



Crime patterns

The 2023 NCRB report shows rise in cybercrime and crimes against tribals

The National Crime Records Bureau's annual reports on crime and prison statistics have to be read with a strong caveat – most of the numbers cannot be compared between States because they are largely dependent upon the registration/reporting of crimes in the first place. However, certain national trends and sharp year-on-year changes within States can still reveal meaningful patterns that could demand policy intervention. The recent NCRB report for 2023 – delayed by a year – points to a worrying trend of postponed surveys, reports and even the Census under the current Union Government. But there are also three telling numbers: the 2.8% decrease in murder cases across the country; a staggering 28.8% surge in crimes against Scheduled Tribes (ST), and a 31.2% increase in cyber crimes. While the decrease in murder cases will come as a relief to law enforcement – most of the cases pertain to disputes, personal vendetta or enmity and “gain” – the other two numbers are alarming. The steep rise in crimes against STs is largely due to the ethnic violence in Manipur, with the registered numbers jumping from just one in 2022 to 3,399 in 2023 – which a more effective government could have mitigated. Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan also recorded significantly high crime rates against tribals suggesting their vulnerability in the central Indian States. This is not a new phenomenon; previous NCRB reports have highlighted higher crime rates in regions with significant tribal populations.

With greater Internet penetration across the country, there has been an increase in cyber-crime, particularly related to financial fraud and sexual exploitation. Anecdotally, it is evident that these numbers must have gone up even further in the last two years with the greater use of digital financial instruments in daily transactions and investment. While policing has tried to keep up with the growing menace of cybercrime, with specialised cells, the ubiquitousness and deepening spread of digital crimes require more sophistication and dedication by the police to tackle them. Crimes against children rose by 9.2% in 2023 – with the offender known to the victim in 96% of the cases. While the increase could be a function of improved reporting across States, the high number (1,77,335 cases) suggests that States must work on a war footing to sensitise children about these crimes and inappropriate behaviour by adults. A subset of these crimes could also include the application of the POCSO Act in the case of consensual adolescent relationships and this is an area that needs to be carefully handled by the prosecuting and policing agencies. Reported crimes against women registered a modest increase of 0.4%, but this masks a 14.9% spike in dowry-related crimes, pointing to a persistent societal problem.

Making sense

Krasznahorkai gets recognition for melancholic stories in an absurd world

At a time of two wars in the world, a writer described as a “master of the apocalypse” has been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for 2025. Hungarian author László Krasznahorkai was chosen by the Swedish Academy “for his compelling and visionary oeuvre that, in the midst of apocalyptic terror, reaffirms the power of art”. The 71-year-old novelist and screenwriter has won many accolades and was a perennial candidate. Often compared to greats such as Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Herman Melville, his dystopian, absurd and melancholic stories mirror life in Hungary under oppression and beyond in the pre and post-fall of the Iron Curtain era, with a chilling resonance to contemporary times. He gained recognition with his 1985 novel of ideas, *Satantango*, translated into English by George Szirtes in 2012. It revolves around a group of destitute residents of a collective farm on the eve of the fall of communism, waiting for a miracle, which needless to say would not happen. The tone is set with the epigraph, from Kafka's *The Castle*: “In that case, I'll miss the thing by waiting for it.” Krasznahorkai has collaborated with film-maker Béla Tarr to adapt his works for the cinema. With his second book, *The Melancholy of Resistance*, he began to be hailed as a postmodern visionary. It was published in Hungarian in 1989, when the wall came down, and first translated into English in 1998.

In *The Melancholy*, a circus comes to a town with the carcass of a giant whale, and sinister happenings follow. His unbroken sentences – like a fellow laureate, Jon Fosse, Krasznahorkai too often omits full stops – are often deemed difficult and demanding. His translator calls Krasznahorkai's work “a slow lava flow of narrative, a vast black river of type”. Krasznahorkai's travels to China and Japan in the early 2000s inspired his contemplative novel, *Seiobo There Below*. The breadth of his oeuvre is evident in the homage he pays to literary giants: Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* gets a relook in Baron Wenckheim's *Homecoming*; Melville's ghost haunts *Spadework for a Palace: Entering the Madness of Others*, a story set in Manhattan. In an interview to writer Hari Kunzru for *The Yale Review*, Krasznahorkai says “the apocalypse is now”, pointing out that “hell and heaven are both on earth, and they are here now”. About the role of art in the future, he says: “Art is humanity's extraordinary response to the sense of lossness that is our fate.” By awarding literature's top prize to Krasznahorkai, the Swedish Academy signals that it is turning to serious but innovative literature and art in a world where little makes sense.

Unemployment has consistently emerged as one of the most pressing political issues in Bihar. In the last two Assembly elections, jobs and livelihood were among the top concerns. In 2015, post-poll surveys conducted by Lokniti-CSDS showed that ‘unemployment/jobs’ was the most important issue for 9.1% of voters. By 2020, this percentage rose to nearly 21.0%, making it the second most important issue for voters. With the employment scenario still grim, it is an issue that is likely to dominate voter priorities in the forthcoming polls.

The situation needs to be looked at objectively, for which official statistics are useful. Under the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), the latest State-level indicators on employment are the April-June 2025 quarterly report and the July 2023-June 2024 annual report, with insights on Bihar.

Looking beyond the unemployment rate
The quarterly and annual releases cite Bihar's unemployment rate as 5.2% and 3%, respectively, whereas it was 5.4% and 3.2%, respectively, at the national level for ages 15 and above. To the casual reader, Bihar's employment/unemployment picture seems decent to good. However, such a superficial reading is misleading. To truly understand employment conditions, one must understand three interrelated indicators in the PLFS – Worker Population Ratio (WPR) or share of the population that is employed; Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) or the share of the population either employed or actively seeking work, and Unemployment Rate (UR) or share of the labour force that is unemployed and actively looking for work.

Looking at the UR in isolation conceals the true picture. The same quarterly and national releases cite the WPR for Bihar at 46.2% and 51.6%, respectively while the national WPR is 52% and 58.2%, respectively, which shows that the share of those employed in the working age population is much lower in Bihar.

On checking the WPR and LFPR in the table, Bihar has low WPR, low LFPR, and therefore low UR. A more holistic interpretation is grim because many in Bihar are not working (low WPR), and many are not even looking for work (low LFPR).



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Bihar needs a strategy to revive education, create formal jobs and stem the outmigration of its workforce

A true picture	The employment crisis in Bihar is not a matter of perception but one of hard evidence													
	Quarterly (April-June 2025)*				Annual (July 2023-June 2024)**									
	WPR	LFPR	WPR (15-29)	LFPR (15-29)	WPR	LFPR	WFR (15-29)	LFPR (15-29)	Female WPR	Female LFPR	Female WPR (15-29)	Female LFPR (15-29)	Proportion of regular wage salary workers	Proportion of casual labour workers
Assam	57.9	60.8	40.7	48.2	64.3	66.9	44	51.3	48.1	50.2	30	35.1	18.9	19.7
Bihar	46.2	48.8	28.3	33.9	51.6	53.2	31.2	34.6	30.1	30.5	14.2	14.8	8.7	23.8
Chhattisgarh	55.1	59.8	39.6	48.3	69.7	71.5	57.8	61.7	58.1	59.5	47.6	50.6	15.9	18.5
Jharkhand	47.3	49.4	30.7	35.6	63	63.8	49.3	51.1	49.6	49.8	38	38.6	12.9	19
MP	54.8	57.2	41.2	45.8	68.3	68.9	56.6	58.1	51.9	52.3	37.4	38.1	13.2	18.6
Odisha	50.3	53.7	33.7	42.1	62.9	64.9	46.3	52.1	48	49.4	33.7	37.6	13.6	24.4
Rajasthan	53.9	59.1	35.5	45.4	61.7	64.4	44.1	50.4	48.9	50.9	31.7	36.5	18.8	12.5
Uttar Pradesh	47.7	50.2	32.1	37.1	55.1	56.9	39	42.9	33.6	34.5	20	21.8	12.4	14.9
West Bengal	54.9	57	39.2	44.7	59.6	61.1	41.6	49	39.2	40.4	28.1	31.2	20.4	23.1
All-India	52	55	35.8	42	58.2	60.1	41.7	46.5	40.3	41.7	25.6	28.8	21.7	19.8

Source: PLFS, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India. All figures are in %; unless otherwise specified, WPR and LFPR are reported for all persons aged 15 years and above | *Current Weekly Status (CWS) | **Usual Status (PS+SS)

The real need is a holistic demographic mission

The announcement on August 15, 2025, of a demographic mission, has become a topic of controversy in social and political circles. While the stated mission was limited to monitoring undocumented immigration from Bangladesh and its implied demographics in India's border regions, a holistic demographic mission seems to be the need as the nation is at the demographic crossroads. The most populous nation, with a large youth demography, undoubtedly becomes a matter of global envy and local pride. The demographics have never assumed significance in policy circles except for its relevance in population control. Demographic diversity is a blessing in disguise to sustain India's population well into the next century. Reading India's demographics may not essentially be limited to the country per se but has to be in relative terms with other global regions.

Need for a broader scope

A demography mission requires examining the kind of demographic transformation that has taken place over the last two decades. Demographic imaginations relating to the three demographic components of fertility, mortality and migration are quite limiting but have broader implications towards regional distribution of the age-sex composition of population and households. The agenda of a demography mission should not necessarily be limited to reading the future of demography but in recognition of emerging population features in terms of capabilities such as education, health and livelihood features alongside the evolving institutions in response to the migration transition. From a human capability standpoint, a demography mission needs to address the



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A true demography mission needs to examine India's various transformations

Since those not working are not even looking for work, the unemployment rate looks deceptively low. This is a classic manifestation of the “Discouraged Worker Effect” wherein people without jobs lose hope of finding employment opportunities and completely withdraw from the labour force

A comparison of Bihar with similar/comparable States strengthens the inference and shows how bad employment conditions are in Bihar. But it is important to compare Bihar against States of a similar size and economic background. In this, two factors are crucial in determining similarity: population and per capita income.

For a meaningful comparison, Bihar was grouped with nine large, low-income States (population above three crore as in the Registrar General of India's 2024 projections, per capita income below national average for 2025-25).

There are nine States that fall under this criteria, which are Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

When Bihar's indicators are compared with the chosen group of States, the results are alarming. Bihar ranks the lowest across WPR and LFPR. Uttar Pradesh fares marginally better but still hovers near the bottom.

The quarterly PLFS (April-June 2025) shows that among youth (15-29 years), the picture is even bleaker: only 28 out of 100 are working. Bihar is at the bottom in terms of youth work participation and youth labour force participation. For a generation that should be building its future, the doors of employment remain closed.

Since quarterly figures may be influenced by seasonal fluctuations in employment, it is important to look at the annual PLFS estimates as well. Quarterly estimates are based on Current Weekly Status, in which the reference period used to determine a person's employment status is just seven days.

The annual report also presents Usual Status: principal+subsidiary status), or figures which give a more comprehensive and stable picture of employment over a long term, minimising the distortions caused by short-term variations such as festivals, illness or crop cycles. It also captures people's subsidiary work. However, these annual figures too reinforce the same conclusion. For

imbalanced infrastructure to generate human capabilities across regions. Consider the case of education and skill capabilities or a ‘dream India’ emerging as a skill capital in the world – the educational infrastructure remains skewed across regions and is not in keeping with middle class aspirations. This results in inequities with the affluent being able to achieve things as against the less affluent failing to do so.

Issue of migration

While there have been major advances on the fertility and mortality fronts, migration seems to be a major population balancer across regions. Hence, policies need to be in place to make the choice of migration equal for everyone. But then the political discourse on migration is quite adverse within India. Despite the constitutional guarantee of a free mobility of individuals across all States, migrant identity is often threatened on various grounds. First, this is not a stated identity but rather a constructed one. Therefore, the protection of such an identity should ideally rest with the state rather than the individual.

Another complexity is the home and host attribute which needs to have an equal stake apart from the individual who is a migrant. The current political discourse on this subject is on disenfranchising migrants from their right to voting at home as they do not qualify to be the ‘usual resident of the place’.

The same right could perhaps be bestowed on them by the host place, where they are equally disenfranchised. This raises a question on whether migrants face a constant battle of belonging. Resolving this puzzle that internal migrants confront should be the agenda of a demographic mission which should strive to

those aged 15 years and above, Bihar's WPR stands at 51.6% and LFPR at 53.2%, which are abysmally low. Only Bihar and Uttar Pradesh fall below 60% in WPR.

The situation is grave for women. Bihar's female WPR is only 30.1%, or out of 100 women aged 15 years and above, only 30 are working. The situation is even more distressing for young women. In the 15-29 age group, Bihar's female work participation rate stands at 31.2%, while neighbouring Jharkhand records 49.3%, which is nearly 20 percentage points higher.

The quality of jobs in Bihar is equally troubling. Only 8.7% of workers are engaged in regular wage/salaried jobs, the lowest among comparable States. Bihar is the only State – not just in this group but also in the entire country – with a single digit proportion. At the same time, 23.8% of workers are employed as casual labourers, the highest share after Odisha across these States. This indicates a lack of secure and formal employment opportunities.

Such outcomes are in stark contrast to the claims of the National Democratic Alliance, which often highlights the formalisation of the economy as one of its achievements. In Bihar, however, the labour market remains overwhelmingly informal, insecure and poorly remunerated.

Migration and the missing numbers

A caveat must be kept in mind while interpreting Bihar's employment indicators. The PLFS counts only those individuals residing in the State during the reference period. The employment picture could have been better had the PLFS been capturing migration as well.

The grim labour market outcomes cannot be separated from Bihar's governance record. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's government has failed to improve literacy and human capital formation. The same PLFS (annual) shows Bihar's literacy rate at only 73.2% for the 5-plus age group, which is far below the national average. Without significant improvements in education and skills, the State cannot hope to generate meaningful employment opportunities.

Despite frequent announcements, investment summits and promises of industrial revival, little has materialised on the ground. Mr. Kumar's political manoeuvres and shifting alliances have yielded little tangible benefits for Bihar's economy. The State has underperformed be it education, job creation, industrialisation and formalisation.

The employment crisis in Bihar is not a matter of perception but one of hard evidence. PLFS data consistently reveal that Bihar lags in all key labour market indicators. Mr. Kumar's tenure of nearly two decades as the Chief Minister has failed to address these structural weaknesses. For a State with such a young population, this represents not just a missed opportunity but a potential social crisis in the making.

Bihar urgently needs a comprehensive strategy to revive education, create formal jobs, and stem the outmigration of its workforce. Anything short of this risks perpetuating the cycle of poverty, migration, and underdevelopment that has long haunted the State.

restore migrant rights.

On longevity

The changing demography also poses other puzzles such as growing longevity and the provisioning of social security. There is sincere engagement on this issue to redefine ageing and economically productive years of life, where the young and the old equally remain productive as long as they remain healthy and active. The other implication of social security protection being the sole responsibility of the state needs a relook as well, with employers preparing employees to remain financially secure for their non-earning years of life. The entire scene of provisioning of social security needs a rethink with there being extended years of life.

Recognition of changing demographics is perhaps necessary in all possible planning, policy making, evaluation and monitoring. While there are plethora of indicators being made available to celebrate progress and achievements, one wonders whether they are able to account for changing demographics. When it comes to allocation and provisioning too, demographics should dictate the priorities. Unfortunately, the per capita hangover continues to prevail which ignores the composition of the population in the denominator. A demography mission's foundation lies in the demographic sensitisation of a whole lot of intellectual discourse on mainstreaming, marginalisation and inclusion. Demography is not a mere discipline to offer a retrospective and prospective dimension of population. It is the foundation to build the future of humanity with a suitable alteration in strategies in keeping with the evolving global order.

power or publicity.

Gopalaswamy J., Chennai

The historian from Madras

It was moving to read about the illustrious but short life of C. Minatshi (‘Tamil Nadu InFocus’ page, October 10). As the first woman to receive a doctorate in

history from the University of Madras in 1936, it was enlightening to know that she became “the greatest woman scholar that India has yet produced”.

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

GROUND ZERO



A bottle of Coldrif cough syrup, manufactured by the Tamil Nadu-based Sresan Pharmaceuticals. A.M. FARUQUI

Killer cough syrup

Twenty-four children have died in Madhya Pradesh and three others are in a critical condition after consuming an adulterated cough syrup. Lab tests show that the syrup contained a high concentration of diethylene glycol, an industrial solvent that is never used in medicine. **Bindu Shajan Perappadan and Mehul Malpani** report on the horror that highlights the dangers of India's weak regulatory system

The last words Afsana Khan heard from her son, Usaid, were the lines of a nursery rhyme – “*Anaar ka meetha daana*” (The sweet seed of the pomegranate). A drowsy and weak Usaid had tried to recite the rhyme as he lay in a hospital bed at New Health City Hospital in Nagpur, Maharashtra.

“I was trying to cheer him up. He had started going to nursery school just two months ago, so I asked him to recite the rhyme. He fell unconscious after saying these lines and never woke up,” says Khan, sitting in her two-room house in Parasia town in Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh (M.P.), about 150 kilometres away.

On September 13, Usaid died due to kidney failure, after three sessions of dialysis. He would have turned four yesterday.

Khan's younger son, 2-year-old Yamaan, is too young to understand the tragedy. As Khan speaks, Yamaan crawls under a chair and grabs an empty bottle of cough syrup. Khan quickly snatches it from him. “You stay away from this,” she snaps. Hours later, a team from the State Health Department arrives to seize the bottle.

The 60-millilitre bottle of the cough syrup, Coldrif, has been linked to an unfolding tragedy in M.P. Since September, 24 children from the State have died. Most of them were from Chhindwara, while some were from the neighbouring Betul and Pandhurna districts. Three more children remain in a critical condition in Nagpur. The discovery of contamination in the cough syrup points to a larger, dangerous problem – India's poor regulatory system.

A dangerous prescription

All the 24 children had one thing in common – they developed a fever and cold, and received treatment in Parasia, a bustling town 30 km from the district headquarters.

Parasia is surrounded by the scenic Satpura mountain ranges and coal mines and is lined with rows of hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies. Among them is the hospital of Dr. Praveen Soni, a popular paediatrician in the area. According to many parents, Dr. Soni prescribed the Coldrif syrup, along with other medicines, for several sick children. Other doctors in town, including Dr. Amit Thakur and Dr. Aman Siddiqui, also allegedly prescribed the same syrup for some other children who reported similar symptoms.

The parents bought the prescribed medicines and went home. They began to worry when their children complained of a stomach ache after drinking the syrup. Soon, worry turned into panic: the children began vomiting and became drowsy. Their small bodies swelled up. Finally, unable to urinate, the children suffered severe kidney damage and died.

Suresh Pipri, a 40-year-old farmer from Parasia's Sethiya village, recalls the last few days of his 5-year-old daughter's life. “Rishika was diagnosed with fever on August 25 and received treatment from Dr. Thakur,” says Pipri. “She was prescribed 5 ml of syrup twice a day. When we gave her the first dose, she began vomiting green fluid. She vomited multiple times through the night and complained of a stomach ache. The next day, she stopped talking and recognising anyone.”

Pipri took her again to Dr. Thakur, who referred her to a private hospital in Chhindwara city. Despite three days of treatment at the hospital, Rishika's condition worsened and she was

When we gave Rishika the first dose, she began vomiting green fluid. The next day, she stopped talking and stopped recognising anyone

SURESH PIPRI
Rishika's father

not able to urinate at all, he says.

“On September 2, the doctor conducted a sonography and some other kidney-related tests. The results were not good. Her creatinine levels were extremely high. The doctor referred her to a private hospital in Nagpur,” he says. There, Rishika underwent nine sessions of dialysis. When her condition worsened, she was put on a ventilator for 4-5 days. She died on September 16.

Pipri stares at Rishika's dance videos on his phone and her drawings. “We did everything we could, but we could not save her,” he says.

A month of deaths and confusion

While most of the children in M.P. had been prescribed the syrup from mid-August onwards, the first death, of 3-year-old Divyansh, occurred on September 2 in a private hospital in Nagpur. More deaths of children were reported on September 4, 7, and 9, but authorities in Parasia and Chhindwara were unaware of the horror.

“Since the children had been referred to private hospitals and had died there, the local health department had no record of them,” says Dr. Ankit Sahlam, Block Medical Officer (BMO), Parasia.

On September 16, after five children had died, health authorities in Nagpur wrote to the Chhindwara district hospital, informing them that children hailing from Parasia, or children who had been referred to hospitals from Parasia block, had died in Nagpur due to kidney failure.

“This is when we started tracing the cause,” says Dr. Sahlam. “Our focus was on finding sources of infection from water, food, or animals. When we found that the children had been treated by local doctors first, we told those doctors to transfer all the children with similar symptoms to the Civil Hospital in Chhindwara.”

The Chhindwara authorities failed to trace the cause of the problem. “On September 22, the doctors at the Government Medical College, Nagpur, told us that the kidney damage could have been caused by some medicine,” says the Chief Medical and Health Officer of Chhindwara, Dr. Naresh Gonnade. The doctors also sent the prescriptions issued to the five children in Parasia.

“The Health Commissioner in Bhopal and other State authorities instructed us to launch a campaign to find the medicine that had caused the deaths,” Dr. Gonnade says. The search led to two common cough syrups in the prescriptions – Coldrif and Nastro-DS. Dr. Gonnade says the

Drug Inspector of Chhindwara was asked to start collecting samples of the two syrups from pharmacy stores as a precautionary measure.

On September 24, teams of the National Centre for Disease Control, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), and the State surveillance unit of the National Health Mission in M.P. arrived in Chhindwara to investigate the deaths and collect samples.

According to a document of the M.P. Health Department, seen by *The Hindu*, the teams collected various samples to check for infections and diseases, including Leptospirosis, Chandipura, and Japanese Encephalitis. Tests ruled these out. Finally, the biopsy tests of the kidneys of four of the five children confirmed Acute Tubular Necrosis, an acute kidney injury.

Dr. Sahlam, the BMO of Parasia, says that it was only on September 26 that the authorities suspected Coldrif to be a potential cause. The government seized batches from pharmacies and instructed doctors not to prescribe the syrup.

On October 1, the then Controller of the Food and Drug Administration, Dinesh Kumar Maurya, wrote to the drug control authorities in Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh, asking them to take action in the matter. While Coldrif had been manufactured by Sresan Pharmaceuticals in Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu, Nastro-DS had been manufactured by Aquanova Pharma, in Himachal's Solan district. Nastro-DS has since been cleared following tests by the M.P. Food and Drugs Administration (MPFDA).

A high degree of toxicity

With the death toll climbing, the State Health Ministry and the Union Health Ministry sent samples of various medicines for testing.

The Tamil Nadu government ordered inspection and testing of samples as well. It found that one sample of the cough syrup tested showed diethylene glycol (DEG) contamination at a level of 48.6% weight/volume. The government issued a ‘stop production’ order to Sresan Pharma on October 3 and the CDSCO recommended that the company's manufacturing license be cancelled.

On October 4, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said, “Nineteen medicine samples which had been consumed by children were collected from private practitioners and nearby retail stores... Out of the initial 10 samples analysed in the first batch, nine met quality standards. However, one of them, viz. cough syrup Coldrif, contained DEG beyond permissible limits.”

DEG is a toxic chemical substance typically used in antifreeze solutions for air-conditioners, fridges, and freezers, and as a solvent for products, including cosmetics, at very low concentrations.

According to the CDSCO, DEG replaces pharmaceutical-grade solvents, such as propylene glycol and glycerin, required for safe human consumption. “DEG is cheaper and has a colourless, syrupy consistency and sweet taste like glycerin. It is used by manufacturers to cut costs,” says a senior official at CDSCO.

Upon further investigation, the CDSCO identified three products which had been contaminated – Coldrif from Sresan Pharma (Tamil Nadu) showing 48.6% DEG; Respifresh TR from Rednex Pharma (Gujarat) showing 1.342% DEG; and ReLife from Shape Pharma (Gujarat) showing 0.616% of DEG.

In its official statement, the Tamil Nadu Drugs Control Department said the inspection team found several non-compliances at Sresan Pharma. They noticed 39 critical observations and 325 major observations. “It was found that the alleged batch was manufactured using non-pharmacopoeial grade Propylene Glycol as an excipient, which might have been contaminated with DEG and Ethylene Glycol (EG), which are known nephrotoxic and poisonous substances,” it said.

In India, while the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, and the associated Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, do not explicitly list DEG by name, they prohibit the use of any substance considered “adulterated” or “substandard”.



While CDSCO approves new drugs, clinical trials, and imports, the States handle the licenses for manufacturing, sale, and distribution at the State level

RAJEEV SINGH RAGHUVANSHI
Head of Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)

Who is responsible?

Contaminated, Indian-made cough syrup is a recurring health hazard. In 1986, at least 14 patients, including a child, died of acute renal failure after being administered glycerol syrup laced with DEG at Mumbai's J.J. Hospital. In 2022, a number of countries reported that over-the-counter cough syrups for children had been contaminated with DEG and EG. These resulted in the deaths of more than 300 children in Gambia, Indonesia, and Uzbekistan. A lab analysis in Gambia revealed that the product samples contained unacceptable amounts of DEG and EG and that the bottles of syrup had been imported from India. Yet, the problem persists.

Explaining how drugs are licensed in India, Dr. Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi, head of CDSCO, told *The Hindu* that health is a State subject. “This means that while CDSCO approves new drugs, clinical trials, and imports, the States handle the licenses for manufacturing, sale, and distribution at the State level,” he said.

Since the findings, the Tamil Nadu Health Department has suspended two senior drug inspectors in Kancheepuram for failing to carry out quality checks and for failing to monitor the drugs manufactured by Sresan Pharma over the last two years. On October 10, Tamil Nadu Health Minister Ma. Subramanian told reporters that while the State had acted against its officials, Central drug inspectors, who are expected to conduct inspections of drug manufacturing facilities across India once every three years, have not done this for six years in Tamil Nadu.

Drugs are licensed in India through a process overseen by the CDSCO and the State Drug Standard Control Organisations (SDSCO), following the guidelines of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act. The process requires making applications, submitting documents, and carrying out inspections to ensure that the drugs are safe, effective, and manufactured under strict quality standards.

An official of the Union Health Ministry says that in the case of Coldrif, the company, Sresan Pharma, got its license from the State government in 2011; this was renewed in 2016. “The company wasn't in our radar,” the official says.

A senior FDA official in Bhopal in M.P. says if a drug has been approved by the State in which it is manufactured, the maker does not need separate approval to sell it in another State. “No approval was granted to this syrup by the MPFDA,” he says. “But we were responsible for testing random samples of the concerned batch, SR-13 of Coldrif, which we did not do, apart from not having proper sale and distribution records. Three FDA officials have been suspended for negligence.”

The aftermath

On October 9, an M.P. Special Investigative Team arrested G. Ranganathan, proprietor of Sresan Pharma, in Chennai. They sealed his manufacturing facility located along the Chennai-Bengaluru highway.

The police also filed a criminal case at Parasia police station against Dr. Soni. They booked him and the directors of Sresan Pharma under Sections 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and 276 (adulteration of drugs) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, as well as Section 27(A) of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, which prescribes penalties for the manufacture, sale, stock, or distribution of substandard and illegal cosmetics.

The Indian Medical Association objected to Dr. Soni's arrest. Doctors say it is difficult to tell whether a medicine is contaminated simply by looking at it. Many medicines that are contaminated can look, smell, or taste like non-contaminated products. “This is why rigorous and continuous safety checks on medical products to detect and destroy contaminated medicines, whenever possible, is essential,” says Dr. Anil Bansal, member of the Delhi Medical Association.

The M.P. government is now probing how a large batch of contaminated cough syrup landed in Parasia. “Over 600 bottles of contaminated cough syrup were dispatched from Jabalpur to Chhindwara, with a large batch sent to Parasia,” says a source in the Union Health Ministry. The Chhindwara Additional Collector, Dharendra Singh, says 543 bottles have been seized so far.

Dr. Gonnade says at least 1,000 ASHA workers, 3,000 Auxiliary Nurse Midwives, and several Anganwadi and health workers have been conducting door-to-door surveys since. “They are all hunting for those bottles,” he says.

The CDSCO has asked all the State governments to submit a list of cough syrup manufacturers in their States and has initiated a joint audit of these companies. It has informed the World Health Organization that it has identified and recalled three contaminated cough syrups – Coldrif, Respifresh TR, and ReLife – and halted their production. It has also clarified that none of these products were exported.

In Dighavani village, about 15 km from Parasia, Prabhu Dayal and Kunti Yaduvanshi sit in darkness. Their younger son, Vikas, caught a fever on September 19 and was prescribed Coldrif by Dr. Soni. “By the time we reached Nagpur on September 22, the doctors said they were suspicious of the syrup and were testing it. Did he [Dr. Soni] not know that this syrup had already killed children? What was the government doing,” asks Dayal. All they are left with is a passport-sized photo of Vikas; he died on September 27.

With inputs from Serena Josephine M. in Tamil Nadu

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Double edge

Easier ECBs may spur dollar flows, but there are risks

After maintaining a tight leash on External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs) by prescribing who can borrow, for what purposes and at what rates and tenures, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has now proposed sweeping relaxations in ECB rules for India Inc. The recent proposals, if implemented, will improve India Inc's access to foreign currency borrowings, help companies, banks and NBFCs with good ratings reduce their cost of funds and result in an influx of dollar debt capital.



However, stringent safeguards will be needed to prevent this debt from turning into a millstone around the economy's neck in times of global turmoil. There are two main aspects to the proposed relaxations. One, RBI plans to do away with its prescribed interest rate cap (all-in cost ceiling of 450 basis points over benchmark rate) for ECBs, to allow borrowings at market-determined rates. On paper, the all-in cost ceiling was meant to act as a check on lower-rated entities accessing overseas markets. But in practice, some India Inc entities have used structures such as Foreign Currency Convertible Bonds (FCCBs) to side-step these rules. Now, companies will be allowed to raise ECBs subject to a quantitative limit of \$1 billion or 300 per cent of their net worth (after considering both domestic debt and ECB proceeds), whichever is higher. Regulated financial sector entities will not be subject to even these limits. The minimum maturity period for ECBs will also be shortened from five to three years.

These relaxations can prompt lower-rated entities, especially NBFCs, to tap foreign debt markets at high rates. However, RBI must ensure that they don't leave their currency exposure unhedged. This is precisely what led to a string of defaults and rollovers in FCCBs and ECBs during the taper tantrum of 2012-13. RBI may need to keep closer tabs on India's external debt and upcoming repayments to pre-empt sudden pressure on the rupee. Two, the eligible list of sectors allowed to raise ECBs will be expanded and restrictions on end-use done away with. The proposals suggest that all incorporated Indian entities (including LLPs) be allowed to raise foreign currency debt, with end-use allowed for all purposes for which FDI is permitted.

This is, in fact, a practical tweak. Eligibility criteria that allowed only export-oriented or infrastructure companies didn't really stop a spate of low-quality companies from raising FCCBs/ECBs in 2009-13 and courting trouble. Flouting of end-use criteria was also rampant, with layered structures used to funnel funds to unauthorised uses. However, these relaxations can encourage round-tripping; water-tight monitoring is called for. Overall, if the intent behind these relaxations is to encourage debt-based dollar flows into India at a time when both portfolio flows and FDI are erratic, this may work. However, it is up to RBI and other regulators to ensure that private borrowers don't harm India's reputation of being a frugal and disciplined global borrower.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Ceasefire deal: the real work is just beginning
Donald Trump called the pause in hostilities he has brokered the first step to a "strong, durable and everlasting peace". No one can do more to determine the outcome than the US president. This was, for him, a modest statement, acknowledging that Israel and Hamas had agreed to the first phase of his plan – it being their decision, not his, to break a multi-point agreement into a multi-stage discussion. Two parties so far apart agreed on one thing: both would rather defer the really difficult issues. In Israel and Gaza, there was joy – however tentative – at the announcement. An end to the annihilation, the release of all hostages and the resumption of large-scale aid have all been desperately needed. There is every reason to fear that this will not lead to a lasting peace, and every reason to strive to ensure that it does. (LONDON, OCTOBER 9)



Rare earth governance safeguards global supply chain
China's Ministry of Commerce announced measures aimed at strengthening export controls on certain rare earth-related items and technologies. The new measures further refine China's regulatory framework and mechanisms for controlling the export of specific rare earth-related items and technologies, drawing attention both domestically and internationally. The new regulations will help China better safeguard national security and interests, while also demonstrating the country's consistent stance of firmly upholding world peace and regional stability. This decision is by no means an improvised move. Rather, it is a part of China's systematic efforts to promote the standardised management of the rare earth industry. (BEIJING, OCTOBER 9)



VS SESHADRI

The global trading system faces a crisis. Anchored so far by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and a rules-based multilateral order, it is now being reshaped by geopolitics and contestation, search for economic security and regulatory defences, and shock remedies for trade imbalances. The three trade majors — the US, European Union (EU) and China — together accounting for over 40 per cent of world merchandise trade are acting very differently pursuing their narrow interests while seriously undermining the global trading system. Stability and predictability which are key for world trade to thrive, are eroding.

The US, the standard-bearer of free trade, has turned decisively unilateral. Any partner with a trade surplus, friend or foe alike, faces adverse tariff treatment. Even FTA partners are not exempt. "Reciprocal tariffs" are now deployed not only to curb deficits and bolster domestic manufacturing but also as leverage on issues far beyond trade — from trafficking to sanctions on Russian oil. Additionally, tariffs already applied or potentially, on "national security" grounds, have multiplied: from steel and aluminium under Trump-1 administration to now 15 sectors, extending to such unlikely products as kitchen cabinets.

Washington's trade deals now demand that partners cut tariffs and non-tariff barriers for US goods and digital services, allow import of goods as per American standards, commit to investments in the US, purchase US energy or defence equipment, and open resource markets to American firms. In return, the US offers only token tariff relief. Elements in the Japan deal is illustrative of the one-sided nature: 90 per cent of profits from Japanese investments in the US will flow to Washington, and just 10 per cent to the investor.

A three-tier tariff regime has emerged: the lowest 10 per cent for partners running surpluses with the US, a higher level of 15 per cent for those with deficits but a deal, and the highest, mostly above 20 per cent, for countries without a deal. India, figuring in the last category presently, on top of 25 per cent reciprocal tariff is faced with an additional levy of 25 per cent on account of Russian oil purchases.

UNDERMINING THE WTO
By discriminating between countries, Washington breaches the WTO's most-favoured-nation principle. Its tariffs, often far above bound levels, openly flout multilateral commitments. By drawing partners into bilateral deals that do not conform to FTA requirements, the US effectively makes them complicit in WTO illegality. Former US TR Robert Lighthizer and



GETTY IMAGES

current incumbent Jamieson Greer have made clear: the goal is a new two-tier trading order where "rebalancing" takes priority and tariff, a "formidable stick".

CHINA'S DISSEMBLING APPROACH
China, meanwhile, professes support for multilateralism, inclusivity and globalisation even as it bends WTO norms to its advantage. When it joined in 2001, many expected a shift towards a market economy. Instead, Beijing has enshrined its "socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics" — an opaque system blending state control with market mechanisms.

Its strategy is deliberate: build industrial overcapacity, dominate global markets including through cheap exports and create dependencies. China's dominance in rare earths, magnets, semiconductors and renewable sector is getting leveraged. There is price to pay for those seen acting not in conformity with its interests.

Through the Belt and Road Initiative, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and currency swapping arrangements China has built a web of economic linkages that bind countries to its orbit. Its participation in RCEP, expanding FTA network, and application

The WTO's future looks uncertain. The very powers that built the system are now weakening its foundations

to join CPTPP point to an ambitious bid for economic leadership. Yet this approach carries risks to partners — of debt dependency, supply chain overreach, and pressure to accept China's ever-expanding "core interests".

Europe, in contrast, has turned regulation-heavy, using climate and social goals as veiled tools of industrial protection. The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) effectively imposes extra tariffs on imports from countries that do not meet EU emissions targets — ignoring the tenet of 'common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities' under the Paris agreement. Other initiatives, such as the "Competitiveness Compass", reveal a new industrial policy mindset. The EU also boasts the world's largest network of FTAs, with over 45 agreements concluded and more under negotiation.

Notwithstanding its professed commitment to multilateralism and WTO rules, Europe too has compromised. Outraged initially by Trump's tariffs, it later struck a transactional deal with Washington, pledging investment and purchase commitments in return for tariff relief. Its moral high ground has become harder to defend. Even so it has talked about building EU-CPTPP structural cooperation as a way of weathering ongoing trade policy storms.

