# comment

Whoever saves one life saves the world entire - The Talmud

# Railways must take every step to prevent stampedes

Tt is not surprising that our report on Prabhadevi station witnessing ■ stampede-like conditions after the shutdown of the Elphinstone Road bridge has elicited an avalanche of responses.

With two of the bridge's staircases closed for demolition, thousands of commuters are now funnelling onto a narrow foot overbridge to move between the east and west, causing severe crowding during rush hours.

These staircases, used mainly by

commuters heading to Parel in the east or Prabhadevi in the west, have forced people to walk northward to reach the two remaining bridges. Sources said this surge should be diverted to the newly constructed south-end bridge to prevent the north-end bridges, which also serve Parel station, from becoming dangerously congested.

Photographs accompanying our report show a long line of commuters using a narrow bridge. This is a potentially dangerous situation, and we

must have people diverted to the south end of the bridge. It is good to read that personnel are stationed to guide people. There is signage, too. It will benefit people to follow a less crowded route, so that in case of any emergency, one is safer with a thinner route. People must also accede to RPF and GRP personnel deployed to divert the crowd from the first six coaches toward the two northend bridges, while commuters from the remaining six coaches are being guided toward the south-end bridge.

The Railways can explore if announcements can be made on platforms to take the less crowded bridges or options available, so that commuters are mentally prepared to move towards the newer bridges. In any case, a good announcement system and some messages to passengers as they alight about not pushing, listening to rumours, and ways in which one can move out need constant reinforcement, so they should be played over the system.

# Fooling or feeding the algorithm?

**SOCIAL BUTTERFLY** 



Aastha Atray Banan

ast month, after I posed a snarky post about the atrocity that is the talk show called Two Much, hosted by Twinkle Khanna and Kajol, my follower count finally budged. It went up from 22,300 (where it had been since 2022) to 23,300, where it's been sitting pretty since. And even though my account got six million views last month, it's all quietened down now. My rant worked—because Indians love nothing better than bringing down Bollywood and its blatant nepotism and inherent bias — but the question was now what?

As a creator, engagement is paramount. But even if your content is smart, witty, life-altering wisdom, it can only touch people, if it reaches people. And that's where we say hello to the algorithm. For me, a sore point has been to see content that is all about sound life advice on how to deal with family, society, life's challenges — but the videos begin with/ or are completely shot with the creator in his/her underwear or putting on clothes/or in a bikini. For example, a creator called Komal, who also is a life coach, talks about divorce, getting life back on track after a toxic relationship, being a single parent, not bending down to society (all pertinent subjects), but her videos sometimes open with her in a bra, putting on a t-shirt. And for a second, I am confused. Did this video need this hook?

They say it does. A 2020 study by the European Data Journalism Network and Algorithm Watch, says that Instagram's algorithm prioritised posts showing "scantily-clad" men and women, with posts of women in underwear being 54 per cent more likely to appear in users' feeds. In 2025, that percentage must have increased multifold. So, in that case, Komal has hit the bull's eye where the message is serious, but the way it's presented is strategic. She really doesn't need me, or cares about me, getting incensed here.

Worldwide, creators have done

It's a brutal battle to stay relevant on Instagram, and even more so to get noticed by the right audience. But, should we succumb to the algorithm asking for a sexy hook in lingerie, to up follower count?



Some social media influencers use the algorithm's bias for their own benefit. REPRESENTATION PIC/ISTOCK

what Komal's doing. They use the algorithm's bias for their own benefit — there are body positivity creators who cook in sexy lingerie, fashion and beauty influencers who make Get Ready With Me videos as they talk about trauma, relationships, confidence building — all as they also sell products and recommend what to wear, what to eat. Offline, the radical feminist group from Ukraine, Femen, protest topless against sexism, authoritarianism, and religion. Their form of protest is to free their bodies of patriarchy, and expose the hypocrisy as they get media attention to highlight important issues.

But what has always made me wonder (and I slipped in a Carrie Bradshaw reference here, IYKYK) is where does it leave a creator like me? I am confident, can speak to the camera, can

write ranty carousels on what upsets me, but I can't show skin on Instagram. I am one of those who places icons and emojis strategically to cover cleavage. And to try and fool the algorithm by posting content where I am not fully dressed, gives me the jitters. I admire and am in awe of anyone who can do it.

But here is my question: Are we really fooling the algorithm, or are we feeding the beast who then will want more of the same? If I talk about perimenopause or the challenges of being a mid-level, middle-age manager, all while wearing a bikini, am I not succumbing to the same pressures of society that we are trying to break through? And then, will not every creator, whatever their followers' count be, struggle to get seen and heard, without using the clickbait

For me, a sore point has been to see content that is all about sound life advice on how to deal with family, society, life's challenges but the videos begin with/or are completely shot with the creator in his/her underwear or putting on clothes/or in a bikini

hook of partial nudity?

But then people may say, hey, podcast bros seem to be getting all the eyeballs without being in their speedos. And if you are a stand-up comic or make funny skits, well, you got the numbers. Or if you rage bait with every single video, well, that works too. So, maybe I, you or anybody reading this who relates, just needs to make better content. Content that breaks through the clutter. Content that speaks louder than an algorithm.

All we can do is try. Like this column will, every week, without you ever knowing I am wearing my "I love my bed" pyjamas as I write it. Oops.

Ranting and raving about all that's trending on social media, Aastha Atray Banan is an author, creator, podcaster, and the Editor of your favourite weekend read, Sunday mid-day. She posts at @aasthaatray on Instagram.

Send your feedback to mailbag@mid-day.com

# **LETTERS**

# Govt must step up for citizens in distress

This refers to 'mid-day helps bring back Mumbaikar stuck in Qatar'. A passport can be lost abroad, and the Indian embassy must help citizens in such cases. The plight of Pius Coutinho after losing his passport in Doha was shocking. mid-day's report pushed authorities to act, and the embassy finally issued the certificate enabling his return.

**SN KABRA** 

# Permanent safety checks can save precious lives

This refers to 'We must learn lessons from horrific Goa tragedy'. Blocked exits, weak fire systems, untrained staff, and inflammable decor show clear neglect and bypassed rules. Tourism cannot run on such fragile safety; stronger, permanent fixes are needed.

**AMIT BANERJEE** 

# Mumbai resorts need tougher safety checks

More than 25 people died in the Goa resort fire, a reminder that Mumbai's resorts, especially near beaches, must also maintain strict safety checks so people can enjoy their parties without fear.

**CAJETAN PETER D'SOUZA** 

# State audits can catch hotel safety gaps early

The Goa tragedy shows why every state should review safety standards across hotels, restaurants, and pubs. A thorough audit can identify gaps early and prevent similar accidents, making public spaces safer for everyone. **BAL GOVIND** 

# have your say!







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# The Statesman

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

# **Defining Citizenship**

he United States is once again confronting a question that cuts to the heart of its democratic self-understanding: who belongs, and on what terms? The Supreme Court's decision to hear the challenge to birthright citizenship ~ ignited by the Trump Administration's attempt to deny automatic citizenship to children born to undocumented migrants and temporary-visa holders ~ represents far more than a procedural dispute. It is a moment of reckoning with the country's own constitutional promises, its anxieties about immigration, and the political rhetoric that has transformed a settled principle into a fresh battleground.

For over a century and a half, the framework has been clear. The 14th Amendment of the US Constitution enshrined a sweeping guarantee of citizenship for anyone born on American soil, save for the narrow and historically specific exceptions of children of diplomats and occupying foreign forces. This guarantee was designed to end the ambiguity surrounding the status of formerly enslaved people, ensuring that the circumstances of one's birth could not be wielded to deny full membership in the national community. Yet the amendment's clarity has not shielded it from reinterpretation by those who view the modern immigration landscape through a lens of threat rather than integration.

The administration argues that the phrase "subject to the jurisdiction thereof" excludes those born to parents who lack lawful status or permanent ties to the country. That interpretation upends both longstanding legal precedent and the pragmatic understanding of jurisdiction that courts have applied since Reconstruction. More importantly, it singles out a subclass of American-born children for diminished recognition, not because of anything they have chosen but because of the legal identity of their parents, a move that risks normalising inherited inequality.

The stakes could not be higher. Demographic analyses already indicate that ending birthright citizenship would expand the undocumented population sharply over the coming decades. Rather than deterring irregular migration, it could entrench a multi-generational category of people living in legal limbo, destabilising communities and stretching public institutions without offering any coherent solution to the systemic challenges of immigration enforcement. It would also unsettle the long-held assumption that the Constitution restrains the state from constructing hierarchies of belonging based on ancestry or administrative status.

The Court's eventual ruling will be pivotal. Upholding the executive order would signal a profound retreat from the inclusive logic of the post-Civil War constitutional settlement. Striking it down would reaffirm that citizenship is a civic, not hereditary or bureaucratic, identity ~ one rooted in the nation's historical commitment to equal birthright.

At a time of intense political polarisation, the decision will speak not only to constitutional interpretation but to the kind of society the United States chooses to be. The question before the Court is, in essence, whether foundational principles bend under contemporary pressures or remain anchor points in turbulent times.

# **Fragile Firewalls**

ustralia's decision to bar under-16s from social media is rooted in an anxiety that now spans continents: parents feel they are losing the battle to keep their Achildren safe online. The stories that propelled this move ~ relentless cyberbullying, algorithm-driven spirals of harmful content, and the inability of tech giants to meaningfully self-regulate ~ reflect genuine anguish. But as the law takes effect, its flaws are already visible. The ban promises order, but in practice it may offer little more than an illusion of control.

The first cracks appeared even before enforcement began on Tuesday. Teenagers, supposedly the targets of this sweeping reform, needed only minutes to bypass the system. Age-verification tools designed to underpin the law ~ facial scans, age inference, and digital ID checks ~ are inconsistent, easy to fool, and loaded with privacy risks. A parent's photograph held up to a camera, a cheap mask, or a VPN is often enough to defeat the very architecture meant to keep children out. What was envisioned as a robust digital checkpoint is shaping up to be a leaky sieve.

Yet, the deeper question is not whether teenagers can outsmart the system ~ they can, and many will ~ but whether this model of protection meaningfully reduces harm. Forcing children off major platforms may push them toward less-regulated apps, anonymous chat sites, and fringe online

spaces with weaker safety nets. The unintended consequence could be to expose them to precisely the dangers this law seeks to avoid. Larger platforms are imperfect, but their moderation systems, imperfect though they are, offer more protection than the digital back alleys young people may now explore.

The ban also risks overlooking the complex role social media plays in young lives. For many children, especially those who are isolated, neurodivergent, or questioning their identity, online spaces can be lifelines.

Cutting off access without creating alternative avenues for connection risks compounding their vulnerabilities. A single age threshold ~ 16 ~ cannot capture the nuances of adolescent development, nor can it substitute for digital education that equips children to navigate modern life.

What Australia's experiment ultimately demonstrates is the danger of mistaking a blunt instrument for a comprehensive strategy. Safety will not come from drawing a hard line at the login screen.

It will come from compelling platforms to redesign the mechanics of engagement, curb predatory algorithms, invest in moderation, and build guardrails that operate regardless of age. It will come from equipping young people with the literacy, self-awareness, and support systems needed to handle an

online world they cannot realistically be kept away from. Australia's move reflects a society desperate for action and unwilling to accept tech companies' inertia. But real progress will require more than exclusion. It will require reshaping the digital environment itself ~ because the answer to online harm is not simply keeping children out, but making the places they inhabit safer by design.



# One Country, Many Divisions

There are, indeed, a number of similarities between EU and India: both are polyphonic and pluralist democracies, both are *the antithesis of the modern* nation state, which requires a common religion, a common language and a common enemy. While India has twenty-eight States, EU comprises twenty-seven countries. Both have a common currency, a commonflagand a national anthem~butthefeeling of nationhood is missing in the EU. Also, like the EU, there are vast differences in income and productivity amongst Indian States. And much like the EU, inefficient regions of the Indian Union, are heavily subsidized by hard-workingStates

head of the visit of the President, and all European Union Commissioners, to India in February 2025, the Economist ran a leader "How India became an unexpected role model for Europe," that compared India favourably with the European Union (EU), which according to the Economist, had a 'sclerotic economy' and 'gridlocked politics.'

There are, indeed, a number of similarities between EU and India: both are polyphonic and pluralist democracies, both are the antithesis of the modern nation state, which requires a common religion, a common language and a common enemy. While India has twenty-eight States, EU comprises twenty-seven countries. Both have a common currency, a common flag and a national anthem ~ but the feeling of nationhood is missing in the EU.

Also, like the EU, there are vast differences in income and productivity amongst Indian States. And much like the EU, inefficient regions of the Indian Union, are heavily subsidized by hard-working States, courtesy the Finance Commission. As an aside, both Pakistan and Bangladesh are perfect examples of a modern nation state with a common religion (Islam), common language (Bangla and Urdu, respectively) and a common enemy (India), but both are on the verge of becoming failed states, while India and the EU are commendable success stories.

There is no denying the fact that diverse countries and groups, including Russia, China and EU, are cosying up to India, and vice-versa, because of the upheaval in international relations, caused by US President Trump's erratic activities. The US has all but rewritten her relations with Europe, by excluding Ukraine and all of Europe, in talks between the US and Russia in Riyadh in February, and later accentuating the divide by threatening to levy thirty per cent tariff on EU goods ~ an issue that was sorted out



Therefore, copious praise for our governance and institutions by Western media should be taken with a pinch of salt; it may be an atonement for decades of sarcastic, and sometimes even untrue reporting ~ as Virgil had said much earlier, 'beware of the Greek bearing gifts.' There is, of course a distinct disadvantage that India suffers vis-à-vis the EU; while Europe is perceptibly divided amongst different nations, divisions in India are not so apparent but often much deeper. Also, EU members enjoy good bonhomie – even amongst those countries which were on opposite sides during the World Wars.

A division assiduously promoted by the political class in India, is the North-South divide, of which language chauvinism is an integral part. Southern states have a long-standing grudge against Northern states, because successive Finance Commissions have allocated funds according to a State's population, which worked to the disadvantage of southern States, because following Government policy, they controlled their population.

Again, because of lower population, the proposed delimitation of electoral constituencies, would add Lok Sabha seats to northern states, while southern states will send fewer MPs to the Lok Sabha. Then there is the eternal simmering problem of Hindi vs. southern languages, which is not a problem at all, because all languages can grow and flourish together, but sagacity and tolerance are required from politicians to halt what is turning into a

virtual language war. Then, India has highly visible economic divisions; we have an uber rich class, a very small middle class, and eighty crore people on free rations. Gross inequality is there for everyone to see ~ every city has skyscrapers housing the rich, and the poor living on the roads next to them. According to the M3M Hurun India Rich List 2025, India has 358 dollar-billionaires, i.e., individuals having wealth of more than Rs.9,000 crore, and 1,687 individuals, with a worth exceeding Rs.1,000 crore. The number of billionaires has increased six-fold since 2012, and India added 24 billionaires in 2024 alone.

According to Oxfam: "The top 10 per cent of the Indian population holds 77 per cent of the total national wealth. 73 per cent of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest 1 per cent, while 670 million Indians who comprise the poorest half of the population saw only a 1 per cent increase in their wealth."

There is, of course, a counterview; according to a recent World Bank report, with a Gini coefficient of 25.5, India was the fourth most equal country in the world. According to experts, the World Bank report was based on consumption, and not income data, which masks inequality, to some extent. Significantly, India's national account statistics, have been rated at 'C,' by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which concluded that data provided to them had "some shortcomings that somewhat hamper surveillance."

Also, Chancel and Piketty have observed, in the World Inequality Report 2022: "Over

the past three years, the quality of inequality data released by the government has seriously deteriorated, making it particularly difficult to assess recent inequality changes."

SAKSENA

The writer is a retired Principal Chief Commissioner of Income-Tax

One reason for this divergence in perception could be that most economies are even more unequal; the disparity between the wealth of the rich and poor is such that the combined wealth of the world's 10 richest men is more than the wealth of the poorest 3.1 billion people i.e., 40 per cent of the world's

population. The 10 richest men have so much wealth that if they spent a million dollars each a day, it would take them 414 years to spend their combined wealth, and if they sat on top of their combined wealth, piled up in US dollar bills, they would reach almost halfway to the moon.

Then there are concerns about freedom of religion, which is a Fundamental Right, guaranteed by the Constitution. A Pew Research Centre Survey, conducted in 2019-20, found that Indians of all religious backgrounds overwhelmingly felt that they were very free to practice their faiths. Across all major religious groups, most people said that it was very important to respect all religions to be "truly Indian."

The Survey also found that there were many shared values, accompanied by a number of common beliefs across religious lines. However, such syncretic traditions are increasingly under threat from vote-bank politics, with political parties trying to consolidate votes by appeals to religion, and by propagating a concept of cultural

nationalism, and perceived historical wrongs. Such views, once limited to the fringes, are now increasingly becoming mainstream, through right-wing espousal. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) observed that the present government had "allowed violence against minorities, and their houses of worship to continue with impunity, and also engaged in and tolerated hate speech, and incitement to violence." The Commission has consistently recommended that India be labelled a "country of particular concern" which denotes

the lowest level of religious freedom. These views have been emphatically repudiated by the Government, but moderate voices are now needed to restore calm in a society, which is being thoughtlessly provoked by age-old fears and anxieties.

Caste conflicts often erupt in violent agitations by various castes, for various reasons, mainly job reservation, and demands for a caste-based census, and its acceptance by the Government, has generated a lot of controversy. Complexity of caste-based divisions in India could be understood by the fact that the four main castes in Hindus are further divided into about 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes.

Our Constitution bans discrimination on the basis of caste, but sadly, even seventy-five years after Independence, caste is a decisive factor in elections, and Government employment. The fact that most successful regional parties are caste-based says a lot about the importance of caste in politics. Probably, the caste system, which divides Hindus into rigid categories, is the biggest obstacle to India's embrace of modernity.

Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, the architect of our Constitution, foresaw the consequences of such divisions in society. He wrote: "On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value...We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up".

# CHINADAILY

# Electricity a measure of success in China's transition toward greener future

*Of The* 

n July 2025, China's monthly electricity consumption surpassed the trillion kWh mark for the first time, as the country continues to lead the world in terms of electricity consumption scale, affordability, and supply resilience. Empowering 1.4 billion people with accessible, reliable and affordable electricity supply is a vivid microcosm of the efficacy of China's governance.

Energy consumption is widely regarded as a solid and real-time indicator of economic activity. In 2024, China's total electricity consumption was 9.85 trillion kWh, accounting for one-third of the global total, approximately 2.5 times that of the United States, 3.7 times the European Union, and 5 times India.

In July 2025, China's industrial electricity consumption reached 600 billion kWh, accounting for over half of the national

electricity consumption. Electricity consumption in the tertiary sector in July was 208.1 billion kWh, an increase ownership is about 37 million units. In

of 10.7 percent, with electricity consumption in the wholesale A Member and retail sector and the accommodation and catering sector growing by nearly 12 percent and 6 percent respectively, reflecting the consumption growth potential of China's mega-sized market.

Data on electricity production and consumption reflect how China's growth has changed people's lives for the better. China's average electricity price remains stable at around 0.6 RMB per kWh, making it one of the countries with the

lowest electricity prices globally. Power outages are a rarity in China. a year-on-year increase of nearly 5 percent, Even during peak hours in summer, people could rest assured that they can

turn on air conditioning whenever needed. Currently, China's electric vehicle

> the first half of the year, approximately 3.28 million new charging stations were added, making China's the world's largest charging network, with an average of two charging stations for every five EVs.

Electricity also empowers the modernization drives in rural and agricultural areas. During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, investment exceeding RMB 800 billion yuan was allocated to consolidate and upgrade the rural power grid, achieving a rural power supply reliability rate of 99.9 percent. Smart irrigation, intelligent greenhouses, drone crop protection, and similar technologies are transforming traditional agriculture.

the success of its green transition. The

nation is translating the conviction that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" into concrete action by steadfastly implementing its carbon reduction goals.

As a mega-economy, China is advancing both economic growth and its green agenda in parallel, thereby injecting greater certainty into global climate governance.

In the first half of 2025, renewable energy generation accounted for nearly 40 percent of the national total electricity generation. China's export of green products and new energy technologies benefits the globe. During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, China's exports of wind and photovoltaic products cumulatively helped other countries reduce carbon emissions by 4.1 billion tonnes, equivalent to China's energy structure epitomizes approximately four months of global forest CO2 sequestration.

# Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

# Prudent blend

**Sir**, Apropos the editorial "Balancing Growth" (Dec. 9), the RBI's cautious rate cut reflects a welcome balance between optimism

and restraint. India's improving inflation outlook, rising rural demand, and steady investment sentiment suggest an economy gaining confidence, yet the risks of global volatility

and supply disruptions remain real. The central bank's stance serves as a reminder that growth driven by discipline is more durable than growth fuelled by

excessive stimulus. While the numbers look encouraging, the challenge now lies in sustaining momentum without slipping into complacency or widening inequality.

Small businesses, job creation, and manufacturing depth still need stronger support to ensure growth feels real beyond charts and forecasts.

A stable macro environment is valuable, but it must translate into better livelihoods, smoother credit access, and wider participation across states and sectors.

As India moves ahead, a coordinated blend of prudent monetary policy and targeted fiscal action could ensure the current progress matures into long-term resilience rather than a temporary upswing.

Yours, etc., Avinashiappan Myilsami, Coimbatore, 10 December.

# **Civic bodies**

**Sir**, Apropos "Inferno of neglect" (9 December), the Goa club fire is the latest in our regulatory lethargy. Post each disaster officials are content to cite notices issued, warnings served, and files moved. Paperwork is no substitute for enforcement and failure to act means lives lost.

The Kamala Mills fire in Mumbai (2017) was caused by restaurants and inadequate fire exits. The Surat coaching centre blaze (2019), that killed scores of teenagers, was a makeshift establishment operated without fire clearances. The Uphaar theatre fire in Delhi is a capital example of allround apathy There is a systemic malaise, where



oversight exists on paper, routinely sidestepped through patronage, understaffing, or indifference. Accountability remains token. Civic bodies must be as personally answerable as the errant owners.

Yours, etc., R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai, 10 December.



# PERSPECTIVE



# Why Seoul is wooing the foreign media

**LEE BYUNG-JONG** 

n the first anniversary of former President Yoon Suk Yeol's December 3 martial law declaration, President Lee Jae Myung did something unprecedented. Last Wednesday, he held an 80-minute press conference exclusively for foreign media. For the first time in recent South Korean memory, only foreign correspondents were invited to a presidential press event.

Under the theme "A Renewed Democracy: One Year On," Lee used the occasion to underscore the resilience of Korean democracy its ability to rise above the political turmoil that culminated in last year's martial law declaration. Korea's democratic journey, he noted, is now a "model case for world history."

Lee's reason for convening a foreign-media-only press conference is not difficult to grasp. He wanted the world to understand that Korea's democracy is functioning again. But beyond that, the event was an unmistakable gesture of gratitude toward foreign journalists who not only over the past year, but throughout the country's modern history.

During the conference, he thanked foreign reporters for swiftly and accurately portraying the Korean people's resistance to the political crisis. Yet his appreciation stretched back decades - to the years when Korea's domestic press was silenced, and foreign media provided the

only reliable window into the reality of authoritarian rule.

During the darkest years of military rule, domestic media operated under tight restrictions. Censorship was rampant, and journalists were routinely harassed or punished for stories deemed critical of the regime. Except for a few exceptionally courageous reporters, most had no choice but to remain silent under draconian press controls. By contrast, foreign correspondents enjoyed comparatively greater freedom because military rulers wished to avoid diplomatic friction - especially with Washington, which was highly critical of Seoul's suppression of the press.

The contrast was stark during the 1980 Gwangju Democratic Uprising. Domestic journalists were largely denied access to the city, which was tightly sealed off by the military. A few pro-government outlets were allowed in, but their reports were heavily censored and often distorted. Some portrayed peaceful pro-democracy demonstrators as violent mobs threatening public order. In Wednesday's press conference, President Lee even admitted that helped safeguard Korean democracy he once believed this narrative because that was what local media had reported.

Foreign journalists, however, were able to document the Gwangju crackdown more freely and thus more accurately. They entered Gwangju at great personal risk and documented the military's brutal crackdown against peaceful pro-democracy protesters that resulted in hundreds of casualties.

They succeeded - despite censorship and threats - in transmitting their powerful stories and images to audiences worldwide. These impactful accounts galvanized global outrage and helped shift international opinion decisively against Korea's authoritarian regime.

This global pressure had real consequences. The US government, influenced partly by foreign media coverage, placed substantial pressure on Seoul to protect human rights and move toward democracy.

Former President Kim Dae-jung, initially sentenced to death by a military court for allegedly instigating the Gwangju Democratic Uprising, was later pardoned in significant part due to Washington's intervention. Other pro-democracy figures, including former President Kim Young-sam, also received sustained coverage that helped maintain momentum for democratic change.

Foreign media again played a vital role when Kim Dae-jung returned to Korea in 1985 after years of self-imposed exile in the United States. There were widespread fears he might face physical harm at Gimpo International Airport, echoing the assassination of Philippine dissident Benigno Aquino at Manila International Airport two years earlier.

To deter any attack, US politicians and journalists boarded the same flight and accompanied Kim down the steps. Newsweek later covered the episode in a story titled "A Stormy Homecoming." Such articles helped fuel the People Power movement and ultimately contributed



to the military's June 1987 Democratic Declaration, where many democratic reforms, including a direct presidential election and the autonomy of local governments, were announced.

As Korean media liberalized and flourished, the role of foreign media naturally became less central - and at times even counterproductive. During the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, many foreign media outlets sharply criticized Seoul's economic management and predicted imminent national default. Some of their claims were exaggerated or unsupported, yet foreign investors believed them and withdrew capital en masse, worsening the financial crisis and forcing Korea to seek an emergency International Monetary Fund bailout.

Even with such episodes, foreign media have, on balance, been beneficial to Korea. Beyond their

contributions to democratization, foreign journalists helped introduce Korean pop culture to global audiences. Their portrayals of Korea's dynamic cultural and social landscape have been instrumental in elevating the country's soft power. More recently, their coverage of Korea's technological and industrial competitiveness has reinforced its economic reputation.

Seen in this broader historical context, Lee's exclusive press conference for foreign media does not seem unusual at all. It reflects Korea's recognition of how deeply foreign journalists have shaped its modern journey - documenting its darkest moments, amplifying its democratic struggles, and eventually helping usher the country onto the global stage as a confident, resilient democracy.

The Korea Herald/ANN.

## 100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 12 December 1925

# **OCCASIONAL NOTE**

OUR Surma Valley correspondent draws attention to the increasing per-plexity of the labour problem in the tea gardens. He is not speaking for the Surma Valley alone, but for the Assam Valley also and the Dooars. Darjeeling might be included also. The fact is that India is rapidly becoming an industrial as well as an agricultural country, and the demand for the best class of labour is much greater than the supply. Apart from the high wages offered by manufacturing industries the opening up of new land in Chota Nagpur and Assam is providing new opportunities for agriculture. One of the remedies suggested is that gardens should attempt to increase the outturn per acre rather than continually break new soil. This end, says our Surma Valley correspondent, can only be attained by the introduction of the most modern and scientific methods. An expansion of the Scientific Department which the tea industry maintains is, therefore, necessary. More local officers are wanted. The Dooars, it is said, are pushing a scheme for a permanent resident officer in that district. But such officers are needed in every one of the tea growing districts, for climate and soil vary so much that what is good for the open plains of Assam may be bad for Cachar and Sylhet.

## **News Items**

MOSLEM DEPUTATION

## THE GAEKWAR **INVITED TO ALIGARH**

(FROM A CORRESPONDENT.) BOMBAY, DEC.

THE Aligarh Muslim University deputation consisting of Professors Hadi Hasan and Syed Abdul Jalil (University Proctor) reached Baroda on December 6, and was received by His Highness the Gaekwar the

The deputation presented an address to His Highness and requested him to honour the Muslim University by going to Aligarh during the Jubilee week.

# SIR JOHN KERR

# **RESUMES CHARGE OF ASSAM GOVERNORSHIP**

SHILLONG, DEC. 9.

next morning

His EXCELLENCY' Sir William Reid, Acting Governor of Assam, left Shillong yesterday accompanied by Lady Reid for Pandu, where His Excellency made over the charge of his office to Sir John Kerr, who arrived in Shillong last evening.

£20,000,000 IN COAL SUBSIDY

## **EFFECT ON MINING INDUSTRY**

LONDON, DEC. 10

IN the House of Commons Mr. Churchill gave a few crumbs of comfort while speaking on the supplementary estimates of £9,000,000 for the coal subsidy which were agreed to without division.

He recalled that the Government's decision to postpone the crisis in July was due to the possibility of a trade revival which was thought then to be visible, and he declared that while the coal output was steadily increasing it was hopeless to expect that the gap between the export prices of coal and the cost of production would disappear.

He emphasized that the mining interest could not be allowed to become indefinitely a pensioner upon other industries, and he hoped that all parties in the industry would make an effort to regain its old and independent position.

He mentioned that last week the output of 5,000,000 tons was the high-est since May, and he anticipated that the total subvention for nine months would be approximately £20.000,000.

The subvention, had not led to an appreciable reopening of the pits.— Reuter.

## IRISH SETTLEMENT

# **DAIL PASSES SECOND READING OF BILL**

LONDON, DEC. 10.

THE Dail has passed the second read ing of the

Irish Agreement Bill by 71 votes to 20. The final stages of the bill are being taken up on Tuesday next.

In the course of the debate President Cosgrave, in a passionate speech, said that he understood from Mr. Baldwin that the Commission's award would have given the Free State 200 square miles and 20,000 people and taken from them a considerable part of Donegal.— Reuter.

# The first instalment of freedom

**PRAVIN KAUSHAL** 

t 5 a.m., a vast segment of India's workforce begins its day. There are no **—** punch-ins, no holidays, no salary slips, and crucially no mention in the nation's GDP figures. This is India's "Care Economy," powered by millions of women who perform unpaid labour tirelessly, day after day. This work, which involves cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and the elderly, is essential for the smooth functioning of households and the economy at large.

However, a silent revolution is underway. The Indian state has begun to recognise this labour, not just with rhetoric, but with hard cash. Currently, India is hosting the world's largest social experiment in unconditional cash transfers. Across some 12 states, nearly 11.8 crore women receive monthly direct benefit transfers (DBT) ranging from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,500.

Critics often dismiss these schemeswhether it is Maharashtra's Ladli Bahin, Madhya Pradesh's Ladli Behna, or Tamil Nadu's Kalaignar scheme as "Revdi culture" or political freebies. But to view them solely through the lens of electoral bribery is to miss the profound sociological shift occurring in India's hinterlands.

To understand the impact of Rs 1,000, one must look beyond the

India. The Ministry of Statistics reveals a stark reality: the average Indian woman performs 5 hours of unpaid domestic work daily, while Indian men contribute barely 30 minutes. This unequal distribution of labour creates "Time Poverty," preventing women from accessing formal employment and education, leaving them with empty pockets.

An empty pocket is not just an economic condition; it is a political one within the household. It signifies a lack of decision-making power. In this context, unconditional cash transfers serve as a critical intervention. Unlike schemes in Brazil or Mexico, which often tie funds to conditions like school attendance or vaccination, India's model sends a distinct message: this money is a right, acknowledging a woman's social status independent of her maternal duties.

Data from various states suggests that this liquidity is doing more than just purchasing goods; it is altering the dynamics of relationships.

In Maharashtra, a 2025 study revealed a staggering statistic: for 74 per cent of beneficiaries, this scheme provided the first money they could call their own in their entire lives. As one beneficiary noted, she no longer has to "spread her hand" before her husband for Rs 10 worth of turmeric. This shift from dependency to autonomy may

privileged perspective of metropolitan not be life-changing in a macroeconomic sense, but it is certainly life-supporting. It makes a woman's share in the household visible.

> In West Bengal, women are utilizing these small sums as seed capital. Beneficiaries like Somada Das have used Rs 1,000 to buy clothes for resale, engaging in what economists term "micro-entrepreneurship". Meanwhile, studies from Tamil Nadu, where the scheme is explicitly framed as an honorarium for unpaid care work, indicate a reduction in domestic crises and marital conflict. Financial security, however small, breeds mental peace and confidence.

> A pervasive patriarchal anxiety suggests that "free money" will discourage women from working. Data from Assam, Bihar, and Tamil Nadu proves the exact opposite. Women are not leaving the labour market; they are using these funds to pay for bus fares to find work, to learn new skills, and to negotiate better conditions. The cash does not make them lazy; it enables them. It provides the financial cushion to say "no" to exploitative conditions, rather than withdrawing

from work entirely. It is undeniable that these schemes are politically motivated. In elections from Bihar to Madhya Pradesh, women have emerged as "Queen Makers," a constituency no party can afford to ignore. However, policy



exchange for votes, it is a net positive for democracy. It transforms women from a silent vote bank into an active political constituency with specific demands. Despite the optimism, we must remain critical. Cash transfers alone

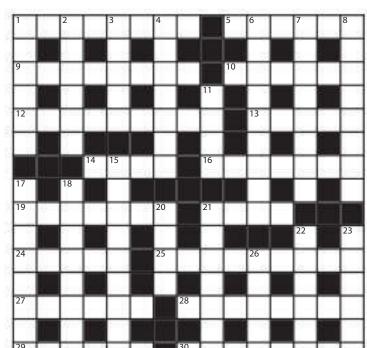
cannot dismantle structural patriarchy. Receiving Rs 1,000 does not reduce the five hours of domestic drudgery, nor is it a substitute for a formal job paying Rs 10,000 or Rs 20,000. If we view cash transfers as the solution rather than a support, we risk ignoring the harder battles for equal pay, safe workplaces, and shared domestic responsibility.

still subsidizes the paid economy by providing free services that would otherwise cost trillions.

Ultimately, these transfers are not the full price of freedom, but they are its first instalment. True empowerment will arrive not when a woman goes to the bank to withdraw this money, but when she goes to deposit her own earnings. Until then, recognizing her unpaid labour with cash is a necessary start to a long overdue conversation.

(The writer is Director - Strategic Partnerships, Mrikal (Data/AI Center) and a Young Alumn Member, Govt, Liaison Task Force, IIT-

# **Crossword** | No. 293319



## Yesterday's Solution



## **ACROSS** Roughly slay idol

that's unfaithful Prohibit domesticated. tailless fowl (6) Worried journalist after past offence 21 Groomsmen recalled 10 Bombards ship crossing place of turmoil (6)

12 Quickly getting

close in public

13 Bird inside a glebe-

house is hiding (5)

14 Carry drug in pub 16 Frown about rolling around in

dirt (7) 19 Get too big for unfashionable final part of clothing line (7)

25 Evidence of storm

easing when

energy is lost

(9)

regularly got up 24 Old seal swims in **DOWN** gulf ingesting lobster heads

Continue slowly and tediously to

27 Rescue vessel

tea (8)

returns with with electrical knowledge of current working monster finally (5) Hail new German 28 Place brewing local superhero

29 Handles cons (6) 6 30 Undiplomatic time to reduce activity

find fabulous beast 11 Unfinished 2 Sun shed scoop (6) (4)

Sports distressed satchel with note inside (9) Players gathering stage right for message

**Bulb in contact** 

Assembled vellow plant for audience platform for male

and beer (6) 23 Flowing grease settles (6)

26 Fish in Test dropping end of fly

15 Registration of

mentor Len upset

17 In favour of drink

soprano rejects

18 Mystery driver and

getting A marks (8)

short friend

21 Insignia of Algeria

destroyed (7)

22 End with bit of fish

20 Run up to Casanova? (4)

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







## Should India ban social media for kids?

Tech addiction demands layered responses — digital literacy, parental involvement, psychological support, and educational redesign

Once it was alcohol, then it was drugs; now addiction has a new name-social media. Its addicts are everywhere-across age groups, classes, and cities. It is an epidemic that spread before anyone even realised it. India, like other nations, is hooked 24x7 to social media, and this is more prominent amongst young children who are now exposed to all the good and bad the digital world has to offer. In this scenario, Australia's decision to ban social media access for children under 16 has reignited a global debate on how societies should confront the escalating crisis of tech addiction and its psychological repercussions.

The Australian government's move is undeniably sweeping and disruptive in its implications, even though its intent is clear: to protect young users from the toxic digital environment and online harm that has come to be accepted as digital normal. The factors that pushed Australia to ban social media for children may be just as relevant for India. While there is little disagreement on the need to limit children's access to social media, enforcing a blanket ban could be excessively harsh and may be counterproductive. That said, the case for intervention is undeniably strong and is the need of the hour. Psychologists worldwide have been sounding the alarm for years. Clinics now report children as young as eight showing symptoms of mental illness: hyperactivity, violent behaviour, throwing tantrums when devices are taken away, and an inability to disengage

Regular access to social media is changing cognitive and emotional development amongst children in a big way. Declining attention spans, inability to form coherent sentences, and eroded real-world communication skills are becoming disturbingly common. The picture becomes even murkier when you include incidents like the Blue Whale challenge or misogynistic school group chats-proof of how an immature mind can be drawn into, or even trigger, serious harm. Australia's ban may not be a panacea, as even the strictest age ban can be circumvented, and children adept at navigating technology may find proxy routes sooner rather than later. Indeed, no law can compensate for what is lacking at home, in classrooms, or in broader digital culture, but government intervention paves the way for incremental reforms in schools, colleges, and even at home.

India's challenge is more complex: its vast population, socio-economic diversity, and uneven digital literacy make a ban impractical and insufficient, though action is essential. Some progress is emerging through bottom-up efforts, with over 5,000 parents joining support groups to build healthier digital habits, reinforcing families as the first line of defence. Tech addiction needs layered solutions-digital literacy, parental involvement, psychological support, and educational redesign-because while a ban may raise awareness, it cannot replace the long-term task of building resilience and autonomy in young users. India must craft its own path.

# The SC's push for CCTV accountability

Triggered by alarming reports of custodial deaths and the routine absence of surveillance footage, the Court's intervention underscores a stark reality: despite years of judicial directives, transparency inside police stations remains largely a myth



**HASAN KHURSHID** 

The Supreme Court of India's recent intervention into the disturbing pattern of custodial deaths has revived a long-standing and uncomfortable debate: Why does custodial violence persist despite decades of judicial directions, committees, and constitutional safeguards? On September 4, 2025, a Bench comprising Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta registered a suo motu Public Interest Litigation (PIL) after taking cognisance of a Dainik Bhaskar report revealing that 11 people had died in police custody in Rajasthan in just the first eight months of 2025. The trigger was not only the shocking number but also the wider pattern of deliberate non-compliance with directives mandating CCTV surveillance in police stations across India. For years, courts have emphasised that CCTV cameras are not optional but essential tools for ensuring transparency, curbing torture, and upholding constitutional rights. Yet, police stations across states continue to function without operational cameras, or worse, with cameras that are conveniently "faulty" or whose footage is "unavailable. According to media reports, police routinely withhold CCTV footage in custodial death cases, citing technical glitches, storage issues, ongoing investigations, or legal barriers. These excuses have created fertile ground for impunity, where the monitor of oversight-the CCTV camera-is neutralised precisely when accountability is most needed.

This is not the first time the Supreme Court has intervened. Earlier rulings — DK Basu, Paramvir Singh Saini, and Shafhi Mohammadlaid down clear and mandatory directions for installing functional video and audio surveillance in police stations. In 2020, the Court issued detailed guidelines requiring uniform installation across all states and Union Territories. It even made Station House Officers personally responsible for maintaining CCTV systems, preserving recordings, and ensuring timely repairs. Yet, five years later, the Court has been forced to confront the same systemic neglect. During the hearing on November 25, 2025, the Supreme Court minced no words: "Custodial violence and deaths are a blot on the system. This country will not tolerate this practice. You cannot have deaths in custody." The Court demanded compliance affidavits from all states and Union Territories, posting the matter for further hearing on December 16, 2025. Its concern stems from the constitutional premise that surveillance in police stations is a fundamental safeguardan obligation, not a discretionary administrative decision. High Courts have echoed similar

In Akhilesh Pandey v. State of Madhya Pradesh (2018), the Madhya Pradesh High Court warned



THE REAL TEST NOW IS WHETHER STATES WILL FINALLY ACT — OR WHETHER **CUSTODIAL DEATHS WILL** CONTINUE TO BE

TRAGIC BUT **INEVITABLE** STATISTICS

The writer is a legal

@dailypioneer

TREATED AS

on the rule of law. In later cases-Shafhi Mohammad (2018) and Paramvir Singh Saini (2021)-the Court expanded guidelines, with Justice Rohinton Nariman stressing that installing CCTV cameras was a constitutional

The pioneer drenched in blood to such an extent that police officers had necessity rooted in Articles 21 and 22. Yet, the implementation remains **SINCE 1865** to change their uniforms twice

police station would be treated as contempt

of court. This, however, has done little to

change the ground reality. The disconnect

between judicial directives and executive

action has allowed custodial violence to

fester. India's struggle with custodial brutali-

ty is not new. In 1997, the Supreme Court in D.K.

Basu recognised custodial torture as an assault

half-hearted, largely because custodial violence thrives in opacity, and the state machinery shows little urgency to disrupt this culture. The judiciary's frustration draws from a long history of ignored reform efforts. From the National Police Commission reports (1977-81) to the Ribeiro and Padmanabhiah Committees, from the Malimath Committee to the landmark Prakash Singh judgment of 2006, India has been inundated with recommendations for transforming the police from a "force" to a "service."

Despite this, real change has remained elusive. Justice AN Mulla's searing 1961 remark that no group in India matches the police force's record of lawlessness-though later expunged-continues to resonate with uncomfortable accuracy. Recent events have only reinforced these concerns. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, countless videos surfaced showing policemen mercilessly beating civilians, including pregnant women and elderly citizens. Such images laid bare the deep-seated culture of unrestrained power. One of the most horrifying examples remains the 2020 Sathankulam case in Tamil Nadu, where the CBI charge sheet revealed the savage torture of 59-year-old P. Jeyaraj and his 31-year-old son, J. Bennicks. Over seven hours, police personnel stripped, beat, and humiliated the father-son duo, forcing them to clean their own blood from the floor. Despite Jeyaraj's pleas, citing diabetes and high blood pressure, the brutality continued until

both men succumbed to their injuries. Their clothes were extent that police officers had before presenting them in

court. The investigation also exposed medical negligence-Dr Vinila, who examined them, failed to document their injuries or provide medical support that might have saved their lives. This case stands as a grim reminder that custodial torture is not an aberration but a structural crisis embedded in policing culture CCTV cameras alone cannot eradicate it, but they can act as a crucial deterrent-if the system allows them to function. The Supreme Court's recent intervention is not merely a legal exercise; it is a moral reckoning. India cannot claim to be a constitutional democracy while allowing citizens to be brutalised behind closed doors. The real test now is whether states will finally act-or whether custodial deaths will continue to be treated as tragic but inevitable statistics. The nation's conscience demands more than compliance affidavits; it demands genuine accountability.

# PIC TALK



A camel stands in the glow of the sunset light, in Pushkar, Rajasthan.

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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# Why educating girls is not enough: Bridge the skill gap



**DEVENDRA KUMAR** 

## ND OPINION THE PIONEER

India has spent decades strengthening girls' access to education. Through scholarships, awareness drives, and community-level campaigns, the country has succeeded in bringing more girls into classrooms than ever before. Enrolment rates for girls have risen at primary, secondary, and even higher education levels. Yet a stubborn gap remains: while more young women finish school and college, far fewer make it into the workforce. This disconnect reveals a hard truth-education alone cannot guarantee employment. For Indian girls, skill development is the missing link between learning and livelihood.

Across the country, thousands of young women hold degrees but remain unemployed. This reflects a deeper

structural issue: literacy and academic qualifications, although essential, do not automatically translate into employability. Many graduates lack the practical, digital, and workplace skills demanded by contemporary industries. Compounding this are entrenched social

norms and cultural expectations that often overshadow the benefits of education. For many girls, familial restrictions, gender stereotypes and ideas about "appropriate"

The Pioneer wides this bridge.

When women stereotypes, and ideas about "appropriate" work limit their ability to turn education SINCE 1865 into financial independence.

These social barriers shape everything-from whether a woman is allowed to work to what kind of job she can accept. Families frequently avoid roles that involve travel. physical tasks, or late hours, forcing even educated women into narrow, low-growth career paths. Confidence-building and communication abilities-skills critical in today's work culture-are rarely nurtured in traditional classrooms, making skill development programmes essential.

The reality becomes even harsher in India's vast informal sector, where more than 90 percent of working women remain concentrated. Most are unskilled and engaged in low-paid, insecure jobs-domestic work, agriculture, tailoring, construction, home-based production, or micro-enterprises. In rural areas especially, women face severe skill deprivation and remain trapped in unstable jobs with little chance of mobility. Skill development can change this trajectory. Training in digital literacy helps women shift from low-productivity work to stable, betterpaying opportunities. Today's industries-whether healthcare, manufacturing, hospitality, technology, or retail-

demand a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical ability, and skill training pro-

When women acquire skills, the impact extends far beyond employment. Skilled

women strengthen economic productivity, innovation, and inclusive growth. Within families, a working daughter or mother enhances financial security and decision-making power. Moreover, skilled

workers are better positioned to negotiate fair wages, resist exploitation, and move into formal employment. The next step for India must be to integrate skill development into every stage of education. Rural training centres must be expanded, especially for girls with restricted mobility. Partnerships with industry can

ensure training aligns with real job market needs. Crucially, communities and families must be sensitised to value skill training as essential-not secondary-to education. For India's girls, skill is the pathway to independence, confidence, and security.

The writer is the founder of the Ladli Foundation

## **AUSTRALIA'S SOCIAL MEDIA BAN SPARKS CALL FOR VIGILANCE**

The Prime Minister of Australia has openly appealed to young people to refrain from using social media, and teenagers are now prohibited from accessing these platforms. Yet, there remains a possibility that some adolescents may still bypass restrictions by manipulating age settings or posing as older users with fake

identities. The risks facing teenagers online are well documented, and in countries like India the lack of transparency and effective oversight only heightens these concerns. With parents increasingly occupied by demanding professional lives, attentive supervision has reduced significantly. Many single children grow up without the stabilising presence of grandparents, and even when grandparents are present, their guidance is often

culture. Consequently, teenagers turn to unsolicited advice from social media posts, videos, or equally uninformed peers, creating a cycle of immature and sometimes harmful influence

Decades ago, society provided an additional layer of support through close relatives and elderly neighbours, whose guidance parents accepted with respect. Over time, however, such involvement has come to be seen as interference, leading to the loss of a valuable safeguard.

Parents in Australia have welcomed the government's decision. A similar measure is urgently needed in India, where constant guidance for teenagers should be seen not as dictatorship but as essential support that protects their curiosity from harmful and inappropriate content

**SUNIL OKHADE | INDORE** 

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## **Urban India needs coordinated reform**

One of the most pressing issues in India today is the widening disconnect between rapid urban expansion and the slow pace of essential infrastructure development.

Cities continue to grow outward at extraordinary speed, yet public transport, waste management systems, and affordable housing consistently fail to keep pace, leaving both residents and municipal authorities under severe strain. The challenge is not purely financial: it also lies in weak institutional coordination, outdated planning frameworks, and a persistent tendency to prioritise high-visibility projects over everyday necessities. Consequently, even well-designed reforms often lose momentum and struggle to deliver meaningful improvements.

A more realistic solution begins with strengthening municipal governance. Cities must be granted the autonomy and technical expertise required to plan for the coming decade rather than the next election cycle. Transparent budgeting, reliable service delivery, and people-centred urban design should guide all development. If governments adopt such an approach, India's cities can evolve in a manner that is efficient, liveable, and environmentally sustainable.

A. MYILSAMI | TAMIL NADU

## Diwali's heritage glows anewx

India's Diwali, newly inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, arrives as a moment of cultural pride and personal joy. This recognition feels profoundly affirming. Diwali has never been merely a spectacle; it embodies India's civilisational spirit, carried in the quiet radiance of a single diya and the belief that renewal is always within reach.

Across centuries, the festival has gathered many layers of meaning: Rama's triumphant return to Ayodhya, Mahavira's nirvana, Guru Hargobind's liberation, and the mercantile traditions that once illuminated ancient

Yet Diwali's deepest strength lies in its ability to anchor ordinary lives, reminding families and communities that clarity, compassion, and moral courage endure even amid turmoil.

UNESCO's recognition honours not only Diwali's history but also the people who have safeguarded itartisans shaping earthen lamps, storytellers preserving memory, and generations who kept the flame alive in difficult times. In an increasingly anxious world, may this acknowledgement serve as a gentle reminder that harmony is a practice renewed each year.

