

Meltdown in Nepal

Need for interim government at the earliest to steer it out of turmoil

THE REISA sense of déjà vu regarding the massive anti-government student protests in Nepal that toppled the government headed by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli. Last August, weeks of student protests in Bangladesh forced PM Sheikh Hasina to flee to India. Three years ago, escalating nationwide protests in Sri Lanka led to former PM Mahinda Rajapaksa seeking safety in a naval base. Of course, there are differences between these groundswells of opposition that forced regime change in the neighbourhood. In Nepal, the ban on social media was the proximate trigger for the protest by Gen Z but the unrest was simmering for some time. In Bangladesh, the students agitated against the quota system for government jobs. In Sri Lanka, the unrest was against crippling shortages of essentials and double-digit inflation.

Tensions have been mounting in Nepal because of the frustrations of the youth over the lack of jobs—with unemployment among those who are 15-24 years of age as high as 22.7%—and widespread corruption of the political class. Before the social media ban, Gen Z users were posting about “Nepo kids”—younger members of prominent political families—and their lavish lifestyles in a poor nation. The protests should be seen in the broader context of political instability in this Himalayan nation. There have been 14 governments since Nepal became a democracy in 2008. Frustrations have been mounting as virtually every senior political leader—including Oli and five former PMs—faces corruption charges.

The youth feel there is no future in this corrupt and stagnant system. “If the protests are the loud revolt, migration is the quiet rebellion,” argued professor Amitabh Mattoo of the Jawaharlal Nehru University in a newspaper column. More than 400,000 people leave the country every year—the population of Nepal is 30 million—for employment in West Asia, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. They also head to Europe and the US where they form the fastest-growing community of Asian Americans. The remittances they send back home is the mainstay of Nepal’s economy, amounting to 33% of GDP. Unlike in Sri Lanka, there is no economic crisis that has created such a ferment as growth is expected to be 4.5% in fiscal 2025 (mid-July to mid-July) and 5.4% in FY27, according to the World Bank. Nepal’s growth must translate into jobs if this youth demographic is not to be hollowed out.

The big question is, what comes next? The Nepal’s army is now in control on the streets amidst indications that one of the student outfits, Next Gen Nepal, is ready for dialogue but the parliament would have to be dissolved first. The first priority was to install an interim government that is acceptable to Gen Z. The army deserves praise for persuading former Chief Justice of Nepal Sushila Karki—after several rounds of talks on Wednesday—to accept a request from protesters to be the interim head. As the largest neighbour, India is keenly watching these developments in Nepal and has expressed hope that restraint would be exercised and all issues addressed “through peaceful means and dialogue”. Although there is relief that former PM Oli is no more in the picture due to his anti-India stance, India must engage with all the stakeholders, especially the protesting student leaders. Dealing with regime change in the neighbourhood entails deploying more resources and diplomatic personnel to be abreast of fast-breaking developments. The sudden meltdown in Bangladesh took India completely by surprise. This should never happen again.

Who actually wants a thinner iPhone?

THERE WAS A time when thickness and weight were two main questions when buying new technology, maybe even the most important. That’s why, when Steve Jobs slipped a MacBook Air out of an envelope in 2008, we all oohed. It was a new dawn for laptops: finally some mercy for the world’s shoulders.

There were some performance trade-offs, but they were seen as worth it. The MacBook Air redefined expectations of how a laptop could look and feel, and it only got better from there. As well as MacBook Air, by 2013 we had the iPad Air, too.

Continuing the trend on Tuesday, Apple Inc. introduced the 5.64 mm-thick iPhone Air to answer those critics who say that at 7.95 mm, the new iPhone 17 is too thick, a certified whopper. If you can locate any of those critics, please send them to me because I don’t believe they exist. Nor do I believe many consumers will care about thickness when they learn the iPhone Air means sacrificing things they worry about more than any other factor: battery life and a more-capable camera.

These consumers also care about price. At \$999, the iPhone Air comes in at \$200 more than the more powerful 17, or just \$100 less than the full-featured 17 Pro. Is that a good deal to achieve thinness when you’re only going to stick this phone into a case immediately anyway? This is one of the stranger products Apple has ever released. The company didn’t elaborate on what it meant by “all-day battery life”, but here’s a clue: Alongside the launch of the device, Apple showed off an accompanying external battery pack for “life’s busier days”. (It’s \$99.)

So what’s the deal? Francisco Jeronimo, an analyst with IDC, said the design refresh—which includes a new look for the other iPhones in addition to the iPhone Air—is about shortening the amount of time consumers wait to upgrade their devices, which has been trending longer and longer as the phone and its components

have improved and the phones have started to look very similar from one year to the next. As CCS Insight’s Ben Wood put it, “It has been a few years since Apple has had new iPhones that you could put on the table in a coffee shop, meeting room or pub, and people would ask, ‘Is that the new iPhone?’”

So it was good news if that’s the sort of thing that matters to you: The new Pro line-up looks distinctly different from the models of the past few cycles, with its massive new camera bump—the company called it a “plateau”—and distinct new colours.

On matters of thinness, Jeronimo points to the Samsung’s S25 Edge—5.8 mm—which sold more

than a million units in this year’s second quarter, making it the sixth most popular smartphone globally in IDC’s “high-premium” category of \$1,000 to \$1,600—though online reviews, both professional and from regular people, bemoan the poor battery performance.

Those kind of sales numbers would be table stakes for Apple, but the S25 Edge at least signals an audience for thinner phones, Jeronimo argues. The iPhone Air, then, might be a consumer-testing and market research opportunity for Apple ahead of some truly large upgrades coming next year. The iPhone Air makes use of Apple’s own wireless chip and modem. Spinning up the supply chain that produces them will be useful as Apple prepares for products like the highly anticipated folding iPhone, which will ultimately feel like two iPhones fused together. That device, far more than anything on show today, will be what gets people upgrading their iPhone more quickly.

All this leaves the iPhone Air as a niche product, built for those who simply must buy every new Apple product or those wear their jeans too tight (there’s probably plenty of overlap in that particular Venn diagram). Like the experimental Vision Pro—another case of Apple doing a little R&D and market research out in the open—it’s perhaps less about this first version of iPhone Air and more about the second one.

As Tim Cook wrapped up the launch event on Tuesday, Apple’s shares were trading marginally down—around 1.5%. It was a muted response from investors who know the real litmus test of Apple’s strategy—on both AI and the future of the iPhone—won’t come until next year.

● DIGITAL CURRENCY

FOR INDIA & THE GLOBAL SOUTH, THE PRESSURE TO TRADE MORE IN DOLLAR-BACKED STABLECOINS IS INEVITABLE

The geoeconomics of GENIUS

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sification of global trade and lack of faith in American financial assets, the dollar might face usage pressures. However, the extent to which it loses its sheen as a “safe haven” depends on the availability of stable non-dollar alternatives.

China, India, and several other emerging market economies are developing sovereign central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) for increasing the use of such currencies in their external payments.

These CBDCs—backed by national monetary and currency authorities—are not direct efforts to promote de-dollarisation. However, the current geopolitical scenario, especially the enlarging rifts between the US on one hand, and China, India, Russia, Brazil, and other emerging market economies on the other, might create the impression that emerging market digital currencies are attempts to displace the US dollar. President Trump clearly subscribes to the view as is clear from his describing the BRICS as distinctly “anti-American” and pursuing the de-dollarisation agenda.

The US has not piloted a CBDC yet. However, it plans to retain the prominence of the US dollar, and increase its use, through a different strategy. This involves encouraging the use of US dollar-backed

private crypto currencies referred to as stablecoins. Central banks or national monetary authorities do not manage the latter. However, unlike the average cryptos, they are not considered volatile or high-risk, as they are linked to a stable global currency such as the US dollar or similar safe and low-risk financial assets.

On 18 July, the US announced the Guiding and Establishing National Innovation for U.S. Stablecoins (GENIUS) Act for creating a regulatory framework for stablecoins in the US. The Act aims to make the US the global leader in digital assets by ensuring the USD retains its global reserve currency status.

The GENIUS rules emphasise that stablecoins issued by the US will be fully backed by US legal tender, which will be either the dollar or US short-term treasures. The ostensible strategic goal of the legislation is to make US dollar-denominated debt widely appealing to global investors by making such debt easily transactable through a variety of stablecoins of different issuers.

The geoeconomic motive of the GENIUS Act is in making the US dollar the leading option for financial transactions in a rapidly digitising world. Stablecoins are not regulated by central

Major dollar-pegged stablecoins, such as the USDC and USDT, promoted by Circle and Tether, should be able to thwart potential de-dollarisation by increasing the dollar’s digital use

Reorient telecom licensing approach



TV RAMACHANDRAN

President, Broadband India Forum

IN WHAT MAY seem a self-contradictory position, in this digital era, telecom has been “liberated” from the telecom market and is woven into the fabric of almost all socio-economic activity. It has become the magical wand that opens doors to completely different sectors such as retail, finance, banking, healthcare, education, and transportation. Data flows defy geography to deliver enormous socio-economic benefits across borders. Yet, even in this hyper-connected world, notwithstanding admirable achievements on many fronts and a historic Telecommunications Act 2023 with many parts being implemented, India’s licensing policy framework remains somewhat archaic, with sectoral silos and physical boundaries. Telecom licences and authorisation take ages, compliance checklists stretch endlessly, and penalties are calibrated for the monopoly era—not for the layered, border-blurred, and ultraragile digital ecosystem we now inhabit.

Yet, as more services overlap—telecom, broadcasting, satellite, cloud, content, and fintech, all enmeshing with each other—the policy instinct has been to extend control rather than recalibrate it. The question we therefore urgently need to ask now is not how to license more, but why license at all in certain cases. And where licensing is justified, we must assess whether the cost of compliance outweighs the societal benefit.

Temptation for “command and control”: Albeit much softened in recent years, India’s telecom licensing regime remains one of the most onerous in the world. A unified licence can run into dozens of annexures and demands compliance across security, financial, technical,

and operational parameters. Even activities that in most countries are registration-based or unlicensed—such as providing Wi-Fi hotspots, deploying private networks, or satellite-based Internet of Things (IoT)—often fall under the heavy licensing hatchet here.

The burden is not just administrative. The opportunity cost is immense. Every extra step of approval delays service roll-out; every grey area in the rules chills investment; every layer of compliance devour scarce capital that could otherwise expand networks or improve quality of service. For instance in Wi-Fi, globally delicensed spectrum has powered innovation worth billions of dollars. India’s delay in releasing the 6 GHz band for Wi-Fi 6E/7—partly due to incumbent lobbying—has cost faster, cheaper broadband and significant economic gains. There are similar roadblocks in satellite broadband, private 5G, and cloud data centres.

The missing RIA lens: Globally, policymakers and regulators increasingly apply regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) to weigh total costs—compliance, opportunity loss, innovation suppression—against intended benefits. Australia adopted RIA in as early as 1985, making it one of the first nations to institutionalise this approach.

India’s digital communication policy processes rarely apply such a lens. Once a licensing or registration requirement is proposed, there is a flawed/misplaced

What we need to ask is not how to license more, but why license at all in certain cases. We must assess if the cost of compliance outweighs the societal benefit

“justification” in terms of “security” or “level playing field” without quantifying its economic drag. There is little transparency on whether alternative, less intrusive options were considered—such as self-certification, ex-post enforcement, or co-regulation.

For instance, when private 5G networks are kept in a regulatory holding pattern, the cost is not merely to a few companies. It is the lost productivity gains across manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, and agriculture that could have used ultra-reliable, low-latency connectivity. When satellite broadband operators face a labyrinth of overlapping permissions from several departments, the cost is not just their legal bill—it is the millions of unserved rural citizens who stay offline.

A 21st-century framework must start from the principle that licensing is the exception, not the default. When justified—for managing scarce spectrum, ensuring interconnection, or protecting national security—it should be narrow, technology-neutral, and proportionate to risk.

Crucially, cost/benefit analysis should be embedded into every new licensing or regulatory proposal. Before imposing any permission regime, ministries and regulators should publicly explain: the specific problem it addresses; whether less intrusive solutions were considered and their outcomes; compliance costs for both government and industry; and, most importantly, the net cost/benefit for consumers

banks, unlike CBDCs, making them far more appealing to several sections of the global “digital” community preferring loosely regulated cryptos. The more risk-averse among the latter will also find the US dollar-backed stablecoins appealing given their stability accruing from the greenback. Major dollar-pegged stablecoins, such as the USDC and USDT, promoted by Circle and Tether, should be able to thwart potential de-dollarisation by increasing the dollar’s digital use.

Geoeconomic motivations have encouraged China also to consider yuan-backed stablecoins in addition to its CBDC. This contrasts with China’s earlier strategy of resisting more trade in cryptocurrencies. With the SWIFT inter-bank payment system likely to become more tightly controlled by the US, leading to lesser global use of the yuan, it is important for China to diversify options for greater use of its digital currency. Stablecoins are the way forward.

Tariffs have delivered for the US what they could have by getting amenable deals with various trade partners. The next round of demands from the US are likely to be for buying US debt through stablecoins. In addition to buying debt, it is likely that more US business-to-business global transactions will be “persuaded” to be settled digitally through dollar-backed stablecoins. Indeed, trade invoicing might also be encouraged to be settled digitally through stablecoins, citing the inflated cost of using traditional greenback!

For India, and several other economies from the Global South, the geoeconomic pressure to trade more in dollar-backed stablecoins is inevitable. Negotiating the pressure will not be easy; more so since China too, over time, will offer its stablecoins as further tradable and “stable” options.

Views are personal



DAVE LEE

Bloomberg

than a million units in this year’s second quarter, making it the sixth most popular smartphone globally in IDC’s “high-premium” category of \$1,000 to \$1,600—though online reviews, both professional and from regular people, bemoan the poor battery performance.

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and the public.

Such transparency would not only curb overreach, but also build trust between the government and industry, and signal global investors that India is serious about business.

This is not merely a matter of efficiency. In a borderless digital economy, capital, talent, and intellectual property are mobile. A start-up can base its satellite IoT operations in Bengaluru or Singapore; a hyperscaler can host its artificial intelligence workloads in Mumbai or Dubai. Regulatory predictability and cost-effectiveness are decisive factors.

If India continues to cling to legacy licensing instincts while peers streamline, the competitive gap will widen. Conversely, if we lead with a cost/benefit-based, principles-driven framework, India can position itself as the natural hub for next-generation connectivity, cloud, and digital services.

Need for self-effacing regulations: The real challenge is not just keeping pace with technology but resisting the urge to regulate for its own sake. In a fast-paced, borderless world, advanced services demand not more licences but smarter governance. India’s digital future will be shaped less by the number of pages in our licences and more by the wisdom to ask—every time—whether today’s regulation is truly worth the cost it imposes tomorrow.

(The article is inspired by the author’s former colleague and friend, Rajat Mukarji)
Views are personal

Research inputs by Garima Kapoor of Broadcast India Forum

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SC rights a wrong

The Supreme Court’s decisive intervention, ordering the Election Commission of India (ECI) to include Aadhaar card as one of the 12 valid documents for the special intensive revision of Bihar’s electoral rolls, is vital. It’s a resounding victory for the fundamental right to vote, reaffirming the principle that procedural rigidity must not oppress lakhs of eligible citizens. The inclusion of Aadhaar

paves the way for a smoother, more accessible verification process. It also assists electors already on the rolls who require document verification. It vindicates the persistent appeals from political activists and civil society who had warned against the ECI’s stance. The order forces the ECI to align its procedures with the practical realities of identity verification. It sets a precedent for all other revisions envisaged across India. The ECI must now adopt a more diligent and

humane approach, emphasising house-to-house verification and ensuring the electoral roll is accurate and represents people.
—Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Shift from dollar

Apropos of “The silent de-dollarisation” (FE, September 10), although the US dollar remains the safest forex asset with SWIFT, the changing global economic and political scenario has reduced its sheen. US sanctions

curbing Russian payments have made countries seek alternative currencies such as euro, pound, and yen for settlement. US sanctions and harsh import tariffs have also compelled others to have forex reserves in currencies other than dollar. The central banks of various countries have also increased the quantum of gold and reduced demand for dollar.
—NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

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Editor's
TAKE

Nepal in Throes of Political Unrest

The present crisis in Nepal reveals that systemic governance failures, coupled with a disillusioned youth, can turn into explosive turbulence

Nepal, India's immediate Himalayan neighbour, is facing people's wrath. People are on the streets and violence is the order of the day. The protesters are largely Gen Z, who were outraged by the Government ban on social media. What began as demonstrations against a temporary ban on social media has spiralled into a full-blown uprising against corruption, misgovernance, and entrenched political privilege. Now the people want a complete overhaul of the system. The protests were sparked when the Government blocked Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and other platforms, citing regulatory concerns. Though the ban was lifted within days, the damage had been done.

The move was seen as an assault on free expression and a desperate attempt by the political elite to stifle dissent. When police opened fire on demonstrators, killing 19 people, the protests only intensified. Anger has long simmered over widespread corruption and the widening gulf between the political class and ordinary citizens. Nepalese youth face unemployment, migration pressures, and economic stagnation as the Government does little to address their grievances. The violent targeting of leaders' homes – including that of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, who was forced to resign – reflects the extent of this rage. The collapse of law and order has serious implications for Nepal's fragile democracy. Airports have been shut, ministers chased through the streets, and the parliament building set on fire.

The present crisis shows people's waning faith in the political system itself. Nepal's transition to democracy was hard-won, but power struggles, instability, and corruption have eroded trust. For India, the turmoil next door is a matter of immediate concern. The two countries share not just an open border but also deep cultural, social, and economic linkages. Political instability in Nepal can quickly spill over into the region, impacting cross-border trade, tourism, and security. India must tread carefully. New Delhi cannot afford to remain a bystander.

A nuanced approach is needed – quiet diplomatic engagement with all political stakeholders, support for democratic institutions, and investment in people-centric initiatives that address youth aspirations. By strengthening economic cooperation, creating job opportunities through cross-border projects, and extending humanitarian assistance, India can position itself as a friend in need.

A lot would depend upon the Nepalese youth, who need a rallying point and a credible leader. What they want cannot be achieved in a day. They have to come to terms with the fact that systemic changes take time to take root and must work for it over a period of time. Right now, they need a credible leader. Mayor Balendra Shah, who studied in Karnataka, has emerged as a powerful leader. Whether he can assuage the feelings of the youth remains to be seen.



SUMEER BHASIN

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's 25th anniversary summit comes at a time of deep recalibration in the global order. For Asia, the SCO is no longer a mere security forum; it has evolved into a stage where the contradictions of geopolitics, economics, and energy converge. For India, the question is existential: Will it remain a dispensable pawn in Washington's larger contest with China and Russia, or position itself as a pivotal state bridging US-anchored markets with Eurasian supply chains?

China at the Centre, Contradictions All Around

China is undeniably the centrepiece of this recalibration while simultaneously being the driver of Eurasian integration through BRICS and SCO and the source of sharp contradictions within both. Its embrace of Pakistan as its "iron brother" sets a hard ceiling on India's strategic manoeuvrability, while territorial disputes and competition in Asia cast a permanent shadow over India-China ties.

Japan, too, finds itself pulled in opposite directions: Security reliance on the US but deep economic interdependence with China. The SCO thus represents both a promise of multipolarity and a theatre of contradictions.

Russia: The Indispensable Player

For Russia, the SCO and BRICS are strategic lifelines. Sanctions have tethered Moscow closer to Beijing, but forums like the SCO provide legitimacy and a platform to resist US dominance. Yet, Russia's weakened position means it is now a junior partner to China, not the co-equal it once aspired to be.

Here, India's growing role within the SCO becomes critical for Moscow: By backing New Delhi's deeper participation, Russia can offset Beijing's overreach and inject a measure of balance into an organisation at risk of becoming China-centric. For Moscow, India is both counterweight and indispensable bridge.

Trump's Tariff Shock

The wild card remains Washington. Trump's tariffs have become a key instrument of statecraft, injecting volatility into global trade. What was once a dispute over deficits has morphed into an assertion of raw power while signalling allies and adversaries alike that access to US markets can no longer be taken for granted. The consequence may be a deepening of Eurasian realignment, as countries from India to Turkey and Central Asia hedge their bets.

SCO@25: India's Pivotal Test

The SCO began as a regional security forum but has since evolved into a crucible where geopolitics, economics, and energy intersect. Can India rise as a pivotal player, balancing rival powers while safeguarding its national interests?



Economic Resilience Under Strain

India's energy and economic resilience are both on the line. Discounted Russian crude delivered up to \$17 billion in savings, but export losses from US 25 per cent+25 per cent tariffs threaten to wipe that cushion away and far beyond. India's MSME sector contributes around 30 per cent of GDP and over 45 per cent of total exports, while employing over 60 per cent of the workforce. The knock-on effect is immediate: Job losses, credit freezes, SMEs scaling back operations and wider risks to growth and export competitiveness.

According to recent reporting, over 50,000 small exporters are already scrambling to reroute shipments or find new markets, amid tightening credit conditions.As tariff-driven losses mount, the political fallout will be felt in voter sentiment, especially in export-reliant states and among urban middle-class consumers facing inflationary pressures.

In a democracy of India's scale, external economic shocks are never just about trade; they ripple into electoral dynamics, coalition stability, and the political economy of reform.India's response must be multi-pronged: Diversify energy sources, build stronger strategic reserves, negotiate safeguards or carve-outs with Washington to protect vulnerable export sectors. Simultaneously, support MSMEs with credit guarantees, export facilitation, and market diversification, so that the tariff squeeze does not translate into massive unemployment and growth setbacks.

India-Japan: The Middle Power Axis

Amid these contradictions, Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to Japan is a significant counterbalance to the SCO's China-centric tilt. Tokyo and New Delhi, despite different alignments, share a core interest in preserving open sea lanes, resilient supply chains, and an Asia not dominated by any single power. Japan, heavily dependent on both US security guarantees and Chinese trade, sees India as an indispensable partner in creating strategic

depth. The outcomes of Modi's visit – deepening defence technology cooperation, expanding semiconductor and critical minerals supply chains, and accelerating joint infrastructure projects – are all strategic signals that Indo-Japan ties are strengthening substantially. For India, this partnership strengthens its ability to act as a pivotal state: A bridge between US-anchored markets and Eurasian corridors, while also crafting an independent Asian pole alongside Japan. In effect, India and Japan are emerging as hinges of Asia's multipolar balance.

Both are middle powers capable of shaping the region's architecture if they institutionalise cooperation across energy, technology, and defence. Together, they provide a democratic, rules-based alternative to China's hierarchical vision of Eurasian integration.

Washington's Strategic Blind Spot

For the United States, the opportunity is to reassert leadership by restoring predictability: Anchoring Asia through security guarantees while offering market and technology access. Yet the short-term weaponisation of tariffs undermines those very objectives. By treating partners like India as expendable in its contest with China, Washington risks nudging them deeper into Eurasian forums it once sought to marginalise. If the US fails to recognise the structural costs of this approach, it may find its long-term strategic influence in Asia irreparably weakened.

The Geopolitical Reset Ahead

The SCO's 25th anniversary marks a decisive shift towards a non-Western bloc, where Eurasian powers seek insulation from US coercion and dollar dominance. Asia faces opportunities in new trade corridors, energy routes, and financial mechanisms, but also sharper rivalries. For India, this is the ultimate test of statecraft – whether to rise as a stabilising power or remain constrained. With Japan as partner and a parallel track in the SCO, India can shape Eurasia's future and act as a pivotal state.

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

FOR RUSSIA, THE SCO AND BRICS ARE STRATEGIC LIFELINES. SANCTIONS HAVE TETHERED MOSCOW CLOSER TO BEIJING, BUT FORUMS LIKE THE SCO PROVIDE LEGITIMACY AND A PLATFORM TO RESIST US DOMINANCE. YET, RUSSIA'S WEAKENED POSITION MEANS IT IS NOW A JUNIOR PARTNER TO CHINA, NOT THE CO-EQUAL IT ONCE ASPIRED TO BE

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The Power of Prayer: One Step Towards God



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2ND THE PIONEER OPINION

From my earliest childhood, prayer came to me as naturally as breathing. Whenever I fell sick, felt threatened, or faced the anxiety of an upcoming exam, my instinct was to fold my hands and turn to God. Only later did I understand why this came so easily: because, as the Bhagavad Gita (15.7) reminds us, every soul is a part of God. Just as a child instinctively seeks comfort from a parent, we turn to the Divine for protection and guidance. It is the most natural connection one can make.

As I grew older, I began to realise the profound benefits of prayer. The first and foremost is the direct connection with God – instant and without barriers. In the Gita (7.16), Lord Krishna explains that four kinds of people approach Him in prayer: The distressed, the inquisitive,

the seeker of wealth, and the wise. But how does God respond? Do we truly deserve His help? This is an important question. Consider a job seeker approaching a businessman. If the applicant lacks the required qualifications, the businessman turns him down. Prayer works in much the same way. God listens, but He responds according to what we deserve. Looking back at my school days, I often prayed before exams.

Did I deserve His help? Yes, because I maintained a regular relationship with Him. Every day I went to my grandmother's Poojaghar, bowed before the deities, and received Prasad. Moreover, I applied myself diligently to my studies. Since I did my part, God did His. My results were usually good. Later, as I finished my education, the challenge was to stand on my own feet and not burden my family. Here, God's generosity was overwhelming. He led me unexpectedly to the United States, where I studied under a professor who had just retired from a world-renowned company.

Although I had gone for a different specialisation, I somehow agreed to his offer to guide my Master's studies. Jobs in that field were scarce, but miraculously, he recommended me for one in America. The education and work experience I gained there sustained my livelihood ever since. Truly, when prayers are sincere and deserving, God responds with mercy far greater than we

imagine. Yet material success brought another struggle: a lack of peace, the absence of true sukha. Once again, I turned to prayer – this time more intensely. God began to guide me through intuitions, and I became receptive. Slowly, I gave up relying solely on myself, realising that dependence on ego only invited fears, anxieties, and endless cycles of thought.

Awareness of my own smallness and helplessness deepened, and wisdom began to replace pride. I saw how He micromanaged my life with precision. This made me wonder: Why do we, so small and limited, take on the burden of controlling everything ourselves? Why lose sleep worrying about the future when the Omniscient One is ready to help? Through prayer and spiritual practice, we secure peace, hope, and true happiness.Prayer is universal. From Sanatan Dharmis to Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs, every faith upholds it. Prayer can be spoken, whispered in the heart, written down, or offered silently with folded hands. I counsel my loved ones to cultivate this practice. God is ever eager to oblige. As the saying goes, "Take one step towards God, and He takes ninety-nine towards you." Prayer is that first step.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and a popular columnist

NEPAL ON THE BRINK AS GEN Z UNREST SPARKS TURMOIL

Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli was ousted by a staged coup. The social media ban acted as the trigger, but discontent had been brewing for some time owing to a slump in the economy, growing unemployment, the lavish lifestyles of "nepo kids," and massive corruption within the coalition Government.

Sadly, Oli was more concerned about consolidating his position in the CPN-UML for a third term at the helm rather than learning from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, where powerful regimes fell due to a lack of empathy towards genuine public grievances.

Monday turned out to be the bloodiest day in Nepal's history as security forces unleashed brute force on Gen Z protestors. Oli's barbarism was on full display as his men rained bullets on unarmed demonstrators,

killing 20 of them. It was mass murder in broad daylight, right in front of Parliament. Oli's atrocious act is likely to haunt generations of Nepalis, showing how a democratically elected leader could unleash such violence.

The intensity of the protests should be a cause for concern for India, as they came barely a year after student protests in neighbouring Bangladesh dislodged Sheikh Hasina's Government. Nepal is geopolitically more crucial, acting as a buffer between India and China. India must keep its engagement open, without being seen as interfering, while calm is restored and elections are held swiftly. Lasting peace in Nepal now depends on swift elections and responsive leadership.

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

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

Tariff disputes strain India-US ties

The Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday welcomed US President Donald Trump's recent optimism over trade talks, insisting the negotiations would help realise the "limitless potential" of the India-US partnership.

The conciliatory exchanges, however, mask the scale of the challenges still facing the relationship. Only weeks ago, Trump doubled tariffs on Indian goods to 50 per cent and introduced an additional 25 per cent levy in protest against India's purchase of discounted Russian crude.

Tensions deepened further after Trump publicly vented "disappointment" at India's oil trade with Russia and warned that the US had "lost India and Russia to deepest, darkest China," posting an old image of Modi with Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping at a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit. On Tuesday, September 9, the Chinese envoy in New Delhi strongly criticised the Trump administration's decision to impose tariffs of up to 50 per cent on Indian exports, describing the move as "unfair and unreasonable." Both leaders appear keen to project stability, but the disputes over tariffs, energy policy, and India's balancing act between Washington and Moscow remain unresolved.

BHAGWAN THADANI| MUMBAI

Cricket fever versus exam stress

It is in the news that the 2026 Men's T20 World Cup is likely to be played between 7 February and 8 March. The one-month-long tournament will be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka in different venues with twenty teams clashing against one another. While the ICC is still finalising the schedule, the window of the mega tournament has been identified and informed to the participating countries. Though this is delightful news for millions of cricket lovers in India, the same is sure to give "hypertension" and "sleepless nights" to millions of parents as their wards get set for the board exams during the same period. Normally it has been seen that parents worry the most when it comes to exams and cricket, and now that this tournament is likely to coincide with the various board exams, their pulse rates are sure to go high.

With the availability of hi-tech gadgets catering instant information, it may not be possible to restrict children completely. Teachers and parents must guide them with a meticulous plan, balancing study and leisure, and reminding them gently to give priority to exams. Exams must remain the priority, but cricket need not be the casualty. With planning and discipline, both can coexist.

MPRADYU | KANNUR

Cinema silenced by spectacle politics

There was a time when cinema in India listened – to the street, to the silence, to the stories people carried in their bones.

Today, it speaks. Loudly, confidently, and often carelessly. In recent years, a certain kind of film has begun to dominate our screens – not cinema, but spectacle. Not stories, but state-approved scripts. These films do not explore history; they patrol it. Complex lives are reduced to slogans. Entire communities become villains. Patriotism is packaged, sold, and shouted. Somewhere along the way, we stopped asking questions.

Certainty is dangerous when it comes dressed as entertainment. These films tell you what to think, who to fear, and what to believe. You are either on the "right" side, or you are the problem.

Meanwhile, the real questions-about jobs, food, health, and justice – are drowned beneath chants and special effects.

A country as layered and plural as India is being taught to view itself in black and white. Worse still, these films are not reflections of society; they are instructions to it. They reshape how we see each other. They reward anger. They manufacture enemies. Cinema should open windows. These films build walls.

NOOPUR BARUAH | TEZPUR

India battles brain drain as students flock overseas for education

Rising remittances cannot mask the cost of brain drain, as more Indian students spend abroad than they send back.

With visa curbs, high living costs, and underpaid jobs overseas, India faces both challenges and opportunities to retain its talent



DINESH N
JOSHI

Limited seats in prestigious universities in their home country has for decades been pushing Indian students to pursue higher education abroad, resulting in what is called an intellectual brain drain. Rather than staying back and contributing to their home country, a plethora of privileged students are choosing to go abroad for college. There has been, in recent years, a large section of academics who argue that this is in fact a good thing. 'Remittances are rising rapidly', they say.

They're partly right but they're missing the bigger picture. While India is the largest remittance-receiving country in the world and it is in fact true that remittances have more than doubled from 55 billion dollars in 2010-11 to 118.7 billion dollars in 2023-24, the statistics only convey the story partly. Firstly, remittances as a percentage of GDP has remained constant at around 3 per cent since 2000. Secondly, what Indian students are now spending abroad for education has risen rapidly. According to some estimates, the total spending by Indian outbound students could reach 70 billion dollars by 2025 — a number which is rising more rapidly than the remittances being sent back.

Thirdly, and most importantly, this argument fails to consider an important hypothetical: what if these students had chosen to stay back? The argument I make is two-pronged. One, that if the students were to stay back, the Indian economy would benefit far more — in other words, remittances do not compensate for the economic and intellectual capital drain caused, and two, at times it would also be far better for the students to stay back in India, taking into account the cost of living abroad and recent anti-immigrant trends across the world.

Let me address the second claim first. According to the latest data from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), over 1.8 million Indian students are currently studying abroad in 2025 — a staggering rise from 1.3 million just two years ago. This data, however, hides one important detail.

All the top three destination countries — Canada, US and UK — for Indian students (which account for a third of all Indian students heading abroad for education) have witnessed



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nessed a sharp decline in the backdrop of tightening immigration measures, including introduction of caps on student intake and restrictions on dependent visas.

Consider this: from 2023 to 2024, Canada witnessed a 32 per cent drop, with permits falling from 2.78 lakh to 1.89 lakh, the United States saw a 34 per cent decrease, with F1 visas dropping from 1.31 lakh to 86,110, and the UK recorded a 26 per cent reduction, with sponsored student visas issued to Indians decreasing from 1.20 lakh to 88,732 during the same period.

While some argue that this is a bad sign, it provides a window of opportunity for the Indian government to reverse decades of brain drain.

But will the anti-immigrant rhetoric and curbs on visas actually prevent students from going abroad, or will they just change their destination of travel? I think that it most definitely can.

Many Indians who go abroad are actually not receiving good returns on the thousands of dollars they spent on their college education. First, many are unemployed or underemployed after their education is completed.

Second, those who get jobs are getting paid less than what Americans and Europeans with the same skills are earning. As an example, the H-1B Visa Reform Act of 2004 restructured the salary slabs and inserted two wage levels, at the 34th and 50th percentiles of the total salaries surveyed for an occupation in an area, below the highest (the 67th percentile). This implies an underpayment for

Indian (and other international) workers embedded in the law itself.

Third, their attractive salary packages include e-SOPs and other variables which are not actually part of what they receive in hand, and the cost of living abroad is considerably higher than the cost of living in India. Rent, groceries and travel all make up a considerable chunk of their expenditure, and what they're left with is sent back to their families.

While Indian students who get into Ivy League institutions would perhaps not want to stay back in India, to make many others stay back will be a low-hanging fruit. With minimal efforts, India will be able to retain talent which will not only show up in GDP figures for years to come but will also advance R&D in the process.

A particularly promising area of collaboration is the growing partnership between India and the UAE in the fields of education and employment. The UAE has become a top destination for Indian professionals, with the country expanding opportunities for skilled workers in various sectors, including healthcare, engineering and IT.

Education-wise, both nations have been actively exploring collaborative programmes, exchange initiatives, and scholarships to enhance bilateral ties. Indian universities and institutions are establishing campuses in the UAE, further cementing the relationship. For Indian students, this provides an attractive, nearby option for world-class education, while also offering enhanced job prospects in the

UAE's rapidly growing economy.

There can be two ways of retaining talent in India. First, to build more good-quality higher education institutes and second, to ensure that Indians return to their home country after graduating abroad. In terms of the second objective, India is already in the process of reversing the brain drain. Under the leadership of PM Modi, the most cutting-edge, deep tech and frontier tech start-ups, led by Indian students with PhDs from major global universities, are now taking root in India. Our start-ups have grown from just 400 a decade ago, to 1.3 lakhs today, and nearly 50 per cent of these are coming up in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities.

It is here that the role of political leadership deserves special recognition. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision, combined with the efforts of senior leaders like Devendra Fadnavis and Dharmendra Pradhan, has ensured that education and employment remain at the core of India's growth story. Maharashtra CM Fadnavis has been instrumental in advancing educational reforms at the state level, pushing for skill development and industry-academia linkages, while Pradhan, as Education Minister, has driven initiatives that strengthen higher education and empower students with future-ready skills. A recent example is steps taken to make Mumbai a global education hub by handing over Letters of Intent to five globally acclaimed universities to set up campuses in Maharashtra. Together with the Prime Minister's emphasis on innova-

tion and entrepreneurship, their combined leadership has laid the groundwork for India to transform its brain drain into a brain gain.

India stands at the cusp of a technological revolution, presenting immense opportunities in areas such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), big data, energy transition, electric vehicles (EVs), quantum computing, genomics, 3D printing, robotics, drones and space exploration. All these sectors have been kickstarted by the Government through initiatives like the National Quantum Mission, India AI Mission, and the Semiconductor Mission.

Some problems remain, however. The biggest one being domestic funding, which needs to grow rapidly. Consider this — Indian start-ups raised over \$12 billion in 2024, but about 75 per cent of this came from international sources. Another one is payment of royalties. While India produces approximately 24,000 PhD graduates annually, the country paid \$14.3 billion in IPR royalties in 2024, while earning only \$1.5 billion, highlighting a significant gap which can be filled by greater innovation.

The first challenge seems to be more daunting — building quality higher education institutions. While premier education institutions like the IITs, IIMs and IIITs are producing skilled professionals and are second only to Ivy League colleges, there is a dearth of such universities in India. Another challenge is a change in curricula, which is already underway to link research and industry needs. This would involve addressing skill shortages in data science, biotech, clean energy, AI and ML among others. For this, industries must step up and support the government.

It is a known fact that in India research is more de-linked from industry needs in comparison to other countries. In short, it is not solely the amount of R&D that matters, but the quality. To date, two-thirds of the R&D in India is contributed by the Government. The private sector needs to step up to fill the gap.

India is well positioned to become the world's leading start-up ecosystem. With graduate upskilling programmes, the Government's initiatives to foster innovation, and the support of universities and corporates, the aspiration of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat, where talent nurtured at home stays and contributes locally, will come to fruition in the coming decades.