INDIA'S BALANCING ACT
Committed to multilateralism and wary of great-power pressures, India prefers adherence to WTO norms. Yet with only 2.3 per cent of world trade its leverage is

Ports can anchor global green hydrogen economy

An Indian PPP initiative can create green industrial corridors and shipping fleets. India's ports can emerge as green energy hubs

R Lakshmanan
Akshima Ghatge

Indian ports are uniquely positioned to lead, reshaping both the national and global green hydrogen and maritime landscapes. The government has designated Deendayal Port, Paradip Port and VO Chidambaranar (VOC) Port located in Gujarat, Odisha and Tamil Nadu, respectively, as green hydrogen hubs. Industry leaders have also committed over ₹1.5 lakh crore in investments across the ports-linked value chain.

Recent market signals further strengthen India's competitiveness. The SECI green ammonia tender for the fertilizer sector achieved price discoveries averaging around \$600 per tonne, nearly 45 per cent lower than comparable global auctions such as Germany's, setting new international benchmarks. Similar trends are expected for green methanol, reaffirming India's potential as a cost-competitive producer of green e-fuels. Ports offer several advantages as green hydrogen hubs, including proximity to industrial clusters, established infrastructure, and access to international markets.

The shift provides an opportunity for

ports to become Asia's new gateway for green shipping fleets. The recently launched report, 'Gateway to Green' —assessing port readiness for green hydrogen transition to India, published by RMI and the Indian Port Association (IPA) — offers insights into Indian ports' infrastructure and investment requirements to transition into green hydrogen hubs. It also outlines actions that port authorities must take to capitalise on these opportunities.

EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES
The emerging green hydrogen landscape presents opportunities for ports to evolve from mere trade enablers into key players in the green hydrogen value chain, integrating roles spanning production, storage, distribution, and demand facilitation. With targeted measures in place, ports can now take a more active role in enabling a green hydrogen ecosystem.

The three designated green hydrogen port-based hubs — Deendayal (Kandla), Paradip, and VOC (Tuticorin) — have allocated close to 4,500 acres of land for production, storage, bunkering, and refuelling infrastructure. To build on this foundation, a tiered land allocation strategy could be introduced prioritising off-takers of hydrogen derivatives, such as fertilizers, ammonia, and steel. Such a



PORTS. Driving the green agenda

strategy would ensure land use efficiency, stimulate demand, and enable trade of hydrogen-embedded products.

Indian ports already handle nearly five million tonnes of ammonia and methanol annually. Ports such as VOC and Jawaharlal Nehru Port, which already handle ammonia and green ammonia cargo with dedicated storage, can leverage this existing infrastructure and fast track their ambitions to scale.

Adopting a hub-based model through public and private collaboration could be a pragmatic path. Ports that adopt common user infrastructure (CUI) systems can bridge infrastructure gaps by minimising redundant capital expenditure.

A CUI model, where essential infrastructure such as hydrogen pipelines, storage, or desalinated water is shared, enables ports to explore new

limited. A persistent and wide goods trade deficit is an added constraint. While it has trade surplus with both the US and the EU it has a ballooning trade deficit with China of around \$100 billion that also poses a strategic vulnerability.

New Delhi's four-pronged self-reliance push involves: filtering high-risk investments and apps; strengthening domestic manufacturing through production-linked incentives in import dependent and emerging sectors including semiconductors; forging supply chain and critical minerals partnerships with trusted countries; and expanding its FTA portfolio — with the UAE, Australia, EFTA and the UK already in place, and ongoing negotiations with the EU and a few others.

All this is work in progress whose urgency and importance cannot be overemphasised.

Meanwhile, US has remained India's top trading partner. However its present 50 per cent tariff complicates the relationship. Negotiations on the bilateral trade agreement (BTA) are however continuing. It is important the two sides agree on a good deal soon. An early conclusion of the FTA with the EU will also be crucial.

THE MULTILATERAL ROAD AHEAD

The WTO's future looks uncertain amidst all this. The very powers that built the system are now weakening its foundations. Some argue that reform, not nostalgia, is the path forward. WTO rulebook certainly needs updating: subsidies, industrial policy, state-enterprises and transparency must all be disciplined anew. Emerging issues — digital trade, technology controls, the overreach of "national security" exceptions and the environment-trade nexus — demand addressing. While a full fledged dispute settlement system needs revival, members must first agree on the rules such a system will adjudicate.

Whether the WTO Ministerial in Cameroon in March 2026 can produce a meaningful way forward looks doubtful. Competing visions loom large:

A US-led two-tier system, dividing the world into "friendly" and "adversarial" camps under differing tariff regimes.

A WTO-minus-US approach, where others uphold multilateral rules while bypassing Washington — though this would not curb distortions from non-market economies.

EU-CPTPP cooperation opening outwards, spanning a new architecture built on high-standard trade norms but may be a tall order for developing countries.

A surge in bi-lateralism, as countries hedge through selective deals while awaiting calmer times.

The rules-based order that once powered globalisation is fraying. Let us hope what replaces it may not be raw power dressed in the language of fairness.

The writer is former Ambassador and Senior Fellow, Delhi Policy Group

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

Strengthening banks
With reference to the editorial 'Expected credit gain' (October 10), the new Expected Credit Loss (ECL) framework is pragmatic and farsighted. The new framework is in line with the aspirations of the Indian banking system to become globally competitive and move towards greater global integration. It will encourage early granular understanding of risk, proactive risk management and will enhance the resilience of the system as it introduces provisioning for potential

future loss. It will also improve transparency and accountability, aligning with global standards. The latest reforms announced by RBI appears to be a precursor to a further consolidation and strengthening of the banking sector.

Kosaraju Chandramouli
Hyderabad

SEBI reforms
This refers to 'SEBI rationalises broker fines, eases bourses rules' (October 10). The recent SEBI reforms to standardise fines and

streamline reporting highlight the need for fairness in market regulation. SEBI has rationalised many penalties, introducing warnings and caps, but smaller brokers may still face higher compliance burdens than larger firms. Past reforms, like those in 2019, overwhelmed many smaller brokers with fines more manageable for bigger players. While current changes aim to reduce these risks by eliminating redundant penalties and standardising fines, continuous monitoring is essential to ensure

fairness without placing excessive pressure on smaller brokers. SEBI must provide targeted support to ensure that these changes do not disadvantage smaller players.
S Balasubramanian
Villupuram, TN
Economic growth
This refers to 'India on track to become \$5 trillion economy by 2027, says Gadkari' (October 10). With the level of economic activities going on in the Indian economy, nominal GDP or even real GDP can be achieved as

being planned. But what is needed in India is inclusive growth. Every sector in the country should optimise its growth. Especially agriculture and labour-intensive manufacturing enterprises should register maximum growth, as they are the main strengths of the Indian economy. Also, there should be sustained human capital formation in different sectors and to ensure that involuntary unemployment is reduced to negligible levels.
S Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

The big jobs bluff in Bihar

The state has an employment problem, but government jobs for all households is certainly an outlandish promise

Promises during election campaigns ought to be taken with more than a pinch of salt — although they are still important because they give us an idea about the larger worldview of the political parties and politicians making them. It is against this backdrop that Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav’s promise of giving a government job to a person in every household in Bihar ought to be evaluated. The numbers are beyond ridiculous.

According to the caste survey conducted by the Bihar government in 2023, the state had 130.7 million people spread across 27.6 million households. Only about two million people held government jobs in the state, according to the data, some of which will be central government jobs. Now, if Tejashwi is to keep his promise, the state will have to increase the number of government jobs by a factor of almost 13, which, in turn, will increase the government’s salary bill by a similar multiple. In 2025-26, Bihar’s spending on salaries is budgeted at ₹54,697 crore. This number multiplied by 13 would be more than ₹7,00,000 crore. This is more than twice the total budgeted spending of Bihar in 2025-26, which is ₹3,16,895 crore. To be sure, this is an underestimate of the spending involved since pensions have not been counted here.

Money is not the only problem here. Unless one is talking about really low-paying government jobs, where the trend has been to outsource to private providers, Bihar will find it difficult to find people to hire. According to the 2024 calendar year *Periodic Labour Force Survey* data, the share of graduates in Bihar’s 18-35-year-old labour force — population working or looking for a job — was just 12.9%, almost half of what this number is in the rest of the country (23%). The numbers are lower for Scheduled Castes (7.4%), Scheduled Tribes (9.4%) and Other Backward Classes (12%), which the RJD claims to be its core social base. The short point is that Bihar neither has the money nor the skilled workforce to roll out what seems to be Yadav’s promise of utopian managerial socialism. The promise is so bizarre that it seems the announcement is not based on even some bare minimum diligence within the party.

One can dismiss it as election rhetoric — the RJD is not the only party to make outlandish promises during an election campaign — or think of it as a sign of the intellectual bankruptcy of the primary pole of political opposition in one of India’s most populous and economically backward states. Tejashwi’s father and the founder of RJD, Lalu Prasad, is one of the central characters in the politics of social justice in India. His political success was based on mobilising the socially discriminated against entrenched feudal oppression. However, Lalu Prasad mistook the means of radical caste mobilisation as an end, whereas the goal should have been to reinvent Bihar’s moribund economy. It is this failure that has prevented Lalu Prasad and his party from winning office on their own in Bihar for two decades now. This historical challenge cannot be overcome by making outlandish promises.

To be sure, the current government has not exactly changed the state’s fortunes. Democracy, in its ideal form, should not be vulgar sloganeering to animate a mass of precarity. It should be driven by a genuine urge to make people’s lives better by making considered and informed policies. Promises such as providing a government job to every household in Bihar are an unfortunate reminder that it is mostly the former variety of democracy that is still around in our country.

Independent India’s voice of non-violence who led a revolution

Jayaprakash Narayan’s life and teachings are a testament to the power of people to bring about social transformation peacefully. His teachings emphasise defending democratic values and working towards the building of a just society

On October 11, 1902, in the *dharm, sanskriti* and *gyan bhoomi* of Bihar, at the confluence of the Ganga and the Ghaghra in the village of Sitabdiara, was born the champion of democracy, Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan. Today, we commemorate his 123rd birth anniversary. Fondly remembered as JP, the architect of *Sampoorna Kranti* (Total Revolution), was a statesman, who never thought about himself, but always placed the concerns of the poor as his topmost priority. The title *Lok Nayak* was bestowed on him by no great personality, but by the loving masses who had assembled at Patna’s Gandhi Maidan on June 5, 1974. On this day, I pay my *naman* (salutations) to this great leader.

JP’s humble beginnings from Sitabdiara helped him stay rooted and always concerned about the problems beleaguering the poor. After completing his primary education from Sitabdiara, he shifted to Patna. The scholarly and nationalistic atmosphere in the city sowed the seeds of nationalism in him. During his intermediate education, the Non-cooperation Movement against the British was sweeping through India. It left a deep impact on him: He shunned all luxuries and adopted *swadeshi*.

During his seven years as a student in the US, JP was attracted towards Marxism, which he thought offered the solution for all of India’s problems. However, upon his return to India and after exploring the feasibility of customising the philosophy of Marxism to the Indian scenario, he realised that democratic socialism and *Sarvodaya* were better suited to address the problems of India. This practical approach bears

witness to JP’s wisdom and statesmanship. It reveals that he was not merely a follower of ideologies but a leader seeking change and transformation in society.

In 1952, he thought Vinoba Bhave’s Bhoodan movement combined with the philosophy of *Sarvodaya* could address the land question in India. His initiatives during 1954-1973, such as the resettlement of the dacoits of Chambal, and the formulation of a non-violent Total Revolution have been acknowledged and recognised worldwide. He constantly yearned to achieve the goals of freedom, equality, brotherhood and peace for the whole of mankind.

Jayaprakashji’s understanding of the concept of the dignity of labour was not theoretical, but stemmed from his own personal experiences. During his student years in the US, he had to support himself financially doing several odd jobs. These experiences gave him insights into the issues concerning the working class, which helped him strengthen his belief that honest labour deserved respect, fair wages, and humane working conditions. He observed that while industrial societies enjoyed prosperity, the working class often lived in poverty. When he returned to India, he carried with him a strong conviction that the foundation of a just society must rest on the welfare of the working class. Significantly, in 1947, he was chosen the president of three important all-India labour organisations, namely, the All-India Railwaymen’s Federation, the All India Postmen and Telegraph Lower Grade Staff Union, and the All India Ordnance Factories Workers Union.

Jayaprakashji’s journey did not end with the freedom movement. He was not attracted to public office, but yearned to do *seva* (service) for the people. In the 1960s, Bihar experienced a terrible famine. Jayaprakashji, along with his associates and followers from the Bhoodan movement, engaged in relief work to alleviate people’s sufferings. During this association with the relief work of Bihar Rahat Committee, he had firsthand experience of the service-to-the-nation approach of the RSS *swayamsevaks*. He was deeply moved.

When he encountered corruption in all walks of life, Jayaprakashji felt the need to inspire the youth of the nation to usher in the revival and



CP Radhakrishnan

India Railwaymen’s Federation, the All India Postmen and Telegraph Lower Grade Staff Union, and the All India Ordnance Factories Workers Union.

Heading to Oscars, movie on forgotten Indian soldiers

Almost all the films that are celebrated as war movies in world cinema are from Hollywood or Europe. Retrospectively, one is tempted to ask the question: Whose world and war do these feature?

Some distinct features mark the war movie genre. A majority of them are about the two World Wars, mostly World War II. They revolve around the bravery and sacrifice, the tactical manoeuvres and strategic failures of white men and their armies. The rest of the world constitutes the white man’s war arena, where the natives are part of the background, either as informants and helpers or, more often, as mere fodder.

For instance, over a million Indian troops served overseas during World War I and around 2.5 million in World War II, of which more than 74,000 Indian troops died in the former and about 87,000 in the latter. These soldiers were fighting as members of the native regiments of colonial armies or as mercenaries for whom the army was an employer or a way out of poverty. They were rarely celebrated as war heroes or martyrs. Few memorials were built for them, and no sagas valorised them. They were all fighting someone else’s wars. If their side won, they got paid; if they were on the side of the vanquished, they were killed or taken as prisoners of war (POWs) to face an uncertain future. In his essay, *An Indian POW in Italy*, Amitav Ghosh

recalls watching war movies with his father, who was a WWII veteran: “When I think back now, it strikes me that some of the best of these war movies were actually prisoner-of-war movies.”

Papa Buka, Papua New Guinea (PNG)’s official entry for the Oscars this year, deals with this erased history of violence. Directed by Dr Biju, a national award winning director (*Saira, Veetillekkulla Vazhi, Perariyathavar, Valiya Chirakulla Pakshikal, Veyilmarangal*), this film, in the Tok Pisin language and shot in PNG, is about the journey of two Indian historians, Anand Kunhiraman and Romila Chatterjee, to PNG to write a book on the Indian soldiers who served with the British and Australian forces during WW II. It is a road movie of sorts, where the duo journeys through remote villages in their attempt to unearth a slice of forgotten history. In the war memorial they visit, there are hundreds of stones without names, memorialising the fallen men whose identities are unknown.

On this journey, their local guide is Papa Buka, an old war veteran. For Chatterjee, this journey is not just an academic one, but also very personal — her maternal grandfather was an Indian soldier who fought for the British army in WW II in PNG. He died in PNG, but there was no information as to how he died or where he was buried. So, for her, it is a personal journey into her own past. For Kunhiraman, it is another kind of journey. An Indian academic



CS Venkiteswaran



The idea of revolution is often synonymous with violence. But Jayaprakashji’s concept of Total Revolution was based on non-violence.

HT ARCHIVE

reconstruction of Indian society. In 1973, when people started losing faith in the institutions of democracy, he restored their hope and faith by calling for Total Revolution from the Paunar Ashram of Vinoba Bhave. The ultimate goal of the Total Revolution movement was to achieve a humanist version of an ideal society. His relentless campaign against the corruption entrenched in the politics of those days was instrumental in establishing the power of people in democracy. He galvanised the masses and channelised their anger into the establishment of a new order in India in 1977. He demonstrated that democracy is not about ruling the people, but about being the voice of the masses.

As a 19-year old, it was an honour and great privilege for me to contribute to the *Sampoorna Kranti* movement as its district organising secretary in Coimbatore. My learnings during this phase, a crucial juncture in the history of India, helped my transformation into a confident and socially aware leader. The movement nurtured within me essential traits of leadership — maturity, ethical judgment, and civic consciousness.

As we fondly remember our beloved Jayaprakashji, let us not fail to acknowledge the unfailing support of his spouse, Prabhavati Devi, who had made a vow of celibacy as an act of selflessness towards the cause of the freedom movement. She channelised and dedicated her energy towards selfless pursuit of the ideals of Gandhiji.

From the Quit India movement of 1942 to Total Revolution in the 1970s, the one constant factor that kept him going was his love for the nation. Even though he had the opportunity to seek any post of his choice in the government, he

never yielded to the lure of office but remained committed to selfless service to the nation. His *tyag bhavna* for the uplift of the poor and the downtrodden is unsurpassable.

Jayaprakashji’s life and teachings are a testament to the power of people to bring about change, no matter how insurmountable the challenges appear. His teachings place emphasis on defending democratic values and working towards a society where equality, justice, and peace prevail. He was a visionary leader, who refused to separate political freedom from social and economic justice. His teachings continue to inspire not just politicians but every Indian citizen who believes in the ideals of democracy, liberty, and equality.

The idea of revolution is often synonymous with violence. But Jayaprakashji’s concept of Total Revolution was based on non-violence. Through a non-violent people’s movement, he was able to lay the foundation of a Bharat that would uphold the values of humanism and ethics.

As we fondly remember and pay our tributes to this great leader, we should pledge to remain vigilant custodians of the democracy that he helped to defend.

Our true act of homage on this day will be to awaken our conscience and work towards the betterment of Bharat with selflessness, service, and truth. For all his contributions towards nation-building, he was awarded the Bharat Ratna, which I believe, was too little for this great man.

CP Radhakrishnan is Vice-President of India.



Papa Buka is an enigmatic and charming character, at home both in time and space. NAFA PRODUCTIONS/AKSHAY PARIJA PRODUCTIONS

from an oppressed community in Kerala, he has struggled his way up, fighting caste insults and prejudices. For him, it is a journey that connects the destinies of indigenous people across the world.

Papa Buka is an enigmatic and charming character, at home both in time and space. An aged man who embodies the island’s troubled history, he knows the nooks and crannies of the forest, its trails, and the tribes inhabiting it. His presence is also ethereal in a way: He joins the historians in their pursuit and dies in the middle of the journey, soon after his revelations about Chatterjee’s grandfather and his death. Though she is unable to locate the actual site of burial that only Papa Buka knew, there is a sense of closure to her pursuit.

But the fact that she never finds the actual site

also leaves within her a more profound and deeper connect with the Island. It remains a space where memories and lineages lie buried deep, not yet physically entombed or memorialised, thus transforming it into something deeper and more profound. It is the wound of history that cannot be healed by memorialising, but only by debunking the very idea of war as nothing but murder. The Einstein quote at the beginning says it all: “It is my conviction that killing under the cloak of war is nothing but an act of murder.”

Biju’s visual and narrative treatment, like in his earlier films, is detached, always one step removed from the characters. There is no effort at psychologising or entering into the minds of the characters; the camera seldom goes close to them. The mid and long shots necessarily make the viewer look at the characters from a distance by placing them within the larger context of their milieu, surroundings, and landscapes. The striking frontal portraits of the indigenous people in all their sartorial splendour at the beginning and end of the film bracket the narrative, as if the whole film is a message from beyond, the history that comes back to haunt us.

Papa Buka is a significant film not only as a co-production between two erstwhile colonial people who went through similar historical experiences. It is also a movie about the yet-to-be-written histories of their entangled pasts; the tragic junctures where the destinies of faraway continents were connected by colonial plunder and wars.

It is also a movie that looks at world history from the point of view of the non-whites, the people who paid the price for colonial campaigns, yet were invisibilised and silenced.

CS Venkiteswaran is a scholar of cinema and a filmmaker. The views expressed are personal

Clothes and culture: Legal status of dressing choices

In a recent incident, members of a fringe Right-wing outfit stormed into the rehearsal for the Miss Rishikesh pageant and objected to women contestants wearing “western clothes”, claiming it “polluted the culture of Uttarakhand”. This is not an outlier — it is part of a long history of using clothes to curtail women’s participation and access to public spaces.

Women’s bodies have long been, and continue to be, the site of policing and the imposition of collective morality. In India, clothes are not seen as mere self-expression but as symbols loaded with affective meaning. In some schools and colleges, the *hijab* is seen as antithetical to education; in temples, the lack of a head covering is read as immoral or westernised; in public spaces, short skirts or sleeveless tops are equated with promiscuity. One politi-

cian even compared women in “bad dresses” to Surpanakha from the Ramayana, whose punishment was to have her nose cut off.

Two problems arise when meaning is externally imposed on women’s clothing. First, clothing is essentialised to infer things about a person’s religion, caste, class, gender identity or sexuality. These inferences, born of stereotypes, reinforce harmful assumptions: Veiled women “threaten public order”; women in skirts “invite” assault; pageant contestants “destroy” culture. Second, these assumptions translate into exclusion—women are denied access to schools, temples, workplaces, and public life, sometimes violently.

While the law often provides answers, it

remains silent on the right to dress. Clothing restrictions are usually contested through other rights, such as religion, gender equality, or minority culture. However, there is no explicit legal protection for dressing choices as such. Can a woman’s choice to wear something non-religious or non-cultural, like a humble T-shirt and pants (at the centre of controversy in Uttarakhand), be protected under Indian law? One viable route lies in Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution — the right to freedom of speech and expression.

Article 19(1)(a) protects expression through words, art, or gestures, but courts have rarely extended this to dress. A notable exception is *Aishat Shifa v. State of Karnataka* (2022), where the Supreme Court considered the ban on *hijabs* in educational institutions. The split verdict saw Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia hold that wearing the *hijab* was protected expression, while Justice Hemant Gupta disagreed, stating that uniform codes amounted to a reasonable restriction. The issue awaits a larger bench’s consideration.



Jwalika Balaji

Locating dress within the right to expression has clear advantages. This approach does not depend on any religious or cultural claim, and all forms of clothing can be protected simply as self-expression. Once it is established that the dress is a form of expression by the wearer, any restriction must satisfy the “reasonable restrictions” test under Article 19(2). This requires justification on grounds such as national security, public order, etc. The recent Supreme Court decision in *Kaushal Kishor v. State of UP* (2023) strengthens this by allowing Article 19 rights to be enforced against private parties. This could be an extremely useful tool for women, for whom unreasonable restrictions may follow from the classroom to the boardroom and into the prayer room. Clothes are often windows into the self and if the self has to exist with dignity, autonomy and agency, the right to dress per one’s self-expression will have to be fiercely safeguarded, thread-by-thread, and stitch-by-stitch.

Jwalika Balaji is research fellow, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. The views expressed are personal

{ EDITOR’S PICK }

HT’s editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

FICTION AS RESISTANCE

This year’s winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, László Krasznahorkai, belongs to a long tradition of European writers who saw fiction as a medium to reflect on the human condition. Krasznahorkai, a post-communist Hungarian writer, is in the lineage of authors such as Franz Kafka, who created their own unique dystopias to remain true to their calling.

Krasznahorkai’s postmodernist fiction is not easy to read. His sentences sometimes extend across pages, and the meditative prose is demanding. Of his many novels, we recommend *The Melancholy of Resistance*, translated by George Szirtes, an award-winning poet and translator, into English. The novel meanders through events in a small Hungarian town when a circus troupe arrives with a huge stuffed whale. The language in the book — complex thoughts drawn in over-long paragraphs, yet singularly evocative — is reminiscent of his original vocation as a professional pianist.



The Melancholy of Resistance László Krasznahorkai 1989

The EU must stand up to Trump



JOSEPH E STIGLITZ

On July 27, the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) announced a preliminary trade and investment deal in Turnberry, Scotland. But nothing was actually signed, and even if it had been, it would not have been worth the paper it was written on. After all, US President Donald Trump did sign a formal trade agreement with Canada and Mexico during his first term, only to tear

it up as soon as he returned to office. Any agreement with Trump therefore must be regarded as, at best, a temporary truce. It will hold only until America's capricious leader sees or hears someone or something that makes a new whim official policy. Still, it is worth remembering the specifics of the Turnberry deal, because some were quite peculiar. Given that Europe has 30 per cent more people and only a slightly smaller economy (in purchasing power terms) than the US, standard bargaining theory would imply that any deal would be roughly symmetrical. Instead, it was entirely one-sided. In addition to the US imposing unfair tariffs on European imports, Europe committed itself to investing in the US and purchasing US energy. But, of course, the EU can promise no such thing. As I have jokingly pointed out to EU trade negotiators, Europe is not (yet) a

centrally planned economy. The EU cannot force Europeans to make specific investments or purchases; the Turnberry numbers were offered merely to placate Mr Trump, allowing him to boast that he had used America's power to claim another scalp and extract more of the value from global supply chains. Who cares if international law was trampled? That is simply what great powers do. Just look at Russia, with its war of conquest against a peaceful neighbour. As I expected, the cease-fire did not last. Less than a month later, Mr Trump was back to threatening Europe, this time over its Digital Markets Act, which seeks to ensure market competition, and the Digital Services Act, which aims to mitigate harms imposed on Europe by digital platforms. Among other things, the EU requires some "content moderation" to prevent the kind of algorithmic amplifica-

tion of incitement to violence and misinformation that had such disastrous consequences in Myanmar, and it insists on taxing big technology companies. Contrary to what Mr Trump seems to think, these regulations are not discriminatory against the US and its tech giants. They are applied uniformly against all firms operating in the EU. They represent the outcome of a long deliberative process in which EU regulators and lawmakers carefully weighed the benefits and costs associated with alternative measures in the context of a rapidly changing world with rapidly changing technology. As in all such processes, views differed, with some worrying that the rules were too restrictive. But I and many others worry that the rules are not restrictive enough. The tech giants still exercise too much market power, conduct too little content moderation, and continue to abuse privacy rights. The situation is having serious adverse effects on European society, especially its young people and its democratic politics.

The question facing the EU now, however, is different. Whatever their views on existing regulations, Europeans must decide whether to surrender their sovereignty and democratic processes to a bullying authoritarian populist who is supported (and often directed) by America's own tech oligarchs. By now, we should all know that capitulation will lead only to more demands down the road. It makes no sense to fold to a country that is governed by a lawless president-king, a man driven entirely by personal obsessions, misconceptions about economics, and unjustified — and therefore unsolvable — grievances. European values are too important to be traded away. Yes, there may be short-run costs to standing up to Mr Trump, especially for firms that depend on the US market. But while economists have long recognised that there are gains from trade when it is conducted on fair terms, Mr Trump is trying to extort as much value added from global supply chains as he can, which means that the gains to Europe are greatly

diminished — and may even be negative. The EU has the economic strength to withstand Mr Trump's tariffs, especially now that it is investing in rearmament to win the war in Ukraine. Moreover, the losses that come from giving in would be much larger. The principles that have governed international trade since World War II are critical for trade to be broadly beneficial. Without the rule of law, markets do not deliver efficient or fair outcomes. Investment would be discouraged, growth would suffer, and democracy would be further undermined. When Chinese President Xi Jinping stood up to Mr Trump, Mr Trump backed down. And more recently, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has made it clear that some things cannot be compromised: His country's sovereignty, dignity, rule of law, and democracy. The EU should do the same. The author is a Nobel laureate in economics. ©Project Syndicate, 2025



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Investment strategy for CMs



PLAIN POLITICS ADITI PHADNIS

Why do some chief ministers come to power ruling for decades, while others go home at the end of their term, sometimes never to be heard of again? In other words, what constitutes the political capital of a chief minister? And what gives them a place in history books? Caste arbitrage to secure the top state job is passe, as explanations go. Ramakrishna Hegde got the job as chief minister of Karnataka *because* he was an unthreatening Brahmin in a landscape dominated by the clash of powerful and ambitious Vokkaligas and Lingayats. Jayalalithaa got it *despite* being a Brahmin in a state like Tamil Nadu, where opposition to Brahminism was a political ideology. This kind of politics can get you one spell in the job. But more than one term depends, almost entirely, on what you've done in your first term. Take Bihar, where polls have just been announced. Till today, Nitish Kumar and his supporters like to claim he is "Sushasan Babu", a description he gave to himself in his first full five-year tenure (technically second because he became chief minister for the first time from March 3 to March 10, 2000, but that was only a nominal stint) from 2005 to 2010. He told *Business Standard* how he found only

Remington typewriters and paper strewn on the floor of the chief minister's secretariat when he entered his office. He wrote out his first order by hand and copied it manually on another piece of paper because there was no carbon. *The Economist* wrote in 2004: "Bihar... has become a byword for the worst of India: of widespread and inescapable poverty; of corrupt politicians indistinguishable from the mafia dons they patronise; of a caste-ridden social order that has retained the worst feudal cruelties; of terrorist attacks by groups of 'Naxalite' Maoists; of chronic misrule that has allowed infrastructure to crumble, the education and health systems to collapse, and law and order to evaporate." Bihar's turnaround story is too well documented to bear repetition here. But most of the moves in Nitish Kumar's first term were administrative and caste-neutral: Reviving the state-owned Bihar Bridge Construction Corporation (which eventually posted profit), pushing it to build bridges in a state where floods are routine occurrences. New schools were built and plans were made to hire 200,000 new teachers with funding from the World Bank. Key medical services like radiological and pathological testing were outsourced to private parties with subsidies for low-income groups. The Bihar State Electricity Board was reorganised with generation and distribution reform. Having got one term, in his second, he consolidated: A scheme offering free bicycles to girls, the recognition that women could be better administrators, and reserving positions for them in running schools.... The net result? His appeal as an administrator continues to strike a chord among voters. Much of this work was done in his first term. Jyoti Basu, the longest-serving

chief minister of West Bengal, achieved much of what he is remembered for today, between 1977 and 1982. Land reforms and Operation Barga — recording the names of sharecroppers (*bargadars*), which protected them from eviction from land and ensured they received their rightful share of the crop — brought the Communist Party of India (Marxist), part of the Left Front, to power repeatedly, and Basu was the man whom the bloc trusted the most to lead the government. Land that was above the legal ceiling was also vested in the state and redistributed to landless peasants, creating a natural constituency. As chief minister, he piloted the first decision of his Cabinet: That all political prisoners be set free. A few investments. Decades of power. Chandrababu Naidu's administrative acumen is well known. But people forget some of his crucial social welfare interventions. As far back as 1999, in his first term, he launched the Deepam scheme: Providing gas stoves to women along with one million gas cylinder connections. The World Bank noted that his administration prioritised economic reform, infrastructure, and technology over large-scale welfare populism. While that cost him electoral setbacks, it was also the route for instant brand recall and he's still there, living to fight another day, 30 years after the launch of his Telugu Desam Party, following the toppling of the government of his father-in-law, N T Rama Rao. Glib talk about caste equations can only explain a part of it. But deconstruct successive election victories and somewhere the anchor will be the administration the government provided in its first term. Falter on this front — and you lose.

CJI, IPS, IAS & Homebound

Education, reservations, and govt jobs are meant to bring equality and dignity. That we are a long way from it is evident in the shoe thrown at the CJI and the suicide of Haryana IPS officer. The film *Homebound* too has a lesson

Three things have come together to raise a combination of issues related to caste and minorities that India has failed to resolve even 75 years after its Constitution was born. The caste issue, of course, has persisted through centuries. The three things: The shoe-throwing at the Dalit Chief Justice of India in his court; a senior Dalit IPS officer in Haryana shooting himself and leaving a suicide note about years of discrimination, victimisation, and bottled-up fury; and, third, the somewhat counter-intuitive success among the well-heeled of *Homebound*, by Neeraj Ghaywan, the most prominent and powerful Dalit filmmaker in Bollywood. This is no hit to rival *Saiyaara*, *Pathaan*, *Jawan*, *Animal*, *Baahubali* or *Kantara*. It also did not have any of the usual build-up: PR interviews, sponsored (paid) reviews across many publications, social media influencers and definitely no big stars. If Vidya Balan's Reshma in *The Dirty Picture* told us the three-word mantra that makes a movie successful — entertainment, entertainment, entertainment — *Homebound* fails it. It makes no pretence of offering any. It wasn't designed for a ₹100-crore opening. Yet, after a very slow start, it picked up through sheer word of mouth, especially among the upper-crust professionals and younger entrepreneurs — say, those with eight-figure annual incomes or in high sevens, the socio-economic influencer class. Evidence comes from the most expensive, if small, halls in multiplexes running to full capacity in the metros. The social buzz that I pick up in these circles isn't that the film was a bore, exaggerated, overly political, or the usual line we keep hearing, "it's obvious that reservations haven't resolved inequality in over 75 years". So, what else can "we" do? Better to just give "them" good education, facilities, and let "them" compete. That mission fails at the "we" and "them". On the contrary, among those watching *Homebound*, you'd see empathy with the struggles of three very young and poor rural Indians with education, smarts and aspiration. There's audience acknowledgement of how the "system" was always loaded to fail them. So, what do we do now? For perspective, these three young people represent more than one-third of India's population, Dalits and Muslims. Education, reservations, and government jobs are meant to bring equality and dignity. That



NATIONAL INTEREST SHEKHAR GUPTA

we are a long way from that is evident in the shoe thrown at the Chief Justice and, sadder still, the "suicide" of Haryana Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) Y Puran Kumar. By the way, his wife and 2001-batchmate Amneet P Kumar, also a Dalit, is in the IAS. She's the one who filed the FIR blaming the state DGP and a district SP for her husband's victimisation. Here we stand then. If a CJI, an IPS, and an IAS officer cannot get dignity and equality, it shows our systemic injustices and prejudices are too deep and visceral to be fixed after 75 years of reservations. We must persist, not roll back. That the three young friends in *Homebound*, Chandan Kumar (Valmiki), Mohammed Shoaib Ali and Sudha Bharti (also a Dalit), played by Vishal Jethwa, Ishaan Khatter and Janhvi Kapoor, respectively, are competing to be recruited as police constables, brings back a conversation with "Babu" Jagjivan Ram in 1985. I was reporting for *India Today* in the first upper (general) caste protests as the Mandal Commission report became a talking point. Ram was now out of power and had time. For me, he made the best case ever for reservations. He talked of an old friend, a Scheduled Caste (nobodys used Dalit yet) shoe entrepreneur in Agra with big exports, lavish house, an imported car and millions. Yet he was pleading with Babuji to get his son recruited as an assistant sub inspector (ASI) in the UP Police. "You've got all this wealth, why would you want your son to become just an ASI," Babuji asked him. He said, "However rich we may be, a Brahmin will never treat me or my son with respect. But if he's an ASI, all juniors, including Brahmins, will salute him. That's how reservations bring equality and power," Babuji said. The picture is a bit more complex in *Homebound*, as Chandan insists on competing in the general category. If he discloses his caste (Valmiki), he says that in the police, they would condemn him to sweeping duties. Sudha ultimately wants to graduate and compete in the UPSC. And Shoaib, is so street-smart he outsells his tie-clad managers while being just a peon in a white goods company. The big boss spoke to him in amazement and used the popular corporate description "bechoor" for one who's brilliant at selling anything. He's on way to becoming a tie-clad salesman himself until he's humiliated at the drunken party at the boss' house while watching

Racing on code, winning on nerves

EYE CULTURE AYUSHI SINGH

The moment the five red lights fade, the world tightens to a point. Engines snarl. Tires bite. The air itself seems to tremble. A million dollars worth of machinery explodes forward, and in that heartbeat between stillness and motion, Formula 1 begins again. "It's lights out and away we go!" the phrase rings through the air, as it always does, but the race unfolding today isn't quite the one fans grew up with. For decades, Formula 1 was about instinct — the split-second courage to brake late, to gamble on grip, to chase a line that numbers couldn't explain. Two-time F1 World Champion Fernando Alonso once joked, "I knew he'd brake first. He has a wife and kids waiting at home." It was wit, yes, but also truth — the quiet arithmetic of fear and nerve, solved at 300 kilometres an hour. Now, that calculation has a new participant. Somewhere between the garage and the grid, instinct has started sharing the cockpit with code. Algorithms now study every millisecond of motion, every gear shift, every angle of tire wear. Peter Bayer, chief executive officer of Red Bull Racing puts it simply: "The fight we're fighting every day is of hundreds and thousands of a second. For a human being, it can be overwhelming." That sliver of time — too fine for

human reaction — is where artificial intelligence has made its home. It doesn't flinch, or second-guess, or sweat. It doesn't imagine victory or dread failure. It just knows. Torque, traction, temperature, wind — every variable modelled before the race begins. What drivers once felt in their fingertips now lives inside a dashboard of graphs. The chaos that once defined F1 is being quietly rehearsed in code. The modern F1 car runs as much on data as on fuel. Ferrari now feeds its history into IBM's WatsonX, predicting outcomes before they happen. McLaren Automotive's engineers push millions of virtual laps through Google Cloud. Red Bull runs billions of simulations on Oracle systems, racing the same race thousands of times before Sunday ever arrives. It's no longer the pit wall of cigarette smoke and gut instinct. The theatre of tension has shifted from faces to figures. Risk has been tidied up, turned into a variable that can be managed. And yet, some things resist being digitised. São Paulo, 2024: Max Verstappen starts 17th on a track glazed with rain. By the first corner, he's already passing cars that, on paper, should have beaten him. Seventy-one laps later, he crosses the line first. No algorithm saw it coming. That drive — raw, defiant, instinctive — reminded everyone watching that data can define margins, but never magic. Progress always has a price. The

sport is smarter now, safer too, but perhaps less alive. Formula 1 once thrived on the edge of chaos, on the unpredictable blur between skill and luck. Today, every gust of wind, every drop of rain, every twitch of rubber has been reduced to numbers. Surprise is slowly being engineered out of existence. And when the machines do make mistakes, it feels different. There's no visible panic, no flash of regret, just silence and data. The human theatre of triumph and failure has slipped into the background, buried somewhere in a server farm. Something else is fading — personality. The sport's great drivers once carried an aura, a sense of danger, of unpredictability. Now, their genius is being flattened into trends and metrics. Formula 1 still has its heroes, but their edges are being smoothed by code. Still, the heart refuses to stop beating. The rain will always fall where it's not supposed to. Some drivers will always brake later than he should. For all its simulations, the sport remains addicted to the one thing machines can't reproduce — uncertainty. Because without risk, speed is just math. And a win? Just data, executed perfectly. Technology has rewritten how Formula 1 speaks, but not what it feels. Beneath all the graphs and telemetry, every race still begins the same way — a pulse, a breath, and the roar that follows when the eighth gear kicks in as the lights go out.

