

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Value of prohibited foreign cigarettes seized by Delhi Police

10 in lakhs. Delhi Police arrested three men from Uttar Pradesh and seized prohibited foreign cigarettes. Acting on a tip-off, police intercepted the suspects near Sikandra Road and recovered 77,200 cigarettes of premium brands such as Dunhill and Davidoff that lacked the mandatory health warnings required under Indian law. PTI

Number of eligible voters for Odisha's Nuapada bypoll

2.53 in lakhs. It comprises 1.24 lakh men, 1.29 lakh women, and 21 people of the third gender who are eligible to vote in the November 11 Nuapada Assembly byelection, according to Odisha's Chief Electoral Officer R. S. Gopalan. The constituency will have 358 polling stations. PTI

Number of sports grounds to be built in Punjab by AAP

3,100 Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal laid the foundation stone for 3,100 new sports grounds across the State, with an investment of ₹1,194 crore. The initiative aims to promote sports culture, curb drug abuse, and engage youth constructively. PTI

Value of heroin seized from duo by Mathura Police

5 in crores. Police in Mathura seized 1.045 kg of heroin and arrested two men. The accused, Faizan from Delhi and Waqar from Gurugram, were reportedly transporting the consignment from New Delhi to Agra. Officials said the duo had ties to a drug network involving a Nigerian national active for the past seven years. PTI

Investment planned by Delhi PWD for drainage revamp

387 in ₹ crores. To tackle chronic waterlogging, the Delhi Public Works Department will overhaul the drainage system along the 22-km Mehrauli-Badarpur Road. The proposal is expected to be tabled at the next Expenditure and Finance Committee meeting. PTI

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What are the various electoral forms?

What is Form 6 used for in the context of electoral rolls? How can Overseas Electors register to vote? Which forms are used to raise objections or request corrections? What should citizens do to ensure their names are correctly included in the electoral rolls?

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan R.

The story so far:

The Election Commission (EC) has just concluded the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar. It proposes to roll it out in other States in a phased manner.

What is the current significance?

Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (RP Act), deals with the preparation and revision of electoral rolls. A summary revision is carried out before each general election or by-election in any constituency. The RP Act also authorises the EC to carry out a special revision of the electoral roll at any time.

The EC, through its order dated June 24, had decided to conduct SIR for the entire country. Since the Bihar Assembly elections are due in November, the Commission issued guidelines for the SIR of the Bihar electoral roll, with July 1 as the qualifying date.

The SIR process in Bihar involved submission of enumeration forms by all registered voters, submission of any eligible documents to prove citizenship (for electors registered after 2003), publication of draft electoral rolls based on forms submitted, a period for filing claims and objections, verification and disposal of claims and objections by the Electoral Registration Officers (ERO), and publication of final roll.

The SIR process was challenged in the Supreme Court. In its interim orders, the court had directed the EC to accept Aadhaar as one of the eligible documents to be submitted along with the enumeration forms as proof of identity. The final roll for Bihar was released by the EC on September 30. The Commission proposes to complete the SIR process for the entire country in a phased manner based on the Assembly election schedules

Various forms with respect to electoral rolls as per RER

Form Number	Description
Form 6	Application to be submitted by new voters to be registered as an elector. As per section 19 of the RP Act, the qualifying dates for completion of 18 years of age, are 1st day of January, April, July and October of the year in which the electoral roll is prepared or revised.
Form 6A	Form for inclusion by an Overseas Elector. Non-Resident Indians who have shifted out of India, on account of education, employment or otherwise, can register as an elector in the constituency in which their address as per passport is located.
Form 7	Objection for proposed inclusion/deletion of name from existing roll. This form can be filed by a registered elector in a constituency in respect of any other registered elector or proposed inclusion in the roll or for deletion of applicant's own name.
Form 8	Form for shifting residence/correction of entries. This form can be filed by a registered elector for shifting of residence or correction of entries.
Form 5	Notice of publication of draft electoral roll by the ERO.
Form 9	List of applications for inclusion of names received in Form 6.
Form 10	List of applications for objection to inclusion of names received in Form 7.
Form 11	List of objections/applications for correction of entries received in Form 8.
Form 11A	List of applications for shifting of address within the constituency received in Form 8.
Form 11B	List of applications for shifting of address outside the constituency received in Form 8.

*Forms 9 to 11B are prepared and published by the ERO



Field work: A Booth-Level Officer checks documents during the special intensive revision of the electoral roll, Araria district, Bihar, on July 8. Shashi Shekhar Kashyap

for various States.

What are the various forms?

In the present context, it is important for citizens to be aware of the various forms that deal with electoral rolls. These forms are provided in the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 (RER). A brief summary of all the important forms as per RER is provided in the Table given above. It also contains detailed guidelines for filling out the application with respect to each of these forms.

What should citizens do?

There are political arguments both for and against the SIR exercise as carried out in Bihar. However, clean electoral rolls are paramount for the conduct of free and

Citizens should ensure that they verify the published draft rolls. They should fill out the enumeration forms as required. New voters and electors who have migrated to different constituencies should fill out the relevant forms

fair elections, which is essential for our functioning democracy. The EC would hopefully devise a more spread-out schedule in future SIRs that provides adequate time for hassle-free participation by voters. The list of eligible documents is also likely to include Aadhaar as proof of identity, in

subsequent SIRs as per the Supreme Court directive.

Meanwhile, citizens should ensure that they verify the published draft rolls. They should fill out the enumeration forms as required.

New voters and electors who have migrated to different constituencies should fill out the relevant forms. Political parties and civil society groups should assist citizens, especially the most marginalised sections, throughout the process. This would ensure a clean electoral roll without compromising on the right to vote of every eligible citizen.

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

THE GIST

▼ The Election Commission conducted a special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, starting with Bihar, requiring voters to submit enumeration forms and proof of identity.

▼ Citizens should verify draft rolls, submit the relevant forms if they are new voters or have migrated, and seek assistance from political parties and civil society to ensure clean electoral rolls without compromising the right to vote.

Why are T.N. food outlets opting for a new delivery partner?

Can the new model overcome the challenges that doomed earlier ventures?

D. Suresh Kumar

The story so far:

App-based food delivery has been facing a shake-up in Tamil Nadu in recent months. Breaking new ground, restaurants from smaller towns such as Namakkal and Cuddalore have logged off popular app-based food delivery giants Swiggy and Zomato. They have instead on-boarded Zaaroz, a lesser-known, homegrown alternative.

Why are restaurants switching platforms?

Restaurateurs cite high commissions, unilateral discounts, and poor communication from the big players as reasons for the platform migration. Restaurants claim they have to pay a commission, sometimes ranging between 30% and 35% plus GST to Swiggy and Zomato. Besides, the apps unilaterally offer deep discounts to customers, denting profits.

In small towns, the hoteliers are largely skilled businessmen but not fully digitally literate. As a result, they are unable to comprehend the terms and conditions they sign up for and are not able to contest the deep discounting tactics. Increasing food prices to cope with consequential losses hasn't been viable either. As a result, restaurant owners say they end up incurring heavy losses and are forced to wind up their businesses.

What is Zaaroz, and how does it operate differently?

Headquartered in the temple town of Chidambaram – over 230 km north of Chennai – Zaaroz was founded in 2019 by Ram Prasath, a young entrepreneur. It has been operating as an app-based general delivery platform in over 50 Tier-2 and Tier-3 locations in Tamil Nadu with 5,000 vendors on board and serving an estimated eight lakh customers. It has since ventured into the food delivery business.

Unlike the commission-based

operations models of Swiggy and Zomato, restaurants are onboarded on the Zaaroz platform for a flat monthly subscription: ₹3,000 plus GST for bigger restaurants and ₹1,500 plus GST for smaller eateries, messes, and bakeries. The company also provides electric bikes to delivery executives, and for those using fuel-driven bikes, it offers ₹2 per km towards petrol expenses.

How have restaurateurs responded?

In July, many restaurants in Namakkal – the poultry and lorry body building hub in western Tamil Nadu – logged off Swiggy and Zomato and migrated to Zaaroz. The Namakkal Town and Taluk Hotel Owners Association secretary, N. Arul Murugan, said, “Earlier, the eateries paid ₹20,000 to ₹30,000 as commission to the apps. Now we are able to save 90% of the money.” As a result, he said, restaurants were able to slash menu prices.

Last month, the Cuddalore District Hotel Owners Association also switched

over to the new app. Terming these two districts as a “pilot,” Tamil Nadu Hotel Owners Association president Venkadasubbu said the model would be adopted by restaurants across the State, as popular delivery apps were overcharging both hoteliers and customers.

What does the future look like?

The founder of Zaaroz, Mr. Prasath, said the company is expanding to other districts and towns, including Theni and Perundurai.

However, taking on established players with deep pockets, experience, and economies of scale is not easy. In the app-based cab-hailing market, new entrants have struggled to survive against the big players.

The same would hold good for the food delivery business, where patronage needs to be sustained.

In 2021, the Kerala Hotel and Restaurant Association launched its own food delivery app, ‘Rezoy’, charging a flat 10% commission. However, it expanded too quickly from Kochi to Thrissur to Malappuram and collapsed under the pressure.

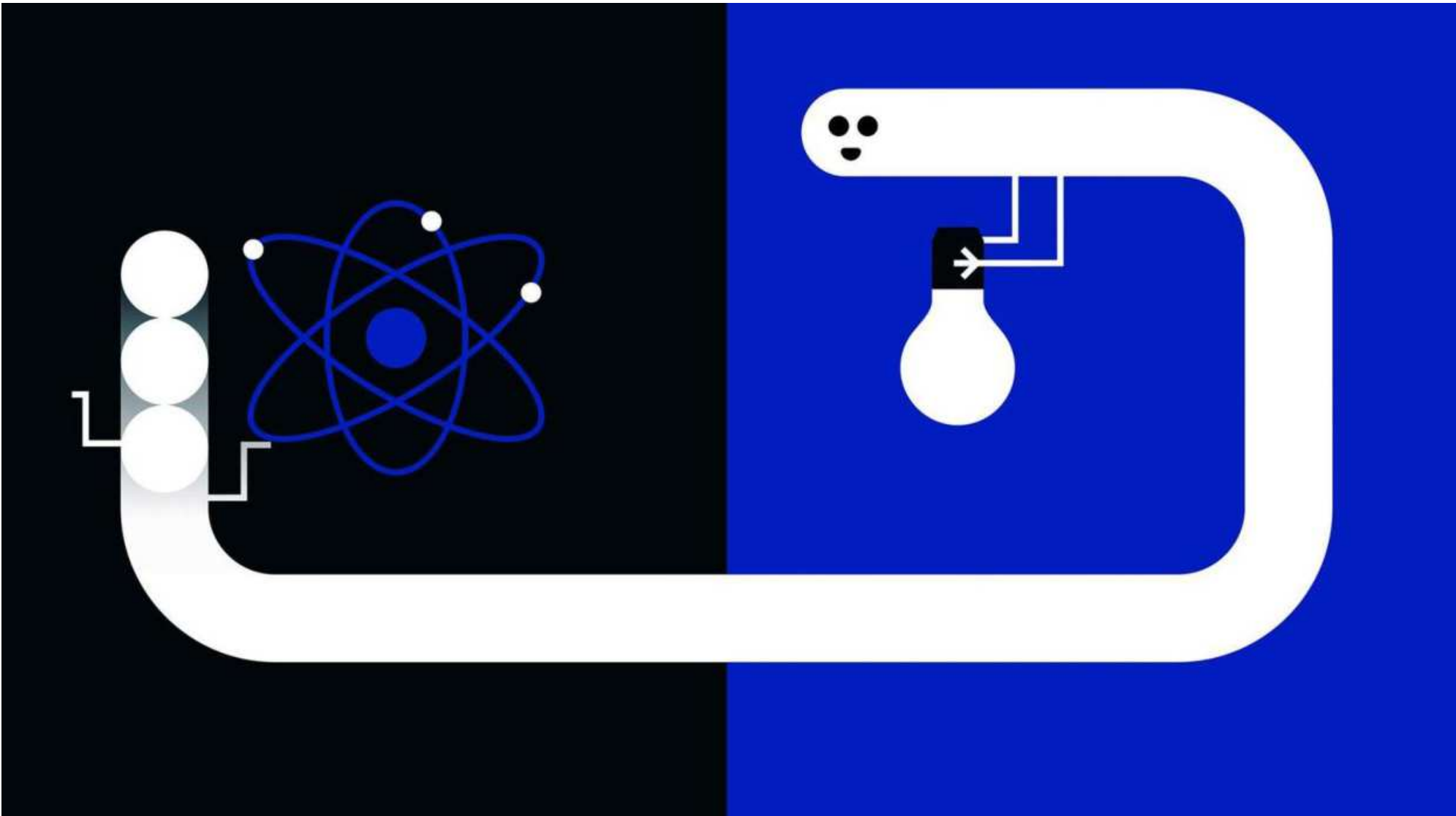
Attempts by restaurant owners elsewhere to break free from Swiggy and Zomato have met with little success. Zaaroz will face similar challenges in terms of logistics, customer acquisition, driver retention, and platform reliability. It is too early to decide if it will tick all the boxes.

THE GIST

▼ Restaurants in smaller towns like Namakkal and Cuddalore have logged off Swiggy and Zomato, citing high commissions, unilateral discounts, and poor communication from the big players. They have migrated to Zaaroz, a homegrown app charging a flat monthly subscription.

▼ Zaaroz plans to expand to other districts, but faces challenges in logistics, customer acquisition, driver retention, and sustaining patronage against established players.

KEYWORD



Quantum tunnelling is a phenomenon in which a particle passes through an energy barrier instead of having to climb over it. JOHAN JARNESTAD/THE ROYAL SWEDISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

The curious history of how quantum mechanics came to be ‘seen’ in an electrical circuit

The work that won this year’s physics Nobel Prize lay at the end of a chain of ideas that created a bridge from the quantum world of particles to the macroscopic world of devices; Clarke, Devoret, and Martinis showed that macroscopic systems can exhibit quantum tunnelling and energy quantisation

Vasudevan Mukunth

Quantum mechanics is usually described as the science of the very small – of electrons, atoms, and photons that behave in ways that defy the rules of everyday experience. Yet one of the most striking results of modern physics is that this quantum behaviour doesn’t vanish abruptly when systems become large. Instead, it continues to show itself in the behaviour of groups of particles doing something together. Over the years, physicists have learnt how to engineer these groups, measure them, and even control them to perform specific tasks.

The 2025 physics Nobel Prize has been awarded to John Clarke, Michel Devoret, and John Martinis for showing in their experiments that quantum tunnelling – a phenomenon in which a particle passes through an energy barrier instead of having to climb over it – can occur not only in the subatomic realm but also in an electrical circuit big enough to see with the naked eye. Their achievement came at the end of one particular chain of ideas stretching back to Brian Josephson, a British physicist who first described how pairs of electrons could tunnel through an insulating barrier between two superconductors, and Anthony Leggett, who later proposed that an entire circuit’s collective state could itself behave as a quantum object. Together, these ideas created a bridge from the quantum world of particles to the macroscopic world of devices.

The single quantum wave

In 1962, when Josephson was a 22-year-old graduate student at the University of Cambridge, the Bardeen-Cooper-Schrieffer (BCS) theory had explained superconductivity. In a superconductor, electrons move in pairs known as Cooper pairs, forming a collective state that flows without resistance. Josephson wondered

what would happen if two superconductors were separated by a very thin insulating barrier. Would the paired electrons simply stop at the wall, or would they tunnel through (since that’s something quantum physics allows)?

Using the maths of quantum physics, he showed that it was possible for a supercurrent, i.e., a superconducted current, to pass through even if there was no voltage across the barrier. The result was revolutionary: a current could flow indefinitely across an insulator purely because of the particular relationship between the two superconductors. Josephson derived a simple formula linking the current to the phase difference.

In a superconductor, all the electrons that form Cooper pairs act together as a single quantum wave. And like any wave, this collective quantum state has a phase, which you can think of as a measure of how far along the wave’s cycle (crest to trough) it is at a given point.

When you place two superconductors next to each other with a thin insulating barrier between them, each one has its own quantum wave and its own phase. The phase difference is simply the difference between those two phases – i.e., how much one wave leads or lags behind the other.

This difference isn’t just mathematical; it’s also physically real and it controls how electrons tunnel between the superconductors. In fact, the current that flows across the junction depends directly on the sine of that phase difference, which is what Josephson expressed in his formula: $I = I_c \sin(\phi)$, where ϕ is the angle expressing the phase difference.

Imagine two synchronised dancers performing the same steps. If they move perfectly in sync (no phase difference), they look like one. If one dancer is slightly ahead of the other, that offset (their phase difference) creates visible interference in their motion. Similarly, when the

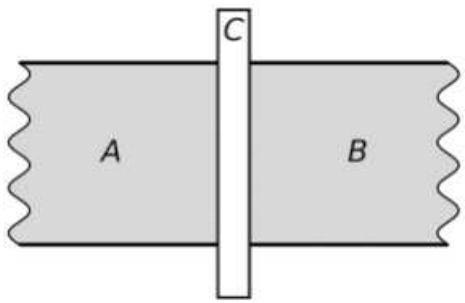
superconductors’ phases differ, that offset drives a beat between them, producing a current even when no voltage is applied.

The next great leap

Josephson also predicted that if a voltage were applied, the current would oscillate at a specific frequency proportional to that voltage. He also said that if the setup were illuminated with microwaves of that frequency, there should be a measurable voltage across the barrier. When other researchers quickly confirmed these predictions, this Josephson effect became a cornerstone of quantum electronics. In 1972, the BCS theory won the Nobel Prize for physics, and Josephson followed the next year with the prize for his work.

To visualise the Josephson effect, imagine two reservoirs of water separated by a thin glass wall. Classically, no water should cross it. But in the quantum world, waves associated with the molecules on either side can interfere and create a small but steady leak through the wall. The Josephson junction – which is a sandwich of two superconductors and an insulator – is the electrical version of this improbable leak. The supercurrent doesn’t arise from a push or voltage, but from the coherence of the quantum waves themselves. ‘Coherence’ here means the ability of the system to maintain its quantum character. And because of this coherence, a Josephson junction can behave like a single quantum entity, even though it consists of trillions of electrons.

The next great leap on this chain was that of the British-American physicist Anthony Leggett. By the late 1970s, physicists knew Josephson junctions behaved in ways consistent with quantum theory, but there also remained a deeper conceptual question: could an entire macroscopic variable, such as the current flowing in a circuit, obey the laws of quantum mechanics as if it were a microscopic particle?



A schematic illustration of a single Josephson junction. A and B are two superconductors; C is an ultrathin insulator. MIRACETI (CC BY-SA)

Leggett, then a young theorist with a background in superfluid helium, recognised that the Josephson junction offered the ideal testing ground. He proposed treating the phase difference between the two superconductors (remember: a collective property involving trillions of electrons) as a single parameter moving in an energy landscape. In his model, the system resembled a marble trapped in a valley between two hills. The marble represented the phase difference; the hills represented energy barriers determined by the junction’s current and capacitance. If the marble had enough energy, it could roll over the hill, corresponding to the junction switching from a zero-voltage state to one with a finite voltage. But even without enough energy, quantum mechanics allows the marble to tunnel through the hill, appearing on the other side without having to go over the top.

Leggett predicted that at a sufficiently low temperature, when there wasn’t enough heat in the system to push it over the energy barrier, a macroscopic variable of the system could tunnel through – and that this could be observed as a small current that’s independent of the temperature.

Something remarkable

His work did more than propose a radical

idea: it set down specific conditions in which macroscopic quantum effects could survive the destructive influence of the environment. He analysed how frictional losses and electromagnetic noise (together known as dissipation and decoherence) would discourage quantum tunnelling, and showed how to design circuits that would minimise them. In other words, his theory showed a way to use the Josephson junction to test the limits of quantum mechanics.

Among those who took up the challenge were Clarke, Devoret, and Martinis. They developed exquisitely clean Josephson junctions and cooled them to fractions of a degree above absolute zero. By biasing the junction with a steadily increasing current, they could watch for the point at which it switched into a finite voltage state. At high temperatures, the switch occurred at random currents determined by thermal fluctuations: i.e. the hotter the sample, the more easily it could jump over the barrier, instead of opting to tunnel through.

But as they lowered the temperature, something remarkable happened. Below a certain point, the temperature no longer mattered: the junction continued to switch with a small but steady probability, exactly as Leggett’s model predicted. This escape rate also stopped following the classical thermal pattern and instead settled into a pattern only quantum mechanics could explain. In effect, the trio had caught a macroscopic system tunnelling through an energy barrier.

To strengthen their case, the three then turned to spectroscopy. If the phase variable truly behaved like a quantum particle, it would have to have discrete energy levels. They followed Josephson’s prediction and shone microwaves of specific frequencies on the circuit, and found that it absorbed energy only when the frequency matched the gap between energy levels. This was clear evidence of energy quantisation in a macroscopic object.

The superconducting qubit

In two papers in 1981 and 1985, they described the observation of macroscopic quantum tunnelling and quantised energy levels, both in a single Josephson junction – a result that built directly on Josephson’s discovery and Leggett’s theory. Over the next few decades, as physicists developed materials more suited to these tests and advanced techniques that could make finer measurements, they were able to confirm these effects with ever greater precision. Eventually, the experiments became the foundation of today’s quantum computers. Or as Michael Schirber of *Physics Magazine* put it: “The work thrust open the field of superconducting circuits, which have become one of the promising platforms for future quantum computing devices.”

At the heart of these computers is the superconducting qubit, which is a device that works by harnessing the same quantum behaviour seen in Josephson junctions. A qubit is the basic unit of information in a quantum computer. Unlike a classical bit, which can be either 0 or 1, a qubit can exist in a superposition: part 0 and part 1 at the same time. This allows quantum computers to explore many possibilities simultaneously, making them powerful for solving problems that are too complex for classical computers. Each of these qubits consists of a circuit of the sort the laureates used. By virtue of behaving like a quantum particle, a variable of the macroscopic circuit – e.g. the phase difference – would essay the role of the qubit, while the large size of the circuit would make it easy for an operator to manipulate and measure it.

Leggett has often reflected that while quantum mechanics appears universal, there may still be limits imposed by environmental factors, and that probing those limits is as important as building devices that exploit them. His work on macroscopic quantum systems helped establish the modern field of quantum coherence, which now spans condensed-matter physics, quantum optics, and quantum information science. Josephson, meanwhile, went on to explore the philosophical implications of coherence, proposing that the deep connectedness implied by quantum phase relations may have analogues in other domains.

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on pop superstar, Taylor Swift, who has just released her twelfth studio album

Nitika Francis

QUESTION 1
What is the name of Taylor Swift’s fifth studio album, which is also the year of her birth?

QUESTION 2
Which British male popstar, who has extensively toured India and made music with Arijit Singh, was made internationally popular through his stint as concert tour opener for Swift?

QUESTION 3
Which play by William Shakespeare does Swift draw inspiration from in one

of her biggest hits? Name the song as well.

QUESTION 4
What is the name of the song Swift penned for fellow pop star Rihanna’s collaboration with DJ Calvin Harris?

QUESTION 5
In June 2019, a dispute emerged between Swift and her former record label, Big Machine Records, over the ownership of the masters of her first six studio albums. How did Swift retaliate to being unable to own the rights to her first six studio albums?



Visual Question:
Identify this hip-hop artist and fashion designer who stormed onto the stage whilst Swift was collecting her MTV Video Music Award in 2009, claiming it should have gone to American singer Beyoncé. AP

Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz: 1. In which constellation did Kepler’s Supernova (SN 1604) occur? **Ans: Ophiuchus**
2. What type of supernova was SN 1604 classified as? **Ans: Type Ia**
3. What is the title of Kepler’s 1606 book detailing his observations of the supernova? **Ans: De Stella Nova in pede Serpentarii**
4. What was the maximum duration for which SN 1604 remained visible to the naked eye? **Ans: 18 months**
5. What was the primary composition of the progenitor star of SN 1604? **Ans: A carbon-oxygen white dwarf in a binary system**
6. Although it is popularly known as ‘Kepler’s Supernova’, who was the first person to record an observation of SN 1604? **Ans: Lodovico delle Colombe in northern Italy, on October 9, 1604**
Visual: Identify this drawing. **Ans: Johannes Kepler’s original drawing from his book ‘De Stella Nova in pede Serpentarii’ (1606) depicting the location of the stella nova**
Early Birds: C. Saravanan | Neil Lall | Sumana Dutta

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

Word of the day

Bellicose:
having or showing a ready disposition to fight

Synonyms: hostile, aggressive, defiant

Usage: *The team’s bellicose behaviour on the field got them penalised.*

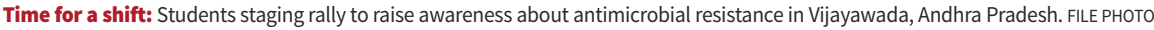
Pronunciation: newsth.live/bellicosepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /belˈtʰkɔːs/

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Abdul Ghafur

This is not because resistance is less dangerous than before. If anything, the problem is worse. The real crisis is that our words no longer move people. AMR



Antibiotics, while life-saving, are not neutral. Even a single dose can disrupt the microbiome for months. In some cases, the balance never fully recovers. The consequences ripple through what scientists call the “axes” of communication between the gut and the rest of the body. Disturbances in the gut microbiome affect the brain, worsening anxiety or depression. They affect the lungs, increasing the risk of asthma and severe respiratory infections. They alter metabolism, raising the likelihood of obesity and diabetes. They influence the

This is a reminder that microbes are not only about disease. They are about individuality, diversity, and beauty. They shape our daily experiences in invisible

(Dr. Abdul Ghafur is senior consultant,
infectious diseases, Apollo Hospitals,
Chennai and coordinator, Chennai
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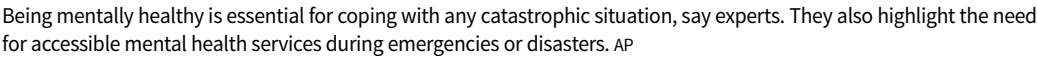
Instead of only warning that antibiotics cause resistance in society, the message can be: antibiotics can harm your microbiome. Protect your good bugs — they protect you

Prioritising mental health during emergencies is essential: experts

Serena Josephine M.

This year's World Mental Health Day theme: "Access to Services: Mental Health in Catastrophes and Emergencies" – highlights this urgency. The World Health Organization (WHO) points out: "crises such as natural disasters, conflicts, and public health emergencies cause emotional distress, with one in five individuals experiencing a mental health condition. One in five people (22%) who have experienced war or conflict in the previous 10 years has depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder or

Dr. Lakshmi emphasised that mental health, once equated with mental illness, is now better understood. It has a greater role in emergencies and crisis situations such as



wars and man-made disasters. She also stressed the importance of addressing children's mental health as many may have been exposed to violence and trauma. "Nearly 80% of refugees live in low-and-middle income countries. Relief should include not only physical, but also mental and psychological support. Mental health components should be a part of the initial planning. It

Government response
P. Poorna Chandrika, professor of psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health (IMH), Chennai, recalled how IMH responded during the Gaja cyclone that hit Tamil Nadu in 2018. "A team from IMH that included psychiatrists and psychologists went to Pudukkottai, one of the

Physical needs such as shelter are met after a disaster, but mental health needs are most often neglected, she said, adding: "People could be in a state of shock, not knowing what to do. They could look for a support system during

More efforts needed
Sivabalan Elangovan, consultant psychiatrist in Chennai, said that in crisis situations such as wars or disasters, efforts are first taken to restore all facilities. “Economy, health and stabilisation, in the case of war are among the focus areas but the mental health of people in these zones is not looked into. The impact of crisis and emergencies on children and adolescents is long-term, and so, mental health services are crucial. Access to mental health services must be created on a priority basis in emergencies and

Dr. Lakshmi also referred to the WHO and Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidelines for mental health and psychosocial support in emergency settings. "This outlines how to offer psychological help to people during disasters, and it is important to practice them actively," she said. (serena.m@thehindu.co.in)

Expected credit gain

ECL norm will boost banks’ resilience, credit capacity

The RBI’s draft guidelines for transitioning to Expected Credit Loss (ECL) framework are well conceived. It is essentially a system of anticipatory credit loss provisioning, and comes at a time when the asset quality of banks is sound; GNPA and NNPA ratios are at multi-decadal lows of 2.3 per cent and 0.5 per cent, respectively. ECL norms call for higher provisioning in the first year, and can apply pressure on the capital buffers of the banks. But the record high capital adequacy ratio of scheduled commercial banks, at 17.3 per cent, suggests that they can absorb the increase comfortably.



The ECL framework will improve resilience in the banking system. Given the spurt in unsecured retail, micro-finance and MSME loans since the pandemic, these forward-looking rules will help in early recognition and in warding off stress in banks’ loan portfolios. The current rules for classifying loans as non-performing assets if interest and principal are due for over 90 days, have been retained. But the new rules introduce three stages to all loans. At stage one, the loan faces no default risk. At stage two, the loan is due for more than 30 days and faces a significant increase in credit risk. Banks must use triggers such as rating downgrades, corporate restructuring, macro and company specific news to move loans to stage two. Loans in stage three are non-performing assets, due for more than 90 days.

Under the existing rules, Special Mention Accounts need no provisioning. But the new rules specify provisioning at every stage. Each bank must build its ECL model to arrive at the extent of provisioning required, considering the probability of default, expected loss on default, borrower-level risk indicators and macro-economic data. The ECL system calls for minimum provisioning for loans in the three stages, taking sectoral classification into account. For instance, provisioning is higher for unsecured retail loans in all three stages. Most private sector banks appear to be well capitalised and have made adequate provisions; but many public sector banks are expected to witness some pressure on their capital buffers due to the higher provisioning, particularly banks with large unsecured retail, MSME and micro-finance loan portfolios. The RBI has rightly decided that the rules will be enforced from April 2027 giving banks time to prepare. A glide path has been provided until March 2031 so that the additional provisioning can be added to the common equity tier 1 capital in five tranches spread between FY27 and FY31. This will ensure that the leverage of the banks is not suddenly impaired, affecting their ability to lend.

The draft guidelines for credit risk capital framework, being introduced along with ECL guidelines, will ensure precision in computing risk weights and aligning them with Basel III standards. The rules propose to link risk weights to ratings of the borrowers, stages in project finance and collateral received. These rules will, in fact, lower the risk weights for several categories of loans, freeing up capital for banks.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



Global funds to add a zing to gold

Global investment managers are increasing their allocation to gold, and positions in gold derivative contracts are surging

POINT
BLANK.



LOKESHWARRI SK

Headlines such as “Gold on fire again, moves beyond \$4000”, “Gold storms past ₹1.26 lakh/10 g in Delhi,” “Gold goes parabolic,” are becoming increasingly frequent as gold has been charting a blistering rally over the last two months. No one is really complaining since the returns have been quite exhilarating, at 51 per cent gains so far this year in US dollar terms. The gains are even higher in India at 57 per cent, with the rupee depreciation adding to the returns.

But there is a touch of nervousness among investors, with many wondering whether to buy more gold now or to sell their current holding. To answer these questions, we need to understand the drivers of this rally. According to World Gold Council, demand for gold comes from three sources. Jewellery buyers who account for around one-third of the demand, investors in gold ETFs and gold bars and coins who account for 44 per cent and central banks which account for roughly 15 per cent.

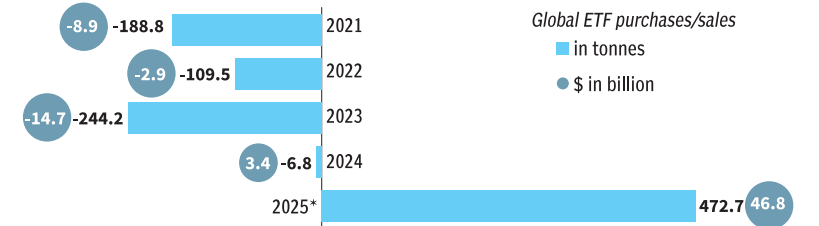
The ongoing rally is not driven by gold jewellery buyers since consumption demand tends to become tepid when prices surge. Demand from gold jewellery buyers was down 14 per cent in the second quarter of 2025. Central bank purchases are also 21 per cent lower in this period. But investment demand has zoomed 78 per cent. Gold exchange traded funds had sold 7.1 tonnes of gold in the second quarter of 2024, but they have purchased 170.5 tonnes in the second quarter of 2025.

What is heartening is that the investment flows into gold ETFs appears to be led by a long-term strategic shift in asset allocation by global fund managers. This is evident in Morgan Stanley’s chief investment officer Mike Wilson’s note in September recommending a 60/20/20 portfolio strategy with 60 per cent allocation to equity, 20 per cent to gold and 20 per cent to fixed income securities.

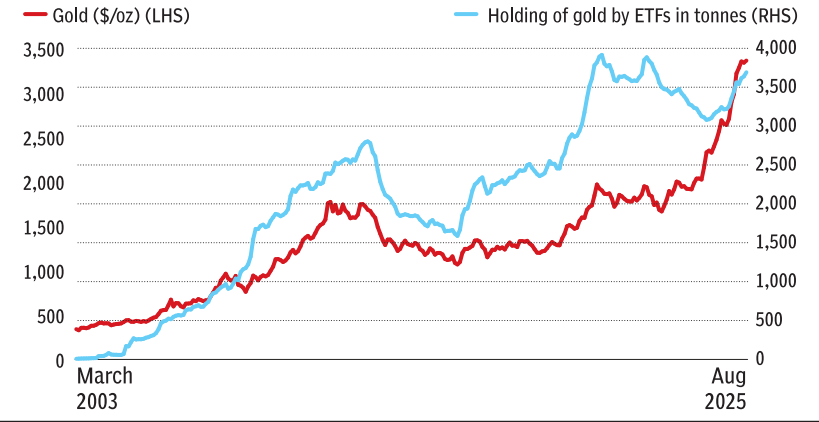
The note is implying that the fund manager expects gold prices to continue giving healthy returns well in the future. This is a departure from the past when even the riskiest portfolios contained only 10 per cent in gold denominated assets. Speculative positions in gold future contracts are also hitting record levels. With both global funds and speculators now arriving at the party,



Trend reversal in gold purchases by ETFs



ETF flows have high correlation with gold prices



the celebrations could well continue much longer than most expect.

WHY ARE GOLD ETFs BUYING?

Both individual investors as well as investment funds appear to have made large bets on gold since the beginning of this calendar. With ETFs being the preferred vehicle for gold investment, they have been receiving copious inflows. The ETFs have therefore turned

large buyers of gold in 2025. Between January and August 2025, gold ETFs purchased 472.7 tonnes of gold and increased their assets under management by \$46.8 billion. North American and European funds are buying the most gold since June though Asian funds were large buyers in the first quarter. This is in sharp contrast to recent past when ETFs were net sellers of gold between 2021 and 2024. They had sold gold amounting to 549 tonnes in this period.

