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The real turnout

Record polling percentages reflect lower voter base

The 2026 Assembly elections have delivered striking headlines: West Bengal registering an unprecedented 92.47 per cent turnout and Tamil Nadu following with 85.10 per cent. Assam and Puducherry, too, have recorded their highest-ever participation. On the face of it, this suggests a decisive deepening of democratic engagement. But a closer look at the numbers, especially after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, shows that these record percentages rest on a significantly altered base.



West Bengal illustrates this most sharply. The numbers suggest that the headline turnout of 92.47 per cent in 2026 is at least partly a function of a sharply reduced electorate. The voter roll, at 6.81 crore, is lower by about 77.4 lakh (a contraction of 10.2 per cent) compared to the 2024 Lok Sabha election, and by roughly 53.1 lakh (7.2 per cent) from the 2021 Assembly polls. Yet, in absolute terms, the number of votes polled in 2026, about 6.30 crore, is only modestly higher than the roughly 6.05 crore votes cast in both 2024 and 2021, an increase of just about 4 per cent. This indicates that while participation has indeed risen, the dramatic spike in turnout percentage is amplified by a smaller denominator. The Tamil Nadu numbers tell a more nuanced story behind the headline turnout of 85.10 per cent. The electorate has contracted sharply, to 5,67,74,436, down by about 55.6 lakh (8.9 per cent) from 2024 and 61.7 lakh (9.8 per cent) from the 2021 Assembly polls. Yet, in absolute terms, the number of voters has actually risen: 4,83,13,946 ballots were cast in 2026, compared to 4,35,60,393 in 2024 and 4,64,06,392 in 2021. This means participation has increased by nearly 10.9 per cent over 2024 and by about 4.1 per cent over 2021. The surge in turnout, therefore, is real but not as dramatic as the percentage suggests.

Kerala presents a milder version of this pattern. The electorate has declined from 2,77,49,159 to 2,71,06,059, a drop of about 6,43,100 voters, or roughly 2.3 per cent, even as turnout reached 78.13 per cent, among the highest in its history. Assam, by contrast, has seen its electorate expand from 2,33,75,087 in 2021 to about 2,50,21,408 in 2026, an increase of roughly 6.8 per cent, while still recording a peak turnout of 85.38 per cent. In cleaning up the electoral rolls, the SIR has reset, or shrunk, the denominator against which participation is measured, Assam being the lone exception. The percentage rise, therefore, seems large even if the absolute increase in votes is modest.

None of this detracts from the administrative achievement or the visible enthusiasm of voters. The danger lies in reading a statistical outcome as a political signal. That said, the exclusion of *bona fide* electors seems to have occurred everywhere, largely because of the hurry in which SIR was conducted. These unfortunate errors should be rectified. The SIR should be ideally be seen as an exercise that enhances the credibility of the electoral process.

POCKET: The Summer of '26

RAVIKANTH



New credit loss norm could hurt

PLAYING SAFE. The ECL rules risk exclusion of capable, asset-light borrowers — favouring weaker borrowers with collateral



SOUMIK BHUSAN
SANKARSHAN BASU
SATYA JEET

For decades Indian banks managed bad loans under the Incurred Loss (IL) approach. Banks provisioned only after borrowers actually defaulted. The Reserve Bank of India is changing the Asset Classification, Provisioning, and Income Recognition norms. From April 1, 2027, banks must shift to the Expected Credit Loss (ECL) framework, from backward-looking IL model.

The RBI is asking lenders to anticipate crashes before they happen. Loans will be classified into three stages based on extent of credit deterioration. Stage 1 category (performing assets, no significant increase in credit risk) requires provisions for expected losses over the next 12 months. Stage 2 (performing assets with significant increase in credit risk but not credit impaired) and Stage 3 (non-performing or credit impaired) categories require lifetime loss coverage.

ECL uses three variables: Exposure at Default (EAD), Loss Given Default (LGD), and Probability of Default (PD). Together, they estimate not just current stress, but future vulnerability. This new rule retains the existing norms for classifying non-performing assets (i.e., 90-days overdue), complemented by the banks' assessment of any forward looking credit risk requiring additional provision. For example, Stage 1 identification or the shift from Stage 1 to Stage 2 can occur irrespective of the current 90-day overdue norm. Therefore, credit risk could be triggered by 30+ days past due (rebuttable), rating downgrades, borrower stress, or portfolio-level signals.

Prudent ECL creates a policy dilemma: does systemic resilience come at the cost of credit rationing? As of March 2025, Indian banks held net advances of ₹15,905,063 crore, of which, around 75 per cent are secured by collateral or guarantees, leaving 25 per cent unsecured (*see Table*). On paper, this appears comfortable. In reality, collateral values often collapse during systemic stress due to fire-sale effects, where assets cannot be liquidated near book value. This weakens recovery rates and raises Loss Given Default (LGD).



Banks' lending profile (₹ crore)

Year	Advance	Tangible assets	Guarantees	Unsecured	Unsecured %
2013	58,79,773	45,62,786	3,96,411	9,20,577	15.7
2014	67,35,213	53,44,050	3,55,240	10,35,871	15.4
2015	73,88,160	58,32,621	3,99,440	11,56,100	15.6
2016	78,96,467	61,82,189	3,77,339	13,36,939	16.9
2017	81,16,109	63,35,567	3,94,114	13,86,428	17.1
2018	87,45,997	67,11,787	3,40,641	16,93,570	19.4
2019	96,76,183	73,06,226	3,25,281	20,44,676	21.1
2020	1,03,01,897	76,53,630	3,22,771	23,25,496	22.6
2021	1,08,06,381	79,82,866	3,83,556	24,39,959	22.6
2022	1,21,98,769	86,54,421	4,90,938	30,53,411	25.0
2023	1,43,19,353	1,00,71,488	5,89,855	36,58,009	25.5
2024	1,71,42,340	1,20,98,909	7,00,126	43,43,305	25.3
2025	1,59,05,063	1,11,28,866	7,48,608	40,27,589	25.3

Source: RBI, Statistical Tables Related to Banks in India

Once banks lose confidence in collateral recovery, they tighten lending, not because borrowers are weaker, but because security becomes unreliable. Unsecured advances rose from 15.7 per cent in 2013 to 25.3 per cent in 2025, lowering recovery rates and thereby increasing ECL provisioning pressure. Now the question remains: will this potential increase in provisioning trigger credit rationing?

When banks demand collateral to reduce unsecured exposure, borrower behaviour creates a natural self-selection. Safe borrowers, confident of repayment, are willing to pledge assets, while riskier borrowers avoid collateral because they expect a higher chance of default. Under ECL, this sorting becomes sharper. Since banks must account for LGD from day one, unsecured loans carry a much higher immediate provisioning burden. As a result, banks may simply avoid offering unsecured credit altogether.

Raising interest rates worsens borrower quality, so banks manage risk by restricting access to credit rather than increasing prices — this is credit rationing

In credit markets, when demand exceeds supply, interest increase fails to clear the market, due to the Stiglitz-Weiss Theory. Under this, if a bank tries to "price in the risk" of an unsecured loan by charging a 20 per cent interest rate, the "safe" borrowers who have low-margin, low-risk projects leave the market because the cost eats their entire profits. "Risky" borrowers remain because they only plan to pay if their high-stakes project succeeds. The bank knows that it is left with a Akerlof's "lemon" pool of borrowers. To avoid this, the bank keeps interest rates lower than the market-clearing level and simply refuses to lend to everyone who wants money i.e., rationing. Banks stop lending to anyone who does not have "excessive" collateral. Raising interest rates worsens borrower quality, so banks manage risk by restricting access to credit rather than increasing prices — this is credit rationing.

Risky borrowers also affect the Probability of Default component of ECL. As Stiglitz and Weiss argued, beyond a point, higher interest rates attract mainly high-risk borrowers, making price a weak risk-control tool. Under ECL, loans to such borrowers trigger higher projected PD, especially during economic slowdowns. The resulting provisioning burden may exceed what banks can recover through higher interest income. This may push banks to tighten credit standards rather than simply raising interest rates as price increase hurts quality.

PROBABILITY OF DEFAULT

The real shift in ECL is moving from "what happened" to "what might happen." Banks must incorporate macroeconomic variables into PD models. If PD estimates are highly sensitive to interest rates or sector stress, even a small shock can push loans from Stage 1, requiring only short-term provisioning, to Stage 2, where lifetime expected losses must be recognised. To avoid this jump, banks may stop lending to sectors showing early signs of weakness.

While ECL may push banks towards safer, collateral-backed lending, it also raises a deeper question: should access to credit depend on true repayment capacity or simply on asset ownership? ECL creates a forward-looking system that prices risk more transparently and reduces the chance of sudden systemic shocks. However, ECL risks exclusion of capable but asset-light borrowers, while favouring weaker borrowers with strong collateral.

A promising entrepreneur without property may be denied credit, while a mediocre borrower with real estate gets funded. The risk of credit rationing is real, but ECL is not a threat to growth by itself. Its success will depend on how well banks use data and how effectively RBI's five-year transition period helps balance prudence with credit access.

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Why India cannot afford to ignore tech sovereignty

If control over critical digital assets vests in another country, access to essential data could be restricted suddenly

Rajesh Nambiar

Over the past two decades, India has made extraordinary strides in bringing technology into the centre of national life. By almost every measure of digital adoption, India has done something remarkable. Yet much of the technology infrastructure that powers this transformation is not owned by India. Most businesses run on foreign platforms. Critical systems including government services, hospitals, banks, power grids, and supply chains flow through foreign clouds or rely on systems ultimately controlled outside our borders.

The question this raises is simple. What happens if that access is suddenly restricted?

In 2025, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court reportedly lost access to his email after a technology provider complied with government instructions. Around the same time, an Indian company, Nyara Energy, suddenly lost access to essential cloud tools. These were not cyber criminals breaking into systems. These were administrative decisions made by legitimate service providers.

For a nation as large and ambitious as India, being a mere consumer of technology is a risk we can no longer afford to take.

However, when we talk about technology sovereignty, it is easy to get lost in the clouds. Sovereignty, in this context, means the ability to make consequential decisions about ones own digital infrastructure without being subject to another country's veto. Broadly, it relates to control over critical digital assets along with the associated physical and intangible enablers such as human expertise and the governing regulatory framework.

It is equally important to understand what this is not. Technology sovereignty does not mean we stop using foreign innovations or that we try to build every single tiny component ourselves. Instead of viewing it as techno-isolation, it must be seen as having the intellectual property, the local talent, domestic capabilities and the legal authority to ensure our most critical systems like power grids, financial networks, and defence systems are resilient.

LESSON FROM ABROAD

India is not alone in facing this problem. Other countries have been grappling with the same questions, and their approaches offer us a useful map, even if none of them fits India's situation perfectly.

The first approach is full ownership. China built its own versions of almost everything, its own search engines, social media platforms, payment systems, and increasingly its own chips and cloud infrastructure, supported by substantial state funding and strict limits on foreign players.

The US arrived at a similar outcome through an entirely different route. By producing private companies that the entire world came to rely on. The second approach is regulatory power. The European Union does not own global technology, but it shapes how global technology behaves within its borders and, increasingly, beyond. European data protection rules, competition regulations, and standards for artificial intelligence have become reference points that even American companies must follow to access European markets.



GLOBAL APPROACHES. India must incorporate them for tech sovereignty

The third is strength through partnership. The Chip 4 arrangement between the US, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan around semiconductor supply chains is one example. As on date, India lacks foundational IP in most advanced technologies, has limited critical minerals and semiconductor capacity and, importantly, our bargaining power *vis-à-vis* jurisdictions of global big tech parent companies is weak.

Further, while our talent base is huge, depth in deep-tech areas is limited; building such expertise will take years.

India will need elements of all three global approaches to technology sovereignty.

Rather than choosing one model, India should adopt a layered strategy where different parts of the technology stack are addressed differently and the approach evolves over time. The most practical path combines domestic capability building, smart regulation, trusted global partnerships, and market driven innovation.

The most important structural step India can take is to establish a National Technology Sovereignty Council, a permanent, functioning institution tasked with synergising disparate efforts and developing a technology sovereignty framework which defines short- and medium-term priorities, approach for each technology layer, and tracks progress against defined metrics.

Alongside this, the government must engage industry as a genuine partner rather than simply as a regulated sector. Policymakers must evangelise the business case for sovereignty aligned investments beyond compliance, facilitate technology transfer from global majors, and catalyse collaborative R&D in sovereignty aligned areas through industry consortia and shared labs. Technology sovereignty is not a project for the long term. The decisions made in the next three to five years will determine what options India has in the decade after that.

The writer is President, Nasscom

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.

Tech vs ethics

Apropos 'Challenge of Mythos' (April 30). The new AI model Claude Mythos shows how technology can now find and exploit weaknesses in computer systems faster than humans. This power can help protect networks but also create new risks if misused. Governments and companies must act quickly to set fair rules and share responsibility. Cybersecurity is no longer just about fixing problems — it is about managing power wisely. Mythos reminds us that progress must come with caution, because the same intelligence that builds safety can also break it if left unchecked.

K Chidanand Kumar
Bengaluru

Ethanol transition path

This refers to 'Centre pushes for 100% ethanol-powered vehicles' (April 29). Building on E20's success, the move towards E100 signals a clear step towards energy independence. However, higher ethanol blends reduce fuel efficiency and may raise running costs. Feedstock expansion must be managed without straining land and food needs. This calls for closer alignment between policy ambition and field readiness. A phased rollout, supported by stable supply chains and transparent pricing, can ease the transition.

S Balasubramaniyan
Villupuram, TN

Millet consumption

Apropos 'Millets are still not on our menu" (April 30), it is really disheartening to learn that consumption of millets, which are rich in iron, calcium, fibre and so on, is falling despite India accounting for nearly 38 per cent of global output of the commodity. Once people develop a habit of consuming millets (like how they have for rice, wheat, etc), then it will become permanent item on their menu.

S Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai

Deciphering rupee's fall

This refers to 'Why the rupee has fallen steeply' (April 30). The authors make a persuasive case that the rupee's sharp fall was driven less by weak fundamentals and more by sentiment-driven capital flows. The self-fulfilling nature of depreciation expectations is a genuine concern, and the RBI's intervention appears justified on those grounds. That said, the deeper structural issue deserves attention: India's relative shortage of AI-related stocks and slower corporate earnings growth made it a less attractive destination when global capital grew cautious. Addressing that gap is a medium-term imperative that monetary intervention alone cannot substitute for.

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Digitisation can be toxic

A safer way to deal with e-waste is urgently needed

Vaibhav Mishra
Sanjay Fuloria

The narrative of Digital India is, in many ways, a legitimate success story. Yet beneath this celebration lies a problem that remains largely invisible in public discourse: the growing and poorly managed burden of electronic waste.

In India, much of the discarded electronics flows into an informal and often hazardous waste economy where dismantling and recovery are carried out using unsafe methods such as open burning, acid leaching, and crude landfilling. The environmental consequences — contaminated soil, polluted water sources, and toxic air — pose long-term risks to both ecosystems and human health.

AI systems depend on high-performance GPUs and specialised servers that consume large amounts of energy, generate significant heat, and wear out quickly. As Indian firms race to adopt AI, hardware replacement cycles are shrinking. The result is a steady and growing stream of high-grade electronic waste — one that policy frameworks have not kept pace with.

On paper, India appears prepared. The E-Waste (Management) Rules, 2022, and the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework place clear obligations on manufacturers to collect and recycle end-of-life electronics. Corporate sustainability reports routinely highlight commitments to a "circular economy," suggesting that waste is being recovered and reused responsibly. However, the gap between regulatory intent and ground-level reality is stark. In informal recycling hubs such as Seelampur in Delhi or peripheral zones around Chennai, the circular economy is largely a fiction.

Instead of investing in accessible collection centres or take-back infrastructure, companies often rely on purchasing recycling certificates from third parties. The result is regulatory compliance without environmental protection.



E-WASTE. Health concerns K RAGESH

HEALTH IMPACT

An estimated 90 per cent of India's e-waste is handled by small scrap dealers and waste pickers who operate outside formal regulation. These workers play a critical role in keeping cities clean, yet they remain among the most neglected participants in the waste management chain. Using rudimentary tools, they burn insulated wires to extract copper or immerse circuit boards in corrosive acids to recover traces of gold. Prolonged exposure to toxic fumes and heavy metals leads to respiratory illness, neurological damage, and long-term health complications. Children are often present at these sites, amplifying the social cost of neglect.

The irony is difficult to ignore. While policymakers promote the circular economy as a sustainable future, the people enabling recycling on the ground often work in conditions reminiscent of an earlier industrial age. Any serious commitment to decent work and inclusive growth must address this contradiction by integrating informal recyclers into safer, regulated systems rather than treating them as an inconvenience to be bypassed.

If India is to avoid converting digital success into environmental liability, a course correction is essential. First, transparency must move beyond certification toward physical tracking of e-waste, ensuring that discarded electronics are collected and processed safely. Second, right-to-repair legislation can restore longevity to devices by requiring manufacturers to provide modular components and repair support. Third, the informal recycling sector must be recognised as an asset.

With appropriate incentives, training, and safety standards, these workers can become partners in a regulated e-waste ecosystem rather than its most vulnerable victims.

India's digital ascent has earned it a place at the global table. Whether that achievement endures will depend on whether innovation is matched by accountability.

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Is AI a mere cover to lay off staff?

AI IN THE DOCK. Here, the corporate 'earnings call' story outruns the technology. Disclosure norms need to be tightened



GETTY IMAGES



SANCHIT VIR GOGIA

Every technology of consequence eventually finds itself in the dock. The Railways did. The motorcar did. The mainframe and the offshored back office did in their turn. Artificial intelligence is now there. The case being argued is not whether the technology works. It is whether the corporate explanation given in its name is true. The charge in front of the court right now is layoffs. The reasons offered for layoffs have shifted with the seasons.

For a decade it was demand. Then over-hiring. Then tariffs. Now AI. What was a footnote in restructuring announcements two years ago is now the headline. The bend is global. The exposure, for India, is structural.

Our IT-BPM industry, our captive global capability centres, our remote-services export engine (the long backbone of urban middle-class formation in this country) sit precisely in the layer most directly substitutable by current-generation AI.

The story is moving faster than the technology. Every great industrial transition has, sooner or later, produced its own social contract.

The British Factory Acts followed the mills. Trade adjustment programmes followed the post-war opening of borders.

INDIAN EXPERIENCE

Closer home, the cotton mills of Bombay closed through the 1990s; over two lakh workers in Girangaon were displaced; the mills became shopping arcades and luxury towers; the workers became security guards, hawkers and names on a Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) register. There was no transition architecture. There was severance. The two are still routinely confused. We are now several quarters into the AI transition. The contract has not been written. The damage is being attributed before it has been measured.

At Greyhound Research, we have spent the better part of this year tracking the gap between what corporates are saying about AI and what enterprises are actually delivering. According to Greyhound Pulse, nearly four in five enterprises now use AI in at least one business function. Two-thirds use generative AI regularly. The numbers describe a revolution. They do not describe a return.

Greyhound Pulse also shows that fewer than one in five can point to a measurable, enterprise-wide profitability impact. Not pilots. Not anecdotes. Earnings. The productivity gains are real but narrow, concentrated in high-skill services and finance, uneven across the long tail of mid-market firms. The earnings-call version of AI is smoother than the real one. Adoption is not value. Pilots are not production. Headlines are not evidence.

In a recent board conversation with an Indian IT services firm, the framing was telling. AI was not, on closer examination, the cause of the proposed workforce action. It was the cover. A long deferred restructuring, repeatedly resisted in better quarters, could finally be announced. The technology had supplied not a mandate, but permission. Variations of that conversation are now happening in boardrooms across the globe.

JOB LOSSES

Across our Greyhound Fieldnotes engagements globally, the pattern is consistent. Head-count compression is concentrated in service operations, back offices, clerical processing, customer support and junior knowledge work, even as engineering, product and applied AI roles continue to grow.

This is not displacement. It is the quiet removal of the lower rungs of the ladder.

Any layoff above a material threshold that cites AI, automation or transformation should trigger standardised disclosure, routed through the MCA or SEBI

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), roughly one in four workers globally now faces some generative AI exposure. Women are over-represented in the highest-risk category. The young, seeking their first high-skill job, face the steepest squeeze of all. This is not a job apocalypse. It is something subtler and more durable. It is the slow barricading of the door marked first decent job.

The American WARN Act requires advance notice of mass layoffs but does not require disclosure of AI as a cause. The European AI Act treats AI used in hiring and termination as high-risk, but does not yet govern the broader corporate claim that AI made a redundancy necessary. Most jurisdictions remain in soft-law mode. Guidelines. Ethics frameworks. Voluntary codes. Soft law is dignified in print. It tends to evaporate the moment it meets an earnings call.

India has neither WARN-equivalent disclosure nor a comprehensive AI Act. The AI Governance and Economic Group (AIGEG) constituted earlier this month is institutional architecture, not statute. We have the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947, designed for an industrial economy that no longer reflects how most Indians earn their living. None of it asks the question that now matters most.

TRUTH IN ATTRIBUTION

Was AI actually responsible? Or was AI the alibi? What governance now requires is not reinvention. It is resolve. Five moves are needed. Truth in attribution. Any layoff above a material threshold that cites AI, automation or transformation should trigger standardised disclosure, routed through the existing Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) and Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) corporate-disclosure architecture rather than a new regulator. Which functions. Which systems. Pilot or production. Which baseline metrics.

What share via attrition versus dismissal. Misstatement or omission should attract civil penalties scaled to the size of the workforce action, drawing on the same architecture SEBI already operates against inaccurate corporate filings. Without disclosure, AI is not a cause. It is a brand.

Where AI is the stated rationale for major cuts, an independent audit of capability, task fit and human oversight should be a precondition, not a postscript. Where the audit finds that claimed productivity gain does not match proposed workforce reduction, regulatory disclosure and a mandatory consultation period should follow automatically.

The IndiaAI Mission and NITI Aayog have already begun the institutional groundwork. We require this discipline of pharmaceuticals, banks and aircraft. An advisory audit is theatre. A binding one is governance. The architecture must move from passive notice to affirmative obligation on large employers. Funded redeployment. Apprenticeships. Wage insurance.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), working alongside the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and the Skill India architecture, has the rails.

What is missing is the obligation to use them when AI is the stated cause of cuts. Protection for the entry-level pipeline. Where firms use AI to compress junior hiring, offsetting investment in graduate intake and apprenticeships in exposed occupations should be required. The long-run cost is not today's redundancy. It is the absent ladder for the next cohort. India should build its own, tracking role-level exposure, hiring freezes, severance patterns and regional concentration in customer operations, finance back offices and early-career software roles.

The labour market has not yet broken under AI. That is precisely why this is the moment to act, not the reason to wait. The historical pattern, from the British Factory Acts to Girangaon, is unambiguous: governments arrive late, scope narrowly, and write the social contract only after the damage is too large to deny. There is no rule that obliges us to repeat it.

The writer is the Chief Analyst at Greyhound Research (part of The House Of Greyhound), a global technology research, advisory, consulting & education firm

thehindu businessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

May 1, 2006

Burmans hike holding in Punjab Tractors to 12.5%

The Delhi-based Burman family, which surprised the market last November by purchasing 11.19 per cent stake in Punjab Tractors Ltd (PTL), has increased its shareholding in the tractor company to about 12.5 per cent in recent weeks through purchases in the open market. This brings it within sniffing distance from the threshold limit of 15 per cent required for an open offer.

NTPC scouts for blocks in Egypt, Australia

NTPC Ltd has kicked off the process of scouting for oil and gas exploration blocks abroad, with plans being firmed up to pick up stake in Egypt and Australia.

'Bharti plan for 74 pc FDI cap okay'

Paving the way for a possible increase in the foreign direct investment (FDI) stake in Bharti Airtel, the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) has taken a view that the company's proposal to in crease the FDI cap up to 74 per cent is in line with existing laws. FIPB has, however, said in an internal note that Bharti's proposal may be considered for approval, subject to the comments of the Department of Telecom.

Lagarde signals ECB to consider June hike after latest hold

Jana Randow
Mark Schroers
Alexander Weber

ECB President Christine Lagarde signalled the European Central Bank will consider a possible interest-rate hike in June after policymakers debated and rejected the idea on Thursday.

"We made an informed decision on the basis of yet insufficient information," Lagarde said. "We debated the decision that we have unanimously taken today, but we also debated at length, and in depth, a decision to possibly hike."

Asked whether the June meeting will bring a rate increase — as investors and analysts currently expect — she said the next six weeks "will be the right time" to assess the economy "in order to make an informed decision on verified and revisited information."

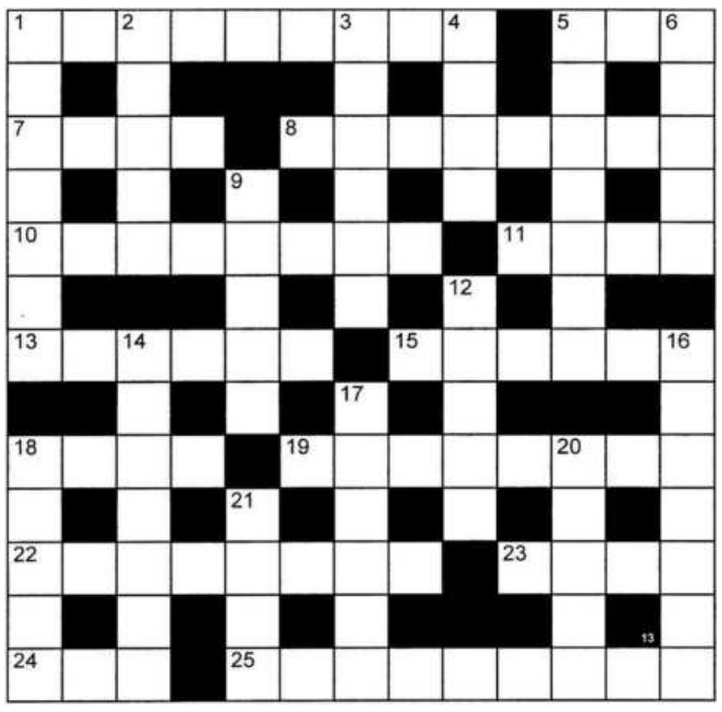
Officials haven't so far seen convincing evidence in the data of the need to tighten monetary policy, with the ramp-up in oil and natural gas costs "certainly" not yet triggering so-called second round effects, according to Lagarde. Growth in the 21-nation economy, meanwhile, is starting to suffer. The ECB isn't alone in holding fire: The Federal Reserve sat tight on Wednesday and the Bank of England decided against a move earlier on Thursday. "The upside risks to inflation and the downside risks to growth have intensified," the ECB said in a statement as it left the deposit rate at 2 per cent, where it's been since June 2025. "The Governing Council remains well positioned to navigate the current uncertainty." The ECB is also mindful of the blow to output, with data published shortly before its rate announcement showing first-quarter gross domestic product grew by a less-than-expected 0.1 per cent in the euro zone — feeding stagflation fears, though Lagarde played down that idea. "We don't apply stagflation — that flashy term — to the circumstances that we have," she said. "We really think that it's associated with with the 70s situation."



ECB President Christine Lagarde REUTERS

Markets reckon officials will focus on the upswing in prices, which jumped by 3 per cent in April — the quickest since the autumn of 2023 — due to the ramp-up in energy costs. BLOOMBERG

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2670



EASY

ACROSS

01. Breaking up of food in the body (9)
05. Take late meal (3)
07. Ready money (4)
08. Made to go without (8)
10. Fungus (8)
11. Viva voce (4)
13. Work; socialist (6)
15. Left untilled (6)
18. Ruin, destiny (4)
19. Cud-chewing animal (8)
22. Orders (8)
23. At one time (4)
24. Sailor (3)
25. Wanders off the point (9)

DOWN

01. Counting system based on ten (7)
02. Sudden blasts of wind (5)
03. Refrigerator (3-3)
04. The standard (4)
05. Some, not many (7)
06. Foot-control (5)
09. Criminal deception (5)
12. Proportion (5)
14. A howling mistake (7)
16. See crime etc committed (7)
17. Sporting canine (3-3)
18. Old European coin (5)
20. Old Indian coins (5)
21. Guardian's charge (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

01. A way to dispose of food, on a personal basis (9)
05. Have something to eat when Manx cat is back (3)
07. Sort of money that was a small Eastern coin (4)
08. Made to go without, short pair joined four indeed (8)
10. There is space, after so much sentimentality, for fungus (8)
11. Test is alternative to a novice driver (4)
13. Socialist rating to look sullen about (6)
15. First of the farmers to let it lie so without cultivation (6)
18. Destruction of a party with honour (4)
19. It is a milk-producer, which is curious in a worker (8)
22. Military divisions one exercises supreme authority over (8)
23. As soon as there's no return, cite it as being missing (4)
24. Something black that always rattles the leaders (3)
25. Appreciate long hair with top off if one wanders off point (9)

DOWN

01. I'm laced in a way that is systematic in counting (7)
02. Blasts of wind caused by sulphur in the intestines (5)
03. I fight in the ring round Council of Europe to get cooler (3-3)
04. What is usual for Mr No in another form (4)
05. More than one somehow leaves right inside it (7)
06. Its sole application is to make something work (5)
09. Criminal activity gave psychologist a change of heart (5)
12. There's no end to the allocation of how much to how many (5)
14. Nineteenth century dress was an embarrassing blunder (7)
16. See what's wrong? (7)
17. Sporting animal right out of the ground starts growling (3-3)
18. What 19 chews up at the end used to be spent in Europe (5)
20. Old Indian 7 used as an alternative around the North (5)
21. A bolt or a bar for custody, perhaps (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2669

ACROSS 1. Peruse 4. Census 9. Netting 10. Strip 11. Yard 12. Bear 13. Mar 15. Sort 16. Snob 19. Top 21. Gold 22. Thou 24. Ingot 25. Gallant 26. Gantry 27. Ceased

DOWN 1. Penny-farthing 2. Retires 3. Slip 5. Ensuring 6. Scrim 7. Superannuated 8. Agree 14. Brighter 17. Beheads 18. Flags 20. Pagan 23. Flee

Gulf within

Differences with Saudi Arabia and Iran's attacks led to the UAE's exit from OPEC

The UAE has withdrawn from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), a cartel that it joined in 1967, and OPEC+. It was OPEC's fourth-largest producer (3.12 million barrels per day) and its third-largest exporter (2.88 mbd) in 2025, behind Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The Emiratis clearly sought to free themselves of production constraints set largely by the cartel's dominant producer, Saudi Arabia. With significant spare capacity, the Emiratis believe that they are better off with the autonomy to ramp up exports, a capability now constrained by the de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the largest disruption to oil supply in history, following U.S.-Israel attacks on Iran. Brent crude prices barely budged on the announcement, revealing how heavily the Strait crisis weighs on the market. But once the UAE weathers this crisis, whether through the Strait's reopening, or by routing more crude through a pipeline bypassing Hormuz, analysts estimate that it could lift production by roughly a million barrels a day. While Saudi Arabia, OPEC's bellwether, has remained chary of over-supply and sought to keep prices high, the UAE has long pushed for higher production for revenues that it intends to funnel into AI infrastructure and other diversification projects.

Unsaid in the UAE's move is also its frustration with what it sees as a lack of cartel-wide coordination in responding to Iran's missile and drone attacks on Gulf oil and military facilities; Iran is also an OPEC member. The Emiratis have also differed sharply with the Saudis on external interventions: in Yemen and Sudan. The UAE also seeks closer ties with Israel than most Gulf states, which remain uncomfortable with any thaw given Israel's genocidal actions in Gaza and its attacks on Iran and Lebanon. The U.S., a non-OPEC member, and the world's largest oil producer at 13.6 mbd, has long viewed the cartel's price-setting unfavourably, and President Donald Trump has repeatedly pressed it to pump more. The UAE perhaps calculates that aligning with Washington will yield benefits for its production and pipeline ambitions, though Mr. Trump's transactional and mercurial foreign policy offers little guarantee. The UAE's exit also reflects a structural issue: OPEC's share of global crude dropped to 36.7% in 2025, and with Hormuz shut, pricing power has shifted to American producers in the short term. OPEC will continue, but with a reduced ability to set prices. For net oil-importing countries such as India, however, the immediate threat is not the cartel's unravelling but the "double blockade" in the Strait of Hormuz and the fragile Iran-U.S. ceasefire. Unless a new geopolitical détente emerges between Iran and the Gulf states, volatility will persist, threatening energy security regardless of what unfolds within OPEC.

Embers in the air

Seasonal fires need long-term management, not just preparedness

The Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu and the adjoining forest divisions of Mudumalai, Coimbatore and Erode have been dealing with wildfires that escalated to being a crisis requiring the assistance of the Indian Air Force. Even so, the intense fires are not anomalous, but an acute manifestation of a seasonal event. Parsons Valley and Pykara in the Nilgiris have been worst-hit while significant blazes were also reported from the Singara and Masinagudi ranges. One major blaze broke out in Wenlock Downs and spread rapidly. February to May is fire season in this region, and in April, officials said that high heat and strong winds created a "conducive environment"; the wind, in particular, carried embers over pre-existing firelines and partly explains why this season has been a breakout. Some fires also burnt hotter and for longer in Pykara because of the accumulated biomass and invasive undergrowth, and took longer to be doused. The Nilgiris feature steep terrains and limited road access, slowing the movement of crew and equipment to particular spots. This said, most fires also have a human hand. Tribespeople gather wood in the area to make brooms – an activity closely monitored by officials – and herders have also been known to burn dry grassland, forcing grasses to regrow and become fodder. The latter together with discarded smoking paraphernalia are known accidental causes. This year, one blaze entered the Coimbatore division after Kerala forest staff began a controlled burn allegedly without coordinating this with Tamil Nadu. Some officials also expressed suspicion that miscreants deliberately set fires in the Reserve, allegedly over the Forest Department's failure to address tiger-related deaths meaningfully, but local communities are usually the first-responders to these fires.

While none of these causes is new, their confluence this year with the hot summer is likely to have stoked the intense fires. Indeed, climate variability – rather than climate change alone – is also raising the baseline risk. Keeping other causes fixed, a hotter, drier summer automatically leads to fires that threaten the best-laid plans more. Even this year, authorities had begun planning in March, setting up control rooms and firelines, ensuring animals' access to water outside human-settled areas, clearing weeds, and mounting awareness campaigns. However, many activities that add to the fire risk remain tied to peoples' livelihoods and traditional practices, so they cannot be eliminated without suitable alternatives. Taken together, managing the region's seasonal fires is becoming less about what can be planned for in the short term and more about what can be factored in over the long term.

On May Day, a workforce in India without a floor



Rejimon Kuttappan

A workers' rights expert

This year, May Day arrives not as a commemoration, but as a diagnosis. Within a single fortnight last month, two events clarified the state of Indian labour more sharply than any official review.

On April 10, thousands of garment workers in Noida's Phase 2 Hosiery Complex stepped out of nearly 300 factories and onto the streets, demanding a minimum monthly wage of ₹20,000. On April 14, a high-pressure steam tube ruptured at Vedanta's 1,200 MW Singhitarai thermal plant in Chhattisgarh, killing 20 workers and injuring 15. One protest was about the price of labour; the other, about the price of being alive while performing it. Both answer the same question: what has India's labour reform actually produced?

The Noida strike began with a specific arithmetic grievance. On April 9, the Haryana government notified a 35% hike in minimum wages, raising unskilled monthly wages from ₹11,274 to ₹15,220, with effect from April 1, 2026. Across the border in Noida, unskilled workers were earning roughly ₹435 a day, compared to ₹585 in Haryana for identical work. Protesters at the Hosiery Complex – employees of different companies – assembled in B Block, blocked traffic, and refused to disperse without written assurances.

By April 13, the administration had deployed over 1,200 personnel, including the Provincial Armed Constabulary and Rapid Action Force; lathi charges and stone-pelting followed, and nearly 400 people were detained. Under pressure, the Uttar Pradesh government announced an interim 21% hike, setting wages at ₹13,690 for unskilled workers in Gautam Buddh Nagar and ₹16,868 for skilled workers. The workers rejected it; their demand remained ₹20,000.

Between pay and survival

The gap between ₹16,868 and ₹20,000 is not a bargaining position. It is the difference between what a family pays for rent, gas, and school fees in the NCR and what the state is willing to concede as a dignified minimum.

Four days later, the furnace at Singhitarai did its own counting. A preliminary report from the Chief Boiler Inspector, backed by the Forensic Science Laboratory in Sakti, Chhattisgarh, attributed the explosion to 'excessive fuel buildup inside the furnace', which produced pressure surges that displaced critical piping. The probe flagged "repeated negligence in equipment upkeep" by Vedanta and its contractor NGSL (NTPC GE Power Services Pvt. Ltd.). A first information report has been registered against Vedanta's Chairman Anil Agarwal, the plant manager, and others under Sections 106(1), 289 and 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

The dead were not Vedanta's own employees; they worked for a subcontractor. This, too, is a pattern.

From Noida's streets to furnace rooms in Chhattisgarh, India's new labour regime delivers for employers — and for workers, what it long warned of

Chhattisgarh alone has recorded 296 industrial deaths over three years. Across India, the Directorate General of Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes recorded 3,331 factory deaths between 2018 and 2020 – three a day – yet only 14 people were imprisoned under the Factories Act during the same period. The global union IndustriALL counted over 400 workplace fatalities in India in 2024, with the chemical sector alone accounting for 220. In July 2025, an explosion at Sigachi Industries in Telangana had killed 44 people, mostly migrant workers, at a plant that the State fire department found lacked basic fire alarms and heat sensors.

A structural shift

These are not disconnected episodes. They are the operating conditions of an economy that, on November 21, 2025, formally adopted the four labour codes. In a single stroke, and without any transition period, the four codes – the Code on Wages, the Industrial Relations Code, the Social Security Code and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHWC) Code – replaced 29 central labour laws. The Indian Labour Conference, the country's apex tripartite forum, had not been convened since 2015.

The new regime raises the threshold for prior government permission for layoffs, retrenchment, and closure from 100 workers to 300 under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, enabling firms below that size – an estimated majority of India's factory units – to retrench workers without administrative scrutiny. A peer-reviewed analysis in the National Library of Medicine archive notes that this merely restores the pre-1982 threshold, reversing an Emergency-era protection enacted after a wave of mass layoffs affected over half a million workers.

The OSHWC Code, 2020, simultaneously raises the statutory definition of a 'factory' from 10 workers in a factory with power to 20, and from 20 workers in a factory without power to 40, lifting an entire tier of smaller workplaces – where India's textile, garment, metal, hosiery, and food-processing clusters are concentrated – out of mandatory safety oversight. Labour economists warn that this technical reclassification has a profound impact on worker coverage, since a majority of India's small manufacturing units employ fewer than 20 workers.

The inspection architecture has been similarly diluted. The OSHWC Code replaces unannounced inspections with an 'Inspector-cum-Facilitator' model, combined with randomised, web-based allocation through the Shram Suvidha portal and employer self-certification – a shift that, as the International Labour Organization's India Labour Inspection Profile notes, may contravene the requirement for independent, unannounced inspections under ILO Convention No. 81.

Procedural hurdles for collective action have also stiffened. Under the IR Code, no worker may strike without 60 days' prior notice, flash strikes are prohibited outright, and strikes are barred during and for weeks after any conciliation or tribunal proceeding. "Mass casual leave" by more than 50% of a workforce is now deemed a strike. Trade unions argue that, in combination, these provisions make lawful industrial action virtually impossible to organise, completing the regime's pro-employer tilt.

A reform that raises statutory thresholds in almost every operative clause, is not rationalising protection. It is removing it. The enforcement chapters read more like a facilitation framework than a compliance regime.

Ten central trade unions, excluding the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), observed a "Black Day" on November 26, 2025, calling the codes a "deceptive fraud on the working class". Their objection was not sentimental. When the legal definition of a factory excludes the smallest and most dangerous workplaces; when inspectors announce their visits through a portal; when retrenchment requires no permission below 300 workers; and when strikes are bound by procedural tightropes, the predictable result is the Noida street and the Singhitarai shop floor.

The wage stagnation that drove workers from Motherson Sumi and Richa Global into a baton charge, and the deferred maintenance that caused a boiler tube to rupture, are not separate problems. They are two ends of the same system.

Old laws, new realities

There is an honest public case for labour reform. The Factories Act of 1948 is older than most Indian States; the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1923 predates the Constitution. A regulatory architecture built for the industrial economy of late-colonial India – of jute mills, textile mills, and railway workshops – cannot plausibly govern a workforce that today includes gig workers, platform workers, and digital-media workers. No serious observer, and no Indian trade union, disputes that consolidation was overdue. The question is not whether the law should have changed; it is what it changed into.

Consolidation is not dilution, and simplification is not exemption.

On May Day, the test for any labour framework is modest: does it allow a worker to earn enough to live, and to live through the shift? In April 2026, the answer from Noida and Singhitarai is the same. In Noida, police fired tear gas at factory workers protesting for a living wage as fuel-driven inflation outpaced wages. In Singhitarai, a boiler tube burst at a Vedanta power plant on April 14, releasing 600°C steam onto workers eating lunch; 20 were killed, all contract workers employed through a business partner rather than as direct employees. Neither a wage that sustains life, nor a workplace that preserves it. A regime that cannot deliver the second while pricing out the first has not been rationalised. It has been rewritten against the very people it was meant to protect.

India's sprint beyond the dairy red line to the Pacific



Ritu Srivastava

Associate Professor, Economics, K.J. Somaiya Institute of Management

India concluded a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with New Zealand in December 2025, at a time marked by fractured supply chains and rising protectionist tendencies among nations. Guided by the vision of "Viksit Bharat", India has recalibrated its foreign trade policy, transitioning from a cautious, tariff-focused negotiator to a strategic, high-velocity partner. This shift characterises a clear departure from the historical "slow burn" model of trade diplomacy. There are six key wins for India in this FTA, as it aligns with the Viksit Bharat blueprint for trade policy based on strategic autonomy and global integration."

India's rapid FTA execution

First, this pact is one of India's fastest-concluded FTAs, with negotiations officially launched in March 2025 and concluded in December 2025. This gives India a first-mover advantage in Oceania while also signalling its swift institutional integration and ambitious posture to other partners. This fresh display of efficiency and the ability to compress negotiation cycle times is a new deliverable from India to its trade partners.

Second, this FTA embeds talent mobility as a core economic pillar with the "Yoga and Māori" reciprocity between the two nations. There are many provisions for human capital outflow, including professional pathways, youth engagement and bi-directional exchange of traditional medicine. The FTA allows for a separate annual quota of 5,000 professional visas for skilled Indian professionals in high-skill jobs such as IT, engineering, and health care, with a tenure period of up to three years. An annual quota of 1,000 work-and-holiday visas will also be permitted for young Indians, aligning India's workforce with New Zealand's age requirements. Most importantly, it is the first bilateral reciprocity agreement that will allow international recognition of India's Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) system along with the native Māori health practices of New Zealand.

The Free Trade Agreement with New Zealand reflects India's evolving trade diplomacy strategy

Third, the FTA lays down a commitment of capital inflow of around $20 billion over a period of 15 years in high-priority sectors such as agri-tech and food processing, renewable energy, education and health-care management, wherein New Zealand's technology and capital will be the much-needed catalyst for growth. This influx will also strengthen the "Make in India" programme.

Strategically shielded

Fourth, India has been so far successful in negotiating for an agreement which protects one of the sensitive sectors of India's economy – "dairy". The mechanics of the pact include the exclusion of fluid milk, cheese, and yogurt from duty concessions. India will grant progressive market access, on a duty-free basis, for infant formula and high-value-added dairy products, over a seven-year period, allowing domestic nutritional firms access to quality raw materials. The pact proposes a "Ring Fenced Value Addition Framework" to boost downstream processing of manufacturing. Under this agreement, New Zealand firms are permitted to import dairy products from India duty-free for manufacturing purposes, if 100% of the products are exported out of India. The pact uses an advanced tariff rate quota mechanism, providing for a minimum import price and seasonal constraints on select commodities such as apples, honey, and kiwifruit.

The fifth win is that New Zealand has pledged to change its legislation within 18 months. This change will provide Indian Geographical Indication (GI) products with protection such as that offered by the European Union. As a result, brands such as Darjeeling tea and Basmati rice will receive top-quality legal protection in Oceania.

Securing a South Pacific foothold

Last, this FTA with New Zealand is increasingly significant, as it creates a geopolitical hedge for India and opens new markets, with New Zealand serving as a gateway to Oceania and the Pacific Island countries (PICs). By adopting New Zealand's trade regulations and norms, India secures a logistical centre and "regulatory reference point" in the South Pacific. Through this trade agreement, India demonstrates its ability to meet Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) standards and sets a precedent for further negotiations with other partners. The FTA signals India's ability to open and engage in global supply chains while maintaining a balance between market access and domestic protection.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The UAE's move

The United Arab Emirates' shift away from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries should be seen less as a rupture and more as a recalibration of energy sovereignty within an increasingly fragmented geopolitical order. While the broader backdrop includes tensions involving the United States, Israel and Iran, the immediate driver lies in the UAE's effort to align its expanding production capacity with strategic autonomy. Energy is no longer insulated from security alignments; it now reflects shifting partnerships, contested regional influence, and the desire for fiscal flexibility in an uncertain global economy.

For India, the implications are nuanced. A loosening of OPEC discipline may create room for more diversified and competitive sourcing, particularly with the UAE enhancing India's bargaining power in energy procurement. However, this potential advantage is offset by heightened volatility in West Asia, where instability around key maritime routes such as the Strait of Hormuz can quickly translate into supply risk.

India's strategic interest, therefore, lies in balance: leveraging a more fluid oil market to secure diversified, cost-effective supplies while simultaneously strengthening energy security through strategic reserves, supply diversification, and carefully calibrated diplomacy across competing regional blocs.

Vijay Singh Adhikari,
Nainital, Uttarakhand

Exit polls

Far from being harmless indicators, exit polls have increasingly become tools that distort public perception and weaken democratic seriousness. These polls are often based on questionable sampling methods and incomplete data. Yet, they are presented with an air of authority. This creates a misleading narrative of certainty even before the official results are declared. Such premature conclusions risk influencing public sentiment and may even affect voter behaviour in multi-phase elections.

Equally alarming is the role of the media which amplifies these projections through sensational debates and speculative analysis.

Instead of encouraging informed discussion on policies and governance, attention is diverted to a numbers game driven by guesswork. It is imperative that stricter regulations be imposed on the dissemination of exit polls, and that media organisations exercise greater responsibility. Democracy deserves thoughtful engagement, not theatrics built on uncertain predictions.

Nagarajamani M.V.,
Hyderabad

Teen Digest

Congratulations to *The Hindu* on the launch of *The Hindu Teen Digest,* the "refreshed weekend offering for teenagers". This thoughtful initiative for readers who will be tomorrow's leaders is a commendable investment in the nation's future.

T.S. Karthik,
Chennai

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

Should the PIL jurisdiction be reconsidered?



Anuj Bhuwania

Professor of law and author of 'Courting the People: Public Interest Litigation in Post-Emergency India'



Talha Abdul Rahman

Advocate based in Delhi

PARLEY

Public Interest Litigation (PIL) emerged in the 1970s as a transformative judicial innovation aimed at widening access to justice for the poor and the marginalised. This was achieved by relaxing the strict rules of standing to permit representative actions, and by broadening the scope of judicial notice to allow courts to take *suo motu* cognisance of public issues and convert them into litigation. Over time, however, concerns have been raised about the misuse of this jurisdiction. More recently, during the ongoing proceedings in the Sabarimala reference case, the Union government has urged the Supreme Court to reconsider the PIL framework altogether, citing the rise of "agenda-driven litigation." Should the PIL jurisdiction be reconsidered? Anuj Bhuwania and Talha Abdul Rahman discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Aaratrika Bhaumik**.

Where should courts draw the line on who can file PILs?

Anuj Bhuwania: The evolution of PIL can be traced to the Supreme Court decisions of the late 1970s, such as *Hussainara Khatoon & Ors. vs. Home Secretary, State of Bihar* (1979), which marked a departure from the traditional doctrine of *locus standi*, under which only an aggrieved party could approach the court, towards permitting representative standing. This enabled third parties to institute proceedings on behalf of marginalised groups unable to access justice due to systemic barriers. Over time, however, there has been a discernible shift towards a broader model of citizen standing, where individuals approach the court not as representatives of affected groups but in their own capacity as members of the citizenry. This transition has led courts to engage with issues in an open-ended and, at times, indeterminate manner. In my view, the court's jurisdiction ought, as far as possible, to be invoked by those who are directly affected or, at the very least, by those with a clear interest in the matter.

Talha Abdul Rahman: I do not believe that the rules of *locus standi* should be reverted to their earlier, restrictive form. The structural barriers that justified its relaxation decades ago remain largely intact, and courts continue to be inaccessible to the poor and marginalised. For instance, individuals whose homes are demolished by the state as a purported punitive measure may often lack the means or capacity to seek judicial redress. In such circumstances, if third parties step forward to challenge these demolitions on the ground that due process has not been followed, they ought to be accorded standing. This is not merely a representative action, but an assertion of a constitutional guarantee – that the rule of law must be upheld in its full measure, even where the harm is not personally suffered.



The Supreme Court of India.

PILs often involve complex, polycentric disputes. Do they risk judicial overreach and the exclusion of key stakeholders?

TAR: The concern is valid. There have been instances where courts, while hearing such matters, have had to respond to executive inaction. This then raises a recurring question: do they possess the institutional competence to navigate such issues? In my view, they do, particularly when assisted by able counsel and robust adversarial presentation. At the same time, courts have also consciously refrained from encroaching upon the domains reserved for the executive or the legislature. For instance, on April 29, the Supreme Court declined to direct the enactment of specific laws on hate speech, instead leaving any legislative redress to the appropriate authorities. This reflects an important reality – there are limits to what the courts can do.

AB: In the past, there have been several instances where courts, while hearing PILs, have proceeded without hearing those directly affected. This was particularly evident in a series of cases before the Delhi High Court in the mid-2000s concerning slum evictions, where PILs filed by resident welfare associations sought the removal of slums, but the slum dwellers themselves were not impleaded as parties. Similarly, the Supreme Court's handling of pollution-related litigation over the past four decades, much of it arising from PILs filed by environmentalist M.C. Mehta, highlights the limits of judicial intervention in addressing

> There have been instances where courts have had to respond to executive inaction. This then raises a recurring question: do they possess the institutional competence to navigate such issues?
> TALHA ABDUL RAHMAN

problems of such scale and complexity.

How can courts address the rise of 'ambush PILs' filed to preclude genuine claims?

AB: Increasingly, there have been instances of litigants rushing to court with poorly drafted petitions, often with the intention of securing an early dismissal and thereby precluding genuine litigants from approaching the court. These petitions are frequently driven by partisan motives. This is deeply concerning, as it risks prompting courts to deal with such matters in a cursory manner, without fully engaging with the complexities they warrant. In my view, this is not merely an issue of abuse of jurisdiction, but a problem rooted in the very nature of PIL itself.

TAR: It is often difficult to distinguish an 'ambush PIL' from one that raises genuine grievances. Yet, their proliferation has fostered an environment of suspicion, with courts increasingly questioning the *bona fides* of petitioners. While this may not fully address systemic concerns, there are procedural safeguards. The Supreme Court Rules, 2013, require that a writ petition contain a specific pleading identifying the fundamental rights alleged to have been violated. In the absence of such a disclosure, the Registry may decline to list the petition. Courts have also imposed costs to deter such filings.

Have courts ensured meaningful compliance with the directives issued in PILs?

TAR: Ensuring compliance with the directives in PILs often depends on the Bench. Where a judge is inclined to see a matter through, the case is kept pending, interim directions are issued, and compliance is periodically monitored. However, there has been a growing tendency in the Supreme Court to step back once a final judgment is delivered, leaving enforcement to the High Courts and trial courts. This is where gaps begin to emerge. In my view, the Supreme Court ought to retain some degree of oversight post-judgment, including initiating contempt proceedings for non-compliance.

AB: There are clear violations of several important directives issued by the Supreme Court in PILs, often without any recourse to contempt proceedings. This tends to create a culture of impunity, allowing authorities to disregard court orders with little consequence. That said, the problem is more endemic and not confined to the PIL jurisdiction.

Should guidelines be laid down on the role of the amicus curiae (a lawyer appointed to assist the court)?

AB: The role accorded to an *amicus* in PIL proceedings raises several concerns. In dealing with complex cases, courts have, at times, expanded the role of the *amicus* to an extent that risks diluting basic procedural safeguards, particularly the right of affected parties to be heard. For instance, in *T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad vs Union of India*, which originated as a PIL to protect forest areas in the Nilgiris and Kerala, the *amicus*, at various stages, was filing applications for directions and had effectively stepped into the role of the petitioner's counsel. The issuance of guidelines in this regard would be a welcome step.

TAR: Typically, courts appoint lawyers of a certain competence and integrity as *amici*, with the expectation that they will assist the court in navigating the pleadings and arguments in a case. However, the role of the *amicus* is not uniform and can vary across jurisdictions. In my view, an *amicus* should refrain from taking sides and instead assist the court by fairly presenting the arguments on all sides. Given how fluid the role is, clearer guidelines are needed.

What reforms are needed to strengthen the PIL jurisdiction?

TAR: One requirement for entertaining a PIL should be that it is well-researched and confined to challenging enacted laws or executive action or inaction, rather than inviting the court to make policy choices. For instance, a petitioner should not approach the court seeking the enactment of a Uniform Civil Code.

AB: We need to return to the fundamental idea that PILs are an extrapolation of the principle underlying *habeas corpus* –that parties who cannot, for unavoidable reasons, appear before the court are represented by someone else. Only then will PILs retain their legitimacy.

To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

NOTEBOOK

Trade unionists and stories beyond labour rights

Leaders who interact with workers and are engaged in long-term activism often have an astute reading of politics on the ground

Meera Srinivasan

When I first met Bala Tampoe at his sea-facing office in Colombo, my aim was simply to get a perspective on the labour conditions in Sri Lanka from a senior trade unionist. He was 91 then and had led the Ceylon Mercantile Union (CMU) as its General Secretary for 65 years. He spoke at length on the history of the island's labour movement, and about his own journey and disillusionment with the Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP). He took me through historic moments such as the Hartal of 1953 and the systemic attack on labour rights after economic liberalisation in 1977.

"Comrade Bala", as he was widely known, was fiercely critical of the Mahinda Rajapaksa administration's militarised response to the residents of Weliweriya – located in Colombo's neighbouring Gampaha district – who were protesting for clean drinking water. Army personnel opened fire and at least three residents were killed. "In this country if you block a highway even for the most elementary reasons, the penalty is death!" he told me in that interview. I understood the import of his point on military violence in the country's Sinhala-majority south, when Mr.Rajapaksa lost the presidential election in January 2015, after a decade in power. He was defeated not only because minorities rejected him, or because the opposition had wide appeal. In that significant election in post-war Sri Lanka, many within the Sinhalese community had decided they were done with the leader they once backed unconditionally. In retrospect, I felt Mr. Tampoe had begun reading that sentiment in 2013. He passed away in September 2014.

In my reporting experience, I have noticed that many trade unionists, interacting with workers and engaged in long-term activism, have an astute reading of politics on the ground. Their movements may have lost steam over time, but their ability to read political dynamics was intact. That is why I enjoyed talking to Linus Jayatilleke, president of the United Federation of Labour. I first met him in a campaign for land rights for Malaiyaha Tamils in Sri Lanka's hill country. While invested in local struggles, he was also very interested in labour movements elsewhere and constantly looked for information and contacts. He would often point to connections and differences in struggles, offering a sharp political lesson in solidarity and internationalism in a casual chat over tea.

In my early reporting days in Chennai, I encountered R. Geetha of the Unorganised Workers Federation. Regardless of which party was in power, she was focused on foregrounding workers' rights. A great communicator like many other effective leaders, she always had time to break down issues to a clueless cub reporter.

Another story that took me to worker organisations on both sides of the Palk Strait is the fisheries conflict which affected fishermen of northern Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. Amid reductive takes, leaders of fishermen's societies in Sri Lanka, and those I met through the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) along coastal Tamil Nadu, gave me a far more complex picture of the fisheries ecosystem, the political economy of the sector, and the crucial difference between affluent leaders who own destructive bottom trawlers and daily-waged labourers who risk their lives to bring in high profits for their employer.

Some reporting assignments have also led me to worker unions that are ethno-nationalist or averse to women in leadership positions. Even so, speaking to them has invariably given me useful insights into how a large segment of society is thinking. For reporters, listening to people and getting to know how they are thinking is a vital first step before understanding why they might think so. But there are scores of examples in history that clearly illustrate how we are all better off because of trade unions and worker movements – be it the 8-hour working day, civil rights, universal suffrage, or the abolition of child labour. May Day is a reminder of that.

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PICTURE OF THE WEEK

A barren walk



Scorching heat: People walk across the parched riverbed of the Bharathapuzha at Ottapalam, Palakkad, Kerala on Thursday. In Palakkad, the maximum temperature has crossed 41 degrees Celsius, while readings at two stations are nearing 40 degrees Celsius, indicating conditions akin to a heatwave. K. K. MUSTAFAH

FROM THE ARCHIVES
The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 1, 1976

Fire incidents in trains: sabotage not ruled out

New Delhi, April 30: The spate of fire incidents in the suburban trains in Bombay was the subject matter of a short notice question in the Lok Sabha to-day.

The Minister of State for Railways, Mr. Mohammed Shafi Qureshi, who faced a barrage of supplementaries from agitated Congress members assured them that there was as yet no evidence of any sabotage. At the same time, he made it clear to the house that he did not want to rule out sabotage behind these fire incidents. He told Mr. B. Dhamankar (Cong) who had tabled the question that "special immediate measures" had been taken to prevent fire incidents and to minimise the damage – Samachar.

Mr. Dhamankar said he had made a first hand study of the situation in Bombay and had gathered the impression during a recent tour of his constituency in Thana that these fire incidents had shaken the confidence of the commuters who now tended to become panicky and jump off running trains at the sight of a mere spark. He suggested that the railway administration in consultation with the Home Ministry go deeper into the ramifications of the fire incidents.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 1, 1926

Russo-German Treaty

Rugby, April 30: Sir Ansten Chamberlain referred to the recently concluded treaty between Germany and Soviet Russia. He said, "I am not prepared at the moment to express the considered judgment until I have studied the document very seriously. But I shall study it in the hope that I shall find that the German Ministers who assured us that they would do nothing inconsistent with the achievements of Locarno have kept their word. I shall read the documents with the hope that I may find that the language is appropriate to the purposes which German Ministers sincerely entertain."

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Dilapidated school buildings demolished in Dehradun

56 The Dehradun district administration has demolished 56 dilapidated school buildings to ensure the safety of students and eight more are likely to be razed within a month, officials said on Thursday. A total of 64 condemned school buildings were identified. PTI

Percentage increase in India's marine fish catch in 2025

3 in per cent. India's marine fish production in 2025 rose by 3% to 35.7 lakh tonnes compared to the previous year, ICAR-CMFRI on Thursday said. According to an assessment by the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Tamil Nadu emerged as the top marine fish-producing State. PTI

Percentage growth of Taiwan's economy in the first quarter

13.70 in per cent. Taiwan's economy saw double-digit growth in the first three months of 2026 thanks to robust demand for artificial intelligence technology, data showed Thursday, despite concerns over the West Asia crisis. AFP

Number of Gaza activists 'kidnapped' by Israel

211 Organisers of a Gaza-bound aid flotilla said Israel's army had "kidnapped" 211 activists in a raid in international waters off Greece. Helene Coron, a spokeswoman for the Global Sumud France, that the operation had taken place near the island of Crete. AFP

Number of registered users on PhonePe as of April 29

700 in million. PhonePe announced that it has crossed the milestone of 700 million (70 crore) registered users on as of April 29. This highlights PhonePe's population-scale reach in India and the breadth of its digital platform offerings. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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How is the next UN chief being chosen?

Why is the role of Secretary-General important? Who are the candidates? What factors shape the choice? Why does this election matter now? What are the candidates' campaign priorities? What happens next?

EXPLAINER

Raja Karthikeya

The story so far:
The election of the next UN Secretary-General is underway. On April 21-22, four candidates – two women and two men – pitched their records of public service and leadership to the UN General Assembly in "informal, interactive dialogues".

Why is the role of Secretary-General important?
The UN Charter defines the Secretary-General as the UN's Chief Administrative Officer, who oversees the work of the UN Secretariat and fulfils "any other functions and duties entrusted" to them by the organisation's principal organs, including the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council. The Secretary-General also has the mandate to bring to the Security Council's attention any issue that threatens global peace and security.

Where needed, the Secretary-General has the authority to appoint "Personal Envoys" (as Antonio Guterres has now done for the current West Asia conflict).

Often described as the world's "chief diplomat," the Secretary-General is the face and voice of the UN, speaking as the world's conscience on issues ranging from the arms race in space and climate change to persistent inequality that hampers economic growth.

How is the Secretary-General elected?
The UN Charter states that the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council. This means that the Permanent Members of the Security Council – China, France, Russia, the U.K., and the U.S. – have a significant say in who gets elected.

What considerations play a role?
While the term of a Secretary-General is technically "discretionary," incumbents have, since 1981, voluntarily limited themselves to two terms. By custom, the post rotates among five regions of the world: Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. This is the turn of the latter. Within the region, there are dynamics at play, with Spanish-speaking Latin American countries and English-speaking Caribbean nations supporting different candidates.



Often described as the world's 'chief diplomat,' the Secretary-General is the voice of the UN. REUTERS

Who are the candidates?
The four candidates now officially in the race are: Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; Macky Sall, former President of Senegal; Rafael Grossi, Head of the International Atomic Energy Agency; and Rebecca Grynspan, Head of the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

Why is this election crucial?
Eighty years after its founding, the UN is facing a deep financial and political crisis. The Secretariat relies on mandatory "assessed contributions" collected from member states. Still, non-payment, partial payment, and delay in payment of dues by leading contributors have triggered an unprecedented financial situation.

The Security Council is paralysed by acrimony and persistent vetoes by the permanent members. The UN is also struggling to mobilise funds and troops for missions in places such as Haiti, and with host country relations in cases such as in Mali, where the UN mission was forced to withdraw.

Over the past decade, the UN played a key role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, advancing climate action through the Paris Agreement, and promoting sustainable development via the 2030 Agenda. However, recent conflicts in Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, Ukraine, and Iran have raised questions about its ability to prevent war – a central idea of the UN Charter. There are increasing calls for the UN to "return to basics" by focusing more on conflict resolution. The Sustainable Development Goals are now universal markers of developmental progress but there is rising concern that only 18% of the targets are on track to be met by 2030. Meanwhile, the humanitarian system is under severe strain due to multiple conflicts, intensifying disasters, and pressures on international humanitarian law. The next Secretary-General will have the unenviable task of not just administering, but rejuvenating the organisation.

What are the candidates' campaign priorities?
During their interactions with the General Assembly, Ms. Bachelet, Ms. Grynspan, and Mr. Sall all emphasised preventive diplomacy – the UN term for preventing conflicts through adroit behind-the-scenes parley with the stakeholders to the conflict. However, their approaches differ. Ms. Bachelet prioritised field presence, while Ms. Grynspan focused on merging the UN's work in the prevention of conflict with its work on human rights. Ms. Grynspan was arguably the most vocal on UN reform, proposing restructuring the Secretary-General's office within the first 100 days if elected. Among areas for priority action, Ms. Bachelet highlighted climate, Mr. Sall highlighted migration, and Mr. Grossi highlighted UN-World Bank relations. Ms. Grynspan stressed the need to protect least-developed nations from funding cuts.

All candidates committed to gender parity, while Ms. Bachelet emphasised improving geographic diversity within the UN workforce, a longstanding demand of developing countries. On the stasis in the Security Council, Ms. Grynspan and Mr. Sall said they would publicly call out permanent members of the council who violate international law, while Mr. Grossi promised to uphold the UN Charter. Ms. Bachelet said she will use the Secretary-General's office to build political viability for Security Council reform.

What happens next?
In the next phase, the Security Council will hold closed-door deliberations and straw polls before recommending a candidate to the General Assembly around October. Once the latter confirms the choice through a simple majority vote, the new Secretary-General will take office on January 1, 2027.

(Raja Karthikeya is a former international civil servant)

THE GIST

- The UN is facing a deep financial and political crisis, with Security Council paralysis, funding shortfalls, and rising global conflicts.
- The next Secretary-General will have the task of rejuvenating the organisation, focusing on conflict prevention, reform, and advancing sustainable development goals.

What happened to Komagata Maru passengers in 1914?

Why was the Komagata Maru denied entry into Canada? What happened to the passengers?

