



Pause, not peace

Donald Trump should play the honest broker, not a partisan patron

After two years of relentless Israeli bombardment, Palestinians in Gaza are finally getting a reprieve. The ceasefire agreement, signed by Hamas and Israel as part of U.S. President Donald Trump's 20-point peace plan, brought a pause in Israel's attacks. Hamas is expected to release all living hostages on Monday and the bodies of the rest on the days after. Israeli troops have already started retreating to the initial withdrawal line, from Rafah in the south to Gaza City in the north along the border, and some 2,000 Palestinian prisoners will be released. Mr. Trump deserves credit for the ceasefire. Until recently, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who always vowed to fight until "total victory", resisted all calls for a ceasefire. When Israel started the Gaza war, after Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack, it pledged to "dismantle" the Islamist militant outfit. In two years, Israel has turned Gaza into rubble and displaced most of its 2.3 million people. Its brutal genocidal assault and starvation of Palestinians led to its international isolation. Yet, Hamas remained an unresolved problem. Mr. Netanyahu wanted to continue to fight irrespective of international public opinion. But the U.S., which continues to back Israel militarily and diplomatically, finally strong-armed Mr. Netanyahu into accepting the ceasefire in return for the release of hostages.

While the ceasefire is a major reprieve for the Palestinians, the hostages and their families, it may not necessarily lead to lasting peace in Gaza. The ceasefire is only the initial phase of the Trump plan, which also calls for demilitarising Hamas, placing Gaza under an international governance body, and the deployment of an International Stabilisation Force for security. In its response to the Trump plan, Hamas agreed to release the hostages but remained non-committal on other terms. Another contentious issue is the continuing presence of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Gaza - after the initial withdrawal, the IDF will still control some 53% of Gaza. Mr. Trump is expected to travel to Egypt on Monday to attend a summit on Gaza - French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer will be present. The renewed international attention on the Palestine question is a positive development. But the question is whether these deliberations can bridge the gaps in the Israeli and Palestinian positions, leading to lasting peace. Hamas is unlikely to accept demands to dismantle itself, certainly not after fighting Israeli forces for two years. But it could be pressured to relinquish power in Gaza for a Palestinian authority, backed by international actors, while Israel should be persuaded to leave. For Mr. Trump's hopes for lasting peace, he should act as an independent broker, not as a partisan patron of one country, and recognise Israel's security and the Palestinian quest for self-determination.

Mature relationship

India and the United Kingdom have deepened business ties without fuss

At a time when social media threats, reciprocal actions, and shrill rhetoric are becoming the global norm, the manner in which the India-U.K. economic relationship is unfolding is a refreshing change. U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's two-day visit to India last week reinforced the existing solidity in economic relations and deepened them. India's negotiations with the U.S. have been fraught, erratic, and dramatic. U.S. President Donald Trump has also shown that he is more than willing to change the contours of deals already struck. Negotiations with the European Union have been less fraught and dramatic, but there certainly seems to be a gap between the positive assurances made by the leaders and what the negotiators say in private about the deal's progress. Against this backdrop, Sir Starmer chose to bring a delegation of more than 100 entrepreneurs, cultural representatives, and university vice-chancellors and left India with defence, investment and movie deals, further cementing the trade deal signed in July. The keenness to deepen trade relations makes eminent sense. India, despite being the fourth-largest economy in the world and one of the largest markets, accounts for less than 2% of the U.K.'s total merchandise exports. The U.K. accounts for about 3% of India's exports. There is ample scope for trade to grow. Growing India-U.K. trade could also mitigate some of the impact of the U.S.'s punitive 50% tariffs, if they remain.

One of the unsaid reasons why India is slowing its capital expenditure is because it needs to fund its defence acquisitions. Sir Starmer's visit made sure that some of these acquisitions - in the form of a £350 million missile supply deal - came the U.K.'s way. The U.K. government also revealed that 64 Indian companies have so far committed to invest £1.3 billion in the U.K. It goes without saying that U.K. companies would have made similar investment commitments in India, but the Indian government has inexplicably not made these public yet. Yet, statements by companies such as Rolls-Royce show that there is enthusiasm there. The Indian population in the U.K. is the largest ethnic minority, and this is not lost on the political leadership either. One of the first things Sir Starmer did on arriving in Mumbai was to visit Yash Raj Films (YRF) and meet Indian producers. The result was that YRF has committed to shoot three films in the U.K. Two U.K. universities have also committed to opening campuses in India. This cross-sector cooperation is how mature democracies should work together - without fuss and ego, just business.

The recent spate of Israeli victories has left the impression that Israel is now the military and political hegemon in West Asia and can shape the region to suit its preferences - the near decimation of Hezbollah's military wing in Lebanon; the overthrow of the Assad regime leading to extended Israeli control of Syrian territory; the total devastation of Gaza and the drastic reduction of Hamas's military capabilities, and, above all, the near total destruction of Iran's nuclear weapons capability albeit with American help.

The fragile ceasefire imposed by United States President Donald Trump in Gaza last week adds to this impression because of his accompanying harsh rhetoric, publicly warning Hamas about the devastating consequences that it may face if it rejects his plan. To the uninitiated this may appear to signal a further tilt in favour of Israel. But Mr. Trump's plan was much more an imposition on Israel than it was on Hamas. In effect, it was Israel that was ordered to ceasefire since it was doing all the shooting and the killing and to partially withdraw its forces to new lines in Gaza. Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had to give up his goal of completely destroying Hamas and reimposing full Israeli control over Gaza. All that Hamas conceded was the release of Israeli hostages in return for the release of over a thousand Palestinian prisoners. Hamas has so far not accepted Mr. Trump's demand to disarm and give up its goal of governing Gaza after a total Israeli withdrawal. Whether it will ever do so is an open question.

It is a binational state

While prospects for Israel's regional hegemony may look bright in the short term, such hegemony is unsustainable over any length of time. Despite its current militarily unchallenged position, eventually, Israel will prove to be a colossus with feet of clay. There are several indicators that point in this direction.

The first is its demographic base. Israel within its 1967 borders has a population of just over nine million, with Palestinians forming 20% or about two million of this population. The West Bank including East Jerusalem plus the Gaza Strip is home to over six million Palestinians. Greater Israel, which is the dream of a sizable proportion of Israeli Jews, will have a population almost evenly divided between Jews and Palestinians.

Therefore, in terms of demography, it will clearly be a binational state. This is bound to pose an existential dilemma for Israel. It would have to accept the political as well as the demographic reality of a binational state with equal rights for all its Jewish and Palestinian citizens if it wants to remain a democracy. Alternatively, it would have to openly acknowledge the fact that it is an



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Despite its militarily unchallenged position, Tel Aviv could prove to be a colossus with feet of clay

Indicators of Israel's unsustainable hegemony

apartheid state with one ethnic group ruling over the other à la South Africa under Afrikaner rule. The first option would put an end to the Zionist dream of a Jewish state in the heart of West Asia. The second it will formalise the existing situation but at the same time bring upon Israel a huge amount of international opprobrium that would leave it further isolated internationally and treated as an outcaste state just like South Africa under apartheid rule. Either of the options would leave Israel internally divided or internationally isolated or both. For such a state to sustain a hegemonic position in the region in the long-term would be a very tall order.

The impact of Israel's actions

The second reason why Israeli hegemony is likely to be unsustainable is the fact that its recent actions have scared off several Arab regimes, especially the Gulf sheikhdoms and Saudi Arabia, that had seen Israel as a potential counterweight to Iran's perceived hegemonic ambitions in the region. This assessment was the driving force behind the so-called Abraham Accords among Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, and extended later to Morocco and Sudan. These states now perceive Israel as a power drunk actor that has run amok. While some of them may have secretly applauded Israel's decimation of Hezbollah, the atrocities committed by Israel in Gaza - where 67,000 Palestinians, including thousands of women and children, have been killed by Israeli bombs and bullets and by Israel's policy of starving the besieged population - have left them unnerved. Although these states have authoritarian regimes, their rulers realise that popular anger over the carnage in Gaza is reaching boiling point and can have deleterious effects on the legitimacy of their regimes if they are seen cosying up to a perennially aggressive Tel Aviv bent on denying the Palestinians their right to self-determination.

Furthermore, the callous Israeli attempt to kill Hamas negotiators in Qatar by bombing Doha, in September 2025, in contravention of its promise not to attack Hamas officials in Qatar, has convinced the Gulf regimes that they cannot consider Israel to be a trusted friend let alone an ally. This has set back by years the Israeli-American dream of extending the so-called Abraham Accords, and especially the all-important normalisation of Israel's relations with Saudi Arabia. Israeli legitimacy even among sympathetic Arab elites has reached its nadir.

Finally, Israel's actions in Gaza, which border on ethnic cleansing, have brought about a sea change in popular opinion in the U.S. This is extremely important because Israel's ambition for hegemony in West Asia rests on the assumption that it would have unflinching support from Washington. While this may not be clear at first

sight, the erosion in popular support for Israel in the U.S. is bound to be reflected in American policy in the not-too-distant future. Mr. Trump's railroading of Mr. Netanyahu to accept his plan for ending the war in Gaza, although it did not meet the latter's goals, may be a sign of things to come. Israel's abject dependence on the U.S. was laid bare by Mr. Netanyahu's call, on Mr. Trump's command, to the Qatari Prime Minister to apologise for the attack on Doha.

American popular opinion has never been so hostile towards Israel as it is now. A recent Pew poll found that almost 60% of Americans hold negative views of the Israeli government. Even a substantial proportion of American Jews has turned against Israel. Another recent *Washington Post* poll showed that 61% of American Jews hold the view that Israel has committed war crimes in Gaza and that 40% believe that Israel committed genocide. Many American academics, including most genocide scholars, believe that Israel's policies in Gaza meet the legal definition of genocide. This is true of most human rights organisations as well. In short, American public opinion is becoming synchronous with the opinion held in most European countries that has forced many of their governments to recognise the State of Palestine despite the strident objections of Israel and America. This swing in public opinion is eventually bound to influence decision-makers in Washington especially since a considerable part of Mr. Trump's MAGA ('Make America Great Again') base has also begun to subscribe to it.

The view in Washington

American support to Israel is of vital importance to Tel Aviv. A major change in Washington's approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict and towards West Asia in general could transform the whole equation between Israel and its neighbours. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the U.S. has major strategic and economic interests in West Asia which have so far played second fiddle to its unquestioning support for Israel. This could easily undergo a change under Mr. Trump given his transactional approach to international relations where allies' interests are considered secondary to American objectives.

Furthermore, with Iran's nuclear and missile capabilities degraded and the Tehran-led Axis of Resistance in a shambles, Israel's strategic value to Washington stands reduced. In fact, it is beginning to be perceived as an obstacle to the achievement of America's larger strategic and economic goals. Without America's unconditional support, Israel would be cut down to size and its dreams of regional hegemony shattered beyond repair. This is a scenario that may happen sooner or later, and probably sooner than later.

Great Nicobar revives the issue of nature's legal rights

From an ecological point of view, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands can be easily rated as one of the world's most major biological diversity hotspots, acting as a global carbon reservoir and climate regulator. Unfortunately, the development trajectory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has been largely influenced by mainland India which has often been far removed from the needs of an island ecology. The issue in focus now is the Government of India's multi-crore mega-plan for the Great Nicobar Island - the construction of a power plant, township, transshipment port and airport, which will also affect 13,000 hectares of pristine forests.

Essential judicial precedent

A landmark judgment relating to the issue of diversion of forests that could come to the rescue of the Great Nicobar Island is the Niyamgiri Hills case, pursuant to the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

In its 2013 judgment, in *Orissa Mining Corporation Ltd. vs Ministry Of Environment & Forest and Ors.*, the Supreme Court of India addressed the concerns of the Dongoria Kondh tribe who resisted plans for bauxite mining in the sacred Niyamgiri Hills of Odisha. Following protests by the tribes in the region against mining which threatened their culture, religion and environment, the Court ordered a referendum in the affected *gram sabhas*, which unanimously voted against the project. The Court upheld the competence of the *gram sabha* to safeguard and preserve the traditions of the community, their cultural identity, community resources and community modes of dispute resolution.

In light of this judgment, the pertinent questions with respect to the proposed project on the Great Nicobar Island include whether the Tribal Council of Little and Great Nicobar has been allowed to exercise its competence in certifying the settlement of forest rights under



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There are examples in the legal world that offer guidance on the protection of territories and natural resources

the Forest Rights Act before the decision to divert forest land. A report in this daily, "Forest rights of tribal people were not settled for Nicobar project: council" (August 23, 2025), has highlighted how the Tribal Council had said that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Administration had made a false representation to the Centre by claiming that rights of the tribal people under the Forest Rights Act had been identified and settled before diverting the required forest land for the project.

Granting rights to nature in India

What is being witnessed in the Great Nicobar is not new but one more example of how big multipurpose projects are on track to be planned disasters. The examples are many - from Tehri in the north to Koel Karo in the east to Sardar Sarovar in the west. To respond to a consistent failure of environmental law in protecting ecology, several countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and New Zealand) have adopted a new legal approach called 'earth jurisprudence' or 'rights of nature' which grants rights to non-human natural entities (rivers, forests, mountains, and various ecosystems), recognising them as subjects of rights holders.

This approach drew inspiration from an influential article written by Christopher Stone in 1972 - 'Should Trees Have Standing? - Toward Legal Rights For Natural Objects'. He argued that the current approach did not consider damages to the environment, but only environment-related damages to humans in granting relief.

Second, such relief did not go to the natural entity but only to affected human beings. He said that making natural entities as right holders, by vesting them with legal standing in court and making them the direct beneficiaries of legal redress, would improve the environment. But the question arises whether natural entities, like human adults, be held legally responsible and exercise legal competences by entering into contracts or whether they can sue and be sued by

an aggrieved party. Stone suggested the creation of a guardianship body which could initiate legal action and also collect funds to preserve and restore its condition.

The groundbreaking turn towards recognising the rights of natural entities happened in India in 2017 when the Uttarakhand High Court granted legal personhood to the Ganges and Yamuna rivers, as well as the Gangotri and Yamunotri glaciers. The judgment, in *Mohd. Salim vs State of Uttarakhand and Others*, conferred these entities with rights and obligations but only through a designated person. Although the Supreme Court stayed the ruling of the High Court, some of the elements in the High Court judgment, especially the idea of conferring guardianship responsibilities on behalf of those natural entities, could be a signpost for designing legal personhood.

The case in Colombia as guidance

Pushing the boundary of the Forest Rights Act further to incorporate the idea of granting legal personhood is one such option. Still, the idea of granting legal personhood to natural entities will require the building of greater clarity on the specific legal rights and the responsibility of individuals charged with upholding them. An in-depth study of important normative questions such as how to define rights bearing nature, what rights to recognise, who can speak for nature, and whether someone should be responsible for protecting nature, is required.

In finding answers to these normative questions, there is guidance from Colombia's Atrato River case (2016), which recognised bio-cultural rights - a reference to the right of ethnic communities to autonomously administer and protect their territories as well as the natural resources that constitute their habitat. The formation of a commission of guardians requires the inclusion of representatives from the indigenous people facing the destruction of their habitat.

2025), that the health and the safety rights of workers will become executive discretion, is factually incorrect and misleading.
Rini Choudhury,
New Delhi

India-Afghanistan ties
At a time when China is leaving no stone unturned to cosy up to nations especially India's

neighbours and Pakistan is turning belligerent, it is imperative that India keeps Afghanistan in good humour. However, New Delhi must persuade the autocratic regime to adopt a fair rights-based system.

Aanya Singhal,
Noida, Uttar Pradesh
Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

Global doors, measured steps

Not so long ago, the idea of India as the place for resolution of international commercial disputes would have sounded like the start of a bad lawyer joke. Equally unimaginable was that the Supreme Court of India, known for decades for its exceptional judicial activism and for protecting the constitutional rights of India's citizenry, would throw its weight behind the idea of making India a destination for the resolution of high-value commercial disputes – first, for adjudicating disputes related to domestic investments; and second, for adjudicating disputes related to cross-border investments.

The India Alternative Dispute Resolution Week, organised by the Mumbai Centre for International Arbitration in Bengaluru, Mumbai and Delhi last month, reflects a change unimaginable just a decade ago. No one expected that top litigation and arbitration counsel from across the globe would flock to India in such a short span of time; and that they would trade best practices with the Indian Bar and Bench, in a manner hitherto seen in New York, London, and Singapore.

Foreign law firms in India
The fact is that international interest in the Indian legal profession is not new. In fact, foreign lawyers were interested in tapping the Indian market as early as the 1990s, when the economy opened up. However, Indian law firms were small, know-how was patchy, and the possibility of scaling up was limited by the fragmented manner in which firms were organised. There was also a brain drain from the five-year law schools. In short, the Indian legal industry, at that juncture, was simply not ready to jostle with foreign law firms. These concerns were aired in court, which resulted in multiple decisions. First, in its 2009 decision in *Lawyers Collective*, the Bombay High Court disallowed



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The India Alternative Dispute Resolution Week reflected a change that was unimaginable just a decade ago

foreign law firms from practising both corporate transactional work and litigation in India, even if they had on their rolls Indian qualified lawyers. Three years later, the Madras High Court doubled down the position in *A.K. Balaji*, but fortunately left a small crack open by permitting temporary advice on foreign law to be provided by foreign lawyers. Finally, in 2018, the Supreme Court harmonised the strands: “fly-in, fly-out” advice was fine, but permanent offices were not. Foreign law firms that wanted to open offices in India were left standing at the altar, which then gradually led to a waning of their interests.

Many critics called the Indian approach parochial. In truth, it was really about timing. The worry was never that Indian lawyers lacked ability. Think of Sir Benegal Rau, or Fali Nariman, or Soli Sorabjee, whose advocacy travelled well beyond Indian courts. Rather, the concern was that domestic firms would be muscled out by foreign law firms.

A changed picture
The picture has changed dramatically. Indian law firms hitherto manned by 15-20 lawyers, have over 1,000 lawyers with significant global exposure. That, coupled with top-notch know-how, allows Indian law firms to grow even further. Commendable in this growth has also been the fact that unlike many other sectors in India which grew because of the introduction of foreign direct investment, the Indian legal profession grew organically, with little or no outside support. Today, Indian law firms have offices abroad, and Indian lawyers are often dually or triply qualified, practising across jurisdictions and climbing to the very top of their fields.

It is against this backdrop that the Bar Council of India's 2025 Rules for Registration and Regulation of Foreign Lawyers and Law Firms can be seen as the first formal step towards providing new impetus to the growth of the

Indian legal profession. This comes on the heels of the Bar Council's first substantive acknowledgement in 2023, indicating that the Bar was open to allowing foreign lawyers to practise foreign and international law in India. The 2025 amendments give a framework.

Aristotle's Golden Mean
Yes, the framework bristles with compliance obligations, be it registrations, ministry certifications, annual filings or the 60-day cap on unregistered “fly-in” work. While these may feel like red tape, they ensure foreign expertise complements rather than eclipses the domestic profession. Concerns about such requirements deterring entrants remain, and indeed, it is better to air these now than after the floodgates open. Put simply, the idea is that foreign firms can advise on their home-country law, international law, and appear in international arbitrations seated in India. What they cannot do is equally crucial. They are not permitted to practise Indian law or appear in Indian courts unless enrolled. Reciprocity remains the lodestar of the new framework. Foreign firms may only set up shop in India if Indian lawyers are given the same rights in the foreign jurisdiction. Far from a bland compromise, this is Aristotle's Golden Mean – neither reckless liberalisation nor defensive insularity. As Rabindranath Tagore once said, “[e]verything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it.” India, slowly and deliberately, is creating that capacity.

As that capacity builds, so will the consequences. As Abraham Lincoln put it, “I walk slowly, but I never walk backward.” That has been India's legal journey: cautious, deliberate, but steadily moving forward. The Indian legal profession and domestic law firms are set to become a world players, a testament of which was played out through September.

Balancing faith and politics

The LDF finds itself entangled in Sabarimala troubles — again

STATE OF PLAY

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When the Travancore Devaswom Board announced its plan to organise the Global Ayyappa Sangamam, a global meet of Sabarimala devotees, in September, few expected it to expose another fault line in Kerala's uneasy relationship between faith and politics. That a Left Front Democratic (LDF) government, which has long been proud of its commitment to rationalism, embraced the language of faith and devotion sparked a wave of reactions, ranging from scepticism and ridicule to outright opposition.

In 2018, the LDF had enforced the Supreme Court verdict allowing women's entry into Sabarimala despite opposition from many devotees in the State. This cost the Left Front dearly in the 2019 Assembly elections. By organising the Global Ayyappa Sangama, the LDF appeared to be conducting a re-branding exercise to reclaim goodwill from the broader Hindu community. To detractors, however, the event appeared to be opportunistic at best and desperate at worst.

At the event, an array of community organisations representing various Hindu groups stood on a public stage with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. There were several empty chairs at the venue, but for the government, the optics clearly mattered more than the attendance.

For a while, the LDF's strategy seemed to work. The political discourse centred around the support provided by key community organisations to the government, par-



ticularly the Nair Service Society (NSS). Realising this, the Opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) scrambled to repair its ties with the NSS, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) accused the NSS of “turning Left”. For a while, it appeared that the NSS, despite internal criticism, was even inching towards an informal understanding with the SNDP Yogam, another community organisation that leans in favour of the LDF.

However, all this changed when a controversy suddenly erupted. The idols of the *dwarapalakas* or temple guards, and their pedestals, in the Sabarimala temple suddenly seemed to have lost weight. It appeared that the gold plating on the idols had gone missing. Immediately, there were allegations of theft, manipulated records, and a massive cover-up. The Kerala High Court ordered a detailed investigation into the case.

The full details of the suspected irregularities are still not known. However, the ongoing inventory and expert inspection of Sabarimala temple's valuables is a key step towards making the temple's management more transparent. In parallel, a Special Investigation Team, constituted in the wake of an interim report from the Travancore Devaswom Board's vigilance wing, is conducting an inquiry as well.

The magnitude of the scan-

dal has left several officials of the Board, including at least three Board presidents appointed by the LDF government since 2016, in the line of fire. This fresh wave of allegations, spanning nearly 25 years of temple administration, has thrown the government off balance as well, just when it seemed to have struck a fragile equilibrium with the Hindu community organisations. The controversy has exposed serious lapses by the authorities in overseeing the temple's affairs, as well as their inability to prevent a network of wrongdoing at Sabarimala involving some TDB officials and some outsiders.

Meanwhile, the organisations that once stood with the LDF for the sake of Sabarimala, including the NSS, find themselves cornered. The NSS is grappling with mounting criticism from people at the grassroots for having offered unconditional support to the LDF. Meanwhile, the SNDP Yogam, which is struggling to retain its credibility amid growing public anger, has demanded an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation into all the irregularities at Sabarimala; this has been echoed by the UDF. The NSS too has now called for an impartial probe and urged “punishment without mercy” for those found guilty.

The Opposition has seized the opportunity to allege wrongdoing by the Board and the government. The Congress has demanded that the Devaswom Minister resign, and the BJP, which, from the sidelines, watched the episode unfold, has also swung into campaign mode.

For Kerala, the hill shrine has long symbolised a struggle to balance faith and politics. The latest episode underlines that struggle once again.

Do cash transfers build women's agency?

There is a need to ensure that women do not only receive money but also control, grow, and sustain it for their own advancement

DATA POINT

Shravani Prakash
Jiya Bharti
Riya Khanna

The politics of welfare in India has become increasingly gendered, with cash transfers emerging as both a social policy instrument and an electoral strategy. Just weeks before Assembly elections, the Bihar government has rolled out the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana – a ₹10,000 transfer to 75 lakh women as seed capital for self-employment. The goal is to help them start or expand small enterprises, with up to ₹2 lakh in additional support for successful ventures.

This joins a list of women-focused cash transfer programmes, such as Karnataka's Gruha Lakshmi, West Bengal's Lakshmi Bhandar, Madhya Pradesh's Ladli Behna Yojana, and Telangana's Mahalakshmi. These are powered by India's Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) architecture, anchored on the ‘JAM trinity’ of Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar, and mobile phones. This infrastructure enables targeted delivery and transparency.

As of August 2025, over 56 crore Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana accounts have been opened, with women owning 55.7% of them. According to the World Bank's Global Findex Database 2025, 54% of Indian women reported opening their first bank account primarily to receive government benefits or wages. With 89% of Indian women now holding a bank account – on par with developed nations and far above the global average of 77% – India has achieved a remarkable milestone in recognising women as economic actors with a formal financial identity (**Chart 1**).

At the heart of this progress lies a critical question: can direct cash empower women as economic agents rather than just welfare recipients? DBT schemes have been

shown to enhance women's visible control over resources. Research shows that income in a woman's name increases her say in household decisions and improves outcomes for children and the elderly. Therefore, schemes such as Bihar's Rojgar Yojana to become genuine instruments of economic empowerment, they need to move beyond simply placing money in women's bank accounts. Beneficiaries require complementary long-term support.

Most importantly, building genuine financial agency will require giving women control over assets by providing them with secure property rights and joint land titles. Only when women have tangible control over land or business assets can they leverage credit, participate in markets, and engage in new forms of commerce.

Equally critical is strengthening the ‘mobile’ pillar of the JAM trinity. Subsidised smartphones and affordable data plans would allow women to access their accounts and digital payment tools independently, avoiding reliance on shared devices that erode privacy and autonomy. Banks, fintech, and mobile operators must co-create financial products that reflect the realities of women's informal, seasonal, or sporadic incomes; caregiving responsibilities; and limited financial and digital literacy.

Community-based confidence networks can bridge the trust gap. Initiatives such as digital banking *sakhis* and secure WhatsApp or UPI groups can offer trusted spaces for women to seek advice, share experiences, and resolve doubts collectively. Another priority should be to expand the number of female banking agents – less than 10% of India's 1.3 million business correspondents are women. The path to real empowerment lies in coupling access with agency-building – ensuring women can not only receive money but also control, grow, and sustain it for their own advancement.

tions (**Chart 3**).

Therefore, India's leap from access to agency for women remains incomplete. So, for schemes such as Bihar's Rojgar Yojana to become genuine instruments of economic empowerment, they need to move beyond simply placing money in women's bank accounts. Beneficiaries require complementary long-term support.

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Shravani Prakash, Jiya Bharti and Riya Khanna are with ICRIER's Economic Policies for Women Led Development Program

Beyond the transfer

The data for the charts were sourced from the World Bank Findex Report (2025) and the CMS-Telecom Report 2025



Chart 1: Proportion of women who own bank accounts in India and globally

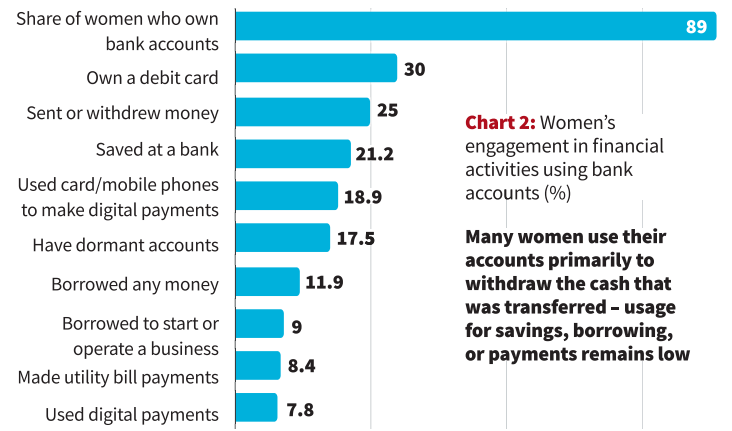
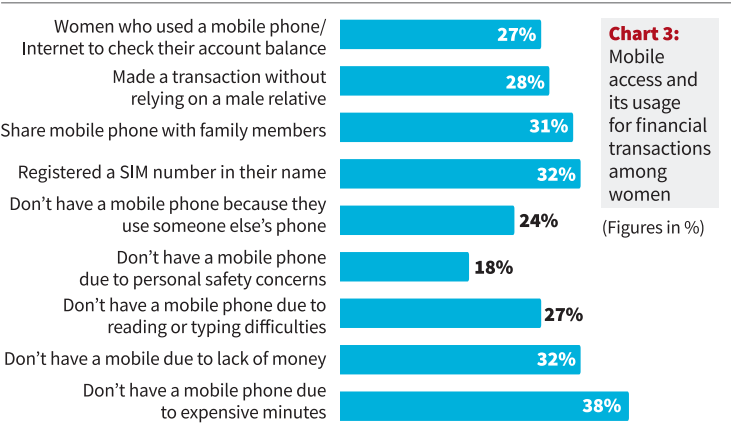


Chart 2: Women's engagement in financial activities using bank accounts (%)

Many women use their accounts primarily to withdraw the cash that was transferred – usage for savings, borrowing, or payments remains low



(Figures in %)

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The  **Hindu.**

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 13, 1975

Meteorology advisory centres for farmers

Varanasi, Oct. 12: A wide network of agricultural meteorology centres will soon come up in the country to provide advisory services to the farmers and conduct research on meteorological aspects of agriculture.

The Agricultural Meteorology Division at Poona, a division under the India Meteorology Department, will be expanded to undertake these activities in an effort to boost the country's farming.

According to Dr. R.P. Sarkar, Director of Agricultural Meteorology Division of the Meteorology Department at Poona, five regional centres will be set up at Madras, Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Nagpur in the current plan to provide advisory services to the farmers.

The centres will broadcast through All India Radio, possibly daily information on what crop practices should be followed, what fertilizers and pesticides should be used under different climatic conditions and when and how to harvest to the best advantage.

The division was already providing some advisory services to the farmers through SITE (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment) programmes, Dr. Sarkar told UNI in an interview.

Dr. Sarkar was here as a delegate to the ecology meet which ended yesterday.

The proposed advisory service would be different from the existing farmers' weather bulletins broadcast through AIR every evening.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 13, 1925

The clay industry in Mysore

Mysore, Oct. 12: The Government gave stipends to a number of young men to get trained in the clay industry and allied arts at the Jamsheji Jeejeebhoy School of Arts in Bombay and other places. By their joint effort an institution where flooring and roofing tiles, busts, etc. are to be manufactured has been just started. The institution is called the Industrial Fund Ceramic Institute, and is registered as a philanthropic institute. The fund is to be collected from public subscriptions, as the capital to the glass factory at the Talegaon was done under the name of the Paisa Fund. The income of the institute is to be utilised for infrastuture development, for educating poor students and developing the industry.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Taliban fighters killed along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border

200 At least 23 Pakistani soldiers were killed in intense overnight clashes along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, the Pakistani Army said on Sunday, as tensions escalated between the two neighbours amid mutual accusations of cross-border aggression. PTI

Number of persons arrested after clashes at fascist rally in Spain

17 Spanish police said the arrests were made in the northern city of Vitoria on Sunday after fascist supporters of former dictator Francisco Franco clashed with counter-protesters. The rare violence comes as the European country marks the 50th anniversary of the general's death. AFP

Services delivered through the Himachal e-District portal

22.78 In lakh. Services delivered through Himachal Pradesh's e-District Portal in 2024 was the highest so far under the State's ongoing push for digital governance, officials said on Sunday. In 2025, the number has already touched 15 lakh. PTI

Number of single-teacher schools in India in 2024-25

1.04 lakh. These schools catered to 33,76,769 students — an average of about 34 students per school. The highest number of "single-teacher" schools is in Andhra Pradesh, followed by Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Lakshadweep. PTI

The amount of sugar exported by India in 2024-25

7.75 lakh tonnes. India is estimated to have exported 7.75 lakh tonnes of sugar in the marketing season that ended September, AISTA said, urging the government to announce an early export quota for the new season. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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The voting patterns of Muslims in Seemanchal

Muslims in Seemanchal are broadly divided into three castes — the Surjapuri, Shershahbadi and Kulhaiya castes. Although the differences between them are not very obvious to an outsider, these three caste groups differ culturally

FULL CONTEXT

Tanzil Asif

Muslim voters are often said to vote en-bloc. This assumption has been applied to the Muslims of Seemanchal in Bihar as well, largely due to the surprising rise of Asaduddin Owaisi's party All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) in 2020. However, this is hardly the case. Around 28% of Bihar's 2.31 crore Muslim population live in the Seemanchal region comprising Kishanganj, Katihar, Araria and Purnia districts. While almost all of them are from the Sunni denomination of Islam, the community is not homogeneous.

Caste composition

Muslims in Seemanchal are broadly divided into three castes — the Surjapuri, Shershahbadi and Kulhaiya castes. Although the differences between them are not very obvious to an outsider, these three caste groups differ culturally, rarely intermarry, and speak distinct dialects. The dialects originate from a mixture of Maithili and Bangla, diluted with words borrowed from Hindi and Urdu. The dialect spoken by Shershahbadis is closer to Bangla, while the Kulhaiya dialect is closer to Maithili. Surjapuri lies somewhere in the middle, with heavy dilution from Urdu words.

However, the biggest difference between the caste groups depends on which Sunni Islamic movement they follow — Barelvi, Deobandi, or Ahle Hadith. Surjapuris are divided between Barelvi and Deobandi, with a larger section leaning towards the former. The Kulhaiyas are predominantly Deobandi, while Shershahbadis largely follow Ahle Hadith. Barelvi, Deobandi and Ahle Hadith are three Sunni Islamic movements in South Asia. Barelvis embrace Sufism, veneration of saints, and the celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Deobandis are more reformist, discourage excessive saint veneration and innovations, while maintaining some Sufi influence in a stricter form. Ahle Hadith adherents rely directly on the Quran and Hadith, opposing any religious customs not found in early Islamic texts.

Earlier, all three groups — the Surjapuri, Shershahbadi and Kulhaiya — were identified as Shaikh, one of the three castes categorised as upper-caste Muslims along with Pathan and Syed. However, due to the historical backwardness of the region and changes in political representation, Shershahbadis and Kulhaiyas were included in the list of Extremely Backward Classes (EBC), while Surjapuris remained in the Backward Caste category. The Bihar caste Census 2023 identifies Surjapuris as the third largest Muslim caste group (after Shaikh and Ansari) with a population of around 24.5 lakh people. The Shershahbadis have around 13 lakh, and Kulhaiyas, 12.5 lakh. There is also a fourth caste derived from Shaikh called the Sekhra, with a population of about 2.5 lakh in Seemanchal. In addition, there are Muslims from different castes who have migrated from different parts of Bihar to Seemanchal for business purposes. They are collectively referred to by locals as *Pachhimas*, meaning Westerners or those coming from the west, particularly from the region around the Begusarai district.

The Surjapuri Muslims mainly live in Kishanganj, Purnia and Katihar districts. Araria is dominated by Kulhaiya Muslims, with a considerable population also living



Not homogenous: A Booth Level Officer (BLO) checks documents during the SIR at Jogbani, Araria in Bihar on July 8. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

in Purnia. Shershahbadi Muslims primarily live in Katihar, with a considerable presence in Kishanganj.

Shifting trends

Caste awareness and voting along caste lines is a recent phenomenon among the Muslims of Seemanchal. These political shifts began around 2000, and by 2010, the change had become visible.

Before 2000, there were Muslim MLAs from all four prominent castes in Seemanchal. Mohammad Hussain Azad, Rafique Alam, Abdul Jalil Mastan (Amour), Abdus Subhan, Islamuddin, Najmuddin, Mohammad Suleman, Abdul Jalil (Kadwa) and Usman Ghani from the Surjapuri caste; Mohammad Taslimuddin, Hasibur Rahman, Motiur Rahman, Halimuddin Ahmed, Muzaffar Hussain and Beula Doza from Kulhaiyas; Mohammad Shakoor, Mubarak Hussain and Mansoor Alam from Shershahbadis; and Mohammad Azimuddin from the Sekhra caste were elected MLAs from different constituencies of Seemanchal. Many of them got elected from seats not dominated by their castes.

However, this well-distributed representation, which reflected the saying *jiski jitni sankhya bhaari, Uski utni hisse daari* (the greater one's numbers, the greater one's share), was not reflected at the Lok Sabha level. The Kishanganj Lok Sabha constituency, dominated by Surjapuri Muslims, was represented either by Kulhaiya leaders like Mohammad Tahir, Jamilur Rahman, Halimuddin Ahmed and Mohammad Taslimuddin, or by upper-caste Muslim leaders such as Syed Shahabuddin, Syed Shahnawaz Hussain, or parachute politicians like M.J. Akbar.

It took a tall Surjapuri leader, Maulana Asrarul Haque Qasmi, a well-known Islamic scholar who served as general secretary of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, 24 years to get elected from Kishanganj. He first contested in the 1985 byelection but could only win in the 2009 general elections, when Surjapuri Muslims collectively rallied behind him against the incumbent Mohammad Taslimuddin, a Kulhaiya. After that, in 2014, Mr.

Taslimuddin shifted his base to neighbouring Araria, a Kulhaiya-dominated constituency.

In subsequent elections, Surjapuri Muslims continued to dominate the Kishanganj seat, reaching a peak in the last Lok Sabha elections which saw a triangular contest between three Surjapuri Muslim candidates — Mohammad Jawaid from the Congress, Mujahid Alam from the Janata Dal (United), and Akhtarul Iman from the AIMIM. Meanwhile, Mr. Taslimuddin's family has maintained dominance in Araria, winning or losing in close contests since 2014. Katihar's long wait for local Muslim representation in Parliament continues as Tarique Anwar, a Syed from Arwal, has held sway there for 50 years.

The present scenario

Since 2000, the number of Surjapuri MLAs in the Bihar assembly has ranged between five and seven, Kulhaiya between one and two, Sekhra between zero and one, while MLAs from the most vilified Shershahbadi community has dropped from two to zero.

Out of the 24 Assembly constituencies in Seemanchal, 11 were won by Muslim MLAs in 2020. Of these, six are Surjapuri, two Kulhaiyas, one Sekhra, and two upper-caste Muslims. The number of Muslim MLAs in the region was the same in 2015, but then there were seven Surjapuri MLAs and only one upper-caste Muslim MLA. Purnia's Baisi seat is currently represented by Syed Ruknuddin Ahmad, an upper-caste Muslim whose family has traditionally managed a local dargah, a shrine revered by Barelvi Muslims. Senior Congress leader Shakeel Ahmad Khan, also an upper-caste Muslim, has consecutively won from Katihar's Kadwa seat.

Just like the Kishanganj Lok Sabha seat, in many seats the caste equation has now stabilised. All four Assembly seats in the Kishanganj district — Kochadhaman, Bahadurganj, Kishanganj and Thakurganj — along with Katihar's Balrampur, are dominated by Surjapuri Muslims. Araria district's Jokihat and Araria are traditional Kulhaiya seats. Purnia's Amour and Baisi

are largely Surjapuri-dominated but have a significant Kulhaiya population. Katihar's Prampur has a mix of Surjapuri and Shershahbadi populations, while Kadwa has a large Surjapuri population. Katihar's Barari, Manihari and Korha, and Kishanganj's Thakurganj and Kishanganj seats, have a considerable Shershahbadi population.

Sekhra Muslims are numerically significant in the Araria assembly seat, although the only current Sekhra MLA represents Purnia's Kasba, which has a notable Kulhaiya and Shershahbadi presence.

It is now almost impossible for a non-Surjapuri Muslim candidate to win from Kochadhaman, Bahadurganj, Kishanganj, Thakurganj and Balrampur. Similarly, a non-Kulhaiya Muslim cannot hope to win from Jokihat, and the Araria assembly seat is also difficult for a non-Kulhaiya Muslim candidate. Amour and Baisi, though Surjapuri-dominated, often see strong Kulhaiya candidates. Prampur is the only seat where a prominent Shershahbadi Muslim candidate has appeared in the last few elections. Manihari is reserved for Scheduled Tribes, Korha for Scheduled Castes, while none of the major alliances now field Muslim candidates in Barari.

The *Mahagathbandhan* (grand alliance) in Bihar, which is the Opposition alliance, comprising the Rashtriya Janata Dal, Congress, Left parties and others will respect the caste dominance in their ticket distribution this time as well. The AIMIM which had tasted success in five seats of Seemanchal by unifying Surjapuri-Kulhaiya votes is making the same attempt again in these elections. The AIMIM Bihar chief Akhtarul Iman is a prominent Surjapuri leader and the incumbent MLA from Amour. However, the party has announced a Kulhaiya candidate in the neighbouring Baisi seat, in an attempt to unite Surjapuri-Kulhaiya votes in the region, and it is given that the party's candidate in the neighbouring seat, Jokihat, will be a Kulhaiya.

Tanzil Asif is the founder of Seemanchal-based news platform Main Media.

THE GIST

▼ Around 28% of Bihar's 2.31 crore Muslim population live in the Seemanchal region comprising Kishanganj, Katihar, Araria and Purnia districts.

▼ Caste awareness and voting along caste lines is a recent phenomenon among the Muslims of Seemanchal. These political shifts began around 2000, and by 2010, the change had become visible.

▼ Out of the 24 Assembly constituencies in Seemanchal, 11 were won by Muslim MLAs in 2020. Of these, six are Surjapuri, two Kulhaiyas, one Sekhra, and two upper-caste Muslims.

CACHE



SpaceX, X and electric car maker Tesla CEO Elon Musk. AFP

Why did ex-Twitter executives’ file a lawsuit against Elon Musk?

In their lawsuit, former Twitter CEO Parag Agrawal, CFO Ned Segal, Chief Legal Officer Vijaya Gadde, and General Counsel Sean Edgett claimed that Mr. Musk fired them because of his personal grudge, and a “special ire” against them

Sahana Venugopal

The story so far: On October 1, Elon Musk agreed to settle a \$128 million lawsuit brought against him by former Twitter senior executives, as per media reports. In the lawsuit, former Twitter CEO Parag Agrawal, CFO Ned Segal, Chief Legal Officer Vijaya Gadde, and General Counsel Sean Edgett accused Mr. Musk of firing them without a reason after he purchased the social media platform for \$44 billion, and denying them severance payments. While the exact sum of the settlement and its conditions are not yet public, the case was significant as the high-profile firings set the tone of Mr. Musk’s stormy term at the helm of Twitter, which he later rebranded as X.