India accelerates mobility innovation with MOTION Centre of Entrepreneurship



ARVIND
KUMAR

India's mobility sector is evolving at an unprecedented pace. As the global automotive industry pivots towards smarter, cleaner, and more connected transport systems, India is positioning itself not only as a manufacturing leader but also as a global innovation hub. Driving this transformation is the rise of Autonomous, Connected, Electric, and Shared (ACES) mobility — an area that is witnessing robust support from both industry and government. One of the initiatives in this space is the MOTION Centre of Entrepreneurship (CoE) in Pune.

A flagship initiative launched by the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) under the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) and supported by the Government of Maharashtra, MOTION CoE serves as a sector-focused innovation and incubation hub dedicated to ACES start-ups. Located at Electronic Sadan III, MIDC Bhosari, Pune, this 10,000 sq. ft. facility is equipped with cutting-edge labs, a 75-seater co-working space, and advanced prototyping infrastructure. It is backed by a powerful consortium including Tata Motors, Kinetic Group, Intel, MathWorks, Visteon, ARAI, SAE India, TIE Pune, and the College of Engineering Pune.

The Centre offers more than just infrastructure. It delivers a full-stack support system, combining expert mentorship, physical and virtual incubation, funding opportunities through the Start-up India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS), assistance with Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), legal and financial services, and connections with investors and industry stakeholders.

As a result, MOTION CoE has emerged as a key enabler of India's next-gen mobility vision.

To date, the CoE has incubated 55 start-ups, surpassing its initial goal of 51. These ventures have collectively achieved a valuation of over ₹465 crore, generated over ₹34 crore in revenue, attracted over ₹23 crore in external funding, created more than 500 jobs, and launched 82 products and 128 prototypes. They have also filed 67 IP applications, of which 40 have already been granted. Among these, five standout start-ups exemplify the CoE's transformative potential.

Attron Automotive is creating high-efficiency electric propulsion systems for two and three-wheelers. Their product portfolio includes integrated IPM PMSM motors and advanced controllers built on the proprietary Eta framework,



aimed at delivering superior performance and energy efficiency. Recognised by Inc42 as a top mobility start-up to watch, Attron's focus on R&D has resulted in one technology patent and two design registrations. With customisation, modularity, and per-edge labs, a 75-seater co-working space, and advanced prototyping infrastructure. It is backed by a powerful consortium including Tata Motors, Kinetic Group, Intel, MathWorks, Visteon, ARAI, SAE India, TIE Pune, and the College of Engineering Pune.

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suppression, and performance optimisation. Kairus has filed one technology patent, secured two design patents, and deployed 100+ kWh of storage systems.

As electric vehicles gain traction, scalable charging infrastructure is crucial. Eidikos Business Enterprises is meeting this need with its Level 2 AC charging kiosks, specifically designed for e-bikes, e-rickshaws, and electric cars. Their hybrid model includes both Captive Charging and Charging-as-a-Service (CAAS). Their composite charging stations have been granted design registration, and their distributed deployment model is well-suited for urban and peri-urban areas in India.

The journey of these start-ups reflects the broader impact MOTION CoE is making in the ACES space.

By bringing together infrastructure, mentorship, funding, and real-world deployment opportunities, the CoE has emerged as a model platform for sectoral innovation. It aligns seamlessly with national initiatives, such as the Automotive Mission Plan 2047, which aims to position India as a global leader in sustainable, tech-driven mobility.

As these ventures continue to scale, they are not only addressing India's transportation needs but also building solutions that are globally relevant. In doing so, MOTION CoE is proving that the future of mobility in India is not just about vehicles, it is about vision, innovation, and impact.

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From Hasina to Oli: Nepal's digital uprising and a familiar fall



KS
TOMAR

Former Nepalese prime minister K.P. Sharma Oli now finds himself in a position once occupied by Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina — a leader who underestimated the fury of a connected generation. Both believed that choking social media could muzzle dissent. Both assumed that cutting digital lifelines would contain anger. Instead, both triggered leaderless uprisings that rattled the foundations of their rule.

What began as simmering frustration over corruption, inflation, and an unfulfilled post-pandemic recovery erupted after Oli's administration banned 26 major digital platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and X. For millions of Nepalis, this blackout struck at the heart of daily life. The reaction was immediate and fierce: at least 22 people have died in subsequent violence, mobs torched the houses of ministers, MPs, and even former prime ministers, and terrified leaders fled their neighbourhoods. The rage did not spare state institutions. Protesters stormed and set fire to the Supreme Court building. Ram Chandra Poudel, the veteran Nepali Congress leader and the country's third President, resigned after his residence was attacked.

With police forces overwhelmed, the army appealed for restraint. Yet even senior leaders faced mob fury: an ex-prime minister from the Nepali Congress was injured, and cadres from both Oli's Communist UML and the Congress party became targets.

The protests' defining characteristic is their lack of central leadership. Gen Z activists, students, and anarchist groups dominate the streets, but no figure exists to negotiate with the government. What started as resistance to a social media ban has quickly broadened into a revolt demanding jobs, accountability, and an end to systemic corruption. Analysts argue that democracy itself is not at risk of collapsing into military rule.

Nepal's political history is steeped in protest. The 1990 People's Movement dismantled absolute monarchy. The Jana Andolan of 2006 forced King Gyanendra to retreat. On 8 September 2025, that legacy returned with a digital edge. This time, the spark was not monarchy or constitutional deadlock but the attempt to cut off what young Nepalis see as their lifeline — social media. Authorities defended the blackout by citing the 2023 Social Media Directives and a Supreme Court ruling requir-

ing global platforms to register locally, appoint representatives, and curb harmful content. TikTok and Viber complied; Meta and Google did not. Oli insisted extremists had hijacked the protests, while officials argued they were merely enforcing rules. But citizens saw censorship, not regulation.

In a country where over 90 per cent of internet users rely on these platforms for news, tourism, remittances, and business, the ban felt like suffocation. Already disillusioned by corruption scandals, many viewed this as the final straw. Nepal has endured 14 governments in 16 years. Inflation is eating away at wages. Dynastic privilege dominates politics.

For the young, social media was the only credible public square — and its shutdown silenced their voice. Royalist forces, meanwhile, have resurfaced. A massive pro-monarchy rally earlier this year demonstrated that nostalgia for the crown has not disappeared. Analysts suggest royalist groups infiltrated the current protests, lending them additional force.

The blackout has also worsened economic fragility. Telecom companies lost revenue, tourism recovery stalled, and families dependent on remittances faced fresh uncertainty. India reinforced border security but avoided becoming a scapegoat, unlike in past uprisings. China, enjoying stable ties, also kept its distance. For once, neither neighbour was at the centre of the storm. In this turbulence, a new figure has captured the imagination of young Nepalis: Balendra Shah, or Balen. Elected as Kathmandu's mayor in 2022, Shah is no ordinary politician — he is a rapper with a master's degree in structural engineering, admired for his mix of cultural appeal and technocratic efficiency.

For disillusioned urban youth, he symbolises an alternative to the old party system. Whether he can rise as a national force remains uncertain, but his popularity reflects the hunger for fresh, non-partisan leadership.

Nepal's turmoil offers a 21st-century lesson: shutting down digital spaces is as combustible as curbing the ballot box.

For the country's youth, digital rights are democratic rights. Ending the blackout may calm the streets temporarily, but the real challenge is deeper — rebuilding trust, restoring accountability, and balancing regulation with freedom.

Unless leaders rise to this challenge, Nepal risks repeating its cycle of protest and repression — this time with battles fought not only in Kathmandu's streets but also across cyberspace.

The writer is a senior political analyst and Ex-Chairman of the Standing Committee of All-State Public Service Commissions in India

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The Pioneer

Endless Deadlock

France has once again been thrown into political upheaval, with its Prime Minister brought down not by a scandal or a sudden shift in public mood, but by the arithmetic of parliamentary hostility. The removal of François Bayrou, after less than a year in office, highlights a deeper dysfunction in the Fifth Republic: the inability of successive governments to forge durable majorities, even on existential issues like national debt.

Mr Bayrou's downfall was dramatic, but also strangely inevitable. By calling a confidence vote over fiscal restraint, he gambled not just with his own career but with the credibility of President Emmanuel Macron's embattled second term. His warnings of unsustainable liabilities ~ France's €3.4 trillion debt and the ballooning cost of servicing it ~ were substantive. Yet in the theatre of French politics, substance rarely outshines symbolism. To left and right alike, the debate was not about numbers but about striking a blow against Macronism.

The opposition's unity of purpose was tactical rather than ideological. The hard right sought to weaken Mr Macron's hold and press its nationalist agenda. The left viewed Mr Bayrou's austerity as an attack on welfare and pensions, already sore points after the retirement age was pushed to 64. The confidence vote became a proxy battlefield for grievances that stretch far beyond fiscal policy. In such conditions, Mr Bayrou's technocratic appeal to intergenerational fairness - warning of young people condemned to "slavery" under debt ~ was always going to be drowned out by partisan jeers.

For Mr Macron, the crisis is both personal and structural. Five prime ministers in less than two years is not simply bad luck; it reflects the hollowing of the political centre. The President once promised to transcend France's old partisan divide. Instead, his project has left him isolated, with little capacity to build coalitions on either side. Turning to the left risks surrendering his pro-business legacy. Sticking with his camp risks further stalemate. Dissolving parliament, meanwhile, would hand momentum to parties that thrive on discontent rather than governance.

Beyond the Palais Bourbon, public patience is thin. Cost of living pressures, insecurity, and immigration dominate everyday concerns, while debt sustainability feels like an elite preoccupation. Movements promising to "block everything" capture a mood of obstruction more than renewal. The likely wave of strikes and boycotts this autumn will only deepen the sense of drift.

And yet the structural challenge remains: France cannot indefinitely postpone grappling with its fiscal trajectory, especially as defence commitments rise and the politics of welfare harden. Mr Bayrou's exit removes the messenger, not the message. Whoever succeeds him will face the same arithmetic of debt and division, the same contradictions of a republic where presidential authority collides with parliamentary fragmentation.

The crisis therefore is not merely about a fallen prime minister but about whether France's institutions can still deliver stability in an age of fragmentation. Without a new basis of consensus, the revolving door at Matignon may keep spinning, while the debt ~ and the disenchantment ~ only grow heavier.

Digital fault-line

The turmoil in Kathmandu on Monday is more than a story of street protests. It is a reminder of how central digital freedoms have become to the fabric of modern society, and how easily governments misjudge the consequences of curbing them. The decision to block dozens of popular social media platforms triggered a chain reaction that left at least 19 people dead, many injured, and the credibility of the state deeply eroded.

Under mounting pressure, the Nepal government has now lifted the ban, but the reversal comes too late to undo the damage. Nepal's leaders must recognise that social media is not just a technological novelty; it is a public square and digital access is synonymous with freedom and opportunity. Restricting it without building alternative avenues of expression or ensuring transparency will only inflame grievances.

The official justification - regulating online spaces to counter misinformation, hate speech, and fraud - is not unique. Governments around the world are grappling with the same challenges. Yet the bluntness of Nepal's approach, abruptly cutting access to platforms used daily by millions, revealed not a policy of protection but one of control. In the digital age, social media is not a luxury. For young people in particular, it is their marketplace, classroom, newsstand, and stage. To disrupt that ecosystem is to attack livelihoods and identities all at once.

The protests, led by self-identifying members of Generation Z, were not just about losing access to Instagram or YouTube. The slogans carried through the streets - "enough is enough" and "end to corruption" - made it clear that discontent runs deeper. The social media ban became a spark, igniting anger over governance, transparency, and accountability. A generation that feels side-lined by traditional politics has found its voice online, and silencing that voice was bound to provoke confrontation.

The state's response has further entrenched the divide. Water cannons, rubber bullets, and curfews convey weakness, not authority. Deploying the army to the streets of the capital is an admission that dialogue has failed. Instead of easing tensions, these measures have hardened perceptions of an authoritarian drift. Worse still, many citizens have simply turned to VPNs to bypass the ban, undercutting the very rationale for the crackdown. The government is left with blood on its hands and little to show in terms of effective regulation.

The lesson here is not that digital spaces should remain lawless. Online platforms do carry risks, and states have a duty to protect citizens from malicious content. But the method matters. Regulation requires trust, consultation, and proportionality. Heavy-handed decrees, enforced by bullets and batons, destroy that trust. In a fragile democracy, where citizens' faith in institutions is already tenuous, such measures risk long-term instability.

The tragedy in Kathmandu stands as a warning: in the 21st century, the legitimacy of a government rests not on its ability to control information, but on its capacity to engage with an empowered, connected, and impatient generation.

Politics of Payback~II

Beyond the specific punishments, there is the ever-present threat of a hail of insults, a lesson in public humiliation to potential transgressors. The tweets, the rally speeches, the press conferences - they all serve as a public record of who has crossed Trump and what they have received in return. The names are not forgotten, the slights are not forgiven, and the public shaming is a warning to others. This is a form of political theatre designed to reinforce a single, unyielding truth: loyalty is the only currency that matters, and disloyalty will be met with public scorn and private ruin.

Let's turn to the international stage. An independent-minded foreign government, however determined an adversary or stalwart an ally, invites tariffs. The ally that dares to criticize a policy, to vote against a resolution, or to pursue an independent foreign policy finds itself the target of economic sanctions. The adversary that challenges American dominance, that seeks to expand its own sphere of influence, finds itself subject to a volley of economic attacks.

The message is a simple one, delivered with the blunt force of economic power: align with me, or face the consequences. This is not diplomacy; it is a form of economic coercion, a tool of punishment wielded against nations.

The Tax Foundation has documented the use of tariffs against both allies and adversaries, with rates sometimes reaching as high as 50 per cent on certain countries like India for buying Russian oil.

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public scorn and private ruin.

In the end, this is not a system of political debate or even political rivalry. It is a system of retribution, a machine designed to punish dissent and reward loyalty.

It is a system that erodes the norms of democracy, that chills free speech, that undermines the independence of our institutions, and that transforms politics from a contest of ideas into a personal vendetta.

The Trumpian reckoning is not just a style of politics; it is a fundamental reordering of our political life, and its full implications are still unfolding before our eyes.

The question is not whether this pattern exists, but rather, what the long-term consequences will be for a democracy that has been taught a very harsh lesson in the politics of punishment.

All of this feels unprecedented, the sheer scope and brazenness of it. But is it? We have to ask the historical question. Is this an exception, or is it a recurring theme in American history? Let's go back a couple of centuries.

You can trace this back to the very beginnings of the republic. Take John Adams and the Sedition Act of 1798. That law essentially made it a crime to criticize the president and his Federalist Party.

Newspaper editors were put on trial, and it was a clear attempt to use the power of the government to silence political dissent. The law, as some historians note, was

specifically gerrymandered to allow criticism of his rival, Thomas Jefferson, but not of Adams himself.

And then you have Andrew Jackson, who weaponised the 'spoils system.' He removed more than 919 officials ~ nearly 10 per cent of all government postings ~ and replaced them with his loyalists. His famous line, "To the victor belong the spoils of the enemy," wasn't just a political slogan; it was a blueprint for using government jobs as a tool of political reward and punishment.

Exactly. Fast-forward to the 20th century. Franklin D. Roosevelt, after a landslide victory, proposed his infamous "court-packing plan."

The Supreme Court had been striking down his New Deal legislation, so he proposed a bill to expand the Court, adding a new justice for everyone over 70. It was a thinly veiled attempt to dilute the power of his conservative opponents on the bench. He lost the legislative battle, but the threat was enough to make the Court change its tune.

And, of course, no discussion of this topic would be complete without Richard Nixon. His "enemies list" is legendary. He compiled a list of over 200 political adversaries ~ journalists, celebrities, labour leaders ~ with



NARAIN BATRA

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Manila trying to distort postwar order

Despite China's consistent efforts to resolve its territorial disputes with the Philippines through peaceful dialogue and friendly consultations, the Ferdinand Marcos Jr government has time and again provoked China on issues related to the South China Sea in disregard of Beijing's continuous display of restraint and goodwill. By repeatedly making waves in the waters with the help of external forces, Manila has shown itself to be a troublemaker jeopardizing regional security and stability. In its latest provocation, the Philippine Navy, in collaboration with the armed forces of Australia and Canada, conducted a so-called multilateral maritime cooperative activity in the South China Sea on Wednesday, prompting the People's Liberation Army Navy to be on high alert and conduct a cautionary patrol.

Stressing that any attempt to create hot spots in the South China Sea will not succeed, a spokesman for the PLA Southern Theater Command said that Chinese forces will resolutely defend the country's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights.

It is noteworthy that Manila chose Sept 3 as the day on which to stage its latest provocation, as China held commemorative activities including a grand military parade in Beijing, to mark the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and the World Anti-Fascist War that day. This makes the Marcos government's move extremely egregious as the Philippines also suffered from Japanese aggression. China's territorial rights are supported by the Cairo Declaration of 1943, the Potsdam Proclamation of 1945, as well as other postwar arrangements under international law, which affirm that China recovered Taiwan island in October 1945, and in the following year started the process of receiving and reclaiming South China Sea islands such as the Xisha and Nansha islands, which had been seized and occupied by Japanese aggressors. The return of the territories to China was completed in December of



the same year, and announced to the world. Subsequently, China officially issued the Location Map of the South China Sea Islands, formalizing its legal recovery of these islands under international law. The postwar international order established the basis for China's recovery of its South China Sea islands and resumption of it exercising sovereignty over them. As the world marks the 80th anniversary of the victory in the war, it is pertinent to reaffirm this historical truth. What Manila has done, with the connivance and encouragement of external forces, poses a grave challenge to the postwar international order, which risks sparking regional instability by undermining established international rules.

The reckless actions of Manila may also lead to increased geopolitical tensions, which will only hinder cooperation among nations, erode trust for diplomacy and potentially spark regional or even global conflicts. Moreover, Manila has engaged in provocations targeting China with increasing frequency. Just two weeks

prior to the latest joint patrols, Philippine and Australian forces teamed up in Manila's westernmost province for a large-scale joint drill ~ which was Canberra's largest deployment of troops to Southeast Asia since 1999.

Such complicity in Manila's provocations has only emboldened the Marcos government. Inciting and supporting Manila's irresponsible moves are the major cause of increased tensions that have harmed the shared interests of countries in the region.

This has left China with no other choice but to take firm and resolute countermeasures against any provocative behavior to safeguard its justified and legitimate interests. In addressing maritime issues between nations, China remains committed to maintaining peace and stability in the region together with neighboring countries.

PERSONAL

THANK YOU Infant Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Jude for hearing my pray for Nikus safe delivery. — DS.



Proud moment

Sir, This refers to the news report, "World applauds Purulia's story told by filmmaker Anuparna Roy", published today. This is a great moment for our country. The journey of Roy from growing up in the little-known Narayanpur village in Purulia's Neturia block to winning the Best Director Award at the prestigious Venice International Film Festival is a story of admirable conquests. I'm sure she will become an inspiration not only for aspiring independent filmmakers but also for people who would want to tell stories of forgotten existence. Heartiest congratulations to Anuparna Roy.

Yours, etc., Anupam Neogi, Kolkata, 9 September.

Yours, etc., D S Kang, Hoshiarpur, 7 September.

Fitting

Sir, The article 'A Tribute to Bhupen da', published on 8 September 2025, contributed by none other than our Prime Minister Narendra Modi, would act as a tribute to the nation, especially to the younger generation. There could not be a better choice to write this article on the life of a creative genius of music who gives a call to awaken crores of deprived souls by the side of the Ganges.

Bhupen Hazarika has shown that music is not just for entertainment. Inspired by Paul Robeson, he has composed several songs in Assamese, Bengali, and Hindi where similar notes are resonated. In a brief space, our revered Prime Minister has paid an excellent tribute to the genius.

Yours, etc., Ranjit Kumar Guha Roy, Mississauga, Canada, 8 September.



Transformative stewardship

NARENDRA MODI

Today is September 11. This day evokes two contrasting remembrances. The first dates back to 1893, when Swami Vivekananda delivered his iconic Chicago address. With the few words, "Sisters and Brothers of America," he won the hearts of thousands present in the hall. He introduced the timeless spiritual heritage of India and the emphasis on universal brotherhood to the world stage. The second is the gruesome 9/11 attacks, when this very principle came under attack thanks to the menace of terrorism and radicalism.

There is something else about this day which is noteworthy. Today is the birthday of a personality who, inspired by the principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, has dedicated his entire life to societal transformation and strengthening the spirit of harmony and fraternity. For lakhs of people associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, he is respectfully referred to as Param Pujya Sarsanghchalak. Yes, I am referring to Shri Mohan Bhagwat Ji, whose 75th birthday is, incidentally, falling in the same year when the RSS marks its centenary. I would like to convey my best wishes to him and pray for his long and healthy life.

My association with Mohan Ji's family has been very deep. I have had the good fortune of working closely with Mohan Ji's father, the late Madhukarrao Bhagwat Ji. I have written extensively about him in my book, *Jyotipunj*. Along with his association with the legal world, he devoted himself to nation-building. He played a pivotal role in strengthening the RSS across Gujarat. Such was Madhukarrao Ji's passion towards nation-building that it groomed his son, Mohanrao, to work towards

India's regeneration. It is as if Parasmani Madhukarrao prepared another Parasmani in Mohanrao.

Mohan Ji became a Pracharak in the mid-1970s. Upon hearing the word 'Pracharak', one may mistakenly think it refers to someone who is simply doing *Prachar* or campaigning, propagating ideas. But, those familiar with the working of the RSS understand that the Pracharak tradition is at the core of the organisation's work. Over the last hundred years, thousands of young people, inspired by a patriotic zeal, have left their homes and families to dedicate their lives to realising the mission of India First.

His early years in the RSS coincided with a very dark period of Indian history. This was the time the draconian Emergency was imposed by the then Congress government. For every person who cherished democratic principles and wanted India to prosper, it was natural to strengthen the anti-Emergency movement. This is exactly what Mohan Ji and countless RSS Swayamsevaks did. He worked extensively in rural and backward areas of Maharashtra, especially Vidarbha. This shaped his understanding of the challenges faced by the poor and downtrodden.

Over the years, Bhagwat Ji held various positions in the RSS. He performed each and every one of those duties with great dexterity. Mohan Ji's years as the head of the Akhil Bharatiya Shantik Pramukh during the 1990s are still fondly remembered by many Swayamsevaks. During this period, he spent considerable time working in the villages of Bihar. These experiences further deepened his connection with grassroots issues. In 2000, he became the Sarkaryawah and here too, he brought his unique way of working, handling the most complex of situations with ease and precision.

In 2009, he became the Sarsanghchalak and continues to work with great vibrancy.

Being Sarsanghchalak is more than an organisational responsibility. Extraordinary individuals have defined this role through personal sacrifice, clarity of purpose and unshakable commitment to Maa Bharti. Mohan Ji, in addition to doing full justice to the enormity of the responsibility, has also brought to it his own strength, intellectual depth and empathetic leadership, all of which is inspired by the principle of Nation First.

If I can think of two attributes Mohan Ji has held close to his heart and imbibed in his work style, they are continuity and adaptation. He has always steered the organisation through very complex currents, never compromising on the core ideology we are all proud of and at the same time addressing the evolving needs of society. He has a natural connect with the youth and thus has always focussed on integrating more youngsters with the Sangh Parivar. He is often seen engaging in public discourse and interacting with people, which has been very beneficial in today's dynamic and digital world.

Broadly speaking, Bhagwat Ji's tenure will be considered the most transformative period in the 100-year journey of the RSS. From the change in uniform to the modifications in the Shiksha Varg (training camps), several significant changes occurred under his leadership.

I particularly remember his efforts during the Covid period, when humanity battled a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. In those times, continuing the traditional RSS activities became challenging. Mohan Ji suggested increased usage of technology. In the context of the global challenges, he remained connected with global

perspectives while developing institutional frameworks.

At that time, all Swayamsevaks made every possible effort to reach out to those in need, while ensuring the safety of themselves and others. Medical camps were organised in several places. We also lost many of our hardworking Swayamsevaks, but such was the inspiration of Mohan Ji that their determination never wavered.

Earlier this year, during the inauguration of the Madhav Netra Chikitsalaya in Nagpur, I had remarked that the RSS is like an Akshayavat, an eternal banyan tree that energises the national culture and collective consciousness of our nation. The roots of this Akshayavat are deep and strong because they are anchored in values. The dedication with which Mohan Bhagwat Ji has committed himself to nurturing and advancing these values is truly inspirational.

Another admirable quality of Mohan Ji's personality is his soft-spoken nature. He is blessed with an exceptional ability to listen. This trait ensures a deeper perspective and also brings a sense of sensitivity and dignity to his persona and leadership.

Here, I also want to write about the keen interest he has always shown towards various mass movements. From Swachh Bharat Mission to Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, he always urges the entire RSS family to add vigour through these movements. In order to further social well-being, Mohan Ji has given the 'Panch Parivartan', which includes social harmony, family values, environmental awareness, national selfhood and civic duties. These can inspire Indians from all walks of life. Every Swayamsevak dreams of seeing a strong and prosperous nation. To realise this dream, what is required is both clear vision and decisive action. Mohan Ji embodies both these qualities in abundance.



He has always been a strong votary of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat', a firm believer in India's diversity and the celebration of so many different cultures and traditions that are a part of our land.

Beyond his busy schedule, Mohan Ji has always found time to pursue passions like music and singing. Few people know that he is very versatile in various Indian musical instruments. His passion for reading can be seen in several of his speeches and interactions.

This year, in a few days from now, the RSS will turn 100. It is also a pleasant coincidence that this year, Vijaya Dashami, Gandhi Jayanti, Lal Bahadur Shastri Jayanti and the RSS centenary celebrations are on the same day. It will be a historic milestone for lakhs of people associated with the RSS in India and the world. And, we have a very wise and hardworking Sarsanghchalak in Mohan Ji, steering the organisation in these times. I will conclude by saying that Mohan Ji is a living example of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, showing that when we rise above boundaries and consider everyone as our own, it strengthens trust, brotherhood and equality in society. I once again wish Mohan Ji a long and healthy life in service of Maa Bharti.

The writer is Prime Minister of India.

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 11 September 1925

OCCASIONAL NOTE

The jute market in Calcutta appears to have settled down to the position generally indicated by the official forecast. The forecast may or may not be accurate in detail, but it is admitted that the crop is going to be a short one, and the main question to be determined is, who is going to feel the pinch? Most of the Dundee mills are privately owned, and these together with their German competitors, could if they pleased cut the Gordian knot of high prices by closing down. In that case prices would fall and Calcutta mills would be able to replenish their stocks at a lower cost than is open to them at the present moment. They must, however, go on working whatever happens; and if the crop turns out to be as short as is feared, and if consumption of jute abroad is not checked, the local mills will simply have to buy jute and pay for it, so to say, through the nose. There is, however, many a slip between the cup of an official forecast and the lip of a completed jute season.

News Items

ABOLISHING SLAVERY

BRITISH PROPOSALS FOR LEAGUE

Geneva, Sept.

Viscount Cecil on behalf of Britain, unexpectedly submitted to-day, at a League Committee meeting, proposals for the eventual abolition of slavery, including domestic slavery, in all parts of the world. No serious objections were raised, but the Portuguese and other delegates emphasized the importance of not moving too rapidly. It is understood that the proposals are regarded as the most important of their kind since the Brussels Act of 1890. They provide for severe punishment for anyone attempting to engage in slave traffic in any signatory State and assimilate slave-trading with piracy. They further lay down that a slave boat shall be treated as a pirate vessel. —Reuter.

STRIKERS SENT TO PRISON

STRONG ACTION IN AUSTRALIA

Melbourne, Sept

Legal processes are active in connexion with the shipping strike. Sixty-four of the crew of the steamer Ascanius, at Adelaide, were sentenced to-day to a fortnight's imprisonment. Three hundred warrants of arrest have been issued at Melbourne, and 89 at Sydney, when the liner Mongolia today sailed punctually. —Reuter.

FLIGHT TO NORTH POLE

CAPT. AMUNDSEN'S NEW AIRSHIP

Oslo, Sept.

Details of Capt. Amundsen's Polar Flight in 1926 have been given by Lieutenant Riiser Larsen, who was second-in-command of the Amundsen Expedition last summer. He says that Capt. Amundsen has bought for £15,000 a semi-rigid airship from the Italian Government. The airship is fitted with three engines capable of doing 115 kilometres an hour, and has a cruising speed of 80 miles an hour. The crew will consist of sixteen, including Capt. Amundsen; Ellsworth; who had secured half the capital from America; the Italian, Colonel Nobile; Riiser Larsen and other Italians and Norwegians. It is planned to start from King' Bay thence across the North Pole to Alaska. The airship will be ready by Christmas and trials will begin in the New Year. —Reuter's Special Service.

SETTLEMENT BASIS

OWNERS REJECT THE PROPOSAL

Cape Town, Sept

The Union Castle Line, on behalf of the shipowners, has declined to agree to the suggested basis of settlement, namely the postponement of the reduction of wages for six months pending the official inquiry in Britain into the existing machinery for representation of seamen of the Maritime Board, in view of the agreement with the Maritime Board. —Reuter.

BASAB DASGUPTA

One of the questions everyone faced during my high-school years was "Do you remember where you were when you heard that John F Kennedy was shot?" A similar question in this century was "Do you remember where you were, when you first heard about the twin towers in New York being hit by planes piloted by terrorists?"

I vividly remember where I was. I was in Torreon, Mexico, working at a manufacturing plant owned by RCA, on a temporary assignment. RCA, originally an American company, was later bought by Thomson, a French multinational.

It was a normal morning. I parked my car at my designated spot and started to walk towards the main entrance. It was around eight o'clock. One of my colleagues, Jaime, had gone to the airport to pick up a French engineer coming to provide technical support on some equipment. Jaime and this engineer were walking a few steps behind me. Jaime told me in an excited voice "Basab, did you hear about the planes striking the World Trade buildings in New York? There were two planes and both towers were hit. I saw the second tower being hit as they were showing the video of the damage to the first tower".

I gave him a blank stare. None of this made any sense. Jaime repeated some of the same statements and then said, "let us go to Francisco's office and watch on TV". Francisco was the plant manager. He and his

staff members and I huddled around the TV. It was an unbelievable scene. I was shocked, horrified, angry and almost numb at what I was seeing. Then reports started to come in about a hit on the Pentagon by a plane and another plane crashing in Pennsylvania.

I immediately made two phone calls – one to my ex-wife Swapna and one to my daughter Runa (not real names) who were both in California. It was shortly after 6 a.m. in California and I woke Swapna up to give the bad news, urging her to turn the TV on. I remember her saying "Oh my God, they are destroying the Pentagon" as she was watching TV and crying. I did not get hold of Runa at her Stanford dormitory. Swapna told me that Runa was in D.C.! I could not believe it. Runa had a history of often being in the most dangerous places.

One year she spent an "alternate spring break" in the infamous "skid row" of Los Angeles, to understand the homeless and other destitute people with major emotional, physical and addiction problems who live there. Later, she went to Sri Lanka to help the tsunami victims. She was in D.C. to organize an AIDS walk. I was worried sick. I just wanted to hug Runa and Swapna as well.

The most heart-sinking and stomach-churning moment came when the first tower simply sank to the ground amid a huge cloud of smoke and debris. I was hoping against hope that we would be able to repair the towers by rebuilding the upper twenty or so floors. Now it became clear that both towers would

eventually be flattened. I remembered our ferry ride to the Statue of Liberty when we visited New York in 1988 and the view of the Manhattan skyline from the ferry. The twin towers were standing there as a majestic symbol of glory and prosperity of the nation.

Swapna was able to contact Runa: she was in a building only a couple of miles from the Pentagon. Swapna instructed Runa to immediately take a train from the nearest metro station and go into Virginia. Swapna's brother, who lived in Reston, Virginia near D.C., picked her up from there. Runa stayed with her uncle for two days. Eventually she got back to California by taking several short hop flights, avoiding large planes and large cities.

I felt miserable. I lost my appetite and probably my zest for life as well. My fear was that the US government was going to close the border, and I would not be able to go back home anytime soon. I realized how much I loved my adopted country and how much I missed it. This entire Mexico experience seemed meaningless. It was not even clear how Mexicans felt about what was going on. I sensed almost a hidden glee in some of the folks; as if they were saying "see, the US is not that invincible after all". I watched the rerun of 9/11 morning events on TV for several days.

I told both my French boss in Paris and Francisco that I needed to go to California at the earliest opportunity just to retain my sanity. They understood and did not object. The opportunity came two weeks later. I combined the trip with some official business

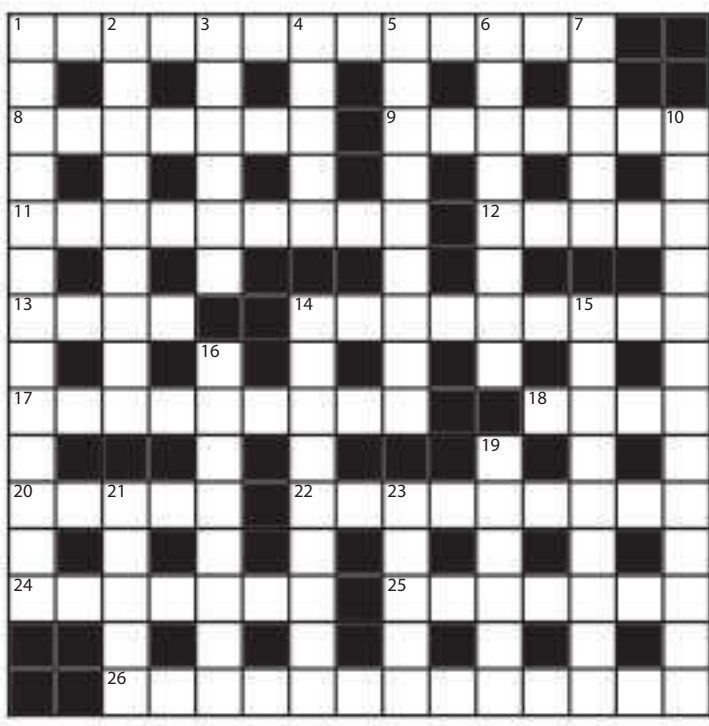


in the LA area. The security check even at the small Torreon airport was rigorous. They searched everything in my suitcase, threw away a tube of toothpaste and asked me all sorts of questions. The AeroMexico flight arrived at LAX around the scheduled time of 10 p.m. The Customs and Immigration check lines were a lot longer. Fortunately, I was going to spend the night at a hotel near the airport because my meeting the next day was in the LA area. By the time I reached my hotel room, the David Letterman show was on TV.

It was so good to see his face and so comforting to listen to him. I cannot explain how happy I was to be back in California. I just rolled over the comfortable bed while tightly holding the pillows and breathing the air of freedom. I knew that no terrorist would be able to deprive us of our values and our freedom.