Prathmesh Kher

The story so far:
In the spring of 1914, a Japanese steamship called the Komagata Maru sailed from Hong Kong toward Vancouver, British Columbia, carrying 376 passengers: 340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims, and 12 Hindus from Punjab in British India. They were British subjects hoping to build new lives in Canada. What awaited them was a two-month standoff in the harbour, a brutal denouement on the docks of Calcutta, and a place in the history of both India's anti-colonial movement and Canada's long reckoning with its own past. The episode was recently mentioned by singer Diljit Dosanjh on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*.

Why was Punjab central to events leading up to the voyage?
By 1914, Punjab had become the primary recruiting ground for the British Indian Army. The British had cultivated Punjab as a loyal province populated by a "martial race," but the relationship was both lopsided and extractive. Rapid agricultural growth combined with easy credit had created a crisis of rural indebtedness, and epidemics of malaria and plague in the early 1900s pushed families toward emigration as the only way out.

Among those who left were the founders of the Ghadar movement, established in 1913 among expatriate Punjabis on the U.S. West Coast, dedicated to the armed overthrow of British rule in India.

The Komagata Maru voyage was freighted with this politics from the start. Ghadar activists boarded the ship in Yokohama, delivering lectures and distributing anti-colonial literature, and British intelligence was watching closely.

What led to the standoff?
The voyage was organised by Gurdit Singh, a Punjabi entrepreneur based in Singapore, who chartered the ship specifically to challenge Canada's exclusionary laws. Canada had enacted a "continuous journey regulation" in 1908, barring entry to anyone who had not travelled by a single unbroken journey from their country of birth, while also pressuring shipping companies not to sell direct tickets from India.

When the ship arrived at Vancouver's Burrard Inlet on May 23, 1914, immigration officials refused to let it dock. Prime Minister Robert Borden kept the ship anchored offshore, cutting off communication and stalling proceedings. The local South Asian community raised over $20,000 to take over the ship's charter and hired a lawyer to bring a test case, but the British Columbia Court of Appeal unanimously upheld the discriminatory laws. Officials then withheld food and water. On July 19, an armed police force of 150 men attempted to board the ship; the passengers fought them off. Borden dispatched a naval cruiser. Only 22 passengers, mostly those who could prove prior Canadian residence, were ultimately permitted to disembark. The ship departed under escort on July 23. British colonial authorities, suspicious of the passengers' politics, refused to let the ship dock in Hong Kong or Singapore. When it finally anchored near Calcutta in late September, police tried to force the exhausted passengers onto trains bound for Punjab. They refused, marched toward the city, and were fired upon. Twenty passengers were killed; many more were imprisoned. Gurdit Singh evaded capture for years before surrendering in 1920 and serving five years in prison.

What happened when the ship returned to India?
In the aftermath, the Ghadar movement surged in recruitment. Some members returned to Punjab in 1915 to attempt an armed uprising, which failed due to informers and mass arrests. Dozens were sent to the gallows. But the movement's martyrs became folklore.

Canada was slow to acknowledge what it had done. An apology delivered at a community festival by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2008 was rejected by many as insufficient. It took until 2016 for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to deliver a formal apology on the floor of the House of Commons. The Komagata Maru remains a sharp demonstration of what colonial subjects had long understood: that the British Empire's promises of equal subjecthood were never meant for everyone.

THE GIST

- The Komagata Maru carried 376 British subjects from Punjab but was denied entry into Canada under the "continuous journey" regulation, leading to a two-month standoff in Vancouver harbour.
- On returning to India, the passengers faced police firing near Calcutta, killing 20 people.

FULL CONTEXT

A century after legal recognition, workers still lack real protection

Since the Trade Union Act first gave workers legal recognition and protection, the law has not lived up to its intent; it preserves rights on paper but, through procedural constraints and silence on platform workers, continues to limit the ability of workers to organise and act

Prathmesh Kher

In 1918, Bahman Pestonji Wadia founded the Madras Labour Union, India's first trade union with regular membership and a relief fund, established to address what he called the "mal-treatment of workers" by European officers. The union he helped build was, in the eyes of British common law, a conspiracy to restrain trade.

In 1921, a Madras court put a price on the act of organising workers against unfair working conditions. £2,000 was awarded against Wadia and fellow unionists for leading a strike against the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills. The management agreed to waive the payment on the condition that Wadia sever all associations with the union he had built. There was no law to protect him. The unionists complied.

But even in compliance, the unionists showed defiance. One of the union leaders, Vengal Chakkarai Chettiar, told the judge in open court: "I am an evangelical worker for the Wesley Mission. I am getting ₹10 per week, with which I am living. I have only my clothes, which I am wearing, and a few spare clothes at home. If necessary, I will remove my clothes and give them to the court. But the amount of compensation ordered by you cannot be recovered from me. At the same time, I cannot be stopped from working for the trade union of workers. Even if my clothes are removed in execution of a decree, I will continue to work for the trade union by wearing my loincloth. If necessary, we will go for work stoppages to win our demands."

The judgment brought into the open something that had been gnawing at the labouring classes for decades. By 1921, India had hundreds of trade unions, yet not one had legal recognition. N.M. Joshi, co-founder and General Secretary of the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), understood the specific nature of the problem. In March 1921, the same month as the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills judgment, he moved a resolution in the Central Legislative Assembly recommending that the government introduce legislation to register and protect trade unions. Five years of legal and political pressure followed before the Act was finally passed in 1926. The Royal Commission on Labour in India, reporting in 1931, described what the struggle had been for: to give trade unions the necessary protection from civil suits and criminal laws relating to conspiracy to enable them to carry on their legitimate activities.



GETTY IMAGES

Letter and spirit

The Trade Union Act of 1926 emerged from five years of sustained pressure from the labour movement, from nationalist leaders who understood that organised workers were essential to the freedom struggle, sharpened by the colonial state's calculation that legal frameworks for managing workers' grievances were safer than the revolutionary alternative.

Section 18 of the Act answered the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills judgment directly: "No suit or other legal proceeding shall be maintainable in any Civil Court against any registered Trade Union or any office-bearer or member thereof in respect of any act done in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute" including inducing breach of employment contract, or interfering with the employer's trade or business. The weapon used to silence Wadia was removed from the employer's hands. Section 17 addressed the criminal threat: no office-bearer or member of a registered union shall be liable under the IPC's criminal conspiracy provision, Section 120B, for agreements made to further legitimate union objects, "unless the agreement is an agreement to commit an offence."

An Indian worker now had legal recognition and legally recognised rights. A union was no longer a conspiracy.

By 1928, the Girni Kamgar Union in Bombay had over 70,000 members. That year saw 203 strikes involving over five lakh workers. The left wing of the labour movement, strengthened by the Act's protections, was growing fast and fusing with nationalist politics, as it had in 1908, when Bombay's workers struck for six days over Lokmanya Tilak's imprisonment. Two responses came simultaneously from the colonial state.

The Meerut conspiracy case arrested 33 labour organisers, men working openly, in unions the 1926 Act had made legal, and charged them not under Section 120B, where the Act's immunity held, but under sedition provisions the Act had never touched. Then came two bills together. The Trade Disputes Bill banned sympathetic strikes, built in notice periods long enough to make sustained action practically impossible, and made illegal any strike that extended beyond a purely industrial dispute. What had electrified Indian politics since 1908, the joining of workers' grievances to nationalist ones, was now a criminal act. Motilal Nehru named it plainly: "the Slavery of India Bill." The Public Safety Bill went further, giving the executive power to act not on what people did but on what they were deemed to intend, with the Governor General as judge of intention.

On October 30, 1928, months before the bills came to a vote, Lala Lajpat Rai, who had presided over the AITUC's founding session in 1920, led a peaceful protest in Lahore against the all-British Simon Commission. Police Superintendent James Scott ordered a lathi charge. Rai was beaten across his chest. That same evening, still standing, he addressed the crowd at Mochi Gate: "I declare that the blows struck at me today will be the last nails in the coffin of British rule in India." He died eighteen days later.

At the Bombay Presidency Youth Conference in December 1928, Jawaharlal Nehru told the students: "Ally yourself to the masses of the country, the peasantry and the industrial worker... And if you do so, you will automatically avoid the pitfalls of reformism and petty compromise." By July 1929, with both bills passed and the Meerut accused in custody, his analysis of the Public Safety Bill was unsparing: "This is dangerous enough at any time and in any country to make the Executive Government the judge of what is in the mind of those opposed to it. It is far more dangerous in India, where there is a foreign government." When the government's spokesman claimed that foreign agitators had caused the country's labour unrest, Nehru was contemptuous. The actual cause was economic distress. "A strike is always unfortunate and deplorable, just as a fever is unfortunate and deplorable, but it is no good cursing the fever. The wise man treats it and tries to remove the causes of it."

Three months before that analysis, on April 8, 1929, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt threw smoke bombs and leaflets from the visitors' gallery of the Central Legislative Assembly. The pamphlet named three provocations: the Meerut arrests, the bills, and the death of Lajpat Rai. "The indiscriminate arrests of labour leaders working in the open field clearly indicate whether the wind blows," it read. Then came the sentence that named the whole situation: "It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear."

Singh was hanged in 1931, aged 23. Dutt was transported to the Cellular Jail in the Andamans to serve a life sentence. The Meerut accused spent years in prison. The Girni Kamgar Union was broken. The 1926 Act's protections remained on the statute book. The letter never came to match the spirit.

Past as prologue

The Trade Union Act survived independence and was absorbed into the constitutional settlement. Article 19(1)(c) gave every Indian citizen the right to form associations or unions. Registered trade unions increased by 625% between 1951 and 1979. The ideological fire of the early movement cooled, over time, into wage bargaining. Then in 1991, the New Economic Policy arrived with its logic that labour flexibility was the price of growth.

In 2020, during a Monsoon Session of Parliament conducted under pandemic restrictions, with the Opposition protesting procedural irregularities, the government passed four labour codes consolidating 29 existing laws. One of them, the Industrial Relations Code 2020, absorbed the Trade Union Act 1926. It came into force on November 21, 2025.

The new Code preserves Sections 16 and 17, successors to the 1926 Act's immunity provisions, in language almost identical to the original. A century's worth of protective words, freshly reprinted. But the dissonance between the letter and the spirit continues.

To be recognised as such, a negotiating union must now demonstrate 51% support among workers on the muster roll. In industries characterised by high turnover, casual labour, fixed-term contracts, achieving and maintaining this numerical ceiling is nigh impossible for most unions, and this is precisely in sectors where workers need protection the most. Section 62 requires 60 days' notice before a strike can begin, four times the 15 days the 1929 Trade Disputes Act demanded, the bill Motilal Nehru had already called the "Slavery of India Bill." Workers cannot strike during conciliation proceedings, or for seven days after, or during Tribunal proceedings, or for 60 days after those conclude. Between notice periods and cooling-off clauses, an employer can keep a workforce in procedural suspension without end.

Then there is the silence that reveals more than any provision. The words 'gig' and 'platform' do not appear once in the Industrial Relations Code 2020. NITI Aayog estimated 7.7 million platform workers in 2020. Yet a law that came into force five months ago contains not a single word about the workers who run errands across every city in the country. They are legally classified as independent contractors.

The struggle continues

Despite the hurdles thrown their way, workers continue to organise. The Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union, the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers, and the All-India Gig Workers Union continue to exist, organise meetings on WhatsApp, and occasionally win. In March 2024, platform worker unions forced Zomato to reverse a policy that segregated delivery fleets by food type. This decision was understood to endanger religious minority and lower-caste riders by making their identities visible in a society marked by discrimination.

The Fairwork India Report 2024 assessed 11 major platforms operating in India and found that none recognised a collective body of workers or a trade union. Four States have now passed social security laws for platform workers, welfare benefits designed, with some care, to make the struggle for collective bargaining seem unnecessary.

The deaf have not learned to hear. The loud voices are still necessary.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

"How do you pronounce l...h...a...c...k...a...d...a...i...s...i...c...a...l?"

"The first syllable is pronounced like the word 'lack'. The 'a' in the second syllable is pronounced like..."

"...let me guess. It's probably pronounced like the 'a' in 'China', 'amount', and 'another'. Am I right?"

"Very good. The 'dai' is pronounced like the word 'day'! The 's' that follows sounds like the 'z' in 'zoo', 'zip', and 'zing'."

"And the 'i' is like the 'i' in 'bit', 'kit', and 'pit'!"

"Exactly! And the final 'a' is once again like the 'a' in 'China'. Now then, can you guess which syllable has the stress?"

"Well, when Sujatha used the word, I think she put the stress on 'dai'."

"That's right! The word is pronounced lackaDAIsical. Do you know what it means?"

"No, I don't. But it can't be anything good, that's for sure."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because Sujatha said that I was lackadaisical about a lot of things."

"She is right, you know."

"Thank you very much. Now, can you tell me what the word means?"

"When someone is lackadaisical about something, he/she does not show any enthusiasm or interest in it."

"You mean like our cricket stars. For all the money they get, they are pretty lackadaisical on the field."

"They certainly are."

"How does this sound? Many Government officials have a very lackadaisical approach to their work."

"That's a good example. Here's another one. When I was in school, I had a very lackadaisical approach to my studies."

"Things haven't changed much, have they? Ha! Ha!"

"That's a good one. By the way, have you decided what you are going to specialise in?"

"I haven't made up my mind."

"...you are still yo-yoing, are you?"

"Still what?"

"Yo-yoing. A 'yo-yo' is..."

"I know what a yo-yo is. It's a toy that kids play with."

"That's right! When someone accuses you of yo-yoing, what they mean is that you are vacillating. You can't really decide what to do."

"...in other words, when I 'yo-yo' I find it very difficult to make up my mind about something."

"Yes, that's right! That's one of the meanings of 'yo-yo'. Here's an example. I wish my boss would stop yo-yoing and make up his mind about what he wants to do about the insubordination problem in our office."

"Your boss yo-yo's quite a bit, doesn't he?"

"He certainly does. And so do you. You always have to yo-yo before deciding on something. Have you decided on which TV to buy?"

"I am still not sure. You see,...."

"...stop yo-yoing, will you? If I were you, I would buy the bigger one. At that price, it's a steal."

"Steal? What do you mean? You want me to steal the thing?"

"No, no! I wouldn't want you to do anything like that. When you say that something was a steal, it means that you got it very cheap. It was a great bargain."

"It was so cheap that you feel you didn't pay anything for it."

"Exactly! It's as if you took the thing from the seller without paying anything for it."

Published in The Hindu on June 27, 2000

THE DAILY QUIZ

Here is a quiz on International Workers' Day and its history

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

International Workers' Day is observed on May 1 in more than 80 countries, but not officially in the X. Name X (a country), which celebrates the same occasion in September — by order of its head of state in 1894 — in order to distance itself from the radical communist ideas associated with the date.

QUESTION 2

International Workers' Day commemorates the _____ affair. On May 4, 1886, a peaceful rally for the eight-hour workday in Chicago turned violent after someone threw dynamite at the police. The name of the incident refers to the square where the incident occurred; the incident is also considered the climax of the Great American Upheaval. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 3

The Y adopted the date of May 1 in 1889 as International Workers' Day to honour the events of Q2. Y was an organisation of socialist and labour parties from various countries. Y collapsed with the start of the First World War, which had tried but failed to prevent through working-class action. Name Y.

QUESTION 4

India celebrates its first May Day in 1923 in P (a city), thanks to the efforts of labour leader Q. Among others, Q advocated socialism in colonial India, articulated Marxist ideas in the public sphere, and cofounded the first organised trade union in India. Name P and Q.

QUESTION 5

In February 1956, Nikita Khrushchev delivered a famous speech in which he denounced Joseph Stalin's excesses, behind closed doors. What was the title of Khrushchev's speech?



Visual Question:
Name this activist and Gandhian who helped found the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), considered to be the world's largest trade union of informal women workers. MOHAN JUNEJA (CC BY-SA)

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. What word meaning 'guide' in German was used to refer to Hitler? **Ans: Fuhrer**

2. In 1923, Hitler attempted to pull off a coup and overthrow the Weimar Republic; the attempt landed him in prison. What was it called? **Ans: The Munich Putsch**

3. What is the name of the totalitarian dictatorship set up by Hitler from 1933 to 1945? **Ans: The Third Reich**

4. In 1936, the Nazi regime used this international sporting event for propaganda. It wasn't held again until 1948. Which event was this and what event caused its delay? **Ans: Olympics. World War 2**

5. The Axis Alliance was formed between Hitler, Mussolini, and another leader. Name him. **Ans: Japanese emperor Hirohito**

Visual: If you're a Harry Potter fan, you would have heard of the Chamber of Secrets. But have you heard of the Chamber of Horrors? This statue is found in which museum's chamber of horrors? **Ans: Madame Tussauds**

Early Birds: C. Saravanan | Sunil Madhavan | Arun Kumar Singh | Mohan Lal Patel | Prem Nath Tiwari

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

Word of the day

Enjoin:

give instructions to or direct somebody to do something with authority

Synonyms: command, instruct, charge

Usage: *The teacher enjoined the students to remain quiet during the exam.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/enjoin

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ɪnʤɔɪn/

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

WEB EXCLUSIVE
A tale of two Shivajis — emancipator of peasants vs instrument of politics
— By Nikhil Sanjay-Rekha Adsule
Log on to www.indianexpress.com

WORDLY WISE
There is no liberty if the power of judging be not separated from the legislative and executive powers.
— Montesquieu

The Indian EXPRESS
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RAMNATH GOENKA
IN 1932
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Plan for early summer, extreme heat

TRADITIONALLY, IN large parts of the country, the April weather was a prelude to the scorching summer. However, it's increasingly becoming clear that extreme heat is no longer a May-June phenomenon. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), at least 11 states are in the grip of a heat wave. Though temperatures are expected to fall next week, the relief is likely to be temporary. The Centre's decision to issue a heat advisory to states is, therefore, a much-needed step. It has urged state governments to shift work hours, mandate rest breaks, and ensure cooling arrangements for workers exposed to the sun. Hospitals have been directed to set up dedicated heatstroke units, stock oral rehydration solutions, and train staff for rapid response. These advisories reflect some lessons learned from recent heat waves. But they are not enforceable. Much more needs to be done to protect the vulnerable from the elements.

Most states in the country have heat action plans (HAPs). They list standard procedures for individual departments — from public health and education to agriculture and electricity. However, implementation has been an Achilles' heel of most HAPs. Chronic underfunding, weak institutional capacity, and poor interdepartmental coordination have limited their effectiveness. Heat stress is not classified as an emergency like floods, earthquakes or cyclones in the country's disaster management framework. Some states have categorised heat waves as a state-specific disaster — this allows them to use up to 10 per cent of their annual State Disaster Response Fund for relief. The 16th Finance Commission, which submitted its report earlier this year, recommended that a heat wave be notified as a disaster at the national level as well. Such recognition will enable states to access central relief funds and institutionalise long-term resilience-building measures.

More than half of India's districts are prone to heat-related stress, according to a study conducted last year by the Centre for Energy, Environment and Water. Urban areas face an additional challenge. Concrete and asphalt store vast amounts of heat during the day and release it at night. The built environment keeps the air warm even after sunset. This disproportionately impacts low-income communities living in dense settlements with limited access to cooling. Conversations on heat, therefore, need to go beyond reactive advisories to adaptation strategies — expanding green cover, promoting heat-proofing infrastructure and labour protection. The early onset of summer should be seen as a warning — the country needs to align climate science with public health, urban planning, and social security.

Task for new Fed chair: Protecting autonomy

THE US Federal Reserve's decision to keep interest rates unchanged in its April meeting was along expected lines. The conflict in West Asia, the consequent dislocations in the energy market and supply-chain disruptions, have led to considerable macroeconomic uncertainty. While committee members have opted to wait in order to gauge the impact of these developments on inflation and growth, what was noticeable was the growing disagreements over the direction of policy. The dissent — one member preferred to lower interest rates, while three others opposed the "easing bias in the statement" — has been the greatest in recent years. This comes at a particularly challenging time for the Fed. The central bank is going through a leadership transition — Jerome Powell's term as Fed chair ends on May 15, and Kevin Warsh, Trump's choice, has been confirmed by a Senate banking committee.

Under Powell, the Fed confronted multiple shocks, ranging from the Covid pandemic to the energy-market disruptions following the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the war in West Asia. During his term, the central bank was criticised for being "behind the curve" and not raising rates fast enough to combat inflation following the pandemic. More recently, Powell and the Fed have also faced a barrage of criticism from US President Donald Trump. In his second term, Trump has been quite vocal in his criticism of the direction of monetary policy. His attempts to pressurise the Fed into lowering interest rates have raised apprehensions over the independence and autonomy of the central bank. It was only a few days ago that the US Justice Department dropped its investigation over the Fed's building renovations — an investigation Powell had framed in the context of "the administration's threats and ongoing pressure".

The leadership change at the Fed — the full Senate vote will be held in May — will be closely watched. Inflation in the US has edged upwards — consumer prices rose 3.3 per cent in March amid the war in Iran. Gas prices are now at $4.3, up from $3.18 a year ago. But the demands to ease policy may well continue. The political context is unlikely to change. The challenge before the next Fed chair will, therefore, be to resist political pressure, safeguard the autonomy and independence of the central bank.

He-Man & power amid uncertainty

IN 1977, ahead of the release of what would become the phenomenon that is *Star Wars*, filmmaker George Lucas approached Mattel for a tie-up to produce licensed franchise toys. It refused, the deal went to Kenner, and the rest became history. Mattel's resurrection was engineered three years later by a toy designer, Roger Sweet, and his brainchild, He-Man, a broad-shouldered action figurine with a power sword, on a mission to defend Castle Grayskull and the planet, Eternia, from the evil forces of his uncle and archenemy, Skeletor. His inception story might have rested on a missed opportunity, but with his bulging biceps and ripped abs, He-Man turned out to be "the most powerful man in the universe" through the 1980s. "I always wanted to be a He-Man and never could... I knew almost every guy in the world would love to be a He-Man," Sweet, who died on April 28, at 91, had said in a 2019 interview. Turns out, he was right.

Inevitably, comparisons to *Star Wars* followed but He-Man was gloriously, almost brazenly, a commercial artefact that wore its purpose lightly, moving from toy to television to comics, a hero conjured in the image of what a toy might demand rather than what a tale might require. For entire generations, He-Man defined heroism, even as it circumscribed the emotional vocabulary available to boys, insisting that power lay in invulnerability rather than complexity, that men didn't cry or experience fear.

That idea of masculinity might have been dented, but He-Man's appeal, it seems, is not entirely lost. A new film is slated for this summer, a slice of nostalgia for old acolytes and, perhaps, a question for the uninitiated: In a strife-torn world, what does it mean to be powerful, once the old certainties have worn thin?

Likely below-normal monsoon is a warning: India must heed water stress



V ANANTHA NAGESWARAN AND M RAVICHANDRAN

ON APRIL 13, the India Meteorological Department issued its first update for the coming monsoon season. The monsoon season is expected to be mostly below normal. The probability of it being even above normal to excess is almost ruled out. More importantly, many of the rainfall districts will face below-normal rain. Very few areas of the country will receive normal to above-normal rainfall.

This is mainly due to the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) effect. El Niño and La Niña are two weather patterns that occur in the Pacific Ocean. They are part of a larger climate phenomenon called the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO). Both have significant effects on global weather, influencing rainfall and temperatures. El Niño typically leads to reduced monsoon rainfall, while La Niña tends to strengthen the monsoon.

ENSO is expected to set in, in June. But the effect will begin to be felt in July. So, the current expectation is that ENSO will have its effect in the second half of the monsoon season rather than the full monsoon. However, as we write this, ENSO is developing rapidly in the Pacific. It may occur even earlier.

A couple of other minor consolations are the negative correlation between the Northern Hemisphere or Eurasian snow cover and the rainfall in the subsequent monsoon season. Between January and March 2026, Eurasian snow cover was below normal. That augurs better for the precipitation during the monsoon season. Of course, that has been factored into the seasonal forecast. Second, the IOD — Indian Ocean Dipole — counterpart to ENSO, but in the Indian Ocean, will also be counteracting the effect of ENSO on India's Southwest Monsoon. But IOD is expected to have its effect only in the second half of the monsoon season. This has already been factored into the rainfall assessment.

Another minor relief is that the Super ENSO phenomenon, which has an even greater impact on the monsoon rainfall, is setting in much after India's monsoon season officially ends. So, India's rainfall will not be much impacted by the Super ENSO. It is expected that this year's ENSO phenomenon will have a bigger impact on Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Australia. The ENSO effect usually lasts nine to 12 months.

It will be good to treat this year's ENSO effect as yet another warning sign for the country to get its act together on water. In the past, ENSO occurred once every two to seven years. Now, the gap between two ENSOs appears to have shrunk, and its intensity is also increasing. That is not good news. Second, while India's average rainfall is expected to hold up reasonably well in the years to come, notwithstanding this year's ENSO, at least until the end of the decade, it is widely known that precipitation will become narrower in both spatial and temporal scales. That is, rainfall may have a concentrated geographic footprint and occur in shorter intervals. The occurrence of recent years' rainfall and this year's forecasts also reflect this.

The image of a steady drizzle throughout the day, misty skies and an atmosphere that lends itself to quiet contemplation and relaxed minds over a cup of chai and a hot samosa or pakora while watching the monsoon rain has given way to concerns about the damage that fast, furious downpours will cause. It is all about deluge and not drizzle. That means taking water management more seriously than we have done so far.

> Civilisations have flourished and perished because of water. India has been witness to that. We will be doing ourselves a big favour if we treat water conservation and management as an existential necessity

Civilisations have flourished and perished because of water. India has been witness to that itself. Therefore, we will be doing ourselves a big favour if we do not treat water conservation and management as an avoidable luxury but as an existential necessity. There was a sound reason why the rulers of yore created temple tanks, bunds, reservoirs and numerous other water bodies. All these structures enabled the harvesting of rainwater. Now, we have built over them. India has to conserve water more than ever since brief but massive rain deluges do not allow the soil to retain water. Worse, the water runs off too quickly, taking the top and fertile soil with it. Therefore, capturing it is more important than before.

Barely a month before the IMD released its monsoon update, three experts published their book on water. They were not shy of sounding dire. Parameswaran Iyer, Arunabha Ghosh and Richard Damania, in their book *Water, Nature and Progress: Solutions for a New India*, call for a circular water-economy mission that treats used water as a resource rather than a liability, with realistic targets and financing models. India reuses only 3 per cent of its treated used water, while cities like Singapore meet 40 per cent of their water demand through reuse. The mission proposes staggered targets — 50 per cent treatment capacity by 2028, 100 per cent by 2035, 50 per cent reuse by 2035 — along with a framework for public-private partnerships that draws on successful models from Surat, Thane, Taiwan and Jordan.

One of the pillars on which India's aspiration of becoming a developed society and economy rests is water. If that pillar is corroded by pollution and the under-appreciation of its role in sustaining civilisations, the edifice will struggle to rise and remain vulnerable to collapse.

Water is a scarce commodity that will become increasingly so, and its price must reflect that. Right now, that scarcity value is captured by unregulated water tankers. That shows that people are willing to pay a price for water, but they resist paying a water tax to the state because they are not sure of service quality. So, the ability to charge a water tariff follows, rather than precedes, improvements in state capacity and service delivery. But governments across the country cannot provide an assured, reliable water supply, nor can they build the infrastructure to do so without the financial capacity to fund it. Therefore, an honest conversation between the governing and the governed on water pricing and service commitments is overdue.

India is not the only water-stressed society, but, as with every other problem — employment or energy transition, to name just two — the challenge is greater and more urgent for India given its sheer size. Its reactive approach to insidious challenges such as water stress may be both inadequate and too late. This year's likely below-normal monsoon has served us one more warning. We will be helping ourselves if we pay heed to it.

V Anantha Nageswaran and M Ravichandran are, respectively, the Chief Economic Advisor and Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India. Views are personal

Vibhajit Bharat: Forcing Mumbai cabbies to speak Marathi



ARVIND P DATAR

THE DIRECTIVE to taxi and autorickshaw drivers to demonstrate their proficiency in Marathi has been mercifully postponed from May 1 to August 15 by the Government of Maharashtra. Apart from the irrationality of this proposal, it is doubtful if it is constitutionally permissible.

Article 19(1)(d) guarantees to every citizen the fundamental right to move freely throughout India. Article 19(1)(e) gives every citizen the fundamental right to reside and settle in any part of India. Under Article 19(1)(g), any citizen can practice any profession or carry on any occupation, trade, or business. These fundamental rights can be restricted only by a law made by the Maharashtra legislature and not by executive instructions. Any restriction also has to be reasonable and in the interests of the general public. Equally important is Article 21, which protects the right to life and has been repeatedly interpreted to include the right to livelihood. Thus, any attempt at such linguistic compulsion may not pass judicial muster.

In the opinion of this writer, neither Maharashtra nor any other state can amend the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, or make any law that makes it mandatory for a citizen to be able to read and write the regional language as a condition precedent to own or operate a taxi or autorickshaw. A mere amendment to the Motor Vehicle Rules will not do.

This move is also irrational. Where does one draw the line? If taxi and auto drivers must compulsorily know Marathi, can the same restriction be placed on nurses and doctors working in Maharashtra? A Bihari engineer, a Bengali chartered accountant or any white-collar employee can work and settle in Maharashtra with no knowledge of Marathi, but a person from eastern UP who comes to Mumbai to drive an auto because of poverty must have a working knowledge.

The Eighth Schedule has 22 official languages. Any citizen, irrespective of his mother tongue, can carry on his occupation in any part of India. A working knowledge of Marathi can be a condition only when it is indispensable to the job or work that a person has to do.

> Any citizen, irrespective of his mother tongue, can carry on his occupation in any part of India. A working knowledge of Marathi can be a condition only when it is indispensable to the job

Maharashtra's move will have adverse national consequences if other states follow suit. There are reports that similar demands are being made in Karnataka. The imposition of such conditions may yield short-term political benefits. But it can have disastrous consequences for the nation.

There is an equal need to moderate the imposition of Hindi. The recasting of our criminal laws without any significant change is an example of the unnecessary use of Hindi. The Indian Penal Code has been renamed Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the old sections have simply been renumbered. The Criminal Procedure Code and the Evidence Act have also been renamed. The titles of the new enactments are incomprehensible to most people in southern India. One cannot forget the anti-Hindi riots that engulfed Tamil Nadu in the late 1960s. And the new laws have not made the slightest difference to the problems that face the criminal justice system.

The first step that former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew took in 1965 was to make English, not Chinese, the official language of Singapore. This was a critical step in securing the economic progress of the small nation. The insistence on only the regional language being used in government schools also requires reconsideration. Knowing English is, unfortunately, necessary, particularly for the youth from underprivileged sections of society, for easier access to better-paying jobs. A combined use of English, Hindi and the relevant state's regional language is the urgent need.

In 1956, Indian states were sadly divided on linguistic lines. Our states must not take decisions that weaken the Indian or Bharatiya identity or make it difficult for people in one state to migrate to and work in another. We have an ambitious plan for a Viksit Bharat@2047. To achieve it, we must not take steps that lead to a *vibhajit* Bharat or divided India.

The writer, a senior advocate, is a Maharashtrian, born in Mumbai, settled in Chennai. He mainly practises in New Delhi

The chronicle of AAP defections foretold



ASHUTOSH

ABOUT TWO-thirds of AAP MPs in the Rajya Sabha, led by Raghav Chadha and Sandeep Pathak, declared that they would merge the parliamentary party with the BJP. This did not surprise me. It was the inevitable result of the kind of people who were promoted in the party at the expense of those who were honest and loyal to the cause of the Anna Movement.

For some time now, AAP has refused to go back to the drawing board. This is not the party we all knew. It was the one party with the character and will to take people along to reinvent the corrupt political system. When AAP forgot its biggest resource was not money, power, or institutions but moral capital, its decline began. To begin with, AAP had attracted brilliant people from all walks of life — social workers, activists, lawyers, diplomats, journalists, corporate managers, software engineers, and doctors. They were successful in their fields and did not need a political party to shine. They joined AAP because they genuinely felt the nation needed to change course to realise its potential. When the country reacted massively to the call given by the Anna Movement to fight corruption, they wanted to be fellow travellers on that revolutionary journey. Unfortunately, this journey could not reach its destination because the movement was led by people without vision.

AAP had criticised traditional parties for their "high command culture". Within, it fashioned a "super-high command" where no leader, minister or office-bearer mattered except one man. The rest were automatons, who were to say and do what they were told. A disconnect between leader and party was inevitable. And whenever a party ceases to be democratic, it turns into a system to further the careers of the chosen ones. These people are smart enough to realise they don't have to be loyal to the party but to the leader. In the last few years, AAP was adorned with such people from top to bottom. They became MPs, MLAs and ministers.

> AAP had criticised traditional parties for their 'high command culture'. Within, it fashioned a 'super-high command' where no leader minister or office-bearer mattered except one man

What is most puzzling is that, unlike Narendra Modi, Arvind Kejriwal has the unique knack of losing his closest lieutenants. Chadha was once Kejriwal's blue-eyed boy, put in charge of Punjab and credited with AAP's success in the state. After it formed the state government, he was considered Kejriwal's eyes and ears. But when the party was in trouble and its top leadership imprisoned, he was nowhere to be seen. Similarly, Pathak was once the most powerful person in AAP. The entire party structure was at his disposal. He was also instrumental to AAP's success in Punjab. Another rebel, Swati Maliwal, was a member of Kejriwal's core team even before the Anna Movement. She became a Rajya Sabha MP. Ironically, she parted ways with Kejriwal in the most acrimonious way. All three owed their political careers to one man, but he could not retain them.

AAP has been unable to craft an institutional framework that can deal with the kind of crisis it faces today. The party, and particularly its leader, need to reflect on this failure to build a team.

The writer is co-founder of SatyaHindi and author of Reclaiming Bharat

40 YEARS AGO

May 1, 1986


INDIAN EXPRESS

Security forces enter Temple

150 held in bid to flush out terrorists

Panthic panel men flee complex

11 killed in firing at Barabanki

House supports action in Temple

Shekhar re-elected party chief

Bid to flush out terrorists

THE PUNJAB Police and paramilitary forces entered the Golden Temple Complex in Amritsar to clear off "terrorists, separatists and anti-national elements". The swift action led by the Amritsar Deputy Commissioner, Ramesh Inder Singh, and the Senior Superintendent of Police, S S Virk, started with the raiding of the Guru Nanak Niwas, Guru Ram Das Sarai and the Teja Singh Samundri Hall, which were frequented by militants.

House supports temple action

LEADERS OF all political parties in the Lok Sabha fully supported the Punjab Government's determined operation to flush out anti-national "Khalistani" elements from the Golden Temple complex and effectively deal with terrorists. Members greeted with cheers the statement of the Home Minister, P V Narasimha Rao, confirming that the Punjab Police and CRPF had entered the Golden Temple complex and taken into custody some persons. The search for terrorists is continuing.

Chernobyl reactor meltdown

WESTERN SOURCES said they had indications of a meltdown of a second nuclear reactor at the devastated Chernobyl atomic power plant, and several European nations warned their people about the danger from what could be the world's worst nuclear disaster. A US official said news reports of 2,000 deaths in the nuclear accident were credible. He made this remark after studying data relayed from a US spy satellite that overflew the area where the radiation leak occurred.

Delhi Apartment Bill passed

THE LOK Sabha passed the Delhi Apartment Ownership Bill seeking to give statutory recognition of an apartment as a unit of property capable of transfer and for a statutory organisation armed with adequate powers for the management of common areas in multi-storeyed buildings. The Bill meets the longstanding demand of owners of apartments and flats, both residential and commercial, for the grant of ownership rights in the property.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

UAE exiting OPEC wounds a cartel already far from the peak of its power.
—The Guardian

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THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A weekly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate

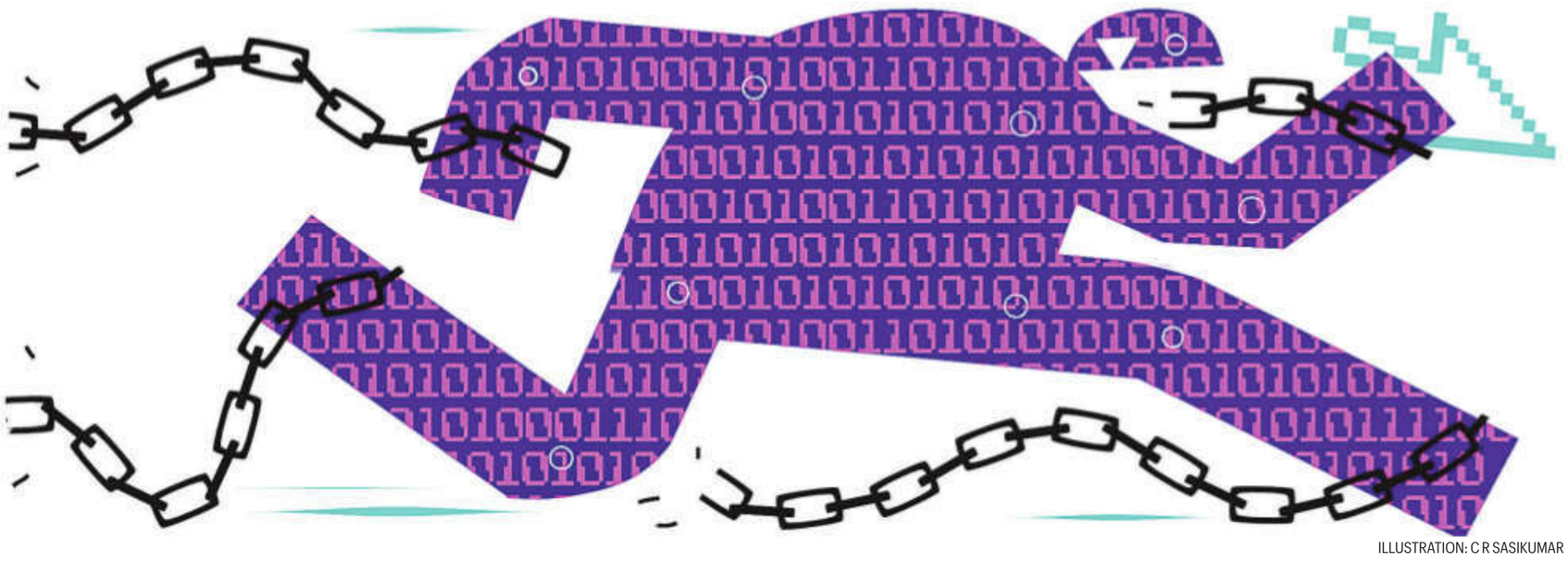


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

Anthropic's Mythos raises a question: What kind of regulation does AI need?

Now, only damage control is possible



NISHANT SHAH

THE FOUNDING dream of the digital revolution was that of a digital commons. It sounds romantic after we have watched the commons being sliced, packaged, sold, and commodified. And yet, it is a dream I want to hold on to.

There were extraordinary visions of what digital technologies could do if they were built as public infrastructures. Public does not mean free or outside power. The QR code was patented but made publicly usable; Linux, open protocols, and community-maintained code still hold up much of the digital economy. The giant private economy of the internet was powered by infrastructures it did not fully own.

For a long time, however compromised, the digital commons rested on three sides: The people who built and maintained its infrastructures; the publics who used, adapted, contested, and animated its applications; and governments, which were supposed to regulate, safeguard, and hold these systems accountable to collective progress.

Large language models have destabilised all three. These systems are built on public infrastructures, public data, public labour, open technical cultures, and decades of shared digital experimentation. Their governance, however, is black-boxed and negotiated behind closed doors. Their financial logic is no less alarming. Anthropic has announced a $380 billion post-money valuation. OpenAI has been reported at a valuation of $852 billion. These valuations do not emerge from settled public trust, social safety, or proven sustainability. They emerge from the conversion of collective dependency into private speculative power.

With Claude Mythos, we are perhaps not only seeing the end of the dream, but its replacement.

Anthropic has made Claude Mythos Preview available through Project Glasswing as a gated research preview, ostensibly to help selected partners find and fix vulnerabilities across critical software systems. Anthropic also says Mythos Preview has already identified thousands of zero-day vulnerabilities. On paper, this sounds like responsibility. In practice, it shows us the problem.

A private corporation, built on public infrastructures, is now deciding who gets access to a model powerful enough to find vulnerabilities in the systems on which the world depends.

The question of whether AI regulation should be heavy-handed or with a light-touch has arrived too late. Claude Mythos signals the end of the internet as a public utility, and the shrinking power that governments have in national and global regulation.

Who watches the watchman? Nobody. With Mythos, the watchman who is supposed to identify the vulnerabilities and cracks is also the only one who can protect the system by taking an ethical position. Except Mythos has no sense of ethics. Anthropic might loosely have one, but not enough to stop it from releasing the model, even in limited preview.

Technologies are not tools. They are propositions. They imagine the worlds that cluster around them, and then begin to make those worlds available, profitable, and inevitable. They are not dangerous only when deployed. They can be dangerous in their very existence. We now have the nuclear version of generative AI sitting with us. Not because it will destroy the world tomorrow, but because its existence reorganises the conditions of security, vulnerability, trust, and power. Anthropic might stall this for a while, but others will get there and not perform this limited restraint. Once a capacity exists, it becomes normalised, and we adapt to it.

Regulation and oversight are of little use if they are always playing a chasing game. AI companies have turned regulation into the last line of redress when it should have been the first line of defence.

Asking whether we need more or less regulation to keep people safe is like asking whether regulation can deweaponise a gun. In a world where the gun exists, people will die. Regulation may reduce the damage, but it cannot undo the world that the weapon has already made.

What remains is to ask whether global governance systems can do what regulation can no longer do: Not merely control these technologies, but slow them, refuse them, perhaps force their degrowth. Control might now be a fantasy, as naive as the dream of the digital commons. But there is still a difference between fantasies. The commons asked us to build public power, however imperfectly. This new fantasy asks us to trust the people who broke the world, and then handed us repair as a service.

The writer is professor of Global Media at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and faculty associate at the Berkman Klein Centre for Internet and Society, Harvard University

Better execution, not more restriction



MEGHNA BAL

ANTHROPIC'S MYTHOS has put regulators on high alert. Mythos can identify security vulnerabilities in software systems, help plan attacks against them, and simulate how such attacks could unfold — abilities once limited to a small group of highly skilled humans. The advancement of such AI capabilities heightens the risk of bad actors using them to scale attacks on businesses, institutions, and critical infrastructure.

The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) has since issued an advisory on the cyber risks posed by advanced AI systems, acknowledging the criticality of keeping pace with frontier AI cyber capabilities and recommending the reinforcement of baseline cybersecurity measures. The RBI is also discussing with banks the risk posed by such systems. The regulatory alarm should perhaps have come earlier. A 2026 Global Threat Report by cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike indicates that AI-enabled bad actors increased attacks by 89 per cent in 2025 over the previous year. Nonetheless, authorities in India should see this as an opportunity to bolster cyber resilience across the board. The question is: How should they go about it?

First, the government must shore up the security capabilities of smaller entities in critical sectors. While it seems that the government is looking to secure critical infrastructure like banking and telecom, not all entities have the same capacities. While giving evidence before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance, the RBI acknowledged that cooperative banks lagged on security maturity and had been subject to cyberattacks.

Smaller entities like cooperative banks are going to lag on defences because they are resource-constrained. CERT-In's advisory acknowledges this limitation and prescribes a set of instructions for smaller businesses. However, securing such entities does not necessarily require more regulation. One report indicates that cooperative banks find cybersecurity compliance prohibitively expensive. A related issue is trusted vendors. When banks are looking for the lowest-cost option, they also become vulnerable to bad actors posing as cost-effective options.

The solution combines financial support with trusted implementation pathways. The government must create a corpus fund that can be used by smaller entities to strengthen their cybersecurity systems. Such a fund should be paired with a trusted vendor list that they may rely on to scan and secure their systems against threats. Pairing the fund with a trusted vendor list would also reduce the risk of misuse, poor-quality procurement, and malicious actors.

Second, the government must ensure that other areas of regulation do not inadvertently weaken cybersecurity. This requires a review of laws and proposed laws that may increase vulnerabilities in existing systems. The Draft Digital Competition Bill is one example. Broadly, the Bill prohibits mobile operating system companies from imposing restrictions on sideloading, inadvertently expanding the pathways through which malicious applications reach users. Such risks have already manifested in the cooperative banking sector. In 2025, cyber fraudsters made off with Rs 11.5 crore from the Himachal Co-operative Bank by tricking a customer into downloading a malicious application that gave them remote access to his phone, and then using that access to infiltrate its internet banking system.

Third, the government should resist the temptation to respond by restricting access to advanced AI systems altogether. While this does not seem to be on the anvil at the moment, the terms of reference for the recently constituted AI Governance and Economic Group empower it to classify AI use cases into categories such as "deploy", "pilot" and "defer", suggesting that access-based restrictions may become part of India's AI governance toolkit. Such an approach would be counterproductive, and should be avoided. Bad actors are unlikely to be constrained by legal frameworks.

With frontier AI systems like Mythos, what matters is not necessarily the number of weaknesses in a system, but which of those weaknesses can be exploited before they are fixed. This requires a departure from traditional cybersecurity approaches, which tend to treat vulnerabilities as discrete issues and overlook the interconnectedness of digital systems today. Such systems-level thinking must also inform national cybersecurity strategy. Planning must not only focus on large targets, but also address smaller and less apparent vulnerabilities that could serve as entry points into critical systems. India's cybersecurity armour will only be as strong as its weakest link.

The writer is director of the Esya Centre, a think tank based in New Delhi. Views are personal

Buddha Purnima lessons for a troubled world



C P RADHAKRISHNAN

ON THE auspicious full moon day of Chitra Pournami, when temple festivals are being celebrated, I pray that prosperity grows in every home. I am happy to extend my Buddha Purnima greetings to all brothers and sisters.

Among the many gifts Bharat has offered to the world, Buddhism stands foremost. The life and teachings of Lord Buddha continue to illuminate the lives of millions across the globe. Bharat taught the world the importance of self-realisation. The very word "Buddha" means "the awakened one". It is significant that the birth and enlightenment of this great soul, who strove to guide humanity toward self-awareness, fall on the same day.

Prince Siddhartha was raised in luxury. At the age of 29, renouncing his palace, wife, son, and all worldly wealth, he wandered in pursuit of spiritual truth. After six years of intense seeking, he attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya, becoming the Buddha. The realisation of the Four Noble Truths and the path of ethical conduct marked the beginning of a new philosophy. Near Varanasi, at Sarnath, he delivered his first sermon to five ascetics. Known as "Turning the Wheel of Dharma", this teaching became the foundation of Buddhism. Over time, many were drawn to his teachings. King Bimbisara of Magadha donated the Venuvana monastery in Rajgir. The wealthy Anathapindika covered the entire Jetavana grove with gold coins to build a monastery. Such acts reflect the deep faith in righteousness that existed in Bharat.



Monasteries taught the Four Noble Truths: There is suffering; desire is the root cause of suffering; by eliminating desire, suffering can be overcome; and by following the Eightfold Path, one can live free from suffering. The Buddha advised: Do not dwell on the past — live in the present. Truthfulness is powerful. The mind is the source of all actions, so cultivate positive thinking. Do not retreat in fear during difficult times. Life's journey is ultimately individual — guide it along a spiritual path. Words can wound, so speak gently. Love and non-violence are essential. Always keep learning.

Tamil literary works like *Manimekalai* and *Kundalakesi* present Buddhist philosophy beautifully. Though many texts are lost, their contributions remain invaluable. "Intoxicating drink that clouds the mind, and the taking of life — the wise, free from delusion, have renounced these, listen: Birth and death, and death leading again to birth/ Are like sleep and waking — this is the truth./ Those who perform righteous deeds attain a noble world/ Those who commit evil deeds fall into deep suffering./ Realising this, the discerning have severed their attachments." Thus, the epic *Manimekalai* explains the essence of Buddhism (*Aathirai Pichchaiyitta Kaathai*: 84–90).

The Buddha emphasised five moral precepts: Non-violence, non-stealing, refraining from adultery, truthfulness, and abstaining from intoxicants. Because he brought clarity and enlightenment to troubled minds, he is celebrated as the "Light of Asia".

I recall what Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in *Mann Ki Baat*: "The message of Bhagwan Gautama Buddha's life remains relevant even today. He taught us that peace begins within us; he made us realise that conquering oneself is the greatest victory. In the midst of the tensions and conflicts the world is going through today, Buddha's teachings have become even more significant."

The transformative power of the Buddha's teachings is evident in how they changed Emperor Ashoka into a proponent of peace. Ashoka propagated Buddhist principles through inscriptions and stupas across the land. The stupas at Sanchi and Sarnath continue to attract people from around the world, and the lion capital at Sarnath is Bharat's national emblem. Ashoka, his family and the monks helped spread Buddhism across Asia, with his son Mahinda carrying the teachings to Sri Lanka. Buddhist monks also helped propagate the faith in Tamil Nadu, where traces of it remain in several regions. Monks provided free medical care and education without discrimination. Charity, especially feeding the poor, was a fundamental duty. Feeding the hungry was seen as giving life itself, as expressed in Tamil literature.

All religions have been accepted with a unified spirit across the whole of Bharat, which shows that this nation has always been one in terms of culture and shared feeling.

Buddhism, which emphasised lifelong learning, established educational institutions and libraries on a very large scale. As early as the fifth century, Nalanda University was a great centre of learning with around 10,000 students and 1,500 teachers. Records indicate that there was a renowned university in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu. Universities such as Vikramashila and Odantapuri, along with numerous literary works, showcased the intellectual heights of the nation to the world. Scholars from across Asia came to study at Buddhist universities. The 15-year-long pilgrimage of the Chinese monk Faxian was undertaken specifically for Buddhism. The Chinese monk Xuanzang spent 16 years in Bharat studying at Nalanda and collecting texts before returning. Xuanzang also visited Kanchipuram, where he studied and copied manuscripts.

Moved by compassion for the weakened Buddha after his severe austerities, Sujata lovingly offered him milk porridge, saving his life and giving him the strength to meditate under the Bodhi tree. On Buddha Purnima, we remember her love and kindness by preparing and offering payasam.

"Love is the source of joy, love is the light of the world, love is the greatest power" — these teachings of Buddha remain deeply relevant. I pray that love and peace may flourish across the world.

The writer is the Vice President of India

Indian science has a leadership problem



VIVEK POLSHETTIWAR

INDIA STANDS at an important moment in its scientific journey. It has extraordinary talent, strong institutions, and increasing political commitment toward innovation and self-reliance. Yet there is an uncomfortable reality that many scientists quietly acknowledge: Our scientific ecosystem often rewards visibility more than discovery. Recent controversies surrounding academic claims and announcements are not isolated events. They reveal a structural problem within the ecosystem. Press conferences, social-media announcements, ceremonial launches and headline-friendly claims often receive more attention than the slow, rigorous process that leads to scientific breakthroughs.

This culture is gradually shifting incentives away from difficult, high-risk research toward work that produces quick visibility. India today produces a large number of scientific publications and has a vibrant community of researchers and students. Yet, when we examine global technological leadership in advanced materials, semiconductors, energy technologies, CCUS or deep-tech manufacturing, India remains significantly behind the US, Europe, and China.

The reason is not a lack of talent. Indian students and scientists perform exceptionally well globally. Many of the world's leading laboratories and technology companies are powered by Indian researchers. The problem lies in the structure of our scientific institutions and the incentives they create. Too often, success in Indian academia is measured through metrics that prioritise quantity over impact: The number of papers published, committees served, or awards collected. The ecosystem is rich in fellowships, medals and recognitions, but far poorer in environments that nurture long-term, high-risk scientific discovery.

Scientific ecosystems ultimately reflect the leadership that shapes them. Visionary leadership can build institutions that change the course of history. India has witnessed this before. In the early decades after Independence, young leaders such as Homi Bhabha and Vikram Sarabhai built institutions like TIFR, BARC and ISRO. They created environments where scientists could pursue bold ideas with confidence.

Today, the challenge is different. Our institutions are larger, our bureaucracy heavier, and global competition far more intense. Leadership requires not only scientific excellence but also administrative courage, the willingness to reform systems that have become slow, hierarchical and risk-averse. Younger scientists within Indian academia possess global experience, strong research records and a deep understanding of emerging scientific fields. Yet, leadership structures often remain static for decades, limiting the infusion of fresh ideas and urgency.

Many scientists across India recognise these problems but often hesitate to speak openly because the system does not always reward criticism or reform. Yet, constructive self-criticism has always been the foundation of scientific progress. Scientists who have worked within Indian institutions and internationally understand the strengths and weaknesses of our ecosystem. Their responsibility is not only to publish papers but also to help shape institutions that can produce the next generation of discoveries.

Despite challenges, the future of Indian science remains bright. The country possesses a massive demographic advantage. Government initiatives in deep-tech innovation, space technology, and energy transition signal an increasing commitment to scientific progress. What India needs now is alignment between policy ambition and institutional execution. If the government embraces academic reform, increases funding, empowers capable younger leaders and prioritises genuine discovery over optics, India can become a global leader in science and technology. Its scientific history shows what is possible when vision, courage and institutional freedom come together.

The writer is professor of Chemistry at TIFR, Mumbai. In 2024, he received the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Oil games

THE UAE'S exit from OPEC is a culmination of tensions that have been building for years ('Another oil market churn is in the offing', *IE*, April 30). For India, the immediate question is practical — how to position itself to benefit from increased output from the UAE while hedging against volatility caused by Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Long-term supply agreements and diversified sourcing remain the sensible route. India's energy diplomacy has generally been pragmatic, and this realignment demands more of the same — quiet, interest-driven engagement rather than reactive positioning.

M Barathi, Bengaluru

Promote multilateralism

INDIAN HISTORY is woven with democratic traditions that comprised diverse cultures, profound philosophies, and remarkable contributions to human civilisation, long before such concepts evolved in Western societies ('Trump, Iran and lessons from civilisation states', *IE*, April 30). Today, when the global leadership is defaulting to power blocs and zero-sum thinking, India's legacy can serve as a toolkit for navigating conflict in a fractured world by offering alternative pathways rooted in balance, restraint, and coexistence. The idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam can reframe international relations from rivalry to shared responsibility to promote multilateralism.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh

Keeping up with reality

THE COLUMN captures the dissonance between schooling and teenagers' digital lives ('How to be a good mom in times of new tools, old school', *IE*, April 30). It resembles teaching retired parents online banking while they still insist on updating a physical passbook. Our education system clings to familiarity even as reality shifts. As Pink Floyd's Another Brick in the Wall reminds us, we don't need no education that ignores context. The task is to align learning with lived realities and evolving competencies.

Harsh Pawaria, Rohtak

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• HEALTH

Why SC is looking at the way brain death is certified

Anonna Dutt
New Delhi, April 30

THE SUPREME Court on Tuesday said it will seek expert opinion from AIIMS doctors on whether there is a need to conduct tests such as electroencephalogram (EEG) and angiogram to declare someone brain dead. The bench was hearing a petition alleging that patients who may not be brain dead are declared so to facilitate organ donation.

What is brain death?

Brain death is an irreversible condition where all activities of the brain, including automatic functions such as breathing controlled by the brain stem, cease. The patient continues to survive — and breathe — with the help of life support systems such as ventilators. These patients, most of whom would have suffered severe injuries that cut off oxygen supply to the brain, are for all intents dead and cannot be revived. As they die while being on life support — which keep their blood pumping — they make for good candidates for organ donation.

Why do we need to declare people brain dead?

Declaration and certification of brain death is essential for deceased organ donation, where organs and tissues such as kidney, liver, heart, and eyes are donated to undisclosed, unrelated recipients. While India is a global leader when it comes to the absolute number of transplant surgeries, most of these involve organs donated by living relatives. These procedures are getting safer, but they still hold risks for a healthy donor. This risk can be done away with when using deceased donor organs.

Despite the fact that nearly 1.5 lakh people die due to traumatic brain injuries and another 50,000 due to stroke every year — both categories of patients who qualify as brain dead donors — only 1,100 persons actually donate organs. India's rate of deceased donation, while on the rise, continues to be very low at 0.77 per million population. On the other end of the spectrum is Spain, which sees 48 deceased donations per million population.

What is the protocol for declaring brain death?

The current guidelines by the apex regulator National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) requires a four-member hospital board to declare that a patient's brain function has irreversibly ceased at least twice with an interval of 12 hours. This board has to determine and note in writing what was the illness or accident that led to the condition, and whether there could possibly be any reversible causes. They also have to note whether spontaneous breathing has ceased, whether the patient's pupils react to light, whether their eye moves to the opposite side when their head is turned (just like a doll's eyes would), whether they have any response to pain, and whether they have a gag reflex, among others.

"The current guidelines require various bed-side tests for the declaration of brain death. It does not specify the need for tests such as EEG or angiogram," said Dr Manjari Tripathi, head of neurology department at AIIMS Delhi.

What is EEG and angiogram? What does it tell us?

An EEG test essentially looks for the electrical signals in the brain using several small electrodes attached to the head. For a brain dead patient, this test would show that there is no electrical activity in the brain. An angiogram uses contrast dyes and X-rays to check the blood flow in the brain. While the bed-side tests can indicate brain death, these two tests are more conclusive.

There are, however, challenges to utilising these tests for determining every brain death. Two experts, on condition of anonymity, said that using these tests would mean that smaller hospitals would never be able to declare a person brain dead; therefore, the already low number of deceased donations would go down further.

What are the challenges in brain death certification?

One of the challenges is the lack of knowledge even among physicians, which leads to several patients never being officially declared and asked to be organ donors.

An AIIMS study last year found that more than half of doctors — including neurosurgeons, neurologists, and critical care specialists who are usually included in the certification process — did not receive any training on brain death certification at the time of their graduation.

• CLIMATE

One heatwave is over, but more may be on the way

With rain expected to be subdued, particularly during second half of monsoon, India could face long periods of intense heat this year



AMITABH SINHA

LIGHT TO moderate rainfall on Wednesday and Thursday brought an end to a week-long spell of heatwave in most parts of north and central India, the first of the season. And another spell of heatwave is unlikely for the next two weeks at least, according to the latest forecast by the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

But that might only be a temporary relief. There are indications that the temperatures might remain high this year, not just in the summer months but even extending into the monsoon season, and thereafter. That may mean several such spells of heatwaves could be possible in the coming months. With rain expected to be a little subdued, particularly during the second half of the monsoon season, India could be facing prolonged periods of intense heat this year.

• Heatwave days in worst-hit meteorological subdivisions

REGION	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
West Rajasthan	6	58	3	29	33
East Madhya Pradesh	0	34	13	26	10
Vidarbha	2	18	11	11	8
West Madhya Pradesh	2	42	4	24	7
East Rajasthan	4	28	0	23	21
Odisha	3	11	24	37	7
East Uttar Pradesh	0	33	11	33	8
Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi	2	37	5	30	11
Saurashtra and Kutch	12	25	4	16	15
West Uttar Pradesh	2	28	5	32	5

• States reporting highest heat-related deaths

STATE	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Punjab	38	90	110	91	130
Uttar Pradesh	176	117	50	35	130
Telangana	107	156	98	43	62
Bihar	64	215	53	57	78
Maharashtra	128	159	56	37	90
Andhra Pradesh	97	128	50	22	47
Jharkhand	42	88	23	33	47
Odisha	40	84	13	15	38
Haryana	56	46	23	14	27
Madhya Pradesh	15	33	7	2	27

SOURCE: PARLIAMENT QUESTIONS

Heatwave zones

Summers have always been very warm in most parts of India, but heatwaves are very specific conditions defined by the India Meteorological Department (IMD). If the maximum temperature of a place gets at least 5°C higher than normal, and this condition is reached at least two days in succession, the place is said to be experiencing a heatwave. If the temperature gets warmer than normal by 7°C, a severe heatwave is declared.

A few other things are factored in before declaring a heatwave, particularly whether the place is located in plains or mountains and whether its normal temperature is below 40°C or higher. But the main idea is the same. Heatwave is a condition where the temperature of the place gets unusually, and uncomfortably, higher than the normal. The thresholds defined by IMD are specific to India and are not universal definitions of heatwave.

Heatwaves in India occur mainly during the March to June period, though sometimes they do extend further into the monsoon season as well. In 2023, some parts of the country experienced heatwave conditions even in February, a month in which there is not even a provision to declare a heatwave.

There are two areas where heatwaves are common in India: one, the northwestern and central part extending into Bihar and Jharkhand, which is known as the core heatwave zone; and two, the eastern coast comprising Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. The physical mechanisms causing heatwaves in these two areas are different, though related.

In the core zone, heatwaves are caused mainly by persistent high-pressure conditions in the upper atmosphere that force the air to sink downward. This sinking leads to compression of the air, warming it significantly.

Over Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, heatwaves are primarily a result of the prevention of the normal sea-breezes from coming over to the land by unusual westerly or northwesterly winds blowing from the hot landmass in north and central India.

In general, the frequency and intensity of heatwaves is higher in the core zone, though historically, both Andhra Pradesh and Odisha have reported a disproportionately large number of heatwave-related deaths. On an average, a heatwave lasts between 4 and 8 days.

The southern peninsular India, as well as the northeastern part, have so far remained largely unaffected by heatwaves, though long-term climate projections suggest that this might not remain the case in the future. A 2023 report by IMD on heatwaves and cold waves cited studies that have suggested that southern India could be experiencing severe heatwaves by the end of this century. These studies also suggest heatwaves have been becoming more frequent and intense in the last half century, and their average duration is also on the rise.

Heat deaths

Hundreds of people die every year due to heat-stroke and other heat-related diseases, and thousands fall ill.

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These numbers are widely considered to be under-estimates, because not all such cases are reported.

El Niño linkage

Several studies have shown that there was a strong linkage between the frequency and severity of heatwaves in India and the El Niño phenomenon in the eastern Pacific Ocean. In general, there is a greater chance of prolonged and severe heatwaves occurring in India during an El Niño phase. The opposite happens with the La Niña phase.

El Niño and La Niña are opposite phases of El Niño Southern Oscillation, a large ocean-atmospheric interaction that occurs over the equatorial Pacific Ocean, off the coast of South America, and influences weather events worldwide. During El Niño, the surface waters in this part of the Pacific Ocean get unusually warm.

In India, the El Niño phase is most commonly associated with a tendency to suppress rainfall, while the La Niña phase tends to induce more rains. But El Niño is also linked to stronger heatwaves in India. This is relevant for the current year because an El Niño event is under development, and is likely to mature between May and July. It is because of this that IMD has predicted a below-normal monsoon rainfall this year.

Most forecasts about this El Niño suggest that this event will gain in strength and persist through the rest of the year. This means that its influence in causing heatwaves could be felt next year too. Historically, the frequency and severity of heatwaves in India have been found to be more than average in the year immediately succeeding an El Niño event.

"The time series of frequency, duration and maximum duration clearly indicate a correlation between El Niño events and heat waves over India. It is clear that most of the years with above average heat wave activity over India are the years following El Niño events," the 2023 IMD report noted.

Heatwave as disaster

As many as 23 states in India are now affected by heatwaves. Each one of them, and hundreds of cities, now implement a heat action plan during summers. These plans are mainly about implementing solutions like making cool water available at public places, creating shelters and shaded places, revising the school, college and office timings, distribution of hydrating solutions, and halting non-essential outdoor activities, including construction, at least during peak hours. These plans have had varying degrees of success.

Still, hundreds of people die every year due to heat-stroke and other heat-related diseases, and thousands fall ill. These numbers are widely considered to be under-estimates, because not all such cases are reported.

Incidentally, a heatwave is not yet considered a notified disaster under the Disaster Management Act in India. The Sixteenth Finance Commission, which submitted its report last year, recommended that both heatwaves and lightning be included as notified disasters.

In practical terms, this will enable the state governments to use the money in their State Disaster Response Funds to provide relief and assistance to people affected by heatwaves and lightning. This was a long-pending demand of the states, considering rising instances of heatwaves in India and increasing expenses in implementing the heat action plans.

• INFRASTRUCTURE

Reliable link, shorter trip: Promises of direct Jammu-Srinagar train

Arun Sharma
Jammu, April 30

RAILWAY MINISTER Ashwini Vaishnaw on Thursday flagged off the first direct Vande Bharat Express from Jammu to Srinagar, which will not only provide all-weather connectivity between the UT capitals but also reduce travel time. It takes 6.5 to 7 hours to travel by car via the Jammu-Srinagar national highway (NH44), which can be closed for days due to landslides during rain and snowfall. With the train, the journey will be completed in just under five hours.

• Journey under five hours



Vande Bharat's schedule

The train with 20 coaches will operate six days a week from May 2 (except Tuesdays). This is an extended operation, as the Vande Bharat Express with eight coaches has been operational on the Katra-Srinagar section since June 2025.

The extended train will depart from Jammu Tawi railway station 6.20 am and reach Srinagar at 11.10 am, covering a distance of around 266 km. From Srinagar, the train will depart at 8 am to reach Jammu Tawi by 12.40 pm. With brief halts at Katra, Reasi and Banihal stations, it will ease pressure on vehicular traffic on NH44 and provide relief to thousands of daily commuters.

