in the region. Mauritius plays an important role in India's Neighbourhood First Policy. Its strategic investments like the inauguration of the Agalega Island Airstrip and Saint James Jetty, in the strategic island in Mauritius showcases India's commitment to acting as a reliable regional net security provider. In this situation, China's rising footprint in the region is problematic with

its closeness to states like Maldives with projects like Male-Beijing defense pact, which poses strategic concerns that New Delhi must closely monitor. Maldives is positioned geographically between Lakshadweep and Diego Garcia, which makes it an uncomfortable strategic gap for India and the western partners. While India continues to have closer ties with Island states like Madagascar and Seychelles, it should keep extending its security and humanitarian outreach in the island states of IOR to continue reinforcing its leadership in the region.

While Diego Garcia still remains under the UK-US tenantry, China will continue to engage with Mauritius bilaterally through platforms like Forum on China-Africa Cooperation or the Mauritius-China Free Trade Agreement. Thus, the strategic opportunity that Mauritius provides right now needs to be facilitated by New Delhi, while avoiding any unnecessary provocation with China.

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PERSPECTIVE

THE MESSAGE FROM THE BYPOLLS

There is an unofficial rule of thumb, as far as bypolls are concerned. These usually go in the favour of the ruling party - hence in the case of assembly elections then the polls usually favour the party that is in power in the state, and if we are talking about Lok Sabha bypolls then it favours the central government. Of course as with all rules there are exceptions such as legacy seats or sympathy factors for a particular candidate but by and large this seems to be the case.

This is what makes the current set of bypolls whose results were announced on 23rd June so interesting. Of the five assembly seats that went in for bypolls, the Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Admi Party (AAP) won two of these seats—one in Gujarat and another in Punjab. The TMC won the seat in West Bengal, while the Congress bagged the seat in Kerala. The BJP also won one seat in Gujarat. Now let us take a look at who is in power in these states - in Punjab where the Aam Admi Party won the Ludhiana West seat it is the party in power. However in Gujarat where it scored a sizable win over its nearest rival the BJP, it is the latter which is in power. The Aap candidate, Gopal Italia won the Visavadar seat by a margin of 17,581 votes against BJP's Kirit Patel. This win is important also because the bypoll was necessitated by the fact that the earlier MLA from Visavadar had quit the party and gone over to the BJP during the Lok Sabha polls. Hence with this win, the Aam Admi Party has managed to reclaim its stronghold.

This is remarkable, both in terms of margin and in the messaging. The message here is both for the Congress and the BJP. The Congress should be careful before it loses another foothold to the Aam Admi Party while the BJP should not take the home state of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister for granted. The message from Punjab is also equally clear - all those who thought that the Punjab elections (slated in 2027) were going to be a walk-over should think again. As a side note one must add that even Gujarat goes to polls in 2027.

A by-result of the Punjab bypoll is that the AAP candidate Sanjeev Arora would be giving up his Rajya Sabha seat. It is expected that this would now be taken up by Arvind Kejriwal ensuring his entry into national politics. Those who were missing Kejriwal post the Delhi assembly loss earlier this year will see him back in action pretty soon.

The other wins are somewhat predictable but an indicator of the political winds. The Congress-led UDF candidate Aryadan Shoukath has won the Nilambur assembly by-poll in Kerala defeating the CPM candidate. Since it is the CPM that is in power in the state, this win buffers the Congress party's expectations of being able to wrest the state away in the assembly polls, slated next year. As this seat falls in Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's constituency it was doubly important for the Congress to win this one. The fifth bypoll was in West Bengal where the TMC candidate emerged victorious. Mamata Banerjee's magic still holds strong. No surprise there.

All in all, while these elections do not change very much on the ground these bypolls are an interesting indicator of which direction the political winds are blowing.

PRIYA SAHGAL

Manipur: Between armed forces, Special Powers Act and President's rule

OPINION

DR. SHADAB AHMED



When the Austro-Asiatic settlers, Tibeto-Burman migrants and Indo-Aryan émigrés settled at various periods of history in India's north-eastern state of Manipur, they could never have predicted that this diverse assimilation of tribal clans will ethnically engender an inter-tribal conflict in 21st century India. Nor could the mighty British Empire and British Raj in all their insight and foresight predicted that the once mighty Manipur

Kingdom will descend into primitive and primal chaos for a resurgent ethnic identity. But this inter-tribal conflict is what keeps the state of Manipur simmering and seething, like a dormant volcano that threatens to erupt in mindless mayhem and cause protracted anarchy.

Manipur to this day remains deeply polarised, between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. This polarisation has not only matured among the civilian populace of Manipur, but also spiralled into the aristocracy, bureaucracy and judiciary of the state. To put in context, Manipur is broadly and ethnically divided into a predominant Hindu Meitei and a minority Christian Kuki-Zo population, and there exists deep mistrust between the two communities which keeps them perennially divided.

Impassive violence erupted in 2023 during a march organised by the state's tribal communities. Led by representatives of the Kuki-Zo, the participants were protesting against a court decision that had ruled in favour of the majority Meitei community's demand to be recognised as a Scheduled Tribe, a status which confers both income and outcome in government jobs, quotas and protection of land. The Kuki-Zo, who are mostly Christian and have long been recognised as a tribal group, opposed this move all and sundry, arguing that the Meitei, who are mostly Hindu, already hold most of the political and economic power in the state.

With both misinformation and disinformation rife along with unattested propaganda and unsubstantiated rumours, the barred gates of ethnic hostility opened, leading to large-scale communal, inter-personal and sexual violence. Hundreds were killed and thousands were displaced. Unable to quell the clashes, and with defunct militant organizations joining in to feast in the mayhem like rabid and



People gather at the Wall of Remembrance to mark two years of the crisis in the state, in Churachandpur on 03 May, 2025. ANI

diaboliical hyenas, New Delhi spatially segregated the Meiteis and Kukis, partitioning the state between them into two exclusive ethnic zones, with the Meiteis gaining the valley areas where the capital city of Imphal sits, and the Kukis ascending the surrounding hills. The state was pumped with CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) to maintain a central buffer zone between the valley and hills, which is patrolled thoroughly. In true tribal

fashion, the buffer zone failed to keep the violence buffered in, with both communities regularly breaching the buffer zone to attack the other side.

Not willing to trust the state or central governments, both communities have formed “village defence forces” to protect themselves and, even more concerning, militant groups from both sides, which had been dormant for years, have resurfaced. The state government has

traditionally blamed these spiralling militants to the Chin refugees from Myanmar, who conventionally share the tribal kinship with the Kukis, and are reported to be ambassadors of narco-militancy and narco-terrorism in the North-Eastern valley, hills and NEFA regions.

Unable to find out a remedial and mutually-according solution for the festering situation, the statutory resolution for confirming the February imposition of

President's Rule in Manipur was adopted by both the Rajya Sabha and by the Lok Sabha in the first week of April 2025, hoping to keep Manipur stabilised enough. In the same month, assessing the law and order situation and aiming to contain both the insurgent & resurgent violence, and to facilitate coordinated military & paramilitary operations in Disturbed Areas, the Central government imposed the controversial provisions of The Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 (AFSPA), extended to the entire state of Manipur, with the exception of 13 police station areas across 5 districts, for a period of six months starting from April 2025. AFSPA's controversial provisions include granting the central armed paramilitary forces the power to fire on individuals, arrest without warrants and search premises without authorization. Prosecution of security forces involved in such operations requires prior approval from the central government, sparking debates on human rights and accountability. The Narendra Modi

led Central Government should make full use of both the imposed protections and interloped precautions to resolve the putrid and necrotic decline of the blood-scarred state of Manipur. A welcome ineptive step would be to constitute a “peace committee” involving both the ethnic communities and an equal representation from each clan and gender. The government must decisively recover stolen arms & ammunitions in conjunction with disarming both belligerent parties, marauding militant outfits and buttressing militias. The underlying issue fragmenting the Manipur state is the issue of the land and land-holding. The government must tactically work to promptly resolve the actual and perceived grievances of both the Meitis and Kukis, including their desire of autonomous jurisdictions, provincial administration and tribal delegatory governance.

Dr Shadab Ahmed is an Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeon, acclaimed Columnist and author, renowned for his insightful writings on Indian History, Geopolitics and Ethnic Culture

June 25 marks the day in 1975 when then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared Emergency in India, suspending democratic rights. It stands as a stark reminder of authoritarian rule and the resilience of India's democratic spirit.



Indira Gandhi declared an emergency on June 25, 1975, after her election was invalidated.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

On the night of June 25, 1975, India changed forever. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in a dramatic and unprecedented move, declared a nationwide Emergency under Article 352 of the Indian Constitution. It marked the beginning of the darkest period in the country's democratic history. For 21 months, from June 1975 to March 1977, India was in the grip of an authoritarian regime that suspended civil liberties, curtailed freedom of the press, jailed thousands of opposition leaders, and stifled dissent. But what led to this drastic measure?

At the heart of it was a single judicial verdict—a landmark judgment by the Allahabad High Court that declared Indira Gandhi guilty of electoral malpractices and disqualified her from Parliament. This ruling not only shook the foundations of her political career but also plunged India into a political crisis, culminating in the declaration of Emergency.

1971 GENERAL ELECTIONS

The seeds of the 1975 Emergency were sown in the aftermath of the 1971 general elections. Riding high on her popularity following India's decisive victory in the Bangladesh Liberation War, Indira Gandhi led the Congress party to a resounding victory. One of her major opponents, socialist leader Raj Narain, lost the Rae Bareilly seat by over 100,000 votes.

However, Narain challenged the election results, alleging misuse of government machinery and unethical campaign practices.

The petition was filed in the Allahabad High Court, marking the beginning of a legal battle that would take nearly four years to reach a verdict. While initially considered a symbolic challenge, the case gradually gained traction due to mounting evidence and the growing popularity of anti-Congress movements across India.

THE VERDICT THAT SHOOK THE NATION

On June 12, 1975, Justice Jagmohanlal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court delivered a stunning verdict. He found Indira Gandhi guilty on two counts of electoral malpractice: using government personnel, specifically her aide Yashpal Kapur, who had not formally resigned from his government post before campaigning for her, and misusing state resources, including the use of loudspeakers, stages, and the police.

Though the court dismissed other charges—including bribery, misuse of the Indian Air Force, and distribution of liquor and blankets due to lack of evidence—the two confirmed violations were serious enough to invalidate Gandhi's 1971 election. The judgment not only disqualified her from Parliament for six years but also threatened her position as Prime Minister.

This was the first time in independent India's history that a sitting Prime Minister had been found guilty of electoral misconduct and barred from holding office.

The ruling sent shockwaves across the political spectrum. Opposition parties celebrated it as a triumph of democracy, while the Congress party was left stunned and scrambling for damage control.

SUPREME COURT'S INTERIM RELIEF

Indira Gandhi immediately appealed the High Court's decision to the Supreme Court. On June 24, 1975, the apex court granted her a conditional stay. She was allowed to remain Prime Minister until the full appeal was heard, but with significant limitations—she could not vote in Parliament or draw a salary as an MP.

This partial relief did little to contain the growing unrest. Political rallies erupted across the country, and a coordinated opposition front began demanding her resignation. One of the loudest voices against her was that of Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), a veteran Gandhian and social activist who had already launched a popular movement against corruption and authoritarianism, especially in Bihar and Gujarat.

THE EMERGENCY IS DECLARED

Just a day after the Supreme Court ruling, on the night of June 25, Indira Gandhi took the most decisive and controversial step of her political career: Acting under Article 352 of the Constitution, President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed signed the proclamation of

NEARLY TWO YEARS OF DARKNESS: THE EMERGENCY INDIA CAN'T FORGET



Emergency, citing internal disturbances and threats to national security.

Later that night, Indira Gandhi addressed the nation via All India Radio. In a carefully crafted speech, she claimed that a "deep and widespread conspiracy" was threatening national stability. "The President has proclaimed the Emergency. This is nothing to panic about... I am sure you are all aware of the deep and widespread conspiracy which has been brewing ever since I began to introduce certain progressive measures," she declared.

With that proclamation, the democratic rights of over 600 million Indians were suspended.

LIFE DURING THE EMERGENCY

Over the next 21 months, the country witnessed an unparalleled clampdown on civil liberties. Article 19 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to freedom of

speech and expression, was suspended. Opposition leaders were arrested en masse under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). Jayaprakash Narayan, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, Morarji Desai, and George Fernandes were among the thousands jailed without trial.

Press freedom was extinguished overnight. Newspapers were required to submit all material for government approval before publication. Editorials were blacked out, and several journalists were imprisoned. Prominent publications like The Indian Express and The Statesman ran blank editorials in protest.

Perhaps the most draconian measures came under the leadership of Sanjay Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's younger son. Though he held no official position, Sanjay exercised enormous power behind the scenes. He spearheaded controversial programs such as mass sterilization drives targeting poor and rural populations, especially in northern India. These programs were executed coercively, often with the help of local officials and police.

Another major policy was the aggressive slum clearance drive in Delhi, which left thousands homeless and displaced. These forced evic-

tions were carried out with bulldozers and batons in the name of urban beautification and public order.

UNDERGROUND MOVEMENTS

Despite the oppressive climate, resistance never truly died. Student-led protests and underground publications kept the flame of dissent alive. One of the most significant acts of defiance came in the form of a nationwide railway strike in 1974, led by George Fernandes. Though crushed, it became a symbol of resistance.

Movements such as the Navnirman Andolan in Guja-

rat and JP's Bihar Movement had already laid the groundwork for mass mobilization. Even during the Emergency, these movements inspired citizens to quietly organize, inform, and prepare for change.

The Janata Party—an alliance of socialists, Bharatiya Jana Sangh (the precursor to BJP), and breakaway Congress factions—began to form as a unified alternative to Indira's increasingly autocratic rule.

FALL OF THE EMERGENCY REGIME

By the beginning of 1977, Indira Gandhi, perhaps believ-

ing she still enjoyed popular support, announced general elections. Many historians speculate that she underestimated the public resentment against her and the government's excesses.

The elections held in March 1977 delivered a crushing blow to the Congress. The Janata Party won a sweeping majority, and for the first time in independent India's history, a non-Congress government was formed at the Centre. Morarji Desai became Prime Minister, and Indira Gandhi herself lost her seat in Rae Bareilly. On March 23, 1977, the Emergency was officially lifted.

CONSTITUTION MURDER DAY

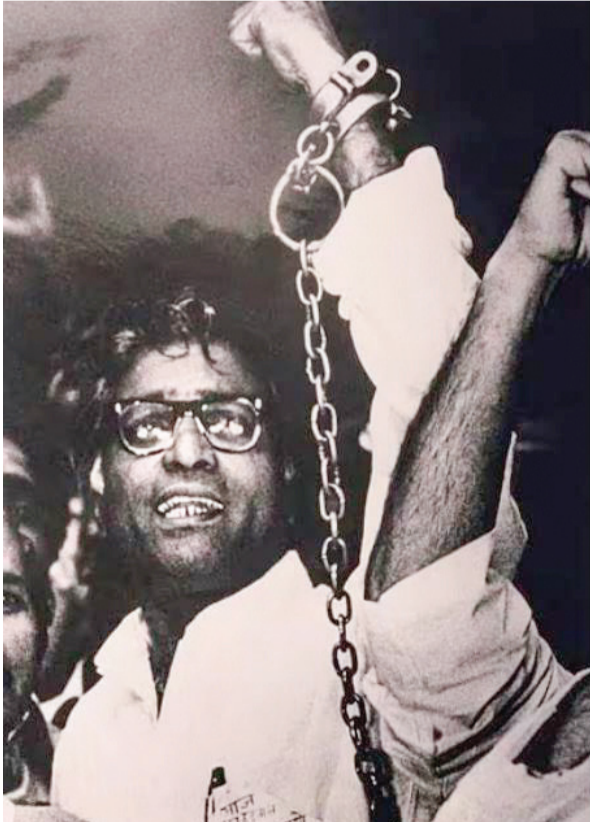
As India marks the 50th anniversary of the Emergency, the debate over its legacy remains as relevant as ever. The BJP-led gov-



In 1977, the Congress party was ousted and the Janata Party led by Morarji Desai gained absolute majority. Morarji Desai became the first non-Congress PM of India.



Sanjay Gandhi being escorted by the police during the Emergency. He attained a great deal of notoriety for forced sterilizations.



George Fernandes



L.K. Advani

During the Emergency (1975–77), millions were affected:
Over 100,000 political opponents were jailed without trial.
Civil liberties were suspended nationwide.
The press was heavily censored.
Forced sterilization campaigns, led by Sanjay Gandhi, targeted over 8 million people, especially the poor.
Slum demolitions displaced thousands in urban areas.
Students, activists, and union leaders were arrested or silenced.

Timeline of Key Events
June 12, 1975: Allahabad High Court declares Indira Gandhi's election invalid.
June 24, 1975: Supreme Court allows her to stay as PM but with curtailed powers.
June 25, 1975: Emergency declared; civil rights suspended.
June 26, 1975: Indira Gandhi addresses the nation.
September 1976: Sanjay Gandhi initiates forced sterilization campaign.
January 18, 1977: General elections announced.
March 23, 1977: Emergency officially ends.

THE AFTERMATH AND LEGACY

The 1975–77 Emergency left an indelible mark on Indian democracy. While it demonstrated the fragility of constitutional safeguards, it also underscored the resilience of

democratic institutions and public spirit. In the years that followed, several amendments were made to strengthen democratic processes and prevent such unilateral decisions in the future. The 44th Constitutional Amendment, passed in 1978, made it much harder for any future government to impose an Emergency on vague or flimsy grounds.

Today, it stands as a somber reminder that democracy, while enshrined in the Constitution, ultimately relies on the vigilance of its citizens and leaders alike.





JEROME POWELL
Federal Reserve Chair

“For the time being, we are well positioned to wait to learn more about the likely course of the economy before considering any adjustments to our policy stance



MARK RUTTE
NATO Secretary-General

We are not living in happy land after the Berlin Wall came down. We are living in much more dangerous times... We have to make sure that we defend our beautiful way of life and systems



ABHISHEK SINGHVI
Senior Congress leader

There can be no doubt that India has been a role model for democracy and development in Asia. And that too with odds humongously, deeply stacked against it

Death with dignity

The right to death with dignity is no less important than the right to live. The recognition of an individual's right to exercise bodily autonomy is a sign of maturity in any evolved society. No doubt, in a country like India, making laws on euthanasia or assisted dying is fraught with several complexities. It does not, however, mean that such attempts should not be made. India should, in fact, take a cue from the United Kingdom, which recently approved the Assisted Dying Bill, a move that marks a major turning point in the country's approach to individual rights at the end of life. After a long public debate, the British House of Commons passed the new legislation, granting terminally ill adults the legal right to choose the timing and manner of their death. This is an issue that sits at the uneasy intersection of personal dignity, medical ethics, and societal responsibility. The final approval by the British Parliament suggests that society is slowly recognising the need to uphold dignity in death. At its core, the debate boils down to the sanctity of choice versus the sanctity of life. Advocates of the Bill made a strong case that individuals facing imminent death should have the right to decide how their final days unfold. To deny this is to risk trapping people in drawn-out, degrading circumstances where suffering outweighs hope. In India, thanks to a landmark verdict by the Supreme Court in 2018, 'Living Will' is allowed.

This empowers individuals of sound mind and health to leave explicit instructions in advance about the medical treatment to be administered when they become terminally ill and can declare in advance that their life must not be prolonged if they slide into a vegetative state. In a follow-up to the progressive move, the apex court, in January 2023, removed the condition that mandated a magistrate's approval for withholding of life support to a terminally ill person. This was aimed at making the guidelines on 'Living Will' more workable and less cumbersome. The document will now be signed by the executor of the 'Living Will' in the presence of two attesting witnesses, preferably independent, and attested before a notary or Gazetted Officer. In fact, the apex court pulled up the Centre for failing to enact a law on passive euthanasia in accordance with its 2018 judgement upholding the right to death with dignity. By remaining silent on such a crucial issue concerning terminally ill patients, the Centre is trying to abdicate its legislative responsibility and passing the buck on the judiciary. The 2018 verdict, allowing passive euthanasia, recognised the right to die with dignity as a fundamental right in the spirit of Article 21.