I did not want to go back to Torreon. However, the stock market had just collapsed, and the future was uncertain; I could not just walk away from a secure high paying job. It is fair to say that the event changed me forever. On the one hand I realized how fortunate we were to live in a country

Crossword | No. 293237



Yesterday's Solution

SASHAY

FEASIBLE

TEGG

VPRX

ASTER

DEFINITE

NPE

NNNE

DOONESBIT

NERVE

UT

AUASR

PANICATTACK

STO

THEEB

TV

KETT

TI

ONICE

FRYINGPAN

ERR

TOHC

CATHETER

BREACH

AULL

MINNE

PRECLUDE

SATYRS

ACROSS

1 Hero potentially good to czar catching virus (6,7)

8 Rich ruler caught and hung in reorganisation (5-2)

9 Idiot and ice largely doing for this (7)

11 Bad atmosphere when publisher punches fellow publisher? (3-6)

12 Purge one recalled as the worst time (5)

13 In reverse of normality, a bear market with ever-rising prices (4)

14 Half four at lido, train regularly with greater confidence (1,8)

17 People reportedly unable to speak freely, Niinsky among others (9)

18 Elite in revolution deprived of a valuable estate? (4)

20 Millionaire leaving his estate for good, born during Christmas (5)

22 Lingerie on bed in Durham? (9)

24 Marking certainly stops poet working (7)

25 Refuse roubles Onegin brought to the west (7)

26 Nice bloody vodka for one true love (7,6)

DOWN

1 Pen sad epic novel about 1Ac's 26, leading character suffering this fate? (13)

2 Coach shortened odds saddling thoroughbred (9)

3 Say working men must lead state (6)

4 Nothing happening? Close (3,2)

5 Play's opening leaves playwright bound to meddle (9)

6 See about skinning cats; approach gradually (6,2)

7 That hurt, Glaswegian hoolligan admitted (5)

10 Stoppage of tram maybe ill-starred, involving 1Ac (7,6)

14 Mime artist clutches belly, absorbing one in character (3,6)

15 Too ambitious removing clothing, lovers agree, shivering (9)

16 Peg on a boat, Dicky to help at home (5,3)

19 Arranged upper limits on losing love? (6)

21 Gloomy book to exfiltrate for publication (5)

23 Russian agreed communist rose to the challenge (5)

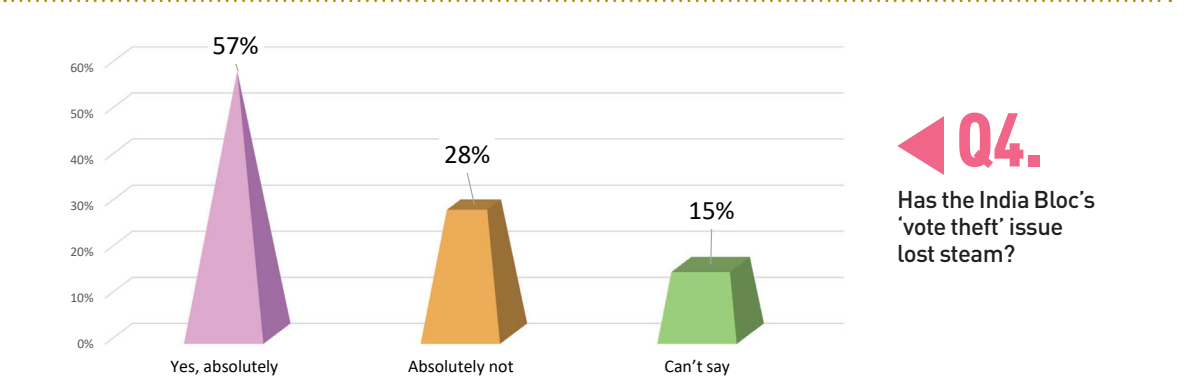
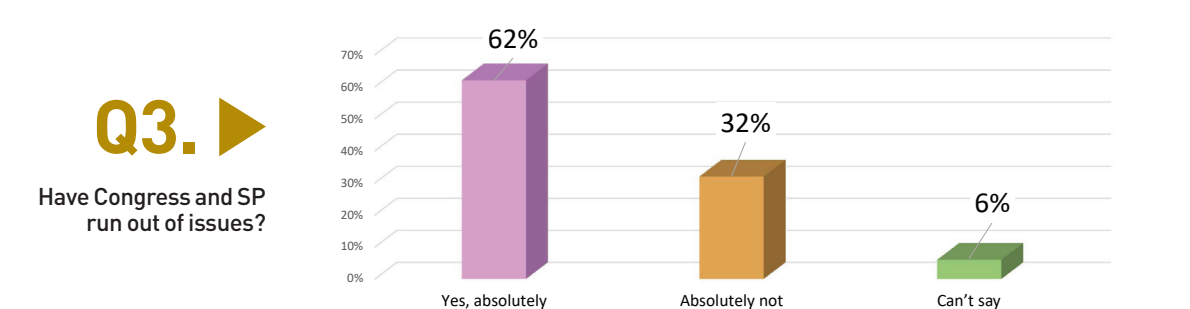
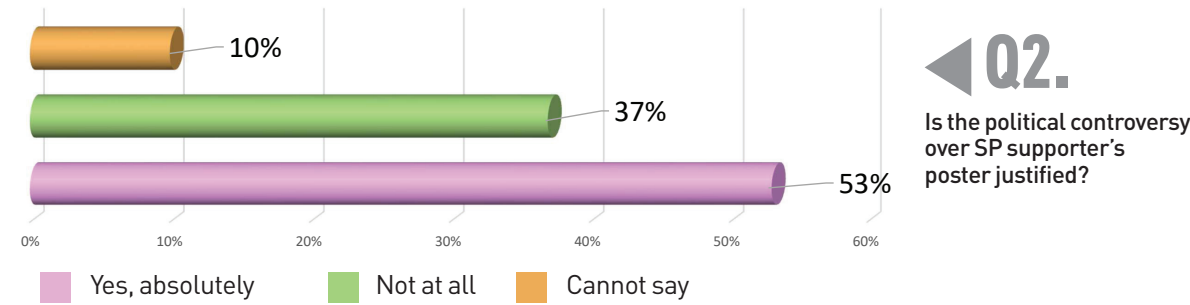
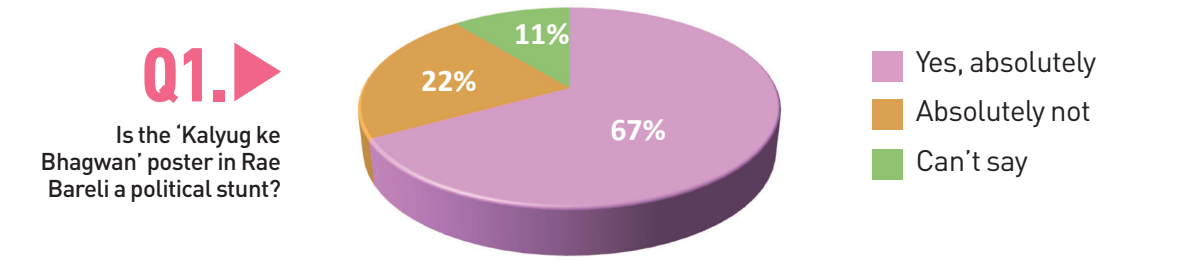
NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON VICE PRESIDENT ELECTION

62% believe that Congress and SP run out of issues

Before Rahul Gandhi's two-day Rae Bareli visit, banners depicting opposition leaders as deities sparked controversy. The posters, installed by SP leader Rahul Nirmla Baghi, labeled Tejashwi Yadav as Brahma, Rahul

Gandhi as Vishnu, and Akhilesh Yadav as Mahesh. This move triggered intense political debates.

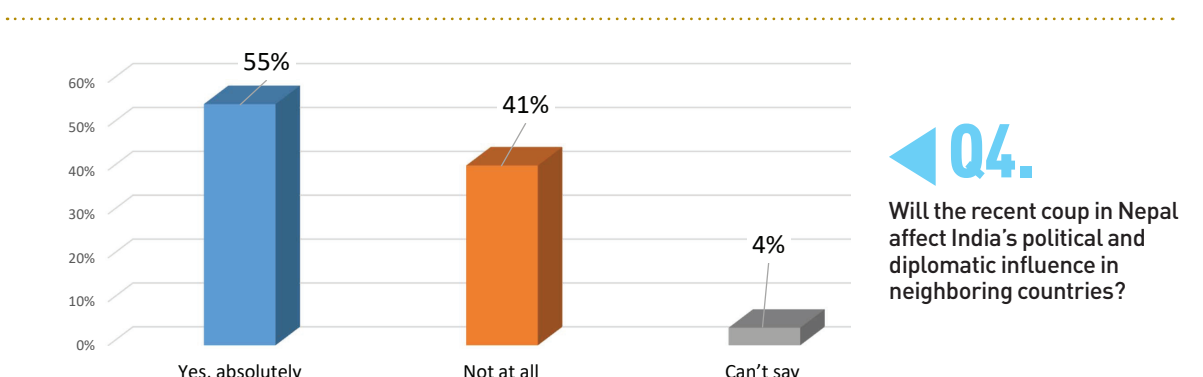
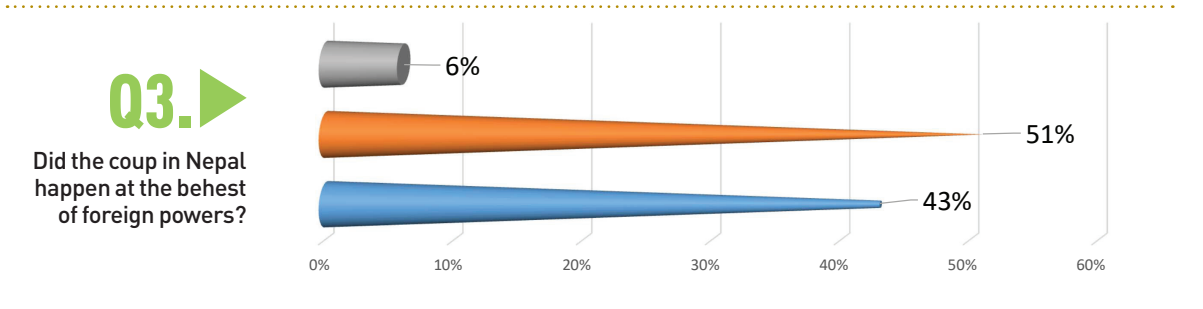
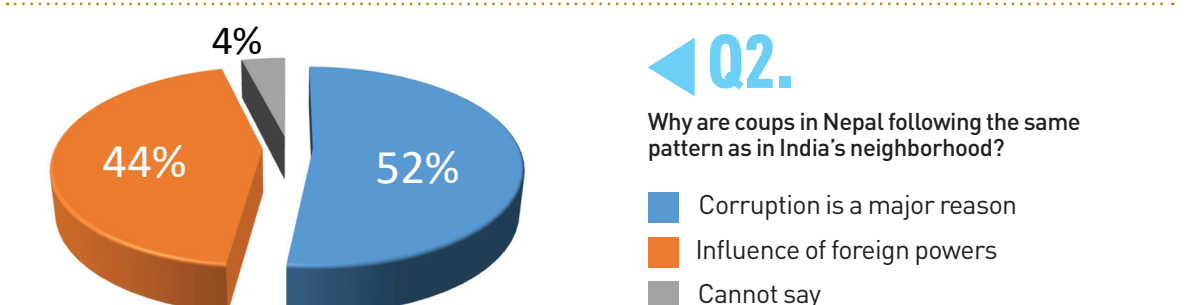
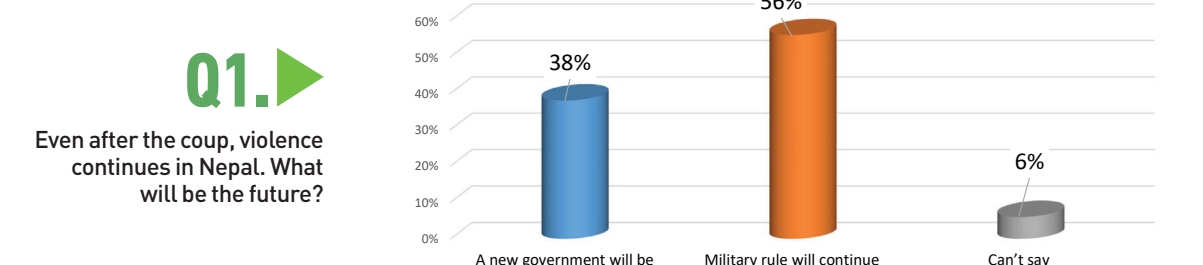


THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON NEPAL POLITICAL CRISIS

38% believe Nepal will form a new government despite post-coup violence.

The survey on Nepal's political crisis reveals deep concerns about instability. 56% believe military rule will continue despite the coup, while 52% blame corruption for recur-

ring turmoil. Opinions are divided on foreign influence, but 55% think India's regional role will be affected. Notably, 57% see Nepal's Gen-Z protests shaping history.



Radhakrishnan to take oath on Sept 12

CONTINUED FROM P1

preme Court judge Justice B. Sudershan Reddy, who secured 300 votes.

Announcing the result, Rajya Sabha Secretary General and Returning Officer PC Mody said that 767 out of 781 MPs cast their votes, marking a turnout of 98.2%. Of these, 752 ballots were valid, while 15 were invalid, lowering the required majority to 377 first-preference votes.

While the NDA had the support of 427 MPs on pa-

per, it also received backing from 11 MPs of the YSRCP. Interestingly, Radhakrishnan secured 14 votes more than expected, prompting speculation of cross-voting from the Opposition.

Following the announcement of results, Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated CP Radhakrishnan and expressed confidence in his leadership. "Congratulations to Thiru CP Radhakrishnan Ji on winning the 2025 Vice Presidential election. His life has always been devoted to serv-

ing society and empowering the poor and marginalised. I am confident that he will be an outstanding VP, who will strengthen our Constitutional values and enhance Parliamentary discourse," the Prime Minister wrote on X.

Furthermore, 13 MPs abstained from voting in the election. These include seven MPs from the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), four from the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), one MP from the Shromani Akali Dal (SAD) and one Independent MP.

Nepal boils against corruption

CONTINUED FROM P1

But this rebellion is not just because of a social media ban. It is the spark from years of built-up corruption, favouritism, and economic inequality that is now trying to burn the whole country. Let's take a deep look at the real reasons for this rebellion, the forces behind it, and Nepal's future.

The roots of the rebellion are deep in Nepal's political and economic system. Corruption has spread like an epidemic in the country. According to Transparency International reports, Nepal is one of the most corrupt countries in Asia. Political leaders and their families treat government resources like their own property. For example, the recent Pokhara Airport scam and fake refugee scandal made headlines. Billions of dollars in government money were stolen, but

no action was taken against the guilty. The young generation, especially Gen-Z, is fed up with this inequality. Unemployment rate is over 20 percent, and millions of youth are forced to work abroad. They support the country's economy through remittances. But what about at home? Children of political families enjoy luxury cars and foreign vacations, while ordinary Nepalis struggle for basic needs like health, education, and jobs. On social media, the 'Nepo Kids' campaign fuelled this anger, where pictures of leaders' kids' lavish lives went viral. [20] [22]

When and how did this rebellion start? At the end of August 2025, the government banned 26 social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. They claimed it was to stop fake news and fraud. But protesters say it was a tool for

censorship to silence voices against corruption. In cities like Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Itahari, thousands of students and youth came out on the streets, holding books in school uniforms. These protests were peaceful at first but quickly turned violent when police fired guns and 19 people were killed. In response, protesters set fire to the parliament building, government offices, and leaders' homes. Oli's Communist Party and Nepali Congress coalition government could not handle this uproar, and Oli had to resign.

Now the question is, who is behind this rebellion? Mainly, it is a spontaneous revolt by Gen-Z youth who are tired of political parties. But some analysts see outside forces involved. Nepal is a buffer zone between India and China, and its instability worries both big neighbours. Some reports mention 'deep

state' or American influence, which was uncomfortable with Oli's pro-China policies. Oli had increased disputes with India by issuing new maps of Nepal and pushed forward China's Belt and Road Initiative. India fears that in an unstable Nepal, ISI or Chinese spy agencies could become active. Some also say the rebellion is linked to demands for restoring the monarchy, because since the monarchy ended in 2008, 14 governments have fallen in Nepal. However, the main force is the youth, who are sick of corruption.

What will happen to Nepal's future? In the short term, there is a risk of chaos. The army has been deployed on the streets, curfew is imposed, and Kathmandu airport was closed. The economic damage is huge: Tourism, a big part of the country's GDP, has stopped. If remittances

are affected, the economy could collapse. Politically, there will be efforts to form a new government, but the instability of coalitions will continue. Some people are demanding the return of the monarchy for stability, but Communist parties will oppose it. If the rebellion continues, there could be more violence in Nepal, and outside powers might interfere. But if reforms happen—like controlling corruption and giving jobs to youth—it could be a new beginning. Nepal needs strong institutions and transparent governance now, or this crisis will get deeper.

This rebellion has proven that no country drowning in the fire of corruption can stay calm for long. Nepal's youth will not sit quietly anymore; they want change, and the world has to see if this change will be creative or destructive.

Ex-CJ Sushila tipped to lead govt

CONTINUED FROM P1

to step down, triggering the need for an interim administration. As per sources, restrictive orders have been issued nationwide, and a curfew remains in place until 6 AM Thursday. The names of Sushila Karki, Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah, and former electricity board CEO Kulman Ghising are reportedly being considered by the protesting youth-led "Gen Z" movement to lead a caretaker government. Local media reports indicate that Karki has gained strong support

from this group.

In a statement, the army said the measures were necessitated to curb possible incidents of looting, arson, and other destructive activities "under the guise of agitation".

The army warned that any form of demonstrations, vandalism, arson, or attacks on individuals and property during the restrictive period would be treated as criminal acts and dealt with accordingly. Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport resumed operations Wednesday evening,

24 hours after it was shut down due to escalating protests.

The Gen Z-led protest, which erupted on September 8, began in Kathmandu and quickly spread to major cities like Pokhara, Butwal, and Birgunj. The protests were triggered by a government ban on major social media platforms, citing tax and cybersecurity concerns. The movement, driven primarily by students and young citizens, is demanding greater transparency, accountability, and an end to political favouritism.

Protests greet Macron's new PM amid budget cut

CONTINUED FROM P1

Nord station in Paris, but were repelled. Demonstrations and attempted blockades were also reported outside Parisian secondary schools and in cities like Rennes and Montpellier.

At Lavoisier School in Paris, nearly 100 masked students protested with placards reading: "We are blocking because we care about our mental health". "To fill their coffers, Bayrou is picking our pockets"

Medical staff also joined the protests, striking over budget cuts and deteriorating working conditions.

Police used tear gas in multiple cities to disperse crowds blocking roads. In Lyon, protesters set fire to bins and blocked highways, while masked groups in

Paris suburbs built barricades and threw rubbish at officers. Authorities deployed 80,000 police nationwide to maintain order.

French Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau confirmed that nearly 200 arrests had been made by midday. Despite the protests, traffic on the Peripherique ring road around Paris remained "virtually unaffected", according to France 24.

In Nantes, police again used tear gas, while in Lyon, a protester named Florent criticised Macron's appointment of Lecornu as a "slap in the face".

Socialist Party leader Olivier Faure urged Lecornu to renounce the use of Article 49.3 of the French Constitution, which allows the government to pass laws without a parliamentary vote.

India-US trade talks hold potential

CONTINUED FROM P1

discussions at the earliest. I am also looking forward to speaking with President Trump. We will work together to secure a brighter, more prosperous future for both our people," Modi said in his post.

The Prime Minister's remarks followed a statement by Trump on Tuesday (local time) via Truth Social, where the US President said he was pleased that talks to resolve trade frictions were continuing. Trump said he was confident the negotiations would reach a "successful conclusion" and underlined his intent to speak with Modi in the coming weeks.

"I am pleased to announce that India and the United States of America are continuing negotiations to address the Trade Barriers

between our two Nations. I look forward to speaking with my very good friend, Prime Minister Modi, in the upcoming weeks. I feel certain that there will be no difficulty in coming to a successful conclusion for both of our Great Countries," Trump wrote.

The latest exchange comes days after Trump described the India-US ties as a "very special relationship" and emphasised that he and Modi would "always be friends," even while expressing displeasure over India's current trade decisions.

At a White House event on Friday, Trump was asked by ANI if he was ready to reset ties with India. He replied, "I always will. I'll always be friends with (PM) Modi. He's a great Prime Minister. I'll always be friends, but I just don't like what he

is doing at this particular moment. But India and the United States have a very special relationship. There is nothing to worry about. We just have moments on occasion."

In response, Modi on Saturday had warmly acknowledged Trump's comments, saying he "deeply appreciates and fully reciprocates" the US President's sentiments. The Prime Minister also described bilateral relations as "forward-looking" and directed towards a "Comprehensive and Global Strategic Partnership."

"Deeply appreciate and fully reciprocate President Trump's sentiments and positive assessment of our ties. India and the US have a very positive and forward-looking Comprehensive and Global Strategic Partnership," Modi said in his earlier post.

Allies must be open to new ties

CONTINUED FROM P1

parties will have to work for that. He even maintained that during the seat sharing talks, the seats need to be divided in such a way that good and strong seats as well as weak seats also go in all alliance partners quota to work strongly.

The Congress also maintained that it has asked the block level organisations to share the names of the probable candidates with the party state leadership by

September 14 and then state election committee will have a meeting on September 16.

Allavaru said that the first formal meeting of the Screening Committee will take place on September 19.

Allavaru, while responding to a question on if Tejashwi Yadav is the chief ministerial candidate for Bihar, said that the people of the state will elect their new chief minister in the polls.

The party leaders also maintained that soon the party will come out with

the joint manifesto for Bihar.

A party leader maintained that the Congress has already formed the Manifesto Committee three months ago.

The party leader said that the joint manifesto is being given the final touch and after that a joint campaign will be launched on all the 243 assembly seats in the state.

The Congress in the last assembly polls had contested on 70 out of 243 assembly seats in 2020. The Congress had managed to win 19 seats in 2020 assembly polls.

A LIGHTER BASKET, A STRONGER HOME: HOW GST 2.0 TOUCHES THE LIFE OF EVERY INDIAN WOMAN

OPINION

REKHA SHARMA



It is often said that India's economy beats inside every kitchen, every bazaar, and every small saving a homemaker makes. From September 22, GST 2.0 brings that heartbeat closer to relief and cheer. With slabs reduced to just two, and daily essentials like food, shampoo, detergents, and personal care items becoming cheaper, this reform is not merely a tax cut. It is a lived experience for millions of women who stretch every rupee to run their households.

Picture Sunita, a mother of two in a small town in Haryana. Every month, she

carefully plans her grocery list: cooking oil, atta, milk, soap, biscuits for her children, a packet of shampoo for herself. Until now, she often found herself compromising, choosing between a brand she trusted and one that was affordable. But with GST 2.0, many of these items will cost less. Her monthly basket will suddenly feel lighter on her wallet, leaving her with a small but meaningful surplus. Perhaps now, she can set aside a little more for her daughter's tuition, or buy that extra packet of dry fruits she always wanted for the family's health. This is where reform touches lives—it transforms consumption into confidence.

At the heart of GST 2.0 lies a dramatic simplification: the old 12% and 28% slabs have been scrapped in favour of a streamlined dual-rate system of 5% and 18%, with a 40% levy reserved for luxury and sin goods. For the common man, this means cheaper essentials, affordable healthcare, lower costs of education tools

and appliances, and more money in hand to spend. For farmers, reduced taxation on agricultural inputs eases costs, increases profitability, and strengthens the rural economy. For the middle class, a simplified structure lowers day-to-day expenses, directly boosting purchasing power. It is a reform designed to ensure that no group is left behind—it touches every household, every village, every sector.

India's 63 million Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)—the true engines of job creation—are also among the biggest winners. For too long, these enterprises struggled with complex paperwork, high tax burdens, and cash flow bottlenecks. By lowering input costs, easing compliance, and stimulating consumer demand, GST 2.0 empowers them to compete, expand, and innovate. Stronger MSMEs mean more jobs, higher incomes, and deeper penetration of entrepreneurship in rural and semi-urban India. The ripple effects will be felt in every marketplace and every family's income.

Perhaps the most progressive step is in healthcare. The reduction of GST on medical technology items from 12% to 5% has the power to transform access to diagnostics and devices,



The reduction of GST on medical technology items from 12% to 5% has the power to transform access to diagnostics and devices, ensuring preventive care becomes affordable and accessible.

ensuring preventive care becomes affordable and accessible. A consistent, lower-tax approach across preventive, curative, and rehabilitative healthcare reduces disparities and expands early detection mechanisms. This is reform with

a human face—one that places Swasth Bharat at the core of Samridh Bharat.

Equally important, GST 2.0 strengthens India's fiscal and economic architecture. Simplified rates and processes bring predictability and transparency,

critical for attracting investment and driving industrial growth. Supply chains will be more efficient, entrepreneurs and investors will operate in a pro-growth environment, and domestic consumption will expand as households feel relief. It is a strategic recalibration of India's fiscal policy—balancing immediate relief with long-term sustainability—proving that reform can be both fiscally responsible and socially progressive.

The brilliance of GST 2.0 lies in its universality. From agriculture to manufacturing, from healthcare to

education, from startups to large industries—everyone benefits. Women-led businesses and youth-driven enterprises, in particular, will thrive under lower costs and simpler compliance. As festivals approach, GST 2.0 is like a timely gift. Households can celebrate with a fuller thali and a freer spirit. The woman of the house—always the first economist of the family—will finally feel the relief of a government policy that listens to her daily struggles.

Over the last 11 years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently de-

livered reforms that place India on a stronger footing. From the first rollout of GST in 2017 to today's simplified, futuristic framework, India has moved from fragmented taxation to a unified, citizen-friendly system. GST 2.0 is not just a historic milestone in tax reform—it is a milestone in governance itself, showing how cooperative federalism can deliver transformative results.

GST 2.0 will be remembered as more than revised tax rates. It is a reform of lives and livelihoods, a catalyst for national progress. It empowers households, energises industries, revitalises MSMEs, strengthens healthcare, and restores confidence in the economy. Above all, it restores dignity to the woman who runs her home, ensuring her children's needs are never compromised and her dreams never delayed. Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, governance is not about numbers—it is about people.

GST 2.0 is about dignity in every household, confidence in every woman, and hope in every family that tomorrow will be a little easier, a little brighter, and a lot more secure.

Rekha Sharma, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, and former Chairperson, National Commission for Women (NCW)

Education as a soft power tool of foreign policy

OPINION

DR. SARITA JAIN

In the contemporary global age, the concept of soft power, enunciated by Joseph Nye, has become a key aspect of international relations. Soft power indicates the ability of a nation to attract and influence others through persuasion and cultural appeal rather than coercion or economic enticement. Amid the various instruments of soft power—culture, political values, diplomacy—education occupies a central place. India, a civilisational state renowned for its intellectual and spiritual traditions, has historically leveraged education as a soft power tool, and it is gaining strategic importance in the 21st century.

The educational heritage of India has for centuries been a beacon for scholars across the globe. Ancient universities such as Nalanda and Takshashila attracted learners from far and wide, thereby establishing India's reputation as a hub of knowledge and learning. In modern times, this legacy is reflected in India's expanding higher education landscape and the international recognition of institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs). These institu-

tions, along with a highly skilled émigré community of scholars, scientists, and technocrats, have strengthened India's image as a global knowledge power.

Furthermore, India's intellectual exports—Sanskrit, Yoga, and Ayurveda—have gained global prominence, not only as academic subjects but also as instruments of wellness and lifestyle. Initiatives like the International Day of Yoga, the establishment of AYUSH Chairs in foreign universities, and cultural exchanges denote India's conscious effort to leverage its educational and cultural capital as tools of diplomacy. India's foreign policy increasingly embodies education as a deliberate soft power strategy. Programmes such as the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) scheme and the 'Study in India' initiative encourage students from Asia, Africa, and Latin America to pursue education in India. The provision of educational opportunities for foreign students is one of the most important instruments of a state's soft power (Cowen and Arsenault, 2008, p. 10). Government-sponsored scholarships and capacity-building programmes create a network of foreign alumni who often



Foreign universities are being invited to establish campuses in India, while Indian institutions are encouraged to expand collaborations, faculty exchanges, and research partnerships abroad.

rise to leadership roles in their respective countries, cultivating goodwill and enhancing bilateral relations.

The New Education Policy (NEP 2020) also emphasises the internationalization of Indian higher education. Foreign universities are being invited to establish campuses in India, while Indian institutions are encouraged to expand collaborations, faculty exchanges, and research partnerships abroad. Such steps, apart from elevating India's academic profile, also promote people-to-people diplomacy, which serves as a cornerstone of sustainable foreign relations. Globally, nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and China have long recog-

nized the strategic utility of education. The Fulbright Program, British Council scholarships, and Confucius Institutes exemplify how education shapes global perceptions and builds enduring cultural bridges. India's approach, moreover, stands apart, drawing strength from its pluralism, democratic ethos, and freedom of intellectual pursuit. Despite these advantages, certain challenges remain. India's institutions often face global ranking hurdles, infrastructural deficits, and bureaucratic complexities that hinder international student enrollment. It is critical to address these gaps through enhancement of quality, regulatory reforms, and stronger aca-

demic branding. Moreover, India's widespread use of English as a medium of instruction provides a unique edge in attracting students from non-English-speaking countries seeking global opportunities.

Education emerges as a sustainable, ethical, and deeply impactful tool of diplomacy in a world where influence is increasingly measured by the ability to inspire rather than dominate. The civilisational depth of India, its democratic values, and educational strengths offer a compelling narrative of soft power. By strategically aligning its educational outreach with foreign policy objectives, India can nurture global goodwill, foster enduring partnerships, and reinforce its position as a vishwa guru—a teacher to the world.

Dr. Sarita Jain, Professor, Department of English, Government College Chaksu, Jaipur. (Raj)

A story that cuts too close: Review of 'Ikhtitam'

BOOK REVIEW

I have read many works that claim to be "political thrillers." Most are entertainment, designed to pass the time. 'Ikhtitam' is different. It unsettles. Because behind the names and the changed details, one can sense the echo of real files, real choices, and real costs.

The book begins with elections—but not the routine kind. The narrative shows how politics, security, and foreign hands can tangle until no one is sure who is running the game. A party leader chasing power, intelligence whispers of terror plots, money flowing in strange ways, and the constant suspicion of betrayal—it is all there.

What struck me most is not the action itself but the mood: the sense that danger is never far, and that decisions taken in small rooms can tilt the fate of a nation.

You can see the author has spent years reporting on politics and intelligence—the detail doesn't come from imagination alone. The book claims that it is inspired by real people and real events—on this I left the readers to judge rather than give a confirmation or a denial.

The writing has the discipline of field notes. Meetings in cramped flats, shadow sources, the uneasy talk with retired officers—all of this has the smell of truth. Fiction, yes, but not invented out of thin air. It is written by someone who has walked close to the fire.

The characters are not easy to judge. Krishna, the leader at the centre, is no

saint. His fight against corruption and terror comes with compromises—funds from questionable sources, allies with shadows of their own. Mrinal, the journalist-turned-operator, carries loyalty but also doubt. Even the retired intelligence man, drawn back for one last operation, is not shown as a flawless mentor.

This greyness is the strength of the book. Real life is like that. In the field, there are no clean hands, only degrees of necessity.

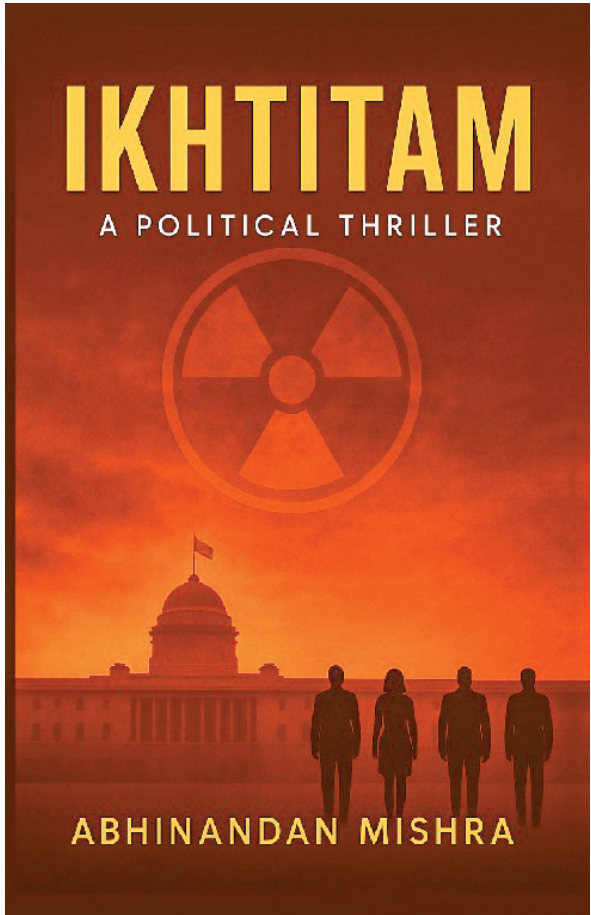
Some parts read larger than life, especially the closing sections with nuclear terror threat.

For a reader who has lived through actual crises, the speed and scale may feel

heightened. Yet the message holds. The book reminds us that we cannot take stability for granted. One missed signal, one leak, one compromise—and the price can be unbearable.

For me, Ikhtitam is less about whether every plot detail is "believable" and more about what it says of our times: that politics and security can no longer be separated, that foreign intelligence games are constant, and that even well-intentioned leaders can be trapped by ambition and fear. The author has done something rare—turned the unspoken into a story the public can grasp. It is not a comfortable read. It should not be.

Reviewed by a former insider



A child bride defied tradition, won her freedom, and returned as a pioneering doctor who inspired legal reform.



When Dadaji Bhikaji and his family asked Rukhmabai to move into his home, she refused—and her stepfather supported her decision. Wikimedia Commons

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Divorce laws around the world have transformed dramatically from the 19th century to the present, reflecting shifts in societal values and the quest for gender equality. In India, the journey from the first legal divorce of a Hindu woman – Dr. Rukhmabai Raut in the 1880s – to today’s multifaceted divorce laws illustrates how legal reforms often follow courageous individuals and changing social norms. This article traces the trajectory of divorce law in India, examines key legal reforms and landmark cases, and compares global practices, especially regarding how assets are divided (who gets “half of everything”) after a divorce. By exploring why judges decided cases the way they did, and quoting their words or those of the people involved, we can understand how legal reasoning and social pressures have shaped modern divorce laws.

RUKHMABAI RAUT: INDIA’S FIRST LEGAL DIVORCE CASE (1880S)

In 1885, Rukhmabai Raut became the first Hindu woman in India to legally obtain a divorce, after a protracted court battle that challenged orthodox norms. Married at age 11 to Dadaji Bhikaji (then 19), Rukhmabai had continued to live with her widowed mother and stepfather, pursuing education – an unusual path for a girl in 19th-century India. When her husband eventually demanded she move into his home, Rukhmabai flatly refused. Dadaji sued for “**restitution of conjugal rights**,” seeking a court order to compel his wife to live with him.

The Bombay High Court case **Bhikaji v. Rukhmabai (1885)** attracted widespread attention. Justice Robert Pinhey, who first heard the case, stunned society by siding with Rukhmabai. He ruled that English precedents on conjugal rights did not apply to a marriage contracted in “helpless infancy” and held that “*be could not compel a young lady*” (Rukhmabai) to cohabit against her wil. In other words, a child marriage lacking adult consent could not be enforced – a radical notion in that era. Pinhey’s progressive decision provoked fierce backlash from conservative voices, who accused him of attacking Hindu customs. Under pressure, the case was retried in 1887 before Justice Farran, who took a more orthodox view. Justice Farran ordered



Rukhmabai Raut (in 1880s attire) – a child bride turned physician whose refusal to submit to an unwanted marriage sparked India’s first legal divorce case and galvanized social reform. Wikimedia Commons

Rukhmabai to “**go live with her husband or face six months’ imprisonment**”, effectively upholding the husband’s marital rights.

Rather than submit, Rukhmabai bravely told the court she would rather go to jail. “*Rukhmabai responded that she would rather face imprisonment than obey the verdict*,” noted one account. Her defiance made headlines in India and even in Britain, igniting debates on women’s rights and child marriage. The young woman also took her cause to the press, writing bold letters under the pseudonym “A Hindu Lady.” In one such letter to *The Times of India*, Rukhmabai vividly described her plight: “*The brutal custom of child-marriage had deprived all happiness of my life. It is a stumbling block in the two things which I regarded to be most important – my education, and nurturing of my mind as per my expectation. I am isolated for no fault of mine*”. This heartfelt appeal for freedom and education struck a chord with reformers and the public. A support campaign formed, and ultimately Rukhmabai appealed to Queen Victoria in Britain for relief.

The case was finally settled out of court in Rukhmabai’s favor in 1888 – with popular accounts claiming that Queen Victoria intervened to dissolve the marriage (though historical evidence of direct royal action is scant). Dadaji Bhikaji agreed to relinquish his claims in exchange for monetary compensation, and Rukhmabai was free. This outcome – effectively a legal divorce – was unprecedented for a Hindu woman. Judges and officials recognized that enforcing the marriage would be unjust. As one summary put it, Rukhmabai’s 1885 case “*was a landmark in Indian legal history*” and ultimately led to “*Queen Victoria dissolving her marriage, and two major legal changes later down the line* –

the Age of Consent Act of 1891, and the subsequent eradication of the custom of child-marriage by law”. In other words, her fight set in motion reforms to raise the age of consent and curb child marriage.

Why did the judges decide as they did? Justice Pinhey was influenced by the principle that marriage requires consent – he observed that English law on conjugal rights assumed consenting adult parties, which Rukhmabai clearly was not at the time of wedlock. His willingness to defy tradition was likely bolstered by growing reformist sentiment against child marriage. Conversely, Justice Farran felt bound by orthodox interpretation of Hindu law and the sanctity of marriage customs, thus ruling against Rukhmabai. The tension between these views – individual rights vs. tradition – played out in the courtroom. Rukhmabai’s own resolve (she was ready to go to prison) and the public support she garnered tipped the scales in favor of a humane settlement. Her victory was more than personal: it “*symbolised a triumph of justice over patriarchal norms and inspired countless women to stand up for their rights*”. The case’s notoriety pressured the colonial government to act, contributing to the **Age of Consent Act, 1891**, which raised the age of sexual consent for girls (from 10 to 12 years) to prevent child brides from being forced into consummation. In effect, Rukhmabai’s courage and the judges’ decisions helped jump-start legal reforms to protect women and minors.

EARLY DIVORCE LAWS IN INDIA: COLONIAL ERA TO INDEPENDENCE
Rukhmabai’s case occurred in a time when formal divorce was virtually unknown in many Indian communities. Under orthodox Hindu law of the 19th century, marriage was typi-



Married at 11, Rukhmabai refused to accept a life she never chose, setting off a legal battle that not only led to India’s first divorce, but also sparked major reforms in marriage laws. Wikimedia Commons

cally indissoluble – there was no concept of divorce for Hindus (except possibly through rare custom). Muslim personal law allowed husbands to repudiate marriages (talaq) and provided limited grounds for wives to seek divorce, but these were governed by religious law, not a uniform civil code. The British colonial regime had introduced a few statutes: for example, the **Indian Divorce Act, 1869** provided divorce procedures for persons of Christian faith (though it was highly biased against women), and the **Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936** did so for Parsi Zoroastrians. Notably, the 1869 law required a Christian wife to prove aggravated circumstances (like adultery plus cruelty or desertion) to get a divorce, reflecting Victorian moral norms. For the vast majority of Indians (Hindus, Muslims, etc.), matrimonial disputes were left to personal laws and community adjudication, with the colonial courts intervening mainly in exceptional cases like Rukhmabai’s.

However, by the early 20th century, social reform movements were chipping away at these rigid norms. **Child marriage** became a focal issue. After the Age of Consent Act (1891) addressed consummation age, the **Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929** (also called Sarda Act) set minimum marriage ages (14 for girls, later raised) – a law that, while not directly about divorce, showed the lawmaking trend of protecting women in marriage. For Muslim women, a crucial reform was the **Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939**, which for the first time gave Muslim wives statutory grounds to obtain a divorce through courts (such as if the husband had disappeared for 4+ years, neglected maintenance, or was impotent, etc.). This Act was driven by progres-

sive Muslim jurists and politicians who saw the injustice in denying wives the relief that husbands could get extra-judicially through talaq.