Feat of engineering

Moving through deep gorges and densely forested valleys in the backdrop of the Shivaliks, Pir Panjal and the Himalayas, the electrically propelled engine-hauled Vande Bharat covers various engineering marvels.

The 111 km-long Katra-Banihal stretch includes 27 tunnels and 49 bridges, including the world's highest Rail Arch Bridge over the Chenab River, and India's first cable-stayed rail bridge over Anji Khad. While the Chenab bridge is 35 m higher than the Eiffel Tower, the bridge over Anji Khad has at its heart an inverted Y-shaped pylon or bridge pillar that climbs 193 m above its foundation, which is more than double the height of the Qutub Minar.

The rail line passes through India's longest tunnel, measuring 12.77 km, connecting Khari with Sumber. It also includes the country's second and third-longest tunnels.

Long road to trains

- The Himalayas are young, and the geologically unstable Shivalik Hills and Pir Panjal mountains lie in the seismically most active Zones IV and V.
- The terrain is difficult and sees heavy snowfall, and it presented serious challenges in constructing bridges and tunnels.

Challenges and innovations

More than 205 km of motorable roads were built for Rs 2,000 crore to transport heavy machinery, construction material, and workers to construction sites.

In view of the challenges faced in constructing highly complex tunnels and huge bridges in unstable mountainous terrain, railway engineers devised a novel tunnelling method to prevent any structural problems.

With heated windshields, advanced heating systems and insulated toilets, the train remains operational and comfortable for passengers through the year. Its piping system is such that the water supply cannot freeze even at -10 degrees Celsius temperatures. During winter, a snow-clearing locomotive moves ahead of the train. Seismic dampers have also been installed to absorb tremors in this high-risk seismic zone.

The railway line has also provided the people of Kashmir a means to transport commercial goods such as apples, dry fruits, pashmina shawls and handicrafts to other parts of the country in the shortest possible time and at a much lower cost. While more than five lakh people have travelled via the Vande Bharat between Katra and Srinagar so far, nearly two crore kg of apples have been transported from Kashmir to Delhi.

• POLICY

How Ambedkar laid the foundations of India's modern labour legislation



EXPERT EXPLAINS

RITESH JYOTI

THE AUTHOR IS A MASTER'S STUDENT AT AZIM PREMJI UNIVERSITY. HE WORKS WITH BAWS.IN, A LIBRARY OF AMBEDKAR'S WORKS.

BHIMRAO "BABASAHEB" Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution and independent India's first Union Law Minister, began his political journey by organising the Independent Labour Party to address the issues of the labouring classes in colonial India. But his concerns went beyond material conditions. For him, labour must be able to live a life that allows the development of their human, cultural and spiritual potential.

In 1942, nearly a month before the launch of the Quit India movement, Ambedkar was appointed as the Labour Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council, where he introduced a slew of pathbreaking legislation for the welfare of labour or the working classes. This included reduction of working hours from 12 to eight, maternity benefit for women workers, provident fund for employees, paid leave and dearness allowance, compulsory recognition of trade unions, housing and medical facilities for workers, employee state insurance, and many more.

Ambedkar's experience as the Labour Member (1942-46) is reflected even in the making of the Constitution, particularly on the provisions related to labour. For instance, through Article 39, the Constitution directs the State to design policies to ensure "adequate means to livelihood for all its citizens, and equal pay for equal work for both men and women".

Through Article 43, it directs the State "to secure, by suitable legislation or economic organisation or in any other way, to all workers, agricultural, industrial or otherwise, work, a living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities".

Most importantly, the Constitution actively seeks to eliminate the glaring economic inequalities by stating "that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to sub serve the common good; that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment".

A watershed moment

In the colonial era, particularly after the World Wars, industrialisation began to expand in the Global South, pushing vast masses out of agrarian, feudal set-ups into a labour-driven capitalist economy.

This was also a time when little attention was given to the interests of labour. Against this backdrop, Ambedkar's contributions to labour legislation marked a watershed moment for the Indian labour movement. During his tenure as Labour Member, India set important benchmarks in labour rights and moved towards meeting global standards for protections that workers are entitled to.

Also, in 1942, a Tripartite Labour Conference was held in New Delhi — the first of its kind in India's history — where government, employers and employees came together to discuss their problems.

As chairman of the conference, Ambedkar ensured that labour and management came face-to-face as equals. The conference marked a new phase in the relationship between industry and labour, laying the foundation for the evolution of labour policy.

The conference also aimed at the formulation of a uniform labour code and raised concerns about placing it in the Concurrent List. As Ambedkar noted, if there was no central legislation, each province might frame its own laws "by allowing Provincial considerations to dominate over considerations of general and national importance".

These conferences took place regularly between 1942 and 1946.

Ambedkar's efforts also led to the formation of the Labour Investigation Committee in early 1944. This first-of-its-kind fact-finding body examined critical aspects of labour life such as wages, working conditions, housing, and broader social realities, creating an evidence-based framework for future social security policies.

Labour welfare measures

Ambedkar's experiences during his 1943 visit to Chota Nagpur to see the lives of mine workers translated into policy some years later. A Bill he introduced in the Central Assembly (as the Lower House of Parliament was called during British rule) led to the establishment of the Mica Mines Labour Welfare Fund in 1946 to support welfare measures for workers in the mica mining industry. This led to similar welfare funds created for workers in other industries.

Another key amendment followed in 1946, when Ambedkar pushed for a provision requiring mine owners to provide separate bathing facilities for male and female workers. He framed it as a matter of not just hygiene but dignity.

Even before becoming a Labour Member, Ambedkar had been raising the issue of maternity benefits in the legislature, arguing that women must not be forced to choose between livelihood and birth. The Maternity Benefit Act of 1929 reflected these efforts and stood as one of his earliest interventions on the issue, even before such protections were widely taken up at the international level. This framework was strengthened through amendments in 1943 and 1945, which clarified benefits and expanded both the duration of leave and wage support, especially for women working in mines.

Ambedkar's legacy

Through amendments to existing laws, new protections for women workers, and measures around compensation and welfare, Ambedkar laid the foundation for a more inclusive labour policy. These efforts did not just address immediate concerns but set the ground for future legislation on health, maternity benefits, and protection against industrial accidents.

Major changes were brought through amendments to the Factories Act, addressing long working hours and the absence of basic welfare measures for workers. At the same time, he ensured that this reduction would not lead to any cut in wages or dearness allowance. While India earlier had longer working hours, the new framework moved towards the global norm of a 48-hour workweek.

Ambedkar's untiring efforts to secure these safeguards for labour in the pre-independence legislations and in the Constitution bears testimony to the champion of labour rights in him. But despite this, he was clear about one thing: labour rights cannot survive on reforms alone. He believed that to sustain the rights they have achieved, they must have representation in politics.

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{ OUR TAKE }

Battles against hate speech

A stringent law could help but the judiciary must ensure that such a statute is not weaponised by the State against dissidents

In an ideal world, a modern secular republic would not need separate laws curtailing hate speech. Existing provisions clamping reasonable fetters on free speech — as they do in India — would be adequate to deal with elements trying to exploit religious, political or caste-based fault lines for vested interests. In such a world, the police would be impartial in registering cases against those trying to instigate violence.

Unfortunately, this is far from an ideal world. Despite orders from the Supreme Court, local administrations often hesitate to book those trying to exploit local disturbances. Many cases against people accused of offending religious feelings are either flimsy or politically motivated. As a result, hate speech flourishes unchecked.

Against this backdrop, the Supreme Court's latest order — saying that existing penal laws adequately address hate speech — appears incongruent with reality. The top court reminded public figures of their duty to exercise restraint in public discourse, holding that hate speech is antithetical to the constitutional value of fraternity and strikes at the moral fabric of the republic. But it dismissed the petition seeking separate offences for hate speech and rumour-mongering, describing the petition as "misconceived" in assuming that the field of hate speech remains "legislatively unoccupied".

There are two issues here. One, the apex court's earlier direction to the states to register cases against those indulging in hate speech is now observed largely in the breach. As noted earlier by this newspaper, several verdicts over the past decade have dwelled on what constitutes hate speech and how governments should combat it, but the political will to crack down on such acts is too feeble, given the possibility of electoral benefits. Moreover, despite laying down substantive principles and legal doctrines, some courts have been reticent in actively intervening in actual cases of hate speech. Two, the absence of a legal definition of hate speech puts too much discretion in the hands of the executive and law enforcement machinery, and opens the door for political influence. It also hobbles any effort to tackle the perpetrators of hate speech in a court of law. This can be reversed only with a stringent law against hate speech and more active involvement by the judiciary to ensure that new statutes are not weaponised by the State against political opponents or dissidents. The top court should reconsider.

The many political lives of Uddhav Thackeray

Uddhav Thackeray, the Shiv Sena-UBT chief, always sported the veneer of a reluctant politician. His public persona was in sharp contrast to his father and founder of the Sena, Bal Thackeray, who did not care for the etiquette of parliamentary politics but weaponised rhetoric to polarise people. The senior Thackeray refused to contest elections and seek public office; instead, he ran the party and government through his nominees. Those were different times. When the terms of engagement between the BJP and the Sena changed, Uddhav offered himself as the face of an ideologically incoherent alliance that included the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party and sought public office. The Maha Vikas Aghadi experiment did succeed initially: Uddhav became chief minister between 2019 and 2022 and fared well as head of the government during the Covid years. But a split in the party, followed by the devastating loss in the 2025 assembly election has laid bare its contradictions. His decision to withdraw from contesting the council polls, despite the consensus in the larger Opposition that he should, suggests his stint in legislative politics is over.

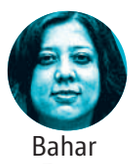
What does this mean for the Shiv Sena-UBT and Maharashtra politics? Uddhav's son, Aditya, is already a legislator and seems primed to take over. Uddhav will, perhaps, retreat to being an elder statesman of the party and decide its future course while Aditya enhances his leadership credentials. This may also work for the MVA, which could do with a mentor, especially since Sharad Pawar, is ailing. The question, however, is if a leader can stay away from legislative politics and seize the political narrative: Bal Thackeray could in a different era and when the united Sena was a formidable force. How Uddhav recalibrates his political role will be keenly watched.

Heat action plans must go beyond emergencies

A fundamental problem for many heat action plans is that they involve episodic reactions to deep-seated systemic failures in urban design



Heat action plans can be tools of empowerment for vulnerable groups that stand to lose their livelihood during a heat wave. HT ARCHIVE



Bahar Dutt

A recent study by IIT Bombay shows that heatwaves over the Indo-Gangetic Plains are primarily driven by local land and atmospheric factors, rather than by hot air travelling from elsewhere. Another study in Springer Nature Research highlights that local weather conditions — such as soil moisture, cloud cover, and humidity — play a greater role in accelerating heatwave intensity and duration than previously understood. This means local land-atmosphere interactions could dominate more than regional, large-scale climate changes in creating extreme heat events. Morbid as their results may be, both these studies remind us that mitigating emissions can seem a lofty global goal for dealing with the climate crisis. Yet, simple interventions at a local level can help buffer citizens at least in the short and intermediate terms against extreme weather events, particularly intense heat waves.

Here's the good news: India is one of the few countries that has heat action plans ready for more than 100 cities with local and hyper-local interventions outlined. These plans are very simply strategic frameworks rolled out by state- and district-level bodies with multi-sectoral targets to respond to extreme heat events. Given the scale of the looming crisis with heat, these are not just imperative, they could be lifesaving.

This is what heat action plans have got right — the importance of early warning systems, upgrading existing infrastructure for an emergency response and training the medical community to respond to the crisis. Simple measures such as the specialised heatstroke immersion cooling unit set up by Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in Delhi or the setting up of cooling centres in cities like Jodhpur and Churu in Rajasthan are fine interventions. Other cities have innovated with adjusting working hours during a heat wave, while those such as Ahmedabad have a comprehensive roof-top cooling policy in place. (The city has incorporated passive cooling solutions such as solar reflective paint that can drop indoor temperatures by 3-6°C across hundreds of homes.)

There are some heat action plans that have been reduced to bureaucratic paperwork — prepared to meet formal requirements, but lacking meaningful implementation or follow-through. At first glance, the heat action plans of some cities or districts read more like Environment Impact Assessment reports; they make the right noises with the correct glossary of terms but are lacking in strategic long-term interventions or any meaningful action to save lives or the environment.

Others are so glaring in their mistakes that they forget to change the name of the state and have simply lifted text from other reports. For instance, while analysing the heat action plan for the Dhaulpur region in Rajasthan, this author found several directives to the Jammu and Kashmir government, indicating that the text had simply been lifted from another report. It is unclear why the heat action plan for Dhaulpur, Rajasthan has direct forecasts of Jammu and Kashmir.

But for such glaring mistakes, heat action plans could do so much more. Delhi's Heat Action Plan, again, makes a reference to increasing greenery but doesn't map out problems such as low survival rates and lack of land availability for planting trees.

A fundamental problem for many heat action plans is that they involve episodic reactions to deep-seated systemic failures in urban design: For instance, large pockets of Delhi being devoid of any green cover, construction of cement-based expressways that add to the heat island effect with long stretches of expressways leading into the city becoming absolutely devoid of any shade or green cover. Within city planning, there is now little space for the walker or the street vendor during a heat wave.

Then there are cities such as Thane that have comprehensive and respectable heat action plans in place with granular details and clear alignment of responsibilities within government departments with the right mix of hard science and innovative policy interventions. Developed in association with the Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW), the Thane heat action plan gets many action points right, while looking at historical trends and establishing effective pathways for response.

Heat action plans can be turned into windows of opportunities to provide cooling options to vulnerable populations who don't have a choice other than working in peak summer, such as delivery people, construction workers, and other daily wage workers.

So, what does this access to cooling look like in city-based interventions? Does it mean the installation of air conditioners in government or community centres?

Or, can it go deeper, as the World Resources Institute mentions, through planting of shade trees, creation of shaded walking pathways, installation of reflective "cool roofs", creating porous pavements, and managing urban geometry to maximise shading and natural airflow?

Access to cooling cannot be a luxury. It has to be viewed as a right given the predictions of a scorching summer ahead. Heat action plans can be tools of empowerment for vulnerable groups that stand to lose their livelihood during a heat wave. The challenge is to ingrain these independent "pilot projects", currently managed by NGOs, in city planning.

Bahar Dutt is a conservation biologist and environment journalist. The views expressed are personal

Stronger Indo-German ties central for industry, strategy



Gurjit Singh

Defence minister Rajnath Singh's recent visit to Germany could be a pivot in the evolution of Indo-German defence ties, providing a transition from sporadic engagement to a more deliberate partnership. For decades, cooperation between India and Germany in defence remained restricted, confined to niche areas such as naval engineering and select technology transfers. German restrictions on small arms and technology was an impediment too. What emerged from this visit is an ambitious framework that prioritises industrial collaboration, technological co-creation, and longer-term strategic alignment.

This shift has a growing recognition on both sides that defence partnerships today are no longer about straightforward procurement. Instead, they are increasingly about integrating industrial capabilities, sharing innovation ecosystems, and building resilience in supply chains. Germany's evolving defence posture, particularly since its post-Ukraine "Zeitenwende", has pushed Berlin to expand production capacity and diversify partnerships. India, meanwhile, is accelerating its efforts to strengthen domestic manufacturing under its strategic autonomy framework. These parallel trajectories create possibilities of convergence.

A key outcome of the visit was the articulation of a more formalised structure for cooperation. Both sides are now seeking sustained industrial engagement. This includes encouraging German firms to establish roots in India's defence manufacturing landscape, while opening pathways for Indian companies to participate in advanced engineering and system integration. The emphasis is on continuity, beyond transactional exchanges toward embedded partnerships. A similar approach was adopted when German defence minister Boris Pistorius visited Japan, Australia and Singapore in March.

The most consequential dimension of the visit focuses on the delayed submarine programme, Project-75I. This $8-billion initiative has renewed momentum, with Germany's Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems the leading contender in collaboration with Mazagaon Dock Shipbuilders Limited. The significance of this project goes beyond the acquisition of six advanced submarines. It represents a potential anchor for a multi-decade partnership in one of the most complex areas of defence manufacturing.

Unlike earlier acquisitions, Project-75I is structured around substantial technology transfer, local production, and lifecycle sustainment. The German offer, centred on advanced conventional submarine designs such as the Type-212 family, includes sophisticated air-independent propulsion (AIP) systems that enhance underwater endurance and stealth. For India, this is critical: The ability to remain submerged for extended periods without surfacing improves operational effectiveness in contested maritime environments.

Equally important is the industrial ecosystem that could accompany this deal. If concluded, the programme would entail not merely the assembly of submarines in India, but the gradual development of indigenous capabilities in hull fabrication, propulsion integration, sonar systems, and maintenance infrastructure. This could position Indian shipyards as regional hubs for submarine servicing and upgrades, extending the partnership well beyond the initial contract.

The strategic implications are significant. Submarine warfare remains a decisive domain in the Indo-Pacific, where stealth, deterrence, and sea denial capabilities are key to maritime security. By collaborating on submarine technologies, India and Germany would invest in a shared capability that aligns with their strategic interests: Germany's in maintaining a rules-based maritime order, and India's in securing its expanding naval footprint.

Beyond submarines, the visit opened avenues in emerging defence technologies. Discussions highlighted the potential for work in unmanned systems, particularly drones equipped with advanced sensors and autonomous capabilities. Germany's strengths in precision engineering and sensor design complement India's expertise in software integration and scalable manufacturing. Together, these capabilities could produce systems tailored not only for domestic use but also for export to third markets.

Another area gaining traction is defence electronics. Modern warfare increasingly relies on integrated networks of sensors, communication systems, and data-processing platforms. German expertise in radar and electronic systems aligns well with India's push toward network-centric operations. Collaborative efforts in this space could range from next-generation surveillance systems to electronic warfare solutions capable of operating in complex environments.

Industry engagement formed a crucial pillar of the visit. Interactions between Indian officials and German defence manufacturers underscored a shift toward commercially viable partnerships. For German companies, India offers scale, cost advantages, and access to a rapidly growing market. For Indian firms, collaboration provides exposure to high-end technologies and integration into European supply chains. This mutuality of interest strengthens the durability of the partnership, making it less dependent on political cycles.

However, the path ahead is not without constraints. Germany's export control regime remains stringent, and the transfer of sensitive technologies will require careful negotiation. Differences in procurement procedures and industrial standards could also pose challenges. Moreover, India's existing defence relationships, with countries such as France and the US create a competitive landscape in which Germany must carve out its distinct role.

Despite these challenges, the broader trajectory is clear. The visit reflects a convergence of strategic priorities: Germany's search for reliable industrial partners, India's ambition to build domestic capabilities, and a global shift toward diversified defence supply chains. The submarine project, in particular, exemplifies this convergence.

In that sense, Rajnath Singh's visit was not merely a diplomatic engagement but a signal of intent. It suggests that Indo-German defence cooperation is entering a new phase, defined less by isolated transactions and more by sustained, technology-driven collaboration. If the initiatives set in motion are carried through with consistency and political backing, the partnership could evolve into a significant pillar of both countries' defence strategies, with implications extending well beyond the bilateral sphere into the Indo-Pacific.

Gurjit Singh is a former ambassador of India to Germany. The views expressed are personal

{ JOSEPH AOUN } PRESIDENT, LEBANON

Pressure must be exerted on Israel to ensure it respects international laws... and ceases targeting civilians, paramedics, civil defence, and humanitarian health and relief organisations



HT

India's AI ambition risks outrunning its readiness



Lloyd Mathias



Gaurav Bhagowati

India has been clear about not just participating in the artificial intelligence (AI) revolution but also shaping it. The AI Impact Summit earlier this year was evidence of this.

But, two global indices released within weeks of the summit, taken together, offer a more sobering reality check. The Oxford Insights Government AI Readiness Index 2025 ranks India 27th globally, reflecting middling performance on governance, regulatory quality, and public-sector capability. In contrast, the 2025 Stanford University Global AI Vibrancy Index places India among the world's top three AI ecosystems, citing strengths in talent, research output, digital infrastructure, and startup dynamism.

The two rankings reveal a structural imbalance: India's AI market is sprinting ahead, while its institutions are still catching up. This divergence is not accidental. Over the past decade, India made a deliberate strategic bet on building population-scale digital infrastructure. This foundation now enables AI applications to scale faster than in most large economies. It is this ecosystem that the Stanford index celebrates. India has a deep pool of technical talent, a large and diverse deployment market, and a startup sector that is both energetic and increasingly well-funded.

But the Oxford index highlights what is missing. AI readiness is not just about innovation; it is about governance. It measures whether the State can regulate, deploy, and oversee AI responsibly. On these parameters — data governance, regulatory clarity, institutional capability — India remains a work in progress.

To be fair, the government has moved with intent. In 2025, India introduced the India AI Governance Guidelines and formed a dedicated AI Governance Group supported by a Technology and Policy Expert Committee and committed nearly $1.3 billion to AI infrastructure. The scale-up to 38,000 GPUs signals a push towards compute sovereignty. Yet, this is where the narrative risks becoming misleading.

India's AI strategy is increasingly being framed as an infrastructure story — more GPUs, more data centres, more capital expenditure. But compute capacity, while necessary, is not sufficient. In fact, without parallel investments in governance, the imbalance the two indices highlight could deepen.

The real risk is that India will adopt AI too quickly without the institutional safeguards to manage its consequences. In such a scenario, markets will outpace regulation. Private firms will deploy AI across finance, health care, and public services faster than the State can define standards or enforce accountability. The result is erosion of trust.

China has tightly aligned State direction with ecosystem growth. The US and Europe, despite their differences, are embedding AI into regulatory and national security frameworks. Institutional capacity is evolving alongside market expansion in these jurisdictions.

India, by contrast, risks assuming that its digital public infrastructure success will automatically translate into AI leadership. While DPI addresses needs of scale and access, AI introduces new challenges: Opacity, bias, safety, and systemic risk.

Energy, too, remains a hard constraint. Scaling data centres, cloud infrastructure, and semiconductor ambitions will put pressure on power generation, transmission, and land use. Without coordinated planning, these could become binding constraints.

Few countries are as well-positioned to deploy AI at population scale — and do this as deeply — as India. But opportunity without preparedness is a fragile advantage.

Building robust data governance frameworks, reforming public procurement to integrate AI responsibly, and investing in digital capability within the State are all necessities. Regulatory clarity must replace ambiguity. Equally important is infrastructure alignment. AI policy cannot be divorced from energy policy, semiconductor strategy, and urban planning.

For the private sector, the challenge is to resist the temptation of unchecked acceleration. Responsible AI practices, including transparency, auditability, and bias mitigation, must be embedded early, not retrofitted after regulatory intervention.

The core question is whether India can build the institutions to sustain AI capability. If it fails, the gap between innovation and oversight will widen into a structural fault line. India's AI future will not be determined by how fast it moves, but by how well it governs that speed.

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Policy prescription

MoF's economic review presents a realistic assessment

The latest monthly Economic Review, by the Department of Economic Affairs under the Ministry of Finance, released this week, has done well to present a realistic assessment of the current macroeconomic situation, along with a policy path. It's been over two months since the beginning of the conflict in West Asia, with no resolution in sight. The Strait of Hormuz, through which about one-fifth of global crude oil passes, has been blocked by both the United States and Iran. Amid continued uncertainty, prices of crude oil rose again on Thursday, with benchmark Brent crude trading above $125 per barrel, compared with about $70 before the start of the conflict. While the global economy is suffering because of the conflict, countries like India are particularly exposed because of their considerable dependence on the region for imports of crude oil.

The review is spot on in saying that several international agencies seem "guilty" of assuming a quick restoration of energy supplies. However, it's worth noting that many governments, including those starting the conflict, also seem to have assumed that it would end quickly with minimal disruption. However, Iran's resistance and resolve have altered the conflict's nature. Therefore, it is unclear how long the impasse will persist or how a durable resolution will be achieved. One clear message from the West Asia conflict is the need to build buffers of key inputs, and this should not be limited to oil and gas. It has been witnessed that countries can weaponise their dominance in the production of critical inputs and commodities. Coming back to oil, some countries have passed on the increase in prices, and some have not. India is in the latter category. The government reduced special excise duty on petrol and diesel to protect the oil-marketing companies (OMCs) to some extent. However, reports suggest the OMCs may see under-recoveries of about ₹80,000 crore just on the sale of liquefied petroleum gas this financial year if present level of losses persists. They are also estimated to be facing large losses on the sale of petrol and diesel. This is not a sustainable position, and prices have to be adjusted. This will have implications for growth and inflation outcomes. Projections of a deficient monsoon would only complicate matters for Indian macroeconomic managers.

In the given context, the review notes that many countries may be tempted to shore up near-term growth and protect employment. However, the need to maintain macroeconomic stability must also be kept in mind. The review recommends pushing the reforms agenda. For instance, the decriminalisation and deregulation process must continue. Simplifying processes, which helps lower the cost of imports and exports, can be extremely useful in the present circumstances. Taxation policies need to be made more certain and predictable. The review has also emphasised attracting capital flows and noted that all agencies need to come together in this regard. India runs a current-account deficit and is also facing capital outflows. In unfavourable circumstances, India needs to do much more to encourage foreign investors to invest. Thus far, the government has managed the situation reasonably well, possibly assuming that the crisis would be resolved quickly. However, with continued uncertainty, it will have to make adjustments. The objective should be to preserve macroeconomic stability and boost medium-term growth prospects.

Measuring services

The new index will fill a critical gap

The National Statistics Office's (NSO's) proposal to introduce an index of service production (ISP) for the formal sector, with 2024-25 as the base year, is a significant step forward. Services contribute over half the gross value added (GVA) in India. The ISP, built primarily on goods and services tax (GST) data, will provide monthly data to capture short-term movements in services-sector activity, much like the index of industrial production (IIP) does for the manufacturing sector. Along with revision in other indices, it signals a broader attempt by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) to modernise India's statistical architecture.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development manual and the Eurostat's guide have recommended services-production indices based on turnover, volumes, or input indicators, with turnover-based measures deflated by appropriate price indices as the preferred approach. Advanced economies such as the United Kingdom publish a monthly services index, which feeds directly into their monthly gross domestic product (GDP) estimates while South Korea releases a services-industry activity index using value-based indicators adjusted by sector-specific producer prices. The European Union too compiles monthly services-production indices across member states. India's ISP proposal broadly aligns with these international practices, particularly in its reliance on administrative data and value-based indicators.

However, measuring the services sector remains inherently difficult owing to its diverse and fragmented nature. As the approach paper notes, reliable high-frequency data is lacking for major segments such as real estate, professional services, and retail trade. Even where the data exists — such as in banking, insurance, railways, or telecom — their combined share is less than one-fifth of services output, limiting their usefulness in constructing a comprehensive index. More significantly, the informal sector, accounting for nearly one-third of the GVA in services, remains outside its scope due to persistent data gaps.

Since services production is closely tied to sales, GST "outward supplies" can serve as a proxy for output. However, a more fundamental challenge lies in price measurement. International guidelines clearly favour producer price indices (PPIs) as deflators for converting nominal turnover into real output. India, however, does not yet have a comprehensive index. In its absence, the approach paper proposes using a mix of sector-specific consumer price indices (CPIs), a non-food consumer price index, and other proxies. This makes the development of a production price index indispensable. The ongoing effort to design such an index will, therefore, be a crucial complement to the ISP. A robust index would not only improve the accuracy of the ISP but also address long-standing concerns about deflation in GDP, where reliance on the wholesale price index (WPI) is seen as inadequate. The ISP's initial release will be "trial index", given the significant data and methodological gaps. The priority now must be to expand coverage, refine deflators, and integrate informal-sector proxies. With improvement, the ISP can evolve into a credible and essential tool for real-time economic assessment.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Gold loans: Reading the growth right

The portfolio can glitter only if backed by prudence

Recent media reports have highlighted the rapid growth in personal gold loans and the potential risks associated with larger-ticket exposures, higher borrower leverage and fluctuating gold prices. These concerns deserve attention, but they also need to be seen in perspective.

Gold loans narrow a genuine credit gap: They give households and small borrowers an easy way to obtain liquidity, using an asset they already hold, often within the formal financial system rather than through informal channels.

That said, a gold loan is still a credit decision, and strong collateral can never be a substitute for sound credit judgement. Repayment capacity, overall leverage, and the purpose of borrowing all matter.



BANKING & BEYOND

SWAMINATHAN J

A time-tested form of credit

In India, gold has always meant more than adornment. It has stood for security and reassurance, and a natural hedge against life's uncertainties. For generations, households have turned to it not only as a store of value, but also as a ready source of liquidity when needed.

Indeed, the practice of pledging gold for credit predates India's modern legal system. Ancient texts such as the *Manusmriti* and the *Arthashastra* refer to secured lending, interest, and loan discipline, showing that gold-backed borrowing long predated modern financial institutions. For much of our history, such borrowing took place outside the formal financial system, often at high interest rates and with little transparency or recourse.

In the late 1950s, banks in southern states began offering gold loans in a more structured manner and at reasonable interest rates. In the following decades, gold loans gained momentum to become a standard loan product, catering to consumption needs as well as agricultural operations. Later, specialised non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) expanded this business through wider branch networks and more customer-friendly practices.

The modern story of gold loans in India is, therefore, not simply the story of a growing financial product. It is also the story of formalisation, of an age-old household practice gradually moving from oral agreement and local discretion to documented finance under a regulatory framework.

Why formalisation matters

This formalisation of lending against gold collateral is a welcome development. It gives households fairer valuation, documented terms, grievance redress and greater accountability, while allowing a widely held household asset to be used productively for genuine needs.

At a time when greater attention is being paid to the pace and quality of unsecured retail lending, gold loans offer an avenue for secured retail credit and can support a healthier mix of retail credit.

A product with natural strengths

Gold loans have certain strengths that explain their enduring relevance. Gold is tangible collateral, capable of valuation within defined norms, with transparent market prices and standard units of measurement. Gold loans allow households to raise finance without permanently parting with an asset of lasting value, faster than through other forms of formal credit.

More importantly, gold jewellery often carries emotional significance that goes well beyond its market price. For many households, pledged ornaments are family assets associated with security and sentiment. That can strengthen repayment discipline and help explain why gold loans have often shown lower stress than unsecured retail credit.

The higher growth in gold loans may also be reflecting something positive: The movement of borrowers from informal sources to regulated entities, the more productive use of household assets, and a healthier balance between secured and unsecured lending for banks and NBFCs.

Strengths do not eliminate risks

Such versatility of the product should not be mistaken for the absence of risk. A modest gold loan used to bridge a temporary need or serve a productive purpose is very different from repeated borrowing layered over existing debt. A real concern arises when a highly leveraged borrower, already servicing housing, consumer or personal debt, turns to gold-backed borrowing as an additional layer of leverage. Concerns multiply when there are concurrent loans, repeated renewals or top-ups, and limited visibility into total indebtedness.

Gold, like any other commodity, is subject to price cycles, and adverse price movements are not uncommon. Prudential safeguards such as loan-to-value ratios and attention to borrowers' total indebtedness therefore matter, especially in volatile times.

Broadly, the greater vulnerabilities in lending against gold usually arise from weak appraisal, poor monitoring and deficient controls, including spurious collateral, custodial lapses and repeated top-ups. That is where the real regulatory and supervisory perspective must lie.

An old instrument, a mature framework

The Reserve Bank of India's recent directions address these issues through a harmonised framework for regulated entities, combining calibrated loan-to-value limits, differentiated treatment for income-generating and consumption loans, stronger valuation and custody standards, safeguards for auctions and collateral release, and greater emphasis on credit assessment for larger exposures.

The objective is not to constrain a useful product, but to ensure that, as gold lending expands within the formal financial system, it does so on sound and transparent foundations. The conduct dimension is particularly important in a product that often involves household jewellery of deep personal value. This calls for transparent valuation, clear communication of terms and conditions, proper notice before auction, fair realisation of value, prompt release of collateral after repayment and effective grievance redress. Responsibility for these outcomes ultimately rests with the banks and NBFCs, even when some activities are outsourced.

As lending against gold collateral becomes more deeply embedded and enhances access to the formal financial system, the lending practices must be nothing less than gold standard!

The next phase

Gold loans are entering a new phase in India, where growth can also signal formalisation, better use of household assets and a healthier mix of retail credit. Their long-term strength, however, will rest on sound processes and proper oversight.

A product shaped by history and household practice is now moving into a more coherent regulatory architecture. The aim is to ensure that it evolves in line with modern standards of fairness, prudence and accountability.

The author is Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of India. The views are personal

India's opportunities in global rebalancing

The global economy today faces multiple intersecting challenges, a "polycrisis" in the eyes of Columbia University academic Adam Tooze. The major economic blocs now view economic interdependence as a source of vulnerability rather than a path to enhanced productivity. If managed cleverly, India can use these tensions to sustain its own growth aspirations, provided the domestic reform thrust is maintained and India, with the Centre and the states working together, prepares itself to attract and absorb both foreign and domestic investment.

At the invitation of President Emmanuel Macron, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is due to attend France's G7 summit next month. Imbalances in current account deficits and surpluses are at the centre of the summit's economic agenda. These imbalances primarily involve three global players: The United States, the European Union and China — the G3. Recent research (to which we have contributed[1]) suggests that while balanced growth and non-discriminatory trade are fundamental to a well-functioning global economy, these principles are currently jeopardised by the policy choices and geopolitical compulsions of the G3[2].



SUMAN BERY, BHASKAR J KASHYAP & ABHINAV MOTHERAM

India's engagement at the summit should build on its impressive recent record of concluding free-trade agreements, most importantly with the EU. Yet, India's most pressing requirement remains investment finance, ideally linked with the transfer of technology and integration into global value chains. The counterpart of current account deficits is net cross-border financial flows.

The dynamism of the US economy, coupled with the depth and creativity of its financial markets and confidence in its legal system, has made it the preferred destination for gross and net flows from both China and Europe. A more durable resolution, therefore, requires not only policy adjustments in surplus and deficit economies, but also credible destinations where capital can be deployed productively at scale.

India's development trajectory positions it directly within this global adjustment process. Unlike surplus economies that export capital, India has historically run moderate current account deficits, reflecting its status as a capital importer. These deficits have generally remained contained, averaging around 1 to 2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in recent years, and have been financed without major external stress.

This reflects a structural feature of the Indian growth model: Domestic investment has rightly exceeded domestic savings, generating what we might call "good" current account deficits paired with "healthy" net external capital inflows, part of which is appropriately diverted to building up our foreign exchange reserves.

There are moments (like the present) when current account deficits are widening in response to shocks, but our system has a well-developed playbook for dealing with these. It is important to be able to differentiate between "good" and "bad" current account deficits. The former is characterised by a rise in capital formation in productivity enhancing investment, ideally meeting market tests imposed by private sector investors.

During the previous investment cycle, gross capital formation rose to nearly 40 per cent of GDP in 2008, a level associated with rapid growth and structural transformation. Sustaining a growth rate of 7 to 8 per cent, consistent with reaching a developed economy status by 2047, will require a sustained investment push towards these earlier levels. This is the macro strategy, but at the sector level, two transitions — energy and urbanisation — are both investment hungry. Domestic savings alone are unlikely to suffice, implying a continued role for foreign capital.

The question then is not whether global savings should be redirected, but how much and under what conditions they can be absorbed productively by India. Given India's scale and sustained investment needs, even a modest reallocation of global capital flows could have meaningful domestic and global effects.

Two points follow: First, the best guarantee of using capital productively is competition, for which trade and investment openness are key. Second, we need to be vigilant about the investment freedom granted to our Mini- and Maharatnas in their investment choices. In principle, they should be subject to the same rigour as is applied to public investment via the Expenditure Finance Committee in the Ministry of Finance. High quality finance to support high quality investment needs to be India's mantra.

By remaining a moderate capital importer, India can act as a natural absorber of global savings, aligning its domestic investment needs with the surplus savings of ageing economies. In doing so, it contributes to the reduction of global imbalances while preserving macroeconomic stability.

The G7's discussion of global imbalances is an ideal opportunity for the Prime Minister to link India's future reform agenda with its past successes and to indicate that India welcomes deeper global engagement for its own needs and those of the global order. Unlike export-led models of East Asia, India's growth has been driven more by domestic demand and services. This has reduced exposure to external tensions and created space for more balanced integration into global value chains.

The broader point is that India's development strategy aligns with a wider global need. The task now is to ensure that global savings are directed towards productive uses, and India is well placed to play a central role in that reallocation.

The authors are, respectively, outgoing Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog, Indian Economic Service Officer and Consultant at NITI Aayog.
The views are personal

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Rasputin beyond the myths

BOOK REVIEW

KANIKA DATTA

Rasputin's role in the downfall of the 304-year-old Romanov dynasty has become the stuff of prurient popular legend. The story of this charismatic self-styled mystic's proximity to Russia's last Tsar and Tsarina and the apparent miracles he performed to save their haemophiliac heir yielded Robert K Massie's 1967 best-seller *Nicholas and Alexandra*, a movie starring Laurence Olivier and a Boney M disco hit. The wildly exaggerated lyrics of the latter nevertheless infuriated the Soviet authorities enough to ban it when the group performed in Moscow in 1978.

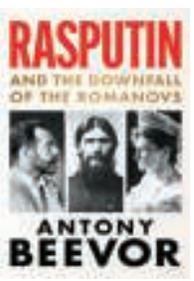
In *Rasputin and the Downfall of the Romanovs* Antony Beevor casts a cool academic eye on this controversial faith healer. He explains his choice of subject at this moment as a lifelong fascination with Grigory Efimovich Rasputin and Russia. "The story serves to focus on that no-man's land between truth and myth ... which is an essential part of the story of Rasputin, and increasingly, of our own today." He also contends that the Siberian peasant's centrality to the Romanov's downfall "provides an intriguingly different angle on the so-called great man theory of history" but does not expand on this theme.

Mr Beevor is a reputed historian of World War II. In 2022, he appeared to switch interests, writing *Russia: Revolution and Civil War,* a competent book that nevertheless did not break new ground. Neither does *Rasputin* but it certainly represents narrative history at its best.

The value of the book lies in the detail culled from, among other things, reports by the Cheka, the Tsarist secret police, post-assassination interviews and state documents. Let's look at myths. Mr Beevor finds no evidence that Rasputin was ever a "lover of the Russian Queen", per Boney M, nor her four daughters. But he was undoubtedly a prodigious womaniser and rapist, dividing his attention between prostitutes and high-born ladies, who formed a near permanent circle of acolytes. Mr Beevor also rules out membership of the forbidden Khlyst sect that rejected Orthodox Christianity and was reviled by the nobility.

Yet Rasputin held what would pass for moderate political views today, which magnified his unpopularity at court. He strongly opposed the rampant anti-Semitism of the era — though he accepted bribes from Jewish businessmen to promote their commercial interests. He also opposed the court's martial outlook, a prescient opinion given the catastrophic defeat to Japan in 1905 and in World War I.

That Rasputin was a chancer who preyed on a gormless Tsar and his highly-strung wife is beyond doubt. Mr Beevor sets the context in the opening chapters. He deftly creates a portrait of a Tsar so convinced of the divinely ordained nature of absolute monarchy that he is deprived of empathy for his people in a deeply inegalitarian society and fails to heed his advisors' counsel for constitutional monarchy until circumstances force it upon him. Nicholas' Empress, Queen Victoria's grand-daughter, enhanced his unfitness for the role well before Rasputin's arrival. In a society that scarcely conformed to standards of Victorian morality, Alexandra censured low-cut dresses, excessive merry-making and extra-marital liaisons. As Mr Beevor writes, "By her refusal to indulge the expectations of St Petersburg society, the young Empress lost not just popularity but also influence and respect."



Rasputin and the Downfall of the Romanovs
by Antony Beevor
Published by Hachette
699 pages ₹361

Mr Rasputin's power over the Tsar was as much a product of the regime that made him possible. "The increasingly degenerate society of *fin de siècle* St Petersburg offered some striking contrasts between Orthodox belief and amateur spiritualists," Mr Beevor writes. The Empress herself "longed to believe in what she saw as the natural holiness of rough peasant seers", as did the Tsar.

Before Rasputin, there was Philippe Nazier-Vachot, a French hypnotist. The royal couple's faith held even when Philippe prophesised, from Alexandra's expanding girth, a longed-for son that turned out to be a false pregnancy. Alexandra' desperation to safeguard the sole male heir made her vulnerable to Rasputin's compelling presence and inexplicable ability to cure the Tsarevich.

His power grew when the Empress set up a "boudoir cabinet" during World War I, with her uxorious husband away at the front. It soon became notorious for unhinged directives and serial sackings and appointments of inept loyalists on Rasputin's advice (in exchange for bribes). In the 15 months till the end of 1916, "the country saw four prime ministers, three ministers of war, three ministers of transport and three ministers of agriculture," Mr Beevor writes.

For all the mystique, Rasputin role in the fall of the Romanovs is overstated. Centuries of misrule had created conditions for revolution before Nicholas II. As Mr Beevor writes, "The mortal wounds were cumulative and had already been inflicted."

This was also an era of reckoning for absolute monarchy, an issue Mr Beevor does not examine. Four European empires disintegrated after World War I. But for a more sober understanding of the Tsars' last days, this book is an enjoyable, if limited read.

MY VIEW | THE LAST WORD

Labour unrest in India reflects a spike in the price of cooking gas

We can turn the energy shock into an opportunity by raising the wages and thereby productivity of our industrial labour force



INDIRA RAJARAMAN
is an economist.

PTI



The Strait of Hormuz chokehold inflames oil prices and causes jitters in India. In a seeming upturn, the Iranian ambassador to India met journalists on 13 April to say there is continual engagement with the Indian government. He is also reported to have said no Indian ships had been charged for passage through the strait.

That comfort disappeared on 18 April when two Indian tankers were fired at during passage through the strait by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) of Iran. An earlier tanker had gone through successfully, suggesting a fragmented command structure. The need of the hour, easier said than done, is to identify and engage with those multiple power nodes to achieve a synchronized policy towards Indian tankers.

Meanwhile, worker unrest had been gathering force in the industrial outskirts of Delhi, which turned violent on 13 April. In a not-unrelated development, India's inflation rate for March released that evening printed at 3.4%. Only a slight uptick for sure, from 3.2% in February. But as a weighted average, it glossed over the ballooning price of cooking gas in March after the outbreak of hostilities in West Asia on 28 February.

Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) in standard cylinders of 14.5kg by weight is sold to registered customers at an administered price, which has been hiked only by ₹60 to ₹913. But industrial workers are typically migrants without a registered connection. In the informal market, where smaller cylinders of 2kg or 5kg capacity can be refilled, there is a price carnival.

This is no criticism of the new Consumer Price Index (CPI), which is well structured (refer to my *Mint* piece of 3 April), but when cooking gas goes up in price anywhere from five times or more in the informal market, the official headline inflation rate becomes an irrelevant number. For those who have no fuel to cook their own food, there are urban food carts functioning from gas-refillable cylinders. In Delhi, I found a roadside cart still offering lunch for ₹20, but it had only one-half of a *kulcha* sliced horizontally in place of a whole one as previously, a serving of potatoes with an occasional chick-pea, and a small blob of pickled carrots. None of the gathered clients mentioned the war which had reduced the content of the meal.

Wage levels of industrial workers are set at the state level. Recently, the government of Haryana commendably hiked minimum wages by 35% effective 1 April 2026, in response to worker unrest brewing for some months. That hike provoked wage unrest in neighbouring Noida (short for New Okhla Industrial Development Authority) in Uttar Pradesh (UP), at an admittedly difficult time of rising raw material and logistics costs. The UP government responded with skill-calibrated wage hikes, but there are fears they will not be enforced, especially for labour hired through contractors.

By the 2025 Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), upto half of workers in manufacturing receive a monthly wage of ₹15,000 at most. If engaged through a contractor who extracts a commission from that, workers receive less than the reported wage. In informal settlements the monthly rental for a small room of 100 square feet is typically ₹5,000 (excluding utilities), leaving no margin whatever for sudden exigencies. Their ask is wages in the ₹18-20,000 range. By 2025 PLFS data, a monthly wage of ₹20,000 was in the uppermost quartile of salaried workers in manufacturing.

In textile and hosiery units in Noida, a major centre of labour unrest, the largely female workforce is also demanding reduced working hours, reported to be 12-hour days, and usable toilet facilities. The labour shortage these units are reported to be facing might have driven these working hours, although the labour shortage itself reflects reverse migration back to rural homes after the tariff hikes, further reinforced by the spike in the price of cooking fuel.

Starting from an official headline inflation rate in the 3-4% range, any wage rise will enable a clear improvement in worker health and productivity that should dampen a wage-price spiral. There could not be a better way to mark the 250th anniversary of Adam Smith's classic work, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, published on 9 March 1776, which pointed to productivity as the true source of the wealth of nations.

QUICK READ

A wage rise will enable a clear improvement in worker health and productivity. There may not be a better way to mark the 250th anniversary of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.

Better pay can drive up what Smith's classic work identified as the true source of a nation's wealth. Productivity gains could also dampen any wage-price spiral that pay hikes may set off.

An Indian policy on the anvil is a price stabilization fund (PSF) for creating a buffer reserve of petrol, diesel and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). It is similar in conception to one set up back in 2014-15 for essential agricultural commodities, which has functioned very effectively (and even in the current year commands a budgetary allocation of ₹4,100 crore). The difference is that the supply end of agricultural commodities is amenable to greater domestic policy control than fuel products.

The April half-yearly review of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected economic growth in India at 6.5% for both the current year and the one after, notwithstanding a projected decline in global growth to 3.1% and 3.2%, respectively.

It is for us to fulfil that IMF expectation with a focus, starting this May Day, on betterment of the lives, working conditions and thereby the productivity of the country's industrial labour force.

MINT CURATOR

Japan could help Asia defend itself as America turns its back

Tokyo's new arms-export policy must get its nuts and bolts in place



MIHIR SHARMA
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist.



America's will to act in defence of its Asian allies has diminished. ISTOCKPHOTO

It has been almost two decades since the late Shinzo Abe [former prime minister of Japan] stood in India's parliament and told the assembled legislators that "it is incumbent upon us two democracies, Japan and India, to carry out the pursuit of freedom and prosperity in the region."

Abe defined their task as protecting freedom of navigation in what he was perhaps the first to call the Indo-Pacific. That task has gotten only more urgent as America withdraws—or, more recently, imposes blockades on crucial straits—and China pushes harder against the first island chain.

Abe's vision never really became reality, because Japan's efforts with India and others in Asia always had self-imposed limits. There's a chance, however, now that Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae has eliminated some of those constraints.

With the revision last week of rules to remove restrictions on overseas sales of lethal weapons, Japan can export advanced equipment, including warships and missiles, and support its partners' defence far more directly.

There's a great deal of pent-up demand that Tokyo is moving to satisfy as quickly as possible. Last weekend, Australia announced the purchase of three Mogami-class frigates, made by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. And when Japan's defence minister Shinjiro Koizumi visits the Philippines and Indonesia in a few days, some more deals are likely to be announced. Indonesia is reportedly interested in those upgraded frigates as well.

This process should have begun a few years ago, when countries' budgets weren't under quite as much pressure. They're now burdened by higher levels of debt and security planners are struggling to figure out whether to spend scarce hard currency on expensive legacy platforms or on the drones and autonomous weapons they suspect might determine how battles of the future are won.

Plus, in the meantime, a new challenger for Asia's defence spending has emerged. Last week, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung was in New Delhi. The two countries co-produce Hanwha Aerospace's K9 howitzer and Korean manufacturers don't want to stop there.

South Korea's rise up the arms-trading charts has been meteoric. But so far, almost half of its defence exports have gone to Poland, including an order for 360 of Hyundai Rotem's K2 tanks.

Korean producers' combination of price flexibility and quality, however, will prove attractive to Asian militaries in the coming years; the Philippines has already ordered FA-50 light combat aircraft and new warships.

In manufacturing sector after sector, Japanese firms have lost ground in Asia to their more agile rivals across the Tsushima Strait. Unless they push themselves to close deals quicker, this might be another.

The saga of the US-2 seaplane is illustrative. It was the first piece of equipment operated by the self-defence forces that Tokyo was willing to export, because it was usable for civilian search and rescue as well, and thus permitted even under the previous arms-control regime.

India has been in talks to buy it since at least 2011. At first the price was set too high, and then the tech transfer and co-production was hard to pin down. However, the underlying problem was Japanese inexperience. As the analyst Satoru Nagao said at the time, "There was no one responsible official on Japan's side."

Tokyo will have to learn salesmanship quickly—because more is at stake than a few conglomerates' profits. The entire region is learning to live with a US that is at best distracted and at worst antagonistic. But America was the keystone of the Indo-Pacific's security architecture, sitting at the centre of a web of formal alliances and informal groupings.

And the glue holding it all together was shared platforms, long-duration defence deals, co-development and integrated arms supply chains.

If Asian nations are to try and replicate this structure, they will need Japan to step up. Abe's vision of the Indo-Pacific was built around a group of partners that were able to hold the line for themselves; but the unstated assumption was that the US would fill whatever gaps were left.

That assumption has failed in recent times and threatens to take Abe's "free and open Indo-Pacific" down with it. A new glue is needed for the region, although its countries don't have too many options. Korean arms will help, but Japan will have to become a supplier and organizer as well as a strategist.

If Takaichi Sanae can get slow-moving corporations and doubtful officials acting swiftly, she has a chance of salvaging just enough of her mentor's ambitions to make a difference. ©BLOOMBERG

MY VIEW | PEN DRIVE

Hunting the heffalump: Just who is an entrepreneur?

SURESH BHAGAVATULA



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Many years ago, in 1971, Peter Kilby wrote that understanding entrepreneurship is like hunting a 'heffalump,' a fictional elephant-like creature from *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

Many claim to have captured it, but their descriptions do not match and no two agree on what it looks like. After centuries of research, we are still arguing about what an entrepreneur really is. Is an entrepreneur a risk taker, an innovator, a manager, a social outsider or just someone who got lucky?

If you look around India today, you will see this confusion in everyday language. A vegetable vendor who adopts UPI, a startup founder in Bengaluru, a second-generation owner of a family business and a social entrepreneur in a village are all called 'entrepreneurs,' but we rarely mean the same thing in each case.

The word 'entrepreneur' entered economic writing more than 200 years ago. In the 18th century, Richard Cantillon described the entrepreneur as an uncertainty bearer. In the 19th century, during the Industrial Revolution, Jean-Baptiste Say saw the entrepreneur as someone above the capitalist, who moves resources from lower to higher productivity.

The 20th century changed the picture again. Frank Knight drew a line between risk and uncertainty and argued that entrepreneurs make decisions when the future cannot be calculated. Joseph Schumpeter then turned the entrepreneur into a central figure of 'creative destruction,' the innovator who reshapes markets. Israel Kirzner focused on the entrepreneur's alertness to price gaps and market imperfections.

More recently, Peter Drucker argued that entrepreneurship is a discipline that can be learnt, "a purposeful and organized search for a change." Howard Stevenson, whose definition is now standard in many business schools, describes entrepreneurship as the pursuit of opportunity regardless of the resources currently under one's control.

But others were looking elsewhere. In the early 1900s, the sociologist Max Weber argued that Protestant ethics helped create entrepreneurs and, with them, capitalism. Other religious traditions, he suggested, did not shift their work ethic towards systematic wealth creation the same way.

Mark Granovetter extended Karl Polanyi's idea of 'embeddedness' into the study of social networks and wrote that all economic actions are embedded in human relationships. In this view, entrepreneurship is not only about who you are, but also about whom you know. Displacement or marginality theories add that many entrepreneurs begin as social outsiders, such as immigrants or religious minorities who may find that conventional career options are limited and so turn to entrepreneurship.

Psychologists turned inward, asking if there is a characteristic entrepreneurial personality. David McClelland, after experiments in Andhra Pradesh and other locations, argued that entrepreneurs tend to have a high need for achievement. Julian Rotter focused on 'locus of control' and suggested that entrepreneurs are more likely to believe that outcomes depend on their own actions, not on external forces.

A simple way to summarize these perspectives is to say that economists ask *what* the entrepreneur *does*, psychologists ask *who* the entrepreneur *is* and sociologists ask *where* the entrepreneur *came from*. Kilby's heffalump is hard to catch because each group is examining a different part of the same animal, so to speak.

Recent work in entrepreneurship has tried to bring these strands together. Scott Shane and Sankaran Venkataraman describe entrepreneurship as a nexus between people and opportunities. Economists were right to focus on opportunities and psychologists were right to focus on individuals, but each was incomplete on its own. It is the connection between a particular person and opportunity that matters, like a specific location on a map.

QUICK READ

For over 200 years, academics across the disciplines of economics, psychology and sociology have tried to define 'the entrepreneur,' but they all say something different.

That may be because they focused on different aspects of who an entrepreneur is. It may be more useful to pay attention to entrepreneurial action and what gets in its way that mustn't.

After years of having interacted with entrepreneurs in India and elsewhere, I find myself aligning with Drucker: Entrepreneurship is a discipline, and it can be learnt. Entrepreneurs, in this view, need a bias for action. Recent scholars have argued that we should move from asking who an entrepreneur is to examining what entrepreneurial action looks like.

So where does that leave us? After over 200 years, we still do not have a single neat definition of 'the entrepreneur.' But we are getting better at understanding what entrepreneurs do, how they notice, interpret and act on opportunities in uncertain and complex environments.

Kilby's heffalump may never be fully captured, and that might be the point. In a world where a street vendor with a QR code, a tech founder fresh out of college and a woman reviving a family craft business can all be called entrepreneurs, a single definition will always fall short.

Perhaps the more useful task, for scholars and policymakers, is to pay attention to entrepreneurial action: where it emerges, how it is enabled or blocked, and what it changes. If we can learn to recognize and support that action, the missing definition may not trouble us quite as much.

OUR VIEW


AP

France's gold move may hold a cue even for India

Its decision to shift gold out of America is prudent given the weaponization of finance by the Trump administration. India should consider it too, besides diversifying its forex reserves

Last month, France did something that would have been unimaginable a few years ago; certainly before the outbreak of the Ukraine war, when US-led sanctions cut Russia off from the Swift payment system, the main messaging network that enables secure international financial transactions, and froze more than $300 billion of its assets. Its central bank, the Bank of France, pulled out its remaining gold reserves held in New York. Admittedly, no central bank today relies on gold to back its currency. But gold reserves still serve as a safe haven during global trade uncertainties and are an essential component of national wealth as well as financial security. They are often used as a hedging tool against inflation and currency fluctuations. So, it is not as if France has reduced its gold holdings. Nor was the action carried out overnight. Between July 2025 and January 2026, it sold 129 tonnes of gold it had stored in New York since World War II, and used the proceeds to buy higher-quality gold bars in the European market, storing them in its underground vault in Paris. With it, France now holds all the 2,437 tonnes of its gold domestically. It helped, of course, that the price of gold surged in recent times—the gold sale helped turn the French central bank's 7.7 billion euro net loss in 2024 to an 8.1 billion euro net profit in 2025.

Bank of France governor François Villeroy de Galhau denied the move was motivated by geopolitical considerations, noting that it was purely technical in nature. The older bars it held needed to be upgraded to meet contemporary global standards, but it was easier to buy compliant gold in Europe than to refine and ship the old bars. That was the official reason. What was unstated perhaps was the desire to move the gold out of the reach of the US, which has not hesitated to weaponise finance and use the preponderantly US-centric global financial order to serve its own ends and penalize those that differ with it. But France is not the first country to consider such a move, nor is it likely to be the last. Germany, which still holds roughly a third of its gold in New York, is facing increasing calls to ship its gold out of the US as Washington's unilateral ways stoke distrust even among its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies over a possible abuse of its financial powers. More broadly, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) working paper shows that imposition of financial sanctions by the US and its allies has typically been associated with an increase in the share of central bank reserves held in gold, especially for countries less geopolitically aligned with America.

For India, the last time it was at the receiving end of US sanctions was after its 1998 nuclear tests. But we need to be alert to heightened geopolitical risks in the post-Trumpian world. Research by the Brookings Institution based on IMF data shows that while India was the fourth-largest purchaser of gold after Russia, China and Turkey between 2007 and 2015, it moved up to the third spot during 2015 to 2024. According to India's latest *Economic Survey* too, the share of gold in its foreign exchange reserves—consisting of foreign currency assets (bonds of the US and other major governments and deposits with foreign central banks), gold, special drawing rights and reserve tranche position with the IMF—has been rising. This is a welcome reset of our reserve composition. Perhaps we should also take a cue from France and tighten control over what belongs to us.

MY VIEW | FARM TRUTHS

Worker protests raise questions over industrial relations in India

Better wages and work conditions for the country's workforce would enable faster economic growth



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Recent months have seen worker protests across states. Workers protested low wages and poor work conditions in an IOCL factory in Barauni, Bihar, in February. This was followed by protests in Surat, Gujarat. More recently, workers protested in Manesar, Haryana, raising similar issues. The latest unrest was in Noida, Uttar Pradesh (UP), where workers turned out in large numbers to protest.

These protests were in different industries, in both the public and private sectors, and in states with varying labour laws and industrial structures. Common to them was the fact that almost all workers were contractual; employed without formal social protection, their wages were low and work conditions poor. Their demands were similar: an increase in minimum wages, proper working hours, payment for overtime, basic social security and workplace facilities.

This unrest is not surprising. Many of the issues on which the workers protested have been in the public domain for long. These went unnoticed by the mainstream media even as the situation worsened over the years. Data on contractualization is available for organized manufacturing in the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI). The proportion of contractual workers was under 20% of the total at the turn of the century. By 2023, it had more than doubled to 41%.

Increasing contractualization through labour contractors implies that industries are not obliged to provide workers any social security. A nexus between recruiters and contractors exists across industries, not just in the private sector but also among government and public sector enterprise recruiters.

Minimum wages have not been revised in many states for more than a decade. They were last revised more than 10 years ago in Haryana and UP until worker protests forced their governments to revise them overnight. While regular revisions of minimum wages are typically delayed, even basic bi-annual hikes to adjust for the rising cost of living are not followed in many states. After the protests in Haryana, its minimum wages for unskilled workers were increased from ₹11,274 per month to ₹15,221; these rose from ₹11,313 per month to ₹13,690 in Noida. But even with these increases, wages remain lower than the minimum necessary for a decent living in urban centres. The hikes are not even enough to cover the rise in household costs due to inflation. Labour-survey data shows that not only have wages for regular workers stayed low, these have declined in real terms since 2011-12, a fact acknowledged by India's *Economic Survey*. Regular wages in urban areas declined by 1.2% per annum between 2011-12 and 2022-23, the longest period of decline in real wages. While these have increased 1% annually in the last two years, they are lower than the real levels in 2011-12.

QUICK READ

Wages have been stagnant for years. Data shows that real wage levels in 2022-23 were lower than in 2011-12 even as large numbers of industrial workers have been denied basic labour provisions.

Low wage bills are often seen as necessary for business competitiveness but a poorly paid workforce also means the economy must suffer lower overall demand than need be.

That the protests took place soon after the draft rules of India's four Labour Codes were announced late last year raises questions on the nature of worker engagement in industrial units. More than unremunerative wages, workers are unhappy with their work conditions. Many are required to work without breaks. And while there is no social security in a contractor-driven employment arrangement, even basic provisions such as leave and health coverage are denied. Most of these come under the ambit of the Labour Codes, which seem largely designed to give enterprises greater leeway. Unfortunately, even the codes' basic rights and provisions meant to help workers appear to remain only on paper.

These protests can be attributed to the dilution of worker rights for almost two decades. While their immediate trigger may have been a rise in living costs, the real problem lies in India's political-economy approach to growth and industrialization. The chipping away of worker rights has been justified as necessary for the competitiveness of Indian industry. Contractualization, low wages and denial of basic labour rights are seen as a way of controlling the workforce while keeping business costs low across the economy. But an industrial relations environment that justifies growth at the expense of worker rights can hardly contribute to GDP growth. Poor working conditions and meagre wages not only contribute to unhealthy employer-employee relations, but also reduce demand for industrial goods and services. Much of the demand weakness seen in India lately has been a result of a long stagnation in worker earnings. Protecting worker rights should be part of India's strategy for industrialization if its end-goal is faster economic growth.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

Gold will be around, gold will be money when the dollar and the euro and the yuan and the ringgit are mere memories.

RICHARD RUSSELL

GUEST VIEW

Don't rush to replicate HUL's network of influencers

PARTHA SINHA


is a senior advisory professional.

That Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) has a network of 300,000 'influencers' at work for its marketing department, as declared in April by Unilever CEO Fernando Fernandez, has quickly become a PowerPoint talisman. In a world where entire industries sometimes change direction through choreography rather than conviction, that's an evocative figure. Indian marketing has always had a weakness for the large gesture. When a major FMCG company moves, others often do not study the move so much as receive it like scripture. Some of this is rational. Companies of that scale have data, muscle and consumer intimacy that few can match. But some of it is plain mimicry.

Economists call one version of this an informational cascade: rational actors suspend private judgement and follow visible behaviour until imitation starts masquerading as consensus. It looks like strategy. Often, it is just organized deference made to look thoughtful by PowerPoint.

While 300,000 online content creators who can hawk products may make sense for a company with over 50 brands and proprietary AI systems for network management, we ought to ask if this model is replicable by others. History is littered with strategies that looked inevitable but proved expensive.

Consider India's 'influencer economy.' Estimates by GroupM, Dentsu and Statista place it at ₹9,000–10,500 crore. Millions of creators have got into the act of shaping purchase decisions. What began as a experiment has become *de rigueur*. And yet much of it still runs with cheerful informality. Deal pricing is opaque, disclosures are patchy and fraud is endemic.

George Akerlof had a phrase for markets where quality is hard to observe: lemons. Bad deals drive out good ones as price levels favour the former over the latter. The analogy feels uncomfortably contemporary. Audits by HypeAuditor and a study cited by the World Federation of Advertisers suggest inauthentic engagement affects over 40% of creator accounts globally. When follower counts can be bought, engagement simulated and amplification manufactured, the market begins to reward the appearance of influence over influence itself. Ad campaigns in such systems tend to fail quietly.

Oddly, few question this model, which rests on a peculiar asymmetry: we trust people more than we trust institutions. The 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer and data from Influencer Marketing Hub show that creator recommendations often command far greater trust than branded communication, especially among younger audiences. Findings like this have tilted marketers in favour of influencers.

Trust, however, is susceptible to arbitrage and arbitraged trust has a way of collapsing. When advertising is cloaked in friendship and endorsement cosplays as authenticity, something subtle begins to come apart. A channel built on authenticity can industrialize performance, no doubt. Jean Baudrillard, who argued that modern life goes by simulation rather than authentic action, would have smiled darkly. The influencer's job is to play-act a recommendation. And often the audience knowingly participates in this theatre.

QUICK READ

While 300,000 online content creators who can hawk products may make sense for a company like HUL, we ought to ask if this model is replicable by others. Adopting its game could be risky.

The Indian influencer market is large but riddled with problems that range from deal pricing opacity to questions of audience authenticity and what credit influencers deserve for sales.

That is not influence but semiotics with a rate card. Yet, strangely, just when the stakes rise, the conversation thins. Marketing professionals speak of online reach, overlooking a problem of control.

A 2024 Advertising Standards Council of India audit found 69% of leading digital influencers in breach of disclosure norms. That should have caused more intellectual discomfort than it did.

Who verifies audiences? Who monitors creator risk after a campaign goes live? Who prices reputational risk exposure? Who writes contracts assuming things may go wrong? These questions need to be raised by marketers.

Friedrich Hayek saw markets as distillers of dispersed information into prices. The problem here is that deal prices do not always go by reliable information.

Measurement cannot always come to the rescue. The attribution of sales to influencer efforts and returns on investment in influencer networks remain among the unresolved problems of this model, as studies put out by Nielsen and McKinsey continue to suggest.

The answer may not be to enlarge networks in the hope that the law of large numbers will kick in, as more influencers could end up scaling up the structural problems outlined above. Which is why the winners in this space may not be those most intoxicated by network expansion, but those ready to get their foundation right: measurement discipline, contractual rigour, authenticity audits, disclosure governance and brand-creator fit.

Systems must precede spectacle. Scale in itself is not strategy, though it acts as an amplifier. If the system beneath it is sound, scale compounds returns. If it is weak, scale industrializes inefficiency. That is true of supply chains, institutions and influence.

Confronted with PowerPoint slides that show HUL's online outreach, marketing professionals may be tempted to ask how they can do what this FMCG major is doing. The better question to ask is whether one's company has what it takes to make a success of it. Blind imitation often looks intelligent at the beginning, but its costs usually reveal themselves later. And in this field, as in other markets, borrowed conviction is often the most expensive asset of all.



CONTRAPUNTO

Relying on govt to protect your privacy is like asking a peeping tom to install your window blinds

– JOHN PERRY BARLOW

For Your Eyes Only

What you watch on TV should be nobody's business. Consumers must be protected

Your smart TV is a mole. As TOI reported yesterday, it collects snapshots of everything you watch and hear, and sends them to 'data brokers', so that they can refine your profile, and sell it to advertisers. Are we surprised? Yes, although we shouldn't be, knowing that our phones – and the apps on them – tablets and laptops are all part of the 'surveillance economy'. Smart ACs, those with voice command functions, can be easily hacked to listen in on bedroom talk. Smart cars keep a GPS log of every place you've been to. Why should smart TVs be less devious?