What is the history of the Twitter firing lawsuit? Mr. Musk’s acquisition of Twitter started off as a running gag online, but was soon finalised in 2022. The acquisition process was marked by confusion, as well as multiple U-turns throughout the months running up to October 2022. Mr. Musk was initially set to join the company’s board but later offered to acquire the company. He then tried

backing out, citing numerous spam accounts. He finally went ahead with the acquisition reluctantly, expressing his misgivings about the platform. After he bought Twitter, he immediately fired several senior executives so they did not have enough time to resign, per their lawsuit. Mr. Musk then began laying off 50% of the company’s 7,500-person strong workforce, gutting safety and content moderation teams. Many employees in Twitter offices worldwide were completely unaware of their employment status even as Mr. Musk revamped the app, made free features paid, and reinstated banned accounts.

What did the fired executives do? In their lawsuit, filed in March 2024, Mr. Agrawal, Mr. Segal, Ms. Gadde, and Mr. Edgett claimed that Mr. Musk fired them because of his personal grudge, and a “special ire” against them. They further alleged that the firings were aimed at saving himself \$200 million by making sure the executives would not get their severance benefits, including stock options that were due to vest. The executives “appropriately and vigorously represented the interests of Twitter’s public shareholders throughout Musk’s wrongful attempt to renege on the

deal,” the filing stated. “For their efforts, Musk vowed a lifetime of revenge.” The executives also referenced quotes from Mr. Musk’s biography by Walter Isaacson to back their claims. The filing stressed the importance of severance benefits to ensure that company executives represented the best interests of shareholders. Furthermore, they claimed that Musk’s efforts would not withstand legal scrutiny and that he accused the executives of “gross negligence” and “willful misconduct” without providing evidence.

Who all were involved in the lawsuit? Elon Musk is the billionaire technologist and owner of Twitter, which he rebranded as X after buying it for \$44 billion in 2022. X is now owned by his AI company xAI. Parag Agrawal worked at Twitter from 2011 until 2022, and was Twitter’s Chief Executive Officer from November 29, 2021 until October 27, 2022, following Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey. He is now the founder and CEO of Parallel, which is focusing on open web experiences and high accuracy web searches for AI tools and systems, per his X account. Ned Segal was Twitter’s Chief Financial Officer from August 25, 2017 until October 27, 2022. According to his LinkedIn

account, he is currently the Chief of Housing and Economic Development in San Francisco. Vijaya Gadde is a lawyer who worked at Twitter from 2011 until October 27, 2022. She became the Chief Legal Officer in February 2018. As per her LinkedIn, Ms. Gadde is a member of multiple company boards. Sean Edgett worked in Twitter’s legal department from 2012 until October 27, 2022, and was Twitter’s General Counsel from February 2018. He is, according to his LinkedIn profile, the Chief Legal Officer and Secretary at the Match Group.

Is there any information about the settlement? According to a legal filing dated October 1, 2025, in the U.S. Northern District Court of California, the four executives and Mr. Musk stated that they had reached a settlement. This is not final, and requires certain conditions to be met in the near term. In addition to this, the parties involved sought court approval for the existing case management deadlines to be postponed by about a month in each instance, so that they would have time to meet the stated conditions. The settlement amount and the stipulated conditions have not yet been disclosed.

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on the Nobel Prizes following the announcement of the 2025 Laureates

V.V. Ramanan

- QUESTION 1**
In 2025, for the first time in Nobel history, four faculty of which U.S. institution have won the award in a single year.
- QUESTION 2**
Which is the latest of the six categories (added in 1968)? Also, who established the category?
- QUESTION 3**
The last time there was no Nobel Prize for a category was in 1972. Which category?
- QUESTION 4**
Which category has had the

- most laureates with 232 since inception, including 40 times of having three people sharing the award.
- QUESTION 5**
Who was the last individual to win a second Nobel prize and in which category?
- QUESTION 6**
What is common to these five Peace laureates: Carl von Ossietzky, Aung San Suu Kyi, Liu Xiaobo, Ales Bialiatski and Narges Mohammadi?
- QUESTION 7**
What is the surname of the only siblings to have won the Nobel Prize, with one sharing the 1969 Economics prize and the other the 1973 Medicine prize?



Visual question: Name this Asian who declined the prize in 1973. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

- Questions and Answers to the October 10 edition of the daily quiz:** 1. The name of Taylor Swift’s fifth studio album. **Ans: 1989**
2. This British male popstar was made internationally popular through his stint as a concert tour opener for Swift. **Ans: Ed Sheeran**
3. The play by William Shakespeare Swift drew inspiration from in this hit song. **Ans: ‘Romeo and Juliet’ by William Shakespeare; ‘Love Story’**
4. The name of the song Swift penned for Rihanna’s collaboration with DJ Calvin Harris. **Ans: ‘This is What You Came For’; she wrote the song under the pseudonym, ‘Nils Sjoberg.’**
5. The way in which Swift retaliated to being unable to own the rights to her first six studio albums. **Ans: Swift set to create new recordings of all of the musical work in the six albums that did not belong to her, and re-release them with the suffix of ‘Taylor’s Version’**
Visual: Identify this hip-hop artist. **Ans: ye or Kanye West**
Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan| Neil Lal| Teena Chaudhary| Vibhuti Singh| Arun Kumar Singh



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

She is the epitome of grace

I found a paper which disproved the thesis. So now its back to square one for me and my team

S. Upendran

What is the meaning and origin of the idiom ‘back to square one’? (K. Saurabh, Vizag) The expression has been around for some time, and when it was first used, it was ‘back at square one’. Nowadays, when we say that we are ‘back to square one’, what we mean is that we are back to where we started. The solution that we had come up with to solve a problem did not work; and as a result, we are going back to the beginning, start all over again, and come up with another plan – one that will hopefully work! The owner has changed his mind, and is now unwilling to sell the car. So, I’m back to square one. I have to look for another one. When her abstract was rejected, Shalini realised that it was back to square one as far as the article was concerned.

Several explanations have been put forward as to the origin of the idiom. The first is that it comes from one of the board games that many of us played as kids – Snakes and Ladders. When we think we are about to win the game, we sometimes land on a snake and slide all the way to the bottom. We begin all over again! Others are of the opinion that the expression itself was made popular in the early decades of the 20th century, by radio commentators on the BBC. On the day of important football games, newspapers and sports magazines had a drawing of the football field divided into eight squares. All the squares were numbered, and radio commentators kept the audience informed about what was happening on the field by telling them in which square the ball was in. The home team’s goalie stood on square one, and when a defender tapped the ball to the goalie, the ball was ‘back to square one’.

How is the word ‘epitome’ pronounced? (T. Nirupama, Kochi) The important thing to remember about this word is that the final ‘e’ is not silent; the word consists of four syllables, and not three. The ‘e’ in the first and fourth syllables sounds like the ‘i’ in ‘kit’, ‘lit’ and ‘hit’, while the ‘o’ is like the ‘a’ in ‘china’. The second syllable is pronounced ‘pit’. The word is pronounced ‘i-PIT-e-mi’ with the stress on the second syllable. It comes from the Latin ‘epitome’ meaning ‘abridgement’ or ‘brief summary’. Nowadays, the word is mostly used in everyday contexts to mean ‘ideal example’ of something. For example, if you were to say that someone is an epitome of laziness, what you are implying is that the individual is the perfect example of laziness – he is an embodiment of laziness. The word can be used with both positive and negative qualities. Another word, which has more or less the same meaning, is ‘paragon’. Even at 70, many consider her to be the epitome of grace and elegance. upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

Fallal: cheap showy jewellery or ornament on clothing
Synonyms: bauble, gaud, novelty, trinket

Usage: She bought a dress full of sparkly fallals.
Pronunciation: newsth.live/fallalpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /fæɪˈlæl/

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

Abel laureate Masaki Kashiwara changed how algebra meets analysis

His big breakthrough in representation theory came about a decade after he proved the Riemann-Hilbert correspondence; although it belongs to mathematics, representation theory is very important to quantum physics. Physicists often use it to describe the behaviour of electrons and photons

Sayantan Datta

In March this year, the Japanese mathematician Masaki Kashiwara found out over a Zoom call that he had been awarded the Abel Prize, one of mathematics’ highest honours, for “his fundamental contributions to algebraic analysis and representation theory”.

Dr. Kashiwara had started developing parts of his Abel-winning work when he was 23. He is now 78.

At the time, enrolled as a postgraduate student at the University of Tokyo in Japan, he began working with D-modules – a way by which mathematicians can study a system of partial differential equations using the tools of algebra. These equations are commonly found across the sciences.

By 1980, Dr. Kashiwara had used his theory of D-modules to prove the Riemann-Hilbert correspondence – one of 23 famous problems posed by the German mathematician David Hilbert in 1900. (Three of Hilbert’s problems remain unsolved to this day.)

Such was the impact of this work that “Kashiwara could (even should) have won the Fields Medal already at the International Congress of Mathematicians ... in 1982,” Dr. Pierre Schapira, a French mathematician who has collaborated with Dr. Kashiwara for over five decades, wrote in April this year. The Fields medal is another prestigious prize in mathematics but is reserved for those below the age of 40.

In 1982, the Medal went to Alain Connes, William Thurston, and Shing-Tung Yau. When Dr. Kashiwara did not win, Dr. Schapira speculated it was “because his work was too innovative to be understood at that time.”

And he was just getting started.

Riemann-Hilbert correspondence

Differential equations help us describe how one quantity changes with respect to another. For example, such an equation can be used to describe how a car’s speed changes vis-à-vis time. Solving this equation can help say whether the car is speeding up or slowing down at some point in time and by how much.

The Riemann-Hilbert correspondence is about a particular type of differential equations called linear partial differential equations.

Imagine you’re baking a cake. As the oven heats it from the outside, heat spreads inside the cake and different parts of the cake warm at different speeds. If you wanted to describe this, you’d need to know how temperature changes with time and how it changes at different points inside the cake. A partial differential equation is the mathematical way to keep track of all these changes at once.

When working on a mathematical equation, it is possible to encounter a solution that isn’t well defined. For example, the solution of the equation $y = 1/x$ is not defined for $x = 0$. Such points are called singularities. Partial differential equations have singularities, too.

And if you follow the solutions of a partial differential equation for points around a singularity, you encounter an effect called monodromy. Imagine a spiral staircase where each step is a point where the equation can be solved. At the centre of the spiral lies the singularity.

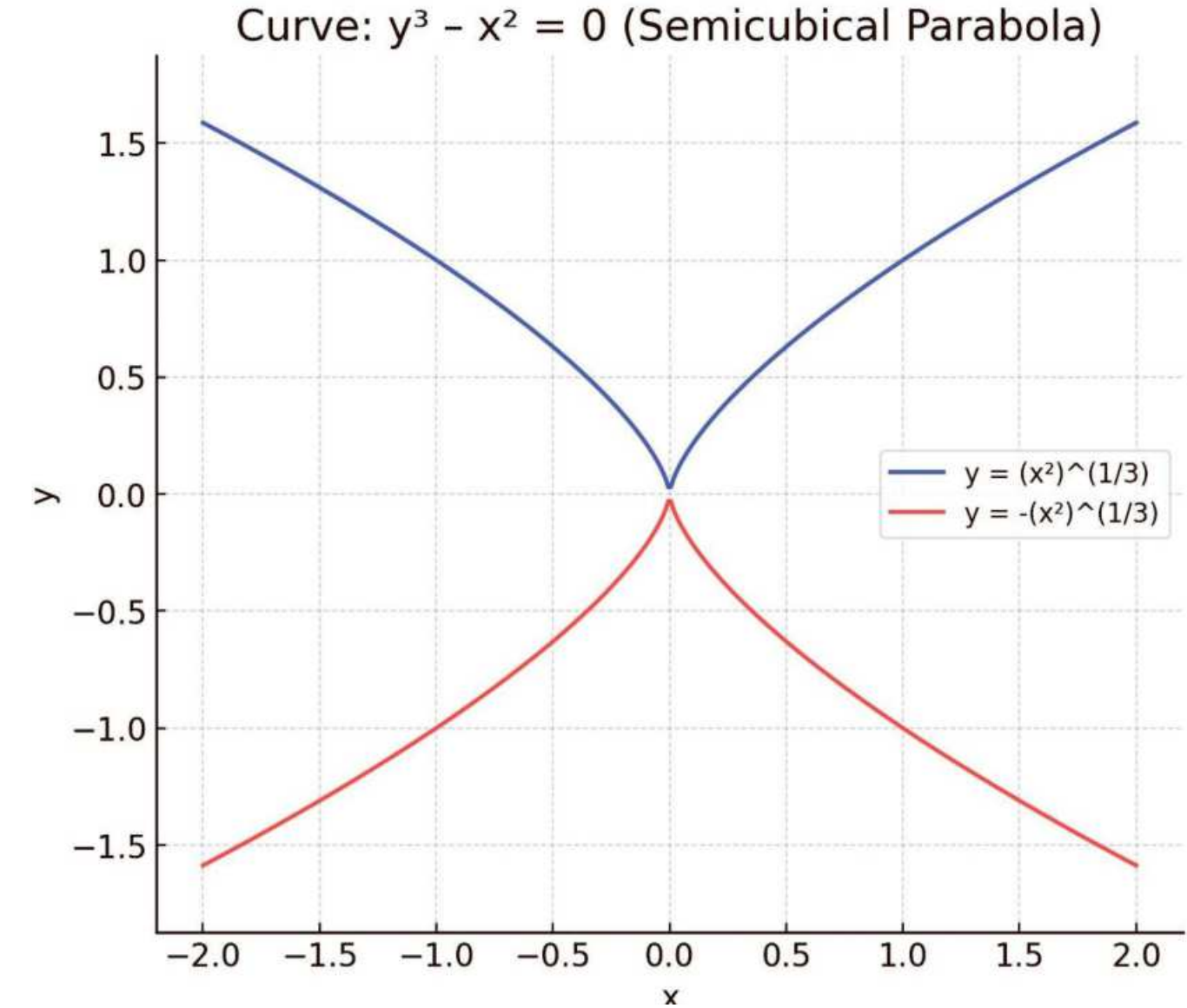
Because the solutions lie along a spiral staircase, taking one complete turn of the staircase won’t return you to the point where we started. Instead, you’ll have climbed a level higher or a level lower. This is like a monodromy. Specifically, a monodromy is when the solutions of a partial differential equation around a point behave differently when we return to it after having looped around a singularity.

When Hilbert proposed the Riemann-Hilbert correspondence, he knew that given a partial differential equation, one could identify its singularities and monodromies. He wondered if the opposite was true: that, given a singularity and a monodromy around it, would it be possible to determine the corresponding equation?

The Belgian mathematician Peter Deligne provided a proof of the Riemann-Hilbert correspondence in 1970. A decade later, two mathematicians – Zoghman Mebkhout and Dr. Kashiwara – independently proved it for settings more general than that considered by Dr. Deligne. Dr. Kashiwara’s proof involved the theory of D-modules.

‘A new horizon’

Dr. Kashiwara’s work was a part of a



A graph depicting a singularity at [0, 0] for the function $y^3 - x^2 = 0$. IMAGE CREATED WITH CHATGPT 5

larger project initiated by his advisor Mikio Sato, the Japanese mathematician credited with launching the field of algebraic analysis in 1959.

Algebra is the field of mathematics that deals with variables (e.g. x and y) and the relationships between them. Analysis is the field that tries to provide a theoretical foundation for calculus. Among other things, analysts are concerned with how to solve differential equations.

Even though they are common in the sciences, differential equations are known to be very hard to solve. In fact, barring some of the simplest cases, there exist no explicit formulae to crack them.

Sato’s algebraic analysis was an attempt to circumvent the need to solve individual differential equations. Instead, he wished to use the tools of algebra to study how certain kinds of partial differential equations behave.

This would help mathematicians study all solutions of a system of partial differential equations rather than individual solutions, Arvind Nair, a mathematician at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai, said.

“Moving questions [of analysis] to algebra allows for the tools of algebra to be used” for studying partial differential equations, “which are often very powerful,” he added.

Algebraic analysis also sought to bridge two domains of mathematics – algebra and analysis – previously believed to be independent. As a result researchers could solve problems from one domain using the tools of the other.

In a 2024 paper, Schapira, Dr. Kashiwara’s collaborator, called this advance “a new horizon in mathematics”.

Dr. Kashiwara took Sato’s dream forward when he began working on D-modules as a student. According to Dr. Schapira, Dr. Kashiwara’s work on D-modules finally gave mathematicians “the tools to treat general systems of linear partial differential equations, as opposed to one equation with one unknown”.

That is, instead of trying to solve one partial differential equation in detail, D-modules allowed mathematicians to study how classes of such equations behaved in different conditions.

In his efforts, Dr. Kashiwara recast the Riemann-Hilbert correspondence as a correspondence between D-modules and mathematical objects called perverse sheaves. The latter is a way to represent systems of solutions of polynomial equations. A polynomial equation is an algebraic expression like $x^2 + y^2 = 0$.

“This can be thought of as a dictionary between two kinds of [mathematical] objects,” Dr. Nair said.

Hilbert’s version of this dictionary involved partial differential equations and a collection of singularities and monodromies around them.

Dr. Kashiwara’s reformulation also expanded the scope of the correspondence. According to Apoorva

Kashiwara recast the Riemann-Hilbert correspondence as a correspondence between D-modules and mathematical objects called perverse sheaves. The latter is a way to represent systems of solutions of polynomial equations

Khare, an associate professor of mathematics at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, “the original setting of the problem was far more restricted than the one Kashiwara solved the question in.”

Representation theory

About a decade after Dr. Kashiwara proved the Riemann-Hilbert correspondence, he made another big breakthrough, this time in a branch of mathematics called representation theory. Although it belongs to maths, representation theory is very important in physics too – especially quantum physics. In fact, physicists often use it as the language to describe the behaviour of basic particles like electrons and photons.

Representation theory takes complicated mathematical objects and expresses them in terms of simpler ones. A good example is groups. In maths, a group is the set of all the different ways you can change the position of an object – by rotating it, flipping it or moving it around. Each such change is called an element of the group.

Groups can be very hard to study because they carry so much information. To make them easier to handle, representation theory converts them into matrices, which are rectangular grids of numbers or symbols. The theory offers rules so that every element of the group corresponds to a specific matrix.



Dr. Kashiwara took Mikio Sato’s dream forward when he began working on D-modules as a student. GERT-MARTIN GREUEL (CC BY-SA 2.0)

This idea of representing with matrices can be extended to other mathematical objects as well. One important example is the quantum group, created by mathematicians and physicists in the 1980s. This is where Dr. Kashiwara next made his mark.

Moving on a graph

In 1990, Dr. Kashiwara invented crystal bases, a new way to represent quantum groups. (MIT mathematics professor George Lusztig also independently invented crystal bases at the same time.)

Consider a two-dimensional space, like a graph with x - and y -axes. A point in this graph can be represented as a vector: an arrow that starts from the origin and ends at the point. These vectors can be expressed as a combination of movements along the x - and y -axes. For example, you can reach [5, 3] from [0, 0] by moving 5 units on the x -axis followed by 3 units on the y -axis.

Mathematicians call these unitary movements ‘bases’. According to Dr. Khare, Kashiwara turned the basis of quantum groups into graphs. It was a significant achievement because it created a “combinatorial tool that enabled the solution of many problems [of quantum groups] in representation theory,” per Kashiwara’s biography on the Abel Prize website.

Dr. Khare added that the technique made “computations on these objects easier” and that it yielded “more comprehensive information about quantum groups”.

Mathematicians around the world often use Dr. Kashiwara’s discoveries to push the boundaries of their disciplines. For example, Dr. Nair, the TIFR Mumbai mathematician, said he uses Dr. Kashiwara’s formulation of “the Riemann-Hilbert correspondence every day” in his work. Dr. Nair works on representation theory and algebraic geometry; the latter uses algebraic techniques to solve problems in geometry.

Perhaps Dr. Kashiwara’s biggest contribution is building bridges between different domains of mathematics. His work on D-modules, for example, bridges the study of differential equations with algebra and topology, the study of spaces that are not changed under certain kinds of deformations.

In doing so, it allows mathematicians to tackle problems in one domain with tools borrowed from a different domain – somewhat like how using Teflon coatings, originally made to protect aircraft, gave rise to diets with less cooking oil.

At 78, Dr. Kashiwara is still building these bridges for mathematicians.

(Sayantan Datta is a faculty member at Krea University and an independent science journalist. The author thanks Pierre Schapira (Sorbonne University) and K.N. Raghavan, Rishi Vyas, and Vivek Tewary (all at Krea University) for their inputs. dattasayantan95@gmail.com)



The naked mole rat lives nearly 10x longer than other mammals of similar size. TIM EVANSON

A mere four mutations help the naked mole rat fix its DNA and live longer

The Hindu Bureau

The naked mole rat (*Heterocephalus glaber*) is a small, hairless rodent native to East Africa, and famous for living an astonishingly long time, up to around 37 years, nearly 10x longer than mammals of similar size. Scientists have long suspected its remarkable longevity comes from adaptations that keep its DNA intact.

As we age, DNA damage accumulates in our cells. Normally, cells repair these breaks using several molecular pathways, but errors or inefficiencies in repair make genomes unstable and lead to ageing and disease.

One molecule known to influence this process is cyclic GMP-AMP synthase (cGAS). In humans and mice, cGAS helps detect foreign DNA, such as that from viruses, and triggers immune responses. However, it also suppresses one of the body’s main DNA-repair systems, called homologous recombination. As a result, human cGAS can actually make cells more prone to ageing and cancer.

Scientists have wondered whether, during evolution, the naked mole rat might have changed cGAS so that it no longer interferes with DNA repair, or maybe even helps it. A new study led by researchers at Tongji University, and recently published in *Science*, set out to check this idea.

The researchers compared the cGAS genes and proteins of naked mole rats with those of humans and mice. They used genetic engineering tools to switch specific amino acids – the building blocks of proteins – between species and observe the effects on DNA repair. They also performed experiments in cell cultures, fruit flies, and mice to test how these molecular changes affected genome stability, cellular ageing, and lifespan.

In the naked mole rat, evolution essentially flipped the role of cGAS, supporting the idea that efficient DNA repair is one of the main defences against ageing

Thus, the team found that in humans and mice, cGAS interferes with the homologous recombination pathway; however, in naked mole rats, cGAS enhances it. The reason lay in four amino acid substitutions in cGAS’s structure, which allowed naked mole rat cGAS to remain bound to DNA for longer after damage occurred instead of being quickly removed. This binding prevented cGAS from being tagged for destruction by a process called ubiquitination.

Instead, naked mole rat cGAS brought together two repair proteins, called FANCI and RAD50, to speed up homologous recombination and help fix DNA breaks more efficiently. Cells with this modified cGAS showed fewer signs of stress-induced ageing.

When the scientists put the same four amino acid changes into human cGAS, the molecule stopped harming DNA repair.

The discovery is remarkable for showing that longevity can evolve not only by improving helpful repair enzymes but also by weakening harmful regulators. In the naked mole rat, evolution essentially ‘flipped’ the role of cGAS, supporting the long-standing idea that efficient DNA repair is one of the main defences against ageing.

“Our work provides a molecular basis for how DNA repair is activated to contribute to the exceptional longevity during evolution in naked mole-rats,” the researchers wrote in their paper.

Independent experts have said that if scientists can safely reproduce this effect in other species, including humans, it could open new paths for age-related research and therapies. For example, medicines that adjust how cGAS interacts with DNA might help cells maintain genome integrity without compromising the immune system.

For feedback and suggestions for ‘Science’, please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject ‘Daily page’

Radio reforms

Digital radio is overdue and needs a push

In an age where payments, cinema, and even government services have embraced digital transformation, radio, the medium that once defined mass communication, remains stubbornly analogue. India’s first proposal to shift FM radio to digital was floated in 2018. Seven years on, FM broadcasting continues in its traditional analogue form, with audio quality, channel capacity, and user interface stuck in the last century.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) is now attempting to change this, recommending that new smartphones and in-car radios be equipped with digital FM chips by default. This move, if implemented, could finally bring India’s airwaves into the 21st century. Digital FM promises a versatile listening experience. Unlike analogue radio, a single digital frequency can carry three to four channels, offering listeners more variety while enabling broadcasters to segment audiences more effectively. This, in turn, expands advertising inventory and allows operators to charge premium rates. TRAI’s plan envisions spectrum auctions in 13 cities, including the four metros of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai, and nine other major cities, with winners receiving a 15-year window to operate services.

The transition is not without challenges. The radio segment has remained commercially stagnant, with advertising revenue holding steady at around 2 per cent of the media market over the past four years. In this scenario, the cost of shifting to digital — particularly the expense of acquiring spectrum for digital services — may appear prohibitive for radio operators. TRAI has proposed a pragmatic approach: digital radio operators would pay “nil” bid amounts for the first five years, with mechanisms for instalment payments thereafter. The regulator also noted that commercial success will depend on the proliferation of receiver devices, meaning listenership, and hence advertising revenue, will be minimal during the initial rollout phase. It has also recommended a simulcast mode for the migration of existing analogue FM. Under this mode, operators can simultaneously broadcast one analogue channel, three digital channels, and one data channel on the assigned frequency — providing operators with a transition period.

Globally, there are multiple digital radio standards, including Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB/DAB+), Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM), and HD Radio. TRAI has wisely recommended adopting a single standard but has left the choice to the government. This leaves the door open to potential delays because the industry players are divided between adopting DRM and HD Radio. DRM is an open, royalty-free standard, while HD Radio, may require royalties. A definitive decision is essential to give manufacturers the confidence to invest in single-chip solutions, reducing costs and ensuring availability for both portable and in-car devices. Device makers should be incentivised to install digital FM receivers across devices. Digital FM is long overdue, and merits a push.

OTHER VOICES.

The Japan Times

U.S., China Must Avoid Futile Trade War

Trade friction between the United States and China, which had been in a relative lull, has begun to reignite. This might be part of negotiating tactics related to tariff talks, but if their confrontation deepens, it will inevitably deal a significant blow to the global economy. Both the United States and China must exercise restraint to prevent their conflict from descending into futile retaliation between the two. U.S. President Donald Trump announced Friday that the United States would impose an additional tariff of 100% on imports from China, starting Nov. 1. He said the move is in retaliation for China’s stricter export controls on rare earths. Trump expressed his anger, saying, “China has taken an extraordinarily aggressive position” on trade. TOKYO, OCTOBER 12

The Guardian

AI bubble: capitalism still hasn’t evolved to protect itself

The message from global regulators this week was blunt: the AI boom is driving stocks to dotcom-bubble highs – and the world is finally listening. With so much cash riding on so few firms, any loss of faith could send shares tumbling and drag down the wider economy. China’s proposed export controls on rare earths add a fresh threat: not just to sentiment, but to advanced chip supply chains themselves. It’s a long way down from such dizzying heights if gravity reasserts itself. Warnings from the past abound in Charles Kindleberger’s history of financial crises, Manias, Panics and Crashes, which begins with tulip mania in 1636. What commonly happens, he wrote, is “that some event changes the economic outlook. New opportunities for profits are seized, and overdone.” LONDON, OCTOBER 10

All of us are familiar with politicians and government officials — never mind that they come very low down on the Indian State’s food chain — making a big show of their status. Last week I saw a fellow who was clearly a politician walk into the boarding area of a flight accompanied by a three-man entourage provided by the airport as required by law now. No one paid any attention to him.

His place in the scheme of sarkari things became evident after the flight took off. He was seated with the rest of us low life even though the plane had a premium economy section. Some babu somewhere in the government system had ruled that he wasn’t entitled to anything more than the minimum. His mortification was apparent.

There was another passenger who came alone, sat down quietly in one corner of the holding area, boarded without fuss and went and sat down on his allotted seat at the back of the airplane. But everyone who saw him, and most did, acknowledged with a namaste or with that peculiar arm-to chest-gesture. He was a famous but ageing cricketer.

He had what the politician didn’t have: stature. The politician, poor fellow, merely had status and not much of it either.

The differences between the two are huge, not the least of which is the fact that while status can be taken away, stature can’t. The former disappears while the latter grows.

The sheer inability of the agents of the Indian State — starting from a lowly clerk to the president — to appreciate this is very embarrassing and troublesome. Below are some anecdotes about this.

THAT ENTITLEMENT THING
Back in 1961, my father had taken my brother and me to a Test match in Delhi. Just before the lunch break ended, a minor altercation broke in a few rows below us. Two slaps were given. Then, suddenly, my father vanished.
When he returned we asked him where he had gone when he returned. His explanation has always stayed with me.
“The man being roughed up”, he said,



Status and stature: The great Indian confusion

Indians who represent the state confuse status with stature. Status is usually bestowed by power, stature has to be earned

“is a minister in the State government”. That State happened to be my father’s cadre. “I didn’t want him to see me seeing him being beaten up.”

The said minister had confused status with stature and had expected the legitimate allottee of the seat to give it up for him. But who recognises a State level minister at a Test match? All he got was two hard slaps from an irate Punjabi.

Of course, this would not have happened had he had a policeman with him like these fellows do now. His status would have got him a seat to which he

The differences between the two are huge, not the least of which is the fact that while status can be taken away, stature can’t. The former disappears while the latter grows

was not entitled. But stature? Perish the thought.

Stature is apparent when you see, say, a former finance minister who cut taxes is queuing up to check in and people request him to come to the head of the queue. Or a musician or an author or anyone — even a journalist, for that matter — who doesn’t need the trappings of status granted by the state to show off.

In Helsinki I once saw the traffic come to a halt because the president was crossing the road. He was alone. There was no fuss but people gave him way.

In contrast, someone circulated a video a few years ago of a mere district magistrate walking into an auditorium with eight people in attendance — after having gotten out of an SUV that had been escorted by a police jeep in front and another at the back.

This was another example of the status-stature confusion. There are plenty of videos on YouTube of low level

officials behaving as if they are minor potentates. Do take a look. They will make you so angry.

ME TARZAN, YOU JANE
This sort of me-Tarzan, you-Jane behaviour is recent. It didn’t happen until about the 1990s, when the sociology of the Indian state started to change.

While there’s a lot to be said in favour of the changes, the confusing of status with stature was one of their highly negative aspects.

Power is now seen bestowing stature, and not just status. “I represent the state, therefore I am superior to you”. This is not very different from “I am the white sahib, so I am superior to you”. But the white sahib was not corrupt. Our agents of the state are horrifyingly so.

By the way, this superior attitude lies at the very heart of Article 311. But more about that another day.

In Australian coal miners’ woes, a warning for India

In the long run, India must cut its reliance on coking coal and consider alternative technology routes

Simon Nicholas
Saumya Nautiyal

India’s push to build more blast furnaces to meet its growing demand for steel raises a critical concern: It will result in increased imports of metallurgical coal. Industry leaders highlighted the risks of such import reliance at the Indian Steel Association’s Coking Coal Summit in September.

India is currently dependent on imports for around 90 per cent of its metallurgical coal needs, and in the first eight months of 2025, nearly half of it came from Australia.

Statements from Australian coal miners have indicated that the energy security risks for India are on the rise.

Australia is the world’s biggest exporter of metallurgical coal — which includes coking coal and pulverised coal injection, both used in blast furnaces — with most of its production based in Queensland. However, data analytics firm Wood Mackenzie, warns that Australia requires over 100 million tonnes per annum of new hard coking coal (HCC) mine capacity by 2050 to avoid a supply shortfall.

A factor threatening to worsen this shortfall is Queensland’s contentious progressive royalty regime, introduced in 2022, under which royalty rates increase with the price of coal.

Two of Australia’s key suppliers to India — BHP and Whitehaven Coal —

have been vocal in their criticism of Queensland’s royalty regime.

BHP, the world’s largest mining company and Australia’s leading met coal exporter, through its BHP-Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA) joint venture, is a critical supplier to Indian steelmakers. A previous company statement disclosed that 40 per cent of the company’s met coal exports go to India.

On the royalty regime, BHP has made its position clear. In its latest company statement, CEO Mike Henry said BHP will “not invest any growth capital in Queensland, both for cost and risk”, adding that the royalty hike means the state is “no longer investible” for long-term projects.

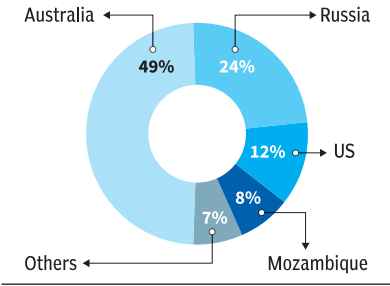
Paul Flynn, Whitehaven’s CEO, has voiced similar concerns, emphasising that Queensland’s royalty regime is already diverting capital into New South Wales (NSW). However, with production in NSW dominated by thermal coal, this shift risks restricting future investment in met coal capacity — a concern for India.

Another met coal producer in Australia, Peabody, also hit out at the royalty regime.

Meanwhile, the Queensland government has ruled out changes to the coal royalty scheme.

LOOKING BEYOND AUSTRALIA
According to S&P Global, India received 54.5 Mt of coking coal in the January-August 2025 period. Of this,

India coking coal imports in Jan-Aug 2025



Australia supplied 26.4 Mt (49 per cent), while Russia supplied 13.3 Mt (24 per cent), the US 6.7 Mt (12 per cent), and Mozambique 4.2 Mt (8 per cent).

Aware of the mounting energy security risks, India is exploring new routes to diversify its coking coal supply. Since 2020, Russian coking imports to India have surged from 4 Mt (around 7 per cent) to 16 Mt (22 per cent) in 2024 — a four-fold increase in as many years.

Over the same period, Australia’s share of imports fell by 40 per cent, while other countries, such as the US, Mozambique, and South Africa, strengthened their presence in the Indian market.

And though India is broadening its supply base, obstacles remain. For instance, new trade routes are not always viable. Take the case of JSW Steel, which had to recently pause its plans to source coking coal from

Mongolia due to logistical hurdles. To manage supply risks, India’s steelmakers are investing in overseas mines while also scaling domestic production under the government’s Mission Coking Coal.

The government initiative has led to an increase in production from 44.79 Mt in FY21 to 66.47 Mt in FY25, with an aim of 140 Mt by 2030.

However, very little of the current domestic production meets industrial specifications, notes a new report by EY Parthenon and the Indian Steel Association. As a result, overall these steps will help reduce dependence on Australia but not eliminate it completely.

In the long run, India must cut its reliance on coking coal and consider alternative technology routes. The government is already developing a scheme to incentivise secondary steel producers to recycle scrap steel in electric arc furnaces (EAF), which can reduce reliance on met coal. Further, India can invest in green hydrogen-based direct reduced iron (H₂-DRI) in the longer-term.

The future use of domestically produced green hydrogen has the potential to be a major energy security windfall for India’s fast-growing steel sector.

Nicholas is Lead Analyst-Global Steel; and Nautiyal is Energy Finance Analyst – Steel Sector, South Asia at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA)

BELOW THE LINE



US Ambassador-designate to India Sergio Gor PTI

Just visiting

US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor and Deputy Secretary Michael Rigas’ week-long visit to India has spurred a lot of interest amidst policy watchers, given the recent stress in ties between the two nations. Some are expressing hopes that the visit may demonstrate US’ renewed goodwill towards India and its

interest in resolving the tariff tangle. But why is Gor still not officially taking charge in India and settling down in the country to have more time to sort out affairs? Is that another issue to be settled between the two countries? One certainly hopes not.

Surprise guest

The Navi Mumbai airport was inaugurated last week with fanfare and the guest list included ministers’, politicians, bankers, airline chiefs and friends and family members of Adani group which is executing the project. But one VVIP guest caught everyone’s attention — GV Krishna Reddy. The 88-year-old Reddy, who was accompanied by his wife and son Sanjay, was the one developing the

airport before being taken over by Adani group in 2021. In fact, the original concession agreement of the airport was signed by the Reddys in 2018. The selection of architect Zaha Hadid and finalisation of lotus-themed terminal design too happened under their watch.

Rice row

The Centre has recently set up the Non-Basmati Rice Development Fund (NBRDF). Nomination of members to the fund has raised eyebrows among the rice trade. One, the Centre seems to have given importance to the Indian Rice Exporters Federation (IREF) over other organisations such as the All-India Rice Exporters Association (AIREA) and The Rice Exporters

Association of India (TREA). The nominations of TREA representatives from Chhattisgarh and Kakinada (Andhra Pradesh) are seen as a move that could create problems within the organisation. A little bird says the NBRDF nominations seem to indicate that the Centre is treating AIREA, the oldest association in the trade, as an organisation for basmati exports. **Network issues** Poor network and mobile connectivity played spoilsport at the Global Startup Summit held in Coimbatore. It was a bizarre sight, seeing international delegates, industry leaders, ministers and even the organisers trying to call/text each other to no avail.

Cries of repeated ‘hellos’ and folks hoisting the phone in every orientation dominated the otherwise picturesque landscape. A colleague, who had scheduled an interview with a spokesperson he had never seen before, even had to ask each delegate individually if they were that person. **Dark, dystopian world** On his 41st birthday, Telegram founder Pavel Durov said he had little reason to celebrate. Instead, he issued a stark warning about a rapidly approaching “dark, dystopian world”. “Our generation risks being remembered as the last to possess freedoms — and the one that let them slip away,” he wrote in a post on X. **Our Bureaus**

What is left of the Left

A refreshing pep talk on why the Left still matters

BOOK REVIEW.

Shubho Sengupta

If you went to college in the 80s and 90s in Kolkata, you were probably: smoking a lot of things you shouldn't have; listening to Mohiner Ghoraguli bootleg tapes; joining SFI marches to show solidarity with Cuba.

The activist-politician Saira Shah Halim's new book, *Comrades and Comebacks*, is a fun, breezy, well-researched, and refreshingly non-academic read for that generation (now paying high EMIs in corporate India) and their like-minded descendants in any Indian city. And also for those who wouldn't touch them with a bargepole.

The book has its flaws, but it refuses to be either a dry academic tome or a misty-eyed memoir. Instead, it is part reckoner, part manifesto, part crash course in leftist thought. Halim is conversational, often cheeky, and not above a playful pun — “Can the Left get it Right?” being one of several winks she throws the reader's way.

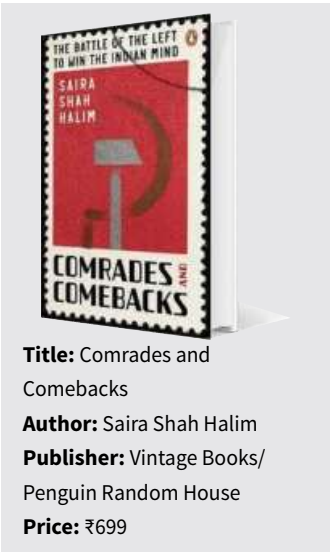
The early chapters sweep across the rise of the global Left, its role in India, and its imprint on the freedom struggle. Bhagat Singh, fiery as ever; the maverick MN Roy; Mohammad Barakatullah plotting in Kabul; and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose demanding a socialist future — their shadows are long and their stories often more dramatic than films.

GLOBAL CAST

Halim keeps the cast global. Che Guevara swaggers through the pages, cigarette in hand. Bernie Sanders turns up to prove socialism can still draw stadiums. Greta Thunberg agitates for the planet's future. Marx himself arrives later than expected, but, thankfully, without hagiography.

Alongside characters come ideas. Marx's “opium of the masses” is reinterpreted through Covid-era healthcare collapse. Stalin is introduced as “significant other” – not demon, not saint, but a distorted detour. There's a brisk survey of imperialism from colonial taxation to NATO's Iraq war; a primer on fascism with Gramsci as guide, and even a cheeky pairing of Lenin and John Lennon on the same playlist.

If this sounds like a political science syllabus crammed into a few chapters, that's because it is — yet Halim avoids dryness. Landlords are modern Draculas,



Title: Comrades and Comebacks
Author: Saira Shah Halim
Publisher: Vintage Books/
Penguin Random House
Price: ₹699

“land to the tiller” becomes a line for the gig economy, and jargon is punctured with pop culture.

Where the book is strongest is in the way it links history to the present. The Swiggy rider hustling for orders is placed alongside the 19th-century peasant demanding land rights.

But here's the rub: while Halim revives the passion of Leftist thought, she is less severe on its failures. The Left in India has not only been battered by neoliberalism and communal politics; it has been undermined by dogmatism, factional splits, and a refusal to modernise. Its record in power is mixed. Bengal's early land reforms gave way to industrial flight, labour strikes, cadre raj, and stagnation. Kerala scores high on social indicators but still cannot create enough jobs to prevent migration. These are failures of imagination as much as circumstance.

The bigger problem is relevance. Today's youth are more interested in start-ups, coding bootcamps, or K-pop than Marxist study circles. Gig workers may be exploited, but the Left has offered little beyond recycled slogans. Invoking “land to the tiller” in an era when most twenty-year-olds want broadband, not farmland, only deepens the disconnect.

There is also an air of nostalgia. Halim's heroes energise, but they don't answer why the movement that once ruled States now struggles to win a handful of seats.

It's not a perfect book. But what makes it work is its energy. It is a reckoner, a manifesto, and a pep talk for anyone curious about why the Left mattered — and whether it still might.

Time will tell.

The reviewer is a digital marketer, columnist, and podcaster with an inquisitive mind

Building a compassionate society

This book explains why the economy needs to be reimagined in order to put people at the heart of policymaking

BOOK REVIEW.

B Baskar

The world economy is at a crossroads. All the shibboleths of the past lie shattered. It is in this context that makes Arun Maira's book *Reimagining India's economy* particularly relevant.

Maira has worn many hats — corporate honcho (he had a long stint with the Tata group), consultant (Boston Consulting Group), policymaker (he was a member of the erstwhile Planning Commission) and later in life his stint with international NGO HelpAge International.

This gives him both an insider and an outsider view of how societies work. He has also written books (12 including this, and counting) and articles on ‘compassionate capitalism’ explaining the necessity to create capitalism with a human face.

Maira believes that many of the economic metrics, chiefly measuring the economy's success through GDP growth, need to be discarded. He's clearly not a fan of what he calls “growth obsession”. The economy's success, according to him, must be measured by the number of jobs it creates and not necessarily the growth it generates.