When India gained independence in 1947, the stage was set for overhauling marriage and divorce laws under the Constitution’s promise of equality. Reformers like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar pushed for a **uniform civil code**, but faced resistance. As a compromise, independent India enacted community-specific reforms. The **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 (HMA)** was revolutionary: for the first time in Indian history, Hindus (as well as Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists) had a legal pathway to divorce by decree of court. Under this Act, divorce could be granted on specific fault grounds – cruelty, adultery, desertion (for 2+ years), unsoundness of mind, conversion to another religion, or serious venereal disease, among others. Initially, the bar was high; for instance, cruelty needed to be of a grave nature, and divorce was seen as a last resort after attempts at reconciliation. In 1976, the HMA was amended to further liberalize divorce: **mutual consent divorce** was introduced (Section 13B) allowing couples to end the marriage amicably after a short separation period, and the required separation period for certain grounds was reduced. Meanwhile, other communities’ laws also modernized: the **Indian Divorce (Amendment) Act, 2001** eased the harsh requirements on Christian women seeking divorce, bringing parity with other religions, and the Special Marriage Act (1954) provided a non-religious marriage and divorce option for inter-faith couples or those who chose civil marriage.

LANDMARK DIVORCE CASES IN INDEPENDENT INDIA
Several court rulings have punctuated the evolution of



Queen Victoria of South Africa. Wikimedia Commons

Indian divorce law, often expanding rights or prompting legislative change. One early landmark was the **Shah Bano case (1985)** – technically about maintenance after divorce, but its impact on divorce and gender justice was profound. In *Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shab Bano Begum*, a 73-year-old Muslim divorcee went to the Supreme Court seeking alimony beyond the brief post-divorce period recognized by Islamic law. The Court, invoking criminal procedure law applicable to all citizens, upheld Shah Bano’s right to maintenance, famously regretting that the constitutional directive for a uniform civil code had “remained a dead letter.” The judgment stirred controversy; traditionalists accused it of infringing Islamic law, and Parliament reacted by passing the **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986** which curtailed Muslim divorcees’ maintenance rights to some extent. Nonetheless, the Shah Bano saga highlighted the need to reconcile religious personal laws with principles of equity – a theme that re-emerged in later cases.

More recently, the Supreme Court’s verdict in the **Shayara Bano case (2017)** marked a milestone for Muslim women’s rights in divorce. This case challenged the practice of “*triple talaq*” – an instant, unilateral divorce pronounced by the husband. A five-judge bench by a 3:2 majority declared instant triple talaq unconstitutional. The opinions brim with strong language: “*It is manifestly arbitrary to allow a man to ‘break down [a] marriage whimsically and capriciously’*,” one justice wrote. Another memorably said, “*What is sinful under religion cannot be valid under law*”, underscoring that no personal law custom can violate fundamental rights. The Court concluded that this form of talaq was “*not*



From 1884, her case sparked protracted court battles and a public reckoning over child marriage; she kept studying and wrote as “A Hindu Woman,” gaining support. Backed by a fund, she trained at the London School of Medicine, graduated, returned in 1895 as one of India’s first women doctors, and worked at a women’s hospital in Surat. Wikimedia Commons

part of Islam” and violated constitutional morality. As a result, Muslim husbands can no longer instantly divorce; they must follow due process. Shayara Bano, the woman who brought the case, exclaimed in relief, “*Finally I feel free today. I have the order that will liberate many Muslim women*”. The judgment exemplifies how the judiciary weighed gender justice over an age-old practice – the judges took into account that triple talaq left women destitute and violated their dignity, which informed their decision to invalidate it. This ruling was later reinforced by legislation (the Muslim Women Act, 2019, criminalizing triple talaq).

Hindu divorce law has also seen progressive interpretations. For example, courts have increasingly recognized **cruelty** in non-physical forms (mental cruelty) as valid ground for divorce. In a notable 2006 case, the Supreme Court observed that prolonged mental agony and indifference in a marriage could amount to cruelty warranting divorce – reflecting an evolving understanding of what makes a marriage unviable. Moreover, though Indian law does not yet formally recognize “irretrievable breakdown of marriage” as a ground for divorce (absent specific legislative provision), the Supreme Court has in some cases used its special powers to grant divorce when a marriage is clearly beyond repair. In a 2023 decision, the Court even suggested that a long-dead marriage can be dissolved by the Court itself under Article 142 of the Constitution (complete justice provision), **waiving the mandatory waiting periods** for divorce by mutual consent in appropriate cases. Such decisions indicate the judiciary’s pragmatic approach – judges have stated that forcing unwill-

ing partners to stay married serves no one’s interest, and thus they have been willing to bend rigid procedures when justice demands.

Another landmark was the case of **Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India (1995)**, where the Supreme Court condemned the practice of Hindu men converting to Islam solely to take a second wife (circumventing monogamy rules). The Court not only voided such conversions done in bad faith but also made a fervent appeal for a uniform civil code to unify personal laws on marriage and divorce. While no UCC exists yet (except in Goa, discussed below), these judgments kept the reform discourse alive. The **Sarla Mudgal** ruling shows judges looking beyond black-letter law to prevent misuse and ensure fairness – a theme consistent in divorce jurisprudence.

Indian courts have also dealt with **property and maintenance issues** in divorce, as we will see next. A crucial case in property division was **White v. White (2000)** – although from the UK, it has influenced Indian thinking on equitable distribution. In that UK House of Lords case, a homemaker wife of 33 years was initially awarded far less than half the family assets, but the Law Lords raised her share, establishing that when dividing marital property, there should be no discrimination between breadwinner and homemaker. This principle – recognizing the homemaker’s contribution as equal – has been cited with approval by Indian courts when deciding alimony and property disputes. Indian law may not explicitly provide a 50/50 split, but judges increasingly strive for fairness so that a non-earning spouse (usually the wife) is not left economically handicapped after divorce.

PULMONARY REHABILITATION: A BOON FOR RESPIRATORY HEALTH



DR. LAKSHYA BHAKTYANI

Pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) is a comprehensive, evidence-based program that is designed to help people with chronic lung diseases. It improve their quality of life, manage symptoms, and increase physical fitness. It is recognized globally, including WHO, as an effective non-pharmacological method for managing conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), bronchiectasis, interstitial lung disease, asthma, pulmonary fibrosis, and pulmonary hypertension.

Components of pulmonary rehabilitation include:

- Exercise training: Specifically designed physical activities to improve muscle strength and endurance, increase exercise tolerance reduce breathlessness and fatigue. It also includes specific tools and equipment designed to improve respiratory muscle strength, lung function and



airway clearance. This is usually conducted under supervised sessions two to three times a week over 6-8 weeks.

- Education: Providing information about lung disease, ways to manage symptoms, breathing techniques such as pursed-lip breathing, and self-management skills for dyspnea (difficulty in breathing) and increased rate of breathing.
- Psychosocial support: Assistance and techniques for managing anxiety, depression, and stress related

to chronic lung disease.

- Nutritional guidance: Guidance to improve muscle mass and overall health, especially for those at risk of malnutrition.

Pulmonary rehabilitation programs are conducted in hospitals, community centers, outpatient clinics and even at home. Patient participation usually requires referral from a healthcare provider.

Benefits of pulmonary rehabilitation include:

- Reduce symptoms of shortness of breath and fa-

tigue

- Fewer hospital admissions and shorter hospital stays in chronic conditions
- Improved ability to perform daily activities (ADL) like reduce dependency in bathing, feeding etc.
- Enhanced mental health and physical well-being
- Improves quality of life
- Increase functional exercise capacity

Pulmonary rehabilitation is tailored as per individual, based on a patient's health and goals. It is often provided by a multidisciplinary team that may include doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists, physiotherapists, exercise specialists, and dietitians.

Program design: It should be supervised by pulmonary physiotherapist and one session usually takes 40 -45 minutes. It's recom-

mended at least 3 days per week, with a minimum of about 20 sessions and preferably longer (6-12 weeks) for lasting benefits.

Individualized assessment: Target heart rate, accepted drop in oxygen saturation, Vo2 max, exercise capacity and muscle function are evaluated to tailor exercise prescription and maximize improvement.

Improvement is documented with tests of distance and duration of walking done pre and post pulmonary rehabilitation program. Improvement in lung volume is also noted by Spirometry.

Although pulmonary rehabilitation does not cure lung disease. It improves physical conditioning and symptom management especially when started soon after hospital discharge. Increasing access and participation in PR programs is crucial to maximize these benefits.

In summary, exercise training in pulmonary rehabilitation improves physical capacity, reduces symptoms like breathlessness, enhances quality of life, and decreases healthcare burden by reducing readmission, making it the foundational intervention for managing chronic respiratory diseases.

The author is a physiotherapist.

Endometriosis may go on to affect teenagers as young as 12 years old



DR. SMEET PATEL



Endometriosis, a condition too often equated mistakenly with an illness that concerns only adult women, can begin much earlier—sometimes at age 10 or 12. Endometriosis is an estrogen-related condition, and as estrogen secretion begins at the same time roughly as the onset of menarche (the beginning of the first menstrual period in a girl), endometriosis will occur just at the time of the onset of puberty.

This period in a young girl's life is marked by an outburst of hormonal activity, resulting in major physical, emotional, and psychological alterations. The body starts to prepare for menstruation even before the first period arrives through secreting hormones, which can lead to fluctuations and imbalances. Hormonal alterations are often followed by pain or discomfort—but not all pain can be dismissed as normal. Endometriosis may present with symptoms such as pelvic pain, painful periods, intestinal discomfort, tiredness, or low energy. Mild discomfort during the first few cycles is

normal, but intense pain for over six months or impacting one's daily activities may be a cause for concern.

The surprise? Even imaging procedures like ultrasounds and MRIs could yield normal results, especially in early-stage disease. This naturally means delayed diagnosis, where pain is normalized or dismissed. Early detection, however, is necessary—not only to cure the pain but also to stop disease progression and maintain fertility.

Two popular assumptions explain how endometriosis may arise. The first is retrograde menstruation, where menstrual blood moves backward through the fallopian tubes and into the pelvic cavity and allows endometrial cells to implant and establish themselves outside of the uterus. The second is the theory of embryonic Müllerian cells, where the embryonic Müllerian cells in the developing fetus do not leave the body and instead end up becoming endometrial-like tissue. Both of these hypotheses also suggest that endometriosis could become evident at an early age.

According to Dr. Smeet

Patel "Certain girls are undergoing a lot of pain during their periods. For the first 2-3 years, if there is vast pain, then it may possibly be something that needs to be checked." The gynecologist can assist in checking whether symptoms occur because of puberty, endometriosis, or other medical conditions like PCOS.

Regular check-ups also give adolescent girls the advice they need—not just on dealing with symptoms, but also on menstrual hygiene, recognizing abnormal patterns, and even preventive treatments like the HPV vaccine. Interestingly enough, the early signs of PCOS and hormonal issues caused by obesity can also show up during adolescence. With early intervention—by means of lifestyle changes like exercise and dietary changes—these can be reversed.

The bottom line: Adolescence is a critical time for reproductive health. Informing girls about conditions like endometriosis and encouraging early medical counsel empowers girls to be the bosses of their body and their future.

The author is the Endometriosis Specialist.

5 common supplement misconceptions you shouldn't fall for

BY SACHIN DARBARWAR

As conversations around health and wellness grow, supplements have become a daily ritual for many. From boosting energy and immunity to supporting focus and overall well-being, they promise quick fixes in a fast-paced world. Yet, with their rise in popularity comes an equally rapid spread of myths and misconceptions. Misunderstanding how supplements work, or don't work, can lead to wasted money, misguided choices, and in some cases, potential harm.

Here are five common misconceptions about supplements, and the facts you should know before making them part of your routine.

1. **Natural means it's always safe - Think again**
The word "natural" is among the most overused labels in the wellness industry. While many supplements are plant-based, that doesn't automatically make them safe. Some natural compounds can interact

with medications, trigger allergies, or contain impurities if not properly sourced and tested. The safest approach is to check whether the supplement is backed by transparent sourcing, quality testing, and clear dosage guidelines rather than assuming "natural" equals harmless.

2. **Supplements can replace healthy food - Does it?**
Supplements are meant to complement a balanced diet, not substitute for it. Whole foods provide a complex mix of fibre, enzymes, and micronutrients that no capsule or powder can fully replicate. However, factors like busy lifestyles, poor soil quality, or specific health conditions can lead to nutrient gaps. In such cases, supplements may help bridge deficiencies, but they work best when paired with nutrient-rich meals, not instead of them.
3. **More is better - Not really.**
It's tempting to believe that higher doses will deliver faster or stronger benefits,

but the body doesn't work that way. Most nutrients have an absorption threshold, beyond which extra amounts are either excreted or, in some cases, stored in harmful ways. Overdosing on vitamins like A or D, for instance, can be toxic. The key is effectiveness, not volume. Choosing supplements with proven absorption rates and taking them as directed is far safer and more beneficial than overloading your system.

4. **All supplements are the same - Far from it!**
Walk down any supplement aisle and you'll find countless products that look interchangeable. In reality, quality can vary dramatically. Differences in ingredient sourcing, extraction methods, purity levels, and delivery systems can determine how effective a supplement really is. Some may contain fillers or additives, while others invest in third-party testing to verify safety and potency. Reading labels carefully and looking for certifications can help dis-

tinguish genuine quality from marketing spin.

5. **I'll feel it immediately - Not possible.**
Supplements are not magic pills. While certain ingredients, like caffeine or magnesium, may deliver noticeable effects quickly, most work gradually. Improvements in immunity, gut health, or hormonal balance often require consistent use over weeks or even months. Viewing supplements as part of a long-term wellness plan, rather than expecting instant results, sets more realistic expectations—and often better outcomes.

Supplements can be valuable tools for supporting health, but only when approached with clarity and care. Understanding common misconceptions helps cut through the noise of marketing and misinformation, empowering you to make smarter, safer choices. Instead of chasing quick fixes or labels, look for quality, transparency, and balance, because true wellness is built over time, not overnight.

LONGEST ROAD TRANSFER THROUGH AMBULANCE ENSURES SAFE JOURNEY FOR 41-DAY-OLD INFANT

Through heavy rain, winding ghats, oxygen shortages and even a cardiac arrest on the road, a fragile neonate survived a 1,200 km journey of hope

TDG NETWORK

A 41-day-old infant weighing less than 1.5 kg, battling severe anemia, internal bleeding, acute kidney failure, and a sharp platelet drop, survived a high-risk 24-hour ground transfer from Surat to Hyderabad. In what is now being recognized as one of the longest neonatal ambulance transports in India, the journey spanning over 1,200 kilometers became a story of hope, courage, and survival.

Air ambulance, the conventional option for long-distance critical care, was deemed unsuitable in this case due to limited oxygen availability and the need for frequent interventions such as platelet transfusions and continuous monitoring. With no room for delay, a fully equipped neonatal ambulance by RED Health was mobilized to ensure safe and uninterrupted care during the journey.

The infant was accompanied by two senior doctors and two NICU-trained nurses, who provided



round-the-clock medical support — platelet transfusions every 12 hours, high-flow oxygen, round-the-clock monitoring of vitals, and in-motion stabilization whenever needed. Each kilometer tested the baby's fragile condition, as the team drove through rain-soaked highways, winding ghats, and an overnight stretch where every breath was measured in dwindling oxygen cylinders.

When the ambulance finally reached its destination hospital KIMS Cuddles Secunderabad, Hyderabad, the baby arrived in stable condition, a moment of relief that words could barely capture. The parents shared, "Red Health helped us a lot, especially the drivers who drove safely from Gu-

jarat to Telangana. The NICU setup with a ventilator was provided which we didn't get in any other ambulances. Hence we chose RED Health Ambulance. Night travel without any stay, the team looked at our baby and monitored it throughout. Thank you, RED Health Team."

Dr. Babu S. Madarkar, Clinical Director, Neonatal & Pediatric Clinician, KIMS Cuddles Hospitals, Secunderabad, said, "During the journey, the ambulance had to navigate through bad roads, heavy rain, and multiple challenges, yet the team ensured the baby reached safely. This was possible only because of seamless coordination between doctors, nurses, and the RED Health team. For a neonate, this was one of the longest and most

critical transfers we have witnessed, and it stands as a powerful reminder to what teamwork and timely intervention can achieve."

The RED Health team echoed the sentiment. Mr. Prabhdeep Singh, Founder and CEO, RED Health shared, "Our job is to respond to emergencies. When air transfer was not an option, every intervention had to be planned and executed in motion. At RED Health, what matters most to us is ensuring that patients get the chance to return safely & healthy to their families. We are truly glad that the baby is now healthy and going back home."

This rare and challenging transfer underscores the critical importance of ground-based neonatal critical care. It also highlights the power of teamwork between hospitals, doctors, and emergency medical staff. What could have been a story of despair turned into a journey of hope, and a testament to a new benchmark of saving lives in medical emergencies.



Artificial intelligence heart watch

TDG NETWORK

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the way electrocardiograms (ECGs) are interpreted, particularly in the detection of arrhythmias—irregular heart rhythms that can lead to serious complications like stroke or sudden cardiac arrest. Traditional ECG analysis requires skilled cardiologists to identify subtle patterns across multiple leads, which can be time-consuming and prone to human error. AI, especially



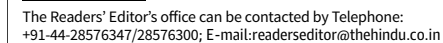
deep learning algorithms, offers a powerful solution by automatically analysing ECG signals with remarkable speed and accuracy.

By training on millions of ECG recordings, AI models learn to recognize patterns

that indicate arrhythmias such as atrial fibrillation, ventricular tachycardia, or premature contractions. These systems can often detect abnormalities that might be missed in routine screenings, enabling earlier intervention. Some AI tools are integrated into wearable devices, like smart watches or portable ECG monitors, allowing continuous heart rhythm monitoring outside

clinical settings.

The benefits are significant: faster diagnosis, reduced workload for healthcare professionals, and improved access to cardiac care in remote areas. However, challenges remain, including ensuring model transparency, reducing bias in training datasets, and achieving regulatory approval for clinical use. Despite these hurdles, AI-powered ECG interpretation is set to become a cornerstone of preventive cardiology and personalized healthcare.



To build roads is to build peace

In India’s tribal hinterlands, especially those affected by Maoist insurgency, roads are not just a matter of transport. They are emissaries of the state, carving a path not only through forests and hills but also through histories of marginalisation and neglect. In regions where formal institutions are barely visible, a newly built road often marks the first arrival of governance itself.

A growing body of research shows that road development in conflict-affected areas has a stabilising effect. In Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha, core States in the “Red Corridor,” the presence of rural roads is strongly associated with improvements in electricity access, employment opportunities, and security. Roads help reclaim governance from non-state actors who thrive in isolation. When the state is absent, insurgent groups often step in with slogans and systems. Across conflict zones, insurgents have set up parallel institutions that mimic state functions. Diego Gambetta’s classic study of the Sicilian Mafia illustrates this: extralegal actors assume roles such as conflict resolution and taxation when the state withdraws. In India, Maoist insurgents have attempted to fill governance gaps in remote areas by running informal courts and levying their own “taxes.” The demand and supply logic applies to governance. An undersupply of formal governance leads to opportunistic entrepreneurship seeking to pick up the slack in supply.

In some tribal regions, it is reported that extralegal outfits have even dispensed rudimentary medical aid where clinics are absent – an act that blurs the line between care and coercion. Research by Alpa Shah (2018) and Human Rights Watch (2009) notes that the Naxalite presence in villages often includes some health services and welfare activities, though always underwritten by the threat of violence. As scholar Zachariah



Pavan Mamidi

is Director, Centre for Social and Behavior Change (CSBC), Ashoka University

Mampilly (2011) observed in other insurgent contexts, such services are not charitable - they are strategic. The aim is not just survival but legitimacy.

Legitimacy cannot rest on coercion alone. Extralegal governance, while sometimes filling the gaps left by the state, is not bound by constitutional safeguards or democratic principles. Its forms of justice are often opaque, arbitrary, and punitive. In several Maoist-affected areas, there are reports of kangaroo courts (*jan adalats*) that have issued summary punishments, including executions, without due process. This is justice without appeal, correction, or accountability-more terror than tribunal.

This is why infrastructure matters. It is the physical precondition for the presence of lawful authority. Jain and Biswas (2023) have shown that road connectivity correlates with a decline in crime and increased service access in rural India. Internationally, Rafael Prieto-Curiel and Ronaldo Menezes (2020) demonstrate that violence is higher in poorly connected areas, whether in cities or rural zones. Infrastructure, they argue, is not merely functional; it is political.

Formal state institutions, though imperfect, operate within a framework of laws shaped by democratic consensus. These laws are debated, refined, and subject to public scrutiny. When schools, police stations, clinics and courts are introduced in conflict-prone areas through road development, they bring not only services but a system that is, at least in principle, accountable to citizens. It is the rule of law, not rule by fiat.

This contrast is critical. While formal institutions are subject to electoral oversight, bureaucratic accountability, and legal restraint, informal justice systems are not. They more often reflect entrenched power hierarchies and patriarchal norms, leading to practices such as vigilante justice

and collective punishment. In the absence of courts, entire communities can be targeted. Accusations of collaboration with security forces have, in some cases, led to mob reprisals under the guise of justice.

The Indian state has recognised this. In Chhattisgarh, former top official and current NITI Aayog CEO B.V.R. Subrahmanyam led a thoughtful strategy that placed infrastructure at the heart of governance renewal. Roads came first, followed by schools, clinics, and law enforcement. Each road had a message: that the state has come in, and is here to stay.

Safeguards are needed too But infrastructure alone cannot resolve conflict. Roads can carry relief or repression. Without institutional safeguards such as justice mechanisms, health-care access, and community consultation, they risk becoming symbols of control rather than inclusion. A road should not simply be laid through a village but built with the village as this is essential to legitimacy. Moreover, we must be mindful that informal social norms, even outside insurgent control, can be just as exclusionary. It is said that in some parts of rural India, *khap* panchayats and caste councils operate alongside or in place of formal institutions. These bodies often enforced rigid social codes through shame or violence. While they may have provided swift resolution, they did so without the protections of equity or legality. Development, therefore, must aim not only to replace insurgent authority but also to integrate pluralistic, rights-based governance rooted in India’s constitutional values.

As India invests in its tribal heartlands, especially in regions like southern Chhattisgarh, road development must be part of a broader effort to extend justice, dignity, and opportunity. The goal is not merely movement but belonging. To build roads, then, is to build peace.

Roads help reclaim governance from non-state actors who thrive in isolation

The BRS’s woes continue

CBI probe into Kaleshwaram lapses, rebellion by Kavitha spell more trouble

STATE OF PLAY

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The political drama in Telangana that unfolded with the suspension of Kalvakuntla Kavitha last week is likely to trouble the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), the main Opposition party in the State, which is confronting one issue after another. Ms. Kavitha was the BRS Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) and Telangana Jagruti President, and is also the daughter of BRS leader and former Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao.

The BRS is already grappling with a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation, ordered by the Congress government in Telangana, to look into the findings by the Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghosh Commission of Inquiry. The Commission had probed alleged irregularities in the construction of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project, leading to its inoperability. The open rebellion by Ms. Kavitha is another blow for the BRS. A day after her suspension for ‘anti-party’ activities, she tendered her resignation as MLC, and vowed to fight her detractors.

The BRS also faces a tough challenge in retaining the Jubilee Hills Assembly seat with the passing of the sitting member, Maganti Gopinath. Its popularity will be tested once the bugle for local body polls is sounded.

Another emerging issue is bypolls to a few Assembly seats being conducted if the Telangana Assembly Speaker decides to disqualify turncoat MLAs who joined the ruling Congress. The Supreme Court

had ordered the disposal of the disqualification petitions within three months.

The ruling Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are preparing for the prestigious local body polls. In contrast, the BRS is in a state of confusion – Ms. Kavitha has also blamed a cousin and former Irrigation Minister, T. Harish Rao, and former Rajya Sabha member Joginpally Santosh Rao for her woes which has irked her father as well as brother, BRS president K.T. Rama Rao.

Some women BRS leaders have tried to counter her but the response has been weak as this is an issue that involves the party’s first family. While the BRS leadership has been cautious on the issue of 42% quota for Backward Classes (BC) that has been envisaged by the ruling Congress in order to improve its electoral chances. Ms. Kavitha has made it clear that she intends taking up the BC quota slogan.

The party leadership is confident that they can handle any damage that she might cause – she may not attract many leaders to her fold and there is speculation that the ‘neglected’ second or third rung leaders may try and jump ship. To unsettle her, the BRS has engineered a split in the Telangana Jagruti, the cultural outfit that she had floated at the height of the Statehood movement.

BRS leaders are also watch-

ing to see whether Ms. Kavitha could embarrass the party by fielding candidates in the local bodies.

While the sarpanch elections are held on a non-party basis, the ZPTC and MPTC part of Panchayat Raj bodies are conducted using party symbols. After losing power in the Assembly elections in 2023, drawing a blank in the 2024 general election and shocked to have 10 of its MLAs defect to the Congress, the BRS can ill-afford to face more trouble.

In the 2019 local body polls, the BRS – it was called the Telangana Rashtra Samiti then – won 445 ZPTC seats and 3,556 MPTC posts in elections to 534 ZPTC and 5,659 MPTC vacancies in 32 districts. The Congress is now keen to bag a majority of the seats.

The BRS still has a chance to recoup if it is able to focus on the local body polls. Though its strategy on the 42% BC quota is still unclear, it faces an uphill task in taking on the resurgent Congress, which is banking on the BC quota issue to win.

Nevertheless, it will be a straight fight between the Congress and the BRS as the BJP is not a force to reckon with.

Amid the gloom, BRS leaders are hopeful that the legislators who defected will be disqualified, paving the way for another round of bye-elections. If this happens, the byelections will not only be a challenge to the BRS but also to Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy of the Congress, who can ill-afford to lose a seat.

Whether the BRS will be able to take on the might of the Congress in the event of bypolls will be keenly watched. Till then the BRS will have to find a way to manage its many troubles.

Political instability, economic difficulties behind Nepal’s rage

Nepal is the most unstable democracy and has the fourth highest remittance-dependency

DATA POINT

Vignesh Radhakrishnan
Srinivasan Ramani

The “Gen Z” protests in Nepal that began as a movement against the ban on social media outlets and corruption on Monday, took a violent turn the next day, with attacks on all institutions. The proximate reasons apart, political instability – marked by frequent changes in government and unethical alliances – has kept Nepal’s stark societal inequalities intact, especially among youth who are forced to emigrate due to soaring unemployment. This should explain their angry protests.

When Khadga Prasad Oli -- he has since resigned -- formed a new government in 2024, it marked the 30th change in leadership in Nepal ever since it became an elected democracy in 1990. Despite transitioning from constitutional monarchy (1990-2008) to becoming a constitutional republic (2008 onwards), no Prime Minister has ever completed a full term.

Data show that Nepal tops the world in government tenures since 1990. Excluding countries such as San Marino, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Switzerland, where frequent leadership changes are legally mandated, Nepal leads with 25 completed tenures since 1990 – each lasting on average just a year and two months (**Table 1**).

These frequent changes have undermined the promise of stable, democratic, federal governance as envisioned by Nepal’s two Jan Andolans (1989-90 and 2005-2008). Political instability has also meant that long-standing inequalities – between rich and poor, rural and urban, educated and less-educated – remain entrenched. These divides are most pronounced among youth, the main cohort that led the demonstrations against political elites in protests described as “Gen Z vs Nepo kids”.

Nepal’s overall unemployment rate stood at 12.5% in 2022-23, but the burden falls disproportionately on the young. Among those aged 15-24, unemployment reached 22.7%, compared to 11.5% in the 25-44 group and 7.5% among those aged 45-64 (**Chart 2**).

Inequality cuts across multiple dimensions. Some 17.2% of individuals from the poorest households were unemployed, as against 8.5% from the richest. Education creates stark differences: unemployment stands at 18.1% among those with only basic schooling, compared to just 6.3% among bachelor’s degree holders. Geography adds another layer – while Kathmandu valley records the lowest rate at 7.6%, unemployment exceeds 20% in many rural regions.

Critically, labour force participation itself is much lower among poor, rural, and less-educated populations. Among the relatively fewer in these groups who enter the labour market, a higher share cannot find work. This creates a double disadvantage – not only are they unable to find employment, but many are not even actively seeking it due to lack of relevant opportunities.

This has pushed many, especially from disadvantaged groups, to seek work abroad. About one in four males in Nepal is absent from home, with a significant share living outside the country. The proportion of female-headed households has increased dramatically from just 13.6% in 1995-96 to 37.1% in 2022-23, reinforcing this pattern of male out-migration.

Absenteeism is starkest in rural areas and among youth. About 20% of the rural population is absent from home, compared with just 8.7% in the Kathmandu valley. More than half of male absentees (56%) are aged 15-29 years – the same group recording the highest unemployment rate. Those who leave Nepal to work abroad have become a major income source for families and the nation. The share of households receiving remittance-

es has risen sharply from 23.4% in 1995-96 to 76.8% in 2022-23. Among such households, remittances now account for over 33% of total income, up from 26.6% in 1995-96 (**Chart 3**).

More significantly, remittances increasingly originate from outside Nepal. In 2022-23, nearly 50% came from countries other than India, about 20% from India, and the rest from internal migrants. In contrast, in 1995-96, 44.7% came from within Nepal and 33% from India. This shift highlights both the growing exodus of Nepali workers and diversification of destinations beyond India. Current remittance sources show that Qatar (10%), Saudi Arabia (9%), Malaysia (8.6%), and the UAE (7.1%) are the most preferred non-Indian destinations for Nepali workers.

Personal remittances have surged from just 1% of Nepal’s GDP in 1990 to over 33% in 2024. By this measure, Nepal ranks as the world’s fourth most remittance-dependent country. Notably, this figure covers only cross-border remittances.

These statistics show precisely why Nepal’s youth had taken to the streets with such fury, even if the violent upheaval that followed the Gen Z’s protests the next day deserves a closer look at who instigated the arson and vandalism that targeted Parliament, the Supreme Court and other institutions.

In sum, Nepal has achieved the world’s highest level of political instability while simultaneously becoming the world’s fourth most-remittance-dependent economy. These two facts seen together suggest that political instability has resulted in the lack of economic policies to diversify Nepal’s economy and provide jobs, forcing citizens to seek jobs abroad. Which goes on to explain why there is severe anger against the political system that came into being after two massive civil and political society mobilisations in 1990 and 2005.

With inputs from Godhashri S.

Fire in the mountains

The data for the charts were sourced from the National Statistics Office of Nepal and the Rulers, Elections and Irregular Governance dataset



Table 1: Countries with the highest number of tenures their heads of governments have had between 1990 and August 2021

| Country | Tenures | Average tenure (months) |
|----------|---------|-------------------------|
| Nepal | 25* | 13.7 |
| Vanuatu | 22 | 15.6 |
| Bulgaria | 17 | 21.8 |
| Nauru | 17 | 16.8 |
| Moldova | 16 | 22.8 |
| Japan | 15 | 23.1 |

*The data excludes two tenures of direct rule by former King Gyanendra. Countries where frequent leadership changes are legally mandated are excluded

Chart 2: Nepal’s age-wise unemployment rate in 2022-23 (in %)

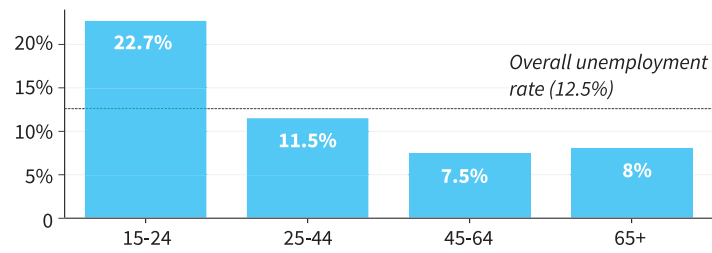
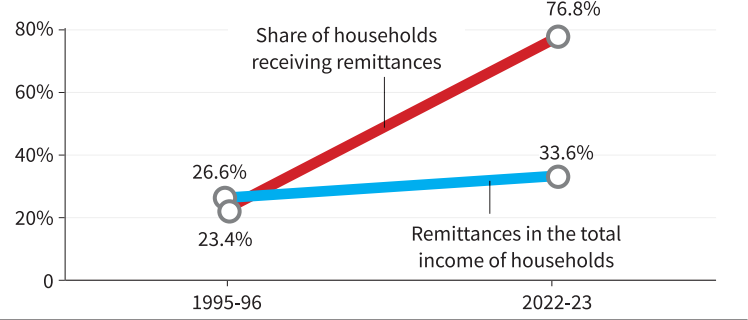


Chart 3: Share of households receiving remittances and the share of remittances in the total income of recipient households in Nepal



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 11, 1975

Madras Has Deepest Port

MADRAS, Sept. 10

Madras is the deepest port in India to-day with the completion of dredging of the outer harbour to receive ships 46 feet of draught last month. The first oil tanker loaded up to 46 draught, was berthed in the Bharathi dock on August 13 with 73,000 tonnes of Iranian crude for the Madras refinery. The Shipping Corporation of India’s tanker, M.T. “Lal Bahadur Shastri” arrived on August 29, laden up to 46 feet draught and carrying 65,000 tonnes of crude. Prior to the completion of deepening of the outer harbour, ships of draught upto 42 feet only were received. A proposal to deepen the outer harbour further to receive ships of draught upto 49 feet was pending approval of the Government of India, Mr. S.P. Ambrose, Chairman of the Madras Port Trust, told news-men to-day. The Chairman said the construction of the first stage of the fisheries harbour, north of the Bharathi dock, to accommodate 50 trawlers and 500 mechanised fishing boats was expected to be completed by the middle of 1977. The capacity would be increased to receive 160 trawlers and 500 more mechanised boats later. In addition to 35 acres available on the shore now, 60 acres would be reclaimed from the sea to provide facilities like auction and packing halls, cold storage and processing plants. The harbour was designed to handle 40,000 tonnes of sea food per annum initially and 80,000 tonnes subsequently.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 11, 1925

Abolition Of Slavery

Viscount Cecil’s Proposals Submitted to League Committee (Reuter’s Agency.) GENEVA, Sep. 9.

Viscount Cecil, on behalf of Britain, unexpectedly submitted to-day at the League Committee, proposals for the eventual abolition of slavery, including domestic slavery in all parts of the world. No serious objections were raised. But Portuguese and other delegates emphasised the importance of not moving too rapidly. It is understood that the proposals are regarded as the most important of their kind, since the Brussels Act of 1890 and provides severe punishment for anyone attempting to engage in slave traffic in any signatory State and assimilates slave trading with piracy and lays down that the slave vessel shall be treated as a pirate.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The projected decline in revenue of Indian shrimp in FY26

12 in per cent. The U.S. is India's most critical market for frozen shrimp, representing 41% of the export volume and 48% of the value in FY25, India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) said in a report. The US's 50% reciprocal tariff is expected to significantly impact trade flows. PTI

Funds regional parties earned through electoral bonds

70 in per cent. Around 40 regional political parties declared a combined income of ₹2,532.09 crore in the financial year 2023-24, according to an analysis by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). The Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) reported the highest income at ₹685.51 crore. PTI

Odisha's electric vehicle adoption target by 2030

50 in per cent. The Odisha Electric Policy, 2021, came into force in September 2021, with an objective of adopting 20% EVs in the next four years, an official said. "However, the target could not be achieved as only around 9% EV adoption took place during this period," he said. PTI

The death toll from attacks by an Islamist group in Congo

89 The attacks, carried out by the Allied Democratic Force (ADF), are the latest in a series of mass attacks on civilians in the troubled region. The ADF operates in the border region between Congo and Uganda. The ADF pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group in 2019. PTI

Dengue cases linked to climate change in Asia and the Americas

18 in per cent. The 18% translates into more than 4.6 million extra infections per year on average from 1995-2014, researchers said. Under continued global warming, mosquito-borne infectious diseases could climb another 50-76% by 2050. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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What is next for Indian football?

What did the Supreme Court judgment say about the status of the Indian Super League? Why did the Football Sports Development Limited put the 2025-26 season on hold? Has the All India Football Federation ratified its new constitution? Is there a possibility of the FSDL not being the commercial partner this season?

EXPLAINER

N. Sudarshan

The story so far:

In September 1, the Supreme Court of India paved the way for the commencement of the country's top-flight football – the Indian Super League (ISL). Scheduled to begin this month, the premier competition has been in limbo ever since the Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL), organisers of ISL, announced on July 11 that the 2025-26 season will be 'put on hold'. But in a short order – with a detailed judgment to follow – the SC accepted a tentative roadmap presented jointly by the FSDL and the All India Football Federation (AIFF) which will see the season start with the Super Cup in late October, followed by the ISL in December, subject to the consent of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

Why was the ISL put on hold?

In 2010, the AIFF signed a 15-year Master Rights Agreement (MRA) with the FSDL – a joint venture between Reliance Industries and Star Sports – to run the ISL, which eventually kicked off in 2014. The FSDL is AIFF's commercial partner and pays Indian football's custodian an annual sum of ₹50 crore for the right to broadcast, commercialise and manage Indian football, including the national team. But this agreement runs only till December 8, 2025, and though negotiations to finalise new terms went on for months, they remained inconclusive. A deal that will expire midway through the season was deemed undesirable and the organisers decided to suspend operations until there was clarity about the future.

The situation was made more complicated when the SC, back in April, asked both parties not to take any final decision until it pronounces the judgment in a case regarding the formulation of a new constitution for the AIFF. This case



Fresh hope: The Kerala Blasters FC team during a training session in Kochi in 2023. FILE PHOTO

arose out of a judgment passed by the Delhi High Court in 2017 which deemed that the election of AIFF office-bearers was in violation of the National Sports Code. The SC stayed the HC order and called for a new constitution to be drafted. The SC's recent prohibition on any decisive parleys between AIFF and FSDL was essentially to avoid a scenario where the eventual verdict calls for fresh elections and the whole MRA has to be renegotiated by the new AIFF committee.