Do movie sequels really work?



YES, BUT... SANDEEP GOYAL

The year 2025 has been raining sequels. But unfortunately, the box office has not been very kind to most of them. *War 2*, starring Hrithik Roshan, Jr NTR, and Kiara Advani, grossed ₹364.35 crore (₹169.39 crore for the Hindi version) but has still been declared a flop — its production budget was said to be upwards of ₹400 crore — and the YRF Spy Universe production has left behind a trail of red. *Housefull 5*, which featured a massive ensemble cast including Akshay Kumar, Riteish Deshmukh, Abhishek Bachchan, Jacqueline Fernandez, Sanjay Dutt, and Jackie Shroff, was reportedly made with a budget of ₹375 crore but ended up with a box-office collection of only ₹304 crore worldwide, with India contributing ₹234 crore. Verdict: Average to flop, despite being only second to *Chhavaa* in collections in 2025.

Baaghi 4 starring Tiger Shroff, Sanjay Dutt, Sonam Bajwa, and Harnaaz Sandhu was made on a budget of about ₹80 crore. It had a struggling box-office run, managing to earn worldwide gross of around ₹93.19 crore by its second week. Again, deemed a flop. *Dhadak 2*, starring Siddhant Chaturvedi and Tripti Dimri, had an estimated budget of ₹40 crore but grossed just over ₹20.75 crore in its first 10 days at the box office, closing eventually at ₹29 crore. Declared a major flop. *Raid 2* starring Ajay Devgn, Riteish Deshmukh, and Vaani Kapoor, made with a reported ₹120 crore was the only sequel to buck the trend this year. The film earned over ₹242 crore worldwide, becoming a significant commercial success. But Devgn too had his downer in another sequel, *Son of Sardaar 2*, which featured him with Mrunal Thakur in the lead roles. The film was reportedly made on a budget of ₹150 crore but went on to become a massive box-office disaster, earning only ₹65.38 crore worldwide. Again, a flop verdict. Now let us look at the originals. *War 1* clocked ₹475.50 crore and was declared a blockbuster. The Housefull franchise kicked off with ₹117 crore. Versions 2, 3, and 4 did ₹108 crore, ₹110 crore, and ₹276 crore, respectively.

Baaghi launched with a box-office haul of ₹94 crore, climbed to ₹158.24 crore in Version 2 and tapered off at ₹137.05 crore for the third sequel. The first *Raid* was a hit at ₹127.42 crore. *Son of Sardaar* had a great start at ₹139 crore — which is why the sequel has been more than disappointing. For the record, even *Singham*, which started at ₹157 crore dipped to ₹140 crore in the sequel. So lukewarm sequels is not just a 2025 phenomenon. With all these statistics before us, one is left to wonder whether it was wise that a number of other planned sequels did not see the light of day. *Jagga Jasoos 2*, *Munna Bhai Chale America*, *Dostana 2*, *Ra One Sequel*, *PK 2*, *Brahmastra Next* were all rumoured, and sometimes even announced, but never really took off. Movie sequels generally "work" financially by leveraging the proven popularity of an original film. Sequels usually underperform the original when they themselves lack an original story. While some sequels fail, many highly successful franchises demonstrate that sequels can work well when they expand on a beloved universe or offer audiences a chance to revisit characters they have already connected with, and liked. So where did Bollywood

mess up? Studios invest in sequels because they are built on a known and liked story, characters, and world, making them a safer financial bet than a completely new, untested concept. A successful first film already has a built-in audience eager to see more stories and characters from that universe. Returning to a popular franchise allows studios to benefit from existing brand recognition, which is a powerful marketing advantage. Sequels can fail if they are superfluous, don't add anything new to the original story, or lack a focused plot, which summed up much of Bollywood in 2025. Sequels can risk losing their audience if they are too similar to the original (self-plagiarism) or too different from what fans expected. Audiences may turn out for sequels but if they don't enjoy them as much as fresh, original films, then the rehashed ones face rejection. Well-executed sequels can expand the movie's mythology and deepen the established world, making for a more engaging experience. But there is no universal formula to follow. The disasters of 2025 should be a big lesson for sequel producers. The author is chairman of Rediffusion





The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

ON NEW GROUND

Engagement with Taliban acknowledges that, in a competitive neighbourhood, ties with Kabul are a strategic necessity

EVER SINCE THE Taliban seized Kabul in August 2021, India has engaged with it gradually and incrementally. A big breakthrough came in January 2025, when Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met Afghanistan's Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, in Dubai. Now on his first official visit to India, Muttaqi on Friday met External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, who announced that India will upgrade ties and re-open its embassy in Kabul. This follows their positive conversation in May, days after the India-Pakistan ceasefire following the Pahalgam terror attack, which was unequivocally condemned by the Taliban. The series of engagements confirms that New Delhi recognises the ground reality that the Taliban is the only force, for now, that appears capable of controlling all of Afghanistan. It is also an acknowledgement that, in a highly competitive neighbourhood, maintaining ties with the Taliban is a geostrategic necessity.

Relations between the Taliban and Pakistan have deteriorated sharply in the recent past. Islamabad has accused the Taliban of sheltering the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and has carried out airstrikes inside Afghan territory targeting alleged hideouts. As recently as Thursday, the Taliban blamed Pakistan for explosions in Kabul and Paktika province. Meanwhile, Pakistan's mass expulsion of Afghan nationals has further strained ties. In this fraught context, India's position was evident in Jaishankar's remarks to Muttaqi on Friday, where he stressed that India and Afghanistan have a "common commitment towards growth and prosperity", which are "endangered by the shared threat of cross-border terrorism" and that there must be "coordinated efforts" to "combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations". New Delhi should use its growing ties with the Taliban to help prevent Afghanistan from turning into a launchpad for anti-India terror groups.

Beyond food, healthcare, disaster relief, and infrastructure projects, India has shown support for the Taliban on the global stage recently by joining Pakistan, China, and Russia in opposing US President Donald Trump's bid to take over Bagram airbase in Afghanistan. The Jaishankar-Muttaqi meeting makes it clear that the Taliban wants India to engage more with Afghanistan, citing "long civilisational and people-to-people ties for centuries." To be sure, this growing entente coexists with a disquieting reality: The Taliban remains an autocratic regime with scant regard for human rights, particularly those of women. As recently as Monday, the UN Human Rights Council agreed to establish an "ongoing, independent investigative mechanism" to probe abuses in Afghanistan. This is also why, despite greater engagement, India still refrains from formally recognising the Taliban government. To not talk, however, carries its own risks. Beijing has already signed major investment and security agreements with the Taliban, and India cannot afford to let Afghanistan, a country of immense regional importance, drift entirely into China's orbit. New Delhi must therefore maintain a cautious engagement with Kabul, balancing pragmatic interests with its commitment to the well-being of Afghanistan's people.

DEATH OF A POLICEMAN

IPS officer Y Puran Kumar's suicide raises disturbing questions of discrimination and impunity. It must be probed fairly

WERE IT NOT for the tragic circumstances of his death, Y Puran Kumar would have been seen as an example of social mobility and of the upholding of the Indian Constitution's promise of equality. He was a Scheduled Caste (SC) Indian Police Service officer of the Haryana cadre; his wife, Amneet P Kumar, is an SC IAS officer, and his brother-in-law is an MLA in Punjab. On the face of it, Kumar and his family had reached the upper echelons of government and politics. His suicide and the eight-page note he leaves behind, which alleges systemic discrimination, including by senior IPS officers, however, casts a shadow on that image. It also raises disturbing questions about entrenched biases that cramp and distort institutional spaces. These questions must be addressed, not evaded.

The allegations of "mental and administrative torture" and "caste-based discrimination, public humiliation, targeted mental harassment and atrocities" by senior officers in Haryana in Kumar's dying declaration must be probed. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCS) has directed the Chief Secretary and Director General of Police, Chandigarh, to submit an action taken report in seven days. The state government and police must investigate Kumar's suicide urgently, in a transparent manner. The temptation to close ranks in the face of public and judicial scrutiny must be avoided. Issues of embedded prejudice and discrimination and their effect on the mental health of those at the receiving end are too important to be brushed under the carpet. This must be a moment for reflection and introspection for the police.

Caste is a proven fact in crime and punishment in India. The Status of Policing in India Report (2025) by Common Cause and Lokniti found that victims of torture are "most often from marginalised communities" and that police personnel across states see certain SC and ST communities as "criminal". The survey also found that "one in every four Scheduled Caste (SC) police personnel think that Dalits do not get justice". The caste-based, and even casteist, nature of policing in India is an unfortunate remnant of a colonial structure that urgently needs to be consigned to the past. Doing so, however, is easier said than done, and requires police forces — particularly at the leadership level — to be open and sensitive as they turn the searchlight inwards. Kumar's death and his allegations must not be swept under the institutional carpet. The Haryana police cannot allow discrimination to go unchecked and unpunished within.

THE WORK OF PEACE

Nobel to Maria Corina Machado shows that democracy is a work in progress and must be defended every day

OVER 20 YEARS ago, when Maria Corina Machado first confronted Venezuela's deep institutional rot, she knew the choice was clear: It would be ballots over bullets. As she challenged the authoritarian regimes of Hugo Chavez and his successor Nicolas Maduro, demanding free and fair elections and campaigning against their repressive measures, she was tried for treason, stripped of her seat in the National Assembly, repeatedly threatened with physical violence, barred from election and forced to go into hiding. That she has never stopped speaking up and reaching out to her beleaguered fellow citizens is a measure of her great personal courage. For the Nobel Committee, which has honoured her long fight with the Peace Prize for 2025, it is also an exemplar of what it takes to keep the flame of democracy alive.

At a time of deepening authoritarianism around the world, this year's Peace Prize acknowledges that the work of democracy is never done, that it must be defended as much against tyranny as against cynicism and indifference. Democracy, as the Nobel Committee has said, "depends on people who refuse to stay silent, who dare to step forward despite grave risk and who remind us that freedom must never be taken for granted". The refusal to be mute in the face of despotism and cruelty often comes at great personal cost — imprisonment, exile, violence and even death — but this is what makes the fight so precious.

Peace, of course, is not just the absence of war. Peace can exist only where there is freedom, where people have the right to choose and where they have a voice and hand in shaping their nation's future. The honouring of Machado's tireless efforts to restore democracy in her country is an endorsement of the fact that the work of peace is not just conducted at the high diplomatic table; it happens in the trenches of the everyday struggle for justice and in the labour of all those who resist tyranny at every level.



VIVEK KATJU

AFGHANISTAN'S FOREIGN MINISTER Amir Khan Muttaqi's visit to India is a time to mainly look forward but also to remain mindful of past India-Afghanistan developments. The latter is to ensure that India's policies towards the Afghan Taliban proceed positively but soberly. They should not be marked by the unrealistic enthusiasm that its foreign and security establishment displayed towards the Afghan republic in its closing years.

India's Afghanistan approaches have to be framed within a changing environment in its western neighbourhood. The US has decided that Pakistan should play a major role in India's immediate and extended western neighbourhood. China is also expanding its influence in this area. Its ties with Pakistan remain ironclad, its influence in Iran and in the Arabian Peninsula has expanded. Russia has accorded diplomatic recognition to the Taliban and its bonds with Iran are strong. It is in this setting that India has to safeguard its interests to its west in the backdrop of Pakistan's implacable enmity. And it is in this regional setting also that Muttaqi is visiting India to promote mutual interests.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Muttaqi on October 10. He announced that India would re-establish its mission in Kabul. It has had a technical team in the Afghan capital since June 2022; hence, the move to formally reopen its embassy was overdue. Jaishankar implied that, for the time being, a chargé d'affaires would be appointed. This indicates that India does not want to give a signal that it is diplomatically recognising the Taliban till there is a consensus in the international community to do so. This is the correct approach.

While it may disappoint the Taliban, it will ensure that it does not ruffle feathers in Washington that India has joined the Moscow-Beijing camp on Afghanistan. It is necessary to signal this especially as India had joined the consensus at the recent Moscow meeting that no country should have military structures in Afghanistan. Soon, India should state that it is for the Taliban to

Afghanistan is key to ensuring that India manages fallout of great power geopolitics to its west

India's Afghanistan approaches have to be framed within a changing environment in its western neighbourhood. The US has decided that Pakistan should play a major role in India's immediate and extended western neighbourhood. China is also expanding its influence in this area. Its ties with Pakistan remain ironclad, its influence in Iran and in the Arabian Peninsula has expanded. Russia has accorded diplomatic recognition to the Taliban and its bonds with Iran are strong.

decide their country's security policies and foreign relations and no one else.

If India reopens its embassy in Kabul, it would have to allow the Taliban to control the Afghan embassy in Delhi sooner rather than later. That would also imply that it would fly the flag of the Afghan emirate. That, too, should not cause India any diplomatic discomfiture because it would not imply formal diplomatic recognition. The fact cannot be overlooked that the Taliban has controlled all Afghan territories since it captured Kabul in 2021. There is no opposition either within or outside the country that can overthrow it. This is a factor that the entire international community has to accept.

Western demands for the Taliban to adhere to universally accepted norms on human rights will continue. But it is unlikely to do so. The group is committed to its Deobandi-Wahhabi interpretation of the Sharia. It will not abandon its theological moorings. Jaishankar did well not to venture into the area of human rights.

This marked a departure from the past. The India-US 2+2 Joint Statement in November 2023 had noted, "The Ministers urged the Taliban to respect the human rights of all Afghans, including women, children, and members of minority groups; and uphold freedom of travel." Jaishankar's silence on the issue is not because India endorses the Taliban approach on these issues but because it has had to do business with states, over the decades, that have pursued almost Taliban-like policies. But they are affluent and, hence, the custodians of human rights in the West have preferred to turn a blind eye to their approach to human rights.

In his opening remarks at the meeting, Jaishankar referred to the "shared threat of cross-border terrorism that both our nations face". These words connote that India stands with the Taliban against Pakistan's covert and overt actions against it. Naturally, Pakistan and China will be wary of India-Taliban cooperation in the security field but it is a natural consequence of threats that

both face from the same quarter.

This is ironic because it was Pakistan that sustained the group for over two and a half decades. Pakistan was instrumental in the Taliban inflicting a strategic defeat on the US to return to power in Afghanistan. What Pakistan obviously overlooked is that, as with other Afghan regimes in power in Kabul, the Taliban would not accept any interference in its India policies. Nor would it hand over its Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) kin to the men in khaki. And, of course, Pakistan also forgot the immutable and historical contradictions between peoples living on the opposite banks of the Indus!

Jaishankar spelt out the areas, stretching from food to health to training and education, where India would cooperate with the Afghan people. He also said that India would complete stalled projects. The Taliban would welcome Indian assistance in these areas but what it would look for is greater liberalisation in the visa regime for students and the sick. India should not hesitate to accept more Afghan visitors subject to security checks. This is vital to take the relationship forward and there is little danger of Afghans wanting to permanently settle in India.

It is also encouraging that Muttaqi desired greater Indian involvement in mining and other sectors of the Afghan economy. Clearly, the Taliban doesn't wish to become China's economic vassal even as it is mindful of the need for greater investment. India cannot afford for Afghanistan to become economically integrated with western China.

The Taliban will have to manage the major powers' interplay and also Pakistani pressures on relations with India. To do so, it wants enhanced Indian engagement in Afghanistan. This is in keeping with traditional Afghan policies. For India, a firm presence in Afghanistan is key to ensuring that it successfully manages any negative impact emanating from great power geopolitics in its western neighbourhood.

The writer is a former diplomat



JYOTIRADITYA M SCINDIA

EVERY TIME I set foot in the Northeast, I feel reenergised. Our Prime Minister calls it the Ashtalakshmi — a region of diversity and opportunity. On my recent three-day visit to Arunachal Pradesh, I experienced this moving mural, each frame brimming with heritage and progress.

My journey began at the Donyi Polo Airport in Hollongi, a shining example of the success of UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik), which has made air travel to India's remotest skies affordable and accessible. In just a few years, the number of airports in the Northeast has grown from nine to 17, four of them in Arunachal Pradesh — a transformation driven by PM Narendra Modi's push for connectivity. When I was in charge of the civil aviation ministry, PM Modi directed us to make these airports more than transit points. Each was envisioned as a window into its land, where bamboo-inspired structures, tribal motifs, and regional architectural designs remind every traveller that modern India has not left its roots behind.

After a smooth three-hour drive, I found myself in Ziro Valley for the Ziro Music Festival, ranked among the world's top music festivals, yet unlike any global spectacle. Every element is designed in an all-natural, eco-friendly setup, ensuring the valley returns to its pristine state once the music fades. Local artisans showcased their crafts, and thanks to Digital India and the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile trinity, cashless payments were effortless.

On stage, a Khasi folk singer followed an indie band from Mumbai; a French guitarist jammed with a local drummer; a Swiss wood sculptor exhibited her work, while a folk artist from Rajasthan laughed alongside

IN ARUNACHAL, INDIA'S STORY

The state is rooted in tradition, yet it looks at the future with confidence

Waste had been turned into compost, solar lamps lit homes, and eco-tourism flourished through homestays built with bamboo and polished stones. Here, fruit plantations of oranges and kiwis thrived alongside weaving cooperatives marketing shawls online through e-Marketplace. Young entrepreneurs spoke proudly of taking their crafts digital, while elders shared wisdom in shaded courtyards. This was the Digital Northeast Vision unfolding in real time.

Apatani farmers. It was Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat in its truest form, where music became a language of togetherness and a celebration of India.

The next morning, the valley breathed in a gentler rhythm — the Apatani way of life. A brisk 8-km walk through the countryside with the young and energetic Chief Minister Pema Khandu unfolded like a living painting — mist trailing over golden paddy fields, flowers blooming, canals glimmering with darting fish, bamboo houses standing proud against the mountain winds. At its heart lay the UNESCO-recognised paddy-fish cultivation system, where ingenuity and nature move in harmony. And then came a moment that has etched itself in my memory: The Apatani people, breaking into song with the playful refrain "*Delhi se aya mera dost*", their voices wrapping around me in such warmth that I felt less a visitor and more as if I had returned home. That emotion continued as we savoured a traditional Apatani meal with steaming millet porridge, bamboo shoot curry, wild greens, and river fish filets.

It was the women of Ziro who left the most lasting impression. Self-help groups, empowered under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana and the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana, are embracing an inclusive livelihood. From weaving textiles dyed in natural hues, to fermenting fruits into pickles and wines, to carving ornaments from bamboo and stone, their enterprises are vessels of culture, dignity, and hope. At the Goodwill Enclosure, I was humbled to meet the 1811 Medium Regiment, our country's guardians, before paying homage to Army martyrs.

In Hong Village, I met Tage Rita Takhe, who

left her engineering career to start Naara Aaba, India's first woman-led kiwi winery. With the support of her family, she transformed her orchard into a thriving enterprise producing wines from kiwi, apple, and guava, each infused with the crisp freshness of mountain air. Her success embodies PM Modi's call for Vocal for Local, Local to Global.

If Ziro was music and soil, Hun Village was discipline and vision. Its spotless streets were adorned with murals and flowering pathways. Waste had been turned into compost, solar lamps lit homes, and eco-tourism flourished through homestays built with bamboo and polished stones. Here, fruit plantations of oranges and kiwis thrived alongside weaving cooperatives marketing shawls online through e-Marketplace. Young entrepreneurs spoke proudly of taking their crafts digital, while elders shared wisdom in shaded courtyards. This was the Digital Northeast Vision unfolding in real time.

In many ways, Arunachal Pradesh offers lessons the world desperately needs: Sustainability rooted in tradition, women-led entrepreneurship, digital empowerment, and community-driven growth. In every corner, I saw the reflection of PM Modi's vision of Digital India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat, Startup India, and Jan Dhan Yojana unfolding into empowering aspirations. Arunachal Pradesh's story is India's story, the story of a nation that is rooted in tradition yet looks at the future with confidence.

The writer is Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region and Union Minister of Communication

OCTOBER 11, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

WORLD BANK ON INDIA

DAVID HOPPER, THE World Bank's top policy official for South Asia, said that the WB would expand its lending to India in the next three years. Hopper added that India was one of the world's most creditworthy nations and had been following every prudent fiscal policy. He projected a growth rate of six per cent over the next three years.

SRI LANKA PEACE TALKS

A SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGH in India's peace efforts was achieved when the Sri Lankan government conceded two major de-

mands of the militant Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF) regarding the functioning of the proposed ceasefire monitoring committee. Leaders of six Sri Lankan Tamil groups in New Delhi accepted Colombo's set of proposals.

CONSCRIPTION LAW

THE SRI LANKAN government rushed through legislation in Parliament to create a national armed reserve and enlist in its ranks any citizen over 18 years for "the defence of the country or to quell rebellion, insurrection or civil commotion". The new law provides for the appointment of a competent author-

ity for manpower mobilisation, the establishment of a reserve affairs council and the establishment and maintenance of any supplementary forces "as deemed necessary by the security needs of a country".

PANELS FOR PRICES

PM RAJIV GANDHI has constituted two cabinet subcommittees on prices — one to deal with the immediate supply situation and the other to prepare long-term strategies to check prices. Both are headed by Finance Minister V P Singh. The cabinet committee on political affairs has been reconstituted following the recent reshuffle of the Council of Ministers.



THE IDEAS PAGE

Rohit deserves better

Rohit Sharma built the team and read the game like few could.
His unceremonious demotion from One Day International captaincy does him a disservice



SANDEEP DWIVEDI

IMRAN KHAN WAS 40 when he hand-held Pakistan to the 1992 World Cup title. By the time the 2027 50-over World Cup is upon us, Rohit Sharma will also be 40. But, like The Khan, he won't have a fairytale farewell. The national selectors ended his ODI captaincy the other day by naming 25-year-old Shubman Gill as his replacement. It was an unusual and unexpected decision with no precedent.

Only the eclectic with no worldly desires or ambitions would have remained unimpacted by the demotion. As for Rohit, he has been a proud captain, a silent chaser of grand dreams and a winner of two ICC tournaments in a matter of months — a rare achievement for a nation that isn't Australia and that has a long history of World Cup heartbreaks.

Indian cricket isn't known to snatch the captain's armband from a player who, in his last outing in India Blues, was the Man of the Match in a winning ICC tournament final. The unreasonable immunity that those with World Cup silverware have enjoyed was not extended to Rohit.

Will the snub hurt Rohit, demotivate him and hasten his retirement? Or will he come out roaring, channel his anger into run-making, be the Tendulkar of the dressing room and end his career like the master did on that magical April 2 evening in 2011 at Wankhede? When Rohit comes out to open the Indian innings with his successor Shubman in Australia in little over a week, the world will get a first hint of the answer to the above questions.

Chief selector Ajit Agarkar gave many reasons for the intriguing Rohit-to-Shubman switch. One of them was about the complexity of having three captains for three formats — Shubman (Tests), Rohit (ODI) and Suryakumar Yadav (T20). In that case, there should be just one all-format captain so that life for the selectors, coaches and administrators would be much simpler.

Then there was one about Rohit getting too few international outings since the world doesn't play too many ODIs, and the former captain had retired from Tests and T20. So, was that Rohit's fault? Isn't it the BCCI's responsibility to ensure that India's ODI specialists get enough match time before the World Cup that really matters? Virat Kohli is in the same boat as Rohit. Will we let the world's best ODI player rust in London?

Before the second Test, days after he was named the ODI captain, Shubman would talk about the importance of Rohit and Virat for India's ODI chances. "There are very few players in the world with such skill, quality and experience. From that perspective, we are definitely looking at them (Rohit and Virat) for 2027," he said. Rohit would have liked to be "looked at" differently — a gaze that was more respectful of his impressive ODI record, which was significantly better than his modest Test numbers.

That's why, when Rohit retired from Tests — apparently, he was forced to — there was



C R Sasikumar

no outrage. The England series result under Shubman's leadership would validate the bold call taken by Agarkar & Co. Gautam Gambhir and Shubman ensured the Test transition was wonderfully seamless. The 2-2 series result in England saw the emergence of new stars and a new India.

Generally, a dressing room with a young captain and a new coach isn't overwhelmingly welcoming for senior players who have had an unquestionable reign in the same premises. A mix of youth and experience isn't always a winning combination; in the real world, it can also mean complex situations with multiple power centres. The easy option here was to defang the senior and empower the young captain. But was it the right decision?

Did the selectors, emboldened by the successful shaping of India's Test future, get carried away? Picking Shubman as Test captain was a bold call but making him the ODI skipper of a team that had Rohit and Virat has a whiff of bravado. In the haste to ride the "New India" wave, the time-tested "Good Old India" was hastily forgotten. Rohit's white-ball leadership is a masterclass for any budding captain and a longer apprenticeship for Shubman would have helped him and India.

Since the time he won five IPL titles, Rohit has known what it takes to win limited-overs games. It is a precious gift only a few possess — it was last seen in MS Dhoni. In three successive ICC events — the 50-over World Cup in 2023, the World T20 in 2024, Champions Trophy in 2025 — India had looked like Australia under Ricky Ponting. Everybody knew their roles in a team with 11 match winners. It was a unit that respected the conditions and played with a definite plan. They were entertaining to watch; they had it in them to sweep this cricket-crazy nation off its feet.

The only way to get the respect of the team, Imran would say, is to perform and set

Did the selectors, emboldened by the successful shaping of India's Test future, get carried away? Picking Shubman as Test captain was a bold call but making him the ODI skipper of a team that had Rohit and Virat has a whiff of bravado. In the haste to ride the 'New India' wave, the time-tested 'Good Old India' was hastily forgotten. Rohit's white-ball leadership is a masterclass for any budding captain and a longer apprenticeship for Shubman would have helped him and India.

an example. Rohit did exactly that. If India were a crack unit, Rohit was on the front line. All through the 2023 World Cup campaign, he would throw caution to the wind, undertake cricket's most difficult task — taking on the best opposition bowlers with a new ball in hand as an opener.

He was a sly captain — he took the field with a mind full of ideas but he always thought on his feet. Well before the 2024 World T20 in the US and West Indies, at the press conference to announce the team, he said he had a plan. It turned out he was banking on the spinners, and it worked wonderfully well. Rishabh Pant's elevation up the order, the use of all-rounder Axar Patel's batting prowess, and the short surprise Bumrah spell in the middle overs were inspired decisions that won India games.

Fans are said to have short memories. So do selectors, it seems. In a long 50-over World Cup, a team needs a seasoned captain who knows his team inside out. The present Indian team is the one Rohit groomed. He has known Bumrah since the time he joined the Mumbai Indians as a teenager. He was the one who gave Kuldeep Yadav the confidence he desperately needed. With India's key all-rounder, Ravindra Jadeja, he played the 2006 under-19 World Cup. He also understands the enigmatic Shreyas Iyer the best.

There was no tearing hurry either to make the very talented Shubman the ODI captain. Rohit should have got one more series as a leader. This isn't a petition for an ageing captain, nor a plea for giving a longer rope on sympathetic grounds. This is an ode to an ODI legend and a white-ball Mike Brearley, who was tragically denied what he had earned. This is also a reminder that Imran might not have been the fittest at 40, but he was the sharpest and wisest and at his inspiring best.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The temptation for Israel's allies now may be to ease off, acting as if this short-term fix were a solution. They must instead invest intensified effort to produce the strong and durable peace of which Mr Trump spoke — which will only be feasible if it is founded on justice."

— THE GUARDIAN

Can't whitewash the RSS

Its claims of service collapse in the face of its own record. Its fear of social change mirrors anxieties of upper castes threatened by modernity



D RAJA

THE COMMUNIST PARTY of India and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) were founded in 1925 — one in Kanpur, the other in Nagpur. But they could not be further apart in purpose, philosophy, and historical role. The CPI emerged from the anti-colonial struggle — it represented the awakening of India's working class and peasantry, across religion, caste, and region against imperialism and oppression. It was an organic part of the freedom movement, demanding not merely political independence but social and economic transformation. The RSS, in contrast, stayed aloof from the freedom struggle. The organisation's founder, K B Hedgewar, and later its ideologue, M S Golwalkar, dismissed the independence movement as "political". Instead, it focused on building a *rashtra* rooted in religious exclusivity and rigid social hierarchy. While Communists were mobilising people for freedom, and many were jailed and martyred, the RSS was busy conducting drills in secrecy, reinforcing caste distinctions, and pledging loyalty to the colonial administration.

The CPI's cadres were part of every major national upsurge — from the 1930s workers' strikes to the Telangana and Tebhaga struggles, from the Punnapravayalar uprising to the student movements of the 1940s. Its vision extended beyond mere transfer of power; it fought for the end of exploitation and inequality. The RSS, on the other hand, was absent from every defining moment of India's liberation and disdainful of the idea of a plural, democratic India. Instead, the Sangh saw India's diversity not as a strength but as a weakness. Its obsession with religious identity suited the colonial strategy of divide and rule, and its fear of social change mirrored the anxieties of the upper castes threatened by modernity, equality, and social justice.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the RSS centenary celebrations was an exercise in historical reinvention. He credited the RSS with "patriotism and service," claiming that *swayamsevak*s worked tirelessly during Partition to help refugees. The truth, however, is that the RSS's propaganda and ideology of hatred were among the sparks that ignited the communal inferno of 1947, especially in Punjab and Jammu. The organisation's literature and speeches of that time described Muslims as traitors, creating an atmosphere of suspicion and vengeance. To recast this as humanitarian service is to whitewash the role of communal mobilisation in one of the greatest tragedies of the Subcontinent. Modi also repeated another longstanding falsehood: That the RSS was invited by Jawaharlal Nehru to participate in the 1963 Republic Day parade in recognition of its services during the China war. The 1963 parade included MPs, schoolchildren, volunteer groups and trade unions. It's possible that RSS cadre joined the parade as part of the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, an RSS-affiliated organisation; however, the RSS wasn't "invited".

filiated organisation; however, the RSS wasn't "invited".

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's centenary address followed the same pattern of half-truths. He spoke of "*swadeshi*," "self-reliance", and "unity", but his vision of unity is built upon exclusion. This is the same Bhagwat who had called for a review of reservation for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. For all its talk of national unity, the RSS remains a staunch defender of hierarchy — between castes, men and women, and between the privileged and the powerless. Its women's wing, the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, operates under the paternal authority of the male-led organisation. For the RSS, "unity" means everyone accepting the supremacy of the upper-caste Hindu male.

Bhagwat's claim that the RSS has worked for harmony and service collapses before its own record. Golwalkar's *Bunch of Thoughts*, one of the Sangh's foundational texts, identified three internal enemies of the nation — Muslims, Christians, and Communists. The RSS has never wavered from this line — it continues to find "enemies within" to rally its base. Bhagwat's invocation of *swadeshi* and nationalism rings hollow when the economic policies of the government it guides have handed over national assets to corporate monopolies and hollowed out small industries and agriculture. The Sangh's idea of "self-reliance" translates into submission to crony capitalism; its "cultural nationalism" translates into communal polarisation.

For a century, the RSS has survived not by courage but by compromise. During the freedom movement, it avoided confrontation with the British. After Gandhi's assassination, it parlayed with sections of the Congress to lift the ban imposed on it. During the Emergency, the same pattern was repeated. RSS chief Balasaheb Deoras wrote to the government offering cooperation if the ban on the organisation was removed.

The Communists, in contrast, fought for workers' rights, land reforms, education, and healthcare, helping to shape modern India's progressive legislation — the nationalisation of banks and coal, tenancy reforms, labour protections, and public health initiatives. The CPI and other Left forces have been the conscience of the Republic, defending secularism, democracy, and social justice against all assaults. They stood firmly by the nation in every war imposed upon it — most notably in 1971, when India helped liberate Bangladesh. The Communists supported the abolition of privy purses, the deepening of federalism, and the expansion of democratic rights. They fought separatist forces in Punjab and the Northeast, losing over 300 comrades to Khalistani terrorism, and consistently worked to preserve communal harmony.

The RSS stands opposed to the ideals of equality upheld by Mahatma Gandhi and B R Ambedkar. Modi and Bhagwat's speeches at the RSS centenary were not reflections on a century of service but attempts to rewrite history and legitimise an ideology that has always thrived on division and deceit.

A hundred years on, it is clear who has truly served the nation's soul — not those who divided it, but those who keep it united in the name of justice.

The writer is general secretary, Communist Party of India



RAM RAJYA
BY RAM MADHAV

Diplomacy, not romanticism

Amid global churn, India needs to re-evaluate its options

"THE OLD WORLD is dying. And the new world struggles to be born. Now is the time of monsters," wrote the renowned Italian philosopher and politician Antonio Gramsci. It applies as much to the 2020s as to the 1930s, when Gramsci pitted his Marxist ideology against the Fascist power of Benito Mussolini. The old world that Gramsci saw dying was the result of the monstrous politics practised by leaders like Adolf Hitler and Mussolini, and even Joseph Stalin, who was also a Marxist. Others, like US President Franklin Roosevelt, through his silence, and British PM Neville Chamberlain, through his appeasement of Hitler in 1938, helped hasten the death of that world.

The chaos of the 1930s resulted in the outbreak of World War II and the birth of a new world order. Now, as that order, built on pillars like democracy, globalism and peace, crumbles, similar characters in different countries are causing great upheavals. Gramsci's categorisation of such leaders as "monsters" may not be appropriate in the present context. Nevertheless, today's wars and instability can be characterised in the same terms as those of Gramsci.

Just as the US's refusal to join the League of Nations contributed to its collapse in the 1930s, the UN, created as the bedrock of the new order, is struggling due to a lack of financial support from Washington under Trump. Many countries see it as a redundant organisation unable to influence events.

China, in the meantime, is seen enthusiastically supporting that institution. It occupies various important positions in the body. Yet President Xi Jinping shows little interest in its most important annual event, the General Assembly, which he has rarely addressed. At the same time, China is actively building a new institutional framework for international cooperation through frameworks like the Belt and Road Initiative, Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilisation Initiative. Completing the process of building a new order, Xi announced the formation of the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) in September this year, which aims to "reform and improve the international governance system".

India should be alert to the consequences of these developments. The relationships it spent decades building seem to be coming to naught. Despite its best efforts through the "Neighbourhood First" policy, it was unable to build a stable and friendly neighbourhood. Destabilised polity in several of its neighbours is testing India's foreign policy acumen. The US has once again tilted towards India's archrival to the west, seduced by the promises of the Prime Minister and the Field Marshal. It may be naive to assume that China was unhappy with Pakistan's growing proximity to the US. Over the past few decades, it invested heavily in that country's political, military and civil infrastructure. Pakistan's overtures, whether to the US or

Saudi Arabia, would not have happened without the knowledge and consent of Beijing. In fact, China, as a policy, never prevents its friends from engaging with the US. It did not stop Kim Jong Un of North Korea from meeting Trump thrice in just 12 months during 2018-19.

Trump is eager to clinch a deal with Xi when the two leaders meet at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum later this month in South Korea. But he is showing no such hurry in resolving the standoff with India over tariffs. A breakthrough is anticipated at the East Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur on October 26-27, where Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi may meet. However, trade talks between the two countries are unlikely to be concluded before the summit. It may take some more time before the tariffs conundrum is finally resolved. In the absence of a deal, the Indian side may see a Modi-Trump meeting as a futile exercise. Also, Trump is spending only October 26 in Kuala Lumpur and skipping the summit scheduled for the next day, leaving less scope for any detailed engagement between the two leaders.

