



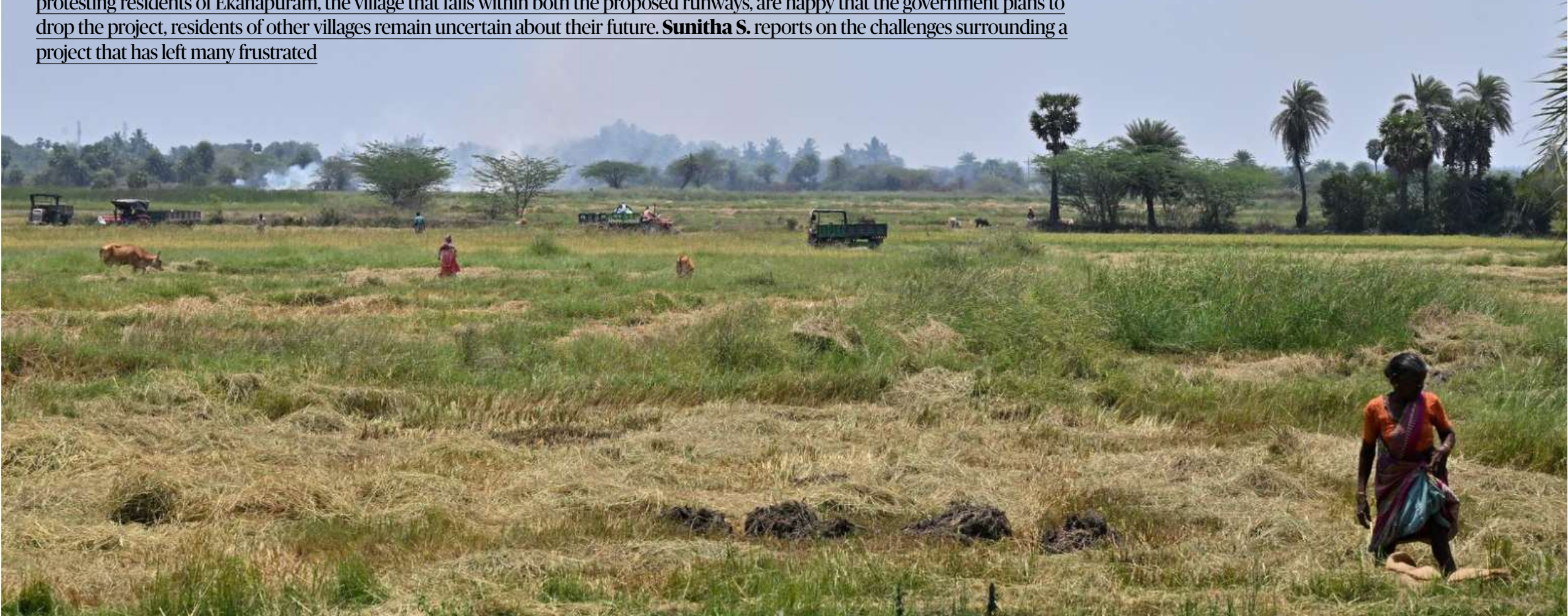
## A ND-NDE



GROUND ZERO

The uncertain flight of Parandur airport

The proposed Parandur airport project in Tamil Nadu has been put on hold, though there is no official announcement yet. While the protesting residents of Ekanapuram, the village that falls within both the proposed runways, are happy that the government plans to drop the project, residents of other villages remain uncertain about their future. **Sunitha S.** reports on the challenges surrounding a project that has left many frustrated



Ekanapuram village, identified as the site where Parandur airport’s runway would be built. VELANKANNI RAJ B.

Govindaraj Janardhanan is struggling to find words to describe his relief. A farmer from Ekanapuram village near Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu, who also works part-time at a private firm, he is happy that the Tamil Nadu government has paused the Parandur airport project and may even drop it altogether. “This will save our village and agricultural lands from being destroyed,” he says.

On May 4, when the results of the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections were announced and actor-turned-politician C. Joseph Vijay was elected as the new Chief Minister, a wave of excitement spread across many parts of the State.

For Ekanapuram, largely made up of agricultural lands, wetlands, and small-scale farms, the moment was significant. The village had been at the centre of a massive farmers’ movement against the proposed ₹27,400 crore greenfield airport project at Parandur. Planned as Chennai’s second airport, the project involved the acquisition of more than 5,300 acres from more than 13 villages in and around Parandur. As per the proposal, Ekanapuram was to fall within both runways of the airport.

Six months before coming to power, Vijay had visited the protesting villagers and extended his support to their cause, which had been ongoing since 2022. Today, the village, located nearly 50 kilometres from the existing Chennai airport at Meenambakkam, is cautiously optimistic.

While the State Minister for Energy Resources and Law, R. Nirmalkumar, said that the State government would drop the Parandur airport project and look for alternative sites, a stance reiterated by the Industries Minister, S. Keerthana, an official announcement or a Government Order is still awaited in this regard. For industry representatives and several travellers, however, the government’s decision has come as a disappointment.

Relief in Ekanapuram

The airport project faced strong opposition from the residents of Ekanapuram, who feared displacement, the loss of agricultural land, and environmental damage, particularly its possible impact on local water bodies. In the project area, 26.54% comprises wetlands, according to Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation, the nodal agency executing the airport project.

“We were shattered when the announcement to build the airport was made in 2022,” says G. Subramanian, Secretary of the Parandur Airport Opposition Joint Movement, a coalition of villagers, farmers, and environmentalists. “After protesting for nearly 1,000 days, we are glad that the government is going to drop the project now.”

Subramanian explains that the project site is full of water bodies. “Nelvoy lake and water bodies including Vayaleri, Kadaperi, and Kalieri would have been affected. The path of the Kamban canal passing through the project area too would have been obstructed,” he says.

Filling up water bodies with concrete and urbanising the area would not only destroy these villages but could also have wider consequences for Chennai, which has experienced flooding on several occasions during the monsoon season, he says. “The city may witness a disaster if this project is implemented,” Subramanian says.

He is quick to clarify that the residents of the village are not opposed to development, but only want the government to pick a better location for the project. “We are not opposing a second airport for the city. We are only asking the government to look for other options,” he says.

Villages in a limbo

After the airport project was announced in 2022, the protests continued even as the State govern-

Why would we want to spend money repairing or rebuilding a house without knowing if we will even have a life here in this village?

D. SHANMUGHAM  
Resident,  
Nagapattu village

ment proceeded with the application process for various approvals. The project subsequently received site clearance and in-principle approval.

Land acquisition for the project commenced in July 2025. The government, however, avoided acquiring land in Ekanapuram and began registrations in the surrounding villages. So far, nearly 1,700 acres have been acquired from villages including Nelvoy, Nagapattu, Thandalam, Podavur, Valathur, and Akkamapuram.

While Ekanapuram is unaffected, the residents of the other villages who were forced to sell their lands worry about their livelihood and the uncertainty that lies ahead. They wonder if the government will return their lands.

K. Murugan, a resident of Nagapattu, who was compelled to give up his farmland, says he is now living off the money that the government gave as compensation. “We were left with no choice, so we parted with our farmlands,” he says. “Now, we hear that the government plans to drop the project. But there is no clarity since there has been no official announcement yet.”

Murugan says the situation has left the villagers frustrated. “Now that the government has taken away our land, they should execute the project and shift us to the nearby Karai village. That way, we can find a job. Access to transport too will become easier,” he adds.

D. Shanmugham, another resident of the village, gave one acre of his land for the project. He believes that the government should return the lands to the farmers if they don’t plan to go ahead with the project. “Our street lights have not been repaired. Our drains are still blocked. When we raise these issues with the local authorities, they don’t rectify the issue claiming that it is an airport site and that the residents will be shifted soon anyway,” he says.

Residents also say they have not been able to rebuild or repair their houses. Those living near the proposed airport site continue to struggle with leakages and other structural problems in their houses. As Shanmugham says, “Why would we want to take a risk and spend money repairing a house or rebuilding a house without knowing if we will even have a life here in this village?”

In some households, these structural problems have even affected marriage prospects, with families losing out on potential matches because of the condition of their houses.

D. Devaki Ammal, a resident of Nagapattu who lives in a single-room house, says her family has been looking for a suitable match for her granddaughter for a while now. “Families who come to visit us are unhappy with the state of the house. If I tell them that we may get a new house when the airport comes up, or we may renovate this one, they look unconvinced. My daughter and I

are distressed over the problems this project has caused,” she says.

Devaki says the authorities could consider moving them to a new, permanent site. “That will do us a lot of good. Some of these issues will be resolved,” she says.

Some residents who took the risk of building houses say they do not expect to live in them for more than a few years, given the lack of clarity surrounding the project. S. Prema, a resident of Nelvoy, says residents are exasperated. Unaware of what is going to happen next, they have not even built toilets. “They are scared to invest money fearing it will be a waste,” she says. “But my husband and I took the decision to reconstruct a house because the existing one had too many problems. Sometimes, snakes would enter the house through crevices. We decided to rebuild it for the safety of our children.”

But Prema says the family is not able to set up the house as they wish. “If I like something which I know will look good in my house, I don’t buy it because I am not sure how long we will stay here,” she says.

Maintenance issues in Chennai

While the villages around the site are divided, aviation experts, industry representatives, and frequent travellers in Chennai are disappointed that the project has been paused and worry that it could be dropped altogether. Though Chennai airport has not reached its maximum capacity yet, many air passengers feel that the city requires a bigger, swankier airport with better maintenance and improved flight connectivity.

A. Sankar, a frequent traveller in Chennai, says passengers like him are unhappy about the many issues in the Meenambakkam airport, whether it is the maintenance of the airport or the difficulty in getting a cab. “Airports in other metro cities offer so much more in terms of experience. Passengers have many options to dine and shop. Time just flies by before boarding. I can’t say the same about the airport here. When the authorities can’t even open a cab boarding point on time, it’s only natural for passengers to feel frustrated.” He says passengers have waited for a long time for a second airport, and changing the site yet again will only affect them further.

Karthik K., another traveller, says the connectivity that other metro airports offer is far better than that of Chennai. “Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi have direct flights to more domestic and international destinations than Chennai,” he says.

An aviation expert says Chennai missed the opportunity for aviation-led development two decades ago when a second airport for the city was proposed at Sriperumbudur. That project did not take off, and the existing Chennai airport was modernised.

“The city has too much at stake in terms of air connectivity, industrial growth, and investment opportunities. It cannot afford to let this opportunity slip away yet again,” he says.

He says the process to choose a site for the second airport commenced once again more than seven years ago. Initially, 11 sites were examined in all. Of them, four were shortlisted – Thirupurur, Padalam, Pannur, and Parandur. “The Airports Authority of India (AAI) inspected all the four sites and said an airport could be built either at Pannur or Parandur, pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of both. Parandur was finally chosen since there were fewer families to be relocated there,” he says.

A source in the State government believes that any site spanning several thousand acres is bound to have its own set of challenges. “It is nearly impossible to find a site without water bodies in Chennai’s vicinity. There are ways to miti-

Airports in other metro cities offer so much in terms of experience. Passengers have many options to dine and shop. I can’t say the same about the airport in Chennai. When the authorities can’t even open a cab boarding point on time, it’s only natural for us to feel frustrated.

A. SANKAR  
Traveller

gate issues. A hydrological study was already conducted by a team of experts and was submitted to the government in 2024.”

The aviation expert also notes that it is not easy to find a site for an airport. “This is not like building a railway or a bus terminal. Several factors have to be considered including obstacles, airspace availability, wind pattern, no fly zones in the region, and proximity to a defence site or another airport,” he explains.

He says if the government decides to drop the proposal to build the airport at Parandur, Pannur is the only alternative for now. “But then, passengers will have to wait another eight or nine years because the government will have to yet again receive all the approvals and complete construction. Politicians come and go, but it is the passengers who suffer at the end of the day,” he adds.

The importance of an airport

Industry representatives say airports are no longer just transit points; they have evolved into economic anchors that attract investments and drive large-scale commercial, business, and residential development. They add that when companies consider investing in a city, the quality of its airport and cargo infrastructure is a key factor in their decision-making.

Ganapathi Ramachandran, entrepreneur and board member of The Southern India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI), says it is evident that a modern, state-of-the-art airport with strong connectivity is crucial for attracting investments in business parks, logistics hubs, hospitality, the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) sector and tourism, and is vital for the State’s development. Tamil Nadu should expedite the implementation of the Parandur airport project or, at the very least, pursue an alternative option and implement it soon, he says. He believes that any further delay will only prove costly for the State’s development.

“The youth of today are different,” Ramachandran explains. “With every passing decade, they have a new demand. Tamil Nadu, with its advantages such as a large talent pool, can attract major companies and benefit from robust aviation infrastructure and improvements in social infrastructure. Unless a city is vibrant in every aspect, it will be difficult to attract and retain young talent,” he says.

V.N. Shivashankar, senior vice-president of SICCI, says Bengaluru and Hyderabad have witnessed a remarkable transformation over the past decade, with new modern airports playing a significant role. “The city expands significantly; better roads and infrastructure come up around the airport zone, and areas that were previously less popular begin to thrive,” he says.

Bengaluru, he says, is a perfect example of this trend – it created an entirely new ecosystem, attracted more firms to set up offices, and generated new opportunities for the State.

He adds, “Chennai cannot afford to lose out on the second airport project, especially after coming this far in terms of clearances and land acquisition.”



Farmers of Ekanapuram village during their protest against the greenfield airport project at Parandur. VELANKANNI RAJ B.



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RAMNATH GOENKA

◆ IN 1932 ◆

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## Easing on China is right move at right time

IN 2019, India decided against joining RCEP, a trade agreement spanning 15 Asia-Pacific countries. A few months later, in April 2020, the Centre amended the FDI policy via Press Note 3, making government approval mandatory for investments from countries that share a land border with India. Both decisions were, in part, driven by concerns over China. But despite the ambiguity since then over the relationship with Beijing, trade ties between the two countries have deepened considerably. Imports from China touched \$131 billion in 2025-26 and the country now accounts for roughly half of India's non-oil goods trade deficit. However, FDI from China has been minuscule. Since 2000, investment flows to India have added up to just \$2.5 billion. The government has now approved a joint venture between Dixon Technologies and Vivo Mobile for manufacturing electronic devices and smartphones in the country. This is a step in the right direction.

In recent years, there has been a concerted attempt by multinationals to diversify away from China. India has, however, not been a significant beneficiary of the China+1 play, with countries like Vietnam benefiting more. The Economic Survey 2023-24 put forth two choices to benefit from the trade diversion away from China — either integrate more deeply with its supply chains or encourage greater FDI from the country. The Survey veered towards the latter option. In line with this thinking, in March this year, the Union cabinet approved changes to the FDI policy for investment from countries that share a land border with India in order to facilitate greater inflows. The approval of the joint venture between Dixon Technologies and Vivo Mobile and the waiver of customs duty on 85 goods used in manufacturing batteries, display assemblies and others comes only days after four Chinese power equipment manufacturing companies were reportedly allowed to take part in government tenders for critical power projects.

China is inextricably linked to the global manufacturing supply chain. That reality cannot be wished away. China is also a large source of FDI. As per the World Investment Report by UNCTAD, its outward investment "has become more targeted, with greater emphasis on greenfield projects, manufacturing, energy, infrastructure and critical raw materials, often in developing economies and along South-South investment corridors". While India has legitimate strategic and security concerns, there are also economic imperatives. A balance must be struck. The domestic manufacturing ecosystem must be deepened, and efforts stepped up to increase value addition and pursue closer integration with global supply chains. A careful and calibrated approach is needed.

## In Bengal, a crime, the mob & state abdication

THIRTY KILOMETRES away from Kolkata, a story of serial state failures plays out. First, there was a heinous crime, the assault and murder of an 11-year-old, allegedly by four men, which sparked protests and demands for justice. The brutalising of a child can shake faith in the government's ability to protect the most vulnerable. Then, a man was lynched by a mob in Baruipur in South 24 Parganas district for the murder — it turned out that he, reportedly, was not responsible for it. Chief Minister Suvenendu Adhikari asked the police to identify lapses and an SIT was constituted. That, however, cannot mask the third failure: The "encounter" of an accused and the ruling party's defence of that action.

The framing of the lynching by Chief Minister Adhikari is deeply problematic. He has sought to let his government's law enforcement off the hook, and spoken of the mob violence as a "political conspiracy" with a "communal connection". State BJP president Dilip Ghosh has labelled those questioning the encounter and the subversion of due process as "anti-social". "The criminal and those who support criminals should receive equal treatment," he said. These statements from the highest political quarters are unseemly. They can even be read as signalling a tolerance of, or impunity for, extra-judicial action and state vigilantism. They are especially jarring coming from a ruling party that has made big promises on law and order and women's safety.

As part of *poriborton*, the BJP promised the West Bengal voter relief from a ruling dispensation whose politics crept into all institutions and cramped all spaces, from the economy to crime and justice. By looking for fall guys for its lapses, the Adhikari government is not getting off to a good start. It must, going forward, underline its respect for institutions, due process and fundamental rights, of victims and also the accused. The first step to that end must be a delinking of law and order and partisan politics.

## Now showing: Mr Brexit vs Count Binface

WILLIAM PITT the Younger was, appropriately, Britain's youngest-ever prime minister, taking office at the age of 24. The sitcom *Blackadder* made a gag out of it, showing an election in which the PM's brother, a child ("Pitt the Even Younger") is a candidate. But election-watchers might remember this episode for another reason: The candidate of the fictitious Standing at the Back Dressed Stupidly and Looking Stupid Party, doing just that. It was funny because it was real — satirical parties and candidates have long been a feature of British elections. Recall the Official Monster Raving Loony Party. Or, the Landless Peasant Party candidate standing with his fist raised behind Gordon Brown in 2010. But now, things have turned deadly serious: Nigel Farage's principal opponent in the upcoming Clacton by-election will be Count Binface.

The Reform UK leader resigned from Parliament and triggered the by-election in a bid to vindicate himself amid a controversy over his finances, and all other major parties are boycotting the poll — leaving Farage, in the words of Chancellor Rachel Reeves, to "spend the summer arguing with a bin". Binface does wear a bin-shaped helmet; underneath it is comedian Jon Harvey. His policies include nationalising Adele and building at least one affordable house. One might twig from all this that the point is satire. Reform supporters, however, have been attacking Binface as an Oxford-educated member of the elite. Well, he is a count after all.

Few expect Binface to win on August 13, although he may benefit from protest votes. There's a discussion to be had about whether the other parties' boycott deprives voters of serious alternatives or if participating would merely be playing into Reform's hands. Beyond this contest, though, in a country that bins prime ministers faster than a lettuce can rot, the count may just embody the zeitgeist.

# Next leap will come from bringing AI and digital public infrastructure together



MANISH SABHARWAL AND RAVI BAPNA

THE FAILURE of multiple visits by the Japanese government to 111-year-old Sogen Kato's house to honour him — he was never home — had a simple explanation. He had been dead for 30 years while his family collected his pension. This triggered a national investigation that identified 3 lakh people who were assumed to be "living" but were dead. India's Aadhaar programme has reduced such pension scandals, improved the efficiency of government spending (up 117 times since 1991), and catalysed digital payments (42 per cent of the world's transactions). The next orbit for digital public infrastructure (DPI) lies in AI integration — it will raise state capacity and empower the new tone from the top on Jan Vishwas.

The last few years have been tough for Indian tech. We don't have a credible horse in the AI generation race, DeepSeek came out of China, and automated code generation has blunted the employment outlook for software services. But a recent conference at the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) suggested optimism about this digital revolution of AI for three reasons. India is the world's largest natural data laboratory. Integrating DPI with AI could be the biggest reimagination of the

Indian state since 1947. And AI deployment may be more employment-generative than AI generation. Let's look at all three in detail.

First, India has gone from data poor to data rich in just 10 years because of three bold acts of entrepreneurship in 2016: Jio, UPI, and GST. For decades, India's economic policy relied on periodic surveys and delayed, uneven and incomplete administrative data. But now, DPI's digital exhaust makes us the world's largest natural data laboratory for financial inclusion, welfare targeting, enterprise formalisation, platform economics and digital governance. UPI's monthly 23 billion transactions create one of the world's largest behavioural datasets. GST's 20 crore payments create real-time visibility into supply chains, invoicing, production and consumption. FASTag's 4.5 billion payment transactions create mobility and logistics datasets at scale. And, more than 27 billion annual Aadhaar authentications enabled a 16-fold expansion in direct benefit transfer beneficiaries. For the first time, a developing country is using population-scale digital data to accelerate development rather than waiting for conventional statistical systems to catch up. The job is hardly done — rigorous academic research, well-funded think tanks to bridge theory and practice, and open public data commons are just emerging — but the future seems very different from the past.

Second, India's political reimagination since 1947 has created the world's largest democracy on the infertile soil of the world's most hierarchical society. But why didn't we create the world's largest economy? Besides the delusional 1956 Second Five-Year Plan, weak state capacity

DPI without AI is infrastructure, and AI without DPI is intelligence. AI plus DPI is enhanced state capacity

## The earth under a Teejan sky



RAJEEV SETHI

TEEJAN BAI, who lived to demolish many boundaries, is now free to go wherever and do whatever she wants. As a girl child, she was told not to perform — she did. She was told to settle down — she didn't. She was asked not to improvise with the Pandavani *parampara*; she created her own form with her unique blend of narrating the mythos, punctuated with personal anecdotes.

I met her five decades ago with Habib Tanveer, who tried to "stage" her. She found her own sky, mentors, and audiences, creating her own Mahabharata with her favourite acts strung together as personal narratives. Who can forget her rising up, expanding her frame, becoming a challenged Bhima, holding her tambura like the mace of Bhima? Or becoming Draupadi, forced to surrender her dignity in a patriarchal court?

In every region in India, villagers claim that the Pandavas, during their *agyatvas*, stayed there. In Chhattisgarh, several local popular stories have been woven into the epic over the years. The stories of the Mahabharata, here, are called Pandavani, the stories of the Pandavas.

Originally, the Pandavani was strictly restricted to men. Teejan became the first Pandavani woman storyteller. She drew inspiration from folk tales and rituals and from the local understanding of the *shashtra*. With her defiance of community norms, Teejan had also opened the doors for young female *kathakars* to battle against the customs of a conservative rural society.

I had the fortune of "directing" Teejan ji in three separate productions over the years: *The Hidden River* for the NCPA in Mumbai (1995), *Mother Daughter-Father Son* for Ariane Mnouchkine of Theatre de Soleil in Paris (1994), and *Sangram Aur Azadi* for the sesquicentennial of 1857 at the Red Fort in Delhi (2007).

We had gathered in Mumbai to unravel a series of powerfully enacted vignettes that would reveal the delicate story of union and balance struggling to survive in a polarised world. Teejan, known for demolishing male bastions, decided to play the invincible Bhishma, demolished by Shikhandi, without whose help even Bhima couldn't succeed. Great gurus in-

vited as part of my *Hidden River* workshops had watched for the first time Teejan making gender fluid.

Everyone was exceptionally moved by Teejan's simultaneous tenacity and vulnerability and was inspired to follow her act with their unique artistry highlighting female-centric representations. Today, few artists across genres see each other perform.

My second reference is the play we created in Paris on an idea given by Ariane Mnouchkine to explore the vulnerable world of *parivarik parampara* in this age of mass and multiple transmissions. Ariane and Teejan loved each other, and we all bonded over being together in Paris to create a totally new theatrical production on traditional transmission. This was the link I needed for Teejan to tell us how she would choose someone to hand over her legacy to.

She found Rambha, a tenacious young relative, who took on the challenge, and every night of the performance we all watched spellbound as the magic of transmission went beyond the call of duty of student-teacher.

Teejan never had a child of her own, but the mother and father in her made her look after a whole "*kumbha*" of accompanists and their families.

The third anecdote related to my last unrecorded foray in theatre. When the offer to create an inter-medial manifestation came up to celebrate 150 years of 1857, I jumped on the idea of celebrating the courage of sepoys, retelling their stories. I could only think of Teejan amidst 2,000 artists. Teejan chose to narrate the tale of bravery and defiance implicit and explicit in the story of Abhimanyu in the *chakravayuh*.

Teejan Bai often espoused the magic of reaching out to breathing audiences, "*saans leti janta*", under the open sky she yearned for. Working for the Bhilai Steel Plant for 30 years, she could create an audience. In the end, paralysed and unable to speak, she did regret that artists can never take on the "*maidan-e-jung*" as a "*khulla manchi*" of their own lives. For her, nurturing emotions and needs meant more than "*chahaks*" and "*jajmans*" (fans and patrons).

The writer is the founder-trustee and chairman of Asian Heritage Foundation

### 40 YEARS AGO

July 11, 1986



### Another panel on transfer likely

THE MUCH-awaited transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab and areas in lieu of the city to Haryana on July 15 is once again being deferred at the request of the Punjab Chief Minister, Surjit Singh Barnala. The Centre may appoint another commission to identify the areas to be transferred from Punjab to Haryana.

### Pakistan to make Chinese F-7s

PAKISTAN HAS decided to produce three prototypes of the Chinese F-7 interceptor aircraft upgraded with US engines, avionics

is another suspect in our failed transition from farm to non-farm jobs. Historically, governments increased state capacity through more administrative structures and personnel (government spending has increased 53,000 times since the 1947 budget of Rs 198 crore). DPI enables better resource allocation, improved service delivery, earlier fraud detection, and quicker responses. But a reimagined citizen interface has been blunted by a lack of interoperability (digital silos are stronger than physical silos), the government's internal technology capacity, and a mentality that seems to be satisfied with PDFs, when the aim should be for APIs. AI's capacity to use unstructured data will help us leapfrog data integration and the interoperability challenges within our strong consent architecture and the recently articulated principles of Jan Vishwas Siddhant. Multiple language interfaces will open up labour and education markets, and AI will improve public health expenditure. India will be the first large country to integrate AI into population-scale DPI — America built AI on private-sector data ecosystems, and China built AI on platform-centric digital ecosystems. DPI without AI is infrastructure, and AI without DPI is intelligence. AI plus DPI is enhanced state capacity.

Finally, India's angst about AI's impact on jobs is understandable if it ends up with the winner-take-all characteristics of search or the fiery nationalism that halts access to

frontier models — the recently revoked restrictions on frontier AI models such as Claude 5, for instance. But deploying AI in the daily lives of citizens and companies requires more ingenuity, organisational savviness, and

human capital than AI generation itself does. You don't have to build a car to drive it; let's build the roads (AI applications) that get people to extract economic and social value. The deployment of AI in DPI could make India the use-case capital of the world, not unlike the American state that used defence spending during the Cold War to catalyse Silicon Valley. India's enterprise DPI, currently under implementation (universal enterprise number, entity digilocker, API Setu, single source of truth for regulation), could potentially combine with a Universal Lifetime Social Security Account for every citizen (*Aadhaar punji*) to unleash a revolution in formalisation similar to what NPCI did in payments (private innovation on a non-profit layer). This would reduce information asymmetry, lower transaction costs, improve credit allocation and worker-job matching, enhance supply chain and logistics efficiency, and accelerate the creation of high-wage, private, non-farm jobs.

The *Arthashastra* suggests that strategy is most powerful when choices in strength, timing, and place are mutually reinforcing. Combining our strengths in DPI with the new tone from the top about Jan Vishwas (NCAER research suggests 66 per cent of connected Indians use the internet for entertainment but only 11 per cent for online government services), could deliver our new tryst with destiny: Higher state capacity, citizen satisfaction, and mass prosperity. And this is an appointment we shall keep.

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## A funeral in Iran as a performance of power



SUJATA ASHWARYA

IRAN BURIED Ayatollah Ali Khamenei this week in a funeral designed to be read. His casket travelled from Tehran to Qom, across the border to Najaf and Karbala, and finally to Mashhad for burial beside the eighth Shia imam. The casket was draped in the red Ya Hussein flag flown from the Karbala shrine itself. A giant clenched fist rose in Enghelab Square, framed by images of ballistic missiles; banners in three languages carried the funeral's motto: We must rise. The ceremonies were timed to coincide with Muharram, the month of mourning for Imam Hussain's martyrdom, and also the 250th anniversary of American independence.

As scholar Lisa Wedeen observed of Assad's Syria, authoritarian states demand that citizens act as if they believe, because the public performance of belief is itself a form of control. The regime does not need every mourner to grieve. It needs every mourner to be seen grieving. Khamenei was killed in the opening strikes of a war that shattered Iran's deterrent architecture. The funeral recasts this defeat as Karbala, the seventh-century martyrdom that anchors Shia identity. In this telling, a leader who could not be protected becomes one who chose sacrifice, and failure acquires the dignity of sacred continuity. The state is drawing on the deepest reservoir of meaning in Shia culture to transform a death it could not prevent into a sacrifice it can claim. Hundreds of thousands have indeed filled the Imam Khomeini Grand Moshalla and the processional routes, their grief genuine and, for many, profound. But the mourning is not universal. Many buried their own dead in the crackdowns of 2009, 2022, and 2026. The regime's answer is transport, food, and an infrastructure of mourning designed to show unanimity. Grief organised with the logistics of a military operation is grief doing political work.

The most eloquent symbol of the week, however, is an absence. Mojtaba Khamenei, who succeeded his father as Supreme Leader, did not attend the funeral. Iranian officials say he was kept away for fear of an Israeli assassination. Consider what this means. The new leader cannot stand at his own father's grave, and his voice reaches his people through an intermediary. A state that cannot secure its leader during a ritual of such consequence is performing strength precisely because it cannot demonstrate it. The same logic now extends to the Strait of Hormuz. Under the MoU signed with the US, Iran has guaranteed toll-free passage for 60 days. Yet its newly created Persian Gulf Strait Authority has made Iranian-approved insurance mandatory for every transiting vessel, free for now, while reserving the right to charge fees when the window closes. The revenue at stake is marginal beside the cost of reconstruction. The fee's true function is symbolic.

But there is a difference between symbols that express power and symbols that substitute for it. The Islamic Republic governs a wounded country: An economy in ruins, deepening isolation, a population whose suffering the ceremonies are designed to reframe rather than relieve. Modernity plays by modern rules, written in production figures, investment flows, and legitimacy, none of which can be conjured by a flag from Karbala. The funeral ended in Mashhad. The symbols have done their work, and they have revealed exactly what they were deployed to conceal.

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The state is drawing on the deepest reservoir of meaning in Shia culture to transform a death it could not prevent into a sacrifice it can claim

cumbed to their injuries in city hospitals.

### PM to meet Northeast CMs

THE PRIME Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, has convened a meeting of chief ministers of all northeastern states to assess the impact of the Mizo peace accord in the region and to consider measures for tackling insurgent groups operating in some parts of the region. The meeting, called at short notice, is expected to be attended by chief ministers and chief secretaries of Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura besides Mizoram, to review developmental programmes.

and weaponry systems. This decision is understood to have been taken simultaneously with a \$2 million contract to an American firm for the design study of the modified fighter. The three prototype fighter jets when completed will function like an upgraded MiG-21.

### Ahmedabad death toll at 19

MORE AREAS of the walled city were brought under curfew and vigil by the security forces stepped up as the death toll in communal violence during the annual *rath yatra* procession rose to 19. Four bodies were recovered and four others suc-



● **WHAT THE OTHERS SAY**  
Netanyahu's government just declared the end of the rule of law in Israel  
— *Haaretz, Israel*

# The Ideas Page

SATURDAY, JULY 11, 2026



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11

## You vote therefore you are: The hidden consequences of electoral deletion



SY QURAISHI

**T**HE RECENT experience of R Rajagopal, former editor of *The Telegraph*, should worry every Indian citizen. Rajagopal has publicly stated that the renewal of his passport was held up after police verification because his name had been deleted from the electoral roll during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). He received his renewed passport subsequently, but the fact remains: A distinguished journalist who had voted for decades suddenly found himself unable to obtain a passport because he no longer existed on the voters' list.

When reports of large-scale deletions from electoral rolls first began to emerge, the reaction of many citizens was surprisingly indifferent. "I never voted anyway," some remarked. "What difference does it make if my name is deleted?" Having spent years combating precisely this voter apathy through the Election Commission's SVEEP programme, I recognised the sentiment immediately. It reflected the widespread belief that deletion from the electoral roll meant nothing more than losing an opportunity that many had never exercised.

The Rajagopal episode exposes how mistaken that assumption may be.

The Election Commission has consistently assured the Supreme Court that the SIR is confined to preparing electoral rolls and that deletion carries no consequences beyond the right to vote. The Supreme Court, too, has reiterated that deletion from the electoral roll does not determine citizenship. The developments on the ground, however, suggest that this constitutional separation is beginning to erode.

An early cautionary lesson came from Assam. The National Register of Citizens was an exercise directly concerned with citizenship. Yet even there, exclusion from the NRC did not by itself result in loss of citizenship; any such determination could follow only after due process before the Foreigners' Tribunals. Even so, many families whose records became entangled in the NRC process found access to Aadhaar-linked services disrupted for years.

What, incidentally, are the welfare

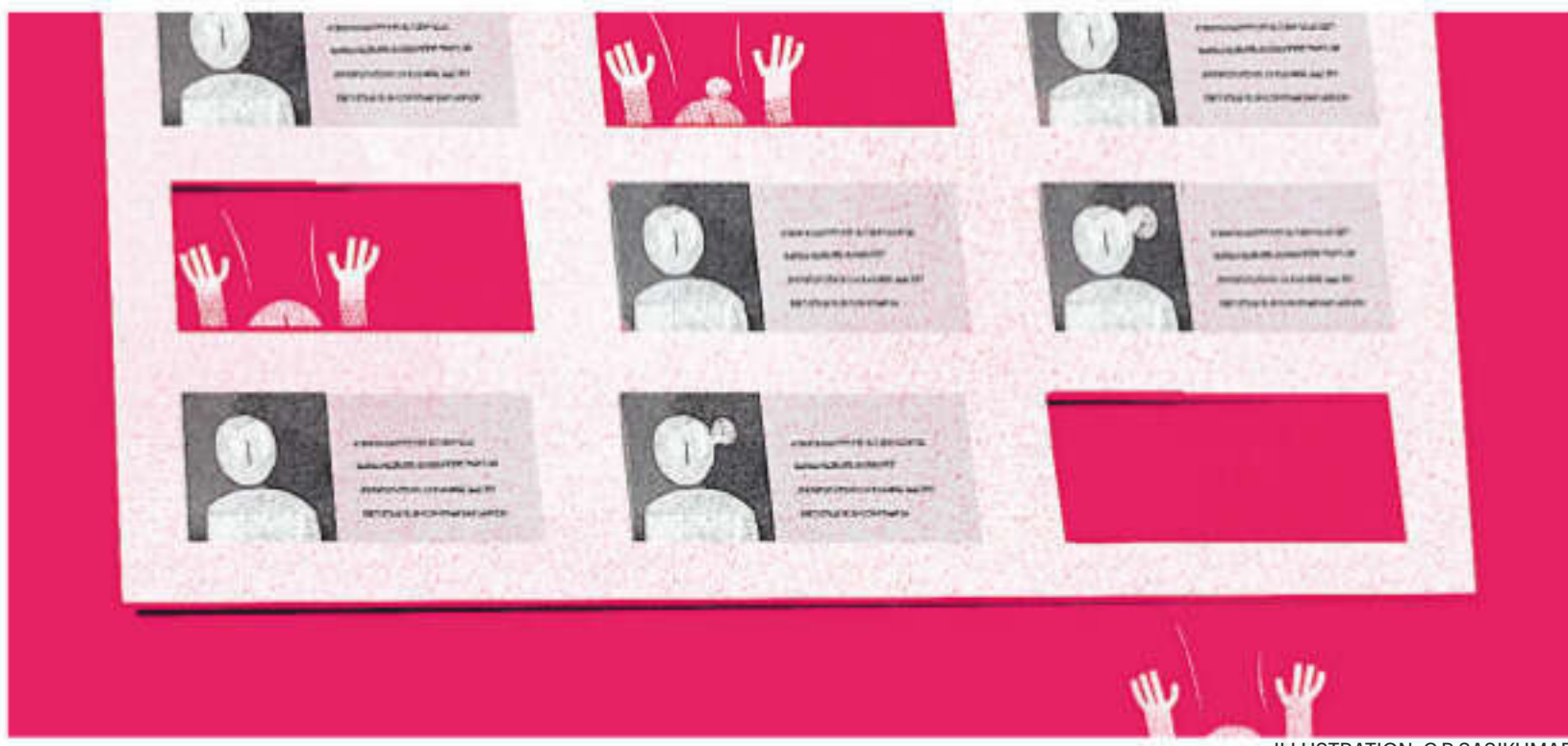


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

schemes? Subsidised food grain under the public distribution system, scholarships for students, old-age, widow and disability pensions, maternity benefits, LPG subsidies, housing assistance, health insurance, direct benefit transfers and even routine banking services. The lesson was simple: Although one government database was never intended to determine rights under another, administrative consequences often travelled far beyond the original purpose of the exercise.

That possibility has now become a harsher reality.

In Bihar, the consequences of electoral deletion have been stated with brazen candour. Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary said that persons deleted from the electoral roll "will not be entitled to any government benefits, including ration and other welfare schemes", and that "their bank passbooks will also be cancelled in due course of time." For the first time in independent India, deletion from the electoral roll has been publicly linked with exclusion from welfare benefits and even banking services.

West Bengal has moved in a similar direction. Chief Minister Suvenudh Adhikari declared that "no deceased person, illegal infiltrator or non-Indian individual will be allowed to avail government schemes". Food and Supplies Minister Ashok Kirtania stated that "those whose names have been deleted through the SIR cannot avail government schemes". Another minister added that persons deleted "are not citizens of the country or are dead... They cannot get the bene-

**The Supreme Court, too, has reiterated that deletion from the electoral roll does not determine citizenship. The developments on the ground, however, suggest that this constitutional separation is beginning to erode**

fit of government schemes."

The Election Commission has assured the Supreme Court that the constitutional wall separating the electoral roll from other civic entitlements would remain intact. It is precisely that assurance which now appears to be under threat.

Assam, though not covered by the SIR, offers a different but equally instructive example — one that reveals the political purpose that electoral roll revision can come to serve. During the recent revision of electoral rolls, CM Himanta Biswa Sarma declared publicly: "My job is to make the Miya people suffer." He urged that Bengali-speaking Muslims be "troubled" "in any way" possible, adding: "Only if they face troubles will they leave Assam... We are saying it openly; we are not hiding it." He also announced that 4 to 5 lakh "Miya" voters would be deleted from Assam's electoral rolls and later explained: "I won't be able to deport them in my lifetime. That's why I keep pressuring them, so that they leave by themselves." It is the language not of an administrator updating electoral rolls but of a constitutional functionary presenting electoral deletion as an instrument of exclusion.

If Bihar and West Bengal illustrate the expanding administrative consequences of electoral deletion, Assam illustrates something even more disturbing — the political purpose that, in some quarters, is now openly attached to it.

Taken together, these developments reveal a pattern that should concern every constitutional democracy. A list prepared for the

limited purpose of determining who may vote is quietly beginning to influence who may receive welfare benefits, banking services and travel documents. A clerical mistake, an absent migrant worker, a missed visit by a booth-level officer, or the inability to produce an old document can now trigger a chain of consequences extending far beyond the polling booth.

This is no longer merely about the right to vote. It is about the citizen's relationship with the state.

The electoral roll serves one constitutional purpose: Identifying those entitled to vote under Article 326. Welfare benefits flow from separate statutes. Banking relationships are governed by different laws. Passports are issued under an entirely different legal framework. Citizenship is determined under the Citizenship Act, not the Representation of the People Act. These legal boundaries exist to ensure that an administrative exercise designed for one objective does not become a mechanism for exclusion in entirely unrelated spheres of public life.

Once those boundaries begin to dissolve, the consequences become grave. A citizen deleted from one database may gradually discover that he has disappeared in many others. The case of R Rajagopal is therefore not merely the story of one journalist encountering bureaucratic difficulty. It is a warning to the republic. Those who once dismissed electoral deletion with a shrug — "I never voted anyway" — now have reason to think again. Their indifference rested on the belief that only the vote was at stake. That assumption no longer appears safe.

Electoral rolls are indispensable to free and fair elections. They must never become proxies for determining a citizen's entitlement to rights, services or benefits beyond the electoral process. The republic has always recognised a vital constitutional distinction between the right to vote and the broader rights of citizenship. That distinction now deserves to be reaffirmed — with clarity and without delay.

For, if deletion from the electoral roll is allowed to acquire consequences far beyond the franchise, the hidden cost of losing one's name from the voters' list may prove to be not merely the loss of a vote, but the beginning of a citizen's gradual disappearance from official existence.

*The writer is former Chief Election Commissioner of India and author of An Undocumented Wonder: The Making of the Great Indian Election*

## Theft at Ram Temple betrayed public trust. Now, reform

RAM RAJYA  
BY RAM MADHAV

**T**HE CONTROVERSY surrounding the theft of offerings allegedly by some staff members of the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya disturbed every right-thinking person in the country. Temples are sacred spaces and offerings are not just donations but a personal bond between the deity and the devotee. Ayodhya has a special place in the hearts of crores of Indians, given the 500-year-long struggle that preceded its restoration. That intense emotional attachment to the Ram Temple, manifested in the grand celebrations witnessed during the consecration ceremony in January 2024, led to great anguish over the news of theft.

There is another reason behind the public's disquiet. The temple is being managed by persons connected with the Sangh Parivar, which enjoys an unblemished record of integrity, probity and discipline. Many offerings in cash and kind are made in Ayodhya because of the trust that people repose in the Sangh Parivar. It is the breakdown of that trust that compounded the resentment of the people.

The Parivar leadership understood the severity of public resentment. Dattatreya Hosabale, the general secretary of the RSS, issued a strongly worded statement calling for severe punishment for those found guilty. He also called upon the temple trust to ensure "proper financial management, flawless and transparent operational systems, and an atmosphere imbued with purity, sanctity and true *dharmikata*". On its part, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust (SRJTKT), the body of saints and eminent citizens entrusted with the management of the temple, acted swiftly and handed over the investigation to a Special Investigation Team (SIT) constituted by the state government. The SIT has arrested a number of accused and has also questioned some of the senior functionaries of the Trust, including its general secretary Champat Rai, who has resigned. The Trust has accepted the resignation of Rai and trustee Anil Mishra, who were responsible for overseeing the

day-to-day functioning of the temple affairs.



ILLUSTRATION: TANUSHRI MITRA

The RSS is not a registered trust, but its mammoth institutional structure runs on the principle of mutual trust and confidence among its functionaries. The SRJTKT is a registered trust, yet it needed a professional system in place to run the temple. The RSS functionaries involved in managing the Ayodhya temple seemed to have naively followed the RSS principle of trust alone. That their trust has been

breached must have come as a rude shock and a crucial lesson. Rai and Mishra rightly took the onus for the mishap on themselves. To blame them for any kind of dishonesty or ill intention will be unfair. Their failure lay not in their personal integrity but in their professional misjudgement of people and practices.

The Ram Temple attracts around 2 million people every month. It is as popular as other prominent temples like Tirupati and Vaishno Devi, which have developed efficient systems for crowd management, counting of offerings and pilgrim amenities. The Ram Temple Trust should have put similar systems in place. It has now decided that an executive officer will be appointed with sufficient powers to bring in order, transparency and professionalism in the temple's functioning.

It must be borne in mind that even the best-managed temples like Tirupati have faced complaints of embezzlement by staff, thefts in temple offerings and snatching of offerings out of donation boxes during peak hours. Some of these cases are being investigated by the CBI. When such instances happen, the culprits are blamed and punished, but not the TTD trust. When burglars break in, owners are not punished. The same should apply to the functionaries of the Ram Temple Trust, except demanding corrective measures.

Temples like Tirupati and Vaishno Devi are managed by government-controlled trusts. But the Ayodhya temple is managed completely by an independent trust. The Sangh and affiliates like the VHP have always demanded that Hindu temples must be freed from government control and handed over to saints and eminent citizens. Ayodhya was showcased as an example. The lapses at the temple should not result in denying the right of the Hindus to administer their religious places. Instead, this is the best opportunity to develop a model by which the Hindus continue to enjoy their rights while the governments may also play a limited role of oversight to ensure probity and order.

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Apply law equally

SHIV SENA leaders and cadres have a history of taking the law into their own hands. Their corporator, Ramesh Mhatre, followed that practice ('Don't let the rowdy politician get away', *IE*, July 10). No one gave him the right to assault two doctors. No public official should be above the law. The authorities must conduct an impartial investigation and ensure that justice is served in accordance with the law. The doctors' association is right in seeking stronger legal protection against violence in hospitals.

*Bal Govind, Noida*

THE ARREST of Ramesh Mhatre is a welcome first step. But let us be honest: One arrest does not fix a systemic problem ('Don't let the rowdy politician get away', *IE*, July 10). When a politician attacks a doctor or a government official, it is not just an assault; it is a display of power over the public. The real test now is whether the law will be allowed to take its course without political interference.

*Ananya Mishra, Kanpur*

### Safeguard diaspora

THE RECENT multinational operation against crime syndicates is good news ('A global crackdown and a chance for India', *IE*, July 10), but we must not waste this momentum. India should focus on breaking the local links that feed these global networks — tightening financial trails, countering the glorification of gangsters on social media, and protecting vulnerable students who get trapped as pawns. Canada's new willingness to cooperate is welcome, but we also need stronger domestic systems: a dedicated cell to safeguard our diaspora, faster extradition processes, and awareness campaigns in states like Punjab, where young people are often lured by false promises.

*Babu Crishna, Bengaluru*



ABHAY JERE

LAST MONTH, China conducted a surgical strike on its education system and scrapped over 12,000 undergraduate degree programmes that it deemed obsolete and irrelevant. Effectively, it declared one in three of its university courses unfit for the future job market. In their place, 10,200 new programmes in AI, robotics, semiconductors, quantum applications and advanced manufacturing were introduced. Even newer disciplines like "embodied intelligence" are now receiving an institutional push. These reforms were triggered by numbers China could no longer ignore. Its urban youth unemployment is around 16 per cent, even as AI companies complained they could not find qualified people to hire.

Aren't we facing a similar problem? By 2047, India aspires to become a \$20-trillion economy. Education remains the primary ladder for social and financial mobility. Building globally competitive human capital should be our foremost national priority. We say that we are now bigger than China, and younger, more diverse and governed by democratic structures. None of that changes the number staring back at us: According to the latest India Skills Report, only 56 per cent of graduates are employable.

The India Graduate Skill Index

**China rewrote a third of its university system because it ran out of patience. India still has a choice**



SHUVADITYA BOSE

KOLKATA IS doing its best annual impersonation of Venice. The man has waited for the rain to relent. It doesn't. He steps out anyway. The antiquated raincoat is perfectly at home with the city's anachronism. With the obeisance of a pallbearer performing one final duty, he unties the knots. The flag — hoisted with pride four weeks ago — feels heavier than usual, drenched as much by monsoon as by another unrealised dream. The quadrennial tradition reaches its melancholy conclusion. Brazil are out of the FIFA World Cup.

Nearly a thousand miles away, I find my-

## Our universities need a reset, not China playbook

found that employability in AI and machine-learning roles climbed by 46 per cent, while employability in HR, digital marketing and administration is falling. Some US universities have slashed fees by 50 per cent for conventional MBA programmes, considering declining demand in an AI-dominated world. The market is not confused. Our education policies need to catch up. BBA, BA and BCom programmes are struggling because they prepare students for work that software now performs for free, like data entry, translation, and first-draft analysis. A student beginning a three- or four-year degree today may graduate into a job description that will no longer exist. With over 4 crore students enrolled across 50,000-plus colleges, and roughly 55-58 per cent studying Arts, Humanities or Commerce, the scale of potential displacement is huge.

India cannot and should not run China's playbook. For millions of first-generation learners, education is the most powerful instrument of upward mobility. But "we can't copy China" must not become an excuse for inaction. What we need is not the death of disciplines — it is their rebirth. Humanities programmes must evolve into digital humanities or cultural analytics. Linguistics must effectively merge with computational se-

mantics. Engineering syllabi must be rebuilt around "systems thinking" and "energy transition", not legacy techniques.

Industry 5.0 is no longer a distant reality. Now, humans and intelligent machines will work alongside each other. This has already reshaped factory floors, finance teams and design studios. Skill augmentation must become as integral to higher education as earning a degree itself. The NEP 2020, though visionary, is a pre-AI document. We may now need a focussed AI addendum that formally pivots our approach. Our Union Budget has set aside Rs 500 crore for a Centre of Excellence in AI for Education, in tandem with the IndiaAI Mission. However, pilots are not systems, and intent is not infrastructure.

If we are serious about Viksit Bharat, then we need to build a framework of viksit vishwavidyalaya — not as another pilot project to be announced and quietly shelved, but as a national standard for a future-ready Indian university where every degree holder sits alongside genuine AI and data fluency. China rewrote a third of its university system because it ran out of patience. India still has a choice. The question is whether we make it — before the decision is made for us.

*The writer is MD & CEO, Dexit Global and former vice-chairman of AICTE*

## Brazil's power is not its five Cups, but its dancing feet

self performing the same ritual in Noida, only with less urgency. Intoxicated by a concoction of corporate and capital, seldom does this city pause to breathe for football. I am spared the jeers that inevitably follow when a Brazil exit coincides with an Argentina triumph. Except, there is an invisible thread that connects the two cities — the hurt feels exactly as unendurable.

Where I grew up, football teams were not chosen. They were inherited as family heirlooms. The generation before ours witnessed two revolutions in quick succession. First came globalisation. Then came Brazil. Before Arun Govil taught divinity, Zico and Sócrates had already cast their spells. Before Shaktimaan, Romário was the closest personification of a superhero. Brazil were not loved because they won. They were loved be-

cause they brought joy.

Unfortunately, the Brazil we grew up venerating bears little resemblance to the one that arrived in the US. The flamboyance has made way for the formulaic.

For the Indian working class, who grew up far removed from Rio's beaches and São Paulo's streets, Brazil represented something much larger than merely football. Nothing paralysed us quite like the tyranny of "what if". What if we fail at the impending examinations looming large? What if we cannot articulate ourselves in the job in-

**For generations, they played football as though failure was an acceptable price for beauty**

terview? What if we don't live up to the societal expectations we had very little control over? What if the letter that we wrote to express our love, with trembling hands, is met with soul-crushing rejection?

Brazil asked a different question. Not what if we fail, but, so what if we do?

For generations, they played football as though failure was an acceptable price for beauty. They taught us that life need not be negotiated in binaries of victory and defeat. Lose, if you must, but lose on your terms. Brazil's greatest export was not the footballers, but the spirit of *foie de vivre*.

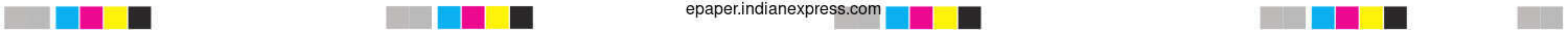
For perhaps the first time in living memory, Brazil leave a World Cup having surrendered not merely a match, but the very idea that made the world fall in love with them. They were timid. Predictable. Forgettable.

The magic is waning.

And yet, four years from now, another June will arrive. Another father will climb onto a porch to fasten a Brazil flag. Another child will be curious to hear stories about Neymar. Not what he won — of which there is very little — but his rainbow flicks. The rabonas. The paradinhas. The elásticos. The flashiness. The dancing feet that made millions fall in love with the team representing a nation they would never visit.

That is Brazil's true inheritance. Not the five stars stitched on the shirt, but a brand of football so unapologetically different that we grew up believing nobody else had the right to play football that way.

*The writer is deputy copy editor, The Indian Express. shuvaditya.bose@expressindia.com*





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HEALTH

Why weekly diabetes shot could reshape treatment



ANONNA DUTT

DANISH PHARMACEUTICAL giant Novo Nordisk Thursday launched its once-a-week insulin shot in India that promises to make blood sugar control more convenient in one of the world's largest diabetes populations. Called icodect, the drug will be sold under the brand name Awikli ("a weekly") for just Rs 261 per week. This is the world's first long-acting insulin shot that reduces injections from 365 days a year to 52 days.

How does it work?

For long-lasting effects, two key modifications were made to human insulin to develop insulin icodect.

FIRST, a fatty acid chain was added to increase its affinity to a protein in the blood called albumin. When a week's dose of insulin is delivered under the skin, this bonding with albumin creates an inactive depot of the drug. This bond is reversible and the drug is slowly released into the bloodstream throughout the week.

SECOND, three amino acid substitutions were made to lower the molecule's affinity to insulin receptors. Even after the molecule gets out of the albumin bond, the reduced affinity for insulin receptors means the drug gets used slowly. The reduced affinity does not reduce the potency of the drug.

"The impact of this drug is similar to that of any other insulin. The advantage for the patients, however, is that it would reduce the number of shots they have to take. This is likely to improve compliance as well," said Dr SV Madhu, professor of endocrinology at GTB Hospital, New Delhi.