On August 22, however, after being apprised of the difficulties faced by the stakeholders in the football ecosystem, the SC asked AIFF and FSDL to come up with a "workable arrangement for the smooth functioning of the league(s)". The SC, through last week's order, while making no mention of fresh elections, *prima facie* accepted the joint roadmap

and stated that the "collaborative effort is a significant step in the evolution of Indian football".

What have AIFF and FSDL proposed?

Apart from the provisional dates for starting the season, it has been agreed to "conduct an open, competitive and transparent tender for selection of a commercial partner to conduct the ISL in line with global best practices". This effectively means that there is a chance that the FSDL may cease to be the commercial partner if any other entity outbids it. Additionally, FSDL agreed to "waive its contractual Right of First Negotiation and Right to Match under the Master Rights Agreement dated 08 December 2010" and to issue a No Objection Certificate for the execution of this tender. This process is to wind up

before October 15 and a bid evaluation committee has been formed for the same. FSDL also told the SC that the July-September quarterly rights fee of ₹12.5 crore has been cleared and that it was open to advancing the payment of the final tranche of ₹12.5 crore for the October-December 2025 quarter.

What does the short to medium-term future hold?

Once the tender is floated and a commercial partner finalised, broadcast deals have to be struck and revenue-sharing agreements with clubs drawn. These remain important for clubs to work out their budgets for the season.

While such negotiations progress on one side, authorities will have to deal with the stern ultimatum that the world governing body FIFA and AFC have issued to the AIFF to adopt and ratify its new constitution by October 30. It is to be noted that in August 2022, when the SC appointed a Committee of Administrators (CoA) to temporarily assume charge of AIFF and finalise the new constitution, FIFA suspended the AIFF citing "undue interference by a third party".

A repeat of this episode is unlikely, for the AIFF is now governed by an elected committee, and the SC's detailed judgment ratifying the constitution – as finalised by Justice (Retd.) L. Nageswara Rao after taking into account the comments and suggestions of various stakeholders on the draft version prepared by the CoA – is expected shortly.

The constitution has to be in line with the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, which was passed during the recent monsoon session of Parliament. But the Act, despite receiving Presidential assent, is yet to be notified. The SC had initially kept its judgment pending to ensure that the constitution was in sync with the Sports Governance Act. But in the last hearing, it indicated that it will not wait for the law to be notified after being informed by the Centre's counsel that it could take as many as six months.

THE GIST

▼ In 2010, the AIFF signed a 15-year Master Rights Agreement (MRA) with the FSDL – a joint venture between Reliance Industries and Star Sports – to run the ISL, which eventually kicked off in 2014.

▼ But this agreement runs only till December 8, 2025, and though negotiations to finalise new terms went on for months, they remained inconclusive.

▼ On September 1, the Supreme Court of India paved the way for the commencement of the country's top-flight football – the Indian Super League (ISL).

Why does peace seem so elusive to eastern DRC?

Why is the U.S. interested in entering the region? Why did the ceasefire deal fail?

Anu Maria Joseph

The story so far:

Over the past eight weeks, the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has seen two major developments. On June 27, Rwanda and the DRC signed a U.S.-brokered peace agreement in Washington, DC. On July 19, the Congolese government and M23 rebel group signed a ceasefire deal in Doha, mediated by Qatar. However, days after the U.S.-led peace agreement and Doha ceasefire, M23 resumed its offensive, undermining the peace objectives.

What happened in the U.S. and Doha?

Washington brought the DRC and Rwanda to sign a peace agreement, committing to a cessation of hostilities, respect for territorial integrity, and an end to support for armed groups, including the M23. Both signatories agreed to establish a Joint

Security Coordination Mechanism (JSCM) within 30 days to oversee conflict settlement and an Economic Integration Framework within 90 days to promote licit mineral trade and economic cooperation. The accord also calls for disengagement, disarmament, and conditional integration of armed groups into the Congolese forces. For the DRC, the U.S. entry meant an end to illicit mineral trade; security assistance; and U.S. investment. Rwanda has been accused by the UN and other Western countries of supporting the M23 rebels. The international pressure left Rwanda with no option but to sign the agreement.

Doha mediated directly between the DRC and the non-state armed group, M23. The DRC and M23 rebels signed a Declaration of Principles, agreeing to an immediate ceasefire and commitment to reach a comprehensive peace agreement by August 18. The M23 promised to withdraw from the regions it seized, and

the DRC agreed to release M23 prisoners.

What are the interests of the U.S.?

For the U.S., the deal would give them access to the DRC's \$24 trillion worth of critical mineral reserves. The country possesses 70% of global cobalt reserves, making it the world's largest producer. The region is also popular for its coltan, copper, diamond, gold and tin reserves. Further, U.S. entry into the region would mean an end to Chinese companies' monopoly in the DRC's mineral sector.

Did the peace agreement last?

The Doha ceasefire did not hold for long. M23 continued its offensives in North and South Kivu provinces. The Human Rights Watch reported that the group killed more than 140 people in July. The ceasefire was violated when M23 and DRC failed to adhere to the terms of the agreement. M23 has not withdrawn from the regions it seized, nor has the DRC

released M23 prisoners.

What does it mean for the conflict?

The U.S.'s direct involvement and Qatar's mediation with armed groups have brought hope and opened a gateway toward trust and a lasting peace in eastern DRC. Although the ceasefire was violated, Qatar resumed re-negotiating with the warring sides on August 26. However, DRC's record of previously failed ceasefires and peace efforts signal that commitment and compliance from all actors can never be guaranteed.

Unlike previous peace initiatives, the U.S.-led peace agreement served the security, political and economic interests of the warring parties. The signing of the agreement conveyed an impression of a return to peace in the region, which is far from happening. The conflict in eastern DRC is rooted in unresolved history stemming from the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the subsequent Congo wars, and the tensions between more than a hundred ethnic armed groups, persisting over decades. Although the peace agreement successfully brought Rwanda and DRC to the bargaining table, the root causes of the conflict remain unaddressed. Therefore, for the agreement to succeed, it requires a comprehensive peace process and continued efforts.

The author is a Project Associate at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore.

THE GIST

▼ Washington brought the DRC and Rwanda to sign a peace agreement, committing to a cessation of hostilities, respect for territorial integrity, and an end to support for armed groups, including the M23.

▼ Doha mediated directly between the DRC and the non-state armed group, M23.

▼ The U.S.'s direct involvement and Qatar's mediation with armed groups have brought hope and opened a gateway toward trust and a lasting peace in eastern DRC.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Pine trees from a wood in Himachal Pradesh. GETTY IMAGES

Wood wide web: trees have their own network to preserve life

What is a tree? When were trees born? Three books urge readers to think of trees not as passive, aesthetic entities but as key shapers of the environment. Trees are rain-makers above ground and redistributors of water underground, among other contributions

Sudhirendar Sharma

It is easy to think of trees as passive entities with limited mobility, the essential green in the biodiversity of life. But as new research shows, the environmental benefits of trees – air cleaning, prevention of flooding, sequestration of carbon dioxide – are side-effects of trees’ abilities to shape the environment. There is a tendency to take trees for granted for their environmental and aesthetic values. It is so despite the fact that any of the tree species which have evolved over thousands of years carries a common ecological narrative. Amongst many environmental services on offer, the amazing property of trees is that they can not only bring water down from the sky, but can send it back up as transpiration too.

But to assume that trees have only a limited role is to belittle their existence. Conversely, it is amazing how trees have done more as blind explorers beneath the soil to communicate and cooperate not only with themselves but with other species too. It is only in recent times that this quality is being studied. In the process, trees have emerged as the original terraformers, breaking down barren rock to create soil, channelling water into rivers, and releasing oxygen into an atmosphere previously inhospitable to complex life. Without trees, the earth would have literally been a desert.

This hasn’t been a passive process in itself. Trees have, over millennia, exerted control over fundamental elements – water, air, fire, and the ground beneath.

Element by element, trees have learned to control water, air, fire and the ground beneath, as well as fungi, plants, animals, and even people, shaping them according to their ‘tree-ish’ agenda. According to tree researcher Harriet Rix, (*The Genius of Trees*, 2025, Bodley Head) trees are not victims of change but agents of change in a grand ecological narrative. They are undoubtedly leading actors in the great drama of life on earth. “When modern humans evolved about 40,000 years ago, there were an estimated six trillion trees on the planet. By the time we appeared on the scene, trees had already altered the planet’s air, changed the flow of water, used fire as a tool and built relationships with the plants and animals around them,” writes Rix.

Vital consciousness
Recent scientific research has illuminated the intricate relationship trees maintain with their surroundings. For the better part of almost 400 million years, trees have been some of the largest organisms on land.

While early research highlights the interesting exchange of resources through what is often dubbed the ‘wood wide web’ – some interpretations have ventured into anthropomorphism and human-like emotions being transmitted to trees. How have trees done this is perhaps the story to understand.

Do trees have consciousness? The work of Suzanne Simard (*Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*, 2021, Allen Lane) is worth mentioning here wherein she gives anthropomorphic claims that trees ‘talk’ to and ‘love’ one

another. It is like putting a nurturing mammalian face on to the giants of the forest to unfold the complexities of a system. The arboreal history also reveals how these passive organisms fundamentally reshaped the planet. Billions of years ago, these early plants embarked on an evolutionary journey culminating in the majestic trees that dominate landscapes worldwide.

Trees are more than what they may seem to the naked eye. Recent research has enlisted the role of trees in shaping the crucial elements of the ecosystem viz., water, air, soil, plants, and animals. Although all elements are equally important, trees have an endearing effect on rainfall and water flows above and below them. The anatomy of trees is more tightly engineered than a human body, because rather than moving to avoid drought and flood, trees control their own environment to counter any emerging situation.

Above the ground, trees are rain-makers and under, their roots collect and redistribute water. And in between, the tree can control and use the water within itself. But the core question remains: does water enable the trees or do the trees enable the water? A little bit of both – and when the climate changes around them, trees tend to get better at shaping water.

Innate value
Scientists argue that there is a reason why we find the smell of wood so comforting, and like to press our noses between the pages of books. A little over fifty species of trees constitute ‘divine’ trees – trees

based on our faiths and traditions. Vasudha Rai’s *Sacred: The Mysticism, Science, Recipes and Rituals* (Ebury 2025) does not investigate such divine antecedents but reflects on the values ascribed to trees like peepal, banyan, rudraksha and deodar. Why are these trees considered invaluable? What is the scientific basis of such a belief?

An acclaimed author on wellness, who connects traditions with contemporary living, Rai goes into the science of it. Blending spiritual wisdom with scientific research, she provides new insights on our symbiotic relationship with trees. What makes divine botany interesting is the manner in which it outlines ancient mysticism, modern science, and enlists recipes to build the narrative that helps reconnect with trees.

Exploring and reviving this subject is not without reason. It is about revisiting our reverence for the green cover which has reached such a crescendo that we are devoted to the intangible god but do not respect tangible manifestations of the divine.

In reality, every plant must be seen as sacred because every plant species supports some bacteria, insects, bees, birds and mammals. According to ancient scriptures, every leaf and blade of grass, branch and the trunk is home to nature spirits. There is an ancient tale in which a guru asks his disciple to go into the forest and find a plant that has no use. The disciple comes back empty-handed because he cannot find a single plant that had no use.

Sudhirendar Sharma is an independent writer, researcher and academic.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

“The roads are really bad, aren’t they?”
“Yes, the rain has caused many damages.”
“The rain has caused much damage. The word ‘damage’ doesn’t take ‘many’ before it. It is preceded by ‘much’.”
“I see. So, is it O.K to say the fast bowlers caused much damage on the wet pitch?”
“Sounds O.K. to me. Here’s another example. The earthquake didn’t cause much damage.”
“I cannot say, the earthquake didn’t cause much damages, right?”
“You’re right.”
“I see. Sujatha called Gopa a ‘blockhead’ the other day. What does it mean?”
“Why don’t you guess.”
“Considering the fact that Sujatha and Gopa hate each other, I would say it’s not something complimentary.”
“Go on.”
“Does blockhead mean an idiot or something?”
“Good guess. When you call someone a ‘blockhead’ you’re saying that he/she is stupid. It’s an informal word. For example, my old boss was a blockhead.”
“Is your new boss a blockhead too?”
“Don’t be a blockhead. I am definitely not going to tell you if my new boss is a blockhead or not.”
“Which probably means that he is a blockhead.”
“I didn’t say that!”
“You didn’t have to! But tell me, where does the word blockhead come from?”
“There was a time when wigs were fashionable in Europe..”
“...I want to know where the word ‘blockhead’ comes from. I’m not interested in wigs.”
“Patience, my dear friend, patience!”
“I don’t have much of that. Please, continue.”
“As I was saying, in the good old days wearing wigs was a fashion. And what do you think a person did with a wig when he wasn’t wearing it?”
“He probably kept it in his cupboard.”
“If he did that then the wig would have lost its shape. And the owner would have had a problem wearing it.”
“So what did the owner do so that the wig didn’t lose its shape?”
“He placed it on a block of wood that was shaped like his head.”
“I see. Since the block of wood was shaped like the owner’s head, I guess it helped retain the shape of the wig.”
“Exactly! And because this block of wood was shaped like a human head, it was called a blockhead.”
“That makes sense. So, a blockhead is actually something on which you place a wig.”
“Yes, that’s right.”
“And since this block of wood had nothing inside it, the word blockhead began to be applied to those who didn’t have anything inside their heads.”
“Precisely! You’re pretty smart. You’re not a blockhead after all!”
Published in *The Hindu* on January 27, 1998.

THE DAILY QUIZ

On the 208th birth anniversary of Carl Zeiss, the German optician whose name became synonymous with precision lenses, here’s a quiz on his life, work and legacy

Prathmesh Kher

- QUESTION 1**
What was the first product manufactured in Carl Zeiss's workshop in Jena?
- QUESTION 2**
Which mathematician cum physicist did Zeiss bring in during the 1860s to apply theoretical science to microscope design?
- QUESTION 3**
What unusual policy did Zeiss impose regarding microscopes that failed to meet quality standards?
- QUESTION 4**
Carl Zeiss provided two major welfare measures for his workers long before they became common in industry. Name them.
- QUESTION 5**
What was Carl Zeiss's declared philosophy regarding the relationship between craftsmanship and science in instrument making?



Visual question:
What is the connection between this movie still and Carl Zeiss?

- Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:** 1. The term when a player wins the four majors in all three disciplines a player is eligible for. **Ans: Boxed set**
2. In the history of men's tennis, only these two players have won the calendar Grand Slam. **Ans: Don Budge, Rod Laver**
3. Only these two players have achieved a "Surface Slam". **Ans: Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal**
4. The only player who has won a non-calendar year grand slam. **Ans: Novak Djokovic**
5. This female tennis player equals Novak Djokovic with 24 grand slam singles wins. **Ans: Margaret Court**
6. This player went almost six years without a loss on clay. **Ans: Chris Evert**
Visual: Identify this player. **Ans: Maureen Connolly; she is the only player in history to win a title without losing a set at all four major championships**
Early Bird: Apoorva K.C.

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

Word of the day

Conscientious:
characterised by extreme care and great effort; guided by or in accordance with conscience or sense of right and wrong

Synonyms: painstaking, scrupulous

Usage: It was a conscientious decision to speak out about injustice.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/conscientiouspro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˌkɒnʃɪˈɛnʃəs/

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



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Himachal declared ‘fully literate’: what does this mean?

ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 10

EARLIER THIS week, Himachal Pradesh was declared a ‘fully literate’ state — the fifth such state/Union Territory after Goa, Ladakh, Mizoram, and Tripura.

None of these, however, have 100% literacy. Himachal claims to have a literacy rate of 99.3%, Goa 99.72%, Mizoram 98.2%, Tripura 95.6%, and Ladakh 97%. So what does it mean to be ‘fully literate’?

How is literacy defined?

The Ministry of Education defines literacy as “the ability to read, write, and compute with comprehension i.e., to identify, understand, interpret and create, along with critical life skills such as digital literacy, financial literacy etc.” It defines ‘full literacy’ as “achieving 95% literacy in a State/UT”.

The Ministry communicated these definitions to states/UTs last August. It felt the need to define these terms for ULLAS (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society), a literacy programme for people over 15 who may not have attended school.

The ULLAS program was launched in 2022 with the aim of achieving 100% literacy by 2030, which is one the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN. The program is also in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 which calls for adult education initiatives to achieve 100% literacy.

How does an individual attain ‘literacy’?

Under the ULLAS program, adult learners are taught basic reading, writing, and math (arithmetic like addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) that a child in school would learn up to class 3. They are also taught how to read and measure time, make sense of calendars, use currency notes, write cheques,

OTHER ADULT LITERACY SCHEMES

ULLAS is latest of govt initiatives to promote adult literacy from 1950s onward

■ In 1960s-70s, the Centre and several states ran programs targeting literacy among farmers and women.

■ The National Literacy Mission, which ran from 1988 to 2009, also targeted this age bracket.

■ The National Adult Education Programme was launched in 1978 to eliminate illiteracy in 15-35 group.

■ ‘Saakshar Bharat’ (Literate India) mission ran from 2009-18. Meant for ages 15 and above, it also focused on functional literacy and numeracy.

and safely make digital transactions.

This training is provided either through a mobile app or offline, by students or community volunteers. Then, the Functional Literacy Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT), a 150-mark reading, writing and numeracy test, is administered in the person’s chosen language.

On passing the test, the learner is certified by the National Institute of Open

Schooling (NIOS) as having acquired foundational literacy and numeracy.

How does a state become ‘fully literate’?

To learn who requires training under the ULLAS program, states conduct door-to-door surveys, or rely on other data. (More later.) Those identified as not being literate are given requisite training and administered FLNAT.

The key to some states/UTs receiving the ‘fully literate’ tag is that the adults they identified as not being literate have cleared the FLNAT. This relies on their prior estimates of the number of people who are not literate.

In States/UTs where literacy levels (as per the 2011 Census) are already high, or where the population is relatively small, the process of identifying people who are not literate, imparting training, and making them clear the FLNAT works faster.

As per the Census of 2011, Goa had a literacy rate of 88.7%, Himachal Pradesh 82.8%, Mizoram 91.3%, and Tripura 87.2% — well above the country average of 74%.

How has literacy been measured so far?

For the 2011 Census, any person aged 7 and above who could read and write with understanding in any language was considered literate. Among women, the literacy rate was 64.6%; for men it was 80.9%. The Census also measured adult literacy — for those aged 15 and above — for which the national figure

was 69.3%. Since the 2011 Census, sample surveys by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation have been used to measure literacy.

■ The National Sample Survey (NSS) 71st round (Jan-June 2014) showed an adult literacy rate of 71%. For Goa, this figure was 90%, while it was 83% in Himachal Pradesh, 96% in Mizoram, and 86% in Tripura. The NSS uses a similar definition for literacy as the Census — of being able to read and write with understanding in any language.

■ The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2023-24 showed a national literacy rate of 77.5% (aged 7 and above; similar definition of literacy as Census). For Tripura, this was 93.7%, for Mizoram 98.2%, for Goa 93.6%, and for Himachal 88.8%.

The report estimated that 22.3% of people aged 15 and above were not literate. This figure was 2.2% in Mizoram, 7.3% in Goa, 7.4% in Tripura, and 12.7% in Himachal. It was the highest in Bihar (33.1%) followed by Andhra Pradesh (31.5%) and Madhya Pradesh (28.9%).

EXPLAINED HEALTH

AUTISM RISK: IS PARACETAMOL SAFE TO TAKE DURING PREGNANCY?

US HEALTH Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr plans to announce a link between autism and prenatal exposure to the popular over-the-counter pain and fever medicine Tylenol, sold generically as acetaminophen in the United States and paracetamol in the UK (and India).

What does scientific research say on paracetamol use during pregnancy?

There is no firm evidence of a link between the use of the drug and autism. Recent studies have yielded conflicting conclusions on whether its use during pregnancy might create risks for a developing foetus.

A 2024 study of nearly 2.5 million children in Sweden found no causal link between in utero exposure to paracetamol and neurodevelopmental disorders like autism spectrum disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

A 2025 review of 46 earlier studies did suggest a link between prenatal paracetamol exposure and increased risks of these conditions, but the researchers from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, Harvard University, and others said the study does not prove the drug caused the outcomes.

They advised that pregnant women should continue to use paracetamol as needed, at the lowest possible dose and for the shortest possible period.

Large 2025 studies from Europe and Japan have suggested that what might appear to be small associations between prenatal paracetamol use and neurodevelopmental disorders might actually be due to confounders, that is, other underlying factors — such as environmental conditions, parents’ health and genetics, other medications the mothers may have been taking, and illness.

What are the medical guidelines for pregnant women?

Paracetamol is the recommended first-line medication for pain and fever during pregnancy in guidelines from the



US Secretary of Health Robert F Kennedy Jr on Tuesday. *The NYT*

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Britain’s Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and other medical organisations.

Use of ibuprofen, naproxen and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs in the third trimester can lead to birth defects, both societies warn.

Pregnant women should talk to their doctor if they plan to take any of these medications, ACOG advises.

What are the risks of not reducing fever during pregnancy?

Untreated maternal fever and pain during foetal development can increase the risks of birth defects such as heart conditions, abdominal wall defects, and neural tube defects in which the brain and spinal cord do not form properly. Untreated pain and fever has also been linked with preterm birth, low birth weight, and miscarriage.

In pregnant women, untreated fever and pain can cause high blood pressure, dehydration, depression and anxiety, and other health problems.

REUTERS

EXPERT EXPLAINS



BASHIR ALI ABBAS

ISRAELI JETS struck a target in Doha on Tuesday, making Qatar the seventh country Israel has bombed since October 2023.

In a public statement, Israel said it had targeted a Hamas delegation that Qatar was hosting as part of ongoing negotiations with Israel and the United States.

At the time of the attack, Hamas leaders were meeting to discuss their response to the latest ceasefire proposal from Washington. The strike killed five Hamas members and a member of Qatar’s internal security, but reportedly failed to kill Hamas’ core negotiating team.

“If we didn’t get them this time, we’ll get them the next time,” Yechiel Leiter, Israel’s ambassador to the US, told *Fox News* on Tuesday.

This is the first time that Israel has attacked a Gulf Arab state directly, and one that is a US ally and hosts the largest American military base in the Middle East (Al-Udeid).

Israel’s calculation

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu justified the airstrike as retaliation for a shoot-in in Jerusalem on September 8, and as part of Israel’s operation to eliminate Hamas after the terrorist attacks of October 7, 2023.

However, the targets, location, and timing of the strike, and the risk involved in the unprecedented attack on a US ally, point to a larger Israeli rationale.

Israel has been violently disrupting US negotiations with third parties that it is hostile to, by targeting the negotiators.

It attacked Iran in June — when the US was in the midst of nuclear negotiations with the Tehran regime — and rationalised the attack as strengthening the American bargaining position by weakening Iran’s. US-Iran negotiations are yet to resume.

After the Doha attack — for which Israel took “full responsibility” — Netanyahu informed President Donald Trump that Israel sought peace, and that the attack would help achieve that aim. Trump said Israel’s attack did “not advance Israel or America’s goals”, but eliminating Hamas was “a worthy objective”.

Like in the case of Iran, here too the Trump Administration regretted Israel’s actions and asserted US non-involvement, but



Smoke rises from the target of the Israeli airstrike on Doha on Tuesday. On Wednesday evening, Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed “deep concern” and “condemn[ed] the violation of the sovereignty of the brotherly State of Qatar”. *AP*

retroactively deemed them acceptable.

The Doha strike also confirms Netanyahu’s strong disinclination for a ceasefire in Gaza, even one imposed by the US. An acceptance by Hamas of the US proposal this week would in theory enable a second ceasefire this year.

The first three-phase ceasefire sealed in January was breached by Israel in March after it alleged Hamas had deviated from the terms of the agreement, and launched a fresh offensive to take over larger parts of the Gaza Strip.

Tuesday’s attack in Doha came three days after Israel launched an operation to take over Gaza City, one of the last remaining urban areas in the South of the enclave where more than a million famine-stricken Palestinians have been forced to seek refuge following earlier Israeli orders to evacuate the North.

This tactic goes together with Israel’s strategy of taking over the remaining Palestinian territories. Any break in the military effort will create space for greater global pressure to halt such expansion — and Israel has no assurance that it will get such an opportunity again.

In May, Netanyahu had asserted that the war in Gaza would continue even if the hostages were released, since Israel’s goal was the complete elimination of Hamas. In the last week of August, more than 15,000 Israelis protested in the streets against the Prime Minister’s approach towards the release of the hostages. Netanyahu, though, seems to have assessed that the benefits from a disruption in ceasefire negotiations outweigh the risks of attacking a US ally in the Gulf.

Qatar’s perspective

The Prime Minister of Qatar described the unprecedented violation of Qatari sovereignty as “state terrorism”, and asserted that a “pivotal moment” had been reached, which required “a response from the entire region to such barbaric actions”.

Qatar, he said, was “a mediator state officially hosting negotiations and delegations from the state which launched missiles at the negotiating delegation from the other side”, and demanded to know how the Israeli action could be acceptable.

Qatar’s focus on its mediating role is important — Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani had met with the Hamas delegation the day before the Israeli attack to press for a ceasefire. Qatar hosts the Hamas leadership not only out of its desire to be a successful regional mediator, but also at the behest of Israel and the US. The first Trump administration had used Qatar’s good offices to negotiate with the Taliban the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

More than disrupting the negotiations for a ceasefire in Gaza, the Israeli airstrike undermines Qatar’s longstanding reputation as a secure and discreet facilitator of difficult and sensitive negotiations. This reputation has been key to Qatar’s international buy-in as Doha has risked its ties with other Gulf Arab states in the past to maintain critical relationships across regional faultlines (such as the Iranian government, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, or Hamas in Gaza).

How does the Israeli airstrike differ from

Iran’s attack on the Al-Udeid base in June?

Iran’s attack was symbolic retaliation for the US-Israeli strikes, to preserve the credibility of Tehran’s deterrence, and carried out with sufficient advance warning. There was also tacit recognition that the Iranian missiles would be intercepted before they hit Al-Udeid — and Qatar’s interceptions were successful.

Iran had also issued repeated assurances that it did not intend to cause damage to the “brotherly State of Qatar”.

Israel’s attack, on the other hand, was substantive, with declared intention to cause damage to Qatari facilities hosting the Hamas delegation. Advance warnings would be counter-productive to such an offensive mission. Iran avoided risk, while Israel absorbed it.

Fallout in the region

Qatar has “reserved its right to respond” to Israel’s attacks. Most Arab and other states have condemned the Israeli action, and Saudi Arabia has pledged to place “all capabilities” at Qatar’s disposal to respond to the “brutal Israeli aggression”.

But the scale of any Qatari response, if it occurs at all, will be limited or symbolic. Qatar is well integrated into the US military system in the Middle East, and has invested considerable resources in cultivating greater confidence within the Trump Administration (such as gifting the President a Boeing 747).

However, Israel’s confidence and capabilities to undertake such an attack would reinforce the two-year-old learning for Qatar and other regional Arab states that Israel now has disproportionate power and agency to unilaterally reshape the region.

On Wednesday, the Knesset Speaker posted an image of the Doha strike on X and announced that “this is a message to all of the Middle East”. For Gulf Arab states that spent the last decade balancing against Iran, which too, held disproportionate influence through its proxy networks, Israel would now appear as the power that needs counterbalancing.

The assault on Gaza has drawn global condemnation, and more states are increasingly displaying a willingness to also sanction and censure Israel, the latest being Spain. Blocs such as the European Union have usually tended to see sanctions as disturbing the route to a mediated solution. But the attack in Doha could have implications beyond the question of Qatari or Arab retaliation.

Bashir Ali Abbas is a Senior Research Associate at the Council for Strategic and Defense Research, New Delhi

How geotagging of buildings will work during Census, how it will help

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 10

INDIA’S NEXT Census, which will be conducted in 2027 after a delay of six years, will include many firsts — it will be the first Census to be conducted digitally; for the first time, people will have the option of self-enumeration; and members of individual castes will be counted for the first time since 1931.

Also, all buildings across India will be geotagged — never before has such an exercise been undertaken as part of India’s decennial population Census.

What is meant by geotagging?

It is the process of marking the latitude-longitude coordinates of buildings on a Geographic Information System (GIS) map. GIS is a computer system that captures, checks, and displays data on specific positions on the surface of the Earth.

Latitudes and longitudes are imaginary lines that are used to determine the location of a place on the globe. Latitudes (or ‘parallels’) are horizontal lines that indicate the north-south distance of a place from the equator; longitudes (‘meridians’) are vertical north-south lines that determine the east-west distance of a place from the prime meridian, which passes through Greenwich, UK.

Together, lines of latitude and longitude imagine a grid on the surface of the Earth. Any location can be described by the point where a specific latitude and longitude intersect.

Geotagging provides a building with a precise and unique locational identity that can be pinpointed with accuracy.

How many ‘buildings’ does India have?

Census 2011 defined a ‘Census House’ as “a building or part of a building used or recognized as a separate unit because of having a separate main entrance from the road or common courtyard or staircase etc”.

CENSUS BASICS

THE POPULATION CENSUS has been conducted since 1872;

2027 CENSUS will be the 16th such exercise, and the eighth since Independence.

A RANGE OF DATA, including data on housing conditions, amenities and assets, demography, religion, language, literacy and education, economic activity, migration, fertility, etc., are collected along with the headcount of individuals at the village, town, and ward levels.



INDIA’S POPULATION was 1.21 billion as of March 1, 2011. It is now estimated to have become the most populous nation in the world.

A Census House may be occupied or vacant; it may be used for residential or non-

residential purposes, or for both.

The last Census (2011) recorded 330.84

million houses in India, of which 306.16 million were occupied and 24.67 million were vacant. 220.70 million houses were in rural areas, and 110.14 million were in urban areas.

How will the geotagging take place?

Geotagging will be done during the Houselisting Operations (HLO), the first phase of the Census, which is scheduled for April-September 2026. (The second phase is of Population Enumeration (PE), during which demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural data of individuals will be collected.)

It is learnt that enumerators will visit buildings in the Houselisting Blocks (HLBs) assigned to them, and geotag each building using Digital Layout Mapping (DLM). Enumerators can switch on the current location on their smartphones and list the building using the mobile application.

An HLB is “a well-defined area in a village or in a ward of the town which can be clearly demarcated on the ground and for which a notional map is drawn for the purpose of the Census Operations”.

Data will be collected on the number of Census Houses and Households residing in each building. Buildings will be classified in categories such as ‘residential’, ‘non-residential’, ‘partly residential’, and ‘landmark’.

Census 2011 defined a ‘household’ as a group of persons who normally live together and take their meals from a common kitchen, unless the exigencies of work prevent any of them from doing so.

How will the geotagging help?

According to sources, geotagging will help to accurately estimate the number of Census houses and households requiring enumeration, thus improving workload management across field functionaries.

In earlier Censuses, notional sketches were drawn by hand as part of the houselisting exercise.

However, the government has been using geotags on a smaller scale — for example, assets such as houses constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana -Gramin and PMAY-Urban are geotagged.



THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE
ONLY THE DEAD HAVE SEEN THE END OF WAR.
— GEORGE SANTAYANA

The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE NEW V-P

To clear his predecessor's shadow, Radhakrishnan should let himself be guided by the Constitution — and nothing but

THE ELECTION OF the 15th Vice President of India, the second highest constitutional post in the country, took place under a lingering shadow. Chandrapuram Ponnusamy Radhakrishnan comes to the office even as speculation is yet to die down about the unusual and unceremonious exit of his predecessor Jagdeep Dhankhar. Midway in a term scheduled to end in 2027, almost mid-sentence on the opening day of the Monsoon Session of Parliament, Dhankhar resigned, citing health reasons that were widely seen to be unpersuasive. The unmistakable impression was that his exit had to do with losing the trust of the government that had appointed him. Even after being seen to conspicuously play by the ruling establishment's script in taking on the Opposition in Rajya Sabha, and the judiciary outside it, Dhankhar apparently was not deemed to be loyal or amenable enough eventually. V-P Radhakrishnan takes over in a difficult moment, therefore, when questions still swirl about the space for manoeuvre, and more importantly, the limits of his high constitutional office in a time of sharpening political polarisation and a take-no-prisoners political executive.

Radhakrishnan traces his political lineage to the RSS, and has had a long and varied experience in public life subsequently — as the BJP's Tamil Nadu chief, as a two-term Lok Sabha MP from Coimbatore, as governor of Jharkhand and Maharashtra most recently. In all these roles, he has earned a reputation of being the affable consensus-builder, and for an ability to make friends across the political divides fluently. As Vice President, Radhakrishnan will need to carry with him these qualities, and particularly the learnings from his tenure in the Raj Bhawan, also an office circumscribed by the demands and constraints of constitutional propriety. In the wake of Dhankhar's abrupt exit, it may seem that the V-P's main challenge will be to calibrate his relationship with the government in turbulent times, keep it on even keel while not looking over his shoulder constantly. But Radhakrishnan cannot lose sight of his primary responsibility: As chairperson of Rajya Sabha, the burden of fair and impartial conduct of the proceedings of the House, in which the Opposition is given a voice and a hearing, will be on him.

To be sure, it will be a tightrope walk. The new V-P must navigate the demands of his office under a third-term government wielding a stern loyalty test, in a time when the lines between government and opposition have hardened, and the spaces for independent and mediating institutions are shrinking. He must keep his equanimity and, more importantly, let the constitutional mandate — and only the constitutional mandate — guide him through thick and thin. Welcome, Vice President Radhakrishnan, and best wishes.

STRIKING AT WILL

Israel's attack on Qatar underlines that Netanyahu government has little regard for international opinion or domestic dissent

ISRAEL'S STRIKES INSIDE Qatar, which have drawn global criticism, deal a hammer blow to any realistic prospect of ending the war in Gaza soon. The operation in Doha targeted Hamas's negotiating team, which had convened to discuss the latest US ceasefire proposal, President Donald Trump's "last warning". Hamas has confirmed six deaths, but it has also said that the group's leadership has survived. The attack is a sign that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is doubling down on eliminating Hamas completely, instead of focusing on a negotiated settlement that can ensure the return of the remaining Israeli hostages. Immediately after the strike, The Hostages and Missing Families Forum in Israel said they are worried about the price the hostages may have to pay.

Trump has voiced his unhappiness and insisted that Netanyahu has acted unilaterally. Qatar, after all, is no ordinary country: A tiny but wealthy Gulf state, it is a key US ally and hosts the largest American military base in the Middle East. The Qatari government condemned the attack as a "clear breach of the rules and principles of international law." Netanyahu, however, has defended it as a targeted move on Hamas's political leadership, in retaliation for the recent Jerusalem shooting that killed six people and an assault on an Israeli army camp in Gaza that left four soldiers dead. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter explicitly prohibits the use of force against the "territorial integrity or political independence" of another state. And without UNSC authorisation, Israel's actions appear to constitute a violation of sovereignty and an act of aggression under international law. But over the past two years, Israel has shown little regard for the rules, executing strikes against multiple nations like Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq that almost certainly violate international law, at will.

The latest attack comes against the backdrop of three simultaneous developments. First, the planned offensive of the IDF to seize what it claims is Hamas's last remaining stronghold in Gaza, where thousands continue to endure hunger. Second, the mounting protests inside Israel demanding an end to the war and a deal to immediately secure the release of the remaining hostages. Third, the opening of the UN General Assembly this week, where major Western nations, like the UK, France, Australia, Belgium, and Canada, are expected to follow through on their pledge to recognise the State of Palestine. If Israel's strike on Qatar signals anything, it is that the Netanyahu government has little regard for either international opinion or domestic dissent. Its overriding objective appears to be the continuation of the war and its expansion to new fronts.

INDIA VS REST

They may be favourites to win, but at this Asia Cup, Suryakumar Yadav and his team will also be on test

A COUPLE OF months after India won the 1983 World Cup, some Asian countries came together to form the Asian Cricket Conference (Conference would later change to Council). It was decided that the first international cricket tournament to be played outside the purview of the International Cricket Council would be the Asia Cup in 1984. It's apt that this event returns to the UAE, for it was in Sharjah that the first edition was played. Perhaps for the first time, India stands as an overwhelming favourite to win this year.

In the initial years of the tournament, it was thought that the main contest would be between Pakistan and India. But in its first 12 years, Sri Lanka and India won the trophy five times apiece, with Pakistan winning just twice. After the early years of the tournament, things changed and these days, the gap between India and the rest seems like a deep chasm. That isn't surprising considering India has numerous state-level T20 leagues feeding talent into the IPL, the Big Daddy of T20 in world cricket.

Though it looks strong on paper, this Indian team is relatively young and new. It's the first big T20 tournament without the likes of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli or Ravindra Jadeja. It's the first big event for captain Suryakumar Yadav, and though he has been leading successfully for a while now, his hold on the team will be tested with the inclusion of Shubman Gill, the Test captain, into the squad. India don't have an ODI captain as yet as they haven't played a game after Rohit Sharma lifted the Champions Trophy and considering Suryakumar doesn't always find a place in the ODIs, it's expected that Gill might be given that role. That leaves Suryakumar holding the reins in T20 for now, and a triumph in Asia Cup will enable him to lead India in the T20 world cup early next year. Of course, if they don't win here, it might well set the cat amongst the pigeons.