Several factors seem to have made investors nervous, pushing them towards gold. One, Donald Trump’s irrational trade and migration policies which have thrown global trade in disorder and caused major challenges for companies in the US and elsewhere. Two, the US economy is beginning to falter due to these policies with GDP growth for 2026 being revised lower to 1.4 per cent. Three, with the US Fed

Total holding of gold by ETFs has not yet surpassed the previous peak of 3,884 tonnes recorded in April 2022. This indicates room for more gold purchases by these funds in near future

Why the Centre’s shipbuilding package is crucial

It will reduce India’s dependence on foreign vessels, boost investments and jobs and enhance strategic autonomy

bl.explainer

TE Raja Simhan

On September 25, the Union Cabinet approved a ₹69,725-crore package to revitalise India’s shipbuilding and maritime ecosystem. Here’s the lowdown on why this package is required and how it will build self-reliance in the shipping sector

Why is this a critical move for India’s shipping sector?

The Asia-Pacific region accounts for nearly 85 per cent of the ₹15,500-crore global ship building market. China has nearly 70 per cent market share, followed by South Korea and Japan.

Chinese shipyards are fully booked for the next 3-4 years. India’s fleet comprises about 1,600 vessels, with a gross tonnage (GT) of 14 million tonnes.

The package aims to increase India’s shipping fleet, as the country plays a crucial role in global trade. More importantly, India annually spends \$75 billion on leasing global ships while owning about 2 per cent of the world’s total tonnage.

So India needs its own ‘desi’ fleet to ensure that the trade does not spend too much on sending its goods on board foreign ships. The Union Budget had

allocated ₹69,725 crore to revitalise the ship-building industry.

Is the US plan to penalise Chinese shipping a trigger for moving towards Aatmanirbharta in shipbuilding?

The United States Trade Representative (USTR) stated in February that the US administration would charge Chinese-owned cargo ships as well as third-country-flagged vessels built in China, \$1 million or more per port of call in the US. Over half of all ships delivered globally in 2024 were built in China. This is a significant trigger for India to build its own ships, as most of the cargo from and for India is currently on board ships made in China. Consequently, Indian trade will have to pay the penalty as part of the freight.

What are the main areas where these funds will be spent?

The funds will be allocated to shipbuilding financial assistance schemes, the creation of a Maritime Development Fund, and for shipbuilding development schemes.

The package introduces a four-pillar approach designed to strengthen domestic capacity, improve long-term financing, promote greenfield and brownfield shipyard development, enhance technical capabilities and skilling, and implement legal, taxation,



SHIP BUILDING. Strategic concerns

and policy reforms to create a robust maritime infrastructure.

Why has the share of Indian ships declined over the years to less than 5 per cent?

Until two years ago, India’s global trade was relatively small, so it was cheaper to buy or lease ships from abroad than to build ships. However, things have changed dramatically now, with India’s global trade expanding rapidly. However, India has not kept pace with China in shipbuilding and is heavily dependent on foreign ships. The lack of technology to build large ships was also a notable absence in India.

Today, the maritime sector remains a backbone of the Indian economy, supporting nearly 95 per cent of the country’s trade by volume and 70 per cent by value. At its core lies shipbuilding, which not only contributes significantly to employment and investment but also enhances national

security, strategic independence, and the resilience of trade and energy supply chains.

Ships from which countries are being used predominantly in India’s merchandise trade?

While most ships are built in China, South Korea, and Japan, the majority of owners are based in Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, and France in the container shipping industry. Bulk ships and oil tankers are owned by other countries, including India.

Who will build ships?

Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) and Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders will be the two major beneficiaries. CSL will invest ₹15,000 crore to build a commercial shipbuilding yard. The project is expected to generate over 10,000 jobs (4,000 direct and 6,000 indirect).

Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders, the premier war-shipbuilding yard in India, will also invest ₹15,000 crore, creating employment for more than 45,000 people (5,000 direct and 40,000 indirect). These are just the start. Many more large deals will come in future, said a shipping expert. Companies from China, South Korea, and Japan, as well as those from Europe, are expected to invest in the ship building industry in India, either directly or through joint ventures.

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.

Punish the culprits

With reference to the Editorial “Killer syrup” (October 9), the irresponsible misuse of DEC component, the toxic substance, beyond the permitted levels in the cough syrups by the unscrupulous drug companies, leading to unwarranted infant deaths is unpardonable. Corruption and lax regulatory oversight appears to be the main cause in the failed due diligence while licensing of the pharma units and defunct periodical inspection of the quality certification standards of

drugs. Though the extent of human suffering and the loss of lives cannot be quantified and restored, the culprits should be penalized by applying the “polluter pay” principle and equally the vicarious liability should fall on the concerned authorities who utterly failed in discharging their duties, to prevent such mishaps at least in future.

Sitaram Popuri
Bengaluru

Crucial visit

Apropos, ‘Starmer in India with

large UK Inc team for trade push’, (October 9), UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s visit to India holds major significance amid escalating global geopolitical tensions and renewed US trade tariffs. The visit underscores Britain’s intent to strengthen strategic and economic ties with India. Discussions on defence cooperation, technology partnerships, and the long-pending Free Trade Agreement are expected to dominate the agenda. Starmer’s outreach signals a

pragmatic shift in UK foreign policy —positioning India as a central ally for trade diversification, stability, and counterbalancing growing global economic and political realignments.

N Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

A corporate titan

The article ‘Pioneer of creative capitalism’, (October 9) — eulogising Ratan Tata, touching, as it is — is a realistic assessment of the evolution of the economy and corporate culture through the 1990s

till date and Ratan Tata’s contribution to it. The impact Ratan Tata so unassumingly brought about in corporate values and among the youth of India shines through and finds expression in the numerous start-ups as also in the mobilisation of youth to involve in elderly care and community work, thanks to his support and guidance. He gave a fresh face to capitalism making it creative. May his ilk grow.

Jose Abraham
Kottayam



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Gaza’s wait for
a durable peace

Stopping the two-year-old war is the first step towards resolving the conflict in West Asia

Gunfire will cease in Gaza after two years of war and more than 67,000 deaths. According to US President Donald Trump, Israel and Hamas have agreed to a ceasefire as part of implementing a 20-point peace plan mooted by him. Hamas has agreed to release hostages — 48 of them, though only 20 are believed to be alive — and Israel, in return, will release prisoners, withdraw its forces from Gaza city, and allow aid to reach the Palestinian civilian population, bombed out of their homes and starved of food, water, medicines, and other essentials. Trump, who perceives himself as a peacemaker and dealmaker deserving the Nobel Prize for stopping multiple wars — the Nobel committee will announce the peace prize today — may even travel to West Asia to witness the exchange of hostages and prisoners.

Hopefully, the ceasefire will lead to a durable peace in West Asia — on the edge since October 7, 2023, when Hamas brutally attacked Israel, killing some 1,200 people and taking a large number of hostages. Israel retaliated ferociously by razing Gaza to rubble and targeting Hamas leaders in Lebanon, Syria and Qatar, leading to a limited war with Iran involving the US as well, and making the whole of West Asia insecure.

The ceasefire is just the first phase of the peace plan. The immediate task, of course, is to end the fighting and enable the delivery of aid to the hapless Palestinians. Rebuilding and reconciliation are tricky issues that will require major negotiation and building of trust among the stakeholders. Issues such as the establishment of the Palestinian State, backed by a majority of the world community but rejected by Israel, and the role of Hamas, the predominant voice in Gaza, can be resolved only through consensus-building and statesmanship. Since much of the Arab world is on board for the peace plan, including the interim governance arrangement mooted for Gaza, there is no reason to doubt the efficacy of the plan.

Both Israel and Hamas have been losers in this war: Tel Aviv lost moral standing, with UN bodies describing its actions as genocide, and global political support; the mass rallies in the West, including the US, are evidence of this. And the terrorist act of Hamas has come at a great human cost and possibly, its end as a political force. Both parties (the Benjamin Netanyahu administration and Hamas) stand diminished and, most likely, alienated from their own people, for eschewing the path of negotiation and coexistence and pursuing a path of mindless violence.

In Ronaldo, football
gets its first billionaire

Cristiano Ronaldo has long been one of football’s great goal scorers, and also a man driven as much by milestones as glory. Most international appearances, most international goals, the highest paid player in history (by moving to Al-Nassr in 2023), but it doesn’t stop there for him. Even at the age of 40, the superstar is still driven by the rush of being the first to achieve something: He wants to become the first in FIFA’s records to score a thousand goals, international and club combined (currently, he has 946). It is precisely this hunger that has seen him become the first footballer to reach billionaire status, according to the latest *Bloomberg Billionaires Index*, which has valued the Portugal great’s net worth at an estimated \$1.4 billion.

His latest contract renewal with Saudi Arabian club Al-Nassr, which will keep him there till he is 42, is reportedly worth more than \$400 million — all tax-free. The \$18 million a year from his Nike contract helps too, as do the 665 million Instagram followers. As part of his deal with Al-Nassr, Ronaldo reportedly received a 15% stake in the football club — a team-owning trend that has been embraced by his peer Lionel Messi, who will get part ownership of Inter Miami CF when he retires. So while football remains the main driver, the other endorsements and investments are starting to add up.

The portfolio is very similar to other billionaires in sports — this group of sportspersons includes basketball greats Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson and LeBron James; golfer Tiger Woods; and tennis player Roger Federer. Sporting talent brings them the initial recognition, but it’s smart investments and deals thereafter that propel them into the billionaire category. Ronaldo’s current life is a far cry from his humble beginnings, but as always, for him, the real thrill is in the chase. He’ll quickly move past this, onwards and upwards, to a new goal. But as a billionaire.

How India can beat
the encirclement trap

New Delhi can enhance its leverage by actively engaging in processes to resolve global conflicts and challenges, and expanding its strategic autonomy

Is India getting hemmed in on all sides? From what is happening around us, it does look like it is. Advertently or inadvertently. For one, the US is still unsure of where it wants India to fit into its world view. This shakeup of India’s relations by the US, the likes of which has not been seen since the sanctions on India after our 1998 nuclear tests, has gone beyond merely pushing India to get a good trade deal. The optimists point out that many important aspects of our bilateral relations are progressing well. Others point out that India has lost its geopolitical relevance for the US, symbolised by the punitive tariffs against India for the purchase of Russian oil in disregard of our national interests. The truth is somewhere in between.

It will be hasty to conclude that India has ceased to matter to the US in the larger geopolitical scheme of things. In the midst of relentless pressure from the US impacting Indian exporters, jobs, students and H-1B visas, the India-US trade deal may well be a eureka moment for

both countries. However, juxtaposed against a US-China deal which will reset the two countries’ equation in Asia, India’s concerns are genuine. While there may not have a “Munroe doctrine moment” between the US and China, with each side drawing lines around their spheres of influence, the Chinese side will press for some concrete understanding on the Indo-Pacific given their formidable clout with the US on trade issues like rare earth minerals. With the Trump Administration in no mood to mollicoddle its own allies in the Indo-Pacific, including Japan, South Korea, Australia or even Taiwan, how high will India figure in this US-China equation? Quad may go into hibernation.

That said, it is counterproductive to see every step of the US as aimed at India. But the US can do a lot more to address Indian concerns even while satisfying its domestic constituency. Removing the punitive tariffs on India is a good place to start, especially since there has been a 60% increase in oil purchases from the US this year. This should start offsetting the trade deficit.

The European Union (EU) is, at best, quiet and, at worst, has joined the US in imposing sanctions against India, as it did against Nyara Energy where Russian Rosneft has a substantial minority holding. European nations have struck lopsided trade deals with the US; they had to choose between, on the one hand, preserving

their alliance with the US and the so-called liberal order, and, on the other, standing their ground, losing American backing, and facing China on their own. The challenge to their world order is serious since it is coming, for the first time, from within — from the US. In this scenario, the EU, instead of clinching the elusive trade deal with India and strengthening their presence, like the UK has done, is trying to hem India in with their misguided regulations.

Closer home, with China, India has taken steps for an important but symbolic reset at Tianjin. But the tough questions are yet to be answered by China including pending de-escalation at Galwan and encircling India by militarily helping their “iron brother” Pakistan, making inroads in Bangladesh, and enhancing their leverage in Nepal and Maldives. Further, the huge trade deficit, stopping critical minerals, withdrawing their nationals from Indian companies and building their biggest dam on their side of the Brahmaputra next to the Indian border are all indications of their intention to hem India in.

Ironically, the road to tackling the misguided economic policies of the West is through China. With old security templates with China broken, it is time for India to engage in a mutually beneficial manner for Chinese investments to flow into non-security areas in exchange for market access to Indian investments. Noth-



TS Tirumurti



With China, India has taken steps for an important but symbolic reset at Tianjin. But the tough questions are yet to be answered.

ing creates more pressure on the West than seeing India and China doing business together!

To complicate matters, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have signed a mutual defence agreement to treat aggression against one as against both. While some analysts say it is aimed at Israel, not India, or that it may not make any meaningful impact since such an understanding was always there, any tacit understanding becoming a written agreement has implications and it will be a misjudgment to brush it away. Even if India now has the best of bilateral relations with the Gulf countries — one of the achievements of this government — this pact complicates its broader regional relations, especially if the UAE and others join it. And of course, Pakistan got a further boost for its geopolitical rehabilitation when the Pakistan army chief Asim Munir met President Trump — not once but twice after Operation Sin-

door. Now the US is selling air-to-air missiles to Pakistan. This comes at a time when the US has withdrawn exemption to India from its sanctions on the Indian-assisted Chabahar port in Iran, shutting the geopolitical door on India to access Afghanistan and Central Asia, something which will only gladden the hearts of Pakistan and China.

As geopolitics and bilateral equations change, India needs to enhance its leverage by actively engaging in processes to resolve global conflicts and challenges, not staying on the margins, and expanding its strategic autonomy, not abandoning it, and undertaking serious reform. Only then can we counter, and transcend, the efforts to hem us in.

TS Tirumurti is a former ambassador and Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, New York. The views expressed are personal

The perils of polarisation
for India’s defence forces

Summoning hundreds of America’s top military leaders from their posts worldwide, US President Donald Trump and secretary of war Pete Hegseth, harangued them in what is being interpreted as an attempt to enforce ideological alignment among the military’s command structure, with a blunt ultimatum that officers who disagree should resign. While such developments in far-off America should not be of concern to us, this sudden and significant departure from long-standing norms in a fellow democracy and its bearing on civil-military relations calls for reflection.

India’s armed forces have, so far, had an excellent record of non-involvement in any kind of activity that can be described as politically motivated. A serviceman is free to cast his vote as he wishes, but any expression of political views or public signs of political affiliation has remained taboo. Thus, no politics, no religious discrimination and no caste, gender or ethnic bias was considered the Indian military’s gold standard credo, and an attribute that has distinguished it from many other national institutions, which have forfeited the public’s faith and confidence.

Of late however, the secular and non-discriminatory ethos of the military appears to be under stress. While the Indian Army has inherited a tradition of accommodating and respecting diverse religious ceremonial, especially those linked to the faith of its troops, now, there appears to be a steady push towards public display of a politically-motivated religious-cultural identity. Senior military leaders are increasingly visible at places of worship or pilgrimage and are seen participating in religious ceremonies. This is unexceptionable, since every individual is free to pray at the temples of his gods and observe the rituals of his faith. However, military ethos and propriety have traditionally required that religious worship remains a private and personal activity, undertaken when off duty, and without involving service facilities or personnel.

What military veterans find jarring is that such appearances are duly photographed and publicised in the media, and that officers are often seen in uniform on such occasions, in the company of political functionaries. Thus, the time-honoured regulations barring the display of religious marks, signs and symbols while wearing the uniform are frequently being violated. This is accompanied by increasing references to mythological and religious themes — often painstakingly contrived — in public briefings and utterances and also while assigning code-names to military operations and institutional symbols. All in the name of a “long-overdue process of de-colonisation”.

Such tendencies lend themselves to an interpretation that the armed forces are either initiating the process or allowing themselves to be progressively pushed into alignment with a specific religious-cultural agenda. This would not only be violative of the oath of allegiance that every serviceman swears to our secular Constitution, but would also send a message of alienation and exclusion to the personnel of diverse faiths, who continue to serve in uniform in significant numbers.

Of more serious concern should be the distinct possibility that these acts, rather than being signs of soldierly piousness, are indicative of eagerness to please the political establishment. In a region full of militaries

with political aspirations, the Indian armed forces have, fortunately, remained completely untainted by political stain or ambition so far. Any signs of straying from this path of rectitude should be a cause of worry to the political establishment because it could undermine India’s national security.

India’s tradition of an apolitical military is something which we must firmly adhere to for reasons critical not only to the nation’s security but also its core interests.

First, if the military were to align with a specific political party, its leadership’s decision-making could be compromised. Second, governments are bound to change, sooner or later. Therefore, military officers who ingratiate themselves with one political party could be purged when its opponents come to power, resulting in organisational turmoil. Third, political or religious polarisation would create deep fissures within the officer corps to start with, and eventually infect the rank and file. Last, the military commands respect from the public for its non-partisan approach, but if the people begin to perceive it as another rent-seeking organisation, swayed by politics or religion, that respect will vanish.

In earlier times, a prime cause of concern for soldiers used to be the indifference of the Indian politician towards national security issues, manifested in the consistent failure of parliamentarians to take up defence-related issues. Against this backdrop, the September 2016 cross-border raids on Pakistani terrorist camps constituted a salutary paradigm shift. This was confirmed by the February 2019 airstrike on Balakot and now Operation Sindoor, launched as retribution for a cross-border terrorist attack. These actions marked a welcome departure from the long-standing policy of “strategic restraint” and called Pakistan’s nuclear bluff. Insofar as they marked the end of political indifference towards national security, these developments have, rightly, received a warm welcome.

However, this newfound political interest in security issues has also brought with it some complexities. Not only have politicians started taking credit for ordering military operations — which is their prerogative — but also for their successful execution. When done for political advantage, this prompts rival parties to retaliate by questioning the government’s claims. In such a cross-fire, the military leadership, unfortunately, finds itself on the horns of a dilemma. If they do not defend themselves, their credibility is cast in doubt, and if they do, they risk accusations of political partisanship.

Finally, we must remember that the defining characteristic that elevates India’s military above its regional peers is its unwavering allegiance to the Constitution. This sets it apart from China’s People’s Liberation Army, which swears loyalty to the Communist Party, and Pakistan’s military, which claims to be “defenders of Islam”. Allowing political or religious polarisation to seep into our armed forces would severely erode morale, cohesion, and combat efficiency, with grave consequences for the nation’s security. Therefore, insulating our military from such contagion is an issue that demands deep and urgent reflection by both our political and military leadership.



Arun Prakash

Admiral Arun Prakash (ret'd) is a former chief of the naval staff. The views expressed are personal

{ EMMANUEL MACRON } PRESIDENT, FRANCE



This agreement must mark the end of the war and the beginning of a political solution based on the two-State solution

On the first phase of the Israel-Hamas peace deal

Muslims and the RSS:
A personal odyssey

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has, in its 100 years, become one of the most powerful cultural and social forces in India. In his centenary address, RSS general secretary, Dattatreya Hosabale, spoke of an India where divisions of religion, birth-place and caste would give way to shared purpose, urging *swadeshi* (self-reliance), strong family values, social harmony, ecological consciousness and civic duty. He invoked *rashtra dharma* (duty to the nation) as an eternal moral duty transcending faith or region, declaring that Indians must dedicate themselves to the nation.

Hosabale outlined five pillars for transformation — *swadeshi* (self-reliance), strong family values, social harmony, ecological consciousness and civic duty. He invoked *rashtra dharma* (duty to the nation) as an eternal moral duty transcending faith or region, declaring that Indians must dedicate themselves to the nation.

The RSS has endured bans, survived suspicion, and transformed into a body capable of shaping the national agenda. It is often misunderstood as merely a socio-political force because of its proximity to the BJP. True, the organisation has expanded dramatically during the years the BJP has been in power, but it flourished even during the long decades of Congress rule. In truth, it is politically agnostic. What it ultimately desires is not office but imprint. In my view, the RSS is a civilisational movement, waging a patient battle for hearts and minds.

I write this as someone who was born far from Nagpur, both geographically and metaphorically. I grew up in what is now Jharkhand, cradled in a neighbourhood of Hindus. My earliest memories are of festivals: I splashed colours on Holi, lit lamps on Diwali, and joined the Dussehra *pandals*. That these were “Hindu festivals” never crossed our youthful minds; for us, they were simply the joyous rhythm of childhood. In return, our Hindu friends came to our homes for *sevayan* and biryani on Eid, joined our *iftars* and offered a warmth that knew no name beyond friendship. We prayed, we celebrated and we laughed together.

And yet, whispers reached us. Relatives and elders would caution: Beware of the RSS. They said that behind its rhetoric of harmony lay a demand for the submission of our identity.

Years later, in 2013, I left behind a successful investment banking career and met Narendra Modi, then the BJP’s prime ministerial candidate. He was direct: If I pledged to serve the nation, he would welcome me. I accepted. That decision was scandalous within my community. Many branded me a traitor for joining the very

forces they had long distrusted. The hurt was deep, and for a while, I lived as an outcast. But time, as it does, softened the edges. A decade later, those who once shunned me now listen when I say that misunderstandings need not last forever — that suspicion can give way to trust.

Still, for many in the community, the paradox remains. To live as a Muslim in India is to live with the weight of proof. They tell me, “We are natives and yet foreigners, citizens and yet suspects”. A friend once said, half in jest and half in pain, “How many more times must we prove our love for this *rashtra* (nation)?”

It is in this fragile space that the Sangh’s outreach to Muslims becomes significant. The RSS *sarsangchalak* (chief), Mohan Bhagwat, has spoken with a conciliatory tone: “From the day Islam came to India, it has been here and it will remain here.” These are welcome words, though some in the community still hear inclusivity on the majority’s terms.

Yet many others take heart. Imam Umer Ahmed Ilyasi, after welcoming Bhagwat, said, “Our DNA is the same; only the form of worship is different.” His words reflect a longing for recognition, for suspicion to melt into fraternity. But others, like Asaduddin

Owaisi, dismiss such gestures as “hypocritical.” Between hope and scepticism, our community drifts, never quite at rest. Yet if we strip away the layers of ideology and fear, we cannot deny our soil. Islam in India was never a foreign intrusion. It seeped through Punjab’s villages via Sufi shrines, entered Bengal’s poetry where Allah was called *Iswara* and *Prabhu*. Crores of people in the Muslim community still carry the surnames of their Hindu ancestors — Bhat, Shah, Cheema, Khokhar, Patel, and many others. To call us outsiders is to deny this truth: We are of this land. We have Hindu ancestry in our DNA, so where is the question of being outsiders?

The real question, then, is not whether Muslims belong to India. We always have, and always will. The question is whether the India envisioned by the Sangh can belong to Muslims without demanding the diminishment of their identity. What I see today is a shift, however small. India, at its best, is already a chorus. The task for RSS more than the government now is to make that chorus permanent. Can they do it? I believe they can.

Syed Zafar Islam is a national spokesperson of BJP, former member of parliament and former managing director, Deutsche Bank, India. The views expressed are personal

A promising stack

India must build on its telecom gains

The indigenous 4G stack and the digital revolution in India have emerged as some of the standout features of the ongoing telecom summit in New Delhi. Listing the achievements of the telecom sector in the country while inaugurating the “India Mobile Congress”, Prime Minister Narendra Modi brought out the timeliness of investing, manufacturing, and innovating in India. Telecom has indeed been a success story for India, leaving aside the rough patches such as the alleged scam linked to 2G spectrum allocation more than 15 years ago, retrospective tax on Vodafone’s 2007 acquisition of Hutchison Essar, and the longstanding government versus industry dispute around charges linked to adjusted gross revenue (AGR) of telcos. While many of the policies and rulings, with an adverse impact on the industry, were either eased or reversed subsequently, newer pain points have surfaced more recently. For instance, top industry representatives have underscored the need for a regulatory reset to combat digital fraud. Telecom regulations in the country should be in step with the ever-evolving digital risks. However, there’s no consensus yet on who should be held responsible for spam calls and messages, with the government, the regulator, and the industry holding different views on the matter.

Despite the challenges, the telecom sector in India has scored well on tech advancements. The indigenous 4G technology stack, figuring among the elite five, is an example. For the stack, the Centre for Development of Telematics developed the core network, Tejas Networks provided the radio access network (RAN), and Tata Consultancy Services served as the systems integrator. Besides India, four countries — China, South Korea, Denmark, and Sweden — have developed a 4G mobile technology stack. For users, a 4G stack would mean faster and reliable mobile internet services, and for the country the indigenous technology is expected to offer the benefits of national security and digital sovereignty. Another advantage of the 4G stack is a possible upgrade to the 5G infrastructure in future because of the software-first design of the platform. The homegrown 4G stack, deployed for Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd, is being readied for export as well.

Even as the 4G stack stands out for its tech innovation, India has hit the ground running on 5G, which, according to the government data, has reached every district of the country. India’s 5G subscriber base stands at 365 million as of September, showing significant growth within three years of its launch. The overall telecom teledensity in the country is also a positive indicator, at 86.4 per cent, with sufficient room for growth still, unlike in many saturated economies. The growth is expected mostly from rural India, with rural teledensity at 59.3 per cent, against 134.5 per cent in urban parts of the country.

The domestic manufacturing of telecom devices and also record exports from India, with a boost from the production-linked incentive scheme, have added to the sector’s success story. Mobile-phone production has grown 28 times and exports 127 times since 2014, estimates suggest. But, for the telecom sector to remain a leader, service providers must be financially healthy. In that context, the growing concern over India’s private telecom sector becoming a duopoly needs to be addressed. Telcos have to put their house in order in terms of rationalisation of tariffs, which are among the lowest globally. One GB of wireless data costs less than a cup of tea, Mr Modi said at the telecom summit. That may not be sustainable for the industry in the long run.

Tax certainty

Presumptive tax regime can improve FDI

It is well acknowledged that India needs large amounts of foreign direct investment (FDI) to push up its investment rate and, in a sustainable manner, improve its growth rate. However, tax uncertainty remains one of the biggest drags on India’s full FDI potential. In this regard, the NITI Aayog’s latest “Tax Policy Working Paper” rightly diagnoses the core of the problem. Ambiguity in defining the “permanent establishment” (PE) and profit attribution rules has blurred the line between “business presence” and “taxable presence”, introducing a risk premium for investors. An unexpected PE trigger, exposing investors to retrospective tax demands, could lead to substantial and unforeseen tax liabilities on income earned from India, thereby deterring investment. The premium not only deters new entrants but also drives existing firms towards complex, indirect investment structures designed for tax arbitrage. The result is capital inefficiency and costly litigation.

Recent Supreme Court rulings, cited in the working paper, illustrate how unpredictable outcomes can emerge from the same legal framework. In *Formula One World Championship Ltd vs Commissioner of Income Tax (2017)*, the apex court held that the Buddh International Circuit constituted a fixed-place PE for the foreign enterprise, as the event was “under the control and disposal” of the taxpayer, even though it lasted just a few days. The *2025 Hyatt International (Southwest Asia) Ltd vs Additional Director of Income Tax* judgment further extended this logic to India-United Arab Emirates treaty cases, reaffirming that management or coordination activities, even without a physical office, could trigger PE liabilities. While these decisions uphold the integrity of India’s taxing rights, they underscore an urgent dilemma. Without clear, objective standards for what constitutes a PE, India risks conflating a legitimate commercial presence with taxable control. Major disputes often take six to 12 years to reach a final settlement. For foreign businesses, such litigation timelines translate into frozen assets, accumulated interest liabilities, and a loss of strategic momentum.

Thus, the challenge is not India’s assertion of its tax rights but the opacity of the rules. Modern investment hubs cannot function on case-by-case jurisprudence. Countries like Singapore and the Netherlands codify precise thresholds for PE — based on duration, activity type, and degree of control — to minimise discretion. India’s current ambiguity diverges from this global best practice, increasing compliance uncertainty. The NITI Aayog’s proposal to introduce an optional presumptive-taxation scheme for foreign entities would be a constructive step in this regard. Under the proposed scheme, foreign firms could opt in to pay taxes on a predefined, sector-specific percentage of their gross revenues from India. Firms choosing this route would benefit from safe-harbour protection because tax authorities would not separately litigate the existence of a PE for that activity, relieving them from maintaining locally exhaustive books. Importantly, firms that believe their actual profits fall below the presumptive amount could instead file under the regular regime. Thus, it offers investors clarity upfront on tax liability while safeguarding revenue predictability. However, success depends on careful calibration. Industry-specific tax rates must be data-driven, not arbitrary, and the tax administration must build the institutional capacity to implement it consistently.



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Deregulation: The flavour of the moment

While deregulation is generally good for the economy, in banking it is wise to proceed cautiously

In a year in which India has been hit with additional tariffs of 50 per cent on exports to the United States, you would not have expected India’s gross domestic product (GDP) growth projection to be revised upwards from 6.5 per cent in April to 6.8 per cent in October. Or the inflation rate to be revised downwards from 4.0 per cent to 2.6 per cent.

Yet, that is what the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) did in its latest monetary policy statement earlier this month. The tariffs will indeed impact growth. However, since they kicked in from September, the impact will be felt in the third and fourth quarters. The RBI’s downward revisions for these two quarters indicate the impact will be extremely modest. For the year as a whole, the impact of tariffs in the second half of the year is overshadowed by GDP growth of 7.8 per cent in the first quarter of FY26, which was a good 100 basis points (bps) above expectations.

Commentators have been crying gloom and doom for the Indian economy ever since Donald Trump’s announcement of reciprocal tariffs on “Liberation Day”, April 2. Little of that has materialised in all these months. Analysts were projecting India’s GDP for FY26 to be shaved by around 50 bps, from 6.5 per cent to 6 per cent or below. The RBI believes nothing of the sort is on the cards.

But then the Indian economy has a habit of delivering pleasant surprises in recent years. In FY23, a year in which the Ukraine conflict erupted and unfolded in a big way, India’s GDP grew at 7.6 per cent when analysts were unsure if growth of even 6.5 per cent was possible. In FY24, GDP growth shot up further to 9.2 per cent, a number

that defied all forecasts by a wide margin.

These outcomes cannot be said to be accidental. They are the result of sound macroeconomic policies, regulation, and governance. The economy has become resilient in the face of serious challenges.

What we are faced with at the moment is uncertainty. We do not know exactly how the tariffs will unfold, where they will settle, or when. Geopolitical shocks have thus far not spiralled out of control but nobody can bet on that. The answer is not “big bang” reforms, dramatic measures that exacerbate uncertainty in the present while promising returns in the distant future. Instead, the focus must be on reducing uncertainty in the present while creating a more enabling environment for economic agents. The government is right in moving deregulation to the top of its agenda, even as it maintains the momentum of public investment.

That also appears to be the thinking behind the stance of the RBI in its latest monetary policy statement. With inflation at a record low, there seemed to be little risk in cutting the policy rate. The RBI resisted the temptation to do so. With a projected growth rate of 6.8 per cent in a challenging environment, there is not much upside to be had from cutting the policy rate at this point. Better to conserve ammunition for when the growth rate threatens to sag.

The RBI has instead announced deregulatory measures that are intended to boost credit growth at banks. Bank non-food credit has grown at 10.2 per cent over the previous year, down from 13 per cent in the year before. It is driven mostly by growth in consumer loans (11.8 per cent). Loan growth to industry is



FINGER ON THE PULSE

T T RAM MOHAN

Transforming governance by asking ‘why’

As India enters the next phase of governance reforms, the key question is what they should target to go beyond past achievements. Over the last decade, more than 40,000 ease-of-doing-business measures — from the Single Window Interface and e-Sanchit to faster insolvency resolution and online tax filing — have significantly reduced time, costs, and procedural complexity. Yet a contrasting picture emerges. With 9,420 new compliances added in 2023 alone (TeamLease), further reforms are needed to create a truly globally competitive and efficient business environment.

Why do new compliance requirements keep emerging despite efforts to reduce them? A key reason lies in the inherent tension within governance: Bureaucracies naturally favour continuity over change and control over deregulation. The common reflex — “The rules do not permit it” — often overlooks the fact that laws exist to serve society. Laws are meant for people, not people for laws. As technology advances and global competition intensifies, continuous review of rules becomes essential. Nations that reimagine procedures and embrace innovation emerge more efficient and competitive.

A more fundamental explanation lies in the purpose of reforms. They fall into three categories, depending on the question they address: “Why” a rule exists, “How” it is implemented, and “What” it actually means. Most reforms focus on execution (how) or compliance (what), rarely questioning the rule’s underlying purpose (why). Without understanding why a rule exists — what public good it serves — changes remain superficial and incremental. Probing purpose is central, as formalised in Toyota’s founder Sakichi Toyoda’s “Five Whys” method, which identifies systemic flaws rather than surface symptoms, enabling lasting, meaningful reform.

Consider a rule criticised by entrepreneurs: Multiple government approvals to start a business. Using the Five Whys: (i) Why are so many approvals required? To ensure businesses meet safety, environmental, labour, and financial norms before starting. (ii)

Why not check compliances after the business begins? Fear that businesses might misuse the system or violate rules if allowed to self-certify. (iii) Why is there such distrust in businesses? Historically, under colonial and socialist systems, enterprises were seen as exploitative. (iv) Why has this distrust persisted? Because the colonial legacy has never been fundamentally questioned. (v) Why not adopt trust-based self-certification with penalties for violations? It would require a structural shift — from pre-approval controls (process approach) to accountability afterwards (outcome approach).

Reforms that focus only on *How* or *What* yield very different results. A *How-focused* reform — moving approvals online, reducing timelines, or integrating single-window portals — improves efficiency but leaves the “approval raj” intact. A *What-focused* reform — simplifying forms, removing duplicates, or reducing licences — reduces burden but preserves the underlying assumption that government permission is always required.

Asking why is a powerful tool for meaningful reform. It sparks critical thinking and challenges outdated assumptions. One assumption that needs rethinking is distrust within governance. A government of the people, by the people, and for the people must discard this mindset. When rules exist merely because “someone might cheat,” the Pareto principle applies: Most people are honest, and the cost of elaborate distrust-driven controls often outweighs losses from cheating. Shifting to a trust-and-accountability approach has a collateral benefit. It reduces unnecessary procedures, simplifies governance, lowers administrative burden, and creates a system that is both efficient and fair.

Another outdated notion is that national interests are best served only by the public sector and that public funds are its exclusive domain. Any collaboration with the private sector is viewed with suspicion. A corollary is keeping strategic sectors under government control in the name of national safety. I would differ: Patriotism and nationalism are defined by commitment and



OFF THE GRID

AJAY KUMAR

a disappointing 6.5 per cent and it is propped up by growth in loans to micro, small and medium enterprises (18.5 per cent), once regarded as a problem area by banks. Growth in loans to large corporations is a mere 1.8 per cent.

The RBI says that industry is taken care of by funds from non-bank sources. In 2025-26, the total flow of resources from non-bank sources to the commercial sector increased by ₹2.66 trillion, more than offsetting the decline in non-food bank credit by ₹0.48 trillion. One does not know why the RBI is coy about providing the figures for the flow of funds from different sources (banks, non-banks, external commercial borrowings, internal resources, etc), as it used to in the past.