Though he doesn't altogether dismiss the role of growth, he feels an excessive focus on it misses many more crucial aspects of the economy.

INDUSTRIAL JOURNEY

This book is a part memoir and part agenda-setting — Maira talks about how his family had to move from Pakistan to India after partition and build a new life. The part where he describes his stint with TELCO (now Tata Motors) and the valuable mentorship of Sumant Moolgaokar is particularly interesting. It

gives us a good glimpse of how Indian industry navigated the policy maze through the 1960s to 1980s — when baby steps to expose Indian industry to global competition were taken.

Maira is disturbed by many aspects of India's economy — growing inequality, environmental degradation, lack of good jobs and the dangers of the demographic dividend being frittered away.

In the first of the three sections, Maira talks about his early days in school and college and the career choices he faced and why he chose to join the Tata group in the mid-1960s instead of the civil services. This section also has a chapter on industrial policy and why it has come back into fashion after two decades. Maira discusses the divergent paths taken by India and China and how China emerged as the manufacturing hub of the world while India lost out, despite both countries starting at the same base in 1991.

Maira argues that the renewed focus on industrial policy now is due to the political pressures, both in India and the West, to create more jobs. But a mere increase in the share of manufacturing is not enough to create more jobs. Industrial policy also must focus on the pattern of manufacturing and industrial enterprises that needs to be promoted. Maira advocates a ‘systems view’ for industrial policy, where the interlinkages of the various parts of the industrial economy — labour, skilling, taxes, subsidies and so on — need to be looked at in their entirety and not in silos. Coordination and communication between the various actors in the industrial system is crucial and here Maira cites Japan's example.

In the next chapter, Maira analyses the conflict between capitalism and democracy and how this needs to be resolved. His prescription is — reforming multilateral institutions (WTO for instance), listening to people



Title: Reimagining India's Economy
Author: Arun Maira
Publisher: Speaking Tiger Books
Price: ₹599

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Arun Maira is a former member of the Planning Commission and former Chairman of Boston Consulting Group, India. He was a member of the TATA Administrative Service and worked in several senior positions in the TATA Group in India and abroad

more carefully and designing “social enterprises” where people at the bottom of the pyramid become “wealth-creators too”.

THE POWER OF LISTENING

Maira says that though the economic reforms since 1991 led to rapid growth lifting many millions out of poverty, yet

India's record of improving the lives of the poor pales in comparison to China and Vietnam. In the second section, which is rather theoretical, Maira talks about economic, social and natural systems and their interconnections.

In the third section, Maira discusses the future of India's economy in the backdrop of a ‘Trumpian world’. The growing income inequality and ‘economic precarity’ of a large number of Indians, the environmental degradation and the unique challenges thrown up by demographic shifts (ageing societies) are analysed.

Maira calls for a bottom-up approach to development where ‘listening closely’ to people is more important than grand plans drawn up by economists and policy makers from the above. He says that economists and policy makers have much to unlearn. Crafting policies through listening to those at the bottom of the pyramid is the way to go. Maira's stint with HelpAge International, where he had the opportunity to travel to various parts of the world to see how senior citizens are taken care of, gave him this insight of the “power to listen”.

The first sign of building a compassionate and caring society is how carefully we “listen”. Maira argues that the “top-down” technocratic approach is responsible to creating many of the current day economic problems. While dealing with the environment and the “problem of commons”, community-led solutions are best suited where listening to the people plays an integral role.

Maira does not give a detailed blueprint of the “reimagined economy” and that perhaps was not his intention. Through this book Maira wants to spark a conversation on many of the crucial issues facing us today.

Written in an easy and engaging style, this book will interest both policymakers and lay readers concerned about the future of India.

NEW READS.

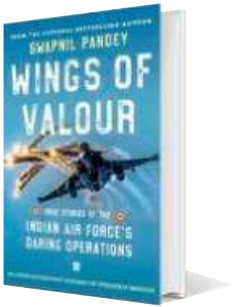


Title: The Art of Conversation

Author: Khurshed Dordi

Publisher: Penguin Business

This book will equip you with the tools and techniques you need to navigate any conversation with poise and confidence

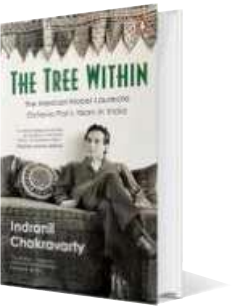


Title: Wings Of Valour

Author: Swapnil Pandey

Publisher: HarperCollins India

The author brings the extraordinary journeys of Air Force personnel alive in this book and immortalizes yet another force's legacy in the nation's collective memory



Title: The Tree Within: The Mexican Nobel Laureate writer Octavio Paz's Years in India

Author: Indranil Chakravarty

Publisher: Penguin

An enchanting story of Octavio Paz's passionate love-affair with India where he served as Mexico's ambassador

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 13, 2005

20 sugar, cement, paper projects likely to trade carbon

Twenty Indian projects from the sugar, cement and paper and pulp sectors, seeking to trade carbon, are likely to be registered soon at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) with the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) Executive Board recently approving methodologies for flyash mixing during the cement manufacturing process, and power generation from industrial bio-residue.

UK court restricts launch of Ranbaxy's cholesterol drug

The United Kingdom High Court of Justice today restricted Ranbaxy Laboratories Ltd from launching early its generic version of Pfizer's cholesterol reducing drug, Lipitor, in the UK. The court upheld the exclusivity of the main patent covering the active ingredient of the drug until November 2011.

IA to raise domestic fares by 10 pc from October 18

Indian Airlines (IA) has announced that its domestic airfares would go up by 10 per cent from October 18. In a statement, the airlines has said that there would also be a proportionate increase in all special fares including the promotional, excursion, easy and point-to-point fares.

Short take

Walking the talk on workplace mental health

Shefali Mian

On mental health, organisations have made visible strides — mental health webinars, Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), wellness apps — but are these efforts moving the needle?

The numbers tell a sobering story: Eighty per cent of India's workforce reported mental health issues in the past year, costing employers an estimated \$14 billion annually in absenteeism, presenteeism, and attrition.

India ranks highest globally for burnout symptoms (59 per cent), according to McKinsey Health Institute.

Seventy-six per cent of Indian employees say they lack the time and

energy to do their job effectively, a leading indicator of disengagement and innovation slowdown. Encouragingly, there are now multiple helplines, signalling a shift toward accessible care.

Webinars and awareness campaigns are a start, but they often only scratch the surface. EAPs exist on paper but suffer from low utilization.

FIVE SHIFTS

Authenticity over optics: When leaders share their own coping strategies or therapy journeys, it normalises vulnerability. But this must be authentic and bounded.

Empower managers as first responders: Managers must be equipped with practical micro-skills: spotting early signs of distress, initiating

empathetic check-ins, and making warm referrals to internal or external helplines.

Turn policy into practice: Encourage employees to take time off when they feel emotionally drained, without fear of judgment.

Measure what matters: Track psychological safety scores, EAP utilisation, after-hours work patterns, and attrition linked to burnout.

Design for inclusion: Mental health challenges aren't uniform. Offer regional language counselling, life-stage support, and culturally sensitive programmes.

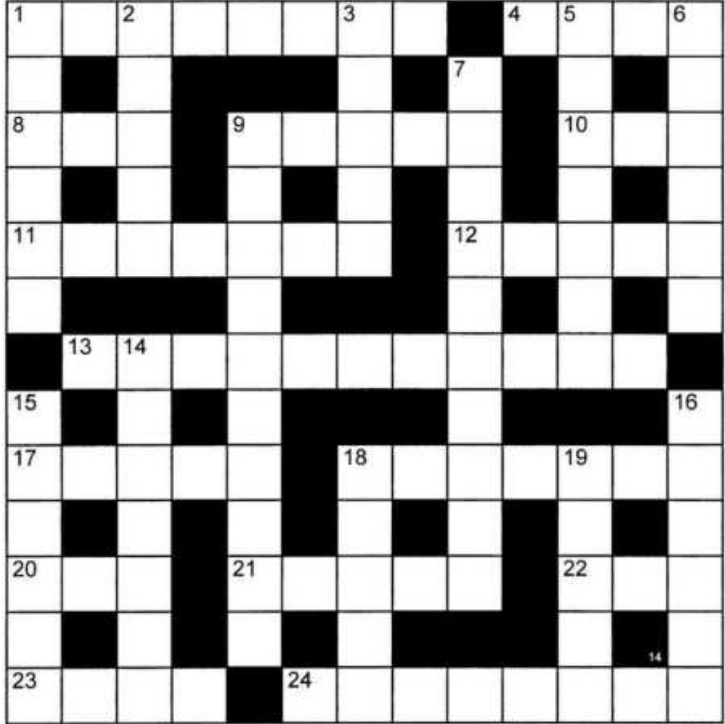
What employers can do now is to redesign work such as audit meeting loads and after-hours emails—because no amount of yoga sessions can offset

systemic overload. Some organisations offer confidential counselling and mental health resources. They encourage leaders to model healthy boundaries, the focus being on creating a culture where well-being is not an afterthought but a shared priority.

Mental health is critical for productivity, retention, and employer brand. India has made structural progress — insurance parity, helpline infrastructure—but the real change will come when organisations embed mental health into leadership behaviour, and everyday work design. Walking the talk isn't about doing more. It's about doing better.

The writer is Director Compensation & Benefits, Abbott India

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2801



EASY

ACROSS

1. Sheriff's officer (8)
4. Expectorated (4)
8. Boring implement (3)
9. Red hair-dye (5)
11. Be indebted (3)
11. Given coronation (7)
12. The heath genus (5)
13. Solemn ceremony (11)
17. Something to be copied (5)
18. Utter a low, deep laugh (7)
20. Scull (3)
21. Called (5)
22. The beard of barley (3)
23. Chore, job (4)
24. Holds closely, firmly (8)

DOWN

01. Dream-like state (6)
02. Infantile paralysis (5)
03. Made to pay penalty (5)
05. Condition in a deed (7)
06. Front part of shoe (6)
11. Was hit on the head and had to have tooth capped (7)
12. Am to get heath plant in the New World (5)
13. Joyous ceremony could once be trial arrangement (11)
17. Show clothes can be small version of the real thing (5)
18. Chuckle at her colt running around (7)
20. A heart of gold, but it may be involved in row (3)
21. Amend the way one's nominated (5)
22. Bearded process starts as whiskers, naturally (3)
23. Sat back and took potassium: just the job! (4)
24. Lots of eggs one holds tightly to one (8)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2800

ACROSS 1. Catamaran 5. Tip 7. Onyx 8. Offering 10. Breakage 11. Obey 13. Rasher 15. Orders 18. Jail 19. Sensible 22. Forsaken 23. Ha-ha 24. Yap 25. Matchwood
DOWN 1. Clobber 2. Thyme 3. Refuge 4. Need 5. Thimble 6. Pigmy 9. Skeet 12. Fresh 14. Stirrup 16. Steward 17. Relent 18. Jiffy 20. Bravo 21. Calm

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

01. Court officer involves past in the quarrel (8)
04. Got rid of the shellfish spawn in one's mouth (4)
08. It bores everything that sounds like it (3)
09. Redhead may use it in the kitchen, naturally (5)
10. Be in the red? We have nothing to begin with (3)
11. Was hit on the head and had to have tooth capped (7)
12. Am to get heath plant in the New World (5)
13. Joyous ceremony could once be trial arrangement (11)
17. Show clothes can be small version of the real thing (5)
18. Chuckle at her colt running around (7)
20. A heart of gold, but it may be involved in row (3)
21. Amend the way one's nominated (5)
22. Bearded process starts as whiskers, naturally (3)
23. Sat back and took potassium: just the job! (4)
24. Lots of eggs one holds tightly to one (8)

DOWN

01. Catalepsy made one less than certain of it (6)
02. Illness one caught in game of chukkas (5)
03. Made to pay for study if it's up to it (5)
05. A condition of being poor is about to start victimization (7)
06. Part of shoe to pace about with (6)
07. State, Pa or Ma? (10)
09. Away from centre of influence the Navy might handle it (10)
14. Lasts it out to the finish, sure of its adaptation (7)
15. I'm going to send a letter to the tax (6)
16. In which one has the advantage of following deuce (6)
18. Arrived at Luxor initially with the ship of the desert (5)
19. Give instruction to everyone singly, nothing being left out (5)



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

The Great Game in rare earths

Critical and rare earth minerals need global regulations; national missions can help avoid being at the mercy of an OPEC-like body

US President Donald Trump has threatened to impose 100% additional tariffs on China after the latter tightened export controls on rare earth minerals that are essential to the production of a range of goods, across areas of utility — from daily consumption to frontier technology. Beyond Trump’s mercurial trade pronouncements, the larger issue here is how countries leverage their rare earth and critical mineral deposits and the need for institutionalising a global regulatory framework for their supply. The retreat of consensus-building and multilateralism from global governance that the world is seeing currently makes this task particularly difficult. But given the foundational impact of these minerals in energy transition (key to the planet’s climate future), AI and quantum computing, the global community can’t afford to leave supply to the discretion of political dispensations in reserve-owning countries or, worse, allow cartelisation.

The Chinese controls illustrate the problem. The country accounts for 61% of global rare earth production and 92% of their processing, giving it near-total control over supply till the time other potential sources are explored, developed, and integrated into the global supply chain. Beijing’s new controls go far beyond curbing mere shipment of the minerals — they severely restrict access to technologies involved in their exploration, mining, and refining. Also, it is moving aggressively to invest in reserve-holding geographies elsewhere. This gives China an advantage on two fronts. One, it can decide the pace and quantum of supply as well as the widening of the supply market, with monopolistic leverage on pricing, supply terms, and, as its earlier talks with the US have shown, in trade talks with hard-nosed, extractionist regimes. Two, the lead this gives China in the technology race against the US could be pivotal in its evolution as a global hegemon.

Such overwhelming influence calls for global regulation, but hoping for this would be futile. There is a need to avoid OPEC-style cartelisation (in oil and gas) in the space, but it is not clear whether this will happen. The imperative for the demand side is clear. To illustrate, China’s curbs could slow India’s EV plans, clean energy expansion, and defence manufacturing. Against this backdrop, countries (including India) should use multilateral forums such as COP30 in Brazil to build the momentum for a rules-based architecture for critical and rare earth minerals. And they should launch missions to prospect for and tap these resources within their boundaries, forge partnerships with countries possessing untapped deposits, and identify alternatives.

Message from Haryana: Caste spares no one

The tragic circumstances surrounding the suicide of senior Haryana IPS officer Y Puran Kumar have underlined that allegations of caste discrimination continue to permeate the highest echelons of the Indian officialdom and must be thoroughly probed. Kumar, 52, a 2001-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, shot himself dead at his residence in Chandigarh Sector II on October 7, at a time when his wife, senior bureaucrat Amneet P Kumar, was part of a delegation led by Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini. An eight-page letter written by Kumar has blamed senior officers, including the director general of police in Haryana and the Rohtak superintendent of police (SP), of “blatant caste-based discrimination, targeted mental harassment, public humiliation and atrocities”.

Despite the damning note, political pressure and public anger, the probe in the case threatened to take the usual route in those involving Dalit victims — the FIR, lodged after outrage, initially didn’t name the eight accused or invoke stringent sections of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, which were only added after the family protested and withheld the last rites. Though the Rohtak SP has now been transferred and a special investigation team set up, the government will need to ensure a thorough and transparent probe that affixes accountability without scapegoating anyone. It should not be relegated to the back burner of government priorities. The case also opens the door to a difficult but necessary conversation around caste discrimination in the police and bureaucracy. Honest introspection and course correction will make for a more just and representative administration that serves the citizenry better.

{ GRAND STRATEGY }

Happymon Jacob



The gains of recognising the Taliban govt in Kabul

It could help India cultivate political goodwill and public support in Afghanistan

For the first time since the Taliban assumed power in Kabul in August 2021, India has hosted the Taliban foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in New Delhi. New Delhi’s policy has so far been a slow but steady engagement of the Taliban, but without recognising the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, apart from the Russian federation, which recognised the Taliban government a few months ago, no other country has done so thus far.

India has been engaging the Taliban before and after it came to power in Kabul four years ago, and the visit of Muttaqi to India with India officially referring to him as the “foreign minister of Afghanistan” is the closest it has come to recognising the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan. If New Delhi is prepared to treat Muttaqi as the foreign minister of Afghanistan, and call him as such, why not recognise the government he represents as the official government of Afghanistan?

The time has come for New Delhi to recognise the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan, for the simple reason that doing so has minimal downsides and clear strategic benefits. I will

highlight four specific reasons why New Delhi should consider recognising the Taliban government without delay. But before I come to that, let us briefly discuss some of the objections to doing so.

The most strident objection to extending diplomatic recognition to the Taliban in Afghanistan stems from a moral argument. India should not recognise a regime that espouses deeply undesirable values and adopts discriminatory practices against half or more of its citizens, goes the argument. There is merit here. Having acknowledged that, it must be kept in mind that neither are all regimes morally acceptable (just because they commit atrocities in a sophisticated manner) nor does recognising a regime with unacceptable moral values amounts to endorsing its values or lack thereof. International politics is more complex than that. Our personal choices of friendship can’t determine how States make policy choices.

The second objection is that by recognising the Taliban as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan, one may be unwittingly enabling the rise of puritanism and strengthening abhorrent values in the region. I think the exact opposite is true. Mainstreaming the Taliban by recognising them is a way to socialise them into better behaviour. Consider this. The Taliban of 1996 is not the Taliban of 2025. They have become worldly wise, slightly more moderate, and more open to modern ways of dealing with the world around them. After intense criticism for gender-based discrimination,

the Taliban corrected their mistake by inviting Indian women journalists — who were excluded from Friday’s Delhi press conference — to the one yesterday. Sometimes, change stems from exposure, socialization, and pressure rather than outright exclusion. Even if you disagree with that, shunning a regime in your neighbourhood because you don’t agree with their beliefs and practices is bad statecraft.

The third objection concerns how courting the Taliban could worsen relations between India and Pakistan, potentially pulling India into Afghanistan’s ongoing conflicts. However, the reality is that India-Pakistan relations are already at a low point, and engaging with Afghanistan is unlikely to significantly alter that dynamic.

Let me now outline four reasons why India must recognise the Taliban government. First of all, the Taliban have generally maintained a positive stance towards India, apart from the IC814 hijack, which was more the handiwork of the Pakistani ISI than the Taliban itself. Since taking power in Kabul in August 2021, they have made efforts to improve relations with India, including emphasising that Kashmir is a bilateral matter between India and Pakistan, thereby aligning with India’s own position on the issue.

Second, only Russia has so far recognised the Taliban government in Kabul, but it’s only a matter of time before other countries follow, given the reduced Western pressure on the Taliban and the



If New Delhi waits to recognise the Taliban after other countries have done so, it would diminish the diplomatic importance of such a move. AFP/MEA INDIA

decline in the local resistance to it. China and Pakistan are likely to follow Russia’s example. If New Delhi waits to recognise the Taliban after other countries have done so, it would diminish the diplomatic importance of such a move. Conversely, early recognition would give India a strategic first-mover advantage, positioning itself as a key player in shaping the future of Afghanistan. The argument that India shouldn’t recognise the Taliban because others haven’t is flawed; in fact, it is precisely because others haven’t done this that India must take the opportunity to recognise them.

Third, maintaining a close strategic partnership with Taliban-led Afghanistan may even be a useful strategy in dealing with the Sino-Pakistan plans to wean the region away from India, and to balance, to the extent possible, the growing Chinese closeness to Kabul. No matter who rules Kabul, Afghanistan has, for the most part, been an important partner to India. The presence of a disagreeable regime in Kabul should not disrupt that important partnership.

India’s “full commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of Afghanistan,” as stated by external affairs minister S Jaishankar

during Muttaqi’s visit, appears primarily aimed at Pakistan. This suggests that New Delhi recognises the strategic value of proactively engaging with Afghanistan’s government as a way to counter-balance Pakistan’s influence in the region. There is no point in beating around the bush on that.

Courting the Taliban regime has a useful Pakistan angle to it.

Finally, for the Taliban, which is desperately seeking international recognition and legitimacy, diplomatic recognition from India would be highly significant. For India, it could help cultivate a strong foundation of political goodwill in Kabul, and foster a strategic partnership with Afghanistan. In an increasingly unfriendly regional environment, New Delhi stands to gain valuable goodwill, strategic partnerships, and a friendly presence at the gates of Central Asia by taking this step.

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In Bihar, the INDIA bloc fights a perception battle

Will it be the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) that will assume office in Patna on November 14, when the Bihar assembly election results are announced? Or will it be the Mahagathbandhan (a phalanx of the larger Opposition alliance, the INDIA bloc, in Bihar)? There’s also a third player that is keenly watched — the Jan Suraj Party, founded by pollster Prashant Kishor, who may emerge as a kingmaker.

The upcoming polls are a high-stakes battle for the big players in the state — the BJP, its allies the Janata Dal (United), or JD(U), and the Lok Janshakti Party- Ram Vilas Paswan (LJP-RVP), and, on the other side, the Congress and its ally Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). Hectic discussions are on among alliance partners to iron out differences and finalise seat deals as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, there has been considerable excitement in the Opposition ranks over the camaraderie between the INDIA bloc’s three relatively young leaders — the RJD’s Tejashwi Yadav, the Congress’s Rahul Gandhi, and the Samajwadi Party’s Akhilesh Yadav (from the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh). Relegating the complexities of their parties’ individual political aspirations to the backseat, the first two have travelled across the state along with the third, drawing crowds. The BJP, for its part, is determined to crack the state which it has never won without an ally. The Congress has experience of ruling the state on its own, for the better part of the period from Independence to 1990. Thereafter, the Mandal parties — RJD and JD(U) — took charge.

The three INDIA bloc leaders seem to have generated hope among those in the state who seek political change. Ideologically though, this chunk of the population doesn’t seem averse to CM Nitish Kumar and LJP leader Chirag Paswan — BJP allies in the state and the Centre.

In the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, the founders of RJD, SP and LJP — Lalu Prasad, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan — came together to fight the BJP and JD(U). Now, Lalu Prasad is ailing and fighting corruption cases, while Mulayam and Ram Vilas Paswan are no more. The baton has passed to their sons — Tejashwi, Akhilesh, and Chirag, respectively.

Significantly, the BJP may be eyeing Bihar but not necessarily the crown after the setback in UP in the 2024 general election. Given how this was in sharp contrast to its performance in Bihar, winning 30 out of the 40 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar with allies, the BJP leadership understands the indispensability of chief minister Nitish Kumar and his party, the JD(U) to the NDA. However, despite provocations from Prashant Kishor, the leadership has so far avoided announcing a CM face for the NDA.

THE COMING TOGETHER OF THE THREE LEADERS FOR THE VOTE ADHIKAR (VOTING RIGHTS) RALLY — IN RESPONSE TO THE SPECIAL INTENSIVE REVISION EXERCISE IN BIHAR — HAS DISPELLED DOUBTS ABOUT OPPOSITION UNITY

The BJP has not revealed its cards yet and by keeping Nitish in good humour, it can be confident of Kurmi support. In successive elections, the BJP leadership has surprised all with their ability to manage cross-caste support and booths.

Coming to the Mahagathbandhan, the big question is can Tejashwi and company replicate the INDIA bloc’s 2024 performance in UP in Bihar? Surely, he can learn from Akhilesh, who tempered his Yadav allegiance when it came to ticket distribution, with eyes on larger gains. Though neither the NDA nor the Mahagathbandhan have announced their CM faces, the post is politically critical for Tejashwi, should his alliance win. It can help silence detractors within his extended family and allow him to take complete control of the RJD.



Sunita Aron

There are some hiccups here as the Congress has grown ambitious. There is some commentary about Rahul Gandhi’s silence on a CM face being a strategic choice given that some castes such as the Dalits and the Brahmins may be willing to return to the Congress fold after decades of estrangement, but could turn away in the event of a Yadav-dominated RJD at the helm of affairs.

The Dalit vote is also a complicated bloc. In UP-2024, the alliance between the Congress and the SP helped the INDIA bloc win over Dalits. However, Bahujan Samaj Party leader Mayawati — after the party’s lacklustre showing in UP — has sent her nephew Akash Anand to Bihar, who could cut into the Mahagathbandhan’s Dalit votes. The LJP’s Paswan vote base is unlikely to be threatened by the BSP. Will Tejashwi back some powerful Dalit leaders as Akhilesh did in UP?

All this said, the coming together of the three leaders for the Vote Adhikar (Voting Rights) rally — in response to the Special Intensive Revision exercise in Bihar — has dispelled doubts about Opposition unity. However, there are other significant challenges facing the Mahagathbandhan: Apart from the charge of dynastic politics, the Congress and the RJD must battle a narrative of Muslim appeasement. In addition, Tejashwi will also have to fight the *gundaraj* (lawlessness) tag that dogs his father’s tenure as Bihar CM — a problem that Akhilesh faced in UP, with regard to his father Mulayam Singh Yadav’s stint as CM. Tejashwi can draw lessons from Akhilesh here. Given the *gundaraj* image was strongly associated with Yadav domination in UP, Akhilesh moved to dilute this charge by implementing his “*pichda-Dalit-alpsankhyak*” (backward, Scheduled Castes, and minorities) formula in letter and spirit when it came to ticket distribution. Tejashwi and Lalu, on the other hand, failed to keep their promise of giving due representation to all castes in the 2024 general elections.

Can the Tejashwi-Rahul-Akhilesh trio convert the Vote Adhikar turnout into votes? They are all young leaders, and unemployment is a major issue in Bihar. The perception is that it is the youth who will likely decide this election as the women vote may get divided along caste lines. But, Prashant Kishor, too, has been consistently raising the unemployment issue over the past several months.

The game has only just begun.

The views expressed are personal

{ BR GAVAI } CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA



Babasaheb Ambedkar’s Constitution ... sets us apart from neighbouring countries that are witnessing turmoil

Inaugurating a court building in Ratnagiri



{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



The recipe of trumping odds: The RSS playbook

I have been watching the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) — in its 101st year now — for more than 50 years. An obvious curiosity arises about the secret of its success.

People may point out that Uttar Pradesh chief minister (CM) Yogi Adityanath and Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma don’t belong to the RSS fold. That is true, but it is equally true that once you are part of the BJP, you can’t escape the RSS ideology.

The political arm of the RSS, the BJP, is leading the coalition that is in its third successive term at the Centre, and the Sangh’s ideological roots are deepening. The RSS has achieved this despite stiff opposition from the Communists, socialists, and the Congress Party.

How did the RSS succeed? I would like to elaborate on four instances from different decades of Indian history that help explain this.

In 1969, my father admitted me to a Saraswati Shishu Mandir (an RSS-run school), when he was transferred to Allahabad (Prayagraj today). The school was run from a building owned by Rajendra Singh, who later became RSS *sarsanghchalak* (chief). It had a period dedicated to reading books or magazines in the library. No other school had a whole hour dedicated to studying something other than the course material. Physical training (PT) was mandatory too. The teachers and the principal regularly visited the homes of students, to talk to parents about ways to make their children more *sanskari* and *shikshit* (morally upright and educated). During the house visits, nation building, India’s history of occupation, and failings of government policies were also discussed.

In 1979, I completed my graduation and started writing for newspapers and magazines. During this time, I befriended many Communists and socialists. They discussed issues such as international affairs and personalities including Che Guevara, Lenin, Mao, Trotsky, and Stalin endlessly in coffee houses or at roadside tea stalls. In those days, the Moscow-inspired People’s Publishing House and other such publishers provided Russian and progressive literature at a discounted price. Maxim Gorky’s *Mother*, printed on glossy paper, was available for just ₹5 while Bhisham Sahni’s epochal novel, *Tamas*, cost ₹40. Not surprisingly, people with meagre income preferred progressive literature. RSS *swayamsevaks* (volunteers), on the other hand, were busy in rendering *seva* (service) in

villages and among the Dalits and the tribal communities. They supported the poor in their struggle against floods, pestilence, and general poverty. All these efforts bore fruit within a decade.

By 1989, the RSS successfully turned the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign into a mass movement. Sangh workers went door to door to collect bricks for the proposed temple. Kar-sevakpura was established in Ayodhya. Anyone who visited the site and saw the large mass of bricks amassed would return convinced that the whole country has thrown its weight behind the movement.

I was the resident editor of a newspaper in Agra at that time and could sense that the world around me was changing. One day I received a chit from the office reception. The name on it was of Gopal Godse, Nathuram Godse’s brother and co-accused in Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination. For the next one-and-a-half hours, I grilled him. Unperturbed, he insisted that he and his brother didn’t kill Gandhi. He said that they “respected Gandhiji a lot”, but his demise was in the interest of the country. His face keeps popping up in my consciousness these days: On October 2, I saw Gopal Godse trending on social media.

I vividly remember my first meeting with LK Advani in those fateful times. One bright winter day, he invited the editors of three prominent newspapers of the city for a breakfast meeting at the Agra Circuit House, to discuss the Ram Janmabhoomi issue. No one then guessed that the Babri Masjid would be demolished within the next two years. The Sangh had employed everyone, from ordinary workers to Gopal Godse and mass leaders such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Advani, to make its case for a Ram temple.

In 1999, Vajpayee became the Prime Minister and Advani his home minister. It marked the decisive victory of the RSS ideology in the electoral battlefield. Today, we are witnessing its full dominance.

If the Congress and its allies want to regain power in Delhi, they may have to borrow a leaf from the RSS playbook on employing traditions, moral conduct, and organisational genius for at least a decade. The Sangh’s present unassailable position is hard-earned; can its adversaries cultivate the patience and where-withal to challenge its supremacy?

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal

Building a partnership

UK-India relations still have room to grow

The recent visit of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK), Keir Starmer, to India was meant to emphasise recent developments in bilateral relations, culminating in the signing of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (Ceta) in July this year. Mr Starmer was accompanied by the largest ever delegation of businesspeople from the UK to visit this country, and Whitehall has emphasised that during the visit Indian companies have promised investments of about 1.3 billion pounds in the UK economy. Those include an expansion of manufacturing facilities in the north of England by TVS Motor, which acquired British company Norton Motorcycles in 2020. India, meanwhile, hopes to gain access to advanced innovation through new joint projects. The trade deal itself may open up markets for Indian companies, including smaller ones. For example, the gems & jewellery sector, which is likely to be hit hard by the United States' new trade policies, hopes to double its exports to the UK in the coming years.

Mr Starmer delivered an address to a fintech conference in Mumbai, an indication that closer ties between both the financial and tech sectors in the two countries are on the horizon. The UK, although struggling with problematic fiscal numbers and a high-cost domestic economy, nevertheless remains a major financial centre and location for technological innovation, especially in biotech and fintech. These strengths are reflected in the nature of the collaboration planned, which is meant to upgrade facilities at the institutions run by the Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council in India and the Indian Institute of Science. Some Indian priorities in the past, however, have been taken off the table. For example, it is unlikely that questions about work visas for Indians will come up in negotiations again, given the domestic political situation in the UK. There has already been a surge of Indian arrivals in the UK, with about 850,000 migrating just between 2021 and 2024. Instead, the Indian and UK governments have agreed to cooperate more closely to ensure the return of illegal migrants.

A great deal of work, however, remains to be done in order to ensure the implementation of Ceta in such a way that all companies, including micro, small, and medium enterprises in India, benefit from it. Mutual-recognition agreements for professionals need to be hammered out, and these may not be easy since both nations have services-heavy economies. Commitments on e-governance in trade as well as regulatory cooperation will need to be followed up if the full benefits of the trade agreement are to be harnessed. Further work will also have to be done in the security domain. The Indian and the Royal British Navies have exercised together in the past, but there is potential for greater cooperation in the Indian Ocean region, including in triangular format with the French.

The UK has invested further in its naval base in Bahrain and there is hope that it will be able to step up anti-piracy surveillance and operations, in support of and in cooperation with, the Indian Navy. The India-UK partnership remains one of the most tension-free and transparent from New Delhi's perspective, and there is considerable room for it to expand further in both the economic and security spheres.

Known unknowns in Gaza

Lack of clarity challenges the peace plan

Despite the celebrations erupting when United States (US) President Donald Trump announced a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, signs of the 20-point peace plan fraying at the edges are already evident. Hamas leaders have announced that they will not be involved in the official signing of the peace plan, which Mr Trump will be attending with Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi and various world leaders in attendance at Sharm el-Sheikh on Monday. Hamas has described the plan, drawn up between Israel and the US without Hamas participation, as "absurd". As Palestinians return to their pulverised homes from areas that the Israeli Defence Forces have begun vacating, peace in the short run is contingent on what happens in the 72 hours after the ceasefire starts. In the longer run, there appear to be too many obstacles and much lack of clarity for the plan to offer a durable peace for the region.

Under the plan, Hamas must release all 20 hostages believed to be alive by noon (local time) on Monday. In addition, the remaining deceased hostages (about 26 of them) must be handed over within 72 hours, with some leeway to give Hamas time to locate them. In turn, the Israelis will release 250 Palestinian prisoners serving life sentences and 1,700 detainees from Gaza. The problems could begin here because Israel has declined to release two high-profile leaders whom Hamas has demanded. It is also unclear what will happen if Hamas delays the release of the Israeli hostages. As aid workers prepare to surge into Gaza, a multinational force from Egypt, Qatar, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, overseen by the US military (though without boots on the ground), will monitor the ceasefire and check for transgressions.

Assuming this first phase goes successfully — and there are multiple unknowns here — the broader plan is problematic. It is unrealistic to assume that Hamas will agree to disarm and play no role in a territory it has dominated since 2007. Hamas is even less likely to endorse handing over the strip over to its fierce rival, the Palestinian Authority (PA), which administers the West Bank, and from which it wrested control of Gaza. Israel, too, is reluctant to see the PA's involvement in post-war Gaza. There are questions, too, around the ambit of responsibility of the "temporary transitional committee" of Palestinian technocrats, given that it will be supervised by a "Board of Peace", chaired by Mr Trump and involving former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, raising all the old boogies of western colonialism. Together with a plan for economic development that centres on construction, it is difficult to escape the notion that Gaza could become a real-estate play for foreign corporations rather than a sustainable enclave for Palestinians to live in peace and prosperity. Most concerning is the question of Israeli credibility. Israel still occupies 53 per cent of the strip, though a phased withdrawal under the plan will reduce this to 15 per cent. Why should Israel be present in Gaza at all? Given its brazen encroachments in the West Bank, it is difficult to see Israel complying with any major retreat, the second since 2005, when it unilaterally dismantled all settlements. The open-ended nature of the proposals and the lack of good faith on either side will remain a challenge for lasting peace.



Indian virtue in US-China trade war

Their game of chicken and our path to triumph

The global order, based on rules, is being systematically subverted by China. Its state-led economic model relies on practices that contravene the principles of the World Trade Organization, including extensive industrial subsidies that create global overcapacity, pervasive non-tariff barriers, state-sponsored intellectual property theft, and forced technology transfer. In the security domain, Beijing openly disregards international law, exemplified by its rejection of the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling on the South China Sea. It undermines regional stability with military coercion against Taiwan and provides a crucial economic lifeline to Russia helping in the invasion of Ukraine. In response, the new United States (US) administration, under Donald Trump, has initiated a policy of imposing high, broadbased tariffs, aiming to force fundamental changes in China's behaviour.

This confrontation is a geopolitical game of chicken. The game theory model is simple: Two drivers accelerate towards each other on a single-lane road. The first to swerve is the "chicken"; if neither swerves, the result is a catastrophic collision. The high-stakes stand-off between Washington and Beijing is of this nature. Each side is projecting strength, but a closer look reveals significant internal weaknesses that pressure both to find an off-ramp.

On the Chinese side, the economy is afflicted by severe structural weaknesses. The collapse of the over-leveraged property sector is the epicentre of the crisis. This has triggered a solvency crisis for developers and for local governments that depend on land sales for a significant portion of their revenue. The contagion has, in turn, placed the banking system under severe stress, given its exposure to both property developers and local government financing

vehicles. The government has ratcheted up economic nationalism, crushing private-sector confidence and fuelling record-high youth unemployment.

Decades of state-directed industrial policy have created chronic overcapacity in one industry after another, from steel to solar panels to electric vehicles. These sectors now depend on exporting their surplus production to remain financially viable, making them acutely vulnerable to tariffs and trade barriers.

The combination of the failures of central planning, a collapsing property bubble, and a demographic decline invites a historical parallel with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) of the mid-1980s: A seemingly mighty, centrally planned economy quietly crumbling from within. Beijing's dilemma is acute. In 2023, China's exports of goods to a broad bloc of advanced economies totalled approximately \$1.85 trillion, of which the US was at \$427 billion. The Chinese government is torn between nationalist pride vs the pragmatic necessity of ending the trade war to stabilise its economy.

On the American side, for all the rhetoric about protectionism, the economic reality is also challenging. Imposing high, broadbased tariffs is a self-defeating policy that inflicts significant harm on the domestic economy. The tariffs disrupt supply chains, raise input costs for American manufacturers, and ultimately act as a tax on consumers. Apart from a capital-investment boom in artificial intelligence, underlying American economic growth has stalled. The tariffs are feeding inflationary pressures. Reflecting a global retreat from American assets amid policy uncertainty, the dollar has weakened significantly; the dollar/euro exchange rate has dropped by approximately 11 per cent in 2025 alone.

Both protagonists are engaged in the high-stakes



SNAKES & LADDERS
AJAY SHAH

Regime change, not climate change

Donald Trump has spoken from the global pulpit. Speaking on the 80th anniversary of the United Nations (UN), the United States (US) President called climate change a "big con" and by association, all of us, who advocate urgent action, charlatans. In his rant, he berated Europe for its transition to green energy, saying it leads to high costs, which would kill growth. He dismissed the science of climate change and went on to say that coal was clean.

But I am not writing this to demean your intelligence and to explain why Mr Trump is wrong. We know the reality of climate change as extreme weather events tear across our world, bringing with them economic devastation and human tragedy.

The question is, who was Mr Trump really addressing when he spoke at the UN General Assembly (UNGA)? I believe this is what we must discuss. He was not speaking to the leaders in the grand room; he was not even speaking to the likes of you or me. He was speaking directly to the large numbers of ordinary middle- and working-class people, both in the rich world and the to-be-rich world, who believe that they have been cheated and deprived in the globalised economy. In their minds — and Mr Trump would like to ensure that this message is stamped — the problem is the "invasion" of immigrants, who they see as taking away livelihoods. It is about governments that are weak and allowing this to happen with impunity. It is then linked to the higher cost of living, declining real wages, and the cost of green transition, which Mr Trump says will lead to the downfall of the Western

civilisation. Windmills, which generate cleaner power at a lower cost than conventional systems do, are blamed for driving down standards of living.

He wants this message to spread across the world — particularly the West — so that it turns against the "left loonies" (his words, not mine). We must see his message at the UN as a political effort to turn people towards the "right" and away from governments that believe in social justice and climate action.

Let us also be clear that there is deep resentment in the Western world, which was the architect of the free-trade globalisation regime and led economic growth. Mr Trump is taking it all to a boil so that he can bring about changes in the politics of the West — at least where there is still commitment to the change the world so desperately needs. He wants those governments to fail so that the parties that stand against multilateralism, global solidarity, and climate action can win. This is regime change on a scale never seen before.

And it is happening. Europe's ambitious climate policy is facing headwinds. The European Commission failed to secure an agreement on the next round of emission-reduction targets. There is now increased resistance to these policies, and it is no surprise that there is a growing shift towards parties that eschew climate change, much like Mr Trump does.

The US President wants to accelerate this movement so that the world aligns with his side of the divide. Climate change has become a pawn in this political game, which is driven by hard economic



DOWN TO EARTH
SUNITA NARAIN

When US first swung the big stick



CLAY RISEN

In July 1898 the American diplomat John Hay boasted in a letter to his friend Theodore Roosevelt, then the commander of the Rough Riders volunteer cavalry, that their country had benefited quite well from what he called a "splendid little war" against Spain, quickly taking control not just of Cuba, but of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines too.

Though Roosevelt and his men were still in Cuba, Hay was already praising a war "begun with the highest motives, carried on with magnificent intelligence and spirit, favored by that fortune which

loves the brave."

That assessment may have come too soon. As Joe Jackson makes clear in his compelling, thoroughly researched but occasionally exhausting book, *Splendid Liberators*, the Spanish-American War remains perhaps the most misunderstood conflict in US history.

It was certainly not splendid: More than 4,000 US soldiers died between 1898 and the declaration of peace in 1902 in the Philippines, where an insurgency had drawn the Americans into a brutal guerrilla war. Civilian deaths were well over 500,000 in the Philippines and Cuba, thanks to the horrific tactics employed by the Spanish and the American occupying forces.

And while at the time the war might have seemed "little," it was in fact world-altering: In a single conflict, the United States captured virtually every Spanish colonial territory; it established itself as a major power along the eastern edge of

Asia; and it revealed an enviable capacity to turn its robust industrial and economic base into military might, almost overnight.

Jackson has done a service in uniting the two phases of the conflict into a single, engrossing narrative. Most observers, then and now, did not see the Cuban and Philippine theatres as parts of the same war.

Jackson prefaces the book with 10 pages of dramatic personae. Chief among them is Frederick Funston, about as close to an avatar of America's swift rise to global power as one could find. Raised in rural Kansas in the decades after the Civil War, he made his way to New York City in the 1890s, where he fell in thrall to the Cuban cause.

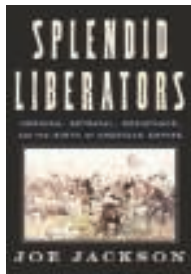
He was not alone. America was rapidly becoming a literate, middle-class society, qualities that also made it more aware of the world beyond its borders. With that awareness came a missionary

zeal to use America's power to help the world's down-trodden. In the 1890s, donations poured into charities like the recently established Red Cross, and protesters demonstrated against the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Armenians by Ottoman troops.

Millions of Americans like Funston also swooned to the cause of "Cuba Libre". In 1896 he joined the furtive waves of American civilians who smuggled themselves onto the island to enter the fray.

He didn't last long. Wounded repeatedly and stricken by malaria, he left Cuba after 18 months, only to rejoin the fight after President William McKinley declared war on Spain in 1898.