India must take a cue from the United Kingdom, which recently approved the Assisted Dying Bill

Million-dollar adviser for cash-strapped Telangana!

Revanth must explain not just how the tie-up with TBIGC benefits TG, but also why he needs to outsource governance to London



Dr KRISHANK

The recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Telangana government, led by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, and the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBIGC) has sparked controversy. The institute, headed by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, is known for offering strategic advisory services to governments across the world. However, the collaboration raises eyebrows due to TBIGC's financial record — reportedly generating \$121 million through its advisory operations. This prompts many to question whether such an expensive partnership is appropriate for a State currently facing financial distress as claimed by the Congress government.

Puzzling Pact
Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has cited Telangana's financial distress in various public meetings. That no one believes him and the party high command in Delhi refuses to give him appointments is another matter. What is more puzzling is that, despite the "bankrupt" condition of the State, his government has gone ahead and signed the MoU with an international adviser known for charging exorbitant fees. One wonders how a cash-strapped State can afford to engage with such a high-profile institution. Meanwhile, the Revanth Reddy government has been on a price-hiking spree: the cost of sand has risen from



Rs 1,200 per tonne during the BRS regime to now Rs 2,000. Alcohol prices, Metro Rail and bus pass fares have also increased. Yet, the Congress government continues to delay the implementation of 6 Guarantees, Declarations and 420 promises.

The choice of TBIGC also revives concerns about the Revanth Reddy government's pattern of signing MoUs with companies or institutions whose credibility and impact remain questionable. In the past, several agreements were made with little to no follow-up or transparent outcomes, raising suspicions about whether these deals serve political optics more than actual policy goals.

From Godi India Pvt Ltd to Revanth's brother Anumula Jagdeesh-owned company Swachh Bio, to Walsh Karra and URSA Cluster — allegedly fraudulent companies — Revanth Reddy has publicised them as multi-crore investment successes. The MoU with TBIGC risks becoming yet another such example, especially if measurable development outcomes are not demonstrated in the near term.

Blair's Baggage
Further complicating the issue is Tony Blair's controversial global image. His involvement in contentious foreign policy matters, particularly his stance on Iran, is well documented. Given India's longstanding diplomatic ties and friendly relations with Iran, the Telan-

gana government's association with a figure who has historically supported aggressive postures towards Iran could send mixed diplomatic signals, and may not align with India's broader geopolitical interests.

It is worth noting that Iran is the second-largest supplier of crude oil to India, while India is one of the largest foreign investors in Iran's oil and gas industry. Moreover, the lack of transparency surrounding the MoU — its objectives, expected deliverables, and financial commitments — adds to public scepticism. Taxpayers deserve clarity on how their money is being spent, especially during a period of alleged economic hardship. Without clear benchmarks for success, such agreements can easily become symbolic gestures rather than engines of real development.

The TBIGC has been advising the Saudi Arabian government as part of the 9-million pound agreement. Blair is known to act as a middleman between

The choice of TBIGC revives concerns about the Revanth government's pattern of signing MoUs with companies or institutions whose credibility and impact remain questionable

global bankers and Africa, operating like a commercial management consultant. Has Revanth Reddy agreed to bear TBIGC's huge expenses? The Congress Chief Minister has often sought aid from the World Bank without providing a clear picture of how he would spend it. Is this collaboration only to use Tony Blair to raise international loans?

Lacks Transparency

While global expertise can be valuable in shaping governance strategies, the Telangana government's decision to partner with the Tony Blair Institute appears poorly timed and insufficiently justified. Does the Revanth government endorse Tony Blair's controversial views against Muslims? Given the financial situation and the political baggage associated with the institute's leadership, this move raises more questions than answers.

The Telangana government must provide greater transparency and rationale if it wishes to maintain public trust. It must also elaborate on how it plans to benefit from the TBIGC partnership. With TBIGC's 800 staff working within several governments worldwide, is Revanth Reddy relying on a British adviser to manage the administration of the Telangana government, and at what cost?

(The author is official spokesperson of BRS)

Letters to the Editor

English

Union Home Minister Amit Shah prophesied that the day is not far when speakers of the English language in India would feel ashamed. It is unfortunate that Shah has pounced on English, forgetting that it is the universal language which connects India with the world. Further, English serves as the unifying factor in a country like India where multiple languages are spoken by multiple groups of people. The Minister should realise that our learning, participation and contribution to the global production of knowledge, particularly in fields like research and development,

innovation and discoveries are inconceivable, without English.
THARCIUS S FERNANDO,
Chennai

Beat the heat

The Editorial 'Cool idea' (19 June) was interesting. The proposal to fix the lower limit of ACs to 20 degrees C seems apt in view of the environmental crisis. The easiest thing we do to beat the heat is to turn on the AC. The increasing use of ACs will only add to the disaster. How about placing some plants at home along with the ACs? Needless to say, what we need to beat the heat is to plant more trees. There is really no alternative. We are on the road to Environmental Disaster!

MELVILLE X D'SOUZA,
Mumbai

Cartoon Today



India in the hotspot

■ New York Times

Mango season and selling frenzy

Yakin Shah paced the parking lot of a cargo warehouse at Newark Liberty International Airport. He awaited 800 boxes of mangoes that had flown from a warehouse in Pune, India. Nearly all had been presold.

■ BBC

When Dubai became part of India

In the winter of 1956, Times correspondent David Holden arrived in Bahrain, then still a British protectorate. Holden hadn't expected to be attending a garden durbar in honour of Queen Victoria's appointment as Empress of India.

■ CNN

India's high-tech ambitions get a boost

India was gunning for a greater slice, not only of the smartphone industry, but the entire supply chain. With Apple announcing it will build US-bound smartphones in India, India is seeing new momentum.

DECCAN Chronicle

25 JUNE 2025

Look back at Emergency: It shouldn't happen again

Never again — two words are sufficient to bring out why the darkest and most tumultuous time in the history of independent India should never be allowed to recur. As a fledgling democracy soon to hold its first general elections and elect a national parliament, a jubilant nation was filled with happy Indians from 1947. Most Indians were essentially poor but extremely proud to be free people as India grew up as a sovereign republic, fought three wars — during two of which national emergencies were declared (1962 and 1971) — and the nation learnt to forgo American PL 480 funds.

Individual liberty was seen as a sacrosanct right that defined the nation and shaped an open society that sustained through economic vicissitudes. And 50 years ago, came the Emergency declaration on June 25, 1975. Mass arrests were made, the press was muzzled, political opponents jailed, civil liberties curtailed and mass sterilisations carried out even as forcible evictions were ordered of the poorest people to make way for gentrification.

A democratically elected government transformed into a despotic regime which ruled by decree for 21 months until good sense dawned on the ruler and her acolytes. Mrs Indira Gandhi came back in 1980 to rule on, her tyrannical Emergency image making way for an older, more benign persona, but she had blotted the aura of a powerful personality who was only the world's second woman Prime Minister.

Dissension may have been growing as exemplified in Jayaprakash Narain's people's movement, labour unrest, railway men striking and incidence of economic hardships of inflation and rising food prices. But all of it put together did not demand such a move as the imposition of an Emergency. History would have it that Indira Gandhi's adoring aides and a radical son pushed her into it.

No rebellion was threatening stability, or the security of the nation, and the rulers were well ensconced after a mandate very much in favour of national governance by the Congress party. "Internal disturbance" was a fig leaf that barely covered the ambition of taking total control by defusing the power of the judiciary, all because it went by the statute book while appearing to be a stumbling block in India's progress as perceived by a few with megalomaniacal tendencies.

The Allahabad high court ruling that found Mrs Indira Gandhi guilty of electoral malpractices was the immediate cause of the declaration. Five decades later, the injury sustained by the free Indian muzzled by the very person they deified and so voted for remains etched in the psyche of their descendent.

Close to four-fifths of the population is younger than 50 today, which means they have no direct knowledge of what it was like to live without the guarantee of personal freedom. There is no recorded history of why the Emergency ended when it did. It is but a guess that Indira Gandhi was given poll surveys that showed her coming back to power, and that they proved inaccurate.

The events of those 21 months during which Opposition leaders were incarcerated, some even tortured in custody, serve today as a warning to Indian people and their netas that never again should anyone wield the power to declare a suspension of the right to liberty. When we see dissent being muzzled even without Emergency powers today, it serves as a reminder of what could happen if the power to declare such an Emergency, too, had not been taken away with the Constitution amended to substitute "armed rebellion" for "internal disturbance". The checks and balances must remain lest India lapse into the state some authoritarian nations, including at least an old democracy, are seen falling into.

UDF makes a point in Kerala

The results of the by-elections to four Assembly constituencies in the four corners of the country, save the one in Kerala, display a pattern of winners retaining their seats. However, the UDF's win in Nilambur in Kerala and the AAP's in Gujarat's Visavadar seat stand out as they cause some jubilation in the winners' camp for different reasons.

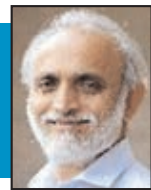
The win in Nilambur must boost the morale of the Opposition UDF ahead of next year's Assembly election. The seat has been a UDF bastion for the last five decades, and the LDF was able to make some dent only when it had a defector from the Congress camp joining it. The bypoll was necessitated when the two-time Independent MLA, a former Congressman who was propped up by the LDF, cut ties with the ruling front and resigned. The MLA quit and joined the Trinamul Congress, and contested again. In the three-way contest, the UDF wrested the seat back from the LDF, with the TMC candidate walking away with more than 15 per cent votes. The UDF is sure to bank on the strength of its united campaign while the LDF has to scout new methods to convince the people to give its candidates a third term notwithstanding the impressive strides made by the state in the last nine years.

The AAP win in Gujarat has an added sweetness to it, for the bypoll was necessitated when its sitting MLA resigned and joined the BJP. That the party was able to retain its ground in a state where it has only started to make its presence felt does tell a story. The AAP had also needed a morale booster after its debacle in Delhi, and the bypoll wins in Gujarat and in Ludhiana West Punjab have provided just that. The TMC win in Kaliganj in West Bengal with the highest margin so far is another statement that the party continues to be in a formidable position despite challenges posed by the BJP.

Subhani



How Indira misread signs, failed morality test in 1975



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

There was no Mood of the Nation poll in 1975. It was to be inferred from other indirect means — the number of street protests, gherao (the word has gone out of circulation), rail roko, and hunger-strikes. But there was a subtle, psychological mood reckoner. This was the commercial Hindi film.

But cultural history was not a developed field in India then. It is not so now. 1975 also marks the 50th anniversary of Hindi films: Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay*, Yash Chopra's *Deewar* and Gulzar's *Aandhi*, among others. These coincide with the 50th anniversary of the imposition of Indira Gandhi's Emergency.

Do these films in some way indicate the mood and atmosphere of the volatile political background of 1975? Those who look at the Emergency, and who do so regularly and ritualistically every June 25, do not take a broader view of Indian society and politics. Most of them have been content to go along the narrow political track. The political track is clear and easy to follow: the Allahabad high court judgment disqualifying Indira Gandhi for violation of rules in the 1971 election from Rae Bareilly on June 12, and the declaration of Emergency on June 25, followed by the arrest of all Opposition leaders. But 50 years after the Emergency, one is dissatisfied with the interpretation that it was the villainy of Indira Gandhi alone that resulted in the Emergency. The questions arise as to what was the state of the nation, the mood of the nation in 1975 and the years preceding it? Srinath Raghavan, who had earlier traced the connections between the Second World War and the defini-

tive role of the Indian soldiers in it, has recently taken a broader view of Indira Gandhi, the Emergency, and the political trends at the time in the country and abroad.

The cultural markers of the time, which are to be found in popular cinema, can reveal the deeper mood of the times. Movies can be meaningful ways in political criticism. Attempts have been made to interpret popular culture, as represented in popular commercial films, in larger social and political terms, but it is done in the obscure language of philosophical and psychological alienation. The esoteric modes are not to be scoffed at. There has to be room for all kinds of interpretation. But a sociological interpretation of the movies

EMERGENCY: 50 YEARS LATER

of the times could reveal something more interesting than mere political analysis.

The three movies — *Deewar*, *Sholay* and *Aandhi* — were shot in 1974 and they were released in 1975. They indicate the general mood and how it must have impacted the filmmakers. Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar, who became the successful screenplay and dialogue writers of what has come to be identified with the "angry young man" portrayed in an iconic manner by Amitabh Bachchan, first in the film *Zanjeer* and continued in *Deewar*. But the Khan-Akhtar duo did the screenplay and dialogue of *Sholay* as well. But what was pictured in *Deewar* and *Sholay* goes beyond the directors, the actors, story and dialogue writers. It is about the mood and spirit hanging in the air of the times.

Deewar is known to be

Indira Gandhi's Emergency was the response of a weak leader to the turmoil of times. She thought she was restoring order, but she did it the wrong way. Force is the weapon of a weak government.

loosely based on the Bombay smuggler Haji Mastan. By the time *Deewar* was made, he was in prison. There is the story that Amitabh Bachchan had met him in prison, and narrated that how cold his eyes were. This was the outlaw hero. It showed that India in the late 1960s was drifting. The underworld was at work, and the political idealism of an earlier period had disappeared to a great extent. The police officer played by Shashi Kapoor in the film stands as a lonely sentinel, and he draws inspiration from the shattered and yet defiantly idealistic schoolmaster played by A.K.

Hangal. The political system is in the shadows. The State is ineffective. *Sholay* again shows that justice — in this case the personal revenge of a police officer, played by Sanjeev Kumar, whose arms have been cut off by a notorious outlaw — had to be got through private initiative. The police officer gets two criminals to carry forward his private war. The political order is invisible.

Aandhi is indeed a different kind of movie, compared to *Deewar* and *Sholay*, even as Yash Chopra and Ramesh Sippy are so strikingly different from the poetic sensibility of Gulzar. The story of *Aandhi* came on the radar and it was banned after running for 24 weeks in the cinema hall. The debate whether it was about Indira Gandhi remains inconclusive, despite Gulzar's weak rationalising that it was indeed based on Indira Gandhi, but

only on her traits and mannerisms. The film was about a woman politician who was ambitious, and the dilemmas of her domestic life. The politician was shown for the first time as a private individual with a public life. And that is why it remains a watchable film even after 50 years.

These three films do not in any way portend the Emergency. They manage to draw a broader picture of the times. The times were uncertain, troublesome, and even violent. What holds these pictures is not so much their indirect commentary on the politics of the times, and they do provide a strong and subtle political commentary, but human relations and emotional bonds, the bond between a mother and a son in *Deewar*, the bond of friendship between two desperadoes in *Sholay*, and the love of a woman and a man caught in tussle of ambition and sentiment.

The self-conscious meditation over the troubling times in the 1976 Satyajit Ray film, *Jan Aranya*, where the patriarch thinks aloud about how things had gone wrong, even as the sons accept the cynical norms of the day.

But do these movies justify the imposition of the Emergency? Of course they do not. They help us understand that it was a period of deep unrest. Indira Gandhi's Emergency was the response of a weak leader to the turmoil of times. She thought she was restoring order, but she did it the wrong way. Force is the weapon of a weak government. The popular idea that Indira Gandhi was a strong leader because of her 1971 landslide election victory, and her role in India's military intervention in the birth of Bangladesh in 1972 was misplaced. She failed the real moral test by imposing the Emergency when she felt that she was being personally challenged.

Is history a morality tale? It is indeed in many ways.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

UDF BYPOLL WIN SIGNIFICANT

Normally byelections are a cakewalk for ruling parties. But in Kerala, the ruling LDF has lost to the Opposition Congress-led UDF in the Nilambur Assembly seat by a margin of over 11,000 votes. It should serve as a wake-up call for the LDF. That said, can Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi now say that the election was fixed? Even in Gujarat, the ruling BJP lost to AAP in Visavadar constituency, albeit it won the Kadi seat.

S.Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai

CONGRESS MUST GROW UP

It has become routine for Congress leaders to quarrel like terrible infants. They may not like Mr. Modi, but he has achieved a lot. Mr. Tharoor, in speaking the truth while praising the PM, should not be faulted. The Congress leaders' accusation that under Mr. Modi's foreign policy "India is isolated globally" and Indian "diplomacy is shattered" makes them appear to be blinkered. In fact, due to his crafty foreign policy India is respected globally. Did not Vajpayee praise Indira Gandhi as 'Kali' in 1971? Did any Jan Sangh leader criticise him? And did not Karunanidhi praise Vajpayee as the right leader in a wrong party? And none took umbrage in DMK. It is time Congressmen stopped petty disputes, learned to respect leaders like Mr. Sashi Tharoor, a well-educated and dignified personality.

A.SESHAGIRI RAO
Korattur

'POLITICAL' CONFERENCE

Whether Lord Murugan is happy or not with the Murugan Conference held at Madurai, the people of TN, especially the electorate and the DMK party and its coalition parties are not happy as the BJP has used it as a political conference instead of a religious one. Denigration of Leaders like Periyar and Anna and the stoic silence of AIADMK leaders at the conference and afterwards especially that of EPS will not go well with the people. As for EPS statement that he was not aware that disparaging videos would be screened is not surprising as EPS has the habit of learning of happenings by watching TV.

M.C.VIJAY SHANKAR
Chennai

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Pradeep S. Mehta



Can India take the lead, mobilise Global South on funding of terror?

In South Africa last week for a G-20 review conference on Global South issues, the air was charged with both urgency and purpose. While there was considerable concern on the conflicts around the world, including in Africa, some did ask questions about the recent India-Pakistan conflict. I explained how the provocation over the selective killing of Hindu tourists in Pahalgam by Pakistani terrorists led to India's kinetic response against the terrorist camps in that country. Thankfully, better sense prevailed on both nations, who ended the conflict after four days. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi said unequivocally that any further terror attacks from Pakistan will be responded to with stronger force.

Terrorism sadly bankrupts the world, not just in lives lost, but in derailed development and compromised sovereignty. In an article earlier this month, India's former foreign secretary Nirupama Rao argued that the time has come to move beyond episodic outrage and towards building an enduring institutional architecture. She advocated a Global South-led initiative to combat terrorism not merely through punitive responses, but by integrating counter-terrorism into the development and justice frameworks of the emerging economies. Our Prime Minister too raised this forcefully at the recent G-7 summit in Canada, sending a strong message to Pakistan.

We can go a step further. India, along with the African Union, can lead the formation of a G-20 task force on terror financing, with India simultaneously spearheading the launch of "T20: Twenty Against Terrorism", a new multilateral platform shaped by those who endure terrorism, not just observe it.

This reflects not only diplomatic responsibility, but an ethical imperative. The world cannot afford another wasted decade of inertia. From Srinagar to Somalia, from Sahel to Southeast Asia, the costs of delay are too widespread.

As Ms Rao noted, inequality and fractured global governance perpetuate both poverty and violence. Just as the G-20 rose to the challenge of global economic instability in 2008, it must now recalibrate its mandate to safeguard peace and justice. India, as a democracy with deep counter-terrorism experience and development-first credentials, is uniquely placed to galvanise this movement.

This can be the world's blueprint for a secure future. And its founding message should be clear: we will not be silenced, and we will not be sidelined. Peace will not be gifted to us and we will define it and defend it together.

Focusing on the African continent, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, in recent talks with Nigeria's Bola Ahmed Tinubu, emphasised the importance of anchoring G-20 priorities in Agenda 2063: Africa's strategic blueprint for inclusive development, self-reliance and prosperity. But the ambitions of Agenda 2063 can't work in a security vacuum.

Africa's underdevelopment fuels not only internal instability but cross-continental threats, including migration surges and trafficking routes. Europe's security is intrinsically linked to Africa's prosperity.