Meanwhile, initiatives like the Quad and IMEC may also hit a roadblock given the emerging new equations in Asia. The US's interest in the Quad appears low, with the White House remaining noncommittal about Trump visiting India to participate in the summit later this year. Some Western scholars suggested turning AUKUS — the

Australia-UK-US military alliance — into JAUUKUS by adding Japan, which would have been a death knell for the Quad. Fortunately, AUKUS itself is facing the challenge of US neglect and growing resentment in Australia over burgeoning defence budgets.

Some may argue that this turmoil is due to one man, Trump, and normalcy will return once he leaves office in 2028. Three years is a long time in international politics. Trumpian disruption is going to leave its imprint on the shape of the new order to come.

India responded to Trump's tariff regime by standing firm and encouraging *atmanirbharta* (self-reliance). Modi delivered an important message two weeks ago, exhorting people to adopt *swadeshi* and promote indigenous industry.

While that is a commendable response, what India urgently needs is a comprehensive recalibration of its diplomatic options — both long- and short-term. Pragmatism should be the touchstone of its strategy and diplomacy, not romanticism. Henry Kissinger once warned that a country that demands moral perfection in its foreign policy would achieve neither perfection nor security. Diplomacy is, after all, the art of saying "nice doggie" until you can find a rock, as American comedian Will Rogers once quipped.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HOPE FOR PEACE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'First steps to peace' (*IE*, October 10). The ceasefire, though fragile, has brought a glimmer of hope to West Asia. The jubilant scenes in both Gaza and Tel Aviv are testimony that ordinary people yearn for peace, not conflict. The diplomatic efforts have been crucial, and PM Modi congratulating Donald Trump is a welcome affirmation of India's support. Leveraging our goodwill with Palestine and Israel, India must be a constructive partner for peace.

Krishan Kumar Chug, New Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'First steps to peace', (*IE*, October 10). Any ceasefire without the release of Israeli hostages will stand on shaky ground. While both sides may feel pressured into temporary compromise, genuine peace requires trust. Yet, the humanitarian plight of Palestinians must not be sidelined. A just and enduring peace demands parallel attention to human rights, freedom, and security for both peoples. Only when dignity is restored on both sides, can the guns truly fall silent.

Harsh Pawaria, Rohtak

TATA RIFT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Tata mistrust' (*IE*, October 10). What an irony that this rift is coming out in the open around the first death anniversary of

Ratan Tata. It is deja vu at Tata Group, as four years after the apex court settled the power struggle over the sacking of Tata Sons Chairman Cyrus Mistry, controversy has entered the boardroom again. The split must be resolved amicably. The Tata Group is important for our economy due to its size and market influence.

Bal Govind, Noida

BALANCED DIALOGUE

THIS REFERS TO the article 'A future-facing pact' (*IE*, October 10). The visit of British PM Keir Starmer marks a major step forward in the deepening of India-UK relations, with both leaders demonstrating a strong commitment to a modern, future-oriented partnership. The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and the new defence and technology collaboration signal a shift towards strategic and economic interdependence. PM Narendra Modi's emphasis on a partnership driven by "talent and technology" and Starmer's endorsement of India's "Viksit Bharat 2047" vision show the relationship now encompasses innovation, security, and people-to-people links. India's concerns on extremism and illegal migration were raised candidly, reflecting a maturing, balanced dialogue between equals.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali



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Revisiting India’s industrial barometer: Base year revision of IIP



SAURABH GARG & MRIDUL SAGGAR

AS NATIONS grow, their economies undergo a structural change: some sectors lose importance, others gain. Such structural transformation often accompanies long-term economic growth, marked by a progressive shift in the economic structure — from a high reliance on agriculture to increased industrial activity, and ultimately to the predominance of the services sector.

Issue of industrial growth

In India, with brisk growth in services, the sector’s share in Gross Value Added (GVA) has doubled since the early 1950s, averaging 62.5% over the first half of this decade.

Agriculture and allied activities, while still essential, now contribute to about 15% of the GVA. But industry, at around 22% of the GVA, leaves scope for improvement.

Initiatives like Make in India, Production Linked Incentive schemes, ease of doing business reforms, and industrial corridors, among others, are efforts to boost industrial growth. They have helped improve growth rates in each of the three sectors covered under the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) — mining, manufacturing, and electricity — in the post-Covid period, compared to before the pandemic. Recent GST rate cuts will further shore up consumption and support industrial recovery. Furthermore, developments related to deregulation, liberalisation and the emergence of new industries signal healthy dynamism.

Why revise base year

With a more market-oriented economy, the need for quick and symmetric information has grown. Therefore, the statistical systems must adapt to capture full and correct information of the economy. This is especially true for industry, which not only con-

stitutes over a fifth of the economy’s output, but also has backward and forward linkages with other sectors.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has been working on multiple fronts to ensure and improve data quality amid rapid changes. Towards this end, one of the steps was to constitute a Technical Advisory Committee for Base Year Revision of the All-India Index of Industrial Production (TAC-IIP).

Apart from the government and the Reserve Bank of India, numerous stakeholders, from businesses to financial analysts, use IIP data. The IIP is a crucial input for quarterly GVA, used in planning and research.

The compilation of IIP in India commenced with the base year 1937. To capture economic and technological shifts, it has undergone nine subsequent base year revisions. The TAC-IIP has now recommended a base year revision to 2022-23, in alignment with the new base year proposed for the GDP.

Note that the methodology for compil-

ing the IIP is very much aligned with the International Recommendations for the Index of Industrial Production (IRIIP), 2010, with suitable adaptations to reflect national requirements and data availability.

Key improvements

The new series will incorporate updates to the product basket, improved data sources, and reworked sectoral weights. The following are some key improvements proposed:

Expansion of scope, coverage: Item-basket is being revised to capture obsolescence as well as innovations, by dispensing with several once-relevant products such as fluorescent tubes & CFLs, printing machinery, and kerosene, and capturing new-age products like laptops, vaccines, LED bulbs, and components of aircraft and spacecraft.

As per IRIIP guidelines, the IIP should cover sectors like Mining & Quarrying, Manufacturing, Electricity, Gas, Water Supply, and Waste Management. For the first time, the new IIP aims to cover minor miner-

als and gas supply with information captured from key producing states/ ministries.

Treatment of ‘not elsewhere classified’ items: The selection of the IIP item basket is based on the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), and its classification codes. In this context, MoSPI has undertaken a mammoth exercise of identifying 276 “not elsewhere classified” items by revisiting relevant factories. The new index ensures that 95% of their weights are assigned to specific items, with only 5% redistributed, thus significantly enhancing information content.

Substitution of factories: So far, once a factory was included in the sample, it remained part of the index even if it ceased operations or changed its line of production. This often creates a problem when production items get replaced with newer near-substitutes.

To overcome these limitations, the new IIP series proposes to introduce a systematic methodology for substituting factories that have shut down or altered production lines. Replacement will be contingent on reliable data for at least 12 overlapping months for

incoming and outgoing firms.

Seasonally-adjusted series: As always, the MoSPI wants to capture underlying trends and cycles in output for analytically meaningful forecasting. This is why the Ministry is working in collaboration with TAC-IIP towards putting in place a system to additionally provide a de-seasonalised IIP, in line with international practice.

The MoSPI is making sustained efforts to improve national statistics, the fruits of which will become increasingly clear over time. After discussion in the TAC-IIP, the lag in IIP has already been reduced. The integration of GST data with national statistics and greater digital adoption will be a game-changer.

In this context, the Ministry is treating the base year revision for the IIP as much more than a periodic statistical exercise.

Saurabh Garg is Secretary, MoSPI.
Mridul Saggar is Professor at IIM Kozhikode and Chair of the TAC-IIP.

The views expressed are personal.

GDP: GRAPHS, DATA, PERSPECTIVES

India’s growth trajectory, in comparative terms

RECENT DISRUPTIONS in trade and Washington’s apparent proximity to Pakistan led many analysts to conclude that India and Pakistan are again being hyphenated on the international stage.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar recently said, “The best way of de-hyphenation is to outstrip the other party in terms of power and capability.” While military power is a key metric, often the most dependable long-term marker of power is a country’s economic strength, not just in absolute terms, but also relative to its neighbours and rivals.

The chart provides a glimpse of why India is truly an ascendant regional power. The four lines here map the ratio of GDP (in current US\$) between India and the US, China and Pakistan. The vertical axis shows the number of times one economy is of another.

Here are the main takeaways:

1. The US’ economic momentum has been rather spectacular. The bigger an economy, the harder it is for it to

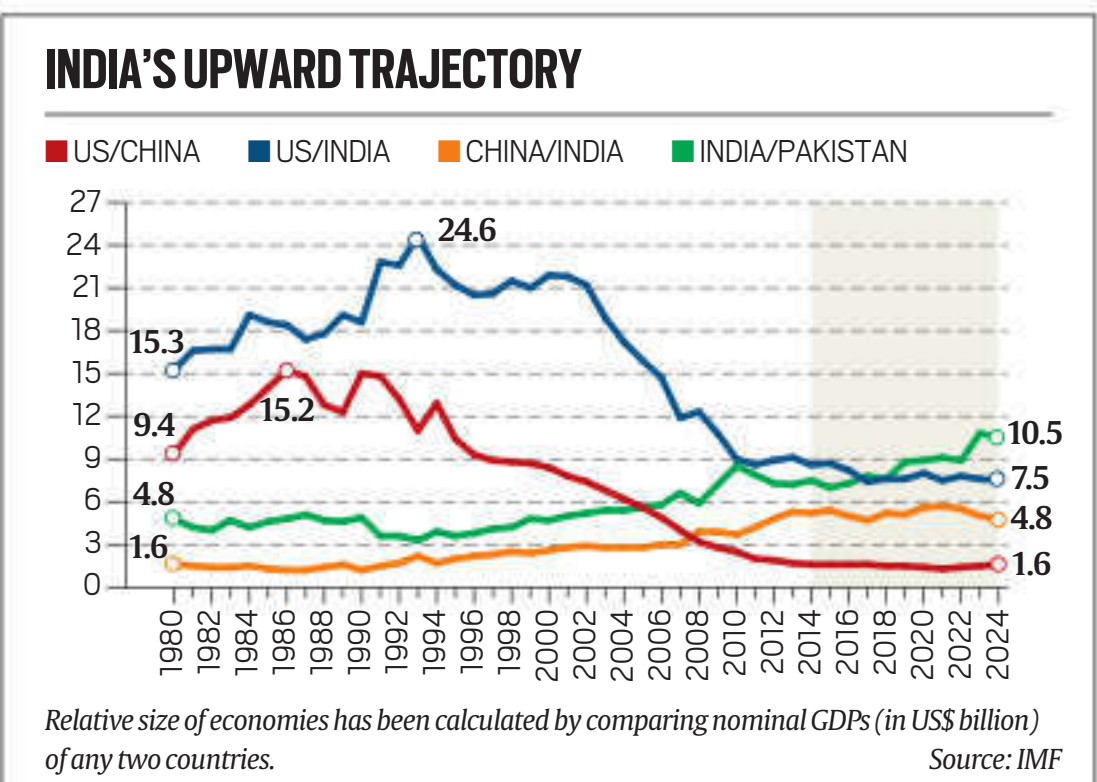
maintain a fast growth momentum. Yet, as the lines mapping the US vs China and the US vs India trends show, the US economy has restricted its slide over the past decade. Still, relative to India, the US has lost ground over the decade: from being 8.6 times India’s economy in 2014 to 7.5 times in 2024.

2. India, on the other hand, has kept pace with China’s growth and hasn’t allowed China to increase the gap in relative terms. If anything, the relative ratio has come down: China’s GDP was 5.4 times India’s in 2015 but only 4.8 times in 2024.

3. Against Pakistan, India’s economy has now extended the gap, helped by Pakistan’s economic mismanagement. Just over the past decade, India’s economic size relative to Pakistan has gone from 7.5 times to 10.5 times.

Among these economies, India and the US show an upward trajectory, while China and Pakistan seem to be running out of steam.

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Maria Corina Machado, ‘Iron Lady of Venezuela’, winner of Nobel Peace Prize

ARJUN SENGUPTA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 10

THE 2025 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Maria Corina Machado, a Venezuelan politician who has led the country’s democracy movement for the past two decades, making her, according to the Nobel Committee, “one of the most extraordinary examples of civilian courage in Latin America in recent times”.

Dictatorship in Venezuela

Until the 1990s, Venezuela had one of the longest-running democracies in Latin America. Today, it has one of the region’s most entrenched authoritarian regimes.

The erosion of democratic institutions began in 1999, when socialist Hugo Chávez, then newly elected as President with massive popular support, convened a constitutional assembly to draft a new constitution.

What made things worse was that the anti-Chavista coalition, despite having a significant presence within democratic insti-

tutions, chose to support a failed US-backed coup in 2002, and then an oil strike in 2003, to force the president out.

This gave Chávez justification to go on a Stalinist purge across all institutions. By 2006, the anti-Chavista coalition had lost most of the institutional resources. Over the next two decades, Chávez, and his successor Nicolás Maduro became increasingly authoritarian.

The outcome of the 2024 elections, which saw Maduro retain power, has been widely disputed in Venezuela and internationally; as have the results of many previous polls.

‘Ballots over bullets’

Over the past two decades, Machado has emerged as one of the staunchest opponents of the Chavista regime.

Born into a well-off family in Caracas in 1967, Machado obtained a bachelor’s degree in industrial engineering and a master’s degree in finance. In 1992, she established the Atenea Foundation, which works

2025 NOBEL PRIZE
PEACE

MARIA CORINA MACHADO, 58
“for her tireless work promoting democratic rights for the people of Venezuela...”

NEXT: NOBEL ECONOMIC SCIENCES

with street children in Caracas.

A decade later, she found Súmate, a volunteer organisation whose stated mission is to monitor elections. In a 2004 article in *The Washington Post*, Machado described how she decided to establish Súmate.

“Something clicked... I could not stay at

home and watch the country get polarised... We had to keep the electoral process but change the course, to give Venezuelans the chance to count ourselves... It was a choice of ballots over bullets,” she said.

In 2003, Súmate organised a campaign to force a constitutionally-permitted referendum to remove Chávez. The referendum was held in 2004; Chávez held on to power amid allegations of voter fraud, including by Súmate. Afterwards, Chávez branded the leaders of Súmate as “conspirators” and “lackeys of the US government”. Machado was charged with treason and conspiracy. (The case fizzled out).

Politician with US ties

Machado has long had close ties to Washington. In 2005, after being accused of treason, she met with then President George Bush Jr at the White House. Súmate has also received generous funding from American donors, most notably, the Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy.

Machado on Friday dedicated her Nobel

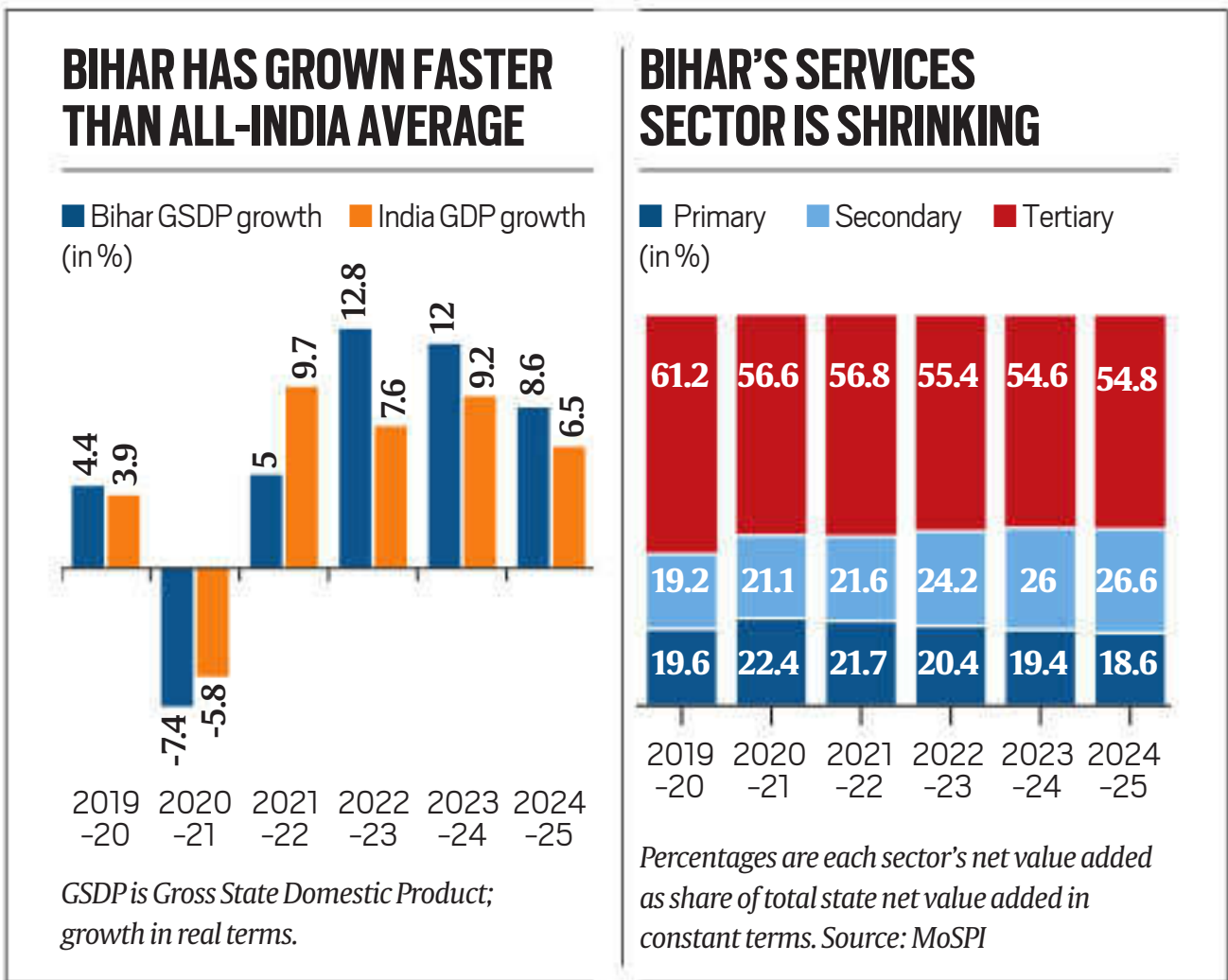
2,500 crore in total) to start small businesses. If successful, they will get an additional Rs 2 lakh. Nitish Kumar has promised to expand the scheme further if voted back to power.

Other promises include a revamped self-help allowance scheme. Under it, the government will extend a monthly allowance of Rs 1,000 for up to two years to unemployed graduates aged 20-25 years who are not pursuing further studies.

Whether or not these schemes are ‘freebies’ — the word has no legal definition — is irrelevant; what we do know is that they will all add to the state’s expenditure, specifically, revenue expenditure. At a time when the central government is pushing hard on capital expenditure and calling on the private sector to invest more, it should be a concern if Bihar’s revenue expenditure as a percentage of total expenditure rises. Bihar, in particular, needs more investments to generate jobs and lift its residents out of poverty.

For 2025-26, capital expenditure has been estimated at just under Rs 42,000 crore, or a third of the committed expenditure, and just 14 per cent of total expenditure.

According to the NITI Aayog, at 33.76 per cent, Bihar had the highest proportion of multidimensionally poor people in the country in 2019-21. From a consumption perspec-



tive, too, the picture is bleak. An updated Rangarajan poverty line (constructed by economists from the Reserve Bank of India), shows that for urban Bihar, the minimum Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure needed to not qualify as poor in 2022-23 was Rs 2,277 — the third lowest in the country. For rural areas, the figure was Rs 1,724, which was the sixth-lowest.

Progress made, and required

None of this is to say progress has not been made in Bihar. Its performance in reducing poverty over the last decade has been particularly noteworthy.

In terms of the headline number, its growth rate has outstripped that of India as a whole in recent years (*Chart 1*). Over the last three years, Bihar’s Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) has grown 11.1 per cent per year on average in real terms, compared to India’s average growth rate of 7.8 per cent. While commendable, it is over a low base — Bihar’s GSDP in 2024-25 was less than Rs 10 lakh crore, or only 5 per cent of India’s GDP.

Retail inflation, meanwhile, has generally been lower in Bihar, the last couple of years notwithstanding.

However, this is clearly not enough. The services sector, which powers growth for the rest of the country, has shrunk in Bihar (*Chart 2*). According to statistics ministry data, the net value added by Bihar’s tertiary or services sector has reduced as a percentage of the total net state value added, from 61.2 per cent in 2019-20 to 54.8 per cent in 2024-25. The share of the secondary sector (manufacturing, construction, and utilities) has risen from 19.2 per cent to 26.6 per cent, while the primary sector (agriculture and mining) has remained broadly steady around the 19-20 per cent mark.

A rising share of the secondary sector is a good sign, but India’s growth story over the last two decades or so has been about the services sector, which can offer high-paying jobs — essential for retaining qualified and local talent.

Even in terms of the number of factories, Bihar had just 3,386 in 2023-24, as per the latest Annual Survey of Industries. This was just 1.3 per cent of all factories in the country. Of the total number of workers employed by the Indian industry, Bihar housed just 1.17 lakh, or 0.75 per cent.

These are troubling figures for India’s third-most populous state.

Uniting opposition

Machado has paid a price for her opposition to the regime, from facing criminal charges to intimidation and even the threat of physical violence by Maduro’s allies.

While many anti-Maduro politicians, including Juan Guaidó, who Trump declared as president in 2019, have fled from the country, Machado has remained with her people. And she promises to do so “*hasta el final*” (“till the very end”). This has helped her corral the otherwise fractured opposition behind her. That Venezuela has witnessed a catastrophic economic contraction under Maduro — the largest outside of war in 50 years, according to *The NYT* — has also helped.

It is in this backdrop that Machado in 2024 mounted the strongest opposition campaign in the past 25 years. While she was barred from contesting herself, it was for her, and not the little known former diplomat Edmundo González, that the people were voting. And although Maduro clung on to power, Machado is likely the most popular figure in Venezuela today.



A thought for today

Greater the artist, greater the doubt. Perfect confidence is granted to the less talented as a consolation prize

ROBERT HUGHES

Cheer Up, Don

Five tips for Trump before next year's Nobels

First thing, Trump, it's alright not to get the Nobel Peace Prize. Nobody, barring a grand total of 143 men and women, has got it over the past 125 years. That's seriously rare, but rarer still is being US prez, which you've been twice. So, cheer up. Second, as Orwell said, war is peace. The converse must be true then – peace is war. Indeed, there were 338 nominees for this year's peace Nobel. We hope you were in the fray, but we won't know for 50 more years, because that's the rule. Suppose you weren't even in the running... the 7, or 70, or 700 wars you stopped this year was sheer selfless service then. Feel good about it.



Third – Orwell again – war is indeed peace. That's why Venezuelan Maria Corina Machado got the peace Nobel, and you didn't. Just look up the past winners and you'll find most weren't present at or behind an armistice. Like God, peace works in mysterious ways. Sometimes, it involves defusing nukes, at others it means standing up for rights of women and children. Often, like Machado, it requires fighting for rights and democracy within a country.

Fourth, if it ain't broke...don't break it. US has been a model of democracy, free speech and rule of law. Don't turn it into a tinpot dictatorship – like Maduro in Venezuela – with your executive orders and national guard deployment. You won't win any awards for starting a civil war, but your successor might win a Nobel for stopping it.

Fifth, keep up the good work. You've leashed Netanyahu and paused the killing in Gaza. Now, make sure the peace holds. If it holds a year from now, you will have a very good chance at winning. You might fly away with \$1.1mn on that \$400mn Qatari plane. Just make sure to make it tax-free with an executive order first.

Phantom Police?

Seoul has a hologram cop. Not everyone's thrilled

He doesn't quite crash land but takes form all a sudden – a life-size apparition in uniform, if you find yourself in Seoul's popular Jeo Dong Park. Don't let him spook you – it's only a hologram of a cop, appearing every two minutes between 7pm and 10pm to, well, spook those up to no good. Police claim the made-in-UK 'assistant officer' lowered crime rates in the bustling neighbourhood under Seoul Jungbu police station by as much as 22%, between Oct 2024, when the pilot was launched, and May 2025. The cop



was officially posted in the park in Aug. So, if you're wandering around, under the influence of whatever's your poison, and itching to pick up a fight, well, chances are the sight of a ghostly cop could nudge you to abandon the idea. No need to break into a cold sweat or run, for he'll disappear in two minutes. So what does this hologram cop do if it comes across a fight? He can't chase, let alone handcuff you. Yet. 'Enhanced features' are work in progress. His role now is surveillance, a deterrent to low-key 'impulsive' crime. Privacy may be globally dead but still, the idea hasn't gone down well with everyone. Visitors find him annoying, while his ghostly presence is fast creating an urban legend of a 'haunted park'. Clearly, tech savvy policing is not yet a smooth walk in the park.

How Do You Create A Hot Tech Hub?

Via a culture that's open to change and normalises risk-taking

The US-China big power competition is the defining geopolitical issue of our times. Undergirding this dynamic is the race for tech, especially AI. In *The New Geography Of Innovation: The Global Contest For Breakthrough Technologies*, **Mehran Gul** investigates whether US's Silicon Valley still retains near-monopoly over cutting-edge tech, or have other global locations such as China's Shenzhen and even the greater London area taken over that mantle. Plus, what's truly conducive for creating a hot tech eco-system? Is there a secret sauce that America has and China appears to have replicated? The answers are complex.

At first glance, China's breakneck development in tech over the last decade appears to be eclipsing Silicon Valley. But closer inspection reveals a nuanced picture. True, Silicon Valley is undergoing change – described in the book as a vibrant rainforest being converted into controlled farmlands. But that necessarily doesn't translate into US tech decline, the author says. New American tech hubs are coming up in New York, Miami and Austin that are taking the flame of Silicon Valley forward.

China, on the other hand, has created its own tech champions like Tencent, Baidu and ByteDance in record time. It certainly has speed on its side, and its quality and volume of research has also improved tremendously. But it's still not doing pathbreaking research like US. Why? A combination of factors that includes strict guardrails of the Communist Party – exemplified by the 2021 crackdown on Chinese tech firms – a Chinese university system that is not quite yet at par with American universities, and an environment where govt policy guides the direction of innovation.

But to settle the debate, one statistic

is enough to confirm US's continued tech dominance: Apple became the first American tech company to cross a trillion-dollar valuation in 2018 with seven other American companies joining it since, but the rest of the whole world, including China, doesn't even have one.

What then is the secret to successful tech eco-systems? The author interviews scores of tech entrepreneurs and stalwarts across geographies and comes to a somewhat underwhelming answer: there is no set formula. Almost all successful tech companies look the same. But they can come up in very different circumstances. In UK, the greater London area is where all the action is. But that has come at

mindfield

SHORT TAKES ON BIG IDEAS



the cost of increasing regional disparity that not only puts London at risk but also undermines the dynamism of UK's tech story. This disparity was also a reason for Brexit.

Switzerland and Germany have great education and no shortage of talent or infra, but their local cultural preference for stability over risk means they are just not able to realise the same tech innovation potential as US or China. South Korea and Singapore created their miracles through huge govt support. But there are also limitations to this approach as seen by calls to reform Korea's chaebols.

But one thing appears clear, according to the author: societies that are more receptive to change appear to have a better chance of fostering tech successes. That means openness to talent, openness to innovation, and openness to risks. In the Indian context, we may have Bengaluru. But we need many more Bengalurus that incentivise tech entrepreneurship and risk taking. That means a policy framework that fosters innovation and a culture shift that normalises failure. India has lots of catching up to do.

MORE THE CHATTER

LESS THE MATTER

Leaving Mumbai, Learning Goa

A city writer goes to the gaon. Away from civic failures and ugly aesthetic of Indian metros, he finds nature and clean air, plus locals who loathe his tribe

Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi



In 2011, when I first moved to Moira, in north Goa, the phone range was so lousy that I'd have to walk to the end of my lane just to make a call. On the way, a local farmer once accosted me for harbouring a python in my garden that had eaten his cat. This caused a ruckus, so the next-door uncle, two feni in, arched his neck over the wall to take in the tension. There were power-outs for hours, there still are. One monsoon, my roof flew away.

How did I end up here? I had had an enviable life in Mumbai. My family moved to Juhu when it was a stretch of marsh. By the time I was eight, Bollywood stars lived so close to us, I could monitor their domestic strife. As a young man (by then, a writer of modest success) I had a place at many tables where champagne was vintage and everyone was plotting some kind of usurping, usually of companies, cooks and husbands (cooks were the most prized).

I left for many reasons, including ineffable ones, like sticking around in one place so long you can only get sick of it. In my thirties, Mumbai's transformation from adorable puppy vibes to burly, man-eating monster was rapid.

Skywalks appeared – they resembled worms from the small intestine. Then came the metro project – this was infra projects as intergenerational trauma. My grandmother had died by the time the one in Ville Parle was looping across my best friend's yard, where it looked ready to collapse even before some *netas* would inaugurate yet another functional ugliness.

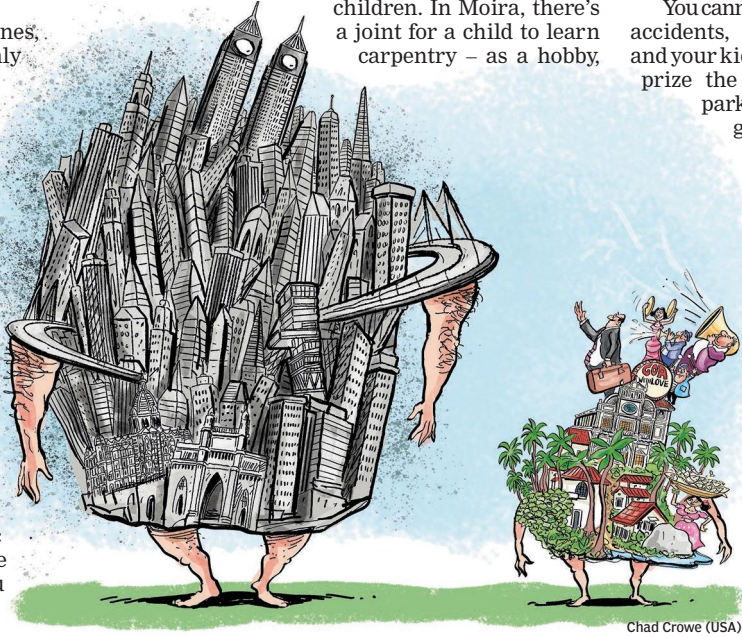
Yes, functional ugliness is the *de facto* aesthetic of modern Indian cities. Govt-funded functional ugliness competes with privately funded ones. A billionaire built a 27-floor, cantilevered ode to such revolting taste that the architect ought to be publicly flogged (Arundhati Roy will file my human rights record under 'appalling'). Near the Worli Sea Link, public art was so vile it doubled as cautionary. 'Become an accountant,' one might warn a child. 'If you become a city artist, you'll make *this*.'

Perhaps the wisest thing to do with a big Indian city is to leave it. I did. It wasn't cool then, the way moving to Goa is now, but it was an act (as Orry might say) of self-care.

First, what had I left behind? The Juhu-Colaba commute was longer than the flight from Mumbai to Goa, thanks to dug-up roads and endless traffic. Tom-Tom's 2024 index puts Mumbai drivers at roughly 29 minutes per 10 km at peak, with about 100+ hours lost to rush-hour traffic annually. Kolkata and Pune now rank among the world's slowest. Mumbai offers roughly 1.24 sq m of public open space per person. It's brave to call it 'space' and delulu if you imagine it as 'open'.

Mumbai, like Delhi, is breath-taking, meaning it takes your breath away, leaving you rasping on the floor for oxygen. We still have to beat Delhi's world record as the most polluted capital – we're working on it! And so a city writer – gasping, gasping – turned to the pastoral.

Well, I'm not the only one. Some came to Goa to make art, others to save their marriages or raise their children. In Moira, there's a joint for a child to learn carpentry – as a hobby,



We Are All Stalkers & We All Get Stalked

Surrendering degrees of privacy for the sake of convenience is a Faustian bargain. For celebs it's more extreme, but the rest of us also have to contend with weirdos getting all up in our business

Bikram Vohra



Columnist based in Dubai

She is a mini celebrity – recognisable but no trumpets play when she enters a room. She had just settled herself in her seat on an aircraft, ready to do a couple of hours' of good reading. The passenger next to her was busy on his computer so no perfunctory greetings were exchanged. But a sudden visual unease in the corner of her eye made her look at his screen more closely. He had scrolled her page, her history, her images and was blatantly looking for more.

She said with asperity, "What the heck do you think you are doing?"

He said, "Working on my computer. Why do you ask?"

"Because you are sitting next to me and reading about me, that's invading my privacy."

"Actually, you are invading mine. I am within my rights to see what I want wherever I am, it is none of your business. My seat, my computer, so just don't look."

She said she would call the crew. He said she could call the Captain for all he cared, he wasn't doing anything wrong, whatever he was downloading she had directly or indirectly put there, so blame yourself, lady.

The crew came, tried with sincerity, could do nothing and for the next two hours she sat and seethed in the debris of her privacy, feeling stalked, as if she was in the presence of a predator, who continued to trawl the material on her that he had downloaded while waiting for the doors to close before takeoff.

Everything is so invasive now that the rulebook has been arbitrarily rewritten. We can take pictures with impunity and no longer need to ask permission. We can tape conversations without clearance. Blatantly disrespectful conduct is now the norm and the law is fragile and protection feeble. Like lemmings

hurtling towards the cliff but we don't see it.

None of us is far from the dilemma on the plane, in our helpless surrender to the new electronic god, the algorithm, slaves to a disembodied database that knows our cravings better than our own mothers. We offer up our location data for a faster food delivery, our search history for a mildly amusing cat video, and our so-called friendly networks for a fleeting hit of social validation. We are like tragicomedies, proudly polishing the bars of our own cage, convinced the sheen is a sign of progress.



Our smartphones are not just phones; they are digital sirens, perpetually screaming our location, our desires, and our private thoughts into the electronic ether. We carry them everywhere, these disloyal sitches in our pockets, broadcasting a live feed of our existence to corporate overlords who compile the data, a more accurate representation of who we are than our own self-image. We become the stars of our own reality shows, with an audience of bots.

Bought and paid for even if we haven't realised it. In a world that feels increasingly vast and anonymous, a 'like' is a candle flicker of warmth, a share is a moment

not institutionalised labour. Many were climate-change exiles from north India, where kids were hacking out their lungs before they turned four.

All of us prized nature the way city counterparts did Birkins. We didn't want bragging rights to a Jor Bagh *barsati* as much as straight out sunset skies across the Socorro plateau. There were retirees and misfits. There were writers. And restaurateurs who had failed in Mumbai – who, later, also failed in Goa.

We learned to recognise a *poi* seller's horn. We began to haggle for fish in Mapusa market in strange, postcolonial accents. Goa's pandemic-era influx of remote workers and digital nomads wasn't big on *ghar wapsi*. They stuck around. And brought friends. Understandably, the locals now loathe us, our noise, our WhatsApp groups where we fight for kombucha strains.

From time to time, someone asks why I traded a city of museums (never enough), bookshops (too few), and cinemas (somewhat thrilling) for village life that counts on imaginative stamina – and emergency power backup. Because our cities failed us.

You cannot build a civic culture on a string of charming accidents, like when a pothole turns into a pond and your kid floats a paper boat on it. You need rules that prize the commons; billionaires who commission parks and libraries instead of heliports and garba performances; a planning regime that isn't, essentially and shamelessly, a builder lobby.

Relax. Stats show the great migration – nationally speaking – is still the great stay. Indians are continuing to live in cities. They're just hating their lives there more than ever. The village-versus-city binary is useless. Cities win.

But most Indians are now desperate for better cities – cleaner air, parks without prowlers and beaches without miles of rubbish, a commute that doesn't kill you or tap water that isn't flavoured with jaundice, diarrhoea or sewage. We want to stay but we simply can't, and those of us (a silently growing tribe) who left, did so from an existential crisis (or as design critique). Or, frankly, because we love Goa.

Shanghvi is the author of 'The Lost Flamingsoes of Bombay' and 'Loss'

Calvin & Hobbes



Blueprint For Lasting Peace In Palestine

Saniyasnain Khan

Recently, US President Donald Trump unveiled a detailed plan for Gaza. It called for an immediate ceasefire, hostage exchanges, and a staged Israeli withdrawal, while placing Gaza under temporary international supervision with promises of large-scale humanitarian aid and economic development. Though ambitious, such frameworks often struggle because they overlook deeper moral and psychological roots. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, in his Ten-Point peace formula offered a realistic, transformative path forward.