This time he was sent to the Philippines. Funston soon became an avid participant in the US military's three-year counterinsurgency. He used many of the



SPLENDID LIBERATORS: Heroism, Betrayal, Resistance, and the Birth of American Empire by Joe Jackson
Published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux
786 pages \$39

Spain as a world power, but showed itself willing to do all the terrible things that Spain and other European countries had done to maintain control.

Jackson has mastered the material and offers a persuasive interpretation of

same tactics employed by the hated Spanish: His men executed prisoners, tortured people for information and destroyed crops in an attempt to flush out the guerrillas. In 1899, he was promoted to the rank of brigadier general.

Funston's no-holds-barred methods won him the backing of jingoists like Roosevelt, who became president following McKinley's assassination in 1901. Roosevelt saw his country as both a force of liberation and an empire, bringing American values to the world whether it liked it or not.

The Americans declared the war over in July 1902. Within a few years, the United States had not only replaced

it. Still, though his account of the US campaign in Cuba makes *Splendid Liberators* hard to put down at times, elsewhere it drags.

Certain petty annoyances stand out. Jackson has a habit of tacking between tenses, sometimes within the same paragraph, so that action in the past suddenly shifts to the present, then back.

Still, Jackson writes with a sense of urgency about the need for Americans to examine the ease with which their country gets involved in faraway wars, especially when jingoism is once more on the rise.

"It's easy for moral certitude and blindness to be one," Jackson writes. "The myth plays out often — in my life, from the Bay of Pigs to Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. The leaders we elect always act surprised when things go awry."

The reviewer is *New York Times* reporter on the Obituaries desk and the author of *The Crowded Hour: Theodore Roosevelt, the Rough Riders, and the Dawn of the American Century*.
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IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

Liz Mathew: In your latest interview with *The Indian Express*, you said you were thrown out of BRS. How are you dealing with that situation now and what's next?

It is really stressful and painful because I chose public life to fight for Telangana's statehood and was very passionately and deeply involved in the movement. I worked very hard to make sure that women of Telangana participated in the movement by going around every village. I made sure that Bathukamma, an indigenous festival by women of Telangana, which was neglected when we were part of Andhra Pradesh, was a point of pride where all women could join together and would not be relegated to being second grade citizens.

In general, when a political party calls for women's participation, they don't respond very well. But I worked closely with people. In 2014, I contested on a BRS ticket, got elected to Parliament and did my bit. But I lost the following term because of a deep-rooted and well played out conspiracy by most of the people I'm upset with now and the coterie surrounding my father. From that time onwards, I have been constantly requesting the party leadership to look into why we lost and organisational gaps if any. No checks were done. A couple of years later, my leader realised that something was not working properly and said that I needed a post in the district. That's when I became a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC), which again is an elected post. I am a person who calls a spade a spade. In politics, you're not supposed to do that. But internally, I did. I tried to tell my father and brother that we need to work towards the promises that we made to the leaders of the Telangana movement and why we need to honour the spirit of Telangana. There were a lot of internal issues which I flagged but then one of my confidential communications to my leader was very tactfully leaked by this coterie.

Now I'm forced to continue this discourse in public, which is not right but they left me with no choice. Ultimately, that led to my suspension from the party. I simply had one question, for somebody who has been working with the party through thick and thin, why wasn't a showcase notice issued to me? I reasoned if the party suspended me the way it did, I would not hold on to its positions. So I resigned as MLC and also from the party membership.

The only thought in my mind when I joined the agitation for statehood in 2006 was simple: Being an educated woman and daughter of KCR himself, I shouldn't be sitting at home. I did my bit but I believe very strongly that I was unfairly and uncereemoniously removed from the party. As for the future, I might get one or two positions either by floating a party or joining another one. But will it lead to the change that I have demanded while being in the BRS? I'm now leading this backward class reservation movement and will work towards social equality in Telangana. I call it the Samajika Telangana movement, where all communities should get an equal share and opportunity in power politics. How will my goals converge with the people's movement and how can I take it forward is the crossroads that I am at right now. But hopefully, in the next few months, I'll find a path and walk on it.

Liz Mathew: Tell us how you want to take Telangana Jagruthi forward?

Telangana Jagruthi is a civil society organisation that was formed during the statehood movement. We've always spoken about how both the Congress and BJP had been conning the people of Telangana and had put up roadblocks in the formation of the state. So, my organisation has always been political in nature.

For two years, we worked on women's reservation, holding roundtable conferences and pressurising MPs from various parties to talk about it in both Houses of Parliament. We got support from 18 political parties. This resulted in the women's reservation bill. We have taken up reservation for OBCs (other backward classes) as they form 52 per cent of the population in Telangana. So, the Congress, before coming to power, had promised to give 42 per cent reservation to OBCs. Telangana Jagruthi was the only organisation in the last two years fighting for this cause. The Congress passed the Bill which is awaiting presidential assent, one that the BJP is holding up.

Liz Mathew: As we know it, BRS is your father's party. Yet you have not been receiving any messages or responses from the party. Do you hold your father responsible for your ouster?

When a party comes to power or is about to come to power, there are certain forces that surround your leader, whom we call coterie. I blame this coterie for everything that is going wrong with the BRS. These are forces with vested interests. And my father, having led a movement, has always worked for the welfare of the state. He is beyond these things. Right under the candle, there is a lot of darkness because of the shadow that the candle itself casts. That's where these evil creatures dwell. That is how the coterie prevailed and I got thrown out.

Liz Mathew: Did your brother support you when you were jailed (for the alleged liquor policy scam in Delhi)?

I have suffered the most. The BJP's entire vendetta against BRS was continuously and constantly focussed on me. For three years, I was constantly bullied, had to face the



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

‘I call a spade a spade... that’s why I was unfairly removed from my party’

Former BRS leader and now activist K Kavitha on her expulsion from the party, its patriarchal coterie, why women do not find a space in political families, the importance of a fair caste census and the fallout of delimitation. The session was moderated by Deputy Editor Liz Mathew

Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the media. My own party did not rescue me during that time. But when I was jailed, as a family, both my father and brother stood by me, came to jail. After I came out of jail, nobody supported me, includ-

from that, except maybe in Kerala, where women are given a better space I feel. Even in the case of Supriya Sule (daughter of Sharad Pawar), Ajit Pawar (her cousin) was given a lot more power before her. This is the same story, from the Gandhis to everybody else.

ideology. Only in 2022, before the 2023 Assembly elections, the BJP declared September 17 would be celebrated as Telangana Liberation Day and Home Minister Amit Shah attended a programme. I believe this is an infringement of federal rights because as a Central government, you are coming into a state, trying to redefine our history and creating differences among Hindus and Muslims. Would they do that in any other state? Why did the Home Minister attend the ceremony without the involvement of the Chief Minister? Now, to counter the BJP's narrative, the Congress has come up with a different name. But people of Telangana have always tried to live in peace.

Liz Mathew: A few months ago, there were rumours of BRS merging with the BJP. How far is this true?

I have said this already, I will say it again. When I was in jail, I received a proposal on a merger in

exchange for my bail. I said, 'No, the law doesn't work that way.' I believe in the justice system. There is no way that a party born out of a statehood movement should be sacrificed for one person's freedom. After I came out, there was not much discussion on that. That is

ON 'VOTE CHORI' ALLEGATION BY RAHUL GANDHI

IF RAHUL GANDHI IS CITING SPECIFIC EXAMPLES, IT IS FOR THE ELECTION COMMISSION TO COME CLEAN. RAHULJI HAS THIS HISTORY OF RAISING QUESTIONS AND THEN RUNNING AWAY FOR A HOLIDAY. I HOPE HE CONTINUES THE FIGHT

where I would leave it.

Asad Rehman: The Congress has been pitching the Telangana caste survey done by the Revanth Reddy government as a model that can be used for the Central caste census. Do you think this can be a template for the rest of the country?

The Congress is only trying to bank on this caste survey, not only in Bihar but in every other election. When KC Rao Sir had conducted the caste survey right after the formation of Telangana in 2014, the population of

OBCs was 52 per cent. Now, after Revanth Reddy's government conducted the caste survey, the OBC population is 46 per cent. So, there is a six per cent reduction in the OBC population, which is a serious concern. There is a sudden rise in OC (open category) population.

The Congress government has been very opaque on the caste survey and has not placed it in the Assembly as well. For anything to be a model, it has to be very transparent. The Indra Sawhney case verdict (in which the Supreme Court upheld the validity of reservations for OBCs), clearly says there has to be a dedicated commission. If a dedicated commission does the enumeration and after that if the government can prove that there is no proportionate representation of any community, that community can then be given reservations.

Vikas Pathak: You have said you have doubts about the caste survey because of conflicting data. But census exercises in India since 1881 have generally thrown up very authentic data, which are also used by researchers. While almost all parties are on board on the caste survey, is it now a game of one-upmanship as to who is more pro-OBC?

When caste surveys were conducted in Telangana, the enumerators did not go to every house though they are supposed to do so. That

is our fundamental objection. When conducting a caste survey, one has to be very careful about noting the sub-caste as well because that's important for sub-categorisation of reservations. The reservation percentage of your job, your education, your political representation, everything will change. That is why it is not about one-upmanship but about being careful and accurate.

Liz Mathew: Do you think the caste census has the potential to do some good for the OBC community?

It will do some good if we work on the sub-categorisation properly. In Telangana OBCs are 52 per cent but public representatives are very few. You can identify only about four or five caste leaders. The remaining castes never got benefit of any reservations at all, neither in education or employment. So now the fight is to make sure that benefits go to every sub-caste under the OBC umbrella. If the enumeration is correct, then the sub-categorisation can be correct and the benefits can flow seamlessly.

Liz Mathew: Another major concern for the southern states is delimitation. Your chief minister also spoke about it. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin has been raising it very often. Do you see it becoming a major issue?

When it comes to actual political influence, it has always been a tilted floor for the southern politicians compared to their northern counterparts. Very few of us make it to the top in Delhi, considering Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are bigger states. If the representation and the percentage of representation of the south is kept as it is today, only then will southern states have some say. The southern states contribute the highest to the nation's GDP but what we get in return is very less. Yet we share our wealth with our fellow Indians. That is fairly fine because we are a union of states and as a federal set-up, we should be doing that. But yes, political representation should not be sacrificed and the southern states should get proper representation that is not just based on their population. Their contribution to the GDP should also be taken into consideration.

Vikas Pathak: Ever since the debate began around delimitation, we have seen statements by southern politicians, and even by the RSS chief, that people should have more children. Also, when you say GDP should be taken into account, how will it sit with our general policy where prosperity is not rewarded and poverty gets you subsidy. Even the voting right is not based on your wealth. How do we reconcile these polarities?

The call for population growth is linked to a long-term policy adjustment factor and not a solution. We have seen this call happening in nations like China, which is bearing the brunt of a one-child policy, and Japan, where younger people are not getting married. As a result their geriatric population is more than the young population. All I am saying is reward well-performing states, be it for family planning or contributing to GDP. If the representation of the South keeps going down and yet if they have to share money with everyone else, resentment will ultimately rise.

Asad Rehman: Do you think that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's allegations on 'vote chori' will have an electoral impact at some point in the country?

If Rahul Gandhi is citing specific examples, it is for the Election Commission to come clean. When Rahulji spoke about 'vote chori,' I could see the resonance even in the last village of Telangana. People said, "This is possible. They must have done it. It is the BJP!"

Also, Rahulji has this history of raising questions and then running away for a holiday. I hope he continues the fight. I hope all other parties continue to do so. The Election Commission's primary responsibility is to make sure it gives answers and confidence to the people.

IDEA EXCHANGE

KALVAKUNTLA KAVITHA

FORMER MP AND FOUNDER OF TELANGANA JAGRUTHI

WHY KALVAKUNTLA KAVITHA

As the daughter of former Telangana CM and Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) founder K Chandrashekar Rao, K. Kavitha has been a force-multiplier in the movement for statehood. Recently suspended from the BRS for taking a stand against coterie politics, she is seeking to establish herself as an independent political force

ON THE CASTE SURVEY

THE SUB-CASTE IS IMPORTANT FOR SUB-CATEGORISATION OF RESERVATIONS. THE RESERVATION PERCENTAGE OF YOUR JOB, EDUCATION, POLITICAL REPRESENTATION, EVERYTHING WILL CHANGE

ON DELIMITATION

REWARD PERFORMING STATES, BE IT FOR FAMILY PLANNING OR CONTRIBUTING TO GDP. IF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE SOUTH KEEPS GOING DOWN AND THEY HAVE TO SHARE MONEY WITH EVERYONE, RESENTMENT WILL ULTIMATELY RISE

Tata Sons must list

An IPO can replace the moral opacity of ‘trust’ with the moral clarity of accountability

THE SHAPOORJI PALLONJI (SP) Group, the second-largest shareholder in Tata Sons, is justified in renewing its demand for a public listing of the holding firm of the Tata group’s 25 listed companies with a combined market cap of ₹26.5 lakh crore (around \$300 billion), and a host of mega unlisted entities. SP Group Chairman Shapoorji Pallonji Mistry’s articulation of his “profound belief” that “transparency is the truest form of respect for both legacy and the future” will find a lot of resonance, particularly when Tata Trusts, which has a commanding say over Tata Sons, is a divided house over governance issues. In sharp contrast is the Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI) silence on listing of Tata Sons even though the September 30, 2025, deadline of complying with the scale-based regulatory framework for non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) is over. This is surprising as the preamble to the framework clearly said that “an NBFC should not act in a manner detrimental to the interests of its investors”. The RBI, which had earlier classified Tata Sons as an upper-layer NBFC, a label that requires it to go public, can’t be perceived to be applying a different yardstick for the so-called big boys of India Inc.

Tata Trusts’ hesitation probably stems from the fact that the holding company is controlled through various trusts and a public market listing would expose the company and the trusts to the regulatory scrutiny. A listing may also arguably limit the group’s control on its listed entities and lead to equity dilution. But these are not strong enough arguments for the reluctance to list Tata Sons. Few names command as much moral capital as the Tatas. But moral capital, like financial capital, depreciates when not renewed through accountability. The debate over whether Tata Sons should list is not only about compliance; it is about the credibility of capitalism itself. Tata Sons’ decision to contest the RBI’s listing mandate also sits uneasily with its own legacy of stewardship. The company controls dozens of group firms, influences massive capital flows, and yet remains largely invisible to public oversight. The House of Tata should not stand dimmed by secrecy at the top.

Transparency will not erode the Tata ethos; it will protect it. A public listing would bring sunlight to the boardroom, fairness to minority shareholders, and confidence to markets. It would replace the moral opacity of “trust” with the moral clarity of accountability. If the Tata Group wishes to remain India’s moral compass in business, it must not resist the future. A listing would subject Tata Sons to disclosure norms, board scrutiny, and the discipline of market valuation—mechanisms that strengthen, not weaken, institutional integrity. It would also allow the Trusts to redeploy capital more effectively and give the public a stake in one of India’s most important corporate institutions.

There is another reason why Tata Sons should list. It would help simplify the complicated group holding structure of the Tata Group, increase investor transparency, and enable some of the listed group companies to liquidate their combined 12.87% stake in Tata Sons. Such cross-holdings have been a concern for investors for a while and a simplified structure would enable Tata Sons to have better control over the promoter votes on shareholder resolutions. A simpler structure would also be in synergy with Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran’s publicly stated mission of streamlining the group’s complicated shareholding structure, hoping to unlock value at its subsidiaries and reduce debt further. Jamsetji Tata’s vision was always expansive—industry not as privilege, but as public good. The same spirit should now guide the modern Tata Group. Listing Tata Sons is not a concession to regulation; it is a reaffirmation of trust.

The Nobel goes to Machado. For Trump, there's always 2026

ONCE AGAIN, FIVE otherwise obscure individuals on the Nobel committee in Oslo, chosen by the Norwegian parliament, made controversial news today in giving out their Peace Prize, the world’s most sought-after award. They did so for the best of reasons, for this year’s laureate — Maria Corina Machado of Venezuela — is as deserving as any has ever been. Machado, as the committee put it, is known for her tireless work promoting democracy for Venezuelans and her struggle against dictatorship. That dictator is her nemesis, Nicolas Maduro. If Venezuela were free, Machado would probably be President instead of him. As it is, she’s in hiding while still leading the opposition against him — and giving hope to Venezuelans and all others who love liberty.

And yet it’s impossible to overlook a candidate the committee conspicuously omitted: US President Donald Trump. He took his second oath of office only 11 days before this year’s deadline for nominations and so couldn’t reasonably have won the 2025 award anyway, even if his latest — and laudable — efforts to bring peace to Gaza prove successful. Then again, Oslo did once give the medal “on spec” to an American president in his first year: Barack Obama in 2009. Even the committee members soon realised that this decision had been rushed and looked vaguely ridiculous. Trump, though, remains obsessed with it; somehow, he inferred that it entitled him to the Nobel now. So he has done something unprecedented in the 124 years since the prize

has been awarded: He launched a brazen and global lobbying effort, enlisting allies and supplicants at home and abroad to nominate and second him, while incessantly boasting about being a peacemaker and occasionally even menacing the committee, if not all of Norway, should he be snubbed.

His methods and style work against him in the cerebral and understated Scandinavian milieu of the Nobel Prizes. Alfred Nobel’s ideal recipients wouldn’t ask for recognition at all and would remain focused on spreading fraternity. Regarding that, Trump is, for now, a puzzle. He is genuinely pursuing peace in places. On the flip side, he’s deploying troops to American cities, bullying allies, blowing up speedboats in the Caribbean and threatening war against Venezuela — perhaps the only thing he has in common with Machado is Maduro as an adversary. Whether renaming the Department of Defense the Department of War or staging cadillo-style military parades, Trump seems at least as obsessed with war as with peace.

But the Nobel committee lives in the real world, and human nature, as well as matters of war and peace, are too complex to fit onto one golden medal. Controversy and contradiction have dogged the prizes since 1901. Did Teddy Roosevelt deserve his prize in 1906 for brokering peace between Russia and Japan? After all, he also did plenty of bullying. Was Henry Kissinger the best choice in 1973? He did agree a ceasefire in Vietnam. But he had also orchestrated the bombing of Laos and Cambodia and was considered a war criminal by some.

Their cases were difficult, and so is Trump’s. Since the nominating season for the 2026 prize is now open, here then is my unsolicited advice to the President. First, stop boasting, threatening and crudely demanding the prize — the committee is capable of noticing what you do. Second, in making foreign policy, focus not on “how it plays” on TV but on what saves lives today and prevents wars tomorrow.

If you do manage to pacify Gaza, it’s because you finally applied real pressure not just to Hamas but also to Israel’s Benjamin Netanyahu. So try that approach with Vladimir Putin in Russia. Also, be nicer to your allies, because you’ll need them to deter Moscow, Beijing and Pyongyang, and deterrence is good for peace.

For now, here’s to Machado, Venezuelans and people everywhere who love freedom. As to Trump, if he starts putting his prodigious power in the service of fraternity among nations, I’ll cheer loudest when he accepts the Nobel Peace Prize in 2026, or any other year.

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● FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
INDIA MUST MOVE QUICKLY ON DOMESTIC POLICY SUPPORT & SYSTEMIC REFORMS TO REAP BENEFITS

Can UK soften tariff blow?

ASHOK GULATI
SULAKSHANA RAO

Respectively distinguished professor and senior fellow at ICRIER

lion, 11%), Germany (\$76.3 billion, 9%), France (\$39 billion, 5%), and Italy (\$31.9 billion, 4%). In 2024, the largest import category was machinery and engineering goods (HSN84, 85, \$167.44 billion) coming largely from China (26%), the US (15%), and Germany (9%); followed by gems and jewellery (HSN71, \$92.8 billion) from Canada (20%), the US (13%), and Switzerland (12%). Vehicles (HSN87, \$88.8 billion) came mainly from Germany (24%), China, and Spain (8%), and France (7%). Pharmaceuticals (HSN30, \$30 billion) came from the US (16%), Germany (14%), and Italy (10%).

Where, then, are the opportunities for India? Granular analysis at the commodity level gives a better picture. Take for example gems and jewellery—of the \$92.7 billion imports by the UK, India’s contribution was just \$0.6 billion. With nearly \$11.9 billion of Indian exports at stake in the US market, the UK can be a very promising hedge. In 2023, the average most-favoured nation (MFN) tariff was 1.16% for India, 0.11% for the US, and 0.04% for Germany; while Canada and South Africa had zero duty. Labour-intensive sectors like textiles and apparel tell a similar story. The UK imported \$22.3 billion worth of apparel and made-ups in 2023, while India supplied only \$1.59 billion. Before CETA, India faced MFN tariffs averaging 9-12% (HSN61-63). With CETA, Indian exporters are on par

with Bangladesh and Vietnam (zero tariff), and enjoy a tariff edge over China. This effectively removes a long-standing cost disadvantage and strengthens India’s competitiveness in one of the UK’s largest import categories.

Likewise, in leather and footwear (HSN 42, 64), the UK imported around \$8.5 billion, while India’s exports were just \$453 million. In 2023, footwear faced an average MFN duty of 8.04% for India, compared with 13.02% for China and 13.09% for Vietnam. Leather goods carried around 3% for India, similar to China, Italy, France, and Vietnam. With CETA now reducing duties, India’s share in the UK’s overall imports could increase substantially, partly offsetting the losses arising from the US tariff shocks. Although the UK cannot fully compensate India’s losses in the US market, it can help soften the tariff blow.

At the same time, India too must make space for UK products to ensure a balanced and credible trade partnership. One of the most prominent areas is alcoholic beverages, where India will gradually cut import duties on Scotch whisky and gin from 150% to 75% immediately and to 40% over 10 years. However, a 10-year timeline is long. Reducing it to five would signal stronger partnership. Beyond beverages, advanced machinery including defence equipment, clean energy tech-

With Starmer’s visit and the CETA in place, the UK market offers a significant opportunity for India

The mirage of digital sovereignty



RISHI RAJ

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THERE’S A GROWING buzz in the technology and chatterati circles these days that feels both familiar and new. Familiar in its patriotic fervour, and new in its ambition and scope. Digital sovereignty has become the latest buzzword, gathering momentum as domestic firms have started taking steps towards building their own large language models, cloud infrastructure, data centres, and even indigenous email and messaging platforms. The conversation has gained currency with Zoho’s stunning rise as the flag-bearer of self-reliant technology. Its messaging app, Arattai, has stormed the charts, drawing endorsements from Cabinet ministers and igniting a sense that the long-elusive dream of an Indian-built digital ecosystem might finally be within reach.

What makes all this interesting is the blend of policy, pride, and pragmatism. A few years ago, the idea of building an indigenous alternative to WhatsApp or a foundational artificial intelligence (AI) model seemed fanciful. Now, companies like Zoho and a clutch of AI start-ups are trying to do just that, which is to move beyond being service providers to becoming product creators. The government’s IndiaAI mission, with its ₹10,000-crore investment in compute infrastructure, reflects the same aspiration that we should not merely consume technology but also create it.

The excitement, however, has also led to some loose understanding of terms like digital sovereignty and swadeshi. At the

recent FE Best Banks Awards, when Home Minister Amit Shah was asked what swadeshi means, he replied that any product built with the sweat of Indian labour qualifies as indigenous. The statement was telling because it recognised that in an interconnected global economy, building in India for the world is as swadeshi as building in India for India. It is a vision of self-reliance that embraces global participation rather than shunning it.

And yet, much of the current chatter seems to miss that nuance. The celebration of products like Arattai is well-deserved, but it must not morph into a call for digital isolation. True technological sovereignty does not come from closing off global products; rather it comes from creating ones that can stand beside them, and compete with them, on equal terms. The world has seen such enthusiasm before, from Hike Messenger to Koo, where early bursts of nationalism translated into downloads but not lasting engagement.

Zoho’s Arattai feels different, not least because of the company’s long track record of patient product-building. Its back-end infrastructure has been built painstakingly over years rather than assembled in haste.

But it’s scale that separates global platforms from local experiments. WhatsApp, for example, became indispensable not just because it offered free messaging

but because it built an entire ecosystem around payments, small business communication, and media sharing. Similarly, Google and Apple became global giants not because they were American, but because they solved universal problems elegantly and consistently. Their success was built on usability and reach, not on the nationality of their founders. For domestic firms aspiring to digital sovereignty, the real test is whether they can build for the world.

This same dilemma shadows our AI ambitions. Inspired by China’s DeepSeek, which developed a powerful foundational AI model at a fraction of Western costs, the government launched its own AI mission to create indigenous large language models. The intent is to ensure that we also have a seat at the global AI table.

But the bigger challenge is not technical but economic. Unlike China, which shields its domestic market, India is an open economy where foreign products dominate. Any Indian-built foundational model must therefore compete not just with OpenAI’s ChatGPT or Google’s Gemini, but also with China’s DeepSeek, and it must do so in a market that prizes performance and affordability over origin.

That competitive reality has already humbled many domestic tech efforts. The indigenous 4G telecom stack, developed by Tata Consultancy Services and Tejas

footprint it has in the global arena, impressing its allied partners. —RV Baskaran, Pune

Fragile peace

The ceasefire between Hamas and Israel is being celebrated worldwide, but should the world really cheer a pause in bloodshed while justice still bleeds? Every truce without accountability only deepens the wound of humanity. The silence of

nologies, and medical devices offer further scope for UK exports.

With Starmer’s visit and CETA in place, the UK market offers significant opportunity for India. But reduced tariffs alone will not translate into exports unless matched with structural reforms that promote India’s competitiveness. This is because many competitors like Canada (UK-Canada Trade Continuity Agreement), Bangladesh (Developing Countries Trading Scheme), and Vietnam, Singapore, and Australia (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) already have a head start.

What should India do? Policy support through targeted incentives can help Indian exporters tap the UK market. Domestic reforms are equally important. Access to capital must improve, both in terms of ease of access and cost. Trade facilitation is another critical gap. According to the World Bank Enterprise Survey, the average export custom clearance time in India is 17.3 days compared to 6.7 days in Bangladesh and 3.3 in China. The next important thing to address is India’s “regulatory cholesterol” as highlighted by Manish Sabharwal. India’s regulatory framework often constrains rather than enables scale. The ease of doing business also has to improve. Finally, India must scale up and integrate its industrial clusters by investing in shared testing facilities as well as infrastructure that can reduce costs, and improve quality across sectors.

India needs to move quickly on domestic policy support and systemic reforms to reap the benefits of CETA and Starmer’s visit with the largest business contingent. The UK could be India’s first strategic destination in its quest to diversify exports in the face of Trump’s tariffs. As global trade realigns, the onus is on India to seize this opportunity.

Views are personal

The push for indigenous tech is welcome, but true sovereignty will come from building products the world wants to use

Networks, has so far found no takers beyond BSNL. It is here that the notion of digital sovereignty meets its limitation. Sovereignty in the digital age is not about exclusion but about capability and influence. A nation becomes digitally sovereign not by walling itself off from global technology but by contributing to it, by creating platforms and products that others adopt and depend on.

This is not to dismiss the importance of indigenous effort. On the contrary, the push for home-grown models, data centres, and cloud infrastructure is vital. It builds capacity, sharpens skills, and lays the foundation for the next wave of innovation. But these must be stepping stones toward global competitiveness, not ends in themselves. Boycotts and bans may create temporary surges, but they cannot substitute sustained excellence.

Zoho’s journey is instructive precisely because it has always looked outward while remaining rooted in India. It builds its technology stack in-house, but also earns its revenue globally.

Therefore, the road ahead will demand more than patriotic zeal. It will require domestic firms to think beyond replication, to innovate, differentiate, and globalise. Only then can digital sovereignty move from being a political slogan to an economic reality. The day the country’s digital products are adopted not out of sentiment but out of choice will mark the arrival of true technological independence.

powerful nations, so vocal elsewhere, now echoes like guilt. How long will the world call temporary calm “peace”? A ceasefire cannot replace conscience, nor can diplomacy replace morality. Real peace begins not when guns stop firing, but when humanity triumphs all else. Until then, everything remains under siege. —Hasnain, Patna

● Write to us at fe.letters@expressindia.com

Don't Read Much Into Banerjee-Duflo Flight

US research edge secured by money and talent

The relocation of Nobel Prize-winning couple Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo from the US to Switzerland amid the Trump administration's assaults on academic freedom and research funding will trigger angst over brain drain. These fears may be overblown. The economics Nobel laureates would have personal reasons for making the move. Their work is in development economics where the subject of study is poor nations. Such a line of enquiry can be conducted equally well from Boston and Zurich. Social science provides a dynamic area of research as economies move at varying speeds towards affluence. The process of understanding this change is based on real-life experience and must be collaborative.

Doomsayers would have a more plausible cause for alarm if the US academia were to begin losing their best brains in natural sciences, where research output provides tangible and immediate gains to the host economy. The US has consistently ranked among the top global talents since the middle of the 20th century, developing its military and economic might. The process is driven by US business, which acts as the principal client for the research flowing out of universities. Other nations lost out because they didn't have enough business funding for research. They couldn't match budgets of US universities.

Well, that issue is even more magnified now. American companies dwarf European and Asian rivals by a wider margin today. It would be easy for US Inc to fund research around the globe if talent stays at home. Besides, companies like Google have an enviable number of Nobel Prize winners on their rolls. Few companies anywhere in the world would have business interests of a scale to be able to justify cornering so much talent. It would take a very long time for the US to lose its critical mass in research. Secondary centres may gain some traction through reverse brain drain but no country is poised to seriously challenge US research hegemony.

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Passing of Diane Keaton's America

Diane Keaton didn't just wear America's contradictions, she also accessorised them. In oversized suits and rakish hats, she was the woman who made eccentricity elegant, feminism flirtatious and liberalism lovable. Her screen presence was never about domination, but about negotiation — between independence and intimacy, intellect and impulse, tradition and rebellion. She was the cinematic embodiment of a progressive America that believed in wit over war, charm over conquest and radical acts of kindness.

In Woody Allen's 1977 Annie Hall, she redefined not just fashion, but female agency, something blatantly in short supply in Roe v Wade-overturned Trumpland. Keaton was the woman who read Joan Didion, quoted Yeats, and 'still' made you laugh at dinner. Her characters were inclusive not because they ticked boxes, but because they made space for vulnerability, difference and the unscripted. Keaton's America was one where liberals didn't sneer, conservatives didn't shout, caring wasn't performative. It was baked in awkward New York pauses and offbeat jokes. Or, at least that's how the US came across to us from the movies and TV shows.

Her passing on Saturday at 79 marks more than the loss of an actor — it signals the fading of a cultural projection. The America she represented was one that could be self-critical without being self-loathing, idealistic without being naïve and funny without being cruel. In an era increasingly defined by algorithmic outrage and curated identities, Keaton's legacy reminds us of a gentler rebellion, one fought with laughter, empathy and refusal to conform that the US showcased over time irrespective of ideology or class. If that vision is to survive, the US must be reimaged — not in costume, but in character.

JUST IN JEST

The right response to an only-male journos invited would be the opposite

Now, an All-Female Gaze Press Con

It seems there's been much consternation over what we call the classic 'Oops, all dudes!' press conference, where an only-men diplomatic meet was followed by only-male journalists invited in its aftermath. Both hosts and guests, of course, were shocked. Shocked! They had simply invited 'journalists', and it just happened that a bunch of XY-chromosomes turned up. A statistical anomaly, surely, for which the blame should lie in media houses sending 'Talib-friendly' reporters.

But balance can be restored — not through any apology, but through a follow-up 'Oops, all women!' presser. Same podium, same topic, but this time, the room can 'just happen to be' all women. There is nothing that can make things even more impactful than having at least one journalist come in burqa. No need for finger pointing, or diversity statements drafted by wakey wokes. Just a panel of women—womanel, if you will — asking sharp questions, taking notes, and not once referring to their colleagues as 'Bhaisaab'. And if anyone complains? 'Oh, we just invited journalists. It just *happened* to be all women.' So next time your event 'accidentally' resembles an old boys' club or fraternity reunion, remember: the best clapback is a well-dressed, well-prepared room full of women who didn't come to play gender politics, but came to report a successful meet between two sets of bros.

Polymarket successfully predicting this year's Nobel Peace winner raises concerns beyond the prize

Is Nothing Secret Anymore?



Subimal Bhattacharjee

Much speculation — and mirth — surrounded the run-up to the announcement of this year's Nobel Peace Prize, with the Norwegian Nobel Committee naming Venezuelan human rights activist and Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, instead of another public figure who had been openly hankering for it, the winner. The choice of Machado, too, came under flak, with some pointing out her recent support for Israel and approval of Donald Trump — she 'dedicated' her Nobel to him.

But these controversies became side notes when two Norwegian newspapers reported unusual movement in the online betting markets ahead of Friday's announcement of the Prize. In particular, bets for Machado spiked on Polymarket, a decentralised 'prediction platform' (read: gambling site), 11 hours before her name was announced. As the news of the 'leak' spread, it didn't feel like a triumph of collective intelligence, but more like a crack in the foundation of institutional trust. On Saturday, head of Nobel Institute Kristian Berg Harpviken said, 'It seems we have been prey to a criminal actor who wants to earn money on our information.'

Have prediction markets become so sophisticated that they can penetrate even the most closely guarded secrets? Polymarket operates on a simple principle: wisdom of crowds. Unlike traditional polls, it's a blockchain-based marketplace where users buy and sell shares in potential outcomes. You buy shares that predict Candidate A winning. If S/he does, you profit. If not, you lose stake. The market price — hovering between zero and \$1 — represents the collective probability assessment of thousands risking real money on their convictions.

The technology behind Polymarket runs on blockchain smart contracts. Every trade is recorded immutably, creating an audit trail that shows when confidence in particular outcomes shifted. This transparency is what makes the Nobel incident so intriguing. One can see precisely when the market 'knew' the answer, watching in real-time as the probability for the eventual winner surged from moderate odds to near-certainty in the final hours before the announcement.

Polymarket's algorithm doesn't predict outcomes. Instead, it aggregates human judgment weighted by financial commitment

judgment weighted by financial commitment. It's capitalism meeting epistemology — people literally putting their money where their mouths are.

Historically, this mechanism has proven accurate, often outperforming expert polls in elections because it synthesises diverse information sources:



We need to solve this puzzle fast

news reports, insider knowledge, pattern recognition and intuition. But here's where it gets complicated: Polymarket's accuracy depends entirely on the information feeding into it. The algorithm is only as good as what its users know. Or what they think they know.

Three scenarios could explain Polymarket's prescient call:

● **Pure luck** With markets making enough forecasts, some will hit the bull's eye through sheer probability. But the Prize has a small pool of serious contenders, making lucky guesses statistically unlikely when the odds shift dramatically in the final hours.

● **Sophisticated pattern analysis** Polymarket users may have collectively identified signals invisible to casual observers: travel patterns of committee members, diplomatic activities, or subtle shifts in media coverage.

● **Information leak** If someone with insider knowledge participated in the market, the entire premise of the Nobel Prize's confidential deliberation collapses.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee's internal probe will likely focus on key areas: auditing communications through email logs, phone records and travel patterns. It may also scrutinise Po-

lymarket's trades for suspicious spikes, unusual betting, or large wagers placed just before the announcement.

While blockchain provides transparency, it doesn't reveal real-world identities, making this detective work particularly challenging. Also, reviewing security protocols around the announcement itself — who had access to the information, how it was stored and whether proper confidentiality measures were maintained — could reveal anything from an innocent coincidence to a devastating breach.

The Nobel Prize's true power comes from its perceived objectivity and integrity. If prediction markets can accurately forecast the winner, it transforms Nobel Prize announcements from revelation to confirmation. The cynic in all of us wonders: If Polymarket knew, who else knew?

This isn't just about the Nobel. It's also about whether our most sacred institutions can maintain meaningful confidentiality in an era of prediction markets, big data and distributed intelligence. This precedent is chilling for central banks, courts, or anyone whose authority hinges on timing disclosures

chilling for central banks managing market-sensitive information, courts deliberating landmark cases, or anybody whose authority depends even partly on controlling the timing of revelations.

The Nobel Committee must not only investigate, but transparently report its findings, even if they're inconclusive. Silence will breed conspiracy theories. Openness, however uncomfortable, builds trust. Perhaps the answer isn't just tighter lockdowns, but also shorter windows between decision and announcement. Or maybe new frameworks for thinking about institutional secrecy is needed in an age where collective intelligence can penetrate almost anywhere.

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The writer is a commentator on digital policy issues

ChatGPT SHAIRI OF THE DAY

GoI and Taliban sitting on a tree,

Both of them talking strategic autonomy.

One said, 'Let business ease!'

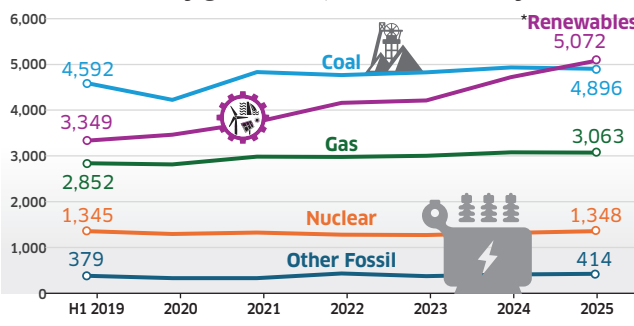
The other: 'Yes, but no ladies please.'

While Pakistan looked on sensing much jeopardy.

First Half: Renewables vs Coal

Renewable energy sources generated more electricity than coal globally for the first time in the first half of 2025, according to Ember data. Renewables, such as wind and solar, supplied 5,072 terawatt hours (TWh) of electricity globally between January and June, surpassing coal's 4,896 TWh. Curbing coal power generation, which emits around double the amount of carbon dioxide as gas generation, is regarded as vital by most scientists to meeting global climate targets...

Global electricity generation, Jan-Jun of each year (TWh)



*Renewables include wind, solar, hydro, bioenergy & other renewables, such as geothermal
Source: Monthly electricity data, Ember, Reuters

MEME'S THE WORD



Economic is Ecological



Raj Shekhar Joshi

India's economic growth trajectory is increasingly being defined by the growing frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters. A Swiss Re Group report, NatCat 2025, estimates that natural catastrophes cost India over \$12 bn in 2025, with floods accounting for more than 63% of those losses. Between 2000 and 2025, India's cumulative disaster bill has crossed \$180 bn.

Beyond direct asset damage, the fallout includes lost human productivity, mounting public debt, and long-term risks to GDP growth and poverty alleviation. The Himalayan region illustrates climate risks: Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand have faced relentless monsoon calamities, causing ₹4,500 cr in losses. In addition:

► Over 2 lakh ha of farming area has been abandoned in the past 25 years in Uttarakhand, and tens of thousands of springs have dried up or reduced discharge, causing water runoff through gravity rather than absorption into farmer-friendly soil or spring-zone areas.

► Unregulated urbanisation has intensified disasters.

These challenges demand an effective disaster management strategy, combining agricultural restoration, spring rejuvenation, construction zoning regulation, early warning systems (EWS), greater use of tech and watershed management with unwavering strategic intent, authentic mission mode and action orientation.

The 2023 northern India floods devastated agricultural output, induced supply shocks and disrupted goods movement, creating multiplier effects across the economy. Rising heatwaves and floods cut labour productivity, especially of vulnerable sections, with projections warning of up to 24.7% GDP loss by 2070 if no

corrective climate actions are taken. This indeed needs to be turned into an economic driver.

India's current disaster management budget and insurance coverage are inadequate for the scale of the risk. National Disaster Response Fund allocations exceeded ₹30,000 cr between 2023-25, yet the gap for prevention, ecosystem restoration and resilience-building is estimated at over \$24 bn annually for the next decade.

Analysts recommend immediate capital infusions of \$10-15 bn per year from a blend of public finances, private investments, international climate funds, catastrophe bonds and expanded disaster insurance schemes.

Insurance penetration is particularly low, with under 10% of economic losses currently covered, exposing farmers, MSMEs and urban assets to crippling risk.

To address this, India must mobilise dedicated climate and ecosystem restoration funds by leveraging green bonds, payments for ecosystem services and PPP models to fund watershed development, afforestation, resilient urban infrastructure and flood-proof housing.

The pathway forward lies in synchronising climate-resilient economic policies with nature-based disaster risk reduction, backed by financial innovation and community engagement. Unintegrated policies multiply vulnerabilities and hamper sustainable development. This indeed can be turned into an economic driver.

The ecosystem approach is not an environmental luxury; it is a business imperative. In the Himalayas, ecosystem-based land and water manage-



Drowned and out

ment is pivotal. Research finds that every \$1 mn invested in agro-ecological restoration yields \$7-14 mn in avoided disaster and productivity losses.

► Water management strategies emphasising wetlands and aquifer restoration reduce flood risk, improve irrigation reliability and offer water security at \$0.50 per cubic metre — cheaper than conventional grey infrastructure. Agro-forestry and carbon credits offer a significant economic opportunity.

► Strict construction regulation is essential to break the cycle of disaster amplification. Urban planning must incorporate green infrastructure like parks, rain gardens and permeable pavements that absorb stormwater runoff and cool microclimates. This holistic connection between agriculture, water and the built environment must be at the core of regional resilience strategies.

► To unlock business resilience and safeguard long-term competitiveness, India must integrate local realities with global best practices. The ecosystem approach offers a blueprint aligning economic growth, climate resilience and disaster risk reduction.

► Expand disaster insurance coverage to mobilise \$10-15 bn annually for ecosystem restoration, mainstreaming ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction in agriculture, urban planning and water management, and incentivising resilient infrastructure through blended finance and PPP models.

Bold policies and investments in nature-based solutions and risk finance are essential foundations for India's sustainable economic security amid escalating climate uncertainties.

Coherent policy and strong strategic intent at the state level must drive this integration, serving as a lifeline in today's climate crisis and economic uncertainty. Without such holistic, ecosystem-based governance, India risks amplified disruption, economic setbacks, social costs and lost development opportunities amid accelerating climate-induced disasters.