More than surprise, there's a sense of betrayal. We weren't told that, while bingeing on shows, we'd never be alone in the room. That once every 500 milliseconds – 7,200 times an hour – our TV would relay info about shows and ads we've sat through. And for what? That's the easier answer. Your family's old 'idiot box' TV was a one-time purchase. The manufacturer didn't earn a paisa from you after the sale. But by sharing your viewing habits, and tastes, with advertisers daily, your smart TV becomes a perpetual revenue stream. As Bill Baxter, TV maker Vizio's former CTO, said in 2019, this kind of spying – automatic content recognition or ACR – is the reason those 65-inch TVs have become so cheap. Manufacturers don't need to recover their costs upfront. Last year, the global market for ACR data was worth $4.2bn. By 2034, it's expected to touch $23bn – an yearly growth of 21%.



Should we be grateful for ACR then, view it as a subsidy? No. Firstly, because there's no subsidy. You actually pay more overall – a lump sum first, followed by a pay-with-your-privacy model. Secondly, ACR is a secret clause. It's not disclosed to you at the time of sale. Wouldn't you pay more for a TV that didn't track you? Cheaper hardware is no justification for invasion of privacy. Just as a discount doesn't entitle a hotel to install cameras in its bathrooms. Plus, this kind of profiling is risky when the data flows to foreign servers, and possibly govts. Viewing habits can reveal political leanings, and expose you to targeted online influence. That's why it's important to curb ACR use. It shouldn't be turned on by default, and users should have an easy way to turn it off, even if they clicked 'yes' at some point.

Document The Horror

Nothing moves without paperwork. Why then is getting documents such an ordeal?

Odisha bank branch officials, who demanded proof-of-death of a woman from her brother, found a way around the lack of documents speedily enough, when he carried her skeletal remains to the bank. And that is the single point that needs emphasis. Compliance with rules is one thing, refusal to address the reality of document scarcity, and poor documentation across large tracts of India, quite another. In this case, the 52-year-old in Odisha's Keonjhar had made multiple visits to the bank, which refused to budge without 'documentation'. Again and again, we witness the wretched circumstances people land up in, because of an over-emphasis on documentation, which disregards ground truths.



Documents to show eligibility – whether for claims to deceased kin's savings, or right to be on a voter roll – are needed. But, why does getting the simplest of documents remain a bureaucratic nightmare?

Procuring documents is an ordeal. A name-change or a property deed, a duplicate academic certificate or proof of birth/death can be notoriously complicated. A missing certificate can block school admission. A misspelt name can stop a person from opening a bank account. Smallest corrections need affidavits & notaries & repeated visits to offices – or money to middlemen, for whom conjuring paperwork is livelihood. Document-seekers must jump through endless hoops. Even digitisation delivered limitedly. Digitised, valid documents can be rendered incorrect, because somewhere in between, spelling errors were introduced, half addresses were uploaded, photos incorrectly mapped. Incorrect fields crop up on screens that aren't on the physical document. Recall how NREG claimants lost earnings over mismatched biometrics, and non-recorded attendance. Red tape has no accountability. In Bengal, 27L people who had documents couldn't vote. Frustration drove a man in Odisha to dig up his sister's remains. That bankers in Keonjhar quickly found a solution, shows that the delay, and runaround, was just bureaucratic tyranny.

General ignorance

When lack of knowledge itself becomes a form of inverse knowledge

Jug Suraiya



Should general knowledge be renamed general ignorance? According to Global Language Monitor, a new word to describe a new thing, in fields as diverse as science and slang, is coined every 98 minutes, resulting in over 5,400 additions annually.

If this were not information overload enough, terms that have long been and continue to be in common usage are being revealed to be factoids, or manufactured facts, like fake news.

This was brought home to me recently when a reader, Harmeet, forwarded to me a post, billed as The World's Easiest Quiz, with PS that passing requires only 3 correct answers – "Only total duffers will fail!!"

How long did the Hundred Year War between England and France last? Where are Panama hats made? From which animal do we get catgut? In which month is Russia's October Revolution observed? What is a camel's hairbrush made of? Canary Islands in the Pacific are named for which animal? What was King George VI's first name? What colour is a purple finch? Where are Chinese gooseberries grown? What is the colour of Black Box in a commercial aircraft?



jugularvein

The answers: The Hundred Year War lasted 116 years, with time taken off to catch the latest episode of GoT. Panama hats are made in Ecuador. Catgut is got not from felines but from sheep and horses. Russians observe 1917 October Revolution in Nov, the time shift caused by changing from the old calendar to the new.

A camel's hairbrush is made of squirrel fur, Canary Islands are named not after little yellow birds but dogs, George VI's first name was Albert, Al to pals. Purple finches are crimson, Chinese gooseberries come from New Zealand, and a plane's Black Box is orange.

I scored a perfect zero, which makes me a prime duffer, two exclamation marks and all. Thanks to such verbal misdirection, the more ignorant we remain, the less likely are we to be wrong.

Or, as Plato put it, only I know because I know I know nothing.

Editor's note: the writer confirms his perfect ignorance by ascribing to Plato the famous quotation from Socrates.

We Make Bats, We Don't Call The Shots

Sports goods manufacturing in India has huge economic potential. Yet, Pakistan's Sialkot outperforms us. For more clusters like Jalandhar & Meerut, policies, investments & infra need to happen in tandem

Sanjeet Singh & Ashish Dhawan



India's recent World T20 championship, was only the latest reminder of how sport now commands global attention on a scale few other things can. And Fifa World Cup football is an even grander spectacle, whose shots will soon thunder around the world. Behind the spectacle, billions of dollars of footballs, cricket bats, training gear, protective equipment, and athletic infra move through international supply chains each year, produced in specialised manufacturing clusters that most fans have never heard of.

India has such clusters. And they are hiding a remarkable, if underexploited, story. The towns of Jalandhar and Meerut, together, form the backbone of India's sports equipment industry, their origins tracing back to the skilled artisans who resettled there after Partition.

Walk through Jalandhar's Basti Sheikh locality today, and you'll find workshops producing footballs that have been kicked around in European leagues, and inflatable balls that carry the "Made in India" stamp at the Fifa World Cup. Meerut, meanwhile, is home to a cluster that supplies a majority of the cricket bats used on international pitches – the same hand-crafted English willow blades wielded by Test players from Australia to West Indies.

These are not cottage industries: they represent deep generational expertise that global buyers quietly depend on.

And yet, taken together, India accounts for only around 0.5% of global sports equipment supply. This is a country of 1.4bn people, with one of the world's largest and fastest-growing sporting populations. The gap between our sporting ambitions, and our manufacturing footprint, could not be more stark.

There's much more than pride at stake. Large-scale employment, a diversified manufacturing base, and accelerated export growth all depend on closing that gap. Recent Union and state govt policies have underlined the importance of this goal, through sector reforms, production incentives, and investment in industrial infra. While electronics and automobiles have dominated the narrative, durable industrial growth will also depend on sectors that combine strong domestic demand with export potential.

Sports equipment manufacturing is precisely such an opportunity – and its time has come. Consider three reasons why the case for a structured policy push is now compelling.

First, the sector is both jobs-rich and export-hungry. According to Annual Survey of Industries, sports manufacturing generates roughly 25 jobs per crore rupees of investment – second only to apparel and footwear. Global trade in sports equipment alone is estimated at $50bn annually. China commands nearly half of all exports. Pakistan's Sialkot, responsible for roughly 70% of the world's hand-stitched footballs, and exporting sports goods worth over $350mn in a year, outperforms India's entire sports manufacturing sector.

Vietnam and Indonesia are catching up too, each steadily absorbing orders from global brands diversifying away from China. India, with far greater scale, skill depth, and sectoral overlap with textiles, leather,



Image: AI

plastics, and light engineering, has been a bystander in a race it should be leading.

Second, the timing is strategically aligned with India's growing sporting ambitions. India will host Commonwealth Games 2030, and is simultaneously pursuing a bid for Olympics 2036. Hosting mega sporting events requires large volumes of specialised equipment across disciplines – from athletics infra to sportswear to training accessories. Importing the majority of that would impose avoidable fiscal costs, and squander a rare moment of domestic demand concentration.

The Li Ning story after Beijing 2008 Olympics, shows what is possible when industrial policy and sporting ambition are pointed in the same direction: a domestic brand transformed into a global competitor, on the back of the Games' visibility. India should be writing a similar playbook now, by showcasing a range of made in India products at the games that are second to none in quality and price.

Third, rising domestic participation is restructuring demand in India's favour. The past decade has brought a genuine cultural shift – organised sports, recreational fitness, private academies, and govt-backed grassroots programmes, have collectively enlarged the market for sports goods in ways that reduce risk for manufacturers, and underpin export competitiveness. Global supply chains, still scarred by pandemic-era disruptions, are actively looking for a credible China+1 partner. India's established cluster base, cost-competitive labour, and deepening domestic demand make the proposition attractive.

The hard part is for India to get its rising tide in order. Industry consultations suggest that Indian manufacturers face a meaningful cost disadvantage versus competing geographies, driven by higher raw material costs, elevated logistics expenses, and the prohibitive cost of obtaining international certifications – a particular barrier in a sector where Fifa, ICC, and BWF approvals are prerequisites, not nice-to-haves.

These pressures are compounded by the absence of anchor brands capable of generating scale, facilitating technology transfer, and building long-term buyer confidence.

Addressing this will require targeted action on both sides of the ledger: rationalising input costs, investing in cluster infra and modern logistics, and establishing internationally accredited certification facilities within India. Equally important is a coherent brand-building strategy – one that strengthens domestic labels in high-volume sports, while attracting global partnerships in emerging segments.

India's manufacturing ambitions are often expressed through the language of mega-factories and frontier technologies. Those investments are critical. But broad-based industrial growth will also be built on sectors that combine labour intensity, export potential, and rising domestic consumption.

Sports equipment sits firmly at that intersection. If the coming decade is to be one in which India not only hosts the world's biggest sporting events, but also supplies the equipment that powers them, then the case for bringing Jalandhar and Meerut – and the talent they represent – into the centre of India's industrial strategy has never been stronger.

Singh is senior adviser, Niti Aayog, and Dhawan is founder-CEO, The Convergence Foundation

Money Heists: Bad Guys Adapt, So Must Good Guys

RBI has proposed sound safeguards for digital payments. But if these are to work, real-time intelligence infrastructure has to provide the real judgement, with static rules serving as backstops

Krishnan Ranganathan



RBI's new discussion paper on "safeguards in digital payments" is a welcome attempt to address Authorised Push Payment (APP) fraud – scams where customers, under pressure or deception, authorise payments that rob them. But if these proposals are to mature into workable safeguards, the next draft will need to answer a set of harder questions about design, proportionality, and implementation.

UPI volumes and values are vast, and fraud has risen with equal ambition. Most of it isn't a Bond-villain hack of core systems but social engineering: phone calls, romance scams, deepfakes of distressed relatives, all designed to persuade the victim to press "pay" of their own free will. RBI's instinct is to add friction: delays, ceilings, extra approvals, and a big red OFF switch. That instinct is understandable. Friction can buy time, interrupt impulse, and reduce losses. But it is also blunt: it slows legitimate users, while sophisticated fraudsters improvise.

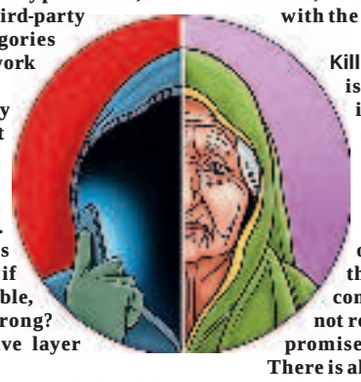
The paper already recognises many first-order downsides. The more important task now is to ensure that the final design does not leave second-order gaps unresolved.

One-hour pause needs a life cycle, not just a timer | The first proposal is a mandatory one-hour lag on person-to-person transfers above `10,000. RBI is right to see value in a "pause" for suspicious payments, and it is also right to recognise that users may be induced to bypass it. The harder question is what happens once a bypass becomes persistent.

If whitelisting is permitted, the design should not assume that a "trusted" payee remains low-risk indefinitely. It needs a life cycle: expiry, review, and the ability to revoke. Second issue is that the effectiveness of the lag may depend on what happens beyond the originating bank. The case for the lag is thus strongest when paired with shared intelligence and rapid inter-bank coordination, rather than treated as a self-contained solution.

A sensible final design would preserve thresholds as triggers while tying the actual delay to risk signals such as first-time payees, unusual devices, account age, or beneficiary alerts.

Trusted persons need legal and operational guardrails | Proposal for a pre-registered "trusted person" for certain high-value transfers, is clearly motivated by protection, not paternalism. But mandatory third-party approval for broad customer categories raises questions that a final framework will need to confront more directly.



One is legal. Indian law generally begins from the presumption of adult capacity, which suggests caution before creating a system in which a third party can effectively control transactions. Second is operational. Any model like this needs answers for ordinary failure cases: what if the trusted person is unavailable, conflicted, coercive, or simply wrong? Without fallback routes, a protective layer can become a source of impasse.

That argues for a narrower and more defensible starting point: opt-in use, trusted contacts before trusted approvers, and stronger legal scaffolding if veto powers are ever formalised.

Shadow credit needs due process, not just discretion | Proposal to cap annual credits into low-credit-turnover accounts, and place excess inflows into "shadow credit", is an understandable attempt to disrupt mule-account economics. RBI is also right to recognise that this may inconvenience legitimate users. But if the idea proceeds, the key issue is procedural discipline.

A framework that lets funds remain blocked until a bank is "satisfied" invites inconsistency unless the term is anchored by minimum standards: what documents may be asked for, how quickly the bank must ask, how long it has to decide, whether partial release is possible, and what appeal route exists. Those details will determine whether the tool is experienced as targeted risk control or arbitrary administrative power.

A flat `25L ceiling is easy to administer, but crude across regions, occupations and income patterns. Thresholds should be supplemented by anomaly detection, which spots behaviour inconsistent with the account's profile.

Kill switch must match its promise | It is probably the most intuitively useful idea in the paper. Customers in distress need a simple way to stop digital outflows quickly. But here too, the final framework will depend on scope and communication.

If certain debits, such as mandates or standing instructions, remain outside the switch, that may be justifiable for continuity reasons. But the exception cannot remain implicit; otherwise the product promise will exceed the product reality.

There is also a case for thinking through misuse. A control designed for emergencies can itself become part of a scam script unless activation and reactivation are carefully designed. If reactivation is cumbersome, the victim may end up both robbed and locked out, the switch then working better for the fraudster than for the customer.

Broad lesson is that thresholds, by themselves, are not enough. Fraud is adaptive. Safeguards must be too. Otherwise India may end up with the world's fastest payment rails, while still leaving fraudsters with the smoothest commute.

The writer is former executive director, Nomura India

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



The mind is careful, suspicious, he advances little by little. He advises "Be careful, protect yourself" Whereas love says, "Let yourself, go!" The mind is strong, never falls, while love hurts itself, falls into ruins. But isn't it in ruins that we mostly find the treasures?

Shams Tabrizi

Buddha Purnima: Towards Experiential Wisdom

Vikas Bishnoi & Vipul Anekant

On Buddha Purnima, when the full moon illuminates the night sky, we commemorate the birth, enlightenment, and parinirvan of Siddharth Gautam, and the radical liberation of human inquiry from the chains of dogma. Buddhism stands as a singular philosophical tradition that refuses to sacralise belief. Unlike many religious traditions that demand faith, devotion, or unquestioning acceptance, Buddhism turns the very act of believing into an object of scrutiny. Its invitation is austere, and profoundly modern: test everything, including the Buddha's teachings. Even subtle, subconscious adherence to any concept, Buddhist or otherwise, is questioned. There is no blasphemy here, no sacrilege, because the Buddha never demands devotion to unexamined propositions.

Buddha's epistemological courage with crystalline precision is audacious: "Do not believe anything merely because it is spoken by the Buddha, or because it feels right, or because you revere the teacher. Believe only that which you have verified through your own experience." This maxim is not peripheral; it is central. This philosophy manifests most profoundly in *Bhavana-maya panna*, experiential wisdom. Such wisdom arises through meditation, particularly vipassana, where insight is not received secondhand but realised within.

Unlike *sutamaya panna*, wisdom gained from listening or *cintamaya panna*, wisdom derived from intellectual reflection, *bhavana-maya panna* is a direct, personal apprehension of reality. There is no intermediary – no deity, scripture, teacher, priest, God or metaphysical construct can substitute for this intimate knowing. The middleman dissolves. No one stands between the seeker and truth.

Buddhism's intellectual courage extends further. It eschews metaphysics, sidestepping perennial philosophical puzzles in favour of pragmatic inquiry. Buddha famously maintained a noble silence on the existence of God, leaving room for rational autonomy rather than theological subservience. Like Jainism and Taoism, Buddhism is a creatorless/godless religion. The problem of evil renders a benevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient God rationally incoherent, considering observed suffering. Buddha's concern was relentlessly practical: the cessation of suffering through ethical living and epistemic integrity.

One could engage in the core project of cultivating mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom without a metaphysical commitment.

Any philosophy that functions as an organised religion or spiritual path comprises three interlocking components: epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics. Buddha's genius lies in its refusal to bind them rigidly together. One can inhabit the tradition, participate in its moral and contemplative practices, and yet suspend belief in metaphysical doctrines. Buddhism allows room for disagreement, for suspension of judgement, and even for indifference or an agnostic outlook to its broader unverifiable metaphysical belief system, without negating one's adherence.

In contemporary terms, Buddha offers a template for a modern spirituality, one that is investigative, experiential, and intellectually generous. It insists that truth is not handed down but discovered, that wisdom is cultivated, and that ethical life emerges from understanding rather than blind faith. In an interview, Nobel laureate Krasznahorkai reflects on Buddha and the Buddhist metaphysical notion of nothingness, "Do you remember what Buddha told us about the circle? There is a big difference between the infinite and the uncountable finite. After all, what do you think happens when the Sufi dancer dissolves into nothing?"

Buddha's legacy promotes a liberal, progressive and democratic spirit of 'agree to disagree'. In an age of polarised certainties, the most enduring gift from Buddha is a vision of spirituality that is at once ancient and strikingly modern, inviting inquiry and honouring experience.

The writers are chief executive officer, Mhow Cantonment, and deputy commissioner of Delhi Police

THE SPEAKING TREE

Editor's TAKE

Exit polls signal the mood, not the mandate

Exit polls offer an early glimpse of the Assembly election outcomes, but conflicting projections — especially in West Bengal - highlight their limits

As the elections draw to a close, one of the most eagerly awaited events is the announcement of the election results. But, before that, exit polls are released, which help sustain the election momentum and provide fodder for the talking heads. Within hours of the last vote being cast, the pollsters are out with the exit polls, and most of us believe them to be the results, though many times they have been proved wrong. Yet, they are widely watched television programmes across the nation. The exit polls are conducted by several psephologists which often differ from one another, giving mixed signals to viewers. But the nation is hooked, as it cannot wait for the final counting day, just a few days ahead. This time around, the show is no different.

The broad trends emerging from the "poll of polls" for the recently held Assembly elections suggest a familiar pattern: incumbency holding firm in some regions, while anti-incumbency outmaneuvering the ruling party elsewhere. Yet, exit polls can at best predict the general electoral mood, as they are an imperfect science. On the face of it, the projections appear largely in line with political expectations. In Assam, most pollsters have forecast a comfortable return for the BJP-led alliance. Similarly, in Puducherry, the AINRC-led NDA is expected to retain power, reinforcing the perception of stability in the Union Territory. Exit polls are generally more accurate if the contest is one-sided, but if it is a close contest, their predictions can go haywire.

In Tamil Nadu,most exit polls point towards a second innings for the DMK, suggesting that the electorate may have endorsed continuity over change. However, the emergence of actor Vijay's TVK has been seen as a spoiler for the DMK and may lead to a hung Assembly, according to some predictions. But it is different story in Kerala which appears to be poised for a cyclical shift, with most exit polls predicting a comeback for the Congress-led UDF after two consecutive terms of the LDF, aligning with the state's long-standing tradition of alternating governments. Meanwhile, West Bengal remains the most keenly observed state. While several exit polls give the BJP an edge, others project a victory for the Trinamool Congress.

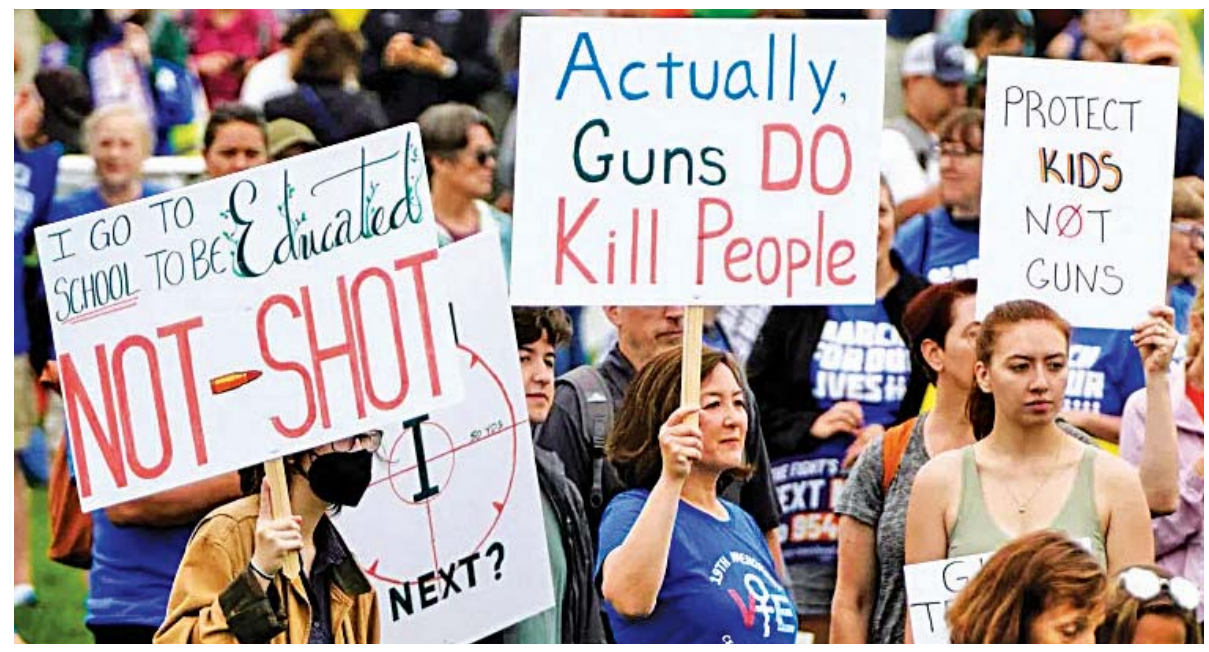
Despite these seemingly coherent narratives, the reliability of exit polls remains a matter of debate. Their track record in India has been mixed at best. Methodological limitations – ranging from small or unrepresentative samples to urban bias and respondent hesitancy – put a question mark on their credibility. Unlike in the West, it is a challenge to capture the diversity of India's electorate – the interplay of caste, class, and regional factors – in small sample sizes which makes precise forecasting exceedingly difficult. One would need the sample size to be really huge and diverse to nullify these biases. Do exit polls serve a constructive democratic purpose? Proponents argue that they enhance transparency. Critics, however, contend that they risk shaping perceptions prematurely, influencing market behaviour and building political narratives. It is better to wait for the counting day as the final word rests with the voters. May 4 is not very far away after all!

America's deadly divide over firearms

Despite recurring mass shootings and even assassination attempts on its presidents, the gun control debate in the United States remains one of the most polarising fault lines in public life, shaped by ideology, identity, and political calculation



BHOPINDER SINGH



Traditionally, Republicans are more opposed to gun control laws than the Democrats, owing to differences in cultural identity of respective cadres, geographical psychographics, and also the urban-rural split (or the coastline-hinterland "divide"). The Republican heartland is essentially the white-dominated "redneck" country, where people go hunting and have self-defence traditions. Therefore, the all-powerful National Rifle Association (NRA) has aligned itself with Republican ranks to pursue its agenda. The Second Amendment to the Constitution is interpreted contrastingly by Republicans and Democrats. The line "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed" - herein, the word "militia" is decoded by Republicans as implying individuals.

Today, Americans own 46 per cent of the world's civilian-owned firearms. It has been statistically proven that firearm ownership increases the risk of firearm homicide, suicide, and even impulsive lethality. As per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this leads to 45,000-48,000 gun-related deaths annually. All counter-arguments that firearms provide safety are humbug, as data show that firearm ownership puts individuals and their families at higher risk of injury and death. It is well established that bearing weapons tends to trigger aggressive thoughts and actions. So why do Republicans still oppose gun control laws? Besides the interpretation of the Second Amendment, there is also an unmistakable racial undertone to that position, wherein white supremacist/majoritarian groups (core Republican base) are inherently and overwhelmingly opposed to gun laws.

Former President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, was a classic Republican (with his cowboy image), like Donald Trump today. In 1981, an actress-obsessed lunatic shot at President Ronald Reagan to impress the said actress and catch her attention. Ironically, the shooter was a white male who had registered as a Republican earlier. The shooter's action was not a political act, but a delusional act driven by psychological impulse. Yet, despite being hit and having a narrow escape after surgery, Reagan did not budge from the core Republican stance. He argued, "It's a nasty truth, but those who seek to inflict harm are not fazed by gun control laws. I happen to know this from personal experience".

> IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT MOST ATTACKS CONDUCTED HAVE NOT EMANATED FROM THE SOCIETAL TYPOGRAPHIES THAT HAVE BEEN FEARMONGERED BY POLITICIANS LIKE TRUMP

The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry

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The Pioneer

Most likely, the shrewd politician would have sensed that any strengthening of anti-gun laws would have gone against his political base. However, once out of office and seeing the real-time fate of his Press Secretary, James Brady (left permanently disabled), in the same shootout, Reagan supported the anti-gun Brady Bill, thereby building a bipartisan consensus on the issue. It marked a significant turning point in US gun policy.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

The US has had a violent past of presidential assassinations, with figures such as Abraham Lincoln, William McKinley, and JF Kennedy. Many more have survived assassination attempts. Whenever such instances occurred, the deeply partisan issue of gun laws erupted, only to subside thereafter to familiar positions of disagreement between Republicans and Democrats.

The most recent addition to presidential assassination attempts involves the current incumbent, Donald Trump, who has faced multiple attempts on his life. Trump was first fired upon at a Pennsylvania campaign rally in July 2024. Later, in September 2024, Secret Service agents spotted a gunman concealed in the bushes of his golfing club in Florida. Most recently, at the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner in Washington, a major security scare was averted as the supposed "lone wolf" could not reach the presidential dais.

But Trump is a 24-hour politician who seizes every opportunity to sharpen his polarising image and invest in personal bravado, as opposed to making restorative changes towards tackling rampant gun misuse in American society. In the Pennsylvania shooting attempt, he struck a gladiator-like fist-pump pose. Now, post the latest attempt, he postured "muscularity" by insisting that he did not want to leave the place and that he "fought like hell to stay, but it was protocol". This incident may be political gold for Trump personally to revive his sagging popularity following the unpopular Iran war, but it could also be yet another lost opportunity to make wiser decisions on gun laws.

Trump should show humility and sensitivity on the issue of gun violence by rising above partisan positions if he is to make America — and Americans — truly safe. Already, Trump's "us-versus-them" narrative has dangerously divided Americans and made many feel deeply isolated, discriminated against, and even targeted. There is a disturbing cause-and-effect relationship that can be established between a tense society and easy access to weapons. But neither is Trump expected to lower his xenophobic and polarising rhetoric, nor is he expected to draft progressive legislation that rises above partisan positions, even if the same is tantamount to making America safer.

It is important to note that most attacks conducted have not emanated from the societal typographies that have been fearmongered by politicians like Trump. If anything, very often these "lone wolves" hail from sections of society that are encouraged by his policies. As Trump's predecessor at the White House, Joe Biden, famously said, "Enough prayers. Time for action". But it is unlikely that Trump will drive any positive action, despite this incident.

PIC TALK



Young girls perform a traditional dance during the KVS Regional Sports Meet 2026 in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh.

PHOTO: PTI

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Aunty: From casual address to cultural stereotype



KAJLEEN KAUR

2ND OPINION

Recently, a UK employment tribunal ruled in favour of an Indian-origin healthcare assistant and awarded her approx ₹1.7 lakh in compensation after a colleague repeatedly called her "aunty" against her wishes. It was quoted that using it when unwantedly creates an offensive environment, and constitutes harassment, age and sex discrimination and carries a negative social impact.

Aunty, a social label, reflects a generational gap and is now taken to be a 'hostile' and ridiculed manner of addressing a lady. It is actually a spoiled form of "aunt," which, according to any English dictionary, means "father's/mother's sister." But in our society, it has a filthy meaning of not being young anymore, with its use further deteriorating to refer to "middle-class mentality". In common parlance, it refers to an ageing woman, even "not-so-elderly," if she is married, or, surely, when she is a mother, or if she chooses to dress in ethnic clothing. Social media and memes have additionally reinforced it from a gesture of respect to a subject of humour.

All women of 40-plus age or even in their late 30s have to face the trauma of the uncalled-for transition to the new age group, and thereby to the unfriendly sobriquet. It does take some time to sink in, and every lady in India can well relate it to the famous lines from an old TV serial, "Aunty Mat Kaho Na". The initial stages of the shock begin with substantial time spent in front of the mirror, checking for any visible wrinkles on the face, salt and pepper hair, or any such trait in physical appearance that has pushed them into this new ugly stamping. This is then followed by efforts to improve skin care routines and maintain a good figure. The result is an extra slot of expenditure spent on the services of beauticians and gymnasiums.

It's worth pondering what urges us to keep away from this branding. There is indeed an insecurity in joining the too-early and unwanted old-age league. In fact, in the contemporary world, even the actually elderly women are choosing to take up invasive cosmetic treatments like Botox, fillers, and hair transplants to manage to look young and, needless to say, not be referred to as Aunty. Moreover, a comparison with a little time ago in the 1990s, women were mostly restricted to household chores and family care. There was a smaller proportion of the population consisting of women who were working, driving vehicles, and working out in gymnasiums or doing aerobics or swimming to maintain their physiques. The society was not even open to women with modern or western dressing, especially after marriage. So now, if women are working hard to keep themselves young, it is also for society to respect their choice and approve of their disapproval. A serious introspection of the situation, to the unreceptive and offensive nature of the 'Aunty title', is needed, given its misogynistic relevance and social consequences, especially when it has been taken legally. We must understand that times, outlook of people, education, and society are all transforming. There is more acceptance and respect for people's opinions and the mental impact of any action.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

As societies evolve and we strive for an inclusive culture, we should discard acts of personification, disrespect, and unhealthy communicative practices. Words may seem trivial, but they quietly shape attitudes, and changing them is often the first step towards changing mindsets. It can be replaced with more respectful, pleasing, and acceptable forms of address such as Madam and Sir.

The writer is an assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, Delhi University

FROM CONVICT TO COUNSEL: SHOULD THE BAR OPEN?

The concerns raised by Congress MP R Sudha in her letter to President Droupadi Murmu deserve serious attention. Her appeal to cancel the enrolment of A G Perarivalan as an advocate has reignited a difficult but necessary debate on the limits of rehabilitation in cases involving grave national crimes.

Perarivalan was convicted in connection with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, which deeply scarred the nation. In 1998, a TADA court sentenced him to death, a verdict upheld by the Supreme Court of India. Years later, prolonged delays in deciding his mercy petitions led the Court to commute his sentence to life imprisonment in 2014. In 2022, invoking its extraordinary powers under Article 142, the Court ordered his release, citing the extraordinary length of incarceration and his conduct.

Yet, this judicial relief was not an exoneration. The conviction stands; the gravity of the offence remains unchanged. The release was grounded in constitutional compassion, not a reassessment of guilt.

This raises a troubling question: how did a person convicted of such a heinous crime gain admission to a law university and subsequently enter the legal profession? Institutions typically require disclosure of criminal history. If such norms exist, were they applied uniformly in this instance?

The legal profession demands public trust. Rehabilitation must be balanced with ethical expectations, ensuring justice and mercy are both upheld and seen to be upheld.

AP THIRUVADI | CHENNAI

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com.
In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Heatwave hardships of field workers

Extreme heat across the nation has made each passing day miserable for everyone. The government and administration have issued orders, especially for children and the elderly, to remain indoors between 11 am and 5 pm to minimise heatstroke and summer-related ailments. However, some professionals are compelled to work in scorching conditions, as their jobs involve meeting prospects to promote company products at the customer's convenience. They are often kept waiting for hours for just a few minutes of interaction with doctors. These professionals are pharmaceutical field workers and their middle management, popularly known as medical representatives and area managers.

Irrespective of uncomfortable and harsh weather, they must meet doctors to promote products. Often, they wear formal attire, including neckties, even in peak summer to remain presentable.

Although some are well paid, their job security depends heavily on performance. Despite daily risks and pressure, their concerns remain unheard. Lawmakers and authorities must recognise their struggles and consider safeguards for their safety, dignity, and job security.

SUNIL OKHADE | INDORE

Aviation sector in turbulence

India's aviation sector is once again navigating turbulence, and the warning signs are too stark to ignore. Aviation remains an inherently fragile business, as the collapse of Jet Airways so vividly demonstrated. The Federation of Indian Airlines has rightly flagged the unsustainable burden of aviation turbine fuel pricing, which continues to distort the sector's cost structure.

When input costs remain persistently elevated, airlines are left with limited levers. One predictable response is aggressive cost-cutting. This often manifests in reduced connectivity on marginal routes and a decline in passenger convenience, as witnessed during recent operational disruptions involving IndiGo. Such measures may offer short-term relief to balance sheets, but they gradually erode the overall quality of service.

More concerning is the long-term risk to safety and maintenance. Financial strain can lead to deferred investments in upkeep and training, posing systemic risks.

India's aviation growth cannot rely only on rising passenger numbers while ignoring structural inefficiencies. Rationalising ATF pricing and taxes is essential to ensure service reliability and passenger safety.

HARSH PAWARIA | ROHTAK

Exit Polls on shaky ground

The exit polls published after voting concluded across Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, Assam, and Puducherry present projections so contradictory that careful reading is essential before treating them as political fact.

Tamil Nadu is where the confusion runs deepest. Most agencies project a DMK-led alliance victory with 125-160 seats, yet Axis My India gives TVK up to 120 seats, and VoteVibe gives AIADMK an outright edge. These are not marginal differences - they describe entirely different electoral outcomes. Kerala polls broadly agree on a UDF return after a decade. West Bengal projections suggest a possible BJP majority, potentially ending fifteen years of TMC rule, while Assam points comfortably towards BJP retention. History offers a sobering corrective. In the 2021 Assembly elections, all four leading agencies — Axis My India, C-Voter, Jan Ki Baat, and Today's Chanakya — got at least one state wrong. West Bengal was the standout failure, with polls severely underestimating TMC.

In 2024, major agencies predicted 350-400 Lok Sabha seats for the NDA; the alliance secured 293. Beyond numbers, exit polls shape perception. Without transparency, they remain expectation management.

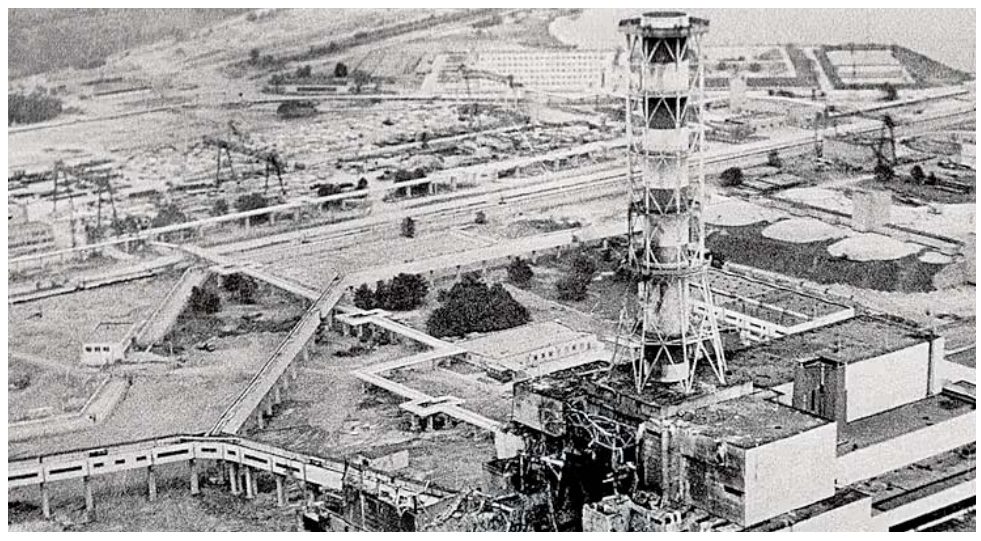
A MYILSAMI | COIMBATORE

Chernobyl at 40: A disaster that refuses to end

From the damaged shell of Reactor 4 to the militarised exclusion zone, Chernobyl today is not a relic of the past but a warning in motion, where science struggles against uncertainty and institutions continue to manage dangers they cannot fully control



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA



The fundamental lesson of any tragedy that claims to teach something is simple: build a mechanism that prevents repetition. Yet history rarely behaves like a controlled experiment. It loops, mutates, and returns in altered form, often in places that insist they have already understood the lesson. Forty years ago, on a day like today, 26 April, Chernobyl tore through that assumption. It did not just expose a failed reactor design; it exposed how quickly institutions, states, and expertise bend under pressure, secrecy, and denial. Since then, new nations have formed, old ones have dissolved, and international bodies have rebranded themselves as guardians of "lessons learned". And still, the core pattern persists: systems that acknowledge danger while continuing to reproduce it.

Chernobyl today is often framed as a resolved chapter. Reporting from the exclusion zone does not support that comfort. It is not closed. It has been contained, partially stabilised, and then reinserted into another instability: war. The New Safe Confinement, a €1.5 billion structure meant to lock away reactor 4's remains for a century-long decommissioning process, is already damaged by a drone strike. Engineers are no longer working only against decay and radiation, but against renewed physical attack. One senior engineer put it plainly: "You cannot tell radioactivity to stop being radioactive." That is obvious physics. The problem is political systems that behave as if physics can be subordinated to urgency, conflict, or neglect.

Inside the reactor itself, the language used by scientists is stripped of sentiment. There is no room for metaphor when describing "corium — a mix of melted fuel, concrete, and metal formed in 2500°C heat", or when describing spikes of neutron activity that still appear unpredictably. One researcher, Anatoly Doroshenko, who enters the structure to take measurements, describes his preparation in terms that are almost procedural rather than emotional: "You should be aware that everything is contaminated." He adds, repeatedly, "you should control yourself." The repetition is not stylistic; it is instruction. The work is not about courage; it is about limiting error in a place where error becomes physical consequence.

This is the same reactor where, as another account records, "the reactor flew" seconds after the AZ-5 shutdown button was pressed. The mechanism designed to stop the system instead accelerated its destruction. Systems fail not only through absence of control, but through control functions that behave unpredictably under stress. Forty years later, the most repeated claim in contemporary reporting is not about radiation itself, but about displacement. A recent New Scientist report states directly: "The biggest threat to Chernobyl is no longer radiation." It continues: "The one-dimensional view of Chernobyl as a contaminated wasteland is wildly off the mark." This matters because public memory tends to freeze the site into a single condition: a poisoned void. The reality is more unstable. Radiation has decayed unevenly, ecosystems have expanded, and wolves and moose move through zones where humans cannot safely remain for long periods. But stability here is conditional, dependent on maintenance, monitoring, funding, and above all, political access.

That political access has become the fragile point. The exclusion zone is now also militarised territory. Russian occupation in 2022 brought trench digging in contaminated soil, looting of laboratories, and the destruction of research continuity. One scientist described returning to his office to find it stripped, computers removed, and research interrupted mid-process. Another described it as "typical behaviour for a medieval army", a phrase that is not literary but diagnostic: extraction without understanding value systems beyond immediate use.

El País documents the same rupture from a different angle, through lived memory inside the zone. A former worker recalls Russian soldiers asking: "Who has given you permission to live better than us?" It is not about Chernobyl, but about comparison systems embedded in modern conflict. The exclusion zone becomes a mirror for political grievance projected onto infrastructure, science, and ordinary survival. The city did not die; it was displaced, reoccupied by forest, then by soldiers, then by scientists again. Death here is not an event but a repeated administrative claim. The scientific community working in the exclusion zone operates under dual pressures of radiological risk and physical insecurity. As a New Scientist report describes, researchers work close to reactor 4's core, carefully balancing speed against exposure: "You want to do the work, and you also want to see something, but it's not an excursion." The zone is often misrepresented as either horror tourism or ecological recovery, but the reality is procedural, repetitive work constrained by radiation dose limits rather than time.

Four decades later, Chernobyl sits alongside the global nuclear posture today. States maintain arsenals designed for deterrence rather than use, yet continue modernisation programmes that increase the speed, accuracy, and survivability of delivery systems. The result is a paradox: the probability of total war remains low, while the capacity for total destruction remains intact and, in some cases, improved. Strategic stability is treated as a technical equilibrium, while geopolitical trust continues to erode.

In that sense, Chernobyl is not a relic. It is a functioning case study in what remains after systemic failure: partial containment, institutional adaptation, and persistent vulnerability. The presence of wildlife in the exclusion zone is often cited as evidence of recovery. That is misleading. It is not recovery in the human sense. It is the absence of human pressure combined with persistent contamination at variable depth. As one researcher notes, radiation effects exist alongside "ecological effects", and separating them remains unresolved.

What persists more than radiation is uncertainty. Workers enter reactor structures knowing that conditions can shift. Humidity changes alter neutron behaviour. Water levels alter reactivity. Even after four decades, "nobody knows exactly where all the fuel material is inside the reactor", as one scientist states. That lack of precise mapping is not a failure of effort; it is a structural limit of access and destruction.

The most striking continuity is not catastrophe, but the normalisation of abnormal conditions. Residents cook, tend gardens, and care for animals in areas officially declared uninhabitable. Scientists conduct routine inspections inside structures that could become lethal if mechanical stability changes. Soldiers patrol zones that were once research fields. Each group adapts to conditions that were never meant to stabilise into everyday life.

This is where Chernobyl intersects with present geopolitical behaviour. The assumption that catastrophic risk leads to long-term caution has not held. Instead, high-impact risk environments are managed, not avoided. Nuclear deterrence persists. Infrastructure is rebuilt after strikes. Exclusion zones are repurposed for research, military control, and limited habitation. Risk is not eliminated; it is administratively absorbed. As Svetlana Alexievich's Voices from Chernobyl puts it: "Chernobyl is like the war of all wars. There's nowhere to hide." It adds, "The era of physics ended at Chernobyl." It assigns finality to a place that continues to function in altered form. It is not accurate; it is psychological closure applied to an unfinished system.

What remains after 40 years is not resolution, but layered instability: radioactive decay processes that outlast political systems, military occupation that disrupts scientific monitoring, and environmental change that proceeds regardless of human classification. The most dangerous assumption is that Chernobyl represents a completed warning. It does not. It represents a condition that continues to be managed under shifting priorities, each of which temporarily suppresses one risk while introducing another. As Adam Higginbotham's Midnight in Chernobyl observes, it "sweeps away the convenient fallacy that what had happened in Chernobyl had been a once-in-a-million-years fluke", while Fukushima later "stifled the nuclear renaissance in the cradle". The reactor is still there. So is the war. So is the science that insists on entering both.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

WHAT REMAINS AFTER 40 YEARS IS NOT RESOLUTION, BUT LAYERED INSTABILITY: RADIOACTIVE DECAY PROCESSES THAT OUTLAST POLITICAL SYSTEMS, MILITARY OCCUPATION THAT DISRUPTS SCIENTIFIC MONITORING, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE THAT PROCEEDS REGARDLESS OF HUMAN CLASSIFICATION

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Why India's children need more than just food

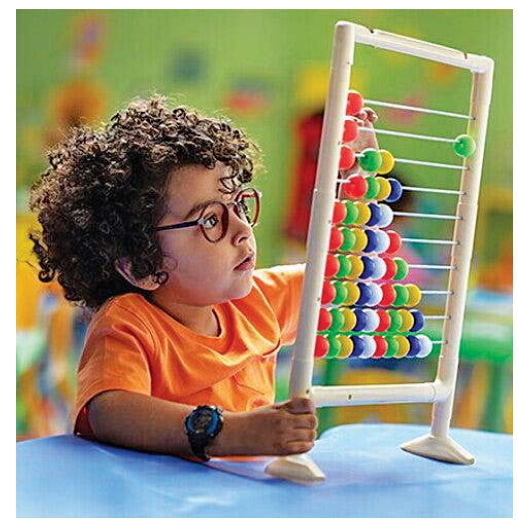


SARATH GOPALAN

A five-year-old girl was brought to my clinic not long ago. She seemed to be behind on her milestones, slower to speak, less engaged than children her age. Her developmental assessment placed her at the level of a three-year-old. Her mother was concerned. The child had not been ill. There was no diagnosis to point to. But when we spoke about the previous two years of COVID-19, the picture became clearer: prolonged school closures due to lockdowns, resulting in her spending most of her time at home, screens replacing playtime, and meals being simpler and less varied than before. Her brain, in those quiet years, had not received what it needed to grow. She was not an exception. Across clinics, paediatricians and developmental specialists were seeing the same pattern: healthy children falling behind. Not because of the virus, but because of everything that came after it. The World Health Organization tells us that 90 per cent of brain development occurs before the age of five, making the early years the single greatest opportunity we have to shape a child's cognitive, emotional, and social future. The neural connections formed during this window strengthen learning, language, memory, and resilience for life. Getting nutrition right in this period is one of the most powerful investments we can make. Micronutrients such as iron, zinc, and selenium, often described as neuronutrients, are essential for healthy brain development and function. Yet the data tells us a troubling story. Iron deficiency alone affects approximately 50 per cent of children under five in India (NFHS-5). Anaemia was recorded in 67.1 per cent of children aged under five, up from the previous survey. Recent evidence, including nationally representative analyses of children aged 12-59 months, found that over 60 per cent had micronutrient deficiencies, with or without anaemia. This points to a far wider nutritional gap than haemoglobin counts alone reveal.

Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), an omega-3 fatty acid, supports brain architecture, memory formation, and visual development. Choline, another essential nutrient, is now considered essential for brain development. When mothers consume choline during pregnancy, it supports healthy gene activity, cell structure, and the growth of key brain regions, including those responsible for memory and thinking. These nutrients are not optional additions to a child's diet; they are foundational to their potential. The most important nutritional intervention in a child's life begins before birth. Brain development starts in the foetal stage, and a mother's nutritional status directly shapes the neural foundation her child carries into the world. DHA supports neural connectivity in utero; iron and folic acid supplementation during pregnancy reduce the risk of low birth weight and developmental delay. Yet only 44 per cent of pregnant women in India consumed iron-folic acid supplements for the recommended 180 or more days (NFHS-5), a gap that represents an enormous and addressable opportunity.

This is why investing in adolescent girls is an investment in the next generation. A well-nourished girl becomes a well-nourished mother, and a well-nourished mother gives her child the best possible start. With 59 per cent of adolescent girls in India anaemic (NFHS-5), prioritising this group through schools, community programmes, and targeted supplementation is one of the most effective interventions in the entire continuum of care.



Although nutrition is important, brain development requires two parallel inputs: nutritional adequacy and emotional-social stimulation. The pandemic illustrated this powerfully. UNICEF estimates that one in seven children globally experienced significant developmental or learning loss during COVID-19, not primarily from illness, but from the withdrawal of peer interaction, conversation, and play. Screens replaced human connection, and language, motor, and social development suffered.

Responsive caregiving, verbal interaction, tactile engagement, and a stimulating environment are neurologically formative and are essential to healthy brain architecture. Early childhood programmes that integrate both nutritional support and developmental stimulation produce outcomes that neither can achieve alone. India's programme architecture is well placed to act on this.

Programmes like POSHAN Abhiyaan and PM POSHAN already reach millions of mothers and young children across the country. Initiatives like POSHAN Pakhwada demonstrate the power of sustained, community-level mobilisation around nutrition. The delivery architecture, which includes the anganwadi network, the frontline workforce, and community-level reach, is in place. The opportunity now is to deepen what that architecture delivers.

With the right training and support, they can expand their role from tracking physical growth to also guiding parents on early stimulation, responsive caregiving, and child development practices. Integrating the WHO and UNICEF Nurturing Care Framework, which connects nutrition, health, safety, early learning, and caregiving into a coherent whole, offers a clear and scientific roadmap for this evolution. It moves the goal from simply feeding children to helping them truly thrive.

Nutrition in early childhood is among the highest-return investments a nation can make. When children receive what their developing brains need — the right micronutrients, the right caregiving environment, and the right stimulation - the dividends are lifelong: stronger learners, more productive workers, and a more resilient society.

India has the ambition of Viksit Bharat. It has the systems. It has the science. What this moment calls for is a shared commitment to treating early childhood nutrition not as a welfare line item, but as the foundation on which everything else is built.

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Two nations, One vision: Delhi–Seoul axis



ABHISHEK PRATAP SINGH | KAUSTUBH TRIPATHI

When South Korean President Lee Jae-myung landed in New Delhi on April 19, he carried the weight of eight lost years. The last state visit by a South Korean leader was President Moon Jae-in (2018). This gap spanned a pandemic, the Ukraine crisis, the Iran war, global supply chain disruptions, and emerging geopolitical shifts in Asia. This makes the summit not a routine renewal of ties but a deliberate act of 'strategic recalibration' between India and South Korea.

This visit did not come in any geopolitical vacuum. Its immediate diplomatic genealogy traces to the G7 Summit in Kananaskis, Canada (June 2025), where Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Lee held their first bilateral meeting and agreed on cooperation in commerce, investment, technology, and shipbuilding. They met again on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Johannesburg (November 2025), where Modi personally extended the invitation. In addition, the sixth India-South Korea Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue (FPSD) held in Seoul (February 2026) provided a foundation for this visit, leading to an upgrade in bilateral relations.

Both India and South Korea are mid-sized, significant powers with large economies. India, now the world's fifth largest, and South Korea, the twelfth, are navigating a disruptive global order marked by economic protectionism, trade weaponisation, and rising power assertiveness. In the words of Prime Minister Modi, both share commitments to democratic values, the rule of law, and a stable Indo-Pacific outlook. The shift in the relationship is not sentimental but structural and contextual.

The composition of the South Korean delegation makes this visit distinct. President Lee arrived with over 200 individuals — ministers, senior officials, and business leaders representing key industrial sectors. This does not appear to be a delegation assembled merely for protocol; rather, it reflects a market-entry force. When industry leaders in semiconductors, shipbuilding, and defence manufacturing accompany the President, the signal is clear: Seoul is here to build a long-term presence and strengthen bilateral relations.

The economic context explains the 'why'. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), signed in 2010, has delivered growth but also accumulated trade imbalances. The two sides have now committed to



upgrading CEPA, identifying asymmetries, expanding market access, and aligning it with evolving global supply chain realities. Bilateral trade has grown from $14 billion in 2010 to $27 billion in 2025, with Indian imports at around $18.5 billion. India expects that CEPA 2.0 will address non-tariff barriers, boost services exports, and rebalance trade flows.

The two sides have signed 25 agreements focusing on enhancing steel exports from India, establishing a new Steel Dialogue, setting up Korean Industrial Townships, and joint production of anti-aircraft guns and missiles. Additional agreements include AI research, science and technology education, space exploration, digital payments, sports, and cultural exchanges.

An India-Korea Business Forum at Bharat Mandapam brought together industry leaders to translate summit commitments into tangible investments. The digital payment interoperability initiative could facilitate flows for small and medium enterprises, often the last beneficiaries of such agreements. New platforms have been launched to streamline financial flows and boost industrial links, including the India-Korea Financial Forum (IKFF) and an Industrial Cooperation Committee. The aim is to achieve $50 billion in bilateral trade by 2030, with a focus on technology, resources, and long-term supply chain stability.

Cooperation in the semiconductor sector deserves special attention. India is advancing its Semiconductor Mission 2.0, backed by a ₹76,000 crore incentive programme. India is actively seeking South Korean support to achieve its semiconductor ambitions. The India-Korea Digital Bridge (IKDB) provides an institutional channel to integrate India's manufacturing incentives with South Korea's technological strengths. Under the 'plus one' strategy, India is positioning itself as a global base for assembling, testing, marking, and packaging semiconductors.

This is not a one-way arrangement. While India seeks technology and capital, it offers South Korea market diversification, reduced dependence on Chinese exports, and a skilled workforce. An India-Korea chip corridor could reduce global dependence on Taiwan-centric fabrication - a goal aligned with broader strategic interests.

In shipbuilding, South Korea remains a global leader in LNG carriers, container vessels, and offshore platforms. The Comprehensive Framework for Shipbuilding and Maritime Logistics outlines partnerships in greenfield clusters, upgrading Indian yards, and building a $25 billion pipeline for 400 vessels. To address shortages of specialised maritime engineers, both sides have agreed to train 10,000 engineers through KOICA. For India, Korean capital and expertise align directly with its Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.

India provides land, labour, and a growing market, while South Korea brings technology, training standards, and global contracts. This partnership also carries strategic weight, especially as West Asian tensions disrupt shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz.

The India-ROK Joint Strategic Vision document signals that both nations view this relationship in civilisational and strategic terms. Rabindranath Tagore's "Lamp of the East" for Korea reminds us that this partnership has deep historical roots. The long-term agenda of this summit aims to transform this legacy into a powerful engine for industrial growth and strategic cooperation.

By converging their strengths, India and South Korea are forging a forward-looking partnership, turning diplomacy into tangible outcomes. In the illumination of the East, both nations stand together as trusted partners.

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Mythos Legend Ups Cybersecurity Stakes

Develop agentic defence mechanisms

Anthropic's Claude Mythos can identify security flaws in software within hours, flaws that have remained undetected for decades. To spot a vulnerability, however, Mythos must be able to exploit it. Which it also does within hours. This makes it a concerning AI tool if it falls into the wrong hands. Anthropic has prudently decided to release the AI model to a select group of companies that develop critical software. The intention is to patch the digital infrastructure before Mythos becomes publicly available. This, in turn, raises two sets of issues. One, not all digital infrastructure is built by Big Tech. And, two, not every company developing AI cybersecurity tools will be as conscientious as Anthropic.

India has built an impressive stack of DPI, and is assessing the new risk environment it faces. GoI, as Nirmala Sitharaman noted last week at the ET Awards for Corporate Excellence, is in talks with the US administration for access to Mythos. India's position is that its digital backbone has a reach comparable to, if not greater than, that of Big Tech firms. However, this stance dilutes Anthropic's original intention of limiting access to a core group. India's argument tends to favour equitable access to cybersecurity tools before Mythos' potential risks are fully mitigated. This represents a balanced approach in an industry divided over whether the model is primarily a security solution or a threat.



Regardless of how Mythos evolves, India has begun auditing its cybersecurity requirements. Large enterprises are better equipped to protect themselves. But small firms require a supportive ecosystem to counter AI-driven threats. Regulatory adoption of AI must align with industry deployment to safeguard all stakeholders. A system as significant as UPI requires an adequate response to the evolving cybersecurity landscape. GoI has identified the threat early, and targeted policy intervention could encourage the development of domestic, agentic defence mechanisms.

Off the Tough Route To Loan Recovery

A sordid viral video of reportedly loan recovery agents roughing up a delinquent borrower in Pune may remind many of the spiralling thriftlessness in Indian households. But it masks a deeper malaise in our banks. It's a story of a dog-eat-dog chase among high-street lenders to grab customers, skewed incentives to private firms to whom the nasty job is outsourced, a shoddy and hasty process to assess the creditworthiness of potential customers, and a growing temptation, particularly among the young, to borrow, spend and roll over credit card dues.

RBI rules prohibit banks and recovery agents from using coercive tactics. But strong-arm methods are common. The Pune case is not the first such instance. It certainly won't be the last.



Driven by the urge to diversify into retail loans that can generate more profits, banks charge steep interest on unsecured advances like personal loans and credit card outstanding to partly absorb losses from higher defaults and absence of collaterals. Like armies hired to salvage sunk loans, the task of originating loans is left to direct selling agents working on commission. Banks are barred from hiring agents to raise deposits. Slapping a similar ban on engaging outsiders to spot borrowers and go after them when payments are overdue may curb harassment of borrowers. But it would make banks' operating costs unsustainable.

A saner, though unpalatable, option would be regulating the fees offered to recovery agents and instilling bank managements of the urgency to follow a realistic credit appraisal method and pick borrowers carefully. Changing a culture, buoyed by targets and bonuses, isn't easy. But questioning and penalising banks whose agents misbehave could be the first step in treading a long road.



JUST IN JEST

Isn't it weird how CAPF presence can keep violence at bay?

Welcome Trappings Of Faux Martial Law

The ever-articulate TMC Krishnanagar MP Mahua Moitra — always the urbane yang to her boss' more urban yin — found the presence of army personnel outside polling booths across West Bengal this time such a bother. After casting her vote on Wednesday, she perfectly enunciated her complaint, 'While voting is usually a celebration of democracy, this time voting feels like military rule.' It seems the junta was out in full regalia in Nadia district where she voted. Funnily enough, violence in usually-violent election-time Bengal has been imperceptible. Could it be — and here we are sticking our necks out — that the usual suspects found it hard to go about their usual poll-time threats, coercion and worse because of the insidious presence of 2.4 lakh Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel across the state? We don't want to jump to conclusions, but could better policing somehow have led to minimal violence in Bengal this time?

Perhaps, for the likes of Moitra who are fortunate not to fear anything except fear itself, the presence of police in a troubled area could be a giveaway sign of a police state. And who knows? Maybe this year's near-pacific experience for voters in Bengal could throw up some novel ideas. Like CCTVs in hospitals that actually work, curtailing any miscreant from thinking that he could get away with a heinous crime or two.

Record number of voters is cause for cheer, but concerns over why many of them voted linger

Ballé Ballé & Bullied Ballot?



Akshay Rout



Tune in, turn on, turnout

While the political outcome of elections in four states and a Union territory must wait till May 4, there's one instant takeaway: the staggering voter turnout. 92.47% in West Bengal, 85.10% Tamil Nadu, 85.38% Assam, 89.83% Puducherry, and 78% Kerala. The first four are records. Oh, and in all 5 polls, women have outnumbered men at polling stations.

This surge was partly anticipated when Bihar — with a weak turnout history, and the first state to come under SIR — had a record 67% assembly election turnout last year. With removal of those absent, shifted, dead and duplicates from electoral rolls, a significant upward correction in turnout was expected. SIR also forced sensitisation about the value of being a voter.

During the first 10 Lok Sabha elections since 1951 (45.67% turnout), the level remained below 60%. In the next five, it was marginally above. 2014 was a watershed election year yielding 66.44% turnout, above 65% for the first time. Polling in assembly elections witnessed a similar increase in the last 15 yrs.



Combative campaigns, many falling foul of the model code, set effective narratives to draw people out. Polarisation has meant large numbers coming out 'to defend' and an equal number 'to dislodge'

EC deserves credit for placing the voter at the centre of the exercise. 'Greater participation for a stronger democracy' became the buzzword from 2010 onwards, when EC began its Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (Sveep) programme. A kind of 'special intensive' mobilisation was visible, to get everyone eligible on the electoral roll, and those on the register to vote.

The commission worked on scientific identification of non-voting groups and geographies from polling stations upwards and made suitable demand and supply interventions. Gaps in female and youth participation, along with urban apathy, were specially followed up.

This momentum has been unabated, despite the push from last year to remove 'ineligible' people from electoral rolls. Steps to make voting more friendly continue, the latest being limiting 1,200 electors per polling station, home voting, mobile deposit facility at polling booths, transport for people with disabilities, and more readable voter information slips.

Indian election laws don't overtly prescribe electoral participation measures. Electoral managers believe that their job is to set the playground right. People walking in or not to vote is their call.

The latest round of assembly polls has seen combative campaigns, both online and offline, many of them falling on the wrong side of the model code. But these did set effective narratives to draw people out. Polarisation has meant large numbers coming out 'to defend' and an equal number 'to dislodge'. In a mature setting, voting can be an endorsement of governance or of an alternate agenda. But in much of the Indian context, it can also be pushed by resentment or frustration. Votes are still cast along identity, community and clan lines where nothing else is judged.



Turnout as vengeance or out of fear, and turnout as nation-building are different servings from the same poll kitchen

In West Bengal's bumper show this time, a sizeable number of voters were migrants returning to cast their votes. This is a positive development, since there has always been concerns about people being unable to travel to make their choice. EC attempted several interventions in the past, including an all-party consultation on remote voting. But this has yielded limited results so far.

But it's another matter whether workers on modest wages working in NCR or Mumbai travelled to polling booths in Bengal — where SIR, immigration and the threat of losing their citizenship were electoral issues — out of their own volition to exercise their democratic rights, or for self-preservation. Many migrant voters had to make a second trip to their constituency to cast their vote, the first being for enumeration, hearings or submission of documents to secure themselves as electors.

All post-SIR elections, whether in Bihar in 2025, or the five conducted over last month, cement an elevated path of popular participation. India, after recovering from an earlier average of 55% turnout, had already moved to the 'middle range' of countries with turnouts higher than 60%. Now, abetted by SIR, the country is poised to break into the top league with a steady turnout level of above 75%. In a world of dwindling democratic practices, rising distrust in electoral functions and election workers, and decline in voter interest, this is no mean achievement.

But euphoria over new turnout records will do well to be tempered by sobriety on at least two grounds:

SIR-pushed There is need for circumspection over the promise of voting rights of all. Ambedkar's principle of 'one man, one vote and one vote, one value' needs to be experienced by marginalised Indians at the state's cost. Any exclusion of electors based on technicalities, staff inefficiency, poor documentation or tight timelines can diminish the glow of a great turnout. 'Greater participation' and 'pure electoral roll' are two sides of the same coin. No space should be allowed for collateral damage in search of 'purity'.

When it comes to shove Voting driven by provocation, coercion and bribes can have far-reaching unpleasant consequences for India's society beyond polling day. Instead, voting conducted and exercised under calm and informed persuasion, or civic sense can augment sociopolitical capital. Turnout as vengeance or out of fear, and turnout as nation-building are different servings from the same poll kitchen.

The writer is former DG, Election Commission of India

Demographic Dividend, Really?



Chetna Israni

Every few months, a fresh report reminds us that India is sitting on a demographic goldmine. Over 65% of the population is under 35. The median age is 28. By 2047, the working-age population will reach 1 bn.

The dividend is real. What is often glossed over is the condition of the people expected to deliver it. Policymakers frame this as an opportunity window. On the ground, it often feels like pressure is building without release.

India is still playing catch-up from the Covid contraction. Despite a sharp recovery to 9.1% growth, the low baseline means the gap only closes around 2034. Every year that passes without adequate job creation closes the window further.

Young Indians make up nearly 83% of the country's unemployed population, with urban youth unemployment at 18.8%. Only 51% of graduates are employable. With a large share of the population entering the workforce, the economy needs to sustain 6-7% GDP growth to absorb new entrants. Below that, the gap widens.

In such an environment, patience does not always pay. Speed becomes a rational response. Get something. Anything that pays. Move fast. Secure income. This shift is often framed as impatience. It is more accurately a response to inconsistent returns on delayed effort. When systems don't reliably reward long-term investment, short-term decision-making becomes more likely. Sometimes, inevitable.

This is the cultural shift that the dividend discourse refuses to account for. A generation under sustained economic pressure does not think in 5-yr arcs. That is behavioural reality sitting beneath the optimistic projections. And it is getting worse.

Economic Survey 2025-26 documented a 55% increase in gig workers, from 7.7 mn in FY21 to 12 mn in FY25. The Survey's language is instructive: many workers are being pushed into gigs, not by preference, but by weak demand, skill mismatch and absence of a safety net.

Economic pressure forces young people into short-term, task-based work. Short-term work offers income but no skill architecture — which means no upward mobility. No upward mobility deepens economic strain. And deepened strain makes the next generation of young entrants even more desperate for the fastest available fix. The cycle does not break on its own. It compounds.

India's 18-34-yr-olds rank 60th among 84 countries in mental well-being, with an average mind health quotient (MHQ) score of 33, placing them in the 'distressed' or 'struggling' range. A workforce in chronic distress does not invest in the future. It manages the present, a symptom of a system that has not been designed with people in mind.



Bridge the gap

China's demographic dividend unfolded when its median age aligned with India's today. It was supported by manufacturing scale, global trade integration, and coordination between education, industry and employment. India's path is different. As a services-led economy, it requires not just workers but also job creators — at scale. That is harder.