Is icodect different from insulin?

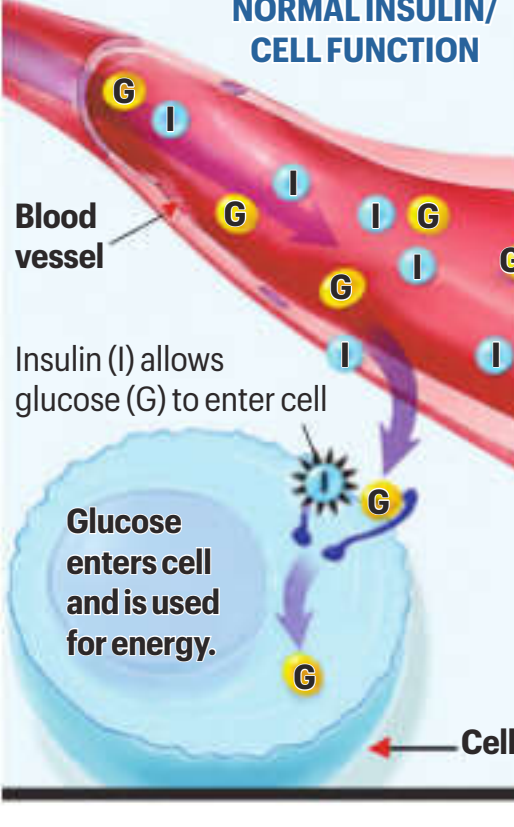
Icodect is an insulin analogue — a genetically engineered version of human insulin — that increases its life within the body.

Before the discovery of insulin in 1921, a childhood diabetes diagnosis was fatal. Physicians prescribed starvation treatment — low-calorie diets with periods of fasting. "Patients with T1D [type 1 diabetes] were often kept in hospital for weeks or months at a time, while their calorie intake and glucose excretion were meticulously recorded," ac-

HOW DIABETES TYPES 1 AND 2 AFFECT THE BODY

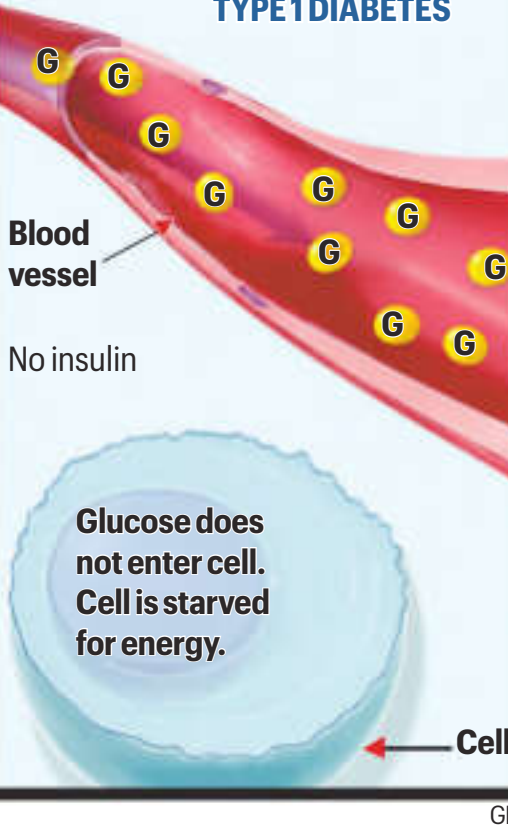
TYPE 1 DIABETES

A condition where the pancreas completely stops producing insulin, the hormone responsible for controlling the level of glucose in blood.

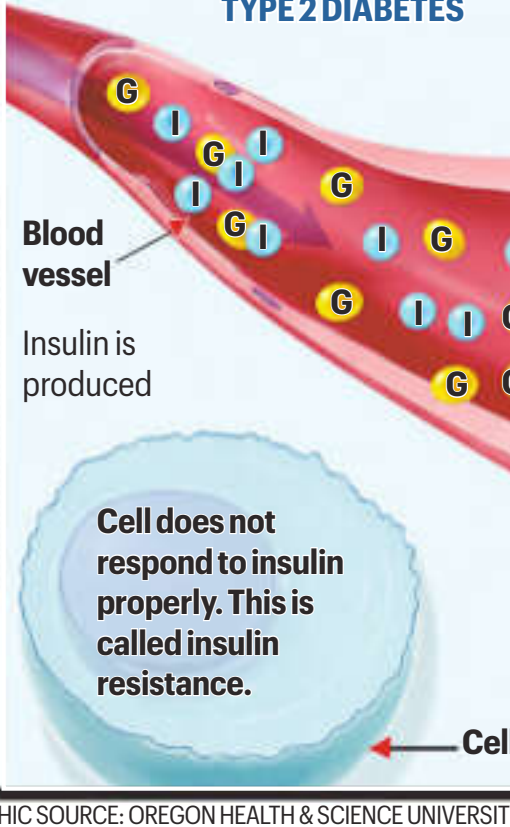


TYPE 2 DIABETES

Body's insulin production either goes down or the cells become resistant to the insulin. It accounts for more than 90% of all diabetes cases in the country.



101 million INDIANS ARE LIVING WITH DIABETES  
136 million INDIANS HAVE PRE-DIABETES



GRAPHIC SOURCE: OREGON HEALTH & SCIENCE UNIVERSITY

the blood glucose levels, need to take insulin injections to prevent further complications. Yet, most of them are unwilling to switch to the shots. Initiating insulin early can prevent damage to the organs, nerve endings, and the eye," said Dr S K Wangnoo, head of endocrinology at Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, New Delhi. Even doctors show reluctance to start their patients on insulin treatments.

Dr Madhu said once patients do not meet blood glucose targets despite the maximum dose and combination of oral medications, they should immediately be moved to insulin, initially at a lower dose with oral pills before transitioning completely to insulin.

Vikrant Shrotriya, managing director of Novo Nordisk India, said: "Currently, there are six million people on insulin in India, but this number should at least be double. Insulin is a drug that is never abused and is very effective for the treatment of diabetes, yet people stay away from it. We are hoping that the convenience of using this drug would mean more and more people who are recommended insulin start using it."

SECOND, as background insulin for type 1 diabetics

Those with type 1 diabetes need a long-

Weight-loss drugs

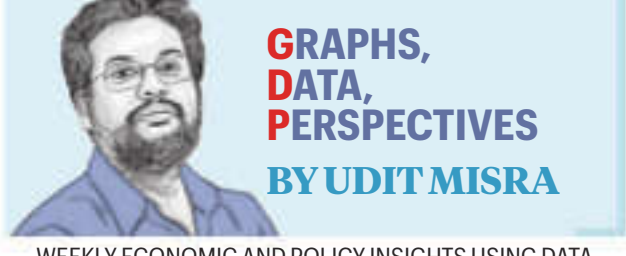
Icodect, which lowers blood glucose levels, becomes more effective when combined with GLP-1 drugs.

•

This is because abdominal obesity, which GLP-1 tackles, reduces insulin sensitivity. Meaning, more insulin is needed to process same amount of sugar.

ECONOMY

June inflation may breach RBI 4% target: Transport is driving this



GRAPHS, DATA, PERSPECTIVES  
BY UDIT MISRA

WEEKLY ECONOMIC AND POLICY INSIGHTS USING DATA

THE RETAIL inflation rate is set to breach the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) target level of 4%, according to an analysis by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). The next set of inflation data, covering June, will be released Monday.

Retail inflation fell sharply from more than 6% in October 2024 to zero in October 2025. Since then the figure has started edging up — a trend exacerbated by supply constraints in the wake of the West Asia war. Even so, retail inflation stayed below the RBI's target rate of 4% for the past 16 months. In May, the retail inflation was 3.93%. According to CMIE's estimates, the overall retail inflation in June is likely to be 4.25%.

Reasons for higher inflation

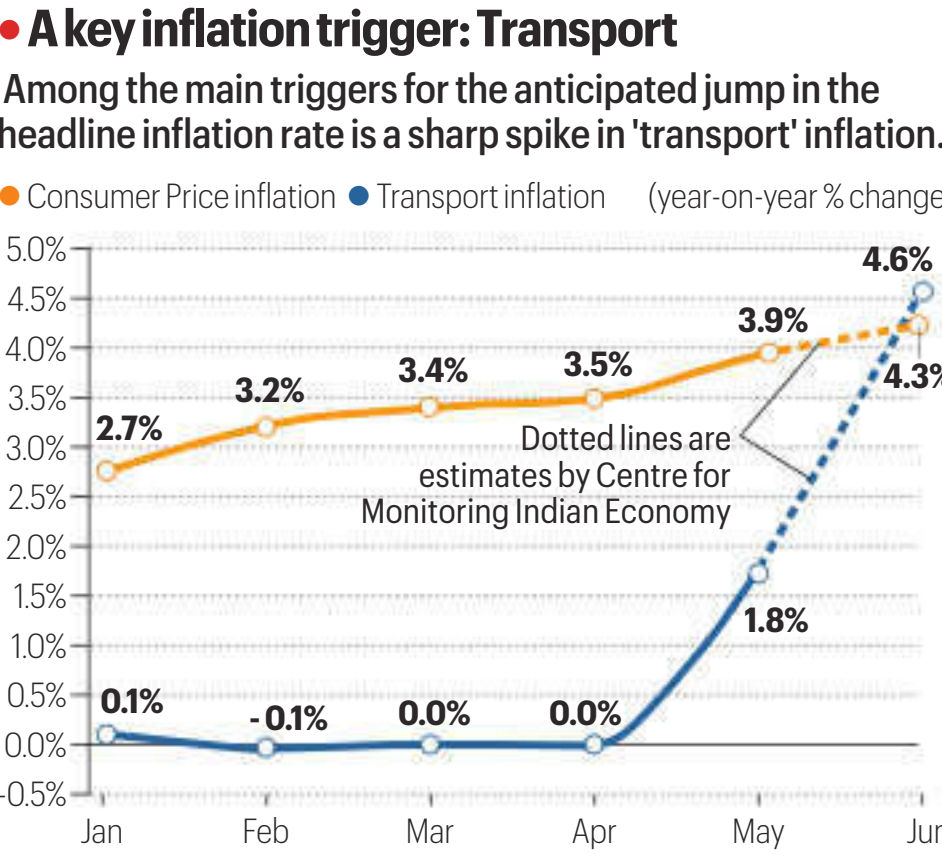
There are two main triggers for the anticipated jump in headline inflation rate,

according to CMIE.

One, is the sub-category of "transport" inflation. In the overall index used to calculate inflation, this sub-category has a weight of around 9%. According to CMIE's estimates, transport inflation, which had largely been close to zero for most of this year, is likely to have grown by 4.6% in June. This sharp spike in transport-related inflation (see chart) in June shows the full impact of the petrol and diesel price hike that were first implemented in May.

There are other factors that have likely pushed up transport costs. "...travel fares would have continued to rise, reflecting the higher fuel costs... Maruti raised vehicle prices from June to offset rising input costs. Inflation firmed across all components of the transport division, with the fuel price hike remaining the principal driver," notes CMIE's analysis.

The second sub-category that has experienced higher inflation in June has to do with different types of fuels. The government increased domestic LPG prices in early June, marking the second hike since March. LPG prices in June averaged Rs 947 per 14.2 kg cylinder across major cities, up from Rs 923 in May. Prices have cumulatively in-



creased by more than Rs 80 since March.

"Higher LPG prices are also expected to have lifted the cost of substitute fuels such as firewood and dung cakes. Consequently, inflation in the electricity, gas, and other

acting dose known as the basal dose, along with shots around the meal times known as the bolus dose, based on how many calories they consume. "People with type 2 diabetes would be the best fit for this drug. This is because people with type 1 diabetes already need to take the three doses a day; a fourth dose doesn't add too much burden. Plus, they typically see more fluctuations in their blood glucose levels and need to adjust their insulin doses accordingly. When I put out a survey two years ago, some women reached out to me and said that they needed to adjust the dose during menstruation. This type of flexibility is not possible with a weekly dose," said Dr V Mohan, chairman of Dr Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre, Chennai.

What about side effects?

The most common side effect of the medicine is hypoglycemia — a condition where the blood glucose levels fall too much — that can affect one in ten people. Dr Wangnoo, however, says this is the same level as seen with other daily insulin shots.

Dr Madhu says: "The reason people notice these episodes of hypoglycemia with insulin is that blood glucose levels are controlled for the first time with it. Even pills can cause episodes of hypoglycaemia, but when blood glucose levels are through the roof, the question of hypoglycaemia does not arise."

How much does it cost?

The drug will cost Rs 261 per week. It will be available in two doses of pre-filled pens — a 700 ml unit costing Rs 2,611 and a 2,100 ml unit costing Rs 7,883. A patient usually needs around 70 units per week, which may need to be scaled up depending on need. "The Rs 261 per week cost is cheaper than the current price of other insulin analogues, which can cost anywhere between Rs 345 and 453 a week. This drug will essentially cost around Rs 50 a day," said Shrotriya.

How many people in India need it?

Currently, 101 million people are living with diabetes and 136 million with pre-diabetes. "While initially most of them would be managed with pills, after five years, say, 5% to 10% would need insulin shots. And, after 10 years, maybe 20% to 30%. Even if we consider that only 20% need it, the number would still stand at around 20 million. There would definitely be more use for the drug in type 2 diabetics because of the convenience of taking one shot and cost similar to other products in the market," said Dr Mohan.

fuels category is estimated to have risen to 1.9 per cent from 0.8 per cent in May," says the CMIE analysis.

Impact on growth

Higher inflation is bad news for economic growth. Fast-rising prices drag down the real economic growth rate because they reduce a consumer's power to purchase goods and services with the same level of income. Things get worse when the RBI's policy action is taken into consideration.

At 4.25%, retail inflation would still be within the RBI's comfort band of 2% to 6%. If it stays within this zone, the RBI is unlikely to sharply calibrate its monetary policy.

But if inflation goes above 6%, for instance, the RBI will need to raise interest rates in the economy. This makes all kinds of loans costlier and, thus, makes it expensive for anyone to undertake any economic activity. Reduced economic activity reduces demand for goods and services in the economy, thereby cooling down price rise.

Given the renewed hostilities between US and Iran, the RBI will likely be cautious in the coming months if inflation keeps inching up. If the trend sustains, expect it to hike rates at some point during the year.

LEGAL

Behind Satluj takedown, the parallel regimes for theatrical and OTT releases

Apurva Vishwanath  
New Delhi, July 10

AFTER BEING stuck for nearly three years over certification issues, the movie *Satluj*, based on the life of rights activist Jaswant Singh Khrala, premiered on ZEE5 on July 3. Just two days later, however, it was taken off the platform. While the film remains available internationally on ZEE5 Global, it is unavailable in India "until further notice".

Government sources have cited "security concerns" over the film. An Inter-Departmental Committee, constituted by the government under the Information Technology Rules 2021, is set to take up the matter.

The takedown of a film that was never allowed a theatrical release has put the spotlight on the parallel regulatory regimes in India — the Cinematograph Act for theatrical releases and the Information Technology (IT) Rules, 2021 for streaming platforms.

Why was *Satluj* banned?

The film chronicles Khrala, the Amrit-

sar-based activist, who investigated the alleged illegal cremation of "thousands of unidentified bodies" by police during Punjab's militancy years. He was abducted and killed in 1995, a case in which several police officials were convicted.

The project, originally titled *Ghullughara*, changed its name to *Punjab '95* after the first round of scrutiny by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). The CBFC sought 127 cuts before it would clear a theatrical release, which the makers refused.

The film, therefore, never reached the cinemas and eventually landed on the over-the-top (OTT) platform — without the cuts — under the name *Satluj*. Parallely, the makers challenged the CBFC's objections before the Bombay High Court in 2023, but later withdrew the petition.

How does CBFC certification work?

Theatre releases are governed by the Cinematograph Act, 1952. Under Section 4 of the Act, any person wishing to exhibit a film publicly must apply to the CBFC, a statutory

body under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Screening uncertified films in a cinema is a criminal offence.

The CBFC certifies films into categories: U (unrestricted); UA (unrestricted with parental guidance); A (adults only), and S (restricted to specialised audiences).

The Cinematograph (Amendment) Act, 2023, further split the UA category into age-based sub-categories and made certificates perpetually valid, removing the earlier 10-year limit. The Act also empowers the board to refuse certifications or to grant them subject to excisions and modifications if a film is against the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India; the security of the state; friendly relations with foreign states; public order, decency or morality; or involves defamation or contempt of court. These are the "reasonable restrictions" on free speech under Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

Filmmakers have long criticised the wide discretion given to the examining and revising committee within the CBFC. Until 2021,

a filmmaker, by a CBFC order in the form of a refusal or grant of a certificate or demands of cuts, could appeal to a dedicated tribunal under the act. A tribunal rationalisation reform abolished FCAT, transferring its functions to the High Courts, which is a slow and expensive process for time-sensitive releases. Critics also say that judges may lack the specialised engagement with cinema that a specialised tribunal would bring.

This is perhaps why the makers of *Satluj* withdrew the plea before the Bombay High Court and turned to streaming services where the CBFC has no jurisdiction.

How are OTT platforms regulated?

OTT platforms typically operated with minimal oversight. But as their influence and reach grow, the government has made attempts to regulate these platforms.

In 2019, the Karnataka High Court dismissed a writ petition seeking the regulation of content on OTT platforms also under the Cinematograph Act. The HC reiterated the distinction between public exhibition

of films, which is governed under the Cinematograph Act, to a private viewing of content on an OTT platform by individuals in the privacy of their personal spaces.

The government had also opposed the plea, arguing that the provisions of the IT Act take care of the apprehensions expressed by the petitioner.

OTT content is regulated under part III of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, which prescribe a code of ethics requiring publishers to exercise caution over content that may fall under the grounds for "reasonable restrictions" mentioned above.

The rules set up a three-tier grievance structure — self-regulation by the publisher, self-regulatory bodies and government oversight through the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. This framework is also under challenge. The Bombay and Madras High Courts have stayed this provision.

In the 2023 Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, which was subsequently withdrawn, the government attempted to

define OTT platforms as a broadcasting service to bring them under its ambit.

In the case of *Satluj*'s takedown, the government has reportedly used its powers under Section 69A of the IT Act.

What is Section 69A?

Section 69A involves the power to issue orders to block content. These orders are issued under the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009. The government must record the reasons for blocking in writing, and then a designated review committee examines these directions and can set aside orders if they do not comply with Section 69A.

The Information & Broadcasting Ministry has formed an Inter-Departmental Committee under Rule 14 of the IT Rules to look into *Satluj*'s content and make recommendations to the government. It can recommend warnings, an apology or disclaimer, reclassification or modification of content, or deletion and blocking under Section 69A.



DEBT FUND OUTFLOWS OF RS 1.09 LAKH CRORE, MOSTLY FROM LIQUID &amp; LOW DURATION FUNDS IN JUNE

# June equity MF inflows up 26% from May; gold ETFs see rebound

**Akash Mandal**  
*Mumbai, July 10*

INFLOWS INTO equity mutual funds (MFs) rose 26% in June from the previous month, with contributions from systematic investment plans (SIPs) at a three-month high of Rs 31,781 crore. Overall net MF outflows from the overall mutual funds industry narrowed to Rs 52,949 crore from Rs 64,021 crore in May as more money poured into equity schemes, while gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs) saw a 65% month-on-month increase in flows.

Flows into ETFs rebounded during the month, especially for gold and silver ETFs, while those into hybrid mutual funds also jumped, signifying that investors preferred to diversify across schemes as the stock market remained volatile in June amid geopolitical uncertainties.

"June marked positive equity inflows for the 64th consecutive month. SIP contributions touched a record Rs 31,781 crore, reflecting growing investor confidence and the increasing adoption of disciplined, long-term investing," said Venkat Chalasani, Association of Mutual Funds in India's (AMFI) Chief Executive.

Assets under management (AUM) of the MF industry rose further to a new record of Rs 82.2 lakh crore as of June 30 from Rs 81.6 lakh crore on the last day of the previous month. Last month also saw the assets under control (AUC) of the MF industry, at Rs 76.41 lakh crore, surpassing that of foreign investors' Rs 76.22 lakh crore for the first time.

This indicates continued growth of the industry amidst heavy foreign outflows this year. AUM represents the total value of all schemes managed by the industry, including factors such as accrued returns, while AUC only represents the total underlying assets held by

an institution.

Equity inflows rose 26% MoM and 23% year-on-year to Rs 28,973 crore in June, with inflows into mid-cap funds — the most popular category — increased nearly 39%, while those into multi-cap, large, and mid-cap funds, focused funds, and value funds also rose by over 30%. "The increase in inflows into multi-cap, mid-cap, and small-cap funds suggests investors are participating across the market-cap spectrum rather than chasing a single pocket of the market," said Suranjana Borthakur, head of distribution and strategic alliances at Mirae Asset Investment Managers (India).

On the debt side, outflows widened to Rs 1.09 lakh crore from Rs 96,949 crore in May. In June 2025, debt outflows were a mere Rs 1,711 crore. The rising debt scheme outflows is primarily due to exits from liquid, low-duration, and short-duration funds, which are often used by companies and institutional players to park their money safely in the short term.

June was a good month for ETFs, with those related to gold seeing net inflows of Rs 3,443 crore after the outflow of Rs 725 crore in May.

The rebound in gold ETF flows suggests investors continue to value gold as an effective portfolio diversifier amid global uncertainty, according to Rohit Sarin, co-founder of wealth management firm Client Associates. Silver ETFs also saw inflows of Rs 4,287 crore compared to an outflow of Rs 2,113 crore in the previous month.

The fall in gold prices from its peak in late January may have played a part in the revival of precious metal ETF inflows, giving investors a good entry point with potential for future returns.

Gold ETFs are backed by physical gold and are thus directly linked to gold prices.

## FPIs return to Indian stocks, but not much has changed

**Akash Mandal**  
*Mumbai, July 10*

After four months, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) — at least in the first 10 days of July — have been net buyers of Indian stocks, having purchased shares worth \$1.6 billion.

However, it may not amount to much. The West Asia war in late February sparked a \$28-billion exit by FPIs from the domestic equity markets over the next four months.

The US-Iran peace deal, announced on June 14, turned sentiment around, with the second half of last month seeing net inflows of \$1.1 billion after outflows of \$6.7 billion in the first half. But there is little to suggest that the return of FPIs — which has coincided with a sharp pullback in AI-led markets such as South Korea on worries about the tech rally being overstretched — has changed how foreign investors view India as a market.

### Limited downsides, AI alternative

Some experts think that while foreign flows into Indian equities may remain iffy going forward, a deep sell-off may not be seen again as FPIs may see India as an opportunity after valuations in AI-driven markets have gone through the roof. "Thus, they are entering markets like India, where the downside is very limited at this point, so they can at least protect their money," said Pravin Bokade, head of research at IDBI Capital Markets.

Further, as the initial AI capex cycle matures, investors will also look for opportunities in secondary AI markets. In this regard, India becomes more at-



The war in late February sparked a \$28-billion exit by FPIs. REUTERS

tractive thanks to improving macro fundamentals, Motilal Oswal Financial Services said in a report earlier this month.

According to Motilal Oswal analysts, India's valuation premium over emerging markets "has compressed to a historic low of 18% in June, significantly below its long-term average of 73% and CY22 peak of 147%". This, according to them, leaves fewer reasons for FPIs to remain net sellers for long.

The measures taken by the government and the Reserve Bank of India on June 5 to boost inflows into debt may have also had an indirect effect on equity markets by having a positive impact on keenly-eyed metrics such as Balance of Payments, deeper foreign participation, and a more stable rupee. Vishad Turakhia, MD and CEO of Equirus Securities, pointed out that currency stability is a key consideration for overseas equity investors as continued depreciation can "significantly erode" returns in dollar terms. In June, foreign inflows into the debt market jumped to \$5.8 billion from \$291 million in May, with talk of the

rupee hitting 100-per-dollar in the coming months having vanished entirely.

### AI, geopolitics 'superficial' reasons

Inflows have been far too modest so far, making it difficult to extrapolate any positives, said Dhananjay Sinha, Systematix Group's CEO and co-head of institutional equities. The Indian market, Sinha said, remains expensive and no earnings growth to match it.

Others are not as charitable. According to Kotak Institutional Equities, using AI and geopolitics to argue away India's weak performance over the last two years "seem superficial".

"We believe sections of the market have been too complacent on the quality of the business models of Indian companies and disruption risks to their business models, too generous in valuing the market for the past few years, and too optimistic on earnings," Kotak analysts led by Sanjeev Prasad said in a note on July 1.

FULL REPORT ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](https://www.indianexpress.com)

KERALA ONLY MAJOR STATE LAGGING BEHIND, BUT NOT OPPOSED

# Boost for labour reforms as West Bengal on board now

**Ravi Dutta Mishra & Aanchal Magazine**  
*New Delhi, July 10*

THE BJP's recent electoral gains has led to an upside for labour reforms. States that were holding out from implementing the long-pending labour codes are now coming on board. With a BJP government in place now, West Bengal, which lagged behind in framing the draft rules for the four labour codes, is getting ready to roll them out.

Opposition-ruled state Kerala is now the only major state that still remains out of the loop on the new labour codes and is yet to notify the rules, a senior government official said. However, Kerala is "not against" the implementation but is moving slowly in formalising the process for rollout of the four labour codes, the official added.

With the Congress-led UDF replacing the CPI(M)-led LDF government in Kerala, the official said the change in government could open the doors somewhat as the state is "not against" the implementation of the labour codes and will open up to the benefits of the codes.

"West Bengal and Kerala are yet to notify the rules for the labour codes. But West Bengal is going to implement the codes soon. Kerala is the only major state that's left. It has said that it will assess the same but has not opposed it. That there could be challenges at the time of implementation of the new rules has been discussed with the states. The Centre has assured the states that it will resolve all queries," the official said.

The official pointed out that Karnataka, despite being an Opposition-ruled state, has accepted the codes and prepared the draft rules.

The Centre had notified the four labour codes — Code on Wages, 2019; Industrial Relations Code, 2020; Code on Social Security, 2020; and Occupational Safety, Health and Work-



### ROAD AHEAD

**WEST BENGAL**, which lagged behind in framing the draft rules for the four labour codes, is getting ready to roll them out after the BJP government came to power

**OPPOSITION-RULED** Kerala is now the only major state that still remains out of the loop on the new labour codes and is yet to notify the rules. However, the state is "not against" the implementation

**THE CENTRE** had notified the four labour codes in November 2025. In December last year, the government had told that 34 of the 36 states and UTs had finalised the rules for the Code on Wages, Code on Social Security and Industrial Relations Code.

ing Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020 — in November 2025, close to five years after getting the law passed in Parliament. In December last year, the Ministry of Labour and Employment, in a written response, had said that states/Union Territories are still in the process of finalising the rules, adding that 34 of the 36 states and Union Territories (UTs) had finalised the rules for the Code on Wages, Code on Social Security and Industrial Relations Code.

The Mamata Banerjee-led government in West Bengal had refused to comply with the labour codes, alleging that if the law was implemented, many workers would be deprived of social security.

Last December, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had also opposed the codes, saying they pose a threat to job security as the threshold for requiring prior government approval for layoffs had been raised from 100 to 300 workers, adding that companies would hire short-term workers to avoid giving benefits to long-term workers.

The Code on Wages seeks to redefine the break-up of wages to increase the share of the basic pay component — to enable higher provision for social security, especially in the service sector. The codes also aim to expand the social security provisions for gig workers.

While most states have finalised draft rules under the labour codes, as per the government reply in Parliament, the progress varied, depending on the government in power. For instance, BJP-ruled states like Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Assam finalised the draft rules in the first half of the year, but Opposition-ruled states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Telangana were slower. Labour laws fall under the concurrent list of the Constitution. Hence, both the Centre and states are empowered to make rules. But in the event of a conflict between state and central laws, central legislation generally takes precedence, unless the state's law has obtained presidential assent.

FULL REPORT ON

[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](https://www.indianexpress.com)

## ONGC approves 1.75mt strategic petroleum reserve

*New Delhi:* India has revved up plans to bolster its emergency crude buffer after recent geopolitical shocks exposed risks to oil supply routes.

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has approved a 1.75-million-tonne strategic petroleum reserve at Mangaluru, adding nearly 13 million barrels of storage. ONGC said in a stock exchange filing that the project will be developed as a Phase-I extension of the Mangaluru strategic petroleum reserve, along with associated facilities.

The government also approved the second phase of the Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) programme, which will add another 6.5 million tonnes of storage capacity. This includes a 4-million-tonne reserve at Chandikhol in Odisha and a 2.5-million-tonne expansion at Padur. Together with the existing 5.33-million-tonne capacity, the expansion is expected to raise emergency crude coverage to more than 20 days of consumption. FE

### BRIEFLY

## India's forex kitty jumps \$7.26 bn to \$674.19 bn

*Mumbai:* India's forex reserves jumped \$7.26 billion to \$674.193 billion during the week ended July 3, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the forex kitty had dropped by \$5.654 billion to \$666.933 billion. The reserves had expanded to an all-time high of \$728.494 billion during the week ended February 27 this year before the onset of the West Asia conflict, which led to several weeks of a drop as the rupee came under pressure and the RBI had to intervene in the forex market through dollar sales. For the week ended July 3, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased \$4.51 billion to \$545.578 billion, the central bank's data showed. PTI

## SBI sells 1.42% stake in SBI Funds Mgmt

*New Delhi:* State Bank of India (SBI) has sold 1.42% stake in its asset management arm, SBI Funds Management Ltd (SBIFM), to 30 investors for Rs 1,655 crore in a pre-IPO placement round, the bank said. The lender sold the stake at Rs 574 per share, which is also the higher end of the IPO price band, according

to an exchange filing. SBI Funds Management's Rs 11,600-crore maiden public equity offering will open on July 14 and conclude on July 16. The entire IPO is an Offer for Sale (OFS) by promoters SBI and Amundi India Holding. SBI sold the shares to investors including 360 ONE funds, Tata AIG General Insurance Company, Go Digit General Insurance and Bennett Coleman. PTI

## World Bank Group commits \$890mn for solar project

*New Delhi:* The World Bank Group has committed \$890 million funding support to accelerate India's national programme for solar rooftop to bring clean energy to millions of homes and create 1.7 million job opportunities across the renewable energy manufacturing, installation, and services value chain. The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors have approved the project, the agency said in a statement on Friday. The financing package for the programme includes an \$820 million loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), a \$60 million concessional loan from the Clean Technology Fund, and a \$10 million grant from IBRD's Livable Planet Fund, it said. PTI

NEWLY-APPOINTED US FEDERAL RESERVE CHAIRMAN KEVIN WARSH HAS ANNOUNCED FIVE TASK FORCES

# Rajan, Raj Chetty on panels to review US Fed functioning

**Press Trust of India**  
*Washington, July 10*

FORMER RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan, Delhi-born American economist Raj Chetty and senior Microsoft executive Asha Sharma have been roped in by the US Federal Reserve to review the manner in which it conducts monetary policy.

The five task forces announced by the newly appointed US Federal Reserve chairman Kevin Warsh also include former Bank of England Governor Mervyn King, former Walmart CEO Doug McMillon, Nobel laureate Thomas Sargent and Silicon Valley venture capitalist Marc Andreessen.

"I am honoured that the best minds from a range of disciplines have agreed to work with us to sharpen our performance as an institution. The goal is straightforward: to ensure the Fed is best positioned to achieve our objectives in this consequential time," Warsh said in a statement on Thursday.

He said the US economy has changed significantly over the last generation, and each task force will carefully consider whether policymakers' means, methods, analytical tools and policy approaches can be improved.

The five task forces will examine areas central to the broad conduct of monetary pol-

icy. They will be co-led by external advisers accomplished economists, business leaders, and former central bank practitioners with deep expertise in their fields. Supported by Federal Reserve staff, they will operate independently, with a mandate to follow the evidence, provide candid feedback, and produce rigorous findings for the Federal Open Market Committee, the Federal Reserve said in a statement.

Rajan will serve on the Balance Sheet Policy task force alongside Harvard economist Karen Dynan and former Federal Reserve Governor Jeremy Stein. The panel will examine the costs, benefits and institu-



Raghuram Rajan will serve on the Balance Sheet Policy task force alongside Harvard economist Karen Dynan. FILE PHOTO

tional implications of the Federal Reserve's current balance sheet regime, including its asset holdings and their role in imple-

menting monetary policy. Chetty, a Harvard University economist, co-led the Data task force with McMillon and the

University of Chicago economist, Kevin Murphy.

The group will focus on improving the quality and timeliness of real-world economic signals that inform the Federal Reserve's policy decisions. Chetty is known for pioneering the use of large administrative and real-time datasets to study economic mobility, inequality and labour markets in the United States.

Wisconsin-born Sharma, the executive vice president of Microsoft and CEO of Xbox, will serve on the Productivity and Jobs task force alongside venture capitalist Andreessen and Stanford economist Charles I Jones.

### MARKETS

|                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <br>Sensex<br>77,569.39<br>827.57<br>1.08% | <br>NIFTY<br>24,206.90<br>244.10<br>1.02% | <br>Gold ▼<br>₹1,43,368   | <br>US Dollar ▼<br>₹95.32 |
|                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                | <br>Silver ▼<br>₹2,20,390 | <br>Oil ▼<br>\$74.37      |

NOTE: GOLD, SILVER RATES AS PER INDIA BULLION AND JEWELLERS ASSOCIATION GOLD PER 10G, SILVER PER 1KG; CRUDE OIL (INDIAN BASKET) AS OF JULY 9, 2026



## Edible oil vulnerability

Imports are a burden best avoided; biofuel focus of key suppliers signals price spike

**AFTER TWO YEARS** of decline, India's edible oil imports in value terms rose again in oil year 2024-25 (November-October), with forex outgo of \$18.3 billion compared with the previous year's \$15.9 billion. The import bill for the current year is projected to exceed \$19 billion. Landed cost of edible oil imports spiked after the start of the West Asia war, and is now 11-13% higher year-on-year. Fresh supply-side price pressures have lately emerged, owing to a likely production slump in Indonesia and Malaysia, the key exporters of these items to India, Jakarta's roll-out of its "B-50 biodiesel programme" from July 1, and the US's aggressive biofuel policy. Over 30% of Indonesia's palm oil output may eventually be diverted to the biofuel sector, reducing the surplus available for exports. Malaysia also has similar plans. For India, which still meets 57% of its edible oil consumption requirement through imports, these developments are expected to impact trade and current accounts and stoke inflation.

Edible oils have become a large item in India's import basket over recent years. As incomes rose, consumption of these items grew much faster than domestic production. Their imports surged from \$9.95 billion in 2019-20 to \$19.6 billion in 2021-22, though import volumes have grown at slower rates, roughly in the range of 13-16 million tonnes (MT) during the last five-six years. Clearly, the exporting countries have capitalised on India's rising demand and its inability to sufficiently scale up domestic production.

Non-essential imports are what could be controlled through policy tools like prohibitions, tariffs, and quantitative restrictions, a notable example being the purchase of gold from overseas. As for goods and minerals that can be domestically produced or extracted, it is reasonable to expect deliberate policy action to curb imports. For example, coal imports suddenly surged a few years ago, but by ramping up domestic mining, considerable foreign exchange has since been saved. A jump in imports of electronic inputs and semiconductor components is nothing to worry about, as these lead to value-added exports and domestic value creation.

To their credit, policymakers haven't failed to recognise the imperative of boosting edible oil production. A national mission, launched in November 2024, aims to boost primary oilseed production from 39 MT in 2022-23 to 69.7 MT by 2030-31 and achieve self-reliance. India is already the top global producer of rice bran, castor seed, safflower, sesame, mustard, and niger, and it cultivates sunflower, soya bean, and groundnut in large quantities. Of the total imports of a little over 16 MT of cooking oils in the 2024-25 oil year, palm oil shipments accounted for over 47%, while sunflower and soybean oils accounted for the balance. Therefore, raising palm oil output manifold is critical to self-sufficiency. The oil palm mission has made significant headway over the past decade. However, to raise crude palm oil production from around 0.4 MT now to the targeted 2.8 MT by 2029-30, the cultivated area needs to extend beyond Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Cluster-based interventions and improved seed systems can help boost yield. It is equally important to create a robust edible oil processing industry by maintaining a large import tariff differential between crude and refined oils. Frequent tariff revisions could upset the confidence of both farmers and refining units. The support price system must prove effective and remunerative for farmers who grow edible oil plants, instead of only favouring water-guzzling grains.

## China's next soft-power export could be beauty

**ASIA'S EXPORT CHAMPIONS** Japan and South Korea have blazed a trail that China is now following. Once their industrial might was established, they began to sell soft power: music, movies, television, the aesthetic style that accompanies them — and the practical tools to achieve the look.

Although overseas sales of Chinese beauty brands are roughly half those of South Korea, the gap is narrowing. But unlike K-beauty, which counts the US as its biggest market, the West won't be the main growth engine, at least for now.

Southeast Asia is the region most critical to the success of Chinese cosmetics and personal-care products, known collectively as C-beauty. They should carve out an advantage over Japanese and Korean rivals with lower prices, rapid rollouts, and by catering to local needs by offering broader skin-tone ranges as well as halal-certified products that can be used by the region's over 200 million Muslims. The strategy is starting to pay off for privately owned Shanghai-based Joy Group. Founded 10 years ago, it has three main brands: cosmetics lines Judydoll and Joocyee as well as René Furterer, a high-end French haircare brand whose China operations were acquired in 2023.

China's reopening in 2023 paved the way for the group to expand more aggressively in the region after arriving two years before, culminating in the opening of three stores in Singapore — its first overseas outlets. As a result, international sales surged 10-fold over three years to \$87 million in 2025, helping lift group revenue 22% to \$620 million. Three of its top five overseas markets are in Southeast Asia.

Its number-one cosmetics maker, Proya Cosmetics, should be similarly focused. It needs a new growth driver after revenue declined in 2025, with sales of its namesake brand falling by 10% due to increasing competition. Building a physical presence in Malaysia through DFI Retail Group's Guardian pharmacy chain will help. Hangzhou-based Florasis, known for ornate packaging, has also pivoted to the region after a stint building up its US business.

This will also set the stage for expansion further afield in West Asia and Latin America. The overseas push is driven by necessity. Competition in China's domestic beauty market has become so intense that margins have been squeezed, making profitability harder to achieve.

The approach is gaining traction. Exports to the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations more than doubled over the past five years, according to BMI, the research unit of Fitch Solutions. Indonesia, the world's fourth most-populous country, is the top market.

The region is a natural destination for C-beauty because of the similarity of their respective online shopping ecosystems. Two of Southeast Asia's top platforms, Lazada and TikTok

Shop, are owned by Alibaba Group Holding and ByteDance, respectively. Strategies that work in China, such as livestream promotions, can be easily converted.

But TikTok isn't just a sales channel, it has brought trends inspired by Chinese sister app Douyin into the mainstream. "Douyin makeup" favours doll-like eyes paired with gradient lips for an ethereal appearance inspired by anime and China's xianxia fantasy genre. And just as K-pop stars popularised Korea's understated-yet-polished aesthetic, Chinese dramas like *Pursuit of Jade* (a hit on Netflix's Global Top 10) are introducing audiences across Southeast Asia to C-beauty.

To be sure, China's \$5.7 billion worth of beauty exports is still modest compared with the biggest players, amounting to roughly a quarter of France's and 60% of the US total, according to Alexis Amann, who writes the *Playbook of Beauty* newsletter.

There is one way it can stand out more effectively in high-growth Muslim-majority markets: by seeking halal certification to ensure products comply with Islamic principles. Making cosmetics wudu-friendly — allowing observant Muslims to wear makeup without interfering with the ritual ablution performed before prayer — would bolster those efforts. By contrast, although many Korean brands are vegan and halal-friendly, they don't tend to pursue certification.

C-beauty doesn't need to dethrone French luxury brands or conquer US department stores to succeed. The more realistic strategy is to dominate neighbouring markets, refine products for local tastes, and build cultural cachet before expanding further. Just as Korean entertainment helped turn K-beauty into a global phenomenon, China's growing influence in popular culture could do the same for its cosmetics.

**THE 2026 FIFA** World Cup is a first of its kind. It's co-hosted by the US, Canada, and Mexico. It has 48 teams, 104 matches, and a global television audience of 5.8 to 6 billion. Fifa expects to see record revenue while the three host countries are expecting benefits in tourism, employment, and international prestige. But does hosting a World Cup really make a country wealthier?

The answer is complex, though. Fifa expects to earn more than \$11 billion from the tournament, up from the \$7.57 billion in revenue generated by Qatar 2022. Broadcasting rights, sponsorships, hospitality packages, and ticket sales are all expected to set new records, of course aided by many more matches than earlier. Some studies estimate that the tournament could generate \$40-80 billion in global economic activity.

Unlike Brazil in 2014 or Qatar in 2022, however, the 2026 World Cup requires relatively little investment in new stadiums. Most venues are existing NFL facilities in the US, supplemented by established stadiums in Canada and Mexico. This "asset-light" model reduces construction costs and avoids many of the "white elephant" stadiums that have burdened previous hosts.

The most immediate gains are expected from tourism. Millions of visitors are spending on hotels, restaurants, transport, shopping, and entertainment. Cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Dallas, Toronto, Vancouver, and Mexico City are receiving global exposure that ordinary marketing campaigns could never buy. Canada alone estimated that World Cup-related activities would support more than 24,000 jobs and generate approximately CAD 3.8 billion in economic output.

The tournament was expected to boost jobs in hospitality, logistics, security, media, and event management. Better transport, digital infrastructure, and city services can pay off in the longer term. These expectations reflect what econo-

mists call the legacy hypothesis — the belief that mega-events leave behind infrastructure, stronger tourism, and a more favourable international image.

Yet many leading sports economists urge caution. Pre-tournament impact studies tend to overstate benefits and ignore opportunity costs, argue sports economists Dennis Coates and Brad Humphreys. But tourist spending is often a substitution of spending that would have occurred anyway, rather than the creation of new wealth. Furthermore, much of the profit ends up in the hands of Fifa, multinational sponsors, broadcasters, and international hotel chains, rather than benefitting local economies.

In their comparative study of the 1998 France and 2006 Germany World Cups, Swantje Allmers and Wolfgang Maennig reached similar conclusions. Short-term increases in tourism and retail sales in Germany were recorded, but there was little evidence of longer-term gains in national income or employment. The most significant gains, they concluded, were intangible — national pride, international visibility, and social cohesion.

And while Fifa earns enormous revenues from broadcasting, sponsorship, and ticket sales, host governments usually bear much of the expenditure on security, transport, and public services. Italy exceeded its budget in 1990, adding to

public debt. South Africa invested heavily in stadiums in 2010, several of which struggled to find regular use. Brazil spent nearly \$15 billion on the 2014 World Cup, provoking nationwide protests over public spending. Qatar's reported expenditure exceeded \$200 billion, although much of it formed part of a wider national development programme rather than football infrastructure alone.

The US in 1994 presents a different picture. By relying largely on existing stadiums, it avoided major capital expenditure while helping launch Major League Soccer, creating a lasting institutional legacy. In many respects, the 2026 tournament follows this more sustainable approach.

Yet the economics of 2026 differ from every previous World Cup in one crucial respect: pricing. The BBC has described the tournament as perhaps the largest experiment in dynamic pricing ever undertaken in global sport. Ticket prices fluctuate according to demand, much like airline fares. Hospitality packages for premium matches have reached extraordinary levels, while Fifa now incorporates ticket resale into its own platform, enabling it to capture part of the premium previously earned by ticket scalpers.

Richard Sheehan, professor emeritus at the University of Notre Dame, estimated that ticket and hospitality rev-

**The 2026 Fifa World Cup illustrates the transformation of football into one of the largest commercial industries, combining sport, media, tourism, and technology on an unprecedented scale**

## India's next economy hiding in plain sight



ROOPA KUDVA

The writer is a business leader and startup investor

The largest unbuilt market, a highly durable source of employment, and the massive shift in demand across sectors are coming from age, not technology

**IN MAY, THE** Indian government confirmed that the country's total fertility rate has fallen to 1.9 — below replacement level for the first time, and down from 4.6 in 1985. The demographic implications of this are profound. And yet, amid widespread anxiety about AI taking jobs, the fastest-growing source of employment over the coming decades may be work that no algorithm can do and has nothing to do with technology. It has to do with age.

India has a median age of 29 years; and 7% of our population is over 65. China's median age is 40; 14% of its population is over 65. By 2050, India will be exactly where China is now — and China, for all its economic ambitions, is already grappling with a shrinking workforce, a collapsing birth rate, and fiscal pressures its institutions were not built to absorb. We are looking at a 25-year preview of our own demographic future.

Most commentary on this data reaches quickly for alarm. The dependency ratio will rise. Pension systems are thin. Healthcare infrastructure is strained. All true, and all matter. But alarm is not a strategy, and it tends to obscure the more important question: what can be done with 25 years in hand?

By 2050, India will have ~340 million people over 60 years of age — roughly the current population of the United States, with money to spend, needs to be met, and almost no industry yet built to serve them.

This is the silver economy, and India has barely started thinking about it.

Seniors need housing designed for ageing bodies. They need financial products calibrated to longer lives, irregular post-retirement income, and healthcare costs that compound with age. They need nutrition adapted to different metabolic needs, technology interfaces that do not assume 20-year-old eyes and reflexes, and travel and leisure experiences designed at a different pace. Each of these is a significant white space. The global silver economy is already a market worth trillions. India's version of that market will be enormous — and is almost entirely unbuilt.

The healthcare and caregiving dimension is the largest single opportunity, and the most resistant to automation. Geriatric medicine, physiotherapy, home nursing, palliative care, mental health support, dementia care, and the daily work of physical caregiving require human presence, human judgement, and human touch. No algorithm substitutes for any of it. Young Indians who build careers in elder care and rehabilitation today will face near-permanent employment. And if India builds this industry at scale, it will not only serve its domestic population. It will also create a globally exportable service at precisely the moment when Japan, Germany, South Korea, and most of Europe face elder care deficits they cannot fill from within their

**The global silver economy is a market worth trillions. India's version will be enormous, and is almost entirely unbuilt**

own shrinking workforces. Additionally, ageing is no longer just about lifespan, but healthspan. That opens new markets for preventive care, nutrition, wellness, and healthy ageing.

All these present opportunities for India's private sector.

India's old-age dependency ratio currently sits at around 16 elderly per 100 working-age individuals. By 2050, that figure is projected to reach 30. Every three working Indians will be economically carrying one person over 60, on top of children and their own households.

Healthcare financing is where the fiscal pressure is sharpest. An ageing population is a higher-cost healthcare population — chronic disease management, long-term care, and end-of-life care are expensive in ways that maternal and child health, which dominated India's earlier demographic profile, are not. Public health spending needs to rise substantially. Insurance systems need to deepen. The architecture of long-term care financing needs to be constructed largely from scratch.

The fiscal math changes considerably, depending on what India does in the next 15 years. If we create a productivity dividend — through education, skilling, and job creation at scale — the tax base will be wide enough to absorb the coming

dependency load. Else the 2040s will arrive with a large elderly population, a strained workforce, and a state that is structurally unprepared.

There is a third dimension. A 65-year-old in 2050 will be healthier, better educated, and more digitally capable than a 65-year-old today. Longer working lives, phased retirement, senior entrepreneurship, and community service are labour force strategies that materially change the dependency arithmetic. Countries that find ways to keep seniors productively engaged will age differently from those that warehouse them.

India has a genuine choice here. The demographic shift is not negotiable. The response to it entirely is. We spend enormous energy debating the technologies that will shape tomorrow's economy. We spend far less thinking about the demographic shift that will reshape demand across almost every sector, much as urbanisation and digitisation did in earlier decades. The largest unbuilt market, a highly durable source of employment, and the massive shift in demand across housing, finance, healthcare, nutrition, and services are coming from age, not technology.

The entrepreneurs, institutions, and policymakers who recognise this now will define the next Indian economy. And 25 years, as China is discovering, passes faster than it looks. But for those who start preparing now, that's still more than enough time.

foreign-controlled platforms without adequate safeguards for sovereign data. Building indigenous, standards-based systems now, rather than retrofitting them later, would strengthen India's position in an increasingly digital global trade architecture. This deserves the same policy urgency and sustained investment that UPI itself once received.

—SP Suganya Devi, Coimbatore

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IN THE NEWS

WORLD BANK TO GIVE \$890 MN FOR SOLAR ROOFTOPS

THE WORLD BANK Group has committed \$890 million funding support to accelerate India's national programme for solar rooftops to bring clean energy to millions of homes and create 1.7 million job opportunities across the value chain. In addition, it will mobilise \$4.2 billion in private financing in the form of commercial loans enabling them to install solar rooftops.

KABUL SEEKS INDIA'S HELP FOR AGRI UPGRADE

AFGHANISTAN MINISTER MAWLAWI Attaullah Omari on Friday sought India's cooperation to modernise its farming, livestock and irrigation practices with advanced technologies, highlighting the long-standing ties between the two nations.

India's non-fossil fuel-based energy capacity up 22%

INDIA'S NON-FOSSIL FUEL-BASED energy capacity increased over 22% year-on-year to 297.36 GW in June, the official data showed on Friday. The country's non-fossil fuel-based energy capacity stood at 242.78 GW in June 2025, according to the data.

El Nino may lead to sardine decline next year: ICAR

THE INDIAN COUNCIL of Agricultural Research-Central Marine Research Institute (ICAR-CMRI) on Friday said that the El Nino event was likely to trigger immense marine heatwaves, leading to significant decline in Indian oil sardine availability next year.

Farmers protest in Punjab on July 14; call for no-toll day

FARMER LEADER JAGJIT Singh Dallewal announced on Friday that protesters will make toll plazas across Punjab free of charge on July 14 to protest the Punjab government's proposed land-pooling policy, alleged irregularities in the Land Mortgage Bank, and the proposed India-US free trade agreement.

- AGENCIES

RETAIL SALES UNDER-RECOVERY FAR OUTWEIGHS REFINING UPSIDE

OMCs' June quarter loss likely touched ₹60,000 cr

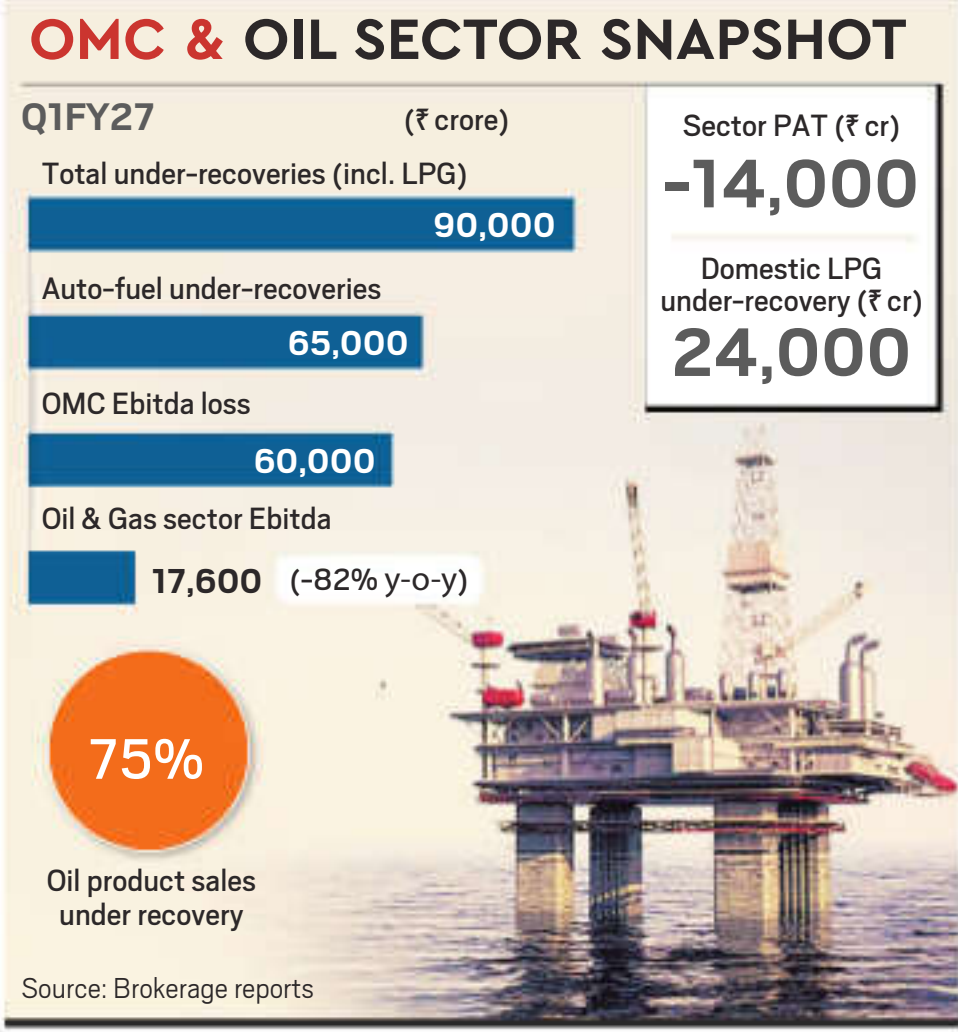
SAURAV ANAND  
New Delhi, July 10

STATE-RUN OIL MARKETING companies (OMCs) are expected to post a combined Ebitda loss of ₹60,000-62,000 crore in the first quarter of FY27 as the full impact of the West Asia supply shock, elevated crude prices, a weaker rupee and sharp retail fuel under-recoveries hit their profit and loss statements despite strong refining margins, according to brokerage estimates.