India's recent "Operation Sindoor" military strikes, following the Pahalgam attack, exemplifies a model of strategic restraint and calibrated force. But the underlying message is starker: terrorism is no longer just a national issue. The networks that enable it, from hawala channels to

crypto wallets, are global.

We must establish a permanent G-20 task force on terrorist financing. If the G-20 can coordinate swift action on shadow banking, crypto markets and corporate taxation, why has it neglected the financial pipelines of terrorism?

Within the G-20 framework, we propose the creation of a "T20: Twenty Against Terrorism" task force, to unite the world's most terror-affected regions: nations that are too often recipients of post-crisis aid, not partners in pre-emptive strategy.

The T20 will not replace the United Nations or the FATF, but complement them by bringing speed, field-based intelligence, and cultural context. The focus would be on:

- Local de-radicalisation models
- Digital surveillance and capacity building
- Community resilience
- Financial tracking innovations
- Real-time intelligence sharing

Among the G-20 members, long-term victims such as India, the African Union member states, Mexico, Turkey and Russia should no longer be silent partners.

They must become active architects of the global counter-terror framework. This effort can begin immediately via informal consultations during South Africa's presidency and culminate under the United States' G-20 presidency with the T20's formal launch.

Jim O'Neill, who coined the "Brics" acronym around two decades ago, recently underscored India's structural strengths whether its youthful population, resilient domestic demand, and strategic partnerships across the G-7, G-20 and Brics blocs. Yet,

what remains unspoken is even more critical: India's rising moral legitimacy as a voice of the Global South.

Its G-20 presidency in 2023 marked a watershed by facilitating the African Union's formal admission into the grouping. Now, India must deepen its leadership by championing the creation of a G-20 Task Force on Terror Financing and convening the first-ever T20 Twenty Against Terrorism summit in New Delhi, ideally with a permanent secretariat.

The urgency for such architecture is not abstract, it is deeply moral and immediate. Terrorism thrives where global inaction persists and where the financial networks remain unchecked.

From Johannesburg to Jakarta, Srinagar to the Sahel, the demand is unmistakable: the world must step forward, not as passive recipients of Western security templates, but as the proactive shapers of a new global security paradigm.

As the United States prepares to take over the G-20 presidency, India along with other G-20 members must act swiftly and set up a task force with teeth to track and cut terror financing, and launch the T20 as a coalition of the most affected, yet under-represented, states. The precedent of the 2008 G-20 financial reform must now guide us toward a 2025-26 security recalibration. The message from South Africa is unmistakable: we reject a future defined by terror. In the spirit of "ubuntu" (humanity to others), we will author our own peace — collectively, urgently and unapologetically.

The writer is the secretary-general of CUTS International, a 40-year-old leading global public policy research and advocacy group

The Statesman

Incorporating and directly descended
from THE FRIEND OF INDIA - Founded 1818

Resilient valley

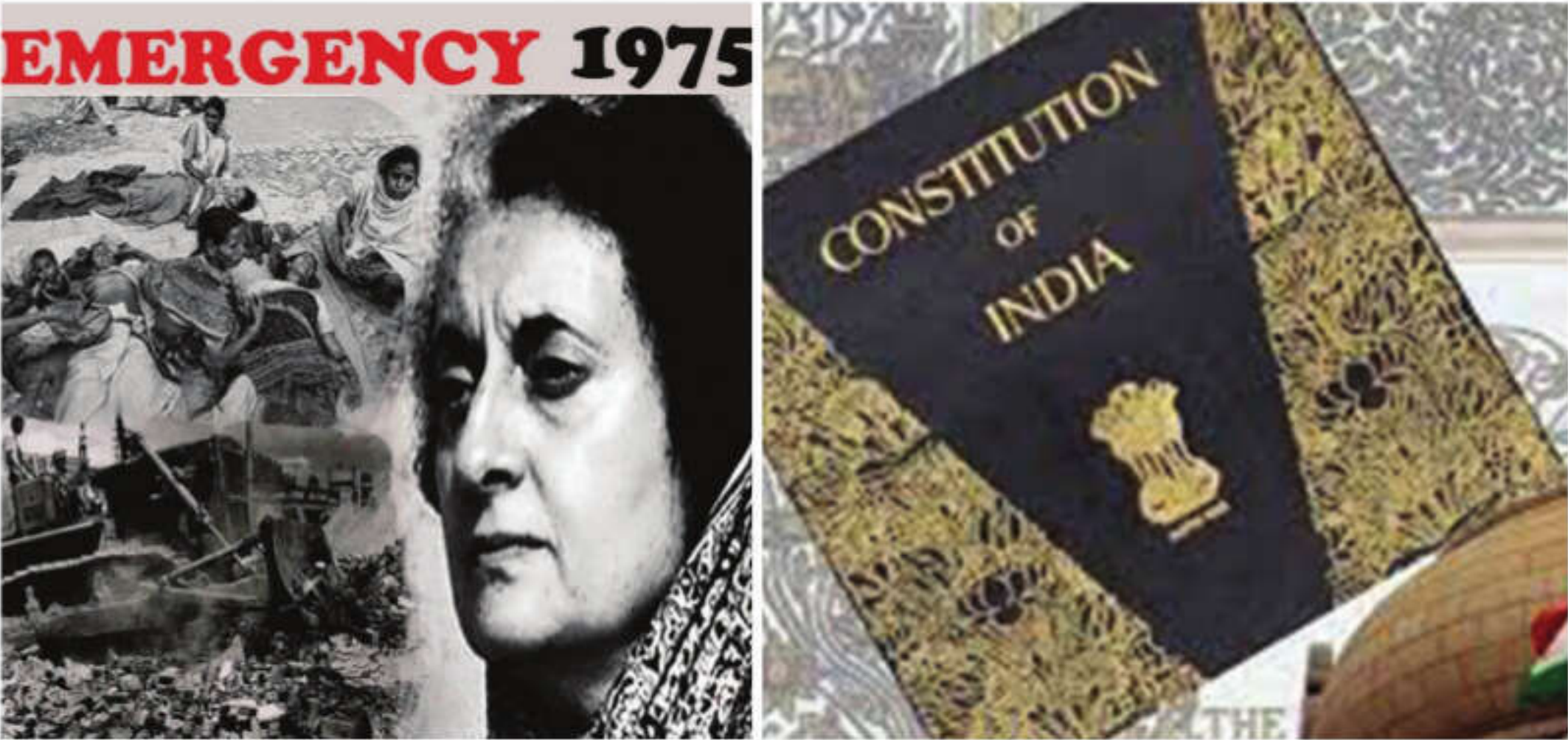
For decades, the Kashmir Valley has been India’s bittersweet paradox ~ an exquisite landscape forever haunted by geopolitical uncertainty. Each time peace seems within reach, a violent tremor breaks the spell. The deadly attack on tourists at Pahalgam this April was yet another grim reminder of the volatility that lurks beneath Kashmir’s breathtaking beauty. The shock of 26 civilian deaths shattered the region’s main economic pillar ~ tourism ~ just as the valley was preparing for what promised to be a record-breaking summer. The repercussions were immediate and brutal. Cancellations flooded in, hotels fell silent, and boatmen on the Dal Lake found themselves waiting in vain for passengers. More than two-thirds of tourist destinations were swiftly shut down in the wake of the attack, choking the very lifeline that sustains thousands of local families. The fear was palpable ~ both for personal safety and for economic survival. Yet, amid the gloom, an unexpected resilience is surfacing. A slow but steady trickle of tourists is returning to Kashmir. Indian families from Rajasthan and Delhi have braved public apprehensions to honour their vacation plans, riding water bikes on Dal Lake or wandering through Srinagar’s famed gardens. Polish tourists recently arrived in the city, perhaps drawn by curiosity or an instinctive belief that life must go on, terror notwithstanding. There is cautious optimism among hoteliers, guides, and shopkeepers who dare to hope that Kashmir’s lost tourist season may not be entirely beyond salvage. A quiet contributor to this recovery is the new rail connection linking Srinagar to Katra. This twice-daily train, running packed and fully booked for months ahead, is not merely a logistical achievement ~ it is a psychological bridge, reducing the distance between the valley and mainland India in both practical and emotional terms. Pilgrims to Vaishno Devi are now extending their journeys into Kashmir, helping to dispel the fog of fear that the attackers sought to spread. However, this fragile revival is not assured. The sense of normalcy that visitors report today can be undone by a single fresh incident. Memories of conflict run deep, and confidence, once lost, takes far longer to rebuild than to destroy. The government’s decision to close major tourist spots was understandable, but a well-planned, phased reopening ~ with visible security and transparent communication ~ may be the key to sustaining this fledgling resurgence. What is clear is that Kashmir cannot afford another lost season. The livelihoods of thousands are tethered to the fragile promise of peace. The valley’s beauty is eternal; its peace, sadly, is not. For Kashmir to truly reclaim its place as India’s crown jewel, its safety must become routine, not exceptional. Kashmir’s tourism rebound is not just a matter of economics ~ it is a quiet test of trust, resilience, and the human instinct to hope beyond fear. The outcome of this test remains uncertain.

Strategic Retreat

The United States’ recalibration of its Africa strategy signals a stark departure from decades of broad-based engagement towards a narrower, cost-driven approach focused largely on security. While the Trump administration’s emphasis on “burden sharing” may appear fiscally prudent in the short term, it risks undermining both African stability and long-term US strategic interests. The African continent ~ particularly regions like the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, and Somalia ~ stands at the intersection of poverty, environmental stress, weak governance, and violent extremism. These factors are inseparable from the spread of jihadist groups that now threaten not only fragile African states but also global security. In the past, US engagement in Africa combined military aid with substantial development assistance, recognising that insecurity cannot be disentangled from socio-economic deprivation. The current shift away from such a holistic strategy, with the closure of development agencies and reduction of direct military presence, leaves a vacuum unlikely to be filled by local governments already stretched thin by internal challenges. General Michael Langley, the senior US military commander for Africa, underscores the threat posed by militant groups seeking coastal access to fund their operations via smuggling, trafficking, and illicit trade. Yet, even as these risks escalate, Washington’s pivot suggests that African nations must now defend not only their own sovereignty but also global interests ~ with limited outside support. This expectation ignores the fact that many African armies remain under-resourced and ill-equipped to absorb such a heavy burden, let alone confront adversaries increasingly skilled in exploiting state weakness. The United States justifies this realignment by arguing for African self-reliance. But self-reliance requires time, capacity building, and sustained investment ~ elements that are being stripped away alongside military and developmental disengagement. Worse, the withdrawal of US development agencies removes critical programmes that addressed the very conditions which fuel radicalisation: food insecurity, unemployment, and environmental degradation. Without these stabilising measures, military efforts alone are unlikely to halt the cycle of violence and recruitment. This retreat also opens space for geopolitical competitors. China’s state-driven infrastructure investment and Russia’s opportunistic military support are expanding in influence as the US shrinks its African footprint. Both rivals are likely to capitalise on the gaps left by Washington ~ not necessarily for African benefit, but to secure their own strategic footholds. For the Trump administration, focused sharply on domestic security and fiscal restraint, Africa may seem peripheral. Yet instability breeds global consequences. The collapse of governance in one region can ripple outward, affecting maritime trade routes, migration patterns, and transnational terrorism threats. A purely transactional approach that prioritises cost-cutting over comprehensive engagement risks greater expense down the line ~ in dollars, influence, and security. In its quest for efficiency, the US risks discarding a hard-earned shield against future threats. Africa’s battles are no longer just Africa’s; they are quietly becoming the world’s. The price of neglect may yet outweigh the savings of disengagement.

Constitution Reclaimed

The infamous 42nd Amendment sought to fundamentally alter the Constitution's character, centralising power and eroding its checks and balances. It was a moment when democracy held its breath and dictatorship crept through the corridors of power in constitutional disguise. This was not just a political power grab, it was a philosophical betrayal of the Republic. The centralisation of power under Indira Gandhi stands today as a cautionary tale of what happens when a leader places dynasty above democracy



In the grand journey of Indian democracy, the Constitution has always been more than a mere document, it is our moral compass and national conscience. Framed by visionaries, it was envisioned as a shield against tyranny, a covenant of liberty, and a roadmap to social justice. Yet, there came a time when this sacred charter was trampled upon, not by foreign invaders, but by a democratically elected Prime Minister.

The Emergency of 1975–77 remains one of the darkest chapters in Indian history. Under Indira Gandhi’s regime, the Constitution, intended to safeguard the people, was turned into an instrument of control. Civil liberties were suspended, the press was muzzled, opposition voices jailed, and the judiciary browbeaten into submission.

The infamous 42nd Amendment sought to fundamentally alter the Constitution’s character, centralising power and eroding its checks and balances. It was a moment when democracy held its breath and dictatorship crept through the corridors of power in constitutional disguise.

This was not just a political power grab, it was a philosophical betrayal of the Republic. The centralisation of power under Indira Gandhi stands today as a cautionary tale of what happens when a leader places dynasty above democracy.

The process of disrespecting the values of the Constitution continued even after the rule of Indira Gandhi. From Rajiv to Sonia to Rahul, the Gandhi family has displayed a consistent pattern of undermining constitutional propriety for political convenience.

Rajiv Gandhi, following in his mother’s footsteps, overturned the Supreme Court’s progressive Shah Bano judgment, sacrificing justice at the

altar of appeasement.

Sonia Gandhi, during the UPA years, operated as an extra-constitutional authority, often overshadowing the elected Prime Minister and subverting institutional integrity.

Rahul Gandhi, in a shocking display of disregard for due process, publicly tore up an ordinance passed by his party’s own government, an act of dynastic arrogance that humiliated the government and mocked constitutional governance. Across generations, the family has treated the Constitution not as a guiding framework, but as a hurdle to personal and political power.

Even today, wherever Congress is in power, constitutional values are the first casualty. Appeasement politics takes precedence over constitutional principles proving once again that for Congress, vote-banks come before the Constitution.

In contrast, the leadership India has seen over the past decade under Prime Minister Narendra Modi reflects stability, accountability, and respect for the Constitution. From day one, the Modi government has treated the Constitution not as a political prop but as a living, breathing instrument of national transformation.

It has not merely paid lip service to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar but has institutionalised his legacy in a way no previous government has.

Through the development of the “Panch Teerth”, five landmark sites linked to Babasaheb’s life, the government has immortalised his contributions to constitutionalism and social justice. The Dr. Ambedkar International Centre in New Delhi, and the

Ambedkar memorial in London, both stand as global tributes to his vision.

In 2015, November 26 was officially declared as Constitution Day, not as an act of token symbolism, but as a national call for constitutional literacy and civic awareness.

Across schools, colleges, government institutions, and civil society platforms, Constitution Day is now observed with renewed purpose and pedagogic seriousness. It’s a move that reflects the Modi government’s deep respect for democratic pedagogy.

Even major legislative reforms under this government, whether the abrogation of Article 370, abolition of Triple Talaq, or the passage of the Women’s Reservation Bill, have all followed due parliamentary process. Each has reflected constitutional

fidelity while advancing justice and equity.

While Indira Gandhi sought to bend the Constitution to suit dynastic ambition, Prime Minister Modi has chosen to harness it to serve national ambition. He views the Constitution not as a roadblock but as a roadmap.

The landmark abrogation of Article 370 was not just a political decision; it was a constitutional correction. It ended a decades-long anomaly that kept Jammu & Kashmir in legal limbo. For the first time since independence, citizens in the region enjoy full constitutional rights and benefits, affirming the principle of “One Nation, One Constitution.”

The Modi era has also been marked by deep structural reforms with constitutional resonance. The Digital India initia-

tive, Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity, and Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) have revolutionized governance. These reforms have democratised access to state services, reduced corruption, and restored dignity to the last citizen, fulfilling the constitutional promise of equality and non-discrimination.

The critics often decry the Modi government for being “too strong,” conflating assertive leadership with authoritarianism. But this is a fundamental misunderstanding of democratic strength.

A strong leader, anchored in constitutional morality, can deliver long-awaited justice and equity. Whether it’s gender reforms like the abolition of Triple Talaq, or long-neglected issues like women’s representation in legislatures, Modi’s government has used its legislative mandate to empower, not to entrench.

Furthermore, the government’s persistent efforts to raise constitutional awareness and reinforce civic engagement distinguish it from its predecessors. There is a conscious emphasis on a constitutional culture, which was conspicuously missing in earlier regimes that reduced the Constitution to a ritual reference point. That is the enduring legacy of the Modi government: reclaiming constitutional morality not just in courtrooms or classrooms, but in the daily life of governance.

History will remember Indira Gandhi for silencing the Constitution’s voice. It will remember Narendra Modi for amplifying it. Indira Gandhi viewed the Constitution as a hurdle; Narendra Modi sees it as a harness of the nation’s potential.

In the end, the story of India is the story of its Constitution. And under Modi, that story is being retold, not with fear or favour, but with clarity, conviction, and constitutional courage.

US LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

A ruthless race

Sir, I have no expertise in polemology but as an ordinary inmate of the world I feel that increasingly we are becoming so barbaric and ruthless that the cave dwellers of prehistoric times would be ashamed of our uncivilized demonstrations of force and power. As in the case of persistence in enabling tobacco and poppy plantations, manufacturing, exporting and importing war weapons is the one of the world’s most profit-making businesses.

The mandatory warning that tobacco and drugs kill is flouted with impunity as there is obvious permission that every corner shop and every airport duty free shop can sell tobacco products. And yes, the drug peddler is everywhere from casinos and cafes to street corners.

Similarly, on a more visibly horrendous level is the military weapons market and its twin, the illegal arms market, bristling with arms dealers, suppliers and buyers. If there is a market, there must be consumers; in this case

the consumers are determined to consume the human world, as now children are targets too.

The export and import of war weapons, military aircraft and ships, flaunting spectacular exhibitionist power, massive bombs being dropped with arrogant accuracy on homes and hospitals, is not new. Remember Hiroshima and Nagasaki!

Right now, according to Google, the world’s largest exporters of war weapons are the USA and France, and the world’s first and second largest importers of war weapons are Ukraine and India. O tempora, O mores.

One can only shudder at the plight of the ordinary, unarmed, helpless people of the world who are being bombed or shot out of existence, as inevitable collateral damage, unleashed by the unabashed emperors of the world.

Yours, etc., Sanjukta Dasgupta, Kolkata, 23 June.

ON GUARD

Sir, Apropos the letter of Arun Kumar Basu published under the title “Defrauded” in this column on 10 June, I’d like

to share with you my experience of the fraudster.

A fortnight ago I received a phone call from an unknown person who claimed he was the Manager of Bandhan Bank Main Branch from Samriddhi Bhavan at Salt Lake. He warned me that my ATM card would be blocked unless I updated my KYC details immediately. However, for that purpose I should provide him my date of birth as recorded in my PAN card.

I knew that Bandhan Bank did not have its main branch at Samriddhi Bhavan and that the bank would not ask for submitting KYC details through phone calls. Just out of curiosity I gave him an incorrect date of my birth. Soon thereafter I received two consecutive messages on my mobile informing me that there were two failed login attempts in my bank account.

Thus I learnt that my account could be accessed through my date of birth and the fraudster had attempted to log in to my account.

However, such login could not be completed unless I pro-

NOT QUITE NOBEL

Sir, It seems that President Donald Trump is very keen to win a Nobel Peace Prize. He knows very well that he can’t be the next president of America.

So this is the time for him to be a claimant for a Nobel Prize by projecting himself as a peace messenger. Trump said, “I should have gotten it four to five times; they won’t give me a Nobel peace prize because they only give it to liberals.”

Trump also claimed the ceasefire between Pakistan and India had taken place due to his mediation, and a treaty between the Republic of Congo and the Republic of Rwanda had been made possible due to his intervention.

If all this is true, then how could Trump, who claims to be a messenger of peace, barbarically attack Iran? On the one hand, Trump is speaking of eradicating terrorism, on the other, he helps a terrorist country, Pakistan, get an IMF loan for fostering various terrorist organisations.