At the heart of this proposal is the principle of Hudaybiyyah, drawn from Prophet Muhammad's treaty with the Meccans in seventh century. The lesson is clear: pursue peace even when it requires compromise, because it opens possibilities later. Rather than insisting that every demand be met first, the priority must be to stop bloodshed and build conditions where opportunity can flourish.

The Quran commands believers to

adopt peaceful reconciliation (4:128). Violence has dominated the region for over six decades, yet it has brought neither justice nor progress. True change will come only through nonviolent engagement. The Quran also teaches that hostility can turn into friendship when evil is repelled with good (41:34). This means choosing patience, dialogue, and generosity instead of revenge.

The formula emphasises that peace must precede justice. Justice cannot thrive in an atmosphere of rage and retaliation. Peace, even if incomplete, provides the stability needed for progress through political, legal, and diplomatic means. Without peace, the call for justice remains trapped in cycles of conflict.

Another key principle is to remain result oriented rather than emotional. The Prophet described a true believer as one who abandons actions that bring no benefit. Decades of violent resistance have yielded little. It is now essential to

focus on practical methods that deliver real improvement rather than symbolic gestures of defiance.

A vital component is the rejection of violence against innocents, including suicide bombings. The Quran declares that killing a single innocent person is like killing all of humanity (5:32). Such acts, far from achieving any moral or political goal, violate core principles and remove blessing from any cause they claim to serve.

Instead of hostility, the proposal calls for building common ground through cooperation. Historically, Muslims and Jews lived and worked together in fields such as science, medicine, and trade. In modern times, there are many shared arenas – education, technology, agriculture – where collaboration could yield mutual benefit. Rekindling this cooperative spirit could transform the Holy Land into a model of shared prosperity.

The formula also recognises that today's world operates through democracy

Sacredspace



We often think of peace as the absence of war, that if powerful countries would reduce their weapon arsenals, we could have peace. But if we look deeply into the weapons, we see our own minds — our own prejudices, fears and ignorance.

Thich Nhat Hanh



THE SPEAKING TREE

OUTOFLINE

ON ARTISTIC TRANSGRESSION AND URBAN CHAOS



Anish Gawande

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Death on trial

The debate around capital punishment isn't about criminals; it's about the conscience of a nation



The death penalty is back in the spotlight. In the US, five inmates are scheduled to be executed in the next eight days. Here in India, the Supreme Court on Wednesday declined the Centre's plea to issue victim-centric or society-centric guidelines in heinous-offence cases where death penalty is imposed.

The Centre, in its 2020 application, had argued that the existing framework (from *Shatrughan Chauhan v Union of India*, 2014) is overly focused on the accused and convict. It asked that executions follow within seven days after a black warrant is issued. The Court's dismissal suggests that this debate – accused-centric vs society- or victim-centric – still lacks judicial consensus.

I have long opposed the death penalty. I believe in reformatory justice. If we now give up on the worst in society, we also erode our belief in what is best. If we assert someone is beyond redemption, we lose our own claim to humanity.

People often say: "But what about deterrence? What about justice for victims?" Let's grant, for argument's sake, that deterrence works. Even then, the costs are too high. Evidence from multiple studies shows no credible link between executions and reduced crime. The Death Penalty Information Centre notes state and regional data in the US show no meaningful correlation between capital punishment and lower homicide rates.

Scientific American summarises that evidence fails to support deterrence claims; it warns the death penalty is "ineffective, often botched, and a much more

expensive punishment than life imprisonment."

Beyond deterrence, there is the spectre of error. In India, six men sentenced to death for rape and murder in 2009 were acquitted in 2019 – declared innocent after years on death row.

The system is not infallible.

Blackstone's Ratio reminds us: "better that 10 guilty people escape than one innocent suffers." One wrongful execution is state murder with no remedy. The death penalty also allows us to evade collective responsibility. We condemn an individual monster and absolve the society that shaped them. In cases

of child sexual assault – take Badlapur, for instance – many demand execution. Yet when death is meted out repeatedly, the structural failures remain: Few CCTVs in schools, no standard psychological protocols, poor implementation of laws like the Shakti Act.

Execution becomes a political

gesture, not a solution. I expect criticism. Many will see me as insensitive to victims, as prioritising the criminal over suffering. But I take inspiration from Gopal Krishna Gandhi's book, *Abolishing the Death Penalty*, where he frames this as a question of moral courage. I invite readers to engage, to read, to question: Is our demand for vengeance overshadowing our duty to justice grounded in dignity?

Globally, momentum has turned against capital punishment. Over 85 countries have abolished it entirely; more than 70 per cent of nations have ended it in law or practice. Even here, India's use has been sparse: Over the last 25 years, despite thousands of death sentences passed, only eight executions have been carried out. In 2022 alone, India had 539 prisoners on death row, a 40 per cent increase from 2015 according to Project 39A. Yet, the Supreme Court and High Courts commute or overturn nearly all death sentences. So, the question is not whether the death penalty should exist somewhere. The question is: Do we, as a society, deserve the right to decide who lives and dies? And with what certainty?

I hold to the belief that justice must evolve, not regress. That human dignity cannot be surrendered in moments of rage. If we are to sustain a justice system worth its name, we must demand that every sentence, especially the gravest, be grounded in fallibility, humility, and repair, not spectacle.

Death may be irreversible. Our courage to stand by what is must not be.

Anish Gawande is a writer and translator

THE PARENTPLAYBOOK

STRATEGIES FOR GROWING UP, TOGETHER



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Toddlers and teens: Not the same, yet not that different

The systems we put in place in the toddler years will hold us in good stead through the teen years

Understanding the similarities between the brain development of toddlers and teenagers can help us stay patient, provide structure, give support, and teach safety across both stages of child development.

As parents of toddlers, we seem far more vested in routines, sleep, nutrition and behaviour modification. Somehow, the moment they hit the teen years, we resign ourselves to children who sleep less, eat erratically, have random schedules and behave any which way they please. This is our mistake.

The teen years, like the toddler years, need us to step up, be vigilant,



be particular and be present, perhaps even more than the early years. Both stages of development see heightened emotional reactivity. Toddlers have tantrums while the teens erupt into mood swings. This stems from changes occurring in the brain.

Brain growth needs energy, energy comes from sleep, food and exer-

cise. Prioritise your teen's sleep the same way you ensured your toddler had a good night's sleep. Ensure your teen consumes wholesome meals the same way you ensured your toddler had balanced nutrition. Ensure your teen has physical activities and a healthy offline life the same way you focussed on your toddler's physical development.

Our toddlers run around exploring everything in sight. It is through this exploratory stage that they start to understand their environment. It is this very similar heightened reward-seeking behaviour that leads our teenagers to risk-taking behaviours. Their behaviour reflects trial and error, curiosity and a fierce need for autonomy. It does not stem from malice or from the need to make your life a misery.

Knowing that these are the two most dynamic stages of child development, we must be prepared. We,

the parents, our peers and our extended ecosystem are sometimes collateral damage. Remember, the systems we put into our homes from the toddler years will hold us in good stead through the teen years.

The foundation of a peaceful home environment with a teenager living in it comes from our ability to keep prioritising all those things we taught our toddlers to hold good a decade later. The inside voice, kind hands, the magic words, the delayed gratification, the validation, the praise, the uninhibited love and laughter, it is all still possible.

Both stages, toddlerhood and adolescence, are similar as they are characterised by rapid brain remodelling, neuroplasticity and a mismatched system development. A mismatched system is one that develops faster emotional systems but lags in control and regulation. Both these child development stages

offer multiple opportunities for growth as well as vulnerabilities.

Environmental factors like routines, family connections, physical exercise and play, along with positive social relationships with peers as well as adults enhance the child's quality of life and accelerates cognitive and emotional growth.

So, whichever stage of parenting you are at, work on being emotionally responsive, open, warm, and respectful. Nurturing environments are buffers against peer conflicts, peer pressure, risk-taking behaviours and managing stress. Teenagers with strong parent-child bonds exhibit greater success when faced with difficult situations. And isn't that our primary goal as a parent to raise a child who manages life, stress and relationships with confidence and resilience?

Piya Marker is a parent coach and special educator

REUTERS/MAHMOUD ISSA



Displaced Palestinians make their way back home after a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas went into effect, in the central Gaza Strip, on October 10

GAZA CEASEFIRE DEAL EXPLAINED

Hostage and prisoner release has been finalised, but other points of friction between Israel and Hamas appear to remain unresolved. And the question of who would finally govern Gaza is still not clear

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The announcement of a deal between Israel and Hamas to release Israeli hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners and a partial ceasefire was met with celebrations in Israel and Gaza, but public information is limited and much remains unresolved.

What we know

The Israeli government formally approved the first phase of the deal early on Friday, as set out in an initial agreement signed on Thursday, with Israeli troops starting to partially withdraw from positions in Gaza.

Earlier, Shosh Bedrosian, a spokesperson for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office, said the Israel Defence Forces will pull back during that first 24-hour period to retain control of 53 percent of the Gaza Strip. Hamas would then have 72 hours to release the remaining alive Israeli hostages. About 20 of the remaining hostages held in Gaza are believed to be alive. Trump said on Thursday that the

remaining Israeli hostages held by Hamas would be released Monday or Tuesday – and that he would travel to Egypt for a signing of the agreement.

Under Trump's framework, unveiled last week, Israel would release 250 Palestinian prisoners serving life sentences, along with 1,700 people detained from Gaza since October 7, 2023 – including all women and children who were detained. That list is still being finalised, according to Bedrosian.

What we don't know

Some of the most significant points of friction between Israel and Hamas remain unresolved, and mediators are yet to publicly announce the ceasefire's logistical details.

It appears mediators are waiting until the second phase of the talks to tackle some of the thornier "day after" issues, such as the disarmament of Hamas, the future governance of Gaza, the presence of international forces in Gaza and the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops. None of those issues have been addressed publicly.

Trump's framework called for the

formation of a government of Palestinian technocrats to run the enclave's day-to-day affairs and for international troops to take over security in Gaza after Hamas is disarmed and Israel withdraws.

While the Trump administration framework was used by mediators to launch talks in Egypt this week, it is unclear how closely the final ceasefire agreement will adhere to that 20-point plan.

It is also unclear how humanitarian aid could be brought into Gaza and by whom under the deal agreed to Wednesday night. Trump's original framework says that "upon acceptance of this agreement, full aid will be immediately sent into the Gaza Strip" and will be distributed by the United Nations and other international organisations.

Hamas officials said the main assurance they were seeking in the negotiations was a guarantee from the United States that Israel would not resume bombing Gaza as soon as the hostages are released. It remains unclear whether anything more than a verbal guarantee was offered by the US and other mediators.

As part of a deal, Hamas would release the bodies of hostages sometime after the release of live captives. The group has said it could take longer than 72 hours to retrieve all of the bodies and cautioned that it would need unimpeded access around the Gaza Strip to transfer them.

Trump's plan

The peace plan put forward by Trump, which forms the basis for the ongoing talks, includes a phased withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, the return of all hostages to Israel, the disarmament of Hamas and the eventual formation of a Palestinian government under the supervision of a new international body. The first two parts of that plan constitute much of the initial phase of the agreement signed Thursday. The rest remains under discussion.

Residents would not be forced to leave Gaza under the Trump framework, unlike in earlier proposals by Trump and Netanyahu to forcibly displace Gazans. "We will encourage people to stay," the proposal says, a point Trump reaffirmed in remarks Thursday. It also includes points on a "Trump economic development plan to rebuild and energise Gaza".

As the initial phase takes shape, key issues that could stand in the way of a larger agreement include questions on Hamas's disarmament, the extent and pace of Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, the presence of foreign forces, the nature of an interim governing body, the role of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza's future and contested language around the objective of realising a Palestinian state.

Hamas did not reject calls for its disarmament in the Trump plan, but the group also didn't explicitly

accept that element of the plan either. A European official briefed on the negotiations said the group has agreed to disarm but insists it would hand weapons over only to the Palestinian Authority, the body that governs the Palestinian-controlled parts of the West Bank – a condition Israel is expected to reject because Netanyahu is opposed to a future role for the Palestinian Authority in Gaza.

Without providing further details, the plan says that Hamas members "who commit to peaceful coexistence" are to be given amnesty and that members of the group who wish to leave Gaza should be provided "safe passage to receiving countries".

The question of who would govern Gaza remains open.

The Trump plan calls for Gaza to be governed by Palestinian technocrats overseen by a "Board of Peace". Trump would chair the board; former British prime minister Tony Blair would be a member. The board would oversee strategic and diplomatic decisions, supervise security, work with Israel and coordinate with US allies in the Persian Gulf, who are expected to fund much of the reconstruction.

The government would eventually hand power back to the Palestinian Authority, according to the Trump plan, but only after the Palestinian Authority has "reformed". Netanyahu has called for the "enduring transformation" of the Palestinian Authority, including changes to school textbooks and an end to policies that support the families of Palestinians killed in clashes with Israeli troops. Netanyahu reaffirmed his objection to a role for the Palestinian Authority in remarks from the White House last week.

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Emission targets

Carbon-heavy sectors put on notice

THE Greenhouse Gases Emission Intensity Target Rules, notified by the Centre earlier this week, are a major step towards curbing industrial pollution as well as environmental degradation in India. These rules have fixed the country’s first legally binding emission reduction targets for carbon-intensive industries. Production units that emit less than their assigned target can earn tradable carbon credit certificates, while those exceeding it must purchase equivalent credits from the Indian carbon market or pay a penalty. As many as 282 industrial units in the aluminium, cement, pulp & paper and chlor-alkali sectors are required to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions from the 2023-24 baseline levels. Notably, some big names feature in the first compliance cycle: aluminium smelters operated by Vedanta, Hindalco, Nalco and Balco and large cement plants owned by UltraTech, Dalmia, JK Cement, Shree Cement and ACC. The government has sent a strong message that the high and mighty must lead by example in the pursuit of green goals.

India is the world’s third largest emitter of greenhouse gases, with China on top and the US at the second spot. The new rules, which incentivise industries to reduce emissions, build on the PAT (Perform, Achieve and Trade) energy efficiency scheme, which had set energy-saving targets. The Central Pollution Control Board, which is tasked with imposing penalties and overseeing time-bound recovery, needs to act strictly in accordance with the legal framework. The board must be well prepared for a pushback from industrial giants.

It’s heartening that India produced more solar and wind power than ever before in the first half of this year, even as carbon dioxide emissions from its power sector fell by 1 per cent on a year-on-year basis during this period. Greenhouse gases from human activities are regarded as the most significant driver of climate change. India, which has witnessed a spate of climate impact-related calamities this year itself, must go all out to promote clean energy. Sustainable development should be at the core of the march towards a climate-resilient, carbon-neutral future.

Punjab’s sports push

Big talk on building stadiums, bigger test ahead

PUNJAB’S Rs 1,194-crore plan to build 3,100 village stadiums may sound like a golden goal — but the question is, who will keep the game going? Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal have packaged it as a war on drugs and a revival of Punjab’s sporting spirit. The intent is noble; but it is the execution that will decide if it turns into a legacy or a liability. The project’s vision is sweeping: modern multi-sports grounds spread across villages, offering space for football, hockey, athletics and traditional games — even recreation for the elderly. For a state racked by addiction and disillusionment among its youth, sports offer discipline, purpose and pride. If the stadiums truly become community hubs, they could help channel Punjab’s restless energy into something productive and unifying.

But as experience shows, building facilities is the easy part. The real test lies in ensuring sustainability. Many projects across states turned into neglected grounds due to poor maintenance, lack of equipment and absence of coaching. Without trained coaches, tournaments and local sports management, Punjab’s new fields risk becoming photo-op showpieces rather than engines of change. Inclusivity is equally critical. Access must extend to girls, the elderly and the differently abled. And traditional rural games like kabaddi, wrestling and *gatka* should not be sidelined by modern ones. Moreover, transparency in fund utilisation and measurable indicators — such as participation levels and changes in drug-use patterns — will be essential to assess real outcomes.

Punjab’s plan could indeed turn the tide — but only if it is matched by long-term vision, transparent management and measurable outcomes. Done right, it can strengthen community bonds, improve mental health and even unearth hidden rural talent. Otherwise, these 3,100 stadiums risk becoming what many past schemes did: political trophies, not public assets.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1925

India's productive wealth

IN a previous article, we stated that the scheme of the economic survey recommended by the Visvesvaraya Committee was much too elaborate and costly for the present condition of India, besides being unworkable in respect of certain details. Throughout its report, the committee has, indeed, been guided by the example set by Western countries and the statements made by Western economists; and the scheme recommended is also designed to suit Western ideals. One thing that the committee has ignored is the fact that India is not, like other advanced countries in Europe and America, a self-governing state, pursuing economic advancement, more or less in the same manner as they do in Germany, England or Canada. One of the objects mentioned in the resolution passed by the Legislative Assembly, asking for an enquiry into the economic condition of India, was to test the “capacity of the people to bear the existing burden of taxation (including land revenue)” and to ascertain whether “the manner in which the burden of taxation is distributed at present between the different classes of population” is just. It is gratifying that the Economic Enquiry Committee has made some important suggestions with this end in view, many of which can with advantage be adopted at a cost which is not likely to be heavy. It is very important to ascertain the total productive wealth of India from year to year and also the income of the principal classes of the people.

OPINION

What Afghan women want

Indian women journalists may have asked Muttaqi this question to which he has no answer



THE GREAT GAME

JYOTI MALHOTRA

DO you keep the *karwa chauth* fast? Make no mistake, that’s a googly, not a question, that has been asked of North Indian women over the years. Not just because you’re damned if you do (by feminists looking askance), or damned if you don’t (by the growing Sanskritisation of Middle India, which believes there’s only one answer to any riddle wrapped in an enigma), but because the question itself is a pigeonhole. Better not to answer it. Better to read the book that Ruhi Tewari has just written, called, *What Women Want*.

Ms Tewari’s book is about “understanding the female voter” in India, but the question is a larger one. If you have the imagination, you can broaden the canvas and ask it elsewhere too, including in neighbouring Afghanistan, where the Taliban regime carries out the most repressive actions against its own women.

In fact, the news from Delhi is that the Taliban Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, who is on a six-day visit to India, during which time he will visit the Taj Mahal, the monument to love, as well as the Deoband seminary, refused to invite any Indian women journalists to his press conference in the capital on Friday.

Perhaps Muttaqi was worried what people would say back home if he was seen mingling with Indian women. And even though the press conference was held in the Afghan embassy, technically Afghan soil, the Taliban leader lost a huge opportunity to signal to half his population back home, why the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan should be given another half chance to



EVASIVE: Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi refused to invite Indian women journalists to his press conference in New Delhi on Friday. ANI

emerge from the Dark Ages.

The Indian women journalists may have asked Muttaqi the question to which he doesn’t have an answer : What is it that Afghan women want? And if all they want is only half the sky, why don’t the mullahs in Kandahar give it to them?

Except, the answers are all there, if you really want to see them. This reporter was in Kabul on the first anniversary of the Taliban takeover of Kabul, in August 2022, and went into the ICU of the Indira Gandhi Children’s Hospital to see how women nurses and doctors dealt with the toughest cases. The ICU was clean and sanitised. The women doctors and nurses wore a uniform but no face covering. They were there to save lives, especially that of struggling neonates, not because they were women but because they had a skill, an expertise and a commitment to do so.

In Delhi, certainly, both India and the Afghan regime will want to downplay this avoidable kerfuffle over the exclusion of women journalists and urge everyone to look at the big picture — which is, that India has gone back on its own reservations about the Taliban and will now upgrade its mission in Kabul to a full-fledged embassy. This

The sad part is that it took the Indian govt about a decade to realise its own mistakes in the Afghan theatre.

is truly a big step not just in India’s neighbourhood policy, but also signals a welcome return to pragmatism.

The sad part is that it took the Indian government about a decade to realise its own mistakes in the Afghan theatre. New Delhi was so heavily influenced by the Americans, especially by the Afghan-origin former US ambassador in Kabul Zalmay Khalilzad, that it forgot it was a heavyweight in the region. The US should have depended on India’s historical perspective and current analysis, not the other way round.

India should have played a role in the distribution of power in the Kabul landscape — at first help sort out the power struggle between Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah; then when the Americans were parachuting Ashraf Ghani into Kabul, told them it was a terrible idea; once he was inserted, Delhi could have helped build a coalition against

the emerging Taliban, even as it talked to the moderate Taliban to broker a deal between all sides.

Today, the story in Delhi is — look how smartly India has brought around the Taliban! But the tragedy is that the Taliban were ready to be brought around a really long time ago — talk to any Taliban or non-Taliban Afghan in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan, male or female, Pashtun, Tajik or Hazara, and you will realise the incredible affection and regard Afghans have for Indians. Bollywood heroes and heroines, permanently on *karwa chauth* and beyond, remain such a rage even today.

Never forget that the Taliban are also Afghan — Hamid Karzai reminds you about this fundamental truth each time you speak to him. The significant of this is that they will never really be in hock to the Arab. The question as to why Osama bin Laden left the mountains of Tora Bora to finally live within spitting distance of a Pakistan military establishment in Abbottabad, has its own answers.

The truth is that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has gone through convoluted hoops to arrive at this moment today — which is that Delhi and Kabul have a very special relationship that goes back centuries. Every-

one else has always known that.

Here’s a second truth : India has seceded from its own neighbourhood and allowed other players to take precedence. China, Russia, the US and Pakistan, each of them are significant players in the Indian subcontinent — across all the nations that stretch from the Karakoram mountain ranges to Cox’s Bazaar on the Indian Ocean — and while they are welcome to play, India must return to its pre-eminent spot in this space.

The first step has been taken by hosting Amir Khan Muttaqi. The second must be to reopen India’s consulates in Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif — shut down under one pretext or another, mostly under US pressure and latterly, the fear of the Taliban takeover in 2021.

Perhaps the MEA should send a few of its amazing women diplomats to these consulates, just like it did in 2001 when Vijay Thakur Singh, the redoubtable diplomat on the Afghanistan-Pakistan desk, was sent to Kabul after the US bombed the Taliban into submission after the 9/11 attacks — along with Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, Rudrendra Tandon and Vivek Katju, as India’s ambassador; Katju, now a columnist with *The Tribune*, was part of the team in December 1999 which negotiated with the Taliban on the Kandahar tarmac for a full week to send the passengers of IC-814 safely back home. Who says India doesn’t know the Taliban?

An Indian ambassador in Kabul is hardly a hardship posting. It’s like going home. That’s what Muttaqi should have told all the Indian male and female journalists he should have invited to his Delhi press conference on Friday — and patiently answered all their “what do women want” and all other questions.

Breakfast in Delhi, lunch in Amritsar-if-you-can’t-go-to-Lahore and dinner in Kabul? As Dr Manmohan Singh’s famous phrase resounds across the ether, you can imagine him having the last laugh somewhere.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The Taliban could take our pens and books, but they couldn’t stop our minds from thinking. —Malaka Yousafzai

When *madaaris* cast a spell

BILAL AHMAD SHAMIM

UNTIL the 1990s, *madaaris* — street magicians, jugglers, conjurers, snake charmers, monkey and bear handlers, acrobats, rope dancers/walkers and stilt performers — were the principal source of raw and unfiltered entertainment for both children and adults.

The mere sound of a *dugdugi* or *damru*, or the lilting melody of a flute, would send little children scampering, older ones rushing, and even the elders hurrying briskly to the spot to watch the show. Even passersby could seldom resist lingering a while to watch the *madaari* at work. Young girls and women, however, often viewed the spectacle from behind half-open doors or through curtained windows, stealing furtive glances at the unfolding tricks.

These street performers, usually accompanied by their families, roamed the dusty village paths carrying their modest paraphernalia: a *dugdugi*, a flute, a ‘magic wand’ — called *churtu* in their parlance — a stick, some rags and bags, and a miscellany of sundries for their tricks. They required neither a decorated stage nor an elaborate costume. A bare patch of ground on a humble street, large enough for five score people to gather, was all they needed to bring their performance to life. Occasionally, the *madaari* would summon a boy from the crowd to assist him. This boy, known as the *jamoora* (stooge), became an essential part of the show.

He had a large repertoire of tricks up his sleeve and a rare ability to elicit gasps from the crowd. To begin, he would pose some silly and simple questions to the *jamoora*, such as: “*Jamoore, meri chadar mein ek janwar chhupa hai — bata, tu is se ladega ya bhag jaega?*” or “*Bata, tu shaadi kis se karega?*” Such playful exchanges invariably evoked peals of laughter.

Once he had the audience under his control, the *madaari* would perform tricks one by one: sleight-of-hand illusions, producing pigeons out of an empty bag, bringing sweets seemingly from thin air, pulling iron balls from his mouth, and many more. Between tricks, he cracked jokes to keep the crowd engaged.

Once, a classmate of mine was chosen as the *jamoora*. Holding a tin can in one hand, the *madaari* told the boy to touch his nose, head, cheeks and ears one by one, then put his hand into the can — each time, a coin would drop with a clink. My classmate, lured by the sound of money, tried to dip his hand into his own pocket. The spectators laughed at this innocent attempt.

Almost every show ended with an act that was painful to watch, though it was nothing more than a contrived manoeuvre designed to evoke sympathy and make spectators loosen their purse strings. The *madaari* would cover a family member under a thick cloth and stab him with a knife, even producing fake blood. He would then urge the crowd to drop coins into a bowl that was passed around. Some kids, and even a few adults, would quietly slip away — some out of fear, others unwilling to part with their money.

Once ubiquitous across Indian villages and towns, *madaaris* exist only in memory today.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Diminishing purpose of sports

Refer to ‘Don’t infect sports with politics’; sports has always served as a bridge between nations, transcending boundaries, ideologies and conflicts. Allowing politics to infiltrate the sporting arena not only undermines the spirit of fair play but also distorts the values of teamwork, respect and unity that games are meant to promote. Athletes represent the essence of discipline and dedication — they are ambassadors of peace and goodwill. Denying them the opportunity to interact or compete freely due to political tensions diminishes the universal purpose of holding sporting events. History has shown that sports diplomacy often achieves what political dialogue fails to deliver — mutual respect and understanding. It is, therefore, imperative that governments, sporting bodies and media refrain from politicising games.

PARVINDER SINGH, MOHALI

‘No handshake’ spectacle

Refer to ‘Don’t infect sports with politics’; unfortunately, politics is everywhere, be it sports, defence services or the judiciary. If we decided to play against Pakistan even after the Pahalgam terror attack and Op Sindoor, how could a handshake have altered the state of affairs? If the Indian team skipper acted on instructions from the government, it was a wrong step. One can only hope that if the Women’s World Cup final is played between India and Pakistan, the spectacle of ‘no handshake’ is not repeated. Pakistan is our enemy on the battlefield, but on the playground, we are just rival teams — fighting with bat and ball, not guns.

WG CDR CL SEHGAL (RETD), JALANDHAR

Farmers are frontline workers

Refer to ‘Stop blaming farmers, start supporting them’; stubble burning is not an environmental crime — it is a symptom of a broken agricultural support system. Farmers are not villains; they are frontline workers feeding the nation. If India truly wants cleaner air, it must stop criminalising farmers and instead make them a part of the solution by providing incentives and respect, and promoting innovation. Sustainable change will come from collaboration — where farmers

are not seen as the problem, but as partners in building a cleaner, healthier future.

GAURAV BADHWAR, ROHTAK

Overcoming the visa divide

Refer to ‘Beyond trade deal’; considering the rising cost of US visas and tightening of mobility rules in the UK, there is a golden opportunity for India to discourage brain drain. For decades, our brightest minds have sought career growth abroad due to better opportunities and research ecosystems there. Now, as the usual destinations become less accessible, India must act decisively — by investing in higher education, promoting innovation and ensuring dignity and fair pay for skilled professionals. Instead of lamenting the loss of talent, India should focus on creating conditions that retain and even attract Indian minds back home.

HARSH PAWARIA, ROHTAK

Vigilance needed in festive season

Amid the uproar over deaths caused by killer cough syrups in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the Central and state governments must step up efforts to curb the sale of spurious sweets and dairy products in the festive season. Unscrupulous elements exploit this opportunity to make a quick buck by selling adulterated *paneer* (cheese), *khoya* (milk solids) and skimmed milk that constitute the main ingredient of sweets. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India must conduct special enforcement drives so that every citizen gets to enjoy unadulterated food products during festivals. Public awareness drives should also be carried out.

KRISHAN KANT SOOD, NANGAL

Human lives at risk on roads

Driving has become increasingly difficult due to bad roads and heavy traffic. Earlier, congestion was limited to a few rush hours around school and office timings, but now it seems to persist throughout the day. By promising delivery “within minutes,” food aggregators have created a hazardous system, putting the lives of motorists, pedestrians and, above all, delivery boys at risk.

BALVINDER, CHANDIGARH

UK seeks India's markets, not its workers



SHYAM BHATIA
LONDON CORRESPONDENT,
THE TRIBUNE

WHILE whisky and machinery grab headlines, the most sensitive chapter of the UK-India trade deal is professional mobility, the ability of Indian nurses, engineers and IT specialists to work in Britain with fewer barriers.

The issue touches the core of both nations' ambitions. India wants its skilled citizens to move freely in a global market; Britain wants growth without reopening the door to mass migration. The trade pact, signed in July and now reinforced by UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's visit to India, tries to square that circle.

The deal was concluded at Chequers on July 24 when India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to the UK for the signing of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agree-

ment. Nearly 7,000 new UK jobs were announced during Modi's visit. "These investments are a powerful endorsement of the UK's global standing and economic potential," Starmer said while hosting him. "Nearly 7,000 new jobs spread across every region of our country will mean more opportunities, more innovation, and make working people better off."

Business and Trade Secretary Peter Kyle added that Indian companies were now "investing billions of pounds to back thousands of jobs," proof, he said, of the scale of opportunity this presents for British businesses.

Three months later, when Starmer arrived in Mumbai for his first visit to India as Prime Minister, he was determined to show that July's deal was more than a photo-op. "It was an honour for me to host you in the United Kingdom in July," he told his hosts. "We struck the UK-India Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement in July."

Speaking to business leaders, he added, "I think the opportunities are already opening up. Our job is to make it easier for you to seize the opportunities." At the Global Fintech Fest, he urged Indian entrepre-



UNEASY: In practice, Starmer's immigration white paper tightens several visa routes. REUTERS

neurs to use Britain as their gateway: "We want the UK to be your number one partner of choice for finance and fintech."

He also announced that more than 10,000 further jobs had been created during his delegation's visit and described India as "on track to become the third-largest economy by 2028, with the UK perfectly placed to be a partner in that journey."

Yet the deal's long-term gains remain modest. A

For India, freer movement is the tangible reward that turns trade rhetoric into human opportunity.

House of Commons briefing projects a GDP boost of only 0.13 per cent, or about £4.8 billion. Most benefits will come in services such as finance and education, where the free flow of people is crucial.

The government itself admits that India remains one of the most protectionist markets, with non-tariff barriers that have long restricted UK exports.

RAND Europe, a research institute, called the agreement "as much politics as

economics," warning that strict quotas and narrow sectoral focus could limit its broader impact.

The mobility clause is where that political tension is sharpest. The so-called Mobility Partnership is designed to smoothen the way for Indian professionals, not only doctors and engineers but also creative-industry specialists, fintech analysts and chefs.

In practice, Starmer's new immigration white paper tightens several other visa routes, creating an uneasy contradiction. "The deal's economic logic rests on talent flows," one Warwick Business School economist said, "yet politically, talent mobility remains the hardest sell."

Trade unions share the ambivalence. They welcome skilled labour but fear that without safeguards, wages could fall and contract work may spread. For India, meanwhile, freer movement is the tangible reward that turns trade rhetoric into human opportunity.

Industrial Britain has its own stake. Tariffs on Scotch whisky are dropping from 150 to 75 per cent immediately and to 40 per cent within a decade; machinery and automotive components also gain. But in the Midlands, where small

engineering firms already face cheap imports, enthusiasm is cautious. One chamber official told me, "Investment promises don't always reach the shop floor. Many small and medium-sized enterprises — or SMEs — still need help navigating Indian standards and customs processes."

Large players such as Tata, Mahindra, Infosys and TVS are expanding, yet smaller suppliers worry that partnership could shade into dependence. The manufacturers' body, Make UK, warned that trade deals alone do not rebuild factories; they must be matched by skills, investment and infrastructure.

Ultimately, the success of the UK-India pact may not be measured in whisky barrels or export tonnage but in human movement, the students, nurses, engineers and entrepreneurs who make the corridor between London, Birmingham, Mumbai and Bengaluru busier than ever.

As Starmer put it recently in Mumbai, "Our job is to make it easier for you to seize the opportunities." Whether Britain's politics allows him to deliver on that promise may decide if this deal becomes a milestone, or just another memorandum.

Taliban strips Afghan girls of their last lifeline to education



GORDON BROWN
FORMER PRIME MINISTER,
UNITED KINGDOM

FOUR years after the Taliban excluded girls and women in Afghanistan from secondary and higher education, the regime shut down the internet, depriving them of one of their last opportunities to learn. What started as a ban in a few provinces to "prevent immoral activities" escalated to a nationwide internet blackout on September 29, 2025. While access was restored on October 1, many Afghans say that service remains slow and unstable.

The nearly 2.2 million Afghan girls barred from attending school beyond the primary level now live in fear that they will lose their last lifeline to an education.

Remote learning is one of the few available alternatives (together with underground and homeschooling) for these girls to receive a secondary education while remaining in the country.

Over the past four years, Education Cannot Wait (ECW), which I once chaired, UNICEF, and

strategic partners have provided education to 1,60,000 Afghan girls excluded from the classroom by scaling up community-based and accelerated learning programmes in remote and underserved areas.

But many of these programmes have an online component and, thus, are almost impossible to continue when the Taliban curtails access to the internet.

While the regime has yet to give an official explanation for the recent shutdown, it knew that such a cut would deny Afghans — in particular, girls and women — access to knowledge from the outside world.

The Internet blackout is only the latest example of the Taliban's increasingly brutal assault on the rights of girls and women.

After banning girls over the age of 12 from getting an education, the regime barred women from most forms of employment, excluded them from nearly all public spaces and prohibited them from traveling anywhere without a male chaperone.

The Taliban's draconian dress code requires women to wear burqas, covering them from head to toe.

By 2024, the Taliban's edicts became even more repressive. Women — already banned from speaking in public — were prohibited from praying aloud or reciting the Koran in the presence of other women.

In 2025, as part of a broader ban outlawing the teach-



BRUTAL: With Internet blackout, the Taliban is depriving girls of even online education. SANDEEP JOSHI

ing of human rights and sexual harassment, the Taliban removed books written by women from universities. This included titles like 'Safety in the Chemical Laboratory', which the regime found to be of "concern" due to "anti-Sharia and anti-Taliban policies."

Against this backdrop of tightening restrictions, access to the online world was one of the few freedoms Afghan girls and women were allowed. "The only hope left for us was the Internet and online learning," one woman from the northern province of Takhar explained to the BBC. "When I heard that the Internet had been cut, the world felt dark to me," she added.

Another woman, who lives in an eastern province, described feeling "helpless" in the face of internet outages: "(My sisters and I)

The Taliban's cruel policies have long-term consequences not only for Afghan girls and women but also for the country's economic growth.

dreamed of finishing our education and helping our father financially, but now... we all sit at home doing nothing."

The Taliban's cruel policies and human rights violations have long-term consequences not only for Afghan girls and women, but also for the country's economic growth.

According to UNESCO, the lost income from the exclusion of women and girls from education will total \$9.6 billion — equivalent to two-thirds of today's GDP — by 2066. Such a huge loss would be catastrophic for a country where roughly 85 per cent of people live on less than \$1 a day, and around half the population needs humanitarian assistance to survive.

This is not the future Afghans want. A recent United Nations Women

report found that 92 per cent of the country's population supports girls' secondary schooling.

Afghan girls continue to risk arrest by sharing their powerful testimonies and demanding the right to study in ECW's #AfghanGirlsVoices campaign.

The UN must urgently classify gender apartheid — defined as "inhumane acts committed within the context of an institutionalised regime of systematic discrimination, oppression, and domination by one group over another or others, based on gender, and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime" — as a crime against humanity.

Such a move would represent an important step towards holding the Taliban accountable for its systemic efforts to segregate, control and silence girls and women in Afghanistan.

Muslim-majority countries have vociferously criticised the Taliban's education ban.

Qatar, which has long served as a mediator between the regime and the West, expressed deep concern about the policy.

Saudi Arabia also condemned the decision, which it described as "astonishing in all Islamic countries" and as "contrary to giving Afghan women their full legitimate rights, foremost of which is the right to education."

The United Arab Emirates

pushed for the ban's swift reversal, denouncing it as a violation of "the teachings of Islam."

Islamic teaching does indeed support girls' education. 'Iqra', meaning to read, is the first word of the Koran.