Dolat Capital said OMCs are likely to post a combined Ebitda loss of ₹60,000 crore, a decline of 301% y-o-y and 251% sequentially. For perspective, this exceeds 50% of HPCL's market capitalisation.

The pressure was led by retail fuel losses. Dolat Capital said around 75% of OMC oil-product sales volumes faced under-recoveries during the quarter. Domestic LPG under-recovery is projected at ₹24,000 crore, excluding government compensation of ₹7,500 crore, and was 20% higher than the total for FY26. Gross integrated margins were negative at ₹3 per litre, against the long-term average of ₹11.5 per litre, while kerosene under-recovery stood at ₹34.4 per litre.

Equirus Securities said, "1QFY27 is a quarter where



March's supply shock finally lands on P&L", as the quarter absorbed three full months of elevated crude, record spot LNG and a weaker rupee. Brent averaged around \$97 per barrel, up 25% QoQ, while Dubai crude rose 19% QoQ. Spot LNG surged to around \$18/mmbtu, up

34% QoQ, and the rupee weakened 3% sequentially, compounding input-cost pressure.

Refining provided the only cushion, but it was not enough. Equirus said Singapore GRMs (gross refining margins) spiked to a record \$25 per barrel, up 166% QoQ, helped by strong product cracks, with gasoil up 65%, jet fuel up 54% and gasoline up 92%. However, the marketing side broke down, with petrol marketing margins turning negative at about ₹7 per litre

and diesel deepening to around ₹26 per litre.

ICICI Securities estimated that OMCs lost ₹18.9 per litre on diesel and ₹6 per litre on petrol in April-June, against positive margins of ₹8.2 per litre on diesel and ₹10.3 per litre on petrol in the year-ago quarter. The losses were driven by the mismatch between international fuel prices and largely stable domestic pump prices.

Kotak Institutional Equities said the first quarter would be impacted for all oil and gas companies due to the West Asia conflict, supply disruptions and volatile prices. It expects OMCs to report a combined PBT loss of around ₹62,000 crore, while government-estimated OMC losses stood at around ₹75,000 crore. The brokerage said April-May was "bleak" for OMCs, though sharp oil-price declines and retail price hikes at the end of May have brought back supernormal margins on petrol and diesel.

Dolat expects IOC to report an Ebitda loss of ₹25,157 crore and net loss of ₹22,441 crore. BPCL may post an Ebitda loss of ₹17,917 crore and net loss of ₹14,381 crore, while HPCL may report an Ebitda loss of ₹17,070 crore and a net loss of ₹14,002 crore. Equirus expects HPCL to be the worst hit because of its higher marketing-to-refining skew.

Labour reforms get boost as Bengal comes on board

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA & AANCHAL MAGAZINE  
New Delhi, July 10

THE BJP'S RECENT electoral gains have led to an upside for labour reforms: States that were holding out from implementing the long-pending labour codes are now coming on board. With a BJP government in place now, West Bengal, which lagged behind in framing the draft rules for the four labour codes, is getting ready to roll them out.

Similarly, with the Congress-led UDF replacing the CPI(M)-led LDF government in Kerala, a senior government official said that the state is "not against" the implementation of the labour codes, but is moving slowly in formalising the process.

"West Bengal and Kerala are yet to notify the rules for the labour codes. But West Bengal is going to implement the codes soon. Kerala has said that it will assess the same but has not opposed it. That there could be challenges at the time of implementation of the new rules has been discussed with the states. The Centre has assured the states that it will resolve all queries," the official said.

The official pointed out that Karnataka, despite being an Opposition-ruled state, has accepted the codes and prepared the draft rules.

The Centre had notified the four labour codes—Code on Wages, 2019; Industrial Relations Code, 2020, Code on Social Security, 2020; and Occupational Safety, Health

POLICY SHIFT

■ West Bengal moves closer to the rollout after years of resistance under the previous Mamata Banerjee-led government



■ Kerala softens stance on labour codes as the new Congress-led UDF government signals support

■ Karnataka breaks the political pattern, with the Opposition-ruled state accepting the codes and preparing draft rules

and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020—in November 2025, close to five years after getting the legislation passed in Parliament.

In December last year, the Ministry of Labour and Employment, in a written response, had said that states/ Union Territories are still in the process of finalising the rules, adding that 34 of the 36 states and Union Territories (UTs) had finalised the rules for the Code on Wages, Code on Social Security and Industrial Relations Code.

The previous Mamata Banerjee-led government in West Bengal had refused to comply with the labour codes, alleging that if the law was implemented, many workers would be deprived of social security like Provident Fund and benefits of the Employees' State Insurance.

Last December, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had also opposed the codes,

saying they pose a threat to job security as the threshold for requiring prior government approval for layoffs had been raised from 100 to 300 workers, adding that companies would hire short-term workers to avoid giving benefits to long-term workers.

Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya had countered that the increase in threshold would boost job creation as employers would have the flexibility to hire more people directly.

The labour codes introduced the concept of Fixed Term Employment (FTE), under which employers would be able to hire workers directly under a fixed-term contract, with the flexibility to tweak the term of the contract based on the seasonality of the industry. These workers, however, would be treated at par with regular workers during the tenure of the contract.

Assam govt tables nearly ₹3L-crore FY27 budget

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Guwahati, July 10

THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT on Friday presented a ₹2.85 lakh crore budget for FY27, proposing to raise tax exemption limit for small tea growers by four times and cut VAT on piped natural gas by almost 10 percentage points.

Presenting his maiden Budget, Assam Finance Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah also announced the continuance of all the major schemes rolled out during the last five years, but said those practising polygamy will not be eligible for any benefits and government staff found guilty of this practice will face dismissal.

Proposing a 'green cess' on polluting sectors, the government announced that two lakh people will be recruited over five years by filling existing vacancies and creating new posts across various departments.

Baruah tabled a budget and aimed a fiscal deficit of 3% of the state's projected GDP. "To provide relief to small tea growers, I propose to enhance the agricultural income tax exemption threshold to ₹10 lakh of annual agricultural income," he added.

Extreme heat may squeeze incomes, raise living costs

SAURAV ANAND  
New Delhi, July 10

EXTREME HEAT IS emerging as a significant economic risk for Indian households, threatening both incomes and living standards as climate change intensifies, according to a report by adelphi global.

The report, Heat, Health and Increasing Cost of Living: A Call for Action, estimates that workers in agriculture and construction—among the sectors most exposed to rising temperatures—could lose the equivalent of 22.5 working days annually to heat stress by 2030.

The report says climate-driven heat affects household finances through two reinforcing channels. Heat stress reduces workers' productivity, forcing them to slow down, take more frequent breaks or stop work altogether, resulting in lost wages. At the same time, heat-related illnesses increase out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure, adding to the financial burden on families.

Citing the latest Lancet Countdown, the report estimates that India's potential income loss from reduced working hours and lower labour productivity due to extreme heat reached \$194 billion in 2024, equivalent to

CLIMATE THREAT



■ Agriculture and construction workers could lose 22.5 workdays a year to heat stress by 2030

■ Heat delivers a double financial blow by reducing earnings while raising out-of-pocket healthcare costs

■ India's heat-related income loss reached an estimated \$194 billion in 2024, or about 5% of GDP

about 5% of the country's GDP.

India is among the countries most vulnerable to the economic fallout from rising temperatures, the report said. It warned that the combination of heat-related productivity losses, a large informal workforce, high out-of-pocket healthcare spending and limited social protection could amplify poverty risks.

The study covered eight countries—Bangladesh, Brazil, France, India, Indonesia, Italy, Nigeria and South Africa—to assess the economic and social costs of rising heat.

"Our report reveals that climate change is making us sicker and as a result, it's also making us poorer," said Mathilde Wilkens, report author and consultant, adelphi global. "As climate-driven heat stress puts people's health at risk and stops them working, households are suffering a double burden of reduced incomes and increased medical expenditures."

India is classified as extremely vulnerable to heat risks. Under the SSP1-RCP2.6 scenario, most of the country is projected to face high humidity-based heat risk during 2020-2039. The report links RCP2.6 to a global average temperature rise of 1.5°C by 2100, making the India findings significant even under a low emissions pathway. The number of hot days above 30°C in India is projected to range between 183 and 230 days annually. India already loses 4.31% of working hours across sectors every year due to heat, with losses projected to rise to 5.80% by 2030.

The stress is sharper in agriculture and construction, where outdoor physical labour is common. Working-hour losses in these sectors are already estimated at 5.87% and are projected to rise to 9.04% by 2030.

Gujarat shifts focus to semiconductor supply chain

NANDINI OZA  
Ahmedabad, July 10

FOUR YEARS AFTER unveiling India's first dedicated semiconductor policy, Gujarat has begun attracting the ancillary ecosystem that supports chip manufacturing. Around 10 companies have applied for land and another 15 are in talks as the state looks beyond marquee fabrication projects. While attracting large chip projects remains a priority, the focus is increasingly shifting to building the supporting supply chain.

Neha Kumari, mission director of the Gujarat State Electronics Mission, said 10 ancillary units had applied for land and discussions were underway with 15 others. "A

lot has been done and a lot needs to be done. Currently in India, everything needed for chipmaking, including gold wires, is imported," she said.

The industry requires more than 150 types of gases and chemicals, Kumari said, adding that companies from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have shown interest in setting up units. Linde, a global supplier of ultra-high-purity atmospheric, process and specialty gases for semiconductor manufacturing, has been allotted land. Sources said announcements are likely within the next couple of months.

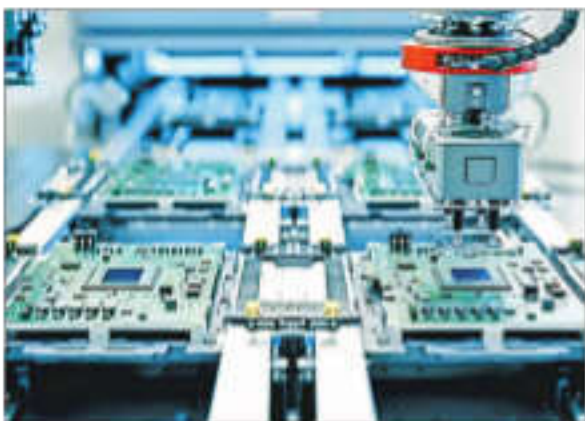
The shift reflects the reality confronting India's semiconductor ambitions. While fabrication plants are the

INDUSTRY BUILDOUT

■ The state shifts focus from attracting fabs to building the semiconductor supply chain ecosystem

■ Around 10 companies have applied for land, while 15 more are in advanced discussions

■ India still imports critical chipmaking inputs, including gold wires, gases and specialty chemicals



■ Firms from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are exploring Gujarat investments; Linde has secured land

Tata Electronics, Micron, CG Semi and Kaynes Semicon represent investments exceeding ₹1.24 lakh crore

anchor investments, the industry's competitiveness depends on a robust network of suppliers, service providers and skilled manufacturers.

With Tata Electronics in Dholera and Micron, CG Semi and Kaynes Semicon in

Sanand, Gujarat is seeking to capitalise on its early lead. Together, the four projects represent investments of more than ₹1.24 lakh crore.

Kumari said these high-investment projects qualify for both central and state

incentives. In Gujarat, ancillary units are also eligible for the same subsidies as semiconductor manufacturers. The state is developing semiconductor infrastructure in and around Dholera and Sanand at an estimated cost of nearly



Fiscal blues

In a tough year, higher fiscal deficit can't be ruled out

Owing to global headwinds, the fiscal deficit target of 4.3 per cent of GDP may be breached in FY27. But that should not be a cause for worry. Both, US and Iran have ratcheted up hostilities, just as it seemed that oil prices were moving back to pre-war levels and ships had begun to move across the Strait of Hormuz. In addition, if the monsoon does not hold up (there has happily been a sharp improvement over June this month) there could be further adverse impact on inflation and growth.

To be sure, this looks like a worst case scenario, and even if one of these variables turns favourable the outlook will improve. But the Centre and States need to be prepared. This implies spending more to protect vulnerable groups and shore up demand, as the Centre has indeed sought to do by creating the ₹1 lakh crore Economic Stabilisation Fund in March. It is worth noting here that a small fiscal slippage should not be seen as a calamity. India has a proven record of bouncing back to its fiscal trend path after loosening its purse strings in times of adversity. Today, monetary and fiscal authorities are faced with the task of dealing deftly with falling growth and rising inflation. The Reserve Bank of India, in June, pegged growth this year at just 6.6 per cent (down from 6.9 per cent in April), while expecting inflation to rise to 5.1 per cent from 4.6 per cent. With interest rates rising globally, the Centre cannot borrow without restraint to meet rising expenditure needs. Its finances for this year so far are indicative. As reported recently by this newspaper, the fiscal deficit in April-May was ₹1.62 lakh crore, against just ₹13,163 crore in the same period in FY26. Revenue expenditure was up 20 per cent at over ₹60,000 crore, led by a 47 per cent rise in fuel and fertilizer subsidy outgo. Total receipts were down 2 per cent at about ₹70,000 crore. The outgo on urea was a fourth of the annual budget (₹1.71 lakh crore for FY27). This is inevitable.

Even if global headwinds actually recede, the supply chains may take time to bounce back. While persisting with the capex push, the Centre should ensure that outlays on VB-GRAM-G are well utilised. The States need some leeway in spending in such a situation. Food subsidies may top the revised estimates of ₹2.28 lakh crore for FY26. The Budget's plan to save ₹17,000 crore in fertilizer and food subsidy has come unstuck. Fiscal consolidation has been achieved by curbing primary deficit (fiscal deficit minus interest payments) from 1.4 per cent of GDP in FY25 to 0.8 per cent in FY26 and a projected 0.7 per cent in FY27. The revenue deficit has dropped marginally as a share of GDP, indicating that the axe may have fallen on development expenditure. This should be looked into. With interest payments at 40 per cent of revenue receipts, the government needs to relook at non-debt options to raise funds — such as disinvestment. Revenues forgone which have not yielded results should be reviewed. A gentle reset is called for.

POCKET RAVIKANTH



India's economy has demonstrated remarkable resilience, maintaining strong growth despite global economic uncertainties. According to the IMF's World Economic Outlook (April 2026), India's GDP is projected to grow by 6.5 per cent in 2026-27. National Statistics Office of MoS&PI data also show that India's economy recorded a CAGR of 8.56 per cent between 2021 and 2025, reflecting a robust post-pandemic recovery and sustained economic momentum. While these macroeconomic indicators are encouraging, a critical question remains: Is economic growth translating into adequate employment opportunities? The challenge is particularly significant for women and educated youth, who continue to face barriers in accessing quality jobs. The Periodic Labour Force Survey 2025 report unambiguously reveals both encouraging signs and a reminder that significant work remains.

**WOMEN'S WORK**  
The Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) increased to 30.7 per cent in 2025 from 25.4 per cent in 2022; similarly, the Worker Population Ratio (WPR) rose to 29.8 per cent in 2025 from 24.6 per cent in 2022. It clearly reveals that more women are either working or actively seeking work than earlier. Despite this progress, women's participation is considerably higher in rural areas (34.6 per cent) than in urban areas (22.2 per cent), indicating that urban women's contribution to the labour market remains limited. The challenge is even clearer among young people, with urban female unemployment (15-29 years) at 18.9 per cent, significantly higher than the 11.8 per cent for urban males. In rural areas, nearly 70.7 per cent of employed women are self-employed, and only 9.3 per cent are in regular salaried jobs, mainly in agriculture, family enterprises and home-based activities. While self-employment supports livelihood, it is often associated with lower productivity, income insecurity and limited career growth. Overall, higher participation does not automatically translate into quality employment. India has made great progress in education, especially for girls and young women. Notably, the Female Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has improved at the higher secondary level of education, rising to 60.9 per cent in 2024-25 from 54.6 per cent in 2020-21, which surpassed the Male GER of 56.2 per cent, that means once a female student clears class 10, she is statistically more likely to pursue higher education than her male peers.



India's growth story needs more women at work

**TAKING CARE.** To fully tap women's work potential the government must invest in the care economy

Similarly, at the higher education level, the Female GER increased to 30.2 per cent (provisional) 2022-23 from 27.9 per cent in 2020-21. These statistics clearly signal that more girls are entering higher education than ever before, and the challenge has therefore moved to ensuring meaningful economic returns from education. Despite steadily improving educational attainment, urban female labour force participation remains low, and youth unemployment among women remains elevated, pointing to a growing gap between education and employment. Recognising this challenge, the Union Budget 2026-27 announced the Education-to-Employment-and-Enterprise (EEE) Committee under NITI Aayog, even before the PLFS report was published. The committee held its first meeting on May 22, focusing on strengthening linkages between EEE and assessing the impact of emerging technologies, including AI, on future jobs. The initiative highlights that expanding educational opportunities is only the first step, and its benefits depend on successful transitions into productive employment, with the growing importance of aligning women's skills with labour market needs.

**ENABLING PARTICIPATION**  
Yet employment opportunities alone may not fully explain the gap between educational attainment and workforce participation, particularly for women. More women are educated, but workforce participation remains low. It is worth considering what other factors might be holding them back, including caregiving responsibilities, workplace flexibility, safety, transportation, etc. Unpaid caregiving work is particularly significant, as it directly affects women's ability to enter, remain in and progress within the labour market. Across the world, women continue to bear more caregiving responsibilities. According to the ILO, women perform more than three-quarters of all unpaid care work, and around 708 million women globally are outside the labour force due to unpaid caregiving responsibilities. This challenge is becoming even more important in urban India. The Time Use Survey 2024 also reported that females spent 289 minutes on unpaid domestic and 137 minutes on caregiving activities for household members. Today, many families live in nuclear households, often far from their extended family. As a result, working parents, especially mothers, must shoulder much of the care burden. As long as unpaid care work remains heavily feminised, advances in employment and productivity will remain uneven and fragile. Countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Japan have responded to this challenge by investing in the "care economy", which includes caregiving responsibilities of children and the elderly. While India's demographic and fiscal circumstances differ significantly, their experience shows that affordable and accessible care services can support female workforce participation. The challenge is not only about creating employment opportunities but also about ensuring women can access them. Converting educational gains into economic gains, investing in the care economy is one of the smartest investments India can make.

**GROWTH WITH INCLUSION**  
India's economic outlook remains strong. However, the next phase of India's growth will be shaped not only by the pace of economic expansion, but also by how widely its opportunities are shared. While growth, investment and structural reforms provide a solid foundation, converting educational gains into productive employment and enabling women to participate fully in the workforce are important goals. Investing in the care economy is not merely a social welfare measure; it is an economic strategy that can unlock human capital, increase productivity and advance India's vision of inclusive and women-led development.

Chandrasekar is Joint Director in MoS&PI; Prasad is Head of Education & Training, ILO's Research & Statistics Department. Views expressed are personal

The Gulf region is back to a dangerous impasse

With the escalation of attacks by both US and Iran, the fragile peace that was in place is fast fraying

**Sridhar Krishnaswami**  
It did not take US President Donald Trump much time to respond to Iran's attacks on commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. According to him, the ceasefire is "over" and the US could resume its naval blockade and hit civilian infrastructure. The Central Command (Centcom) unleashed missiles across three Iranian provinces, the 60-day waiver on oil exports is off, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) attacked American military sites in Kuwait and Bahrain, all of which did not sit well with oil markets. The sudden escalation in the Middle East is taking place at a time when word was put out that Round Two of peace talks between Washington and Tehran is set to begin in Pakistan. Iran has not acknowledged its hand in the attack on shipping in the Hormuz, nor has it denied it. On the one hand, some have seen the latest development as a calculated move on Iran's part to project its power and leverage over energy supplies. To say attacks on oil tankers are going to jack up prices in the market is a no-brainer. In flexing its muscles in the Hormuz, Iran perhaps wishes to show it is the boss of that international waterway. What cannot be missed is during the ongoing talks between Iran and Oman over the Hormuz, tankers are preferring to use Oman's side of the Hormuz for safe passage. On more than one occasion Washington has said that it will not allow collection of tolls or any levy as service charge. If Iran's intention is to cripple energy markets by driving up prices and at the same time choke the vital waterways, there is no doubt that such a move could be self defeating. In the lifting of the US sanctions on oil, there was a brief respite for the Iranian economy which is said to be on the verge of collapse.

**IRAN POWER STRUGGLE**  
The unrest in Iran early this year was triggered by the worsening economic situation, which later turned its focus on human rights. It is difficult for any regime to keep talking of people's resilience amidst empty supermarket shelves. In addition, if Indian exports are only competitive due to a weaker rupee, there is much rethinking to be done.



**IN THE CROSSFIRE.** Strait of Hormuz REUTERS

That brings up the question of a power struggle in the ruling elite of Iran with the moderates, who are seen as negotiating with the US. They are being increasingly challenged by the hardliners among the clerics and the IRGC, long seen as the custodian of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 that led to the flight of the Shah from Iran. There is a growing perception that the US and Israel, after wiping out the top civilian and military leadership during the early days of the war, have ended up strengthening the hand of the hardliners, with more extreme elements now calling

the shots. In all the chatter about economic disruption and power struggle being the reasons behind the sudden spurt in attacks on commercial shipping, another angle could not be totally discounted: Tehran deliberately keeping the attention on the Hormuz to deflect the focus from its nuclear programme which has generally been passed off the ultimate objective in the peace process. In all the buzz about attacks on tankers, clearing of mines in the Hormuz, strikes and attacks on neighbours, the issue now pushed to the background is the nearly 500 kg of Uranium — enriched or otherwise — nuclear dust, safe keeping, the International Atomic Energy Agency, parameters of a new deal with sunset clauses and so on. But Israel has been quite uneasy about the ongoing talks between Washington and Tehran. So the chances of Iran trying to divert attention from nuclear issues to the Hormuz, or trying to position itself as the sole protector of the Gulf and its waterways, remain slim.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and United Nations

● **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to [bleditor@thehindu.co.in](mailto:bleditor@thehindu.co.in) or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

**Rupee gyrations**  
With reference to the article 'Why currency stability is important?' (July 10), currency stability is crucial because it protects purchasing power, encourages foreign investment and helps business plan. Over the last 12 months the rupee fell roughly 11 per cent. High global energy costs and capital moving to safer assets caused this drop. A weak rupee makes electronics and oil imports more expensive. It is the RBI's job to maintain currency stability.

**P Victor Selvaraj**  
Palayamkottai (TN)  
'Why currency stability is crucial' (July 10) is well articulated. It succinctly argues that a weaker exchange can no more be considered a favourable input for promoting exports. The writer rightly mentions that the costlier imported inputs partly negate this benefit. Another aspect is that the overseas buyer can easily calculate the rupee benefit accruing to the Indian seller due to the weaker rupee and ensure that the India exporter does not gain.

**V Vijaykumar**  
Pune  
**RBI holding firm**  
This refers to the Editorial 'All clear' (July 10), the agreement between European regulators and the RBI is a quiet victory for India's financial standing. For two years, European banks faced higher costs to clear their investments through India's main clearing house because the RBI refused to let foreign regulators oversee Indian systems. The RBI held its ground, and now Europe has accepted that Indian rules are good enough. This means cheaper transactions for European investors, which should bring more money into Indian bonds. At a time when foreign money is leaving our stock markets, this boost for debt investments is welcome. But the deeper point is simple: India can play by global rules without surrendering its own authority.

**Babu Crishna**  
Bengaluru  
**Critical minerals**  
Apropos 'The minerals gap India cannot afford to ignore' (July 10), it is concerning that India's mineral partnerships remain limited even as demand for critical minerals accelerates globally. China's dominance in refining, not just raw extraction, is the real chokepoint as the article rightly highlights. Signing more bilateral agreements is welcome, but analytical capability and consistent follow-through also matter. India should prioritise investment in domestic refining infrastructure while securing long-term supply contracts with resource-rich nations.

**SP Suganya Devi**  
Coimbatore



# Rank and File, In Both Football & Biz

Helps top ‘teams’ hold greater influence

Fifa’s football rankings serve both teams and World Cup. They set out objective qualification benchmarks, are used to ensure the league stage is fair, and can be used to forecast how competitive a match will be. Rankings are designed to ensure that teams are rewarded for *sustained* performance, rather than individual exploits. They also allow comparison between sides that have never played each other directly. Yet, like all predictive models, Fifa’s rankings are not perfect. These rankings drift over time as teams make their way in and out of contests. They also act as a disincentive for highly ranked teams to play lower-ranked opponents because an upset could lead to a disproportionate drop in their standings.

For all their limitations, Fifa’s rankings attach an economic marker to football that ensures teams are assured of a certain revenue if they maintain their position. This lowers the risk of unpredictable outcomes by aligning effort with reward.

It helps top-rated teams acquire greater influence over the sport. There is, therefore, more than enough incentive to game the system. Typically, this involves strategic scheduling to avoid strong opponents, manipulating the margin of victory to inflate metrics, or intentional losses to secure better future brackets.

World Cup is a contest where every team puts in effort — irrespective of ranking — to win. The probability of winning is determined by a team’s share of the total effort expended by all teams. This leads to the unfortunate outcome that teams spend resources equal to the value of the prize. This is the ‘Tullock paradox’, after Gordon Tullock whose work in game theory showed how sporting contests can be a social waste because resources spent on winning could have been better used elsewhere. A perfect ranking of teams would indicate which one is likely to expend the greatest effort. That would make the results predictable and take away the (non-economic) reason for World Cup-watching. Much like Big Business that is bereft of ‘disruptive’ spirits for economic pleasure.

# Middle Powers Find New Strategic Fuel

The signing of the administrative arrangement enabling Australia to sell uranium to India is the standout outcome of Narendra Modi’s visit. While the 2008 India-US Civil Nuclear Deal ended India’s pariah status in the global nuclear order, the successful conclusion of a decade of negotiations with Canberra marks another milestone, recognising India as a mature, responsible and growing economy. Beyond its diplomatic significance, the agreement gives New Delhi greater confidence to accelerate its transition to a low-carbon economy.

Trump’s après moi, le déluge approach — upending partnerships and alliances, disrupting the rules-based international order, accommodating Beijing, and deprioritising the Indo-Pacific — has accelerated the conclusion of agreements. The awakening of the middle powers has received additional impetus from the energy crisis triggered by the US-Israel war on Iran, the increasing impacts of climate change, and growing concerns about economic growth, competitiveness and supply chain security as countries seek to decarbonise economies. Finalising the arrangement for uranium sales strengthens India’s pursuit of its target of 100 GW of nuclear power capacity. The deal will also add momentum to Australia’s efforts to secure successful outcomes at this year’s UN climate talks, which it is co-leading with Türkiye.

The uranium agreement, together with the expanding critical minerals, energy and defence partnerships between Australia and India, as well as similar agreements with Japan, Indonesia and, potentially, New Zealand, signals that middle powers are forging new pathways to strengthen the liberal international order that has underpinned decades of global prosperity and cooperation.

JUST IN JEST

Far from an angry politician, high-end slippers are all the rage

Didi’s Chappals Get Dior Flip-Flopped

What Bengal thought yesterday, global high fashion has just thought up today — chappals, calling Didi’s anti-haute accessories ‘flip-flops’, of course. Luxury labels are selling minimalist versions for eye-watering prices and declaring them footwear of the moment. Think €690 for a suede platform pair by Phoebe Philo and €800 for minimalist black leather slippers — sorry, flip-flops — by The Row. The prices have led to eye-roll sprees. But with heatwaves rewriting wardrobes across the West, the ‘umble Hawaii could well also have its lux moment. Which, of course, brings us back to Mamata B. And before anyone says it — yes, so what if she isn’t ‘back’? She’s still the undisputed style ambassador of the blue-white rubber slipper. Long before fashion editors rediscovered minimalist dressing, Didi had perfected the art of pairing chappals with Dior confidence. Trends come and go. Style icons don’t.

The only thing that’s really changed is marketing. Add premium leather, a designer label, and a Paris runway instead of Kolkata streets, and prêt-à-Howrah Station porter becomes haute. The last time it had a fashion moment was in the ‘00s. Back then, it was all about the Havaiana, the Brazilian plastic classic. But here’s the thing again: it’s not the chappal that’s making waves. It’s the flip-flop. And, no, it’s *not* just the English word for chappals.

## ECO CHAMBER Economic lessons from the Beautiful Game, especially the African model THIS TIME FROM AFRICA?



Abheek Barua

Around 2/3rd of the 48 teams that qualified for the ongoing World Cup final rounds are high-income or upper-middle-income economies. Roughly 1/3rd are lower-middle-income or low-income economies.

Economists who tend to poke their noses into the Beautiful Game have long sought to find a relationship between income — both aggregate or GDP, or average per capita — of economies and their performance in the highest level of international competitive football.

Instead of a neat upward curve that relates football glory with per-capita income, they find a curve that rises with per-capita GDP, and then slowly flattens. This roughly occurs at the middle-income or upper-middle-income levels, associated with countries like Argentina, Brazil and Croatia.

Success stories of ‘late starters’, who, unlike Latin America, did not have the ‘religious’ passion for football, validate the GDP link. Take the rise of rich oil-producing West Asian nations like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. These started doing well at the Asian level and in youth competitions in the 1980s. But their subsequent rise on the international stage has been spectacular.

Their recipe of success is well known: invest heavily in infrastructure including training academies, elevate the status of national leagues, in Saudi’s case by bringing in international stars.

The US is another example of a nation late to the party, but whose income levels helped raise its footballing status. North American Soccer League collapsed in the 1980s due to lack of visibility. Since then, the US’ steady climb, despite dominance of legacy sports like American football, baseball and basketball, may well support the argument that money works in promoting late entrants.



WORK-A-WAKA: (Clockwise from top left) Senegal’s Sadio Mané; Algeria’s Riyad Mahrez and Aïssa Mandi; Morocco’s Soufiane Rahimi and Achraf Hakimi; Ivory Coast’s Franck Kessie

The curious case — and one that could be of enormous importance to development economists and policymakers — relates to the 1/3rd of the 48, particularly the low- and low-middle-income African countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ivory Coast, Senegal and Cape Verde. DRC has a per-capita income of about \$900, and Senegal \$2,000.

Does the African model have lessons for the way we view development strategies? Let’s set aside diasporic players who grow up in the European football system, and focus on the ‘pure African’ way.

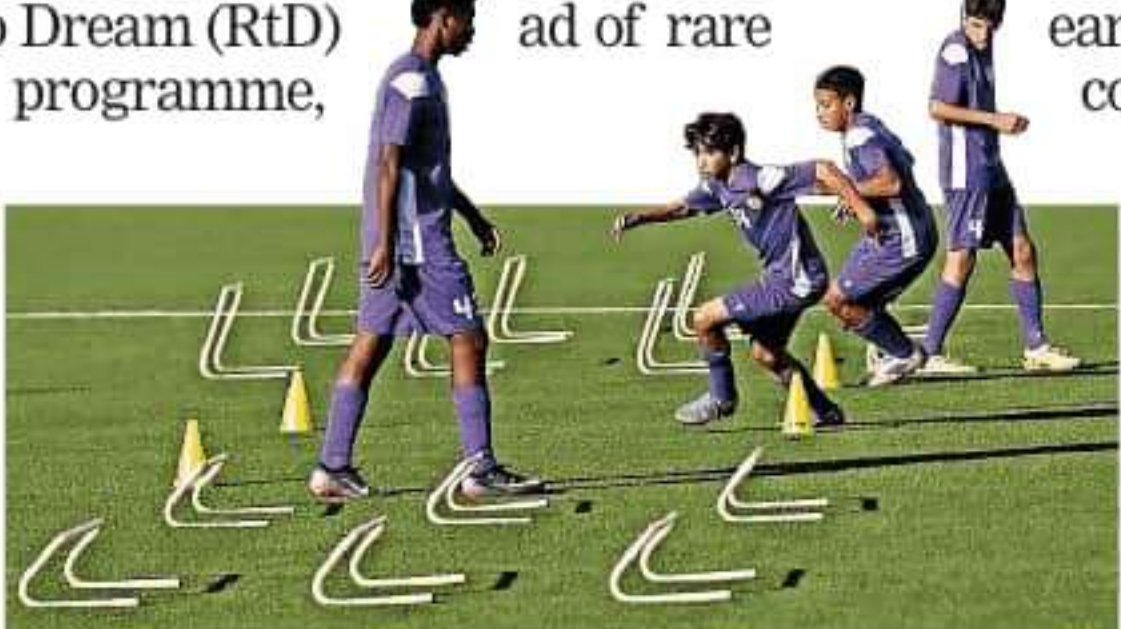
► **Private football academies** Diambars football academy in Senegal, Ghana’s Right to Dream (RTD) youth development programme, and Ivory Coast’s MimoSifom academy are examples. These are enclaves insulated from political interference. Revenues come from private investors and transfer fees from European clubs that players represent. These also provide safe haven during civil unrest.

One could argue that these enclaves are a pat on the back for the bottom approach, or ‘doable’ development loosely associated with Randomista, or randomised control experiment approach. The right structure — let’s call them sub-

institutions (SIs) — when designed to specific outcomes can deliver. More importantly, SIs can work well within poor economic and political institutions.

Sceptics would argue that this is simply a case of demand creating its own supply. Demand for talent from richer countries has built a supply pipeline from Africa. But talent is not a homogeneous low-end product like potatoes. The curious thing is the SI response to supply opportunities where academies have been allowed to function freely and be capable of supplying quality talent.

Left economists may see this as ‘colonisation redux’, a case of pure extraction with terms of trade heavily tilted against the ‘co-



Search for footballing talent is actually buffering the supply base of African talent, akin to mining activities actually boosting reserves of coltan or gold

ad of rare talents, richer countries are mining another scarce resource — skilled footballers. This is, at best, an incomplete characterisation. Search for talent is actually buffering the supply base of talent, akin to mining activities actually boosting reserves of, say, coltan or gold.

Model Africa is creating things that economists would love to see. First, there are spillovers, or externalities, helping local football flourish. True,

there are more problems at the local level than at the international level. But things are changing.

The multinational Africa Cup of Nations (Afcon) is a major event on the global football calendar. The fact that club leagues within countries, despite stadium and other infrastructure shortages, are gaining traction is particularly encouraging.

This is not confined to elite tournaments. Tanzania’s Premier League and Angola’s Girabola, for instance, have become immensely popular. Local investments are coming through for support — billionaire backing and TV right sales in Tanzania, and diamantaire money in Angola.

What has followed is a virtuous circle of intra-continental trade in football skills. Player fees in other countries are lower than in the elite regions. Consequently, there’s considerable migration of talent. As a result, fees in exporting economies should see an increase. Economists would predict that this could be the path to the holy grail of ‘convergence’ in player incomes and talent across the region, bootstrapping the entire continent in the process.

Success breeds success. Glory of African teams in international tournaments has also driven across countries to step up domestic football institutions. For them, the gold standard is Morocco’s Mohammed VI football academy.

Economists should take away a couple of things from the African football model:

● Hyper-focused ‘institutions’ of the right sort are important, and their independence is key to their delivering right outcomes. The SI success proves that isolated delivery systems can work well in environments typically associated with weak governance and economic instability.

● Trade, both at global and intra-regional level, is a benign force.

It may be worthwhile for development experts to think of whether the African model can be replicated elsewhere. Re-working models of foreign aid and philanthropy to work better, for instance?

The writer is former chief economist, HDFC Bank

# Engage, Shape The Debate



Shuchi Talati & Arunabha Ghosh

The world has made real progress on emissions. Policies triggered by the Paris Agreement have bent the temperature curve: a trajectory once headed for 4-5° C of warming has been brought down to 2.1-2.8° C. But it’s not enough. Overshoot will increase calls for drastic, rapid interventions, the kinds that demand robust governance.

It’s against this backdrop that an idea is gaining attention: solar radiation modification (SRM), or solar geoengineering. SRM refers to the idea of reflecting a small proportion of sunlight away from Earth to reduce temperatures. Proposed technologies range from painting roofs white to space-based mirrors that reflect sunlight. But the two most considered technologies are injecting reflective aerosols into the stratosphere and marine cloud brightening.

Climate change itself is a landscape of known unknowns. We know the monsoon will be disrupted. But we cannot always say exactly how, where or when. SRM adds a second layer of ‘unknown unknowns’. We can’t yet model what it would do to regional weather; to India’s rainfall, or to the world’s food supply.

One country — or even one determined actor — could attempt it at scale, and effects would not stop at any border. It might cool the planet on average while shifting rainfall from one region to another. Pause it suddenly, and the temperature could snap back. And there’s moral hazard. Having SRM tech could weaken the resolve to cut fossil fuel emissions.

The research is happening. The question is no longer whether solar geoengineering will be explored, but who governs it and how.

Right now, the answer is unsettling. Direction of this field is being set by a small circle of powerful actors, almost all in the developed world. Funding from public, commercial and philanthropic sources is also almost entirely concentrated in these countries. To be certain, research is increasingly important across regions to reduce uncertainty, improve understanding and address open questions. But research alone is insufficient. Because context shapes who it serves.

In tech development, an often-repeated norm is that science must come first, and governance can follow when necessary. But in SRM, waiting to build governance creates new risks. When built well, good governance doesn’t slow responsible

research. It enables it to move quickly and be publicly understood.

And, ultimately, lack of governance leaves decision-making to partisan actors. This is especially true for developing countries, which have the most to gain or lose from how SRM knowledge is built. If governance is postponed, there will be less inclusion of developing countries, a lack of accountability, and the most vulnerable will be disempowered.

For India, the stakes could not be more direct. Its climate exposure is well known. And because SRM is borderless and politically charged, even a modest action can trigger major diplomatic and public reactions. India cannot afford to let others define what credible SRM research looks like or set governance standards on its behalf. If research priorities and accountability norms are not shaped with India today, they will be set elsewhere, without Indian interests at the table.

India is not only exposed but is uniquely equipped to lead. With strong scientific institutions, an active civil society and governance capacity, India has both the stakes and institutional depth to shape the governance of SRM research. Importantly, leadership in SRM governance must centre the most vulnerable. A governance approach that centres Indian agency on the global stage but fails to include India’s most vulnerable domestically will lack the credibility it seeks. NITI Aayog has begun moving in this direction.

The central question is how India builds a legitimacy-first approach to governance through transparent procedures, clear disclosure norms, meaningful engagement and accountable review, built in parallel with the science. Some of this groundwork is being laid. Solar Geoengineering Research Governance (SGRG) Platform is working to turn these principles into practical tools, not to push for deployment but to ensure that if research advances, it advances with legitimacy. India’s hand in shaping such efforts is essential.

The technology is still young. Most SRM work remains confined to models and labs. That is exactly why this moment matters. The foundations are being laid now. India should help lay them so that, if research moves forward, it moves forward with the developing world in the room.

Talati is founder-ED, Alliance for Just Deliberation on Solar Geoengineering, and Ghosh is CEO, Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)

# Not a Risk Worth Taking



Prakash Kashwan

Waltham, Massachusetts: We’re currently experiencing one of the most severe and widespread global heatwaves on record. Such extreme weather events are often cited as justification for considering solar radiation modification (SRM), a.k.a. solar geoengineering.

UNEP defines SRM as ‘a set of speculative methods designed to reflect sunlight and temporarily cool the Earth’. Climate models suggest that SRM could reduce global temperatures. But deploying it on a climatically meaningful scale would require an unprecedented logistical effort.

According to the Royal Society, achieving roughly 1° C of cooling could require around 1,800 high-altitude aircraft flights per day, each carrying about 15 t of aerosol material for injection into the stratosphere. Sustaining such an intervention could require an aviation operation comparable to the daily flight capacity of about three Heathrow-sized airports for decades.

SRM also has important limitations. While it may reduce marine heatwaves in some regions, it could intensify them elsewhere. More fundamentally, SRM does not address the underlying causes of climate change. It would neither reduce fossil fuel-related air pollution, which carries a substantial public health burden, nor halt ocean acidification driven by rising atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations. There is also concern that the prospect of a technological climate intervention could weaken political incentives for rapid emissions reductions, creating a moral hazard that prolongs dependence on fossil fuels.

Beyond these limitations, SRM poses significant environmental and ecological risks. ► Injecting sulphur-containing compounds into the stratosphere could delay the recovery of the Antarctic ozone layer. Sulphate aerosols may also contribute to acid deposition, with potential consequences for ecosystems and human health, although the magnitude of these effects remains uncertain.

► SRM could also weaken the global hydrological cycle, reducing average precipitation even as regional effects vary considerably. Its impacts on rainfall are among the greatest scientific uncertainties surrounding the technology.

Studies by Indian climate scientists suggest that different SRM deployment

strategies could produce contrasting outcomes: some may strengthen atmospheric circulation, while others could suppress rainfall and create drier conditions across large parts of India.

There is little need to emphasise how profoundly any disruption to, or increased uncertainty in, the Indian monsoon could affect the country’s economy and society. Less widely appreciated, however, is that the Afro-Asian summer monsoon — which underpins the water and food security of more than 2 bn people — is among the most difficult components of the climate system to model accurately. Future projections of monsoon precipitation, therefore, remain highly uncertain, and SRM could further complicate those projections.

Socioeconomic consequences of SRM could also generate geopolitical risks. Monsoon failures or catastrophic flooding in South Asia could be blamed — rightly or wrongly — on SRM deployment, potentially heightening regional tensions.

Yet, the most consequential strategic competition is likely to centre on the world’s two leading powers, the US and China, whose technological capabilities and geopolitical influence make them the most plausible protagonists in any future contest over SRM deployment or governance.

The US could, in principle, deploy SRM unilaterally using its extensive network of military bases and airfields. Pentagon has identified geophysical and environmental conditions as factors that can shape national security and military operations, while US researchers are developing systems to detect potential solar geoengineering activities. Meanwhile, Israeli-American company Stardust has announced plans to commercialise SRM technologies. The company is led by Yanai Yedvab, a former deputy chief scientist at Israel’s Atomic Energy Commission.

These developments underscore that SRM is increasingly intertwined with questions of strategy, security and global governance. Recognising these challenges, an international group of governance scholars has proposed a Solar Geoengineering Non-Use Agreement, arguing that existing international institutions are ill-equipped to develop and enforce governance arrangements that are equitable, inclusive and politically legitimate.

Calls for greater restraint have also gained traction across the developing world. Around 60 countries, including those represented at the 2025 African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, have expressed concern over expanding advocacy for solar geoengineering and have supported a non-use agreement or stronger international regulation.

By supporting efforts to democratisate governance of SRM, Indian policymakers, academics and civil society can help ensure that decisions about a technology with planetary consequences are not determined solely by the interests of a few powerful states.

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THE SPEAKING TREE

## Why Arguing May Not Help

HASMUKH ADHIA

As Indians, we are used to arguing on various matters. Sadhana Panchakam, one of the smaller texts written by Adi Sankaracharya, says a wise person should avoid getting into arguments. Essentially, arguments generate more heat than light. Knowledge is like light. Truth can never be reached by arguments.

Ego is the basic emotion in all arguments. We want to prove that we are superior in knowledge and understanding of the subject compared to others. In any conversation, we tend to jump into a discussion by picking up threads from what others have said. Our ego prompts us to do so. Very few people have the courage to say, ‘Sorry, I do not know much about this subject to give my opinion.’

Arguments do not help anyone for more than one reason. First, for any communication to take place, attentive listening must happen. In arguments, no one is listening; both are only talking. Second, when facts are mixed with emotions such as ego, they are always distorted. Hence, nothing is achieved. Silence is the best remedy to put a stop to arguments.

Sometimes, even enlightened people make mistakes. They know the philosophy of life, and they think it is important to correct others’ misconceptions. However, it is not easy to make anyone wiser so quickly. One can share wisdom only with those who want to change themselves.



## Holmes and Away

Sherlock Holmes and Watson go on a trip. After dinner, they go to sleep to set off early the next day for a hike. In the middle of the night Holmes wakes up. He wakes Watson up.



‘What do you deduce?’ Groggily-eyed Watson replies, ‘I see millions of stars, so there must be planets, and life.’

Holmes sighs, ‘Watson, someone has stolen our tent.’

## Card-iac Arrest

A man goes to the doctor and says, ‘Doc, I keep thinking I’m a deck of cards.’ The doctor sighs, ‘You’re not a deck of cards. You’re just stressed.’ The man insists, ‘But I feel shuffled, cut and dealt every day!’

The doctor leans in and says, ‘Then stop playing games with yourself.’

## On-Time Train

A man boards a train with a giant suitcase. The conductor asks, ‘What’s inside?’ Man: A time machine. Conductor [laughs]: Prove it.

The man opens the case — nothing inside. The conductor scoffs, ‘That’s empty!’ The man nods, ‘Exactly!’ It already left for yesterday.

## Tailpiece

A man goes to the zoo and is surprised to see only one animal there: a dog. Confused, he asks the zookeeper, ‘Why is there only a dog in this zoo?’ Zookeeper [shrugs]: Because it’s a shih tzu.

## Chat Room

## If It’s Peace, Take A Bet on War

Appropos the news report, ‘Truce & Dare West Asia Back in Turmoil as US, Iran Exchange Fire’ (Jul 10), Trump’s ‘ceasefire’ with Iran was less a pause in hostilities than a performance in teasing ambiguity. The moment he declares peace and suspends strikes ‘for now’, he prepares to resume the drumbeat of aggression. It’s more like ‘teasefire’. He announced Iran’s supposed approval of his deal almost 40 times, which were rejected by Tehran. Oil prices sway like puppets, their strings yanked by Trump’s Truth Social theatrics. The mystery is deliberate: a theatre of confusion where Trump plays both narrator and actor; scripting Iran’s lines without consent. The ceasefire is less about peace and more about manipulating prices, headlines and perceptions. Diplomacy has become a carnival ride — spinning endlessly, never arriving at a destination. O Prasad Rao Hyderabad



# What the statue boom reveals about politics



PAST PARTICIPLE  
MANU S PILLAI

If you were to visit the magnificent Pangong Tso in Ladakh you'd have to travel a number of hours from Leh. Driving up slim, gravelly roads, at Chang La you'd find dizzying views of the region's Himalayan terrain. The oxygen levels are low at 5,000 metres, and for those visiting from the country's other parts, it can all feel rather forbidding. Luckily, the lake will rapidly lift your spirits: barely vegetated chocolate earth tipping into a rich, extraordinary splash of colour. However, you'd also notice something surprising. In this predominantly Buddhist zone—the lake is also sacred—with long cultural links to Tibet, a monumental statue will come into view. It is of a historical personage, a man we know, and many revere, as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the Maratha hero. There is only one, slightly odd detail: that in his own lifetime, Shivaji had probably never heard of Ladakh or Pangong Tso.

India is witnessing a golden age for statues. Governments across political lines are anxious to celebrate our land's iconic figures, competing to make such tributes taller and taller. But we are also a quarrelsome people and can't always agree on which of our greats deserve the honour. Just recently, as the Union home minister arrived to lay the foundation stone for a 125-foot statue to Syama Prasad Mookerjee in Kolkata, someone vandalised an existing bust of the same person in the same city. Disputes also crop up over colour: some years ago in

Uttar Pradesh, a statue of B.R. Ambedkar was vandalised. When a fresh one took its place, Babasaheb was dressed in saffron. The innocent mistake was rectified with a quick coat of blue. Then there are statues that can only be described as hideous. In Kerala's capital, for instance, there is a bust of Indira Gandhi. If she ever saw it, Mrs Gandhi herself might have despatched a team for demolition.

Thiruvananthapuram, interestingly, is said to be the first place in south India where a statue—of the modern, street-facing, "what an honour" type—was raised to an Indian. Sir T. Madhava Rao (1828-91) belonged to a set the British called "native statesmen". He served for many years as *deewan* (minister) to the Travancore maharajah, helping him modernise his administration, get his finances in order, establish schools, build roads, and transition from an old-fashioned semi-feudal government to a bureaucratic state structure. Eventually the maharajah in question grew envious of his minister's fame and Rao left, but not before Travancore was recognised as a "model state". In 1893, after Rao's death—and in a different ruler's reign—the city's people honoured him with this memorial. It was a big deal: most such public statues celebrated India's white rulers at the time. Here was a chunk of bronze dedicated to someone brown.

This is not to say that Indians lacked commemorative statuary. While the British are believed to have introduced the concept of the civic statue, our forebears took a more niche approach. Patrons of religious sites, for instance, often placed sculptures of themselves in these complexes: in the Madurai Meenakshi temple in Tamil Nadu, thus, you will find a pillar featuring a man with an ample midsection, his hands joined in a devotional pose. This is the famous 17th century ruler of the area, Tirumala Nayaka. In Tirupati, Krishnadevaraya of Vijaya-



The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj statue at Pangong Tso, Ladakh.

nagara presented in the 16th century bronzes of himself and his two consorts. Go back a few hundred years and you will see forms of Rajaraja Chola (947-1014) in the same mould. In all these, the pose is not heroic as in modern statuary. Instead, they suggest submission and surrender before god, advertising the relevant kings not so much as great conquerors but as Devotees No.1.

It is not just rulers, however, who can claim sculptural representation; there are cases of ordinary figures also mak-

ing it to the archive in stone and metal.

In the Padmanabhaswamy temple in Thiruvananthapuram, for instance, carved on a pillar is the head carpenter who designed the present structure in the 18th century. At Pandharpur in Maharashtra, one encounters the *samadh*i of Chokhamela, a 14th century Dalit poet-saint; on certain occasions, a metal head, believed to depict him, is brought out and placed here for veneration. Of course, in this case, the man's caste position determined where in the tem-

ple he was granted a spot—at the foot of the steps, outside the door. There are statues signifying tragedy too. At Chathurthiary in Kerala, a sculpture represents a local hero called Perumparayan. A poor farm worker, he was buried alive to bridge a breach in a fast-collapsing bund. He was subsequently deified. Convenient, a critic might say.

In that sense, statues always also reflect something political. If the British went about installing versions of Queen Victoria and her progeny in India, it was

not because they presented dazzling aesthetic possibilities. It was an attempt to reinforce British assertions of imperial might over the land. When, after independence, those statues were craned up and relegated to display slots in museums, this too was political: a (finally) sovereign nation making a statement.

It is a time-consuming process, though, because there are presumably too many statues to withdraw. It was only a few months ago, for example, that Edwin Lutyens' bust was removed from a spot in Rashtrapati Bhavan, replaced by a stately likeness of C. Rajagopalachari. The former was the architect of the presidential palace and like the carpenter in the Padmanabhaswamy temple, probably intended the bust to be a signature of sorts. In 2026, that 1929 signature was erased.

Many will approve but remember that it isn't just the foreigner's iconography that can become controversial. When Shivaji was installed in Ladakh, the 30-foot statue was celebrated in an official declaration as a "symbol of valour, vision and unwavering justice". For the thousands of troops from all over India stationed in this physically exacting place—soldiers who have had to deal with the unpleasant business of Chinese incursions—this memorial to a familiar martial hero probably offers a morale booster. Yet a local politician could not help but ask what "relevance" a structure like this held for Ladakh in its distinct context. The region has its own icon, Sengge Namgyal, also from the 17th century, with his own great military exploits. He too has a statue. Only that unlike the massive Shivaji raising his sword in warning to the Chinese, the "Lion King" of Ladakh sits at an intersection in Leh, watching over traffic.

Manu S. Pillai is a historian and author, most recently, of *Gods, Guns and Missionaries*.

# A race to control the Arctic

The Arctic is no longer just a site of East-West tension but a region where intra-alliance dynamics must be managed carefully

Anoop Mahajan

For centuries, the Arctic has lingered in the global imagination as a mythical, almost otherworldly place. The Greeks believed that beyond the cold northern winds lived the Hyperboreans, a people blessed with eternal spring, perfect happiness, and extraordinary longevity. This myth gives us Boreas, the god of the North Wind, and the root of Aurora Borealis, or the now Instagram-famous Northern Lights. The Arctic is supposedly also home to Santa Claus and his Elves, and even to Superman.

In reality, the Arctic is an empty, frozen wilderness that tests the limits of survival, inhabited only by lurking polar bears, intrepid explorers and ancient Inuit communities. As with all past explorers, my first experience of the Arctic was awe at the brutal, unforgiving landscape, followed by a deep urge to protect this unique and vital place.

However, the Arctic is changing, and it is changing fast. It is warming faster than any other region on Earth, and while some world leaders continue to publicly question the scientific evidence, they have privately realised that climate change is real. Their governments are preparing for an ice-free Arctic that will unlock new trade routes and access to valuable natural resources.