Does such a person deserve to win the Nobel Peace Prize?

Yours, etc.,
Mihir Kanungo,
Kolkata, 22 June.

vided them with the OTP which would have been sent to my mobile. I did not lodge a complaint with the police but I learnt the modus operandi of the fraudster. Despite repeated warnings from the banks, customers share their personal information and/

or the OTP received on their mobile with unknown persons and hence lose their savings. Bank authorities cannot be blamed for such irresponsible acts of the customer.
Yours, etc., Debraj Bhattacharya, Kolkata, 23 June.

A MEMBER OF THE

ANN

ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Economic growth must align with sustainable social development

It is the right choice. In earlier development stages, every country places strong emphasis on industrialisation, especially manufacturing and processing. However, if we aim for sustainable development, we must not underestimate the role of agriculture. Looking at the miraculous development of East Asian countries between 1960-1990 (Republic of Korea and Japan) and 1980-2010 (China), we can see that while they focused on industrial development, agriculture was not neglected. Ensuring food security was a special priority. Japan, for example, saw its agricultural labour force drop by a yearly average of 3 per cent during its period of rapid economic development, yet labour productivity still increased by about 4.5 per cent annually. Alongside industrial development and double-digit economic growth rates, Japan managed to ensure food security and became one of the world’s largest economies.

National development, in addition to high incomes and strong social welfare, must take into account a balanced population size. Japan, the Republic of Korea, China and other developed economies are now dealing with population ageing, declining population size, a shrinking workforce and increasing retirees. This is a

Việt Nam News

rough problem because life expectancy keeps rising, and once the population declines, it is extremely hard to reverse.

Foreseeing this, the Party Central Committee issued Resolution No 21-NQ/TW in 2017 on population matters in the new era, which identified population as a key factor in national development and defence. Population policy is a strategic, urgent and long-term task. It requires a comprehensive approach in terms of size, structure, distribution and especially quality, in alignment with socio-economic, defence and security factors to ensure sustainable development. Resolution No 21-NQ/TW also asserts that investment in population work is investment in development. The State gives priority to allocating budgets and resources to population initiatives. Recently, the National Assembly Standing Committee amended the Population Ordinance (effective from June 18, 2025) to legislate the Party’s population policies and directions, including officially ending birth restrictions.

Viet Nam is undergoing major demographic changes: we are still in the period of demographic dividend (with 67.4 per cent of the population aged 15-64), but population growth is slowing and the ageing rate is accelerating, among the top 10 fastest-ageing countries globally. According to data from the General Statistics Office of Viet Nam (GSO, under the Ministry of Finance), Viet Nam’s fertility rate has fallen sharply from 2.11 children per woman in 2021 to 1.96 in 2024. As many as 32 out of 63 current cities and provinces now have fertility rates below the replacement level (two children born per woman).



The force of soft power

CHAITANYA K. PRASAD

Challenges, experiences, opportunities, and imagination have shaped the India story in the soft power terrain over the 11 years of the Modi government since 2014. In this period, soft power has not only emerged as a guiding force, it has become the soul of India's diplomatic strategy, propelling the country to new heights and redefining the parameters of global knowledge exchange.

The term soft power, coined by Harvard professor Joseph Nye in the 1980s, originally referred to a country's ability to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction, rather than coercion or force. While Nye focused largely on American cultural exports and value systems, India's approach to soft power has been more layered, rooted in its civilizational depth, democratic ethos, and an inclusive, pluralistic vision of global engagement.

Over the past decade, India has redefined this term through distinctly indigenous lenses. The collation, collaboration, and curation of new ideas, themes, and platforms have reshaped how we understand and apply soft power. From yoga and ayurveda to cinema, cuisine, education, and digital infrastructure, India has offered a fresh 'cuisine of thought', blending tradition with modernity. These exports are not just cultural; they are connectors, linking India with people, policies, and perceptions across geographies.

India's pride of place in the global soft power discourse today is no accident. It is the result of strategic clarity, cultural confidence, and a reimagined diplomatic approach grounded in lived culture rather than formal posturing. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership has given soft power a renewed focus, anchored in participatory energy, collaboration, and innovation. What has emerged is a people-first soft power matrix, lived through festivals, amplified in films, and echoed across student exchanges, diaspora engagement, and tech-enabled global outreach.

This philosophy was most vividly on display during India's G20 Presidency in 2023. The theme, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: "One Earth, One Family, One Future", was more than symbolic. It became a lived experience. Music, crafts, cuisine, and digital storytelling were seamlessly interwoven into the diplomatic fabric of the summit. Leaders didn't just engage in dialogue; they immersed themselves in India's diversity, art, and cultural vibrancy. By transforming policy platforms into cultural showcases, India introduced a new grammar of influence, one that communicates as much through symbolism as through strategy. It demonstrated clearly that India doesn't divide tradition from innovation, it weaves them together.

This year's International Day of Yoga, celebrated globally on 21 June, further amplified that spirit with the theme "Yoga for One Earth, One Health." It was a powerful articulation of India's timeless belief in personal well-being as the cornerstone of collective harmony. From the UN headquarters to ancient temple backdrops and bustling city squares across continents, the celebration reaffirmed yoga's role as a cornerstone of India's soft power story. Indian missions across the globe led these events with grace and purpose, reaffirming that India's influence is felt through peace, not power.

A critical pillar in India's soft power evolution has been education diplomacy. Prime Minister Modi has consistently championed the potential of education tourism as a global connector. Initiatives like Study in India, the growing network of Institutes of Eminence, and expanding academic collaborations with foreign universities reflect India's ambition to become a global education hub, not just for affordability, but for its unique blend of ancient wisdom and forward-thinking pedagogy.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has been a turning point in this journey. With its emphasis on multilingualism, critical thinking, and global academic integration, NEP 2020 is positioning India as a destination for both substance and spirit. India today is not just offering



degrees; it is offering a philosophy. Platforms like DIKSHA, designed for digital, inclusive learning, are now being studied by countries seeking low-cost, scalable educational models that democratize access and encourage lifelong learning.

Indian cinema has long been a cultural export, but in the past few years, it has evolved into a powerful soft power weapon. From Payal Kapadia's historic win at Cannes 2024 to the worldwide resonance of South Indian films, Indian storytelling has pushed through linguistic, geographic, and thematic boundaries. These films are more than entertainment; they are emotional emissaries, carrying Indian values, visuals, and voices into hearts across the globe.

Alongside cinema, India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), comprising platforms like UPI, Aadhaar, and DigiLocker, has transformed the country into a model for ethical, people-centric technology. This is soft

power with utility, digital tools that serve public good and offer replicable frameworks for emerging economies. India is no longer just exporting culture; it is exporting scalable, inclusive systems.

India's 32 million-strong diaspora continues to be a potent force in this soft power matrix. Their contributions across sectors, from politics and business to science and arts, position India as a truly global node. Initiatives like Pravasi Bharatiya Divas and sustained engagement with youth of Indian origin have ensured that the diaspora remains deeply connected, not just nostalgically but functionally.

At the same time, India's democratic resilience, its electoral strength, media pluralism, and civic vibrancy, continues to be its most enduring moral soft power. In a global climate fraught with polarization and digital disinformation, India's messy but vibrant democracy remains a beacon of balance and endurance.

The last 11 years have not merely expanded India's soft power toolkit; they have reimagined the entire arena. Soft power today is not a side narrative; it is central to how India sees itself and projects itself. It flows through food, faith, fintech, festivals, and films. It educates through NEP, heals through Ayurveda, and connects through yoga. It does not lecture, it lives. It does not dominate, it draws. India's greatest strength lies in its ability to blend civilization with innovation, emotion with execution. Its soft power is not ornamental; it is operational. Not passive, but persuasive. And in a world increasingly divided by noise, India is offering a voice rooted in harmony.

The future of influence may be digital, mobile, and global, but it is also deeply Indian. And now more than ever, the world is listening.

(The writer is a former civil servant who writes on cinema and strategic communications. The views are personal. Inputs were provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan.)

Global hotel brands target Japan

SHINGO SUGIME

The Japanese hotel market is entering a new era. As the tourism industry shifts its focus from quantity to quality, foreign hotel chains are increasingly targeting Japan as one of the few growth areas in a mature market, drawn by its appeal and investment opportunities. New concepts such as wellness and integration with local culture are emerging as competitive advantages, and a fresh breeze of "Japanese luxury" is beginning to blow.

The Japanese luxury hotel market has historically been dominated by prominent Japanese brands, notably the "Big Three" of the Imperial Hotel Group, Okura Nikko Hotels, and New Otani Hotels. However, there has been a notable surge in the presence of foreign brands outside the Tokyo metropolitan area in recent years, leading to increased competition and the introduction of new value propositions.

The Singapore-based hotel chain Capella Hotel Group has selected Osaka as the site for its inaugural establishment in Japan. The group, which developed Capella Singapore — the venue for the first U.S.-North Korea summit in 2018 — opened Patina Osaka in May of this year just across the moat from Osaka Castle, a popular destination for visitors to Japan. Patina presents itself as a lifestyle brand tailored to a new generation of travelers.

eration of travelers.

John Blanco, the "cluster general manager" for Capella Kyoto and Patina Osaka, stated in an interview, "We aim to provide customers with not just a place to stay, but a unique, locally rooted experience." He revealed plans to collaborate with famous graphic artists from Osaka for events, offer programs that utilize the region's cultural heritage and natural environment and develop region-specific menus. The group also plans to introduce hidden local attractions and establishments not featured in guidebooks.

Umeda, the area around Osaka Station, is attractive for its excellent access to tourist attractions in Kyoto, Nara and Kobe, all within an hour's reach, and has been called "Osaka's last prime location" for development. In April, the Waldorf Astoria Osaka, representing the premium brand of Hilton Hotels, opened in this area, marking the brand's debut in Japan ahead of its planned opening of a hotel in Tokyo.

The Waldorf Astoria, established in New York in 1893, is a renowned brand with a distinguished history of offering exclusive menus and services. Prominent architect Andre Fu designed the hotel in Osaka, blending art deco elements popular in the brand's early days with Japanese-inspired touches. This design reflects the abundance of art deco architecture in Osaka and aims for "harmony

with the local community." Besides the brand's reputation and glamour, this reflects a growing trend toward sustainability and support for local culture. Joseph Khairallah, Hilton's area vice president and head of Japan, Korea and Micronesia, said, "We can provide guests with a unique experience."

In Shikoku, four regional banks invested in a company to attract hotels, hoping to promote the use of local activities and foods as luxury brands seek regional cooperation and the central government aims to disperse foreign tourists across Japan in light of their current overconcentration in certain areas. The company plans to open a hotel in Kagawa Prefecture in the summer of 2027 in collaboration with Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, based in Hong Kong. In addition to the fact that there are few foreign-affiliated hotels in rural areas, creating a gap between supply and demand, the company aims to expand consumption in the region by attracting visitors to Japan and creating job opportunities.

Changes are also underway in the midrange hotel sector, which has historically been dominated by domestic chains such as the APA Hotel and Resorts Group and Toyoko Inn. In 2025, IHG Hotels & Resorts opened its first mid-range brand, Garner, in Osaka. While Marriott International is expanding its luxury



brands, such as Ritz-Carlton and St. Regis, and lifestyle brands, including Moxo and Aloft, in major cities, it is developing midrange brands in Kyushu and Hiroshima, where it is making new investments. The objective is to position these brands as "a gateway to lifelong use of Marriott" and to develop the market for the younger generation.

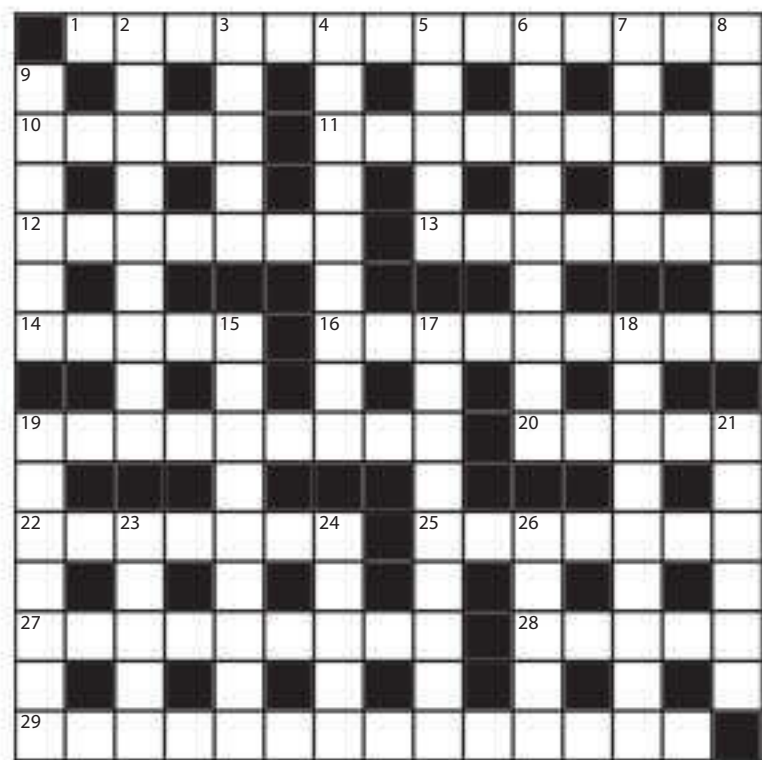
Prolonged deflation and zero wage growth have led to low wage levels in Japan's service industry, resulting in a severe labour shortage. Blanco of Capella highlighted that the most significant challenge in establishing the hotel was recruiting personnel, emphasizing that they offered the highest salary levels in the

industry and had created a workplace environment where employees could take pride in every aspect, from their uniforms to the cafeteria. He added: "There are some aspects of hospitality that somebody cannot teach through training. We proactively engage with motivated students enrolled in vocational and hotel schools at an early stage." In the future, the hotel industry's focus will be on investing in human resources effectively. This will include the development of new evaluation criteria for employees and the creation of training programmes tailored to their needs.

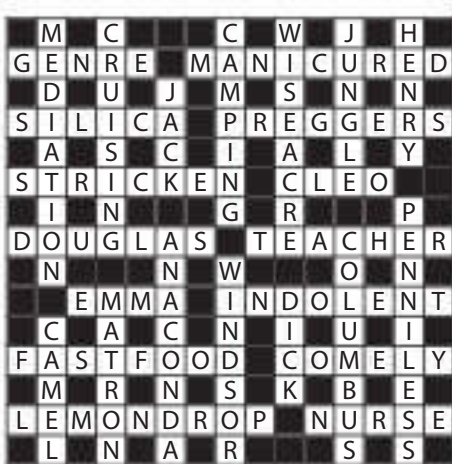
The Japan News/ANN.

CROSSWORD

NO-293175



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



ACROSS

- Reasonable tune queen's mate used in playing violin (4,2,8)
- Name of woman a consumer reported (5)
- Margin accepted by one doing trial period (9)
- Core of workers in vessel showing affinity (7)
- Outer garment for medieval person, as court windy (7)

DOWN

- Body parts goatee thankfully hides (5)
- South American author regularly dreads being shelved (9)
- What might make you stir alive if slack? (9)
- Returned skirt of silk with tailored pleats (5)
- Hirsute Parisian's one with small hooter (7)
- Man of science tears up novel (7)
- That woman's call to back a liberal dissident (9)

DOWN

- Straightening leg Tin Man bust (9)
- Romeo with every single one making pass (5)
- Firm that's erected circus tent employs well-armed individuals (9)

DOWN

- Place where you find actors start (5)
- Bird trio breeds with barn shaking (5,9)

DOWN

- Climbers from India struggle on peak in Switzerland (5)
- Stop holding back, saint is most dull (9)
- Opening of one no-trump men raised (5)
- Turned tad grey at sea (7)
- Be sure to hold appeal for goal (6)
- Keep money from house party in Bedfordshire town (4,3,2)

DOWN

- Band heading hit entertainment venue (5,4)
- European characters announced grand ladies (9)
- Token elevated cleric keeps where in French church? (7)
- Son bitter about A levels (6)
- Hollow squash on smooth woody plant (5)
- Specialised hospital, charming nurses (5)
- Ride moving up South Beach (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

To the ordinary man it will appear a paradox that while India, as Mr. Chartres told the Rotary Club yesterday, can undersell Middlesbro and Glasgow pig-iron on its own ground at Home the steel industry of India should have to be bolstered up by bounties. Indian pig-iron is to-day probably the cheapest in the world. That is due not so much to the low price of labour as to the low cost of ore and the favourable situation as regards the materials required for smelting. Steel, however, is a different proposition, since its making calls for a large amount of skilled labour which has to be imported at high cost. Even with that disadvantage it is a matter for regret that steel should have to be supported by the State, for when an industry gets used to crutches it seldom arrives at the point where it admits that these can be discarded. The main incentive to the most efficient production is removed.

NEWS ITEMS

EMPIRE DEVELOPMENT

NEW COMMITTEE OF CIVIL RESEARCH

LONDON, JUNE 23.

THE Committee of Civil Research will be presided over by the Prime Minister and in his absence a Minister will be nominated by him.

The Committee will consist of persons summoned by the Premier and will be an advisory body charged with giving centralized attention to the development of economic, scientific, and statistical research in relation to civil policy and administration and define new areas in which inquiry is valuable.—*Reuter*.

FRENCH MERCHANT KILLED

MARINES IN ACTION

CANTON, JUNE 24.

THOUSANDS of students, workmen, citizens and soldiers, paraded along the bund around the European quarter and opened fire opposite the Victoria Hotel in the British concession.

British and French marines replied with machine-guns, and the firing lasted twenty minutes. A French merchant M. Pasquier was killed; and the Commissioner of Customs Mr. Edwards was seriously wounded. One British marine and two civilians were also wounded. All the evidence indicates that the Chinese fired first.—*Reuter*.

BRITISH WOMEN LEAVE

HONG-KONG, JUNE 24.

FIVE-HUNDRED British and other foreign women and children in the European quarter of Canton have embarked for Hong-Kong. The East Surrey Regiment has been ordered to stand by in case of need.—*Reuter*.

AERO-ENGINES

INVENTION TO REMOVE CHIEF WEAKNESS

LONDON, JUNE 24.

THE Air Ministry has placed orders for experimental types of a newly invented metal propeller fitted with automatically variable blades, creating in effect an infinitely variable gear, whose ratio will be automatically adjusted to the speed and load of an aeroplane, and removing one of the greatest weaknesses of aero-engines, namely the fixed gear —*Reuter's Special Service*

REAL MONSOON

COLOMBO GETS 2.46 INCHES IN 24 HOURS

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.)

COLOMBO, JUNE 24.

COLOMBO is experiencing real monsoon weather at present. Prior to yesterday the monsoon had been weak as far as Colombo was concerned but yesterday evening it developed considerably and throughout the night heavy rain fell. During the 24 hours ended 9-30 a.m. to-day 2.46 inches have been registered at the Observatory. There was a high wind which increased in strength during the evening. At 8-30 it attained a velocity of 30 miles per hour. To-day more rain fell, and there are indications that conditions will not change for some time.

Although monsoon conditions set in a number of weeks ago, rainfall was not heavy, and it seemed that the prediction of a weak monsoon this year would prove correct. The weather at present, though suggestive of a spell of the usual monsoon rains, does not necessarily point to a monsoon of the customary strength being experienced during the ensuing months.

Editor's TAKE

The long dark night of Indian democracy

Emergency is grim reminder that democracy must be safeguarded at all costs

The democracy is a powerful yet fragile political system. It has to be nurtured, its institutions must be strengthened before it becomes truly effective. India had a short brush with autocracy on June 25, 1975, a date etched in the memory of India as the moment when Emergency was imposed by the then President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed at the behest of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Fifty years later, the shadow of that night still looms large over the nation's democratic conscience. It was on this day that the Prime Minister imposed a nationwide Emergency, suspending civil liberties, jailing political opponents, and censoring the press. What unfolded over the next 21 months was a stark deviation from the democratic values enshrined in the Constitution.