"The seeking of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim," states Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 74, one of the six canonical teachings in Sunni Islam and a sign of the faith's deep commitment to learning by men and women alike.

In accordance with these beliefs, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation is working "to unite scholars and religious authorities in the Islamic world against the decision to prevent girls from education."

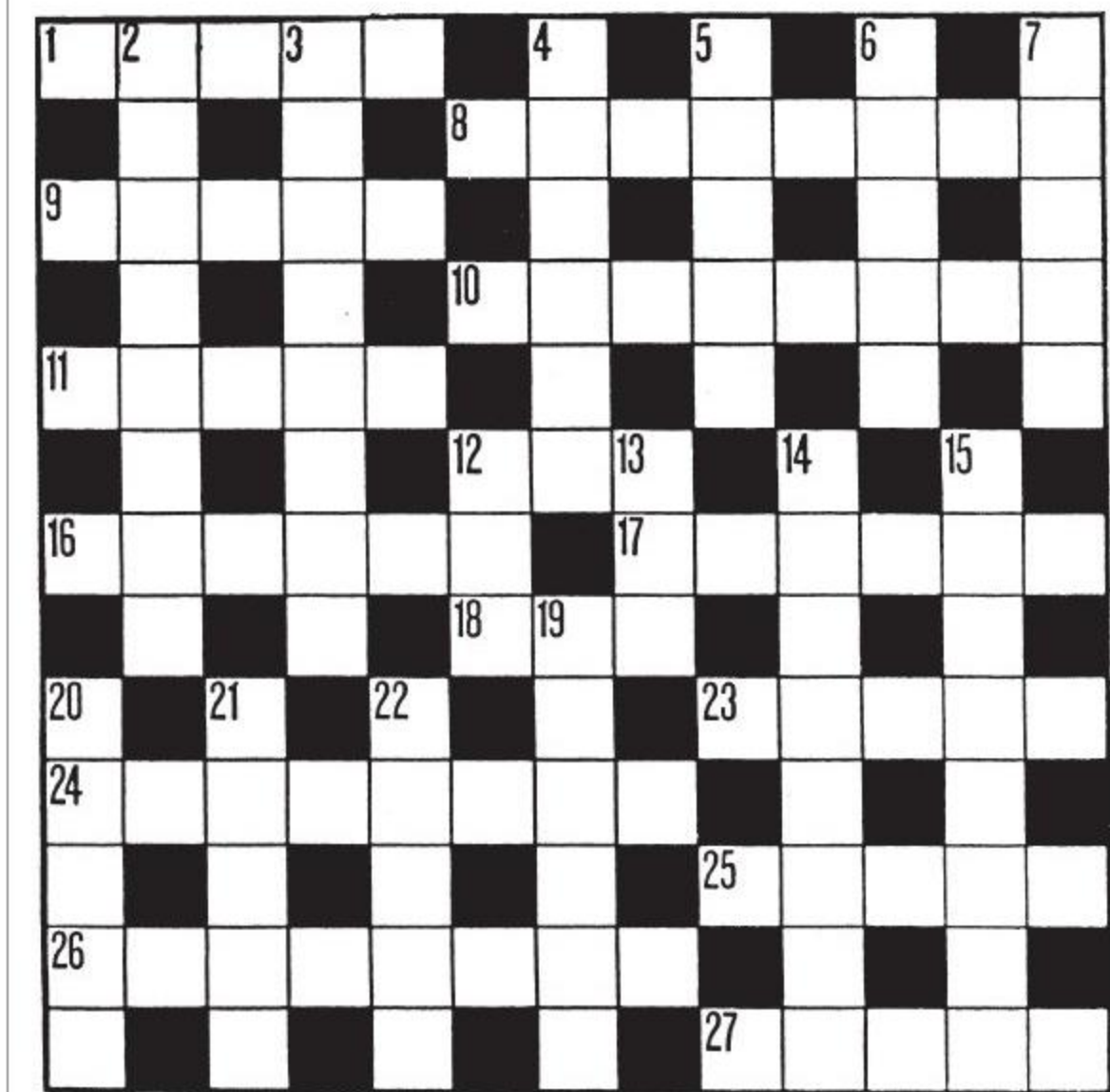
Although the Taliban's Internet blackout was abruptly lifted, the expansion of its assault on girls' education into the online realm is a worrying development.

The regime's leadership, in particular its religious leaders who reside in Kandahar, must be reminded as often as possible that there is no foundation in Islamic law for the Taliban's efforts to revoke the right to learn.

And the international community must take steps to hold the Taliban accountable, especially as its activities penetrate well into Pakistan, and before it pushes its inhumane policy to yet another new extreme.

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QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1 Very small amount (5)
 - 8 Remove all doubt (4,4)
 - 9 Discord of colours (5)
 - 10 Maintain one's position (3,5)
 - 11 Unbending (5)
 - 12 Section of relay race (3)
 - 16 Dedicate (6)
 - 17 Accomplish (6)
 - 18 Follow closely (3)
 - 23 Speak derisively (5)
 - 24 Almost (3,5)
 - 25 Leisure-time activity (5)
 - 26 To say nothing of (3,5)
 - 27 Theatrical profession (5)

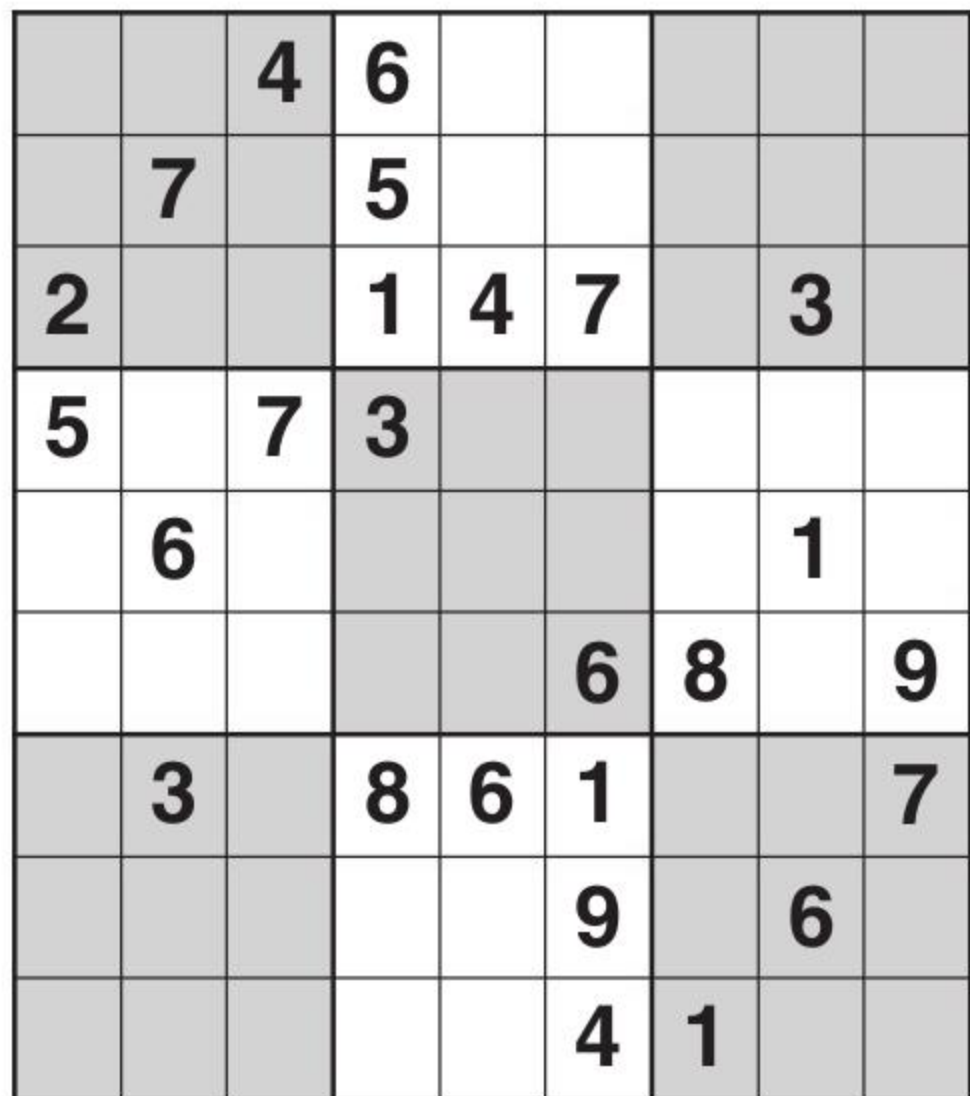
Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Out of order, 6 Able, 10 Canal, 11 Cap in hand, 12 Ravenous, 13 Ashen, 15 Chiffon, 17 Defence, 19 Oversee, 21 Pollute, 22 Prove, 24 Punctual, 27 In the main, 28 Rogue, 29 Etna, 30 Under wraps.

Down: 1 Once, 2 Tentative, 3 False, 4 Raccoon, 5 Exposed, 7 Brash, 8 Endangered, 9 Unlawful, 14 Accomplice, 16 Fostered, 18 Neuralgia, 20 Explain, 21 Penance, 23 Often, 25 Throw, 26 Less.

- DOWN**
- 2 Inopportune (3-5)
 - 3 Take advantage of (4,2,2)
 - 4 Deep narrow gorge (6)
 - 5 English romantic poet (5)
 - 6 Appraise (5)
 - 7 Trivial (5)
 - 12 Guided (3)
 - 13 Joke (3)
 - 14 Refuse to yield (5,3)
 - 15 Diverse assortment (5,3)
 - 19 Pleasure-trip (6)
 - 20 Corner (5)
 - 21 Express clearly (5)
 - 22 Constructed (5)

SU DO KU



HARD

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 11, 2025, SATURDAY

■ Shaka Samvat	1947
■ Aashwin Shaka	19
■ Aashwin Parvishite	26
■ Hijari	1447
■ Krishna Paksha Tithi 5, up to 4:44 pm	
■ Vyatapata Yoga up to 2:07 pm	
■ Rohini Nakshatra up to 3:20 pm	
■ Moon enters Gemini sign 2:25 am	

FORECAST

SUNSET:	SATURDAY	17:56 HRS
SUNRISE:	SUNDAY	06:23 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	30	18
New Delhi	33	19
Amritsar	29	18
Bathinda	29	17
Jalandhar	29	18
Ludhiana	32	19
Bhiwani	29	18
Hisar	29	18
Sirsa	30	20
Dharamsala	27	14
Manali	15	08
Shimla	24	12
Srinagar	23	06
Jammu	31	16
Kargil	14	-01
Leh	14	-01
Dehradun	29	16
Mussoorie	22	12

TEMPERATURE IN °C



Editor's
TAKE

Celebrating discovery creativity, and peace

The 2025 Nobel Prizes shine a spotlight on remarkable human achievements across science, literature, economics and peace

The Nobel Prizes, established by Alfred Nobel's will in 1895, are undoubtedly the most coveted prize on the planet. Over the years it has become an ultimate recognition of one's work. Indeed it it has evolved into the most prestigious global accolade, celebrating human achievement in science, economics literature, and peace. This year, in the field of medicine, Mary Brunkow, Fred Ramsdell, and Shimon Sakaguchi have been honoured for their pivotal discoveries concerning peripheral immune tolerance.

The Nobel Prize in Physics has been awarded to John Clarke, Michel H. Devoret, and John M. Martinis for their experiments demonstrating macroscopic quantum mechanical tunneling and energy quantisation in an electric circuit while in Chemistry, Susumu Kitagawa, Richard Robson, and Omar Yaghi received the prize for their development of metal-organic frameworks (MOFs). But when it comes to Nobel for peace and literature there are different view points as they are highly subjective.

VS Naipaul the celebrated novelist had a long wait to get it. This time around, Hungarian author László Krasznahorkai is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his compelling and visionary oeuvre that, in the midst of apocalyptic terror, reaffirms the power of art. The Nobel Peace Prize, perhaps the most scrutinised of all, has been a subject of controversy over the years. This year, former US President Donald Trump was nominated for his role in facilitating peace agreements, notably between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and his efforts toward ending conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine.

However, US President Donald Trump did not get it as the Nobel Peace Prize 2025 was awarded to Maria Corina Machado, Venezuela's main opposition leader who is in hiding. Machado, also known as Venezuela's Iron Lady for her work in promoting democratic rights. The controversy surrounding the Nobel Peace Prize often stems from the complex nature of global politics.

While the prize aims to recognise individuals or organisations that have made significant contributions to peace, the selection process can be influenced by geopolitical considerations, leading to debates about the true intentions behind awarding the prize. In fact so far two people have refused to accept the Nobel prize. Jean-Paul Sartre and Le Duc Tho voluntarily refused a Nobel Prize. Sartre declined it in the Nobel Literature Prize in 1964 as he rejected all official honours, and Tho declined the 1973 Peace Prize due to the ongoing conflict in Vietnam. US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger received the peace prize in 1973 but it is still debated for the rationale.

At the end of the day Nobel prize is just an honour for someone's achievement but does not define the person. Interestingly enough, Mahatma Gandhi never won a Nobel peace prize but he stands taller than all those who won!

Gaza: Diplomacy and the mirage of peace

As President Donald Trump prepares to unveil an ambitious peace plan in Jerusalem,the region stands at a familiar crossroads: hope staged against history, and diplomacy contending with the unyielding memory of loss



NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA

Well, my days in Jerusalem, Gaza, and Tel Aviv a few weeks ago were in substance no different from my time in Tehran last year. They are arch-enemies, locked in a conflict whose roots are as ancient as they are intractable, a struggle over biblically evolved claims to land and memory. One thing is consistent among both Iranians and Israelis: people are treated not merely as adversaries to be vanquished but as existential embodiments of deeply entrenched national and religious imperatives. While Iranians endure one of the most severe economic constrictions in living memory, Israelis too confront anxiety and austerity, albeit within a militarily assertive framework.

The attacks of October 7, 2023, orchestrated by Hamas, were followed by powerful Israeli counterstrikes, culminating in a devastating crescendo that left grief, ruin, and communities profoundly traumatised on both sides. Two years on, the aftershocks of these hostilities are still being measured-not only in lives lost but in the psychological and societal scars that will shape generations. What unfolds is less a conventional conflict than a palimpsest of pain, where each eruption leaves indelible impressions on the civilian psyche. There is no precise formula predicting the next chapters, but these are undeniably consequential times, as President Trump prepares to land at Ben Gurion Airport this weekend, ostensibly to address the Knesset. The Trump peace plan, audacious in its ambition, seeks to convert a region saturated with grief and militancy into a deradicalised, economically revitalised, and politically stabilised polity. Its twenty points articulate a quasi-utopian vision: a terror-free Gaza overseen by technocrats, suffused with humanitarian aid, subjected to international oversight, and economically incentivised to renounce armed struggle. Yet the challenge lies not in the written agreements but in Gaza's historical substratum, where ideological sediment is deep and resistant. By mandating a temporary Palestinian technocratic committee supervised by a Board of Peace led by Trump and Tony Blair, and by demanding Hamas' demilitarisation, the plan presupposes a linearity to conflict resolution that reality rarely affords. It assumes that structural reforms, conditional amnesties, and international economic infusions can eclipse the cultural memory of martyrdom, imprisonment, and dispossession. Yet this linearity underestimates Hamas' capacity to convert sequential crises into strategic advantage, revealing a profound misreading of the organisation's adaptive acuity.

Hamas, having survived the decapitation of its senior leadership-including once-untouchable figures-has emerged not weakened but trans-



The Pioneer SINCE 1865

THE TRUMP PEACE PLAN, AUDACIOUS IN ITS AMBITION, SEEKS TO CONVERT A REGION SATURATED WITH GRIEF AND MILITANCY INTO A DERADICALISED, ECONOMICALLY REVITALISED, AND POLITICALLY STABILISED POLITY

The writer is a columnist based in Colombo

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PIC TALK

A woman shows her hands decorated with henna on the occasion of the 'Karva Chauth' festival, in Amritsar

PHOTO: PTI

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FRAGILE TRUCE AS ISRAEL, HAMAS AGREE TO INITIAL CEASEFIRE

Israel and Hamas have agreed to the first phase of a Gaza ceasefire under a US-brokered plan proposed by President Donald Trump, marking a cautious step toward ending months of bloodshed.

Announced after indirect talks in Egypt, the agreement - signed on October 9, 2025 - awaits final approval by Israel's security cabinet and parliament.

Under the plan, Israel will halt military operations within 24 hours of ratification, following which Hamas is expected to release 20 hostages, along with the remains of several others.

In return, Israel will free between 1,700 and 2,000 Palestinian prisoners, and humanitarian aid into Gaza will be significantly scaled up.

The truce comes at a politically tense moment: Israeli

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces growing international isolation and domestic dissent, while Hamas is under mounting pressure from regional allies to de-escalate.

A reduction in hostilities could stabilize West Asian markets, ease global oil supply anxieties, and enhance India's trade and energy security.

It may also open space for deeper diplomatic engagement between India, Israel, and key Arab states.

However, observers caution that the agreement remains fragile. The United Nations and concerned nations must sustain diplomatic pressure to ensure that this temporary truce evolves into a durable, verifiable ceasefire.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

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

The easy path and the hard truth!

SANJAY
CHANDRA

We often take the easier, well-trodden path rather than the trail that does not exist. This instinct is the result of conditioning since childhood.

A chance observation during a therapy set me thinking. I first used my right hand before switching to the other for-taping magnets on my palms. It was the easier way as I am a right-hander. I recalled how,during college examinations, we always attempted the easier questions first, leaving the tougher ones for later. That was not taught in any syllabus in the school or the college. We were guided by our instincts and the lessons learned from seniors by word of mouth.These are not isolated incidents. All of us would have similar stories to narrate. The seemingly harmless habits formed during the formative years often

shape our attitudes as adults. They may even make us indifferent to others, not knowingly or out of malice,but simply because of conditioning.

A video was shared on our society WhatsApp groups which illustrated this quite well. It showed a house help sitting on the bench in the lawns with the pet of her employers and talking loudly on her telephone. The clip sparked outrage.Some objected to her sitting on a bench meant only for the residents, others to her gossiping on the telephone while occupying the seat, and many to the pet being allowed free access to the lawns.There were also counter-arguments about the rights of every living being. I suspect, both the view points had roots in the lessons absorbed early in life. One of the roads from Gurgaon to Faridabad runs through the Aravalis. The landscape is a beautiful lush green after the monsoon rains. It would be a beautiful drive if it were not marred by grey and brown patches. The construction debris and other waste material including plasticw are dumped by the roadside. My daughter's friend observed that only a decade ago he used to run along this road in the mornings. It is easy for the authorities to issue instructions for the waste disposal at designated sites. It is easier for the builders and us to scar the lovely landscape. We were taught to keep our homes clean. Nobody told us to keep our surroundings clean too.

A common sight on the roads is the presence of traffic

policemen in hordes at signals. They pounce upon the errant riders and drivers. It is often amusing, though tragic,when we find the law enforcers and the defaulters huddling together to negotiate. Many cannot resist the temptation of an easy way out and others the lure of easy money.

Yet, not all is bleak. We encounter many who do not hesitate to go the extra mile for the good of fellow being sbe-lying the oft repeated sentiment that people are short of time and devoid of empathy in an ever-increasing fast-paced world. I find strangers going out of the way to render assistance to the old for crossing the road or carrying bags for them or any other chore. We, and two other couples, were on vacation in Austria. We caught a bus and realized that we had overshot our destination by some distance. A helpful young lady not only got off the bus with us,but also walked with us till our destination to ensure we were not lost. There are many such examples. Small gestures like these reaffirm faith in humanity.

Doing the easy is wired into our psyche. But that alone is not enough. We must learn and also teach to take the more difficult path.Each of us must become a leader in thought and action. It is not a price to pay. It is an obligation - to ourselves and to humanity.

The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Chidambaram Questions ECI

Senior Congress leader and former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on Thursday questioned the Election Commission of India's (ECI) special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar, citing serious concerns over inclusions, exclusions, and duplication of voter entries.In a sharp statement, Chidambaram demanded transparency, asking: "What is the estimated adult population of Bihar, and what proportion of it is reflected in the electoral rolls? What happened to the rest? How many names are gibberish, and how many house numbers are blank or invalid? How many voters appear twice?" He urged the ECI to answer these questions "in the interests of fairness and public confidence."

The ECI has been accused of failing to publish the final list of deleted voters, amid claims of over five lakh duplicate entries in the state's rolls. Chidambaram asserted that the current revision exercise "creates more doubt than clarity."His remarks come at a crucial juncture, as the Supreme Court is hearing petitions related to the Bihar SIR. With Assembly elections scheduled in two phases on November 6 and 11, and vote counting on November 14, the controversy over electoral integrity has added a new dimension to Bihar's political climate.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Nobel for the Science of material

The 2025 Nobel Prize in Chemistry has been awarded to Susumu Kitagawa, Richard Robson, and Omar M. Yaghi for their pioneering work on metal-organic frameworks (MOFs) - crystalline structures that link metal ions with organic molecules.

Their discovery represents a breakthrough in material science and a profound reminder of chemistry's higher purpose: to transform power into sustainability and harmony with nature.MOFs, with their vast surface area - a few grams equalling that of a football field - can absorb and release gases with remarkable precision. They hold promise for carbon capture, hydrogen storage, water and air purification, and even extracting drinking water from desert air using solar energy.

Robson conceived the architecture, Kitagawa proved its durability, and Yaghi refined it into the discipline of reticular chemistry. Together, they have redefined chemistry not as the art of reaction, but as the science of renewal. Their work stands as both a technological milestone and a moral reminder -that true innovation lies not in mastering nature, but in learning to coexist with it.

VIJAY SINCH ADHIKARI | NAINITAL

The cost of technological progress

The explosive growth of artificial intelligence, especially large language models like GPT, is creating an unexpected strain on global water supplies. Studies show that a single major AI model can consume millions of gallons of water every year, primarily to cool massive data centers. This silent drain is particularly alarming in water-stressed regions such as Texas, the Middle East, and parts of England. Tech giants like Google and Microsoft are investing in recycled water and energy efficient cooling, yet their efforts lag behind the accelerating demand for AI services. The question remains: are we willing to trade vital natural resources for digital progress? As innovation surges ahead, communities already grappling with drought and scarcity face mounting risks. Without urgent global attention to sustainable water management; the future may confront a paradox-where our smartest technologies contribute to one of humanity's oldest challenges: survival. If unchecked, AI's progress could deepen the world's water crisis, turning innovation into an ecological liability. Every digital leap must be matched by environmental foresight Unless global leaders and tech giants treat water as seriously as data, the cost of intelligence may well be thirst - a future where progress flows, but the planet runs dry.

HASNAIN | PATNA

Ladakh: A mirror cracking under climate change

It's easy to think of Ladakh as India's most remote area, useful for tourism brochures and border maps. In reality, it is a mirror that shows our common fate. You can see the hunger of the farmer in Bihar, the thirst of the worker in Delhi, and the worry of families on the beaches in those glaciers that are melting



ACHARYA PRASHANT

Late September brought Ladakh back in the news. There were violent protests in Leh that led to a number of unfortunate deaths. Curfews were put in place, and environmentalist Sonam Wangchuk was arrested under the National Security Act. Protests have since extended to Delhi, Chandigarh, and Dehradun, but the national awareness of the core issue of climate change remains low.

Why doesn't a cry from the roof of the world resonate down to the plains? Ladakh is not warning about an administrative issue or a border grievance. It's an existential problem that will eventually affect every family in India.

The Roof of the World Is Cracking

The Himalayas, often termed "India's northern sentinel", are a wall of ice and stone that protect the subcontinent. But scientists tell us that this wall is still new and weak. A large share of India's climate-related disasters now strike the Himalayan belt. Cloudbursts in Himachal, landslides in Uttarakhand, and glacial-lake bursts in Sikkim are just a few examples.

Satellite studies from 2000 to 2021 show that almost all of Ladakh's glaciers have lost mass, and many are melting at rates never seen before. The Parkachik Glacier in the Suru Valley used to be considered stable, but it currently shrinks by around twenty metres every year. Seventy-seven glaciers in the Drass region got thinner by more than a metre between 2000 and 2020. There are now glacial lakes where ice used to be: silent lakes whose fragile rims can fail without warning.

Glaciers don't melt gently. First, there is a flood when lakes overflow and break their banks. Then comes drought, when the reservoir itself dries up. The cycle of pehle baadh, phir sukha (flood first, drought after) is already happening in villages from Kargil to Nubra.

A Desert of Ice, Now Without Ice

Ladakh is different from the rest of the Himalaya because it is in a rain shadow. It only gets about 100 mm of rain a year; practically all of its water comes from melting snow. As the snowline rises each year, springs dry up, crops die, and people start to move.

A 2023 study by the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology revealed that groundwa-



The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

WE NOW WORSHIP GDP. YET INDIA HAS ALREADY LOST ABOUT TEN PERCENT OF ITS GROWTH IN RECENT YEARS BECAUSE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The writer is a philosopher and teacher of global wisdom literature, is the founder of the PrashantAdvait Foundation and a bestselling author

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ter levels in parts of Leh and Kargil were dropping quickly because glaciers were no longer feeding the aquifers. Local engineers like Sonam Wangchuk devised "ice stupas", fake glaciers that hold winter melt for summer irrigation: an ingenious but temporary fix for a dying cryosphere.

Extreme weather events in India are now routine. The India Meteorological Department recorded 314 days of such events in 2022 and over 310 by 2024, with the Himalaya bearing the biggest share.

Hunger, Heat, and Feedback Loops

Climate change affects us three times a day: at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The FAO's 2023 report says that over three billion people are malnourished in some way. This will get worse because of the Himalayan situation. Research in Nature Climate Change shows India's main crops — wheat, rice, maize, bajra, and jowar — are expected to have lower yields by mid-century, with losses up to 25 percent depending on the scenario. When supply shrinks, prices rise; the poorest, who spend most of their income on food, will be hurt first. Snow and ice reflect sunlight. Lose that albedo and dark rock speeds the

thaw. Soot from diesel traffic and road-work makes glaciers darker, making them absorb more heat. Water vapour, a greenhouse gas, rises from melting ice. Warmer oceans release carbon instead of absorbing it. These aren't lyrical metaphors; they're feedback loops that can be measured. If the average global temperature goes up by 2 °C, northern India could rise by 4 to 8 °C. Think about Delhi or Jaipur at 55 degrees Celsius. At that temperature, even air conditioners break down, tyres fuse with asphalt, and people stop working outside. This isn't prophecy; it's science.

Water, War, and the Illusion of Growth

Thirst will come along with food insecurity. In the next few decades, more than a hundred towns around the world are expected to face severe water shortages. Thirty of these cities are in India. Jaipur, Indore, Thane, and Srinagar are all on the same line as Bengaluru.

In the past, wars were fought over colonies and then over oil. Unless cooperative frameworks like India's river-sharing agreements with its neighbours grow to put shared resilience first, the

battles of the future may be for water.

If the threat is so clear, why don't more people act? Because we are all distracted. Endless entertainment, fights between groups, and the cult of GDP are all drugs. People think of climate change as something far away or too technical, even as it eats away at life itself.

We now worship GDP. Yet India has already lost about ten percent of its growth in recent years because of climate change. In the worst-case scenario, the loss might be as high as thirty percent by mid-century. Crops wrecked, infrastructure ruined, deaths due to heat — the harm is real. Some say that India should focus on development first and that taking action on climate change is only for the wealthy. But this is not a real choice: climate change has already hurt our growth; therefore, real development must now mean being able to adapt. We build buildings to show progress, while the mountains that feed our rivers are falling apart. The contradiction is clear: growth eats the land it stands on.

A Mirror and a Warning

Research from the Indian Institute of Science shows the average temperature

in Leh has gone up by roughly 1.6 degrees Celsius since 1980. Over the past two decades, Ladakh's glaciers have lost about 14 percent of their mass. It's easy to think of Ladakh as India's most remote area, useful for tourism brochures and border maps. In reality, it is a mirror that shows our common fate. You can see the hunger of the farmer in Bihar, the thirst of the worker in Delhi, and the worry of families on the beaches in those glaciers that are melting. All of the feedback loops happening there — melting ice, unpredictable monsoons, and tired soil — will eventually reach the plains. The Himalaya is not just a beautiful sight; it is the subcontinent's cooling system. When the engine gets too hot, every field and faucet below will tremble.

The Real Logic Behind the Protests

The protests going on lately are not just about Ladakh's political position or independence. They are a warning for civilisation. Sonam Wangchuk and local farmers are on a hunger strike to draw attention to something deeper than government negligence.

It would be just as foolish to ignore them because they are from a faraway district as it would be to ignore the smoke alarm because it goes off in another room. Ladakh needs to be declared an ecologically vulnerable zone right away, with limits on construction and tourism that can be enforced. These are not hard things to ask for. They need political will, not technological marvels.

Freedom from Denial

Sonam Wangchuk should indeed be released, but real freedom comes from working together to safeguard Himalayan habitats, encourage sustainable consumption, and prioritise renewable energy. Ladakh isn't yelling for itself; it's yelling for all of us. The Himalaya has already made its statement — in ice, in floods, and in silence.

Not just ice melts there; so does human awareness. We need to look in the mirror. And when we do, we'll understand that the protests in Ladakh aren't acts of rebellion; they're acts of remembrance, reminding a distracted civilisation that when the roof collapses, every room below is lost.

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Reviving the spirit of discipline through a better-trained National Cadet Corps



GURMEET SINGH

One of the most useful youth organisations created immediately after Independence was the National Cadet Corps, the genesis of which was to create a force of young minds at the national level to train young boys and girls to be better citizens and future leaders of our vast country in all walks of life, including the defence forces. This was rightly realised by our leaders through a committee under Pandit H N Kunzru in 1946, and subsequently, after a series of meetings at various levels, it came into existence on 16th July 1948 under the NCC Act XXXI of 1948 under the Ministry of Defence with the following aims:

- To develop character, comradeship, ideals of service and capacity for leadership in the youth of the country.
- To stimulate interest in the defence of the country by providing service training to youth.
- To build up a reserve to enable the Armed Forces to expand rapidly in a national emergency.

The National Cadet Corps was given an inter-service image in 1950 when the Air Wing was added, followed by the Naval Wing in 1952. While elementary military training was given to school students (cadets of the Junior Division), college students (cadets of the Senior Division) were trained as potential officers of the three wings — Army, Navy and Air Force. Following the Chinese Aggression, to meet the requirement of the nation, National Cadet Corps training was made compulsory in 1963. However, on the resistance of students against compulsory National Cadet Corps training and also on the suggestions of some Vice-Chancellors, entry into the NCC was again made voluntary in 1968.

Till 1968, NCC's Senior Division was being taken very seriously, and good regular officers were given the charge to look after the management at the Directorate, Group and Unit levels. The resources, stores, logistics, furniture and office accommodation in respect of Group Headquarters and Units were being taken care of in a very proper and planned manner.

The whole NCC under the first DG onwards was being planned and expanded in a very careful and controlled manner, under the command and control of regular and efficient officers, keeping in mind the needs and financial resources of the country. After this, the NCC expanded in a very haphazard manner, mindlessly from 23,000 in 1950 to about 14 lakh cadets at present, with the aim to expand this to about 17 lakh in the next three years. This expansion of Units, Groups and

the Directorates in different states was never properly planned, without looking at the resources. There were no proper buildings to house these NCC establishments during the period of this mindless expansion, till about 1988.

There were very few regular officers to look after these various Units. Many retired and re-employed officers were given the charge of Units and Groups. These officers had no interest in the upkeep of these NCC offices and in imparting serious training to cadets. The NCC cadets were not being given the right picture about officers' lifestyles, officer-like qualities and turnout. The quality of training was far below the desired standard. Most of the service-related issues were either neglected or presented in a very shabby manner. Probably no Unit or Group was fully equipped to give proper training in the right spirit, either because of the lack of the right kind of staff or lack of resources.

Other than in some big cities, there was no semblance of training equipment and resources at the local levels in rural areas. The officers posted in these rural areas were least interested in the development of NCC. They were just passing their time without proper teaching of service matters and of military training schedules, particularly in rural belts. In addition to service subjects, very little attention was being paid to some of the important aspects like parade training and turnout. These were being neglected everywhere.

The impression was given that parade training was a waste of time and served no purpose other than physical fitness, which is covered under sports. Parade training is one of the most important aspects of the training that helps in developing focus and concentration among the youth but unfortunately has not been paid due attention. It was generally seen that anyone taking parade training seriously had the best focus in their day-to-day schedule as compared to others. It has been seen, though not properly documented, that those who take parade training seriously performed much better in all activities as compared to those who neglected it. In the big cities, the Units were reasonably well-equipped but in rural areas things are in an utter state of neglect. The entire NCC logistics in many states are in a state of absolute neglect. Looking at the benefits, these are sheer minimal compared to the amount being spent. The audit carried out every year into these offices is also a matter of questionable sanctity. Too many senior officers are holding charge of NCC activities who are not able to pay proper attention towards management and planning, which can be better looked after by officers at the Group Commander level. On the general front, the refreshment provided is highly inadequate and should be improved in quality and quantity. On the brighter side, there are some excellent and useful activities provid-

ed to cadets which are impossible to get otherwise, like the Republic Day Camp, Advance Leadership Camp (most useful for personality development), Hiking, Trekking, Rock Climbing Training Camp, Yachting Regatta and other such activities specialised in the Naval and Air Wings.

One of the best programmes established is the Youth Exchange Programme, where cadets visit foreign countries, thereby helping in international understanding. Cadets are being sent abroad regularly. The selected candidates also get opportunities to have overseas deployment, but unfortunately, the opportunities for all these above-mentioned programmes are given only to a handful of cadets from our country and need to be expanded further to be available to a larger section.

A large section remains all through without these benefits. A large number might not have even heard about these activities because of the poor training uniformly being provided all over.

Though on paper there is an opportunity for cadets to become commissioned officers after clearing the 'C' Certificate exam, the number remains dismissively low. This should also be expanded further to benefit a larger number of cadets. Finally, when we look at the list of DG NCC, in the initial phase some had a tenure at the 2-star rank level for close to 15 years, which is not understandable. Were there no other suitable young officers at that stage, or were these officers not considered fit for further promotion or for any other suitable assignment that they were stuck in the NCC for so long? As a consequence, these long tenures made these officers uninterested in proper planning and development of NCC as compared to an officer who would be much more enthusiastic towards this if given a shorter tenure. The cadet's handbook has some excellent suggestions, but no one at any level ever monitors it. If we need to revamp this institution of NCC in the proper direction, we need to have excellent officers to encourage students through their personal examples. After considerable efforts at universities and academic levels, approval could be obtained for giving up to four credits towards their graduation degree under NEP-2020, so that we are able to get eventually not only wonderful defence officers but also excellent citizens for our nation, which is equally important for our nation's all-round development.

It can be said that NCC is the finest organisation for youth for overall personality development if proper training is imparted, but there is a huge gap between the planned schedule and the actual work being done, and therefore its performance can be rated as far below the level of satisfaction.

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CHANDRAKANT KUMBHANI

Cotton is more than just a fabric; it is a fibre that weaves together economies, ecosystems, and human lives across the globe. From the clothes that warm us to the livelihoods that depend on its cultivation, cotton remains at the heart of both global trade and rural prosperity. As the world seeks more sustainable ways to grow and live, cotton offers a powerful example of how farmers can lead this change — preserving the environment while building more secure and rewarding livelihoods.

India, one of the largest cotton producers in the world, sits at the forefront of this opportunity. For generations, the crop has supported millions of smallholder farmers, shaping rural economies and communities across the country. Today, even as the sector faces challenges such as climate variability, groundwater depletion, and market fluctuations, a quiet revolution is taking place in cotton fields across India.

Sustainability is no longer a choice but a necessity, and a powerful lever for growth. Across India, an increasing number of farmers are beginning to adopt practices that make cotton both more productive and more resilient. Examples of organic and regenerative farming, crop rotation, intercropping, and integrated pest management are showing encouraging results — improving soil health, conserving water, and reducing dependence on chemical inputs. These approaches are restoring degraded land, lowering production costs, and helping farmers adapt to unpredictable weather patterns. The challenge now lies in taking these proven practices from scattered successes to widespread adoption, ensuring that cotton remains viable even in the face of climate change. However, the change cannot stop at the farm. For real impact, farmers must have a stronger voice and fairer access to markets. Today, most smallholder cotton growers still sell through long chains of intermediaries, leaving them with little bargaining power and a minimal share of the final value. While examples of farmer collectives and producer organisations are emerging across India, they still represent only a fraction of the cotton sector. Expanding these models is key to ensuring that farmers can aggregate their produce, improve quality, and negotiate directly with ginners, textile units, and responsible brands. When smallholders are better organised and connected to markets that value sustainable cotton, they gain not just higher incomes but also greater stability. Building

these pathways at scale is essential if sustainability is to translate into real economic empowerment for India's cotton farmers.