In *Polar War*, Kenneth R. Rosen examines this unfolding transformation and the geopolitical scramble it has triggered among the world's major powers. He demonstrates how leaders from Russia and China have long recognised the role the Arctic will play in the near- and long-term future, while the current global superpower, the US, hampered by political grandstanding and poor foresight, has been forced to play catch-up.

Rosen's first-person reporting takes readers on a journey from military outposts to ancient Inuit towns to scientific stations. He traces how the US, Russia, China and other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) are repositioning themselves in the High North.

Rosen highlights the collision of environmental fragility and strategic ambition, showing how climate change is reshaping not only the Arctic landscape but also, through it, global power dynamics. He points out that the US needs to



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANOOP MAHAJAN

work with its European allies, rather than belittle them. As with his previous books, he weaves together field observations, interviews and historical context to chronicle the changes in a region that is rapidly becoming central to global security and diplomacy.

*Polar War* details how the war in Ukraine has profoundly reshaped Arctic states' view of the High North. Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to a near-complete halt in cooperation between Moscow and the other Arctic Council members, effectively freezing the primary forum for dialogue. Russia has not been invited to an Arctic Council meeting since 2022, a move that has dealt a major blow to diplomacy.

Rosen reports that open borders have given way to heavily guarded boundaries, affecting the local populace, who worked together to survive in this tough environment until recently. This has led to able-bodied men trying to escape Russia, in small boats, even during hurricanes, to avoid conscription, something not seen since the fall of the Iron Curtain.

His visits to the military bases across the European Arctic show that the remaining Arctic states have accelerated military planning, strengthened regional alliances, and increased surveillance and infrastructure investments across the circumpolar north. NATO members now view the Arctic not only as a zone of climate vulnerability but also as a strategic frontier where deterrence and preparedness have become more essential than during the Cold War.



(top) The Ny-Ålesund railway on Spitsbergen, Svalbard, which operated from 1917-62; rapidly rising temperatures are melting permafrost and destabilising existing structures.

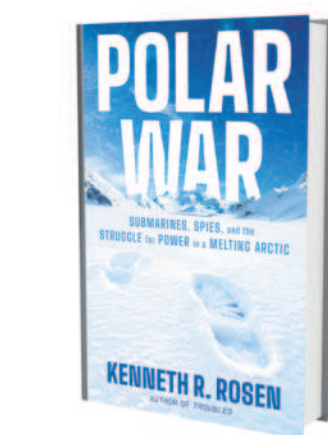
The ongoing conflict has made it clear that geopolitical stability in the Arctic can no longer be taken for granted and that there is deep mistrust between the Arctic nations.

Rosen details that the renewed aggressive strategic interest in Greenland by the US is worsening matters, and discussions about expanding American influence there are weakening long-term alliances. While not yet amounting to formal territorial claims, these moves have unsettled other Western-aligned Arctic states, who now view the US with greater caution.

For Denmark, Norway, and Finland, media-frenzied exclamations from the US,

akin to those on reality TV, underscored how even allies can introduce new uncertainties into an already fragile geopolitical landscape. Unfortunately, through all this showboating, the will of the people of Greenland is effectively ignored, something the Inuit know all too well from experience with Denmark. The existing indigenous people are treated as nothing but pawns in this Arctic chess game.

Rosen notes that while the current US President is bullish about the Arctic, as he is with most things, his lofty plans to build an Arctic-specific military and acquire 11 icebreakers (compared to the two currently operating) face technical hurdles,



**Polar War: Submarines, Spies, and the Struggle for Power in a Melting Arctic.** By Kenneth R. Rosen, Simon & Schuster, 320 pages, 1999.

including a lack of American expertise to build them. He shares his experience aboard the US's largest and most technologically advanced icebreaker, *USCGC Healy*, which shows that the US has very little experience surviving in the Arctic, let alone waging warfare on its own. He shows that past and current military training exercises clearly demonstrate the need for the US to work with its NATO partners, who have decades of experience in the region. Thus, the book highlights that the Arctic is no longer just a site of East-West tension but a region where intra-alliance dynamics must be managed carefully.

During his journeys across the Arctic, Rosen joins a few scientists as they collect valuable data in harsh conditions and highlights how, while the geopolitical tensions rise, the Arctic's fragile ecology has become little more than an afterthought.

As the Arctic warms at almost four times the global average, one can see the effects in melting sea ice, collapsing permafrost, shifting ecosystems, and stressed wildlife populations, and yet, these realities are overshadowed by military posturing and strategic calculations. The scramble for shipping lanes, minerals, and influence has pushed ecological stewardship to the margins, even as the Arctic's environmental health remains central to global climate stability. He notes with stark irony how, while nations prepare for an ice-free Arctic to advance their strategic interests, the very ecosystems that make the region unique and sustain Indigenous communities are being destabilised.

This geopolitical hardening stands in contrast to the long tradition of scientific collaboration that once defined the Arctic. For decades, research stations such as Ny Alesund in Svalbard embodied a uniquely cooperative model. Scientists from multiple nations have been working together to understand the Arctic through painstaking observations in atmospheric science, glaciology, oceanography, biology, ecol-

ogy, and climate, regardless of political tensions elsewhere. India, too, maintains a permanent scientific base here. Himadri, established in 2008, contributes to atmospheric and cryospheric research in partnership with other countries and has led to important discoveries about teleconnections from the Arctic to the Indian subcontinent. The growing fractures described in *Polar War* sit uneasily against this history of shared scientific purpose.

*Polar War* reads like a warning to the US. The book shows that Russia and China have clarity and ambition, with a well-thought-out execution plan, giving them an early start, while the West-aligned nations still decide their priorities. The book also highlights how the Arctic is at the mercy of global forces, whether through climate change or geopolitical ambitions.

At times, the book reads like a collection of essays rather than a cohesive narrative, and themes such as militarisation, climate urgency, and geopolitical rivalry recur across all the chapters. For readers unfamiliar with Arctic issues, the lack of a clear narrative arc may make the book feel fragmented, even fictional, despite the very real geopolitical stakes it describes. With tighter editing and a clear storyline, the insights could have landed with even greater force.

That said, this book is important, even for readers in India. Since 2013, India has been an Arctic Council Observer (thankfully, our leaders had the necessary foresight) and is formally recognised by the Arctic Council as a contributor to Arctic science, policy discussions, and environmental stewardship, without decision-making authority. Through this position, India is expanding its scientific, strategic, and economic interests in the region by establishing permanent research stations in different parts of the Arctic and influencing governance decisions of the Arctic Council. This matters because changes in the Arctic affect India in multiple ways, including by influencing the monsoon and extreme weather over the subcontinent and hence have direct economic impacts on the country.

*Polar War*, thus, offers essential context for most people who do not know why the Arctic matters to us. The book also helps Indian readers and administrators understand the geopolitical landscape they are entering, where climate impacts, resource competition and power politics intersect, shaping trade routes, resource exploitation and global strategic positioning in the decades ahead.

Anoop Mahajan is a scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Ministry of Earth Sciences, and conducts research on climate change, with a focus on the polar regions. He has led and participated in multiple scientific expeditions to the Arctic, Antarctic and the Southern Ocean.



# A love that's eternal and forever unspoiled

Manil Suri's powerfully candid memoir examines questions of filial bonds and duty against his family's life in a stifling room in Bombay

Somak Ghoshal  
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**M**anil Suri's memoir, *A Room in Bombay*, is dedicated to "Prem". It becomes clear in the first few pages that it refers to his late mother, Prem Suri née Bindra. The decision to refer to her by her formal name is revealing. Instead of instinctively reaching out for a more intimate form of address, Suri seems to want to distance himself from this primal filial bond, which, as is evident from his account, was an all-consuming force in his life. While he wants to dedicate his life's story to the "Mummy" he adored, at times with a fiercely disturbing intensity, he also wants to acknowledge the unique person behind that figure who pushed him to discover aspects of himself he would probably not have done, left to his own devices.

In choosing this route into life writing, Suri echoes the legacy of great memoirists like Roland Barthes. When the French writer wrote his famous treatise on photography *Camera Lucida*, he spent a sizeable portion of the book contemplating, with what felt like survivor's guilt, the larger-than-life canopy of love that his recently dead mother had held over him through the years. For Suri, as the only child of a couple stuck in a loveless but co-dependent marriage, the duty of being a loyal son was far more onerous than it is to most other children. For, apart from living his truth (embracing his homosexuality, for instance), he had to be the lifelong supplier of the "intimacy" that was absent from his parents' marriage.

Born in 1958, Suri grew up in one room (hence the title), which was sublet to his parents for a modest rent, in a four-room apartment in south Bombay (now Mumbai) by an Ismaili family. Life in Razia Mansion, overrun by belligerent stakeholders, was a nest of trouble. The shared kitchen was barely made available to the Suris by their landlord, while the common bathrooms remained filthy, their occupation a sore point of contention among all the residents. When the quarrels erupted, expletives were spat out like cannon fire. If some people spewed bile liberally, others conjured up inventive humiliations (such as switching off the light every time someone went into the loo or leaving a gift in the toilet bowl to discourage their neighbours from using it).

Despite these daily frictions, irregular source of income (Suri's father was an aspiring playback singer who never made it in Bollywood; instead, he worked as an assistant to directors like Kalyani-Anandji and Laxmikant-Pyarelal) and interpersonal squabbles, Suri's dotting parents, Prem and Ram, left no stone unturned to give their son the best life they could. He got a solid education, the tastiest delicacies even when money was tight, and the slightest hint of a sneeze from the boy set his parents on a flurry of medical attention and tender loving care. In return, Manil had to promise unflinching love to them, expressed in the form of frequent hugs and



Suri grew up in one room sublet to his parents in south Mumbai.

ISTOCKPHOTO

kisses "on the lips".

This physical affection was the "drug", Suri writes, his parents were addicted to. Another child may have usurped such advantage and exploited their parents' emotional dependence. But Suri says he experienced this "power" he wielded over two adults as a profound, at times abject, sense of "responsibility."

In a memorable instance, when he is too groggy to talk with his mother on the phone due to the time difference, he apologises to her in his next letter home by writing "I love you" 365 times. Over the years, he wrote more than 2,700 letters to his parents. While Prem was keen for this fact to be recognised in the *Guinness Book of World Records*, it was eventually counted as a national record of sorts.

Suri, now in his 60s, recounts these episodes with a wry sense of humour. But the reader only needs to put themselves in the shoes of his teenage self to get a sense of the unspoken trials of such a childhood and adolescent. Admittedly, many of the unsavoury scenes in the flat may be familiar to viewers of Bollywood cinema of a certain era (Hrishikesh Mukherjee chronicling life in the *chawls*) or readers of Bombay fiction of a specific vintage (Rohinton Mistry writing about the Parsi subculture). But Suri's vision of his past is much more menacing and psychologically harrowing, rooted as it is in the "room" he remained

trapped in with his parents.

Inside the microcosm of the room, young Suri discovered the perfect haven to run his own little kingdom. There he played cards with his mother, kissed his father goodnight even as he disliked the latter becoming drunk every evening. The room was where he indulged his love for reading; it was where his pubescent body awakened to desire. Yet, as the years go by, it also seemed to exert a malevolent hold over the life of the family, refusing to let them go, thwarting their efforts to find another place to live in. Even after Suri literally escapes the room by going to the US to get a PhD in mathematics, he could not fully free himself off the hold the space had over his heart and soul.

And so, thousands of miles away, he feels wracked with guilt, thinking of his parents' inability to stand up to the machinations of the neighbours. Suri's father eventually dies in his 80s, without ever achieving his long-coveted dream of finding a home for his family away from the room. Once the room is handed over, Suri never ventures back in, not even for old times' sake.

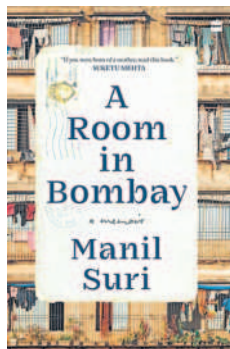
Apart from the life of his family, the other major theme of Suri's memoir—his reckoning with his homosexuality—is told with a refreshing

equanimity. Prem, who had studied psychology and Freud, was seemingly at ease with her son's sexuality, though she was conflicted about making it public knowledge. Suri's father's reaction, in contrast, was more benign, even mystifying. Instead of the adversity he had feared from him, Suri finds Ram reacting to his coming out to him (much later in life) with a poise that was unusual for men of his generation.

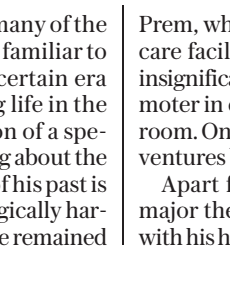
It is tempting to explain away such unexpected behaviour as proof of unconditional parental love. However, in Suri's telling of their story, the reader becomes keenly aware of the unique, if inscrutable, individuals that Prem and Ram each were in their own rights. Our parents are also other people, Suri seems to remind us, who we shall never fully understand, or make sense of.

For Suri, umbilically attached as he remained to his parents till their deaths, the truth behind this realisation dawns much later in life as he nurses his mother through a prolonged and harrowing spell of dementia, leading to her death. As Prem's condition worsens, Suri is wracked with the usual doubts. Did he do everything he could to make her life easier as a dutiful son? Was it selfish of him to refuse to take her back to the US to live with him? Should he have found a better way to manage his job and his relationship with his partner Larry, while he looked after his mother at his home?

The only definitive knowledge he has in the end is that it was his unique privilege to know such a great love as he got from his mother, and that it was also "liberating for this love to have come to an end."



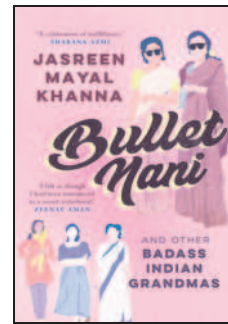
**A Room in Bombay:**  
By Manil Suri,  
HarperCollins India,  
320 pages, ₹699.



**The People's Sanctum:**  
By Manuraj Shunmugasundaram,  
Penguin Random House India,  
216 pages, ₹699.

## NEW ON SHELVES

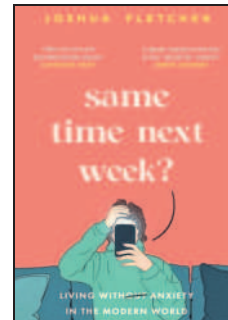
**I**n a society like India where the elderly, more so women in that age bracket, are relegated to the margins, Jasreen Mayal Khanna offers a fresh counterpoint. Inspired by her own *nani* who refused to play by the rules, she profiles 12 daredevil women who have boldly redefined their identities in the autumn of their lives and proved that age is nothing but a number. *'Bullet Nani: And Other Badass Indian Grandmas'*, by Jasreen Mayal Khanna, Pan Macmillan, 280 pages, ₹399.



**I**n a world of rising authoritarian politics, P. Lankesh's Kannada play in translation, first published over three decades ago, assumes a striking significance. With Nadir Shah, the Persian emperor who sacked Delhi, at its centre, the play focuses on questions of morality, institutional failure and the dangerous insolence of power. *'Gunamukha: Namaz of a Dying Empire'*, by P. Lankesh, translated by H.S. Komalesha, Yoda Press, 102 pages, ₹250.



**I**t isn't unusual anymore for people to defer to AI for mental health advice. But the complexity of what goes on inside a therapist's room can barely be understood, let alone addressed, by a machine. By chronicling the journey of four of his clients, therapist Joshua Fletcher shows that the work of healing requires far more effort and expertise than writing a few well-worded prompts. *'Same Time Next Week?'*, by Joshua Fletcher, Hachette India, 416 pages, ₹899.



**M**anuraj Shunmugasundaram revisits the legacy of the Vaikom Satyagraha (1925) and its impact on caste-based discrimination, especially with regard to temple entry in India, in this forthcoming book. Drawing on a multiplicity of sources, he examines how the reformist movement profoundly transformed the very idea of India itself. *'The People's Sanctum'*, by Manuraj Shunmugasundaram, Penguin Random House India, 216 pages, ₹699.



# 'Any tech ends up as a tool of political capture'

In her new novel, Meena Kandasamy explores the Indian manosphere and its connection with the far right

Aditya Mani Jha

**M**eena Kandasamy's latest novel *Fieldwork as a Sex Object* has two epigraphs. The first is a quote from the *Manusmriti*, and the other a Twitter comment about the primary purpose of sex being to "fecundate the female" and that anything beyond the 2 minutes required to do that would be "perversion, degeneracy and socialism". Using this framing, Kandasamy unites far-right Hindu commentators and online incels (also called the "manosphere")—two groups that not only overlap but also share a number of goals, including the curtailing of women's autonomy and reversing the legal-material gains of feminism.

*Fieldwork as a Sex Object* is structured as a series of first-person vignettes and episodes written by Amrita Chaturvedi, aka "Amy", a London-based student activist who's evasive about her posh-girl background (her father is a Supreme Court attorney). A vocal critic of the Indian gov-

ernment, Amy's world is turned upside down overnight after a sexually explicit "deepfake" video featuring her goes viral. Soon she is shunned by her supposed friends, patronised by her family and trolled non-stop by the Indian manosphere.

"It's so funny and strange how Indian incels and their Western counterparts have very similar opinions about women, about sexuality, female pleasure, and so on," Kandasamy says. In the last few years, a number of novels set in India have hinged on online videos going viral. Prayag Akbar's *Mother India*, Megha Majumdar's *A Burning* and Aravind Jayan's *Teen Couple have Fun Outdoors* come to mind. Kandasamy's novel, however, is fundamentally different because it keeps its focus squarely on the incident's profound emotional and psychological impact on Amy.

"In an earlier era, unless you were a very famous public figure, criticisms of you or your work would largely be private," the author says. "Generally speaking, people did not know what was being spoken about them behind their back. But with the social media environment of today, Amy faces a lot of public judgement and scrutiny, and even if she logs out, someone can still capture a screenshot and send it to her. So there is no real escape, even temporarily."

Amy's past comes back to haunt her. People, especially Indians, are quick to



Kandasamy gives us searing insights into the contemporary internet.

blame her because of her perceived transgressions of the past—participating in Leftist student politics in Delhi, appearing in a short-lived reality show, kissing a woman on camera, and so on.

In such a turbo-charged world of instant judgement, stable allies are crucial to one's well-being. Amy is deeply touched, for instance, when her friend Nimmi takes care of her in the horrid first

few days, bringing her home-cooked meals and distracting her with humour.

But Amy soon begins to sprout romantic feelings for Nimmi and contemplates making a move, despite understanding that this will not end well for either woman. A kindly (but also performative and tone-deaf) white acquaintance named India offers Amy shelter at her home following a particu-

larly rough patch. But Amy is continually judgmental and dismissive of India and her efforts.

"Amy is quite allergic to India's privileges as a white person, and her performative use of language," Kandasamy says. "But India is also a genuinely nice person who wants to take care of a woman under attack from all quarters. What Amy doesn't understand is that India's privileges as a white person are so very similar to the privileges Amy herself enjoys back home in India as the daughter of an important man."

Along the way, Kandasamy gives us searing insights on the contemporary internet via Amy's occasional standalone rants. A single-page chapter titled *Case Study: Gen Z* sees Amy skewering the "psychothic moral pedantry" of Gen-Z, noting that this is the only cohort that looks at the nonconformist members of the previous generation with disdain. Kandasamy writes: "When it comes to these pick-me puritans, it is like listening to your parents. They are the most sexually conservative

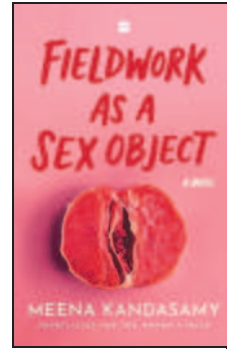
generation in decades."

Elsewhere, a two-page chapter, *Man-thropology*, reads like a poem. It unfurls in the form of call-and-response couplets where each first line sets up a situation in a woman's life and each second line records a chauvinist response by a perennially online Indian man.

One of the most important connections Kandasamy makes is between how boys are raised in Indian joint families and the kind of political views they later endorse as adults. A superbly-written flashback scene depicts a war of words between Amy and her entitled, misogynist cousin. He calls her a whore and worse, and she responds in kind. Later, we see him leading an organisation of keyboard warriors paid to attack the political opponents of Hindutva.

"We're now heading into the AI era or perhaps we are already in it," Kandasamy says. "We should always remember that these new technologies, whether it's social media or large language models, they become tools of political power and political capture in the end."

Aditya Mani Jha is a writer based in Delhi.



**Fieldwork as a Sex Object:** By Meena Kandasamy, HarperCollins India, 240 pages, ₹599.







# Should the world adopt a law against ecocide?

From the Vietnam War to the crisis in West Asia, the environment is no longer just collateral damage. It is becoming a target in its own right



SHYAM SARAN

It was an American scientist, Arthur Galston, who coined the word “ecocide” in 1970 to describe the catastrophic effects from the indiscriminate use of the infamous Agent Orange by US troops fighting in the Vietnam War. Agent Orange was used as a powerful herbicide to destroy large swathes of thick vegetation, within which Viet Cong guerrillas were suspected of hiding and launching surprise attacks against American troops.

Agent Orange was used alongside napalm, an incendiary weapon that ignited upon impact into a sticky gel that would cling to the target, destroying material, undergrowth and enemy personnel, via intense heat, extensive burns and suffocation. But napalm did not leave lingering, long-term damage. Agent Orange did.

Soil contaminated by it is still being cleaned up in several affected areas in the country. Its ecological impact is multi-generational, and its toxicity is known

not only to poison the soil and water sources, but also to affect human DNA, causing cancer and birth defects passed down through generations. If napalm was like a chemical weapon, Agent Orange served as both a chemical and biological weapon. Galston was right in describing its use as ecocide, in the same category as genocide and war crimes. However, this was accepted neither by the US nor by the international community.

An effort was made to cover such actions in Protocol 1 to the Geneva Convention, concluded in 1977. Article 35(3) and Article 55 explicitly prohibit warfare methods that are intended or expected to cause widespread, long-term, and severe damage to the natural environment. This seems to cover collateral environmental damage, but the key here is intentionality, which is difficult to prove. The Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, deliberately set fire to the oil wells in Kuwait after he was forced to retreat from the kingdom in the Gulf War 1.0 in 1991. These wells burnt for several months causing immense and long-lasting environmental damage but his actions were not described as ecocide. The legal position remained ambiguous.

The issue has once again come to the fore with the repeated aerial and artillery bombardment of the densely populated region of Gaza

by Israeli Defense Forces, turning it into an ecological dead zone. The mountains of rubble are estimated at 39 million tonnes, which include asbestos, heavy metals and toxic chemicals.

The bombing of oil and gas facilities by the US and Israel in Iran has also inflicted huge, immediate, and long-lasting damage to the country’s environment, rendering vast swathes of its territory uninhabitable, with the soil poisoned by toxic chemicals both from the ordnance used and from the targeted facilities, such as oil refineries. These effects have been described as a “slow motion chemical war.” According to one report, the military assault on Iran created an “apocalyptic environmental crisis”, with the 9 million residents of Tehran affected by the black cloud and toxic fallout from the bombing of an oil storage facility on the outskirts of the capital. This is estimated to have released 5 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in just two weeks.

In the Ukraine War, some of the rich grain-growing areas of the country, including its major river, Dnipro, are saturated with toxic chemicals, which are the residue of bombs, artillery shells, and missiles rained on the country by Russia. Unexploded munitions embedded in agricultural fields are a constant threat to farmers. It is estimated that 30 per cent of the country is littered with landmines and unexploded



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

ordnance, which impacts agricultural production and physically tears up the topsoil ecosystem, resulting in long-term land degradation. Now, Ukraine is paying Russia back in the same coin. The recent hits on Russian oil refineries have led to toxic black smoke enveloping large areas around them, including the important city of St Petersburg. It has become difficult to dismiss this as collateral damage since it would be well understood that deliberately attacking an oil refinery would have catastrophic environmental consequences.

Legal experts have defined ecocide as “unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term environmental damage”.

In 2010, Polly Higgins, a Scottish lawyer, argued that the Earth should be recognised as a legal entity and should be entitled to legal protection against spoliation by individuals, businesses, or governments. She led an international movement — Stop Ecocide International — to have ecocide recognised as an international crime under

the Rome Statute. The Rome Statute is an international treaty adopted on July 17, 1998, which set up the International Criminal Court, with its jurisdiction to cover genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. If accepted, ecocide would become the fifth category of international crimes.

After her death in 2019, Stop Ecocide International is being led by her long-time associate, Jojo Mehta.

The experience of the three recent wars, two of which are still ongoing, reflects the reality that the

damage to the environment in the targeted country may be as extensive as, and more long-lasting than, the immediate damage to military targets. It is only a small step to weaponising the country’s environment itself. Nor would such environmental damage remain confined within national or regional borders.

The Persian Gulf is home to a unique marine ecosystem that boasts of rare and unique coral reefs. Its nutrient-rich waters are home to a diverse marine biology of shellfish, oysters, scallops, crabs and shrimps. Their population has been devastated by the oil spills from sunken vessels and stranded oil tankers and cargo ships in the Strait of Hormuz.

The shallow lagoons ringed by thick mangrove forests have also been contaminated by oil spills and may never recover once they die. The collapse of fisheries has deprived thousands of their livelihoods. The nature and scale of warfare has changed dramatically. The environment is no longer just collateral damage in a war. It is becoming a target in its own right. This will have serious global consequences. A war anywhere could become war everywhere as far as planetary ecology is concerned. Recognising the Earth as a legal entity with its own rights makes sense, as does ecocide as a crime against humanity.

Indian tradition considers Nature as a mother who nurtures, a cosmic mother cow or a Kamadhenu. If laws are passed to protect the cow as a holy being, why not pass legislation to safeguard Mother Earth as a legal entity entitled to protection?

The writer is a former foreign secretary

## Sweet fuel, bitter impact



VIEWPOINT  
DEVANGSHU DATTA

Brazil’s deployment of ethanol as a substitute for petrol should serve as a blueprint, with cautionary footnotes, for India. Brazil started implementing ethanol mixes in 1975, after the 1973 oil shock. Like India, Brazil was a huge importer of crude oil.

At the time, Brazil was ruled by a military dictatorship, which didn’t care about public opinion. So the government could have rammed an ethanol mandate through. But some senior military officers had interests in the automobile industry, while others had interests in the sugarcane-to-ethanol industry.

This led to a balancing of interests. Brazil opted for a gradual ethanol transition. This gave Brazil’s auto industry and insurers the time they needed to develop efficient flex-fuel engines. It also meant drivers could fully depreciate the petrol-powered vehicles they were using, before moving to flex-fuel.

Fifty years down the line, Brazilian pumps offer choices between E20, and various ethanol-petrol mixes all the way to E100 (a combination of ethanol and water with no petrol). All Brazilian petrol cars, and most motorcycles, run on flex-fuel engines, which use any mix. The fuel tanks have sensors that detect the composition and adjust engine timing.

Brazil has also developed “drop-in” biodiesel — fuels which can be used in diesel engines without modifications. India is looking at 15 per

cent isobutanol blending in diesel, which also presents its own set of problems.

Brazil is almost three times as large as India. It has one-seventh the population. It’s in the tropics. This means lots of arable land. It planted sugarcane in huge quantities. Cane is the most efficient crop for ethanol yield due to its high-sugar content. For historical reasons, Brazil also had a tradition of advanced research and development (R&D) in the agro-sciences, which meant it found ever more efficient ways to squeeze ethanol out of cane. It also had a big internal market for automobiles and manufacturers started incorporating flex-fuel engines into Brazilian cars.

Brazil had insane inflation through the 1970s and 1980s, often logging 100 per cent plus inflation per annum during those decades. But the consensus opinion is that ethanol blending helped moderate some of the ill effects because it insulated the country from oil shocks.

The downside was that extensive sugarcane plantation led to massive environmental degradation, both directly and indirectly. Cane is a water-intensive crop that needs good soil. It is commonly cleared after harvest by burning.

Cane plantations took over areas where such conditions existed, while less fertile regions became home to livestock farmers and crops that could survive in less benign conditions. So while cane degraded the fertile Atlantic coast, cattle-ranchers and other farmers were displaced and moved into the Amazon. They cut down the rainforest, and killed local tribal people. This process has continued and is said to have accelerated during the Jair Bolsonaro regime, when laws protecting the rainforest and its tribes were repealed.

Despite the darker aspects of this process, we could claim

that Brazil’s adoption of ethanol has been a qualified success. Ethanol has a lower carbon footprint than fossil fuels. The Brazilian consumer has a choice between many mixes, which are priced according to prevailing prices of crude and ethanol. The long runway gave the auto industry time to engineer for the transition, and people did not suffer economic losses with their vehicles suddenly experiencing steep dips in mileage and seeing rubber parts wearing out quickly.

Brazil is the world’s second-largest cane sugar producer. India is the largest. India consumes more sugar and khand-sari than Brazil does. (India also uses damaged grains and rice to produce ethanol.) India has a much larger population, much less arable land and more water stress. The environmental degradation will be considerable if acreage under cane increases from current levels, and India lacks the vast rain forest, a la Amazon where displaced crops may be replanted (never mind the displacement of tribals).

In key cane-growing districts, a large chunk of the population tends to be employed on the industry’s value chain, and this value chain has extended as ethanol enters the picture. This makes cane politically sensitive, since the fortunes of voters align with industry trends. Ethanol as fuel is good for the cane industry.

But the automobile industry also has a really long value chain and generates lots of employment. Forcing the auto industry and vehicle owners through a rapid transition was something Brazil’s generals avoided.

India has missed out on that balance. It might get the environmental degradation as well as the additional unhappiness of auto manufacturers and vehicle owners suffering economic losses.

## Satluj, Punjab & political fallout

The Diljit Dosanjh-starrer *Satluj* doesn’t blame any political party or individual politicians. We only know the demographic in Punjab it’s bound to trigger the most

Even in the most innocent times, nobody in Punjab would believe that the OTT release and then sudden withdrawal of Honey Trehan/Diljit Dosanjh’s *Satluj* was without political motives.

In this era of conspiracy theories, everybody in Punjab seems to have their own “insight” into this. If the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wanted to stop the film, as the Central Board of Film Certification’s 127 proposed cuts showed, it could’ve easily made sure Zee wouldn’t release it. It’s also owned by somebody close to it politically.

Then, why would he pull it in 48 hours? Everybody would’ve known that once out in digital form, it will be shown widely. If anything, the controversy will give it more fire and fury. The buzz in Punjab, headed for elections early next year, is: Who benefits the most from this controversy? Or who will it hurt the most? As usually happens, one outcome leads to the other.

Let’s list four things the film does. One, by focusing on just the man who investigated “fake” encounters after the militancy was over, it’s playing into a generation-old grievance. The film will rekindle fresh anger with its revisionism.

Two, in a hardly subtle way, there is heroism bestowed upon the militants. Watch the way August 31, 1995 human-bomb assassination of chief minister Beant Singh is portrayed. In the background plays the foremost Sikh verse of sacrifice in battle.

Three, while it is bound to anger many younger Sikhs with no lived experience of the decade of terror, those particularly affected will be the Jats (‘Jutt’ in Punjab), especially among the more religious and conservative sections. A critical mass of them, in terms of a percentage of overall demographics or voter base, live in Punjab’s border districts and traditional strongholds of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD).

And four, overtly the film is so apolitical as to be anodyne. It’s as if this was a private war between the militants and the police. We only know the demographic it is bound to trigger the most. They’re the relatively conservative sections of the Jutt Sikhs, especially in rural constituencies.

Where might their vote go as a result? The Shiromani Akali Dal, which has traditionally owned this vote, has been on the ropes already. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, it lost the Tarn Taran/Khad-sar Sahib constituency to jailed radical Amritpal

Singh by a huge margin. The radicals got another seat, Faridkot, won by Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa, the son of Delhi cop Beant Singh, who was one of Indira Gandhi’s two assassins.

This mass of voters was already angry, disaffected from their mainstream politicians, and especially the Akalis. It is unlikely that the same voter, further angered by *Satluj*, will return to the Akali Dal. They are even more likely to stay with the radicals. And because this conservative mass will almost definitely not go to the Congress or the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), there is only one party that benefits.

See it like this. Power in Punjab has rotated among three entrenched political forces: The Congress, Akali Dal, and AAP. The radicals are the fourth, if limited.

Even to be a coalition partner, the radicals will need the Akalis to win a third of the seats, an improbability. For the Akalis, with their “believers” vote split, they can be driven to further marginalisation. The AAP has to deal with anti-incumbency and attacks from the Sikh clergy. The Congress is fighting with itself. In this melee, if the Hindu vote consolidates, only the BJP benefits.

See Punjab politics through its demographics. Contrary to folklore, Punjab isn’t a Sikh state. The Sikhs, at 58 per cent are a majority, but Hindus, at around 40 per cent, are significant. If the Sikh vote fractionalises and the Hindus come together, the state could take an unimaginable turn.

We can cut and dice this further. Of the Sikhs, about 60 per cent are Jutts, say, about one-fourth of the state’s overall population. They form the bulk of the Akali, radical and anti-Congress vote. If more of it shifts to the radicals, it decimates SAD-Akali Dal and benefits AAP or the Congress. The BJP wants to consolidate the Hindus, as in West Bengal and Assam.

If they get 70 per cent of the Hindu vote, they’re in business in what will then become a five-way split.

A relatively under-appreciated factor is the Dalit vote in Punjab. It is widely, and quite reliably, estimated at 33 per cent, Sikh and Hindu. They are 35 per cent of the Sikhs. Traditionally, the Congress had a foothold there, and the AAP cut into it. An important point is the sway that the many *babas* and *deras* have on this vote bank. That’s why rape convict Gurmeet Ram Rahim gets paroles on the eve of any polling, even a panchayat election. The

BJP has built this constituency for long.

Next week, the Prime Minister visits Punjab. He will go to Jalandhar to inaugurate the new railway station, but the really politically significant move will be his expected visit to Dera Sachkhand Ballan, the “seat” of Sant Niranjan Dass ji. He’s the spiritual leader of the Ravidassia Dalit community. We do not know the split, but the larger community, of what will be described as Jatavs in the Hindi heartland, constitutes just about half of all Dalits in Punjab. In this Republic Day’s list of honours, Sant Niranjan featured with a Padma Shri. You can add two and two.

Next step is electoral data. After the break of the old alliance with SAD over farm Bills, the BJP decided to go alone in Punjab. It was arrogant and suicidal, it was widely thought.

Sure enough, in the 2022 Assembly elections, it got just 6.6 per cent. But in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, it went up to 18.65 per cent. It sounds even more impressive given that the Congress and AAP were at around 26 per cent each, and the Akalis were reduced to 13.48 per cent as conservative Sikh vote moved to the radicals. They are looking down the barrel now. You can understand why they are organising shows of *Satluj* in “every village” of the state.

The BJP is hoping if they can go up to 30 per cent vote, max out in the 55 constituencies where Hindus have significant presence, and have the *deras* deliver the Dalits, they can be the largest party. It looks like simple enough arithmetic, and to that extent, it might see the risk of a fresh wave of radicalisation worth its while. For sure, it would believe it will put it down quickly, and so what if another *Satluj*-like film is made 30 years later. We need to note that while the Akalis are celebrating *Satluj* and others are quiet, it is only the BJP’s Raveet Singh Bittu who’s attacking it. You might credit this on his being former chief minister Beant Singh’s grandson, but if you think any BJP leader goes out on a limb without the party’s approval, you must be naive.

Nobody can be sure, but this would look like the most logical explanation for this dramatic *Satluj* release and withdrawal on Zee5. It is just that Punjab’s voters can also surprise us. The *Satluj* protagonist, Jaswant Singh Khaira’s wife, contested for Lok Sabha from Tarn Taran/Khad-sar Sahib twice. In 1999 for a breakaway Akali Dal faction when she lost her deposit, and then in 2019 to finish third, with the Congress winning the most “religious Sikh” seat in the state. In 2019, she was fielded by Punjab Ekta Party that Sukhpal Singh Khaira formed after breaking away from the AAP. Khaira is now in the Congress and among its most vocal leaders. All of this, just in case you thought only Bihar’s politics was complicated.

By special arrangement with *ThePrint*

## The new AI mercantilism



TICKER  
MIHIR S SHARMA

Not in our lifetime has any technology accelerated at the pace that artificial intelligence (AI) is doing so today. When OpenAI’s ChatGPT first broke into public awareness in early 2023 or so, it was clearly a vast improvement over previous text chatbots; yet, in the three years since

then, it and its competitor models have metamorphosed into something unrecognisable.

We still do not know what the effect on the macro-economy of these models’ effectiveness will be. What does appear clear, however, is that — as a public policy and economic-security problem — they do not represent a problem for the 2030s, but something far more immediate.

Many were forced to confront this when the United States’ (US’) Department of Commerce reportedly told the AI lab Anthropic to cut off access for non-US citizens to its most advanced deployments, Fable 5 and Mythos 5. Naturally, this was a completely unimplementable order — if nothing else, Anthropic itself has a large number of non-US citizens

working on those models. The order thus amounted to telling a major company to switch off its latest offer.

After some negotiations, export controls were lifted on the deployment with more safety guardrails, namely Fable 5; Mythos 5, however, remains restricted although specific partners are allowed access. Fewer of its potentials are switched off for safety reasons. In return, those vetted operators who have been allowed to use it have to agree to far stricter terms that limit how they use it.

Given that we know very little about the actual capabilities of these models — though rumours abound that Mythos proved capable of breaking high-level crypto-security used by the US intelligence estab-

lishment — it is also possible that this was a bit of strong-arming by the administration of President Donald Trump, which has taken a dislike to Anthropic after the latter attempted to impose ethical restrictions on the use of its technology by the Pentagon.

But, if so, it has certainly served as excellent marketing material for Anthropic. Mythos has lent itself to a great deal of myth-making.

But there is nevertheless a real question here. If Mythos or some successor deployment — perhaps from Anthropic, perhaps from another American lab — does indeed demonstrate the sort of extraordinary jump in capabilities and danger that we have only seen before a couple of times, such as with the development of nuclear weapons, what will Washington’s reaction be? And how will other countries respond?

It seems clear that the US administration believes that it can both analyse swiftly enough the dangers that a model being released to the world might pose to its security, and that if it acts to restrict it then it will be able to do so effectively. The labs, they believe, will comply; the technology will not leak; it will not be replicated or copied. These are fairly stringent assumptions.

The only real competitor to the US in terms of creating frontier models is the People’s Republic of China. (The European front-runner, France’s Mistral, has lost a great deal of ground in recent months.) Chinese models were initially being touted as

being largely open-source, and easy to deploy and adapt. But that will not last forever. It was reported over the last fortnight that Beijing’s Ministry of Commerce had convened sessions with major technology companies to examine whether and how restrictions, especially export bans, could be imposed on their own top-tier models. According to one *Reuters* report, officials also want to limit who can invest in related startups within China. This followed the thwarting of Meta’s \$2 billion bid for the Chinese startup Manus, and official orders to Moon-shot AI that it obtain government approval before receiving foreign

venture capital. Legal scholars gathered a few months ago to try and frame a new AI-focused economic-security law that might allow Beijing to limit frontier systems to domestic release, or to withhold them from the public altogether.

The open question is whether this intensifying climate of restrictiveness in the two major AI geographies is driven by economic nationalism or by genuine national-security concerns. We know that most restrictions on trade in past years supposedly driven by security worries were actually mercantilism in another guise. But it might be too soon to assume that the same is true for these restrictions on AI. Certainly, the news that Beijing — which has so far used its cheaper models as a way of extending its economic power — might be reversing course suggests that genuine security concerns might exist.





## THE ASIAN AGE

11 JULY 2026

## Uranium deal icing on cake of Modi's visit to Australia

Securing an agreement for supply of Australian uranium to fuel India's nuclear power programme was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's prize catch on his eastern trip to the Antipodes. The landmark deal should open the way to give a new impetus to India's clean energy objectives, the plans for which have either lain dormant or moved at snail's pace for over the 12 years since India and Australia had agreed in 2014 on a civil nuclear cooperation pact. Australia's preparedness to get its miners to enhance their operations to fulfil India's large order for nuclear fuel to energise its green ambitions as well as steer away from fossil fuels a little more drastically because of current uncertainties over crude oil supplies and their carbon footprint also sends a message to the world on India as a reliable user of uranium for peaceful purposes.

The ground realities changed in the years since 2014 as the regulations over culpability and compensation in the event of a nuclear accident were altered in the "Shanti Act" of 2025, limiting liabilities to international standards. In those 12 years, much may have been said about selling nuclear fuel but the uranium never came from Down Under. Against a planned nuclear power generation of 100GW by 2047 (22.5GW by 2032), India's current installed capacity is just 8.8GW from 25 plants that generate only around three per cent of the nation's power consumption.

As Australian Prime Minister Antony Albanese pointed out, the pre-2014 bilateral ties — and perhaps the ties in the last 12 years — were "underdone" and it is only now that India appears to have moved up the international order to be considered a crucial strategic partner, if not quite an ally though both countries are fellow members in Quad. The nuclear deal caps this new effort to further ties and take the bilateral aspects further regardless of divergent views on China, the country that is invariably the elephant in the room at every major diplomatic meeting.

As Prime Minister Modi vibrantly pointed out, the Indo-Pacific is not just the confluence of two great oceans, it also symbolises shared concerns over maritime security in view of the current geostrategic fears and suspicions. An array of pacts with Indonesia as well as Australia are set to operationalise closer cooperation in maritime matters in which India's role as a facilitator and coordinator of data sharing has been rising.

The other great worry emanating from recent geopolitical shifts in the wake of US trade moves has been in the field of critical minerals and India's search for reliable supply chains is spurred by events after China clamped up supplies. And Australia may be well placed with the capacity to supply many materials from its Critical Minerals List. With the nations kicking on towards a fuller ECTA by building on the interim deal of 2022, India may also be hoping to reduce the trade deficit with Australia.

With investments to begin flowing in — an Australian pension fund is taking a \$346 million punt on India's infrastructure fund and New Zealand mulls earmarking an ambitious \$20 billion — the importance of pitching India internationally is stressed. Prime ministerial visits carry a lot more significance than the civilian awards that Mr Modi is adorned with but which are a recognition of India's global heft today.

## J&amp;K: Halt libraries' crackdown

The Jammu and Kashmir administration's territory-wide campaign to screen and purge "objectionable" books marks a profound and troubling shift. It is one thing for a government to decide what textbooks align with its educational vision. It is quite another to raid bookstores, blacklist authors, confiscate publications and police every shelf in every school and coaching centre. This is not curriculum oversight. It is state-driven narrative control.

The trigger was the discovery of allegedly separatist-linked content in two school library books — *Personalities and Legends of J&K* and *Great Personalities of Jammu and Kashmir*. These titles referred to Jammu and Kashmir as "India-occupied Kashmir" and described pro-independence leader Muhammad Maqbool Bhat as "Shaheed-e-Azam" or great martyr.

Bhat, co-founder of the Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF), a militant organisation advocating the reunification of J&K as an independent state, was hanged in Delhi's Tihar Jail on Feb. 11, 1984 after being convicted on murder charges. Over time, he came to be seen as a foundational figure in the violent separatist movement that gripped the region for more than three decades.

Glorifying him as a martyr undeniably contradicts India's stance. But the administration's response — suspending officials, blacklisting authors, withdrawing all their works, launching criminal investigations and ordering a territory-wide sweep of every book in every institution — goes far beyond correcting a procurement lapse.

That is part of a broader pattern. In 2025, the government banned 25 books by respected scholars, journalists and historians — from A.G. Noorani, Arundhati Roy, Sumantra Bose, Victoria Schofield, David Devasdas and Anuradha Bhasin to Piotr Balcerowicz and others — alleging they promoted "false narratives" and "glorified terrorism". Critics countered that these were rigorously researched works offering critical political analysis, not propaganda.

The new directive, therefore, intensifies that fear. Schools must now eliminate anything "prejudicial", "age inappropriate" or "contrary to national interest" — elastic categories easily stretched to fit any inconvenient fact. Police raids on bookstores make the message unmistakable: Only one version of Kashmir's story is now permissible. Kashmir's history — its conflicts, aspirations, traumas and political movements — cannot be erased by administrative order. Memory lives in people, not just pages. Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution protects the freedom of speech and expression. The current campaign in J&K undermines that guarantee, replacing dialogue with decree.

## THE ASIAN AGE

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Farrukh Dhondy  
Cabbages  
& Kings

"The magpie's cry goes clackety-clack —  
It says she's gone and won't come back...  
Why personify the cry of a bird?  
The notes or the sentiment overheard?  
The magpie knows nothing of your loss...  
And even if it did, it wouldn't give a toss."  
— From *Flutter Gutter Verses*, by Bachchoo

Unlike some distinguished writers — such as J.K. Rowling — and several academics, I have never experienced "being cancelled". This is the contemporary practice of being refused a platform to which one was formerly invited, owing to protests from people and lobbies who don't like your opinions.

So, JK has been denied a hearing and banned from several platforms because she believes that humans are assigned a gender at birth through their chromosomes and through formation of their sexual organs and secondary gender manifestations.

These bans and cancellations make me wonder if my opinions, which I express in these columns, in others and in my books and speeches from various platforms, are innocuous and not worth bothering about? Perhaps in my short and happy life, though I have acquired the description of being "radical", I have never sufficiently offended any vociferous lobby.

Luck? Caution? Fence-sitting? (I plead not-guilty, m'lud)

Not for my opinions, but for my very existence, I have indeed suffered some bans or omissions.

I suppose the first one that comes to mind was when, in the wake of Richard Attenborough's Gandhi, I was approached by two Pakistanis — the distinguished director Jamil Dehlavi and a contemporary from Cambridge, Akbar Ahmad, proposing that I write a film on Jinnah.

I said I was out of sympathy with Jinnah for splitting the sub-continent. They said my Indo-nationalist view probably didn't take in all the facts that caused the fragmentation of British India. They urged me to read Stanley Wolpert's biography of Jinnah. I did.

Akbar, as producer of the tentative project, had offered me a decent sum of money if I would write the film. And yes, gentle reader, after reading two or three biographies of the Quaid-e-Azam, I understood the complexities that led to "Partition" and told Jamil and Akbar that I would write a script as I conceived it. They agreed and I did.

When I handed in the completed screenplay, Akbar said to me: "That's great, we'll start production soon, but Farrukh, you won't get a credit on screen as the writer!"

I was about to say "pour the hell qua non?" but instead simply asked why.

"Because the film is being financed by Pakistani capitalists who would not support the production if the screenplay was by a non-Muslim Parsi of Indian origin, resident in Britain with a reputa-

tion for Marxist views and radical 'socialistic' activity."

"And you are to promise to never claim to have written the film," Akbar said, "and I want to increase your fee by a thousand pounds".

Gentle reader, being of a modest (and acquisitive?) disposition, could I refuse?

The film went into production with Christopher Lee, famous for playing Dracula, as the mature Jinnah, and Shashi Kapoor as the angel Jibrail who questions Jinnah in heaven (yes, one of the opening scenes).

The film was a success in Pakistan — so much so that General Pervez Musharraf, who was then in charge, appointed Akbar Ahmad as Pakistan's high commissioner to Britain.

Then came the unravelling. Jamil and Akbar fell out, with Jamil accusing Akbar of inflating the budget and carrying away extremely large sums of money by pretending they were paid to (non-existent) "script consultants" and other such fabrications. Jamil blew the gaff, and journalists then called me to ask if I had written the script. I, sticking to my promise, said "no comment", or the equivalent. Then Seamus Milne, a *Guardian* journalist, showed me a document which said that I sold the script of *Jinnah* to Akbar Ahmad for "£1". It had my signature.

So, he said either I did write *Jinnah*, or I was accusing the high commissioner of Pakistan of forging my signature. I said I wasn't accusing

Akbar of forging my signature.

"So, you did write *Jinnah*," says Seamus Milne. Out of the bag burst pussy. The UK and Pakistani papers picked up the story and when they called me, I told them that if Gen. Musharraf was handing out diplomatic posts for writing *Jinnah*, I would be quite happy to be Pakistan's ambassador to Tahiti, and will look after Pakistan's interests after I've looked after some of my own. It was a joke! *Dawn* printed it.

I subsequently met General (no longer supreme) and Mrs Musharraf at a friend's party and Mrs Musharraf asked me why my name was not on the film. I told her, and she, and the general, who was listening, said words to the effect of "that's absurd!"

So, to the latest of such reverses: I've written a play called *Karna: Warrior of The Sun*, based on the *Mahabharata*.

My good friend, a producer, proposed to stage it in India in partnership with the National School of Drama. Great!

He subsequently informs me that one of the members of the governing body of the National School insisted on cancelling the partnership on the grounds that the play was written by a non-Hindu, resident in Britain, with a reputation for being a Marxist.

Partnership duly cancelled...

O tempora! O mores!  
But yes, it will reach the stage!

Subhani



## Did Fadnavis fiddle while Mumbai nearly drowned?



Shobhaa's Take

Rain... rain... go away... Little Donald wants to play..." While Mumbai drowned, the rest of the world stayed afloat, and in particular Big Bully Donald Trump, who tossed away any thoughts about a peace deal with Iran by declaring it was "over".

Closer to home, Mumbai just about managed to keep its head above water. Without writing another whiney column about the "multiple organ failures" of the BMC (Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation), which is the primary civic body responsible for the civic infrastructure and day-to-day administration of Mumbai, and also happens to be India's richest civic body, I do need to vent. When a megapolis virtually shuts down for two to three days, it is not just unacceptable but borders on the criminal.

A crime minus any punishment. Year after year, Mumbai comes to a standstill because of an annual event — the devastating monsoon. Note: This is an annual event. Not something that takes Mumbai by surprise. The Mumbai Monsoon is not an ambush. It is not a sneaky stealth attack that catches the city off guard. It is a closely tracked weather pattern. A known beast. "A Hungry Tide", that sweeps over a city with due warning. Year after year. Despite its predictability and well-established savage behaviour, the lack of preparedness by the civic authorities is nothing short of vicious negligence. It is a wonder, in a city that boasts of the country's top legal brains, nobody has taken the authorities to court on behalf of citizens. When things get desperate, we invoke the mysterious "Spirit of Mumbai". Mumbaiers are expected to miraculously rise to the

occasion with zero help, and even less responsibility, from those civic bosses and politicians sitting pretty in their homes and offices, offering lame excuses for all the disasters inflicted on sitting ducks — ordinary citizens.

To add insult to injury, just as Mumbai was staggering back to life, the ineffective and weak Maharashtra government has announced a ₹13,000-crore "flood plan". Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis rolled out the plan in the state Legislative Assembly — and nobody laughed! The BMC is currently hanging on to a staggering ₹78,000 crores in FDs: which is taxpayers' money.

What is it doing lying around in FDs when there is a dire need to disburse funds right now and rescue Mumbai before some more disasters and deaths occur? Let's not even talk about The Missing Link — which is CM Fadnavis's biggest folly. A folly that exposed the worst in our system. The much-touted "Missing Link" (what a strange name) collapsed before it had even taken off. The "engineering marvel", built at a cost of ₹6,695 crores and described as a "feat", the bypass with two major tunnels connecting Mumbai and Pune, was inaugurated only on May 1, 2026! It is already being described as a gigantic embarrassment...

Not to worry. The wedding of Anshula marked the first marriage in Boney Kapoor's family. It was celebrated with all the traditional trimmings associat-

To add insult to injury, just as Mumbai was staggering back to life, the ineffective and weak Maharashtra government has announced a ₹13,000-crore 'flood plan'

vehicles and warned motorists about the landslide. They deserve recognition and gratitude. But hey... that does not absolve the administration from taking full responsibility, owning up and explaining where that money was spent — who pocketed how much. Rampant corruption in high places has paralysed Mumbai for decades... But the worm is ready to turn!

Despite the downpour that converted Mumbai into a filthy, dangerous swamp, there was reason to cheer — two high-profile celebrity *shaadis* were celebrated with the expected *dhoon dhaam* — nothing was allowed to dampen the spirits of Bollywood revellers. Mumbai loves its "Monsoon Weddings", especially if those involve our movie folks. Aamir Khan, 61, lived up to his well-established reputation as a life-long, diehard non-conformist, by marrying for the third time, surrounded by his loving family (which includes two former wives and their children).

The latest Khan wedding generated such a strong buzz on social media that for a few short, sweet hours we forgot all about our soggy, miserable, rain-soaked lives, and joined the party. Hurrah! Aamir set a new fashion trend for desi bridegrooms by wearing heavy anklets and a nose clip. Disappointingly, a beautiful "maang tikka", *sindoor* and *mangalsutra* were missing from his attire.

Not to worry. The wedding of Anshula marked the first marriage in Boney Kapoor's family. It was celebrated with all the traditional trimmings associat-

ed with a boisterous Punjabi *shaadi*. Rohan Thakkar, the lucky bridegroom, was around. Of course. If fans cared to look for him, beyond the dazzling guests dancing energetically, while the rest of the city limped back to semi-normalcy.

