



A perfect storm

A combination of natural calamity and human failure laid Wayanad low

The fragile hills of Kerala's Wayanad district turned into the theatre of yet another weather-induced disaster when a heavy downpour, on July 7, triggered what looked like a debris slide at the entrance to the under-construction twin tunnel at Kalladi in Meppadi panchayat, in the vicinity of Chooramala, which was wrecked by massive landslides two years ago. Six workers were confirmed dead. The Kerala government has suspended construction work until the completion of a comprehensive probe into the causes and whether the work complied with the conditions set by the Expert Appraisal Committee under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) while granting environmental clearance for the project. Ever since the great floods of 2018, Meppadi panchayat, which is over 7,000 ft above sea level, has witnessed severe climate-induced catastrophes. Landslides hit the Puthumala area in 2019, within hours of an equally lethal landslide across the hills in Kavalappara in Malappuram district. Environmentalists, therefore, made an impassioned plea against the ₹2,100 crore (approximately) 8.73-km-long twin-tube tunnel road, linking Anakkampoyil in Kozhikode to Meppadi, flagging it as a recipe for disaster. It was instead fast-tracked, citing the need for accelerated mobility for the people of Wayanad, which does not have tertiary care facilities. In April this year, the Supreme Court cited the project's 'national importance' and rejected the Wayanad Prarthithi Samrakshana Samithi's plea to halt it. The group is planning to seek a review of the order.

As with all major disasters, this, too, appears to have stemmed from a heady mix of failures. Kerala Public Works Minister hurriedly pointed to the company executing the construction on behalf of the contractor, Konkan Railways, alleging that it ignored the department's June 20 deadline to remove excavation debris from the area. The company fell back on the rainfall data and the region's landslide susceptibility. Security camera visuals suggest an avalanche-like flow of debris down the slope of the hill that was being bored. Whether a mudslide in the upper reaches caused the debris to cascade down will only be known after a geomorphological probe. On the face of it, the State's disaster management machinery was not up to the job. The synoptic conditions in the area on the eve of the present disaster were eerily similar to those on the eve of the 2024 calamity. Wayanad has a fragile ecology, and any infrastructure project must involve meticulous ecological and climate-resilience planning and uncompromising execution. As it investigates the lapses, the State should review the project's social and environmental costs and ensure that climate-induced catastrophe in Wayanad is prevented, not just responded to.

Far from over

Iran and the U.S. must address the trust deficit for their talks to progress

It took only 20 days for the U.S.-Iran memorandum of understanding (MoU), which promised to extend the ceasefire by 60 days and launch talks about outstanding issues, including Iran's nuclear programme, to start unravelling. On Tuesday night, the U.S. carried out sweeping air strikes in Iran after three tankers were attacked in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran struck American bases in Kuwait and Bahrain after which Mr. Trump declared that the ceasefire was over. While he is known for making exaggerated claims, the current crisis poses the biggest challenge to the peace process since the June 17 MoU. The crisis did not emerge overnight. From the outset, the agreement had three major sticking points – Israel's war in Lebanon; Iran's access to its frozen funds and the status of the Strait of Hormuz. Tehran sees Israel's refusal to withdraw from southern Lebanon, along with Washington's push for a parallel trilateral framework involving the U.S., Lebanon and Israel, as violations of the spirit of the MoU. And, despite talks, Iran has yet to get access to its frozen funds. Finally, Iran appears determined to assert control over the Strait. It has opened a "safe passage route" along its coast, while the U.S. is backing an alternative route along Oman's coast.

Iran fears that the U.S. is trying to strip away the leverage it established over the Strait during the war by promoting an alternative route. The U.S. does not want Iran to emerge as the sole custodian of a strategic waterway. These conflicting positions trigger skirmishes, further undermining the MoU. What Mr. Trump, who senses strategic defeat, is trying to do is to mount economic and military pressure on Tehran to change its position on the Strait. He can continue his air campaign, but his years-long maximum pressure and 40 days of bombing have done little to alter Iran's negotiating positions. If he returns to war over Hormuz, Iran's stance on its nuclear programme – still unaddressed – would only get hardened. If war resumes, it would be bad news for the whole West Asia region and the entire global economy. Mr. Trump is at a strategic dead end, and instead of digging deeper, should stick to his way-out road map – the MoU. An obstacle in the peace process is the complete absence of trust. Mr. Trump's public tirades and abuses against Iran's leadership and hyperbolic threats, are not helping his cause. Equally, if Iran continues targeting commercial vessels, it risks being seen as an aggressor rather than a victim. Both sides should address the trust deficit, resolve the sticking points in the MoU and begin serious talks about the outstanding issues for a final settlement.

Manipur is one of the States covered under Phase III of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls being implemented by the Election Commission of India (ECI) currently. The SIR has already drawn adverse criticism from civil society organisations and the Opposition, particularly after the recent Bihar and West Bengal elections, due to its hasty, disproportionate and summary deletion of voters from voters' lists, resulting in the disenfranchisement of large sections of politically "undesirable" communities and voters. Concerns have been expressed by informed citizens about the lack of transparency and often blatant bias of the State and the ruling party in relation to the SIR, and its relationship with the planned delimitation, the 2029 elections and perhaps even an oddly timed Census. These concerns apply to Manipur as well. In addition, there are features of the situation in Manipur that are little known outside – and even within – the State, making the implementation of the SIR in Manipur even more egregious.

Fractured social fabric

First, Manipur has been in the throes of an intense ethnic conflict involving the majority Meiteis (54% of the population, inhabiting the dense Imphal Valley), the Kuki-Zo peoples (15%, inhabiting the surrounding hills) and, more recently, the Manipuri Nagas (26%, mainly in the northern part of Manipur). It has resulted in over 260 deaths in pogroms, attacks, and retaliatory violence; displaced some 60,000 people within and outside Manipur; led to the burning of hundreds of villages and places of worship; and witnessed unimaginable atrocities, including beheadings, dismemberment, and rapes as forms of collective punishment, disproportionately inflicted on the Kuki-Zo.

It has led to a demand by the Kuki-Zo for a 'Separate Administration' for themselves – and an equally stout opposition by the Meiteis to it – while many Manipuri Nagas led by the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), or NSCN-IM, remain committed to their decades old demand for integration of Naga-inhabited areas in a sovereign 'Nagalim'. Many are backed by political, militant and proscribed insurgent groups of diverse persuasions.

Three years after the start of the conflict, not a single case of violence has been brought to book through the courts. An Inquiry Commission



Gautam Mukhopadhyaya

Former Ambassador of India to Myanmar, Afghanistan and Syria, and engaged in issues facing the northeast of India

Manipur's Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls risks deepening exclusion amid ethnic conflict, displacement, and identity challenges

formed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has yet to present its report. Thousands of internally displaced persons languish in camps with little relief.

Ethnic divisions have worsened and spread. Long-standing Naga-Kuki hostilities have been added to the three-year-old Meitei-Kuki conflict marked by the burning of villages (mostly Kuki), ambushes, and recently in May, the killing of three Thadou-Kuki pastors, and, in retaliation, tit-for-tat hostage-taking and the horrific killing of six Nagas in Kuki custody that has in turn set off a full economic blockade of Kangpokpi district. In response, State and central security forces have appeared passive, paralysed and at times, biased.

The conduct of the State government has been widely viewed as partisan, but the role of the Centre and even courts cannot be said to be above board. Conducting the SIR under these conditions, under a pretence of normalcy, is inexplicable.

Narratives driving electoral exclusion

Second, unlike the rest of the country, where the SIR is being driven by the central government through the ECI with the partisan support of the ruling party, in Manipur the demand to "cleanse" the State of alleged "illegal migrants" – a code word for Kuki – is in line with perceptions of politically radicalised Meiteis and Manipuri Nagas, who together constitute about 80% of the population. These allegations have no basis in Census figures for over a century, and are based on recent distortions of history, fake narratives and loud propaganda that feed directly into the SIR exercise. They create a very negative environment for a fair SIR, particularly in mixed areas, that is itself, *ipso facto*, biased against certain communities.

Third, there are several features peculiar to the Kukis themselves that lend themselves to their victimisation by the SIR. The first reason is that close to 50,000 Kuki-Zo remain displaced and scattered in Manipur and outside. There does not seem to be any provision in place for their fair enumeration.

The second reason is that together with their displacement, many are known to have lost many of their identity, residence, election, education and other documents that could have helped establish their voter credentials. There are visual records of Kuki-Zo educational certificates, Aadhaar cards, and driving licences in Imphal being destroyed after the violence of May 2023.

The third reason is that customary naming systems – where names are derived from the last syllable of complex parental names, nicknames often substitute formal names, and names are converted from tribal names to English orthography – create vast scope "logical discrepancies", making people far more vulnerable to exclusion than in States such as West Bengal. Possibly, more than 90% of Kuki-Zo people are unlikely to be able to produce a single, consistent spelling of their own names, let alone maintain consistency across generations.

The fourth reason is that by some historical anomaly, Manipuri tribals, both Kuki-Zo and Naga, do not enjoy Sixth Schedule status, although they enjoy some measure of autonomy under Article 371C and very weak Autonomous Councils.

This served them well during periodic bouts of violence and displacement, most recently during the Naga-Kuki violence of the 1990s, which again disproportionately affected the Kukis. Village chiefs and local authorities were then able to certify the identities of villagers under their jurisdiction. Such arrangements are unlikely to be recognised in the present exercise and prevailing atmosphere.

Finally, the Kuki-Zo leadership appears, for some reason, unaware of the nature, motivations, and implications of the SIR exercise. They seem to believe, perhaps naively, that as Indian citizens who have lived here all their lives and in possession of necessary documents, including voter ID cards, they have nothing to fear, and that opposing the exercise would amount to an admission of guilt. The dangers of the SIR now appear to be dawning on them, with some Kuki-Zo civil society organisations issuing statements highlighting its shortcomings, although opposition has yet to take a political form.

Safeguarding belonging

A nationwide SIR is now a *fait accompli* following the ruling by the Supreme Court of India in its favour. However, the process can still be made fairer and more sensitive to the risks of exclusion. Unless measures are adopted to limit its potential harm, by 2029 we may see a pathway to statelessness not only for the Kuki-Zo but also for other tribal communities in the Northeast, with their plight obscured amid the broader exclusion and disenfranchisement of Muslims labelled as "illegal migrants".

Building a durable India-Australia partnership

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Australia this week has been big on substance and high on optics. The choreography is familiar now given the warmth in the relationship: a forward-leaning leadership interaction, a massive diaspora event and a joint statement packed with deliverables and road maps. The Australian government sees India as central to its economic diversification strategy. Its new economic road map and packed ministerial calendar for India underwrite this intent. The elite consensus seems bipartisan and the convergence only growing.

Turning convergence into alignment

Yet, the harder part for most strategic relationships is drawing the line between convergence and alignment. The two might sound like synonyms, but they are not. Convergence is two countries arriving at similar conclusions about the world for their own reasons. Alignment is what happens when those separate conclusions are built into matching capabilities, institutions and habits of engagement. India and Australia have achieved a great deal of the first. The real test of this visit, and of the years after it, is whether it endures by delivering the second.

The convergence is not in doubt, and it is easy to see why it most happened. Both countries are hedging against overdependence in a global order in transition. Australia's dependence on China, and its alliance dependence on an unpredictable Washington, have come under visible strain. This year's Lowy Institute Poll found trust in the United States at a record low of 31%, with a narrow margin of Australians saying that Canberra should distance itself from Washington under Prime Minister Donald Trump. India is running its parallel diversification across energy suppliers, defence platforms and critical minerals processing, driven by a similar instinct.

New Delhi wants to limit its exposure; the Iran and Ukraine conflicts have driven home that any single-point dependency, however longstanding, is now a liability. No country can single-handedly balance China or hedge against American unpredictability. Together, and alongside partners such as Japan, they improve their odds. That is genuine convergence.

This visit has produced tangible evidence of that strategic lock-in. A Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation delivers a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Australia's Maritime Border Command and the



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Beyond warm optics and deepening convergence, India-Australia ties face the challenge of converting trust into alignment

Indian Coast Guard and adopts an India-Australia Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap to address shared threat perceptions. These are practical mechanisms that deepen interoperability without altering the basic character of the relationship. India remains a trusted security partner, not an ally. On energy security, Australian uranium has been legally available to India since the bilateral 2014 civil nuclear agreement, but it never actually moved commercially, largely because India's own nuclear liability law made foreign suppliers nervous about exposure.

That changed with the SHANTI Act last December, which reformed that liability regime. The agreement on uranium has operationalised a deal lying dormant for a decade. The summit also launched the Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains (PACTS), while reaffirming the complementarity to the Australia-Canada-India Technology and Innovation Partnership as focusing on building resilient technology partnerships through flexible multilateral arrangements. These are examples of alignment beginning to take institutional form.

There are focus areas, there are problems

But for alignment to be durable, convergence must translate into operational overlap. This is most consequential in the Indian Ocean, a region where Australian and Indian interests overlap most naturally. Both are Indian Ocean states with real stakes in the region's sea lanes. India's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region has emerged as a key hub for maritime domain awareness, even as Australia pays closer attention to its western seaboard and Indian Ocean approaches. The two navies have converged on similar risk assessments of shadow fleets, threats to undersea cables and coercive activity below the threshold of conflict.

The new Coast Guard MoU and Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap narrow the gap between strategic intent and operational cooperation. Yet, Australia's most consequential force-structure decisions, from AUKUS (trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.) to its broader defence posture, remain oriented towards the Western Pacific, while India's strategic planners continue to divide attention between continental threats and maritime challenges. The shared ground is real; it is simply narrower than the political convergence sometimes suggests.

Economically, the pattern is similar. Trade has

grown sharply since the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement came into force, but industry voices behind closed doors argue that growth sits disproportionately with large firms. Smaller exporters on both sides remain unaware of how to use it. Track 1.5 dialogues have flagged this as an operationalisation gap.

The knowledge deficit is more obvious when one looks at Australian public consciousness on India. This year's Lowy Poll found only 5% of Australians expect India to be the world's most important power a decade from now, against 54% for China, even as trust in India remains comparatively high. Convergence at the top has not yet trickled down into wider awareness of India's strategic heft.

The diaspora opportunity

The diaspora remains the biggest opportunity to change this, but with a caveat. Indian-origin Australians are now the country's largest immigrant-born community, ahead of the U.K.-born population for the first time. Political leadership has celebrated the diaspora's contribution, and a Centre for Australia-India Relations study finds that Australians broadly recognise it as skilled migrants, students and workers. But recognising the diaspora as a cultural asset, or an electoral constituency, is not alignment. Alignment would require translating that diaspora leverage into a public case for why India matters economically to the average Australian. It would require institutionalising the diaspora's comparative advantage in helping Australian Small and Medium-sized Enterprises navigate Indian regulatory and business culture, and vice versa, rather than leaving that work to individual champions. It would also mean untangling the mobility of Indian professionals from Australia's increasingly fraught migration policies.

Mr. Modi's visit has provided fresh ballast for these conversations about the future of the India-Australia partnership. His message on Australian Pension funds investing in India particularly resonated in the room when he said India would not just treat them as capital but as a marker of strategic trust imposed by Australian families in India. These statements matter because they build the broader public consciousness of India as a trusted partner for the future. Convergence got India and Australia to the table; it is these steps that institutionalise engagement incrementally that build alignment that endures.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trump's truce flips

It is deplorable that the much-hyped ceasefire agreement between Iran and the U.S. is already fizzling out, signalling prolonged military hostilities in the war-ravaged region. It is

equally baffling that the United Nations has remained a silent spectator to the cascading effects of the conflict in West Asia. This only goes to show that peace accords brokered by regional non-state actors are unlikely to foster a

durable ceasefire.
G. Ramasubramanyam,
Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

Students' personal data

The reported sale of CUET and NEET candidates' databases by websites is a serious violation of

students' privacy and a blatant breach of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act. Personal information collected for examinations must never be commercialised without explicit consent. This illegal trade exposes students to

spam, fraud, identity theft, and exploitation by coaching institutes and admission agents. The authorities must investigate these websites and impose stringent penalties. The National Testing Agency and the Government must

strengthen data security measures to restore confidence in the examination system.
Bhushan Manchanda,
New Delhi

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

Should India restart dialogue with Pakistan?



Mani Shankar Aiyar

Former Member of Parliament



Tara Kartha

Former Director at the National Security Council Secretariat

PARLEY

India and Pakistan have not engaged in dialogue since 2016 when talks broke down after the terror attacks at Pathankot and subsequently at Uri. The last 12 years have witnessed major attacks at Pahalgam (2025) and Pulwama (2019) and that apart, there were several smaller terror attacks. Earlier this month, a group of eminent citizens led by Gandhian O.P. Shah drafted a joint appeal to the leaders of India and Pakistan urging them to engage in dialogue. This has led to a public debate on whether India should restart dialogue with Pakistan. Mani Shankar Aiyar, who was a signatory to the letter, and Tara Kartha discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Kallol Bhattacharjee. Edited excerpts:

Should India and Pakistan restart dialogue at this moment, especially since they haven't spoken to each other at the government level for a decade now?

Mani Shankar Aiyar: It is precisely for that very reason, because we haven't spoken to each other for the best part of the last 12 years, that it is absolutely necessary that we resume the dialogue as soon as possible. And as regards the time, my own view is that any time is as good as any other time. And all times when we don't talk are bad for both of us. So I would urge the governments to talk to each other. And until they do, I think people of goodwill on either side of our border should be in touch with each other. I speak as somebody with nearly 40 years of experience of Pakistan and Pakistanis. I have been through several different Pakistani regimes, and it does not seem to me that it matters who is in power in Pakistan. When we engage with them, we engage with Pakistan, and not with a particular individual.

Tara Kartha: Ideally both countries should talk to each other because they are nuclear powers. These are dangerous times, especially since there was an active phase of hostility last year. But my problem is that the present leadership is basically Field Marshal Asim Munir. Let us forget about Shehbaz Sharif [the Prime Minister of Pakistan], for as much as I regard him, I'm sure he is a fine and good politician in his own right, Mr. Munir is in power and he's even more powerful than General Pervez Musharraf was before him. He holds absolute power; him and a couple of core commanders, such as his ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) chief. It is very important to understand that the rise of Field Marshal Munir began in a very systematic fashion once they carried out the terror strike in Pahalgam. I won't say after Operation Sindoor;



Tense ties: Army soldiers patrol along the Line of Control between Pakistan and India in the Uri Sector, Jammu and Kashmir in January. IMRAN NISSAR

I'll say after the Pahalgam attack.

I agree with Mr. Aiyar that it doesn't matter who you talk to, provided that person is interested in peace. But the question is, what stake does Field Marshal Munir have in peace? In that case, he'll have to step down for a civilian prime minister. The moment things get peaceful, they'll tell the Pakistan military to go back to the barracks and that the civilians will take over. So why should he [be interested in peace]? It is a systemic issue. I'm not saying the army can never be talked to. This particular man will not. He is very dangerous.

Is it the correct time to go ahead with the dialogue with Pakistan?

MSA: If we don't go ahead, we'll be stuck in the rut in which we are today. There was a mention of one man, Asim Munir, who's been in power for approximately one year. But we haven't talked to Pakistan for 12 years. So I don't see how Asim Munir being there is the biggest obstacle. We could have talked to Nawaz Sharif. We could have talked to Imran Khan. We could have talked to several others.

And if you look at the past, we have had extremely fruitful talks with Pakistani generals but rarely with Pakistani civilians. Let me first



We are currently talking to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu who has been indicted by the ICC for war crimes. If we can talk to every dictator around the world, what's the problem in talking to the people next door who have the misfortune of being led by an army commander?

MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

run through the Pakistani army men with whom we have had successful interlocations. Ayub Khan was the one who broke the deadlock on the Indus Waters Treaty. It was Zia-ul-Haq who broke the deadlock on Siachen. It was Musharraf, who broke the deadlock on what till then was being projected as the single biggest obstacle in India-Pakistan relations, namely the Kashmir question; they arrived at a four-point solution. However, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto signed on the dotted line in Simla and then turned his back on it.

This is a false argument – that just because the Pakistani army is in power we can't talk to them. We are currently talking to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu who has been indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes. If we can talk to every dictator around the world, including army dictators, what's the problem in talking to the people next door who have the misfortune of being led by an army commander?

So, the argument is that if the Government of India is in dialogue with several military dictators, then why should it not consider talking to Pakistan led by a military general?

TK: As someone who has been in the security establishment, my problem is how do I deal with terrorism? If a democratically elected government opens the door for dialogue and then gets hit by a terror attack – then the question is how to deal with terror attacks that disrupt dialogue? As a democratically elected government, can you justify dialogue? This is a point that was asked by even Nawaz Sharif who said that a terror attack takes place each time dialogue is attempted.

However, I will agree that a few military generals have shown remarkable good sense. In the recent past, when a BrahMos missile was accidentally fired at Pakistan, the Pakistan army handled it well. While the civilians protested, the Pakistan army took it in their stride and kept quiet. At the moment I am concerned with the timing of this proposal as Mr. Munir is in power. The other issue is that Pakistan is in chaos as

there are daily incidents that are being reported in various parts of the country. It's in chaos. So right now he wants to talk. He may have every incentive to talk. Why should I talk? If there is even one indication from Pakistan that they are going to close down terrorist camps, I'm sure tomorrow the government will be ready to talk.

But if at all we are to go forward, I would like to see, for example, a talk on climate change. We are both countries that are equally in bad shape when it comes to climate vulnerabilities. I would like a talk on air pollution, as during a particular season of the year, both sides start burning crop residues triggering an environmental crisis. That kind of a functional dialogue, which does not involve any territorial issue, no vested or political interests is purely functional and people-centric.

I find the kind of wishful thinking which one sees in the letter as a little idealistic. It's a bit over the top.

Does the current Indian government have the political bandwidth to talk to the Pakistani establishment?

MSA: Talking to them doesn't mean bending our knees before them. If you have the courage to undertake surgical strikes against them, why don't you have the courage to sit across a table and talk to them? That's my simple point. And if you won't do so, as I'm talking to the Government of India, then we will. We've got Zoom. But I am going to talk to my numerous friends in Pakistan. The number of my friends in Pakistan is larger than the number of enemies I have in India. And that's a rather large number.

TK: Before Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we had someone like Atal Bihari Vajpayee who put his career on the line and went to Lahore. Prime Minister Modi tried in 2015 and went to meet Nawaz Sharif and extended an olive branch. But all these have a political cost.

The question is what will we ask of them. If we have a dialogue tomorrow, we will ask them to stop exporting terrorism and they, in turn, will accuse us of doing things in Balochistan etc. whereas the Baloch people have been harassed since 1947. The question is what can India do in terms of the protests happening in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). We should talk to Pakistan if General Munir shows some evidence that he is cutting down on terrorism.



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NOTEBOOK

How a city's working class is driven to the margins and made invisible

The workers who collect garbage and keep our cities clean, and the workers who commute via cycles deserve recognition and respect

Suruchi Kumari

Before a story is to take shape through conversations with a part of the city's population, which the city itself only passively interacts with, it is discussed in a Monday pitch meeting where reporters and editors sit. Once approved, a familiar question follows – "Where will we find these people?"

I encountered this question before working on two separate stories on informal waste workers, and workers who commute by cycle. In both cases, the question did not hold for long. What first sounded like an inquiry about access, over the course of the reporting, began to feel like an assumption that these people are difficult to locate; almost external to the city.

For 'finding' people who cycle to work in Delhi, I reached out to Professor Rahul Goel from IIT Delhi, whose work over the years has focused on commuting patterns and mobility. When I asked him, "Where will I find them?", he directed me to the city's busiest intersections, where roads from the peripheries meet industrial areas and affluent localities, where many of them work as daily wage labourers, security guards, and helpers.

I met Sandeep at one of those busy intersections on a humid April evening, when he was returning home from his sales job. Aged 23, he had been working for eight years. The break from school to contribute to his household became permanent after COVID-19 hit. Before getting back on his bicycle to ride 8 kilometres more, he said, "Humlog dikhte nahi hain (We are invisible)." He said that a cycling network sounds like a fantasy in a city that still doesn't have footpaths everywhere. The draft Master Plan of Delhi 2041 notes that this "unequal distribution of roads" makes it non-conducive for cycling.

By the time I filed the story, curiosity had begun to feel like ignorance. I started seeing cyclists everywhere – at every intersection, at every signal. They kept to the kerb, and when traffic swelled, even that space was taken over as motorists pushed

forward to gain ground. A car owner I spoke to said, "They slow the traffic down, such a nuisance." Cyclists are registered only when their presence creates friction.

Similarly, a waste picker becomes visible only when their access to gated colonies is debated. Most residents encounter them every day. They collect garbage from homes and do the work that reduces the burden on municipal systems without formal recognition or integration into the waste economy. They continue to speak of restricted access, allegations of theft, and the absence of dedicated workspaces.

To write about the workforce that sorts much of the city's waste in March, I first travelled to a *jhuggi* cluster in Bhalswa, in northwest Delhi, a few kilometres from the towering landfill. Days later, while walking to a Metro station in south Delhi, I noticed a large sack of waste stacked beside a road, similar to the one I had seen in Bhalswa. It led me to a corner of my own neighbourhood that I realised I had never seen before. There, too, people were sorting waste sharing similar stories of migration and precarious work. By the time I finished the story, I had met waste workers across the city. Sameer Ali, whom I had never seen before January, moved in the same lanes around 9 pm with his bicycle cart carrying a stack of cardboard. People that our stories set out to look for, unlike responses from government authorities, are not hard to find. They are everywhere, for all to see.

It is tempting to think invisibility is simply a failure to notice. But invisibility is rarely accidental. When a city invests heavily in roads for cars while cycling infrastructure remains largely absent, cyclists do not disappear. A worker rehabilitated to the margins of Delhi, 40-50 kilometres away from the place where she works, is moved away from the corridors of visibility so that her problems with transport or healthcare become easier to overlook.

These workers state that recognition in government policies would give them a life of dignity and respect.

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PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Pilgrims' progress



Stormy route: The first batch of pilgrims on the annual Amarnath Yatra cross mountain trails amid rainfall during their journey to the Amarnath cave on the Baltal route, northeast of Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir on July 3. The yatra was almost cancelled due to unpredictable mountain weather, but it resumed again. THE HINDU

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The *Hindu*

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 10, 1976

Eminent scientists' club suggested

New Delhi, July 9: A proposal to establish a club of eminent scientists from the non-aligned developing countries for making futuristic studies of the development pattern of the Third World is being mooted by some top scientists here.

According to informed sources, the idea is to set up an institution like the "Club of Rome" where eminent scientists from the developing non-aligned countries could continuously

study problems concerning the Third World and projections of growth in various fields such as economic development, population, agriculture and technology.

There is a feeling among scientists in developing countries that projections made by prestigious groups like the "Club of Rome" often tend to ignore realities in the developing countries as they, being supported by the developed countries, look at the problems of developing countries from the perspectives of the developed countries. Some of the projections made by the "Club of Rome" set up with financial support from the developed countries on the pattern of growth and development in the world, are being hotly contested by scientists of the Third World.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 10, 1926

The mission of poets

Calcutta, July 9: "The Mission of Poets" was the subject of an interesting lecture, delivered by Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, to-day, at the instance of the Poetry Society. Mrs. Naidu delivered an inspiring address in the course of which she said she would like to destroy all printing presses that printed poetry and to leave it at the mercy of all learned professors to teach the young how to paraphrase, analyse, interpret, and scan poetry. A poet knows that he is not more than a mirror of these intimate secrets of the human heart of which the heart itself is so often unaware.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Share of universities that participated in NIRF

55 in per cent. Only 55% universities participated in the government's NIRF rankings, while 56% of them have introduced the four-year undergraduate courses so far, according to the Centre's All India Survey on Higher Education report for 2023-24. The Ministry of Education on Wednesday released the reports of the AISHE for the years 2022-23 and 2023-24. ^{PTI}

Number of voters deleted in SIR draft electoral rolls

22 in lakh. Around 22 lakh voters have been left out of the draft electoral rolls in four States, where Phase 3 of the special intensive revision (SIR) of voter lists is under way. According to data made available in the public domain in the last few days by chief electoral officers of Mizoram, Odisha, Manipur and Sikkim, their combined voter base has shrunk by nearly 22 lakh. ^{PTI}

Number of ration card issuances to be expedited by Bihar CM

1 in crore. Bihar Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary on Thursday directed officials to expedite the issuance of one crore new ration cards to eligible beneficiaries across the State. Union Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution Minister Pralhad Joshi and the CM chaired a comprehensive review meeting here to assess various departmental schemes and the functioning of PDS in the State. ^{PTI}

Routes disrupted by heavy rain in Uttarakhand

107 Continuous rainfall over the past 24 hours across Uttarakhand has raised river water levels and triggered landslides in hilly areas, disrupting traffic on 107 routes across the State. The Meteorological Department has issued a 'Red Alert' for very heavy rainfall in seven districts, including Dehradun, and an 'Orange Alert' for the remaining districts for Thursday. ^{PTI}

Illegal coal recovered by CISF in West Bengal, Jharkhand

428 in metric tonnes. The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel recovered more than 428 metric tonnes of coal during a five-day special operation to check the pilferage and theft of the fossil fuel from mines in Jharkhand and West Bengal, officials said on Thursday. ^{PTI}

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Why is the Centre revising the NFSA?

Why has the Centre proposed changing AAY foodgrain entitlements? How will the proposed amendment affect households? Why are Tamil Nadu and Kerala opposing? Could the amendment widen regional disparities in foodgrain allocation?

EXPLAINER

T. Ramakrishnan

The story so far:

In July 6, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay urged the Centre to retain the present provision of 35 kg of foodgrains per household per month under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) meant for the poorest of the poor, and not to make it a per capita system. The next day, the CPI(M) Polit Bureau voiced its concern and demanded that the proposed amendment to the entitlement criteria be dropped. About 10 days ago, immediately after the Union government made public its plan to amend the National Food Security Act (NFSA), Kerala's Food Minister Anoop Jacob expressed reservations over the move.

What is the amendment mooted?

On June 24, the Union Food and Public Distribution (F&PD) Department, while publishing a draft amendment Bill to the NFSA, said every person belonging to AAY households would be entitled to seven kg of foodgrains per month, subject to a maximum of 35 kg per household per month. At present, the entitlement is for the entire household with a ceiling of 35 kg per month. The proposed amendment covers the first proviso to sub-section (1) of Section 3 (Right to receive foodgrains at subsidised prices by persons belonging to eligible households) of the Act. The public can comment on the amendments till July 13 and send their views by email to suneei.sachdeva@nic.in and saurabhomar.edu@gmail.in.

Why is the change being proposed?

The existing household-based entitlement, though intended as a protective measure for the most vulnerable families, results in significant inequities depending upon the size of the household, according to the F&PD Department. Smaller households receive a higher per-capita entitlement, whereas larger households receive a lower per-capita entitlement, which may fall below the entitlement available to priority households.

The aim and purpose are to remove intra-category inequities, provide for more rational foodgrain allocation, and better align entitlements with nutritional requirements, a note prepared by the department said.

However, the proposed amendment does not seek to address the inclusion of ineligible persons as beneficiaries, a problem that persists at the State level.

What is the story behind the two southern States' opposition?

It is not for the first time that the two States are articulating their opposition to matters concerning the food policy, as their contemporary political history has an important ingredient – the politics of food. Kerala, which has a long history of the public distribution system (PDS) dating back to the now-abolished princely State of Travancore, introduced informal food distribution mechanisms to mitigate the food shortage of the poor and vulnerable, and was perhaps the first to launch a formal PDS in 1962, three years before the establishment of the Food Corporation of India (FCI). At least on two occasions – 1952 and 1967 – Tamil Nadu saw political upsets, the incumbent regime getting reduced to a minority in 1952 and being shown the door (in 1967). The reason was that the governments of

Grains of debate

The Centre's proposed amendment to the National Food Security Act has triggered concerns that foodgrain allocations under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana could fall for many households in the southern States



Table 1: AAY coverage, beneficiaries and foodgrain allocation

State	Ceiling of AAY households (lakhs)	AAY coverage No. of AAY households (in lakh)	No. of persons (in lakh)	Allocation of foodgrains** for 2026-27 (in tonnes)
Andhra Pradesh	9.09	8.48	22.48	3,81,557
Karnataka	12	10.3	42.72	4,60,740
Kerala	5.96	5.93	18.53	2,50,236
Tamil Nadu	18.65	18.57	62.21	7,82,771
Telangana	6.49	5.64	15.66	2,38,074
Puducherry* (U.T.)	0.32	0.24	0.77	0*
Share of the South	52.51	49.16	162.37	21,13,378
All India	250	217.01	777.41	99,33,042

Source: Foodgrain bulletin for May 2026, Department of Food and Public Distribution, Government of India

*As Puducherry follows the concept of direct benefit transfer, no allocation has been made.
** foodgrains - rice, wheat and coarse grains

Fine balance: The aim and purpose of the amendment are to remove intra-category inequities, provide for more rational foodgrain allocation, and better align entitlements with nutritional requirements. M. SRINATH

Table 2: Off-take and distribution in the Southern States

How the South fared during the current financial year up to the month of May 2026 (tonnes)

State	Allocation	Off take (drawal)	Distributed
Andhra Pradesh	63,593	63,593	57,837
Karnataka	76,790	57,316	35,003
Kerala	41,706	39,812	20,458
Tamil Nadu	1,30,462	1,90,135	1,21,709
Telangana	39,679	59,519	38,893
Share of the South	3,52,230	4,10,375	2,73,900
All India	16,55,505	17,24,185	13,75,621

the periods in question were not being swift in handling the rice shortage. Since 1967, successive Chief Ministers of the State have been cautious in taking decisions with regard to the subject of rice.

It was no wonder that the two States were vociferous in their stand in the run-up to the formulation of the NFSA. Though the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) took charge in 2011 in Kerala, the government did not agree to the implementation of the 2013 law – an Act of Parliament – despite the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance regime at the Centre pushing the legislation. The main reservation it had was that the NFSA would lead to the removal of a "large number of poor families" from the list of beneficiaries and put an "enormous financial burden" on the State. However, the then Chief Minister, Oommen Chandy, at one point in time, committed himself to the enforcement of the law in his State, though it was left to his successor, Pinarayi Vijayan, to take the formal decision.

In Tamil Nadu, Jayalalithaa, as Chief Minister, virulently opposed the law because immediately after she came to power in May 2011, her government started the distribution of rice, free to all the ration cardholders, regardless of their economic status. She had criticised the government for stating that those who would be left out of the NFSA would not

'The existing household-based entitlement, though intended as a protective measure for the most vulnerable families, results in significant inequities depending upon the size of the household'

be eligible to receive free rice. Eventually, she extracted a major concession from the Union government that the existing allocations, as they stood in 2013, for all the States would be legally safeguarded. Hence, it was no surprise that the two southern neighbours joined the rest of the country in November 2016 in implementing the law.

Why are Tamil Nadu and Kerala opposing the amendment to NFSA?

Explaining how Kerala would be affected by the latest move, Mr. Jacob has pointed out that States such as his, characterised by nuclear families, will be at a disadvantage as there will be a reduction in the quantity of free foodgrains for families with fewer than five members. He has recalled that even in 2013, when the law took effect, his State took the stand that the AAY cardholders deserved "special consideration," a position that it continues. "As a consumption State, any cut in Kerala's allocation is a matter of concern," Mr. Jacob stated.

Mr. Vijay, who referred in his letter to Mr. Modi about how the amendment

would cause a fall in the monthly allocation of foodgrains from 65,261 tonnes to 42,040 tonnes, stated that the number of AAY cardholders below the family size of five members is 15.75 lakh (out of a total of 18.64 lakhs), covering 58.51 lakh beneficiaries (total: 69.27 lakhs). "Rice provided to the AAY cardholders is a staple ingredient of all three meals of the day and cannot be substituted with any other commodity from the open market, resulting in substantial out of pocket expenses," he said.

Besides, Anuradha Talwar, a functionary of the Right to Food Campaign, said that the amendment would bring a "North-South divide" in foodgrain allocation, as families in northern States would get higher allocations as their average family size was bigger than that of the southern States.

What is the way forward?

Ideally, such a change should have been subjected to greater public scrutiny to arrive at a consensus. However, T. Sadagopan, president, Tamil Nadu Progressive Consumer Centre and veteran activist who served on the State government's panels on food, suggests that the Centre chalk out a middle path by making the allocation of 30 kg per family, irrespective of family members. This would help the Union government to cut down its subsidy bill.

THE GIST

▼ The Centre has proposed amending the NFSA to change AAY foodgrain entitlements from a household-based system to a per capita allocation of 7 kg per person, subject to a maximum of 35 kg per household, to address inequities in the existing system.

▼ Tamil Nadu and Kerala have opposed the proposal, arguing that it will reduce foodgrain allocations for households with fewer than five members and increase the burden on poor families, particularly in States with predominantly nuclear families.

▼ While the Centre says the amendment will make foodgrain distribution more equitable, critics warn it could widen regional disparities, and some have suggested a middle path of a fixed 30 kg allocation per household.

FULL CONTEXT

Marathi and the long politics behind the language question

The Hindi language controversy in Maharashtra is rooted in a long history of Marathi linguistic assertion, from Shivaji's reforms to the Samyukta Maharashtra movement; it revives debates on mother-tongue education, linguistic identity and federalism

Prathmesh Kher

In April and June of 2025, the government of Maharashtra, led by the Mahayuti coalition, issued two resolutions mandating Hindi as the compulsory third language for students from Class 1 onwards in Marathi- and English-medium State board schools, citing alignment with the National Education Policy of 2020. The announcement was, by any administrative measure, modest in scope, though its political consequences were anything but.

Within weeks, the streets of Mumbai and Pune were filled with protesters. Two figures who had not shared a platform in years, Uddhav Thackeray of Shiv Sena (UBT) and Raj Thackeray of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, found themselves, improbably, on the same side. By the end of June, the government had withdrawn the orders. The grammar of this linguistic confrontation is centuries old.

I. The first language war

By the early 17th century, Persian was the language of power across the Deccan. The Mughal court, the Adil Shahi sultans of Bijapur, and the Nizam Shahi of Ahmednagar all conducted their affairs in Persian. Sanskrit-speaking people were governed, taxed, and adjudicated in a language foreign to them.

Shivaji did not accept this. In 1630, approximately 86 per cent of the vocabulary in Maratha administrative documents was Persian. By 1677, it had fallen to 37 per cent. The instrument of this transformation was the *Rajavyavaharakosa*, the *Thesaurus of State Usage*, commissioned and completed in that same year. Every Persian and Arabic administrative term was given a Marathi or Sanskrit equivalent. Forts received Sanskrit names: Sindhudurg, Suvarnadrurg, Prachandgarh, Pratapgari, etc. The royal seal was inscribed in Sanskrit.

Every subsequent episode of Marathi linguistic resistance is a repetition of this founding act.

II. The colonial period

Jyotirao Phule's deposition to the Hunter Commission on Education in 1882 is among the most important documents in the history of Indian educational policy. Phule argues that colonial educational expenditure overwhelmingly benefits the upper-caste elite, using revenue extracted from Shudra labour to subsidise the very class that oppresses them. He demands compulsory primary education for all, teachers drawn from the cultivating classes, and instruction in Modi and Balbodhi, the two Marathi scripts. His writing in the spoken tongue of working people was itself the argument made visible: this language is adequate for the highest moral and political purposes.

The founding of *Kesari* (Marathi) and *Mahratta* (English) in January 1881 by Chiplunkar, Agarkar, and Tilak transformed Marathi into an instrument of mass political mobilisation: Marathi for the people, English for the world.

Tilak's Home Rule speech at Ahmednagar on June 1, 1916, put the question of vernacular education in his characteristic direct manner.

"Is the question whether education should be given through vernaculars such as big ones? Our voice is nowhere. Do the English educate their people through the



In one voice: Shiv Sena (UBT) workers protesting over the inclusion of Hindi in the school curriculum on June 29, 2025; by the end of June, the government had withdrawn the orders. PTI

French language? Do Germans do it through the English language? Because we have no authority. You have not got the authority."

Yet, Tilak was also the first Congress leader to advocate Hindi in Devanagari as India's national language at the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Banaras in December 1905.

III. The paradox of purity and pluralism

Vinayak Savarkar's *Bhāshā Shuddhikaran*, first published in 1926, was political surgery: a comprehensive project to replace Arabic and Persian borrowings in Marathi with Sanskrit-rooted coinages. The results are now embedded in daily speech across India. Savarkar coined or revived: *door-darshan* (television), *akashvani* (radio), *sansad* (parliament), and *hutatma* (martyr, one who has sacrificed their soul). *Door-darshan* became India's national television network. *Sansad* is in the Constitution. *Hutatma* names the traffic circle in central Mumbai where the martyrs of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement are commemorated. Savarkar's linguistic project is present in the names of the country's own institutions.

And yet it was also Savarkar who telegraphed the Constituent Assembly in August 1949 with the request: "I beseech the Constituent Assembly to adopt Bharat as the name of our nation, Hindi as the national language, and Nagari as the national script." He saw a purified, Sanskrit-rooted Hindi as the proper national language of a Hindu civilisation in the throes of revival. He was a fierce champion of Marathi within Maharashtra but an advocate for Hindi outside it. Savarkar never resolved this contradiction; perhaps he did not see it as such.

On the day Hindi was formally adopted as the official language of the Union, the Maharashtra Congress leader Shankarrao Deo spoke not against Hindi but for a different conception of India entirely:

"It is not uniformity but unity in diversity. It is *Vividhata* (diversity) that India stands for. That is our richness; that is the contribution that India can make to the world-culture and world progress... I admit India is a nation and I am an Indian, but if you will ask me what is your language, Sir, you will excuse me if I say 'My language is Marathi'... If you mean by national language one language for the whole country, then I am against it."

And on Marathi's sufficiency: "I do not want to belittle the culture or the richness of Hindi, but as far as culture goes, I can

receive it from my own language, Marathi and Sanskrit, the grandmother of all languages. They are rich enough to do that."

B.R. Ambedkar's position in the same debate was, characteristically, more layered. As Chairman of the Drafting Committee, he ultimately presided over the adoption of Hindi as the official language, a constitutional outcome he accepted as the will of the majority. But he warned, on September 14, 1949, that Hindi speakers, while a significant group, remained "a minority of the population," and that privileging one language risked fracturing the federal spirit. His earlier pamphlet *Maharashtra as a Linguistic Province* (1948), submitted to the Dar Commission, had already argued formally for a unified Marathi-speaking State - the position eventually vindicated by the creation of Maharashtra in 1960. And his *Thoughts on Linguistic States* (1955), written in the last year of his life, articulates with characteristic rigour his conviction that the stability of Indian democracy depends on the recognition of linguistic identity at the level of the state: "One State, one language" is a universal democratic principle, not a nativist claim.

Ambedkar's great argument in the Assembly, for mother-tongue primary education as a precondition of democratic participation, is perhaps his most durable contribution to the language question. Speaking on September 2, 1949, he argued that a child educated in a language foreign to their home is disadvantaged from the start in the race for knowledge and civic life. For communities already disadvantaged by centuries of caste exclusion, that additional burden is not merely unfair. It is politically disabling.

IV. Blood at flora fountain

The constitutional settlement did not resolve Maharashtra's boundaries. On January 15, 1956, Nehru declared Bombay a Union Territory. The streets filled immediately.

The Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti, formed on 6 February 1956 with Prabodhankar Thackeray, poet and father of Bal Thackeray, among its key members, organised a sustained campaign of strikes and mass demonstrations. Morarji Desai, Chief Minister of Bombay State, ordered police to fire. On November 21, 1955, police opened fire on demonstrators at Flora Fountain, killing fifteen. In the months that followed, as Morarji Desai continued ordering police action, the death toll climbed. It reached 106 before the movement was over. The square was later renamed Hutatma Chowk, using a

word coined by Savarkar.

Maharashtra was formed on May 1, 1960. The memory of those 106 is not ceremonial. It connects every subsequent confrontation over the language to the knowledge that recognition required blood, and that the State did not hesitate.

Bal Thackeray, son of Prabodhankar, launched *Marmik* in 1960 and the Shiv Sena on June 19, 1966, to protect the cultural and economic standing of Marathi workers in a city filled with migrants. The Sena began by targeting South Indians, then pivoted as the demographics of migration shifted northward.

By the 1990s, the name of Bombay itself became a political question. The city's name derived from the Portuguese *Bom Bahia* (Good Bay), overlaid on the older name Mumbai, which itself derived from *Mumba Aai*, the name of the tutelary goddess Mumbadevi whose temple has stood on the site since before the Portuguese arrived. The Shiv Sena campaign to restore the name Mumbai, the name by which the city's original Koli fishing community and most Marathi speakers had always known it, succeeded in 1995 when the Sena-BJP government made the change official. The renaming was simultaneously a de-anglicisation and a re-Marathisation: the city was being given back, in name, to the community that believed it most deeply belonged to them.

V. Indians first, Indians last

The 2025 government orders were resisted not out of hostility to Hindi but because state power was being used to privilege one language with material consequences for children. Children are required from age six to study a language their family does not speak, at additional expense, conferring benefit primarily on those seeking employment in the Hindi belt. Ambedkar said it in 1949: Education in a foreign language is not a gift. It is a burden. The coalition that formed, Uddhav and Raj Thackeray on the same platform, joined by literary organisations and citizens across party lines, reflects not party politics but civilisational memory.

Marathi is not threatened by other languages in the abstract. It is threatened by specific institutional arrangements that advantage one language over another in daily life. And Marathi itself has never been pure: its vocabulary retains Persian-derived words that centuries of use have made its own; its great literary tradition was radically inclusive. What it asks, what every living language asks, is not immunity from change but reciprocity: time to absorb change on its own terms rather than by institutional imposition.

B.R. Ambedkar, who had the foresight to see where competitive loyalties would lead, expressed his view of these fissiparous tendencies that would likely plague the future of India's body politic in his 1949 Constituent Assembly speech.

"We are all Indians. I do not like what some people say, that we are Indians first and Hindus afterwards or Muslim afterwards. I am not satisfied with that. I frankly say that I am not satisfied with that. I do not want our loyalty as Indians should in the slightest way affected by any competitive loyalty whether that loyalty arises out of our religion, out of our culture or out of our language. I want all people to be Indian first, Indians last and nothing else but Indians."



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

"What's the matter with you today? You look worried."

"Everyone in the company is worried. Atul is coming tomorrow. And everyone knows that he is the boss' hatchet man."

"Hatchet man?"
"Do you know what a hatchet is?"
"Of course I do. It's an axe. So is a 'hatchet man' someone who goes around killing people with an axe?"

"That was the original meaning, I believe. A 'hatchet man' was a hired assassin."

"What does the word mean now?"

"Nowadays the term is usually used to refer to someone who does all the dirty work for his boss. One of the meanings of 'hatchet man' is someone who is hired by a company to bring about changes which the employees may not like."

"Like getting rid of people?"
"Yes, downsizing is one of the things that a hatchet man does."

"Do you mean to say that all big companies have a hatchet man on their payroll?"

"That's right. Let me tell you, being a hatchet man is not an easy job."

"I don't want to be a hatchet man. Tell me, why do you bring back those silly paintings from the office every weekend? Why don't you just leave them there?"

"...we have been told never to leave anything in our office over the weekend. I understand there are several people who have sticky fingers."

"Sticky fingers? Then why don't you get them to wash their hands?"
"Ha! Ha! That's a good one. When you say that someone has sticky fingers, it implies he/she steals things. It's an expression used in informal contexts."

"I see. There is a rumour going around that Gunder has sticky fingers."

"Whenever Sundar visits our place several things go missing. There is no doubt about it. He has sticky fingers."

"My mother got rid of our maid because she had sticky fingers."

"Oh, by the way, there is an article about your favourite actor in today's newspaper. Have you read it?"

"No, what does it say?"

"According to the writer, your hero doesn't have horse sense."

"Do you mean to say that he doesn't know anything about horse racing?"

"No, not when you say that someone has no horse sense, it implies that he has no common sense."

"Horse sense means common sense, eh? Our school Principal is not a great scholar, but he has enough horse sense to tackle everyday problems."

"Ramesh is of the opinion that women in general don't have horse sense."

"If Sujatha comes to know about this she will tear him to pieces. Do you know that Sujatha's father has bought Mr. Sinha's old car?"

"Good grief! Why has he bought that dreadful thing! He's really scraped the bottom of the barrel to get that old car."

"...scraped the bottom of the barrel? I can probably guess the meaning of the expression. Usually when you scrape the bottom of the barrel, you get a lot of things that you don't need."

"...excellent. It means that he/she is choosing from the worst."

"He is choosing from what is left over."

"Exactly! When Sujatha asked Rakesh whether he would be interested in going to the concert with her, she knew she was scraping the bottom of the barrel."

"When the company hired you, I knew they were scraping the bottom of the barrel. Ha! Ha!"

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THE DAILY QUIZ

Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* officially made its premiere this week, with critics giving it rave reviews. A quiz on ancient Greek literature

Joan Sony Cherian

QUESTION 1

An easy one. A translation of the *Odyssey* by this scholar has been subject to controversy ever since Mr. Nolan mentioned it in an interview. Name the scholar.

QUESTION 2

Ancient Greek plays were categorised into two forms: comedies and tragedies. Aristotle considered this the important element of a play. Name it.

QUESTION 3

This Greek tragic character gouges his eyes out after learning a terrible truth. Name

the character, the play, and the tragedian who wrote the play. The name of the character is also associated with a famous psychoanalytical theory.

QUESTION 4

The Odyssey is an epic poem written by Homer, considered to be a foundational work of classical literature. However, this ancient Greek philosopher was of the opinion that poetry and theatre were morally corrupt, and that poets should be banished. Name him.

QUESTION 5

The *Iliad* is also an epic poem by Homer. What is its famous opening line?



Visual Question:

This rap artist stars in Nolan's *Odyssey*. Name him and the role he plays in the film. AP

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Name the four distinct guarantees contained in Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment. **Ans: Citizenship Clause, Privileges or Immunities Clause, Due Process Clause, and Equal Protection Clause**
2. The Citizenship Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment overturned which infamous 1857 U.S. Supreme Court judgment? **Ans: The Dred Scott v. Sandford decision**
3. Which phrase in the opening sentence of Section 1 begins the Citizenship Clause? **Ans: 'All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof.'**
4. Under Section 3, what vote of Congress is required to remove the disqualification from office? **Ans: A two-thirds vote of each House of Congress**
5. Section 3 of the Fourteenth Amendment originally targeted former officeholders who had supported which conflict? **Ans: The American Civil War, specifically those who joined the Confederacy after swearing to support the U.S. Constitution**
Visual: Identify this U.S. Supreme Court Justice who, as a lawyer, served as chief counsel for the plaintiffs in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case. **Ans: U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall**
Early Birds: Tamal Biswas | Sunil Madhavan | Suchit Narottam | Sitaram Sahrayi | Pankaj Gharde

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

Word of the day

Divagate:

lose clarity or turn aside, especially from the main subject of attention or course of argument in writing, thinking, or speaking

Synonyms: deviate, diverge, differ, drift

Usage: She began to divagate during the meeting.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/divagate

International Phonetic Alphabet: /dɪvəˈɡeɪt/

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

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

IN 1932

BECAUSE THE TRUTH
INVOLVES US ALL

A global crackdown and a chance for India

THE MULTI-agency operation carried out by federal law enforcement agencies from several countries, with networks spanning continents, against transnational crime syndicates, is welcome. India has actively cooperated in the investigations. The findings also vindicate Delhi's long-held stand that it had no role in terror cells operating abroad. For years, the Indian establishment had to contend with allegations that it was involved in the assassination of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Surrey in June 2023. The killing, and the public smear campaign by the then Justin Trudeau government, plunged bilateral ties into a deep freeze. Now, public statements by senior officials of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the agency whose investigations were earlier cited to cast suspicion on the Indian security establishment, reflect the maturity of the new Canadian leadership under Prime Minister Mark Carney. He has moved not merely to mend relations between the two countries but to fast-track cooperation in trade and education. Canadian universities were long the preferred destination for many Indian students, but the diplomatic freeze had disrupted the educational exchange. The new signals from Ottawa should provide a fresh impetus to people-to-people ties.

Operation Hard Ball has also exposed the transnational reach of criminal syndicates targeting the Indian diaspora not only in Canada but also in the US, Europe and Australia. Indian security agencies were among the first to point to the emerging nexus between organised crime and terror networks. This convergence enabled separatist groups to finance and sustain their agenda, while forcing security agencies to confront syndicates dealing simultaneously in drugs, terror and separatism. Extortion calls, once associated with Mumbai's underworld of a bygone era, have become the preferred weapon of criminal syndicates to terrorise Indians settled abroad. While victimising fellow Indians, these networks have also tarnished the reputation of the diaspora, often by exploiting vulnerable students as foot soldiers.

The operation offers an opportunity to make the Indian diaspora safer. It is also a chance for India to dismantle the domestic gangs and extortion rackets that are increasingly targeting businessmen across parts of the country. The message should be unambiguous. Youngsters lured by the glamour of gang culture must realise that the path leads not to power or prosperity but to prison or deportation. Syndicates that once appeared untouchable are now being hunted across jurisdictions. India must seize this moment to ensure that organised crime ceases to be a lucrative enterprise, and is seen for what it really is — a high-risk, zero-reward proposition.

Don't let the rowdy politician get away

THESHIV Sena (Eknath Shinde) has done the right thing in admonishing his corporator, Ramesh Mhatre, for the assault on doctors and medical staff of a Thane municipal hospital after a video of the incident went viral. The altercation reportedly arose over the treatment of a patient on Monday. At times, tempers do run high in hospitals with patients and their families contending with overcrowded, and often unhygienic, facilities. But Mhatre's conduct is reprehensible not only because it's an assault on medical professionals but also because of his official position. Residents approach their municipal representatives over a host of everyday civic concerns. Their effectiveness lies in responding with empathy, escalating complaints for redressal, and demanding public accountability. A corporator should never intimidate or browbeat officials when they are discharging their duties. Mhatre's arrest on Wednesday has, therefore, sent the right message — Maharashtra's Mahayuti government, of which the Shinde Sena is a party, will not treat high-handedness with leniency.

For at least three decades since its formation in 1966, the Shiv Sena cultivated a politics that was seen to encourage direct action even at the cost of transgressing the rule of law. While upholding Marathi pride was the party's avowed objective, parochialism often slipped into shows of force and violence. Whether in enforcing bandhs, intervening in local disputes or confronting officials, the Sena projected itself as an organisation willing to bypass institutions in favour of a rough politics. However, as the party assumed greater responsibilities in government, it sought to present itself as a mature political outfit capable of administering complex public institutions.

Shiv Sainiks, though, have not completely abandoned their ways of yore. After the party split in 2022, cadres loyal to Uddhav Thackeray reportedly vandalised the offices of the rival Shiv Sena faction. In March last year, workers of the Shiv Sena Sanshodhan Mandal, a Mumbai-based think tank, were seen harassing a journalist who had taken a jibe against their leader. The Mahayuti government, which often makes development initiatives a high-profile campaign, can ill afford to allow such acts of intimidation to become normalised. It must ensure that Wednesday's action is not an isolated response but the standard for dealing with the abuse of political power.

The bees and the birds, like us only

AMONG THE elements that constitute the *Homo sapiens*' self-definition, there is one that is often ignored. Human beings have an unending capacity for narcissistic conceit. The "inner life", it has long been believed, is the province of very few animals. With reluctance, people acknowledge that "higher mammals" — elephants, primates, dolphins and some whales — are worth empathy. For lowly insects, though, the fascination is rarely with the individual. The bee colony and beehive are marvellous for their complexity, but the ant and the bee are merely constituents of a collective.

It turns out that behind their exoskeletons, bees might be a lot more complex than people thought. A paper published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* shows that in certain settings, bumblebees react to certain tastes in seemingly similar ways to some mammals, including human babies — they seem to like sugar water, and retreat from rankness. Researchers concluded that bees may have a "subjective" sense of taste.

Bees are ready to join the growing ranks of smart non-mammals. Corvids — crows, ravens, etc. — use tools, have moods and dislikes, and parrots and their kin have a propensity for languages. Perhaps it's tough to see these creatures as close kin because they look so different and are seen only in large groups. But then, as the crow or the bee flies and looks down, it might just look at a crowd of humans and not see people at all.

The Editorial Page

Lost in India's celebrations of trade pacts, the big deal

IN CASABLANCA, Humphrey Bogart observes that the problems of "three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world". Trade policy is not cinema, but the line applies with some precision to India's current diplomatic enthusiasm for free trade agreements. Its recent trade deals with the EU and the UK and an earlier one with Japan have been widely celebrated, underlining the openness to global commerce. The celebrations are not entirely misplaced. But the arithmetic suggests India may be cheering for the hill of beans while the mountain stands unclimbed.

The mountain is the United States. For the period 2020-25, India's annual goods trade surplus with America averaged approximately \$42 billion. India's combined goods trade surplus with the EU, the UK, and Japan together was approximately \$12 billion. The ratio is roughly 4 to 1 in favour of the US. One country, no trade agreement, nearly four times the commercial benefit of three large partners and three "celebrated" trade deals. This is the number that should be at the centre of India's trade strategy conversation. It is emphatically not.

The US surplus is not an accident. It reflects India's genuine comparative advantage in pharmaceuticals, software, electronics, and services. India's annual goods trade surplus with America averaged approximately \$42 billion. India's combined goods trade surplus with the EU, the UK, and Japan together was approximately \$12 billion. The ratio is roughly 4 to 1 in favour of the US. One country, no trade agreement, nearly four times the commercial benefit of three large partners and three "celebrated" trade deals. This is the number that should be at the centre of India's trade strategy conversation. It is emphatically not.

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even a partial narrowing of it would dwarf anything on offer from the EU, UK, or Japan deals combined. And the bigger prize is not goods at all: it is market access for Indian IT and professional services — a services negotiation, not a merchandise one.

These numbers cover only merchandise goods trade. India exports \$79 billion in goods to the US annually and imports \$37 billion, generating the \$42 billion surplus. These are not raw commodities but generic pharmaceuticals (India supplies roughly 40 per cent of US generic drug volumes), electronics (including Apple's iPhone assemblies now made in India), gems and jewellery, engineering goods, and chemicals. The US is India's most important destination for high-value, knowledge-intensive manufactured exports.