To commemorate this chapter and honour the spirit of those who resisted it, the Central Government has announced the annual observance of June 25, as "Samvidhaan Hatya Diwas" – the day when the Constitution was undermined in both letter and spirit. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a statement, emphasised that this observance would serve as a reminder of what happens when the Constitution of India is trampled upon. The Emergency years remain a chilling testimony to how fragile democratic systems can become when the checks and balances of power are compromised. The Constitution, which guarantees citizens their fundamental rights, was reduced to a tool of convenience.

The press, which should serve as the fourth pillar of democracy, was shackled. Judges were pressured, critics were imprisoned, and ordinary citizens lived in fear. Dissent was branded as disloyalty, and the very act of questioning authority could land one behind bars. Yet, amidst this darkness, a flame of resistance endured. Opposition leaders, activists, students, journalists, and countless ordinary Indians stood firm. Despite arrests, intimidation, and state surveillance, they refused to surrender their voice. It was their courage and unyielding faith in the democratic process that paved the way for the eventual return to normalcy. When elections were held in 1977, the people of India delivered a resounding verdict, removing the ruling regime from power and reaffirming their faith in democratic ideals. The Lok Sabha, in its resolution, has condemned the Emergency and called it a black chapter in Indian history.

Speaker Om Birla has also praised the strength and resolve of those who fought to restore democracy, reminding the country that such vigilance is not a one-time act but an ongoing duty. Remembering the Emergency is not an exercise in bitterness but a commitment to never forget. It is a reminder that democracy is not self-perpetuating. It demands effort, awareness and above all, the courage to speak when silence is safer. As India marks 50 years since the Emergency, "Samvidhaan Hatya Diwas" must become more than just a symbolic remembrance – it should be a reaffirmation of our collective resolve to guard the democratic institutions and help free dialogue and openness in society. We must strive to promote equality and harmony in all sections of society and be respectful of our diversity. In remembering the darkness, we preserve the light.

PICTALK



A beautiful Black Drongo perched against nature's soft green. PANKAJ KUMAR

Mediation credit dispute

The true extent of US involvement in the India-Pakistan ceasefire remains contested – caught between Trump's boasts of backchannel diplomacy and India's historical resistance to external mediation

There is an ongoing discussion regarding the involvement of the United States in facilitating the ceasefire between India and Pakistan that took place in Pahalgalam last month. US President Donald Trump has claimed, "I stopped the war," underscoring the nuclear capabilities of both nations. Conversely, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserts that India did not seek external assistance, stating that the ceasefire was through direct negotiations between the Indian and Pakistani military forces.

Both President Trump and Prime Minister Modi reiterated their respective positions in recent months. Consequently, the question of who holds the correct stance remains open to interpretation, as both parties offer valid supporting evidence for their claims. This ongoing disagreement persists despite Modi's communication to Trump regarding the absence of third-party mediation. Yet, Trump continues to advocate for the United States' involvement in the ceasefire.

During a call this week, Modi told Trump that the ceasefire was reached through discussions between the two militaries, not through US mediation, as stated by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri in a press release.

Trump praised both nations for agreeing to a ceasefire. The nature of US involvement remains shrouded in uncertainty. Approximately thirty minutes after Trump's proclamation, India's Foreign Secretary reported that Pakistan's Director General of Military Operations had contacted his Indian counterpart. They agreed to halt all firing and military actions, but conspicuously, the United States was not mentioned.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, expressed gratitude to Trump for his leadership and proactive role in facilitating the ceasefire. Hosting lunch at the White House for Pakistan's Army Chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, this week, Trump claimed again that the lunch was intended to "thank him for not going into the war" and to discuss a potential US trade deal with the country. He even boasted about how he used trade deals to prevent a possible nuclear escalation in the Indian subcontinent.

Trump told reporters last month: "I said, Come on, we're going to do a lot of trade with you guys [India and Pakistan]. Let's stop it. Let's stop it. If you stop it, we'll do a trade. If you don't stop it, we're not going to do any trade." This was the carrot shown to both sides. When asked what he hoped



to achieve from his meeting with General Munir, he said, "General Munir was extremely influential in stopping the conflict from the Pakistan side, while Modi handled it the Indian side."

The White House luncheon meeting represented a significant boost in US-Pakistan ties, which had suffered under the Trump administration and its predecessor, the Biden administration, and courted India as part of efforts to counter

Pakistan's Field Marshal, after his lunch with Trump at the White House, suggested the Nobel Prize for Trump.

On Saturday morning, shortly after Trump's ceasefire announcement, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo shared details about the United States' mediation efforts. He tweeted that he had engaged with senior officials from India and

Pakistan, including Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Shehbaz Sharif. He announced that both Governments have agreed to an immediate ceasefire and to discuss issues at a neutral site.

Trump's offer to mediate on Kashmir is sensitive for India, which has firmly opposed third-party involvement in its disputes with neighbouring countries. Delhi is also upset that Trump's tweets often hold India and Pakistan as equals, hyphenating both. New Delhi discourages Western leaders from undertaking simultaneous visits to India and Pakistan.

New Delhi's reluctance to accept even a facilitative role from a third party has deep historical roots. This stems from India's long-standing opposition to external mediation and the belief that the issue should be addressed strictly through bilateral discussions.

Meanwhile, New Delhi sought significant outcomes at the recent G7 summit held in Canada. A primary focus was on urging G20 nations to isolate Pakistan in light of the recent conflict that ended on May 10 in a ceasefire. Indian officials were disap-

pointed at President Trump's balanced support for both India and Pakistan. Furthermore, India hoped for a trade agreement with the US and was banking on a meeting between Trump and Prime Minister Modi in Calgary. However, this was not to be as Trump had to leave the summit a day early, resulting in the cancellation of the anticipated meeting. Trump perhaps has an interest in being considered for the Nobel Prize. The Chief of the Pakistan Army has suggested that Donald Trump might merit consideration for the Nobel Prize following his recent visit to the White House. Trump himself conveyed a sense of frustration, stating, "I do not often receive recognition for my contributions," about his peace initiatives concerning the Iran-Israel conflict. On a frustrated note, he said, "During my first term, tensions between Serbia and Kosovo reached a critical point that could have led to conflict, and I took proactive measures to avert that situation."

(The writer is a popular columnist. Views are personal)

Yoga: An ancient practice for modern living

SECOND Opinion

Yoga, as we know, has ancient roots, and while many revered gurus have contributed to its evolution, it is Patanjali who is most often credited with systematising it. Despite its ancient origins, yoga remains profoundly relevant – perhaps even more so – in today's fast-paced, high-pressure world where many are seeking balance, calm, and a deeper connection with themselves.

Swami Sivananda outlined five essential principles of Yoga, which continue to hold immense value in contemporary life:

1. Proper Exercise — Asana practice.
2. Proper Breathing — Pranayama.
3. Proper Relaxation — Savasana.
4. Proper Diet — A balanced, vegetarian diet.
5. Positive Thinking and Meditation.

These five pillars form the foundation of traditional yoga and offer a holistic approach to wellness – physical, mental, and emotional.

Yoga is for everyone who breathes – and therefore, for everyone alive. Regardless of one's fitness level, age, or health conditions, yoga can be adapted to suit individual needs. For instance, a Hatha Yoga routine benefits the entire body: engaging over 640 muscles, 206 bones, and joints, the spine, and vital organs including the lungs, heart, and skin.

With proper breathing techniques and adherence to the five yogic principles, the practice paves the way for a healthier, more balanced mind and body.

For those who may find certain postures challenging, alternatives like Sukshma Vyayam (subtle exercises) can be practised. These movements target every synovial joint and the surrounding muscles, and can be performed while seated, lying down, or standing.

Other adaptive practices include Chair Yoga, which involves modified postures done while seated and Yoga for the Golden Years, which focuses on breathwork and maintaining mobility in ageing bodies.

Modern scientific studies increasingly validate the therapeutic benefits of yoga. Research supports its effectiveness in managing conditions such as alcoholism, anxiety, asthma, carpal tunnel syndrome, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart disease, depression, diabetes, hypertension, insomnia, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and menopausal symptoms, among others. Yoga's relevance in addressing modern health challenges is clear and well-established.

Here's what regular practitioners have to say: Aniha Modi, 31, entrepreneur, shares: "As a student of yoga, I've discovered that beginning my day with a consistent practice leaves me feeling calm, centred, and relaxed. One of my favourite parts is the 15 minutes of pranayama. Unlike traditional meditation, which I've often found challenging on my

own, pranayama is guided breathwork that gently leads me into a state of stillness. It quietsens my mind and sets a peaceful tone for the day. The benefits have been truly transformative – especially a complete relief from anxiety and a natural ability to wake up early, refreshed and energised. Yoga has become more than just a practice; it's a grounding ritual that supports my mental and physical well-being."

Yoga encourages us to work with our bodies according to their unique needs – stretching where required, strengthening the lungs through breathwork, and enhancing mobility and flexibility. One of its most special aspects is the inclusion of regular intervals of deep relaxation, which prevent the build-up of lactic acid and muscle fatigue.

Rhythmic, guided breathing calms the lungs and the heart, while focused stretching revitalises neglected parts of the anatomy. Practising with a smile uplifts the spirit, and mindful breathing soothes the mind like nothing else.

Even a simple session of guided relaxation, pranayama, or yoga nidra fosters self-love and profound inner calm. As we approach a decade since the first International Day of Yoga was observed, awareness and global interest in this ancient science have only grown. Adopting yoga as a way of life – not just on one day but every day – can bring immense benefits. There is ample evidence to show that this practice has transformed lives across the world – and continues to do so for millions.

(The writer is a certified Sivananda Yoga teacher with over 30 years of practice. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

PM's silence on Israel-Iran war

It is very unfortunate that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is maintaining silence on the ongoing conflict between Iran and Israel, despite India's deep energy and diplomatic ties with Tehran and Government must speak out in favour of peace.

Iran has consistently supported India by procuring nearly 50 per cent of crude oil from Iran. Today, the war is happening there, yet the Prime Minister remains silent for what reason God knows.

The common man is more concerned with essential needs food, clothing, shelter, and fuel prices than with slogans of global supremacy.

There is a desire for an immediate end to the war between Israel and Iran and appeal for India to take a stand for peace and to voice its concerns internationally. Nuclear weapons and missiles are threatening global stability. Many innocent lives are being lost. Let us all pray for peace, promoting harmony and opposing war in all forms.

India must rise above silence and stand for peace. With deep energy ties to Iran and a history of mutual support, it is imperative that our leadership voices concern. War spares no one – missiles don't discriminate. Let India champion harmony, not hegemony. The world needs peace, not posturing.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Preparing for the unthinkable

Strengthening India's District Disaster Response Force As climate change accelerates and global tensions simmer, India faces a rising threat from both natural calamities and conflict scenarios. From floods in the plains to landslides in the hills, and from urban fires to potential wartime disruptions, the scale and complexity of emergencies demand a bold, grassroots-level solution.

The time has come to reimagine our district disaster preparedness. India's District Disaster Management Authorities, established under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, are mandated to plan and coordinate local disaster responses. Yet, in many districts, these authorities are under-resourced and reactive in nature. What we need is a District-Level First Response Corps – a unified force of trained volunteers and personnel ready to act within the crucial "golden hour," without waiting for the disaster to incur further damage during the time we commence.

To safeguard lives and infrastructure in an increasingly volatile world, India must urgently invest in a robust District-Level First Response Corps. Strengthening the DDMA's with trained personnel, swift communication, and local empowerment can ensure timely, effective action during the golden hour. Preparedness must replace passivity – only then can we build resilient communities equipped to face disasters and crises head-on.

RAJINDER NARULA | PATIALA

The darkest hour of Indian democracy

From June 25, 1975, to March 21, 1977, the 21 months of the Emergency transformed India into a nation where fear and silence gripped every heart. The iron hand of power weighed heavily on every breath, yet even in this pitch darkness, rays of hope flickered. Underground movements led by small but determined activists, courageous leaders languishing behind bars, and journalists quietly raising the voice of truth kept the flame of democracy alive. When the dark curtain of the Emergency was lifted in March 1977 and the bugle of general elections sounded, the people unleashed a storm of such force that the corridors of power shook. Indira Gandhi and her Congress party suffered a crushing defeat, etched indelibly in the annals of history.

This was the historic triumph of the people – a clarion call that proved that while the roots of democracy may be shaken, they cannot be uprooted. This dark chapter of the Emergency remains etched on our conscience as a warning. It teaches us unequivocally that democracy is not a static system but the name of an unending struggle. It breathes only when citizens remain vigilant, institutions stay autonomous, and the voice of dissent is respected. The Emergency exposed the terrifying face of centralised power and unchecked authority, which can crush the soul of democracy.

RK JAIN ARJEET | BARWANI

WEST ASIA: TIME FOR INDIA TO RECLAIM ITS MORAL VOICE

An unextinguished fire is continuously raging in West Asia. Religion, culture, trade, and a number of factors are contributing to its prolonging nature. Plundering the rich resources of fossil fuels, on which the development of the modern world rests, is attracting the focus of the developed nations to ensure their firm grip on the countries in the region. Attack on Iraq, Libya, Syria and now Iran are basically to continue the domination over this region.

India's interest in Iran is also known to all. Indian investor Adani's stakes are also there. An intensified war involving Iran and America will have its serious impacts on the economy of many countries.

India calling for peace is natural and routine. But its failure in condemning Israel and the US exposes the hypocrisy of the ruling dispensation. Trump hosting lunch for the Field Marshal of Pakistan – a country possessing more than 100 bombs – and attacking Iran for its preparations to make a nuclear bomb, exposes his erratic

and illogical approach. India should mobilise all the moral courage and political will at its disposal to condemn both Israel and the US for all their atrocities. Calling Iran to halt attacks projects Iran as the country to start the war, whereas the fact remains otherwise.

When the entire world is plunged in a state of shock and despair, Pakistan is playing comics by nominating Mr Trump for the Nobel Prize for Peace for his ambitious tasks of annexing Greenland and Panama, desire to make Canada the 51st State of the US, driving away the natives of Gaza to convert it into a global tourist spot, and so on. India has a glorious past – promoter of Panchsheel and leader of the Non-Aligned Movement. Besides weighing the trade benefits, the ruling dispensation should keep the Country's image also in its mind to make ourselves eligible to be called Vishwaguru.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANATAPUR

A Mahabharata of Conscience in the Shadow of Emergency

While **Indira Gandhi** was blindfolded by power akin to Gandhari, Chandrashekhar was unsparing in his defence of democratic ideals. His fearless writings and his refusal to compromise is a timeless reminder that true patriotism often means standing alone, armed only with truth and integrity

FIRST
Column

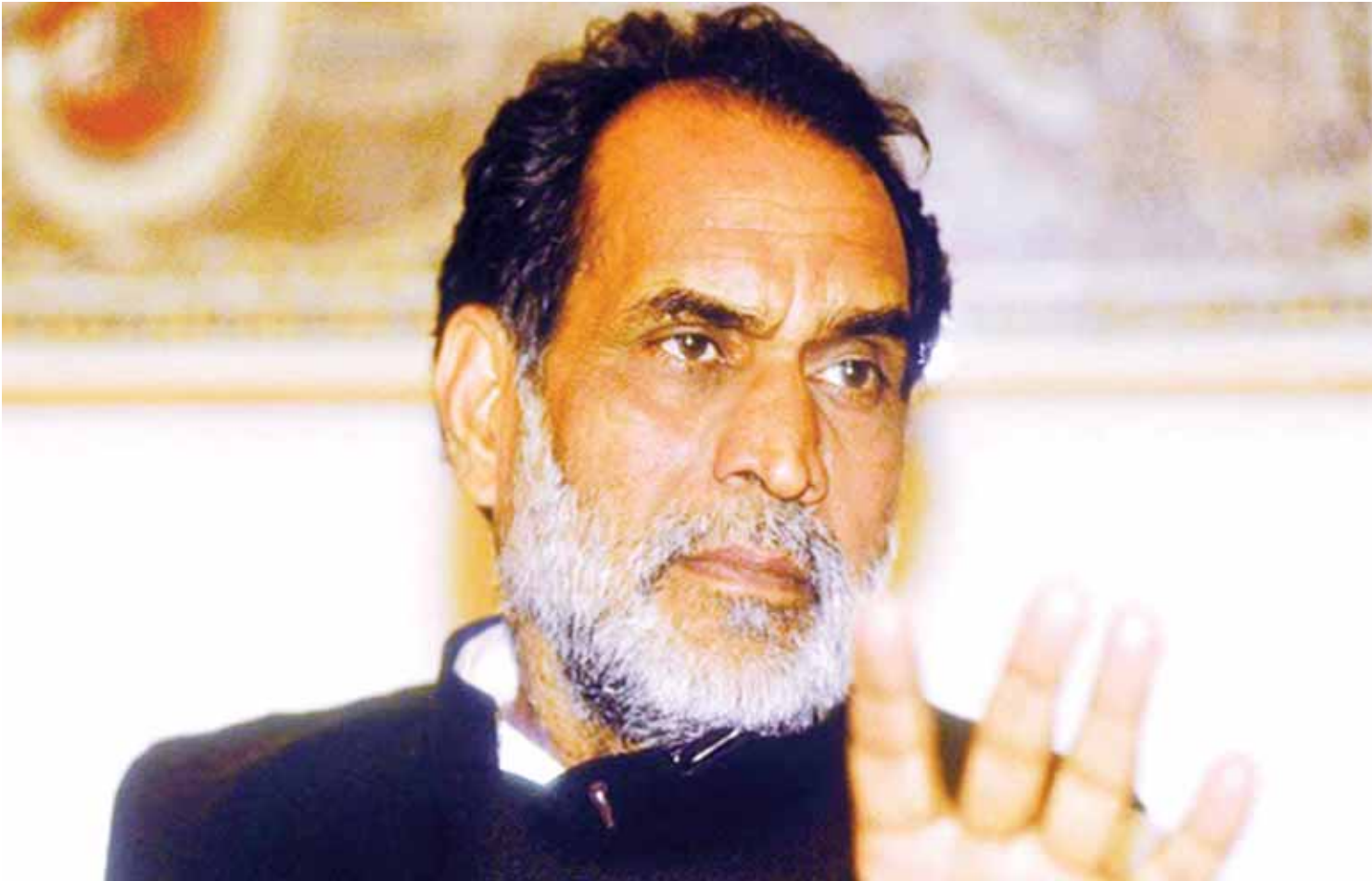
The political relationship between Chandrashekhar and Indira Gandhi during the tumultuous years of the Emergency is one of the most remarkable episodes in post-independence India. In it lie lessons of courage, conviction, betrayal, and the irreparable cost of authoritarianism. This political drama — steeped in democratic values and personal anguish — has been likened to a Mahabharata, where Chandrashekhar stood as a lone Yudhishtira amidst a Kaurava — like establishment, and Indira Gandhi, once hailed as Durga, gradually assumed the blind and rigid mantle of Gandhari. The Emergency, imposed on the midnight of June 25, 1975, was not born out of a sudden conflict with Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), but from a prolonged erosion of democratic norms. Yet, had Indira Gandhi possessed a more democratic spirit, the very conflict with JP could have been avoided. If Indira respected JP, the Mahabharata of the Emergency could have been averted. Instead, she chose confrontation, arrogance, and repression — actions that isolated her from the democratic ethos and painted her in the colours of Gandhari, blind to the consequences of her choices.

Chandrashekhar's writings, especially his jail diary and autobiography, provide an unvarnished account of this decline into autocracy. On February 8, 1976, writing from prison, he made a grim yet composed observation — he had no regret about being jailed. It was as though he had mentally prepared for it. Unlike others in the Congress who quietly complied or suppressed their dissent, Chandrashekhar chose to oppose Indira Gandhi openly and fearlessly. His integrity was unwavering, and that made him unique in a party that had largely succumbed to sycophancy.