## VIJAY SINGH ADHIKARI | UTTARAKHAND

## Reimagining a song for India

Reimagining Vande Mataram requires sensitivity to history, culture, and contemporary identity. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's iconic song portrayed the motherland as nurturing, protective, and divine, and the phrase "I bow to thee, Mother" captured the emotional and spiritual bond felt during the freedom struggle. In an independent and secular India, however, there is space to consider a modern interpretation that reflects today's pluralistic values.

Vande Bharatam — meaning "I bow to thee, India" is more direct and less symbolic, potentially making the song more inclusive for those uncomfortable with religious imagery. The name Bharat resonates across languages and regions, offering a shared identity that avoids specific cultural or devotional associations. Such universality may encourage collective participation without hesitation. Culturally, this shift signals modernisation. While the maternal depiction remains integral to the independence movement's memory, adapting the song acknowledges India's multi-faith, diverse society. Yet any alteration must be approached with care, as Vande Mataram is inseparable from the freedom struggle and continues to evoke the sacrifices of earlier generations.

O PRASADA RAO | HYDERABAD





# India redraws its strategic lines with Putin's Delhi visit

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted Vladimir Putin with a bear hug and handed him a Russian translation of the Bhagavad Gita, it was more than ceremonial warmth — it was a calculated message. The gesture signalled that India will chart its own course regardless of Western discomfort





**NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA** 

That was no ordinary greeting; on the frosty evening of last Thursday, Indian Prime Minister Modi embraced Russian President Vladimir Putin in a bear hug at Delhi airport and, within moments, presented him with a copy of the Bhagavad Gita in Russian. The choice of gift was laden with symbolism-echoes of Robert Oppenheimer, who drew profound philosophical reckoning from the same text, declaring, "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds," after witnessing the first atomic explosion. Was Modi signalling the weight of nuclearage responsibility to Putin, or was this a deliberate affirmation of India's comfort in maintaining ties with a pariah state under global sanctions?

The streets of Delhi, festooned with Russian and Indian flags and dominated by colossal billboards of Modi and Putin, suggested more than ceremonial protocol-it was pageantry of influence, an audacious statement of India's strategic independence. In that gesture, New Delhi appeared to assert that moral judgement from the West would no longer dictate its choices, and that the Indo-Russian relationship. forged during the Cold War and hardened by decades of defence dependence, remains a pivot capable of unsettling the established order in South Asia and beyond.

Putin's first visit to India in four years, coinciding with talks in Washington over a possible Ukraine peace framework, came at a time when New Delhi is walking an increasingly delicate tightrope between Moscow and Washington. The optics of the visit-from ceremonial receptions at Rashtrapati Bhavan to summit talks at Hyderabad House-reflected not merely diplomacy but an overt projection of influence. Modi's presentation of the Bhagavad Gita in Russian was emblematic: a centuries-old text of dharma and duty, layered with the moral weight of choice, now inserted into the theatre of highstakes realpolitik.

Putin himself, in an interview with India Today, described India as a "major global player, not a British colony," praising Modi as a "reliable person" who does not succumb to pressure. These words, spoken against the



TO INDIA IN FOUR YEARS, COINCIDING WITH TALKS IN WASHINGTON OVER A POSSIBLE UKRAINE PEACE FRAMEWORK, CAME AT A TIME WHEN **NEW DELHI WAS** WALKING AN **INCREASINGLY DELICATE TIGHTROPE** BETWEEN MOSCOW

The writer is a Colombo

AND WASHINGTON

to leverage frozen Russian assets for PUTIN'S FIRST VISIT Ukraine, and growing Chinese assertiveness, highlight India's determination to claim agency in a multipolar world where Washington and Brussels no longer set the rules unilaterally. Historically, the Indo-Russian relation-

ship has oscillated between strategic necessity and opportunism. Declassified CIA documents from the 1980s reveal the delicate dance India played with the USSR during the Cold War. Indira Gandhi's approach, as the CIA observed, was staunchly nationalist and fiercely protective of India's regional supremacy. The per cent secondary tariff imposed on United States feared that

backdrop of US sanctions. EU manoeuvres

India's policies towards its neighbours, coupled with its Soviet alignment, could destabilise South Asia while simul-

foothold. Today, the echoes of that era reverberate: New Delhi remains Moscow's top arms buyer, leases nuclear-powered submarines, and maintains energy ties that have drawn ire from Washington, while ensuring that its engagement with Russia does not fully alienate the United States or Western partners.

economic metrics. India-Russia trade in FY metrics, its diaspora injects substantial

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

2024-25 amounted to approximately USD 68.7 billion, heavily skewed in Moscow's favour due to energy imports, with a trade deficit of around USD 59 billion. Both Russia and India aim to expand bilateral trade to a target of USD 100 billion by 2030, a goal that falls just two years after the next general elections, when Prime Minister Modi is widely expected to contest again despite the symbolic 75-year age limit for party leadership-a restriction largely treated as political theatre and quickly forgotten. Meanwhile, India continues to negotiate with the United States to mitigate punitive tariffs, including a 25

India's purchases of Russian oil. It is also worth noting that India recorded a goods trade surplus of about USD 41.18 billion with the US in FY 2024-

taneously granting Moscow a strategic 25, with exports of USD 86.51 billion and imports of USD 45.33 billion, reflecting strong bilateral trade despite earlier concerns over tariffs. Remittances provide a partial counterweight: total remittances to India reached roughly USD 135.46 billion, including USD 25-30 billion from the US, while Russian remittances are negligible in comparison. This indicates that What is important to note here are the while India faces challenges in trade

financial resilience into the economy.

The summit also highlighted defence collaboration in stark terms. India's USD 2 billion lease of a Russian nuclearpowered attack submarine, with delivery scheduled for 2028, signals an unprecedented deepening of underwater capabilities.

The vessel, unable to enter combat under lease terms, is intended to train crews and refine India's nuclear submarine operations — a critical step for strategic deterrence in the Indian Ocean amid rising Chinese and US naval competition. Russia, despite sanctions and Western pressure, continues to sustain a militaryindustrial complex capable of producing tanks, missiles, and drones at accelerating rates. As reports from Ukraine's Centre for Analytical Studies and Countering Hybrid Threats indicate, nearly half of Russian defence enterprises remain unsanctioned, exposing the limitations of Western punitive measures. In this context, India's engagement with Russian defence capabilities is both a practical necessity and a symbolic assertion that strategic imperatives can outweigh Western orthodoxy.

Sanctions, however, remain a persistent backdrop. The European Union, under Ursula von der Leyen, has attempted to

deploy emergency measures to convert frozen Russian assets into loans for Ukraine, challenging EU treaties and raising the prospect of legal confrontations with countries such as Hungary and Belgium. The United States, meanwhile, has explored using the same assets in USled investment frameworks to facilitate reconstruction or political leverage. India, observing these efforts, has maintained a stance of strategic neutrality-resisting calls to condemn Russia while advocating for diplomacy, and emphasising that selective sanctioning by Western powers is inconsistent and self-serving. Putin, speaking to India Today, noted that Washington and Moscow presented papers in parallel but reached no compromises, and highlighted that over 90 per cent of Russia-India transactions are conducted in national currencies-a subtle yet potent challenge to dollar dominance.

The optics extend into nuclear and hightech collaboration. India is developing nuclear-capable submarine-launched ballistic missiles, advancing its underwater fleet, and exploring high-tech partnerships with Russia, recalibrating the strategic environment in South Asia. Putin's rhetoric that "Kiev is the mother of all Russian cities" and his framing of Russia's role in eastern Ukraine resonate with historical narratives of great power assertion, yet they also serve as a conscious projection of strength aimed at partners like India. Modi's reception was far from ceremonial: it underlined a shared understanding that global power is increasingly multipolar and that alliances must be flexible, resilient, and insulated from Western

Even in the economic sphere, India challenges conventional assumptions. While the trade deficit with Russia persists due to energy imports, India's broader engagement with global markets-including remittances from its diaspora and ongoing negotiations with the US-allows New Delhi to balance sovereignty with strategic interest. Putin's discussions emphasising bilateral trade growth, hightechnology collaboration, and future energy projects further solidify this interdependence. The bottom line is clear: the India-Russia partnership, far from being a relic of Cold War calculations, has evolved into a sophisticated framework for navigating sanctions, economic competition, and regional security challenges. and it may yet redefine the balance of power in South Asia

# Is Delhi crafting a new role for Ghulam Nabi Azad in Jammu and Kashmir?



**ANIL ANAND** 

A rather mysterious post appeared on the socialmedia platforms recently focused on former Congress veteran and head of the now defunct Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad. It neither quoted anyone nor was attributed to any source but suggested that Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi is mulling over assigning a key role to Mr Azad, most probably in the demoted and dissected

Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has dropped a significant hint about a major role for veteran leader Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad. Sources indicate that Azad may be assigned an important position in Jammu & Kashmir, signalling a possible political shift in the Union Territory," read the social media posts.

What makes it more interesting is that neither the Prime Minister's Office-BJP nor Mr Azad have either confirmed or rejected these posts. It will be interesting to know how and from where these posts originated.

What role? Will a leader of national stature such as him be appointed as the Lt Governor of Jammu and Kashmir? An erstwhile state of which he was not only the chief minister but also lorded over and influenced governmental and political decisions from New Delhi.

Or, if the post has any credibility, is he being considered to helm yet another political experiment cooking in the annals of Delhi's power corridors? Hinting at a possible chief ministerial role for him in the BJP-included future government in the UT? Or was it a mere kite-flying exercise as the post evoked no further response, particularly from the ruling dispensation-BJP and the Narendra Modi government?

What makes the post related to Mr Azad's future curious was that it almost coincided with yet another exodus from the DPAP and leading towards the Congress-the party which he served for decades and, in turn, took the boy from the remote area of erstwhile Doda district to towering national heights. It is another matter that after his unceremonious exit from Congress he refuses to give any credit to the party for his stature as a towering national leader. And quite unconvincingly!

With his closest aides and former Minister Mr GM Saroori, credited with having backed Mr Azad to walk out of Congress and float a new political outfit, having already joined the done, despite their earlier jubilation on discon-Congress, the new setback for him came when tinuing the process, under pressure particularhis two more trusted aides Mr Jugal Sharma and Mr Abdul Majid Wani, both former ministers, announced their plans to rejoin Congress. Suddenly, the mysterious posts appeared on social media about the possibility of a fresh J&Kcentric assignment for Mr Azad.

Not that these developments, of Azad aides' "ghar wapsi", had happened suddenly. More than half-a-dozen DPAP leaders, including them, had made efforts to join Congress before the assembly elections but their attempts were foiled by a group of leaders dominating the J&K Congress and thwarting all efforts at its revival or growth. Most of these DPAP leaders later contested elections as independents to avoid any linkage with Mr Azad, whom people perceived to be soft towards the BJP, and

Adding a few more seats-as these leaders would have won as Congress nominees-to the Congress kitty would have made the party a formidable partner in the ruling alliance. It would also have broken the hegemony of a set of people controlling Congress in the UT. No probe was ever held and no heads rolled

even one year after the assembly The discontent in the DPAP had

started simmering a few months after the party came into being.

Most of these leaders, dyed-in-the-wool secular Congressmen, had pinned their hopes on Mr Azad to provide a secular option to Congress in Jammu and Kashmir as the party had not only lost its moorings but had failed to meet the Narendra Modi-anchored BJP's challenge. Ostensibly, they were dismayed at Mr Azad not taking a clear political stance in the politically charged Muslim-majority UT with a considerable presence of Hindus, thereby giving an impression of soft-peddling towards the saffron party.

Ever since the dilution of Article 370 on August 5, 2019, and the corresponding Constitutional changes resulting in the UTs of J&K and Ladakh, BJP's moves at installing its government have failed. Although the Centre is adamant in ignoring the demand for restoration of statehood in J&K, and a similar demand has gained foothold in Ladakh along with bringing the tribal-dominated UT under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India, and their reiteration that it will be done at an appropriate time, the political winds have started blowing in differ-

A big self-inflicted setback for the Centre and the RSS-BJP combine was the Modi government's decision to restore the over-a-centuryold tradition of 'Durbar move' that entails shifting the capital to Jammu and Kashmir in winters and summers respectively. This was ly from people in BJP's stronghold of Jammu which has been under economic stress due to wrong and anti-Jammu policies of the Centre

and the UT governments. Durbar move entailed Kashmiris moving to Jammu in winters. This was a major source of contribution to Jammu's economy which has been in dire straits after the opening of the Jammu-Srinagar railway link via the holy town of Katra (Vaishno Devi) and later stoppage of Durbar move. In the absence of any alternate and viable plan to sustain Jammu's economy, despite the region having voted for BIP in the last eight elections-from Lok Sabha down to Panchayat via UT Assembly-and religion-related and communal issues showing signs of weakening as a counter to divert people's feelings connected with their economic survival, the Central dispensation could be toying with an idea of yet another Azad-centric political move after the failure of his DPAP experiment.

Given the none-too-pleasant political scenario in Jammu and Kashmir and with the DPAP fiasco behind his back, the question arises: Will Mr Azad bite the bullet in the twilight of

his political career?

To be fair to Mr Azad, all through his political association with Congress-during which he was always, within the government and

the Congress, at the decision-making levels-he had safely avoided getting involved in murky political experimentation as part of the statecraft. He definitely had his hands soiled in the Congress's internal power dynamics which led to many stalwarts quitting or retiring from the scene, and no one even from the younger lot who held any promise was allowed to come up. The ruptures in the Congress's organisational set-up were clearly visible once Mr Azad quit the party, with none other of any consequential stature available to take charge.

How could he be relevant in Jammu and Kashmir's political scenario under these circumstances, despite the fact that he still has some credibility left?

In any new experiment, even if he accepts Mr Modi's offer-which could range from becoming Lt Governor, simultaneously of the two UTs, or functioning in an interlocutory capacity focused on the problems of J&K and Ladakh, and not a direct political role-he would only be seen as a representative of the Modi government, with BJP being the political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

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# A sustainable sporting future for new India



**NASIR** 

**ALI** 

India's sporting rise is no longer measured only in medals or Olympic success; it is unfolding quietly in school grounds, small towns, and remote districts where a new era of sports infrastructure is taking shape. For the first time in decades, government ambition for a fitter and more inclusive nation is aligning seamlessly with private sector innovation. Together, they are creating an ecosystem defined by accessibility, sustainability, and world-class standards, marking a transformative chapter in India's sporting journey. Government investment through programmes like Khelo India has played a central role in this shift. What started as a mission to identify talent and nurture young athletes has evolved into a nationwide movement to strengthen grassroots infrastructure. With more than a thousand Khelo India Centres sanctioned across the country, access to sporting facilities is no longer a privilege restricted to metropol-

The rapid development in remote regions underscores this change. When a multi-purpose indoor hall opens in Arunachal

Pradesh's Kamle district or when Himalayan states receive hundreds of crores for sports facilities, it reflects a deeper reorientation of develop-

ment priorities. Sports infrastructure is now seen as integral to inclusive growth, not an optional extra.A child in Ladakh, Nagaland, or Meghalaya should have the same chance to train, play, and dream as a child in Delhi or Mumbai, and India is beginning to make that aspiration real. By taking modern facilities to remote, tribal, and hilly regions, the country is not merely constructing fields and courts — it is building a future pipeline of talent that previously remained invisible due to lack of access. But infrastructure alone cannot drive change. The private sector has stepped forward to bridge the gap between policy and execution. India's sporting future must evolve without compromising the planet's well-being. For example, Gallant's partnership with Nike Grind, Nike's global sustainability initiative, is a testament to this commitment. Providing world-class sports gear is of utmost importance for the country's sporting excellence - rubber infill, delivering football turfs, multi-sport courts, and athletic tracks that meet global standards while remaining suited to India's climate and usage patterns. These surfaces are durable, safe, weather-resis-

tant, and engineered to ensure sustainability never comes at the cost of performance India's varied geography and climatic extremes make it essential to pair global technology with local delivery. Many companies, including Gallant, work on the model that integrates international expertise with strong on-ground execution, ensuring that facilities in rural districts rise to the same benchmarks as those in major cities. Today, world-class facilities are emerging in district schools, universities, sports academies, and community grounds, creating a more level field for talent across regions. This is also an era where public vision and private execution are reinforcing each other. Government funding through Khelo India and Special Area Games schemes is

reaching even difficult terrains. Private innovators are ensuring these facilities are built using sustainable materials that reduce long-term costs and environmental impact. CSR support from corporates is further enhancing the reach and quality of sports infrastructure across communities. Together, these collaborations are building a model that is scalable, eco-conscious, and socially impact ful. The future demands more than just building more fields; it demands facilities that are greener, smarter, and longer-lasting. With rising environmental concerns, the sports sector too must move towards responsible innovation. Materials like Nike Grind contribute to a circular economy by reducing waste and repurposing discarded material into high-perfor-

The Pioneer

mance surfaces. Gallant Bounce installations reflect this mindset, prioritising accessibility, safety, and longevity. These facilities become inspirational spaces where

children discover confidence, athletes sharpen their skills, and communities gather with pride.India's next sporting leap will likely emerge from its remotest corners. A new turf in a tribal school or a synthetic track in a hilly region reinforces that talent is not determined by geography. As India prepares for global competitions and future Olympics, the foundations being laid today will determine the champions of tomorrow. The road ahead is filled with promise. India's sporting aspirations now reflect a larger cultural commitment to fitness, resilience, and collective growth.

With government vision and industry innovation working in tandem, the nation is steadily moving towards a future where world-class. sustainable sports infrastructure becomes the norm. The fields being built today will shape not only athletes but the spirit of a confident and

The writer is the founder of **Gallant Sports** 



## **Editorial**



## Playing to the gallery

Karnataka's hate crimes Bill is a threat to free speech

ood intentions do not necessarily lead to good outcomes, and it is important to recall this lesson of history in the context of the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, 2025. Its pious objectives are more likely to lead to unintended horrors against free speech and individual liberty, and blatant misuses of state power. The intent of the proposed law is to define and penalise hate speech and hatemotivated acts that incite disharmony, hatred or violence against individuals or groups based on various protected characteristics. The corrosion of public spaces in free societies is indeed troubling, and governments, policymakers and the citizenry are justifiably concerned about this. Individuals and communities are targeted for their religion, race, sexual orientation, caste and gender through public platforms, particularly social media. There is a certain impunity from law that purveyors of hatred are guaranteed. They are often rewarded with political power and social influence. Starting with prejudice against fellow humans, hate speech is fuelled by misinformation and fake news oftentimes. Speech, prejudice and hatred create a vicious cycle, sometimes leading to violence against groups and individuals. Karnataka has more than its share of all these, and the State government must have thought that a specific law is the way to tackle this.

Such attempts around the world are creating more problems than they resolve. Restriction of speech on any ground is a bad idea, and when an agent of the state is authorised to determine what is allowed and what is not, it is a slippery slope. A case in point is how law enforcement in several western countries cracks down on peaceful pro-Palestinian speech as anti-Semitic. Most of the attributes that such laws, including the proposed one in Karnataka, are trying to define are indefinable concepts such as harmony, hate, enmity and ill will. All agree in principle that no one should spread hate or prejudice, and they go on to accuse opponents of doing it. Considering the inescapable subjectivity in this determination, the powerful prevail. The Bill defines hate speech as any expression (spoken, written, visual, electronic) made in public view to deliberately cause injury, disharmony, enmity, hatred, or ill will against a person or group with a prejudicial interest, which is so sweeping and totalitarian that the risk of misuse will be manifold compared to any social good that can be achieved through this. The only reason why speech ought to be controlled in a free society is the imminent threat of violence, and existing laws are more than enough to tackle such situations. The Karnataka government is playing to the gallery. And it is playing with fire.

## **Notional security**

The U.S. is in pursuit of global dominance and isolationism

curity Strategy (NSS) under the Trump second term, a document described as a road map to "ensure that America remains the world's strongest, richest, most powerful, and most successful country for decades to come". Washington has identified five top foreign policy priorities. These include the notion that the era of mass migration has ended, that core rights and liberties including the freedom of speech and religion need to be protected more than ever before, that the "days of the U.S. propping up the entire world order like Atlas are over", that the White House sees it as imperative to double down on shepherding peace deals across the world as a means to solidify U.S. influence abroad, and that economic security will be accorded highest importance in foreign policy. For the last pillar of national security, especially, the thrust of concerted foreign policy actions for the remainder of the second Trump administration will entail efforts towards achieving balanced trade, securing access to critical supply chains and materials, reindustrialisation of the U.S. economy, boosting American defence infrastructure, energy dominance, and supporting Wall Street to leverage the "dynamic free market system and our leadership in digital finance and innovation" worldwide.

While the grandiose terms of U.S. foreign policy priorities are unsurprising in their broad emphasis, other than, perhaps, the unrelenting subtext of eternal, unquestioned American exceptionalism, it is the broadside against European allies that is most troubling for the risk that it poses to regional stability across the continent. The NSS not only takes a patronising tone on Europe facing the "stark prospect of civilizational erasure" owing to its purported economic decline, but it also faults Germany and EU countries with "unstable minority governments" whose policy actions do not apparently match their stated desire for peace in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine. Little wonder that Germany's Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul retorted that in the context of Germany, he did not believe that "questions of freedom of expression or the organisation of our free societies" belonged in the U.S. NSS and that his country did not need "outside advice". While the NSS is a signpost to guide U.S. diplomats towards a united vision for Washington-defined foreign policy goals, its latest version has set the cat among pigeons so far as anxieties around NATO's strength are concerned. If, as the NSS says, the U.S. intends to push a "burdensharing network" to force all its allies to assume responsibility for stability in their regions, it might end up bolstering the sense of impunity with which autocrats worldwide flout territorial and human rights norms in their quest for power.

# The stark reality of educational costs in India

rticle 21A (86th Amendment, 2002) of the Constitution of India provides the Right to Free and Compulsory Education for children of ages six to 14 years. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 expands this vision to cover children from ages three to 18 years, thereby extending the goal of universal education from pre-primary to higher secondary (Class 12). The NEP aims to achieve this universalisation of school education up to the secondary level by 2030. Although education is meant to be free, many students still attend private schools, where substantial fees are charged. In addition, due to several reasons, many students also go for private coaching, which adds to the financial burden.

Given the constitutional guarantee of free education, how expensive is basic schooling in India? How much do parents actually spend to send their children to school – an obligation that, in principle, lies with the government as mentioned in the Constitution? The NSS 80th Round (April-June 2025) survey, on "Comprehensive Modular Survey: Education", offers the latest data to explore these questions.

### **Enrolment trends in schools**

At the national level, 55.9% of students are enrolled in government schools, 11.3% in private aided schools, and 31.9% in private unaided schools. Enrolment in private schools is much higher in the urban sector than in the rural sector. Among the total schoolchildren in urban areas, 51.4% are enrolled in private school, while this share is 24.3% in rural areas. However, the gender gap in private school enrolment is relatively small – 34% of boys and 29.5% of girls.

In the rural sector, children are enrolled more in government schools than in private schools. Private school enrolment is 28.1% in pre-primary, 25.9% in primary, 21% in middle and secondary, and 25.8% in higher secondary. In contrast, in the urban sector, the share of children enrolled in private schools is much higher – 62.9% in pre-primary, 55.3% in primary, 49.8% in middle, 44% in secondary, and 42.3% in higher secondary. As education levels increase, private school enrolment declines in urban areas.

When compared with the earlier round of the NSS Survey on Education (75th round; July 2017-June 2018), we observe an increased share of children enrolled in private schools. In rural areas, the share of children enrolled in private schools increased from 20.9% to 25.9% in primary level, from 16.7% to 21% in middle level, and from 17.3% to 21.1% in secondary level. In urban areas, the share of children enrolled in private schools increased from 50.5% to 55.3% at the primary level, and from 41.8% to 49.8% at the middle level. This rising enrolment in private schools is leading to the increasing costs of education

Enrolment in government and private schools is closely linked with educational expenditure.



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Santosh Kumar Dash

is Assistant Professor at IRMA, 'Tribhuvan' Sahkari University, Gujarat The survey asked whether students had to pay any course fee. In rural areas, 25.3% of government school students and 98.2% of private school students reported paying course fees. In urban areas, 34.7% of government school students and 98% of private school students reported paying course fees.

The survey reveals that for fees per academic year in government schools, rural fees range from ₹823 (pre-primary) to ₹7,308 (higher secondary), while urban fees range from ₹1,630 (pre-primary) to ₹7,704 (higher secondary). In private schools, rural fees start at ₹17,988 (pre-primary) and go up to ₹33,567 (higher secondary), while urban fees range from ₹26,188 (pre-primary) to ₹49,075 (higher secondary).

When these figures are converted into monthly terms, the financial burden of private schooling becomes even more apparent. In rural areas, monthly expenditure on private schooling ranges from ₹1,499 for pre-primary to ₹2,797 for higher secondary. In urban areas, these figures rise significantly, from ₹2,182 to ₹4,089. When compared to the Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) from the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24 survey, it is evident that the cost of private schooling at the pre-primary level is roughly equivalent to the monthly income of the poorest 5% of households, while the cost at the higher secondary level aligns with the MPCE of households in the third income decile. This stark contrast underscores the financial strain that many families face in accessing quality education.

## Incidence and cost of private tuition

The survey collected information on whether a student was taking or had taken private coaching during the current academic year. In this survey, information on private coaching was collected separately and not as a component of expenditure on school education. The survey found that 25.5% of children in rural areas and 30.7% in urban areas take private coaching. In the rural and urban sectors, the proportion of students taking private tuition increases as we move from lower to higher levels of education. In rural areas, it is 10.7% at pre-primary, 21.6% at primary, 29.1% at middle, 36.7% at secondary, and 33.1% at higher secondary. In urban areas, it is 13.6% at pre-primary, 26.6% at primary, 31% at middle, 40.2% at secondary, and 44.6% at higher secondary.

The average expenditure on private coaching per reported student during the current academic year is higher in the urban sector than in the rural sector. It is ₹13,026 in urban areas and ₹7,066 in rural areas. The average expenditure on private coaching increases as we move from lower to higher levels of education. In rural areas, it is ₹3,980 for pre-primary, ₹4,825 for primary, ₹6,043 for middle, ₹8,616 for secondary, and ₹13,803 for higher secondary. In urban areas, it is ₹5,815 for pre-primary, ₹7,947 for primary,

₹10,765 for middle, ₹16,415 for secondary, and ₹22,394 for higher secondary.

Research shows that higher household income, better educated parents, and urban residence are strongly correlated with a greater demand for private tuition. Studies also observe a positive and significant effect of private tutoring on students' learning outcomes.

Consequently, parents who place a high value on education and possess the financial resources are more likely to invest in private tutoring for their children. Thus, the tendency to seek private tuition is particularly higher among students enrolled in private schools. Although private schooling charges relatively high fees, many teachers in private schools are underpaid and often underqualified, which leads students to rely on private tutoring for academic support. Further, some scholars argue that private tuition has also become a symbol of prestige among families

## Strengthen publicly funded schools

The findings of the NSS 80th Round Survey highlight the stark reality of educational costs in India. Despite the constitutional guarantee of free education, a significant proportion of students, (24.3% in rural and 51.4% in urban), attend private schools that require substantial fees. With private tuition further burdening household finances, education is becoming increasingly unaffordable for many families, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds.

This trend is not only exacerbating inequalities in access to quality education but also threatening the very principle of basic and universal education. As government schools face declining enrolment, children from economically disadvantaged families are being pushed into the private education system, often at the cost of significant financial strain.

Additionally, the growing private tuition phenomenon contributes to widening learning inequalities, where the wealthy have an undeniable advantage over disadvantaged households. Thus, strengthening the quality of learning in publicly funded schools can arrest this trend.

Addressing these challenges requires urgent reforms. Strengthening the quality and accessibility of government schools is paramount to ensuring that education remains a right, not a privilege. A 2024 study by economists Ankush Agrawal, Parul Gupta, and Debasis Mondal published in The Journal of Development Studies finds that private tuition is negatively associated with school quality indicators. This implies that students at 'better' schools rely less on tutoring. Thus, strengthening the quality of learning would help bridge the widening gap between students from different socio-economic backgrounds. It is only through these efforts that we can move toward achieving truly equitable and inclusive education for all children in India.

# The Madras High Court must break its silence

raised earlier by the State.

Il appointments of judges to the High Court must be recommended by the Collegium, which comprises the Chief Justice of the High Court and the two senior-most judges. This recommendation is then sent to the State government. In turn, the State government can raise objections and seek clarifications. If the Collegium reiterates its choice or makes clarifications, the government is bound by the decision.

## The clarification sought

On November 9, 2025, the Madras High Court Collegium recommended the names of six district judges for elevation to the High Court. The State government did not express any objections against the merit or suitability of the candidates, but instead, sought clarification on a fundamental procedural concern, i.e., the constitution of the Collegium itself.

Collegium Itself.

Justice J. Nisha Banu, who had once headed the women lawyers' association at the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court, was elevated to the High Court Bench on October 5, 2016. In a career on the Bench spanning nine-plus years, Justice Nisha Banu is now third on the seniority list and the second most senior judge of the High Court. She is now a 'Collegium judge' at the

Madras High Court.

However, on the recommendation of the Supreme Court Collegium, the Union Ministry for Law and Justice issued a notification dated October 14, 2025, transferring Justice Nisha Banu to the Kerala High Court and also to be placed ninth in seniority for reasons that are unknown. But the fact remains that Justice Nisha Banu did not proceed to join. Admittedly, Her Lordship is part of the Madras High Court and she continues to be a Collegium judge. Therefore, the State government had sought for clarification on the non-inclusion of Collegium judge Justice Nisha Banu and the inclusion of Justice M.S. Ramesh,

the next seniormost judge.

The State government sought clarification on what the legal authority was for this substitution and whether it was supported by any Supreme Court direction or constitutional principle.



A finding of the

Round survey,

'Comprehensive

Education', is

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NSS 80th

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Survey:

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G.M. Akbarali is a former Judge, Madras High Court

The High Court

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The essence of a constitutional democracy lies not merely in its written text but also in the integrity of its institutions. The judicial appointments process – safeguarded by the Supreme Court's own jurisprudence through the Collegium system – stands at the heart of that integrity. Is the Collegium assuming that Justice Nisha Banu is not a part of the Madras High Court or has it already clarified the issue with any authority to proceed? Whatever it may be, the State is entitled to a clarification.

Rather than clarifying these concerns, the

Collegium proceeded to recommend nine more

clarifying the core issue of constitutional validity

advocates to fill additional vacancies, without

The Memorandum Of Procedure mandates that in the appointment of High Court judges, the Chief Justice of the High Court and the two seniormost judges of that High Court shall recommend the names. But here in the Madras High Court, a senior judge was ignored.

## When procedure becomes substance

It is sometimes argued that procedural deviations are minor – that good candidates should not be denied due to "technicalities". But in the constitutional architecture, procedure is not ornamentation. It is the foundation. The Collegium system itself is a creation, not of statute, but of judicial precedent and, therefore, must strictly adhere to judicially-developed norms to retain legitimacy.

When a judge who continues to wield administrative authority is excluded without recorded justification, and when another judge is included without jurisdictional support, the very decision-making entity becomes questionable. If the body making the recommendation is not properly constituted, the recommendations themselves risk becoming void. This is not a mere administrative lapse. It is a constitutional crisis because the integrity of judicial appointments cannot coexist with uncertainty over who is authorised to make them and where there is a situation where another Constitutional branch is in the dark.

The Collegium system itself is criticised for its lack of transparency, nepotism, under- or non-representation of deserving members across the sections, political influence and accountability.

## The need for reforms

The Madras High Court Collegium must clarify with reference to law or procedure why Justice Nisha Banu was excluded and Justice M.S. Ramesh was included.

Silence is not an option when the issue strikes at the structural integrity of judicial independence. Otherwise it will leave a citizen to wonder whether there was 'any motive' at play. Whether discontented or contented, affiliated or unaffiliated, ideological or religious, a judge is a judge.

The High Court must note *Kural* 541, "Orndhukan Notaadhu Iraipurindhu Yaarmaattum Therndhusey Vaqdhe Murai (Search out, to no one favour show; with heart that justice loves Consult, then act; this is the rule that right approves").

This situation should also prompt the Supreme Court to revisit the Collegium system and frame reforms that have been demanded for long, and ensure clearer rules of composition, published reasons, and mandatory disclosures.

The question is not whether these six district judges or the nine advocates are eligible candidates, though the selection of the nine advocates appear aligned with political preferences or ideological loyalty. The question is whether the method of their recommendations for elevation is in accordance with Article 217 of the Constitution of India and the Memorandum of Procedure which rules that the Chief Justice of the High Court and the two seniormost judges of the High Court shall recommend the names for appointment as High Court judges.

Once the constitution of the Collegium becomes questionable, the recommendations also become questionable and there is definitely a constitutional crisis between the two branches of the Constitution, the judiciary and the State government.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## **Parliament, the debates**The only result from the

debates in Parliament on the Vande Mataram 'issue' and poll reforms seems to be rancorous, controversial and demeaning arguments from both sides of the political aisle.
There was no clarity on the issues under discussion and only the loss of precious time. As both sides were unrelenting in their stated

positions, the discussions ran aground. This is most unfortunate given the expenses to the public exchequer.

V. Padmanabhan,
Bengaluru

## Social media ban

Australia's social media ban for children under 16 is a tough but timely decision and needs global attention ('World' page, December ('World' page, December australian will definite to the control of t

There is no doubt that it has a clear and inspiring long-term view and will prove to be a boon. The bold decision of the Australian Prime Minister will definitely motivate

other developed nations to think on these lines. Vijaya Segara Ramsait, Courtallam, Tenkasi, Tamil Nadu Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in

r power. | and demeaning arguments | unrelenting in their stated | Bengaluru | 12). | will definitely motivate | must carry the postal address.

THE HINDU

# Is the falling rupee a cause for alarm?



<u>Sabnavis</u>

**Chief Economist** at the Bank of



Ranen **Banerjee** 

Partner and Advisory Leade at PwC India



ver the last few days, the rupee exchange rate has fallen below ₹90 a dollar and has largely stayed at that level. Now, with Parliament running, a lot of the discourse on this has been political. However, from a policy level, it is critical to understand the economics behind the fall. Why is the rupee falling? Is it falling worse than other currencies? Does the fall hurt or help the Indian economy? And finally, is this a cause for alarm? Madan Sabnavis and Ranen Banerjee answer these in a conversation moderated by TCA **Sharad Raghavan**. Edited excerpts:

## Why is the rupee falling?

Madan Sabnavis: It is falling for a variety of reasons. The first is that the fundamentals are definitely negative. When I talk of fundamentals, I am talking in terms of a higher trade deficit, possibly a higher current account deficit, and the movement of FPIs (foreign portfolio investments), which have tended to be negative rather than positive. These are the fundamental factors and these also get reflected in terms of our forex reserves coming down.

But I think the factor which has been driving the rupee down is more on the tariff front, where there were expectations that there would be a deal between India and the United States. That seems to be on the anvil, but still has not quite taken place. I think that is the reason why the sentiment has turned in the other direction.

In this entire business of the rupee depreciating, a critical factor which sort of moderates the level of fall of the rupee has been the intervention of the RBI (Reserve Bank of India). Now, we have seen that the intervention of the RBI in the forex market has tended to be limited. It does look like the fall of the rupee is within the acceptable limits of the RBI, though we should say upfront that the RBI maintains it is not defending any rate, but is out there to check any excess volatility in the market. These are the reasons why we have seen the rupee crossing from ₹87 to ₹88 to ₹89 and now ₹90.

Ranen Banerjee: The rupee is falling for two or three reasons. The primary one is ongoing portfolio outflows, which are increasing the demand for dollars. Second, our import growth has been higher than the export growth. And that also boosts the demand for the dollar. The current account deficit has been higher. So I think it's the demand and supply of dollars and how much the RBI releases from its reserves to meet the demand. The uncertainty on the tariff agreement creates a forward-looking challenge. And it may impact the economy also. So that



GETTY IMAGES

may influence some sentiment of the portfolio investors, who may be withdrawing from the Indian market. But I don't think that is the key reason why portfolio investors are withdrawing. I think the key view that the investors are taking is that the valuations are higher and that they could have a higher return in other economies by deploying that capital in the immediate term. So, that is influencing portfolio flows. And of course, the uncertainty on the trade front adds to that sentiment.

## Does a falling rupee indicate a weakness in the economy?

MS: Definitely not. Because if you are looking at the overall state of the economy, if you go by the performance on the GDP front, it has been fairly remarkable, the kind of growth rates we have seen in the first half of the year. So, I don't think it has anything to do with the real economy. The balance of payments is fairly robust. The RBI Governor had also pointed out that affordance reserves are covering 11 months of imports. So, I don't see any problem out there. It is more of the sentiment that has been driving the rupee downwards.

**RB:** I don't think that there has been any structural change in the economy that is influencing the rupee. The fundamentals are very strong. We are having robust growth. Inflation is benign. The monetary policy is quite accommodative. The rate cuts have been done. The fiscal consolidation is in place. Capital expenditure is going on. The government is adhering to the fiscal roadmap that it had laid down. So I don't think structurally anything major has changed. It is my belief that it is more transient factors that are impacting this (fall of the rupee), rather than structural factors.



I don't think we are in a situation where we need to be alarmed. We are the worst performing currency in the last three months, maybe. But if we take a two-year horizon, then I think other than the Korean currency, all other emerging market currencies have possibly depreciated against the dollar much more than the rupee. RANEN BANERJEE

## Do you feel that there is any benefit to India from a falling rupee?

MS: The only benefit which we would be getting on account of the falling rupee is more theoretical in nature. When I say theoretical, economic theory says that when the rupee depreciates, your exports gain a competitive advantage over the other countries. From the point of view of exports, if other currencies are not depreciating, but the rupee is depreciating, maybe around 4-5%, which we have seen in the current calendar year, this is an advantage for our exporters. The higher tariffs that have been imposed by the U.S. could be negated to a certain extent by the price competitiveness that we get on account of the rupee depreciation.

Imports will become more expensive. Every commodity which we are importing is going to become more expensive by 4-5%. But purely from the point of view of inflation, if you look at the components of the CPI (Consumer Price Index) and what really gets affected on account of imports, our calculation shows that 5% depreciation on a sustained basis could push up inflation by something like 0.3-0.4%, which is not really very high. And given the fact that inflation is at an all-time low in India, this should not be a major worry for us.

**RB:** The exporters may be happy that they are having a better realisation. And also, they may be happy that given some of the tariff headwinds, our products may become a little bit more competitive. If you look at, say, services, services exports is a very large segment of our economy and it has been doing very well, growing very fast. So companies that are exporting services are going to have better bottom lines in rupee terms. Who knows, they may be willing to share some of those benefits with their employees as higher bonuses. And then that may lead to further support for consumption. So, there are various channels through which benefits could come.

But then there are downsides also. We are a

large importer. And therefore, during any rupee weakness, we have to shell out more rupees. And there could be some additional expenses that need to be done by companies that are importing. And if the demand holds, then to a very small extent, there could be some bit of imported inflation too, but it may not be very large. So we can't really say whether it is benefiting India or not because different segments of the economy get impacted differently.

### Is the falling rupee alarming and should the RBI step in or let it fall?

MS: Every time the rupee reaches a new low, there is a tendency for a certain amount of alarm. And if the rupee is going down and there is little interference from the RBI, there would be a natural tendency for this to become self-fulfilling and the rupee will fall further. But in terms of internal dynamics, the currency should not be a major worry. From the point of view of exports, no alarm. From the point of view of inflation, no alarm.

But I think what is a worry is that when we have such a volatile currency, it becomes a bit difficult for both exporters and importers to do business, because normally we expect the rupee to be stable. The rupee should actually be appreciating, given the fact that the dollar is weakening. So, to that extent, I think it is definitely a disruption for us, especially for those who are in the business of importing inputs. But it is not going to rock the overall economic performance of the economy.

There may also be some pressure on the fiscal balance, but we will have to wait for the revised budget figures to understand the extent of the impact. There would definitely be some problem even in terms of fertilizer imports. But we don't expect that to actually upset the fiscal arithmetic too much.

**RB:** I don't think we are in a situation where we need to be alarmed. We are the worst performing currency in the last three months, maybe. But if we take a two-year horizon, then I think other than the Korean currency, all other emerging market currencies have possibly depreciated against the dollar much more than the rupee. So, we must not forget that we almost had a flat exchange rate for over 12 months prior to the last six months. So I don't think that there is need for alarm.



To listen to the full interview Scan the code or go to the link

**NOTEBOOK** 

# At COP30, China's tea-infused fabric and India's austerity

Pavilions are where countries set up cultural displays that tout their commitment to sustainable development and clean energy

Jacob Koshy



aybe it is just the magic of the panda," Liantong Zhou told me in a paroxysm of laughter,

Something strange was happening at the Chinese pavilion in the Hangar Convention and Fair Centre, the venue of the COP30 climate talks in Belem, Brazil. These pavilions at the annual United Nations conference are where countries set up cultural displays that tout their commitment to sustainable development and clean energy. They are also venues for panel discussions and seminars, and provide opportunities for bureaucrats, ministers, and businessmen to network. They are like temporary embassies where all the countries mark their presence over the fortnight of talks.

What marked the Chinese pavilion were the queues. On all days, Ms. Zhou told me, people had been lining up for an hour, sometimes two or three times a day, for 'gifts'. These freebies included baubles, pens, caps, panda figurines, candles and soft toys - every day tourist ware - and were outwardly unexceptional. There were bigger panda soft toys and coffee mugs as well, but these were not free and had to be bought. And those were not exactly flying off the shelves.

I asked Ms. Zhou if she would endure a two-hour wait for similar stuff back home in Beijing. She gave me a diplomatic chuckle - she worked at the Environment Ministry and was only volunteering at the pavilion – and did not let her official mask slip. "Most of these are metal but some of them are made of tea," she explained. "Bags?" I asked. "No, they are dissolvable, tea-infused fabric and recyclable. Once you are done with them, you can drink them."

Other pavilions too had their draw: there was free Colombian coffee and Australian cakes, but no long lines. Here, in a microcosm, was geopolitics at play. China was the manufacturing powerhouse of

the world and everyone at its pavilion was lining up for a piece of whatever the Chinese were giving away. This was no longer the country that, once in the popular imagination, was linked to plastic articles and toxic paints. 'Metal,' 'recyclable,' and 'eminently desirable' was the aesthetic the pavilion exuded.

At COP30, the U.S. was absent. It was where countries such as China, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia - or the Like-Minded Developing Countries, as they are called steered the conversation away from ending fossil fuel to concerns such as adaptation and the money needed to better fortify against a heating globe. From the European perspective, these countries, with their refusal to set hard deadlines on phasing out fossil fuels. are stalling progress, though it is also common knowledge that without China's rare earths, solar cells, and batteries, an oiland-coal-free planet is an opium dream.

In contrast to the Chinese pavilion, the Indian pavilion was austere. 'India@COP30' was displayed amid the red, orange, and green. India may be the third largest solar producer in the world, but a little over 70% of its actual electricity comes from coal. There were no queues because there was nothing to give away. It was nearly always empty except for visits by members of the Indian delegation.

"See these chairs?" Ms. Zhou continued, pointing to elegantly crafted wooden ones. "Tomorrow evening, when the pavilions close, we are going to give them all away. We shipped these in from China. We have committed them to a local NGO but anybody who wants them can take them away for free, if they line up."

However, the next day, shrieks rent the pavilion. "Fire! Fire! Everyone clear out," UN marshals bellowed, herding us all through the exits. A short circuit in the vicinity of the Africa pavilion had razed large portions. The venue was sealed. and shut for the day. I wondered if somebody had grabbed those chairs.

jacob.koshy@thehindu.co.in

## PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Rhythm of the harvest



Men and women of the Hill Tiwa community harvest paddy in Umsuwai village in Karbi Anglong district of Assam. RITU RAJ KONWAR

## FROM THE ARCHIVES



FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 12, 1975

## Loch Ness snaps fail to end controversy

London, Dec. 11: Two British scientists have charged that photographs an American team claimed it took of the legendary Loch Ness monster "prove nothing". The British

scientists, all experts at London's prestigious Natural History Museum, said last night that the photographs showing what appear to be a grotesque horned head and a giant flipper jutting from a fish-like body "do not constitute acceptable evidence of the existence of a large living animal." The attack stirred further controversy around the claims by the Americans, led by Mr. Robert Rines of Boston, that they had located the elusive monster that has intrigued scientists for generations.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 12, 1925

# No pearl fisheries in Ceylon

There are no prospects of a Pearl Fishery next year. The news was communicated to a representative of "The Ceylon Daily News" by Dr. Joseph Pearson, Marine Biologist and Director of the Colombo Museum, who has returned from the inspection of the Pearl Banks.

# Text&Context

THEMOHINDU

## **NEWS IN NUMBERS**

**HIV-positive cases** registered in Patna in 2025

**Project Director** of Bihar AIDS Control Society, N. K. Gupta, told reporters that "1,200 HIV-positive cases have been registered in Patna, followed by more than 400 in East Champaran and 340 in West Champaran district in 2025 so far." PTI

## Number of civilians killed in fighting in eastern Congo

More than 400 civilians have been killed as the Rwanda-backed M23 armed group continues its offensive in Kivu province in eastern Congo, regional officials said on late Wednesday, adding that Rwandan special forces were in the strategic city of Uvira. AP

## Amount received by Pakistan from the IMF for climate resilience

in \$ billion. The amount, which would reflect in the bank's foreign exchange reserves for the week ending December 12, is part of the IMF's dual track bailout for Pakistan with a 37-month Extended Fund Facility and climate focussed Resilience Sustainability Facility. PTI

## Issues of aircraft GPS interference reported by govt. in two years

System/ Global **Navigation Satellite** System spoofing and jamming refers to attempts to manipulate a user's navigation system by giving false signals. In recent times, there have been instances of GPS spoofing and interference incidents. PTI

## Farmer suicides in Maharashtra in the last three months

Raising the issue during Zero Hour in the Rajya Sabha, NCP(SCP) MP Fauzia Khan said Maharashtra leads the country in farmer suicides, with the State government informing the Assembly about the 766 deaths in three months. PTI

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# Savings shift reshapes India's markets

Domestic savings are replacing foreign institutional money, boosting stability but exposing new investors to uneven participation and higher risks; booming markets mask access and performance problems, underscoring the need to fix asymmetry and strengthen investor protection

**ECONOMIC NOTES** 

Saumitra Bhaduri **Shubham Anand** 

significant transformation is under way in India's capital markets. Domestic household savings are now replacing foreign institutional money. This is not just a change in numbers – it is a shift in market power. Indian equities are less exposed to the unpredictable swings of global capital, which is positive for stability. However, there is a challenge: millions of new retail investors are stepping in, and not all of them are prepared for the complexities ahead. As India aims for "Viksit Bharat 2047," the question is whether stability built on unequal participation and limited returns supports inclusive growth.

## The rise of domestic money

The latest NSE Market Pulse report shows Foreign Portfolio Investor (FPI) ownership of Indian equities at a 15-month low of 16.9% and 24.1% in the NIFTY 50. Meanwhile, domestic Mutual Funds (MFs) are hitting new highs quarter after quarter. Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) are bringing in record inflows, and individual investors, through direct holdings and MFs, now own nearly 19% of the market, the highest in over two decades. Domestic savers are now the market's anchor. They are helping reduce volatility and giving institutions a "flight-to-stability" option, as seen in the NIFTY 50's surge in October.

This market ownership shift has a corresponding impact on the policy landscape. The Reserve Bank of India now enjoys greater flexibility, thanks to domestic inflows and record-low inflation – CPI inflation eased to 0.3% year-on-year in October. With less reliance on FPI flows, the central bank can prioritise stimulating bank credit growth and managing the growth-inflation trade-off, rather than defending the rupee from capital flight. Yet, this policy space is not



GETTY IMAGES

guaranteed; it could quickly evaporate if household confidence falters or if market downturns disproportionately impact the most vulnerable. Without careful management, this shift risks becoming a source of future instability.

**Boom in primary markets** 

Further reflecting the confidence in domestic capital, the primary market is booming. Seventy-one mainboard listings this fiscal year have raised over ₹1 lakh crore. This surge is supported by a strong appetite for capital formation: in the first nine months of FY25, Indian companies announced investments exceeding ₹32 lakh crore, a 39% increase over the same period last year. Notably, the share of private participation in these announcements has risen to around 70%.

However, beneath this growth lies a more complex reality. The celebratory narrative around MFs and retail participation often skips a key point: the quality of financial advice and how wealth is distributed. A concerning trend can be observed in the IPO market. Companies like Lenskart are commanding sky-high price-to-earnings multiples. Mamaearth and Nykaa have seen similar trends. These examples raise questions about whether market exuberance is outpacing fundamentals and whether retail

investors are being exposed to excessive

Financial literature provides some answers – investing doesn't guarantee better returns. This dynamic is highlighted in the so-called "performance problem" in finance, where most active fund managers struggle to consistently beat the market after accounting for risk and fees.