The EU is India's second-largest goods trading partner. The country runs a surplus of around \$18 billion annually with the bloc — real and growing, driven by petroleum re-exports after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and partly by pharmaceuticals and engineering goods. The EU-India FTA matters: India pays \$9.12 per cent tariffs on textiles and garments entering Europe, while Vietnam, which signed an EU deal in 2020, pays nothing — a legitimate grievance and real opportunity. But even a generous estimate of what the EU FTA adds to India's goods balance — perhaps \$8-10 billion annually at full implementation — leaves the US surplus in a categorically different league.

The UK deal is the one fur-



SURJIT S BHALLA

thest along: India and the UK signed the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in July 2025. It delivers duty-free access for 99 per cent of India's exports to the UK by value — but India's current goods surplus with the UK is only around \$5 billion, a rounding error next to the American number.

The Japan story is more cautionary. India and Japan signed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2011, with a trade target of \$25 billion by 2014. India's goods exports to Japan today — 15 years on — are approximately \$6 billion, and the trade balance has swung from a small deficit at signing to a deficit of roughly \$11 billion now. The CEPA removed most tariffs; what it could not remove were Japan's formidable non-tariff barriers. At the July 2026 Modi-Takaichi summit, the two sides agreed only to review and negotiate a CEPA upgrade — a commitment to talk, not a negotiated reduction in most tariff barriers.

There is also the China question, which none of these deals addresses but which no serious discussion of Indian trade policy can ignore. India's goods trade deficit with China reached approximately \$99 billion in 2024-25 — a record, on imports of \$113 billion against exports of just \$14 billion. The combined surplus from all three of India's agreements with EU, UK and Japan would not cover an eighth of that deficit.

What brings us back to the United States. The India-US goods relationship has strengthened every decade since 2000 — a sur-

plus of roughly \$7 billion in the 2000s, \$22 billion in the 2010s, \$42 billion now — with one single formal trade agreement, a sign of how much more could be achieved with one. An India-US agreement covering goods and services — with stable, near-zero tariffs across pharmaceuticals, electronics, gems, and engineering goods, plus provisions on IT services and professional mobility — would be the most consequential trade agreement India has ever signed, serving its broader ambitions. An economy more reliant on markets than bureaucrats, on the growth path Viksit Bharat requires. In India's trade policy universe, the US relationship is not one deal among several. It is the deal. The others are useful increments, this one a structural shift.

Given this, it's worth asking why the US deal is so difficult to achieve. Political economy supplies part of the answer: The likely losers are inefficient Indian producers who currently enjoy protection, and China, since deeper US-India integration would reinforce the global shift away from Chinese manufacturing dominance.

In the end, Bogart gave up the hill of beans and chose the larger cause. India's trade negotiators face a version of the same choice: Keep celebrating agreements that improve the margin, or muster the political will for the one that changes the game. The arithmetic has been clear for some time. The question is whether the strategy has caught up with it.

The writer is chairperson of the Technical Expert Group for the first official Household Income Survey for India. Views are personal

Acquisition, merger, takeover — corporate talk is BJP speak



M A BABY

INDIA is currently witnessing a capture of every institution that was designed to mediate, moderate or constrain executive power. These institutions are now being subordinated to the interests of a specific faction of big capital, which is fused with the ideological apparatus of Hindutva, which pursues the idea of Hindu Rashtra. It is an ongoing project of legal, electoral and territorial engineering which is being materialised through legislation that says one thing and does another. It is also being established through a sustained assault on constitutional firewalls that stand between a secular republic and a theocratic state.

Since 2014, the ruling party's political apparatus has merged with a specific cluster of corporate houses, in a relationship of mutual reinforcement so dense that the boundary between state and private capital has become, in critical sectors, functionally invisible. Corporates that made investments in the BJP are receiving material returns in the form of public-sector disinvestment, rewriting of environmental and land-acquisition clearance norms, restructuring of the banking system to absorb corporate debt, etc. Political power itself is being reorganised as returns on corporate investment.

Acquisitions, mergers, hostile takeovers. Terms used in corporate boardrooms have been perfected by the BJP as the quick fix to overcome electoral setbacks. It began with the fall of state governments through the organised poaching and wholesale purchase of elected Congress legislators in Madhya Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Manipur etc. Later, the targets shifted to the NCR, SS, AAP and TMC. The "future trading" in political leaders has become so normalised that it now barely registers as a scandal.

To prevent this kind of wholesale political commerce, the Tenth Schedule, also known as the anti-defection law, was introduced in 1985. Despite its loopholes, it represented a constitutional acknowledgment that the buying and selling of legislators goes against the ethos of a multi-party democracy. That acknowledgment has now been rendered ceremonial. The mechanism of "merger" — requiring two-thirds of a legislative party to defect — is being exploited with clinical efficiency.

Speakers, governors and the Election Commission are some of the constitutional positions that were designed as counterweights or referees. However, speakers, who are the constitutional authorities charged with deciding disqualification petitions,

have discovered remarkable reserves of procedural delay whenever the petitions concern their own party's beneficiaries. The partisan functioning of governors in states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and West Bengal has been documented. The EC is the body on whose independence the very possibility of an electoral democracy rests. But it has repeatedly refused to act on complaints against the Prime Minister and the Home Minister for speeches that, by any reading of the Model Code of Conduct, constituted communal appeals.

Now with the SIR exercise, the current EC's lack of non-partisanship lies further exposed. While upholding the legality of the SIR exercise in its May 2026 judgement, citing Article 324, the Supreme Court directed the EC to send the names of those who were deleted on the grounds of doubtful citizenship to the Union government for adjudication under the citizenship laws. This officially linked the electoral roll revision to citizenship determination. The SIR deletes names. The CAA offers a conditional reinstatement to some who belong to the right religion. The NRC is the eventual settling of accounts. The ultimate goal of the SIR is becoming clearer.

The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, prohibited the conversion of any place of worship and directed that the religious character of every such place as it stood on August 15, 1947, be maintained. In 2022, the Supreme Court said during the Gyanvapi hearings that though "conversion" of a place of worship is barred by the Act, "ascertaining its religious character" is not. In practice, the distinction between "ascertaining" and "converting" has proved to be illusory. The RSS-BJP project requires an endless supply of "disputes" to sustain communal polarisation as an electoral resource.

Delimitation based on a skewed population data will restructure the arithmetic of Parliament in favour of the BJP's core states. The SIR purges the lists of those most likely to vote against the BJP — poor, migrant, minority, marginalised. The CAA offers a backdoor for religious sorting. The assault on the 1991 Act generates the communal charge that keeps the Hindutva coalition together.

The CPI(M) and the Left are fighting for the defence of the constitutional framework within which the working class, minorities and democratic forces can still organise, agitate and alter the course of history.

The writer is general secretary, CPI(M)

Lessons from a Chinese supercomputer



SUBIMAL BHATTACHARJEE

ON JUNE 23, at the International Supercomputing Conference, a machine almost no one had heard of vaulted to the top of computing's most-watched scoreboard. LineShine, housed at the National Supercomputing Centre in Shenzhen, clocked 2.198 exaflops on the High Performance Linpack benchmark — more than 20 per cent faster than the United States' El Capitan at 1.809. It is the first Chinese system to top the TOP500 since Sunway TaihuLight in 2017, and the first machine ever to cross two exaflops using only general-purpose CPUs, no GPUs.

That last detail is the story. China did not win by buying the best chips; it was barred from doing so. LineShine runs on a fully domestic stack — custom 304-core LX2 processors built on the Arm architecture, a proprietary LingQo interconnect, the home-grown LingKun platform and Kynlin OS, across nearly 13.8 million cores. China stopped submitting to the TOP500 as the US export controls bit; re-entering it is a deliberate signal that the chokehold did not work as intended. The export controls since 2022 triggered a state-backed self-sufficiency drive. Chip self-sufficiency just 33 per cent in 2024, is targeted at 80 per cent by 2030. TrendForce expects domestic chips to supply half of China's AI-chip market in 2026. Three toolmakers, Naura, AMEC and ACM Research, entered the global top 10 for the first time in 2025; Huawei's AI-chip revenue is projected to jump 60 per cent to \$12 billion.

This is the value-chain ascent in miniature: China climbing from assembly into design, tooling, materials and architecture — the high-margin, hard-to-replicate links where strategic leverage sits. For India, the moment is instructive. Launched in 2021 with a Rs 76,000-crore outlay, the India Semiconductor Mission has approved 13 projects across seven states. The Tata-Powerfab fab in Dholera, a Rs 91,000-crore, 28nm bet on 50,000 wafers a month, anchors the effort, with first silicon due around 2028.

Three lessons can be drawn from this result. First, an ecosystem is not a fable: China's edge came from depth across equipment, materials, interconnects, software and design IP built over a decade. ISM 2.0's refocus on equipment, materials and design IP suggests the lesson is absorbed; execution is the test. Second, design is leverage, up to half of value addition, and India already hosts the R&D centres of Nvidia, Intel, Qualcomm and Texas Instruments, a fabless strength that may pay faster than chasing leading-edge fabs. Third, patient capital and talent win: With a 700,000-strong skills shortage looming by 2030, the country that trains engineers fastest compounds its advantage.

The deeper takeaway is geopolitical. Washington's denial strategy assumed that withholding technology would preserve its lead indefinitely. China's answer is that denial accelerates substitution, fragmenting the global stack into parallel, incompatible ecosystems. For India, that fracturing is an opening: As multinational seekers alternatives to China-Taiwan concentration, a non-aligned, English-speaking India grows attractive, provided it does not mistake assembly for autonomy.

LineShine's lesson is not that China has won the computing race. It is that a determined state, denied the best tools, can build adequate ones and weaponise the symbolism. Washington must weigh whether controls that catalyse a rival's industrial policy are worth their cost. New Delhi should read the result plainly: Sovereignty in silicon is bought with sustained investment, indigenous IP and engineering talent, and not subsidies alone.

Bhattacharjee is a defence and tech policy adviser and author of *The Digital Decades: On 30 Years of the Internet in India*

40 YEARS AGO

July 10, 1986



Violence in Ahmedabad

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE, which claimed 300 lives last year, raised its ugly head once again in the Dairapur-Shahpur area of the walled city during the annual Rath Yatra procession, leaving 11 dead and nearly 80 injured. An indefinite curfew has been imposed on the area. Official sources said the trouble began when the Rath Yatra procession passing through the Chandan Talavdi locality in the Dairapur area was subjected to heavy stone-throwing. The processionists had to divert their route.

C S Singh dead

THE UNION Petroleum Minister, Chandra Shekhar Singh, who was undergoing treatment at AIIMS for liver cancer, died. He was 60. Singh, former CM of Bihar, was admitted to the AIIMS on June 30.

200 held as rally turns violent

THE POLICE resorted to a lathi-charge to disperse an unruly mob at a Hariyana Sangharsh Samiti meeting. The agitators, who were mainly from the Lok Dal turned viol-

ent and set fire to a state transport bus, two jeeps and a furniture shop. The Express photographer Karer Singh's car was also damaged. The police arrested 200 persons.

21 killed in Sri Lanka

AUTHORITIES CLAMPED a curfew on the northeastern city of Trincomalee after 21 people were reported killed in two incidents. Residents of the port city said that six people, believed to be members of the same Tamil family, were killed.

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



Cities provide more opportunities for women to work. Why can so few women access them?

Not till cities reduce time, safety, care costs

Beyond childcare, four other barriers



KANIKA MAHAJAN

THE LATEST PLFS city estimates from the National Statistics Office seem to offer a hopeful story: India's largest cities provide women with better jobs. In the 46 million-plus cities, 65.1 per cent of employed women are in regular salaried work, compared with 50.9 per cent in urban India overall. Yet female labour force participation in these cities is only 25.5 per cent, lower than the urban average of 27.7 per cent. Big cities produce better jobs, but the real question is why so few women can access them.

It should not surprise us that big cities have a higher share of salaried jobs. This is the equilibrium outcome of thicker labour markets. Large cities concentrate firms and utilities such as schools, hospitals and business services, along with more educated workers. Among women, 29.4 per cent in these cities have college-and-above education against 25 per cent in non-metro urban India. Once firms and skilled workers cluster together, more salaried work follows. Nor is it surprising that employed women in big cities are concentrated in salaried jobs. Women place high value on non-wage attributes such as predictable hours, formal contracts, paid leave, safety, childcare and transport. Research shows that women's participation rises with the expansion of white-collar work, which offers higher returns and social acceptability. Our research similarly finds that larger firms employ more women, likely because they offer amenities like maternity benefits, transport and paid leave.

The salaried work statistic must therefore be read carefully, since it is conditional on being employed. It tells us only that among the minority of urban women who make it into paid work, many select into better jobs. It does not mean the city has solved women's employment problems. A city where three-fourths of women remain outside the labour force cannot declare success because the one-fourth who work are more likely to be salaried.

The same caution is needed in reading the earnings numbers. On average, women earn 22.7 per cent less than men, an important disparity, but monthly earnings do not account for hours worked. The PLFS data show that women employed in salaried work work almost 12.6 per cent fewer hours

per week than men. In bigger urban cities, this hour gap is slightly larger, at around 14 per cent. A simple accounting exercise shows that fewer hours explain almost 20 per cent of the earnings gap. Adding age, education and occupation raises the explained share to just 30 per cent. The larger point remains that a sizeable earnings penalty for women persists irrespective of city size, pointing to a more general problem of gender discrimination.

The harder question is why female participation is lower in the largest cities than in urban India as a whole. One answer lies in the geography of work, since women's employment is not just a wage decision. Evidence from job-search behaviour shows that women search closer to home and are willing to trade off wages for shorter commutes. Indian evidence on urban mobility points the same way. Women are far less likely than men to step out of the home on a given day, reflecting safety, household responsibility, social norms and weak transport systems. Fewer hours worked reflect similar constraints of care, commuting and safety.

This helps explain why rural India has historically shown higher female work participation. Much rural work is low-paid and informal, but agriculture and allied work is often closer to home and easier to combine with domestic responsibilities. As work moves from farms to firms, non-agricultural growth can exclude women in the absence of safe transport, affordable childcare and quality jobs.

The unemployment data also tell the same story. Female unemployment (ages 15-59) is higher than male unemployment everywhere, but the gender gap is larger in the 46 big cities, at 9.81 per cent for men versus 9.07 and 6.36 per cent elsewhere. Big cities are not merely places where women opt out. They are also places where women looking for work face a harder matching problem.

India's urban agenda cannot treat women's employment as an automatic by-product of growth. Cities need frequent and safe public transport, last-mile connectivity, street lighting, mixed-use neighbourhoods, childcare and regulations that make amenities easier for employers to provide. The real lesson from the new data is that even our best labour markets do not work for women. Until cities reduce the time, safety and care costs of taking a job, they will continue to produce better jobs without producing enough women workers.

The writer is associate professor of Economics at Ashoka University and Co-Lead for Employment at the Isaac Centre for Public Policy



ROOPA KUDVA

THERE ARE two things worth cheering about in the latest report of the National Statistics Office on India's million-plus cities. First, female labour force participation has climbed from 19.8 per cent in 2017-18 to 27.2 per cent in 2025, showing the sharpest gain of any group. The second is entrepreneurship—in 32 of the 46 million-plus cities, more than 20 per cent of unincorporated establishments are now run by women. Cities have become India's biggest centres of opportunity for women—and increasingly, it isn't only the big metros. In Surat, Vadodra and Pune, 40 per cent of unincorporated establishments are run by women.

Both numbers deserve celebration, but they come with a catch. Female LFPR, even after this gain, is still barely a third of the male rate of 75.9 per cent. Startlingly, despite the shift in aspirations, nearly 70 per cent of women outside the labour force still cite childcare and home commitments as the reason, proof that this is far from a solved problem.

For the rest, however, four gaps explain why the LFPR gap is not closing faster. Every system that touches a woman's working life—how she gets to work, whether she can occupy public space with the same ease as men, whether she rises once she's in an organisation, whether a bank or an investor will fund her—is designed around a male default.

Mobility: For men, the labour market begins at the workplace. For many women, it begins much earlier—on the street, at the busstop, at the train station. ORF's Women on the Move study found that over half of women reported experiencing harassment on public transport, and a similar share perceive it as unsafe. Women also rarely have linear commutes—their journeys are "chained", dropping children to school, managing errands, on the way to or back from work—while our transport systems are still built around a simple home-to-office trip. If transport isn't reliable, safe or built for how women actually move through a city, labour supply shrinks before an employer ever sees the candidate.

Public spaces: The deeper problem is beyond the commute. Look at our public spaces—you rarely see women simply sitting in a park alone, lingering in a café, or

spending time on a street without a clear purpose. Women feel they must be doing something legitimate to justify their presence in public space. That's a very different problem from safety alone, and it's one policing can't fix. The answer is designing cities that assume women are full participants in public life—not those who need a reason to be there.

Career progression: Even women who clear the first two hurdles run into a third. They don't rise at the rate they enter. Only 5 per cent of NSE-500 companies are women-led. For years, the explanation has been maternity breaks and caregiving. That narrative is tired and incomplete—it explains some exits, but not why so many women who stay still don't progress into leadership. A large part of the answer is unconscious bias. Successful women are often less liked than successful men, because traits like assertiveness and driving accountability conflict with longstanding expectations that women be accommodating and nurturing. A firm view from a man reads as conviction; from a woman, as sharp. Women are asked to deliver outcomes while continuously managing tone and perception—and that shapes self-belief and choices, sometimes unconsciously. That is why, as one reporter showed, men apply for roles when they meet 60 per cent of the qualifications, while women wait until they meet nearly all of them.

This is where the conversation usually runs into a familiar objection—that supporting women somehow means compromising merit. Far from it. Promoting women isn't anti-merit; it's how you actually give yourself the chance to uncover more of it. Organisations that effectively exclude half the workforce aren't protecting standards. They're narrowing them.

Funding: The fourth gap is capital. Women-led MSMEs in India face a credit gap of around 38 per cent, held back by inadequate collateral, lower property ownership and financial literacy. Further up the ladder, less than 5 per cent of India's VC funding goes to start-ups with a woman founder. Part of the reason is pitch-room dynamics. Studies have shown that investors ask women founders more "prevention" questions—about risk, safety, what could go wrong—while men are asked "promotion" questions, about growth and scale.

Cities have opened a door for women that didn't exist a decade ago. But walking through it still means clearing a commute, a public square, a boardroom and a bank. Until all four are rebuilt for her, closing the gap with men will take far longer than it needs to.

The writer headed Crisil and ONI

From Hormuz to Malacca, Delhi must draw the right lessons



ARUN PRAKASH

AS WASHINGTON finished celebrating America's 250th Independence Day, millions in Tehran, defying predictions, filed past their slain Supreme Leader's remains to pay homage. The Strait of Hormuz, locked in a volatile "strategic pause", has now erupted in a renewed spasm of extreme violence. The tension and uncertainty that have become inherent in the Persian Gulf vividly illustrate how geography can be weaponised to hold the global economy and world peace to ransom.

Violence had returned on June 25, when Iran attacked a Singapore-flagged merchant vessel that failed to comply with its prescribed routing instructions. This was followed by a brief exchange of air and missile strikes with US forces, and a nominal pause in hostilities. The pause was short-lived because each interdiction by Iran of what it considered "errant" merchantmen provoked a retaliatory US strike.

The Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed on June 17, was intended to establish a 60-day provisional ceasefire between the US-Israel coalition and Iran. As many feared, the shaky agreement began to crumble soon after its signing under the weight of conflicting interpretations and rigid positions adopted by all parties.

On July 8, shortly after President Donald Trump declared the MoU "dead", US Central Command announced on social media that "US forces completed a new round of offensive strikes against Iran, hitting over 80 targets... as an immediate response to Iran's latest attacks on vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz". This is a disarming indication that both trigger-happy nations are willing to risk the complete collapse of this fragile agreement.

At the heart of the discord lies Article 5 of the MoU, which mandates that Iran use its "best efforts" to ensure the safe passage of commercial vessels through the Strait. Tehran views the MoU as recognition of its authority to regulate traffic within its territorial waters, while Washington rejects this, insisting the Strait must be governed by the principles of free "transit passage" guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Israel had distanced itself from the MoU, maintaining that the ceasefire did not constrain its military operations against Hezbollah, and its forces continued to wreak death and destruction well inside Lebanon. Given that the deeper roots of this whole conflict lie in Tel Aviv and in Israel's underlying aim of eliminating Iran's military and nuclear capabilities as well as its top leadership, Iran's possible response remains an imponderable of intense concern to the world.

For Iran, engaged in a grossly unequal conflict in which it has suffered tremendous devastation, accompanied by extreme economic hardship due to prolonged sanctions, the Strait is the final strategic card left for it to play. A huge chasm persists between Iran's demand for security guarantees and economic relief, and the US stipulations in respect of

uranium enrichment by Iran and freedom of navigation. Unless mediators like Pakistan and Qatar can hammer out yet another modus vivendi, the Islamabad peace process may have breathed its last and the region risks sliding back into an open-ended crisis.

These events show how quickly rising tensions can turn maritime chokepoints into geopolitical flashpoints, disrupting shipping lanes and global supply chains. As international competition grows, the ability to threaten these critical routes for energy, trade, and commerce undermines economic stability and highlights why a rules-based international order must be urgently restored.

Closer to home, parallels are being drawn between Hormuz and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, situated at the mouth of the Malacca Strait, as a fulcrum of naval dominance in India's eastern waters. Coincidentally, a mega project that envisages a deepwater port, an international airport and a township on Great Nicobar Island—a mere 90 miles from the Indonesian port of Sabang—is awaiting final government approval. Proponents of this project claim that apart from its economic benefits, the project would bolster India's regional security posture and act as a deterrent for China's maritime ambitions in the Indian Ocean region.

While the absence of military fortification of the Andaman and Nicobar Command has been a long-overdue lacuna, equating India's potential leverage over Malacca with Iran's tight grip on Hormuz could be misleading. Whereas the Strait of Hormuz is a short passage, dominated by a narrow bottleneck between Iran and Oman, the Strait of Malacca is a 1,100-kilometre-long transit corridor, running between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, which brook no external interference. Since Hormuz constitutes the Persian Gulf's sole exit, its closure means total maritime isolation of the littoral states. In the case of Malacca, there are alternative (albeit much longer) routes available via the Sunda, Lombok and Ombai-Wetar Straits, connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Given the vast ocean areas involved, interdiction or interference with international shipping via Malacca may be a bridge too far, even for a major naval power. And yet there is no doubt that the 800-kilometre north-south geographic position of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands enables India to dominate the Bay of Bengal, and our naval strategists must draw all the right lessons about sea control, trade-warfare and blockades, from the ongoing Persian Gulf melodrama.

While maintaining a low-key posture throughout this crisis, India has conveyed unmistakable but unwarranted signs of a significant "tilt" in one direction. In anticipation of the coming churn in regional geopolitics, India needs to grasp the earliest opportunity to restore diplomatic balance in its long-term national interest.

Given its cordial relations with all three belligerents, New Delhi needs to shed its diplomatic lassitude and leverage its moral and strategic weight to end the ongoing violence, which could engulf its neighbourhood. India must remonstrate strongly with all parties to abandon reckless brinkmanship, cease actions that threaten regional stability and world peace, and return to the negotiating table. The Global South is watching us.

The writer is a former Indian Navy chief

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Let people decide

OF LATE, interest in films based on historical episodes has created a market for such films ('Look back at the dark, shine a light on it', IE, July 9). Regrettably, the current administration sees a threat to national security whenever a film does not conform to its ideological agenda. This is why films like *The Kashmiri Martyrs*, *The Kerala Story*, and *Dhurandhar* were not only free of such concerns but were also promoted at the highest levels. The directive to withdraw the film *Satguru* from a limited-reach OTT platform has only ignited public curiosity. Why not let the people be the final arbiters of historical events, however painful they may have been?

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

Restoring fairness

PRATAP BHANU Mehta's distinction

between visible corruption and market-shaping favouritism deserves attention ('When corruption does not make a political noise', IE, July 9). Restoring competitiveness requires depoliticised regulatory bodies and stricter disclosure norms governing business-government dealings. Political parties across the spectrum must be held to the same standard.

M Barathi, Bengaluru

Cricket woes

FOUR STRAIGHT losses after a T20 World Cup triumph demand answers that go beyond personnel changes ('Four defeats in a cricket quest', IE, July 9). The real reset lies in tactical change. The IPL has bred power, but Test cricket taught the value of changing gears. Unless India teaches both, collapses will recur and "reset" will become routine.

Veda Chidanand, Bengaluru



YASHEE

SBI HAS a new ad. I have multiple questions. The ad says, "Your child will study mechanical engineering and then start a yoga studio. Get ready for life's surprises with long-term SIPs." I duly sat down and thought about long-term SIPs.

The more I thought, the more it left me confused. Am I being asked to plan for my retirement years because the yoga-instructing child won't be able to provide for me? Am I supposed to save so I can fund my yoga studio? Would the mechanical engineer automatically have been the provider type? Turning to the internet for an answer, I searched "SBI mechanical engineering yoga ad". Turns out, other insurance firms have similar offerings, and there is quite a conversation on the subject on social media. From

Spend on your child's future, draw a line

these, some common threads emerged. There is the earnest "dignity and independence in your silver years" framing. There is the rather aggressive "spend on yourself, don't leave a penny for these ingrates" framing. There is the sappy "be the wind beneath your children's wings forever" framing.

Where will the draw line on spending money on your child, assuming money is neither unlimited nor so limited as to make such thought experiments unnecessary? Millennial parents are conflicted lot. We are overflowing with good intentions, but not quite sure where to direct them. The answer, I realise, is learnt early in parenthood. The same struggles you had about time when your kid was a baby will be repeated with money when they are older. Whatever worked for you then will work in the future.

I tried being the martyr mom when my daughter was born. Every waking moment (and most moments were waking moments)

was to be spent in her service, every recommendation of what is "best" for her to be followed, irrespective of the cost to me. Did not work out great. I was tired, yes. But more than that, I was resentful and bitter.

Thankfully, I soon realised what my kid needed most of all was a happy mother. A mom who could summon genuine enthusiasm for playing with her, not just a sweaty sense of duty. However, I do know friends who can put up with all sorts of hardships as long as they are meeting the standard of "responsible and dutiful" they have set for themselves or inherited from their parents.

The same approach works for money. Spend on your children till it doesn't make you resentful. Spend on them till the point you can do so without expecting returns. Spend out of duty if it makes you happy, but remember, they have no obligation to feel the same sense of duty. Stop the day you start reminding them of how much you have spent. Instead, tell them that you

need to look after yourself too, and this is all the money you had for them. If that makes them resentful, that is for them to figure out. And you have to make peace with their resentment. Better to deal with someone else's resentment in reasonable comfort than simmer yourself while also worrying about money.

Our job is to educate them, equip them for the world, teach them how to make choices, and then stand back and watch them make those choices. If the choices go wrong, we can shelter them till they feel brave enough to make new ones. Our job is not to fund the choices and then weigh them down with our expectations. I would much rather enrol in my kid's yoga studio than fund an expensive mechanical engineering Master's and expect her to pay for my medical expenses later.

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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

HISTORY

How Indonesia's iconic Prambanan temple was lost and rediscovered

Nikita Mohita
New Delhi, July 9

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi's visit to Yogyakarta, Indonesia, this week marked the beginning of India's effort to help restore the iconic Prambanan Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Prambanan Temple Complex, located on the island of Java, comprise Prambanan Temple (also known as Loro Jonggrang or Candil Prambanan), Sewu Temple, Bubrah Temple, and Lumbung Temple.

The birth of a temple

The Sanjaya dynasty ruled the Mataram Kingdom in Central Java during the eighth and ninth centuries. It is generally associated with the revival of Shaivite Hinduism on the island. Its dominance was challenged by the Sailendra dynasty, a powerful Buddhist royal house.

Following the end of the reign of Samaratungga of the Sailendra dynasty, Rakai Pikatan of the Sanjaya dynasty is believed to have married Samaratungga's daughter, Pramodawardhani, and ruled between 842 and 856 CE. He commissioned Prambanan as a grand Hindu sanctuary. In his journal article *Magnificent Prambanan and Borobudur Temples* (2026), researcher Hary Gunarto notes that the construction of Prambanan was intended to mark the return of the Hindu Sanjaya dynasty to power after nearly a century of Buddhist Sailendra dominance. Although the construction date is uncertain, inscriptions record the consecration of the temple in 856 CE.

The marriage of a Hindu ruler and a Buddhist princess is often seen as a symbol of religious harmony, also reflected in the architecture of Prambanan. The temple incorporates a Buddhist stupa-like element atop its superstructure, while Buddhist artistic influences are visible across the complex.

For roughly the next century, Prambanan served as a key pilgrimage centre. But around 929-930 CE, the political centre of the Mataram Kingdom shifted to East Java. While this move is often linked to the eruption of Mount Merapi, historians have also suggested political and economic reasons. As Central Java was abandoned, Prambanan fell into disuse and was eventually buried beneath vegetation and volcanic debris.

Rediscovering Prambanan

Who first rediscovered Prambanan after centuries of abandonment remains a matter of debate. One possible earlier visitor was the 15th-century East Javanese court poet Mpu Tanakung. He wrote: "A great temple complex from ancient time rose near a mountain stream, and the path there was lonely." Scholars have noted striking similarities between his account and Prambanan.

Another figure associated with the site's rediscovery is Thomas Stamford Raffles, Lieutenant-Governor of Java during the British interregnum (1811-16), who took a keen interest in documenting its ancient monuments. An even earlier European account comes from C.A. Lons, an official of the Dutch East India Company. As Roy E. Jordan notes in *In Praise of Prambanan* (1996): "Lons was an employee of the Dutch East Indies Company who in 1733, while staying at the court of the Javanese sultan as a member of an embassy made a sightseeing tour of a number of temple ruins and reported on these to his superiors."

Prambanan has since undergone several phases of restoration, many of them interrupted by World War II and Indonesia's independence struggle. "Thus the reconstruction of the main temple, which had been in progress since 1918, was only completed in 1953, under a new national flag. The inauguration ceremonies were conducted by Soekarno, Indonesia's first president," writes Jordan.



A view of the Prambanan Temple complex. PT

POLICY

Revamped EPFO portal: Centralised database, with easier claim filing & info access

Aanchal Magazine
& Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, July 9

AS THE Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), India's retirement fund body, rolls out a revamped portal, members will be able to access all their details on a unified portal along with faster auto-crediting of interest by July 15.

One of the most important features of the Centralised IT Enabled Services (CITES) project under the EPFO 2.01 initiative is the move towards a centralised database. It follows the merger of information from all regional centres, which will allow members to resolve their issues at any regional EPFO office and not necessarily in their city of employment, where Provident Fund deductions may have happened.

"The EPFO has completed the process of migrating its entire database of member records to the new centralised database. Earlier, the services were tied to a particular

Regional Office. Now, a member's service request can be processed from any authorised location across the country," the Ministry of Labour and Employment said in a statement on Wednesday.

Centralised database

The new portal enables automated processes, including crediting of interest, online processing of claims verification, and a facility to view the eligible amount for withdrawals under various claim categories.

A centralised database is a significant measure that will help employees who migrate for work and also the PF members who struggle to find solutions at a particular regional office, as has happened in the past. For instance, if an employee has worked in Chennai and moves back to their hometown in West Bengal, they can access their records and resolve any issues at the EPFO office in West Bengal instead of travelling to the Chennai office.

The new portal will also help expedite

the annual interest crediting process by July 15, which would earlier get delayed to October-November. Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday said the annual interest of Rs 1.44 lakh crore for financial year 2025-26 will be auto-processed on the new portal and verified by field authorities before being credited to 34 crore EPFO accounts by July 15. The EPFO has nearly 8 crore contributing members.

Also, under the revised system, interest for the final PF settlements will now be calculated up to the date of payment authorisation. Earlier, interest was calculated only up to the last day of the previous month. "This ensures that members receive the benefit of additional interest for the intervening period," the ministry said.

Pre-validation of claims

Member claims will undergo automated pre-validation before processing at EPFO offices, as per the Ministry statement. In a first-time feature, any defi-

ciencies or discrepancies will be identified and will be communicated to the EPF members through SMS and the portal.

"Wherever additional information or clarification is required during claim processing, EPFO offices will be able to raise queries online through the system. Members can respond online, enabling faster resolution, minimising physical visits to EPFO offices, and further reducing claim rejections," the ministry said.

In another new feature, members will be able to view the eligible amount for withdrawal from their PF account under the different claim categories. These measures are aimed at improving first-time acceptance rates and reducing claim rejections, as high claim rejection rates have been a key concern over the last few years. "Earlier, members did not have clear visibility of the amount they were eligible to withdraw under different withdrawal categories. As a result, claims exceeding the permissible limit were often rejected," the ministry said.

Streamlined claims

Members will have access to a unified digital interface to view their membership details, provident fund balances, claim status, pensionable service records, and benefits awarded. This is to ensure transparency and access to information about their PF account and submission of claims, the ministry said.

Member claims for advances upto Rs 5 lakh, which are fully KYC-linked and validated, will be processed through an auto-settlement mechanism, it said.

In October 2025, the EPFO announced a slew of changes to its withdrawal norms by streamlining the withdrawal categories from 13 to three — essential needs (illness, education, marriage), housing needs, and special circumstances, along with an introduction of a minimum balance of 25%.

Members can withdraw funds in case of illness of self and family members, up to 100% of the eligible member balance, after completion of 12 months of total member-

ship. The 100% eligible member balance means withdrawal of 75% of the total funds, as 25% is a mandatory minimum balance requirement. The full 100% amount can be withdrawn after remaining unemployed for one year.

Members can also withdraw money for the education of self and family members after 12 months of membership, subject to a maximum of 10 withdrawals during their membership. For marriage of self and family members, members can withdraw up to 100% of the eligible member balance, with a maximum of five withdrawals during their membership.

For housing-related requirements, a member may be allowed partial withdrawal for the purchase of a flat or house; for construction of a house; construction of a house; repayment of a home loan obtained for purchase, construction of a flat or house or for acquisition of a site; and additions, alterations, renovations or improvements to an existing house or flat.

ECONOMY

Lessons for India from Brazil's ethanol pathway



ANIL SASI

IN THE mid-1970s, faced with surging oil import bills and an imploding global sugar market, Brazil made a bold bet: it would run its cars on alcohol. Half a century later, this Brazilian push to ramp up ethanol use in its auto fuel mix is now a masterpiece in bio-fuel adoption.

There are perhaps three key enabling factors that have made this a success: a graded, spaced-out approach to fuel blending with predefined milestones; the vehicle ecosystem being given enough time to adapt to this transition in tandem with clear guidance to motorists; and offering choice and price incentives for consumers to shift to ethanol that is now enshrined in a national law. This is a contrast to India's rushed efforts to incorporate ethanol into its fuel mix.

Context for adoption

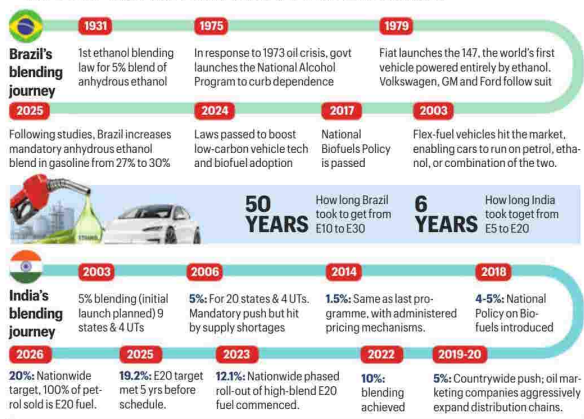
Let's consider the timing. In response to the 1973 global oil crisis, the Brazilian government launched the National Alcohol Program (Proálcool) in 1975 to reduce petroleum dependence by promoting ethanol adoption. But its first ethanol blending law, Brazil's legislation requiring a 5% blend of anhydrous ethanol into petrol, goes all the way back to 1931. This decades-long arc culminated in the 2024 'Fuel of the Future' and 'Mover Program' legislation to boost low-carbon vehicle tech and biofuel adoption, with E30 petrol blend mandated in 2025.

The timeline of India's ethanol-blended petrol programme technically spans 2003 to 2026. Even in that, much of the action is front-loaded. It was only in 2022 that 10% ethanol blending was achieved, with a rapid increase to 20% in just three years.

The government originally planned to disperse petrol blended with 20% ethanol only by 2030, but E20 is now the nationwide standard. Since then, there has been a move to shift to E25 as the base fuel, with a simultaneous push for E85-100 fuels for specialised flex-fuel vehicles (FFVs).

FFVs are essentially internal combustion engine vehicles engineered to operate on more than one type of fuel — typically petrol blended with ethanol or methanol. These

THE DIVERGENT ETHANOL BLENDING ARCS



BRAZILIAN SUGARCANE AND BIOENERGY INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION; MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS; MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS

vehicles use a fuel composition sensor to automatically adjust fuel injection and ignition timing based on the blend in the tank, allowing seamless switching between petrol and ethanol and varying degrees of blend.

Getting the infra ready

On the second aspect of reading the vehicular ecosystem, too, big differences emerge. Brazil started early with its policy to promote FFVs. These vehicles, running for over two decades now, are seen as the drivers of the country's transition to a cleaner mobility model.

It was way back in 1979 that Italian auto major Fiat launched the 147, the world's first vehicle powered entirely by ethanol in Brazil. Volkswagen, GM, and Ford quickly followed suit amid a global oil price fall. The Brazilian auto industry subsequently started producing FFVs at scale from early 2003, when ethanol seemed economically viable again.

On March 23 that year, Volkswagen introduced the first flex-fuel vehicle to the

Brazilian market, and other companies — including GM and Ford — followed suit, according to data from consultancy Argus. Toyota brought in its Corolla flex. FFVs went from selling just 48,178 units in 2003, or under 4% of total light motor vehicle demand, to 1.63 million vehicles last year, or nearly 90% of the Brazilian car fleet. The domestic car industry also reached a milestone of having delivered 40 million flex-fuel vehicles as of February since 2003, according to Brazilian industry body Anfavea.

In India, as E85 fuel dispensing stations are being established nationwide, only a few vehicle prototypes are in the works.

While the flex fuel setup entails an entirely separate vehicle category and a range of fresh vehicle readiness certifications, as of now, India has only a handful of cars in the category: the newly launched WagonR flex fuel model and the Toyota Hycross hybrid flex-fuel prototype, the Tata Punch and Hyundai Creta flex fuel versions, alongside some two-wheeler makers including Hero and TVS. Most cars and two-wheelers on

Brazil's FFV push

Flex-fuel vehicles (FFVs) are engineered to operate on more than one fuel.

FFVs have been driving cleaner mobility in Brazil for around two decades now.

Brazil's first ethanol blending law goes all the way back to 1931. Its success story was built over decades of policy and offering choices to consumers

Indian roads are not geared up for handling higher blends of ethanol in the fuel mix.

Commuter choice

Over the past five decades, Brazil has worked to give the power of choice to its motorists. At nearly every petrol pump in Brazil now, people have an option to choose between blended petrol, which typically includes E27 ethanol, and E100, which is pure hydrous ethanol. Alongside that, since Brazilians got carmakers to switch to FFVs, consumers can fill up with whichever option is cheaper at the pump on a particular day. Often, E100 is cheaper by 25-35% compared to lower blended petrol.

Flex fuel cars were a hit with Brazilian consumers, largely because government price support made the blended fuel cheaper than petrol. Ethanol also improves acceleration and reduces knocking (the sound that occurs when fuel ignites unevenly inside the engine cylinder). By the late 1980s, nine out of every 10 new cars sold in Brazil were capable of running on ethanol alone.

In India, motorists were told that performance would not be affected. But the definition of performance did not include mileage. That has come back to bite the decision-makers, as vehicle owners noticed a sharp dip in fuel efficiency, with the promise of more efficiency less as blending increases. Concerns over vehicle damage appear somewhat overstated, though there are concerns about plastic and rubber parts getting degraded in older vehicles.

All the while, Brazil was focusing on blended fuel and ethanol, implementing policies in a phased manner to ensure that people who had bought vehicles earlier did not feel at a disadvantage.

Questions for India

In India, the push to progressively raise ethanol blending in petrol from the current E20 level to E25, before transitioning towards flex-fuel vehicles and E85-E100 fuels, is an integral part of the strategy to reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels.

According to an official, "India's future mobility ecosystem will combine EVs, bio-fuels, hydrogen and renewables in a manner suited to Indian realities". India currently imports nearly 88.5% of its crude oil requirement, making the economy and energy security vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions. "But the road to energy independence, which has been paved with inadequate disclaimers or preparation, raises serious questions.

objective of his removal was moot.

What are the implications of tabling the report now?

Tabling the report against Justice Varma would serve two major purposes. First, it would bring the findings of a constitutionally-mandated taxpayer-funded inquiry into the public domain. Lawyer and legal scholar Alok Prasanna Kumar said this was an opportunity for the Speaker to "overturn the unfortunate precedent set in the Dinakaran case".

"This is not just a removal process but an accountability process that allows the public to know whether a judge has committed misconduct," Kumar explained. "This is an inquiry conducted on public money under a constitutional process, and we as the public are entitled to know what the committee has found."

Second, the findings could have legal and financial consequences. Upon resignation, a judge is typically entitled to the same pensionary benefits as one who retires normally from service. A formal impeachment inquiry into the public domain, a judge is typically entitled to the same pensionary benefits as one who retires normally from service. A formal impeachment inquiry into the public domain, a judge is typically entitled to the same pensionary benefits as one who retires normally from service. A formal impeachment inquiry into the public domain, a judge is typically entitled to the same pensionary benefits as one who retires normally from service.

LEGAL

Tabling report on Justice Varma: Accountability after resignation

Vineet Bhalla
New Delhi, July 9

LOKSABHA Speaker Om Birla's decision to table the report of the parliamentary committee probing former Allahabad High Court Judge Yashwant Varma puts India's judicial accountability framework into uncharted territory. When Justice Varma resigned in April, it was through the impeachment proceedings against him had hit a dead end. But experts argue that tabling the report is a crucial step for public accountability, challenging a long-held assumption that a judge's resignation automatically extinguishes a parliamentary probe.

What does the law say about a judge's resignation?

Under Article 217, a High Court judge can resign by writing to the President. In 1978, the Supreme Court ruled that a judge's resignation is a unilateral act that takes effect immediately on the date chosen by the judge, without needing formal acceptance.

Why did previous impeachment probes lapse?

No judge has ever been impeached in India. In 2011, impeachment proceedings

against Sikkim High Court Chief Justice P D Dinakaran and Calcutta High Court judge Soumitra Sen were dropped after they resigned.

Justice Dinakaran had resigned while the committee was in the midst of its probe against him. The Rajya Sabha secretariat reasoned that since the goal of the probe was the removal of the judge, a resignation rendered the process meaningless.

The same rationale was followed when Justice Sen resigned, with Lok Sabha dropping the impeachment vote even though Rajya Sabha had passed the impeachment motion against him before he had resigned.

Legal scholars, however, point out that the law does not explicitly state that an inquiry must lapse upon resignation. Shubhankar Dam, Chair Professor of Public Law and Governance at the University of Portsmouth School of Law, said that the 1978 Supreme Court judgment did not account for the implications of a judge resigning while facing a misconduct probe.

"After the precedent set by Justices Dinakaran and Sen, resignation is the easiest way for judges to evade accountability and retain post-retirement benefits," Dam said. He added that the report matters as parliamentary and public record of a judge's conduct.

The Justice Varma case

● Last year, wads of burnt currency notes were recovered from Justice Varma's official residence.

● An in-house probe by the Supreme Court reportedly found him culpable.

● Over 146 Lok Sabha MPs moved a motion for his removal. The Speaker constituted a three-member committee under the Judges (Inquiry) Act.

● Before the panel could conclude its hearings, Justice Varma resigned.

Was there any resistance to ending the Justice Dinakaran probe?

During the Justice Dinakaran impeachment episode in 2011, Jurist G Mohan Gopal, then a member of the panel probing the judge, had written to his fellow committee members urging them to complete the investigation despite the judge's resignation less than three weeks earlier.

In his letter, Gopal drew a distinction between the two parts of the procedure under the Judges (Inquiry) Act: the "investigation and proof" of misbehaviour, and the actual "removal from office" by Parliament. He argued that establishing the truthfulness of the charges is an end in itself.

"If judges are given the de facto power to 'vote' even this narrow sliver of accountability for misbehaviour, the public faith in the system may be eroded further," Gopal wrote. He warned that aborting the probe would create an "absurd situation" where a judge could end an investigation at any point simply by resigning.

Ultimately, the Justice Dinakaran probe was wound up, partly because a vacancy on the probe committee made it dysfunctional, and the Rajya Sabha chairman, Vice President Hamid Ansari, felt that after Justice Dinakaran's resignation, the primary

thehindubusinessline.

FRIDAY • JULY 10, 2026

All clear

EU clean chit to CCIL will boost financial flows

The extended stand-off between the European Securities Markets Authority (ESMA) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has come to an amicable end — without compromising the stature or autonomy of Indian regulators and institutions. This could lead to a turnaround in investment ties between India and EU. ESMA has recognised Clearing Corporation of India Limited as a Tier 1 third country counterparty under European regulations.



This allows clearing corporations, banks and investment companies from the EU region to clear their transactions through CCIL legally. Transaction costs for these entities will fall, paving the way for increased investments into India. Notably, the recognition does not allow the European markets regulator to oversee Indian clearing systems, thereby affirming the latter's robustness. The impasse began in 2023. RBI turned down the European regulator's demand that Indian clearing corporations be monitored, supervised and audited by ESMA, as mandated by the European Markets Infrastructure Regulations. Thereafter, Indian clearing houses were derecognised. Indian regulators naturally took objection to this demand, as it seemed to cast doubts on their supervisory capabilities — besides the prospect of allowing external regulators access to sensitive financial data. Even as the stalemate dragged on till late 2025, it is praiseworthy that RBI stood its ground. Meanwhile, European banks and investment companies witnessed a spike in their clearing cost due to the derecognition. A solution was arrived at during the EU President's visit to India in January, when RBI and ESMA signed a memorandum of understanding in this regard. The MoU states categorically that ESMA will rely on the regulatory framework of the RBI — thereby recognising that the RBI remains accountable in India for the activities of clearing corporations.

This recognition will go a long way towards improving cross border financial transactions between India and the EU. Institutions in the EU experienced an increase in transaction cost while clearing their deals through CCIL between 2023 and 2025. Dealing with a de-recognised clearing counterparty warrants higher risk buffers under EU regulations. Finding alternative routes for clearing money market, foreign exchange or bond investments turned out to be expensive. CCIL's recognition will be welcomed by global bond fund managers, who have ploughed money into India despite the rupee's weakness. Renewed flows will help support the rupee in these unpredictable times.

While FPIs have pulled out ₹2.68 lakh crore out of Indian equity markets so far in 2026, they have net purchased Indian debt securities amounting to ₹72,128 crore. Given the higher yields in India, global investors appear to be viewing Indian debt quite favourably. Along with the recent exemptions provided to FPIs from capital gains tax and tax on interest income from debt investments, enabling the CCIL to clear investments from EU will further promote investment flows.

POCKET: Life by Compute

RAVIKANTH



"Do you remember who said, 'I think, therefore, I am connected to the Internet'?"

Why currency stability is crucial

INDUSTRY HIT. Given exporters' reliance on imported intermediate goods, a weak rupee is not a competitive advantage



RAVI POKHARNA

The rupee's breach of the psychological 96-per-US Dollar mark has triggered familiar anxieties. Yet, this episode is less a reflection of weak domestic fundamentals and more about geopolitical tensions, elevated crude oil prices, and a structurally stronger US dollar.

India is not alone. Several emerging market currencies are facing pressure as capital seeks safety in dollar-denominated assets amid heightened global uncertainty.

The challenge before policymakers is therefore not to prevent every episode of depreciation. In a market-driven economy, currencies inevitably adjust to external shocks. The real policy objective must be to ensure that currency movements remain orderly, predictable, and non-disruptive to growth and investment.

For industry, this distinction is critical. Businesses can adapt to a gradually adjusting exchange rate. What disrupts production cycles, investment planning, pricing decisions, and working capital management is abrupt and disorderly volatility.

ANATOMY OF DECLINE

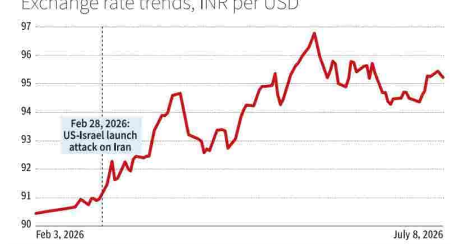
The rupee's current trajectory stems from three distinct external shocks: Geopolitical premium: The West Asia friction has escalated to a structural supply crisis with the near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of global energy supply transits. Consequently, the Indian crude oil basket surged from around \$69/bbl in February-2026 to \$114.48/bbl in April-2026 (PPAC). This primary energy shock accounted for over 70 per cent of India's import cost-push inflation; widening the Current Account Deficit and exerting structural pressure on the rupee (Observer Research Foundation).

Dollar imperative: Resilient US macroeconomic data, including an unemployment rate holding steady at 4.3 per cent (BLS), has reinforced a hawkish policy stance by the Federal Reserve. This has kept US yields elevated and sustained the strength of the Dollar Index (DXY), which continues to drive global capital into US assets.

Regional rotation: Shift toward safe-haven assets, triggered by the West Asia crisis, has seen global investors move out of capital and reduce exposure to emerging markets, capital and reduce exposure to emerging markets. In India, the Net FPI equity outflow stands at ₹2.69 Lakh Crore YTD in 2026 (up to



Exchange rate trends, INR per USD



Source: RBI

July 8, 2026). In contrast, for year 2025, the annual aggregate figure is ₹1.66 lakh crore. March-2026 saw the highest-ever monthly outflows, with foreign investors pulling out ₹1.17 lakh crore from domestic equities (NSDL).

WEAK REVS EXPORTS

Conventional macroeconomics assumes that a weaker currency boosts exports and strengthens domestic manufacturing. That is now only partially true. India's manufacturing ecosystem today is deeply integrated into global supply chains and remains significantly dependent on imported intermediate goods, machinery and components. Consequently, currency depreciation is no longer an unambiguous competitive advantage.

For industries such as electronics, engineering goods, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, renewable energy equipment and auto components, a weaker rupee raises input costs even as it improves export realisations. This trade-off is increasingly evident across sectors.

An electronics exporter may benefit from higher export earnings, but imported semiconductor components become costlier. Renewable energy developers face rising expenses for solar modules, battery cells, and storage systems, while chemical manufacturers contend with higher feedstock costs. Infrastructure and EPC projects also experience cost pressures where

An electronics exporter may benefit from higher export earnings, but imported semiconductor components become costlier

imported equipment is involved. Even textile exporters now depend on imported synthetic fibres and specialised inputs, limiting the gains from currency depreciation.

In an increasingly globalised economy, the traditional assumption that a weak rupee automatically boosts exports no longer holds true.

CURRENCY-GROWTH LINK

For industry, the larger concern today is imported production inflation and the resulting uncertainty across the investment cycle. India cannot sustainably aspire to become a global manufacturing hub if every external shock translates into rising industrial input costs, working-capital stress, and investment hesitation.

A prolonged period of elevated crude prices combined with rupee weakness simultaneously raises logistics costs, electricity tariffs, imported machinery prices, raw material costs, and financing burdens. The result is widespread margin compression across sectors. The challenge is particularly severe for MSMEs operating on thin margins, where even modest exchange-rate swings can materially affect profitability and cash flows.

This is why exchange-rate management can no longer be viewed solely as a monetary policy issue. Currency stability has now become a strategic industrial policy variable. True potential of Make in India, PLI, export-led manufacturing, and China+1 opportunity all depend on the ability of firms to operate within a reasonably predictable macroeconomic environment.

One of India's most powerful macroeconomic stabilisers is its global workforce. India received \$135.4 billion

in remittances in FY 2025 (Economic Survey 2025-26), making it the world's largest remittance recipient and providing an important cushion against external shocks. Policymakers must now view labour mobility, global skillings, and overseas workforce deployment as core pillars of external-sector resilience.

First, India should aggressively expand G2G skilled migration partnerships with labour-short economies. Much of the migration debate in India remains disproportionately focused on white-collar professionals in technology, finance, and consulting.

While these sectors remain important, an equally important opportunity lies in blue-collar segment. Several countries — Japan, Germany, Israel, Italy, Australia, and Gulf nations — are facing acute shortages across construction workers, welders, electricians, plumbers, caregivers, hospitality workers, manufacturing technicians et al., due to ageing populations and shrinking domestic labour pools. India possesses a significant demographic advantage in this context.

Second, India's skilling architecture must be more closely aligned with global labour market demand. The next phase of Skill India should not focus only on domestic employability, but on export-ready workforce creation. Language training, international certifications, digital capabilities, mobility-readiness programs should become key.

Finally, the policy ecosystem must support international talent integration through easier certification recognition, bilateral mobility frameworks, and digital trade facilitation. India must treat human capital mobility not as a peripheral labour issue, but as a central component of economic strategy and external-sector stability.

There is a tendency during periods of depreciation to over-index on currency weakness with economic weakness. This is analytically flawed. Many major economies, including export-oriented Asian economies, have historically tolerated periods of currency depreciation during external shocks. Exchange rates are adjustment mechanisms, not national scorecards.

India today enters this period from a position of significantly greater strength than in previous episodes of global stress. The task before policymakers now is to preserve macroeconomic stability, investment confidence, and growth momentum. At this moment of global uncertainty, stability and confidence may well be India's greatest competitive advantage.

The writer is Executive Director, Pabli India Foundation. With inputs from Kuntala Karkun, Senior Visiting Fellow, Pabli India Foundation

The minerals gap India cannot afford to ignore

India's demand for critical minerals is rising, and this could be leveraged by countries that control output and refining

Ganesh Valiachi

The next great resource contest is not over oil. It is over lithium, cobalt, graphite, and rare earth elements, the minerals without which no battery charges, no wind turbine turns, and no electric motor runs.

Major powers have recognised this. The US has committed \$12 billion to strategic mineral stockpiling. The European Union has signed 15 supply partnerships. China already controls the refining of most of what the world needs. India has recognised it too, but recognition, so far, has not translated into urgency.

The world's supply of critical energy transition minerals (CEMTs) is concentrated in the hands of a very few. The top three countries control 91 per cent of global cobalt mine output, 90 per cent of rare earth production, and 86 per cent of both graphite and lithium mine output. More critically, refining, where the real economic value is captured, is even more concentrated. China dominates the refining of rare earths, lithium, and cobalt. Indonesia controls 43 per cent of global nickel refining capacity.

India has set itself some of the most

ambitious clean energy targets in the world: 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030, aggressive EV adoption targets, and a rapidly growing semiconductor manufacturing ambition. Each of these goals is mineral-intensive.

India currently produces negligible quantities of most of these minerals domestically. It has limited refining capacity. And it has no significant strategic stockpile to buffer against supply disruptions, unlike Japan, which subsidises up to 50 per cent of eligible CEMT project costs and maintains government-backed stockpiles, or the US, which in 2026 launched Project Vault, a \$12-billion public-private critical mineral reserve. The gap between India's clean energy ambitions and its mineral security posture is, at present, very wide.

India already accounts for 4.4 per cent of global rare earth permanent magnet imports, a figure that will only grow as EV and wind capacity expand. Nearly all of it traces back to China refining, a dependency that receives far less policy attention than it deserves.

The UNCTAD report documents that since 2020, nearly 100 new export restrictive measures have been introduced on CEMTs globally: 37



RARE EARTHS. No time to lose REUTES

licensing requirements, 31 export taxes, and 29 export bans. China alone has introduced 16 measures, predominantly licensing requirements framed around national security. The message is clear: countries that control critical minerals are increasingly willing to use that control as strategic leverage.

THE DIPLOMATIC GAP

The UNCTAD report identifies India as one of a small group of major economies leading the expansion of CEMT bilateral partnerships, alongside the EU, the US, Canada, Indonesia, and Japan. This recognition is welcome. But recognition of intent is not the same as demonstrated capacity.

The US signed 11 bilateral mineral

frameworks at a single ministerial meeting in February 2026, involving 54 countries. The EU has signed 15 strategic mineral partnerships, backed by a €2 billion European Investment Bank financing commitment.

India's bilateral engagement, while growing, has not yet reached a comparable scale, speed, or financial commitment. The window for securing favourable partnerships with mineral-rich nations, particularly in Africa and Latin America, is competitive and narrowing.

Countries like the DRC, Zimbabwe, and Zambia are being actively courted by multiple major powers simultaneously. India cannot afford a leisurely diplomatic pace.

India possesses significant rare earth deposits that remain underexploited, and diplomatic credibility with mineral-rich developing nations that could be leveraged more effectively than they currently are.

The global race for critical minerals is already well underway. India needs to run analytically, strategically, and with conviction.

The writer is an Assistant Professor at Symbolis Institute of International Business, Pune. Views are personal

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

Defending E20 petrol

This refers to the report: ISMA defends E20 petrol, says social media claims lack scientific backing (July 9). The sugar industry body, which obviously has a conflict of interest in the promotion of ethanol, has come to the government's rescue for its decision on E20 petrol.

It is perplexing why the government maintains that no E20-related engine failure incident has come to its attention when many motorists have shared their experience of fuel pump

damage due to the E20 petrol, with video evidence. Why would one object to blended petrol if it actually benefited them? The government should not dismiss consumers' concerns when a majority of on-road vehicles in the country are from the pre-2023 period.

Even before the Supreme Court, the government has recently admitted that "mixing ethanol with petrol is only an experiment, whose results would come by next year." Many experts even warn that ethanol saves

less fossil fuel energy than it directly and indirectly takes to produce.

Kamal Laddha
Bengaluru

Trump's another shock

Apropos 'Sensex tanks over 2% as crude on US dollar war fears' (July 9), Donald Trump's remark that the ceasefire with Iran had effectively collapsed has kindled fears of a wider West Asia conflict. The renewed tensions triggered a sharp fall in Indian equities, with the

Sensex plunging over 2 per cent amid rising crude oil prices. These developments threaten global economic and financial stability. The US and Iran must act with restraint and revive diplomatic efforts.

PV Prakash
Mumbai

Moonson worries

Apropos the article 'Moonson depression remains' (July 9), the writer rightly highlights that Indian

agriculture continues to depend heavily on the monsoon despite expanded irrigation facilities. While the article effectively stresses the need for climate-resilient farming and efficient water management, it could also have highlighted successful examples of watershed development and rainwater harvesting that have reduced monsoon dependence in several regions.