Equally significant is the social transformation taking place alongside these economic shifts. Women, who form a large and often under-recognised part of the agricultural workforce, are increasingly being acknowledged as essential contributors to cotton's success. When women farmers have equal access to training, technology, and financial resources, entire communities benefit. Strengthening women's participation and supporting farmer cooperatives and producer organisations that promote equity helps create systems where knowledge, opportunity, and profits are more evenly shared.

Of course, challenges remain. Climate stress, soil fertility, and labour inequities continue to test the resilience of farming communities. Yet the solutions to many of these problems already exist; what is needed now is scale. Proven practices that conserve water and promote efficient use, restore soil health, and improve working conditions must reach far more farmers to make a lasting difference. This is where collaboration becomes critical. Civil society organisations, corporates, government agencies, and philanthropists all have vital roles to play in driving farmer education, awareness, and capacity-building.

Encouragingly, this growing ecosystem of collaboration demonstrates that cotton's future can indeed be sustainable — one where productivity, environmental balance, and human well-being advance hand in hand. When sustainability becomes central to how cotton is grown, processed, and valued, it safeguards not only the crop itself but also the millions of

families whose lives are interwoven with it. Cotton's story has always been deeply human. It is the story of hands that sow, pick, spin, and weave, of livelihoods sustained and futures built. By embracing sustainability, India can demonstrate how time-honoured farming practices and contemporary approaches can join forces to safeguard both communities and the environment. The stakes could not be higher, but neither could the potential. Cotton remains the world's most widely used natural fibre, and the decisions made today — from farm to fabric — will determine whether it continues to support the livelihoods of millions of farmers and their communities. India can lead the way in making cotton a model of sustainable growth, showing how a traditional crop can secure both environmental health and more stable, equitable livelihoods for rural families.

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Opinion

What Trump's Gaza plan means for the two-state solution

DR. ABDEL AZIZ ALUWAISHAQ

Donald Trump's peace plan is focused on Gaza, but it includes a vague reference to Palestinian statehood. The plan went through a number of iterations, taking into account input from the various parties. Point 19 of the edited version of the plan, as released by the White House, states: "While Gaza redevelopment advances and when the PA reform program is faithfully carried out, the conditions may finally be in place for a credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood, which we recognize as the aspiration of the Palestinian people." Notice that it says that conditions "may finally be in place" for a "pathway to Palestinian statehood."

To reassure Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu even further, point 20 states the US, not the UN or other mediators, "will establish a dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians to agree on a political horizon for peaceful and prosperous coexistence."

These conditions the plan attaches to

peace moves beyond Gaza were clearly some of the edits that Netanyahu insisted on to accept the plan. The White House acquiesced to get the deal through. Still, this is significant because, after many years of rejecting even such remote and vague references, Netanyahu is changing course. It is also the first time that Trump, in his second term, has expressed public support for a Palestinian state.

The momentum toward the realization of a two-state solution appears to be unstoppable. The Gaza genocide has finally persuaded the doubters of the heavy price of reluctance and hesitation. Too many countries have waited too long to grant the Palestinians what is their due in the form of an independent and viable state.

The New York Declaration and the High-Level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution marked the high points of this year's UNGA.

The Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, led by Saudi Arabia, France, Norway, the Arab



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League and the EU, has generated so much interest that almost every nation in the world has joined. The New York Declaration, which was endorsed by the UNGA, includes a clear pathway to full Palestinian statehood. The alliance has several working groups.

The current Israeli government is in clear opposition to these moves. In panic, it has hastily adopted a plan to establish large settlements dissecting the West Bank, with the purpose of making a Palestinian state difficult to achieve. Under the guidance of its most extremist ministers, it has unleashed violent settlers to burn and terrorize Palestinian villages. Its minister of finance, another right-wing fanatic, has withheld hundreds of millions of dollars accrued to the Palestinian Authority from customs revenues in order to starve Palestinian institution of funds.

In response, the Emergency Coalition for the Financial Sustainability of the Palestinian Authority was announced on Sept. 27, following the UN conference and the announcement of the Trump plan. Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland,

Ireland, Japan, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and the UK announced the launch of the new grouping to deal with the urgent and unprecedented financial crisis confronting the PA.

The immediate purpose is to "stabilize the PA's finances and preserve its ability to govern, provide essential services, and maintain security, all of which are indispensable to regional stability and to preserving the two-state solution," according to a statement released by the coalition, which was formed in the belief that short-term aid alone is not sufficient. What is needed is a sustainable, predictable and coordinated funding mechanism, working with international financial institutions and key partners to mobilize resources, support ongoing governance and economic reforms, and ensure full transparency and accountability.

Trump's peace plan for Gaza is a good start, but the work of the global alliance is needed now more than ever to continue the march toward the realization of a sovereign and viable Palestinian state.

After many years of rejecting even such remote and vague references, Netanyahu is changing course



COURTESY: AMJAD RAJIB/ASHARQ AL-AWSAT

I am worried that every strategic European decision is being influenced by whatever Moscow does or thinks

EU is diverting from its core goals and mission

KHALED ABOU ZAHR

Today, I see that Europe is diverting from its core goals and mission. I am worried that its obsession with Russia will hinder its expansion or even its growth as a single market. It sees Moscow's hand in everything bad that happens. While deterrence and security have always been part of the EU or any bloc's construction, it was always guided by something more, like higher values, especially when it came to its construction and expansion. It is like the more you try to avoid the tree on the road, the more likely you are to hit it.

I am worried that every strategic European decision is being influenced by whatever Moscow does or thinks. There is a big difference between the EU's positioning against the Soviet Union and its positioning

today against Moscow. Being ready and prepared for any risk was only part of its positioning during the Cold War; the bigger picture was building a prosperous bloc and avoiding wars between its members, while offering equal opportunities to all.

There was a clear positive example of what Europe stood for when Spain joined the European Communities in 1986. This move came a decade after the end of Franco's dictatorship and the adoption of a democratic system. The same can be said of Greece, which became a member in 1981 after the end of its junta period. For both countries, joining the bloc helped stabilize their political systems and modernize their economies. This expansion was natural and for the benefit of Europeans, not focused on an enemy.

But things have changed. The construction of the EU is now being led by tactics,



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not a long-term strategy or a focus on achieving real goals. We can clearly see how Moscow is even guiding the EU's relations with Türkiye. This is demeaning both for Brussels and Ankara.

Moreover, one should ask whether the discussions about Ukraine's candidacy are being pushed for the right reasons or only as a part of a tit-for-tat with Moscow.

We cannot avoid stating that Brexit and the weakening of Paris and Berlin have shaken the pillars of the EU. Moreover, overregulation and the imposition of policies — such as immigration policies — that no longer seek to unite but to erase national identities in favor of a European one are, in my view, the same core issue. The overcentralization of the EU's operations, instead of empowering a confederation, is the real issue. It is time for Europe,

as it builds up its defense and develops real deterrence, to enter the next phase of its construction and to shift toward the building of a confederation.

A confederation would allow defense, foreign policy, economic policies and trade to be unified in a central European institution, while the individual states would retain their authority. This step would allow the EU to be more than an economic zone that clumsily does geopolitics. It could reset itself and come up with a real and clear political vision that allows countries to cooperate closely on important issues, such as security and economic stability, while preserving national sovereignty and cultural identities.

The EU needs to evolve into a confederation, while preserving regional autonomy. This is its true strength.

Opinion

COP30 may be the most significant climate summit yet

DR. MAJID RAFIZADEH

COP30, the latest edition of the annual UN climate change conference, is coming at a time of accelerating climate issues and risk. Scientists are increasingly warning that tropical forest systems — especially the Amazon — are approaching a tipping point. Recent assessments also reveal that much of the Amazon is already degraded or deforested to the point that even modest further losses could push it past a key threshold.

This means that the efforts of the next few years will determine whether global warming can be limited to the targets set out in the Paris Agreement. So, next month's COP30 is critical and should be more than a diplomatic meeting. It must ensure policy, finance and local action proportionate to the scale of the danger. Hosting the conference in Belem, Brazil, has more than symbolic importance. Holding the negotiations at the edge of the Amazon places the forest, its people and its ecology at the heart of global climate discussions. This should force policymakers and delegates to directly confront what is at risk — not in abstraction but in living ecosystems and communities. Moreover, the urgency of scaling finance is greater than ever. As a result, COP30 ought to address the gaps, as many countries'

existing commitments fall far short of what climate science indicates is needed. The deficit is not only in ambition but also related to the capacity for implementation and funding. COP30 must focus on several issues and areas that are intertwined and it should also pay special attention to particular regions whose stakes are disproportionately high. First, halting deforestation and forest

degradation must be at the core of the discussions. The Amazon biome is essential and the accumulated losses of forest cover and degradation are threatening its ecological integrity and its capacity to function as a carbon sink. It is also important to restore degraded lands and ensure that economic development does not drive further forest loss. Second, in terms of climate finance, developing countries — particularly tropical forest nations, small island states and least developed countries — face severe shortages. As a result, the international community should increase transparency, ensure accountability and channel funds directly to subnational actors and vulnerable populations. Third, the rights and participation of indigenous peoples should be guaranteed. This means supporting local livelihoods, respecting land tenure and territorial governance, avoiding displacement and involuntary resettlement, and ensuring that



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benefit-sharing occurs. Fourth, many regions are already experiencing climate impacts — intensified storms, floods, droughts and fires, threats to water and food security, and damage to infrastructure. Therefore, COP30 ought to strengthen actions that help societies buffer, adapt to and recover from harm. The Baku to Belem Roadmap and Brazil's proposed Tropical Forests Forever Facility address some of the core deficits in climate finance, especially for forests, adaptation and the need for results-based payments. More importantly, the inclusion of indigenous peoples, civil society and local governments in planning and calls for governance reforms are positive signs. Nevertheless, there are still some substantial gaps. First, the scale of the finance proposed may be insufficient, as the estimates for what is needed to avoid catastrophic climate change — in forests and globally — are far larger. The ambition for \$1.3 trillion annually is meaningful, but disbursement, monitoring and ensuring that money reaches those who need it most remain a challenge. Furthermore, inclusion could be threatened if representatives from vulnerable regions or nonstate actors are unable to attend or participate fully, meaning the outcomes may be skewed

toward powerful actors. Implementation capacity could also be uneven. Many of the proposals depend on strong local governance and the legal enforcement of rights, which in many parts of the Amazon remain fragile. Timelines and accountability are critical. Proposals must not only be adopted on paper but also have clear, monitored deadlines and enforcement. Without these moves, COP30 will only create declarations and roadmaps that will not be translated into sustained, long-term change. COP30 in Belem may prove to be one of the most consequential climate summits ever. The stakes are exceptionally high due to the potential collapse of portions of the Amazon. The proposals already on the table could be effective. But the summit's success will depend on whether it leads to tangible outcomes that are cemented in binding commitments. The importance of COP30 should not only lie in the convening of global actors, but in them taking concrete action that shifts climate governance toward greater justice and effectiveness. This includes whether finance is delivered at the scale needed and whether the voices of those most affected — indigenous peoples, local communities and poorer nations — are genuinely heard and empowered.

The conference in Brazil must ensure policy, finance and local action proportionate to the scale of the danger

Its success will depend on whether it leads to tangible outcomes that are cemented in binding commitments

Green shipping could mean a green Africa

CHUKWUMERIE OKEREKE

In early September, African leaders convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for the Second Africa Climate Summit, which focused on overcoming the obstacles to climate-resilient development on the continent. In their efforts to devise solutions, drive innovation and attract financing, these leaders are reshaping global climate action. As part of that process, they are increasingly recognizing that decarbonizing shipping — an industry that generates nearly 3 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions — could be a powerful catalyst for Africa's green industrialization. African governments have already emerged as key players in negotiations over reductions in shipping emissions. Earlier this year, they helped secure the approval of the Net-Zero Framework at the International Maritime Organization, the UN's maritime regulator. Included in the framework is the world's first binding pricing mechanism on greenhouse gas emissions from ships. This measure, which the International Maritime Organization is expected to adopt formally at its upcoming October session, represents an important

victory for multilateral climate action and signals the beginning of the end of shipping's dependence on fossil fuels. But the real test will be how this pivotal policy is designed and implemented over the next few years. For African governments, the biggest question is how the revenues generated from the International Maritime Organization's pricing mechanism, projected to be \$10 billion to \$15 billion per year by 2030, will be used. If distributed equitably, these funds could help Africa close its huge energy gap, upgrade its port infrastructure and fleets, and invest in transmission networks and grids that could unlock our vast renewable energy potential, especially in geothermal, wind and solar. A resilient grid is also essential for the production of renewable hydrogen and other green e-fuels — the most promising long-term clean energy solution for the shipping industry. This would likely provide a boost to Africa's existing green hydrogen projects and spur new ones, in the process accelerating industrialization, boosting gross domestic product and positioning the continent as a



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global energy exporter. Until now, Africa has faced challenges in developing its abundant renewable resources largely because of the high cost of capital. African economies remain weighed down by unsustainable debt burdens and low credit ratings, which make it prohibitively expensive to invest in clean energy. Given the perceived risks, the continent currently receives only about 2 percent of global investment in renewables. But the revenues raised from the International Maritime Organization's new carbon-pricing mechanism could be used to lower initial costs, de-risk clean energy investments and pave the way for Africa to power global shipping. Crucially, the International Maritime Organization must support this drive to harness Africa's renewable resources by creating strong incentives for e-fuels. Otherwise, cheaper options such as liquefied natural gas, which is far more destructive to the planet, and crop-based biofuels, which increase pressure on food systems, risk undercutting green hydrogen and impeding African countries' efforts to achieve sustainable growth and development. The

increased use of biofuels would be particularly catastrophic for African countries. Like many other African countries, Nigeria has everything it takes to become a leader in sustainable shipping fuels, including abundant sun and wind and a young workforce. Now it just needs the right investments. If designed properly, the International Maritime Organization's framework could help provide the funds that Africa needs to ramp up its renewable energy capacity. Failure to create an ambitious, equitable policy risks limiting Africa's prospects. As the International Maritime Organization gathers in London this month to adopt its Net-Zero Framework, African countries must show the same leadership and determination as they did at the Second Africa Climate Summit. Ensuring that the continent reaps the benefits of the International Maritime Organization's new mechanism would be a remarkable example of international cooperation. A climate-resilient future is within reach, so long as African voices are heard, and taken seriously, on the global stage.

Until now, Africa has faced challenges in developing its abundant renewable resources largely because of the high cost of capital

Like many other African countries, Nigeria has everything it takes to become a leader in sustainable shipping fuels

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The FT View



Trump’s militarisation of law enforcement

The president is putting the neutrality of US armed forces under threat

As National Guard troops from Texas and Illinois arrived in the Chicago area this week, Donald Trump escalated his feud with Illinois governor JB Pritzker, who has vocally opposed their deployment to the city. Accusing him of failing to protect federal immigration officers – the ostensible purpose of sending Guard troops – the president fumed that Pritzker, and Chicago’s mayor Brandon Johnson, should “be in jail”. Chicago is the latest place where the president is bent on breaking the presumption against deploying the military for law enforcement on US soil. National Guard soldiers have already gone into Los Angeles and Washington DC, and a small number into Memphis, Tennessee. A court has temporarily blocked their use in Portland, Oregon. Trump

insists they are needed to fight crime, and protect Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and federal property amid his mass deportation programme. His orders look instead like a dangerous power grab aimed at creating a domestic military force answerable to him – and which can be used against the will of state executives. The president has used a favourite ploy to circumvent the Posse Comitatus Act that prohibits the use of the military to execute domestic laws: declaring a crisis that requires emergency measures. The grounds he is citing to put National Guard troops under federal control are entirely specious. Trump has called Portland a “war zone” and “war-ravaged” city. But district judge Karin Immergut, a Trump appointee, said the claim that federal troops were needed to control a protest at an ICE facility was “simply untethered to the facts”. The president has called Chicago a “hell hole” of crime, though crimes including homicides have

dropped sharply since Covid-era peaks. Trump is also taking these steps only in Democrat-run cities. But an academic study this year found that electing a Democrat rather than a Republican as mayor made little difference to crime and arrest rates. Federal immigration agents are using military-style tactics, often with TV cameras on hand. In a raid on Chicago’s South Side last week, said to target connections to the Venezuelan Tren de Aragua crime gang, agents used unmarked trucks to surround an apartment block, some reportedly rappelling from helicopters. Residents including children were zip-tied, according to an immigrant and refugee rights group. Such heavy-handed methods provoke protests, which can then be a pretext to call in Guard troops. The dramatisation of supposed internal threats such as Tren de Aragua is the domestic complement to the president’s attempts to turn Venezuela into an external bogeyman for the US. Address-

The country urgently needs the Supreme Court to rule on what the tests are for ordering soldiers on to American streets

ing top US military officers last week, Trump claimed that America was “under invasion from within”. Fighting this “enemy within” would now be a major part of the military’s mission. US courts have put up some resistance against the president’s militarisation of law enforcement. Judge Immergut issued temporary restraining orders blocking deployment of both Oregon and California National Guard troops to Portland. A federal judge last month barred soldiers from law enforcement activities across California, but the justice department said it would appeal. Thankfully, Trump has so far complied with judgments. But as the restraining orders and appeal rulings mount up, America urgently needs the US Supreme Court to rule on what the tests are for putting the US armed forces on American streets. The political neutrality of the military has long been a pillar of US democracy and its constitutional order. With alarming speed, Trump has brought it into question.

Opinion Technology

How China could pull ahead in the AI race



Dan Wang

Each month brings fresh indications that China is catching up with the US on the development of artificial intelligence. At the end of 2024, the Chinese start-up DeepSeek decisively demonstrated that Silicon Valley possesses no monopoly on frontier models. It’s large language AI model was shown to achieve a comparable performance using far fewer chips than those of the US. In the wake of DeepSeek, models released by Alibaba, ByteDance, Moonshot AI and other Chinese labs have demonstrated new capabilities. Even China’s beleaguered, sanctioned chip sector has seen the production of AI chips surge. Within Silicon Valley, more start-up founders and venture capitalists are gaining an appreciation of the scale of China’s broader achievements. They

It has advantages in power generation, technical talent and data on manufacturing

grow more impressed by its ability to master complex manufactured products at scale, such as electric vehicles, as well as the ability to make enormous investments in electrical power. That has been accompanied, over the past 10 months, by a sense of unease about the Trump administration’s policies, including limiting the employer-sponsored H-1Bs visas widely used by the tech sector. By nearly all measures, the US still maintains the global lead on AI. It possesses the most important asset: computing capacity, as represented by the most advanced AI chips. But computing power is not the only component of AI. China enjoys other structural advantages in the competition. So it is time to ask: Is there a potential scenario in which China pulls ahead of the US on AI? Data centres demand fantastic amounts of electrical power. Here, China has a towering advantage over the US. In the first half of 2025, Ember Energy calculated that China installed 256 gigawatts of solar capacity – that’s 12 times the 21 gigawatts installed in the US. While China has 32 nuclear reactors under construction, the US has none. Meanwhile, President Donald Trump has been actively hostile to the deployment of solar and wind,

denouncing these technologies as “the scam of the century”, and directing his administration to cancel offshore wind development. In the longer term, the US might run into power problems caused by hungry data centres. China, a state that takes pains never to deny power to heavy industry, faces little of that risk. AI is created by a class of human technical talent that is highly skilled and very expensive. To build up Meta’s capabilities, Mark Zuckerberg has reportedly offered pay packages worth hundreds of millions to individual engineers. Many of the publicly listed hires at Meta’s AI lab earned their degrees at Chinese universities, including Tsinghua, Peking and Zhejiang University. These Chinese engineers tend to be fluid creatures, sometimes moving between labs in Silicon Valley, sometimes repatriating when attracted to China or disenchanted with the US. Here again, Trump’s policies have the potential to destabilise competitive dynamics. The intensity of the Maga movement’s xenophobia could prompt more of them to take their skills back to China. AI is not a simple “race”. What matters is not just creating the technology but what each country does with it. Silicon Valley has been obsessed with superintelligence, as if it were possible to build God in a box. Beijing has been interested less in treating AI as a supernatural goal, and more as a technology to be harnessed – Chinese academics and policymakers consistently talk about AI as a practical tool for enhancing existing industries. AI will help both countries deepen their specialisations. Think about it this way: America is better in service sectors such as consulting and litigation; with AI, it might be able to generate even more lawsuits. China, which has far superior training data on manufacturing, might grow even better at producing electronics, drones and munitions. The main obstacle on China’s path towards AI mastery is the lack of computing capacity. But here, Trump might still offer relief. In an unprecedented deal, the US president is set to provide exceptional export licenses to Nvidia and AMD to sell to China if they hand over 15 per cent of these revenues. China’s AI development prospects would certainly be brighter if US constraints were relaxed. Not only could it close the gap on training AI, it would be able to give its tech talent much greater computing power and a more robust manufacturing base to improve. The writer is a fellow at Stanford’s Hoover Institution and author of ‘Breadknife: China’s Quest to Engineer the Future’

Letters

Why off-exchange trading is bad for investors

Your recent Alphaville article on the convergence of proprietary trading firms and quantitative hedge funds (FT.com, September 29) highlights the systemic risks of “strategy crowding”, where different firms’ models increasingly overlap and compete for the same opportunities. However, one important implication was overlooked. As competition intensifies and strategies converge, hedge funds have a greater incentive to avoid signalling risk by executing trades away from public exchanges, in dark pools or

through internalised venues (where orders are matched within a firm’s own systems rather than on open markets). This is not a hypothetical concern: Bloomberg reported in January that, for the first time on record, the majority of US equity trading now takes place off-exchange, with hidden trades accounting for more than half of total volume. Analysts warn the shift looks increasingly permanent. If more liquidity migrates to opaque channels, the integrity of price discovery in public markets is at risk.

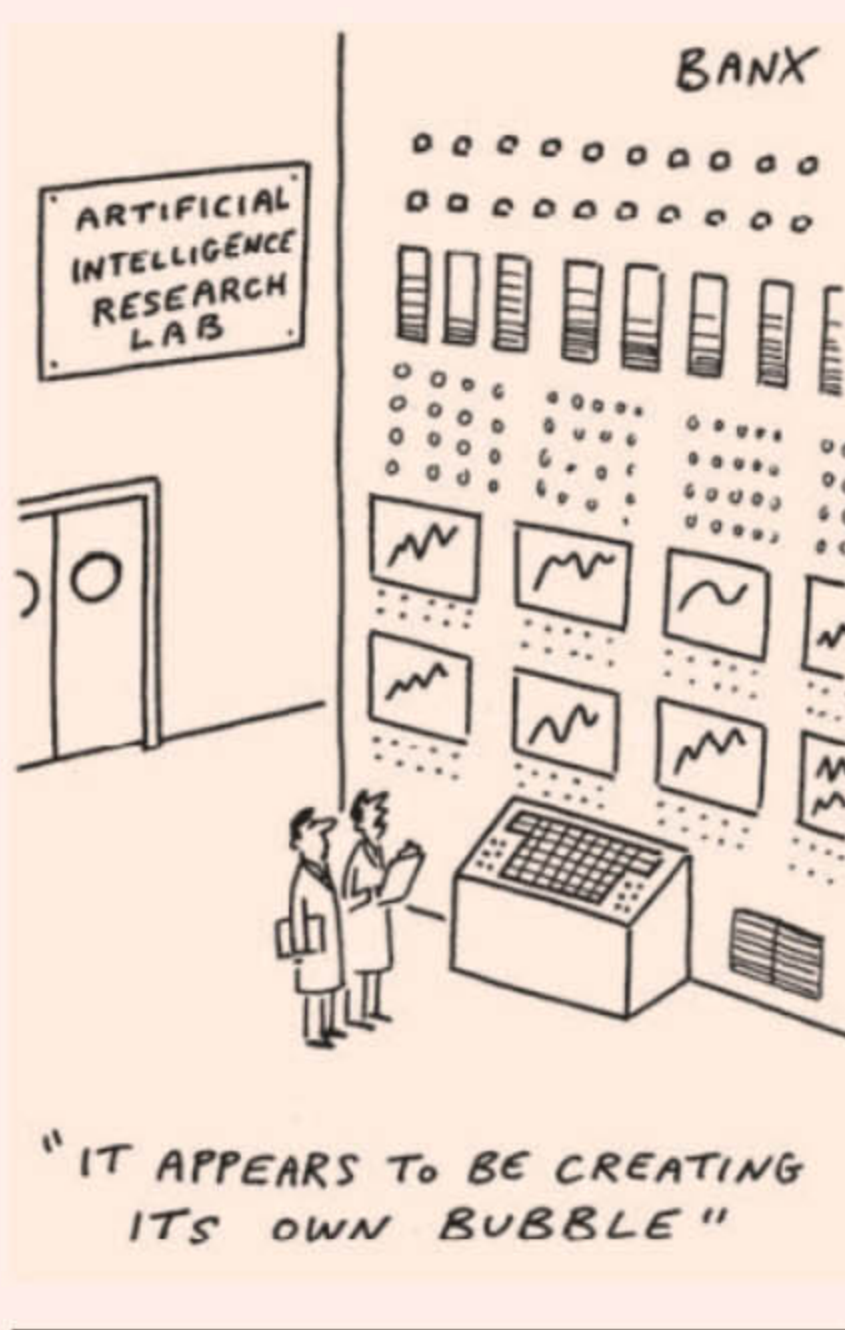
Exchanges exist to aggregate supply and demand transparently. Their erosion undermines not just traders but all investors and issuers who rely on reliable benchmarks of market value. The “quant quiver” may therefore be less a passing tremor than a sign of creeping opacity; and one policymakers and practitioners should treat with urgency. **Daniel Schlaepfer** President and CEO, Select Vantage Toronto, ON, Canada

Takaichi reveres Thatcher, but may be more like Truss

Sanae Takaichi’s victory in the leadership race of the Liberal Democratic party has put the focus on Japan’s financial markets, as analysts had predicted a fall in the price of Japanese government bonds if she won (“Japan set for first female PM after Sanae Takaichi wins leadership race”, Report, FT.com, October 4). Margaret Thatcher, whom Takaichi reveres, is associated with market-based policies, including the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, deregulation and tax reform. However, Takaichi’s campaign pledges are the exact opposite. While she promises aggressive fiscal stimulus to cope with high prices, she is not afraid to say publicly that raising the consumption tax “would be stupid”. Financial markets are understandably concerned. Takaichi apparently intends to inherit the economic policies of Shinzo Abe. However, while “Abenomics” may be a booster shot to end chronic deflation, it does not contribute to a fundamental solution. The time for the Japanese economy to rely on stop-gap measures has long passed; there is an urgent need to cut expenditures and spend wisely. If she ignores this reality, she may end up following in the footsteps of Liz Truss, not Thatcher. **Takeo Tamashiro** Tokyo, Japan

Protectionism is rarely patriotic, but always costly

Martin Wolf’s analysis (“Trump’s tariffs won’t deliver many jobs”, Opinion, October 8) is timely. I have long believed that Donald Trump’s trade wars amount to little more than taxing his own countrymen and women – raising input costs, fuelling inflation and eroding consumer welfare, all in the name of protecting industries and American jobs. What puzzles me is not the policy’s economics but its politics: who is clapping for Trump after all? The average American worker gains little, with no new jobs, while small manufacturers lose competitiveness due to higher raw material costs. Two additional risks deserve mention. First, retaliatory tariffs from trading partners will inevitably hit US exports in the agriculture and technology sectors that have been America’s global strengths. Second, by undermining rules-based trade, the US is ceding moral leadership to China, which can now pose as a defender of globalisation. Tariffs may win applause at rallies, but they weaken America’s credibility and consumers alike. As history shows, protectionism is rarely patriotic – but it is always expensive. **Rakesh K Chitkara** Dubai, United Arab Emirates



Big retailers’ food inflation complaints miss the point

Ashley Armstrong’s article “Big retailers to be spared rates rise after food prices warning” (Report, October 3) highlights the pressure major supermarkets are placing on the government over proposed business rates increases. But to suggest this is a straightforward concern about food inflation misses the broader context. The sector in question has a long record of leveraging the reliefs available on empty properties to its advantage. Many of the largest sites are in effect warehouses, not traditional retail spaces. In recent years retail, office and warehouse spaces owned or operated by these companies – who often land bank and thwart developments – have benefited from grants and exemptions during periods when smaller businesses received limited support. This history complicates claims that the sector is uniquely burdened today. Yet the narrative in the FT article glosses over such a reality. Instead large retailers frame rising costs such as wages, national insurance and packaging taxes as justification for both reduced support for smaller businesses and the reason to pressure the government to find mitigation elsewhere. References to other taxes are largely a deflection from their broader responsibilities, including environmental and community obligations. If the major retail sector demonstrates a transparent, constructive approach to its role on the high street, government engagement is more likely. Without that, the perception remains that the sector is prioritising its own self-interest, which risks a tit-for-tat with policymakers at a time when the reputations of retail and property sectors are under scrutiny. **Shaylesh Patel** Founder and CEO, ASTOP, London W6, UK

Israel’s role as arbiter of peace plan is a problem

There is much to be welcomed in the Trump 21-point plan for peace in Gaza (“A long-awaited plan for ending the war in Gaza”, The FT View, October 2). But there are lessons from the relatively recent past that highlight the difficulties and the dangers. In the Northern Ireland peace process it was only after the US intervention and the appointment of former senator George Mitchell as chair of the peace talks, alongside the participation of the Republic of Ireland’s government, that real progress was made. Prior to that the UK government was seen as both a participant and in many ways also the referee, with troops on the ground and therefore not trusted. In this case, a plan developed by President Donald Trump in discussion with the Israelis and with minimal if any Palestinian involvement suffers from the probable ongoing role that Israel will play as umpire or arbiter of the post-hostage release/prisoner exchange ceasefire. Based on events in Lebanon, the most likely outcome is that Israel will shortly after the exchange of hostages and release of prisoners declare that there has been a ceasefire breach and recommence military activities in Gaza and we will be back to a situation close to the start. Only the determined and ongoing involvement of President Trump, who deserves credit for forcing acceptance of the plan on Israel, could prevent or reverse such Israeli action. Can the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab states depend on this? Given the recent unchallenged reiteration by Israel’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, that there can be no Palestinian state in future, the omens look bleak. **Sir Mark Moody-Stuart** Hassocks, West Sussex, UK

An unfortunate phrasing

I am sure your leader about the synagogue attack in Manchester was meant to be genuinely sympathetic (“The Manchester tragedy and antisemitism in Britain”, The FT View, October 4). Unfortunately, it contained a very questionable sentiment because you write about British Jews feeling unwelcome. I am a proud Jew, born here more than 92 years ago; my parents were likewise born here. I was educated here both at school and in my profession. I am English, so why on earth do I need to feel “welcome” here? That expression is apt for guests. I am not a guest in the country. The wording reveals a most unfortunate attitude, and you should give it a thought. **Michael King** London HA7, UK

Banking alliance’s demise hits climate finance hopes

The collapse of the Net-Zero Banking Alliance (“Global banking climate alliance folds four years after launch”, Report, October 3) isn’t just the end of a well-meaning initiative. It lays bare a deeper flaw in the global strategy for climate finance, a flaw rooted in the hope that private capital, left to its own devices, could lead the charge. Back in 2021, the NZBA was greeted with optimism. It seemed like the private financial sector was ready to drive the shift to net zero. Fast forward four years, and that optimism has evaporated. Political backlash, coupled with growing legal risks, has driven major US and European banks to quietly step away. What began as a bold commitment has been reduced to another set of nonbinding guidelines. This was always the risk – placing faith in voluntary co-operation to achieve what are, at their core, public goals. In the absence of regulatory muscle, even the most ambitious alliances can fall apart. Political cycles shift, lawsuits loom and markets still reward emissions more often than they punish them. Finance has the power to experiment and influence, yes – but it cannot enforce collective responsibility. The takeaway? The climate transition cannot rest on the shoulders of private finance alone. It’s time for governments and regulators to turn promises into policy; by weaving climate risk into capital frameworks, requiring transition strategies and setting standards that don’t shift with market whims. Rather than seeing the NZBA’s dissolution as failure, we should see it for what it is: a turning point. The era of good intentions and voluntary gestures is winding down. What comes next must be built on hard rules, real accountability and public leadership that doesn’t blink. **Apostolos Thomadakis** Head of Research, European Capital Markets Institute, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, Belgium

Recalling Vreeland’s quip on an Indian fashion shoot

The Pink Un’s copy editors should perhaps have taken out their blue pencils and at least inserted an extra pair of quotation marks within Nicholas Cullinan’s comment regarding the pink theme of the upcoming British Museum ball that “it is the navy blue of India” (“British Museum steps out with glitzy BM ball”, Arts, September 8). After all, it was Diana Vreeland, a columnist at Harper’s Bazaar and later Vogue editor-in-chief, who famously first coined the phrase some 60-plus years ago. **Joe Spitzer** Hong Kong

Grand Duke flummery has no place in the FT

Was there really a need to give the story about the Grand Duke of Luxembourg handing power over to his son such a prominent place on page 3 (“Pass the duchy: Luxembourg’s Grand Duke hands over to son”, Report, FT Weekend, October 4)? The FT is indeed a fine paper but may I suggest some common sense when allocating precious space to such stories? Especially at a time when there is no shortage of important topics deserving of attention. **Nigi Riffat** Bayside, NY, US

Opinion

America is sucking in growth from the rest of the world

FINANCE

Gillian Tett



What on earth – or in cyber space – is happening to business investment in America? A decade ago, when capital investment seemed deplorably weak, economists were asking that question with a tone of alarm. No longer. The current mania for artificial intelligence is contributing to such eye-popping levels of tech investment that capex has become the key driver for America's recent growth. Unsurprisingly, US President Donald Trump is crowing. This week, the White House website trumpets the claim that he has delivered \$8.8tn of new investment pledges – that amounts to around a quarter of the entire economy. The governments of UAE, Qatar, Japan and Saudi Arabia apparently

account for much of this – a collective \$4.2bn. However, companies such as Apple and Nvidia have also promised at least \$500bn capex, each. So have anonymous "EU companies". Is this real? The answer is not easy, since investment flow data is notoriously patchy and late. However, if you scrutinise sources such as fDi Intelligence (an FT-owned group), the Federal Reserve, the Peterson Institute for International Economics and a new report from McKinsey, you get both "yes" and "no". Because there are at least four striking points to note about FDI. First, Trump's \$8.8tn is almost certainly an exaggeration. As Olivia White of McKinsey notes, historically only about two-thirds of FDI pledges become real projects. And the shortfall this time could be bigger, since countries like Japan made pledges under duress (to avoid tariffs) that may be challenged. "Trump's quest may boost US inflows above levels recorded in 2023 and 2024, and perhaps approach \$400bn in 2025, but will fall short," says the Peterson Institute. Even allowing for massive Big Tech capex pledges – worth \$300bn from Amazon, Meta, Microsoft and

Alphabet – this does not approach \$8tn. The second key point, though, is that "just" \$400bn of FDI nevertheless signals a startling shift in the tectonic plates. In recent decades, America's outbound FDI easily outstripped inflows, because its companies were building manufacturing operations in cheaper locations including China. However, fDi Intelligence calculates

Western nations are investing in each other while China is investing in non-western markets

that in Trump's second term "the inbound-to-outbound ratio is 41.4 per cent", the second highest figure for more than 20 years. Thus "the US is becoming almost as prominent as a destination as it is as a source of FDI". To be fair, this started before this administration: Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act ignited a remarkable green tech manufacturing investment boom, which Trump is now partly

unwinding. But Trump is now determined to suck in growth from the rest of the world to a truly remarkable degree – particularly from Europe. Third, China's role in global FDI is shifting almost as fast as America's. The Middle Kingdom used to attract far more inflows than outflows. However, McKinsey reckons that western investment into China has slumped by 70 per cent since 2022. The inbound to outbound ratio has collapsed to 30 per cent during the Trump era – meaning that China "now exports way more FDI capital than it imports," fDi calculates. That reflects geopolitics: western countries are investing in each other while China is investing in non-western markets (and, to some degree in Europe). Friends are huddling together. Fourth, FDI flows used to be driven by western companies seeking cheap manufacturing for consumer goods. But since 2022 three-quarters of greenfield FDI has gone into "future-shaping" industries like digital infrastructure and green tech, McKinsey says. Thus "FDI projects announced since 2022 could quadruple current battery manufacturing capacity outside China,

nearly double the global data centre capacity that powers AI, and draw the United States into the circle of top leading-edge semiconductor-producing nations," it adds. This is startling. A cynic might challenge that rosy prediction. America does not currently have enough trained labour to staff high tech factories. The recent immigration raid on a Hyundai factory in Georgia alarmed investors. And tariffs are raising the cost of investment. Then there is another issue: the explosion in AI-linked capex is so extreme that it seems highly unlikely to produce the returns investors expect. Worse, the valuations of companies such as Nvidia and OpenAI are being raised by dangerously circular financial flows. That creates a risk of a market crash which could cause investment pledges to shrivel. But until that happens, the key point is this: America's role in the global FDI game is shifting – fast – and in a manner that needs to be more widely recognised. Whether you love or hate Trump, it might yet be one of the more consequential legacies of his tenure.