THAROOR THINK

BY SHASHI THAROOR

IN THE EVER-SHIFTING theatre of international diplomacy, moments of quiet recalculation often speak louder than grand pronouncements. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Beijing — his first in seven years — and his meeting with President Xi Jinping on the margins of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, may not have yielded dramatic breakthroughs, but it marked something far more valuable: A deliberate pivot from confrontation to conversation.

Five years ago, the tragic loss of 20 Indian lives in the Galwan Valley cast a long shadow over Sino-Indian relations. The border, unresolved and volatile, became a metaphor for the broader diplomatic freeze. Trade slowed, flights ceased, and the spirit of "Chindia" — that hopeful portmanteau coined in header times to capture the promise of Asian synergy — was shelved in surrender to strategic suspicion. But today, the machinery of engagement is whirring once more.

The symbolism is unmistakable. Indian pilgrims have returned to Hindu and Buddhist sites in Tibet. Direct flights are resuming. Visa restrictions are easing. Patrolling has resumed on our disputed frontier. Both nations are orchestrating a flurry of high-level exchanges to formalise the thaw. These gestures, though modest, are not without meaning. They signal a shared intent to move beyond the recriminations of the past and to reimagine a relationship that has too often been defined by its fault lines.

India and China share a rich tapestry of historical engagement that stretches back over two millennia, the era of the Golden Road and the Silk Road, which served as conduits not only for trade in silk, spices, and precious stones, but also for profound cultural and religious exchange. Buddhism, born in India, found fertile ground in China through the travels of monks and scholars, while ancient Indian texts like the *Arthashastra* referenced Chinese goods, attesting to early awareness and interaction. Chinese students studied at Nalanda, and an Indian monk, Bodhidharma, took martial

Modi-Xi meeting hints at a new chapter after years of silence. But old mistrust and new asymmetries persist

At the heart of the Modi-Xi dialogue was a reaffirmation of a principle that ideally ought to be self-evident but has long been elusive: That India and China can be development partners, not just rivals. The assertion that 'differences should not turn into disputes' is more than diplomatic boilerplate — it represents a conscious effort to de-escalate the dominant rhetoric since 2020, when it was all 'Hindi-Chini bye-bye'. In an era of global volatility, where trade wars flare and alliances shift with alarming speed, such clarity is welcome.

Of course, the spectre of American tariffs looms large over this rapprochement. President Donald Trump's stinging levies — 30 per cent on Chinese goods, with threats of escalation to 145 per cent, and a punishing 50 per cent on Indian exports — have jolted New Delhi into reconsidering its strategic calculus. India, once courted as a prized partner, now finds itself labelled a "laundromat for the Kremlin" by Washington's trade hawks. The economic fallout is real: Exporters face closure, jobs have been lost and more hang in the balance, and the promise of preferential treatment lies in tatters.

In this context, China's overtures — welcoming Indian commodities, fast-tracking

arts to the famed Shaolin Temple in China.

Fast forward to the mid-20th century, and the spirit of cooperation was rekindled as both nations emerged from colonial shadows into sovereign statehood. India was among the first non-communist countries to recognise the People's Republic of China, and the 1940s and 1950s saw vibrant exchanges in science, education, and diplomacy, with both countries participating in landmark events like the Asian Relations Conference (1947) and the Bandung Conference (1955), in which Jawaharlal Nehru's India took it upon itself to introduce Communist China to the world. Despite later tensions, this era was marked by mutual respect and the optimism of "Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai", laying the groundwork for a relationship that, even today, seeks to balance ancient affinities with modern aspirations.

At the heart of the Modi-Xi dialogue was a reaffirmation of a principle that ideally ought to be self-evident but has long been elusive: That India and China can be development partners, not just rivals. The assertion that "differences should not turn into disputes" is more than diplomatic boilerplate — it represents a conscious effort to de-escalate the dominant rhetoric since 2020, when it was all "Hindi-Chini bye-bye". In an era of global volatility, where trade wars flare and alliances shift with alarming speed, such clarity is welcome.

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In this context, China's overtures — welcoming Indian commodities, fast-tracking

investments, and publicly rebuking American "bullying" — are not merely opportunistic. They reflect a recognition that Asia's two largest economies must find common cause in a multipolar world. Strategic autonomy, a theme both leaders underscored, is not just a slogan; it is a necessity.

Yet, we must temper optimism with realism. The border remains a tinderbox, with no progress on de-escalation to the *status quo ante* of April 2020, even while both sides promise progress toward a permanent border agreement. Our massive trade deficit with China persists and is compounded by huge non-tariff barriers imposed on Indian companies. The structural asymmetries in the relationship — military, economic, and political — cannot be wished away.

Just recently the exodus of over 300 Chinese engineers from Foxconn's pivotal iPhone 17 manufacturing facilities in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka revealed how painfully Beijing could squeeze our ambitions. China has leveraged its dominance in rare-earth production and processing by restricting exports of rare earths and rare-earth magnets, which are crucial for electric vehicles and electronics, to India. It has also imposed trade restrictions on the export of high-end capital equipment, including for electronics assembly and other sectors, heavy-duty tunnel boring machines and solar equipment, severely impacting India. The real test lies not in the symbolism of summits but in the substance of sustained cooperation.

Still, there is reason to hope. The resumption of dialogue, the restoration of people-to-people ties, and the shared commitment to multilateralism suggest that India and China are willing to engage — not as antagonists, but as interlocutors. In a world increasingly defined by zero-sum thinking, that alone is a victory.

The spirit of "Chindia", it seems, is stirring once more. Slowly and cautiously, but unmistakably. Let us hope it endures.

The writer chairs the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs



RAKESH SINHA

THE ELEGANT OBSERVER

Sankarshan Thakur's journalism stood out for its depth and empathy

IN 2014, ON a muggy August afternoon in Kathmandu, we found ourselves in a roadside cafe, staring at pints of Carlsberg on the table. We had been shooved away from the street below where security men were taking no chances to let Narendra Modi's cavalcade pass, the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Nepal in 17 years.

As we waited, wondering what should be the highlight of the day's dispatch, Sankarshan Thakur, who had once been a colleague at *The Indian Express*, asked if I had read Barbara Kingsolver. Only one, *The Poisonwood Bible*, I said. *Demon Copperhead* was still eight years away. For a few minutes, we let our thoughts drift to the Price family in faraway Congo, forgetting what we were here for. We need to write, he said. He asked me to look up Kingsolver's 2008 speech at Duke University. I did, months later. I made a note of thanking him, but never did.

There are writers and then there are writers. Sankarshan was in the latter category. And with his passing today, a certain elegance is gone.

Memory is only a little about memorising, he would say. Writing in *The Telegraph*, the newspaper he was to edit later, Sankarshan recalled his mother's memory of his father Janardan Thakur, the author and journalist, who had passed away in

1999. He wrote that he would often see his mother looking at him "almost as if she were looking at someone else and I just happened to be in the way." He said she told him, "It isn't you, it's your father."

We met again in Kathmandu in 2015 when a devastating quake destroyed large parts of the city and country. He said he had been writing, *The Brothers Bihari*, where he had put together his earlier works on Lalu Prasad and Nitish Kumar, was due for release ahead of the Bihar Assembly elections that year. That conversation ended quickly. We got back to reporting the dead and the misery and the sorrow of the living. I remember his line about the banks of the Bagmati running out of ground to stack pyres.

Be it Kashmir or Bihar, in the turmoil and politics that he captured so well to tell an India story, his reportage stood out. For the richness of details, the portrayal of characters, the ominous warnings of what could follow. Knowing him, however fleeting our meetings, this was one Bihar election he would have loved to write on. That was not to be.

Being with him was also fun. I recall one episode from that 2014 trip to Kathmandu when Modi travelled to Nepal. Waiting for word on the outcome of the meetings, we

stopped an official to inquire what had transpired. He told us to wait for the formal statement. But before he walked away, he said India would be extending an LOC to Nepal.

A young reporter for an Indian TV channel, who seemed to be new to the profession and not prepared for the assignment she had been thrown into, turned to Sankarshan and asked him why India would want to extend the LoC to Nepal. With a straight face, he told her something on these lines: "Terrible, isn't it? Pakistan would be so upset, and China so angry." She nodded in agreement. Alarmed that she may air it, I told him, "Stop it. She may put it out." Sankarshan then broke it to her gently: This LOC is a Line of Credit to Nepal, not the Line of Control with Pakistan.

That episode stayed with us, and he would bring it up each time we met. Everyone whose lives he touched will miss him, remember him for the warmth he exuded, his gentle gaze, the firmness with which he would call a spade a spade, and the richness of the conversations he would have even with people he didn't exactly know. And I, for one, will also remember him for introducing me to the world of Kingsolver.

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SEPTEMBER 11, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

J&K HOUSE IGNORES HC

THE JAMMU AND Kashmir Assembly, by a majority vote, decided to ignore the directions of the state High Court to allow three Opposition members to participate in the proceedings of the House. There were heated exchanges and two walkouts by National Conference (Farooq) members, according to whom the action of suspension of the three members contravened the rules of procedure of the House.

NO ILLEGALS IN ASSAM

THE BANGLADESH FOREIGN Minister, Humayun Rashed Choudhury, once again de-

nied the presence of "any illegal Bangladeshis in Assam". He said Indira Gandhi had announced in Parliament in 1972 that all refugees who had gone to India returned to Bangladesh. "So, quoting the Indian Prime Minister we can say that there are no Bangladesh nationals in India," he said. He also added, "There is no evidence that illegal immigrants from Assam are being pushed into Bangladesh."

INDIANS KILLED IN UK

AT LEAST THREE persons, believed to be Indians, were burnt to death during arson and looting in Birmingham's Handsworth area where renewed violence erupted during a

visit by the British Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd. A fourth person was also killed in the riots which resulted in the destruction of about 50 shops and residences, almost all of them belonging to Asians.

HERMES FOR INDIA

BRITAIN'S FLAGSHIP in the Falklands war with Argentina, the aircraft carrier HMS Hermes, may be given to the Indian Navy as a bonus for a multi-million-pound arms deal. Senior officers from the Indian Navy are due in Portsmouth to attend the Royal Navy exhibition. They will be looking at British defence hardware, including Sea Harrier vertical-take-off jets for India's aircraft carrier, the Vikrant.



The IDEAS PAGE

Wisdom and trust

Mohan Bhagwat has steered the RSS through complex currents, never compromising on the core ideology. At the same time, he has overseen its evolution



NARENDRA MODI

TODAY IS SEPTEMBER 11. The day evokes two contrasting remembrances. The first dates back to 1893, when Swami Vivekananda delivered his iconic Chicago address. With the words, “Sisters and Brothers of America,” he won the hearts of the thousands present in the hall. He introduced the timeless spiritual heritage of India and its emphasis on universal brotherhood on the world stage. The second is when this very principle came under attack from the menace of terrorism and radicalism, on 9/11.

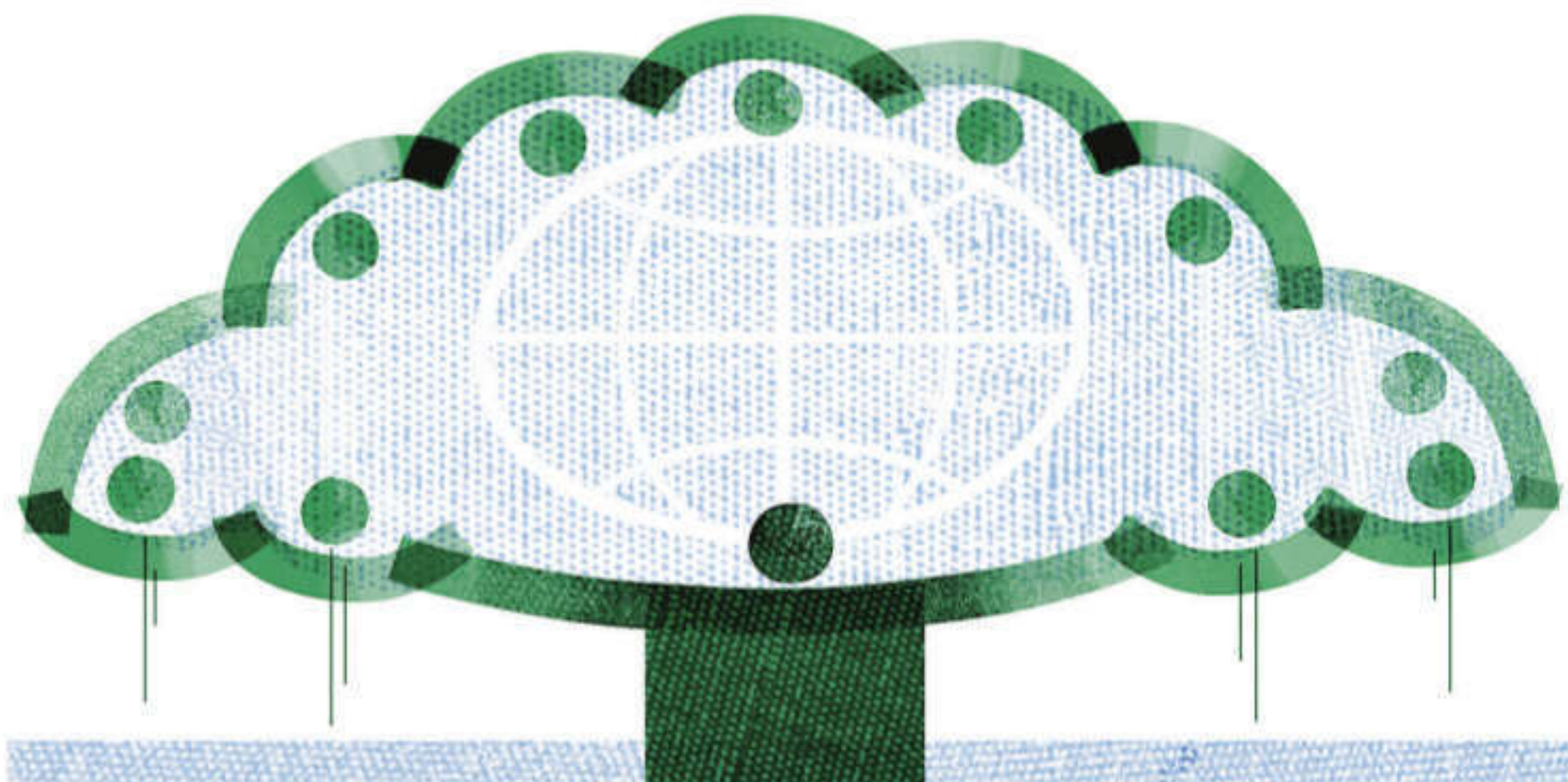
There is something else about this day which is noteworthy. Today is the birthday of a personality who, inspired by the principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, has dedicated his entire life to societal transformation and strengthening the spirit of harmony and fraternity. For lakhs of people associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, he is respectfully referred to as Param Pujya Sarsanghchalak. Yes, I am referring to Shri Mohan Bhagwat, whose 75th birthday is, incidentally, in the same year the RSS marks its centenary. I would like to convey my best wishes to him and pray for his long and healthy life.

My association with Mohan ji’s family has been very deep. I have had the good fortune of working closely with his father, the late Madhukarrao Bhagwat ji. I have written extensively about him in my book, *Jyotipunj*. Along with his association with the legal world, he devoted himself to nation-building. He played a pivotal role in strengthening the RSS across Gujarat. Such was Madhukarrao ji’s passion for nation-building that it groomed his son, Mohanrao, to work towards India’s regeneration. It is as if *paramani* Madhukarrao prepared another *paramani* in Mohanrao.

Mohan ji became a *pracharak* in the mid-1970s. On hearing the word “*pracharak*”, one may mistakenly think it refers to someone who is simply doing *prachar* or campaigning and propagating ideas. But those familiar with the working of the RSS understand that the *pracharak* tradition is at the core of the organisation’s work. Over the last hundred years, thousands of young people, inspired by a patriotic zeal, have left their homes and families to dedicate their lives to realising the mission of India First.

His early years in the RSS coincided with a very dark period of Indian history. This was the time the draconian Emergency was imposed by the then Congress government. For every person who cherished democratic principles and wanted India to prosper, it was natural to strengthen the anti-Emergency movement. This is exactly what Mohan ji and countless RSS Swayamsevaks did. He worked extensively in rural and backward areas in Maharashtra, especially Vidarbha. This shaped his understanding of the challenges faced by the poor and downtrodden.

Over the years, Bhagwat ji held various positions in the RSS. He performed each and every one of those duties with great dexterity. Mohan ji’s years as the head of the Akhil Bharatiya Shariik Pramukh during the 1990s are still fondly remembered by many swayamsevaks. During this period, he spent considerable time working in the villages of Bihar. These experiences deepened his connection with



C R Sasikumar

grassroots issues. In 2000, he became the Sarkaryawah and here, too, he brought his unique way of working, handling the most complex of situations with ease and precision. In 2009, he became the Sarsanghchalak and continues to work with great vibrancy.

Being Sarsanghchalak is more than an organisational responsibility. Extraordinary individuals have defined this role through personal sacrifice, clarity of purpose and unshakable commitment to Maa Bharti. Mohan ji, in addition to doing full justice to the enormity of the responsibility, has also brought to it his own strength, intellectual depth and empathetic leadership, all of which are inspired by the principle of Nation First.

If I can think of two attributes Mohan ji has held close to his heart and imbibed in his working style, they are continuity and adaptation. He has steered the organisation through complex currents, never compromising on the core ideology we are all proud of and at the same time addressing the evolving needs of society. He has a natural connection with the youth and thus has always focused on integrating more youngsters into the Sangh Parivar. He is often seen engaging in public discourse and interacting with people, which has been very beneficial in today’s dynamic and digital world.

Broadly speaking, Bhagwat ji’s tenure will be considered the most transformative period in the 100-year journey of the RSS. From the uniform to the modifications in the Shiksha Vargs (training camps), several significant changes occurred under his leadership.

I particularly remember Mohan ji’s efforts during the Covid period, when humanity battled a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. In those times, continuing the traditional RSS activities became challenging. Mohan ji suggested increased use of technology. In the context of the global challenges, he remained connected with global perspectives while developing institutional frameworks. At that time, all swayamsevaks made every possible effort to reach out to those in need, while ensuring their own safety and that of others. Medical camps were organised in several places. We also lost many of our hardworking swayamsevaks, but such was the inspiration of Mohan ji that their determination never wavered.

Earlier this year, during the inauguration of the Madhav Netra Chikitsalaya in Nagpur, I had remarked that the RSS is like an Akshayavat, an eternal banyan tree, that energises the national culture and collective consciousness of our nation. The roots of this Akshayavat are

deep and strong because they are anchored in values. The dedication with which Bhagwat ji has committed himself to nurturing and advancing these values is truly inspirational.

Another admirable quality of Mohan ji’s is his soft-spoken nature. He is blessed with an exceptional ability to listen. This trait ensures a deeper perspective and also brings a sense of sensitivity and dignity to his persona and leadership.

Here, I also want to write about the keen interest he has always shown towards various mass movements. From Swachh Bharat Mission to Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, he always urges the entire RSS family to add to these movements. In order to further social well-being, Mohan ji has given the “*Panch Parivartan*”, which includes social harmony, family values, environmental awareness, national selfhood and civic duties. These can inspire Indians from all walks of life. Every swayamsevak dreams of seeing a strong and prosperous nation. To realise this dream, what is required is clear vision and decisive action. Mohan ji embodies both these qualities in abundance.

Bhagwat ji has always been a strong votary of “*Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat*”, a firm believer in India’s diversity and the celebration of so many different cultures and traditions that are a part of our land.

Beyond his busy schedule, Mohan ji has always found time to pursue passions like music and singing. Few people know that he is very versatile in various Indian musical instruments. His passion for reading can be seen in several of his speeches and interactions. This year, in a few days from now, the RSS turns 100. It is also a pleasant coincidence that this year, Vijaya Dashami, Gandhi Jayanti, Lal Bahadur Shastri Jayanti and the RSS centenary celebrations are on the same day. It will be a historic milestone for lakhs of people associated with the RSS in India and the world. And, we have a very wise and hardworking Sarsanghchalak in Mohan ji, steering the organisation in these times. I will conclude by saying that Mohan ji is a living example of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, showing that when we rise above boundaries and consider everyone as our own, it strengthens trust, brotherhood and equality in society. I once again wish Mohan ji a long and healthy life in the service of Maa Bharti.

The writer is Prime Minister of India

If I can think of two attributes

Mohan ji has held close to his heart and imbibed in his working style, they are continuity and adaptation. He has steered the organisation through complex currents, never compromising on the core ideology we are all proud of and at the same time addressing the evolving needs of society. He has a natural connection with the youth and thus has always focused on integrating more youngsters into the Sangh Parivar. He is often seen engaging in public discourse and interacting with people, which has been very beneficial in today’s dynamic and digital world.

Manipur politics is very asymmetrical. In the 60-member Assembly, the Meitei-dominated valley has 40 seats while the Nagas and Kuki-Zo have 10 MLAs each. This is because of the larger population in the valley and its periphery. In such a setting, how does governance balance out? Even if the Kuki-Zo demand for a Separate Administration is shot down, what steps will help ensure that the Centre’s funds do not circulate only in the valley? Violence in Manipur was sparked off by a decision of the Manipur High Court, which stated that the Meitei community, which constitutes 53 per cent of the state’s population, is to be included in the Scheduled Tribes list. Later, the Supreme Court castigated this decision, stating that this was an entirely legislative matter and not the brief of the courts. However, the large-scale takeover of forests in the hills and turning them into reserved forests by evicting the tribals who were already living in those areas created a lot of resentment against the state government. Now, before PM Modi’s visit, there have been more agreements signed between the Centre and the militant outfits that are under

DEAR EDITOR, I DISAGREE

Introducing a column in which we invite readers to tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of ‘The Indian Express’

Free movement, as the editorials correctly point out, is a key factor in peace-building. In Kangpokpi in October 2023, I was told that even the relief material promised by the Centre could not reach the district because the vehicles could not come to the hills from Imphal. My friends and I from Shillong had to take the long route, Dimapur-Kohima-Senapati, to reach Kangpokpi. It wasn’t safe to take the Imphal-Kangpokpi route then, and it is not safe today. Such is the brutal division of spaces in the same state inhabited by three major ethnic communities – Meiteis, Kukis and Nagas.

The first editorial hopes that the PM’s visit becomes a significant step towards rebuilding trust and restoring a political process. How will this be possible when the Kuki-Zo community continues to be treated with disdain and labelled as “narcoterrorists” by some Meitei factions? Fostering trust is easier said than done until these narratives are discarded.

President’s Rule, when it did come in February 2025, only two-and-a-half months short of two years of violence, was too little too late. It was a face-saving attempt that did not send the right message.



PATRICIA MUKHIM

RECENT EDITORIALS ON Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s scheduled trip to Manipur (‘To Manipur, finally’, IE, September 4) and on the agreements reached by the Centre and Kuki-Zo groups (‘An opening in Manipur’, IE, September 8) say that the PM’s proposed visit comes at a critical moment, when the prospect of resolution exists. What magic wand will PM Modi wave in Manipur? Its people keenly await his visit after enduring over two years of ethnic violence. He had deputed Amit Shah a few days after the violence, and the latter did what most Home Ministers do. He urged the state government to ensure that law and order are under control and retrieve the stolen weapons. What Amit Shah did not raise was why underground outfits like the Arambai Tenggol and the Meitei Leepun were given a free hand by then Chief Minister N Biren Singh.

The primary action after the violence began on May 3 should have been to bring the state under President’s Rule immediately. This did not happen, either because of a poor reading of the situation or because Manipur was under a BJP government. And so, the violence raged on, and people continued to be killed. Manipur became national news when the video of two young women being paraded naked made it onto social media. Families who lost young members in the violence and those Kuki-Zo homes in Imphal that were torched have not seen justice. Meiteis, too, have been killed in the Kuki-Zo majority areas.

In Manipur, justice first

Without it, no agreement can lead to long-term peace

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“Today, we stand at the threshold of a new Nepal. A Nepal where transparency must replace corruption, where accountability must silence impunity, and where the sacrifices and murder of 19 young martyrs must never be forgotten.”

— THE HIMALAYAN TIMES

The GST template

GST Council’s recent decisions, the most far-reaching recalibration since the tax’s inception, provide a model for consensus-building



N K SINGH

INDIA’S QUEST FOR tax simplification has been an abiding one. For long, the average person regarded India’s taxation structure as draconian, with suboptimal outcomes both in revenues and compliance. Direct taxes saw substantial progress, culminating in the New Income Tax Code that simplified procedures and eased compliance.

On indirect taxes, the story was more difficult. Excise remained complex and opaque, with multiple rates compounded by India’s federal structure. The idea of a Goods and Services Tax was first conceived in 1985 by V P Singh, then Finance Minister. MODVAT (Modified Value Added Tax) was introduced in 1986, but the reform remained unfinished. The 1991 balance of payments crisis revived the debate, as conditionalities under the World Bank’s structural adjustment loan and the IMF’s credit arrangement committed India to a broad-based value-added tax. Yet the reforms were partial, and progress remained slow.

I recall much deliberation on the revenue-neutral rate during my period as Revenue Secretary in P Chidambaram’s first tenure as finance minister. The Atal Bihari Vajpayee years saw the Kelkar Task Force of 2002 lay the groundwork for GST, but concerns over state autonomy, revenue loss, and political gridlock stalled progress. It became clear that without the participation and trust of states, GST could not move forward. The decisive moment came under Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s leadership. States were assured by then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley of compensation of 14 per cent annual growth in GST revenues for five years, addressing fears of revenue loss.

The creation of the GST Council under the Union finance minister, with all state finance ministers as members, was unprecedented. Few federal systems in the world offer such pooled sovereignty, where both Parliament and state assemblies circumscribe fiscal powers for the common good. It was no easy decision for legislatures to surrender their autonomy over excise, but consensus carried the day.

When GST was launched in July 2017, it subsumed 17 taxes and 13 cesses into a single system. Gains were immediate. The taxpayer base expanded from 66 lakh in 2017 to over 1.5 crore today. Collections rose sharply, with the tax base itself increasing from Rs 45 lakh crore to Rs 173 lakh crore over the past decade at a CAGR of 14.4 per cent. Successive Council meetings oversaw revisions, widened coverage and improved compliance.

The latest reforms, approved unanimously by the GST Council in September 2025, mark the most far-reaching recalibration since the tax’s inception. Four slabs now compressed to two: 5 per cent and 18 per cent, with a higher rate of 40 per cent for luxury and sin goods. Life and health insurance premiums were exempted. This was more than cosmetic. It addressed the most persistent criticism that complexity weakened compliance and confused both consumers and businesses. Fewer rates mean easier classification, fewer disputes, and smoother administration. For citizens, essentials become cheaper; for businesses, predictability improves; for policymakers, the reform marks a decisive shift from incremental tin-

kering to bold consolidation.

The Group of Ministers, chaired by Bihar’s Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary, steered tough negotiations. The 56th GST Council meeting approved the package with all states on board. That the reform was endorsed unanimously is no small achievement and reflects the maturity of our federal compact.

There are three reasons why these changes are transformative.

First, the consensus of all state finance ministers is historic. No other country has created an institution comparable to the GST Council, much less used it to deliver far-reaching changes. Jean-Claude Trichet once remarked that India’s federal entity was unique, and that Europe, in its quest to matter globally, must pursue pooled sovereignty as its path forward.

Second, concerns about revenue loss are overstated. The Revenue Secretary estimated a short-term hit of about Rs 48,000 crore based on 2023-24 consumption, but actual outcomes may vary. Experience shows simpler structures enhance compliance and buoyancy. As consumption rises, revenues recover. The doubling of GST collections in five years proves that buoyancy, driven by growth and trust, matters more than rate design.

Third, GST 2.0 has the potential to trigger a virtuous cycle. It strengthens India’s image as a predictable and reform-oriented economy. This reform signals that India is willing to listen to stakeholders and act decisively. If the Centre and states can cooperate on taxation, why not extend this spirit to other areas of economic reform? Uniform rules, transparency and collaborative approaches to land and labour could complete the unfinished agenda.

The finance minister has acknowledged that unfinished tasks remain. These include ensuring that benefits reach the common consumer, small and medium enterprises, and industry more broadly. One important extension could be allocating a share of GST proceeds to urban local bodies. With India’s rapid urbanisation, empowering municipalities with assured resources would align with the federal spirit and strengthen governance at the grassroots.

Detractors have argued that these reforms were not acts of conviction but responses to Trump’s tariffs. I recall similar snide remarks were made of the 1991 reforms, dismissed as compelled by crisis rather than chosen with foresight. History has shown otherwise. It is the finance minister’s sagacity that freed up private capital in the economy even through the turbulence of the pandemic.

It is worth recalling that during a decade of Congress rule, the GST could not be brought to fruition. Concerns over autonomy, fears of revenue loss, and political hesitation prevented progress. The fact that it has now been achieved through consensus only highlights the contrast in political will and execution.

Looking ahead, there is still a need for a viable institution through which the Centre and states can take decisive action on unfinished reforms, particularly in land, labour, and capital. Could the GST Council become a template for this purpose, fostering purposive dialogue and decision-making for pooled sovereignty?

One cannot help but be somewhat amused at the misplaced criticisms of delay or compulsion. Could this be a case of sour grapes, and equally, perhaps, a case of the winner taking it all? In the end, the real winners are the people of India.

The writer is former chairman, 15th Finance Commission

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INJUSTICE UNDONE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘The 12th document’ (IE, September 10). The Supreme Court’s mandate to the Election Commission of India to include the Aadhaar card as one of the valid documents for voter enrolment in Bihar under the ongoing SIR has effectively halted potential wholesale disenfranchisement. The EC, from the start, was adamant in opposing Aadhaar’s inclusion, and it initiated disciplinary action against booth-level officers accepting it in deference to the apex court’s guidelines. Now that the EC plans to conduct a comparable exercise across the country, the SC’s decision assumes added significance.

Kamal Laddha, Bangalore

A NEW ERA

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Sincaraz era is here’ (IE, September 10). Carlos Alcaraz’s range of shot-making is a torment for opponents. Drop shots, spins, slices, thunderous forehands — he makes a tennis court look small. Against Jannik Sinner in New York, his defen-

sive reach was extraordinary, while his serve, once the weakest part of his game, held like iron. The two have swept the last eight Slams. The future of tennis is in good hands.

SS Paul, Nadia

INDIA, THE HELPER

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Listen to Gen Z next door’ (IE, September 10). By virtue of its size, history, and geographical location, India is destined to carry the burden of its neighbours’ follies. If the Sri Lankan economy nosedives, India must pitch in to ensure that it stays afloat. Though China has been manipulating Nepal for quite some time, it is India that is called upon to open channels of communication with the youth rioting in Kathmandu. Even the Maldives feels comfortable forcing India’s hand by playing the China card. While the neighbours assume that they are entitled to support from India, the reverse has never been true. India must overcome this combined curse of history and geography.

Shubhada H, via email

OUR VIEW



Economic embers had a role in Nepal's eruption

This week's turmoil in Nepal may have been sparked off by its ban on social media but the frustration of the country's youth has a deeper economic cause—notably, jobless growth

The distressing turn of events in Nepal, with youth at the forefront of violent unrest on the streets of Kathmandu, is not the result of any one factor. Even if a ban on social media can be identified as its proximate cause, with such bans widely seen to violate civil rights, it is the outcome of a complex web of factors. The vehemence on display made that clear. One powerful reason, among others, is the failure of its economy to keep pace with the aspirations of its people, especially the young. Hence the term 'Gen Z' protests. Nepal not only depends heavily on remittances from elsewhere, for a country with one of the lowest per capita incomes in the world, it has a high level of unemployment, with the youth worst afflicted. Discontent in Nepal demonstrates the perils of a pressing national issue going unaddressed—such as a scarcity of quality jobs.

According to a World Bank report, although Nepal has done a remarkable job in poverty reduction, it has done so “without transformative domestic growth, investment, or job creation.” Its reliance on money sent from abroad, which has played a major role in reducing poverty and been central to its economy's growth, has not translated into quality jobs at home. A staggering 82% of its workforce is in informal employment, far higher than global and regional averages. Though its economy has recovered from the covid crunch and real GDP grew by 4.9% in the first half of 2024-25, up from 4.3% in the same half of 2023-24, it has not been able to provide sufficient jobs, especially for those aged under 35, who account for a third of its population. 'Jobless growth,' a term coined by economist Nick Perna in the 1990s for growth without com-

mensurate job creation or with decreasing employment levels, is at the root of many of Nepal's ills. Tackling this problem will not be easy in a scenario where the World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs Report 2025* expects many jobs to be lost to technological change, especially AI, apart from geo-economic fragmentation, economic uncertainty, demographic shifts and a green transition. This grim future stares not just at low-income countries, but at rich ones too; US policy convulsions can be traced to popular anxiety over job scarcity, although tariffs are more likely to worsen than resolve America's problem, even as they cost people elsewhere their livelihoods.

Fortunately for us in India, successive governments have been alive to the need for jobs. Faster growth of services, which typically offer fewer jobs across all skill levels compared to manufacturing, has meant slower job creation than needed. Hence, India's concerted efforts to raise the share of manufacturing to at least 25% of GDP. This also explains initiatives such as Make in India, Skill India and the Production Linked Incentive scheme, apart from job-oriented budgetary outlays. Fostering entrepreneurship and making business easier to do are no less critical. Lighter regulation, easier access to credit and enhanced infrastructure can all empower small businesses to grow and generate jobs. Indeed, it is almost a given that no government can afford to let employment stagnate or drop. Nepal's turmoil may have been sparked by anger over a key liberty—to associate and speak freely—being curbed, but its youth frustration has a deeper cause: jobless growth. Its big challenge now is to expand its economy while ensuring it also sprouts quality jobs. If it's any consolation, it is not alone.

MY VIEW | MYTHS AND MANTRAS

What does 'merit' really mean? And does it relate to investing?

In investing, as in life, we should attain clarity on whether our skills or our luck gave us success



DEVINA MEHRA is founder of First Global and author of 'Money, Myths and Mantras: The Ultimate Investment Guide'. Her X handle is @devinamehra

A couple of months ago, I was at the British Museum, and besides pondering what would be left if everything in its halls that was looted from the rest of the world was returned (pretty much nothing), I had to contemplate something else as well.

There I was, queuing up for the ladies' room and the line went from right outside the door up about one-and-a-half flights of stairs. There were 52 women waiting (yeah, I counted). Next to the ladies' was the gents' and the men were just strolling in and out—there was no wait at all.

And this is not an outlier situation. This is the case pretty much in every public place in every country.

What does this say about fairness and equality? It could well be that similarly sized spaces were allotted for both the men's and women's toilets, but then how do we end up with these unequal and frankly unfair waiting times?

Here are some reasons. Obviously, urinals take up less space than stalls. Then there's the fact that women's physiology and clothing require more time to manoeuvre, making the whole process more time-consuming than for men. Not to mention that a certain number of women will be pregnant or on their period and are more likely to be looking after children or elders. That pushes the average turnaround time up even further. All of these result in the

mind-bogglingly unequal waiting times we see in such places.

This isn't my discovery. In fact, there have been 'potty parity' movements around the world to ensure that the outcome for users is equal, rather than focusing on allotting an equal amount of space for the two kinds of toilets.

At this point, you may be wondering, 'What is this discussion on toilets doing in a business paper?' Well, it is symbolic of what equality means and how it can be interpreted.

Every time I see a discussion on merit versus any kind of affirmative action or reservation, I think—what is 'merit'? Can I, as a person who grew up as a child of two professors in a house full of books, really say that I am competing on the same basis as someone who may be a first-generation learner just because we are answering the same exam?

It really came home to me when I was talking to a friend who runs an after-school education centre in his father's village. He said that it was not an especially poor village. Even so, the school-kids did not see a written word outside their school because the shops did not have name boards and there were no magazines or books at their homes. A majority of readers of this newspaper cannot envisage such deprivation.

Most children in our country do not study in a school which can even get them to the bare minimum level of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Now suppose someone does get into a so-called good school on the basis of some social quota; even then, is it a level playing field? Besides the way such children are often treated by other students and teachers, they also lack the kind of support at home that other kids may take for granted. There is also the prism of expectations: both in terms of the chores they are expected to do after school hours as well as how much encouragement they get to score well and aim high.

And I have not even come to the generational disadvantages faced by

many—not just in education, but even in basics like health and nutrition. Not to mention the mental health implications of being humiliated and discriminated against all your life.

However much we may say that caste discrimination does not exist in India, listings on most modern matrimonial sites expose it as a lie. Not to mention news snippets of people and even children getting beaten up for 'offences' like drinking from the wrong water vessel or going on horseback for their *baaraat* (wedding procession).

A long-time friend who only recently shared that he belonged to what is called a Scheduled Caste told me that when his father was studying in a village school, he had to clean the classroom and then listen to the teacher while sitting in the veranda outside the classroom. When his mother herself became a teacher, she could not even go up to the desk of upper-caste students. Can you imagine the impact of this trauma and humiliation? The really sad part is that this friend did not use caste reservation and neither did his daughter. But his daughter told me that even in a professional college in a metro city like Mumbai, the caste question was always an unpleasant undercurrent. That is still the lived reality in metros, let alone smaller towns and villages.

In investing, when our portfolio is doing well, we attribute it all to our genius-level stock picks, without giving good luck a thought. Whereas when the portfolio crashes, we have many villains to blame, from market operators to shady managements and bad luck. In other aspects of life too, we hate to attribute our success to privilege, or the ultimate lottery of where we were born. We do not want to admit that we would not have reached where we have were we born to landless labourers or pavement dwellers. We credit only our merit. There is reason to examine all this. What is real parity? What is privilege? What is equality? And what does merit really mean?

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

Of all aspects of social misery, nothing is so heartbreaking as unemployment.