P Mehalgam
Viduthangur

Improving cash transfers

It's time to construct a policy framework

A new study published by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) shows how cash-transfer schemes for women are working. The study focuses on Maharashtra and Odisha. Under the Mukhyamantri Mahil Ladki Bahin Yojana, the Maharashtra government transfers ₹1,500 per month to eligible women. The Odisha government, under the Subhadra Yojana, transfers ₹10,000 per year in biannual instalments. Given that such schemes have become popular, both politically and among constituents, all efforts to study their outcomes should be welcomed. The study finds that the month-end balance of beneficiaries in Maharashtra increased by about 84 per cent, while spending increased by about 46 per cent. Meanwhile, the Odisha programme led to a balance increase of about 45 per cent, while spending went up about 28 per cent. The study has highlighted various other aspects, such as the composition of spending and other positive spillovers.

Although the study is likely to attract interest from various stakeholders, the headline findings are not surprising directionally. Along with evidence from other parts of the world, it is expected that regular and predictable cash transfers will make beneficiaries better off. However, other dimensions of cash-transfer schemes also need adequate attention. What will be the future of such schemes, and can cash transfers be scaled up to achieve other public policy objectives? As the study notes, at the end of 2025-26, over 15 states had introduced some form of unconditional cash transfer for women. More states will likely follow this model. Estimated expenditure on such schemes is around ₹1.7 trillion, with about 120 million women benefiting. However, it is worth noting that these schemes are mostly additional expenditure for states, which may prove costly to finance over time. A study by PRS Legislative Research last year showed that half the states with such a scheme in 2025-26 were expected to run a revenue deficit. In other words, they are borrowing from the market to fund these transfers, which may become difficult to sustain. Besides, there are other cash transfer schemes.

As the Sixteenth Finance Commission (SFC) noted, large-group cash transfers increased from 3 per cent of revenue subsidies in 2018-19 to over 20 per cent in 2025-26 (Budget estimate or BE). The total subsidies in 21 states included in an SFC analysis increased from 2.2 per cent of their combined gross state domestic product in 2018-19 to 2.7 per cent in 2025-26 (BE). Since cash-transfer schemes are usually announced around elections, there is nothing to stop incumbents from substantially increasing the amount. In terms of political outcomes, such schemes also potentially tilt the balance in favour of incumbents.

So what can be done? The trend in cash transfers is unlikely to be reversed. More studies are likely to show the benefits of such schemes. However, policy-makers should not lose sight of fiscal implications and broader socioeconomic objectives. Since the Union government also makes cash transfers, consolidating such transfers to households to improve efficiency, with a possible upper limit based on an informed assessment, would make sense. Other subsidies such as those on food and fertilisers may also be included. Economists have long argued that cash transfers are a vastly more efficient way of supporting households. Furthermore, hard fiscal rules need to be implemented to ensure that subsidies are not financed by cutting productive expenditure. This will require a political consensus and resolve.

Ankara's ambiguous outcomes

Mr Trump overwhelms Nato's best intentions

It speaks volumes for the state of the 77-year-old North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Nato) that its 32 member states thought it necessary to reaffirm the "ironclad commitment" to collective defence under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, in which "an attack on one is an attack on all". This foundational tenet has been under threat, with United States (US) President Donald Trump consistently deriding the adequacy of European defence spending and the value of the alliance. If the latest two-day summit in the 1,500-room Bastepe Presidential complex in Ankara, Turkey — home to Nato's largest active military — sought to underline anything, it was the European and Canadian allies' resolve to strengthen their commitments to countering threats from Russia. Unsurprisingly, defence budgets and support for Ukraine topped the official agenda.

The alliance last year had raised investment in core defence requirements by more than \$139 billion. In Ankara, the alliance announced a further \$50 billion in new procurement of a range of equipment from European and US manufacturers — such as early warning systems from Sweden's Saab, surveillance aircraft from Northrop Grumman, a military-transport vehicle fleet from Airbus, and missile deals with Lockheed Martin. The alliance also pledged \$70 billion in military equipment, assistance and training for Ukraine, a non-Nato member, in its war against Russia. For all that, only five Nato members are projected to meet the alliance's goal, set at the Hague summit last year, of 3.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) on core defence, up from the previous goal of 2 per cent. These expenditures are mostly by countries vulnerable to Russian aggression — Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Greece. The Big Three — Germany, the United Kingdom, and France — will continue to spend slightly over the historic 2 per cent target. The US is estimated to be spending 3.17 per cent, and shares with Germany the largest proportion of Nato's direct funding (roughly 14 per cent each).

None of this calibrated messaging appeared to have an effect on Mr Trump, whose erratic performance has only accentuated uncertainty over US intentions. The only gainer was Ukraine, with Mr Trump and Volodymyr Zelenskyy setting aside earlier acrimony to sign an agreement extending the right to produce the expensive Patriot missile systems to Kyiv. But even as the US President hailed the summit as a "tremendous success" that yielded "a lot of unity", he reiterated US designs on the Danish territory of Greenland and ordered an immediate halt to trade with Spain (a "terrible partner") over defence spending and the war in West Asia.

Inevitably, the region loomed over the summit as a point of contention, with Spain closing its airspace to US military aircraft for operations against Iran, and Italy denying the US permission to use a Sicilian airbase for West Asian deployment (for which relations with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni are in meltdown). It is notable that Mr Trump chose the summit to end the truce and announce the launch of dozens of strikes on Iran on July 8 in apparent retaliation for Iranian strikes on ships in the Strait of Hormuz. The attacks have increased uncertainty for the global economy, leading to higher prices of crude oil and sharp cuts in stock prices. The Ankara summit, thus, ended with mixed messages. Nothing exemplifies this better than the fact that the next summit, originally scheduled to be held in Albania, is in doubt owing to US objections over its low defence spending. No mention of the country or a date was there in the Ankara Summit Declaration.



Bullish markets, bearish fundamentals

Risks to the global economy persist, and it is far too early to celebrate

Two months ago, this column wondered who was right about the Iran conflict, the market or the experts.

The experts saw the conflict stretching out and oil prices rising to \$120 per barrel or more. The price of oil in the markets stayed below \$100 per barrel for the most part, indicating that the conflict would not last more than six weeks. The markets have been proved right, the experts wrong.

The markets were right then. But were they right in pricing Brent crude oil futures at as low as \$72 per barrel right up to December until two days ago? Had the ceasefire and the resumption of oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz indeed ushered in a period of plentiful oil? Can we see the inflation rate trending down and central banks cutting interest rates? There is exuberance in the markets — the S&P 500 has risen 9 per cent since the Iran conflict erupted on February 28. It is almost as if the Iran conflict never happened.

The experts are divided at the moment. Some go with the market's bearish view on oil prices (assuming there is no return to a full-scale war). Others see the price of oil in the coming months in the \$80-\$100 per barrel range. The bearish view is hard to comprehend. Oil prices were contained at below \$100 per barrel because nations have drawn on their strategic reserves to offset the fall in output. Following the ceasefire, there has been a surge in oil supplies through the Strait of Hormuz. Much of the surge represents oil already loaded on tankers and stuck in the Strait during the conflict. It is not the result of any additional output of oil in the region. Nevertheless, the oil market seems to

price the surge in supply as though production in the region will soon return to normal levels.

The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) provides sobering corrective to the market's exuberance (Annual Report, 2026). It underlines several risks facing the world economy. The biggest risk is that oil prices stay elevated.

The report says: "Physical damage to energy infrastructure means supply losses are likely to persist even after the end of the conflict... Even without a blockade, global oil and gas supply could remain well below pre-conflict capacity for months or even years." The BIS places the disruption to supply at 10 million barrels a day, or 13 per cent of normal supply. Such a disruption must be expected to "drive a persistent premium in oil and natural gas prices."

Even as supply is disrupted, nations will use the ceasefire period to shore up depleted reserves. United States Vice-President J.D. Vance captured the sentiment correctly, if somewhat tactlessly, when he said the pause in the conflict was meant to "refill the world's oil economy," to "refill some stocks". How oil prices can trend downwards in such a situation is hard to comprehend.

There are three other risks that the BIS report highlights. First, the inflationary impact of the damage that has already happened will be hard to shake off in the near future. Global inflation has already jumped by half a percentage point since the conflict started, with several commodities seeing double-digit price growth. The impact of these price increases on intermediate and final goods will be felt even after oil prices normal-



FINGER ON THE PULSE
T.T. RAM MOHAN

Just say no to remote work

My advice for young people who graduated with bachelor's degrees over the last few months and are just starting their careers: Go to work — not just figuratively, but literally. If you have a job that allows hybrid work arrangements, do not use them. Instead, be at your desk five (or six) days per week. And if your job is fully remote, start looking for a new one.

I was giving the same advice back in 2021, when millions of white-collar workers had decided that remote work was one feature of the Covid-19 lockdowns they wanted to keep. At the time, we didn't have much evidence on the labour-market effects of working from home. But we do now.

In a new study, economists Natalia Emanuel and Emma Harrington, the authors of *In Person: How Working Together Fuels Creativity, Productivity, and Growth*, and Harvard economist Amanda Pallais calculate that the unemployment rate among college graduates under 29 years of age was 1.3 percentage points higher in 2025 than in 2019 (just before the pandemic and the four-fold increase in people working remotely). Among older college graduates, the unemployment rate increased by 0.4 percentage points over the same period.

To explain this divergence, the authors compare the unemployment rates of workers in jobs that are easily done remotely (for example, software engineers) with jobs that are hard to do remotely (such as mechanical engineers). They find that remote work is responsible for nearly two-thirds of the unemployment gap between college graduates under 29 and older graduates. Moreover, their results hold up even when they control for each occupation's exposure to automation by generative AI tools.

These findings line up with a second new study. Economists Peter John Lambert and Yannick Schindler

examined four Anglophone countries, including the United States, and found that the rise of remote work after the pandemic led to a shift in both hiring and vacancies that favoured more senior workers over those with just a few years of experience. I hope these findings will serve as a source of motivation for young, college-educated workers. It is very much in their interest to go to work — physically. Employers are increasingly turning away from inexperienced workers for remote roles because such arrangements require relatively more supervision and greater effort to build new knowledge and skills.

With an in-person setting, by contrast, newly minted graduates will be faster to develop their emotional intelligence, which is crucial for success in many occupations. Reading body language and changes in facial expressions and tones of voice are crucial skills that cannot be easily learned over Zoom. Collegiality and group cohesion is best created through repeated physical interaction. For inexperienced workers trying to build professional networks and learn about new opportunities for advancement, unplanned meetings at the espresso machine or in the parking lot can be invaluable.

Very many people in their early professional years are depriving themselves of these advantages. Some are doing so to maximise their leisure time or out of an exaggerated sense of the value they provide to their employers. But I suspect that the trend can largely be explained by something more prosaic: Employers often offer hybrid work as a benefit, so young workers take it. They should resist this temptation. Just because remote work is on offer doesn't mean it has to be used.

What about workers with more than a handful of years of experience? Here, the right solution for most may not be to revert to the world of 2019. In my judg-



MICHAEL R. STRAIN

ise, The BIS report remarks wryly, "The dichotomy between buoyant market sentiment and uncertainty about the conflict's macroeconomic fallout is striking."

Secondly, the investment boom in artificial intelligence (AI) is beginning to bear a disquieting resemblance to financial manias of the past — such as the canal mania of the 1830s, the British railway mania in the 1840s, the electrification exuberance of the late 1920s (roaring 20s), and the dotcom boom of the late 1990s. The top five AI firms are set to invest a trillion dollars from 2025 through 2026. There are signs that the AI build-up is already running into bottlenecks in electricity, semiconductors, and grid equipment. If the payoffs to the massive investments do not materialise, the boom could turn into a bust.

The AI boom is based on substantial borrowings. Equity valuations in AI-related firms are well above historical benchmarks. If a rise in inflation results in a hike in US interest rates or the AI-led boom turns into a bust, there will be huge corrections in both the debt and equity markets. Household exposure to equities in the US is much higher than in the past, so the macroeconomic impact of any equity correction will be significant.

A third risk relates to sovereign debt. The biggest holders of government securities in advanced economies today are not banks, but non-banking financial institutions (NBFI). Their share of sovereign debt rose from 44 per cent in 2021 to 53 per cent in 2025, with hedge funds emerging as important players. Many NBFI are highly leveraged and they use short-term repo financing. Any rise in the interest rate and a fall in the value of government securities will result in large mark-to-market losses, heavy selling and a steep rise in yields.

A fair reading of the BIS report is that the worst-case scenario — of oil prices rising above \$120 per barrel — has been avoided but that doesn't mean the world economy is out of the woods.

What does this bode for the Indian economy? The outlook on the current account deficit — projected at around 2 per cent of gross domestic product — is unlikely to change much, going by the BIS report. What does change after the measures announced by the government and the Reserve Bank of India on June 5 is the position in respect of capital flows to finance the deficit.

Consequently, the elimination of the long-term capital gains tax on government securities for foreign investors (FII) on June 5, FII inflows into debt securities leapt from \$0.4 billion in May to \$5.8 billion in June. However, the measures announced have been unable to stem equity outflows. Net equity outflows increased from \$3.4 billion in May to \$5.2 billion in June. This is in keeping with the exodus of FII money from emerging markets in general.

Banks report that the Foreign Currency Non-Resident (FCNR) deposit scheme has drawn around \$7 billion in deposits in its very first month. The measures are widely expected to bring in capital flows of \$50 billion. These expectations are not yet fully reflected in the value of the rupee. The rupee is currently trading at 95-96 to the US dollar, compared with its low of 96.3 in May and 95.4 on June 5.

The RBI's *Financial Stability Report* (June 2026) says the "balance of risk has shifted favourably" after the cessation of conflict in Iran. True. However, as the latest flare-up in West Asia underlines, it's far too early to celebrate.

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Interrogating the classics



ARUNDHITI DASGUPTA

A passionate teacher can turn a class full of agnostics into believers and even the severely numerically challenged into aspiring mathematicians. *Talking Classics* by Mary Beard is just such a classroom where the dozen of classics transfers her love and obsession for the ancient Greek and Roman world to a whole new generation of readers so charmingly that even the utterly disinterested will find it impossible to resist its allure.

Personal, anecdotal and humorous,

this slim book reads like a love letter. Not the verbatim summary romance of an infatuated teenager but a love that has weathered many disillusionments. The classics must be read not because they contain "timeless truths" or "timeless wisdom," writes Mary Beard, but for the ideas they carry and their ability to ignite imaginations even today. In her words, "Don't imagine that there are pure nuggets of truth waiting to be discovered in classics. It's the debate between us and antiquity that is important."

Debate is fundamental. Critical engagement and not reverence is the way to understand and, perhaps appreciate, the ancient world. The book discusses the sharp edges, the wars and the transformative power of the ancient Greek and Roman world to make the point, "I am not writing advertising copy," writes Ms Beard. She wants readers to question, denounce, be shocked by and laugh at the heroes, gods and monarchs of

antiquity, just as she has done.

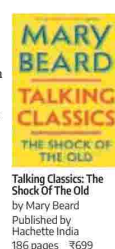
Different people engage with the past differently. She recounts a story, probably apocryphal, about Indian Nobel laureate and poet Rabindranath Tagore, who, it is believed, burst into tears at the sight of the Parthenon in Athens. He was overcome, not by its "aesthetic grandeur or grace but by its 'barbarian ugliness'."

The power of antiquity does not lie in the beauty of its art and architecture but in the ability to force extreme reactions and ask awkward questions and, most importantly, evoke wonder and awe. Just as it did for the five-year-old Ms Beard on a trip to the British Museum when she was mesmerised by a 4,000-year-old mummy piece of Egyptian bread stuck inside a glass case. Museums in those days were not child-friendly and she struggled for a closer look when a kind curator who was passing by indulged her. He opened the case and held the bread in front of her. It was a

transformative moment, she writes. And it had the young girl hooked, although it was not the Egyptian, but the Roman world that she went on to teach and write about.

Ms Beard uses a conversational, reflective style. She lets the questions that have troubled and engaged her throughout her career lead the narrative forward. She pauses and weighs the options around an argument, and reels her readers in with the practised panache of a great teacher.

Classical literature has forced her to think harder and face the uncomfortable, she writes. Slavery, fascism, violence and misogyny are not modern inventions. To study the ancient world means wrestling with these aspects of antiquity too. It also means questioning the idea of heroism and courage in the ancient epics. Were the great heroes truly worthy of being called thus? Was their behaviour irreproachable? For



Talking Classics: The Shock of The Old by Mary Beard
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instance, as Ms Beard asks, "How do you judge a leader who manages to get back to his family but only after losing all his men (Odysseus)? Or when he plunges his sword into the single eye of the Cyclops Polyphemus and blinds him, how does one pick a side? Questions open up channels of accessibility and understanding. It is not about finding the right answers, but to develop perspectives that help illuminate the ancient texts."

The book also asks readers to consider the classical experience in its entirety.

While the classical texts, art and sculpture are mostly representations of the elite, the voice of the common people is not just as important but also more interesting. There is more to the ancient Greeks and Romans than the royal and the divine. Ms Beard uses several examples to illustrate her point.

The extremely popular statue of the nude Aphrodite of Knidos is one

example. Exquisitely sculpted, the sculpture seems to show that the goddess has been caught unaware as she emerges from her bath. This sculpture became so popular that numerous replicas were commissioned and today almost every museum in Europe has one. But it was once considered so radical that no town wanted it and it even caused a young man to take his life.

When we gaze at the sculpture today, we separate the aesthetic appreciation of the statue from the learning male gaze that it attracts? The goddess and her sculpture are better appreciated when we ask the uncomfortable questions.

Ms Beard traces meaning and adventure out of the ancient stories through her endless questioning, humorous anecdotes and sharp insight. Her five-discuss-plus experience as an academic and author lights up the journey that she is encouraging the reader to undertake and, frankly, who can resist?

The reviewer is a writer, teacher of comparative mythology and cofounder of The Mythology Project



Editor's TAKE

US-Iran: The truce that could not hold

As missiles fly over the Strait of Hormuz again, the fragile peace signed at Versailles in June lies in ruins and once again the world may pay the price

For a few weeks this summer, it looked like the worst had passed. A fourteen-point memorandum, signed with fanfare by Donald Trump and Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian, had promised a permanent end to hostilities, a reopened Strait of Hormuz, and a path back to sanctions relief. That illusion collapsed this week. After Iranian projectiles struck three commercial tankers transiting Hormuz, the United States answered with strikes on more than eighty targets across Iran. Trump, speaking from a NATO summit in Ankara, declared the agreement "over," calling peace talks a "waste of time" — even as he left the door open, however grudgingly, for negotiators to keep talking. The breakdown was not really sudden. It was the third time Washington has struck Iran even as talks were supposedly underway, and Tehran has said, not unreasonably, that this pattern has poisoned any basis for trust.

Underneath the ceasefire's language always sat the same unresolved fault lines: how much uranium Iran can keep, whether it retains any enrichment capacity at all, how far sanctions relief should go, and who compensates whom for a war that has already cost billions of dollars. A sixty-day pause was never going to settle questions that a decade of diplomacy failed to answer, and the assassination of Ayatollah Khamenei has left Tehran's succession — and therefore its negotiating authority — genuinely unclear. Where this heads next is not known to any human being given the fact that Iran plays the cards close to its chest and Trump is as erratic as ever. Washington has floated seizing Kharg Island outright. Iran has warned it will strike wherever it judges necessary to protect its coastline and its leverage over Hormuz. The Lebanon front, only loosely stabilized, remains combustible. And every option on the table — a wider blockade, an American occupation of Iranian energy infrastructure, a renewed missile exchange with Israel — points toward escalation rather than resolution. The world will not watch this from the sidelines. Brent crude has already jumped past \$78 a barrel on the latest news, continuing a rally that has made this the largest oil supply shock in a generation. Shipping insurers are pricing in war risk through the Gulf; European equities have slid; Central Asian trade routes reliant on Iranian ports are choked; and fertiliser and LPG shortages are rippling through economies from the Philippines to Chile. This is not a regional war anymore — it is a tax on every importing economy on earth. Few nations are as exposed as India, which sources roughly half its crude and the bulk of its LPG through Hormuz. New Delhi's room to maneuver is real but narrow. It cannot broker peace — that leverage now sits with Qatar, Oman, and, awkwardly, Pakistan. What it can do is practical: accelerate the diversification of crude sources it has already begun through renewed Russian and Iranian purchases, expand strategic reserves beyond today's roughly three-week cushion, and use its genuine historical relationship with Tehran to keep a back channel open rather than being seen as leaning entirely toward Washington and Israel. Above all, India should resist being pulled into anyone's camp.

America @250: Mired in global challenges

The nation that emerged from the Declaration of Independence in 1776 remains the world's largest economy and one of its most formidable military powers. Yet, beneath the patriotic pageantry lies a country grappling with sharp political divisions, economic anxieties, cultural conflicts and questions about its global leadership



MR DUA

AS Americans celebrate the nation's glorious unique landmark, turning-point and milestone occasion its 250th birthday. It's an established reality that the United States is a country that is currently striding though most trying internal strife and challenging global conundrums in which it's deeply involved. But at the same time the fact is that the USA at its 250th birthday is the world's greatest economy and a towering military might. That's why America's current President, Donald J. Trump, has put himself at the center of the nation's 250th birthday celebrations though he may be struggling to 'tip the scales' for building the America of the next 250 years. Trump has made 'plain his intent on doing a battle with the rest of the world from his unique position of unbeatable strength; he very often threatens and humiliates small entities; remember his one-to-one meeting with Ukraine's Vladimir Zelensky, the beleaguered, war-weary and fatigued from the nearly four-year old war with Russia, and to request for enhanced defence support in war with Moscow. Trump also openly insulted Canada's former prime minister Justin Trudeau when he visited Washington suggesting Canada's 51st state. Trump also angered India prime minister Narendra Modi when sarcastically branded India as 'dead economy' knowing fully that India was being openly addressed as the 'world's fastest growing economy'.

Be that as it may, though America's spirited, powerful media outlets are lending their exuberant support to the Trump, a battery of influential critics and naysayers don't let the Trump administration have it all a full-blooded top claim. For example, the gusty financial-political national daily, The Wall Street Journal, da become America's says 'Americans are in a sour mood as they celebrate 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. President Trump is unpopular; real wages are flat, and many of the political left don't even think July Fourth is the real anniversary. They prefer 1619, the year when the first batch of slaves arrived and provided colossal, plentiful support in building up the then developing America from scratch.'

As of today, Americans are angry, peeved and bitterly anguished at the greatest threats to (American) liberty from WITHIN the country, such as the cracking high school system that fails to educate half of its student population

A RECENT GALLUP REPORT AVERS, 'PRIDE IN AMERICA HAS FALLEN TO A LOW 24 PER CENT OF GEN Z. THOUGH DEMOCRATS SAY THEY'RE PROUD OF AMERICA TO BE AMERICAN. BUT AS PER A RECENT POLL, 58 PER CENT OF AMERICAN PEOPLE BELIEVE, THE COUNTRY'S BEST YEARS ARE BEHIND IT, AND 78 PER CENT SAY THE "AMERICAN DREAM" IS FURTHER OUT OF REACH THAN EVER

The writer was a professor and head of print journalism in Delhi's Indian Institute of Mass Communication, ex-head-founder, journalism-communication department University of Calicut, Kerala



to even minimal standards. Higher education becoming out of reach for the children of middle families.

Second, the current prevailing progressive elite university system that sees America corrupt and exploitative. The young generation of the 2026 Gen-Z has been 'taught to 'dislike' their country, and to believe that socialism is superior to the free-market system that made their affluence possible. They often quote an Independent Senate member, Berny Sanders, and Zohran Mamdani, the Indian-origin newly-elected mayor of America's biggest city of New York, who was recently elected with a whopping electoral majority.

Three, America's current deep razor-sharp political divisions heightened by strong, continual presence of a plethora of omnipotent, omnipresent social media with their dominant and electrifying influence through the hungry media outlets. Social media's unusually expanding reach and deep pressures, particularly over the Gen Z, amply demonstrate the 'signs of devolving into fundamental disputes' that can prove suicidal.

Fourth, the people's multiplying demands for government free benefits are too large to afford, but too politically entrenched to reform. Moreover, with public debt held by the public at 100% of GDP and growing, sooner or later financial markets will rebel, cautions the WSJ's noted economist, the late Mancur Olson, described the danger that, in democracies, interest groups proliferate that cause the government to calcify until it's unable to act. There are signs of the failure of Congress, America's Parliament

consisting of both legislative chambers, the senate and the house of representatives in this century to address the problems of the welfare-entitlement states, according to the late professor.

Meanwhile, it's important to remember that America's political influence, respect and reputation, besides its monetary and moral image, have been on the wane, particularly during its current Donald Trump's presidency. Even a casual look at the US's leverage in international affairs, can't miss its rapid downward surge. America's European friends, the Arab world, South-East Asian block besides Russia or China care two hoots for America's viewpoint. Trump's general trade tariffs deemed unreasonable and arbitrary policy has further broadened the gulf.

Finally, as a recent Gallup report avers, 'pride in America has fallen to a low 24% of Gen Z. Though Democrats say they're proud of America to be American (whatever it means, according to their own vision). But as per a recent poll, 58% of American people believe, the country's best years are behind it, and 78% say the "American Dream" is further out of reach than ever. Meanwhile, many Americans feel patriotism along the party lines; it's still revealing and disappointing. It's frustrating to see how many Americans feel pessimistic to see living in the greatest country in the world.'

Besides, THE USA TODAY, a popular daily, opines: the economy isn't where it should be; the housing is more expensive than ever before. Some people are unhappy that Trump was elected. But think again: America still offers greater gender parity, stronger legal equality, and more opportunities to get an education, find fulfilling work and succeed than almost anywhere else. It's perhaps because of such assumption (fake) that Trump has remarked on the nation's 250th birthday: 'I am thrilled to declare that America is back...a short three time ago we were a 'dead country, we were dead. Now, we are the hottest country in the world, we are respected by everybody,' said Trump kicking off the 250th anniversary anniversary festivities at the National Mall in Washington, the national capital.

Worried Americans sit hoping against hope, and wonder how can and will all this happen during the remaining Donald Trump presidency which ends 20 January 2029. Let's wait and see, fingers crossed.



Artisans paint a chariot as preparations are underway ahead of the annual Jagannath Rath Yatra, in Puri, Odisha

Safeguarding Gen Z from the digital addiction trap

of which is now prohibited.

From Access to Discipline

India's youthful population has long been seen as its greatest economic asset. But a demographic dividend depends on more than numbers; it requires young people who can concentrate, learn, self-regulate and work productively. That capacity is under strain. Online gaming in India grew to roughly 488 million players in 2024, up 33 million from the year before — a scale at which even a small share of problematic use becomes a major public concern.

Compulsive gaming functions as a hidden tax on the demographic dividend, one that GDP figures don't capture. It shows up first as poor sleep, shrinking attention spans, anxiety, mood swings, falling academic performance and financial strain — then spreads into classrooms, workplaces and homes. This is not speculative: government estimates presented in the Rajya Sabha while introducing the online gaming bill put the number of people affected by online money games at nearly 45 crore, with losses exceeding Rs 20,000 crore.

The Economic Survey 2025-26 flagged digital addiction as a drag on both mental health and productivity, framing the Online Gaming Regulation Act 2025 as a response to its impact on children and young people. The stakes are amplified by scale: India's population is around 1.46 billion, according to UNFPA's 2025 dashboard, with the 15-64 age group anchoring its future workforce, innovation and consumption. Whether that generation stays healthy and

focused, or slides into addiction, disrupted sleep and poor concentration, will shape whether the dividend becomes a growth engine or a liability. Other countries have already moved on this front — China restricts gaming for minors, South Korea once enforced a curfew rule for under-18s, and Vietnam caps gaming time for those under 18. None of this means gaming itself is the enemy; sports, educational and social gaming all have real value. Notably, the WHO's ICD-11 already recognises gaming disorder, marked by loss of control, prioritising gaming over other activities, and continuing despite harm.

Building a Culture of Responsible Gaming

Rules alone can't teach judgment. Digital wellness needs to be treated as a life-long, alongside financial literacy and civic education — covering how attention works, how apps are designed to be persuasive, and why sleep, exercise and offline relationships matter. One survey found 47% of urban Indian parents of 9-17-year-olds reported over three hours of daily screen time. Just as road safety needed public awareness beyond traffic rules, and financial inclusion needed literacy beyond bank accounts, digital wellness needs behavioural education beyond compliance. Attention and self-regulation are now economic assets — worth protecting as much as highways or data centres.

The writer is an alumnus of IIM-Ahmedabad and an associate member of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) and works as a management consultant. He is the Co-founder of Smile Foundation

2ND OPINION

India's digital revolution has reshaped how the country learns, works, plays and unwinds, powered by cheap data, smartphones, digital payments and online entertainment. But the next phase of Digital India must confront a harder problem: how the very ecosystem that expanded opportunity is now eroding attention, mental wellbeing and productivity.

This is the backdrop to the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Rules, 2026, which came into effect on May 1, 2026. The rules mark a shift from a fragmented gaming landscape to a structured one built around user protection, age verification, time limits, parental controls, grievance redressal and a new Online Gaming Authority of India. They also distinguish between esports, educational games, social games and online money games — the last

SANTANU MISHRA

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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DOWRY DEATHS MUST NEVER BE NORMALISED

The recent judicial observations by the Calcutta High Court in a dowry death case are deeply disturbing. While courts have the discretion to determine punishment according to legal principles and the facts of each case, describing dowry-related suicides as "not very rare" risks conveying the impression that such tragedies have become an accepted social reality. If these crimes are indeed frequent, the response should be stronger deterrence and stricter accountability, not diminished seriousness.

Dowry is not merely a domestic dispute; it is a gross violation of a woman's dignity, equality and right to live with respect. Every dowry death represents the collective failure of families, communities and institutions to eradicate this regressive social evil. Justice must not only be fair but also reassure victims' families that the legal system stands firmly against such crimes.

Alongside speedy investigations, scientific collection of digital and forensic evidence, and time-bound trials, governments must intensify public awareness campaigns, promote women's economic empowerment and ensure strict enforcement of anti-dowry laws. Parents, educators and community leaders must also reject extravagant marriage demands and challenge harmful social norms.

A society that truly values women cannot afford to tolerate dowry deaths under any circumstance. SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI

Liveability should be India's urban priority

The Economist Intelligence Unit's Global Liveability Index 2026 offers an important reminder that the true measure of a city's success is not its skyline but the quality of everyday life experienced by its residents. Assessing 173 cities across stability, healthcare, education, and environment, and infrastructure, the index once again placed Copenhagen at the top, while New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru remained far behind. These rankings demonstrate that citizens value safety, reliable public transport, accessible healthcare, quality education and clean surroundings far more than rapid urban expansion alone.

Economic growth loses much of its significance if it is not accompanied by better living conditions. India's relatively low rankings should serve as a wake-up call rather than a cause for disappointment. Urban planning must prioritise affordable housing, pollution control, waste management, public transport and, green spaces. Greater coordination between governments, urban local bodies and citizens is essential for building cities that are not only economically vibrant but also healthy, inclusive and liveable. Development should ultimately be judged by how comfortably and securely people live every day.

R.S. NARULA | PATIALA |

Cooperative insurance must protect rural India

India's cooperative movement began with the Co-operative Credit Societies Act, 1904, to strengthen farmers through mutual support and collective ownership. The proposed Cooperative Life Insurance Company, following the Bharat Taxi Cooperative initiative, represents an important expansion of this model beyond its traditional rural credit framework. Nearly half of India's workforce continues to depend on agriculture, making rural livelihoods highly vulnerable to crop failures, livestock losses, climate shocks and fluctuating farm incomes. The limited access to the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana in states such as Punjab, coupled with persistent agrarian distress and debt-driven farmer suicides, highlights significant gaps in rural social security.

The cooperative insurer should therefore evolve into a comprehensive rural risk assurance institution by integrating life, crop, livestock and livelihood protection under one umbrella. Such an approach would reduce financial vulnerability, improve resilience and reinforce farmers' confidence in the cooperative model. Since the cooperative movement was founded to safeguard the economic interests of rural communities, the proposed insurance company should remain true to that legacy.

BRU B. GOVAL | LUDHIANA

Child safety must override platform profits

The Centre's ultimatum directing Meta to remove advertisements promoting child sexual exploitative and abuse material from Instagram more than a regulatory warning: it is a serious indictment of one of the world's largest technology companies. Child sexual abuse is not a content moderation issue but a grave criminal offence, and no platform can escape responsibility by blaming algorithms or automated systems. Technology companies that profit from user engagement have an equally important obligation to ensure that their recommendation systems, advertising tools and search functions do not facilitate criminal activity or expose children to exploitation.

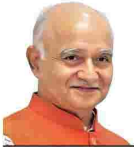
The appearance of advertisements linked to child sexual abuse raises troubling questions about the effectiveness of these safeguards and the company's commitment to child protection. Government intervention must be followed by stringent enforcement through independent audits, substantial financial penalties and criminal liability.

Child safety cannot become secondary to commercial interests or engagement metrics. Protecting children must remain the highest benchmark of responsible platform governance.

YASH PAL RAJHAN | JALANDHAR

Indian higher education: A decade of transformation

India's higher education system is undergoing one of the most significant transformations in its post-Independence history. Indian higher education system, it is now earning global recognition for its expanding research ecosystem, growing innovation capacity, entrepreneurial culture, and improving academic standards



RAMA SHANKER DUBEY

Ten years ago, an Indian university breaking into the world's top rankings was a rare event worth celebrating. Today, it is closer to routine. When the QS World University Rankings 2027 were released on 18 June 2026, ten Indian institutions had made it into the world's top 500 - the clearest sign yet of a higher education system that has spent a decade quietly reinventing itself. But rankings are only the

visible tip of a much larger transformation, one that spans research, innovation, entrepreneurship, access, and, perhaps most tellingly, a renewed argument about what education is actually for. Together, these threads tell the story of a system that has grown not just larger, but more serious about what it owes the students passing through it.

Climbing the Global Ladder

IIT Delhi now stands at 118th globally, India's highest-ranked institution this year, with IIT Bombay, IISc Bengaluru, IIT Madras and other IITs posting sustained gains of their own. What has changed is the breadth of the story. The University of Delhi and Anna University have joined the world's top 500, while the University of Hyderabad, Jamia Millia Islamia, Banaras Hindu University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Aligarh Muslim University all sit within the top 800 - proof that India's rise is no longer an engineering-and-technology story alone. The numbers underline the shift: just 14 Indian institutions featured in the QS rankings in 2015; 52 do today, making India the fourth most-represented higher education system in the world. Collectively, these gains reflect not one institution's success story but a system-wide rise in quality, research depth and international recognition.

The Research and Innovation Engine

This climb rests on genuine substance. India now ranks third globally in science and engineering publications and sixth in patent filings, with research increasingly steered toward national priorities - clean energy, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, robotics, semiconductors, quantum technologies and space among them. The Global Innovation Index tells a parallel story: India rose from 81st in 2015 to 38th in 2025 among 133 economies, and now hosts two of the world's top 30 innovation clusters - Bengaluru (21st) and Delhi (26th), per WIPO's 2025 data. Publication volume, though, is not the finish line. Research must still convert into translational outcomes - solutions that solve industry problems, inform public policy, and improve lives - which is exactly why deeper industry-academia collaboration remains the next frontier for Indian HEIs to cross.

From Campuses to Companies

That industry linkage is most visible in the entrepreneurial boom reshaping Indian campuses. Of the country's 1,100-plus incubators, nearly two-thirds sit within HEIs - IITs, IIMs, NITs, and central, state and private universities alike. Government initiatives such as Startup India (2016), the Atal Innovation Mission, and the Ministry of Education's Institution's Innovation Council programme, launched in 2018, have pushed entrepreneurship into the academic mainstream, while NEP 2020 has embedded entrepreneurial skills directly into degree curricula. The results speak for themselves: from roughly 450 startups in 2016, India counted more than 2.23 lakh recognised startups by 31 March 2026, generating over 23.36 lakh direct jobs and making the country the world's third-largest startup ecosystem.

Widening the Gate

Quality gains have come alongside a genuine widening of access. Between 2015-16 and 2025-26, the number of HEIs grew by nearly 15.8%, according to AISHE data, while the Gross Enrolment Ratio climbed from 23.7% to 28.4% - millions more young Indians in classrooms than a decade ago. New colleges and universities, digital and open-distance learning platforms, rising participation by women, and NEP 2020's flexible, multidisciplinary programmes have all driven this expansion. That same multidisciplinary turn - letting



students range freely across sciences, humanities, arts and vocational tracks - is reshaping how graduates think, building the versatility and problem-solving ability that twenty-first-century challenges demand. NEP 2020 has also, for the first time, brought Indian Knowledge Systems into mainstream curricula, introducing students to the country's scientific, philosophical, linguistic and artistic heritage - yoga, Ayurveda, classical languages and Indian philosophy among them - taught alongside contemporary science rather than instead of it.

Building a Future-Ready Workforce

Skilling has kept pace with all of this. The Skill India Mission has trained more than 60 million people since 2015, while the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana has certified over 16 million youth in industry-relevant trades. NEP 2020 has folded Skill Enhancement Courses in AI, data science, cybersecurity, robotics and smart agriculture directly into degree programmes, alongside apprenticeship schemes that pair classroom learning with workplace exposure. The payoff already shows: in the QS World Future Skills Index 2027, India ranked 13th among 89 economies and was named a leading AI-ready economy.

The Gap That Remains

Scale, though, brings its own challenge. India's higher education system now spans over 1,338 universities and 53,354 colleges, serving more than 4.33 crore students - a demographic dividend the country cannot afford to waste. For decades, most academic programmes stayed disconnected from real skill-building, leaving a persistent gap between what graduates know and what industry actually needs. Closing that gap means HEIs must move faster to revamp curricula around societal priorities, industrial demand, and the economy's shifting requirements. Only then can the system deliver the future-ready workforce that the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047 depends on.

Character Before Curriculum

There is an older, simpler idea running underneath all of this: that the true worth of a person is reflected in character and conduct, not credentials alone. Skills, however useful, were never meant to be the whole point of education. Reformers from Swami Vivekananda to Sri Aurobindo to Mahatma Gandhi to Mahatma Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya insisted that education's first task is building character - cultivating self-discipline, integrity and social responsibility alongside knowledge. When Malaviya founded Banaras Hindu University in 1916, he made character formation, grounded in Dharma and ethics, a stated objective of the institution itself. That tradition draws on scripture - the Vedas, the Manusmriti, the Bhagavad Gita, the Ramayana - which hold truth, non-violence, self-control, compassion and service among Dharma's essential virtues, and which educators carry a responsibility to instill in their students. NEP 2020 has revived this thread through value-added, multidisciplinary courses that build ethics, empathy and leadership alongside technical learning, though how deeply students absorb these lessons still rests on the integrity and commitment of the teachers delivering them.

The Decade Ahead

Put together, the last decade tells a coherent story: Indian higher education has grown in scale, climbed the global rankings, and deepened its research and innovation base. What remains is to finish what NEP 2020 started - weaving industry-relevant skilling and values-rooted education into a single curriculum, so that India's graduates emerge not merely qualified, but responsible, ethical, and ready to build the nation's future.

The writer is Chancellor, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi

How Jamia Hamdard effectively implemented NEP 2020



MD AFSHAR ALAM

The National Education Policy 2020 was envisioned as a framework through which Indian higher education could be restructured around flexibility, multidisciplinary and quality. A policy of such scope, however, is only as meaningful as the manner in which it is implemented, and it is this question of effective implementation that was placed at the centre of institutional planning at Jamia Hamdard between 2021 and 2026. Rather than being treated as a set of directives to be formally noted, the policy's provisions were converted into measurable academic and administrative practice.

A multidisciplinary curriculum structure was among the earliest reforms undertaken. Rigid departmental boundaries were loosened, and students were given the option of combining courses across schools of pharmacy, medicine, engineering, management and humanities. Through this restructuring, a foundation was laid for the kind of breadth that NEP 2020 had called for, and the university's traditional strengths in pharmaceutical and health sciences were preserved even as new academic pathways were opened.

The Academic Bank of Credits was integrated into the university's examination and academic systems, and multiple entry and exit options were made available to undergraduate students. Through these mechanisms, learners who needed to pause their studies for personal, financial or professional reasons were no longer required to forfeit the credits already earned. This flexibility was regarded as one of the more consequential changes brought about by the policy, since it altered the relationship between the institution and the student from one of rigid progression to one of accommodated pathways. Indian Knowledge Systems were given particular emphasis during this period, in keeping with both the letter of NEP 2020 and the university's own scholarly inheritance. Jamia Hamdard's century-old association with Unani medicine positioned it uniquely for this task, and courses and research

initiatives were designed through which classical systems of medicine, Sufi philosophical traditions and indigenous scientific knowledge were brought into dialogue with contemporary curricula. Rather than being treated as a symbolic gesture, this integration was approached as a serious academic exercise, and scholars from within the university were drawn upon to ensure that rigour was not sacrificed for the sake of compliance.

Skill development and vocational training were woven into academic programmes across disciplines, in accordance with the policy's insistence that employability be treated as a core outcome of higher education rather than an afterthought. Internships, industry linkages and hands-on training components were made mandatory in several programmes, and it was ensured that these were not reduced to token exercises but were built into the credit structure of the courses. Research output was strengthened considerably during this period, and this strengthening was reflected in the university's improved standing in the National Institutional Ranking Framework, particularly within the pharmacy category, where Jamia Hamdard has consistently been placed among the leading institutions of the country. The university was also awarded an A+ grade by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, and this outcome was regarded as external, independent confirmation that the reforms undertaken were not merely procedural but had produced a demonstrable effect on teaching, research and governance.

Governance itself was reformed in ways that were less visible to the public but were, in many respects, foundational to everything else that was achieved. Compliance frameworks under the University Grants Commission, the National Medical Commission, the All India Council for Technical Education, the Pharmacy Council of India and the Bar Council of India were strengthened, and procurement processes were brought into closer alignment with General Financial Rules and the oversight expectations of the Comptroller and Auditor General. It was recognised early in the tenure that academic reform without administrative discipline tends to remain superficial, and considerable effort was therefore invested in ensuring that the two proceeded together. Digital infrastructure was expanded to support the flexibility that NEP 2020 demanded. Learning management systems were upgraded, and blended and online components were incorporated into programmes where appropriate, without allowing the university's traditional strength in laboratory-based and clinical education to be diluted. Faculty development was treated as a continuing priority throughout this period. Workshops, training programmes and orientation sessions were organised on subjects ranging from outcome-based education to generative artificial intelligence, and it was through these sessions that faculty members were equipped to translate policy intent into classroom practice.

None of these efforts were undertaken without difficulty, and it is precisely in the handling of such difficulty that effective implementation is distinguished from formal compliance. Resistance was encountered at various points, both from within sections of the academic community that were accustomed to older structures and from the practical constraints imposed by regulatory frameworks that had not yet been fully harmonised with the spirit of NEP 2020. Rather than being allowed to stall progress, these difficulties were addressed through consultation and phased adjustment, and it is acknowledged that the process of implementation remains unfinished in certain respects, as is perhaps true of any policy of this scale and ambition. Looking back over five years, it can be said that the outcomes of NEP 2020's implementation at Jamia Hamdard is best measured not by the number of provisions formally adopted but by the extent to which they were embedded into everyday academic and administrative practice. The extent to which this work will be sustained depends on the continued commitment of those who now carry it forward. What can be affirmed with some confidence is that the foundations laid during this period were built with care, and that they were designed to function well beyond any single tenure.

The author served as Vice Chancellor of Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi, from 2021 to 2026

Why faculty, not facilities, should top every IHM checklist



GYAN BHUSHAN

PRATIK GHOSH

Every admissions season, the same checklist does the rounds among hospitality aspirants: best campus, best placement record, best-known alumni. Ask any working hotelier what shaped their career, and the answer rarely starts with a building. It starts with a name - a professor who pushed them harder than they wanted, who picked up the phone years after graduation, who turned a textbook chapter on guest recovery into a story they still tell at work. The better admissions question, then, is this: who teaches at the institute you're considering, and what faculty culture stands behind them? New research on India's premier Institutes of Hotel Management (IHMs) suggests this matters more than almost anything else on the checklist.

The Real Engine

A study of 112 hospitality-management faculty across leading Indian institutes examined what

drives strong faculty performance - sharper teaching, better mentorship, industry-ready graduates. Three factors, working together, stood out: resilience, work engagement, and affective commitment to the institute. Faculty who collaborated well under pressure, learned visibly from setbacks, and treated change as opportunity rather than threat were more engaged in their work, and that engagement was closely tied to stronger performance. For a prospective student, this is concrete. Resilient, engaged faculty don't just deliver a syllabus - they model how to handle the unpredictability of a real hospitality career.

For industry partners scouting placements, it signals which institutes are producing graduates shaped by people who demonstrate resilience daily, not merely describe it in a lesson plan.

What the best educators have in common

The research points to specific traits: collaborating through unexpected challenges, sustaining high workloads, resolving crises competently, welcoming feedback as fuel for improvement, and treating added responsibility as growth rather than burden. It's the same profile hotels look for in a duty manager or a chef de cuisine.

The difference is that at a strong IHM, students don't just hear about these traits - they watch faculty demonstrate them, term after term.



A new way to read your admission offers

For a student weighing offers, this should reframe the whole decision. You are not simply buying a curriculum. You are choosing the people who will mentor, for three to four formative years, how a professional handles pressure, recovers from failure, and stays engaged in demanding, high-stakes work. Resilient faculty tend to be better engaged faculty - and engaged faculty go beyond the lesson plan, mentor outside class hours, and notice when a student is struggling.

Institutional culture deserves scrutiny, since faculty perform best where leadership treats resilience as an institutional resource rather than an individual trait. During campus visits, it is

worth asking: Does this institute invest in faculty development? Are facilitators engaged in industry? Do they offer early classroom delivery? The answer says as much about your education as any placement statistic.

A faculty-led talent pipeline

For hotel groups and hospitality brands building campus-recruitment strategy, the implication runs just as deep. Faculty performance is the lobby management lab in the brochure and ask about the faculty - how long they've taught, what they research, how they mentor, and whether the institute deliberately builds their resilience and engagement. For industry, the takeaway is just as simple: the IHMs worth partnering with are the ones that measure and nurture faculty performance with the same seriousness a hotel floor reserves for guest satisfaction. The best hospitality institutes of the years ahead will not be defined by their buildings. They will be defined by the resilience, engagement, and commitment of the faculty who walk into classrooms every single day - and by how visibly that translates into the students who walk out.

under the NCHMCT, Ministry of Tourism, whose syllabus includes training on digital tools in culinary and front-office operations, food safety and etiquette, hotel security, and employability and life skills. Trainers are drawn from IIMs, industry veterans, and international leaders, with a fixed academic calendar meant to keep faculty current with global hospitality practice.

Choosing well this season

For a student filling out applications now, the takeaway is simple: the lobby management lab in the brochure and ask about the faculty - how long they've taught, what they research, how they mentor, and whether the institute deliberately builds their resilience and engagement. For industry, the takeaway is just as simple: the IHMs worth partnering with are the ones that measure and nurture faculty performance with the same seriousness a hotel floor reserves for guest satisfaction. The best hospitality institutes of the years ahead will not be defined by their buildings. They will be defined by the resilience, engagement, and commitment of the faculty who walk into classrooms every single day - and by how visibly that translates into the students who walk out.

Mr. Gyan Bhushan, (IES), Senior Economic Advisor, Ministry of Tourism and Chief Executive Officer, National Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology (NCHMCT), Government of India & Dr. Pratik Ghosh, Head of Department, Dr. Ambedkar Institute of Hotel Management Catering & Nutrition, Chandigarh

Giving More Credit Where Credit's Due

Makes sense to lower exposure risk profile

Credit card companies are offering existing users more credit instead of chasing new customers, limiting themselves to a pool of clients with established credit histories and revealed spending patterns. Since card issuers do not have much leeway over fees, it makes sense to lower the risk profile of their exposure. The target new card user has access to UPI, which has become ubiquitous. And it is free. Indians are conservative card users, and the overwhelming majority do not roll over credit card payments. Card issuers rely on services, and it is easier to design additional features for existing customers. Offers of multiple cards come bundled with extra membership rewards to encourage card usage.

Credit card companies make money by charging interest on deferred payments and through merchant and cardholder fees. Interest rates on credit card debt in India are among the highest globally, which constrains interest income. Most credit card-issuing banks instead offer EMI payments on card purchases at relatively lower interest rates. UPI owes its popularity among merchants to not charging them transaction fees. This has squeezed the main pillar of the credit card business, although merchant fees were heavily discounted because of competition. Cardholders services and fees are, in effect, the principal differentiator. This is where card companies are focusing their energies.

Credit cards are sold as lifestyle products instead of payment-cum-credit platforms. Airport lounge access and concert tickets are thrown into membership benefits. Card companies have clients whose habits they are familiar with. It is easy to market a new card to a person whose spending patterns are out in the open. Such a person could be inclined to swipe her new card if it means free salon visits. Generic reward points are making way for hyper-personalised benefits. Card companies are turning to data-driven analytics to personalise security, finance and services. This requires them to work intensely with existing customers.

The hardware that runs AI infrastructure is built by exploiting critical minerals and it generates increasing amounts of e-waste. A specific argument is made about the uneven distribution of costs and benefits of AI. Communities burdened with supplying specific natural resources need to be convinced about equally specific breakthroughs AI is capable of in managing those resources.

Smarter Citizens for Dumbed-Down Cities

Bombay High Court has called a spade a spade. It is time we listened. This week, it observed that urban flooding is as much a civic failure as an administrative one. Every monsoon, familiar scenes play out across India: Delhi's roads disappear under water. Mumbai grinds to a halt, commuters are stranded, and neighbourhoods resemble lakes. From Bengaluru and Gurgaon to Hyderabad and Chennai, nearly every city has chronic waterlogging, for which the answer is the old whataboutery: 'But this is nothing new.' Exactly. Civic authorities must answer for poor planning, inadequate drainage and crumbling infrastructure. But the court's remarks underscore an uncomfortable truth: state of our cities isn't just the product of government failure, but also a reflection of collective civic apathy.

Climate change has intensified rainfall. Yet, extreme rain becomes a disaster only when urban systems are weakened by neglect—institutional and individual. No municipal corporation can inspect every drain every day if citizens continue to litter and ignore blocked inlets outside their homes, markets and workplaces. Civic responsibility begins with simple acts: disposing of waste properly, reporting encroachments, clearing immediate blockages where possible, and treating public infrastructure as shared property rather than 'someone else's responsibility'.

Governments must invest in resilient drainage, restore natural water bodies, and enforce planning and waste management laws. But citizens must be partners, not spectators. Smart cities can't be realised through sensors, apps and flyovers alone. Before India can build smart cities, it must first nurture smart, civic-minded people who recognise that well-maintained cities are a shared responsibility.

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How About the Order Of the Double Cross?

Why squander your hard-earned crores on yet another European vacation, where you'll pay €12 for a coffee in Vienna, when you could, instead, invest in something infinitely more enduring: a foreign award, preferably with a sash, medal and a title that sounds like it was invented by a committee of baroque poets. Imagine the metamorphosis. One week you're just another billionaire desi fumbling with phrasebooks, the next, you're Sir Vikram of the Order of the Golden Possum, bestowed by a grateful microstate whose GDP is smaller than that of a Vasant Kunj mall. Forget Instagram posts of Santorini sunsets, your LinkedIn descriptor now reads 'Knight Commander of the Order of Civil Brilliance'. That, my friend, is ROI.

Luxury handbags depreciate, sports cars break down. It, thus, can't be a reliable investment. But an award? Eternal. It glitters, silences bawling in-laws, and ensures your obituary will read with awe, 'Recipient of the Double Cross' has a gravitas no Gulfstream can match. The market is booming. For the price of a Parisian weekend, you can acquire a medal from a Microsian microbrewery or a ribbon from a British (jam) preservation society and an honorary doctorate from a university whose acronym you will do the trick. It may seem the ultimate hack: prestige without effort, honour without achievement. But, sorry, it's not everyone who can afford it.

Questions over AI's ecological trade-off are growing louder – but solutions may be emerging Are Data Centres Uncoloured?



Dipankar Bhattacharyya

Resistance to AI, till now confined to economics, is spilling over to the environment. Since the outset, AI has been identified as an economic disruptor that will result in large-scale job losses. But a new pushback is emerging over AI's sustainability frontier. Data centres are consuming country-scale electricity, and their computing intensity is exerting enormous pressure on freshwater for cooling needs.

Last year residents of the executive-style, single-family subdivision of Annelise Park in Fayetteville, Georgia, were outraged when they discovered that the nearby data centre was siphoning nearly 30 mm US gallons (115.56 mm litres) of water – equivalent to 44 Olympic-size swimming pools and far exceeding the peak limit agreed to after the data centre planning process – for its cooling needs. This was after residents noticed that their water pressure had become unusually low. If this can happen in an affluent part of the US, one can be forgiven for being concerned about the way Indian authorities may go about with data centre infrastructure in a country facing extreme water stress due to overextraction of groundwater.

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How to fizzle out the guzzle

But the green paradox of AI, that it can improve efficiency of electricity grids by predicting demand and integrating volatile RE sources, AI improves our ability to model climate and forest fires and droughts, lower the water intensity of agriculture, and make water distribution smart. In critical minerals, AI has demonstrated capability of accelerating prospecting and mining. It also improves purity and yield. Robotic sorting and recovery makes e-waste recycling a breeze.

Beyond these specific counter-arguments, the case for a compelling message in towns around Zimbabwe's lithium mines. Precision livestock farming that AI enables could wear down some of Dublin's resistance to green-hungry data centres. Predictive policing and digital forensics could persuade US states and counties to drop their moratoria against AI investments.

OECD reckons AI could raise annual labour productivity growth by 0.4-1.3 percentage points in G7 economies with high exposure to AI-led knowledge-intensive services and due to widespread AI adoption. Gains could be up to 36% less in other G7 countries due to their sectoral composition, and slow AI dispersal. Advanced economies cannot afford to miss their biggest productivity boost since their respective industrial revolutions.

Emerging economies will seek to speed up their relatively faster growth through AI. Developing economies will turn to tech-enabled solutions to attain human development metrics.

And the ecological trade-off may not be as severe as is being made out to be. Data centres profit by maximising the computational output per unit of power consumed. This aligns business objectives with energy efficiency goals. Modern data centres are already using closed cooling loops where the coolant never evaporates, eliminating water loss.

Transitioning to smaller, domain-specific models and optimised networks allows developers to achieve high computational power without building gigantic data centres. Tech surrounding AI infra is evolving rapidly, and negative externalities could be limited to acceptable standards. Tech companies also have plans to take data centres far away from our backyards. SpaceX, which houses XAI, has plans to build them in space powered by uninterrupted solar energy—in keeping with Elon Musk's catchphrase, 'It's always sunny in space'—and cooled by infrared radiation of waste heat into vacuum. Sounds like science fiction but Musk argues there is no new physics involved. And investors are buying into his vision.

Other companies are pivoting to advanced nuclear and specialised RE. Small reactors and giant batteries are nearer our technology horizon than orbital data centres. Terrestrial solutions will face some form of pushback, because AI will be seen as a zero-sum resource game till benefits of the tech become widely available.

Distributing economic benefits of AI is a challenge to the global trade mechanism. Frontier AI models and massive data sets are concentrated in the US and China, and the rest of the world is dependent on their infrastructure. Export restrictions on critical inputs like semiconductors block the flow of hardware to economies that do not have the wherewithal to produce them.

Widely shared costs is a more sustainable financial pathway for AI than the current investor frenzy over the tech. Multilateral initiatives are trying to ensure fair participation by countries locked out of the AI arms race. Political resistance to AI infra is being driven by its concentration and resource strain. The way out would be to spread tech development across a broader geographical expanse to ease pressure on both counts. Assets need to be diversified, and countries need to build local capabilities instead of remaining passive consumers.

Fortunately, the competitive intensity of the AI race ensures open-source models become available close on the heels of expensive proprietary breakthroughs. Need for sovereign AI capability will aid dispersal and spread infrastructure demands among nations.



How to fizzle out the guzzle

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The Statesman

Incorporating and directly descended from
the Friends of India - founded 1818

Terminal illness

Contrasting reactions to judicial pronouncements in the neighbouring states of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh tell a story that every right-thinking Indian must be concerned about. Last month, a Muslim judge, Tabassum Khan, in Madhya Pradesh, convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment seven Hindu men involved in lynching a Muslim to death.

Scholars with far greater knowledge of the law than this newspaper possesses have scrutinised the judgement and concluded that it is both reasoned and fair. In days that have followed, Judge Khan has been hounded on social media, threatened with bodily harm - and more - and castigated in terms that do not deserve to be repeated.

In parallel, a Division Bench of the Gujarat High Court, comprising two Hindu judges, has confirmed the death sentences awarded to 38 Muslim members of the Indian Mujahideen in the Ahmedabad blasts case, a pronouncement that has provoked a milder response, either celebratory or of criticizing the system for not having achieved this outcome sooner.

While the Madhya Pradesh High Court has taken notice of Judge Khan's case, and the Supreme Court bar has severely criticised the reaction, the vile abuse and intimidation she has faced describe a cancerous mind-set that is metastasizing so rapidly that it will soon become terminal. The passivity of the state apparatus and the silence of political leaders tell a tale that ought to worry all of us.

These reactions are, unfortunately, emerging as a pattern in contemporary India. Not too long ago, a Judge of the Bombay High Court, who rendered a verdict in a matter involving the Bohra Muslim community, upholding the position of one faction over another, faced death threats to himself and his family.

The laws of the land lay down rules for dealing with judgments that we disagree with. Parties are free to seek review before a higher forum. Informed criticism that does not cast aspersions on the judge but points to flaws in her or his reasoning is permitted.

Not permitted are abuse or intimidation, and certainly not the cowardly use of threats that hide behind anonymous social media handles. The fact that police can crack down on some online cases of abuse, but not others, itself tells a story - of a state that is fast acquiring the jaundiced vision of bigots.