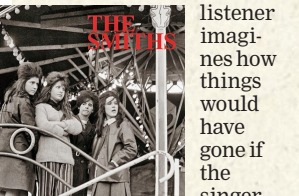
The writer is vice-chairman, Setu Aayog, Uttarakhand

MELODY FOR MONDAY

Jeane The Smiths

'Jeane,' a glorious 1983 B-side track by the Smiths, is a grimy gem. It shoots out the raw ache of lower middle-class disillusionment — in the Smiths' Thatcherite Britain equivalence, that would be 'working class'. To love and be loved is one thing. To live a life where love can live and thrive, you need material comfort — which is where this song goes off the usual Top of the Pops track and delivers the missive.

Yet, amid the squalor, there's a strange, sad tenderness where the



listener imagines how things would have gone if the singer and his partner 'had enough'. The repeated refrain, 'We tried and we failed,' is like a church bell being rung to articulate shared defeat, a tragic bond between two people clinging to dignity in a world that offers none.

Johnny Marr's guitar jangles with slow, pointless urgency. The riff is insistent, driving the song forward like a train rattling through Bulandshahr station.

'Jeane' doesn't aspire to grandeur. It's 'over', so, yes, it wallows, it flails, it fails. And in doing so, it captures something transcendent. Beauty sometimes lingers in hopeless spaces.



THE SPEAKING TREE

Compassion As Guide

THE XIV DALAI LAMA

Time flows; no one can stop time. Use time properly, meaningfully, sensibly. Don't use time for destructive purposes. The rest of our lives becomes more meaningful if we utilise time wisely.

The way you spend time should make you feel genuine satisfaction. If you use time cheating and bullying, you might get some sort of satisfaction but that would be very short-lived — for, in the long run, even a non-believer gets some sort of doubt; you feel some sort of uneasiness. That's why, only do those things that give you deep satisfaction. That's living a meaningful life. Just money will not give you real satisfaction. Only greed increases, for you always want more.

Cultivate a more compassionate attitude and that will give you genuine satisfaction. So, how to make your life more meaningful? First, we should think...all sentient beings experience pleasure and pain (although some are debating about whether plants have feelings). All sentient beings wish to be happy. Because of the power of intelligence, human beings have much better ability to avoid suffering. In the meantime, somehow, that very intelligence is also the source of problems.

There's too much stress. The more educated you are, the more expectations you have (and others have of you), your hopes and fears, too, are intensified because of memory and intelligence. Animals have less expectation; they deal with immediate threats.

We should use our intelligence in such a way that it is a source of happiness, not as aggravator of anxiety and stress. Real happiness comes from within and not from money and knowledge.

Chat Room

Putting Savings To Good Use

Apropos 'GST 2.0 Shot for Public Health' by Samir Mehta (Oct 11). The pharmaceutical industry must consider investing the gains from reduced GST in R&D. The cost of R&D in India is about 87% less than that in developed markets, providing it a cost advantage. Even so, India's R&D spending is about 0.2% of GDP, much lower than Asian countries like South Korea (3.9%). Not surprisingly, global firms generated 5.6x more patents and 8.4x more publications for every \$1 billion in revenue compared to Indian firms. YG Chouksey, Pune

Civic Sense Needed

Apropos 'PM Modi Bats for Swadeshi Products to Empower India' (Oct 9). GoI's efforts to deliver modern infrastructure while encouraging 'Made-in-India products will be in vain without civic sense. The sight of paan stains and litter



on Mumbai Metro Line 3, just days after its launch, is a disheartening reflection of our lack of civic sense. Despite the administration's efforts to deliver modern infrastructure, such negligence undermines progress. When will citizens awaken to their civic duty? Without it, dreams of development remain hollow. Muhammad Asad, Mumbai

More to Ed Than Tech

Apropos 'Children Plug into AI Chatbots, Leaving Reality, Parents Behind' (Oct 12). Schools must have professional psychological counsellors to help students cope with new technology so that they use it for productive purposes. Even at home every effort must be made to ensure children cultivate the habit of reading, spending time outdoors, developing hobbies and also socialise. This will help enhance their knowledge and develop a broad outlook in the society. S Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

Letters to the editor may be addressed to editet@timesofindia.com



CONTRAPUNTO

The most dangerous negotiation is the one you don't know you're in

- CHRISTOPHER VOSS

Loosening Gordian Knot

Trump appears to be open to fixing ties with New Delhi. GOI did well by holding strong

It's still early days, but US ambassador-designate Gor's meeting with Modi over the weekend signalled the possibility of a thaw in bilateral ties. It's rare for PM to meet an ambassador before the person has actually assumed office. Gor also came bearing the message of strengthening India-US partnership, particularly in critical minerals, the supply of which China is again looking to squeeze. Modi had also praised Trump's Gaza Peace Plan last week. All of this may suggest that a trade deal between the two countries – the main bone of contention – is close.

True, given Trump's mercurial nature, he is capable of changing his mind any time. However, there are also reasons to believe that Washington now realises that New Delhi is not going to buckle under the pressure of tariffs. After all, India is in the right here. It was willing to negotiate on all trade matters, including working towards a consensus on import of Russian oil – which the previous Biden administration had asked to buy. The additional 25% tariff for importing Russian oil was totally just Trumpian pique. India also played it smart by messaging a show of force with other Brics members. Hence, if all of this was meant to be Trump-style pressure negotiations, it possibly did not work much.

Second, now that the award of the Nobel Peace Prize has passed, Trump might start listening to some of his more rational advisers. It's because he was so obsessed with the prize, pushing claims about stopping seven wars, including, ridiculously, the India-Pakistan conflict in May, that Trump took umbrage at New Delhi's vehement denial of his involvement in the summer ceasefire. This made him inclined to listen to tariff hawks like Peter Navarro and Howard Lutnick. But now that things have settled down on the Nobel front, Trump may be more open to listening to steadier voices like Marco Rubio.

At the end of the day, India and US both benefit from a productive relationship. Our long-term strategic visions for a stable, rules-based international order align. That can't really be said of the India-China relationship where the Chinese Communist Party wants to dominate Asia in the long run. India did well to hold its ground vis-à-vis US. It showed it can't be bullied. Trump White House would do well to get its India policy back on track and pick up things from where they were left off in Feb during Modi's visit to Washington. Gor seems to have taken tentative steps in that direction.



Autumn Of Work

Trends change. Quiet quitting gives way to job hugging. AI will wreak more change. Then what?

HR trends have this in common with diet trends, that just when you learn one, another pushes it to the backburner. Just when the Great Resignation, quiet quitting, acting your wage, bare minimum Mondays, generally behaviours of employees with ennui, have entered everyday vocabulary, the spotlight is shifting to their radical opposite, which is job hugging. Yeah, this is new. Hugging trees, loved ones, hugging to send social messages like Princess Di, or to send geopolitical ones, to support a grieving person, to cheer a victorious athlete, all these and more we know well. But hugging a job? Who loves it that way?

Turns out this has both economic and philosophical explanations. The job market cooling in many places explains why people with a job are holding on to it for dear life. Experts say this clinginess is not one-sided. In different measures, it can also be seen on the employers' part. What's interesting is that though it's being driven by external uncertainties, and in that sense it's being forced upon workers, and it's accompanied by loss of bargaining power, it need not mean a bad attitude to the work itself. One can end up appreciating one's work more and therefore doing it more impressively, in a job-hugging market. Even constantly being told that AI is close to snatching one's job away need not spur one to just give up, but to try harder, smarter.

Beyond the immediate market conditions though, which change with the seasons, there is also by now a solid, analytical resistance to hustle culture, and to the idea that an entrepreneurial life is the only meaningful one. Let's appreciate the 9-to-5 jobs till we have these: the showing up, doing sincere work, and then spending the rest of the time building a rich, personal life.

Booting it in Gurgaon

Thoughts set off by the great Indian security check

Vineet Kanauja



Living in Gurgaon – that glittering forest of glass towers, luxury hotels, and malls large enough to require their own postal code – one quickly learns to accept many urban quirks. Traffic that moves like a bored snake, Uber drivers lost on familiar lanes, and the most theatrical of them all: the great Indian security check.

It's a ritual performed with the solemnity of a religious rite, but as effective as sprinkling holy water on a pothole.

You approach the boom barrier at an office, hotel, or mall. Out comes the guard with his universal prop – a handheld mirror – peering under your car for 1.3 seconds, or sometimes skipping the mirror entirely, per the building's protocol.

The protocol itself is a mystery: Some insist on checking the bonnet, convinced criminals hide in carburettors; others go straight for the boot aka the dicky. A few do both, doubling the illusion of thoroughness without improving security.

Boot inspection is quick: open, glance, slam. All that's inside the boot – suitcases, watermelons, reality TV casts – is irrelevant.

It's theatre. And theatre raises questions: what if they actually found a bomb? Will they evacuate calmly or mumble 'my mistake' and sprint for tea?

Our guards, bless them, are polite, dedicated, and unarmed. Facing an armed intruder, they'd likely retreat gracefully – just like the rest of us.

Side entrances are another story. Many are so poorly monitored you could drive in with a small tank and still find parking.

CCTVs are supposed to help. In reality, some are off, some point at walls, and a few still record the 2019 monsoon.

Yet the check continues. We slow down, nod, pop the boot, and close it fast. Both sides know it's a performance, but it feels comforting – the illusion of safety is something we cling to.

Sometimes I wonder what would happen if a guard actually inspected my boot. They'd find old sneakers, a yoga mat, a shopping bag – and maybe the dangerous thought that we should stop pretending and start securing.

Until then, I'll keep driving through Gurgaon, content in the knowledge that my safety rests in the hands of men with mirrors and the world's fastest boot-closing reflexes.

Tariffs, Chips, Rare Earths & Us

US & China are battling over tech, resources and ultimately world dominance. Choosing sides is impractical for India. What it should do is build resilience and self-reliance

Ajay Srivastava



World trade has entered a very volatile phase as US and China – the two pillars of the global economy – clash over technology, resources, and power.

On Oct 10, Trump announced a 100% tariff on Chinese imports starting Nov 1, pushing total US duties on Chinese goods above 130%. This move followed China's restrictions on exports of rare earth metals, vital for US defence and clean-energy industries.

This fight is no longer about exporting more or about competitiveness. It is about control over minerals, chips, energy, and technology. Washington sees Beijing's export curbs as economic coercion and China views US technology bans similarly. Both now use trade as a tool to advance their geopolitical goals.

For the world, this US-China trade and tech war marks the end of the post-war era of predictable, rules-based trade. In its place stands a world of weaponised commerce, where nations hoard resources, restrict exports, and subsidise industries for strategic advantage. Tariffs, sanctions, and industrial policy have replaced WTO discipline, turning trade into a contest of leverage and control over critical inputs.

Chronology of escalation | The roots of this new US-China conflict can be traced back to 2018, when Washington started blocking China's access to advanced semiconductors, chipmaking tools, and AI software. These restrictions were expanded in Oct 2022 and Dec 2024. Under Washington pressure, Japan, Netherlands, and South Korea, the core members of today's global semiconductor supply chain, imposed similar restrictions – effectively cutting China off from the world's most advanced chipmaking ecosystem.

Beijing has now struck back. On Oct 9, it imposed sweeping export controls on rare earths. The new rule requires countries to obtain China's approval for any export of products containing even trace amounts of Chinese-origin rare earths or of products refined using Chinese technology.

China's move was not sudden. Over four decades, it had quietly built near-total dominance over the global rare-earth supply chain – acquiring mines in Chile, Australia, and Congo, and developing domestic refining and magnet-making capacity. With control over 70% of

global refining of rare earths, Beijing turned its industrial advantage into geopolitical leverage – a mirror image of Washington's chip controls.

A day later, on Oct 10, Trump announced a new 100% tariff on Chinese imports, confirming that the tech rivalry had become an all-out economic war.

Chips vs minerals | US and China now control different choke points in the global economy. America dominates the semiconductor chip supply chain, from design to advanced manufacturing, while China leads in rare-earth refining, graphite, and magnet production, giving it vast influence over important industrial supply chains. It is a clash between the world's tech superpower and its mineral and manufacturing superpower.



Impact of new tariffs in Trumpland | US depends heavily on China for everyday goods – 66% of laptops, 81% of smartphones, 74% of toys, 80% of cutlery, 93% of umbrellas, 90% of table fans and ovens, 96% of vacuum flasks, and 99% of blankets. The new 100% tariffs will double consumer prices, raise anger, and hurt US manufacturers reliant on Chinese components.

For the rest of the world, such decoupling of the two largest economies means rising costs, unstable supply chains, and greater global uncertainty.

India: Squeezed by both superpowers | US Export Administration Regulations (EAR) restrict India's access to advanced semiconductors, defence electronics, and dual-use technologies, requiring licences even for civilian imports.

LG, Hyundai Fundraising Signals Rupee Going Global

But internationalisation of the currency will & should be a slow business. Even the yuan isn't fully convertible yet

TK Arun



LG Electronics India Ltd's initial public offering, seeking to raise ₹11,607cr (\$1.3bn) from the Indian public, has been oversubscribed by Day 2. Before LG, Hyundai India had raised \$3.3bn via its IPO in India. Both issues represent milestones in the internationalisation of Indian rupee, and not just an opportunity for Indians to own chunks of the Indian subsidiaries of Korean multinationals.

Recently, RBI announced some measures to make rupee play an expanding role outside the country. The internationalisation of rupee is, thus, on the official agenda. The state has only been following the market's lead.

The Korean giants' Indian subsidiaries have not raised money for their own operations. In either issue, the South Korean parent has sold a chunk of its stake in the Indian venture. The proceeds would be repatriated to Korea. India has forex reserves in excess of \$700bn, on which the Korean repatriation of IPO proceeds would hardly make a dent.

In the afterglow of India's opening up in 1991, several Indian companies had raised capital abroad, issuing global and American depository receipts, offering to convert these into Indian equity for sale on Indian bourses. GDRs and ADRs raised capital for Indian companies, and were traded on foreign exchanges.

The Korean MNCs are raising money in India for their parents in Korea – not by offering fresh shares, true, but by diluting their stakes in Indian subsidiaries. In operational terms, these companies have raised capital from Indian investors. Should India allow foreign companies to raise fresh capital in India, regardless of whether they have an active subsidiary in India or not?

Before we explore that terrain, let us note that India's capital market has begun the internationalisation of rupee, and that India's foreign partners in the exercise come from Asia, and not from the West, where India's globalisation dreams have traditionally focused. Indeed, the speculation in the markets right now is if Toyota would follow the Koreans, and have an IPO in India.

So, how gung-ho should India be about internationalising rupee? Not a great deal. No currency can play a global role with total efficacy without being fully convertible. Rupee is not convertible on the capital account for Indian residents, although foreigners are free to move their capital to and from India, subject only to national security restrictions on the source of capital. India is not ready to rush into full capital account convertibility. Even China, with economic size and foreign exchange reserves four times as large as India's, has not made yuan fully convertible.



India generally runs a current account deficit, rather than a surplus. A deficit has to be financed by additional capital inflows. India's reserves represent capital inflows that have not been absorbed into the real economy. Underlying these reserves are claims by foreigners on chunks of the Indian economy.

China, in contrast, runs up huge current account surpluses, exporting far more than it imports. China is an exporter, rather than an importer, of capital. There is nothing wrong with India being a net importer of capital, that is, investing more than it has saved domestically. This helps India grow faster than would have been possible just on the strength of domestic savings. All that it means is that India has to be mindful of macroeconomic stability to maintain the confidence

Since 2023, China has restricted supplies of gallium, germanium, graphite, and rare earths – materials crucial to India's electronics, EV, and clean-energy industries. Although Beijing eased some curbs in Aug 2025, allowing exports of fertilisers, rare earths, and tunnel-boring machines, India remains critically dependent on Chinese supplies across sectors.

In pharmaceuticals, China provides 97.7% of India's erythromycin and 88.1% of its antibiotic imports. In electronics, Chinese firms supply 96.8% of silicon wafers, 86% of flat-panel displays, and 80.5% of laptops. The clean-energy sector is even more exposed – 82.7% of solar cells, 78.9% of panels, and 75.2% of lithium-ion batteries come from China. Industrial goods show similar dependence, with 91.4% of embroidery machines and 92% of saw blades imported from China. China accounts for 75.8% of lamps, 72.3% of inverters, and 49.9% of UPS systems imports.

A sudden supply disruption could cripple India's pharma, electronics, or EV industries within weeks. Reducing critical reliance on China must become the centrepiece of India's industrial policy. For this, India may use a dual-track approach.

- A nationwide reverse-engineering campaign to localise low- and mid-tech imports, such as pumps, motors, bearings, and textile machinery.

- Building vertically integrated ecosystems for advanced components (chips, sensors, and PCBs), supported by a ₹100bn innovation fund.

Trade deals with US | Once hailed as a breakthrough, this May's US-China trade deal now stands effectively void after Washington's new 100% tariffs on Chinese imports. India should draw a clear lesson from this: no deal with US is ever final. Politics, not predictability, increasingly drives trade policy in Washington.

As India negotiates its own trade deal with US, it must do so from a position of equality and caution – protecting its red lines on agriculture, intellectual property, digital trade, and e-commerce. Strategic autonomy, not market access at any cost, must remain the guiding principle of India's engagement.

What the US-China showdown has done is shatter the post-war illusion that trade and politics could be kept apart. For India, the task is not to choose sides but to build resilience – diversify suppliers, localise production, and strengthen self-reliance.

The writer is an expert on trade & tech issues

Calvin & Hobbes



When Shoe Fits, The Foot Is Forgotten

Osho

Remember, this is one of the greatest mantras: ...when the shoe fits, the foot is forgotten...when the belt fits, the belly is forgotten; and when the heart is right, 'for' and 'against' are forgotten.

Whenever you are healthy you don't know anything about your body – the body is forgotten. When there is some illness, only then can you not forget the body. Do you know any head without a headache? When there is a headache, you cannot forget the head. When the shoe is pinching, it doesn't fit. When you don't have any headache, where is your head? You completely forget it. Whatsoever is healthy is forgotten; whatsoever is ill is remembered – it becomes a continuous note in the mind, a continuous tension in the mind.

A perfect man of Tao does not know himself; you know, because you are ill. The

ego is illness, substantial illness, because you continually have to remember that you are somebody. This shows that you are in a deep 'dis-ease'. Disease creates the ego; a perfectly healthy natural being forgets completely. He is like a cloud, like a breeze, like a rock, like a tree, like a bird – but never like a man. He is not, because only illness, like a wound, has to be remembered.

Remembering is a mechanism for safety and security: if there is a thorn in your foot, you have to remember. The mind will go to the spot continuously, again and again because the thorn has to be thrown out. If you forget it, the thorn will remain there, and it will be dangerous; it may poison the whole body. When there is a headache, the body says remember it; something has to be done. If you forget it, that headache

may become dangerous.

The body shows you whenever there is something ill, something wrong; the body attracts your attention. But when the body is healthy you forget it; you become 'bodiless' when the body is healthy. And this is the only definition of health: health is when there is no consciousness of the body. If there is any sort of consciousness of the body, then that part is not healthy.

The same applies to the mind. When your consciousness is healthy, there is no ego; you don't know anything about yourself.

You don't go on reminding yourself that 'I am something', you simply relax. You are, but there is no 'I'. It is a simple 'am-ness', an 'is-ness', but there is no 'I', crystallised ego. The self is not there...

This is one of the deepest things to be



THE SPEAKING TREE

Sacred space



It is wisest to be impartial. If you have health, but are attached to it, you will always be afraid of losing it. And if you fear that loss, but become ill, you will suffer. Why not remain forever joyful in the Self?

Paramhansa Yogananda

understood: when the heart is right, all 'for' and 'against' are forgotten. Look – you have anger, sex, greed. If you say anger is wrong, when your whole life will pass in an angry state. Sometimes you will be angry, and sometimes you will be angry against anger – that will be the only difference. Sometimes you will be angry, and when the anger is gone you will be angry against the anger; this you call repentance. Then you will decide never to be angry again – and you will be angry again, because both states are anger.

Sometimes you are angry with someone else, sometimes you are angry with yourself because you were angry. Don't be against anything. Why? – because whenever you are against anything it means deep down you are for it, otherwise why be against?

Abridged from *When the shoe fits* / Courtesy Osho International Foundation / www.osho.com

THE IDEAS PAGE

This Diwali, a Hanuman leap

Propelled by scale, skill and self-reliance — that's India's answer to the return of protectionism and demographic anxiety in the developed world



HARDEEP S PURI

AS LAMPS ARE lit across India, a timeless scene from the Ramayana speaks to our present. Hanuman stands at the edge of the ocean, uncertain of his strength, until Jambavan reminds him of what he possesses. The leap that follows is not a miracle; it is self-belief on show. That is what Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been preparing the Indian economy for — one that draws from its inner strength to overcome global turbulence. As the world turns inwards with new visa barriers and tariffs, India under Modi is turning its own confidence outward, transforming adversity into acceleration.

In recent months, the United States has imposed a \$1,00,000 fee for new H-1B visa petitions and a 100 per cent tariff on branded and patented pharmaceutical imports. These moves were framed as job protection, but they underscore a deeper trend: The return of protectionism and demographic anxiety in the developed world. India's answer under Prime Minister Modi has been to strengthen the three pillars that no tariff can touch: Scale, skill, and self-reliance.

The contrast with the world is striking. China's population is ageing rapidly, its median age is now past 40, while India's remains under 29. Two-thirds of our people are below the age of 35. That youthful energy, harnessed through skillings, education, and enterprise, is what makes India the growth engine of the world economy. It is not a slogan when global institutions report that India contributed more than 16 per cent of the world's growth last year. It is the result of a decade of reform, investment, and infrastructure under the Prime Minister's leadership.

Recent data underlines this momentum. The Reserve Bank of India has revised India's GDP forecast for FY26 to 6.8 per cent, citing resilient domestic demand, steady investment flows, and a healthy monsoon outlook. GST collections in September crossed Rs 1.89 lakh crore, the ninth consecutive month above Rs 1.8 lakh crore, showing both buoyant consumption and a widening tax base. Foreign-exchange reserves have touched \$700 billion, enough to cover almost 11 months of imports, while remittances in the June quarter stood at \$33.2 billion, well above last year's levels. The manufacturing PMI held strong at 57.7 and services at 60.9, reaffirming India's status as the world's fastest-growing large economy.

This buoyancy is also mirrored in the markets and in the streets. Retail and e-commerce sales during this Dussehra have touched their highest levels ever, crossing Rs 3.7 lakh crore according to industry bodies such as CAIT and Retailers Association of India — nearly 15 per cent higher than last year. Online platforms clocked over Rs 90,000 crore in gross merchandise value during the first fortnight of the festive season, driven by demand for automobiles, electronics, gold and apparel. Diwali is now expected to break all previous records, signalling consumer confidence and the success of the government's push to expand formal credit,



CR Sasikumar

digital payments and rural purchasing power.

The economic foundations are solid. Over the past decade, India's GDP has nearly doubled to become the world's fourth largest and imminently expected to overtake Germany. Foreign-exchange reserves exceed \$600 billion. Inflation is moderate and fiscal prudence is matched by record public capital expenditure. In 2024-25, India's overall exports of goods and services reached an all-time high of about \$825 billion, while merchandise exports alone were about \$437 billion. Renewable capacity has surpassed 220 GW. These numbers tell the story of a nation that has moved from fragile to formidable under a leader who combines vision with execution.

Sadly, PM Modi's approach to Atmanirbhar Bharat is being misconstrued for political gains by a few naysayers who are still viewing it through 20th-century lenses. Self-reliance is not isolation. Atmanirbhar Bharat is best understood as strength turned outward — strength that allows engagement on equal terms. It is the capacity to make in India for the world, to decentralise opportunity so that value flows to those who create it, and to engage global markets on equal terms. From mobile phones and defence equipment to medical devices and solar modules, production-linked incentives have catalysed investment, jobs, and exports.

The Anusandhan National Research Foundation, with Rs 50,000 crore of planned outlay, will revitalise our R&D ecosystem. A second fund-of-funds for start-ups and the expansion of PLI schemes will deepen our technology base. Under PM Modi's guidance, India built the world's most inclusive digital public infrastructure. The Unified Payments Interface now handles more daily transactions than Visa, over 650 million a day. Aadhaar, DigiLocker, and ONDC together form an ecosystem that connects citizens, small businesses, and innovators at a population scale. UPI's global partnerships with Singapore, the UAE, and others show that Indian innovation can set global benchmarks. This is technology as governance, empowerment, and export.

People remain the centrepiece of this story. Our diaspora, over 32 million strong, is among the world's most successful and respected. Eleven Fortune 500 companies today are led by Indian-origin CEOs commanding a combined market capitalisation above

This buoyancy is also mirrored in the markets and in the streets. Retail and e-commerce sales during this Dussehra have touched their highest levels ever, crossing Rs 3.7 lakh crore according to industry bodies such as CAIT and Retailers Association of India — nearly 15 per cent higher than last year. Online platforms clocked over Rs 90,000 crore in gross merchandise value during the first fortnight of the festive season, driven by demand for automobiles, electronics, gold, and apparel. Diwali is now expected to break all previous records, signalling consumer confidence and the success of the government's push to expand formal credit, digital payments, and rural purchasing power.

six trillion dollars. Their journeys mirror the aspirations of a new India: Skilled, confident, solution-oriented. Remittances of \$135 billion in 2024 are not just inflows of wealth; they are affirmations of trust. As PM Modi has often said, the Indian abroad is not just an expatriate but an ambassador of the country's values and enterprise.

PM Modi's leadership has given this scattered global energy a domestic anchor. Make in India, Startup India, and Skill India are not parallel tracks but a connected value chain: Identify opportunity, enable entrepreneurship, equip talent. The next step is a comprehensive global skilling mission that unites these initiatives under a single framework. Standardised curricula aligned with international certifications, pre-departure training for workers, language and cultural orientation, and portable social-security agreements — these will make the Indian worker the preferred professional across continents. It is an agenda already in motion through multiple G2G partnerships forged under Modi's diplomacy.

The symbolism of Hanuman's leap is, therefore, apt. It was not an act of defiance, but of duty fulfilled through self-realisation. PM Modi's governance philosophy is rooted in the same belief that India's destiny lies in awakening the potential of its people. Infrastructure, digital transformation, green energy and global partnerships are the instruments of that awakening. When others build walls, India builds capacity. When others narrow trade, India expands opportunity. When others fear the future, India prepares for it.

Hanuman's leap was the recovery of memory. Prime Minister Modi's project has been to restore that national memory of capacity. When others build walls, India builds capability. When others ration opportunity, India scales it. That is how civilisational confidence becomes a modern competitive edge. As we approach Diwali, it is worth recalling that Hanuman's leap did not shorten the ocean — it increased his confidence. The world may raise new barriers, but India today has the leadership, resilience, and purpose to rise higher. Guided by Prime Minister Modi's vision, this is a nation that will not pause at the shore. It remembers its strength and leaps ahead.

The writer is the Union Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The message from global regulators this week was blunt: The AI boom is driving stocks to dotcom-bubble highs — and the world is finally listening. With so much cash riding on so few firms, any loss of faith could send shares tumbling and drag down the wider economy.” — THE GUARDIAN

Bagram in the New Great Game

An American comeback to the airbase could reshape strategic calculus for Afghanistan's neighbours, including India



SYED ATA HASNAIN

THE FEW TIMES I have flown into Kabul, the descent offered an intriguing view — the sprawling expanse of Bagram airbase, lying just off the flight path, massive runways and a concrete sprawl ringed by mountains. Bagram radiated an aura of strategic purpose, a reminder that Afghanistan, for all its rugged isolation, was coveted by empires.

Now, four years after the last helicopter lifted off in 2021, there are reports of the US eyeing a return to Bagram. It is an idea laced with irony — Washington, having left Afghanistan in haste and humiliation, now seeks to reinsert itself, possibly through an understanding with the Taliban it once fought. The logic, though, is cold and strategic: Afghanistan is too central, too exposed, and too unpredictable to be left unobserved.

For two decades, Bagram was the epicentre of America's military and intelligence footprint in the region. It served as a logistics hub, a drone base, a detention centre, and the forward edge of US power projection into South and Central Asia. From there, Washington could monitor not just Afghan insurgents but also Iranian movements, Chinese activity in Xinjiang, and Pakistan's volatile tribal belt. The geography is unforgiving, yet that very ruggedness grants it strategic reach to the Pamir Knot, where Central and South Asia, China, and Russia converge.

The Americans may not seek a full-scale reoccupation. Their intent could be subtler — limited access, shared intelligence operations, or covert logistics to monitor *jihadi* activity and broader geopolitical shifts. Afghanistan's mineral-rich terrain, valued in trillions, adds an economic undercurrent to the interest. Rare earths, copper, lithium, and cobalt — resources critical to the global green transition — lie buried under Afghan soil, and the Chinese are already showing keen interest in mining rights. The US, having ceded the field once, may not want to stay out of the new scramble.

Then comes the counterterrorism dimension. The withdrawal of Western forces has allowed groups like ISIS-K and remnants of al-Qaeda to resurface. For Washington, the nightmare scenario is Afghanistan once again becoming a launchpad for global jihad. A small, deniable presence at Bagram, possibly in coordination with elements of the Taliban regime, would give the US early warning capability without direct re-entry into Afghan politics.

Cooperation with the Taliban is paradoxical. The US sustains Afghanistan through aid and limited engagement but withholds recognition. The Taliban seeks legitimacy and funds, inviting a transactional deal — access and intelligence for economic relief. Yet, this risks internal rifts between pragmatists and hardliners.

Beyond Kabul's hills, the tremors of a US return would be felt across the region. Each of Afghanistan's neighbours reads Bagram's revival as a potential threat to its own strategic space. China views any American foothold in Afghanistan as an intrusion into what it sees as its western security perime-

ter. Bagram's proximity to Xinjiang and to key arteries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) makes Beijing deeply uneasy. The base would sit alongside routes linking Central Asia to Pakistan and Iran — precisely where China seeks economic dominance.

Iran shares that discomfort with China. From its perspective, US surveillance aircraft operating from Bagram could easily monitor its eastern frontiers and even reach into sensitive military zones near Mashhad. Tehran's cooperation with the Taliban, quietly nurtured after 2021, is partly motivated by the desire to prevent any American re-entry into Afghanistan.

Pakistan, too, feels the heat. Though ties with Washington have improved since 2022 over intelligence needs, Islamabad would resist a permanent US base at Bagram — it erodes its leverage over Kabul. Direct US presence weakens Pakistan's military influence and clashes with strong anti-American sentiment at home.

The Central Asian states — Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan — are cautious. They remember the turbulence that foreign military bases brought during the early 2000s. With Moscow and Beijing asserting dominance through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, any American re-entry into their southern flank risks reigniting big-power rivalries across their borders.

For India, the calculus is complex. New Delhi once viewed the US presence in Afghanistan as a strategic buffer that kept Pakistan and extremist groups in check while offering a counterweight to Chinese expansion. A US return under Taliban patronage alters that equation. It risks creating a triangular dynamic — Washington and Islamabad finding renewed utility in each other, while India is left to navigate a reduced footprint. For New Delhi, the challenge now is to remain engaged with Afghanistan through development, education, and connectivity — projecting influence without dependence on any Western power.

The unease among all these players stems from a shared realisation — any external power's presence in Afghanistan alters the equilibrium of the region. The last time this lesson was ignored, it led to four decades of turmoil — from the Soviet invasion of 1979, aimed at reaching the Indian Ocean, to the American campaign that followed. Every power that has sought permanence in Afghanistan has eventually been forced to retreat.

Yet, the temptation remains. For the US, Bagram offers a vantage point over a shifting world — from Iran's assertiveness to China's western outreach, from Russia's resurgence to the evolving jihadist threat. For Washington's strategists, it is an anchor in the New Great Game, where geography, technology, and ideology intersect once again. But the lesson of history is clear: Afghanistan grants access, not allegiance. The Americans may believe that a light footprint, far from combat, will help them stay without being trapped. That, too, is what the Soviets once thought as they moved into the same mountains — only to learn that proximity to the Indian Ocean came at a price too heavy to sustain.

If the US does return to Bagram, it will not be to fight another war. It will be to watch, to listen, and to hedge — ensuring that, in this restless heart of Asia, no one else wins the peace.

The writer is a former corps commander of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps and member of NDMA. Views are personal



ABHINAV KUMAR

TRUST IS THE bedrock of any society's functioning. A society's wealth is reflected in its citizens' faith in the institutions that govern them. Trust engenders stability, fosters cooperation, and cultivates a sense of belonging. It allows citizens to engage with the state, hold their leaders accountable, and depend on government institutions for justice and opportunity.

In an age where anger towards authority often manifests as violent protests, restoring trust is not merely a pious hope; it is an imperative for the prosperity and stability of India. Even today, for millions of young Indians and their families, a government job is seen as the best bet for economic security and upward social mobility. No surprise then that public service commissions at the central and state level are seen as beacons of hope by millions of young, talented and less privileged Indians. These institutions are meant to ensure that the twin national goals of meritocracy and social justice are realised in a transparent, efficient and impartial manner.

However, the integrity of this trust has been severely tested over the last decade and has often been found wanting. This failure is less apparent for commissions at the central level, but appears to be a serious concern for commissions across states. The landscape of public service recruitment, once viewed as a sanctuary of fairness and transparency, has been marred by a series of scams.

For instance, in 2023, it was revealed that in the Bihar police recruitment exam, candidates were using proxies, and exam papers

To mend a broken system

Rebuilding trust in public service recruitment exams needs tech-led overhaul

were leaked. In Punjab, the 2021 scandal surrounding the Punjab Public Service Commission (PPSC) exams showcased how systemic failures led to leaked question papers. Reports of examination malpractices in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal illustrate a disturbing trend where mediocrity was favoured over merit. The most recent example has come from Uttarakhand, where an exam conducted by the state's Staff Selection Commission for junior-level posts in the state government was marred by allegations of paper leak and corruption. Responding to widespread expression of angry public sentiment, the Chief Minister has recommended a CBI inquiry into the matter. All these incidents highlight the need for effective and urgent policy interventions.

The cycle of scams has endangered the careers of countless deserving candidates and sparked widespread disillusionment. A generation that has prepared tirelessly for these examinations, often at great financial and emotional cost, finds itself at the mercy of a broken system. Restoring credibility to the examination process is imperative. Several measures come to mind that must be adopted urgently.

First, we need to take a careful look at the appointment system. In many states, appointments to these commissions are less about placing the most dedicated experts in positions of power and more about rewarding loyalists. There have been plenty of incidents where members of such commissions were found guilty of malpractice. Any serious attempt at reform must address this

concern. Transparency in appointments to these commissions has to go hand in hand with transparency in recruitment processes. This includes the publication of exam syllabi, evaluation methodologies, and the candidates' performance statistics in a way that is accessible to all stakeholders. A transparent system serves as the best deterrent against malpractices.

Recently, the Home Minister emphasised the need to employ technology in innovative ways to transform the recruitment landscape. Implementing biometric identification or unique candidate IDs can significantly reduce proxy exams. Using an encrypted question-paper delivery system can curb the menace of paper leaks. Strengthening the legal framework surrounding examination malpractices is also critical. Special fast-track courts to deal with cases of examination-related fraud can ensure that justice is prompt and impactful. Uttarakhand has been a pioneer in this regard, with one of the most stringent laws against copying anywhere in the country that was passed in 2022.

Given the frequency of such scams, there is a need for a national-level regulatory body that can assess, regulate and evaluate the recruitment processes in different states. Perhaps the UPSC can be entrusted with this mandate, or the Government of India can consider setting up a separate body. Setting up an independent regulatory body can help in maintaining objectivity. These bodies should be empowered to audit examinations and recruitment processes, and they

should perhaps also have the authority to investigate complaints.

Public service commissions across the country are autonomous institutions. Their members enjoy vast authority and privileges. Instituting an accountability mechanism that holds such officials responsible for lapses in the recruitment process is vital. Bodies that record and monitor decisions, such as review panels, can help in evaluating the integrity of the recruitment process. Encouraging collaboration between governmental agencies and civil society organisations can also be helpful. Engaging with watchdog entities and allowing for citizen representation in recruitment oversight can enhance credibility.

The recurring incidents of recruitment scams have tarnished the trust in government institutions and led to widespread public protests. What is required now is a concerted, multifaceted approach to rebuild the faith of the aspirants and citizens and uphold the sanctity of the recruitment process.

A robust and transparent recruitment system is not merely a necessity but a fundamental right of every citizen aspiring to serve their nation. The journey toward regaining credibility is complicated, yet not insurmountable. Armed with determination and a clear action plan, we can create an ecosystem that honours merit, respects aspirants, and rejuvenates trust — a form of capital that India needs now more than ever.

The writer is a serving IPS officer. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TALIBAN PRESSER

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Taliban team kept women out, embassy premises gave shield' (IE, October 12). The reported exclusion of women journalists from Afghan foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi's press conference is deeply disturbing and unacceptable in a democratic nation like India. It is troubling that neither the organisers nor officials objected to such discrimination. The government must reaffirm its commitment to gender equality and ensure this is never repeated.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Taliban team kept women out, embassy premises gave shield' (IE, October 12). After Afghanistan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi addressed a "men-only" press conference at the Afghan embassy in Delhi, keeping women journalists out, Opposition parties have rightly questioned how a dispensation that talks up "*nari shakti*" could allow this. While diplomatic premises may claim protection under the Vienna Convention, this cannot justify blatant gender discrimination in press access on Indian soil.

SS Paul, Nadia

HOW TO BE GENTLE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Raising boys to remain gentle is an act of resistance' (IE, October 12). It is striking how two boys raised by the same parents can be very different. This may be due to the company they keep, the books they read, the content they consume, etc. While parents must push the child away from harmful influences, these are mostly effective in the early years. Later, external influences multiply. Can society serve as a scaffolding to help nurture gentleness in boys then? That remains doubtful.

Aerika Singh, Chandigarh

CASTE FAULTLINES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'Death of a policeman' (IE, October 11). Haryana IPS officer YP Kumar's suicide after caste discrimination, coming soon after a shoe being thrown at CJI BR Gavai, also a Dalit, reveals deepening faultlines. Bias against reservation in the system makes it insensitive to the woes of SC/ST employees. Can the investigation be left to those who did nothing for the victim when he was alive? Those who Kumar approached must account for their omissions.

LR Murmu, New Delhi



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

Quantum leap by Indian researchers in boosting digital security

AMITABH SINHA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 12

IN A major breakthrough that can have profound implications for digital and online security, an Indian research group has developed new quantum techniques to generate and certify truly random numbers. The researchers from Bengaluru-based Raman Research Institute, led by quantum physicist Urbasi Sinha, used a general purpose quantum computer to experimentally demonstrate and certify the generation of true random numbers.

This potentially paves the way for development of hack-proof digital security.

Random numbers

Very large randomly-generated numbers are the foundation on which modern encryption systems and security architectures are built. The defining feature of such numbers is that they are created in completely random processes, not by following any pattern or algorithm. As a result, they cannot be guessed or predicted. Anything built on top of them—passwords, encryption keys, or authentication systems—become highly secure against hacking.

Our current systems, however, do not use truly random numbers. They use what are known as pseudorandom numbers, generated through computer algorithms. These algorithms are sophisticated enough to ensure that the very large numbers they produce appear random and are extremely difficult to predict without the knowledge of how the algorithm works and what its initial input is.

These pseudorandom numbers are good enough for securing our existing networks. Even the fastest computers, applying brute-force algorithms, would take centuries or longer to decode the passwords or encryption keys based on these numbers. But the advent of quantum computers poses fresh risks. Quantum computers utilise the very unique, and unusual, properties of the quantum world to store and process data. The fundamentally different way in which

they handle data enables them to efficiently perform some incredibly difficult tasks that are beyond the capabilities of traditional computers. As such, current architectures for digital security become vulnerable against them.

Naturally random

True randomness can only come from natural or physical processes, not from any algorithm. Radioactivity and weather events are some examples of random processes in nature. The quantum behaviour of microscopic particles is also inherently random.

Scientists have been using some of these processes, particularly quantum properties, to generate truly random numbers.

If a stream of photons is sent through a device and measured for a particular property, some photons can exhibit one behaviour and be assigned the number 0, while others can be assigned 1. The resulting sequence of 0s and 1s can be random. This is how a Quantum Random Number Generator typically works.

But even this is not foolproof. The device can be faulty or biased. Worse, it could be vulnerable to hacking. In such a scenario, the integrity of the generated numbers cannot be ascertained. This is the problem of certification. It cannot be certified whether the number is coming from the underlying natural randomness of the process, or from a fault or manipulation of the device.

"In the context of security, we tend to give almost supernatural powers to malicious actors. We assume they have the capacity to do whatever is theoretically possible to hack the system, howsoever difficult or improbable it might be. The

end goal of a secure system, therefore, is not to make it incredibly difficult to hack into, but impossible, something that is not even theoretically possible to do as per our current knowledge," Urbasi Sinha said.

The breakthrough

Accordingly, Sinha has been working on device-independent quantum random num-

ber generation, using another quantum property called entanglement. In the quantum world, two particles, such as photons or electrons, which have interacted previously, can influence each other's behaviour later regardless of the physical distance between the two.

Each of the particles can be measured independently and in a randomly chosen manner, and the results compared. If the outcomes violate an inequality called Bell's Inequality, it means the result is coming from the inherent quantum behaviour and is truly random.

Such experiments have been run by several scientific groups, and random numbers generated. But one challenge in this kind of set-up is that the two particles have to be separated by at least a couple of hundreds of meters to ensure that all possibilities of interference are eliminated. A set-up that is more than two-hundred metres in size is not a practical proposition in real-life situations.

Sinha used a modified approach. Instead of using spatial separation in two particles, she used time separation in a single particle to look for violations of another kind of inequality,

called Leggett-Garg inequality. In 2024, Sinha's laboratory at RRI became the first one to generate truly random numbers by showing the violations of Leggett-Garg inequality in a loophole-free experimental set-up.

This year, she has gone a step further. "So far, we had generated random numbers through experiments carried out in controlled environments in our laboratory. This time, we ran our experiments on a commercially available quantum computer, which is not customised. This is important because it shows that our technique is robust enough to be applied in real-life situations in which there is a lot of noise and other disturbances," Sinha said.

Sinha's result is a major breakthrough with huge commercial and strategic implications. In fact, it is the first major globally relevant research output from the National Quantum Mission so far.