JANE ADDAMS

MY VIEW | WORLD APART

China hype is enhancing its image at home and abroad

RAHUL JACOB



is a former Financial Times foreign correspondent

A gargantuan military parade, complete with state-of-the-art stealth carrier-based fighter jets, tanks with optical sensors and militarized robots, might seem an odd setting from which to sound bugles of peace, but China's President Xi Jinping did just that on 3 September. “Only when nations and peoples treat each other as equals and watch out for and help one another, can we safeguard common security, eliminate the roots of war, and prevent the recurrence of historical tragedies,” said Xi.

The parade coincided with reviews of *Breakneck: China's Quest to Engineer the Future* by Dan Wang, a book that attributes the Communist Chinese leadership's ability to steer the economy ahead rapidly to the fact that most of its senior leaders are engineers. The US, by contrast, Wang argues, is weighed down by having too many lawyers and too much litigation. Wang contrasts the high-speed rail between Beijing and Shanghai that was built in a couple of years and has been running since 2011 with the planned

super-fast link between Los Angeles and San Francisco, which is still years from completion. Cue alarming headlines like: 'Does the Future Belong to China?'

If hype and a speedy infra build-up are what it takes to attain global dominance, China would have been unrivalled several years ago. Its public project management and engineering acumen is impressive. Its seizing of the commanding heights of the green economy, from electric batteries to solar panels and EVs, is awe-inspiring. Never mind that its companies in this race are heavily subsidized and only a handful make money. Wang is duly reverential while also making the point that Shanghai, where he lived for many years, is also a much more liveable city today. Its parks have increased by a few hundred while he was there to an admirable 1,000 today and its metro system is world class. Wang recently complained of screechy New York subway trains.

As it happens, I am also in awe of China's infrastructure, although I suspect many of its local governments are weighed down with billions in debt that will never be repaid. It's also a matter of perspective; New York's subway system began 120 years ago, Shanghai's 90 years later. I am just back from New York and could not help noticing

that its underground was far better than I remembered when I lived there in the 1990s.

Wang's book has received mostly uncritical acclaim in the US. Despite his admiration of Shanghai, Wang lives in the US because he prefers its 'pluralism.' Nevertheless, his book coincides with the US government at its most chaotic, except in seizing more power from the legislature. The parade in Beijing has also been a moment of shock and awe for China watchers in India and overseas. The temptation to accede to China's relentless march seems harder to resist.

Still, a few caveats are in order. For starters, Wang's thesis that an engineering mindset to nation-building is far better than others is questionable. China's leadership would benefit from having many more able economists and by letting more lawyers successfully defend activists and business people in the cross-hairs of the state. It is telling that the most widely admired Chinese civil rights lawyer of the early 2000s, Pu Zhiqiang, was sentenced a

decade ago for “creating a disturbance” and “inciting ethnic hatred” and had his license to practice law revoked. He remains under residential surveillance. The rule of law and property rights would make China a more admirable superpower. As the columnist Noah Smith points out, Japan's industrialization of the 1960s and 70s was managed by bureaucrats who had studied law.

Given how the US has overturned the principal axioms of the global trading system, it may be tempting to embrace China as a counterweight. But, China's approach to international trade in the past two decades has been profoundly mercantilist. Even as its exports to the US decline this year, China's trade surplus with the world is expected to hit \$1 trillion.

There is also the lingering overhang of a debt trap for many developing countries that joined Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative. Countries in Asia and Africa have suffered from the difficult terms of large loans from China for infra projects whose benefits are

not always clear. A paper published by Aid-Data and co-authored by academics from Oxford University, William and Mary in Virginia and the University of Hamburg, reveals how Chinese loans for infrastructure projects usually built by Chinese companies are collateralized with revenues from commodity exports: “Our findings reveal a previously undocumented pattern of revenue ring-fencing, where a significant share of commodity export receipts never reaches the exporting countries. Revenues routed overseas secure priority repayment for the creditor; they remain out of public sight and largely beyond the borrower's reach until the secured debts are repaid.” The researchers reveal that over 60% of the collateralized loan portfolio of Chinese creditors in developing countries is typically not repaid from project revenues: “Instead, most of the cash flows come from sales of the borrowing country's leading commodity export, such as oil in Angola, gas in Indonesia, or cocoa in Ghana.” It is a clever way of de-risking infra investments that are often white elephants, but pity the developing countries at the receiving end of such stiff credit terms.

As Xi said last week, “The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is unstoppable!” At many levels, we have been warned.

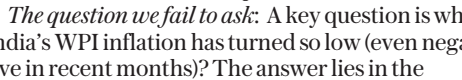
MINT CURATOR

What flood-hit Pakistan could learn from Bangladesh today

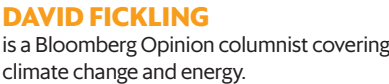
Empowerment delivers disaster resilience and a stronger economy



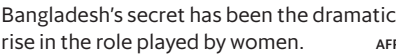
Is India unique in its CPI-GDP deflator divergence? A second recurring charge is that India's GDP data is suspicious because the GDP deflator behaves very differently from CPI inflation. For example, in the first quarter of 2025-26, real GDP grew 7.8% while nominal GDP grew 8.8%, implying a deflator of just 0.9%. Some commentators have found this "too low" compared to CPI inflation. I have written on this topic earlier as well (shorturl.at/Ecolot), but would need reiteration given that this confusion persists. The divergence between CPI and GDP deflators is not unique to



India's GDP estimates are robust, produced by a professional statistical system that makes the best use of available data. The real issue is not the credibility of our statistics, but their interpretation. Talking of supposed 'statistical mysteries' distracts from real challenges: resilience in overall growth, but persistent weakness in manufacturing, amplified by the tradables/non-tradables gap. GDP deflators like the CPI and WPI each tell a different story. Understanding how they differ—and why—is essential if our debate is to illuminate rather than obscure the real state of the Indian economy.



Bangladesh's long road from that war-torn moment to its present status, as an independent country about 50% richer than Pakistan itself, is a testament to what change from below can accomplish. Despite its own deep vulnerability to natural disasters, the country has suffered fewer flood deaths in the past 25 years than Pakistan has experienced since 2020. That has largely been achieved without the sort of



Floods have always been devastating. After the waters recede, however, they can nurture a new era of growth. ©BLOOMBERG

THEIR VIEW

Brace for risk repricing as insurers face climate claims

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Five sectors in India are the most exposed. Agriculture is the most vulnerable. Farmers endure whiplash between floods and droughts, hail storm and cyclones. According to district-level climate risk assessments, India's flagship crop insurance scheme has struggled to keep pace with the volatility. Insurers are testing simpler designs such as

Ports and logistics, too, face disruptions from storm surges and flooding, forcing contracts to narrow coverage. Health and labour-intensive industries are vulnerable as heatwaves and extreme humidity threaten worker safety. Group health covers are beginning to include heat-related illnesses, while micro-insurance is being tested for

Reinsurers are playing a decisive role in this transformation. Global firms that backstop Indian insurers have been hit by escalating losses from European floods to American wildfires. Their response has been to tighten terms in India as well—by raising rates, lifting payout thresholds and pushing

Climate change, by raising both the frequency and severity of payouts, is pushing this balance to its limits. Unless insurers adapt, their solvency could come under strain, especially given the 150% solvency margin requirements imposed by the Indian regulator.

Climate change is forcing insurers to do what they are supposed to: put a price on risk. In India, where both exposure and vulnerability are rising, prices are set to rise. The sooner companies and policymakers recognize this, the better prepared they will be for a future where protection is neither guaranteed nor cheap.

IT under fire

Indian IT players must heed HIRE Act warning

So far, US’ trade offensive against India had been limited to merchandise trade. Indian IT service players, who derive a significant portion of their revenues from the US, had been sanguine that they would not be impacted by the tariff offensive. Their confidence stemmed from the fact that members of the World Trade Organisation, in 1998, agreed not to impose levies on digital services through an ‘e-commerce moratorium’. This has been ‘renewed’ over the years.



But the Bill introduced by US Senator Bernie Moreno, namely, Halting International Relocation of Employment Act or HIRE Act, comes as a surprise that could hurt Indian IT services and Global Capability Centres (GCCs). While chances are that the Bill may not become law, certainly not soon, it should serve as a warning to Indian companies to address their vulnerabilities. The Bill is also likely to face stiff resistance within the US as it aims to punish US companies which are hurting American workers by “shipping good-paying jobs overseas in pursuit of slave wages and immense profits.” The Act proposes a 25 per cent tax on all outsourcing payments paid by a US company or taxpayer to a ‘foreign person’ for work which benefits consumers in the US. The definition is so broad that it covers all kinds of outsourcing by US companies including information technology, finance, research and development, marketing and customer service. US companies using low-cost labour from India and other emerging economies will be badly hit if the legislation is passed. The Act further states that such outsourcing payments cannot be claimed as deductions, increasing the tax outgo of the companies.

The Act may not become a reality anytime soon. All eyes will be on the e-commerce moratorium pact when it comes up for review early 2026. Meanwhile, US companies are likely to oppose this Bill vehemently as it can dent their profitability. Given the smaller pool of adequately qualified workers in the US, they will find it difficult to onshore these jobs. The Bill also appears to include GCCs set up by MNCs such as Alphabet, Apple, Amazon and Meta in low cost jurisdictions. With large investments already having been made in these facilities, these companies will not want punitive taxes.

Even if the Bill is not passed, large US MNCs may rethink outsourcing their operations and opt for a higher proportion of local labour going forward, notwithstanding the constraints. Indian IT players, already grappling with slowing revenue due to the uncertain global environment, technology shifts and increasing competition, will find it difficult to deal with this setback. They must try to reduce their dependence on the North American region which accounts for a large chunk of the revenue and diversify to Europe and countries in the APAC region such as Japan and Singapore. Indian IT should overhaul its business model, stop relying on outsourcing and turn its attention to product development and innovation to build a more sustainable business.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



Online dispute resolution: The tech-law balance

TRUST FACTOR. ODR must be embedded within a robust legal and regulatory framework to make it credible and accountable



MS SAHOO
KEYUR SHAH

In July 2025, the Bombay High Court set aside an arbitral award where the arbitrator had been appointed by an Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) institution using an algorithm. The Court held that such an appointment violated party autonomy under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 (Act), reaffirming the Constitution Bench ruling of the Supreme Court in November 2024. It also issued notices to two ODR institutions seeking details of how their algorithms ensure party autonomy in such appointments. This judgment is a timely reminder to strengthen ODR before its shortcomings jeopardise its future.

ODR did not originate in legislation; it evolved in response to market needs. It was born out of the rapid growth of digital commerce, the proliferation of small-value and repetitive disputes, and the demand for faster, cheaper, and more accessible means of resolution. Today, millions of disputes in India, ranging from e-commerce refunds and consumer grievances to defaults in digital lending, are being resolved online, without any court intervention. This spontaneous adoption demonstrates both the appeal and the inevitability of ODR.

ODR is not an entirely new species of dispute resolution, but a new delivery channel for well-established alternative dispute resolution methods such as arbitration, mediation, and conciliation. It leverages technology to improve access, speed, and efficiency.

It is especially useful in handling small-value claims, consumer complaints, digital lending, and cross-border transactions where conventional litigation is impractical or uneconomical.

TECH, AN ENABLER

But technology is only an enabler, not a substitute for law. ODR must strictly adhere to the foundational principles envisaged in the legal framework, including the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, and the Mediation Act, 2023. An ODR process that compromises statutory safeguards, such as party autonomy, risks being struck down in courts, undermining both legitimacy and adoption.

Party autonomy lies at the heart of arbitration law: it demands equal and meaningful participation of the parties to the dispute in choosing the arbitrator. This may be compromised if the ODR institution picks up an arbitrator on a random basis from a pre-approved pool of arbitrators, disregarding parties’ preferences for specific expertise, cultural alignment, or perceived neutrality.

ODR institutions must, therefore, maintain publicly accessible panels of qualified arbitrators with verified qualifications and domain expertise, and demonstrable integrity. Such panels must carry brief profiles, case experience, and track records to allow parties to make informed choices. Where parties cannot agree, the institution may step in, but only under pre-defined, transparent rules.

Enforcement is another pressure point. Some ODR platforms are ambiguous on this front, and some may not conform to the Act. For instance, the SMART ODR operating under SEBI oversight permits challenges under the Act, but requires a market participant challenging an arbitral award to deposit the entire award amount upfront in

ODR institutions must, therefore, maintain publicly accessible panels of qualified arbitrators with verified qualifications and domain expertise, and demonstrable integrity

escrow. Non-compliance could render the participant ‘not fit and proper,’ risking cancellation of its registration. If the award is upheld, the amount is automatically released to the other party, ensuring enforcement.

By contrast, the counterparty challenging an award is not subject to similar obligations and can challenge without any deposit, leaving the participant to seek enforcement only through courts. This framework places the parties on an unequal footing and conflicts with the Act, which does not mandate pre-deposits for challenges. Worse, market participants may face double jeopardy if the Court, independently, requires security for a stay of enforcement. To preserve fairness, ODR rules must fully align with statutory provisions governing challenge and enforcement.

A credible dispute resolution system thrives on transparency. The US’ FINRA system offers useful lessons in this regard. Under the oversight of the Securities and Exchange Commission, FINRA publishes every arbitration award, monetary or non-monetary, favourable or unfavourable, in a searchable, public database. These awards disclose the names of parties, counsels, arbitrators, claims, defences, and outcomes, with sensitive personal identifiers such as social security or account numbers redacted.

FINRA also provides detailed statistics on filings, closures, resolution timelines, and the nature and types of disputes resolved. Making arbitration outcomes (not proceedings) publicly accessible serves the public interest: deters wrongdoing, fosters trust in the dispute resolution system, and enables investors to evaluate a broker’s track record before engaging with them.

ACCOUNTABILITY FACTOR

Another aspect is the accountability of the ODR institution. At present, both the platforms and the arbitrators they empanel operate largely outside formal regulatory oversight. There is no statutory body to license ODR

institutions, approve their byelaws, or supervise the conduct, appointment, or removal of arbitrators. This regulatory vacuum raises concerns: Who ensures the neutrality of platforms? Who holds arbitrators to account for competence or ethics? Who certifies procedural safeguards and data security? Courts cannot fill these gaps through ex-post correction. A structured framework of accreditation, oversight, and grievance redressal is essential to institutionalise trust in the system. ODR is reshaping India’s dispute resolution landscape, driven primarily by market forces. Its rapid success, however, has outpaced the legal framework. Unless regulations catch up to provide clarity and oversight, ODR risks hitting a credibility ceiling. A dedicated ODR law, or at least a tailored chapter within existing statutes, should address the full spectrum of issues: licensing and accreditation of ODR institutions; minimum standards for procedural fairness, neutrality, and competence of neutrals; transparent disclosure norms for awards, arbitrators, and systemic statistics; robust data security and privacy protections; and procedural safeguards consistent with statutory frameworks for arbitration and mediation. Such a framework would provide ODR with the legitimacy to graduate from a market experiment to a mainstream pillar of justice delivery.

ODR is efficient, accessible, and scalable. But its future will not be secured by technology alone. Unless India embeds ODR within a robust legal and regulatory framework, it risks growing in numbers but faltering in credibility. The choice is clear: allow ODR to drift in a legal grey zone, vulnerable to pushbacks, or embed it firmly within law to deliver fair, accountable, and enforceable outcomes. The sooner this balance between technology and law is achieved, the stronger will be India’s dispute resolution system, a vital pillar of sustained economic growth.

The writers are advocates

HIRE Act could hurt IT workforce, students

The definition of “foreign person” seems to be drafted broadly to cover wages paid to non-immigrant visa holders in US

M Muneer

The US has intensified tariffs, tightened immigration rules, and pursued sanctions, while other countries enforce stricter data privacy regimes. The strategic challenges for corporates and countries are plenty for building competitiveness. For the IT sector, with almost 60 per cent of revenues coming from exports, the strategic implications are not small. Smaller IT players will be impacted severely.

The imminent threat of the Halting International Relocation of Employment (HIRE) Act, placed in the US Senate is yet another tremor. Its intent is to create American jobs by discouraging outsourcing. But beneath the surface, the Bill carries complex implications, not just for the Indian IT sector, but for the 4,20,000-odd Indian students currently enrolled in US universities. Many of them, particularly in STEM disciplines, aspire to build careers in America. The HIRE Act could alter their chances in ways not immediately obvious.

At its core, the HIRE Act would impose a 25 per cent excise tax on payments made to foreign service providers and simultaneously deny tax

deductions for those expenses. Analysts estimate this could raise the effective cost of offshored IT services by nearly 60 per cent, once state and federal corporate taxes are factored in. Added to this are potential tariffs, such as a 50 per cent duty on imported hardware that would further stretch US tech budgets.

‘FOREIGN’ FACTOR

More troubling is the Bill’s scope. The definition of “foreign person” seems to be drafted broadly enough to cover wages paid to non-immigrant visa holders in the US. If this is so, it will adversely impact international students seeking careers in the US.

If the HIRE Act is passed, the offshore industry will be in a tight spot, no doubt. The higher costs of offshoring will restrain the American enterprises and will force them to look at onshore hiring. This may seem beneficial for the international students graduating from the US universities, as they are physically present onshore and well-trained.

But the term “foreign person” is causing major concerns amongst the students, as it could include them under the provision. If so, the wages paid to the F1 visa holders under the Optional Practical Training scheme (international students contributing to



IT SECTOR. Under pressure

corporate sector) could be subjected to the same tax structure.

Despite the rhetoric of reshoring, economic logic points the other way. Even factoring in higher costs under the HIRE Act, outsourcing to India remains 20-40 per cent cheaper than doing it locally. American companies know this, as they have been dependent on a hybrid model for competitiveness. Bringing long-term offshoring contracts to a sudden ending is not easy either, not just in terms of costs but in learning curves, customer disconnect, weakening resilience, and human capital.

Further, there exists a STEM talent shortfall in the US market. The universities are not producing enough domestic graduates to bridge this gap owing to multiple reasons, especially in

emerging fields like AI, cybersecurity, and semiconductor design. Indian students passing out of ITs and graduating from US universities offer culturally integrated and well-trained talent solutions.

Rather than shrinking opportunities, the US should expand them. Clearer, safer, and longer work authorisation for STEM graduates would ensure that international talent strengthens, not weakens, the competitive advantages.

For India, the lesson is dual. On one hand, it must prepare the students for uncertainty by diversifying destinations. Countries like Germany, Canada, and Australia are already rising in popularity. On the other hand, India’s IT sector must continue moving up the value chain by investing in deep tech, AI, biotech, and advanced R&D. This will ensure that its graduates remain globally indispensable, whether or not US immigration ebbs and flows.

The HIRE Act may not pass; similar bills in the past stalled under lobbying pressure from corporations. But the political climate has shifted toward protectionism, and this Bill has a more credible chance of advancing. The risk cannot be dismissed.

Muneer is co-founder of the non-profit Medici Institute for Innovation

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Opportunity in threat

This refers to “HIRE Bill shakes up IT players” (September 10). This Bill, which proposes to impose 25 per cent tax on US companies for outsourcing work, would create problems for the US business also. Outsourcing is driven by wage arbitrage. Besides, since the US is home to some of the giant companies in the world, it might face domestic talent deficit. Whether this has been accounted for while making this Bill is debatable given Trump’s weaponisation of

tariffs. However, Indian companies should take it as a timely call for re-engineering their production and service aimed at higher quality at lower cost, market expansion strategy and mastering AI with job redesign.

YG Chouksey
Pune

Unpredictable Trump

This refers to ‘India, US continuing negotiations to address trade barriers: Trump’ (September 10). Trump has signalled a thaw in the bilateral chill between India and the

US and he also looks forward to speaking with his ‘very good friend’ Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the coming weeks amid continuing trade talks. But should Trump be taken seriously, given the tariffs and punitive measures imposed on India? His continuous flip-flops on policy matters are not making matters easy. However, it is genuinely wished that he fulfills his latest commitment to PM Modi.

Kumar Gupta
Panchkula (Haryana)

Women in dairying

This refers to the article ‘Uplift women in dairying’ (September 10). The dairy sector is the second backbone of our rural economy, the first being agriculture. India is fighting against western countries in not giving access or opening to the country’s dairy sector to outsiders. Millions of rural folk engage in dairying activity, silently contributing their share towards growth of the sector, which goes unnoticed. This sector is beset with unpaid work by family members. Apart from imparting training on

improving entrepreneurial skills and in upskilling of women, necessary financial support in buying electrical milking kits, erecting hygienic shelters for housing the milch animals and growing of nutrients rich plants and grass need to be prioritised. Agricultural Extension Officers of public sector banks and the Block level Development Officers at Panchayat and Tehsil levels have a greater role to play in identifying the credit needs to empower women in this sector.

RV Baskaran
Pune

GST push for clean energy

Rate cuts will lower renewable energy project costs

Sandeep Kashyap
Saurabh Agarwal

The recent GST rate rationalisation in the energy sector reflects a strategic shift towards promoting renewable energy and making clean energy technologies more affordable and attractive for investment. This aligns with the government’s vision to become energy independent by 2047 through the large-scale adoption of renewables, green hydrogen, green ammonia and domestic exploration of critical minerals, reducing reliance on imported coal, oil and gas.

The reduction of the GST rate on solar power generators, wind-operated electricity generators, and other renewable energy devices from 12 per cent to 5 per cent is a game-changer. This will directly lower costs and improve the financial viability of renewable energy projects. The effective GST on solar and wind projects, based on the 70:30 formula, is now reduced from 13.8 per cent to 8.9 per cent. Overall, these reforms provide a supportive framework for power and energy, enhancing viability and sectoral resilience.

DUAL NARRATIVE

Beyond solar and wind, GST rationalisation extends to other segments of the energy sector. The reduction of GST on waste-to-energy (WTE) devices to 5 per cent provides a timely stimulus to this emerging industry, aligning tax policy with sustainable waste management and energy generation. Similarly, lowering GST on allied inputs such as cement from 28 per cent to 18 per cent has the potential to ease infrastructure costs which is critical for industrial expansion and competitiveness. This comprehensive approach underscores the government’s commitment to fostering a competitive and sustainable energy landscape.

While the reforms present a positive trajectory for renewables, they also create a dual narrative for the broader energy sector. The GST on goods and services used in petroleum exploration and production contracts has been raised from 12 per cent to 18 per cent, which could marginally increase project costs. Similarly, GST on coal has been revised to 18 per cent from 5 per cent plus a cess of ₹400 per tonne. However, the overall impact on thermal power costs is expected to remain contained.



RENEWABLES. Welcome tax sops

These shifts reflect the measured approach to promote clean energy while maintaining operational viability of conventional energy sources.

As the GST framework evolves, the long-term vision should entail bringing petroleum products and electricity within its ambit. A phased approach, beginning with electricity, natural gas, or aviation turbine fuel (ATF), would advance the objective of a comprehensive consumption-based tax system. Industry stakeholders have consistently highlighted this need, given its potential to reduce stranded taxes, improve liquidity, and enhance efficiency across value chains. Such a move would mark a decisive step towards a fully unified and seamless indirect tax regime. Bringing electricity under the GST framework would allow businesses to claim Input Tax Credit (ITC) on their power bills. This ability to claim ITC, which is currently not possible because electricity is an exempt supply, would reduce costs for commercial and industrial consumers. If these savings are passed on to all customers — both retail and industrial — it would lower overall electricity costs, thereby boosting the global competitiveness of Indian industry.

For industry to fully leverage this transformative reform, a proactive and strategic approach will be essential. Companies should immediately revisit existing contracts, especially those with ‘Change in Law’ clauses in Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) to ensure revised tax rates are accurately reflected in costing and tariffs. This agility will be crucial to managing short-term challenges. A reassessment of financial models and bidding strategies will be critical, as the government’s clear expectation is that cost efficiencies from rationalisation be passed on to end-consumers.

Kashyap is CEO of Purvah Green Power Private Ltd, and Agarwal is a Tax Partner at EY India

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

September 11, 2005

Domestic airlines looking to hike fares

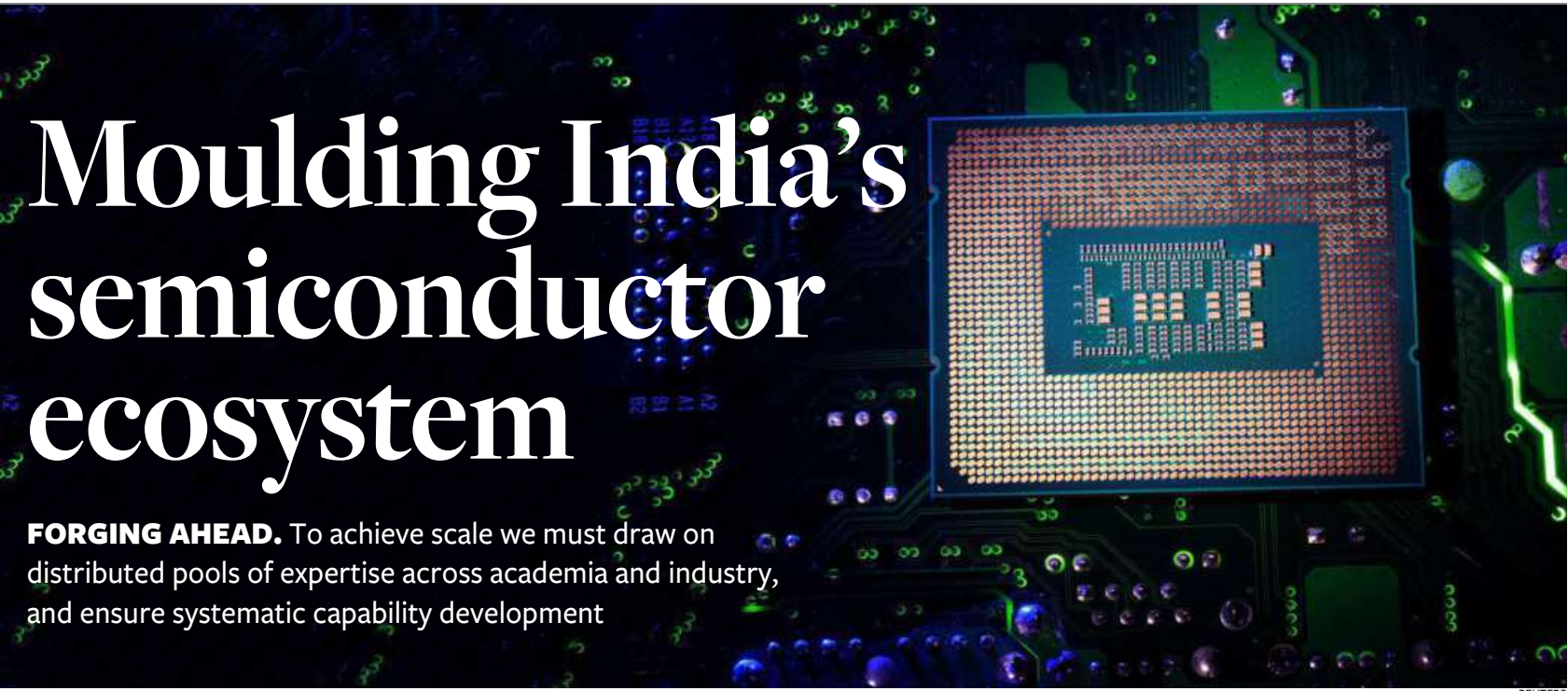
Domestic air travel could soon become dearer. Leading domestic carriers such as Jet Airways, Air Sahara and Air Deccan have confirmed to Business Line that they are looking at a hike in air fares, which could be round the corner. While officials of most airlines are tight-lipped about how much the fares will rise by, there is general unanimity that a decision will have to be taken soon.

Consolidation: Agenda set for 7 leading PSU banks

The Union Finance Minister, Mr P. Chidambaram, put forth a new agenda for seven leading nationalised banks, asking them to draw up proposals for consolidation through the acquisition of smaller Government banks or other private banks. He said the idea is to ensure that India has four-to-five ‘giant banks’ that could match any reputed financial institution in the world.

Mumbai floods: PSU general insurers may take ₹2,300-cr hit

The four public sector general insurance companies can face losses of around ₹2,300 crore on account of claims arising out of the Mumbai floods, according to figures released by the New India Assurance Company. New India Assurance estimates its losses at ₹600 crore.



Moulding India’s semiconductor ecosystem

FORGING AHEAD. To achieve scale we must draw on distributed pools of expertise across academia and industry, and ensure systematic capability development



SREEVAS SAHASRANAMAM

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled the Vikram-32 at Semicon India last week, it signalled something foundational: the emergence of an Indian semiconductor innovation ecosystem in a world where chips are no longer just technology — they are geopolitics. Designed by ISRO and fabricated at SCL Mohali, the 32-bit microprocessor is India’s first indigenously developed chip. While it is built on 180nm technology — far from 3nm chips that are powering the global AI race — this milestone highlights India laying the groundwork for a future where chips are not just imported, but designed and built locally.

To understand why India has been behind the curve in building the semiconductor ecosystem, let’s dial back a few years. One might be surprised to note that Semiconductor Complex Ltd (SCL) in Mohali started in 1984, three years before Taiwan Semiconductor Company (TSMC), currently the world’s largest semiconductor foundry. SCL, in its initial years, was close to the cutting edge of chip technology, manufacturing DRAM chips and partnering with global multinationals.

But a devastating fire in 1989 halted SCL and with it India’s semiconductor momentum, pushing it back by multiple decades. Post liberalisation, while India became a chip design hub with global firms like Texas Instruments and STMicroelectronics setting up their design centres, we missed the boat on building fabrication capacity, as AMD and others skipped India for bureaucratic delays in favour of other Asian nations.

Fast forward to 2021, the launch of the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) with an outlay of ₹76,000 crore marked a serious intent of revival, with a focus on the entire stack of chip development from design, fabrication, assembly, to human capital. ISM offered clarity and vision alongside capital support for fabrication labs and design-linked incentive schemes. This has started attracting global players like Micron and domestic firms like Tata Electronics Private Ltd to set up semiconductor plants. Parallely, there are also plans towards strengthening the talent pool through university collaboration with IISc, with targets such as 60,000

India’s semiconductor vision is no longer constrained by vision, ambition, or policy, but what remains elusive is ecosystem depth

semiconductor engineers in the next 10 years.

ECOSYSTEM DEPTH

India’s semiconductor vision is no longer constrained by vision, ambition, or policy, but what remains elusive is ecosystem depth. As Chris Miller points out in his book *Chip War*, the semiconductor industry is a globally distributed supply chain, anchored on deep specialisation and interdependence. For instance, the Netherlands’ ASML holds a near monopoly in the extreme ultraviolet lithography machine used to etch intricate circuit patterns on silicon wafers; Taiwan’s TSMC has perfected high-volume fabrication; the US leads in Electronic Design Automation (EDA) software used in chip design, and South Korea has built dominance in memory technologies. These have happened at the back of decades of state-supported investment in the case of TSMC, South Korea’s chaebol-led innovation, alongside talent clustering and ecosystem orchestration.

This fragmented nature of the semiconductors is its unique feature underlying both its economic efficiency and geopolitical fragility, but that sets a high bar for India. The current semiconductor push amidst the changing geopolitical environment is timely, but India needs to be on guard against ‘fab nationalism’ — the thinking that setting up fabrication plants equates to success. Globally, as Josh

Lerner documents, such hard infrastructure building innovation ecosystem efforts, such as Malaysia BioValley and Germany’s Bavarian cluster, have had muted success.

What India needs is a focus on ecosystem depth and market competitiveness. Fab labs must evolve into engines of innovation, not expensive monuments. Vikram-32 is proof of concept — a demonstration that India can indigenously produce a chip. But it is not yet proof of scale, which needs a talent pool, sustained investment, and systematic capability development.

Insights from India’s biomedical innovation ecosystem creation, highlighted in our recent research, offer valuable lessons here. Success in deep tech domains rarely comes from isolated breakthroughs. It comes from ecosystem orchestration under uncertainty — drawing on distributed pools of expertise across academia and industry, aligned in mission-mode around national priorities. India’s semiconductor journey could follow a similar path: a distributed ecosystem orchestration that is resilient, collaborative, and globally relevant.

In today’s world, where chips are defining geopolitical leverage, India’s ability to scale will depend not on how many fabs it builds, but on how well it builds the ecosystem around them.

The writer is Professor, Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow, UK

Are Indians’ dietary preferences nutritious?

Prasu Jain
Meghal Sharma
Astitva Ranjan Srivastava

The new MoSPI report on nutritional intake, based on the 2022-23 and 2023-24 surveys, when read alongside the 2011-12 findings of the 68th round of the NSS, offers a telling portrait of how Indians eat. In 2011-12, per capita daily calorie intake averaged 2,233 kilocalories in rural areas and 2,206 in urban areas. A decade later, the numbers are broadly stable: 2,212 in rural and 2,240 in urban India. Protein intake was about 60 grams per person per day in 2011-12 and has inched up to around 61 grams in 2023-24, while fat intake has moved from 48 grams to about 52 grams in urban India.

According to 2011-12 HCES data, out of all the meals received in 30 days from all the sources, the highest numbers of meals from school, *balwadi*, etc., were received by rural children in the age-group 5-9 (8.5 meals per boy and 9 meals per girl), followed by rural children in the 10-14 age-group (7.1 meals per boy and 7.7 meals per girl). This trend remained the same as per 2022-23 and 2023-24 data. Furthermore, the rural figure is more than twice the corresponding urban

figures across all age-gender categories, and this pattern remains consistent throughout the decade.

This shows that anti-poverty measures and targeted welfare schemes such as the Mid-Day Meal scheme, and the Integrated Child Development Services have ensured that hunger is no longer as acute as it was in earlier decades. The Poshan Abhiyaan, launched in 2018, has further placed nutrition at the centre of public policy, focusing on pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children.

EATING PATTERNS

However, the twin surveys highlight two important points about eating patterns of Indians. First, it shows that diet diversity still lags. In rural India, almost half of the protein people eat still comes from cereals like rice and wheat. Foods that are richer in protein — such as pulses, fruits, and vegetables — are eaten much less. For example, only about 9 per cent of protein in rural diets comes from pulses, which is far below than the recommended levels. In urban India, people eat slightly less protein from cereals and a little more from pulses compared to rural areas, but the difference is marginal.

Second, there’s a downward trend in monthly per capita consumption of



EFFECTIVE. Mid-day Meal scheme

cereals and pulses and pulses products both in rural and urban areas from 2011-12 to 2022-24. However, cereals still constitute the highest percentage from where people consume protein.

In States like Punjab, Haryana and Kerala, per capita daily calorie and protein intake is well above the national average, reflecting dietary diversity supported by milk, pulses, and animal proteins. In States such as Odisha, Bihar, and Chhattisgarh, intake levels remain closer to the national mean, but here too the data indicate gradual improvements compared to 2011-12. What stands out is the slow but steady decline in cereal dependence and the rising contribution of pulses and dairy across most regions.

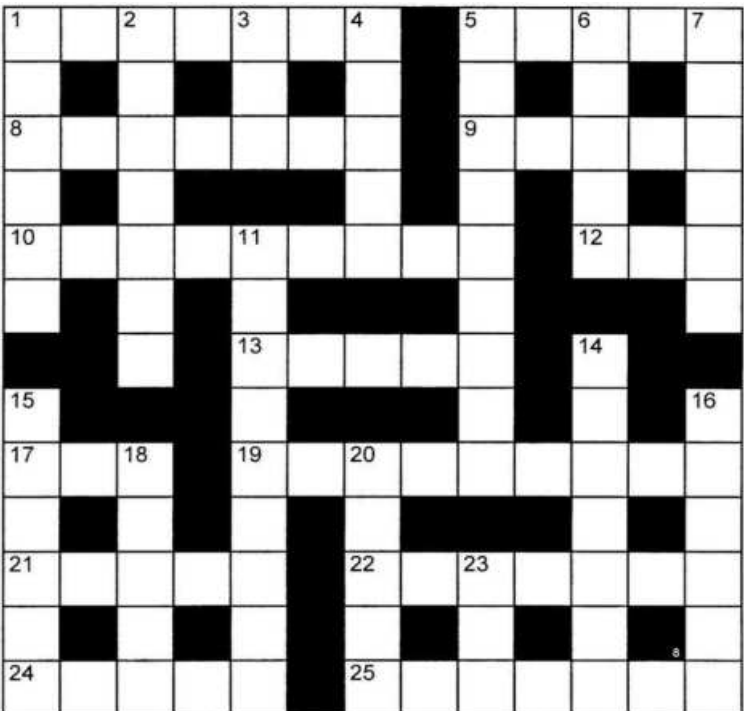
The comparative evidence from 2011-12 to 2023-24 shows how far India has come and how much more is possible. Calories are no longer the central concern they once were, but ensuring adequate proteins, vitamins, and minerals remains unfinished business.

Welfare schemes that already reach millions can be further diversified — supplementing rice and wheat with pulses, millets, and fortified foods. Public meals, from schools to *anganwadis*, can be designed to reflect regional preferences while ensuring balance. And citizens themselves, armed with greater awareness, can reclaim the wisdom of traditional diets — dal, greens, fermented foods, and seasonal fruits — without abandoning the convenience of modern food systems.

The lesson from the surveys is that India’s nutrition story is not about whether we are eating enough, but whether we are eating right. With the right mix of policy, culture, and awareness, it is possible to imagine a future where the story is not of sufficiency alone, but of true nourishment.