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Ask what your gym can do for your country

Elisabeth Braw

At troops are tiring to look at," Pete Hegseth told America's assembled generals at a meeting in Virginia last week. Luckily for the US secretary of war, he may not have to exhaust himself. Gen Z, which makes up an increasingly significant proportion of the world's militaries, is known for its devotion to health and fitness. This may prove a good thing, not just on a personal level, but as an opportunity for how the military and government think about protecting society. Long before Hegseth's remarks, western military recruiters were worrying that the lifestyle of the younger generations was becoming too sedentary for even lighter military tasks. Moreover, at a time of rising security issues, declining birth rates mean there are fewer young people and hence a smaller base for armed forces to recruit from. Now Gen Z seems to be resolving part of the problem on its own. According to a recent survey in Europe, North America and Asia, 36 per cent of this generation exercise regularly and 50 per cent want to start doing so. They also seem keen to serve their countries; the number of applicants to Germany's voluntary military service has increased by 15 per cent compared to last year. Finland's Reservists' Association has gained some 4,000 new members this year. Some of this stems from a desire to find community. As Robert Putnam documented, we no longer bowl together like we used to. Nor do we join other clubs, and we certainly don't participate in worship as frequently as previous generations did. As a result, 7 per cent of people in England and 13 per cent of

Gen Z-ers' fitness obsession may give governments an opportunity to expand civil defence groups

EU residents report feeling lonely most or all of the time. Among 16- to 24-year-olds, the figure is higher. Meanwhile, our societies are grappling with another undeniable trend: insecurity. In the past few weeks, there have been Russian drone incursions into Poland and Romania, a violation of Estonian airspace by Russian MiGs and drone disturbances at Danish and German airports. That means that military and government officials alike are having to think much more seriously about how members of society might have to help protect their countries. Gen Z gym rats are not going to voluntarily set up auxiliary homeland protection units, nor would we want them to. Instead, governments should seize the unexpected opportunity and launch – or expand – such civil defence groups. During the cold war, Sweden operated nationwide associations of radio operators, dog trainers, truck drivers, parachutists and much else – all in support of the armed forces. Belonging to an association was like belonging to a bowling club, but with a purpose. Volunteer defence was a national movement then, and now it's thriving again. These associations still exist and are growing; in the first months after Russia's invasion, the associations received as many new members as during a normal year.

Though they support the armed forces, the voluntary defence organisations have very little to do with weapons. Instead they specialise in areas ranging from radio operations to driving lorries and training dogs. Today, some 380,000 Swedes are active in such organisations, doing work that would otherwise have to be taken on by the armed forces. While some other countries have Home Guards and a smattering of volunteer groups (which these days include an Estonian cyber unit and a new Lithuanian scheme that will train 22,000 people to operate drones), no other country has matched Sweden's. Other nations should follow suit. Protection corps could regularly train, then deploy to support hospitals or help disable suspicious drones. During the pandemic, some 330,000 participants in the UK's Duke of Edinburgh scheme spent 1.8mn hours volunteering. If governments teamed up with civil society to create similar new opportunities, many Gen Z-ers – eager to find community and protect their homelands – would likely heed the call.

The writer is a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and advises Gallos Technologies

The battle to dismantle Blair's Britain

POLITICS

Robert Shrimmsley



A former Conservative MP tells how he once saw Margaret Thatcher asked what she considered her greatest political achievement. "Tony Blair and New Labour," she replied. "We forced our opponents to change their minds." She may have given other answers over the years but this one always rang true. Thatcher saw politics as ideological warfare. Now, 50 years after she won the Tory leadership, her disciples see things differently. Blairism is not her greatest achievement but when the country took a wrong turn. The battle to unpick that era is now an animating agenda for both the current Conservative leadership and Nigel Farage's Reform UK. For many years the Blair administration was seen less as a consensus-shifting government than as one that simply embedded and softened the Thatcher settlement through investment in public services and social policy goals such as reducing child poverty and getting more women into the workplace. But today's right wing has changed its mind. It believes Blairism defined politics for two decades with Tory leaders from David Cameron to Theresa May,

and even partially Boris Johnson, accepting much of his social agenda. In the mind of the new right (I include Reform UK here in spite of its economic interventionism), the New Labour era shifted powers away from the executive, expanded welfare and imposed values, regulations and social protections that the right believes stifle enterprise and ushered in so-called "woke" culture. Brexit and then the immigration debate perhaps disguised the breadth of the right's ambition but this year's party conferences have made explicit what perhaps seemed piecemeal. Dashing the pro-European dream was just the beginning, both an end in itself and a vehicle for bringing down the administrative and social pillars of Blair's Britain. Legislation that one or both parties intend to scrap or rewrite includes a litany of New Labour laws; the Climate Change Act, the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law, the Constitutional Reform Act that created the Supreme Court and passed the power to appoint judges from the Lord Chancellor to a new independent commission. Also in the line of fire are the Equality Act and hate crime laws. Reform plans to review the autonomy of the Bank of England in an echo of Donald Trump's attacks on the Federal Reserve and the wider populist dislike of independent regulators. Even Scottish and Welsh devolution face some questions. The Blair dream of 50 per cent of students going into higher education is now seen as a mistake, as is the creed of multiculturalism, the belief in multina-



tional institutions and globalisation generally. And, of course, Blair is also blamed for the wave of immigration from eastern Europe. Tories and Reform view New Labour's welfare policies as the catalyst for the current high levels of in-work benefit payments. The rising salience of religious Christianity and natalism in parts of both parties has left some women fearful of a more traditionalist approach to their rights. Nigel Farage has already backed stricter abortion rules, calling the UK's 24-week limit "totally out of date". In many areas there is a legitimate critique here. Even Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer accepts the UK is over-regulated, with unaccountable officials and quangos creating a democratic deficit. There is an issue with judicial activism.

Conservatives' mistake was their willingness to sign up to his liberal agenda, the new right argues

Welfare bills are too high. But the right's agenda also reflects a broader desire to pare back the state's social missions. The new right wishes to return to the original Thatcher settlement (perhaps forgetting her early support for climate action or the single market). They argue the Conservatives' biggest mistake was their admiration for Blair and willingness of Cameron and others to sign up to what they saw as his liberal agenda. There are risks in this for Conservatives who need to rebuild their coalition and who, wisely, are now focused on restoring their economic credibility. There is no path back unless they can regain the southern seats lost to the Liberal Democrats. Many of those former Tory voters quite liked the Blair era. Blair's social democracy offered a vision of a market economy in which growth could be tailored to global challenges and social justice, a middle route between the harshest version of the free market and socialist interventionism. There is a case that it has ceased to deliver in a low-growth economy, but without it the only alternative to

the new right will be left populism. The politics of the right is now a battle to be seen as the primary alternative to Labour. Reform clearly has the upper hand but to retain it the party must destroy the Tories as a viable option. Even a modest Conservative revival will rapidly shift calculations. But whoever prevails, this is the right's new agenda. There are counter-arguments to the critique of the Blair settlement. Not all regulation is bad. For all the legitimate questions about judicial activism and over-reach, do we really want to return to judges appointed by cabinet ministers? It might feel good when you are in power; in opposition not so much. But both parties have sniffed the electoral winds and sense a country seeking a shift of direction. Even Labour is revisiting the Blair agenda, be it on university numbers or immigration policies. Politics is a never-ending battle of ideas and the fight to deconstruct the Blair settlement is gathering momentum. Things can only get bitter.

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Why powering business is the real lightbulb moment for Africa

ENERGY

David Pilling



In a changing world, one thing has remained numbingly constant. The answer to the question how many people in Africa lack access to electricity is always the same: 600mn. That was true 15 years ago, and is true today. It reflects a population that, in running up-the-down-escalator fashion, appears to be increasing as fast as providers can electrify. Which is not much consolation if you're sitting in the dark. In 2010, according to the International Energy Agency, of those people without electricity, more than one-third were Africans. Today, as poorer countries in Asia and Latin America have illuminated, 80 per cent of the 740mn people without electricity are in Africa. The World Bank and the African

Development Bank are doing something about it. Last year they launched, in collaboration with other organisations, a \$90bn scheme to connect 300mn people to electricity in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2030. That is a laudable aim if only because it galvanises effort. The fact that it is a plan dreamt up by multilateral institutions should give pause, though of course many countries have electrification targets of their own. Some 30 states have signed "energy compacts" under the Mission 300 initiative, securing funds in return for regulatory and other pledges. Of more concern than the provenance of the scheme may be the underlying assumptions. Moussa Blimpo, assistant professor of economics at the University of Toronto and an expert on electrification, argues that Mission 300 is putting the cart before the horse. Its aim, he says, is to bring electricity to poor people whether they can afford it or not. To him that is a recipe for unsustainable subsidies, financially stressed electricity providers and government debt. The aim, he suggests, should be the reverse.

Electricity should be a development tool to create jobs and economic growth so that people can afford electricity at commercial rates – if they want it. This may seem like an argument about angels dancing on the head of an electric filament. But Blimpo's theory goes to the heart of how development works. If people have money, they will Electricity will have a bigger impact when formal companies use it to create jobs and tax revenue

send their kids to school, purchase electricity or put a roof on their house. "When we think about development in terms of solving the 25 problems people have in their life, we end up spreading ourselves thin," he told the Africonomics podcast. He would prefer to create an enabling environment, particularly for businesses, by making the existing power supply cheaper and more reliable.

Take a concrete example. Until recently, South Africans were subjected to rolling blackouts, the result of ageing generators, poor maintenance and mismanagement at state electricity provider Eskom. Economists calculated that sporadic electricity – which meant factory shutdowns, unrefrigerated food and transport delays – cost the economy \$235mn a day. South Africa has made power cuts far less frequent. That was a much better use of the government's time and money than it would have been to, say, extend the failing electricity grid to people living in isolated rural communities. The proposal to improve electricity supply for those who can already afford it sounds heartless. But, as Angus Deaton, a Nobel economist, writes in *The Great Escape*, when economies take off, some people benefit first. Deng Xiaoping, father of China's economic miracle, made the idea that some people get rich first the core of reforms that upended the egalitarian assumptions of China's Communist party under Mao Zedong. Mission 300, with its focus on off-grid

electricity and renewable energy – itself a stretch in a continent with a laughably low carbon footprint – takes the opposite view. It is essentially a levelling-up exercise. If it has a broader development goal it is based on the idea that, by bringing electricity to very poor people, some will become micro-entrepreneurs. This has a nugget of truth. But electricity will have a bigger impact when formal businesses – the motors of successful economies – use it to create jobs, economic growth and tax revenue. As Ken Opalo of Georgetown university, writes: "The hoped-for blooming of micro-entrepreneurship won't cut it." The idea that millions of individuals using a tiny number of kilowatts can budge an economy up to the next level is symptomatic of a flawed "small is beautiful" ideology. As countries that have successfully moved out of poverty have demonstrated, thinking big and creating life-shifting growth is a better bet. Once people have real economic prospects, few will choose to sit in the dark.

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2

A free-speech comedian walks into a Riyadh bar ...

Jonathan Liew

← Continued from front

 a US-made F-15 Eagle over a Houthis-controlled area of Yemen. And yet, understandably, there were areas where even these brave messengers of truth feared to tread. A leaked contract issued to performers outlined topics that would be deemed unacceptable to the hosts. Jokes about Saudi Arabia itself were strictly off limits: its royals, its legal system, its government. Any religious material was a no-go. Presumably, too, the country’s human rights record.

Which feels slightly incongruous, given the fact that so many of the festival’s performers pride themselves as advocates of free speech. Carr, for instance, has called himself “a free speech absolutist”, which is certainly a very noble way of describing what he does for a living. Chappelle has long railed against a cultural consensus that prevents him telling the jokes he really wants to tell while - confusingly - also allowing him to tell those very same jokes to packed arena audiences every year.

But of course it is not hard to divine the true motivations of the new Saudi court jesters. By and large, these performers are established comedians, already financially secure and simply leveraging their reputation in pursuit of another lucrative payday. A few of them have even been helpfully explicit in this regard. As Davidson explained: “I see the number, and I go: ‘I’ll go’.” The more interesting side of the equation is what the Saudis think they are getting out of it.

Because the point that has been overlooked in much of the commentary on this is that Saudi Arabia boasts its own rich and active comedy scene, albeit one that rarely lives on the lit stage. Some of the better-known Saudi comics - Amy Roko, Hisham Fageeh, Bader Saleh - are stars of YouTube and TikTok. Naturally they operate within strict constraints, and with culturally appropriate material. Saudi humour also lives in late-night cafes, in WhatsApp groups and voice notes, on the less regulated corners of the web and shielded by multiple layers of irony and deniability. Sometimes, this leads to mortal danger: in June a journalist called Turki al-Jasser was executed for allegedly running a satirical X account critical of the regime.

The Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin deployed the term “carnivalisation” to describe the disarming characteristic of laughter: its ability to dissolve conventions, social norms and traditional hierarchies of power. But what is realistically possible at a festival organised by state decree, where tickets cost up to £200, and where performers are given five-star treatment and a list of proscribed topics?

In a way, Riyadh’s investment in comedy can be seen as an ambitious but doomed attempt by the Saudi government to buy the kind of authentic grassroots culture it is unable to produce for itself. Doomed because ultimately the very materials that produce good comedy - irreverence, human ingenuity, artistic freedom, intellectual courage, a sense of common shared values - are anathema to the dictatorship. This is in essence the equivalent of the Abu Dhabi Louvre, the Qatar World Cup, the gold-plated Oval Office. You can buy comedians, but you can’t buy a sense of humour.

The US comedian Sinbad once famously observed that “comedians are funnier when they’re riding the bus”. And perhaps both Saudi Arabia and its hired entertainers are labouring under a kind of convenient delusion. The naivety of the government in imagining that comedy can whitewash its crimes is matched only by the naivety of the comedians, some of whom genuinely believe their presence is a kind of cultural bridge, a force for positive change.

Of course art *can* change minds - change worlds - but only if the will to do so truly exists. Or, as a world-renowned standup comedian almost put it: I stand up for your right to do standup comedy in a medieval autocracy. But please know that you’re wrong. You’re living in a fantasy land, and after you leave nothing happens. So, you know. Stop being a fucking child.

The Guardian

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Israel-Palestine

Trump’s deal offers Gaza the hope of peace - but a real solution is still distant

Donald Trump called the pause in hostilities he has brokered the first step to a “strong, durable and everlasting peace”. No one can do more to determine the outcome than the US president. This was, for him, a modest statement, acknowledging that Israel and Hamas had agreed to the first phase of his plan - it being their decision, not his, to break a multi-point agreement into a multi-stage discussion. Two parties so far apart agreed on one thing: both would rather defer the really difficult issues.

In Israel and Gaza, there was joy - however tentative - at the announcement. An end to the annihilation, the release of all hostages and the resumption of large-scale aid have all been desperately needed. There is every reason to fear that this will not lead to a lasting peace, and every reason to strive to ensure that it does. In finally reining in Benjamin Netanyahu, and in offering Qatar a security guarantee that persuaded it (with Egypt and Turkey) to lean more heavily upon Hamas, Mr Trump has created an opportunity which must be seized.

To recognise that his intercession has brought this ceasefire is also to acknowledge that Mr Trump, and Mr Biden before him, could have ended this conflict long ago. More than three dozen of the hostages taken by Hamas-led militants on 7 October 2023 are believed to have been killed in captivity. More than 67,000 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military in Gaza. The tens of thousands of children who have been orphaned or are suffering acute malnutrition

offer some indication of how profound and lasting the damage will be.

The Hamas atrocities of 7 October, and the genocide in Gaza, have pushed both Israelis and Palestinians towards seeing the underlying conflict as, more than ever, an existential struggle. Hostilities could easily resume - though for now, at least, both Hamas and the Israeli government seem to believe that a deal will be better for them than continuing the conflict.

Hamas has no desire to disarm. The bulk of Mr Trump’s plan says that Israel will not occupy or annex Gaza, but offers Palestinians in essence a colonial administration under Mr Trump and Sir Tony Blair, with only the wispiest suggestion that they might prove themselves deserving of statehood in the future. Mr Netanyahu has already rejected that.

Israel’s prisoner release will not include the highly popular Marwan Barghouti, jailed for ordering murders in the second intifada and seen by many as the figure most capable of bringing Palestinian factions together. Mr Trump may not remain invested in this crisis for long once he has taken his victory lap. Strikingly, the breakthrough came shortly before the Nobel peace prize is to be announced, on Friday (though the committee held its last meeting on Monday).

Emmanuel Macron, whose diplomatic initiatives helped pave the way for this moment, stressed on Thursday that it should lead to a political outcome based on the two-state solution. The growing international pressure upon Israel, itself a reflection of public opinion’s impact upon the governments of its allies, and the increased involvement of the region, were critical. The temptation for Israel’s allies now may be to ease off, acting as if this short-term fix were a solution. They must instead invest intensified effort to produce the strong and durable peace of which Mr Trump spoke - which will only be feasible if it is founded on justice.

Scotland and Wales

As the UK parties struggle, the SNP and Plaid Cymru could cause earthquakes

Viewed through the Westminster prism, UK electoral politics seems a five-party contest. The narrative has been well aired in the conference season. The three established parties - Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats - are each battling to peg back the Reform UK surge, with the Greens hovering in the wings. In Scotland and Wales, however, there are different pictures that the Westminster prism does not see. In both countries, the UK parties still fight their corners. Yet the main nationalist parties - the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru - are reaping the benefit. In Scotland, the SNP has a clear polling lead, while in Wales, Plaid is head-to-head with Reform UK. Caught between the two, the established parties find themselves battling for survival.

With the nationalists holding their respective annual conferences this weekend, and crucial elections next spring to the devolved parliaments, observers across the UK need to be clear. Much of the political wind in 2026 will blow from the north and the west. Next year, both the SNP and Plaid Cymru could be government parties, a familiar role for the former, but a spectacular turnaround for the latter.

Plaid’s rise means its Swansea conference is a pivotal opportunity for the party under its leader, Rhun ap Iorwerth. Plaid owes its recent rise to many things, including a sluggish economy, UK Labour’s unpopularity, and Welsh Labour’s lacklustre record. A Senedd byelection on 23 October in Caerphilly, a seat Labour has never lost, will be a bellwether of the wider mood, and of Plaid’s appeal in the valleys.

You have to go back to 1918 to find an all-Wales election in which Labour did not come first. Labour has also won every time the Senedd has been contested, as it will be again in May. Yet, if the most recent Wales-wide poll holds good, that is set to change. Plaid will instead be the largest party, just ahead of Reform UK, with Labour third. Though still a minority, Plaid would be in government. In Welsh terms, that would be a political earthquake. Perhaps in Britain-wide terms too.

An SNP victory in May’s Holyrood contest would hardly be an earthquake, after 18 continuous years of nationalist government. It would, though, signal a remarkable comeback from a period of eclipse, and from an often dismal record on public services. For Labour, which did so well in Scotland in the 2024 general election, it would signal a crisis moment, imperilling Sir Keir Starmer’s leadership.

A fifth SNP term could put independence back on the agenda, too, with the party arguing that a separate Scotland is the best way to escape Nigel Farage. The SNP’s John Swinney published a new independence proposal this week. Although mainly aimed at the party’s debates in Aberdeen this weekend, events after May could give his ideas another lift. Support for independence is already on 47%. It might not take much more to tip the balance the SNP’s way.

Both nationalist parties scent victory. But the two movements march to the beat of different drums. Plaid has re-emerged as an as-yet untarnished centre-left alternative to Labour and the right. By contrast, the SNP is doing well in the polls in spite of its record. The Scottish Social Attitudes survey published this week found only 22% satisfied with the NHS, while trust in devolution is also down. Neither party looks set for majority government. As rival parties have also found, winning the support of unhappy voters may prove easier than putting the party visions into practice.



'It's over! It's over!', we cry. But fear still haunts Gaza

Hassan Abo Qamar



Yesterday morning, I didn't wake up to the sound of explosions but to my brother shouting: "It's over! It's over!" For a moment I thought I was dreaming. I wondered: what is happening? Has another loved one been targeted? What is over?

Then he told me that Donald Trump had said it. "I am very proud to announce that Israel and Hamas have both signed off on the first Phase of our Peace Plan," the US president wrote on his social media platform. For the first day in a long time, people in Gaza woke up to news that could be called happy. The ceasefire went into effect at noon. The sound of Israeli warplanes still echoed in the sky – but for once they didn't feel frightening.

The first phase of the ceasefire agreement only includes the exchange of prisoners. That means 20 Israeli hostages in Gaza thought to be alive and up to 1,950 Palestinians from Gaza. Israel has arrested hundreds of people over the past two years without reason. Among them are a relative of mine, detained after Israel's bombing of the Tel al-Sultan displacement camp earlier this year, and Dr Hossam Abu Safieh, taken from his workplace while performing humanitarian duties in Kamal Adwan hospital.

But fears remain: is the genocide really over?

I went out into the streets to see friends and neighbours and exchange political observations. People seem to be trying to make the most of this first phase, as there is no guarantee that it will last. Families await the fresh arrival of gas, flour and sugar, not just to consume but to stockpile, fearing a new siege or sudden price hikes if the truce collapses.

My friend Ahmed shook his head: "After the prisoners are handed over, Israel will find a thousand ways to torture us." Meanwhile, my friend Khader laughed jokingly: "I don't care about anything; I just want to eat chicken and get gas into the house."

For most Palestinians in Gaza, the ceasefire

Families await the arrival of gas, flour and sugar – not just to consume but to stockpile, fearing price hikes if the truce collapses

means no more than these small details: hot meals, cooking gas, and a break from the smoke of firewood that causes headaches and eye irritation. These simple hopes reflect a longing for normal life; for education, food and a peaceful night's sleep.

Others felt nothing. They said it was too early to judge the truce, and that their lives had been destroyed to the point where little could be saved. People in Gaza are haunted by the faces of loved ones buried under rubble and the thought of spending winter in threadbare tents. Most people here now live in tents and wonder if Israel will repeat what it did during the previous truce by refusing to bring in rubble removal equipment or temporary housing units. The Israeli army still controls about 55% of Gaza, preventing people in border areas from returning to their homes – or what remains of them.

Although the people in Gaza are happy that the bloodshed has stopped, the catastrophe is not over; they remain displaced – refugees in their own homeland. Entire cities such as Rafah and Beit Hanoun are still under direct occupation, and they may have to wait for the second or third phase of the agreement for the army to withdraw.

While those in Gaza cling to these fragile hopes, politics on the other side of the border threatens to erase them. Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, will continue to face intense pressure from his far-right coalition partners, who view any truce as a betrayal. Israeli ministers such as Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir have warned in the past that they would topple Netanyahu's government if the prime minister agrees to what they call "surrender". His political survival depends on these extremists, and his power depends on the continuation of the conflict, given the legal troubles that could send him to prison once out of office.

Caught between international pressure for peace and domestic pressure to keep fighting, Netanyahu seems to be walking a tightrope. Washington and Arab and Islamic capitals are pressing to maintain the truce, and European countries have started hinting at economic sanctions

in recent months. But inside Israel, the far right demands what it calls "total victory" – a phrase that, for Palestinians in Gaza, means the expulsion and ethnic cleansing of Gaza's population.

This deal may be a gateway to ending the genocide or a corridor to continuing it in an even harsher form once the world's attention moves elsewhere. Yet it remains a relief for people in Gaza: about 400 trucks entering daily could revitalise the health sector with supplies, and opening the Rafah crossing on the border with Egypt in both directions could allow hospital patients, stranded students and families separated by the conflict to travel.

The war has taken so much from us, our homes, lives and loved ones, but it has not taken away our desire to live, to rebuild and to drink a morning cup of coffee without fear. As I write these lines, the sounds of celebrations rise and people are repeating the same words: "It's over." I wish I could believe it completely.

Celebrations in Khan Younis after the ceasefire announcement

PHOTOGRAPH: RAMADAN ABED/REUTERS

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MARTIN ROWSON

Educating kids at home? Now I finally get it

Emma Brockes



If you want to get rich, a friend of mine said recently, set up an exam centre. We were talking about her decision to home school - or unschool, or home educate, depending on your tribal affiliation - her two children, making her simultaneously part of a broader trend and also somewhat strange to herself. The cliché of home schooling still leans on the idea of a fringe choice made by fanatical parents who produce a poorly socialised child - if you said of a child: "They're home schooled", you'd trigger a knowing look that implied: "Say no more."

Well - maybe - all that is changing. Home schooling is still a fringe choice, but the numbers are soaring. In 2024, UK councils received 66,000 notifications of children moving to education at

home, more than double the number from 2020 and bringing up the total to some 111,700 children in England. Given that there are about 9 million school-age children in England alone, this still represents a tiny proportion. But the leap in last year's numbers is significant, not least because it seems to encompass families who previously would not have imagined themselves taking this path in a million years.

I spoke to two parents, one in London, one in Yorkshire, both of whom moved their kids to home schooling after or towards the end of primary school, both of whom are loving it - albeit sheepishly - and neither of whom believes it is prohibitively difficult.

Both are atypical to some extent, since neither of them was acting for religious or health reasons, or in response to failures in the threadbare special educational needs and disabilities (Send) provision in state schools, which are traditionally the primary motivators for pulling kids out of mainstream schooling. Of both I wanted to ask: how can you stand it? The staying across the curriculum, the never getting time off and, chiefly, the teaching of maths, which presumably entails you having to do some maths?

Tyan Jones, in London, has a son turning 14 who would be in year 9 and a 10-year-old girl. Her eldest son left school after year 6, when he didn't get into a single one of his requested high schools in a London borough where the choices aren't great. Her daughter left year 3 a few years later after her son's departure seemed to work out. She is a single parent who runs her own business and can be flexible around when she works. This is the main thing about home schooling, she says: it permits a form of "concentrated learning" that allows you to determine your own schedule.

I mean, to me it sounds like hell. But talking to Jones - who says that if her daughter feels like having a "reading day" or "a complete day of cello", then she

goes ahead and permits it - I can see the appeal. Not everyone does. So strong are the feelings triggered by people making choices for their kids that you might not make for your own that my friend in Yorkshire a) asks to remain anonymous and b) says she has lost friends by deciding to home school her kids.

Her 15-year-old daughter and 19-year-old son are so highly motivated that her son, earlier on in his teens, bought all the textbooks himself, got up before 5am each day to study and has now returned to sixth form, where he is on course for top grades for all his A-levels (he took some time out before sixth form to be sure that going back to school was what he wanted to do). "He was a boy who loved ballet and the Brontës and hated football - he didn't fit in at secondary school," says my friend, who is an artist married to a teacher. Her daughter, meanwhile, was "quiet at school" but has flourished at home, and combines ploughing through the curriculum with a day of dance and youth theatre a week.

I couldn't do it. I think I know this about myself. During the pandemic, when I was up against a deadline to finish writing a book, my five-year-olds spent six weeks almost exclusively on TikTok and did none of the school worksheets. But, says Jones, if you can pull it off, "it's less stressful than school. My favourite day is Thursday, a 'wellbeing day', when we clean the house, the kids do all the cooking, and we chat and chill." When my friend in Yorkshire first pulled her kids out of school, she was full of guilt and panic. But here's what she discovered: that if your kids "don't fit the mould", there is another option, and it's not as hard as you think.

"There's more time to be alive," she says of the way they have figured things out - and that includes taking holidays in term time at a fraction of the cost: that's one thing parents with kids in school dream of.

UNA MULLALY

Speaking Irish
frees the
imagination

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Opinion



UNITED STATES

Trump's bullying of Latin America is almost certain to backfire

Simon Tisdall

▲ Strong support
for Venezuela's
president,
Nicolás Maduro,
in Caracas

MIGUEL GUTIERREZ/EPA



Running for president in 2024, Donald Trump vowed to avoid overseas US military interventions such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet within months of his inauguration, US forces were bombing Yemen and Iran. Looking south, Trump threatened to seize the Panama canal. Now, the Pentagon is gearing up for attacks on “terrorist” drug cartels deep inside Colombia and Mexico. Of most immediate concern is a possible renewed effort to forcibly impose regime change on Venezuela.

Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela’s hard-left authoritarian president, believes the US is already waging “undeclared war” on his country after several deadly strikes on Venezuelan vessels in international waters – Trump shared a video of the latest attack, which killed four people, on his social media last Friday. The president also notified Congress that the US is engaged in “armed conflict” with drug cartels. He claims, without providing evidence, that the targeted boats were carrying US-bound illegal narcotics. He has placed a \$50m bounty on Maduro’s head.

Latin American governments are fretfully watching a big US military buildup around Venezuela, including warships, F-35 fighter jets, an attack submarine and 2,200 marines. Such powerful assets are not much use in drug interdiction. But they could be used offensively, or to support special forces raids and airstrikes. Last Thursday, Venezuela accused the US of an “illegal incursion” by at least five F-35s. Maduro says he is readying a state of emergency to “protect our people ... if Venezuela [is] attacked by the American empire”.

What is Trump up to? Drug smuggling is a serious problem – but killing people on a whim on the high seas, while common and difficult to prosecute, is still illegal. And anyway, the UN says, most of the cocaine entering the US comes from Colombia, Peru and Ecuador, and is mostly not trafficked through Venezuela. Draft-dodger Trump likes to act the tough commander-in-chief. He is now trying to deport Venezuelan migrants, many of whom fled to the US to escape sanctions he himself imposed. Some analysts suggest he covets Venezuela’s abundant oil, gas and mineral resources.

It’s true that Trump and John Bolton, his then national security adviser, hoped to replace Maduro in 2019 in what Caracas claimed was a regime change plot. It’s also true that Maduro’s 2024 re-election victory was widely condemned as fraudulent. Given a free choice, Venezuelans would almost certainly sack him. And clashing ideologies are a factor, too. Maduro, unworthy heir to Hugo Chávez’s

Bolivarian revolution, is an affront to Trump’s imperial idea of a US-dominated western hemisphere, where the 1823 Monroe doctrine rules again and neoliberal, free-market capitalism operates without restraint.

Yet given his hapless blundering on other key foreign issues, the most likely explanation for Trump’s behaviour is that he hasn’t got a clue what he’s doing. He throws his weight around, makes impetuous misjudgments, stokes fear of foreigners and bases policy on whether he likes other leaders. In 2019, with Maduro on the ropes, Trump blinked. Full-scale military intervention in Venezuela remains unlikely. More probable is an intensified campaign of destabilisation, sanctions, maritime strikes, and air and commando raids.

Far from weakening and isolating the regime, Trump may achieve the exact opposite. Maduro is already using the crisis to assume “special powers” and rally public opinion behind patriotic calls for national solidarity. Trump’s bullying of other left-leaning Latin American countries such as Colombia – and presumptuous cheerleading for rightwing populists in Argentina and El Salvador – is spurring a regional backlash, too. Most governments abhor the thought of a return to the bad old days of Yanqui meddling in Washington’s “back yard”.

Trump’s attempt to use punitive tariffs and sanctions

to strong-arm Brazil into pardoning its disgraced former hard-right president Jair Bolsonaro backfired spectacularly last month. Crowds took to the streets of Brazilian cities to defend what they rightly saw as an assault on Brazilian sovereignty. The popularity of Bolsonaro’s successor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, soared. “We are not, and never again will we be, anyone’s colony,” he declared. Lula told Trump, in effect, to get lost. Then, when they met at the UN general assembly, Trump backed off and played nice.

The perception of a leap backwards in US-Latin America relations grows ineluctably. “His administration views Latin America as a security threat, associating it with drug trafficking, organised crime and incoming migration,” Irene Mia, of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, warned earlier this year. “The US approach has become negative, prioritising unilateral action and dominance rather than partnership,” she said, adding: “The region is being treated less as an equal partner and more as a sphere of influence to be controlled.”

Trump’s hawkish advisers are part of the problem: notably Stephen Miller, deputy chief of staff, and Marco Rubio, a former Republican senator for Florida who is secretary of state and national security adviser. For Rubio, a critic of leftwing rulers in Cuba and Nicaragua, Maduro is unfinished business. Defending the attacks on boats, he declared: “Interdiction doesn’t work. What will stop them is when you blow them up ... And it’ll happen again.”

Trump’s efforts to reprise the role of Latin American neighbourhood policeman are regressive, dangerous and self-defeating. Long-term, the winner will most likely be Beijing, an increasingly influential regional actor, investor and leading member of the Brics group of nations. As the US burns its bridges across the world, Trump is making China great again ●



The US approach has become negative, prioritising unilateral action and dominance rather than partnership

LANGUAGE

The Irish language is a joy – the portal to punk and poetry

Una Mullally



Amid a boom in Irish culture across music, literature, film and fashion, the Irish language – Gaeilge – is also experiencing a revival. Once the majority’s native tongue, it was assailed and diminished as a daily, working, spoken language under British colonialism and became largely confined to rural west coast districts for much of the 20th century, kept alive by generations of families. But over recent decades the number of schools teaching the national curriculum exclusively through Irish has risen from fewer than 20 in the 1970s, to more than 200 today. The 2022 census showed a 6% increase in the number of people able to speak Irish compared with 2016. Irish is a core subject on the curriculum and compulsory in all schools.

Yet in the 2024-25 academic year, a record number of pupils – 14% of the post-primary school population – were granted exemptions from studying Irish. This makes me sad for the young people who will miss out – not just on the growing professional opportunities it provides, but the richness of the language and the window into Irish culture it cracks open.

The number of Ukrainians attending school in Ireland explains at least some of the rise in numbers seeking to opt out. There are close to 7,000 Ukrainian pupils in post-primary schools across the country. Exemptions can only be sought if a student was born outside Ireland, was educated outside Ireland for a significant period, or

has needs that affect learning a language. And yet many Ukrainians are learning and studying Irish – along with significant numbers of Poles and Latvians. The broader issue is longstanding and systemic, where the language is still not seen as a priority by some Irish parents, or is perceived as overly challenging or even superfluous.

How the language is taught in schools has been a matter of debate since the foundation of the state a century ago. For decades, the same grievances have been repeated, with some justification: primarily that while Irish language, literature and poetry are studied, there isn’t enough emphasis on everyday usage.

I attended a post-primary Gaelscoil (Irish-medium school) in Dublin in the 1990s into the 2000s. Studying one’s entire curriculum through Irish was sometimes viewed as idiosyncratic or nationalistic. But the language was a shared code among my school friends, and I maintained it on leaving school.

Although I struggle with rustiness and confidence in speaking and writing it, “keeping” my Irish is probably the greatest gift I have given myself. Irish is a portal, a lyrical language intrinsically connected to the natural world. Early Irish literature is among the oldest vernacular literature in western Europe. As a spoken language, Irish predates English by a millennium.

*** Una Mullally**
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the Irish Times,
and editor of
Repeal the 8th

English has nothing on the spirit of Irish phrases, and the evocative, poetic journeys they can take.

So if you wanted to playfully yet emphatically berate someone, you could say “*go n-ithe an cat thú, agus go n-ithe an diabhal an cat*” (“may the cat eat you, and may the devil eat the cat”). There are dozens of words for penis in Irish, including *bliúicán* (a wild carrot).

Enter the Kneecap effect. Many younger people – inspired by the Belfast and Derry rap group – are now embracing Irish. Kneecap themselves repurpose old terms for a hard-partying present. But it’s their declaration of Irish as a punk language and part of a process of personal decolonisation that has become a motivating and mobilising cultural and political force. Last month, 25,000 people marched in Dublin demanding more investment in the language and in *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking) areas, with organisers framing the language as “an inclusive one, one that stands against far-right extremism and fascism”.

Despite the rise in school exemptions, the enthusiasm for Irish, and a growing collective confidence in speaking it, is increasingly evident.

But perhaps the most revelatory moments happen in private. During the pandemic, myself and my wife – who grew up in the Irish-speaking area of north-west County Donegal, but “lost” her Irish over time – began speaking it more frequently at home. Having moved to Dublin in the late 1980s, she had also lost her Donegal accent. But Gaeilge has dialects and accents (*canúint*) that instantly identify one’s geographical roots. When she spoke Irish, I heard her true accent for the first time. With it, came the unique vocabulary of her home county’s landscape and culture. An oral artefact, as though preserved in amber, was suddenly – or as we say, “*go tobann*” – alive again ●

▲ Road signs in the rural west of Ireland, in both the Irish language (Gaeilge) and English

ALAMY