## **Unequal outcomes**

The consequences of this structural inefficiency are direct, impacting how new equity wealth is concentrated among upper-income groups - as seen in higher MF participation in areas with formal financial access – market stability may inadvertently accelerate wealth inequality. The recent decline in household equity wealth by ₹2.6 lakh crore in the last quarter is particularly concerning. If these losses are concentrated among new, vulnerable investors, the promise of inclusive growth rings hollow. Moreover, concentrated benefits dampen aggregate demand, as high wealth concentration often leads to a lower marginal propensity to consume.

One can argue that increased retail participation is a sign of democratisation and will naturally lead to better outcomes as markets mature. But without appropriate safeguards and education, new investors may face higher risks and losses. Market corrections are a normal part of investing, but when losses are concentrated among inexperienced investors, long-term trust in markets can be damaged.

## Fixing asymmetry

Addressing these challenges requires more than just increasing the volume of savings. The current financial system must confront the "access asymmetry problem." This means shifting the focus from simply disclosing information to actively protecting everyday investors. Key steps include incentivising lower fees and promoting passive, low-cost investment vehicles.

With active schemes holding 9% of the market and low-cost passive funds only 1%, lowering expense ratios and educating investors on indexing are crucial steps toward solving the "performance problem."

Deeper structural issues also demand attention. As promoter holdings in the NIFTY 50 reach a 23-year low of 40%, it is vital to ensure this reflects healthy capital raising, not opportunistic disinvestment. Strengthening corporate governance and transparency is necessary to safeguard long-term value for domestic savers.

Equally important are data-driven interventions. Using gender- and location-specific data can help identify gaps in access and outcomes, enabling targeted policies that bring more women and underrepresented investors into the financial mainstream.

The market's new foundation is promising, but the imperative now is to shift from simply attracting funds to proactively deepening institutional integrity and broadening financial literacy. Navigating the asymmetries inherent in financial deepening is no longer a peripheral concern; it is a fiduciary imperative. Saumitra Bhaduri is a Professor, Madras School of Economics, Chennai; Shubham

## THE GIST

Domestic household savings replace foreign institutional money, giving Indian markets stability but raising concerns about unequal participation and limited returns for new retail investors.

Access asymmetry and unequal outcomes emerge as key challenges, making investor protection, lower fees, passive investing, and stronger governance crucial.

# What does Supreme Court's ruling on narco tests mean?

Why did the court set aside the Patna High Court order allowing an involuntary narco test?

C.B.P. Srivastava

The story so far:

he Supreme Court has held that any forced or involuntary narco test shall be unconstitutional and invalid, setting aside a Patna High Court order that permitted such a test in *Amlesh* Kumar v. State of Bihar (2025). The apex court is of the view that the High Court's order was in contravention of the guidelines given in Selvi v. State of Karnataka (2010).

## What is a narco test?

A narco test is a process of investigation during which it is expected that the accused, undergoing such a test, would express the concealed facts. He is sedated by administering a certain class of substances, such as barbiturates, for instance, Sodium Pentothal, to reduce a subject's inhibitions and reasoning ability. It is a non-violent method similar to those called polygraphs or brain mapping.

### Why are these tests constitutionally problematic?

Clause (3) of Article 20 of the Constitution provides for the protection against self-incrimination, meaning that no person accused of any offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself.

The Supreme Court, while referring to the Selvi guidelines, has held that without free consent, any such test would be unconstitutional and hence any information obtained therefore shall not be used as evidence. It is important to note that all three clauses of Article 20 form the constitutional foundation of India's criminal justice system. Clause (1) deals with ex-post facto laws – laws that declare an act as an offence which, when committed, was not an offence. Further, Clause (2) states that no person shall be prosecuted and punished for the same offence more than once, that is, protection against double jeopardy.

Clause (3), as discussed earlier, protects an accused from self-incrimination.

One of the principles of a democratic criminal justice system is the need to balance the rights of the victim with those of the accused. Any violation of the right against self-incrimination would be a matter of serious concern in the context of democratic values and principles. Similarly, personal liberty under Article 21 is of paramount importance because it incorporates the Right to Privacy, and any such test without the express consent of the person (accused) would violate one of the most basic human rights.

Moreover, it is also to be noted that Article 21, together with Articles 19 and 14, constitute the 'Golden Triangle' of the Constitution, as explained by the Supreme Court in Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978). It means that violation of the Right to Privacy would thereby violate the Right to Life and Personal Liberty, and, finally, the Golden Triangle.

### What have courts said about evidentiary value?

Anand is a PhD Scholar

Two more case laws appear relevant in this regard. In Manoj Kumar Saini v. State of MP (2023) and Vinobhai v. State of Kerala (2025), the courts held that the results of a narco test do not confirm guilt. Although information obtained from the test might contribute to the investigation, it must be corroborated with other evidence. The Supreme Court has held that consent must be informed, recorded before a magistrate, and undertaken with medical, legal, and procedural safeguards.

Article 21 incorporates the phrase 'procedure established by law' which signifies that the procedure provided by law shall be fair. All procedural safeguards shall be taken care of before conducting any such non-invasive tests. The court has made it clear that a person may volunteer for a narco-analysis test at the stage of defence evidence under Section 253 of BNSS; however, there is no indefeasible right to such testing.

The principle underlying informed consent is individual autonomy, which is associated with the concept of natural justice. Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant said that an act is ethical only when performed with consent. In this context, forced or involuntary testing violates ethical principles as well as core human and natural values.

C.B.P. Srivastava is President, Centre for Applied Research in Governance, Delhi

## THE GIST

The Supreme Court has ruled that any forced or involuntary narco test is unconstitutional, holding that the Patna High Court's order violated the safeguards laid down in Selvi v. State of Karnataka (2010).

The court reaffirmed that such tests, without voluntary and informed consent, breach Article 20(3)'s protection against self-incrimination as well as the Right to Privacy under Article 21

# Why human-rating matters as India prepares for Gaganyaan

Human-rating emerges as a crucial process ensuring that space systems like LVM-3 can safely carry humans by adding redundancy, robust abort capabilities, and rigorous testing; as Gaganyaan approaches, ISRO upgrades and certifies the LVM-3 for human-rating

Unnikrishnan Nair S.

The story so far:

s India moves closer to flying astronauts as part of Gaganyaan, human-rating has emerged as a central but oft-unseen part of the story. Launch vehicles like LVM-3 already fly satellites safely but carrying people demands a lower tolerance for risk and a different way of thinking about failure.

### What's the definition of human-rating?

Human-rating is the rigorous engineering and certification process that makes sure a space system, like a launch vehicle or a crew module, can safely carry humans to space. As a result, human-rated systems have an acceptable level of risk.

According to NASA standards, this is a 0.2% chance for a catastrophic event causing loss of crew during the ascent and descent phases of flight.

As part of the human-rating process, engineers attach redundant critical systems, e.g., triple or quadruple redundant flight computers; robust abort capabilities throughout the time of ascent, like the crew escape system; fault tolerance to single failures; and a reliable environmental control and life support system for the crew cabin.

They also exhaustively test, verify, and document far beyond what's required for expendable cargo rockets, all to achieve the stated loss-of-crew probability.

## Why is human-rating challenging?

The endeavour of escaping the earth's gravity is much harsher and less forgiving than flying through the atmosphere, like aeroplanes do. In fact, between flying through the atmosphere and entering the vacuum of space, rockets have to accelerate to 28,000kmph in just 8-10 minutes, experience intense vibrations, and withstand high structural loads at the point of maximum dynamic pressure.

A passenger aircraft, on the other hand, can cruise gently for hours through the atmosphere at less than 1,000 kmph with (relatively) large safety margins, can tolerate engine failure without catastrophe, and can glide or divert to an airport during emergencies.

As a result, the most reliable orbital launch vehicles have success rates of around 98-99.5%, whereas commercial airliners have safety records closer to one fatal accident per 10-20 million flights.

### Which launch vehicles have been human-rated?

As of today, fully operational human-rated launch vehicles – i.e. those flying crew to earth orbit – are Russia's Sovuz-2, China's Long March 2F, and SpaceX's Falcon 9.

In the U.S., United Launch Alliance's Atlas V rocket completed its crewed test flight in 2024 using the Boeing Starliner crew capsule, but it awaits certification for routine operational crew rotation missions following post-flight technical reviews. NASA's Space Launch System is also human-rated but it has only flown one uncrewed mission, Artemis I, and is currently preparing for its first crewed

## Which agency provides human-rating certificates?

In the U.S., NASA grants the final human

THE DAILY QUIZ



rating certification, thus authorising the vehicle for crewed flight, particularly where NASA astronauts are involved. For commercial missions like SpaceX's Crew Dragon and Boeing's Starliner, NASA specifies stringent crew safety requirements.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) also licenses commercial launch operations to protect public safety on the ground but doesn't certify crew safety.

The China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) grants human-rating approval for systems like the Long March 2F and Shenzhou spacecraft. In Russia, Roscosmos is the certifying authority for the long-standing Soyuz rocket and spacecraft.

## How often do human-rated launch vehicles succeed?

Russia's Soyuz spacecraft programme has

undertaken more than 150 crewed missions since 1967. It has an exceptionally high success rate, about 98%. The programme did suffer two fatal missions early in its history: Soyuz 1 in 1967 and Soyuz 11 in 1971.

However it has been nearly flawless in the current era vis-à-vis delivering crew to orbit. The Soyuz crew escape system successfully saved the lives of cosmonauts in at least three non-fatal launch failures: in 1975, 1983, and 2018. Since the 1971 incident, the crew safety success rate for the Soyuz program has been 100%.

The U.S. Space Shuttle programme completed 135 human space missions from 1981 to 2011 with 133 successes at a rate of 98.5% (133 successful). Its two failures, the Challenger and Columbia disasters in 1986 and 2003 respectively, were the only losses of vehicle and crew. All other flights safely achieved their primary objectives.

The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket paired with the Crew Dragon spacecraft has achieved a 100% success rate across 20 of its orbital human spaceflights. These NASA Commercial Crew rotations to the International Space Station and private missions, including the Axiom-4 mission that Indian astronaut Subhanshu Shukla

China's Shenzhou human spaceflight programme, operated by CMSA and launched aboard the Long March 2F rocket, has completed 16 crewed orbital missions with a record of success since its inaugural crewed mission in 2003. However, its flawless run was compromised by the Shenzhou-20 mission in November, when the spacecraft was damaged by space debris. While the crew returned safely aboard the Shenzhou-21 capsule, the damaged Shenzhou-20 capsule was left docked to the Tiangong space station.

## Why aren't all launch vehicles human-rated?

Human-rating a launch vehicle is essential to ensure the astronauts' safety but it's technically challenging and more expensive.

The certification process imposes enormous costs because it requires additional systems, rigorous testing, and extensive documentation. These provisions also increase complexity and rocket mass, potentially reducing payload performance and sometimes introducing new modes of failure.

For a cargo mission, the priority is to maximise the mass of the payload (e.g. satellite or supplies) delivered to the desired orbit at the lowest possible cost per kilogram. Adding the mass and complexity of additional systems required for human-rating for a cargo mission would however drive up the price for

### Which vehicle is being human-rated for Gaganyaan?

India's maiden human spaceflight programme will use the LVM-3 rocket. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has upgraded it and it's currently being certified for human-rating. Once it's thus rated, it will be called the HLVM-3 and will be able to carry Indian astronauts into space.

To this end, ISRO has added extra ackup systems, made several system and subsystems more reliable, strengthened the engines, extensively tested and built a fast crew escape system (which can pull the crew module away in case anything goes wrong during launch).

ISRO selected the LVM-3 for Gaganyaan for multiple reasons. The rocket has already proven its merits in seven consecutive successful orbital flights (including the Chandrayaan-3 mission). It's also the most reliable rocket in ISRO's

The rocket's fully indigenous propulsion stages - two Vikas liquid engines, the C25 cryogenic engine, and the S200 boosters - are also aligned with India's strategic goal to achieve self-reliance in human spaceflight, under its Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

Unnikrishnan Nair S. is former director of VSSC and founding director of the Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC), Bengaluru. He is an expert in launch vehicle systems and reentry technologies.



# Know your **English**

## S. Upendran

"You look really happy today." "I have every reason to be. I got 95 in my maths test."

"That's great. How do you plan to..." "... was math... I mean, was maths ever

your favourite subject?" "No way. Even now I get nightmares

thinking about it. By the way, it is not entirely wrong to say 'math'. You see, ..." "... All my teachers use the word 'maths', not 'math'."

"Everyone in India says 'maths'. That's because we follow the British variety of English. The word 'math', however, is very commonly used in American

"So Americans would say, 'I love math', rather than, 'I love maths'."

"That's right. An American would say, 'Usha's father is a math teacher'. We in India would say, 'Usha's father is a maths teacher'."

"I guess it depends on which side of the Atlantic you are from." "But remember, in India, most people

use 'maths'..."

"... so I'd be better off using 'maths', instead of 'math'." "Exactly!"

"Do Americans say 'mathematic' instead of 'mathematics'?"

"No. When it comes to the full form, both the Americans and the British say 'mathematics'. For example, I hope I don't get a father-in-law who teaches mathematics. Then he would find out how dumb I am."

"That reminds me. Where's your dictionary?'

"It's in the cupboard. What are you looking for?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. Ah! I knew it, I knew it! The plural of 'father-in-law' is 'fathers-in-law'!"

"Yes, but..."

"Subhash kept insisting that it was 'father-in-laws'!

"She is right!"

"But this dictionary..."

"... that dictionary is more than ten years old. You'll find that most new dictionaries include both 'father-in-laws' and 'fathers-in-law' as the plural of father-in-law."

"So, it's ok to say, 'Fathers-in-law' or Father-in-laws'

"Does the same rule apply to 'mother-in-law', 'sister-in-law', 'daughter-in-law' ... "

"Yes, the same rule applies to all these words too. For example, my uncle's sons-in-law/ son-in-laws are in the computer business."

"My uncle is not very happy with his two sons-in-laws/ sons-in-law."

"That's bad. Would you like to have some coffee?"

"I wouldn't mind."

'sugar' and 'spoonful'?"

"How much sugar do you take?"

"I take... Sugar! That reminds me what is the plural form of 'spoonful'?" "What's the connection between

"I just remembered that song from the movie Mary Poppins. Remember the line, 'A spoonful of sugar lets the medicine go

down'?" "Oh, yes! I remember. Anyway, coming back to your question, the plural of 'spoonful' can be 'spoonful' or

'spoonfuls'. Both are acceptable.'" "How about this example? I had ten spoonful/ spoonfuls of castor oil this

"If you had, you wouldn't be sitting

with me now! Published in The Hindu on December

## Word of the day

## Conflation:

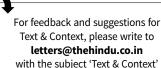
the act of putting two or more things or ideas

Synonyms: combination, blend, merging

Usage: The error happened due to a conflation of reports.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/conflationpro

International Phonetic Alphabet:/kənfleɪʃən/



with the subject 'Text & Context'

## Who was the producer

**QUESTION 1** 

**QUESTION 2** 

## of the only Hollywood film in which superstar Rajinikanth acted?

S. Venkataraghavan

### Who were the heroines of the Hindi films starring Rajinikanth, Gair Kanooni, Bhagwan Dada, and ChaalBaaz?

## **QUESTION 3** Which film marked the

100th milestone in Rajinikanth's career?

**QUESTION 4** Name the heroine who has acted in the highest number of films with Rajinikanth.

## **QUESTION 5**

The 1981 film Tik Tik Tik. directed by Bharathiraja, featured Kamal Haasan in the role of a photographer alongside multiple heroines and included hit songs such as Idhu Oru Nila Kaalam, Poo Malarinthida, and Netru *Indha Neram*. Since this is a quiz on Rajinikanth, what is the connection between this film and him?

## **QUESTION 6**

Name the first film of Raiinikanth produced under the AVM Productions banner, and name the producer.



Superstar Rajinikanth turns 75 today. Here is a quiz on the iconic actor and his films

## **Visual Question:**

Which Rajinikanth starrer, based on a serialised novel (that appeared in Kalki 1966) by Uma Chandran and directed by J. Mahendran (debut), is regarded as a major turning point in his acting career? THE HINDU ARCHIVES

### previous day's daily quiz: 1. A 1949 drawing from one of its young beneficiaries, meant as a thank-you note for supplying milk to her village, became the organisation's first greeting card. What did the painting depict? Ans: The creation by seven-year-old Dzitka Samkova from then Czechoslovakia featured children dancing around a maypole. 2. In 1953, certain words were dropped

**Questions and Answers to the** 

from the organisation's official name. Which two words were removed? Ans: International" and "Emergency" 3. UNICEF was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in which year? Ans: 1965 4. In the 1970s, UNICEF partnered with the Government of India and the World Health Organization to develop the world's most widely used hand pump in response to severe droughts affecting rural India. Ans: India Mark II

5. In the early 1980s, UNICEF 'took blame'

when the U.S. announced plans to withdraw from another UN body. What negative impact did this create? Ans: UNICEF experienced a decline in donations because donors confused it with UNESCO. 6. In 1989, UN members adopted this

Please send in your answers to

resolution. Ans: Convention on the **Rights of the Child** 7. This UNICEF-proposed humanitarian

concept proposed safe spaces for child welfare within conflict zones. Ans: The body's promotion of 'children as a zone of peace' inspired a temporary ceasefire for three 'days of tranquillity' during the Salvadoran civil war in 1985 to allow mass immunisation of children.

Visual: This woman is one of UNICEF's earliest Goodwill Ambassadors and a Hollywood actress. Ans: Audrey Hepburn Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan Tamal Biswas | Piyali Tuli | Arun Kumar Singh | Suchit Narottam

# Invisible epidemic: why air pollution is India's largest health threat?

<u>India's air quality crisis is both widespread and deeply entrenched; the scientific evidence is overwhelming, and the health impacts are undeniable; country must now recognise clean air as a fundamental right essential to equitable growth and a non-negotiable national priority</u>

**Sudheer Kumar Shukla** 

ir pollution in India is no longer a winter irritant confined to the northern plains. It has become a persistent, nationwide public health emergency that affects every demographic group and nearly every organ system. Across the Indo-Gangetic plain, and increasingly in fast-growing urban centres elsewhere, dangerous concentrations of particulate matter are shaping disease patterns, slowing childhood development and silently reducing life expectancy.

India's air quality crisis is both widespread and deeply entrenched. Of the 256 cities monitored in 2025, 150 exceeded the national PM 2.5 standard as per a report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. For most urban residents, breathing unhealthy or hazardous air is now a routine part of the year. The Indo-Gangetic plain remains the worst affected. In 2025, Delhi recorded seasonal PM 2.5 levels of 107 -130 µg/m³-far above India's 24-hour limit of 60 µg/m³ and the World Health Organization guideline of 15 µg/m³.

## Flawed index, outdated ceiling

India's official Air Quality Index (AQI) continues to cap values at 500, although real-time pollution levels in Delhi and other cities often exceed this threshold. The cap – introduced over a decade ago was intended to avoid public alarm and was based on the belief that health impacts beyond 500 would be uniformly severe. Consequently, government platforms collapse all extreme pollution into one "severe" category, even as international trackers such as IQAir routinely show values above 600 and occasionally beyond 1,000. Experts have repeatedly pointed out that India's AQI relies on outdated thresholds and instruments, and that the scale requires recalibration, removal of the upper cap and modernised monitoring.

The health burden of toxic air is stark. According to the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) of the University of Chicago's Energy Policy Institute, nearly 46% of Indians live in regions where air pollution significantly reduces life expectancy. In Delhi, current PM 2.5 exposure translates into a loss of more than eight years of life when measured against WHO standards. Across northern India, the losses range between 3.5 and seven years.

The mortality toll is equally worrying. In 2023, air pollution contributed to nearly two million deaths nationwide, as per the State of Global Air Report, 2025, primarily from cardiovascular disease, stroke, COPD and diabetes. Pollution-linked mortality has risen by 43% since 2000, underscoring the cumulative effects of long-term exposure.

## What PM 2.5 does inside the body Cardiovascular harm: PM 2.5 particles

penetrate deep into the lungs, cross into the bloodstream and provoke systemic inflammation. Multi-city epidemiological studies in India show an 8% increase in annual mortality for every 10 µg/m³ rise in long-term PM 2.5 exposure. Elevated exposure is linked to hypertension, atherosclerosis, myocardial infarction, arrhythmias and ischemic stroke. In a country already struggling with high cardiovascular disease rates, polluted air acts as a potent, invisible accelerant.



**Gasping for air:** Air pollution in India is no longer a winter irritant confined to the northern plains. It has become a persistent, nationwide public health emergency that affects every demographic group and nearly every organ system. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

**Respiratory illness:** Respiratory illnesses remain the most visible consequence of toxic air. Nearly 6% of Indian children now suffer from asthma. Clinical data from AIIMS reveals that a modest 10 µg/m³ increase in PM 2.5 can cause a 20-40% spike in paediatric emergency visits for respiratory distress. Children exposed to high pollution levels show a 10-15% reduction in lung capacity – a deficit that may persist into adulthood. Among adults, COPD, chronic bronchitis and recurrent respiratory infections are increasingly common, especially for those living near roads, industries, landfills and construction

logical impacts: Emerging scientific evidence shows that air pollution affects the brain as seriously as it affects the lungs and heart. PM 2.5 particles can cross the blood-brain barrier, triggering neuroinflammation and oxidative stress. Studies from Indian cities link pollution exposure to poorer academic performance, impaired memory and slower cognitive development among children. International meta-analyses show a 35-49% higher risk of dementia for every 10 μg/m<sup>3</sup> increase in PM 2.5. Reviews in Environmental Health Perspectives (2024) suggest that polluted air accelerates brain ageing through vascular injury and toxic metal deposition.

metal deposition.

Maternal and neonatal health: High PM 2.5 exposure is associated with preterm births, low birth weight, stillbirths, and heightened neonatal mortality. Women living near major roads, industrial sites or waste-burning hotspots are especially vulnerable. These early-life impacts have long-term consequences, deepening health

Air pollution contributed to nearly two million deaths in 2023, as per the latest State of Global Air Report, primarily from cardiovascular disease, stroke, COPD and diabetes

inequities across generations.

Air pollution in India mirrors existing social and economic inequalities. Lower-income communities often live closest to emission hotspots - major roads, industrial clusters, construction zones and landfills. Children in these neighbourhoods spend more time outdoors and are therefore more exposed. Poor housing, limited access to clean fuels and inadequate healthcare exacerbate vulnerabilities. During winter, States such as Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar frequently record "severe" or "hazardous" AQI levels (CREA, 2025), where the poorest bear the heaviest burden.

Public discussions often focus on stubble burning or Diwali fireworks. While these events intensify pollution, they are not the root cause. Source-apportionment studies consistently show that year-round structural contributors – vehicular emissions, industrial processes, dust from construction and demolition, informal waste burning, and household biomass use – drive baseline PM 2.5 levels. Seasonal factors simply worsen an already dangerous situation.

The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) has initiated some improvements, but its targets remain modest and enforcement weak. Therefore, a health-centred, multi-sectoral strategy is

THE GIST

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India's air quality crisis is both widespread and deeply entrenched. Of the 256 cities monitored in 2025, 150 exceeded the national PM 2.5 standard as per a report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. India's official Air Quality Index (AQI) continues to cap values at 500, although real-time pollution levels in Delhi and other cities often exceed this threshold.

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now essential, which should include the following aspects:

Transport transformation:
Large-scale electrification of buses, taxis, auto-rickshaws and two-wheelers; shifting freight from diesel trucks to rail and electric fleets; real-world emissions monitoring; and the introduction of low-emission zones and congestion pricing

Industrial control: Strict enforcement of pollution-control technologies and a phased transition from coal-based processes

Construction regulation: Mandatory dust-suppression protocols, enclosure norms and mechanised sweeping.

Waste-management reform: Segregation at source, decentralised treatment, biomethanation and scientific landfill remediation to eliminate open burning.

Health-system integration: A health-centred framework should integrate air quality into routine healthcare. District-level advisories based on real-time AQI, lung-function testing within school-health programmes, and screening for COPD and cognitive decline.

## A fundamental right

India must recognise clean air as a fundamental right essential to equitable growth. The scientific evidence is overwhelming, and the health impacts are undeniable. Protecting clean air must now become a non-negotiable national priority – anchored in science, driven by public health, and executed with urgency.

(Dr. Sudheer Kumar Shukla is an environmental scientist and sustainability expert. He currently serves as head-think tank at Mobius Foundation, New Delhi. sudheerkrshukla@gmail.com)

# Preventing strokes before they begin: tools everyone should be aware of

## <u>Vikram Huded</u>

Brain strokes continue to remain one of the most alarming public health challenges in India. It is evident that many strokes need never have happened. Strokes are the final event in a long, silent process – one that we now have the tools to detect, slow down, and often prevent.

One of the most overlooked contributors to stroke risk lies not in the brain, but in the neck. The carotid arteries, which carry blood to the brain, can gradually narrow due to the build-up of fatty plaques. This process is often completely symptom-free. Yet when a plaque ruptures or a clot forms, blood flow to the brain can suddenly stop, leading to irreversible paralysis, loss of speech, or even death.

Recently, an important international study, the CREST-2 trial, offered new clarity on how we

can better protect people at risk. The study followed more than 2,400 individuals with severe but symptom-free carotid narrowing. All participants received the best possible medical therapy – including strict control of blood pressure, cholesterol, and other vascular risks. However, the findings showed something crucial: those who also underwent carotid stenting had nearly half the risk of stroke or early death over four years compared with those treated with medicines alone.

## Tools available

This does not mean that every individual with carotid disease requires an intervention. What it does reinforce, however, is that early identification of severe carotid narrowing provides an opportunity to offer additional protection to those who truly need it.

One of the simplest tools available



The most effective protection against stroke continues to be disciplined control of blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes and regular physical activity. FILE PHOTO

to us is the carotid Doppler ultrasound. This non-invasive test uses sound waves – without any radiation – to assess plaque build-up and measure how much the artery has narrowed. It is quick, painless, widely available, and remarkably

recommended indiscriminately for everyone, it can be immensely useful for individuals with multiple stroke risk factors. These include high blood pressure, diabetes, elevated cholesterol levels, smoking, heart

informative. While it is not

disease, peripheral artery disease, or a strong family history of vascular events. For adults above 50-55 with such risks, adding a carotid Doppler scan to an annual health check can help unearth dangerous blockages long before they cause harm.

## Focusing on the basics

Of course, no scan replaces the basics. The most effective protection against stroke continues to be disciplined control of blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes; quitting smoking; regular physical activity; and maintaining a healthy body weight. These lifestyle foundations remain our strongest defence.

At the same time, we must remember the signs that need urgent medical attention. Sudden weakness, facial drooping, slurred speech, vision loss, or sudden imbalance should *always* be treated

as a medical emergency. These brief, transient episodes – often called warning strokes – may be the first indication of significant carotid disease and represent a narrow window to prevent something far more catastrophic.

As we work toward strengthening India's stroke-preparedness ecosystem, encouraging proactive risk assessment must be a key priority. A simple neck artery scan, guided by the individual's risk profile, can be the difference between identifying a silent threat early and discovering it only after disability strikes. Stroke prevention is not only possible – it is within reach, if we act n time. (Dr. Vikram Huded is senior consultant, director, and clinical lead, interventional neurology programme, Narayana Health, Bengaluru. vikram.huded.dr@ narayanahealth.org)

# thehindubusinessline.

## Shot in the dark

Fed rate actions seem out of sync with macro data

ith President Donald Trump exerting not-so-subtle pressure on the US Federal Reserve to ease rates and financial markets pricing in a high probability of it, it is not surprising that the Federal Open Markets Committee (FOMC) has obliged by trimming the policy rate by 25 basis points in its latest review. FOMC has made the usual noises about the need "to achieve maximum employment with an inflation rate of 2 per cent over the long run". However, the truth is that it has taken its latest policy decisions in a data vacuum.



With an extended federal government shutdown lasting 43 days over October and November, critical data releases in the US essential to rate actions, have been unavailable. The Q3 GDP release has been put off and the latest available data for Q2 2025 (April-June) showed the US economy racing along at 3.8 per cent (a sharp rebound from a 0.6 per cent contraction in Q1). This offers little justification for a rate cut. Inflation releases have also been delayed, but the latest one for September 2025 showed sticky PCE (Personal Consumption Expenditure) inflation at 2.8 per cent. This is well above the Fed's 2 per cent target. For much of the past year, the FOMC has been attributing its rate cut decisions to a weak jobs market. However, the closely watched non-farm payrolls report from the US Bureau of Labour Studies was 'cancelled' for October and 'delayed' for November. The September report showed the economy adding a healthy 1.19 lakh jobs though unemployment was at 4.4 per cent. A more recent private jobs report however suggested that layoffs are now spiking in the private sector.

With FOMC actions clearly out of sync with available data, its guidance that rate actions from here on will depend on incoming data, is not very helpful. Economic projections (the dot plot) from the Federal Reserve members stir the pot further. In the December review, Fed members have revised their GDP growth forecast for 2026 upward from 1.8 per cent to 2.3 per cent and pegged down inflation projections from 2.6 per cent to 2.4 per cent. This is suggestive of a soft landing, but they still project rate cuts of 25 basis points in 2026 and 2027.

Financial markets are likely to be thrilled with the Fed's decision to restart its market purchases of short-term US treasuries, starting at \$40 billion this month. While the ostensible purpose is market liquidity, this would also have the happy effect of helping out the US government's borrowing programme and wrestling down bond yields. Liquidity infusion by the US Fed has historically stoked risk-taking and accelerated portfolio flows into emerging markets. Indian stock markets, which have been facing a barrage of foreign investor selling, could do with such flows. Lower US market yields could also prompt inflows into Indian bonds, easing pressure on the rupee. However, it needs to be seen if this script plays out, given the suspense over India's trade deal.

## OTHER VOICES.

# The Juardian

## Trump and Europe: more an abusive relationship

Sir Keir Starmer, Emmanuel Macron and Friedrich Merz have become adept at scrambling to deal with the latest bad news from Washington. Their meeting with Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Downing Street on Monday was so hastily arranged that Mr Macron needed to be back in Paris by late afternoon to meet Croatia's prime minister, while Mr Merz was due on television for an end-of-year Q&A with the German public. But diplomatic improvisation alone cannot fully answer Donald Trump's structural threat to European security. The US president and his emissaries are trying to bully Mr Zelenskyy into an unjust peace deal that suits American and Russian interests. In response, the summit helped ramp up support for the use of up to £100 billion in frozen Russian assets as collateral for a "reparations loan" to Ukraine. (LONDON, DECEMBER 8)



## UK's pernicious manipulation of cybersecurity

The UK government's decision to impose sanctions on two Chinese companies is an unconstructive approach to its relations with China. Its "political manipulation under the pretext of cybersecurity", as rightly described by Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun, risks undermining the potential for productive engagement between the two countries. The move, ostensibly on the grounds of so-called "cyberattacks" linked to the Chinese government, is fundamentally spreading disinformation. This is a dangerous wrongdoing that not only intends to distort the nature of cybersecurity challenges faced by nations, but also diverts attention from the necessary cooperative efforts needed to address them. (BEIJING, DECEMBER 11)



**RAJIV KUMAR ABHISHEK JHA** 

ecently, the Reserve Bank of India reduced its benchmark policy rate, with the RBI Governor highlighting declining exports as a key area of concern. Over the past decade (FY15 to FY25), India's merchandise exports have grown at a CAGR of just 3.4 per cent. Labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and apparel, gems and jewellery, leather products, and agricultural goods have expanded at an even slower pace of 2-2.5 per cent, while high-value electronics and automobiles have largely buoyed the overall export

For mass employment, accelerating growth in these traditional sectors is crucial. India's District as Export Hub (DEH) policy is a strategic vision to boost labour-intensive exports and job creation by leveraging each district's unique skills and products. It aligns with India's aspiration to expand the country's share in global manufactured trade flows, by adopting a hyper local focus. With targeted infrastructure, institutional support, and global market access, it can transform local strengths into export competitiveness. While in principle, DEH initiative is one of the most promising pathways for generating jobs where populations reside, ground realities reveal a starkly different

The first bottleneck is the absence of reliable and comprehensive exporter databases at the district level. Export Promotion Bureaus (EPBs) at the State level maintain lists only of those exporters who are registered with them. But this represents only a fraction of the actual exporter universe. For Uttar Pradesh this figure is 25-30 per cent. The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), which maintains the most accurate and exhaustive list of import-export certificate (IEC) holders, does not share district-wise exporter data with EPBs, and consequently, districts remain effectively blind. This systemic data gap makes evidence-based hyper-local and focused policy-making virtually impossible. How can a district be groomed into an export hub when the State government and EPBs do not know who its exporters are, what they produce, or what challenges they face?

## THE INVISIBLE MAJORITY

A defining feature of UP's manufacturing exports landscape is that about 95 per cent of enterprises are micro and nano units (up to ₹1 crore of turnover), often operating out of homes or tiny informal workshops. Lacking basic knowledge of export documentation, which surely needs to



# Transforming districts into export hubs

BASIC REFORMS. Sharing DGFT data with States, formalising micro units, and strengthening logistics, testing labs and packaging centres will help build the required ecosystem

be simplified, and of importers compliance requirements, these small exporters rely on intermediaries like trading houses or merchant exporters for actually undertaking exports.

While these intermediaries play an important role by connecting small producers to export value chains and helping them navigate compliance, they also capture a substantial share of the value, exploiting the structural vulnerabilities of micro exporters. This challenge must be addressed if UP and other States wish to scale labour-intensive exports. At present the DEH hub in found wanting in these crucial respects. Effective market-based mechanisms need to be put in place to address this constraint that affects the great majority of exporters in UP.

## AN EXAMPLE FROM AMROHA

The indigenous musical instruments cluster in Amroha offers a telling real life case study. The district's dholak and other traditional instruments have received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, acknowledging their craftsmanship and heritage value. Amroha houses nearly 300-350 small units, most of them family-run and operating from informal home-based setups. Yet only one or two of these units export directly. The rest rely on intermediaries in bigger cities and lose huge share in the value chain. For example, the average cost of producing a basic dholak ranges from

## A significant barrier for exporters is the lack of knowledge of importers'

requirements and very poor access to major global markets

₹900-1,100, while a high-quality dholak having ornamental detailing and with craftsmanship costs around ₹2,000.

Manufacturers typically sell these to buying houses or merchants with a margin of 15-20 per cent. However, these buying houses export the same dholaks for approximately \$200 (around ₹17,000), which is nearly six times the price received by the manufacturers. This loss of value to the actual  $manufacturers\ can\ be\ prevented\ if\ a$ measure of structured hand-holding is put in place.

These micro exporters face several structural weaknesses in the export ecosystem including frequent electricity fluctuations, production units located in hard-to-reach areas, severe space constraints that limit capacity expansion, and a complete absence of quality assessment and materials testing facilities. These challenges affect not only the wooden musical instruments of Amroha but also sectors such as readymade garments, carpets, and handicrafts across many districts in

Without formalised production spaces and modern cluster development, export growth will remain constrained. While the government's ODOP initiative has successfully identified key products, identification alone is not enough; it must be supported by infrastructure development, cluster formalisation, and improved access to technology to drive real export momentum

## THE MISSING MIDDLE

A significant barrier for exporters is the lack of knowledge of importers' requirements and very poor access to major global markets. The government must create a structure in each district to facilitate such exposure through

curated buyer-seller meetings, exporter development workshops, and access to export mentors in India and different markets globally. Attracting some anchor investors from major export markets, for example the sogo soshas (large Japanese trading houses) to selected districts could unleash a massive export jump from these districts by linking the small exporters to the regional and global value chains.

## **EXPORT CONCENTRATION**

In districts like Amroha, out of ₹2,880 crores of exports, top 15 covers close to ₹2,300-2,400 crore, or 85-90 per cent of total exports. This concentration is typical across many districts. Micro and nano units collectively contribute only a small percentage of exports despite forming the overwhelming majority of units. This asymmetry means that policies cannot treat all units equally. A district's export strategy must be differentiated, supporting strongexporters to grow and helping small units integrate into supply chains through structured hand-holding or attracting anchor investors.

For the District as Export Hub initiative to succeed, foundational reforms are essential such as creating a unified exporter database by sharing DGFT data with States, and formalising micro and nano enterprises through incentives and cluster-based infrastructure. Strengthening district-level logistics, testing labs, packaging centres, and shared machinery will help build the ecosystem required for exports. A uniform pan-India template will not work; India needs a district-specific, data-driven, cluster-oriented export strategy.

Kumar is the Chairman and Jha is a fellow at Pahlé India

# Is Atmanirbhar Bharat on the right track?

Whether it is the Railways or the semi-conductor push, creation of core intellectual property and design remains a weak spot

Sudhanshu Mani

push to make India a manufacturing hub is welcome both for economic growth and employment, but manufacturing that is divorced from design and development, as is largely the case today, cannot make India a global powerhouse. Our pharmaceutical sector is a telling example. India produces more than 20 per cent of the world's generic drugs, yet remains heavily dependent on imported ingredients and contributes little by way of original R&D. Its role in the global value chain remains modest; manufacturing without design may create capacity, but it rarely creates influence.

Celebration of mediocrity is our weakness. Consider the Vande Bharat Express, proclaimed as a symbol of India's design prowess. Perhaps only I, having led the project, can say frankly that it was indeed a proud first step towards trainset design, but never the world-class breakthrough it is made out to be. Instead of sustained upgrades in technology, speed and reliability, it has proliferated with nearly 160 services, but without any significant technological upgrade. Even a sleeper variant that should have matured years ago is still struggling.

A rare silver lining is the effort to develop an indigenous 250 kmph

high-speed train, although even this emerged less from a planned progression and more from an inability to clinch a deal with Japan. Another example is the Metro sector; nearly ₹2 lakh crore has been spent on rolling stock and signalling in the last 25 years but India does not have a product of its own, with misplaced pride in exports of trains merely assembled in India.

This sense was reinforced during a recent interaction with executives of a major multinational that supplies equipment, services and software for semiconductor manufacturing. Much of their IT and a significant portion of their design work is carried out in India, yet they have no market here. With India's new push for semiconductor manufacturing, they are upbeat, sensing opportunity, but they emphasise the need to invest in R&D, indigenous capabilities, innovation for product development, and ecosystem collaborations at a local level.

## CHIPS UNDERPIN EVERY TECH

Semiconductor chips now underpin virtually every technology shaping modern life. From Industry 4.0 to AI, from electric mobility to telecommunications, chips have become central to economic competitiveness. Demand for advanced chips is rising due to India's large population, expanding digital services, a growing electronics market, a shift to EVs and the 5G



design IP GETTY IMAGES

rollout. The transport and mobility sectors alone are emerging as major consumers of specialised chip solutions, creating room for innovation India must seize. The government has created a policy framework to encourage this shift. The India Semiconductor Mission, with a budget of ₹76,000 crore, provides up to 50 per cent financial support for capex in semiconductor manufacturing. The Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors offers a 25 per cent incentive for producing photovoltaic polysilicon, wafers, solar cells, electronic components and sub-assemblies and e-waste recycling. The Production Linked Incentive scheme for large-scale electronics seeks to boost domestic manufacturing of mobile phones, electronic components and semiconductor packaging. India's semiconductor market, valued at about

\$25 billion today, is projected to grow at nearly 17 per cent. Entrepreneurs and investors sense an opportunity to build a more self-reliant supply chain.

Yet the uncomfortable truth is that growth in demand and manufacturing will not translate into global leadership like that of China, Taiwan or even Singapore. India has semiconductor design talent, with more than one-fifth of the world's chip design engineers based here, and many global companies running design centres in the country. But this is design work for others. India owns no chip design IP and has a nascent fabless ecosystem. Manufacturing and design must evolve together for a nation to become a genuine semiconductor

power. The dominant countries succeeded because design, IP creation, R&D and fabrication progressed in an integrated, mutually-reinforcing manner. India's challenge, therefore, is to ensure that its current manufacturing push is complemented by a strong ecosystem for chip design and deep-tech innovation. Only then will India move from being a workshop for global needs to a workshop of global innovation. The next leap lies not just in making chips, but in imagining and owning chips the world will need.

The writer is retired General Manager/Indian Railways, Leader of Train 18/Vande Bharat project, and Independent Rail Consultant

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## Mineral priority plan

This refers to 'Critical differences' (December 11). India's critical minerals strategy needs sharper focus because risks differ across all 30 minerals. Treating all minerals the same slows action, especially where China controls refining of rare earths and other energy critical materials. Real progress comes when we first identify high-risk minerals. These include rare earths, lithium, cobalt, and graphite, which are crucial for magnets, batteries, and clean energy technologies. Addressing gaps in refining reduces import

dependence. Science-based criteria can set firm tiers and help refine rare earths effectively. India must direct capital, technology, and partnerships to these minerals first. This tiered approach builds capacity faster and strengthens self-reliance in critical minerals.

S Balasubramaniyan Villupuram, TN

## **US' security strategy**

The United States' newly released National Security Strategy marks a clear break from the internationalist policies that guided Washington

after 1945. One significant shift is the elevation of the Western Hemisphere, with the US treating dominance in Latin America and the Caribbean as central to its security. At the same time, it appears to be moving away from the pursuit of global hegemony and the earlier belief that it must intervene in conflicts across the world. This change reflects a recognition of the limits of American power and a willingness to accept greater diversity in international affairs. As the US adopts a less interventionist stance, countries will need to

recalibrate their engagement. For India, strong regional leadership combined with broader partnerships with Europe, Russia and Japan will help create more favourable terms for dealing with the evolving American approach.

## M Jeyaram

## Workers in Al world

It refers to 'Embed worker inputs while deploying Al' (December 11). Nothing could be worse for the workers as well as companies when workers hear about AI and

than direct from the horse's mouth. Workers are the most critical stakeholders and their valuable inputs on creating an Al framework can only help their companies in the long run as theoretical models will find their limitations sooner than later. Unions, on their part, will have to show willingness to be part of this Al transformation. Union officials will have to look at AI as a tool to progress rather than a threat to end their employment.

automation through rumours rather

**Bal Govind** 

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# Learnings from IndiGo crisis

Top management should prevent operational risks

K Srinivasa Rao

 anaging operational risks involving people, technology, processes, systemic controls, and internal or external factors is critical. If not addressed early, they can be devastating and threaten organisations' survival. The IndiGo crisis serves as a lesson for many entities across sectors. It exposes gaps in monitoring, controls, and corrective actions.

It appears from the sequence of massive disruptions that the giant IndiGo airline has grown too large without a commensurate expansion of its operational risk management framework, exposing it to enormous backlash from stakeholders. Moody's has already stated that the IndiGo crisis is 'credit negative', highlighting serious planning failures and a material financial hit for the airline.

REGULATORY CHALLENGES

The root cause of the crisis is IndiGo's failure to prepare for compliance with the revised Flight Duty Time Limit (FDTL) standards for pilots' flight duty periods, officially announced in January 2024. Initially, compliance was due by June 1, 2024, but a phased transition was later allowed, extending the deadline to November 1, 2025.

In practice, this meant airlines had about 16-22 months from the issuance date (January 2024) and at least four months from July to November 2025 to adjust rosters to meet the most restrictive requirements, such as 48-hour weekly rest and the extended night-duty window.

Any high-impact regulatory change, such as FDTL, is initiated and prescribed through a consultative process, with a well-defined transition period to ensure seamless compliance with the norms. Any upgraded regulatory norms, particularly in the sensitive aviation sector, are intended to improve safety standards, which remain non-negotiable.

Every enterprise, including airlines, should develop a strategic plan to transition its entire ecosystem to new systems and comply with the improved regulations designed to protect the interests of all

Enterprises should view the



INDIGO. Luggage pile-up PTI

implementation of such long-term regulations as a risk-mitigation project. PERT charts should be created to guarantee timely execution, accounting for lead times and potential disruptions. Monitoring and control tools, outcome management, and progress tracking need regular updates to ensure a smooth transition to new standards.

The governance, risk, and compliance framework should be well established within organisations, with the board and its risk management subcommittee overseeing progress in preparedness. Best corporate governance practices recommend that any strategic shift driven by significant regulatory changes be monitored at the board level, with ongoing oversight and guidance on progress.

Any delay in complying with critical regulations could create an operational risk, leading not only to regulatory penalties but also to disruptions on a scale that could damage the reputation carefully built over decades of hard work.

The crisis at IndiGo indicates that the board's has insufficient oversight of critical compliance systems, putting the airline at operational risk. IndiGo should ensure that the financial impacts of the crisis do not convert operational risk into liquidity risk, which will be more challenging to manage. This could serve as a learning for businesses across various sectors, demonstrating that continuous management of operational risks and awareness of them should be deeply embedded in the risk governance framework for sustainable growth.

The writer is Adjunct Professor, Institute of Insurance and Risk Management, Hyderabad Views are personal



DHARMA RAJU BATHINI

n November 13, the government notified the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025 through G.S.R. 846(E). Together with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, these Rules operationalise India's long-awaited data governance regime: setting out standards for consent notices, duties of data fiduciaries, security practices, grievance timelines, and the designation of Significant Data Fiduciaries (SDFs).

For India's digital economy, this marks substantial progress. For India's workers, however, the Rules represent a profound missed opportunity. Despite years of consultations and the rapid expansion of workplace technologies, the final Rules provide virtually no worker-specific protections — even as algorithmic management, biometric attendance systems, and data-driven performance tracking have become ubiquitous.

The Expanding Landscape of

Workplace Surveillance: Across white-collar, blue-collar, and platform sectors, employers in India increasingly rely on:

\* Biometric attendance systems (fingerprint, iris, facial recognition); \*GPS-based location and route

tracking; \* Keystroke, screen-time and productivity loggers;

algorithms; \* Algorithmic shift allocation, rating

\* Automated résumé filters and hiring

systems and incentive optimisation. These systems shape workers' hours, earnings, evaluations and livelihood security every day. Global vendors also advertise even more intrusive workplace surveillance technologies including emotion-recognition or gait-analysis

## WHAT THEY DO AND DON'T DO

(i) "Employment purposes" remain dangerously broad: Section 7(i) of the DPDP Act permits employers to process worker data without consent for "the purposes of employment" or safeguarding the employer from loss or liability." The DPDP Rules 2025 do not define or narrow this phrase. There is no proportionality test, necessity standard, or objective limit on downstream uses. This leaves vast room for

"function-creep", where data collected for routine operations is repurposed for monitoring or disciplinary control. The well documented use of EPFO/UAN data for dual-employment checks is a vivid example of data repurposing (function-creep) in India's labour

(ii) Workers have no practical access rights for most workplace data: Under Sections 11-12, a worker can access or correct their data only if they previously

gave consent. But almost all workplace data



# New Data Protection rules leave workers behind

THE LACUNAE. Unspecified reasons for collecting data, workers' lack of access to their data and feeble collective redress systems are pain points

processing occurs under Section 7(i) (non-consent).

The result: Workers can be denied access to productivity metrics; they cannot inspect or correct algorithmic profiles; they cannot review logs used to discipline them. Rule 14 requires employers to publish the manner of exercising rights and meet response deadlines. But it does not extend those rights to non-consent situations, so the core problem remains intact.

(iii) No safeguards for automated decision-making at work: Neither the Act nor the Rules grants: a right to explanation; meaningful information about the logic of automated decisions; human review, or; an appeal against algorithmic outcomes.

The only algorithmic provision appears in Rule 13(3) — and applies only to Significant Data Fiduciaries. Most employers are not SDFs. Thus, algorithmic decisions in hiring, pay, scheduling and performance management remain effectively unregulated.

(iv) No sensitive-data tier — even for

Under Sections 11-12, a worker can access or correct their data only if they previously gave consent. But almost all workplace data processing

occurs under Section 7(i)

(non-consent)

biometrics: The DPDP framework contains no "sensitive personal data" category. Biometric identifiers, despite their intimate nature and widespread workplace use, receive no heightened protection. (v) No collective redress mechanisms:

All rights and grievance procedures are individualised. Rule 14 outlines timelines for acknowledgment and resolution but:

\* Provides no collective complaint mechanism,

\* Grants no standing to unions or worker associations,

\* And does not require employers to consult workers before deploying monitoring technologies.

This is a critical omission in an era where systems typically affect entire workforces.

## WHERE INDIA NOW LAGS

\* GDPR treats biometrics as "special category data," (Article 9 (i)), protects individuals from solely automated decisions with legal or significant effects (Article 22), allows non-profit organisations to represent data subjects (Article 80).