Sinha's technique is still a lab-scale product, and needs to be developed into a full-fledged commercial solution. This will require more research grants and support from both the government as well as private bodies.

EXPLAINED AVIATION

LOOK UP IN THE SKY: EUROPEAN AIRPORTS' DRONE PROBLEM



An American unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). Wikimedia Commons

DRONES HAVE increasingly disrupted airspace across Europe in recent weeks, raising alarm over the repeated incursions of uncrewed aerial vehicles and prompting airport shutdowns. Fingers have been pointed at Russia over its war in Ukraine, though Moscow has denied involvement and investigators are still gathering evidence. Whoever is behind the incidents, governments and regulators are under pressure to find solutions.

The surge

At least 18 suspect drones have been spotted in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Germany by monitoring service Enigma since September 16, many near airports. Drone incursions have impacted airports like Gatwick and Heathrow in Britain for over five years, but there has been a significant upsurge in incidents this year.

"The data indicates persistent activity over several weeks, and potentially coordinated incursions on specific days," an Enigma spokesperson said. Drone sightings at airports have proven especially disruptive, with shutdowns rippling across the entire aviation network and delaying flights.

Ourlania Georgoutsakou, Managing Director for Airlines for Europe (A4E), said the proliferating incidents should "speed up" implementation of protocols to minimise disruption in an "overstretched and fragmented European airspace". Protocols include monitoring, frequency checking and jamming.

The chaos could be a sign of hybrid warfare tactics, chief executive of security advisory firm Dyami Eric Schouten said. Recent drone incidents and other airspace violations show Europe is facing hybrid warfare to which it must respond

with measures that go beyond traditional defence, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said last week.

The defences

Various technologies have become available in the market, including microwaves, jammers, lasers and even missiles. Capabilities range from drone detection, jamming of frequencies used by drones, and shoot-downs. The challenge? Most of these tools, particularly ones that can actively destroy drones, are often too potentially dangerous for a built-up civilian setting.

In 2021, the European Aviation Safety Agency issued guidance on managing drone disruptions. Airports have purchased their own counter-drone tools from companies like Dedrone, Thales and DJI Aeroscope, but the vast majority of these devices only provide detection tech. Germany's government has proposed a law to allow its police to shoot down drones if needed after drone sightings disrupted Munich airport earlier this month. But introducing lasers and missiles to take down drones in civilian airspace poses its own safety challenges, including the risk of damage to civilian aircraft and wider infrastructure.

Any major action will require clearer policy from the government, experts say, leaving airports to mostly stick to detection tools for now. They also expect incursions to become more frequent across Europe, with seaports, nuclear installations and even prisons being prime targets for drone interference. Although the disruptions have highlighted vulnerabilities, they would also bring more clarity and action from authorities and force more coordination of counter-measures across sectors.

REUTERS



HARISH DAMODARAN

THE PROGRAMME for blending of ethanol in petrol was initiated primarily to help sugar mills make timely payments to farmers, by creating an additional revenue stream from the processing of cane.

Till 2017-18, mills produced ethanol only from so-called C-heavy molasses, the final dark brown liquid byproduct of cane processing containing sucrose that cannot be further economically recovered and crystallised into sugar.

From the 2018-19 supply year, mills began making ethanol from an earlier 'B-heavy' stage molasses (having higher sucrose content available for fermentation) and also directly from whole cane juice or syrup. They were encouraged to do so by the Narendra Modi government's decision to pay mills more for ethanol produced from the B-heavy and direct cane juice/syrup routes, in order to compensate them for the revenues foregone from reduced/nil recovery and sale of sugar. The result: Between 2013-14 and 2018-19, the total supply of ethanol to oil marketing companies (OMC) shot up from a mere 38 crore to nearly 189 crore litres. The all-India average ethanol blending in petrol, too, rose from 1.6% to over 4.9%.

From sugar to grain

But it wasn't just sugarcane.

From 2018-19, the Modi government also fixed separate ex-distillery prices for ethanol derived from rice, maize and damaged food-grains. This was, again, intended mainly to help sugar mills. Many of them installed multi-feedstock distilleries that could run on molasses and juice/syrup during the crushing season (November-April), and on grain in the off-season (May-October) when cane wasn't available.

Ethanol production basically involves fermentation of sugar by yeasts. In molasses or cane juice, sugar is present in the form of sucrose. Grains contain starch, a complex carbohydrate that has to first be extracted and broken down into simple sugars before further fermentation, distillation and dehydration to

ETHANOL SUPPLIED TO OIL- MARKETING COMPANIES					
(in crore litres)					
SUPPLY YEAR	FROM SUGARCANE	FROM GRAINS	TOTAL SUPPLY	BLENDING IN %	SUGAR DIVERSION@
2013-14	38.00	0	38.00	1.60%	0
2014-15	67.41	0	67.41	2.33%	0
2015-16	111.40	0	111.4	3.51%	0
2016-17	66.51	0	66.51	2.07%	0
2017-18	150.50	0	150.50	4.22%	0
2018-19	179.05	9.5	188.55	4.92%	3.37
2019-20	157.09	15.94	173.03	5.00%	9.26
2020-21	260.90	41.50	302.40	8.10%	22.00
2021-22	339.75	68.34	408.09	10.02%	36.00
2022-23	369.30	137.10	506.40	12.00%	45.00
2023-24	270.27	402.22	672.49	14.60%	24.00
2024-25*	300.00	620.00	920.00	19.12%**	35.00
2025-26*	400.00	650.00	1050.00	20.00%	50.00

Note: Supply years are Dec-Nov till 2021-22, Dec-Oct for 2022-23 and Nov-Oct from 2023-24. *Projected; **All-India average for Nov-Aug; @lakh tonnes.

ethanol with 99.9% alcohol concentration.

The incentives for ethanol production from grains led to not only sugar mills using these as an alternative, off-season feedstock—in no time, exclusively grain-based ethanol distilleries came up in states such as Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh.

The grains were largely maize and rice. That included surplus and broken/damaged grain sourced from the Food Corporation of India (FCI) as well as the open market.

More grain than sugar

In the 2023-24 supply year (November-October), the OMCs procured 672.49 crore litres of ethanol from distilleries, with the all-India average blending ratio reaching 14.6%.

Significantly, out of the total 672.49 crore litres, only 270.27 crore litres or 40.2% came from sugarcane-based feedstock: C-heavy molasses (57.56 crore), B-heavy molasses (148.81 crore) and cane juice/syrup (63.90 crore).

The balance 402.22 crore litres ethanol supply was from grains: Maize (286.47 crore), broken/damaged foodgrain (115.62 crore) and FCI rice (0.13 crore). Thus, maize alone contributed more ethanol than all sugarcane-based fermentable material!

The same pattern has been repeated in the current supply year. Out of the total 920 crore litres likely procurement, 300 crore or less than a third would be from sugarcane-based feedstock and the rest 620 crore from grain (see table). Maize's share in that would be around 420 crore litres.

There are two reasons why cereal grains have become the mainstay of the ethanol blended petrol programme rather than its originally targeted beneficiary, sugar.

The first was the drought-induced poor sugarcane crops in 2023-24 and 2024-25. The Modi government responded by limiting the use of B-heavy molasses and cane juice/syrup for making ethanol. The sugar diverted for production of ethanol through these routes, then, fell from 45 lakh tonnes (lt) in 2022-23 to 24lt and 35 lt in the following two seasons. The country's net sugar output also plunged from a record 359.25 lt in 2021-22 and 330 lt in 2022-23 to 319 lt in 2023-24 and an estimated 261.1 lt in 2024-25.

The second reason had to do with differential pricing. For the 2024-25 supply year, the ex-distillery price of ethanol produced from maize was fixed at Rs 71.86 per litre. This was more than the per-litre prices payable by the OMCs for ethanol from C-heavy molasses (Rs 57.97), B-heavy molasses

(Rs 60.73), cane juice/syrup (Rs 65.61) or even FCI surplus rice (Rs 58.50) and broken/damaged grains (Rs 64).

Simply put, what started as a programme for the sugar industry has turned out more beneficial for standalone grain (especially maize)-based ethanol manufacturers.

Policy implications

For 2025-26, the OMCs invited tenders for the supply of 1,050 crore litres of ethanol, corresponding to an average blending target of 20% (the actual ratio achieved during November-August 2024-25 was 19.12%).

But as against the requirement in the tender that closed on October 7, the distilleries offered a total quantity of 1,776.49 crore litres. That included 1,304.86 crore litres of ethanol from grain and 471.63 crore from sugarcane-based feedstock.

The largest share was from maize (831.89 crore litres), followed by FCI surplus rice (396.60 crore litres).

It is quite likely that the OMCs will end up sourcing only the required 1,050 crore litres, split between grain (650 crore) and sugarcane (400 crore).

From a policy perspective, the problems are two-fold. The first is the excess capacity. At last count, there were some 499 distilleries in India that had invested roughly Rs 40,000 crore in building an annual ethanol production capacity of 1,822 crore litres. And there are limits to how much more ethanol blending in petrol is technically feasible.

The second relates to the familiar "fuel versus food and feed" debate. The ethanol blending programme has certainly given a boost to maize growers, by creating a new market for the grain consumed mostly as a poultry and livestock feed ingredient.

However, taking an average 380 litres of ethanol production from one tonne of maize, the 420 crore-odd litres supplied in 2024-25 would have used over 11 million tonnes (mt) of the feed grain. Given India's domestic production of about 42 mt—and rising milk, eggs and meat consumption also driving feed demand—the sustainability of maize as a fuel grain is an open question.

The same goes for rice, where the 396.60 crore litres of ethanol supply offered by distillers for 2025-26 has been predicated upon overflowing stocks in FCI godowns. But this surplus grain scenario may not repeat every year. The fuel vs. food dilemma is probably less in sugar, where domestic consumption isn't growing as much. That leaves more surplus cane as feedstock for biofuel.

In Morocco, Madagascar now: what unites 'Gen Z' protests across countries

RISHIKA SINGH
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 12

AFTER INDONESIA, the Philippines and Nepal, youth-led protests (often dubbed "Gen Z protests") are on in the North African nation of Morocco and the Indian Ocean island of Madagascar. On Sunday, the Madagascar presidency said "an attempted illegal and forcible seizure of power" was seen.

The agitations have similarities: social media-led mobilisation, young protestors, and grievances over quality-of-life issues.

Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, a Research Fellow at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies, who studies social movements and digital spaces, told *The Indian Express*. "These countries share the dynamics of extreme imbalance of power and resources between a handful of elites and the rest of the population. They are parts of re-

treating middle-income countries affected by the loss of manufacturing jobs that used to drive post-World War 2 industrial countries like Korea or Japan."

"Yet, young people are told the same industrial mantra that they need to get college degrees to have better lives than their parents. When this doesn't happen, they are understandably frustrated," she said.

In Morocco

Demonstrations have continued in more than a dozen Moroccan cities for over 10 days now. In late September, the death of eight women during childbirth in a hospital in the town of Agadir sparked the agitations. The lack of quality public services was juxtaposed with the government pouring billions into building stadiums for the FIFA World Cup, which Morocco will co-host in 2030. Among the protestors' chants was "Stadiums are here, but where are the hospitals?"



A collective called Gen Z 212 (212 is Morocco's dialling code) is at the helm, with the messaging app Discord being a popular medium for communication. It was also the choice of protestors in Nepal.

\$3,993, while the global average was over \$13,000. Some poverty reduction has happened over time, driven by employment in industries such as tourism.

In Madagascar

Several power and water cuts in September led to protests that the government sought to put down, resulting in the deaths of over 20 people. It led to the protestors criticising the establishment, later demanding the resignation of President Andry Rajoelina.

The protests began as a youth-led movement known as Gen Z Mada, which first coordinated over Facebook and TikTok. Later, they tied up with civil society groups.

About 50% of Madagascar's population is under 18. The country has a per capita GDP of just \$545, with more than three-fourths of the total population living below the poverty line. *Reuters* reported that income per capita has fallen 45% between independence from France in 1960 and 2020.

The common threads

Other recent protests have highlighted similar problems, be it the elite cornering opportunities in Nepal and the Philippines (leading to slogans mocking "nepo" kids or the children of the elites), or economic woes in Indonesia.

Sombatpoonsiri said that what has changed is how young people organise for collective action. "Social media platforms allow for rapid communication and coordination, but the downside is that "fast mobilisation" lacks longevity. Their demands for social change require persistence and long-term engagement in advocacy rooted in a broad-based coalition—something that quick and decentralising online organising can struggle to sustain. This explains why, despite a steady rise in the number of protests, many movements have struggled to achieve their stated goal," she said.

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STRAIGHT
FORWARD
SHASHI SHEKHAR

Respond to this column at
feedback@livemint.com

THE RECIPE OF TRUMPING ODDS: THE RSS PLAYBOOK

I have been watching Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), now in its 101st year, for more than 50 years. Today, when its *swayamsevak*s (volunteers) are in power in Delhi and 14 other state capitals, there's a curiosity about the secret of its success.

People may say Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath and Assam's Himant Biswa Sarma aren't from the RSS fold. But it's true that once you're in BJP, you can't escape RSS ideology.

Not only has the political arm of the RSS, the BJP, returned to power at the Centre for the third time in a row, its ideological roots are deepening, too. The RSS achieved this despite stiff opposition from the Communists, Socialists and the Congress party. It was an ideological war and the RSS top brass knew the path was thorny and dangerous. So, how did they succeed?

I'd like to give examples from different decades of Indian history. In 1969, my father admitted me to Saraswati Shishu Mandir school when he was transferred to Allahabad. The school, close to Lal Girda, was run on the ground floor of a building owned by Rajju Bhaiyya, or Rajendra Singh, who later became RSS sarangchalak. I was nine and I remember a class was dedicated to reading books or magazines in the library. I didn't find any other school where one whole hour was dedicated to read material other than "course". Physical training was mandatory, too.

The role of teachers and the principal went beyond school; they would visit homes of "weak" students and discuss with parents ways to make their ward more *sanskaar* and *shikshit* (morally upright and educated). One Mr Kaushal was our principal and often visited our home. He wouldn't just discuss me with my parents but also nation-building, reasons for our prolonged slavery and failings of policies. Next year, I was sent to a another school as my father was given accommodation in a distant locality.

In 1979, I completed my bachelor's and started writing for newspapers and magazines. I befriended many Communists and Socialists. With cigarettes on their fingers, they'd discuss endlessly in coffee houses or on roadside tea stalls. Their issues infatuated young minds as they included international affairs and personalities such as Che Guevara, Lenin, Mao, Trotsky and Stalin.

Back then, Moscow-inspired People's Publications and other publishers would sell Russian and progressive literature at a discount. Maxim Gorky's *Mother* printed on glossy paper was available for just ₹5, while Bhisham Sahni's epochal novel came for ₹40. Not surprisingly, people preferred progressive literature. RSS workers, on the other hand, were busy with *seva* (service) in villages, among the dalits and tribals. Contrary to the Communists' rants about proletarian struggle, they stood with people during their struggles. Within a decade these efforts started bearing fruit.

By 1989, RSS successfully turned the Ram Janmabhoomi "liberation" efforts into a movement through its apex body Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Sangh workers went door to door to collect bricks for the proposed temple. Karsevakpuram was established in Ayodhya. Visiting people were convinced entire India was behind the movement after they saw the amassed bricks.

I was the resident editor at a newspaper in Agra and could sense the world around me was changing. One day, I got a chit from the reception; the name written was Gopal Godse, Nathuram's brother and co-accused in Gandhi's assassination. I was stunned. For one-and-a-half hours, I probed him. He insisted that he and his brother didn't kill Gandhi. "We respected Gandhi a lot," but his demise was in India's interest, he said. His face now keeps popping up in my mind these days ever since I saw Gopal Godse edging past Gandhi on social media trends on 2 October. Are he and his associates succeeding in their mission?

I remember my first meeting with L. K. Advani at that time. He invited three major dailies' editors to discuss Ram Janmabhoomi. No one could fathom the mosque would be demolished within next two years. The Sangh deployed everyone: ordinary workers to Gopal Godse to mass leaders like Atal-Advani. In 1999, after being ousted in just 13 days a couple of years ago, A. B. Vajpayee was PM and Advani his home minister. It was a decisive electoral win of an ideology. Today, we are seeing full scale dominance.

If the Congress and allies want to regain power in Delhi, they will have to borrow a leaf from the RSS playbook, employing traditions, moral conduct and organizational genius for at least a decade. Do they have the patience and the wherewithal?

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. Views are personal.

Slow drive for e-trucks as local sourcing rule bites

E-truck manufacturers wary of ambitious indigenization due to concerns over tepid demand

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NEW DELHI

A chicken-or-egg-first problem has developed in the country's electric truck industry, with the government pushing manufacturers to comply with an ambitious component localization plan, while manufacturers demur, given concerns over tepid demand.

Two people aware of consultations held earlier this month between the heavy industries ministry and e-truck makers—including Tata Motors, Ashok Leyland, Volvo Eicher Commercial Vehicles and Murugappa-group's IPL-Tech—said the government had asked the companies to comply with the localization criteria. A phased manufacturing programme (PMP) for e-trucks unveiled in July as part of the ₹10,900-crore PM E-Drive scheme set deadlines for components that e-truck makers would be allowed to import. Most such products and components are imported from China currently.

It listed products and components such as an HVAC system (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning), electric compressors for brakes, charging inlets for standard EV chargers, a battery management system, a vehicle control unit, and traction motors, among others. The cutoff date



Even after more than two months since the guidelines for e-trucks were announced, no e-truck model has passed the localization test as of date.

AFF

for the import of most of these components was 1 September, with imports of a few being allowed till 1 March 2026.

One recent relaxation was when the government allowed e-truck makers to import traction motors with rare earth magnets from Chinese suppliers in the wake of the rare earth magnet supply cut from China.

The PM E-Drive scheme for e-trucks and e-buses was extended by two years till FY28 in August, only a few months before it was set to lapse as funds for these two vehicle segments was not utilized.

The ₹10,900 crore support in the

scheme is earmarked for subsidies on purchase of electric two-wheelers, three-wheelers, e-buses, e-trucks, electric and hybrid ambulances, and charging infrastructure. E-buses made up about 40% of the allocation.

Even after more than two months since the guidelines for e-trucks were announced, no e-truck model has passed the localization test, said one of the persons quoted above. This indicates the shift to localization is slow.

"The government has asked e-truck makers to expedite the testing process," said the first person cited above.

₹10,900 cr
The sum set aside for the PM E-Drive scheme

1 Sep
Cutoff date set for ending import of parts from China

App-based shuttles to go legit in Maharashtra

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NEW DELHI

Commuters in Maharashtra, long frustrated by unreliable buses and crowded commutes, may soon find daily shuttles safer, more reliable, and easier to book. And app-based shuttle operators in the state may finally gain legitimacy.

A new draft policy—the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Rules, 2025—proposes to bring private buses and contract carriages under app-based aggregator norms for the first time. A draft, copy released on Saturday and reviewed by *Mint* but not yet public, mandates operators to hold valid permits and bars use of vehicles older than eight years.

If implemented, the move could finally legitimize business-to-consumer shuttle models like Uber Shuttle, Cityflo and Chalo, which have long

operated in a regulatory grey zone. Uber and Cityflo have faced enforcement action in Mumbai, with authorities seizing buses and issuing fines for alleged permit violations.

"For many daily commuters, app-based shuttles offer a middle ground—more reliable and comfortable than public buses, but still far cheaper than cabs," said Amit Kaushik, an independent automotive expert. "They're especially useful for people in parts of cities not well connected by metro or local trains, giving them a more dependable way to get to work." Queries to Cityflo and Uber didn't immediately elicit a response.

Shuttle services, where passengers share rides along fixed or semi-fixed routes, typically in buses, for quicker and cheaper commutes, have not taken off in Maharashtra despite strong demand.

For an extended version of the story, go to livemint.com.

A new draft policy plans to bring private buses and contract carriages under app-based aggregator framework

Traffic data to guide road project model

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NEW DELHI

The Centre plans to mandate awarding new highway projects under the build-operate-transfer (BOT) model if the traffic data, generated through the electronic toll collection system FASTag shows that private developers can earn at least 15% annual returns from toll collections, two people aware of the matter said.

Less remunerative projects, such as contracts showing less than 15% annual returns, will be awarded under hybrid annuity model (HAM) or engineering, procurement construction (EPC) route, where government bears full or partial construction risk and funding. By contrast, under BOT, the private builder develops the road, operates it, and recovers costs with tolls.

The move is aimed at reducing investor risk in construction of greenfield highway stretches, as the developer would be aware of likely returns on investment while bidding. This is expected to allow the government to put out more projects for award



Less remunerative projects will be awarded under hybrid annuity model, or engineering, procurement construction route.

MINT

under the BOT route, which places investment risk entirely on private concessionaires. The plan is to make this route attractive for most highway project awards and expects the private sector to participate more aggressively for these projects.

"As per the plan, the ministry of road transport and highways (MoRTH) has asked its highway construction and awarding entity—National Highways Authority

of India (NHAI)—to do fresh assessment of traffic data for all upcoming highway projects so that projections on returns could be calculated more accurately," said first of the two persons cited earlier on the condition of anonymity.

"This would be used to segregate highway awards with stretches projecting 15% or more returns going under BOT while others (with less than 15%) getting awarded under HAM or EPC

The move is expected to allow the government to put out more projects for award under the BOT route

mode," the person added.

Queries emailed to spokespersons of MoRTH and NHAI on Friday remained unanswered till press time.

Mint had earlier reported on the plan to introduce a new model concession agreement (MCA) by September-end. This move comes against the backdrop of the share of BOT projects in highway contract awards falling from a high of 90% a decade ago to sub-10% now. Private investors have shied away from taking up the entire risk of construction of highways and have opted for projects awarded under HAM and EPC models.

The MoRTH is also taking other measures such as extending toll rights of competing highways to the same concessionaire that is building a new stretch, as reported by *Mint* earlier. It has also brought a transparent compensation system in BOT contracts, where any revenue shortfall will be compensated by the government. A more structured dispute resolution process has also been set up.

Experts say the BOT model is seeing developer interest.

For an extended version of the story, go to livemint.com.

Regulator looks to make drug approval process fairer to first applicant

Priyanka Sharma
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NEW DELHI

In a move to spur drug innovation and to restore fairness in the regulatory ecosystem, India's top drug authority plans to overhaul a rule that puts early applicants for new medicines at a disadvantage, according to official documents and people familiar with the matter. The change is aimed at easing delays and encouraging greater investment in clinical research, a crucial step as India seeks to reinforce its role as the "pharmacy of the world" and

expand its \$50 billion pharmaceutical market.

Under the existing framework, the first company seeking approval for a new drug must conduct clinical trials and bioequivalence studies, an expensive and time-consuming process. Subsequent applicants can get nod for the same drug by giving only bioequivalence data, effectively benefiting from the groundwork laid by the initial applicant.

The cost for the first applicant can run into crores of rupees. The total cost of a clinical trial in India is influenced by numerous factors, including the trial phase, type of



The change is aimed at easing delays and encouraging greater investment in clinical research.

MINT

drug, patient sample size, and the specific procedures involved. The total cost of a clinical trial in India can range from \$1 million to \$3 million (₹8.8–26.4 crore) and the regulatory fees are in the range of ₹2–3 lakh for each phase. The

development of a new drug can typically cost ₹1.0–1.5 crore. Bioequivalence studies cost much less, with an application fee of ₹2 lakh.

To correct this imbalance and draft a fairer, research-friendly approval policy, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) has now invited public comments.

In a communication dated 8 October, Drugs Controller General of India Dr Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi sought feedback from industry stakeholders to help design a more equitable framework. Officials said the aim is to ensure parity in regulatory obligations while

promoting innovation and faster access to new therapies, a balance that could be critical as India's clinical trial market, valued at \$1.5 billion, is seen up at \$8.4 billion by 2029.

Stakeholders have a 30-day window from the date of the notice to give feedback.

"There is lack of level playing field between the first applicant who obtains approvals of a new drug first time in the country based on the clinical trial and bioequivalence study and the subsequent applicants who obtain approval of the same new drug on bioequivalence study data, for whom the cost of regula-

tory compliance is much lesser as they are not required to conduct the clinical trial," Raghuvanshi said.

"The current system has been found to be inefficient, as multiple companies often seek permission to conduct clinical trials for the same drug. However, in many cases, only one applicant actively proceeds with the full trial and submits the necessary reports. The other applicants then simply submit bioequivalence study reports to get approval for the same drug," said an official in the know of the development.

For an extended version of this story, go to livemint.com.

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OUR VIEW



Electricity reform: This time, let's make a go of it

Proposed legislative amendments aimed at fixing what ails this vital sector could help make Indian industry more competitive. Two proposals stand out that spell hope over experience

The Centre recently proposed legislative changes to “strengthen and reform” India’s electricity sector in keeping with the “evolving industry requirement.” This is an urgent goal, given new pressures on Indian industry to turn more competitive, be it trade headwinds or higher supply chain costs. Back home, to their detriment, businesses contend with cost and time burdens imposed by protracted statutory approvals and inefficient logistics. In the global arena, on average, our electricity tariffs for industrial use are higher than in China, but lower than what factories in the US pay, and even lower if compared to Europe. We have room to lower this and improve our competitive edge. Barring Gujarat, in industrialized states—like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka—industrial consumers of electricity subsidize household and farm consumers.

The draft Electricity Amendment Bill of 2025, among other measures, seeks to eliminate that cross-subsidy in five years. This alone, however, would be inadequate, since electricity is a concurrent subject in India’s Constitution and it is for states to implement this reform. Their reluctance to shake off populism, or at least pay for it, has been evident. Most state electricity regulators are hardly independent and approve tariffs that are less than the cost of supply. As a result, at a national level, the dues owed to utilities, termed ‘regulatory assets,’ have ballooned over the years to a staggering ₹3 trillion, as estimated, while the pile-up of losses is more than twice this. Even though the Centre’s tariff policy as early as 2006 sought to bring down the cross-subsidy to under 20% of the average supply cost by 2011, it is far from done. To loosen this regulatory capture, the

amendments seek to hold individual regulators accountable. If they violate the norms, they are liable to be sacked. This, however, is a double-edged sword, since a change in a state’s government can result in a political witch-hunt against those who refuse to play ball on populist moves that the state budget does not need to fund. So, unless adequate safeguards are built at the implementation level, what little is left of regulatory independence could be at threat. Hopefully, the amended law will cap regulatory interference, especially since it also seeks to upgrade the Centre’s interaction with states via an Electricity Council that engages with state power ministers to arrive at a consensus on reforms.

This platform could also help unlock an opportunity to improve the quality of consumer service, as proposed by the Centre. Thus far, distribution utilities have had a monopoly, since barriers to competition are high, with new players required to set up parallel wires to supply consumers with electricity. The amendments aim to let new entrants access existing networks. Once the Bill is enacted, state administrations would be expected to invite rival players. The economic merits of this are clear: lower bills for the consumer, thanks to more efficient power procurement, and lower costs for the utility on the maintenance of supply infrastructure. The platform could push the political class to implement the plan and reduce space for political parties to mis-portray it as ‘privatization’ in their poll rhetoric. Overall, the success of these measures, along with the Bill’s other proposals, would require the Centre to meaningfully engage and nudge states, while helping out with any financial support that the latter may need. This would speed up this vital sector’s path to commercial viability.

GUEST VIEW

Medical tourism could be India’s next major export opportunity

We have what it takes to deliver high-end care and make economic gains if we use a focused strategy



PRATHAP C. REDDY
is founder and chairman, Apollo Hospitals

With manufacturing exports threatened by tariffs and AI automation reshaping IT services, India needs a new growth engine. One opportunity lies in medical value tourism (MVT)—foreign patients travelling to India for world-class care that combines advanced medicine, competitive pricing and trusted outcomes. MVT can become a major earner of foreign exchange, a job creator and a powerful vehicle of soft power.

The global medical tourism industry is already worth \$40 billion annually and is projected to reach \$100 billion by 2030. With global healthcare services exceeding \$6 trillion, the headroom for growth is enormous—especially as populations in developed countries age and strain their healthcare systems.

India’s share today—around 6-8%, well behind Thailand’s 25% and Turkey’s 10-15%—could realistically rise to 25-30%, given our vast pool of skilled doctors and nurses, strong tertiary care infrastructure and deep experience with complex conditions. International patients also drive a local services economy of translators, medical facilitators, hotels, transport, pharmacies and rehabilitation. Few sectors combine foreign exchange earnings, employment and national brand projection like MVT.

What India does better than its peers: Thailand and Turkey, the current poster nations of medical tourism, built

their brands through hospitality, efficiency and focused niches. Thailand thrives on ‘wellness-plus-elective’ procedures—cosmetic surgery, dental work, spa-based recovery. Turkey dominates hair transplants and cosmetic procedures, backed by aggressive marketing and government facilitation. India’s advantage lies higher up the value chain in complex procedures—cardiac surgery, oncology, organ transplants, neurosurgery, advanced orthopaedics and robotic interventions.

India also stands out for its large pool of English-speaking doctors trained in global protocols, hospitals with global accreditations and long experience managing multi-morbidity cases. Add robust diagnostics, affordable generics, reputable nursing, rehabilitation services and a digital health stack to enable post-hospital-discharge care, and India offers a comprehensive care ecosystem that is hard to match.

India’s value proposition: For complex care, India delivers OECD-level outcomes at a fraction of the cost—and with far shorter wait times. A coronary bypass that costs \$140,000 in the US or \$15,000-20,000 in Thailand is available in India at \$5,000-6,000. These savings extend across diagnostics, ICU care, medicines and follow-ups.

Lessons from peers: Thailand has perfected the experience layer—hotel-like recovery, concierge workflows, frictionless arrivals. Turkey shows the power of focus—pick a few flagship offerings and scale up rapidly.

India should resist the temptation to be all things to all patients. It should anchor its brand on ‘advanced, outcomes-led complex care at global value’—and then use hospitality and recovery excellence as added layers.

A six-point agenda would help:

Brand India as a high-end clinical destination: Launch a ‘Heal in India’ campaign focused on outcomes, success stories and patient testimonials—not just low cost. Set up a multilingual portal that lists accredited hospitals and

offers transparent prices together with concierge-service support.

Ease cross-border payments: For many African patients, currency transfers are a friction point. India should enable smoother flows through pan-African payment systems, rupee vostro accounts and UPI corridors with African banks. Pre-funded patient wallets can reduce exchange-rate anxiety.

Ensure insurance portability across borders: Self-paid services limit the potential of MVT. India should negotiate with insurers in Africa, the Gulf and Central Asia to have accredited Indian hospitals included in their networks. A cross-border third-party administrator hub and sovereign-backed reinsurance would raise the system’s credibility.

Reward hospitals that attract foreign patients: Treat MVT as a service export. Offer tax credits or grants linked to verified forex earnings, with bonuses tied to infection control and patient-reported outcomes. Provide low-cost capital for ICU and robotic suites that target international patients.

Offer visas on arrival and ease logistics: Introduce a 48-hour medical e-visa with attendant visas, create green airport channels and regulate patient facilitators. Standardize discharge summaries and digital medical records to integrate these with home-country systems.

Develop medical clusters: Build hubs in Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Kochi as ‘medical export districts,’ offering plug-and-play clearances, recovery hotels and dedicated logistical support. Wellness and Ayurveda can complement it.

With focused execution, India can double foreign patient inflows in 3-5 years, especially for high-value procedures. The gains would ripple across the economy. We have an opportunity to dominate outcomes-driven advanced care at global value. If money, insurance and logistics can move as smoothly as the scalpel, medical value tourism can be India’s next great services success—and a quiet triumph of soft power.



JUST A THOUGHT

The UN took a strong stand against apartheid; and over the years, an international consensus was built, which helped to bring an end to this iniquitous system. But we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.

NELSON MANDELA

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

Gaza: What gives Israel its courage to defy the world?

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist and screenwriter. His latest book is ‘Why the Poor Don’t Kill Us.’

Once again, the Levant is on the verge of peace. I know what to say about how long this peace would last, but I wish to be more hopeful than prescient, even though I am a columnist. By many measures, Israel won this war. The peace is a consequence of the decimation of Hamas and the end of a famous myth that Iran is a military equal of Israel. The victor achieved this by being brutal. It appeared to consider Palestinian and even Iranian civilian casualties collateral damage. This removed Hamas’s most effective shield, Palestinian civilians. Israel also rendered ineffective another Hamas shield—international opinion. The country went ahead with its objective of finishing off Hamas with no regard for what the world had to say, and most of the world had only one thing to say—that it had to stop. With only the US on its side, Israel was responsible, by its own admission, for the death of at least hundreds of Palestinians who were not armed threats.

Where did Israel find the moral courage to

do this? There is a popular view that Israel, as a Jewish state, is so aggressive because Jews have been historically persecuted in Europe, and that gives it the privilege to consider itself specially placed to defend itself by any means at its disposal.

I don’t think that is what is going on. There may be a more interesting aspect of human nature at work.

There is this implication about people who have gone through suffering, oppression or bias that they are bitter and deal with the world with bitterness or meanness or cruelty. Some groups of people have a reputation for being relatively nasty, and they are sometimes presumed to be so because they were or are persecuted.

What may appear to be, at first glance, a sympathetic understanding is in reality a stereotype. I have no problems with stereotypes. Usually, they are approximations of complex truths that help us grasp complex things about society. But often the stereotype is plain wrong.

All groups have people who may be kind or mean or cruel, and in any given group of people, there would be some proportion who are capable of cruelty. What may differ is how empowered they feel to express themselves. People in the social mainstream cannot

express their meanness, but persecuted groups can. This, I believe, is true of all persecuted groups that have a reputation for being mean. There is a minority within them who feel so morally empowered to be cruel that their actions become facile representations of their whole community. A handful of aggressive alpha males can create an impression that a more peaceful majority cannot. A factor that makes this stereotype stronger is empathy, when a public figure, for instance, ‘forgives’ the behaviour of members of such a community because “they have been through much.”

Guess which group almost never seems to have a specific reputation for being publicly mean, bitter or cruel—straight mainstream men. This may not only be because they are too broad a group to have specific attributes. To my mind, this is chiefly because they have no easy moral basis to be cruel. As a result, the cruel among them can only be so in their private lives. Some of them seem to go the woke way to expend that capacity

because that offers them a moral way to defame and belittle other people.

Israelis who had the natural capacity for cruelty, aggression or violence could channel their temperament for what they saw as an exquisite moral cause. As a result, they could rise swiftly in their nation as exceptional individuals who could influence the political and military strategies of Israel. A hawk in a nation that has a moral market for hawks has a very different level of prestige than a hawk in a more placid place like India or America.

While Israel has had anti-war protests too and its leadership is yet to face its electorate, with elections overdue, I believe this is one of the important reasons why the country could deploy armed forces to blast children and other innocent people in Gaza with such ferocity that it came close to committing a particular kind of atrocity that is rarer than the word’s fame suggests—‘genocide’.

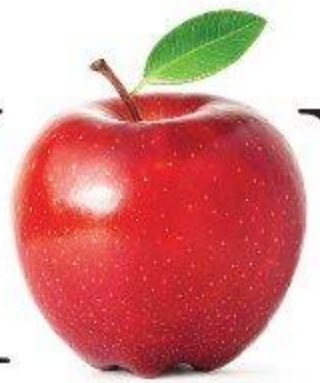
Genocide is a word that the global left uses carelessly. Riots in India have falsely

been described as such. If you object to it, lovers of the word will make you feel you are a murderer yourself. Maybe these people have seen so little of real life that they need to react in this manner to project gravitas. But in the case of what Israel was doing in Gaza, especially over the last year, it was becoming hard to deny the accuracy of the word. It was becoming hard to deny that we were watching the annihilation of a people because of who they are.

This level of organized aggression might appear to spring from within Israeli society, which may have seen a moral justification for it. But I would argue that the war’s ravages are explained by the actions of only a few individuals with a disposition to cruelty.

The rise of Hamas in Gaza itself could be explained by the same phenomenon among Palestinians. The long oppression of Palestinians gave a moral halo to those among them who were disposed to violence and they gravitated towards a violent moral cause. That made them folk heroes and materially wealthy.

Justice does not make its victims any more cruel than people who do not face the same misery. It just gives a free pass to a small fraction of any such population to be themselves.



CALCUTTA MONDAY 13 OCTOBER 2025

The Invisible Choreographer

Indian scientists decode how a protein controls cell movement. G.S. Mudur reports

With a microscope that makes molecules appear a million times larger, Saikat Chowdhury has uncovered the secrets of a master choreographer — a protein that directs how cells change shape and move. Chowdhury and his students at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, have shown how SPIN90 directs other molecules inside cells to create long protein filaments that serve as scaffolds that help cells grow, repair themselves, protrude in specific directions and move.

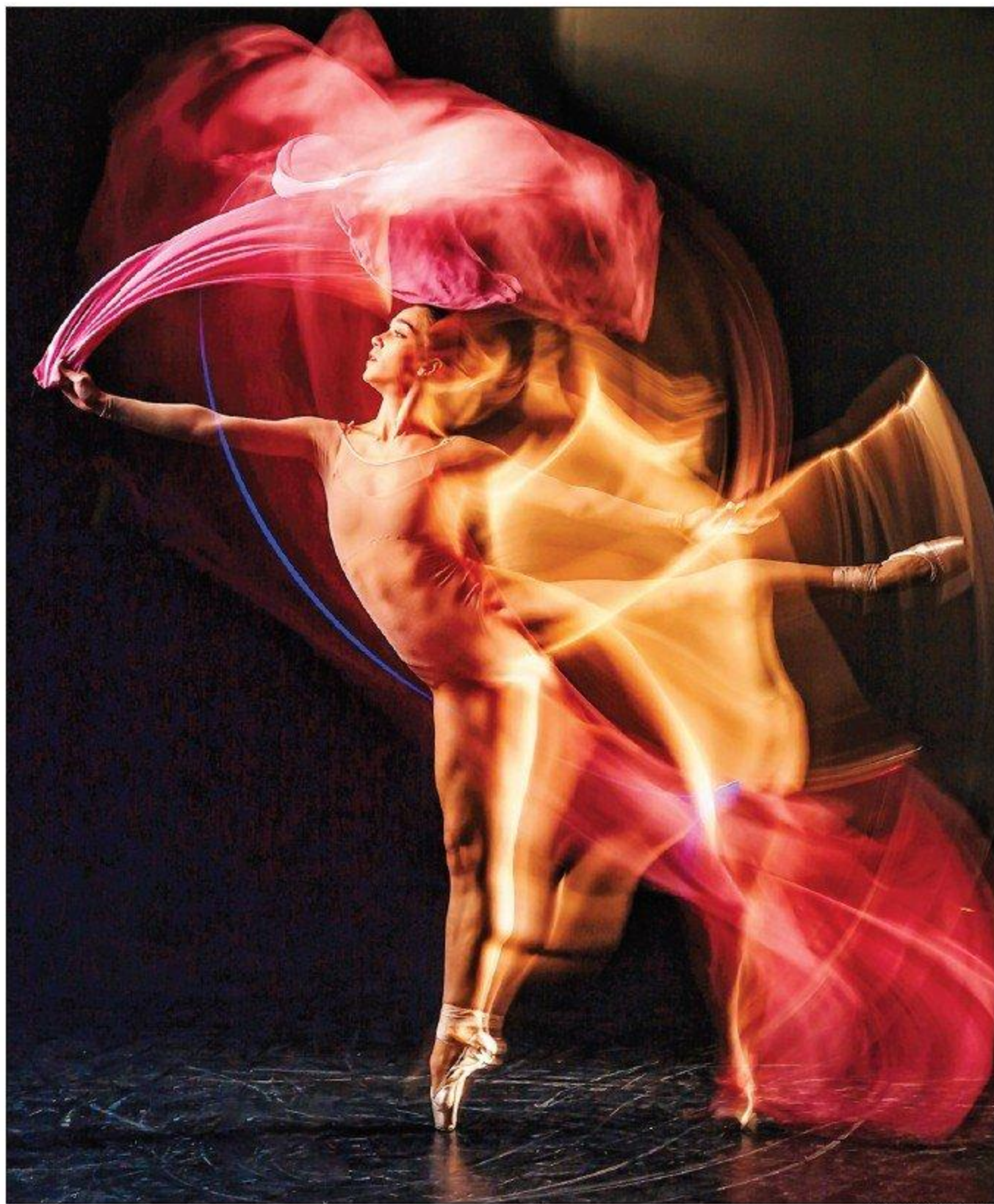
Their findings provide fresh insights into the mechanisms that drive movements of cells and explain how immune cells chase infectious agents, cancer cells spread to distant sites and neurons wire themselves during brain development.

“For decades, the intricate mechanisms and the biological engineering involved in cellular movements remained largely unknown,” Chowdhury tells *The Telegraph*.

That, however, began to change in the early 1990s, thanks to US biologist Julie Theriot’s pioneering observations on a bacterium called *Listeria*, an intracellular parasite in mammals. Theriot, then at the University of California, San Francisco, US, discovered that *Listeria* hijacks molecules called actin — and its nucleator Arp2/3 complex — found in cells and nudges them into a process called polymerisation, forming long filaments that allow the bacteria to acquire comet-like tails.

“Actin polymerisation provides the driving force for bacterial propulsion,” Theriot and her colleagues suggested in their landmark paper published in the journal *Nature* in 1992. The whipping motion of the actin filaments provides the propulsive force for the movement. Those observations were among the earliest clues that cells can harness actin filaments to generate the force required to move, Chowdhury says.

In the pages of biology textbooks or under a regular microscope, cells may look quiet and stable. In reality, their interiors are bustling factories, constantly building and breaking down substances and reshaping themselves. To move toward an infectious



ISTOCK.COM/ZINKEVICH

agent or repair damaged tissue, a cell must push out tiny protrusions in the direction it wants to go. Between 2006 and 2018, research from labs in South Korea and the US showed that the protein SPIN90 binds with a complex multi-protein machine called Arp2/3 complex, which acts as a “seed” for the polymerisation process that generates actin filaments. This bond provides the initial spark that allows cells to rapidly assemble structural filaments

and respond to their environment.