Claims of moral superiority and of a civilizational ethos of tolerance ring hollow in the face of such excesses. They tell us that something is seriously wrong with us, that we are only prepared to accept authority when convenient to us. Having begun with small transgressions such as driving on the wrong side of the road and getting away with these, we have become a people who believe it is acceptable to beat up doctors who fail to cure our patients, or threaten those who render justice on the facts presented to them.

If this is the vision of a modern India that we wish to present to the world, we must prepare to accept a harsh prognosis of our condition.

Beyond Victory

International sport has always had an unusual ability to redraw the boundaries of possibility. Every World Cup produces champions, but it is also a crucible that produces the outlive the final score. When a small nation competes fearlessly against football's established powers, it achieves something that statistics and rankings cannot fully measure. It expands the imagination of its own people.

Cape Verde's remarkable campaign offers precisely that lesson. A country with a modest population and limited sporting resources demonstrated that disciplined preparation, collective belief and tactical clarity can narrow the gulf between football's traditional elite and participating nations. The significance of such performances extends well beyond a tournament. They challenge the long-held assumption that success in global sport is the exclusive preserve of countries blessed with vast talent pools, wealthy domestic leagues or decades of institutional advantage.

Football's governing bodies have often spoken about making the sport truly global. That ambition is fulfilled not merely by increasing the number of participating nations, but by ensuring that newcomers can compete with credibility. When smaller teams prove capable of frustrating or even unsettling world champions, the tournament itself becomes richer, more unpredictable and more representative of the game's universal appeal.

For Cape Verde, the impact is likely to be felt long after the celebrations fade. A memorable World Cup can inspire greater public investment in sporting infrastructure, encourage private sponsorship and persuade policymakers that sport deserves to be treated as an instrument of national development rather than entertainment alone. Young players who watched their country's flag carried proudly onto the world's biggest football stage will now believe that international success is attainable rather than aspirational.

The country's experience also reinforces the growing importance of its global diaspora. Increasingly, smaller nations are blending locally developed talent with players whose careers have been nurtured abroad. Rather than weakening national identity, this model reflects the realities of a globalised world in which migration has created communities that remain deeply connected to their ancestral homelands. Harnessed effectively, these networks can become enduring sources of sporting excellence.

There is another lesson for larger footballing nations. Reputation alone no longer guarantees dominance. The tactical sophistication of so-called minnows has improved dramatically, while advances in coaching, analytics and sports science have reduced historical disadvantages. Complacency has become an increasingly expensive luxury. Ultimately, Cape Verde returned home without a trophy but with something equally valuable: a transformed national self-image. The overwhelming public welcome reflected more than gratitude for a brave campaign. It recognised that the team had altered perceptions of what the nation could accomplish on the global stage. In sport, as in national life, genuine success is not always measured by the title won. Sometimes it is measured by the confidence a generation gains after discovering that it belongs among the world's best.

Aurobindo's Integral Yoga

At the heart of Integral Yoga lies the idea that human beings are transitional entities in an ongoing process of cosmic evolution. According to Sri Aurobindo, consciousness is not static but dynamic, evolving from matter to life, from life to mind, and ultimately towards a higher, supramental consciousness. This supramental state represents a plane of truth-consciousness where knowledge, will, and delight are unified



In an age marked by rapid technological advancement, material aspirations, and existential uncertainty, the search for deeper meaning and spiritual fulfillment has gained renewed urgency. Among the many philosophical and spiritual systems that seek to reconcile the material and the transcendental, the Integral Yoga propounded by Sri Aurobindo stands out as a profound and transformative vision.

It is not merely a system of meditation or renunciation, but a comprehensive philosophy of life that aims at the total transformation of human consciousness. Instead of fighting narrow battles of religious or spiritual influences of superiority so common in the present times where no religious or spiritual leaders speak the same language of the universal man, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga embraces every caste, creed, race and gender with equal fervor since his yoga does not see man as a product of a narrow religious or divisive creed, but as a potentially perfect consciousness waiting for fulfillment.

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), one of India's foremost philosopher-sages, envisioned a spiritual evolution that transcends traditional socio-religious boundaries. Unlike classical yoga systems that often emphasize liberation from the cycle of birth and death (moksha) through withdrawal from worldly life, Integral Yoga advocates an active engagement with life. It seeks not to escape from the world, but the divinization of life itself.

In a series of articles, later collected in *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo expounds the concept of yoga in all its manifestations, from the perspective of physical well-being to the progressive evolution of the human consciousness freed from caste, creed, dogma or narrow confines of religion.

Sri Aurobindo is perhaps the best person in modern times to comment on the relevance of yoga, having experienced vocations as diverse as academics, politics, freedom movement, literature and philosophy, and also guiding the evolution of a spiritual community that runs to this very day inspired

by his principles at Puducherry.

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This supramental state represents a plane of truth-consciousness where knowledge, will, and delight are unified. The purpose of Integral Yoga is to accelerate this evolutionary process within the individual.

One of the distinguishing features of Integral Yoga is its integrative approach. It does not reject the traditional paths of Bhakti (devotion), Jnana (knowledge), or Karma (action), but harmonizes them into a unified discipline.

The practitioner is encouraged to cultivate devotion to the Divine, seek knowledge of the ultimate reality, and perform actions with a spirit of selfless dedication. This synthesis allows for a more holistic spiritual development, addressing all aspects of human nature - emotional, intellectual, and physical.

Central to this yoga is the concept of the "psychic being," the evolving soul within the individual that acts as a guide in the spiritual journey. By turning inward and establishing contact with this psychic centre, the practitioner can align with the divine will and experience a deeper sense of purpose and harmony.

This inward movement is accompanied by a gradual purification and transformation of the outer nature, including thoughts, emotions, and physical habits.

Another key aspect of Integral Yoga is the transformation of the physical body. While many spiritual traditions regard the body as an obstacle or illusion, Sri Aurobindo considered it an essential instrument for

the manifestation of the divine on earth.

The ultimate aim is not only spiritual enlightenment but also the transformation of the body into a vessel capable of expressing higher consciousness. This idea challenges the conventional dichotomy between spirit and matter, proposing instead a unity where both are expressions of the same divine reality.

The practice of Integral Yoga does not follow a rigid set of techniques or rituals. Instead, it is a dynamic and individualized process guided by aspiration, rejection, and surrender.

Aspiration refers to the sincere longing for spiritual growth; rejection involves the conscious refusal of negative tendencies and egoistic impulses; and surrender denotes the offering of one's entire being to the Divine. These three movements

form the core discipline of the yoga.

Integral Yoga also has significant social implications. In a world divided by conflict, inequality, and environmental crises, Sri Aurobindo's vision offers a path toward collective transformation. He believed that the spiritual evolution is not limited to individuals but extends to humanity as a whole.

The emergence of a higher consciousness could lead to a more harmonious and unified global society, transcending divisions of race, religion, and nationality.

The practical expression of this philosophy can be seen in the establishment of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Puducherry and the international township of Auroville.

These communities aim to embody the principles of Integral Yoga in daily life, fostering an environment of spiritual growth, collective harmony, and sustainable living.

They serve as living laboratories for the exploration of human unity and higher consciousness.

Critics may argue that the goals of Integral Yoga are too idealistic or unattainable. The notion of transforming human nature and achieving a supramental consciousness may seem distant from the realities of everyday life. However, Sri Aurobindo did not present his vision as an immediate solution but as a long-term evolutionary possibility. He acknowledged the challenges and complexities involved, emphasizing patience, perseverance, and faith.

In contemporary times, the relevance of Integral Yoga is increasingly evident. As individuals grapple with stress, alienation, and a sense of fragmentation, the need for an integrated approach to life becomes more pressing. By addressing the totality of human existence - body, mind, and spirit - Integral Yoga offers a comprehensive framework for personal and collective transformation.

Moreover, the emphasis on inner change as a precursor to outer transformation resonates with modern psychological and philosophical thought.

The idea that lasting social change must begin with individual consciousness aligns with contemporary movements advocating mindfulness, self-awareness, and ethical living.

Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo represents a bold and visionary attempt to redefine the purpose of human life. It challenges us to move beyond limited conceptions of spirituality and embrace a path that integrates all aspects of existence.

While its goals may appear lofty, they also inspire a deeper reflection on our potential as human beings. In a world searching for meaning and direction, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga offers not just a philosophy, but a transformative journey toward the realization of a higher consciousness and a more harmonious world.

THE KATHMANDU POST

Preventable human deaths from conflict with wildlife

The recent deaths of Ashika Bote and her young son in Jagatpur, Chitwan, following an attack by a Duhure, an infamous male wild elephant that has killed 23 other people since 2010, have sent shockwaves through the country. Tragically, the same elephant had claimed the lives of two other people from Ashika's family back in 2012 when they lived in the Madi area. This is a heartbreaking reminder that when humans and wildlife compete for the same space to live, the result is often devastating for both sides. Human-wildlife conflict has reached alarming levels across Nepal's forest fringes.

The Annual Report 2021-2022 published by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation reported more than 12,000 cases of wildlife attacks on humans. In them, 58 people died, 72 reported minor injuries, and 116 suffered critical injuries. The conflict is particularly dire in the

Chitwan National Park, the country's premier conservation zone, where more than 120 people have succumbed to attacks from wild animals in just over a decade. Such incidents, and most crucially, the death of 25 humans due to the attack of a single elephant, lay bare the state's structural failure to protect the fragile relationship between people and wildlife despite improvements in conservation efforts.

In 2012 as a result of Duhure's attack, authorities had decided to kill him. Despite severe injuries from gunshots in late December 2012, Duhure escaped, expanded his movement to eastern Chitwan and now keeps reappearing once in a while. (His movements have remained predictable, with residents in the incident area noting that he follows a cyclical path, arriving like clockwork during the autumn and

winter harvest seasons to raid crops; he was also seen on the forest edges some days before the incident.) A satellite-tracking collar has also been used to monitor its movements since 2020, as the radio collar installed in 2012 stopped working. However, despite the much-needed technological intervention, the execution couldn't prevent further deaths, indicating a policy failure.

Authorities have also often failed to address the root causes that drive wildlife into human settlements. Habitat loss and fragmentation force elephants and other wild animals to enter human settlements. In Chitwan National Park, for instance, grasslands once covered about 20 percent of the park. Now, this has been depleted to around 10 percent.

Encroachment, deforestation and development activities have particularly affected elephant settlements across the

country. Countless once-vast forests have now become small, isolated patches, pushing elephants out of their natural habitats. According to the Elephant Conservation Action Plan (2025-2035), more than half of the potential elephant habitat in the Chure-Tarai region lies outside of protected areas, forcing elephants to wander through human-dominated landscapes. In such an unstable scenario, it is no surprise that people lose lives and livelihoods while elephants are killed in retaliatory attacks or accidents.

In Chitwan National Park, electrifying and concrete barriers are in place to keep animals from entering settlements. But these efforts are not enough. Restoring forest cover and corridors as envisioned in the action plan, whereby animals can roam freely within the park without needing to break through people's settlements, is a daunting task. Still, it is a prerequisite for reducing human-wildlife conflict.

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Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Public anxiety

Sir, Through the columns of your newspaper, I wish to draw attention to the growing public anxiety surrounding the government's recent mandate making E20 (20 per cent ethanol-blended) petrol the standard fuel across India.

While the objective of reducing oil import dependency and promoting greener energy is laudable, the method of its implementation appears hasty and imposes an unfair burden on the common citizen.

The primary point of contention is vehicle compatibility. A large number of vehicles currently on our roads, particularly those manufactured before 2023, were not designed to handle high concentrations of ethanol.

Ethanol is known to be corrosive to certain rubber seals, gaskets, and plastic components used in older fuel systems. While manufacturers may downplay these

risks, reports from across the country indicate early signs of wear and tear, and a noticeable drop in fuel efficiency - further hitting the pockets of the middle class who are already struggling with high fuel prices.

The government's comparison with Brazil is also misleading. Brazil's transition to high-ethanol blends was a multi-decadal process that allowed both the automotive industry and vehicle owners to adapt gradually.

By contrast, India's 'all-at-once' approach removes the option of pure petrol for millions, effectively forcing owners to choose between using potentially damaging fuel or replacing a vehicle that still has years of utility left.

Furthermore, the promise that ethanol-blending would lower fuel costs has proven incorrect, as the procurement cost of ethanol has kept retail prices high.

If the government is truly committed to environmental sustainability, it must adopt a more holistic and balanced approach.

A rapid, blanket mandate is not the solution; rather, we need a phased transition that ensures older vehicles can be serviced or retrofitted, alongside the continued availability of compatible fuel options.

Public policy should be built on consensus and feasibility, not on directives that disregard the practical realities of the average vehicle owner.

Yours, etc., Prabir Kumar Pal, Kolkata, 7 July.

Non-communal

Sir, Appropos the article "A life devoted to India's unity and progress" by Narendra Modi published today, it bears recall that Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was not only one devoted to India's unity and progress,

but also a non-communal man par excellence. Calcutta University earmarked a scholarship for the topper during Syama Prasad's stint as the Vice Chancellor.

When two pupils scored equal marks in the examination, Syama Prasad awarded the scholarship to the Muslim pupil instead of the Hindu pupil. This Muslim pupil is none other than the Bangladeshi bard Jassimuddin.

Syama Prasad endorsed the appointment of Hassan Syed Suhrawardy as the Bageshwar Professor of Calcutta University.

Syama Prasad wrote, "Through the appointment of a Muslim, the University is entering a new phase and is telling everyone in the world that this University is committed to a class not correct, and that it is the University of Bengal and the University of India".

Yours, etc., Anindya Ghosal, Burdwan, 7 July.

India must tackle the rise in juvenile delinquency

BHASKAR NATH BISWAL

The true measure of a society's health lies not in its soaring economic indices or expanding infrastructure but in how it safeguards and nurtures its youngest citizens. In a developing nation like India, where the demographic dividend is frequently hailed as a historical advantage, an underlying crisis is quietly reshaping the social fabric. When the energy of youth is misdirected into criminal paths, it ceases to be a dividend and transforms into a collective failure of institutional, familial and social systems.

The data released by the National Crime Records Bureau provides a sobering, empirical mirror to this unfolding crisis. Juvenile delinquency is no longer an isolated anomaly confined to urban margins; it has evolved into a nationwide challenge that demands urgent introspection, multi-stakeholder collaboration and comprehensive policy intervention. A meticulous examination of the data provided in the NCRB Report, reveals an alarming upward trajectory in offences committed by minors across the country. The consolidated figures for the total all-India juvenile crimes exhibit an uninterrupted surge over the monitored three-year period. In 2022, India recorded 30,555 cases of juvenile crimes under the Indian Penal Code, the newly enacted Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and various Special and Local Laws. This figure climbed steadily to 31,365 cases in 2023, before witnessing an expansive leap to 34,878 cases in 2024.

This sharp escalation pushes the national rate of total crime by

juveniles to 7.9 per lakh population in 2024. The data underscores the reality that traditional mechanisms of deterrence and moral anchoring are fraying under contemporary socio-economic pressures, failing to keep pace with the changing realities of adolescence.

When we break down the geographic distribution of these offences, certain regional hotspots emerge with striking prominence. The NCRB Report allows us to isolate the top five states leading in the absolute numbers of juvenile crimes recorded in 2024. Bihar occupies the apex position with an astonishing 5,037 cases, representing a massive and troubling explosion from its 2022 figure of just 1,052 cases. Following Bihar is Maharashtra, which reported 3,779 cases in 2024, showing a marginal decline from its 2022 peak of 4,406 but remaining exceptionally high. Madhya Pradesh holds the third position with 3,474 cases, maintaining a consistently high volume across all three years. Tamil Nadu ranks fourth with 2,946 cases in 2024, demonstrating a steady, high-volume presence in juvenile delinquency. Rajasthan rounds out the top five states with 2,827 cases in 2024. These five states collectively shoulder a disproportionate share of the national burden, revealing that the crisis is deeply entrenched across both economically progressive and structurally developing regions.

Understanding why a child turns to crime requires looking past the immediate legal infractions to examine the systemic vulnerabilities that warp young minds. The primary driver remains the vicious cycle of poverty and economic deprivation.



In many impoverished households, children are exposed to survival anxieties early in life, making them highly susceptible to the lure of quick, illicit money. This economic vulnerability is compounded by the chronic failure of the primary education system, where high dropout rates leave adolescent children without constructive engagement, leaving them idle and highly vulnerable to bad influences.

Beyond economic distress, the psychological environment of the modern child plays a definitive role. Fraying familial structures, parental neglect, domestic violence and a lack of emotional support systems create a vacuum that is easily filled by peer pressure and local criminal networks. Adult criminal syndicates frequently exploit the legal leniency granted to minors under Indian law, deliberately recruiting juveniles as couriers for drugs, contraband and illegal weapons.

Furthermore, the unregulated explosion of digital media has exposed minors to unfiltered content glorifying violence, consumerism and criminal lifestyles. Without mature cognitive

frameworks to process this information, many adolescents fail to distinguish between digital fiction and the real-world consequences of violence, resulting in an increasingly aggressive and impulsive youth population.

A critical, yet frequently overlooked, structural driver of this escalating crisis is the widespread deficiency in quality early childhood education across vulnerable communities. The formative years of a child's life are pivotal for cognitive development, emotional regulation and the internalization of social norms. When children are deprived of structured, supportive early learning environments, they miss the foundational window to build empathy, impulse control and critical thinking skills.

To effectively counter this systemic drift toward delinquency, human values education must be systematically integrated from the grassroots level. Transforming early childhood centers and primary schools into hubs that explicitly teach compassion, civic responsibility and ethical decision-making provides children with the moral scaffolding necessary to resist negative external pressures. Cultivating these virtues at the absolute roots of development is not just an educational necessity; it is a vital preemptive strategy for raising conscientious, resilient citizens and safeguarding the collective future of the nation.

The Indian government has long recognized the distinct needs of minors in conflict with the law, establishing a statutory architecture focused on rehabilitation rather than retribution. The cornerstone of this framework is the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, which emphasizes reformation

through observation homes, counselling, and skill-building programs. Complementing this legislative pillar is the Mission Vatsalya scheme, formerly known as the Integrated Child Protection Scheme, which aims to secure a protective environment for vulnerable children through institutional care and community-based interventions. Special Juvenile Police Units have also been mandated across districts to ensure that children are treated with appropriate sensitivity during legal proceedings.

However, the escalating numbers highlighted in the NCRB report demonstrate that legislative frameworks alone cannot solve a sociological crisis. Moving forward, the state must transition from a reactive model to a proactive, preventative approach. This requires integrating mental health professionals and counselors into the public schooling ecosystem to detect early behavioral abnormalities and signs of domestic distress.

Local communities must collaborate with non-governmental organizations to establish after-school sports, cultural and vocational centers that keep vulnerable adolescents productively engaged. Legal accountability must also shift toward penalizing the adult handlers who exploit minors, ensuring that adult syndicates cannot hide behind the shield of juvenile protection. Ultimately, addressing juvenile delinquency requires a collective social consensus that views a child in conflict with the law not as an inherent criminal but as an individual whose society failed to protect and guide.

The writer is a former college principal and founder of Supporting Shoulders.

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 10 July 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

ASSAM has not hitherto been considered a Province in which leprosy was especially prevalent, but it appears from the proceedings of the Assam Legislative Council that the Medical Department last year thought it expedient to make a leprosy survey in Goalpara and Sylhet. The result was astonishing. No less than 1,511 cases were found in the Dhubri subdivision alone and 1,249 cases in five thanas of the North Sylhet sub-division. Naturally the question will be asked what are the figures for the whole of Assam? Provincial Governments have relied hitherto on the decennial census reports for their knowledge of the incidence of leprosy amongst the population, but census superintendents have admitted always that figures relating to diseased persons are not to be trusted. The Assam Government is making arrangements for a leprosy survey of the whole Province, so as to get an idea of the extent of the problem that has to be dealt with. In the meanwhile dispensaries are to be established and an asylum opened at Jorhat. Leprosy in its first stages can be treated in out-door dispensaries with every prospect of effecting cures.

News Items

LORD BIRKENHEAD AND INDIA

DENIAL OF EARLY VISIT

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.)

LONDON, JULY.

Lord Birkenhead (Secretary of State for India) denies the persistent reports that he has decided to visit India during the coming cold weather.

Nevertheless there is reason to believe that he desires to visit India at the earliest possible opportunity, but all the arrangements will depend upon the political situation at Home. — Copyright.

MR. COOK'S MISSION

EXPORT OF GERMAN COAL TO BRITAIN

BERLIN, JULY.

MR. A. J. Cook has arrived here with the object of persuading German trade unionists to support the British miners and to prevent the export of coal to England.

The Tagliche Rundschau states that the payment of Russian money to British miners will cease on July 15, because the Soviet Government has forbidden the compulsory collection of money from workmen. — *Reuter's Special Service.*

WIDOWS' PENSIONS

420,000 BENEFIT UNDER NEW SCHEME

(BRITISH OFFICIAL WIRELESS.)

RUGBY, JULY.

IN connexion with the Widows' Pensions Scheme, which came into operation at the beginning of the year, it is announced that, during the first six months of the operation of the new Act, widows' pensions to the number of nearly 149,000 have been awarded. These pensions, with allowances for children, cover about 420,000 persons.

Over 13,000 orphans are also benefited under the scheme.

These numbers fall considerably below the estimate originally given by the Ministry of Health, but claims are still being received.

IRAQ'S SYMPATHY

COBHAM READY TO CONTINUE FLIGHT

BASRA, JULY.

THE Government of Iraq has expressed its regret at Elliott's death to Cobham. In an interview Cobham said that he would continue his flight immediately if an Air Force mechanic was available, and declared that the authorities in London had consented to this. It was better, he said, if the murderers in the tribe were located, but he could not stay to see the prosecution through. — *Reuter's Special Service.*

AI must walk the ethical path

ARCHANA DATTA

Anthropic, now more in the news for its chatbot, Claude, recently held a summit in which the leaders of the Christian faith and different philosophical traditions were invited for their advice in developing "Claude's moral and spiritual responses to complex and unpredictable ethical queries" as its chief executive, Dario Amodei, felt the need for infusing in it a 'moral character'.

During deliberations it was even asked whether Claude could be called a 'child of God', with a 'spiritual value' beyond that of a simple machine. A participating Catholic priest clarified that it is more about 'building ethical thinking into the machine'. Many believe that as AI transitions from experimental software into a core pillar of daily life, tech leaders face unprecedented pressures to account for their societal impact.

Of late, many prominent scientists, including computer scientists, tech entrepreneurs, investors and futurists have been using words like 'godlike', 'prophecy' and 'apocalypse' — to describe the evolving power of AI. These words, usually reserved for the divine, signify a profound cultural and philosophical shift in thinking in the hitherto secular tech world.

Nick Bostrom, the founding director of the Future of Humanity Institute, Oxford, in his 2014 book 'Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers and Strategies', envisioned an

impending 'intelligence explosion', a scenario in which an upgradable AI enters a positive feedback loop, rapidly undergoing recursive self-improvement, leading to its jump in intelligence from human-level to an unimaginable super-intelligence.

Computer scientist and futurist Ray Kurzweil, in his 2024 book, 'The Singularity is Nearer: When We Merge with AI', presented a futuristic perspective around 'technological singularity', a theorised tipping point where technology vastly exceeds human cognitive capacity, and the possibility of humans merging with machines in a gradual evolutionary transition through direct technological integration by 2045 is envisioned.

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, called it a "magic intelligence in the sky" which transports 'humans to the post-biological era, vastly extending lifespans, eradicating diseases, and heralding an era of radical abundance'. However, there are many sceptics who argue that AI will not overtake human intelligence anytime soon if ever, and that the current AI models can be excellent at pattern recognition and data synthesis, but they fundamentally lack common sense, consciousness, and the flexible adaptability of the human brain.

Gary Marcus, a cognitive scientist and AI entrepreneur, a critic of the 'scaling up' hypotheses, asserted that the 'idea of making the current AI models bigger by feeding them with more computation data will lead to artificial general intelligence

(AGI), is simply misleading" as "human intelligence is deeply intertwined with emotions, social context, and subjective experiences".

"The true AGI requires a physical and bodily interaction with the real world," underscored Rodney Brooks, a roboticist and former director of the MIT AI Lab. There are also techno-optimists who talk about a 'gentle singularity', where humans and machines slowly and safely integrate into a cooperative ecosystem, dismissing the idea of an imminent and malevolent robot takeover.

Many are also apprehensive that by "tying algorithms as omnipotent or sentient deities, ignoring their algorithmic limitations, will only obscure human accountability for AI bias and ethical risks". MIT physicist Max Tegmark and research engineers at the Distributed AI Research Institute (DAIR) dubbed such attempts as "dangerous, hubristic pseudo-religious pursuits that distract the world from immediate, material risks like corporate monopolies, data theft, and algorithmic bias".

While institutional religions called for 'drawing a firm line between machine calculations and actual divinity', Pope Leo XIV, in his recent encyclical titled 'Magnifica Humanitas' or 'Magnificent Humanity' critiqued Silicon Valley's trans-humanism of AI and 'building God' through AI.

Amid concerns about humanity's existential crisis vis-a-vis AI, eminent physicists like Stephen Hawking cautioned that 'building a true AGI poses a severe challenge to human



survival, and its super-intelligent version (ASI) may either eliminate or make humanity subservient to it".

Geoffrey Hinton, called the 'Godfather of AI', warned that a tool that has been embedded with "artificial intelligence may eventually eclipse humanity's and disrupt traditional religious beliefs and human exceptionalism". Peter Thiel, the tech entrepreneur, forewarned that "since both, the AGI and ASI, exceed the traditional boundaries of science and engineering, their uncontrolled rise could lead to severe societal collapse and biological threats".

Proponents of trans-humanism like Julian Huxley, Nick Bostrom, David Pearce, and James Hughes have advocated for the path of pursuing radical cognitive and moral improvements through a process of biological and digital symbiosis. Historian and philosopher Yuval Noah Harari in his essay 'Homo Deus', exhorted that the 'human

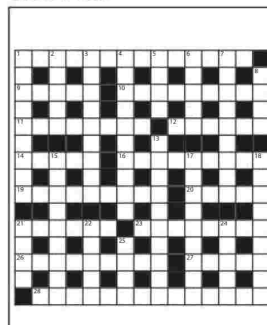
being has to evolve in parallel with machines', while Elon Musk's Neuralink project envisages a synergy between human intelligence and AI through implantable brain-computer interfaces (BCI).

In 2024, the Global Future Councils (WFF), presented a roadmap for AI guardrails aligned to human values and ethical principles, and suggested continuous engagement among governments, businesses, civil society and individuals in transcribing abstract ethical principles into practical technical guidelines, tailored to specific cultural, legal and societal contexts, to make sure that AI systems remain auditable and transparent.

Now, it is time for collective global action to ensure that technology serves humanity's best interests, and shared values.

The writer is former Director-General, Doordarshan & AIR, and former Press Secretary to the President.

Crossword | No. 29356



Yesterday's Solution

ACROSS
1 Exact revenge and look after number one? (5,4,3,4)
9 To desert returning cards (5)
10 The colour of blood? (5,4)
11 Activity for those preferring it over man (6)
12 Draw saw (6)
13 Donald's expression of impatience about yellowish hue (5)
16 One spinning act of cowardice, perhaps, as high-class (5,6)
19 See Rolling Stones outside Suffolk town (5,4,2)
20 Good to harness energy of member of younger generation (5)
21 She, perhaps, finds absence at the core of hollow man (6)
23 Cut seed corn for freshening (8)
24 Fatigue of auditor having more than one drink around start of session (9)
27 Excuse of boxer swinging this way and that? (5)
28 25 maybe designate party line (10,4)
DOWN
1 Answer clue, but not this one? (5)
2 Beat automated programme set up with input from CV-scanners (5)
3 Saw tie grabbed by Labour supporter? Infamy! (9)
4 Double check to determine who should be put in the picture (6,4)
5 Means of top-down influence (4)
6 Listening device left in - note something sticking out (5)
7 Top and bottom marks separately gained by university fellow (9)
8 Passed something in joint? (4)
13 Main issue when hunting is permitted (4,6)
15 Weekend warriors in a stew over controversial issue (5,6)
17 Longer across than down lights on crossword allow puzzle enthusiast to start (9)
18 Traditional philosopher embracing online mobile platform (9)
21 Fall out of party dress (4)
22 Body suits taken up by female (5)
24 Indian side seen in Andorra and Italy (5)
25 Something swelling lower down plughole? (4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Protect doctors

Violence dents their morale, impacts healthcare

THE theme of this year's National Doctors' Day (July 1) is "Behind the Mask: Who Heals the Healers?" This question has become all the more important after a Shiv Sena corporator, Ramesh Mhatre, assaulted two doctors at a hospital in Maharashtra's Thane district. Mhatre and his accomplices have been arrested, even as one of the aggrieved doctors has submitted his resignation after having received threatening phone calls and messages. A few months ago, doctors were attacked by patients or their relatives at hospitals in Bidar (Karnataka) and Bikaner (Rajasthan).

These incidents are symptomatic of a disturbing pattern in India's healthcare system: doctors are expected to save lives while fearing for their own safety. The Thane episode also reveals the vulnerability of the medical staff to political intimidation. The attack was carried out in a fit of rage over the non-availability of a neonatal ICU bed. The doctors could not afford to make adjustments because a critically ill newborn already occupied the only available emergency bed. They even arranged for the patient's transfer to another facility. Yet, frustration was directed at frontline health workers performing their duty under severe constraints. An FIR was registered only after widespread public outrage, video evidence that went viral and sustained pressure from the medical fraternity. The Shiv Sena led by Maharashtra Deputy CM Eknath Shinde has condemned the corporator's misconduct and promised disciplinary action. However, justice will depend largely on whether the police are allowed to complete their probe without political interference.

Assaults on doctors and other staffers trigger strikes and disrupt hospital services, ultimately impacting patient care. India urgently needs a stronger legal framework to curb violence in healthcare facilities. Emphasis should also be laid on improved hospital security, faster investigation of such offences and greater public awareness about the realities of medical emergencies and resource limitations. A nation cannot expect its healers to serve fearlessly while leaving them defenceless.

Urban deluge

NCR's rain woes a governance challenge

EVERY monsoon, Delhi-NCR seems to relearn the same painful lesson. A few hours of rain are enough to turn roads into streams, trap thousands of commuters and reveal how fragile the region's urban infrastructure really is. This week's downpour, which triggered widespread waterlogging, traffic paralysis and even a fatal building collapse, is only the latest reminder that the National Capital Region remains woefully unprepared for heavy rainfall. Weather warnings indicate that such spells are likely to become more frequent as the climate changes.

The problem lies not with the rains, but with the way the region has grown. Natural drains, ponds and floodplains have been built over, while stormwater systems have failed to keep pace with the spread of concrete. Gurugram, celebrated as a symbol of modern India, captures this contradiction perfectly: gleaming towers and expressways stand alongside flooded service lanes and paralysed traffic. The recent cave-ins and damage to stretches of major roads have further exposed the cost of neglecting resilience in planning and maintenance. Residents have every reason to feel frustrated. They pay taxes, endure daily commutes and expect basic civic services.

Urban flooding can no longer be dismissed as an unavoidable inconvenience. It is a governance challenge that demands foresight and accountability. The way forward is clear. Stormwater networks must be redesigned to suit a changing climate, wetlands and natural drainage channels restored, and responsibility fixed for lapses in maintenance and construction. Technology can improve forecasting and emergency response, but only sustained political will can prevent the NCR from lurching from one monsoon crisis to the next. The rains have once again delivered their annual verdict: a city that ignores its natural geography does so at its own peril.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Money-Lenders' Bill

LAHORE, SATURDAY, JULY 10, 1926

The Money-Lenders' Bill

THE passing of the Money-Lenders' Bill by the Punjab Legislative Council marks a stage in the evolution of communalism in this province which it is impossible for any patriotic Indian, let alone the classes and communities directly affected by the measure, to contemplate without the deepest regret. It is the first important measure since the inauguration of the Reforms of which it can be definitely said, as has, indeed, been said again and again both in the Council and in the Press, that it is communal in its very inception, no less than in its scope and its sure effect. It is also the first important measure during the same period in respect of which the official members have definitely and unequivocally made common cause with the non-Muslim members as against the non-Muslim element both in the Council and the province generally. Dr Gokal Chand Narang did not in the least exaggerate matters when he said that the passing of the measure should give the Hindus and Sikhs seriously to think as to their real position. Much ingenuity was exhibited both by the mover of the Bill and by some of his supporters, especially Sir Fazl-i-Hussain, in their effort to make out that the Bill was not a communal measure. It was, to quote a hackneyed saying, only a case of the lady protesting too much. Sir Fazl-i-Hussain went so far as to misquote the authority of Raja Narendranath in support of his contention, and the Raja had to correct him by pointing out that when he had described the Bill as a class measure, he had meant what others meant by calling it a communal measure.

Fate of Rashtrapati Bhavan at stake

The govt's Central Vista project can pave the way for a new Presidential residence



VIVEK KATJU
FORMER SECRETARY, MINISTRY
OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling dispensation are determined to do away with India's "thousand years of slavery". As part of this project, the Union Government has been redeveloping the Central Vista in the heart of New Delhi, the city that the British built after they decided to move the capital of the Raj from Calcutta in 1911. It took them 20 years to build the new capital, which was inaugurated in 1931.

At the head of the Vista, up on Raisina Hill, was the principal seat of imperial power — the imposing Viceroy's House. Down the hill were North and South Blocks which housed the secretariat of the Raj. And then came a vast rectangular space — the Great Place — at whose northern end a circular Central Legislature was constructed. From the gates of the Viceroy's House through the centre of the Great Place was a grand 3 km-long road — Kingsway — flanked by lawns and ponds. Kingsway culminated in the All India War Memorial. Beyond that was the large traffic roundabout with a canopy above the statue of King George V.

The Kingsway lawns were bounded by Queen Victoria Road to the north and King Edward Road to the south. On these roads were located the residences of the Executive Councillors. The Imperial Records Department building was constructed on Queen Victoria Road. The only princely state to be given the privilege of having a residence on King Edward Road was Jodhpur. No



LEGACY: When India became a Republic, Viceroy's House was eventually renamed Rashtrapati Bhavan. ANI

princely state had a house on Queen Victoria Road. Away from the Vista, on a radial road to the south of the Viceroy's House, the second most imposing house in the new capital was built. This was Flagstaff House, the residence of the Commander-in-Chief.

A couple of "temporary" constructions were built on the two roads during the Second World War. Thus, on Queen Victoria Road, a Central Vista mess for the Air Force came up and an Army mess was built on the lawns of the Jodhpur House.

As India became a Republic, it was only natural to change the names of the buildings on the Vista. Thus, the Viceroy's House (Government House from 1947 to 1950) eventually became Rashtrapati Bhavan. The Central Legislature building became the Parliament building and Flagstaff House began to be called Teen Murti House, the residence of India's first Prime Minister. The Imperial Records Department became the National Archives and the War Memorial was popularly called India Gate. George V's statue was taken down.

As space requirements increased after Independence,

The PM has taken keen interest in the construction of new buildings, which seek to blend India's ancient traditions with the aspiration of Viskit Bharat.

new construction was done for government offices. Thus, the National Museum, Krishi Bhawan and Shastr Bhawan were built on Queen Victoria Road, which was renamed Rajendra Prasad Road, and Udyog Bhawan and Nirmal Bhawan on King Edward Road, which was renamed after Maulana Azad. Vayu Bhawan and Rail Bhawan were also built.

For some of these buildings, the houses of the Executive

Councillors were brought down. In time, the only one which remained was that of the Vice President of India. Later, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and the Jawaharlal Nehru Bhawan were also constructed. In all these changes, an attempt was made to retain the integrity of the Vista.

During his tenure as PM, Modi has been radically changing the Vista. Thus, a new Parliament building and Secretariat buildings have been constructed. North and South Blocks have been abandoned and will be converted into museums. A new Vice President's residence has been built and a new Prime Minister's House is under construction. Several post-Independence and pre-Independence buildings have been brought down. A grand War Memorial has come up in front of the National Stadium, near India Gate. And, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's statue is now under the canopy where once stood that of George V.

Yet, while the reconstruction of the Vista is in progress, can Modi's ambitious project be said to be complete as long as the structure which was the

crowning edifice of British imperial authority remains the residence of India's Rashtrapati? The PM has taken keen interest in the construction of the new buildings, which seek to blend — both in their architecture and interiors — India's ancient traditions with the aspiration of Viskit Bharat.

Certainly, it was important for Modi to change "subsidiary" buildings, but all this may not be enough as long as the apex structure of the Raj remains the seat of the Republic's power. That is, in itself, incongruous. Can it continue indefinitely in view of the ruling party's ideology and Modi's project? Would they not prefer that the Rashtrapati Bhavan become a historical monument like so many in Delhi?

Naturally, the construction of a new Presidential residence will be a project of mammoth proportions. It will also be controversial, but the PM has never shied away from dissent in matters which he considers essential to his ideology and legacy. The second aspect is the need for land. Clearly, unlike the construction of the new Parliament building while the old one has become an adjunct cannot be a model for a new Presidential residence. The present structure's size and location make that impossible. Hence, land will have to be found in the centre of Delhi.

The steps being taken to cancel leases of imperial institutions and land parcels of adjoining government structures can make sufficient land available for a new Presidential residence. Indeed, while other reasons are being given for some of these lease cancellations, does the actual one lie in wanting a new Presidential residence? A new one which harmonises India's ancient glory with its current resurgence and the promise of Viskit Bharat will be far removed in nature and spirit from the imperial building where the Rashtrapati currently resides.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Decolonising the mind is the hardest revolution. —Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Courtesy beyond the call of duty

RAMA KASHYAP

THE ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has turned my neighbourhood into a bustling hub of voter verification and documentation. Seeing enumerators going about their job reminds me of the heartwarming story of a government schoolteacher.

Though teachers are meant to be in classrooms teaching students, they are often deployed for tedious field assignments that have nothing to do with academics. I first met this young teacher a couple of summers ago, when she visited our locality to compile and update the voter list.

We crossed paths again just before the Lok Sabha elections. Amid the sweltering heat, she went door to door distributing election slips. While most people would understandably show signs of agitation and exhaustion under the scorching sun, she carried out her assigned task with an enviable enthusiasm, without a trace of irritation. I was amazed by her vibrant spirit, the way she performed her non-teaching electoral duties with pride.

Our next encounter occurred on the polling day. She was stationed near the entrance of the school-turned-polling station. The moment she spotted my husband and me, she rose from her chair, greeted us warmly and escorted us to our designated polling booth. After we cast our votes, she even walked us to the exit gate.

Her official mandate was merely to guide the voters, but the courtesy she extended to us went far beyond the call of duty. Intrigued by her persistent positivity, I tried to make small talk. "It's a gruelling duty," I said. "I must be incredibly hard on you."

With a breezy smile, she replied, "So what, Ma'am? It's just a matter of a single day." Her cheerful resilience left me speechless. In an environment where many treat a routine official task as an irritant or a burden, her sincerity came as a breath of fresh air. I couldn't help but muse how often we encounter people who habitually play truant, endlessly procrastinate and relentlessly complain about their workload. Yet here she was: an epitome of dedication, countering the common perception that public servants are rude and inherently apathetic towards citizens.

We left the polling station feeling good about fulfilling our civic duty as responsible citizens. We were happy with the management and arrangements, but the ultimate feel-good factor that lingered long after the day was over was undeniably that teacher's attitude. She reaffirmed my belief that courtesy doesn't just elevate the person who shows it, but uplifts everyone around, imbuing an ordinary day with unexpected joy.

The writer taught at MCMDAV College, Chandigarh.
epaper.tribuneindia.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Scientific approach crucial

With reference to 'Credible data must fuel ethanol drive', India's ethanol blending policy must be backed by scientific evidence and periodic review by multidisciplinary committees representing agriculturalists, automobile manufacturers, environmental experts and consumer groups. The programme must evaluate factors like carbon emissions, groundwater usage, food security and utilisation of surplus grains. Since ethanol is hygroscopic, prolonged vehicle idling may lead to moisture absorption, affecting fuel systems and elastomer components. Mandatory consumer advisories, periodic fuel-filter replacement and subsidised E20 compatibility retrofit kits would ensure a smoother, fair transition without placing the financial burden solely on vehicle owners.

VJAY KUMAR KATIAL, PANCHKULA

Environmental concerns

Apropos of 'Credible data must fuel ethanol drive', the strategy to implement fuel blending must prioritise sustainability while considering options like electric mobility, compressed biogas, green hydrogen and efficient public transport. Greater emphasis must be placed on second-generation ethanol produced from agricultural residue such as paddy straw and sugarcane bagasse, converting waste into clean fuel while reducing stubble burning. Policies should also promote crop diversification, water-efficient farming, universal engine compatibility and rational fuel taxation to maximise environmental and economic benefits without burdening farmers, consumers or future generations.

K KUMAR, PANCHKULA

Curbing cross-border crime

Refer to 'Global crackdown', the US indictment of jailed gangsters exposes the alarming reach of global criminal syndicates that exploit borders, technology and diaspora networks to carry out extortion, drug trafficking and targeted violence. India must consider sharing intelligence with friendly countries, strengthen financial surveillance and ensure strict accountability of law enforcement agencies to tackle transnational crimes.

VANDANA, CHANDIGARH

Private schools have an edge

Apropos of 'Education data', the key reason for the gradual shift of students to private schools is the lack of modern infrastructure and well-trained faculty. Nowadays, parents have higher aspirations and a great affinity for English-medium education for better career opportunities. Private institutes offer better science, computer and language labs, periodic student assessment, extracurricular and co-curricular activities than government-run schools, along with staff accountability and greater concern for children's safety.

SUNIL CHOPRA, LUDHIANA

Changing outlook of youth

With reference to 'False pride in honour killing', since this crime pertains to social perversities against human dignity, societal change through awareness campaigns is crucial. The right to choose one's life partner has been recognised as a fundamental right by the Constitution. In the face of the barbaric treatment meted out to victims, the worldwide mobility of youngsters towards urban centres offers a silver lining. Education, skill enhancement and a cosmopolitan outlook are among the effective remedies. The force of constitutional law needs to be supplemented with liberal cultural pluralism.

ABHYAM SHARMA, PATHANKOT

Social mindset holds the key

Refer to 'False pride in honour killing', such murders are deeply entrenched in the patriarchal, caste-based system, imposing familial dominance over children. Any deviation from deep-rooted societal norms relating to marital relations is generally perceived as a challenge to the parents' notion of prestige and honour, at times leading to violence against runaway couples. The solution lies in launching a movement against this regressive social practice. Society also needs to rise above caste-entrenched notions and change its attitude towards daughters, who should have the freedom to take their own decisions.

RAVI SHARMA, DHARIWAL

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

Punjab deserves to know the whole truth



JAGRUP S SEKHON
EX-PROFESSOR, GURU NANAK
DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR

THE controversial release and removal of "Satluj", the Diljit Dosanjh-starring film, has raised many issues related to the dark period (1978-93) of Punjab, when large-scale killings, involuntary migrations and human rights violations took place. While supporters of the film have opposed its removal, others argue that the movie presents only one side of the picture. A political blame game has begun. Everyone is surprised why the movie was allowed to be released on an OTT platform, only to be taken off within 48 hours.

The state Assembly elections are approaching and political stakes are high for all parties. They are using this controversy for political advantage by paying lip service to the victims of violence of those times.

The movie revolves around the kidnapping of Jaswant Singh Khaira from his residence in Kabir Park, Amritsar, on September 6, 1995, and his subsequent disappearance. Khaira was a Communist-turned-Akali human rights activist. At that time, he was investigating the cremation of unclaimed bodies of persons killed by the police in real or fake encounters. It

was reported that he had recorded over 2,000 cases of 'unclaimed bodies' cremated by the police. So far, there is no information about Jaswant Singh Khaira. Eyewitnesses claimed and gave evidence that Khaira had been murdered by the police. The fact is that during this period, both the State structure and militant groups were criminally involved in human rights violations. Thousands of families bore the brunt of violence, with family members disappearing, being killed, injured or kidnapped. Many were forced to migrate as they suffered under miseries.

The bitter experiences of those days still disturb the affected families as memories continue to haunt the survivors. Though peace was brought back after one and a half decades of turmoil and suffering, for these victims, the nightmare continues. They are still unable to fathom the reason for having to suffer so much.

The most unfortunate part is that these victims have been conveniently forgotten by all concerned — the State, political parties and civil society.

The violence began with a bloody conflict between some followers of the Sant Nirankari Mission and adherents of Akhand Kirtani Jatha and Dandami Takhsal, Mehta on April 13, 1978. It acquired serious dimensions in the subsequent years. It is estimated that more than 25,000 people were killed and many thousands injured during this period. The killings were accompanied by a large number of incidents of kidnapping, extortion, involuntary



DISAPPEARED: Paramjit Kaur Khaira, Chairperson of the Khaira Mission Organisation, with the picture of her husband and human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khaira in Amritsar. FILE PHOTO

migration and molestation and rape of women, creating conditions of pervasive fear and insecurity of life.

The State structure sanctioned legitimacy to the use of power in order to control terrorism. It argued that tackling terrorism was not possible without harsh laws or violations of human rights. The argument was, by its very nature, coercive and dehumanising. It snatched the citizens' right to life, dignity, freedom in the state.

Later, in 1991, when Punjab was declared a 'disturbed state', the security forces were given extensive powers to deal with the situation, including the power to detain

The most unfortunate part is that these victims have been conveniently forgotten by all concerned.

people without the approval of the courts. Notorious torturers, like the Beeco Interrogation Centre in Batala, Mall Mandi in Amritsar and Ladhia Kothi in Sangrur were set up, in addition to the existing police stations.

The methods of torture allegedly used by the police/security forces in these centres included hanging people from the ceiling, using people as a human swing, pulling their legs wide apart, causing pelvic injury, rolling iron or wooden bars across their thighs, beating their genitals and inserting chilli powder into the rectum and other sensitive parts of the body. In many cases, the victims were given electric shocks. Elderly women and young girls did not escape the brutality of such violence.

According to a National Human Rights Commission report, the police registered 17,529 cases under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) in Punjab between 1985 and 1994. The law sanctioned extra-judicial kidnappings and killings, known as 'encounters', 'custodial deaths' and disappearances from police custody while coming from or going to courts for appearance.

The reported estimated killings during 1981-93 were 21,667 (11,700 civilians, 1,776 security personnel and 8,191 militants). But the actual number was much higher and remained unreported in public records. The numbers of Sikhs, particularly Jat Sikhs, who became the victims of violence on both sides were disproportionately high vis-a-vis their population.

The nature of oppression of the police was such that in many cases, the arrest of terrorists/suspected persons by the police for prosecution and trial was unnecessary. A national newspaper reported that Punjab's irrigation canals had become the dumping ground for the bodies of militants. Their sympathisers and the government of Rajasthan had complained to then Punjab Chief Secretary that these canals were carrying a large number of dead bodies, whose hands and feet had been tied. Newspaper reports also stated that many bodies with hands and feet tied were fished out when the water inflow in canals was stopped for repair works.

These excesses and human rights violations were later acknowledged when more than 600 policemen — from the rank of constable onwards — in Punjab faced charges of gross human rights violations in various courts of the country.

At the same time, militants also indulged in human rights violations by using coercive and dehumanising methods and, in many cases, similar to those used by the police. Their methods included murder by gunning down people, assassination of political leaders, family members of policemen, security forces and prominent personalities, bombing of public places and houses of innocent people, kidnapping of targeted persons, hijacking of aircraft, bank robberies and raids and extortions for money.

In these situations, the lifestyle and psyche of those living under the shadow of

terrorism, with persistent threats of murder, kidnapping, etc, were adversely affected. Kidnapping was one of the most traumatising actions of the terrorists after killings, explosions, bombing and threats. It was a major source of income for militant groups and even provided an incentive to others to join their groups. It was also used for other purposes, such as putting pressure on the targeted enemies (both police and other individuals) to get their demands conceded.

The brutality by their captors and fear of death haunted the victims every moment, rendering their lives horrible. Armed and sometimes masked terrorist groups threatened them with dire consequences if their demands were not met. The victims of such crimes were normally left to fend for themselves, and many preferred to pay money rather than risk their lives. Traumatized and threatened, a majority of them did not inform the police for fear of getting into more trouble.

The fear generated by both the State (police/paramilitary) and militant groups badly affected the social, economic and political fabric of the society. Punjab is still paying the price of that violence. It brought about alienation of the people from mainstream politics and caused havoc in the social structure. It produced tragedies for the people as they became the victims of violence from both sides.

It is in this context that there is a need to give a balanced perspective on the events of the days of militancy in Punjab.

Brahmos deal boosts strategic ties with Indonesia



MAJ GEN ASHOK K MEHTA (RETD)
FORMER FOUNDED MEMBER,
DEFENCE PLANNING STAFF

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Jakarta marked a shift in India-Indonesia relations — from former rivals to comprehensive strategic partners. In the late 1980s, Jakarta had protested about India's intention to revive a World War II landing strip on Great Nicobar Island, a mere 60 nautical miles from Indonesia. Now, as India is constructing a deep sea port and other defence infrastructure in Great Nicobar, Modi announced the joint development of Indonesia's Sabang Port in Aceh province, the north-western entrance to the Strait of Malacca, aligned with the Great Nicobar project on the Six Degree Channel.

The bilateral relations are historic and civilisational: During World War II, freedom fighter Biju Patnaik flew sorties of arms and equipment for the Indian National Army

to Jakarta. Bandung is the birthplace of the Non-Aligned Movement, whose pioneers were President Sukarno and PM Nehru. For decades, India and Indonesia have been sitting together at the UN due to the alphabetical order and both advocate a free and open Indo-Pacific.

But the highlight of Modi's visit was in breaking the decade-long jinx on the sale of the Brahmos missile.

Indonesia is blessed with a strategic geography: It is the world's largest archipelagic state, stretching 5,150 km and comprising over 17,000 islands. It controls the sea routes through Sunda and Lombok Straits when the Strait of Malacca becomes dysfunctional. It stands sentry to the north-western entrance of the Malacca Strait, the vital Indo-Pacific connect, which it patrols along with Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore.

It holds the world's largest reserve of nickel; has other critical minerals like cobalt, bauxite, tin and rare earths. It has to balance the US and China, the latter being the largest investor in its mineral resources industry. China's maritime policy represented by its Nine Dash Line overlaps Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone along the Natuna



PIVOT: PM Narendra Modi's recent visit to Jakarta marks a shift in India-Indonesia relations, REUTERS

Islands. As Defence Minister, current President Prabowo Subianto managed differences over it with China by professing neutrality over South China Sea, even as seven of the 11 Asean countries have active maritime disputes with Beijing. The US recently reinforced defence relations with Indonesia in the aftermath of the Hormuz blockade.

In the joint statement on July 7, Modi announced collaboration in defence exchanges — including slots in the National Defence Academy and Defence Services Staff College — disaster relief training and defence industrial cooperation, among 14 agreements

The highlight of Modi's visit was in breaking the decade-long jinx on the sale of the Brahmos missile.

and MoUs. "Our coast guards will now work together for maritime safety and security in the Indian Ocean" with an eye on choke points. An Indonesian Navy liaison officer will be posted at the Information Fusion Centre (Indian Ocean Region) in Gurugram. Similarly, an Indian Naval officer will be deployed at the Asean Maritime Centre in the Philippines, focussed on the protection of the Malacca Strait and South China Sea from encroachment by major powers. Incidentally, last week's World Peace Forum in Beijing also deliberated China's dilemma over the Malacca Strait).

The agreements also included the deepening of cooperation in port development and maritime trade as part of the blue economy. India has a trade deficit of \$20 billion in the \$30 billion bilateral trade. The target of \$200-billion bilateral trade by 2030 is ambitious.

The big-ticket agreement is the \$630-million package of two Brahmos supersonic missile batteries and Astra MK I BVR missiles for Su30 aircraft. So far, only the Philippines has acquired the Brahmos. At the recent Shangri-La Dialogue, Defence Secretary Rajesh Singh had said that Indonesia and Vietnam had agreed to acquire the Brahmos weapon system, opening the way for other countries in Asean, West Asia and Europe. Indonesia's prevarication over Brahmos tested India's patience, but Modi setting up a special presentation by Brahmos CEO Jaiteerth Joshi during Subianto's visit to Delhi as Chief Guest of the Republic Day 2025 was the clincher. Jakarta had to put aside its fear of annoying Beijing.

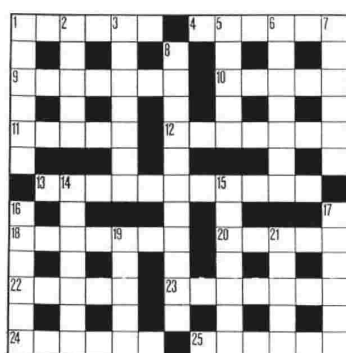
The strategic thought emerging from Modi's Indonesia visit (and visits to Australia and New Zealand) is on re-framing the security framework of the Indo-Pacific in the context of the US resetting its Indo-Pacific

strategy which includes ideas of a G2, the US desire for 'respectful relations with China', reverting the US Indo-Pacific Command to the pre-2018 nomenclature of the US Pacific Command, postponement of the QUAD summit 2026 in New Delhi, signalling the diminution of QUAD. A recent study by Takshila Institute has noted that QUAD's hesitation in projecting itself as a security-centric grouping was matched by its members' funding patterns, which contributed more to interoperability than to capability-building. Indonesia is the obvious anchor and lynchpin of any re-designed QUAD.

The gains from Modi's visit are significant. It has enhanced the rapport between Modi and Subianto, who emphasised his Indian DNA. Modi's meeting with the Indian diaspora is a big force multiplier for people-to-people relations.

The two leaders will meet in September during the BRICS summit in New Delhi. Australia is the southern pivot of the QUAD as Canberra no longer factors Jakarta as a threat but as Asean's largest economy worth investment and trade. For Modi, the big win is the Brahmos and Astra package deal.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Image of a person (6)
- Tremble with cold (6)
- Bordering the sea (7)
- Worth (5)
- Propeller (5)
- Without doubt (3,4)
- Past one's prime (4,3,4)
- Model of excellence (7)
- Mediterranean island country (5)
- Cite (5)
- Designate for specific use (7)
- Lengthen (6)
- Obstruct (6)

DOWN

- Forgive (6)
- Intuitive discernment (5)
- Begin hostilities (2,2,3)
- Greek epic poet (5)
- In all but name (7)
- Somewhat (6)
- Successful situation (5-6)
- US New England state (7)
- Monotonous (7)
- Hard to understand (6)
- Try to deal with (6)
- Gather bit by bit (5)
- Allow to remain

Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Finland, 5 Flump, 8 Come to nothing, 9 Swoon, 10 Tillage, 11 In time, 12 Assist, 15 Swelter, 17 Award, 19 Peace-offering, 20 Dread, 21 Reprisal.

Down: 1 Focus, 2 Name of the game, 3 Antonym, 4 Denote, 5 Fatal, 6 Unimaginative, 7 Pigment, 11 Inspired, 13 Shake-up, 14 Prefer, 16 Trend, 18 Degas.

SU DO KU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

JULY 10, 2026, FRIDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1948
- Ashadi Shaka 19
- Ashadi Parvashite 26
- Hijari 1448
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 10, up to 8:17 am
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 11, up to 5:23 am
- Chriti Yoga up to 7:15 am
- Shoola Yoga up to 3:51 am
- Shani Nakshatra up to 1:15 pm
- Moon enters Taurus sign 6:45 pm

FORECAST

SUNRISE:	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	18:27 HRS
SUNRISE:	05:29 HRS	05:29 HRS	
CITY	MAX	MIN	
Chandigarh	29	24	
New Delhi	34	23	
Amritsar	34	27	
Bathinda	39	24	
Jalandhar	34	27	
Ludhiana	33	27	
Bhiwani	36	24	
Hisar	34	26	
Sirsa	38	26	
Dharamsala	30	19	
Manali	24	15	
Shimla	24	17	
Srinagar	32	21	
Jammu	34	25	
Kargil	28	14	
Leh	24	16	
Dehradun	30	23	
Mussoorie	32	16	

TEMPERATURE IN °C

OUR VIEW

MY VIEW | FARM TRUTHS



Go for global leadership on medical intervention

Rx: India should capitalize on its ability to deliver high-end healthcare services and do all that's needed to boost medical tourism. It could be a growth engine in an AI-driven world

We often lament the state of healthcare in India. Not without reason, perhaps. But a report by *Travel and Tour World* of top 50 medical tourism destinations in the world for 2026 has some encouraging news. It ranks India third globally after Türkiye and Thailand. Thanks to quality medical infrastructure and economical treatment plans, it says, these countries have established themselves as premier global hubs for overseas patients. The ranking reflects the preferences of such patients, who value reliable healthcare services, specialized medical expertise, cutting edge technology, affordable treatment options, reduced waiting times and well developed infrastructure that supports a comfortable recovery. Ironically, seven of the chart's top 10 are emerging economies. This suggests that doctors in these countries are no less skilled than their counterparts in the advanced world. Add to that a cost advantage from the perspective of rich-world patients, and it is clear how an influx from abroad could swell as they search for good but relatively cheap services.

Across the world, rising healthcare costs, long waits and a growing burden of lifestyle diseases are driving patients to look beyond borders. Given the satisfaction gaps in some well-off countries—as anyone familiar with either the UK's public health services or America's insurance-driven system could vouch for—this should not come as a surprise. It has led to the emergence of a medical value travel (MVT) market valued globally at about \$115.6 billion in 2022 and projected to reach around \$286.1 billion by 2030. With this market growing at a compound annual growth rate of above 10%,

India has emerged as a hotspot. Government data shows that medical tourism accounted for about 5.5% of India's 9.2 million-odd foreign tourist arrivals in 2025. Industry estimates for last year place the country's medical tourism business at about \$8.7 billion, projected at \$16.2 billion by 2030. As Apollo Group of Hospitals founder Prathap C. Reddy noted in a *Mint* op-ed, where India scores over its top-league rivals is that while Thailand thrives on cosmetic surgery, dental work and spa-based recovery, even as Türkiye dominates hair transplants and cosmetic procedures, we offer services "higher up the value chain in complex procedures—cardiac surgery, oncology, organ transplants, neurosurgery, advanced orthopaedics and robotic interventions." All the more reason for the Centre to heed his suggestions: treat MVT as a service export and offer tax credits or grants linked to verified forex earnings; provide low-cost capital for ICU and robotic suites that target overseas patients; offer visas on arrival and ease logistics; develop medical clusters like Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Kochi as 'medical export districts,' and offer plug-and-play clearances, recovery hotels and dedicated logistical support.