In 1974, when Morarji Desai sat on a fast demanding the dissolution of the Gujarat Assembly, it was Chandrashekhar who met Indira Gandhi and warned her: "You decide whether you are ready to lose Gujarat or all of India." It was this kind of blunt honesty that Indira both respected and feared. She relented then, but the tide was already turning.

Chandrashekhar never wavered in his belief that JP was not seeking political power but fighting to restore the democratic soul of India. He famously wrote, "JP is not fighting for political power, therefore he cannot be defeated by using state power." He also made efforts to facilitate a dialogue between Indira Gandhi and Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), but their meeting on November 1, 1974, failed. Perhaps even he didn't foresee the gravity of what would follow. "I did not know that Indira Ji would take a step like this Emergency," he wrote with dismay.

Even before the Emergency was formally



declared, the Congress Working Committee had begun to show signs of internal decay. A resolution criticising JP was brought up in the Committee, and Chandrashekhar stood alone in opposing it.

"If the proposal is accepted, I will publicly condemn it," he told Indira. "You will be forced to expel me from the party. I am not worried." Such defiance in a room full of silence and submission was not just political bravery — it was moral leadership.

When he was arrested after midnight on June 25, 1975, it was not just an act of suppression; it was a symbol of the kind of India Indira Gandhi feared: one where voices like Chandrashekhar's couldn't be controlled. Even then, his reaction was stoic. "When that officer talked about my warrant, I felt very good. I felt satisfied. I felt peace." In his jail

diary, he interpreted his arrest not as punishment, but as a path — a path of struggle and resolve



RAM
BAHADUR RAI

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against dictatorship.

Few understood the spirit of resistance as deeply as Chandrashekhar. During his imprisonment, while others were broken or silenced, he remained intellectually and emotionally alert. When an officer told him communists had engineered the rift with Indira, Chandrashekhar replied with clarity: "Indira Gandhi's anger towards me is due to other reasons. I disagreed with her policies and functioning. A person like me bearing such witness, she could not tolerate."

His dissent wasn't motivated by ambition. It stemmed from a conviction that democracy must never become hostage to a single individual. "How can I say that the future of India depends on one person?" he wrote. "Such sycophancy is not possible for me." He was deeply disturbed by the growing culture of praise for Lalit Narayan Mishra, the rise of Sanjay Gandhi, and Indira Gandhi's increasing intolerance. All signs pointed to an authoritarian future.

The Emergency was eventually lifted, and elec-

Samvidhaan Hatya Diwas: Remembering India's Darkest Hours

On June 25th, India observes the Samvidhaan Hatya Diwas — "Constitution Murder Day" — to remind us of the horrors of the 1975 Emergency. On that fateful night 50 years ago, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Congress swept aside India's vibrant democracy in a dictatorial power grab. As Home Minister Amit Shah notes, Indira Gandhi "strangled the soul of Indian democracy by imposing an emergency" and had "lakhs of people... jailed without any reason and the voice of the media was suppressed".

Civil liberties were crushed, opposition leaders like JP Narayan, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani were jailed; the press was gagged; forced sterilisations and slum demolitions terrorised the poor.

For the BJP, this day is more than a historical event; it's personal. The RSS and Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the BJP's ideological roots, bore the brunt of Congress tyranny. Thousands of 'karyakartas' were jailed, beaten, and silenced.

The BJP was born out of resistance to this tyranny. Its rise after the Emergency — first as part of the Janata Party coalition and later as a national party — was rooted in a commitment to constitutionalism, the rule of law, and genuine federalism. This memory has shaped the BJP's long-standing emphasis on institutional integrity, grassroots participation, and merit over dynasty.

Congress's Authoritarian Legacy

It would be a betrayal of India's democratic spirit to label the Emergency as merely the aberration of the 1970s. The same Congress mindset still lurks in today's politics — repackaged, but equally corrosive. Take "dynastic nepotism", for example. Even after its Emergency crimes, the Congress Party continued to make power a family affair. For decades, it cultivated "family raj" in national politics. As PM Modi puts it bluntly: "(Today in Congress), "Nothing is more important than corruption and dynastic politics". It can be seen how party tickets go to Gandhis and their kin rather than grassroots reformers, adding to an ongoing threat to fair competition and meritocracy.

Corruption is another carryover. The Emergency followed allegations that Mrs Gandhi protected corrupt henchmen — and critics argue little has changed. Successive Congress governments at the Centre and in the states have been dogged by nepotism and scandals, enriching insiders at the public's expense.

No wonder the Congress has a "dictatorial" attitude — whipping up a fuss at any hint of scrutiny. Just recently, while India was responding firmly to Pakistan through "Operation Sindoor", Rahul Gandhi kept questioning why the government had accepted third-party mediation — even after the government clearly stated that no such mediation took place and the ceasefire was the outcome of direct talks between the two nations. Instead of



acknowledging the facts, Congress cried foul, showing the same disregard for national interest and accountability that marked the Emergency era.

And when it comes to defending electoral mandates, Congress's record is equally suspect.

The party frequently questions or protests outcomes it dislikes. Rather than accept defeat gracefully, Congress leaders regularly accuse others of "conspiracies" against them. This is a far cry from the democratic tradition Vajpayee championed — "Political parties will come and go... but the country's democracy must remain eternal," he famously said.

Congress's current anti-stalling fundraising reforms in Parliament, filing endless court petitions, and staging ad hoc protests-reveal not confidence in the people's mandate, but a deep-seated fear of losing control over the narrative and institutions. Such tactics echo the old Emergency playbook: manufacture chaos and stall progress instead of building consensus.

In short, today's Congress reeks of the same anti-democratic impulse. When BJP governments push reforms — from economic liberalisation to social welfare schemes — Congress often opts for obstructionism, crying foul in the media and on the floor rather than offering ideas.

Voices of Conscience

It is imperative to recall what respected leaders have said about this history of authoritarianism. Narendra Modi and Atal Bihari Vajpayee — both survivors of the Emergency's jail cells — have repeatedly invoked its lessons. PM Modi has stressed to India's youth that the Emergency is a cau-

tionary tale: "The Emergency was imposed 50 years ago but it remains a fitting example of what happens when the Constitution is trampled over, public opinion is stifled and institutions are destroyed". On Twitter, he called June 25 "Samvidhaan Hatya Diwas" precisely to honour those who suffered and to warn future generations.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, India's true statesman, offered a broader vision. Although he was incarcerated under Mrs Gandhi, he never shrank from upholding democracy's dignity. He declared that no political squabble should imperil the nation: "The political game would always continue. Political parties will come and go. Parties would form and break. But the country must remain. The country's democracy must remain eternal."

And from our Constitution's architect comes the clearest warning: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar famously taught that "political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of its social democracy". In other words, rights and liberties mean little if inequality and injustice are entrenched.

Today, Ambedkar's words remind us that if we allow a powerful minority (be it a family clique or any political gang) to dominate at others' expense, we betray the very foundation of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" embedded in our Constitution. On "Samvidhaan Hatya Diwas", his message resonates: protecting democracy demands constant vigilance.

Call of Samvidhaan Hatya Diwas

We cannot let the sacrifices of the Emergency era be forgotten or dismissed. Congress may claim it was a one-off, but the facts say otherwise. History — and leaders like Ambedkar, Vajpayee, and Modi — all teach us that equality, peace and prosperity flower only under true democracy.

In PM Modi's words: "India must imprint the Emergency's lessons on its collective memory". He warned that those "who imposed Emergency have no right to profess love for [our] Constitution". Today's generation must resolve not to repeat that mistake. We must speak up for freedom of speech, respect for institutions, and the rule of law whenever they are challenged.

Let us pledge to defend the Republic Indira Gandhi tried to silence. Let us heed Vajpayee's and Modi's clarion call: Indian democracy is eternal, but only if we refuse to forget its darkest chapter.

The BJP believes that remembering June 25, 1975, is our moral duty. Congress might feign outrage at any mention of its Emergency, but the truth is clear: if we do not learn from the past, we risk its return. Let us ensure India never goes back to that dark place. Defend democracy — for that is the promise of our Constitution and the enduring legacy of those who paid for it under fire.

(The writer is BJP Spokesperson. Views are personal)

Why India's youth needs mandatory health education

Every day, countless Indian school children reach for sugary snacks, unaware of the long-term health consequences hidden in their daily choices. The Central Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) recent initiative called Sugar Boards, introduced in May 2025, is a commendable first step toward raising awareness. These boards, now displayed in over 24,000 schools, highlight the harms of excessive sugar consumption and encourage healthier options like fruits and water. But awareness alone is not enough.

If we are serious about addressing the alarming rise in diabetes, obesity, and mental health issues among India's youth, we must go further. We need mandatory, curriculum-integrated health education in schools — delivered by trained teachers and supported by national policies that limit the influence of junk food. Only then can we equip our children to make informed, lasting choices for their well-being.

A Growing Crisis

The urgency is clear. A 2023 study by the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) found that 15.35 per cent of Indian schoolchildren are pre-diabetic, and nearly one per cent has Type 2 diabetes, a condition once rare in children. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 13 per cent of adolescents are obese and 18 per cent are overweight, putting them at risk for complications like non-alcoholic fatty liver disease and early-onset dental problems. Mental health trends are equally troubling. A 2022 NCERT survey revealed that 23 per cent of students experience anxiety or stress, often driven by academic pressure. These health challenges are compounded by sedentary lifestyles, excessive use of screen time and widespread access to ultra-processed foods.

In my work at Tarang Health Alliance, I've seen how these factors take a toll on young lives. Sugar Boards, supported by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), provide valuable information. But information alone does not lead to behaviour change. For that, we need continuous and contextual health education.

Countries like Finland have mandated health education since the 1970s, covering nutrition and mental well-being, and have seen significantly lower obesity rates. Australia integrates health education throughout its K-12 system, while in India, Kerala's curriculum includes both physical and health education, contributing to improved youth health outcomes. These examples show what is possible. Since 2016, Tarang Health Alliance has reached over 15,000 students across Haryana, Delhi-NCR, Chandigarh, and Jaipur. We teach students health-related skills and motivate them to improve their health behaviour

tions were held in 1977. Democracy returned, but not without scars. After the defeat of Indira Gandhi, Chandrashekhar went to meet her at her residence in Safdarjung Road. What transpired there revealed the human cost of autocracy. Indira looked defeated and vulnerable. "Sanjay Gandhi will be humiliated... We won't get a house... Our security will be taken away," she said, voicing fears that seemed more personal than political.

Chandrashekhar responded with compassion, assuring her that nothing like that would happen. It was a startling encounter between a woman who once ruled like an empress and a man who had opposed her with unwavering courage, yet still retained the grace to empathise. He was left wondering: Is this the same Indira Gandhi who was once synonymous with the country?

The question remains timeless. Chandrashekhar's courage wasn't about grandstanding. It was about moral clarity. He knew the price of silence in times of oppression. He knew the seduction of power and the corruption of conscience that accompanied it. His life reminds us that dissent is not disloyalty. It is, in fact, the highest form of patriotism in a democracy.

Indira Gandhi's Emergency was a dark chapter, but within it shone the light of leaders like Chandrashekhar. He was not the loud, vindictive opposition of the self-righteous, but the principled stand of a man who believed that India deserved better. His writings — introspective, firm, and often sorrowful — show a leader who was pained by the degradation of democracy, but never defeated by it.

History may not remember all who were jailed during the Emergency. But it will always remember those who walked into jail with peace in their hearts, truth in their minds, and the courage to oppose tyranny on principle. Chandrashekhar was one of them.

He stood not just against the Emergency, but for democracy. Not just against Indira Gandhi, but for the idea of India itself.

To conclude, Indira Gandhi became Gandhari during the Emergency, willfully blind to the consequences of her actions. But in Chandrashekhar, democracy found its Yudhishtira: resolute, dignified, and unwavering, even when surrounded by darkness.

The story of Chandrashekhar and Indira Gandhi during the Emergency is not just about two individuals. It is the story of a nation's conscience, tested and tormented, but ultimately preserved through the moral strength of those who refused to remain silent. And in that long night of political despair, it was Chandrashekhar who held the lamp.

(The writer is veteran Hindi Journalist and this article is translated from Hindi to English for The Pioneer. Views expressed are personal)

through an interactive program. Our trained educators help children make better food choices, manage stress, and say no to tobacco. But such efforts should not remain limited or optional. Every child, regardless of background, deserves access to health education. The long-term benefits are clear: healthier communities, lower healthcare costs, and a generation better equipped to face life's challenges.

The Need for Policy Reform

Current policies fall short. While Sugar Boards are visible reminders, they do not address the flood of sugary snacks in school canteens or the aggressive marketing of junk food to children. The FSSAI's delay in developing India-specific regulations for high-fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS) foods leaves schools relying on WHO standards that do not fully align with Indian food habits. Cities like Chandigarh and Kolkata have banned junk food in schools, but a national policy is long overdue. India should also follow the lead of countries like the UK, which have placed strong restrictions on food advertising aimed at children.


Parents must be part of this transformation. Awareness campaigns and school-based workshops can help them reinforce healthy habits at home — especially crucial in low-income families, where processed foods often seem like the only affordable option. A Simple Formula for Healthy Living. At Tarang, we are also promoting the "5-4-3-2-1-0: Countdown to a Healthy Life" campaign, a memorable "mantra" to help children take charge of their health:

- 5) five servings of vegetables or fruits
- 4) At least four hand washes every day with soap & water: after using the toilet and before each meal
- 3) Three portions of protein-rich food every day
- 2) No more than two hours of recreational screen time every day
- 1) One hour of physical activity every day
- 0) Zero consumption of tobacco, sugary drinks, or packaged salty snacks

Health education doesn't just benefit students — it empowers them to influence their families and communities. But to scale this impact, we need commitment at every level: from policymakers, educators, and parents alike.

The CBSE's Sugar Boards signal an important intent, but intent must translate into action. Let's move beyond displays on school walls and build a national framework that makes health education a core part of every child's learning journey. With trained teachers, informed parents, and robust policies, we can ensure India's children grow up healthier, stronger, and more resilient. The time to act is now.

(The writer is the founder of Tarang Health Alliance and India's national representative for the UNESCO Chair on Global Health & Education. Views are personal)



CONTRAPUNTO
Every Morn and every Night
Some are born to Sweet Delight,
Some are born to Endless Night
- WILLIAM BLAKE, POEM

Atom Of Truth

Experience shows economic strength and conventional military superiority matter more than nukes in a war

Trump's truce may prove only as permanent as his tariffs, with both Israel and Iran alleging attacks through Tuesday, but if it holds, Iran might want to rethink deterrence. Israel made this war a campaign against Iran's alleged nuclear programme. US pummelled Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan in pursuit of the same phantom, even though Iran maintains its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful, and the discovery of 83.7% pure uranium particles at Fordow in 2023 – better than the 82.7% purity of 'Little Boy' dropped on Hiroshima – was a case of malicious contamination.

But assume that Netanyahu and Trump are right, and the centrifuges at Fordow, etc, are indeed spinning uranium hexafluoride to concentrate fissile U-235 for one or more bombs. The likely explanation is that Iran wants a nuclear deterrent – a bomb that discourages others from attacking it. Nuclear deterrence has been a seductive idea for 80 years and USSR/Russia, China, UK, France, India, Israel, Pakistan and N Korea have realised it. For three years now, it's been argued that Russia couldn't have invaded a nuclear-armed Ukraine.



But data from 348 territorial disputes shows nuclear-armed sides enjoy no advantage. Some years ago, University Of Washington professor David Barash challenged the notion of nuclear deterrence in an essay, pointing out that nuclear America couldn't prevent revolutions in China, Cuba, Iran and Nicaragua. It stalled in Korea against a non-nuclear China, and failed miserably in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Nuclear USSR likewise failed in Afghanistan. Saddam fired Scuds at nuclear Israel in 1991. Even the idea that MAD – mutually assured destruction – prevented the Cold War from turning "hot" is doubtful, Barash argued, because US and Russia had never fought a war anyway, and USSR never showed intent to invade Western Europe. Besides, modern guided munitions are so precise – America's GBU-57s at Fordow followed one another down the same shaft – your nukes may be taken out before they can fly.

Over the years, Iran has paid a huge price for its real or imaginary nuclear pursuit. Sanctions have kept it from realising its economic potential – its GDP was roughly level with Saudi Arabia's in 1979, now it's at the 40% mark – and the absence of its air force and air defences in this 12-day war was telling. While autocratic regimes blindly pursue nukes as a guarantee of survival, a strong economy and conventional military strength seem to be better bets.

Whale Of A Story

New research on orcas points to an old human error: we assume what we can't perceive doesn't exist

Do you loofah? It's an efficient delivery of cleaning, soothing, shining pleasures to your skin. Turns out orcas, aka killer whales, the largest members of the dolphin family, are also really into it. The current issue of *Current Biology* reports observations where orcas were seen to refashion kelp to exfoliate each other. This is the first recorded instance of 'allokelping'. Actually, it is the first recorded instance of any marine mammal making a tool out of some object, let alone a grooming tool. How little we know about all the other species that cohabit earth with us, never mind how much we hurt them.

Scientists are finding things out bit by slow bit. In orcas, besides allogrooming, they have observed other rubbing behaviours. The hypothesis is that just as touch helps build relationships and moderate stress among humans, so it is when orcas rub each other with their bodies and fins – and the kelp enhances this experience. But what's really revealing is that every such scientific discovery feels like a big surprise. That's about how hubristic humans are. As conservationist Karen Bakker says, we tend to believe that what we cannot perceive does not exist. Until a wave of new projects and tech started revealing orcas' complex vocalisations and pod-specific dialects, we assumed whales weren't talking to each other, because we weren't hearing them.

Even the fierce debate about AI ignores how it might transform our relationship to the non-human world. Right now we can see a mother orca and child orca grooming each other and talking to each other. What Bakker wonders is whether AI could help 'decode' what they are actually saying to each other. Maybe if we 'heard' animals better, we would extinct them less. Imagine if it was technology that finally got us to understand that animals speak, and live, meaningfully.

Britain on the boil

With its summer weather taken from other places, Britain blows hot and cold

Jug Suraiya



It is the end of June and it has to be hot in Gurgaon, where I live. The problem is that I'm not in Gurgaon, but in London, and the temperature today is going to be 34°C, making it hotter than Gurgaon with its pre-monsoon showers.

Britain has long been in climate change denial of its own climate. It persists in thinking of itself as a cold country. And it is a cold country for most of the year. But then, all of a sudden, the sun will burst through the grey skies, temperatures will soar, and the tabloid headlines will go into a frenzy about how it's going to be hotter than Spain, and the south of France, and Sicily. And the nanny state will exhort people to carry water with them, and get off the bus, or the Tube if they feel faint, and everyone who's been moaning and grumbling about the wet and cold, will now moan and grumble about the horrid heat.

It happens every year, regular as a Swiss clock. But by common consensus, Britain believes itself to be a cold country or at least a temperate one. Hot? No fear, not us. We don't do heat.

So when the heat wave does strike, everyone's caught unprepared. Homes don't have ceiling fans. Bars, restaurants, and most public transport lack air conditioning. And people get bowled over as much by astonishment as by the heat, like ninepins in a game of skittles.

Britain's denial of being a hot country, even temporarily, is both understandable and factually correct. Britain is *not* a hot country; the extreme heat waves it regularly endures are all borrowed from foreign shores.

What the weather reports describe as a 'plume of hot air' will come whooshing in from North Africa, or some such outlandish place, and smite the country with sunstroke.

Britain's borrowed heat from distant climes is analogous to the wealth it euphemistically borrowed in a fit of absent-mindedness from its former colonies and forgot to return. British heat? 'Course not. It's only borrowed. Like the Kohinoor.

THE BEST DEFENCE

IS A GOOD OFFENCE

CAN TRUMP TAME BIBI?