Hallelujah! At least one global person was home and dry even if the world was crying "foul". President Donald Trump getting the FIFA boss man to revoke a "red card" during FIFA's fiercely fought World Cup football matches has created a permanent black mark on the reputation of the Beautiful Game. But why is everyone so shocked by Donald Trump's obnoxious abuse of power? He is a sore loser. An abusive loser. He has just made that official. In US striker Folarin's place, any other sportsman would have felt humiliated about the embarrassing intervention by no less a person than the President of the country.

This is only the second time in World Cup history that FIFA has overturned a suspension for a player sent off during the tournament. Even worse, Gianni Infantino, FIFA's president, should have resigned from his position, rather than surrender to a bully. Tell the world, Signor Infantino, now that you've been stripped of all authority and dignity... how will you appear in history? And please... how are you living with yourself after such a public disgrace?

But guess who had the last laugh? Belgium! Didn't you love the way the team mocked President Trump after their win over the United States?

So... who are you betting on, folks? Like the rest of the football crazy world, I am crushing on the Viral Viking. Seven goals in four games so far. And that hair... uff... Haaland is Samsón! I am rowing away with this striker!

I am looking forward to a France-Norway Final on Sunday, July 19... Let the best boot win!

Instagram handle @ShobhaDe; Twitter handle @DeShobhaa

## LETTERS

## TOO BIG TO FAIL

The Argentina vs Egypt clash in Fifa 26 proved a thriller. Yet it has raised many questions on the conduct of referees. Major controversies had erupted in earlier matches involving Lionel Messi and Argentina. Officials and VAR came under heavy scrutiny for allegedly favouring the defending champions and overlooking fouls committed by Messi. Familiar with "Banks too big to fail", we must concede that some players too cannot fail as huge stakes are involved in associations' and advertising revenue that would need to keep apex teams and players in the finals. India's cricket selectors may similarly persist with wonder kid Sooryavanshi who has been continuously scoring runs fewer than his age. The sport algorithm will ever remain thus.

R. Narayanan  
Navi Mumbai

## BOYCOTT BULLY

PARENTS of a nine-year-old girl who allegedly died by suicide at a school in Jaipur last year have released new CCTV footage from her classroom and school. They allege that their daughter was repeatedly bullied by her classmates and their complaint left on deaf ears. They demand strict action against school authorities under the Juvenile Justice Act. A school should employ qualified counsellors and strengthen CCTV surveillance besides strongly implementing anti-bullying policies. As parents we must also ensure proper upbringing. The civil society could effect a light boycott of the culprits' families so there is some pressure on them and their kid to change mindsets.

Bal Govind  
Noida, UP

## TURNCOATS VALUED

THREE RAJYA SABHA TMC MPs who resigned from their parent party and the Rajya Sabha have now joined BJP. Immediately after joining BJP, they have been rewarded. They are now its official candidates in the RS elections on July 24. It is clear that the whole drama of resignation by these MPs had been staged for this purpose. Sushmita Dev has a history of defection. Less than 10 years ago she was in the Congress. "Worshipping the rising sun" seems to be the policy of Ms Dev. However, the policy of rewarding turncoats by BJP may backfire as loyalists are sidelined and defectors are promoted. This may not be good for the party in the long run.

D.B. Madan  
New Delhi



quick BITES

| INDICATORS             | %                   |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Sensex                 | 77,569.39 1.08      |
| Nifty 50               | 24,206.90 1.02      |
| S&P 500*               | 7,550.78 0.09       |
| Dollar (₹)             | 95.40 0.01          |
| Pound Sterling (₹)     | 127.98 0.04         |
| Euro (₹)               | 109.07 0.04         |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹)       | 143,840* 1.460 1.00 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)*  | 76.19 -0.14         |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield    | 6.716 -0.56         |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 4.557 0.018         |

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Volkswagen brings Tayron SUV at ₹41.99 L

Volkswagen, expanded its SUV-line-up by introducing a lower-spec variant of the Tayron SUV for the Indian market. The new Tayron Life trim is positioned below its flagship SUV the Tayron R-Line and is priced at ₹41.99 lakh at Delhi showroom. The new Tayron Life, a premium 5-seater SUV becomes the brand's second locally assembled model this year, is aimed at buyers looking for more space, technology and everyday practicality.

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Stablecoin use could raise financial risks, says expert

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, JULY 10

Privately issued dollar-backed stablecoins are moving into the mainstream global payments ecosystem with the US advancing the Genius Act and more than 140 companies, including Visa, MasterCard, Google, Samsung and IBM, backing the OpenUSD initiative.

However, wider adoption could pose risks to global financial stability if the underlying US Treasury securities come under stress, according to Vivek Iyer, partner and financial risk advisory services leader at Grant Thornton Bharat.

Stablecoins are digital currencies pegged to the value of a fiat currency. OpenUSD is a privately issued dollar-pegged stablecoin backed by more than 140 companies.

Under the OpenUSD framework, participating companies issue dollar-backed stablecoins that can be used as a medium of exchange across merchants accepting them. The initial focus is expected to be on expanding

DIGITAL CURRENCIES

- Stablecoins are digital currencies.
- Open USD is a private dollar-pegged stablecoin.
- It is meant for transactions instead of currencies and the Genius Act allows these stablecoins to be backed by short-term US treasury bills.
- Transaction and usage fees to emerge only after the ecosystem reaches scale.

Focus will be on driving adoption rather than profits. MONEY laundering and terrorist financing risks may arise.



adoption, with transaction and usage fees likely to be introduced after the ecosystem reaches scale.

"Countries impose current and capital account restrictions in line with their national interests. Stablecoins offer an opportunity to transact without many of these limitations," he said.

He also questioned the provision under the Genius Act permitting stablecoins to be backed by short-term US Treasury bills. According to him, the structure could encourage govern-

ments to rely more heavily on short-term borrowing, leading to fiscal discipline and increasing financial stability risks over time.

The RBI has already warned that private stablecoins could 'threaten domestic monetary sovereignty' and financial stability. Iyer said privately issued digital currencies operating outside the banking system could reduce the RBI's ability to regulate money supply through interest rates, liquidity measures and open market operations.

Soren showcases investment potential in Jharkhand

FC CORRESPONDENT RANCHI, JULY 10

Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren held a series of business-to-government (B2G) meetings with industry bodies, global investors and corporate delegations to explore collaboration across tourism, manufacturing, renewable energy, healthcare, skill development and industrial infrastructure. These were part



of the National Stakeholders' Consultation 2026 event. A delegation from Singapore, led by Simon Wong Wie Kuen, High Commissioner of Singapore to India, expressed keen interest in

long-term partnerships with Jharkhand. CII representatives presented proposals solar and wind power, smart metering, transmission infrastructure, grid, renewable energy and others.

FICCI discussed ways to position Jharkhand as a leading destination for nature tourism, destination weddings, sports tourism. EaseMyTrip, MakeMyTrip expressed interest in state's tourism.

Investor wealth up by ₹5.8 L cr as mkts surge

Positive business updates from banks, MF inflows boosts sentiment

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JULY 10

Benchmark equity indices rebounded on Friday, with the Sensex rising 827.57 points, or 1.08 per cent, to close at 77,569.39 and the Nifty-50 advancing 244.1 points, or 1.02 per cent, to settle at 24,206.90, supported by buying from foreign and domestic institutional investors.

Investors' wealth rose by more than ₹5.8 lakh crore, with the BSE's total m-cap rising to over ₹481.75 lakh crore (about \$5.05 trillion) FPIs were net buyers of equities worth ₹2,603.72 crore while DIIs purchased shares worth ₹2,019.68 crore.

Sentiment was also aided by robust inflows into mid-cap and small-cap mutual funds in June, according to monthly industry data released during market hours.

IT stocks led the gains, with the BSE IT index rising 2.01 per cent after Q1 results of TCS boosted sentiment. TCS closed 1.04 per cent higher at ₹2,069.05.

"The market appears to be on track for a strong recovery. Positive busi-

STRONG COMEBACK

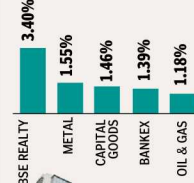
- Sensex gains 827.57 points.
- Nifty-50 up 1.02%, to close at 24,206.90.
- FPIs were net buyers of equities worth ₹2,603.72 cr.
- DIIs were net buyers by ₹ 2,019.68 cr.

Market investors' overall wealth rose by ₹5.80 lakh cr.



IT stocks were among top gainers with BSE IT index up 2.01%.

SECTORAL GAINERS



BSE's market capitalisation rose to ₹481.75 lakh cr.

ness updates from banks, along with a constructive outlook for the IT sector driven by in-line estimates, a potential rebound in global spending, and

AI-related opportunities, have set the stage for an optimistic start to the Q1 earnings season," said Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit.

AI, IRAN WAR RISKS WEIGH ON INDIAN IT FIRMS' EARNINGS

New Delhi, July 10: HCL Technologies, Wipro and Tech Mahindra are set to report earnings as their investor base increasingly questions the value of traditional information technology (IT) services in the age of artificial intelligence.

The sector is weighed down by macroeconomic uncertainty, exacerbated by the Middle East conflict, and the disruptive impact of AI adoption. The twin pressures have weighed on sentiment, driving down shares this year.

Negative sentiment toward the sector deepened after US-listed peer Accenture Plc forecast slower-than-expected quarterly revenue, reinforcing concerns over weakening demand and sending the NSE IT Index even lower.

On Thursday, TCS met net income expectations. — Bloomberg

WhatsApp, Telegram reply to govt notices

FC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 10

WhatsApp has submitted its response to the ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) regarding the proposed launch of the WhatsApp 'usernames'

feature in India.

The reply, received late on Thursday night, is currently being examined by government officials. They are evaluating privacy, security and misuse-related concerns linked to the upcoming feature, sources said on Friday.

The username feature allows people on the messaging platform to communicate without sharing their phone numbers. The government flagged concerns that it could materially increase online fraud, phishing, digital arrest scams, and impersonation

attacks. It had also directed the platform not to launch the feature until consultations on the issue are completed.

Sources also said that Telegram also submitted a reply to government notice over its controversial 'username' feature.

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

India U-23 clinch 3 Asian bronzes

Ordos, China: Middle-distance runners headlined India's performance on the second day of the inaugural edition of Asian U-23 Athletics Championships as the country won three bronze medals here on Friday. Shakeel set the ball rolling for India as he won a bronze in the men's 800m. He clocked 1:48.78 seconds. Vinod Kumar B, the second Indian in the 800m final, finished fourth with a time of 1:49.10s. India's other bronze medal came in the women's 800m race through Bhumeswary Devi Hudrom who clocked 2:10.20s. However, it was a disappointing day for Vaishnavi Rajendra Rawal as she finished fifth with a time of 2:10.83. Uzbekistan's Jonbibi Hukmova won gold in the women's 800m with a time of 2:08.41. Japan's Kurumi Suguro took the silver in 2:09.42. In an exciting men's 200m race, Abhay Singh clinched the bronze medal with a time of 20.96 seconds. China's Youwen Huang won gold in 20.43 seconds while Japan's Kota Uematsu (20.58 seconds) settled for the silver. India's Sharuk Khan finished fourth in the men's 3000m steeplechase with a time of 9:14.14s. — PTI

Naveen-Musa eye podium finish

Kigali City, Rwanda: Indian rally driver Naveen Puligilla and his co-driver Musa Sherif will look for another podium finish at the Rwanda Mountain Gorilla Rally, which is the third round of the FIA African Rally Championship (ARC), starting here on Saturday. The duo completed the shake-down and qualifying stage on Friday.

The Duran Racing team's Puligilla and Sherif of Kasaragod will drive a Ford Fiesta, serviced by MRU Motorsports Africa, in the ARC3 category. The total distance is 307.52km while the 18 Special Stages of competitive distance forms 252km of demanding mountain stages on Saturday and Sunday. "The recce has given us a good understanding of the stages. The terrain is quite technical with changing grip levels of the mountain roads and we are prepared for it," said Puligilla, the Indian National Rally champion of 2025 in the 3T class. — PTI

Bristol, July 10: Shreyas Iyer's valiant unbeaten 80 went in vain as Harry Brook and Phil Salt made a mockery of the 159-run target with blazing unbeaten half-centuries, powering England to a series-clinching nine-wicket win over India in the fourth T20 International here on Thursday.

Opting to bat, Iyer appeared to be batting on a different surface, in his 49-ball 80 not out, his second as skipper, to guide India to 158 for 7. He struck five sixes and four fours, holding the innings together as wickets tumbled around him on a typical pacy English wicket.

In stark contrast to the India innings, England were never troubled by the modest target and dominated the Indian bowlers from the outset as the home side romped home in 13.5 overs to take a 3-0 unassailable lead in the five-match series.

Brook led from the front, blazing 79 not out off 35 balls, laced with eight fours and four sixes, while Phil Salt played perfect fiddle in a 42-ball 59 not out (9x4, 1x6) as the Indian bowlers struggled to get the wickets.

The defeat will be particularly alarming for the reigning T20 world champions, who have now lost back-to-back series within four months of their title triumph in Ahmedabad on March 8.



England batsman Harry Brook plays a ramp shot during the fourth T20 match against India at the Seat Unique Stadium in Bristol, south west England, on Thursday. Brook scored unbeaten 79 with eight boundaries and four sixes. — AFP

For skipper Iyer, who succeeded Suryakumar Yadav after India's title triumph, it was a fifth defeat in six matches as he continues to search for his maiden victory as captain.

India had earlier suffered a humiliating 0-2 defeat to Ireland, while they now trail 0-3 to England after the series opener was washed out.

The final T20I will be played at Southampton on Saturday.

Missing Harshit Rana and Varun Chakravarthy because of injuries, India had Prasad Krishna with the new ball and England had a slow start before Jos Buttler was removed in the second over by Arshdeep Singh.

From there on, it was a one-way traffic for

England as Salt, fresh from his match-winning 70 at Nottingham, took on a wayward Prince Yadav who bowled a no-ball and a wide and was hit for two fours by the English opener. — PTI

Brief Scores: India 158 for 7 in 20 overs (Shreyas Iyer 80 n.o., Jofra Archer 2/20, Josh Tongue 2/36) lost to England 159 for 1 in 13.5 overs (Harry Brooks 79 n.o., Phil Salt 59 n.o.).

TEAM INDIA TRY TO AVOID WHITEWASH

Southampton, July 10: An Indian team with its back to the wall, led by a captain, who is equally cornered, will look to prevent England from inflicting a seemingly imminent 4-0 'whitewash' when the two contrasting sides clash in the fifth T20 International here on Saturday.

Led by Shreyas Iyer, the Indian team's journey started in the damp and windy conditions of Belfast. It then covered north of England in Durham to finally be in the southern city of Southampton to close the five-match series in which one game was washed out.

In the six UK cities (including Belfast), one thing has remained common — Shreyas Iyer's fortunes have remained wretched as he is still without his first win since becoming captain for India. — PTI

Live on TV

FIFTH T20 England vs India from 7 pm on Sony Sports Ten 1



India's Smriti Mandhana hits a boundary on the first day of the first Women Test match against England at Lord's cricket ground in London, on Friday. Smriti scored 83 runs. — AFP

Strong start for women

London, July 10: Smriti Mandhana's aggressive 83 and skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's solid 58 carried a laboursome India to 202 for 5 against England at 202 for 5 on the opening day of the one-off Women's Test here on Friday.

However, Harmanpreet fell at the stroke of Tea, bowled by a lovely off-break from Mady Villiers, to leave the visitors in a bit of turmoil. Deepthi Sharma is batting on 5.

India had made 122 for 3 in the first session, courtesy a breezy 64-run stand for the third wicket

BRIEF SCORES

At Tea: India Women 202/5 in 51.2 overs (Smriti Mandhana 83, Jemimah Rodrigues 35, Harmanpreet Kaur 58) vs England Women.

between Mandhana and Jemimah Rodrigues (35, 38 balls). They needed a continuation of that in the middle phase to retain their control, and the tourists did just that through Mandhana and Harmanpreet. The fourth-wicket pair milked 89 runs as India continued to domi-

nate a bit off-colour England bowling unit.

Mady Villiers and Lauren Filer gave them a semblance of control but Harmanpreet was equal to the task, driving them through cover region.

However, Mandhana fell while approaching a century, edging pacer Issy Wong to stumper Amy Jones.

Earlier, England elected to field once they won the toss, and the decision seemed vindicated as they reduced India to 37 for 2, dismissing Shafali Verma and Yastika Bhatia inside seven overs. — PTI

Asunta seeks help from Ministry in harrasement case

New Delhi, July 10: Former India captain Asunta Lakra has urged the Sports Ministry to intervene urgently against what she described as the institutional protection of sexual harassment, intimidation and victimisation of women athletes in hockey, a charge that has been denied by the national federation.

In a strongly worded letter addressed to the Sports Ministry, the Sports Authority of India (SAI), Indian Olympic Association president P. T. Usha and TOPS officials, Lakra alleged that individuals accused of misconduct were being protected while those raising concerns were subjected to intimidation and retaliation. "I write to you not merely as a former captain of the Indian Women's Hockey Team, a member of the Executive Board of Hockey India, and a selector, but as an Indian woman who chose to speak up when young female athletes were being sexually harassed," wrote Lakra.

"For over a decade, I had

● Asunta Lakra alleged that she faced threats and smear campaign after raising the issue.

the privilege of wearing the India jersey. Throughout my career, I believed that the greatest responsibility of a senior player is not only to win medals but also to protect the next generation.

"It is in that spirit that I brought to the attention of the Government of Jharkhand allegations of sexual harassment by Mr. Sudhir Gola at the Eklavya Hockey Academy in Ranchi. What followed has shaken my faith in the system."

Lakra, who was part of the Indian team during the 2006 and 2010 Commonwealth Games and Asia Cup twice, alleged that she faced threats and smear campaign after raising the issue.

Lakra also accused Hockey India Secretary General Bholanath Singh of threatening her over the issue. — PTI

ZVEREV PUTS AN ENDS TO 'FERY' TALE IN LAST 4

London, July 10: French Open champion Alexander Zverev ended the remarkable run of British wildcard Arthur Fery with a dominant semifinal victory on Friday to reach his first Wimbledon final.

The second seed will face either reigning champion Jannik Sinner or seven-time winner Novak Djokovic for the title after seeing off Fery 7-6 (7/0), 6-2, 6-4 on Centre Court. Zverev is the first German man to reach the final at the All England Club since Boris Becker in 1995. He stands one win from ending his nation's 35-year wait for a men's Wimbledon champion. — AFP

CZECH MATES TO MEET IN FINAL OF WIMBLEDON

London, July 10: Karolina Muchova and Linda Noskova will put their friendship on hold when they fight for the Wimbledon title on Saturday after the Czech pair took contrasting paths to their first All England Club final.

Muchova and Noskova have been friends for several years, bonding off the court and playing doubles together at the 2024 Paris Olympics. Muchova made her WTA main draw debut nine years ago and has been on the cusp of making her breakthrough at the Grand Slams. She was beaten in three sets by Iga Swiatek in her only previous final at the 2023 French Open. — AFP





Editor's  
TAKE

## India–Australia ties come of age

Modi's third visit to Australia, shows a relationship that has moved past symbolism into the business of contracts and commitments

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi touched down in Melbourne on Wednesday evening, fresh from a warm reception in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, he was on an important leg of a three-nation Indo-Pacific tour. This is his third visit to Australia as Prime Minister – a frequency no Indian premier has matched – and it says something about how central Canberra has become to New Delhi's calculus east of Singapore defined by 'Act East' policy.

At the third Australia-India Annual Summit, Modi and his host Anthony Albanese oversaw what officials describe as eighteen distinct outcomes: a Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation that upgrades the relationship with an Annual Defence Ministers' Dialogue, a new maritime security roadmap, and – most striking – a commercial uranium supply agreement building on the 2014 Civil Nuclear Agreement, under which Australia has so far shipped uranium to India just once, in 2017, to feed India's ambitious 100-gigawatt nuclear power goal.

Talks on the long-pending Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement were formally accelerated, building on the 2022 Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement that was India's first developed-country trade deal in a decade. Education, critical minerals, and cultural repatriation rounded out a genuinely wide canvas.

Trade negotiators have set a target of AUD 100 billion in two-way commerce by 2030, roughly double current levels, and Thursday's acceleration announcement gives that number a fighting chance. For decades, India and Australia were bound loosely by cricket and Commonwealth ties rather than strategic convergence; the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, now six years old, has since matured from rhetoric into structure. A 2021 logistics agreement already lets warships use each other's ports, and the new defence declaration reads less like an aspiration than a maintenance upgrade on an alliance-adjacent partnership.

But it was not smooth sailing for the Indian Prime Minister. Rights groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, used the visit to press Canberra to raise India's democratic backsliding, a criticism that has trailed Modi's Australian visits since 2023. It was indeed a low point of the visit but was not allowed to overshadow the visit.

Where does this leave the two countries? Well, the trajectory is unmistakably upward, but increasingly instrumental rather than sentimental. Both governments now speak the language of supply-chain security, critical minerals, and an "open, rules-based" Indo-Pacific. The Quad remains the scaffolding; bilateral deals are increasingly the substance built upon it. If the Jakarta leg was about breadth – reviving an old civilisational friendship into hard defence contracts like BrahMos – the Australia leg was about depth, converting decades of trade and strategic dialogue into binding commitments. The test now is delivery: whether CECA is actually concluded, whether uranium shipments follow the ink, and whether the partnership can absorb criticism without either side flinching.

# Viksit Bharat demands a techno-bureaucracy

To achieve Viksit Bharat by 2047, the existing administrative framework must be strengthened. India needs a governance model that combines the strengths of experienced administrators with the knowledge and analytical capabilities of technical experts. A practical solution would be to establish a structured techno-bureaucratic framework within the government



MONI  
MADASWAMY

India's aspiration to become a developed nation by 2047 is not merely an economic objective; it is a civilizational mission. The vision of Viksit Bharat encompasses technological leadership, food, nutrition and health security, climate resilience, digital inclusion, energy security, and global competitiveness. Achieving these ambitions, however, requires more than investments and infrastructure. It demands a fundamental transformation in the way India governs itself.

While India's economy and society have undergone remarkable changes over the past three decades, many aspects of its administrative architecture continue to reflect structures designed for a different era. One of the most significant yet least discussed challenges lies in the composition of senior leadership within the Government of India. Today, strategic policymaking positions at the level of Joint Secretary and above are overwhelmingly occupied by traditional career civil service cadres.

There is no dispute regarding the historic contribution of India's civil services to nation-building. However, the governance challenges of the twenty-first century increasingly require a combination of administrative capability and deep domain expertise. The world is entering an era shaped by artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, cybersecurity, biotechnology, climate adaptation, digital public infrastructure, precision agriculture, and advanced healthcare systems. Public policy in these sectors cannot rely solely on administrative experience. It requires leaders who possess first-hand knowledge of the technologies, scientific principles, and institutional ecosystems involved.

Ironically, India already possesses a vast reservoir of such expertise within its own public S&T institutions. Scientists, Engineers, Technologists, and Research leaders from organisations such as ISRO, DRDO, DAE, CSIR, ICMR, ICAR, IMD, FSI, WII, ICFRE, NIC, C-DAC, STQC, and NCMRWF have played a pivotal role in advancing national development. They have built satellites, secured strategic technologies, strengthened food security, developed digital governance platforms, expanded scientific research, and enhanced public service delivery.

Yet, despite their immense contributions, these experts remain largely excluded from the highest levels of policy leadership. Their career progression follows separate scientific and technical cadres, placing them outside the mainstream empanelment mechanisms used for senior government appointments by the



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The writer is Professor Emeritus and Chairman, Centre for Agricultural Informatics and e-Governance Research Studies (CAIRS), Shobhit Institute of Engineering and Technology (Deemed-to-be University), Meerut; Former Director General, National Informatics Centre (NIC), Government of India

Department of Personnel and Training. As a result, many critical policy decisions affecting technology, health, agriculture, climate change, digital governance, and innovation are formulated without adequate participation from those possessing the deepest domain knowledge.

This disconnect creates a structural paradox and administrative inertia. The individuals who design and implement many of India's most important national programmes often have limited opportunities to influence the strategic decisions that shape and implement those programmes. The consequences are increasingly visible: Ministries frequently depend on external consultants, advisory bodies, and contractual experts to bridge knowledge gaps. While external expertise certainly has value, it raises a pertinent question: why should India overlook its own institutional scientific talent while seeking expertise from outside?

The challenge is not one of replacing the existing administrative framework but of strengthening it. India needs a governance model that combines the strengths of experienced administrators with the knowledge and analytical capabilities of scientific and technical experts.

A practical solution would be to create a structured techno-bureaucratic framework within government. Just as officers from the IAS, IFS, IPS, IFOs, IRS, IES, ISS, and other organised services are deployed across ministries and departments, senior scientists and technologists should be eligible for empanelment and strategic leadership assignments where their expertise directly supports national priorities.

Such a reform would not diminish the role of civil servants. Instead, it would create a complementary leadership stream that enriches pol-

icymaking through evidence-based expertise and long-term institutional memory. To facilitate this transition, selected scientific and technical professionals should undergo structured administrative training under Mission Karmayogi. The curriculum should include constitutional governance, public administration, public finance, legislative drafting, inter-governmental coordination, and policy analysis. By combining technical depth with administrative competence, India can cultivate a new generation of techno-bureaucrats capable of addressing increasingly complex governance challenges.

The benefits would be significant. Policies would become more evidence-driven and future-oriented. Ministries would gain access to leaders who understand both the scientific dimensions and implementation realities of their sectors. Decision-making would become faster, more informed, and better aligned with national priorities.

Equally important is the need to strengthen accountability throughout the governance system. Senior officials—whether administrative or technical—should undertake periodic field assignments at district, block, and village levels, and should be encouraged to attend focussed workshops at national levels. Such exposure would ensure that policymaking remains grounded in local realities and citizen needs.

Performance evaluation systems must also evolve. Career progression should be linked not only to tenure but also to measurable outcomes, including service delivery, transparency, innovation, fiscal efficiency, and citizen satisfaction. Digital governance platforms now provide unprecedented opportunities to measure outcomes and strengthen accountability across all levels of administration, especially below district levels.

A prime example of where this integrated expertise is urgently needed is the rural sector. The 16th Finance Commission's allocation of ₹8 Lakh Crore to Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) provides a unique opportunity to integrate digital governance, agricultural innovation, local planning, and rural entrepreneurship into a unified development model capable of delivering measurable returns on public investment.

Maximizing this massive fiscal devolution requires a techno-administrative approach that can seamlessly deploy smart irrigation projects, AI-driven climate-resilient farming, and blockchain-based supply chains directly at the village cluster level.

## India's mental health challenge needs more than awareness



PRAVEEN  
GUPTA

### 2<sup>ND</sup> OPINION

Mental health is no longer a silent issue. It is now one of the largest public health challenges facing the world, India included. According to an analysis from the "Global Burden of Disease Study" published in The Lancet, anxiety disorder patients in India increased by 123.5% from 1990 to 2023. It also pointed out that there has been a steep rise in the cases of depressive disorder and anxiety after Covid-19. However, they are more than just numbers. Behind every number is a person struggling with stress, fear, loneliness, burnout, sleep problems or emotional pain. Many are students, young professionals, working parents and elderly people trying to cope quietly every day.

The study also points out an important reality – mental disorders are now one of the leading causes of disability across the world, even more than many major physical ill-

nesses. This should make all of us pause and rethink how we look at mental health in India. To its credit, the government of India has recognised this growing crisis. The Union Budget 2026-27 has placed stronger focus on expanding mental health and trauma care infrastructure. This is an important and welcome step. However, infrastructure alone will not solve the problem. India certainly needs more hospitals, more counselling centres and more trained mental health professionals. We also need to focus on prevention, early support and community-based care.

Mental health can no longer remain limited to big cities or specialised hospitals. One of the biggest concerns is that mental health problems are increasing most rapidly among teenagers and young adults. This is a very sensitive stage of life where emotional health shapes education, relationships, confidence and future careers. Unfortunately, many young people today are growing up under constant pressure. Academic competition, social media comparison, financial insecurity, loneliness and lack of emotional communication inside families are affecting mental well-being deeply. Many children are connected online all day but emotionally disconnected in real life. Anxiety and depression have also increased among women in the post pandemic years due to emotional stress, responsibilities at home, work-related pressure, and societal demands.

Chronic anxiety and depression can disturb sleep, concentration, memory and overall quality of life. Long-term stress may also increase the risk of headaches, hypertension, stroke risk factors, and other neurological problems

indirectly through lifestyle changes. India, therefore, needs a much broader mental health movement. Mental health education should begin in schools. Every school and college should have access to trained counsellors.

Even at the workplace, conversations around burnout, anxiety and emotional fatigue need to be normalised. Primary healthcare doctors should receive basic mental health training so that early symptoms are recognised before conditions become severe. At the community level, we must reduce stigma. Even today, many families hesitate to seek psychiatric help because of fear, shame or social judgement. Mental illness should be treated like any other health condition – without embarrassment. Technology can also play a major role. Tele-consultations, digital counselling platforms, and regional-language mental health services can improve access in smaller towns and rural India where specialists remain limited. More importantly, we need to realise that mental well-being is also connected with issues such as education, job prospects, social welfare, family matters, and the economy.

A country cannot progress without ensuring the mental well-being of its people. India is on the right track by taking the first step in terms of policy and funding. The next step would be implementation on the ground. Mental well-being needs to become affordable, available, and acceptable for all Indians. This way, India will emerge a better nation.

The writer is Chairman, Marengo Asia International Institute of Neuro and Spine (MAIINS)

### DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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### POLITICS SHOULD UNITE CITIZENS, NOT DIVIDE FAMILIES

Politics is meant to be debated in Parliament, not allowed to poison friendships and family relationships. While political leaders are expected to disagree, ordinary citizens need not become foot soldiers of any party. Unfortunately, many people now treat criticism of their favourite leader or party as a personal attack, replacing reason with blind loyalty. Political discussions increasingly descend into hostility, with friends and even elderly citizens exchanging insults over issues beyond their control.

More worrying is the tendency to focus on a leader's attire, appearance or style rather than governance, policies and performance. Likewise, official foreign visits by ministers are often dismissed as leisure trips, ignoring the complexities of diplomacy. Leaders should be

judged by their competence, integrity and public service—not ideological or religious affinity.

The greatest threat to democracy is not rivalry between political parties but growing intolerance among citizens. Healthy democracies thrive on informed debate and mutual respect, not unquestioning allegiance. Governments will come and go, but damaged relationships are far harder to rebuild. No political ideology is worth sacrificing civility, respect and cherished human bonds. Democracy is strengthened by informed dialogue, mutual respect and tolerance. Political differences should never outweigh humanity, because governments change with time, but broken friendships, divided families and lost trust are far harder to restore.

AP THIRUVADI | CHENNAI

Please send your letter to the [info@dailypioneer.com](mailto:info@dailypioneer.com). In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

### Justice must be swift as well as fair

The recent Gujarat High Court judgment upholding the convictions in the 2008 Ahmedabad serial blasts case has reaffirmed the common citizen's faith in the judiciary. The horrific attacks claimed 56 innocent lives, injured nearly 200 people and terrorised the nation for over an hour.

The court's decision to uphold death sentences for 38 convicts and life imprisonment for 11 others sends a strong message that terrorism will not go unpunished. For the families who lost loved ones, the verdict offers some measure of closure, though no judgment can compensate for the loss of precious human lives or erase the emotional scars left behind. Justice, however, loses much of its meaning when it arrives after years of waiting.

Victims and their families deserve timely resolution, not prolonged uncertainty that deepens their suffering. The judiciary continues to command immense public trust because it remains the last refuge of justice. To strengthen that faith further, cases involving terrorism and other heinous crimes must be heard and decided without avoidable delays. Justice should not only be fair and impartial; it must also be delivered within a reasonable time.

SUNIL OKHADE | INDORE

### West Asia cannot afford another escalation

The renewed military confrontation between the United States and Iran threatens to undo the fragile ceasefire that had briefly raised hopes of stability in West Asia. Fresh US airstrikes followed by Iranian missile attacks on Gulf countries have once again pushed the region towards a dangerous conflict with consequences extending far beyond its borders.

The Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly one-fifth of the world's oil and gas supplies pass, remains at the centre of the crisis. Any disruption to shipping through this vital waterway risks triggering higher energy prices, supply-chain disruptions and economic uncertainty worldwide. The latest violence has also cast serious doubt over planned negotiations on reopening the Strait and addressing Iran's contentious nuclear programme. Military retaliation may satisfy immediate strategic objectives, but it seldom produces lasting peace. Continued escalation only heightens the risk of miscalculation and draws more countries into an already volatile conflict. The international community must intensify diplomatic efforts to restore the ceasefire and bring both sides back to the negotiating table. Dialogue remains the only sustainable path towards regional stability and global energy security.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

### Elder care requires collective action

This refers to "Elder care is not optional, it is a social responsibility" (July 9). The article rightly highlights how rapid urbanisation and changing family structures have weakened traditional support systems for senior citizens. While restoring old values is desirable, practical solutions are equally essential. Emotional bonds cannot be legislated, but effective community support can certainly be created. Resident Welfare Associations can maintain registries of elderly people living alone, local police can conduct regular welfare visits, and corporate social responsibility funds can strengthen neighbourhood care initiatives. Such measures are affordable, practical and capable of significantly improving the safety and dignity of senior citizens. At the same time, India must prepare for the challenges of an ageing population by strengthening healthcare, age-friendly urban infrastructure and workplace policies that support caregivers. Old-age homes alone cannot address the growing need, nor can nuclear families shoulder the entire responsibility.

A balanced approach combining legal safeguards, community participation and intergenerational engagement is the need of the hour. How a society treats its elderly reflects its moral character.

VEDA CHIDANAND | BENGALURU



# Renewable energy transition for a climate-resilient India

For India, which imports nearly 85 per cent of its crude oil and more than half of its natural gas requirements, energy independence is no longer merely an environmental aspiration but a strategic imperative. Its rapid transition to renewable energy is emerging as the cornerstone of economic resilience and climate action



SATENDRA SINGH

Every 10 July, Global Energy Independence Day underscores a simple truth: a nation's energy security is inseparable from its economic and strategic stability. A prolonged war in Eastern Europe, unrest across the Middle East, disrupted shipping lanes, and a fresh flash-point between Iran and the United States have rattled oil markets in recent months, exposing how vulnerable countries remain when they depend on distant, unstable regions for fuel. Few nations feel that exposure as sharply as India, which imports close to 85% of its crude oil and more than half its natural gas - a dependence that shows up directly in import bills, the balance of payments, industrial competitiveness, and household budgets. As the country looks ahead to Viksit Bharat 2047, energy security has moved from a policy footnote to a national priority, with India's decade-long renewable energy transformation at its centre.

Conflict in any oil-producing region moves fast through the global economy: crude prices spike, freight costs climb, and import-dependent countries absorb the shock first. India has treated this as a wake-up call, spending the past decade on one of the world's most ambitious energy transitions - one that now ties together energy security, climate action, economic growth, technology and disaster preparedness.

Modern life runs on energy - industry, agriculture, healthcare, education and digital infrastructure all depend on it. Yet coal, oil and natural gas are also responsible for roughly three-quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to international scientific assessments, driving melting glaciers, erratic monsoons, prolonged droughts, stronger cyclones and rising seas - risks that hit India especially hard given its geography and population. Shifting to renewable energy is therefore not simply a fuel substitution; it is one of the most effective tools for cutting climate risk while strengthening energy security.

As the world's fastest-growing major economy and its third-largest electricity consumer, India's power demand is set to climb sharply with urbanisation, industrial expansion, digitisation and rising living standards. Meeting that demand through fossil fuels alone would deepen import dependence and undercut India's climate commitments at once. Renewable energy avoids that trade-off: it is domestically available, abundant, environmentally sound, and - thanks to falling costs - genuinely competitive on price.

## The Scale of the Renewable Revolution

India's numbers are striking. Total installed power generation capacity now exceeds 530 GW, with more than half drawn from non-fossil sources - meeting a key Paris Agreement commitment years ahead of its 2030 deadline. By March 2026, non-fossil capacity had reached roughly 283 GW, making India the world's third-largest producer of renewable energy, with solar and wind together contributing nearly three-quarters of that total.

A few figures capture the pace of change: Solar power capacity has crossed 150 GW; wind has passed 56 GW and India now ranks as the world's third-largest renewable energy producer. This growth has been driven by coordinated policy support: the National Solar Mission, the PM Surya Ghar rooftop solar scheme, ultra-mega solar parks, production-linked manufacturing incentives, and sustained investment in transmission infrastructure.

## India's Place on the Global Climate Stage

India's renewable energy record has also strengthened its standing as a global climate leader. At COP26, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the "Panchamrit" commitments: 500 GW of non-fossil power capacity by 2030, meeting half of India's energy needs from non-fossil sources, cutting a billion tonnes of projected carbon emissions, reducing the emissions intensity of GDP by 45% against 2005 levels, and reaching net-zero by 2070. India has also pushed for developing nations to get adequate climate financing, technology transfer and capacity-building support, backing that stance through initiatives like the International Solar Alliance, co-founded with France.

## More Than Just Clean Power

Renewable energy's value now reaches well beyond emissions reduction. Cutting reliance on imported fuel strengthens energy security and improves air quality, and steep declines in solar tariffs have made it one of



AWANISH KUMAR SINGH

acquiring knowledge. It is about developing the skills, values and confidence needed to navigate life's challenges and opportunities. Rural education must focus on a holistic approach to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth.

## The Need to Go Beyond Traditional Learning

The majority of villagers are considered to be first-time learners; however, it is also crucial that these children receive training in practical skills in order to prepare them to succeed in today's world. Critical thinking, communication skills, teamwork, problem-solving, financial management, digital literacy, and overall awareness are very much needed in today's fast-moving world. All these skills will help students make good



INDIA'S RENEWABLE AMBITIONS NOW EXTEND WELL PAST SOLAR AND WIND. THE NATIONAL GREEN HYDROGEN MISSION AIMS TO MAKE THE COUNTRY A GLOBAL HUB FOR GREEN HYDROGEN, A FUEL WITH REAL POTENTIAL TO DECARBONISE HARD-TO-ELECTRIFY SECTORS SUCH AS STEEL, FERTILISERS, REFINING, SHIPPING AND HEAVY TRANSPORT

The writer is Former Executive Director, National Institute of Disaster Management, GOI and Director, SAARC Disaster Management Centre.

the cheapest power sources available - an economic asset as much as an environmental one. It is also a genuine jobs engine, spanning manufacturing, installation, operations and research, while rooftop solar, solar pumps, mini-grids and biogas plants extend reliable electricity to rural communities once dependent on diesel, advancing goals from poverty reduction to public health and gender equality. As floods, cyclones, heatwaves, droughts and wildfires grow more frequent, reliable power becomes critical for hospitals, emergency centres, water systems and relief camps, all of which can lose power when conventional grids fail. Distributed renewable systems, including rooftop solar and battery-backed microgrids, keep essential services running when the main grid goes down - something India has already put into practice, extending solar power to hospitals, schools and irrigation systems in disaster-prone regions. This echoes the "Build Back Better" principle under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Toward Viksit Bharat 2047, renewable energy is as much an investment in resilience as in clean power.

India's renewable ambitions now extend well past solar and wind. The National Green Hydrogen Mission aims to make the country a global hub for green hydrogen, a fuel with real potential to decarbonise hard-to-electrify sectors such as steel, fertilisers, refining, shipping and heavy transport. Battery storage is another priority, smoothing out the natural variability of solar and wind generation, alongside continued investment in pumped hydro. Offshore wind pilots are underway in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, biomass and mini-hydro projects continue to expand, and rising EV adoption promises to further cut reliance on imported fuel.

## What Still Needs Work

Real hurdles remain. Grid integration tops the list: solar and wind output depends on weather, so absorbing it reliably requires substantial investment in modern infrastructure and storage. Financing is another constraint - hitting the 500 GW non-fossil target by 2030 needs capital from international climate funds, green bonds and public-private partnerships. Domestic manufacturing also needs strengthening: despite progress under the production-linked incentive scheme, India still imports key raw materials for solar panels. Land acquisition, environmental clearances, skilled-workforce shortages and transmission delays add further complexity, all pointing to the need for sustained research and development.

## The Way Forward

India's progress so far shows that economic growth and environmental sustainability can advance together. But reaching 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030, and net-zero by 2070, will require sustained policy consistency, investment and innovation: scaling up rooftop solar and battery storage, building smarter transmission networks, and expanding domestic production of solar modules, batteries and electrolyzers under the Make in India framework - alongside green hydrogen, energy efficiency and embedding renewable power into infrastructure such as hospitals and schools.

The recent turbulence in the Middle East is only the latest reminder of how exposed fossil-fuel-dependent nations remain to forces beyond their control. For India, energy independence is no longer simply an environmental or economic goal; it is a strategic necessity tied to national security, economic stability and climate resilience. This Global Energy Independence Day carries a clear message: the shift to clean, self-reliant energy is not merely sound environmental policy - it is the foundation of a secure and sustainable future for India.



through traditional classroom instruction. By encouraging students to participate in experiential learning activities, educational institutions help students identify their strengths while expanding their understanding of what is possible in their lives and careers.

## Digital Literacy for a Changing World

Digital literacy is another fundamental principle for a holistic education. The rapid growth of tech-

# What the world's finest universities do not teach



ACHARYA PRASHANT

On 30 May, I was at the Cambridge Union in conversation with Professor Jaideep Prabhu. In that hall, where Churchill and Hawking have both been heard, the audience before me was made up largely of economics and management students. But one thing became clear very quickly. However sophisticated the education, there comes a point where no theory helps and no degree comes to the rescue. At that point, the question is no longer about the world. It is about the questioner. A one-hour session stretched into conversations over nearly two days.

And what I saw at Cambridge, I saw throughout the tour. At Oxford, in the British Parliament, at the London School of Economics, and in public dialogues. The lack was the same. People know a great deal, but they do not know themselves. What do the world's finest universities teach, and what do they still fail to teach?

Let us begin fairly. Western higher education has immense strengths. It has reason, analysis, and intellectual honesty. Science has dignity because it does not rush to conclusion. It says: first I will observe, test, verify.

On 8 June, at Oxford, I was speaking on the second mantra of the Ishavasya Upanishad in a setting connected, a century and a half earlier, with Max Muller's role in introducing that very text into the Western scholarly world. On 12 June, at the British Parliament, I spoke on "Asato Ma Sad Gamaya." Universities know how to study the world, but the most important question is left untouched. In the statement "I know," who is this "I"?

That is where education remains incomplete. If you inform a person about the world, but never examine the one gathering that information, education remains incomplete. If the eye itself is distorted, then whatever it sees will also be seen wrongly. All outer knowledge then ends up serving inner distortion.

So the real problem is not a lack of information. The real problem is the condition of the knower.

Knowledge is value-neutral; the user of knowledge is not. A tool is neither good, nor bad in itself. But if the one holding the tool is inwardly distorted, the tool becomes a weapon. Technology then serves exploitation. Economics serves greed, politics serves domination.

On 2 July, in a conversation with the Cambridge-trained biologist Dr Rupert Sheldrake on consciousness and the limits of science, the same point became even clearer. Science asks what a thing is, and how it works. But science, by its nature, does not investigate the one asking those questions. As long as science remains within its domain, it is honest and beautiful. The trouble begins when the limits of science are declared to be the limits of reality itself. Then science turns into scientism. And scientism is very useful to the ego. It allows a person to say: only what is outside is real.

That is where the real trouble begins. At the London School of Economics, in a dialogue with Professor Jonathan Birch on animal consciousness, whose research contributed to UK law recognising even octopuses and crabs as sentient beings, I offered the example of a drunk driver. If a man is driving drunk and we keep improving the roads, softening the barriers, and speeding up the ambulance, will the basic problem be solved? No. There may be some relief, but the root remains untouched. In the very week I was in London, there were severe heatwaves, yet the discussion kept returning to new technology, not to the appetite producing the heat in the first place. But one question is still avoided: who is the one doing all this?

The same point came up again in my conversation with PETA's senior vice-president on 3 July. The exploited may change. Sometimes it is the animal, sometimes the river, sometimes the forest. The exploiter remains almost the same: conditioned, fearful, acquisitive, violent ego. Unless education touches this ego, education produces civilised barbarism. The outer polish remains.

Now let us turn to India. India has had the language of self-knowledge. The Upanishads are here, vedanta is here. India's real contribution was this: before you know the world, see who it is that is knowing. The Ishavasya expresses this in two words: vidya and avidya. If you pursue only avidya, only outer knowledge, you remain in darkness. If you cling only to vidya, in a merely verbal sense, you fall into deeper darkness still. One crosses only by carrying both together. The fault lies not in outer knowledge but in the blindness of the one using it.

And India's tragedy is this: we have repeated this wisdom far more than we have lived it. We have turned it into identity, ritual, sentiment, convenience, and display. What could cut into a person, shake him, and transform him, we set aside. What could become spectacle, we kept.

So this is not a question of East versus West, nor of one civilisation being superior to another. The West knows the outer world very well, but falls silent on the knower. India had the language of the knower, but now often uses that very language to sustain the machinery of ego. Yet in both places, human beings remain frightened, greedy, lonely, and insecure. The real issue is not civilisation, it is consciousness.

Even the students of Oxford and Cambridge, brilliant in their fields, can sense that something remains missing, some lack that neither degrees nor money can fill. But their education does not tell them that what is missing is the cleansing of the eye and the clearing of intent. Because if the knower himself is fearful, greedy, and inwardly unclean, then even the best knowledge will finally serve ego and violence.

So what do the world's finest universities still not teach? They do not teach you to ask whom your education is serving. They do not teach you how to examine the knower.

They do not teach you that achievement without self-knowledge also becomes destructive. They teach the world well. They do not ask who is receiving that knowledge. And until these questions enter the centre of education, universities will continue to produce brilliant, accomplished graduates, while the human being remains a cause of destruction for other species and for the Earth itself.

Acharya Prashant is a philosopher and author whose work centres on self-inquiry and its application to contemporary life

# Educating for life: The case for holistic learning in rural India



AWANISH KUMAR SINGH

Education has always been the first step of progress. However, in the rural landscape, the conversation around education must move beyond textbooks, examinations, and classroom attendance. True education is generally beyond

## The Need to Go Beyond Traditional Learning

acquiring knowledge. It is about developing the skills, values and confidence needed to navigate life's challenges and opportunities. Rural education must focus on a holistic approach to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth.

choices regarding their lives, whether in the workforce or otherwise, and contribute to the improvement of their communities.

India's rural communities are rapidly changing due to technology, entrepreneurship and new opportunities. The education system must change and be able to assist our students in this transitional period, in order to guarantee that our students will have a bright future. In addition to teaching mathematics and science, schools should teach children about leadership, creativity, social values, environmental awareness and personal development.

## Experiential Learning: Building Confidence and Capability

The most effective way to promote holistic education is through experiential learning. Experiential learning encompasses a variety of activities such as sports, arts, cultural programs, community service, and vocational training. These types of activities give students the ability to build confidence and develop practical skills, as well as teach them important life skills such as discipline, resilience, teamwork, and responsibility that are difficult to develop



through traditional classroom instruction. By encouraging students to participate in experiential learning activities, educational institutions help students identify their strengths while expanding their understanding of what is possible in their lives and careers.

## Digital Literacy for a Changing World

Digital literacy is another fundamental principle for a holistic education. The rapid growth of tech-

nology has changed the way people communicate, conduct business, and access and utilise information. As technology becomes an ever-increasing part of everyday life, rural students will need to be equipped with the knowledge and ability to access information, responsibly use digital technology, and seek new learning opportunities. Bridging the digital divide offers tremendous potential and ensures that rural students can compete with urban students on an equal basis. Access to digital media resources also gives rural youth new opportunities for online learning, developing new skills, creating their own businesses and contributing to the growth of India.

## Nurturing Values and Responsible Citizenship

Equally important is the role of values and character building. Education should nurture empathy, integrity, respect, and a sense of civic responsibility. When young people understand their duties

toward society and the environment, they grow into responsible citizens capable of driving positive change. Such values are particularly important in strengthening community bonds and preserving the social fabric of rural India.

Teachers and parents play a vital role in this transformation. Their encouragement and support can help students discover their talents, pursue their aspirations, and develop self-belief. Educational institutions must work closely with families and local communities to create an ecosystem that supports holistic growth. Preparing Rural Youth for the Future

The future of rural India depends on empowering its youth with more than academic qualifications. By integrating life skills, technology, values, and practical learning into education, we can create a generation that is not only educated but also capable, confident, and future-ready. Holistic education is not merely an educational reform; it is an investment in the social and economic development of the nation. When rural students are equipped to succeed in all aspects of life, the entire country moves forward together.

MLC Er. Awanish Kumar Singh is Chief Educationist & President, Subhash Chandra Bose Group of Institutions and State President Kreedha Bharti, UP







# 'No anti-incumbency in Uttarakhand'

# Bengal must confront environmental challenge

(The writer is a former Senior Scientist, Central Pollution Control Board.)

Front page of The Statesman  
dated 11 July 1926

## OCCASIONAL NOTE

## News Items

# WITHOUT A PRECEDENT

# POSITION OF CANADIAN GOVERNMENT

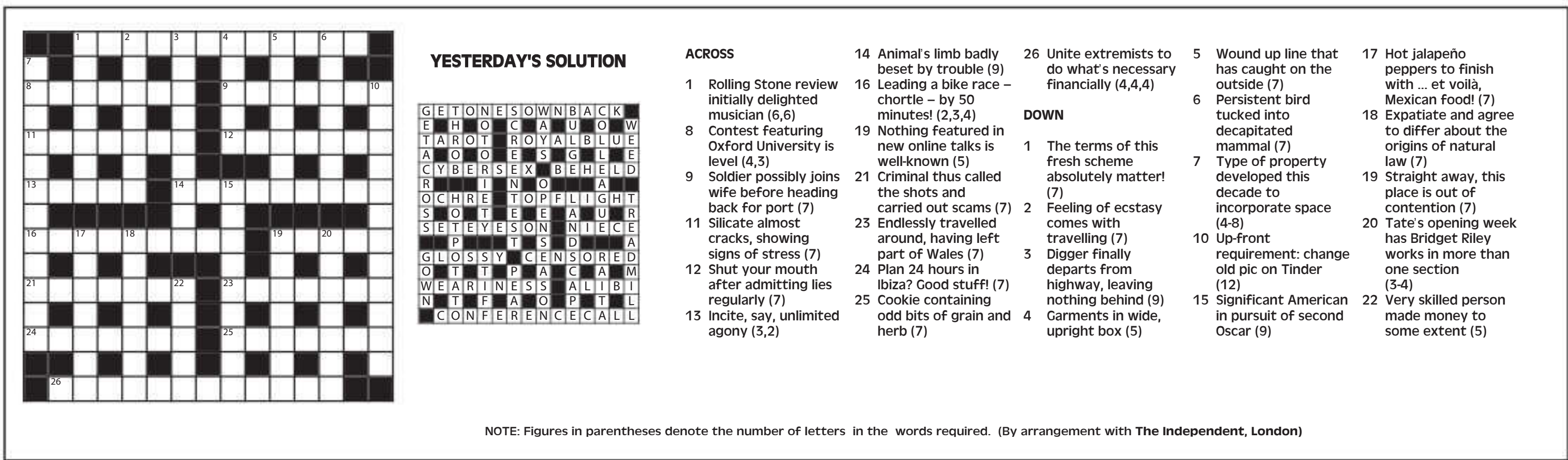
Mr. Stevens declared that the public Treasury had lost thirty million dollars annually owing to Customs irregularities. He promised a drastic investigation and war against rum-running.— Reuter.

## DESERT ROMANCE

# MARRIAGE ANNULLED IN PARIS COURT

The Count pleaded before the Court that the marriage was irregular and the Court decided that, in view of the lady's good faith, the marriage should have certain civil consequences for herself and the child.—Copyright.

## Crossword | No. 293517





DECCAN Chronicle

11 JULY 2026

Uranium deal icing on cake of Modi's visit to Australia

Securing an agreement for supply of Australian uranium to fuel India's nuclear power programme was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's prize catch on his eastern trip to the Antipodes. The landmark deal should open the way to give a new impetus to India's clean energy objectives, the plans for which have either lain dormant or moved at snail's pace for over the 12 years since India and Australia had agreed in 2014 on a civil nuclear cooperation pact.

Australia's preparedness to get its miners to enhance their operations to fulfil India's large order for nuclear fuel to energise its green ambitions as well as steer away from fossil fuels a little more drastically because of current uncertainties over crude oil supplies and their carbon footprint also sends a message to the world on India as a reliable user of uranium for peaceful purposes.