\* The EÚ AI Act designates employment-related AI systems as high-risk, requiring transparency, documentation and human oversight. \* The California CPRA establishes a

distinct "sensitive personal information" category with purpose-limitation requirements. India's DPDP framework is strikingly silent on these workplace-specific risks. CONSTITUTIONAL STAKES India's constitutional privacy

jurisprudence emphasises dignity, autonomy, and proportionality.
The DPDP regime, as applied to

workers, falls short on all three particularly where opaque automated systems determine earnings, shifts, or continued employment.

## A PATH FORWARD

The following interventions do not require amending the Act; they can be implemented through Rules, codes of practice or DPB guidance.

(i) Define and narrow "employment purposes" through delegated legislation. (ii) Extend access and correction

rights to all worker data. (iii) Mandate safeguards for significant automated decisions logic transparency, notice, and human

(iv) Create a sensitive-data tier for biometrics and other high-risk worker

(v) Enable collective complaints by unions or worker bodies.

The DPDP Act and the 2025 Rules are important milestones, but they leave

India's workers exposed to unregulated digital and algorithmic harms. The law can still evolve — through delegated legislation and regulatory

guidance — to ensure India's workplaces meet the Constitutional promise of dignity, fairness and meaningful oversight in the data age.

The writer is a Professor at IIM Calcutta

## thehindubusinessline.

## TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

December 12, 2005

## ONGC drops buyback plan, may divest stake in market The issue of unlocking of cross-holdings among three major oil PSUs — ONGC,

GAIL and Indian Oil is fast reaching a new turn. According to highly-placed sources, ONGC has not only dropped its plan for buyback of shares from IOC and GAIL, but is now actively considering off-loading part of its holdings in the two companies in the capital market.

### Pension corpus of new Govt staff swells to over Rs 2,500 cr The pension kitty that would be available for fund mangers from day one of the

proposed New Pension System (NPS) is steadily swelling. With pension reforms getting repeatedly stuck in the political quagmire, the corpus built through contributions from Government employees joining service after the cut-off date of January 1, 2004, is estimated to have already grown to over Rs 2,500 crore.

### Record wheat crop likely this year A record wheat crop could be in the offing going by the current sowing trend but

experts are cautious waiting for a clear picture to emerge. According to the Agriculture Ministry, the area under wheat has increased to 142.05 lakh hectares (lh) against 11.59 lh during the corresponding period a year ago.

# EU reaches deal to heighten foreign investment screening

Jorge Valero

he European Union reached a preliminary agreement to strengthen its screening of foreign direct investments, the latest move meant to help shield the local economy from China and the

The deal, reached on Thursday, will give the EU more power to review and intervene in foreign investments that affect public order and security. It will also set a baseline EU standard for reviewing these investments, which does not currently exist.

"We achieved a balanced and proportionate framework, focused on the most sensitive technologies and infrastructures," said Morten Bodskov, Denmark's minister for industry, business and financial affairs, whose country is chairing the EU's rotating presidency.

Negotiators from the Council of the EU, representing the member states, and the European Parliament finalized the agreement on Thursday morning.

## STRICTER NORMS

The stricter guidelines are part of the EU's work to protect its economy as Europe grapples with US President Donald Trump's tariff war and China's restrictions on the critical materials that fuel industrial production.

Earlier this month, the EU issued its first economic security doctrine, which stressed that the bloc must ensure inbound investments don't expose



**EU.** Safeguarding local economy REUTERS

critical sectors to hostile ownership. It also insisted such investments should bring added value to the EU and not hollow out the bloc's technological

The new screening rules update a mechanism first implemented in 2020. They set a minimum scope for review

that includes so-called dual-use items, which can have civilian and military

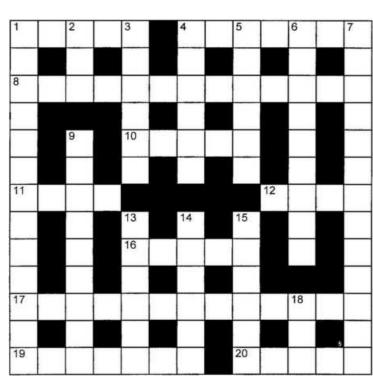
The scope also covers military equipment and critical technologies such as artificial intelligence and semiconductors.

Additionally, the scope includes critical entities in energy, transport and digital infrastructure, electoral infrastructure, and some financial entities, such as central securities depositories.

Negotiators excluded critical medicines and limited the types of financial services under the scope.

The updated rulebook, which still needs formal ratification, will apply 18 months after the regulation enters into

## • BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2844



## **EASY**

**ACROSS** 

01. Closely woven silk (5) 04. Irregular, capricious (7)

08. Certification of meeting official requirements (13) 10. W Indian low-bar

dance (5) 11. Informer, police spy (4)

12. Elevator (4) 16. Jewelled head-piece (5)

17. Bringers of storm weather (7-6) 19. React, answer (7)

20. Ice-cream comets (5)

## **DOWN**

01. One in charge of rail depot (7-6) 02. Convulsive movement in

face (3) 03. Pine-tree leaf (6)

04. Riddle (6) 05. Motive, inducement (6)

06. Barely flowing (9)

07. Clippies (13) 09. Fantastic curls, fancy twists (9)

13. Atelier (6)

14. Extreme dislike (6) 15. Pungent bulb in cloves (6) 18. Samovar (3)

**ACROSS** 

**NOT SO EASY** 

01. Stain removed from material that's smooth (5)

04. Little by little boy took in rodent in fits and 08. Attribution of account: tick turns into a way to

10. Where lost souls appear in Hell, I'm bothered

11. A police spy to annoy one (4)

12. It takes one up, having left one for the East (4) 16. Papal crown seen at IRA turnout (5)

17. Signs of a storm and cold end hurt us badly (7-6) 19. Answer one ponders the making of (7)

20. Pine produces them as traffic markers (5)

## **DOWN**

01. Position Sir adopts; he's in charge where training's

02. Spasmodic affliction starts to infect children (3)

03. It gives one hype, being born but led astray (6)

04. In game that's thrown it is a puzzling thing (6) 05. Logic is so near to its adaptation (6)

06. To con a fish if it's only just running (9)

07. Ladies who had punch almost direct orchestra on 'Hair' (13) 09. Fancy twists with circle giving us u-turn (9)

13. Sound place for us: do it out (6)

14. Great dislike there could be a dearth of (6)

15. Allium, variety of which a girl mixes on top of cooker (6) 18. Labour never tries to conceal the ballot-box (3)

M ND-NDE

## **SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2843**

ACROSS 1. Atlas 4. Curious 8. Generator 9. Tar 10. Minnows 12. Mast 14. Enteron 17. Arum 18. Dogfish 20. Ilk 21. Outfitter 23. Eatable 24. Doric DOWN 1. Argumentative 2. Lining 3. Surmount 4. Cut 5. Rare 6. Outlay 7. Stratospheric 11. Steed 13. Songbird 15. Bucket 16. Filter 19. Comb 22. Tie



{ OUR TAKE }

# NDA build-up in Tamil Nadu

AIADMK—and Edappadi Palaniswami—seem poised to lead the alliance ahead of assembly polls

he AIADMK general and executive council meeting in Chennai earlier this week gave pointers to a realignment of Opposition politics in Tamil Nadu ahead of the assembly elections scheduled next year. One, the meeting endorsed the party's decision to align with the BJP and the NDA; the AIADMK and the BJP-led independent alliances in the last general election, which allowed the DMK-led INDIA bloc to win all 39 Lok Sabha constituencies in the state. Two, the general council empowered party chief and former CM Edappadi Palaniswami (EPS) to decide on allies. Third, it announced that the AIADMK will be the leader of any Opposition alliance in Tamil Nadu: It sets to rest the demand among a section of state BJP leaders for a BJP government in Tamil Nadu.

The convergence of the interests of the AIADMK and BJP is based on the realisation that a divided Opposition has limited chance of cornering the ruling DMK-led alliance. The DMK alliance, which includes the Congress, two Communist parties, and the Dalit outfit Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi, is a formidable political and social coalition with a pan-state presence. The AIADMK knows it needs to expand its support base to stay in the race, which necessitates a tie-up with the BJP and other NDA constituents. (The AIADMKalliance and the NDA together had a 41.33% vote share as against the DMK bloc's 47% in the 2024 general election.) The BJP recognises that the prevailing political paradigm in Tamil Nadu may prefer a Dravidian outfit as vanguard, which the AIADMK can provide for the NDA. The AIADMK, weakened by the death of J Jayalalithaa and multiple splits, retains a 20% vote and has a pan-state presence.

A two-front contest would make the Tamil Nadu assembly polls interesting and competitive. The return of the AIADMK adds depth to the NDA, and in EPS, the alliance has a relatable CM face. In fact, the latter has proven to be a tactically smart leader, leading the party since 2017 and negotiating with the BJP, which, many expected, would occupy a pivotal position in the post-Jayalalithaa, post-Karunanidhi Tamil Nadu politics. For sure, the BJP has grown in the state by tweaking its nationalism and Hindutva planks to suit local conditions, but it may still be early days for the party to chart its independent course. That even a popular filmstar like Vijay has sought to claim the legacy of the Dravidian Movement to launch his outfit suggests that the ideological climate in the state continues to favour politics with a federal flavour.

# A first step towards protecting the Ridge

he Centre's reconstitution of the Delhi Ridge Management Board (DRMB) and grant of statutory powers — following a Supreme Court directive — is a fresh attempt to protect the national Capital's "green lungs". To be sure, the Ridge Management Board has been around since 1995, but has always lacked the teeth needed to ensure the area remains protected. With multiple authorities vested with jurisdiction over the area, the Ridge eventually became nobody's baby. As a result, nearly 5% of the area has already been encroached upon. Making DRMB the single window for Ridge governance, including clearances and permissions for development projects, should address lingering problems.

The importance of the Delhi Ridge — including the Morphological Ridge — can't be overstated. Apart from its ecological value in terms of biodiversity, it filters out toxic pollutants from Delhi's air to a considerable extent. It aids temperature regulation and checks desertification by blocking hot, dry winds from the west and south-west. It also plays an important role in recharging groundwater in the national Capital. But protection for this vital region has moved far too slowly — against more than 7,700 hectares of identified area, just 103 hectares has been notified as protected forests. So, while 4% of the Ridge area has already been diverted to non-forest use, just over 1.3% has been notified as protected forest. A centralised approach to Ridge protection could help check this — especially when it can override the jurisdictions of a clutch of authorities, some of which have actively felled trees in the area. A quick reclamation of the land lost to encroachment would be in order. But, all this depends on enforcement powers — experts believe this has not been made explicit, with only a general direction to national capital authorities to aid the discharge of duties by the DRMB. This needs to be corrected if the granting of statutory powers to the body is to prove meaningful.

{ VITAL SIGNS }
Ramanan Laxminarayan



# Viksit Bharat goal needs investing more in health

Economic growth can occur without health investment, but only for a while. Over time, neglecting the health of the population transforms growth from an engine of progress to a source of fragility

iksit Bharat 2047 envisions India as a \$30-trillion economy with per capita income of \$18.000–21.000. implying developed-nation status. Achieving this would require sustained nominal gross domestic product (GDP) growth of about 10% annually through structural transformation, higher productivity, and major investments in human capital, infrastructure, and innovation. Let us set aside the fact that India has never achieved such a high growth rate for more than a year at a time. Even with a \$21,000 per capita GDP, will India be considered a developed country?

A developed country is one whose wealth rests primarily on human capital rather than natural resources. Its people are educated, healthy, and productive, forming the foundation for innovation and sustained economic growth. Such nations have diversified economies built on ideas, research, and

services, supported by strong institutions and equitable access to health care, education, and opportunity. Governance is stable, and prosperity is widely shared, allowing creativity and productivity to reinforce each other. In essence, development means shifting from extracting value from the land to generating value from human potential —the transformation of natural wealth into enduring human capability.

Economic growth without parallel investment in health is possible, but is almost always temporary and uneven. Several countries — particularly resource-rich or trade-driven economies — have achieved rising GDP per capita even as public health systems remained underfunded. In such cases growth is propelled by sectors like oil, mining, or remittances rather than by broad human-capital development Improvements in early survival may still occur through better sanitation. education, or nutrition, giving the illusion of health progress without major health spending. Yet, once infectious diseases recede and populations age, the limits of this model become clear. Chronic illnesses, urban pollution, and inequitable access to care begin to erode both productivity and social sta-

Empirical studies from parts of Central Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America show that countries can grow for years while health indicators stagnate. But this "decoupling" of income and well-being tends to reverse: Poor health eventually constrains labour

productivity, increases dependency ratios, and raises health care costs, dampening long-term growth. Nations that fail to invest in maternal health, preventive care, and disease surveillance often find their early economic gains offset by rising non-communicable disease burdens and widening inequality.

Historically, sustainable development has depended not just on higher incomes but on deliberate social investment — public health, education, and environmental protection. Where such investment is neglected, growth rests on narrow foundations. In contrast, countries that integrated health into development — such as South Korea, Sri Lanka, or Costa Rica — converted economic gains into longevity, workforce resilience, and social cohesion.

The lesson is clear: Economic growth can occur without health investment, but only for a while. Over time, neglecting the health of the population transforms growth from an engine of progress into a source of fragility, amplifying the very inequities that development was meant to overcome

Life expectancy at birth is one measure of health — imperfect yet stable. India's life-expectancy goals are ambitious but unevenly grounded in current trends. Although there is no stated national target under Viksit Bharat vision documents, several states have articulated concrete targets. Gujarat aims for an average lifespan of 84 years alongside a very low infant mortality



Life expectancy at birth is one measure of health. India's life-expectancy goals are ambitious but unevenly grounded in current trends.

rate; Andhra Pradesh targets 85 years and a maternal mortality ratio below 25 by 2029; Uttar Pradesh tracks insurance coverage milestones as part of its health agenda but without quantitative targets on life expectancy. Nationally, life expectancy has been rising by about 0.4 years annually. In the most optimistic scenario, a level of 81 years by 2047 is realistic, but that requires the current rate of progress to continue.

But that is unlikely. Communicable-disease mortality has already fallen sharply, but non-communicable diseases now account for roughly 65% of all deaths (ICMR-GBD 2023). Without decisive action on obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disorders, air pollution, and mental-health care, India's steady climb could flatten by the 2030s — mirroring the plateau seen in wealthier nations. Between 2005 and 2015, life expectancy rose by four to five years, driven by investments in maternal and child health, immunisation, and infection control; since 2015, the pace has

slowed to about three years per decade.
Even in a moderately optimistic scenario, India's life expectancy will reach only 78 years by 2047, well short of the stated goal of 84 years. Such deceleration is common once countries undergo a demographic transition:
Mortality shifts from infectious to

chronic causes, and gains become harder to achieve. Mexico offers a cautionary parallel — its life expectancy has stalled around 75 years, rising by barely 0.9 years per decade. Unless India sustains health investment and prevention at scale, it risks following that same arc of early success followed by stagnation.

India has, in recent years, stepped back from strong central investment in public health, leaving states to shoulder the burden. That approach is unsustainable. In competing to attract industry, states risk a race to the bottom—lowering environmental standards and eroding quality of life for all. The consequences are already visible in the poor air quality of Delhi and Mumbai, where the limits of State control are painfully evident.

Health and environmental quality are not rewards of prosperity; they are its foundations. The seriousness with which India aligns public-health spending and enforcement of environmental quality to its aspiration of becoming a developed nation will determine whether Viksit Bharat remains a vision—or becomes a reality.

Ramanan Laxminarayan is president, One Health Trust. The views expressed are personal

# Jayasankar Krishnamurty: Lifelong friend, academic

Singh

ayasankar Krishnamurty, born on January 7, 1941, in New Delhi, to Parvati and S Jayasankar, passed away on December 5, 2025. He was an eminent academic and international civil servant who worked for decades on employment. labour and demography, with a distinguished academic career, completing his BA (Hons) in Economics from St Stephen's College, his MA from the Delhi School of Economics, and his PhD from the University of Delhi. A defining milestone was his selection as Agatha Harrison Fellow at St Antony's College, Oxford, which left a deep imprint on his intellectual journey academic embellishments are daunting. But for me, he was my closest friend. My friend-

ship with him is a journey I must recount.

I came to Delhi in 1957 to pursue the same course he did at St Stephen's College.

I was ill at ease and often jeered as the "Patna Boy" in a Delhi dominated by values somewhat alien to East India. Delhi was not the metro it is today. It still bore the aftermath of Partition and was trying to recoup, even as Delhi University and colleges like St Stephen's and Hindu College had established roots. By then, St Stephen's was regarded as the IAS factory of

regarded as the IAS factory of India. The civil services had become the aspiration of many in our generation. Jayasankar, Kitchu to me, however, had a different calling. Given his own preference, he nudged me in the direction of academia. When I followed his example, he dubbed me "professor", his voice carrying a degree of finality, even while recognising that my growing public speaking skills were already being acknowledged.

He had an innovative Tamilian mind, constantly seeking out-of-the-box responses. Kitchu was a source of encouragement in my debates. I vividly recall a debating contest in the aftermath of the 1962 Indo-China war. The motion was, "This House believes that the rise of China is inevitable." I had to speak against it and shared my anxiety with him. We decided to seize the attention of the audience and judges. Three minutes into my speech, he deliberately dropped crockery loudly in the hall. This enabled me to say, "Ladies and gentlemen, China has just fallen." There was roaring applause and I won the prize.

ing applause and I won the prize.

In many senses, his career path synchronised with mine until 1964, both at St Stephen's and the Delhi School of Economics, and during my brief bout of teaching at St Stephen's. Thereafter, I moved into administration and he into academia, yet our friendship never weakened. He would invariably be present on every social occasion, including my marriage.

Personal anecdotes and nostalgia overcome me with emotion. Some traits about Kitchu must be recounted.

First was his unwavering commitment to academia. His obstinacy in this matter was quite extraordinary. His father was in the Indian Defence Accounts Service and his brother, Jayasankar Shivakumar, rose to senior positions in the IAS and later moved to the World Bank. His nephew, S Jaishankar, is now our foreign minister. None of this detracted from Kitchu, who was fired by the world of knowledge, academia and research as a passion he pursued till the

end. He was research associate and, later, professor of economics at the Delhi School of Economics for 11 years. He concentrated on issues that are only now becoming mainstream, particularly labour markets, employment and demography, the compelling challenges of today. As editor of the *Indian Economic Review* and editorial advisor to the *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, he significantly raised the quality of both journals.

Thereafter, he spent decades working in multiple capacities in the International Labour Organization, instead of other more sought-after Bretton Woods institutions. He served as advisor in its Bangkok office and later as population and development advisor in Geneva. He was deeply concerned with countries of the Global South beset by poverty, scarce education, political violence

and uncertain political landscapes, choosing daunting missions in Indonesia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos, Mongolia, Mozambique and the Solomon Islands. He sought to promote credible economic policies to improve social outcomes. He was a formidable copyright editor, having edited three major Oxford University Press volumes and authored over

40 peer-reviewed papers in leading journals, including the Economic and Political Weekly, the Cambridge Economic History of India, and the Indian Economic and Social History Review, among others.

Second, it is somewhat puzzling why he selected employment and demography as his areas of interest. These were not necessarily the first choices of academics at that time. Today, employment lies at the heart of policymaking amid productivity growth, technological disruption and Artificial Intelligence. Shifting demographic patterns and geopolitics are the defining challenges of our time and will remain so tomorrow. It still amazes me how early he recognised these as the central issues of the 21st centure.

Kitchu was supported throughout his life by his wife Sunanda, an economist and academic herself, who nursed and stood by him till the very end. She was his constant guide and companion. His two daughters, Parvati, an economist, and Arundhati, a communications specialist, and their children are enjoined to carry forward his rich legacy in their own ways.

There is an old adage: Marriages are made in heaven. So are friendships. I have often reflected on that saying. My bond with Kitchu was not forged by circumstance alone, but deepened through countless moments of shared life and quiet affection. Kitchu was endowed with extraordinary understanding and empathy. I spent most of my weekends at his house to evade college food. The rule was to rise every Monday morning in time to catch the university spe cial. To induce me to wake up, he would play on the gramophone a lovely rendition of Raag Bhairav, "Jaago Mohan Pyare," sung by Lata Mangeshkar. The Mohan is awake, and so is the Patna Boy, missing you immeasura-

NK Singh is president, Institute of Economic Growth, and chairman, Fifteenth Finance Commission. The views expressed are personal

## { SATYA NADELLA } CEO, MICROSOFT

We have 70 plus data centre regions all over the world. In India, the footprint continues to grow. We now have central India, West India, South India, and we have a partnership with Jio as well

# Actor to auteur, the Raj Kapoor panorama at 100

Ambarish

Mishra

tories of Raj Kapoor's unflinching devotion to cinema are legion. Sample this one: Kapoor once bumped into poet Majrooh Sultanpuri at a central Mumbai studio. Packed off to jail for his Marxist poetry by the erstwhile Bombay government, Sultanpuri had just finished his penal servitude. When Kapoor asked how his 19 months behind bars were, Sultanpuri began to recount them at length. He also read out his latest poem, which he had penned during incarceration. Kapoor, so goes the story, grabbed the sheet from Sultanpuri, paid him ₹1,000 in cash —in circa 1949—and walked away triumphantly. Obviously, he was more interested in the song for his next film than Sultanpuri's sob story.

Twenty-five years later, Kapoor used "Ik din bik jaayega maati key mol, jag mein raha jaayenge pyaare tere bol" as a defining moment in Dharam Karam (1975).

Dharam Karam (1975).
Kapoor, whose birth centenary concludes on Sunday, epitomised all that was best in Hindi cinema: Entertainment, egalitarianism and enterprise. During a pivotal era of socio-cultural transformation, he used cinema as a powerful tool to define

the angst and aspirations of the millions.
Although Kapoor's father, Prithviraj, was a famous actor, Raj refused benefits of entitlement. Instead, he, like the gritty Pathan that he was, chose to rise from the ranks, starting off (at his father's recommendation!) as clapper-boy with veteran director, Kidar Sharma. Kapoor was only 10 when he acted

post-independent India, and gave voice to

in Debaki Bose's *Inquilab* (1935).

Kapoor "arrived", as it were, with *Barsaat* and *Awara*, two back-to-back hits. At 27, he joined the elite club of Hindi cinema's auteurs — V Shantaram, Mehboob Khan, S Mukherjee, Sohrab Mody, and Chandulal Shah. Soon, Kapoor set up his own well-equipped studio in Chembur, a verdant Mumbai suburb

Mumbai suburb.

Kapoor's films tackled with sensitivity and technical virtuosity a range of themes blending the profane and the sacred, modernity and tradition, wealth and hunger, power and conscience, individual and the State. He struck a fine balance between aesthetics and commerce, socialism and glamour. Kapoor's black-and-white era films offer a broad cinematic framework for Nehruvian ideals, often pinpointing the flaws in the system and

exposing the hypocrisy of the middle class. "Bina chor baney koiee bada aadmi nahin ban sakta", Kapoor's famous line in Jagte Raho, is a stark critique of the Nehruvian State and

However, Kapoor never allowed his pro-Left views to obscure his agenda. Also, he offered his own image of femininity — a woman draped in spotless white, strong and sensitive: Nargis in *Shree 420*, Vyjayantimala in *Sangam*, Zeenat Aman in *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*, Padmini Kolhapure in *Prem Rog*, and Mandakini in *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*.

Music was RK Films' strongest point. Poet Shailendra's songs — "Awara hoon", "Jeena Issi ka naam hai", and "Mera joota hai Janani" projected Kapoor's Chaplinsque

Japani" projected Kapoor's Chaplinsque image on the silver screen. Kapoor handled his team with great care, straining every nerve to take out the best from them. He ate biryani and sipped wine with them, consulted them on a shot or a song, celebrated their birthdays and gave them monickers: Music director Shankar was Gendalal (with the soft d), while Shailendra was Pushkin, the leg-

endary Russian poet. His films won global glory, especially in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and the erstwhile Soviet Union: *Jagte Raho* drew 33.6 million viewers in Soviet Russia in 1965.

There is a lovely story of how Pandit Nehru buttonholed Papa Prithviraj, at a high-profile dinner at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi sometime in the 1950s, and quizzed him about a song from Raj's film. "Panditji, I suppose you are talking about Mera joota hai Japani. It has become a rage," Prithviraj replied a tad sheepishly. "Arre bhai, the Russian PM Nikita Khrushchev has gone bonkers over the song," Panditji replied with a laugh.

Kapoor slowed down work in the 1980s following health issues. He died in June 1988. A few days earlier he had received the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke award at a function in New Delhi. The Union government issued a postage stamp in his honour in 2001.

Kapoor was a master story-teller. His life too was a fine blend of myth and reality: To borrow from his *Mera Naam Joker* song, "aadhi haqeeqat, aadha fasana" (half reality, half fiction).

Ambarish Mishra writes on politics and culture. The views expressed are personal

# Policy divisions

US policy differences will require monitoring

The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) of the United States (US) Federal Reserve on Wednesday lowered the policy interest rate, the target range for the federal funds rate, by 25 basis points to 3.5-3.75 per cent, taking the total reduction in the current cycle to 175 basis points. Since there had been some doubt in financial markets about the rate action, the delivery of a rate cut pushed stock prices higher. How $ever, the \, market's \, doubt \, was \, not \, unfounded. \, Two \, members \, of \, the \, committee \, voted$ against the decision to cut, while President Donald Trump's recent appointee, Stephen Miran, wanted a 50 basis point cut. It is worth noting that the Fed's economic projections showed that four other members were also not in favour of a rate cut. Expectedly, Mr Trump was disappointed by the Fed's decision and wanted a bigger  $rate\,cut\,to\,enable\,faster\,growth.\,Clearly, the\,US\,has\,policy\,divisions\,at\,various\,levels.$ The way these differences play out next year will shape outcomes not only for the US economy but for the global economy more broadly.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell, in his remarks, said the policy interest rate was now in neutral territory, which means it is neither expansionary nor contractionary. This might be a little confusing for the markets because the projection suggests that the inflation rate will come down to 2 per cent only in 2028. This also perhaps explains why several FOMC members were against a rate cut this week. Thus, the Fed will now likely wait and see how the economic conditions evolve over the coming months. Mr Powell has argued that tariffs are causing inflation to overshoot. Though he is of the opinion that it is likely to be a one-time increase, the impact will be worth watching. In fact, while the US economy is doing reasonably well, partly because of artificial-intelligence-related investments, hardly any of the stated objectives of increasing tariffs seem to be materialising. China, for instance, continues to post a record trade surplus and has possibly found a way to deal with the disruption.

Be that as it may, the Fed may not necessarily be data-driven in 2026. Mr Powell's term is ending in May, and a lot depends on the next chairperson. It is well known that Mr Trump believes interest rates need to come down significantly and would most likely appoint someone with the same view. Although the new chairperson may not be able to drive the agenda immediately, there will be questions about the possible implications for the Fed's independence and how potential compromises could affect financial markets. Bouts of instability in global financial markets could increase challenges for India. The rupee is under pressure owing to capital outflows, particularly from the equity market. For the near term, the Fed has decided to resume buying Treasury bills to increase liquidity, which should help improve financial conditions. However, from India's point of view, the focus will be on the ongoing trade negotiations with the US. A mutually favourable deal will be more  $significant for India's \, external \, account \, than \, short-term \, policy \, interest-rate \, changes.$ A trade deal will improve flows on both the current and capital accounts. Assuming a trade deal is signed in the near future, from an external-account perspective, the transition at the Fed will be the next major development to watch.

## Risk factor

Railways too must carefully assess duty hours

The disruption in IndiGo's schedule after the enforcement of Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) norms has revived a long-standing but unresolved concern in Indian Railways of how fatigue among loco pilots is managed, and what this means for safety on an increasingly busy network. Loco pilots continue to operate under the far looser "Hours of Work and Period of Rest" (HOER) framework, which permits an average of 52 working hours a week. The All India Loco Running Staff Association's demand is to cap duty at six hours for passenger trains and eight hours for goods trains, along with 16 hours of rest after every trip, weekly rest in addition to daily rest, and the use of fatigue-risk modelling in crew scheduling. These proposals must be carefully studied. They broadly reflect the global best practices, where duty and rest rules are based on scientific evidence of how fatigue affects human performance.

The problem is being compounded by staff shortages. As of March 1, 2024, nearly 15 per cent of train-driver posts were vacant across the network. In Southern Railway, shortages have reportedly delayed the introduction of additional services despite strong passenger demand. While the railways has announced recruitment for more than 120,000 vacancies, the process is slow, and the benefits will be felt only over time. Until then, the existing staff are being stretched thinner. The safety data further underlines why this matters. In 2024-25, there were 31 consequential train accidents, including over 20 derailments. Fatigue may not be the sole cause in most cases, but it is a recognised risk factor in safety-critical operations. Ignoring it increases the chances that small errors cause serious incidents. Notably, in the past decade, the number of women loco pilots has increased substantially, which makes predictable duty schedules, adequate rest, and basic facilities even more important if the railways is to retain talent and ensure safe operations. Further, the principle should not remain limited to loco pilots. Internationally, rail systems have moved decisively in this direction. The European Union enforces strict dutyrest norms, the United States mandates minimum off-duty hours under its "Hours of Service" law, and advanced networks rely on formal fatigue-management systems backed by data and technology.

However, Indian Railways' financial position complicates matters. An operating ratio estimated at 98.43 per cent in 2025-26, along with heavy reliance on central support to finance nearly 95 per cent of capital expenditure, leaves the organisation with limited financial room for manpower expansion. These constraints are likely to intensify with the implementation of the 8th Pay Commission, which will further raise the staff costs. Closing this gap will require more than incremental adjustment. Institutional priorities must explicitly treat crew training and fatigue monitoring as core safety investment, reinforced by technology-driven crew scheduling, a real-time monitoring of duty hours, a transparent disclosure of vacancies, and faster recruitment and training pipelines. As traffic grows and networks become denser, safety margins will depend increasingly on human limits.

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# Four US economic policy shifts of 2025

**FINGER ON** 

THE PULSE

Astonishingly, these shakeups have failed to unsettle the US or global economy — but 2026 will tell whether that continues

In 2025, the world saw one tectonic shift in United States (US) economic policy and at least three others that were consequential. These shifts will not be easy to reverse even if there is a change in administration in the US down the road. How exactly they will impact the US and the world is unclear at the moment. What is clear is that the rest of the world will have to adjust to them.

First, the tectonic shift. The US under President Donald Trump has decisively upended the free-trade

regime that has underpinned the world economy for decades. The world has to live with a US base tariff level of 10 per cent, plus an element that will vary from country to country and from time to time, depending on how the US perceives its trade relationship with that country.

This will be reinforced by even higher tariffs for sectors, such as steel and aluminium, which are perceived to be of strategic importance to the US economy. The weighted average tariff under President Trump has risen from below 3 per cent to around 19 per cent.

T T RAM MOHAN During the year, major nations settled for deals with the US that are hopelessly one-sided. The European Union (EU), for instance, faces a tariff of 15 per cent (with higher tariffs on steel and aluminium) while US exports to the EU face zero tariff. For the privilege of doing business with the US, the EU has committed to spending an additional \$750 billion on US energy products (over three years), investing \$600 billion in America, and buying US military

equipment worth "hundreds of billions of dollars". Japan, too, will face a baseline tariff of 15 per cent and will invest \$550 billion in the US. The United Kingdomgets away with a tariff of 10 per cent because of the

"special relationship" with the US. China has secured a one-year truce with the US that allows tariffs to settle at a staggering 47 per cent for one year. In return, China has agreed to lift restrictions on export of rare earths to the US and buy more soybean from the US.

Switzerland was hit with a tariff of 39 per cent. Its  $President\, rushed\, to\, the\, US\, to\, negotiate\, a \, lower \, tariff \, but$ was rebuffed. Two months later, the US agreed to reduce tariffs to 15 per cent in return for \$200 billion investment from the Swiss. India's refusal to be rushed into a trade

> the abject surrender of nations that are incomparably richer. The second shift has to do with immigration policy. The US administration has

deal looks very brave in comparison with

clamped down on border crossings, deported thousands of illegal immigrants, paused asylum applications, and attempted to limit birthright citizenship. Kevin Hassett, one of Mr Trump's

economic advisers and now a frontrunner for the post of chairman of the Federal Reserve, has argued that the issue is the quality of immigration. He notes that the US admits only 12 per cent of its immigrants on the basis of employ-

ment and skills, whereas 63 per cent of those admitted by Canada and 68 per cent of those admitted by Australia are selected for the skills they bring to these countries.

Mr Trump himself has lately spoken of the importance of H<sub>1</sub>B visas and foreign students in US universities. But the National Security Strategy document released by the White House recently makes the basic stance clear: "The era of mass migration is over". There will be no retreat from the view that migration strains domestic resources, undermines social cohe-

sion and threatens national security.

A third shift is the Trump administration's rejection of climate change and green energy as priorities. One of Mr Trump's first acts after taking over as President in January 2025 was to withdraw from the Paris Agreement that committed all signatories to timebound emission reduction plans. Mr Trump often calls climate change a "hoax" or a "con job", renewable

**OPINION 13** 

energy a "joke" and talks of "clean, beautiful coal". The Trump administration is actively working to dismantle subsidies for renewable energy and electric vehicles, instead opening up more land and waters for oil drilling — "drill, baby, drill" is the motto. The National Security Strategy document declares emphatically, "We reject the disastrous 'climate change' and 'Net Zero' ideologies that have so greatly harmed Europe, threaten the United States, and sub-

sidise our adversaries." Mr Trump's actions will mean higher costs for the rest of the world in battling climate change. It will also mean fewer resources with which to battle it as the Trump administration axes billions of dollars that support climate change projects. It could result in other nations withdrawing from the Paris Agreement as they view the burdens imposed on them as unfair.

A fourth shift is the rise in the level of public debt in the US as well as in other advanced countries. Public debt in the US and other advanced countries has risen relentlessly since the global financial crisis of 2007, and had averaged 104 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) even before the pandemic struck in 2020. Mr Trump passed his Big Beautiful Bill that retained the tax cuts of Trump-1 and boosted defence expenditure. The International Monetary Fund projects US government debt to rise from 122 per cent of GDP in 2024 to 143 per cent by 2030. The corresponding figures for advanced economy debt are 109 per cent and 119 per cent, respectively.

Commentators worry that rising public debt in advanced countries poses a threat to macroeconomic instability in the global economy. Mr Trump's economic advisors, however, believe that faster economic growth, tariff revenues and lower interest rates will cause government debt to fall to 94 per cent by 2034. That is one forecast that will be watched closely. But clearly, the dogma about the unsustainability of high levels of public debt that advanced countries preached to the developing world has gone out of the window.

As the year draws to a close, the astonishing thing is that these massive shifts in economic policy have thus far failed to seriously unsettle the US economy, or the world economy, or the financial markets. The IMF projects growth in the world economy for 2025 at 3.2 per cent, just 20 basis points below last year's. The US will grow at 2 per cent, compared to 2.8 per cent last year. US inflation is running at 2.8 per cent, which is way below what was feared following Mr Trump's Liberation Day announcements.

The US equity market touched an all-time high during the year, with a return of 13 per cent over the year. The yield on the one-year G-Sec in the US is a full 50 basis points below its level when Mr Trump assumed office. Pundits, who predicted economic apocalypse, are trying to find reasons why their forecasts went wrong.

Has the moment of reckoning been merely deferred? Or is Mr Trump on to something? We should know for sure in 2026.

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# India's textiles horse finally has both legs free

India's long decline in textiles and garments was not due to bad luck or weak factories, but poor policy choices. After years of hurting its own synthetic industry, the country is finally removing the barriers that held it back. The policy reset has begun — now execution, scale and speed matter most. The turn-

Bangladesh \$51 billion and Vietnam \$39 billion while India, despite its rich textile heritage, managed only \$17 billion.

India's real handicap in textiles: It missed the synthetic revolution that now drives 70 per cent of global apparel trade. Synthetics power sportswear, winterwear, athleisure, and fast fashion — the categories that dominate shelves in the United States, Europe, and East Asia.

Vietnam and Bangladesh built smooth, low-cost synthetic supply chains to serve this demand. India clung to cotton — and then made synthetics even costlier through high duties, anti-dumping actions, and sweeping quality control orders (QCOs) that restricted imports and priced micro, small, and medium enterprises out of the win-

terwear boom. The impact is visible on the factory floor. Most Indian units run at full capacity only during the cotton-heavy spring-summer season and sit idle through autumn and winter, when synthetics drive global orders. Costs run vear-round, revenues don't.

By ignoring synthetics — the growth engine of modern apparel — Indiatied one leg of its textile horse. limiting scale, depressing wages, and losing market share in the very segment where the future lies. The good news is that this is no longer the case.

Four reforms: Recent policy changes have removed four major barriers that had made India uncom-

petitive in synthetic garments.

First, the government has withdrawn QCOs on over 20 synthetic inputs such as polyester and viscose fibres and yarns, restoring access to global raw materials. Input prices are already falling, giving manufacturers a real chance to compete.

Second, labour reforms have raised the worker China shipped \$113 billion of garments last year, threshold under the Industrial Disputes Act from 100 to 300, while states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Gujarat now allow flexible work schedules. This makes it easier for factories to hire, expand and run

vear-round.

Third, India is closing its tariff gap through free-trade agreements. Indian garments faced duties of 8-12 per cent in the United Kingdom and European Union (EU), and up to 22 per cent in the US, while Vietnam and Bangladesh paid zero. With the India-UK free-trade agreement done and talks moving with the EU and US, tariff parity is closer despite recent US trade actions.

Finally, the government has fixed goods and services tax anomalies that taxed fibres and yarn at higher rates than finished garments, improving cash flow and allowing factories to

operate fully. What India must do now: With the most significant distortions gone, India must now clear the second layer of frictions holding the sector back.

First, stop encouraging low-value exports of fibre and varn. Current rebates make it cheaper to sell these abroad than at home, leaving Indian garment makers short of affordable inputs. India should promote finished clothing, not raw materials.

Second, fix the weakest link in India's textile chain woven fabric and processing. India exports a lot of yarn but has only 6 per cent of the global fabric market because its weaving and processing units are small,

outdated and informal. India must build large, modern, integrated weaving and processing parks to turn yarn strength into fabric leadership. That is how China built its textile power.

Third, fix export procedures. Under advance authorisation, exporters must link every imported fabric to each garment produced — an almost impossible task given the hundreds of fabrics and thousands of styles involved at a large unit. India must shift to Bangladesh-style value-based import entitlements that allow firms to import inputs up to a fixed percentage of export value.

Finally, simplify Customs rules to allow duty-free import of buttons, zippers, and labels on self-declaration and risk-based verification. Current system demands large data sets of information for even low value items.

Firm-level initiatives: India's leading garment exporters must stop acting only as suppliers to foreign brands. They need to create their own designs and labels, and learn the fast-fashion model that moves clothes from idea to store in a matter of weeks. To earn more, they must include high-value synthetic fabrics, branded clothing and new blends that dominate global markets. Competing on quality — not just on low tariffs — is the way to move up the value chain. The immediate priority should be to upgrade factories. India has about 1,200 fast-fashion-compliant units in cotton, but far fewer in synthetics. Nearly 80 per cent of exporters still miss key efficiency benchmarks such

as standard allowed minute. Japan is a reminder: Despite zero tariffs for a decade under the FTA, exports barely rose because Indian firms did not align with Japan's exacting quality and workflow standards. Millions of new jobs and a much bigger global market share are now within reach—if garment makers act boldly.

The author is the founder of GTRI

# The art of 'intentional space'



**SUDHA G TILAK** 

Marie Kondo's Letter from Japan is at once an intimate postcard and a manifesto: Part memoir, part cultural primer, and part practical theology of household life. In this quietly persuasive book, she returns not to reinvent the KonMari method (her tidy commandments are already part of the global domestic lexicon), but to locate that method within a longer Japanese conversation about beauty, ritual, and the ethics of things. The result is less a "how-to" than a set of invitations: To notice, to honour, and to empty space

in order to feel something more fully. Elegantly produced with Japanese typeface serving as ornamental letters and watercolour brush strokes for breaking chapters, the book is organised around discrete practices and ideas like the tea ceremony's attention to gesture, the garden's seasonal patience, the domestic reverence behind age-old household traditions, that Ms Kondo traces back to childhood memory and communal life. She writes with the modest authority of someone who has lived these customs and then translated them, gently, for a readership hungry for concrete spiritual practice inside the home. These chapters do the work of contextualising KonMari: Tidying is not austerity but a cultural habit of offering respect to objects and relationships, and of cultivating "ma" or the meaningful negative space in life.

Written with her television co-star Marie Iida, the prose is conversational:

The everyday, like folding a futon, cleaning a schoolroom, repairing a bowl, becomes an ethical act. This is why Letter from Japan feels authentic rather than programmatic. She is careful to connect technique to temperament: The KonMari question—"Does this spark joy?"—is less about mood and more about alignment, a way to discern what truly matters so that a small life may be devoted to it. That framing is persuasive precisely because it is cultural history and lived experience, not marketing copy.

Yet Ms Kondo's book arrives into a different conversation than the one she helped start a decade ago. A lively counter current in the West where a celebration of "artful clutter," maximalism, and collected homes that read as repositories of character, has reframed the tidy impulse as an aesthetic threat to personality. Writers and stylists celebrate the person who surrounds herself with objects and layered histories, arguing that a curated

mess signals curiosity and a life lived. The Guardian has even argued that Japan itself has a tradition of "joyful clutter" that complicates the minimalist stereotype Ms Kondo is often asked to represent.

**AJAY SRIVASTAVA** 

Ms Kondo is not blind to this pushback; Letter from Japan reads like an answer rather than a rebuttal. Her retort is rhetorical and cultural rather than combative: The point, she suggests, is not to erase accumulation but to make accumulation meaningful. Practices like kintsugi

(mending broken pottery with gold) or mottainai (an ethic of not wasting) reframe care as attachment, and attachment as responsibility. In other words, one can relish collections without letting them tyrannize everyday life. The crucial difference is whether objects are tended to, given a place, and treated as worthy. Homes that celebrate clutter do so honestly: Ms Kondo's method asks



Letter from Japan by Marie Kondo with Published by Leap 306 pages ₹699 306 pages

small interviews, the pausing of a ritual, the explanation of how a family sets the table reads like ethnography written for bedside reading.

The book's limits are also instructive. Readers who expect fresh, radical organising tactics will find the book elliptical; those who want a rigorous critique of consumer capitalism won't find one either. Ms Kondo is conservative in the anthropological sense: She preserves and

only that those objects be

This positioning is where

Letter from Japan feels most

useful: It is not a prescription

for a single style but a medita-

tion on domestic values. Ms

Kondo's strongest chapters

are those that connect cer-

emony and maintenance

ing practices, seasonal

observances) to mental

(school cleaning rituals, bath-

habits: Gratitude, repetition,

sumption. Her reportage like

and a humility about con-

loved on purpose.

explains rather than agitates. Critics who argue that KonMari's global uptake sometimes ignores local labour realities or domestic inequalities will not find satisfying concessions here. But as an accessible primer on why certain Japa nese customs value care over accumula-

tion, the book succeeds. Letter from Japan is a gentle, wellsourced plea for intentional domestic life. Faced with today's maximalist reactions, Ms Kondo offers a middle way - a cultural vocabulary for saying that both space and objects matter, and that the difference between clutter and collection is the presence of attention. Read this book as an ambassadorial piece: It will not convert maximalists or purists wholesale, but it will remind readers on either side that the ethics of a home are made in small, repeated acts of care. It makes for a gentle read in the holiday season or as a mindful gift.

The reviewer is the author of *Temple* Tales and translator of Hungry Humans. She worked with a well-being platform

NEW DELHI, LATE CITY, 22 PAGES

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# **Happening** today

MINISTRY OF Statistics and Programme Implementation to release Consumer Price Index inflation data for November at 4 pm. Economists expect CPI inflation to have risen to around 0.7% from October's record-low of 0.25%. This would be the 10th month in a row of inflation being lower than the RBI's mediumterm target of 4%.

FORMER TELANGANA Special Intelligence Bureau chief T Prabhakar Rao has been asked by the SC to surrender by 11 am for further investigation in the phone-tapping case.

PRESIDENT DROUPADI Murmu, who is on a visit to Manipur, will pay floral tributes at the Nupi Lan Memorial Complex. Nupi Lan (women's war) refers to two movements in 1904 and 1939 led by women, protesting British economic

policies.

KERALA CM Pinarayi Vijayan will inaugurate the sixth edition of Kochi-Muziris Biennale art festival. "The 110-day international exhibition features works by 66 artists/ collectives from 25 countries," Kochi Biennale Foundation said.

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**Business as Usual By EP UNNY** 



**WORLD** 

**PAGE 16** 

**PAK COURT SENDS EX-ISI CHIEF TO JAIL FOR 14 YEARS** 

U.S. CLEARS SALE **OFTECHAND SUPPORT FOR F-16 JETS TO PAK** 

IF USTR SATISFIED WITH OFFER, SHOULD SIGN ON DOTTED LINES: GOYAL

# Amid trade talks, PM speaks to Trump, says will work together

## Discuss importance of sustaining momentum in bid to enhance trade

Ravi Dutta Mishra & **Shubhajit Roy** New Delhi, December 11

AS THE two-day talks between the Indian and US trade teams in New Delhi drew to a close Thursday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced in the evening that he spoke with US President Donald Trump and they reviewed the progress of the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership and discussed, among other issues, the importance of sustaining momentum in the efforts to enhance bilateral trade.

"Had a very warm and engaging conversation with President Trump. We reviewed the progress in our bilateral relations and discussed regional and international developments. India and the US will continue to work together for global peace, stability and prosperity," Modi said on X. This was their third phone

conversation since the Trump



Very warm and engaging conversation with Trump: Modi. FILE

administration imposed 50 per cent tariffs on India – they last spoke on October 22 when

Trump called Modi to greet him on Diwali. "We talked about trade... He's very interested in

that," Trump had said then.

Following the phone conversation Thursday, a statement from the Prime Minister's Office said "both leaders reviewed the steady progress in India-US bilateral relations and exchanged views on key regional and global developments".

The two leaders, according to the statement, reiterated that India and the US will continue to work closely together to advance global peace, stability and prosperity.

Government sources said the leaders expressed satisfacthe steady tion at »CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

# Goa club owners who fled hours after deadly blaze held in Thailand



Gaurav and Saurabh Luthra in Thai police custody in Phuket. ANI

Pavneet Singh Chadha & Nirbhay Thakur Panaji, New Delhi,

December 11

SAURABH LUTHRA and Gaurav Luthra, who ran the North Goa nightclub Birch by Romeo Lane where a fire killed 25 people on December 6, were detained in Thailand Thursday, based on a request from Indian law enforcement agencies. The process to deport the brothers to India has been initiated.

Sources in Goa Police said the fugitive brothers were detained from a hotel in Patong in Phuket Thursday early morning by the Royal Thai Police. The Luthras had boarded a flight from Delhi to Phuket at

5.30 am on December 7, hours after the midnight incident. According to the Goa police

investigation, the duo booked the tickets at 1.17 am on December 7 to flee the country. within 90 minutes of the blaze. The technical fire safety incident report of the Fire Department found that information regarding a fire outbreak at the premises was received by the fire control room at 11.45 pm on December 6. Police said the Luthra brothers were attending a wedding in Delhi on the night of the incident, when a club staff member informed them about the blaze.

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said Saurabh and »CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

# 36-YR-OLD DIED IN MARCH 2021

# Pay Rs 10 lakh to kin of man who died in police custody: NHRC to UP Govt

Neetika Jha Noida, December 11

THE NATIONAL Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has ordered the Uttar Pradesh government to pay Rs 10 lakh as compensation within four weeks and submit proof of payment to the family of Ziauddin, a 36-year-old man who died in March 2021 after he was allegedly tortured in police custody in Ambedkar Nagar.

The Commission also criticised the UP police for "deliberately concealing facts" and failing to provide a credible explanation for multiple injuries found on the deceased.

In its order which was made

public Wednesday, the NHRC noted there was no doubt about the issue that the man was brought by the police to the police station and as per the postmortem report, there were eight injury marks on his body. "However, the report is silent as to how and when the deceased would have sustained the said injury marks, more particu-

of bulldozer action in drug cases

the Winter Session of the Kar-

nataka Legislature here, Para-

meshwara said, "A lot of foreign

nationals, many of them from

African countries, have been

caught smuggling and ped-

dling drugs. We don't know

how they bring it in or supply it.

We are monitoring their move-

ments and have also identified

the landlords who have rented

houses to these people. We are

prepared to go to the extent of

larly, no justification about the nature of injuries while he was in custody of the police," it stated.

The order came after the Commission dismissed the state government's reply to a show-cause notice and upheld its earlier finding that Ziauddin had died in police custody.