Brazil offers a cautionary contrast. Employers hired but did not invest in development. Institutions trained but not for available roles. The result was a workforce that remained underprepared despite participation.

Demographic windows don't close only because of policy failure. They close through a series of disconnected decisions that create systemic gaps.

India's demographic advantage will translate into economic gain only with sustained investment in education and female labour force participation. Both need to move faster.

India's response to youth unemployment has largely taken the form of schemes such as Skill India, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS). The intent is sound. The challenge lies in scale, integration and outcomes.

A certificate without a job at the end of it is not skill development but credential inflation. What is needed is stronger systems logic: apprenticeships aligned with industry demand, education frameworks that reflect labour market needs, and mental health embedded into institutions and workplaces as a productivity input.

Economic Survey 2024-25 estimates that every rupee invested in social and emotional learning can generate ₹11 in long-term economic returns. This positions well-being not as welfare but as capital.

Corporate India has a role here. Organisations that place young employees in high-pressure, low-development roles contribute to the same cycle they later attribute to attrition. India's employment challenge is not about intent. It is about execution — at scale.

The writer is co-founder-director, Morning Star

Make the Fire Harder to Start





Subhashis Banerjee & Debayan Gupta

The conversation about AI and cybersecurity has settled into a familiar pattern: AI systems — including platforms like Claude Mythos — are accelerating attacks. The solution: we must deploy AI in defence.

This framing isn't wrong. But it is incomplete. It skips a prior question: whether the systems we are defending are designed to be secure. Computer science has had the tools to answer this for decades. Skipping the question risks building the next layer of vulnerability on top of the last.

India's digital infrastructure spans every aspect of our existence. Integrity of that infrastructure depends not just on how well we detect attacks but on how well we design against them in the first place. Sound information security begins with threat modelling — a systematic articulation of what needs protecting, from whom, under what assumptions and with what guarantees.

It requires clarity about threat actors and their capabilities, because a nation-state adversary, a ransomware group and a malicious insider demand different postures. It requires provable mitigation, not merely precautionary decoration or forceful proclamations of security. It also requires that trust points be explicitly identified and minimised. Every assumption that a user, a process, a certificate or an insider is trustworthy is a potential point of failure.

These are foundational principles of security engineering, applicable with or without AI. The reality is that they are often sacrificed to deployment speed, procurement cycles, and the temptation to bolt security on after the fact rather than build it in from the start. Even where security design is taken seriously, a critical distinction is often collapsed: the difference between a design threat model, a use case threat model and an implementation threat model.

A system can be architecturally sound, and still be exploited through unintended workflows — legitimate functionality weaponised against its design assumptions. This is the use case layer, where business logic attacks, API abuse, rights violations and social engineering tend to live.

More consequentially, a system can be correctly specified and catastrophically implemented. The gap between what a system is intended to do and what the deployed, running system actually does is where a disproportionate share of real-world breaches originate.



Disable the rogue

These three layers — design, use case, implementation — are analytically distinct. Verification at one provides no guarantee at another. Treating them as a single problem produces neither clarity nor effective defence. This is where the AI conversation becomes productive. Not in the familiar framing of AI-enabled attack vs AI-enabled defence, but in a more foundational application: using automated methods to verify that systems exhibit the security properties their designs intend.

Formal verification — mathematical proof that an implementation satisfies its specification — has been successfully applied to critical components in aerospace, medical devices and secure operating systems. It remains demanding. But for systems above a defined criticality threshold, the argument for it is proportionate and pressing. Static analysis, fuzzing and model checking offer complementary approaches, each capable of surfacing implementation-level failures that human review will inevitably miss at scale.

Emerging AI-assisted verification tools address a bottleneck: the scarcity of human expertise in formal methods in computer science. This is AI applied not to the arms race of attack and defence, but to the harder problem of building systems that are verifiably correct before they are deployed.

India's policy discourse on cybersecurity has focused heavily on incident response and threat intelligence-sharing. These matter. But they are downstream of a more fundamental requirement: that systems deployed at scale are designed and verified to a standard that makes their security properties arguable rather than assumed.

This means mandating layered threat models as a condition of deployment for critical infrastructure. Not design documentation as a compliance artefact, but live, maintained models reflecting actual threat actor profiles and traceable mitigations. It means requiring implementation-level verification evidence for systems above a defined risk threshold. And it means building national capability in cryptography and formal and automated verification as a strategic asset.

Regulatory frameworks that drive genuine security uplift, rather than checkbox compliance, would do more structural good than most reactive measures currently under discussion.

AI is reshaping the threat landscape. But speed isn't the core problem. The real failure is our persistent lack of design discipline to make attacks harder in the first place. Machine-speed threats don't just demand faster detection but also systems built from the outset to be provably harder to break. The tools exist. The principles are clear. What's missing is the will to apply them before the next breach makes the case for us.

Banerjee is professor, and Gupta is assistant professor, computer science, Ashoka University

THE SPEAKING TREE

Buddha and Non-Theism

SUMIT PAUL

In times of extreme ideologies, doctrines and isms wreaking havoc across the world, the Buddha's non-doctrinal approach comes across as an ideal antidote. Buddha went beyond theism and atheism. He was referred to as Eesh-Parangmukh by Ashvaghosh of Saket in his epic poem 'Buddhacharita', composed in the early 2nd c. CE.

Buddha was against all beliefs and ideologies because all isms restrict humans. He knew very well that the debate pertaining to the existence or non-existence of a god was futile and eternally inconclusive because both theism and atheism stand on false and indefinite premises. God cannot be proven or disproven.

Humans have been wasting their time arguing about whether or not god exists. This hasn't made us wiser. Rather, this perennial debate has left us mired in inertia and inactivity. Buddha believed that even the Truth was subjective and all the so-called realities were relative. Things that cannot be proven or disproven must be left behind. Moreover, what does one get out of an otiose debate like god's existence or non-existence?

Pragmatism is central, crucial and integral to Buddha's philosophy. It doesn't dwell upon anything that's vague and amorphous. Any knowledge that has no practical value or application is insignificant. Buddha's emphasis was on self-enlightenment. A truly enlightened human is an evolved and emancipated individual. He doesn't care whether god exists.

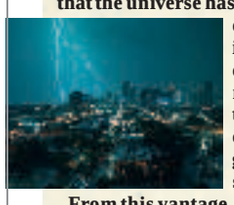
So, the Buddha never wasted his time on unimportant speculations about god's perceived and putative presence and existence. We can learn from Buddha and go beyond theism and atheism to become evolved beings. But are we ready? This is a million-dollar poser.

ALGO OF BLISSTECH

Watching Lightning From A High-Rise

Watching lightning from the perch of a high-rise, you're granted a balcony seat to nature's most anarchic theatre. The city below hums with its usual circuitry — cars, streetlights, shops, people. But above it all, the sky stages a performance that refuses choreography.

Each jagged flash showcases that the universe has no interest in being domesticated, no desire to be tamed by our grids and schedules.



From this vantage, one senses a communion with raw, uncontrollable energy. Lightning is nature's punctuation mark, striking through the sky with an authority that tut-tuts our fragile sense of control. It is both terrifying and liberating: terrifying because it reminds us of our smallness; liberating because it frees us from the illusion that everything can be managed.

The high-rise becomes your contemplative monastery, its walls framing the white streaks as sky calligraphy. Watching the sky rip itself and then instantaneously heal, you're watching tandav in peace. In its brief brilliance, we are given in to awe.

Chat Room

Missing Modules Of Sovereign AI

The argument in 'Enough With Mythologies' by T K Arun (Apr 30) that India needs state-sponsored AI capability, rather than dependence on foreign private firms, is well-taken. The C-Dac precedent is instructive — focused public investment with a clear mandate can deliver. The concern, however, is institutional drift. Grand prizes and university incentives work only if accompanied by sustained funding, insulation from political interference and genuine autonomy for researchers. India has the talent; what it has consistently struggled with is creating the conditions for that talent to stay and build here, rather than elsewhere.
Abbharna Barathi
Chennai

Letters to the editor may be addressed to editet@timesofindia.com

DECCAN HERALD
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Elusive peace, expanding conflict

Violence has erupted again in Manipur with public demonstrations, shutdowns, and other forms of protest reported in many parts of the state. Clashes between protesting groups and security forces have heightened the conflict, which began with a bombing on April 7 that killed two children in Bishnupur district. About a dozen people have died in this phase of unrest. While much of the strife during the past three years stemmed from differences between the Meiteis and the Kukis, the current spate of violence involves the Nagas fighting the Kukis. The divisions between the two groups – like the Meitei-Kuki rift – have a long history. With tensions rising, the Kuki and Naga groups have accused each other of triggering the conflict. The district of Ukhrul has been the epicentre of violence, where a retired soldier of the Indian Army was killed in an ambush.

The fresh clashes involving the Nagas have added a dimension to the state's turmoil and expanded the scene of conflict. Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh, who assumed office after President's rule ended in the state in February, has made efforts to bridge the divides by reaching out to multiple groups and holding negotiations. The Chief Minister recently visited villages in Ukhrul and held talks with the Kuki and Naga groups. Last month, he met leaders of the Kuki-Zo Council. However, the outreach efforts have not made headway. Notably, the firing which killed the retired armyman happened a day after the CM's Ukhrul visit.

Naga-Kuki clashes deepen Manipur's turmoil, as the state's reconciliation efforts falter

Manipur's crisis remains complex, with the old fault lines of tribal rivalries and unresolved tensions still shaping social conduct and political attitudes. Political parties have tried to exploit these divisions to their advantage. In the first two years after the Meitei-Kuki clashes started in May 2023, there was no serious attempt to address old grievances or prevent the risk of new friction. Crucially, the Central government did not restrain the then Chief Minister N Biren Singh whose actions were seen as favouring the Meiteis. The Centre has consistently ignored the situation in Manipur. The current government in the state has not found adequate support from the Centre in its peacemaking efforts. Armed militant groups are still active in the state and attempts to disarm them have not been successful. The ongoing cycle of violence and unrest in the border state is detrimental to national security. But more importantly, the inability to establish processes towards reconciliation and peace will be seen as a failure of the country's democratic system.

When civic neglect sinks the city

After weeks of searing heat, the pre-monsoon showers on Wednesday should have brought relief to Bengaluru. Instead, 111.5 mm of rain – the highest ever for April – left 10 people dead and paralysed large parts of India's technology capital. This was not an act of nature alone. It was the predictable consequence of sustained civic neglect. The most tragic symbol of this collapse was at Bowring Hospital in Shivajinagar, where a compound wall gave way, claiming seven lives. It was an all-too-familiar scene across the city: waterlogged roads, falling trees, collapsing structures, and snapped power lines pushed Bengaluru into chaos within hours.

Even the best-planned city cannot fully withstand nature's fury. But attributing this devastation to an unusually heavy downpour is to ignore an uncomfortable truth: Bengaluru's disasters are increasingly man-made. Its historic network of lakes and wetlands – once natural buffers against flooding – has been systematically encroached upon. Stormwater drains have been narrowed or left choked with debris. Roads have been laid and relaid with scant regard for gradient or drainage, while the city's natural contours, which once enabled run-off, have been steadily subsumed by concrete structures. What is particularly indefensible is the failure of preparedness. The India Meteorological Department had forecast intense pre-monsoon activity. Yet, there was no visible effort to desilt drains, prune vulnerable trees, or secure weak public infrastructure. The resulting disorder – waterlogging in low-lying areas, traffic paralysis, and fatalities – points to an administrative culture that reacts after the event. Even the precincts of Vidhana Soudha were inundated, underlining that no part of the city is insulated from the consequences of myopic planning. The Rs-5 lakh compensation announced for the victims' families, while necessary, cannot substitute for accountability.

One spell of rain cripples Bengaluru again. A reset on preparedness is imperative

The solution lies in a structural reset. Although the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) has formally unified various parastatal agencies under a single umbrella, the persistent lack of coordination between them became painfully obvious during the deluge. More troubling is the fact that Bengaluru continues to be guided by a development plan last updated in 2015, leaving the city to grapple with the challenges of 2026 using a decade-old roadmap. The problems causing such havoc are well known; what is lacking is the political and administrative will to confront them. If the first spell of rain can bring the city to its knees, the coming monsoon could prove catastrophic. Wednesday's tragedy should serve as a warning: it is not the rain that is failing Bengaluru, but poor governance.

POLL POSITION

Arithmetic of uncertainty in West Bengal

The exit polls invite multiple political interpretations, but high turnout and the possibility of tactical voting cloud projections

SUBHAMOY MAITRA

Opinion polls, and especially exit polls, are less predictions than carefully constructed narratives. This time, most exit polls project a change of regime in West Bengal, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) expected to secure a narrow majority. However, a few projections suggest that the ruling Trinamool Congress may still retain power. The projected vote shares place the BJP at around 44%, the Trinamool at approximately 40%, and others collectively at about 16%. Yet the translation of vote share into seats is notoriously complex and non-linear, and this unreliable conversion is precisely what leads exit polls to indicate a thin majority for the BJP.

In the 2021 Assembly election, West Bengal had just under 73.3 million voters, of whom nearly 60 million cast their votes, yielding a turnout of about 82.3%. By the 2024 parliamentary election, the rolls had expanded to over 76 million; yet the number of votes cast rose only marginally to about 60.5 million, bringing turnout down to roughly 79.6%. In simple terms, the denominator grew faster than the numerator. With large-scale deletions, the voter base has contracted to roughly 68.25 million. If one takes the roughly 60.5 million votes cast in the last parliamentary election and divides it by the current, smaller electoral roll, the turnout would already be close to 88.6%. The data suggests a turnout of nearly 93%, implying an additional rise of more than four percentage points over what denominator reduction alone would produce. This indicates that the number of votes actually cast has also increased substantially—by more than three million, considering both phases.

This arithmetic, unsurprisingly, invites competing interpretations. For the BJP, the argument is straightforward. The first phase, covering 152 Assembly segments, overlaps with regions where the party has historically performed better than in southern Bengal, which comprises 142 seats. Coupled with a strong anti-incumbency narrative, the high turnout is read as a sign of consolidation against the ruling party. The assumption is that a significant share of the additional votes has shifted in its favour. This reading is reinforced by visible confidence within the party, reflected in ambitious seat projections and early claims of momentum, even before polling concluded. The heavy campaign presence of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister further underscores the stakes. If this trend holds, the BJP's claim is clear: high turnout implies regime change. It may also be interpreted as a consolidation of Hindu votes. However, the structural limitation remains unchanged: limited support among minorities, who constitute nearly one-third of the electorate and account for a substantial



number of seats in similar proportions.

The Trinamool Congress reads the same data very differently. Its argument draws from history. West Bengal has repeatedly witnessed elections where high turnout has coincided with the return of the incumbent. The 2006 Assembly election, with turnout above 80%, brought the Left Front back to power with a large majority. High participation, therefore, does not automatically signal anti-incumbency. From this perspective, the Trinamool interprets the surge in voting as an endorsement of governance and welfare delivery. There is also a sharper counter embedded in this position. For years, opposition parties have alleged the presence of "ghost" or invalid voters. If such votes had materially benefited the ruling party, the large-scale deletions from the rolls should have led to a decline in votes cast. Yet the opposite appears to have occurred – votes have increased. The Trinamool can therefore argue that its earlier victories were based on genuine voter support rather than inflated rolls. Critics, of course, will argue that the ruling party's organisational strength still allows it to tilt outcomes in its favour to some extent.

What the mood doesn't reflect

Then, there is the third political space, often dismissed in headline projections but rarely irrelevant in practice. The Left Front and ISF are in alliance, while the Congress contests separately. A section of voters continues to express dissatisfaction with both the state and central governments. In districts such as Murshidabad, Malda, and the two Dinajpurs, any shift among minority voters away from the ruling party could alter local equations. In parts of southern Bengal, even a modest drift among majority voters towards alternative formations could complicate bipolar assumptions. The conventional wisdom is that an increase in the vote share of the Left, Congress, or their allies will not translate into a proportional rise in seats. But electoral arithmetic is rarely linear. Even without winning many constituencies, a third force can influence margins, fragment vote blocs, and reshape outcomes indirectly. In closely contested seats, a few thousand votes can matter more than a few percentage points.

This brings us back to exit polls. They attempt to compress all these variables – turnout shifts, regional variation, strategic voting, and multi-cornered contests – into a single projection. However, the elections do not operate on averages; they unfold through distribution. What exit polls often capture is mood. What they frequently miss is structure. So what do they really tell us? At best, an outline: one that appears sharp on screen but blurs on closer inspection.

The data suggests heightened participation; the interpretations diverge. The BJP sees momentum, the Trinamool sees validation, and the third space sees opportunity. Each narrative is internally coherent and collectively inconclusive. Until the results are declared on May 4, every projection is provisional, every claim is strategic, and every certainty is, at best, a well-packaged guess. Politically, there has long been speculation about a tacit BJP-Trinamool understanding, often framed within a broader ideological space associated with the RSS, particularly in the context of weakening the Left and the Congress. The question now is whether this "Didi-Modi" tacit pact narrative will fade if the BJP performs strongly in West Bengal.

(The writer, a professor at the Indian Statistical Institute in Kolkata, is an independent analyst, studying different aspects of West Bengal politics)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

The glitter that faded away

A stolen wedding set led to an unexpected embrace of minimalism

LAKSHMI R SRINIVAS

My connection with gold has always been tenuous. Growing up in an area where dacoities were rife, I saw my mother wear only her *mangalasutra*, ear studs and bangle. Her one precious ornament was her *dovaragilli* (gold choker), and we siblings would occasionally look at the exquisite piece in wonder. There were dacoities in a couple of houses nearby, but my mother's jewellery was never targeted, probably because the dacoits felt it was not worth stealing.

My real encounter with gold came when I got married. When I tried on a necklace set at a jewellery store, my brother called me a *Chandamama* princess. It made my day, as I was young and foolish.

My parents bought the set for me fondly, and I wore it at my wedding. The joy was short-lived, as my spouse and I, travelling back to our city by train in a first-class compartment, were robbed of our jewellery by a gang of robbers in cahoots with the catering staff, who had laced the food.

Early the next morning, we found our suitcases open. The robbers took the jewellery and suits; my *saris* were untouched. We had been so tired after the wedding events that we did not wake up during the robbery. We were thankful that we were unharmed and did not file an FIR, though I wept for a week.

We decided to keep the episode a secret and told ourselves that we would eventually save enough to buy the same set again. When asked by my mother and other family members why I always wore just my *mangalasutra* and costume jewellery, I cited safety, sporting a minimalist look, and even once joked about a gold loan.

Years later, we got the wedding set made to order, but it looked nothing like the original. I then had to tell my parents the entire story.

By that time, with my spouse always chanting, "You're not your jewellery," I had started loving my minimalist look.

I have friends who love gold jewellery. Some years ago, when I was still working and we had been paid arrears, my friend bought jewellery with the amount, while I used it to reduce my housing loan.

With the current price of gold, my friend is happy about investing in gold jewellery. I am equally happy I did not, as my daughter-in-law loves the minimalist look too, and values simplicity over display.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Audit ageing buildings before tragedy strikes

Apropos 'Rain: 7 dead as Bowring Hospital wall collapses' (Apr 30), the tragedy at Bowring Hospital is a sad commentary on institutional negligence, not merely a monsoon casualty. A decades-old structure bearing an additional construction load, vendors sheltering beneath a 12-foot wall during a thunderstorm, and rescue delayed by fallen trees blocking fire engines—each detail reveals a system that fails to prevent disasters. Compensation announcements and inquiry committees are the familiar ritual that follows such events. What Bengaluru urgently needs is a mandatory structural audit of every ageing public building before the onset of the rains, enforced timelines for remediation, and genuine accountability that goes beyond officials found negligent on paper to those who ignored warnings in practice.

K Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

Routine safety checks

It is shocking to read about the death of poor vendors due to wall collapse. The chief minister's visit to the spot and the announcement of compensation to the kin of the dead, though important, are not enough. The GBA should take steps to inspect such old structures and declare them unfit for dwelling or for setting up shops. The government should make it a routine exercise to evaluate old buildings.

Margaret Rajan, Bengaluru

Cleaner fuels

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari has said that there is no future for vehicles operating on fossil fuels and emphasised the need for manufacturers to transition towards cleaner fuel alternatives such as biofuels, CNG, and LNG. He also called on all bus manufacturers to prioritise safety and comfort over merely reducing costs. The transition towards cleaner fuels is the need of the hour, as fossil fuels continue to pose environmental challenges. Equally, the need for quality buses with all safety features is imperative to ensure passenger safety.

S Sankaranarayanan, Chennai

State rules clearly

I refer to 'Staff intentionally removed *janivaras*, punish college: Panel' (Apr 28). The panel has reportedly found fault with the college staff *en masse*. It is highly unlikely that subordinate staff would act on their own without any instruction — oral or written — from the chief superintendent of the exam centre. It is unfair to punish the staff for someone else's *faux pas*. The authorities must print all the relevant instructions on the reverse of the admission tickets to end such incidents.

T V Pandarinath Naidu, Kudige

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: **letters@deccanherald.co.in** (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT



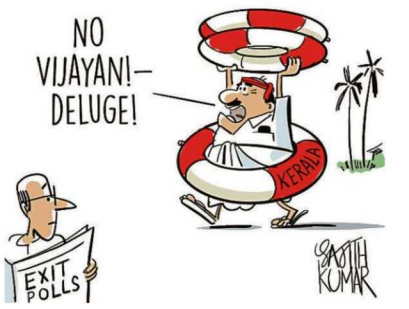
They (Samajwadi Party) have nothing to do with the poor, backward or Dalits. This (SP) is just a group of power-hungry people.

Brajesh Pathak, UP Dy CM

Idealism is the noble toga that political gentlemen drape over their will to power.

Aldous Huxley

TO BE PRECISE



IN PERSPECTIVE

The material reality of labour

Stripped of protections and facing falling real wages, India's workers demand urgent corrective action

SATHYANAND

Marx famously remarked that "Being determines consciousness." The material conditions determine the thoughts, consciousness, and actions of the masses. The recent worker protests need to be analysed from this viewpoint. Over the past 12 years, the Narendra Modi government has attacked trade unions and workers' rights. These attacks have been consistent, beginning with the introduction of fixed-term employment, the dilution of labour laws regarding wages and working hours during Covid-19, and the anti-worker labour codes. The common thread driving these attacks is the government's overriding necessity to appease India's ruling class of big monopoly capital.

We are the most unequal society in the nation's recorded history. In his monograph *From British Raj to Billionaire Raj*, French economist Thomas Piketty states that income inequality today exceeds that of the oppressive colonial regime. The gains achieved in post-independence India – through the abolition of the *zamindari* system, limited land reforms, the nationalisation of banks, and the establishment of large public sector undertakings – have been reversed in the era of crony capitalism and neoliberalism over the past three decades.

The champions of the free market have begun to question its path. Viral Acharya, former RBI deputy governor, wrote an influential paper critiquing the model of creating "national champions," which has effectively created monopolies. He specifically identifies the Reliance, Tata, Aditya Birla, Adani, and Bharti Telecom groups as responsible for high inflation, citing their dominance in commanding prices despite significant reductions in input costs. During the Covid-19 pandemic, BJP-ruled states like Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh announced a moratorium on labour laws. The worsening material conditions cannot be swept under the carpet forever by diversionary tactics. The truth will out.

It is no surprise that in the face of corporate-controlled inflation, real wages are depressed. The political class, shorn of any representation of the working class, has paid scant attention to this issue. If real wages erode, people reduce spending, leading to a downturn in aggregate demand. Wage earners constitute the real majority of our society, and private household consumption contributes to roughly 60% of the GDP.

The economic survey of Karnataka estimates that 1.77 crore workers fall under the category of wage earners dependent on minimum wages. Assuming a modest increase of Rs 4,000 per month – and assuming only 50% of the eligible workforce actually receives it – this would translate to an annual income transfer of Rs 43,000 crore. Compare this with the budgetary allocation for the five guarantee schemes of the Karnataka government, which is around Rs 53,000 crore. Despite the magnitude of this issue, there is hardly a whisper about minimum wages in the corridors of power. The compounded inflation for 2012-2024 was 208%; the growth in minimum wages has not kept pace with it.

Apathy is entrenched

This neglect is no accident; it is deliberate and widespread. In February, the tripartite Minimum Wages Advisory Board in Haryana – comprising equal representation from employers, employees, and the government – unanimously recommended a minimum wage of Rs 23,400 for unskilled workers. The government ignored this consensus and unilaterally declared a minimum wage of Rs 15,300. Only when workers hit the streets was the issue grudgingly picked up by a media more concerned with traffic jams than the workers' struggle for survival. The UP government, while proclaiming the role of external elements in the protests, issued a unilateral interim order to revise minimum wages in the aftermath of the protest, in a clear admission of guilt.

The minimum wage is defined as the cost of production and reproduction of labour power, representing the value of the "necessary means of subsistence." This minimum is not just for physical survival but includes socially determined needs. The Minimum Wages Act of 1948 mandates a revision at least once every five years. Yet, states like Haryana and UP have not revised wages for 11 and 14 years, respectively. Karnataka has failed to notify new minimum wages since 2016-17, despite continued pressure from trade unions. The Supreme Court *(People's Union for Democratic Rights, 1982)* ruled that paying less than the minimum wage constitutes "forced labour" under Article 23 of the Constitution.

The reality is that governments are apathetic, discarding scientific norms for calculating minimum wages in favour of arbitrary determinations. Poverty-level wages masquerading as minimum wages can no longer be accepted. The legally mandated, scientific revision of minimum wages across the country is the rallying cry of the recent protests in UP, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand.

(The writer is Secretary, AITUC Karnataka)

Power without polarity: Why West Asia won't trigger World War III

ASWINI KUMAR MOHAPATRA

Amid the US-Iran standoff in the Arabian Sea following the US naval blockade of Iranian ports, the ongoing conflict in West Asia has stirred fears in some quarters that it could become a catalyst for a third world war. Similar concerns were articulated by several analysts and commentators in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Historically, the world has witnessed numerous interstate conflicts since the establishment of the sovereign state system in 17th-century Europe. Barring the 1914-1918 World War and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, no other conflicts were truly global in scope. Although many were protracted, lasting several years—such as the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s—the extent of global involvement was limited. Unlike World War II, in which more than 50 countries participated, the current conflict involving Iran remains largely confined to three primary actors. The conflict drags on because Iran's clerical regime possesses the escalatory capacity unavailable to either Saddam Hussein of Iraq in 2003 or to Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro earlier this year.

Faced with the world's most formidable military, Iran has adopted a strategy of cost-imposition warfare, comprising the weaponisation of energy routes, the disruption of oil supplies, the use of low-cost drones and ballistic missiles to target military sites, oil refineries and business centres in neighbouring Arab Gulf states. Iranian retaliation has prolonged the conflict, yet it has failed to widen it by drawing in other countries in the region. Likewise, NATO partners of the United States have chosen not to join the US-Israeli military campaign 'Epic Fury', while France and Spain have blocked US warplanes from using key bases and airspace for combat operations against Iran.

In explaining global conflict causation, international relations experts hold that the shift in the European balance of power following the rise of Germany in 1871 was the foundational cause of the outbreak of the two World Wars in the 20th century. The post-Cold War international system has experienced no global power shift comparable to that of 19th-century Europe, despite the economic rise of China and the resurgence of Russia. The differential growth rates in the past two decades have, doubtless, narrowed the gap between the US and the rising powers, leading to the erosion of the former's relative power. However, this process has not culminated in a global power transition, as was speculated in the years following the 2008 fiscal meltdown.

With a vast global network of over 750 military bases in more than 80 countries and nearly 40% of the world's total military spending, the US has the capability to project power in any part of the world. It is thus arguable that the generic description of the current configuration of power as multipolar does not reflect the complex reality. This flawed perception has, instead, fuelled fears of an impending global conflagration. It assumes that competition among several states with comparable levels of power seeking to maximise their influence renders the contemporary international system prone to fluid alignments and miscalculation.

Global conflict is typically characterised by a confrontation between two main opposing military blocs, as was the case with World War II. It involved the Allied Powers—comprising the United Kingdom, the US and the Soviet Union—and the Axis Powers, led by Nazi Germany, Italy and Japan. Neither of the two contemporary conflicts—Ukraine and Iran—has led to the formation of such rigid military blocs. Conversely, the growing fissures within the 72-year-old NATO following the threat of reduced US commitment would in all likelihood embolden Russia in Ukraine and towards other Eastern European nations. The escalation of the Iran war, particularly the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, has boosted Russia's oil revenue by over $8 billion a month, potentially deterring Moscow from active entanglement, notwithstanding its close strategic ties with Iran.

Just as Russia avoids direct confrontation with the US, China persists with its long-standing policy of hiding strength and biding time. The latter, arguably, watches its main adversary deplete military capacity in a protracted regional war, thus debilitating its power projection capability in the Indo-Pacific. In any case, the US-China rivalry is playing out more in the domain of geoeconomics, as both of them are engaged in containing each other's economic and technological leverage while making compromises that serve their mutual interests.

Reflective of this, the two countries finalised the $10 billion profit-sharing TikTok deal earlier this year. Similarly, Russia's recent internal proposals to resume using the US dollar for trade transactions represent a dramatic pivot from its aggressive 'de-dollarisation' campaign. Many such instances reveal the empty diplomatic rhetoric surrounding the emergence of the so-called counter-hegemonic bloc, the absence of which undermines the prospects of a third world war in the near future.

Above all, multilateralism plays a significant role in promoting cooperative behaviour through rules and institutions, even amid intense strategic competition among states. This reduces the chances of a regional conflict becoming a catalyst for a larger war. After all, a third world war, in an age of nuclear weapons on hairpin triggers, would end with no winners, only losers.

(The writer is former Dean, School of International Studies, JNU, New Delhi)

The push for census-based delimitation has deepened regional divides, stalling a critical reform. There is a less contentious alternative, but can there be political agreement?

Women's quota: A fairer formula for consensus

A V S NAMBOODIRI

The defeat of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill should lead to a search for alternatives to implement the idea of women's reservation in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. It opens up the space for proposals within the existing constitutional, legal, and political frameworks. Women's reservation cannot be implemented in a Lok Sabha of the existing strength. If 181 seats – equivalent to one-third of the present 543 – are reserved for women, male members will have to forfeit many seats, without any control over the allotment process. Clearly, this is not a viable alternative.

Then, in sheer terms of numbers, the 33% reservation can be achieved only by raising the present strength to a minimum of 850 (815 from the states and 35 from the Union Territories), as proposed by the Union government, because only then can the existing strength of 543 – ironically, considered by default as male membership – would be protected. That leaves around 283 seats for women (33% of the total strength).

The dispute centres on how to distribute these 283 seats. The government linked women's reservation to the census and delimitation of constituencies through constitutional amendments. Delimitation was first frozen by the 42nd Amendment in 1976 using the 1971 census figures, and the freeze was extended by the 84th Amendment in 2002 until the first census after 2026. The pause aimed to avoid penalising states that successfully controlled population growth – most of them in the South, the North-East, and the North-West – while benefiting the northern, Hindi-speaking states where population grew faster.

The government's proposal to redistribute the 850 seats by increasing each state's and UT's share by 50% is flawed because it still disadvantages better-performing states. Karnataka would gain only 14 seats, while Uttar Pradesh would gain 40, further increasing North India's dominance over the South in the Lok Sabha. This imbalance will fuel continued opposition to census-based delimitation and linking women's reservation to it.

A better and more realistic alternative would be to distribute the 283 seats for women across the states, adding them to the present number of seats in each of the 28 states and eight UTs. But distributing these 283 seats equally among the states and UTs would create an abnormal situation where even states with one or two Lok Sabha seats are allotted about eight seats for women. A practical solution would be to separate the small states and UTs from the larger states and distribute women's seats differently among them.

The numbers align

India has 23 states and UTs with less than 15 Lok Sabha constituencies, accounting for a total of 103 seats. Their seats can be doubled, with the additional seats going to women. For instance, Mizoram, which has one seat, can get an additional seat for women. Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, and Haryana, with 4, 5, 7, and 10 seats respectively, can have 8, 10, 14, and 20 seats, including the additional women's seats. The remaining 180 seats can be equally distributed among the bigger states, each getting around 14 seats (this has been approximated to avoid a fraction. The total number of seats can be adjusted based on this; see table). The Lok Sabha seats in UP can increase from 80 to 94, and those in Karnataka from 28 to 42. Seats in Bihar can go up from 40 to 54, in Rajasthan from 25 to 39, in Tamil Nadu from 39 to 53, and in Kerala from 20 to 34.

When the number of seats is increased equally among states, the room for grievance becomes minimal. The Southern states may not have the grouse over the North securing a disproportionately higher number of seats, and in effect, greater political weightage. This addresses the concern over 'Northern domination', a key reason for opposition to the government's legislative proposal. It freezes the balance of power between states, in terms of Lok Sabha seats, at the present level.

Reconfiguring Lok Sabha seats within states to reserve seats for women is more feasible because intra-state disparities are less severe than national ones. A neutral delimitation commission with fair rules would be essential. Women's seats could also be allocated proportionally based on parties' vote or seat shares, but this would be complex and disadvantage independent candidates.

This is a compromise formula. The Central government, state governments, and political parties should realise that delimitation based on the census, as it is understood now, is a divisive idea in a country with uneven demographic growth and sharply varied political cultures. It can deepen existing divisions and distrust, and even lead to civil strife. The government should be wise and realistic enough to see the dangers of such a move.

Linking women's representation to the census and delimitation was unnecessary. If the goal is to ensure women's reservation without reducing men's representation, the formula presented here offers a better solution. It can also accommodate the demand to add seats after each census through political consensus, with one-third of the newly created seats reserved for women.



PTI

Political Stakes

The BJP is a pan-India political entity with a national vision. However, by proposing delimitation as it has done, the party risks being labelled a regional force that prioritises the interests of the Hindi region. This can hurt the party. It should recognise that there are simpler, less contentious ways to ensure women's reservation in legislatures, and there are more democratic ways to implement the delimitation of constituencies.

The political advantage the BJP hopes to seize by blaming the Opposition parties for scuttling women's reservation will be short-lived. In the long term, the loss will be substantial and real – for the party and the nation.

A democratic alternative

The principle of "one man, one vote, one value" is used to justify delimitation based on population, ensuring that the MPs represent roughly equal numbers of voters. Home Minister Amit Shah cited this to defend the census-delimitation link. Currently, representation is strikingly uneven: an MP from Gautam Buddha Nagar (NOIDA) in UP represents about 27 lakh voters, while one from Wayanad in Kerala represents around 14 lakh.

But the principle is not a constitutional mandate. Article 81, which deals with the composition of the House of the People, says in Clause 2 that "there shall be allotted to each State a number of seats in the House of the People in such manner that the ratio between that number and the population of the state is, so far as practicable, the same for all States." This shows the principle is not mandatory. It should also be noted that the right to vote, which is relevant here, is a constitutional right, and not a fundamental right. The principle can only be considered an ideal and a goal, which is not as important as national unity or democratic consensus.

The principle originated in generally uniform democratic societies in the West and need not be considered essential in diverse societies with uneven political, economic, and social development, such as India.

The 2023 legislation on women's reservation, which the government has now notified, also provides for delimitation, based on the first census after it came into force: the ongoing 2026-27 enumeration. It will revive the issues raised in the Parliament, and the opposition to it is likely to be stronger, making a democratic, alternative solution imperative.

State / UT	Seats	Seats as per new formula
Andhra Pradesh	25	39
Arunachal Pradesh	2	4
Assam	14	28
Bihar	40	54
Chhattisgarh	11	22
Goa	2	4
Gujarat	26	40
Haryana	10	20
Himachal Pradesh	4	8
Jharkhand	14	28
Karnataka	28	42
Kerala	20	34
Madhya Pradesh	29	43
Maharashtra	48	62
Manipur	2	4
Meghalaya	2	4
Mizoram	1	2
Nagaland	1	2
Odisha	21	35
Punjab	13	26
Rajasthan	25	39
Sikkim	1	2
Tamil Nadu	39	53
Telangana	17	31
Tripura	2	4
Uttar Pradesh	80	94
Uttarakhand	5	10
West Bengal	42	56
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	1	2
Chandigarh	1	2
Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu	2	4
Jammu and Kashmir	5	10
Ladakh	1	2
Lakshadweep	1	2
Delhi	7	14
Puducherry	1	2

The figures are based on the author's calculations and are subject to variation.

The formula proposed in this essay would strengthen the country's federal balance as all states will find their parliamentary and political strength increase in equal measure, while the smaller states raise women's representation to 50%. There are no legal or constitutional obstacles to its implementation. It will need constitutional amendments, just as the government's failed proposal did. What is needed is political will and a democratic consensus.

It might be argued that the division of states into small and big, based on a 14-seat cut-off, is arbitrary. But the argument faces a hard reality: population-based delimitation will not be acceptable to the non-Hindi states, especially the South Indian states. Note that the US Senate has an equal number of members from all states, regardless of their size. The proposal made here offers no exact parallel. It only argues that there are democratic means to circumvent the current deadlock and implement a reform too long in the making.

(The writer is a former associate editor and editorial advisor of Deccan Herald*)*

Not just who can teach, but who should

ANITA R SINGH

Every time I watch an orchestra, I am struck by the confident authority of the conductor who brings together diverse instruments into a coherent symphony. I often wonder whether academicians play a similar role in the classroom.

Krishna Kumar, a noted Indian educationist, has observed that social identity remains a significant axis of prejudice and that attitudes towards groups different from one's own often reflect deep-seated bias. This question acquires urgency in light of a recent incident at a university in Bengaluru, where a professor reportedly made insensitive and discriminatory remarks towards a student. More importantly, such episodes may appear isolated, but they point to a deeper concern: the question is not who can teach, but who should be allowed to shape young minds. At stake is not just academic competence but the very ethos of higher education, its commitment to inclusion, respect, and values-based learning.

The many facets of academic life can produce remarkable harmony when thoughtfully aligned. Being a "good teacher" in the evolving landscape of higher education goes beyond subject expertise. It also calls for pedagogical innovation, such as simulations and thoughtful use of digital tools and artificial intelligence. Teaching with cases, for instance, is about enabling students to grapple with real-world complexity, trade-offs, competing stakeholder interests, and imperfect information. In the same vein, role-play brings multiple viewpoints into the classroom, helping students understand the complexity of organisational and societal challenges. That said, teaching with cases alone is not sufficient; faculty should also write them to fully appreciate the key elements that need emphasis in class.

However, teaching is only one part of the academic role. Universities continue to place significant emphasis on research output, measured through publications, journal rankings, and citation metrics. This emphasis persists because such outputs are easier to quantify, compare, and rank. Should citations matter more than journal rankings? Does solo authorship reflect deeper scholarship, or should collaboration be valued in an increasingly interdisciplinary world? At what point does collaboration dilute individual contribution? In this pursuit of measurable outputs, social impact often remains overlooked.

Beyond these traditional expectations, faculty today are increasingly expected to connect with industry, bring live projects into the classroom, and contribute through workshops, conferences, and executive education. In effect, the academic is expected to be a teacher, researcher, practitioner, and institution-builder.

At the heart of this debate lies the growing gap between what is measurable and what is meaningful in higher education. Paradoxically, the most consequential aspects of teaching, which remain immeasurable, are the ability to inspire trust, create an inclusive classroom, and exercise judgment with fairness. Much of what students learn is part of a hidden curriculum, absorbed not through lectures but through the conduct, attitudes, and values demonstrated by faculty.

Crucially, amid these expectations, one critical aspect is the interpersonal dimension of teaching. The faculty-student relationship is inherently asymmetrical, since faculty hold evaluative and institutional power, which makes their conduct not merely a matter of personal behaviour but of ethical responsibility. Faculty members shape not only what students learn but also what they become as individuals. Their words and actions can build or erode a student's confidence and dignity. In increasingly diverse classrooms, principles of equity and inclusion are integral to the teaching-learning process. John Dewey, an influential American philosopher and education reformer, emphasised that teaching is inherently a democratic act that requires respect for diverse perspectives.

Traditionally, some educators have consciously avoided probing students' identities, believing that such knowledge might introduce bias. However, as classrooms evolve, there is a growing recognition that acknowledging identity can also enable deeper connection and build trust. Being inclusive requires the ability to engage students, foster discussion, and create an environment where diverse perspectives can be expressed without fear. Should institutions not invest more deliberately in preparing those who shape future leaders? Faculty selection must go beyond academic credentials to include ethical awareness and inclusive conduct.

The question, therefore, is not how many roles a faculty member can perform but what kind of classroom culture institutions choose to promote. For, if inclusiveness and respect are treated as optional, the orchestra may render music but miss the symphony.

(The writer is the chairperson, Department of OB&HR, Ramaiah Institute of Management)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: MAY 1976

No forcing of language: PM

New Delhi, April 30
Prime Minister Indira Gandhi reiterated here today that she was against "forcing" a language on anybody. "I have given this assurance on previous occasions, and I would like to do so again that we do not believe in forcing a language on anybody," she affirmed. Mrs. Gandhi was inaugurating the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Delhi Tamil Education Association, which runs seven schools in the capital. She commended the three-language formula and emphasised the need for children to learn as many Indian languages as possible.

25 YEARS AGO: MAY 2001

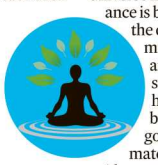
Rao defends his govt's action on Ayodhya row

New Delhi, April 30
Former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao today revealed that the then President Shankar Dayal Sharma, who was not happy with his government for handling the Ayodhya situation, had summoned him to explain "things" before signing the proclamation for the imposition of central rule in UP following the demolition of the disputed structure at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992. Appearing for the fourth time before the Liberhan Commission, Mr Rao said Dr Sharma wrote a letter to him.

OASIS | MIRLE KARTHIK

The universal message of the *Gita*

The *Gita* speaks about the four types of devotees and their characteristics in its seventh chapter and emphasises that the fourth type – the *Gnani* or the realised one – is the most exalted one among them and also the dearest to the Lord, because he is free from all worldly desires, his only goal being to reach the blessed state of union with the divine. But, the *Gita* says, reaching such a state requires efforts across countless lives, each life a step forward in achieving inner purification, the essential prerequisite for the final goal. Here, the *Gita* makes an important observation. "When the aspirant reaches this supreme state, he realises that everything that is seen in the world, both sentient and insentient, is a manifestation of the supreme power. Rare indeed are those who reach such a realised state."



When this statement is read in conjunction with the earlier declaration in the same chapter that not many in this world are spiritually inclined, those among them who make efforts to acquire spiritual knowledge are rarer still, and among them, those who succeed in making progress are even rarer, and among these, hardly one or two reach the final goal, the significance of this statement becomes clear.

But why does this realisation not dawn on all humans, that this universe in all its variegated appearance is but the manifestation of the divine? "It is because man's mind and discretionary power are occluded by the veil of desires, which makes him lose his powers of discrimination between right and wrong, good and bad. His chase of material gains is his worship (the worship of mammon). They are his *anya devatas*, which he mistakenly believes will grant him happiness and mental peace, but which ultimately only land him in sorrow."

Desires by themselves are harmless, as natural as the waves in the ocean. The trouble starts when desires overpower man into the wrong path. The *Gita* now makes the explicit declaration. "It is immaterial in which form men worship the Lord. If they are sincere in their approach with hearts purified by jettisoning all greed and excessive desire, their wishes will be granted. The Lord will confer the mental strength to progress on this path, and, through the deity they prefer to worship, he will confer his grace." Religion, caste, language, nationality – none of them matter.

Indeed, a prescient, much-wanted message in these fractious times!

corporate gallery

Indian Coast Guard Interacts with Fincantieri (Italy)



Bharatiya Tatrakshak hosted a distinguished Italian delegation, including senior representatives from Fincantieri Shipyard, at Coast Guard Headquarters, New Delhi, on 30 April 2026. Counselor Anna Ruffino, Head of the Economics and Innovation Department, Embassy of Italy, and Mr. Eugenio Santagata, Head of the Military Naval Vessel Division, Fincantieri, called on DG Paramesh Sivamani, AVSM, PTM, TM, Director General Indian Coast Guard. The ensuing interaction, chaired by Inspector General Sudhir Sahni, TM, DDG (M&M), served as a focused and forward-looking platform to advance cooperation in shipbuilding, maritime technology, and capability development aligned with India's maritime security priorities. Discussions highlighted collaboration with Indian shipyards for future projects, with emphasis on advanced design features, including resilient hulls for higher sea states, enhanced bollard pull, integrated firefighting systems, and hybrid/electric propulsion. The dialogue also explored modular ship design for versatile, multi-role platforms with rapid operational adaptability.

WTC Mumbai and AIAI Drive Industry–Govt Convergence on MSME Skilling & Workforce Transformation



MVIRDC World Trade Center Mumbai, in association with the All India Association of Industries (AIAI) and in collaboration with the Government of Maharashtra and Sapio Analytics, organized an Employer Session on MSMEs Engagement & Workforce Development at WTC Mumbai, focusing on translating evolving skill requirements into practical outcomes, bridging the gap between education and employability, and fostering partnerships that drive measurable impact. Dr. Vijay Kalantri, Chairman, World Trade Center Mumbai and President, All India Association of Industries, emphasized that skilling must be practical, industry-linked and outcome-oriented and said, "MSMEs are among India's most vibrant economic engines, contributing nearly 30% to India's GDP, 45% to exports, and over 60% to employment, with over 7 crore enterprises across the country. Skilling, innovation, startups and incubation must move together, and policies must be practical, implementable and aligned with industry needs." "While businesses generate income for survival, true innovation creates a windfall that drives transformative growth and long-term development. There is a pressing need to address brain drain, strengthen skilling from the foundational stages of education, and upgrade academic curricula to align with evolving industry requirements through close collaboration between industry and government, while building clear pathways for younger generations to become globally competitive," said Dr. Kalantri.

IIM Ranchi Debuts in QS Executive MBA Rankings 2026, Becomes Jharkhand's First Institute Ranked in QS



IIM Ranchi has marked its debut in the globally renowned QS Executive MBA Rankings 2026, achieving a significant milestone in its journey towards global recognition and academic excellence.
In its first appearance, IIM Ranchi has secured the 4th position among participating IIMs, reflecting its growing stature in executive management education. In the debut of QS Ranking institute has been placed in the 201+ global band and ranked 33rd in the Asia-Pacific region.
2026 QS Executive MBA Global Rankings, reflecting its growing global presence in management education. The QS ranking evaluates institutions across five key parameters: Employer Reputation (30%), Thought Leadership/Academic Reputation (25%), Career Outcomes (20%), Executive Profile (15%), and Diversity (10%). The institute demonstrated balanced performance across indicators, with notable strengths in career outcomes, including salary growth and promotions, and a strong executive profile, reflecting participants' work and managerial experience.
Under Career Outcomes, the ranking evaluates average salary increase and promotion rates of graduates, reflecting the real return on investment for participants. The Executive Profile measures the depth of professional experience, including average work experience, managerial exposure, and C-suite representation, indicating the peer learning environment. Employer Reputation is derived from global recruiter surveys, highlighting industry trust in graduates, while Thought Leadership reflects academic excellence through global academic perception.
The Diversity parameter assesses gender and international representation, ensuring inclusive and globally relevant learning environments. The ranking also considers employer perception and academic credibility, where IIM Ranchi continues to strengthen its position through quality research, industry engagement, and global collaborations. Its inclusion in the QS rankings highlights the institute's commitment to delivering industry-relevant education, enhancing employability, and fostering leadership among working professionals.
This milestone marks a significant moment in the Institute's journey towards global recognition and academic excellence. The QS Executive MBA Rankings are among the world's most prestigious benchmarks for evaluating business schools, assessing institutions on parameters such as employer reputation, thought leadership, executive profile, and career outcomes. The inclusion of IIM Ranchi in this global framework underscores its expanding international footprint and the increasing relevance of its executive programmes. The Institute's recognition reflects its sustained focus on academic excellence, industry relevance, and global engagement. It further reinforces IIM Ranchi's vision of developing responsible leaders capable of navigating complex global business environments. IIM Ranchi's entry into the QS rankings signals its emergence as a competitive and forward-looking business school. An Institute of National Importance, IIM Ranchi has consistently strengthened its academic ecosystem through innovative programmes, industry-aligned curricula, and impactful research initiatives.

whispersinthecorridors



Dr Suresh Mehrotra

Congress Faces Likely Decimation in West Bengal Polls?



The Congress party is staring at a near-total collapse in the upcoming West Bengal assembly elections, according to emerging political assessments and ground-level inputs. Once a significant force in the state, the party has steadily lost organizational strength, cadre presence, and voter relevance over the past decade. Its alliance arithmetic appears weak, with limited traction against the dominant Trinamool Congress and a resurgent BJP, both of whom have consolidated distinct voter blocs. Congress's inability to project strong local leadership or a compelling state-specific narrative has further eroded its prospects. In several constituencies where it previously held influence, early indicators suggest a sharp decline in vote share, with even traditional support bases drifting toward more competitive players. Unless there is an unexpected shift in campaign momentum, the party risks being reduced to a marginal player in the state's political landscape.

Kejriwal in a bid to Ramps Up Punjab Strategy is Holding Daily War-Room Meetings with IPAC & TMC Inputs in Play?



Delhi Ex Chief Minister and AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal has intensified preparations for the upcoming Punjab elections, with sources indicating a high-frequency strategy push centered on funding and cadre expansion. Kejriwal is said to be leading a dedicated core team that is holding more than three closed-door meetings, effectively operating a round-the-clock "war room" to fine-tune electoral tactics. According to people familiar with the development, the focus areas include strengthening booth-level organisation, identifying local influencers, and ensuring a steady flow of campaign resources. The leadership is also reviewing constituency-level data and feedback mechanisms to recalibrate outreach strategies in real time. Notably, sources suggest that select political strategists linked to the Trinamool Congress ecosystem, along with professionals associated with IPAC (Indian Political Action Committee), are informally contributing inputs. Their involvement is believed to be advisory in nature, particularly around messaging, voter segmentation, and digital mobilisation. The accelerated pace of planning reflects AAP's intent to consolidate its position in Punjab amid emerging political challenges and shifting voter dynamics.

Major Recent DAC Approvals

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, has cleared multiple procurement proposals across the armed forces, amounting to ₹2.38 lakh crore (around $25 billion).



Will Modi reshuffle his Cabinet after May 15?



There is a strong rumour in the power galleries that PM Modi could reshuffle his long awaited cabinet after May 15. The Modi government is also going to complete its two years in power in the last week of May.

India Engages Iran to Facilitate Vessel Exit; Shipping Corporation Eyes Renewed Middle East Operations

India is actively engaging with Iran to facilitate the safe exit of commercial vessels amid evolving regional security concerns, signaling a calibrated diplomatic push to protect maritime trade flows. The discussions are understood to focus on deconfliction mechanisms, port clearances, and assurances for Indian-linked ships operating in or transiting through sensitive Gulf corridors. Officials are also exploring coordination channels with Iranian authorities to ensure that delays, inspections, or disruptions are minimized during periods of heightened tension. Parallelly, Shipping Corporation of India is likely to gradually resume or expand sailings to key Middle East destinations, reflecting cautious optimism about route stability. Industry sources indicate that risk assessments are being recalibrated, with insurers, charterers, and operators closely tracking advisories related to chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz. Any sustained easing could support freight rates, reduce voyage uncertainties, and stabilize supply chains linking India with energy and commodity markets across West Asia. However, operators remain cautious, maintaining contingency plans and flexible routing strategies in case geopolitical conditions deteriorate or restrictions tighten unexpectedly. The evolving engagement with Iran is therefore being watched closely by policymakers, shippers, and global logistics players in coming weeks.

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Reliance Retail Acquires Priyanka Chopra Jonas's Anomaly





Reliance Retail Limited (RRL) on Thursday announced the acquisition of Priyanka's global haircare brand Anomaly, including its trademarks, brand assets, and digital properties. The acquisition marks a significant expansion of Reliance Retail's fast-growing beauty portfolio and reinforces its commitment to building and scaling high-growth consumer brands in India and globally.
Founded by the global actor and entrepreneur in 2021, Anomaly is a clean, vegan, high-performance haircare brand offered at an accessible price point. Since its inception, the brand has established a strong international presence with distribution across key global markets.
Through this acquisition, Reliance Retail brings full ownership of the brand's intellectual property and digital ecosystem into its portfolio, enabling it to scale Anomaly through its expansive retail network and omnichannel platforms. The move aligns with Reliance Retail's broader strategy to deepen its presence in the fast-growing beauty and personal care category, leveraging its offline footprint and digital commerce platforms, including Tira, to accelerate brand growth and enhance consumer accessibility.
Ms. Isha Ambani, Executive Director, Reliance Retail Ventures Limited, said, "Bringing Anomaly into our portfolio marks a strategic step in expanding our basket of new-age, high-growth beauty brands. Anomaly's strong global positioning, clean formulation philosophy, and accessible pricing make it a compelling addition to our ecosystem. We see immense potential in collaborating with Priyanka to scale the brand in India by leveraging our omnichannel capabilities and deep consumer insights, while continuing to grow its international presence."
Reliance Retail will focus on expanding Anomaly's brand equity and market share with India as a priority market. Innovation tailored to Indian hair and scalp needs will be a key driver, alongside strengthening product development and localized solutions. The brand will also continue to scale its international footprint across markets such as North America, United Kingdom, and the Middle East as part of its global growth journey.
Priyanka will continue to play an integral role in the brand's evolution as Creative Director, driving innovation, brand vision, and product development. She said, "This is a defining moment for Anomaly. What began as a deeply personal journey has grown into a brand with real purpose and global ambition, and Reliance Retail's acquisition marks an exciting new chapter. Their scale, retail expertise, and commitment to innovation will allow us to bring Anomaly to far more consumers in India and around the world. I'm especially excited to be working alongside the inimitable Isha Ambani, whose leadership I value tremendously. In my new role as Creative Director, I remain deeply involved in guiding Anomaly's evolution, ensuring we continue to grow and innovate while staying true to what we set out to build from the very beginning."
This strategic alignment underscores Reliance Retail's continued focus on curating and scaling future-forward consumer brands within its beauty portfolio, while combining global brand equity with its market expertise, retail scale, and omnichannel capabilities to unlock the next phase of growth for Anomaly across India and international markets.

NFR Strengthens Healthcare Infrastructure with Major Upgrades in 2025–26





Reinforcing its commitment to providing quality healthcare services to railway beneficiaries, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has undertaken significant initiatives to upgrade medical infrastructure and enhance patient care across its network during the financial year 2025–26.
In a major push towards modernization of healthcare facilities, several advanced medical equipments have been installed across key railway hospitals. The Divisional Railway Hospital at Katihar has been equipped with a Digital X-ray system and a Fully Automated Auto Analyzer, substantially improving diagnostic accuracy and efficiency. At Rangapara North, a CR System X-Ray Machine has been commissioned, further strengthening diagnostic capabilities in the region.
The Central Hospital at Maligaon has witnessed extensive upgrades with the installation of cutting-edge systems such as the Lasotronix Laser Diode, Super Inductive Physiotherapy System and a modern Steam Sterilizer. These additions are expected to significantly enhance treatment quality and patient outcomes.
In terms of infrastructure development, the Central Hospital at Maligaon has undergone notable improvements. A new Post Graduate Doctors' Hostel and Dormitory has been inaugurated, providing better residential facilities for medical professionals. Additionally, semi cabins have been renovated and key wards including Female Surgical, Orthopaedic Wards and the Burn Unit have been upgraded to ensure improved patient care and comfort.
A major achievement during the year has been the successful establishment of a Haemodialysis Unit at Central Hospital, Maligaon under Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode. This facility marks a significant step in strengthening critical care services and will greatly benefit patients requiring regular dialysis treatment.
These initiatives reflect NFR's continuous efforts to modernize its healthcare system, improve medical accessibility and ensure high standards of treatment for its beneficiaries. Northeast Frontier Railway remains committed to further strengthening its healthcare infrastructure in the coming years.

The Telegraph

THURSDAY 30 APRIL 2026 VOL. XLIV NO. 291

MUCH BETTER

This year's assembly election in Bengal has been different in at least two aspects that are significant in their own ways. The first element pertains to high rates of voting. The voter turnout was over 91% during the second phase of polling on Wednesday; earlier, the first phase, too, had witnessed a spirited response from electors. The ruling Trinamool Congress and its principal challenger, the Bharatiya Janata Party, have, understandably, drawn their own inferences: these will be put to the test on the day of counting on May 4. The second, equally important, difference concerns a demonstrable dip in poll violence, a malady that has been a feature of elections in this state. Figures from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, an organisation that monitors conflict, suggest that the 2021 assembly elections were Bengal's bloodiest, registering 300 incidents of violence and close to 60 deaths. Apart from sporadic incidents, such transgressions have registered a significant drop on this occasion. This can be attributed to a massive security *bandobast*. Over 2,300 companies of Central Armed Police Forces were deputed by the Election Commission of India for the polls while camera-fitted drones were pressed into service for the very first time. The challenge, now, would be to ensure that blood is not spilled in Bengal after the declaration of the results of what has been yet another polarising election.

But poll security must also be free of political imperatives. Calcutta's mayor has stated that he received a nocturnal visitation from armed Central paramilitary personnel who, Firhad Hakim added, had warned him of consequences if Opposition workers were harassed on the day of the election. Bengal's ruling party has also alleged that Central forces indulged in acts of intimidation. The Opposition, too, will undoubtedly have its own list of complaints. The veracity of such allegations must be established and action taken according to established protocol. A fair election implies nonpartisan conduct not only from contestants but also the election's institutional overseers. A level electoral turf cannot be stomped upon by anyone in the name of preserving electoral security.

EQUAL JUSTICE

The Supreme Court has called the two-decade-old jurisprudence that gave primacy to the accused's right to a fair and speedy trial "old-fashioned". This reflects a long-overdue correction in the philosophy of Indian criminal justice, which had been shaped by the constitutional necessity of protecting the accused from the coercive powers of the State. It cannot be denied that Article 21 rightly strengthens safeguards against arbitrary arrest, prolonged pretrial detention, custodial violence, and endless trials. Presumption of innocence and the right to liberty are central constitutional commitments in a system where undertrial prisoners often spend years in prison without conviction. Yet, equality must be one of the cornerstones of the principle of natural justice. And therein lay an asymmetry. For in protecting the accused, the system frequently treats the victim and his/her rights as an afterthought. Victims, as a former judge pointed out, usually have little say in the investigation, prosecution, or sentencing. This exclusion deepens the wound of the original crime. Victims deserve the right to participate in the legal process, access information, and receive the assurance that the law acknowledges their suffering. This shift is also reflected in Section 413 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, wherein a victim has an independent statutory right to appeal against an acquittal, conviction for a lesser offence, or inadequate compensation. Now the Supreme Court has clearly stated that victims' rights form an essential part of social justice and the rule of law.

Recognising victims' rights does not require abandoning constitutional protections for the accused. Indian prisons remain overcrowded, underfunded, and deeply unequal spaces where detention itself often becomes punishment before conviction. Arbitrary arrests, delayed investigations, and routine denial of bail continue to harm the poor and the legally unrepresented most severely. Yet, a justice system cannot claim fairness if it responds to one form of suffering by creating another. The answer lies in balance. Victims must be guaranteed effective participation in proceedings, timely compensation, witness protection, legal support, and a meaningful voice at crucial stages such as bail and sentencing. At the same time, courts must honour the principle of bail being the rule and not the exception and ensure that speedy trials must be treated as a right for all parties involved. The Supreme Court is correct in rejecting an older jurisprudence that overlooked victims in the name of procedural neutrality. Justice depends on an equal moral weightage towards accused and victim.

SCRIPSI

'Art is odd, and the common method of trying to fit it into the scheme of things, either by taming it or baiting it, cannot succeed.'

JEANETTE WINTERSON

Bhoy nixed *bhorosa* in the Bengal election

Cape fear

UDDALAK MUKHERJEE

"The ballot is stronger than the bullet." — Abraham Lincoln



Would the 16th president of the United States of America have reposed his faith in the strength of the ballot over the destructive power of the bullet — symbolising fear — if he were observing the just-concluded assembly election in Bengal?

The question is not being asked in mirth, or as idle speculation. Lincoln's rousing proclamation about the ballot can be interpreted as an invocation of the robustness of elections, one of democracy's Tebbit tests, against dread. Yet, this year's canvassing for the Bengal election was unprecedented in one aspect: it bore proof of barely-disguised attempts across political lines to weaponise fear as a form of potent electoral capital in a bid to influence voters' opinion.

The advertisements that the Bharatiya Janata Party flooded the front pages of dailies with pivoted around the idea of fear. Pledging faith over fear — "*bhoy noy bhorosa*" — these advertisements provided a long list of the Trinamool Congress's alleged failures and fear-mongering. The BJP pointed fingers at Bengal's ruling party's neglect of farmers, tea gardens, industries, and business, its endorsement of a template of hegemony crafted on violence — an inheritance from the erstwhile Left Front regime — its tending to the cottage industry of corruption, as well as glaring failures to ensure women's safety and dignity. Not all of these charges are figments of a rival's febrile imagination; neither does the fear that the BJP sought to invoke take the form of explicit violence on all occasions. Families with allegiance to Opposition parties in rural Bengal and urban hinterlands often whisper about the politically-orchestrated punishment of the 'social boycott', a seemingly non-violent but brutal mechanism meant to alienate rivals from the larger community and constrict their access to means of subsistence.

The TMC responded to the BJP's stoking of fear of its regime with its own enumeration of the reasons to fear its principal electoral adversary. There was, for instance, the charge of the BJP's intention of intruding into and corroding Bengal's at least superficially inclusive cultural ethos with the practice of shrill puritanism. One of *The Telegraph*'s reporters, who has been on the poll beat across districts, recounted an illuminating example of this whisper campaign. In Purulia, a young woman hailing from a family of BJP supporters was circumspect about voting for the party this time. The reason? She was anxious that her staple of fish and meat would be frowned upon in New Bengal, just as it is in many an Indian state under the BJP's thumb. That the BJP had to make its leaders eat fish — quite literally — in public underlined the deepening imprint of such an apprehension in the people's mind. Again, the BJP's pledge to bring the Uniform Civil Code similarly alarmed not only large segments of Bengal's minorities but also liberal Hindus mindful of that party's assaults on the republic's fraying pluralist framework as well as of the State's renewed capacity to undermine privacy, individual liberties and agency under the bogey of women's welfare — the contours of the UCC in Uttarakhand that the BJP championed augmented this anxiety further.

But what has been the most effective factor in puncturing *bhorosa's* triumph over *bhoy* was the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Bengal that has had peculiarities not to be found in other states. One such feature has been the sieve of 'logical discrepancy' that has been wielded disproportionately by the Electoral Commission of India — now synonymous, the cynic argues, with the BJP — to weed out voters from Bengal's electoral list. Partha Chatterjee has described this malady succinctly in a recent article in The Wire.

"Logical discrepancy is a malady that seems to have afflicted some of the highest echelons of the Indian state… The term 'logical discrepancy' was invented by the Election Commission this time specifically for the revision exercise in West Bengal. It was not used in the recent SIR process in Bihar or Gujarat... or indeed ever before in the history of Indian elections… The true import of the term 'logical discrepancy' was discovered when the final list of eligible voters was published… It now transpires that a large number of those who were found ineligible fell into the logical discrepancy trap…"

Chatterjee's usage of the word, 'trap', is deliberate and justified. The rationale for such 'illogical discrepancies' — mismatch of an elector's name in the current rolls with the rolls prepared after the last intensive revision ("there is no standard form of transcribing Bengali or Arabic-Persian names into Roman script. The same name can easily appear in different spellings", writes Chatterjee); an age gap of less than 15 years or more than 50 years between electors and their parents; six or more electors mapped as progeny of one person and so on — has been spiritedly refuted by many of those who have been pushed out of the voters' list. Worse, as pointed out by the former chief election commissioner, Ashok Lavasa, most of the disenfranchised electors were not given an opportunity to prove their case in time.

The BJP has been vocal in its support for the EC, the SIR and the latter's demonstrable excesses despite the entrenched anxiety and sense of humiliation among the SIR's victims. This made it vulnerable to the TMC's allegations — real or imagined — that the SIR is a prelude to further institutional predations on constitutional rights under its watch. This message — of Bengal's dystopian future under the BJP — was even disseminated by using AI technology by the TMC. The unexpectedly high turnout among voters in the first phase of the elections can be attributed to this fanning of subterranean anxiety.

The liberal editorial classes — a much-maligned and depleted force — may object to this cynical utilisation of fear as electoral capital by contestants in a democracy. But the truth is that modern democracies are heavily reliant on trepidation to pass the electoral test. The ascendancy of the far-Right in numerous democracies, from Europe to the Americas to Asia in recent decades, has been predicated on the politics of panic, with migrants, Muslims, liberals and sexual minorities, among other social constituencies, transformed into fodder for loathing and alarm.