The ground realities changed in the years since 2014 as the regulations over culpability and compensation in the event of a nuclear accident were altered in the "Shanti Act" of 2025, limiting liabilities to international standards. In those 12 years, much may have been said about selling nuclear fuel but the uranium never came from Down Under. Against a planned nuclear power generation of 100GW by 2047 (22.5GW by 2032), India's current installed capacity is just 8.8GW from 25 plants that generate only around three per cent of the nation's power consumption.

As Australian Prime Minister Antony Albanese pointed out, the pre-2014 bilateral ties — and perhaps the ties in the last 12 years — were "underdone" and it is only now that India appears to have moved up the international order to be considered a crucial strategic partner, if not quite an ally though both countries are fellow members in Quad. The nuclear deal caps this new effort to further ties and take the bilateral aspects further regardless of divergent views on China, the country that is invariably the elephant in the room at every major diplomatic meeting.

As Prime Minister Modi pointed out, the Indo-Pacific is not just the confluence of two great oceans, it also symbolises shared concerns over maritime security in view of the current geostrategic fears and suspicions. An array of pacts with Indonesia as well as Australia are set to operationalise closer cooperation in maritime matters in which India's role as a facilitator and coordinator of data sharing has been rising.

The other worry emanating from geopolitical shifts in the wake of US trade moves has been in the field of critical minerals and India's search for reliable supply chains is spurred by events after China stopped supplies. Australia may be well placed with the capacity to supply many materials from its Critical Minerals List. With the nations kicking on towards a fuller ECTA by building on the interim deal of 2022, India may also be hoping to reduce the trade deficit with Australia.

With investments flowing in — an Australian pension fund is taking a \$346 million punt on India's infrastructure fund and New Zealand mulls earmarking \$20 billion — the importance of pitching India internationally is stressed. Prime ministerial visits carry a lot more significance than the civilian awards that Mr Modi is adorned with but which are a recognition of India's global heft today.

J&K: Halt libraries' crackdown

The Jammu and Kashmir administration's territory-wide campaign to screen and purge "objectionable" books marks a profound and troubling shift. It is one thing for a government to decide what textbooks align with its educational vision. It is quite another to raid bookstores, blacklist authors, confiscate publications and police every shelf in every school and coaching centre. This is not curriculum oversight. It is state-driven narrative control.

The trigger was the discovery of allegedly separatist-linked content in two school library books — *Personalities and Legends of J&K* and *Great Personalities of Jammu and Kashmir*. These titles referred to Jammu and Kashmir as "India-occupied Kashmir" and described pro-independence leader Muhammad Maqbool Bhat as "Shaheed-e-Azam" or great martyr.

Bhat, co-founder of the Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF), a militant organisation advocating the reunification of J&K as an independent state, was hanged in Delhi's Tihar Jail on Feb. 11, 1984 after being convicted on murder charges. Over time, he came to be seen as a foundational figure in the violent separatist movement that gripped the region for more than three decades.

Glorifying him as a martyr contradicts India's stance. But the administration's response — suspending officials, blacklisting authors, withdrawing all their works, launching criminal investigations and ordering a territory-wide sweep of every book in every institution — goes far beyond correcting a procurement lapse.

That is part of a broader pattern. In 2025, the government banned 25 books by respected scholars, journalists and historians — from A.G. Noorani, Arundhati Roy, Sumant Bose, Victoria Schofield, David Devadas and Anuradha Bhasin to Piotr Balcerowicz and others — alleging they promoted "false narratives" and "glorified terrorism". Critics countered that these were rigorously researched works offering critical political analysis, not propaganda.

The new directive intensifies that fear. Schools must eliminate anything "prejudicial", "age inappropriate" or "contrary to national interest" — elastic categories easily stretched to fit any inconvenient fact. Police raids on bookstores make the message unmistakable: Only one version of Kashmir's story is now permissible. Kashmir's history — its conflicts, aspirations, traumas and political movements — cannot be erased by administrative order. Memory lives in people, not just pages. Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution protects the freedom of speech and expression. The campaign in J&K undermines that guarantee, replacing dialogue with decree.

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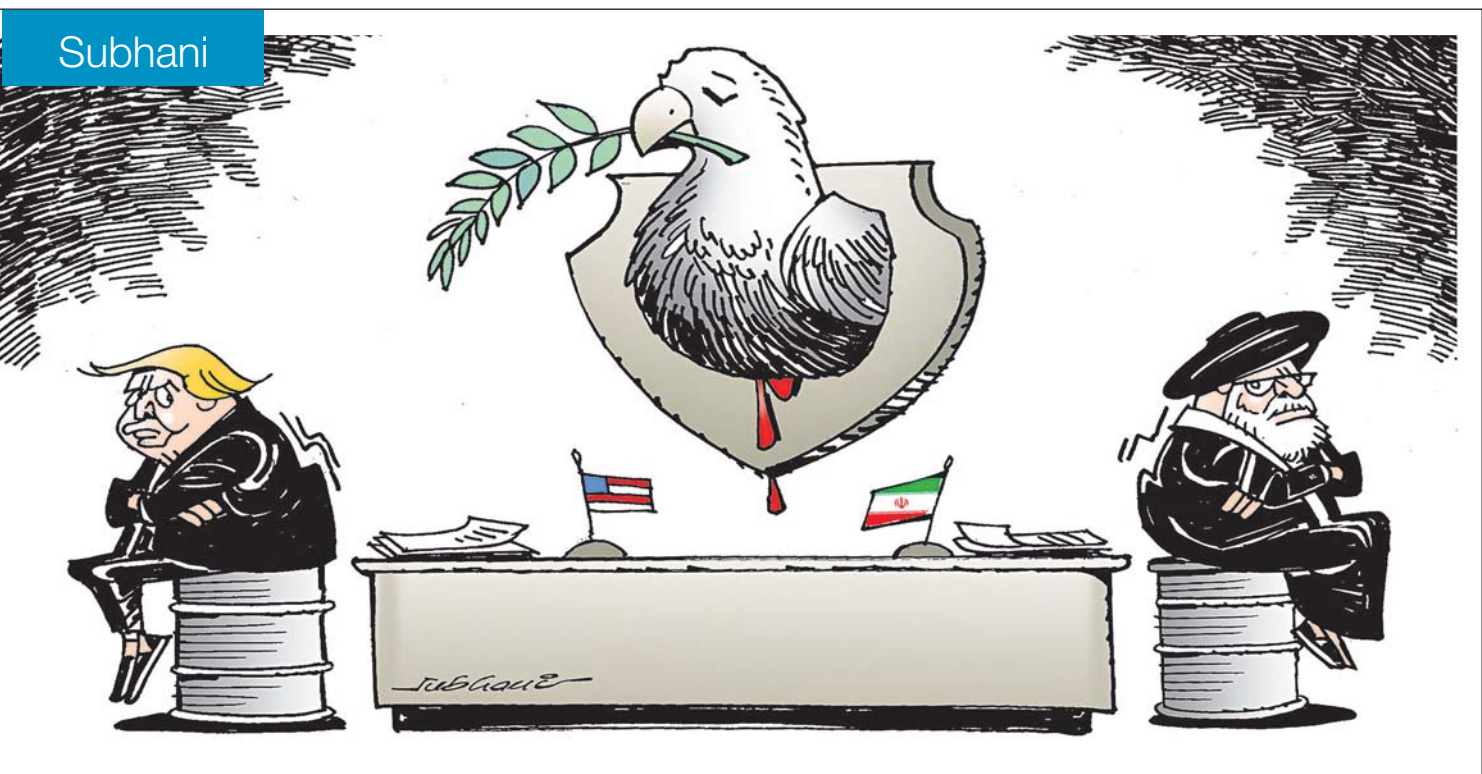
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Did Fadnavis fiddle while Mumbai nearly drowned?



Shobhaa's Take

Rain... rain... go away... Little Donald wants to play..." While Mumbai drowned, the rest of the world stayed afloat, and in particular Big Bully Donald Trump, who tossed away any thoughts about a peace deal with Iran by declaring it was "over".

Closer to home, Mumbai just about managed to keep its head above water. Without writing another whiney column about the "multiple organ failures" of the BMC (Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation), which is the primary civic body responsible for the civic infrastructure and day-to-day administration of Mumbai, and also happens to be India's richest civic body, I do need to vent. When a megapolis virtually shuts down for two to three days, it is not just unacceptable but borders on the criminal.

A crime minus any punishment. Year after year, Mumbai comes to a standstill because of an annual event — the devastating monsoon. Note: This is an annual event. Not something that takes Mumbai by surprise. The Mumbai Monsoon is not an ambush. It is not a sneaky stealth attack that catches the city off guard. It is a closely tracked weather pattern. A known beast. "A Hungry Tide", that sweeps over a city with due warning. Year after year. Despite its predictability and well-established savage behaviour, the lack of preparedness by the civic authorities is nothing short of vicious negligence. It is a wonder, in a city that boasts of the country's top legal brains, nobody has taken the authorities to court on behalf of citizens. When things get desperate, we invoke the mysterious "Spirit of Mumbai". Mumbai's are expected to miraculously rise to the

occasion with zero help, and even less responsibility, from those civic bosses and politicians sitting pretty in their homes and offices, offering lame excuses for all the disasters inflicted on sitting ducks — ordinary citizens.

To add insult to injury, just as Mumbai was staggering back to life, the ineffective and weak Maharashtra government has announced a ₹13,000-crore "flood plan". Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis rolled out the plan in the state Legislative Assembly — and nobody laughed!

The BMC is currently hanging on to a staggering ₹78,000 crores in FDs: which is taxpayers' money.

What is it doing lying around in FDs when there is a dire need to disburse funds right now and rescue Mumbai before some more disasters and deaths occur? Let's not even talk about The Missing Link — which is CM Fadnavis's biggest folly. A folly that exposed the worst in our system. The much-touted "Missing Link" (what a strange name!) collapsed before it had even taken off. The "engineering marvel" built at a cost of ₹6,695 crores and described as a "feat", the bypass with two major tunnels connecting Mumbai and Pune, was inaugurated only on May 1, 2026! It is already being described as a gigantic embarrassment... an expensive "link" that is missing! Had it not been for the alertness of a 24-year-old young man named Sandesh Kharat, who, thanks to his presence of mind, pressed an emergency SOS button near the exit of tunnel number 2, when he and his friends witnessed a landslide from a distance of 200 metres. The control room in Pune swung into action. But even before that, the young men stopped approaching

To add insult to injury, just as Mumbai was staggering back to life, the ineffective and weak Maharashtra government has announced a ₹13,000-crore 'flood plan'

vehicles and warned motorists about the landslide. They deserve recognition and gratitude. But hey... that does not absolve the administration from taking full responsibility, owning up and explaining where that money was spent — who pocketed how much. Rampant corruption in high places has paralysed Mumbai for decades... But the worm is ready to turn!

Despite the downpour that converted Mumbai into a filthy, dangerous swamp, there was reason to cheer — two high-profile celebrity *shaadis* were celebrated with the expected *dhoom dhaam* — nothing was allowed to dampen the spirits of Bollywood revellers. Mumbai loves its "Monsoon Weddings", especially if those involve our movie folks. Aamir Khan, 61, lived up to his well-established reputation as a lifelong, diehard non-conformist, by marrying for the third time, surrounded by his loving family (which includes two former wives and their children).

The latest Khan wedding generated such a strong buzz on social media that for a few short, sweet hours we forgot all about our soggy, miserable, rain-soaked lives, and joined the party. Hurrah! Aamir set a new fashion trend for desi bridegrooms by wearing heavy anklets and a nose clip. Disappointingly, a beautiful "*maang tikka*", *sindoor* and *mangalsutra* were missing from his attire.

Not to worry. The wedding of Anshula marked the first marriage in Boney Kapoor's family. It was celebrated with all the traditional trimmings associat-

ed with a boisterous Punjabi *shaadi*. Rohan Thakkar, the lucky bridegroom, was around. Of course. If fans cared to look for him, beyond the dazzling guests dancing energetically, while the rest of the city limped back to semi-normalcy.

Hallelujah! At least one global person was home and dry even if the world was crying "foul". President Donald Trump getting the Fifa boss man to revoke a "red card" during Fifa's fiercely fought World Cup football matches has created a permanent black mark on the reputation of the Beautiful Game. But why is everyone so shocked by Donald Trump's obnoxious abuse of power? He is a sore loser. An abusive loser. He has just made that official. In US striker Folarin's place, any other sportsman would have felt humiliated about the embarrassing intervention by no less a person than the President of the country. This is only the second time in World Cup history that Fifa has overturned a suspension for a player sent off during the tournament. Even worse, Gianni Infantino, Fifa's president, should have resigned from his position, rather than surrender to a bully. Tell the world, Signor Infantino, now that you've been stripped of all authority and dignity... how will you appear in history? And please... how are you living with yourself after such a public disgrace?

But guess who had the last laugh? Belgium! Didn't you love the way the team mocked President Trump after their win over the United States?

So... who are you betting on, folks? Like the rest of the football crazy world, I am crushing on the Viral Viking. Seven goals in four games so far. And that hair... *uff*... Haaland is Samson! I am rowing away with this striker!

I am looking forward to a France-Norway Final on Sunday, July 19... Let the best boot win!

Instagram handle @ShobhaaDe, Twitter handle @DeShobhaa

LETTERS

INS MAHENDRAGIRI

The commissioning of INS Mahendragiri marks a major milestone in India's maritime strength and self-reliance. As the sixth indigenous Project-17A stealth frigate, it reflects the success of Make in India and reinforces the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat while strengthening India's presence in the Indian Ocean.

P. Siri Chandana

Tirupati

INVESTMENT GATEWAY

AP's outreach to South Korea can accelerate its transformation from an agriculture-dependent state into a global hub for manufacturing, renewable energy and digital technology (*Lokesh pitches AP as South Korea's preferred investment gateway, July 10*). Investments can create jobs, strengthen education and infrastructure, and advance the Swarna Andhra vision.

P.V.S. Sai Raghav

Tirupati

LAND SECURITY

The government's land reforms can secure ownership, reduce disputes and protect farmers' rights through transparent surveys, digitised records and timely registrations (*We are accountable for your lands, says Naidu, July 10*). Citizens must verify records and report errors, while officials should ensure accurate documentation, swift grievance redressal and accountable services.

Raju Kolluru

Kakinada

LETHAL PRACTICE

RMPs administering IV fluids and strong antibiotics without proper diagnosis pose a grave risk. Licensing them is no solution. The government must fill rural vacancies with qualified doctors and specialists. Quackery will decline only when people regain access to reliable healthcare.

C.S. Raju

Puttaparthi

PM IN AUSTRALIA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Australia visit strengthens India's economic and strategic role in the Indo-Pacific. Deeper cooperation in trade, mining, defence and supply chains can benefit both countries. India should use this opportunity to diversify partnerships.

Medapati Sri Sudheesh Reddy

Visakhapatnam

Email your letters to info@deccanmail.com, editor@deccanmail.com.

Farrukh Dhondy Cabbages & Kings



"The magpie's cry goes clackety-clack — It says she's gone and won't come back... Why personify the cry of a bird? The notes or the sentiment overheard? The magpie knows nothing of your loss... And even if it did, it wouldn't give a toss..."

— From Flutter Gutter Verses, by Bachchoo

Unlike some distinguished writers — such as J.K. Rowling — and several academics, I have never experienced "being cancelled". This is the contemporary practice of being refused a platform to which one was formerly invited, owing to protests from people and lobbies who don't like your opinions.

So, JK has been denied a hearing and banned from several platforms because she believes that humans are assigned a gender at birth through their chromosomes and through formation of their sexual organs and secondary gender manifestations.

These bans and cancellations make me wonder if my opinions, which I express in these columns, in others and in my books and speeches from various platforms, are innocuous and not worth bothering about? Perhaps in my short and happy life, though I have acquired the description of being "radical", I have never sufficiently offended any vociferous lobby.

Luck? Caution? Fence-sitting? (I plead not-guilty, m'lud!)

Not for my opinions, but for my very existence, I have indeed suffered some bans or omissions.

I suppose the first one that comes to mind was when, in the wake of Richard Attenborough's Gandhi, I was approached by two Pakistanis — the distinguished director Jamil Dehlavi and a contemporary from Cambridge, Akbar Ahmad, proposing that I write a film on Jinnah.

I said I was out of sympathy with Jinnah for splitting the sub-continent. They said my Indo-nationalist view probably didn't take in all the facts that caused the fragmentation of British India. They urged me to read Stanley Wolpert's biography of Jinnah. I did.

Akbar, as producer of the tentative project, had offered me a decent sum of money if I would write the film. And yes, gentle reader, after reading two or three biographies of the Quaid-e-Azam, I understood the complexities that led to "Partition" and told Jamil and Akbar that I would write a script as I conceived it. They agreed and I did.

When I handed in the completed screenplay, Akbar said to me: "That's great, we'll start production soon, but Farrukh, you won't get a credit on screen as the writer!"

I was about to say "pour the hell qua non?" but instead simply asked why.

"Because the film is being financed by Pakistani capitalists who would not support the production if the screenplay was by a non-Muslim Parsi of Indian origin, resident in Britain with a reputa-

tion for Marxist views and radical 'socialistic' activity."

"And you are to promise to never claim to have written the film," Akbar said, "and I want to increase your fee by a thousand pounds".

Gentle reader, being of a modest (and acquisitive?) disposition, could I refuse?

The film went into production with Christopher Lee, famous for playing Dracula, as the mature Jinnah, and Shashi Kapoor as the angel Jibrail who questions Jinnah in heaven (yes, one of the opening scenes).

The film was a success in Pakistan — so much so that General Pervez Musharraf, who was hen in charge, appointed Akbar Ahmad as Pakistan's high commissioner to Britain.

Then came the unravelling. Jamil and Akbar fell out, with Jamil accusing Akbar of inflating the budget and carrying away extremely large sums of money by pretending they were paid to (non-existent) "script consultants" and other such fabrications. Jamil blew the gaff, and journalists then called me to ask if I had written the script. I, sticking to my promise, said "no comment", or the equivalent. Then Seamus Milne, a *Guardian* journalist, showed me a document which said that I sold the script of *Jinnah* to Akbar Ahmad for "£1". It had my signature.

So, he said either I did write *Jinnah*, or I was accusing the high commissioner of Pakistan of forging my signature. I said I wasn't accusing

Akbar of forging my signature.

"So, you did write *Jinnah*," says Seamus Milne.

Out of the bag burst pussy. The UK and Pakistani papers picked up the story and when they called me, I told them that if Gen. Musharraf was handing out diplomatic posts for writing *Jinnah*, I would be quite happy to be Pakistan's ambassador to Tahiti and will look after Pakistan's interests after I've looked after some of my own. It was a joke! *Dawn* printed it.

I subsequently met General (no longer supremo) and Mrs Musharraf at a friend's party and Mrs Musharraf asked me why my name was not on the film. I told her, and she, and the general, who was listening, said words to the effect of "that's absurd!"

So, to the latest of such reverses:

I've written a play called *Karna: Warrior of The Sun*, based on the *Mahabharata*.

My good friend, a producer, proposed to stage it in India in partnership with the National School of Drama. Great!

He subsequently informs me that one of the members of the governing body of the National School insisted on cancelling the partnership on the grounds that the play was written by a non-Hindu, resident in Britain, with a reputation for being a Marxist.

Partnership duly cancelled...

*O tempora! O mores!*

But yes, it will reach the stage!



# The executive, not judiciary, must crackdown on illegal structures

THE Supreme Court has rightly pulled up civic authorities over illegal and unsafe buildings in Delhi-NCR. Slamming the attitude of local officials, a bench of Justices A Amanullah and Justice R Mahadevan pointed out on Thursday that “only face-saving exercises are being done” to check the menace. The apex court warned officials that it would “attach personal responsibility” on all officials who fail to act against illegal buildings and their owners despite repeated judicial directions. It ordered the personal appearance of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi commissioner and the vice-chairman of the Gurugram Metropolitan Develop-

ment Authority (GMDA) in court. These orders may drill some sense of propriety in the hearts and minds of bureaucrats. It also constituted a team comprising two senior IIT professors, two draftsmen, and MCD officials to assess unauthorised constructions in Delhi’s Saket, Lajpat Nagar, and Malviya Nagar localities. The panel has also been directed to submit its report to the court. So far, so good, but there are limits that the judiciary can and should travel. The kind of localities where people live, what kind of land that should be, what rules and regulations should govern that land, and so on are matters that the executive should take a call. More importantly,

if there are any violations, the wrongdoers must be dealt with accordingly. It is not the job of the judiciary to crack down on the land sharks, and illegal colonisers, among others. Evidently, our governance system has completely broken down, at least in the matter of colonising and housing. Instead of stopping unauthorised constructions that are mushrooming by the day, local officials are sometimes found to be hand in glove with the violators. For instance, a newspaper report showed that around 93 per cent of establishments inspected in Gurugram’s ongoing fire safety drive were found deficient in mandatory fire safety measures. While judicial intervention may yield good

dividends, it cannot offer a long-term solution to the widespread problem. The judiciary cannot substitute for the executive; courts can issue directions, fix accountability, and ensure that authorities perform their statutory duties, but they cannot and should not directly undertake urban planning, enforcement, and governance. Sustainable reform requires civic agencies, development authorities, and state governments to act with integrity, efficiency, and transparency. Building regulations must be enforced uniformly, without political interference or selective implementation. The need of the hour is a mechanism which ensures that the

officials, who deliberately ignore violations or collude with builders, are penalised, and even thrown behind bars. At the same time, approval processes should be made more transparent and technology-driven so that illegal constructions can be detected at an early stage through satellite mapping, digital records, and regular inspections. Public awareness is also important; people shouldn’t knowingly purchase unauthorised buildings. Judicial monitoring may serve as a catalyst for reform, but lasting change will come only when governance institutions function honestly, efficiently, and in accordance with law, ensuring that public safety is never compromised.

## LETTERS

### Preparing careers for the AI era

THE article “Future of management careers in the era of AI” clearly brings out the objective of preparing students for lifelong learning, adaptability, resilience, and continuous learning in a rapidly changing technological environment. The experiences shared by graduates reveal that success depends not merely on academic qualifications but on the willingness to take on challenges, keep up with technological advancements, and be in pursuit of knowledge and professional excellence. The IT departments of organisations must step up by rolling out AI-driven training programmes, setting up innovation centres, carrying out ethical AI practices, and bringing in technologies that enhance productivity while protecting human dignity. IT firms should come up with flexible career pathways, back up employees through regular reskilling, mentorship, mental wellness initiatives, and transparent performance systems so that professionals can move ahead with confidence instead of fearing automation. Employees should reach out to mentors and industry experts to remain competitive in the evolving job market. Students must make the most of internships, research projects, hackathons, certifications, and networking opportunities, build up strong portfolios, and take part in collaborative learning to excel in the AI-driven IT sector. Both the government and IT firms should join hands to assure job security by expanding digital skill missions, strengthening industry-academia partnerships, providing AI transition support, and opening up new employment opportunities to bolster one’s confidence levels.

Raju Kolluru, Kakinada

### Govt must support US-based desi techies

APROPOS ‘Tight job mkt, salary cuts put US-returned desi techies in a spot’ (THI July 10). It’s no more a Sunday afternoon walk in the park for US-based desi techies, who’re forced to return home due to AI-driven job layoffs, unfriendly US visa requirements, and unappetizing emoluments offered even by US-affiliated Global Capability Centers. The onus is on the Indian government to cushion the struggle of these unfortunates, who are mostly youngsters, and have been contributing to the national economy through remittances in their better days. The US-returned techies are ideally appointed without much red-tape, and the deserving offered promotions and salary hikes. Governmental support for startup firms should also ease the pain considerably for US-returned techies, who can contribute through expertise and experience.

Dr George Jacob, Kochi

### Make it easy for techies heading home

THIS is further to “Tight job mkt, salary cuts put US-returned desi techies in a spot”. The unpredictability of US immigration policy is the real problem here, more than any single rule change. Professionals plan years around visa timelines, mortgages and children’s schooling, only to see the ground shift with a policy update. India cannot control American immigration decisions, but it can reduce the impact by making it easier for skilled professionals to reintegrate quickly, through faster credential recognition and streamlined re-entry into provident fund and tax systems. Reducing friction on return would at least soften the disruption these sudden policy shifts keep causing.

K Palaniyappan Muthukumar, Chennai-53

### Displaced techies must eye emerging roles

THIS has reference to “Tight job mkt, salary cuts put US-returned desi techies in a spot”. It is worth noting that this churn isn’t only about visas; AI-led efficiency drives are genuinely shrinking headcount at major tech firms. Oracle, Cisco and Google’s layoffs point to a structural shift, not a temporary slowdown. Indian professionals in the US and back home need to treat AI fluency as a core skill now, not an optional add-on. Companies and industry bodies should expand practical reskilling programmes so displaced techies can move into emerging roles like AI implementation and data governance, rather than competing for a shrinking pool of traditional coding jobs.

M Barathi, Bengaluru-560076

### Drug racket through post offices is worrisome

THE recent bust of an inter-state drug network operating through post offices is seriously worrisome. Criminals are misusing public services to transport illegal substances across states. Such activities endanger the youth and threaten public safety. The police deserve appreciation for uncovering the racket. Authorities should strengthen parcel screening and monitoring systems to prevent similar incidents. Public awareness and cooperation are also essential in combating drug trafficking. If drugs travel freely, the future of our youth is held hostage.

Pranathi Krishna, Hyderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com

## BENGALURU ONLINE

### Footpath clearance drive to continue across B’luru: CM

BENGALURU: Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar on Friday said the ongoing footpath encroachment clearance drive will continue across all five civic zones of Bengaluru, adding that nearly 435 km of footpaths have been reclaimed since the campaign began on July 1. After inspecting the encroachment removal drive at various locations in the city along with Urban Development Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, the Chief Minister addressed the media near Ashoka Pillar in Jayanagar. Shivakumar said authorities have removed 9,878 encroachments so far. The operation included the clearance of 1,340 shops, around 1,800 pushcarts, 2,267 metal sheet extensions, 2,300 steps and ramps, 2,662 pillars and signboards, and 2,247 sheds that had occupied pedestrian pathways. He added that debris has been cleared and repair works on damaged footpaths are also being taken up simultaneously. The Chief Minister assured street vendors that the government was not against them and would provide designated spaces for their livelihood.

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



INDIA’S political system is both unique and complicated. Until the early 1990s, Parliament and state legislatures were known for serious debates, policy alternatives and constructive criticism. Over the years, however, political discourse has increasingly shifted from governance to controversy-driven campaigns. Instead of using issues to push for institutional reforms, political parties now use them primarily as electoral weapons.

With Assembly elections due in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab in 2027, this trend has become even more evident. Rather than pursuing facts to their logical conclusion, almost every party appears focused on scoring political points. They raise an issue, embarrass the opponent and move on without ensuring lasting accountability.

The controversy surrounding Satluj, originally titled Punjab 95, has acquired political significance because Punjab goes to polls next year. The film is based on the life of human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khrala, who documented the alleged illegal cremations and extrajudicial killings during Punjab’s insurgency in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The censor board did not clear the film as its producers refused to implement 127 cuts the board had suggested and instead it was screened on OTT platforms using the legal loopholes. Now on the directions of the government, it has been taken off from OTT platforms.

Enraged over this, the Shiromani Akali Dal has announced statewide screenings,

## ELECTION SEASON; OUTRAGE SEASON

arguing that younger generations should know Punjab’s history. Critics, however, contend that the film presents only one side of a deeply traumatic period. While it highlights alleged human rights violations by the police, it gives relatively little attention to the brutal violence unleashed by Khalistani militants.

Thousands of civilians, police personnel, public servants and political leaders were killed during the insurgency. Equally significant was the role of Punjab police officers such as K P S Gill, whose counter-insurgency campaign is widely credited with restoring normalcy. A historical narrative that omits either state excesses or terrorist violence cannot claim to present the complete truth.

As expected, every political party has adopted a position shaped more by electoral calculations than historical balance.

The Akali Dal backs the film enthusiastically, seeing an opportunity to challenge the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government if it tries to stop the screening of the film. At the same time, it accuses the Centre of restricting its release. The AAP government has permitted private screenings but criticised attempts to remove the film from OTT platforms.

The Congress, uncomfortable because the events occurred largely during its tenure, has avoided endorsing statewide screenings and instead questioned the political use of the film. The BJP has opposed attempts to turn the film into an election campaign while accusing its rivals of presenting a selective interpretation of history.

Similarly, the alleged theft of donation money at the Ram Jannabhoomi temple in Ayodhya offers another example of how India’s political class has



As Uttar Pradesh and Punjab head towards Assembly elections, political parties are weaponising controversies instead of addressing governance. Whether it is “Chanda Chori” or the Satluj debate, accountability has become selective while controversies are amplified and pressing concerns of ordinary citizens are sidelined.

perfected the art of converting every public issue into an election narrative.

The Ram Jannabhoomi temple donation controversy, popularly dubbed “Chanda Chori”, is a classic example.

The Samajwadi Party quickly transformed allegations of theft into a political attack on the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), the RSS, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It succeeded because the temple administration failed the first test of crisis management—speed and transparency.

Instead of responding decisively, the VHP initially stood firmly behind Ram Jannabhoomi Trust General Secretary Champat Rai and Trustee Anil Mishra despite mounting allegations. Although reports suggested that both had offered to resign, the organisation delayed accepting their

resignations, citing procedural formalities. The explanation convinced few.

In the digital era, emergency meetings can be convened within hours, if need be, virtually. A trust administering one of the country’s most important religious institutions could easily have done the same. Every day’s delay strengthened the opposition’s allegation that damage control had taken precedence over accountability.

The investigation raised uncomfortable questions. The delay in registering an FIR, the absence of senior trust members among the accused despite prolonged questioning and the slow pace of visible action fuelled public suspicion. The FIR was reportedly filed only after the Special Investigation Team (SIT) submitted its preliminary findings.

The SIT has since arrested eight persons, recovered cash,

jewellery, gold and a vehicle, frozen multiple bank accounts and begun investigating whether stolen money was invested in the stock market. Investigators claim that nearly 70 instances of alleged theft took place within about 40 days. They also identified major violations of standard operating procedures, including inadequate frisking and poor CCTV surveillance.

Eventually, the trust accepted the resignations of Champat Rai and Anil Mishra and appointed a professional Chief Executive Officer. The VHP acknowledged serious lapses and promised institutional reforms. Yet the most important question remains unanswered: how much money has actually disappeared? Opposition estimates range from ₹200 crore to ₹2,000 crore, prompting demands for a CBI investigation under Supreme Court supervision. Politically, the controversy has undoubtedly dented the credibility of organisations associated with the Ram Temple movement. Whether it significantly affects the BJP’s electoral prospects in Uttar Pradesh remains uncertain, but the opposition has already secured a powerful campaign issue.

If opposition parties genuinely believed financial irregularities had continued for years, why did they become vocal only as elections approached? Accountability loses much of its credibility when it follows the electoral calendar rather than public interest.

The same selective outrage is likely to surface in another controversy that the BJP is expected to use as a political counterattack.

The Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation, established after the Supreme Court’s 2019 Ayodhya judgment to build the new Babri Masjid along with a hospital, library and com-

munity kitchen, has collected donations for several years. Allegations regarding financial irregularities have surfaced periodically, yet no official investigation or FIR has followed.

The BJP is expected to highlight these allegations to blunt the impact of “Chanda Chori”. The opposition, meanwhile, is unlikely to demand a court-monitored probe for fear of alienating sections of its political support base. This is not accountability; it is competitive hypocrisy.

One side demands transparency only from institutions associated with its opponents, while the other discovers concern for financial propriety only when politically convenient. Public trust becomes the biggest casualty.

The larger tragedy is that controversies over donations, films and historical narratives are likely to receive far greater attention during election campaigns than unemployment, education, healthcare, inflation, agriculture, investment or job creation. Electoral politics increasingly rewards emotional mobilisation rather than policy debate. India’s democracy does not suffer from a shortage of controversies; it suffers from a shortage of consistency. Political parties demand transparency only from their opponents, defend institutions aligned with themselves and rediscover moral outrage whenever elections approach. Until this culture changes, controversies will continue to dominate campaigns while governance recedes into the background.

Ultimately, it is for the voter to judge governments and oppositions alike by the same standards rather than by the volume of their election-time rhetoric.

(The author is former Chief Editor of The Hans India)

# Preserving TG’s tribal glory, the Adya Kala way

DR MUCHUKOTA SURESH BABU

TELANGANA is home to a rich and diverse tribal heritage that has been preserved for centuries through music, dance, storytelling, handicrafts, and oral traditions. Communities such as Gonds, Koyas, Chenchus, Lambadas, and Thotis have nurtured unique cultural practices that reflect their close relationship with nature and their collective wisdom. However, rapid urbanisation, changing lifestyles, and the influence of modern entertainment have placed many of these traditions at extinction risk.

To preserve this invaluable heritage, eminent folklorist and cultural researcher Prof Jayadhir Thirumala Rao established Adya Kala, a unique museum and cultural initiative dedicated to documenting and showcasing Telangana’s tribal and folk traditions. Built on more than four decades of field research, Adya Kala serves as a living archive of indigenous culture and a reminder of the importance of safeguarding cultural diversity.

The museum houses a remarkable collection of tribal and folk artifacts, including rare musical instruments, leather puppets, ancient manuscripts, handicrafts, ritual objects, agricultural tools, and household items. These exhibits offer insights into the everyday lives,

beliefs, and artistic expressions of tribal communities across Telangana. More importantly, they preserve traditions that are gradually fading from public memory.

One of the most significant components of Adya Kala is Adi Dhvani, a special exhibition dedicated to tribal and folk musical instruments. Combining live performances with rare instrument displays, the exhibition celebrates the musical heritage of indigenous communities and highlights the craftsmanship involved in creating these instruments.

Among the rare instruments showcased is the Kinnera, a multi-stringed folk veena traditionally made from bamboo and dried gourds. For generations, it was used by wandering bards to narrate community histories and folklore. The exhibition also features Thudum, a percussion instrument central to the musical traditions of the Gond and Koya tribes, and the Runja, an indigenous instrument associated with storytelling performances. Another important exhibit is the Kikri, a violin-like string instrument played by the Thoti community during rituals and devotional events.

These instruments are more than musical tools; they represent centuries of indigenous knowledge, artistic skill, and cultural identity. Crafted from



The significance of Adya Kala has been recognized nationally. Artifacts from its collection have been displayed at prestigious venues, including the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad and Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. “Janjatiya Darpan”, a gallery developed by IGNCA, celebrates the shared cultural traditions of India’s tribal communities. The inclusion of artifacts from Adya Kala highlights the national importance of Telangana’s indigenous heritage. Adya Kala is not merely a museum; it is a cultural movement dedicated to preserving the voices, memories, and artistic traditions of tribal communities.

natural materials such as bamboo, gourds, wood, and animal hide, they reflect the deep ecological understanding of tribal artisans.

Telangana’s tribal heritage extends beyond music. Traditional performances such as the Gussadi dance of the Raj Gonds, the Jamba Puranam accompanied by Kinnera, and Dakkali Kathas preserve history, mythology, and social

memory through oral storytelling. These art forms have long served as vehicles for transmitting knowledge and strengthening community bonds.

Despite their cultural significance, many of these traditions are in decline. Younger generations often seek alternative livelihoods because traditional arts no longer provide sustainable income. The availability of natural materials required for

instrument-making has also diminished due to environmental changes and urban expansion. In addition, television, cinema, and digital media have gradually replaced many traditional forms of entertainment, reducing opportunities for folk artists and storytellers.

Against this backdrop, Prof Thirumala Rao’s work assumes immense significance. Over the past 45 years, he has travelled extensively through remote villages and tribal settlements, documenting oral traditions, collecting rare artifacts, and preserving endangered musical instruments. His efforts have ensured that invaluable aspects of Telangana’s cultural heritage are not lost forever.

The significance of Adya Kala has been recognized nationally. Artifacts from its collection have been displayed at prestigious venues, including the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad and Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. A notable moment came when President Droupadi Murmu inaugurated the “Janjatiya Darpan” Gallery at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Developed by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), the gallery celebrates the shared cultural traditions of India’s tribal communities. The inclusion of artifacts from Adya Kala in this prestigious space highlights the national importance of Telangana’s indigenous heritage.

Adya Kala is not merely a museum; it is a cultural movement dedicated to preserving the voices, memories, and artistic traditions of tribal communities. Through exhibitions, live performances, documentation, and public outreach, it creates awareness about the need to protect endangered cultural practices and inspires younger generations to appreciate their heritage.

Traditional musical instruments and folk-art forms are more than museum objects. They embody the history, spirituality, creativity, and collective memory of communities that have contributed significantly to India’s cultural landscape. Every melody played on a Kinnera, and every rhythm produced by a Thudum carries stories that connect the present with the past.

As Telangana continues to modernize, initiatives such as Adya Kala and Adi Dhvani remind us that development and cultural preservation must go hand in hand. Protecting tribal heritage is not only about conserving artifacts; it is about safeguarding identities, knowledge systems, languages, and artistic traditions that form an integral part of India’s cultural legacy. Through the vision and dedication of Prof Jayadhir Thirumala Rao, these priceless traditions continue to inspire and educate future generations.



# INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS





# COMMENT

## Editorials

### Cultivating a workforce of young sci-tech talent a strategic priority

History has repeatedly shown that scientific revolutions are ignited by minds willing to challenge convention and test new ideas. Likewise, major countries secure their scientific standing by cultivating generation after generation of researchers who dare to venture into the unknown.

That is why President Xi Jinping stressed the need to create institutions that allow scientific inquiry to flourish — through stable support, better evaluation systems, stronger mentorship and an environment in which originality is rewarded.

Scientists need to be afforded the time, institutional backing and intellectual space to pursue discoveries that could shape not just the next research project, but the very contours of the next scientific era. That is why, when addressing the country's highest-level conference on science and technology in Beijing on Wednesday, Xi urged the nation to treat the building of a workforce of young sci-tech talent as a strategic priority.

The country needs to pay attention to discovering and cultivating more excellent young scientific and technological talents on the frontiers of scientific research, and increase the support provided to them. It also needs to pay attention to cultivating teenagers' interest in science, improving their scientific literacy and experimental ability and attracting more teenagers with scientific research potential to devote themselves to the cause of science and technology.

The future of science lies with the youth, Xi emphasized.

The opening year of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) arrives at a time of intensifying technological competition and a rapidly shifting global innovation landscape. China's future depends more than ever on its ability to empower a rising generation of scientific researchers and innovators.

For young researchers and innovators, this is both a challenge and a call to action. It is essential that they integrate their personal aspirations into the broader cause of national development, and channel their youthful energy and creativity into the country's modernization drive.

Only by aligning individual ambition with the

nation's progress can they truly contribute to the sci-tech transformation that lies ahead.

To provide an enabling environment for them, China should further reform its research evaluation system, which should reward true discovery, originality and creativity. Xi called for accelerating reforms that break the grip of the “four onlys” — judging researchers solely by papers, credentials, titles or awards — and replacing them with an evaluation system based on innovation, quality, practical effect and genuine contribution.

Great discoveries rarely emerge from systems that fear failure and entrench the status quo. Young researchers need an inclusive environment to pursue unconventional questions, confidence that long-term projects will survive assessments, and mentors prepared to nurture curiosity instead of demanding immediate returns.

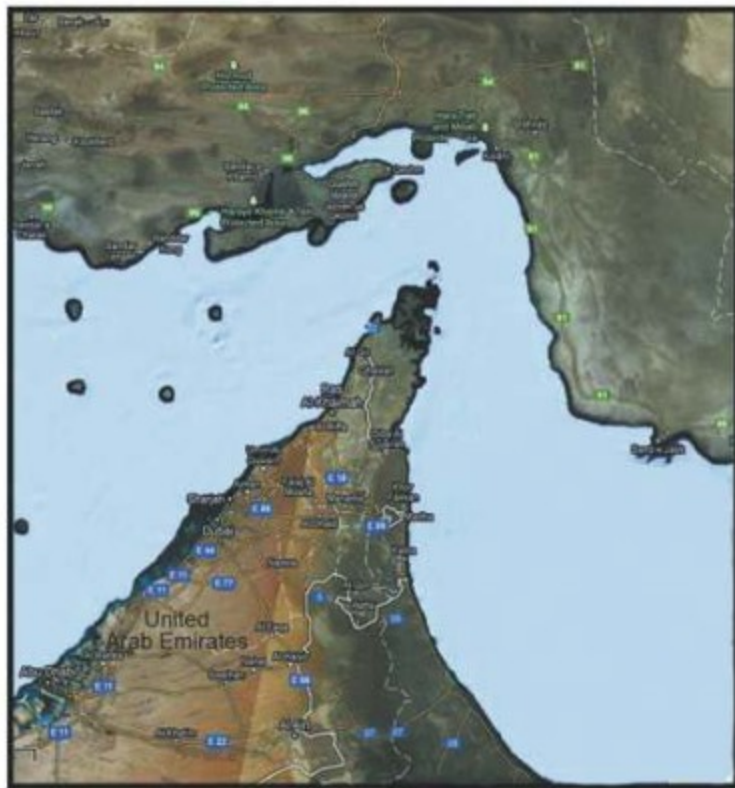
The report released by the Xinhua Institute last month on Chinese youth captures another dimension of this call for action as it notes that the country's younger generation is not only the builder of national development but, increasingly, a contributor to global progress.

Whether in the spheres of artificial intelligence, biotechnology, green energy or advanced manufacturing, China's young scientists are taking on challenges that extend well beyond national borders. Scientific self-reliance and international contribution are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the stronger a country's indigenous innovation capacity, the greater its ability to contribute to humanity's shared scientific future.

The secret of a fulfilled life is to cultivate wide interests and allow those interests to deepen rather than narrow with age. That observation applies to countries as well as individuals. Countries that sustain scientific vitality encourage curiosity rather than conformity, exploration rather than complacency, and have the confidence to raise questions whose answers may not arrive for decades.

China's aspiration to become a leading country in science and technology by 2035 will therefore depend on whether today's young scientists believe their work will be supported, and their talent will be valued.

Luo Jie



The Strait of Hormuz



US-Iran Peace Agreement

## Opinion Line

### Chinese football should live up to expectations of nation

Notwithstanding the Chinese Football Association's denial on Tuesday of the rumor that it had declined a friendly match invitation from Cape Verde, the unfounded allegation continues to be widely disseminated.

Soccer has always generated rumors. Some rumors gain traction because they sound believable long before anyone asks whether they are true or not. The Cape Verde story belonged in that category. It imagined a Chinese team unwilling to face one of the World Cup's surprise packages.

In an age when fiction can complete several laps of the internet before the truth gets its boots on, millions accepted it almost instinctively because it reflected something Chinese supporters have come to expect of the national team: not necessarily failure, but lack of confidence.

That should bother the CFA more than the rumor itself. The 2026 World Cup has once again demonstrated that football has little regard for population or GDP. Cape Verde, representing little more than half a million people, has become one of the tournament's compelling teams. The World Cup has always had room for such successes — one of the reasons why it is so popular. These dark horses remind everyone that football's hierarchy is earned rather than inherited.

Chinese fans, watching this year's tournament unfold without the presence of the national team, cannot help but notice the contrast.

However, had such a match actually been arranged, Chinese supporters

would almost certainly have embraced it because they still crave success and every match presents the opportunity for, if not a win, at least a good performance.

The sarcasm surrounding the national team is often mistaken for indifference. But indifference is silence. Chinese football rarely experiences silence. It provokes arguments, mockery and endless online debate precisely because hundreds of millions still invest emotionally in what they hope it might one day become.

The harder question lies elsewhere.

This World Cup has shown how quickly elite football continues to evolve. Faster restart regulations have accelerated the game's rhythm. Referees have adopted more consistent standards while punishing cynical behavior with increasing severity. Semi-automated offside technology and sensor-equipped match balls have transformed decision-making into a matter of precision measured in milliseconds. Coaches now prepare not simply for opponents but for an environment where tactical flexibility, data analysis and technical accuracy decide increasingly fine margins.

The gap separating Chinese soccer from the world's best cannot be bridged by another expensive signing or another short-term project. If there is an Asian blueprint worth studying, it is Japan's. Its progress has never depended on one generation or one wealthy benefactor. It has been built patiently through youth

coaching, coherent player development and an acceptance that the best footballers must leave home to train.

Chinese football once convinced itself that prosperity could be purchased. The era of lavish spending, imported stars and naturalized internationals created a sport that some foreign players joked looks like football but is not, briefly disguising the deeper structural problems without solving them.

The next generation will have to be developed differently. Investment should go into community pitches rather than transfer fees, to qualified youth coaches rather than fleeting celebrity signings. Young Chinese players should be encouraged to test themselves in stronger leagues while they are still learning their football education. The same applies to coaches.

Grassroots soccer too deserves protection from becoming another form of online entertainment. Viral clips and exhibition events may generate attention, but they cannot replace thousands of ordinary training sessions where habits, technique and judgment are formed. Nor can reform stop with the football administrative system. Chinese football's anti-corruption campaign has restored some confidence to a sport that had spent too long undermining itself.

Chinese soccer's task is not to simply rebut stories that damage its reputation. It is to build a national team whose progress makes those rumors impossible to believe in the first place.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

### Forecasts show resilience of China's economy

The International Monetary Fund on Wednesday upgraded China's growth outlook by 0.2 percentage points to 4.6 percent for the year 2026 from the previous projection in April, while downgrading its 2026 global economic growth forecast by 0.1 percentage points to 3 percent. It attributes the Chinese economy's performance to the robust expansion of its high-tech manufacturing sector and the strong export growth that has followed.

The World Bank also pointed out in its latest China Economic Update, released on Tuesday, that China's investment in high-tech sectors grew by 4.5 percent year-on-year in January-May, driven by robust artificial intelligence-related demand at home and abroad. In June, the OECD had predicted that China's economy will grow by 4.5 percent in 2026.

A closer examination of some key datasets from the first half of 2026 also highlights the foundations of the Chinese economy's steady performance.

By the end of May, the country's cumulative installed power generation capacity surpassed 4 billion kilowatts, a year-on-year increase of 11 percent, and a figure that exceeds the combined capacity of the United States, the European Union, India, Japan and Russia. It took eight years to go from 1 to 2 billion kilowatts, but only about two years to climb from 3 to 4 billion kW. This achievement is built upon the world's most complete new energy industry chain, which produces 80 percent of global photovoltaic modules and 60 percent of wind power equipment.

The fast advancement of artificial intelligence is fueling the momentum driving the economy. In early 2024, China's average daily token usage was just 100 billion. By May 2026, this figure had surged to hundreds of trillions, the highest in the world. This soaring token rate reflects the deep integration of AI into manufacturing and daily life, which has boosted efficiency across sectors spanning chemical production to software development. From January to May, high-tech manufacturing contributed nearly 40 percent to the country's industrial growth, while equipment manufacturing contributed nearly 60 percent to industrial growth. All this is a clear testament to China's accelerating shift toward an innovation-led economy.

Chinese consumption is displaying renewed vitality. The national consumer goods trade-in

program has proved to be a phenomenal success, with sales exceeding 1 trillion yuan (\$147 billion) by June 20, benefiting 136 million people. This policy has not only invigorated the domestic consumption market but also spurred industrial upgrading, with high-efficiency appliances and new energy vehicles at the forefront.

China's consumer price index rose 1 percent year-on-year in June, and the country's producer price index went up 4.1 percent year-on-year, according to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Thursday.

The country's new energy vehicle sector reported continued growth in the first half of 2026, with output and sales both exceeding 7 million units during the period, latest industry data showed on Thursday. NEV output from January to June reached 7.44 million units, while sales stood at 7.45 million units, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Also China's commitment to openness and integration is reflected in its record-breaking foreign trade with Africa. The country has implemented a zero-tariff policy for all 53 African countries with which it has diplomatic ties since May 1. In the first five months of 2026, China-Africa trade registered an 18.2 percent year-on-year increase to reach 1.14 trillion yuan, the first time the figure has surpassed 1 trillion yuan. This is a testament to the fact that China is creating new opportunities for shared growth.

The IMF's decision to lower its global growth forecast underscores the difficulties facing many countries, including inflationary pressures, geopolitical tensions, and supply chain disruptions. In this context, what China has achieved in the past six months highlights the country's ability to navigate global challenges and maintain steady growth.

Even so, with economic headwinds persisting, China's macroeconomic policy will continue to pair moderate monetary easing with proactive fiscal action — but with a sharper focus on targeted measures, rather than broad-based stimulus. The second half of the year will likely bring faster special-purpose and special treasury bond issuance, as well as more support for livelihoods and consumer spending through transfers and subsidies. At the same time, lingering risks in local government debt and property sector financing will require steady, ongoing efforts to unwind.

## What They Say

### New guardrails to make anthropomorphic AI safer

**Editor's note:** China has issued new rules for regulating providers of artificial intelligence systems that simulate human personality traits, thinking patterns and communication styles in emotional interactions with users. Science and Technology Daily spoke to Huang Wenhong, a researcher at the China Center for Information Industry Development, and Sang Jitao, a professor at the School of Computer Science and Technology at Beijing Jiaotong University, about the importance of the new rules that will come into effect on July 15. Below are excerpts of the interviews. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

The new rules focus on AI services that simulate human personality traits and thinking patterns, establishing clear boundaries for anthropomorphic AI interaction and placing greater responsibility on platform operators, which are prohibited from excessively catering to users, fostering emotional dependence or addiction, or manipulating users emotionally in ways that could influence them to make unreasonable decisions.

Platforms are also barred from offering minors virtual intimate relationship services, including virtual family members or romantic partners. In addition, they are required to identify high-risk situations, such as users exhibiting extreme emotional distress or suffering significant financial losses, and provide appropriate reassurance and, where necessary, timely intervention.

AI agents are applications designed to accomplish specific objectives. An AI agent can understand a user's objective, break complex tasks into manageable steps, use external tools, access relevant knowledge bases and data, monitor task progress, and complete an entire workflow within the limits of its permissions. Many AI agents are

also equipped with long-term memory, enabling them to retain conversation history, user preferences, role settings and the status of ongoing tasks, while coordinating with other AI models to execute complex assignments.

The rules do not apply the brakes to the development of custom AI agents. Instead, they establish guardrails for anthropomorphic interaction. They are likely to accelerate the transition from an early stage characterized by low barriers to entry, rapid expansion and unrestricted publication toward a more mature ecosystem featuring categorized supervision, risk-based governance, prerelease review and built-in safety mechanisms. As the rules take effect, platforms are expected to strengthen both the review process for creating and publishing AI agents and associated safety testing.

The rules accept that custom AI agents built on general-purpose large models remain an important direction for the future development of AI applications. But, going forward, a clearer distinction will need to be made between task-oriented AI agents and anthropomorphic agents designed for emotional companionship.

Task-oriented agents, which include intelligent customer service, knowledge bases, work assistants, and educational and scientific research applications do not involve continuous emotional interaction and therefore fall outside the primary scope of the new rules. By contrast, anthropomorphic, companion-oriented and role-playing AI agents will be subject to a more stringent oversight framework.

Although the new rules are likely to increase compliance costs in the short term and reduce the space for low-quality, borderline-legal and traffic-driven AI agents, they are expected to foster healthier long-term development of compliant AI applications serving fields such as education, work, scientific research, cultural communication, eldercare companionship and support for people with special needs.

Before the new rules were released, some AI platforms had already allowed users to create and publicly share a large number of customized AI agents, whose ability to maintain long-term memory and adopt character settings makes it easy for some of these applications to cross the regulatory boundaries governing anthropomorphic interaction.







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## EDITORIALS

# Johnson continues to wage his losing budget and propaganda war

Mayor Brandon Johnson allowed the City Council’s 2026 budget to become law without his signature and he then spent the early months of the year trashing that plan. So it was beyond predictable that this summer we would find ourselves hearing the mayor warn of a shortfall in Chicago’s current budget.

Sure enough, Team Johnson unveiled a midyear update earlier this week and used the opportunity to lambaste the council majority and scare the public into believing the city faces a current-year budget gap of \$130 million or thereabouts. Headlines fell in line with the terrible news: “Chicago is \$130M short,” “Chicago midyear budget claims \$131.7m shortfall.”

But the actual budget document laid out a revenue picture far less frightening.

Revenues through the month of May came in \$32 million short of what was budgeted, not \$132 million.

Why? Some line items are substantially exceeding expectations even as the administration has failed to execute in a timely way \$132 million worth of the measures that the council approved but Johnson opposed, such as selling a portion of the billions in unpaid fines, fees and other debts owed to the city to outside firms for collection. The council figured the city could reap nearly \$90 million from such a sale, but so far it hasn’t happened.

Whose fault is that? It depends who you ask.

Johnson blamed the majority of council members who passed the budget over his objections late last year. Leaders of the majority aldermanic bloc that forged the budget and continue to oppose other of Johnson’s initiatives accused the administration of slow-walking the debt sale as well as other more modest of their revenue raisers that he didn’t like.