Whether the ceasefire holds & West Asia becomes less incendiary depends on US president's ability to make Netanyahu stop using war as political cover and take peace seriously

Attila Somfalvi



Columnist based in Tel Aviv

One could have hoped that after 12 days of mutual skirmishing between Israel and Iran, the exclamation points would outweigh the question marks regarding the future of West Asia. But in this region, as always, nothing is as it seems, and nothing is as it sounds. Leaders from different countries, each driven by their own interests, are spreading unequivocal "facts" that, to this moment, remain unclear in their accuracy, reliability, or actual reflection of reality.

From the Iranians, nothing can be expected: their diplomacy of lies has become infamous, and one would have to be either truly naive or blind to believe the blatant disinformation spread by the Ayatollahs' murderous regime – on nearly every topic. This regime has turned falsehood into its primary tool of operation. Even during the war, the Iranians' hollow threats stood in stark contrast to their poor performance in the ballistic attacks they launched against Israeli civilians. While Israeli Air Force pilots targeted military or strategic assets, the Iranians stuck to their habitual policy of terror, aiming for residential neighbourhoods, hospitals, and civilian centres in general.

All the while, their announcements sought to convince Iranian citizens that they were raining fire and brimstone on sensitive Israeli facilities and inflicting powerful blows on the Zionist enemy. The same logic applies to their conduct regarding the nuclear programme: only pathological liars could build an underground facility buried 300 feet beneath the earth, scatter countless nuclear installations across Iranian territory, construct ballistic missiles and factories that produce weapons of mass destruction – and still claim it is all for peaceful medical, scientific and civilian purposes.

On the other side stand Netanyahu and Trump, two leaders who managed to surprise the entire world, collaborate, and act together to curb the power of the Iranian regime. Both claim victory, both declare that Iran's nuclear programme has been destroyed, and both boast of having changed the course of history. But can we, at this moment, say with certainty what the actual outcomes of the Israeli and American strikes are? Can we truly declare that the facility at Fordow was

indeed destroyed, and that hundreds of kilograms of enriched uranium were buried deep underground? Can we guarantee, without hesitation, that the Iranians have indeed been set back by years in their ability to revive their nuclear programme and their efforts to manufacture destructive ballistic missiles?

As of now, the answer to all these questions is no. Nothing can be promised to anyone, and some time will pass before the real, tangible damage caused by Israeli and American air forces becomes clear – and before Israeli intelligence can definitively assess the status of Iran's nuclear programme. Still, that hasn't stopped



Netanyahu and Trump from issuing dramatic and unequivocal declarations, promising a new West Asia and a weakened Iranian regime. The Israeli and American leaders need this media bravado – mainly to justify the strategic decisions they made over the past two weeks, and also to rally their base around them.

Netanyahu, who has governed Israel almost continuously since 2009, crowned himself the leading fighter against Iran's nuclear ambitions and declared in the past that he wants to be remembered as the "Defender of Israel". But it was precisely during his watch that, on Oct 7, 2023, the greatest security disaster

JP, Vajpayee, Morarji, Charan Singh..Vs Mrs G

On June 25, 1975, hours before Emergency was declared, then oppn bigwigs rallied in Delhi. An eyewitness account of the last protest before Indira Gandhi suspended democracy for 21 months

Vivek Shukla



Over the last 50 years, Delhi has changed dramatically. The city looks different, feels different. Yet, some iconic places appear roughly the same as they did during the heady days preceding Emergency.

The historic Ramlila Ground, close to Old Delhi's Turkman Gate, is one such. To people of a certain vintage, memories echo strongly of a hot summer day in 1975 when the grounds were transformed into a stirring open-air theatre of public protest.

The capital was hot that June 25. The sun sizzled but the political temperature was higher. From early morning people had started pouring in from all parts of the country, especially Bihar. Jayaprakash Narayan, who led the anti-govt protests, was from Bihar with a huge following. Protestors arrived mostly by train at New Delhi railway station. The station's Ajmeri Gate segment was built only during the 1982 Asian Games, much later. In 1975, people walked from the Paharganj end carrying banners and waving photographs of opposition politicians, shouting slogans as they marched past Rouse Avenue, where I lived back in the day.

Most protestors wore kurta-pyjamas and a Gandhi cap. This was the pre-plastic water bottle era. Many carried water in thermos flasks. Delhi had several piyaos (free water kiosks) of free cold water those days – some were in the venue's vicinity.

By 1pm, people – activists, students, working women – had reached the famed protest grounds. Scores of sadhus also came from the nearby Shree Harihar Udasin Ashram of Kamla Market. They stood quietly where the TRAI building is located now. Workers from the city's industrial area and lower ranked central govt employees could also be seen. Rooftops in residences around the grounds teemed with people. Not an inch of

space went unoccupied.

What made the turnout remarkable was that the rally had been planned in just a week. Political brass – including JP, Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, Vajpayee, Raj Narain and Parkash Singh Badal – decided after a series of meetings at the Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF) that they must organise a major public meeting to 'Save Democracy' from the 'fascist politics of Mrs Gandhi's govt', as a young Chandrashekhar, an integral part of the deliberations, later recalled. Despite their advanced age, veteran freedom fighters Acharya Kripalani and Vijayalakshmi Pandit also



RAMLILA GROUND 1975: Jayaprakash Narayan addressing a protest rally organised by Janata Morcha in New Delhi on June 25

attended these planning sessions. With JP staying there, GPF had become the nerve centre of the opposition.

Once the date and venue were finalised, local politicians like Madan Lal Khurana, Shanti Desai (Congress O), and a young Arun Jaitley (ABVP) mobilised people of Delhi and nearby states. Meeting every other day on the lawns of VP House at Rafi Marg, they raced against time to finalise the meet.

Ramlila Ground was packed much before the meeting began at 4pm. Recordings of earlier JP speeches blared from loudspeakers. The platform

from which the veteran politicians spoke had been built for Queen Elizabeth's public address on Jan 21, 1961. Madan Lal Khurana, who presided over the meeting, shouted slogans such as 'Jo humse takrayega, chur chur ho jayega!' to a crowd that responded with full vigour, as he announced it was time to hear the political heavyweights.

Badal was the first to speak. In Punjabi, he set a fiery tone, demanding Indira's resignation. He was followed by Advani, Acharya Kripalani, Raj Narain, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Charan Singh, and Chandrashekhar. All lambasted the union govt.

Khurana then invited the crowd favourite: Vajpayee. By the time he began his address, darkness had fallen. He was in his element as he tore into govt policies. Looking at the ever-swelling crowd, he declared that someone at 1, Safdarjung Road, must be feeling very uneasy, as the presence of so many people was proof that govt had lost the nation's confidence. As he wrapped up his speech, the crowd chanted, 'Desh ko bachana hai, Indira ko hatana hai!'

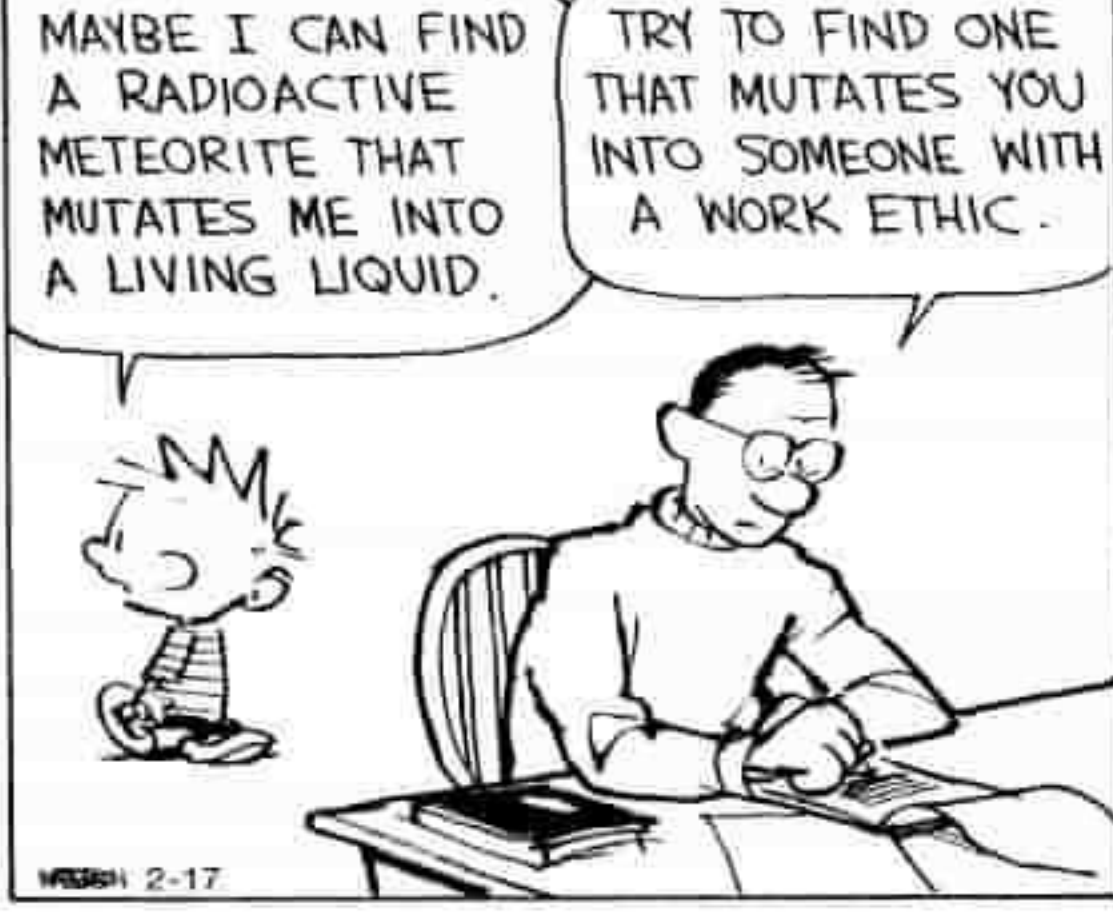
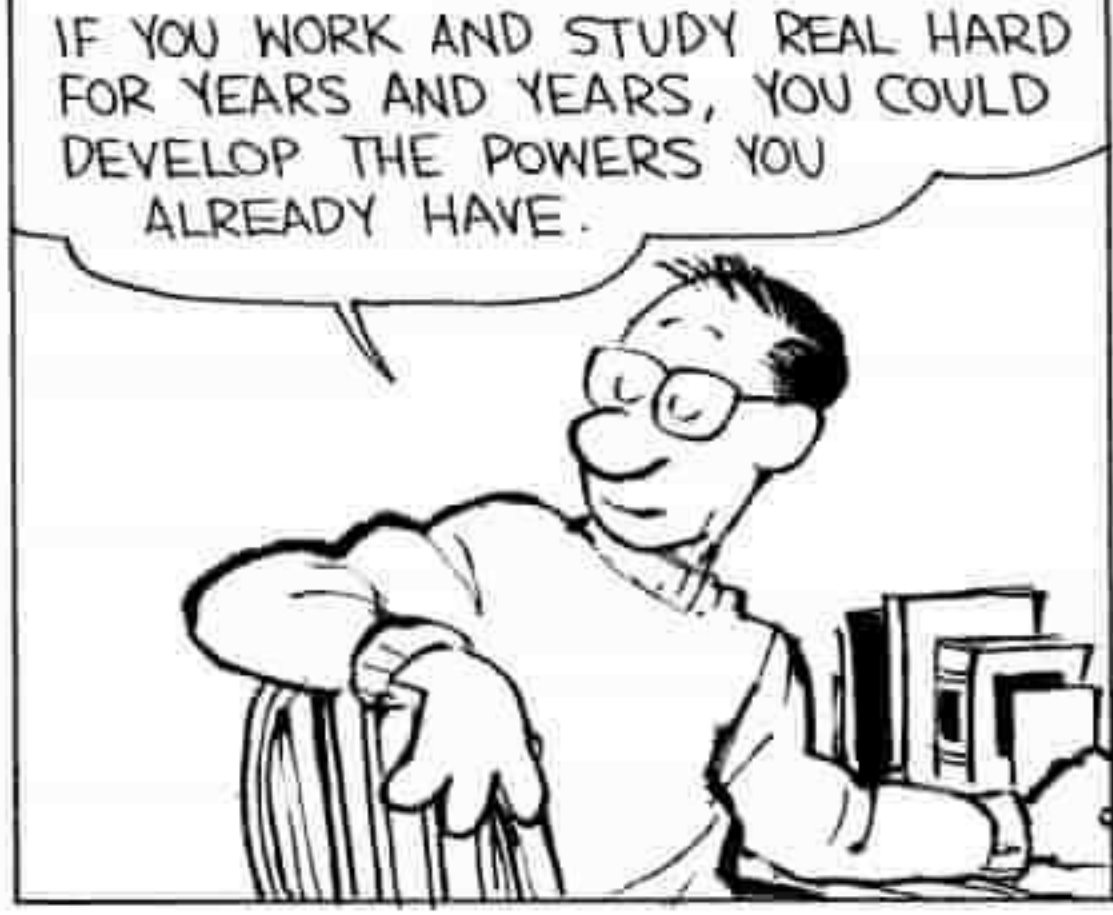
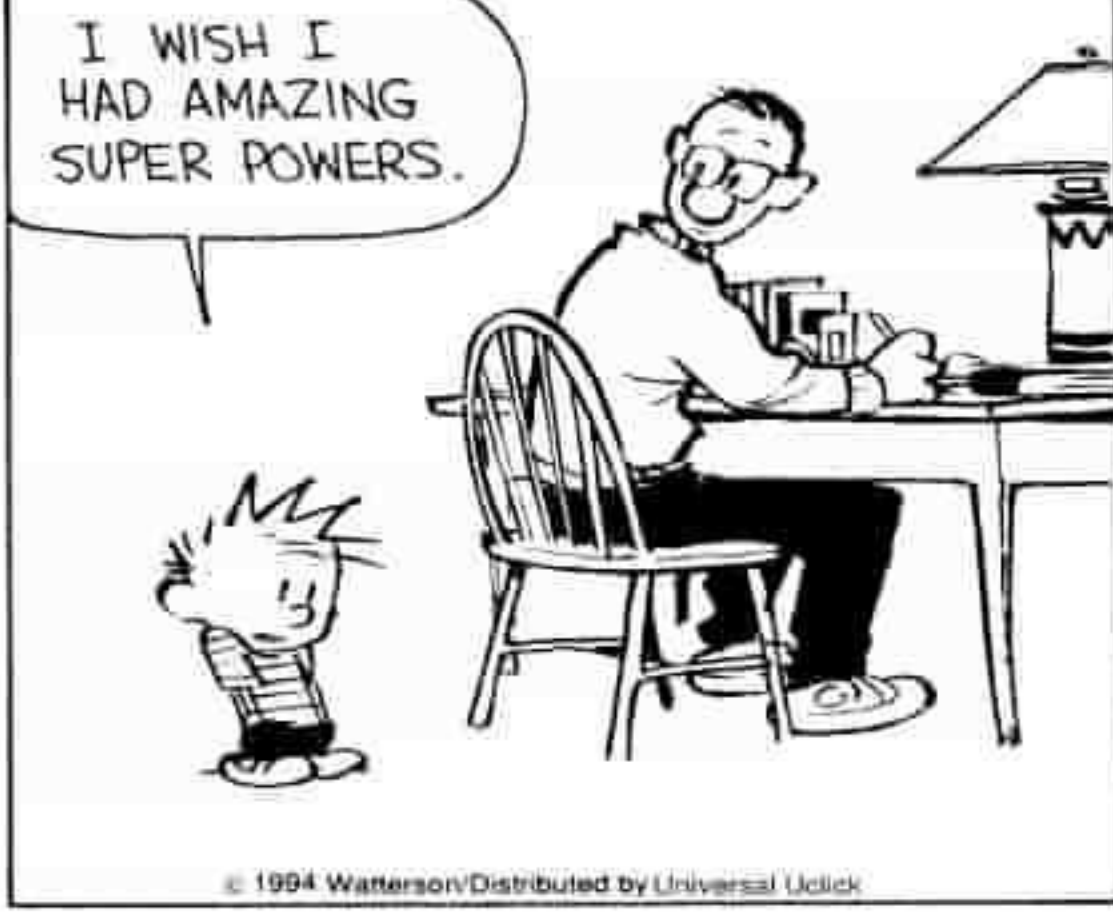
JP, the last to speak, began with the electrifying line from Ramdhari Singh Dinkar's poem, 'Singhasan khali karo ki janta aati hai!' In his 85-minute address, he insisted Indira must resign without delay.

A hush fell over the crowd when JP called upon the armed forces, police, and govt employees to disobey 'illegal and immoral' orders. When JP asked, 'Are you ready to go to jail to save democracy in India?' a sea of hands shot up in unison.

When JP finished, the crowd slowly dispersed into the night. No one had imagined in their wildest dreams that they would wake up the next morning to a state under Emergency, that the 'democracy' they had gathered to 'save' would have been suspended. It turned out to be the last political meeting for the next 21 months in the city.

The writer chronicles Delhi's history and politics

Calvin & Hobbes



How To Maintain Cordial International Relations

Rabbi Ezekiel Isaac Malekar

The guiding principle for international relations, or rather any relationship, should be cooperation and trust. Our broken relationships with others can never be resumed properly unless we have real trust in others. Unless we act in good faith, our actions become meaningless, if not disastrous. To have cordial international relations, we must rededicate ourselves to the universal values of love and brotherhood and reassert the principle of peace and justice.

Terrorism represents an extraordinary phenomenon, purely destructive and disastrous. Various methods adopted by terrorists include assassination, expropriation, kidnapping, destruction, hijacking, suicide bombing, taking innocent civilians as hostages, etc. The following passages speak of man's brotherhood; it is

necessary to ponder over these ideals: "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Then why do we deal treacherously, a man against his brother? Justice, justice shall you pursue, That you may live in your land, you shall not do wrong to him."

The world today lacks peace because in our hearts, we are not seriously desirous of it. We will offer lip service upon the altar of international friendship, yet we are not willing to denounce war. Ask yourself why people hate and kill when they seem to have everything. What is everything? What do they lack? This understanding does not come easily. Yet it is the only pass key to mysteries of the world. Let us realise fully that 'war is hell'. And every dollar and pound we spend on rockets and drones, we are robbing someone of bread and God.

Only then will we climb on the tortuous and perilous road to peace. Achieving peace through justice will prove to be a wrenching task. We must let go of traditional rhetoric, stereotypical thoughts or conceptions.

The major problem is not bombs or nuclear or chemical weapons – these are actually products of the problem. The main problem is that human imagination has not yet expanded to the point where it comprehends its own essential unity. People are not yet aware of themselves as a single interdependent species requiring proper performance of certain vital services if the human-kind is to be sustained.

We can only cope with broken relationships through trust, peace, goodwill, and a better understanding; some compromise must be worked out. Tolerance


towards representatives of other religions and respect for human rights must be the basis for peaceful existence.

The common Hebrew word in this context is Shalom, which means peace be unto you. The infinite longing in Judaism for peace and goodwill finds expression on every occasion.

Prophet Isaiah said, "And He shall judge among the nations and shall rebuke many people, and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore. The wolf and the lambs shall feed together, and the lion shall eat again like the bullock, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt and destroy in all my Holy Mountain, said the Lord."

Peace is one of the pillars of the world; without it, the social order cannot exist.

Sacredspace



You say: I am not free. But I have raised and lowered my arm. Everyone understands that this illogical answer is an irrefutable proof of freedom.

Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace

Turbulence Eases, Now, Steady the Jets

Israel-Iran truce lowers strain on Indian carriers

Cessation of hostilities — fingers crossed — between Israel and Iran is a welcome development for Indian airlines that have been facing major flight disruptions on the West Asia route. Pakistani airspace has been shut to Indian commercial aircraft since May, and the escalating conflict in West Asia was forcing elaborate detours from regular flight paths to Europe and the US. Flight diversions and cancellations add to operational costs and hinder market share gains for airlines. Safety remains another area of concern after the AI-171 disaster. A spate of technical glitches on other Air India flights has also resulted in diversions. Indian airlines now face higher insurance premiums as rates harden amid major fleet acquisition plans and operational expansion.