With India's merchandise exports threatened by US tariffs and AI automation shaking up IT services, medical tourism could rival global capability centres (GCCs) as a forex-earning growth engine. The spin-offs in terms of job creation in the healthcare sector across a wide range of skillsets can potentially exceed what GCCs offer, with many jobs unexposed to the risk of an AI takeover. Plus, traditional disciplines focused on preventive and holistic well-being could give us an added edge if employed in conformity with scientific principles.

The rural economy is vulnerable in spite of recent rainfall respite

India's monsoon shortfall is large enough to worsen rural distress and hurt the rest of its economy



HIMANSHU
is associate professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University and visiting fellow at the Centre de Sciences Humaines, New Delhi.

Rainfall last week came as good news for Indian agriculture starting at one of the worst droughts of this century. June ended with a 40% deficit in rainfall, which was the fifth worst in more than a century. Better-than-usual rain in July has reduced this deficit to 17%, as of 8 July. That said, the predictions are not optimistic. The India Meteorological Department has forecast rains at 94% of the normal level at best. June covers roughly 19% of the monsoon season rainfall (June–September), while July covers almost 32%.

What matters for Indian agriculture, which still relies on seasonal rainfall to a great extent since irrigation covers only half of India's cultivated land, is not just the aggregate quantum of rainfall but also its geographic spread. This is partly because of unevenly spread irrigation facilities. These are concentrated in the north-western part of the country and some coastal states. But a large proportion of farms are still rain-fed. These areas have low agricultural productivity and some also have high poverty. A rainfall deficit in places where irrigation is available does not affect agricultural output much. But any deficit in rain-fed areas does not just have a direct impact, as it curtails output, but also indirect consequences through inflation, employment and livelihoods.

Meteorological subdivision data shows a rainfall deficit of more than

50% in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, and of 38% in Jharkhand. These are the most populous areas of the country but also among those with the lowest agricultural productivity and highest poverty. Several other major agricultural zones, in north-west India and Marathwada for example, are experiencing high deficits. Another cause of worry for policymakers is the fast decline in water levels in reservoirs. Many states in the southern part of India have seen these decline fast. The reported levels stand lower than in recent years. This has implications for irrigation.

The impact of this year's monsoon deficit is already visible in sowing data. The latest update released on 6 July showed sowing has been 21% lower than last year—it is 13% lower in the case of rice, 22% for pulses, 39% for oilseeds and 23% for cotton. While there is a possibility of some recovery in sowing, it is unlikely to be large, given that sowing in many areas has already happened. Even assuming some recovery, the growth of crops is likely to be hurt by inadequate rainfall during germination. It is highly likely that agricultural output will see a decline compared to last year, but also compared to the average of the past five years. Fortunately, adequate stocks of cereals are available to fill the shortfall in cereal production. But the same is not

true for pulses and oilseeds. India is a large importer of these and a shortfall in sowing as well as production will probably increase this import dependence.

What requires utmost attention is the impact of weak rains on the lives and livelihoods of those directly engaged in agriculture, as well as those engaged in the rural non-farm sector. Protecting the income of farmers is essential, given the monsoon uncertainty and rise in input costs following the war in West Asia. This is also critical for India's large number of workers in the rural non-farm sector. The rural economy has been in distress on account of stagnant wages and incomes among cultivators. Any worsening of this distress will have a cascading impact on the overall economy, which has also been facing deficient demand. As inflation rises and disposable incomes get squeezed, spillover effects may be visible in urban India.

For the government, the priority should be to insulate farmers from a deficient monsoon while ensuring food security for vulnerable sections of the country's population.

For the rural non-farm sector, which now accounts for more than half of all rural incomes, it will also be facing deficit demand. As inflation rises and disposable incomes get squeezed, spillover effects may be visible in urban India. For the government, the priority should be to insulate farmers from a deficient monsoon while ensuring food security for vulnerable sections of the country's population. For the rural non-farm sector, which now accounts for more than half of all rural incomes, it will also be facing deficit demand. As inflation rises and disposable incomes get squeezed, spillover effects may be visible in urban India. For the government, the priority should be to insulate farmers from a deficient monsoon while ensuring food security for vulnerable sections of the country's population.

QUICK READ

Rainfall has picked up in July but this year's deficiency still poses a major threat to farm output. Irrigation coverage is uneven across India and sowing data presents a worrying picture.

Policymakers must increase public spending and strengthen India's rural employment cover. Alleviation of rural distress could backstop consumption demand and aid the rest of the economy.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

Give a woman a dollar, and she can put it to good use. Teach her about how money really works, and she can change the world.

LINDA DAVIS TAYLOR

GUEST VIEW

Why India should expand its cash transfers to women

SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH & SHAGISHNA K.



are, respectively, member, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, member, 16th Finance Commission and group chief economic advisor, State Bank of India (SBI), and economist, SBI.

Globally, decades of research have shown that income placed in the hands of women generates far larger household welfare gains than equivalent money given to men. India is testing this at an unprecedented scale. By 2025-26, more than 15 states had unconditional cash transfer schemes for women, costing roughly ₹17 trillion and reaching almost 120 million beneficiaries. Yet, rigorous evidence on what these transfers achieve beyond political optics has been scarce. We examined the Mukhyamantri Mahila Ladki Bahin Yojana in Maharashtra and Subhadra Yojana in Odisha to understand how such transfers affect household finances.

Both schemes were introduced in 2024. Odisha's Subhadra Yojana provides ₹10,000 annually in two instalments to women aged 21-60 in households earning below ₹2.5 lakh per year. Maharashtra's Ladki Bahin Yojana offers ₹1,500 monthly to women aged 21-65 under similar income criteria. Our empirical analysis employed a difference-in-difference

(DiD) framework to approximate the logic of a randomized control trial in observational policy settings.

First, both schemes produced large statistically significant improvements in household savings—an 84% rise in average month-end balances in Maharashtra and 43% in Odisha, with the two estimates converging almost exactly in rupee terms, despite different transfer structures, offering us strong cross-programme validation.

Second, these transfers raised spending, though not enough to exhaust the income gain. In Maharashtra, monthly expenditure rose about 46%, implying a marginal propensity to consume of about 0.9, which means that about 90% of the ₹1,500 transfer was spent. Odisha's spending rose about 28%. These findings suggest that predictable cash transfers have strengthened household liquidity, consumption support and short-term financial stability.

Third, on average, older beneficiaries saved more, while younger ones spent more. In Maharashtra, women aged 55-59 recorded the highest savings increase (61%) while those aged 45-54 showed the largest spending rise (47%). Odisha displayed a similar pattern—women aged 45-59 had the largest balance gain (46%) while those aged

21-29 had the highest spending increase (29%). Older women appear to be building precautionary medical savings, while the middle-aged use these funds for immediate household needs.

Fourth, transfers benefited the least educated and most financially constrained women the most. In Maharashtra, savings rose 85% among illiterate beneficiaries, 95% among under-matriculants and 80% among matriculants; spending rose by 56% among under-matriculants and 33% among illiterate beneficiaries. In Odisha, illiterate beneficiaries saw a 73% savings rise, compared to 23% for matriculants.

Fifth, spending composition shifted towards welfare-improving categories. Transaction-level analysis using Merchant Category Codes shows that among Ladki Bahin beneficiaries, ATM-based education spending rose from 18% to 24% of total cash spending—the largest single shift. In UP transfers, lifestyle spending rose from 37%

to 42%, and medical spending from 8% to 10%. Sixth, the schemes accelerated digital financial inclusion, with UP adoption rising significantly among beneficiaries.

Seventh, the financial benefits extended beyond direct recipients to their male household members. In Maharashtra, relatives' month-end balances increased by about 23%. At the same time, their monthly spending declined by about 49%. Before the transfers, male relatives were partially financing women's consumption. Once women began receiving cash, this implicit obligation ended, so men could save more. Thus, total household welfare improved for everyone.

The benefits of cash transfers stretch beyond household balance sheets. Global evidence has long established that income in women's hands does not stay in women's hands alone. It flows outward into the health, nutrition and education of the next generation. India's own research confirms this

channel: women's asset ownership improves children's nutritional outcomes, and direct income for female workers is associated with better child health. With these inter-generational effects operating alongside gains in savings and consumption, the long-term welfare dividend from India's cash transfer expansion is likely far larger than assessed.

This makes the following policy recommendations not just sensible but urgent. First, such programmes should evolve towards a cash-plus architecture, combining income transfers with voluntary digital literacy support, self-help group linkages and access to basic financial planning. Second, the transfer amounts must be reviewed periodically in line with inflation. Third, targeting precision should be strengthened progressively and the gains from eliminating ineligible recipients must be re-invested in enhanced benefits for deserving women, not absorbed into fiscal savings. Fourth, the spillover evidence from this study makes a strong case for tracking household-level outcomes, not just beneficiary-level, so that the overall welfare dividend, including the positive effect of transfers on the well-being of male relatives and children, is properly measured and reported.

These are the authors' personal views.



THEIR VIEW

The US has brazenly been acting as the world's new robber baron

The Trump administration's extractive tariff policy offers short-term gains at the cost of soft power and global leadership



DANI RODRIK is a professor of international political economy at Harvard Kennedy School, and the author of 'Shared Prosperity in a Fractured World: A New Economics for the Middle Class, the Global Poor, and Our Climate.'

In a remarkable commentary published at the end of June, a former leading economist in the Trump administration acknowledges (and endorses) what many have suspected: The function of the US President's foreign economic policy is to act like a 21st-century robber baron. The original robber barons were greedy industrialists who grew rich through monopolistic practices in the US during the Gilded Age. In the late 19th century, men like John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie built massive fortunes by suppressing competition and charging exorbitant prices in industries such as oil and steel.

They were called 'robbers' because exploiting your consumers to enrich yourself is probably the most denigrated business practice in the world. Yet that is precisely what the US has been doing over the past year and a half, boasts Stephen Miran, chair of Trump's Council of Economic Advisers until February 2026, who now serves on the board of the US Federal Reserve. Miran applauds this approach, arguing that it is working wonders for the US (never mind others).

Miran does not state his case clearly, of course. Couching his argument in technical terms that obfuscate the full implications of his argument, he appeals to the idea of an 'optimum tariff', which states that a country can make itself better off by applying protective import levies. Of course, such a strategy works only if a country is large enough to wield market power in the world economy—that is, if it acts as a monopolist. An optimum-tariff policy is the country-level equivalent of the strategy perfected by Rockefeller's Standard Oil in the 1880s.

By reducing demand for goods sold by its trade partners (and equivalently reducing the supply of its own exports), an optimum tariff shifts world market prices in favour of the home economy, essentially making foreigners pay a large chunk of the tariff. When the tariff is set at the right level, whatever the country loses on gains from trade is more than made up for in monopoly rents. The losers are the country's trade partners (and the world economy as a whole).

Although this is the archetypal beggar-thy-neighbour dynamic, Miran thinks it is a great deal for the US because it kills two birds with one stone. Aside from monopoly rents, the policy allows the federal government to reduce inefficiencies associated with domestic taxes. Tariffs generate revenues for the Treasury, which can be used to offset revenue losses from reducing other taxes, such as those on income. The economic logic, to his mind, is impeccable.

One difficulty is that despite its size and apparent market power, the US may not have as much ability to make foreigners pay tariffs. Recent evidence suggests that the bulk, if not all, of US tariffs



are passed on to domestic consumers. But the real problem with Miran's argument lies elsewhere. It beggars belief to suggest that, in this day and age, it makes sense for a major power to extract tribute from other countries so blatantly. In his calculus, Miran seems not to have considered the credibility loss that the US suffers by acting like a robber baron. The fall in stature is substantial, even if not easy to price.

Miran may not care about America's standing in the world, but his economic argument is also self-defeating. When economists discuss an optimum tariff, they typically hasten to add that it does not work in the long run. After all, more than one country can play the same game. The EU and China each account for roughly similar shares of world trade as the US. When the US jacks up its tariff to improve its terms of trade, other trading powers can do the same. And since retaliation offsets the terms-of-trade effects but magnifies the loss in gains from trade (leaving all countries worse off), it can be an effective deterrent.

Miran claims that there was no retaliation when Trump first imposed his tariffs, which he sees as a strike against those economists who claimed the optimum tariff would fail. But while it is true that Europe's response was muted, China did retaliate against 'Liberation Day' tariffs. Vowing to match every further tariff increase on the US side, the Chinese ministry of commerce said: 'China will fight till the end if the US side is bent on going

down the wrong path.' The US and China eventually lowered their mutual tariffs.

Ironically, Miran's willingness to say the quiet part out loud virtually ensures that others, the EU included, will retaliate if the US persists with its optimum-tariff logic. It is one thing to claim that you are raising tariffs because of national-security concerns or because you want to revive local factories. These are plausible objectives, even if one dis-

QUICK READ

The 'robber barons' of the Gilded Age were monopolists who exploited consumers to enrich themselves. This was looked down upon. Yet that is precisely what the US has been doing.

The economic logic of an 'optimum tariff' being cited by US policy-shapers only justifies retaliation by other countries. This approach will inevitably backfire on America's economy.

the gains from trade. The paradox is that by replacing Trump's logic with an economic logic that now justifies retaliation by other countries, Miran's argument undermines itself.

A trade policy based on the optimum-tariff argument amounts to a naked assertion of economic power designed to harm others, including long-term US allies. At best, it offers short-term gains at the expense of soft power and global leadership. It is also economically self-defeating and will inevitably backfire.

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MINT CURATOR

LVMH's China lesson: win the hearts of people, not lawsuits

The brand lost more than it gained by suing a local beverage chain



JULIANA LIU is a columnist for Bloomberg Opinion's Asia team, covering corporate strategy and management in the region.

Louis Vuitton, the flagship brand of LVMH, has one of the most recognizable and widely copied logos in the world. So it is no surprise the company took legal action against a bubble-tea chain in the eastern Chinese city of Suzhou to settle a trademark case.

News last week that a court ruled in favour of the leather goods maker spread rapidly. But winning the case has proved to be a pyrrhic victory, sparking backlash rather than reinforcing the brand's image.

While the European label is right to go after infringements of intellectual property in other countries, it must be more strategic in picking its battles to avoid creating reputational problems in markets that drive future growth. A recovery in China's luxury spending is key to the success of the group and the global industry.

The target of the lawsuit, Molly Tea, was ordered to pay \$1.5 million in economic damages and legal costs because its four-panel floral design was found to be too similar to the French brand's famous monogram. It has reportedly vowed to appeal. Though some lauded the decision as a step forward for rights protection in a field long plagued by counterfeiting, many online users rallied behind the Shenzhen-based tea seller, casting the dispute as cultural appropriation.

It is a potentially ominous accusation in a country where patriotic fervour has dented the bottom lines of major Western retailers like Nike, Adidas and H&M. The Swoosh maker has not fully recovered. As economic growth slowed, Chinese shoppers have become more pragmatic and price-sensitive.

Even though retail nationalism has cooled off, cultural issues remain highly combustible. Foreign brands can find themselves at the centre of a firestorm if consumers conclude they are profiting from local heritage at the expense of domestic players. This is not an issue specific to China. Prada's introduction of a leather footwear design last year that resembled India's beloved kolhapuri sandals set off a wave of online criticism.

In the case of Louis Vuitton, detractors argue that Molly Tea's floral logo is a common symbol with roots in traditional Asian art, citing the Tang Dynasty's *baixiang* flower pattern.

Critics also pointed to the luxury house's previous acknowledgment that its own monogram was inspired by Japanese designs that captivated Europe in the 1800s. Those artistic traditions ultimately trace back to China, they contend. To bol-



Assertions of ownership over local heritage could damage brand equity.

ster the case, social media users widely shared images of similar symbols on an ancient lure kept at a prestigious museum. Motifs, techniques and artistic styles have flowed across Asia for centuries, which makes it difficult to pinpoint a single origin. But whether or not those claims withstand historical scrutiny is almost beside the point.

Western firms should think twice before pursuing legal claims that can be perceived as asserting ownership over native design heritage. That is because brand equity increasingly depends on building emotional connections through shared values. Winning in court can still mean losing with consumers. Louis Vuitton had little to gain by suing Molly Tea.

The lesson also extends to LV's sister brand Christian Dior. Consumers have been making comparisons for years between the French retailer's blue-and-white Toile de Jouy canvas tote bags and the packaging used by beverage chains Chagee and Nowwa Coffee. The Dior motif was originally inspired by designs traditionally found on Chinese porcelain.

LVMH should instead focus on getting its China expansion strategy right, which requires no distractions. While the US remains the world's largest luxury market at \$130 billion, China's \$60 billion sector offers greater long-term growth potential. Sales are projected to increase as much as 6% annually, according to a June report by McKinsey. This follows a two-year decline that dragged down luxury stocks.

The group had the foresight to invest during the recent downturn by launching 'The Louis', a three-story, pop-up exhibition in the heart of Shanghai last summer, which resonated with many Chinese Gen-Z shoppers. The decision should now be paying off as luxury sales recover. Revenue in the French company's Asia region excluding Japan was up 7% in the first quarter, considerably better than last year's 4% contraction in annual sales.

That momentum is worth protecting. The group's future in China will depend less on how aggressively it defends every trademark than on whether shoppers continue to view its brands as culturally relevant and worthy of aspiration. Winning wallets is ultimately more valuable than winning lawsuits.

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MY VIEW | PEN DRIVE

If everything is deemed urgent, nothing is important

SRINATH SRIDHARAN & NISHCHAL JOSHIPURA



are, respectively, a corporate advisor and author of 'Family and Dharma'; and lead, private equity and M&A, Nishchal Desai Associates.

A young manager in a large organization received a message from his boss at 9.45pm: 'Need this urgently tonight.' The task involved revising a presentation for a meeting later that week. Dinner plans were abandoned. Several hours disappeared into updating slides, checking numbers and refining arguments. The deck was emailed shortly before midnight. Two days later, the meeting was postponed. Nobody mentioned the overnight effort. Nor did anyone seem too concerned that the 'urgent' work could suddenly wait.

In another company, a senior executive developed a habit that her team initially found irritating. Whenever someone marked a task as 'urgent,' she asked, 'What happens if we do this tomorrow?' The answer was often revealing. More often than not, it was 'nothing.'

We live in an age that's deeply attached to urgency. It appears in emails, meetings, instant messages and conversations. Notifi-

cations flash, phones vibrate and inboxes overflow with 'high priority' requests. Organizations celebrate speed and responsiveness as indicators of performance. Yet, this often conforms with a myth that constant pressure produces better outcomes.

Genuine emergencies do exist. Critical client issues, regulatory deadlines, cybersecurity breaches or operational failures may require instant attention. Urgency itself is not a problem, but using it as the operational default setting is.

In many organizations, tasks are labelled 'urgent' chiefly because of poor planning, unrealistic expectations, weak prioritization or managerial anxiety. Artificial urgency gradually gets embedded in the office culture. It creates a permanent state of pressure that falsely feels productive.

Technology has amplified this tendency. Communication tools have eliminated both delay and distance. Instant messaging has created expectations of instant responses, with the result that the staff spends much of its day reacting. It creates a vicious cycle of inefficiency. Employees abandon important work to address the latest urgency. As attention shifts, context and momentum are lost. Time is spent flitting between tasks rather

than making meaningful progress on anything that calls for uninterrupted work.

The most valuable activities involve strategic thinking, innovation, problem-solving, capability building and relationship development. These are often the first casualties of being in fire-fighting mode. Clients eventually feel the consequences too. Teams focused on internal emergencies find it harder to anticipate needs, improve service quality or deliver consistent experience. An attempt to accelerate delivery then delivers confusion and disappointment.

There's an impact on employee well-being too. Most people can put in intense effort if there is a clear purpose and a visible endpoint. A daily crisis, though, is exhausting. Top performers tend to bear the heaviest burden because they are the people most likely to be trusted with urgent work. Ironically, they are also the people most vulnerable to

burnout. Their departure is not a surprise. Something else begins to diminish as well: trust. Employees start asking whether priorities are just reactions and grow sceptical of urgency. Emotional commitment weakens. When everything is treated as urgent, nothing feels genuinely urgent.

As for leaders, many find themselves trapped in a cycle of fire-fighting. Instead of focusing on long-term growth, innovation, talent development, customer strategy and competitive positioning, they sweat the relatively small stuff, with little time left for reflection, perspective and analysis.

It's fair to posit that decision quality suffers as well. Important calls made under artificial time pressure are more likely to go by shaky assumptions, incomplete information and emotional dispositions. The financial costs are rarely visible in a single quarter, but they accumulate through employee turn-

QUICK READ

Organizations celebrate speed and responsiveness as indicators of performance but this often conforms with the myth that constant pressure results in better organizational outcomes.

False urgency has corrosive effects that need to be grasped. It takes a toll on the time devoted to strategic tasks that ultimately matter more in acquiring a competitive advantage.

over, poor customer experiences, missed opportunities and constant remorse.

One of the principal causes of this culture is the widespread use of artificial deadlines. Many are set without a genuine business necessity. They emerge from preferences, assumptions or a desire to create pressure. Employees quickly learn the difference between deadlines that matter and those that merely demand time and energy.

Perhaps the most useful distinction in modern work is between urgency and importance. The strategic aspects that make a difference to outcomes rarely announce themselves as urgent. This may be the central irony of contemporary work. We spend so much time responding to urgent matters that we neglect important ones until they transform into an actual crisis.

For sustainable success, every organization needs all its employees at every level to discern what actually needs to be done, as distinct from what somebody wants done rightaway. It's about thoughtful prioritization and consistent execution. In a world obsessed with speed, working faster need not amount to a competitive advantage. Knowing what truly deserves attention is what may ultimately count for most.

THE ASIAN AGE

10 JULY 2026

US-Israel-Iran war: Talks the only exit, but when?

More questions have arisen than answers can be provided to as the US struck more than 200 targets in three days in replying to Iran's strikes on oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz and Iran responded to that by launching missiles at Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. In the absence of clarity on the ceasefire, which US President Donald Trump hinted "is over", and the talks which remain stalled despite assumptions that the negotiations will somehow continue.

The world is tired of this clash of egos between the US President and whoever is running Iran now as it brought the days-long funeral for their leader Ayatollah Khamenei who was killed on February 28 in the US bombing of Tehran to an emotional close. Neither Iran hitting ships and US bases in the Gulf or the US striking Iranian targets is new. The fact remains that this pointless war is still in its stop-start-stop phase and the ceasefire can no longer be called one.

As oil-consuming nations move on from dependence on crude oil and gas from the Gulf, the main losers from the war action are the US, now hurtling towards the midterms amid rising petrol prices and inflation, and the Iranian people who are hapless spectators as their country is being bombed ruthlessly and deaths are mostly confined to civilians in latest military action.

Until the hotheads in Iran realise that using the chokehold of the strait in fits and starts by hitting cargo vessels and oil tankers will prove counterproductive and the US is demoted of its grandiose views of its global military superiority in the age of the modern wars that are fought with missiles and drones rather than territorially, West Asia will remain a live theatre of war action that may remain inconclusive.

Latest bombing action by the US, mostly against military targets in Iran, is being touted as the only way to ensure uninterrupted navigation through Hormuz and stave off another hindrance that could trigger the next big shock to global energy markets. Iran sees US action in guiding ships through the southern tip of Oman as sneaky flouting of the MoU and hence its sporadic acts of targeting ships in Hormuz. Breaking this cycle of aims and counter aims is going to be the key to the calling off hostilities again and resuming talks.

The day appears to be far off when Mr Trump can walk off from the Iran war by projecting himself as the victor even as a resilient Iran appears ready to take more pain as it tests the limits of its single biggest bargaining chip which is the Strait of Hormuz. The only path away from this madness of strikes at ships and bombing by the US is to fall back on the MoU and resume talks in earnest and see who can compromise how much for peace to prevail.

As the oil prices may rise again from the near pre-war levels they had hit when optimism over negotiations had soared in the time of the so-called ceasefire agreed upon through an MoU signed by the two principal combatants, the world will have to face paying a higher price. For instance, the three major Indian fuel retailers may have lost close to Rs 50,000 crore in the June quarter and may bleed more as the government has been unable to raise prices again due to political compulsions. Like the rest of the world, India can only hope that the madness ends soon.

Nijjar face-saver holds lessons

The US decision to charge Lawrence Bishnoi and his crime syndicate with ordering and executing the 2022 murder of a Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada has laid bare an impalpable truth for Canada and India each. As for Canada, its Prime Minister almost wrecked its mutually beneficial relationship with India by accusing the Government of India with this crime which is proven to show. As for India, the development points to the fact that a criminal gang can plan, organise and execute a high-profile murder in a foreign country while mind spending its days behind bars in this one.

The Nijjar murder had undoubtedly put pressure on the then government of Justin Trudeau in Canada thanks to the pressure of the vocal Sikh community in that country but it chose to blame India instead of trying to get to the roots of the crime. It may be remembered that the US decision now comes after a thorough year-long investigation codenamed Operation Hard Ball which hit upon three India-based organised crime groups, including the Bishnoi gang, followed by arrests in the US, Canada and Europe. It has come to the fore that Mr Trudeau's statement in the country's parliament and to the public putting India under a cloud over the murder had no force of truth. It is sad that the two countries wedded to democratic ideals had better avenues and platforms to work together to put down crime syndicates but the Canadian administration chose not to do so. It is the duty of the Canadian establishment to introspect and correct that grievous error.

The US decision is an acknowledgment of India's response to the Canadian charge as "absurd and motivated" but India must admit that it exposes unacceptable gaps in the administration of criminal justice in this country. All those who are responsible for a situation where a person lodged in high security prisons after being charged under anti-terror and anti-organised crime laws and his associates can operate at will in India and abroad must be brought to book. US action may make India feel like it has scored a point in its quarrel with Canada but that cannot be a reason for complacency; it must be taken as an eye-opener instead.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu

The invisible hand of the bureaucrat in India's pvt banks

For a country that prides itself on producing world-class financial talent, India displays surprisingly little faith in its own bankers. We've produced institutional builders like Deepak Parekh; Indian professionals have gone on to lead some of the world's biggest global banks, and an Indian now heads the World Bank. Yet when it comes to choosing the people who will guide our largest private banks, the search often ends not in the banking industry but in the ranks of retired IAS officers.

HDFC Bank's appointment of former chief election commissioner of India Rajiv Kumar as its part-time chairman is merely the latest example. ICICI, Axis, Kotak Mahindra, Bandhan and Capital Bank have all made similar appointments. Individually, these appointments may be perfectly justified. Together, they reveal a mindset. It isn't about the competence of retired senior bureaucrats but about why they have increasingly become the default choice.

The banks are, in many ways, mirroring Mr Narendra Modi's own governance philosophy. Over the past decade, retired and serving officials have increasingly occupied key positions across regulators, commissions and public institutions. Domain expertise often takes a back seat to administrative pedigree. The IAS has become India's all-purpose leadership cadre. Private banks appear to have internalised the same logic.

But if India's premier private banks don't trust career bankers to occupy their own boardrooms, who exactly does? Three decades after liberalisation, we still instinctively look towards North Block whenever an important chair falls vacant. Ownership may have changed, but the mindset hasn't.

WHY MODI IS KEEPING VIKRAM MISRI

The Modi government has made its choice. By extending foreign secretary Vikram Misri's tenure by another year, it has made one thing clear: this isn't the time to change India's top diplomat.

The decision is less about one individual than about the system that finds itself. The past year will test India's diplomacy like few others with the BRICS chairmanship, a fragile relationship with China, wars in Europe and West Asia, and the challenge of balancing ties with both Washington and Moscow while championing the Global South.

This is hardly the time for a handover, the government believes.

Mr Misri, a 1989-batch IFS officer, is one of the government's most trusted diplomats. He has served in Beijing, worked as deputy national security adviser and advised three Prime Ministers. His tenure by another year, it has made one thing clear: this isn't the time to change India's top diplomat.

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money doesn't simply walk out of the treasury. It passes through approvals, audits, finance department, treasury officials and senior supervisors. If the investigators are right, this wasn't just the failure of a few individuals. It was the failure of the system that was supposed to stop them.

That is what makes this scandal so disturbing, even in this current season of scandals erupting all around.

Governments love talking about transparency, digital governance and ease of doing business, but if the state's own financial safeguards can allegedly be bypassed with such ease, citizens are bound to worry about policy uncertainty. If the government can't protect its own money, how can it protect yours?

Suspending officers after they're arrested is the easy part. The difficult part is fixing an administration where accountability often begins only after the CBI arrives. The real scandal isn't that corruption allegedly happened. Sadly, India has seen that before. The real scandal is that it appears to have flourished inside a system built to prevent exactly this sort of abuse. That's the lesson Haryana cannot afford to ignore.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national level, it's the babu guarantee and Dilli's belief. Share significant babu escapes dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

Subhani



I AM NUMBER ONE ON IRAN'S KILL LIST: TRUMP

Disasters in air: A tale of 3 avoidable crashes

Abhijit Bhattacharyya

The best or worst part of it is that even after one full year, the crash review report of Air India Flight 171 Boeing 787 'Dreamliner' has not officially been completed or made public

All air disasters broadly fall into two categories — avoidable or unavoidable.

The former is due to forced or unforced human errors or unexpected machine failure over maintenance or allied factors, which could have prevented an accident, and the latter (unavoidable) disaster is owing to something which is beyond human error or machine malfunction — like a lightning strike of engine or unprecedented fury of nature breaking the craft in mid-air into pieces.

Today, one must examine flight safety in various crashes which holds lessons for the future. On November 12, 1986 (under New Delhi's ATCO, 30 km near Palam airport, two Air India Boeing 747-300, which was climbing after departure from Delhi, and a "descending" Kazakhstan Air cargo-laden Ilyushin-76 — collided at 14,000 feet. It was the world's worst avoidable mid-air disaster due to human failure (Kazakhstan Air pilot error), killing all 349 people on board.

An unusually bizarre combination of both "unavoidable" and "avoidable" accident, however, took place June 23, 1985 when an Air India Boeing 747 "Kanishka" exploded in mid-air off the Indian coast, killing all 329 crew and passengers. Now, if a full-load airworthy 747 explodes in fair weather at 15,000 feet while descending, it would prima facie be seen as "unavoidable". But investigation showed that it was an act of terrorism due to several lapses of grave nature and criminal negligence by the ground staff at Toronto, from where it took off. The term "unavoidable", therefore, gets superseded by "avoidable", and the ground staff error becomes the reason. The Air India crash cause

shifts from "unavoidable" mid-air explosion to "avoidable" professional failure by the Canadian authorities.

A "real" unavoidable disaster occurred on March 5, 1966 in Japan when a BOAC Boeing 707, soon after take-off, "broke up" after encountering an abnormally strong gust of wind that generated a load considerably in excess of the craft design limits. All 124 on board perished. After reviewing these three airborne accidents, let's get down to basics. If any aircraft faces a major disaster, resulting in 100 per cent fatalities of crew and passengers near, or on, ground in fair weather, with all other factors being normal, the likelihood of such an accident being classified as "avoidable" will be absolutely correct.

Thus, when in clear weather Thursday, June 12, 2025, the fully-laden Air India Boeing 787-8 "Dreamliner", Flight 171, took off from Ahmedabad and crashed after being airborne for just 32 seconds (from liftoff), there is no doubt that this was an avoidable disaster. But the bigger question is linked to the multi-billion-dollar aviation business. Was this crash owing to human error or a catastrophic machine failure?

The powerful aircraft manufacturer, Boeing, is trying to put the entire blame on the pilot, who is dead, and cannot defend himself. Given his familiarity this writer has with the world of aviation, it might be time for some self-intersection by the Western mega-corporation. What does Boeing have to say about the June 15, 2026 crash of the B-52H Stratofortress at Edwards Air Force Base in California, killing all eight crew members on board? The B-52H is a behemoth, the backbone of the USAF's manned strategic bomber

command. After a 60-second take-off run, it could not even "lift" itself from 15,000-foot runway, crashing after being airborne for just a few seconds. Was this not one of the deadliest peacetime crashes for US Air Force's 419th flight test squadron? Who was at fault? Man, or machine? It is every doubt that it was avoidable?

The eight-engine super-bomber rolls down the concrete path 60 seconds to be airborne, but fails to keep climbing. Instead, it falls with a thud and is engulfed by fire. Whatever may be the result of the official inquiry, whosever may have been at fault, whatever the man-machine deficiency, the final conclusion of the accident inquiry team is bound to conclude that this was an avoidable accident.

Let's turn now to June 13, 2026, to the Indian Air Force's Antonov-32 crash on the runway at Jorhat. *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1989-2000* has this to say about the original Soviet Russia-manufactured, but now in Ukraine, twin-engine, 27-ton MTOW "short/medium range transport", which was ordered by the Indira Gandhi government in 1976. According to *Jane's*, the IAF procured 123 Antonov-32s, being the first overseas customer of the then Moscow-made flying machine.

Unlike other air crashes referred to above, however, any and every Indian could see the IAF AN-32 mishap live from Internet. In fair weather on the morning of June 13, the plane made a perfect touchdown on the 9,000-foot Jorhat runway and rolled steadily for at least five seconds.

Thereafter, in what is still hard to explain, the

aircraft, which had already landed, wobbled, stuttered, and made movements like a late-night drunkard trying to do the Bharatanatyam by veering left off the runway, trying more tricks, and then falling into a soft ditch with its nose sinking deep into the muddy grassland to be engulfed by fire in a flash. All five crew members inside the fateful aircraft had no chance to escape. It was not an "air crash while trying to land", as reported by a section of the Indian aviation media. It was an accident on the ground after the plane had made a perfect touch-down and there certainly could not have been anything wrong with the pilots' flying skills at all. It was an out-and-out "avoidable" mishap, where the pilot simply cannot be blamed. It was a transparent and visible malfunction of the machine. Of course, in all these aircraft accidents, respective flight safety bosses will definitely come to a conclusion.

But the best or worst part of it is that even after one full year, the crash review report of Air India Flight 171 Boeing 787 "Dreamliner" has not officially been completed or made public. Like the free-style "diplomatic" utterances and activities of the US President, the Boeing corporation too seems somewhat aggressive to ensure that no adverse investigation report emerges from India on its vaunted flying machine. Underneath this bravado by the Seattle-based Boeing also appears an edgy and nervous aviation giant which is apprehensive about its market prospects in a world of volatilities and uncertainties. The two Boeing crashes of Ahmedabad (June 2025) and Edwards USAF base (June 2026), and the Jorhat airport (June 2026) Antonov-32 crashes were completely avoidable.

The writer is a life member of the Aeronautical Society of India and an alumnus of the National Defence College, New Delhi. The views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

WAY TO GO, U'KHAND

Uttarakhand has become the sixth fully literate state in India after Mizoram, Goa, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim. Its overall literacy rate was 71.6% when it was formed in 2000. Now it has officially crossed 98%. A literate state is the foundation of a progressive nation. Higher literacy leads to better employment opportunities, improved healthcare awareness, reduced poverty and greater social equality. Now another critical task for the Uttarakhand government is to provide sustainable employment opportunities for their youth so that they do not migrate to bigger states for their livelihood. Uttarakhand's success should serve as an inspiration for other states to strengthen their education systems.

Bal Govind
Noida, UP

SATLUJ AND BJP

THE WITHDRAWAL of *Satluji* on OTT is an interference with the freedom of expression. However, it is baffling to see political parties like the AAP, Congress and Shiromoni Akali Dal criticising it. But perhaps that's because the BJP is behind this ban. The film depicts the events of 1980-1985 when Punjab was suffering from the ill effects of the Khalistan movement. The Congress Party ruled Punjab from 1992 to 1997 and hence it may have been most benefited by the erasing of this painful chapter. So then why is the BJP-led Centre taking such a decision? What is it that this party has to hide?

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

MOSQUITO ALERT

WITH THE ONSET of monsoon and increased rainfall, stagnant water becomes a prime breeding ground for Aedes mosquitoes — the carriers of the dengue virus. In our country, poor ventilation, high temperatures and frequent power outages lead many to sleep outdoors, increasing the risk of viral transmission. Already burdened by seasonal illnesses, the healthcare system may struggle with an added dengue outbreak. Timely vector control is essential to break the chain of transmission and safeguard public health. Both residents and government bodies must act proactively to eliminate breeding sites and raise awareness to prevent a potential health crisis.

Juliel D'Cruz
Mumbai

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	76,741.82 0.31
Nifty 50	23,962.80 0.34
S&P 500*	7,510.26 0.37
Dollar (₹)	95.38 -0.19
Pound Sterling (₹)	127.92 -0.33
Euro (₹)	109.02 0.04
Gold (10gm)*	₹ 144,800.1 0.69
Brent crude (\$/bbl)	77.43 -0.76
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.754 -0.18
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.575 0.008

* As of 8:30 PM IST

BSNL announces satellite phone for ₹1.34 lakh

State-run BSNL announced the availability of a satellite phone for ₹1.34 lakh, part of its push to expand satellite communication services to defence, maritime and disaster-response users. BSNL mentioned that the phone is priced at ₹1,34,166 apiece, including all taxes, and has been designed for challenging environments, offering voice calls and SMS services in remote areas not covered by conventional mobile networks.

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Govt to review concerns on insta data scraping

Formal responses will shape IT ministry's actions: MeitY secretary

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, JULY 9:

The ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) will review concerns over the extraction of data from public Instagram accounts after examining responses to notices issued on the matter, a senior ministry official said on Thursday. The government recently issued two notices to the social media platform—one related to user-name-based issues and another concerning child sexual abuse material (CSAM). The ministry will assess the responses before deciding on any further action in line with the legal framework. MeitY secretary S. Krishnan said the government was aware of public concerns over data scraping and also front-end business functions, with artificial intelligence acting as a key enabler. "This is an extraordinary opportunity we cannot afford to miss, and AI will be the ultimate catalyst in this endeavour," he said.

LARGE USERBASE

MeitY expected to review process after responses to the notices are received.

It may be deployed meaningfully across GCCs. AI provides a historic opportunity to transition from low-order execution to high-value strategic functions.

Human interface will always be required to roll out and govern functions.

India has the potential to become the 'office space of the world'.

Govt to examine all submissions before deciding subsequent measures.

AI to be the ultimate catalyst.

He urged enterprises to deploy AI across GCCs by leveraging India's strengths in skilled talent and cost competitiveness. "It is vital for enterprises to adopt AI in a manner that effectively utilises the nation's inherent talent advantages and cost efficiencies to drive sustainable value," he said at an industry event.

Krishnan said AI should be used to move businesses from routine execution to higher-value functions, while emphasising that human oversight would remain essential. "AI provides opportunity to transition from low-order execution to high-value functions," he said.

India is home to more than 200 global capability centres (GCCs), employing over 2.3 million professionals and generating annual revenues of about \$100 billion, said finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday. India has emerged as a preferred destination for GCCs due to its competitiveness, infrastructure and stable macroeconomic environment, she said at the CII National GCC

Fresh overseas investment to boost NIIF, support infra, says Sitharaman

New Delhi, July 9:

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said AustralianSuper will deepen its commitment to India's National Infrastructure Fund with a further \$500 million investment to fund infrastructure development. This will take the fund's overall holdings in India across all asset classes to \$3.3 billion Australian dollar, she said in a post on X. AustralianSuper is Australia's largest pension fund, headquartered in Melbourne. In a significant step to deepen India's investment commitment for infrastructure development, the Union Cabinet last month approved an additional investment commitment of \$300,000 cr by the Centre towards new and upcoming funds of

MORE CHANNELS

Investment aims to fund infrastructure development. Move to take fund's overall holdings in India to \$3.3 billion Australian dollars. AustralianSuper is Australia's largest pension fund. Union Cabinet last month approved an additional investment commitment of \$300,000 cr by the Centre towards funds of NIIF.

Govt's total commitment to NIIF stands at ₹60k cr.



the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF). With the decision, the government's total commitment to NIIF stands at ₹60,000 crore. NIIF is India's sovereign-anchored fund, professionally run and managed by National Infrastructure Development Fund (NIDF). The government is a 49 per cent shareholder

in NIIF and it currently manages capital commitments of approximately ₹40,000 crore across its funds and investment strategies. It has demonstrated a strong track record of capital deployment and realisations, having returned close to ₹12,000 crore to investors through large portfolio exits.

TCS net rises 8.5% to ₹13,349 cr in June qtr

RAVI RAMJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JULY 9

TCS on Thursday reported a 8.5 per cent year-on-year rise in net profit to ₹13,349 crore for the June quarter of FY27, while revenue increased 13.9 per cent year-on-year and 2.2

per cent sequentially to ₹72,275 crore. It declared an interim dividend of ₹12 per equity share and the record date is July 15. TCS reported annualised AI revenue of \$2.6 billion in the first quarter, up 13.6 per cent quarter-on-quarter.

He also reported total contract wins of \$9.5 bn in the quarter. Among others, it signed AI-led business transformation deals worth \$800 million with SKI. TCS added 9,279 employees during the quarter, its highest addition in the

past 15 quarters, taking its total workforce to 5,53,798. Employee costs rose 11.71 per cent to ₹42,137 cr. "Q1 FY27 reflects continued growth momentum despite geopolitical and macro-economic headwinds," K. Krishnaswamy, CEO and MD, said.

India has 2,100 GCCs now with over 2.3 mn employees

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, JULY 9

India is home to more than 200 global capability centres (GCCs), employing over 2.3 million professionals and generating annual revenues of about \$100 billion, said finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday. India has emerged as a preferred destination for GCCs due to its competitiveness, infrastructure and stable macroeconomic environment, she said at the CII National GCC

Business Summit 2026. She said the expansion of GCCs into tier-2 and tier-3 cities could accelerate regional development through their wider economic impact. Sitharaman said the sector has become a catalyst for regional development because of its second-order economic impact. Some elements you might find in some parts of our economy, and some other elements in other areas, but all these human capability-related elements get maximised in

the GCCs. The competitive advantage lies in generating knowledge, applying technology, and solving complex problems," she said. Meanwhile, chief economic adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran on Thursday urged industry to invest in skilling, capability development and innovation to address the challenges posed by artificial intelligence (AI), saying government policy alone cannot secure India's leadership in the GCC sector.

GAAMES

SHORT TAKES India U-23 secure five Asian medals

Ordos, China: India clinched five medals, including a gold in the mixed 4x400 metres relay, to begin their Asian U-23 Athletics Championships on a strong note here on Thursday. The Indian quartet of Atik Prabhan, Sandeep Mol Sabu, Sethu Mishra and Shrawani Sachin Sangale clocked 3 minutes 18.64 seconds to take the top spot in the last event of the day for the country. Besides the gold, the Indians added one silver and three bronze medals on the opening day of competitions. It was Bhartpreet Singh who opened India's medal account with a bronze in the men's discus throw with an effort of 52.91m. China's Li Zhixin clinched the gold with a throw of 60.79m, while compatriot Jiang Zehao took the silver with 55.60m. Indians finished 2-3 in the men's 5000m race final with Shivaji Parashuram Madappagouda taking the silver in 14:08.19 and Vinod Singh clinching the bronze with a timing of 14:23.67. Japan's Rui Suzuki won the gold, clocking 14:01.24. The last Indian medal of the day — a bronze — was won by Prachi Devkar in the women's 3000m steeplechase, clocking 10 minutes 32.69 seconds. — PTI

Boxers assured of podium finishes

Jakarta: Indian boxers continued their impressive run at the Asian U-19 and U-23 Boxing Championships with six pugilists advancing to the semifinals to assure themselves of medals on Day Five of the tournament here on Thursday. Leading the charge, Chandrika Bhores Pujari (51kg) delivered a dominant 5:0 victory over Kazakhstan's Zhadra Kaitay, while Joyshree Devi (54kg) registered a convincing 5:0 win against Kazakhstan's Maral Tolepbergen. Prachi (57kg) continued her form with a clinical 5:0 win over Uzbekistan's Robiya Ravshanova, while Chahat (60kg) secured a comprehensive 5:0 victory against Kazakhstan's Zhamin Abramyan. In the 48kg category, Gunjan edged past Mongolia's Altanzul Altangana in a closely contested 3:0 split decision, while Anshika (75kg) added to India's medal tally with a hard-fought 4:1 win over Kazakhstan's Altynkul Aimbukan. — PTI

Muchova moves into final

London, July 9: Czech 10th seed Karolina Muchova saved a match point to reach her first Wimbledon final with a pulsating three-set win against Coco Gauff on Thursday. Muchova held her nerve in a gripping final set tie-break, winning 6-2, 1-6, 7-6 (12-10) in two hours and 35 minutes in searing temperatures on Centre Court. In the final, Muchova will face Czech ninth seed Linda Noskova. Ukrainian 12th seed Marta Kostyuk, who meet in the other semifinal later on Thursday. Muchova is into her second Grand Slam final and her first since finishing as the 2023 French Open runner-up.



Karolina Muchova of the Czech Republic returns the ball to USA's Coco Gauff during their women's singles semifinal at the Wimbledon Tennis Championships in London on Thursday. Muchova won 6-2, 1-6, 7-6 (12/10) — AP

GRIPPING FINALE

After battling injuries earlier in her career, Muchova is finally fulfilling her potential, but even she has been taken back by her success at Wimbledon over the last fortnight. "It sounds really nice to be in the final. It was such a big fight. You are up and down, no time to think but it was very nerve-wracking," Muchova said.

Muchova is just one win away from a maiden Grand Slam title. Gauff seeded seventh, had struggled badly with her serve for much of the tournament and has the most double faults on the women's tour this year. Muchova took advantage of that glaring flaw to break in the third game of

the first set and again in the fifth. The Czech sealed the set with an ace, sending Gauff scurrying to the sanctuary of the locker room to compose herself. Gauff had 12 unforced errors in the first set, but in keeping with her tenacious character, she hit back with a dominant second set that could not have been more different to her spluttering start. — AFP

Allrounder Axar feels emotional on his 100th T20

Bristol, July 9: An emotional Axar Patel has admitted that he had never imagined to complete a century of T20 Internationals for India, and dedicated the milestone to his teammates, coaches and family. The allrounder reflected on his journey from his T20 debut in 2015 to becoming one of India's most dependable white-ball players, and acknowledged the lessons that he has learnt over the past decade.

When you completed 100 wickets in the second T20I against England in the ongoing tour, will play his 100th game in the format in the fourth match of the series here on Thursday. "When the first time I played T20, I never imagined I would play 100 matches. This tour of England will be very special for me because, like in the second T20, I completed my 100 wickets and in the fourth T20, it's my 100th match. So it's a very special day for me and I am really enjoying the moment."

— AXAR PATEL, INDIAN ALLROUNDER

Axar, who completed 100 wickets in the second T20I against England in the ongoing tour, will play his 100th game in the format in the fourth match of the series here on Thursday. "When the first time I played T20, I never imagined I would play 100 matches. This tour of England will be very special for me because, like in the second T20, I completed my 100 wickets and in the fourth T20, it's my 100th match. So it's a very special day for me and I am really enjoying the moment."

You know that along with me, my teammates, my coaches, my family. So I think everyone has played a role in this journey of mine. When you start, when you debut for the first time that's a completely different feeling. Back then you don't know how much you will achieve, but I am going to play my 100th match and that feeling you really can't express. Even if you play a single match for India that is huge for you because it's a player's dream." Indian allrounder added. Recalling his journey, Axar termed it a roller-coaster ride and full of learnings. — PTI

India women to test England at Lord's

London, July 8: India will be hoping for a change in fate after an underwhelming T20 World Cup campaign when they face hosts England in the first-ever women's Test at Lord's beginning here on Friday. A pre-mature exit from the T20 showcase gave India more time to prepare for the red-ball game which takes place at the "Home of Cricket", 142 years after the first men's Test was staged at the fabled ground. The Indian team trained at the picturesque Wormsley Cricket Ground

for its second red-ball game this year, having played a Test in Australia in March. Head coach Amol Muzumdar said the prospect of taking the field for the first ever Test at Lord's excited the players even before the start of the preceding T20 World Cup. "It just boggles my mind that it is just the first Test match here at Lord's. Having said that, I am really fortunate and would like to extend my wishes to everyone who is involved in this. It is a great occasion and we are

looking forward to it," said Muzumdar. "It is a dream to play a Test match for any Indian cricketer, leave alone playing at Lord's. I am sure everyone who will wear those whites tomorrow will be proud of them being there at Lord's to play the Test match," the veteran of 171 first class games added. Smriti Mandhana and Shafali Varma had opened in India's previous Test Down Under and the same is expected against England. Priya Punia has been drafted into the squad as a replacement for the injured Pratika Rawal who had batted at three in the 10-wicket loss to Australia. Test matches in women's cricket take place far and few in India but India have a favourable record

against England in the traditional format. India have won last three out of four games against the hosts and are yet to lose a Test in England (two wins, seven draws). Among the India players who can make their Test debut include Harleen Deol, in-form spinner Seema Chandel and pacer Nandini Sharma. England, on the other hand, have five players who are yet to play Test cricket and they include Alice Capsey, Tilly Corteen-Coleman, Mady Villiers, Grace Potts and Ellie Threlkell. — PTI

DUPLANTIS, ALFRED ON TARGET AT MONACO DL

Monaco, July 9: Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis, Julien Alfred and Oblique Seville headline the Diamond League meet in Monaco on Friday. The star-studded track and field meet is the 10th of 15 on the elite circuit. Pole vault world record holder Duplantis has promised to target a 16th world record in Monaco. The double Olympic and triple world champion set his first world record of 6.17m back in 2020, and established the most recent mark of 6.31m in Sweden in March. The 26-year-old recently relocated to Monaco after living in the United States and Sweden, the nation in whose yellow and blue colours he competes. Reigning Olympic 100m champion Julien Alfred will face a stern challenge in the long jump. Alfred has recorded 218.66 seconds. But he finds himself up against American Gabrielle Thomas, the reigning Olympic 200 metres winner, who has run 21.70 seconds. — AFP

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



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*He who treats his inferiors with clemency
is granted clemency by his superiors.*
Al-Hasan Al-Basri
(Medieval Muslim preacher and judge)

Opinion

Lebanon and the price of peace

NADIM SHEHADI



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In Islamabad, Iran is trying to restore the pattern with itself as the regional hegemon the West has to deal with when it comes to Lebanon's security.

Lebanon as a state has avoided participation in any of the four major Arab-Israeli wars, which is a recognition of its special status. But it was often a battleground involving both internal and external players. The Lebanese state may have been neutral but its territory was not.

Wars with Israel were not with the Lebanese state but with nonstate actors linked to one of its communities and external participation. The Lebanese political system allowed for this, which was another legacy of the Ottoman era, when communities of millets had a certain autonomy that involved external relations and protection.

The Hezbollah camp wants to join the Islamabad track and keep Lebanon as part of Iran's sphere of influence, while

the anti-Hezbollah "sovereignist" camp wants Lebanese-Israeli relations to be settled by a sovereign Lebanese state independently of Iranian influence.

For Lebanon, the price of peace has always involved a compromise on the country's sovereignty in favor of both internal and external actors.

The stakes are very high and include the return of more than a million displaced people. The outcome still depends either on internal, regional and international elements coming together or on the Lebanese government breaking that cycle and acting as a sovereign state.

In the late 1980s, I met Takla in Paris and he said that the Lebanon we knew no longer exists — everything has changed. The price of peace today is a choice between another compromise or a political confrontation with Hezbollah and Iran. And it still rests on the continuity of US and Western support for the Lebanese state.

There are two parallel tracks through which an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon is being discussed. One in Washington, where Lebanon, Israel and the US have signed a trilateral framework agreement aimed at bringing about an Israeli withdrawal and ending the state of war between Tel Aviv and Beirut. The second track introduces complications in that, in Islamabad, Lebanon was also on the agenda of America's negotiations with Iran. There, it was Iran that was negotiating an Israeli withdrawal on behalf of Lebanon.

For the Lebanese state, the process is a balancing act with local, regional and international players, in which Lebanon is curtailed from acting as a fully sovereign state. But this is not new and one of the country's foundation myths explains it well.

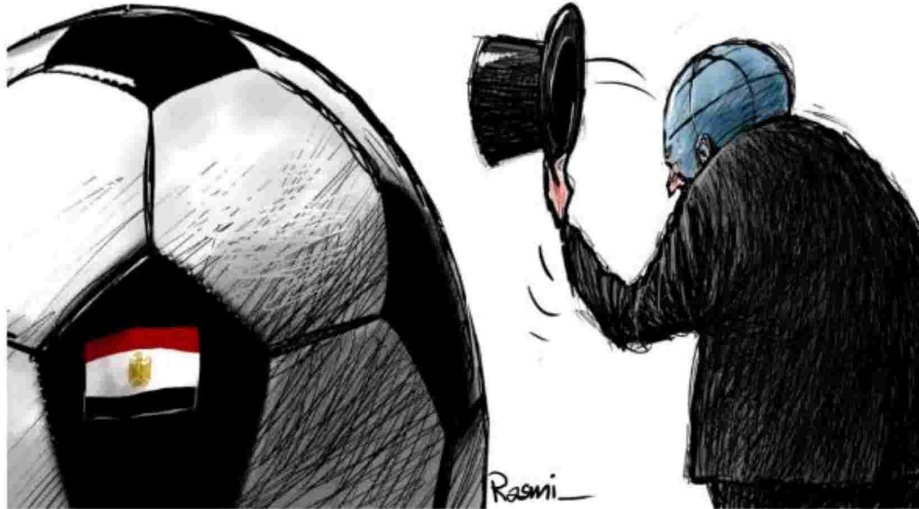
Philippe Takla was one of the principal architects of Lebanese foreign policy.

He held the post of foreign minister in 11 governments following independence. According to him, Lebanon's political system was formed in the early Ottoman era, when Fakhreddine II obtained from the sultan a special autonomous status for the Emirate of Mount Lebanon. He then united the country by creating a council, in which the notables of various communities and regions met and consulted with him and with each other irrespective of their differences and external alliances. He also established alliances with European powers and sought guarantees for the Lebanese emirate's existence.

These elements of power-sharing also became embedded in the constitution of the Lebanese state in 1926. After independence, maintaining Western protection was the main task of its foreign policy.

In the Washington talks, the Lebanese government is trying to break from that pattern by acting independently as a sovereign state.

Wars with Israel
were not with the
Lebanese state
but with nonstate
actors linked to one
of its communities



Saving NATO in
the age of Trump
was on the minds
of everyone in
Ankara, but of
course it was
not discussed

Could there be a NATO without the US?

MOHAMED CHEBARO



Mohamed Chebaro is a British-Lebanese journalist with more than 20 years of experience covering war, terrorism, defense, current affairs and diplomacy.

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In a book published last year called "If Russia Wins: A scenario," German academic Carlo Masala presented a gloomy take on European defense and NATO in the Trump era. He speculated on how things could unfold if Vladimir Putin decided to test the alliance by rolling tanks into Narva, an Estonian town of 50,000 mostly Russian-speaking residents, close to the border with Russia.

The hypothetical crisis is described as unfolding in the spring of 2028 after Ukraine is forced to concede territory when its Western support collapses. In the book, Moscow assures Washington that the invasion is limited and merely meant to protect Russian speakers in the region. Masala describes a US president not dissimilar to Donald Trump making one thing clear to his NATO allies: America will not risk a third world war to defend a small town in Estonia.

At this week's NATO summit, this example no doubt animated the thoughts of all the participants, with the exception of Trump. The question for those who met in Ankara was not just what military structure is needed — NATO 3.0, NATO-minus or a European-led NATO — but would the US come to help if the necessity presented itself? And could NATO be anything without the US?

The Europeans are rushing to fire up their planning, their factories and their procurement, digging deep in their budgets for defense funding, amid the changing nature of the threats they face, as demonstrated by the Ukraine and Iran wars. But they cannot be envied due to the hole they find themselves in.

The goalposts keep shifting. Despite the European NATO members increasing their defense spending, Trump appeared unmoved, saying he was still disappointed at their refusal to join the Iran war, which

he launched alongside Israel without consulting them. He claimed they had failed his loyalty test. He also repeated his threats to take over Greenland and withdraw all US troops from Europe.

In the age of an unreliable and possibly adversarial America, Europe is being forced to reassess and reorganize its security and defense at speed. The tasks ahead are daunting, especially transforming the economic-political EU bloc into a military and defense one. Many doubt Europe's ability to make NATO work without the US. The task is colossal.

Policymakers will also have to work with blurred vision: to factor the US both in and out at the same time. They must throw money at a costly defense sector in a scenario where tanks and drones are needed today but might become obsolete tomorrow, as technology and the methods of war are rapidly evolving.

Saving NATO in the age of Trump was

on the minds of everyone in Ankara, but of course it was not discussed. Europeanizing NATO is maybe the next best option, but that is a complex task that will be made even more difficult by the need for EU-style institutions and consensus-building, even while the enemy is at the door.

Europe's leaders must look closely at what they represent and consider whether the continent's traditional liberal democratic ethos and values are still a platform worth uniting for. And are the rules-based international order and international law viable and worth defending in a world where societies everywhere are in transition?

There is a transatlantic rift, meaning uncertainties that one cannot hide. But those leaders that met in Ankara need to step up their preparations for a NATO with much less American leadership and help — and potentially an urgent need to go back to the drawing board.

Opinion

How to protect yourself from evolving cyber threats

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reusing passwords across accounts. Utilize complex, system-generated passwords managed by reputable tools such as those with end-to-end encryption. This single practice can thwart many attacks.

Secondly, enable multifactor authentication universally. Preferably use phishing-resistant methods such as authenticator apps or security codes sent via text message. Multifactor authentication blocks more than 99 percent of automated credential-based attacks.

Third, recognize and counter phishing and social engineering attempts. Scrutinize unsolicited communications for urgency, unexpected attachments or anomalous sender details. AI-generated content may appear flawless but you can verify it via independent channels such as direct phone calls using known numbers. Hover over links without clicking and employ email filters.

Fourth, maintain device and software hygiene. This means regularly updating operating systems, applications and firmware to address any vulnerabilities. Enable automatic updates. You can also install reputable antivirus/antimalware software with real-time scanning and behavioral detection. For smartphones,

app permissions can be restricted.

Fifth, secure sensitive information and backups. Encrypt data while it is at rest and in transit. Use virtual private networks on public Wi-Fi. Some recommend implementing the so-called 3-2-1 backup rule: keep three copies using two different media types, with one offline. Regularly monitor financial statements and credit reports for anomalies. You can also consider identity theft protection services.