Brad Nolen, US-based molecular biologist and Chowdhury’s collaborator, had in 2018 elucidated the structure of SPIN90 bound to the Arp2/3 complex. But not in their active form — in other words, without filaments. “What wasn’t clear until now was how SPIN90 interacts with the Arp2/3 complex to drive the polymerisation,” says Chowdhury. “If we imagine SPIN90 as a key and Arp2/3 complex as a lock, we’ve tried to understand

which notches of SPIN90 fit into which grooves of Arp2/3 complex and how this triggers the assembly of actin filaments.”

Chowdhury, his student Justus Francis and other students at the CCMB and Nolen at the University of Oregon, US, have now shown that SPIN90 acts as a “master organiser”, guiding actin molecules to assemble new filaments. Their study, published in *Nature Structural and*

Molecular Biology, has also found that two copies of SPIN90 are needed to activate one or two Arp2/3 complexes. This arrangement allows filaments to grow in multiple directions, giving cells both structural support and flexibility in their movements.

The scientists relied on cryo-electron microscopy — a powerful imaging technique that reveals molecules at near-atomic resolution — to observe SPIN90 directly engaging with Arp2/3 complex. SPIN90 activates Arp2/3 complex and also shapes it so the filaments can form without relying on pre-existing cellular seeds, explaining how cells can react so rapidly. “The formation of new filaments can take microseconds, and cells can migrate within seconds,” Chowdhury says.

The study provides a clearer picture of the intracellular engineering behind cell movement, whether in routine housekeeping tasks like fighting infections or in disease processes such as the migration of cancer cells from a primary site to distant organs, a process known as metastasis. Although the discovery concerns a fundamental biological mechanism, Chowdhury says, understanding it could suggest novel approaches for therapies aimed at controlling cell movement in cancer, immune disorders and wound healing.

There are variants of SPIN90 across organisms, and one possible approach could be to selectively block SPIN90 proteins specific to disease-causing organisms such as fungi. This could allow researchers to target only harmful organisms while leaving healthy cellular processes intact.

Because human SPIN90 has so many essential functions, directly blocking it would likely be unwise. However, Chowdhury speculates that tumour cells may migrate using SPIN90 in combination with other molecules unique to the cancer, which could serve as selective therapeutic targets. “Those unique mechanisms or molecules could be targets for future therapies. That is a potential goal for ongoing research,” he says.

Besides revealing how SPIN90 directs a cellular ballet that sustains health and drives disease, Francis says, the CCMB research also reinforces the power of cryo-electron microscopy.

CG
AND
GAMES & GADGETS



A long awaited sequel, full of punishing trials

GAME: Hollow Knight: Silksong by Team Cherry
GENRE: Metroidvania
PLATFORMS: PC, PlayStation, Switch, Xbox

Pharloom, the mysterious realm in *Hollow Knight: Silksong*, is ruled from above by detached and distant figures in a gleaming and tightly sealed citadel. After the lithe and balletic Hornet, reprising her role as gifted royal progeny, is brought to Pharloom under armed guard, she makes a quick escape into this strange and unfamiliar land where she must leap, dash and slash her way to victory.

Along her journey, Hornet meets many self-described pilgrims, other bugs who have come to seek an audience with Pharloom’s cloistered deities. There’s a bell-clanging zealot, various merchants and thieves, even a mapmaking mantis. Hornet and those fellow pilgrims must overcome many layers of obstacles — towering bosses, spike-ridden corridors and dangerous, wind-swept precipices — to gain entry to the citadel’s supposed sanctuary, where even tougher trials await.

The original *Hollow Knight*, released seven years ago, quickly built a devoted fan base because of the cartoony aesthetic and satisfying 2D gameplay, underpinned by an evocative narrative and rich characters.

Beating *Silksong*, even the first of its several endings, requires more than just time — it requires mastery. There’s no brute forcing this game. The most leveled-up player, bristling with upgraded weapons and tools, must still practise and grow familiar with Hornet’s every move, which vary widely depending on how she has been customised.

Different tools affect how brutally Hornet attacks, how high she jumps and how quickly she dashes. One approach allows you to regain health by aggressively attacking enemies, in contrast to the delicate game of keep-away employed elsewhere. *Silksong* deepens and complicates the relatively simple systems of the previous game, and learning its intricate new structure is an intriguing challenge.

Yet all these trials tend to obscure *Silksong*’s narrative and atmosphere. The game’s numerous bosses stand out more for their mechanical challenges than the stories they tell. The Savage Beastfly and Sister Splinter were incredible pains who taught me all about timing and positioning, but I have no idea why I fought them or who they really were.

Pharloom is a world I

want to explore, but I am constantly getting waylaid by enemies large and small. The flying foes that dash around and bait me into disastrous mistakes are the bane of both my health bar and spirit.

This all frustrates any potential wanderlust in spite of Pharloom’s rich bounty of sights. *Silksong* has a much broader footprint than *Hollow Knight*, soaring into the heavens and plunging deep within the earth. The map is packed with secrets, false dead ends and hidden shortcuts. It’s easy to get deliciously lost here, to wander through dim caves and dank tunnels, growing more and more desperate without a map merchant or save point in sight.

Hornet manages to make this oppressive, atmospheric world her own. She forms alliances with its residents, with *Silksong* introducing semi-permanent settlements



that can be strengthened through side missions and donations. Though many of these side missions are trite collect-a-thons, there are occasional enlivening hunts that require following the ghostly trail of an elusive boss.

Exploring this world thoroughly is necessary to see all of the game’s endings. It sheds more light on what went down in Pharloom — how it fell victim to the same cycles of accumulation and greed that made *Hollow Knight*’s kingdom susceptible to outside influence and corruption.

Actually achieving these endings requires a monumental degree of effort. Players must invest dozens of hours familiarising themselves with *Silksong*’s many regions, fast-travel points and important characters. They must solve the challenging quandaries of pilgrims and track down the hidden castaways of an itinerant flea circus who are wedged into every far-flung corner of Pharloom.

This is a world meant to be lived in, to be run through again and again, until that weird pattern of rocks starts to look like a breakable door, until that specific tangent of wall edges ultimately reveal a potential hidden passage. But the act of moving through Pharloom is so dreadfully cursed with teeth and claws and jagged shell that it becomes difficult to want to exist in this world at all.

It’s a bristly world, left too long in the oven, now hardened over.

YUSSEF COLE/NYTNS

MICROSCOPE

Star molecule

On a brown dwarf star dozens of light-years away, astronomers have detected trace amounts of phosphine, a molecule that on Earth is produced by living things. This discovery is not life, the astronomers say. Any life as we know it would be impossible to sustain on such a star. But the detection, published in the journal *Science*, may help scientists in their quest to find both phosphine and life elsewhere in the galaxy.

NYTNS/CHARLIE COFFORD



Gene therapy

Preliminary results from a small clinical trial to treat Huntington’s disease, a devastating neurodegenerative condition, have for the first time shown a substantial benefit in patients. The treatment involved a gene therapy injected directly into the brain. Over the course of three years, patients who received the treatment had 75 per cent slower progression of symptoms. The findings were announced in a news release by uniQure, the company that sponsored the research.

Pompeii ruins

The eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79AD reduced the vibrant Roman resort town of Pompeii to a scorched ruin, buried in ash drifts as high as nine metres. New research published in *The E-Journal of the Excavations of Pompeii* shows that an invisible, post-eruption city of what one scientist terms “outcasts and underdogs” lived among the ruins for centuries, inhabiting the upper floors of buildings that were tall enough to poke through the ash.



NYTNS

Don’t blame the rivers

Jayanta Bandyopadhyay chats with Prasun Chaudhuri about the need for scientific policies and holistic measures

Recent floods have washed away parts of North Bengal, Sikkim and Bhutan. Heavy rain in the eastern Himalayas is nothing new. But why is this happening so frequently?

Rivers that drain mountains, like the Himalayas, carry large volumes of water. This is an important part of the global water cycle. The mountains and the moisture-bearing atmospheric circulations convert the great volumes of moisture in the atmosphere to rainfall through a complex interactive process that results in wide variations in rainfall in the mountains. This has been described as uncertainty on a Himalayan scale. The science for such climate processes is not yet well-established. Only initial correlations have been made between breaks in the monsoon and extreme rainfall events in the Himalayas.

Two years ago, a glacial lake outburst flood or GLOF in north Sikkim was responsible for a similar catastrophe. Some experts say the GLOF was caused by climate change. What happened this time?

GLOFs in the mountains are expected natural events, as are extreme rainfall events. Indeed, both global warming and climate change enhance the intensity and occurrence of such events. Studies have also shown that climate change causes more intense rainfall events, even though the total rainfall may not vary much. This increases the hydrological scope of more flash floods in Himalayan rivers.



WATER RAGE: The Holong bridge in Alipurduar was damaged during the recent floods. Photo: Avijit Sinha

What could policymakers have done to prevent such devastation?

Engineering may change nature to some extent but it is more important to change the nature of engineering. Policymakers could do a lot of good by adhering to this idea. They should also give autonomy to the scientific community, so that we can move beyond projects to support economic growth alone to economic growth moderated by needs of ecological stability. We need to recognise that our engineering is right now aimed at capturing space from rivers, which have the ecological task of draining the flows from upstream to downstream.

Would desiltation of Himalayan rivers prevent such flooding?

It is indeed crucial. These rivers carry large volumes of silt. We cannot separate this silt from the river flow. Supply-oriented engineering has, however, tried to do exactly that. A new

science for Himalayan rivers describes the flows as WEBS — water (W), energy (E) latent in the flows, biodiversity (B) and sediments (S). This perception will generate an interdisciplinary knowledge for Himalayan rivers.

How are multiple dams on the Teesta responsible for flooding?

Any structural interference with a river will result in changes in its characteristics. Rivers emanating from the eastern Himalayas need to be understood from a holistic perspective, like the WEBS. If river engineering is designed with a reductionist conceptual framework, it will not deliver the results declared in the project documents.

Bandyopadhyay is a distinguished fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, an independent global think-tank based in New Delhi

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Af-Pak clashes

India-Taliban engagement riles Islamabad

IT's hardly a coincidence that Afghanistan-Pakistan relations have hit a new low during Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi's ground-breaking visit to India. Pakistan brazenly carried out airstrikes in Kabul on Thursday, the day Muttaqi landed in New Delhi. In retaliation, Afghan forces attacked Pakistani military outposts; 58 Pakistani soldiers were killed in the fighting, according to a Taliban spokesperson. Calling the attacks by Afghans 'unprovoked', Pakistan claims to have seized around 20 Afghan military posts and 'terrorist hide-outs' in border areas. The clashes have sparked fears of a wider, prolonged conflict that could have serious implications for the entire South Asian region and beyond.

Incessant terror attacks by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have rattled Islamabad in recent months. Pakistan has repeatedly alleged that TTP fighters are operating from Afghan soil, but Kabul has denied the charge. Muttaqi has stated that Afghanistan wants a peaceful resolution of its conflict with Pakistan, but he has hastened to warn that if the peace efforts don't succeed, his country has "other means" to tackle the situation. It is apparent that the Taliban have been emboldened by their growing ties with India, adding to Pakistan's frustration. No wonder Pakistan summoned the Afghan ambassador to express its "strong reservations" over the India-Afghanistan joint statement issued in Delhi. The mere fact that the statement mentioned "Jammu and Kashmir" while talking about the Pahalgam terror attack has not gone down well with Islamabad. Causing more discomfiture to Pakistan, the Afghan government has reaffirmed that it won't allow any group or individual to use Afghan territory against India.

Counter-terror collaboration with Afghanistan can be beneficial for India, especially amid reports that Pak-based terror outfits have rebuilt the camps that were damaged during Op Sindoor. Delhi and Kabul must keep up the pressure to corner Islamabad, a notorious sponsor of terrorism that is now feeling the heat itself.

A green idea fails

Punjab's biomass unit closure stirs stubble woes

THE closure of a biomass power plant in Punjab this week reportedly due to uneconomic power purchase rates and mounting operational losses is more than a business setback. It is a warning that India's green transition cannot rest on policy rhetoric alone. At a time when the state is once again battling farm fires, this shutdown strikes at the heart of one of the few sustainable solutions to the annual stubble crisis. Biomass plants were meant to turn Punjab's crop residue, that is generally burned in fields, into clean energy and income for farmers. Instead, what we are witnessing is a system in retreat. The economics have soured because power utilities are unwilling to buy electricity from these plants at rates that reflect true costs. Delayed payments, absence of assured supply chains, and lack of coordination between agriculture and power departments have only worsened the picture. If plants are shut down, farmers are left with no viable alternative to manage their straw. Enforcement alone cannot fill this vacuum.

The failure is not of technology, but of governance and economic design. For years, Punjab and the Centre have subsidised machines like Happy Seeders and balers, yet the ecosystem that would absorb or repurpose the collected residue has not matured. Without reliable markets for biomass, whether for power, bio-CNG or industrial use, farmers have little incentive to invest in costly residue management.

The situation calls for a course correction: rational tariffs, timely payments and state-supported logistics networks to ensure regular straw supply. Without these, each shutdown will bring Punjab and its neighbouring states closer to another smog-choked winter, where policy promises literally go up in smoke. Farm waste must be treated not as an environmental nuisance, but as a renewable asset that fuels a circular rural economy.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1925

Lord Reading's opportunity

THE 11th of October has come and gone. The whole of patriotic and politically self-conscious India has with one voice condemned the unjust, iniquitous and humiliating treatment accorded by the Government of South Africa to our countrymen residing in that part of the British Empire, and in particular the Asiatic Bill which threatens their very existence. The demonstration has taken two forms. From every place of religious worship, Hindu, Muslim and Christian, there have gone forth prayers to the throne of the most high both to give strength to our countrymen and countrywomen to battle manfully against the threatened national wrong and to change the hearts of the South African Government and the British Government, so that they may realise their duty and do it. And side by side, public meetings have been held, mostly under the auspices of Congress organisations, at all recognised and important centres of political activity, recording the country's indignant protest against the action of the South African Government and the criminal indifference of the Imperial Government. This two-fold demonstration, in which patriotic and self-respecting Indians of all communities and all political parties have freely and wholeheartedly joined, affords a splendid opportunity to Lord Reading and his government to justify the claim they have so often put forward of being as good as a national government. If they know their duty and their business, they will not hesitate one moment to place themselves at the head of this great national demonstration, as any national government would have done in similar circumstances.

OPINION

Gaza hopes to pick up the pieces

The Trump-brokered ceasefire should be cautiously welcomed for a humanitarian reason



C UDAY BHASKAR
DIRECTOR, SOCIETY
FOR POLICY STUDIES

THE Gaza ceasefire agreement, announced on social media by US President Donald Trump, came into force on October 10. The initial phase aims to pause the hostilities in a genocidal war of retribution by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) that began after the Hamas terror attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.

This Trump-brokered ceasefire is to be cautiously welcomed for one overriding reason – and that is the humanitarian dimension. Two years of a relentless war and the indiscriminate, disproportionate attacks on civilians in Palestine to neutralise Hamas have killed over 67,000 Palestinians; about 2,000 Israelis, including civilians and soldiers, have lost their lives. According to UN agencies, humanitarian organisations and local authorities, around two million Palestinians (of a total of 5.5 million) have been displaced.

Gaza has been reduced to rubble; famine conditions prevail, with children and women bearing the brunt of the Israeli onslaught. With the ceasefire coming into effect, displaced Palestinians are returning to areas like Gaza City and Sheikh Radwan. Tens of thousands of Palestinians are trekking north along roads like Al-Rashid from southern camps such as Nuseirat and Khan Younis, carrying their meagre belongings amid a ruined landscape.

With 600 aid trucks now entering Gaza daily, the ceasefire will mitigate – to some extent – the famine declared in August and described by the UN as a "man-made catastrophe." This surge in aid, coupled with the reopening of Rafah and other crossings, could



REALITY: Equitable & sustainable peace and socio-political justice will remain elusive for Palestinians. REUTERS

alleviate suffering for Gaza's almost two million residents, 80 per cent of whom are displaced.

The next phase of the ceasefire agreement – also being referred to as the Gaza peace deal – involves hostage and prisoner exchange between Israel and Hamas. It is expected that beginning today, Hamas will release 20 Israeli hostages and the mortal remains of the 28 deceased. In the reciprocal arrangement, Israel is preparing to free about 250 long-term Palestinian prisoners (serving life sentences) and around 1,700 detainees arrested in Gaza since October 7, 2023, including women and children.

If this proposed exchange takes place without any hurdles or surprises, President Trump is likely to arrive in the region to a thunderous roll of drums as the peacemaker par excellence. Norway will be alerted to look no further; next year's "Nobel Peace Prize winner" will emerge in the land of Bethlehem, and the Magi of this century will assemble in TV studios the world over, led by Fox News and its global clones.

But alas, the reality is grim. Equitable and sustainable peace as well as socio-political justice for the Palestinians will remain elusive, while the optics of a historic breakthrough enabled by Trump will flood chanceries

India can contribute to the international rebuilding efforts that Gaza desperately needs.

and media platforms.

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu has been brought to the ceasefire table kicking and screaming and there have been reports of the IDF firing on returning Palestinians. Hardliners in Israel are determined to deny any concession to Palestine that will usher in peace and prosperity, as envisioned by Trump and the regional partners (Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia). Once the Israeli hostages are safely back, it is probable that there would be attempts to scuttle the peace deal.

However, one must hope for the best, and a more positive scenario can unfold in this manner. If cessation of hostilities, hostage-prisoner release and troop withdrawal proceed smoothly in the initial phase, this would lay the foundation for

tentative trust in the next phase – full demilitarisation and reconstruction of the wasteland that is Palestine/Gaza.

The Palestinian Authority's potential role in governance could marginalise Hamas, thereby aligning with Israel's long-term security goals and the US-led call for a two-state framework. But this is a long way off, for the immediate priority is clearing the rubble, finding more bodies and rebuilding Gaza. The bill for this could be upwards of \$50 billion.

The most authoritative estimates for reconstructing Gaza after the war place the total cost at \$53.2 billion over the next 10 years. This figure comes from the joint Interim Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment by the United Nations, European Union and World Bank, covering damages from October 2023 to October 2024. It includes physical infrastructure repair (\$29.9 billion), economic and social recovery (\$19.1 billion) and environmental cleanup (\$1.9 billion), with \$20 billion needed in the first three years alone. It is not clear at this stage as to how this money would be made available to Palestine.

The more disconcerting feature of this peace deal is that it has been framed as a US-led initiative supported by regional

heavyweights – outside of the UN framework. A multinational military monitoring force including 200 US troops will be positioned in Israel to establish a coordination centre to oversee Hamas compliance from bases outside Gaza. An interim technical governance team to be led by former UK PM Tony Blair is in the pipeline and this reeks of neo-imperialism, Trump style.

With the UN Security Council in virtual paralysis, given the bitter discord between the US and the Russia-China dyad, the world is witnessing extended geopolitical dissonance. This has been exacerbated by the Trump-driven tariff turbulence. Yet Trump is to be accorded one cheer (not three) – for bringing a reluctant Netanyahu to the negotiating table.

India has supported the agreement, with PM Modi congratulating Netanyahu on the activation of the first phase. India has been invited by the US and Egypt to attend a follow-up 'Gaza Truce Retreat' aimed at discussing ceasefire monitoring and reconstruction.

New Delhi's pedigree in complex peacekeeping operations (going back to the 1953 Korean War armistice and subsequent UN missions) and proven disaster relief competence can contribute to the international rebuilding efforts that Gaza desperately needs.

The ceasefire pact is tentative, fragile and prone to setbacks. This is the third major truce since the war began in October 2023 – first in November 2023 and later in January 2025 – and both collapsed. Will October 2025 be auspicious? The jury is out – the talks on demilitarisation and governance are imminent, even as Hamas has rejected 'foreign guardianship'.

Bringing this complex ceasefire-cum-peace deal under the UN aegis would be highly desirable, but the feasibility of such a transition is very low. Trump wants peace, and "King Canute's courtiers" will proclaim that it has indeed arrived and the Star of Bethlehem is glowing over the rubble of Gaza.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Gaza cannot and must not be allowed to remain a prison camp. — David Cameron

A box full of sweet memories

NJ RAVI CHANDER

MY maternal grandfather brought a box of *mithai* for us every month after his retirement. We anticipated the day when he would draw his pension and pedal to his favourite sweetmeat shop in Bengaluru's Shivajinagar. Secured to the bicycle carrier, a canvas bag would hold the delicious treats. Upon reaching home, he would unpack the box and place it before the deities in the *puja* room in a gesture of gratitude for receiving pension.

After a quick prayer and a brief wait, the family elders would share the sweets with us. We kids would have our eyes glued to the box. In the 1960s, even after we moved to a new house nearby, grandpa continued to shower us with *mithai* on his pension day. This monthly ritual proceeded like clockwork until the end of his life.

As they shared the *mithai*, each family member delighted in the treat. Some, such as the rock-solid, circular *Sohan Halwa*, my mother's favourite dessert, had a flavour that would fade very slowly. Dividing *Sohan Halwa* was a test of complicated geometry, and a scuffle would break out as we scrambled for a larger portion. However, mom's efforts guaranteed that everyone enjoyed an equal serving. Similarly, whenever we sliced a mango, a skirmish would break out, and we would start bickering over the middle portion, convinced that it was more fleshy.

Grandpa's pension day was also special because he would drop a handful of gleaming coins into our piggy bank. His shirt pocket clinked with small change. He also rewarded us for good grades, and the better we did, the more coins we got. During joyful times, he would offer a 25-paisa coin, a small fortune back then. We seldom let the piggy bank overflow, opting to crack it open early to treat ourselves to goodies.

His health issues, particularly a liver disease, eventually stopped the sweet-filled meetings. His health declined bit by bit, and he felt his strength wane. It saddened us to see the World War II veteran in a vegetative state. In his last days, he struggled to breathe, each gasp punctuated by agonising moans. And then the inevitable happened when grandpa left us for his heavenly abode.

Guilt overwhelmed me as I was not around when he passed away, caught up in a cricket game with my friends. My father rebuked me for not being present with grandpa. During his final journey, the smell of gunpowder wafted through the air as the Sappers' guns boomed their salute to the war hero.

As I savoured a mouth-watering sweetmeat the other day, I could almost hear grandpa's footsteps, bringing home the box of treats. Those were not just *mithai* boxes; they were fragrant packets filled with love and affection. The aroma strengthened our bond, making us feel closer than ever. His absence made the world seem bland.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Afghanistan must learn from India

Refer to 'What Afghan women want' (*The Great Game*); Indian women journalists were not allowed to attend Taliban minister Muttaqi's press conference as they would have asked uncomfortable questions. Women in Afghanistan find it difficult to educate themselves and even if they become qualified somehow, they are forced to operate within limits and amid restrictions. They are not able to realise their potential. Afghanistan will certainly benefit from its friendship with India but its Taliban rulers should emulate India, which has empowered women by opening the doors of education, police, military and administrative services for them. Afghan women, too, should get their due.

RAJ BAHADUR YADAV, FATEHABAD

Shun regressive mindset

Apropos of 'What Afghan women want'; the Taliban rely on oppressive force, compelling women to submit, but women in other parts of the world continue to stand free and strong. History shows that no form of darkness lasts forever. The darkest age eventually welcomes the light of dawn and regressive societies will also eventually get transformed with time. These conservative men must be reminded that the world belongs equally to men and women, and that every human is born free. They must understand that they hold no power to grant or deprive anyone of their dignity or rights. True strength lies not in domination, but in humility and kindness – values that they must one day learn to embrace.

PRATIBHA, ZIRAKPUR

Trust needed in India-UK relations

With reference to 'UK sees India's markets, not its workers'; the visit of British PM to India marks a major step forward in the deepening of relations between the two nations. The Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement and the new defence and technology collaboration signal a major shift towards economic and strategic relations. However, UK needs to welcome Indian skilled professionals in its market. On the other hand, India needs to address its regulatory barriers that limit its market access for foreign goods such as man-

goes, spices and marine products. For India-UK partnership to reach its full potential, gaps in mobility, regulation and trust must be addressed and removed.

HARBINDER S DHILLON, UNA

Stadiums require maintenance

Refer to 'Punjab's sports push'; making of 3,100 stadia across the state is not going to serve the complete purpose unless they are fully equipped with sports-related infra, professional coaches are appointed and the stadiums are maintained. Birlon Park stadium in Jalandhar hosted international cricket matches in the 1980s, but is now in a state of neglect, according to news reports. We can only hope that successive state governments will maintain the stadia and the people will make the utmost use of the facilities.

RAVINDER KUMAR JAIN, LUDHIANA

Well-deserved Nobel Peace Prize

Refer to 'Peace Nobel for Venezuela oppn leader Machado'; the decision to confer the Nobel Peace Prize on Maria Corina Machado is both a vindication and a rebuke. Forced into exile for challenging Venezuela's authoritarian regime, she symbolises the moral courage of dissent that speaks truth to power. Her recognition underscores a global yearning for democracy in regions where elections are mere rituals of control. Donald Trump's self-advocacy for the same honour comes as a paradox. Machado's sacrifice and Trump's worldview are poles apart, although she is looking forward to US help "to achieve freedom and democracy".

SS PAUL, NADIA

Modern-day madaaris

Refer to 'When *madaaris* cast a spell'; *madaaris* quit the scene following complaints about abuse of performing animals. Magicians donning ostentatious costumes are now called 'illusionists' and there is a huge market for the cleverly designed apparatuses they employ in order to enthrall viewers. In fact, they are invited by schools and paid to perform in front of curious students.

MOHAN SINGH, AMRITSAR

AI and the Great White-Collar Recession



AUNINDYO CHAKRAVARTY
SENIOR ECONOMIC ANALYST

IN the 1990s, newspapers across India started putting out 'Page 3' stuff — colourful reports about the social life of the bold and the beautiful, the rich and the famous. Those were the early days of globalisation, when glamour and glitz had just started to capture the middle-class mind in India. Very soon, newspapers and magazines began to print supplements and pullouts that focused on the fabulous lives of socialites. In fact, to break into the world of the glamorous, it became important to break into Page 3.

Soon, socialites and social climbers began to cultivate glamour and entertainment reporters. This became an industry of its own — and a side hustle for Page 3 reporters who would charge money to cover a party or an event. It was an open secret, which, understandably, reached the ears of newspaper owners. One of them — a fine enter-

prising specimen — decided to join the party. So, s/he made the Page 3 pullout an entirely sponsored feature. You could throw a party, invite the usual suspects, hire a photographer, send the pictures to the newspaper, duly labelled with the right names, pay a fixed fee and get published in the paper.

Why am I telling you this? Because AI is a bit like Page 3. All of us have used it to speed up our work. It is very common to get a call from your boss at 9 pm, telling you to get a deck or a presentation ready by 9 am. Before AI platforms became really smart, you had to burn the midnight oil and get the document ready, only to see your boss take credit for it. Now, you can simply give a well-tailored prompt to ChatGPT, upload the output to ChatGPT for PowerPoint, and get a presentation out in 15 minutes.

Until a few months back, your boss ignored this subterfuge. S/he knew that you were using AI, but didn't want to confront you with it. Now, you are being asked to 'show' that you are using AI in your work. If you aren't, then you will be sent to an 'upskilling' workshop. If you still stubbornly refuse to make your work less 'human', you risk being served with a pink slip.

This is exactly what is happening across corporate India — indeed, across the world.



PYRAMID CRUMBLES: Now, the bosses are saying let AI do work directly — why do we need you? ISTOCK

Bosses have embraced the reality of AI, much like the newspaper owner had embraced the fact that people will pay to get onto Page 3. So, instead of allowing employees to reduce their work by using AI, they are using AI to reduce their employee strength.

To understand this better, think of a typical old-school corporate entity. It is structured like a pyramid. There are many employees at the bottom, with entry-level skills, who perform many mundane tasks. Above them are a smaller number of professionals — still young — who have more experience, have displayed greater skills and, therefore,

A company needs far fewer entry-level employees, and a significantly lower number of middle-level managers.

do more intricate tasks. They get paid more, but don't have anyone reporting to them.

Right above this level come the middle-level managers — a slightly smaller body of leaders and supervisors who are in charge of small projects and have teams under them. This level is made up of young rising stars and older has-beens who didn't manage to rise to the next level. These people make schedules, supervise and track work output, and manage people under them, work on important but routine things such as compiling payroll data, or optimising employee leave applications. These are

important roles that keep the corporate body alive, but they don't have strategic value.

Above these middle-level managers comes a layer of senior managers — people who supervise many middle-level managers, work on growing the business, plan cost reductions, long-term brand-building, and expansion strategies. At the top of this layer are the various Cs in the C-suite — COO, CFO, CMO, CTO, CHRO, and so on. And above all these layers, sits the CEO or the MD.

It has now become abundantly clear that AI — if used to its current limit — can handle not only the work of the first two levels of the pyramid but also many supervisory and administrative tasks of middle-level managers. Till a few months ago, enterprising employees in each of the bottom three levels, including mid-level ones, were using AI platforms to ease their work and speed it up. Now, the bosses are saying let AI do it directly — why do we need you?

That automatically means that a company needs far fewer entry-level employees, and even a significantly lower number of middle-level managers.

There is another reason for a chunk of middle-level managers becoming redundant. Imagine a company with a hundred entry-level and junior employees, supervised by

10 middle-level managers. Now, AI renders 40 of them redundant. The company is left with only 60 employees for supervision. Given that they, too, are required to use AI for their work, each middle-level manager will be expected to handle 15 subordinates. This means, instead of needing 10 middle-level managers, the company will need only four. Six middle-level managers become redundant.

This is happening across the world at an alarming pace. TeamLease Digital estimates that AI will put 20% to 40% of Indian middle-level managers at risk, across IT, outsourcing, finance, retail and manufacturing, in just one year. Many big companies — TCS is the most cited example — are sacking middle-level managers to make way for AI. In some cases, employers are sacking people, not because AI is doing a better job than humans, but often in anticipation of what is yet to come, even if AI hasn't delivered much for their own companies.

This is what some economists are calling the Great White-Collar Recession of 2025. The IMF has warned that AI could lead to long-term unemployment and economists agree that middle-class professionals will be the worst hit. If it continues like this, what started in 2025, is only going to get worse in 2026.

Zubeen represented not perfection, but possibility



MAULEE SENAPATI
PROFESSOR, DLCS UNIVERSITY OF PERFORMING & VISUAL ARTS, ROHTAK

THE death of Zubeen Garg marks more than the end of a prodigious career. It reveals the deep anxieties and contradictions of a society caught between cultural intimacy and capitalist consumption. Few figures in recent Indian popular culture have embodied this tension so completely as the iconic Zubeen has. To understand Zubeen Garg is to understand the social imagination of contemporary Assam, its longing for rootedness, its unease with modernity and search for continuity after the voice of Dr Bhupen Hazarika fell silent.

In the decades following Bhupen Hazarika's passing, Assam experienced a quiet cultural vacuum, with the artist who could both mirror and move the masses, missing. Spontaneous and profoundly instinctive, Zubeen entered this very space, to reign the contemporary music scene and the hearts of millions in Assam. In doing so, the singer belonged not to the concert hall but to the everyday soundscape of Assam.

Zubeen's widely popular songs carried the pulse of a people negotiating rapid

change in the post-liberalisation Assam: the erosion of rural worlds, rise of capitalism, unsteady expansion of urban life and growing movements of people from rural to emerging urban spaces, besides the fast-spreading tentacles of consumerism. In such a social scenario, his voice travelled from tea gardens to university canteens, from marriage halls to protest gatherings, from the annual Bihu *manchas* (public stages set up during Rongali Bihu) to night coaches plying on the highways, knitting together an imagined community of listeners.

Zubeen's popularity cannot be understood without situating it within Assam's socio-political landscape. The region has long been marked by tensions over issues of identity, resulting in unrest, from the anti-foreigner movement of the late 70s and 80s, followed by militancy, creating fractures within the social fabric. While cultural icons like Hazarika mediated politics through explicit moral and ideological appeals, Zubeen's intervention was more instinctive and emotional. His politics was not declared through slogans but through his recognition of Assamese identity as porous and dynamic rather than fixed and exclusionary. In a state still grappling with questions of belonging, migration, cultural hegemony and linguistic assertion, Zubeen's music offered a unifying space where identity was felt rather than preached.

A song like '*Mayabini*' exemplifies this truth. At one level, '*Mayabini*' is a mellifluous love song, mysterious and melancholic, yet it also speaks



FANTASY: His life exemplifies how cultural icons emerge when institutions falter. ANI

of a collective loss and longing that resonates beyond romance. Its melody, rooted in Assamese folk idioms, is layered with contemporary instrumentation made possible through Zubeen's understanding of orchestration, suggesting a dialogue between tradition and modernity. That tension is what defined Assamese society in the 2000s, a generation caught between rural nostalgia and urban aspiration. '*Mayabini*' became popular not merely because it was soul-stirring, but because it expressed an emotional situation shared by listeners who were entering a new economy, yet yearning for the warmth of an older world. His songs — *Amanikha Xare Ase* and *Xunare Xojua Poja* — extend this theme of emotional modernity, articulating loneliness, uncertainty and desire within a society undergoing rapid existential tests.

Unlike the grand collectivist optimism of Bhupen Hazarika's era, Zubeen's songs were intimate and self-reflective, mirroring the inward turn of a generation raised amidst con-

The singer was trapped between his identity as an artiste and the demands of a media economy that thrives on performance rather than creativity.

sumer culture and social fragmentation. Yet, paradoxically, these songs also created moments of mass identification as people sang them in gatherings, weddings and rallies. This coexistence of the private and the collective made Zubeen a singular figure in Assamese public life.

What also made Zubeen distinct was his resistance to containment. He sang in multiple languages, composed for films and experimented with genres, from rock and folk to spiritual. The fluidity of experimentation with his music was not merely an aesthetic choice; it also reflected the shifting social terrain of Assam, a society exposed to global media flows across the 90s and the decade to follow, but anchored in strong community memory as the singer became a cultural mediator between these worlds, his art a site where nostalgia met aspiration, where the rhythms of Bihu and the idioms of western music could conveniently coexist.

Yet, Zubeen's very openness made him acutely vulnerable. As cultural consumerism deep-

ened, the market's appetite for the authentic began to devour authenticity itself. Artistes were branded and circulated as consumable commodities. The more popular they became, the more their spontaneity was sacrificed to visibility.

Zubeen, whose creativity was instinctive rather than strategic, found himself at the crossroads of this transition. He was trapped between his identity as an artiste and the demands of a media economy that thrives on performance rather than creativity. That the artiste was aware of it is evident from his interview by novelist Rita Choudhary for her podcast. Zubeen shared hints about being exploited by a section. In doing so, one cannot help but notice a certain awkwardness in the singer's expression: that of helplessness.

In a world driven by algorithmic curation, Zubeen's music retained the capacity to forge genuine collectivity. He did what platforms only simulate: evoke shared emotion. His songs travelled not through data but through lived experience, through the oral and affective circuits that sustain regional cultures, as in folk traditions. After the artiste's tragic death, when people say "Zubeen united Assam", it is the recognition of a rare phenomenon in contemporary popular culture, the re-emergence of community through sound.

But the celebration of Zubeen also exposed Assam's uneasy relationship with fame and modernity. In a society historically suspicious of individualism, his flamboyant persona, alternately tender and

defiant, tested the limits of what it meant to be a public figure. He was both idolised and admonished, loved for his candour and judged for his excesses. In this ambivalence lies the deeper sociological reading of his popularity: Zubeen represented not perfection, but possibility. He became the ordinary man's fantasy of freedom in a conformist world.

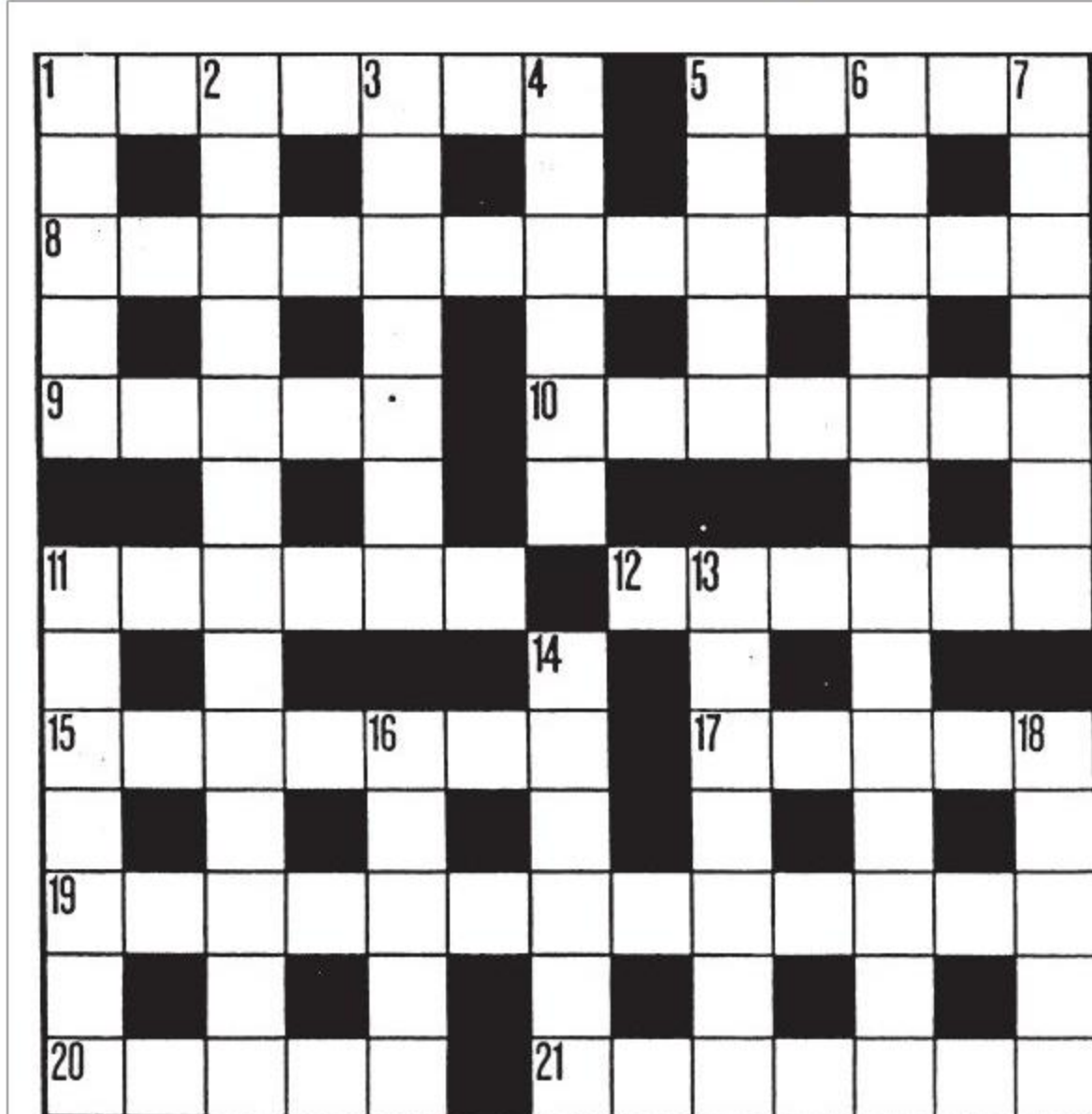
His life exemplifies how cultural icons emerge when institutions falter. Zubeen gave voice to a generation that no longer believed in grand narratives yet yearned for belonging. His art was not the anthem of a movement but the soundtrack of a mood, fragmented, plural and deeply human.

His death, then, is not only the loss of a beloved artiste but a mirror to our times. It forces us to confront the slow violence of a market that commodifies creativity and hollows out the very souls it celebrates.

And yet, his voice refuses erasure. It lingers in tea gardens, in dim hostel rooms and in the mechanical rhythm of city nights, a reminder that authenticity can still survive noise. Zubeen's songs continue to hold together what liberalisation and political forces fragmented: community, tenderness and the stubborn dignity of emotion. His art endures as a moral challenge to the times, to a culture that celebrates performance but forgets feeling.

If Hazarika was the conscience of a collective dream, Zubeen was the heartbeat of its disillusionment. His death closes an era, but his echo will remain the last cry of a people still searching for meaning in the ruins of modernity.

QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- Reinforce (7)
 - Shaped like a dice (5)
 - Conclusively (4,3,3,3)
 - Submerge (5)
 - Small spot (7)
 - Vacillate (6)
 - A deep red gemstone (6)
 - Wonderful (7)
 - Mountain ash (5)
 - Concede beyond usual limits (7,1,5)
 - Be high above (5)
 - Pounce down (7)

Saturday's solution

Across: 1 Pinch, 8 Make sure, 9 Clash, 10 Sit tight, 11 Rigid, 12 Leg, 16 Devote, 17 Attain, 18 Dog, 23 Sneer, 24 Not quite, 25 Hobby, 26 Let alone, 27 Stage.

Down: 2 Ill-timed, 3 Cash in on, 4 Ravine, 5 Keats, 6 Judge, 7 Petty, 12 Led, 13 Gag, 14 Stand out, 15 Mixed bag, 19 Outing, 20 Angle, 21 State, 22 Built.