"In absence of any material before this commission, this commission cannot come to a conclusive conclusion that the death of the deceased did not occur while in the police custody and now to save the skin, the police have given such a report to cover the mischief done by it while endorsing the reply by Deputy Secretary, Home Department, Government of UP," the order stated.

According to the complaint filed by Ziauddin's brother, Shahabuddin, his brother was picked up by a police SWAT team headed by Sub-Inspector Devendra Pal on March 25, 2021 while he was on his way to a relative's home. Hours later, the

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

bulldozing even the homes

where the drug peddlers live on

foreign nationals arrested for

peddling drugs had been de-

years, the Opposition has criti-

cised BJP-led governments in

various states over "bulldozer

justice", this is one of the first

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

• COMPLAINT ALLEGING 'VIOLATIONS OF FAIR PLAY PRINCIPLES' FILED WITH FIDE; FATHER, COACH DENY CHARGES

ported in the last two years.

The minister said about 300

While for the past several

# Remembering Dharmendra

Actor-BJP MP Hema Malini held a prayer meeting in New Delhi on Thursday in memory of her husband, Dharmendra, who died last month. Also seen are daughters Esha Deol, Ahana Deol, ANIL SHARMA PAGE 8

## Now, Cong Govt in Karnataka warns **PLEA FOR PASSIVE EUTHANASIA**

# 'Have to do something': SC wants board to examine man comatose for 13 years

**Express News Service** New Delhi, December 11

THE SUPREME Court has asked the Director of AIIMS, New Delhi, to set up a secondary medical board to examine a 32-year-old man who has been in a vegetative state for the last 13 years so that the court can take a decision on his father's

plea to allow passive euthanasia for his son.

A Bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and K V Viswanathan asked for the report to be submitted by December 17, and fixed the next hearing for December 18.

"We will have to do something now. We can't allow him to live like this. That's for sure,"

Justice Pardiwala said Thurs-

On November 26, the court had asked the Noida Sector 39 district hospital to constitute a primary medical board to examine the patient, Harish Rana, to decide on his father Ashok Rana's plea for permission to withdraw the »CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

# Poll panel extends SIR deadline in five states and one UT

**REVISION OF ELECTORAL ROLLS** 

**Damini Nath** 

New Delhi, December 11

FOR THE second time since October when it announced the schedule for the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, the Election Commission Thursday extended the deadline for electors in five states — Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh — and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands to submit enumeration forms in the ongoing exercise by three to 14 days.

Thursday was scheduled to be the last day of enumeration of electors in the SIR for eight states and three UTs, while Kerala had earlier been given an extension until December 18. The draft electoral roll for all states and UTs, except for Kerala, was scheduled to be published on December 16. Kerala's draft roll will be published on December 23.

In a statement, the EC said it had revised the schedule "based on the requests received from the Chief Electoral Officers of the 6 states/UT".

However, in another statement Thursday, EC data showed that in five of the six states/UT, enumeration work »CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

• The schedule Enumeration form

submission deadline

■ Draft roll publication date

STATES/UTs Goa, Puducherry, Lakshadweep. Dec 11 Dec 16 Rajasthan and **West Bengal** Tamil Nadu, Dec 14 Dec 19 Gujarat

Madhya Pradesh. Chhattisgarh, Dec 18 Dec 23 Andaman & Nicobar, Kerala Dec 26 Dec 31



**EXPLAINED** 

# What voter has to do

Electors have to trace themselves or any adult relative to the roll of the last intensive revision done in the early 2000s. Those unable to provide the extract will get a notice after the draft roll is published. They will be asked to submit documents to establish eligibility.

Kiran Parashar

Belagavi, December 11

KARNATAKA HOME Minister

G Parameshwara said Thurs-

day that the Congress govern-

ment was taking "decisive ac-

tion" in drug-related offences

and was prepared to take strong

steps, including bulldozing the

by MLC K Abdul Jabbar during

Responding to a question

homes of drug peddlers.

14 KILLED AS TRUCK FALLS INTO GORGE IN **ARUNACHAL** 

**STUDENT RAPED BY PROF: PUNISH HIM SO OTHERS** DON'T SUFFER

**SC CALLS FOR SPEEDY TRIALS** IN UAPA CASES

Father's 'role' casts cloud over 3-year-old youngest rated chess player

Mumbai, December 11

Amit Kamath

A WEEK after a three-year-old boy from Sagar in Madhya Pradesh became the youngest rated chess player ever, ques-

tions are being raised over his achievement. A complaint filed with FIDE, the international chess body, has alleged PAGE 1

that there were "clear violations of FIDE's fair play principles by coaches",

anchor and that helped the boy enter the elite club of chess players.

The complaint further

claims that all the three oppo-

nents who lost to the boy were coaches from the academy where he trains. "It appears that the rating was achieved through unfair means, involving clear violations of FIDE's fair play principles by the coaches or individuals supervising the games," the complaint states.

FIDE, sticking to its policy of secrecy over such matters, didn't confirm or deny the complaint.

However, the boy's father, Siddharth Singh Kushwaha, and his coach, Nitin Chaurasiya, said they were aware of the complaint. Dismissing the allegations, they claimed that the boy was being targeted due to factional politics in Madhya Pradesh's chess federation, which is being run by an ad hoc committee for the last few years. "In Sagar, there are two fac-

tions in the local chess body. One faction is trying to target the other by trying to prove my son's record came by unfair means," Kushwaha told The Indian Express. The boy hit the national

headlines in the last few months by registering wins over older and better-ranked players. He defeated Abhijeet Awasthi (Rating 1,542), Shub-



Complaint says boy's opponents, who he defeated, were coaches at same academy where he trains

ham Chourasiya (Rating 1,559), Yogesh Namdev (Rating 1,696) in tournaments hosted at Khandwa, Indore, Chhindwara

and Mangaluru. But the complaint states that Chourasiya, Namdev and

Awasthi are coaches at the

New Delhi

trains in Sagar. Countering this, the boy's father and coach have calling it a coincidence. "Just because these people

are from Sagar and we know them, it cannot prove that there was anything unfair. I know these three people by face, as someone who also runs a chess academy. They are like our competitors," said Kushwaha, who runs a chess academy in Sagar called Olympio Chess Club.

The complaint alleges that at one of the tournaments, both the boy and Namdev entered the event after the draw was decided by FIDE's electronic sys-

of the two late-entrants were inserted manually in the draw and were also paired to play against each other. The boy ended up defeating Namdev. In the same tournament,

tem. As is the norm, the names

the complaint claims, Namdev lost out on time because he went to the washroom for the final minutes of a 10-minute rapid game. The boy's coach, however, denied that the loss was because of Namdev going to the washroom. "It's not just my son, there

were other children, too, who reached late and were manually paired off," said Kushwaha.

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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2025

WORDLY WISE

The aim of argument, or of discussion, should not be victory, but progress.

— Joseph Joubert

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RAMNATH GOENKA → IN 1932 ◆-

> BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# Vande Mataram & vote chori, all heat, little light

HE DEBATES this week in Parliament, on 'Vande Mataram' and electoral reform, enlivened both Houses after a long time. In a political moment when the deliberative institution seems besieged, this was much needed, very welcome. That said, the debates were significant not for the discursive spaces they opened up, but for their blind alleys. For one, the discussion on 'Vande Mataram' seemed to be solely in service of a vanity project of the ruling BJP. The Ram temple is built and consecrated and the dhwajarohan last month marked a symbolic closure of sorts in Ayodhya. In recent days, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself leading the charge against Macaulay's children, it has seemed that the BJP, in search of a new grand theme, has found it in "decolonisation", which also folds in its long-running campaign against "appeasement" as a secondary theme. The excavation of the events that surrounded the adoption of two stanzas of 'Vande Mataram' as the national song in a Congress-dominated polity offered the BJP a tempting opportunity to bring together these two planks and launch a double-barrelled attack on Congress, and the BJP seized it with both hands. It was foretold that that debate would not shed any light, only work up some heat.

The second debate, on electoral reform, is much more of a missed opportunity. In recent months, ever since the Election Commission launched the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Bihar, questions have been raised about the best way to enhance the integrity of the electoral process. A debate in Parliament could have been the opportunity to take this important conversation forward, to widen it to encompass other consequential issues, such as cleaner and more transparent election funding, or the terms of the EC's independence and its verification processes. Indeed, this seemed to be the rubric under which the discussion was framed — poll reform. What happened, instead, was a repeat of the same old political thrust and parry. Rahul Gandhi, who set the tenor for this debate, gave a speech that left no room for questions, or for a movement towards answers. It accused, it indicted and pronounced the verdict. The government had stolen all elections, said the LoP, and it had captured all institutions, including the EC. If there was any possibility of the government engaging with the substantive issues of electoral reform — of which there is no evidence — Rahul Gandhi's indiscriminate hurling of allegations put paid to it.

Parliament needs to come alive more often. But it also needs to use its time carefully and wisely. The 'Vande Mataram' and SIR debates reduced it to a platform for blame games and a showcase for a political standstill.

# Karnataka Bill can constrict free speech

AWS THAT are used to curb the freedom of speech and expression, laws that criminalise what the powers-thatbe find offensive or unpalatable, often claim to defend lofty ideals. For instance, governments of every political hue have a tainted record when it comes to the misuse of the sedition law — ostensibly meant to protect national security — as well as laws that criminalise "hurting religious sentiments". Special laws, such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and others like it in various states, have also been used to criminalise dissent. The Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, 2025, tabled on Wednesday, claims to "curb and prevent dissemination, publication or promotion of hate speech and crimes, which cause disharmony, hatred in the society". In effect, it disempowers the citizen vis-a-vis the government.

The proposed law defines "hate speech" and "hate crime" in broad and loose terms while proposing stringent punishments. The former "includes any expression which is made, published, or circulated, in words either spoken or written... with an intention to cause injury, disharmony or feelings of enmity or hatred or illwill against person alive or dead, class or group of persons or community, to meet any prejudicial interest". For this, offenders can be imprisoned for up to 10 years. The Bill makes exceptions for categories such as artistic expression, academic inquiry and reporting and commentary. In practice, however, these exceptions will be determined in the courts. Given the punishing nature of the criminal justice system, they provide little comfort.

Provisions of the BNS already deal with incitement to violence, hurting religious sentiments and prejudicial speech acts against marginalised groups. Why, then, another law? The Karnataka government is responding with a simplistic, ineffective, and in an open and argumentative democracy, potentially dangerous instrument to what is a complex social and political problem. Prejudice, othering and polarisation have become all too "normal" in recent years. Unfortunately, the political class has often been a catalyst for these sentiments and has kept social wounds open rather than stanching them. At best, the Bill is a band-aid that avoids a deeper reckoning. In fact, as with so many of its predecessors, it carries the danger of being used to criminalise the very people it seeks to protect. It must be scrapped.

# From humans to fish, problem is fake news

TIS no secret that humans are struggling with misinformation in the digital age. According to a study by researchers at Cornell University, fish, flies and bacteria experience it, too. For instance, as much as swimming together helps fish stay alert to predators, the study published in Interface notes how sometimes a fish can perceive a threat where there isn't any, and make a run for it — and all others in the school follow. In species that live in big social networks, fake news seems unavoidable.

This may seem scary. But like in a vaccine, a speck of something bad can help build a greater resilience. In 1835, every town in the US was abuzz with a new discovery: The Sun, a two-year old "penny" newspaper in New York, republished six articles by astronomer Sir John Herschel in the Edinburgh Journal of Science, claiming that the Moon was covered in lush rivers and amethyst crystals, and was home to unicorns, "man-bats" and bipedal beavers. The "discoveries" were all fake, but "The Great Moon Hoax" led to the explosion of penny papers and helped create a new class of readers in the US. NYU mathematician and physicist Alan Sokal's 1994 submission of a sham article to Social *Text* and its acceptance by the journal successfully drew attention to what he called the "decline of standards of rigour in the aca-

demic community". If misinformation is unavoidable, wisdom lies in becoming more discerning. For fish and humans, one mantra could help: Don't follow the herd, follow the science.

# Party-state is marching into public universities. There is no one to say no

HE INDIAN public university is being quietly consigned to oblivion. The long-term structural pressures, political interference, and academic abdication across all regimes have been hollowing out universities at least since the 1970s. The crisis that first engulfed state universities in the 1960s slowly percolated to the central universities. Tragically, it was UPA-II with its penchant for centralisation masquerading as reform — that laid the foundations for the assaults that would follow. Despite all this, the public system remained obstinately enduring.

This column has, over the years, dwelt on the systemic issues facing Indian universities: Governance structures, funding cuts, and so forth. But even then, there were modest hopes for a turnaround. The expansion of institutions created severe pedagogical stresses; everyone worried about access, almost no one about quality. But the churn in the social composition of universities was an opportunity. Students, unlike in the "time-pass", strike-ridden culture of the 1970s, were keen to learn.

Economic growth raised the penalty for not learning. Faculty quality was uneven, but legendary teachers still owned their classrooms. For all its faults, the university was still, in a manner of speaking, a free space. There was enough of a recognisable institutional structure to keep it functioning. We assumed, perhaps naively, that there was a bottom beyond which universities would not fall.

That assumption no longer holds. Conversations with colleagues in public universities across the country are now uniformly bleak. Even the minimal institutional form of the university seems to be disappearing. This newspaper yesterday carried a story about the removal of five vice-chancellors (V-Cs) in Rajasthan, prompted by ABVP protests. The episode exposed two trends everyone privately acknowledges but few publicly confront.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

The Editorial Page

power the ABVP now wields in many universities. Student unions have always been significant actors in campus life. But almost every public university professor I speak to, across several states, now says the ABVP has a virtual veto over what happens in their institutions. Pre-censoring of speakers is routine, driven by real or imagined fear of protest. In Rajasthan, the allegations go further: That the ABVP effectively functions as a front for political extortion. Perhaps the only historical precedent for this level of domina-

of what should have been a global education hub in Kolkata. What was once practised in some states is now the national norm. Students ought to engage in politics; it is an extraordinary civic education, and many will, in their individual capacities, work for political parties. But we must still ask whether the form of party politics that dominates student life in India is counterproductive. Should student bodies be formally affiliated with

Part of the decimation of the

The first is the collapse of even the most stolidly boring administrative norms. It used to be a basic procedural principle that inquiring officers had to be senior to those being investigated. Even this norm has been discarded when governments want to dismiss V-Cs.

The second is the unprecedented veto

tion is the Left Front's decimation political parties at all?

university stems from the fact that both student and teacher politics



**PRATAP BHANU MEHTA** 

Students ought to engage in

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affiliated with political

parties at all?

became partisan all the way down. Student politics was a conduit to political careers; the reverse was also true, with parties using unions to control universities or manufacture mayhem. This is as true of the SFI and the NSUI as it is of the ABVP.

The largest unintended casualty of this arrangement was the disappearance of the "student" as a category in public consciousness. Student unions were mostly about everything except protecting the long-term interests of students. Teachers' unions, also party-affiliated, fared no better. As a result, the two groups that ought to have had the strongest stake in academic excellence — students and professors — could rarely speak as collective academic actors. They existed as individuals, but their collective avatars were party appendages. The tragedy of the Indian public university is that the very constituencies that might have defended it were structurally prevented from doing so.

The state universities are, of course, undergoing their moment of schaden-

freude, as they watch party rule descend upon once-hallowed institutions like Delhi University and JNU. As this column has argued before, these universities were far from perfect; they were unconscionably short-changing their students. In some areas, there are, of course, pockets of achievement. But to hear about their current condition is to descend into a kind of unimaginable institutional dystopia: Students afraid to organise seminars; faculty required to submit papers months in advance for pre-clearance; pressure to attend RSS-sponsored events; the absolute decimation in the quality of

appointments, even by previously uneven standards. The pedagogical mission is more confused than ever: CUET is an exam machine, not a pedagogical solution to any problem. V-Cs behave as if their job were to perform the home ministry's functions, pointing fingers at ideologically inconvenient faculty.

These can only be reported as conversations, but they are harrowing ones, cutting across the political spectrum. As one colleague put it, "there are increasingly three degrees you need: RSS, Modi and money". I have seen an economist from the Delhi School of Economics in tears, contemplating what the School once was and what it has become. A left-right confrontation over the university might not be ideal. But at least it could have intellectual content and be compatible with some threshold understanding of what a university is. The worries colleagues now express are far worse.

Perhaps those of us who exited the public system have forfeited the right to speak about it. But the true tragedy is public silence. Delhi University, once a cacophonous arena where a V-C could not move a flower pot without sparking protest, now lies inert before the party-state. The university has been domesticated And all this in the name of a "Bharatiya tradition" that once insisted rulers lay down their arms before entering a place of learning. We are witnessing a reversal of that ethic: Power marching into the guru*kul* fully armed, and finding no one left willing to say no. There are no professors or students, only partisans, or worse, nationals and anti-nationals.

> The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

# In a parasocial world, our bubbles of isolation



SUMANA Roy

Acute

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online stalking

have led to

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T ALMOST the same time "parasocial" was being declared the Cambridge Word of the Year, a student in a creative writing workshop was reading her letter to Slash, the lead guitarist of Guns N' Roses: "To Slash (birth name: Saul Hudson; born 23rd July, 1965), I hope this finds you shrouded in an appropriate amount of cigarette smoke and creative genius. See, we've always worked well together. When you're on stage, I'm in the 200th row. When you release a song, I match my walking pace to its BPM. This synergy is what our relationship is built on. But lately, the Slash Experience is starting to deviate from its core specifications. I've compiled a list of items we need to address before this becomes a systemic issue. We can work together to fix this," wrote Samaira.

Soon after, Aarushi shared her letter to Shakespeare, whom she addressed as "Dear Sir Rhymes-A-Lot": "I encountered you for the first time four centuries and six years after your death, in the year of two thousand and twenty-two, and you have since stuck to me like a bad case of the bubonic plague... Did your time have the concept of a fan? An admirer, perhaps, or an addict? That is what you have made of us... Should you have any defence to offer from beyond the grave, I await your correspondence."

A week later, Prisha shared a letter she was writing to "Matt", which ended with "Matt, why do you keep drawing the curtains at night these days? You know it makes it hard for me to see you." It was a "stan" letter — "stan" is a portmanteau of

"stalker" and "fan". My students were responding to a module on epistolary literature that I teach as part of an introductory course on creative writing: Rabindranath Tagore's letters to his niece Indira, Rainer Maria Rilke's to the "young poet", Franz Kafka's to Milena, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's letters and papers from prison, Virginia Woolf's suicide note, among others. We discuss how "literature" derives from "litera", letter, and that it was in it that the impulse for literature would first germinate, the

reaching out to someone outside oneself, first the letter-reader, the addressee, then the stranger-reader. Some letter receivers would go on to reply, become letter writers themselves. That form would create what we would come to understand as literary culture — letters becoming reviews, responders reviewers, literature an open letter. Such an instinct, of recording and responding, marks the earliest fiction in the English language — the epistolary novels of Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson, with the names of the letter writers and receivers providing their titles. Its clunky protocol of giving and receiving, as if life were structured like Christmas morning, must have gradually made the form of the epistolary novel unattractive to novelists. But it's returning now — we read an excerpt from one such novel in this course: On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous. The protagonist of Ocean Vuong's novel writes letters to their mother — she has no English, and won't be able to read them. It's a sign — a signal, if you will — that we are living through a time where the letter will be addressed to a person who won't — or can't — read it.

That is the kind of letter my students often write — to their "younger self", to an imagined "older self", to a dead grandmother, a friend or teacher with whom they are no longer in touch, and, of course, to the famous. Acute aloneness, the seeming impossibility of communicating with anyone outside their tremulous selves, the legitimising of online stalking ('What's the last Instagram account you stalked?' is a common talk show question) have led to human beings constructing detailed paracosms. Fanfiction and the epistolary form have become a natural outlet for the parasocial impulse, where the tragicomic urgency of utterly one-sided relationships give these forms an intravenous drip.

I wonder whether it's a sign — writers are writing for someone who doesn't exist, someone imagined: The reader?

Roy, a poet and writer, is associate professor, Ashoka University. Views are personal

# India-US trade needs stable framework, not firefighting



BHOWMICK

Washington

now sees

India's latest

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HIGH-LEVEL US trade delegation is in New Delhi for a fresh push to break the India-US trade stalemate. At stake is a trade relationship nearing \$200 billion a year, growing steadily but still operating without a formal framework. Washington has taken a hard line on trade imbalances, imposing a cumulative 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods. New Delhi insists those duties must ease before any deal and has resisted US pressure to open the sensitive agriculture and dairy markets.

US farm lobbies want India to buy more American row crops as Washington seeks to diversify exports away from China. This week, President Donald Trump threatened new tariffs on Indian rice. Regulatory divergence has further complicated the picture. US officials frequently cite India's stringent rules as barriers. New Delhi defends them as rooted in consumer safety and cultural norms. Newer frictions lie in digital trade and labour mobility. India's data localisation policies and draft e-commerce rules are seen by US companies as costly red flags. Visa and talent mobility add another layer. In September, Washington announced a steep fee on new H-1B petitions. New Delhi has made clear that skilled mobility is a priority, even if formally outside a trade mandate.

Energy cooperation is another area ripe for agreement. India's heavy imports of Russian oil have been a flashpoint, but they also underscore India's need for energy diversification. A trade pact could facilitate larger purchases of US energy, giving India a non-Russian supply option and boosting a major US export category.

Meanwhile, India's own trade strategy has shifted markedly. After walking away from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership mega-pact in 2019, New Delhi has leaned into a web of bilateral and minilateral deals tailored to its interests. This flurry reflects a deliberate "China+1" strategy. Aligning more closely with the US is central to India's bid to secure its geoeconomic future in a multipolar order, just as Washington sees a deeper trade partnership with India as both a strategic counterweight in Asia and a growing market that could rival China's.

Washington now sees India's latest offers as materially stronger, even as it continues to flag sensitivities on specific imports. This points to movement: New Delhi is testing the political limits of what it can put on the table; Washington is increasingly treating India as a core market. A first-stage package is likely to target areas with high payoff and manageable domestic costs.

The more challenging work in 2026 will be to move from damage control to rule-making, while keeping the process insulated from election cycles. If New Delhi and Washington can use this phase to co-design standards for critical technologies, critical minerals, and semiconductor supply chains, the trade framework will help shape the Indo-Pacific economic architecture and anchor the India-US partnership in shared prosperity, risk diversification, and long-term strategic stability.

The writer is a fellow and lead, World Economies and Sustainability at Centre for New Economic Diplomacy, Observer Research Foundation

# **40 YEARS AGO** December 12, 1985



# Walkout in Rajya Sabha

MEMBERS FROM opposition parties, barring those from the AIADMK, walked out of the Rajya Sabha as the stalemate over the sealing of party offices in Parliament House continued. The walkout came after chairman R Venkatraman allowed MS Gurupadaswamy (Janata) to make a submission. The Opposition should be allowed to function without any obstacles in a democratic manner, he said. The chairman said, "This House has no jurisdiction to discuss this matter."

# **Relief for Sikh migrants**

PUNJAB CHIEF Minister Surjit Singh Barnala announced a package of relief measures for Sikh migrant families including free-of-cost LIG houses for widows, destitutes and disabled persons. Barnala said 1.691 families numbering 6,850 members had migrated to the state following the riots.

# PM on Assam Accord

PRIME MINISTER Rajiv Gandhi warned the people of Assam, especially minorities, not to be misled by any propaganda against the Assam Accord, which, he said, was "welltimed and would protect the interests of all sections of the society". He said Congress (I) alone could ensure proper implementation of the Accord and speedy development of the state. The PM said the prolonged agitation on the foreigners issue had affected

the pace of development and disrupted academic life in Assam.

# **DPS student with Pak revolver**

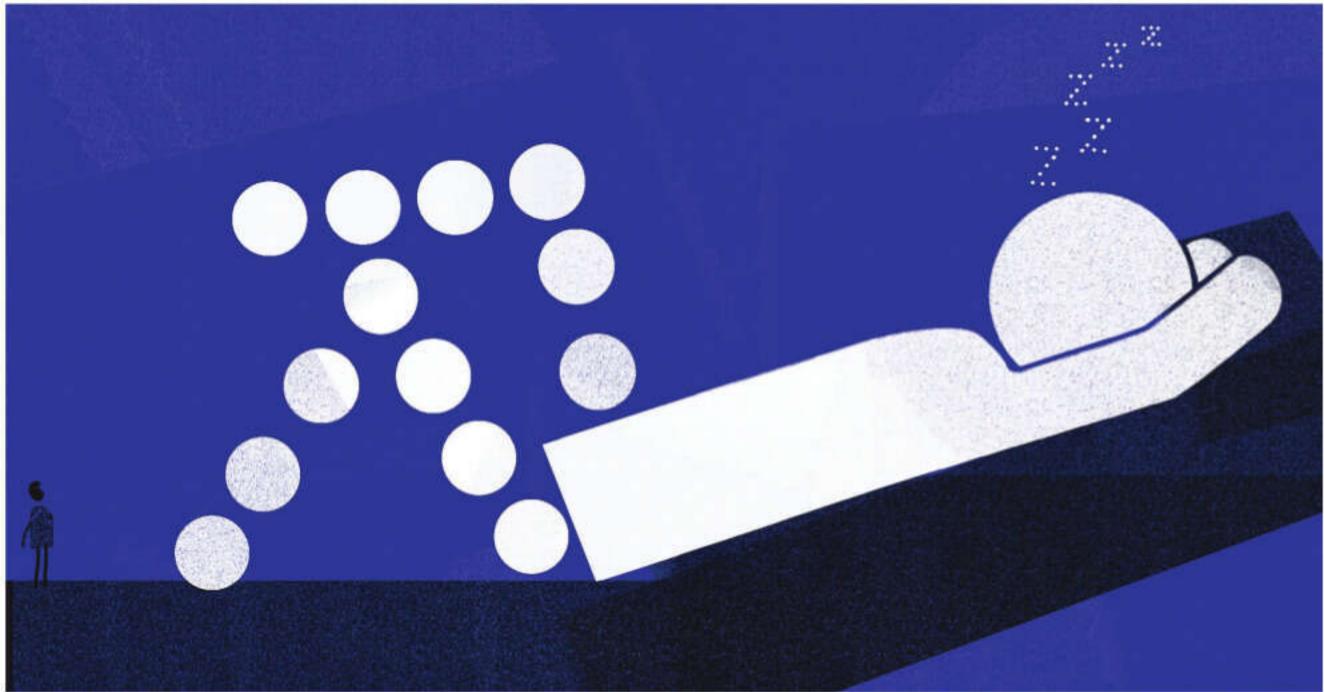
AN UNLICENSED Pakistan-made .32 bore revolver was seized from a Class XII student of the Delhi Public School, Mathura Road. The student, Kanhiya Kumar, is said to have brandished the revolver during a fight between some day scholars and hostellers in the school premises. The revolver was, however, empty. The boy is reported to have told the police that he was given the revolver by a retired colonel of the Indian Army, Col S K Abrol. The colonel had apparently told him to find a buyer for the weapon.

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## New Delhi

**DIS/AGREE** THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

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



Will the questions being asked in the ongoing IndiGo crisis lead to reform or backsliding?

# IndiGo is too big. It will call the shots

• WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

Human rights organisations have

of the state of rights in Bangladesh.

again painted a sobering picture

— The Daily Star, Bangladesh



**O**MKAR GOSWAMI

HERE ARE duopolies and then there are duopolies. Consider a hypothetical case of two firms, each accounting for 25 per cent of a market, with scores of other small players taking care of the rest. It is, for all intents and purposes, a duopoly, but with relatively constrained pricing power thanks to the other players who together account for half the market. Now, consider a very different ball game where one firm, IndiGo, takes up more than 65 per cent of the market with Air India accounting for less than 27 per cent. Here, it becomes a brutal duopoly, almost veering to a monopoly. There lies the heart of the issue.

There is no doubt that IndiGo is an efficient and profitable airline. However, with its sheer scale and dominance, IndiGo always believed that rules could be bent in its favour. The DGCA initially introduced its Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) in January 2024. The aviation industry, led by IndiGo, managed to get this rolled back on several occasions. Eventually, FDTL was implemented this year by the DGCA in two phases, July and November.

The FDTL rules mandated: (i) 48 hours of weekly rest for crew — up from 36 hours; (ii) a longer night duty window (00:00-06:00); (iii) a sharp cut in night landings only two per week per pilot; and (iv) a cap of eight flying hours at night.

IndiGo believed, as before, that it could sidestep these rules. Instead of preparing for these by hiring more pilots and reducing the number of flights, it decided on a "dekha jayega" approach, convinced that it could get away with it. It couldn't, and was struck with a monumentally embarrassing crisis that it chose not to comprehend.

It will take over a month to get things back in place. But has IndiGo paid the price for intentionally creating this horrendous situation for its passengers? I would argue not. Yes, its CEO has apologised; yes, it is gradually reimbursing those who could not fly; and yes, it has can-

WHEN SOMEONE says nostalgia, what do

you think of? For me, it's usually some-

thing small, a sound I haven't heard in

years, a road that suddenly feels familiar,

or the way someone used to say my name.

Growing up, I understood the concept of

memory as something that lived quietly in

the background, triggered by chance

rather than design. And yet, in the last few

years, nostalgia has taken a whole new

humans, but by algorithms.

celled and re-rostered several hundred flights. But, believe me, let some time pass, and it will be back to square one.

Why so? Because with over 65 per cent market share, IndiGo effectively calls the shots—with Air India as a convenient price taker. Will the DGCA seriously financially penalise IndiGo to a point where it hurts, as it hurt the hapless passengers? I bet not. Will IndiGo permanently reduce the number of flights to accommodate the FDTL rules? Well, already, the DGCA has given it exemptions based on a national mandate. Will IndiGo hire more cockpit staff to accommodate its pre-crisis flight timetables? I think not in the near future. Where necessary, more accommodation will follow. From the DGCA, in "national interest".

The lesson is simple. When one player accounts for almost two-thirds of the passenger market and when it is often the only carrier to many airports, the shoe is firmly on IndiGo's foot. Not the government's, irrespective of what the DGCA may claim.

IndiGo has become too big to regulate. It effectively calls the shots. So, in a duopoly where one player controls 65 per cent of the market, passengers will have to suck their thumbs. After its righteous noise-making, the DGCA will quieten down. Come the second half of December and early January 2026, IndiGo will be back to having an envious load factor at high ticket prices — and thus deliver great profits for its shareholders.

Is there a near-term solution? I'm afraid not. This grossly one-sided duopoly isn't going to disappear in the near or even medium term. Consider two simple facts: First, that air travel in India is growing by leaps and bounds, and will continue doing so over an increasing base. And second, almost two-thirds of this growing traffic is catered to by a single airline, IndiGo. Nobody — be it the regulator or the government can credibly call the shots. And what shots can they call without threatening to recreate bits of the licence-control-permit raj? Perhaps the DGCA may force the CEO and COO to step down. But besides that, what else?

IndiGo will continue ruling the skies. Give it another month, and all will forget about the December chaos that the airline created. C'est la vie.

> The writer is an economist, an independent director and chairman of CERG Advisory Private Limited

# Don't kill aviation's shining success story



SHELLEY VISHWAJEET

VIATION IS a very fragile sector. Beyond the glamour and allure, it is one of the most challenging businesses to run. No wonder that both globally and in India, we have seen many airlines biting the dust even as new ones took off. Very few airlines across the world have been able to develop a model that is both

sustainable and profitable. Europe is currently witnessing record closures of airlines, one after another almost one every month. India has been no exception to this fragility. In the past two decades, we have seen many national and regional airlines go under. And when everything appears to be under control, something unexpected crops up, disrupting the entire process. From volcanic disruptions thousands of miles away to flash strikes by disgruntled air traffic control staff in Europe, anything can trigger global waves of disruptions.

This brings us to the latest and one of the worst disruptions in India's aviation sector. It was sparked on December 2 by IndiGo, an airline that controls over 60 per cent of the domestic market share. A never-before-seen mayhem was unleashed among millions of travellers, denting India's image as a credible aviation economy. A lot has been said and written already about the ongoing crisis, and a lot of blame has been exchanged, but it may help us to deconstruct the episode dispassionately.

While India's aviation sector has grown — and quite phenomenally — in the past 25 years, it has not really matured as an accountable and ethical aviation economy. With every crisis, whether the grounding of major airlines like Kingfisher or Jet Airways or smaller regional airlines, in hindsight, we have discovered that it was not only the airlines that were defaulting, but the watchdogs as well. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), and financial institutions were caught either napping or conniving. Against the backdrop of the current disruption, questions should be asked about the DGCA and the MoCA. "Who will regulate the regulators?" becomes a burning question. Does the MoCA have any committee, comprising not only palatable sahibs but also industry veterans, to review the DGCA's decisions? It's time to wake up.

The most important issue is this: Can India, at this juncture, afford a sacrificial goat — and that too its biggest success story in aviation?

IndiGo is not only India's biggest and most profitable airline, but also one of the most remarkable aviation stories globally in the past three decades. It is symbolic of India's rise as an aviation superpower. Its dominant domestic market share is not the result of manipulations or unethical wheeling-dealing but largely of sound commercial decisions, helped by some good fortune. More importantly, it happened to be in the right place at the right time and was best prepared to leverage the gap and opportunity created by grounded airlines. IndiGo had the mind, machine and money to fill the vacant slots and catapult itself to the top. Without wishing to sound like an unsolicited solicitor of IndiGo, resentment against its current size and dominance is unjustified.

But is this good enough to let IndiGo go off the hook? Not at all. IndiGo must realise that the weight of its success and size creates its own gravity that can pull it down. You can't be a leader only in numbers; you have to lead by example, too. Growth at any cost cannot be the only mantra of success, and profit at any cost cannot be the only motivation.

IndiGo needs to remember that the world is watching its conduct and practices. While admired for its amazing growth and financial successes, the world is also observing what lies in between ethical conduct, corporate governance, and treatment of employees and flyers something that will really make or mar IndiGo's credibility and reputation. Finally, this crisis must be converted into an opportunity to make the entire aviation sector more accountable, ethical and service-oriented.

Vishwajeet is the author of The IndiGo Story and an independent business journalist

# The Trump slump— it's started and it's real



ANIL SASI

HE DIMINUTION of US President Donald Trump's powers and the loss of his ability to bulldoze the Republicans seems to have begun earlier than most predicted. And how things change! If the Democrats spent much of this year in shell-shocked silence, the 2025 electoral cycle — two gubernatorial races in Virginia and New Jersey, and the mayoral election in New York — have reversed the mood. Republicans look rattled confronting what has emerged as Trump's biggest vulnerability: The economy.

Americans seem increasingly frustrated with Trump's handling of inflation and the cost of living, two issues key to his re-election last November. There is an irony here. Trump rode a wave of economic pessimism to re-election, but in New York, his ideological polar opposite, Zohran Mamdani, won on almost the same plank: Promising relief from high living costs, in Trump's own home turf, New York. That convergence of message, and the speed with which it translated into electoral losses for Republicans, is a warning sign the White House cannot ignore.

His ratings have plunged in the chaotic wake of his tariff onslaught. Londonbased YouGov's data suggests Americans disapprove of Trump's handling of immigration, another issue central to his re-election. If there were expectations of the presidential honeymoon lasting till the midterms, that hope seems to have been cut short.

A US President's honeymoon period is generally seen to be an extended window after their inauguration during which they continue to see elevated approval ratings until they fall below 50-55 per cent. This period has been shrinking for decades. President Dwight Eisenhower's honeymoon lasted over three years, according to Gallup (using the less than 55 per cent approval rating yardstick); JFK's 32 months, and Richard Nixon's 14. Joe Biden's honeymoon lasted six months, permanently falling below 55 per cent in July 2021. Trump has set a new record low.

At the start of his second term, public opinion was even Stevens. His approval rating has reached its lowest point 10 months into his second term and is the lowest since he left office in 2021, according to a new survey by Gallup released last week, which showed his approval rating at 36 per cent, with 60 per cent disapproving of how Trump's handled the job since returning to the White House in January.

The immediate policy trigger for Trump's slump is his tariff regime. After

weeks of bluster, he was forced to backpedal, issuing executive orders in mid-November exempting a range of essential imports, including coffee, bananas and beef, from sweeping tariffs amid mounting public anger over rising prices. The latest is a flip-flop on highend Nvidia chips to China.

Add to this the roiling within: The stonewalling by some Republican senators during the government shutdown; noises over Trump's demolition and kitsch construction in the White House. The biggest one, of course, is the pushback by his MAGA base. On the Jeffrey Epstein scandal, which forced Trump to do an uncharacteristic U-turn on the issue of releasing the files. This was epitomised by Marjorie Taylor Greene's transformation from Trump's staunchest MAGA flagbearer to being branded a "traitor" by the man she once venerated.

John Bolton, who served as Trump's national security adviser before the two fell out, captured the moment neatly: "Trump is now on the downhill slope. That doesn't guarantee the rate of dissent or how far it goes, but it's a little bit like the Wizard of Oz. You pull the curtain back, and suddenly everybody's operating in a different world. I think that's happening," he told The Economist.

Some of this may be Bolton's wishful thinking but behind the curtain, there's a shift. Mamdani's reception in the Oval Office was dramatically warmer than many had expected given their bitter standoff. Some see it as Trump's attempt to recalibrate after the November setback.

What is clear is that

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What is clear is that Republicans are recalculating. Fear of a prirecalculating. Fear of a mary challenge from Trump once kept them primary challenge from obedient. Now their Trump once kept them greater anxiety may be the Democrat on the greater anxiety may be election ballot. Institutional pushback is also mounting. Most of the US Supreme Court judges hearing arguments in the case chal-

> lenging Trump's sweeping use of emergency tariffs in early November seemed to doubt their legality for one reason or another. An adverse verdict could potentially have major knock-on implications. Earlier, the top court allowed Lisa Cook — one of the members of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System — to continue in her job for at least a few months until it heard arguments in a case over whether the President can sack her.

> For now, the big boom in artificial intelligence has kept US markets humming, drowning out the noise of inflation ticking up and rumblings of deeper economic weaknesses. That could come unstuck if the bubble were to even partially deflate; a crash could deepen Trump's dent. New Delhi, working hard to navigate the choppy Washington waters, could do well to keep an eye out for these shifting winds.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

# **Vande Mataram row**

THIS REFERS to the article, 'Bande Mataram, the other Vande Mataram' (*IE*, December 12). Prime Minister Narendra Modi's contention that the "fragmentation" of the song "sowed the seeds of Partition" is a product of his simplistic reading of history. He cannot distort the truth to suit the Hindu Right's political narrative and score brownie points. The BJP's ill-disguised attempt to politicise the song, interwoven with India's freedom struggle, for political gain has laid bare its true character. A song that should be sung as a hymn of love for your country has been weaponised as an assertion of religious nationalism. It is no less than a communal war cry. The unexpurgated song portrays Mother India as a goddess without taking into account the multi-religious identity of the Indian populace.

— David Milton, Maruthancode

# **Don't vilify English**

THIS REFERS to the article, 'Amid Macaulay row, let's not forget, India increasingly speaks in English to itself' (IE, December 12). A language is not just a medium of expression. It is a window into a whole culture. English may have

New Delhi

been a new language, that is, an oppressor's language a century ago. Today, however, Indians have well and truly appropriated it and made it their own. One can not trivialise something practical and useful by calling it just a Macaulay mindset. - Rahul Gaur, Gurgaon

# **Pollution budget**

THIS REFERS to the article, 'Delhi's fight against toxic air is reconfiguring the city' (IE, December 12). If China can allocate 270 billion dollars to tackle pollution, why has India — a 4-trillion-dollar economy — not committed even a single billion to the same fight? In 2025-26, the allocation for pollution control stands at just Rs 854 crore. With only weeks to go before the budget, we will soon learn the government's intentions. For India — and for Delhi in particular — the contrast offers a clear lesson: Combating air pollution must become a national priority, not only to protect public health but also to bolster India's global credibility. This not only affects public health but also impacts tourism, international diplomacy, and investor confidence. For India to project itself as a rising global power, the condition of its capital becomes especially significant. — Shahanshah Akhter, New Delhi

# Nostalgia, now Wrapped in algorithm

telling me what I listened to, how much. my listening age, and apparently, what kind of person that makes me. HIMANSHI SAINI

The weird part isn't the data itself but how easily we welcomed it. We let an app turn our inner lives into an annual performance review and emotions arranged into Top 5 lists. But was music just what I listened to? It was when I listened. Who I was with. What I was trying to get through. A breakup. A commute. A deadline. A morning I didn't know how to start. Those private moments now arrive as perfectly packaged vertical slides on our phone screens, this year in a purple and white theme, and we post them online without thinking twice.

shape. It started to feel curated, not by That's where the tension lies for me, the Every December now, without fail, space between memory that used to be Spotify performs its little annual ritual: deeply personal and memory that's now Wrapped. Bright colours, cheerful graphs quietly monitored. Spotify Wrapped looks

clean, cute even, but what it really tells me is that nothing is ever lost. It's all archived somewhere. Once those private moments turn into data points, our feelings start showing up like metadata. Your happy hour peaks at 4 pm on a Wednesday. Your heartbreak becomes your most-played artist. Your anxiety gets a playlist option. The app sees the patterns, but not the person.

And yet, when I see my year mapped out like that, it feels strangely real. Almost too real. There's a sense of recognition, ves, that was me, but also a distance, that that wasn't the whole story. It's my year, but without any context. Just timestamps and loops.

There's also a dual thought to it. An intimacy that's comforting for a second. Like someone was paying attention when I wasn't. But it is also slightly creepy. Because someone was paying attention when I wasn't. It shows me parts of myself I didn't consciously record. And the most unsettling bit, the relief I feel when it arrives every year, as if I need an app to summarise a year I lived through in real time. Maybe this duality tells us that Spotify

didn't re-create nostalgia from scratch; it made space for it in the digital age. It structured it, colour-coded it, and made it easier to look at. And somewhere between what we lived and what gets shown, we started trusting data more than memory. Maybe that's what memory now is, part feeling, part algorithm. Part us, part something watching us.

Comforting? I think so. Creepy? Definitely. But try looking away. You can't.

The writer is a Delhi-based visual storyteller who has previously worked at the Partition Museum

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Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel in Delhi in 1950. NEHRU ARCHIVE

POLITICS

# How Nehru, not Patel, became first PM: The politics behind 1946 Cong poll



ADRIJA ROYCHOWDHURY

IN RESPONDING to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's "vote chori" charge, Union Home Minister Amit Shah delved into India's Independence-era politics, invoking what he described as a historical subterfuge in Jawaharlal Nehru's elevation as independent India's first prime minister.

Shah argued that in 1946, when the Congress was choosing its president — a decision that would effectively determine the head of the interim government and later the first prime minister — the majority of state units backed Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Yet, Nehru became the consensus choice, a development Shah characterised as "vote chori". The episode Shah referred to centres on the 1946 Congress presidential election, a moment that shaped both the interim administration and the leadership of a soon-to-be sovereign nation.

## What happened in the 1946 Congress president poll?

With World War II drawing to a close, negotiations between the Indian National Congress and the British government over the transfer of power gathered pace. In this context, the Congress decided to hold internal elections — a routine annual affair that had been deferred for six years. The disruptions of the Civil Disobedience movement of 1940-41, the imprisonment of top leaders, the general elections of 1945-46, and the Cabinet Mission's arrival all contributed to the delay.

Ordinarily, the Congress presidency did not carry great executive power. Gandhi's towering presence meant organisational decisions flowed through him. The post was often more ceremonial than authoritative. But in 1946, the stakes were different. The Congress president would lead the interim

government, making him the de facto head of the soonto-be independent administration.

The three official candidates were Patel, Nehru and Acharya J B Kripalani. The incumbent Congress President, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, had hoped to continue and was backed by several provincial committees. But days before the vote, Kripa-

lani and Patel informed the

All India Congress Committee that they wished to with-

**PAST TO PRESENT** 

Union Home Minister Amit

Shah told Parliament that the

original 'vote-chori' happened

gress president over Patel.

election, Gandhi made his

when Nehru was made the Con-

In the run-up to the Congress

choice clear: He wanted Nehru

to lead the party with India on

the cusp of Independence.

draw, leaving Nehru the sole candidate. The story behind these withdrawals, however, was more complex. As Rajmohan Gandhi records in Patel: A Life, Gandhi had privately made it clear by April 20 that his preference was Nehru. When a newspaper suggested that Azad might be re-elected, Gandhi wrote to the Maulana expressing his reservations about another term. He urged Azad to clarify that he did not intend to continue. "In today's circumstances, I would, if asked, prefer Jawaharlal," Gandhi wrote.

Despite Gandhi's preference, Patel was the overwhelming organisational choice: 12 of the 15 provincial Congress committees reportedly backed him. To honour Gandhi's wishes, Kripalani proposed Nehru's name at a Working Committee meeting, and members — including Patel — signed the proposal. Kripalani then withdrew his own nomination and drafted a withdrawal note for Patel as well. Patel showed the note to Gandhi. Gandhi, despite his preference, offered Nehru the opportunity to step aside since no provincial committee had backed him. Nehru remained silent, a silence interpreted as unwillingness to accept the second position. Gandhi then asked Patel to sign the withdrawal, which he did without protest. Nehru was elected unopposed. A month later, the Viceroy invited him to form the interim government. Nehru's biographer Michael Brecher later wrote: "If Gandhi had not intervened, Patel would have been the first de facto premier of India." The Sardar, he noted, "was robbed of the prize and it rankled deeply".

## Why did Gandhi prefer Nehru?

A year later, Gandhi publicly explained his stance. "Jawaharlal cannot be replaced today, whilst the charge is being taken from Englishmen," he said. Gandhi believed that Nehru, a Harrow and Cambridge alumnus as well as a barrister, was better suited to negotiate with the British leadership. Gandhi also recognised that Nehru enjoyed goodwill among at least a section of Muslims. Internationally, too, Nehru was better known, and Gandhi felt this visibility would help India assert itself in global affairs. Finally, he believed that Nehru's elevation would not come at the cost of Patel's contribution. "They will be like two oxen yoked to the governmental cart," he said. "One will need the other and both will pull together."

# How did Patel react?

There are differing accounts of Patel's reaction. He neither protested nor defied Gandhi's directive. At 71, he knew such an opportunity was unlikely to come again. Rajmohan Gandhi notes that those close to Patel said the denial hurt him deeply. Others argue that the decision did not affect his commitment to party work or governance. A week after the election, Patel was reportedly making everyone, including Gandhi, "laugh a lot".

ECONOMICS

# Behind China's \$1-tn trade surplus



China's Yangluo Port, a domestic and international freight harbour on the Yangtze River in Wuhan. NYT

# 'Surplus is as much a sign of imbalance as it is of strength'



**EXPERT EXPLAINS** 

Lizzi C Lee

EARLIER THIS week, trade data from China showed that in the first eleven months of 2025, the country hit over \$1 trillion in trade surplus. No country has ever recorded such a figure in that time period.

What does this mean for global trade, and is it all good news for China? **Lizzi C Lee**, a Fellow at the Center for China Analysis, Asia Society Policy Institute, Washington DC, speaks to **Rishika Singh**. Excerpts:

## How do you see the \$1-trillion milestone in the context of China's growth trajectory?

The record surplus reflects China's longstanding ability to produce at scale, not a sudden surge in competitiveness. Over two decades, China built dense supply-chain clusters and a policy environment that consistently favoured manufacturing and exports. The weaker value of the renminbi also helped at the margin this year, although it didn't fundamentally change the picture. What makes this milestone significant is that it comes when China's own domestic demand is weak and global trade is uncertain. The surplus has grown partly because production capacity kept expanding, while consumption and investment at home lagged. It is as much a sign of imbalance as it is of strength.

## What are the constituents of this figure? Do they indicate exports of

higher- or lower-value goods? The export mix has shifted decisively toward higher-value goods. November's data shows the same pattern seen throughout the year: strong machinery and electronics, weak labour-intensive exports. Automobiles and integrated circuits did much of the heavy lifting, with export growth far outpacing traditional categories like apparel or toys, which continued to shrink. This reflects two realities. First, China is moving up the value chain. Second, low-margin sectors are under pressure from both global competition and China's own "anti-involution" push. It refers to how, in recent months, the government has spoken about the subject of manufacturing overcapacity amid low domestic demand,

which has led to firms reducing their prices to appeal to consumers. However, with continuous demand-supply mismatch, it could very well lead to firms undercutting each other into oblivion. This is being termed involution, and the government has increasingly sought to contain the situation.

## China's US-bound exports are falling. Does this mean China has substituted the US? Or is transhipment at play?

China hasn't replaced the US; it has leaned more heavily on everyone else, most notably, the Global South. November's export rebound came almost entirely from non-US markets, while US demand remained soft. Some rerouting through Southeast Asia likely exists, given the US tariff risks. However, diversification is a big part of what's carrying the surplus.