Prasu is Deputy Director, Meghal and Astitva are Assistant Directors, MoSPI. Views are personal

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2780



EASY

ACROSS

- Defends against attack (7)
- Urge, drive (5)
- Bubble raised on paint (7)
- Social get-together (5)
- Prudence, prevision (9)
- Wrongdoing (3)
- Living and breathing (5)
- Conjunction (3)
- Those undergoing penitence (9)
- Black bird (5)
- Put back (7)
- Famous (5)
- State explicitly (7)

DOWN

- Redden (6)
- Rider’s foot-iron (7)
- Take a chair (3)
- Gesture of indifference (5)
- Unable to wait or endure (9)
- Deposits and leaves (5)
- Producing eggs (6)
- Produced keen edge (9)
- A charge, command (7)
- Motherly woman (6)
- Fix the amount of (6)
- Down quilt (5)
- Nanny (5)
- Young seal (3)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Is trapped by spiders, but doesn’t give up (7)
- Drive a mile out when parking inside it (5)
- It is raised running rail system with broken tiles in it (7)
- Leave one another at beginning of year for jolly get-together (5)
- Shows prudence with bead at the front of the barrel (9)
- Don’t stop to vocalise about one that’s deadly (3)
- Breathing: it’s wicked to reach a conclusion that’s backward (5)
- In addition, they are the beginnings of all new developments (3)
- They are sorry the writer is about to get temporary shelter (9)
- Navy is about to get classic greeting from Tower bird (5)
- Two different sorts of material to substitute (7)
- Remarkable way to end it (5)
- Without stopping along the way to put it into words (7)

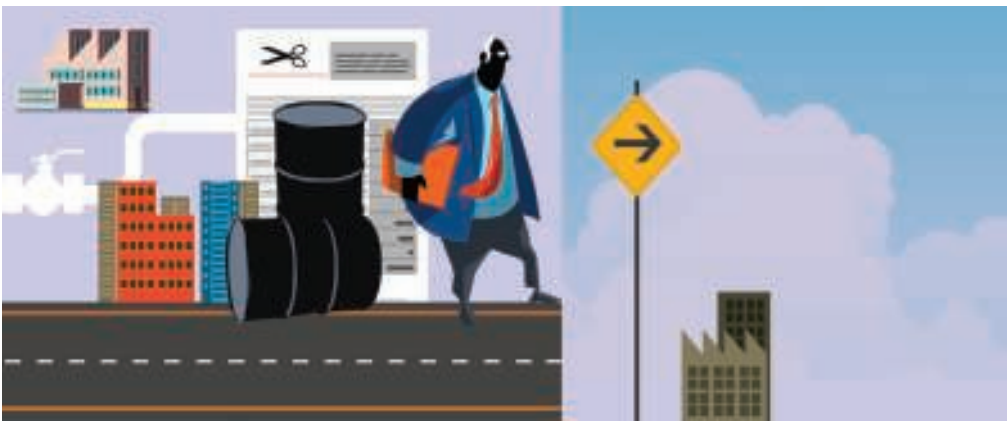
DOWN

- Redden iron that turns up in red stone (6)
- Wind things right up to put one’s foot in it (7)
- To be in session is up to Parliament finally (3)
- She doesn’t finish on the mat with such a careless gesture (5)
- Fidgeting to get on, I am on the doctor’s list (9)
- Leaves vehicle in public places (5)
- Producing a clutch while putting cutlery on the table (6)
- End phrase in confusion, but one made one’s point (9)
- Instruction to bank a chap can take out (7)
- The older woman is not to be seen with broken arm (6)
- Rate it like the South, less pounds being lost (6)
- In a piece for two, five are a cover-up for one lying (5)
- Character in R & J notes usual Romeo says envy leads to her (5)
- What one doesn’t want to be sold is a pet, either way (3)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2779

ACROSS 1. World 4. Heinous 8. Remit 9. Passive 10. Pie 11. Crescendo 12. Oast 13. Char 18. Entourage 20. Tip 21. Sea-girt 22. Ochre 23. Rancher 24. Dates

DOWN 1. Word processor 2. Rummers 3. Detect 4. Hopper 5. Insect 6. Onion 7. Stenographers 14. Hatchet 15. Punish 16. Banter 17. Devoid 19. Train



Employment quality

Greater reliance on contract labour has implications

The latest Annual Survey of Industries 2023-24 points to a worrying trend — the rise of contractualisation. Contract workers now account for 42 per cent of the workforce engaged in the organised manufacturing sector. This is the highest since 1997-98, when their share was only 16 per cent. In fact, contractualisation has risen by nearly 8 percentage points in the last 10 years, while the share of workers directly employed by factories has displayed a consistent declining trend. For a country like India, which must rely on labour-intensive manufacturing, rising contractualisation signals deterioration in the quality of employment being generated.

Contract workers are typically not directly employed by factories but are hired through third-party agencies. Evidence suggests that Indian firms have traditionally faced rigid labour laws and strong employment-protection provisions, making it difficult to adjust the workforce based on demand conditions. To circumvent these restrictions, firms increasingly depend on contractual arrangements, which offer them greater flexibility in workforce management and reduce costs associated with benefits and job security. A striking aspect of this trend is wide interstate variations. In 2022-23, it was observed that 68.6 per cent of the industrial workforce in Bihar is contract labour, whereas Kerala reports only 23.8 per cent.

Thus, uneven regulatory enforcement and different industrial practices across states add another layer of complexity to the challenge. There is also a clear rural-urban divide in that the share of contractual workers employed with factories located in rural areas is likely to be higher than that of contract workers in factories in urban centres. Economist Arvind Subramanian and others have, for example, shown how firms adopt “multi-plant” strategies to stay nimble and diversify risks emanating from regulations, including labour laws. This fragmentation prevents workers from organising effectively, keeping collective bargaining weak and wage demands low. However, as a result, firms in India are not able to attain scale, which affects productivity and competitiveness. This is one of the reasons India has not been able to take advantage of its labour abundance and has underperformed in terms of exporting labour-intensive goods. Even capital-intensive industries, which typically require skilled workers, are also witnessing higher contract-worker intensity than labour-intensive sectors, undermining the argument that contractualisation serves only low-skill or temporary needs. Instead, it points to a systemic shift towards precarious employment practices aimed at cost-cutting and power asymmetry.

These trends are concerning since contract workers do not enjoy the same employment benefits as regular workers. These include no job security, limited or no insurance, and no paid leave. The result is an increasingly fragile workforce that bears the brunt of economic shocks, with little recourse. In this context, operationalising the four labour codes without delay remains critical. They promise streamlined regulation, improved working conditions, and greater stability for contractual and gig workers. By making labour markets more inclusive and secure, they can help arrest the deteriorating quality even in the formal sector. In terms of broader macroeconomic outcomes, deterioration in labour-market conditions, even in the formal sector, will have implications for overall demand. India needs a balance between flexibility in the labour market and employment conditions.

Proving identity

SC ruling makes SIR inclusive

The Supreme Court on Monday effectively reprovved the Election Commission of India (ECI) for being excessively stringent in its operation of the “special intensive revision”, or SIR, in Bihar. This process, meant to recreate the electoral roll before the Assembly elections in that state, has become mired in controversy amid concerns about disenfranchisement. The court in July, however, chose not to act on those concerns and allowed the process to go ahead. But it did indicate that some documents — a ration card and the Aadhaar unique ID among them — should be considered as proof of residence by the poll panel. But the ECI, it appears, continued to avoid the use of Aadhaar.

This was clearly seen to be inaccurate. The court has correctly stepped in to point out that, under the law as written, a unique ID must be accepted as proof of identity, more so as the ECI plans a countrywide SIR. There are no shortcuts available when it comes to the process of establishing citizenship. A special and intensive revision of the electoral roll, as the name implies, cannot just choose to avoid the use of certain documents because that might make the ECI’s job more difficult. Unless all possible methods of providing identity are included, accusations that such revisions are not inclusive will gain traction.

It is important to note that Aadhaar was never meant or designed to be proof of citizenship. Indeed, it was originally not even meant to prove residence. As conceived, it was a lightweight way to use digital technology to link a person’s biometrics to a specific number. Even during the previous government, however, it began to be weighed down by debates about what additional weight it could carry. The Union home ministry felt that it would compete with its National Population Register, which enumerated citizens, and fought against it; the eventual compromise was to turn it into address proof. However, the fact is that it is now widely accepted as proof of identity and residence, and thus must be scrutinised and not ignored by anyone trying to exclude a possible voter from the roll.

The entire SIR project is problematic for the simple reason that establishing citizenship cannot be a special and intensive project prior to a pivotal election. The fact is that India has always had a problem identifying its citizens. This will probably decrease in future generations, given that more births are being officially registered now, and the ideal proof of citizenship is the birth certificate. But as it stands, a majority of Bihar’s voters asked to submit documentation were born in periods when the birth-registration rate was below 10 per cent. Thus, the process of validation becomes extremely difficult. Under such circumstances, as the court noted, it becomes a “trust issue”. In other words, the agency undertaking the effort of validating the right to vote must be operating with the highest standards, be seen to be impartial, and have adequate capacity dedicated to the task.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council should be complimented for breaking the “tyranny of status quo” by restructuring and reducing the number of GST rates. Following the Prime Minister’s Independence Day address, which promised a Diwali gift of lowering the tax burden, there were optimistic expectations of a reduced rate, a simpler structure, and greater ease of tax payments. Credit goes to the Union finance minister, as chairperson of the GST Council, for persuading the members to unanimously adopt the decision to restructure the tax into two major rates by moving most items under the 12 per cent slab to the 5 per cent category, while also implementing measures to speed up registration and ensure faster refunds.

International experience shows that there is no “one-size-fits-all” system of value added tax (VAT). Each country adopts a variant of VAT, depending on political acceptability and convenience. However, if some bad features, such as large-scale exemptions, too high or low thresholds, or multiple rates creep into its implementation, it is very difficult to remove them later. However, if restructuring is done to reduce the tax burden, it gets universal acceptance. Not surprisingly, the decision to reduce the number of rates has been welcomed by all. While there was apprehension about revenue loss among the non-National Democratic Alliance-ruled states, the finance minister seems to have allayed their fears. In any case, they too do not wish to be seen as obstructionists.

According to official estimates, the reform is expected to entail a revenue loss of about ₹48,000 crore on an annualised basis for this financial year. This

works out to ₹8,000 crore per month, which is not very high. This is not surprising because consumption of those items that will now be taxed at 5 per cent is likely to expand to some extent, offsetting part of the loss, as most of the items in this category are expected to have reasonably high price elasticity of demand. In any case, the revenue from items under the 12 per cent slab was about 5 per cent of the total, and reducing the rate will have only a marginal impact. However, restricting the 28 per cent category to demerit goods — particularly the reduction in rates on construction materials and automobiles and their parts — is likely to make a dent in revenue. Not surprisingly, the non-NDA ruled states have voiced apprehensions. In some cases, this could affect their fiscal balance or capital expenditure, and it remains to be seen how they will adjust.

While reducing GST to two main rates is a significant measure, it is important to note that the system is still riddled with problems. Ideally, a GST levied at a single rate, apart from exemptions, eliminates many administrative and compliance issues and reduces distortions. It is no surprise that 81 per cent of the countries that have adopted VAT in one form or another since 2000 have preferred to levy the tax at a single rate. Even after the elimination of the 12 per cent category to reduce the structure to two main rates, some of the problems will continue. The large difference between 5 per cent and 18 per cent, besides incentivising lobbying to seek the lower rate, can lead to misclassification of the goods, often resulting in litigation. There will be instances where the prevailing rates can create an inverted duty structure, particu-



POLICY PILLARS
M GOVINDA RAO

larsly in items such as apparel, footwear, tractors, fertilisers, pharmaceuticals, and edible oil. The issue becomes more severe in the case of a consumption-type VAT, where input tax credit is also allowed on capital goods and machinery purchases. The distortions continue when the tax rates are bracketed according to the value of the commodity or service, or when the rate varies with end-use categories.

The reduction in the GST rate from 12 per cent to 5 per cent on a number of items is expected to provide a cushion against the adverse effects of the Trump tariffs on gross domestic product (GDP) growth by boosting private consumption. GDP at constant prices in the first quarter recorded an impressive growth of 7.8 per cent, driven mainly by strong growth in private and government consumption expenditure and capital formation, aided by the front-loading of government capital expenditure.

It is hoped that the reduction in GST rates will provide an additional thrust to the private consumption engine needed to achieve the projected 6.5 per cent growth this year. However, since items in the 12 per cent category account for only about 5 per cent of total GST, the additional boost to consumption may not be significant. At the same time, it must be noted that the adverse effects of higher US tariffs will be on both net exports and foreign investments, and the only way to counter this is to seek alternative markets and undertake reforms to make the economy more competitive. Similarly, the expectation that the reduction will reduce the inflation rate substantially to warrant a cut in the policy rate may also be questionable, for at present almost 50 per cent of the items that are in the consumer price index bundle are exempted from GST.

The most important tax reform needed at the present juncture to counter Trump tariffs is to make the economy more competitive. In this context, the reform to expand the tax base to include petroleum products is important. Presently, the cascading effect of taxes on petroleum products is very high and this increases the cost of transportation of goods and people.

In 2023-24, cascading taxes at the Union level constituted 24.4 per cent of total domestic consumption taxes, while at the state level, domestic consumption taxes, excluding GST and state excise duties, constituted 34.4 per cent of consumption taxes.

Of course, the revenue loss factor outweighs any other consideration in this reform, but it is necessary to make a realistic estimate of the loss and initiate measures to limit it by pruning the list of exempted goods. The inclusion of petroleum products in GST would help in taxing the transport sector much more comprehensively than at present. Also, services such as legal fees, which are currently exempt, should be brought into the tax net to make it more comprehensive. Similarly, the merit goods rate can be increased to 6-7 per cent.

However, this reform will not be easy to implement, since neither the Union nor the states would like to risk revenues, and the Union government is unlikely to take the lead because 85 per cent of the excise duty collected on petroleum products comes from cesses and additional excise duties, which are non-shareable. But these are dire times, and it is necessary to think out of the box to inject greater competitiveness.

The author is chairman, Karnataka Regional Imbalances Redressal Committee. The views are personal

India must hold the inflation target line

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has initiated the second statutory review of the flexible inflation targeting (FIT) framework it has used since 2016. Its recent discussion paper seeks public feedback on whether FIT, which has anchored the Monetary Policy Committee’s (MPC’s) decisions for nearly a decade, remains relevant for India’s economy.

The paper raises four questions: Should the RBI target headline or core inflation, given food’s dominant weight in retail price index? Is the 4 per cent inflation target with a tolerance band (+/- 2 per cent) still appropriate for a fast-growing economy? Should the tolerance band be adjusted or scrapped entirely? And should the point target give way to a more flexible range-based approach?

To answer, it is useful to understand what the framework has delivered. Since May 2016, headline inflation has averaged just around 4.8 per cent. Expectations, once volatile, have become more stable. The median one-year-ahead inflation expectation has declined significantly from earlier double-digit peaks towards a narrower range of 8 to 10 per cent. Even when price pressures surged above 6 per cent — in 2019, when onion prices spiked, during the Covid-19 pandemic, and after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine — the RBI’s Inflation Expectations Survey of Households (IESH) shows that expectations remained strongly anchored. That is no small achievement. FIT has ended India’s long cycle of inflation surges and stop-go monetary policy.

The anchor has held because it aligns with how inflation is experienced in India. Food and fuel account for nearly 50 per cent of the consumption basket for the poor, and price surges in these items dominate the lived experience of inflation. In a financially constrained economy, where credit markets are shallow, poor households cannot easily smooth con-

sumption. Thus, food shocks quickly feed into demand and wages. That makes headline inflation, not core, the welfare-relevant measure. Targeting a narrower index, stripped of food and energy, would effectively de-anchor inflation expectations and weaken the legitimacy of the RBI’s monetary policy.

What of the target itself? After July’s undershoot to an eight-year low of 1.55 per cent, the allure of lowering the target is easy to see. Conversely, many analysts argue that raising it could help accommodate transient supply-side shocks. Both temptations should be resisted. The RBI’s own analysis shows that 4 per cent inflation roughly coincides with a zero-output gap, balancing price stability with growth. Importantly, after nine years, the 4 per cent target has become a Schelling point around which expectations, politics and markets seem to have converged. There is little case for shifting it.

Nor is there a case for abandoning the point target with tolerance bands in favour of a bare range. Behavioural evidence shows expectations anchor around clear midpoints, not fuzzy intervals. The midpoint disciplines both policymakers and price-setters. Narrowing the 2-6 per cent corridor would force the MPC into pro-cyclical tightening whenever the monsoon falters or oil prices jump; a wider band would blur accountability when rising global uncertainty may demand monetary discipline.

India’s inflation record over recent years has been shaped less by demand imbalances than by recurrent supply shocks, such as volatile food prices, erratic monsoons, energy price swings, and geopolitical developments. Many have questioned whether FIT can remain effective in such an environment. Recent evidence suggests that the framework has improved policy traction despite higher volatility. Work by Raghuvanshi and Ahmad (2024), published in the *Journal*



AMARENDU NANDY

of *Asian Economics*, shows that since adopting FIT, the interest-rate and credit channels have become more effective in restraining inflation, while their impact on output has diminished. Monetary policy now transmits more directly to prices with less collateral damage to growth, clearly a hallmark of a firm, credible anchor. FIT has allowed the RBI to respond calmly to shocks, without the overcorrection cycles that once unsettled growth.

What must evolve is the framework of accountability and communication that supports FIT. The RBI’s statutory obligation under Section 45ZN — writing to the government when inflation remains outside the band for three quarters — must become a more transparent accountability exercise, much like how the Bank of England follows an “open letter” system. The public report should explain the reasons for the breach and the horizon over which inflation will be steered back to 4 per cent. The RBI must also publish policy-consistent inflation projections and the expected timeframe for a return to target, making its intent easier to assess and its response function more predictable.

The RBI should also strengthen signal extraction while keeping headline consumer price index (CPI) as the legal target. It could publish core measures like trimmed-mean or median indices to separate temporary spikes from persistent pressures. The Bank of Canada does so with CPI-trim and CPI-median, giving a clearer view of underlying trends without weakening the anchor.

With fiscal pressures rising worldwide and monetary independence under strain, the anchor must remain. We must not fix what is not broken. The imperative is to make flexibility predictable and accountability visible. That is how the RBI can continue to preserve its hard-won credibility.

The author is assistant professor (economics) at IIM, Ranchi. The views are personal

Empathy beyond the treeline



SNEHA PATHAK

Laurent Tillon’s *Being an Oak* has been translated from the French original *Être un chêne: sous l’écorce de Quercus* by Jessica Moore and tells the story of nature, using a forest and an oak tree within it as its focus. The oak, which Mr Tillon names Quercus, is located in Rambouillet Forest where he has spent a considerable time in the company of nature.

Mr Tillon begins the story of Quer-

cus 240 years ago in 1780, right from the moment Quercus, then an acorn, falls down from another, older oak tree. Written in a way that is bound to remind his readers of a novel, Mr Tillon goes on to chart the life story and the various stages in the life and growth of his beloved Quercus till 2020, when the book comes to an end. In telling us the story of Quercus, he also tells us the story of many other creatures and beings, including the lively, thriving, Silva — his name for Quercus’ home, a forest constantly abuzz with activity. The other major characters in the history of Quercus include Homos, the man; Apodemus, the wood mouse; Tortrix, the caterpillar; Canis, the wolf and many others species, each of which plays an important role in his life. Through the interlinked life stories of these creatures, Mr Tillon manages to remind his readers of the complex web

of interdependent relationships that we all share with nature.

It’s not surprising to learn that apart from Homos, the relationship of all the other participants of this natural cycle remains one of harmony, co-existence, and most often of symbiosis. It is only human interference, right from the days before the French Revolution, which brings major, long-term, and not always useful, changes in nature’s rhythms. Reading *Being an Oak* is like immersing oneself into a world that most of us are, at best, only partially aware of. Through the life of Quercus and his neighbouring flora and fauna, we come to realise the complex and advanced processes of nature and how nature has the capacity to incessantly change, adapt and heal itself when left to its own devices.

Mr Tillon’s narrative of Quercus’ story is thrilling and exciting. His storytell-

ing-like writing technique also ensures that the book remains immensely readable despite the usage of botanical and other scientific terms used in the book from time to time. His quasi-mystical relationship with Quercus and Silva is reflected in his writing. He is writing not just as a forester (Mr Tillon is the head of biodiversity at France’s National Forestry Office) or a scientist, but as someone who feels a deep, almost spiritual, connection with nature and loves to spend time away from the human world in the company of trees.

Trees and nature teach Mr Tillon, and by extension readers, certain valuable lessons about life through the way nature behaves and takes care of its own. For instance, the book shows us that while trees might seem to be solitary and static organisms, they are actually connected



Being an Oak: Life as a Tree
by Laurent Tillon
Published by Ithaka Press
277 pages ₹799

through their mycorrhizal networks with other trees in the forest and share not just important elements required for their growth, but also send and receive distress signals in time of need. This leads Mr Tillon to share a profound life lesson he has learnt in the company of Quercus: “In the forest, all is shared, all is recycled, and mutual aid goes far beyond the species barrier.”

Being an Oak also shows its readers how beings in nature respect boundaries, never encroaching or claiming what’s not theirs, always co-existing with their neighbours who draw nutrients

from the same soil, sun, air and water. Mr Tillon also describes how human needs and wants, in contrast, often negatively impact the forests and how old forester’s policies might be changed in keeping with the needs of the rapidly advancing populations.


It’s interesting to note that though Mr Tillon says that he doesn’t want to use anthropocentrism, he does so in the book. This, along with the usage of personal pronouns for all the beings that feature in Quercus’ life story adds to the impact of the book. Ms Moore also comments upon this usage in her Translator’s Note, pointing out that using personal pronouns for trees and animals was a deliberate choice on her part as using these can “shift our whole relationship to nature, of which we often forget we are a part.”

Mr Tillon’s writing comes from a place rooted in a deep sense of empathy, with an almost mystical connection with Silva in general and Quercus in particular. His meditations upon nature and descriptions of the buzzing forest life in the last chapter might just inspire readers to leave the world behind, find a forest, and develop a relationship with a Quercus of their own.

The reviewer is an independent writer and translator

Apropos 'Himalayan Firestorm: Chaudhry Nepal' by Dipanjan Roy Chaudhry (Sep 10), John Dryden's quote, 'Beware the fury of a patient man', comes to mind when looks at the public uprising in Nepal, where the nation's youth, waiting for years with infinite patience for the rulers to stop being corrupt and self-serving, and work for the development and progress of the country, have found their patience wearing thin and have decided to revolt. Nepal is the third country in the neighbourhood, after Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, to witness an orgy of violence, with a former PM's wife losing her life after her house was set on fire, and the PM's residence, parliament, etc, being torched. Here's hoping that with the army moving in and PM KP Sharma Oli resigning, peace will descend soon on this Himalayan kingdom.

*C V Aravind
Banguru*



A thought for today
Only the mob and the elite can be attracted by the momentum of totalitarianism itself. The masses have to be won by propaganda
HANNAH ARENDT

99% Wrong

Nepal is another cautionary tale of govts acting like elitist 1%. India's politics is a check on this

Inequality has existed almost from the time humans settled down as agriculturists 10,000 years ago, and there's a view that govts emerged as a way for the elite to exploit the rest. Oli's govt perhaps subscribed to it. Else, it would have picked up the tectonic rumblings that brought it down on Tuesday. Although not the worst, Nepal's inequality problem is serious. Per World Inequality Database, the top 1% of its population pockets 13.4% of income, while the bottom half lives on 18.5%. Wealth inequality is much worse – the top 1% holds 25%, the bottom half only 4%. Reports say ordinary Nepalis felt powerless and disenfranchised in the face of this disparity. But the youth, especially, chafed at the growing arrogance of the powerful, and their own diminishing prospects in an economy that increasingly runs on remittances.

As a communist, Oli would have been familiar with Marx's warning about history repeating itself, first as tragedy and then as farce. France wasn't poor in 1789 – its GDP was thrice the size of Britain's – but it brought the Revolution upon itself by coddling the elite while flogging the masses. Tsarist Russia ran into the same twister. The past century has been even more unforgiving to govts that cling to the idea of Divine Right. Centuries ago, Arthashastra laid down simply what govts were expected to do – provide security, justice and economic prosperity to people. Modern govts everywhere are expected to deliver these goods. Even autocracies like China, Russia and Saudi Arabia are mindful of the aspirations of their masses now. In US politics, the phrase, "It's the economy, stupid", resonates three decades after Bill Clinton's campaign coined it in 1992. Downward revision of employment data last month rattled Trump so much that he fired his Bureau of Labour Statistics chief.

The truth is, people agreed to submit to govts 5,000 years ago in return for public benefits. That's the original social contract. India, for all its burden of poverty, inequality, corruption and unemployment, has not faced the kind of ructions its neighbours have, because competitive democracy doesn't allow the governing party to lose touch with the ground. If govt can't create jobs, it tries to compensate with free rations. This isn't ideal, or sustainable, but pragmatic. Even Machiavelli, for all his twisted views, agreed that for a govt to keep people on its side – rather than the elite – is good policy because "the great want to oppress and the people (only) want not to be oppressed".

India-US Thaw?

Hard to say. Trump can change his mind anytime. But there may just be a chance that things are looking up

Trump's social media post confirming that India and US are continuing their trade negotiations perked up markets yesterday. Trump also said he looks forward to speaking with Modi over the coming days. But coming on the back of acrimonious statements from White House and MAGA acolytes like Peter Navarro, New Delhi would do well to be cautious. Trump's mercurial nature – just days ago he was saying that India and Russia were lost to deepest, darkest China – combined with his need to satiate his tariff-focused MAGA base means that a deal isn't done until it's actually done.

India has done well to smartly hold its ground and send some strategic signals to Washington via the SCO summit in Tianjin. It also prudently engaged a lobbyist close to Trump. The cumulative effect of these moves is to impress upon Trump the value of the India-US strategic relationship, which goes beyond trade. Plus, Trump is focused only on goods trade where India has a surplus. But he conveniently ignores services trade where US enjoys a surplus to the tune of \$44bn. Add to this the potential of US defence sales to India that have been growing since 2007 and valued at over \$24bn. US platforms have to be part of the mix as India modernises its armed forces inventory.

Then there is the China factor. If Washington wants to counter Beijing's growing hegemony in the Indo-Pacific, it needs New Delhi in its corner. And with China and Russia having formed a limitless compact, it strategically suits India to be part of groupings like Quad. Finally, there are the huge, unquantifiable, mutual benefits that accrue from India-US people-to-people connections and synergies in scientific research, tech and myriad other fields. Neither country would like to sacrifice this. Trump, therefore, should follow through on his words and quickly end this trade feud.

Our man in Armani

Has haute couture lost its hauteur?

Bachi Karkaria

Indian designers now strut Oscar red carpet and Met galas so frequently that vaunted French and Italian labels may no longer be as wanted. So many fancied international brands swagger through our dollar-a-dozen malls that you can have a walk-in closet full of braggie handbags without stepping out of the country. Then there's the great leveler, knock-offs. They've become so good that some women no longer splurge on the real thing fearing that no one other than the incurable *ingenue* will believe it's genuine. *La dolce Vuitton* has got so soured by over-buy that, asked by a London tabloid what he'd give as a gift, design-guru Terence Conran shot back 'None of that LV tat!' So, the passing of Giorgio Armani last week should only be of passing interest, no? No.

Mythology is the OG influencer. The Italian designer who freed men from fussy suits and created the unstructured jacket will continue to endure. So will French Coco Chanel because her LBD did the same for women. Created in 1926, the Little Black Dress answered the crying need for a 'well-mannered' frock which would see the sartorially correct through afternoon tea into the cocktail hour.

Christened Gabrielle Bonheur, she acquired the flirty nickname from 'Where are you, Coco?' the number she sang in night clubs after having to leave her nun-run orphanage home at 18. Her legend lives even if some of our sisterhood have mauled the classic LBD, tarting Coco's no-frills ready-to-wear into flouncy party-wear.

Like McAlloo Tikki and 'peeza dosa', we now *desify* everything with *atma nirbhay* self-confidence. But reverse osmosis was long the norm. Of the Sindhis who dominated New York's rag trade in the 1970s, one was talented enough to get co-branded with storied Gloria Vanderbilt when she launched 'the first jeans designed for women'. It suited him to let people think that 'Murjani' was as Italian as 'Modigliani'.

Today, Tarun Tahiliani wouldn't need to resort to such dissembling. Nor Sabyasachi replace his 'h' with a Latinish second 'c'. *Grazie* a dio Indian designers no longer depend on Guccipudi. They can Fendi for themselves.

Alec Smart said: "Gen-Z always teaches lesson to GenAuthority. Shut Down leads to Blow Up."

Grown-Up Questions For Gen-Z

Who'll head Nepal's next govt is a question complicated by the fact that protesters aren't ideological & there's no clarity as of now which institution they should talk to for regime change

Keshav Pradhan

Reports from Nepal are conflicting and confusing. At the time of going to print it appeared from social media posts that a so-called 'students poll' identified its key demands as dissolution of parliament, declaring Nepal a Hindu rashtra, making ex-chief justice of Nepal Supreme Court Sushila Karki interim PM. And, a demand for a new constitution.

In the last six decades, Nepal has changed its constitution as many times. Yet it finds itself still stuck in a maze of political instability, corruption, nepotism, underdevelopment, unemployment and migration. The joke goes: "Rahadani (passport) is the only thing most easily available in Nepal." Migration of its workforce, which began soon after the 1814-16 Anglo-Nepal War, continues unabated, in ever growing numbers, to all four hemispheres. To depict their ever rising disillusionment with leadership, Nepalis often quote an old proverb: "Junai jogi aaye pani kaanaai chireko" (Whoever the mendicant, he always has split earlobes).

This week, it took protesters less than 48 hours to bring Nepal's dispensation, comprising communist and democratic parties, to its knees. Propellers of the latest political change, called Gen-Z, were born between 1997 and 2012 – a period that saw Nepal abolish the 1990 constitution, transit to the 2008 interim constitution, onto the 2015 constitution that completes its 10th anniversary on Sept 20. The 2015 constitution was the result of 10 years of Maoists' 'people's war', which cost more than 17,000 lives, and Jan Andolan-II led by mainstream democratic and Left parties.

The recent events were reminiscent of those of 1979 when King Birendra's refusal to allow students to take out a rally against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's hanging snowballed into a huge political controversy. Relentless student protests forced the palace to hold a referendum on whether Nepalis want a multi-party system. Political

parties were then banned, and supporters of the party-less system ultimately won opinion polls a year later.

Question now is which way will Nepal turn so far its system of governance is concerned. The scale of violence this time was unprecedented – death toll on a single day has never been so high. The three primary symbols of democracy – parliament house, headquarters of federal govt (Singha Durbar) and Supreme Court – were set on fire, reminding everyone of unrest in Sri Lanka (2022) and Bangladesh (2024).

On Wednesday, a day after PM Oli of CPN-UML quit office, govt-run daily *Gorkhapatra* carried a statement by Gen-Z Movement Alliance – "Our uprising has reached the final stage." The Alliance ruled out compromise with "the old political establishment." Few had expected a campaign against the ban on certain social media platforms would take such a radical turn.

It's a matter of time before individuals and groups with vested interests start a debate on possible invisible players from within and outside of Nepal. Unlike in the past when popular movements were run by ideology-based organisations, the present campaign has no such identity.

This may make Nepal struggle a lot more to find a leadership acceptable to all sections and return to normalcy. Every established leader is under close scrutiny. In view of this, statements by President Paudel, army chief Gen AR Sigdel and deposed King Gyanendra merely appeal for restraint, peaceful resolution. Army's taken charge of law and order. The ex-King has been making news ever since monarchists and Rastriya Prajajanta Party launched a campaign last year to return him to the throne he lost in 2008, with the slogan: "Raja aao desh bachau" (king, come back, save us). His supporters demand restoration of Nepal as a Hindu state.

A section of Nepali Congress, often seen as pro-India, supports multi-party monarchical democracy initiated by



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America's Asking: Will Trump Get Epsteined?

He's survived so many scandals that there's no guarantee a full release of Epstein files, even if they have damaging info, will lead to his downfall

Michael Wasiura



Columnist based in Washington DC

If there's anything that might persuade Trump's supporters to turn against their orange idol, it is the contents of Epstein files – an enormous trove of documents that US law enforcement agencies gathered while investigating the systematic sex trafficker's crimes. The documents released by a congressional committee this week include

a 2003 birthday note to Epstein, with sexually suggestive drawing and text, allegedly sketched and signed by Trump.

Since 2019, when *The Miami Herald* published a meticulously investigated report alleging that New York billionaire Jeffrey Epstein had been flying underage girls to his Caribbean island, rumours have swirled about all of the rich and powerful men who might have compromised themselves while paying a visit there.

In mid-Aug 2019, four days after Epstein was found dead in his New York City jail cell, Trump rhetorically asked a gaggle of reporters, "Did Bill Clinton go to the island? That's the question." Pro-Trump propagandists have been demanding the publication of Epstein's client list ever since. For a while, Trump openly supported them. "Yeah, I'd be inclined to do the Epstein," he said in an interview two months before the 2024 election. "I'd have no problem with it."

Since then, the Trump administration has been notably liberal when it comes to declassifying other sensitive documents. Materials pertaining to the assassination of John F Kennedy were released in March. FBI's files on civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr followed in July. And in Aug, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard publicly ousted a pair of undercover CIA officers. And yet, the administration has deemed the Epstein files unworthy of similar treatment.

Of course, if the files do indeed contain info about which members of the global elite actually accepted Epstein's invitations for an island getaway, no one in

America – whether they are a Republican, a Democrat, or a former First Lady named Hillary – will be surprised if our notoriously promiscuous 42nd president turns out to have been a regular guest. As Trump told reporters in July, "You ought to be speaking about Bill Clinton, who went to the island 28 times."

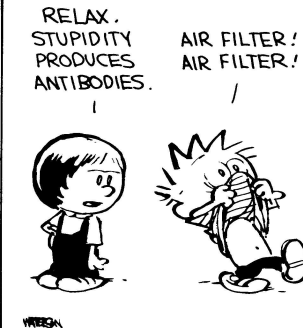
The problem for Trump is that it would be equally



surprising if our 45th and 47th president, who was famously close with Epstein in decades past, really has nothing to hide. Although Trump continues to claim that "I never went to the island," only his most blindly loyal supporters actually believe him.

This past May, Attorney General Pam Bondi briefed Trump about the fact that his name was featured in the documents, and if irrefutable evidence emerges that Trump is not being truthful about his travel history, then Epstein-gate really could prove to be the scandal that finally causes his base to realise their hero has

Calvin & Hobbes



Chardi Kala: The Sikh Secret To Joyful Living

Stuti Malhotra

In the wake of devastating floods in Punjab, where countless families grapple with loss, uncertainty, and hardship, the Sikh spirit once again turns to its timeless source of resilience. Even amid waters of despair, the principle of Chardi Kala – ever-rising spirit – reminds us that hope, strength, and faith can never be drowned. This uniquely Sikh ideal doesn't merely urge optimism; it embodies a profound spiritual resilience, grounded in divine trust, contentment, and service.

The secret to happiness is *Santokh*, contentment. Unlike desire, which multiplies endlessly, contentment draws a full stop after basic needs are met. In one telling incident, a man complained to a friend about a modest salary raise. The friend asked, "Back in college, did you ever imagine earning

this much?" The man admitted he hadn't. "Then your discontent isn't about your salary; it's about someone earning more in comparison to you." Such reflections illustrate how comparison, not reality, robs us of happiness.

True joy stems from an inner alignment with *hukam*, Divine will, cultivated through *naam simran*, humility, remembrance, and gratitude.

Guru Granth Sahib repeatedly reminds us that real happiness cannot be found in fleeting pleasures but is rooted in an inward journey. Bhagat Namdev offers a metaphor: just as a boy flying a kite talks and laughs with friends but remains focused on the string, a spiritually aware person engages with the world but stays anchored in the Divine. This balance – being in the world but not

of it – is the essence of Chardi Kala.

Guru Nanak Dev says, "*Chintat hee deesee sabh koe. Cheeteh ek tahee sukh hoe* (SGGS P932)" – everyone has worries and cares. He alone finds peace who thinks of one Lord.

Guru Nanak Dev, in opening verses of *Japji Sahib*, addresses the human quest for truth: *Hukam rajaee chalnaa Naanak likhiaa naal* (SGGS P1) – O Nanak! It is written that you shall obey *hukam* of His command and walk in the way of His will.

"How can one become truthful? By walking in *hukam*." To accept *hukam* is to accept that not everything goes according to our individual will, but everything unfolds according to a higher plan. Yet, accepting *hukam* is not always easy. The *haumai*, human ego, rebels, desiring control. It asks, 'Why me?' The

root of suffering often lies in the gap between our expectations and reality. Chardi Kala bridges this gap – not by eliminating pain, but by transforming our relationship with it.

Bhai Vir Singh compares *naam simran* to cleaning a mirror: just as a dusty mirror cannot reflect light, a distracted mind cannot perceive peace. Through consistent remembrance, the grime of ego and desire is wiped away, revealing a radiant Self. Path of *seva* frees one from shackles of ego.

To dwell in Chardi Kala is not to suppress sorrow, but to surpass it with spiritual strength. It is spiritual optimism that sings even in sorrow, that perseveres in faith even when circumstances betray it. A Sikh Ardas concludes: "*Nanak Naam Chardi Kala, tere bhane Sarbat da bhala*" – may the spirit always rise, and may all humanity prosper in Your will.

Sacred space



It's a question of attitude. If you really work at something you can do it up to a point. If you really work at being happy you can do it up to a point. But anything more than that you can't. Anything more than that is luck.

Haruki Murakami



THE SPEAKING TREE