- DOWN**
- Ponder resentfully (5)
 - Outcome of pure chance (4,2,3,4)
 - Learner in a trade (7)
 - Root vegetable eaten raw (6)
 - Throttle (5)
 - Writing or print (5,3,5)
 - Gather (7)
 - Absolutely determined (4,3)
 - Concerning (7)
 - Orderly arrangement (6)
 - Semi-aquatic furry animal (5)
 - Well known (5)

SU DO KU



HARD

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 13, 2025, MONDAY

■ Shaka Samvat	1947
■ Aashwin Shaka	21
■ Aashwin Purnimite	28
■ Hijari	1447
■ Krishna Paksha Tithi 7, up to 12:25 pm	
■ Parigha Yoga up to 8:10 am	
■ Shiva Yoga up to 5:55 am	
■ Aardra Nakshatra up to 12:27 pm	
■ Moon enters Cancer sign 5:59 am	
■ Ahoi Ashtami	

FORECAST

SUNSET:	SUNRISE:	MONDAY TUESDAY	17:54 HRS 06:23 HRS
CITY		MAX	MIN
Chandigarh		31	17
New Delhi		32	19
Amritsar		30	18
Bathinda		33	18
Jalandhar		30	18
Ludhiana		30	18
Bhiwani		31	19
Hisar		31	19
Sirsa		31	20
Dharamsala		27	14
Manali		22	07
Shimla		24	13
Srinagar		26	05
Jammu		32	16
Kargil		15	-01
Leh		13	-02
Dehradun		30	16
Mussoorie		22	12

TEMPERATURE IN °C



Editor's
TAKE

A crackling verdict for Diwali

The SC is likely to allow 'green firecrackers' in Delhi giving boost to Diwali celebrations and relief to fire cracker industry but environmental concerns remain

This Diwali is likely to be a noisy and dazzling one, as the Supreme Court is likely to clear the use of green firecrackers for five days. The decision will be welcomed by festival enthusiasts and the firecracker industry, which has borne the brunt of the ban in Delhi, one of the country's largest consumers of fireworks.

But this may not be a good news for the Delhi environment as the Delhi AQI numbers may go sky high with the bursting of firecrackers. Indeed, the environment, once again, takes a back seat. The decision, likely by a bench led by Chief Justice Bhushan R. Gavai, will reverse an earlier ban reaffirmed just months ago by another bench headed by Justice Abhay S. Oka. The court may now permit a limited relaxation – a “trial basis” celebration – with regulated time slots and the use of only NEERI-approved green crackers. In principle, it seems like a balanced compromise between cultural sentiment and environmental necessity. But if one is to go by the past experience this might be a nightmare for the Delhites. Delhi's experience suggests that the line between regulation and enthusiasm is breached rampantly.

Even during years when firecrackers were banned, Delhi's night skies crackled defiantly with light and smoke. Enforcement was minimal; penalties, rare. Now, with the ban likely lifted and a legal nod granted, the festival of lights may well turn into a festival of smog.

The promise of “green crackers” offers little assurance. Experts warn that even these supposedly eco-friendlier versions reduce emissions by only about 30 per cent. In a city where air quality already teeters on the brink of “severe” for much of winter, that reduction is hardly meaningful. The momentary joy of bursting crackers will be followed, inevitably, by mornings filled with choking air, teary eyes, and breathless children and elderly citizens.

Though the SC decision may give relief to the firecracker industry workers, many of whom belong to marginalised communities and whose livelihood depends on the trade is welcome, it comes at the cost of health of millions of people. The long term solution would be to provide them with alternative vocation and rehabilitate them. The firecracker industry must also need to evolve, it must work on less polluting options which would not jeopardise the environment and the health of the people. The right to livelihood must coexist with the right to clean air – not overpower it. Environmentalists fear that this verdict could set back years of hard-fought progress in public awareness and policy enforcement. Delhi's air, already burdened by stubble burning, vehicular emissions, and industrial pollutants, needs relief, not more triggers for deterioration. If “trial basis” celebrations spiral into widespread violations – as past experience suggests they will – the city could be left gasping once again.



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Much has been said about the quest for perfection, and everyone is encouraged to go on working till that perfection is achieved. The story of actual life has many messages other than this.

Typically, pure gold is supposed to be worth 24 karats. It is equally true that pure gold, when it is 24 karats, will not hold, and to make it a usable product, there has to be a mix of alloy, and the gold cannot be more than 22 karats in the product.

This, in effect, means that when one is talking of an ornament of pure gold, it is assumed that the content of gold in the product would be less than 100 percent. In fact, the measurement of pure gold to form the ornament, as indicated above, is uniformly supposed to be less in measure. Absolute terms do not apply.

So also, in real life, perfection is not acceptable in absolute terms because operationally, it does not work. The best of efforts require accounting for some reality, as reality can vary from activity to activity and indeed from situation to situation.

Illustratively, when people talk of speaking the truth, the capacity to speak 100 percent truth is dangerous, and listeners very often do not quite accept truth in its entirety. The question is: if 100 percent truth is not acceptable, then how much of the truth is acceptable? These are often written off as settled questions, but they face everyone's query at many steps of human deed. The prescriptions are unaccommodating and demand perfection. The operational situation requires compromises that no one can be certain of.

Even religious preachers and those who claim to be moral guardians are not known to articulate any definite guidelines. The result is a situation where practices, sometimes essentially local in character, become prevalent. The trouble, however, is that when approximations come into play, there is no standardization of approximation. This can and does lead to intolerances and sometimes retrievable aberrations.

These sometimes can and do become even beyond minor modifications. This is an essential gist of management, and this is where practices become more dominant than merely maintaining the 'correct posture.' This essentially makes life an art. Indeed, nothing succeeds like success.

In current times, the story of the Mahabharata is a telling example, even where exceptions are there. The reference is to

The myth of perfection

The Mahabharata, that vast mirror of Indian life, reminds us that wisdom lies not in the impossible pursuit of absolutes but in mastering the art of approximation – in knowing what works, when, and why



EPICS ARE NOT UNIQUE TO INDIA, BUT THE EPICS OF INDIA ARE TRANSCENDENT AND BEYOND MANY EPICS FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD

repeated references to a higher cause and moral justice. The pursuit of the objective is not lost in a pedestrian quest for righteousness. This does not throw morality out of the window but takes a higher view of the same. The narrator often can and does express implied disapproval but then leaves it to the judgement of the reader. Such being the facts of life, the consensus of a group regarding what it considers tolerable and acceptable becomes a hallmark of correctness and otherwise. This is the power of group dynamics.

The narrative of the Mahabharata is a sterling example of how “approximation” so often carries the day and technical accuracy is lost among the many contenders. Indeed, like everywhere else, the victor takes all, and the vanquished can only wish to live to see another day.

That having been said, it does not alter the idea of the bull's eye. While being archery, nobody approximates the archer's efforts to hit the bull's eye, and no one would say that even if he approximated by 20%, you are within the acceptable limits. The bull's eye remains the bull's eye. Perfection indeed has its place. Its content is often determined by the context.

What, then, is the message that the entire debate, discussion, and analysis falls back

upon? What indeed is the concept of judgment?

What is right or acceptable depends on situation to situation, context to context, and sometimes even the person's cognitive ability. This leads us to an important conclusion: namely, the realization that human judgment is superior to all other analyses, whether it be of everyday life or archery. Practical life has only experiences to serve as guidelines, and there is no greater touchstone than 'what works.'

That is where the text of the Mahabharata is such a tell-tale story of life itself. There is a Bengali proverb to the effect: “Jaynay Bharatiya Senay Bharaty” (that which is not in the Mahabharata is not in India).

Epics are not unique to India, but the epics of India are transcendent and beyond many epics from different parts of the world

Truly being an Indian is the compendium of much global wisdom. The crux is that it is also what is doable and achievable through traditional learning or otherwise.

It is about time to draw attention to the traditional learning modes of India and try to convert them for use by modern Indians. This will certainly enrich and level up the approach to artificial intelligence. That may be another story.

The writer is an internationally acclaimed management consultant.

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PIC TALK



A vendor displays a decorated earthen lamp ahead of the upcoming Diwali festival, in Thane. PHOTO: PTI

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MAHAGATHBANDHAN VOWS TO TACKLE CORRUPTION IN BIHAR

In a decisive move to restore governance and accountability, the Mahagathbandhan of Congress and RJD, if elected to power in Bihar, has promised to take strong action against entrenched mafias that have long exploited the state's systems. Corruption and criminal networks have infiltrated sectors ranging from infrastructure to education and mining, enabling “fake work” in roads, bridges, tap water projects, and village-level schemes, allowing contract mafias to siphon public funds. The coalition has pledged zero tolerance for such practices, warning that those defrauding Bihar's citizens will face strict consequences. Education mafias, notorious for rigging examinations and manipulating results across schools, colleges, and universities, will be curbed to

protect the future of thousands of students. Similarly, recruitment mafias responsible for recurring irregularities in government hiring will be reined in to ensure fairness and transparency. Additionally, the Mahagathbandhan plans to implement comprehensive policies to curb transfer-commission mafias, who manipulate postings for personal gain. Immediate action will be taken once the government is formed, aiming to eliminate criminal influence from governance. Through these measures, the coalition seeks to usher in a new era of accountability, transparency, and justice in Bihar, demonstrating a firm commitment to protecting public resources and restoring citizens' trust in government.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

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

TJS George: The Conscience of Indian Journalism



SANTHOSH MATHEW

2ND THE PIONEER ND OPINION

There are journalists who write the news, and then there are those who write history. T.J.S. George belonged to that rare second kind — a man who didn't just report events but reshaped how we understood them. When he passed away at 97, India lost not only a chronicler of truth but also the moral compass of its journalism.

Born Thayyil Jacob Sony George on May 7, 1928, in the village of Thumpamon in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district, his journey from a small-town boy to one of Asia's most respected editors mirrored the evolution of Indian journalism itself. After studying English Literature at Madras Christian College, George began his career at just nineteen with The Free Press Journal in Bombay, a crucible of post-independence idealism. There, he learned that journalism

was not about pleasing power but questioning it — a conviction that would define his life. In 1965, that conviction landed him in jail.

As editor of The Searchlight in Patna, George exposed corruption under Bihar Chief Minister K.B. Sahay. The government retaliated with sedition charges, making him the first editor in independent India to be imprisoned for his writing. It was a defining moment — one that tested both the freedom of the press and the strength of India's democracy. Defence Minister V.K. Krishna Menon, returning to his lawyer's robes, personally defended him in court — a gesture that underscored that truth still had allies.

George's spirit remained unbroken. A decade later, when much of Asia was viewed through Western lenses, he co-founded Asiaweek in Hong Kong with Michael O'Neill. The magazine was revolutionary — “Asia as seen by Asians.” Within a year, it was profitable and influential, offering a bold, pan-Asian voice that rivalled Time and Newsweek. When Time eventually bought and shut it down, George wrote that it was more than business — it was how power silences independence. Returning to India in 1981, George joined The Indian Express, where he remained for 25 years. His columns, spanning politics, literature, cinema, and culture, were masterclasses in clarity and elegance. He wrote not to impress, but to illuminate. His prose carried music and precision — never shrill, never careless.

“Journalism,” he often said, “is not a profession, it is a public trust.” Over the years, George became as celebrated for his books as for his journalism.

His biographies of V.K. Krishna Menon, Nargis, and Lee Kuan Yew remain benchmarks of literary reportage. His 2008 autobiography, Ghoshayatra (The Procession), chronicled half a century of Indian media with wit and candour. Anecdotes — like Jawaharlal Nehru's quip to J.R.D. Tata about nationalization — became timeless reflections of his style: sharp, humorous, humane. In 2011, he received the Padma Bhushan, and in 2019, Kerala's Swadeshbhimani-Kesari Award — the state's highest journalism honour. Yet, he wore recognition lightly. For him, integrity outlasted applause. Through his writings, T.J.S. George taught generations that journalism's duty was not to echo the powerful but to enlighten the public.

Even in his nineties, his pen remained fearless, precise, and deeply moral. He believed that truth was not loud — it was enduring. As he departs, George leaves behind more than words — he leaves a way of seeing. His journalism was not about breaking news, but about building understanding. And as long as truth matters, T.J.S. George will be remembered — not just as an editor or author, but as the conscience of Indian journalism.

The writer is an Associate Professor Centre For South Asian Studies, Pondicherry Central University

Rift in NATO as Spain defies rules

NATO is reportedly considering action against Spain for not meeting its defence spending target of 5% of GDP. The country's left-leaning coalition government has resisted boosting military expenditure, prioritizing social welfare programs over defence. Achieving NATO's benchmark would entail higher taxes on the middle class, cuts to foreign aid, and significant imports of advanced weaponry — politically unpopular measures that the government is reluctant to pursue. This tension underscores growing ideological divides within NATO as security threats escalate globally. Spain's stance reflects a broader debate over balancing national priorities with collective defence obligations, raising questions about the alliance's cohesion. For India, the situation offers a twofold insight.

First, it signals potential limits in Europe's unified response to Indo-Pacific security challenges. Second, it opens avenues for New Delhi to deepen defence and technology collaborations with individual NATO members seeking partnerships outside the strict alliance framework. As NATO grapples with internal disagreements, countries like India may find opportunities to strengthen strategic ties while navigating the complexities of Western defence politics.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

India-UK CETA: A Boost for Jobs and growth

The recently signed India-UK Comprehensive Economic & Trade Agreement (CETA) is a significant step toward strengthening India's economy, with the potential to generate around 1.4 lakh jobs, particularly in export-driven sectors like gems and jewellery. Beyond trade, the agreement underscores the value of strategic international collaboration in supporting skilled artisans, MSME workers, and small-scale entrepreneurs.

However, the promise of employment can only translate into real impact if policymakers ensure accessible skill development, fair wages, and sustained market support.

Initiatives that combine trade facilitation with entrepreneurship programs and vocational training can maximize benefits, ensuring that economic growth is inclusive and sustainable.

CETA demonstrates that forward-looking agreements are not just about numbers — they are about empowering the workforce, fostering innovation, and creating equitable opportunities across sectors. By leveraging such partnerships thoughtfully, India can inspire similar initiatives in other states and industries, building a resilient economy that balances global engagement with local prosperity.

K R GAGAN | TUMKUR

Trump's Nobel dream dashed

The announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize for Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado has dashed former U.S. President Donald Trump's hopes of receiving the prestigious award. Machado was recognized for her tireless efforts in promoting democratic rights in Venezuela and striving to transform the nation's dictatorship into a functioning democracy.

Meanwhile, Trump and the Republican Party have often overstated his accomplishments, citing peace negotiations and ceasefire deals as grounds for a Nobel Prize. However, such actions are largely expected of any U.S. president and do not warrant personal claims to the award. It is ironic that Trump presented himself as a deserving candidate, seemingly equating routine presidential duties with extraordinary contributions to global peace.

The Nobel Committee, by awarding Machado, has underscored the essence of the prize: recognizing genuine, ground-level efforts that bring real value to humanity. Her work highlights courage and commitment in the face of oppression — qualities that reflect the true spirit of the Nobel Peace Prize. The committee's decision deserves appreciation for focusing on merit rather than political self-interest, and for honoring someone whose actions genuinely advance freedom and democracy.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

From reaction to resilience: Wake-up call on disaster preparedness

As the world marks the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction on October 13, India faces a defining moment. Once-isolated natural events have become interconnected, human-driven crises. The need to shift from relief to prevention, from reaction to resilience, has never been more urgent.



SATENDRA SINGH

Each year on 13 October, the world observes the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, a global reminder that disasters are not mere acts of nature but reflections of human choices, planning, and preparedness. In 2025, this reminder is especially relevant for India, a country experiencing the brunt of escalating climate volatility. The recent monsoon season has underscored how unpredictable and destructive weather patterns have become, transforming natural events into prolonged humanitarian, economic, and governance crises.

The Changing Face of Disasters

From the towering Himalayas to the sprawling plains, India's disaster map has shifted dramatically. Floods, cloudbursts, and landslides are now occurring with greater intensity and frequency, affecting both rural and urban landscapes. Cloudbursts that once struck isolated valleys now sweep through pilgrimage towns, disrupt highways, and paralyse modern cities. In the Himalayan states, once thought of as remote and sparsely populated, intense rainfall events have become almost seasonal. Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand have emerged as epicentres of recurring devastation. Meanwhile, Punjab — the heart of India's agrarian economy — has endured vast floods that submerged fertile fields and shattered rural livelihoods. Even cities like Chandigarh and Ludhiana, designed for order and resilience, have faced crippling urban flooding, exposing the limits of outdated infrastructure. These patterns point to a sobering truth: India's risk landscape is evolving faster than its systems can adapt.

The Rising Human Costs

The cost of this transformation is visible in lives lost and communities uprooted. In Himachal Pradesh, the 2025 monsoon inflicted massive destruction — hundreds of fatalities, washed-out bridges, destroyed homes, and economic losses running into thousands of crores. Between 2018 and 2025, the state recorded hundreds of extreme weather incidents, reflecting not anomalies but a new climatic norm. Behind these numbers lie countless personal tragedies: families swept away by landslides, towns cut off for weeks, and small businesses obliterated overnight. Infrastructure painstakingly rebuilt after earlier disasters has been destroyed again, trapping residents in a relentless cycle of loss and fragile recovery. Uttarakhand's ordeal was equally grim. In August, a sudden flash flood tore through pilgrimage routes, sweeping away homes, lodges, and marketplaces. Entire valleys were submerged, and scores of people went missing. Military and disaster-response teams worked around the clock to rescue stranded pilgrims and villagers. But beyond the physical losses lay the economic ones — the collapse of tourism, the destruction of local economies, and the erosion of livelihoods that sustain thousands. In the plains, Punjab told a different but equally devastating story. Widespread floods submerged hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland, isolating villages and damaging irrigation systems. For farmers, the floods wiped out standing crops and stored produce alike, leading to soaring debts and market instability. Within weeks, rice prices rose, highlighting how local disasters can ripple through national food security and global trade.



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The Mirage of Modernity

Even India's most advanced cities — symbols of progress and aspiration — have proved alarmingly vulnerable. This monsoon, Chandigarh, Gurugram, and parts of Delhi-NCR were paralysed by severe waterlogging. Power failures, transport gridlocks, and business disruptions turned urban life into chaos. The cause was not just intense rainfall but years of neglect. Wetlands and floodplains that once absorbed excess rainwater have

been replaced by concrete. Stormwater drains remain choked with waste and are designed for rainfall patterns that no longer exist. As a result, every downpour turns into a civic emergency, revealing a critical failure in urban governance. Urban flooding also magnifies systemic inequalities — with slum dwellers, informal workers, and low-income residents facing the harshest consequences.

Disasters Are More Destructive Now

The worsening scale of disasters is neither accidental nor inevitable. A warming atmosphere holds more moisture, intensifying rainfall and triggering cloudbursts. Deforestation, encroachment on wetlands, and rampant construction on riverbanks and hillsides have stripped away natural buffers. In many parts of the Himalayas, road widening, tunnelling, and hotel construction proceed without adequate scientific assessments. In the plains, unregulated sand mining and damming alter river courses, increasing flood risks. The result: natural hazards transformed into human-made catastrophes. Equally troubling is the weakness of local governance. Many municipal bodies and panchayats lack the expertise, funds, or authority to enforce land-use laws and environmental regulations.

Rethinking Disaster Strategy

India's disaster management architecture has certainly evolved since the early 2000s, especially in early warning systems and post-disaster response. Yet, the current trajectory of loss shows that reactive relief mea-

sures are no longer enough. The country needs a preventive, community-based, and technology-enabled strategy — one that builds resilience from the ground up. At its heart must be local capacity building. Disasters begin locally, and so must resilience. Panchayats, ward committees, and local volunteers should be trained in first response, evacuation, and first aid. Schools and colleges can double as awareness hubs, teaching not just disaster science but the culture of preparedness. District Disaster Management Authorities must be empowered with funds and autonomy to develop locally relevant disaster plans.

Building Awareness and Trust

Public awareness remains the first line of defence. Campaigns must move beyond slogans to sustained, community-driven engagement. Hill communities need guidance on landslide and flash-flood preparedness, farmers require real-time weather data and insurance support, and urban residents must understand the importance of ecological conservation. Communication should use diverse channels — community radio, local influencers, schools, religious networks, and digital alerts. Most importantly, it must be rooted in trust and local language, ensuring people act on warnings rather than dismiss them.

Technology and Infrastructure for the Future

Modern technology can revolutionise disaster preparedness. Artificial Intelligence, satellite data, and predictive analytics can provide early warnings for floods and land-

slides. Drones can survey damage and assist in relief logistics. Mobile-based alerts can reach millions instantly — but only if the systems are inclusive, covering rural and marginalised populations.

Nature: The Best Defence

Nature-based solutions offer durable, low-cost protection. Reforesting hills, restoring wetlands, and reviving ponds and tanks can significantly reduce flood risk. Allowing rivers to flood certain zones naturally prevents catastrophic breaches elsewhere. These ecological measures also improve biodiversity, groundwater recharge, and livelihoods — outcomes concrete walls can never achieve.

Governance Reforms

True resilience demands structural reform. Every new infrastructure project must undergo disaster and climate risk assessments. Land-use plans must be enforced rigorously, and local bodies equipped with the authority and resources to act. Incentives such as tax benefits or insurance rebates can encourage builders and farmers to adopt resilient practices. Disaster risk reduction should be mainstreamed across ministries — from housing and transport to agriculture and education.

From Catastrophe to Continuity

As India observes the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2025, the lessons are undeniable. Disasters are no longer isolated or seasonal — they are a constant test of national resilience. The country cannot stop cloudbursts or cyclones, but it can prevent them from becoming humanitarian crises. A truly disaster-resilient India will rest on five pillars: empowered communities, strong local governance, technological foresight, ecological restoration, and institutional accountability. Each life saved, each livelihood protected, and each community rebuilt stronger marks a step towards that goal. Moving from reaction to resilience is not just an environmental or economic imperative — it is a moral one. As the climate crisis deepens, India's ability to adapt will define its collective future. 13 October is more than a day of reflection; it is a call to action — to turn tragedy into transformation, and vulnerability into strength. Only then can India emerge from the cycle of calamity into a continuum of continuity, stability, and hope — a nation truly prepared for the storms ahead.

Rivers in rage: Floods, memory and life in the Indian Himalayas



RITIKA JOSHI

The rains this year in Uttarakhand came with a fury that felt both familiar and new. Rivers swelled within hours. Roads cracked and vanished. Hillsides gave way as terrified families ran uphill, clutching their children. For outsiders, such scenes seem sudden and shocking. But for those who call the Himalayan valleys home, this fear returns every monsoon. Every season brings the dread of cloudbursts and collapsing slopes. The Himalayas, mighty as they are, remain fragile — a landscape where beauty and danger coexist. Here, rivers are gods, floods are remembered in songs, and disasters are often told as divine retribution. To live in these mountains is to live in reverence — balanced between awe and fear. For centuries, the rhythm of the monsoon has guided every aspect of Himalayan life. Farmers sow when the rains arrive. Pilgrims to the Char Dham temples plan their journeys by its pulse. Traders once timed their crossings of high passes by its breaks. But the rhythm is now broken. Uttarakhand normally receives around 1,162 mm of rainfall during the monsoon season. This July alone, 239 mm poured down within just the first 10 days. Rain that once spread across months now falls in violent, concentrated bursts. Scientists confirm what locals already sense — extreme rainfall events are increasing. The heaviest storms release more water than ever before. For mountain farmers, the difference between steady rain and a cloudburst is the difference between life and ruin. A single night of torrential rain can wash away entire terraces, erode topsoil, and turn careful construction into rubble. In Dehradun, even the state capital, a cloudburst this year left neighbourhoods submerged. Cars floated through narrow lanes; families stood waist-deep in water inside their homes. The city, once imagined as a safe valley refuge, could not withstand the monsoon's rage.

The other side of the Himalayan story is written in ice. Glaciers, the ancient water towers of Asia, are melting faster than ever. As they retreat, they leave behind glacial lakes — deceptively calm and scenic, yet dangerously unstable. In Uttarakhand's Alaknanda catchment, glacial lake area has grown by over 239 per cent between 1990 and 2020. Across the Himalayas, such lakes are expanding, their natural barriers made of loose rock and moraine instead of solid

dams. A landslide or sudden inflow can cause them to burst catastrophically.

The 2021 Chamoli disaster was one such warning. Within minutes, a torrent of rock, ice, and water swept away hydropower projects and entire villages. Survivors described it as "the mountain exploding." Downstream communities had no warning — only devastation.

This danger does not stop at state borders. In Sikkim, a glacial lake outburst in October 2023 sent the Teesta River roaring through valleys, collapsing bridges, breaching dams, and destroying army camps. For the Lepcha people, the tragedy echoed an ancient belief — that floods arrive when humans lose harmony with nature, and the Mother Creator sends waters to cleanse the land. The mountains themselves are weakening. Satellite studies reveal that much of the Himalayan terrain is now highly erosion-prone. The risk is greatest where forests have been thinned, and highways and tunnels have sliced through fragile rock.

When heavy rain falls on disturbed slopes, it no longer seeps into the soil — it rushes down, carrying boulders, trees, and houses in its path. In Dharali, Uttarkashi, the Bhagirathi River rose overnight, wiping out homes and farmland.

In Himachal Pradesh, this year's floods swept through Kullu and Manali, submerging apple orchards and bridges. Families who had lived by these rivers for generations saw everything vanish.

Much of this damage, locals say, is self-inflicted. Roads to pilgrimage sites cut deep into unstable hillsides. Hydropower tunnels blast through fault lines. Hotels rise on floodplains where rivers once meandered freely. For engineers, every new road marks progress; for the mountains, each cut is a wound. The floods of 2023 were a grim reminder that nature always collects its dues.

Floods are not new to the Himalayas. The British gazetteers of Kumaon and Garhwal record dozens of them — awed by the violence of rivers that could erase entire valleys. In 1893, when a landslide dam on the Birahi Ganga burst, the Alaknanda valley was devastated. Elders in Garhwal still tell their grandchildren stories of "the flood of Birahi."

In Himachal, old families remember how the Beas once changed its course overnight in 1975, taking orchards and temples with it. In Assam's foothills, folk songs still speak of the Brahmaputra swallowing villages whole. These memories endure not only as grief but as warning — a reminder that rivers are never truly tamed, and that respect is the first rule of survival.

While science attributes floods to rainfall and melting glaciers, mountain folklore offers another explanation — divine anger. In 2013, after Kedarnath was ravaged, many saw it as Shiva's

"tandava," his cosmic dance of destruction. Others said it was the wrath of Nanda Devi, whose sacred sanctuary had been violated.

In Kumaoni jagars — ritual ballads — floods appear as punishments for human arrogance. In the oral epic Malushahi, storms and rivers are forces that decide fate. Himachal's legends speak of Parashurama unleashing waters to drown sinful lands. The Lepcha myth of Sikkim and the Apatani traditions of Arunachal share a common lesson: when humans forget humility, the rivers remind them who truly rules these mountains. Across the Himalayas, rituals continue to express this ancient respect for rivers. In Uttarkashi, villagers float lamps on the Bhagirathi before opening irrigation canals. In Pithoragarh, lamps are lit on bridges at the onset of monsoon. In Himachal, offerings are made to Beas and Sutlej before the sowing season. In Arunachal, rituals appease river spirits before fishing begins. These are not mere customs. They are acknowledgements of a deeper truth — that rivers have agency, that nature must be approached with reverence. Such rituals remind communities that preparedness and humility are part of survival itself.

Behind every flood statistic lies a human story. Farmers in Pithoragarh watch their terraces crumble into rivers. Mothers in Chamoli lie awake through nights of thunder, fearing the next landslide.

Children in Rudraprayag miss months of school because the roads are gone. Shopkeepers in Dehradun clean their stores after every flood, only to lose their goods again.

The poor suffer the deepest scars. A washed-away field or home is not easily rebuilt. Debt replaces soil as their foundation. Yet resilience persists — Kedarnath was rebuilt, pilgrimage routes reopened, and terraces were replanted. Stories of survival travel from village to village, keeping collective memory alive.

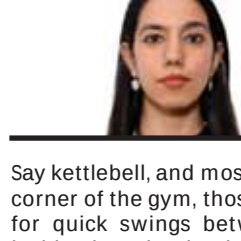
Floods are part of the Himalayan destiny — these are young, shifting mountains. But the toll need not be so brutal. Forecasts must reach every remote village. Glacial lakes must be closely monitored. Roads and hydropower projects must heed the geology they intrude upon.

Science can mitigate risk, but cultural wisdom must also guide us. The songs, myths, and rituals of mountain people hold deep ecological truths — about balance, limits, and reverence. Floods, then, are not merely natural disasters. They are messages carried by water — reminders that to live in the Himalayas is to live humbly, prepare constantly, and remember always that rivers are both givers and takers of life.

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Forged in iron: Women rising in kettlebell sport



ISHANI SIROHI

Say kettlebell, and most people picture a dusty corner of the gym, those round iron bells used for quick swings between sets. But hidden inside that simple shape is an entire sport: Kettlebell Sport, or Girevoy Sport, born in the heart of Russia. The word giry itself means kettlebell in Russian. What began as a simple tool for farmers to weigh grain evolved into one of the world's most gruelling strength-endurance disciplines. Its events sound deceptively simple — the jerk, the long cycle, and the snatch — but they test every ounce of precision, breath control, and mental resilience an athlete has. Professional divisions lift two 24 kg bells for women and two 32 kg bells for men. Amateurs lift 16 kg for women and 24 kg for men.

From Russian Roots to Global Grit

Kettlebell Sport was formalised in the Soviet era as a test of strength and endurance. Over decades, it developed its own techniques, timing, and judging systems, eventually spreading across Europe, America, Asia, and now India. Today, the sport falls under federations like the International Union of Kettlebell Lifting (IUKL) and national bodies such as the Kettlebell Sport India Association (KSIA). The formats have evolved beyond the traditional 10-minute sets. There are now half-marathons, full marathons, and even events with multiple hand switches, each testing not just strength, but stamina and focus. Yet despite this evolution, kettlebell sport remains one of the least recognised disciplines. It lacks funding, facilities, and visibility. In a country obsessed with cricket, it's an uphill climb to even get people to know what this sport is, let alone support it.

The Invisible Women of Iron

If the sport itself is niche, then women in kettlebell sport exist almost in the shadows. There are no fancy sponsorships or televised championships. Women train in makeshift setups, sometimes on uneven floors, under tube lights, without proper bells. They balance work, families, and training, often with no coach and even less recognition. And yet, they show up.

The women of kettlebell sport aren't chasing fame; they're chasing mastery. Every rep is an act of defiance against invisibility. Every lift says, "we're here too." Ask someone about kettlebell sport, and you'll probably get a puzzled look. "You mean CrossFit?" they'll ask. Not quite.

Kettlebell Sport isn't about random repetitions or short bursts. It's a symphony of efficiency, every grip, lockout, and breath measured to conserve energy and maximise output. Gyms display

kettlebells as just equipment, unaware that in other parts of the world, athletes are setting records with those same tools. It's like owning a Stradivarius violin and using it as a paperweight. In India, kettlebell sport is still finding its footing. Small communities are rising, people training in garages, rooftops, and parks, guided more by passion than infrastructure. This year, under the aegis of IUKL and KSIA, four Indian athletes received partial sponsorships to compete at the World Cup stage in St Petersburg, Russia. That might not make national news, but for those of us inside the sport, it's monumental. It's proof that even without the glamour of mainstream sports, the spirit of competition and the hunger to represent the tricolour burns strong. Every Indian lifter who steps on an international platform carries more than just kettlebells. They carry the weight of every athlete training unseen, unheard, unfunded, and they lift anyway.

Will kettlebell sport ever reach the Olympics? Maybe not soon. But every great sporting movement starts the same way — with a handful of believers who refuse to quit. Kettlebell Sport is unique because it fuses strength and serenity. Ten minutes on the platform isn't a display of aggression; it's meditation through movement. You have to be calm under pain, composed under pressure.

And that's where women, especially, shine. Their grace, discipline, and ability to endure redefine what strength means. They're not just breaking records, they're rewriting expectations.

The dream isn't just about medals or rankings. It's about exposure.

If kettlebell training found its way into schools, it could change the way we approach fitness entirely. It doesn't care about your background, body type, or gender. The bell rewards discipline. It humbles ego. And that's exactly why it deserves a place in the mainstream.

Kettlebell sport may never be glamorous. It doesn't need to be. It's a sport for the persistent, for those who don't lift for applause but for purpose. As someone who has stood on the world stage, felt the iron bite into my palms, and the silence between each rep, I can say this: the sport gives back far more than it takes. It forges you, physically, mentally, spiritually. So the next time you see a kettlebell in the corner of your gym, don't walk past it. Pick it up. Feel the weight, the history, the challenge it carries. Because in that moment, you're part of something bigger, something that's still writing its story, one rep at a time. The kettlebell doesn't ask for applause. It asks for respect. And every woman who lifts one earns it!

The writer is IUKL Kettlebell
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YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB
*My beloved traced his fingerprints
across the night, shaping them into stars.*
Ghada Al-Samman
(Contemporary Syrian writer, author and woman of letters)

Opinion

A scientific revolution that must balance hope against risk

DYA-EDDINE SAID BAMAKHRAMA

Artificial intelligence represents one of the most significant milestones in human scientific progress. It can be described as a natural extension of the human mind's long journey to understanding and reshaping the world. Just as the discoveries of fire, agriculture, and the Industrial Revolution marked turning points in human civilization, AI now stands as the "fourth revolution," one that redefines humankind itself, along with its relationship to knowledge, power, and production.

AI is no accident. It is the fruit of accumulated human intellect, a long evolution that began with mathematics, logic and early programming, and has now culminated in cloud computing and deep neural networks. In economy and production, AI has empowered companies to boost efficiency, cut costs, and analyze markets with unprecedented speed, allowing certain economies to grow faster than others.

In healthcare, AI has introduced

revolutionary tools for disease diagnosis, medical imaging, and precision medicine.

In education, it has opened the door to personalized learning systems that adapt to each student's abilities and pace, thereby fostering greater equity in educational opportunities. In our daily lives, from smartphones to self-driving cars, AI has become inseparable from our modern experience. Yet this revolution is not free of danger. Its darker side carries risks that threaten security, stability, and even human identity itself.

Firstly, there are security and military risks. The development of lethal autonomous weapons signals a new arms race, potentially more dangerous than nuclear weapons, given that no binding international treaties yet regulate their use.

Secondly, we see economic and social risks. The expansion of automation might eliminate millions of traditional jobs, increasing unemployment and widening social inequality.

Thirdly, we face cultural and intellectual risks. The ability of AI to create deepfakes,



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for example, could enable large-scale misinformation, election interference, and social discord.

Then there are the ethical risks. Who owns AI? Who decides what is acceptable or forbidden in its use? These fundamental questions remain unresolved. AI transcends borders and cannot be confined to any single state or continent. Therefore, humanity urgently needs governing frameworks, including: legally binding international agreements to regulate AI development and prevent its use for military or hostile purposes; a UN-led global charter, akin to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, ensuring that the technology remains a force for good; and enhanced international cooperation grounded in shared responsibility and free from the selfish pursuit of profit at any cost.

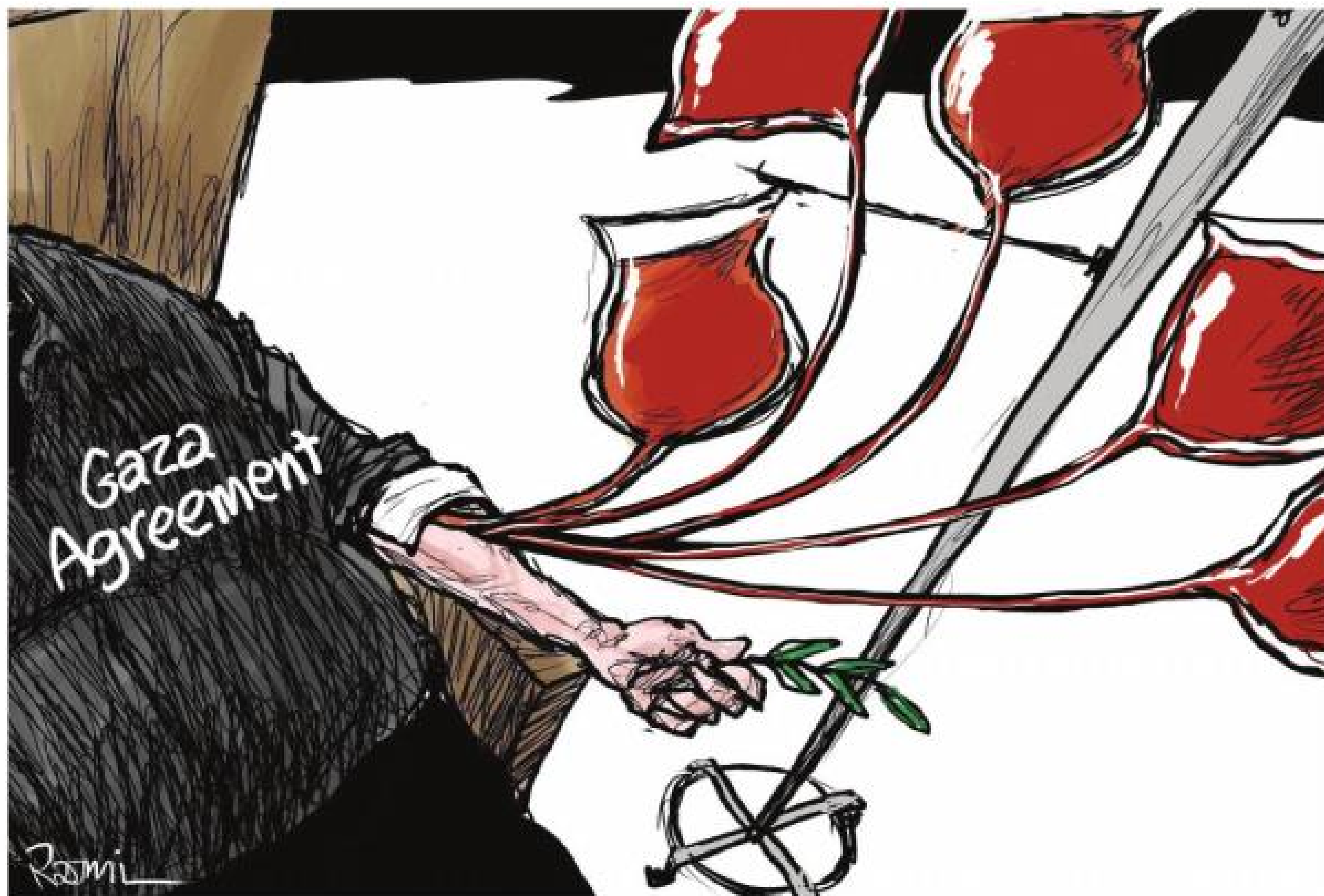
President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti has emphasized that AI is not a passing trend but a strategic pillar of national modernization and institutional reform. In an address this year, he affirmed that "digital innovation and artificial

intelligence are among the most decisive levers of development and modernization," while calling before the UN for ethical oversight and international accountability.

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has stated: "We are building a leading model to unlock the value of data and AI, to power knowledge economies and elevate current and future generations." This vision for the future reflects the Kingdom's strategic embrace of AI under Vision 2030, and through global platforms such as the Global AI Summit in Riyadh.

Many other leaders have echoed the calls for ethical global standards that will ensure human welfare remains at the center of progress. The ultimate question, then, is whether AI is a blessing or a curse. In truth, the technology is neither purely good nor inherently evil. It is a tool. Used wisely, it can usher in a new era of prosperity, justice and sustainable development. But left to the greed of corporations and the rivalries of global powers, it could become a curse that endangers humanity's very future.

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COURTESY: AHMAD RAMIL/ISHAQ AL AMBAT

When the war
comes to an end, the
question for Israelis
will be how they
will climb out of the
deep, dark abyss

Two years of sheer hell, and it is not finished

YOSSI MEKELBERG

At last, negotiators in Sharm El-Sheikh have agreed an end to this period of the most horrific bloodshed in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since 1948. Albeit it will only be a long haul toward a return to normality. Yet aside from indulging in some cautious optimism, it is perhaps also time for some initial reflection within both societies. How did they get into such a catastrophic nightmare?

Benjamin Netanyahu's recent triumphalist speeches and statements, often utterly contradictory, are the legacy of his long, much too long, time as Israeli prime minister. It is a legacy that will take years to overcome and rectify, not only for the Palestinians and others in the region, but also for Israel and its own people. Netanyahu's premiership is not over yet but is nearing its end; it is just a matter of time, and how much more damage he is prepared to inflict on everything and everyone within his orbit,

until he exits the political stage for good.

If anything should have hastened the end of his career, it was the utter failure to anticipate and prevent the Hamas-led attack on Oct. 7, 2023, and his reported paralysis for the first few days that followed it as he realized that the greatest security failure in Israel's history had taken place on his watch. But neither he nor his lieutenants in this worst-ever government in Israeli history have been of a mind even to acknowledge their colossal failure, never mind apologize for it, do the decent thing by resigning, and subject themselves to the judgment of the people by calling a general election and establishing an independent inquiry into Oct. 7.

Unsurprisingly, the attack by Hamas traumatized Israelis, and some kind of response to it was inevitable and justified. But nothing can justify the nature of a response that has left more than 67,000 people dead, most of them civilians and many of them children, and a territory of scorched earth, razed to the ground. The



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war in Gaza has raged for two years, not out of any strategic considerations but to ensure Netanyahu's political survival and prevent his corruption trial from concluding.

As an initial part of the healing and reflection process, a state inquiry into the failures of Oct. 7 must be established. It must have the power to investigate all aspects of the events leading up to that disastrous day, and everything that followed, including all ministerial decisions. It must not tolerate any cover ups. Only when this groundwork allows the truth to emerge can Israel also begin to start asking itself how it allowed a government of extremists and incompetents to lead it into a war that was more about revenge and the political survival of a ruling coalition, than ensuring the failures of Oct. 7 can never happen again.

Whatever the events that led up to that day, they cannot serve even as a pretext, let alone an excuse, for the massacre that took place that morning. But equally, the events of that day can never serve as an excuse for what the

Israeli military subsequently did in Gaza: the killings, the destruction, the multiple displacements, and the deliberately inflicted famine.

Times of deep crisis also present opportunities. In this case, it could be a chance to define, or maybe redefine, what kind of country Israel wants to be. Does it wish to be one that lives eternally by the sword, as Netanyahu and his messianic partners would prefer, and continues to violate the rights of other people on an industrial scale? Or one that is prepared to embark on a genuine, if extremely difficult, path toward peace and reconciliation that will ultimately result in coexistence as equals?

Peace with the Palestinians is not a matter of doing them a favor. It is not only a moral imperative, it is also in the best interests of Israel itself. Putting more than 100 years of conflict and bloodshed behind them will enable both societies to define who they are and what their destiny should be. These are questions that for far too long have been mainly defined by conflict and bloodshed.