The deregulatory measures are about growing banks’ loan business at the expense of competing sources. The big deregulatory move is allowing banks to fund mergers and acquisitions (M&As). This is long-term funding that entails asset-liability mismatches. It also requires care in judging valuations of M&As. The RBI might have allowed such financing for the better-rated banks to start with and then extended it to the lower-rated banks.

Another deregulatory move is the removal of the framework that disincentivised lending to corporations with bank credit exposure of over ₹10,000 crore. The RBI argues that the Large Exposure Framework suffices to manage risk at the bank level. The issue of lending to highly leveraged corporations, however, does not go away. As we all know, banks lent merrily to a high-profile, highly leveraged group. It required the shock effect of an equity research report for the group to bring its leverage down to more sensible levels.

The RBI says it will address concentration risk through macro-prudential tools if necessary. Presumably, it does not see a problem of high leverage at corporations at the moment. Nevertheless, there is merit in specifying higher risk weights for bank loans to corporations with debt-to-equity ratio above a certain level (instead of specifying an absolute value of credit exposure). A third regulatory move — a proposal to license new urban cooperative banks — is truly mystifying.

The deregulatory measures will boost credit growth and bank income but will not boost economic growth because, for the most part, they substitute non-bank credit with bank credit. It is not clear that low rates of credit growth are a serious problem for banks at the moment. Return on assets of scheduled commercial banks was a healthy 1.4 per cent in March 2025; for public sector banks, it was 1.1 per cent. Besides, banks continue to face the problem of deposit growth lagging credit growth: Deposits grew at 9.5 per cent in the last year while credit grew at over 10 per cent. Boosting credit growth without getting a handle on deposit growth is not a great idea.

Deregulation in the economy in general is a good thing. There is always a case for visiting regulations that have outlived their rationale and cramp business activity. In banking, however, it is wise to make haste slowly with deregulatory initiatives. Bank governance and risk management still have a long way to go. It makes sense to conserve the hard-won gains of financial stability of the past few years.

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China, up close and personal



NEHA KIRPAL

Best known for her 1991 family autobiography, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*, Chinese-born British writer Jung Chang is back with a follow-up to that popular book. *Wild Swans*, an epic personal history of the author, her mother and grandmother, was a book that defined a generation and offered a first-hand view of the depredations of Mao Zedong’s era. *Fly, Wild Swans* brings the story of her family as well as that of China’s over the years up to date. In many ways, the book is Ms Jung’s tribute and love letter to her mother, her “guardian angel”.

In *Wild Swans*, Ms Jung wrote, among other things, about her grandmother’s excruciating foot-binding as an infant, Mao Zedong’s rule, especially its last decade, the horrific Cultural Revolution during which her Communist parents were subjected to painful humiliation, and how Deng Xiaoping finally brought the Mao era to an end. Around this time, a 26-year-old Jung became one of the first Chinese to leave Communist China for the West in 1978 — which she describes as being “out of the cage”.

Though she lives in London, Ms Jung’s life was still deeply entwined with her birthplace. She visited her mother who continued to live there, and travelled around the country to research her books. “The country has been turned upside down many times by tempestuous changes,” writes Ms Jung in the book’s Prologue. Her books talk primarily about her and her family’s experiences dealing

with the regime during those tumultuous years. Over the last 120 years or so, present-day China has grown from a crumbling state to a strong global power.

When Ms Jung’s mother visited her in London, she told her many stories about her family in the form of 60 hours of structured recordings. That became the seed which gave birth to *Wild Swans*. Even though the book has sold more than 15 million copies worldwide, and been translated into more than 40 languages, it is still banned in Ms Jung’s own country.

In *Fly, Wild Swans*, Ms Jung writes about how her parents, who were working with Mao’s Communist Party, soon became disillusioned with it — especially during the Great Famine between 1958 and 1961 when some 40 million people died of starvation. They understood that there was no space in the Party for values such as equality, kind treatment of women and comradesly warmth. But they soon realised that once someone joined

the Party, there was no exit — a crucial fact that kept the Party going. In 1966, Ms Chang was 14 years old when Mao launched the Cultural Revolution, with its horrific legacies of atrocities.

When her father wrote to Mao to protest against the Cultural Revolution and asked him to stop the violence that was wrecking so many lives, he was imprisoned. Subsequently, he was beaten and tortured repeatedly, and her parents faced endless denunciation meetings and periodic detentions. Nobody dared to clear someone who had criticised Mao.

In 1968, a 16-year-old Jung wrote her first poem to express her feelings about the society in which she was living. When some Red Guards came to raid their house, she was forced to destroy her poem and flush it down the toilet. “One thing that turned me viscerally against the regime was that nearly all books were condemned as ‘poisonous weeds’ and bonfires were lit across China to consume them,” she writes. The Cultural Revolution had poisoned everything, including love, she added. During those years, having a love affair was deemed an

unspeakable sin. “‘Sex’ was a dirty word, and even sexual love was unmentionable.”

Naturally, the last freedom Ms Jung was determined to taste in Britain was sexual liberation. Arriving in London, she began a relationship with an Englishman. She then met a Singaporean pianist and professor, but Chinese were not allowed to marry foreigners at the time. After much struggle, they married in 1982. Anglo-Irish historian Jon Halliday became Jung’s second husband, with whom she co-wrote a biography of Mao. Though it played a significant role in the world’s understanding of one of the most important figures of the 20th century, it received mixed reviews and some of its facts were questioned.

Soon after Mao’s death in 1976, his closest associates were arrested and imprisoned. People started celebrating, as Deng launched a comeback, and China began to gradually change under the econ-



Fly, Wild Swans: My Mother, Myself and China
by Jung Chang
Published by William Collins
309 pages ₹599

omic reforms he introduced. “Mass political victimisation would stop, and improving people’s living standards was to be the Party’s top concern,” writes Ms Jung. Deng restarted proper education in the country after more than 10 years, and books that had disappeared for over a decade reappeared in bookshops. After being shut for 15 years, tea houses reopened in 1981. In the early eighties, people in China could also express their love more openly.

After the publication of Mao’s biography, Ms Jung realised that she had to be prepared for the worst, because

Beijing would view her as a kind of enemy. In 2024, when her mother had a haemorrhage, Ms Jung was unable to visit her, and could only communicate with her heartbreakingly over video calls.

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The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

TATA MISTRUST

Disagreements between Tata trustees must be resolved — and they, more than anyone else, need to set their house in order

NINE YEARS AFTER Cyrus Mistry was unceremoniously removed as chairman of Tata Sons, and a year after the death of the patriarch, Ratan Tata, the shadow of both still looms over the storied group. Long held as an exemplar in corporate governance, the group is now a house in disorder. Sharp differences of opinion have emerged between the trustees of the Tata Trusts, which together hold roughly 66 per cent stake in Tata Sons, the group's holding company. Considering the sheer breadth of sectors it operates in — from steel to auto, software, retail and semiconductors — another power struggle at the conglomerate could have far-reaching ramifications. Uncertainty at the top and a long-drawn-out conflict will impact decision-making, affecting not only the group's businesses but the wider economy as well.

Reports suggest that the disagreements between the trustees arose over board appointments, access to sensitive information and the listing of Tata Sons. The latter also has implications for the Shapoorji Pallonji Group — the group holds an 18.37 per cent stake in Tata Sons — as a listing would help it unlock value, ease its debt burden. The RBI had classified Tata Sons as an upper-layer NBFC and given it a deadline of September 30, 2025 for listing. But, with the deadline passing — Tata Sons has moved to deregister as an NBFC — the central bank is still deliberating. Last Wednesday, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra is reported to have said that “any entity which has a registration, till it is not cancelled, will continue to do its business”. A few days ago, Tata Trusts chairman Noel Tata, vice chairman Venu Srinivasan, trustee Darius Khambata and Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekaran met with Home Minister Amit Shah and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. While government intervention in the matter would raise a red flag, the fact that the trustees held a meeting with senior Union government ministers underlines the seriousness of the situation.

The absence of a towering figure, after the death of Ratan Tata, is being felt. Unlike the West, capitalism in India has tended to be more promoter-driven. For all their limitations, promoters do tend to bring stability to a business. But the history of the Indian corporate sector is also littered with examples of how, when strong promoters have passed away or did not have a clear succession line, the group either weakened or split. Under Ratan Tata's stewardship, the Tatas sailed through storms, with an approach that prized achieving “consensus and unanimity on issues”, as Vijay Singh, who was on the board of Tata Sons, told this newspaper. For a group that has prided itself on its principled approach to business, and has long been held in high regard for its integrity, this saga must be quickly brought to an end. The Tata Trusts must put their house in order — it's vital to their future.

FIRST STEPS TO PEACE

For now, Trump's plan appears viable due to pressures on both sides in Gaza. But it will be a long and arduous haul

EXTRAORDINARY SCENES OF celebration played out in Gaza and Tel Aviv on October 9 — dancing, clapping, fireworks, celebratory gunfire, tears of joy. After 734 days of war, sparked by Hamas's October 7, 2023 terror attack on Israel and followed by an Israeli retaliation that unleashed death and destruction on a scale that drew widespread global condemnation, there is a long-awaited flicker of hope. Both sides announced Thursday that they had agreed on the first phase of a ceasefire deal. The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, clarified that the agreement would take effect only after cabinet approval. The exchange of a number of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners is to take place within 72 hours of the deal's implementation. The agreement was announced on social media by US President Donald Trump, whose 20-point plan, backed by Arab states, compelled Israel and Hamas to re-enter indirect talks in Egypt this week. He has indicated that he may travel to Egypt to oversee what could be the greatest diplomatic achievement so far of the US President's second term.

Trump's plan appears viable for now due to pressures on both sides. Israel faces growing international isolation for its war that has killed at least 66,000 Palestinian people and catalysed a famine in parts of the Gaza Strip. Netanyahu, a master of political self-preservation, has been on the receiving end of mounting domestic anger over his failure to bring back the remaining hostages. He likely believes he can withstand a backlash even if his far-right allies threaten to quit his government over the agreement. Hamas, meanwhile, has been unable to inflict damage on Israeli forces in Gaza and has been pressed by Qatar, Egypt and Turkey to make concessions. Both sides, therefore, may think they gain more from the deal than from continuing hostilities.

For all the optimism and hope, however, there are reasons to proceed with caution. The current stage is reminiscent of the January ceasefire, which collapsed within weeks after Netanyahu unilaterally abandoned the agreement and renewed Israel's offensive. For any ceasefire to hold, Trump will need to lay down the line for his Israeli counterpart, who has displayed his penchant for disruption, most recently in Qatar. Then there are the known unknowns: It remains unclear how much territory Israeli forces will relinquish, whether Hamas will truly disarm, and what governance in Gaza will look like after the war. Most importantly, peace cannot — and should not — be pursued without prioritising the rights of the Palestinian people. India, too, must play its part in ensuring that the current path leads to eventual self-determination and statehood for Palestine, because that remains the safest bet for the region's long-term security.

LESSONS IN ENDURANCE

Nobel to László Krasznahorkai is endorsement of literature as resistance, a reminder that great art is not always easy

READING LÁSZLÓ KRASZNAHORKAI can be a daunting exercise. The Hungarian writer's characters drift through landscapes of entropy and ruin — provincial towns, collapsing empires, haunted minds. His prose unfurls across long, labyrinthine sentences that spiral through darkness and grace, that demands that readers look harder, stay longer, feel more. But for those who follow his winding syntax to the end, the reward is a haunting clarity, of the faint, stubborn lights of hope that lie beyond the abyss. It is this architecture of apocalypse and his almost monastic faith in language's capacity to reckon with chaos, “this compelling and visionary oeuvre that, in the midst of apocalyptic terror, reaffirms the power of art”, that the Nobel Prize in Literature 2025 honoured.

Born in the provincial town of Gyula, Krasznahorkai's novels reflect Europe's shifting tectonics. In *Sátántangó* (1985), adapted into a seven-hour film by Béla Tarr, a collapsing Hungarian village becomes a stage for cyclical delusion. In *The Melancholy of Resistance* (1989), the arrival of a ghostly circus revives a provincial town's simmering anxieties. In *War and War* (1999), a lonely archivist travels to New York in a manic bid to publish a mysterious manuscript that may or may not hold the key to transcending time. In these narratives that unravel more than they resolve, Krasznahorkai, 71, confronts the most elemental of human fears — annihilation, irrelevance, absurdity — and the unschooled insubordination of hope.

In a world steeped in conflicts and climate crises and a pervasive culture of superficiality, the award to Krasznahorkai comes as a recognition of literature as resistance. It is a reminder that great art is not always immediate, or easy. It demands attention, engagement, even surrender. Sometimes, it lacks the polished graces of the mainstream, the marketable ease of the easily comprehensible. Sometimes, as Krasznahorkai shows, it is a long sentence that leads readers into hearts of darkness, not to be lost, but to witness — and to learn how to endure.



Soumya Bhowmick

WHEN UK PRIME Minister Keir Starmer landed in Mumbai, the visit was marked by considerable pomp — Bollywood-style frames, cultural showcases, and a large UK business and academic delegation accompanying him. Alongside that spectacle, his team unveiled fresh investment pledges from Indian firms and reaffirmed their intent to bring the India-UK trade deal into effect quickly. But for this partnership to reach its full potential, attention must turn to migration, talent, and every other bridge that connects two economies — even whisky casks used as cross-border investments.

When prime ministers Narendra Modi and Starmer formally signed the India-UK Free Trade Agreement earlier this year, both sides spoke of a new era of collaboration — not just in trade, but in shared ambition. The pact promises to remove or reduce tariffs on most goods and services. The UK expects to reap benefits of around £4.8 billion annually over time, and India foresees deeper access for its exporters. The agreement holds real potential: According to government modelling, UK exports to India could increase by nearly 60 per cent, and imports from India by about 25 per cent, resulting in a total trade increase of approximately £25.5 billion in the long run. While the gains aren't earth-shattering in relative terms, they are meaningful — especially for sectors where India holds competitive strength, such as textiles, leather, and specialty goods. In return, this benefits UK capabilities in advanced manufacturing, green technology, and services.

What complicates the mobility debate further is the shifting global landscape of skilled migration. In September 2025, the US announced a staggering increase in the application fee for new H-1B petitions: From a few thousand dollars to \$100,000. This move is widely seen as “prohibitive”, especially for Indian tech firms that have relied on the H-1B route for decades to staff

For India-UK partnership to reach its full potential, gaps in mobility, regulation and trust must be addressed

As the US tightens the screws, Britain is offering a gentler pitch — lower visa fees, expanded ‘Global Talent’ routes, and a narrative of being friendlier to Indian tech professionals. In that context, the India-UK FTA, even if silent on full mobility rights, becomes part of a broader contest: Can the UK capture some of the talent that the US is effectively pricing out? The FTA may not grant sweeping visa access, but the shifting US regime increases the stakes — Indian professionals and firms will watch how Britain balances openness and domestic politics.

client-facing roles in America. Indian companies are already recalibrating strategies: Leaning harder on intra-company L1 transfers, offshoring marginal work back to India or closer geographies, or deploying B-1 business visas for short visits.

The timing places the UK in an interesting position. As the US tightens the screws, Britain is offering a gentler pitch — lower visa fees, expanded “Global Talent” routes, and a narrative of being friendlier to Indian tech professionals. In that context, the India-UK FTA, even if silent on full mobility rights, becomes part of a broader contest: Can the UK capture some of the talent that the US is effectively pricing out? The FTA may not grant sweeping visa access, but the shifting US regime increases the stakes — Indian professionals and firms will watch how Britain balances openness and domestic politics, and how effectively it can convert trading ties into pathways for people.

An interesting dimension of this agreement is how it may reframe Scotch whisky not only as a traded product but as a financial asset class. The deal halves India's import duty on Scotch from 150 per cent to 75 per cent initially, which improves margin prospects for distillers, intermediaries and distributors. That shift has already spurred financial innovation. For example, just before the FTA was signed, the Caledonian Malt Fund L P, a Bermuda-registered investment fund focused on Scotch whisky casks, was launched. It is openly anchored on the expectation that tariff relief in India will strengthen demand and valuation of casks. In this way, the trade agreement offers more than just greater flows of goods — it lays the groundwork for cross-border capital investment. For Indian investors, whisky may evolve from a luxury import to a meaningful portfolio allocation tied to global demand, maturation cycles, and bonded warehouse structures. Yet challenges remain. The bilateral in-

vestment treaty, which is still being negotiated, is crucial for ensuring investor protections, tax clarity, and effective dispute resolution. India still needs to address regulatory and sanitary barriers that limit market access for goods such as mangoes, spices, and marine products. Meanwhile, the UK's planned Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism looms over carbon-intensive Indian exports, such as steel and cement, unless safeguards are agreed upon. And, perhaps most immediately, the deal must pass the UK Parliament — a process that could stretch into a year or more, subject also to domestic lobbying pressures on sensitive sectors.

What matters most, though, is what happens on the ground in the years ahead. Will British firms expand hiring of Indian professionals — even under general immigration pathways? Will Indian exporters scale up manufacturing and innovation-led exports to the UK? Will whisky imports flow more freely, and will Scotch casks become a recognised asset class for bilateral capital flows? If yes, then the FTA may earn a place as more than just a headline — it could be a live engine of growth, cooperation and shared opportunity.

Ultimately, this partnership is not without risk, but it is well worth the effort. The India-UK FTA charts a hopeful path, blending commerce, strategy and innovation. Its success will depend less on the signatures and more on sustained delivery, adaptability and the willingness to bridge the gaps in mobility, regulation and trust. If both sides invest in converting promise into practice, this deal might quietly become one of the strongest pillars in their long-term future.

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Stela Dey

A BUNCH OF men in Rishikesh decided a couple of days ago that they'd had enough of women participating in beauty pageants. Members of a fringe right-wing outfit stormed a Miss Rishikesh rehearsal and started lecturing contestants about “Indian culture”. One of them was heard telling the women, “Modelling khatam ho gayi, ghar jao (Modelling is over, go home)”.

Imagine that. A man walking into a room full of women and telling them to “go home”. Because apparently, women existing confidently in public, wearing clothes he disapproves of, are now a threat to Uttarakhand's *sanskriti*. This isn't about culture. It's about control. And now, frankly, it's exhausting.

From Valentine's Day raids to pub attacks, from college dress code “guidelines” to self-appointed gender guards, India's moral police are having quite the free run. They pop up wherever women dare to be visible, modern, ambitious, or simply free.

The hypocrisy is staggering. We sell “Western clothes” in every store, run beauty pageants on national television, celebrate Miss Universe wins, but when a small-town pageant tries to do the same, suddenly, it's the end of Indian civilisation. I want to call it out for what it is: Moral panic dressed up as cultural protection. Rishikesh, a city known worldwide for yoga and international visitors in shorts and sports bras, apparently can't handle its own women walking a ramp in similar outfits. Foreigners can wear what they want; Indian women must “know their place”.

The women at that rehearsal did what

ABOUT CONTROL, NOT CULTURE

Women on stage, shining, choosing, speaking — that scares the bullies in Rishikesh

more of us must do: They talked back. One contestant confronted the leader of the pack and asked him to stop the sale of Western clothes if they had a problem. Another asked the only question that really matters: “Who are you?”

Exactly. Who are these men to decide how women should live, work, or dress? Who made them the gatekeepers of morality?

What happened in Rishikesh isn't just an isolated burst of chauvinism. It's part of a larger culture that polices women constantly: From school uniforms to workplace attire to the way women employees are indirectly asked to be more “agreeable”. We are told it's about respect, but really, it's about power.

And this power doesn't only shout; it seeps quietly into the everyday lives of women. It's why girls are taught to text “reached home” before they have even caught their breath. Why parents track location pins instead of trusting that the streets will be safe. Why so many women don't go out after a certain hour, avoid wearing “revealing” clothes, or tuck away dreams that seem “too bold”. The country never stops reminding women that their safety, their choices, their dignity are all conditional.

That's what incidents like Rishikesh do: They don't just humiliate a few contestants on stage; they send a message to every young woman watching — know your limits. They chip away at women's confidence, one catcall, one piece of “advice”, one interruption at a time. For every contestant who dared to stand there in heels, there

were likely a dozen others who wanted to, but didn't because they knew the world would punish them for trying.

Beauty pageants, for all their flaws, still give women something rare in small-town India: A stage. An opportunity and the confidence to dream bigger. For many, it's not about glamour, it's about agency. And that's what unnerves men like these. A woman on stage, shining, choosing, speaking — that's the real threat for them. These men, who are not worth naming, blur into one another. Men cut from the same cloth, faceless in their fury, identical in their need to control, unknowingly terrified of women who won't shrink before them.

But women aren't shrinking anymore. From politicians in hijabs, pilots, journalists, Army officers, bartenders, and pageant contestants — they're pushing back, talking back, standing tall in the glare of moral policing. So, unsolicited advice from men needs to stop.

India's culture, that these self-proclaimed protectors “guard”, crumbles every time a woman is told to sit down, shut up, and go home. Our culture needs protection from such men and their intimidation tactics, from the constant policing disguised as tradition and morality. The real threat to our culture isn't women in short dresses; it's men like these with short tempers and long lectures on morality. And if our culture is so fragile that a few women in sequins can break it, maybe it's not worth saving at all.

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OCTOBER 10, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

HIJACKERS SURRENDER

FOUR PALESTINIANS WHO hijacked the Italian cruise liner *Achille Lauro* surrendered after holding 400 crew and passengers hostage for two days, Egyptian foreign minister Esmat Abdel-Maguid announced. He said, “The hijackers of the Italian ship surrendered... They will leave Egypt... And the Italian vessel will head towards Port Said harbour.”

PM ON SIKH DETAINEES

PRIME MINISTER RAJIV Gandhi has said that the Centre would not make any compromises to release Sikhs charged with

waging war against the state. Gandhi was asked during an interview with *The Guardian* how much control the central government would retain over prisoners to be released under the amnesty promised by Punjab's new Akali Dal government. “It depends... the prisoners who are charged with war against the state... we are not compromising on that.”

LIBERALISING TRADE

WORLD BANK PRESIDENT A W Clausen called on developing and industrialised nations to implement reforms that would enable them to actively participate in efforts to liberalise and strengthen the international trading system.

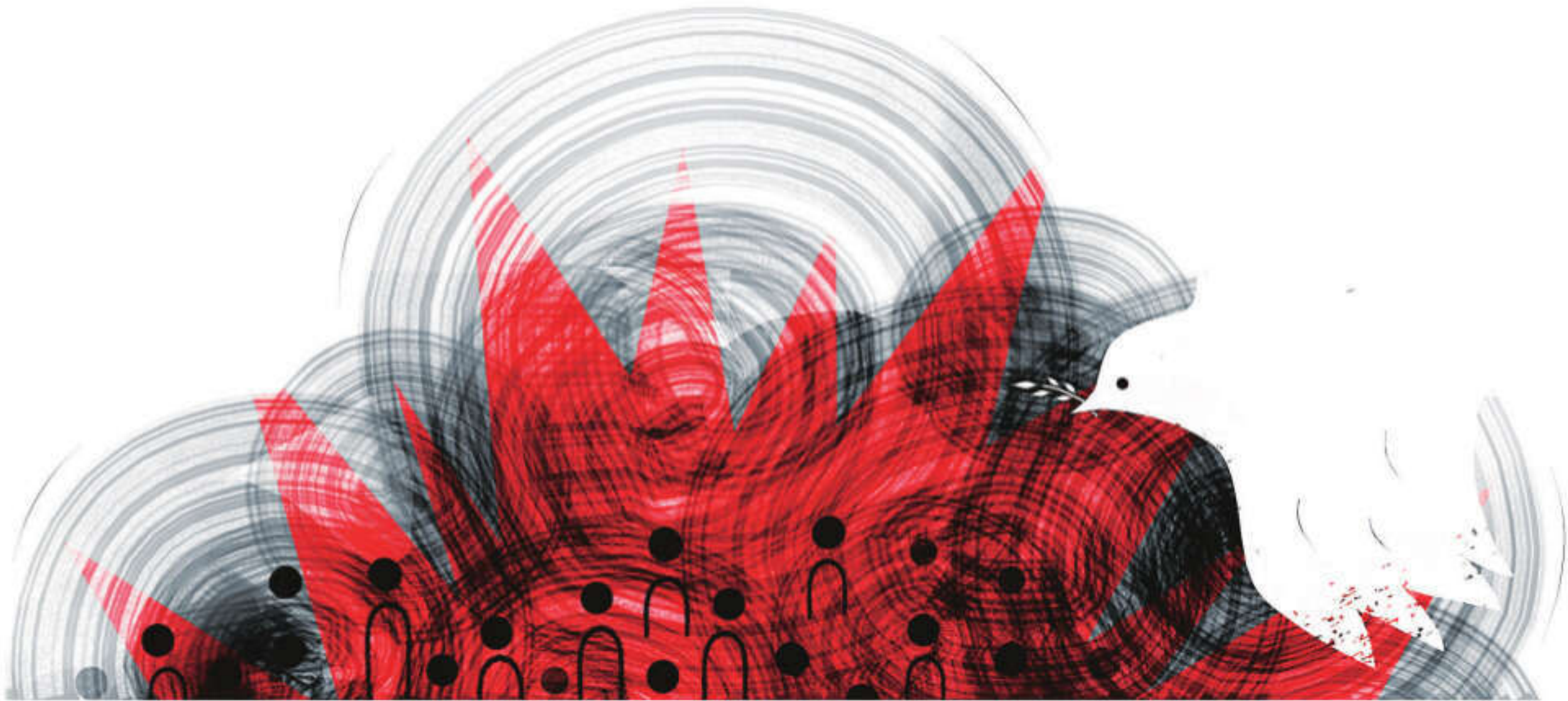
At the joint conference of the World Bank and the IMF in Seoul, he said developing countries should reform their policies in a way that would promote an adequate flow of capital.

HAZARDOUS PLANT

A COMMITTEE OF experts, which has examined the safety and pollution control measures of the chlorine plant of Shriram Food and Fertiliser industries on Najafgarh Road, West Delhi, has concluded that its location in a populous area and along a busy arterial road poses a hazard to the community. The large number of chlorine one-tonners kept in the storage area add to the potential leak hazard.

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

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



C R Sasikumar

On Thursday, Israel and Hamas came on board the first phase of an agreement based on US President Donald Trump's Gaza plan. What role can India play, how realistic is the prospect of peace?

India has stakes in Gaza's peace

There are both historical precedents and regional interests for New Delhi to be actively involved in the new plan



NICOLAS BLAREL AND SUMIT GANGULY

ON THURSDAY, ISRAEL and Hamas agreed to the initial phase of a ceasefire proposal in Gaza based on US President Donald Trump's 20-point plan, including an immediate ceasefire, Israeli withdrawal to agreed lines, and the release of all hostages in exchange for the release of Palestinian detainees. Hamas would be excluded from governance and a demilitarisation process initiated. The plan calls for international investment in water, energy, health, infrastructure, and economic development.

Trump's plan has won cautious backing from various key actors such as the Palestinian Authority (PA), the EU, and Arab states such as Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, despite concerns about the lack of a clear timeline for Israel's withdrawal. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has also reluctantly supported the plan even though some right-wing members of his coalition have criticised it. They are firmly opposed to granting Palestinians any role in governance. Although Hamas has indicated a willingness to engage in talks, it has also expressed reservations about the requirement for disarmament.

India has welcomed the plan with PM Narendra Modi, too, describing it as "decisive progress" and a "significant step forward". Israel's envoy to India said that it should carry out reconstruction activities, given its expertise in important infrastructural projects and its good relations with both Israel and the PA.

However, since October 7, 2023, India's official position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been cautious, oscillating between condemnation of terrorism and a desire to preserve strategic interests with Israel, while maintaining a principled stance in favour of Palestine. This is consistent with its historical commitments, notably its longstanding position that the only durable peace is one that allows for an independent Palestine and ensures Israel's security.

Despite India's ambiguous signalling, there are some reasons to believe that it may be asked to play a more important role. For one, it has historically been engaged in supporting a resolution to the conflict. In 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru lobbied for India to become a member of the UN Special Committee on Palestine, where it went against Western states to support the creation of a single federal state with Arab and Jewish provinces. India did recognise the State of Israel in 1950, but maintained its solidarity with the Palestinian cause, notably through sustained financial support since 1951 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). India also contributed major contingents

to both UN Emergency Force I (UNEF I) and UNEF II — peacekeeping operations deployed during and after Arab-Israeli conflicts. Patrolling the Egypt-Israel Sinai border, Indian forces even endured casualties in the early hours of the Six-Day War in May 1967.

Even as France, the UK, Canada and Australia decided to recognise the Palestinian state, India has highlighted that it was one of the first non-Arab states to do so, in 1988. The establishment of India's diplomatic ties with Israel in 1992 was partly driven by concerns of being excluded from an ongoing peace process that had begun with the Madrid Peace conference. Since then, New Delhi has regularly attended donor conferences and UN committee meetings on Palestinian rights, and provided developmental aid and technical assistance and training to the PA while developing strategic ties with Israel.

India has criticised Israel's ongoing military operations, even if not always directly, especially following its strike on Doha. India's shifting stance is a reaction to the change in international opinion on Israel and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states' concerns about the Qatar attack. India also has interests in the region that go beyond strategic exchanges with Israel on counterterrorism. Over the past decade, Israel's economic and political relations with the GCC states have changed dramatically, especially following the Abraham Accords and the announcement of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) project in 2023. Given growing economic interdependence, India will likely align its positions with those of the GCC.

There are historical precedents and regional interests for India to be actively involved

Indian participation would stand in contrast to China's critical stance towards Trump's proposal. However, given the unanswered questions with respect to the plan's implementation, India would need to condition any type of participation on the historical principles guiding its position.

in the new Gaza plan. Indian participation would also stand in contrast to China's critical stance towards Trump's proposal. Given the unanswered questions with respect to the plan's implementation, India would need to carefully condition any type of participation on the historical principles guiding its position: Ensuring Palestinian sovereignty, offering protection guarantees and humanitarian relief to Palestinians staying in Gaza, and respect for international humanitarian laws.

One immediate discussion should be over whether Indian workers would be encouraged to participate in reconstruction projects.

Close to 12,000 Indians came to Israel, through government-to-government agreements and private recruitment channels, to replace Palestinian workers. India would need to ensure that such recruitment efforts do not alter the economic landscape in ways that could make Israel-Palestine reconciliation harder, as it reduces avenues of Palestinian engagement with Israel and may add to existing Palestinian grievances.

Blarel is assistant professor of International Relations at Leiden University, the Netherlands. Ganguly is a senior fellow and directs the Huntington Programme on strengthening US-India relations at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University



SAPTARISHI BASAK

SINCE THE JANUARY ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas collapsed in less than two months, multiple attempts at mediation to stop the fighting in Gaza have failed. Most recently, Israel's audacious strikes in Doha, targeting a Hamas negotiation delegation, had ended any realistic prospect of the two-year-long war ending soon. Despite widespread international opposition and mounting domestic anger, Israel launched a ground offensive in Gaza City last month and expanded its assault.

On October 8, however, both sides came to an agreement on the first phase of a ceasefire deal to end the conflict. This comes against the backdrop of US President Donald Trump's 20-point plan, which is being lauded across the world as a promising step towards a lasting peace in the region. However, given the realities of the past 700-plus days, the road ahead is long and paved with potential disruptions.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has, throughout the war, pandered to his far-right allies, who have kept his government afloat. Coalition partners like Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir have already made clear, via multiple statements and interviews, their desire to achieve some very specific war aims: Annexing both Gaza and the West Bank, driving out Palestinians and establishing Jewish settlements. They have also been categorically opposed to any role for the Palestinian Authority in Gaza, and needless to say, any pathway towards Palestinian statehood.

Netanyahu has tried his best to frame the proposal as an Israeli victory, earlier saying that his country's troops would remain in Gaza even after the hostages are freed, without a proper timeline for withdrawal. His allies are not buying it, though. Ben-Gvir said that his party would not be a part of "a national defeat" and "eternal disgrace". Smotrich, too, was strongly critical of the condition of halting the IDF's offensive while details of the Trump plan are worked out. Latest reports indicate that the IDF is preparing to pull back, though the scale of the withdrawal is unknown.

Trump's plan, therefore, puts Netanyahu in a bind like never before. On the one hand, he can hardly say no to the plan being imposed by Israel's most important ally and cheered on by most of the world. As reported by Axios, when he told Trump last week that Hamas's partial acceptance of his plan was nothing to celebrate, the US President hit back, "I don't know why you're always so f***ing negative. This is a win. Take it."

On the other hand, going ahead with the deal puts Netanyahu's government at risk, and with it, his ability to delay the trials he faces over multiple corruption charges. Not to forget, before the war, Israel saw massive protests against the proposed reform aiming to give the government full control of the Supreme Court or court decisions. An end to the war also means a public reckoning with his own failings with respect to October 7.

Recall that in March, when Israel abandoned the January ceasefire with Hamas, Netanyahu blamed it all on the latter's refusal to release more hostages before talks on ending the war proceeded, something that was not part of the January agreement. In June, Israel attacked Iran despite the ongoing negotiations between Iran and the US over the future of Tehran's nuclear programme (reportedly, a deal was close).

And most recently, the September 9 strike on Qatar, targeting Hamas negotiators, was by far Israel's most stunning disruption. Ironically, it was this attack and the shockwaves it sent across the Arab world that arguably pushed Trump to accelerate plans for peace in Gaza. Reportedly, Trump forced Netanyahu to call up the Qatari Emir and apologise to him.

Cornered, what Netanyahu will do from here is hard to predict. He finds himself trapped between domestic political concerns and geopolitical pressure from Trump, Europe and the Arab states. A possible tactic, then, is to stall and accuse Hamas of not agreeing to the terms of the deal, and convince Trump that he must "finish the job". The other possibility is that Netanyahu, being adept at keeping his political career alive, survives the backlash from his far-right allies and weathers the storm till the next election.

The ceasefire and the hostage-prisoner exchange plan, therefore, might still fall apart, and there is enough evidence from this year alone to be cautious about any roadmap until it has been fully implemented. What is reasonably clear is that Netanyahu would invite further global isolation for himself (he took a longer route to the US to bypass arrest in Europe), his government (Smotrich and Ben-Gvir are sanctioned and banned from entering certain countries) and his country, should the war be prolonged and the Palestinian people be forced to endure further misery.

Trump, who has been pursuing the Nobel Peace Prize, will have to keep a check on the Israeli Prime Minister, whose past record does not inspire much confidence. The US President, reportedly, will be flying to Egypt to supervise the final stages of the first phase of the deal and the return of the remaining Israeli hostages. Once they are back in Israel, though, the possibility of Netanyahu reneging on the agreement and renewing hostilities (like in March) cannot be ruled out.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Mr Trump ran for President promising to reduce the cost of living, and of energy prices in particular. He has failed so far." — THE NEW YORK TIMES

Lost in the election chatter

India is staring at one of its biggest crises: Unemployment of the educated



ZERO HOUR

BY DEREK O'BRIEN

SPECIAL INTENSIVE REVISION. Corruption. Caste equations. Out-migration. Education. Yes, Bihar is weeks away from speaking its mind. Like any election — experts, observers and shoot-in-the-dark psephologists are deconstructing "strategy" and "stance". Over the next few weeks, your neighbour, your niece in her second year of undergraduate studies, and your uncle will turn into electoral pundits. Lots of chatter. Lost in all of this is an important conversation about a 12-letter word that does not get the importance it deserves election after election. Unemployment.