Interestingly, as the scholar, John Keane, suggests in his instructive examination of the relationship between democracy and fear, modern democracy was imagined to have the capacity to sublimate fear, an element central to the sustenance of despotism and an unrestrained State that Montesquieu tore to shreds in *De l'esprit des lois* (*The Spirit of Laws*). Yet, it is evident that democracy's relationship with fear has come full circle — but in reverse — with fear's transformation into an electoral good in polities around the world. What has abetted this reversal is the parallel hollowing out of institutions that are, theoretically, democracy's vanguard, the neutering of civil society as well as the media's willing consumption and amplification of fear — rashes that are spreading on India's body politic as well.

Bengal's electoral outcome will be known in a few days. But what is already known is that this election in Bengal was a testament to *bhorosa* being outvoted by *bhoy* by the minders of democracy.

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Consider the human factor

NITYA NANDA

India has adopted Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), which aims to replace "mindless consumption" with "mindful... utilisation". But does such an approach contradict India's aspiration to become Viksit Bharat? Decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation should, in principle, allow economies to continue growing. But such growth has generally been slow, localised and often temporary. In some cases, reductions in domestic carbon emissions are accompanied by increased imports of energy- or emission-intensive goods, merely transferring the environmental burden elsewhere.

Given these limitations, it may be useful to think about a different kind of decoupling — one between GDP growth and human well-being. If life expectancy at birth is taken as a proxy for human well-being, interesting patterns emerge. In 2023, among more than 200 countries, around 44 countries had life expectancy levels above 80 years. These countries showed wide variation in *per capita* income. Interestingly, the country with the lowest income level in this group was the Maldives. Other countries achieving similar life expectancy with relatively modest income levels include Chile and Costa Rica. Their experience suggests that high levels of human well-being can be achieved even at moderate income levels.

A number of factors explain these outcomes but environmental conditions play an important role. All three countries mentioned above enjoy relatively clean air and water. Chile has prioritised green public spaces and urban environments that promote active lifestyles. Costa Rica is well-known for its healthy dietary patterns. The country's drinking water is also said to be rich in minerals that contribute to bone health and help mitigate problems like high blood pressure. In contrast, concerns about water quality in India have led many households to rely on RO water filtration systems. While these systems remove impurities, they also eliminate essential minerals. Over time, this may contribute to health problems such as reduced bone density and increased risk of hypertension. Costa Rica also emphasises what is locally known as *plan de vida*, or a sense of purpose in life linked to community engagement. This social dimension contributes to lower stress levels and greater well-being. These countries have also invested consistently in public health systems and education which have played an important role in improving human development outcomes.

With sustained economic growth, India could potentially quadruple its *per capita* income over the next 20 years. This would make it possible for to achieve much higher levels of human well-being. For this, greater emphasis needs to be placed on improving health and education outcomes, along with environmental sustainability. India is home to nearly 18% of the world's population but possesses only about 2.4% of the world's land area and roughly 4% of global freshwater resources. Managing natural resources under such constraints will remain a major challenge. As India's economic growth continues, resource use is likely to increase. Development strategies will then need to place greater emphasis on environmental protection, particularly clean air and safe drinking water.

Income inequality in India has been increasing in recent years; this can slow progress towards higher levels of human development by limiting access to health, education, and other essential services. Regional inequality creates ecological pressures and encourages large-scale circular migration, which can affect social well-being and weaken family support systems. In this context, initiatives such as Mission LiFE highlight an important dimension of development: economic progress must be accompanied by sustainable lifestyles and improved quality of life. India has the opportunity to pursue a development trajectory that emphasises human well-being, environmental sustainability, and balanced growth.

Nitya Nanda is Director, Council for Social Development, New Delhi

Unrest, again

■ Sir — The three-year ethnic conflict in Manipur has taken a troubling turn, with the crisis between the Meitei and the Kuki communities now widening to include clashes between Nagas and Kukis. Violence erupted on April 21 when the state police moved to clear a roadblock set up by the United Naga Council in protest of the killing of two persons by alleged Kuki militants.

The Centre faces sharp criticism for its perceived inaction and failure to restore peace since the violence began on May 3, 2023. A three-day shutdown brought life to a standstill across Naga-inhabited districts, highlighting the deepening instability in the state.

Bhagwan Thadani,
Mumbai

■ Sir — The conflict in Manipur is worsening. Holding the state government responsible has yielded little resolution. It is especially concerning that many women have been compelled to take to the streets to demand their basic rights. Disconcertingly, at a time when urgent intervention is required, the prime minister and the home minister appear preoccupied with election campaigning in West Bengal. Their constitutional responsibilities require greater attention to crises such as the Manipur conflict rather than photo opportunities aimed at attracting voters.

Arshad Ali,
Guwahati



Hunger games

■ **Sir — During his election campaign in Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was invited by the ruling Trinamool Congress to dine at the state government's Maa Canteen,where a full meal of rice, *dal*, and vegetables costs only five rupees. While the prime minister has already sampled local *jhalmuri*, the TMC clearly feels his 'Bengal experience' is incomplete without tasting the food that the state government prides itself on providing. While the TMC wants to highlight its grassroots connection, it is cynical to turn the hunger of thousands of ordinary people into a backdrop for political theatre. Reducing a meal meant for the poor to a contest between political heavyweights shows how politicians care more about optics than the dignity of the poor.**

Adrita Roy,
Hooghly

■ Sir — The renewed outbreak of ethnic violence in Manipur underscores the fragility of the state's political framework. While the new government raised expectations of stability, the recent wave of protests and clashes has revealed how little leadership change has altered conditions on the ground. The crisis is rooted in years of administrative inertia and deep socio-economic distress. What is required now is decisive action in the form of sustained dialogue and a firm crackdown on illegal arms.

M. Jeyaram,
Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

Offensive rhetoric

■ Sir — By sharing a post that described India as a "hellhole", the president of the United States of America, Donald Trump, has insulted a thousand-year-old civilisation. India, however, has seemingly digested the remark. Instead of registering a protest, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has remained silent ("A timid partner", April 28). Accepting such remarks without objection can diminish India's global stature. Ironically, much of America's progress has been shaped by immigrants, including the Indian community, whose contributions have greatly enriched the country.

Aranya Sanyal,
Siliguri

■ Sir — Donald Trump's endorsement of Michael Savage's comment describing China and India as "hellhole[s]" is highly demeaning. Savage's accusation that these nations scammed the system to get their relatives American citizenship exposes deep condescension and poor diplomatic sensibility. This situation recalls 1971 when the then-president, Richard Nixon, sent a naval fleet to the Bay of Bengal to intimidate India, yet India stood tall against the threat.



Rhetorical slight

Principled dialogue is essential to repair the strains in the relationship.

Salil Karmakar,
Barrackpore

Layered progress

■ Sir — Despite persistent issues like unemployment, Bengal has achieved genuine social progress ("Layered reality", April 28). Significant spending on social services, a higher sex ratio, and increased life expectancy are markers of development. But the absorption of displaced labourers into informal trades is disguised unemployment. With the 16th Finance Commission discontinuing revenue deficit grants and the global oil shocks, there is little fiscal cushion to address these weaknesses.

Sukhendu Bhattacharjee,
Hooghly

Print power

■ Sir — Karnataka's initiative to mandate newspaper reading in schools is a visionary step for safeguarding intellectual growth. At a time when digital scrolling has sharply reduced students' attention spans, reviving the habit of reading print newspapers can help cultivate sustained thinking.

Schools across the country could build on this by introducing junior op-ed circles to encourage critical engagement with editorials and vocabulary exercises to strengthen language skills. With a majority of future jobs requiring high-level information synthesis, such initiatives should become a national educational standard rather than remain a local experiment.

Vijaykumar. H.K.,
Raichur, Karnataka

■ Sir — The recent initiative by the government of Kerala to award grace marks for reading to school students is commendable. It will nurture healthy habits among them. In an age of digital distractions, such measures rightly recognise reading as central to intellectual and emotional development. This effort can be strengthened by introducing a structured curriculum



Deep imprint

with age-appropriate books across classes. If adopted by other states as well, such policies could improve students' critical thinking and learning outcomes nationwide.

A.C. Vineeth Kumar,
Thrissur, Kerala

Letters should be sent to:
The Telegraph
6 Prafulla Sarkar Street,
Calcutta 700001
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The Tribune
ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Abortion autonomy

Minor's choice prevails over rigid law

THE intervention by the Supreme Court in permitting the termination of a 30-plus-week pregnancy of a 15-year-old rape survivor is an assertion of constitutional morality over procedural rigidity. Importantly, the decision was backed by medical inputs, which flagged severe mental trauma, the psychological impact of continuing the pregnancy and elevated medical risks associated with advanced gestation. At the same time, the court made it clear that while medical opinion informs the decision, it does not determine it. The final threshold remained constitutional — centred on dignity, autonomy and the right to life.

This distinction is crucial. Acting on medical assessments, the SC held that forcing continuation would violate the survivor's bodily autonomy and mental well-being. In doing so, it reaffirmed a principle often lost in legal and medical processes: reproductive choice rests with the individual, not institutions acting on her behalf. At issue is the framework of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, which prescribes gestational limits but allows exceptions where there is grave risk to physical or mental health. These exceptions are mediated through medical boards whose cautious interpretations can delay or deny access. The SC's observation that doctors cannot decide for patients is a necessary corrective, even as it raises concerns about late-stage procedural risks and foetal viability.

For minor rape survivors, delayed reporting, stigma and administrative hurdles frequently push pregnancies into advanced stages. At that point, risks such as haemorrhage, complications during delivery and long-term health consequences rise sharply, especially for adolescents. Forcing continuation compounds both physical danger and psychological trauma, raising serious concerns under the right to life. The court's rebuke to the Centre — urging it to respect citizens' choice — underscores that reproductive autonomy is integral to personal liberty, even as it exposes gaps in the law that force survivors to seek judicial relief.

Cheat sheet

Counselling should not replace disciplinary action

THE detection of hundreds of unfair means cases in exams has turned the spotlight on the Surat-based Veer Narmad South Gujarat University. From currency notes slipped inside answer sheets with requests such as "please pass me" to answers scribbled on clothes and even the use of AI tools like ChatGPT through mobile devices — the erring students' desperation is plainly evident. In a controversial move, the university is presenting these students before a malpractices inquiry committee and sending some of them for counselling after finding out why they cheated. The university's "Education with Understanding" experiment raises an uncomfortable question: can academic dishonesty be curbed or discouraged without penalties?

Notably, India has toughened its stand on exam malpractices in recent years through the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024. Against this backdrop, the Gujarat university's step seems to prioritise introspection which might be construed as leniency. It's true that academic stress and competition can push students toward unethical shortcuts. Addressing these root causes is essential to reduce cheating. The university faculty and management cannot absolve themselves of responsibility for the sorry state of affairs.

Exams are not merely academic rituals; they are gateways to professions that demand competence and integrity. Any attempt to normalise malpractices could demoralise honest students. The deterrent effect of punishment, especially in a system already grappling with paper leaks and exam fraud, cannot be ignored. The challenge, therefore, lies in balance. Counselling should complement — not replace — firm disciplinary action. Educational institutions must make it clear that while they are willing to understand students' compulsions, there will be zero tolerance to cheating in any form.

Pope shows Trump the mirror

Leo XIV has boldly exposed the US President's "delusion of omnipotence"



TRYSTS AND TURNS

JULIO RIBEIRO



WAR IN WEST ASIA : The Pope has urged the US and Iran to resume talks. REUTERS

AN overwhelming majority of Roman Catholics worldwide follow the teachings of the Pope. Since Catholicism has the largest following among those who profess Christianity, US President Donald Trump — the most powerful person in the world — cannot afford to ignore what the Pope says about his decisions and actions on the global stage.

When Trump disregarded the rules-based international order and sent his troops to kidnap Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in January this year, Pope Leo XIV was stunned. He disapproved of Trump's action but said nothing till the US President attacked Iran at the prodding of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Leo XIV, born Robert Francis Prevost, was a native of Chicago till he chose to become a missionary and joined the Order of St Augustine in Peru, where he lived for over 20 years before moving to the Vatican to head the Dicastery of Bishops. In that role, he helped the Pope identify and appoint Bishops all over the world. He became the first American to occupy the throne of St Peter in May last year.

During the first nine months of his tenure, the Pope largely remained silent. He spoke up when the US-Iran war started wreaking havoc on innocent civilians, including children. Alluding to Trump, the Pope said he was a tyrant who had "delusion of omnipotence".

The Pope's emergence as a spiritual leader who spoke his mind triggered his spat with Trump. His apt assessment must have shaken the US President to the core.

In retaliation, Trump described Pope Leo XIV as an individual who "knew nothing of foreign policy" and was "weak on crime". There is no doubt in the minds of people even in the US — except Trump's core MAGA supporters, who are mostly white blue-collar workers belonging to the Evangelical Christian faith — that the President was morally wrong. Trump would have surely liked to have the Roman Catholics on his side, but the Pope's timely tirade upset his calculations.

Vice President JD Vance, himself a Catholic, advised the Pope "to stick to matters of morality", implying that Trump's decisions and actions had not contravened the rules of morality!

> Trump cannot afford to ignore what the Pope says about his decisions and actions on the global stage.

Vance's incorrect advice would not have swayed the Pope, but the emailed bomb threat to his own brother, John Prevost, and other relatives living in suburban Chicago apparently did. If this threat was the handiwork of MAGA supporters, that alone says a lot about the path that politics is taking in a country that preaches democracy to other nations. The fact remains that the Pope, who had boldly mocked Trump's "delusion", did try to mitigate the impact of those remarks with his statements in some African countries that he visited recently.

Many US citizens disapprove of the war started by Trump against the Iranian regime. It is well known that Netanyahu brought Trump on board in a bid to solve Israel's perpetual problem with Iran, which is guided by religious prejudice against Judaism.

It is apparent that Trump has not studied Persian history. If he had, he would have learnt that the Parthian Emperors, followed by the Sassanian rulers, of ancient Persia resisted the Eastern Roman Empire that ruled from Constantinople (later renamed Istanbul by the Ottoman Turks). Even the Roman Empire could not subdue Persia. It was forced to exist as an equal power with the Sassanians, who followed the Zoroastrian religion till the Arabs invaded Persia and converted Persians to Islam.

My friend, Dr Farokh Udwadia, who was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1987, recently wrote a treatise on the Parthian and Sassanian empires. Persian Zoroastrians refused to convert and instead migrated to the west coast of India to form the now tiny but very influential Parsi community. I met Farokh for the first time at the Padma awards ceremony in 1987. He is not only a very distinguished doctor but also a dedicated researcher of Persian history. I am eternally indebted to Farokh for saving my wife Melba's life when she was fighting for survival at Mumbai's Breach Candy Hospital in 2002 (she passed away in 2022).

Reverting to the spat between the US President and the Pope, I can sense that my friends in Mumbai, both Catholic and non-Catholic, are squarely in agreement with Leo XIV. Along with the majority of Catholics in Mumbai, I certainly am one with the Pope.

Last week, he described those who waged wars and appropriated the earth's resources as thieves who robbed the world of a peaceful future. He also urged the US and Iran to resume talks to end the war.

I felt sad when the Pope attempted to tone down his criticism. But on reflection, I realised that he cannot put his US-based relatives in mortal danger. Trump's supporters intend to "Make America Great Again" by any means, fair or foul. It is something we in India also experience at the time of elections when winning is all-important, the means totally irrelevant. The definition of "morality" changes when politics and the quest for power take precedence.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"In a divided and troubled world, the Holy Spirit teaches us to walk together in unity. — Pope Leo XIV"

How Rajiv Gandhi charmed US media

RAHUL SINGH

IT's strange how an incident jogs the mind, and long-forgotten memories come surging back. When I read about the attempt on US President Donald Trump's life during the White House correspondents' dinner, I recalled my trip to Washington in June 1985. We, a group of mediapersons, were accompanying then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. It was Rajiv's first major foreign tour after he had become PM following his mother's assassination.

The cities we had already been to included Algiers and Paris. For Algiers, all of us had to possess a yellow fever vaccination certificate, essential for visiting any country in Africa in those days. The vaccination was available at only a few places. Surprisingly, Central Research Institute, Kasauli, was one of them. At that time, I was posted nearby in Chandigarh. Why was I chosen to be in the Press party? Rajiv himself might have had a hand in it as we knew each other a little from our Cambridge days.

The US was clearly the prime focus of the PM's tour. Ronald Reagan was the US President, and from the word go, he and Rajiv got on famously, though there was a generational gap between the two. In Washington, Rajiv had to confront probably the toughest, no-holds-barred correspondents of any country in the democratic world — the members of the National Press Club. Yet, Rajiv charmed them all, answering their probing questions with humour and bonhomie.

He was also confronted by a group of Sikhs, perhaps with Khalistani sympathies. He disarmed them by pointing out that the "Khalistan" they wanted, basically the entire territory once ruled by the Sikh Emperor Ranjit Singh, included much of what was now Pakistan! They looked visibly discomfited.

Somehow, I was chosen as the only Indian journalist to sit at the high table, close to Rajiv (again, that may have been his doing). I foolishly placed my tape recorder right in front of him, which the security staff promptly removed. To my embarrassment, all this was shown to millions in India on Doordarshan, then the only TV channel in India.

Rajiv came across as a seasoned politician, not the pilot who had entered politics just to "help mummy" following the death of his brother, Sanjay, in a plane crash. He was keen to improve India-US ties, which had been frosty during Indira Gandhi's rule, particularly when Richard Nixon was at the helm.

Though it might sound a bit cheesy, I think all Indian journalists present at the National Press Club lunch felt proud that we had a leader like Rajiv. Sadly, except for the Punjab and Mizo accords, I subsequently watched matters mostly go downhill for him. I wrote accordingly in the newspaper of which I was the editor at that time. Word got back to me that he was unhappy with my comments, and government advertisements to the paper dried up.

Both Indira and Rajiv paid with their lives for misjudging and mishandling the situation in Punjab and Sri Lanka, respectively. History will surely conclude that, along with the Bhuttos, the Gandhis were the most tragic first families of our times.

The writer is a veteran journalist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Opportunity for India

Apropos of 'Widening Gulf'; the UAE's decision to exit OPEC+ (Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and their allies) may weaken the oil cartel's control over crude prices and create favourable opportunities for oil-importing nations like India. As our country depends heavily on imported fuel, the government should take timely steps to secure affordable and stable energy supplies through stronger ties with the UAE and other producers. At the same time, India must accelerate investment in renewable energy and domestic resources. Wise planning can strengthen India's energy security and economic stability.

HARSHITA SINGLA, BY MAIL

Affordable energy at stake

With reference to 'Widening Gulf'; the editorial highlights a significant shift in global energy politics with the UAE's exit from OPEC+. This move may create uncertainty in global markets. The UAE's strategic step is aimed at gaining production flexibility, but it also raises concerns about price volatility. Notably, OPEC+ countries account for nearly half of the global oil supply, so any division can impact economies worldwide. For India, this presents both risks and opportunities in securing affordable energy. Policymakers must act cautiously to balance economic stability with evolving geopolitical realities.

CHAVI VOHRA, NEW DELHI

Onus on bank staff

Refer to 'Banking on dignity'; it is shocking that an *adivasi* in Odisha had to dig up the body of his sister just to prove to a bank that she had died. Simply opening bank accounts to achieve targets is not enough; the importance of a grievance redressal mechanism and sympathetic behaviour of the staff cannot be overemphasised. Banks must sensitise their staff to be cooperative, empathetic and helpful in such matters. The move to recruit local officers for the convenience of customers is laudable. It is time to take corrective measures to improve the image of the banking industry. Also, the system of registration of deaths should be hassle-free, especially in rural areas.

GS MANN, NAYA NANGAL

Rules must be people-friendly

Refer to 'Banking on dignity'; it is unfortunate that poor people are not treated with dignity. Imagine the plight of the man who had to take his sister's body/skeleton to a bank as proof of her death. Rules and regulations should be people-friendly; bank staffers must always be ready to help customers, particularly those from underprivileged sections. Red tape should not be allowed to impede the delivery of public services. A callous approach makes it worse for the people, who have to complete myriad formalities.

RAMESH C GARG, KOTKAPURA

Tribute to a soldier

The passing of Lt Gen Depinder Singh marks the end of a golden era in the annals of the Indian Army. He was the quintessential soldier's soldier. From serving as the Military Assistant to Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw during the 1971 India-Pakistan war to commanding the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka, he handled tough assignments with resilience. His book, *Soldiering with Dignity*, is an intimate and honest portrayal of the Field Marshal. Beyond all the medals and laurels, Lt Gen Depinder Singh was known for his humility and sharp wit. Even at 96, he remained an inspiration for the veteran community in the Tricity. With his departure, we have lost not just a decorated commander but also a link to the historic victories that defined modern India.

AK JOSHI, AMRITSAR

Excessive screen time

The CBSE and various health organisations are actively discouraging excessive screen time for children, citing its harmful effects. However, almost every school finds it convenient to share homework, assignments and notices through WhatsApp groups, forcing students and parents to spend even more time glued to their phone screens. Ironically, parents are told to curb their child's screen usage and yet are expected to check their phones regularly so as not to miss any school-related update. Students, too, are compelled to use smartphones and computers to access their assignments, often without supervision.

KIRAN DALAL, KARNAL

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit.
These should be cogently written and can be sent by **e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com**

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

THE TRIBUNE, SATURDAY, MAY 1, 1926

In defence of gold standard

THE Royal Commission on Indian Currency and Finance has almost finished its inquiry and is expected to submit its report at an early date. Among the witnesses examined in London was Dr Edwin Cannan, Professor of Economics at the London University, who has taken an independent and impartial view of the currency problem in India. It will be remembered that the Indian view on this question is unanimous and in favour of the adoption of the gold currency standard at once. A few independent European bankers and others support the same view, but certain British financiers and officials have made objections to this change and recommended the continuance of the present system for some time longer. Dr Cannan has refuted these objections and supported the Indian view. We hope his learned and cogent arguments will be given the importance they deserve. In the first place, he says that if the principle of the gold exchange standard were faithfully carried out and if the people of India also felt satisfied with it, he would not recommend change. But considering how the system is liable to be mismanaged, as it has been on several occasions, and how it has alienated the confidence of Indians, he thinks that it is absolutely necessary to introduce the gold currency standard in India. "If I were myself an Indian," he says, "I should prefer the simpler gold currency standard as being less likely to be broken down by the bad management." He says the gold exchange standard's liability to mismanagement and consequent heavy loss to the country is so great that the gold currency standard would, on the whole, be cheaper to the people and more satisfactory in every respect.

Tribune flyover threatens city's founding vision



SUMIT KAUR
FORMER CHIEF ARCHITECT, CHANDIGARH

CHANDIGARH stands at a perilous crossroads, where the pressures of regional expansion threaten to dismantle the very logic of its creation. The imminent construction of the Tribune Flyover is more than an urban design failure; it is a rejection of sustainability and the vision of an inclusive, humane city.

The proposed 1.6-kilometre concrete monolith is an obsolete 20th-century response to a 21st-century crisis. This intervention ignores the statutory mandates of the Chandigarh Master Plan (CMP) 2031 and violates the city's architectural legacy. We are no longer just debating a traffic solution; we are deciding whether to remain a global benchmark for humane urbanism or surrender our identity to the highway culture that Le Corbusier sought to transcend.

Le Corbusier conceived Chandigarh as a biological organism, where each part of the city performed a specific function within an integrated whole. This harmony relied on the 7V hierarchy of roads, a graded system from pedestrian paths (V7) to fast vehicular roads (V1), designed as a circulatory network. By separating fast-moving traffic from local movement, this structure ensured efficiency, safety, environmental balance and a humane public realm. It was intended to privilege order over chaos and people over vehicles.

This logic is precisely what interventions like the Tribune Flyover begin to unravel. By privileging speed and volume over hierarchy and separation, such projects disrupt the balance the city's road system was designed to maintain.

The strongest argument against such projects lies in decades of global evidence on induced demand. Cities like Los Angeles and Houston show that expanding road capacity delivers little lasting relief; it attracts more vehicles, raises emissions and merely shifts congestion elsewhere.

Chandigarh is not immune. Short-sighted road widening has already eroded green berms and safety zones. By prioritising through-traffic on V2 and V3 roads, originally designed as internal arteries, we have allowed them to become high-speed corridors, serving bypassing vehicles at the expense of residents, pedestrians and public transport.

As highlighted in a recent IIT-Roorkee webinar on "City, Equality and Happiness", the global paradigm is shifting towards democratising road space. Enrique Peñalosa, former Mayor of Bogotá, noted that a city is only "smart" when it prioritises the dignity of human movement over the speed of machines. India still has the opportunity to leapfrog into 21st-century mobility by investing in public transport and pedestrian networks rather than locking into car dependence.



VALUE: A humane city must prioritise cyclists and pedestrians over private vehicles. LALIT MOHAN

In Chandigarh, this dignity is eroding. The V8 cycle tracks, often seen as recent additions, were integral to the original Master Plan. Their neglect, along with the incomplete implementation of V7 pedestrian paths, has pushed the city towards car dependency. A humane city must prioritise cyclists and pedestrians over private vehicles.

> Expanding road capacity does not solve congestion; it invites more vehicles.

This struggle echoes Jane Jacobs' opposition to the Lower Manhattan Expressway, where she argued that cities are communities, not traffic corridors. A more recent example is the Cheonggyecheon Stream in Seoul, where removing an elevated highway improved ecology, reduced temperatures and boosted tourism, demonstrating the long-term benefits of reclaiming infrastructure for people.

This failure is most visible in the collapse of the Punjab New Capital (Periphery) Control Act, 1952. Designed to protect Chandigarh's character, the Act has become ineffective as satellite towns have mushroomed across Mohali, Panchkula, Zirakpur and New Chandigarh. Each day, thousands of vehicles stream into the city, ignoring planning boundaries.

The result is a city absorbing pressures it was never designed to handle. The CMP 2031 recognises this as a regional challenge, calling for an Interstate Regional Planning Board and an Integrated Interstate Traffic and Transportation Plan (IITTP). These are not optional, but essential safeguards. Without them, we are not solving congestion but placing costly bandages on a widening regional wound.

Ignoring this framework carries a profound environmental and human cost. The flyover disregards warnings on preserving Chandigarh's "open-to-sky" vistas and requires the felling of the historic Mango Garden. This grove is not merely a collection of trees; it is living infrastructure, a biological filter embedded in the city's design. Its removal is not just an ecological loss but the erasure of intent.

At the same time, terminating a high-speed corridor near GMCH-32 threatens a designated silence zone, introducing noise into a space where recovery depends on calm. In easing movement, we risk degrading both the air we breathe and the spaces where we heal.

The path forward lies not in more concrete, but in rethinking mobility. Instead of accelerating vehicles through Chandigarh, we must invest in solutions that allow the city to function at a human pace: underpasses where necessary, intelligent traffic management and reallocating road space towards pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. This is not abstract. It is the difference between a city where daily needs are within walking distance and one where every errand requires a cross-city drive. Revitalising sector markets to serve daily needs can reduce unnecessary travel. When movement is local, system-wide pressure eases. When streets serve people, the city regains balance.

True progress requires upholding what already exists: the sanctity of the Chandigarh Master Plan (CMP) 2031 and the Edict of Chandigarh, long-delayed regional coordination, and a robust public transport network. The choice is not between a flyover and gridlock, but between two distinct futures for our home. One is defined by speed, fragmentation and an eroding identity. The other is rooted in balance, accessibility and the vision of a humane city.

Infrastructure decisions do more than alter movement; they rewrite our civic values. The question is whether Chandigarh will remain a global model of thoughtful urbanism or allow a single piece of concrete to set it on an irreversible path away from its founding ideals. We are not just building a road; we are deciding what kind of city we deserve.

Exit polls: Patterns, pitfalls and possibilities



SANJAY KUMAR
PROFESSOR, CSDS, AND ELECTION ANALYST

THE exit poll results, released on the evening of April 29 for elections in Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal and Puducherry present a mixed picture. While there is broad agreement among pollsters in Assam and Kerala, predictions for Tamil Nadu and West Bengal remain divided. The polls suggest a decisive lead for the BJP-led alliance in Assam and the Congress-led United Democratic Alliance (UDF) in Kerala. But suspense remains over the likely electoral verdict in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

Some pollsters have preferred to defer the exit poll prediction for West Bengal, where the second and final phase of voting concluded on April 29, in order to get a better sense of the data. This is a wise decision. Some more time is needed to assess the data, which may have been collected late in the evening on polling day.

This delay is no guarantee that the estimates calculated would be better or near-perfect. After all, voting ended in Tamil Nadu on April 23 and the pollsters had ample time to have a careful look at the data. Yet, estimates vary across agencies for Tamil Nadu. The fact that all exit poll forecasts for Assam and Kerala converge on one outcome is not because the pollsters got sufficient time for data collection and analysis. The main reason is the visibly lower political competition between the contesting parties or alliances.

Still, the exit polls must be read with caution. All of them were off the mark during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections — while they predicted 400-plus seats for the NDA, the final results were different. During the Haryana Assembly elections of 2024, almost all pollsters forecast that the Congress would win big, but it was the BJP that registered the victory. In the Chhattisgarh Assembly elections of 2023, despite exit polls predicting a Congress victory, it was the BJP that won. The recent Assembly elections in Bihar have a mixed record as far as the success of exit polls is concerned. While many exit polls predicted victory for the NDA, none of them anticipated such a huge victory for the alliance.

The predictions for the Tamil Nadu elections are somewhat complex. Of the four exit polls available, three have predicted victory for the DMK alliance, with the AIADMK alliance being at number two and the Vijay-led TVK at number three. One exit poll is the outlier, showing different results.

Attention is focussed on West Bengal, where the election has been intensely fought. Most exit polls predict a victory for the BJP and one poll shows a different forecast.

So, four exit polls seem to agree on the results in two states (Assam and Kerala) and disagree on those in two states (TN and West Bengal). The disagreement seems to be of a similar nature, with three on one side and one or two outliers. These are not results, just estimates. The count method (3 vs 1 of 4 exit polls) is certainly not the best method to guess which exit poll may be closer to reality.



REMEMBER: Exit polls are not results, just estimates. PTI

> A small change in vote share can make a huge difference.

While the current exit polls are largely similar to those aired in recent years during various elections, one can see some differences too. This time, we have much fewer exit polls than seen in the recent past, when their number ran into tens. The reasons for this decline are not known. It could be due to finance issues or reduced interest of media houses in conducting exit polls.

With the results slated for May 4, if the pollsters do go wrong, it would be likely due to vote-share estimation errors, as even a small change in vote share can make a huge difference in the number of seats for parties. A party can win more seats even with a reduced percentage of votes than its rival. This has been seen a few times in the Karnataka Assembly elections, due to the spread and concentration of votes.

This is the tricky aspect of our first-past-the-post electoral system. Here, whether a candidate wins her seat by one vote or by one lakh votes, in both cases it is counted as one seat.

Even as exit polls often tend to make bold statements about elections in the name of "prediction", one should not forget these are only estimates and that they only offer a directional sense. They must not be hyped as "real results" but treated as estimates. Exit polls may catch the eyeballs and even make someone a hero for a few days, but it is not the best way to go forward.

Also, pollsters should not shy away from giving vote share estimates as they may be more accurate than seat forecasts. A minor deviation in the vote share estimate, as compared to the actual vote share, cannot be seen as a wrong forecast. But a deviation in the number of seats forecast by an exit poll and the actual seats won is considered a failed or wrong exit poll.

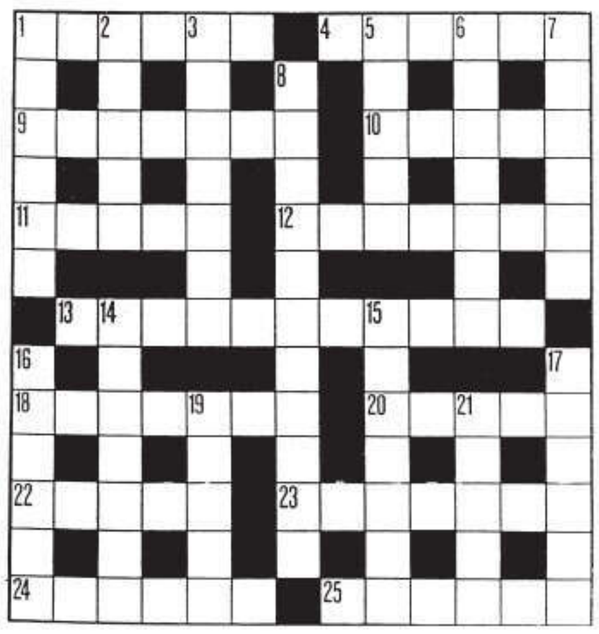
The massive use of artificial intelligence is also posing new challenges in the conduct of exit polls. Over the last few election cycles, political parties seem to have invested heavily in AI-driven data analytics to segment voters and tailor messages at the micro level. For this targeted mobilisation of voters, parties use inputs from the social media engagement of voters, consumer behaviour-related data and online behaviour data. This micro-targeting of voters cuts across traditional voting blocks. For example, voters are divided into groups such as young first-time voters, aspirational entrepreneurs or specific government scheme beneficiaries, whose preferences shift from their traditional voting to these new blocks.

Conventional exit poll methods struggle to capture these rapidly shifting, data-defined voter segments as these micro-segments of voters are guided by behavioural data rather than other identities. Pollsters normally use conventional stratified sampling, which cannot estimate turnout and swing among precisely those groups of voters that are targeted by political parties aggressively.

Exit polls may shape perception, but they do not determine outcomes. In an evolving data-driven political landscape, their limitations are becoming harder to ignore.

Views are personal

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Possessions of monetary value (6)
4 Firmly established (6)
9 Campaigning (7)
10 Apportion as share (5)
11 A lessening of effort (3-2)
12 Long tedious discussion (7)
13 Serve a useful purpose (4,2,5)
18 Early stage of development (7)
20 Expression of great approval (5)
22 Dumbfound (5)
23 In the dock (2,5)
24 To blush (6)
25 Without restriction (6)

DOWN
1 In addition (2,4)
2 Walk with self-important gait (5)
3 Crush underfoot (7)
5 Walk wearily (5)
6 Dear to the heart (7)
7 Whole (6)
8 To monitor (4,2,3,2)
14 To discharge (7)
15 Adjudicator (7)
16 Steal in small amounts (6)
17 Simultaneous firing of guns (6)
19 Coolness in danger (5)
21 Originate (5)

Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Pasture, 5 Cramp, 8 In an undertone, 9 Lodge, 10 Austere, 11 Propel, 12 Digest, 15 Inertia, 17 Scrap, 19 To say the least, 20 Range, 21 Marshal.

Down: 1 Phial, 2 Stand to reason, 3 Ukulele, 4 Endear, 5 Corps, 6 Above reproach, 7 Pretext, 11 Pointer, 13 Insular, 14 Mayhem, 16 Thyme, 18 Petal.

SU DO KU

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

V. HARD

epaper.tribuneindia.com

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

MAY 1, 2026, FRIDAY

Shaka Samvat	1948
Vaisakh Shaka	11
Vaisakh Parvishte	18
Hijari	1447
Shukla Paksha Tithi 15, up to 10:53 pm	
Siddhi Yoga up to 9:13 pm	
Swati Nakshatra up to 4:36 am	
Moon in Libra sign	
Budh Purnima	

FORECAST

SUNSET: FRIDAY 19:00 HRS
SUNRISE: SATURDAY 05:39 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	37	21
New Delhi	40	24
Amritsar	35	20
Bathinda	40	22
Jalandhar	35	22
Ludhiana	37	21
Bhiwani	39	25
Hisar	40	22
Sirsa	40	25
Dharamsala	27	16
Manali	21	08
Shimla	24	13
Srinagar	16	10
Jammu	31	21
Kargil	—	—
Leh	19	04
Dehradun	33	20
Mussoorie	21	14

TEMPERATURE IN °C

LIVE RICH
FINANCIAL Chronicle
VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | 1 MAY 2026

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	76,913.50	-0.75
Nifty 50	23,997.55	-0.74
S&P 500*	7,138.19	0.03
Dollar (₹)	95.07	0.22
Pound Sterling (₹)	128.23	0.11
Euro (₹)	111.06	0.111
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	151,050▲2,000	1.34
Brent crude ($/bbl)*	114.56	-2.94
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.018	0.33
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.402	-0.014

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Laurus Labs Q4 net goes up 19% to ₹279 cr

Laurus Labs' net profit increased 19 per cent to ₹279 crore in March quarter, compared to ₹234 crore same period previous financial year. Revenue increased 5 per cent to ₹1,812 crore against ₹1,720 crore in the year-ago period. "We accelerated our performance in FY26, delivering strong revenue growth and expanded profitability," Satyanarayana Chava, founder and CEO, Laurus Labs, said in a release.



Mkts slide as crude hits $126, see late rebound

Sensex falls 1,237 pts early but then recovers 650 pts in second half

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 30

Global energy concerns intensified as crude oil futures surged to a four-year high of $126 per barrel amid escalating geopolitical tensions between the United States and Iran, and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The spike in oil prices pushed the Indian rupee to a record low and triggered a sharp fall in equity markets, although sentiment improved later with a pullback in crude prices and the currency.

Brent crude futures were trading at $114.33 per barrel around 8 pm IST, below the day's high of $126.

The BSE Sensex opened sharply lower by over 480 points, with losses widening to 1,237.5 points, or 1.6 per cent, to hit an intraday low of 76,258.86. The Nifty 50 fell to an intraday low of 23,796, down 380.8 points.

However, a recovery of more than 650 points in the second half helped the Sensex close 582.86 points, or 0.75 per cent, lower at 76,913.50.

The Nifty 50 recovered about 200 points from the day's low to settle at 23,997.5, down 180.15 points, or 0.74 per cent.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) were net sellers of equities worth ₹8,047.86 cr, while domestic institutional investors (DIIs) were net buyers of ₹3,487.1 crore.

"The rise in oil prices, along with persistent FII outflows and weak global cues, led to weakness across sectors. The market saw a partial recovery on value buying," said Gaurav Garg, equity analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk.

TURBULENT CHAPTER

- Brent crude oil futures traded at $114.33 per barrel around 20.00 hours IST, lower than day's high of $126 per barrel.
- With more than 650 points recovery in second half, Sensex closed 582.86 pts or 0.75% down at 76,913.5.
- Nifty-50 settles 200 pts higher from day's low at 23,997.5.
- Recovery seemed more of domestic institutions balancing act after early panic selling by foreign investors.



ALL SECTORAL indices came under selling pressure while IT, pharma managed to close in green.

THE RISE in oil prices, along with persistent FII outflows and weak global cues, led to broad-based weakness across sectors. Market witnessed a partial recovery supported by value buying.
— **GAURAV GARG,** *Equity analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk*

OIL CARTEL OPEC+ MAY INCREASE OUTPUT IN JUNE

Vienna, April 30: OPEC+ is likely to agree another symbolic production increase for June, in the group's first move since the surprise departure of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), three delegates said.

Seven major nations led by Saudi Arabia and Russia will probably add 188,000 barrels a day to their output target during a video conference on Sunday, two of the delegates said, even though they'd be unable to implement it with the Strait of Hormuz blocked. The OPEC+ delegates asked not to be identified as any deliberations are private.
— *Bloomberg*

Rupee hits new low of 95.34 vs dollar, later recovers to 94.91

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 30

The Indian rupee on Thursday touched a historic low of 95.34 against the US dollar as Brent crude prices surged, with June futures rising to $126 per barrel, the highest in four years.

Oil companies and foreign portfolio investors continued to buy dollars in the market, while the 10-year benchmark yield touched 7.06 per cent.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 95.02 and fell to an intraday low of 95.34 (a loss of 46 paise), eclipsing its previous all-time low of 95.21 hit on March 30, before recovering to 94.86 on suspected RBI intervention. It finally closed at 94.91, marginally weaker than its previous close of 94.84.

The US Federal Reserve kept interest rates unchanged amid inflationary pressures triggered by high crude prices.

"Rising oil prices is triggering FII outflows, which in turn compound dollar demand from oil importers. This is overwhelming the defence the RBI is putting up," Anindya Banerjee, head, commodity and currency research, Kotak Securities, said.

April alone has seen FII outflows of $7.5 billion, taking calendar year-to-date outflows past $20 bn. This comes on top of a significantly expanded oil import bill, as Brent crude has moved from $72 in February to $126 now.

Experts said trade deficit and capital account are exerting pressure in the same direction, leaving rupee with little natural buffer.

Meanwhile, Indonesian rupiah hit a lifetime low, falling 0.5 per cent, while the Philippine peso also briefly touched a record low. The Japanese yen recovered from 160.73 to 159.30 against the dollar following intervention by the Bank of Japan. The Korean won also rebounded, moving towards 1,477.

"The rupee remains vulnerable unless the RBI takes additional steps," said Anil Bhansali, head, treasury, Finrex Trading.

Investment demand drives gold purchases

SANGEETHA G.
CHENNAI, APRIL 30

Gold demand in the March quarter rose 10 per cent to 151 tonnes, while its value nearly doubled to ₹2.27 lakh cr. Investment demand comprising coins, bars, and gold ETFs surpassed jewellery demand and emerged as the primary driver of consumption, according to the World Gold Council.

Gold demand in Q1 2026 stood at 151 tonnes, up from 137 tonnes in the year-ago quarter. In value terms, demand surged 99 per cent to ₹2,27,530 crore, compared with ₹1,14,600 crore in the same period last year. Jewellery demand declined 19 per cent to 66.1 tonnes, while demand for bars and coins rose 34 per cent to 62.3 tonnes. Gold ETF demand jumped 197 per cent to 19.9 tonnes, up from 6.7 tonnes in Q1 2025. Investment demand was significantly higher at 82.2 tonnes, compared with jewellery demand of 66.1 tonnes.

Federal Bank to buy StanChart's 4.5L cards

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 30

Federal Bank will acquire Standard Chartered Bank's portfolio of around 4.5 lakh credit cards in India. The transaction is expected to be completed this year.

"The portfolio to be acquired comprises 4.5 lakh credit cards, compared with Federal Bank's existing base of 8 lakh non-co-branded cards and 13 lakh co-branded cards," the lender said in a statement.

The transaction is expected to increase Federal Bank's non-co-branded credit card receivables by nearly 90 per cent. The final portfolio size will depend on the timing of the transfer and receipt of customer consents, it added.

Standard Chartered, which earns a majority of its revenue from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, had about 6.4 lakh credit cards in India as of March, according to data.

The bank is selling a portion of its India portfolio comprising customers who hold only credit cards and do not have a broader banking relationship.

The acquisition marks a gain for Federal Bank, with around 75 per cent of the acquired card base concentrated in India's top eight cities.

This is expected to more than double the bank's presence in these locations.

APARTMENT PRICES INCREASE 8-20% IN MARCH QTR: JLL

Hyderabad, April 30: Residential property prices continued their upward trend in the January–March quarter, rising 8–20 per cent across seven major cities on the back of higher input costs, with growth expected to moderate going ahead, JLL India said.

Apartment sales increased 8 per cent to 70,631 units during the quarter, up from 65,222 units in the year-ago period. New supply grew 13 per cent to 90,023 units.

The seven cities covered in the report are Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Kolkata.

The data pertains only to apartments; row houses, villas excluded.

GAMES

SHORT TAKE



RIYAN FINED AFTER VAPING INCIDENT

New Delhi, April 30: Rajasthan Royals captain Riyan Parag was on Thursday fined 25 per cent of his match fee for bringing the game into "disrepute" after being caught vaping on camera during the IPL game against Punjab Kings in Mullanpur. Parag's actions during the Royals' chase on Tuesday night drew condemnation on social media.

It has learned that on field umpires Tanmay Srivastava and Nitin Menon had not reported the matter to match referee Amit Sharma right after the game. They only did that after seeing visual proof and Sharma found Parag guilty for a code of conduct breach as per the IPL guidelines.

The Level 1 offence carries 25 per cent deduction from match fees and one demerit point.

"Riyan admitted to the offence and accepted the sanction imposed by the Match Referee, Amit Sharma," said the IPL in a statement.

"The BCCI is also exploring other options to initiate proceedings for stringent action against the erring team, its officials and players to ensure that the reputation of IPL remains intact," the statement added.

When reached out to BCCI secretary Devajit Saika on possible action on Rajasthan Royals, he said: "As it is written clearly in the statement, we are exploring what action to take on the team. It is not decided yet." The Indian government had banned e-cigarettes back in 2019, prohibiting their production, sale and distribution. As per the law, the offender faces imprisonment up to one year and/or a Rs one lakh fine for a first time offence. — *PTI*

JASUN SHINES

Holder, Gill help Titans overshadow RCB

Ahmedabad, April 30: Jason Holder was immense on the night, taking two wickets and three catches. Shubman Gill and Jos Buttler then backed his all-round prowess with handy cameos as Gujarat Titans sealed a nervy four-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in an IPL match here on Thursday. Holder's two-wicket burst (2/29) and those sharp catches helped the Titans bowl out defending champions RCB for a modest 155 in 19.2 overs. But with Gill (43, 18b), Buttler (39, 19) and later Rahul Tewatia (27 not out, 17b) leading the charge, GT ended up at 158 for six in 15.5 overs.

RCB remained second in the table with 12 points, and GT too was static on fifth but added two valuable points to swell their tally to 10 after this game.

After the early departure of Sai Sudharsan, the Titans' charge to victory started with Gill's uncharacteristically aggressive knock of 43 off 18 balls (4x4, 3x6).

Taking on the new-ball attack, Gill hammered Bhuvneshwar Kumar for a four and a six before going after Josh Hazlewood, tearing into the Australian with three fours and two sixes in a 24-run over as GT raced to 36 without loss in just two overs.

On the other hand, Buttler, who was dropped on 1 by stumper Jitesh Sharma off Hazlewood, made RCB pay instantly. He scooped the very next ball cleanly for a six over fine leg and never looked back.

Buttler finished the powerplay in style with a four and a six as GT surged to 69 for 2.

He continued the charge after the field spread, smashing spinner Suyash Sharma for back-to-back sixes — one straight down the ground and another sliced over long-off — in a 17-run over.

But Gill fell to Bhuvneshwar as his powerful punch found Kohli inside the circle. The veteran pacer soon struck to jettison Buttler to cap a fine spell.

In the process, Bhuvneshwar reached 352 wickets, becoming only the second Indian bowler after Yuzvendra Chahal (391) to cross the 350-wicket mark in T20s.

Earlier, returning to the venue where they had lifted the title last season, RCB were cruising at a run rate in excess of 10 with Kohli leading the charge, smashing Kagiso Rabada for 21 runs in his opening over which included five fours in a row.

But Gill persisted with his strike bowler and the call paid off handsomely.

Rabada (1/38) struck back to remove Kohli for a blazing 28 off 13 balls, triggering a collapse as RCB lost wickets in a cluster through the middle phase.

Left-arm pacer Arshad Khan wrapped the tail and returned with 3/22.
— *PTI*



Gujarat Titans bowler Jason Holder celebrates after taking the wicket of Royal Challengers Bengaluru batter Jitesh Sharma during their Indian Premier League match in Ahmedabad on Thursday. GT won by four wickets. — *PTI*

SCOREBOARD

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Jacob Bethell c Rashid Khan b Mohammed Siraj 5, Virat Kohli c Rashid Khan b Rabada 28, Devdutt Padikkal b Rashid Khan 40, Rajat Patidar c Holder b Arshad Khan 19, Jitesh Sharma c Buttler b Holder 1, Tim David c Holder b Rashid Khan 9, Krunal Pandya c Holder b Arshad Khan 4, Romario Shepherd c Sai Sudharsan b Holder 17, Venkatesh Iyer c Sai Sudharsan b Arshad Khan 12, Bhuvneshwar Kumar not out 15, Josh Hazlewood run out 0. Extras (lb-3, w-2) 5. **Total (all out in 19.2 overs) 155.**

Fall of wickets: 1-34, 2-35, 3-79, 4-80, 5-91, 6-96, 7-126, 8-126, 9-155.

Bowling: Mohammed Siraj 4-0-38-1, Kagiso Rabada 4-0-44-1, Jason Holder 4-0-29-2, Arshad Khan 3.2-0-22-3, Rashid Khan 4-0-19-2.

Gujarat Titans: Sai Sudharsan c Sharma b Kumar 6, Shubman Gill c Kohli b Kumar 43, Jos Buttler b Kumar 39, Washington Sundar lbw b Shepherd 12, M Shahrukh Khan c Hazlewood b Shepherd 8, Rahul Tewatia not out 27, Jason Holder c Padikkal b Suyash Sharma 12, Rashid Khan not out 7. Extras (w-4) 4. **Total (for 6 wickets in 15.5 overs) 158.**

Fall of wickets: 1-42, 2-57, 3-92, 4-109, 5-111, 6-141.

Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 4-0-28-3, Josh Hazlewood 4-0-56-0, Suyash Sharma 3.5-0-44-1, Romario Shepherd 4-0-30-2.

Starc boost for Delhi against RR

Jaipur, April 30: Delhi Capitals have little time to dwell on what has been a bruising stretch of results as they gear up to face a confident Rajasthan Royals in their IPL match here on Friday. It has been a difficult run for the Axar Patel-led side this season. They have swung between extremes in the last two games. From posting a 250-plus total only to concede a world-record chase, to being bowled out for 75 against RCB.

Add to that a one-run defeat against Gujarat Titans earlier this month, and Delhi have had their share of emotionally damaging results. With three wins and four losses, they are seventh on the table and need a turnaround soon.

Delhi's biggest concern has been their inconsistent batting. While the likes of K. L. Rahul, David Miller, Tristan Stubbs and Sameer Rizvi have all contributed in patches, the unit has failed to click collectively.

There is some good news on the bowling front. Pace ace Mitchell Starc is set to return after getting clearance from Cricket Australia to play from May 1. With Lungi Ngidi still unavailable, Starc's inclusion comes as a timely boost. He is likely to replace either Kyle Jamieson or Dushmantha Chameera.

Delhi's bowlers couldn't do much while defending 75 in the previous game , but they will need to be sharper against a strong Rajasthan batting line-up.

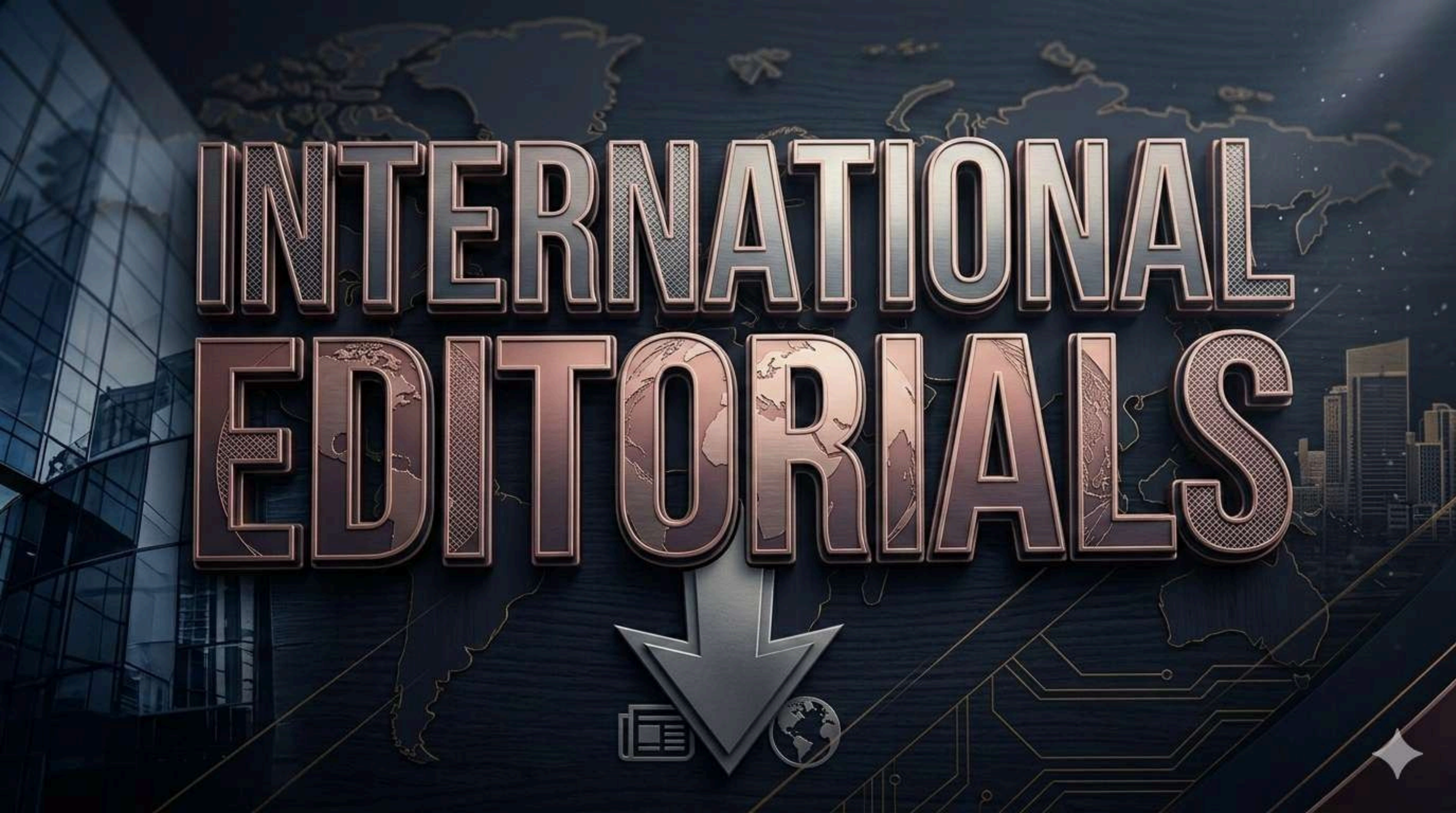
Their top order has been aggressive, with fearless Vaibhav Sooryavanshi taking on world class bowlers like Jasprit Bumrah, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins from the outset and Yashasvi Jaiswal showing good touch.

— *PTI*

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INTERNATIONAL
EDITORIALS

Opinion

Haiti's original sin? Freedom.

The country's revolution shocked the world. America still isn't over it.

Laurent Dubois



LYNNE SLADKY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

"Let's go to Haiti, and how history repeats itself." With these words, the CBS Sports commentator Nico Cantor celebrated the qualification of the Haitian soccer team for the 2026 FIFA World Cup last November, its first in over 50 years. The team's victory over Nicaragua, he explained, had come on Nov. 18, a national holiday in Haiti.

"Two hundred and twenty-two years ago today," Mr. Cantor said, "Jean-Jacques Dessalines led Haitian forces into the Battle of Vertières" — the last major battle of the Haitian Revolution — "where he defeated the French and gained independence." The country's triumph on the soccer field, he suggested, was the latest chapter of its long quest for dignity and sovereignty.

For many Haitians, the convergence was deeply meaningful. In a world in which they and their country are often attacked and demeaned, in which their people are often pushed around and rejected, the moment of unity and victory on a global stage was part of a sustained struggle against the odds.

Over centuries, competing stories about the country have become a way of fighting over much larger questions about freedom, racism and what the future of the societies of the Americas and the world will look like. For many decades after the Haitian Revolution began in 1791, the country's reputation as the cradle of one of the world's largest and most successful antislavery uprisings created anxiety and fear among enslavers throughout the Americas.

Since then, its very existence has routinely been cast by outsiders as a disturbance and threat. In the United States, the attacks against Haitian immigrants that were at the fore in the 2024 U.S. presidential campaign — and that continue today — are part of a centuries-old tradition.

But there has always been another way of viewing Haiti, too; one rooted in solidarity and an understanding that the past struggles and future aspirations of Haiti and the United States are intertwined.

Haiti was once French Saint-Domingue, a brutal plantation system where more than half a million enslaved Africans labored to produce products like sugar and coffee for European consumption. It was, for much of the 18th century, the most profitable colony in the world.

The mass uprising that overthrew slavery there in the early 1790s sent shock waves through Europe and the Americas. When Napoleon Bonaparte sent a force to re-establish slavery there in 1802, his troops were met with steadfast resistance. In 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who had been born into slavery, proclaimed Haiti's independence and declared: "We have dared to be free."

Many outside observers found all this to be simply "unthinkable," notes the Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot. They couldn't imagine the enslaved, whom they considered mere property, as historical actors, let alone equals or victors. So they sought to explain away the events by blaming outside agitators and casting the revolution as nothing more than unfurling barbarism.

Thomas Jefferson, writing in 1799, worried about the "cannibals of the terrible republic," anxious about the influence they would have on enslaved people in the United States. Throughout the 19th century, pro-slavery writers and politicians continued to cast Haiti's independence as a disaster, and negative depictions of the country and its people in media of that era became staples of broader racist thought.

This very loud tradition has often shrouded the long reach of the Haitian revolutionaries' powerful ideals and practices. As Jefferson feared, the revolution inspired an antislavery movement in the United States, including the nation's largest slave revolt in Louisiana in 1811.

The abolitionist John Brown considered the Haitian Revolution an inspiration and an example, and the Haitian government carried out a state funeral in his honor in the National Cathedral, complete with an empty casket, after he was executed in 1859. For Americans who also had a vision of a future based on freedom and equality, Haiti was, in the words of Frederick Douglass, "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh."

Over time, Haiti became a magnet for migrants from around the world, including African Americans, Germans and people from the Middle East. But that began to change in 1915 when the United States invaded Haiti and rewrote its constitution to allow foreign landownership in the hopes of developing a sugar plantation economy there under U.S. control.

The occupation, which lasted until 1934, upended life in Haiti, with U.S. authorities seizing land and waging a brutal counterinsurgency campaign against those who resisted. It also laid the foundations for decades of dictatorial rule under the Duvalier family from 1957 to 1986.

Many Haitian migrants fleeing that regime sought refuge in the United States, but as their numbers grew in the 1970s, they encountered increasingly restrictive immigration policies. Washington largely supported Haiti's dictatorial regime as a regional bulwark against communism, so, in contrast to those fleeing neighboring Cuba, the United States considered Haitian migrants economic rather than political refugees.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan signed an executive order directing the Coast Guard to interdict boats carrying Haitian migrants on their way to Florida. This immigration strategy, still active today, was developed specifically to prevent Haitians from setting foot in the United States, where lawyers could work with them and help them claim asylum.

Throughout the 1980s, Haitians were accused of bringing AIDS to the United States — a spurious claim that nonetheless led to a fresh wave of anti-Haitian sentiment in America. In the 1990s, after a violent coup against the democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide sent thousands more fleeing the country, the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay became a detention

DUBOIS, PAGE 10

Trump, Pope Leo and the meaning of Catholic defiance

The pontiff-vs.-president imbroglio reveals a hunger for moral authority.

Christine Emba



JAMIE LEE TAETE

Is America having a Catholic revival? The idea that the United States is seeing a surge in converts to the faith, especially Gen Z-ers, might be more projection than fact. But the reaction to the clashes between Pope Leo XIV and President Trump have made it seem far more plausible — even understandable.

Since February, the president has prosecuted an under-theorized and unpopular war on Iran with increasing unpredictability and genocidal threats, silencing objections through assertions of political power and military force. But over the past several days, criticism from the Bishop of Rome — Leo's public rebuke of those threats as "a moral issue for the good of the whole entire population," and later his prayer for "dignity, understanding and forgiveness" to stand against the "delusion of omnipotence" — appeared to pierce the president's hubris, and inspired a cross-section of Americans to voice their own dismay with Mr. Trump.

The Roman Catholic Church and its leader possess what is needed now: a robust moral vocabulary — for calling out good versus evil and demanding justice and peace — that appeals to something higher and more compelling than grim realpolitik, and an independent, consistent point of view that transcends partisan politics. The church is a 2,000-year-old institution with a global remit and, if you're one of its 1.4 billion adherents, a mandate from God to shepherd human souls. It stands apart from everyday institutions and economic systems and thus cannot be captured by voter concerns or fears of a vengeful president. Its perspective is meant to be overarching and eternal, an intriguing proposition in an era that feels painfully unmoored.

In smoother times religion can seem unnecessary. And for many, much of the 20th century seemed compelling enough without it: Individuals were free to make lives of their own, the material dividends of capitalism provided enough novelty and prosperity to distract from deep longings, and liberal ideals could stand in as a sort of state religion, a barely needed justification to undergird an idealistic and mostly functional government.

There was enough hope in the idea of an arc of history bending toward justice to satisfy at least some taste for higher concerns. For a growing share of secular and religiously disaffiliated Americans, living within what the philosopher Charles Taylor describes as the "immanent frame" — a social understanding that the natural world is all there is, with no recourse to the spiritual or supernatural — posed few issues.

But as the last several years have made especially clear, the grand project of liberalism is no longer universally affirmed. The economic spoils of capitalism are not novel (nor, for that matter, reliably assured or evenly distributed); prioritization of the self seems to have resulted in loneliness and anxiety. Governing institutions have grown sclerotic and scandal-prone, relinquishing their authority and becoming less able to articulate, let alone respond to, deep questions of purpose and meaning. A mixture of confusion and nihilism hangs in the air; immanence no longer seems to suffice.

Under these conditions, institutional religion of some kind seems poised to make a comeback as a provider of the spiritual and communal anchors people need. The question is which kind.

In recent years, the decline of American Christianity overall has felt well understood and only moderately lamented. But news sites and social media in April appeared fascinated by the possibility of a Catholic-specific resurgence. "60 Minutes" went "inside the Catholic Church's quiet revival." An Evie Magazine headline breathlessly reported that "N.Y.C.'s Hottest New Club Is Catholic Mass."

The theory wasn't quite borne out by actual numbers: For every convert to the Roman Catholic Church each year, most reports were careful to note, eight to 12 leave the fold. An uptick of conversions in highly networked urban areas (several reports discussed the same New York City parishes) and Ivy League campuses seems overreported on by journalists familiar with those worlds.

Still, even the jaded commentariat finds the idea compelling that a disaffected generation raised in a modern, secular world might very well be seeking something transcendent, in continuity with long tradition — and that other generations might be, too.

Catholicism has never been fully at home in the United States: From the nation's founding, white Protestants made up the establishment elite. Romanism, in contrast, was a religion of immigrants and the poor, the Vatican's influence seen as a threat to American interests since the colonial era. But today, many mainline Protestant denominations have squandered their distinctiveness in a quest for relevance, leaching credibility with each attempt to keep up with the latest social justice trend. At the same time, evangelicals have traded scriptural grounding for nearness to political power, becoming in some cases no more than an arm of the Republican Party and less credible for being so.

While the Catholic Church can be dogmatic (quite literally!) on social issues and has weathered scandals such as its clergy sexual abuse reckoning, it has still managed to remain countercultural by modeling what it looks like to think rigorously about moral principles through a Christ-specific lens, grounding them in its particular tradition of thought and applying them to concrete issues in the public square. The times when the church has broken containment and attracted the interest of those outside its ranks have tended to be those during which it condemned inhumanity and championed the good as an outsider's voice, countering the failures of the age: Pope John Paul II's defense of human dignity as a resistance to Communism, Pope Francis's public commitment to humility and inclusion.

This latest Catholic moment — both the fascination with new conversions and the resonance of the pope-versus-president imbroglio — reveals a hunger for moral authority.

It's difficult *not* to hope that a revival of some kind is on its way.

CHRISTINE EMBA *is the author of "Rethinking Sex: A Provocation."*

OPINION

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The banality of evil, again



Bret Stephens

President Trump erupted in anger at the CBS journalist Norah O'Donnell after she read him excerpts from what is said to be a manifesto written by Cole Tomas Allen, the man charged with trying to kill Trump at Saturday's White House Correspondents' Association dinner. Some conservatives seem to think no good can be served from reading these words, but that's a mistake: It's always useful to be reminded, again, of the banality of evil.

The distinguishing feature of the manifesto is its insipidity. "I am a citizen of the United States," Allen writes. "What my representatives do reflects on me." Later, he justifies the possibility that he might harm the people in the ballroom "on the basis that most people *chose* to attend a speech by a pedophile, rapist and traitor, and are thus complicit," although he adds that "I really hope it doesn't come to that."

The manifesto lays out five objections to what he is about to attempt — starting with "As a Christian, you should turn the other cheek" — followed by his brief rebuttals. The impression is less of a person struggling with an anguished conscience than of someone not bright enough to come up with objections that would force anything but glib self-justification.

The distinguishing feature of Cole Tomas Allen's manifesto is its insipidity.

Finally, the author is at pains to convey the impression that he's a nice guy with a sense of humor. He apologizes to everyone he deceived ("I apologize to my parents for saying I had an interview without specifying it was for 'Most Wanted' ") and offers copious thanks to family, friends, colleagues and students. His final words are that he experiences "rage thinking about everything this administration has done," followed by "Stay in school, kids." He is — or so he thinks — Guy Fawkes by way of Sesame Street.