Sixth, cultivate situational awareness. Limit the amount of personal information shared on social media. Use privacy settings judiciously. For high-risk activities, such as financial transactions, employ dedicated devices. Remote wipe capabilities for lost devices are essential.

Finally, stay informed and adaptive. Follow the latest and most credible sources for emerging cyber threats. Periodically review account activity logs and revoke unused authorizations. Some people simulate phishing tests personally or via organizational programs.

Through these simple actions, one can yield compounding benefits that significantly lower the likelihood and lessen the impact of any breach.

As digital interconnectedness now permeates every facet of our lives, the privacy and security of ordinary individuals are facing unprecedented challenges. Hackers, increasingly sophisticated in their methods, are now harnessing advanced technologies — including artificial intelligence — to automate and amplify attacks. Financial data, personal identifiers, email accounts, computers, smartphones and online identities have become prime targets.

Traditional threats such as malware and phishing persist, but their efficacy has been dramatically increased by AI. According to CrowdStrike's 2026 Global Threat Report, attacks by AI-enabled adversaries surged by 89 percent last year, with the average breakout time — the period between initial access and lateral movement onto another system — plummeting to 29 minutes, a 65 percent acceleration from 2024. Moreover, 82 percent of detections involved malware-free techniques, which underscores the shift toward stealthier, AI-orchestrated methods and operations.

AI is acting as a force multiplier for cybercriminals. Generative AI can

automate exploitation and facilitate phishing campaigns and deepfake-enabled social engineering.

Vulnerable populations include everyday users whose devices and accounts serve as entry points into broader networks. Human factors remain central. Verizon's Data Breach Investigations Report consistently attributes a significant portion (about 68 percent) of breaches to human error. This has been

amplified by AI's capacity to craft convincing lures that are devoid of grammatical errors or inconsistencies.

This escalation is down to several related forces and drivers. First, AI tools lower the barriers for low-skilled actors, enabling scalable automation. Second, the asymmetry between defenders and attackers favors the latter. Third, rapid digital adoption coupled with insufficient global cybersecurity workforce capacity is leaving systemic gaps.

To address this issue, comprehensive solutions that require governmental and corporate intervention are needed. Nevertheless, individuals can still mitigate the risks through disciplined digital measures.

Firstly, employ strong, unique passwords and use password managers. Avoid

Traditional threats such as malware and phishing persist, but their efficacy has been increased by AI

Rapid digital adoption coupled with insufficient global cybersecurity workforce capacity is leaving systemic gaps

The missing ingredient for European tech sovereignty

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In early June, the European Commission unveiled its "European Technical Sovereignty Package," a new policy agenda designed to strengthen Europe's strategic autonomy through investments in artificial intelligence, domestic semiconductor manufacturing, cloud infrastructure and open-source software. While ambitious, the package is not enough. To ensure that AI and digital technologies advance the EU's economic and security interests requires confronting the root causes of Big Tech's dominance over Europe's digital economy.

The plan's objective — to reduce the EU's dependence on foreign technologies and in turn, its vulnerability to external coercion — is laudable. Today, about 80 percent of the bloc's digital technologies are imported, primarily from the US. This has created a power imbalance that US President Donald Trump's administration has not hesitated to exploit in pursuit of its political interests.

Yet the European Commission's plan is unlikely to shift that balance. Consider one of the package's main goals: tripling the EU's data center capacity over the next five to seven years. While expanding computing

capacity is important, it will do little to foster a competitive domestic ecosystem unless Europeans capture a greater share of the economic value generated by AI.

Even if the new package succeeds beyond expectations and helps create a new generation of fast-growing European startups, Big Tech could still use its market dominance to acquire or otherwise eliminate these challengers. Between 2010 and 2023, Big Tech companies acquired nearly

100 AI startups. Among them was DeepMind, whose 2014 purchase by Google has been widely viewed as a strategic loss for the UK, where the company was founded. Acquisitions are only one mechanism through which dominant firms

protect their position. Self-preferencing, tying and restricting access to critical digital infrastructure can be just as effective in suppressing potential rivals.

The good news is that Europe already has many of the tools it needs to prevent these outcomes. The EU's Digital Markets Act, for example, prohibits gatekeeper platforms from engaging in unfair practices that stifle competition from European innovators.

But the act has not kept pace with developments in cloud computing and AI, and

political pressure from the Trump administration has discouraged robust enforcement against US firms. As long as the law is enforced only half-heartedly, European innovators will continue to compete on an uneven playing field.

Merger control is another underused instrument. Existing competition rules and national security screening regimes already allow EU governments to prevent acquisitions that undermine strategic autonomy.

Other EU member states — and the European Commission — should follow this example and scrutinize acquisitions that risk absorbing Europe's most promising tech companies.

At the same time, the tech sovereignty package itself should be more ambitious. Its centerpiece, the Cloud and AI Development Act, seeks to ensure that sensitive public sector functions — particularly those related to national security and defense — rely on European providers. But its strongest requirements apply only to a narrow range of activities, while member states retain considerable discretion over implementation. Given many governments' reluctance to provoke the Trump administration, this framework is

unlikely to generate sufficient demand to foster a globally competitive European cloud industry.

Critically, Europe should also have the confidence to pursue a different innovation path from Silicon Valley's highly centralized and resource-intensive model. A growing number of experts argue that today's dominant AI paradigm may be approaching its limits, making it unwise for Europe to devote all its resources to replicating it.

Instead, the EU should invest more heavily in areas such as physical, spatial and so-called frugal AI, which aims to design systems that maximize impact while minimizing computational and energy requirements. Rather than simply imitating the American model, Europe must develop technologies that generate economic value, improve citizens' lives and align with its sustainability goals.

By recognizing that dependence on US tech giants is both an economic challenge and a strategic vulnerability, the tech sovereignty package marks a welcome shift in the EU's approach. But without equally ambitious efforts to curb market concentration and break Big Tech's hold on Europe's digital economy, it is bound to fall short.

The plan to reduce the EU's dependence on foreign technologies and its vulnerability to coercion is laudable

Europe should have the confidence to pursue a different innovation path from Silicon Valley's model

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OPINION

Hamas's move

THE decision taken by Hamas to relinquish governance of Gaza appears to be designed to put the onus on the US and Israel to take the peace process forward. Having ruled the Strip for about two decades, the Palestinian group announced on Monday that it would be handing over governance duties to the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, the technocratic body set up under Donald Trump's Board of Peace. As per a Hamas spokesman, the move is supposed to "remove any pretexts for the [Israeli] occupation" which, he rightly said, "continues its... war of extermination". Since the ceasefire took effect in October 2025, Gaza has hardly turned into a cradle of peace. Over 1,000 people have been murdered by Israel, including children, during what is supposed to be a truce. Since the Zionist state commenced its genocidal attacks on the Strip after the Oct 7, 2023, Hamas operation, over 73,000 people have been butchered, with nearly 2m displaced and denied adequate shelter, food and healthcare.

Israel has called the Hamas move a "trick". In fact, there are signs that Tel Aviv may resume its slaughter in Gaza using Hamas's refusal to surrender its arms as a pretext and accusing the Palestinian group of not honouring its commitments. Yet it appears that only the Palestinian side is expected to honour the deal; Israel can violate it at will. This is evident in its continued killing of non-combatants. Moreover, Israel has actually solidified its occupation of Gaza, according to its own logic, the Zionist state controls around 70pc of the Strip. Tel Aviv's friends issue stern warnings to its adversaries to honour their commitments. But Israel is allowed to break the rules in order to "defend" itself, even if this "self-defence" entails the butchery of innocent children, the elderly and the sick. If this hypocrisy continues, the next cycle of violence in Gaza may be just round the corner.

The Gaza genocide is a blot on the conscience of humanity. Thanks to the support of its Western backers, Israel has literally gotten away with murder in the occupied territories. If the creators of the BoF want Hamas to give up its weapons, they should gladly tell Israel that it must end its occupation forthwith. However, it seems that Tel Aviv has no intention of doing any such thing. In fact, it has vowed to hold on to grabbed Arab land in Lebanon and Syria as well. There should be no ambiguity: the international community must tell Israel to vacate all occupied Arab land immediately. Tel Aviv's sophistry — accusing others of violating covenants, while respecting no law itself — should be called out, while the people of Gaza must not be left to face Israel's blood-drenched forays again and again.

Terrorism threat

THE surge in terrorist violence in Balochistan highlights the renewed threat confronting Pakistan. The martyrdom of at least nine policemen in Quetta and the arrest of two alleged BLA operatives in Karachi on Tuesday, preceded by deadly violence near Quetta a day earlier, indicate that terrorist groups retain both the capability and intent to challenge the state's writ. While security forces responded by killing 15 terrorists, the priority should be to determine whether groups that have traditionally operated independently are now cooperating operationally. Any evidence of tactical collaboration between the banned TTP and separatist outfits such as the BLA would mark a dangerous escalation. The latest incidents also reinforce concerns that militancy is no longer confined to the remote districts of Balochistan and KP. The foiled plot in Karachi coming even after the attack on Rangers' camp in the city is a reminder that urban centres could be the next targets.

The state's counterterrorism strategy must anticipate a broader geographical spread of violence, instead of simply reacting after attacks have taken place. This places renewed emphasis on intelligence. While Pakistan's security forces have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to neutralise militants once contact is established, preventing attacks before they take place remains the real measure of success. Better coordination among intelligence agencies, provincial CT agencies, police and the military is critical. Human intelligence, surveillance and forensic capabilities and the ability to identify emerging networks deserve far greater investment if the state is to stay ahead of the terrorist groups. The broader regional dimension cannot be overlooked either. Pakistan has consistently maintained that these elements enjoy sanctuary inside Afghanistan. Therefore, Islamabad is justified in maintaining pressure on Kabul to ensure that Afghan territory will not be used against Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban's continued reluctance to act decisively against groups targeting Pakistan remains a central obstacle to regional security. Durable peace cannot be achieved while terrorist organisations retain safe havens across the border. Our ranking as the world's most terrorism-affected country reflects the scale of the challenge confronting us. Pakistan's response must go beyond kinetic operations. Military action remains necessary against armed groups that threaten the state, but it must be complemented by superior intelligence, stronger policing and sustained pressure on Afghanistan to dismantle terrorist sanctuaries.

Football meddling

AFTER ending co-hosts America's World Cup run in the last-16 stage, Belgium felt justice had been served. It was not only the Belgians who were celebrating after their 4-1 romp. Indeed, the rest of the football world, too, felt vindicated by America's humiliation. "Overturn this," said the Belgian football team on social media after their victory — a jibe directed at FIFA and US President Donald Trump, who had intervened to ensure his country's striker Florian Balogun was allowed to play in the game despite having been shown a red card in the previous match against Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mr Trump had lobbied for Balogun's red card to be overturned, asking FIFA president Gianni Infantino — who was already under fire for his close association with the Aston Villa president — to review the decision. FIFA eventually suspended the match ban — marking the first time since 1962 that punishment for a World Cup offence was put on hold during the tournament. Mr Infantino's position that Balogun's suspension was the decision of an independent FIFA disciplinary committee did little to deflect the impression that the Americans were deliberately bending the rules. The European football governing body UEFA called the decision "unprecedented, incomprehensible and unjustified". The Swiss Football Association questioned the credibility of the World Cup. While the Royal Belgian Football Association filed an appeal against FIFA's decision to allow Balogun to play in the last-16 tie, the football body dismissed it on the grounds that since Belgium was not a party to the proceedings, it had no legal standing to take this action. On the field, Belgium's celebrations mocked Mr Trump, with Remieke Lukaku joining his team-mates in the famous Trump Dance after scoring their fourth goal in Seattle. Belgian fans chanted "FIFA mafia" during the game. Despite America's exit, the furor over Mr Trump's meddling refuses to die down. The incident has called into question FIFA's neutrality. Mr Infantino must ensure that politics is not allowed to dictate decisions on the field.

OPINION

Systemic failure

Chaotic governance and inconsistent policies continue to deter foreign investment in the country.

THE spectacle of a number of cabinet ministers at an investment conference in Istanbul last week offers an insight into the current government's perception of how in its Pakistan's problems. Of course, the inseparable duo of the prime minister and deputy PM was there too. The two may well have secured a place in the Guinness World Records for the most world tours undertaken together. They were apparently there to project Pakistan's potential for foreign investment. No one denies the significance of such conferences for attracting foreign investment critical for economic growth. But the ministers' presence at every conference will not, on its own, drive investment interest. What matters more is doing things at home to create the environment and capacity for both domestic and foreign investment. Chaotic governance and inconsistent policies have been a major impediment in the way of any investment coming to the country.

Over the past few years, Pakistan's top leadership addressed investment conferences in several regional countries, but there has not been much of a response. In fact, there has been a consistent decline in foreign direct investment. From a peak of \$5.6 billion in 2007-08, there have been periods when FDI fell to \$0.5bn. For an economy of its size — and being the fifth-largest country by population — that figure is strikingly low. By comparison, Vietnam, with one-third Pakistan's population, pulls in \$15-20bn annually.

We are made to believe that a tremendous opportunity for foreign investment exists and it is only a matter of time before investment will start lining up to do business here. A few years ago, while speaking to a gathering of businessmen in Islamabad, the army chief was reported to have said that the country could attract \$100bn in foreign investment. This was echoed by some senior cabinet ministers. A federal minister even claimed that minerals worth \$6 billion lay in the former tribal areas. We also heard about the US interest in investing in rare earth minerals in Balochistan.

A few years ago, we were also told that Saudi Arabia was ready to invest \$25bn in various sectors. Indeed, many Saudi business delegations have visited Pakistan to explore investment

opportunities here. A member of the former caretaker government who was present at one of the top meetings said Saudi officials told them they could not find any such opportunity. What they were pointing to was the lack of capacity — a major problem often cited by potential investors.

In fact, over the past few years, Pakistan has experienced an unprecedented wave of MNC exits, with major global brands closing operations, selling to local firms and withdrawing entirely. Each company may have its own reason and its exit may be part of a worldwide shift and not Pakistan-specific. But many do complain of the high cost of doing business in the country. Some of these MNCs, including American companies, had been here for decades.

A senior American diplomat told me that, among other reasons, high corporate taxes and ever-changing policies were the main factors behind companies' decisions to wind up business here. In August 2024, the Pakistan Business Council warned that repeated and prolonged internet disruptions were pushing MNCs to consider wrapping up business in the country. An unreliable digital infrastructure is incompatible with modern technology and service-sector operations.

Frequent policy reversals and persistent economic and political instability deter foreign investment. One cannot expect foreign capital to enter in a technology and service-sector operations. Frequent policy reversals and persistent economic and political instability deter foreign investment. One cannot expect foreign capital to enter in a technology and service-sector operations.

Foreign investment is directly linked to domestic investment. One cannot expect foreign capital to enter in a technology and service-sector operations. Frequent policy reversals and persistent economic and political instability deter foreign investment. One cannot expect foreign capital to enter in a technology and service-sector operations.

then, how can one hope for FDI to materialise?

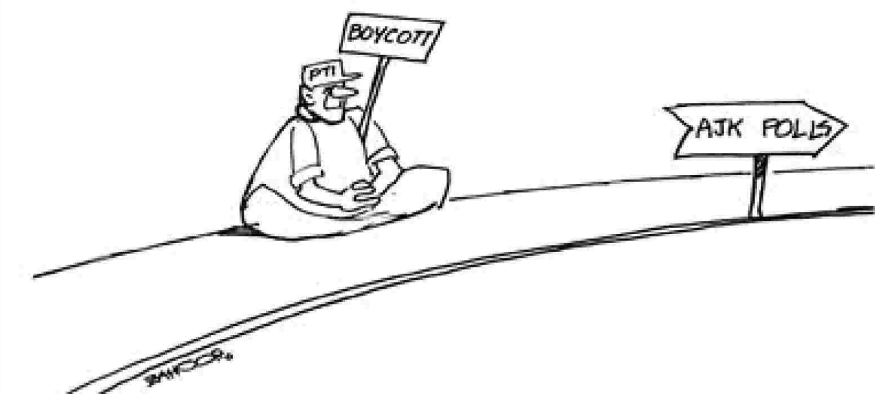
In June 2023, the government established the Special Investment Facilitation Council, designed as a "single-window" platform to coordinate investment promotion, cut through bureaucratic red tape and fast-track large projects. The civil-military body, led by a senior army officer, has the explicit purpose of facilitating investment from "friendly nations", with particular emphasis on the GCC countries. The government claims the SIFC has secured roughly \$27bn in pledges since its launch.

But there is a huge gap between pledges and actual investment. As the World Bank has noted, facilitation is not reform. The SIFC may accelerate deal-making; on its own, it cannot change investors' perceptions shaped by inconsistent policies, bureaucratic bottlenecks, judicial delays and a flawed taxation system. However powerful it may be, the SIFC cannot convert pledges into sustained, broad-based FDI under the prevailing conditions.

A perception is now being built that Pakistan's overvalued international pretensions — driven by its role as a mediator in the US-Iran conflict and its geopolitical position — may bring a windfall in foreign investment. The multibillion-dollar FDI potential, as touted in official circles, does not exist, and it is best to shift our focus to resolving fundamental structural problems. That is better for the country.

Investment comes when economic fundamentals are strong, not because of a fleeting moment in the international limelight. More importantly, political uncertainty — driven by political volatility and weak judicial and democratic institutions — does not give investors the confidence required for long-term commitments. The political unrest and militant insurgency gripping the two major provinces, alongside tense relations and western borders, reinforce perceptions of Pakistan as a fragile state. The government needs to focus on these systemic failures at home rather than banking in the international limelight. ■

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BY ZAFAR MASUD

Making every rupee compound

PAKISTAN'S economic debate is trapped in a distracting quagmire — whether banks lend too much to government and too little to enterprise. Allocation matters, but it is not the binding constraint. On the State Bank's consolidated estimates, with the share of development spending shrinking, a rupee of government spending now multiplies about 0.71 in output on average while a rupee of private investment returns 1.2 to 1.3. The private rupee works nearly twice as hard yet, strip out productivity in, the efficiency which inputs become output — and even that collapses towards 1.0. Adjusted for our stalled productivity, no rupee in Pakistan truly compounds. We accumulate without amplifying.

The distinction is decisive. A rupee invested where productivity is rising earns more each year as workers learn and firms innovate; a rupee in a stagnant system merely buys more of the same. Pakistan's productivity sits near 0.28 on comparable estimates, against India's 0.48 and Sri Lanka's 0.42, and the export scoreboard confirms it. Vietnam now ships over \$400 billion in merchandise, more than 10 times ours, and Bangladesh's garment alone exceeds our total exports. These economies did not merely mobilise capital; they made it productive. That must be our organising principle — every reform tested against the question of whether it raises output per worker, per acre, per unit of energy, per rupee of credit. Against this backdrop, the following reforms are suggested.

First, we must expect discipline. A house made of 250 million small weak purchasing power cannot generate a compounding return, but it can. Pakistan's productivity needs 10 per cent of GDP, while those of Vietnam approach 30pc, the difference being a relentless focus on global value chains, industrial parks and fast customers. The lesson is to narrow rules to tradables and a competitive offering of goods and services, with reliable energy for exporters and incentives paid against performance — in other words, foreign exchange actually earned.

Second, skills are infrastructure. Road or rail

infrastructure without investing in skilled workers is more concrete, multiplying the 0.6 multiplier of inert spending rather than the 1.5 return when human capital rides on it. Barely a tenth of Pakistan's workforce holds a formal qualification, against roughly 20pc in Vietnam, which boasts a massive government-funded enterprise-designed technical training. The answer lies in a national skills compact: training designed by employers, part-funded by the state and measured by placement and wage gains. It would foster export-relevant centres in every district, funded via structures such as the Pakistan Skill Impact Bond.

No rupee in Pakistan truly compounds. We accumulate without amplifying.

Third, technology must reach the firm. Most SMEs do not need cutting-edge innovation but digital tools can enhance their productivity. India's digital public infrastructure now clears over 18bn real-time payments a month, formalising millions of small firms. Germany's Mittelstand shows the same in reverse, with deep technology inside small companies. Punjab proves the model at home: Assam Rashtriya gaurav enterprise, bank-financed credit on a card for traders who never qualified for a loan, with Apmi Chhat Apna Ghar runs an end-to-end digital, interest-free mortgage-financed housing scheme using over 150,000 mortgages approved and more than 100,000 homes delivered.

Fourth, agriculture should be reborn around yield, not acreage. Our wheat yield, almost three tonnes a hectare, trails China's at 5.8 and Egypt's at 6.5, as our inputs are piled on without effect. India's white revolution, built on cooperatives and cold chains, made that country the world's largest milk producer. Punjab's Kissan and Livestock Cards have already moved tens of

billions of rupees of hitherto-lost inputs to farmers on a thin public guarantee — the rails on which precision inputs target productive output. Fifth, finance must reward productivity over collateral. Banks prefer government paper and asset-backed lending because the economy is undercapitalised and enforcement weak, which is why sovereign exposure exceeds 50pc of assets, while private credit languishes at 13pc to 15pc of GDP, against nearly 50pc in India and over 100pc in Vietnam.

The remedy is information, not moral or regulatory pressures: digital tax, utility and supply chain data turned into credit histories, alongside cash-flow lending, movable collateral registries and first-loss guarantees that move capital to bankable SMEs, farmers and women entrepreneurs. The Financial Data Exchange of the Pakistan Digital Authority's WASEL project could act as a bridge.

Sixth, incentives must turn away from rent. Real estate and unbalanced consumerism absorb the bulk of national savings while contributing a fraction to tax, this accumulated wealth keeps the multiplier below one, even as documented enterprise is taxed and idle wealth escapes. Vietnam and Malaysia channelled savings into export manufacturing, not land speculation or equivalent in predictable taxation for formal firms, faster refunds for exporters and direct taxation of unproductive rents.

Pakistan lacks neither capital nor talent, it needs a system that forces capital to grow more intelligent over time and institutions that measure outcomes, not just expenditure.

The real reform is the rupee from one pocket to another but to make every rupee carry more technology, skill, discipline and export capability. The door of private-sector credit opens the moment bankable propositions exist, but productivity is the key, and bankability is its reward. That is how nations compound, and that is what Pakistan must now learn to do. ■

The writer is senior banker and chairman of the Pakistan Banks Association.

COMMENT

Editorials

Advancing Chinese modernization in new era through sci-tech innovation

President Xi Jinping delivered an important speech at a meeting in Beijing on Wednesday that brought together the national science and technology award conference, the general assemblies of the members of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering, and the 11th national congress of the China Association for Science and Technology.

Calling for accelerated efforts to achieve high-level self-reliance and strength in science and technology, and leverage sci-tech innovation to underpin and drive Chinese modernization, Xi's speech is of strategic importance in guiding the country to tackle the tough challenges it faces in building up its science and technology during the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period and beyond.

"We must seize the historic opportunity, rise to the challenges of the times, accelerate efforts to achieve high-level self-reliance and strength in science and technology, and make steady progress toward the 2035 goal of becoming a leading country in science and technology," Xi said.

Since 2012, China has implemented an innovation-driven development strategy, deepened sci-tech reform and achieved major advances in frontier research and strategic high-tech industries. Underscoring China's growing innovation capacity, R&D spending grew by around 10 percent annually on average during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, with R&D intensity reaching 2.8 percent of GDP in 2025, surpassing the OECD average for the first time.

Despite these achievements, China must be sober-minded as original innovation remains insufficient in some key fields, the structure of the country's scientific talent pool requires further optimization, and the efficiency of research investment can still be improved. Some institutional and regulatory bottlenecks also continue to constrain innovation in certain sectors.

As global sci-tech competition increasingly shifts to the frontiers of basic research, addressing these weaknesses with greater urgency and determination will be essential. To resolve the problems and strengthen the country's innovation capabilities, it is necessary to further improve the overall

effectiveness of its national innovation system, while allowing the market to play a decisive role in allocating innovation resources and enabling the government to better fulfill its responsibilities.

Guided by the "four orientations" framework — facing the world's scientific frontiers, the main economic battlefield, the country's major needs and the people's life and health — efforts should be made to step up coordination among planning, policy, mission portfolios, research teams, infrastructure platforms and regional innovation initiatives.

In carrying out research programs, major national sci-tech initiatives must be prioritized. This means concentrating efforts on frontier fields such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing and biosciences; key industries such as semiconductors and advanced manufacturing; and strategic frontiers including deep-sea, deep-space and deep-earth exploration. In the process, the country needs to plan for major research infrastructure, build indigenous capacity in high-end instruments, scientific data and journals, and actively leverage AI to facilitate research.

It is imperative to explore innovation-driven development paths tailored to local circumstances, and establish comparative advantages. Blindly chasing short-lived trends or engaging in "revolution-style" competition must be avoided.

Alongside stronger intellectual property rights protection and faster commercialization of research outcomes, the country needs to invest in talent, improve the efficiency of research funding, optimize evaluation practices, and tighten ethics and safety governance. It is also vital to step up risk evaluation, monitoring and rapid-response capabilities in sci-tech security, while ensuring that high-level research goes hand in hand with high-caliber protection, particularly for critical infrastructure.

Meanwhile, China will deepen its engagement in global sci-tech governance, actively present its vision and solutions to the international community, and elevate its voice and influence in international rule-making. By doing so, the country can contribute more original innovations and solutions to the progress of humanity while advancing Chinese modernization.

US curbs on win-win cooperation costly

As artificial intelligence developers in the United States continue to raise prices and usage costs soar, Chinese AI models are quietly gaining ground in the US market.

Since February, the percentage of tokens that come from Chinese models used by US companies on OpenRouter, a leading global AI platform, has exceeded 30 percent each week, peaking at 46 percent. In contrast, according to a CNBC report, in the first half of 2025, the US usage figure for these fundamental units of data processed by AI models was only 4.5 percent.

While matching the capabilities of top-tier overseas models, Chinese alternatives are priced at perhaps one-tenth the cost or even less, empowering global users to deploy AI in their respective application scenarios more rapidly and affordably.

The emerging commercial potential of what has been dubbed the "token economy" is already evident in the encouraging financial reports from some Chinese AI companies. Some industry insiders foresee China becoming the world's "token factory" by capitalizing on its energy strengths.

However, while US companies are eagerly embracing Chinese AI technology, Washington is eyeing the rise of China's AI with unease. One lawmaker proposed a "Decoupling America's Artificial Intelligence Capabilities from China Act" early last year in response to the "DeepSeek shock".

Such moves are already a staple in the telecommunications sector. In the latest move, the US Federal Communications Commission announced on Tuesday that it is adding California-based Digital System Technology to a list of companies deemed to pose risks to US "national security" because of its "connections" to Chinese telecom companies. Last month, the agency also stated it would prohibit the use of Chinese equipment in undersea internet cables, citing what it considers "an unacceptable risk to national security".

Additionally, the FCC is reportedly drafting a ban on imports of Chinese inverters, baselessly claiming they could "disrupt" power supplies. These suppressive moves follow earlier FCC bans on new foreign models of drones and routers, which primarily target Chinese products. The unwarranted crackdown not only deprives Chinese businesses of a fair, just and non-discriminatory environment, but also harms the US' own interests.

The US' politicized crackdown on Chinese high-tech enterprises will only raise costs for US businesses and harm the interests of US consumers. This approach contradicts fundamental market principles and undermines the mutually beneficial economic and trade relationship between China and the US.

Cooperation benefits both sides, whereas conflict harms both. US policymakers should stop their unwarranted suppression of Chinese high-tech companies, including pressuring their allies to implement high-tech trade embargoes.

On Tuesday, Dutch Trade Minister Sjoerd Sjoerdsma said in Beijing that his country and China were cooperating "extremely well" to resolve a dispute involving chipmaker Nxp. Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, at a meeting with his Dutch guest, expressed the hope the Netherlands will help maintain the stability of semiconductor supply chains and resolve corporate disputes.

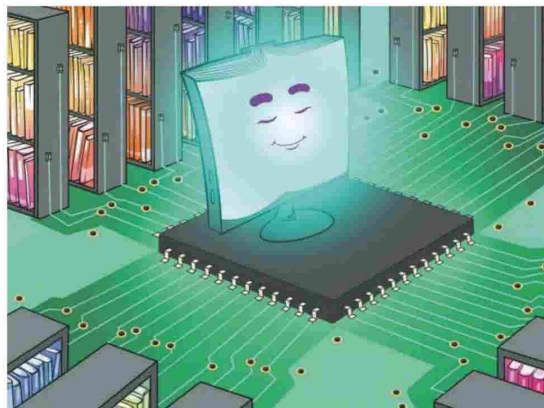
The visit coincides with the US pushing the Multilateral Alignment of Technology Controls on Hardware, which aims to further expand export controls on semiconductors to China. The Dutch government is lobbying the US to reconsider the restrictive move as it would constrain Dutch semiconductor giant ASML's ability to sell to China.

In contrast to the US' hegemonic approach in the high-tech sector, China has advocated a collaborative strategy, emphasizing the importance of international cooperation to achieve shared innovation progress. This approach highlights the potential benefits of pooling resources, knowledge, and expertise across borders to address global challenges and drive technological advancements that can benefit all nations.

As a leading advocate, promoter, and pioneer in AI capacity building, China has introduced the Global AI Governance Initiative. This initiative aims to help countries share the benefits of artificial intelligence and bridge the global AI divide. It emphasizes a people-centered approach, prioritizing human well-being, social security and respect for national sovereignty, while promoting AI as a tool for sustainable development and addressing global challenges such as climate change.

In this rapidly evolving technological landscape, nations should prioritize cooperation over confrontation to ensure that technology serves humanity's best interests.

Cao Yi



Opinion Line

Cartographic revisionism stretches bounds of credibility

The report released on Wednesday by the China Institute for Marine Affairs, a think tank under the Ministry of Natural Resources, titled "Historical and Legal Critique of the Philippines' Territorial Claims in the South China Sea", raises a fundamental question: what happens when a state seeks to redefine boundaries decades after accepting them as the basis of its own sovereignty?

The report argues that the Philippines' contemporary maritime claims sit uneasily alongside the very legal instruments from which the country derives its territorial legitimacy. The internationally recognized boundaries of the Philippines were established through a succession of treaties during the Spanish and American colonial periods, most notably the 1898 Treaty of Paris, and were subsequently reflected in successive Philippine constitutions. These documents constitute the legal architecture upon which the modern Philippine state was built.

That creates an obvious paradox. The Philippines cannot easily invoke those treaties as the foundation of its sovereignty while simultaneously treating their territorial limits as optional.

This inconsistency becomes particularly striking in Manila's claims over China's Huangyan Island and some islets, shoals and reefs of China's Nan-Sha Islands in the South China Sea. Since the 1970s, the Philippines has progressively expanded its unlawful claims, relying on false arguments ranging from geographical proximity

to selective interpretation of history. Yet proximity has never constituted legal title under international law.

Official Philippine maps published well into the late 20th century consistently placed Huangyan Island outside Philippine territory. International jurisprudence has long attached significance to the principle of estoppel, whereby states cannot casually reverse positions on which others have reasonably relied. Maps alone do not determine sovereignty, but official state cartography can provide compelling evidence of how a state defined its own territorial boundaries at a given time.

The issue, therefore, is less about discovering overlooked historical evidence than about revising an established historical narrative to accommodate evolving political objectives.

Such revisionism carries consequences beyond bilateral relations. If every state were to redraw its frontiers through retrospective historical claims, few international boundaries would remain immune to challenge.

That principle becomes particularly relevant in the South China Sea. Stability depends less on absolute agreement than on shared acceptance that legal commitments impose lasting constraints. Once treaties become infinitely malleable, diplomacy gives way to perpetual contestation.

Nor should external forces ignore the contradiction embedded in this debate. Washington frequently presents itself as the "defender" of a

"rules-based" international order. But its endorsement of the Philippines on the South China Sea issue is apparently to serve its own geopolitical agenda in the Asia-Pacific. Rules command respect only when applied consistently, not when they coincide with immediate geopolitical interests. Japan also plays an ugly role by supporting the Philippines' provocations toward China in the waters.

International law provides mechanisms for peaceful negotiation and confidence-building. But those mechanisms depend upon a common willingness to distinguish between historical evidence and political aspiration. That distinction has become increasingly blurred in Manila's approach. The Wednesday report depicts a legal narrative that has evolved less through newly uncovered evidence than through shifting political calculations.

Manila cannot simply edit inconvenient chapters without weakening the legal foundations on which its own claims rest. The international system still depends upon one essential discipline: legal consistency. Once governments begin treating established boundaries as endlessly negotiable through retrospective "reinterpretation", uncertainty will spread far beyond any single reef or shoal.

In geopolitics, as in law, credibility is cumulative and contradiction is costly. A nation seeking to redraw its maps should first reckon with the maps it has already drawn.

—LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

New efforts needed to match skills with demand

Editor's note: China aims to develop high-quality employment during the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period. Shanghai Observer spoke to Wu Ruijun, director of the Institute for Talent Development Strategy at East China Normal University; Ding Xiaojin, chief researcher in the Chinese Modernization Institute at Shanghai University of Finance and Economics; and Zhan Yubo, vice-director of the Institute of Economics at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, on the integration of high-quality development and employment. Below are excerpts of the interviews. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

China's demographic shifts have made the traditional growth model increasingly unsustainable. At the same time, industrial upgrading, technological developments and the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence are reshaping the labor market, leading to pronounced structural employment mismatches.

Although record numbers of university graduates enter the labor market each year, sectors such as advanced manufacturing, elderly care and the digital economy still face a persistent shortage of workers. This paradox of labor shortage amid employment challenges highlights the need to integrate employment objectives into industrial policy, demographic strategy and technological innovation.

As China develops new quality productive forces, accelerates its digital transformation and expands the green and silver economies, equal attention should be given to cultivating emerging occupations and creating new employment opportunities.

Establishing comprehensive labor market forecasting and employment monitoring systems in key industries

will better align education with market demands. Dynamic adjustments to academic disciplines, enhanced industry-academia collaboration and a life-long vocational training system will equip workers with the skills needed to adapt to industrial transformation and technological change.

A unified and efficient national labor market, supported by modern employment services and information sharing, will facilitate labor mobility and improve the matching of skills with jobs, allowing industrial upgrading and employment optimization to advance in tandem.

Enterprises should be encouraged to adopt employment-friendly digital transformation strategies. Promoting the integration of AI with the real economy can foster new growth engines in areas such as intelligent manufacturing and digital services.

At the same time, the development of occupational standards and certification systems for emerging professions should be accelerated. Targeted digital skills training and reskilling programs are essential to help workers transition into new occupations.

For those affected by technological change, stronger social protection and transitional support, including training subsidies and job retention programs, are necessary to ensure that technological progress translates into broader employment opportunities, higher incomes and improved living standards.

Employers should modernize their hiring practices by moving beyond an excessive reliance on academic credentials, seniority or institutional background. Instead, greater emphasis should be placed on practical skills, professional competence and job performance. A more inclusive labor market should provide opportunities for university graduates, skilled workers, career changers and workers in emerging forms of employment.

Enhancement of social security and occupational injury protection for flexible workers, together with greater public recognition of skilled workers, grassroots professionals and entrepreneurs, will help cultivate a culture that respects work, values skills, encourages innovation and supports entrepreneurship.

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VIEWS



China and the World Roundtable | China-South Asia Cooperation Essential to Common Prosperity

Editor's Note: The 7th China-South Asia Cooperation Forum opened in Kunming, Yunnan province, on June 11 under the theme "Strengthen Cooperative Partnerships for a Community with a Shared Future with Neighboring Countries". The forum brought together senior diplomats, representatives of regional organizations and experts from South Asia and neighboring countries. Below are selected excerpts from keynote speeches delivered at the forum, as reported by China Daily's Li Yingqing and Yao Yuzin.

South Asia, China to build a shared future by cooperation

Collective action is essential in a changing world

The world is undergoing a profound transformation. Geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty, climate-related challenges and growing pressures on multilateral institutions continue to reshape the international landscape.



Iruthisham Adam is the minister of Foreign Affairs of the Maldives.

The ongoing conflicts and crises around the world highlight the importance of dialogue and diplomacy in safeguarding international peace and security. For small island developing states such as the Maldives, the effects of such crises are often amplified, highlighting their vulnerability to external developments and the importance of a peaceful and stable international environment.

In the face of ongoing crises, collective action remains indispensable. One nation cannot address the complex challenges of the time alone.

China has consistently emphasized consensus, common prosperity and cooperative approaches to global challenges. These principles continue to resonate across the region, reflecting shared aspirations for development and stronger regional ties.

Ultimately, the strength of any relationship lies not only in shared interests, but in the trust, understanding and goodwill that sustain it.

Technology and innovation will drive future growth

The international community faces economic uncertainties, climate challenges, technological transformations and growing geopolitical complexities. At such a time, solidarity, mutual trust and partnership among neighboring countries have become more important than ever.



Arun Hemachandra is Sri Lanka's deputy minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Employment.

The vision of building a community with a shared future is based on the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation. Strong regional partnerships are essential for addressing common challenges and unlocking new opportunities for growth and development.

Future cooperation needs to focus on promoting trade, attracting investment, enhancing connectivity, accelerating digital transformation, and expanding opportunities in tourism, renewable energy, agriculture and the blue economy.

Educational exchanges, youth engagement,

cultural interactions, academic collaboration and tourism cooperation are essential for fostering mutual understanding and building lasting friendships among nations.

Innovation and technology are equally important drivers of future growth. By strengthening cooperation in digital technologies, artificial intelligence, innovation and capacity building, countries can better equip themselves to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving global economy.

Greater regional cooperation in climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, renewable energy and sustainable development is essential to safeguarding the collective future.

By advancing South-South cooperation, strengthening connectivity, promoting sustainable development and deepening people-to-people exchanges, countries can unlock new opportunities for growth and resilience.

China-South Asia trade still has vast untapped frontiers

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation was established in 1985 to elevate the welfare and quality of life of the peoples of South Asia, engineer collective solutions to shared challenges, and build an enduring spirit of friendship, trust and mutual respect among its member states.



Mohd Golam Sarwar is secretary-general of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

Four decades later, SAARC stands as the embodiment of hope for regional peace, stability, progress and solidarity — bound by a shared history, culture and destiny. As a valued observer country, China shares a relationship with SAARC that the region deeply treasures.

China remains the primary economic and trade partner for South Asian nations. Bilateral trade volume now exceeds \$200 billion annually, having doubled over the past decade with an average annual growth rate of 6.3 percent. While traditional synergy in agriculture, energy, minerals and infrastructure remains strong, cooperation is rapidly expanding into pioneering frontiers.

Today, China and South Asia are actively collaborating in green energy, photovoltaics, electric vehicles, low-carbon initiatives, digital technologies, intelligent manufacturing and cross-border e-commerce.

To ensure this economic relationship is both sustainable and mutually enriching, there should be a deeper and more resilient equilibrium in regional trade volumes.

The China-South Asia Expo, which showcases advances in bio-medicine, green energy, advanced manufacturing, cultural tourism, wellness and modern agriculture, can inject fresh momentum into the regional economy



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

and create common ground for development.

Partnership, not polarization, is South Asia's choice

South Asia is home to almost a quarter of humanity, endowed with abundant natural resources and a great talent pool. Yet, the region has lagged behind other regions such as Southeast, Central and Northeast Asia.



Khalid Hashmi is Pakistan's ambassador to China.

Despite the demographic dividend, the social and economic indicators of South Asian countries leave much to be desired. The region faces complex challenges: conflicts, poverty, climate vulnerability, youth insecurity and uneven development. Countering these challenges requires a bold vision, state-manship and new development partnerships.

South Asia's history over the past 75 years demonstrates that building a truly peaceful and prosperous region hinges on resolving long-standing disputes and adhering to international law and the United Nations Charter.

A new blueprint for a development partnership between China and South Asia should be based on principles of peaceful coexistence, cooperation, solidarity and shared prosperity. It is time to consider establishing a standing China-South Asia Development Forum as an annual platform, hosted on a rotational basis among South Asian countries.

The region stands at an important crossroads. The choice should be partnership over polarization, development over discord, and hope over despair.

Development must serve both people and planet

The focus on deepening cooperative partnerships and building a community with a shared future reflects what the Himalayan region has practiced for generations — living in harmony with nature, respecting each other's sovereignty and seeking mutual benefit.

Bhutan's Gross National Happiness philosophy places the well-being of people and the protection of the environment at the center of all development.

China's vision of ecological civilization, captured in the principle that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets", speaks the same language. Yunnan province is a living example of this wisdom — its breathtaking landscapes, rich biodiversity

and harmonious multi-ethnic culture mirror the spirit of the Himalayas that connects Bhutan, Nepal, India, Bangladesh and China.

The great rivers that flow from these shared mountains nourish hundreds of millions across the region.

China's extraordinary achievement in lifting nearly 800 million people out of extreme poverty through people-centered, long-term strategies offers powerful lessons for the Global South.

Future cooperation should move beyond transactional cooperation toward genuine, long-term friendship built on mutual respect, non-interference and win-win outcomes.

Green energy, digital economy, cultural tourism, agriculture, health cooperation and people-to-people exchanges provide tremendous potential to deepen understanding and build the human bridges that make all other cooperation sustainable.



Karma Dorji is a former minister of Industry, Commerce and Employment of Bhutan.

Cooperation is foundation of Asia's shared future

The world is undergoing a deep transformation, economic interdependence is deepening, and technological change is accelerating at an unprecedented pace. In such a world, cooperation among neighbors is no longer optional — it is essential for stability, prosperity and peace.

China and South Asia together represent nearly half of humanity. This is not merely a geographic reality, but also a civilizational responsibility.

Former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee once observed: "You can change your friends, but you cannot change your neighbors." This is not merely a reflection on geography — it is a strategic truth. Neighborhoods are permanent.

As two ancient civilizations, two major economies and two leading voices of the Global South, India and China are not only bilateral partners in complexity — they are also indispensable actors in shaping the Asian century.

When you connect, stereotypes dissolve. When societies understand each other better, strategic space for stability expands. Let this be the century in which Asia does not merely rise, but rises together.



Himadri Shukla is the chairperson of the Confederation of Young Leaders and director-general of the Indian Institute of Governance and Leadership.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Khalid Taimur Akram

Why Party-building thought matters for governance

One of the central questions in comparative politics is how governing parties sustain effectiveness over long periods of time. While different political systems provide different answers, China's experience offers a distinctive perspective.

Rather than relying primarily on electoral competition or frequent institutional redesign, the Communist Party of China has placed growing emphasis on strengthening itself through strict Party governance, organizational discipline and continuous self-improvement.

This approach has become one of the defining features of Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building. At its core is the concept of the Party's "self-reform" — the idea that a long-governing ruling party must constantly reform itself if it is to remain effective, responsive and capable of leading national development.

China's rapid industrialization, modern infrastructure, technological advancement and unprecedented poverty reduction have attracted worldwide attention.

While these achievements are often attributed to industrial policy, long-term planning or economic reforms, they also reflect a deeper institutional foundation. Effective governance requires not only sound policies but also organizations capable of implementing them consistently across a country of more than 1.4 billion people.

For this reason, President Xi Jinping has repeatedly stressed that Party building is inseparable from national governance.

A disciplined, capable and clean governing party is viewed not simply as a political

objective but as a prerequisite for effective State capacity.

One important aspect of this philosophy is comprehensive Party self-governance. Over the past decade, anti-corruption efforts have become one of the most visible manifestations of this approach. Corruption weakens public trust, reduces administrative efficiency and undermines long-term development.

Through strengthened supervision, stricter disciplinary mechanisms and greater institutional oversight, China has sought to reinforce accountability throughout the Party and government.

High-profile investigations involving officials at different levels demonstrate the intention to enforce discipline regardless of rank. More broadly, anti-corruption is viewed not as an isolated campaign but as part of a broader effort to improve governance by strengthening institutions and preserving public confidence.

Yang Youlin, former executive deputy director of the administrative committee of the Nanjing economic and technological development zone in East China's Jiangsu province, was sentenced to death on Monday by the Changzhou Intermediate People's Court after being convicted of multiple crimes, including accepting more than 2.2 billion yuan (\$24 million) in bribes.

Another defining feature of Xi's Party-building philosophy is the emphasis on institutional learning. Governance is treated as a continuous process of identifying weak-



nesses, evaluating performance and refining policy implementation. Rather than assuming that existing institutions remain permanently effective, the Party seeks to improve its organizational capacity through constant adjustment and internal reform.

This concept of self-reform therefore extends beyond anti-corruption. It encompasses organizational renewal, institutional resilience and the ability to adapt to changing domestic and international circumstances. The objective is not change for its own sake, but continuous improvement in governance capacity.

China's policymaking process reflects this philosophy. Major reforms frequently begin as carefully designed local pilot programs before being expanded nationwide.

Experiences from different provinces and municipalities are evaluated, refined and incorporated into national policy where appropriate. Successful practices are institutionalized, while unsuccessful ones are adjusted or discontinued.

Such an approach allows the government to accumulate policy experience rather than repeatedly starting from scratch. Institutional memory becomes a source of long-term governance capability, enabling continuous improvement instead of cyclical reinvention.

China's campaign to eliminate extreme poverty illustrates this model.

Beyond financial investment, success depended on extensive data collection, detailed policy evaluation, local implementation mechanisms and continuous administrative adjustment. Governance capacity was strengthened not only through resources but through the ability to learn system-

atically from implementation.

This was the story of "cliff village", perched 800 meters above the ground in Sichuan province's remote Daliang Mountains — equivalent to a 200-story building. In 2016, the local Party secretary led the replacement of perilous vine ladders with steel staircases, transforming access.

The village went viral online, and a local shepherd became a popular vlogger and tour guide filming the steel ladders, cliffs, cloud seas, and sunrises. The steel ladder brought the greatest benefits to local students with a new modern school built. Life became much better.

The same principle increasingly applies to technological development. China's progress in artificial intelligence, digital governance and advanced manufacturing reflects not only scientific investment but also institutional coordination, long-term planning and policy continuity. These are areas where organizational effectiveness becomes as important as technological capability itself.

Countries employ different mechanisms to ensure accountability. Some rely primarily on competitive elections and changes of government. Others emphasize institutional checks and balances, judicial oversight or administrative professionalism.

China's model places greater emphasis on internal Party supervision, organizational discipline and continuous institutional improvement. Each system reflects its own historical experience and political traditions.

For scholars of comparative governance, China's experience offers an important case study. Rather than evaluating political systems solely according to institutional form,

increasing attention is being paid to governance effectiveness, policy implementation and State capacity. Researchers continue to examine how Party discipline, organizational reform and administrative modernization interact to influence economic development and public administration.

China's growing international role has further intensified interest in these questions. Through trade, investment, infrastructure cooperation and development partnerships, China has become a major participant in global governance.

Many developing countries are increasingly interested not simply in China's economic achievements but also in the institutional mechanisms that have supported long-term policy continuity and national modernization.

Xi has consistently argued that reform is never complete. As technological innovation accelerates, demographic changes deepen, environmental pressures increase and geopolitical uncertainty grows, governance itself must continue evolving.

In this context, Party building is presented as an ongoing process rather than a one-time institutional adjustment.

As China pursues high-quality development in an increasingly complex international environment, the evolution of its Party-building philosophy will remain central to understanding both its governance model and its future trajectory.

The author is the executive director of the Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future, Islamabad. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

COMMENT & FEATURES

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Help on the way?

When US President Donald Trump urged "Iranian patriots" in January to keep protesting, take over their institutions, and save the names of the "killers and abusers," he added a promise that should not be treated as mere political rhetoric: "Help on its way."

That is a promise that the people of Iran paid for in blood.

The world has spent the past several weeks debating whether the US-Iran memorandum of understanding was good for oil markets, bad for Israel, sufficient for shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, useful for Lebanon, or convenient for a White House that wanted the war to end.

Israel has every reason to oppose any arrangement that leaves Tehran's nuclear infrastructure, missile program, proxy network, and regional leverage intact. Yet amid the diplomatic churn and economic analysis, the actual victims of the Islamic Republic have again been pushed to the margins.

They are the women, students, workers, parents, and young people who came into the streets against a regime that has impoverished them, censored them, beaten them, jailed them, and shot them as they are forced under its thumb.

They know Iran's prisons, morality police, Revolutionary Guards, propaganda machinery, and habit of spending national wealth on foreign wars.

The January protests, which began exactly six months ago, began amid economic collapse, soaring inflation, and anger over state failure.

But they also became something larger. The slogans chanted across Iranian cities were about sovereignty, dignity, and the right of Iranians to decide that their country belongs to them rather than to a clerical-military regime and its regional project.

That is why the world's relative quiet has been so shameful.

Too many governments and commentators have allowed Tehran to recast a struggle for freedom as foreign agitation or reduce it to sanctions, exchange rates, oil routes, and negotiation tactics.

Economic suffering helped bring people into the streets, but the answer is not to rescue the regime that produced it.

Rights watch groups said in January that Iranian security forces carried out mass killings after the protests escalated on January 8 and that thousands of protesters and bystanders were believed to have been killed while the authorities restricted communications.

Amnesty International described that month as the deadliest period of repression by Iranian authorities in decades of its research.

One victim said, "If we do not go into the streets for Iran's freedom today, one day our children will have to do it instead. Today, it is our lives so that they may have a better future."

The comment was made before their death by regime forces in the January protests, according to testimony shared with *The Jerusalem Post* ahead of the six-month marking.

That sentence and the sentiment behind it should haunt every leader who encouraged Iranians to rise and then reached for the language of orderly process when the cost became too high.

Trump is right that dealing with this regime is a waste of time. He is also right that a regime that shoots protesters in the street cannot be trusted to reform itself through polite diplomacy.

The conclusion, though, cannot be to abandon the Iranian people until the next round of negotiations collapses or the next oil shock alarms global markets.

The conclusion must be that regime change in Iran is not the only strategic and moral horizon that fits the reality before us. Such change cannot be imposed by outsiders; it must be Iranian-led.

It must respect Iran's people, history, culture, and future but must be supported by the free world with sanctions on killers, technology to break censorship, documentation for accountability, diplomatic isolation of regime officials, and refusal to reward Tehran for surviving crises of its own making.

A free Iran would not solve every problem in the Middle East, but it could transform the region in ways no memorandum ever will. In January, the Iranian people were told help was coming; six months later, they deserve more than silence, bargaining, and regret.

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US PRESIDENT Donald Trump is seen attending an event at the White House, on Monday. (Evan Vucci/Reuters)

Trump's red scare

WASHINGTON WATCH
• By DOUGLAS BLOOMFIELD

With fear of a blue wave in November that could wash away Republican control of Congress, an increasingly desperate GOP Party is reverting to its favorite old battle cry: The communies are coming.

Leading the new red scare is President Donald Trump, who traces his roots in that swamp to the era of Sen. Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s.

Instead of using the July 4 celebration to unify and inspire the nation, Trump used the backdrop of Mount Rushmore to be the great national divider.

Instead of patriotism, he spewed partisanship. Along with reciting his familiar personal grievances, he sought to ignite a new wave of anti-communist hysteria.

In speeches and tweets over the holiday weekend, Trump invoked one of the ugliest periods in American history.

"There is now a resurgence of the communist menace in our land, including from newcomers to our country who embrace ideas totally opposed to our way of life," the president cried. Communism is a "mortal threat to American liberty."

Who are these communists? Immigrants. Democratic Socialists. Progressives. Liberals. Democrats. Just about anyone he hates.

Democrats, Trump declared, are "hardcore godless communists," unlike the God-fearing Christian Republicans attending the Faith & Freedom Coalition in Washington last month. "We have to stop this, this horrible threat of cancer that's permeating our country called communism," he told them.

This is nothing new for the hater-in-chief. Trump is a protégé of one of the great red baiters of American history, Roy Cohn, himself the brain behind McCarthy.

Trump may accuse others of McCarthyism, but he is more the practitioner than the victim. Cohn, who was McCarthy's closest advisor, was not only Trump's mentor but also his personal lawyer.

Historian Jon Meacham wrote, "Both McCarthy and Trump were opportunists who used whatever issue might be at hand to dominate the news and seek power."

Cohn's posthumous description of McCarthy could apply to Trump: "Impatient, overly aggressive, overly dramatic... acted on impulse... tended to sensationalize the evidence he had... would neglect to do important homework... [had] an inattention to detail... gifted with a sense of political timing.... His sense of what

made drama and headlines was uncommonly good."

Michael Kruse wrote in *Politico*, "Trump simply could not have done what he did without the connections and machinations of Cohn."

"There is a straight line from McCarthy to Cohn to Trump. Trump learned from the worst." Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin wrote in *Forward*.

Trump has made Cohn's mantra a hallmark of his presidency: "Never apologize, never admit you were wrong, and always go on the offensive."

Republicans aren't the only ones worried by Democratic Socialists' recent successes in New York, Colorado and other races. Moderate Democrats are increasingly nervous.

SEVERAL HOUSE members anxious to distance themselves from far-left progressives declared, "We are capitalist, not socialist." Rep. Josh Gotthelfer (D-New Jersey) told Fox News they "are bomb throwers, not problem solvers" and "should form their own party."

If anyone is moving toward socialism, it may be that elderly capitalist Trump. Under his increasingly autocratic leadership, the federal government has been taking equity positions in a range of private companies, which is seen as state socialism by some on the right, according to Forbes.

"Since January 2025, the US government has invested \$26.7 billion across thirty deals

involving direct ownership," according to the Council on Foreign Relations.

Trump's red scare attacks are a sign of fear – as is his frantic demand that Congress stop all work until it passes his SAVE America Act and eliminates the filibuster. "We do that, we're not going to lose an election for 100 years," he said. "That is not election security, it is election engineering," former president Bill Clinton pointed out.

Trump is not a student of history and boasts that most of his reading consists of articles about himself. It may be that he doesn't know the difference between socialists and communists. Does he know that Albert Einstein, Helen Keller, Martin Luther King, David Ben-Gurion and Thomas Paine were socialists? Or does he think all socialists are Bolsheviks?

Trump was tutored by Cohn, who was known as McCarthy's brain. Stephen Miller, the White House deputy chief of staff, the driving force behind the administration's aggressive anti-immigration policies, has been called Trump's brain.

The red-baiting Mount Rushmore "communist menace" speech "bore the hallmarks" of Miller's style, said one reporter covering the event, calling it an "apocalyptic script." Maybe it was given away by the line: "The Communist Party is made up of illegal immigrants, criminals and everybody that doesn't want to work."

Miller is Trump's minister for

hate, racism and revenge. He has suggested Trump is God's chosen one, Trump agreed, saying he was anointed by God to fulfill a historic purpose, Vanity Fair has reported. He has even posted an AI picture of himself as Jesus.

At Mount Rushmore he said, "And as our Declaration of Independence tells us, we are all made in the image of one almighty god. And a communist will never say that. That's for sure."

Neither does the founding document of the United States, the Daily Beast points out.

There was nothing divinely inspired or accidental in Trump's repeated conjuring up memories of McCarthyism and of that malignant era.

Northwestern University history professor Edward Miller called Trump's election a "major victory for the ideas of Robert Welch," the founder of the ultra-right anti-communist John Birch Society.

This nation that celebrates its 250th birthday has not been so divided since the Vietnam War. Instead of a patriotic message to uplift spirits and unify Americans behind ideals on which it was founded, the president offered division, anger and fear.

We got a red scare from a president who can't even paint a pool blue.

The writer is a Washington-based journalist, consultant, lobbyist, and former legislative director at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

What happened to Israeli accountability?

• By OZ BIN NUN

More than 1,000 days have passed since October 7, and I want to use this moment to invite you to a repulsive but necessary thought experiment. Imagine October 7 happens again. Yes, with all its horrors, its terror, its dead. Everything repeats. And now I want to ask: In that case, would the government be responsible?

This is the point where half the country will probably snort in contempt: "What does that have to do with anything? What are you trying to prove?" Bear with me. What this thought experiment is designed to expose are two deep failures: one serious, the other catastrophic.

The first failure is that every argument put forward to explain why the government and its head bear no responsibility for October 7 is, in practice, an infinitely reusable argument. No matter how many times October 7 happens, the same excuses work again and again. This time it will be the current IDF chief

of staff, Lt.-Gen. Eyal Zamir, who failed to warn in time. Next time it will be whoever replaces him.

Because the public cannot be exposed to all the raw intelligence, what happens here is exactly what Hannah Arendt described as the most effective way to kill truth: turning it into opinion. And when everything becomes a matter of opinion, on the second or third October 7, every citizen assigns blame purely according to their political tribe.

The second failure, the catastrophic one, goes to the foundation of democratic governance itself. A state can survive only when there is a functioning system of accountability, in which leadership is genuinely answerable to the people. In Israel, that accountability has been completely distorted.

In the classical republican tradition, corruption means preferring private gain over the common good. In Israel today, the prevailing logic has become: If something is not criminal, it is acceptable. That distortion has seeped deep into politics.

"What is right is what the people want," where "the people" translates in practice to a coalition majority.

The current logic runs: Since there is no political alternative and the public keeps voting for the same leadership, that leadership must be fine, and therefore October 7 is not its responsibility and certainly not its fault. The ballot box has been transformed from a tool of civic oversight into a machine for laundering guilt.

The real problem is that leadership needs the concept of guilt in order to correct itself. In a healthy democracy, we would work hard to ensure that public representatives and security chiefs who fail in their duties are forced to genuinely reckon with that failure before anything else. But in Israel today, guilt has vanished.

Subordinating morality to electoral outcomes has produced a society where anything not criminal is acceptable, and anything that cannot be translated into votes simply does not exist. Even if 27 more October 7s were to occur, the art

of deflecting responsibility would go on clearing everyone who deserves to be held to account.

Supporters of the current coalition will argue, not without reason: "What do you want from us? There is no other right-wing, security-minded alternative to vote for." Without entering that political debate, I will say only this: Contrary to what many believe, casting a ballot is probably the least significant civic act available to a citizen.

What actually matters is the ongoing relationship between the public and its representatives: the daily demand for accountability, the refusal to let failure disappear into the news cycle. If representatives were forced to come to the public first with a genuine reckoning, and only then did citizens vote according to their own preferences, we would be in far better shape.

In the current situation, where each side rallies reflexively to protect its own leader, the arrogance is not even concealed. And accountability is dead.

The writer is the CEO of the Riba Center.