The mayor consistently has castigated the debt sale proposal



Chief of Policy Jung Yoon, from left, Mayor Brandon Johnson, center, and Budget Director Annette Guzman answer questions from the audience during a town hall on Feb. 3 at the South Shore Cultural Center. The mayor defended his handling of the 2026 budget and took questions. **JOSH BOLAND/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

as immoral (it’s not) so it’s hardly surprising his administration hasn’t made a high priority of getting it completed despite the substantial dollars attached. That’s the sort of executive resistance or opposition to a separate but co-equal branch to which Johnson and his supporters rightly object when the Trump administration attempts to withhold appropriated funds from jurisdictions the president doesn’t favor, such as Illinois and Chicago.

In either case, the executive branch is tasked with administering and enforcing laws, whether

the mayor or president likes them or not. That’s how our governments must function in a democracy. When they don’t, we get the relitigating of past debates and general chaos.

Johnson continued this week to push for his foolish and counterproductive desire to impose a \$33-per-month tax on each Chicago job generated by the city’s largest private-sector employers. The head tax was at the heart of the budget battle last year and led to Johnson’s extraordinary decision to allow the budget to become law without his signature.

It is more than clear at this stage that the head tax is anathema to the council majority. Rightly so, since it would send a horrendous signal to the private sector that Chicago is so hostile to business that it would punish employers for putting people to work. Johnson, of course, is free to run for reelection on the issue next year if he chooses to seek another term. But that tax isn’t happening this year. Obviously.

We’ll mention at this point that one of the largest upside surprises so far this year has been the revenue generated by Chicago’s eye-watering tax on cloud

computing licenses, the vast bulk of which is paid by the corporations Johnson frequently accuses of having “no skin in the game” in terms of financing city government. The city projected \$362 million from that tax as of the end of May; it took in \$402 million.

One other interesting factoid that demonstrates how taxes have unanticipated consequences: The budget hiked the checkout bag fee to 15 cents from 10 cents. And more irritated consumers clearly have started bringing their own bags. The city collected just \$10.3 million through May, 10% below the projected \$11.5 million.

You don’t think businesses would react negatively to a head tax? When a fee or a tax is egregious enough, people and businesses respond.

The midyear budget report should not be occasion for fighting last year’s wars. It should be a clear-eyed status report on the city’s finances — and no more.

And if the mayor is going to warn of deep budget shortfalls that presumably must be filled, he and his team should be providing concrete estimates and calling specifically for action instead of continuing to fight yesterday’s ideological battles. We have no idea based on what was said and presented this week whether such action will be necessary.

But if the hole is deep enough, the mayor shouldn’t waste time. He should be calling in the unions representing city workers and negotiating belt-tightening steps that would mitigate otherwise-necessary position reductions and layoffs. That’s what other mayors do in such circumstances, including recently in liberal cities such as Denver, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

And if this tunnel-vision mayor is unwilling to do that unpleasant work, the council majority must step into the breach as it did with last year’s budget and do what should be the mayor’s job.

## We already know how Chicago voters feel about a millionaire tax. We want to know what they think about other important issues

Every citywide advisory question that reaches Chicago voters means another did not.

So the debate isn’t simply about which ideas deserve a public vote, but about who gets to decide what voters are allowed to weigh in on in the first place.

During Thursday’s City Council Rules Committee meeting, six proposed citywide advisory questions — including three submitted by Mayor Brandon Johnson — vied for a place on November’s ballot, where ultimately only three citywide questions can appear.

Mayor Brandon Johnson’s proposals largely reflected his administration’s policy priorities: asking voters about a city millionaire tax, seeking federal reimbursement for immigration enforcement costs and creating a permanent Property Tax Relief Fund.

The aldermanic proposals, by contrast, focused on long-standing municipal questions: whether to restore ShotSpotter, build a permanent festival space and change the timing of city pension contributions.

When only three advisory questions can appear on the ballot, the distinction matters. Every slot devoted to an administration priority is one less opportunity to gauge public opinion on another pressing issue. That is precisely why mayors should be especially cautious about using scarce ballot space to advance their own agendas.

Particularly compelling, in our view, is the proposal asking voters whether Chicago should restore gunshot detection technology. We have long held that ending ShotSpotter was a mistake. A citywide vote would tell elected officials whether Chicagoans agree.

Oh, and there’s another topic we forgot to mention.

The millionaire tax.

Johnson wanted to ask Chicagoans whether the city should impose a 3% surcharge on individuals earning more than \$1 million annually.

Separately, former Gov. Pat Quinn and state Rep. La Shawn Ford today announced an ordinance calling for a citywide advisory question asking Chicago voters whether they support a proposed Illinois constitutional amendment imposing a 3% income tax surcharge on millionaires, with revenue split between property tax relief and education.

For a brief time, two different millionaire-tax questions were competing for one of the city’s few available ballot slots.

How is this productive?

A millionaire tax has already

been considered in Springfield and failed to advance. Gov. JB Pritzker wisely declined to push for its placement on the statewide ballot, as we noted in March, pointing to the sound defeat in 2020 of his signature progressive income tax.

There is little mystery about how Chicago would vote on a millionaire tax, as such a proposal has long enjoyed support here. The obstacle has never been Chicago, but the rest of Illinois. This tax idea gets trickier statewide, and given that advancing such a tax would require amending the Illinois Constitution, it’s going nowhere unless the rest of the state gets on board.

Which is why the city shouldn’t commit valuable real estate to an advisory question on this issue. Johnson’s was shot down in committee. The fate of Quinn and Ford’s plan is uncertain — and

unlikely.

The committee ultimately rejected Johnson’s millionaire-tax proposal and his property tax relief question while advancing his proposal seeking federal reimbursement for immigration enforcement costs. It also advanced advisory questions on ShotSpotter, a permanent festival site and earlier pension contributions. The full council still must weigh in before any of these questions make it to the ballot — and because the number of citywide advisory questions is limited, not every proposal can ultimately appear before voters.

Thursday’s vote is not the final word. The full City Council still must decide which questions ultimately reach Chicago voters.

But the committee sent an important message of its own: how ideas reach the ballot matters, too.

### ON THIS DAY 101 YEARS AGO FULL PRISONS

The superintendent of federal prisons, L. C. White, has been trying to get board and room in state prisons for the oversupply of federal prisoners. Only one state prison has offered to take any. The state prisons of such character as would be acceptable to the national government and its criminal wards are themselves full up enforcing their own laws.

The national government can room more than it can feed, but it anticipates the worst when the federal judges get back from their vacations and all the courts are again in session.

Among the moral advantages of prohibition it was said that there would be less need for prisons. It is found that the need is for more and much larger ones. Prohibition and the prison housing shortage are at least contem-

poraneous. It is true that within the prohibition period there has developed a higher organization of crime, a multiplication of laws, and a shortage of prisons.

We have so many laws—local, state and federal—that not many people can or will get through a day without breaking one or more of them. We know that before the federal government assumed so many state police functions and threw its agents into the private life of American citizens there was almost a fetish of respect for the national law and law enforcement. Criminals who took chances with state law hesitated before they did so with the federal law. The federal government, in extending its power, has weakened its authority.

**Tribune editorial board,**  
**July 10, 1925**



**MICHAEL RAMIREZ**



OPINION

# Cook County’s 911 mental health response program grows, while Chicago’s flounders

By Thomas J. Dart  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

The discussion on how to treat those with mental illness in our communities — specifically as it relates to 911 calls for mental health crises — never ends. The primary response in the city of Chicago is the Crisis Assistance Response and Engagement program.

CARE was born from the school of thought that the only way to effectively address mental health issues is to send clinicians out on calls rather than police officers. It is loosely based on programs such as Oregon’s Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets, a much-lauded (and now mostly defunct) program that sent mental health workers instead of police officers to address low-level, nonviolent calls for service involving mental health issues.

This model sounds good and sells well at galas and fundraisers. But, after years of attempts throughout the country, the model has not worked. Whether it’s because of funding issues or execution, it has floundered.

Mental health has long been a critical concern for me, and in my 20 years as sheriff, I have made it my mission to expand mental health services in the jail and the community. This is because I, like many thoughtful people in the criminal justice system, recognize that treating mental health as a criminal issue only serves to flood



Cook County police Sgt. Bonnie Busching tests a virtual meeting with a tablet at the Cook County sheriff’s office in Chicago on Aug. 13, 2021. The sheriff’s office is using the tablets to give people having a crisis face-to-face virtual meetings with mental health professionals. **NAM Y. HUH/AP**

our jails and ignores the underlying issues that, left unaddressed, will continue the cycle of law enforcement involvement in a health issue.

After years of groundbreaking mental health programming at the jail, I developed a plan to tackle the vexing issue of the tens of thousands of mental health calls presently directed to law enforcement through 911 calls. Frankly, I was tired of hearing utopian plans supported by neither data nor reality.

The system we developed is the Co-Responder Virtual Assistance Program (CVAP), which equips our police officers with low-cost electronic tablets that they use to

instantly connect a person in crisis via video to one of our civilian mental health professionals 24 hours a day.

No waiting for the clinician to arrive. No worrying about their safety when they get there. Minimal cost, because we are using mental health professionals we already had in place. And the side benefit of using tablets is that we quickly discovered that talking on Zoom felt much less confrontational to people in crisis — especially to kids and teens, who sometimes find online interactions less threatening than in-person conversations.

All this with a staff of 21 and a

total budget last year of less than \$2.3 million. It should be noted that CVAP isn’t all these staff members do, either. They also run our Treatment Response Team, another program that works with those dealing with substance-use disorders.

Today, while the CARE program is floundering, CVAP continues to expand. Currently, 47 police departments — or more than one-third of local cities, towns and villages in Cook County — use our service, meaning that CVAP is available to a combined total of 770,000 residents. We’ve expanded CVAP’s use to virtually every part of the sheriff’s office. Our detectives use it. Deputies use it in our courthouses and on evictions. It’s available to officers who have to notify someone that their loved one died. CVAP staff are embedded in our dispatch center.

Most recently, our officers on mass transit have used it for individuals they encounter on CTA trains, buses and stations. In short, anytime someone could benefit from a mental health professional, they are just a Zoom session or phone call away.

As for results, CVAP clinicians have provided immediate, virtual mental health co-responses to more than 1,400 police calls for service since they took their first call in December 2020. And CVAP staff have fielded another 6,100 calls from people looking for help for themselves or their loved ones. The program doesn’t just address

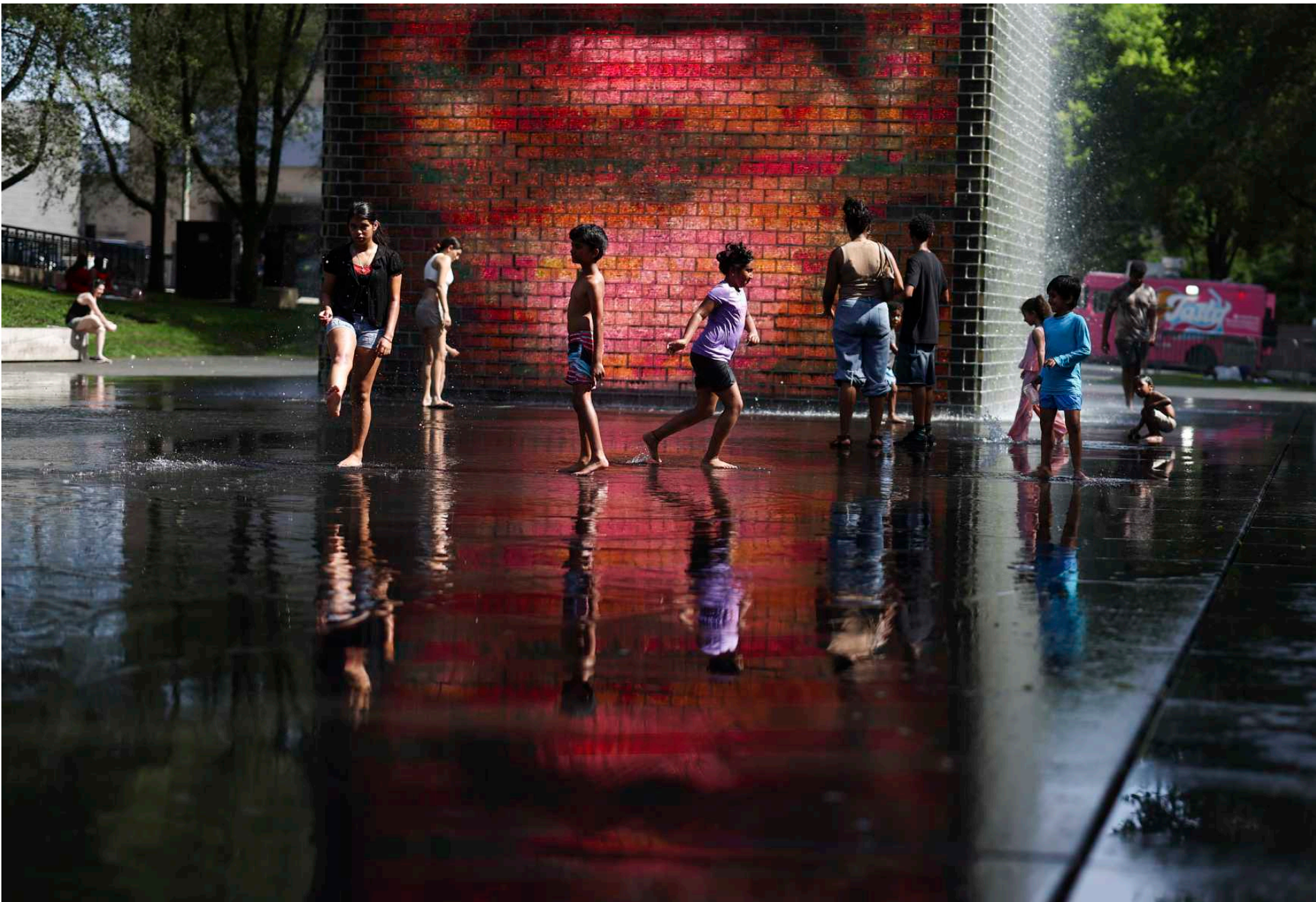
the immediate crisis that precipitated the 911 call; it also treats every individual as a potential client for case management for their underlying issue. That’s why CVAP maintains an active client list of more than 500 people — many of whom first engaged with the program following a police response — that staff members regularly engage with to connect them with services, resources or just to see how they are doing.

The success of this program is demonstrated by the fact that, to our knowledge, there have been no use-of-force incidents on calls for service where police have used CVAP. Police officers like it because it’s an effective tool to safely de-escalate or prevent volatile interactions. Clients and their loved ones like it because they see we’re bringing help, not just handcuffs. And the model has garnered attention from other jurisdictions, including Broward County, Florida, and the city of Philadelphia, which have sent officials to learn how to adopt CVAP.

It’s a great model that every town or city in Cook County should adopt rather than throwing more money at unworkable models. The community does not need another great-sounding but impossible-to-implement program.

The community needs help now.

*Thomas J. Dart is Cook County sheriff and a former Illinois prosecutor and state legislator.*



Children cool off at Crown Fountain in Millennium Park in downtown Chicago during a heat wave on June 29. **EILEEN T. MESLAR/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

## Climate change’s heat is baking us to death. We must act



**Elizabeth Shackelford**

America celebrated its 250th year of independence under a historic heat dome that shattered more than 148 records for daily high temperature across the Eastern United States. The nation’s capital recorded the hottest Fourth of July on record at 103 degrees. Philadelphia, where our Declaration of Independence was written, recorded three days in a row above 101 degrees for the first time ever. The heat last week was so severe that parades and events across the country were canceled, including the flagship Independence Day Parade planned in Washington. The heat index in Chicago exceeded 100 degrees on July 1, putting the power grid under strain.

It isn’t just the United States. Heat waves have rocked Europe three times already this summer, with record temperatures hitting the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Portugal in late May, late June and again right now. The

June heat wave caused more than 1,300 excess deaths. With less snow on the ground each year to deflect the sun, and the warming Arctic nearby, where rapidly melting sea ice leaves more ocean to absorb the sun’s energy, Europe is warming faster than any other region on earth.

Since only about 20% of households in Europe have air conditioning, it’s hard to ignore. I’m in France now and can attest. We went to the mountains seeking relief, but the heat was relentless even at 4,000 feet. With no air conditioning, even sleep was a chore.

But these inconveniences are nothing compared with what lies ahead if we don’t change course. The most alarming new temperature record was the ocean surface, which hit almost 70 degrees in June, capping off six months of record warmth. Marine heat waves are triggering extreme weather, killing off marine wildlife and bleaching coral reefs, and even more heat is in the forecast with a super El Niño weather pattern expected this year. This will cause extreme flooding in some regions and droughts and wildfires in others. It could even cause famine in parts of the globe.

All of this is threatening to collapse the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation, or AMOC, a critical ocean current system that pulls water from warm areas of the ocean up north where it cools and sinks and cycles back south. The Gulf Stream, which brings warm water from the Gulf of Mexico into the Atlantic Ocean and shapes the climate in the United States as well as Western Europe, is part of that system. Once thought to be a low-risk possibility for some future generation, new estimates suggest AMOC could collapse within decades and that it’s already too late to turn back the clock. A mysterious cold ocean blob has been discovered south of Greenland that scientists suggest is a sign of AMOC heading toward a tipping point. AMOC’s collapse would be globally catastrophic; in fact, it’s the event at the center of the apocalyptic 2004 film “The Day After Tomorrow.”

As my mother lamented recently, “Climate change is ruining summer.” And it’s ruining summer whether you believe in it or not. I remain shocked that so few people, in America in particular, are not seized with this and raising alarm. The frog in boiling

water metaphor is just a little too on the nose.

Ironically, the very things that help Americans avoid the realities of climate change are speeding it up: our car-based lifestyle, our plentiful air conditioning, our economy based largely on industries that happen inside away from the elements. I lived and worked in Africa for years and never met an African skeptical of climate change.

So perhaps it’s unsurprising that the U.S. government today stands alone in aggressively opposing the mitigation of climate change and doubling down on the fossil fuels that cause it. The fossil fuel industry has paid a lot of money for its friendly treatment in Washington, but President Donald Trump’s administration has taken that favoritism to lengths so absurd it would be comical if this weren’t such a dire issue. Trump’s One Big Beautiful Bill, signed into law a year ago, increased fossil fuel subsidies by \$4 billion to reach nearly \$35 billion a year, which coincidentally is roughly equal to the cost of renewable energy projects that were canceled due to Trump administration policy changes. The administration has even paid

\$2.5 billion of taxpayer money to get companies to shut down existing wind energy projects.

Like tobacco companies that spent decades denying the health dangers of cigarettes, people who financially benefit from dependence on fossil fuels will always try to deny that climate change is happening, and that their products are causing it. Politicians in the pocket of these industries will do the same.

But we will keep experiencing its disastrous effects in our day-to-day lives, in the form of hotter summers, longer tornado seasons, more dangerous droughts and floods, longer fire seasons, higher food costs and more expensive insurance.

We Americans can choose to put our heads in the sand, but it’s hot down there now, too.

*Elizabeth Shackelford is a senior adviser with the Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group and a foreign affairs columnist for the Chicago Tribune. She is also a lecturer with the Dickey Center at Dartmouth College. She was previously a U.S. diplomat and is the author of “The Dissent Channel: American Diplomacy in a Dishonest Age.”*



OPINION

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

**Mexican team inspired pride**

On Sunday night, as the minutes ticked down in the Mexican national team’s World Cup defeat to England, I couldn’t help but wipe tears from my eyes. This time was different; they weren’t heartbreaking, gut-wrenching, defeated tears. It was me reflecting on something Dr. Seuss is credited with saying: “Don’t cry because it’s over. Smile because it happened.”

I thought of the joy of all my people from every corner of the globe who had a reason to smile and laugh and celebrate being us. We celebrated in our amazing cities with our people and with strangers who couldn’t help but join in on the fiesta. The whole world found out what we know. We’re beautiful people who love México, love life and love the amazing land we are blessed to either call home or the land of our ancestors.

I remembered last September when people like me were persecuted in the streets of Chicago and could legally be racially profiled and taken away without due process. That period was mentally and physically taxing on thousands of people like me who stayed in the house for fear of being the next one federal agents took. I remembered when the capture of an infamous drug cartel head brought attention to Mexico for all the wrong reasons, and in some cases, people questioned whether the only Latin American nation to host two World Cups (and the Olympic Games) could host a third.

I remembered taking my father to the World Cup’s opening game this year at Estadio Azteca in Mexico City on June 11. Gosh, did that immigrant deserve it after working two jobs for most of his life as a baker, and during that period, his son proudly became a United States Marine. His other son worked with the U.S. national soccer team, and his daughter, helping younger people accomplish their goal of higher education.

I remembered my mother, a working mom whose matriarchal disposition kept it all together and allowed us to live our American Dream.

During Sunday’s game, I was grateful and proud to be Mexican and knew the victory was our squad giving us a reason to smile and celebrate ourselves.

May it be this way forever. Viva México.

— *Sinhue Mendoza, Chicago*

**FIFA president caved to pressure**

I watched the U.S. men lose to Belgium on Monday night. My feelings were complicated. At best, I’m a casual soccer fan, but, hey, it’s the World Cup, and it’s here. USA!

I also watched the U.S. versus Bosnia and Herzegovina match, and I watched as Folarin Balogun received a red card. Ouch. Brutal, but them’s the rules, right? And has there ever been a match without a controversial call? In any sport?

I was horrified to read that President Donald Trump pressured FIFA President Gianni Infantino to repeal Balogun’s suspension. Infantino, the same guy who invented and awarded Trump the “FIFA Peace Prize,” caved pretty quickly.

I hoped against hope that, this time, someone would stand up for integrity and rules and a bully wouldn’t get his way. And maybe give the USA a chance to win fair and square.

But, like Charlie Brown and the football, I’m still hoping.

— *Suzanne Zettle, Naperville*

**FIFA lacks an appeal process**

The recent controversy surrounding U.S. striker Folarin Balogun’s red card reversal highlights a glaring flaw in international soccer’s governance. Balogun was cleared to play against Belgium after FIFA suspended his automatic one-game ban and placed him on probation instead. While American fans were glad to have him back, the arbitrary way this decision was reached undermines the integrity of the sport.

Major American sports leagues have a formalized, transparent appeal process built into their core rules. In the NFL, MLB and NHL, if a player or team faces a major penalty, there are clear, structured channels for arbitration.

In contrast, FIFA, an organization that operates with hundreds of staff members



People toss a massive blowup soccer ball back and forth in Elgin before the start of the World Cup game between Mexico and England on Sunday. STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

globally and is projected to bring in a staggering \$13 billion over this World Cup cycle, lacks a formal, equitable appeal process for on-field discipline. With a referee’s decision on the field being considered final, teams have no way to challenge a bad call, which does happen during a game.

In fairness to the players and to the nations participating, FIFA must establish a legitimate, independent appeal process. With modern video technology and multiple camera angles showing exactly what happens, there is no excuse for this organization to rely on nonappealable referee decisions.

It is time for FIFA to adopt the

transparency and fairness that other major sports leagues have practiced for decades.

— *Al Zvinakis, Lemont*

**Balogun should have sat out**

Despite the reinstatement of the U.S. soccer team’s star player for Monday’s match, sitting him out might have gone a long way toward restoring the goodwill the team — and the U.S. — had been enjoying.

— *Jase Frederick, Evanston*

**Goals of democratic socialists**

Regarding “Centrist Dems must not let ‘democratic socialists’ take over their party without a fight” (July 5): Wow! Did Joe McCarthy write the editorial about democratic socialists?

This piece is ill-informed fear-mongering, and this nonsense really needs to stop.

Most Americans support individual pieces of the democratic socialist platform. This includes universal healthcare; increasing taxes on the super-rich, decreasing military spending; raising the minimum wage; expanding social services such as childcare; strong public education and paid family leave; and adopting green energy technologies. It also includes putting guardrails on corporations to ensure clean water, air and soil, and fair worker treatment and compensation.

The editorial board knows that democratic socialism is not communism. This opinion was irresponsible and inflammatory.

— *Rebecca Palumbo, Tinley Park*

**Definition of a centrist Democrat**

I would put this question to the Tribune Editorial Board: What defines a “centrist Democrat”? This editorial is written as if the readers already know what a centrist Democrat is. But without a clear definition, how are we to compare?

Simply using extreme examples from some far-left demo-

cratic socialist candidates is not sufficiently illustrative. Does a centrist Democrat support universal healthcare? How about taxing the very wealthy at higher rates rather than giving them tax breaks? Do centrist Democrats want to reduce wealth disparity or keep it growing? What about working for policies that increase affordable housing? Spending less on our already-bloated military and more on programs that help our people? How about common-sense campaign finance reforms such as overturning the disastrous Citizens United Supreme Court decision?

Do centrist Democrats support partisan gerrymander-

ing or term limits for Supreme Court justices and members of Congress? If the answers to these questions are “no,” then a centrist Democrat is no different than a Republican.

This piece reads more like fearmongering than a thoughtful analysis. I do give the board credit, however, for not going as far as using the “communist” label that our current Republican president is slinging about.

— *Ronda Schiess, River Forest*

**Platner did not wait, fortunately**

Former Maine U.S. Senate candidate Graham Platner did not take a page from President Joe Biden’s 2024 playbook. Biden afforded his Republican challenger Donald Trump an advantage by waiting too long to drop out of the race. With the growing allegations against Platner, he reassessed his campaign and bowed out of the race. Had he waited longer, it would have only inured to the benefit of Republican incumbent Susan Collins. A Collins victory would dash Democrats’ hope of taking the U.S. Senate, which — except for the pending bipartisan affordable-housing legislation — has been rubber-stamping this administration’s objectives and policies.

— *Ava Holly Berland, Chicago*

**Why is Trump above scrutiny?**

It has become very clear that Maine Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Graham Platner was a terrible choice to face Republican incumbent Susan Collins.

Platner has a shady past, and he may be a rapist.

Having said that, why is Platner subjected to scrutiny that is not applied to the president of the United States, the leader of the free world who, among his many misdeeds, was found by a court to be liable in the sexual assault of a woman and who has been accused of rape and sexual misconduct by several people?

In one of their debates, President Joe Biden accused Donald Trump of having “the morals of an alley cat.” That was an insult to all alley cats.

What is good for the goose should be good for the gander.

— *Oren Spiegler, Peters Township*

**Illinois clings to partisanship**

I am disgusted that Illinois refused to officially participate in the Great American State Fair, part of the nation’s 250th anniversary celebration. That isn’t principle — it’s partisanship placed above the state and above the country every one of us belongs to, regardless of who holds office.

It’s also hypocritical. Democrats have spent years warning about division in this country. Yet Illinois chose to boycott its own country’s 250th birthday celebration because of who’s in the White House. That doesn’t fight division — it manufactures more of it.

It’s an embarrassment on the world stage. Other nations watched how America marked this milestone, and Illinois’ absence sent a message that this state can’t set politics aside even for one moment of national significance.

I expect the people who represent me to rise above petty partisanship. This time, they didn’t.

— *Thomas Hoerner, Mokena, Illinois*

**Protected right to free speech**

As America celebrated its 250th Independence Day, white supremacists marched openly in Washington, spreading hatred with little public condemnation from our nation’s highest office. Their presence raises a simple but uncomfortable question: What am I missing?

For years, political leaders have argued that even hateful speech by white supremacists is protected by the First Amendment unless it crosses the line into criminal conduct. If that constitutional principle is valid, it must apply equally to Americans who peacefully advocate for human rights, including the rights of Palestinians.

Let me be clear: Anyone who promotes violence or supports terrorism deserves condemnation and accountability. But peacefully speaking out for civilians suffering in war is neither terrorism nor extremism. It is protected speech.

The Constitution does not create one standard for white supremacists and another for those who peacefully call for justice. The First Amendment

cannot depend on politics, race, religion or whether those in power approve of the message.

America’s strength has always rested on defending constitutional rights consistently, not selectively. When free speech is protected for some but questioned or punished for others, we are no longer defending the Constitution.

We are defending hypocrisy.

God bless our Constitution — not hypocrisy.

— *Masood Akhtar, Madison, Wisconsin*

**Restricting birthright citizenship**

Since the Constitution is clear about the fact that anyone born in the United States is automatically a citizen, the U.S. Supreme Court made the correct decision in affirming that right. That said, I do agree with those who feel that there should be some exceptions. For instance, asylum seekers who have a child born here but then are denied asylum by the courts. Another example would be tourists who come here with the explicit desire to have their child be born in the United States.

The problem is that since this right is in the Constitution, it would probably require a constitutional amendment, which would be difficult during this administration’s term. Perhaps Congress could pass some restrictive laws, but I’m afraid the legislation would be challenged and struck down by the courts.

Therefore, it appears that we are stuck with this situation, and President Donald Trump should forget about it and move on to other important matters.

— *Dan Schuchardt, Wheaton*

**Can our American values endure?**

American values — democratic governance, adherence to the rule of law, cooperation among allies, equal opportunity, journalistic freedom — have been, for the past 250 years, a model for the rest of the world. The perversions served up by this U.S. Supreme Court and the administration stand at the forefront of an assault on those values.

But there is a glimmer of hope in the willingness of this court and other courts to reject the administration’s egregious departures from the moral high ground. Do the birthright citizenship ruling, the tariff rejection, the felony convictions of the president and preservation of funding for the press represent a chance for us to redeem our experiment in democratic governance?

We face a test. Is our system strong enough to withstand this assault on its fundamental values? Is the public motivated sufficiently to rise peacefully and demand changes? Can “this nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, long endure”?

— *Del Bloem, Hoffman Estates*



# OPINION

## Maine May Get Another Platner



**POTOMAC WATCH**  
*By Kimberly A. Strassel*

Democratic Party leaders are fuming over the incompetence of the progressive operatives who gave them Graham Platner, the Maine train wreck who jeopardizes their ambition to take the Senate. Yet those leaders are standing mutely as the same progressives dictate Mr. Platner's replacement. It's a perfect illustration of the party's dysfunction.

Days after Politico reported another round of sexual-assault allegations from another Platner ex-girlfriend, the party shucked off the Maine "oysterman." Democrats will tolerate Nazi tattoos, unhinged Reddit posts, extramarital sexting and even accusations of physical abuse (if lodged by a conservative). But the party wants it known it will act on allegations from a liberal woman—overnight. Once it was ruled Mr. Platner had to go, he was gone. No chance to explain, no window for pushback. Liberal leaders linked arms in a classic demonstration of Democratic Party ruthlessness, stripping the candidate of endorsements, funds, voter data and ground support.

In a video, Mr. Platner made clear he feels robbed—and with some justification. When Maine primary voters went to the polls on June 9, they already knew most of

the Bad Boy Platner story and overwhelmingly nominated him anyway. Mr. Platner wants to blame his political execution on the media and the "political establishment." But among the first Democrats to rush for the Graham-tanic lifeboats were the progressive insurgents who recruited him to go around the party establishment. This was the party as a whole—the "party of democracy"—uniting to erase the voters' decision.

That's where the unity ends. Amid the wreckage is a pressing deadline—2½ weeks from now—to choose a replacement nominee. You might think that Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee head Kirsten Gillibrand would be shouting "I told you so" and "the grownups are back in charge." They are the "establishment" that the progressives unwisely defied by recruiting Mr. Platner.

Mr. Schumer had recruited the popular Gov. Janet Mills to take on GOP Sen. Susan Collins. Ms. Mills is a vetted professional with a lifetime of public service—district attorney, state representative, attorney general, first female governor. She won election and re-election by comfortable margins and was the first gubernatorial candidate since the 1990s to receive more than 50% of the vote. Ms. Mills's résumé contains not a single entry for "sexting," "rape" or "Nazi tattoo." She'd have been a

formidable challenger.

But she wouldn't do for the Bernie crowd, determined to use this year's primaries to saddle the party nationwide with far-left candidates. They plucked Mr. Platner out of obscurity, dazzled by his "workingman" credentials, wanting to show that a socialist-leaning "outsider" and "fighter" would generate enthusiasm. Then they jeered Ms. Mills to the sidelines—

**Cowed by the left, the party establishment may get stuck with another hard leftist.**

trashing her as too old, too moderate, too establishment. She suspended her campaign in April, just in time to watch the Platner clown car go full Bozo.

The party has now engineered a do-over. To be decided by the tippy top. The base remains aggrieved over past party maneuvering—from the rejiggering of the primary calendar to aid Joe Biden, to the disastrous coronation of Kamala Harris. Ergo, the Maine Democratic Party is frantically spinning its plan for a complex "convention," complete with "delegates" chosen by "county committees" and other features suggesting democracy. This is all nonsense. The party quickly killed a plan to have a true caucus, which would have given voters a

new say. This decision will be made by insiders—apparently by the same progressive poobahs who just blew up Democrats' Maine race in monumental, humiliating fashion.

Before Mr. Platner even announced his suspension, that progressive crew came out in force to declare that only another progressive firebrand would be tolerated. They helpfully flagged for the press a list of democratic-socialist approved mini-Platners, and prodded several to jump into the race. "I've got a message for Chuck Schumer and the DSCC: Maine doesn't need Washington insiders picking our senator," declared Jordan Wood, one of the front-runners.

And Mr. Schumer? He, along with any Democrat with a sensible plan for winning Maine, remains cowed by the likes of Mr. Wood (age 36, running on the strength of his bio as a congressional aide). He has offered no pushback against the party's progressive minority. No threats to withhold resources. Ms. Mills—sitting governor, with the broadest name recognition of any Democrat in the state—remains She Who Must Not Be Named.

If Democrats lose Maine, they will blame it on the "flawed" Mr. Platner. The real blame will be on the party "establishment" who sat still at this second moment—and watched the left make the same mistake all over again.

*Write to kim@wsj.com.*

**BOOKSHELF** | By Alex Belth

## Mean Streets, Murky Waters

### Gowanus Crossing

**By Vincent Coppola**  
*Holt, 256 pages, \$27.99*

The New York City borough of Brooklyn is often portrayed with nostalgia. In "Gowanus Crossing," Vincent Coppola's elegiac memoir, even the pollution is imbued with longing.

"In the 1960s," Mr. Coppola writes of Brooklyn's Gowanus neighborhood, a narrow corridor abutting the Gowanus Canal, one could "drive a car at fifty miles per hour down Carroll Street from Hoyt, accelerate over the one-hundred-foot-wide waterway—and gag."

The source of the stench was the canal itself, a stretch of sewage, chemicals and other unmentionables in "green water that hissed and bubbled like a witch's cauldron."

Wedged between the residential neighborhoods of Park Slope and Carroll Gardens, Gowanus in the 1960s was a self-contained world populated by dockworkers, shopkeepers, wise-guys and priests, where the sound of mockery was "a constant: singsong, aural graffiti, echoing everywhere." Mr. Coppola's family, originally from southern Italy near Naples, settled in the neighborhood in the 1890s. The small piece of Brooklyn was a place of "nonstop crime and violence" where, in Mr. Coppola's words, "even the undertakers tried to kill one another."

Education was treated with suspicion in Mr. Coppola's family and in the neighborhood at large. Authority was disdained and outsiders unwelcome. The oldest of four brothers and one of more than 30 first cousins—"more tribe than family," as he puts it—Mr. Coppola was an anomaly. As a child he was a reader and a diligent student.

Though he knew no adult who had completed high school, he would go on to graduate from Columbia Journalism School and build a career as a reporter, mostly at Newsweek.

Each of the 32 chapters in "Gowanus Crossing" is devoted to a neighborhood personality or an episode from the author's youth. It's a trim book—you can read it in a couple of sittings or on a long flight—but it's perhaps best enjoyed in small doses, a chapter or two at a time. You don't chug espresso.

Many of Mr. Coppola's recollections are sensory: roasted peppers, his grandma's sizzling meatballs, a neighbor's home-made wine sweetened with peaches—"smells and tastes that intoxicate me to this day." Memorable characters he introduces include Armando Illiano, a 4-foot-tall gangster connected to the Gallo crew who walked a pet lion named Cleo around the neighborhood. Margie, a neighbor Mr. Coppola describes as "a woman with a wrestler's bulk . . . and murder in her heart" taught high school by day and tended bar beneath the author's apartment at night. She eventually loses her teaching job for biting a student in the head.

"Everyone from Gowanus shouts," Mr. Coppola writes. "All day, all the time, as if they're players fretting and strutting on some invisible stage."

The author, restrained and watchful, proves the exception. As a child, Mr. Coppola stayed close to home, "afraid of the unknown, of being alone, of losing friends and family should I venture out of Gowanus, a fear hard to shake."

The anxieties that were an ordinary part of life in the neighborhood—including air-raid drills at school and the constant threat of violence from parents, teachers, police officers and street punks—is conveyed vividly. "It's an unsettling thing," Mr. Coppola writes, "to see my father and uncle, both wife beaters, flailing at each other in the gutter."

The same two men figure in one of the book's most arresting episodes. In 1956 a fire at Bush Terminal's 35th Street pier, not far from Gowanus, produced what was then one of the largest explosions in New York's history. Afterward, the young Vincent watched his father, his uncle and a few other men, all veterans of World War II, gather in the Coppolas' backyard, where tomato plants flourished between weeds and broken glass. Taking swigs from a bottle of whiskey, each man prepared to have one of his knees smashed with a hammer—by his helpful friends—so he could file injury claims connected to the explosion.

**Vincent Coppola lovingly recounts his youth in a neighborhood where violent conflict was the norm and the local waterway was toxic.**

"What level of desperation," Mr. Coppola asks, "forces you to believe that crippling yourself for a few thousand dollars is the only option you have?"

This unanswered question lingers, along with an atmosphere of loneliness. Most of the people from the neighborhood would die young, "mortality in the air like early frost." Many of his father's friends would be cut down by "cigarettes and stress and brutal working." Mr. Coppola's beloved brother Thomas would die of AIDS in 1985. His parents—first his father, then his mother—would die in their 60s. When the author was diagnosed with throat cancer despite having never smoked, he wasn't surprised. "Surviving is the surprise," he writes without self-pity.

The culture depicted in "Gowanus Crossing" is one many readers will know through mafia movies, though the book is chiefly set "before 'The Godfather' exalted organized crime and romanticized violence," writes Mr. Coppola—who is not related to Francis Ford Coppola. The criminal ensemble of Martin Scorsese's "Goodfellas" (1990) is echoed in the book's roll call of neighborhood characters—Jimmy Psycho, Richie Mel, Uncle Fat—yet "Gowanus Crossing" avoids cliché.

Like Mr. Scorsese, the author adores the flawed characters he grew up around, but he's no fool, and comes to loathe the mob, along with the crueler authority figures—nuns and cops among them—who mistreated him as a child. Gentrification eventually claims Gowanus, as it has the surrounding neighborhoods, and Mr. Coppola is unimpressed by the newcomers who seem convinced that "no one and nothing of value existed before they arrived."

"We leave so little trace in passing through life," he writes. In this collection of sketches, filled with guilt and shame, pride and love, Mr. Coppola finds the meaning he craves.

*Mr. Belth writes the Substack newsletter Dig This With Alex Belth.*

### Coming in BOOKS this weekend

Life in the Soviet Union after Joseph Stalin • Interracial encounters in the antebellum South • A history of U.S. foreign policy • Homer's 'Odyssey' on audiobook • The Hollywood studio at the turn of the 21st century • & more

## A Christian Vision for the Future of AI

**HOUSES OF WORSHIP**  
*By Walter Kim*

The questions that define civilizations don't always announce themselves cleanly. They can arrive wrapped in the language of progress—faster, smarter, more efficient—until one day we realize that what has arrived isn't what we wanted.

In the case of artificial intelligence, choices made in boardrooms and research labs will have far-reaching consequences. We need to understand that clearly, before the changes become irreversible. Even more, to make serious decisions about our future, we need to state the moral definitions of what it means to be human and the limits on AI's influence on the social order.

AI development is outpacing ethical deliberation, and people are already being harmed. We've seen teens counseled toward suicide, a proliferation of child sex-abuse material and communities strained by sprawling data centers. And that's only what's come to light. This technology is permeating our lives in ways beyond our awareness. The risks of AI superintelligence run from economic upheaval to the concentration of power in the hands of whatever corporation or government wins the AI technology race.

At the same time, we have to see clearly the good of AI. I recently met a developer whose AI tool helps trafficking survivors delete their images online. AI can provide earlier

and more accurate medical diagnoses, together with treatment plans providing real advancements for underserved communities. AI is generating creative solutions in water management.

Transformational opportunities for improvement are before us, thanks to AI. But a pro-human worldview—the philosophical grounding to aim those opportunities at the moral end of human flourishing—won't emerge spontaneously. We must shape AI before it shapes us.

That is why I joined a multi-faith coalition in Rome last October to declare that AI must be ethical and people of faith must help make it so. The American Security Foundation convened an assembly of leaders and scholars at the Vatican, where we signed a Joint Statement on AI Ethics. The statement set five principles as the moral architecture of the AI age: accuracy, transparency, privacy, security and the common good of human dignity.

A statement, however, is only a beginning. In Rome we established a moral vocabulary—the groundwork necessary for further discussion. In late May we reconvened in Athens, inviting other faith leaders to join us in developing and applying that ethical language. Keeping pace with AI will take all of us speaking with clarity and common purpose. The market-driven development of new technology, by itself, won't protect children, truth or human dignity. But religious traditions have spent millennia on exactly

those concerns. Ethical public policy must be developed with meaningful input from faith communities.

For evangelical Christians like me, a foundational conviction is that human beings are made in the image of God. In the ancient Near East, the image of God was used to legitimize power of the divinity of kings. In that context, the Book

**The development of the technology is beginning to outpace ethical deliberation.**

of Genesis does something audacious. It democratizes royal dignity, extending it to everyone—man and woman, slave and sovereign, each bearing inestimable worth.

That conviction underlies Christian accounts of dignity, equality, justice and human responsibility. It has also shaped the most consequential moral arguments in Western history. The claim was provocative then as it is now. It is the kind of underlying moral idea that can protect us from an AI-influenced social world that doesn't understand the point of all technology is the elevation of human worth.

People of faith number more than six billion worldwide. Religious leaders, scholars, advocates, parents, professionals and policymakers can curtail abuses and promote human dignity. Pope Leo XIV's

recent encyclical, "Magnifica Humanitas," demonstrates such moral participation.

We don't need to choose between innovation and integrity. We can move forward if we have the confidence and moral clarity to demand three things. First, a national truth-in-AI standard, so people know when content is synthetic and when they are dealing with a machine rather than a person. Second, human accountability wherever AI shapes consequential decisions in areas like healthcare, education and lethal military action. Third, independent auditors to measure these systems not by efficiency or profit alone, but by whether they protect human dignity and serve the common good.

The church, too, has work. We must form the next generation to judge these tools, not merely use them. Christians working in technology have a calling to shape these systems from within, and they need prayer and support. All of us can back measures like the Defiance Act (which gives people a way to fight back against harmful AI-generated images) or join campaigns pressing for accountability and dignity.

Regulation need not stymie innovation. It can be a guardrail, not a brake. But we can't be passive observers of a revolution that will reshape every dimension of human life. We must be advocates and architects.

*Mr. Kim is president of the National Association of Evangelicals.*

## When Your Friends All Turn 70

**By Lou Weiss**

One by one, my classmates from elementary school are turning 70, and the celebrations and acknowledgments are moving through our lives like Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue.

These are low-key affairs in someone's home or a restaurant, not fancy parties or far-flung cruises. We gather in sixes and eights for dinner at places chosen more for their decibels than their desserts. Seventy-three reservations? Didn't they have anything at 6:00?

Seating is more ritualistic than a state dinner. Men at one end of the table, women at the other. A couple of "middlers" settle in between for when conversation includes the whole group. I try to grab the chair to Goldberg's right, as that's his good ear. Entrees are often split by couples and still leave something for tomorrow's lunch. Because we are turning 70 and have license to

let loose, we order a single dessert with six forks.

Discussions range from Steelers Super Bowls at one end of the table to new grandchildren at the other. Both ends mourn the recent death of Bill Mazeroski.

Who recently fell down is another topic, followed by my grab-bar lecture. The shower, I explain to my friends for the 15th time, is a silent killer.

**Birthday dinners are small and early, and we don't eat a lot.**

Downsizing and condo strategies are divulged. First-floor master bedrooms are the holy grail in hilly Pittsburgh.

Our hard drives being full, we can vaguely remember that we had some grudge but not what it was about or who it was against. We're mostly beyond hating and bragging at

this point, happy to be vertical or angled a bit. I'm one of the few still kvetching about rap music and why isn't "Saturday Night Live" funny anymore? I see why parents would name their kid A\$AP Rocky, but did they really need the dollar sign? Seems gratuitous.

Also, our Sirius channels keep getting moved. The '40s, which logically used to play on 4, is now up near Sinatra. The '50s and '60s, formerly 5 and 6, are 72 and 73. The '80s, '90s and 2000s are rightly at 8, 9 and 10, but watch out, '70s on 7, you're hanging by a thread.

One fit friend, Wendy, planned a dance party that I was going to miss, so we met over coffee. A trained art conservator, she is the unofficial archivist for our grade-school class. She pulled out a Polaroid of the third-grade boys. Without hesitation, I named everyone but stopped short as I realized that we now knew how many of their life stories

unfolded. Engineer, engineer, doctor, carpet salesman.

I still picture people as they were in their prime, not as they are now, which isn't that bad since we came of age right when people decided to get healthy. Our grade was especially lucky, missing both the draft lottery and mullets but catching erectile dysfunction pills when they went generic. To paraphrase Monty Python, we're not dead yet, but as we meander through our 70-year events the birth class of '56 is mainly happy to have made it this far, leading productive and meaningful lives and remembering those whose lives were cut short.

The Hebrew blessing on a birthday is that you should live to 120 (Moses' age when he died in good shape with all of his marbles). Instead, let's shoot for 80 and see where we go from there.

*Mr. Weiss is a Pittsburgh carpet salesman.*



OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

How Trump’s Tariffs Really ‘Work’

President Trump is grasping for good economic news to rescue his underwater job approval rating. So it’s not surprising that he’s hailing Toyota’s announcement Tuesday that it will expand truck production in Texas. This is a deflection from the dismal reality that his border taxes are raising costs and have failed to usher in a manufacturing renaissance.

Toyota said it plans to invest \$3.6 billion adding a second assembly line at a new San Antonio facility to produce its Tacoma truck and will create 2,000 jobs. The Japanese auto maker currently produces the Tacoma in Texas and Mexico, so it will be shifting production from south of the border.

Music to Mr. Trump’s protectionist ears. “Toyota is moving from Mexico to the United States (Texas!). A really big deal. Tariffs at work!” the President wrote on social media. Sorry to curb the enthusiasm, but Toyota may have made the decision for business reasons unrelated to his tariffs.

The Japanese car maker’s press release lavished praise on Texas’s pro-business environment and included statements from the state’s political leaders (Attorney General Ken Paxton excepted). No mention of Mr. Trump or his tariffs. Toyota says the new plant will provide “flexibility” from “advanced manufacturing technologies,” which may offset the relatively higher labor costs in Texas.

But the President is right that his tariffs are at work—in destroying U.S. jobs and raising prices. The U.S. has lost some 75,000 manufacturing jobs since January 2025, including 25,900 in motor vehicle and parts production. Manufacturing jobs have been declining since early 2023, so not all of these job losses stem from Mr. Trump’s border taxes. Some auto job losses are probably an overhang from the electric-vehicle fiasco.

Still, there’s no question his tariffs are raising costs for U.S. manufacturers. At the same time, foreign retaliation has hurt America’s farmers and depressed purchases of agriculture equipment. A slowdown in trade has also dented demand for semi-trucks.

Mr. Trump’s Section 232 national security tariffs on autos and parts have cost \$35.2 billion through April of this year, and his steel and aluminum tariffs another \$17.5 billion, ac-

ording to U.S. government data. Mr. Trump and his advisers claim that foreigners pay his border taxes, but the evidence shows that U.S. companies, workers and consumers are picking up most of the tab.

The Anderson Economic Group estimates that auto tariffs on Canada and Mexico alone added about \$1,600 to the cost of each car made in the U.S. last year. While auto makers absorbed some of the Trump tariff costs, they also passed on a large share to customers.

A March report by Cox Automotive found that tariffs drove a 10.4% increase in the average suggested retail price of a new car. Sticker prices rose by an estimated \$5,000 to \$8,900 for imported vehicles and about \$1,600 to \$2,000 for U.S.-made cars. Auto dealers—most of which are small businesses—absorbed about 4.5% of the manufacturer’s price increase.

Dealers have shed 6,100 jobs since Mr. Trump became President. Cause and effect? Manufacturers have also added fees to avoid raising base prices. Cox says GM and Ford charge “destination fees” of \$2,795 for full-size trucks and SUVs. GM has increased such fees by 40% (about \$800) on its Chevrolet Silverado. Call it the Trump tax.

Auto makers have also reduced imports, and in some cases discontinued sales, of entry-level models because the tariff costs render them unaffordable. One result is that younger and middle-class Americans are struggling to afford new cars, especially on the heels of the Biden inflation.

Many are driving clunkers for longer—and paying more for repairs if they break down—or buying used cars. New vehicle sales have averaged 15.9 million in the first half of this year, down from the 17 to 18 million in the five years before the pandemic. When people buy fewer cars, auto makers don’t need as many workers.

The uncertainty hanging over the extension of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade agreement is delaying some investments since businesses don’t know what the trade rules or tariffs will be in a few years—or even tomorrow with Mr. Trump. His trade oscillations and border taxes are a major reason the economy hasn’t performed as well as during his first term, and why Americans are so unhappy.

He hails Toyota’s investment, but what about the job losses?

Abdul El-Sayed is a leftist who sounds like a conspiracy theorist.

A Revealing Senate Debate in Michigan

The next big effort by the left to conquer the Democratic Party is Michigan’s Senate primary on Aug. 4, and this week’s debate between the two contenders illustrates the stakes. Abdul El-Sayed told viewers that he wants to abolish ICE, confiscate billionaire wealth (“let’s say an 8% tax”), freeze seniors’ property taxes, and offer free childcare, plus government healthcare “without a deductible, a premium or a copay.”

The other thing he’s selling, though, is left-populist conspiracy theories. “For too long,” Mr. El-Sayed claimed, “our foreign policy has been handed to us by the likes of the state of Israel and AIPAC,” the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. He promised to “stand up to the monopolies and oligopolies that are picking our pockets.” The Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency “is not about immigration,” he said. “ICE is about normalizing paramilitary force on our streets.”

The other candidate, Rep. Haley Stevens, argued she’s a real legislator, unlike her opponent, whose primary business is getting attention for himself. “I am not trying to sell a book or a podcast,” Ms. Stevens said. “My head is down doing the work for the people of Michigan, who need the work to be done. We do not need a celebrity Senator. We need a workhorse.” She also made

a case that she will do better in November against Republican Mike Rogers.

Ms. Stevens would like to shift the country sharply leftward as well. She endorsed “taxing the growing billionaire class, and forcing them to pay their fair share,” as well as uncapping the Social Security payroll tax, which comes off currently after the first \$184,500 of earnings. Ms. Stevens wants to set a national policy on paid family leave for workers.

She’s no fan of President Trump or his push for mass deportation. “Donald Trump’s ICE is completely out of control, and it is an abuse of power,” Ms. Stevens said. She introduced legislation in March to set up what she called a new “independent special prosecutor.” She told the debate audience that Mr. Trump’s \$70 billion ICE “slush fund” should be redirected to other law-enforcement agencies.

Is that enough for the Democratic base these days, or does it crave harder stuff? The debate moderators didn’t press Mr. El-Sayed on whether “abolish ICE” means no deportations; whether he’d vote to make private health insurance illegal; or whether President Obama was an Israeli puppet, too.

But leftist utopianism is in the air after Democratic primaries in Washington, D.C., New York and Colorado. How about Michigan?

“If there’s an embargo, a blockade, whatever name they want to put on it, how did humanitarian aid from Belize, Canada, Chile, China,

Colombia, the European Union, Mexico, Spain, Russia, Uruguay, and the U.N. itself reach the country just in the last few months?” Mr. Waltz asked. “There is no ring of Navy warships sitting around

this island blocking trade or humanitarian aid going into Cuba. It’s fake. It’s false. It’s a lie. Period.”

The U.S. has sanctioned the regime’s big shots, but it sends “a half a billion dollars a year in commodities to Cuba” and it sent “more than \$100 million in aid” this year alone, Mr. Waltz said. America also works “with the Vatican and the Catholic Church to deliver food and medicine to the needy. Aid that we also provided—additional aid after the most recent hurricane.” Some blockade.

All of this left Cuban Ambassador Bruno Rodríguez sputtering in rage as he banged the desk and accused the American of failing to observe “decorum,” and calling him “a liar.” That’s called hitting a nerve.

So “why does Cuba continue to call for this debate and come to this microphone?” Mr. Waltz asked his colleagues. “The answer is simple: because blaming the United States is the only economic plan Havana has left.”

Havana’s usual blame-the-U.S game gets a rebuttal at the U.N.