The West Asian crisis poses deep and multifaceted challenges for India's airlines. It is among the most lucrative international segments, helping keep a lid on domestic airfares. Aviation hubs in the region serve as critical gateways for passengers travelling to Europe and the US. Surging oil prices due to geopolitical tensions further squeeze airline margins. A resolution of the crisis allows airlines to focus on structural issues such as capacity building, fleet modernisation and safety improvements — factors that will determine their long-term competitiveness against global rivals. Foreign airlines are seeking expanded bilateral agreements, even as Indian carriers await delivery of new aircraft. This asymmetry may not favour Indian airlines aiming to capture outbound traffic, and eventually establish India as a regional aviation hub.

With Russian and Ukrainian airspace closed due to the ongoing conflict, the West Asian corridor has become vital for international aviation. Closure of this pathway was squeezing airlines into narrow, congested alternate routes. Additional risk of flying near war zones compounds concerns around safety and scheduling. De-escalation offers breathing space. Indian aviation must use it wisely to cover lost ground.

Gents, Cease the Fire, Not Seize Fire

Who takes credit to bring about a ceasefire matters little when a raging conflict puts civilians in bombs' way. So, if Trump says he has put an end to the violence traded by Israel and Iran over the last 12 days, Tel Aviv and Tehran haven't questioned the narrative. Even as Iran and Israel have violated Tuesday's ceasefire, which was separately confirmed by the warring parties, a cessation to attacks would allow all three players to come out claiming victory. Benjamin Netanyahu can tell his people that he has ended Iran's nefarious nuclear weapons-building plan. Ali Khamenei can tell his that he has given Israel, and its supply chain the US, a fitting reply. And Trump, of course, can come out smelling of roses, an aftershave he went in already wearing before 'saving the world'. The question now is whether the cessation of fire will hold.

The fact that Tehran and Washington had an understanding prior to the US dropping bombs on Iranian nuclear sites, and Iran dropping (symbolically the same number) bombs on US military enclaves in Qatar, tell us that shadowboxing has its importance in trying to settle geopolitical wrangles. And despite earlier misgivings with the Israeli PM, by bringing in the cavalry at Israel's request, Trump could not be accused of pussy-footing by Netanyahu after the latter had already gloated about the kind of influence he has with his *chaverim* in Washington.

Yes, the ceasefire is as tenuous as a Donald Trump claim. The US president has already told Israel, 'Bring your pilots home, now!' With his face to save if bombing resumes full-scale, the US will have more incentive to do what his support base wanted him to do in the first place: not rush in where angels care not to tread. Calls from Tel Aviv notwithstanding.

P.S. But first, someone shut down Israeli's lebensraum in Gaza.

JUST IN JEST

The worse the times, the louder the laugh, the more potent the resistance

Why We Should All Be Laughing Now

Yesterday, we had a large posse of heavy-eyebrowed highbrows outside our office protesting about the levity regularly churned out in this column. Their contention: in these dark times of war, imminent AI takeover, multibillionaires at the cusp of becoming billionaires overnight, and under-the-influence influencers, we continue to produce 'frolic'. 'It's obscene!' said one angry worthy. But here's our defence: if the world is going to hurl itself into the flaming dumpster of geopolitical disaster and neighbourhood fumes, the least we can do is guffaw while it burns.

'This is no time for laughter!' To which we say, 'This is *precisely* the time for laughter — preferably the kind that makes you snort tea up your nose and question your dignity.' Sitcoms and romcoms, comic writing, cartoons, absurd social media reels, politicians... these aren't distractions. They're resistance in nitrous oxide. Humour may not disarm tyrants. But it certainly pisses off their minions. It yanks the pants off propaganda, and shows us the spinach in its teeth. And, sometimes — the 'some' increasing in frequency each day — you've headlines that reflect such an absurd reality that you need to take out the bumper sticker that says, 'You can't make this up.' Which is why gallows humour — like galouti kababs — need to keep coming. With grim-faced chutney on the side.

CURSOR India should find self-interest, if not moral courage, to speak out against aggression

Of Cats and Caught Tongues



T K Arun

Bombing of Iran represents a return of old-style imperialism, making the point that might is right with the biggest bang possible without exploding an atomic bomb. Which cat got the tongue of India, leader of the 'global south', when the US bombed Iranian nuclear sites? Why did India turn mute, when the world called on Israel, at the UN, to end its genocide in Gaza? In the forests of Mt Zion and Washington DC, why this appetite for India's respect among nations?

Admittedly, New Delhi has a tough choice in deciding whether to speak up, or mumble 'Victim, de-escalate!' when the US and/or Israel goes rogue. India relies on these partners for vital intelligence and ordnance in the face of hostilities from across the border. It looks embarrassingly difficult to criticise, on the one hand, and extend the other for help, when help is needed.

This embarrassment is more apparent than real. Nations do not play nice with other nations. They pursue their self-interest. If the US helps India with intelligence and weapons, and Israel is happy to sell advanced military technology to India, this is not because a warm, fuzzy feeling envelops Washington or Tel Aviv whenever India crops up in the conversation. It is, because India has its uses.

India enjoys a degree of global respect because it's a large and growing economy with diverse capabilities and enough strategic heft (or the promise of it) to be the countervailing force in the region vis-à-vis



Uh-oh, not another UN vote

China, and has a reputation for reasonably principled behaviour.

India is the world's most populous nation, with 146 cr people. Its per-capita income is barely lower-middle-income. But in aggregate size, it will soon become the world's 4th-largest economy. It has a successful space programme, and nuclear programme that has yielded nuclear weapons and the means of delivering them accurately. It has diversified technological capability and managerial nous, and is home to the world's 3rd-largest herd of unicorns.

India has very large and capable armed forces, and nuclear-powered submarines that can stay submerged for long and undetected, to provide the country with second-strike capability, making for effective nuclear deterrence. Thanks to the Indo-US nuclear deal of 2008, for which Manmohan Singh staked his government's survival, India is a member of

key groupings that control access to strategic capability. It's a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime

Thanks to Nehru, India's independent foreign policy makes for strategic autonomy, and gives it credibility to speak on behalf of other 'global south' countries

(MTCR), Australia Group on chemical weapons and precursor chemicals, and Wassenaar Arrangement on dual-use technologies. It has quasi-membership of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG), as well.

Of late — and credit for this must go to the present government — India has begun to marshal its technological and manufacturing capability to build its own weapons and weapons systems. India can, and ought to, do much more. But whatever it already has, makes India a major power in the region. What makes it globally salient is the independent foreign policy it has carefully forged, thanks to Nehru, and pursued since Independence.

This makes for strategic autonomy, and credibility to speak on behalf of other nations of the 'global south', acquired through its role as the moving spirit behind the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and other groupings such as BRICS and BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China).

NAM has five basic principles: respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; non-aggression; non-interference in internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence. And long before 'Responsibility to Protect' was formally articulated as a principle guiding international conduct, India had both adopted, and balanced, it with the principles of NAM, when it acted to stop the genocide by West Pakistani forces in East Pa-

kistan, in collaboration with religious fundamentalist elements.

'Responsibility to Protect' imposes the obligation on each state to protect its own people from genocide, and when states fail in that duty, deems breach of the offending nation's sovereignty warranted, to enable the global community to discharge that responsibility. India stands only to gain by standing by those principles at all times. It could attract some hostility from some capitals for some time. But it will win India lasting credibility.

But doesn't the fact that Iran's is an oppressive theocratic regime justify such attacks on its sovereignty? The best way to answer that question is to ask how many people would have welcomed an end being brought to Indira Gandhi's Emergency — the 50th anniversary of its declaration, incidentally, falls



Doesn't Iran being an oppressive theocratic regime justify attacks on its sovereignty? Well, how many people would have welcomed an end to Mrs Gandhi's Emergency by an attack by Pakistan, China or the US?

today — by an attack by Pakistan, China or the US? Internal oppressors are easier to tackle than powerful occupying forces.

Regime change through external aggression in volatile regions leads to chaos that radiates outside and engulfs distant shores. We saw that with Iraq and Libya. Regime change through internal resistance is something else — the resistance is ready to take charge.

India should find the self-interest, if not moral courage, to speak out against imperial aggression, and uphold the banner of principled international relations.

Two-Timing These 2-Wheelers



Arijit Barman

Rapido, India's largest bike taxi operator, is headquartered in a commercial hub where traffic stands still most days. But that's Bengaluru for you. The richest live in exclusive enclaves with poorest infra all around. They employ hundreds of techies who design apps that deliver everything in 10 mins, yet waste hours of productive lives in daily commute. Since last week, the largest employer in India's thriving gig economy — double than deliveries and 10x of ecommerce — faces a state-wide ban.

Karnataka has banned bike taxi aggregators, claiming private vehicles cannot indulge in commercial activities. Instead of taking punitive measures, the state must plug a crucial gap and partner with them. That would sync Karnataka with 12 other states and UTs that have drafted policies based on broad guidelines of the Motor Vehicles Act (MVA) 1988,

which permits 2-wheelers to be contract carriages.

It's the state's job to provide infrastructure, transportation and public service deliveries. Karnataka has failed on all counts. Even after a decade, expansion of the Bengaluru metro rail network has been abysmal. Delays have exacerbated traffic congestion as vehicular traffic has galloped 56% in the same period. Instead of further clogging choked arteries of roads that operate on an average 4x capacity, bike taxis leverage the existing infra in 300-plus cities and towns to make travel affordable, accessible and convenient. About 95% of 200 mn 2-wheelers ply on the roads with a single user. Private operators have stepped in to sweat those bikes more efficiently.

It's a template borrowed from other Asian countries and pockets of Africa and Latin America that have high population densities. In each of these markets, bike taxis have emerged as primary transportation choice. It's not just about absolute volumes. Often, they act as the crucial link between first and last mile of public commute — the single biggest roadblock towards faster adoption of rapid urban transit systems.

In smaller cities, where options are



MG Road, here they come

even more limited and time-bound, they are fast becoming the mainstay as work hours keep expanding while bus fleets aren't. Price-wise, as a bridge among autos, taxis and buses, bike taxis have found perfect product market fit.

Being app-first, they are a safer (8-level checks like driver verification, route monitoring, insurance covers) and more transparent alternative to offline options. The state exchequer can also earn a tidy sum, through GST revenues from fares, permit fees and aggregator licences.

In a state where a third of all posts in the administration are still vacant, bike taxis have managed to offer 6 lakh people their principal source of income every month. For many young underemployed, it also acts as supplementary means of earning. A 2024 KPMG report, 'Unlocking the potential of bike-taxis in India', suggests that this is most bike taxi drivers' primary income source, or

when they suddenly require money for emergencies.

The move is especially baffling as it highlights the state's policy inconsistency, which otherwise has been at the forefront of providing social security benefits to gig workers. Two-wheelers used for delivery services are allowed to operate freely under white number plates. But those providing passenger transport using the same vehicles, and operating under similar commercial intent, are subjected to restrictions. Both are gig jobs. Both involve commercial use of 2-wheelers. Both are governed by the same MVA.

Much like neighbouring Goa — where vested interests of the local taxi mafia have created an inefficient and extortionist monopoly that has begun hurting its tourism-driven economy — in Karnataka, too, local politicians and policymakers are succumbing to motivations of autorkishaw unions that had earlier put a spoke in the wheels of innovative development.

Karnataka should immediately reverse the ban and accelerate a regulatory framework for the business to thrive.

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Cool Down Tempers, Temperatures



KumKum Dasgupta

Monsoon is expected to reach Delhi and adjoining areas soon, with Monday's 'teaser' rains'. It was its earliest arrival since 2013, when it reached Delhi on June 16. This year, monsoon reached Kerala on June 1, its earliest onset over the Indian mainland since 2009, when it hit the southern coast on May 23.

Relief may have come with rains. But according to World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), Asia is warming at twice the global average. WMO's 'State of the Climate in Asia 2024', released on Monday, spells it out starkly:

- 2024 was the warmest or second-warmest year on record (depending on the dataset), marked by widespread and prolonged heatwaves.
- Warming trend during 1991-2024 was nearly double that of 1961-90.
- Parts of India experienced extreme heatwaves, contributing to more than 450 deaths.

Despite the rising toll, efforts to address the crisis remain mired in inertia. Heat continues to be underestimated, under-acknowledged and structurally ignored.

► **Familiarity breeds complacency** 'We haven't fully internalised temperature variations we are witnessing now,' explains Arunabha

Ghosh, CEO, CEEW (Council on Energy, Environment and Water). 'Heat is still not thought of as a disaster — historically, it hasn't been. So, the response advisories tend to be minimal, almost casual, like 'stay at home'.'

But temperature alone doesn't kill. Two other key dimensions are often overlooked:

- Vulnerability of different socio-economic groups, and their ability to adapt to sustained high temperatures. Take two people in the same city: one works in construction, the other in an AC office. Both feel the heat. But their sensitivity to it is different — one works outdoors for hours, the other remains largely insulated.
- Then there's adaptive capacity. A construction worker in a prosperous city might have access to public health centres, or pharmacies offering ORS. But in a poorer city, even that basic safety net may be missing. The ability to cope is not just personal — it is infrastructural, and deeply unequal.

Such fault lines become even more exaggerated as we move towards underrepresented and underserved sections: women, PWDs and transgender individuals.

► **Personal advisories** To save lives, data must be local — and personal. 'Instead of vague advisories, we must incorporate heat-specific triggers into our early warning systems [EWS], based on local climate patterns,' says Ghosh.

The good news: researchers at IIT Roorkee have designed a prototype EWS that forecasts individual health risks from heat stress over a 5-day window. It combines weather data with personal health, exposure and occupational factors, assigning a risk score and a colour-coded result — green for low, yellow for medium, and red for high risk — tailored to individuals. This is a significant departure from the current one-size-fits-all heatwave alerts issued for entire populations.

Such personalised tools can empower people to anticipate risks and plan daily activities, or adjust habits based on specific vulnerabilities. But awareness and early warnings alone won't fix what's broken. India must embed climate resilience into urban planning, building codes and public health systems — where the real gaps lie.

► **Infra focus** In early June, as heatwaves gripped Delhi-NCR, many seeking relief in public spaces found little respite. Toilets were broken or abandoned, water points were scarce and cooling zones were nonexistent. For the elderly, children, preg-

nant women and persons with disabilities, the risks multiply.

It's a stark reminder that no matter how many Heat Action Plans (HAPs) are announced, they're being layered over a crumbling foundation. Basic urban infrastructure is either missing or dysfunctional — leaving people exposed, unsupported and increasingly vulnerable as temperatures rise and extreme weather becomes the norm.

India's cities need to cool down. Planners must integrate green spaces, shaded walkways and water bodies — steps that build not just climate resilience but also more liveable cities. And this isn't just about comfort or aesthetics. Liveable cities attract more talent and build stronger economies. City-level HAPs must be urgently revamped to reflect local vulnerabilities, emergency response must be paired with long-term resilience, and secure funding should be obtained for sustainable cooling.

► **CEEW's 2025 report**, 'How Extreme Heat is Impacting India: Assessing District-level Heat Risk', finds that 57% of districts — home to 75% of Indians — now face high heat risk. HAPs must also address night-time heat and humidity stress using granular, real-time data. With heatwaves now recognised under State Disaster Mitigation Fund (SDMF), states have the means to mobilise targeted, risk-based planning.

The science is here. Funds are now available. What we're missing is urgency. And the humility to plan for realities people already live through.

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THE SPEAKING TREE

Spirited Investment

BHARTENDU SOOD

Dabbling in shares helps one acquire spiritual wisdom. It is said, 'Guru bin gyan na hoi' — without a teacher, there is no true knowledge. Therefore, the uninitiated must seek the advice of experts.

Mistakes are the stepping stones to perfection; investors should not be disheartened if they incur losses in the early stages. It is key to be thoughtful, patient, pragmatic and prudent while investing, and quick to exit when the situation demands.

Arjun's son Abhimanyu fought valiantly against the Kauravas but was killed in the end because he entered the Chakravayuh without knowing how to exit it. Similarly, developing the skill to exit at the right time is critical in investing. Pause when the market is volatile.

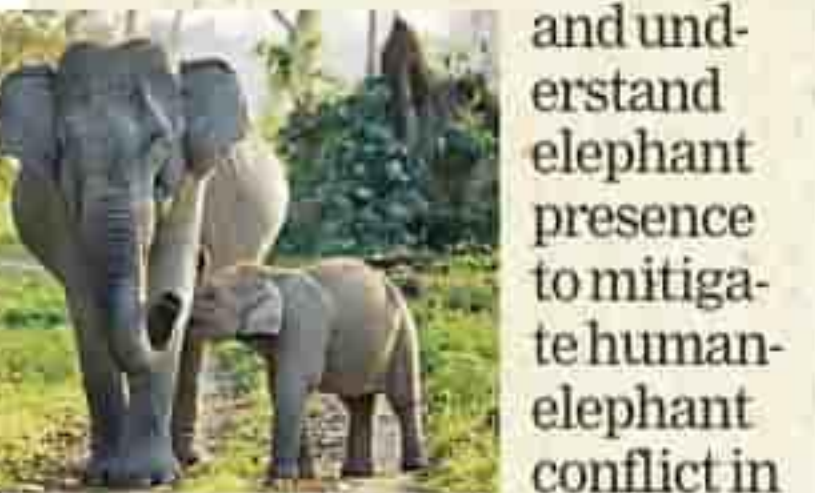
For every stock, even a blue chip, there is a right time to enter and exit. Equities rise and fall like tides of the sea. Always remember, when your calculations go wrong, debt can rob you of peace of mind, and affect not just you but also your family and their future. At all times, maintaining equanimity is essential.

The Bhagwad Gita says, 'Perform your duties established in Yog, renouncing attachment, and be even-minded in success and failure; evenness of mind is called Yog.' According to the Gita, wise men attain the blissful Supreme state by possessing equanimity of mind and renouncing the fruits of action. Remember, arth, wealth, is only one of the four purusharthas: dharma, arth, kaam, and moksh. It is a means to an end, not an end in itself.



While in the Wild, Listen

Can animal behaviour be decoded through sound? Wild Frequencies, a three-part miniseries by Mongabay-India, takes this question seriously — and answers it with nuance, science and a touch of wonder. In the second episode, **Know Them**, hosts Shreya Dasgupta and Kartik Chandramouli talk to Seema Lokhandwala of the Elephant Acoustic Project, which aims to develop and deploy state-of-the-art tech to monitor



Kaziranga National Park and the Karbi Anglong region.

Lokhandwala guides us through the rich vocal repertoire of Asian elephants — chirps, rumbles, trumpets, roars — all clues to how they communicate, bond and navigate human-dominated landscapes. Each call is a building block of behaviour, offering insights into herd dynamics, alarm signals and emotional states.

The episode, shaped by Abhijit Shylnath's sound design, helps us hear individuality in the wild. These aren't generic members of a species; they're decision-makers, living their lives shaped by relationships, risks and survival strategies.

Wild Frequencies makes a strong case: to understand animals deeply, sometimes you don't need to watch them — you need to listen.

Chat Room

A Trigger Called The Accelerator

Appropos the Edit, 'Going Beyond the Old 'Kitna Deti Hai?' (Jun 24), it is paradoxical that while car buyers demand crash-proof vehicles, superior safety gadgets and in-built controls, their adherence to safety norms and traffic rules has been abysmally poor. The pressure on vehicle makers to build secure and impregnable vehicles is yielding results through innovative designs. But the lackadaisical road behaviour is transcending all limits and has become the potential reason for accidents. The major blame is attributable to lack of regulatory controls with the meagre strength of traffic police and the general apathy to safety standards. Unless the fear of law with stringent punishments is driven into the ecosystem, accident prevention will remain a pipe dream.

Rajarao Kumar
Bengaluru