## How does the surplus interact with China's push against involution and foreign accusations of 'dumping'?

It highlights a dilemma. At home, officials say they want to avoid endless price wars and curb blind capacity expansion. Abroad, China faces growing accusations that this expansion is distorting markets. Europe's criticism reflects deeper anxiety over strategic sectors. The surplus won't slow China's manufacturing machine on its own. But it raises questions about whether current output levels are sustainable without provoking more trade friction.

## How sustainable is export-led growth? Could the world's dependence on Chinese goods fade anytime soon? Is a second 'China shock' coming soon?

In the short run, China can continue exporting strongly because its cost structure and supply chains remain competitive. But the long-run outlook is more complicated. Many countries are now reducing reliance on Chinese goods, especially in strategic sectors. The term "China shock" was coined in a 2013 paper by US economists David Autor, David Dorn, and Gordon H Hanson. They argued that cheap goods from China directly competed with US manufacturing. Although consumers did benefit, this "shock" led to the loss of around 2.4 million

jobs from 1999 through 2011. A second "China shock" is possible, but it is more likely to happen in the advanced manufacturing/technology category rather than cheap consumer goods. China's rapid advance in the areas of EVs, batteries, solar energy, and electronics is already triggering protective moves abroad. That pushback is part of why China's domestic debate on involution has become more urgent.

# Another **'China**

The deluge of Chinese goods has raised the prospect of another 'China

Shock'?

Shock', first seen in US in the '90s. This could lead

to issues such as job losses in several Asian countries, including India, as well as much of Africa.

Experts say a second 'shock' is more likely in advanced manufacturing and tech, rather than cheap goods.

# Numbers hide domestic weaknesses: Imports, consumption, currency

Export dominance one of many drivers of surplus



US PRESIDENT Donald Trump's tariff war seems to have had little effect on China's export-driven economy with the country clocking a record \$1-trillion trade surplus with the rest of the world in 2025.

The landmark is clearly a reaffirmation of China's stranglehold over global merchandise trade and a stark reminder of the fact that while Trump's tariffs may have thwarted shipments to the US, exports to South and Southeast Asia, Africa and LatinAmerica have correspondingly spiked.

And the deluge may have only started, which some analysts say could be the beginning of a "second China shock".

This could potentially lead to economic and social consequences in countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and India, as well as much of Africa and Southeast Asia. Europe, already bracing for the impact of Chinese electric vehicles and consumer electronics, is perhaps now stuck "between an ultra-competitive China and a protectionist America," said Politico. Beijing's trade surplus "is untenable," French President Emmanuel Macron told the Les Echos financial newspaper.

## *Manufacturing dominance*

There has been an evolving bipartisan consensus in Washington DC that China has gotten away with low-cost manufacturing for too long. This is more significant now than in earlier decades, when trade represented a much lower share of global goods production and consumption.

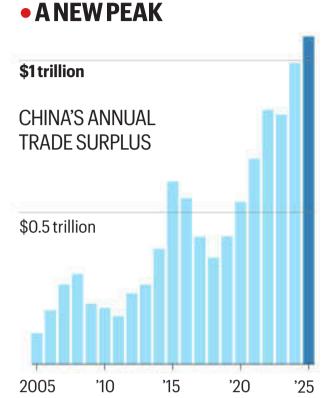
Weakening domestic demand, alongside export-facilitating policies in products, where China is the world's dominant manufacturer, has led to prices collapsing globally and driving other national producers out of business. While the benefit of this has been a phase of sustained lower global inflation, China has simultaneously created a progressive stranglehold over global manufacturing: a level of manufacturing dominance by a single country seen only twice before in world history — by the UK at the start of the Industrial Revolution, and by the US just after World War II, according to research by the Rhodium Group and Noah Smith's opinion article, Manufacturing is a war now.

# Domestic demand

What makes China's dominance worse is the continuing weakness in domestic demand. That, too, comes from the problem of China's unwillingness to vacate its earlier specialisation in low value-added manufactured products as it moved up the global value chain.

This has concomitantly led to a weakness in Chinese domestic demand for imported goods, which was expected to rise if China had ceded the manufacture of low value-added manufactured goods. So, more than Beijing's export competitiveness, weak Chinese imports explain this continuing imbalance.

Trump had ostensibly set out to address this imbalance early into his second term. So, while many might not have agreed with Trump's solution, it's difficult to wish away



the problem that he set out to address. Responding to the Chinese trade surplus, the International Monetary Fund linked China's rising exports and growing trade imbalances in part to "a real depreciation of the yuan". In a carefully-worded note Wednesday, IMF officials said the country's low inflation relative to price levels among its trading partners has led to a weaker yuan in real terms. They urged Chinese policymakers to adopt bolder stimulus to boost consumption, which would lift consumer prices, while allowing more exchange rate flexibility.

According to analysis by Brian Hart Hugh Grant-Chapman and Leon Li of the non-profit thinktank Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), China's manufacturing boom has fuelled decades of export-oriented economic growth, undercutting foreign competitors and contributing to a growing appetite for tariffs in the US and Europe.

In the US and other developed economies, consumers have enjoyed cheaper products — but their manufacturers have struggled to compete. The subsequent political backlash has contributed to a growing appetite for tariffs and industrial pol icies, the CSIS study of January 2025 said.

In the face of these tensions, Chinese leader Xi Jinping has doubled down with calls for China to become a "manufacturing power" and dominate global markets for ad vanced high-tech goods such as EVs, highend electronics and defence equipment.

This even as China continues to hold on to its share of traditional export items like garments while shifting some lower-end value chains to Vietnam and the Philippines.

The view in India's policy circles has been that the China-led trade imbalances need to be corrected and that New Delhi is supportive of any global efforts towards that end. That was before Trump's tariff on slaught ended up hitting India and Brazil the worst.

More recently, the concerns here have started to focus on a potential deluge of Chinese goods that were originally intended for the US and could end up in India and other countries, especially as New Delhi has started to dismantle some of its protectionist quality control barriers that it had progressively erected across product groups over the last 36 months. Chinese imports into India have surged in the first seven months of this fiscal, threatening to upend a steadily widening trade imbalance.

GLOBAL

# Taking stock of Syria, a year after the civil war ended



SHUBHAJIT ROY

A YEAR after the fall of Bashar al-Assad, Syria faces multiple challenges as its terrorist-turned-statesman president picks up the pieces of 14-year-long civil war.

# Al-Sharaa's rebranding

Assad fled to Russia last December after a lightning rebel offensive, led by Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), overwhelmed his forces. HTS leader Ahmed al-Sharaa. formerly a sanctioned al-Qaeda terrorist with a \$10 million bounty on his head, took over as Syria President.

Since coming to power, al-Sharaa has rebranded himself as a modern, soft-speaking, linen-suit wearing leader; last month,



Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa. NYT

he became the first Syrian president in 80 years to visit the White House, where he received US President Donald Trump's stamp of approval. "I think this leader can do it." Trump said.

Al-Sharaa has the unenviable task of leading a country that is fractured on ethnic lines and left economically impoverished by the lengthy civil war. While the establishment of the national commissions for Transitional Justice (NCTJ) and for

## **SYRIA IN SHAMBLES**

The civil war is over but ethnic violence has not stopped: pro-al-Sharaa Sunni groups have targeted minority Alawites, Druze, and Kurds.

The country remains in deep economic distress after the civil war: reconstruction could cost more than \$300 bn.

Missing Persons earlier this year has been hailed as a welcome step, much more still needs to be done.

# Twin challenge

Since the fall of the Assad regime, there has been widespread ethnic violence, with Sunni groups aligned to the new regime targeting minority communities, notably, Shia Alawites (Assad's community), the Druze, and Kurds. Al-Sharaa has been criticised for not doing enough to control this violence. Certain actions have been viewed as explicitly fanning tensions: The failure of Syria's interim constitution to guarantee Kurdish rights is being seen as a betrayal by the Kurds, who too fought Assad.

Human Rights Watch has criticised the NCTJ for focussing on the Assad regime, and overlooking war crimes committed by others, including al-Sharaa's HTS.

Meanwhile, millions remain in need of continued humanitarian assistance. Many live in refugee camps or damaged homes, and face stark food insecurity; in Novem-

New Delhi

ber the International Rescue Committee reported that "more than half of the water supply networks and four out of five electricity grids are either destroyed or nonfunctional". The cost of reconstruction could be high as \$345 billion.

# View from New Delhi

India enjoyed robust ties with the Assad regime for over five decades. Even during the peak of the civil war, it maintained its embassy in Damascus. After the collapse, New Delhi called for a "peaceful and inclusive Syrian-led political process". The first official outreach to the new regime came in July.

On Monday, an Indian delegation met Syria Foreign Minister Asaad Al-Shaibani in Damascus. It also met Syria Health Minister Musab Al-Ali; sources said the talks focussed on collaboration in "pharmaceutical manufacturing and medical training". Both sides also spoke on a "scholarship program for Syrian students" and a "specialised engineering cooperation initiative tailored for Syrian government employees".

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# FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2025



GOLD CARD

**US President Donald Trump** 

It is a gift of getting somebody great coming into our country, because we think these will be some tremendous people that wouldn't be allowed to stay

# Quick commerce reset

The express delivery service may look very different from today's crowded battlefield—but far more sustainable

NDIA'S BRUTALLY COMPETITIVE quick-commerce market is clearly heading for a shakeout, as Blinkit CEO Albinder Dhindsa predicts. He's probably right. But the "correction", as he calls it, may not arrive as quickly as expected—not when the early movers have already become default suppliers to affluent households across India's major cities. Some challengers, particularly deep-pocketed horizontal e-commerce giants like Amazon and Flipkart, have little reason to exit soon. Big-box retailers such as JioMart and DMart Ready also have the balance sheets and patience to stay in the fight. Meanwhile, the overwhelming institutional response to Swiggy's ₹10,000-crore share sale underscores a key point: the top two or three players are likely to survive and share the gains. Though eight-odd firms are vying for market share, Blinkit and Swiggy's Instamart have pulled decisively ahead, with Zepto firmly in third place. At this pace, the trio could end up controlling 70-80% of the market—mirroring the concentration seen in India's broader e-commerce sector.

In quick-commerce, the unit economics work only at enormous scale as behind the convenience lies a network of hundreds of dark stores, thousands of delivery partners, and extraordinarily high operational intensity. So the secret to survival in this business is an enormous war chest. That explains why the top three have been aggressively raising capital. Blinkit is sitting on more than \$2 billion; Swiggy is similarly stocked; and Zepto's recent \$450million fundraise has reportedly taken its reserves to about \$900 million. The cash burn is punishing: hundreds of dark stores need to be set up and operated, and thousands of stock keeping units must be maintained across localised assortments.

What's indisputable is that the market itself isn't going anywhere. If anything, it's expanding as more households grow accustomed-even addicted—to 10-minute delivery. Bernstein estimates that by FY30, nearly 70 million Indians will together command "relevant" purchasing power of about \$80 billion (roughly ₹7 lakh crore), a cohort willing to pay for quality and convenience. Its proprietary models peg quick commerce as a \$35-billion market by FY30, driven by share gains from kirana stores across the top 40 cities. Some investors argue this may still be a conservative projection. Sequoia's Rajan Anandan has long maintained that India's addressable markets tend to be underestimated, noting that each decade brings a tenfold expansion in outcomes. That's good news for quick-commerce players, all of whom are chasing scale while simultaneously trying to lift average order values and capture a larger share of household spending. But Dhindsa is right to expect a reset. Many consumer businesses in India have fallen victim to irrational exuberance, and quick-commerce operators are already displaying the early signs: generous discounting to lure price-sensitive customers, waived service fees, and aggressive promotions.

These may expand the funnel, but they inflate acquisition costs—which are not falling, and for first orders are actually rising. So the model will evolve. As Amazon India's Samir Kumar notes, there will likely be multiple offerings tailored to different customer cohorts. Not every consumer is perennially rushed or willing to pay a premium for hyper-fast delivery. But regardless of the eventual segmentation, two realities remain unchanged: capital costs are high, and customer acquisition costs are rising. A lot more cash will be spent before the winners emerge. And when they do, India's quick-commerce market may look very different from today's crowded battlefield—but far more sustainable.

# Affordability isn't a hoax, also not a crisis for most

WHEN SOMEONE TELLS you that they are struggling, it is generally a good rule of thumb to take them seriously. So it was not the best political move for President Donald Trump to call the affordability issue a "hoax". Too many Americans are trying to cope with rising food prices and high costs for housing, health care, and child care. At the same time, it is important to note that there is not a widespread "affordab-

ility crisis" in the US. Some people are truly unable to keep up with basic necessities. Some have high expectations that their incomes can't meet. And some are doing fine. Affordability has been an issue for years, but it became an acute problem when in-

flation spiked after the pandemic and there was a drop in real income. Inflation is still high, about 3%. But real income growth is still positive for most Americans, suggesting income is rising to cover many goods and services that are increasing in price. There are caveats. For the bottom quartile, real wages are not rising as fast as for the

other two. And even for the middle class, real wages haven't risen enough to keep pace with the increase in some critical goods and services. Measuring the overall impact of all this is a challenge, because different house-

holds have different needs and priorities. Some high-profile estimates have shown the middle class is falling behind, but they make some questionable assumptions. For example, they typically assume that a middle-class family has two children

who require care. Child care is expensive, and it is often necessary even after children start school (though once they do, costs do go down significantly). These costs are a real burden for many families, and more can and should be done to help them. But this is not a nationwide crisis that affects a majority of Americans. In fact, only

about 11% American households contain at least one child under the age of six. Another big expense facing Americans is housing. In



**SCHRAGER** Bloomberg

urban areas, the rental value of a primary residence has risen nearly 30% since 2020, and higher interest rates on mortgages have made it harder for a lot of people to buy a home. But about two-thirds of US households are already homeowners, and about half of outstanding mortgages have a fixed interest rate that is less than 4%. Yes, these conditions make it harder for these fami-

is not a homeowner. Yet it's difficult to argue that most households can't afford the cost of housing. Food prices are up 27% since 2020 and are still ris-

lies to move, and it is more expensive for everyone who

ing about 3% a year. For lower-income Americans, this is a real burden and helps explain why their real incomes have fallen or are flat. The impact of tariffs is making

My argument is not that affordability is not an issue. It is that we should be more precise about what affordability means, and for whom. Many of the more vocal complaints come from young childless households in large metro areas or those in the uppermiddle or even upper class, and what they're complaining about is how they can't afford the trappings of affluence. True, housing in cities has become more expensive than ever. And there are young people looking to build their careers in large cities who can't afford to do so. Like other generations before them, they may have to endure the hardship of not living in their ideal city. Some of their challenges are new, but not remotely comparable to those of people on fixed incomes who struggle to afford food.

things worse. But for the average household, food remains a small part of the budget.

Another source of affordability anxieties is the residual sticker shock of high inflation from a few years ago. Prices went up a lot, and while the rate of inflation has since fallen, actual prices have not come down. Incomes may have risen since then too, but not for all families. More generally, inflation is just a bigger risk than it was before, and

the job market is worsening. All of this makes consumers more wary. Affordability is a genuine problem that requires more attention from policy makers. Expanding child-care options, for example, or reducing tariffs and housing regulations, would go a long way towards helping struggling families. But it's just as unhelpful to refer to the affordability crisis as it is to call it a hoax.

# IMAGINATION AGE

NEED TO PREVENT ANY REGULATORY OBSTACLE IN THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF ALIN INDIA

# AI and Industrial Revolution 4.0

HE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL Revolution is upon us, and is being powered principally by artificial intelligence (AI) combined with accompanying technologies such as advanced robotics, Internet of Things, machine-to-machine communication, and gene editing. As these converge into a single ecosystem, the innovations are game-changing—like the emergence of intelligent automation supported by agentic AI, mountains of data analytics, AI medical diagnosis at stunning speeds, individualised learning, and so on. India has its own AI ambitions.

Recently, BVR Subrahmanyam, the CEO of Niti Aayog, said that this "is a foundational transformation that will redefine how nations create wealth, deliver justice, and secure peace", and that "The nations that harness AI responsibly will lead the next century". He aptly called it "the Cognitive Revolution, where intelligence itself is being industrialised". Some have termed this as the Imagination Age.

India's vision for AI is wide, though admittedly, in some ways, we are catching up with the US and China who are competing for global AI supremacy. But India's AI plans do not visualise this. They are more focused on AI sovereignty and shared prosperity with an emphasis on human and ethical values. According to a study by MDI Gurugram for the Competition Commission of India (CCI), the AI market is expanding at a bewildering pace. In India alone, it has grown from a mere \$3.20 billion in 2020 to \$6.05 billion in 2024, and is expected to expand to \$31.94 billion by 2031.

The study observes that AI is progressively transforming Indian businesses. It holds the potential to boost productivity and innovation, and it is reshaping competition dynamics, business operations, and regulatory responses. AI is fundamentally restructuring how companies make decisions, with data analytics and automated deci-

**VINOD DHALL** Founding Chairman of CCI and Senior Adviser,

**Touchstone Partners** 

sion-making aided by AI agentics. However, research indicates that the core area of work for almost 67% of respondent AI start-ups in India lies in the layer of building AI applications. Notably, 76% of the start-up respondents build their application solutions using opensource technologies which dominate India's market.

Similarly, a joint survey by EY and CII notes that there is a strong

momentum in AI adoption among Indian enterprises. Nearly half of the responding entities reported multiple live use cases of AI, and 76% of them believe GenAI will have a significant business impact. Over two-third of the enterprises feel ready to leverage AI, so it has to be seen to what extent AI fulfils its business potential. The survey further notes that AI is being widely used in

banking, financial services, and insurance, healthcare, retail, e-commerce, logistics, and marketing, with applications including dynamic pricing, personalised recommendations, demand forecasting, and automated decisionmaking. In financial services, AI plays a critical role in streamlining operations, improving risk management, detecting fraud, assessing credit risk, and automating customer service. In healthcare, AI-driven diagnostics and drug discovery are gaining traction. Education, global positioning system and navigation, agriculture, social media, gaming,

and astronomy are also witnessing AI integration.

India enjoys some significant advantages fuelled by its outstanding tech talent, rapidly growing economy, and vibrant start-up ecosystem, with reportedly 1,900 start-ups focussed on AI-driven solutions. In September, the Niti Aayog came out with a significant paper titled AI for Viksit Bharat: The Opportunity for Accelerated Eco-

*nomic Growth*, which outlined the potential The services of big outcomes for AI-led value players are the creation, raising producenablers of our tivity and efficiency, and vibrant start-up measures for leap-frogging innovation. The minecosystem and the istry of electronics and widespread use of information technology Al services by the has launched an India AI Mission designed to foster ordinary Indian and democratise AI consumer growth by making the infrastructure for AI use,

> public data unique to our country and culture, and facilities for AI use in Indian languages widely available. It seeks to drive the development of indigenous large language models based on uniquely domestic data.

In India, the infrastructure for AI services is being provided by major digital players such as Microsoft, Amazon, and Google as well as by relatively new players like OpenAI, Perplexity, and Anthropic. They are competing fiercely and ramping up their capabilities, with many services being provided for free. Huge investments are flowing into

this field. TCS has announced an invest-

ment of \$7 billion to set up a new data centre and Google has announced an even bigger investment of \$15 billion for a mega data centre in Andhra Pradesh, with regional clouds for Delhi and Mumbai. In addition, Microsoft, AWS, Reliance, and Adani have announced substantial investments. The services of these players are the enablers of our vibrant start-up ecosystem and the widespread use of AI services by the ordinary Indian consumer.

Some players like Microsoft and Google have integrated their AI services into their other products, making them much more convenient to use. This has the potential to improve decision-making by automating mundane tasks, saving valuable time and providing intelligent assistance. For search, AI has made it easy to obtain a summary extracted from dozens of sources in one place. This demonstrates how AI, a general-purpose technology, can be used to meet different ends. The announcement of Google's Gemini 3 model's launch, with its extraordinary capabilities, has shaken up competition in this field.

Rival AI companies have an understandable grievance that integrating of their own AI into other products gives companies like Microsoft and Google an unfair competitive advantage in deploying and popularising their AI services such as Copilot and Gemini, and call upon regulatory action to curb such AI use. Such an approach, however, amounts to placing restrictive rails around a new and growing technology whose full potential is still unfolding. It would chill innovation in this area. Nothing should be done by an Indian regulator that becomes an obstacle in the early development of AI in India, especially when it promises immense benefits for the Indian consumer, enterprises, and research.

> Co-authored with Rakshit Rana, Associate at Touchstone Partners

# Euro works well, yet Europe falters

economy has

divided with a

rising anti-

immigration

sentiment



**AMOL AGRAWAL** 

The writer teaches at the National Institute of Securities Markets

**AS THE WORLD** ushers in a new year on January 1, 2026, Bulgarians will wake up with anxiety. The New Year shall kick-start a process of the European nation giving up its currency, lev, for the euro. In 1999, the monetaryworldwitnessed a grand experiment where 11 European nations united to give up their monetary policy to a common central bank and adopt a common currency. In 26 years, 10 more countries including Bulgaria have joined euro. This popularity of euro points to an interesting paradox: While the currency seems to be working, Europe is faltering.

How and why did select European countries adopt a common currency? To answer the question, we need to read monetary history. One major struggle for most economies has been to find an appropriate exchange rate system. Before the Second World War, economies fixed currencies to gold. In 1944, under the Bretton Woods (BW) agreement, countries decided to fix exchange rates against the US dollar which was fixed against gold.

In 1971, then US President Richard Nixon dismantled the BW system by delinking US dollar from gold. Most economies were used to being a part of some form of fixed exchange system; they had to now scamper for alternative choices. The pertinent debate was whether one should remain in a fixed exchange rate system or switch to a floating/flexible exchange rate system. The pros of fixed exchange is its predictability and simplicity; the cons are that monetary policy becomes ineffective. The benefit of a flexible exchange is that monetary policy becomes effective; the drawback is its unpredictability.

In 1961, economist Robert Mundell provided another idea that member countries can have a common currency and form an optimal currency area (OCA). An OCA will lead to lower transaction costs and facilitate higher trade. His condition for OCA was the presence of high labour mobility in member nati-

ons. If there is a negative shock in one country, labour can move freely to a less impacted member nation. Later, researchers also added capital mobility and tax transfers as prior conditions.

The European countries, which had in any case formed an economic union for fostering trade post-World War II, decided to

become an OCA by forming a monetary union. A common euro would also provide a platform to challenge the hegemony of the US dollar. They also formed a common central bank (European Central Bank) to frame monetary policy for the member economies. However, to achieve OCA they followed a different strategy. As labour and capital mobility would take a long time, they came out with macroeconomic convergence criteria, hoping to achieve mobility over time.

The convergence criteria had four

they will lose the gains made by euro components. First, price stability where the joining member country's average inflation should not exceed the inflation rate of the three best-performing EU

European policymakers need to urgently work

towards reviving the European economy. Else

member states by more than 1.5 percentage points. Second, fiscal stability, where government deficit and debt does not exceed 3% and 60% of GDP respectively. The third and fourth components were that the stable exchange rates and longterm interest rate should not exceed those of the three best-perform-

ing member states in terms of price stability by more **Europe's political** than 2 percentage points. While 11 major European become highly countries joined the euro, other major economies such as the UK, Denmark, and Sweden opted out.

From 1999-2008, Euro area countries fared well. The transition to euro was relatively smooth and mac-

roeconomic conditions were stable. The members did violate the convergence criteria, especially in terms of high debt levels, but the risks were ignored. The 2008 recession followed by the 2010 European debt crisis exposed the high debt risks, leading to a major economic crisis. The common monetary policy could not focus on the concerns of individual countries, while a common fiscal policy was absent. There was criticism about ignoring Mundell's criteria and also not adhering to their own macro criteria.

After many policy trials and errors, Eurozone countries did recover but scars of the crises remain. The woes of Eurozone (and larger Europe) have only gone worse after Brexit, Russia-Ukraine war, and Trump tariffs. Growth during 1999-2007 for the US and Eurozone averaged 2.9% and 2.3% respectively. It has declined to average 2% in the US and 0.9% in Eurozone in 2008-25. The leading economy of Europe, Germany, has barely grown since 2019.

There are articles and research aplenty that argue how European growth rates and productivity have declined and stagnated over the years. The International Monetary Fund's June 2025 quarterly *Fin*ance and Development was devoted to reviving Europe. Two committees under former former Italian Prime Ministers Mario Draghi and Enrico Letta have provided a road map for a more competitive and productive Europe. Europe's political economy has become highly divided with a rising anti-immigration sentiment which will make it even more difficult to achieve growth based on integration.

Summing up, the paradox of a popular euro and a struggling Europe is an interesting one. The recent European Commission survey showed that 83% of Eurozone respondents favour the common currency. Economic theory suggests that eventually a currency will reflect the fortunes of the economy. European policymakers need to urgently work towards reviving the European economy. Else they will lose the gains made by euro.

# **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

# FDI fragility

Apropos of "Only a few swallows..." (FE, December 11), the wave of bigticket tech investments is encouraging, but it also underlines how uneven and fragile India's foreign direct investment landscape remains. The editorial rightly points out that inflows alone do not tell the full story; persistent outflows, shifting regulations, and slow on-ground execution continue to

dilute investor confidence. Despite India's scale and evident potential in the China+1 shift, manufacturing struggles with land delays, labour rigidity, and unpredictable clearances. These are structural issues, not cyclical lapses, and they demand steady, coordinated policy rather than periodic reform bursts. What global investors consistently ask for is stability—clear rules, quick decisions, and credible enforcement. A practical way forward

would be a single, empowered mechanism that tracks approvals, resolves bottlenecks, and ensures uniform implementation across states. —SM Jeeva, Chennai

# Red tape has to vanish

The series of investment announcements by tech majors is indeed positive news. But for a mulitiplier effect on our economy, investments must pour into the manufacturing

New Delhi

sector. And that will only happen when the red tape would vanish and land and labour reforms see the light of day. And as rightly mentioned in your editorial, the limited success of the performance-linked incentive scheme, which was launched with much fanfare, could be attributed to the above shortfall.

—Bal Govind, Noida

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# **Amazon Grace, How Sweet Your Sound**

Scale, policy push and tech edge draw firms

Amazon's \$35 bn investment commitment in India, announced on Wednesday, reflects the country's market opportunity. India is Amazon's fastest-growing major market globally because of its untapped potential and consumer acceptance of new digital retail formats such as quick commerce. Producers are shaping their marketing strategy around Q-commerce, which bypasses several hurdles in distribution through improved analytics. The size of India's consumer market allows new business plans to be tested at sufficiently large volumes to iron out initial glitches. By the time a technology-driven service establishes itself in the country, such as digital wallets, it becomes ready for export to other markets.

This leads up to claims for sovereign control and local resilience over technologies that are being developed in the country by global companies. Microsoft, which anno-

amazing

unced a \$17.5 bn commitment by 2030 to develop AI and cloud services in India, shows that such claims are legitimate. The combination of resources, policies and market conditions helps create an Indian stack that encourages localised innovation. In this case, too, investment pledges are readily ex-

ecuted due to the unique mix of attributes available in India. This addresses the issue of enforceability of investment commitments other economies may have to tackle.

Technology investment in India has been receiving special policy attention. It has translated into an enviable Indian stack of DPI on which a wide spectrum of virtual commerce is hosted. India's policy environment has evolved along with technological advances to drive dispersal. This helps bring down costs for emerging technologies and makes the country a go-to destination for Silicon Valley. As global competition intensifies, firms increasingly view India as a strategic base for long-term growth. US immigration restrictions could widen the investment funnel. The Chinese market is relatively less accessible for US technology giants. India is a safer bet in many respects.

# Real Cuts Need More Than Just Car Rules

India's proposed CAFE-3 norms, released on September 25, have split the ₹22 lakh cr automobile industry down the middle. Effective from April 2027 to March 2032, the draft rules tighten fuel-efficiency and emissions targets sharply: average fuel consumption must drop from 3.7 litres per 100 km in FY28 to 3.01 litres per 100 km by FY32, while CO<sub>2</sub> emissions must fall to 91.7 g/km. The norms also offer a weight-based exemption for small cars: vehicles with an unladen mass up to 909 kg, engine displacement up to 1,200 cc, and length under 4 m get an additional3g/kmCO2credit, easing compliance slightly.

The debate around CAFE-3 revolves around three points: fuel efficiency, safety, and incentives for tech upgrades. Small-car



makers, including Maruti Suzuki, argue that stricter targets hit light vehicles hardest. Upgrading engines or adding hybrid ech would be costly. Larger-vehicle manu facturers counter that exemptions distort competition, reduce incentives to invest in cleaner tech, and could create safety risks if light cars rely excessively on weight-ba-

sed credits without structural reinforcement. Additionally, CA-FE-3 is a fleet-wide regulation, meaning that a manufacturer must meet average emissions and fuel-efficiency targets across all its vehicles. Companies with a strong small-car line-up can offset emissions from heavier models more easily. Competitors lacking enough small or efficient vehicles may struggle.

Focusing solely on vehicle-level compliance, however, misses the broader picture. Real reductions in emissions and improvements in road safety require better public transport and fuel quality, smarter urban planning, stricter traffic management and disciplined driving. Only when carmaker regulations are integrated with these broader solutions can meaningful reductions in emissions and safer mobility for all be achieved.



The Nietzschean herd chooses sheep to follow in the hope of leading

# **But Who Influences** The Influencer?

Even the influential, it seems, are getting influenced by influencers. These Pied Pipers of LinkedIntell us what to wear, what to eat, how to work, how to live. But hang on, who influences the influencer? Nietzsche, bless his moustache, warned us about herd morality: the sheepish instinct to follow the flock, even if the flock is marching toward a cliff with ring lights strapped to their heads. Influencers, those supposed shepherds of taste and purchasing habits, are themselves sheep in Gucci sneakers, bleating in unison to the tune of 'engagement metrics'. Their 'authenticity' is a performance choreographed by unseen shepherds: marketing departments, trend forecasters, and the occasional astrologer who insists Rahu entering Saturn demands a new protein shake. Imagine the influencer as a Matryoshka doll. Open the lacquered exterior, and inside you'll find another influencer. Then another... until at the core sits an internata PR agency, desperately Googling 'best time to post thirst trap'. The herd morality trickles downward—or upward—until everyone is both shepherd and sheep, bleating into the void. So, who influences the influencer? The herd itself. The influencer is merely the loudest sheep who convinces us that following is leading, without mentioning anything about going up any garden path. In other words, quite the Nietzschean.

Al's next reach is world-building: spatial intelligence that can reconstruct and simulate 3D realities

Space, the Final Frontier



Shailesh Haribhakti & Anil Nair

ast month, startup World Labs released Marble, its frontier multimodal 3D world model. It's a gigantic leap, unleashing spatial intelligence that allows AI to interact with the physical 3D world, beyond language and 2D images as was the case before.

Marble is led by Chinese American Li Fei-Fei, computer science professor at Stanford, currently on leave to pursue this exciting endeavour. She is the founding co-director of Stanford's Human-Centered AI Institute, and co-founder and CEO of World Labs, best known for creating ImageNet in 2006, a largescale visual learning and benchmarking dataset that advanced AI's deep learning and vision capabilities. She's called 'Godmother of AI' and her remarkablejourney began in Beijing, where her family ran a dry-cleaning shop.

While there's so much excitement around AI mainstreaming and its widespread use in enhancing creativity and productivity. Lithinks it falls short of the next level — perceiving, navigating and responding in the physical world like humans do.

Libelieves the deficit is spatial intelligence, which defines how humans interact fluently with the physical world, and spatially grounded imagination that ignites human creativity

In her words, 'History is full of civilisation-defining moments where spatial intelligence played a central role. In ancient Greece, Eratosthenes transformed shadows into geometry to calculate the world's circumference. Hargreave's 'Spinning Jenny' revolutionised textile manufacturing through spatial insight: arranging multiple spindles side-by-side in a single frame that allowed one worker to spin multiple threads simultaneously, increasing productivity eight-fold. Watson and Crick discovered DNA's structure by physically building 3D molecular models.' In each case, text alone would never ha-



### Al Brahmasmi

ve been enough So, what does Marble's world model do? It grasps locational specifics, lighting, objects and layout of the environment, accounting for movement and spatial consistency from different angles, turning them into navigable 3D environments. They can be explored, edited, expanded or simulated, bringing a new dimension to AI.

Envision a video of an object shattering, produced using GenAI models. It might appear real, but it is hallucinate ing physics, not properly simulating hem, without considering gravity or fragility. Marble, by making world models accessible beyond the world of research, opens amazing possibilities for several sectors:

Filmmakers and game creators can create scenes more vividly, constrained less by budget, blending art, play and simulation, turning storyboards into experiences in ways that only large studios could attempt earlier.

Architects can design structures more thoroughly, safely and in much less time, iterating layouts after simulating human interactions.

World models leveraging spatial AI for sharper infrastructural scrutiny will also reshape insurance processes because of physical world consequences. Urban growth and disaster scenarios can be simulated with real and synthetic data, enhancing stress-test-

ing and risk-assessment capabilities. Designers can explore their creative urges across form, fashion and material in more satisfying, collaborative

Scientists can integrate multidimensional simulation with vast arrays of data points, overcoming lab and compute constraints.

Robots can be trained in simulated 3D environments, increasing contextual relevance and flexibility reducing risks.

Educators can now see the world as a classroom, with immersive reconstruction of history and apprenticeship simulations for surgery, aviation, metallurgy and governance, enabling higher absorptive levels.

While GenAI is about LLMs, which predict the next word, largeworldmodels(LWMs)predict spatial geometry and physics too. LWMs can understand, reason and act in a 3D world, a massive transition to 'embodied AI'

Haven't autonomous cars been using spatial intelligence? Sure, they have. But there's a difference. For starters, it's tech-heavy, using LIDAR (light detection and ranging), cameras, radar, ultrasonic sensors, GPS and SLAM (simultaneous localisation and mapping), for identifying lanes, pedestrians, obstacles, other vehicles and trafficlights; for path and motion planning, 3D maps and collision avoidance — all only for driving.

In contrast, LWMs are 3D representations with multi-domain spatial reasoning for indoor, outdoor and imagined spaces, aiming to create machines that can imagine, remember, understand, simulate and navigate spaces, comprehending structures of a real or

'Embodied AI' is what Elon Musk has been promoting with Optimus, a humanoid robot that can handle daily tasks. So, too, is Apptronik, funded in part by Google, whose humanoid robots are used for warehousing and ma-

It's a subject that has engaged Meta's outgoing chief AI scientist Yann Le-Cun, who is developing AI assistants with spatial awareness capable of perceiving, interpreting and moving through physical environments. What it could have led to could well be called a multimodal metaverse—the possibility, after a decade and more, of shifting the metaverse from a static assortment of 3D assets into an involved, immersive ecosystem powered by LWMs.

With rendering being so realistic, interactions being autonomous and la-

tency being low, it potentially allows for the creation of a personalised, evolving, co-experienced universe co-habited by friends, colleagues and associates

As such, world models promise to do for expericivilisation-defining ence what the inmoments where spatial ternet did for inintelligence played a formation decacentral role.... In each des ago. But this case, text alone would scenario is in the realm of speculation, with NYU

professor Yann LeCun announcing his departure from Meta.

History is full of

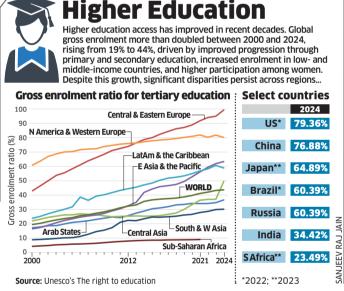
never have been

enough: Fei-Fei Li

Nonetheless, with AI finally mastering the ground beneath our feet, is this the beginning of the shift from the language model to the world model?

Haribhakti is an independent director and Nair is senior fellow. Portulans Institute. Washington DC





# **Bell Curves** ■ R Prasad

Please, sir, I want some more data.

# School of Good Eating RESSTECH





**Pawan Agarwal & Pulkit Mathur** 

India stands at a turning point in its nutrition journey. Undernutrition persists even as childhood overweight, obesity, early-onset diabetes and fatty liver disease are rising. A November 2025 Lancet 3-paper series, 'Ultra-Processed Foods and Human Health', warns that children are consuming unprecedented levels of packaged, salty, sugary and fatty foods. In India, these foods appear in school tiffin, canteens and shops, shaping habits before adulthood.

This is why lessons from Japan and Vietnam matter: These two Asian countries show what becomes possible when schools serve as the frontline of nutrition and food culture—not just places where meals are served, but where lifelong habits are formed. Japan's kyushoku (school lunch) sys-

tem is perhaps the world's strongest school-nutrition model. Children receive a freshly cooked, balanced meal each day rice, vegetables, protein foods, soup, and fruit or milk — designed by nutritionists. But Japan's true innovation is behavioural: food is served in classrooms, children take turns distributing it, handwashing and hygiene are mandatory, and teachers explain where ingredients

come from and why balance matters. This routine is anchored by shokuiku. Japan's national food-education policy, which was started with Basic Law of Shokuiku in 2005, and followed with School Health Law in 2008. Shokuiku embeds food literacy, gratitude, manners, slow eating, seasonality and waste reduction into everyday school life. Japan continues to record among the lowest childhoodobesity rates in the developed world. Vietnam has adapted Japan's principles

into a practical, scalable model. The country's National Institute of Nutrition and Aiinomoto Vietnam support schools in providing balanced meals with standard ised portions, child-friendly preparations and strict hygiene. Schools follow 45-min seated lunch breaks, classroom serving and daily handwashing.

Food education runs across the curriculum, with children learning about nutrition, sustainability and hygiene. Families pay modest meal fees, keeping the system viable. Vietnam proves that structured school meals and daily food education are possible even without large budgets.

In India, government schools run PM POSHAN (midday meal scheme), the world's largest feeding programme, covering 118 mn children across 11.2 lakh schools. Yet, quality, safety, vegetable diversity and eating time vary widely Private schools rely almost entirely on home-packed tiffin that have UPFs, bakery items instant noodles or leftovers. School canteens often sell foods high in salt, sugar and unhealthy fats

These inconsistent food environments contribute to India's rising childhood metabolic disease. Supply-side measures front-of-pack labelling (FoPL), sugar advisories or junk-food restrictions - cannot succeed unless schools also reshape eating habits. Many schools offer only 15-20 mins for meals, encouraging rushed eating and waste.

India needs two approaches to build



Wholesome education

for government schools, and another for private schools.

In state schools, PM POSHAN must be strengthened through a simple, balancedmeal framework developed by nutritionists. PPPs can diversify meals and improve quality. These upgrades must include better kitchens, clean drinking water and proper handwashing stations. Training cooks in healthy, child-friendly preparation, and ensuring a 30-min lunch break will help children eat calmly and develop mindful routines

▶ Private schools should be encouraged to introduce classroom-based meal catering—through on-site or centralised kitchens—while still allowing home tiffin aligned with balanced guidelines. Ban UPFs. Classroom serving creates a calm, structured food environment, and for working parents, school catering also reduces morning stress while ensuring that children receive nutritious and equitable meals every day.

Both types of schools can add 10-min nutrition mini-lessons before lunch, linked to the day's meal and taught through stories, simple activities. food facts, farm insights, gratitude practices and table manners.

Japan and Vietnam demonstrate that improving what children eat must go hand in hand with improving how, where and why they eat. Habits form through routine, repetition and role modelling. India can adapt their core principles: balanced meals, calm lunch breaks, nutrition mini-lessons, class-

room-based serving, limits on UPFs, and teaching hygiene and table manners as part of food culture. India now has both the opportunity and the responsibility to create its own school-food revolution.

Agarwal is former CEO, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), and Mathur is professor, food and nutrition, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi

# Identifying a

## Forgotten Tune There is a peculiar joy in sud-

denly identifying a melody that had slipped from conscious recall. One moment, the tune drifts like a ghost — familiar, yet elusive—and then, with a spark, recognition floods in This instant of clarity feels transcendent, as if a missing pie ce of the self has been restored. Of course, these days, you

can identify an earworm by asking apps like Shazam and SoundHound, or your voice attendant on your phone. But what's the fun—and rush of iov—in that? Research shows that the hu-

man brain can recognise familiar music in just 100-300 milliseconds thanks to fast temporal circuitry that

locks onto patterns of sound. Unlike everyday details—where we left our keys, what we ate for breakfast — music occupies a privileged place in memory. Lyrics and melodies are stored with strong emotional and contextual linkages, making them unusually resilient.

When a forgotten tune resurfaces, the hippocampus and auditory cortex collaborate to retrieve and match stored patterns. Dopamine release accompanies this recognition, producing a rush of pleasure akin to solving a puzzle or reuniting with an old friend. The joy is not merely nostalgia; it is the brain rewarding itself for successful recall.



## **Action and** Renunciation

### JAYA ROW

Renunciation has been misunderstood as giving up the good things of life to adopt a life of deprivation and misery. Hence, people shun spirituality and do not benefit from the power of renunciation. Renunciation is not giving up things you enjoy. It is moving up to far more fulfilling avenues. Action and renunciation go together. They are not mutually exclusive

Renunciation is growth. When a caterpillar transforms into a but terfly, its erstwhile life of darkness and limitation vanishes. Similarly, you experience freedom, joy and cheer, and live a life of effortless excellence with renunciation

Sri Ramakrishna spoke of 4 types of fish that a fisherman enco unters. The wise fish never gets caught. It sees the net coming and swims away. The second gets trapped but manages to break free. The third is ensnared but struggles to get out of the net. The fourth, oblivious to the life-threatening situation bites the net and feels all is well! The Gita speaks of 4 types of people—the bhogi, yogi, sanyasi and jnani.

The jnani is ever free, never bound by the world. The sanyasi understands the danger of worldly entanglement and manages to steer clear. The vogi is bound but endeavours to escape. The bhogi is blissfully ignorant of the risks of worldly involvement and is content with instant pleasures that his life affords.

## **Chat Room**

## A Liberator or A Colonialist?

'How India Subverted Macaulay' by Arnie Guha (Dec 11) underplays the damage done by Macaulay's education project and Briti sh rule. His aim was to create a thin anglicised elite while systematically undermining India's own languages, knowledge systems and spiritual traditions. This cultural and intellectual destruction, combined with colonial economic policies that fuelled famines, deindustrialisation and a massive drain of wealth, left millions impoverished. Then there is the enormous material plunder—from iconic treasures like lt on quasi-slavery and forced labour—which makes the later success of a small English-speaking lite utterly insuffi ce the human and civilisational loss imposed on India. Gauray Modak Mumbai

At a time when Hinduism or Islam's traditional values were discriminatory on the basis of caste, religion, gender and place of birth, Macaulay sought equal justice and education for all Indians. Similar values led him to demand universal rights, equality in social and gov positions, and in education, law and justi-



Indians to be proud of their own historical glories that had been largely forgotten. Was this colonial mindset or enlightenment? Of course, Macau-

ce. This enabled

lay was guilty of racism and hy pocritical justifications for colonialism. So, what's needed is a serious national discourse and debate on the issue so that the larger Indian society comes to terms with what it should embrace and what it should shun as regards the Macaulian mindset. Pradeep Kumar

## **Politics Drowns Our Triumphs**

Apropos the news report, 'Shah Blames Nehru-Gandhi Family for Vote Theft in LS' (Dec 11), Neh ru the scholar-statesman not only led the freedom struggle from the front but also did the groundwork for most of modern India's spectacular achievements. During his 17-yr premiership, Nehru laid the foundation of India's enduring friendship with the USSR. which culminated in Putin's recent visit. India's association with the erstwhile USSR established the public sector and heavy industry, fulfilled critical defence requirements, helped start the space programme, and provided crucial diplomatic support during India's wars with its belligerent neighbours. Nehru's indelible contribution to independent India should be acknowledged. Chander Shekhar Dogra

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## CONTRAPUNTO

Middle age is when you're sitting at home on a Saturday night and the telephone rings and you hope it isn't for you - OGDEN NASH

# Boss Is Calling...

Should seniors desist from work-calling juniors after working hours? Yes. Should there be a law? No

n 1914, Henry Ford doubled assembly line pay for working less. When he shortened the workday from nine hours to eight, and raised daily wage from \$2.34 to \$5, a US paper called it 'Gold Rush'. This miracle won't happen now, but something modest, yet essential, has been a footfor over 20 years, ever since France's highest court held that a worker can't be fired for not taking calls after clocking out.

When the campaign for a 'right to disconnect' was at its peak globally in 2017-18, buoyed by successes in France, Germany, etc, NCP MP Supriya Sule introduced her Right to Disconnect Bill, 2018 in Lok Sabha. Seven years later, she's back with Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025 – just two months after Kerala became the first state to float a namesake bill of its own. As private member bills go, Sule's is unlikely to become law, but it's a great idea regardless.

The daily tyranny of phone and mail - also known as 'second shift' - does nothing for productivity. Corporate uncles sternly



prescribing 72-hour workweeks should look up results of a 2014 Stanford  $research-employee \ output \ plummeted$ after putting in 50 hours per week, and 'work martyrs' with 70 hours on the clock were no more useful than those with 55 hours.

That was Ford's point too. He figured that less could be more, and well-rested workers cost him less in factory accidents. Modern research also shows work is the

"most important sleep thief". So when a boss makes a habit of intruding into workers' me-time, they are grumpy and less productive next day. That's why sensitive employers evolved safeguards years ago. VW in 2012 stopped its BlackBerry servers from sending emails to staff after work hours. Its rival Daimler allowed staff to auto-delete incoming mails while on leave.

And that's the best way to deal with the modern 'on-call' culture that lets you – just like Hotel California – check out any time you like, but never leave. Even France, where the right to disconnect became official in 2017, makes employers and employees draw the work-life line through yearly negotiations. A too-strict interpretation, enforced by bureaucrats and courts, will only lead to unnecessary litigation and harassment, hampering business activity. It can also increase work pressure on staff, because deadlines are sacrosanct, and if the office can't call you after you clock out, you'll need to clock in longer. Hence, we're all for disconnecting, but not by fiat.

## You Are Your Font

Rubio junks a typeface 'coz it's too PC. For many, the look of a typeface is an aesthetic choice. Whatever works

s many fonts as you consume every day, you likely don't give them much thought, but they do contain lots of thoughts. In Calibri these tend towards wokeness, US secretary of state Marco Rubio has objected. His predecessor, who had laid out the red carpet for Calibri, figured it would improve accessibility for readers with low vision, dyslexia, and text-to-speech screen readers. Rubio's rolling back the clock, to Times New Roman. Because of its association with "tradition, formality and ceremony". It is, after all, nearly a century old. Calibri, that upstart, is not even 20.

Govt, academia and courts are overall slow-moving establishments, where talk of changing typefaces is easily despirited. But barring such



islands of constancy, digitalisation has been pushing experiments everywhere. India is a particularly exciting space, with its 22 official languages Imagine that you have to publicise an Odia music festival, but can only access two Odia fonts. That would put real limits on communication. So design studios and

type foundries in India are seeing a lot of dynamic action. And unlike the utilitarian approach of early digital fonts, nowadays there's a focus on balancing contemporary sensibilities with our rich, traditional calligraphic aesthetics.

What the Rubio saga really highlights is that, yes, fonts have aesthetic conventions, but these can be deeply wrapped up in individual ego. In the early days of figuring out which fonts worked best on screens, Steve Jobs famously took a calligraphy class at Reed College. Bill Gates...did not take calligraphy classes. Hence Apple's and Microsoft's different approaches to fonts. But also, different publics have different moods. The pandemic saw plain fonts lose favour and curvy, expressive ones gain it. TikTok and Instagram were on trend font-wise, and many businesses too. In picking a font, you pick a voice. There is also, of course, the option of using a 'weird' font just for fun.

# Voodoo & Hoodoo

It's super that you and I don't believe in superstition and all that rubbish

## **Jug Suraiya**



Like the man who said, "Thank God I'm an atheist!", I claim to be a rationalist who would thank a palmist for confirming that I have no time for superstitious nonsense.

We inhabit a world of Artificial Intelligence and space missions to the Moon and Mars. But there's a secret space within us, hidden away from the realm of science and rationality, which we inherited from ancient tribal memories, the origins of which lie buried beneath the hourglass sands of the centuries.

Among the many phobias that modern medical science enumerates is triskaidekaphobia, an irrational fear of the number 13 as a bringer of bad luck. This phobia is so widespread and intense that many buildings do not list the 13th floor, going from 12 straight to 14. Thirteen becomes particularly unlucky if it falls on a Friday, when people are assailed by friggatriskaidekaphobia, fear of Friday the 13th.