Gautam Sharma (name changed) had a chat with me recently. This soft-spoken young man in his twenties drives for a ride-hailing company. Here's what he told me: "I never thought I would be doing this. I wanted to be a web analyst. I even got a BTech degree. But I couldn't crack college placements. Eventually, my friend's dad helped me land a job at a reasonably well-known firm. My salary just about covered my rent and some very basic monthly expenses. No chance of savings. But now I make about Rs 40,000 a month driving a car — considerably more than what I was earning."

India is staring at one of its biggest crises: Unemployment of the educated. In 2017, over 12,000 people interviewed for 18 jobs as peons in Rajasthan. The candidates included engineers, lawyers, and chartered accountants. In 2024, over 46,000 graduates and postgraduates applied for jobs to be contractual sanitation workers in Haryana.

Consider this. A student spends four years at one of India's top government colleges, paying nearly 10 lakh rupees for a degree, only to graduate with no job in hand. In 2024, two out of every five students who graduated from the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) did not get placement. This pattern isn't limited to IITs. The trend is playing out across the National Institutes of Technology (NIT), Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIIT), and other top institutions. According to the government's own data, more than one in 10 graduates and postgraduates were unemployed last year. For women, it's worse. One out of five women graduates and postgraduates did not have a job.

Seventy to 80 lakh youth enter the workforce every year. Where are the white-collar, reasonably paying jobs for graduates and postgraduates? Even though corporate profits are at a 15-year

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CALLING BULLY'S BLUFF

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Women unbowed' (IE, October 9). The participants of a beauty pageant in Rishikesh who stood up to the bullying by members of the Rashtriya Hindu Shakti Sangathan must be applauded. This a victory, especially given that in recent years, forceful cancellations of various events by right-wing outfits have gone unchallenged. Usually, organisers are the first to fold at any threat of violence. Refreshingly, in this case not only the participants, even the organisers and police called the bully's bluff.

L R Murmu, New Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Women unbowed' (IE, October 9). Members of a right-wing group confronted models in Rishikesh for wearing short clothes during a pageant rehearsal. Muskan Sharma had waited years to walk the ramp. She did not get scared. She stood up to the bullies, asking them to get a ban enacted on the sale of cigarettes, alcohol and Western clothes if they were so bothered by the "corruption of culture". Regardless of her performance at the pageant, Sharma has bagged a win.

SS Paul, Nadia

QUESTIONS AROUND

THIS REFERS TO the report, '5 lakh duplicate voters in final rolls, says Cong' (IE, October 9). The Bihar Assembly elections are four weeks away. Yet the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the

high, companies have been actively cutting jobs. Data from three major information technology (IT) firms in the country indicates that they have together cut about 64,000 jobs in FY24. The pace of growth in net white-collar employment of the four biggest companies has nearly halved in 2023, from what it was five years ago.

A hiring platform recently reported that four out of five engineering graduates and nearly half of business school graduates do not even have an internship offer. The PM Internship Scheme aimed to offer one crore internships in India's top 500 firms. Reality? Less than 5 per cent of those who applied ended up with an internship.

The Union government estimates the unemployment rate at around 4-6 per cent. More worrying is the fact that educated youth account for two-thirds of the total unemployed. Recently, Reuters surveyed 50 top independent economists in the world, 70 per cent of whom said the government's unemployment rate was inaccurate, and distorted the true scale. The discrepancy lies in the fact that data collected by the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) counts working even one hour per week as being employed.

Wide educated unemployment is also probably the reason for stagnant wages as well. In an interview, the chief human resources officer of a renowned consultancy service had admitted that salaries for fresh graduates have been around Rs 3-4 lakh per annum for years. According to the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), the average annual salary of an engineer in 2020 was Rs 33,000 per month. The Economic Survey 2025 revealed that the real wage of salaried men was Rs 395 per day and for women it was Rs 295 per day.

Further, a government-commissioned Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) report revealed sluggish wage growth across key sectors between 2019 and 2023. Information Technology: 4 per cent Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR). Banking, financial services and insurance: 2.8 per cent CAGR. Engineering and manufacturing: 0.8 per cent CAGR.

Even among highly skilled workers like managers and professionals, the average nominal salary increase was just 5 per cent between 2020 and 2023. In the same period, inflation jumped 18 per cent.

The situation is grim. As per the National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India report, released recently, over 12,000 private sector employees and over 14,000 unemployed persons died by suicide in 2023. That is, 34 private sector employees and 39 unemployed persons died by suicide each day in India.

PS: Go watch *Homebound*. Outstanding film, directed by Neeraj Ghaywan. A true story of two boys from a village in north India in search of a job and dignity.

The writer is MP and leader, All India Trinamool Congress Parliamentary Party. Additional research: Dheemunt Jain, Prabhakhar Kumar, Ayashman Dey

state's electoral rolls continues to be under scrutiny. The Supreme Court has told the Election Commission to provide details of voters excluded from the final rolls. The SC has observed that the exercise has created confusion. The ECI needs to answer questions to allay the concerns of political parties, voters and other stakeholders. Among the voters added, how many names were removed earlier? What were the grounds in both cases? Thanks to SC intervention, the SIR has seen a degree of transparency. The ECI would be well advised to address all the shortcomings before it initiates a pan-India SIR.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

TRUE AUTONOMY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Strategic autonomy' (IE, October 9). The tariff attack on India's exports by Washington has made it an object of derision in the global market. The editorial rightly notes India's balancing act in the power corridors, yet glosses over how economic coercion narrows policy space. This carries the risk of our foreign policy autonomy becoming anything but strategic. Although it has gained visibility and deftness, hard challenges remain. True autonomy will be perceived through calibrated actions, ie, trade diversification, institutional reforms and economic diplomacy. This will ensure that strategic autonomy translates into sustainable power projection and underlines India's ambition to shape global norms.

Abhinav Shah, Lucknow

Two 'overriding' Acts

Govt must not lay hands on proceeds of crime in insolvency cases, only punish the offenders

A SUPREME COURT (SC) judgment earlier this year in the Kalyani Transco-Bhushan Power and Steel case, and a subsequent National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) order in the Dunar Foods case have practically undermined the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) principle that a “clean slate” must be available to resolution applicants (RAs). IBC has ab initio been armed with Section 14 that offers moratorium on assets of an entity undergoing resolution. Section 32 (A), introduced in December 2019, reinforced this shelter by giving immunity to the corporate debtor (CD) and its assets from prosecution under other laws. In fact, the origin of Section 32(A) could be traced to numerous instances where courts and tribunals gave divergent treatments to the attachments of assets of CD by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), during or prior to the insolvency process. The conflict between the IBC and the PMLA is particularly difficult as both are “special statutes” that contain “non-obstante” clauses that have an overriding effect over other laws inconsistent with them.

In the latest instance, the apex court has held that neither the NCLT nor the NCLAT has jurisdiction to review decisions taken by statutory authorities on matters that are “in the realm of public law”, like actions under the PMLA. To be sure, the very concept behind the moratorium and immunity provisions in the IBC is that firms are not deterred from bidding for insolvent companies for fear of being troubled with the promoters' past criminal liabilities. While the RA in the Dunar Foods case contended that the Section 14 moratorium applies to all proceedings—civil, criminal, quasi-judicial or otherwise—the NCLAT, citing the SC ruling, held that “proceeds of crime” already being adjudicated under a penal statute “cannot be deemed to be part of freely available resolution estate”.

While this has created a seemingly insurmountable legal challenge to the stakeholders in the insolvency process, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) Chairperson Ravi Mital has held a ray of hope by stating last week that the board and the ED have arrived at a “solution” to address the vexatious issue. What needs to be known is whether the circular, which Mital said would be issued “in a month or two”, would ensure that not only after the successful bidder is chosen, but even during the resolution process, the ED would refrain from attaching the assets financed by the creditors. ED actions running parallel to the resolution efforts would doubtless diminish chances of resolution. It is also unclear whether an understanding between the IBBI and the ED and its endorsement via a circular will have legal validity.

To be sure, Section 32(A) of the IBC preconceived the conflict that has arisen with the PMLA, and explicitly states that “any proceedings” may be initiated against “persons” involved in generating ill-gotten funds, but not the “assets” created even if via malfeasance. What will also serve to resolve the issue is the notion that crime proceeds offered as security to creditors rightfully belong to them, rather than the government. The government's role in this case must be restricted to taking penal measures against the offenders for contravention of the law. The assets of the CD, even if besmirched by crime, must accrue to the creditors, and, thereby, the larger economy and society. Such protection is even more necessary when the business concerned has a chance for revival only with the benefit of such assets.

European giants try radical path to stock market glory

THE LATEST MOVES by European companies to list in the US are more radical than meets the eye. AstraZeneca and TotalEnergies want to upgrade their existing US equity offering to stock from from quasi stock—a well-trodden path. But as ever, the devil is in the detail.

In each case, the idea is to convert the firm's American depositary receipts (ADRs) to ordinary shares. ADRs are a tradable legal wrapper for non-US stock; the underlying share is warehoused by a financial institution such as Bank of New York Mellon. The beauty of ADRs is that they simplify dealing in overseas companies for US investors, and give those corporations easy access to US demand. Switching to ordinary shares means grappling with the difficulties that ADRs circumvent.

First, consider AstraZeneca. In taking a full US listing, the settlement of its share trades moves to the US Depository Trust. Since it's retaining the UK as a trading venue, the way its stock changes hands in London will have to now accommodate technical and regulatory constraints. This means wrapping the London shares in a legal structure called a depositary interest—which is free of UK stamp tax.

The drugmaker isn't the first company trading in London to switch to DIs. But this is the first time a company of such standing will go stamp-free overnight while staying in the FTSE 100 index. So we're about to see a controlled experiment in removing the UK's controversial trading levy. Moreover, AstraZeneca has sent a message that it may be worth taking a full US listing even if it does not involve entering the S&P 500 index—the aspiration of past migrations.

The esteemed US benchmark isn't easy to access. The criteria include various American-flavoured tick-boxes. The ultimate decision is made by a committee. In the hope of finding favour, past corporate migrants have either redomiciled or created “operational headquarters” in the US while downgrading their UK listing status and exiting the FTSE 100.

AstraZeneca isn't bothering with that. Hence it won't become an “index orphan” in limbo between two major benchmarks. Maybe the 100% certainty of being in the FTSE 100 beats the hard-to-guess possibility of joining the S&P 500. Hopefully for the UK, the difference between New York and London trading in one of its top companies won't become characterised by active, engaged investors abroad and faceless passive flows at home.

France's TotalEnergies may well be able to dodge the need for a DI-style wrapper. The oil major has said its ADR upgrade will have no impact on its existing Paris shareholders, implying that it's found a way of creating seamless share dealing on either side of the Atlantic. The details have yet to emerge. You don't see French companies listed on Euronext having their ordinary shares trade in parallel in the US. The complexity of global clearing and settlement rules, and differences between the UK and French market plumbing, probably explain why it may, in fact, be possible. But again, this looks pioneering. Exciting times for capital-markets lawyers.

AstraZeneca is already highly valued. The most concrete upside is gaining a stronger acquisition and fundraising currency. TotalEnergies, by contrast, trades at a notable discount to US peers, so there's more pressure on its ADR conversion to boost that valuation. It's also not chasing S&P 500 membership.

Unlike TotalEnergies's move, AstraZeneca's is part of a clear trend in its home market. The UK firm has exposed how British tax policy incentivises London-listed companies to go to the US. A root-and-branch review is needed in the UK. Much trading in UK stocks has already moved to stamp-exempt methods like contracts for difference. There's no stamp tax on corporate bonds or crypto trading. Levying it on stocks just inflates the cost of capital of companies whose investment activity can actually help spur economic growth.

So the European corporate sector is being pretty innovative in seeking to capture the benefits of the US's deep capital markets. If only the European authorities showed as much inventiveness in keeping companies at home.

THE GOVERNMENT'S CALL SHOULD BE SEEN AS A CHANCE TO REINVENT CONSULTANCY ITSELF

From Big Four to big ideas

MODERN CONSULTANCY

AMIT KAPOOR

Chair, Institute for Competitiveness
X: @kautiliya

ties. Imported models rarely capture India's layered federalism, vast informal economy, or bureaucratic complexities. France's disastrous Covid-19 vaccine rollout that was strategised by consultants who transplanted frameworks from unrelated industries clearly showed how costly external reliance can be. In contrast, Kerala's Covid-19 success drew on institutional memory from floods and past outbreaks, demonstrating the power of accumulated local knowledge. If India is to avoid dependence on spherical-cow abstractions, it must embed consulting

Consulting, at its best, is not just about providing solutions but about interpreting institutions, contexts, and tacit realities

capacity that grows out of its own lived realities. Outsourcing significantly hinders the development of local expertise and infantilises civil services. To prevent this, India must build consultancies that strengthen rather than substitute domestic capacity. That means rethinking procurement and partnerships. Progressive procurement, as practiced in Preston, England, redirected contracts to local firms instead of multinationals, ensuring wealth and know-how circulated within the community. India could adapt this model, privileging home-grown firms so that contracts build national capability rather than drain it.

Equally critical is embedding learning into contracts. Too many consultancy projects end with glossy reports that leave clients no stronger than before. Contracts should mandate knowledge-sharing pro-

visions and capacity-building milestones, so that each engagement leaves behind expertise rather than dependency. This shift would ensure that Indian consultancies act as accelerators of internal competence, not perpetual crutches.

Beyond private firms, India must foster partnerships with universities, research institutions, and public agencies. Unlike profit-driven consultancies, these actors are mandated to generate knowledge for the public good. Directing resources their way could expand India's advisory ecosystem, strengthen public sector research, and create networks of expertise comparable to the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose. Such knowledge ecosystems, built around collaboration rather than market fixes, would allow India to combine its formidable technological and intellectual base with new forms of advisory capacity.

This is not to say that firm size does not matter. Just as India's information technology services sector evolved from back-office work into a global powerhouse, Indian consultancies can aspire not just to protect sovereignty but also to export models. The world is already studying India's digital stack, fintech regulation, and frugal innovation. An Indian Big Four could become ambassadors of these practices, shaping governance in emerging markets, much as McKinsey once shaped corporations in the West.

Regulations must evolve for healthy markets

SHRIRAM SUBRAMANIAN

Founder, InGovern Research Services



ANY ROBUST CAPITAL market is built on investor confidence, corporate transparency, and regulatory agility. As financial instruments, investor profiles, and technologies evolve, the regulatory framework governing them must do so as well. Overly prescriptive rules stifle innovation and deter market participation. Flexible and adaptive regulations help market participants respond quickly to change. Regulations must keep pace with market innovations and global best practices to sustain a competitive capital markets ecosystem.

Recent steps by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), and the ministry of corporate affairs (MCA) reflect this shift. Sebi has introduced streamlined disclosure norms, eased fundraising rules for start-ups and real estate investment trusts/infrastructure investment trusts, and enabled faster settlement cycles to deepen market efficiency. The RBI, meanwhile, has focused on strengthening the regulatory framework for fintechs and non-bank lenders. Both Sebi and the RBI are encouraging innovation through mechanisms like regulatory sandboxes. These measures signal a coordinated move toward a more responsive and forward-looking regulatory environment. Our capital markets have moved to T+0 settlements. The RBI has introduced faster cheque processing that enables quicker payments, and enabled bank funding for mergers and acquisitions. At its last board meeting, Sebi announced a slew of positive changes: easing foreign portfolio investment disclosure norms, rights issue

process simplified with tighter timelines, tweaks to shareholder disclosure norms, optional T+0 settlement, and extended timelines for algo trading.

Sebi has also introduced frameworks that enhance promoter accountability while safeguarding minority shareholder interests. Mandatory disclosures on related-party transactions, reporting on pledged shares, and independent oversight in strategic decisions establish a transparent and enforceable framework for promoter actions. These measures ensure that minority shareholders benefit from the promoter's engagement rather than being exposed to unchecked risk.

In addition to regulatory changes, an active regulatory response has enabled many long-pending matters to be resolved. For example, the open offer approval for the Burman family's entry into Religare Enterprises Ltd. has stabilised governance, strengthened investor confidence, and helped reposition the company for growth.

In another example, Sebi recently approved IHH Healthcare's open offer for Fortis Healthcare and Fortis Malar Hospitals. Although the approval took nearly seven years, it brings closure to the backing of one of Asia's largest healthcare providers to Fortis at a moment when competition in the sector has intensified. Beyond capital infusion, IHH has enabled Fortis in both organic expansion and acquisition-led growth, enhancing the lat-

When disclosure rules are simple, enforcement is predictable, and new technology is welcomed, market participants feel more secure and willing to invest

ter's market positioning and operational capabilities. For minority shareholders, such a development signals a long-term, credible commitment as the Indian healthcare sector is still growing and underpenetrated.

On the other hand, the RBI has recently enabled deposit tokenisation, provided a self-regulatory status for the non-banking financial company sector, rationalised how banks and regulated entities lend to related parties, and allowed for foreign currency settlements via Gujarat International Finance Tech (GIFT) City.

Another dimension is where the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) gets involved—mergers, demergers, acquisitions, schemes of arrangement, delistings, and bankruptcies. These are critical levers for growth, efficiency, and stakeholder value creation. The Indian legal and regulatory framework between Sebi, the RBI, the NCLT, etc. needs to adapt to changing market requirements with faster approvals.

While the above are positive developments, clarity and consistency in regulations will help in a continuous flow of long-term foreign capital. A good regulatory system is one that turns a country's potential into real and lasting results. When rules are clear, flexible, and fair, they help businesses grow while keeping markets honest and stable. Good regulations don't slow innovation, but actually make it easier for new ideas and market participants to thrive. When there's the right bal-

ance between supervision and freedom—like in the “comply or explain” principle—investors gain confidence, more people join the markets, and the overall system becomes stronger. Regulators worldwide, including Sebi and the RBI, are using data analytics and artificial intelligence to monitor markets in real time. India could deepen such tools to detect risks early and improve compliance efficiency.

For both companies and investors, how well rules are made and enforced often decides how well they can grow. Just having strict laws isn't enough, quick and timely enforcement matters. When disclosure rules are simple, enforcement is predictable, and new technology is welcomed, market participants feel more secure and willing to invest for the long term. Time and again when regulators' goals and actions match, markets respond with greater trust, efficiency, and value.

Timing matters too. As financial products and investor behaviours change, the rules need to keep up. Reforms like Sebi's move toward faster settlements, the RBI's approach to regulating fintechs, and the MCA's push for digital compliance show that good governance can be quick and smart without losing accountability. In the end, an effective regulatory system should make it easier for investors and businesses to follow rules with integrity while helping the economy grow. The global aspirations of India will only be realised when companies and investors, both domestic and global, are able to trust a stable yet nimble regulatory regime.

appointment of Vijay Singh must be resolved amicably, because if the latter is trying to undermine the former's leadership in Tata Trusts, then it is going to do more harm than good. One does not need to be an astronaut to understand the importance of the Tata Group to our economy due to its size and market influence. —Bal Govind, Noida

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CONTRAPUNTO

Airplane travel is nature’s way of making you look like your passport photo

- AL GORE

Going Out, In Style

India needs a dedicated minister of emigration, to guide students, among others, on global opportunities

Among the categories of Indians who are already feeling a big Trump toll, students are agonisingly at the front. They saw a 45% drop in US visas issued this Aug, compared to the same period last year. And their feeling of being singled out for hurt is not baseless. For example, the Chinese received twice as many student visas in Aug than Indians. US is of course hurting itself with such actions, but that’s up to American policymakers to handle. Indian ones have to address the hurt to Indians. The students who are no longer getting admissions, funding, visas have no less talent today than last year, when that pipeline was flowing meritocratically. What is urgently needed in the country is an emigration minister of India, EMI, who coordinates with MEA and states to ensure that this talent supply pipeline remains intact.

In May, *Science* published an insightful paper by Catia Batista et al on the effects of high-skilled international emigration on origin countries. It underlines how 62% of the top 100 scorers on IIT entrance exams are abroad, and how that’s not been brain drain, but brain gain. Actually, not just in India but also in China, Israel and Taiwan migrants have spurred IT industries at home by providing venture capital, knowledge and network connections. Critically, the net drain/gain effect at home depends on policy responses. For example, more Indians acquiring computer science skills than the people emigrating raised the quality of human capital, and to the extent that this was complemented by policies helping business creation, it raised population-wide wellbeing.

Now, as traditional destinations turn hostile, an EMI must guide students to fresh pastures. Maybe Ireland and Netherlands offer opportunities that US and UK no longer do. In a geoeconomic environment changing day by day, India mustn’t leave its students fumbling. The country’s talented young need customised help that’s based on researching global opportunities. Only a powerful GOI ministry can provide that. Think about why India’s remittances of \$135bn dwarf China’s \$50bn. Yes, our diaspora is the world’s largest. Also yes, China’s economy, five times ours, is able to provide more high-grade opportunities. Of course, over time, we must build the domestic bandwidth in both educational and employment excellence. But today we need to match our students with others’ universities. Plus, there are critical worker shortages in several countries – Germany, Japan, South Korea – that are only going to get worse. Indians who can gain from this have to be EMI’s core remit.



Be Happy. Or Else...

China is cracking down on one of the few freedoms its citizens had...the right to be unhappy

It seems to be a case of power going to your head, and total power making you lose your head. Armed with DNS filtering, IP blocking, keyword filtering, human moderators and now AI, communist China already runs the world’s most extensive internet censorship system. It’s named the Great Firewall very, very aptly. Forget Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X, and all foreign ‘poisons’. The humans of China have to live with tonnes of their modern history and the present blacked out. From the Tiananmen Square protests and pandemic toll to Xi’s miscalls, it’s all no-go area. But this no longer suffices for the Xi regime. Now it wants to block out social, political, economic disenchantments even more deeply. For this it seems to



have done a deep study of the thought crimes in George Orwell’s 1984.

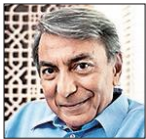
Beijing’s top internet regulator is doing a two-month crackdown on online content of an unprecedented sort. The idea of the campaign is that the internet is not a dumping ground for ‘negativity’. Go ahead and laugh. You thought that’s all it was. Well, the Cyberspace Administration of China is here to educate otherwise. Already, social media accounts have been punished for “spreading false information” about housing prices and other aspects of the economy. But its appetite has just been whetted. It will go after things like world-weariness. And woe betide all the young ones who thought if they couldn’t criticise their circumstances, they could at least go the way of “lying flat on their back”. Nope. From now on, “excessively pessimistic sentiment” may be censored as well.

Here’s something to rival the imagination of even the greatest dystopics from Ray Bradbury to Margaret Atwood. In a country that’s taken to plastic surgery like it was manna, are they all supposed to have their face cut into a smiling emoji now?

Numbers game

The mystery as to how spammers and fraudsters continue calling us despite service provider safeguards

Jug Suraiya



The other day I was pleasantly surprised by receiving a mail on my mobile phone from the Vice Chairman and MD of my service provider.

The mail assured me that the provider had strengthened safeguards against online frauds by marking spam calls and SMSes with clear messages, or by blocking suspicious links across apps and platforms in real time.

“Since the launch of our programme these measures have already protected 4.6cr customers...from falling prey to scams and resulted in fraud having fallen by 68.7%,” the message continued.

The mailed ended with a personal message, “I’d love to hear your thoughts and how we can make our service even better,” ending with a sign-off wishing me “Warm regards”.



I was very impressed. Being the Vice Chairman, not to mention also the MD, of a major mobile network must be a full-time job, having to keep a sharp eye out to ensure that the competition doesn’t pinch your market share through promos and other sneaky methods.

For the Vice Chairman and MD to have taken the time to Warmly regard me enough to mail me made me feel like an AVIP, Almost Very Important Person.

But one thing puzzled me. How, despite all the assured safeguards mentioned, did so many spammers and fraudsters get my number and the numbers of 4.6cr other customers in the first place? It’s like the riddle of the Sphinx.

Statisticians say that if X number of monkeys were given X number of type-writers, in X period of time, they’d reproduce the entire works of Shakespeare.

Using a similar mathematical model, could an X number of spammers/fraudsters, using X number of phones over an X period of time be able to collate all those 4.6cr mobile numbers? Or could it be that there’s some other form of monkey business going on here?

The next time you get a spam or fraud call, ask yourself if it is thanks to your service provider that your number is literally up – up for sale?

Lalu’s Shadow On Bihar’s Vote

Tejashwi has to convince voters he’s not his father’s son when it comes to governance. Nitish has to prove his politics is not losing relevance, derived as it was to counter Lalu, a fading memory

Asim Ali



Political scientist Margaret Canovan wrote that democracy has two faces: redemptive and pragmatic. The first champions a disruptive politics of moral renewal, empowerment of ‘common people’. The second expresses a politics of give-and-take in the service of competent governance. In Bihar, Lalu’s RJD and Nitish’s JDU have been the vehicles of these two faces.

This election hinges on whether RJD’s Tejashwi can credibly project a pragmatic face or Nitish can grow a redemptive face. Let’s start with Tejashwi/RJD’s case.

First, RJD needs to project a pragmatic side because the disruptive politics of social justice had exhausted its potential by 2005. Voters tired of Lalu-Rabri’s 15-year spell of chaotic governance. As political scientist Jeffrey Witsoe wrote about Lalu’s Bihar: “Political assertion of lower castes from the early 1990s resulted in a deep-seated conflict between a new lower caste political leadership and a largely upper caste bureaucracy, police, and judiciary. This is why the politics of caste empowerment resulted in a general breakdown of public institutions in Bihar.”

In the end, Nitish displaced Lalu because he fashioned himself into the pragmatic alternative, combining themes of development and social justice – something Lalu never managed in combination. A Lokniti-CSDS survey in 2015 captured the polarised responses cast by the memory of Lalu or Lalu-Rabri raj. Even though 42% maintained Lalu’s caste politics was responsible for giving ‘voice/place of pride to Dalits and backward castes’, close to half the respondents still blamed it for keeping ‘Bihar backward’, and associated it with ‘goonda raj’.

Second, without emphasising their pragmatic side, RJD will struggle to expand its social coalition enough to win the election. This happened in the last election too, despite their improved performance. RJD’s

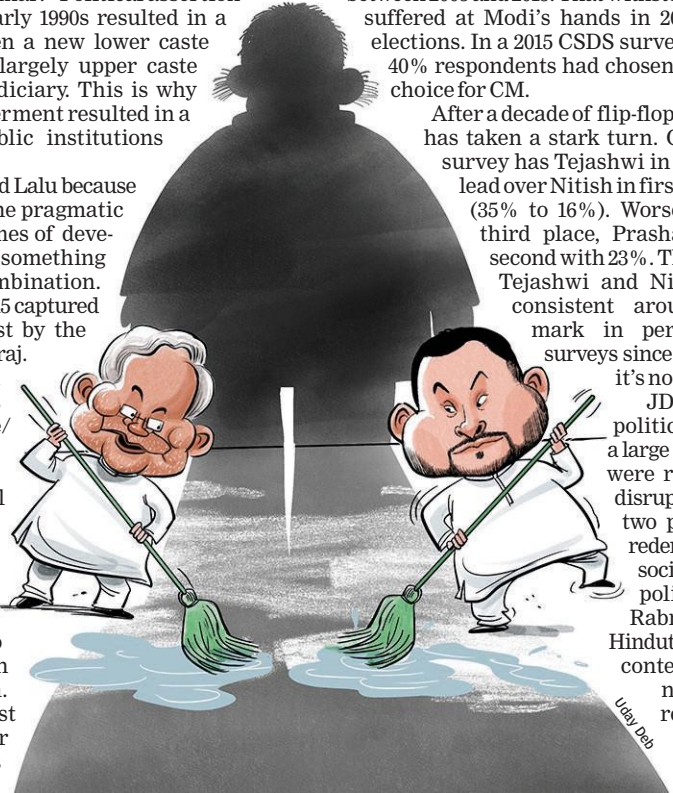
social coalition remains lopsided – a heavy core of Yadav-Muslim but a light periphery. Typically, parties offset this problem by depending on coalition partners to bring home peripheral voters.

But RJD doesn’t have that luxury. In theory, Congress is expected to draw in middle-class and upper-caste voters. But the last two times RJD contested with Congress, the latter only dragged down their coalition MGB, winning fewer than 1 in 5 seats (2010), and 1 in 3 (2020). Similarly, LJP’s Chirag Paswan entrenched on the other side means it cannot outsource the task of bringing Dalit voters. Peripheral voters remain wary of ‘Yadav raj’ or ‘goonda raj’.

If RJD suffers from having its redemptive face turned into an emblem of malgovernance and chaos, JDU, Nitish in particular, is dragged down by its pragmatic face having turned into an emblem of opportunism and stasis. Nitish enjoyed unchallengeable popularity between 2005 and 2015. That withstood the reversal suffered at Modi’s hands in 2014 Lok Sabha elections. In a 2015 CSDS survey, for instance, 40% respondents had chosen Nitish as first choice for CM.

After a decade of flip-flops, the situation has taken a stark turn. C-Voter’s latest survey has Tejashwi in an almost 20% lead over Nitish in first choice for CM (35% to 16%). Worse, Nitish is in third place, Prashant Kishor in second with 23%. The gap between Tejashwi and Nitish has been consistent around the 20% mark in periodic C-Voter surveys since Feb, indicating it’s no mere blip.

JDU’s pragmatic politics worked until a large chunk of voters were repelled by the disruptive edge of two polar kinds of redemptive politics: social justice/caste politics of Lalu-Rabri and BJP’s Hindutva politics. That context has changed now for three reasons. First, BJP has made inroads



Gaza Ceasefire: Trump-Erdogan Game Of Thrones

US prez used a mix of pressure & praise to get Ankara to put pressure on Hamas. But a hawkish Netanyahu and Hamas’s refusal to disarm could derail future peace talks

Aydin Sezer



Columnist based in Ankara

In Gaza, a new ceasefire process is beginning through the intense and equally contradictory efforts of international diplomacy. This time, however, the process is shaped differently by the personal ambitions, political futures, and unexpected alliances of the key actors. The two names that emerge as the architects of this fragile peace are Trump and Erdogan. This ceasefire doesn’t just mean the silencing of bombs; it also signals the beginning of a risky, interest-based game between Washington and Ankara.

Recall that previous ceasefire attempts in Gaza, which began with great hope, quickly collapsed due to realities on the ground and mistrust between parties. The first initiative launched by Trump, through his West Asia special representative Steve Witkoff even before he officially took office, could not escape this fate. That process could not evolve into a permanent solution, and the conflict between Israel and Hamas flared up again. Even as the war continued, peace negotiations in Qatar never lost momentum. But no concrete consensus emerged from these talks. Last month, when Israel targeted Hamas elements in Qatar, the epicentre of negotiations, the door to dialogue was closed completely.

Following this deadlock, Trump re-emerged on the scene with his unique “diplomatic” style. In the new negotiation process that began in Egypt, we once again witnessed Trump’s insistent and coercive attitude, unafraid to threaten his counterparts to achieve his goals. This time, Trump set up the game with a different strategy. In tabling a comprehensive 20-point peace plan, he was on one hand conducting sensitive consensus diplomacy with Netanyahu, and on the other, applying an indirect pressure mechanism on regional players.

The key to Trump’s new strategy, however, were Türkiye and Erdogan. Trump acted with the awareness that Ankara was the only one capable of influencing

Hamas, of bringing them to the table and getting them to say “yes”. To this end, he invited Erdogan to Washington last month, praising him before the entire world. This invitation was an unmissable opportunity for Erdogan, who was in search of legitimacy in the international arena in light of domestic political developments and tensions with the West. Being hosted at the White House was a significant message that Erdogan was able to convey to the Turkish public and international circles.

However, this meeting came at a price. Trump made a clear demand behind closed doors: he asked Erdogan to take the steps that would finish Hamas. His reported



words, “I have done a lot for you, now it’s your turn. You need to convince Hamas on the matter of peace,” were less of a friendly request and more of a veiled ultimatum.

This put Erdogan in a difficult position. For, he had for years openly supported Hamas, which the West categorised as a ‘terrorist organisation’. In fact, Erdogan has virtually acted as Hamas’ advocate on international platforms. But Trump’s pressure and the political opportunities he offered prevailed. Erdogan put his full weight behind convincing Hamas to agree to the peace

plan and enabled the start of a process that would lead to the group’s liquidation. And thanks to Trump’s public praise, he is succeeding in presenting this reversal of his old foreign policy as a diplomatic victory to the Turkish public.

So, what happens next? Can this ceasefire last? First, the fact that a hawkish leader like Netanyahu has said “yes” to this plan suggests that Israel also had a hand in the plan’s preparation and that it is suitable for Tel Aviv’s interests. The release of Israeli hostages, Israeli forces’ withdrawal from a part of Gaza, and the opening of humanitarian aid to the enclave are undoubtedly positive, important steps.

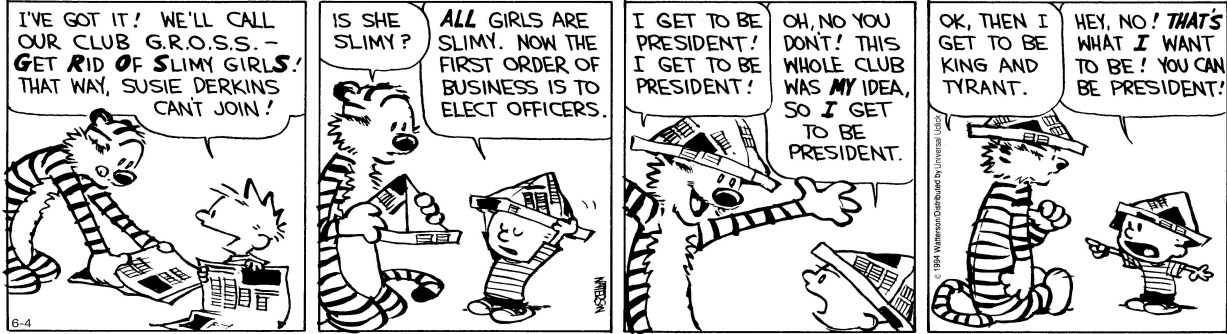
However, there are also many uncertainties. It is unknown for how long and to what extent the administration of Gaza will be undertaken by the proposed technocratic committee and Board of Peace. The most critical question is whether Hamas will truly lay down its arms during this transition period. Plus, there is no guarantee that Israel, after the release of hostages, will not resume attacks on Gaza under the pretext of completely eliminating Hamas. All these elements show that the ceasefire is hanging by a thread.

The fundamental dynamic that is different this time is Erdogan’s personal involvement in this process alongside Trump. Erdogan is, in a sense, personally taking the steps that will wipe out Hamas from Gaza’s political scene. However, this may not be the end but the beginning of a new and more complex era. Although regional states, especially Türkiye, have for years maintained the hope of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital based on the 1967 borders, they have also tacitly accepted the new realities on the ground.