Is this even worth rebutting? It is, and not merely as a matter of simple politics. Allen seems to have drunk deeply from a liberal well in which defensible objections to administration policies mingle freely with the more lurid suspicions of the president that emerged from investigations into Russian collusion and the Epstein files. As the investigation into Allen unfolds, it will be interesting to learn from where he got his news. In another life, he might have made a living as a writer at The Daily Beast.

The degree to which facts have become hard to disentangle from conspiracy theories is one of the depressing hallmarks of the age. So is the relentless hyperbole about the president's alleged destruction of democracy. But conservatives should be wary of pointing fingers here. Who is it, after all, who tried to delegitimize not one but two Democratic presidents, the first through preposterous claims about a fake birth certificate, the second through outrageous falsehoods about a stolen election?

Somewhat more interesting than the politics expressed is the philosophy, such as it is. That's the philosophy of John Wilkes Booth, who shouted "Sic semper tyrannis" — thus always to tyrants — after he shot Abraham Lincoln. It's the philosophy of Luigi Mangione, who is accused of assassinating the UnitedHealthcare chief executive Brian Thompson, and who, in a manifesto found with him, insisted that "parasites" like Thompson "simply had it coming." It's a philosophy that sometimes wins sympathy in this country — like from those who, citing Friedrich Engels, explain that identification with Mangione is an entirely normal reaction to the "social murder" being perpetrated by insurance companies.

In short, it's the philosophy of people who believe that democracy is actually despotism, provided they don't like its results; that the laws of such a democracy are an oppressive sham that must be actively resisted; that the way to bring about change isn't through political participation and elections but rather through multiple homicides. On the right, this is called fascism. On the left, communism. They are functionally almost interchangeable.

And increasingly chic.

"Microlooting" — previously known as shoplifting — is now a thing, at least with one edgy New Yorker writer intent on sticking it to a grocery store. Hasan Piker, the fashionably dressed left-wing streamer, stayed at a five-star hotel in Havana in March so he could join hands with the regime's dictatorial officials to denounce American iniquity. Rama Duwaji, now the first lady of New York, liked social media posts celebrating the pogroms of Oct. 7, 2023. Rape and murder haven't been this cool since the Rolling Stones released "Gimme Shelter" in 1969.

All this is banal not only in its intellectual unoriginality (when will it occur to the Pikers of the world that the term "useful idiot" applies precisely to them?) but also in its moral and emotional shallowness. Wisdom begins in self-doubt, and self-doubt enjoins moral caution, most of all when it comes to irreversible deeds. Among the virtues of democracy is that it allows us to advance our beliefs *tentatively*. It permits us not only to change the things we don't like, lawfully and peacefully, but also to change our minds should we see the error of our ways.

Cole Tomas Allen seems to have just known he was right, with a self-certainty that could countenance murder. Ditto for people like Mangione and their frighteningly numerous cheerleaders in elite quarters. A life in prison might, in time, sober up even the most determined criminals. What will sober up the others?



KYLIE COOPER/REUTERS

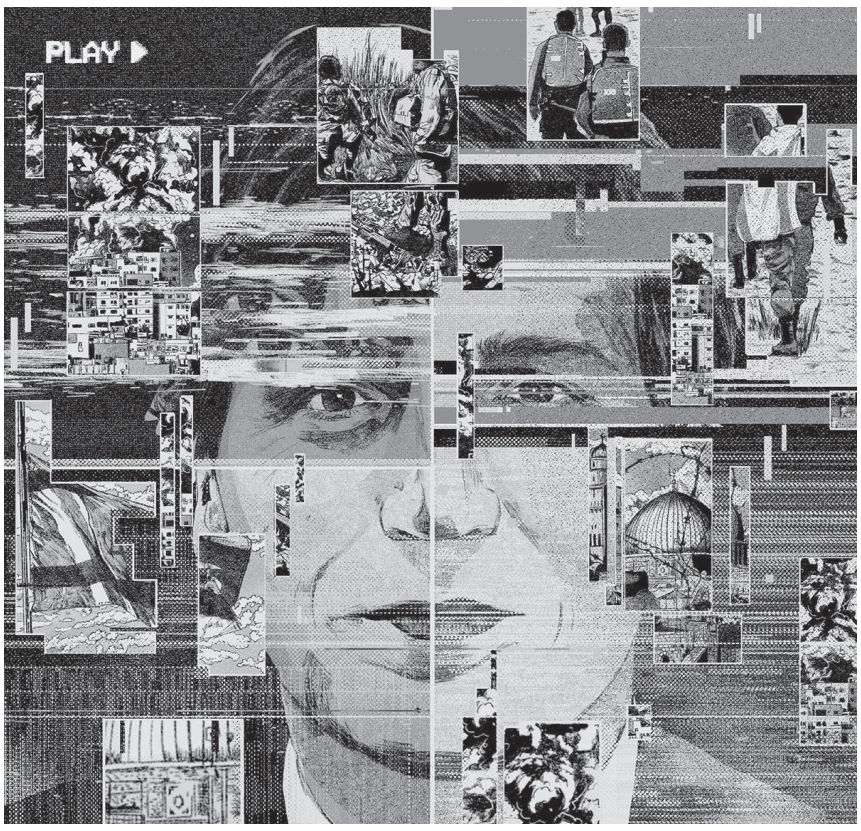
What Tucker Carlson means when he talks about Israel

Peter Beinart
Contributing Writer

Tucker Carlson can read the room. In November 2016, just days after President Trump's first election victory, he launched a prime-time show on Fox News largely devoted to the proposition that liberal elites were replacing white Americans and Europeans with Black and brown immigrants.

Now, as many Americans sour on Israel, he's in the vanguard once again. Over the last year or so, he's become a leading champion on the right for abandoning America's long-held support for the Jewish state. "Hopefully the first thing we do when and if this war is resolved is detach from Israel," he told his audience in early April.

Mr. Carlson's worldview hasn't fundamentally changed. Like other prominent figures on the anti-Israel right, he still sees the West as menaced by alien civilizations bent on its destruction. He has just turned his attention to what he sees as the alien civilization that populates the Jewish state. And he's done so with the same penchant for conspiracy theories that has long marked his public commentary. Now he is using a destructive, ill-defined and unpopular war to give those theories even greater reach.



NICOLE RIFKIN

Consider a monologue Mr. Carlson delivered in March, in which he offered a bizarre theory as to why Israel attacked Iran: The strike was, he said, part of a stealth plan to demolish the Al Aqsa Mosque and rebuild the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, which would then incite a global religious war. The real victims of that religious war, Mr. Carlson claimed, would be "Christian, Western, white countries." Israel's "real target," he suggested, "is not the mullahs in Iran. It's us, as it always has been."

Mr. Carlson's theory is preposterous, but it reflects a perspective growing on the American right. He is at the forefront of a cohort of right-wing commentators who don't merely condemn Israel's manifold crimes against the Palestinians and others in the Middle East. They also suggest something far more troubling: that Israel's crimes stem from its Jewishness, which they claim threatens the Christian West.

Commentators of all ideological stripes can conflate Israel with Jews, progressives included. Still, when progressives seek explanations for Israel's misdeeds, they often talk about systems — settler-colonialism, imperialism, ethnonationalism. These structural explanations implicate many countries, including the United States. By contrast, conservative critics like Mr. Carlson tend to shun such explanations because they threaten American and Christian moral superiority. Instead, they frequently root the problem in Israel's Jewishness.

In its focus on identity, the right's discourse about the Jewish state increasingly resembles its discourse about Islamist terrorist groups. Just look at America's post-9/11 arguments about Al Qaeda and ISIS. The left tended to see these terrorist groups as a product of American imperialism in the Muslim world. The right saw them as the product of Islam. A 2021 Pew Research poll found that Republicans were more than twice as likely as Democrats to say "Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence among its believers."

The far right is conflating Israel with Jewishness.

Now Americans across the ideological spectrum are growing more critical of Israel. But young conservatives are more likely than their lefty counterparts to link Israel's transgressions to its religious identity. Last fall, a Yale survey asked Americans ages 18-34 how they felt about claims that American Jews enjoy too much power, are more loyal to Israel than America and should have their businesses boycotted to protest the war in Gaza. Almost two-thirds of respondents ages 18 to 34 who defined themselves as "extremely conservative" agreed with at least one of those statements. Among people in that same age group who defined themselves as "extremely liberal," less than one-third did.

That's not surprising given the rhetoric of some of America's most influential far-right commentators. Candace Owens, one of America's most popular podcasters, has endorsed Mr. Carlson's claim that the ultra-Orthodox Jewish group Chabad is using the Iran war to try to rebuild the Temple. She has also claimed that the Talmud tells Jews "that we're animals, that they have a right to own us, that they have a right to make us worship them." In 2024 she accused Israel of giving refuge to pedophiles and linked that behavior to the ritual murder of Christians in Europe during Passover. Nick Fuentes, an avowed racist and misogynist who Mr. Carlson recently hosted for a friendly interview, has insisted that "If you read anything about the Israeli government, anything even about Talmudic Judaism, what they say is, we don't love our enemies. They say that the non-Jews, we don't even consider them human."

Mr. Carlson is more subtle. But he, too, often attributes Israel's behavior to what he sees as its anti-Western religion. Last October, he claimed that "the Israeli position is 'everyone who lives in Gaza is a terrorist because of how they were born, including the women and the children.' That's not a Western view. That's an Eastern view. That's a non-Christian — that's totally incompatible with Christianity and Western civilization." Earlier this year Mr. Carlson said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel had tried to punish members of Mr. Carlson's family because Mr. Netanyahu "believes in blood guilt, Amalek. You know, when someone commits a crime against you, you punish not just him but his family, his bloodline. There's no idea that's less Western than that, more anti-Christian than that. Christians reject that."

Mr. Carlson is implying that Israel's punishment of the Palestinian people stems from something particularly Jewish — or "non-Christian" — about its misdeeds. Such civilizational generalizations are false; many Christian and Western leaders practice collective punishment. The United States was founded on the same kind of land theft that Israel is committing against Palestinians.

Combating the anti-Israel right's conflation of Israel and Jewishness is made harder by pro-Israel American Jewish organizations that have conflated those two things as well.

But progressives must not blur the distinction between viewing Israel as a state, which practices forms of oppression and aggression that can occur in states of every ethnic and religious type, and viewing Israel as the product of a peculiarly Jewish pathology. It is understandable that some progressives, who are rightly eager to end America's support for Israel's human rights abuses, might be tempted to see figures like Mr. Carlson as allies. But the struggle for Palestinian freedom should not indulge bigotry of any kind. That includes the bigotry of figures like Tucker Carlson, who blame Israel's crimes on its Jewishness so they can pretend that America and Christianity are morally pure.

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Trump's war will soon be plainly illegal

CHEMERINSKY, FROM PAGE 1

be brought, including by service members and by members of Congress, to enforce it.

Unfortunately, recent efforts to enforce the act have been dismissed by the courts as involving political questions that they cannot decide. For example, in Crockett v. Reagan, in 1982, a Federal District Court dismissed a lawsuit by members of Congress that challenged U.S. military assistance to El Salvador. In Doe v. Bush, in 2002, a Federal District Court dismissed a suit to enjoin President George W. Bush from invading Iraq. The court said that the issues raised were political questions "beyond the authority of a federal court to resolve." Kucinich v. Obama, in 2011, challenged America's military actions in Libya as violating the act and the Constitution. A Federal District Court dismissed the case.

These decisions make meaningless Congress's war powers. In the face of congressional inaction, and without judicial enforcement, there are realistically no checks on the president's ability to unilaterally wage war. If the federal judiciary, up to and including the Supreme Court, won't uphold its responsibility here, it will nullify our Constitution's design that two branches of government should be involved when our country goes to war.

The courts haven't always been so reluctant. The Supreme Court decided several cases arising from the Quasi War, an undeclared naval war with France between 1798 and 1800: In Talbot v. Seeman (1801), the court emphasized the importance of Congress's involvement in any type of war. Chief Justice John Marshall wrote that the "whole powers of war" were vested in Congress. In Little v. Barreme (1804), the court held that even during wartime the president cannot authorize actions that violate acts of Congress.

In the Prize Cases, the Supreme Court considered the constitutionality of Abraham Lincoln's blockading Southern ports in 1861. In a narrow 5-to-4 decision, the court ruled that although the president cannot initiate war, as the commander in chief he could meet an armed rebellion with force. It did not, however, question its own authority to rule on a president's war powers.

The notion that courts cannot enforce constitutional and statutory provisions concerning war powers has no historical foundation. Nor is there any basis for arguing that the War Powers Resolution is unconstitutional as an infringement of the president's powers as the commander in chief. Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution grants Congress the power "to declare war, grant letters of marque and reprisal, and make rules concerning captures on land and water." That last phrase has immediate and obvious relevance when it comes to our military blockading or boarding ships in the Strait of Hormuz.

The Constitution's framers unquestionably intended that the power to use military force lay with Congress. During his presidency, George Washington wrote, "The Constitution vests the power of declaring war with Congress, therefore no offensive expedition of importance can be undertaken until after they shall have deliberated upon the subject, and authorized such a measure."

Yes, presidents control the *execution* of wars, but they don't decide whether to take the country to war. While in Congress, James Madison wrote,



DAMON WINTER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

"Those who are to conduct a war cannot in the nature of things, be proper or safe judges, whether a war ought to be commenced, continued or concluded."

The courts should simply hold that the War Powers Resolution requires the president to end our involvement in the war with Iran unless and until Congress authorizes it. This shouldn't be — and isn't — different than any other injunction on any administration to comply with the law. Mr. Trump might disregard such an order. But that isn't a reason for the federal judiciary to abandon its duty to enforce the law.

ERWIN CHEMERINSKY *is the dean of the law school and a professor of law at the University of California, Berkeley. His books include "No Democracy Lasts Forever: How the Constitution Threatens the United States."*

Haiti's sin is freedom

DUBOIS, FROM PAGE 9

camp for many Haitians, as well as Cubans, who had been caught on the water seeking refuge in the United States. A series of subsequent crises have led Haiti to an increasingly dangerous and unstable place.

The Haitian diaspora in the United States now numbers over a million people. These migrants play a crucial role in Haiti's economy through remittances and are a vibrant part of the communities in which they live. They also continue to be frequent targets of virulent attacks.

The hundreds of thousands of Haitian migrants who are in the country under the Temporary Protective Status program, which was established in the aftermath of a devastating 2010 earthquake, may soon have that status revoked pending a Supreme Court decision later this year.

But there is a different tradition we can draw from: one of exchange and kinship, nurtured by Frederick Douglass and many others over the past centuries. The acts of support shown to Haitian migrants in communities like Springfield, Ohio, where hundreds of locals gathered in a Baptist church in February to protest plans to terminate Temporary Protective Status for Haitians, demonstrate that that tradition remains very much alive.

That is the past we can carry into the future. We can still dare to be free.

LAURENT DUBOIS *is a professor of history at the University of Virginia and the author of "Haiti: The Aftershocks of History," among other books.*

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رُبَّ عَجَلةٍ تَهَبُ رَيْثًا

(اكثم بن صيفي)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

How often does hurry yield only lingering.

Aktham bin Saifi

(Pre-Islamic Arab orator, judge, sage and poet)

Opinion

Hormuz, resilience and cohesion dominate Jeddah summit

DR. ABDEL AZIZ ALUWAISHEG

Gulf Cooperation Council leaders met at an important summit in Jeddah on Tuesday to discuss the lessons learned in the Iran war and review progress in their collective efforts to cope with it.

Since the war started on Feb. 28, there have been nearly nonstop meetings of GCC civilian and security officials. The bloc's foreign ministers held an emergency meeting on March 1, followed on March 5 by a joint meeting of EU and GCC foreign ministers. This week's Jeddah summit reviewed progress and gave instructions for further efforts.

The GCC has always favored diplomacy to tackle the myriad contentious issues with Iran. Some member states worked very hard to prevent this war. Some were major trading partners. But Iran rewarded them by firing the majority of its missiles and drones in this war — more than 85 percent of the total — at GCC targets. The sense of betrayal was palpable.

Iran's attacks made most people and officials in the GCC region lose trust in Iran, but they still favored a "diplomatic path" to end the conflict with Tehran. However, with that diminished trust, any diplomatic efforts will have to be coupled with strengthening defense and deterrence, while enlisting the support of the international community.

The most immediate issue is the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which is precipitating a global economic downturn. This issue should be handled separately and ahead of the other issues that led to this war, because hundreds of millions of people have been severely affected by Iran's action, which has wreaked havoc with both energy security and food security.

The war conditions in the Gulf, but especially the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, underscore the need for faster and deeper connectivity between member states. A lot has been done in the past to improve connectivity and it all came in handy, especially in Saudi Arabia. When Iran closed the strait, exports from and imports into most GCC countries were affected. Saudi ports on the Red Sea served as a viable alternative. Thousands of trucks traversed the Kingdom to deliver goods to the countries on the Arabian Gulf. The Kingdom's 5,000 km of railroads also helped and its airports were utilized by grounded airlines in other GCC countries.



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For full version, log on to www.arabnews.com/opinion

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has advocated since at least 2016 for more extensive connectivity between GCC states and between the GCC region and the rest of the world. That means harmonizing the regulatory environments concerning transport and communications, including standards and protocols. Much has been done in aviation, land transport and shipping, but more needs to be done.

The ceasefire in the war between Iran, Israel and the US may not last long considering the significant gap between the belligerents' positions. Drawing lessons from the first phase of the war, when Iran targeted or threatened nearly every bit of critical infrastructure in the GCC, the Jeddah summit injected urgency into another set of integration projects to enhance resilience. Some are still in the study and exploration phase, while others have progressed further, but the plan now is to ensure that they are implemented soon.

More than 90 percent of Iran's attacks on GCC countries were thwarted, which is testimony to the quality of GCC soldiers and equipment. But it is seeking even better interception rates, earlier warning times and less expensive alternatives.

So, the coming weeks should witness a reenergized GCC system working on several fronts — strengthening defense, improving connectivity, rebuilding what Iran's attacks have damaged, restoring production and export capacity, and improving the quality of life of the 60 million people who live in GCC countries.

The Jeddah summit injected urgency into another set of integration projects to enhance resilience



COURTESY: AMJAD RASMI/ASHARQ AL-AWSAT

One party to the deal, Israel, has taken it upon itself to derail, delay and obstruct the entire process

Gaza's Board of Peace a monument of broken promises

OSAMA AL-SHARIF

The Board of Peace, a body that US President Donald Trump created with much fanfare more than six months ago, is proving to be a monument of broken promises for the 2 million barely surviving inhabitants of Gaza.

Trump stepped in to end two years of what most of the world described as a genocide being perpetrated by Israel against Gazans following the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacks. His Gaza plan, through which the Board of Peace was established, called for an immediate ceasefire, an exchange of living and dead Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners of war, and the immediate resumption of full humanitarian aid. A Civil-Military Coordination Center was established to facilitate the flow of aid.

In addition, an International Stabilization Force was to be deployed earlier this year, while the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza was to relocate to the enclave and assume responsibility for its administrative affairs.

But none of what was promised — and endorsed by a UN Security Council resolution — has been fulfilled. One party to the deal, Israel, has taken it upon itself to derail, delay and obstruct the entire process. What the people of Gaza find themselves confronting today is a state of no-peace, no-war, while the Israeli military actively violates the ceasefire daily.

Beyond the relentless killing, which has intensified sharply in the past week, Israel has barred members of the national administrative committee from entering the enclave, while restricting the flow of humanitarian aid to about 20 percent of what was agreed. Aid agencies, including UNRWA, have been prevented from operating in Gaza and those still present report shortages of food and medicine.

Even before the eruption of the Iran war at the end of February, attention on Gaza's plight had already begun to wane. Warnings and appeals from the UN and other agencies have gone unheeded. The Board of Peace has not convened once to review implementation of the agreed steps and neither Trump nor his aides have spoken publicly about Gaza since January. All the early optimism surrounding the plan's prospects has since evaporated.



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Israel has exploited the current environment to make life in Gaza unbearable. Even the key intermediaries — Egypt, Turkiye and Qatar — have shifted their focus toward resolving the US-Iran conflict amid its regional fallout. Meanwhile, the death toll in Gaza continues its climb. The confirmed Palestinian death toll as of this month stands at more than 72,500, including 20,000-plus children, 270 journalists, 120 academics and at least 560 humanitarian aid workers.

The International Criminal Court, meanwhile, has been preoccupied with a sexual misconduct case against Prosecutor Karim Khan, who was finally cleared of all charges last month. Now that he has returned, there is speculation that a new round of arrest warrants may be issued against senior Israeli ministers.

Trump's Board of Peace was supposed to halt the killing of Palestinians and create the conditions for a political process to restore life to the enclave and begin reconstruction. The US president secured the backing of prominent Arab and international figures for his controversial initiative. Yet, here we are, mired in a gray zone where neither the UN nor its agencies are permitted to intervene in an ongoing conflict, while the Board of Peace is nowhere to be found.

This suits Israel perfectly. Its daily violations continue unchecked and unpunished, while the world's attention is trained elsewhere. The question that demands an answer is: How much longer must the people of Gaza endure the most horrific atrocities amid a peace plan that is terminally paralyzed?

Opinion

Cash alone will not buy the UK migration control

MOHAMED CHEBARO



While the world's attention is focused on the precarious truce in the war in the Middle East and the negotiations that it is hoped will yield a settlement, peace and the end of its many human and economic ramifications, one important event largely escaped attention.

The UK government has agreed to pay France another £660 million ($891 million) to curb the flow of migrants and asylum seekers from French shores and into England.

As the weather improves during spring, the seasonal headache for French and British authorities is renewed. Despite all the draconian measures of the past, small boats continue to cross the English Channel. The new deal will fund more French police and riot units to contain and disperse would-be migrants, more drones and surveillance aircrafts, and investment in coordination centers. This comes with yet another round of tightening of the UK immigration system, making it more difficult for migrants and refugees to settle and speeding up application processing and removal — all to try to make Britain less welcoming.

The extreme-right Reform UK is threatening to deliver a severe blow to the ruling Labour Party in next week's local elections

But throwing cash at the problem will not solve it. The £660 million the UK has agreed to pay France is a drop in the ocean for a problem that has become a money-making machine for gangs, unscrupulous law firms and even states weaponizing refugees as a means to exploit and blackmail for political gain.

One wonders how much slack the new funding will buy the UK government as it faces intense pressure to deliver more migration controls in the face of the growing popularity of the extreme-right Reform UK, which is threatening to deliver a severe blow to the ruling Labour Party in next week's local elections.

It has long been evident that the country's migration and settlement system needs overhauling. Many governments have attempted to close the gaps in the system that allow many migrants to enter the country and settle with the aim of milking the welfare system.

The smugglers and their agents within the UK that have been exploiting the situation for a hefty profit. Then there are the shady agencies offering advice on routes into the UK via educational tracks or fake employment contracts. A BBC investigation this month found evidence that law firms and legal advisers are helping new arrivals pretend to be gay to get asylum.

There is no doubt that the number of arrivals via small boats is currently lower than in 2025. But the Labour government of Prime Minister Keir Starmer is still predicted to suffer severe losses in next week's elections as a result of the immigration issue being whipped up and magnified by the right and extreme right, who claim that the country is being invaded and its culture changed.

This government has gone the furthest of any so far in trying to tighten the rules and make Britain less hospitable

This government has gone the furthest of any so far in trying to tighten the rules and make Britain less hospitable by making settled status and residence harder to obtain, even to the detriment of starving the labor market of workers, which could harm the economy in the long run.

The government is already seeing the benefits of the cash it is spending in France, aiming to stop the tens of thousands of migrants it claims are willing to cross to the UK. This is while constantly trying to make it less comfortable for migrants once they arrive, housing them at former army barracks instead of hotels. The latter caused an outcry last year due to the costs of this policy. Starmer has also claimed that his government has deported or returned nearly 60,000 people with no right to stay in the UK since it came to power.

All this is very well, but it is unlikely to be enough. Evidence shows that sending money to France could yield respite but not a solution. Ramping up the police presence across the Channel might require a similar deal with Belgium and later the Netherlands, as smugglers adapt their tactics and move their operations further along the coast. Ramping up intelligence and crime-fighting capabilities is also welcome, as is surveillance and law enforcement. Reform of the employment market and work visa system is also important, as providing simple legal settlement routes is crucial to stem the flow.

But this is a colossal and grinding task that cannot alone remove the UK's appeal, which is often built on cultural and linguistic affinity, reputation or family precedent, but also due to people smugglers treating migration as a commodity that can be bought and sold.

Mohamed Chebaro is a British–Lebanese journalist with more than 25 years of experience covering war, terrorism, defense, current affairs and diplomacy.

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Redefining energy security, a 10-point guide

RICHARD HAASS AND CAROLYN KISSANE



It is too soon to know when or how the war with Iran will end or what its geopolitical or economic consequences will be. But one thing is already certain: What is meant by energy security must be rethought.

Roughly 20 percent of the world's traded oil and gas passes through the Strait of Hormuz. The recent crisis demonstrated how quickly that flow can be disrupted, placing immediate pressure on energy-importing countries and on the global economy.

The current crisis also highlights that oil and gas facilities cannot be assumed to be secure. On the contrary, they are highly vulnerable to war and terrorism.

Energy security is no longer just about supply. It is about whether the system itself can function under stress

Energy security is often defined as ensuring reliable and affordable access to supplies. That definition is no longer sufficient. What recent events have exposed is that energy security must now encompass the maintenance and resilience of the systems that produce, refine, transport and deliver energy.

In a world of contested transit routes, intricate infrastructure and sophisticated forms of disruption, energy security is no longer just about supply. It is about whether the system itself can function under stress.

What this moment demands is a redefinition of energy security, one that takes the form of a comprehensive framework, built around 10 priorities.

First, diversify supply across regions. This calls for expanding access to supply from the Americas, Africa and other emerging producers.

Second, diversify routes as well as sources. Energy that cannot move is functionally unavailable. This will require expanded investment in alternative corridors, including pipelines that bypass maritime chokepoints.

Third, harden critical energy infrastructure. Refineries, pipelines, liquefied natural gas terminals and electricity grids must be designed and reinforced to withstand disruption.

Fourth, build active energy defense systems. Modern conflict has made energy infrastructure a primary target. Protecting it requires real-time defense — layered air and missile systems, counterdrone capabilities and advanced cyberdefense to detect, deter and respond to attacks.

Fifth, design for resilience, not just efficiency. Systems optimized for cost and speed are inherently fragile. Energy systems require spare capacity, redundancy across critical components and the ability to absorb and recover from disruption.

Sixth, expand and safeguard strategic reserves. Storage should not be viewed primarily as a tool to manage prices but as insurance against disruption.

Seventh, ensure a diversified energy mix. Renewables (including solar, wind, hydro, tidal and geothermal), nuclear power and hydrocarbons each play a role in reducing exposure to shocks. In periods of acute disruption, countries may also need to turn to readily available fuels, including coal, to maintain power generation, industrial output and economic stability. While this will complicate climate objectives, excluding such options altogether is inconsistent with the realities of energy security.

Countries most exposed to disruption face rising input costs, pressure across industries and slower growth

Eighth, depoliticize energy strategy. Energy systems must be guided by the objectives of reliability, affordability and security, not by short-term politics. Frequent shifts in policy direction — seen in the US, Europe, Japan and South Korea, among others — undermine investment, delay infrastructure development and can introduce a de facto political risk premium into energy systems.

Ninth, wherever possible, manage demand as a form of risk reduction. Efficiency lowers exposure and strengthens resilience.

Lastly, recognize that no country is insulated. In the US, energy abundance is often equated with energy security. But oil is priced globally and disruptions abroad translate directly into higher costs at home.

The economic consequences of failing to adapt are significant. Countries most exposed to disruption face rising input costs, pressure across industries and slower growth. Energy insecurity is economic insecurity and maximizing both has become a defining feature of military strategy.

There is a clear parallel with global supply chains. In the aftermath of COVID-19, firms shifted from a "just in time" model to a "just in case" approach that sought to strengthen resilience. Energy systems must now undergo a similar transition. It is well worth paying an added premium; delay will only drive the cost of energy insecurity higher.

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EDITORIALS

How the Chicago police can become more effective and officers better supported

We ask a lot of Chicago police.

To walk into situations where people with guns want to hurt us — and to stop them.

To find our cars after they've been stolen.

To protect our children.

To see their colleagues get shot and killed in the line of duty. To go to work the next day and carry on like normal.

We get angry when they fail or make a mistake.

We want them to be perfect because we want to be safe, and because law enforcement is a critical part of the justice system.

So what does it take to get the job right?

We expend a lot of energy thinking and talking about external mechanisms of accountability for the police. But one of the most important forms of accountability, it turns out, comes from within.

To comply with the federal consent decree, the city of Chicago is required to complete an analysis of whether officers are deployed efficiently and effectively in neighborhoods across Chicago. The result is a 770-page workforce allocation study released in March, offering a detailed look at how the Chicago Police Department is using its personnel.

In recent weeks, we've discussed the report and the broader policing landscape with experts from the University of Chicago Crime Lab, the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago and CPD Superintendent Larry Snelling.

The takeaway is straightforward: Chicago's police force may be large in terms of raw numbers, but too often it isn't deployed as effectively as it could be. The city could improve public safety without dramatically increasing the size of the force, simply by using the one it has more strategically.

Start with supervision.

Many officers don't consistently have the same supervisor. In some cases, they may not even report to the same sergeant from one shift to the next.



Police recruits salute during the singing of the national anthem at the Chicago Police Department graduation ceremony at Navy Pier on July 30, 2024. **STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Why? Because the department's scheduling and deployment system is so complex that, as the report puts it, it "renders unity of command ... infeasible." Even when officers do have the same supervisor, that supervisor may be responsible for far too many people.

Robert Boik, who for a time oversaw CPD's efforts to comply with the consent decree and now serves as the Civic Committee's senior vice president of public safety, told us the profession's recommended officer-to-sergeant ratio is 10:1. In CPD, it can be 20:1 or more. That's not supervision, it's crowd control.

The result? Stretching sergeants too thin to manage men and women doing difficult, dangerous jobs or to catch troubling patterns before they become bigger problems.

"The quality of supervision is No. 1," Snelling told us, acknowledging that being a good sergeant isn't completely dependent upon how many officers you're supervising. "But," he added, "the number of people you're supervising could affect the quality of the supervisor."

These might sound like internal management issues, but it's not that simple.

It's the difference between a sergeant who knows his officers well enough to spot when something is off — a pattern of complaints, a tendency to escalate, judgment calls that keep going the wrong way — and one who is managing a rotating cast of faces while trying to oversee a dozen people at once. It's the difference between a team and a shift.

Chicagoans have seen the fallout from insufficient supervision. Complaints pile up without early intervention. Use-of-force incidents escalate instead of de-escalate. Cases drag on without resolution. Officers sometimes cycle through neighborhoods without building the familiarity that helps prevent crime in the first place. This isn't just a management problem, it's a public safety problem.

But the report doesn't stop at diagnosis; it points to solutions.

For one, better deployment would allow for more proactive policing. Policing shouldn't just be reactive.

The report highlights another problem: too little time on the beat.

It finds officers should spend about 40% of their time proactively patrolling neighborhoods, not just responding to calls.

But in some districts, that isn't happening. Officers are tied up going from one call to the next, leaving little time to build relationships, deter crime or spot trouble before it escalates.

That helps explain a reality many Chicagoans already recognize: As former New York City Police Chief Kenneth Corey, now with the University of Chicago Crime Lab, told us, the only time a squad car comes down a block is often in response to a call.

As the issues are mainly personnel-related, the fixes are to move people around — and, in some cases, make additional hires. In total, the study calls for hundreds of additional personnel, including patrol officers, sergeants and detectives, much of it achieved by filling vacancies and reallocating existing staff, another component of the workforce study we'll cover in the future.

All of these ideas require investment from a cash-strapped city.

"There's a cost to police reform," Boik told us. No one to whom we spoke gave us a cost estimate, and neither does the study. But we can see how such an investment would provide a significant benefit to a city still struggling to control crime.

That's because there's an underappreciated cost to not fixing problems within the police force, one of which is legal settlements tied to police misconduct, Boik added. Already this year, the city has paid roughly $175 million in such settlements — more than double the $82.5 million budgeted — and last month borrowed $267 million at interest rates around 6% for settlements.

How — and whether — much of the recommended changes are implemented depends on the city's fiscal reality, and "things like collective bargaining affect decisions," as Snelling noted.

It has been a tough week for CPD, which is mourning the shooting death of 38-year-old Officer John Bartholomew in the line of duty.

Chicago's challenge isn't just how many officers it has. It's whether the system allows them to do their jobs well, with real supervision, time on the beat and a structure that catches problems before they spiral.

Right now, it doesn't — at least not enough of the time. This report provides some useful ideas on how to fix it.

King Charles gets a W as Magna Carta has Congressional moment

Most Americans think of the Bill of Rights as a bespoke 1789 creation for a nation that was, in the signature "Hamilton" lyric of Lin-Manuel Miranda, "young, scrappy and hungry."

Not so fast, said the great-great-great-great-great grandson of King George III before the U.S. Congress on Tuesday.

King Charles III knew his audience. "The Founding Fathers were bold and imaginative rebels with a cause," he began, softening it up. "By balancing contending forces and drawing strength in diversity, they united 13 disparate colonies to forge a nation on the revolutionary idea of 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.'"

Then he got to what he really wanted to say: "They carried with them, and carried forward, the great inheritance of the British Enlightenment — as well as the ideals which had an even deeper history in English common law and Magna Carta."

Charles was, of course, historically correct, as he was when he went on to note that the Magna Carta is cited in at least 160 Supreme Court cases since 1789 and when he pointed out that England's 1689 Declaration of Rights, the document that established the constitutional monarchy and thus prevented its eventual obliteration (for now), was, shall we say, heavily sourced in the Bill of Rights in 1791. Charles had a sly addition to that assertion, noting that the one was used by the other, "often verbatim."

Was he daring to call James Madison a plagiarist? Charles came close, with a nod and a wink, but the septuagenarian's real point was to recast for a new generation the United Kingdom as the motherlode of American democracy rather than a system to be vanquished or to be seen as a figure of fun, a role King George plays in "Hamilton."

At the same time, Charles was pushing a shared history of understanding the need for checks on the executive branch, a good message for the Republicans in Congress to hear, given the propensity of the president they support to rail against precisely that.

This might all sound trivial. But, in his quirky way, Charles was trying to leverage his reputation as an intellectual (by royal standards, anyway) to stand for a kind of traditionally centrist multi-nationalism in a world where much of the America First right wants to throw away such global thinking, and the left even has styled its anti-Trump protests as "No Kings" marches.

Indeed, a coalition of activists were using his invitation to speak to Congress to launch a campaign for a federal minimum wage of at least $25. "Congress should be focused on the needs of working people struggling to get by," the activists wrote, explaining their intentional timing, "not elevating one of the wealthiest families in the world."

Charles, of course, sees his wealth as incidental to his main role, which is to wield soft political power. He's been doing that for decades and has learned how to leverage his eloquence and wit: "The alliance that our two nations have built over the centuries, and for which we are profoundly grateful to the American people, is truly unique," he said. "And that alliance is part of what Henry Kissinger described as Kennedy's 'soaring vision' of an Atlantic partnership based on twin pillars: Europe and America. That partnership, I believe Mr. Speaker, is more important today than it has ever been."

Hear, hear. But some on both sides of the aisle needed reminding.

ON THIS DAY 61 YEARS AGO
PAY INCREASE FOR LEGISLATORS

Both the Senate and House at Springfield have passed a bill raising the pay of members 50 per cent, or from $6,000 to $9,000 a year. In the House the bill was amended to give bigger pay raises to leaders of both chambers, and this amendment awaits concurrence by the Senate.

As amended, the bill would give the speaker of the House a salary of $13,000 a year. The majority and minority leaders of both chambers would get $11,500, and the party whips $10,500.

Three successive sessions of the legislature have now voted for pay increases. Gov. Kerner vetoed the raises in 1961 and 1963. ... The voters rejected the amendment last November. ... Certainly the rejection of the amendment cannot be read as an endorsement of a pay increase.

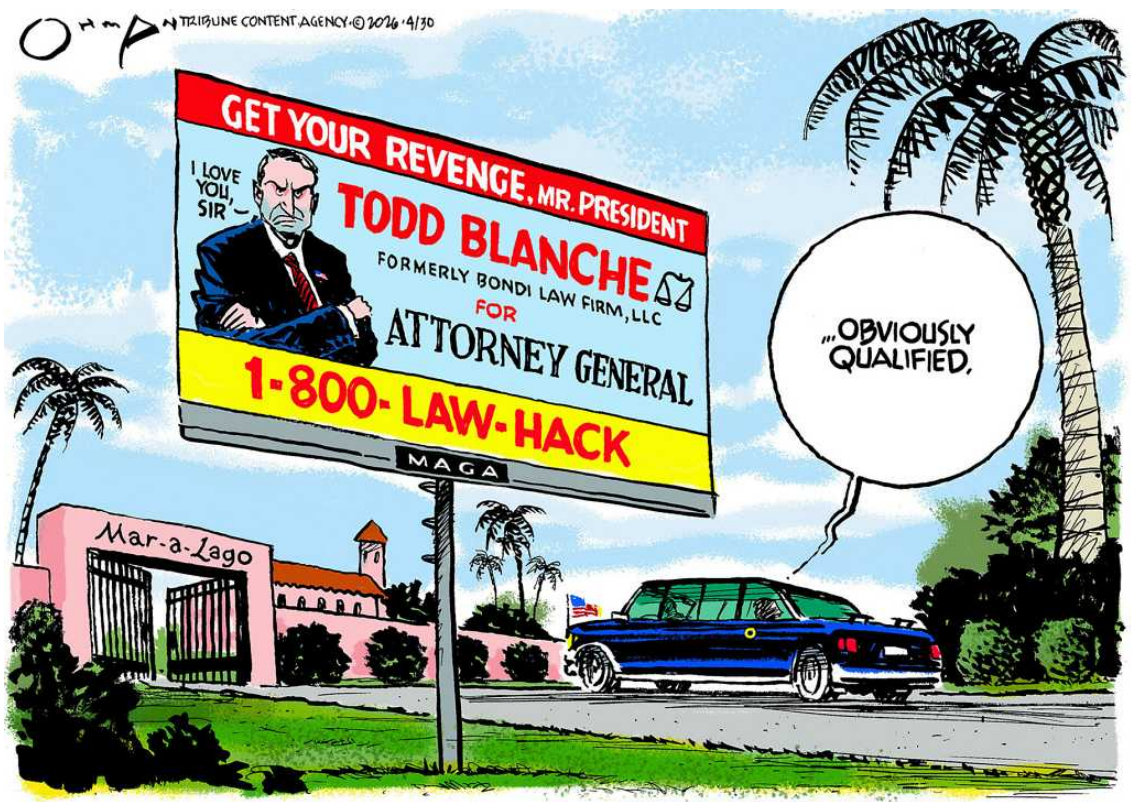
The General Assembly is in regular session for only six months in each biennium. Under the proposed pay increase the members would get $18,000 for six months' work. ...

For a number of members who work literally day and night thruout the session ... this salary would be small compensation. Some members would be underpaid at $40,000 or $50,000. Unfortunately, they are not numerous. A larger number of members are worth less than nothing, and a good many are overpaid at the present $6,000 salary level.

At the present session the House ... might just as well have one member ... because all important decisions are made by Mayor Daley. It is wonderful to behold the shifts and turns in the voting of the House Democratic majority as the levers are pulled in the Chicago City hall. The Democratic members are legislators in name only. The Republicans are too few to show whether they might be useful legislators. Under present conditions, the proposed raise is undeserved by a majority of the members. Gov. Kerner would be justified in vetoing it.

Tribune editorial board, April 30, 1965

EDITORIAL CARTOON



JACK OHMAN/TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY

OPINION



Bicyclists navigate their routes at the intersection of Grand Avenue, Halsted Street and Milwaukee Avenue in Chicago on Tuesday. **ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

What the traffic mess near the site of Chicago's future casino says about the city's process

By Andrew Chrismer
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

At 8:15 on a Tuesday morning this spring, the intersection of Grand Avenue, Halsted Street and Milwaukee Avenue is an angry beehive. Four CTA bus routes — No. 8, No. 56, No. 65 and No. 66 — funnel through a corridor the Chicago Department of Transportation has reduced to one lane in each direction through May. Drivers detoured from the closed Chicago Avenue bridge pile behind them. Ride-share drivers angle for drop-offs. Scooter riders dangerously thread the gaps. Cyclists choose between a narrow shoulder and a sidewalk where a parent pushing a stroller hesitates at a crosswalk whose signal timing has not caught up to any of it. A ride that used to take 10 minutes can take an hour. People who cannot afford to be chronically late for work are chronically late for work.

This is not a story about Bally's and its casino project. Progress on old infrastructure is necessary, and the Chicago Avenue bridge and the Halsted viaduct were overdue. A private developer pursuing a redevelopment opportunity is doing what private developers are supposed to do. The question really is why, in a world-class city where hundreds of thousands of people depend on public transit and safe foot and bike routes to get from home to work on time, our leaders did not see this pending challenge coming.

They had four years. The City Council voted 41-7 to approve Bally's River West casino in May 2022. Bally's delivered a traffic impact study that December. By last fall, five projects — the closing of the Chicago Avenue bridge; the Halsted viaduct; and the Lake, State and Cortland Street bridges — were underway at the same time. Ald. Brendan Reilly, 42nd, called the result a "cluster—-" on the record. Ald. Bill Conway, 34th, said "the lack of planning is unacceptable." Ald. Walter Redmond Burnett, 27th, whose ward houses Bally's, admitted the bridge projects "came out of nowhere."

How does that happen in a city with as much data, expertise and institutional capacity as Chicago?

The City Council vote in May 2022 approved a casino. It did not approve a coordinated infrastructure plan across the Chicago departments of Transportation, Buildings and Water Management and the CTA — because nothing in Chicago's process required one.

I have spent a decade leading human-centered redesigns and alignments of public services, and I have a hypothesis. City departments did not center citizens in these decisions. What got centered were the perfunctory tasks government defaults to when everyone is stretched thin — checking the legal and regulatory boxes for approval, designing detour protocols, posting the orange signs in the right places and marking the lane closures clearly. Every agency delivered on its procedural obligations. The Department of Buildings issued the permits. CDOT published the closure notices. The CTA posted the rerouted schedules. Bally's delivered the traffic impact study. The signs went up.

And the 8:15 rider on the No. 65 is still an hour late.

Every agency did its job. No agency did the job of a citizen.

Imagine if city decision-makers had walked the Grand Avenue bridge at 8:15 on a Tuesday morning in October 2024, stood at Grand and Halsted and Milwaukee, and watched the No. 65 inch forward. Watched the cyclist's narrow choice. Watched the parent with a stroller. And said: Maybe all of this at once is not a good idea. Let's go back to the planning table with CDOT, the CTA, the departments of Buildings and Water Management, the Gaming Board and the casino, together, and center our citizens instead of our regulations.

That walk is not sentimental; it is diagnostic. It is the foundational move of human-centered design — a discipline, not an instinct. Observe actual use. Include the affected people. Iterate against lived reality.

Institutions without this kind of rigorous, human-level methodology do not produce the necessary insight, no matter how many community meetings they hold. Nothing in Chicago's current approval process required anyone to take that walk.

None of this is beyond reach, even now. Public-sector procurement is notoriously siloed and chronically underresourced, and that is not going to change overnight. But the tools to see the whole are more available than they were in 2022. Real-time CTA data, CDOT sensor data, Google Maps traffic data, ride-share drop-off patterns and aggregated 311 complaints can be fused into a living model of what actually happens along the Grand corridor at 8:15 a.m. Every project affecting that corridor can be named on a single public dashboard with an owner, a schedule and a published status.

Commissioners and aldermen can walk the corridor together, monthly, with a standing question: What did we see that the data doesn't show, and what changes as a result?

A world-class city is not the city that puts up the best orange signs. It is the city where someone's job is to stand on the bridge at 8:15 a.m., watch the bus not come and have the authority to say: We got this wrong; let's go back to the table. Chicago approved a casino. Chicago approved the infrastructure the casino requires. Chicago approved the detours. Chicago approved the bus reroutes. Chicago did not approve a process that requires anyone to walk the bridge.

That is the human-level decision paradigm leaders missed, and it is a paradigm we must change.

Andrew Chrismer is founder of Aligned Public Consulting and has spent a decade leading human-centered redesigns of public services, including a $190 million health and human services system serving Franklin County, Ohio.

Pritzker can help Illinois students compete for college admissions

By Micky Horstman
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE



People walk near the main quad on the University of Illinois campus in Urbana on Sept. 15, 2025. **EILEEN T. MESLAR/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

As college decision day approaches May 1, thousands of Illinois students are deciding where they'll go. For many, one school stands out: the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

U. of I. has become one of the highest-rated, most competitive public universities in the country. The average ACT score for incoming students reached 32 in 2025, up from 29 when I applied in 2018. Nearly 30,000 in-state students applied to U. of I. last year, and just over 10,000 were admitted in 2025, according to Freedom of Information Act records from the school. Some of its most prestigious programs are even more selective — computer science admits just 7.4% of applicants, rivaling Ivy League schools.

With a more competitive admissions landscape than ever, students need every possible advantage to stand out, such as tutors, online prep programs and multiple chances to take standardized tests. As standards rise, even small increases in test scores can make the difference between acceptance and rejection.

A federal program could help them compete — if Illinois opts in.

The federal tax credit scholarship program would allow the vast majority of Illinois families, anyone earning up to 300% of the area median income, to receive funds to help eligible K-12 public, private or homeschool students pay for tutoring, test preparation, exam fees and more. The program is funded by donors who give to nonprofit scholarship-granting organizations and receive a dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit of up to $1,700.

Just applying to college has become increasingly expensive. Students hoping to strengthen their competitiveness with Advanced Placement exams and additional ACT attempts can quickly rack up hundreds of dollars in fees. Add application costs, and families can easily spend $600 or more on the process. With tutoring, costs can climb even higher.

Many families earn too much for financial assistance and still struggle to cover these costs.

For Illinoisans navigating this process, even modest help matters. The federal program could cover public school students, unlocking a new way to fund these costs. Support from scholarship-granting organizations could cover the extra steps students now need to distinguish themselves in the competitive college admissions environment.

My sister learned the hard way that even high-achieving students struggle to stand out. I graduated from U. of I., but my sister was rejected with a higher test score and stronger extracurriculars than mine.

My family didn't have resources for extra test prep or tutoring. I was lucky to be admitted then, and I might not have been so today.

Illinois loses a lot of bright students, including my sister, to out-of-state universities every year. Of those who don't get into their top in-state choice — often U. of I. — many leave for another Big Ten experience rather than enroll in regional schools, where enrollment is declining and in-state tuition is one of the highest in the country. Illinois' public university enrollment has fallen by more than 15,000 students since its peak in 2010.

The reality is this: Illinois can't quickly expand seats at its most competitive universities. But it can help students compete for the limited spots that exist today.

The federal tax credit scholarship program offers a way to do exactly that — giving students help to strengthen their applications now, while universities and policymakers work toward longer-term solutions.

Illinois donors will receive the tax credit whether or not the state participates in the program. The difference is that their money would support students and applicants in other states instead of those here at home. Illinois' education funding formula ensures state funding for public schools never declines, regardless of enrollment. Public education funding isn't going anywhere; opting into the program will only make our public school system better.

It's up to Gov. JB Pritzker to decide whether Illinois should opt in.

For many students, covering the cost of an extra test, exam or tutoring session could make the difference between getting in — or moving out.

Illinois students are capable. What they need is a fair chance to compete.

Opting into the federal tax credit scholarship program would be a practical step toward giving them one.

Micky Horstman is the communications manager for the Illinois Policy Institute, a social mobility fellow for Young Voices and a proud U. of I. graduate.

OPINION

Parental controls are not the answer to the AI slop spamming our kids

By Dana Suskind
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE



Icons for the YouTube Kids and YouTube apps are displayed on a smartphone. **JENNY KANE/AP**

Recent reporting has drawn attention to an alarming new trend: video content aimed at young kids that is generated by artificial intelligence and is popping up on YouTube at a shocking rate. These videos feature garbled text, made-up words, disfigured people and animals, nonsensical songs and, sometimes, downright scary imagery. This is AI slop for kids, and it's dangerous. And technology companies' proposed solution isn't good enough.

According to a New York Times report, up to 40% of videos recommended to children on YouTube now appear to be AI-generated. The video titles, descriptions and opening sequences often give the illusion that the content is educational and beneficial for toddlers and preschoolers. It's anything but.

The content in these videos isn't just mindless — in many cases, it's actively harmful. Experts and reporters at the investigative news magazine Mother Jones have found videos showing toddlers swallowing whole grapes (a choking hazard), infants eating honey (which carries a risk of botulism), and children riding unrestrained in the front seat of a moving car. One video all about vowels shows consonants on screen, while another about the 50 states teaches children about "Ribio Island," "Conmecticut" and "Louggisslia."

Our children are being fed toddler misinformation. And it's being produced at an industrial scale. The risk here is not "brain rot," the atrophy of cognitive skills that is afflicting adults and adolescents who outsource an increasing amount of their mental exercise to AI. In young children, whose brains are still being built, the effect is much worse. I call it "brain stunt." Because every experience a child has during their early years helps create new neural connections, wiring the brain for all future learning and connecting, encounters with AI slop may literally wire the brain incorrectly.

This is an enormous problem that demands a bold, urgent solution.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, that is not what YouTube is offering. After a recent investigation uncovered several of the videos I describe above, YouTube terminated six channels for violating its terms of service. This amounts to a Whac-a-Mole response to a firehose problem.

In response to a letter sent to the CEOs of YouTube and its parent company Google, expressing concern about AI slop and signed by more than 200 organizations and individual experts (including me), a YouTube spokesperson issued a statement explaining that the platform requires content creators to disclose if AI was used in creating content that appears realistic and it provides parents the option to block channels.

The implicit message: Parents should manage this themselves. Unfortunately, evidence does not support parental controls as a sufficient or effective means of keeping kids safe online. To begin with, less than half of parents report using these tools at all. A meta analysis of dozens of studies found that the effects of parental-control use were mixed, with evidence of parental controls having beneficial, null and even adverse effects on children and families.

Most troubling to me is the fact that this kind of "opt-in" safety model doesn't protect children equally. It protects children whose parents have the time, digital literacy and awareness to navigate platform settings — which is not most parents. All too often, these differences fall along socioeconomic lines, meaning the children who already face the steepest disadvantages are least protected.

Research has found that parents with lower incomes tend to perceive fewer digital risks and, as a result, underuse active mediation such as parental controls — relying instead on surveillance and nonintrusive inspection. Furthermore, economically advantaged families have been found to address digital media concerns by having open conversations about values and media use, while economically disadvantaged families focus more on potential hazards in their physical surroundings. As a result, the risks of the digital environment fall disproportionately on children who can least afford them.

We would never accept a food safety system that required parents to individually test every product for toxins before feeding it to their child. Instead, we regulate the food supply. We would never accept a policy that ensured car safety for wealthy children but not their low-income peers. Instead, we require car seats and seatbelts.

We don't outsource public health to individual families. And make no mistake: The potential developmental harms of AI slop are a public health concern.

Rather than leaving it up to parents to navigate this risk (or not) on their own, we need universal, platform-level solutions. Those include removal of all AI-generated content from YouTube Kids and from all algorithms feeding recommendations to kids, and mandatory labeling of all AI content, with rigorous enforcement protocols — not as opt-in features but as the default.

Rather than leaving it up to technology companies to enact these policies (or not), Congress should demand them. There is a short window of time to act before the harm is hardwired into a generation of children. We don't ask parents to build their own car seats, and we shouldn't ask them to build their own content filters either.

Every child's brain deserves protection — not just the ones whose parents know their way around an app's settings.

Dr. Dana Suskind is a pediatric cochlear implant surgeon at the University of Chicago, where she runs The TMW Center for Early Learning + Public Health, a research institute that works to support parents and caregivers in fostering healthy brain development.

Voice of the People

Alternative to millionaires' tax

Taxes on millionaires are perhaps blunt instruments to even out our collective responsibility to maintain government and educational functions, but other options to achieve this goal don't seem to get voters' approval. Six years ago, Gov. JB Pritzker proposed a graduated income tax for Illinois. The Tribune Editorial Board vigorously opposed it, going to its fallback position that the state must first cut spending. And where would these cuts be? Well, pensions, of course. Indeed, pension costs are swallowing enormous portions of state revenue as they are for Chicago and its public schools. But pension protection is written in the state constitution, something not likely to change.



Gov. JB Pritzker answers reporters' questions following an address to the Chicago Consular Corps General Assembly at the Newberry Library on March 30. **ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Increased revenue, however, offers a path to pay down those costs. A progressive tax system that allows no exemptions would increase revenue without, like the current system, taxing everyone at the same rate. A taxpayer earning $35,000 a year is faced with a much greater burden than a billionaire taxed at the same rate. Pritzker has already shown paying down pension obligations is good government. Think what could be done with new revenue.

The editorial board loves to roll out as a cautionary tale Ken Griffin's departure for Florida. Griffin, of course, provided huge sums to defeat a progressive income tax before leaving. So, no longer will our museums and other institutions receive some of his millions. But the board should take note of wealthy Chicagoans who continue to support these institutions. Not all the very wealthy are Ken Griffins who flee for the forever goal of endless wealth.

No millionaires' tax? Then support a progressive income tax.
— *Roger Flaherty, Chicago*

Changing tax structure

I recently moved to Chicago from South Carolina that, for the moment, has a graduated income tax and relatively low property taxes. It's a different way of doing things, and the contrast has made me pay closer attention to how tax structure — not just tax rates — shapes everyday affordability.

I'll admit. I'm coming north willingly. Chicago is a world-class city, with its architecture, lakefront and neighborhoods offering something you don't find just anywhere. But like anyone making a move, I'm also looking at the practical side of things, and the numbers tell a clear story.

Illinois has some of the highest effective property tax rates in the country, around 1.8% of a home's value. In many Southern states, that number can be less than 0.5%. That difference doesn't just exist on paper; it shows up in escrow payments, monthly budgets and long-term decisions about whether to stay or go.

At a basic level, states fund themselves through three primary levers: income taxes, sales taxes and property taxes. When one of those levers is constrained, the others have to do more of the work. Illinois relies heavily on property taxes — particularly for education, where roughly 60% of funding comes from local sources — while maintaining a flat income tax rate of 4.95%. The result is a system in which the burden tilts heavily toward property owners.

I understand Illinois voters rejected a graduated income tax in 2020, and I don't dismiss that. People want confidence that new revenue will be handled responsibly before they agree to it. That kind of trust has to be earned.

And to be clear, I'm not suggesting the Southern model is perfect. In many ways, states like Illinois help subsidize parts of the South through federal tax flows. But that only underscores the point: There has to be a better way to strike a balance at the state level.

A carefully designed, moderate approach to income taxation, paired with clear guardrails, transparency and accountability, could help ease pressure on property taxes over time. From where I'm sitting, this isn't about punishing success or protecting one group over another. It's about using all three levers wisely.

If Illinois wants to remain not just a great place to visit but a sustainable place to build a life, it may be worth looking beyond the current debate and focusing on how the system works as a whole.
— *Cale Collier, Chicago*

We have money for the Bears?

Illinois has massive unfunded obligations (mostly fat state worker pensions), is losing population and businesses due to excessive taxation, and underfunds health care to care for those most in need, but now believes it can subsidize a new stadium for the billionaire owner of the Bears.

This is what one-party rule has brought to Illinois. Will voters ever awake?
— *David Howard, Rockford*

Taxation a tool that we can use

The Tribune Editorial Board ("New York Mayor Mamdani was wrong to target Griffin," April 26) implies that New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani's drawing of attention to Florida-based billionaire Ken Griffin's $238 million New York penthouse is an "attack" comparable to a would-be assassin charging a crowded hotel to shoot the president.

To be fair, the board also notes Griffin's "counterattack": threatening to axe his NYC construction project and lay off 6,000 construction workers over Mamdani's pied-à-terre tax plan. If Chicago is any indication, he could also wind down his philanthropic giving in the city.

What follows in the editorial is a timeworn argument.

In prerevolutionary France, the argument was that we need a nobility to control the wealth; otherwise, no one will create any, and the peasants will end up worse off. Then, as now, those financially required to work for a living actually create the wealth, and the nobility hoard and ultimately weaponize it.

But now, we have tools infinitely superior to the revolt and violence of the late 1700s. We have taxation: a democratic, legal and time-honored mechanism to recapture wealth being weaponized by a tyrannical nobility.

Taxation is not violence. However, there is some level of violence in several thousand people being put out of work because a man is protesting paying his property tax (which would amount to less than 1% of what Griffin earned last year). You don't have to break out your Friedrich Engels and endorse the concept of "social murder" to understand there is a human cost to these decisions.

As the board points out, violence feeds violence. So, it's important to separate taxation and violence. Violence is an unacceptable response to being made to pay a tax (essentially, being made to obey a law you disagree with).

Ultimately, the editorial board is right: Billionaires have the power to harm our communities, and they often shape public policy by threatening the public. The good news is: We have the tool to reduce their power, return it to the people and stop living under threat.
— *Chris Curme, Chicago*

CTU's planned actions on May 1

On May 1, I will gladly honor the Roman celebration of the goddess Flora over protests in Chicago that mock the broad success of the American labor movement. Labor protests used to involve personal risk in the pursuit of human rights. Workers put their bodies, livelihoods and lives on the line to oppose employers and governments that exploited physical laborers through inhumane working conditions. It was not uncommon for federal troops to squash uprisings at events, such as at the Pullman strike, the West Virginia mine wars and the steel strike of 1919. In true American tradition, workers died fighting for rights that many of us take for granted today.

In Illinois, the script has flipped. Protests are now government events. The Chicago Teachers Union, likely the most protected class of workers in the city, is leading the charge. This is a group where 40% of its members in 2024 were chronically absent, defined by 10 or more missed days in a year. Regrettably, their students are chronically uneducated.

I do not think it's a stretch to say that our politicians have been captured by the CTU, especially, but not limited to, our mayor.

In Chicago, we have publicly funded teachers who want to protest government injustice while protected by the publicly funded police.

Sadly, private-sector working residents are faced with both increasing taxes and increasing public debt, much of which goes to our CTU protesters.

With respect to the goddess Flora, I think I will mostly recall the saying: "Nero fiddled while Rome burned."
— *Thad Smith, Chicago*

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OPINION

Fake Perils Make Real Money



UNRULY REPUBLIC
By Barton Swaim

You didn't need a legal case to know that the Southern Poverty Law Center, to stay alive, badly needs the perils it claims to deplore. The federal indictment, which charges the nonprofit with wire fraud, false statements and conspiracy to conceal money laundering, alleges that the Montgomery, Ala.-based group paid hefty sums to "informants" supposedly operating inside extremist groups. Millions of dollars allegedly went to these "field sources"—Klan members, neo-Nazis—even as the SPLC labeled the same organizations dangerous extremists on its website.

One of the indictment's claims, if borne out, so perfectly captures the cynicism of radical politics in the 2020s that you'd call it far-fetched if you read it in a novel by Christopher Buckley. The indictment alleges that one source "was a member of the online leadership chat group that planned the 2017 'Unite the Right' event in Charlottesville, Virginia and attended the event at the direction of the SPLC." This person, say prosecutors, "made racist postings under the supervision of the SPLC and helped coordinate transportation to the event for several attendees." Between 2015 and 2023, the nonprofit paid this informant $270,000.

The SPLC's lack of compunction amazes, but its intrigues flow from the nature of the activist nonprofit enterprise. Like almost all advocacy organizations, the SPLC faces the temptation to exaggerate the urgency of its mission and the extent of its accomplishments. Donors respond to big claims and menacing specters. Hence the SPLC's desperate effort to defame people and organizations on the political right—Charles Murray, Prager University—as promoters of "hate" and "extremism." The war for America's soul may go well or poorly, but the money's got to keep flowing.

Which is why that Unite the Right rally was the best thing ever to happen to the SPLC. A gathering of, at most, 500 young nincompoops high on racist humbug metamorphosed, in the minds of anxious Americans—and with the media's help—into a mass movement of brownshirts ready to seize the country's institutions and overthrow its government. Donations to the nonprofit ballooned in the year after the rally.

The SPLC didn't create the Charlottesville rally, though its machinations probably helped at the margins. The import of the episode, though, lies in the fact that the nonprofit's leaders plainly felt it had an interest in making the threat of white racial bigotry appear to hold more sway over American life than it does. "Interest" in the crassest, monetary sense.

The modern liberal outlook, to borrow the political philosopher Kenneth Minogue's metaphor, must have dragons to slay. When the dragons diminish in size or die out altogether, the civic-minded liberal naturally wants to invent bigger ones, if only to have things to worry about. As with every such mental pathology, this one offers financial rewards to determined exploiters.

The late Jesse Jackson based a lucrative career on the fiction that America in the 1980s and '90s still excluded black Americans from opportunity in the way the South had under Jim Crow. The static history of racist America he helped to propagate allowed Jackson, in the 2000s and 2010s, to threaten large companies with boycotts on the grounds that they hadn't done enough to mitigate racism. His attacks would conveniently cease when the companies agreed to donate to Jackson's political operation.

The SPLC, climate groups and other outfits profit from imagined menaces.

Al Sharpton followed the same path. Only Mr. Sharpton, unapologetic perpetrator of the 1987 Tawana Brawley hoax, spun the perception of perennial racism into a decadeslong media career. Ibram X. Kendi, Robin DiAngelo and other "antiracist" theorizers attained celebrity status by persuading millions of well-meaning people to fear and loathe nonexistent monsters.

The District of Columbia teems with nonprofits dedicated to the proposition that one thing or another menaces the citizenry. Human Rights Campaign, to take one example, regularly informs its followers and donors that gay, "trans" and "gender-expansive" Americans suffer from routine violence and bigotry at the hands of their countrymen. In 2025, HRC brought in $46 million in contributions.

Climate catastrophism has grown into a global grift, with poor countries demanding billions in "reparations" from nations with functioning markets, but consider climate alarmism's role in American politics. For decades, the Environmental Protection Agency and related government bodies have doled out grants to climate-related nonprofits that return the favor by churning out apocalyptic reports about an always-imminent climate crisis. The 2022 Inflation Reduction Act supersized that effort. In 2023, the Biden administration came up with what it called the American Climate Corps, to "mobilize the next generation of clean energy, conservation and resilience workers": that is, to send millions of public dollars sluicing through climate nonprofits around the country.

To its credit, the Trump administration canceled the program, but similar funding streams proliferate across federal and state agencies. A cynical observer might feel inclined to use the word "racket": Environmental agencies fund activist groups, which make apocalyptic claims more credible, thus enabling the agencies to demand more funding and regulatory authority from government budgetwriters. Now *that's* what I call sustainability.

To Save the Midterms, Go on the Offensive

By Karl Rove

As Republicans face a tough election, they must remember the words of Zhang Yu, a commentator on the ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu's "The Art of War": "Attack is the secret of defense."

If Republicans fight the midterm on the defensive, they'll suffer potentially sweeping defeats. The GOP must stay on offense to save as many seats as possible. That won't be easy.

Republicans can start by warning that if Democrats retake the House, they'll try passing an impeachment resolution against President Trump on day one. Each Republican should ask if his Democratic opponent supports this. Republicans should maintain that impeachment is a stunt. Two-thirds of the Senate won't vote to convict. Trying would be bad for the country and only further poison American politics.

Pressing Democratic candidates about impeachment leaves them with a bad choice. They can alienate their party's hard left by opposing the move. Or they can disappoint the growing number of Americans tired of bitter, nasty politics by supporting it. In either case, swing voters will see it as a distraction from what really matters.

Republicans must stay on offense on affordability, too. Inflation is 3.3% today. That's still too high. Candidates must explain (briefly) how they're working to bring it down, then ask their Democratic opponent why he didn't speak out when President Biden's policies drove even higher inflation. It reached 8% before a new GOP Congress in 2023 pumped the brakes on Democratic spending and other inflationary policies.

A mix of 'contrast' with the Democrats and new ideas can limit GOP losses.

Energy prices are a big problem for Republicans, and there are limitations in how effective they can be with gasoline at $4 a gallon. But Republicans have a hand to play. They should go after Democrats over their efforts—past and present—to constrain oil and gas production. The GOP's "drill, baby, drill" approach has increased production, putting downward pressure on prices. Do Americans want to revive Democratic policies that constrained the supply of fuel, making it more expensive?

Additionally, Republicans won't get re-elected by simply pointing out what they've accomplished. Running on "I've done a good job" rarely produces midterm magic. Republicans must contrast—a polite word for attack—whenever possible.

Last year's tax cut is an obvious target. Republicans shouldn't only talk about what is in the package. They should aggressively hit Democrats for opposing the bill and ask them whether they will repeal the tax cut. Democratic candidates could say yes or ignore the challenge, shifting the argument to favorable turf for the GOP. Or they could say no, in which case the party's left wing becomes unglued.