Mike Waltz Takes Cuba to School

Cuba’s regime is under pressure as foreign benefactors have vanished, but it’s still hoping for relief from its old friends at the United Nations. Its problem is that U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Mike Waltz is willing to tell the truth about Cuba that the regime doesn’t like to hear.

The long-time Havana narrative, echoed in much of the U.S. media and parts of Congress, is that Cuban poverty is caused by U.S. sanctions. Cuba has called for an emergency session of the General Assembly on Friday on what it calls the U.S. “blockade.” The U.S. lost the vote Tuesday (136-9 with 30 abstentions) on whether to hold the session, but not before Mr. Waltz and his deputy, Jeff Bartos, catalogued Havana’s role in the island’s misery.

“For 67 years, the Cuban regime has enriched itself, its ruling elites, while abusing its people, strangling private enterprise, criminalizing dissent, and clinging to failed communist economics,” Mr. Waltz told the U.N. He spoke about some of the political prisoners in jail for writing poetry and music. And he said that while Cubans live in the dark owing to the failure of the electricity grid, there’s still enough fuel for the Castro family’s private jets.

Mr. Waltz also took apart the claim that the U.S. blocks Cuba’s access to world markets.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Chavista Regime, Venezuela and Trump

Mary Anastasia O’Grady is right that the Chavista regime has prioritized its own corrupt interests over an effective earthquake response (“Why Venezuela Turned Rescue Teams Away,” Americas, July 6). The danger now is that reconstruction becomes another economic excuse to delay the country’s much-needed democratic transition.

Since Nicolás Maduro’s capture in January, the Trump administration has given priority to stability and economic recovery in Venezuela. Treasury has issued general licenses to manage the revival of the country’s petroleum and mining sectors and attract foreign investment. This opening has not been conditioned on progress toward key election-enabling steps, including a new electoral commission, an electoral timeline and a new electoral tribunal.

The regime has also obtained U.S. authorization to hire advisers for what could be the largest ever sovereign-debt restructuring. That \$240 billion burden will be one of Mr. Ma-

duro and Delcy Rodríguez’s enduring legacies, and the Venezuelan people should have the chance to elect their leaders before any restructuring is concluded.

Added to that debt pile are the billions it will take to rebuild La Guaira and other hard-hit areas. The same corrupt regime that built many of the collapsed buildings should not profit from their reconstruction. Its inept response demonstrates why Venezuela, like Cuba, can’t recover effectively under its current leadership.

The Trump administration has mounted an impressive disaster response, but stability will be fleeting as regime failures intensify calls for elections. That’s why it’s more important than ever for Washington to flex its leverage over Venezuela’s exports and debt negotiations. It can put the country on a real path to transition.

CONNOR PFEIFFER  
FDD Action  
Bethesda, Md.

Palestinians Have Been Offered Peace Before

In “A New Path for NATO and Israel” (op-ed, July 6), Rahm Emanuel writes that Yitzhak Rabin admonished Israel to “fight terrorism as if there’s no peace process, and work to achieve peace as if there’s no terror,” and he criticizes Benjamin Netanyahu for not endorsing the latter part of that approach.

Rabin’s actual quote, and the context surrounding it, differ from Mr. Emanuel’s assertion. Rabin didn’t admonish Israel but rather made a demand on Yasser Arafat. At his March 16, 1994, press conference with President Bill Clinton, Rabin called on Arafat to “act like me, to fight terror as if there were no negotiations and conduct the negotiations as if there was not terror.” On Feb. 25, 1994, a Kahanist extremist murdered 29 Palestinians in Hebron. Rabin had condemned the massacre,

and Israel had outlawed the Kahanist organizations by the time of the press conference, less than three weeks later.

Neither Arafat nor his successor ever dismantled Hamas, despite multiple Palestinian promises to do so. Israel nevertheless offered the Palestinians a state four times: at Camp David in 2000, in the Clinton Parameters in 2000-01, in the Bush administration’s Annapolis Process in 2008 and in Mr. Netanyahu’s 2009 Bar-Ilan speech. Mr. Emanuel is more accurate in describing the Palestinian response: “Israeli prime ministers who have extended an olive branch have been met with unrelenting terrorism from their Palestinian partners.”

RICK RICHMAN  
American Jewish University  
Los Angeles

Why the Founders Weren’t Afraid of Lobbyists

Allysia Finley’s column “Did the Supreme Court Steal the Midterm Elections?” (Life Science, July 6) closes with a compelling but often overlooked point: the growth of lobbying is directly correlated with the growth of government.

As law, policy and regulation have penetrated deeper into every facet of life, the First Amendment right “to petition the government for the redress of grievances” has become of utmost importance. What citizen would waste his time or money on lobbying if not for the direct effect of that government on his life, liberty and pursuit of happiness? What business would commit resources that might otherwise fund innovation or reward workers if not for the ef-

fect of government on the fate of the business?

Calls for socialism reinforce the incentive for lobbying, as Ms. Finley suggests. But, even now, those who show disdain at the money spent on lobbying must confront the reality that a government that impinges on nearly every aspect of life is the driving force for efforts to influence policy. The solution is simple: the smaller government the Founders envisioned.

PETER COFFEY  
Madison, Conn.

The Heart Beats the Machine

Regarding Richard Dooling’s “AI and the English Language” (op-ed, July 3): Evelyn Waugh once said that the English language is “incomparably rich and can convey every thought accurately and elegantly.” Its craftsmen bear a weighty responsibility. A large language model can sift, sort and mimic to perfection, but to what degree does the final outcome of a piece of writing depend on how much the writer, human or machine, is capable of caring about its quality?

A machine will write faster, but can it write better? Its words will be blandly pleasing, but can they sparkle? Will it bring a reader to tears? And what of the matter of instinct and feel, those aspects of artistic creation beyond the reach of logic?

A machine may be allocated a wide range of quotidian writing tasks, but let flesh and blood hold fast the art of writing.

MARGARET MCGIRR  
Greenwich, Conn.

Wait Until Gen Z Turns 30

In “As America’s Mood Sours, Its Creed Endures” (Politics & Ideas, June 24), William Galston correctly writes of the 1970s bipartisan effort to remove Richard Nixon from office and avert a constitutional crisis. I would add that Nixon, when ordered by the Supreme Court to surrender the Watergate tapes, did so and resigned his office.

In 1981 I met him at his first appearance after his resignation at a New York political event. Whatever his shortcomings, in his post presidency Nixon conducted himself with dignity and patriotism.

JOHN A. VITERITTI  
Laurel, N.Y.

I was one of those wannabe progressive students in the early ’70s. It came with the college territory—that peer-pressured sense of rebellion and to “never trust anyone over 30.”

But then we turned 30 ourselves. As we became more engaged with work, taxes, personal prosperity and national economic realities, many of us started to lean right.

I don’t see a huge difference in Generation Z today. Give them time. They’ll come around.

DOUG WOLFF  
Cincinnati

Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



“I remembered to charge the phones, laptops, headphones and watch but forgot the charge the car.”

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OPINION

# Why Do Democrats Hate Medicare Advantage?

By John C. Goodman

A bill introduced by Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D., Texas) and co-sponsored by more than 40 House Democrats would sharply reduce government payments to Medicare Advantage plans—private policies for Medicare enrollees. The bill purports to end practices of questionable value, and the press announcement makes the bill out to be an effort at saving taxpayers money.

Mr. Doggett's floor speech introducing the bill suggested a different motive. He said it would “level the playing field” between traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage plans.

It is no secret that many congressional Democrats dislike private health insurance even though private insurers were heavily involved in designing ObamaCare. Politicians on

It’s the best program in the entire U.S. healthcare system, including even employer-sponsored plans.

the left often speak about the desirability of a “public option.” But Medicare has already had a competing public option for more than two decades. It's called traditional Medicare, and it has been losing the competition. More than half of all Medicare enrollees are in private plans.

For all its faults, Medicare Advantage is arguably the best healthcare program we have. It's much better than the ObamaCare exchange plans and most employer plans. Mr. Doggett is attacking this

overall well-functioning program while ignoring our nation's worst program: Medicaid.

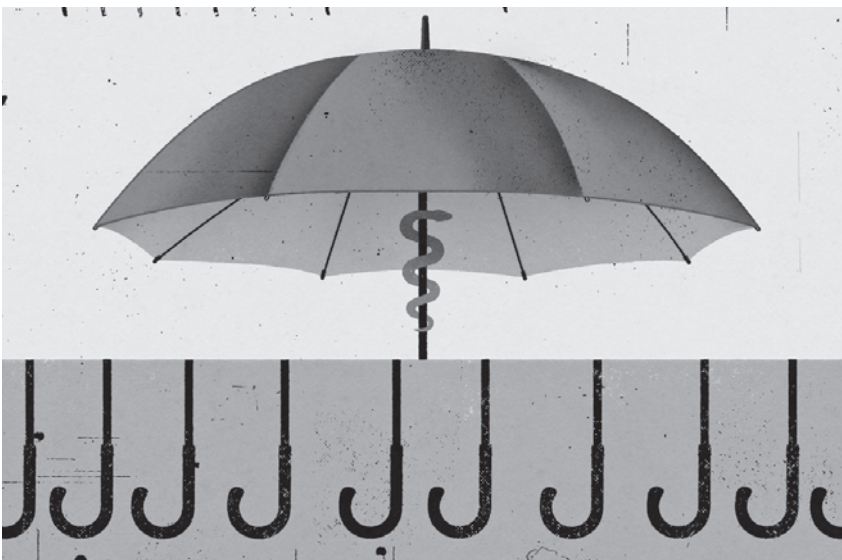
One of the great ironies in U.S. healthcare is that the private insurance industry is largely responsible for administering both the best and worst health insurance programs we have. What Mr. Doggett calls the “giant private insurance companies that profiteer off Medicare” are mostly the same companies that are administering Medicaid.

Medicaid is heavily privatized. Nationwide, 78% of enrollees are in private managed care plans, or MCOs. If you exclude the elderly and the disabled, the figure reaches 90% or more in most states. Medicaid fee-for-service (the public option) usually doesn't even compete for business. Instead, enrollees are normally required to join an MCO. Yet it's rare to hear a congressional Democrat advocate less spending on “giant” MCOs “profiteering” off care for the poor.

If private companies run both programs, why is one so much better? The answer lies in how the program is structured. Medicare Advantage gets four things right:

First, it is the only program in our entire healthcare system in which a doctor who discovers a patient's previously unknown health problem can send that information to the insurer (in this case Medicare). This results in a higher premium payment for the health plan to cover the higher expected cost of care.

Second, because of a sophisticated risk-adjustment program, Medicare Advantage plans are the only plans in our healthcare system that actually want sick people as enrollees. No employer, commercial



RICHARD MIA

insurer or ObamaCare marketplace plan wants a sick enrollee.

This is obvious from the design of marketplace plans. When Democrats' second-tier subsidies—a temporary Covid-era measure—were in place, almost half the enrollees in marketplace exchange plans paid no premium, and 80% paid \$10 a month or less. Plus, the only medical care a healthy person needs is preventive care, and that is also free of out-of-pocket cost. So if you were healthy, the entire package was free, or almost free.

But for sick people in marketplace plans, the out-of-pocket exposure is the highest found anywhere. This year an individual with serious medical problems can pay \$10,600, and double that for a family. Next year it will be \$12,000 for an individual and double that for a family.

Although employer plans aren't as bad, they are also tilted to attract the healthy and avoid the sick.

Mr. Doggett insists that Medicare Advantage plans seek to enroll only the healthy, but the reverse is true. Significantly more low-income beneficiaries were enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans (68% vs. 32%) in 2023. In 2021, such plans were also the preferred choice of black (59%) and Hispanic (67%) enrollees relative to whites (43%). These minorities are known to have above-average medical needs.

Third, Medicare Advantage is the only program in our healthcare system in which health plans can specialize in the treatment of specific conditions such as diabetes, congestive heart failure or HIV. This allows them to create focused factories that are increasingly skilled at providing care. By contrast, in the ObamaCare marketplace, health plans are forced to be all things to all people.

Finally, Medicare Advantage plans make money by keeping people healthy. Long before the price of

insulin became a political issue, some plans were discounting the out-of-pocket cost to diabetics. While the political focus today is on \$35 insulin, some Medicare Advantage plans make insulin available free in special-needs plans for diabetics. Keeping diabetics out of emergency rooms is cost-effective medicine.

Most employer plans and exchange plans haven't done the same because free or cheap insulin would attract diabetic enrollees (on whom those insurers would lose money overall). The incentives in traditional Medicare are even worse. The more traffic there is to the emergency room, the more the doctors earn.

Former Kaiser CEO George Halvorson has written that if a diabetic in a Medicare Advantage plan requires a foot amputation, that will likely cost the plan \$100,000. If an amputation occurs in traditional Medicare, the full cost is borne by taxpayers.

In traditional Medicare, Mr. Halvorson wrote, “20% percent of diabetes patients routinely get ulcers and 20% of those ulcers turn into amputations.” In Medicare Advantage, the number of amputations is a tiny fraction of that. “Far too many low income people who are not on Medicare Advantage plans go blind and then they stay blind for life,” he added. The key to preventing blindness in diabetics is controlling blood sugar levels. Medicare Advantage plans have strong incentives to do that. Traditional Medicare doctors don't.

Mr. Goodman is president of the Goodman Institute of Policy Research and a senior fellow with The Independent Institute.



**POLITICAL ECONOMICS**  
By Joseph C. Sternberg

Chancellor Friedrich Merz last week unveiled another series of economic reforms. The new tranche includes modest income-tax reductions and a commitment to push ahead with previously debated tweaks to the German equivalent of Social Security. There's some labor-market reform and red-tape reduction for businesses.

You can argue the plan is small beer relative to the scale of Germany's challenges. The economy is barely growing after adjusting for inflation, and industrial production is falling off a cliff. But remember that the easiest thing for Mr. Merz to do would be nothing.

Immediately following last year's election, he announced a bipartisan deal to ramp up government borrow-

ing, throw €500 billion at public works, and increase defense spending by at least that amount. That satisfied the Keynesian peanut gallery that always argues Germany need only borrow more to stimulate economic growth. A lesser politician might have called it a day and spared himself the headache of introducing more changes.

Instead, Mr. Merz keeps hammering away at the reform Germany actually needs, with some success, as in last year's tightening of working-age welfare eligibility. Mr. Merz hails from the free-market wing of his center-right Christian Democratic party, and his grand vision is of a German economy that promotes work, business growth and job creation.

His newest plan succeeds on deregulation. Berlin aims to rationalize burdensome data-protection regulations, freeing small businesses from the costliest strictures. There's an effort to limit the adoption of new regulations and to streamline regulatory approvals for businesses.

The trouble is that Mr. Merz keeps hitting political opposition that makes it impossible to go far enough.

The labor-market element of last week's proposal is a case in point. Germany, like most of Europe, desperately needs laws that allow companies to hire and fire easily. Mr. Merz proposes removing legal protections for some workers so they can be fired at will with severance pay.

The German chancellor unveils a plan that’s good on deregulation and so-so at best on everything else.

But this is limited to employees earning more than about €175,000, and is aimed mainly at tech startups. The center-left Social Democrats, with whom Mr. Merz is trapped in a governing coalition, believe they paid too high a political price for labor reforms 20 years ago and are reluctant to touch the hot stove again. To be fair, it isn't obvious voters are ready to abandon the perceived protections of today's regulations.

As for taxes, the reform plan is a

mess. Mr. Merz and Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil, a Social Democrat, say their changes will leave an additional €600 a year in the pocket of a middle-class double-earner family. This would be achieved via tweaks to the standard deduction and the characteristically German formula used to calculate with great complexity the marginal rate for incomes below around €70,000.

Yet in the first sign of trouble, this is offset by tax increases on incomes above €250,000. And many households (single or married) earning more than about €78,000 will see their disposable income decline following the reform, according to an analysis commissioned by Handelsblatt newspaper. This happens due to Berlin's failure to index tax brackets fully for inflation, a small increase in the payroll tax to fund old-age benefits, and messy interactions with tax handouts like child credits.

It's an example of how substantive tax reform can't be done piecemeal when the code is so badly distorted to start with. Yet a big-bang tax reform is impossible as long as

voters and the major center-left party seem allergic to any policy change that might be perceived as benefiting the rich.

Worst of all is what Mr. Merz left out. Germany's deranged net-zero climate policies remain so deeply entrenched in the country's political psyche that they're all but omitted from last week's reform package. Were Berlin to abandon this nonsense, the elimination of climate mandates would stimulate a revenue-swelling industrial boom while easing the burden subsidies impose on the fisc. For as long as voters remain unwilling to contemplate this reform, what they'll get instead is the confusing and inadequate option presented last week.

Mr. Merz's plan is worth executing for the deregulation alone. It's worrying, however, that this may be the limit of what a European polity can achieve even when its leader campaigned on the need for economic reform, and the country's dysfunctions are obvious for all to see. Leaders like Mr. Merz understand that Europe needs to change. Turning thought into action is another matter.

## The Selfie Generation Is the Baby Boomers’ Mistake

By Scott W. Atlas

My story isn't unique in America. All four of my grandparents came to this country in the early 20th century—from England, Poland and Russia—with nothing. Less than nothing. No money, no connections, no guarantees. Some lost family members they came with in the chaos at Ellis Island. They all learned English on their own and spoke it fluently, not because they were required but because they were proud to do so. They had immigrated to become Americans—that was the whole point.

Love for this country ran in the family. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the 17-year-old who would become my father lied about his age to enlist in the Marines. For the men of his generation, that was the gut reaction. Today, polls show a majority of Democrats say they aren't proud to be American.

My father came back from war

and scrambled to find work. After marrying my mom, he worked three jobs, including driving a taxi on the midnight shift, so that his sons could be the first in our family to go to college. One night he fell asleep at the wheel, crashed and was thrown through the windshield. I woke up to find him in a hospital bed in our basement, bandaged and recovering from several broken ribs. Through it all, he never asked whether the system was fair. He didn't look to Washington for a handout. He drove through the night so we could have a better morning.

I got my education with the help of a part-time pizza-delivery job, merit scholarships and loans—loans I was thrilled to take and proud to pay back in full. That's how opportunity was supposed to work. You reached for it, you used it, and you honored the obligation.

I became a physician, then a professor and chief of neuroradiology at Stanford, and eventually a senior

fellow at the Hoover Institution. By many measures, I joined the so-called elite. But I've always been the outsider in those rooms. Most of my colleagues grew up with educated parents, affluent households and connections. I didn't. The difference shapes whether you see success as an entitlement or as yours to create.

My generation—the baby boomers—made a catastrophic mistake. We watched our parents sacrifice, we struggled to move up, and we vowed our children would have it easier. When that time came, we gave them trophies for showing up. We meant well. But in freeing them of the need to struggle, we deprived them of something essential. We raised a generation insulated from failure, from consequence, from the experience of working for something, failing and trying again.

The result is visible in major American cities, where young voters are electing socialist candidates who spew hatred of those who

achieve greatness. These movements aren't about creating opportunity. They're about grievance, redistribution and the conviction that your own failures are the result of someone else's success. It is a politics of envy dressed up as justice.

We meant well when we coddled our children, but they ended up embracing the politics of envy.

The hallmark of today's young generation is the selfie. A photo of yourself, taken and posted for the approval of others. That says everything. And when the world doesn't deliver the validation young people have been told they deserve simply for existing, the explanation is always the same: The system is rigged, the deck is

stacked, someone else has too much.

My grandparents never asked whether the deck was stacked. Of course they had disadvantages. They were dirt-poor immigrants who spoke no English in a new country. They built anyway.

The appeal of socialism to young Americans isn't really about economics. It's about having someone else to blame. When you haven't succeeded after being given every advantage, it's easier to claim the system is unfair than to admit personal failure.

What's tragic is that the narrative of societal unfairness is being sold as compassionate. It isn't. It is condescension packaged as solidarity. It tells young people they are victims—incapable of rising, dependent on redistribution, owed a life they haven't earned. It robs them of the one thing my father's midnight taxi shifts gave me: the knowledge that I could do it myself.

My grandparents came here for opportunity, not guaranteed outcomes. My father eagerly defended his country without asking for anything in return. I am not nostalgic for poverty or for war—my family's sacrifices were real costs, not romantic ones. But what came out of that hardship—the self-reliance, the drive, the refusal to accept helplessness—wasn't incidental to who they were. It was the whole of it.

We have abandoned the uniquely American idea that you must earn what you get. We need to restore that belief, before the generation we indulged forgets it forever.

Dr. Atlas is a senior fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution. He served as a special adviser to the president and a member of the White House Coronavirus Task Force (2020).

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## Britain’s unsustainable mental health bill

### Reducing spending on disability benefits is a major test for Burnham

Britain's disability bill is on an unsustainable trajectory. Since August 2019, the number of individuals claiming personal independence payments (Pip) – a stipend which covers the extra costs of a long-term physical or mental condition – has doubled to 4mn in England and Wales. Rising sickness, an ageing population and long healthcare waiting lists all play a part. But the Pip system makes matters worse through poorly designed assessments and support – particularly for mental health problems. As Sir Stephen Timms, the disability minister, noted in his interim review into the entitlement yesterday, it is “not fit for purpose”.

Last year, outgoing Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer suffered a rebellion from backbench Labour MPs when he

attempted to save £5bn by reducing eligibility for Pip, which is not means-tested and does not come with a requirement to work. His likely successor, Andy Burnham, is cautious about making “crude cuts”. Burnham has pledged to bring utilities into more public control and retain the expensive “triple lock” – which guarantees that state pension payments rise with the highest of inflation, wage increases or 2.5 per cent. So his government will not be able to ignore the growing fiscal burden of disability benefits either. Britain’s £32bn Pip spending this financial year is forecast to rise to £41.5bn by 2031.

Tackling a surge in claims for mental health ailments should be a priority. Recipients for conditions such as anxiety and ADHD have more than doubled since 2021, compared with a 48 per cent rise for all illnesses, and appear on course to continue rising rapidly. Preventing psychiatric conditions – particularly prevalent in young people – is the best way to reduce these claims. Policy-

makers must address the root causes of many stress-related illnesses, including high rates of youth joblessness, the cost of living and social isolation. This will, however, take time.

Easing near-term fiscal pressures will warrant a re-evaluation of how Pip is administered for mental health. There are two main flaws with the current approach. First, eligibility is based on a points-based system assessing difficulties in everyday tasks such as washing and dressing. The criteria are poorly suited to mental health issues, which occur on a spectrum and can vary from day to day. The scoring can also create an incentive to exaggerate symptoms – with chatbots and social media “pipfluencers” on hand to help optimise application forms. Second, cash payments, which are rigidly calibrated, are often not the most effective way to support individuals with genuine psychiatric ailments anyway.

A more bespoke, face-to-face, assessments process with mental health prac-

Recipients for conditions such as anxiety and ADHD have more than doubled since 2021, compared with a 48 per cent rise for all illnesses

tioners would help to screen out moderate and low levels of mental illness, provide more appropriate support and leave more resources available for those with the most severe ailments. Where suitable, prioritising treatment and in-kind care, such as talking therapies and employment assistance, over cash payments would drive savings and better outcomes, too. Social contact and work can be essential ingredients in boosting self-esteem and reducing anxiety.

Burnham has reiterated his commitment to fiscal prudence. But so far he has largely signalled plans that require more spending and further growth-sapping increases in taxes. Governing is about making tough choices, and as the Office for Budget Responsibility warned this week, urgent measures are needed to curb rising public expenditure. Britain’s ballooning mental health benefits would be a sensible place to start. Without action, the disability bill will continue to ratchet higher, raising the tab for today’s youth to pick up in the future.

### Opinion Economics

## Who wants to tax a billionaire?



Last week it became official: in November, Californians will vote on a 5 per cent tax on billionaires’ wealth. Coming on the heels of a similar debate in France, in theory this is a marvellous opportunity for rich economic discussion. In practice I worry the choice will be reduced to a grim question: are you a jealous wealth-basher or a shameless shill for the rich? In an effort to avoid that, here is my contribution: a light(er)-hearted guide to the key characters.

First in the advocates’ camp are the entrepreneurial academics whose business is constructing statistical rage bait. Did you know, for example, that France’s approximately 100 billionaires pay a tax rate half that of the average French person? And did you know that California’s billionaires

brood: the paper billionaires, with stakes in companies that make no profit, and whose value could collapse to zero. Over the past few decades, some 84 per cent of founders funded by US venture capital have been wiped out with nothing.

Under one of the mother duck’s wings is Silicon Valley’s cluster of start-ups; under another are France’s dreams of growing some of the competition. Yes, these sceptics might have seen the recent study finding that in Scandinavian countries a 1 percentage point increase in wealth taxes cut employment by 0.02 per cent and investment by 0.07 per cent, hardly catastrophic. But they squawk that the effects from a bigger tax on a smaller slice of billionaires could be larger.

Then we have the quibblers, who worry about the assumptions underpinning the advocates’ outrageous statistics. They fret about whether the tax rate calculations adequately account for benefits received or the taxes paid towards the ends of billionaires’ lives. (They also doubt that popular billionaire lists such as the Forbes 400 are an accurate indicator of tax residency.) They believe that facts matter and want the debate to be about statistical methodology. Few agree.

Closely related are the practical pessimists, who worry that billionaires will find ways to avoid coughing up, severely reducing the tax take. Emigration is one option, as several California billionaires have already demonstrated. They mourn that historical evidence might not be much help, given how few billionaires a new tax would rely on. When it comes to fixing fiscal deficits, their T-shirts say “tax them *and me*”. They also note that 95 per cent of a multibillion-dollar fortune is still enough to buy a social media company on a whim. They don’t get invited to many parties either.

The prudish perfectionists are eager to tax billionaires, but question whether a wealth tax on its own is the best approach. If capital gains or the corporate profits flowing to individuals are undertaxed in America, fix those. If assets can be parked in holding companies to escape income taxes in France, clamp down on that. A one-off wealth tax is at best a complement to plugs for the abodes in the income tax system, not a substitute. After all, since when was taxing wealth easier than taxing income?

Finally, there are the billionaires themselves. Some are keeping quiet, perhaps hoping that if California’s version passes, it will at least quieten the demands for them to pay their fair share. Which would make them the most idealistic of the lot.

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## Letters

## The hidden costs of net zero will keep electricity prices high

Rachel Millard (“Electricity bills risk remaining high despite rise of cheaper green power”, Report, July 2) sets out some of the reasons why electricity prices are high but leaves out one critical bit.

Because wind and solar are intermittent, the system needs a much greater amount of capacity to meet the same demand. If, say, peak demand is 45 gigawatts, and a safe margin adds say another 15GW, then 60GW would be all that is needed in the old power world of coal, nuclear and gas. But in the wind plus solar world of net zero 2030, there will need to be at least

120GW to meet the same demand, and by the end of the next decade perhaps between 250 and 350GW to meet a higher peak demand. To this must be added the extra costs of doubling the network, and the costs of the storage, batteries and back up capacity too.

The result will probably be massive excess capacity. All of these are extra system components of the costs of electricity necessary to meet a peak demand, which so far is stubbornly not going up very much.

On current policies, electricity costs are likely to remain high through the next decade, even with more electric

vehicles and heat pumps. What’s more, because the wind and solar are on fixed price contract for defence arrangements, the cost of electricity will be largely independent of the price of gas. If, as seems quite possible, gas prices stay low and gradually fall, the government will have ensured not only very high costs but also that customers will not benefit from any such falls.

Promising lower prices will be largely confined to moving the costs around between different groups of customers and taxpayers. These costs of electricity remain the same, with all the associated affordability and

industry competitiveness consequences. Cross-subsidies don’t reduce costs.

The gap with China (with its massive coal) and the US (with its cheap gas, oil and growing renewables) can only get bigger, further depleting what is left of manufacturing in the UK. Neither are looking to the UK as an example that they should follow. Worst of all, none of this will address the fundamental and growing problem of climate change.

**Sir Dieter Helm**  
*Professor of Economic Policy, University of Oxford Fellow in Economics, New College, Oxford, UK*

### Ireland should recuse itself from key EU negotiations

Ireland took over the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union on July 1. During this six-month period, Europe will renegotiate its digital rule book and its corporate tax rules. As council president, Ireland will chair these negotiations and decide what matters are discussed.

Given Ireland’s questionable track record regarding the protection of EU digital rights and the EU’s fiscal base that we synthesise below, we the undersigned call on Ireland to recuse itself from any role in these two areas during the Irish presidency of the European Union.

Google, Meta, Apple, Microsoft, OpenAI, TikTok, and X all selected Ireland to be the location of their EU headquarters. This turned the Irish Data Protection Commission into the primary data watchdog for the EU.

This responsibility has not been matched by effective enforcement. After 10 years of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Ireland has yet to conclude a single EU-wide inquiry into Google. In 2023, Ireland took the extraordinary step of suing every other EU data protection authority at EU court in Luxembourg, seeking an annulment of an order that mandated Ireland to investigate Meta’s use of people’s most intimate data.

Recent developments also raise questions about the independence of Ireland’s digital governance. The current data protection commissioner previously served as Meta’s chief lobbyist in Ireland. Additionally, in the run-up to the presidency, foreign minister Helen McEntee posed with a Meta lobbyist, following their meeting to discuss priorities for Ireland’s upcoming presidency.

Ireland’s tax policy is similarly troubling. It has helped multinationals to avoid paying tax in other European countries. Most notably, the European Commission decided in 2016 that Apple must pay €13bn plus interest in back taxes that it had evaded between 2004 and 2014 by using the “Double Irish” scheme to shift profits from other EU countries to Ireland, which taxed it in effect at a mere 0.005 per cent in the final year of the scheme. Following international pressure, in 2014, the Irish government announced it would abolish the widely used scheme. The EU courts confirmed the 2016 tax avoidance finding in 2024. However, Apple appears to have rebuilt a tax planning scheme through Ireland, avoiding a further €20bn plus in EU taxes since 2016.

In 2025, Dublin-headquartered Chinese clothing giant Temu appeared to be using a scheme in which tax residency does not match the business location, reminiscent of the “Double



Irish” scheme. There is good reason to believe that Ireland continues to facilitate tax arbitrage by multinational corporations that impoverishes Europe. European Public Prosecutor’s Office staff raised serious concerns about money laundering and criminal activity facilitated through an Irish tax planning scheme.

In short, Ireland’s reliance upon giant non-EU firms creates insurmountable conflicts of interest, as evidenced by the country’s track record in the area of data regulation and taxation.

We expect that Ireland will recuse itself from any role in these two areas during its presidency and as a practical matter, we propose therefore that the renegotiation of any relevant files is run by the next country in line for the presidency – Lithuania.

**Professor Mariana Mazzucato**  
*University College London*  
**Professor Alberto Alemanno**  
*HEC Paris*  
**Associate Professor Isabella Weber**  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*  
*More signatories at ft.com/letters*

### History offers a painful lesson for Moscow

How not to consider the war efforts of Ukraine in its fight against the Russian invasion four years ago when seeing its drones reaching the Moscow area (Report, June 27)?

Neither Napoleon in 1812 nor Hitler in 1941 succeeded as invaders in getting further than the outskirts of the city. On those occasions both were the aggressors. Now Muscovites far away from the front line are experiencing Ukraine’s counter attack.

They may be realising – contrary to official propaganda – that this time around Moscow is no longer the safe haven the Russian authorities have predicated. History is always a permanent lesson.

**Alfonso González**  
*Madrid, Spain*

### How to make the triple lock sustainable

Reducing the economically unsustainable triple lock pension payments system will not be easy for Andy Burnham but is nevertheless key to funding long-term growth opportunities (Report, July 3). However, any proposal to reduce immediate payment increases will cause rebellion within the Labour Party and would cause discontent among key older voters.

Adding economic growth to the equation works on many levels. It shows the commitment of the new prime minister to growth as well as tying the “bloated” triple lock payments to what the country can actually afford long term. One possible option is to tie the increase to real five-year growth: If the economy is delivering firm growth at, say, 2/2.5 per cent, the full triple lock can be paid – anything below this and the payments are constrained. If this “fourth lock” can be introduced over a few years, no reductions will take place in the short term, reducing the risk of a parliamentary rebellion and loss of votes in the election in three years.

### America’s conduct has eroded its moral authority

Your editorial, “An American birthday worth celebrating,” (FT View, July 4) reminded me of words spoken to me half a century ago by a respected mentor: “There can be no free world without America, young man.” Those words left a profound impression that America was the guardian and moral compass of the free world.

Decades later, history has betrayed that conviction. Domestically, America took more than a century to extend to its own citizens the rights it proclaimed to be universal. Abroad, the record is even more troubling. While America’s capacity for self-correction deserves credit, it cannot erase decades of strategic expediency overriding professed ideals. The legacy of military interventions has been fractured societies rather than stability, while the selective application of international law has diminished America’s moral authority and reinforced perceptions of a double standard.

America is unquestionably a superpower. Whether history will judge it to have been a great power is another question. A nation’s greatness is determined not by the ideals it proclaims, but by the history its actions leave behind. It deserves an honest reckoning: as a nation of extraordinary promise and achievement, repeatedly betrayed by its own conduct.

**Al Kanji**  
*North Vancouver, BC, Canada*

### Defence spending needs smarter funding models

Your editorial “Saving Nato in the era of Trump” (FT View, July 6) calls for additional EU spending on defence. This is even more urgent for the UK, which currently lags behind many of its European allies. But how can we achieve this?

One way is to cut government expenditure, most notably welfare spending, which Labour MPs and prime minister-in-waiting Andy Burnham appear unwilling to do. Another is to borrow more. In that case, it makes sense to link defence spending to research and development (R&D). According to World Bank data, R&D accounted for 2.68 per cent of UK GDP in 2023, compared with 3.45 per cent in the US, 3.15 per cent in Germany and 3.22 per cent in Switzerland.

Recent academic research suggests defence spending boosts GDP twice, with second-round effects coming from R&D. Burnham should therefore fund additional defence spending through bonds whose interest rate rises with R&D, attracting long-term investors who see stronger innovation as both a driver of economic growth and a source of greater national security.

**Professor Costas Milas**  
*University of Liverpool Management School, Liverpool, UK*

### Let’s make sure data centres are sitting pretty

Is it inevitable that huge data centres will be built on rural UK landscapes, however strong the local protest, under a government ruling on nationally significant infrastructure projects (Report, June 24)?

Like the giant cathedrals and castles the Norman conquerors imposed on the Anglo-Saxon countryside, will we grow to love them? I would like to make a bid for these immense structures at least to be made with an eye to beauty. If cubist artists could camouflage a battleship, surely we could do something with a box.

The incessant hum these centres create could be turned into the music of the spheres on the principle of the aeolian harp.

If AI can’t think outside the box at least we can.

**Jane Swan**  
*Delabole, Cornwall, UK*

**Correction**

● The words “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal” appear in the second paragraph of the US Declaration of Independence, not the opening paragraph as wrongly suggested in an article on July 8.



# Opinion

## There is no grand plan on Iran

MIDDLE EAST

Kim Ghattas



In the late 1950s, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser quipped to CIA operative Miles Copeland that “the genius of you Americans is that you never make clear-cut stupid moves, only complicated stupid moves”.

The words were spoken at a time when America was still seen as somewhat more benevolent than former European colonial powers. This political capital would soon be squandered as the US, fearing the spread of communism, sought to contain local nationalism in the Middle East but ended up pushing some countries closer to the Soviet Union. America’s stupid moves, Nasser said, made people “wonder at the possibility that we might be missing something”.

When the US and Israel killed Iran’s

supreme leader Ali Khamenei on February 28, many in the region pondered the possibility of a new grand plan. Gulf countries had warned Washington against the war, cautioning it would endanger them and in effect close the Strait of Hormuz, with severe consequences for both the US and the global economy. As far back as the 1990s, Saudi Arabia had warned the US against launching a war against Iran, unless it could guarantee bringing down the Islamic republic’s regime.

But when operation Epic Fury began, one senior Arab official told me there was certainly work happening to precipitate regime change behind the firework of missile strikes, although he could not estimate how well organised or resourced it was. Instead, America’s allies in the Gulf were left exposed to Iran’s fury and the US’s ineptitude. Some Iranians, both inside the country and in the diaspora, wanted to believe that US President Donald Trump was delivering on his January promise that help was on the way, only to realise quickly that they had been betrayed.

Supporters of the war will argue that

the military campaign itself was well executed and that the US and Israeli forces delivered maximum degradation of Iranian capacity short of a ground invasion, preparing the way for robust diplomacy. But last month the US signed a memorandum of understanding with extremely favourable terms for Iran. Gulf countries, having been dragged into a war they didn’t want, were left to

An over-reaching Tehran seems to be looking at the US’s confused moves and wondering what it’s missing

contain the fallout of a bad interim deal that ignored their security concerns, including ballistic missiles and proxy militias.

Since then, the Gulf has been hedging intensely to make up for the lack of strategic planning. In the case of Saudi Arabia, this means preserving their relationship with Trump while constraining some of Washington’s freedom of mili-

tary action. Both the Emiratis and Saudis are attempting a détente with Iran while the UAE is also deepening security co-operation with Israel.

Meanwhile, US vice-president JD Vance and secretary of state Marco Rubio appear to have started their rival presidential campaigns, each selling a different vision of the region and the way forward. Vance described his talks with senior Iranian officials, including Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps officers, as the “coolest thing”, while Rubio travelled to the Gulf last month to reassure allies that America was not capitulating to Iran or selling them out.

Less than a month after the MoU was signed, a victorious-feeling Iran seems to be over-reaching, partly because it is looking at America’s confused moves and wondering what it may be missing. A headline Iranian legislator even claimed that America was purposefully manoeuvring parallel tracks to deprive Iran of any leverage.

On Wednesday, Trump was calling Iranian leaders “sick people” after Iran struck ships transiting through the

Strait of Hormuz. The US Treasury revoked sanction waivers that allowed Iran to sell oil for 60 days and the US military conducted 90 strikes against Iran, which included hitting a bridge and rail track in the north of the country, an overland route used for trade with China and Russia.

Trump has now declared the ceasefire to be over and Gulf countries are again incensed at Iran. There may well be more talks but there will also be more strikes. That suits Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the only player here with clear-cut moves, for whom war is an imperative for political survival and who is still hoping that the endurance of the Iranian regime is not inexhaustible.

Few in Washington, Tehran or the Arab world want a return to full-blown war. But the region seems set for a long hot summer of calibrated escalation, a slippery slope to conflagration, until Israeli elections in October and the American midterms in November.

The writer is author of ‘Black Wave’ and an FT contributing editor

## Devolution lacks easy answers over ‘fairness’

ECONOMICS

Chris Giles



The UK’s prime minister-in-waiting has pledged to remove power from Westminster and put it in the hands of people and places that can use it best. Andy Burnham says this devolution will create “a new sense of agency, possibility and hope”.

He will find enthusiastic supporters in his Labour Party and among economists not just from the centre-left. Britain’s poor record on growth is correlated with hyper-centralised economic management. Devolution can enhance incentives for local and regional government to promote growth, allow borrowing against expected future tax revenues and enhance local politicians’ accountability to their voters.

A recent report from researchers at Harvard University and King’s College London judged Labour’s record on devolution harshly. When the party came to power in 2024, it promised “landmark devolution” to boost growth. The government was now “at risk of squandering the best opportunity in a generation to address the UK’s persistent regional inequalities”, the report said.

But while the consensus for more devolution in England is understandable, it rarely confronts fundamental trade-offs. It also ignores the evidence that substantial devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland since 1997 has not boosted growth in these nations.

If the UK wanted to guarantee that local areas took responsibility for their economic performance and secured the

## Burnham must not succumb to a techlash

BRITAIN

Robert Shrimley



Those seeking to comprehend the fundamental nature of the looming Andy Burnham government have not unreasonably chosen to focus on whom he makes chancellor. The winner will be scrutinised for signs that they are not Ed Miliband or anyone likely to raise taxes and borrowing.

But business should also pay heed to another important clue; how Burnham thinks about AI and tech. In the words of one minister: “You can’t have a successful economy growing faster than average if you don’t have great science and tech companies in there.”

The next prime minister has so far largely limited himself to uplifting but empty pledges to make the UK “the world’s leading innovation nation”. But there have also been discordant noises. Admittedly, many of those in his orbit are setting out their own stalls rather than his, but some signals have raised concerns about Burnham leaning into the populist appeal of a “techlash”.

There have been briefings against automated vehicles. A trial scheme in London launched by Uber and Wayve, a British company developing self-driving vehicles, is raising fears over taxi

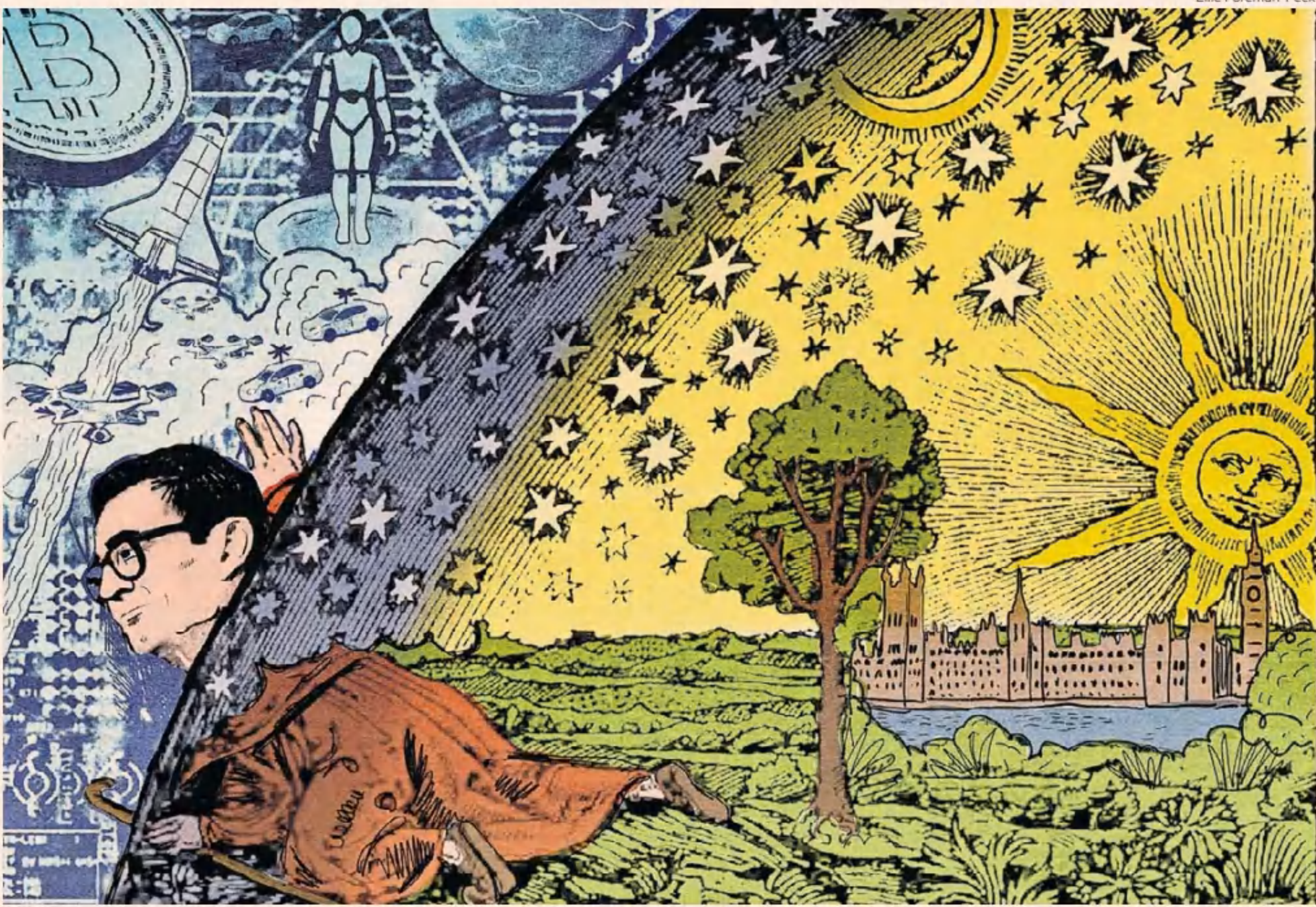
jobs. Others expect Burnham to bow to political pressure to push the Donald Trump- and Israel-aligned US company Palantir out of an NHS data platform programme that is easing bureaucracy and helping to deliver more treatments. Science department officials fear excessive regionalisation will weaken strategic decision-making.

More broadly, one Burnham ally talks of ending “unfettered tech boosterism”, seeing it as a vote loser. This is a swipe at the former prime minister Sir Tony Blair, an unabashed booster, but also a recognition that voters are scared of AI’s impact and of hegemonic US tech giants. You can see the electoral appeal of fighting job losses and standing up to Trump-backing tech plutocrats.

It is reasonable to recognise the dangers. The Trump administration’s temporary decision to restrict access to Anthropic’s AI models highlights the risk of tech dependency. But there is a certain defensiveness that fosters higher regulation and could undermine competitiveness and growth by making the UK appear less open to tech business. Others worry about the impact of plans to increase capital gains tax.

A new AI strategy is promised, focusing on more UK tech sovereignty, reducing reliance on foreign-owned data centres and building in more accountability. But is this a significant rethink or simply a touch on the tiller?

David Lawrence, co-founder of the Centre for British Progress, whose staff are talking to the transition team, expects Burnham to “draw a distinction



between productive and predatory technology”, being tougher on social media companies while welcoming AI investment that secures jobs.

AI advocates meeting the Burnham staff remain sanguine. Policy talks are being led by Josh Simons, the former science office minister who gave up his seat for Burnham. Simons, who once worked in Meta’s AI division, also favours a hard-headed view of national interest over boosterism but one of those who has talked to him avers: “Josh gets it.”

So what does an “innovation nation” need from Burnham? Some steps will sit easily with him. As Manchester mayor he also championed Atom Valley, a proposed manufacturing and tech hub in the towns north of the city, and he will back more regional innovation clusters.

You can see the electoral appeal of fighting job losses and standing up to Trump-backing plutocrats

But you do need to place some big bets and not every town can be a science hub.

The UK must remain a welcoming home for the best minds. Part of the lure of the King’s Cross AI hub is proximity to the pioneering DeepMind. The UK dominates the European venture capital market, attracting nearly 40 per cent of investment across the continent so far this year. This is something to be prized and nurtured with friendly visa regimes and rewarding opportunities in frontier work. But the challenge is turning start-ups into scale-ups. The business model for many British start-ups is selling to a foreign giant. Finding more investment capital is the key to changing this.

One step Burnham will pursue in his focus on tech sovereignty is using the state’s procurement power in defence or the NHS especially to back British firms, guaranteeing them a first customer and therefore investors. There is a model for this already in the government’s quantum programme, which offered £1bn of procurement funds for large-scale computers to UK firms.

Easing dependence on the US must

also mean seeking closer collaboration with the EU, though this also raises issues of divergent tech regulation.

But signalling matters and Burnham must avoid too defensive a posture. The UK has an envied tech and life science status within Europe. It would be a crime to lose it. He must be wary of easy Labour instincts, over-regulating to protect jobs or succumbing to a latent anti-Americanism. Wayve is a British tech success story. Palantir offers a better service for NHS patients.

A sceptical approach to boosterism is wise, as is the greater security and resilience that comes from more tech sovereignty, but it must not be an excuse for ever more protectionism.

Close allies seem to get this point. One says the new strategy will be “far from all defensive”. This is essential. A government capable of leading the British economy through this technological revolution must recognise the challenges. But there is no future in simply wishing them away.

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## How much is AI hacking your emotions?

TECHNOLOGY

John Thornhill



As some of us have learnt to our cost, generative AI models have an ugly habit of hallucinating, or confabulating, facts. Librarians report readers requesting phantom books recommended by large language models. Corporate chatbots offer users non-existent refund policies. And hundreds of lawyers have run into trouble by including fictitious legal cases in their court submissions.

The AI labs have been working hard to improve their models and ground them in factuality. But the mantra of our AI-enabled age remains *caveat lector*: let the reader beware. In spite of the extraordinary capabilities of the latest chatbots, we should be critical of their output and cross-check sources.

However, a group of researchers has been exploring a potentially more insidious area of emerging concern: the AI models’ function as mediators of human-to-human communication. To what extent can AI models nudge users’ opinions in particular directions when asked to polish a LinkedIn post or summarise a YouTube video or provide context for a post on X, for example?

Their conclusion? “Our empirical analysis of LLMs from multiple popular families shows that they systematically introduce directional biases when drafting or improving texts on a wide range of contested topics,” the researchers from the Hasso Plattner Institute, the Oxford Internet Institute and the Weizenbaum Institute write.

The researchers tested four families of models, released by Meta, Mistral, Google and Alibaba, on 13 hot topics, including abortion, gun control, climate change, atheism and the death penalty. The models were prompted to draft and improve social media posts on these subjects. Using mathematical sociological techniques, the researchers assessed the outputs for directional bias.

To take one example, the researchers found a directional bias in favour of pro-life views when using the “Explain this post” feature on X, powered by the Grok AI model, run by Elon Musk. This nudge, which the researchers attribute to a deliberate design choice of the developers, highlights how AI-mediated communication is emerging as a novel lever to influence public opinion.

Understandably, policymakers have

It has the potential for subtle manipulation of opinion that is almost impossible to detect

focused on the “known knowns” when it comes to monitoring AI platforms targeting disinformation and deepfakes. But this latest research confirms the potential for far more subtle and invisible manipulation of opinion that is almost impossible for outside users to detect.

Nudges, of course, can be both good

and bad. They can help steer users away from extremist or self-harming content. But they can also amplify it. The temptation to sway users’ views for self-interested purposes will surely rise as AI companies increasingly involve themselves in politics and/or rely more heavily on advertising revenue.

“We still tend to think of this tech as neutral. It’s just maths. It’s just statistics. There’s no bias in there,” says Sandra Wachter, one of the paper’s authors. “Our research shows it’s very different.”

One of the limitations of the study was that the researchers could only examine open-weight AI models, which enable researchers to study their internal parameters. The most widely used proprietary models, such as ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini, cannot be scrutinised in this way. That emphasises the extent to which AI models remain black boxes. We rely entirely on their designers to exercise good judgment.

Why it may be unwise to do so is highlighted by the latest AI Safety index from the Future of Life Institute, compiled by seven independent experts who rank the world’s top nine AI labs

across six domains. Anthropic, OpenAI and Google DeepMind scored the highest safety ratings, while xAI, part of Musk’s SpaceX empire, DeepSeek of China, and Mistral of France came in last. What is most unnerving is that none earned more than an overall rating of C plus, while the bottom three scored Fs.

Max Tegmark, chair of the FLI, says that if the societal risks of social media revolved around “attention hacking” then those of AI might involve “emotion hacking”, given the models’ persuasive powers. “The ability of AI to manipulate people is a massive concern,” he tells me. “It’s perfectly legal for these AI companies to put in whatever biases they want.”

However, Tegmark says the regulatory environment is finally shifting, even in the US. This week, Illinois became the first state to pass an AI safety law mandating independent, third-party audits. More states seem bound to follow unless, that is, AI models nudge voters the other way.

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Unlike slogans where the policy makes everyone happy and accountable, the reality involves trade-offs

benefits of growth locally, the centre could devolve revenues from taxes that are easily attributed to a place. This tends to mean income and corporation tax but could include others.

But here is the problem. The revenue from these two taxes funds 43 per cent of UK public spending, excluding national demands on the public purse such as debt interest and defence. If this percentage of spending were financed by locally raised income and corporation tax, London could afford to roughly halve its tax rates, while many other places would need significant rises.

It is almost impossible to exaggerate how much London subsidises the rest of the UK. This version of devolution will therefore never happen because it would be seen as unfair.

But once you move away from full fiscal devolution, regional politics immediately becomes a game of persuading Whitehall to give a bigger share of London’s revenues. And the issue of what is a fair distribution is difficult.

Take one frequent bugbear of the north of England. The cities of Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds and Newcastle look at the new Elizabeth Line in London and say it’s unfair that the capital received all that investment (forgetting London paid 70 per cent of the cost). It is a legitimate grievance.

Londoners equally can look at commuting times and note that these averaged 54 minutes for central London in 2024, compared with 30 minutes in Manchester and 26 in Merseyside. They can say London’s needs for transport investment are much greater and the returns higher. Another legitimate grievance. Whitehall must adjudicate these disputes.

It is feasible to have more devolution, with regions and cities allowed to keep additional revenues that they generate after an initial distribution. But this blunts the incentives that make devolution good for growth.

These incentives are further weakened if there are periodic reassessments of regional needs and financing. This would happen because of inevitable political pressure to stop less successful areas from falling further behind.

Unlike slogans where devolution makes everyone happy and accountable, the real world involves trade-offs. And in this world, anyone who believes that a reorganisation of power in the UK will transform growth prospects and eliminate the sense of regional injustice is living in cloud-cuckoo land.

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