The transfer of Gaza’s administration to a transitional committee will have profound effects on the future of the Palestinian issue. Who knows, perhaps while waiting for a permanent peace, the committee that will govern Gaza will itself become permanent, and the Palestinian cause will evolve along a completely different path.

The writer is a former Turkish diplomat

Calvin & Hobbes



One Must Imagine Sisyphus Happy

Tapan Sushel

Suicide, often a consequence of depression and despair, remains a major public mental health challenge. As per the latest WHO data, more than 7L people die by suicide every year across the world. Among them, 56% of global suicides occur before the age of 50. In India, the number exceeds 1.7L annually. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) compiles and shares suicide statistics based on figures reported by the police.

Though WHO does not classify suicide as a mental disease, American Psychiatric Association, International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP), and journals such as *The Lancet Psychiatry* discuss suicide as a case associated with mental disorders.

Hence, a question arises: what is the difference between a disease and an illness? A disease is a biological

problem, diagnosed and treated objectively based on pathological findings and symptoms, such as dengue or allergy. In contrast, illness refers to the subjective experience of being unwell, often understood within a social context. In other words, a suicide-prone person cannot be identified through pathological tests; rather, it becomes evident in his behaviour. *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Nobel laureate Albert Camus, first published in 1942, presents perspectives on life with remarkable clarity. Camus described suicide as a deeply personal philosophical problem, which he broadly discussed in the framework of absurd. “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide,” he writes. Explaining his point of view, he notes that man constantly searches for

meaning, order, and purpose in life, but the universe remains silent and provides no answers. This tension between human longing and the universe’s indifference, ultimately makes life absurd. He says everyone must, therefore, recognise and understand this condition.

Camus argues that suicide is a natural temptation for humans. Yet he insists one must accept the absurd and continue to live. In other words, even if life has no ‘objective meaning’, we can still live it fully – through our experiences, our freedom, and our passions. To make his point clear, he uses Sisyphus as a symbol.

In Greek mythology, King Sisyphus of Corinth was notorious for his cunning and deceit: he betrayed Zeus’ secrets, tricked gods of death, and even escaped from the underworld. For

Sacredspace



The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known loss, and have found their way out of depths. These persons have...an understanding of life that fills them with compassion...Beautiful people do not just happen.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross



THE SPEAKING TREE

IS TEJASHWI A NINTH-FAIL OR SIMPLY ILLITERATE?

OPINION

RAKESH SHARMA



After spending time in the company of Rahul Gandhi, Tejashwi Yadav too has started making absurd and baseless statements. He now goes around saying anything, anywhere — often without logic or meaning — and ends up becoming an object of ridicule.

In one such instance

today, while addressing a press conference, Tejashwi made a statement purely aimed at grabbing power. He announced that if his party comes to power, within twenty days his government would pass a law guaranteeing one government job to at least one person in every family in Bihar — and that this promise would be fulfilled within twenty months.

Did he even think before speaking? Or did he just blurt out whatever came to mind, assuming that people would simply believe him?

I immediately did some arithmetic and realised that only a person completely intoxicated or



LoP in Bihar assembly and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav. File photo

mentally unsound could make such a claim.

Let's look at the numbers. Bihar's population is around 13.45 crore. Assuming an average household has six members, there would be roughly 2.24 crore families. This means 2.24 crore government jobs. Even if the average salary is 30,000 per month, the total annual expenditure would amount to approximately 8,06,976 crore.

Now, Bihar's total budget for 2025-26 is 3,16,895 crore. In other words, the cost of fulfilling this promise would be more than double the entire state budget, leaving a deficit of about 4,90,081

crore — and that's just to pay salaries.

What happens after that? No funds for development, no new schemes — nothing. Bihar would become a state where government employees have nothing to do, perhaps they'll just sit by the Ganges and count waves.

Even God might not have an answer to this absurdity.

The Supreme Court should take note of such nonsensical promises, or the Election Commission should at least ask politicians like Tejashwi to explain where they plan to get the money for such impossible commitments.

Tejashwi, after all, is the torchbearer of a family whose head — Lalu Prasad Yadav — was convicted in the fodder scam. Cases are still pending against Tejashwi, Lalu, and several family members over the land-for-jobs scandal.

So, is Tejashwi planning to grab people's land in exchange for these promised government jobs? If so, neither the people will be left with land nor will the government have money to pay them.

To what depths will these dynastic parties fall just to gain power?

God save India — and Bihar — from such liars.

India-Japan Carbon Market Breakthrough: A turning point under Article 6.2

OPINION

PRADEEP SINGHVI



Government of India has officially opened the doors to international carbon trading. This milestone, led by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), is more than just a policy agreement. It is the moment India's long-discussed carbon market became operational.

The timing is significant. Just weeks before this breakthrough, on July 14, 2025, MoEFCC had issued a memorandum listing eligible activities under Article 6.2. For the first time, businesses, developers, and investors were given clear

ity on which sectors and technologies can generate credits under this framework. From renewable energy with storage, offshore wind, and solar thermal to green hydrogen, sustainable aviation fuel, compressed bio-gas, ocean energy, high-end energy efficiency, green ammonia, and carbon capture and storage, the government provided a clear playbook. This precision was not accidental. It was a deliberate move to signal readiness to both domestic and international stakeholders.

By coupling the eligibility framework with the Japan partnership, India has not only provided certainty but also delivered credibility. Under the Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM), Japanese technology and investment will flow into Indian projects that were once financially unviable. In turn, the credits generated,

formally known as Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes (ITMOs), can be traded internationally, with Japan counting them toward its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). For India, the benefits are manifold: foreign capital for clean technologies, domestic localization of advanced equipment, and capacity building for monitoring and verification.

This is climate diplomacy elevated to economic statecraft. Both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba underlined the agreement as part of a shared "Green Energy Focus for a Better Future." India and Japan, two nations with deep economic and cultural ties, are now writing a new chapter in global climate cooperation.

For businesses in India, the implications are immediate and far-reaching. Air-

lines finally have a credible pathway to finance sustainable aviation fuel. Heavy industries can deploy best-available decarbonization technologies backed by foreign investment. Farmers and rural entrepreneurs can scale compressed bio-gas projects that link sustainable livelihoods to international carbon finance. Energy developers can accelerate offshore wind and storage-linked renewable projects with confidence that their efforts align with global markets. This is not just climate policy. It is industrial strategy, financial innovation, and rural development converging under one framework.

Financially, Article 6.2 creates multiple streams: revenues from carbon credit sales, direct foreign investment into clean energy projects, localization of imported technologies to cut costs, and public-private partnerships in priority sectors like aviation and mobility. A sustainable aviation fuel facility in India, for example, could attract Japanese investment, cut airline emissions, and generate ITMOs while building a new domestic industry. The multiplier effect is enormous.

Yet challenges remain. Effective governance will require close coordination among multiple ministries through the National Designated Authority for the Implementation of the Paris Agreement (NDAIPA), the designated nodal authority. Robust monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems must ensure environmental integrity. Negotiations over how credits are allocated between domestic commitments and international trade will need careful balance. Some technologies, like carbon capture, remain expensive and will demand blended

finance solutions. However, with Cabinet approval in place, strong institutional backing, and India's proven record under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism, these hurdles are surmountable.

What stands out most is the scale of ambition. With Article 6.2 operational, India is no longer a "future player" but an active participant in a global carbon market. The Indo-Japan partnership is the first chapter, but not the last. Europe, ASEAN, and the Middle East are natural next steps, each offering synergies in renewables, mobility, hydrogen, and industrial technologies. India's framework is designed to be replicated, and the Cabinet has already authorized MoEFCC to negotiate further agreements.

For the last, this position India as both a supplier of high-quality carbon credits and a destination for

green investment. For the nation, it aligns climate action with economic growth, technology leadership, and rural development. And for investors, corporates, and developers, it sends one clear message: India's carbon market is not just open. It is ready, credible, and ambitious.

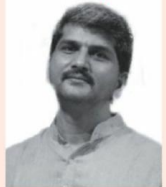
This is a turning point. Article 6.2 has moved from negotiation rooms into real projects, real finance, and real opportunities. For those who have waited on the sidelines, the moment to act has arrived. The rules are set, the framework is live, and India has signaled with conviction that it is prepared to lead. The Indian carbon market is open for business, and the world is watching.

Pradeep Singhvi, Executive Director - Energy and Climate Practice, Grant Thornton Bharat LLP

Panch Parivartan: RSS's Centenary Vision for Bharat and the World

OPINION

GOPAL GOSWAMI



As Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) completes a hundred years of its existence, it has articulated a transformative framework for the future, "Panch Parivartan Sutra" (Five Transformational Pathways). This vision is not merely an internal organisational roadmap; it reflects how RSS imagines the role of Bharat in the 21st century and beyond. It speaks not only to Hindus, but to humanity at large, with an emphasis on inclusivity, self-reliance, and global harmony.

To appreciate its full significance, it is essential to unpack its meaning, its societal relevance, and how Bharat can benefit from this initiative.

What are the Five Transformations (Panch Parivartan Sutra)?

While different RSS leaders have explained the Panch Parivartan in nuanced ways, the five central themes can be broadly understood as follows:

1. Parivartan in Vyakti (Individual Transformation):

Inner character building, discipline, health, and cultivating a value-driven life. It emphasises that national change begins with self-change - (Service), Shiksha (Education), and Sanskar (Values) must shape individuals.

2. Parivartan in Kutumb (Family Transformation):

Strengthening the institution of family as the bedrock of society. The RSS has repeatedly emphasised that in a rapidly urbanising and globalised world, the family remains the primary site for cultural transmission, emotional stability, and ethical upbringing.

3. Parivartan in Samaj (Societal Transformation):

Eradicating caste divisions, building social harmony, promoting inclusivity, and uplifting the marginalised. The Sangh's emphasis on samaj parivartan reflects its century-long social outreach, from Vanvasi welfare to urban poor engagement.

4. Parivartan in Rashtira (National Transformation):

Building a self-reliant, secure, prosperous Bharat that embodies both material progress and cultural pride. This includes Atmanirbhar Bharat, scientific advancement, strong defence, and revival of indigenous knowledge systems.

5. Parivartan in Vishwa (Global Transformation):

Offering the world a Dharmaic vision of sustainable living, harmony with nature, and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the Indian ideal of "world as one family." In an era of climate change, resource conflicts, and declining trust in global institutions, this vision is deeply relevant.

RELEVANCE TO SOCIETY TODAY

1. At the Level of the Individual

Today's youth face an identity crisis, caught between consumerist culture and the search for purpose. The RSS's first

sutra of Vyakti Parivartan encourages personal discipline, volunteerism, and physical-moral strength. Initiatives like yoga, Shakhya, Sports, and Seva activities foster resilience. In a time of rising mental health concerns and social alienation, such grounding is indispensable.

2. At the Level of Family Technology, migration, and urban stress have weakened family bonds across the world. India, though rooted in family traditions, is not immune. The Kutumb Parivartan emphasises protecting the family as the first school of values. Inter-generational respect, care for elders, and gender balance in responsibilities are promoted.

For Bharat, this ensures that rapid modernisation does not uproot cultural stability. For the world, it offers an alternative to the atomised "individual-first" model that has led to loneliness epidemics in developed societies.

3. At the Level of Society Indian society has struggled with divisions, caste prejudices, urban-rural gaps, and economic disparities. RSS interventions in villages, Dalit outreach, seva in natural disasters, and health-education drives embody the Samaj Parivartan principle. It is about weaving India into a harmonious fabric where no community feels left be-

hind. Globally, this principle also aligns with the fight against racial discrimination and cultural homogenisation.

4. At the National Level As Bharat aspires to be a \$10 trillion economy and a global manufacturing hub, the RSS's Rashtira Parivartan framework adds moral depth. It calls for material growth coupled with swadeshi pride, indigenous innovation, and secure borders.

These guards against blind imitation of Western models and instead places Bharat's civilisational ethos at the centre of its rise. For instance, renewable energy, traditional medicine, and knowledge exports are sectors where Bharat can lead with authenticity.

5. At the Global Level The greatest strength of the Panch Parivartan Sutra lies in its global applicability. Climate anxiety, wars, refugee crises, and declining trust in global capitalism have left humanity searching for balance.

RSS suggests Bharat can be the guide, not by domination but by example. Yoga, Ayurveda, vegetarianism, sustainable living, and pluralistic tolerance are not just "Indian exports," but universal solutions. Through Vishwa Parivartan, Bharat positions itself as the custodian of civilisational wisdom for a fractured world.

HOW BHARAT CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS ABHIYAN

1. National Integration: By focusing on samaj Parivartan, caste and sectarian walls can be eroded, allowing Bharat to fully harness its demographic dividend.

2. Economic Self-Reliance: A self-disciplined, value-driven citizenry (Vyakti parivartan) and family-based economic resilience (Kutumb parivartan) create stronger human capital, aligning with the Atmanirbhar Bharat mission.

3. Cultural Soft Power: Vishwa parivartan aligns Bharat with global discourses on climate, sustainability, and wellness. This enhances India's global image as a moral superpower, not just an economic one.

4. Youth Empowerment: By instilling purpose, fitness, and patriotism, the Panch Parivartan strengthens youth against drug abuse, nihilism, and disconnection.

5. Continuity: This Sutra ensures that as Bharat modernises, it does not lose its roots. Instead, its heritage becomes the very driver of progress.

RSS: FOR THE NATION, NOT JUST FOR HINDUS

Critics often caricature the RSS as only a Hindu-centric organisation. The Panch Parivartan vision itself refutes this. Its em-

phasis is not on religious supremacy but on universal upliftment.

• Vyakti transformation is about individual character, irrespective of religion.

• Kutumb transformation respects family values that are shared across communities.

• Samaj transformation explicitly calls for harmony and the end of discrimination.

• Rashtira transformation prioritises India's unity and prosperity for all its citizens, not for one faith alone.

• Vishwa transformation embodies the idea that Bharat's message of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam belongs to the entire human race.

Thus, the RSS centenary declaration is an articulation of national service, not sectarianism. It continues the tradition of Swayamsewaks serving during floods, earthquakes, pandemics, and other crises, where no one's religion is asked before help is extended.

GLOBAL RELEVANCE OF PANCH PARIVARTAN

The appeal of the Panch Parivartan Sutra extends beyond India:

• In the West, where family disintegration and consumerism dominate, it offers a model of balanced living.

• In Africa and Latin

America, it resonates with community-centric traditions and sustainable development needs.

• In conflict zones, it emphasises harmony and dialogue over polarisation.

• For climate action, it stresses Dharmaic living aligned with ecology, far more holistic than carbon-credit economics.

In this sense, the RSS's centenary message is not about exporting ideology, but about re-entering humanity on eternal values.

CONCLUSION: A SUTRA FOR BHARAT 20247 AND BEYOND

As Bharat marches towards its centenary of independence in 2047, the Panch Parivartan Sutra provides a philosophical compass. It binds personal ethics with family stability, social justice with national pride, and global sustainability with civilisational wisdom.

This is not a narrow call for cultural conservatism, but a bold invitation to reimagine progress. In a fragmented world, RSS proposes that Bharat rise not as a superpower that dominates, but as a Vishva-Guru that guide. The Panch Parivartan Sutra, therefore, is not only the Sangh's roadmap, but also potentially Bharat's greatest contribution to the 21st century world order.

Gopal Goswami Ph.D is a Columnist, Researcher and Social Thinker

BUILDING MENTAL RESILIENCE AT WORK

TGG NETWORK

In today's fast-paced professional world, challenges like tight deadlines, constant competition, and evolving technologies can often leave employees feeling mentally drained. Amid this chaos, mental resilience — the ability to adapt, recover, and thrive despite stress — has become one of the most essential workplace skills. It's not just about enduring pressure; it's about growing stronger through it.

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL RESILIENCE

Mental resilience refers to a person's capacity to handle adversity without losing focus or motivation. Resilient employees can navigate difficult situations, learn from setbacks, and bounce back quickly. This skill helps prevent burnout and promotes long-term job satisfaction. Resilience doesn't mean being immune to stress, but rather developing the strength to respond to it effectively.

WHY IT MATTERS AT WORK

Workplaces are evolving



faster than ever, demanding adaptability and emotional stability. When employees are resilient, they manage stress better, maintain productivity, and stay motivated even in uncertain times. For organizations, fostering resilience translates into lower absenteeism, stronger teamwork, and improved employee retention. A resilient workforce contributes to a positive and growth-oriented work culture.

WAYS TO BUILD MENTAL RESILIENCE

Develop Self-Awareness: Recognize what triggers your stress and how you respond to it. Awareness allows you to manage reactions before they spiral out of control. Reflecting daily or journaling can help identify thought patterns that need change.

Stay Connected: Building a network of supportive colleagues creates a sense of belonging and reduces isolation. Talking about challenges openly can relieve emotional burdens and lead to constructive solutions.

Focus on What You Can Control: Many workplace stressors are beyond our control — like market changes or management decisions. Concentrate on what you can influence, such as your attitude, work habits, and mindset.

Practice Mindfulness and Relaxation: Simple techniques like deep breathing, meditation, or short walks during breaks help calm the mind and increase focus. Even five minutes of mindfulness can shift your perspective during a stressful day.

Embrace Failure as Learning: Instead of viewing mistakes as personal shortcomings, see them as opportunities for growth. Each setback offers lessons that make you mentally stronger and more adaptable.



Maintain Work-Life Balance: Disconnecting after work hours and engaging in activities you enjoy — reading, exercise, or spending time with family — rejuvenates mental energy and prevents burnout.

Seek Professional Support if Needed: Talking to a counselor or therapist can help you develop coping strategies and improve emotional regulation. There's no weakness in seeking help; it's a sign of strength.

The Organizational Role: Employers play a vital part in cultivating resilience. Encouraging open communication, offering flexible schedules, and promoting wellness programs can make a big difference. A workplace that values mental health fosters loyalty and long-term engagement.

Building mental resilience at work is not a one-time effort; it's a continuous process of self-care, reflection, and growth. In a world where stress is inevitable, resilience empowers individuals to face challenges with calm, confidence, and clarity — turning everyday pressures into opportunities for personal and professional transformation.

DIGITAL DETOX: WHY IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH TO TAKE A BREAK FROM SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUR PHONE

PRITIKA SINGH

A lot of us start and end our day by looking at a screen. Notifications, messages, and endless scrolling quietly take away our time, attention, and peace of mind. Technology can connect us to the world, but it can also make us feel alone. That is why it is so important for mental health to take a digital detox, which means taking a break from phones and social media on purpose.

You do not have to throw away your devices or disappear from life to do a digital detox. It just means taking a break from all the digital noise and letting your mind relax. It is about being aware of how you use technology, not just doing it out of habit. Being offline for a few hours or a weekend can help you feel calmer, clearer, and more in charge of your feelings.

HOW SCREENS CHANGE THE BRAIN

Our brains are not made to be stimulated all the time. When you spend a lot of time online, you have to respond to likes, messages, news, and opinions all the time. Over time, this makes you tired mentally, emotionally, and physically, and it makes it hard to sleep. Social media can make you anxious and want to compare yourself to others, and scrolling through

it late at night can mess up your body's natural sleep cycle. Even though we feel "connected," a lot of us end up feeling tired, distracted, and alone.

The problem is shown in studies done in India. Studies show that most people spend more than two hours a day on social media, and younger people spend even more time on it. This overuse, especially during the pandemic when work, school, and social life all moved online, has made

teens more stressed, made it harder for them to sleep, and caused them to act out.

THE HEALING POWER OF TAKING A BREAK FROM TECHNOLOGY

When you take a break from your phone, your mind can relax. You start to notice the little things again, like the sound of birds singing, a friend's smile, or the feel of a morning breeze. After cutting back on screen time,

people say they think more clearly, feel more balanced emotionally, sleep better, have more energy, have deeper relationships, and rediscover simple pleasures.

HOW TO START YOUR OWN DIGITAL DETOX

You do not have to go far away to get away. Taking small, steady steps can have a big impact:

- Set aside some time in the morning or evening when you cannot use your phone.
- Do not use your phone while you are eating or talking to someone else.
- Turn off notifications that are not important.
- Instead of looking at screens, go for walks, write in a journal, or meditate.
- Set aside one day a week to not use social media.
- Even small, thoughtful changes can make you feel lighter and more present in your mind.

Digital detoxing is not about rejecting the modern world; it is about getting back in touch with your own world. It helps you get back in touch with yourself, get your mind back on track, and make room for peace and a new point of view. If you ever feel mentally fatigued or overloaded, consider moving away from your screen.

The author is Pritika Singh, the Mental Health Expert

DIGITAL DETOX

WHY IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

WHAT IS A DIGITAL DETOX?

Taking intentional time off from phones, social media, and screens to reduce stress and reconnect with real life

SIGNS YOU NEED A DIGITAL DETOX

Constant urge to check notifications

Feeling low after scrolling

Anxiety when phone isn't nearby

Excessive self-esteem

Trouble focusing on tasks

Strengthens real connections

MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

Benefit	Impact
Reduces stress & anxiety	Less information overload
Improves sleep	Fewer blue-light disruptions
Boosts focus	More mindful attention
Enhances self-esteem	Less comparison, more confidence
Strengthens real connections	Better conversations & empathy

TRY THIS CHALLENGE

RESULT?

- ✓ Set 'no-phone zones' (bedroom, meals)
- ✓ Try 1-hour screen-free blocks daily
- ✓ Turn off non-essential notifications
- ✓ Replace scrolling with a hobby
- ✓ Use apps to track screen time

Meditation, Mindfulness & Yoga: The natural antidepressants

HIMALAYAN SIDDHAA AKSHAR

The human mind is a gem that can be cultivated in a soft and careful manner. Meditation, mindfulness, and yoga are natural methods to regain balance, lift the spirits, and make one peaceful in the soul. Such practices provide a space of sanctuary in the mind, which is relaxing and clear and prompts one to have a stronger association with self.

The practice of meditation is an inward silence. The habit will enable the mind to get rid of tension and create a feeling of satisfaction. Simple meditation can be initiated by sitting well and closing the eyes and concentrating on the breath. One can count the inhaled and exhaled breaths and thoughts will be settled automatically. The five minutes a day routine can be slowly increased to larger amounts to make the mind feel refreshed and calm.

Presence is taught in mindfulness. It promotes the act of not judging or excluding the sensations, feelings, and thoughts. Mindfulness may also involve becoming aware of the taste of what one is eating, sounds of the surrounding, or body motion as one walks. Such awakening will lead to tolerance and decreased ability of the mind to ruminate on concerns or depression.

The practice of meditation is an inward silence. The habit will enable the mind to get rid of tension and create a feeling of satisfaction.

Yoga is the practice of the body and the mind which is in balance and synchronizes with breath movements. Aridha Matsyendrasana (Half Spinal Twist Pose) is one of the effective yoga exercises. The body is folded slightly towards one side and the other hand is placed behind it with the leg bending and the crossed over leg resting. Thanks to this pose, the spine is stretched, releasing tension, and stimulating mental clarity. Taking a few breaths on each side increases flexibility and concentration.

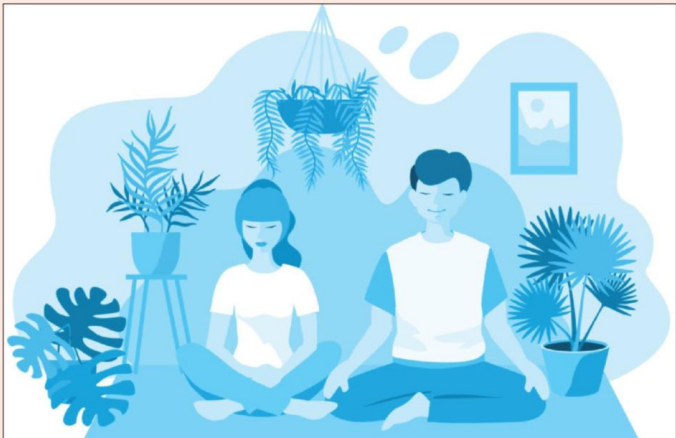
1. Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose) is another yoga pose that promotes relaxation. The chest is raised with the elbows slightly bent lying on the stomach with hands under the shoulders. This mild backbend opens the heart, enhances postures and aids the circulation of energy in the body. This pose will arouse good emotions and rest by practicing several breaths.
2. Tadasana (Mountain Pose) is an easy but strong pose. The body poses in a natural position in which the feet are raised with the body standing high with a relaxed pose and the palms facing partially open. Grounding via the feet and lifting via the spine gives a sense of empowerment and stability and balance.
3. Bhramari Pranayama (Humming Bee Breath) is very effective in the case of breath centred yoga. When

the practitioner is sitting in a comfortable position with closed eyes, he/she inhales and hums gently as he exhales. The practice relaxes the nervous system, relieves stress, and brings about tranquility to the mind and body.

Combining meditation, mindfulness and yoga to everyday life makes one more resilient to sadness, anxiety, and low energy. The traditions are mildly calming and help to think in a positive hopeful outlook. In the long run these natural antidepressants bring about a state of harmony which makes the mind feel light, happy and focused.

The path to a healthy mental state is an individual one. Meditation, mindfulness and yoga create a supportive atmosphere internally, through simple and consistent steps. The body gets refreshed, the mind becomes clear and life is taken with a new boost and positivity. They are tender ways of asking to have peace inside and finding a permanent joy.

The author is the spiritual leader.



MUMBAICORE

THE PACE OF THE CHASE IN A LIMINAL SPACE



Genesia Alves

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Great Expectations

We are so inured to spitting that we need to manufacture some lore or superstition to stop the practice

When the sign warns 'Fine for Spitting', are folk assuming it's an invitation? Like, it's fine? Because if you took a shot every time you saw someone spit, you'd be in hospital with alcohol poisoning before lunch. It's not just the paan-demic either. We may not have many working public fountains and pyaas but the citizenry will often offer themselves up as a water feature. They'll glug down half a litre and spew it all back out onto the street: An art form we call H2-Uh-Oh.

The Global South does have a reputation for being inured to spitting. It's tied to age-old superstitions like removing the evil eye or blessing the day's first cash transaction. A study published by the National Institute of Health in the context of Covid-19 states that while "voluntary spitting can be an expression of hostility and disrespect", "spitting can even be a pleasure-generating phenomenon". The study cites psychoanalytic theories linking spitting with the phallic phase of psychosexual development. For the record though, according to Freud, this is a



stage that occurs between 3-6 years of age. Not in one's paan-accessible adulthood. Just spitting facts here.

Everywhere is 'fine for spitting' – whether paan-infused or not, out of moving vehicles or at rest, on the street, in hospital stairwells, and even on heritage structures. We read about how in Kolkata, the steel bases of the iconic Howrah Bridge have been corroded by paan. In Mumbai this year, the railway authorities celebrated 'Station Mahotsav' with the 19th Century, Grade 1 heritage Bandra Station playing host. Authorities were horrified to find the station festooned with paan despite meticulous maintenance. They shouldn't have been that surprised. Last year, the municipality collected Rs 1.25 crore in fines from roughly 63,000 people caught spitting.

Spitting is an international phenomenon. Of course, everyone

read stories of Harrow and Brent in London, Jackson Heights in New York and Abu Dhabi imposing fines on this cultural import marked by the GI tagged red stains on public property. But we aren't just speaking of the diaspora. In 1842, Charles Dickens, on a visit to Washington, was absolutely horrified by the ubiquitousness of chewing tobacco. In his 'American Notes for General Circulation' he reports on the existence of spittoons in public buildings with everyone exhorted to "squirt the essence of their quids or plugs into the spittoons and not about the bases of the marble columns". He fumes, "The prevalence of those two odious practices of chewing and expectorating... soon became most offensive and sickening."

It's interesting to note that even today, every US Supreme Court Justice has a personal spittoon.

It's interesting to note that even today, every US Supreme Court Justice has a personal spittoon. Baseball made an institution out of spitting

American baseball made an institution out of spitting on the field. Earlier generations chewed tobacco to keep the mouth moist in the dusty pitches. When tobacco was outlawed for players in 1916, they still wanted to retain the 'traditional' jawing and hawking. Today players chew sunflower seeds and, yes, spit the husks out.

Spitting is also ancient. 1st Century historian and naturalist Pliny the Elder regarded saliva as a safeguard against serpents. He recorded ancient Romans spitting on victims of an epileptic fit and, my favourite, "to ward off the bad luck that follows meeting a person lame in the right leg". Asking forgiveness of the gods could be rendered by spitting on yourself. Spitting into the right shoe before you put it on was good luck. And spitting three times before taking any medicine enhanced its curative power.

Spitting isn't common in the animal world. And when it does occur, it is certainly not a friendly, social act. Llamas keep you at spitting distance using saliva as a projectile to warn you away from themselves or their food. Camels spit just out of spite. The archerfish

will poke a snout out of the water and power-hose insects out of bushes with incredible accuracy. Then they devour them. The spitting spider manages to attack prey by spitting venom and web in one go – paralyzing and trapping its victim efficiently. So, you see, it never ends well.

Far too many folk I know have been spat on and not by spiders, llamas or archerfish. Women are familiar with the act as an expression of misogyny or aggression. A freshly painted wall is nothing but an open invitation to be 'the first' to make your mark. Last month, the Lucknow bench of Allahabad court issued a notice after receiving official court documents that bore red fingerprints on the corner of each page. The bench observed that this was a "highly unhygienic situation which is not only disgusting and condemnable but at the same time shows the lack of basic civil sense".

Fines and personal displays of revulsion (aka making loud retching noises) have failed to put an end to the ptoo'ing. There must be some lore that we can manufacture, some new superstition that will spread, and stop the practice. Something in the realm of the dangers of losing your life-force, insulting Mother Earth or disseminating your DNA. This columnist invites all suggestions. Because so far, all other measures have been like spitting in the wind.

Genesia Alves is a journalist and Mumbai is her ancestral village.

LAUGHINGSUTRAS

THE NOT-SO-INNER-VOICE OF A COMMON MUMBAIKAR



Shiv Shambale

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The Libraries of Memory

How many of us have been inside a library in the last decade?

Once upon a time, Mumbai's proudest temple wasn't on a hill or under a dome, it was on Horniman Circle. The Asiatic Library, with its grand staircase and Greek pillars, echoed with the whispers of knowledge seekers, scholars, and students who treated books as sacred relics. Today, those whispers have turned into wheezes as the ceiling peels, the walls perspire, and the manuscripts quietly suffocate under dampness and indifference.

The headlines scream "fungus eats into priceless books", but let's be honest, isn't the same fungus nibbling away at our collective curiosity? The plaster may be falling off the ceiling, but the real collapse is in our appetite for learning. We scroll endlessly through trivia but

can't remember the last time we inhaled the smell of an old page.

Government officials promise restoration funds. Committees are being formed, tenders floated, estimates drawn, and hopefully, by the time repairs start, the next generation will only need to digitise the ruins. But this isn't just a story of bureaucratic delay, it's the obituary of public ownership.

Because while we blame the State, how many of us have even been inside a library in the last decade? A city that queues for hours outside Siddhivinayak for divine blessings should also be able to queue once a week at the temple of wisdom. Take your children, your friends, or even your Insta influencers. A pilgrimage to a library can detox your mind faster than any

Himalayan retreat and does not even cost you a penny.

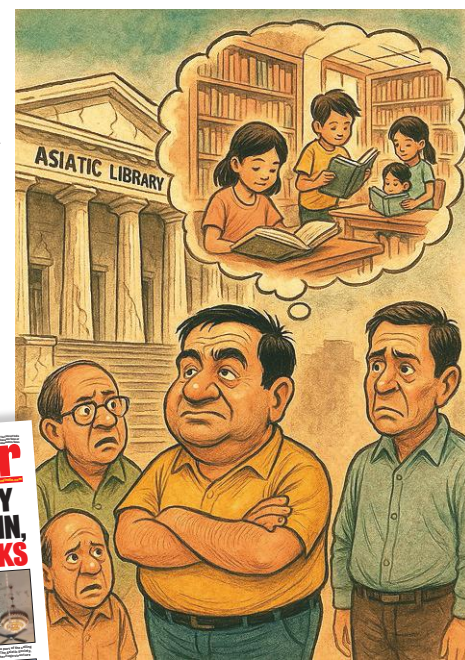
Imagine if every Mumbaikar pledged one library visit day a week. The same way we feed stray dogs or water plants, we could dust a few books, air out a forgotten corner, or just sit under that high ceiling and listen to the silence of a thousand untold stories. That's how you keep knowledge alive, not by storing it underground like treasure in a vault, but by breathing life into it through use.

As Yuval Noah Harari warns in his book Nexus, when machines start talking only to each other, humans will lose their place in the loop. And if we've already abandoned our libraries, maybe we've started that process ourselves. AI won't destroy us out of malice; our own intellectual laziness will do the job nicely.

So, before our libraries turn to mush and our minds to mushier reels, maybe it's time to climb those marble steps again. For in the end,

it's not the books that are decaying, it's us.

Write to me at shiv.shambale@timesofindia.com if you still remember the smell of a real book. Just like we teach our children the religious rituals and temple visits, it is our role to ensure that the next generation also makes weekly trips to these temples of learning to keep the curiosity cells in our brain cells lighted, alive, and fresh.



Mirror's report on the sorry state of The Asiatic Library, dated October 9



INHERITANCE RIGHTS

All kids are not equal

Succession rights of children vary depending on their religion and whether they are stepkids, adopted, or born out of wedlock

The much-publicised family feud following the death of billionaire businessman Sunjay Kapur brought to fore the succession rights of children of divorced parents. However, this represents just one category of kids facing complex inheritance questions. Adopted children, those born out of wedlock, and children from live-in relationships also navigate a maze of succession laws that vary by religion and legal status.

If parents leave behind a will, it is executed according to the law. However, if they pass away without a will (intestate), succession or personal laws come into effect. The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, applies to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains, while Christians, Parsis and Jews are governed by the Indian Succession Act, 1925. For Muslims, personal law comes into force.

Succession or religion-specific laws govern inheritance rights of biological children, but there is confusion regarding other categories. "While succession laws govern intestate succession, judicial precedents over the years have provided clarity regarding the rights of different categories of children, be it the adopted child or a child of live-in partner, in the parents' property," says Neha Pathak, Managing Partner, Trust & Estate Planning, Motilal Oswal Wealth Limited.

Here's how children inherit depending on their parents' marital status and religion.

Biological kids / kids of divorced parents

In both cases, the same laws apply as divorce only changes the marital status of parents, not the child-parent relationship. "They remain Class I heirs (Hindus), Quranic heirs (Muslims), and entitled lineal descendants (Christians and Parsis)," says Raj Lakhota, Managing Partner, LABH & Associates.

HINDUS: According to the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, and the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005, both sons and daughters have a right to the father's ancestral property by birth. If parents die intestate, children being Class I heirs have a first right to their property. "Sons and daughters, including married daughters, have equal rights in both parents' property. After 2005, daughters are also coparceners in ancestral property, inheriting equally with sons," says Lakhota.

In case of minors, they own the property, but cannot legally manage it. A legal guardian, or one appointed by the court, must file a petition in court to manage the property on behalf of minors until they become adults.

MUSLIMS: Sons receive twice the share of daughters, while grandchildren inherit only if their parent is not alive. "Only up to one-third of the estate can be bequeathed by will without the heirs' consent," says Lakhota.

CHRISTIANS & PARSIS: Children inherit equally regardless of gender. In Christians, kids inherit two-thirds of the estate and spouse gets one-third. In Parsis, the spouse shares the estate equally with children.



Adopted kids

HINDUS: Adopted kids have the same inheritance rights as biological kids and are entitled to a share in their adoptive parents' property if they pass away intestate. However, according to the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956, the adopted child loses the right to his/her biological parents' property or to the associated coparcenary property.

However, biological parents can voluntarily leave property or other assets to the adopted child through a valid testamentary document such as a will.

MUSLIMS: "Adopted (kafala) children do not inherit from the adoptive family unless willed up to one-third of the estate. Such children inherit from their biological parents," says Lakhota.

CHRISTIANS & PARSIS: As in the case of Hindus, both Christian and Parsi adopted kids have a right to their adoptive parents' property, and not of their biological parents, unless specified otherwise in a will.

Kids of live-in couples

Live-in relationships have not been granted any legal status or acceptance under the Hindu Succession Act, Islamic law or the Christian personal law. However, according to the 2008 Supreme Court ruling, a child born to a couple in a live-in relationship would have the same right of inheritance as a legal heir. A subsequent Supreme Court ruling in 2015 declared that an unmarried couple that has been living together for a long time can be considered married.

HINDUS: The offspring of such a couple will have the right to his/her father's self-acquired property under Section 16 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. "Children are deemed legitimate and inherit from both parents as Class I heirs, but do not get coparcenary rights in the joint family property of the father's lineage," says Lakhota.

MUSLIMS: Such children are considered illegitimate and can inherit only from the mother, not the father, unless the paternity is acknowledged, and up to one-third of the father's property can be willed or gifted.

CHRISTIANS & PARSIS: In the case of Christians, courts allow inheritance from both parents if paternity is established, otherwise, full rights are only granted from the mother. In Parsis, children have automatic rights to the mother's estate, and to the father's estate, only if paternity is proven.

Stepchildren

"None of the religions has an automatic inheritance right from the stepparent unless the stepchild is legally adopted or named in a will by such a parent," says Pathak. Hence, for Hindus, Christians and Parsis, stepchildren have no succession rights unless they are legally adopted or covered through a will.

"The Juvenile Justice Act permits the adoption of stepchildren, wherein individuals of any religious background may seek to adopt a stepchild after satisfying the eligibility criteria," says Rajat Dutta, Founder & Initiator, Inheritance Needs Services.

Children born out of wedlock

HINDUS: "The Supreme Court, in Revana-siddappa and Another vs. Mallikarjun and Others case, stated that children born from void or voidable marriages are considered legitimate under Section 16 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, and are entitled to inherit property from their parents," says Dutta.

The Act, under Section 16 (3) states that 'such children are only entitled to the property of their parents and not of any other relation'. Hence, such a child would only have the right to his father's self-acquired property, not his ancestral property. However, the above-mentioned Supreme Court ruling in 2011 states that children born out of wedlock have a right to their father's self-acquired property as well as ancestral property.

MUSLIMS: Such a child inherits only from the mother and her relatives, not from the father (unless paternity is acknowledged). "Inheritance through a will or gift from father is possible up to one-third of the estate," says Lakhota.

CHRISTIANS & PARSIS: "Christian kids have full rights in the mother's property and, if paternity is established, also in the father's estate as per the recent court trends," says Lakhota. Among Parsis, legitimacy was traditionally strictly enforced. However, now, if paternity is established, such kids may have rights in the father's estate and automatic rights in the mother's estate.

THE ASIAN AGE

10 OCTOBER 2025

Navi Mumbai starts trend of cities with two airports

The inauguration of the Navi Mumbai International Airport marks a historic moment not just for Maharashtra but for the entire Indian civil aviation sector. For decades, Mumbai — the nation's financial capital — has depended only on the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA), which has been serving the needs of Mumbai for a long time beyond its intended capacity.

The opening of a second major airport for the city symbolises far more than an infrastructural upgrade; it represents the beginning of a new phase in India's growth story, where mega cities will be served by multiple airports in sync with the city's economic size and the country's stature. The Navi Mumbai International Airport is the first such example.

The new airport is the logical response to Mumbai's ever-rising air traffic. With passenger numbers at CSMIA surging past 50 million annually, expansion was not a luxury but a necessity. It will not only decongest the existing airport but will also serve as a catalyst for regional growth, creating a new economic corridor across Navi Mumbai, Raigad and the Konkan belt.

While the Navi Mumbai airport became a reality after an inordinate delay of 27 years, the timing of these developments could not be more appropriate.

India is on the cusp of becoming the world's third largest economy, with a burgeoning middle class and a rapidly expanding pool of affluent travellers. Air travel, once considered aspirational, has become almost routine for millions of Indians. Domestic passenger volumes have rebounded sharply, and low-cost carriers dominate the skies, offering connectivity to every corner of the country.

The strategy of multiple airports fits into a broader national trend. India's aviation sector is now among the fastest-growing in the world, keeping pace with the economy that is growing fastest in the world. The upcoming Noida International Airport near Delhi will soon join

Navi Mumbai in redefining how Indian metros handle growing air traffic. These projects signal a strategic shift — from single-airport cities to multi-airport urban regions — aligning India with global standards seen in metropolises like London, New York and Tokyo.

The Mumbai Metropolitan Region's GDP, estimated at well over \$400 billion, is larger than the entire economy of Pakistan. Several other Indian cities — such as Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad — also boast economic outputs that rival or exceed those of several nations. As these cities grow further, it will deepen their trade links with other countries, translating into greater need for hassle-free and safe air connectivity. This urban-economic might justifies the need for multiple airports, dedicated freight corridors, and world-class logistics hubs to support trade, investment, and mobility.

Apart from the number of airports, the future of aviation will also depend on how well the government sustains this momentum. It is, therefore, important for the governments to focus on ensuring seamless connectivity to airports through robust and high quality public transport. The success of the Navi Mumbai and Noida airports will also rest on how well they complement their existing counterparts, rather than competing with them.

Silver lining spotted in Gaza

The release of 20 of the last surviving hostages from those captured by Hamas on October 7, 2023, may come as early as Saturday. This will represent the first real silver lining amid the Stygian darkness that had enveloped the Gaza Strip for two years and two days. A ceasefire will come into effect as Israel has agreed to pause the fighting until things become clearer in the big push for peace envisaged by US President Donald Trump, a peace that could conceivably come to rule over the whole region.

There can be no equivalence in what the hostages have suffered in Gaza tunnels in the time since the conflict flared, but their plight is not to be dismissed altogether while considering how much damage Israel has wreaked in two years, killing at least 67,000 Palestinians and making uninhabitable four out of every five buildings in Gaza City.

A couple of global organisations have termed Israel's treatment of Palestinians 'genocide' but What is in the air now is a move out of what was a terrible conflict for the Palestinians and the Israelis in which several other proxies of Iran also got involved. This is, however, only the first phase of a grandiloquent Trump peace plan which could potentially change the very landscape of the region, besides global geopolitics, if durable peace can be achieved.

Israel's Netanyahu can present the return of hostages, in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, as a win he has achieved for his people. It would be rum irony if peace has an opposite and deleterious effect on his tenuous political career. But the destruction of Gaza and the deprivation and death of its people had to stop as, over two years; it was vastly disproportionate even to the senseless attack on Israel carried out by the militant wing of Hamas.

The way forward is not going to be easy as Hamas may have to give up a lot more than hostages. The governance of Gaza under international oversight and the presence of a regional peace-keeping force appear to be hugely ambitious conditions to be fulfilled if a fuller peace is to be guaranteed for a region that has never been at peace since the creation of Israel. And yet there is no going back to war if the Palestinians, the greater sufferers in history, are to find peaceful coexistence.

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Subhani



RSS' 100 years: Cult of the national in a diverse India



Shikha Mukerjee

There are a few different ways to make sense of two important speeches delivered to celebrate the centenary of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which brags that it is the world's largest non-governmental organisation, with an unspecified number of members, subsidiaries and mass organisations.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech was that of an ardent devotee to the RSS' ideals and ideology, which from its inception was committed to nation-building, with its mantra of "Nation First". The base of the massive structure was "the unique, simple and enduring mechanism of the daily shakha".

The other speaker, Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS' current head, seemed different, more prosaic and less emotional, a direction setting message to the millions who think and work at his bidding. If not exactly a vision statement about how the RSS cadres must learn to see and act within the changing reality of a climate crisis and a fragmenting world order disrupted by America's trade and tariff policies under President Donald Trump's leadership, it was a call. Mr Bhagwat's call was aptly defined by, of all people, Rabindranath Tagore. Writing in 1922, before the formation of the RSS, Tagore in "Creative Unity" said: "The Cult of the National is the professionalism of the people. This cult is becoming their greatest danger, because it is bringing them enormous success, making them impatient of the claims of higher ideals."

Reading Tagore and Mr Modi together on the consequences of the "cult of the national" is one way of making sense of the PM's speech on one hand and Mr Bhagwat's message to RSS

cadres, affiliates, sympathisers and fellow travellers. Mr Modi, talking of "conspiracies to divide our unity," demographic changes through infiltration and more," made it clear the government and the RSS were on the same page. He said: "Our government is actively countering these. I am glad the RSS too has prepared a concrete roadmap to face them."

The PM takes pride in his roots and his rise from membership in a "shakha", the lowest unit of the massive RSS structure; thus his admiration for the shakha as "an inspiring place where every swayamsevak begins his journey... and goes through a process of personal transformation," is wholly understandable. It also reveals the "professionalism" that worried Tagore. The poet, educationist and author of India's national anthem, had warned in 1922: "With the growth of nationalism, man has become the greatest menace to man. The continual presence of panic goads that nationalism into ever-increasing menace."

Tagore warned: "Crowd psychology is a blind force. Like steam and other physical forces, it can be utilised for creating a tremendous amount of power... unreasoning pride in their own race, and hatred of others." He added: "Newspapers, school books, and even religious services are (used) for this object; and those who have the courage to express disapprobation of this blind and impious cult are either punished in the law courts, or are socially ostracised."

It is curious Tagore listed the ways in which the professionalism of the Cult of the National worked. Considering that the RSS maintains it has millions of cadres, affiliate organisations, their members and sympathisers, as well as the in-

One series of electoral setbacks for the BJP in any of the states where elections are due in 2025, 2026 and in 2027, when Uttar Pradesh is scheduled to vote, will not change the power RSS wields

evitable army of fellow travellers and opportunistic hangers-on, attracted by the link between it and BJP, that has been built over 100 years and continues to grow, the influence it exerts and the power it wields is immense.

The RSS and its networks constitute a nation within a nation; a membership or affiliation of an estimated 10 million (the organisation does not officially declare its membership size), is about the same as the population of Cuba, Sweden, Portugal and greater than the population of Israel, Greece and Austria. It has and will continue to play a significant part in Indian politics, regardless of whether it retains power at the national level through yet another election victory of the BJP in 2029 and in the states, where the BJP is in power.

The BJP's membership is over 100 million. Given that some of the RSS millions are also leading lights of Indian politics, including the Prime Minister, the collective strength of the RSS and BJP is formidable. It works as a vote bank across North India and to a lesser extent elsewhere in the country.

Mr Bhagwat, taken at face value, is addressing a diverse nation. Given the physical size and population of India, there will always be parts that will be on the boil. His centenary call to "embrace our differences", for instance, can be read in two ways: as a caution to Muslims to submit and embrace differences by doing what RSS affiliates want, such as giving up claims to land and mosques that these organisations claim were Hindu structures desecrated by Muslims, or it can be a warn-

ing to his constituency, based on recent events in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

He may be reading the tea leaves differently from the BJP; the resentment evident in J&K BJP leader Jahanzaib Sirwal against Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath's crackdown on Muslim protesters over the "I love Mohammed" posters, who called it "baseless legal actions, heavy-handed crackdown and divisive threats", in Mr Bhagwat's view may be a sign of unwanted rebellion. Hence, his warning; probably to the BJP and the government, that "violent outburst of public anger is a concern for us... The forces wanting to create such disturbances in Bharat are active both inside and outside our country".

The RSS' cure for discontent and violence by sections of people is simple; the State shall intervene with the full strength of the coercive apparatus: "Some differences may lead to discord. Differences must be expressed within the law. Provoking communities is unacceptable. The administration must act fairly, but the youth must also stay alert and intervene if needed. The grammar of anarchy needs to be stopped."

The subsidiary clause, inserted within Mr Bhagwat's message, is a call to his cadres to operate like vigilantes, the "private army" as Sardar Patel described it when banning RSS.

One series of electoral setbacks for the BJP in any of the states where elections are due in 2025, 2026 and in 2027, when Uttar Pradesh is scheduled to vote, will not change the power and influence the RSS wields. The loyalties of the armies of professionals and the professionalism of the people it directly controls is a sort of Deep State. After 100 years of dedication to its mission, the RSS will do everything it can to protect its achievements, including the success of the BJP, led and manned by its swayamsevaks.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

PARSING POWER

The 2025 Nobel Prize in Literature, conferred upon Hungarian author László Krasznahorkai, is a testament to the enduring power of literature to confront and transcend the darkest facets of human existence. Krasznahorkai's work is characterised by contemplative prose and unflinching exploration of dystopian themes. Born in 1954 in Gyula, Krasznahorkai emerged as a literary force with his debut, *Satantango* (1985). His subsequent works, including *The Melancholy of Resistance* (1989) and *War & War* (2004), delve into the complexities of power. His writing earned him the 2015 International Booker. His collaboration with filmmaker Béla Tarr popularised his work.

Vijay Singh Adhikari
Nainital

LUCKY VIJAY

THE KARUR TRAGEDY, though deeply unfortunate, has paradoxically thrust Vijay's TVK into the centre of Tamil Nadu's political churn. While 41 lives lost cannot be brushed aside, the unwavering public support, especially from youth and women, signals that Vijay's appeal goes beyond mere celebrity. Ironically, parties he openly criticised are now courting him, revealing how electoral strategy often overrides principle. Whether it is Congress or BJP, both appear eager to tap into his mass appeal. But with this sudden clout comes a difficult choice: align with compromised political legacies or walk a lonelier path. Either way, Vijay and TVK are no longer a passing phenomenon.

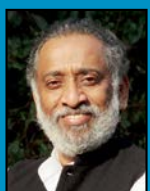
K. Chidanand Kumar
Bengaluru

TOXIC WORKPLACE

A CONTRACT WORKER in Maharashtra, unpaid for nine months, fell at the collector's feet begging for his salary so he could feed his children. Such moments should shake our collective conscience. No one who earns with dignity should have to beg for what is theirs. The solution lies not in sympathy but in accountability — through a transparent wage system that ensures timely payments and holds contractors answerable. True progress begins when a worker's sweat is valued as much as the profits it creates.

Md Asad
Mumbai

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



From trade to tirade: How one tweet rocked Customs boat

It started, as many big stories do these days, with a tweet. A blunt social media post by a mid-sized trading firm announced that it was shutting down its India operations after weeks of alleged harassment by Chennai Customs. Not a formal press release, not a court filing, but a post that instantly set off ripples.

The finance ministry then intervened with its own tweet, stating that an inquiry would be held. Before long, a well-known analyst was hinting that the exercise was less about justice and more about warning others against going public. In the space of a few hours, a commercial spat had been elevated into a drama about governance, accountability, and reputation.

The real worry isn't whether one company had a bad run-in with officials. That happens and usually gets sorted in hushed corridors. The worry is what the optics say: A business goes public with a complaint, the state responds with an inquiry announced on social media, and commentators suggest the whistleblower might end up punished for speaking out. It feels less like due process and more like a cautionary tale in the making.

And this is why the episode has legs far beyond Chennai port. International investors read these signals closely. If the moral of the story appears to be "keep quiet or face the

music", that's not the kind of investor-confidence campaign India wants to be running. A minor customs dispute risks morphing into a global anxiety point about how complaints are handled.

Unless the inquiry is seen as swift, fair and transparent, India might find itself explaining to the world why its digital-age governance appears suspiciously like a theatre of the ugly and absurd.

A PEEK INTO GLOBAL BABU ECOSYSTEMS

Babus in India may be delighted, or perhaps mortified, to know that some of their lowly brethren, both here and abroad, have now been captured for eternity in their natural habitat. A recently released photobook offers an unfiltered, almost voyeuristic, glimpse into the bureaucratic underbelly: rooms piled high with files, chai-stained tables, sagging chairs, and faces that seem halfway between resignation and quiet rebellion.

For those lucky enough never to have set foot inside a government office, the pictures are a revelation. They let you linger over spaces you'd otherwise sprint through—dim corridors where dusty ceiling fans drone louder than conversation or cubicles where the most exciting thing that happens all day is a paper jam. Yet, for millions around the world, these spaces are not exotic curiosities

but a part of daily life, the frontline of citizen-state interaction.

Each frame tells a story not just of work but of inertia, survival, and ritual. The rooms themselves are characters, speaking of past decisions, postponed reforms, and fading hopes of digitisation. It's bureaucracy as anthropology: fascinating, tragicomic, and eerily uniform across continents.

From Manila to Mumbai, the babu's world is a parallel universe with its own logic, rhythm, and cluttered charm. These are the keepers of process, the gatekeepers of governance, immortalised not by performance reviews or audit reports, but by the gentle click of a camera lens. Perhaps it takes art, not reform, to finally make us look at the system long enough to see what's really inside.

CAN AI MAKE BABUS FUTURE-READY? The government's decision to school babus in Artificial Intelligence is, in many ways, poetic. For decades, the fabled "steel frame" has thrived on paperwork, hierarchy, and procedural delays. Now, it is being asked to embrace algorithms, data sets, and machine learning models. Talk about culture shock.

Of course, AI training for civil servants is a necessary step. Policy today isn't just about rules and regulations; it's about crunching data, predicting outcomes, and delivering cit-

izen services with precision. But no algorithm can fix a system that still runs on outdated file movement and a reflexive fear of innovation. AI in the hands of an inertia-prone bureaucracy risks becoming another decorative acronym — like MIS, ERP, or e-Gov before it.

The programme deserves credit for incorporating conversations around ethics, including bias, transparency, and privacy. If anything, these lessons are more urgent for India's bureaucrats than the technical jargon. After all, a machine learning tool that inherits caste or gender biases from its data sets is no upgrade on human prejudice.

The real transformation will come only if these modules are linked to actual decision-making. Imagine AI helping a district magistrate predict flood risks, or a collector plugging leakages in welfare delivery. That's where the technology justifies the hype. Until then, training modules risk being a tick-box exercise, one more line in a babu's mid-career resumé. AI can make India's governance smarter. But it cannot replace the one thing our system chronically lacks: accountability.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	82,172.10	0.49
Nifty 50	25,181.80	0.54
S&P 500*	6,733.83	-0.29
Dollar (₹)	88.78	-0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	118.60	-0.33
Euro (₹)	103.13	0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	122,865*344	-0.28
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.97	-0.42
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.521	0.26
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.14	0.009

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Samsung TVs sales see 2-fold jump in Navratri

Samsung India on Thursday said it experienced strong growth in the appliances business during the nine-day-long auspicious Navratri period, supported by recent GST reforms by the government and promotional offers. The sales of premium televisions jumped two-fold, as compared to the corresponding festive period last year, according to a statement issued by the electronics maker.



All-India house index rises 3.6% in Q1 FY26: RBI

All-India house price index (HPI) based on transaction-level data of 18 major cities increased by 3.6 per cent year-on-year in Q1 of FY26, RBI said. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released its HPI for Q1 FY26 with a new base year of 2022-23 from earlier 2010-11. "Eight new cities Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Pune, Ghaziabad, Thane, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Chandigarh and Nagpur, added to list," it said.

Tata Steel's crude steel production surges 7% in Q2

Tata Steel on Thursday said its crude steel production in India rose by seven per cent to 5.67 million tonnes in the second quarter of the current fiscal, primarily aided by normalisation of operations post the completion of relining of a blast furnace at Jamshedpur, in Jharkhand. In a regulatory filing, the company said that in 2QFY26, Tata Steel India's crude steel production was 5.67 million tonnes.

LG Electronics IPO subscribes over 54 times

LG Electronics India's ₹11,607 crore IPO was subscribed over 54 times on the final day - a response that ranks it among the most sought after public issue in Indian primary market. With a total demand for ₹4.39 lakh crore worth of shares, LG Electronics attracted the largest ever quantum of bids in absolute rupee terms seen in India in last 15 years. The last biggest one was of Anil Ambani's R Power in 2010.

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Factories poised for strong growth in Sept. qtr: Survey

New Delhi, Oct. 9: India's manufacturing sector is poised for strong growth and expansion, with 87 per cent of respondents reporting higher or same production levels for the September quarter, a Ficci survey said.

In comparison, during the first quarter ended June, 77 per cent of respondents reported higher or same production levels. Ficci's survey assessed the performance and sentiments for July-September 2025-26 of manufacturers in eight major sectors namely, automotive and auto components; capital goods; chemicals, fertilisers and pharmaceutical; electronics; white goods and telecom; machine tools; metal and metal products; textiles, apparel and technical textiles. The optimism is also evident in domestic demand, as 83 per cent of respondents anticipate an increase in orders in Q2 FY 2026 (July-September) compared to the previous quarter and more so after the latest GST rate cuts were announced.

However, production costs for manufacturers in Q1 and Q2 FY 2025-26 seem to remain on higher side. Over 50 per cent of respondents reported an increase in the cost of production as a percentage of sales, which is consistent with the previous quarter's findings.

The increase in cost of production compared to

83% of respondents anticipate an increase in orders in Q2 FY26 compared to previous quarter.

GOOD PERFORMANCE

81% respondents report sufficient availability of funds from banks for working capital.

Satellite broadband services after cos rollout plans: Scindia

New Delhi, Oct. 9: Satellite broadband services in the country will begin after companies finalise their rollout plan and the sector regulatory Trai suggests spectrum prices, union telecom minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Thursday.

Speaking to reporters at the India Mobile Congress 2025, the minister said that two satcom players have been given licenses for satcom services, and a letter of intent has been issued to another. "It depends on the play-

ers in terms of how quickly they can roll out their execution strategy. There is one issue that Trai has to still finalise spectrum pricing. That is the pending part, and that regulator will do," Scindia said.

There is growing anticipation over satcom rollout in India, with prominent companies, including Elon Musk-owned Starlink, Bharti-backed Eutelsat OneWeb, and Reliance Jio-Satcom, keenly eyeing the high-stakes game of broadband beamed from Indian skies. — PTI

DGCA seeks for financial autonomy

New Delhi, Oct. 9: India's aviation regulator is pushing for financial and staffing autonomy similar to counterparts in Europe, the UK and US, as it seeks to strengthen oversight and keep pace with the demands of a booming air travel sector.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), wants authority to independently recruit and seeking increased funding to support training programs for staff, people familiar with matter said.

The demand for autonomy underscores the regulator's assessment that it needs to muscle up and bolster oversight of the world's third-largest domestic aviation market.

Any capacity constraints at DGCA also risk raising concerns about its

ability to ensure safety - a worry amplified after Air India crash which triggered a system-wide audit.

Currently, the regulator operates with limited manpower resources and funding that's a fraction of what its global peers receive.

As of July, the DGCA had filled only 553 of 1,063 technical posts and employed 4,295 air traffic controllers. In contrast, the US Federal aviation administration (FAA) has 46,170 employees, including 14,000 controllers.

In FY25, the DGCA has been allocated \$38 million, compared to FAA's \$23.1 billion in fiscal 2024.

India's aviation has grown consistently over the past decade, with passengers doubling to 23.4 crore from 11.6 cr. — Bloomberg

Mkts jump on metal, IT stocks' rally

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, OCT. 9

The market benchmarks Nifty-50 and Sensex rose by around 0.5 per cent led by a broad based rally particularly in metal, IT and pharma stocks and return of foreign investors as net buyers of Indian equities.

Pharma shares received a particular boost as the US administration clarified it will not impose tariffs on generic drug imports from overseas, said analysts.

The Sensex gained 398 points to close at 82,172 up



by 0.49 per cent while Nifty-50 rose by 0.54 per cent to 25,181.80 gaining 135.65 points.

The broader market also gained with BSE mid-cap index up 0.75 per cent and BSE small-cap index up

Silver hits \$51 in global market after 14 years

White metal appreciates 75% since Jan., expect \$72 in 2 yrs

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, OCT. 9

Silver made a historical high of \$51 per ounce in the international market after a gap of 14 years. This took silver in the Indian spot market to ₹1.63 lakh per kg and ₹1.53 lakh per kg in multi-commodity exchange (MCX).

The white metal appreciated 75 per cent since start of the year which may see some technical correction, but analysts estimate the silver prices to go up to \$72 or ₹2,25,000 in next two years.

Silver made a new high since 2011 which had almost touched \$50 at \$49.8 per ounce. Prior to that, in 1980s silver had come closer to \$50 after Hunt Brothers hoarded 100 million ounces of silver as well as silver futures contracts. Silver prices went up from \$6.08 in January 1979 to \$49.45 in January 1980.

However, in Indian market, due to the rupee weakness, silver has touched record high levels several times and made a new high on Thursday as well. "The uncertainty over ceasefire between Israel and Hamas led to continued safe-haven buying in precious metals. Further, tight supplies and soaring borrowing costs in London also supported silver," said Ajay Kedia, MD, Kedia Commodities.

However, no asset class would have given 75 per cent returns in 10 months. Hence 10-12 per cent correction is likely in silver," Kedia said.

Gold too made a new high of \$4,050 per ounce in global market before dropping to \$4,020 levels. This took gold prices in Delhi spot market to a new high of ₹1,27,000 per 10 gm.

SAFE HAVEN

SILVER MADE NEW HIGH SINCE 2011 WHICH HAD ALMOST TOUCHED \$50.

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— AJAY KEDIA, MD, Kedia Commodities

Gold loan market to hit ₹15L-crore mark in FY26

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, OCT. 9

The organised gold loan market is estimated to reach the ₹15 lakh crore mark this fiscal, a year earlier than previously expected with the gold prices continuing to make record highs.

The organized gold loan market reached approximately ₹11.8 lakh crore by March 2025. ICRA estimates the market to further grow and touch ₹15 lakh crore by FY26.

Overall gold loans expanded at a CAGR of about 26 per cent in FY24 and FY25, with banks showing a slightly higher growth rate compared to NBFCs. Among lenders,

the AUM of NBFCs is expected to expand by 30-35 per cent in FY26. NBFC AUMs stood at Rs. 2.4 lakh crore in June 2025 with a growth of 24 per cent. This was driven by gold prices even as the gold collateral tonnage growth remained muted.

However, public sector banks remain dominant players in the space, driven by agriculture and other loans that are backed by gold jewellery. During FY24 and FY25, their gold loans grew at a CAGR of 27 per cent, while that of private sector banks expanded at a relatively slower compound annual

growth rate (CAGR) of 22 per cent.

While the new RBI guidelines for the industry bring in harmonisation and a much-needed clarity to lenders operating in the space, disbursements and operational efficiencies could be impacted in the near term in view of the increased assessment requirements, especially for loans above ₹2.5 lakh.

Smaller ticket loans shall benefit from loan to value relaxation, though higher ticket bullet repaying loans would be impacted. The average LTV has generally remained at less than 65 per cent in the last two years.

AI-payments on ChatGPT soon

Mumbai, Oct. 9: India's payments authority National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and fintech firm Razorpay have collaborated with OpenAI to launch AI-driven payments on ChatGPT, the companies said.

The initiative, currently in pilot stage, will allow users to make purchases on ChatGPT, facilitated by India's homegrown payments network unified payments interface (UPI).

The move follows leading artificial intelligence (AI) companies, including

Alphabet's Google and Perplexity AI, launching their versions of AI-enabled payment services earlier this year.

"With agentic payments, we are transforming AI assistants from simple discovery tools into full-fledged shopping agents," said Harshil Mathur, chief executive officer of Razorpay.

India's pilot will evaluate how the service can be expanded across verticals and how UPI can be used to enable AI agents

with payment credentials "to autonomously complete transactions on behalf of users in a safe, secure, and user-controlled manner," the companies said in a statement.

The service will use UPI's newly launched 'reserve pay' feature, which allows users to reserve funds for specific merchants.

UPI, India's leading fast payments network, processes over 20 billion transactions every month. Axis Bank and Airtel

Payments Bank are the banking partners for the pilot, and Tata Group-owned e-commerce platform BigBasket is among the first platforms to allow customers to shop through ChatGPT.

"We're excited to work with NPCI and explore how we can combine advanced AI with unified payments interface, one of the world's most trusted real-time payment networks," Oliver Jay, managing director of international strategy at OpenAI, said. — Reuters

TCS's Q2 net profit rises to ₹12,904 cr, revenue rises 2.3%

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, OCT. 9

IT major Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) reported 2.39 per cent increase in revenue year-on-year to ₹65,799 crore during second quarter while net profit rose 8.35 per cent yoy to ₹12,904 crore.

TCS's revenue grew 3.7 per cent quarter-on-quarter (qoq) while qoq net profit rise was 1.12 per cent.

TCS announced strategic investments in a new business entity to build

world class AI infrastructure - 1 GW capacity AI datacenter in India.

The company also announced acquisition of US-based IT company ListEngage for \$72.8 million (about ₹646 crore).

K Krithivasan, chief executive officer and managing director, TCS said "We are on a journey to become the world's largest AI-led technology services company."

It didn't disclose employee headcount or attrition rate of the quarter.

VITAL | METALS

Beijing's restrictions on end-use amounts wielding extraterritorial control

China extends curbs on rare earths export

Beijing, Oct. 9: China has unveiled broad new curbs on its exports of rare earths and other critical materials, as Beijing moves to shore up its trade war leverage ahead of a meeting between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping.

Overseas exporters of items that use even traces of certain rare earths sourced from China will need an export license, the ministry of commerce said in a statement, citing national security grounds.

Certain equipment and technology for processing

rare earths and making magnets will also be subject to controls, according to a separate release.

While it's unclear how Beijing plans to enforce the sweeping rules, they mark an escalation in China's campaign to wield extraterritorial controls over the nation's goods.

The curbs mirror Washington's own export regime, which bans Chinese companies from accessing cutting-edge chips and the tools to make them.

Separately, the ministry later announced plans to



CHINA PLANS to expand export controls to range of new products from Nov. 8.

CHINA accounts for 70% of rare earths in global supply.

THEY ARE vital to high-tech industries including chips, auto.

expand export controls to a range of new products in measures that will be enforced from November 8. The newly-affected products include five more rare earths — holmium, europium, ytterbium, thulium, erbium — plus certain

lithium-ion batteries, graphite anodes and synthetic diamonds, as well as some equipment for making those materials.

China has used its control of the rare earth sector - it accounts for about 70 per cent of global sup-

ply - as leverage in negotiations. The minerals have an array of applications that make them vital to high-tech industries including semiconductors and autos as well as military.

The latest policy explicitly states that exports of listed rare-earth materials for defense use will be broadly denied — sharpening prior language that merely required licensing.

Rare earth exports for AI research that could have a military application will be similarly affected, ministry said. — Bloomberg

LIVING THE BOND: FINDING STRENGTH IN CARING FOR A LOVED ONE

BHARATI PAWASKAR

Sandhya Shirodkar (name changed) lived the old saying, ‘Mai maro, maushi jago’ as her own mother had passed away before her maternal aunt, an elderly widow with no children of her own. Living true to this emotion and having found herself burdened with the favours received in childhood from this aunt, Sandhya went out of her way to take care of her octogenarian aunt who suffered dementia, remained bedridden for months, until she died during this Navratri – due to old age, bed soar and mental derailment.

Hospitalised and confined in a special room, with a caregiver at her side, the aunt who had completely lost her mental balance, became forgetful of the day-to-day activities, didn’t recognise faces and didn’t recollect if she had eaten her food. All this was due to dementia, a neurodegenerative condition that affects the person’s memory and motor control. As dementia comes with memory loss, loss of self identity and loss of ability to recognise faces, the aunt had difficulty in communicating and displayed serious behavioural issues. Her life-limiting condition had a significant effect on herself as well as her caregiver.

“For me it was an emotional agony to see my ‘maushi’ suffering so much. She had developed a deep wound due to her hip surgery done some years ago, and which had opened up when she fell again due to loss of motor control. The injury did not heal, and was getting worse every passing day. Lying on her back all the time, she developed a bed sore on her back which had to be cleaned twice a day. Because of this she could sleep only on one side. Due to lack of physical



activity her legs became stiff. The doctor visited twice daily, the nurses did sponging and dressing. Due to her dementia she could not recognise anyone. Unable to express, she kept yelling and screaming, disturbing other patients in the hospital. I was helpless,” shared Sandhya.

The ailing aunt would often throw away her oxygen mask and gasp. She could not gulp tablets or capsules, so doctors gave her drips for medicine. She used to abuse the sisters who came to clean her, give bad words to doctors, go violent and become uncontrollable at times. Sometimes she

used to be silent and lost. Not in her senses, she would not chew the food, so Sandhya used to cook liquid kanji for her and feed daily.

“Maushi passed away during this Navratri, and I thought her suffering finally came to an end. Instead of crying, I thanked God and breathed a sigh of relief for both of us – because she underwent extreme physical pain, and could not even express that through verbal communication, and for me it as a mental torture to see her suffer,” admits Sandhya who spent from her own pocket to pay the caretaker, as her aunt was a widow and

had no children.

Mental illnesses takes a toll on not only the person who is affected, but the entire family and caregivers go through extreme painful situation. Having said that, someone would wonder, what would happen if these mentally ill people were abandoned or disowned by their families and left to die an anonymous death! Sometimes this actually happens, sometimes it doesn’t.

In India, extended family members are taken care of if there’s no one to look after them in their old age. The elderly parents or grandparents are

DO’S AND DON’TS

Prioritising our mental health by staying connected, being physically active, and following routines is a must.

Minimising alcohol use, engaging in meaningful conversations and enjoyable activities, and seeking support from trusted friends, family, or health professionals can go a long way in keeping us fit and fine

Providing inclusive support to children, older people, persons with disabilities, refugees, and people with pre-existing mental health conditions, including those in institutions is necessary

Addressing barriers such as stigma, discrimination, costs, and language is also essential

shown the door if they show signs of insanity. People take care of their loved ones, though they may choke with bottled emotions, and never share their pain with others, for the fear of society. Albeit, the social stigma that comes along with mental illnesses is still unavoidable at many times. Taking good care of one’s mental health is extremely important while serving the mentally sick person.

World Mental Health Day comes with a powerful reminder that there is no health without mental health. This year’s campaign focuses on the urgent need to support mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by humanitarian emergencies. Crises such as natural disasters, conflicts, and public health emergencies cause emotional distress. Supporting the mental well-being of individuals is not just important – it saves lives, gives people the strength to cope, the space to heal and to recover. By working hand in hand, the citizens can ensure the most vulnerable have access to the support they need while protecting the well-being of everyone around. On this World Mental Health Day, let us intensify our efforts to create a world where mental health is valued, protected, and accessible for all, especially in the face of adversity.

Understanding mental wellbeing and the importance of seeking help

AKILA SADIK BEPARI

I had a severe backache so I visited physiotherapist, I have a tooth ache so I visited a dentist, I have a fever so I visited a doctor. These sentences are heard very commonly among masses. But what about these?

“I have depression I visited a mental health professional” “I am suffering from anxiety” I need to visit a Psychologist.

The above concerns are basically ones mental health needs as important as our Physical needs too. But due to humiliation, taboo, self unacceptance, society one often not only neglects but also ignores and disregards the existence of a mental health illness.

Irrespective one must remember take action when small, or else suffering will escalate over a period of time with irreparable damage. What is mental wellbeing and why is it really important?

In simple terms mental health is a state of internal balance between psychological and emotional well-being. There are various reasons why the mental wellbeing of individuals



especially in middle aged and young adolescents has been deteriorating. One of the reasons published in a newspaper long ago mentioned that loneliness is growing among youth and middle aged. In an era where social media is at its top, almost everyone is known for the number of followers they have on Instagram and Facebook which goes up to millions but still we need to understand it’s on social media. In reality it’s not the

same. A person may not have a single good friend with whom they can share their pain. Everyone is busy in their own lives. Parents are busy earning so they may hardly talk among themselves and with kids, children are busy with so many classes that they in reality may not have a healthy friend circle with whom they can share their burden. Almost everyone is busy with gadgets, phone addiction etc again leading to real world. The

Mental health deserves the same attention as physical health. Growing loneliness, gadget addiction, and isolation have worsened wellbeing. Low emotional and adversity quotients deepen struggles, making professional help essential for maintaining mental balance

hours spent on phone is more than time spent with family that too with no quality.

Another issue we see in our current society is nuclear family. I am not against it. Everything has its own its and butts. If we look at past the whole society was involved in bringing up a child. There were areas where a child would go to neighbours, eat and play and return only at times the mother was done with chores and was resting in-laws would be involved in bringing up the child with cultural values, spirituality. Parents would be about values, learning behaviours etc. Along with nuclear family we live in a system where the building will have several doors in an apartment but people have not seen each other for days and months. Again isolation.

Another factor that contributes to mental health illness is the emotional quotient and adversity quotient of an individual. An emotional quotient (EQ) is a measurement of emotional intelligence, which is the ability to understand, manage, and use one’s own emotions and those of others in positive way.

Adversity Quotient (AQ) measures a person’s ability to handle adversity, stress, and challenges. Low levels of EQ and AQ has intensified issues like Intermittent Explosive Disorder (IED), self harm, depression suicide, anxiety to name a few.

Earlier generation had to work hard to get everything but they had someone to speak to, share concerns and elders to learn from but today’s generation has everything on a platter

but no one to speak to, mobile and few immature friends to learn from.

The difference between stress levels in men and women

Research shows that men and women experience stress but the kind of stressor they go through and their coping mechanism are different.

First and foremost gender roles. Men are supposed to earn for family and women work at home. Although many women are working but the role system continues. Women still have to work at home and take care of family. While on the other hand the pressure on men to make sure that he shoulders the earning member and the responsibility of financial role isn’t lowered. Women cry when stressed where as due to society men can’t. Women will take care of everything except herself and a men will take care of all the finances except himself. Men are more towards problem solving rather than repeating the same problem over and over again unlike women who ruminate. We see women experience more psychosomatic issues as compared to men.

So how do we make sure we stay mentality sound?

First and foremost speak about your problem to the right person. A mental health professional can do a great job. I have seen some of my client come to a session and they speak about the issues, they feel so relieved they text me saying I feel really good after the first session.

(The author is a psychologist and alternative medicine therapist)

Building resilience: Strengthening minds for life’s storms

DR AMIT DIAS

Life isn’t a perfectly paved highway — it’s more like our roads in the monsoon: full of unexpected potholes, unexpected bends, and sudden downpours. We can’t control the rain, but we can open an umbrella and even learn to dance in the rain. That’s what resilience is all about — not dodging the storm, but finding your rhythm inside it.

Think of resilience as your mental shock absorber — your ability to bounce back. It doesn’t remove the bumps, but it prevents your emotional wheels from falling off.

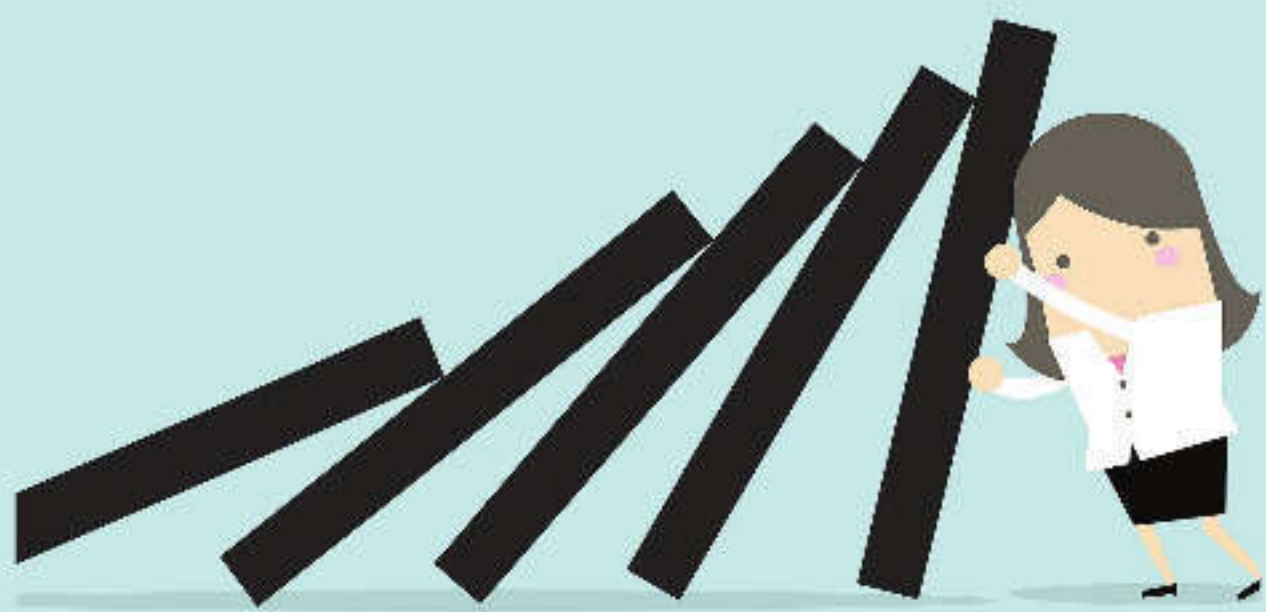
It’s the psychological skill that helps people bounce, bend, and rebuild after life throws a punch. But here’s the interesting bit — it isn’t something you’re born with... It’s something you can train, grow, and polish with practice. Your spiritual life can help build your resilience — I

often see youth drifting away from faith and feel that every problem that comes their way is the end of the world and life is not worth living. The faith that God will make a way when you think that there is no way is very reassuring.

The hidden crisis

According to World Health Organisation, 1 in 10 people worldwide live with a mental health condition, with depression and anxiety leading the way. People are often undiagnosed and live in fear and stigma. One in seven adolescents globally faces a mental health disorder. Suicide is the 4th leading cause of death among those aged 15–29. Over 280 million people live with depression.

In India, where stigma still keeps many silent, suicide continues to claim young lives. Teaching resilience early isn’t just about ‘staying positive’ — it can mean the difference between hope and despair.



Resilience isn’t a hard shell. It’s more like bamboo — soft enough to bend, strong enough to stand tall again. The formula can be applied across the age spectrum and every page of your book of life. When we cling too tightly to ‘how things

should be’ we get stuck. Rigidity can make stress unbearable, leading to anxiety, depression, or worse. A resilient mind says, ‘This isn’t how I planned it — but I can still make it through.’

Access to care matters, take help

Accept the fact that it’s okay not to be okay, but it’s not okay not to do anything about it. The theme for this year’s World Mental Health Day focuses on access to care. Resilience is powerful, but it’s not a replacement for professional help. Over 75% of people with mental health conditions in low – and middle-income countries get no treatment. Stigma, lack of services, and workforce shortages are part of the problem.

Resilience works best hand in hand with accessible, compassionate mental health care. In our recent Swasth Nari Sashakt Parivar Camp at UHTC St Cruz, we screened people for mental health — it was very well received. Mental health services should be made available through the primary health centres as envisaged in the National Mental Health Programme.

Bend, don’t break

Storms will come — loss, illness, rejection, change. But what defines us is not the storm itself, but our response to it. Build your positive friend circle, feel free to talk to someone — know who your go to person would be in times of crisis and emergency.

Resilience is the quiet, steady force that whispers, ‘You can rise again!’

Let’s build resilient individuals, resilient communities, and a resilient nation where mental health is everyone’s business — not just on one day in October, but every day.

(Dr Amit Dias is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Preventive and Social Medicine at Goa Medical College. With over 25 years of experience in mental health research and community health initiatives, he has worked extensively on programs addressing dementia, mental well-being in schools, and public health awareness)

Friends with benefits

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's visit to India marks a turning point in the evolving equation between the two nations ~ one that celebrates commerce and creativity but carefully avoids the political quicksand of migration. His assertion that visa rules for Indian workers and students will not be relaxed may sound disappointing to many, but it reveals a pragmatic reading of Britain's post-Brexit realities.

The United Kingdom, under Mr Starmer's Labour government, is trying to recover both economic momentum and political coherence after years of turbulence. The newly signed trade deal with India is the first tangible step in that direction ~ not a grand gesture, but a calculated move to open markets without opening borders. The agreement, which makes British cars and whisky cheaper for Indian consumers while easing exports of Indian textiles and jewellery to the UK, underscores the shared benefits of mutual access. It also reflects how both governments are increasingly willing to let trade, not migration, define the next phase of partnership.

For India, the symbolism of this approach is significant. It represents recognition from London that New Delhi is no longer a junior partner seeking concessions but an equal economic force capable of shaping global value chains. The UK's decision to link cultural collaboration with commercial engagement ~ as seen in Yash Raj Films' plan to shoot three productions in Britain ~ is a subtle but strategic acknowledgment of India's global soft power.

Bollywood diplomacy may not influence tariffs, but it undeniably deepens emotional capital between societies. Yet, beneath the optimism lies a quiet realism: both nations are seeking advantage, not alignment; cooperation built on mutual benefit, but carefully insulated from domestic political risk.

Mr Starmer's stance on visas, however, also reveals the constraints of his domestic political landscape. Immigration remains a deeply charged issue in Britain, and Labour's new settlement policies aim to reassure a wary electorate that post-Brexit borders will remain firmly guarded.

In this sense, his visit to India sought to expand economic warmth without inflaming political backlash at home. It is a delicate balance ~ between growth and control, openness and caution.

What emerges is a model of transactional diplomacy ~ pragmatic, goal-oriented, and stripped of sentimentalism. Gone are the days when the Commonwealth connection or shared democratic values carried automatic weight in Westminster. In their place stands a hard-nosed recognition that India matters not just as a market but as a manufacturing and technological power whose rise can no longer be ignored.

Mr Starmer's message, therefore, is twofold: Britain wants India as a partner in prosperity, not as a source of population. For New Delhi, that may be acceptable as long as trade, investment, and technology continue to flow both ways.

The new partnership is not about open doors but aligned interests. In that sense, it may well reflect the defining reality of twenty-first-century diplomacy, where nations pursue cooperation without dependence, and friendship without favours.

Power Shift

For the first time in modern history, renewable energy has overtaken coal as the world's largest source of electricity. The event marks more than a statistical milestone ~ it represents a profound shift in how nations generate, consume, and think about power. Yet, behind these figures lies a complex reality of uneven progress, political divergence, and technological imbalance that will determine whether this transition endures or falters.

The most striking feature of the new energy order is its geography. The global South ~ long associated with lagging industrial infrastructure and energy poverty ~ is now leading the clean power revolution. China's scale of solar and wind deployment has been unmatched, with renewable generation expanding faster than its rising electricity demand.

India, too, has added impressive solar and wind capacity while managing to reduce its dependence on coal and gas. Across Africa and South Asia, the falling cost of solar panels ~ down by an extraordinary 999 per cent since the 1970s ~ has made clean energy accessible to communities that were once left off the grid.

This inversion of expectations reveals a quiet truth. Developing countries are no longer passive recipients of clean technology; they are its most dynamic participants. In regions where electricity is both expensive and unreliable, solar power offers not just environmental gain but economic freedom. The affordability of renewables allows small enterprises, rural households, and local industries to flourish without waiting for centralized grids or foreign aid.

However, the picture in advanced economies is less inspiring. In the United States and parts of Europe, clean energy expansion has slowed. Policy uncertainty, weaker wind performance, and high borrowing costs have forced a renewed reliance on fossil fuels. This regression underlines a paradox ~ that political choices, not technological limits, are the greatest obstacle to the green transition.

Meanwhile, China's dominance in clean-tech manufacturing ~ from solar panels to electric vehicles and batteries ~ has reshaped global supply chains. Its exports of renewable technologies now exceed those of most industrial goods, signalling an era in which green technology itself becomes a lever of geopolitical influence. The race to decarbonise is thus entwined with the contest for industrial leadership.

For poorer nations, the challenge is to balance the immediate benefits of solar expansion with long-term sustainability. In some regions, unregulated solar-powered irrigation is depleting groundwater, reminding policymakers that every technological leap carries new ecological risks.

The global energy transition has reached a critical juncture. Clean power is finally keeping pace with rising demand, but its permanence depends on foresight and fairness. Nations that treat renewables as an enduring strategy rather than a passing phase will shape the next century's economic and environmental order.

The shift from coal to clean energy is not just about replacing fuels. It is about redefining power itself, both in the grid and in the global balance of influence.

Volatile World

Nowhere is the tension between dependency and autonomy clearer than in technology. Semiconductors are the brains of the digital age. India has long been absent from the scene, but projects like Micron's \$2.7 billion ATMP facility in Gujarat and Applied Materials' \$400 million R&D centre in Bengaluru indicate a promising foothold. Nevertheless, Trump's America First instincts may cap India's role at assembly only, keeping high-value fabrication at home

When Donald Trump returned to the White House in January 2025, many expected a revival of his emblematic economic nationalism. Few, however, foresaw his outrageous move to impose a \$100,000 H-1B visa fee. For three decades, the H-1B programme had been the conduit of America's technology industry, allowing firms to hire engineers, programmers, and researchers from abroad, majority of them from India.

By setting the fee at a level that makes the programme extortionate, Trump struck at the heart of the U.S.-India innovation marketplace. The immediate reaction was shock. Silicon Valley warned of talent shortages. Infosys and Wipro shares fell, while students in Indian tech institutions suddenly saw their American dreams blurred.

Nevertheless, the visa shock seems more than an immigration reform. It is a metaphor for a new geopolitical era, a world where technology, trade, and people could be instrumentalized. A world where the United States is both indispensable partner and a ruthless unpredictable power, where India must navigate volatility without compromising its strategic autonomy.

Trump's protectionism narrows India's choices, but also creates opportunities. By turning disruption into renewal, India can emerge as a new pole of global innovation, shaping rather than merely adapting to the twenty-first-century techno-(dis)order.

Trump's tariffs go beyond trade balances. During his first term, India lost preferential access under the Generalized System of Preferences, costing exporters hundreds of millions annually. Now Trump has imposed a 50 per cent tariff since India continues to buy discounted Russian oil. This is economic coercion cloaked as international trade policy. It reflects a world of strong-arm



interdependence, where commerce becomes provisional. Beijing punishes Australia by blocking coal imports, Brussels imposes carbon border taxes, and Washington links tariffs to geopolitical alignment, for example.

India's dilemma is unenviable. Russian crude supplies 35 per cent of its energy. Abandoning it would spike fuel prices and retard economic growth. But defying Trump risks U.S. tariffs on textiles, pharmaceuticals, and IT services. New Delhi's response has been rather timid, ineffectual hedging: trade pacts with the UAE and Australia, talks with the EU, and deeper ties with Southeast Asia. But the U.S. remains India's largest export market.

Dependency can be reduced, not eliminated. In a tariff-ridden world, India needs to build its massive domestic capacity to withstand shocks. Strategic autonomy must be measured in resilience, not rhetoric. Where is the tension between dependency and autonomy clearer than in technology. Semiconductors are the brains of the digital age. India has long been absent from the scene, but projects like Micron's \$2.7 billion ATMP facility in Gujarat and Applied Materials' \$400 million R&D centre in Bengaluru indicate a promising foothold. Nevertheless, Trump's America First instincts may cap India's role at assembly only, keeping high-value fabrication at home.

India must push beyond hosting foreign projects toward ecosystem building. It must design and establish firms in Bengaluru, upstream partnerships with Japan, and collaboration with Taiwan and the EU. Self-reliance, Atmanirbhar in Prime Minister Modi's lexicon, does not mean autarky. Even the U.S. depends on Dutch lithography. But self-reliance can mean shaping interdependence on favourable terms. After the Galwan clash in 2020, India excluded Huawei and ZTE from its 5G rollout, betting instead on Open RAN with U.S. and European partners. The Bharat 6G Alliance's partnership with the U.S. Next G Alliance reflects a goal to co-create standards. If successful, India could move from consumer to standard-setter in global telecom. But Open RAN faces hurdles, integration costs, interoperability issues, and Trump's transactionalism. Unless reciprocity is

genuine, with shared IP and joint pilots, India risks being reduced to a market rather than a co-developer.

India's space programme embodies both prestige and pragmatism. The Chandrayaan-3 lunar landing (2023) showcased ambition, while the NASA-ISRO NISAR satellite (2025) delivers data for agriculture and climate resilience. An Indian astronaut aboard the ISS would symbolize U.S.-India cooperation. But Trump could treat space partnerships as transactional deals, demanding cost-sharing or restricting technology transfers. For India, the lesson is that collaboration must be a platform for domestic innovation. Like Airbus in Europe, India must embed partnerships into indigenous capacity.

China is India's big trading partner and fiercest rival. The Galwan clash of 2020

reignited border hostility; nonetheless, Chinese goods dominate Indian imports, fuelling an \$80 billion trade deficit. India has banned several Chinese apps, tightened FDI rules, and barred Huawei, but remains dependent on Chinese hardware from smartphones to solar panels. Trump's hawkishness toward Beijing seems to give India cover. Export controls may slow China's rise, and multinationals may seek "China-plus-one" strategies, often landing in India. But Washington's zero-sum framing risks reducing India to a stand-in status. India must diversify, engaging Europe, Japan, ASEAN, and the Global South, to preserve its real autonomy.

Artificial intelligence is becoming a ubiquitous technology getting embedded into all facets of life. India's partnerships with NVIDIA, Reliance, and TCS aim to build vernacular AI, democratizing access for farmers, students, and patients. But AI's bottleneck is compute. GPUs are dominated by NVIDIA and AMD, fabricated in Taiwan and South Korea. Washington's export controls, aimed at China, constrain India as well. If Trump tightens restrictions, India risks being starved of tools it needs to

innovate. India's response must be threefold: domestic compute clusters, diversified partners (Japan, EU), and open-source ecosystems.

Otherwise, AI risks replicating dependency rather than breaking it. The deepest U.S.-India corridor is not chips or satellites but people. About 71 per cent of H-1B visas went to Indians in 2024. Indian-Americans now number 4.5 million and lead global companies from Google to Microsoft. Trump's \$100,000 visa fee disrupts this channel. Students are uncertain about U.S. degrees and remittances are threatened.

But the long-term effect may be reverse brain drain. Engineers who once saw Silicon Valley as the only path may build careers in Bengaluru, Hyderabad or Pune. If managed wisely, this becomes brain circulation. Returnees bring skills, networks, and capital. Indian start-ups are already attracting Silicon Valley veterans home. The task is to provide fertile soil: world-class universities, start-up-friendly regulations, and incentives for returnees.

Human capital is the most resilient force for autonomy. Chips can be denied, visas restricted, supply chains disrupted. But a skilled population cannot easily be intimidated. Strategic autonomy, then, is not a slogan. It is the embedding of resilience in society, through skills, institutions, and multipolar engagements. Trump's new visa proclamation symbolized the end of an era of assumed openness. But shocks can be catalysts. If tariffs, visa barriers, and tech chokepoints force India to invest in its own capacity, diversify ties, and refurbish talent, they may strengthen rather than weaken autonomy.

India has the scale, talent, and traditions to emerge as a hub of innovation. By converting its youthful demographic dividend into an innovation dividend, leveraging joint projects for domestic capacity, and anchoring autonomy in capabilities, India can rise as a force multiplier of the twenty-first-century order. The Trump age reminds India that technology is power, freedom is capability, and autonomy must be built and rebuilt continuously. If India seizes this moment, the H-1B challenge will become not the closing of a door but the opening of another, toward an India that is both a democracy of scale and a shaper of the global techno-age.



China a global model for inclusive development

Development is a universal goal for nations, but sharing the fruits of development remains a common challenge. With his deep insight into human development trends, President Xi Jinping has proposed a people-centered development philosophy, offering a Chinese approach to fostering global inclusive development.

While development can often be uneven, causing some to fall behind due to various factors, China has steadfastly strived to ensure no one is left behind. Under the leadership of President Xi, 98.99 million rural residents have been lifted out of poverty ~ a miracle in the history of global poverty reduction, something that former World Bank president Jim Yong Kim called one of the greatest stories in human history. Building on this achievement, the Communist Party of China and the government continue to link these outcomes with rural vitalization, consistently consolidating them.

China ensures that no region is left behind. Development can often exhibit significant asymmetries, with regional disparities becoming pronounced and Matthew effects ~ a theory which says that people who have more get more,

while those who have less get less ~ growing evident. As it happened with the "rust belts" in the United States, some initially advanced regions may gradually lose their comparative advantages. By continuously refining regional coordination strategies, increasing transfer payments from the central government, and strengthening paired assistance between better-off and less-advanced areas, China is actively narrowing the regional gaps. Resource-depleted cities, old industrial bases, old revolutionary bases, regions with multiple ethnic groups, border areas, and formerly impoverished areas have overcome challenges, leveraged their strengths, and achieved better development. China provides ordinary people with opportunities to excel in life. Its achievements are in essence built on the personal achievements of ordinary individuals. Access to quality educational resources, diverse employment opportunities, and entrepreneurial prospects form crucial foundations for personal success. The country has invested significantly in promoting education and employment while actively encouraging innovation

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been done or planned to restrict the recurring floods caused by the release of excess water from dams.

On one hand the Chief Minister is always at loggerheads with the Centre, on the other, she is expecting relief funds from the Centre. The political slugfest will be there, but should not affect the interests of the state's people. Perennial flood-affected people cannot be

saved by political talk of 'Central deprivation'. This was the refrain during 34 years of Left rule but ultimately people threw them out of power.

Yours, etc., Mihir Kanungo,
Kolkata, 7 October.

Bihar battle

Sir, The EC's announcement of a two-phase Bihar Assembly election on November 6 and 11 sets the stage for a fascinating political battle. This election, the first after the state's caste survey, will test whether the politics of identity still outweighs governance, development and employment. Both the Nitish Kumar-led NDA and Tejashwi Yadav's Mahagathabandhan are returning to familiar battle lines ~ stability versus stagnation,

governance versus grievance.

However, the controversy surrounding the SIR of electoral rolls and allegations of "vote theft" cast a shadow over the process. The absence of data on removal of illegal voters, as admitted by the CEC, raises legitimate concerns about transparency. At the same time, the EC's decision to replicate the SIR nationwide underscores the importance of ensuring a clean and credible voter list. Bihar's politics has long revolved around personality clashes and caste loyalties. But this election offers an opportunity for its 7.4 crore voters, including 14 lakh first-time electors, to rise above old divides and vote for issues that truly matter - jobs, education, and better governance.

Yours, etc., Vandana,
Chandigarh, 7 October.

When corruption crosses borders

SANGRAM DATTA

Not far from the glittering skyline of downtown Toronto, in the leafy suburbs of Mississauga and Markham, stand rows of palatial homes - elegant, glass-fronted, and conspicuously quiet. To a casual visitor, these neighbourhoods look like any other prosperous corner of suburban Canada. But to Bangladeshis, they symbolize something far darker: a destination for the country's looted wealth. A recent exposé by Bangladesh Pratidin, one of the nation's largest newspapers, has reignited debate over "Begumpara," a term now synonymous with corruption, luxury, and flight from accountability. The report, published on 5 October, claims that since August 2024, Bangladesh's interim government has launched initiatives to recover billions of dollars siphoned overseas — much of it ending up in Canada.

Investigators believe at least 1,000 Bangladeshis suspected of large-scale money laundering have made Canada their permanent home. They include senior bureaucrats, influential businesspeople, and politicians who accumulated immense fortunes through corruption before quietly moving their assets abroad.

Between 2006 and November 2024, more than 44,000 Bangladeshis obtained Canadian permanent residency (PR), according to official Canadian immigration data. Most were ordinary migrants - professionals, students, and families seeking stability and opportunity. But a small, powerful subset took advantage of the now-defunct Investor Visa Program, which allowed wealthy foreigners to buy residency through financial investments. Canadian authorities eventually scrapped the program in 2014, citing evidence that it had become a gateway for global elites to evade taxes and accountability. Yet by then, hundreds of well-connected Bangladeshis had already used it to move millions of dollars out of the country - sometimes through elaborate financial networks designed to conceal their tracks.

"Canada's openness and its stable financial system made it very attractive," said a South Asia-based anti-money-laundering analyst. "For many, it became the final stop - a place where stolen money could sleep safely." The word Begumpara - literally meaning "the colony of wives" - carries a strange irony. Its roots trace back to Mississauga, a city near Toronto's Lake Ontario shoreline. About a decade ago, Indian filmmaker Rashmi Lamba released a documentary titled Begumpura: The Wives' Colony. The film depicted South Asian women who lived alone in Canada while their husbands worked abroad, often in the Middle East, sending money home to sustain their families. Their lives were lonely, their struggles poignant - a quiet testament to the sacrifices behind global migration.

After the documentary's release, Canadian newspapers began using "Begumpura" to describe these communities of migrant wives. In Bangladesh, however, the term took on an entirely new meaning. It was repurposed into Begumpara - a sarcastic nickname for the extravagant neighborhoods where corrupt officials sent their own "begums" and children to live on embezzled public funds.

Today, "Begumpara" is shorthand in Bangladesh for a very specific image: gleaming Canadian mansions built on stolen money, far beyond the reach of domestic law.

Bangladesh Pratidin's investigation revealed that few of these funds moved directly from Bangladesh to Canada. Instead, they were routed through third countries such as Singapore, Dubai, or the United Kingdom to obscure their origins. Once "cleaned," the money was used to buy property, open businesses, or secure investment visas.

A name that has surfaced repeatedly in this context is that of Dr. Ahmad Kaikaus, a former Principal Secretary to the Bangladeshi Prime Minister. According to the report, Kaikaus obtained U.S. citizenship while on study leave, later concealing it to return to government service. He is alleged to have transferred embezzled

funds to the United States, registered companies under his family's names, and subsequently moved those assets to Canada. Another example is Mahfuza Akter, a former senior executive at state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV), who reportedly sent her husband to Canada and later transferred illicit money in his name. Real estate agents in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) say such cases, though difficult to prove, fit a visible pattern. "We often see Bangladeshis buying homes worth one or two million dollars," said a longtime realtor in Mississauga, requesting anonymity. "They don't appear to have high-paying jobs here, and yet they purchase properties outright, sometimes in cash. It's unusual."

The Federal Immigrant Investor Program, which once attracted thousands of wealthy applicants from Asia and the Middle East, became a convenient channel for laundering money disguised as investment. The programme required applicants to make a significant deposit or investment in Canada, after which they could obtain permanent residency. But a 2014 audit found that investor immigrants typically contributed little to Canada's economy. Many declared minimal taxable income, paying less in taxes than average Canadian workers. The government subsequently terminated the programme - but by then, the damage was done. For Bangladesh's elites, the programme's peak years coincided with a turbulent political period at home. Between 2007 and 2014, during Bangladesh's military-backed caretaker government and its sweeping anti-corruption campaign, many business figures quietly shifted their wealth abroad. Canada, with its strong property market and lax beneficial-ownership laws at the time, became a favoured refuge. "That's when a lot of them came," recalled a long-time Bangladeshi resident of Toronto. "They started with condos downtown, near the CN Tower, and later bought sprawling houses in places like Richmond Hill and Oakville. Some homes are occupied; others just sit empty.



They wanted privacy - and distance." There is no registered neighbourhood called Begumpara in Canada. Yet the phenomenon is undeniable. Real estate professionals estimate that at least 200 ultra-wealthy Bangladeshis own multimillion-dollar properties across the GTA. These homes, often held under company names or family trusts, create an illusion of legitimacy while shielding the true source of funds.

Some of these properties are clustered in Bellevue, Mississauga, and Markham, where luxury homes with 6,000-8,000 square feet of space sit alongside those of established Canadian professionals.

"They tend to keep to themselves," said another realtor. "They don't mix much with the larger Bangladeshi community here - especially not the working-class migrants."

For Bangladesh, Begumpara has become a painful metaphor for inequality - a symbol of how power and privilege can buy escape from justice. For Canada, it raises uncomfortable questions about whether its real estate and immigration systems are still being exploited by the global wealthy to hide illicit gains.

Financial transparency experts warn that despite new rules requiring beneficial ownership disclosure,

enforcement remains patchy. Canada's real estate market, long accused of enabling "snow-washing" - the process of hiding dirty money under a veneer of respectability - remains vulnerable.

"Canada's reputation as a clean, safe place is exactly what attracts dirty money," said a Toronto-based financial crime researcher. "It's not that the laws are bad - it's that enforcement is slow, fragmented, and inconsistent." The contrast between the Begumpura of Rashmi Lamba's film and the Begumpara of Bangladesh's elite could not be sharper. The first was built on the honest labour of working-class migrant husbands. The second thrives on the stolen fortunes of a privileged few. Both, however, tell a story about the global flow of money - one driven by necessity, the other by greed.

As the sun sets over Lake Ontario, Mississauga's glass towers shimmer with reflections of aspiration - and, perhaps, of guilt. For Bangladesh, Begumpara is more than a place. It is a mirror of what happens when corruption crosses borders and finds comfort in the quiet streets of another nation.

(The writer is a Bangladesh-based freelance journalist.)

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 10 October 1925

OCCASIONAL NOTE

A MAN who smuggled two pairs of silk stockings into England was fined two hundred pounds the other day. We are kinder to smugglers in India. Their activities lead not so much to appearances before magistrates and heavy fines as to correspondence between associations of merchants, Collectors of Customs, Provincial Governments, and the Imperial Secretariat. Such at least has been the case in connexion with the men who are alleged to be making fortunes by transhipping silk goods from Bombay harbour to small ports in the Kathiawar States, where in some way not quite clear they are able to escape the full duty. The goods are then railed back to Bombay and sold below the market price to the natural disgust of the Japan and Shanghai Merchants Association. As the trick has now been exposed Government will possibly look into the matter and the inquiry might be extended to other articles besides silk on which the 30 per cent duty is imposed, for there are many small ports on the Indian coast and many articles sold all over India at prices which puzzle the honest trader.

News Items

RUSSIAN ARMS FOR CANTON

“RED” DOMINATION OF SOUTH CHINA?

HONGKONG, OCT. 7.

PROMINENT British merchants who have returned here from Canton, interviewed by Reuter, declared that further shipments of arms and ammunition to the Bolsheviks at Canton are expected shortly.

They predicted that the combined Russian and "Red" Chinese forces from Canton would crush the advancing "anti-Red" forces and completely sovietise Canton, unless there was a very speedy foreign occupation of Canton on behalf of the "anti-Reds". This, they added, was the only alternative to complete Bolshevik domination of South China.—Reuter.

CHURCH FREEDOM IN INDIA

BISHOP OF BOMBAY’S LIBERTY PLEA

LONDON, OCT. 8.

AT the Church Congress to-day, the Bishop of Bombay said that the Church in India claimed the same liberty which the Church in England had vindicated for herself.

When the English people once understood these principles they would gladly see a Church of India formed and grown and be proud in India to enjoy its membership. He saw no reason to apprehend that they would be badly treated. This was not an age of uniformity in the Church, and, in India, there was so much diversity among Indians that there would be no inclination to deny one more diversity in the form of the use of the English prayer book by Europeans.

He did not believe that Europeans would find themselves in any way sacrificed. They would only be in a position wherein members of the Church of England now were if they went to the Dominions or to Japan, China, Ireland, and Scotland.

DEFENCE OF MR. AMERY

FAITH IN TURKEY

"I have been told that the country wants a Mussolini, but the English people will never tolerate a dictator; they will never tolerate being Prussianized or Russianized."

With these words Mr. Stanley Baldwin concluded his speech at the Conservative conference at Brighton.

The Premier declared that the efforts of Communists would fail in Britain and France as they had failed in America and Germany.

Mr. Baldwin made a reference to Mosul, stoutly denying that the case for Britain and Iraq had been provocatively presented at Geneva by Mr. Amery, and said there was no reason to believe that Turkey would not fulfil her obligations of honour. Mr. Amery's action, he added, had throughout had the full approval of the Government.

US funding cuts will impair research

MR DUA

Massive financial aid cuts threatened by the Trump Administration to many Ivy League American universities and renowned research institutions will paralyze significant path-breaking scientific research projects and its unique global scientific leadership.

One of the latest reports states that U.S. universities will be confronted with acute financial strains emanating from President Trump's proposal to severely diminish funding for research budgets during the rest of his nearly 40-month second presidential term.

To begin with, the Trump White House has already chopped off Harvard University's research funding of \$470 million. And the university's \$2.2 billion grant is also on the line. In addition, cutting costs from "hiring freezes, research pauses, broad budget cuts, and layoffs are hitting many top-ranking universities." Though nearly five dozen U.S. universities are on the line, those affected the most include Harvard, Columbia, Princeton and Michigan state.

It is widely believed that all-round budget cuts will severely imperil universities' traditional funding on several fronts in Trump's campaign to remake higher education. But one

thing is for certain – the US's quality, history-making and distinct research standards will largely degrade. According to a recent media report (Wall Street Journal) President Trump has "yanked or threatened to pull billions of federal research dollars, citing concern about antisemitism and DEI – diversity, equity and inclusion. He has signed an executive order cracking down on foreign funding." While Columbia University, an Ivy League institution, has already surrendered to the White House diktat for effecting material changes in its various administrative, academic and research programmes, Harvard has stood firm so far. Harvard president Alan Garber has announced he'll take a 25 per cent pay cut. Meanwhile, the university's numerous committees in the faculties of arts and sciences are looking for avenues to save and keep research projects going somehow. All universities are in regular consultation to tackle the situation.

Harvard, globally-recognized for excellence in every area of academic performance boasts 162 Nobel Prize winners and scientists. Many of its researchers are working on cancer immunotherapy, brain tumors, organ transplants, diabetes and more. It was a Harvard researcher who discovered the molecule that is the basis for the GLP-1 weight-loss

medications that have revolutionized obesity care, as reported by The New York Times.