Republicans also can't dwell on the past. Successful campaigns are prospective more than retrospective. GOP candidates must have fresh ideas that will improve the lives of ordinary Americans.

These don't need to be administration initiatives. Don't wait for the White House. In fact, a little independence is important. The ideas don't need to be sanctioned by the House speaker or Senate majority leader, either. Anyone who waits for leadership to tell him what to campaign on is wasting time and risking defeat.

The best ideas will likely come from the work that lawmakers are doing in their committees. Others will come from groups inside the House and Senate caucuses, such as the House Republican Study Committee. Outside think tanks could generate even more ideas, providing allies to sing the policies' praises.

Voters need to grasp why these proposals are important. But it matters even more that voters feel the candidate truly believes the policies are necessary. People can quickly determine whether a politician really cares about an issue.

Republicans also can't forget to find someone on the left who opposes the idea and go after him. Perhaps Mayor Mamdani? Or a member of "The Squad"? It doesn't matter if the targets are far away from the Republican hopeful's district or state as long as they're visible.

Many midterm election variables can't be controlled, such as the president's approval rating, the economy's strength, and the opposing candidate's quality. What GOP hopefuls can influence is their own campaigns' tone and substance.

If Sun Tzu and his commentators are too ancient for Republicans, perhaps they'll heed George Washington. "Offensive operations," he wrote a Revolutionary War colleague in 1799, are "the surest, if not the only (in some cases) means of defence." Battles are most often won on the attack. So are political campaigns. Time to go on offense, Republicans, the right way—on substance.

Mr. Rove was senior adviser and deputy chief of staff for President George W. Bush and is author of "The Triumph of William McKinley" (Simon & Schuster, 2015).

A Rabbi Takes On Pope Leo

By Avi Shafran

Celebrating Mass in St. Peter's Square on Palm Sunday amid the Iran war, Pope Leo XIV declared that God "does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them." He also recalled the prophet Isaiah's words: "Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen: your hands are full of blood."

Yom HaZikaron, Israel's official day of remembrance for fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism, came a few weeks later, on April 20. Warren Goldstein, chief rabbi of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues of South Africa, used the occasion to deliver a stern reply to Pope Leo.

On Yom HaZikaron, he said, we note how "our soldiers who fell in battle" are "holy and pure." He declared that "the wars that Israel has fought since its inception are just wars," something that must be said in this "world of moral confusion."

But the pope, Rabbi Goldstein said, "had the audacity and the brazenness and the cruelty to say that all of those who wage war will be turned away by God."

"How dare he?" the rabbi asked, speaking softly but holding back none of his outrage. "His hands," he said of the pope, "are dripping with blood." Pope Leo "makes no distinction between good and evil," the rabbi said. "He makes no distinction between the barbarians of Hamas, the genocidal maniacs of Tehran, and the noble and brave soldiers of the state of Israel, who are defending civilization itself." He added, "only a religious leader who has lost his soul can say such a thing."

A rejoinder to the pontiff's simplistic condemnation of the war against Iran.

Rabbi Goldstein is no radical, but he gave a remarkable, even shocking, speech in a historical era in which popes have condemned antisemitism without reservation.

In 1993 Pope John Paul II formally recognized Israel, and in 2000 he placed a letter of apology for past Jewish suffering in a Western Wall crevice.

Popes Benedict XIV and Francis both visited the Holy Land, strengthening ties with Israeli leaders. A prominent Jewish leader lambasting a sitting pope is without recent precedent.

But Rabbi Goldstein isn't alone in worrying that Pope Leo may be turning the clock back. Perhaps Israel's response to the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack, its bombing of Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the current U.S.-Israeli war against Iran have changed the Vatican's views. But Israel has always been besieged and threatened and has always used its military might to counter mortal enemies.

The rabbi's final words were poignant. Jews "pray each day for the end of war," he noted. Isaiah foretold that a day will come when "one nation would not lift up sword against another" and that "death will vanish in life eternal," and on that day, "God will wipe away tears from all faces." But, the rabbi concluded, "that day has not yet arrived. And that is why we cry on Yom HaZikaron."

Pope Leo's sermon and Rabbi Goldstein's response may be simply a blip in the relations of Catholics and Jews that have improved so much over the past 60 years. But they may mark a more lasting and more dangerous turn toward enmity.

Mr. Shafran is a columnist for Ami Magazine.

BOOKSHELF | By Barbara Spindel

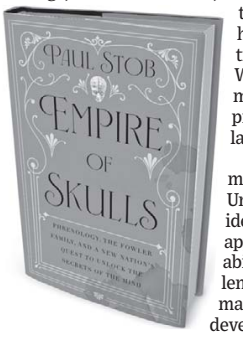
When Phrenology Raced Ahead

Empire of Skulls

By Paul Stob
Counterpoint, 336 pages. $30

In the mid-19th century, phrenology was reaching its peak popularity in the U.S. The idea that the shape of the human skull was linked to intelligence and personality traits had a significant following. In 1836, William Lloyd Garrison, the anti-slavery crusader, sat for a cranial exam with the brothers Lorenzo and Orson Fowler, but opted to conceal his identity from the pair of phrenologists. As Paul Stob tells the story in "Empire of Skulls," his history of phrenology's rise, Lorenzo ran his fingers along Garrison's head while Orson stood nearby. After Lorenzo claimed to discern evidence of moral strength, determination and leadership qualities, Orson is said to have remarked that the sitter "would make a roaring abolitionist."

The story is one of many related by Mr. Stob in which the Fowlers were tested by those seeking to determine whether the new science was legitimate or, in the words of one critic, the era's "prevalent and prevailing humbug." Today phrenology is dismissed as a racist pseudoscience, but in the antebellum age, the author writes, it was "neither foolish nor faddish" to accept that the shape of one's head revealed innate characteristics. Susan B. Anthony, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman were among those who professed their belief in the revelatory power of skulls.



Mr. Stob, a professor of communication studies at Vanderbilt University, points out that "the idea of correlating outward appearance with interior mental abilities had been around for millennia." Franz Joseph Gall, a German physician, is credited with developing the science of phrenology at the close of the 18th century; his assistant, Johann Spurzheim, helped popularize it in Europe and introduced it to the U.S. on an 1832 lecture tour.

The book's focus is the Fowler siblings—Orson (1809-87), Lorenzo (1811-96) and their sister, Charlotte (1814-1901)—who turned phrenology into a sensation and gave it a distinctly American flair. Both Orson and Lorenzo were headed for careers in the ministry, but Orson became captivated by phrenology while a student at Amherst College in Massachusetts. He and his classmate Henry Ward Beecher earned money with phrenological demonstrations in Amherst and its neighboring towns. Orson, sensing that he had discovered his life's work, recruited his brother to join him. (Beecher would become an influential preacher and abolitionist.)

The empire of the book's title encompasses the Fowlers' lectures, publishing company, periodicals (including "The American Phrenological Journal and Miscellany") and New York City headquarters, which was known as the Phrenological Cabinet. Boasting an impressive collection of human and animal skulls, the Cabinet was second only to Barnum's American Museum among tourist attractions in 1840s Manhattan.

Phrenologists divided the brain into 37 regions, each corresponding to a trait: combativeness, cautiousness, benevolence, individuality and so on. They maintained that frequently used regions of the brain received increased blood flow and that the skull's shape and thickness were affected as a result. Feeling for bumps and other cranial features, practitioners created a profile of the sitter's character.

The Fowlers took it a step further, originating what they called practical phrenology. They contended that through mental exercises, people could alter the shapes of their own brains, cultivating desirable qualities and suppressing undesirable ones. Mr. Stob describes their approach as "an invigorating, democratic message for a searching, democratic age." The siblings were tireless workers. Orson and Lorenzo wrote prolifically on phrenology; they traveled the country to deliver lectures and examine heads. Meanwhile, Charlotte and her husband, Samuel Wells, managed the firm's day-to-day business. They were all paid handsomely for their efforts, but Mr. Stob seems convinced that the family's faith in phrenology's powers was genuine.

The bumps and contours of the cranium were once believed to reflect the intellectual power and moral strength of the mind inside.

Not all of their contemporaries were so sure. Orson and Lorenzo, consummate showmen, were summoned to prisons, where they inspected the heads of inmates and guessed their crimes; at lunatic asylums they were challenged to identify the patients' disorders. Throughout Mr. Stob's narrative, their success astonishes onlookers and converts skeptics. Readers must consult his footnotes to find that many of these stories come from the Fowlers' own publications. Most of the accounts, such as the Garrison episode, strain credulity.

The author, poker-faced, plays along. While he presents a serious slice of American history, Mr. Stob is clearly having fun with his topic, as when he describes Lorenzo's fingers lingering "longer than needed" when he examines the cranium of the woman who would become his wife. The book's appendix provides six pages of instructions for performing a cranial exam but concludes by reminding would-be practitioners not to fret over their lack of experience because "phrenology isn't real anyhow."

Mr. Stob's approach makes for an entertaining narrative. But one senses that despite his acknowledgment that there's a line to be drawn from the 19th century's interest in phrenology to the next century's dangerous embrace of eugenics, the book doesn't give full expression to the dark side of phrenology's popularity.

The author places the Fowlers' uplifting take on phrenology in the context of the era's other reform movements—abolition, suffrage and temperance—which aimed for large-scale social transformation. The Fowlers supported them all. But while they opposed slavery, they nevertheless distributed a pamphlet stating that "the Caucasian race is superior in reasoning power and moral elevation to all the other races, and, accordingly, have higher and bolder foreheads."

Phrenology's popularity plummeted after the Civil War; Mr. Stob suggests that the conflict's extreme brutality undercut practical phrenology's grand aspirations for self-improvement. "Empire of Skulls" concludes with an anecdote that neatly captures the theory's waning influence. Mark Twain visited the Fowlers' London outpost in 1873 and decided to put phrenology to the test by submitting to an examination by Lorenzo, under an assumed name. As Twain later recalled, he was informed that there was a striking cavity in one particular region of his brain, indicating "a total absence of the sense of humor."

Ms. Spindel reviews books frequently for the Journal.

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

A Victory for Voting Rights

To hear the critics tell it, the Supreme Court on Wednesday gutted the 1965 Voting Rights Act and made it harder for racial minorities to vote. It did no such thing. A 6-3 majority in *Louisiana v. Callais* took a large step toward ending the partisan abuse of race to carve up Congressional districts in a way that violates the Constitution.

The Supreme Court restricts the misuse of race to gerrymander.

The VRA still protects voting rights, and its Section 2 can still enforce that law against attempts to restrict black voting with poll taxes and other obstacles. The Court struck down the distortion of the VRA to use race to draw Congressional districts in ways that amount to proportional representation. It's a much-needed ruling, even if the Court's reasoning was more complicated than it needed to be.

Section 2 guarantees that minorities have an equal opportunity "to participate in the political process and to elect representatives of their choice." Congress's aim was to prevent minorities from being disenfranchised. Yet courts have wrongly interpreted the law as requiring states to draw majority-minority districts to prevent "vote dilution."

The Court's *Gingles* precedent (1986) set out a four-part test to prove vote dilution, which partisans have been able to game. Plaintiffs must show that a minority group is "sufficiently large and [geographically] compact" and "politically cohesive." They must also demonstrate that the white majority votes "sufficiently as a bloc . . . to defeat the minority's preferred candidate," and that the political process based on the "totality of circumstances" is not "equally open" to minority voters.

Partisans have increasingly filed lawsuits under Section 2 to force states to redraw maps with more majority-minority districts. That's what happened in Louisiana. Liberal groups sued the state after Republicans redrew the state Congressional map following the 2020 Census because it included only one majority-minority district.

The plaintiffs claimed Section 2 required a second such district on the rationale that blacks make up 30% of Louisiana's voting-age population. A federal judge agreed, which prompted Republicans to draw a 250-mile majority-minority district that snakes from the state's northwest to Baton Rouge. White voters then challenged the new map as a violation of the Equal Protection Clause.

The Court majority says the new map is an illegal use of race. Justice Samuel Alito's majority opinion gives a detailed history of Section 2 and a tour of the Court's messy racial gerrymander jurisprudence. He stresses "the general rule that the Constitution almost never permits the Federal Government or a State to discriminate on the basis of race" except to remedy specific instances of past discrimination.

But as Justice Alito notes, much has changed since Jim Crow. The VRA stamped out discriminatory election practices. "Black voters now participate in elections at similar rates as the rest of the electorate, even turning out at higher rates than white voters in two of the five most recent Presidential elections nationwide and in Louisiana," he writes.

Justice Alito seeks to salvage *Gingles*'s four-part test with what he calls an "update" that raises the burden for proving Section 2 dilution by requiring a "strong inference that intentional discrimination occurred." The ruling bars states from considering race when drawing maps and requires plaintiffs bringing Section 2 to "disentangle race from the State's race-neutral considerations, including politics." It will now be difficult to win a Section 2 lawsuit on redistricting without clear evidence of discriminatory intent.

It would have been cleaner if the Court had simply overturned *Gingles* as its original redistricting sin. But that might not have made it past Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Brett Kavanaugh, who three years ago upheld a lower-court order requiring an additional majority-minority district in *Allen v. Milligan*. It takes at least five votes to win, and Justice Alito's "update" on *Gingles* tiptoes around those two precedents to get those votes.

That legal dance created an opening for Justice Elena Kagan to attack the Court's new test in a scorching dissent, and she scores some rhetorical and legal points. But she's overwrought in saying Section 2 is now eviscerated. That's true only insofar as a challenge is really racial cover for partisan gerrymandering.

The majority decision leaves open a crack for partisans to bring Section 2 claims, so the Court will have to police lower courts. The ruling means some states will now redraw their maps to eliminate majority-minority districts that were drawn with racial intent. That might help Republicans this year, though it is too close to Election Day for some states.

The Voting Rights Act was a landmark of American liberty that helped to break Jim Crow. But that storied purpose has been twisted over the years by both parties to justify the use of race to gerrymander. The Justices are restoring the VRA's original purpose.

A 9-0 Ruling for Pregnancy Center Donors

Another culture war, and another unanimous Supreme Court decision, this time freeing pro-life pregnancy centers from a First Amendment purgatory. While the win in *First Choice v. Davenport* is about access to justice, not the merits, it's still significant, including as evidence that the Court is doing law, not politics.

The Supreme Court says the centers can fight New Jersey's harassment.

First Choice runs five faith-based pregnancy centers, providing free ultrasounds and other services, but not abortions. Despite no public complaints about deceptive conduct by the nonprofit, New Jersey's Attorney General in 2023 demanded First Choice hand over the names, addresses and phone numbers for some 5,000 donations. The AG claimed to be investigating whether contributors were misled.

A long line of High Court precedents, going back to *NAACP v. Alabama* (1958), protect donor privacy under the First Amendment. But when First Choice tried to go to federal court, judges held that it didn't have standing to sue, since the subpoena was still grinding through the state system, and no judge had yet compelled the group to comply.

Nine Justices think First Choice should get its day in court. The opinion by Justice Neil Gorsuch says the subpoena told the nonprofit it was "commanded to produce" documents, while warning of penalties for failure. First Choice donors confirmed that fear of disclosure might chill their support.

"All this," Justice Gorsuch writes, "is more than enough to establish injury in fact," which isn't limited to tangible harm but can also arise "when a defendant burdens a plaintiff's constitutional rights." He says that even if the AG were ordered to keep the First Choice donor information private, a government demand to turn it over is "enough to discourage groups from expressing dissident views."

The decision addresses only whether First Choice's lawsuit may proceed. But it sure reads as if the Justices think New Jersey hasn't been trying to investigate pregnancy centers as much as harass them.

Warsh Inherits a Fracturing Fed

Jerome Powell on Wednesday marked the looming end of his tenure as Federal Reserve Chairman by announcing his tenure at the Fed isn't ending—for now. The decision symbolized the trouble Mr. Powell has stored up as his successor Kevin Warsh begins a new monetary era at the Fed.

Powell will stay on as a Governor while dissents grow on the FOMC.

The Federal Open Market Committee made no interest rate move on Wednesday, holding the fed funds rate at 3.5%-3.75%. But it included a degree of dissent not seen since 1992. Governor Stephen Miran voted to cut rates, as he always does. But three Fed regional bank presidents on the FOMC objected to what they thought was the relatively dovish tone of the FOMC's statement.

The dissents perhaps reflect the fading authority of a lame-duck Chairman. But more likely they illustrate the difficult choices facing the Fed in this uncertain era. Inflation remains far too high at 3.2%, and it was rising in February before the Iran war began.

Meanwhile, the shock from rising oil prices leaves some doubt about the durability of consumer spending and economic confidence. Both have held up surprisingly well so far, but no one knows how long the Iran war will last now that it has settled into something of a stalemate over the Strait of Hormuz.

The Banking Committee on Wednesday moved Mr. Warsh's nomination to the Senate floor on a party-line vote. This means he is all but certain to be confirmed in time for the next FOMC meeting in May. He will then inherit the divided Fed, which apparently will include Mr. Powell staying on as Governor but not Chair.

Mr. Powell was gracious toward Mr. Warsh in his press conference on Wednesday, though it was surprising to hear he hadn't met with his successor since a dinner in January. Mr. Powell says he plans to remain as Governor—his term expires in 2028—until he believes the criminal probe into the Fed's reconstruction project is "well and truly over with transparency and finality."

Yet Mr. Powell acknowledged that Justice already has dropped its pursuit and says it won't reopen the case unless it receives a referral from the Fed's inspector general, which won't be forthcoming. Mr. Powell can be forgiven for wondering if a vengeful President Trump will find a way to further harass him or the Fed. But no former chair has remained at the Fed as a governor for nearly eight decades.

Mr. Warsh has the intellectual firepower and experience to lead the Fed and form a consensus on policy that can win public and financial market confidence. But the fracturing of the FOMC, a body known for unity, won't make that any easier. Mr. Warsh said at his confirmation hearing last week that he welcomes more debate at the Fed, and good for him. It looks like he's going to get it.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

This Isn't Your Grandpa's Housing Market

The economic and statistical analysis in William Galston's "The Upper Middle Class American Dream" (Politics & Ideas, April 22) doesn't show the whole picture. He cites data showing that a greater proportion of people have moved into the upper-middle class but ignores the necessarily complementary fact that the proportion of families with lower incomes has shrunk significantly.

For example, he laments that the proportion of smaller homes on the market has declined from 30% to 20%. The income data he cites shows that the upper-middle income earners have increased from 10% to 31% of families. But he ignores the complementary fact that the proportion of families who are lower income has declined by 24 percentage points. So, what's the problem if the homes presumably available to these lower-income families have declined by 10 points? The relevant consumer base has fallen 24 points.

He's concerned that while the rise in median income has outpaced the consumer price index's roughly sixfold rise over the last 50 years, the median house price has risen 10-fold. But that comparison is specious. The Consumer Price Index compares prices of identical items over time or adjusts the price change so that it is equivalent to comparing identical items. If those adjustments weren't done, the CPI would rise much faster—for example, by comparing the price of a cellphone that only makes phone calls to one that plays movies, answers nearly any question and manages your calendar. That's exactly the type of price comparison you get looking at median house price. The average house today is a much different product than 50 years ago. Thirty-seven percent more of the total housing stock has two or more rooms per person and around 75% more have a dishwasher. The proportion with two bathrooms is three times as large and that with central air conditioning four times.

Only looking at part of the picture misinforms the public—and policymakers who should know better.

John Early
Adjunct scholar, Cato Institute
Mt. Pleasant, S.C.

Mr. Early is former assistant commissioner of labor statistics in charge of the CPI.

Newton's Third Law Meets Gerrymandering

I was disappointed, but not surprised, that my fellow Northern Virginians voted by huge margins to disenfranchise the Commonwealth's more rural voters ("Race to the Gerrymander Bottom," Review & Outlook, April 23). The proposed new congressional districts ensure that enormous swaths of Virginia, like the Shenandoah Valley and Northern Neck, will no longer be represented by local residents, familiar with local economic and cultural issues. Rather, these voters will be ignored by faraway politicians who have little in common with them.

On Election Day, I pointed out this mismatch to two "Yes" voters, One actually agreed. She said she hadn't thought about that and that indeed it wasn't fair, but President Trump had to be stopped. Another said that rural residents need to get out and travel more, implying that those voters should be grateful to be represented by the more enlightened in northern Virginia. So much for tolerance and diversity from the Democratic Party.

Nicholas T. Matich III
McLean, Va.

The result of Virginia's referendum proves that Newton's Third Law of Motion—that every force has an equal and opposite reaction—applies as much to partisan gerrymandering as it does to the physical world. Redistricting efforts by bad actors on both sides of the political spectrum generally cancel each other out at the national level. The cost of these efforts is that millions of Americans within affected states have little to no influence over who represents them in the House. The reward? Nothing. For either party.

Mitch Mitchell
Charlottesville, Va.

A sensible definition for gerrymandering: The process of avoiding critical policies and dealing with pesky voters in order to consolidate power.

John Vann
Greenville, S.C.

The SPLC Indictment and the End of Racism

Regarding your editorial "The Southern Poverty Law Indictment" (April 24): Patrick Moore, a cofounder of Greenpeace who parted with them over disagreements on tactics said it best when referring to the evolution of certain charitable organizations: "Many organizations start out as volunteers with a noble cause. But not too long after—if they're successful—they actually end up being a kind of business with a payroll to meet and fundraising suddenly comes to the forefront as being the primary objective. And then it turns into a racket."

John P.A. Budreski
Whistler, British Columbia

It occurs to me that the Southern Poverty Law Center seems to have made no effort to fund insiders in leftist groups such as Black Lives Matter and Antifa, the adherents of which have at times attacked law enforcement and destroyed property. SPLC isn't only dangerous, it has sadly become a useless defender of our legal system and just another tiresome, tendentious interest group.

Ari Weitzner
New York

Americans should be congratulating themselves. If the "watchdog" of racism indeed had to pay millions of dollars to racist organizations to keep the gravy train flowing from naïfs like George Clooney and Apple Inc., we must have conquered the evils of racism once and for all.

Thomas Berner
Yonkers, N.Y.

Keeping a Civil Communion

"Trump's Pope Feud Divides Catholics" (U.S. News, April 18) about divisions among American Catholics highlights something deeper. It reveals how we struggle to live with disagreement. I recall similar tensions decades ago at my Catholic school. Two nuns, both committed to their faith, strongly disagreed over changes in church practice, specifically whether a woman should serve as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. At the time, the disagreement felt unsettling.

What stayed with me, however, wasn't the conflict, but what followed. Those nuns continued to live in the same convent, worship in the same chapel, and receive Communion side by side. They didn't resolve their differences but remained part of the same community. We're losing that lesson today. In civic life, disagreement often leads to separation, which hardens into division. The Catholic Church, for all its tensions, has sustained unity across deep differences for centuries. Our democracy, still relatively young, depends on the same principle: People who disagree must still find ways to live and work together.

Joe Angelastri
Chicago

CORRECTION

The Altamont Speedway Free Festival took place in the late fall of 1969. The April 18 book review "Burn the Candle Right Down" misstated the season.

The article was also published with an image whose orientation was reversed by the licensing agency.

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Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"Addicted? Not! I'm just a social chaser. I could quit squirrels any time I wanted."

OPINION

You Can't Trust 'Climate Economics'

By Roger Pielke Jr.

The scientific journal Nature in December retracted one of the most influential climate economics papers of the past decade. The paper, by Maximilian Kotz, Anders Levermann and Leonie Wenz, claimed that unmitigated climate change would cost the global economy $38 trillion a year (in 2005 international dollars) by midcentury. It was the second-most-mentioned climate paper by the media in 2024, according to Carbon Brief. The paper was cited by central banks and governments to justify aggressive climate policies.

Governments, banks and other institutions have based policies on models unconnected to reality.

Then it collapsed. The authors acknowledged that its errors were "too substantial" for a correction. Nature retracted the paper more than 18 months after first learning of its problems.

Most media coverage treated this as an unfortunate aberration in what is otherwise settled science. The retraction, however, isn't a one-off. It revealed a crack that runs much deeper into the foundation of climate research.

Economists Finbar Curtin and Matthew Burgess at the University of Wyoming released a preprint on April 20 that points out the broader flaws with current climate change research, making the Kotz et al. retraction look like small potatoes. Their paper, "The Empirically Inscrutable Climate-Economy Relationship," starts from the most basic question in climate economics: Can researchers actually measure how climate affects the economy from the historical record?

Their answer is no. That matters enormously, because over the past decade, the field of climate economics has generated some of the most consequential numbers in global finance and governance. Central banks around the world have restructured their risk frameworks around these findings. The Network for Greening the Financial System—a coalition of more than 130 central banks and supervisors, including the European Central Bank and the Bank of England—built its climate scenario guidance on climate economics research. Federal agencies in the U.S., especially under the Obama and Biden presidencies, estimate the "social cost of carbon" when assessing the costs and benefits of proposed environmental policies. This framework has shaped regulations governing appliance standards, pipeline permitting and vehicle emissions. Financial-disclosure frameworks at the Securities and Exchange Commission, and parallel regimes across the European Union and U.K., treated these damage projections as credible scientific findings deserving regulatory weight.

Messrs. Curtin and Burgess show that the method underlying this subfield of economics can't do what researchers claim it can. The problem, they argue, is that the statistical procedure strips out nearly everything that would allow researchers to identify a climate signal, then mistakes the residual noise for that signal. Lumping together countries with similar average temperatures but entirely different institutions, histories and natural resources and then calculating a single damage relationship for all of them doesn't work; it describes the average but fails to describe a single real place on earth accurately. Such studies use sophisticated math to generate numbers—but these numbers don't describe anything real.

Messrs. Curtin and Burgess implicate an entire influential field of literature projecting future climate damages. They argue that there's no



STEPHANIE DALTON COWAN

way out of this methodological predicament; the future effects of climate change are irreducibly uncertain, and could be small or large. Climate economist Noah Kaufman, who worked under Presidents Obama and Biden in the White House, tweeted that the "implication of this paper is that a lot of policy guidance from climate economists over the last 30 years was built on sand."

The problem runs upstream too. For more than a decade, researchers built many of their climate projections on the back of a hypothetical standardized scenario called Representative Concentration Pathway 8.5—a vision of the future which required coal consumption to quintuple by 2100 based on assumptions about future energy use. Those assumptions have already diverged sharply from actual energy trends, and we know today that the scenario is implausibly extreme. That conclusion isn't fringe or even controversial. Yet many scientists continue to emphasize RCP8.5 in climate research, with new studies published daily. The outdated scenario likely persists because of the slow schedule for updating scenario assumptions, the incentive researchers face to publish headline-grabbing results, and a climate advocacy ecosystem built on apocalyptic warnings.

Thousands of studies use it. Projections of flood damage, heat mortality, agricultural disruption and wildfire risk have rested on an implausible baseline that describes an imaginary, modeled future. Governments and financial institutions have treated these projections as the accurate scientific picture of the climate future.

Isn't science self-correcting? Well, it's supposed to be, but the reality is more complicated.

In a 2025 paper in the Journal of Applied Meteorology and Climatology, I documented one of the clearest examples of self-correction failure in climate research that I've encountered in nearly three decades of research.

An insurance company modified a hurricane loss data set by starting from my team's carefully collected data. Many of those modifications have no documentation and no basis in research. The company appended data taken from a different tabulation of losses that were oranges to our apples. It posted the flawed "data set" online where researchers found it and, remarkably, used it as the basis for writing papers published in the peer-reviewed literature with conclusions that went in the opposite direction of the vast majority of peer-reviewed literature on trends in hurricane losses. It wasn't science that led to their conclusions; it was bad data.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the U.S. National Climate Assessment featured prominently in their assessment reports one of these papers even after peer-reviewed research pointed out the flawed data sets.

When I notified PNAS—which published one of the papers relying on the data set—of my concerns about the paper, the scientific journal stood behind the paper. The papers that have used the corrupted data set remain in the literature today. Self-correction failed.

There's no legitimate scientific ambiguity in this case. Either a data set reflects the data it claims to represent or it doesn't. I documented exactly where it didn't and published that finding in a peer-reviewed journal. Apparently, no one cared. If the scientific community can't act on obviously false data—when the problems are carefully documented in the peer-reviewed literature—the prospects for soon correcting course on tens of thousands of flawed studies don't look promising.

None of this means that climate change isn't real. Human activity warms the planet. The uncertain risks merit serious discussion and responses. But so-called settled science that is built on flawed data and shielded from correction fails both policymakers and the public. By defending flawed data, scientific institutions erode the public trust they need to solve the world's most challenging problems.

The cracks in the foundation of climate research with important policy implications are now too big to ignore. It is time for a course correction.

Mr. Pielke is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and author of the Honest Broker substack.

The High Court Strikes a Blow Against Racial Gerrymandering

By Edward Blum

The Supreme Court has issued its long-awaited decision in *Louisiana v. Callais,* bringing much-needed clarity to one of the most confused and contradictory areas of American election law.

The justices held that Section 2 of the 1965 Voting Rights Act doesn't require states to draw election districts to achieve racial proportionality. More important, the court reoriented voting-rights law toward its original constitutional purpose—preventing intentional racial discrimination. No longer will black and Hispanic voters be harvested out of multiracial neighborhoods and communities to create race-based districts.

For decades, voting-rights litigation drifted toward a dangerous assumption: that if election outcomes didn't roughly mirror racial census percentages, something must be legally wrong. Courts and advocacy groups increasingly treated proportional representation as a requirement. States were pressured to sort citizens by race and draw majority-minority districts to hit demographic targets.

The result was predictable and divisive. Gerrymandered maps split cities, counties and neighborhoods, sometimes stretching hundreds of miles to connect distant populations linked primarily by race.

Lawmakers faced conflicting commands. One court ordered a state to create additional race-conscious districts; then a different court ruled those same maps amounted to unconstitutional racial gerrymandering.

Justice Samuel Alito's majority opinion recognizes that the Constitution "almost never permits a State to discriminate on the basis of race" and reaffirms that "strict scrutiny" applies whenever governments intentionally classify citizens by race. At the same time, the justices resolved a question they had avoided for more than three decades: whether compliance with Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act can ever justify race-conscious districting. The court said yes—only in narrow circumstances.

The court held that Section 2 liability depends upon evidence supporting "a strong inference that intentional discrimination occurred." Plaintiffs may no longer prevail simply by showing historical or statistical disparities or underrepresentation. Instead, they must prove that state officials intentionally drew districts to disadvantage minority voters because of race.

Equally important, the court recognized what has been obvious in modern American politics for years. In many states, race and political affiliation are heavily correlated. The court noted that litigants increasingly attempt to "repackage a partisan-gerrymandering claim as a racial-gerrymandering claim." To address this problem, the justices imposed significant new evidentiary burdens on Section 2 plaintiffs. Challengers have a "special burden" to "disentangle race from politics." They must show not only that racial voting patterns exist, but that those patterns can't be explained by partisan affiliation—a high hurdle.

The Constitution 'almost never permits a State to discriminate on the basis of race,' the justices hold.

For years, lower courts often assumed that if an additional majority-minority district could be drawn, it should be drawn. The justices forcefully rejected that premise. Merely declining to create a majority-minority district isn't a Voting Rights Act violation.

The opinion also recognizes how much the country has changed since the first racial-gerrymandering cases were decided 40 years ago. The court noted that "vast social change" has occurred throughout the South and the nation as racial discrimination receded. The justices further acknowledged the emergence of robust two-party competition and the increasing sophistication of computer-generated districting maps.

This decision follows the Court's earlier warnings in cases such as *Shaw v. Reno* (1993) and *Bush v. Vera* (1996), which condemned race-predominant districting as inconsistent with equal protection. It also echoes the principle reaffirmed in the college-admissions case *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023), which reaffirmed the principle that Americans are individuals, not merely members of racial blocs.

The court also said that partisan considerations remain constitutionally permissible in redistricting and that partisan-gerrymandering disputes are beyond the reach of federal courts. States that wish to reduce excessive partisan manipulation still possess many tools for reform. They can require compact and contiguous districts under state law, reduce unnecessary splitting of counties and neighborhoods, strengthen protections for local communities, and establish independent or bipartisan redistricting commissions.

But after *Louisiana v. Callais,* nobody can treat the Voting Rights Act as a mandate for racial proportionality. It is a safeguard against intentional racial discrimination. This restores the original meaning to this important law and moves the nation toward a genuinely colorblind system of election law.

Mr. Blum is president of the Project on Fair Representation and founder of Students for Fair Admissions.

Reopening the Strait Is Now Job One in the Iran War

By Reuel Marc Gerecht And Ray Takeyh

America's war with Iran has already transformed the Middle East. For years, the Islamic Republic's clerical regime bragged that it could strangle the Persian Gulf. But it refrained from doing so, fearful of U.S. retaliation.

Two enormously destructive bombing campaigns in eight months altered Iran's calculations. Neither its nuclear-weapons program nor its ballistic missiles deterred the U.S. and Israel. Today's battle for the Strait of Hormuz offers the Islamic Republic an opportunity to resuscitate its fortunes and humble the U.S. For Tehran, controlling the waterway surely now takes precedence over advancing its damaged atomic ambitions.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is the most consequential player in Iran's scrambled wartime politics. Javan, a newspaper that serves as a mouthpiece for the IRGC, recently published a scenario for economic rejuvenation: "The world economy's critical dependence on this route makes this source of income absolutely unsanctionable and changes the structure of Iran's political economy from crude oil sales to sustainable transit income." Tolls have become an essential tool that Iran selectively imposes. Chinese ships may not have to pay, but Europeans and others surely will.

As important, the regime learned that it can inflict severe economic pain on its enemies with missiles, drones, mines and other established technologies. The Islamic Republic is unlikely to forfeit this leverage peacefully.

Iran now acutely appreciates its neighbors' fragility. The Gulf Arab economies were built under the umbrella of American hegemony. Take that away—and the freedom of navigation that goes with it—and the Gulf states will ineluctably go begging to Tehran. Despite the Western weaponry in Saudi and Emirati hands, without U.S. intervention the Iranians will win any tug of war with Sunni Arabs. Israeli aspirations for regional reorganization—ideally an expansion of the Abraham Accords—will likely fizzle unless Tehran loses control of the strait.

The Trump administration, like its predecessors, has focused largely on the nuclear issue and only secondarily on Iran's missiles. Economic warfare—the blockade and sanctions—is supposed to give America leverage in nuclear talks. For Iran's ruling elite, the bomb is still the ideal way of ensuring the Islamic Republic's regional sway while protecting the homeland from American and Zionist raids. But the nuclear infrastructure is too battered and the regime too unsteady to sprint for the bomb. Tehran needs time, cash and deterrence. Controlling the strait can yield all three. Building a nuke and manipulating the waterway are two sides of the same coin. The first probably can't happen without the second.

America's primary objective, then, must be reopening the strait. Secretary of State Marco Rubio appears to understand Hormuz's importance, saying: "Those are international waterways. They cannot normalize, nor can we tolerate them trying to normalize, a system in which the Iranians decide who gets to use an international waterway and how much you have to pay them to use it." What Mr. Rubio may understand but left unstated is that this means that the U.S. is stuck in the Persian Gulf guaranteeing safe passage as long as the Iranian regime lasts. It also means we are on the hook to protect, at a minimum, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates from missile and drone attacks against energy and water infrastructure, which may come if the blockade begins to eviscerate the Iranian regime or Mr. Trump starts bombing Persia into darkness.

The regime has concluded that the ability to control the route is its ticket to survival and rejuvenation.

No matter what happens, the price of oil will remain elevated—but not as high as if the strait isn't opened. It will take time for global commerce to regain its confidence in America's commitment to the waterway. There will probably be clashes between the U.S. Navy and Iranian armed forces. If the Islamic Republic can get its hands on advanced Russian or Chinese cruise missiles, maintaining freedom of navigation will become a bloody, gut-wrenching affair.

Yet it's entirely possible that the theocracy will crack. All countries have an economic breaking point. Severe economic hardship—much worse than what Iran experienced during the Iran-Iraq war—will soon slam the regime. Another insurrection may yet topple the mullahs and the IRGC. Authoritarian regimes always seem indomitable until they're not.

But the Islamic Republic has demonstrated a resilience that should make us wary of quick fixes. The regime's "resistance economy," designed to be insulated from pressure by other countries, is into its fourth decade. In addition, the revolutionary elite sees itself as the vanguard of the Almighty. Given the repeated insurrections, the Iranian people's obvious fondness for Western ways, and the conspiracy-addled conviction within the regime that America has fueled and guided internal uprisings, Iran's rulers and their foot soldiers see themselves as the last redoubt against unbelief.

If the regime doesn't crack, we could be in a long struggle that will require commitment, patience, and discipline across the U.S. government.

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The FT View

FINANCIAL TIMES
'Without fear and without favour'

The twilight of an oil cartel

UAE's departure leaves Saudi Arabia trying to hold together Opec

The world once quaked at the power of Opec. The 1973 oil embargo on the US by Arab exporters almost quadrupled the crude price. The cartel's influence has long been waning due to oil's declining share of the global energy mix and Opec's declining share of world output thanks to the US shale revolution and rising production in countries such as Canada, Brazil and Guyana. The departure of the United Arab Emirates gives the impression of an organisation now in its twilight. It highlights, too, how the US-Israeli war on Iran is reshaping energy markets and the Gulf — and how the multilateral organisations that, for better or worse, have dominated the world for much of the postwar period are unravelling.

The UAE has, in truth, been looking for a way out of Opec for years. The Emiratis have invested billions in raising their production capacity to 5mn barrels per day by 2027. So they have chafed against quotas that have often restricted their production to a little over 3mn b/d — even if they have long "cheated" on those quotas.

Abu Dhabi's dissatisfaction reflects a broader clash: between oil price hawks such as Saudi Arabia, Opec's de facto leader, which has been trying to defend higher prices to balance its budget, and the UAE and some others who would prefer to maximise volumes and market share before a long-term decline in demand. Tensions between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have been exacerbated by discord over regional policies, as they supported different sides in Sudan's civil war and rival factions in Yemen.

The war in Iran has created both an opportunity and a further incentive for the UAE to leave. The paralysis of Gulf oil exports due to Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz means it could announce its departure without rattling the global oil market. Leaving now also enables Abu Dhabi to take full advantage of the Strait's reopening, when it comes, even if that crashes the price. Assuming this energy shock, like previous ones, spurs a further global long-term shift away from fossil fuels, it is free to pursue its favoured approach of chasing volume.

Opec cannot, of course, be written off. The UAE exit is a fundamental fracture but Opec has survived the departures in recent years of Qatar, Angola and Ecuador. Its remaining members still sit on almost 75 per cent of global proven crude reserves, with extraction costs that most non-Opec countries cannot match.

Yet even after the creation of Opec+ taking in new members such as Russia, the cartel's continuing ability, if not to set prices then at least to manage the market, has relied on its capacity to co-ordinate the "core" Gulf producers. The Iran war has already driven a deeper wedge between Iran and its Arab Gulf neighbours. The UAE's exit from the cartel represents further disintegration.

> Abu Dhabi seems to have prioritised its own interests, and a chance to curry favour with the US

Abu Dhabi might have decided co-operation with its neighbours was vital to the regional postwar recovery. Instead, it seems to have prioritised its own interests, and a chance to curry favour with the US (which, it emerged last week, is considering providing currency swap lines to the UAE and Gulf allies hit by the fallout of the war). Any weakening of Opec is likely to be seen as a win by the Trump White House.

How the Gulf and global energy order are further redrawn will depend on when and how the Iran war ends. But the opportunistic exit of the UAE, the only other Opec producer with significant spare capacity, leaves Saudi Arabia as the primary swing producer trying to hold together a fractious alliance. Abu Dhabi has opted to pump all it can now rather than leave reserves to become stranded assets. Some others may yet decide to do the same.

ft.com/opinion

Opinion Economics

Lessons for African countries on the edge

María Hergueta



Abebe Aemro Selassie

For much of the past 30 years, I've worked with countries as they've dealt with grave economic challenges. More recently, this has been the case for many countries across sub-Saharan Africa, as they have drifted into what I call the "grey zone": not an outright crisis but burdened by imbalances that leave them dangerously exposed. Now, as I prepare to hang up my boots as director of the IMF's African Department, I can't help but reflect on these decades — and a set of abiding lessons recurs.

First, public debt problems emerge gradually — and then all at once. Governments make spending and borrowing decisions with the expectation that a certain level of economic growth will continue forever. Deficits widen slowly, debt ratios creep higher. Favourable financing conditions can supercharge that feeling of immortality. But even reasonable fiscal plans tend to fall victim to external shocks that throw growth off course and push a country towards the edge. This was true for the likes of Greece and Portugal when the global financial crisis hit — and for many sub-Saharan African countries after the pandemic.

> More intrusive geopolitics means insurance against shocks is not pessimism; it is a rational investment

Second, countries can remain in the "grey zone" far longer than we think feasible. Successive shocks have eroded fiscal buffers. In country after country, interest payments on debt have drifted upwards, and are very high relative to revenues. In general, though, debt tolerance seems to have become somewhat higher — partly because of greater access to domestic markets, partly because some external creditors are prepared to take the risk, at a price. But for others, the problem becomes one of solvency rather than just liquidity. And some countries prefer to delay debt workouts, resulting in austerity and depressed growth.

Third, for those countries pushed over the edge, post-default recovery is often faster than feared. Default can lead to significant economic, political and social costs. It can disrupt market access and impose considerable losses on creditors. But these costs tend to be less than the damage wrought by delayed restructurings. And once debt is restructured and uncertainty resolved, recovery tends to take hold more quickly than expected. Just look at the impressive recoveries of Ethiopia, Ghana and Zambia, where growth and investment bounced back markedly due to efforts to restructure their debts.

Fourth, it is, of course, best to avoid getting too close to the edge in the first place. Over my career at the IMF, I have seen fewer countries falling victim to acute balance of payments crises and more able to pull back from the edge. Many countries owe this resilience to improved policy frameworks — notably, keeping fiscal deficits manageable at levels that can largely be financed domestically — and exchange rates flexible for when shocks hit. This has helped reduce their sensitivity to global shocks and tightening financial conditions.

Many African countries have made progress in this direction in recent years. The region's budget balance — excluding interest payments — has steadily improved. Sub-Saharan Africa achieved this consolidation thanks to bold reforms, despite a bigger hit to output from the pandemic, costly and intermittent capital market access, and much reduced concessional financing. In short, strong fundamentals and avoiding unforced policy errors are the best insurance against systemic stress.

I remain optimistic about the region's prospects. This will be the African century. Progress in the past 30 years has shifted opportunities for an entire generation. Demographics will ensure that sub-Saharan African countries are among the few with a rising working-age population. Much investment and consumption demand will follow, fostering innovation and new opportunities amid the ongoing digital transformation.

Still, one cannot take economic progress or prosperity for granted. The global "rules of the game" are shifting radically and the levers countries have relied on for decades — aid flows to bridge funding gaps for vital development needs and unfettered trade to fuel export-led growth — are unlikely to produce the gains they once did. And, as the Iran war reminds us, the shocks will keep coming.

More volatility and more intrusive geopolitics mean that countries in the "grey zone" will find it even harder to step back from the edge. In this environment, insurance against shocks is not pessimism; it is a rational investment. The region's ability to face this latest shock from a better position tells us two things: policy progress can be African-led, and we can look to the future with confidence.

The writer is director of the African Department at the IMF

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Pakistan makes virtue of necessity with role in Iran talks

Ryohtaroh Satoh and Camilla Hodgson ("Refineries in Asia reduce output as Iran crisis chokes crude supplies", Report, April 25) capture well the supply-side shock from the Strait of Hormuz blockade. But the economic and political cost at the consumer end is chaotic and more visible, and nowhere more so than in Pakistan.

Since the US-Israeli war on Iran began on February 28, Pakistan has endured 10 fuel price revisions in seven weeks. Petrol peaked at Rs458 ($1.64) per litre and diesel at Rs520, increases of 43 and 55 per cent respectively in a single announcement on April 2. The government has spent Rs129bn ($458mn) in subsidies, declared a four-day working week, closed schools, and grounded 60 per cent of official vehicles. Even after successive relief measures, petrol is still sharply above pre-crisis levels.

This is one of the reasons that help explain why Pakistan's Field Marshal Asim Munir has emerged as the principal interlocutor between Washington and Tehran ("Pakistan army chief takes unorthodox path in push to save US-Iran peace talks", Report, April 23).

In addition, Pakistan is home to an estimated 35mn Shia Muslims, the second-largest population of Shia Muslims in the world. The day after Iran's supreme leader was killed, 11 people died in violence outside the US consulate in Karachi. Pakistan also shares an 800km border with Iran through the restive province of Balochistan.

Pakistan cannot afford a prolonged war next door. Its peace efforts are a diplomatic ambition; they are also an economic and political necessity.

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Science and the liberal elite

Anjana Ahuja's discussion of whether scientists "as a group . . . lean politically to the left" ("The politics of trust in science", Opinion, April 22) raises questions about what we now consider to be left or right.

If the divide is to be defined in cultural terms, as it is increasingly in the US — between those who believe in authority, tradition and acceptance of established wisdom, as opposed to those who challenge and question these — then both physical and social scientists must be defined as inherently on the left.

She quotes Sir Paul Nurse, the president of the Royal Society, defining science as including "rigorous thinking and balanced debate in pursuit of evidence".

That unavoidably leads to doubting previous assumptions, investigating whether the evidence supports them, and, where justified, challenging the conventional wisdom.

That should not necessarily make scientists "a liberal elite". But it does make them liberals, if those who attack them regard all seekers after answers in an uncertain world as subversive of authority and tradition.

There are "alt-right" Conservatives in the US who now argue that the Enlightenment was a mistake, undermining religion, hierarchy and order, and that universities as such undermine those values.



And of course on this understanding the Financial Times is an inherently liberal newspaper.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire
Liberal Democrat Peer, House of Lords, London SW1, UK

Let's look at aid as shared investment in stability

David Pilling's report on public misperceptions about overseas aid ("People in G7 overestimate foreign aid outlay", Report, April 23; and Letters, April 29) highlights that the problem is not one of excess, but rather of misunderstanding.

This is why the focus must shift from how much is spent to how effectively it is used.

Moving from working in silos to supporting social innovation, by backing communities, governments, and social innovators to co-create solutions, delivers practical outcomes that strengthen economies and institutions. That is not charity, but spending that pays dividends over time.

If international co-operation is to retain public support, it must be explained not as altruism alone, but as a shared investment in stability, resilience, and prosperity — shifting the debate from short-term spending to long-term value.

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Britain's coastal policy — a mispricing of time

Britain's coastal policy (Report, February 24) continues to treat erosion as an episodic event rather than a continuous process.

The implications extend beyond environmental policy. Insurance markets continue to price coastal exposure largely as a binary flood risk, rather than as a gradual erosion curve. Public borrowing — including financing through the Public Works Loan Board, the government's lending facility for local authorities — is therefore tied to assets whose underlying value is quietly depreciating over time.

This is not a failure of response to climate risk, but a failure of measurement. By treating erosion as an event rather than a rate, fiscal systems understate long-term exposure and misallocate capital accordingly. A more accurate approach would incorporate continuous land loss into infrastructure appraisal, recognising coastal land as a diminishing asset rather than a fixed one. The challenge is not storm management, but the mispricing of time.

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OUTLOOK
SYDNEY

Australia's drive to get more blood flowing



by Nic Fildes

My mother spent more than three decades draining blood from Australians. Her work as a pathology nurse came during a time when thousands of citizens thought nothing of rolling up their sleeves to donate to a greater cause. But things have changed. Australia's blood bank is not as flush as it once was.

In the wake of the Bondi Beach massacre last year, this shortage became startlingly clear. The long, snaking lines of would-be blood donors were held up as a hopeful image of the country's response to the tragedy. Within 24 hours, 7,810 donations had been made and 50,000 appointments booked.

The challenge for Lifeblood, the arm of the Red Cross that marshals the donation strategy, is to persuade those people to keep coming back. Up to 100 blood donations may be needed to save a single life and Australia needs 100,000 new donors every year to meet its need for blood and plasma. But there are more recreational beekeepers in Australia than people who have actively donated their blood three times or more.

This is not only an Australian challenge. Most countries have a supply gap. One problem is that the legion of older donors that has kept donations flowing for decades is dwindling and younger generations are not donating or do not return after they've tried it once.

Australia has relied on public campaigns such as a tie-up with thrash metal band Metallica — whose songs include "Bleeding Me" and "Pumping Blood". This proved successful in attracting 2,000 new donors with the offer of a limited-edition T-shirt. There are now hopes that frequent flyer-style gifts could entice more people to return more regularly.

If Australia can work out how to become more self-sufficient, there are hopes that it could forge a path for other countries also reliant on imports.

The situation is particularly acute for plasma — the yellow-coloured component of blood sometimes called liquid gold — which is a vital ingredient for 18 different life-saving procedures ranging from immune deficiency treatment to heart surgery.

Australia supplies only 38 per cent of its own plasma and spends about A $600mn a year to import it — more than double what was spent a decade ago. A report published by the state of New South Wales suggests imports needed could rise to 66 per cent of the total by 2030, meaning taxpayers are set to foot an even larger plasma bill.

For now, Australia relies on the US, where people earn up to $70 per donation, which supplies about 70 per cent of the world's plasma.

Canada, which was facing an 80 per cent import ratio, also opted to allow donors to be paid over the past decade amid dire shortages. However, the outsourcing of blood and plasma collection to commercial operators has been criticised following the deaths of donors. Australia has not used paid-for donations since the "tainted blood" scandal, which took place between the 1970s and early 1990s, when hundreds of people contracted hepatitis C and HIV from blood transfusions.

That means Lifeblood now has to look to new cohorts to replace the retiring ones. One unexpected setting could be particularly fruitful. Peter Achterstraat, the NSW productivity and equality commissioner, argues that blood and plasma donation drives in the office may incentivise workers to volunteer, something the armed forces and police services already do.

He cited the example of Mastercard in Australia, which has co-ordinated with Lifeblood to hold morning teas where the need for plasma is explained. There is executive support for blood drives and employees are allowed to donate on their own schedule, while taxi vouchers have been provided for group donations. That has helped to generate 160 donations, including plasma, in a year.

For Achterstraat, the added benefit of recruiting more volunteers from the workplace could be a way for companies to appeal to younger, socially conscious staff. "Plasma could be the new climate change," he said.

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Opinion

AI companies are just companies



BIG TECH

Robert Armstrong

AI enthusiasts wave off the notion that the technology will lead to mass unemployment. A lot of people once drove horse-drawn carts and made buggy whips, they say. Losing those jobs to automobiles didn't lead to breadlines; on the contrary.

Doomers respond that, in the case of AI, we're not the drivers; we're the horses. The optimists' retort, that horses' lives got better as they went from work animals to luxury items, is no help. Have a look at what happened to the equine population in the first half of the 20th century.

Whatever AI's ultimate impact on unemployment, this back-and-forth highlights the idea that AI is unlike all the technologies that went before, with greater complexity, greater upsides and greater risks — for labour, cyber security, national defence, mental health and so on. So those controlling it have special responsibilities. Everyone in the AI industry acknowledges this. It is expressed in OpenAI's "Model Spec" guidelines and papers on the topic by Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei, which lay down guidelines about what AI companies will allow their models to do.

But AI companies and their models will follow one rule before all others: they will seek to maximise returns for their shareholders, up to the limits set by law. When the law of profit conflicts with the company's internal principles, profit will win every time.

This is not to be regretted. It is the outcome our system of corporate capitalism was intended to create. It has made us free and prosperous by encouraging risk-taking and creativity. And, in most cases, the profit motive and the common good line up beautifully. But as we leap into a new technological age, the old rules of capitalism still apply. Corporations only manage or pay for the economic externalities they create when they are forced to.

The amounts of money AI has attracted are staggering. The Big Tech "hyperscalers" plan to invest more than $600bn in the space this year alone. AI start-ups raised $73bn in the first quarter of 2025. OpenAI raised $122bn in a single funding round last month. The capital comes from people who demand a high return, and who know the industry will soon need more capital to buy computing power. This ensures that excessively cautious executives will be pushed aside, and sets up an arms race in which prioritising safety will open the way for technological irrelevance.

> As we leap into a new technological age, the old rules of capitalism still apply

Amodei argues that there is a tension between building AI systems that won't "autonomously threaten humanity" and staying ahead of authoritarian nations (or is it nation?) that might use such systems against us.

Before that tension comes into play, though, AI company CEOs will have to balance safety and competition. If Amodei or OpenAI's Sam Altman strike that balance in a way that displeases their investors, they will be sacked. The industry's sensitivity to revenue growth expectations is extreme. This week, The Wall Street Journal reported that OpenAI had missed internal sales and user targets. The story moved the whole of the Nasdaq, and OpenAI quickly released a statement calling it "clickbait".

When Amodei says that he is "focused day and night on how to steer us away from [AI's] negative outcomes and towards the positive ones", I'm sure he is sincere. I'm also sure that, from the point of view of how the conflict between AI profit and safety plays out, his words are just noise. The relevant incentive structures don't care what he is focused on.

This simple observation — that some of the risks created by AI can only be managed by citizens, not companies — leaves hard questions about how to regulate it. Figuring it out will be messy. Some AI companies' fears about unintended consequences will be realised.

What might good regulation look like? Horse anecdotes aside, it should not try to protect specific job categories, which always ends in paying people to be unproductive. It should match specific regulatory tools to specific harms — physical, digital, psychological, financial — rather than taking the form of a monolithic law. On the liability side, it should take seriously the example of how other useful but inherently dangerous products like explosives are treated, and it should rethink agency law applied to non-human agents. It should emphasise liability, rather than companies' duty to warn. Investors' skin needs to be in the safety game.

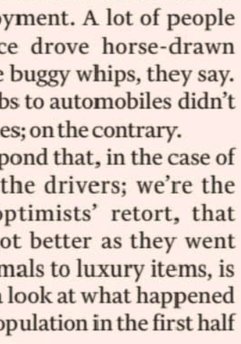
At the outset, though, the key is to reject any suggestion that this product is different, and somehow too complicated for citizens to have a say in. AI is new; capitalism is not.

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America, the King and growth

Carl Godfrey





POLITICS

Janan Ganesh

He has been a discreet and level-headed sovereign for almost four years now. As a result, younger readers might not know that Charles III once championed all kinds of anti-modern causes. Quack medicine, for example. The Gwyneth Paltrow of the Windsors had a thing for homeopathy. As for his views on the built environment, this traditionalist once said that postwar architects had done more to disfigure British cities than Hermann Göring's Luftwaffe.

The connecting theme here is a suspicion of economic growth: a hunch that pre-industrial life, in which GDP per person almost never changed, was happier. The King patronises, in at least one sense of that word, a Romanian village that is all but suspended in time.

With 95 per cent confidence, we can dismiss this worldview as the inanity of a born millionaire. The other 5 per cent? The scintilla of doubt? Well, the country he is visiting this week goes some way to vindicating him.

The US has been an economic success since the financial crash of 2008-9. The UK, like much of western Europe, has scarcely recovered. Yet both countries have become political circuses. The economic determinists who make up most of the west's governing — and commenting — class seem incurious about this conundrum.

Charles is having to meet Donald Trump because America decided to reelect a twice-impeached president. For its part, Britain is on course to make Nigel Farage prime minister even though most voters regard his life's work, Brexit, as a national mistake. These are two countries with comparable levels of anti-establishment anger, despite wildly divergent economic experiences over the past couple of decades. If anything, the richer and faster-growing country's politics is the more gaga. You are left to surmise that economics is, if not quite irrelevant, then hopelessly overrated as a shaper of national mood.

To put it a different way, growth has perverse consequences. One reason that Americans keep electing Trump is that it seems not to affect their livelihoods. Job creation remains strong. US equities remain a high-performing staple of their pension portfolios. Moral hazard is not just something the state brings into being (as when it recapitalises a feckless bank or helps out with household gas bills). The market, too, can produce so much output, so consistently, as to insulate people from their electoral choices. For a decade, voting Trump has been a costless rebellion, the right's version of backing soft-on-crime liberals from the sanctum of a concierged penthouse.

This week, as ever, Britain is lost in witless — and unreciprocated — debate about the special-ness of the relationship. Here is a clue. If it hinges so much on who is in the US administration, on whether their mother was Scottish, it is not special. It wasn't special when the likes of Dean Acheson foreclosed on the British empire after 1945, or when John Foster Dulles seethed at London for abstaining from the Indochina war, or when George HW Bush treated a unified Germany as America's European interlocutor. (Why are the tiffs so often with Wasp or Wasp-adjacent Americans? You would expect the opposite. I leave this matter with the Tories and Farage-ists, who think so deeply about the "cousins".)

In truth, the UK-US pairing is only interesting nowadays because the countries represent contrasting models of political dysfunction. The British kind, born of low growth, is straightforward. There is not enough to go around, so voters turn against elites and outsiders. It is the American kind, the disease of success, that is counterintuitive. At the risk of getting someone somewhere started on a PhD, there must be such a thing as the optimal rate of growth: high enough to make voters feel prosperous but not so robust as to induce complacency when choosing a government.

> The UK's stagnant economy and the US's dynamic one are both politically dysfunctional

Progressives will cite the unevenness of US growth. Inequality there began to widen in the late 20th century. As an account of Trumpism, this theory fails on two counts. First, voting for a tax-cutting, government-gutting Republican is an odd way of venting against social stratification. Also, populism has broken through in more equal and less equal societies, just as it has surged in republics and monarchies, in states as centralised as Britain and as federal as America, in countries that took part in the Iraq war and countries that did not. If there is a common variable, it is that immigration has been high in most places. There is no purely economic explanation that works.

It is not even clear that America is this century's outstanding example of a growing-but-angry nation. Poland is unrecognisably richer than it was at the turn of the millennium: a one-country advertisement for capitalism, and for the EU. At the same time, it has sustained a populist movement successful enough to produce the previous prime minister and the current president.

Those of us who espouse material development have to grant that, beyond a certain point, it really does do strange things to societies. At the very least, it creates the breathing room in which once-vigilant people can take risks with their vote. It is handsome of King Charles to swallow his doubts about modernity, as he didn't when he was a middle-aged dauphin. But it is also unfortunate timing, as the world seems to bear him out far more now than it ever did in his talkative pomp.

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Russia's loss is Ukraine's gain in the Middle East

Hanna Notte

Two months into the Iran war, Russia has secured tangible benefits. It has raked in extra billions in oil revenues. It has stepped up its ballistic missile attacks on Ukraine, which suffers from a shortage of air defences. And it can watch gleefully as Operation Epic Fury turns into the US's own "special military operation" gone awry.

Yet, the war has also had an unwelcome side effect for Vladimir Putin: it has put Ukraine on the Middle Eastern map. Woefully unequipped to deal with Iranian drone and missile attacks, the Gulf states have turned to Ukraine for support. While such co-operation hardly heralds a definitive pivot away from Moscow for these countries, it marks the latest setback for Russia, which has in recent years seen its fortunes decline in the Middle East.

As Iran launched retaliatory strikes across the region in response to the US-Israeli attack in late February, Volodymyr Zelenskyy moved swiftly to leverage Ukraine's hard-won expertise in countering Russian drones. He sent interceptor drones to protect US bases in Jordan. He initiated talks with Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, offering Ukraine's drone technology in return for diplomatic support and energy deals. As part of the package, Ukraine has promised training, software updates and co-production lines for its technologies, laying the foundation for durable defence partnerships.

The US and Iran may have settled into a brittle limbo of neither war nor peace. But Gulf countries must assume that the Iranian regime, should it survive, will retain the ability to mass-produce drones that can hit targets on their shores at will. They, too, have an interest in long-term agreements with a Ukraine that provides adaptable and scalable solutions.

At the same time, the Gulf states must navigate Ukraine's promising courtship under the Kremlin's watchful eye. They still enjoy extensive economic ties with Russia, including in Opec+. They must also contend with Russia on the UN Security Council. In early April, Moscow vetoed a Gulf-supported resolution that called for action to open the Strait of Hormuz. These complex interests explain why the Gulf states have refrained from calling out the Kremlin — notwithstanding mounting evidence of Russian assistance to Iran with targeting data and operational guidance.

> Kyiv has ensured that a number of countries have stakes in its continued survival and prosperity

A battered and hardened Iran could turn to Russia for further support as it seeks to rebuild its military capacity postwar. If the Gulf States are to rein in such defence co-operation, they must stay on speaking terms with Moscow. In 2024, Saudi Arabia played a role in convincing Russia not to provide missiles to the Iran-backed Houthis, and Riyadh may hope to lean on Putin in the future. That risk of increased Russian backing of Iran is not lost on Israel, which has avoided loudly shaming Moscow while engaging in quiet shows of force to communicate its red lines.

Still, the need to tread carefully will not keep the Gulf countries from deepening their co-operation with Ukraine. Publicly, Russia has either mocked or outright ignored Zelenskyy's nimble wartime diplomacy. But the Kremlin won't be pleased about the Middle East's newfound interest in Ukraine, which coincides with Russia's weakening position in the region.

Having sunk its resources into its campaign against Ukraine, Russia in late 2024 abandoned its longtime ally, Bashar al-Assad's Syrian regime. After Assad fled to Moscow just before Damascus fell to a rebel army, the Kremlin then had to watch the US and Israel attack Iran last summer. Russia managed to build budding ties with Syria's new rulers — but so did Ukraine.

Amid the current war, the Kremlin offered itself as mediator, only to be upstaged by Pakistan. In short, Russia is playing a weakened hand in the Middle East today, compared with the peak of its power projection a decade ago. Regional states must avoid antagonising Moscow, but Moscow must also avoid antagonising them. Ukraine, meanwhile, can hope to reap gains from its forays far beyond the Middle East. Capitalising on the momentum of his Gulf tours, Zelenskyy has negotiated defence-industrial co-operation deals with nations in Europe and in the South Caucasus.

He thereby ensures that a growing number of countries have material stakes in Ukraine's continued survival and prosperity. That's a prudent strategy for a country fighting a war of attrition with no end in sight.

While the US-Israeli war against Iran may have provided a short-term boon for Russia, it is Ukraine that could score the bigger long-term gains.

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Can US trading partners still rely on the rule of law?

Inu Manak

Tariffs were the buzzword of 2025. US President Donald Trump, the self-proclaimed "Tariff Man," stretched the limits of his authority to raise levies on allies and adversaries alike, bringing US tariffs to levels last seen in the 1930s. The haphazard way in which those tariffs were applied, paused, exempted, reinstated, and constantly threatened, had trading partners scrambling to secure "deals" to end the uncertainty.

After a year of chaos, the US Supreme Court reined in Trump's actions, but much remains unsettled. Experts have largely focused on how Trump will rebuild his tariff wall with a patchwork of other trade authorities. But the administration's trade strategy is hiding a more dangerous development in plain sight: the erosion of the rule of law in international trade altogether.

Just weeks after Trump's tariffs were revoked, US trade representative Jamieson Greer announced new investigations into alleged unfair trade practices related to foreign excess capacity and production, as well as forced labour law enforcement under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974. Those investigations cover 60 US trading partners from Mexico to Algeria, accounting for the bulk of US trade with the world.

After significant usage in the 1980s, with results that did not live up to hopes, Section 301 was sparingly used after the World Trade Organization's stronger enforcement mechanism was established in 1995. With that option available, Section 301 investigations often led to the filing of a WTO complaint instead of unilateral action. However, soon after Trump first took office in 2017, Section 301 was resurrected, primarily to enact tariffs against China.

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Fast forward to his second term, and it is clear that Section 301 will be back in focus, but this time, it could be more prolific. This is because Trump's previous trade representative, Robert Lighthizer, had a novel idea that his protégé, Greer, now seems eager to implement.

The idea emerged while Lighthizer was renegotiating the trade pact with Canada and Mexico. He sent a draft notice to Congress about how the new US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) could be implemented. While this did not make it into the final implementing legislation, Lighthizer outlined how Section 301 could be used to enforce ostensible US rights even if dispute procedures existed in the USMCA.

He claimed that if formal dispute settlement channels were insufficient, "the USTR's determination on whether the USMCA partner breached USMCA obligations or impaired US rights . . . would be based on the USTR's evaluation of the relevant factual issues". In other words, when it comes to settling disputes, the USTR could play the role of judge, jury and executioner.

With a flurry of Section 301 investigations under way, US trading partners should be deeply worried. Of the 19 deals the administration has negotiated since last summer, none have dispute settlement provisions. The US has also written off WTO dispute settlement since 2017, arguing that many of its trade actions are a matter of economic or national security and therefore out of bounds for WTO adjudication.

This means that when it comes to enforcing all those asymmetrical commitments that trading partners have made in their "reciprocal" trade deals, a neutral adjudication of whether there is a breach will no longer be possible. Instead, the US intends to decide when there is a breach, which facts to consider, and what the punishment will be.

This is a world of far more uncertainty than many US trading partners may have imagined. But more frightening is the inevitable reality that Washington is no longer pursuing a trading system based on the rule of law, but on the rule of US power alone. America's trading partners will need to limit the scope of those commitments and seek reciprocal alternatives elsewhere.

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