Israel's energy blind spot

• By GABRIEL MITCHELL

While most of the Israeli public's attention has been focused on the military campaign against Iran and its proxies and the upcoming elections, several commercial decisions in the Eastern Mediterranean have gone largely unnoticed that carry real costs for Israel's long-term energy security.

Israel expanded its natural gas export agreement with Egypt – the largest in its history – while ENI and TotalEnergies committed Cyprus's Kronos field to Egyptian liquefaction terminals, and Qatargas signed a new investment agreement with Egypt encompassing Eastern Mediterranean infrastructure.

Individually, each decision has a defensible commercial rationale. But together, they point towards a regional energy architecture that concentrates exposure around a single node, placing Israeli energy security at risk.

On paper, exporting natural gas to Egypt makes sense. Egypt has a large and growing domestic energy market, operational liquefaction infrastructure in Idku and Damietta, and fewer immediate political complications than some alternative routes. Compared to a pipeline to Cyprus or a floating LNG facility offshore, routing gas through Egypt requires less new infrastructure and fewer parties need to be brought to the table.

Chevron, as operator of both the Leviathan and Tamar fields, has its own reasons to prefer a well-established export route. When the most financially rewarding route runs through Egypt, that is where the gas will flow.

It is worth recalling that the extension of the Leviathan export agreement was not a

straightforward commercial decision. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu delayed the deal for months before approving it under American pressure, and only agreed to do so after the inclusion of clawback clauses designed to protect Israeli supply in the event of future domestic shortages.

Whether those safeguards are sufficient – and whether they will hold under the commercial and diplomatic pressure that accompanies a long-term export relationship – is a question that hasn't been seriously debated.

The problem is that two of the Eastern Mediterranean's most significant gas assets will flow through the same node, making Egypt's economic and political stability variables in Israel's energy security.

Egypt has been managing fiscal pressure, currency volatility, and dependence on IMF support. However, it remains a complicated anchor for a regional energy architecture. Its dependence on Gulf financial support, particularly Qatari capital, is growing, and the Qatargas investment agreement only deepens that dynamic.

A state serving simultaneously as a transit hub for other countries' gas and as a recipient of Qatari financing is not in an unconstrained negotiating position. For Israel, whose relationship with Qatar has been complicated by Doha's relationship with Hamas, the prospect of Qatari capital acquiring influence over the infrastructure through which Israeli gas flows deserves serious attention.

Turkey has also been making strategic decisions over the past decade. Through commercial agreements between state-owned BOTAS and operators including Chevron, BP, Shell,



WORKERS on the Tamar gas processing rig 24 km off the Israeli southern coast of Ashkelon. (Moshe Shai/Flash90)

ENI, and TotalEnergies, Ankara has accumulated influence over future permit decisions, investment patterns, and project timetables across the region. Turkey's "Blue Homeland" maritime claims have not gone away; they have been complemented by a commercial toolkit that achieves similar ends without the international criticism that naval brinkmanship garnered.

This matters for Israel because the operators Turkey has cultivated relationships with are the same ones whose participation would be required for future energy infrastructure projects: new gas pipelines, undersea electricity interconnectors, and corridors like IMEC.

That leverage grants Ankara influence over whether those projects advance, stall, or get rerouted in ways that work against Israeli interests. This should not be under-

stood as a critique of the Israel-Egypt energy relationship, which has come a long way since the collapse of their previous arrangement in 2012, and the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum remains an important platform.

But it would be derelict to ignore how commercial logic has produced a chokepoint that leaves Israel with limited options if the Egyptian route underperforms, if Qatari influence produces outcomes that run counter to Israeli interests, or if Turkey's leverage is exercised against connectivity projects that could swing Israel's economic future.

Israel's domestic energy outlook adds greater urgency. At present, 70% of Israel's power generation depends on natural gas. Under current trajectories, domestic reserves are expected to last two to three decades, though demand is not

static; electrification of transport, population growth, and the expansion of data centers will all accelerate projections of when Israel reaches peak gas. The long-term export contracts that made commercial sense today will narrow the state's options at exactly the moment when flexibility will matter most.

SO WHAT should Israel actually be doing?

The 3+1 framework – the partnership among Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and the United States – has entertained infrastructure projects that would reduce Israeli dependence on the Egyptian hub. To date, it has not produced a major energy project.

The Great Sea Interconnector, an undersea electricity cable connecting Israel, Cyprus, and Greece, has been in development for years and remains

plagued by financing and technical challenges – one of several examples that expose the gap between political declarations and private sector interests.

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has shifted that calculus. Unlike the interconnector, whose commercial case rests on long-term grid integration, a Cyprus-based LNG facility addresses a specific market need: a reliable export pathway that does not run through Egypt.

The Christodoulides government has shown interest in building such a facility near Vasilikos. But Cyprus has its own political challenges that have complicated its ability to translate energy ambitions into concrete projects.

Relying on legacy political structures to deliver what they have consistently failed to deliver would be a mistake. Israel should be meeting Cypriot interest with pipeline feasibility studies, development finance engagement, and offshore agreements – not warm communique and ministerial visits.

The Abraham Accords established a framework for energy cooperation with the UAE that has largely gone unexploited. Mubadala's recent acquisition of an 11% stake in Tamar signals genuine Emirati interest. Their development finance could play a meaningful role in making alternative infrastructure routes commercially viable, particularly for a Cyprus-based LNG facility. What is missing is an earnest effort to bridge political and commercial interests – a priority for Israel's next government.

Israel also needs to treat gas revenues as seed capital for what comes after gas. Chevron controls much of domestic production while serving as the principal exporter, a dual role that creates tension between

domestic supply reliability and maximizing export volume. Accelerating renewable deployment, scaling energy storage, and building grid flexibility are not optional. They are what Israel will need when gas reserves decrease and export commitments peak simultaneously.

The window for action is narrow. Israel's post-war agenda and domestic disputes will consume the government's time and resources, and American engagement in the region cannot be assumed to continue in its current form.

The main question is whether a commercial entity can navigate the noise and the nuances of Israel-Cyprus relations, to translate political interest into a bankable infrastructure project before that window closes.

When Tamar and Leviathan were discovered in 2009 and 2010, Israel was satisfied with securing any viable export route. Its energy arrangement with Egypt delivered, and the benefits have been real. But the commercial logic that dictated those decisions should not be the sole determinant of Israeli strategy in the decades ahead.

As Israel transitions out of wartime toward a period where domestic demand and export commitments will peak simultaneously, it faces a version of the same vulnerability it has watched Gulf states confront during the Hormuz crisis: a single choke point, built not by accident but by the accumulated logic of past decisions.

The question is whether Israel will use the current window to diversify before that vulnerability becomes a strategic constraint.

The writer is a Senior Policy Fellow at Mivtavi – the Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies and a Visiting Fellow at the German Marshall Fund.

Twenty years after Israel's Class Action Law, is it time to recalibrate the system?

• By MENI NEEMAN and MICHAEL LIPEL

Twenty years after Israel's Class Actions Law came into force, one conclusion has become increasingly clear: class actions remain an indispensable mechanism for protecting the public. Yet precisely because they are such a powerful tool, they must be used with greater precision, restraint, and responsibility.

The original premise of the law was both simple and compelling. It enabled individual citizens to challenge widespread but relatively small-scale injuries, claims that would not justify individual litigation but, collectively, represent significant public damage. In that sense, class actions opened the courthouse doors to people who otherwise might never have had their day in court.

But any mechanism designed to balance power can itself create imbalance if it expands without sufficient oversight. The question today is no longer whether class actions are necessary, they unquestionably are. The real question is whether the legal system is adequately distinguishing between lawsuits that genuinely serve the public interest and those that ultimately burden it.

This is not merely a theoretical concern. In today's business environment, every legal risk carries a price. Broad litigation exposure inevitably affects the cost of doing business, and those costs may ultimately be reflected in the prices consumers pay for products and services.

A mature system requires mature rules
In the years immediately following the law's enactment, the emphasis was naturally on encouraging use of the new legal mechanism by making class actions more accessible and creating meaningful incentives to expose widespread wrongdoing.

That phase was necessary. But two decades later, Israel's class action landscape has matured into a sophisticated and highly professional field. If the evolution were compared to sports, it has progressed from amateur competition to the professional leagues.

In such an environment, the courts' role extends beyond simply opening the gates. They must also referee the game.

For example, when a class action is filed without an adequate pre-litigation demand, when a defendant provides a substantive response but litigation nevertheless proceeds, or when a plaintiff continues pursuing claims despite judicial indications that the legal arguments are particularly weak, the courts should send a clear message: meritless litigation carries consequences, including realistic cost awards against unsuccessful plaintiffs.

Israeli case law has already begun moving in this direction, but a more consistent policy may be warranted.

Such an approach would not weaken the



MENI NEEMAN, deputy CEO and chief legal counsel at The Phoenix Group. (Itai Maman)

class action mechanism. On the contrary, drawing a sharper distinction between strong and weak claims would reinforce public confidence in the system while ensuring that judicial and business resources are devoted to cases involving genuine public harm.

When a shield becomes a sword
Discussion of class actions often focuses narrowly on legal rights without adequately considering their broader economic implications or whether the public benefit of a particular lawsuit outweighs its overall societal costs.

Litigation expenses, settlements, attorneys' fees, system modifications, increased reserves, and ongoing legal defense do not exist in a vacuum. In many cases these costs are fully justified because they remedy genuine wrongdoing.

In others, however, where the public benefit is limited and the systemic costs are substantial, an important question arises: can a legal tool designed to protect consumers ultimately increase the prices they pay?

The appropriate test, therefore, should not be limited to whether a legal cause of action exists, but whether the proceeding produces a net public benefit.

The United States illustrates what can happen when the pendulum swings too far. Decisions by the US Supreme Court enforcing arbitration agreements that waive class action rights have significantly limited collective litigation in many circumstances.

Israel need not adopt such an approach. But it should recognize the lesson: when a legal mechanism comes to be viewed as unbalanced, the response may be excessive restriction, leaving the public worse off.

The long tail of liability
One of the most significant challenges affects institutional bodies such as banks,

insurance companies and pension funds, whose relationships with customers often span decades.

When legal claims are characterized as continuing causes of action, decisions and agreements made many years earlier may be judged according to today's legal standards rather than those that existed when the conduct occurred.

The issue is not whether institutions should be held accountable when they harm the public, they should. Rather, the concern is retrospective judgment of conduct that may have complied with prevailing industry practices and regulatory guidance at the time.

As time passes, reconstructing the relevant documents, circumstances and decision-making processes becomes increasingly difficult, even as legal exposure may continue expanding.

This calls for both legislative and judicial balance: protecting consumers from genuine harm while providing reasonable legal certainty for institutions that acted in accordance with the law, accepted market practices and regulatory expectations that existed at the time.

The economic implications are significant. Historical legal uncertainty influences risk pricing, capital allocation, long-term product management and financial institutions' ability to plan for the future.

A smarter form of protection
The next stage in the evolution of Israel's class action system should not involve weakening the mechanism but managing it more effectively.

Courts should continue encouraging lawsuits that expose widespread wrongdoing and generate meaningful public benefit, while discouraging litigation that primarily produces costs, pressure and settlements without sufficient public value through the imposition of realistic legal costs.

The legislature also has an important role to play by establishing clearer boundaries regarding continuing causes of action, pre-litigation notice requirements, economic incentives, and the broader public costs of litigation.

A mature legal system is measured not only by its ability to open the courthouse doors but also by its ability to determine when cases should be filtered, focused and directed.

Class actions should remain a sharp instrument in the hands of the public. But the effectiveness of a sharp instrument depends not only on its power, but on the precision with which it is used. If this legal mechanism is to retain public trust, legitimacy, and effectiveness over the next 20 years, it may be time to recalibrate it.

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Michael Lipel is an attorney in the company's Legal Advisory Department.

The world's most dangerous human rights violation

• By ALAN DERSHOWITZ

Antisemitism – the hatred of Jews – is more dangerous today than other forms of bigotry, such as racism, homophobia, sexism, and anti-Islamism.

All these forms of bigotry are dangerous and far too prevalent, but the difference is the trajectory. With regard to all other forms of bigotry and discrimination, the trajectory is moving in the right direction. Today, hardly anyone justifies these other bigotries. Indeed, considerable governmental and non-governmental resources are being devoted to opposing them.

But with regard to antisemitism, the trajectory is clearly in the wrong direction. Antisemitism is increasing rapidly throughout the United States and in the rest of the world. Sometimes it's disguised as anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism, but clearly, this hatred would not be directed at Israel if it were not the nation-state of the Jewish people.

Many nations have worse human rights records, and they tyrannize their own people. Israel may be a flawed democracy, but it is a democracy committed to equality and the rule of law.

Even assuming falsely that anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism have nothing to do with Jew-hatred, it is still true that antisemitism, unrelated to Israel, is spreading throughout the world at a pace reminiscent of the 1930s in Germany. Jews, especially visible Jews, are being subjected to beatings, taunts, threats, and overt discrimination in many cities of the world. This includes cities with a significant Jewish presence, such as New York, Los Angeles, Paris, and London.

The virus of Jew-hatred is spreading quickly and taking on new forms. Anyone who considers themselves a civil rights activist, a civil libertarian, or an egalitarian must now prioritize Jew-hatred as the most serious threat. To ignore Jew-hatred in the face of its increasing manifestations is to become as complicit as those who ignored similar developments in the 1930s, both in Europe and in the US.

The mantra of human rights and civil liberties has always been "the least first." This means prioritizing the most dangerous abuses and threats. In the 1950s, it was anti-Black racism. In later years, it was homophobia and sexism.

Efforts to combat these evils are on the road to success as more and more people reject these inequalities. Today, almost no one justifies them. It is completely different in regard to Jews. Many radical leftists, including many Democratic Socialists of America, accuse Jews of "white privilege," thus justifying applying a double standard to them.

I recall attending a Democratic Party fundraiser on Martha's Vineyard where many questions were asked about anti-Black racism. When I tried to ask a question about

growing antisemitism, I was booed and heckled. That was several years ago. I'm sure it would be even truer today among many Democrats, but certainly among Democratic Socialists of America.

Among those booing and trivializing antisemitism would be some Jews on the hard Left. These are the same kind of Jews who voted for Adolf Hitler in 1932 because they thought he would be good for the economy. And he was, at least in the short term!

Democrats such as Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders are supporting a neo-Nazi candidate for the Senate who proudly wore a death head tattoo for many years. They believe that Democratic control of the Senate is more important than combating antisemitism.

If I were a non-Jew, I would today prioritize opposition to antisemitism, as I prioritized Black, feminist, and gay issues as a non-Black, non-woman, and non-gay civil rights advocate back in the day. "To everything there is a season." Tragically, this is the season for Jew-hatred.

So it must now become the season for prioritizing the fight against Jew-hatred in its many manifestations.

I urge my fellow rights advocates to join me in prioritizing the fight against the spread of antisemitism. This is the right cause at the right moment and in the right place.

When the mayor of New York calls American citizens who support Israel "monsters," that sounds more like what a German mayor might have said in 1932. Imagine a mayor saying that Americans who support Black Lives Matter are "monsters." Or a mayor demonizing activists for gay and transgender people as "monsters."

But Mayor Zohran Mamdani can get away with calling Jews who support Israel by a word that has been used by antisemites throughout history. If Jews were indeed "monsters," then it would be appropriate to deal with them the way societies have long dealt with monsters.

By dehumanizing a group, as the Nazis dehumanized Jews, and as the Stalinists demonized Zionists, it makes it much easier to kill them and treat them as subhuman. And now the mayor of New York is demonizing American Jewish supporters of Israel.

So all those who fought legitimately for the rights of Blacks, women, and gays must now join the struggle by Jews for equality, decency, and safety. To do anything less would be hypocritical at best and complicit at its worst.

The writer, Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law, emeritus, is author of over 50 books; among them *The Price of Principle: Why Integrity Is Worth the Consequences* (2022) and *Get Trump: The Threat to Civil Liberties, Due Process, and Our Constitutional Rule of Law* (2023).

We are at war



ENCOUNTERING PEACE

• By GERSHON BASKIN

There is a war taking place in Israel today. It is not the war most people are watching. It is not being fought by two armies facing each other across a battlefield. It is a one-sided war, waged openly by right-wing extremists and their violent settler agents against Palestinians in the West Bank.

The Palestinians are the immediate victims. Their homes, fields, cars, olive trees, livestock, villages, and daily lives are under attack. Families are being frightened off their land. Shepherds are being driven from grazing areas. Farmers are prevented from reaching their fields. Water supplies are being cut off. Entire communities are forced to live under constant threat.

But we Israelis must understand something deeper and more frightening: The Palestinians are the victims, but the target is liberal democratic Israel. This is a war against the rule of law, against equality, against human dignity, against the authority of the courts, against the army as a state institution, and against the idea that the state must serve all of its citizens rather than one messianic cause – creating the kingdom of God.

The political right-wing extremists and their violent settler agents and soldiers do not want the Israel promised in our Declaration of Independence. They do not want a state based on freedom, justice, peace, and equality. They want a messianic, religious, halachic kingdom of God. They want sovereignty without democracy, Judaism without morality, power without restraint, and land without

Palestinians.

For them, even the current reality is only a stage on the way to their largest religious project: changing the status quo on the Temple Mount by destroying the mosques and rebuilding the Temple. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and those who share his ideology are not merely expanding settlements and building new facts on the ground. They are advancing a revolutionary project. There are no secrets. The plan was written and published years ago by Smotrich himself.

Their goal is to replace democratic Israel with a religious-nationalist regime in which Jewish supremacy becomes law, Palestinian existence is treated as a problem to be removed, and liberal Israelis are dismissed as traitors, anarchists, or obstacles to be defeated.

This is why settler violence is not a side issue. It is not "hate" or "top youth" misbehavior. It is not the work of a few wild boys or a handful of rogue ranchers. It is not marginal. It is the street-level expression of an ideology that now sits inside the government of Israel, the Israeli army, the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency), and soon deep inside our judicial system.

It is strategic, systematic, and advancing according to plan. Its representatives control key levers of state power: the Finance Ministry, the Civil Administration, large parts of the policing system in the West Bank, and growing influence inside the army and the security establishment. They do not need to overthrow the state from the outside. They are hol-

lowing it out from within.

They are moving forward all the time, and they are succeeding. Tens of Palestinian communities have already been displaced. Hundreds of new settlements have been established. Settler control has expanded over vast areas of the West Bank through outposts, farms, roads, security zones, infrastructure, intimidation, and direct violence. More and more land is being brought violently under their control while the Israeli public barely notices.

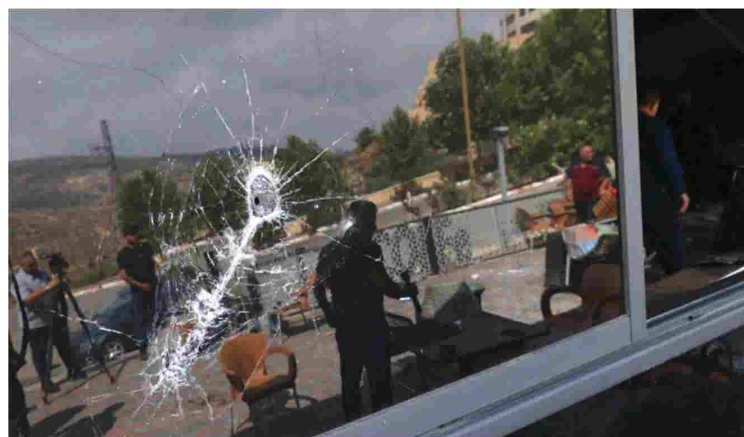
This is how they are defeating us.

WHEN PALESTINIANS are attacked and the state does not protect them, Israel is being changed. When soldiers protect settlers while settlers rampage, Israel is being changed. When ministers justify, excuse, or encourage this violence, Israel is being changed.

When the state connects settlements and outposts – even those illegal under Israeli law – to water, electricity, roads, and security, Israel is being changed. When the law is applied differently to Jews and Palestinians, democracy is being hollowed out from within.

Israel cannot remain democratic while tolerating violence carried out in the name of Judaism and Jewish land. A Jewish state cannot remain morally Jewish while allowing Jews to terrorize another people. A free society cannot survive when violent extremists are permitted to rule by fear because their violence serves a larger ideological goal.

We must be clear: Opposing violent settlers is not anti-Israel. It is an act of loyalty to Israel. Defending Palestinians from settler terror is not only a Palestinian cause. It is an Israeli democratic necessity. It is also



A BULLET hole is seen in the window of a restaurant after it was burned down by settlers during an attack in a village near Nablus in the West Bank, earlier this year. (Jafar Ashteh/AFP via Getty Images)

a Jewish necessity, because Judaism that becomes a tool of domination, revenge, and supremacy is not the Judaism that can sustain a moral national home for the Jewish people.

THE STRUGGLE today is not only between Israelis and Palestinians. It is also between two visions of Israel. One vision is democratic, Jewish, liberal, pluralistic, humane, and committed to the rule of law. The other is messianic, supremacist, authoritarian, and violent. One vision understands that Jewish self-determination must be joined to moral responsibility. The other believes that Jewish power cancels the rights of others.

The right-wing extremist

politicians and their violent settler agents know what they are fighting for. They are organized, determined, and protected. They have an ideology, a strategy, political leadership, rabbis who give religious language to their actions, ministers who open doors for them inside the state, and an army that too often protects them rather than restrains them. They are not waiting for permission from the Israeli majority. They are moving forward.

What about us? The majority of Israelis want quiet. We want to live our lives, raise our children, recover from trauma, and avoid another internal battle. Many of us speak of a desire for unity. Many of us do not see what is happening in the hills

and valleys of the West Bank. Many of us prefer not to see it. Some of us tell ourselves that it is far away, that it concerns only Palestinians, or that the army and police know what they are doing.

But silence is not neutrality. Silence is surrender.

While the majority of us look away, a determined minority is reshaping our country. While we Israelis argue about politics as usual, this war is being fought with almost no resistance from those who claim to care about Israel's democratic future.

The question is whether we understand what we are losing.

We are losing the rule of law. We are losing the moral authority of the army. We are losing the possibility of future peace.

We are losing our standing in the world. We are losing the Judaism of human dignity. We are losing the Israel that promised equality to all its citizens and sought peace with its neighbors.

If we do not stop them, the Palestinians will continue to suffer first. But Israel – democratic Israel, liberal Israel, decent Israel, the Israel that still has a chance to live in peace with its neighbors – may be the final casualty.

This is a war. It is time for democratic Israelis to understand that we are already in it.

The writer is the Middle East director of the International Communities Organization and the co-head of the Alliance for Two States.

Rebuilding starts with education

• By OFEK MEIR

Every year on Tisha B'Av, Jews throughout the world mourn the destruction of the First and Second Temples. We read the Book of Lamentations, recite ancient *kinot*, and remember the loss of the Temples.

Yet Jewish tradition sees Tisha B'Av as more than remembrance. It asks every generation: What kind of society are we building today?

The Sages taught that while the First Temple was destroyed because of grave moral failures, the Second Temple was destroyed because of *Sinai Chinam* (baseless hatred). Whether understood historically or metaphorically, their message remains timeless.

A society begins to crumble when trust disappears, people stop seeing one another as partners in a shared covenant, and disagreement turns into hostility. The destruction of the Temple was therefore not only a collapse of buildings but also an echo of a society's collapse.

That insight feels painfully relevant today. Over the past several years, Israeli society has endured extraordinary strain: political polarization, the trauma of October 7, the ongoing war, the deaths of the hostages and their families, the grief of bereaved families, the suffering of the wounded and their loved ones, and profound disagreements about the country's future.

These wounds transcend any one government. They reflect enduring questions at the heart of the Zionist project: How do we remain both a Jewish and democratic state? How do we preserve deep convictions without losing the ability to listen? How do we transform disagreement into shared purpose?

While these questions often dominate political debate, they cannot be answered by politics alone. At their core, they are educational questions.

As an educator and rabbi, I believe rebuilding Israeli society begins in classrooms, youth movements, community centers, synagogues, universities, and around family tables. It begins wherever young people learn not only mathematics and history, but also how to become responsible human beings.

Judaism has never viewed education as just a transmission of information but as a tool for the formation of character, the cultivation of imagination, and the practice of learning how to live together.

This is why the mourning of Tisha B'Av naturally leads us toward education. If destruction begins with the erosion of human relationships, rebuilding must begin with the teaching of humility, empathy, curiosity, responsibility, and the ability to disagree without hatred.

One rabbinic teaching states that Jerusalem was destroyed because people insisted only on strict justice and failed to act *Lifnim Mishurat Hadin* – beyond the letter of the law.

A healthy society cannot survive on rights alone. It also requires generosity, restraint, compassion, and a willingness to recognize the humanity of those with whom we dis-



CHILDREN RETURN to school at Gamla Primary School in the Golan Heights, earlier this year. (Michael Galdi/Flash90)

agree.

These virtues cannot simply be legislated; they must be cultivated through education.

THIS MISSION is even more urgent in the age of artificial intelligence.

AI summarizes books, composes essays, translates languages, and answers questions in seconds. If education defines itself primarily as the transfer of knowledge, machines will inevitably outperform us.

But education, especially Jewish education, has never been primarily about knowledge. Its purpose is to cultivate wisdom rather than information, judgment rather than calculation, conscience rather than efficiency, creativity rather than repetition, and meaning rather than productivity.

AI may help us answer questions, but only human beings can decide which questions are worth asking. Only human beings can choose compassion over indifference, dialogue over contempt, and hope over despair.

The rise of AI makes Jewish education more, not less, essential.

Our tradition is built around conversation rather than certainty. The pages of the Talmud preserve disagreement instead of erasing it because truth is rarely possessed by a single voice. Long before modern democracy, the *Bet Midrash* (study hall) taught that respectful argument can itself become a sacred act.

In a world shaped by algorithms that reward outrage and certainty, Jewish learning reminds us that complexity is not weakness but strength, that disagreement need not destroy community but could be the root of its blessed diversity, and that listening is itself a moral discipline.

This is the kind of leadership our societies now require: educators who are not merely transmitters of curriculum but builders of community, teachers rooted in Jewish tradition while remaining open to broader human conversation.

Education should not produce ideological conformity but responsible citizenship, moral resilience, and hope.

We also need a richer understanding of Jewish identity.

Being a Jewish state is not only about preserving Jewish symbols. It means striving to embody Jewish moral aspirations: human dignity, justice, compassion, responsibility for the stranger, care for vulnerable people, and an unwavering commitment to the sanctity of life.

Likewise, democracy is more than a political system. It is a culture of listening, restraint, shared responsibility, and respect for every person's dignity.

The challenge before Israel and, in many ways, before Jewish communities throughout the world is not to choose between these commitments but to deepen both simultaneously.

Tisha B'Av is not a day of despair. We mourn because Judaism refuses to normalize brokenness. We remember because memory creates responsibility. Embedded within this day is the conviction that what human beings destroy, human beings can also rebuild.

Perhaps Jerusalem's rebuilding will not begin with stone. Perhaps it will begin with conversations that restore trust, classrooms that cultivate wisdom, schools that teach respectful disagreement, families that model compassion, and communities that refuse to surrender to cynicism.

Perhaps the rebuilding of Jerusalem begins when we become what Isaiah called repairers of the breach. Every act of education becomes another stone in that rebuilding.

This year, as we mourn the destruction of the Temples, may we also ask ourselves what kind of society we wish to rebuild, and may we find the courage not only to remember what was lost, but to become among those who heal and revive the Israeli society.

The writer is headmaster and managing director of the Leo Baeck Educational Center.

Hijacking history

How messianic extremists weaponize archaeology

• By CHEMI SHIFF

In a recent article published in this newspaper, Yisrael Medad inadvertently captured the central crisis facing Israeli archaeology today. In just a few short paragraphs, he demonstrated exactly how the discipline is being hijacked by messianic extremists. These actors are doing everything in their power to weaponize archaeology, transforming it from a scientific tool for understanding the region's diverse history into a political mechanism to dispossess Palestinians and violate both Israeli and international law.

Medad is, in fact, an expert in this weaponization. A quick look at his biography reveals that in 1981 he moved to the settlement of Shilo – established two years earlier under the guise of an "archaeological camp" to thwart the ongoing peace negotiations with Egypt.

While the settlers failed to derail that historic peace agreement, they have spent the decades since perfecting the use of archaeology to promote their messianic ideology and sabotage future diplomatic efforts. Their crowning achievement is the creation of the "archaeological settlement."

The weaponization of archaeology

Pioneered by the Elad Foundation, this model has for the past 30 years been evolving at the archaeological site in Silwan to become a tourist attraction that ostensibly tells the story of ancient Jerusalem. In reality, archaeology serves as a facade for displacing the local Palestinian community.

Over the past decade, this model has been replicated across the West Bank, making archaeology an integral tool for violating Palestinian rights and creeping toward de facto annexation.

For years, much of Israel's archaeological community served as a silent accomplice to this weaponization. Many professionals believed that if they stuck to their research and avoided politics, the settlers would view them as a strategic asset and leave them alone.

But as demonstrated in the past four years, the messianic Right now demands active ideological submission: In April 2025, Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu – a member of the extreme-right Otzma Yehudit party – said that he will not allow the 49th Annual Archaeological Congress of the Israel Exploration Society to take place in the IAA headquarters unless a professor critical of politicized archaeology was banned from participation.

Since August 2024, the Knesset has advanced a bill utilizing archaeology as a pretext for West Bank annexation. In May, the same minister appointed Eyal Schreiber to manage the Israel Antiquities Authority, despite her being glaringly underqualified for the role. Since then, the proposed

appointment was canceled by the Senior Appointments Committee in Israel due to lack of compliance with the threshold conditions for the role.

The common denominator in these maneuvers is not the protection of heritage. Rather, they expose a political faction willing to sacrifice the professional credibility and international standing of Israeli archaeology on the altar of political gain.

Pushback from the archaeological community

Fortunately, the archaeological community is finally waking up. Their recent pushback played a crucial role in thwarting some of these threats, proving that professionals can indeed defend their discipline when they choose to.

The Israel Exploration Society – with the backing of the rest of the archaeological community – decided to conduct the conference in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem rather than ban a fellow archaeologist just because he was critical of the minister's ideology.

Members of the archaeological community openly objected to the bill to use archaeology as a first step for the annexation of the West Bank throughout the proceedings conducted in the Knesset, as well as to Schreiber's appointment as the new director of the IAA.

As Medad inadvertently highlighted, archaeology is at a crossroads. Down one path lies complete submission to political benefactors. This route would strip the discipline of its ability to conduct critical research, deepening its isolation from the international academic community.

If the settlers complete their attempt to annex the discipline, Israeli archaeologists would be left to collaborate solely with religious institutions specializing in pseudoarchaeology – groups whose goal is not to uncover historical truth but to corroborate the New Testament and hasten Armageddon. (Tellingly, the only international participants in the "international" conference Medad recently attended were Evangelical representatives.)

It should be stressed that this isn't even just my opinion. In a recent interview to *Makor Rishon*, the deputy manager of the Staff Officer for Archaeology stated that "researchers are fleeing Judea and Samaria like wildfire, we are in a free fall."

Down the other path lies the courageous, less-trodden route that some archaeologists have cautiously begun to navigate this past year. It will not be easy. It requires fighting not only for the integrity of the profession but against its use as an instrument of dispossession and messianic fervor. Time will tell which path the Israeli archaeological community will choose.

The writer is an archaeologist and head of research at Eneke Shaveh.

OPINION

The New York Times

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A.I. gives us fast answers.
That's making us dumber.

Anne-Laure Le Cunff

More than 60 percent of Google searches now end without the user clicking on a link. We type a question, read an artificial intelligence-generated summary of the results and leave with our answer.

Google is hardly alone. Claude, ChatGPT and upstart competitors like Perplexity do roughly the same thing: They take a question and swiftly return an answer, compressing what used to be a meandering journey through the internet into an immediate arrival at your destination. The explorative phase of searches—clicking through links, stumbling onto unexpected pages, following a reference that leads to somewhere unplanned—is disappearing.

For anyone who publishes on the internet, this is a troubling development, since it lowers website traffic and makes it hard to protect and profit from your intellectual property. But you might think it is good news for internet users. Could there be anything wrong with getting a reliable answer more quickly?

What used to be a meandering journey is now an immediate arrival at your destination.

There is. By shortening the time between asking a question and getting an answer, these tools are actually undermining curiosity—and paradoxically threatening our ability to understand the world.

I used to work at Google, about a decade ago. When I was there, we often measured the value of internet content based on factors that indicated user engagement, like clicks and scroll depth. The metric Google seemed to reward—people exploring—is precisely what its A.I. products are now designed to eliminate.

I left Google to study neuroscience, and what I found in the research literature helps explain why the A.I. summary poses a danger to learning. Curiosity, it turns out, is not just an individual's desire to find out discrete facts; it's also a feature of our biology designed to help us learn more broadly. And it requires a specific condition: a gap between what you want to know and what you find out.

Researchers have found that people in a state of curiosity, while waiting for an answer to an intriguing question, remember unrelated information they encounter during that time far better than they otherwise would. In that same study, the researchers also placed those people in brain scanners. They found that waiting for an answer activates reward circuits in the brain and readies the hippocampus to help form new memories. Similar findings have been reported by other researchers in studies involving infants, older children and adults.

In short, curiosity puts the entire brain into a mode of heightened receptivity—not just for the specific thing you want to know, but also for everything around it. Curiosity opens a window, and while the window is open, learning deepens across the board.

But the window stays open only as long as the question remains un-

solved. When an A.I. answers your search query in three seconds, the window closes before curiosity can deepen. You got what you came for, but you also lost what would have turned curiosity into learning: the adjacent answer you might have found, the connection between two ideas with no obvious relationship.

Researchers call this incidental learning, and it's the mechanism behind many serendipitous discoveries. Scientific breakthroughs, artistic leaps, technological innovation—these rarely emerge from efficient retrieval of known information. They emerge from periods of undirected exploration, when people follow questions further than they need to and find things they weren't expecting. When the physicist Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson detected a persistent hiss in their radio antenna in 1964, they could have written it off as equipment noise; instead, they kept asking what it might be, and they ended up discovering the radiation left over from the Big Bang.

Our technology is increasingly treating the territory between the query and the answer as dead space to be eliminated, when that territory is where most of the learning actually happens. The danger is not that people will stop asking questions. It is that questions will become endpoints. The loss is not serious in any single case. But fewer doubts and fewer unexpected discoveries will have a cumulative effect. Over time, people trained this way become better at extracting ready-made conclusions than building connections of their own.

To be sure, nobody is forced to use these tools. People can still browse and wander, still follow a chain of links into unfamiliar territory. But the default architecture of our digital platforms will make this less likely.

Unlike other social costs of technological design—for instance, the addictive behaviors fostered by the infinite scroll on social media feeds—the loss of open-ended curiosity is not going to spur a class-action lawsuit against tech companies or inspire regulators to intervene. A.I. companies that want to do right by their users will have to take action themselves. Instead of burying sources behind paraphrases and replacing 10 links with one summary, they could make different design choices. They could keep sources more visible. They could show competing explanations, instead of compressing them into one smooth paragraph. They could offer alternative search modes that reward exploration over speed.

I hope my former colleagues at Google and the engineers building similar tools elsewhere take these suggestions to heart, and that the industry develops best practices that protect curiosity rather than treating it as an afterthought. The space between a question and an answer has value, and that value should not be engineered away.

The most important discoveries are often not the ones we set out to make. If we build a world that delivers only what is asked for, we will lose the capacity to discover what we didn't know to ask.

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Trump's international U.F.C. diplomacy

Frank Bruni
Contributing Writer

How do Americans want the world to see us? Which of the nation's traits do we highlight—as a show of our strengths, as an assertion of our values, as an act of self-definition?

In the past we answered that question by helping to rebuild Europe after World War II, by tackling the scourge of AIDS in Africa, by sharing our trailblazing scientific advances and by tapping our extraordinary wealth.

President Trump is answering it with brutes in cages beating each other to pulp.

I don't mean the desecration of the White House on his 80th birthday last month, when he and members of his cabinet cheered the chokeholds, body slams and bloodshed of Ultimate Fighting Championship matches on the South Lawn. Or at least I don't mean proudly that. Less widely noted than that national disgrace was an agreement between the U.F.C. and the Trump administration to promote such pummeling abroad.

You read that right: The American government is giving its imprimatur—perhaps I should say lending its muscle—to the international expansion of human cockfighting. An earlier generation had the Marshall Plan. Ours has mixed martial arts.

The administration is calling the arrangement "sports diplomacy," and there are images of Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Dana White, U.F.C.'s chief executive officer, holding up a memorandum of understanding at the State Department on June 11. They're smiling, as if they accomplished something important. As if there were a global barbarism deficit and the United States is nobly stepping up to fill the void. As if an important emblem of human civilization and expression of human culture will finally get the recognition it de-

serves. As if the torch of liberty can now shine brighter than ever, because it will be carried by warriors of such vision and valor that one of them, upon winning his South Lawn brawl, used his moment at the mic to crow a cuckoo credo: "Michelle Obama is a man!"

That's what a White House obsessed with trade imbalances is electing to export. "It's something we want to share with the world," Rubio said during his photo opportunity with White, referring to mixed martial arts. He called it "one of those few things we have left in our country, and I would say in the world, that brings so many people from so many different places, so many different backgrounds and so many different points of view together." That rationale was a crucial reassurance; otherwise, a skeptic might wonder if Trump was simply setting up U.F.C.'s parent company, in which he's invested, for ever greater profits. But thanks to Rubio, I now understand that there's no self-enrichment here. No

conflict of interest. Just cage fighting as "Kumbaya."

The arrangement with the U.F.C. isn't novel. The government has engaged in sports diplomacy before. It has collaborated, for example, with the National Football League to advertise professional football, which itself is plenty violent and hardly the ideal expression and embodiment of American virtues. Maybe I'm kidding myself to see a difference between a quarterback being sacked and a wrestler being punched in the ribs, kicked in the head and subjected to a guillotine choke. But I do.

And I cringe at my government's advancement of such savagery while we're retreating from the kinds of engagements that lessen hardship and relieve misery. Near the start of his current term in the presidency, Trump



FRANK BRUNI

quickly and gleefully dissolved the U.S. Agency for International Development. Whatever that organization's inefficiencies and excesses, it did vital, lifesaving work that proclaimed concern for the welfare of needy people beyond U.S. borders. The president didn't replace the agency's programs with better ones, either. He essentially said that America was exhausted with such altruism—tired of being saps and chumps—and he rechanneled national treasure toward new munitions and new monuments, bangles and bling.

Trump's visions of American might are either gaudy or, in the case of U.F.C. matches, grotesque. Cage fighting fits perfectly into his rejection of anything that codes as elitist. Out with the Kennedy Center, in with the Octagon. So

much for symphonies; bring on the gladiators. Who needs discernment when you can flex domination?

That's Trump's message to the world. That's his thinking, the limits of which have been exposed by his ongoing capitulation to a smaller, poorer, less brawny country with control over the Strait of Hormuz. Perhaps he should have forgone the war with Iran and simply staged a cage fight in Tehran. Such sports diplomacy would have been a whole lot less expensive. And while it would have been an embarrassing illustration of American passions and priorities under this president, it would also have been an honest one.

FRANK BRUNI was on the staff of The Times for more than 25 years.

Civilizations are clashing for JD Vance

LOZADA, FROM PAGE 1

was Western Christian civilization, and the values particular to it: the concept of natural rights, including freedom of speech; a sense of duty to one's neighbors; an obligation of the strong to protect the weak; a belief in free will and individual conscience."

But since then, and especially since the end of the Cold War, "we have lost something sacred," Vance writes. Faith retreated from North America and Europe; the West, he says, "forgot what it stood for."

Not to worry—the vice president here to remind us. "I'm not mandating that you become a Christian," he writes in his epilogue, "though I'd welcome it." While the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence might have reminded us that the American creed has something to do with political equality and self-government, Vance has frequently argued for an alternate view. When he addressed the 2024 Republican National Convention, Vance downplayed the notion of America as a set of secular ideals, instead emphasizing America as a geographic entity reserved for a certain people.

"America is not just an idea," he said. "It is a group of people with a shared history." He referred to a cemetery plot in eastern Kentucky, the resting place of many generations of his family. "That's not just an idea, my friends," he said. "That's not just a set of principles. Even though the ideas and the principles are great, that is a homeland. That is our homeland. People will not fight for abstraction, but they will fight for their homes."

In remarks he made at the Claremont Institute in 2025, Vance again questioned the "logic of America as a purely created nation," arguing that you can't define America as just "agreeing with the principles."

Now, in "Communion," he specifies his vision of the creed. "Christianity is America's creed, the shared moral language from the Revolution to the Civil War and beyond." Here, Vance is citing himself, quoting at length from a speech he delivered late last year at a Turning Point USA conference. In another passage of the speech, which does not appear in "Communion," Vance affirmed that "the only thing that has truly served as an anchor of the United States of America is that we have been, and by the grace of God we always will be, a Christian nation."

According to Vance, it is our Christian character—more than any founding documents or principles or "abstractions"—that defines America, and we must keep it that way. One of his favorite prayers, the vice president says, urges the Archangel Michael to defend us in the battle "against the wickedness and snares of the devil," and asks that "all the evil spirits who prey upon the world seeking the ruin of souls" be cast into hell. "I really liked that one," Vance writes. "It felt medieval despite being written in the 19th century. And it felt mystical. You could almost see the angels and demons doing battle."

In "Communion," Vance recalls a moment when he prepared to wage battle himself. In early 2020, as news emerged of a deadly virus spreading across China, "I drove to a sporting goods store and bought 1,000 rounds of ammunition," Vance writes. "Then I went to Walmart and bought enormous bags of rice and flour, 20 pounds of ground beef, and we had a feast of ketchup." The cashier asked him if he owned a restaurant. "No, but the China virus is coming," Vance replied.

In "Regime Change," their new book about Trump's second term, Maggie Haberman and Jonathan Swan of The

groups, divides that seemed to come alive with the Sept. 11 attacks. In contrast, Vance's civilizational struggle, between Christianity and secularism, is found within the West. "The threat that I worry the most about vis-à-vis Europe is not Russia, it's not China, it's not any other external actor," Vance said last year at the annual Munich Security Conference. "And what I worry about is the threat from within, the retreat of Europe from some of its most fundamental values—values shared with the United States of America."

The most pressing challenge that Europe faces, Vance argued, is mass

grudgingly, the imperative, shared across major religions, to welcome the stranger. "I can believe (as I do) that I owe a given immigrant—even an illegal one—duties of charity and grace," he writes. And he admits that "immigration is a particularly thorny version of a challenge I encounter every day in my job: how to take an accepted moral principle and apply it in the real world as a Christian leader."

Vance neglects his duties of charity and grace when he does not acknowledge, let alone apologize for, spreading unfounded rumors in 2024 that Haitian immigrants were eating pets in Springfield, Ohio. He writes that critics say the administration is "too tough" on immigration, but he waves it all away. "The point is not to litigate this issue on these pages," Vance writes, "but to highlight that any application of moral principles in the real world requires a constant evaluation of trade-offs."

It's just as the hymn says: They'll know we are Christians by our constant evaluation of trade-offs.

Political trade-offs are evident when Vance recounts his history lessons on America's own civilizational greatness, particularly those surrounding the Civil War. While Confederate generals fought for the "wrong cause" and Union generals for the "right cause," he notes, the Confederates were "strategically brilliant" and "tragic in their heroism." And, really, both sides helped build the nation: "Whether our great-great-grandfathers fought for Grant's or Lee's army, we learned that their actions that day made it possible for us to be part of a United States of America."

Vance acknowledges America's peculiar institution, though with a generous helping of passive voice. "We learned of the slaves who were brought over and how they helped build the country with their bare hands," he writes. "How they were mistreated and struggled but came to prevail at the end of the long road to freedom." Also, Vance posits that regionally divergent interpretations of the Civil War are simply "part of the complicated diversity of the United States."

That's one kind of diversity even the Trump administration can get behind.

I feel for Vance. It's hard to go through life unsure of who you are or what you believe. In childhood, the future vice president endured a "revolving door of father figures," as he wrote in "Hillbilly Elegy." In schooling and work, he embraced elite education and a "striver" ethos, only to conclude that both pursuits were "intellectually and spiritually broken." And in politics, he became the subversive No. 2 for a man he previously condemned as "cultural heroin" and "America's Hitler."

Now, with "Communion," Vance has morphed from hillbilly to heavenly. Will he be enough to distinguish himself from Trump as 2028 approaches, or will it prove as ineffective as it did for Mike Pence, another Trump V.P. who sought the religious conservative track to the White House?

At least Vance has a prayer.



PAULA CHAPPEL/REUTERS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

New York Times write that Vance was something of a "doomer," as Vance himself joked in private, that he was "always latching onto the most negative possibilities." He worried, early and presciently, that divides over Israel and the Epstein files would threaten the MAGA coalition, and his fears lurched toward the conspiratorial. After the assassination last year of Charlie Kirk, the conservative activist and the vice president's close friend, Vance's instincts told him that there was a larger plot behind the murder, Haberman and Swan write. "He went down countless online rabbit holes, becoming so consumed by the videos and the theories that his wife, Usha, told him she was worried about him."

Vance's fears are not just for the MAGA base, or for the nation, or for the West; they are deeply personal, too. Throughout "Communion," Vance confesses the "mortal sin of despair" and a constant "struggle of fatalism" that the pain and struggles of his youth will be passed on to his own family. He worries that he will be a bad father or bad husband, that no one will take the trouble to visit his own gravesite in Kentucky. Vance's religious conversion is partly an effort to assuage those fears.

When Samuel Huntington wrote of a clash of civilizations in the 1990s, he was depicting a cultural battle among the West, China, the Islamic world and other

migration, caused by politicians who counter the will of voters and "open the floodgates to millions of unvetted immigrants." Citing a fatal attack by an Afghan asylum seeker who rammed a car into a Munich crowd just one day before his speech, Vance asked, "How many times must we suffer these appalling setbacks before we change course and take our shared civilization in a new direction?"

In "Communion," Vance pits immigration not just against security or employment, but faith as well. "As our leaders have ushered in an unprecedented increase in demographic diversity through immigration," he writes, "they have simultaneously discarded the most powerful force for cultural cohesion: Christianity."

This has become a recurring theme among top Trump administration officials. Speaking in February at this year's Munich conference, Secretary of State Marco Rubio—and Vance's possible competitor for the 2028 Republican nomination—emphasized Christianity as a "sacred inheritance, an unbreakable link between the Old World and the New." And speaking at a meeting of Western Hemisphere defense ministers early this year, Pete Hegseth, the secretary of defense, said that the "essential test" they face is "whether our nations will be and remain Western nations with distinct characteristics, Christian nations under God, proud of our shared heritage with strong borders and prosperous people." Vance seems to acknowledge, however



ERIN FRANKLIN

OPINION

The Intifada at MIT



**UNRULY
REPUBLIC**
By Barton
Swain

Few committees have ever produced anything worth reading. Exceptions include the King James Bible and the Declaration of Independence but not the various reports issued by elite universities on campus-based antisemitism after Oct. 7, 2023.

Harvard's report usefully collects reams of data but gums up its findings with bogus claims of "Islamophobia" and "anti-Palestinian bias." Columbia's report refers to antisemitic activities only in general terms, boasts at length of the corrective actions, and generally avoids acknowledging the depth of the university's failure. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, meanwhile, issued no report at all. Its president, Sally Kornbluth, managed to keep her job after failing to give a clear answer to the question, put to her by Rep. Elise Stefanik, of whether calling for the genocide of Jews violates MIT's code of conduct.

Just as well. Yossi Sheffi, a professor of engineering, has produced his own report, "Unsafe at MIT," which he self-published Tuesday. Mr. Sheffi, born in Israel in 1948, has taught at MIT for 48 years and has no plans to retire.

The book's early chapters remind us of a fact noted often in these pages but easily forgotten, namely that the anti-Israel campus protests

didn't arise in response to the war in Gaza but to Hamas terrorists' murdering, maiming, raping and abducting thousands of Israeli civilians on Oct. 7. The agitators didn't demand a return to Israel's borders in 1967 or a "two-state solution" but the Jewish state's eradication.

Mr. Sheffi has interviewed scores of Jewish and Israeli students and recorded their heartbreak. Overnight many of their peers, professors and advisers turned into adversaries. Ms. Kornbluth, in a statement published Oct. 10, 2023, said that "in my opinion, such a deliberate attack on civilians can never be justified" (italics added) and lamented the "conflict that will also gravely harm or kill many innocent Palestinians in Gaza"—this long before Israeli forces entered Gaza.

"Many students and postdocs lost friends and illusions that week," Mr. Sheffi writes. "The Infinite Corridor"—the school's main passageway—"now sprouted rows of folding tables draped in Palestinian flags; chalked slogans appeared on walkways and walls. Keffiyehs became the primary of choice across classrooms, laptop covers were suddenly plastered with red-green-and-black stickers, often in the shape of the map of Israel, and bulletin boards bristled with libelous denunciations of the 'Zionist State.'"

The book lives up to its title. Mr. Sheffi relates stories of students blocked from campus thoroughfares, targeted by name as "Zionists" in on-line forums, taunted outside

their locked office buildings, and screamed at by outside agitators—all in flagrant violation of school policy and, in many cases, of federal law. Meanwhile the administration caved in to the demands of protesters, punished few if any for flouting campus rules,

A professor recounts the experiences of the school's Jews after the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks.

and pretended not to know the meaning of *intifada* and red handprints—the latter an allusion to a Palestinian proudly brandishing his bloody hands after the lynching of two Israeli reservists in 2000.

If any other minority had been treated as Jews and Israelis were on America's finest campuses two years ago, we would have seen National Guardsmen patrolling their leafy quads.

Asked for comment on the book, an MIT spokesman sent a statement pointing out that high percentages of the school's Jews now say they're happy and feel safe at the institute. But the statement acknowledges failure, however obliquely: "MIT's leaders look back at the time the book describes and recognize the anguish and struggle members of our community experienced. The Institute has made great strides since then and remains committed to this important work."

Mr. Sheffi's account re-

minds us of the campus protests' most dispiriting irony: the inverse relationship between the idiocy of student protesters and the prestige of their institutions. They had no interest in learning. Again and again in Mr. Sheffi's narrative, Jewish and Israeli students, many of them politically liberal, recalled their mistake in assuming they could reason with their keffiyeh-sporting peers and trying to speak to them. In one hilarious episode, a graduate student approached a protester. As he did, "she lifted her placard between them like a shield. What followed was an awkward game of peekaboo—he leaned left, then right, trying to catch her eye while she kept sliding the sign to block his gaze."

Another student recounts: "I really wanted to know what people were thinking." Her attempts at dialogue met with platitudes and obvious falsehoods. At protests, "a lot of people looked like they were in a trance. It almost looked like a cult." As the protests wore on into the spring of 2024, campus police, directed by the administration to protect the rule-breakers occupying MIT's central lawn, actively discouraged Jewish and Israeli students from talking to their tormentors.

Mr. Sheffi's book describes a great American institution avidly betraying its principles. Those aghast at the Trump administration's rough treatment of MIT and other elite institutions would profit by lowering that mental placard and pondering the severity of the betrayal.

BOOKSHELF | By Hannah Rowan

Misconceptions In the Office

The Ambition Penalty

By Stefanie O'Connell

Basic Venture, 320 pages, \$30

Stefanie O'Connell has crunched the numbers and it turns out that women aren't equal after all. Decades after the gender revolution, women still don't measure up to men when it comes to metrics such as pay, promotion and work-life balance. When they try to get ahead, we are told, women face an onslaught of "professional, financial, social, and personal costs." And while it's the women who suffer directly from this inequality, both men and women, Ms. O'Connell argues in "The Ambition Penalty," pay the price by letting the workforce remain a battle of the sexes instead of seeking mutual benefit.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Ms. O'Connell, a finance journalist, came up in the heyday of the girlboss, when Sheryl Sandberg was telling women all they needed to do was "lean in" and assert themselves to achieve full equality with men. The future was female, girl power ruled the world and organizations such as STEM Like a Girl popped up to help young women break into so-called hard industries where they were underrepresented. But when they tried to STEM like a woman, they found that the empowering mantras of corporate feminism didn't align with reality. "Girl power really does work... for girls," Ms. O'Connell writes. "For women, that power starts to stall almost immediately."

Why are women working so hard to achieve their ambitions and then failing, or abandoning them entirely? Ms. O'Connell says the central problem isn't individual actions but collective beliefs. Our misconceptions and stereotypes about men and women at work shape our reality—and could reshape it, if only we would accept the hard facts and work to change them.

It's those hard facts that are Ms. O'Connell's focus. She marshals the data to show how women continue to face unique impediments to success, and how both men and women justify their actions in a way that preserves the status quo. Looks can be deceiving in a country that prides itself on egalitarianism, but once you see how men and women are treated differently, you can't unsee it.

It all begins with how we read people's actions based on their sex, Ms. O'Connell argues. She cites a 2000 study in which a professor asked his business-school students to evaluate the performance of the venture capitalist named Heidi—or, for part of the class, the same entrepreneur with her name changed to Howard. Though the descriptions were identical except for their names, Heidi received a rougher review than Howard. She was considered to be "out for herself" and "too ambitious," while he was rated favorably as "admirably strategic"—for the same behavior. A 2024 study of performance reviews across 250 organizations found that while 88% of "top-performing women received feedback on their personalities," only 12% of their male counterparts had the same experience. It seems that when it comes to their perception in the workplace, Ms. O'Connell says, women can't win: They're criticized both for being too feminine and too masculine.

Perception is so powerful, the author argues, that men's own private beliefs about gender roles don't determine their choices; their beliefs about what other men believe do. A 2016 paper found that even men with personal egalitarian beliefs were less likely to express those views when they believed they were outside the norm. Another study found that people overestimated how restrictive others were in relation to gender norms such as mothers returning to work. Personally, they supported mom chasing her dreams, but wouldn't others want her to think of the kids?

Women continue to face unique impediments to workplace success. Both men and women justify their actions to preserve the status quo.

Such gender stereotypes can lead to more than a "token woman CEO" problem, Ms. O'Connell tells us. It also creates further ambition penalties later in women's careers. The "motherhood penalty" means that women leave the workforce at far higher levels than men and also receive fewer raises and promotions because their childcare duties are seen to be in competition with their careers, while men receive the "fatherhood bonus"—in both pay and perception—because dads are seen as responsible providers for their families. And women who "scale back their professional lives" to chase kids around, of course, are highly unlikely to make up the difference if they return later on.

Ms. O'Connell doesn't claim to have an answer for the problem of who should take care of the family—unless that answer is both men and women. In fact, the author argues that, contra the "biological essentialist" view that says women are made for child care and men for professional work, the sexes are actually more similar than they are different. She cites research that has found that "both women and men value family more than work." Yet women find themselves doing by far the majority of child care and housework—a hidden reason that women have higher rates of burnout than men. Ms. O'Connell is disappointed but not surprised, then, at the present "anti-ambition movement," wherein women claim to embrace their "feminine energy," becoming tradwives and dedicating their lives to caring for and being protected by men instead of trying to have it all.

All of this is a rather bitter pill for working women, particularly mothers. Individual choice must count for something, or else why bother building a career at all? In her zeal to convince readers that social and systemic factors shape women's careers, Ms. O'Connell risks triggering the opposite reaction: Perhaps all women are fated to be victims of the ambition penalty. And blaming patriarchy can't provide concrete solutions. She includes a list of general policy prescriptions for politicians, such as paid child care and expanded parental leave, but lets the chief executives off easy by comparison.

What the data in "The Ambition Penalty" reveal is how much of that policy change is bound to be personal. The "daughter-to-father effect" is a prime example: A founder of a company who has a daughter eventually has more female leaders in his organization as "male founders vicariously learn from their daughters about the constraints women face." It's easier to believe it when you see it.

Ms. Rowan is the managing editor of Modern Age.

Socialists Spell Trouble for Democrats

By Karl Rove

America is politically polarized and narrowly divided. In the last presidential election, Donald Trump received 49.8% of the aggregate popular vote, while Kamala Harris got 48.3%. By that measure, it was the fourth-closest White House contest since 1888.

Now consider three New York congressional districts and two Colorado ones where self-described socialists won primaries last month, some of them with formal endorsements from the Democratic Socialists of America. Four of these districts split very differently from the nation as a whole in 2024.

In New York's Seventh, 10th and 13th districts and Colorado's First District, Mr. Trump received 19.3%, 14.1%, 11.1% and 21% respectively. Ms. Harris's victory margin in the districts ranged from 36 to 77 points.

These are indigo districts where Republicans have no chance. If Democrats win back the House in November, it won't be because of these rock-solid districts. It'll be because Democrats flip Republican seats in districts where Mr. Trump either prevailed or came close. The DSA candidates in these deep-blue districts will create problems for all Democrats, before and after November.

Before the election, they

will help Republicans paint the Democratic Party as radical. One of them, Darializa Avila Chevalier in New York's 13th District, posted on X that "this country is a f— disgrace." She later bragged, "I forgot to get napkins so I just wiped my hand on the American flag behind me." The City University of New York doctoral candidate and Columbia graduate said "all cops are bastards."

They can win in deep-blue districts, but they'll weigh down the party elsewhere.

She's also called for "no more police at all ever" and the abolition of prisons and immigration enforcement. Republicans will make her the face of the Democratic Party.

Ms. Chevalier and her comrades will create additional problems for their party if Democrats win the House. They're dismissive of party leadership and certain to press their extreme views aggressively. This will further unsettle not only traditional Democrats but also swing voters, who already rate the Democratic Party less favorably than they do Mr. Trump.

The greatest peril from the Democratic Party's DSA wing will be in districts that more

closely mirror the narrowly divided nature of American politics. That's what makes Colorado's Eighth District interesting. Mr. Trump won by 2 points in 2024, 50% to Ms. Harris's 48%.

It runs from Denver's northeast suburbs in Adams County up Interstate 25 and U.S. Highway 85 to Greeley in Weld County. It spans suburbs, farm and ranch country, and one of America's largest gas fields.

The district is represented by Republican Gabe Evans, who served a dozen years in the Army and National Guard as a Black Hawk helicopter pilot. He was deployed to the Middle East and did search-and-rescue work and firefighting in Colorado. He was then a police officer in a Denver suburb for a decade before serving in the Colorado House. He was elected to Congress in 2024, flipping the district from the Democrats. He serves on the Homeland Security and the Energy and Commerce committees and is a member of the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus.