Similarly, just one Columbia department, biomedical engineering, has produced more than 140 inventions in the past five years that led to over 30 industry licenses. In fact, altogether, 87 Columbia researchers, and faculty members and alumni have won Nobel prizes. There are numerous other pathbreaking research programmes that await funding. These include pediatric cancer and treatment for veterans. The federal government has already issued a 'stop-work order' on Harvard research. The NY Times report adds "the upshot is that Trump's financial cuts will 'put research on tuberculosis and A.L.S. - Lou Gehrig's disease at risk' and scientists warn of long-term fallout, but support their research's stance." If stopped 'it'll be the deepest cut yet in a White House campaign against universities that began shortly after Trump took office... other universities include Princeton, Cornell, and Columbia also met with deep cuts to research funding.'

There is yet another report on how financial cuts will "put research on tuberculosis and A.L.S. - Lou Gehrig's disease at risk" and scientists warn of long-term fallout, but support their research's stance." If stopped 'it'll be the deepest cut yet in a White House campaign against universities that began shortly after Trump took office... other universities include Princeton, Cornell, and Columbia also met with deep cuts to research funding.'

The federal government has also reportedly demanded that Harvard



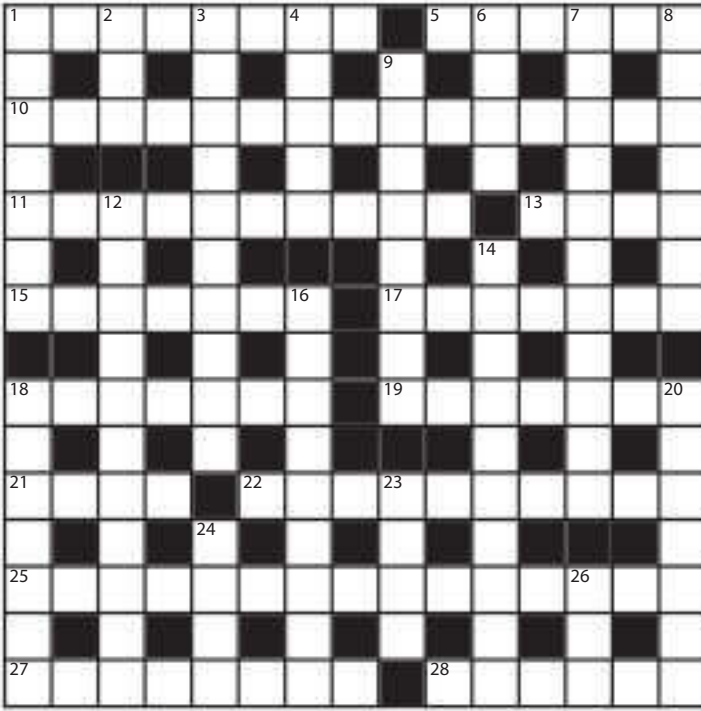
make 'sweeping changes to its admission and hiring policies... or face 'financial threats and penalties, including freezing \$2.2 billion in multiyear grants to the university, along with a \$60 million contract.' The university has also been threatened with losing its 'tax-exempt' status.

Meanwhile, though persistent vicious attacks on elite universities by the Trump White House continue unabated, several teachers' associations and university workers' groups have been planning to sue the administration. Many senior faculty members have also taken to writing in the media protesting against the irrational, irrelevant orders for professors and administrators.

One Columbia history professor wrote: "Columbia will not allow any government to deny professors their rightful role in personnel decisions or to dictate the content of our curricula." Professor Matthew Connelly's reflection further demonstrates the depth of the falling standards of American universities' and makes painful reading. He adds: "We will not collaborate with government agents' intent on deporting our students and faculty members simply because they exercised their First Amendment rights.... The greatness of American universities is at risk because anti-intellectuals are undermining the foundations of academic excellence."

(The writer is a former Professor, Indian Institute of Mass Communications.)

Crossword | No. 293258



Yesterday's Solution

F	A	R	T	H	I	N	G		O	S	P	R	E	Y
E	U	I	O						O					
L	A	D	I	B	I	R	D		I	M	P	O	R	T
T	D	O	M	P	E	M	I							
T	R	E	E	S	P	A	R	R	O	W				
P	Y	L	O	N		M	I	N	N	I	S	O	T	A
P	H	E	E			A	C	R	O	N				
E	R	S	T	W	H	I	L	E		E	N	N	U	I
N	S					S	L	A			T	I	O	
						C	L	E	A	N				
C	E	A	R	D		U	A							
H	E	X	I	O	S	E				C	R	I	M	I
A	A	T				E	A	C	E	L				
T	A	M	E	S	I					S	W	A	N	N
E	R													

ACROSS

1 Type of rock providing road-building material (4,4)

5 Old city's endless conflict in past (6)

10 Assume power, having deviously enchanted others (6,3,6)

11 Showing uninterested state, is told off by head (10)

13 Charge department for meal (4)

15 Secretary to call by one or two, working jointly (7)

17 One s worked diligently, it s inferred? The oppositet (7)

18 Skip introduction to funny little man, a foreign character (7)

19 Sappers taking seconds to destroy train again (7)

21 Knock back some speed, a pill or a tablet (4)

22 With advantage finally evaporating, finish becomes tense (10)

25 Annulment priest must adapt for control board (10,5)

27 Square cut turns game (8)

28 Clubman recalled dropping couples outside (6)

DOWN

1 Gets warmer food in hotel that s dearer (5,2)

2 Ogre with head lowered, seeing gigantic bird (3)

3 Snail volume s middle covering international literature (10)

4 Betray Resistance straightaway when abandoned by Church (3,2)

6 Emperor Moth beginning to fly over (4)

7 Bone broken by Lorenzo, say, requiring adoption of current stress-related science (11)

8 Did Lee collapse after Confederacy finally surrendered? (7)

9 I set fire ablaze, being more spirited (8)

12 Falling internally, ill orang is stricken in consequence of

eating wrong fruit (8,3)

14 Mark small extract from Eugene O'Neill (10)

16 Kind manner, one not evident in blokes (9)

18 BoJo s right wing view (7)

20 Periodically claim total I earn will get reduced (7)

23 Flower that may be potted? (4)

24 Cover charge for audience (4)

26 Arrest of Briton abroad (3)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)



Editor's
TAKE

A new chapter in UK-India ties

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's maiden visit to India signals pragmatism and purpose; India's openness reflects confidence and global stature

The world is changing fast as new equations are emerging and the old ones are consolidating. With Trump reciprocal tariffs redefining the rules of the international trade it is but natural that countries affected, including India, are warming up to new trade partners and strengthening the old ties to absorb the Trump's tariff shock.

Interestingly it is not only the developing countries but even the old US allies are also finding difficulty in adjusting to the new world order. The visit of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer to India must be seen in this light. It marks a defining moment in the evolving relationship between the two democracies having historical bond. Starmer landed in India with the largest-ever UK trade delegation – 125 CEOs and entrepreneurs. This itself shows Starmer's agenda: to put in practice the recently signed UK-India trade agreement. His emphasis on swift implementation reflects both urgency and opportunity. With India poised to become the world's third-largest economy by 2028, and trade between the two nations will be immensely beneficial for both the countries.

For Britain, still overcoming Brexit perils, India represents both a vast market and a strategic ally. For India, deeper engagement with the UK could mean greater access to capital, technology, and skill partnerships – especially in sectors such as clean energy, digital innovation, pharmaceuticals, education, and defence manufacturing.

In recent years, India-UK relations have witnessed both warmth and tension. On the positive side, the two nations elevated their partnership to a comprehensive strategic level in 2021 and launched the "Roadmap 2035", envisioning collaboration across trade, health, climate, and security.

The vibrant Indian diaspora in Britain – one of the largest and most influential globally – has also served as a bridge of goodwill and shared culture. However, irritants have occasionally clouded the equation. India has expressed concern over the UK's handling of Khalistani extremism, while Britain has pressed for openness in trade barriers and human rights issues. Despite these differences, both sides have shown maturity in keeping dialogue constructive and forward-looking. Symbolically, Starmer's first stop at Yash Raj Films underscores the cultural bridge that complements economic ties. Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted Starmer in New Delhi, where discussions were positive and constructive as both leaders were keen to take the "Vision 2035" roadmap forward. Keir suggested he wanted India, as a "global player", to take "its rightful place" on the UN Security Council, a long-held goal of India. Starmer also down-played India buying oil from Russia saying PM Modi always advocates early end of hostilities. PM Modi called his visit "historic." Starmer's visit comes at a time when global economic power is shifting towards Asia. India needs a trusted western partner and UK a dependable Asian friend. UK-India relations could be a win-win for both in the time geopolitical churn.

Forsaking law in the name of justice

The recent Supreme Court incident, where a lawyer threw a shoe at the Chief Justice citing religious sentiment, goes beyond mere misconduct – it strikes at the core principles that allow advocates to argue and challenge within the law



BHOPINDER SINGH

Robert Kennedy famously stated, "Whenever men take the law into their own hands, the loser is the law. And when the law loses, freedom languishes." This is particularly relevant when the said "men" in question are the lawyers themselves, i.e, a person who is trained and qualified to advise people about the law and to represent them in court. Therefore, for lawyers themselves, to renege on that professional faith of oath to uphold the majesty of justice is to betray that very oath that gave them that power to litigate, fair and square.

Lawyers in India sign a written declaration and are bound by the rules as framed by the Bar Council of India. As an advocate in the State Bar Council, the declaration reads, "I shall uphold the Constitution of India, the laws of the land, and the standards of professional conduct and etiquette laid down by the Bar Council of India." While most uphold the required professionalism and etiquette, the conduct of some does regrettably fall short of the same and therefore can (and must) lead to disciplinary action, including suspension or disbarment. One such action that came to light recently was of a lawyer throwing a shoe at the Chief Justice of India, after ostensibly being angered by the judge's purported remarks about a Hindu god.

Not only was it a serious breach of security, propriety and dignity, but also a public insult to the highest chair of justice of the land. While the Chief Justice handled the situation with a great amount of equanimity, composure and maturity by insisting that the arguments continue and refusing to press charges against the lawyer, regrettably the lawyer remained unrepentant and insisted upon his justification with the same line that he was heard saying repeatedly as he was dragged away by the security staff, i.e., "Sanatan ka apmaan nahi sahenge" (We will not tolerate disrespect to Sanatan).

Thankfully, the Bar and the lawyer community came down heavily on the action of the said lawyer and suspended him. However, such emboldened actions and optics make for a frightening picture, as intolerance, hate and fanaticism seem to have engulfed society, sparing no one – not even the practitioners in the highest court of the land. The 'normalcy' with which the lawyer sought to rationalise his action made a mockery of what lawyers fundamentally do, i.e., argue for justice within the contours of the law of the land, and not beyond it. The age-old debate of faith reigning over all laws of the land (perhaps including the Constitution itself) made a return, as the errant lawyer sought to couch his arguments in communal emotions.



The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

THE
CONSEQUENCES
OF NORMALISING
SUCH ACTS WILL
BE VIGILANTE
JUSTICE THAT
CAN BE
VIOLENTLY
METED OUT IN
THE STREETS

The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lieutenant Governor of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Puducherry

dailypioneer

@LtRajputs

bhopinder-singh-390207b2

A 71-year-old self-appointed warrior of the lofty Sanatan Dharma thought it befitting to choose the path of violence to settle a difference of point of view.

Thankfully, no less than the Prime Minister himself strongly condemned the incident in strongly worded terms, stripping away the act from any sort of whataboutery justification that seems to be the norm in these increasingly partisan times.

His statement that "there is no place for such reprehensible acts in our society" and that "it has angered every Indian" was timely and unambiguous. Many who either privately lauded the vigilante act of the lawyer or even sat on the fence whilst judging the merits of the act were stripped of that legitimacy as, notwithstanding the presumed "hurt" imagined by the lawyer on account of the justice's comment, nothing can justify taking the law into one's own hands, that too by a practitioner of law. It is a fact that the legal system is in dire condition and seeks urgent redressal. It is equally true that many systemic issues like the collegium system need a relook to improve their functioning. Individually, one can also argue about the quality of judgments pronounced, i.e, if they are truly born out of legality and good faith, or out of other extraneous considerations like personal faith, biases, fear or post-retirement considerations.

However, taking the law into your own hands is the first step towards anarchy. To plead frustration with the slow pace of justice or even with the commentary (howsoever unsavoury) made by any of the parties during the course of argument is to surrender order, reason and process in favour of unbridled and unrestrained passions.

The consequences of normalising such acts will be vigilante justice that can be violently meted out in the streets. India can ill-afford a situation where such mobocracy reigns supreme.

While it was a clear case of contempt of court with the possible applicability of Section 352 (assault or use of criminal force) or Section 504 (intentional insult to provoke a breach of the peace), the magnanimity shown by the Chief Justice in not pressing the charges is exemplary and mature. Hopefully this forces a healthy introspection on us as citizens of a civilisational land to learn to deal with diversity of opinions and faiths. It is equally incumbent on those in positions of power to measure their own words and expressions more carefully, sensitively and responsibly, so as to avoid offending societal beliefs.

But the moment one believes that settling a score physically over the legal justice system is the way forward is when one forsakes the very system meant to protect all.

PIC TALK



Devotees offer prayers at Kedamath Dham, framed by snow-covered mountains in Rudraprayag, Uttarakhand.

PHOTO: PTI



ASHA IYER KUMAR

2ND THE PIONEER

OPINION

The times they are a – changing, and how! You blink, and the world has spun a few times, setting you down in an unfamiliar place. You sneeze, and before your breath steadies, you find yourself in an alien landscape.

Each morning, I wake up into this shifting space, struggling to find my feet, unsure where I stand in this evanescent world. And I know I am not alone. There are countless others who feel strapped to a rollercoaster that never stops. There is no stepping off for balance, for stepping off means being stranded. Lately, though, I feel like an old, rattling Ambassador car on Dubai's busy highways. Sleek cars and roaring bikes zip past me while I chug along, wondering if I even belong on this stretch anymore. I am unsure whether to look back and take solace in the miles I've

covered or to look ahead and feel daunted by the challenge of finding my place in a world that feels entirely new. People say, "Live in the present," but the present too often looks like a fogged mirror. Why speak of other things? Even my writing now feels old-fashioned and dated. The lyrical cadence I've long cherished is dismissed as "tedious reading no one has time for." The eloquent layers I weave are deemed circuitous. What the world seems to want are cookie-cutter pieces – direct talk with no frills or laces. It's hard to change my ways. It's also hard to remain the same.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, each day passes in uncertainty, not knowing whether to stay steadfast or join the trend and steal a march. To be laid-back or gregarious. Solemn or pushy. To write for a small audience or pander to the crowd. To be vintage AI (my initials) or become a slave of AI. But then again, not all days need to be the same.

For once, today, I chose to step off the usual terrain of confusion about how to take life forward in this swiftly changing world. You can't stay in a rut as if it's your domicile and be condemned to ageing and atrophy. The brass showpieces at home were begging for a polish. They looked older than antiques in a museum, sunk into lacklustre neglect. Their dullness had been vexing me, yet I pretend-

ed not to see. Today, I stopped pretending. I realised I was their sole redeemer. No state of despondency should be terminable, not even that of a showpiece. I saw my reflection in their tarnish – my own human condition seeking deliverance from its listless existence. How would it be if the Lord ignored me as I had ignored them? So I took a gooseberry-sized ball of tamarind and rubbed it on the brassware – the traditional, old-fashioned way. Slowly, I watched the dull blur lift from their surfaces, revealing the true colour of the metal beneath. As I set them back with their gleam mostly restored, the sun shone on them through the gauzy curtain, and I smiled at the thought that this, perhaps, was my story and that of many others too. In need of a polish, a varnish, a revival. Later, I turned to a more mundane task: giving the bathrooms a thorough scrub. With our cleaner away on vacation, it felt like a chance to get into the nooks and corners where his eye might not linger in haste. I extended the domestic streak a little longer, dusting rooms and clearing shelves – chores I had put aside while wondering where I stood in a changing world. Finding relevance in small things, I gently reclaimed myself – renewed.

The author is a columnist, independent journalist, and writing coach based in Dubai

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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TWO SHOCKING INCIDENTS EXPOSE DALITS' EROSION OF DIGNITY

The harsh reality today is that Dalit citizens, whether ordinary individuals or those in high office, continue to face humiliation and injustice under the current Union Government. Two recent incidents underline this disturbing truth: the attempt by a lawyer to hurl a shoe at Chief Justice of India BR Gavai inside the Supreme Court, and the alleged lynching of a Valmiki man in Raebareli, Uttar Pradesh.

In the courtroom, the 71-year-old lawyer shouted, "Sanatan ka apmaan nahi sahenge" (We will not tolerate insults to Sanatan Dharma) before attempting the assault – an act that has been described as unprecedented and deeply shocking.

The fact that such behaviour was cloaked in the language of

religion reflects an alarming rise in intolerance and disregard for constitutional values. Equally disturbing is the Raebareli lynching, which exposes the continued social and systemic marginalisation of Dalit communities and the deteriorating law and order situation in the state. Both incidents highlight how those invoking Manusmriti and Sanatan Dharma are, in effect, undermining the principles of equality and justice.

The Government must take firm action against such acts of hate and intolerance, ensuring that no citizen – regardless of caste – is denied dignity, security, or respect under the law. Only when justice is swift and equality is upheld can India truly claim to honour the dignity of every citizen.

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

PADMANABHA SURYANARAYANA | KOCHI

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pensioners march for justice

Thousands of Central Government and PSU pensioners from across India will march to Parliament on October 10, 2025, under the banner of the Forum of Civil Pensioners' Associations.

Their protest highlights three major demands: first, the withdrawal of the Validation of Pension Rules (March 29, 2025), which they say creates unfair discrimination among pensioners and violates the Supreme Court's 1982 judgment ensuring equality of pension. Second, the immediate appointment of the VIII Central Pay Commission (CPC), which is overdue, as its recommendations are expected by January 2026. Third, the long-pending revision of pensions for BSNL/MTNL retirees (due since January 2017) and the extension of pension revision benefits to PSU employees in the banking and insurance sectors who currently lack them.

The Forum has warned that the recent pension policy changes and government delays represent a systematic erosion of retirees' rights. This march is part of a sustained national campaign, with pensioners' bodies also preparing to challenge the Validation of Pension Act in the Supreme Court. The movement vows to continue peacefully but firmly until justice and equality in pensions are restored.

Fighting corruption requires action

Corruption has become one of the gravest challenges confronting our nation, infiltrating every sphere – from government offices to private enterprises. Bribery, favouritism, and dishonest practices are increasingly common, weakening both the moral core and economic vitality of society. Honest citizens often feel marginalised while those who engage in corruption prosper, fuelling frustration and eroding trust in institutions.

This pervasive problem hinders national development and undermines the principles of justice and equality that form the foundation of our democracy.

Addressing this menace requires a multi-pronged approach. Strict enforcement of anti-corruption laws, transparent administrative systems, and accountability mechanisms are essential. Equally important is cultivating a culture of integrity through comprehensive moral and civic education.

Every individual must commit to honesty, resisting participation in or tolerance of corrupt practices. Citizens and government alike share the responsibility of upholding ethical standards. Only through a concerted effort – combining stringent legal action with the daily ethical choices of individuals – can we hope to restore trust, reinforce justice, and build a society where integrity thrives.

ALTAF HUSSAIN | MUMBAI

AI Deepfakes: A growing menace

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's recent revelation that deepfake videos of her are circulating online shines a stark light on the emerging dangers of AI misuse. Deepfakes – highly realistic but fabricated videos created using artificial intelligence – pose serious risks, from spreading misinformation to manipulating public opinion and committing fraud.

When a senior public figure like the Finance Minister becomes a target, it underscores how vulnerable not just leaders but ordinary citizens can be to deception in the digital age. The rapid advancement of AI technology has made it increasingly easy to produce convincing fake content, blurring the line between truth and fabrication. This technological capability, if left unchecked, could be weaponised for political manipulation, financial scams, or social unrest. The incident serves as a wake-up call for authorities to strengthen regulatory frameworks, enhance cybercrime monitoring, and educate the public about identifying and responding to deepfakes. As AI continues to evolve, society must ensure that these powerful tools are harnessed responsibly, prioritising transparency, ethics, and public safety. Awareness, vigilance, and proactive governance are essential to prevent AI from becoming a tool of deception rather than a force for progress.

NADIM | DHAKIYA

Your vote: Be the powerful change-maker India needs

As Bihar prepares for its 2025 Legislative Assembly Elections, every vote becomes a voice of change. In the world's largest democracy, participation is power — each ballot cast shapes governance, strengthens democracy, and builds a future rooted in equality, accountability, and progress



NITU KUMARI
NAVEET

As Bihar approaches its 2025 Legislative Assembly Elections, its people find themselves at a key turning point. This is not merely a contest for seats; it is about defining the course of governance, progress, and public responsibility in one of India's most dynamic and youthful states.

The vote of each individual is important in a democracy as big and diverse as ours. Victory margins in most constituencies in India have been as low as a few hundred votes. The democratic process will be fair, strong, and credible with the involvement of every citizen. over 7.4 crore registered voters in Bihar will have a chance to cast their ballots to influence the future of the state and, therefore, the effectiveness and vitality of the democratic process in India.

The Commission has also undertaken a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls to ensure accuracy, transparency, and inclusion. This constant revision of the voter list ensures that all eligible citizens, irrespective of their gender, geographical location, or social background, are able to exercise their franchise fairly. People are advised to check their information on the Voter Helpline App or National Voters' Service Portal (NVSP) ahead of the polling day.

The Heartbeat of Indian democracy

The democracy of India is not measured by the number of registered voters but by the number of individuals who come out to vote. The 2019 General Elections were historic because India registered the highest turnout of 67.4 per cent. The 2020 Assembly elections in Bihar recorded a turnout of approximately 57 per cent, which was encouraging as well as promising for higher participation.

The vote is not merely a right but also a duty, and it is not only legal but also moral. Whenever a citizen decides to cast their ballot, they reaffirm the desire to be democratic and to share in the decision-making process. However, on the flip side, every uncast vote is a wasted opportunity — a voice that is never heard in a system that is supposed to hear all voices!

Voice for Change

The significance of an individual vote is much higher than it may seem. For many years in India, there have been frequent instances of a



THE VOTING
PROCESS IS AN
EFFECTIVE
NATION-
BUILDING TOOL
THAT
REINFORCES
DEMOCRACY,
ENHANCES
TRANSPARENCY,
AND CREATES A
GOVERNANCE
SYSTEM THAT
ACTUALLY
REFLECTS THE
GENERAL WILL
OF INDIAN
CITIZENS

The writer is Folk Singer & SVEEP Icon, Patna, Election Commission

 nitukumarinaveet

 @nitunaveet

 The Pioneer

few votes altering the result of entire constituencies, and in some cases, the formation of governments. Picture a constituency in which there is only a voting majority of 200. That margin might be the distinction between two candidates, between two policy orientations, or between two forms of government. The power of democracy rests in the single household making the choice to take part.

Bihar, like other Indian states, has been experiencing close contests, with voter participation having a direct impact on the development priorities, budgetary allocation, and local development. By voting in large numbers, citizens will make sure that the government that is formed reflects the will of the citizens.

What Your Vote Can Do for You

Voting is not merely about pressing a button on the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM); it is an announcement of one's voice, choice, and commitment to democracy. Every vote is the strength to influence the direction of the government and the destiny of the nation.

It is an expression of empowerment since every vote is a statement that each citizen matters — that his/her opinion influences the decisions concerning education, healthcare, employment, and welfare. By voting, people feel that they own and are involved

in the country's decision-making process.

Accountability is also a consequence of voting, since when there is a high turnout of citizens, officials are reminded that there is an observant and active electorate watching their actions and performance.

At its core, casting a vote is an act of equality — the heartbeat of democracy — giving every citizen, whatever their background, an equal say and an equal chance to shape the future.

High voter turnout enhances continuity in development, meaning that the government policies mirror the concerns and hopes of the citizens in issues that are of high priority like infrastructure, women's safety, education, and employment.

Finally, the voting process is an effective nation-building tool that reinforces democracy, enhances transparency, and creates a governance system that actually reflects the general will of Indian citizens.

No Voters Left Behind

It is through the continuous efforts of the Election Commission of India that voting has become accessible and inclusive for all citizens. The Commission is also proactive in its flagship programme, Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP), to create awareness about the need to vote and participate in democracy in an informed way, reaching schools, colleges,

workplaces, and even rural areas.

Particular focus is placed on the involvement of first-time voters and helping the younger generation understand the role they can play in the future of the country. The same attention is paid to the female voters, ensuring women feel safe, confident, and empowered to vote sans restrictions.

The Commission is also concerned with inclusiveness by paying special attention to persons with disabilities, such as providing ramps at polling points, EVMs fitted with Braille, and making postal ballot points available. In the case of older citizens, voting at the convenience of their homes is being introduced in isolated situations to ease the process.

The underlying goal of all such initiatives is simple, yet very powerful — No Voter To Be Left Behind.

Shaping Bihar's Future

The advantage of India is its youth — over 65 percent of the Indian population is under 35 years of age — and Bihar is one of the youngest Indian states. Young voters are the agents of change, innovation, and dynamism. Youth are a dominant influence in the process of developing policies that impact their own lives by registering and voting, whether it is education reforms, job prospects, climate action, or digitalisation. Each voter in a student body also helps

to make the world a better and more responsible democracy.

Ghost of Enlightened and Righteous Voting

Democracy does not flourish solely where there is participation, but where there is informed participation. Voters have been encouraged to ensure that they find out about the candidates, their qualifications, and manifestos before voting. The other principle that is significant is the ethics of voting — voting without bias, inducement, or pressure.

A free and fair election is one that relies on the integrity of every citizen. Democracy is no longer a mechanism, but a national value when voters exercise their rights in a conscious and aware manner.

Voting Day: The Festival of Democracy

All elections in India have been dubbed the "festival of democracy". It is an exaltation of the will of the people collectively — citizens making up their minds about their own future. Millions of voters, polling officials, security staff, and volunteers toil on polling day in order to facilitate smooth, transparent, and secure elections.

Right from the deserts of Rajasthan to the villages of Bihar, every polling booth has been turned into a beacon of democratic India. The Election Commission of India is also using a fair, inclusive, and transparent polling process, and this reaffirms the global trust in the electoral processes in India.

One Nation, One Voice, One Vote

Democracy in India has been appreciated throughout the world because of its magnitude, openness, and inclusiveness. Its true power lies in the involvement of its people. With Bihar getting ready to elect its 2025 Assembly members, the vote of each citizen will play a larger role in the broader narrative of Indian democracy.

That is, a narrative of togetherness in dissimilarity, equality in choices, and power in participation.

Each time you vote, you are not only picking a representative, but also shaping the state/country's future. One vote might not matter much, but when it adds up to millions, it becomes the movement of an entire nation.

When the world's largest democracy is once again galvanised with voting and stained fingers, though, keep in mind — your vote is your voice. Your voice is your power. Use it wisely. Participate with pride to strengthen democracy.

Drone Didi: A revolutionary step towards women empowerment



HIMANSHU
VERMA

Agriculture has always been the backbone of India's economy, employing nearly half of the population and contributing significantly to the nation's food security. However, the sector faces persistent challenges such as labour shortages, rising input costs, low productivity, and the adverse effects of climate change. At the same time, gender disparity in agriculture continues to exist. Women constitute almost 33 per cent of India's agricultural labour force and more than 48 per cent of its self-employed farmers, yet their access to technology, decision-making, and training opportunities remains limited.

To address these challenges, the Government of India has introduced several transformative schemes under its Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) vision. Among them, the Drone Didi Yojana is emerging as a pioneering initiative. This programme is designed to empower women, particularly from rural areas, by equipping them with modern drone technology to enhance agricultural productivity and livelihood opportunities. The scheme is not only a technological intervention but also a social reform that redefines women's role in farming.

The Drone Didi Yojana seeks to bridge the gender gap in agriculture while simultaneously modernising farming practices. It brings together innovation, empowerment, and sustainability — three pillars necessary to uplift Indian agriculture in the 21st century.

Objectives of Drone Didi Yojana

The Drone Didi Yojana revolves around providing drones to women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) across India. These women, popularly termed "Drone Didis", receive training in handling drones for agricultural purposes such as:

- Spraying pesticides, herbicides, and fertilisers with precision.
- Monitoring crop health through aerial imaging.
- Reducing manual drudgery in farming operations.
- Promoting efficient use of inputs like water and fertilisers.

The key objectives of the scheme include:

- Women Empowerment: Strengthening women's role in agriculture by giving them access to cutting-edge technology and making them key stakeholders.
- Employment Generation: Creating self-

employment opportunities for rural women by enabling them to provide drone services to farmers on a rental basis.

- Enhancing Agricultural Productivity: Improving efficiency in crop management through precision agriculture.
- Promoting Sustainable Practices: Reducing wastage of resources such as pesticides, fertilisers, and water.
- Reducing Health Risks: Minimising farmers' direct exposure to harmful chemicals by replacing manual spraying with drones.

Through this initiative, women are not just passive participants but leaders driving agricultural modernisation.

Implementation Strategy

The Drone Didi Yojana is structured with a holistic implementation plan involving multiple stakeholders:

- Provision of Drones: The government, with support from agriculture departments and agencies like NABARD, provides drones to women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) at subsidised rates. Financial support is arranged through credit linkages and grants.
- Training and Capacity Building: Comprehensive training programmes are conducted for women beneficiaries. They are trained in operating drones, performing maintenance, troubleshooting, and understanding safety protocols. Training modules are designed in collaboration with Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), agricultural universities, and drone manufacturing companies.
- Service-Oriented Model: Instead of every farmer owning a drone, SHG women offer drone services to fellow farmers on a nominal rental basis. This ensures affordability for small and marginal farmers while providing a steady source of income to women operators.
- Institutional Support: Technical handholding, maintenance support, and continuous training ensure that women are not left behind after initial deployment. The government also facilitates insurance and licensing for drones.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: State governments and local agricultural bodies track the progress of the scheme to ensure effective utilisation and timely resolution of challenges.

Benefits of Drone Didi Yojana

The Drone Didi Yojana delivers a multi-dimensional impact — social, economic, and environmental.

1. For Women Empowerment
 - Provides rural women with a modern identity as entrepreneurs and service providers.
 - Reduces their dependence on male family members for agricultural decisions.
 - Creates new income streams, enhancing financial independence.

- Boosts confidence and leadership qualities among women SHG members.
- 2. For Agriculture
 - Drones allow uniform spraying of pesticides and fertilisers, reducing wastage.
 - Improves crop yields by ensuring timely interventions.
 - Helps in early detection of pest attacks and diseases using aerial imagery.
 - Reduces labour dependency and speeds up farming operations.
- 3. For Farmers
 - Cost-effective services as they rent drones from Drone Didis instead of buying.
 - Safer farming practices by avoiding direct exposure to chemicals.
 - Increases profitability due to efficient input utilisation and better crop health.
- 4. For the Environment
 - Precision spraying reduces excess chemical usage, thereby lowering soil and water pollution.
 - Promotes resource-efficient and sustainable farming.

Challenges in Implementation

While the Drone Didi Yojana holds immense promise, its ground-level implementation may face challenges:

- Technical Knowledge Gap: Many rural women have limited exposure to technology, requiring intensive training and continuous support.
- High Cost of Drones: Despite subsidies, drones remain expensive, making financing and insurance critical.
- Infrastructure Limitations: Rural areas often lack proper repair facilities, technical assistance, or drone service centres.
- Regulatory Framework: Operating drones requires permissions, licences, and compliance with aviation norms, which may be difficult for rural women to navigate.
- Acceptance by Farmers: Many small farmers are hesitant to adopt drone services due to lack of awareness or traditional mindsets.

Addressing these challenges will determine the long-term success of the scheme.

Conclusion

The Drone Didi Yojana is more than just a technological intervention; it is a social revolution. By putting drones into the hands of rural women, the scheme empowers them economically, socially, and technologically. It also modernises agriculture, improves resource efficiency, and strengthens sustainability.

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Rajasthan's children killed by negligence and corruption



BRIJENDRA
SINGH OLA

When medicine meant to cure becomes a cause of death, it is not a tragic accident; it is proof of systemic rot in governance and regulation. It is also blatant corruption. The recent deaths of three children in Rajasthan after consuming contaminated cough syrup under the Chief Minister's Free Medicine Scheme have shaken the conscience of our state. This was not fate. This was preventable. And the responsibility lies with those who were supposed to ensure medicine safety.

The toxic cough syrup in question, containing Dextromethorphan Hydrobromide, was manufactured by Kayson Pharma, a company earlier blacklisted for failing over 40 quality checks. This company has a documented history of producing substandard drugs. Shockingly, it was awarded a fresh government tender by the Rajasthan Medical Services Corporation (RMSC), the very agency mandated to safeguard citizens by procuring only verified, quality-assured medicines.

This raises a serious and unavoidable question: what were our regulatory agencies doing? Where was the vigilance of RMSC officials, the State Drug Control Organisation, and the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)? How could a company with such a tainted track record be entrusted with supplying medicines for our children?

The facts are chilling. The first child deaths were reported in early September from the Bayana and Sikar districts. Rather than halting distribution immediately, the government's response was to suspend one junior officer and form a routine inquiry panel.

Toxic syrup continued to be available in hospitals and health centres. It took the public collapse of a doctor who consumed the syrup to "prove its safety" for the government to react, but by then, the third child, a two-year-old from Bharatpur, had already died.

This is not mere mismanagement; this is criminal negligence. The CDSCO and state authorities had already issued three advisories in June 2023, August 2024, and April 2025, warning about Dextromethorphan formulations and their risks. Yet, those warnings were ignored.

The procurement process itself appears compromised. When tenders are awarded to blacklisted firms, when substandard medicines pass unchecked into public supply chains, and when quality testing mechanisms fail or are bypassed,



it is not a single act of oversight; it is a pattern of governance failure.

The deaths in Rajasthan are not isolated. They follow a disturbing national and international pattern — from 20 children who died in Madhya Pradesh to Jammu & Kashmir, to Gambia to Uzbekistan — where toxic syrups containing deadly contaminants like Diethylene Glycol (DEG) have claimed hundreds of children's lives. Yet, instead of learning from these tragedies, regulatory inertia continues.

What we are witnessing is a betrayal of public trust. The RMSC, state drug regulators, and procurement agencies have not just failed in their duty; they have violated the basic principle that public health schemes must protect, not endanger, lives.

This matter demands nothing less than a Judicial Commission of Inquiry led by a sitting or retired High Court judge; a complete forensic audit of medicine procurement processes under state schemes; and identification and prosecution of every official at the procurement, testing, and regulatory levels who allowed this poison to enter public supply lines.

The children of Rajasthan were handed death in the guise of medicine. Their parents were betrayed not only by unscrupulous manufacturers but by the very institutions meant to protect them. Until there is full accountability, justice will remain incomplete, and the safety of Rajasthan's people will continue to be at risk.

As an elected representative from Rajasthan, I will raise this issue forcefully in the upcoming Parliament session. The nation must hear how negligence, corruption, and complacency killed our children — and why those responsible can no longer hide behind files and committees. The lives lost must become the turning point for accountability in our healthcare system.

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