The secret history of superstition traces the fear of 13 to Norse mythology when Loki, god of mischief, was the 13th guest at a feast during which the Norse god Baldur was killed. In Christian belief, 13 is associated with the 13 who

sat for Christ's Last Supper, with Friday being the day of jugularvein the Crucifixion. Do you touch wood or keep your fingers crossed to avert misfortune? In German and Celtic lore protective spirits lived in trees,

which you touched to seek their aid. In Christian belief touching wood became symbolic of touching the cross. In pagan custom, crossed fingers were meant to keep your wishes safe from

harm till they were fulfilled. In early Christianity, a crossed-finger handshake was a clandestine identification of a fellow believer. People say "Bless you!" when someone sneezes, a custom dating to mediaeval

times when the dreaded Black Plague, which killed millions, was heralded by a sneeze, calling for a benediction on the sneezer. In Kutchi belief a single sneeze brings bad luck and has immediately to be followed

by a second sneeze, induced if necessary by tickling the nostrils with a wick of cloth. I don't believe in all that rot, I declare, as I touch wood. With fingers crossed, to be doubly sure.

# Who Killed Goa? Not Just Luthra Bros

Arresting owners of the nightclub isn't enough when officials who wink at the destruction of a once-pristine state go about their business. They are the ones who allow shaadis near Olive Ridley nesting zones and hand out coastal zone biz licences

## Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi



The night that Birch by Romeo Lane burned, the DJ was shouting over a crowd that did not yet know it was trapped in hell. Fireworks went off in a thatched, flammable structure. By dawn on Dec 7, 2025, twenty five

We call this a tragedy. The travesty, however, is the collaboration between the state and private greed that gets off scot-free each time.

Birch opened in 2024 in an eco-sensitive intertidal zone, where construction was tightly restricted by law. Vigilant locals complained way back in Dec 2023, when they wrote to authorities, alleging illegal structures were being put up. Only in April 2024 (after the club ran for the full lucrative length of the winter season) did the Arpora-Nagoa panchayat issue a demolition notice.

Here the story devolves into a familiar, devious drill: the owner appealed; the Directorate of Panchayats stayed the demolition; for a year and a half, the file gathered dust as the club racked up revenue. The formula is simple: violate now, pay later'.

Meanwhile, the Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority (GCZMA) received at least two complaintsabout the same property. This authority, whose own job is to "protect and improve the quality of coastal environment", decided it had nothing to say about a 50,000 square foot club on salt pans, with its sewage flowing into the water.

Joints like Birch are not the exception in Goa but, increasingly, the norm.

Goa Foundation - the state's most eminent environmental watchdog - has a public interest litigation archive that reads like an obituary list of norms: contempt petitions over illegal constructions on the Mandovi riverbank; a case seeking demolition of a hotel in Bambolim; a ₹77cr

violation of CRZ norms. If you walk on Morjim beach, you might well run into a wedding on the shore, as many did last month, near an Olive Ridley turtle nesting zone. Upon complaints, tourism department claims it granted no permission. Yet, the mandap went up.

And only afterwards was the resort fined. So what was

signature bridge" over Tiracol river, approved in

more lucrative for the resort: to charge handsomely for an industrial-grade nuisance of a wedding on a beach, or to pay a small fine and carry on as ever?

But such violations impact Goa's environment. Pollution boards flag high faecal coliform in seawater, lakes and estuaries. And what poisons the environment inevitably drives down Goa's dwindling tourism. After all, why would anyone in their right mind fly across continents to swim in other people's sewage?

Now, in light of the Birch tragedy, the state wants to



show us that it is serious. In a dazzling show of optics, the Luthra brothers were traced and detained in Thailand. Their photographs, hands tied, circulated on Indian news channels. This is laudable: the club owners must indeed stand trial. But the speed is instructive.

When a nightclub burns, it's easy to produce villains in handcuffs. Harder, somehow, to bring back the men who looted Indian banks of billions and ruined the life savings of innocent middle-class citizens. Jeweller Mehul Choksi was arrested in Belgium earlier this year, eight years after he had fled to

since 2019, fighting an extradition order that Indian authorities have still not converted into his physical return. The state hunts down nightclub owners in a matter of days, but billionaires who loot the country remain conveniently out of India.

The Birch tragedy also feeds into the narrative of Goa being ruined by "outsiders" - the mildly xenophobic term used to describe settlers. And

part-time residents - like myself. But this is an opportune time to examine that while outsiders might have been directly responsible for this calamity, the state authorities - the insiders, sons and daughters of the soil - are indirectly culpable for the deaths of innocent people.

After all, it was a Goan minister's TCP amendments that "corrected" land use over roughly 17-26L square metres, largely turning orchards and natural cover into settlement. The same dispensation tried to reclassify Goa's iconic coconut palm as "grass", making it easier to clear for construction and push concrete deeper into the coast.

Real accountability cannot end with a televised deportation of a devilish duo from Delhi-a cheap sort of reality TV stunt in which the bad guys are caught and summarily sent to jail. Real accountability should examine, under oath, who stayed the demolition order; why GCZMA disowned an obviously coastal structure; which ministers and senior officials pressed to relax shack norms, expand pools on the sand, and look away from turtle beaches turned into banquet halls.

It would call before a commission not just the Luthras, but also the panchayat officials who let files languish, TCP officers who stamped building plans, tourism and environment ministers who sold "ease of doing business" as an alibi for lawlessness, and the fire authorities who signed off on narrow access roads, which a truck could never navigate.

Such an inquiry would freeze new coastal licences until an independent audit of all CRZ violations is complete, publish a public register of offenders, and recommend criminal liability for officials who enabled them

There is no point dancing on Goa's grave and then pretending to weep at the funeral.

# Ordering A Baby Who'll Grow Up Smart & Tall. Is That A Problem?

Steven Pinker recently noted, children born with specs desired by parents are now a scientific possibility. Should this be left only for mum-and-dad to decide? Some ethicists say yes

## **Ananya Khera**

ognitive psychologist and professor at Harvard, Steven Pinker, in a recent tweet, referred to his 2003 prediction that parents wouldn't opt for direct gene-editing of embryos for higher IQ. He called it the "designer baby myth". But, as Pinker noted, parents seem to have found another way - selecting the smartest from a range of embryos. While direct gene-editing is banned for reproduction, there's a market for 'designer babies' in IVF and ART.

Consumer-driven genetic selection for offspring-for traits beyond disease-prevention, like IQ or height-may be closer than believed. Gene-editing for 'human enhancement' is still speculative science. Even gene-scissors (CRISPR-Cas9) tech has some way to go, because it can handle only one gene at a time. Most traits like IQ, height are polygenic, meaning multiple genes handle a single trait or disease. A lowdown on what's going on.

What are 'designer babies'? | Babies custom-made. To produce/make babies with traits 'desirable'. How do you do that? Parents-to-be have been selecting embryos on the basis of risk of disease in IVF clinics in what is called Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD). This is legal, and practised largely to prevent hereditary diseases. Here, IVF-created embryos are screened and parents select the embryo they can implant for a baby who's predicted to have the lowest risk of the genetic disorder.

On paper, it's simple, as described in Quillette.com. An embryo-selection/screening company and IVF provider harvest at least 15 eggs with daily hormone injections for 8-14 days, fertilised by a sperm of choice. After 4-5 days, a blastocyst develops: a hollow ball of cells with an inner mass & outer layer. The outer layer develops into the placenta. The inner mass goes on to become the foetus. Extracts from each embryo are screened for genetic disorder/chromosomal abnormalities and polygenic (multiple-gene) scores given for each parameter measured. Parents choose which embryo to implant –

a best-fit case. 'Designing' through selection.

Gene-editing tool CRISPR-Cas9 could, in theory, also modify genes in embryos to enhance or select specific traits - including IQ or physical appearance. This is still hypothetical, but as tech progresses, the conversation on 'designer babies' is growing louder.

Question is, regardless of selection from a range of embryos or gene-edited embryos, should parents be allowed to choose non-medical traits of a foetus? Can features be 'designed' by selecting/altering genes? Could you ultimately tailor your baby's genetic code?

Parental autonomy | One school of bioethicists argues it



decide which school a child attends or what they eat, even what values they grow up with. Parents decide on children's medical treatment and parents ever so often leave no stone unturned to make their children's lives better.

So, genetic choices, it is argued, must also be seen in that context. Selecting embryos with lower risk of disease, or improved chance at becoming successful with a higher IQ can simply be seen as an act of care, as an extension of responsibilities.

**Reproductive freedom** | Viewed from a reproductive freedom prism, parents should be free to make reproductive decisions, including genetic ones, as long as it does not

harm the child. Even if some consider parents choosing height or eye colour not kosher, bioethicists argue that parental choice cannot be disregarded.

This is where the ethics debate intensifies. Some in the scientific fraternity fear it may be re-popularising eugenics, a discredited movement that believed that social and intellectual characteristics were based on heredity and race.

But genetics research has made massive strides in the last 100 years. Scientists have collected tonnes of genetic info for the human genome project aided with new testing technologies. This Big Data is studied not to find heredity but to understand which genes influence what traits

It's science, so why fear it? | However, some geneticists caution that modern genetic screening & counselling, a socially-influenced field, could be used to create pressure on parents. If society encourages certain traits, reproductive choice becomes social pressure. Screening embryos for things like behaviour, intelligence or personality would be similar to past eugenics efforts, which tried to control who was "allowed" to be born.

But, truth is the future may already have been born. Screening of embryos provides a polygenic risk score for each trait investigated; these can include predictors for non-medical traits also - IQ, shape of ears, eye colour, what have you. Per Quillette.com, one company already advertises it can predict IQ levels of embryos, for "customers". Is that legal? In US, trait selection beyond disease-related is banned federally and 'discouraged" in private clinics.

Some chafe about gene labs playing god, but the only reality is that deciding where to draw the line needs regulation. There is no argument against screening for hereditary disease. Conversation has moved to how to govern providers of such services, and respecting parental autonomy. Non-medical selection, like sex or appearance, is frowned upon globally, but science isn't waiting. And parents are willing.

## Calvin & Hobbes



BLOOD RED AND THE OTHER YELLOW STRIPED, LIKE A BUG

BUT IF I HAD CONTACTS

I COULD MAKE ONE EYE





## **Sacred**space Destiny is



way. When it isn't, don't call it destiny; call it injustice, treachery, or simple bad

a good thing

when it's

Joseph Heller

# Sacred Truth Hidden Inside A 'Bad' Word

## **Partha Sinha**

very civilisation maintains a → blacklist of words – impolite syllables that must never feature in annual reports, family WhatsApp groups or polite audio on flights. We treat them like emotional contraband. Yet strangely, these forbidden words carry a voltage that 'civilised' phrases cannot. They arrive unannounced, like monsoon wind-raw, truthful, embarrassingly alive.

A curse word is rarely polite. But it is almost always honest. Stub your toe at 2am and no human in history has declared, What a poetic reminder of impermanence.' Pain doesn't subscribe to etiquette. It erupts. Profanity appears when life outruns grammar, when emotion refuses to sit straight. It is the soul sprinting past the traffic cones of respectability-an emotional emergency exit. If spirituality is the discipline of

have always known that the sacred and the irreverent are cousins. Zen monks laugh at silence. Sufi fakirs flirt with God like tipsy poets. And closer home, the Pushti Margis of the Shuddha Advaita tradition lovingly hurl mock-abuses at Krishn during Phalgun-playful songs

meeting oneself without costume,

profanity-used without cruelty-is a

crude, but because it's naked. It comes

from the basement of being, not the

barging onto stage, tearing the script

and shouting its truth unsupervised.

This isn't a defence of

verbal vandalism. Profanity

meant to wound is violence.

Profanity meant to ventilate

is weather. But profanity

used consciously, even

meaning lives.

playfully-that's where

Mystical traditions

drawing room. It is the inner child

surprising participant. Not because it's

where the Divine is teased, chided, even scolded like a butter-thief caught red-handed. This is not disrespect it's intimacy. One only teases whom one deeply loves. The sacred need not always be solemn. That's the hidden role profanity

plays in ordinary relationships. Friends curse freely because they trust each other. Lovers do it to melt distance. Old

classmates do it to time-travel. In these moments, profanity isn't contamination – it's communion. A linguistic hug THE SPEAKING TREE with sharp edges.

Contrast this with corporate language-HR-approved tofu. Tasteless, safe, professionally deodorised. We write emails the way diplomats negotiate treaties. Passion is sanitised, frustration is formatted, truth is spellchecked until it stops being truth. A single unfiltered exclamation

often expresses more reality than a 40-slide deck. Because profanity is a pressure test.

If you can't say the forbidden word even to yourself, are you confronting your life or drafting a press note about it? Sometimes clarity arrives in four letters, not fourteen bullet points.

The spirituality of profanity lies not in the word, but in the permission it grants-to be unarmoured, unedited, unstrategised. To feel fully without checking how it sounds. Clean language has its place. So does truth in its banyanbranch wildness.

Enlightenment isn't sterility. It is awareness. And occasionally, awareness arrives disguised as the one word we're told never to say - the word that leaps out before the ego gets to comb its hair.

The divine is comfortable with our rough edges. It is we who panic at our own wildness. Maybe truth is most alive

when it forgets to behave.



# THE ASIAN AGE

12 DECEMBER 2025

# Electoral reforms merit more attention in Parl

the Parliament is meant to offer a platform for debating issues that need the attention of the government of the day and give policy directions to the executive. The discussion on two important topics, the national song and electoral reforms at the start of the Winter Session, however, beg the question as to

whether these were indeed fruitful. For instance, the Opposition may have won the debate on the national song, but to what end? It has only served to expose, and to some extent legitimise, the ruling party's deep animosity towards the past leaders of the Indian National Congress.

As for the debate on electoral reforms, it only led to the old blame game. The gov-

ernment, as expected, justified the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls across India, while the Opposition criticised the weakening the Election Commission of India as well as its alleged misuse by the government as a tool to hijack the popular

Union home minister Amit Shah, who led the charge or the ruling party, made the political point that the Opposition parties are objecting to the legitimate exercise fearing the deletion of names of illegal immigrants and subsequent loss in elections. He also pointed out the duplicity of the Congress opposing the use of the electronic voting machine whenever it loses the election. Mr Shah indeed has a point to which the Congress has yet to come up with a comprehensive

Mr Shah made the Freudian slip of saying that the SIR is aimed at keeping illegal immigrants out of India's democratic system and that the government will continue with its 'detect, delete and deport' policy

Mr Shah, however, made the Freudian slip of saying that the SIR is aimed at keeping illegal immigrants out of India's democratic system and that the NDA government will continue with its "detect, delete and deport" policy against them. The SIR in fact has, or ought to have, a larger purpose of regularising the rolls, viz., removal of the names of dead voters, elimination of multiple voter IDs and addressing of the issue of large numbers of migrant electors, and it has been clarified by the Supreme Court while hearing the petitions on SIR that the Election Commission has no mandate to decide who is a citizen and who is not. But if Mr Shah has his way, then all those who fail to find their names

on the voters' list will face the threat of deportation. Mixing up the process of electoral roll revision with an exercise to detect illegal immigrants is not a bona fide action; it actually gives credence to the Opposition charge that the far-from-transparent SIR is

indeed a plan to introduce a National Register of Citizens by another means.

Mr Shah also defended the government's introduction of the law keeping the Chief
Justice of India out of the panel to select the Chief Election Commissioner citing the practice during the Congress governments wherein the government of the day consulted no one while making that choice. And it is a fact that the earlier CECs were an exclusive choice of the government. But that hardly explains what difference made by the present arrangement, where a panel of the Prime Minister, his Cabinet colleague and the Leader of the Opposition recommends the name to the President for the appointment of a person as CEC. Moreover, why does the new law take away the equivalence of the ECs with the CEC by giving the CEC the power to remove them? This is a further, and more damaging, assault on the independence of the institution. And, too, Mr Gandhi has been pointing out instances of vote theft but they went

unanswered, first by the EC, and now by the Treasury benches in Parliament.

Thus, while the BJP is justified in pointing fingers at the excesses of the Congress governments of the past, it should not limit its contribution to merely an exercise in whataboutery. Both the ruling party and the Opposition should acknowledge their mistakes and look for ways to clean up and strengthen the electoral process. In fact, the issue of electoral reform calls for much greater attention than that bestowed on it in Parliament by the two sides.

# Global recognition for Diwali

India's most popular festival Diwali, or Deepavali, comes only once a year, but when it comes, it brings good cheer. Well over a billion people celebrate it in India while the diaspora is spreading it worldwide.

As the conflict-ridden world gets more fractious and polarised than ever, Unesco, the  $\,$ otherwise largely powerless United Nations' educational, scientific and cultural arm sees a need to preserve the social histories of its diverse communities.

The Durga Puja made the list of Unesco's intangible heritage list last year and next year it will be the Chhath Puja. Diwali made it to a list of over 700 elements from around the world as the 16th Indian heritage entry that reflects the country's soft

an culture gets global recognition, like with yogg gaining univers ity and even getting a day marked in the calendar, India must understand the cultural and social power of its heritage is perhaps as great as the spiritual.

It is particularly relevant that festivals like Diwali, which celebrates the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness, are essentially secular in nature, which lends them greater resonance among all the people of the country rather than just people who follow the majority religion. The rituals are as much about family and social bonding as they are about religiosity.

Diwali now sits among the Kumbh Mela and the Garba Dance as cultural elements that are uniting in nature as the intangible heritage list is drawn from oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festivals as opposed to rooted heritage like monuments and archaeological sites, etc.

With its rising global popularity, Diwali, a jewel in India's crown of festivals of many religions, being recognised universally is a matter of national pride, but this must be seen as acceptance of the importance of one of many forces that bind Indians socially.

Many Diwali rituals are charming and must be conserved while the Unesco convention's message of best practices and safeguarding measures must apply to ensure the safe use of fireworks to make the festival even more celebrated and its relevance

## THE ASIAN AGE

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# Monopoly in skies sets off SAVE HIMALAYAS flight trauma for Indians



ach and every airflying in India's skies, and those who run them, on both domestic and international routes, must know that their highest priority is to ensure the safety of their passengers, and not to make money and profits for their shareholders. Therefore, both IndiGo (with a domestic market share of 63-64 per cent) and Air India (with 28 per cent), who have turned the domestic aviation sector into a duopoly market (one in which there are only two sellers), must ensure that the Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) rules for pilots are treated as an article of faith. If that is not done, then just one air disaster, killing hundreds of passengers, is waiting to happen to inflict irreparable damage to their credibility, reputation and the trust of millions of Indian passengers.

The present crisis created iGo isn't just extremely despicable, but the issue deserves to be dealt with strictly by the Government of India at the highest level. The crisis has overwhelmed the ministry civil aviation and the DGCA. Both have a lot to answer for, notwithstanding putting up a brave face with a belated show-cause notice to the IndiGo CEO and COO, resulting in a virtual unapologetic defence of the indefensible by the latter.

The harsh truth is that ever since India opened up civil aviation to private operators in 1991-1992, the collective end result has been deplorable and disastrous, due mainly to uncontrolled greed and conspicuous lack of intent. Let facts and figures of the previous bunch of private carriers' deliberate mischief be recalled while dealing with the nasty realitv of todav's IndiGo-stimulated civil aviation mayhem, showing utter contempt for the Government of India's aviation regulations.

Contextually, the CEOs of

both IndiGo and Air India operate the nation's two biggest carriers with no experience of a vast domestic aviation market of a continent-size country. IndiGo boss Pieter Elbers was earli-er CEO of KLM in Holland, which simply doesn't have any domestic air traffic. And Air India's boss Campbell Wilson was CEO of low-cost airline Scoot in Singapore, a city-state where all flights are international, operating out of Changi Airport, and domestic Obviously, for both of them, India's vast domestic sector would be too lucrative a

prospect. No wonder both Air India and IndiGo are more into money, cash and profits, buying new aircraft, flexing muscles and yet afflicted with frequent flight ops glitches. The current IndiGocreated crisis in Indian aviation should be an eye-opener to the Indian government. Shortly after Operation over six when the government asked for termination of lease of Turkish Boeing-777s and rethink on using Istanbul as a hub, IndiGo's CEO, controlling a fleet of 434 aircraft. showed unprecedented arrogance, and virtually refused. He told the media: "We will continue flying to Istanbul and also got a lease extension for Turkish Boeing-777s for six months." One wonders why this was tolerated by the DGCA and civil aviation ministry. What gives these foreign CEOs this kind of hidden power? Will an Indian CEO of KLM or a Singapore airline dare defy the governments of those countries on operating from Amsterdam or Singapore?

While around three dozen so-called aviation operators damaged India since the 1990s, only one (the former KLM CEO) has delivered a lasting blow. Did the Dutchman come to India to oversee the demise of our civil aviation system?

Let us now examine the track record of private play-

While around three dozen operators damaged India since the 1990s, only one (the former KLM CEO) has delivered a lasting blow. Today Air India and Indians sorely miss J.R.D. Tata and Ratan Tata, stalwarts of exemplary probity who understood high-tech aviation.

ers in Indian skies. Air

Carnival (2016-2017); Air Cos-

ta (2013-2017); Air Dravida (2004-2008); Air Mantra (2012-2013); Air Odisha (2011-2019); Air Pegasus (2007-2016); Sahara Airlines (2000-2007) Archana Airways (1991-1999); City Link Airways (1992-1993); Cosmos Airways (1994-1997): Damania Airways (1993-1997); Deccan Cargo (2009-2011); Dove Airlines (2007-2015); East-West Airlines (1992-1995); Easy Air (2015-2015); Elbee Airlines (1994-1998); Goa Way Aviation (1992-1993); Gujarat Airways (1995-2001); Go Air (2005-2021); Go First (2021-2023); Hinduja Cargo Services (1996-2000); Indus Air (2006-2007); Jagson Airlines (2005-2010); Jet Airways (1993-2019); Jet Konnect (2009-2014); Jet Lite (2007-2012); Kairali Airlines (2013-(2003-2012); Kingfisher Red (2008-2012); MDLR Airlines (2007-2009); ModiLuft (1994-1996); NEPC Airlines (1993-1997); Paramount Airways (2005-2010); Raj Air (1993-1994); Supreme Airlines (2016-2018); TruJet (2015-2022); UP Air (1995-1998); VIF Airways (1995-1996).

Do we Indians have any idea what we have been doing in civil aviation? Do we realise how bad we are at running airlines? Is an aviation company like a shopping mall, that it can be run with a trader's instinct. Unfortunately, civil aviation is a public transport-cumservice industry and can't be run with the mentality of traders. It is highly capital-intensive and skilled labourintensive, and those in charge should have the ability to withstand unexpected. unforeseen and unanticipated situations which might lead to hundreds of crores in

cash outflow. Therefore, no private operator should be permitted to start or run an air transport

company just to show off his 'financial wizardry, technological capability and sociopolitical connectivity". It is time for the Government of India to seriously consider taking over one of the two duopoly giants because air transport, especially for a continent-like nation, is a strategic asset. A good first step has been taken with the directive to IndiGo to cut 10 per cent of its flights, but more must be done. IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers'

former employer KLM has a major stake held by both the French and Dutch governments. Air India CEO's former outfit Singapore
Airlines is a publicly listed company, with a majority holding by the Singapore government through investment arm Temaesk Holdings. China's three big state-owned airline groups – Air China, China Eastern and China Southern Airlines — give the govern-ment wide flexibility of choice, strategy and mobility during emergency situations. Today, India's air travellers are at the mercy of IndiGo and Air India. No private company should be allowed to take over either Air India or IndiGo.

Today Air India (and all Indians) sorely miss J.R.D. Tata and Ratan Tata, stalwarts of exemplary probity who understood high-tech aviation. Both understood the supreme importance of passenger flight safety and comfort. They ran Air India in the spirit of public service and not to fleece people. They were "uber capitalists", while the Tata bosses of today have miles to go. Amid today's crisis, Indi-

Go should face the harshest possible punishment for its attempts to break every rule and system, like FDTL and CAR, seeking exemptions from all mandatory stipulations. The airline's reckless route expansion, frequency, capacity with no manpower was nothing but exploitation of staff, passengers and the country. Such unbridled greed for profits can't make the nation's skies safe for

The writer is a life member of the Aeronautical Society of India and an alumnus of the National Defence College, New Delhi. The views expressed here are personal.

On December 11, the world marked International Mountain Day, yet the gravity of the crisis remains widely overlooked. Mountains are melting, eroding and declining faster than our environmental responses. India, with its vulnerable Himalayan region, stands directly in harm's way. Our rivers, climate and biodiversity depend on these fragile ecosystems. If we fail to act now, what will remain for the next generation? And how long can the suffering of mountain communities go unnoticed? Stronger conservation laws, responsible tourism and climate-sensitive development must become national priorities. Protecting mountains is not an environmental preference, it is a foundational necessity.

> Hasnain Rabbani Mumbai

## **AVIATORS IN DGCA**

**DILIP CHERIAN** rightly questions whether generalist bureaucrats are suited to lead India's aviation regulator. Recent events underline this concern: Air India admitted systemic compliance failures after an Airbus a valid airworthiness permit, risking hundreds of lives. Historically, our aviation industry benefited from the leadership of retired IAF officers and aviation professionals with deep operational expertise. Their absence from key regulatory and airline leadership roles now raises safety concerns. Effective oversight in a complex, safety-critical sector demands domain experience, not just administrative seniority. Reinstating seasoned aviators in top posts at the DGCA and airlines could help rebuild a robust compliance culture.

Harsh Pawaria Rohtak, Haryana

## INNOVATE, REGULATE

**MASSIVE COMMITMENTS** by global tech giants underline India's rising importance in the AI landscape, yet they also expose a stark reality: Data centres alone cannot turn the nation into a true technology leader. While foreign investment expands capacity, India continues to underinvest in research and foundational AI development. Unless we strengthen our R&D ecosystem and create stronger public-private research linkages, we risk remaining consumers rather than creators of cutting-edge technology. India must act with intent and urgency — not merely to keep pace with others, but to shape the AI future on its own terms.

K. Chidanand Kumar

## **Bhopinder** Singh



From a jail cell, Imran is getting under the skin of Pak military

kistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan, now incarcerated for several years, appears to be getting under the skin of the country's military establishment, as the excitable statements by Lt Gen. Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, director-general of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), clearly prove. At a high-strung, unprecedented press conference by the DG-ISPR, the implications harked back to Samuel Johnson's saying that "nationalism is the last refuge of the politicians". While there is a ostensible delineation between the civilian politicians and the military generals in Pakistan — the practical reality is that the generals call all the shots, even in the political sphere. It is for a good reason that the Pakistani military is called a "state within a state". As the saying goes, while most countries have armies, in Pakistan, the Pakistani Army has a country attached to it!

At the heated debriefing session, the clearly-flustered DG-ISPR, who in effect heads the propaganda arm of the country's establishment (meaning the armed forces), had to invoke timely nationalism against a man they had put behind bars almost two and a half years back.

One must remember that Imran Khan was actually 'selected" in the 2018 general election (as opposed to 'elected" fair and square) by the Pakistani military themselves, only to be pushed out when the smug Pathan had got too uppity for the liking of the generals. While most of the sparring between the Pakistani "establishment" and the vainglorious Imran was with Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa (the former Pakistan Chief of Army Staff), his successor, now Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, has his own beef.

In October 2019, while Imran was still the PM, the then designated director-general of Inter-Services Intelligence (DG-ISI), Lt Gen. Asim Munir, was unceremoniously bundled out in a sudden reshuffle. The rumour mills had it that Gen. Munir had dug up a lot of dirt over corruption and misconduct by Imran Khan and his partymen, and, more importantly, pertaining to Imran's third wife, Bushra Bibi. Soon, a lackey of Imran, Lt Gen. Faiz Hameed, who would go on to shame himself (he too was later drummed out of the Pakistani Army) and the nation (by kowtowing with the Taliban brazenly just after the fall of Kabul in August 2023), was posted as DG-ISI. Asim Munir had the ignominy of serving the shortest tenure as DG-ISI and he licked his wounds patiently till he got a shot at becoming the Army Chief himself. If Gen. Qamar Bajwa had tied the proverbial noose around Imran's neck, Field Marshal Asim Munir has tightened the knot, very uncomfortably.

Today, a free-for-all demonisation of Imran Khan is taking place by obsequious civilian politicians from the coalition of the unlikely [Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)], along with the full might of Pakistani "establishment". Ironically, this desperate drive of coercion, intimidation and incarceration has only served to

raise Imran Khan's political stock stratospherically. He is the most popular mass leader in Pakistan, even though his party (and many leaders) have been silenced. Imran has symbolically become the pivotal rallying cry as economic morass, diplomatic failures (especially with Afghanistan and India), and societal implosion grips Pakistan. It has become such a powerful sentiment that perhaps even the Pakistani "establishment" realises that a dead Imran Khan would be far more dangerous than a live one, albeit one permanently jailed

Now, all caution of keeping the "uniform" away from the hustle-bustle of partisan politics was thrown to the winds as the DG-ISPR himself railed about Imran as a "national security threat". He went on to link Imran (of Taliban Khan notoriety) directly to India in order to target him as "anti-national". The general shockingly claimed that Imran's agenda "can only come from someone in Delhi". He went on to claim: "Someone sitting there and guiding that... who wishes that this army, which is your armour against *kharjis* and terrorists, sacrificing their lives - stops doing it. This agenda and narrative cannot come from elsewhere". Incredulous as that accusation may sound, the favourite bogey of "India" and "nationalism" (by an Army that has never won any

war, to boot) has returned. Keeping with the times

the DG-ISPR conflated Afghanistan with India in

terms of threats to Pakistan, stating that Pakistan's

military was "standing between the khawarij, ter-

rorists, fitna al-khawarij, fitna al-Hindustan operating from Afghanistan"

A sure sign of unmitigated frustration was when the DG-ISPR forgot temporarily that he was wearing a "uniform" on the pulpit, and yet speaking the language of a goon, as he spewed venom about the retaliatory consequences for Imran Khan and his associates: "We will also come and fight bare-knuckle, there should be no doubt about that". All expectations of measure, restraint and sobriety that is expected of a senior Army officer (that too, on a PR mission) were thrown to the winds, as he spoke the language of an unhinged politician.

Imran Khan is undoubtedly the first civilian leader in many decades to openly call out the bluff and control by the Pakistani "establishment". His open assertion that "neutrals are not neutrals" is the worst kept secret of Pakistan. In desperation, Field Marshal Asim Munir has rushed through the 27th Amendment that also makes him the first Chief of Defence Staff (controlling the Army, Navy, Air Force and Nuclear Command), weakened the Supreme Court, given himself lifelong immunity from prosecution, thrown Imran into jail and virtually given himself a lifelong leadership role. But clearly the shadow of Imran Khan, sitting in jail, still looms large.

The writer is a retired lieutenant-general and a former lieutenant-governor of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Puducherry











NEW DELHI | FRIDAY | 12 DECEMBER 2025

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	84,818.13	0.51
Nifty 50	25,898.55	0.55
S&P 500*	6,857.06	-0.43
Dollar (₹)	88.63	-0.13
Pound Sterling (₹)	116.69	-0.03
Euro (₹)	102.83	-0.29
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	131,318 1,522	1.17
Brent crude (\$/bbl	)* 61.14	-1.72
IN 10-Yr bond yiel	ld 6.611	-0.78
US 10-Yr T-bill yie	ld* 4.135	-0.029
* As of 8:30 PM IS	ST	

## **Prudential sells** 4.5% stake in **ICICI Pru AMC**

ICICI Prudential Asset Management Company's joint venture partner Prudential announced ₹4,815 crore pre-IPO (initial public offering) placement to 26 entities including family offices of certain individuals and financial institutions ahead of IPO. Prudential's 4.5 per cent stake sale at the upper price band of ₹2,165 per equity share ahead of the ₹10,600 crore IPO. ICICI Bank also participated in pre IPO placement.



# Govt plans second working paper on AI in two months

The department for promotion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT) committee on intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and copyright is expected to release its second working paper, on copyright ability of Al-generated content, in about two months. It released first paper on December 8, in which it proposed to give a mandatory blanket licence to AI developers for using copyright-protected works to train Al systems.

## **Naxion Energy to** invest ₹200 crore to enhance mfg

Naxion Energy, a sodium-ion battery company, plans to invest ₹200 crore in 2026 to enhance its manufacturing capabilities, including establishing a new facility in Hyderabad. The company also plans to expand its workforce by 50 per cent as part of this initiative. We are setting up a new manufacturing plant in Hyderabad to meet growing demand from OEMs, said Naxion Energy India CEO Abishek Reddy.

## KSH Intl' IPO to open on Dec.16 for subscription

KSH International, manufacturer of magnet winding wires, on Thursday said it is looking to raise ₹710 crore through its initial public offering (IPO), which will open for subscription on December 16. The issue, with a price band of ₹365-384 per share, will conclude on December 18. The proposed IPO is a combination of fresh issue of shares worth ₹420 crore and an offer for sale of stocks valued at ₹290 crore by its promoters.

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# 'unknown' Indian cos rise

CHENNAI, DEC. 11

In the last two weeks since US sanctions on Russian refiners came into effect, crude oil arrivals from Russia averaged 1.5 Mbd against 1.75 Mbd in 2024. The purchases by "unknown" Indian buyers have gone up to more than one-third of the total purchases, as per the data of

Two weeks after the US sanctions on Rosneft and Lukoil came into effect, the physical market for Russian crude has fractured, but has not broken. India's arrivals from Russia average 1.5 Mbd month-to-date, with predictive flows pointing to a potential rise to 1.6 Mbd. This remains below the 2024 average of 1.75 Mbd, but the decline is modest at 250 kbd.

As per the data of buyers from India, the share of buyers termed by Kpler as "unknown" has gone up by several fold in December. Unknown buyers" had surfaced in November, but their share was small. Unknown buyers accounted for more than one-third of the purchases in December.

Shares of all other buy-

MF ASSETS UNDER

**MANAGEMENT STAY** 

ABOVE ₹80 LAKH CR

**UNKNOWN** Indian buyers purchasing gone up to more than one-third of total purchases. **SHARES** of all buyers apart unknowns were lower in

IOC. BPCL continued lifting Russian crude. MRPL, HPCL have stepped back from

buying.

**ENERGY NEEDS** 

**RELIANCE'S** Russian crude import likely to decline as it will gradually wind down intake of Russian

December compared to November.

Dec. com-

pared to

According to a report by Reuters, several small players buy crude oil from Russia and trade it with others at sea. India's state refiners Indian Oil Corporation

and Bharat Petroleum continued lifting Russian crude. Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals and HPCL have stepped back from buying. Kpler finds that Reliance's Russian crude import is likely to decline as Jamnagar will gradually wind down its intake of Řussian crude, even

discharged last week. "However, given the new ICE regulations, ongoing OFAC sanctions, and the broader pressure sur-

though two cargoes were

rounding Russian crude imports, our base case remains that Jamnagar will gradually wind down its intake of Russian crude. These recent arrivals do not necessarily signal a structural shift in buying patterns, and we still expect purchases to taper as refiners adjust to the evolving sanctions landscape," it said.

Nayara Energy, partly Rosneft, remains anchored to Russian supply. Among other buyer countries, Chinese purchases have dropped and Turkey is alternatives. Meanwhile, the Ural oil from Russia delivered into India's west coast traded at a steady \$6.50/bbl discount, compared to \$2/bbl

# Rupee hits new low

**RAVI RANJAN PRASAD** 

Equity mutual fund (MF) flows improved in November to ₹29,911 crore from ₹24,690.33 crore in October while total assets under management (AUM) crossed ₹80 lakh crore for the first time touching over ₹80.80 lakh crore, as per monthly data released by Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI).

Gold ETFs saw lower inflows compared to last two months at ₹3,741.79 crore (₹8,363 crore in September amd ₹7,743 crore in October) while other ETFs flows remained high at ₹9,720.74 crore on account of Silver ETF

inflows of  $\angle 2,154$  crore. SIP inflows remained strong at ₹29,445 crore, but a tad lower than ₹29.529 crore in October.

SIP assets rose to ₹16.53 lakh crore, now contributing over one-fifth of the industry's total AUM, indicating that investors remain committed to dislong-term investing," said AMFI chief executive officer Venkat Chalasani

of 90.48 vs dollar

**FALAKNAAZ SYED** MUMBAI, DEC. 11

The Indian rupee on Thursday plunged 54 paise to a record low of 90.48 against the US dollar in intra-day trade as foreign portfolio investors continued to dump Indian equities and debt. A host of factors including the statement by India's chief economic adviser that the Indo-US trade deal is likely to be inked by March 2026, Mexico's plan to impose tariffs upto 50 percent tariffs on goods from Asia , higher yields in US

against the rupee At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.3, made a high of 89.96, then lost ground and fell to a record intra-day low of 90.48, registering a 54-paise decline

worked

and Japanese debt

markets

from its previous close. It ended the day at 90.36 against its previous close of 89.96 against the US dollar, down 0.4 per cent. Forex traders said that many stop-losses were triggered on long rupee positions when it fell below 90.42. According to a Reuters report, it is likely that the RBI intervened to help prevent further losses for the Indian rupee. It also added that the central bank's intervention was mild and was mostly intended to slow down the fall instead of holding it to any specific

"The RBI had been keeping the rupee under control for the last four to five days but allowed the level to be breached today. So, the rupee looks rupee more and more ulnerable to

fall towards 91 much sooner than later. The talks between India and US will continue till 12th after which we may come to know whether the trade deal is happening or not," said Anil Bhansali, head of treasury at Finrex

Treasury Advisors. "The euro-rupee and the British pound-rupee pairs have also moved to their all-time highs," he said.

# Russian oil buys in Dec. by After US, Mexico raises tariffs up to 50% on India

Asian peers like China, South Korea and Thailand also face new tariffs

be badly affected by

SANGEETHA G.

After the US, Mexico has raised tariffs up to 50 per cent on Indian exports. Asian countries like China, South Korea and Thailand will also face the new tariffs. This protectionist measure is likely to affect exports of auto and auto components, iron, steel, aluminium and their derivatives, electrical machinery and equipment, apparel and textiles, and organic chemicals from India and the industry wants the government to enter a trade deal with Mexico.

Mexico approved new tariffs, broadly aligning with US efforts to tighten trade barriers against countries like India, Thailand and South Korea, which do not have trade deals with Mexico.

Tariffs ranging from 5 per cent to 50 per cent will be levied on more than 1,400 products from Asian nations that don't have a trade deal with Mexico.

The products include auto parts, light vehicles, clothing, plastics, steel, textile, furniture, leather, footwear, chemicals and machinery.

For most of the affected products, the tariff may increase generally up to 35 per cent. However, the

import duty on cars will rise to 50 per cent.

**MEXICO'S** new tariffs

broadly aligning with US efforts to tighten

trade barriers against

on Asian imports,

countries.

India had exported \$5.74 billion worth goods to Mexico in FY25 and in FY26 till October, the exports stood at \$2.29 billion. Auto and auto components accounted for \$1.94 billion last year and these products will face a 50 per cent tariff.

Other major categories included iron and steel and their derivatives, aluminium and derivatives, electrical machinery and equipment, apparels and textiles, cotton, nuclear boilers and machinery, organic chemicals and pharmaceuticals. While Indian pharmaceuticals may not face high tariffs, other products are likely to get affected.

**MORE TROUBLE** 

AUTO PARTS, light vehicles, cloth-

ture, leather, footwear, chemicals

INDIA EXPORTED \$5.74 bn worth

goods to Mexico in FY25

**TARIFFS** 

ranging

from 5% to

50% will be

levied on

products

from Asian

1,400

more than

ing, plastics, steel, textile, furni-

and machinery to be affected

and in FY26 till

October,

stands at

\$2.29 bn.

"Several metals and engineering products are going to be badly affected by the Mexico tariffs. Mexico has been a big market for engineering products. India has to initiate trade negotiations and sign a trade deal with Mexico as soon as possible. We have requested the government to take steps in this direction. After the US tariffs, the increased duties on Mexico-bound products will severely hit the industry," Pankaj

Chadha, chairman, EEPC

INDIAN

govern-

ment has to ini-

negotiations and

sign a trade deal

increased duties

bound products

will severely hit

the industry. **PANKAJ** 

CHADHA,

Chairman,

EEPC India

with Mexico as

soon as possi-

ble. After US

tariffs, the

on Mexico-

tiate trade

As per reports, the US has been putting pressure on Mexico to increase tariffs to check Chinese imports. Mexico's tariffs on Chinese and other Asian imports may result in US easing tariffs on Mexican steel and aluminium. However, Mexico has denied any connection Trump's

onslaught. Meanwhile, Mexican manufacturers dependent on inputs from China, India and other Asian countries, warned of rising costs that could fan

# India, US bilateral trade deal likely in March: Nageswaran

**MADHUSUDAN SAHOO** NEW DELHI, DEC. 11

Chief economic adviser (CEA) V. Anantha Nageswaran on Thursday hinted that India and the United States are close to finalising their trade deal.

"The talks are now in final stage and a deal appears likely by March next year," he said, while speaking to a TV channel. He described the rupee as undervalued relative to fundamentals.

CEA's comments come at a time when global business conditions are uncertain, and both countries are aiming for a stable, balanced, and growth-oriented agreement.

"I was hoping something would be done by the end of November this year, but it has turned out to be elusive. That's why it is difficult to give a timeline on



this. I think a deal is likely by March6. I would be surprised if we don't have it sealed by the fiscal end.' Nageswaran said.

in the India-US deal, he blamed geopolitics for the delay and said it is hard to put a timeline for the deal. "I believe this is as much a matter of geopolitics as it is of bilateral trade," the CEA said.

On the country's economy and rupee movement, Nageswaran also said that the country's economy is 'doing rather well', with exporters managing to

craftsmanship through a limited-edition collection

Both Lidcom and Lidkar

are dedicated preserving

and promoting Indian lea-

ther industry and the heritage of Kolhapuri

These will be manufac-

tured in India in collabo-

ration with the skilled

artisans from the Mahar-

ashtra and Karnataka

regi-ons, where the tradi-

tional Kolhapuri Chappals

"Combining traditional

are handcrafted.

of sandals," it said.

Chappals.

Prada to source Kolhapuri sandals

hold out against the tariff effects and partially offset the negative fallout by diversifying into other markets. "The economy has surprised us with better performance than we anticipated early in the forecast cycle. The FY27 economic outlook has positive momentum and I will not be surprised if something like this happens for 2026–27 as well," he said.

Moreover, he further said, a weaker rupee at this point of time has been beneficial for the export sector amid the global uncertainties. "The rupee has lost 5

percent-15 percent of its value against India's trade competitors. Having a weaker rupee at this point is not a major problem, as it benefits the export sector given global uncertainties," the chief economic adviser said.

techniques with Prada's

contemporary design and premium materials, the

collection creates unique

dialogue between Indian

heritage and modern lux-

ury expression," it said. Traditional Kolhapuri

Chappals, which have a

unique geographical indi-

cation (GI) tag since 2019 -

are manufactured across

eight districts - four in

Maharashtra (Kolhapur,

Sangli, Satara, Solapur)

and four in Karnataka

(Belagavi, Bagalkot, Dhar-

wad, Bijapur).

# **GLOBAL TRADE WILL EXPAND AT 7% TO**

SANGEETHA G.

\$35 TRN: UNCTAD

Despite slowing down in the second half of the calendar year, global trade ir 2025 will exceed \$35 trillion for the first time - an increase of about \$2.2 trillion, or around 7 per cent, finds the UN's trade and development body. The trade agency UNC-

TAD noted that India was

among the key economies which saw a surge in imports and robust growth in services trade. Global trade growth slowed in Q3 2025 but remained positive at about 2.5 per cent quarteron-quarter. Goods trade increased 2 per cent from Q2, while services rose 4 per cent. This positive trend is expected to continue in the final quarter of the year - goods trade to grow by 0.5 per cent,

and services by 2 per cent. these projections hold, global trade in 2025 will exceed \$35 trillion, an increase of \$2.2 trillion, roughly 7 per cent, compared to 2024.

Of this, trade in goods will account for about \$1.5 trillion of that rise, while services are set to grow by roughly \$750 billion, near-

ly 9 per cent. Among the factors that contributed to the positive momentum, trade between developing economies - known as South-South trade expanded by around 8 per

cent over the last four quarters. East Asia's exports recorded the strongest growth over the past four quarters at 9 per cent, with intra-regional trade growing by 10 per cent. It was also strong for South America. Africa showed

imports and exports. North America's exports fell by 3 per cent in third quarter and imports remained strong. Europe continued to grow in the third quarter, though at a slower pace.

solid growth in both

Imports grew notably in Brazil and India. Over the past 12 months, services trade remained robust with China and India leading in export growth.

## Mkts break losing streak on 25 bps rate cut by US Fed

**RAVI RANJAN PRASAD** 

The market recovered after three consecutive sessions of negative close despite rupee weakness as global markets gained after the US Fed announced 25 basis points interest rate cut on Wednesday.

Benchmark indices closed half a per cent higher with Sensex up 0.51 per cent or 426.86 points to 84,818.13 and Nifty-50 up 140.55 points to 25,898.55.

LOWER | WEIGHT

Indianapolis, Dec. 11: A

next-generation obesity shot from Eli Lilly & Co.

almost a quarter of their

body weight, potentially

making the experimental

drug the most potent

The late-stage study was

designed to measure weig-

ht loss and pain associated

with knee osteoarthritis, a

condition closely linked to

obesity. Patients on the

highest dose of the drug -

called retatrutide — lost

more than 23 per cent of

their body weight in 68

weeks, Lilly said in a state-

weight loss medicine yet.

helped

patients

Foreign portfolio investors were net sellers by ₹2,020.94 crore while domestic institutions were net buyers by ₹3,796.07 crore. "Lower US interest rates

could help FII inflows into the country, over next few quarters as corporate profitability and valuations improve. The markets will keep watching data on US inflation, jobs, and growth," said Naval Kagalwala, COO and head-products, Shriram Wealth.

New Delhi, Dec. 11: Prada an Italian global luxury fashion house, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with two government organisations - Lidcom and Lidkar - to source sandals, inspired

by Kolhapuri Chappals. The MoU was signed on Wednesday between Prada, Lidcom (Sant Rohidas Leather Industries and Charmakar Development Corporation Ltd) and Lidkar (Dr Babu Jagjivan Ram Leather Industries Development Corporation Ltd) in Mumbai, accord-

Firm racing to develop drugs that are easier to take

eeded expectations, with

some patients losing so

much weight they decided

to drop out of trial, it said.

could become an importa-

nt option for patients with

significant weight loss

needs and certain compli-

cations, including knee

osteoarthritis," Kenneth

Custer, president of Lilly

Cardiometabolic Health,

The latest results will

help cement Lilly's domi-

nance in the obesity mar-

ket that's expected to hit

\$100 billion by 2030. The

said in the statement.

'We believe retatrutide



ing to a joint statement.

the framework, implementation and guidance of the 'Prada made in India x inspired by Kolhapuri

The agreement sets out

chappals' project, which

is already the most popu-

lar weight-loss medica-

tion, but Lilly is racing to

develop drugs that are

more effective, easier to

take or that offer benefits

The stakes for these next-

generation compounds are

high: shares of rival Novo

Nordisk plummeted most

on record after an experi-

mental shot fell short of

The drug, CagriSema, helped patients lose an

average of 20.4 per cent of

expectations last year.

promised.

like fewer side effects.

# 3 funds to help Paramount

have agreed to stu-mp up billion to bankroll Paramount Skydance's bid for Warner Bros. Discovery. The region's exposure to

once its deep ties to private equity firms behind the bid are factored in. Saudi Arabia's Pu-

blic Investment Fund and the Qatar Investment Authority joined the relatively-unknown Abu Dhabi firm L'imad Holding to bankroll the hostile offer earlier this week.

bank-roll bid for Warner New York, Dec. 11: A trio by wealthy Gulf states of Middle Eastern funds that have long supplied large amounts of capital

to global buyout firms. One example is Apollo Global Management, which is among firms providing \$54 bildeal is likely larger, lion of financing

for Paramount bid offer. Meanwhile Europe's biggest broadcasting group MFE favours Paramount hostile bid for Warner. "This deal is very important for global media industry," Pier Silvio Berlusconi, chief executive of MediaForEurope,

The funds are overseen

their weight — less than the 25 per cent Novo had — Bloomberg

– Bloomberg

knee pain. The results exccompany's shot Zepbound

ment Thursday. Study par-

ticipants experienced a

more than 62 per cent

Investors expecting the

latest study to show weight

loss of about 20 per cent to

23 per cent, with at least a

50 per cent reduction in

reduction in knee pain.





Fat loss drug effective: Eli Lilly











Mamata warns:

Women will fight

back against SIR

DC CORRESPONDENT

Accusing the Centre of

their names are removed

from the voter list under

the SIR exercise."They

will bring police from

Delhi during the election

and intimidate mothers

and sisters. Mothers and sisters, if your names are struck off, you have the

tools, right? The tools you

use during cooking. You have strength, right? You

won't let it pass if your names are cut, right? The

women will fight in the

front, and the men will be

behind them," she said, adding that she wants to

see who is more powerful

— the women or the BJP.The Bengal CM

alleged that whenever

there are elections, the

BJP uses money to divide

KOLKATA, DEC. 11

Minister

SHORT TAKES

## **SC REJECTS EX-IPS SANJIV BHATT PLEA**

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 11

Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a plea filed by former IPS officer Sanjiv Bhatt seeking suspension of the 20-year jail sentence on him in å 1996 drug seizure case.

A two-judge bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and Vijay Bishnoi said it was not inclined to entertain the matter.The top court was hearing an appeal filed by Bhatt seeking suspension of sentence in the case. A sessions court in town district Palanpur Banaskantha of Gujarat had sentenced Bhatt to

case.Bhatt was found guilty of falsely implicating a Rajasthan-based lawyer by claiming that in 1996, police had seized drugs from a hotel room in Palanpur where the lawyer was staying. He was a superintendent of police in Banaskantha in 1996 and the

20 years in the decades-old

## **33K BABIES BORN** THROUGH BIRTH **TOURISM IN U.S**

From Page 1

district police.

According to a 2022 report of the US Senate committee on homeland security, the practice of birth tourism after the US state department directed its consular officers to treat persons travelling to the US for giving birth as they treat those intending to travel to the US for medical treatment. According to an estimate, 33,000 babies are born in the US every year as a result of birth tourism, apart from lakhs of children born to foreigners who have been staying in the US without permit. Several companies in US cities to assist people in birth tourism. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement prosecutions in California and Florida revealed operators charged \$80,000 for "package deals" that included hospital deposits and luxury housing.

## **COURT GRANTS INTERIM BAIL TO UMAR KHALID**

New Delhi, Dec 11: A Delhi court on Thursday granted interim bail from December 16 to 29 to former JNU student Umar Khalid to attend his sis-

ter's wedding.
Additional Sessions Judge Sameer Bajpai granted interim relief to Khalid, who is an accused in the case regarding the larger conspiracy behind the 2020 Delhi riots.

The judge directed the accused to furnish a personal bond of Rs 20,000 and two sureties of like amount.

"During the interim bail period, the applicant (Khalid) shall not use the social media, the court said, directing him to "only meet his family members, relatives and friends"

It said Khalid also had to "remain at his home or at the places where the ceremonies of marriage as mentioned by him will take place"

Other conditions included the accused not contacting any witness and providing his mobile phone number to the investigating officer.

The court directed Khalid to surrender before the prison authorities on the evening of December 29

## TERROR FINANCING **ED CONDUCTS RAIDS IN 4 STATES**

New Delhi, Dec 11: The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday conducted multistate searches as part of terror financing linked money laundering investigation against a "highly radicalised" ISIS mod-

ule, officials said. The raids were launched early morning at 40 locations, including in the Padgha-Borivali area of Thane in Maharashtra (near Mumbai) apart from Ratnagiri ditsrict and locations in Delhi, Kolkata and some towns of Uttar Pradesh, they said.

The ED teams were provided security by the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) of Maharashtra for the raid undertaken in the state while central security forces assisted them in other areas, the officials said.

The federal agency filed a case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) taking cognisance of a NIA chargesheet that alleged that certain individuals were part of a "highly radicalised" ISIS-linked module engaged in recruitment, training, procurement of weapons and explosives and raising funds to sustain their opera-

# **SC orders EC: Stop acting like** watchful policeman right now

Bench notes procedural aspects of SIR cannot dominate judicial review

SIR sparks heated RS debate

Cong. MP Jairam Ramesh

Sabha during the Winter

parency and credibility of

the electoral process.
"India proudly claims to

be the mother of democra-

cy. The three fundamental

conditions for a fair elec-

tion — level playing field,

transparency, and credibility — have been system-

atically undermined," the

asserted.Accusing the EC

of refusing to provide m-

achine-readable electoral

rolls, hiding IP addresses

P Chaudhary moved the

motion seeking extension

of the tenure of the Joint

Bill, 2024, and the Union

(Amendment) Bill, 2024,

up to the first day of the last week of the 2026 Budget session. The Lok

speaks in the Rajya

session.

Congress

Committee

Constitution

Amendment)

Territories

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 11

The Election Commission cannot assume the role of a "suspicious neighbour' or a "policeman" treating voters with doubt, the Supreme Court was told on Thursday during the final hearings on a batch of pleas challenging the Special Intensive Revision

(SIR) of electoral rolls in various states. A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi heard detailed submissions from senior advocate Raju Ramachandran representing petitioners opposed to the SIR process being undertaken in several states. Ramachandran assailed the conceptual foundation of the SIR and urged that the poll panel's constitutional mandate is to act as a facilitator and enabler of voting rights.

"The negative way of viewing one's own role is that of a disabler or that of a suspicious policeman, Ramachandran adding that when there is an adequate statutory scheme regarding citizenship, the poll panel cannot become a "nosy parker" instructing booth level officers (BLOs) to cast doubt on voters.

He said initiating an inquiry based on a BLO's effectively suspicion amounts to "suspending citizenship"."Now, how does the EC view its role? Because depending on how it views its role will follow how it acts. Either it sees its role as a facilitator and enabler of the societal ideal of universal adult franchise, which would mean helping citizens to vote, proactively helping and enabling."The negative way of viewing one's own role is that of a disabler or that of a suspi-cious policeman or a suspicious neighbour. So depending on how you view your own role, your sense of fairness and how you go about a particular exercise will be apparent from that," he said.

## **APEX VIEW**

- SC tells EC: avoid suspicion.
- SIR challenged in multiple states. • EC must facilitate, not doubt.
- Suspicion-based removal suspends
- citizenship rights. Justice Bagchi highlights domestic
- migration. Petitioners oppose selective SIR exercise.

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA | DC

NEW DELHI, DEC. 11

The Opposition and the ruling alliance parties traded barbs in the Rajya

Sabha on Thursday over

the ongoing special inten-

sive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. Leading the Opposition's charge, the

Congress accused the EC

of being a government

puppet. The BJP hits back,

asserting that the Congress is creating a ruckus instead of using

the available avenues to

Initiating a discussion

on election reforms in the Upper House, Congress Rajya Sabha MP Ajay

Maken alleged that the EC

had become a puppet of

the government and ques-

tioned how democracy can

survive in the absence of a

level playing field, trans-

**DC CORRESPONDENT** 

Lok Sabha

Thursday extended the tenure of the parliamen-

tary committee examin-

ing bills that seek to intro-

duce simultaneous polls

to the Lok Sabha and state

legislative assemblies.

NEW DELHI, DEC. 11

their

redressal.

Court limits routine SIR interven-



Electoral staff segregate forms of the (SIR) of electoral rolls, in Tirunelveli.

result

LS extends committee tenure examining bills

(129th

within 45 days, the Congress MP said, "Today,

the EC has become a pup-

pet of the government."
"The EC's job is to win 'trust', but today its job has

become to create suspi-

cion," Maken added, citing

examples of how voter

turnout figures increased

in Haryana Assembly elections on the day of the

from the figures put out

two days earlier.The Congress MP said the poll

body remained silent when asked about the ori-

gin of extra votes and

Assembly and booth-wise

data. He also accused the

EC of not providing to the

CID, which was investigating the matter of fake

application forms in the

Aland Assembly con-

stituency of Karnataka,

the IP address and port

number of the computers from which the forms were filed.

Sabha adopted the motion

by a voice vote. The com-

mittee has met constitu-

tional experts, economists, Law Commission

Maheshwari, among oth-

ers, since it was constitut-

Yesterday, Committee Chairman Mr Chaudhary

had said that preparation

Chairman

ed last December.

Dinesh

many

announcement

# The ECI has extended the

Uttar Pradesh, and Union Territory Andaman and Nicobar Islands. However, there is no extension for Goa, Gujarat, La-kshwadweep, Rajasthan and West Bengal, the deadline for these states end today. Kerala was given extension last week due to municipal polls in the state. The enumeration period for these states and Union territory was

December 16

of the report on the bills

will take time because the

committee has to listen to

many stakeholders.
"The report will take time. We have to listen to

should be done after lis-

tening to all stakeholders

because it's a very big election reform," he had

stakeholders. It

## **ECI EXTENDS SIR** BY FIVE DAYS IN **SIX STATES**

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

SIR in five states, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, to end on Thursday and the draft electoral rolls were to be published on

The enumeration period for Tamil Nadu and Gujarat has been extended till December 14 and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 19. For Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the enumeration period has been extended till December 18 and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 23. The enumeration period for Uttar Pradesh has been extended till December 26 and the draft electoral rolls will be pub-

### trying to snatch the rights of mothers and sisters in the name of the SIR exercise, West Bengal Chief Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said that the women will fight if their names are struck off from the voter Addressing a massive rally in Krishnanagar, Mamata Banerjee said that the women have their kitchen tools and the strength to use them if

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addresses a public meeting, in Krishnanagar.

people. "I don't believe in communalism. I believe in secularism. Whenever the election comes, the BJP tries to use money and bring people from other states to divide people," she said.

Referring to the recita tion of the Bhagavad Gita in Kolkata on Sunday, Banerjee asked what was the need to organise a public event when everybody recites the holy Hindu text at their

# Bengal Guv applies to EC to be voter of state

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI I DC** 

West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose wants to be a voter of the state, shifting his status from his hometown at Kottayam in Kerala, ahead of the Assembly elections next vear.

He filled up an enumeration form on Thursday, last date of submission of applications seeking enrolment in the voters

In a statement, Lok Bhavan said that the Governor met the booth level officer and other officials from the Election Commission of India in connection with his transfer of EPIC from Kerala and enrol as elector in West Bengal.

According to the statement, Bose said that he always had an "emotional Bengal and its people and



Election Commission personnel, at Lok Bhavan in Kolkata .

with the State and its psyche, art and culture, heritage, literature, its glorious history and outstanding future prospects.'

It added that the Governor had always "expressed that he considers himself blessed that he breathes the same air that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose breathed, walks the same land where Rabindranath Gurudev walked. He considers it a

privilege to be a voter of the land that heralded the

## has umbilical relation Indian Renaissance. BJP workers granted bail after assault: WB

**DC CORRESPONDENT** KOLKATA, DEC. 11

Three BJP workers, who were arrested by police late on Wednesday night for allegedly beating two Muslim hawkers for selling chicken patties dur-ing the Bhagvad Gita recitation event at the Brigade Parade Ground in the city, were granted bail by a court.

Police had arrested Soumik Goldar and Swarnendu Chakraborty, hail who from Gobordanga Ashoknagar respectively in North 24 Parganas. and Tarun Bhattacharya of Uttarpara in Hooghly, identifying them from the viral videos about the incident on December 7, following a complaint by hawkers Sheikh Riyazul

Salauddin. Riyazul alleged that his

products worth ?3000 were destroyed in the mob attack. On Thursday, the three arrested BJP workers were produced at the Bankshall court. Their lawyers prayed for their bail as most of the charges against them were non-cognisable. According to them, the

accused wanted veg patties but were sold chicken patties which hurt their religious sentiment. They also submitted that Soumik was a cancer patient with one leg. The public prosecutor claimed an insult to the hawkers' religious sentiment which is a non-bailable offence, and sought a 14-day police remand of

# **Nearly four-decade-long leftwing extremism officially ends** MP declares Naxal-free after final surrenders

## RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY I DC BHOPAL, DEC. 11

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav declared the state Maoistfree following the surrender of the 'last' two extremist leaders who were active in the state, on Thursday. The announcement came after the sur-render of Deepak and Rohit of the Maharashtra-

Pradesh-

Chhattisgarh (MMC) zone, in Balaghat in the state. While Deepak carried a bounty of ₹29 lakh, Rohit had a reward of ₹14 lakh

on his head. Three tribal districts in Madhya Pradesh, Balaghat, Mandla and Dindori, were earlier identified as the Leftwing extremism-affected dis-

Minister declared.
With this, the nearly four-decade-long Leftwing tricts, under the sway of the MMC zone. "Mandla and Dindori were earlier made Naxal-

Salam",

extremism in Madhya Pradesh has come to an end, he said and described it a 'historic achievement' by the MP police and the Central forces.

free. Balaghat district

became Naxal-free today

with the surrender of the

last two remaining Maoist

leaders. Madhya Pradesh

today bid farewell to Lal We achieved the feat even one month ahead of the deadline we had set our-selves," he said.He said that the counterinsurgency campaign intensified particularly in the last 18 months. Ten hardcore Naxals were killed in separate encounters in the

"We had set a deadline to end Maoism in Madhya Pradesh by January 2026, two months ahead of the deadline set by the Centre. last one year. Forty-two lives in the fight.

Maoists of the MMC zone, carrying a cumulative bounty of ₹8.75 crore, have surrendered in the past few weeks in Balaghat in MP and Rajnandgaon in Chhattisgarh, the Chief Minister said. All armed Maoist cadres in the MMC zone had been neutralised, some killed in encounters and others had surrendered, he said. According to him, 38 security personnel had laid down their

# Luthar brothers held in Thailand

**BHASKAR HARI** SHARMA | DC

Days after a blaze at North Goa's Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub killed 25 people and triggered a nationwide manhunt, its co-owners Gaurav and Saurabh Luthra were detained in Thailand's Phuket on Thursday, moments before a Delhi court rejected their transit anticipatory bail pleas.

Earlier in the day, a Delhi Court dismissed the Luthras' request for four weeks of transit anticipatory bail. Opposing the plea, the Goa government's lawyer argued that the brothers fled India immediately after the incident and were "now seeking leniency after concealing themselves." Counsel for the Luthras told the court that the duo was "willing to return

and cooperate. Photographs released from Thailand showed the brothers handcuffed, holding passports which circulated online soon after news of their detention surfaced. Their detention comes less than 24 hours after the Ministry of External Affairs suspended their passports following a request from the Goa Police.

Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant confirmed the detention and said a team of police and

CBI would bring the Luthra brothers back to India "as soon as possible" as deportation pro-

ceedings were underway. Sawant also said that Arpora panchayat secretary Raghuvir Bagkar, suspended after the incident, was "not cooperating with the investigation" and would be arrest-

Union minister of State Shripad Naik, reacting outside Parliament, confirmed the arrests and questioned the duo's decision to flee. "Where will they run?" he said.

Officials said, Gaurav Luthra, 44, and his brother Saurabh, 40, had booked tickets to Phuket at 1:17 am on December 7, barely an hour after the fire, in an alleged attempt to evade arrest. An Interpol Blue Corner notice was issued on December 9 following a request from the Goa police routed through the

The duo face charges including manslaughter, murder, and causing injury by allegedly organising a fire show "without proper care, caution or fire safety equipment." In a related development in the case, a Goa court remanded Ajay Gupta, who claims to be a sleeping partner and investor in the nightclub, to seven days of police custody. Gupta, brought from Gupta, Wednesday Delhi on



Gaurav Luthra, centrE, Saurabh Luthra, right, who fled India. Police have detained the Luthra brothers. -PTI

## Hydrogen vessel



India's first indigenous hydrogen-fuelled passenger vessel, built by Cochin Shipyard Limited, begins commercial operations on the Ganga river, in Varanasi, on Thursday.

# MP: 9th tiger killed by train

DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, DEC. 11

A train ran over an adult tiger on the Budni-Midghat railway line, which has acquired the tag of 'death track' due to frequent death of wild animals at the same place, forest officials said on Thursday. The rail line passes through the core zone of the Ratapani tiger reserve. The carcass of the

the train late on Tuesday night, was found late on Wednesday. This was the ninth death of a tiger on the same stretch of railway line in the last one year, forest officials said. This apart, 10 leopards have died in the same stretch of track after being hit by speeding

wild animals are being hit by train at time, sources trains in separate incidents in the last one year, a senior forest officer not to be quoted.

said. The Madhya Pradesh forest department has written to the railway authorities to take measures to prevent the death of the wild animals passing through the stretch of railway line, the forest officer said, requesting

said. The track at the spot

on the Budni-Midghat

stretch has a curve. Most

# Along with IndiGo, DGCA and Govt are at fault

THE IndiGo fiasco has uncovered not **⊥** just the insolence and arrogance of the leading domestic airline but also all that is wrong with the civil aviation sector-from the cavalier attitude of the errant airline's management to the feckless behaviour of the regulator Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the insouciance of the government.

Consider the latest DGCA action-stationing nine of its senior officials at the airline's corporate office and conducting an audit of the airline's fleet, pilot, and crew utilisation. Two of these officials have been mandated to monitor flight cancellations, delays, refunds, and passenger compensation status. DGCA Director General Faiz Kidwai has met IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers.

All this seems to be reactive posturing aimed at deflecting criticism rather than improving the situation. The drama began when IndiGo, having failed to comply with the regulator's new crew-rostering rules, had to cancel thousands of flights, thus hugely inconveniencing tens of thousands of fliers; people missed business meetings, marriages, other important engagements, and travel plans. The new norms specify how pilots and cabin crew are rested. Pilots are now stipulated to longer weekly rest, 48 hours instead of 36. Also, the limits on night landings are not stricter, two rather than six. This was after the regulator received fatigue complaints.

The new rules were announced almost a couple of years ago, and were scheduled to come into play in two phases-in June and November. Other major carriers reportedly complied with the new rules, but IndiGo, whose financial condition is much better than that of those who implemented it, didn't. Evidently, the new rules meant higher costs, as IndiGo had to employ more pilots.

It has been alleged that the IndiGo management was confident that it would be able to get around the new rules by 'managing the

The confidence was not misplaced, for the government did give the airline an exemption from the new rules of a few months; now it has time to comply by February 10, 2026.

IndiGo's formal response to the government for the massive operational disruptions also smacks of the same confidence. It informed the DGCA that a single root cause for the crisis cannot be identified at this point in time. More time, it said, is needed to complete a proper Root Cause Analysis (RCA). IndiGo said that "the disruption had resulted from a combination of the factors, including minor technical glitches, schedule changes linked to the start of the winter season, adverse weather conditions, increased congestion in the aviation system, as well as implementation of and operation under the updated crew rostering rules (Flight Duty Time Limitation Phase II), which coincided in lesser or greater measure."

Notice how it is trying to buy time. Also notice how it downplays the real cause-"implementation of and operation under the updated crew rostering rules."

IndiGo's insolence is matched only by the DGCA's incompetence and the government's indifference towards the aviation sector. Why didn't the regulator inspect to ensure the implementation of its rules in a phased manner? The government, too, has done little more than make anodyne statements. Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu said on December 5, "Passenger care, safety, and convenience continue to remain the highest priority of the government of India." That priority must be visible in actions, not statements.

# There is so much beauty in life

Dr Hyma Moorty

class 10 student died by suicide after he felt ▲ insulted by his teacher. The student aged 15, left a note in which he blamed his teacher for scolding him and talking about his parents. A 16-year-old boy committed suicide after being scolded for talking to girl class mate. A 14-year-old Class IX student committed suicide for being sent home for not paying the school fees. He felt ashamed. There will be many such instances of teenagers ending their life, unable to bear 'humiliation'.

Now a days, life has become cheap. Ending life for small reasons has become easier than facing it and overcome the problem.Insult and humiliation causes, a deep mental agony, mood swings,perturbation. helpless situation is felt that pushes them to take the extreme step. Some students cannot recover from the trauma, and hence to avoid shame and disgrace they choose this route. It's heart breaking to see so many students struggling and suffering.

The pressures of school, social media, and life can be overwhelming, but putting a full stop to life is not an acceptable solution. Using empathy and understanding can go a long way in supporting those struggling with suicidal thoughts. Sometimes all that someone need is someone to listen without judgement. Empathy and kindness can make a big difference in someone's

## Changing image of the teacher

In most cases the students have mentioned their teach-

ers for ending their life. It is often heard that there is always a lobby of teachers who time and again encourage only certain 'good' students and don't give chance to others. They have to work and struggle with 'new' students to the particular activity. Those who are not good performers face the brunt of the teachers. There was/is always a

marked difference in the ways in which the teachers treated well-performing students and those with poor marks, comparing the student unfavorably with 'good student'. Sometimes teachers arrogantly say that they pity the parents for having a child of that IQ. The students take extreme step out of distress, irritability or agitation. Nowhere to go, a helpless situation is felt. Suicide for them is a means to avoid shame and disgrace.

## Students look up to teachers

Quite often students feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with teachers rather than their parents. This can be due to various reasons, such as feeling more judged or understood by teachers or may be just needing a different perspective. Most teachers are with open arms and just want to be friends with their students. Sometimes they end up being more than teachers to some of them.

They see them as best friends. When the children tell something to parents, they brush it off asif the child is silly. This kind of attitude causes the child to shut them out and distance itself. But, the teacher as a friend understands and places herself/himself in the position relating to

# **MOVE FORWARD ONE DAY AT A TIME**



From managing class rooms to adapting to changing curriculum, teachers often find themselves under immense pressure. Sometimes they forget to take care of their own well-being

their personalproblems and makes it clear to the student that its quite common for students of that age to go through such issues and try to help out. Teachers often play a significant role in students' lives, and it's great to see them creating a safe space for students to open

## Pressure on teachers Teaching is an incredibly

rewarding profession, but it also comes with a unique set of challenges. From managing class rooms to adapting to changing curriculum, teachers often find themselves under immense pressure. Sometimes they forget to take care of their own well-being. In the society the teachers play a pivotal role in equipping students with knowledge and essential life skills, they inspire, mentor and guide the future generation. How-ever the demands of the profession can take a toll on their mental health.

The constant need to adapt the pressure of ensuing every student's success, and the emotional challenges they face in the class room can be overwhelming. Counselling for teachers addresses the silent struggle many educators face. These struggles quite often go unnoticed, as teachers are expectedto be the pillars of strength, a bundle of patience, astore house of knowledge for their students. It is easy to forget that teachers are human too, with their own vulnerabilities and emotional needs.

Long working hours,

grading papers, long hours of teaching leaves little time for the family and self-care. The school management plays a crucial role in ensuring the well-being of both students and teachers. An empathetic approach to leave managementand fostering a positive work environment is vital for the growth and development of students and teachers alike. After all, a school is more than just a physical structure—it is revered space for learning that shapes the future of a nation. Remember by nurturing our nurturers, we create a better learning environment for our students and a healthier teaching profession.

Using a student as an

example of underperforming to the other students is an unbearable humiliation. Singling out and targeting students even for normal conversations and calling parents for every small issue is an insult to the student in question. Bullying and using the student as a butt of a joke by peers becomes relentless and students cannot endure further and take drastic steps. Students' mental health and overall wellbeing need to be monitored quite frequently by a professionally trained counsellor.

## Counselling is a must! It's so important for stu-

dents, teachers, and parents to have a safe space to talk about their feelings and struggles. Schools and families should prioritize mental health and make counselling accessible to everyone. Most of the students always remain overwhelmed with the high expectation from the family, unhealthy competition and fear of failure. While struggling to cope with so many challenges, they need someone to guide them, overcome these dif-

ficulties and do well in their

academics and career. An educational counsellor plays a pivotal role for the students in finding their strengths and short comings, choosing right career path, and dealing with their disabilities and provide needed emotional support to an extent. They deal with negative emotions like low self-doubt, fear of failure, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, stress, guilt etc., that can give students hard times with their academics and learning. The counsel-

ling sessions can boost their confidence and develop selfawareness so that they can deal with negative emotions and keep stress and anxiety at bay. Parental counselling is

important because it improves parent-child communication, reduces stress and anxiety and helps parents develop effective strategies in managing their child's behavior, fostering understanding and trust. It reduces stress and anxiety and guilt by providing tools and strategies for effective parenting, leading to greater confidence and a sense of control. They will have a deeper understanding of child development, including normal behavior at different stages which helps them interpret and respond to theirchild's needs more effectively.

# Every child is special

Every child is unique with their own strengths, weaknesses and learning styles. Comparing them to others or expecting to fit into a certain mold can be really limiting. It's essential to recognize and celebrate their individuality, and help them find their own path for success. Remember every child isone-of-a-kind, with their own pace, interests, and way of thinking. Sibling or not, no two kids are alike!

Labelling kids as failures is super damaging to their self-esteem and confidence. Every child has his or her own strengths and weaknesses, and it is our job to help them find their groove and celebrate their successes, no matter how small!Let's work together to create a supportive community, where everyone feels heard and valued.

# LETTERS

# Open defiance of the high command

A PROPOS to "K'taka power struggle may dent Cong image nationally," (THI, Dec 11). The Karnataka Congress government's leadership imbroglio, fuelled by competing factions loyal to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, has snowballed into a major crisis for a party high command already seen as weak and indecisive. The tensions escalated further after Siddaramaiah's son, MLC Yathindra, publicly asserted that his father was elected for a full five-year term and would remain Chief Minister throughout, a declaration seen as undermining party discipline. This open defiance highlights how Karnataka leaders show scant regard for the authority of the central leadership. At a time when the party is facing repeated electoral setbacks, such instability only deepens its vulnerabilities.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru

# Indecisive stance costing Congress dear

THIS has reference to your editorial 'K'taka power struggle may dent Cong image nationally'. It is said that the high command itself is undecided over the matter - a section favouring D K Shivakumar to take over the reins of the government as CM. People of Karnataka seem to view the situation as an internal issue of Congress which is unlikely to have serious consequences. The stalled infrastructure projects and attempts to impose new additional tax and enhanced fare to garner revenue is a serious grouse cited by the people which brooks no causal approach by the government for a meaningful redressal.

K R Parvathy, Mysuru

# GOP needs to pull up its socks, urgently

VOUR elaborate editorial on Karnataka power struggle ▲ within Congress party should be treated as final alarm bell by its High Command. There is a saying "Wise people learn from the mistakes of others; Ordinary people learn from their mistakes; And Fools continuously fail to learn from their mistakes at all ". This popular saying should make Congress to introspect and act suitably before it is too late and too little. There is a lurking danger of seeding of dictatorial tendencies in the ruling BJP for lack of a strong and effective opposition at national and state levels. Streamlining of internal functioning of Congress, thus, contributes to a strong Indian democracy.

M V Nagavender Rao, Hyderabad

# Why is Delhi dithering?

THE high command maintaining silence to honour the ▲ power-sharing formula of two-and-half-years given at the time of formation of government in the state in 2023 by adding a new dimension to the "Change of guard" issue is nothing but its old ways of buying time instead of resolving the issue decisively and transparently. There is no iota of doubt that this will not only risk a rebellion within the party like in Rajasthan that could damage its prospects in future elections but also end up paying a heavy price with a vertical break-up of the party. KR Srinivasan, Secunderabad

# Remembering the Mahakavi

On Mahakavi Bharatiyar's birth anniversary, we honour this inspiring poet who led India from confusion, commotion, chaos, and crises to connection, communication, cooperation, collaboration, and finally, celebration of freedom. His verses ignite patriotism eternally.

TS Karthik, Chennai

# Is Mamata inspired by Jagan?

TATEST Bengal Chief Minister's incitement to the **VV** women voters in her state to get ready to attack the SIR implementation machinery with their kitchen implements in case their votes are at risk to be taken away by the police forces deployed from New Delhi is on similar lines with that of the stand taken by the YSRC Party by its ex CM Jaganmohan Reddy. As can be seen, in his exhortation to his party cadres to deal with its Opposition party with "Rappa, Rappa " slogans aiming at doing away with that party at the next hustings.

Seshagiri Row Karry, Hyderabad

# Diwali festival gets its due

TT is proud moment for every Indian as Diwali which is I known as Deepavali or festival lights was added to existing 15 items of India to the list of Intangible Cultural Heiritage (ICH) of UNESCO on Wednesday. The rare recognition to festival of lights not only gives global identity to the festival but also it enthuses the public in general, particularly potters community, crackers manufacturers, sweet sellers, priests, farmers, artisans.

Pratapa Reddy Yaramala, Tiruvuru, AP

thehansreader@gmail.com

# THE HIDDEN HEALTH RISKS OF BOTTLED WATER

MUHAMMAD WAKIL SHAHZAD

ROWING mistrust of tap water has Uhelped turn bottled water into a global staple, even in countries where public supplies are among the most rigorously tested. Marketing has positioned bottled water as purer, healthier and more convenient, but the scientific evidence tells a different story.

This perception of purity is central to bottled water's appeal, yet studies show the product often brings its own set of risks for both health and the environment. A 2025 study suggested that bottled water may not be as safe as many people assume. Tests on water sold in refillable jugs and plastic bottles found high levels of bacterial contamination.

The findings add to a growing body of research suggesting that in many places tap water is not only safe but often more tightly regulated and reliably monitored than bottled alternatives.

In most developed countries, tap water is held to stricter legal and testing standards than bottled water. Public supplies are monitored daily for bacteria, heavy metals and pesticides. In the UK, the Drinking Water Inspectorate publishes results openly. In the US, water suppliers must meet the National Primary Drinking Water Regulations overseen by the Environmental Protection Agency. Across Europe, water quality is governed by the EU Drinking Water Directive.

Bottled water, by contrast, is regulated as a packaged food product. It is tested less frequently and manufacturers are not required to publish detailed quality information. Research has identified contaminants in bottled water, including microplastics, chemical resi-

dues and bacteria. A 2024 study detected tens of thousands of plastic particles per litre in some products. Other research suggests that bottled water often contains higher concentrations of microplastics than tap water, with potential links to inflammation, hormone disruption and the build-up of particles in human organs.

Plastic bottles can also leach chemicals such as antimony, phthalates and bisphenol analogues. Antimony is a catalyst used to make PET bottles, and PET is the most common plastic used for single-use drinks. Phthalates are plasticisers that keep plastics flexible. Bisphenol analogues such as BPS or BPF are close relatives of BPA, a chemical used to harden some plastics and to line food and drink cans. These substances can migrate into the water, especially when bottles sit in warm environments such as cars, delivery vans or direct sunlight.

Scientists are concerned because some of these compounds can act as endocrine disruptors, meaning they may interfere with the body's hormone systems. High exposure to certain phthalates and bisphenols has been linked to effects on reproductive health, metabolism and development, although levels found in bottled water are generally low and the long-term risks are still unclear. Researchers are now exploring what repeated, chronic exposure might mean over time, particularly as bottled water consumption continues to rise worldwide.

Bottled water is not sterile. Once opened, microorganisms can multiply quickly. A halffinished bottle left in a warm car can become an ideal environment for microbial growth. Reusing single-use bottles also introduces



In most developed countries, tap water is held to stricter legal and testing standards than bottled water. Bottled water, by

contrast, is regulated as a packaged food product. It is tested less frequently and manufacturers are not required to publish detailed quality information

bacteria from saliva and the wider environ-

Tap water generally contains beneficial minerals, a point well documented in public health research. In the UK and other countries, fluoride is added to some supplies to prevent tooth decay. Bottled water varies widely in mineral content, and studies suggest that children who drink bottled water more frequently have higher rates of dental caries.

How green is your bottle? Drinking too much bottled water is also hard on the planet. Global consumption is so high that around one million plastic bottles are purchased every minute. Danish water technology company Aquaporin estimates that producing a litre of bottled water can re-

quire up to two thousand times more energy

than supplying a litre of tap water. The car-

bon footprint is higher too, averaging around eighty grams of carbon dioxide per litre once bottling, transport and cooling are included. The bottled water debate cannot be sepa-

rated from the wider pressures facing global water supplies. Access to clean drinking water remains an urgent challenge worldwide. Climate change, rapid urbanisation, industrial pollution and population growth are straining freshwater resources. Unesco warns that more than two billion people already live in regions experiencing high water stress.

To offer alternatives to bottled water, I am working with a team of researchers on Solar-2Water, a portable solar-powered device that generates clean drinking water directly from the air. The system is decentralised, producing water at the point of use rather than relying on long pipelines or large treatment plants. Producing water locally helps reduce reliance on single-use plastics and eases demand on municipal systems.

As pressure on infrastructure grows, decentralised systems that produce clean drinking water at the point of use can complement existing networks. They strengthen resilience during climate shocks, reduce dependence on single-use plastics and provide options for communities where trust in tap water has been damaged.

Bottled water remains essential during emergencies or where tap water is genuinely unsafe. But in most developed countries it is neither safer nor cleaner than tap water. As climate change and pollution reshape water access, understanding the real differences between bottled and tap water matters more than ever.

(The Conversation)

# BENGALURU ONLINE

# BEML rolls out prototype of driverless metro trainset

BENGALURU: BEML on Thursday rolled out the prototype of its driverless metro trainsets, developed for the upcoming BMRCL corridors. The 5RS-DM project will be part of Namma Metro's Phases 2, 2A, and 2B, including the much-anticipated Airport Line.

The prototype for the Pink Line was formally unveiled by Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited Managing Director J Ravishankar in the presence of BEML Chairman and Managing Director Shantanu Roy and senior officials.

The dignitaries also witnessed a test run of the train at the BEML Rail Complex. Under the contract, BEML will supply 318 standard-gauge metro cars, designed, engineered, and manufactured at its Bengaluru facility for the Blue Line (Airport Line) and the Pink Line (Kalena Agrahara in the south to Nagawara in the north), the company said in a release. The trainsets will undergo a detailed programme of testing and commissioning as per BMRCL's implementation schedule, followed by comprehensive maintenance support for up to 15 years, the PSU added.

Read more at https://epaper.thehansindia.com - MurlidharMohol, MoS, Civil Aviation

# BUSINESS

# **BIZ BRIEFS**

# Cognizant unveils Al Lab in B'luru

ognizant announced Uthe opening of its India Artificial Intelligence (AI) Lab alongside a new Cognizant MomentTM Studio in Bengaluru. Both the lab and studio are part of the commitment Cognizant announced in 2023 to invest \$1 billion in generative AI. Ravi Kumar S, CEO, Cognizant, said: "Cognizant plays a pivotal role in enterprise AI by acting as an "AI builder," bringing together our platforms, partnerships and highly skilled workforce to bridge infrastructure investment."

# Sundaram Fin's 25<sup>th</sup> yr in Tirupati

Cundaram Finance Thas announced that its Tirupati branch has completed 25 years of continuous service. S Balasubramanian, VP, Sundaram Finance, said: "At Sundaram Finance, what sustains us is not just longevity, but the spirit of truth, fairness, and service that defines our relationship with people. This branch has endured because of the values it lives by-and the community it serves and belongs to. The event recognized the enduring partnership with customers."

# Dyson's new air purifier

Tyson launched the Dyson HushJet Purifier Compact, an air purifier engineered to deliver whole-room purification with highvelocity airflow, and up to five-year 360° electrostatic particulate filter life. The Dyson HushJet comes in dimensions of 45cm x 23cm x 23cm, it weights 3.5kg and is suitable for a max room size of 100m2. It purifies indoor pollutants such as PM2.5, PM10, pet dander, dust mites, mould spores, nitrogen dioxide from cooking and volatile organic compounds.

# BookMyShow's new initiative

DookMyShow, an en-Dtertainment destination unveiled a report, #BookMyShowThrowback2025. The report notes a decisive behavioural shift: stepping out for entertainment became as routine as deciding where to dine, with films, concerts, comedy and culture finding permanent space on weekly calendars. This is an audience that seeks out experiences with purpose, tracks pop culture with precision and shows up because it wants global-scale storytelling and live moments here, in India and in person.

# Samsung expands skilling programme

Camsung announced a Omajor scale-up of its flagship Samsung Digital & Offline Skills Training (DOST) Sales Programme, under which 9,400 young people from underserved communities will be trained for frontline retail roles. Shubham Mukherjee, Head, Samsung Southwest Asia, said: "Samsung is deeply committed to empowering India's youth to participate meaningfully in the nation's growth story. The DOST Sales Programme, an industry-first initiative, is a focused 5-month training programme designed to equip young people with practical skills.

# Microsoft with 4 top tech firms | Piyush Goyal confident of to power agentic Al adoption

Cognizant, Infosys, TCS, and Wipro with Microsoft are enabling global enterprises to lead in Al-driven economy, harnessing Al that acts as a strategic driver

# **BETTING BIG**

- Microsoft joining 4 IT giants redefines work and innovation
- These IT firms include Cognizant, Infosys, TCS and Wipro
- They will deploy over 200,000 Microsoft **Copilot licences**
- This comes a day after Microsoft's \$17.5 bn investment in India

BENGALURU

Chairman MICROSOFT and CEO Satya Nadella on Thursday announced strategic partnerships with four leading IT companies Cognizant, Infosys, TCS and Wipro - where each of these companies will deploy over 50,000 Microsoft Copi-



lot licenses, collectively surpassing 200,000 licenses and accelerating the adoption of agentic AI.

Microsoft is joining hands with the four leading IT companies to deploy Microsoft 365 Copilot and transform the way organisations operate, innovate, and scale.

With over 50,000 Microsoft Copilot licenses that will be deployed across each of the four IT giants, this partnership underscores the transformative potential of

agentic AI — intelligent systems capable of taking initiative, driving decisions, and generating insights autonomously - aims to create new avenues for growth and competitiveness. Powered by Microsoft, Cognizant, Infosys, TCS, and Wipro are enabling

driver of business outcomes. The four companies will collectively deploy over

global enterprises to lead in

the AI-driven economy, har-

nessing AI that acts not just

as a tool, but as a strategic

200,000 Microsoft Copilot licenses, redefining work and innovation at scale.

This comes a day after Microsoft announced its plans to invest \$17.5 billion in cloud and artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure, skilling and ongoing operations in the country over four years.

"Cognizant, Infosys, TCS, and Wipro aren't just embracing AI — they're setting the global pace. These global enterprises are moving beyond experimentation to full-scale deployment, embedding Microsoft Copilot into the fabric of everyday work," said Puneet Chandok, President, Microsoft India and South Asia.

According to Ravi Kumar S, CEO of Cognizant, "We're experiencing the largest infrastructure investment in tech history, with companies investing hundreds of billions annually into AI infrastructure".

# signing of FTA with EU

MUMBAI

UNION Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday exuded confidence in overcoming issues to finalise a freed trade agreement with the European Union.

Without sharing a timeline on when the pact is expected to be signed, Goyal said that countries like Italy will be able to export their wines and automobiles to India and in turn, India will be able to export whiskies, textiles and auto components to the 27-country bloc.

Citing his discussions with the EU earlier this week, Goyal said, "We are confident... there are a few issues which we still get over the line. I do believe we should be able to get this over the finishing line," Goyal said.

He added that teams are putting in their best efforts to deliver a good agreement, leaving no stone unturned. The Indo-EU FTA will be a fair, equitable and balanced document which will be a win-win for all the countries, Goyal said during his



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remarks at the Italy-India Business Forum, in the presence of Antonio Tajani, Italy's visiting Deputy PM and

Foreign Minister. Both Goyal and Tajani stressed the need for cooperation between democracies for smooth supply of raw materials in the global market. Tajani said one country cannot play a "kingmaker" in deciding the raw material

prices which are critical for production.

The Italian Deputy PM said there is a need for a "political agreement" between Italy-Europe-India-Japan and the USA on this aspect. Goyal also said given the deepening ties between Rome and New Delhi, India-Italy ties will be a defining relationship of the 21st

century.

# ISRO to launch US' BlueBird-6 satellite on Dec 15

NEW DELHI: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is set to launch the 6.5-tonne BlueBird-6 satellite of the US on December 15.

BlueBird 6 communications satellite, developed by the US-based AST Space-Mobile, will be launched on board India's most powerful rocket LVM3. It is one of the heaviest commercial satellites, weighing 6.5 tonnes. The Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite arrived in India from the US on October 19.

"BlueBird 6, a US-licensed satellite, is scheduled to launch on December 15th from the Satish Dhawan Space Center in India," the company said in a statement.

"When launched, it will feature the largest commercial phased array in low Earth orbit at nearly 2,400 square feet. This represents a 3.5 times increase in size over BlueBirds 1-5 and supports 10 times the data capacity," it added. This is the second collaboration between the US and ISRO.

# BMW mulls hike to offset rupee fall against Euro

The company had earlier announced to increase prices by up to 3 per cent from September 1 this year AISALMER

GERMAN luxury carmaker BMW is looking to hike vehicle prices from next month as it aims to offset the impact of the weakened rupee against the euro, company's President and CEO Hardeep Singh Brar said on Thursday. The company had earlier announced to increase prices by up to 3 per cent from September 1 this year, citing the adverse impact of continued forex fluctuation and global supply chain dynamics. BMW currently sells a range of luxury cars and SUVs, including electric vehicles, starting with the 2 Series Gran Coupe priced at Rs45.3 lakh and the XM tagged at Rs2.54 crore, in the Indian market. "Forex fluctuation is a big dampener. We were looking at somewhere about 93 to 95 (rupee against euro) this year, but it is actually around 103 to 105, so it's about 10 per cent deterioration versus our expectation. So that puts a lot of pressure on pricing and

profitability," Brar told media.



He noted that the company was not considering raising prices with the new GST rates coming into effect, but the weakening of the rupee has put a lot of pressure on the profitability.

"The Euro has been extremely unfavourable. The 10 per cent deterioration is really putting a lot of pressure on our bottom line. So, considering that we have to look at the price increase. It could come in January," Brar said.

"We are being forced, otherwise, there were no plans. Given the forex situation, it is really becoming difficult to sustain at these price levels," he added. Mercedes-Benz India announced earlier this year that it is looking to increase prices early next year in order to offset the impact of a weakened rupee against the euro.

# Aster Healthcare to invest ₹120-cr in cancer therapy centres in India

# To support underprivileged cancer patients through CSR

# **ASTER SOCIAL GESTURE**

- The announcement made on 39th Foundation Day
- 5 state-of-the-art radiation therapy centres to be set up across India
- Wayanad centre to be operational in six months

BIZZ BUZZ BUREAU HYDERABAD

ASTER DM Healthcare, one of the largest integrated healthcare providers, has announced a major CSR initiative with Rs120 crore investment to establish five advanced Oncology Radiation LINAC centres across India, dedicated to supporting un-

derprivileged cancer patients. The first centre will be established in Wayanad, Kerala catering to the wider Malabar region, including neighbouring areas such as Gudalore and Gudalpet. The remaining centres will be developed



in strategic locations including Bengaluru and other cities over the next three years, based on community needs and clinical feasibility.

The program aims to provide free and subsidised high-quality radiation therapy to cancer patients from economically weaker sections who are unable to afford or continue life-saving treatment.

Dr Azad Moopen, Founder & Chairman, Aster DM Healthcare said, "This initiative reflects Aster's deep commitment to making advanced cancer care accessible to all, especially underprivileged and underserved communiing five state-of-the-art radiation LINAC therapy centres, we aim to bridge critical gaps in oncology services and ensure that patients receive timely, lifesaving treatment closer to home. No one should be denied

ties across India. By establish-

the chance to fight cancer with dignity, confidence, and hope. Through this effort, Aster reaffirms its mission of delivering high-quality, compassionate healthcare to every patient, regardless of their financial circumstances."

A few key highlights of the initiative include a fully equipped modern centre with linear accelerators and allied facilities.

The treatment will be provided completely free or at highly subsidized rates for patients with low income or those who fall under the below poverty line. Priority will be given to patients who have discontinued therapy due to financial constraints.

# Rangsons bags long-term deal with Airbus

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

RANGSONS Aerospace, aerospace and defense solutions provider with strategic capabilities in Fluid Distribution Systems, Communications Systems and Thermal Management Systems, has secured a long-term contract with Airbus. This milestone further strengthens the company's position as a trusted global partner in high-precision aerostructures and advanced aerospace systems.

The award letter was formally signed by Olivier Cauquil, Senior Vice President - Aerostructures Procurement at Airbus, and Pavan Ranga, Managing Director & CEO of Rangsons Aerospace, marking a key moment in the ongoing strategic collaboration between the two organisations.

Under this long-term scope, Rangsons will be the first Indian Tier-1 company to manufacture critical aviation tubes and duct assemblies for the Airbus A320 Family.

# Markets snap 3-day losing run

Buying across IT, auto, metals helped offset recent weakness, supported by decline in India VIX

# Renewed Optimism BSE climbed

- 426.86pts (+0.51%) to 84,818.13
- NSE Nifty advanced 140.55pts (+0.55%) to 25,898.55

FIIs sold Rs1,651.06

cr; DIIs bought Rs3,752.31 cr

Mumbai

BENCHMARK stock indices

Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Thursday, cutting short a three-day falling streak following buying in auto and metal stocks and a rate cut by the US Federal Reserve. Rebounding from its early

lows, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 426.86 points or 0.51 per cent, to settle at 84,818.13. During the day, it hit a high of 84,906.93 and a low of 84,150.19. The 50-share NSE Nifty appreciated by 140.55 points, or 0.55 per cent, to close at 25,898.55. Following initial volatility, the Nifty gradually moved higher and closed near the day's peak of 25,922.80 as most sectors advanced.

Among the Sensex constit-



tak Mahindra Bank, UltraTech Cement, Maruti Suzuki India, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Tech Mahindra, HDFC Bank, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, Infosys, Trent, Mahindra & Mahindra, Reliance Industries and HCL Technologies were the gainers. However, Asian Paints, Bharti Airtel Bajaj Finance, PowerGrid, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank and Titan were among the lag-

uents, Eternal, Tata Steel, Ko-

gards. "Domestic markets rebounded broadly following the Fed's expected 25-bps rate cut amid high U.S. inflation. The decline in U.S.

10-year yields indicates a moderation in future FII outflows, which bolstered sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said. Nair added that the auto sector excelled due to

anticipated stronger demand, while IT gained traction on the prospect of increased spending. Conversely, other Asian

markets experienced selling pressure over concerns about AI-driven valuations and rising Japanese yields, which negatively impacted overall domestic sentiment. Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd said buying across IT, auto, metals, realty and banking helped offset recent weakness, supported by a decline in India VIX. Steady domestic sentiment was reinforced by robust equity inflows of Rs 29,894 crore in November. However, continued weakness in the rupee capped the momentum he added.

Broader markets rebounded, with the BSE midcap gauge rising 0.79 per cent and

cent. Among sectoral indices, Metal rose the most by 1.14 per cent, Auto by 1.08 per cent, Commodities by 0.94 per cent, IT and Telecommunication by 0.89 per cent each, Focussed IT by 0.87 per cent, Consumer Discretionary by 0.86 per cent, Healthcare by 0.77 per cent and Realty by 0.71 per cent. Oil & Gas was the only laggard. As many as 2,397 stocks advanced, while 1,786 declined and 158 remained unchanged on the BSE. "Indian equities traded

the smallcap index by 0.51 per

higher on Thursday, with the Nifty snapping a three-session slide to end higher, after the US Federal Reserve delivered a widely anticipated 25 basis point rate cut, a move investors hope will help temper foreign outflows," Siddhartha Khemka - Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said. Khemka added that uncertainty around progress in India-US trade negotiations, continuous foreign institutional investor selling, and the absence of major near-term triggers, with the Fed rate cut now behind, are likely to keep market sentiment somewhat lacklustre.

# SIP inflows dip marginally to ₹29,445 cr in November

Despite minor dip, overall investor participation in mutual funds stayed strong

# **INVESTING TRENDS**

- Gold ETFs dropped sharply to ₹3,742 cr
- Sectoral and thematic funds attracted

₹1,865 cr

Liquid funds reported outflows of ₹14,050 cr

Mumbai

SIP inflows in November remained almost steady at Rs 29,445 crore, slightly lower than the Rs 29,529 crore recorded in October, according to data released by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) on Thursday.

Despite this minor dip, overall investor participation in mutual funds stayed strong during the month. Net equity inflows saw a healthy rise, increasing to Rs 29,894 crore in November from Rs 24,671

crore in October. The industry's total assets under management also grew, touching Rs 80.80 lakh crore compared to Rs 79.87 lakh crore in the previous month. "The month's flows underscore a constructive risk appetite, supported by deep domestic liquidity, strong and



sticky retail SIP participation, and optimism about India's medium-term economic and corporate earnings outlook," market experts stated. Within equity categories,

large-cap funds attracted Rs 1,640 crore, improving from Rs 972 crore in October. Midcap funds continued to see strong interest with inflows rising to Rs 4,487 crore from Rs 3,807 crore. Small-cap funds also witnessed higher inflows of Rs 4,407 crore, up from Rs 3,476 crore a month earlier. Gold ETFs, however, saw a sharp decline in inflows, dropping to Rs 3,742 crore from Rs 7,743 crore in October. Other ETFs performed better, with inflows increasing to Rs 9,721 crore compared to Rs 6,182 crore previously.

also gained traction, attracting Rs 1,865 crore against Rs 1,366 crore in October. Liquid funds reported outflows of Rs 14,050 crore in November, but this was significantly lower than the heavy outflows of Rs 89,375 crore seen in October. Dividend yield funds continued to see money moving out, with outflows rising to Rs 278 crore from Rs 179 crore in the previous month. "Going ahead, with uncertainty still prevailing around the timing and pace of monetary easing, flows are likely to remain anchored in shorter-duration and high-quality strategies, with investors preferring to wait for clearer policy signals before extending duration exposure," market experts said.