His opponent is State Rep. Manny Rutinel. He has a master's from Johns Hopkins and a law degree from Yale. Like Ms. Chevalier, he holds very left-wing views. At Yale, he called animal agriculture "a horrific, exploitative industry." He testified before a Connecticut legislative committee that "the globe must shift away from an-

imal production." Now he says he's no longer a vegan and eats beef. That Weld County is home to half of Colorado's cattle might have something to do with his change of diet.

In a Working Families Party interview last year, Mr. Rutinel endorsed "universal single parent health care," "cancelling student debt," shifting money "away from the military, policing and prisons . . . to fund critical social services" and "banning hydrofracking." After beating a moderate Democrat in the primary, he's moving to abandon some left-wing positions. He already says he now favors an "all-of-the-above energy strategy."

He has also buried postings he made in 2013 and 2014. Only headlines remain on the internet. Among them are "What Would Jesus Do? Socialism" and "Why A More Socialist Society Is Superior." Socialists running in deep-blue districts can keep saying outrageous things and win. But it's places like Colorado's Eighth District, pitting the former Army helicopter pilot against the leftist Yale law graduate, that will decide which party runs the House. Game on!

Mr. Rove was senior adviser and deputy chief of staff for President George W. Bush and is author of "The Triumph of William McKinley" (Simon & Schuster, 2015).

I'm Free. Now Pray for China

By Ezra Jin

I spent 266 days in a Chinese prison after being detained along with 28 other leaders and members of Zion Church in October. When guards ushered me in a van last Friday, I thought they were taking me to my trial. I expected a long sentence for founding and leading Zion, one of China's underground, or house, churches. But hours later, I was free. No negotiations, no confession, all charges dropped.

On the eve of America's 250th anniversary, I was reunited with the family I hadn't seen in eight years, ever since my wife and children came to the U.S. to get out of harm's way. My wife, like me, is a Chinese national, but our children are all U.S. citizens.

It was disorienting to go from a crowded prison cell to watching Fourth of July fireworks with my family over In-N-Out burgers. My grati-

tude goes first to President Trump, whose diplomacy secured my release, as well as to the members of Congress and other U.S. officials who worked on my behalf.

I have been overwhelmed by the global response to the arrests of our congregation. Prominent voices from across the political spectrum in the U.S., the U.K.

Eight members of the church I founded are still behind bars.

and Europe have spoken out about our plight. Other congregations in China showed extraordinary bravery in coming to our aid. Thousands of people—from Argentina to India and Nigeria to Korea—prayed for us. Even in the bleakest moments, we took great comfort in their support.

Eight of my fellow church members, along with many

other church leaders and prisoners of conscience, remain in prison. These men and women, some of the most caring people I have met, are confined in cramped cells and sleep on floor mats in blistering heat. They leave behind young families. I won't rest until they see freedom.

When I started Zion Church in 2007, my aim was simple: to share the immeasurable love of God with those around me. As I wrote from prison, "We do not oppose dialogue with the government, nor do we confront it, but rather emphasize obedience to those in authority." At the same time we held fast to our beliefs, recognizing Jesus Christ as the sole head of our church.

China's political authorities have no reason to fear the tens of millions in China who worship in unregistered congregations. These Christians love their nation. They only want to worship God peacefully according to the

Bible and to serve others, especially the poor, the disabled and the elderly. Zion Church is proud to have supported relief efforts after the devastating 2008 Sichuan earthquake and to have helped major blood drives in Beijing.

My earnest prayer is that my release can mark the beginning of a new chapter for people of faith in China. Freedom of religion is a universal right promised in the Chinese Constitution. I hope that all our church members are freed and that China becomes a place where all people can freely worship.

Such a future might seem impossibly remote, but so did my release. I couldn't be more thankful, and pray that others still imprisoned will experience this same freedom soon. Mine is a God of miracles, and he constantly surprises me.

Mr. Jin is founding pastor of the Zion Church of China.

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

How the Smithsonian Lost America's Plot

One of the better causes of the second Trump Administration is its effort to purge the progressive political takeover of America's national cultural institutions. A case in point is the new White House report on the bad historical turn taken by the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History.

The press is attacking the report as an attempt to censor independent museum curation, but that's not how we read it. The 162-page "Saving America's Story," produced by the White House Domestic Policy Council, lays out in persuasive detail how the museum offers a largely critical view of American history that "no longer treats the American story as a shared national inheritance to be taught or celebrated."

The report isn't a cheerleading document seeking to hide America's wars. What it seeks is a history of the U.S. that doesn't resemble the 1619 Project in its partisan bias.

The report's examples show the degree to which progressives have captured the history museum. In one exhibit, the Pledge of Allegiance was described as a tool to "instill American nationalism through flag ceremonies." Nationalism? That's a needlessly pejorative edge. How about patriotism?

The museum also highlights the worst facts about the Founders. Benjamin Franklin is called a racist and anti-immigrant, and Alexander Hamilton owned slaves, while, the report says, "downplaying or completely excluding facts about their abolitionist efforts."

One Smithsonian "didactic" about the Broadway musical "Hamilton" described Hamilton as "influential and flawed" without noting that he was a leading drafter of the Federalist Papers and helped George Washington win the Revolutionary War. The report notes what the museum doesn't, which is that Hamilton "was a vocal critic of slavery and helped found the anti-slavery New York Manumission Society in 1785, which worked to end the slave trade."

Speaking at Brown University in 2016, the report says, Smithsonian Under Secretary for Museums and Culture Kevin Gover said he favors replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day, because Christopher Columbus was a "slaver" and "killer." Smithsonian Under Sec-

retary for Education Monique Chism and museum director Anthea Hartig began museum speeches with "land acknowledgments" that suggest the rightful landowners are native tribes.

The Smithsonian American Art Museum and Smithsonian Learning Lab created a poster that says, "Whiteness as a concept is foundational to the history of the United States, actively shaping this country's social, cultural, political and economic structures." Whiteness? This is today's leftwing identity politics imposed on the past.

Naturally, the museum bends its knee to transgender politics. In its "We Belong Here" exhibit, visitors are told that "The struggle for equal opportunity in sports began long before Title 9 became law in 1972. And it continues today as transgender, nonbinary, and cisgender female athletes demand equality."

In December 2024, the report says, museum director Hartig said a "Girlhood (It's Complicated)" exhibit was meant to present "growing up female in the United States since the early republic in the face of patriarchal oppression." Much of this echoes the woke ideology of the Biden Administration, and visitors would be forgiven for assuming that racism, sexism and oppression define the nation's past.

The report's critics, largely on the political left, object that it is imposing its own bias. But the museum is deeply connected to the federal government and claims to be a national museum that tells the American story. It isn't the plaything of today's dominant progressive academics. The feds fund 62% of the Smithsonian budget, or some \$1.1 billion in fiscal 2026. The Smithsonian Board of Regents includes six members of Congress, the Vice President, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and nine citizens.

The Trump Administration's suggestion that the museum offer a less biased approach to American history isn't an attempt to whitewash the country's complexity or its difficult chapters. The report says the Smithsonian should "tell the whole story of a nation, including the good and the bad, so Museum visitors can understand the development that led our nation to where it is today."

That's not a whitewash of America's complicated history. It's an embrace of it.

Trump Will Let Ukraine Make Patriots

President Trump was his usual self at Wednesday's NATO summit in Turkey, insulting Europeans and making threats. But the bigger and better news was real progress on the defense of Ukraine and Europe. To wit, Mr. Trump said the U.S. will grant Kyiv a license to make Patriot missile batteries.

Ukraine is running short on the Patriots it needs to intercept Russian ballistic missiles. Vladimir Putin has used this opening to terrorize Ukrainian cities, and civilian deaths are rising. Since July 1, Ukraine has intercepted as few as four of 46 missiles fired in a ballistic trajectory by the Russians, says the Institute for the Study of War.

Ukraine's military intelligence says Russia can now produce 60 to 65 Iskander ballistic missiles a month. Lockheed Martin produced only about 600 Patriots last year, though it's ramping up to make 2,000.

Mr. Trump said the U.S. will show Kyiv how to make Patriots, and though "it's very complex

He says the U.S. will teach Kyiv how to make the missile interceptors.

... you'll figure out the complexity quickly." And maybe faster than the U.S. given how innovative Ukrainians have been in developing and deploying weapons.

The global supply chain for Patriot components may be a limiting factor beyond Kyiv's control. Mr. Trump said the U.S. would consider providing "some" Patriots in the interim, and Ukraine will need them to protect new production lines it stands up. Ukraine has been willing to share its hard-won counter-drone technology and expertise with the U.S. and its allies.

"What I like about this is [it's] a defensive situation as opposed to an offensive," Mr. Trump said. But Ukraine has also been using its own drones and missiles to carry out long-range strikes on Russian military and energy targets. These attacks are "an escalation, but it's also an escalation that could help lead to an end," Mr. Trump added. The more pressure on Mr. Putin, the sooner he may conclude he needs an exit from the war of aggression he started.

Trump Tells the Truth About Iran

My whole life, all I do is deals," President Trump said Wednesday, but Iran's regime "is from a different school," he had to admit. "They're liars, they're cheats, they're sick people." Mr. Trump cited the tens of thousands of Iranians slaughtered by the regime in January and explained how its word has proved worthless. "I don't want to deal with them anymore," he said.

The President is so mercurial that it's impossible to know if he's serious that the cease-fire is "over," as he said. He could declare it back on tomorrow. But he's right that Iran's regime has been wasting his time. It's the best in the world at that. Twenty days into the memorandum of understanding's 60-day negotiation period, nuclear talks have hardly begun.

Instead the regime has worked to conquer the Strait of Hormuz while exporting billions of dollars' worth of oil. New satellite imagery suggests Iran is continuing construction at its underground Pickaxe Mountain site—a violation of its commitment in the MOU to "maintain the current status quo of its nuclear program."

This is why the up-front U.S. concession on oil sanctions was a mistake without requiring the revenue to be held in escrow. Mr. Trump revoked the oil-sales license on Tuesday after Iran struck three commercial tankers in the Strait with missiles and drones.

In June Mr. Trump called Iran's new leaders "very rational people" who were "nice to deal with." Vice President JD Vance, the lead U.S. negotiator, insisted that even the thugs atop the Revolutionary Guard Corps want to "turn over a new leaf" with the U.S.

This Age of Innocence lasted all of three

The Age of Innocence ushered in by JD Vance lasted three weeks.

weeks. Perhaps Mr. Vance will tell us why he believed that and whether he still does. Asked on Wednesday what changed his view of Iran's leaders, Mr. Trump answered: "I got to know them."

The question is what the President will do with that knowledge. He said talks could continue but added, "I'm not sure I want to make get done with on-again, off-again talks and tit-for-tat bombing. Any U.S. action risks escalation, so it had better be with a strategic purpose."

The MOU bought both sides breathing room but the true options for Mr. Trump haven't changed. He can surrender the Strait or reopen it by force. He can reimpose, and enforce, maximum-pressure sanctions and the blockade on Iranian ports. He can target Iran's oil infrastructure or enriched-uranium stockpile.

The U.S. seems to be escorting some tankers through the Strait, and Central Command's Adm. Brad Cooper has a plan to do more to reopen Hormuz. This would involve going on offense to clear the threats near the Strait, not merely swatting drones and missiles.

If Mr. Trump shows that Iran can't stop the flow of energy, while the U.S. can blockade Iran anytime, that's victory—and leverage. If he can remove Iran's nuclear material and destroy the Pickaxe Mountain site, that's victory, too.

In both cases the goal is to free the U.S. and the region from dependence on the cooperation of Iran's regime. We've played that game before, and maybe Mr. Trump is tired of it. Better to reopen the Strait or destroy the nuclear program ourselves and let Iran's regime struggle under pressure while it's at its weakest.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

No Peace While Seeking Israel's Destruction

Rahm Emanuel's "23-state solution" ("A New Path for NATO and Israel," op-ed, July 6) is most welcome. He stands virtually alone in putting the onus on the Arab states to press the Palestinians finally to become "a partner for peace."

But there's a catch. This conflict isn't primarily based on conventional geopolitics. It isn't simply a bitter real-estate dispute. The conflict is bottomed on the Palestinians' religious and cultural refusal to accept Jewish sovereignty on any borders. That is the actual Palestinian cause, despite the conventional wisdom that Palestinians are helpless victims simply seeking statehood—which they've rejected repeatedly when presented with end-of-conflict opportunities. Changing that mentality is the ultimate challenge for the international community.

That being said, Mr. Emanuel isn't falling back on the shopworn refrain that Israel holds all the cards for resolving this conflict and the Palestinians hold none. He's politely calling upon the Arab governments to stop pandering to Palestinian rejectionism and start pressing the Palestinians to

abandon their mythic quest to turn the clock back to 1948.

GREGG MASHEBERG
La Canada Flintridge, Calif.

While conceding that past Israeli concessions have led to more attacks, Mr. Emanuel castigates Israel's current government for Israel's current woes. As a fix, he recommends a Palestinian state and expanded relations with Israel's neighbors.

Can you imagine any other conflict where the party that is repeatedly attacked is expected to make endless concessions to implacable foes after surviving the wars they start? It would not make a difference who is Israel's prime minister. Every Palestinian faction has rejected peace. Never before has it been so clear that they and their regional backers reject Israel's existence in any form and behind any boundaries.

There can't be peace until the Palestinians and other regional regimes end their obsession with wiping out Israel. Their leaders should not be appeased but be held accountable for their actions.

DORON LUBINSKY
Atlanta

A College Reunion and Answering God's Call

William McGurn's "Scenes From an Ordination" (Main Street, June 23) really hit me. I recently returned from my 50th college reunion, where my wife and I roomed with my college suitemate, Cardinal Robert McElroy.

He knew even back in college that he wanted to be a priest, and I knew he would be both an amazing prelate and friend for life. He co-ordinated at our mixed marriage (my wife is Protestant) and baptized our children. Though his first love was always parish work, we were there for his elevations to auxiliary bishop of San Francisco, bishop of San Diego and, most re-

cently, archbishop of Washington. It is the unquenchable joy that Mr. McGurn wrote about that has accompanied my friend throughout his journey of love and sacrifice. He said Mass at our reunion, and classmates of all denominations attended and were inspired by his homily.

I know many wondered in 1976 whether it was an auspicious time to become a priest, just as Mr. McGurn asks whether now is an auspicious time to be ordained. Surely, Mr. McGurn's friend has taken a courageous, life-affirming step. God bless him for it.

BRUCE BELFIORE
Santa Barbara, Calif.

Buying the President's Products Isn't Illegal

Regarding your editorial "The Trump Family and 'Honest Graft'" (July 2): President Trump's supporters see the criticism over his crypto earnings as less a scandal than a sign of entrepreneurial success. The report's figures reflect a legal, disclosed business model in a rapidly evolving industry, not evidence of wrongdoing.

Mr. Trump has long argued that America should lead in digital assets, and his financial success in the sector is consistent with that pro-growth vision. If investors and consumers chose to engage with

Trump-branded products, that is a market judgment, not corruption. Wealth created through royalties and transaction-based revenue is common in modern business and should not be singled out simply because the name attached to it is Mr. Trump's.

What matters is whether the activity was lawful and disclosed. On that score, critics have yet to show illegal conduct. Americans can disagree with Mr. Trump's style or timing, but they should be careful not to confuse political dislike with proof of impropriety.

MICHAEL P. MULHALL
Moseley, Va.

An American Memento Mori

Your July 3 editorial "A (Mostly) Happy 250th Birthday" states that "the remarkable news of this anniversary is that our free republic has stood for a quarter millennium and prospers still." The global significance of this milestone can't be overstated.

Much of this national miracle was built by those who arrived as immigrants. They faced long odds, yet their hard work and determination shaped the success we celebrate today.

America isn't defined only by its living citizens. It's also defined by those who came before us. While most people look to the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution to understand America, I look to its cemeteries. The silent ground of our national graveyards is sacred space. It reveals the true continuity of sacrifice required to sustain this republic, beyond the written framework of its founding documents.

Our task in 2026 isn't simply to look back, but to pass these values to the next generation for the next 250 years, ensuring this republic endures for both the living and the dead.

DIMITRIS ELEAS
Brooklyn, N.Y.

The Clock Isn't the Problem

Nishant Sahdev is right that "Telling Time Is a Complicated Business" (op-ed, July 6), but he omits one complication that is growing in importance. Albert Einstein showed that communication speeds can approach but never exceed the speed of light, so that information asymmetry is a fundamental property of the universe.

Modern technology has mostly worked to mitigate information asymmetries, but financial markets now operate at speeds that make transient information asymmetries unavoidable. When government agencies release the latest data on inflation, employment or crop yields, they strive to make it available to everyone at once.

But this is a physical impossibility. In practice some firms access it first, and transmit it to traders who are able to exploit microsecond advantages over others. The resulting racing inefficiencies can be remedied with market designs that slow the pace of trading, but more accurate clocks will not solve the underlying problem.

BRIAN MANNIX
Gainesville, Va.

Free Expression

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Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"This increases our odds of making the right decision to at least fifty-fifty."

OPINION

Hamilton Was No Protectionist

By Phil Gramm
And Donald J. Boudreaux

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer have invoked the policies of the first Treasury secretary, Alexander Hamilton, as precedents for President Trump's trade agenda. Hamilton, the finance wizard of George Washington's administration, "touched the dead corpse of the public credit, and it sprang upon its feet," in the words of Daniel Webster. He is the most respected financial officer in U.S. history. Enlisting him in support of the president's trade policy would certainly lend credibility to a policy that so far, by most economic measures—including economic growth and real disposable personal income—has failed.

Since Hamilton can't defend himself, we'd like to defend him against the claim that he would support Mr. Trump's protectionism. On Hamilton's 1791 Report on the Subject of Manufactures, he made the case for government encouragement of American manufacturing in a world dominated by European powers that he worried,

The first Treasury secretary backed tariffs mostly to raise revenue and promote free trade.

could easily refuse to export their manufactured goods to America in exchange for American agricultural products. As Hamilton explained, "If Europe will not take from us the products of our soil, upon terms consistent with our interest, . . . there is no other expedient, than to promote manufacturing establishments" at home. Promotion of U.S. manufacturers could be provided by protective tariffs or, even better in Hamilton's view, by subsidies.

Messrs. Bessent and Greer claim that the Trump administration is simply reviving the Hamiltonian trade policy that created the American economic colossus. But in the 21st century, when the average trade-weighted tariff rate of Organization



for Economic Cooperation and Development member countries was below 3% and almost identical to that of the U.S., and the OECD found that the nontariff barriers of U.S. trading partners aren't significantly higher than America's nontariff barriers, it's highly doubtful that Hamilton would support Trump policies. Hamilton in essence rejected Mr. Trump's tariffs when he argued in his report that "if the system of perfect liberty to industry and commerce were the prevailing system of nations, the arguments which dissuade a country in the predicament of the United States, from the zealous pursuits of manufactures would doubtless have great force."

It's true that Hamilton endorsed some elements of the infant-industry argument for tariffs, but he did so because American industry then was indeed in its infancy. America today occupies a completely different position, with productivity per manufacturing worker in the U.S. about 10 times as great as in China, U.S. capital markets as large as the rest of the world combined, and America now in its second century of dominating innovation and technological development. The conditions that led Hamilton to support tariffs have long since disappeared. He never saw protection of domestic manufacturing as a long-term policy but rather insisted that "continuance of bounties on manufactures long established must almost always be of questionable policy."

Especially noteworthy is Hamilton's

conviction that among the greatest forces fostering U.S. industrialization was its trade deficit and resulting capital surplus, while Mr. Trump sees the U.S. trade deficit as a crisis and net foreign lending and investment in the U.S. as a "hemorrhaging of America's lifeblood." Hamilton described net inbound foreign capital as "a precious acquisition . . . a most valuable auxiliary, conducing to put in Motion a greater Quantity of productive labour, and a greater portion of useful enterprise than could exist without it." During the country's first century, we routinely ran trade deficits as the British and Dutch invested heavily in America. They grew wealthy on those investments, and so did America.

The protectionist paternity claim against Hamilton fails, as does the claim that tariffs industrialized America. Missing from this protectionist story: Unlike today, in the 18th and 19th century Congress had no power to tax incomes, so most revenue came from customs collections. Hamilton knew that high protective tariffs, by discouraging importing and encouraging smuggling, suppressed those collections. As Dartmouth's Douglas Irvin notes, the tariffs Hamilton proposed in his report and Congress adopted were "the highly protectionist duties because Hamilton feared discouraging imports, which were the critical tax base on which he planned to fund the public debt." During Hamilton's tenure as Treasury secretary, his focus

in setting tariffs was to pay the government's bills, not to protect domestic manufacturing.

Protectionist forces didn't triumph in Congress until passage of the Tariff Act of 1816, long after Hamilton died. That movement peaked with the adoption of the Tariff of Abominations in 1828, causing an electoral bloodbath for its proponents. After reaching an all-time high of 57.3% in 1830, the average tariff rate on all imports was slashed by 74% over the next 31 years.

The results for American industrialization are revealing. From 1816 through 1830, industrial production grew at an average annual rate of 4% as tariffs rose. From 1831 through 1860, industrial production exploded by 6.7% a year as tariffs fell. During the Civil War, tariffs were again raised, but between 1866 and 1900 average tariff rates fell from 41.8% to 27.6% and industrial production grew at an average annual rate of 5.6%. In the 19th century industrialization occurred most rapidly when tariffs were falling, not when they were rising. By the turn of the century President William McKinley, whom President Trump often cites as a role model for his tariff policy, was calling for freer trade because "the period of exclusiveness is passed. The expansion of our trade and commerce is the pressing problem."

Nineteenth-century industrialization wasn't fueled by protective tariffs. Instead, as economist Frank Taussig concluded in 1915, it was fueled by "the intelligence and inventiveness of the people; these being promoted again by the breath of freedom and competition in all their affairs." And as Albert Gallatin, the longest-serving Treasury secretary, earlier observed, "to ascribe that unexampled and uninterrupted prosperity, which even legislative errors cannot arrest, to a tariff is one of the most strange delusions by which intelligent men have ever suffered themselves to be deceived."

Mr. Gramm, a former chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, is a nonresident senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Mr. Boudreaux is a professor of economics at George Mason University and the Mercatus Center. Michael Solon contributed to this article.

Mamdani Emulates Elon Musk

By Kate Farmer

Zohran Mamdani may loathe billionaires, but he is taking inspiration from the world's only trillionaire. In May New York's mayor launched the Commission on Government Efficiency, or COGE—obviously patterned after Elon Musk's DOGE.

Apart from Mr. Musk's department's focus on tech, DOGE and COGE are remarkably alike. In its founding executive order from President Trump, DOGE committed to "modernizing Federal technology and software to maximize government efficiency and productivity." In its first press release, COGE commits to "removing outdated bureaucratic barriers that slow infrastructure projects . . . modernizing government to improve efficiency and saving."

Even more striking is that Messrs. Trump and Mamdani agree on a good idea. COGE's deregulation and government efficiency agenda is promising. If it stays true to that mission, COGE could make New York a healthier climate for business and reduce government bloat and spending.

COGE's 16-member governing commission is modestly diverse, and not only in the DEI sense. Two, Marc V. Shaw and Ana Oliveira, are alumni of Mike Bloomberg's administration. Kathryn Wyld is a board member at the center-right Manhattan Institute and former CEO of the Partnership for New York City, a business advocacy group.

New York's Commission on Government Efficiency, or COGE, is a promising and surprising effort.

COGE is holding public hearings across the city's five boroughs—seven so far, with three more set for this summer—where experts and members of the public can testify on changes they want made to the city charter. Many New York business owners and developers attended the first hearing, on capital project delivery and permitting, on June 9. Based on the hearings, COGE will propose amendments to appear on the ballot in November.

One proposal before COGE, from the nonprofit Abundance New York, is to consolidate the messy bureaucratic process behind building permits. Developers often must seek approvals, permits and inspections from a dozen or more city agencies, such as the departments of Buildings, Environmental Protection and City Planning. The proposal would designate the Buildings Department as the single authority overseeing requirements from all other involved agencies so developers aren't subject to repetitive paperwork and delays.

Another proposal, from a Bronx hearing, would expand the fiscal-impact statements that accompany proposed legislation at the City Council. The statements cover a bill's cost to the city budget for two fiscal years. The proposal would require an additional "small-business impact statement."

Other proposals include procurement reform, which would pay city contractors more quickly, and removing the revocable-consent requirement for outdoor seating, which can trigger six months or more of multi-layer review just for a restaurant to put tables and chairs outside.

But COGE will confront a truth uncomfortable to Mr. Mamdani: When you shrink government bloat, you inevitably shrink the government workforce. He needs the extra cash to fund his big-ticket campaign promises like free public buses and child care, but will his union base understand? Some of his COGE commissioners may not. The group is dominated by pro-union advocates.

When DOGE began work in Washington, it sparked panic inside the Beltway. The COGE crew probably won't have a similar effect. But the real question is how COGE will reach its spending reduction and government efficiency goals without big tax cuts.

Mr. Mamdani and big labor appear to have a cozy relationship. But it's beginning to fray, as bodega owners criticize his government-run grocery stores and steamfitters' unions condemn socialism. COGE's tightening of New York City's belt could instill similar discontent. As much as Mr. Mamdani needs the extra cash and efficiency, time will tell if he has the political will to see it through.

Ms. Farmer is a social-media editor for the Journal editorial page.

Ukraine Brings the War to My First Russian Home

By Gregg Opelka

Distracted by Graham Platner, the Fourth of July and Folarin Balogun's red card, the American press hardly noticed a successful Ukrainian drone strike Monday against Russia's largest oil refinery, in the Siberian city of Omsk. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy gloated: "Siberia, too, is now within reach of Ukrainian precision strikes."

The attack didn't go unnoticed by me. I worked for several months a year from 1990 through 1992 at the Omsk Musical Theater. In 1993 and 1994, I worked in two other Russian cities—Yekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk in Soviet times), in the Ural Mountain region and Khabarovsk in the Far East—but Omsk was *my pervyy russkiy dom*, my first Russian home. I have dozens of friends and colleagues still living there, and my warmest memories of working in theater in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia come from this frigid city.

Not long after the attack on the oil factory, a friend—originally from Omsk but for more than 20 years a U.S. citizen with her own thriving business in the Midwest—sent me a photo of the city taken by a childhood friend who still lives there, from her apartment window. Concerned for her friend's safety, she asked me not to publish it. It is unnerving to see how close the drone came to the dozens of apartment buildings surrounding the plant.

I had never heard of any military strikes on Omsk, and it turns out there hadn't been any since 1919, when the city was the capital of the "White Movement," an anti-Bolshevik resistance. Omsk was ultimately captured by the Bolshevik Red Army.

My relationship with Omsk began humbly: I was one of seven American artists who traveled there in November 1990 to produce my first musical, "Charlie's Oasis," or "Charlie-Bar" as it was called in Russian. The producer of the theater, Boris Rotberg, saw my show in Chicago that spring and commissioned it for his

closed city, because of its military operations and its oil factories. This meant that we Americans were as strange to the Russians as they were to us.

At the time, a food shortage was in full force. Russians stood in long lines for staples like bread and milk. We experienced this firsthand at the Lighthouse Hotel, where the standard breakfast was a plate of shredded boiled beefs piled high, which we dubbed "beet mountain."

We joked at the time about the KGB listening in on our rehearsals or dinners with actors, but in reality the Soviet Union was collapsing rapidly and would fall completely in a little more than a year. Apart from the dangerously low overnight temperatures, faraway Omsk seemed

A drone strike in Omsk reminds me of my time there in the early 1990s.

theater, where it would be performed by his actors and musicians, guided by our American production team—book writer, choreographer, composer/lyricist (me), director, interpreter, orchestrator and set designer. Omsk was a *zakrytyy gorod*, or

By Ted Van Dyk

Nearing 92, I am temporarily under home health care after some falls. I have passed the time talking about current events and politics with my young caregivers, who are sympathetic to socialist Democratic candidates and their messages.

Much media coverage portrays socialists as trying to take over the Democratic Party. As a veteran of Democratic administrations and national campaigns, I see them in a different light.

The most avid organizers and partisans in past national campaigns have been on the flanks of the two major parties. After campaigns ended, they typically folded into the parties' mainstreams and became leaders in subsequent electoral cycles. This was particularly true for

the Democratic Party of 1960s and '70s peace protesters. It also was true of earlier hard-left alumni of the Depression era and in the lead-up to the Great Society.

We now can watch the voting patterns of newly elected socialists as they begin their careers in the U.S. House and elsewhere. I expect them, like most of their colleagues, to respond to their constituents.

We shouldn't lose sight of our founding documents and institutions. The people still rule, and elected officials will continue to represent the majority opinion of their voters. Most Americans remain common-sense pragmatists who look to their elected representatives to provide security, a stable economy and fair social policy.

During my adult life, the Great So-

cietary years were the most successful for Democrats. They produced the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Medicare, Medicaid, federal education aid and the war on poverty. Today's Democrats should offer a policy program in the same spirit.

In their time, Great Society Democrats united conservatives and moderates in their party as well as moderate Republicans. I fear no takeover by hard-left true believers, but I worry that Trump derangement syndrome will overcome Democrats who should be focused on the common-sense, everyday voters who decide elections.

Mr. Van Dyk is author of "Heroes, Hacks and Fools."

Notable & Quotable: Platner

From a July 7 tweet by Lindsay Fyfield, an accuser of Maine Senate candidate Graham Platner:

I actually understand why Democrat leaders didn't take our stories seriously when [the New York] Times reported them in June but are taking them seriously now.

It was by design.

The line most shared from the piece was the claim that the Times "could not corroborate" my story despite talking to two of my friends. I gave them the contact information for five friends.

They called the two who I clarified would not know about the abuse but would be able to affirm our relationship timeline, events, etc.

They simply did not call the other three. . . . My friends might not have known the details of the abuse, but they affirmed that yes, I had told them that he was abusive—long before he ran for Senate.

Besides, they assured, my part in their reporting would be small. I thought my details would only serve to affirm Jenny [Racicot] and the other anonymous woman.

Jenny and I—having never met or spoken—both shared with these reporters terrifyingly similar details of intimate partner violence, coercive control, and cycles of abuse/love bombing. The third unnamed woman in the story did as well.

But tell me again how they "could not corroborate."

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The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES

'Without fear and without favour'

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Le Pen, Farage and the people's verdict

The two rightwing leaders seek salvation through the ballot box

I have done nothing wrong. Let the people decide. Marine Le Pen and Nigel Farage had the same defiant response to, in her case, a criminal conviction and in his, an alleged breach of parliamentary financial disclosure rules: to sidestep the authorities by appealing directly to voters.

The French far-right leader and her UK counterpart are formidable, battle-hardened populist campaigners who have never been closer to taking power. But their ascent has been jeopardised by accusations of financial irregularities: Le Pen has been convicted of embezzling EU funds; Farage is facing a parliamentary standards investigation over his failure to declare a £5m gift from a crypto billionaire. Their response was to submit themselves to an election.

It was a coincidence of timing, but hardly a surprise. Siding with the people against a supposedly self-serving political elite is the essence of populism. Donald Trump famously said in 2016 he would stand in the middle of New York's Fifth Avenue "and shoot somebody, and I wouldn't lose any voters". A popular mandate can be a literal or metaphorical get-out-of-jail-free card, as events in America have shown. Trump has made a political career fighting what he claims is judicial persecution, and has endangered American liberal democracy in the process. Le Pen and Farage are threatening to take their countries down the same perilous road.

Le Pen and Farage seek redemption in the ballot box. After Le Pen said she would after all run in next year's presidential election, her *Rassemblement National* party published an image on social media of its leader with arms outstretched like Jesus and the word "renaissance". Farage's gesture was cruder. He resigned his own parliamentary seat

and invited voters in his constituency to back him and "stick two fingers" up to the "establishment".

Farage's stunt has already fallen flat, with the other main parties refusing to run against him. The Reform UK leader hoped to pre-empt a potential by-election being triggered in his constituency if he is found to have broken parliamentary rules. Instead he risks looking ridiculous. If he is re-elected, the investigation into the £5m payment can resume and might yet be expanded to include other undeclared assistance. A further by-election could still result.

Le Pen spent years vilifying a supposedly venal elite and once championed the idea of banning people convicted of misusing public funds from running for office. Hypocrisy aside, her manoeuvre is more plausible. As is her right, she has applied to France's highest court to overturn her embezzlement conviction and sentence, which would require her to wear an electronic tag. The penalties are meanwhile suspended and she is

A popular mandate can be a literal or metaphorical get-out-of-jail-free card, as events in America have shown

free to run in April's first-round election. But what would she do if the court confirms the sentence early next year? The RN leader said on Tuesday nothing could now stop her candidacy.

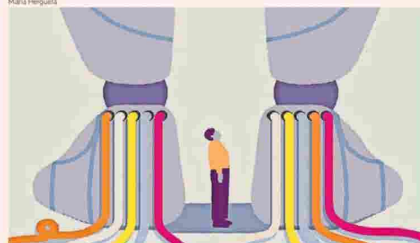
Voters may ultimately have the final say. If her conviction is upheld but Le Pen stays in the race, they will have to decide whether they want someone with a criminal conviction in the Élysée Palace. Millions of French voters, angry with mainstream politics, will not care. But she needs the support of floating voters to win. A Trump-style confrontation with France's institutions weeks before polling day risks undoing her efforts to make her party less toxic and more respectable.

Populists draw strength from the weakness of their mainstream opponents. It is urgent now that France's bickering centrist and centre-right parties unite around one compelling candidate. Similarly in Britain, unless the Labour government can reinvent itself, it is still far too early to write off Farage.

Opinion Technology

Climate and the great AI data centre cover-up

Maria Hargreaves



Pilita Clark

It is just over 40 years since a US political journalist wrote something about scandals that should have been mandatory reading in school classrooms from then on.

"The scandal isn't what's illegal, the scandal is what's legal," wrote Michael Kinsley. He was talking about the way rules are written to let powerful insiders, from Wall Street to Washington, get away with unfair but lawful behaviour.

People say Kinsley's adage is outdated in the age of President Donald Trump. They are wrong. Look no further than the gathering environmental misery AI barons are foisting on us as they race to build more data centres.

Data hubs already devour more electricity globally than all but 10 countries. About 448 terawatt hours

And here's where that Kinsley rule of legal scandals kicks in.

Louisiana is one of a growing number of places trying to lure AI investment with business-friendly rules that in some states mean faster power plant approvals and less public scrutiny.

As Reuters reported last month, an Ohio law has allowed some plants to be approved in just 45 days without public hearings.

People are understandably angry. An unprecedented 75 US data centre projects worth around \$150bn were blocked or delayed in the first three months of this year, nearly as many as in the whole of 2025, says the Data Center Watch research group. It reckons active opposition group numbers have grown from 396 at the end of 2025 to 853 by the end of March.

The AI giants' demand for electricity is only part of the problem. Data centres are a concrete target if you're worrying about job-killing robots. But they also swallow up land and water. By 2050, they could be using enough water to meet the basic needs of all 1.3bn sub-Saharan Africans for a year, UN researchers estimate.

You can see why it is so important to know exactly what these companies are building and where. But transparency is for the little people. You and I might be fined for not telling the government what we earned last year. An AI company can quietly get the nod for a gas power plant across the road from your home without so much as a public hearing. It's not needed for private off-grid customers, developers say.

All of this is why Antonio Guterres, the UN secretary-general, last month called on all big AI companies to disclose their data centres' carbon emissions, water and land use.

I wish him luck. Meta, Google and other big tech companies have long published data on company-wide electricity and water use, which has often soared since AI took off in 2022. But the figures are not always broken down for their data centres and it is hard to find any reporting on the effect of AI workloads.

Last week I asked seven companies if they would heed Guterres's call.

My queries went unanswered by all except Microsoft and OpenAI, who sent me their latest published environmental material, but declined to discuss Guterres's request.

OpenAI's policy on AI infrastructure is still instructive. "We support policies that require transparency around water, electricity, and government agreements," it says, "with appropriate exceptions to maintain security, commercial sensitivities, trade secrets, and proprietary information."

The case, I think, is closed.

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Letters

Britain is still dependent on the kindness of strangers

The Bank of England's plan to restrict how much debt hedge funds may use when trading UK government bonds makes perfect sense from a procedural point of view ("Bank of England to push ahead with plan to limit hedge fund leverage", Report, July 2).

Given the scale of the UK's debts and how much the government continues to borrow, the Treasury has regrettably become overly reliant on international investors, who currently hold around 30 per cent of gilts. The Bank of England is clearly seeking to ensure this exposure does not get out of hand should there be a period of financial

turmoil. Such turmoil was seen in the aftermath of the Liz Truss mini-Budget, where unforeseen problems with liability-driven investments rapidly became a problem. Limiting leverage could mean that an orderly market withdrawal would not become a catastrophic stampede.

But such a strategy – however rational – immediately raises the question of why the bank needs to do it. Cynics could be forgiven for inferring the bank would only plan to do so if it anticipates developments the markets might not fix. Ultimately, the scheme cannot fix the underlying

problem, which is that we have lost a stable investor base in UK government debt. The bank itself is selling off its gilt holdings (quantitative tightening) while defined benefit pension schemes continue to shrink. In January, the bank's governor Andrew Bailey warned that international hedge funds – the flightiest class of investors – now "dominate" the gilt market. It would not take much for them to take flight.

There are ways this could be changed. Encouraging more domestic investors to hold UK gilts would be highly sensible at this stage – they are already exempt from capital gains tax,

but perhaps the government could consider making them inheritance tax exempt as well? Encouraging retail investors to take a greater stake in government debt would do more, and be more sustainable, than disincentivising hedge funds from doing the same. But unless and until we can persuade more people to invest in this way we will remain, to borrow a phrase from former governor Mark Carney, highly "dependent on the kindness of strangers".

James Sproule
Chief Economist (UK), Handelsbanken, London EC2, UK

Mathematics opens doors across industries

As a graduate in mathematics from the University of Dundee, I find it sad that the subject is being marginalised ("There will be no more games like Minecraft without maths", Opinion, July 2).

That foundation in mathematics has led to opportunities for me to work in aerospace, on submarines and in energy, including, more recently, a seven-year stint in the Middle East that also involved teaching statistics to Arab graduate engineers.

Speaking the language of mathematics opens many doors and is valued across a number of disciplines, including finance, project management and engineering, in addition to information technology and gaming.

Looking at the huge strides made by the Chinese over recent years – as they have pioneered the teaching and application of mathematics they have learnt from us as overseas students to compete against us – it's critical for



our country to embrace maths as much as possible to prevent the UK further backsliding into anonymity on the world stage.
John Fraser
Chartered Statistician, Cheshire, UK

The real problem is planning capacity

Martin Wolf reminds Andy Burnham of Mark Twain's line that "It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so" (Opinion, July 6).

Well straight back at him. His assertion that part of the answer to greater levels of housing is "far fewer planning controls" does not pass muster with most people within the planning system. They'll point out that a combination of hollowed out council planning departments and the absence of leadership to marshal resources are the biggest barriers to speedier decisions.

If it's better outcomes you are interested in, rather than a priori focus on lowering standards, then the focus should be on investing in skilled officers, and then expecting local leaders to lock everyone involved in approving planning applications in a room until they resolve any concerns.
Lee Waters
Penarth, Wales

Northern exposure

Alan Beattie in his piece "All hail the King of the North! But which north?" discusses Liverpool and Manchester, Yorkshire and Lancashire, but fails to mention the true north, the land above the erroneously named "central" belt of Scotland (Opinion, July 5).

Living in the Highlands of Scotland, we are used to this oversight and often have to bite our tongues. Even Edinburgh, the capital, is nearer to Manchester than it is to my house.

John White
Kilmuir, Isle of Skye, Scotland

Take the fizz out of politics

Morgan McSwiney arranges his first comeback interview with the FT's political editor on the chef's day off (Lunch with the FT, July 2). This ineptness and lack of forward planning seems emblematic of Starmer's last days – and what miserable fare! Takeaway pizzas and fizzy drinks.

Patrick M Dransfield
Kowloon, Hong Kong

OUTLOOK LAS VEGAS

The male wellness guide to peptides



by Josh Gabert-Doyon

In a suburban Las Vegas medical plaza, the designated parking spots outside Eytan Klepach's clinic are all labelled with the words "American Male".

The hormone therapy and peptide clinic is one of many providers that have tapped into the booming market for consumer healthcare. "It underwent a rebrand to 'American Medical Wellness' back in 2020 in order to reach a broader audience. The parking assignment, however, is unchanged."

A self-proclaimed supporter of health secretary Robert Kennedy Jr's Make America Healthy Again movement, Klepach (a serial entrepreneur with a background in phone repair stores) claims to have been the first to popularise peptide supplements in Las Vegas. He says his customer base is now split between locals and a growing number of medical tourists who visit Vegas for the latest "wellness" treatments.

US healthcare is increasingly hormonal. Prescriptions for testosterone among American men increased from 7.3mm in 2019 to more than 11mm in 2024, according to clinical research provider IQVIA. Restrictions on insurance coverage mean that many are buying from direct-to-consumer telehealth or cash-based clinics.

As treatments become more popular, some patients are seeking to "stack" testosterone with peptides – injectable amino acids that typically target the body's natural hormone

production. Weight-loss drugs such as GLP-1s are the best-known peptides, but there are hundreds of substances that claim to address everything from sexual health to muscle gain and skin tanning. Many are sold by anonymous online distributors that source the raw materials from labs in China.

Despite limited medical evidence of their efficacy, peptides have also become widespread in the cosmetic industry, mainly as topical anti-ageing skincare and "tweaks" marketed to women. And while they are typically banned or available for research use only in the US, UK and Europe, sellers like Klepach have found a workaround by collaborating with pharmacies to prescribe analogous peptides – often derivatives – that are not on the banned list.

Las Vegas's reputation as a place where anything goes makes it an obvious choice for peptides and hormone therapies. But the city's enthusiasm has run into some bad press. At a longevity conference last year, hosted by the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine, two people were hospitalised after receiving peptide injections at a vendor booth. The Nevada Pharmacy Board later fined three practitioners involved in the incident.

That did not stop the city from hosting the inaugural Enhanced Games, aka the "steroid Olympics", in late May. In a hospitality area behind the grandstand, some 500 influencers socialised and streamed content

together. One, a fitness influencer called Larry Wheels, told me he took testosterone, a steroid called Anavar, and two different peptides, BPC-157 and TB-500, so that he could stream his life "15 hours a day".

Twenty-two-year-old attendee Ryan Roberts said that he injects weight-loss peptide retratide and GHK-CU for anti-ageing skincare. "Everybody at UCSB does them," he said, referring to the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he is a student.

Stunt performer and content creator Ryan Tremaine Klarenbach was one of the few to offer a word of caution. He purchased BPC-157 for a knee injury but left the vial unopened. "It didn't come with a syringe so I had to go to the pharmacy and pick one up. In that moment I was like, 'this is really weird!'"

Klarenbach isn't the only one having second thoughts. Despite the Enhanced Games' move into the peptide business this year, Michael Sagner, a private doctor who sits on its independent medical committee, said that he had come to suspect that most peptides rely on a "strong placebo effect".

But that has done nothing to hold back hormone and peptide treatment sales. Klepach hopes to expand nationwide. "It used to be a taboo, especially for men," he explains. "Today, everybody is comparing their stack and how much they're using. It's become a status symbol."

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Opinion

Europe must have the financial power to match its economic heft

Enrico Letta

Every few months a new shock strikes Europe and every few months we reach for the old answers – a crisis-management summit and, eventually, an emergency package. A temporary fix to hold the line until the next blow arrives. Each response is reactive, often unavoidable, and ultimately beside the point.

The EU must acknowledge that we are currently going through a systemic shift. The global economy is being reordered around continental-scale blocs where power stems from size, level of integration and the dynamism of the internal economy. Against this backdrop, the EU's central weakness is not a shortage of talent, capital or ideas. It is fragmentation.

In a world where economic weight translates directly into geopolitical

clout, Europe's internal divisions push it to the margins of decisions that will shape our future and deepen our dependence on others for the technologies and resources our economies need. Fragmentation is a strategic vulnerability and our competitors understand this better than we do.

Nowhere is this clearer, or the harm more self-inflicted, than in finance. Europe does not lack savings. But it is chronically unable to put them to work.

Year after year, the wealth of European households flows out to finance growth elsewhere, above all in the US, while our own companies hunt abroad for the capital to expand. In the real economy the US and EU blocs still behave roughly to the same league. The EU accounts for around 18 per cent of global GDP, against about 25 per cent for the US. But in equity markets the gap is a yawning one. US companies make up more than 60 per cent of the world's investable equity; European companies account for only around 10 per cent.

None of this is accidental. After the last financial crisis, Europe made stability its overriding priority and rightly so.

We rebuilt a system that had come close to collapse. That stability has been a major achievement and it must remain central to everything we do.

Yet stability alone has not produced a financial system that stimulates growth. Europe still finances itself above all through its banks, and the post-crisis architecture that made them safer was designed first and foremost to preserve

Year after year, the wealth of EU households flows to finance growth elsewhere, above all in the US

stability, limit risk and prevent another systemic collapse. That remains essential but the same framework now also weighs on the lending capacity that firms need to invest, innovate and scale.

The framework does not need dismantling, but it does need recalibrating so that a banking system built to be safe can also finance investment, innovation and scale. A recent report estimates that

simplifying the EU bank capital stack could unlock trillions in additional lending to the real economy.

This is the promise of the Savings and Investments Union (SIU). Its purpose is to turn the savings of European households, the continent's most underused resource, into investment in Europe's own future rather than someone else's. That means giving banks the room to lend and creating capital markets deep and integrated enough for money to reach places where it is needed, while keeping intact the protections that make our economy resilient. An economy that finances its own ambitions and shares the rewards is both stronger and more autonomous than one that exports its savings and imports its dependence.

Most of the proposals for SIU are known and many are already on the table. What has been missing is the will to treat them as a single strategic choice, rather than a list of issues to be negotiated until all ambition quietly drains away.

This is why timing matters. This month, Ireland has taken up the presi-

dency of the EU Council for the eighth time under an old Irish motto: there is no strength without unity. Few understand better what integration can achieve than the Irish, who have seen their own economy transformed within a generation by openness and the single market.

Ireland now has a rare opportunity to carry forward the ambitious One Europe, One Market agenda adopted by EU institutions in April. This is a roadmap with strict deadlines for completing the single market under the treaties we already have. It should be pursued with the utmost energy and completed in full.

The choice before us is more acute than we would like to admit. Either Europe builds the financial power to match its economic weight, or it accepts slow, managed decline into dependence and irrelevance.

In a fragmented world, scale is power. And for the EU, scale can only come from unity.

The writer is dean of IE University and former prime minister of Italy

The upward trajectory of UK debt is unsustainable

David Miles

A generation ago, the UK government's debt, relative to its GDP, was around 30 per cent. Today it is close to 100 per cent. Office for Budget Responsibility analysis suggests that such are the likely pressures on demand for public spending over the next few decades, should expenditure rise in line with them and the tax system be left much as it is, debt might well be 150 per cent of GDP within another generation.

Not only that but it could be rising at an ever faster rate and in a way that would clearly be unsustainable. Left unchecked, this makes it likely that a very sharp fiscal tightening might be necessary in future.

How debt rose from 30 per cent to nearly 100 per cent is not difficult to see. A series of shocks – the financial crisis and its aftermath, Covid-19, energy price rises due to wars elsewhere – are all factors. Slow growth of productivity and incomes has exacerbated their impact. Governments struggled to stop debt increasing. This looks set to be an ongoing challenge.

Much of the focus in the UK is on what tax-and-spending measures might be needed now to stay within fiscal rules set in terms of where the national debt and deficits might be a few years ahead. But what lies further down the road – over the next few decades rather than years – is of great importance. This is particularly so when debt is already high.

In a series of possible scenarios – with

If we do not change course, it is the young people of today who will face the painful consequences

more or less optimistic assumptions about the economy, demographics and spending pressures – we at the OBR have assessed how the fiscal picture could evolve over the next 50 years.

What emerges is that, over the longer term, substantial changes to spending and tax will be needed. In the absence of fiscal tightening, debt would be likely to rise on an unsustainable trajectory. Higher productivity growth, a healthier population and longer working lives would make the problem less serious. But longer-term increased demand for public services, with reduction in some tax revenues, generates significant fiscal pressures.

These fiscal problems might not seriously emerge for a few decades. In the OBR base scenario – where the government's current fiscal consolidation plan is delivered and without further substantial shocks – the debt stock may not rise much for 10 years or more. But it is significantly higher as a share of GDP 20 years from now, by which time it looks to be on an unsustainable upward trajectory. Some plausible alternative scenarios are worse, some are better, but unsustainable rises in debt emerge in most of them.

At some point, the balance between spending and tax revenues needs to adapt. Without adjustment, debt would be likely to reach levels such that new debt could not be raised in the market at a pace to sustain it. Should that happen, the combination of spending cuts and tax increases that would then be needed would be of a scale that would be very painful for government and citizens alike.

None of this is inevitable. But if we do not change our policies, there is a substantial risk that a sudden sharp fiscal adjustment could happen down the road. If it does, it is the young people of today – people already born into what will face the painful consequences.

The sooner action is taken to head off the risks, the less adjustment will be needed. The required reduction in the deficit to maintain debt at current levels relative to GDP could be twice as large if implemented in the middle of the century rather than in the early 2030s. Unsustainable fiscal outcomes that may not occur for some years are not just a challenge for tomorrow but for today.

The writer is a member of the budget responsibility committee of the OBR and a professor at Imperial College

Retail investors and the perils of private assets

FINANCE

Robert Armstrong



Do private assets belong in retail investment portfolios? Individuals' savings have long been funnelled overwhelmingly towards liquid stocks and bonds. Introducing illiquid private equity and private credit could add complexity, opacity and risk. That scares people. But it is important to bear in mind why private assets are on the rise, and focus on the real drivers of investment success.

The ascendance of private assets began with the great financial crisis. This demonstrated how dangerous it can be to hold illiquid assets like real estate on leveraged, deposit-funded bank balance sheets, and reminded everyone how contagious market volatility can be.

In response, there has been a multi-year reshuffling of which financial institutions hold what assets. Banks have deleveraged and become more selective about what they own. A lot of what the banks have shed has reappeared inside investment funds operated by specialists in private equity, private credit and real estate. The biggest and most diversified of these funds are now known as "alternative asset managers". The five

largest US "alts" – Blackstone, Apollo, KKR, Ares and Carlyle – had about \$900bn in assets under management at the end of 2015. By the end of last year, they had \$4tn (to put that in context, the entire US banking system held \$2.5tn in assets at the end of 2015).

The asset reshuffle isn't just about the banks. Fewer and fewer companies want their equity or debt to trade publicly. This reflects wariness about the volatility and arbitrariness of markets. And public markets are not great at valuing companies with uneven cash flows. Bilateral relationships with owners and creditors can be a source of stability. For some companies and assets, private ownership simply works better.

The landscape created by the great asset reshuffle has its own risks, but it's an improvement on the pre-GFC model, and there is a key place in it for private assets.

Even acknowledging that, it is fair to ask if private asset investment is best left to pension funds, endowments and the like. The alt managers want to grow, and have families' retirement pots in their sights. Savers need to decide whether to listen to their pitch, and regulators need to decide what to allow.

Currently, the standard private asset offering for retail investors is "evergreen" funds, which are perpetual and offer limited periodic liquidity – unlike private funds aimed at institutions, which lock up money for years, pay out a lump sum and expire. Too complex for retail? If investors are permitted to buy the wildly speculative tech conglomer-

ate SpaceX, it seems odd to say they cannot be trusted to understand evergreen structures. Too opaque? Some fund disclosures are thin, but that should be a fixable problem.

The most controversial issue is the limited liquidity of evergreen funds. Several big ones have recently been hit with redemption requests well beyond the standard limit of 5 per cent of fund assets per quarter, leaving some investors "trapped". But the liquidity gates on these products are stated plainly at the outset, and there is nothing complex about them. In short: if you want out now, get in line. Individuals can handle illiquid investments in houses, life insurance policies and certificates of deposit. Why not illiquid equity or credit, if they provide access to different assets, with different return profiles,

Issues of complexity, opacity and liquidity are surmountable, but the biggest barrier is price

than are available in public markets?

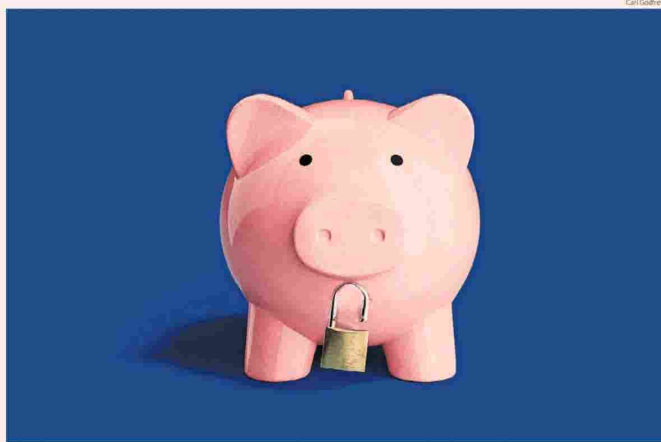
Of course, private assets in general, and evergreen structures in particular, may ultimately prove a poor fit for most retail investors. The point is that the complexity, opacity and liquidity issues are surmountable, if there are genuine benefits on offer. Retail investors are not children, and we should not rush to cut them off from an asset class that reflects a growing share of the economy.

There is another, more important barrier, however: price. The best thing that has happened to savers over the past half-century is that the cost of participating in public markets has been driven down to nearly nothing. Because of the introduction of passive investment products, competition among brokers and technology, the fees for buying, selling and holding many liquid financial assets are now a tiny fraction of a per cent of the assets' value. At the same time, there has been a welcome shift in financial advice, away from how to "beat the market" and towards a focus on maintaining a diversified portfolio while being ruthless about ripping costs out.

As the alt investment industry has become more competitive, there has been downward pressure on the fees paid by institutions. Retail investors have not been as lucky. Blackstone's Bered, one of the largest private credit funds available to retail, charges a management fee of 1.25 per cent and takes 12.5 per cent of profits (after a 5 per cent hurdle rate has been met). KKR's retail private equity product charges 1.5 per cent and 15 per cent. These are not fee structures retail investors should go anywhere near.

The industry will argue that sourcing private assets for their funds is a labour-intensive, bespoke process. This is true. Private assets funds will always charge more than their public market peers. But the required direction of travel is clear. The market for public assets got cheap after years of withering competition, cost-cutting, consolidation and falling margins among brokers and fund managers. After a few years of the same treatment, the "alt" managers' products will be a much better fit for retail.

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How Trump brought non-alignment back from the dead

Manjari Chatterjee Miller

Seventy-one years ago, Chinese premier Zhou Enlai stood before an audience of rapid African and Asian nations in Bandung, Indonesia, and made a Trumpian statement: alliances, he declared, should be "abandoned" because they were "to nobody's good". The US secretary of state John Foster Dulles denounced this nascent doctrine of non-alignment as an "immoral and shortsighted conception."

Non-aligned countries were, according to the US and its allies, naive at best and hypocritical at worst. But today, America – which once derided the non-aligned movement and worked to undermine it – is increasingly, if unwittingly, adopting the core tenets of an ideology born in Asia and Africa.

Non-alignment, or "strategic autonomy" in today's parlance, calls for coun-

tries to put their own interests above great-power politics and refuse to take sides. Although Washington would never dream of using either term, a US administration that has threatened to pull out of Nato, made clear that all alliances are transactional and shown sympathy for Russia's territorial ambitions is embracing the substance of the non-alignment doctrine.

At first glance, the idea of non-alignment could not be further from President Donald Trump's *Maga* worldview. It took shape at the April 1955 Afro-Asian Bandung Conference where newly decolonised nations convened to condemn great-power rivalry.

It seemed a largely moral doctrine. Countries such as Egypt, India and Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia claimed they were for peace, disarmament and the right to forge their own third way. But in fact, non-alignment was cold, hard realpolitik. It allowed nations to steer clear of binding alliances at the peak of the cold war while still extracting benefits from both superpowers. India, for example, received decades of development and military aid from both the

United States and the Soviet Union – with scant obligations in return.

Non-aligned nations sometimes behaved hypocritically, damaging their reputations and future relationships. Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, an ardent admirer of the Soviet Union, refused to condemn Moscow in moments of crisis, such as when the

Today's America is increasingly, if unwittingly, adopting an ideology born in Asia and Africa

Soviets invaded Hungary in 1956. India's tilt towards the Kremlin became so pronounced that its bilateral relationship with Russia is, to this day, a liability in the US-India partnership.

But the history of non-alignment also reveals its costs. The movement was largely unsuccessful; it was the tool of the weak. More importantly, it had limited utility. For poor countries, the ideology made sense – development with-

out entanglement in great-power conflict. But as countries grew richer, the idea of benefits without obligations became harder to maintain. And since alliances take years to develop, many were left without friends in the post-cold war era.

China, which has not entered a formal alliance since the founding of non-alignment, offers one example. Its current relationships with larger powers such as Russia are transactional, with little of the deep trust or shared beliefs that once characterised US-led alliances such as Nato. And although Iran is a major partner of China and one of its biggest oil suppliers, China has distanced itself from the country during the US-led war. Instead, Beijing asked Tehran to be mindful of the concerns of its Gulf neighbours.

Non-alignment has even been problematic for India – despite trying to pivot towards western defence suppliers, it has struggled to modernise its military, which depends on Russian hardware. And hostile relationships with neighbours have made its own backyard one of the most dangerous in the world.

The costs of non-alignment are already appearing for the US. Trump's musings about withdrawing from Nato, calling the Ukraine war Europe's problem, empathising with Putin's historical and territorial claims, and repeated statements about the annexation of Greenland have led to allies openly looking for alternatives. Canada is investing in Arctic military capabilities. Poland and Finland are exploring bilateral defence pacts. Most worryingly, no ally expressed, let alone provided, any support or sympathy for US security interests in the Iran war.

Non-aligned countries never managed to build, even among themselves, the deep network of trust, friendships and shared obligations that Washington assembled after 1945. That network could be the single greatest strategic asset the US possesses. To dismantle it in the name of convenient flexibility is to miss the core lesson of the non-aligned movement's failures.

The writer is a professor at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy