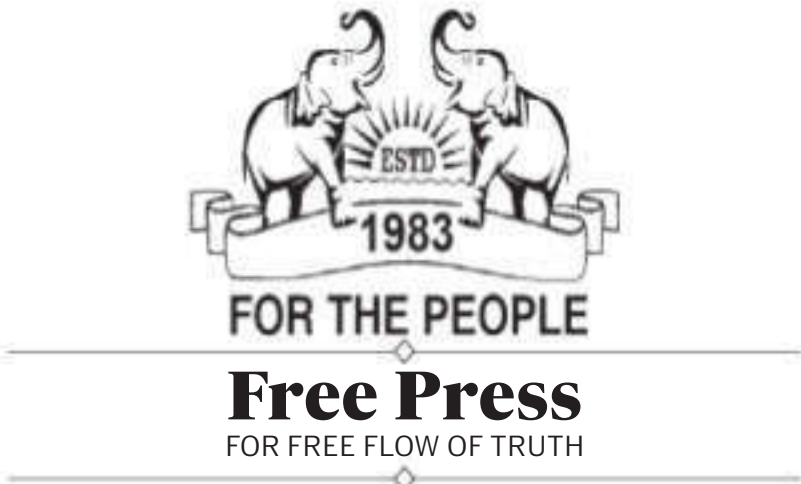




A fight for the right to breathe

That people of all persuasions and ages had to gather near the India Gate to protest the toxic air in India's national capital and demand executive action to curb the annual scourge is bad enough. That they, including children and the aged, were detained by the Delhi Police, summarily bundled into police vans, and booked is worse. The Delhi Police may want to justify their action, saying they followed the letter of the law because the protesters were violating the prohibitory orders promulgated in the area, especially Kartavya Path, where they had gathered. That would be the police missing the larger picture; perhaps the smog hanging consistently over Delhi for the past month has been too thick to see clearly that toxic air is a health emergency. There can be few actions more myopic and blinkered than this. Police personnel, ironically, are among the worst affected by Delhi's consistently high air pollution.

The criminal action also showed the wide chasm between words and actions, both from the executive and the judiciary. Delhi's air pollution is now a chronic issue, hanging fire for over 20 years, and has sparked short-term and long-term decisions by governments of different parties, from the Congress to the Aam Aadmi Party to now the Bharatiya Janata Party; yet no government appears to have wrapped its long arm around the problem in a significant way. Delhi ranks at the top of the charts every year for the world's most polluted cities. For millions in the city, this has meant health crises and additional expenses. Similarly, the lofty statement by the Supreme Court, specifically former chief justice DY Chandrachud, that people have a right to the environment proves meaningless if people must fight to breathe clean air—and face police action for it.

Police personnel, ironically, are among the worst affected by Delhi's consistently high air pollution.

People who do not usually signal with their bodies gathering on a Sunday morning shows their disgust at the lack of meaningful far-reaching action and distrust in both the executive and the judiciary. The morning after, Monday, showed why the protest was necessary; the Air Quality Index at 345 ranked 'very poor' with the critical Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM2.5) at 340 micrograms/cubic metre, or more than 22 times the WHO guidelines. At the other end of the globe in Brazil, delegates gathered at the annual climate summit, Conference of Parties (COP30), to discuss the reduction of emissions and fossil fuel use, which, among other impacts, intensifies air pollution. Noble words from international platforms and national podiums have no resonance if people are forced to protest for clean air and get penalised for it. What, then, is the value of the right to the environment and the right to protest?

A tech fix for property woes

The Supreme Court's recent observations on the lack of reliability, transparency and efficiency in the purchase and sale of immovable property, and the need for a technological transformation of the process are timely. Ruling on a case from Bihar, where the owner could not sell his property due to rules issued without proper legal foundation, the court pointed out that antiquated colonial laws—the Transfer of Property Act, 1882, the Indian Stamp Act, 1899, and the Registration Act, 1908—governing the sector strangely maintained a dichotomy between the ownership and registration, resulting in mere presumptive holding of the title to property. This cast a heavy burden on the potential buyer to carry out an extensive search, spread over three decades, to ascertain marketable title. Hapless buyers have to use a variety of sources, including brokers, to get paper records and prepare the transaction for registration at great expense. In the court's view, the answer to this vexed question lies in blockchain technology. Although it is not a new option, it is increasingly seen as a solution by the real estate sector, not just in India but abroad too. In essence, blockchain technology would replace current paperwork with a distributed digital ledger to record the transactions for a property, with individual changes remaining time-stamped and immutable; each subsequent change becomes distinctly identifiable, creating a clear record. Such a digital trail could sharply reduce fraud, often seen in the form of duplicate sales of land and pledging for loans.

The architecture of a blockchain system, including methods to validate each stage of the process online, would have to be decided by technology professionals for reliability and ease of use by all parties. Yet, agreement on its potential already exists. In fact, this would be a logical extension of the Digital India Land Record Modernisation programme that was approved in 2008 and is still being pursued, although without the necessary vigour. Union Rural Development Minister Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani recently informed Parliament that blockchain technology was not part of the DILRM programme. But reform would speed up transactions and reduce the volume of property disputes, which, the Supreme Court says, account for 66% of civil cases. Greater transparency could cut through the asymmetry at Registration Department offices, which are often cesspools of corruption. It is heartening that the court has requested the Law Commission to prepare a report on new property laws that incorporate blockchain technology, after consultations with the Union and state governments and information technology experts. This paradigm shift is urgently called for nearly eight decades after Independence. The NDA government set out to eliminate archaic laws and reform others a decade ago. Here is a good case that the apex court has flagged, and every citizen stands to benefit from a modern regime for property transactions.

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Insight

BHAVDEEP KANG

Fidayeen attack or accidental explosion? RDX or ammonia gel? Jaish-e-Mohammad or Al Qaeda? The blast at Delhi's Red Fort called to mind a vocabulary of violence that was familiar in the 1990s and 2000s but was blurred in public memory by a decade and a half of relative peace. Now, the continuing vulnerability of metropolitan India to terrorist assault has been explosively revealed. As concerning as the bombing itself is the inevitable fallout, in terms of its impact on the public psyche and the creation of a climate of fear and suspicion.

The blast is a fearful reminder that insurgents evolve to remain one step ahead of law enforcement. They can always slip through the interstices of border security, counter-terrorism measures and technology-enabled surveillance. Even worse, they can infiltrate social institutions, thereby lurking undetected. For every hundred foiled plots, there is one that might succeed.

Earlier this year, Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) to coordinate counter-terrorism efforts of government bodies across the board. Some 28 agencies share minute-to-minute intelligence on this plat-

form. No doubt intelligence agencies have upped their game. Back in 2020, the National Intelligence Grid (NatGrid) was set up to monitor the mobility, financial transactions and telecommunications of known terrorist cells. Media reports suggest that the integration of security-related databases and the application of AI/ML to analyse trends and predict attacks should go a long way in tackling terrorism and organised crime. Meanwhile, under the very nose of this complex intelligence apparatus, a group of doctors stockpiled three tonnes of explosive material and executed a high-profile assault that claimed nine lives in the shadow of the Red Fort.

Many unanswered questions remain; forensic experts and investigative agencies will doubtless unravel the mysterious nature of the explosion and the events leading up to it. But three significant features have emerged. First, a home-grown terror cell was operating at the very borders of the capital. At least four of its members were doctors, three of whom were on the faculty of the Al Falah University's School of Medicine in Haryana. One had been a senior resident at the Government Medical College in Anantnag and was a known sympathiser of the terrorist outfit Jaish-e-

Muhammad (JeM). Two members, including the lone female, were from Uttar Pradesh. In effect, those involved were white-collar professionals who had apparently been radicalised by a cleric associated with the Government Medical College in Srinagar.

Secondly, a large quantity of chemicals, as well as timers, batteries, remotes and circuitry—everything needed to create multiple big bangs—appears to have been moved undetected close to the Delhi-Haryana border over two months. Not to mention arms, including automatic rifles, and ammunition. Thirdly, and this is important, rented residential premises were used for storage. Neither neighbours nor police had the least suspicion. Obviously, this terror cell had been in situ for a long time before it was discovered.

Recruitment of well-educated J&K locals to terror modules is not new, but doctors enjoy a special status that makes it easier to evade questioning. Landlords and police are not likely to be suspicious of qualified professionals working for a highly regarded institution, especially one recognised by the central government. Investigating agencies tend to proceed with caution, well aware that activists and journalists are more likely

to take up allegations of civil rights violations when they involve minority community members of a higher social standing. The alleged involvement of a white-collar terror cell might have the deleterious effect of profiling an entire community. In public perception, jihadists—like Khalistanis—are a small fraction of malcontents. They are people who have an axe to grind. But here we have a group with no apparent problems; they are well-educated and employed and obviously bright enough to obtain an MBBS. The message is that just about anybody can be radicalised and controlled by foreign agencies across the border.

Regression to the 1990s, when bearded men in turbans or kufis triggered a quiver of unease, is avoidable. Back then, stepping out to a market or train station carried an element of risk, and an abandoned bag was an object of fear. From 1988, Delhi experienced a rain of terrorist bombs; in a single month in 1991, there were blasts. In 1997, there were ten separate incidents with 74 fatalities. Markets and train stations were attacked to maximise casualties. The courts, government buildings—the Army headquarters, CGO complex and Parliament itself—and the Red Fort were targeted to sym-

bolically undermine India's sovereignty. Mumbai, as the financial capital, suffered high-magnitude assaults from 2006, including the horrors of 2008 and 2011.

Metropolitan India picked itself up and moved on to a narrative of development and progress. The discourse revolved around jobs and GDP growth. Pulwama and Pahalgam disturbed the peace, but we had the satisfaction of a decisive response. Now, old fears and old prejudices have been revived, and this is where the government's tightrope walk begins. We know from past experiences that public perception can be moulded to some extent. To deflect attention from catastrophic failures of law and order, a community can be cast as both the victim and the perpetrator.

The challenge is to conduct an uncompromising crackdown on the praxis of terrorism while minimising collateral damage. It cannot be eliminated altogether, as law enforcement agencies can hardly walk on eggshells, but they should be seen to be doing their best to avoid injuring innocents.

Bhavdeep Kang is a senior journalist with 35 years of experience working with major newspapers and magazines. She is now an independent writer and author.



Niti Sutra

DR. HIMANSHU RAI

In the grand halls of Hastinapur, amid echoing conch shells and the scent of sandalwood, destiny once turned on the throw of a dice. Yudhishtira—the wisest of kings—was drawn into a fatal game, believing reason could triumph over deceit. He gambled not for greed but for honour, trusting that rules would restrain the unrighteous. The dice rolled, and the world changed.

That haunting scene from the Mahabharata endures as one of the most profound metaphors for statecraft. It reminds us that in the arena of power, even the virtuous can be undone by misplaced faith, and that strategy without caution often births catastrophe.

The Game of Nations

In today's geopolitics, the dice never stop rolling. Trade wars, proxy conflicts, cyberattacks, energy disruptions, and technological rivalries are the modern throws in a ceaseless contest for dominance. Nations wager influence, alliances, and credibility—often underestimating the cost of each move.

History is littered with examples of miscalculated gambles: from the invasions that overstretched empires to the

wars launched on false intelligence. Each echoes Yudhishtira's fateful belief that control could be maintained once the game began. But as he discovered, the rules themselves can be rigged.

For India, navigating this unpredictable global landscape demands both courage and restraint. We live in an era where cooperation and competition overlap, and where perception often outweighs principle. The challenge is to play the game without being consumed by it—to engage without losing equilibrium.

Lessons from Hastinapur

The Mahabharata offers timeless counsel for modern strategists—lessons born not merely of power, but of prudence.

- Never enter a game you cannot exit.:** Yudhishtira's tragedy was not that he lost, but that he continued to play when he should have walked away. In diplomacy and national strategy, overcommitment to a volatile alliance or conflict can erode autonomy. Strategic flexibility—niti—requires knowing when to engage and when to pause.
- Discern illusion from insight.:** Shakuni's loaded dice

symbolised deceit disguised as chance. Today, misinformation, deepfakes, and economic coercion perform similar roles. The wise recognise manipulation before it gains momentum. In a world where narratives are as potent as armies, discernment becomes the sharpest weapon.

- Anchor strategy in ethics.:** When Yudhishtira lost everything, Draupadi's piercing question—"Whom did you wager first, yourself or me?"—exposed the moral blindness that precedes downfall. Modern states too risk moral erosion when expedience replaces ethics. As the Arthashastra warns, "The unjust victory weakens the victor." Power must always be tempered by principle.

India's Balancing Act

India's approach to global strategy reflects the maturity of a nation that has learned from history's dice games. We engage with major powers yet preserve autonomy; align with multilateral forums yet assert sovereignty. Whether in BRICS, the Quad, or the G20, India plays not for spectacle but for substance—preferring persuasion to provocation.

This balance is not passive non-alignment, but active choice—an

assertion of independent thought amid global polarisation. In a world where great powers oscillate between rivalry and rapprochement, India stands as a civilisational actor that measures strength not by aggression but by endurance.

The global order today resembles a crowded sabha, where many throw dice simultaneously—each seeking advantage, each fearing loss. Amid such flux, India's task is to be the steady hand—measured, alert, unwilling to be drawn into reckless wagers.

Our emphasis on dialogue over dominance and partnerships over polarity reflects a deeper instinct: that dharma outlasts deception. The strength of a nation lies not merely in outplaying others, but in outlasting them—through consistency of purpose and integrity of action.

The Dharma of Decision

Every strategic decision is, in essence, a moral one. The Bhagavad Gita reminds us that action (karma) must be guided by discernment (viveka). When nations act from impulse rather than insight, they gamble away long-term stability for short-term gain.

The dharma of decision-mak-

ing thus requires three balances—between ambition and prudence, assertion and accommodation, power and principle. Strategy without ethics becomes manipulation; power without restraint becomes peril.

The dice may represent chance, but policy must represent choice.

The Sutra for Our Times

Yudhishtira's fall was not the triumph of fate but the consequence of faith misplaced—in fairness where none existed. The lesson endures: never mistake motion for progress, or risk for resolve.

As the world witnesses new great games—from the Indo-Pacific to Eastern Europe—the wise must remember that every throw of the dice can redraw destinies. The mark of a mature power lies not in how often it plays, but in how selectively.

The sutra for our times is thus clear and compelling: *Play the game, but never lose sight of the board—for power without prudence is but another throw of Shakuni's dice.*

The writer is director of Indian Institute of Management, Indore

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cricketing Discipline

Cricket today needs stronger discipline — players skipping domestic matches or prioritising leagues weaken national cricket. Respect for the game begins with respect for rules. The BCCI must enforce accountability so that talent, not temperament, defines selection.

A. Sharma, Indore

City Needs Clean Air

Smog chokes our cities every winter, yet governments react only after visibility drops. Long-term solutions like waste segregation, cleaner transport, and curbing construction dust are urgent.

Citizens too must act responsibly. Clean air is not a luxury — it's a right.

V. Nair, Delhi

Farmers Need Support

Unseasonal rains and price fluctuations continue to push farmers into debt. Loan waivers are short-term relief; what they need is fair pricing, irrigation, and crop insurance that works. Policy should focus on stability, not sympathy.

K. Meena, Ujjain

Media Must Reflect Ground Voices

Newsrooms must amplify voices from small towns and villages. Real India lives beyond metros — in its farmers, teachers, and workers. Journalism regains trust when it listens to them.

A. Dubey, Ujjain

Preserve Local Culture

Development must not come at the cost of heritage. New cities, malls,

and expressways must coexist with temples, ponds, and old markets. Progress feels hollow if it erases memory.

L. Sharma, Gwalior

Turkey's Hollow Gesture

Turkey's arrest warrants against Israeli leaders over Gaza atrocities are theatrically symbolic. Ankara lacks both authority and moral ground, given its own repression and judicial bias. This act seeks domestic applause rather than justice. Still, it highlights global frustration with Israel's impunity. Real accountability needs impartial international mechanisms, not hollow diplomatic drama.

K. Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

Trump's Vanity Politics

Donald Trump urging that Washington's new

\$3.7 billion stadium bear his name underscores his obsession with self-glory over public service. Meanwhile, election setbacks hint at waning influence. His fixation on personal branding exposes a shallow leadership style divorced from substance or civic value.

Aditya Shekhar, Indore

AI and Jobs

Artificial intelligence may transform industries, but it's also threatening human employment. While efficiency grows, millions face job insecurity. The government must invest in upskilling programmes so workers adapt to AI-driven changes. Innovation should empower, not exclude, people from the nation's growth story.

R. Subramanian, Chennai



Jails Turn Into Retreats

The Parappana Agrahara prison in Bengaluru seems to have rebranded itself from a correctional facility to a celebrity retreat. The latest videos of inmates flaunting mobiles and luxuries are only sequels to last year's viral photo of actor Darshan enjoying a smoke with a rowdy inside the same jail. When convicts live better than citizens outside, the bars begin to look decorative. A prison that doubles as a clubhouse mocks justice itself.

K. Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

DECCAN
Chronicle

13 NOVEMBER 2025

Educated terrorists add chilling element to 10/11

It is to the credit of India's security agencies that they may have neutralised hundreds of terror plots before their culmination in the last couple of decades. In fact, available evidence suggests that the Delhi car blast was hastened because a very large conspiracy was undone and one of the participants in this ghoulish venture was thought to be fleeing once he became aware of his colleagues having been corralled.

Even so, a single catastrophic event that took place with one conspirator escaping the dragnet was sufficient for it to be pinned as an intelligence failure on the part of the security agencies. And it is the failure to stop a terror event outside Jammu & Kashmir, the regular theatre of operations of terrorists of both the imported and homegrown varieties, which will be the albatross the agencies will carry countrywide as they plough on with their task of trying to keep the nation safe.

Inference points to the Faridabad network having links with events in the Valley, their consequences in terms of Operation Sindoor that struck at the heart of sponsored terror in PoK and in other areas of Pakistan and a planned reprisal by terrorist cells that could have taken on gigantic proportions if three tones of deadly explosives had not been seized from them.

However successful the Faridabad operation arising from investigation of threatening posters that began in the Kashmir Valley may have been, it only illustrates the fact that the vigil must be constant. What lends a chilling dimension to the unravelling of the big conspiracy is that members of the medical profession who would have taken the Hippocratic oath on graduating as doctors have been involved in plotting terror and spreading its tentacles in radicalising others.

The involvement of at least five doctors, four of them born in Kashmir, is symptomatic of the huge problem that the security agencies would be facing if educated people, with access to gadgets and methods of secret communications, knowledge from material online about explosives and various types of bombs and the mechanics of blowing them remotely, are to join a crazed movement that swears by terror in which innocents are far more likely to be hit.

The rise of white-collar terror is going to be the bugbear of security agencies if it is to be assumed the educated will be smarter than the lumpen elements who are readymade fodder for zealotry. And given the recent geopolitical shifts post-Operation Sindoor with Pakistan also cozying up to Bangladesh, the threat of terror will not diminish and may rear its head beyond the Kashmir Valley.

Far from blaming them for not spotting the terrorist who got away, the security agencies should be further fortified with men, machines and resources to coordinate a national effort at gathering intelligence and smashing terror plots that could be taking place anywhere in the country. The timing may not appear propitious but, on the political front, it might make sense to give back statehood to Jammu & Kashmir while retaining total control in security matters.

Good idea to digitise land deeds

The Supreme Court's suggestion to the Central government to reform the country's archaic property laws and introduce blockchain technology in property transactions is most welcome. The suggestion from the top court comes at a time when the Indian economy is on the cusp of emerging as the world's third largest.

Property matters are among the most intractable areas of litigation in India, owing to outdated laws and complicated procedures. These disputes account for an estimated 66 per cent of all civil cases in the country, wasting people's precious time and the judiciary's limited resources. India ranks 154th among 190 countries in ease of registering property.

Two major laws complicate the seemingly simple process of transferring property in India — the Registration Act, 1908, and the Transfer of Property Act, 1882. Although it is generally presumed that a property is transferred from one party to another upon registration, the law treats registration and ownership separately handled by two different departments. This often results in people buying property from individuals with no improper title, leading to decades-long litigation.

One solution to this dichotomy is to entrust both functions to a single department. The Telangana government has already implemented this reform for agricultural land by authorising tehsildars, who maintain land ownership records, to carry out registrations. Similarly, if registration powers are transferred to the municipal administration or panchayat department for residential areas, it could conclusively resolve this issue.

With respect to ease of registration, India began the process of dematerialising equity shares in 1996. Today, equity shares worth Rs 473 lakh crore are held in electronic form, and ownership transfers amounting to over Rs 1 lakh crore take place seamlessly every day. There is, therefore, no reason for land registration to remain cumbersome. It is high time India shifted to a dematerialised (demat) system for land title deeds.

Subhani



Can Mamdani's win in NY reshape 2026 US politics?



Ruchira Gupta

Democracies are not rescued by vibes. They are rebuilt by timely and practical choices. New York just made one.

Voters in America's largest and most diverse city have elected Zohran Mamdani, a 34-year-old son of Uganda and India, a Muslim, and an unabashed democratic socialist, as its 111st mayor. He is the first New York City mayoral candidate since 1969 to clear a million votes, in a turnout that was unmatched for 56 years. The surge came from newly registered young voters, from transit-using and renter-heavy districts, and from lower and middle-income Black and Hispanic precincts.

The demographics tell a story that offers a method. That method can travel from Virginia and New Jersey in 2026 to India and beyond.

Zohran Mamdani set out his vision in 2019. He said that he was a democratic socialist because of its commitment to a state that could provide what is necessary for people to live a dignified life. In the shadow of Wall Street, he argued that the market cannot decide who gets that dignity. Many called this utopian. He ignored the chorus and built a campaign whose means embodied its ends.

He started at the bottom by listening. He treated politics as a neighbourly duty and went door to door, block to block, bodega (Hispanic store) to bodega, *kirana* store to *kirana* store, and bus stop to bus stop. Affordability was not a slogan but a weekly bill paid by a real person.

He quickly turned that learning into tangible policy outcomes. Affordable housing, universal childcare, cheaper groceries and faster, fare free transit. Voters

rewarded a campaign that treated politics as rent due, childcare you can count on, a \$30 minimum wage and fairer taxes. Door knocking turned socialist ideology into felt needs.

He made small business a partner rather than a back-drop. Cafes, bodegas, salons, lunch counters, book stores and corner groceries became organising rooms rather than rows for billboards. Associations from bodega owners to taxi drivers found a place in the plan. So did *kirana* stores and kebab joints.

He kept the coalition broad. He said that housing affordability helps Muslims and Jews alike and rich and poor. He criticised policies abroad that he saw as authoritarian by leaders like Benjamin Netanyahu and Narendra Modi, yet paired that with visits to synagogues, temples, gurdwaras and churches. When the line is that if your cook can afford the rent, then your kitchen stays open, solidarity does its own maths. He showed respect while staying disciplined on a message about shared costs and shared gains across lines of faith, ethnicity and class.

He wore identity without weaponising it. African, Indian, American, Muslim, left of centre, he showed up as himself in dress, food, music, and neighbourhoods. Identity felt like a simple fact, specific and joyful in African fabric, India *kurtas* and snappy New York entry level slim suits.

That authenticity reached the most sceptical bloc in Western politics, the young. Arsenal fandom, a partner met on an app, anxiety about rent, none of it was staged and all of it sounded like life.

His relatability, inclusivity and lived experience helped him scale volunteers to the size of a megacity. A

This is not a plea for centrism. It is a plea for seriousness. The headwinds are real. People worry about the hangover from inflation and about cuts to health insurance and food assistance.

hundred thousand volunteers knocked on three million doors, across religion, class and ethnicity. Social media was buzzing because of supporters and not paid influencers. While the campaign visuals were vintage Bollywood, neither the campaign visuals nor the volunteer visuals showed him as "the leader on a stage". He danced, he sang, he chatted and lingered in small shops, parks, and cafes.

He chose hope and small donors over fear and big checks. Tens of thousands of volunteers did the work. Eighty per cent of the donations he got were less than \$250. He even capped fundraising and said no when he had to. The ground game beat the air war and had an impact on major Democratic victories across the country, including the governorships of New Jersey and Virginia.

But a bigger test arrives next November. America will vote in the mid-term elections (held two years after every presidential election year). For now, President Donald Trump holds the White House, the Supreme Court and both chambers of the US Congress, with friendly judges on the bench and Republican majorities in Capitol Hill.

The Senate is unlikely to change hands. The House is another matter. With a narrow Republican edge and the usual mid-term swing against the party in power, all the indicators point to a potential Democratic takeover within a year. If that happens, the rubber stamp becomes a real check on the President's powers, with the authority to investigate and hold both Mr Trump and his top officials to account.

The Democratic Party should study Zohran Mamdani's win because it offers a concrete answer to the charge that the Democrats are out of touch. After a June low in approval, he showed how to rebuild trust from the ground upwards. If by September 2026 a voter can say that the bill is lower or the bus is quicker, Democrats will have a proof point that punctures the strongman story.

That lesson travels far beyond the United States' borders. In every country which is struggling to hold on to democracy, the antidote to strongman politics is visible service, not louder speeches. Meet people where they live and work. Criticise policy without condemning community. Turn *chai* stalls, bodegas, cafes and markets into organising hubs for cleaner streets, safer lighting, quicker permits and cheaper commutes. Make belonging tangible and real.

This is not a plea for centrism. It is a plea for seriousness. The headwinds are real. People worry about the hangover from inflation and about cuts to health insurance and food assistance. Many are totally exhausted by campus clashes over the Gaza violence or are uneasy at the sight of uniforms at deportation raids. Into that fear, strongman politics offers a familiar bargain, narrow the idea of who belongs in exchange for a promise of order.

The reply that works is to define order as something you can time. A bus that arrives. A permit that clears in days rather than months. A rent that climbs by single digits rather than double. A clinic where a nurse answers the phone. Make the abstract visible. Make the visible truly consistent. And keep the consistent an integral part of the system.

Ruchira Gupta is the author of 'The Freedom Seeker & I Kick and I Fly, founder of NGO Apne Aap and a professor at NYU. Follow her on insta: RuchiraAGupta, on Twitter: RuchiraGupta.

LETTERS

ACRIMONIOUS POLLS

As in the case of recent elections held in different parts of the country, it has been a harsh and bitter reality that the runup to the Bihar assembly elections too was marked by personal attacks, mudslinging and acrimonious speeches by various leaders against their political adversaries cutting across party lines throwing political decency and decorum to the winds. It is a matter of utmost regret that despite boasting of being the world's largest democracy, elections in our country continue to be fought on caste and communal lines with candidates resorting to personal slugfest and sectarian agenda rather than debating and discussing bread-and-butter issues relating to growth and development, relevant for the common man. The fact that the state recorded the highest overall voter turnout since the first elections in 1951 with the women turnout the highest in history underlines the enthusiasm and active voter participation which comes as a silver lining among the dark clouds.

B. SURESH KUMAR
Coimbatore

TERROR STRIKE

The car blast outside the Red Fort Metro Station in New Delhi is a grim reminder of the deepening terror nexus in India. The discovery of nearly 3,000 kg of explosives allegedly linked to Jaish-e-Mohammad and Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind reveals how these outfits have expanded beyond Kashmir through white-collar networks. This shocking incident underscores the urgent need for concerted efforts to strengthen intelligence coordination, close security gaps, and ensure accountability at all levels. Bringing the perpetrators to justice and dismantling such covert terror operations must remain a top national priority

M. Jeyaram,
Sholavandan

Mail your letters to
chennai@deccanmail.com

C.M. Singh



Could anaemia be the reason behind low performance in India's schools?

Good nutrition underpins children's growth and learning, yet the silent epidemic of anaemia continues to undermine both mothers' health and their children's futures. India has halved maternal deaths in the last decade. But though fewer mothers are at risk of dying during childbirth, more than half enter pregnancy anaemic — and their children carry the consequences into classrooms and beyond.

Every parent in India wants their child to thrive in school; however, data released earlier this year state school performances are a cause for concern. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024 report, barely 23.4 per cent of Class 3 students in government schools can read a Class 2-level text. Learning levels measured by the National Achievement Survey declined between 2017 and 2021 across most grades and subjects. Poor teaching and overcrowded classrooms may be part of the story. But as a clinician and public health expert, I know there is another factor we do not talk about nearly enough — anaemia.

Anaemia is most often caused by iron deficiency and starves the body of oxygen, making women tired, dizzy and unable to function at their best. But its true impact is inter-generational.

These inter-generational effects are shaped during what global health experts call the first 1,000 days — from conception to a child's second birthday. This is the most critical window for brain development, immune strength and lifelong learning capacity. If anaemia in mothers is corrected during these 1,000 days, children are more likely to have better birth

weights, healthier growth trajectories and stronger cognitive outcomes when they enter school. Conversely, missing this window often means irreversible losses in learning potential that no later intervention can fully restore.

When a mother is anaemic during pregnancy, her child is more likely to be born premature, underweight and with iron deficiency from day one. This deficiency directly impairs a child's brain development, attention, memory and learning.

In terms of school performance, anaemia translates into lower cognitive scores and poorer educational achievement. It is no surprise that children who start life anaemic struggle later in classrooms.

The statistics are sobering. NFHS-5 shows 57 pc of women of reproductive age in India are anaemic and so are 52 pc of pregnant women. Among children under five, the figure is an alarming 67 pc. These are not abstract percentages but millions of young children who may never reach their full physical and intellectual potential, because their mothers began pregnancy anaemic and the cycle was never broken.

Across states in India, maternal mortality rates are steadily declining. Bihar's maternal mortality ratio has dropped to 100 per 100,000 live births, while UP has halved its maternal deaths in the last decade. These are extraordinary achievements. But maternal anaemia numbers remain high in both states, at 63 and 46 per cents. It remains the single most stubborn barrier to healthier mothers and children.

Anaemia is not only a child development issue. It is a serious threat to women's health. Women with severe anaemia are twice as likely to die in child-

birth, largely due to complications such as postpartum haemorrhage. Even when they survive, they experience chronic weakness and fatigue that limits their ability to work, care for their families or participate in their communities. Anaemia reduces productivity, drains household incomes and weakens the economy.

The good news is that anaemia is both preventable and treatable. India has ambitious programmes like Anaemia Mukt Bharat and Poshan Abhiyaan, but we must sharpen how these reach families.

Three areas stand out.

Accurate and frequent testing is key and reliable haemoglobin measurement must become routine. This ensures early diagnosis and treatment initiation. Digital screening tools are available within government programmes. Minimally invasive digital haemoglobinometers are simple to use and accurate, allowing frontline health workers to reach last-mile patients. Without reliable testing at the village level, anaemia will continue to go undiagnosed. However, for it to be truly effective, states must strengthen systems. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar need to standardise procurement, train ASHAs and ANMs in device use and integrate results into digital dashboards that trigger follow-up and referral.

In terms of treatment, oral iron remains the default, but side-effects and poor adherence mean many women never recover. Intravenous iron, especially ferric carboxymaltose, has proven to be safe, fast and effective. Bihar is preparing to expand FCM access beyond medical colleges to community health centres. This must be done carefully, with training,

infrastructure and pharmacovigilance, but urgently. Bringing FCM closer to where women live will save lives and reduce complications.

Perhaps the most crucial element is ensuring communities — women and their families — trust and recognise the value of these solutions. Too many families dismiss fatigue, pallor or weakness as "normal" in pregnancy. Too many women quietly stop taking tablets. Normalising anaemia testing and treatment requires shifting community norms. Making haemoglobin checks at par with blood pressure or blood sugar, ensuring ASHA workers, equipped with simple counselling tools, draw men and mothers-in-law into conversations about anaemia reduction and women sharing recovery stories in self-help groups are all important ways to build trust. When communities demand services, anaemia reduction accelerates.

None of this is beyond reach. The policies exist, the science is clear and pilot initiatives are underway. At a recent national conclave on maternal anaemia convened by AIIMS Patna, experts, officials and development partners unanimously agreed that we cannot continue with business as usual. India already has robust platforms like Poshan Abhiyaan and Anaemia Mukt Bharat, with their ambitious 6x6x6 strategy. But success depends on institutions and the government collaborating closely to embed new innovations, close gaps in testing and engage communities more directly.

Dr C.M. Singh is the director of the Ram Mohan Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences,

India exercises restraint post-Monday's blast

WHILE the complete and exact details of Monday's car explosion near Red Fort in Delhi will come later, a disturbing pattern is perceptible: the radicalisation of highly educated Muslim professionals, in this instance doctors. It is true that earlier too some educated professionals joined jihadist organisations, but the recent blast, that killed nine people and injured 20, stands out for the involvement of doctors only. Umar Un Nabi, who was driving the car, was reportedly a member of the "doctor module", who managed to escape during raids by J&K police in Faridabad. It is suspected that he panicked after the cover of his module was blown and the main accused in the Faridabad module, Muzammil Ahmad Ganaie, was arrested. He kept moving continuously in the car with explosives. The usual suspect is Pakistan, but initial investigation reportedly indicates that the handlers of the Faridabad module were based in Türkiye and Nangarhar in Afghanistan, from where they were communicating with Umar and other module members. This looks like another dimension to the jihadist terror in India, but this may not be completely surprising. The Turkish government, especially under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is actively providing logistical, diplomatic, and financial support to various terror groups worldwide, a news report in May said.

Türkiye's National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) and state-backed NGOs are accused of systematically supporting terror groups, including Jamaat-e-Islami, Hizbul Mujahideen, and Popular Front of India (PFI). They have been specially targeting youth in Kashmir and Kerala. This is a distinct possibility because Türkiye has never concealed its antipathy towards India. President Erdoğan is keen to present himself as the champion of Muslims all over the world (but not in, say, Sudan, where Muslims are dying in large numbers, and the killers are also Muslims). If Ankara's role in the Red Fort bombing becomes clear, New Delhi must react accordingly. It may have to rethink its attitude, which at present smacks of appeasement, towards Ankara. The point to be emphasized here is that India should adopt a tough posture vis-à-vis Türkiye; for too long we have suffered its misdeeds. Even if we find no evidence of its involvement in the recent blast, we must recognise the Armenian Genocide. In April 1915, Ottoman Turkey began the mass murder of Armenians, a Christian minority; it was a long, meticulously planned operation that aimed to annihilate an entire people. Approximately 34 countries, including the United States and Russia, recognise the Armenian Genocide; sadly and shockingly, India is not among them.

Perhaps, it is the suspicion of Turkish involvement that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and other senior government functionaries have not blamed Pakistan for the outrage. This was despite the loose talk Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif indulged in, accusing New Delhi of involvement in the recent suicide bombing in Islamabad. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the suicide blast that killed 12 people. Sharif nonetheless blames India. Such an abrasive reaction may have stemmed from anxiety in Pakistan. At the cessation of recent hostilities, Modi had made it clear that any terrorist incident would be seen as an act of war by India. Political and military authorities in Pakistan, instead of making bellicose statements, must focus on restraining the terrorists who try to destabilise India.

MEDLEY



LETTERS

Measures to go about 'Ease of doing business'

THIS refers to "Enhance ease of doing business to check the flight of businesses" (Nov 12). For attracting foreign businesses and retaining domestic ones, India must urgently reform its regulatory and trade frameworks. First, streamline manufacturing approvals and reduce compliance burdens such as licensing permits; tax filings and audits; and inspection and documentation to make domestic production more competitive. Second, rationalise tariffs and import restrictions, especially on critical inputs like GM corn for ethanol, aligning policy with scientific consensus and climate goals. Third, insulate trade policy from sectoral and ideological lobbies that distort market access and innovation--domestic soybean industry, ethanol producers, etc. Fourth, improve infrastructure and logistics to match global standards, enabling smoother export and supply chain operations. Fifth, ensure trade agreements like the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), are matched by domestic readiness, preventing unintended business migration to more agile economies like the UAE. Finally, foster predictable, transparent governance that builds investor confidence. The goal must be to make India not just a viable market—but a preferred manufacturing and innovation hub.

Dr O Prasad Rao, Hyderabad

Check flight of businesses

THIS refers to your editorial 'Enhance ease of doing business to check the flight of businesses' (Nov 12). Once considered the most favourable global destinations for ease of doing business are now turning out to be not so good owing to numerous factors – ranging from inimical political climate and one-sided economic considerations by the host. Preferences for international trade are governed by long term policies promoted by governments in power – not focussing on economic advantages alone, but in a policy of give and take, thus having the capacity to substantially absorb the product, domestically. The decisions in terms of policy framework must be handled by erudite economists and insulating international trade lobbies from acting as proxies. India is doing the right thing, despite pressure from the US on certain GM agricultural products being imported into the country, by not opening the floodgates to upset the domestic agricultural interest.

K R Parvathy, Mysuru

The 'spirit of 1991' appears passé

THIS is further to your article 'From warmth to wounds: The erosion of mutual respect in Indian politics' (THI Nov 12). The erosion of mutual respect in politics is a fact that none can deny. Glory days, values and dignity are all from a distant past that today only evoke pleasant memories. We may never revive the 'spirit of 1991'. People valued their leaders, believed in peaceful coexistence and respected the others' point of view. Perhaps that was the age of innocence. With new values, people merely follow their leaders. One should make best out of what we have.

Dr J Bhagyalakshmi, Madanapalle

Allow Karthika vana bhojanalu free of cost

WE fervently urge the Andhra Pradesh government to accord consent and allow people across the state to utilise parks and other recreational green environs, including Bhavani Island, for gatherings, family get-togethers, traditional feasts and vana bhojanalu, free of cost in this lunar month (Karthika masam), revered as the most auspicious time to invoke divine blessings.

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BENGALURU ONLINE

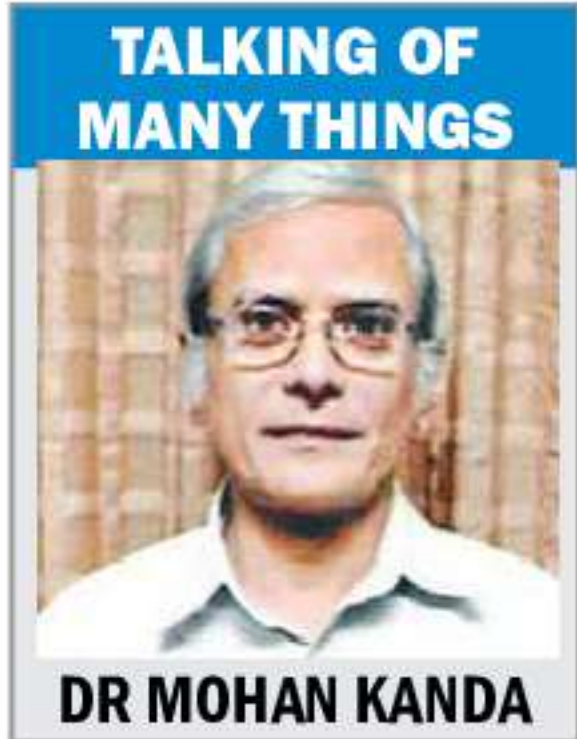
DSK: What's wrong if Siddaramaiah continues as CM?

BENGALURU: Asserting that he and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah are working together unitedly, Karnataka Deputy CM D K Shivakumar on Wednesday, asked: "What's wrong if the incumbent continues as the CM?" Shivakumar, who is also the Congress state unit president, was responding to Minister B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan's recent statement that Shivakumar can become the Chief Minister of the state, after Siddaramaiah completes his five-year term in 2028. There have been talks about the "chief minister change" in the state when the Congress government reaches the halfway mark of its five-year term in November, which is being referred to by some as the "November revolution". "Very happy. What's wrong? The Chief Minister is there. Let him be. We are not sad. We are working together. We are all united and we continue to be united," Shivakumar told reporters in response to a question on Khan's statement. The "chief minister change" talk is based on reported "power-sharing" agreement involving Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar.

Responding to a question on Siddaramaiah's proposed visit to New Delhi on November 15, Shivakumar said he, too, will be visiting the national capital to participate in a programme of Rajya Sabha MP and senior advocate Kapil Sibal. "I'm also going. Kapil Sibal is my lawyer. He has represented me at courts both here and Delhi. He has called me and I'm also going," he added.

Read more at <https://epaper.thehansindia.com>

Sustaining planet's natural ecosystems



TALKING OF MANY THINGS

UNBRIDLED industrialisation, in utter disregard to its impact on the atmosphere of the greenhouse gases being emitted from industrial units, has resulted in the formation of what is called the 'Ozone Hole' in the stratosphere, paving the way for harmful ultraviolet radiation from the sun to reach the Earth's surface, causing health problems and damaging ecosystems. Similarly, use of groundwater, far in excess of the requirement continues unabated, unmindful of the requirements of future generations. So much so that Dr M S Swaminathan, distinguished agriculture scientist, expressed alarm over the exploitation of what he called 'water sanctuaries', meant for preservation for posterity.

Likewise, the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides in agriculture is contaminating, not only the soil, but also groundwater. Alternative practices, more preferable from the point of view of environmental conservation, such as organic

farmers, are yet to catch up on a large enough scale. While industry and agriculture, have, no doubt, to carry on, requisite measures, for undoing and preventing the damage to natural resources, such as the atmosphere, land and groundwater, need also to be taken up purposefully so that the degradation caused can be neutralised and prevented to the extent possible.

Alarmed by the prospect of doomsday for Earth, arriving sooner than expected, many farsighted and public spirited individuals and organisations have sprung into action, to defend and protect it from the consequences of the mindless actions of human beings.

There are, for example, many 'Save the Earth' movements, which include organized groups working at the global level, such as 'Greenpeace', 'Earth Justice', 'Save Soil Movement', 'Earth Day' and 'Earth Hour', dedicated to raising levels of awareness about the importance of, and promoting effort aimed at, environmental protection.

So far as India is concerned, there is the 'Chipko Movement', which began in India in the 1970s, where villagers, particularly women, hug trees to prevent them from being cut down, and the 'Bishnoi Movement', an environmental conservation initiative, founded by



Concern about the future of planet Earth, and what alternative plans, if any, can be made to extend its longevity, have been subjects of discussion for quite some time now. Apart from measures aimed at conserving the integrity of the natural resources, such as land, water, and atmosphere, the possibility of mankind colonising planets in outer space has also been receiving serious attention

Guru Jambheshwar, which began in Rajasthan in the 15th century. Several individual and community actions are also recommended, by environmental activists and experts in the field, which focus on cutting down on waste, by reusing and recycling materials like paper, plastic, and glass, using less water and saving energy by making simple changes at home, such as using long-lasting light bulbs.

Sensible and eco-friendly steps, such as eating more plant-based meals and reducing food waste can significantly lower environmental impact, opting for walking, biking, or public transport, instead of driving, or considering switching to an electric vehicle also are suggested in

writer Carl Sagan, deals with several issues relevant in that context. Tracing the origin of its title to a famous image of the planet Earth taken by the explorer spacecraft, 'Voyager 1', the book captures graphically the insignificance of the planet, describing it as a tiny point of light, 'a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam'. It beseeches mankind to recognise the fact that the planet is the only home it has and its insignificant place in the cosmos makes it that much more important for the nations and the people of the world work towards greater cooperation and mutual respect, eschewing conflict and pride. It also encourages the human race to look for viable and sustainable alternatives for rehabilitating itself elsewhere in outer space. Going further, it exhorts mankind to develop new technologies for interstellar travel with a view, eventually, to establishing colonies in other worlds to ensure the survival of the species.

What is being recommended is certainly not total inaction, for fear of damaging the integrity of the environment and degrading the natural resource base of the planet. Such an attitude would be comparable to the 'Zeno' paradox, which, if taken in the literal sense, can mean that no motion is possible at all, quite contrary to day-to-day practical experience. The idea is that effort at registering progress must continue, but with an eye on its sustainability, from the

point of view of natural resource management. The idea is not to present a gloomy picture, of a tragic end facing planet earth in the near future. If this piece serves as a timely warning to stakeholders such as political leaders, senior administrators, leaders of the scientific community, captains of industry, and successful businessmen, dedicated activists interested in protecting the planet and well-meaning non-government organisations, it will more than have served the intended purpose.

And, on an optimistic note, one must derive consolation, if not confidence, from the fact that, from each of these categories, there are enough examples across countries to leave us with a feeling of assurance about the future.

Having said all that, it can hardly be gainsaid that the privileged status which the planet enjoys in the cosmic scheme of things needs to be very carefully preserved.

By way of an example, I would like to refer to the wonderful work being done, in substituting jute for plastic, in the use of bags meant for wrapping divine offerings by temple authorities. The organisation is called Prabhavana, a cooperative society, entirely comprising women members, which I have had the privilege and honour of being associated with, over the last several years.

(The writer was formerly Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)

Whither caste census? Why it was a non-issue in Bihar elections



SUPRIY RANJAN

For decades, Bihar has been described as the laboratory of caste politics. It was here that the language of social justice acquired its sharpest political expression. To study caste and politics in India without visiting Bihar is, as scholars often say, to miss the very grammar of how democracy negotiates hierarchy.

Bihar's politics has for long carried the promise that democracy could turn social subordination into collective power. Hence, when the state government decided to undertake a caste survey, an exercise that enumerated caste and community shares in population and resources, it seemed, for a moment, that the State was about to close a full circle. When the numbers were released, they confirmed what everyone knew: the overwhelming weight of the backward classes, the narrowness of the upper-caste elite, and the persistence of inequality. It felt as if a new round of the Mandal debate might begin.

And yet, nothing of that sort happened. Census has all but vanished from public conversation in this month's Assembly elections. In a state where every talk of governance or opportunity ends up in caste, it is striking that an exercise once expected to unsettle its polity turned

into little more than white noise this election season.

Limits of redistribution: Part of the answer lies in the simple fact that there were no surprises. The broad social arithmetic was already common knowledge. The official numbers confirmed what every party strategist and voter already knew. But the deeper reason lies elsewhere, in the slow transformation of its social structure and political economy. The violent churn of the 1970s through the early 2000s had already overturned the feudal order that once defined caste relations. The village landlord, the servile labourer, the caste-based control of land and labour, all these have largely faded. The new Bihar is not post-caste, but where caste is not in its 20th century avatar. Oppression has become less visibly direct and more structural.

Inequality now resides in new spaces — in access to quality education, in networks of social capital, and in the possession of marketable skills. Upper and middle-caste households, through cumulative advantages of education, language, coaching and networks, have managed to occupy the expanding ranks of middle-class professions and bureaucracy. The lower castes and Dalits, even when politically assertive, are disproportionately consigned to low-return circuits of migration and informal work. In short, the transition from an agrarian to a migrant and market economy has shifted the axes of inequality: from land and patronage to labour, skills and opportunity. The proposition for an OBC reservations for lower castes in jobs and educational opportunities was done to redress this structural gap. However, as the expanse of public

CASTE CALCULUS IN BIHAR		
Caste and community-wise breakup of candidates		
2025	NDA	MBG
Kurmi	14	7
Koeri	23	23
Yadav	19	67
Vaisya (Bania)	27	13
Rajpoot	37	14
Bhumihar	32	15
Brahman	14	10
Kayastha	2	1
EBCs	29	31
SCs	39	41
STs	2	2
Muslim	5	30
Total	243	254

In theory, the census provides a moral and political basis for democratising representation, for widening the base of participation by aligning state power with the real social composition of Bihar. But the current political economy allows little room for such correction. Representation is mediated not by demographic strength but by financial and organisational capacity

formed the moral meaning of caste itself. Caste no longer operates as a vocabulary of injustice; it now functions as an identity of belonging. The old slogans of 'dignity, assertion, and nyay' have been replaced by the softer language of representation and recognition. The Mandal moment once promised to democratise power. Its residue today is a mosaic of smaller caste outfits, each speaking in the name of its fragment, each wanting its slice of the pie. Bihar is a living example of what scholars like Balmurli Natrajan have called the "culturalisation of caste"—the conversion of caste from a structure of inequality into a badge of cultural identity. This shift has robbed caste of its earlier political potency. Census, in that sense, has become an act of recognition without redistribution.

Structural closure: Even on the recognition side, i.e. an increase in the number of candidate selection from EBC castes (which at present seems most skewed) is hard to come for given the incessantly fragmented nature of the category. Political structure too resists change.

The costs of political entry have risen steeply, and the routes to political power are now heavily mediated. A self-contained circuit where political capital is constantly recycled through administrative and economic retinues most of politics in Bihar.

In theory, the census provides a moral and political basis for democratising representation, for widening the base of participation by aligning state power with the real social composition of Bihar. But the current political economy allows little room for such correction. Representation is mediated not by demographic strength but by financial and organisational capacity.

Counting without consequence: In the end, the story of the caste census in Bihar is not one of neglect, but of absorption. It has been normalised into the everyday arithmetic of politics. Caste has not disappeared; it has become routine. Elections in Bihar still run on caste calculations, but without the moral urgency that once animated them.

The irony is telling: the state that first turned caste into a weapon of transformation now treats it as a matter of managerial convenience. Census was supposed to provoke a reckoning; instead, it has produced indifference. Until enumeration is linked to believable policy programmes and moral imagination, the caste census will remain what it is today, a mirror of Bihar's social structure, not a map for its transformation.

(The writer is an Assistant Professor at GITAM University, Hyderabad and associated with the research organisation People's Pulse)

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Ramnath Goenka

DIRECT CASH TRANSFER SCHEMES FOR WOMEN ARE A LIBERATING FORCE

THE disbursal of ₹10,000 as the first instalment of a ₹2-lakh bonanza announced for women by the Nitish Kumar-led Bihar government has raised eyebrows. Though the timing of the announcement brought up rightful questions about vote-bank politics, Bihar is not the first state to announce direct money transfers for women before an election. All major parties have resorted to similar schemes in the name of facilitating self-employment. In neighbouring Jharkhand, the JMM-Congress alliance introduced a similar unconditional scheme to transfer ₹2,500 a month just before the assembly election last year. Ditto for Maharashtra, where the BJP-led alliance timed the announcement of the ₹1,500-a-month Ma-jhi Ladki Bahin Yojana with the 2024 state polls.

Such schemes have indeed caught a political tailwind in recent years. A new report by PRS Legislative Research shows that as many as 12 states will collectively spend a whopping ₹1.68 lakh crore on unconditional cash transfers to women in 2025-26—up from just two states implementing such programmes three years ago. The Supreme Court has expressed concerns over the timing of such schemes.

It's also true that these schemes put enormous pressure on the state coffers. The PRS report points out that of the dozen states with such transfer schemes, six have projected revenue deficits this financial year. There is no doubt these schemes must be run prudently and be delinked from elections. However, in the long run, unconditional cash transfers have a huge liberating impact on women, who continue to face patriarchy and oppression. The International Labour Organization has highlighted that women worldwide continue to earn a fifth less than men on average for the same jobs—all while performing three-quarters of unpaid care work, too. Many studies have shown cash transfers improve households' nutritional security, enhance empowerment, increase voter turnouts, and reduce dependence on usurious moneylenders. Thus the schemes must be supported one way or another. One way to take off the political edge that devolves on parties announcing such schemes could be for them to morph into a universal basic income aimed at half the population in all states. For that, new fiscal calculations will surely have to be drawn up.

VOTE ON CLIMATE ACTION BEST WAY TO CLEAR SMOG

FOR the first time in India, hundreds of citizens gathered on Sunday to protest the national capital's dangerously polluted air. It followed weeks when the lung-clogging particulate matter hovering over Delhi reached levels 20-30 times higher than the World Health Organization's safe limit. The smog thickened after the protest. On Tuesday, it was declared 'severe'—the most alarming of the six categories recognised by the Central Pollution Control Board. The next day, Delhi and three nearby towns were the only four among 249 urban centres where every monitor continued to flash red. Under the emergency measures in place since 2020, schools have switched to hybrid classes, vehicle use has been restricted, and non-essential construction suspended.

A decade ago, the horizon had looked brighter. India had negotiated the hard-wrought Paris Agreement to cap emissions, announced the Solar Alliance, and set ambitious clean-energy targets. Yet, action since then has not matched the ambition. This year, India's total renewable capacity touched 220.1 gigawatts—commendable progress in drawing half its power from non-fossil sources. But consider this: China added 277 GW of solar capacity in 2024 alone. On the other side of the planet, delegates at COP30 in Brazil's Belém were reminded of the scale of the crisis when torrential rains flooded the very venue of the climate summit.

Meanwhile, in Delhi, the state pollution control committee's X handle retweeted recent Air Quality Index readings when the city was merely 'very poor'—on a scale artificially capped at 500, rendering the numbers globally incomparable. It is impossible to glimpse a clearer future through the opacity of an official machinery that seems to have given up, content to pull levers of a clearly inadequate control system.

On Sunday, it was heartening to see that most of the protestors were young—as if pointing an accusatory finger at the indifference of older generations who have clouded their future. Weighing votes by climate action may be the most effective way to clear the smog of incompetence. If it draws more young voters to the booth, the politics of some of the world's most polluted cities could finally begin to change.

QUICK TAKE

AN ETHICAL TEST

IT'S an Andrew moment for Trump. Messages released by Democratic lawmakers on Wednesday show that the US president not only knew convicted child trafficker Jeffrey Epstein well, but that he had spent considerable time with one of his victims too. For Andrew, it took years for the British establishment to move from revelation to the action of stripping him of public roles. Now, this will be the biggest litmus test facing the US Congress, which is set to reopen soon. If the revelations are extended, there are likely to be tolls on the other side of the aisle too. It will put to rest years of speculation and give standup comedians months of talking points. But first, it will be a test of political ethics.

FOR nearly a decade and a half, India's cities have felt secure—calm streets, crowded metros, and a quiet faith in the invisible shield of our intelligence and police networks. The explosion outside Red Fort metro station in New Delhi will shake that sense of safety. Whether it was an intended terror act or an accidental detonation, the intent behind it was unmistakable—to harm Indians, and thereby, India's confidence.

The incident must not be viewed merely as an isolated tragedy, but as a symptom of a deeper malaise. It signals the quiet resurgence of ideological extremism in India's urban underbelly—a phenomenon that has long simmered beneath the surface, particularly in parts of Jammu and Kashmir, but has now seeped into the social fabric of several metropolitan centres. No longer limited to remote valleys or border districts, it is travelling through cities, universities, prayer groups, and online echo chambers.

The unchecked spread of extremist ideology is today the most dangerous multiplier of terrorism. While our security forces and intelligence agencies have done exemplary work in shrinking the number of active terrorists in J&K and in curbing infiltration from across the Line of Control, radicalism has not been subdued. It doesn't manifest daily, yet it builds the invisible scaffolding on which terror networks stand—those of sympathisers, financiers, propagandists and facilitators who blur the line between faith and fanaticism.

The difficulty is conceptual as much as operational. Around the world, nations have struggled to draw the line between religiosity and radicalism. Deradicalisation programmes, from Europe to South-east Asia, show uneven results because the process requires theological engagement, psychological counselling, and community partnership. India faces this challenge acutely because its diversity makes any single approach inadequate.

Over the past 15 years, India's intelligence and police services have kept terror geographically confined to J&K. Their record in preventing large-scale attacks in urban India is outstanding. Yet, sleeper cells have quietly rebuilt themselves in the shadows—from Bengaluru and Hyderabad to Lucknow and Delhi. These are not the crude, cell-phone-wielding modules of the past; they are educated, white-collared, networked, ideologically-wired, and often hidden behind respectable professional identities. That a group of doctors could turn radical despite their education in India's premier institutions reveals the scale and subtlety of the challenge.

The spread of extremist ideology through urban echo chambers doesn't need instigation from across the border. Inclusion, dialogue and community engagement are as important as curbing infiltration

BEYOND THE BLAST: THE URBAN FACE OF EXTREMISM



LT GEN SYED ATA HAINAIN (RETD)

Former Commander, Srinagar-based 15 Corps; Chancellor, Central University of Kashmir

SOURAV ROY

The radicalisation of professionals is not new. In the Islamic State's early years, engineers, medics and graduates from Europe and West Asia joined its ranks in what analysts called 'nihilistic seduction'—a search for purpose through destruction. India was largely spared that wave; only a few Indians travelled to Syria or Iraq, reaffirming our social cohesion. But that belief is shaken when a qualified Delhi doctor, reportedly with extremist leanings, drives into a crowded road junction with explosives. Even if intent is unclear, the pattern is deeply unsettling.

The challenge lies not only in ideology but in ecosystems. Terrorism endures through networks of finance, narcotics, media and over-ground workers. India has curbed many of these—the National Investigation Agency's crackdown on funding and crossborder flows has choked resources. Yet, ideological networks of preachers and influencers re-

main a grey zone, operating within the thin legality of religious expression and using sermons and social media to quietly shape vulnerable minds.

Some of these networks have found new soil in India's cities, where anonymity and mobility allow radical ideas to thrive unnoticed. This is where the danger multiplies. Urban radicalisation does not require direct instruction from across the border; it grows locally, often through grievance narratives amplified online. The convergence of faith-based grievance, political polarisation, and online propaganda makes deradicalisation extraordinarily complex.

We must also acknowledge the changing demographic of extremist sympathisers. They are younger, better educated, and more connected to global currents of resentment. In Kashmir, years of exposure to both conflict and counter-insurgency have hardened perspectives. Yet, in cities outside the valley, radicalisation stems

WHEN THE SKY RAINS FIRE

IN *Sky Alert! What Happens When Satellites Fail* (2013), Les Johnson had written about satellites being brought down by orbital debris, solar storms and war. In his 2021 novel *Out of Sight*, Martin Granger wrote about rogue orbital junk colliding with geosynchronous satellites—such as the GPS network that orbits at about 20,000 km—and sending them crashing down to Earth. Both the nonfiction and fictional prognoses were brutal: in the collision chain reaction, GPS would be disabled, resource and environmental monitoring lost, flights would crash, spysats and military recon would die, and satellite telescopes blinded.

The domain of science fiction and somewhat outré intellectual maundering a quarter-century ago, no longer is a cascading satellite-collision event considered improbable. In the third week of October, a piece of smoking space junk landed in the desert on an access road to a mine in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, and reignited slow-burn concerns that the Kessler Syndrome, which all space scientists fear, had become not an 'if', but a 'when'.

It is a near-mantra in catastrophology that there is a wait period of roughly half-a-century before theory becomes fact. Nasa scientists Donald Kessler and Burton Cour-Palais proposed the Kessler Syndrome theory in 1978: that overcrowding in low Earth orbit—800-2,000 km in space, where most satellites are parked—could start a domino effect of collisions with cataclysmic impacts. In a sense, it is time for the theory to show its teeth. And it has.

As of 2022, there were an estimated 15,100 metric tonnes of space debris shooting round Earth—54,000 pieces 10 cm in length and longer (about 9,300 of them with active payloads), 1.2 million 1-10 cm in size, and more than 140 million from 1 mm to 1 cm. The ones less than a centimetre were considered technically impossible to track—until the Pilbara piece crashed. It was 150 cm in diameter, and should have been visible, but wasn't.

The space archaeologist Alice Gorman, author of the 2019 book *Dr Space Junk vs the Universe* said, "There was no indication it was going to re-enter right now so people weren't expecting it—when I went to look for re-entry predictions I couldn't find anything, which is an indication of the suddenness of it."

According to the US Aerospace Cor-

poration, a space object catalogue or satellite catalogue is maintained by Joint Combined Space Operations Center (CSpOC) at Vandenberg Air Force Base, part of the US Strategic Command. One of CSpOC's missions is to detect, track, and identify all objects in Earth orbit in addition to monitoring the International Space Station and other Nasa satellites for collisions.

“US military is currently tracking about 20,000 objects and has cataloged more than 40,000 objects over the years”. This means that the US military is currently tracking 0.014 percent of space debris, most but hardly all too tiny to be tracked. It's like playing catch while blindfolded. The European Space Agency's Space Environment Report 2025 says that "intact satellites or rocket bodies are now re-entering the Earth atmosphere on average more than three times a day".

Tipping Points of Space Debris in Low Earth Orbit, a paper published in the *International Journal of the Commons* in January 2024, says, "Over the past decade, the annual number of recorded re-entries has dramatically increased, averaging around 300 yearly re-entries from 2012 to 2019 and then growing to nearly 2000 yearly re-entries in 2021 to 2023."

Gorman speculated that the Pilbara spacejunk could be the end-stage from a Chinese Jielong-3 rocket launched in late September. A paper presented at the International Astronautical Congress in Sydney in early October states that 88 percent of "the 50 most concerning pieces of space junk in low Earth orbit" were rocket bodies. But while the origin of the debris remains speculation—an investigation by the Australian Space Agency could take months—the Chinese National Space Agency reached out to Nasa "over a manoeuvre to prevent a possible collision between satellites".

'Near-space' has, according to the Space Debris User Portal, about 15,860 satellites, 12,900 of them functioning as of October 21. At the current rate of rocket launches—258 in 2024 (the maximum in any year since the first launch in 1957), with the US leading with 145 launches—the end of this decade could see about 70,000 active satellites at altitudes below 2,000 km.

"If space debris is not stabilised in the relative near-term," says the *IJC* paper, "any deferred efforts to clean LEO or reduce active missions will only grant a few additional decades."

Imagine the sky afire with raining debris.

(Views are personal)
(kajalbasu@gmail.com)

For a long time, scientists such as Nasa's Donald Kessler have feared a cataclysmic chain reaction caused by overcrowding of space debris in Earth's orbit. The recent crash of smoking satellite junk in Western Australia might just be an early warning of what's to come

Also located at Vandenberg Air Force Base is the US Air Force's 18th Space Control Squadron, which operates the Space Surveillance Network, which oversees radar and optical sensors at various sites around the world. These sensors observe and track objects that are larger than a softball in low Earth orbit (LEO) and basketball-sized objects or larger, in higher, geosynchronous orbits. The sensors can determine which orbit the objects are in, and that information is used to predict close approaches, reentries and the probability of a collision.

In the event, CSpOC missed the Pilbara spacejunk altogether, raising questions about not only the efficacy of its panoptical claims but also about whether it is possible to track space debris individually in a sky full of them like confetti. The Aerospace Corporation says that the

less from personal experience of conflict and more from digital proximity—the consumption of global Islamist content that repackages victimhood as virtue.

In this context, India's success in operational counter-terrorism—the neutralisation of thousands of terrorists, the containment of infiltration, the establishment of a robust grid—cannot automatically translate into success against radicalism. Bullets and barricades cannot penetrate ideas. This calls for a dual approach: technology to monitor and pre-empt, and community engagement to heal and persuade. The role of the moderate and nationalist clergy is invaluable in this.

The experience of nations such as Singapore offers useful lessons. There, a network of moderate clerics and community leaders has been mobilised to interpret Islamic teachings within a modern, plural framework, providing credible alternatives to extremist narratives. India, with its vast and diverse Muslim population, must craft its own model—one that draws upon the wisdom of friendly and patriotic religious scholars who can bridge the divide between faith and state. Such engagement cannot be cosmetic; it must be structured, resourced and sustained.

A worrying trend is the possible return of suicide terrorism to India's discourse. While '*Jedayeen*' gun attacks have occurred in J&K since the 1990s, true suicide bombings—where the body becomes the weapon—have been rare and alien to India's psyche. Pakistan's tribal belt and Afghanistan normalised them, but if the Red Fort blast involved self-sacrifice, it marks a psychological shift. Cultivated through ideological grooming that glorifies death, such acts demand introspection. Technology can detect explosives, but only social resilience and understanding—through research, digital literacy and inclusive dialogue—can truly immunise minds against extremism. The lesson is simple but urgent; terror feeds on exclusion. The answer to its appeal lies in inclusion, dialogue, and opportunity. No community should feel targeted; no faith should feel besieged. India's pluralism is its ultimate shield.

Urban India today stands at an inflection point. The security grid that has protected it for fifteen years will need augmentation with psychological insight and social intelligence. Technology can disrupt a plot, but only empathy can prevent one. As Delhi recovers from its night of fear, it must remind the nation that vigilance is not the task of the government alone—it is the collective duty of society.

(Views are personal)
(atahasnain@gmail.com)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Doc links

Ref: *Pulwama doctor in the middle of the 'car bomb'* (Nov 12). It was disheartening to read about the involvement of doctors in the tragedy. People may be quick to point fingers at a community, but it need not be so. The right intent must be investigated and any unverified link to religion should be avoided.

Amrose, Thiruvananthapuram

White-collar criminals

Ref: *Conspirators won't be spared: PM* (Nov 12). The blast exposes not only a security failure but also the silent hand of white-collar terror—those who finance, plan, and justify violence from behind corporate or political desks. While the frontline perpetrators face the law, the elite enablers remain untouched. True justice demands tracing this invisible network.

Eldho Thankachan, Ernakulam

Democratic confidence

Ref: *ECI must address trust deficit* (Nov 12). The Election Commission's credibility is central to India's democracy, and even a hint of bias can weaken public faith. Instead of dismissing allegations, the ECI should proactively share verified data and clarify anomalies. Transparency, timely communication, and visible accountability alone can restore confidence.

Abbarna Barathi, Chennai

Premature calls

Ref: *#RIPPrematureObits* (Nov 12). The insensitive declaration of VIP deaths before time is mischievous. The media—both social and conventional—is a race to break news, sometimes even before an event's occurrence. Sheer callousness is responsible for these attempts to garner attention.

Rajaroo Kumar, Bengaluru

UN funding

Ref: *Next in Trump's crosshairs* (Nov 12). While the US president can have a direct bearing on American foreign policy and delay payments, any significant change to the US's involvement in UN funding requires congressional approval through legislation. Such a move requires significant bipartisan support, which is not guaranteed.

N Rama Rao, Chennai

Helping claimants

Ref: *For due diligence on PF dues* (Nov 12). Approving settlements of unclaimed assets requires an engrained humanitarian approach. The present staff strength in Indian institutions is inadequate, added with rare monitoring and follow-ups. Simple manual procedures should be followed.

V R Ganesan, Chennai

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Chairman of the Board: **Manoj Kumar Sonthalia** Editor: **Santwana Bhattacharya**

Deputy Resident Editor (Andhra Pradesh) **BSM Malleswara Rao** * Published by **N.Gopalan** on behalf of Express Publications (Madurai) Private Limited, at 3rd Floor, D.No. 45-40-44/1, Abid Nagar, Akkayapalem, Visakhapatnam - 530 016 and printed by him at Sakshi Press, Survey No.86/10, Madhurawada Village, MCY Limits, Visakhapatnam - 530 041
Visakhapatnam: Vol. 41, No. 267. RNI Reg. No. 44901/86. Phone: 0891-2552910, Fax: 0891-2530303. *Responsible to decide the matter under the PRP Act. **Copyright:** Express Publications (Madurai) Private Limited. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any manner, electronic or otherwise, in whole or in part, without prior written permission is prohibited.

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

A blot on India

Disrespect for diversity a worrying trend

UNITY in diversity — is that a lived reality in India or just a mirage? The Supreme Court has expressed concern over Indian citizens being targeted by their compatriots because of cultural and racial differences. Two students from Kerala were allegedly assaulted by local residents and the police in New Delhi on September 24; accused of theft, they were also forced to speak Hindi and ridiculed for wearing a *lungi/mundu* — a traditional attire of their state. Sadly, the incident has not triggered outrage across the country, in stark contrast to the furore witnessed whenever Indians are subjected to racial abuse and violence in the West.

The court mentioned this disturbing episode while hearing a petition that was filed a decade ago following a series of attacks on people from the Northeast in the national capital. A glaring case was that of Nido Tania, a student from Arunachal Pradesh — he had died in 2014 after a fight with shopkeepers who had mocked his hairstyle. On the court's directions, the Centre had formed a monitoring committee to deal with cases of hate crime and racial discrimination as well as violence. However, the petitioner has claimed that the panel, which is mandated to hold meetings on a quarterly basis, has met only 14 times in nine years. This sums up the government's half-hearted approach towards curbing the menace and promoting pluralism.

Earlier this year, Kashmiri students and traders faced threats in several parts of the country after the Pahalgam terror attack. Treating fellow Indians like outsiders or traitors on one pretext or another is a trend that bodes ill for our democracy and secular fabric. "We are one country," the apex court has rightly said. This simple yet profound truth should be imbibed by every Indian, rising above all kinds of differences. A nation that considers *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family) as its guiding principle should first ensure that all Indians live together in peace and harmony.

HP's joblessness

It reflects fault lines of the state's economy

HIMACHAL Pradesh, often praised for its high literacy and human development indices, now faces a grim paradox — one in every three young persons is unemployed. The latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) puts the youth unemployment rate (ages 15–29) at a staggering 33.9 per cent, up from 29.6 per cent in the April–June 2025 quarter. In contrast, Punjab's rate eased to 18.9 per cent, Haryana's dipped slightly to 15.4 per cent, while the all-India average stood at 14.8 per cent.

The hill state's joblessness is not new, but its scale has become alarming. Behind the bleak figures lie structural imbalances: a limited industrial base, seasonal tourism and a disproportionate dependence on agriculture and government employment. The state's educated youth, many of them degree-holders, shun low-paying private sector work and await elusive government vacancies. As a result, thousands of qualified applicants compete for a handful of posts, while others migrate in search of work. The gender gap is equally stark. Unemployment among educated women remains far higher than among men, reflecting both social norms and the lack of suitable job opportunities. In rural areas too, mechanisation and shrinking farm sizes have reduced informal work options, swelling the ranks of the jobless.

The state government cannot afford to remain complacent. It must move beyond recruitment promises and chart a comprehensive employment strategy. Expanding small-scale manufacturing, agri-processing and eco-tourism can help absorb educated youth. Equally crucial is aligning skill training with market demand, promoting start-ups and incentivising private sector participation in hill-friendly industries such as renewable energy and food-processing. Himachal's high literacy is an asset, but without jobs, it risks becoming a source of frustration and migration. The growing army of jobless youth should serve as a warning. Development must not only educate but also employ.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 1925

PM Baldwin's speech

THE growing interest of British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin in India would undoubtedly be welcome if there were evidence that he was taking some pains to study the Indian point of view and the Indian side of questions. There was no evidence of such study in his Aberdeen speech. There is just as little evidence of it in his speech at the Lord Mayor's Show, in which India figured far more prominently than in any previous speech by the present Premier. Of course, there was a good word for the first elected President of the Legislative Assembly. "I read with particular pleasure," Baldwin said, "some observations of the new Speaker upon taking the office to which he has recently succeeded. Hitherto a strong party man, he expounded the duties and responsibilities of his office in language which would not be unworthy of a Peel or an Ullswater." This is high praise, and it is perfectly well deserved. But it required no deep study of Indian questions and no familiarity with the Indian point of view to bestow this praise on Vithalbhai Patel's first speech in the Assembly after his election as President. Patel's speech was commented upon in appreciative, even eulogistic terms, by leading British journals, including *The Times*, and Baldwin need not have read anything more than those comments in order to form or express the opinion he did. In any case, it gave no indication of Baldwin's intentions in regard to India. For such indication we must go to other passages in the speech; and they clearly show that Baldwin has no mind of his own in regard to India, but is merely a gramophone of Lord Reading and Lord Birkenhead.

OPINION

Let's shut the door on poll-time 'tourism'

The law of ordinary residence should not be stretched for the sake of electoral convenience



SY QURAISHI
FORMER CHIEF ELECTION
COMMISSIONER OF INDIA

ALLEGATIONS have surfaced that thousands of voters travelled from Delhi, Haryana and other states to get themselves registered in Bihar and cast their vote. One widely quoted example is that of a Delhi University professor who reportedly got his name deleted from Delhi's electoral roll and got himself enrolled in Bihar to vote. If the allegations are true, this practice is unlawful.

India's electoral law draws a bright, simple line: you may register only where you are 'ordinarily resident'. Owning a house, nostalgia for your native village or a brief pre-poll stay do not qualify. Ordinary residence is about where you actually live your life.

Under Section 19 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, a person is entitled to be enrolled only in the constituency where he or she is 'ordinarily resident'. Sections 17 and 18 add two non-negotiables: you cannot be registered in more than one constituency, and you cannot be registered more than once in the same constituency. Section 20 explains what 'ordinarily resident' means and, crucially, makes it clear that mere ownership of property does not confer residence.

Ordinary residence is a fact-based, continuous living test — where you habitually stay and intend to remain; temporary absences do not break it. Finally, Section 31 makes false statements in connection with inclusion or deletion (for example, suppressing an existing enrol-



RIGHT TO VOTE : Bona fide movers should be separated from tactical shifters. REUTERS

ment elsewhere while filing for a new one) a criminal offence, punishable with imprisonment up to one year, or fine, or both.

Though the statute doesn't mention the 'six-month rule', the test is ordinary residence, assessed on facts — not an arbitrary calendar count. Second, a temporary absence for work or travel does not cost you your vote at your usual address; you don't lose it because you were away for a few weeks, and you don't gain it because you arrived just before polling. The Election Commission of India has always interpreted 'normally resident' as a six-month period. It appears in operational templates used by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) while issuing show-cause notices before deletion.

The ERO Handbook includes a model notice for cases where a person appears to have shifted: "Whereas, it has been reported to the undersigned that you have been found absent from the place of your ordinary residence as given in the electoral roll for the last more than six months. It is, therefore, presumed that you have ceased to be ordinarily resident in the constituency at the above-mentioned address."

You vote where you live. Not where your ancestral house stands locked, not where your party wants you for a week, not where it is convenient on polling day.

If voters were bussed in, enrolled on tenuous claims and plan to re-enrol in Delhi or Haryana, that is not migration; it is misrepresentation. It defeats the very purpose of constituency representation, which is to reflect the will of those who ordinarily reside in that community — making use of its schools, hospitals, water supply, roads and policing — and who bear the consequences of local governance.

The answer is not to make enrolment harder for workers and students. It is to separate bona fide movers from tactical shifters, and to act firmly where deception is clear. There are five practical steps:

- (1) The law already permits inquiry and deletion when a person has ceased to be ordinarily resident — after a notice and a hearing. Booth-level officers (BLOs) should record neighbours' statements, verify occupancy and submit signed reports; EROs must apply their mind to each case.
- (2) Cross-state deduplication: Configure ERO-Net to automatically flag Form 6 applications from persons who were enrolled in another state in the recent past; seek stronger proof (recent rent agreements, employment/education certificates, utility bills) before admitting such cases. This is not a barrier; it is a threshold of credibility where risk is high.
- (3) Use the criminal deterrent — sparingly but visibly. Filing Form 6 with a knowingly false declaration ("I am not enrolled elsewhere") is an offence under Section 31 of the Act. A handful of well-chosen prosecutions will do more than a thousand warnings. The aim is not mass punishment; it's clear consequences for deliberate misrepresentation.
- (4) Audit after the election. Randomly sample "new electors" in sensitive areas three months after polling. If a pattern

emerges — many are no longer present and never were — that is actionable evidence, not rumour. (5) Protect the genuine mover. Keep flexible documentation options (self-attested residence, employer or institution certificates) paired with BLO verification, so that poor, informal and mobile citizens are not excluded.

What of the much-discussed professor? If he truly ceased to be ordinarily resident in Delhi, moved to Bihar and actually lives there, his registration in Bihar would be lawful (and it should be deleted in Delhi). If he did not so move — and merely got it deleted in Delhi, enrolled in Bihar to vote and plans to restore himself as a voter in Delhi — that is a textbook case for inquiry, deletion and prosecution. The point is not to sensationalise one case, but to defend a clear principle through case-by-case, reasoned orders.

I have often said that the electoral roll is the soft underbelly of our democracy. It must be protected by cleaning it, by cleansing the electorate. If the allegations regarding Bihar are true, they should be investigated — with notices, hearings and speaking orders. When misrepresentation is proven, delete and prosecute. Equally, genuine internal migrants must not be harassed; they are citizens, not suspects.

In the end, the rule is simple enough to be summed up in a short sentence: You vote where you live. Not where your ancestral house stands locked, not where your party wants you for a week, not where it is convenient on polling day. Ordinary residence is elastic enough to include students, seasonal workers and the homeless, but it is not a rubber band to be stretched for electoral convenience.

Electoral 'tourism' may make for clever videos, but it makes for bad democracy. Let's shut the door on it — firmly, lawfully and fairly — by insisting on the law's red line and the handbook's due process: notice, hearing, reasoned order. That is how we protect the roll, the vote and the dignity of the voter.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In an election, one needs both hope and audacity. — Francois Hollande

The unsung art of waiting

RAJESH DHAWAN

IT started at the bus stop, under a peeling old sign promising a vehicle that never quite came on time. Waiting, I realise, is an art form rarely celebrated; it has no international day, no monument, no viral hashtag. Yet every morning, millions of us practise it — quietly, without applause — at traffic lights, in queues, and in life itself.

Most mornings, there are at least four other persons with me. We are a mismatched company: the impatient college student tapping her phone screen, the retiree scanning the street with the vigilance of a sentry, and the shop clerk sipping tea from a steel tumbler. I am the observer — an accidental collector of other people's fidgeting.

Eye contact is rare, yet we invent camaraderie through sighs, foot shuffles and the occasional shared glance that says: "We are in this together, against the buses."

I once witnessed a remarkable scene: a man, briefcase in hand, walked ahead to the edge of the road and looked down, as if his glare alone could summon the great chariot of local transport. When nothing arrived but more dust and a stray dog, he shrugged, smiled at me and said, "In this country, punctuality is a rumour." We laughed, and for a second, the waiting felt like a choice. It is curious how humour often arrives before the bus does.

Over time, I began to notice how waiting stretches perception. The minutes seem longer, but the mind grows quieter. The world, stripped of urgency, reveals its forgotten details — a fluttering newspaper page, a child's laughter from across the street, the fragrance of frying *pakoras* emanating from a nearby stall.

There are mornings when the bus is late beyond all logic, and irritation simmers like invisible heat. Waiting teaches humility; it reminds us we are not always the authors of our schedules.

Once, during the monsoon, the bus took so long that the sky changed moods twice — sunshine, drizzle, then a downpour. None of us moved. We shared a collective umbrella of patience, and when the first drops touched our faces, the old man started humming a Kishore Kumar song. It was off-key, but oddly comforting. For those few minutes, time didn't matter; what mattered was the shared shelter of human endurance.

There is a strange, almost uplifting freedom in waiting. With nothing to do and nowhere to go — at least not immediately — life pauses and the world offers its smallest spectacles: a sparrow pecking at a *samosa* crumb, a gust of wind scattering newspapers, a stranger's random smile. The clock's tyranny loosens its grip; we become, however briefly, timeless.

Eventually, the bus always arrives. Sometimes, miraculously early; mostly, fashionably late. The odd fraternity at the bus stop breaks apart as we climb in, each of us suddenly remembering our own destinations. Faces that had silently shared time now turn away to the windows. And yet, somewhere within, a quiet part of me keeps waiting — not for the bus, but for that stillness to return.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Learning religious tolerance

Refer to 'The Guru gave his all for freedom of faith'; the write-up beautifully captures the eternal message of Guru Tegh Bahadur's unparalleled sacrifice for safeguarding human dignity, spiritual liberty and the right to practise one's faith without fear. The author's contextual narration linking the Guru's martyrdom with contemporary issues of intolerance and religious freedom makes the article particularly relevant and thought-provoking. At a time when societies across the globe face growing polarisation, such reflections serve as a moral compass.

PARVINDER SINGH, CHANDIGARH

Prioritising profit over people

Apropos of 'AI and capitalism are killing the middle class'; the middle class, once a symbol of stability, education and aspiration, is now struggling to stay afloat in a system that prioritises profit over people. The unsettling reality is that even white-collar jobs, once considered secure, are now threatened by algorithms. The rapid automation of decision-making, from classrooms to hospitals, is gradually replacing human judgment with data-driven intelligence. Education systems too, risk producing machine-compatible minds instead of creative thinkers. True development lies in using AI to augment human potential, not to replace it — ensuring that innovation walks hand in hand with compassion and conscience.

ASHOK SINGH GULERIA, HAMIRPUR

Changing footprint of terrorism

Refer to 'Terror alert'; it has become clear that terrorism's ever-shifting footprint has become a persistent challenge for India's security agencies. Such incidents threaten public safety and confidence, which are very important for fulfilling India's ambitious goals. With around 3,000 kg of explosives recovered, conspirators were aiming at a much bigger assault. Besides investigating agencies, the common man must also be cautious and report any kind of untoward or suspicious activity to the police. There shouldn't be any politics by the government or the Opposition either, which can do more harm than good.

PL SINGH, BY EMAIL

Swift action by security agencies

Refer to 'Terror alert'; the blast that occurred in a car near the Red Fort Metro Station is being said to be accidental, since the actual target was some crowded place. There may have been an intelligence failure, but the Delhi Police and other security agencies should be commended for acting swiftly and rounding up the suspects within 24 hours. However, the involvement of some doctors in the Delhi car blast case has tarnished the medical profession. Other professions can also come under suspicion if this trend continues.

WG CDR CL SEHGAL (RETD), JALANDHAR

Shoddy investigation

Refer to 'Nithari acquittal'; it is tragic that even after almost two decades, the killer of 16 children has still not faced the gallows. As India's most abhorred serial killer, Surendra Koli, would walk free after spending 19 years in jail, thanks to a shoddy investigation first by the UP police and later by the CBI. And shockingly, it is not the first time when victims' families did not get any closure: Aarushi Talwar case is another example. A key lesson from the acquittal of Pandher and Koli is that prosecutors must point out evidence shortfalls at the investigation stage itself. The laxity on the part of the investigation agencies is inexcusable.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

AIR still entertaining people

Apropos of 'When radio ruled the roost'; All India Radio was like a rooster who used to melodiously wake up the family and remained a companion for the whole day entertaining, educating, updating and most importantly, evoking nationalism. It still does the same but in today's fast pace of life, people have no time. The younger generation is more inclined towards pondering to its own interests. However, besides the evergreen *Vividh Bharti*, news is another part of the public broadcaster which is still very popular amongst people of a certain age group. For those who do not own a transistor, the AIR app in mobile phones is handy. Come what may, the All India Radio with its motto '*Bahujan hitaya, bahujan sukchaya*' (for the happiness of many, for the welfare of many) will keep reverberating in the hearts of millions of Indians as '*Akashvani*'.
RAJESH CHANDER BALLI, JALANDHAR

White-collar terror is now an inescapable reality



LT GEN SK SAINI (RETD)
FORMER VICE CHIEF
OF ARMY STAFF

ON the evening of November 10, New Delhi was rocked by a powerful explosion that tore through a Hyundai i20 near the bustling Red Fort Metro Station. Thirteen people were left dead and over 20 injured—the shattered glass and charred vehicles testified to the brutality of the attack. Initially, the investigation was mired in disbelief—there were no clear signs of traditional explosives: no wires, no shrapnel and no immediate forensic clues.

As investigators sifted through the remains, a chilling pattern emerged: the spectre of terrorism was once again at Delhi's doorstep, after more than a decade.

Security agencies have identified a prime suspect, a doctor from Pulwama (Kashmir), believed to be part of a sophisticated terror module. Reports suggest that Dr Umar Mohammed was working at Government Medical

College, Anantnag, where his services were terminated due to medical negligence. Reportedly, after his expulsion, he joined the Al-Falah School of Medical Science and Research Centre at Faridabad in 2023.

Emerging evidence ties this white-collar terror module to a notorious Pakistan-backed outfit, Jaish-e-Mohammed, underlining how terror groups are increasingly manipulating educated local recruits to distance themselves from direct involvement.

Since the launch of Operation Sindoor, there has been no let-up in the frequency of terror attempts. Experts estimate that there have been several dozen foiled attempts since May, with security forces gaining actionable intelligence from each operation. Most plots have seen the involvement of local modules, sometimes with direct evidence like Pakistani voter IDs and contraband.

Prior to the car blast, law enforcement agencies made two significant recoveries. On November 9, the police seized nearly 3,000 kg of explosives, including 350 kg of ammonium nitrate, from residential buildings tied to a terror network operating from Kashmir. The cache also included assault rifles, pistols, bomb-making timers and remote detonation devices.



OMINOUS: The spectre of terrorism is back at Delhi's doorstep after more than a decade. REUTERS/ANI

On the same day, the Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) arrested three suspects, recovering Beretta pistols and cartridges, and unearthing evidence of an ongoing plot to target major urban centres. Both cases involved professionals—doctors and university employees—providing yet more proof of the trend towards white-collar terrorism.

The size and sophistication of the armaments point to a concerted effort to trigger mass-casualty incidents, highlighting a disturbing level of intent and logistical capability within these cells.

The Delhi incident marks a visible shift in Pakistan's approach to cross-border terrorism against India. No

India can take a cue from France, which launched the 'Prevent to Protect' plan in 2018 to counter radicalisation.

longer reliant solely on foreign fighters or direct infiltration, Pakistan's deep state now seeks to orchestrate attacks by leveraging home-grown, white-collar professionals.

By employing disaffected local operatives—doctors, students, seemingly respectable citizens—these groups find new ways to evade detection, sow confusion during investigations and forestall leads.

It's a deliberate attempt to maintain plausible deniability so that terrorist acts cannot be directly traced back to the Pakistan state or its institutions. Local operatives blur lines of attribution for security agencies, helping Pakistan strategically distance itself from direct

links to militant operations, especially those with cross-border implications. It involves using proxy groups, fragmented networks or deniable assets to carry out operations.

There are many domestic and international factors for this change of strategy. Firstly, Pakistan seeks to avoid the international fallout of a primary role in terror incidents, making diplomatic or military responses more difficult. The Financial Action Task Force had issued a fresh warning to Pakistan in October, stating that its removal from the grey list in 2022 did not grant immunity from global monitoring or scrutiny regarding money laundering and terrorist financing.

More importantly, growing domestic instability due to a resurgence of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, sectarian violence and the conflict with Afghanistan have led to increasing commitment of the Pakistan army in internal security duties and on the Durand Line. It also feels the palpable pressure to rebrand its image globally while retaining strategic leverage in regional conflicts.

India's security establishment faces unprecedented challenges wherein old battle lines—foreign infiltrators versus home-grown insurgents—have blurred, making detection more complex.

Terror modules now merge professional cover with sleeper-cell tactics, staying under the radar. Large-scale recoveries at different locations indicate an intent not just for isolated attacks, but possible widespread operations across India directed by handlers across the border.

The challenge for agencies lies in proactively mapping new recruitment channels, enhancing HUMINT (human intelligence) on radicalisation within professional ranks and using forensic data and digital surveillance to connect logistical dots. Institutions also need to carry out a thorough selection process, including detailed background checks before employment.

Counter-radicalisation efforts within universities and professional institutions need to be considered to address this evolving threat. India can take a cue from France, which launched the 'Prevent to Protect' plan in 2018 to counter radicalisation, focusing on prevention through coordinated government action involving social, educational, security and prison systems. It builds on earlier plans and aims to shield people from radicalisation, widen detection networks, train stakeholders and design disengagement programmes.

Democracy vs control: The tug of war in PU



RONKI RAM
EX-DEAN, ARTS FACULTY, PU,
& EX-PRESIDENT, PUTA

THE long-drawn agitation in PU, which attracted a huge response from political parties, kisan and mazdoor unions, students' organisations and civil society, had begun as a students' protest against an affidavit to be submitted by the students to the effect that they would not take part in any protest in the university premises.

In the meantime, the Central government issued a notification on October 28 overhauling the 79-year-old democratically elected representative governing structure of Panjab University (PU), known as the Senate (supreme legislative) and the Syndicate (executive body). However, the long-awaited but complicated issue of Senate reforms, which goes back to the tenure of Vice-Chancellor Prof MM Puri, remains inconclusive.

Since then, though the reform issue had become dormant for a long time, it picked up momentum during the turbulent tenure of the vice-chancellorship of Prof Arun K Grover, who preferred to conduct the proceedings of the Senate independent of factional politics.

It was also during his tenure that a National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) committee (March 2015) underlined the need for restructuring the PU Senate and the procedure for the appointment of deans.

At the same time, on October 8, 2015, the then president of the Panjab University Teachers Association (PUTA), who was also a nominated member of the Senate, submitted a proposal for governance reforms. They were put up at the Syndicate meeting, leading to the formation of a 16-member Governance Reforms Committee (GRC) on November 29, 2015.

Chaired by a former chief justice of a high court, it recommended the constitution of three sub-committees to look into reforms, comprising amendments in the PU Act, changes in PU statutes/regulations and improvements by delegation within the regulations. Their reports were put before the GRC and several special invitees and forwarded to the Syndicate and Senate members. They were also submitted to the high court in the PIL awaiting consideration.

The Senate reforms stem from the modification needed in the PU Act (1947) that was carved out of the dated Indian Universities Act (1904), which was designed to fulfill the governing requirements of the then evolving publicly funded university that had come into existence in 1882.

The graduate constituency, the clause of allotment of faculties in four disciplines to a given Senator and the concept of added-members to each faculty



NO POINT: The moot question remains unanswered amid varied viewpoints on PU's governance reforms. FILE

— this was the required arrangement at that time in the absence of provision of the university's own in-house faculty.

According to such an arrangement, any two Senate members in a given faculty could join hands to bring in an 'added-member' from among the affiliated college lecturers and other professionals in their respective faculties.

It was after the Partition, when the university was relocated in east Punjab, that professors and heads of university department were allowed to be included in the faculties of their respective domains as 'ex-officio members' under the PU Act (1947). The faculty constituency in the Senate comprised six elected Senators.

Despite the Senate initiatives that began in 2015, including an affidavit filed by the Vice-Chancellor on governance reforms and financial concerns of PU in a PIL initiated suo moto by the Chief Justice of Punjab and

Those arguing for status quo fail to justify the outmoded stance of the pristine PU calendar in the much-changed scenario of contemporary times.

structure, as existing in other state and Central universities.

It is also being discussed across varied stakeholders that PU evolved in unique circumstances during the colonial regime as the only Punjab heritage university which was established with publicly collected funds after the coming up of the three foundational universities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. And it was for this reason that its uniqueness needed to be preserved. The Senate and Syndicate constitute the epicentre of PU's unique academic heritage status.

It was this status of PU that was highlighted by voices opposing the Gazette notification issued on October 28. It sent shockwaves through PU stakeholder circles, reverberating from Chandigarh to villages in the interior of Punjab.

What gave further spur to the spell of opposition was the delicate time of the announcement of the notification (November 1, 2025). It coincided with the reorganisation of the state (November 1, 1966) as also the ongoing high-profile electioneering process in the Tam Taran Assembly seat, which is being projected as an emerging trend, setting the tone for the 2027 Punjab Assembly elections and 2029 parliamentary elections.

Yet another factor that gave impetus to the opposition against the notification was the geographical placement of PU in Chandigarh, the capital of two states with its union territory status. Thus, any issue related with the governance of the university gets immediately linked with the

larger political dynamics of the state, so much so that any attempt to dilute the university's democratic character is seen as weakening Punjab's claim over Chandigarh.

What led to the exacerbation of the problem was the Centre first putting on hold the notification, with a rider about its implementation, and later withdrawing it on November 7, 2025. Though student organisations have welcomed the decision, they refuse to wind up their struggle until the schedule for the Senate election is announced. It is alleged that the election has already been deliberately delayed for a year by the Centre.

All said and done, the moot question remains unanswered amid the varied viewpoints on PU's governance reforms. Those arguing for status quo, citing the PU's heritage character, fail to justify the outmoded stance of the pristine PU calendar in the much-changed scenario of contemporary times, in comparison to those prevailing at the time the Indian Universities Act (1904) and PU Act (1947) came up. And those advocating major modifications to the PU Act 1947 have failed to justify the dilution of the democratic character of the Senate and Syndicate.

PU should be saved from both extremes: one, the factionalism emanating from the old set-up to the disadvantage of the academic domain; and two, the bureaucratic and hegemonic control of the remoulded governance body, as unfolded in the notification that was later rescinded.

QUICK CROSSWORD

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ACROSS

1 Military government (7,3)

8 A hard black varnish (5)

9 To change in form or function (7)

10 Drastic upheaval (5-2)

11 Tidiness (5)

12 Prevail on (6)

14 Apprehensive (6)

17 Lag behind (5)

19 Toxophily (7)

21 Seafarer (7)

22 Audibly (5)

23 Supporter (4-6)

Yesterday's Solution

ACROSS: 1 Remiss, 4 Warmth, 9 Certain, 10 Other, 11 Check, 12 Engross, 13 Short-change, 18 Pelican, 20 Argue, 22 Quite, 23 Abolish, 24 Engulf, 25 Welter.

DOWN: 1 Rocooco, 2 Merge, 3 Slacker, 5 Among, 6 Mahjong, 7 Harass, 8 Under canvas, 14 Halting, 15 A la mode, 16 Opaque, 17 Zephyr, 19 Creel, 21 Guilt.

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V. EASY

FORECAST

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 13, 2025, THURSDAY

■ Shaka Samvat

1947

■ Kartik Shaka

22

■ Kartik Purnim

28

■ Hijari

1447

■ Krishna Paksha Tithi 9, up to 11:35 pm

■ Brahma Yoga up to 6:58 am

■ Indra Yoga up to 6:27 am

■ Magha Nakshatra up to 7:38 pm

■ Moon in Leo sign

■ Gandmoola up to 7:38 pm

SUNSET: 17:27 HRS

SUNRISE: 06:47 HRS

CITY

MAX

MIN

Chandigarh

27

09

New Delhi

26

11

Amritsar

25

09

Bathinda

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Jalandhar

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Ludhiana

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Bhiwani

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09

Hisar

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Sirsa

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Dharamsala

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Manali

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03

Shimla

18

09

Srinagar

17

-01

Jammu

26

10

Kargil

09

-06

Leh

07

-06

Dehradun

27

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Mussoorie

18

08

TEMPERATURE IN °C

Super-heavy rockets are strategic because they let governments and companies deploy assets faster and in bigger chunks. A single Saturn V launched the entire Skylab space station. Energia was sized to build a Soviet Moon base. Decades later, the race is on again, but this time it looks more like an industrial marathon than a flag-planting sprint.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Humans have always attached more than hardware to big rockets. In the 1960s, the Saturn V enabled the United States to set foot on another world. Standing taller than the Statue of Liberty, it could haul about 140 t to low-Earth orbit (LEO) and sling roughly 43 t toward the Moon. That raw lifting power bought Washington soft power; every Saturn V launch was a television event broadcast in Cold War colour. By the mid-1980s, the Soviet Energia had promised its own super-heavy future. Using strap-on boosters and a methane-fueled core, it lifted around 100 t to orbit and launched the Buran shuttle once. Then the USSR fell. Without a functioning engine, the "Energia" ended after two flights. These two examples bookend a simple truth: tonnage is policy. Countries that can loft football-field-sized payloads setrles. Those who can't watch.

Super-heavy rockets are strategic because they let governments and companies deploy assets faster and in bigger chunks. A single Saturn V launched the entire Skylab space station. Energia was sized to build a Soviet Moon base. Decades later, the race is on again, but this time it looks more like an industrial marathon than a flag-planting sprint.

SPACE'S STARSHIP CHANGES THE EQUATION

In 2025, SpaceX's Starship program moved from aspirational to real hardware. Starship consists of a 70-m reusable ship atop a 72-m Super Heavy booster. The combo eclipses both Saturn V and Energia in height and thrust while embracing full reuse. Starship's first integrated launch attempt in 2023

ended in a mid-air breakup. Subsequent tests improved quickly. By August 26 2025, the tenth flight saw the booster complete a powered ascent and boost-back burn, while the ship deployed eight Starlink simulator payloads and completed a controlled splashdown in the Indian Ocean. On October 13 2025, the eleventh flight reused its booster and repeated the mission profile, testing new banking manoeuvres and landing systems. Both missions ended with controlled splashdowns, demonstrating that even prototypes can survive re-entry.

SpaceX has since pivoted toward its Block 3 (often called "Version 3") vehicles. These ships feature new Raptor 3 engines and, crucially, docking ports and redesigned quick-disconnect for on-orbit refuelling. The booster changes are similarly dramatic: three-grid fins instead of four and engine shielding removed thanks to Raptor 3's improved reliability. The ability to dock two Starships together turns a single giant rocket into a modular system of tankers, depots and landers. It means a lunar lander can reach the Moon by topping off in Earth orbit, rather than hauling all its fuel from the ground. Elon Musk has mused that a Starship launch might eventually cost as little as \$1 million. Whether or not that price is achieved, Starship's economic argument is clear: reusability plus a production line lowers the cost per ton.

The production line matters more than any single launch. SpaceX builds rocket sections in high-bay buildings near its launch pad and has produced dozens of boosters and ships. The company invests billions of dollars of its own capital, spending more than US\$3 billion by mid-2023 and burning US\$4 million per day on the program. That pace is driven not just by ambition but by



A montage of the United States' Saturn V lifting off on different Apollo missions, demonstrating the sheer scale and power of the rocket that carried humans to the Moon.

STARSHIP, SATURN V, AND THE SUPER-HEAVY ARMS RACE

synergy: Starlink. SpaceX's satellite Internet business, needs bigger satellites and bigger rockets. The next-generation Starlink V3 satellites will weigh about 2,000 kg each—over triple the mass of the V2 Mini satellites. A Falcon 9 can fit 29 V2 minis; only a Starship can cram sixty V3s into its cavernous bay. Each Starship launch could add 60 terabits per second of network capacity, turning heavy lift into broadband leverage.

ARTEMIS AS A STRESS TEST

Starship isn't just a commercial vehicle; it is now woven into America's lunar strategy. NASA awarded SpaceX a US\$2.89 billion fixed-price contract in 2021 to build a Human Landing System (HLS) derived from Starship. This lander will ferry astronauts from lunar orbit to the surface during Artemis III, currently targeted for 2027. NASA later selected Blue Origin's Blue Origin Mk2 as a second lander for Artemis V with a US\$3.4 billion contract, broadening the supplier base. However, until Blue Origin flies, NASA is reliant on Starship.

That dependence makes every Starship a geopolitical issue. The Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel (ASAP), an independent group mandated by Congress, visited SpaceX's Starbase in 2025. Panel members were impressed by the "multi-faceted, self-perpetuating genius" of SpaceX's manufacturing but concluded that the HLS schedule is "significantly challenged" and could be years late. Cryogenic propellant transfer—topping off a depot in orbit—has never been demonstrated and was identified as the critical path.

ASAP warned that Starship V3 must not only launch but must reliably dock tankers and depots by the mid-2020s. The panel also noted that SpaceX's Starlink business competes for the same production resources, raising the risk of schedule conflicts.

NASA's own 2024 ASAP report echoed these concerns. It praised SpaceX for demonstrating hot-stage separation, high-altitude flight, flip manoeuvres and booster returns but flagged orbital fuel delivery, cryogenic storage, lunar descent/ascent and integration with the Orion spacecraft as unsolved challenges. The panel urged NASA to avoid unrealistic schedules and to pace Artemis at a manageable tempo. For the United States, a slip doesn't just delay astronauts; it shifts the narrative of technological leadership. Competing nations watch these milestones closely.

THE COUNTER-FORCES: CHINA, BLUE ORIGIN AND RUSSIA

While SpaceX races to turn prototypes into a fleet, other nations and companies are quietly fielding their own heavy lifters.

China's Long March 9 China's state-run launch vehicle builder, the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology, is designing the Long March 9—a super-heavy rocket roughly 114 m tall and 10.6 m in diameter. Early concepts resembled a scaled-up Saturn V, but by 2022, designers shifted to a reusable, booster-less configuration. Version 22 uses twenty-six 200-tonne methane/oxygen engines on the first stage and is expected to haul 150 t to LEO and 50 t to trans-lunar injection (TLI).

In 2023, they tweaked the design again: the first stage will have thirty 200-tonne YF-215 engines, the second stage will use two of the same engines, and an optional third stage will carry a hydrolox engine. Long-term plans include a fully reusable two-stage version by the 2040s that looks conspicuously similar to Starship. China's goal is clear: achieve self-reliance in cis-lunar logistics and be capable of sending crewed missions to the Moon in the early 2030s.

Blue Origin's New Glenn

Blue Origin's New Glenn joined the club with its inaugural flight on January 16 2025. The two-stage rocket stands 98 m tall and 7 m in diameter. The first stage uses seven methane-fueled BE-4 engines and is designed to land on an ocean platform for reuse. The rocket can lift about 45 t to LEO, 13.6 t to geostationary transfer orbit and 7 t to TLI. The first flight reached orbit but lost its booster during descent. Blue Origin's leaders view New Glenn as the foundation for a lunar economy and have multiple vehicles in production. NASA has certified New Glenn for future national security launches, and Blue Origin's medium-term plan includes flights for Amazon's Project Kuiper constellation and NASA's Blue Moon lander.

Russia's Yenisei

Russia announced its Yenisei super-heavy rocket

in 2018 as part of its lunar program. The rocket is designed to carry 103 t to LEO and 27 t to TLI. However, the program has struggled. The final design was expected by autumn 2021, but the project appears to have been paused or stopped before that date. In 2024, Russian officials announced that work would resume in 2025, but the first launch is not expected until 2033. Russia's economic challenges and sanctions have diverted resources, and its existing heavy-lift rocket, Angara A5, can only launch 37.5 t to LEO. Without a viable super-heavy booster, Russia's lunar ambitions remain on paper.

ECONOMICS OF TONNAGE

Launching more mass per flight isn't just about winning a space race; it rewrites the balance sheets of industries. Marginal launch cost—the cost of putting one more kilogram into orbit—determines which projects are viable. Reusable super-heavy rockets compress cost by spreading production and operation expenses across dozens of flights. SpaceX's reuse model echoes the airline industry: once the hardware cost is amortised, the price per flight depends mostly on propellant and ground operations. If a Starship can deliver 100 t to LEO for a price near Falcon 9's 22 t, every kilogram of cargo becomes cheaper.

This is why Musk is willing to pour billions into developing Raptor engines and high-rate manufacturing: production is the strategy.

Starlink illustrates the leverage. Each V3 satellite is about 2 t and offers 1 Tbps of downlink capacity. Launching sixty of them on a single Starship introduces 60 Tbps of new capacity. A constellation refresh that would have required dozens of Falcon 9 missions can be done in a handful of Starship flights. For military logistics, the ability to launch heavy cargo repeatedly means that prepositioned fuel depots and modular habitats can be delivered in fewer launches. For scientists, it means entire observatories could be built in a single piece rather than assembled like the International Space Station.

Competition, however, tempers monopoly power. Blue Origin's New Glenn will serve commercial and government customers at a published price between US\$68 million and US\$110 million per launch. China's future Long March 9 could offer the Chinese government cheap bulk access to orbit. If multiple heavy lifters are flying regularly, no single company will dictate the price of accessing deep space. Instead, states will compete on cadence—how often they can launch—and reliability, not just on size.

SCENARIOS FOR THE 2030S

Given the rapid pace of development, the next five years could unfold along several paths:

U.S. cadence dominance

Starship matures quickly, demonstrating orbital docking and refuelling by 2026. NASA flies Artemis III in 2027 and Artemis IV in 2028. Starship regularly deploys Starlink V3 satellites, building a communications network that underpins lunar and Martian missions. Blue Origin's New Glenn reaches a monthly cadence by the late 2020s, serving as a secondary heavy lifter. The United States and its partners effectively set the price and tempo for cis-lunar logistics. International cooperation becomes necessary because lunar lander bookings exceed the supply of launch vehicles.

Blue parity

China achieves a successful reusable Long March 9 flight around 2028. Its na-

tional program deploys a lunar landing stack in the early 2030s, matching Artemis timelines. Blue Origin scales New Glenn to a flight cadence comparable to SpaceX, launching Blue Origin cargo and NASA payloads. Multiple blocs—U.S., Chinese, and commercial consortia—each have enough lift capacity to support their own stations and resource extraction. Competition for lunar polar water plays out through infrastructure rather than flags.

Fragmentation and delay

Starship's Block 3 encounters technical setbacks. Docking mechanisms or Raptor 3 engines suffer reliability issues, leading to accidents. NASA slips Artemis III to the 2030s, raising questions about the purpose of the program. Meanwhile, budget constraints or political shifts slow China's Long March 9 and Blue Origin's expansions. In this scenario, the super-heavy arms race becomes a cautionary tale about over-promising on reusability, and smaller, expendable rockets like Falcon Heavy, Ariane 6, and China's Long March 5 continue to shoulder most missions.

PRODUCTION IS THE STRATEGY

Single-shot performance looks impressive in televised launches, but long-term impact depends on factory rate. Built five vehicles before shutting down; Energia only produced two. Starship aims to build rockets like airliners. SpaceX has churned out dozens of Raptor engines and integrated them into boosters at a pace unmatched by traditional aerospace. In this model, reliability comes not from perfection but from statistics: if you fly weekly, you find and fix faults quickly.

The same logic applies to Blue Origin and China. New Glenn's reusability depends on building enough boosters to tolerate a learning curve, and the Long March 9 will require factories capable of churning out hundreds of YF-215 engines. Russia's experience shows the consequences of failing to sustain production; without a healthy industrial base, the largest rocket becomes a museum piece.



The Soviet Energia super-heavy booster being rolled to its launch pad in 1987. Designed to haul about 100 t to orbit, the program ended after only two flights, highlighting how economic factors can end even the biggest rockets.

Spec comparison: super-heavy titans					
Rocket	Era/Operator	LEO payload	TLI payload	Reusability	Launches
Saturn V	1960s–70s, NASA	≈140 t	≈43 t	None (expendable)	13 flights, 12 successes
Energia	1980s, USSR	≈100 t	≈32 t	Partial (core expendable, strap-on boosters could land)	2 flights
Starship (Block 3)	2020s, SpaceX	100–150 t (planned)	~?? (depends on refuelling; direct injection limited)	Fully reusable booster and ship; includes docking ports for refuelling	11 test flights as of late 2025
Long March 9 (2023 design)	2030s, China	100–160 t	35–53 t	Planned partial reuse; full two-stage reuse in the 2040s	In development
New Glenn	2025, Blue Origin	45 t	7 t	Reusable first stage; expendable upper stage	1 flight (booster not recovered)
Yenisei	2030s?, Russia	103 t	27 t	Expendable	None (development paused)



SpaceX's Starship lights its engines during an integrated flight test on 13 October 2024. Later test flights in 2025 saw the rocket splash down intact, underscoring rapid progress toward reusability.

ELECTION FOOTAGE DESTROYED, ECI TELLS COURT

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India (ECI) informed the Delhi High Court that CCTV and video recordings from the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Delhi have been destroyed and are no longer held by District Election Officers (DEOs), in accordance with updated guidelines.

This disclosure was made during a hearing before Justice Mini Pushkarna on a petition filed by Advocate Mehmood Pracha, who had requested the preservation of all video and CCTV material related to the elections.

Representing the ECI,

Senior Advocate Sandeep Sethi stated that the footage was discarded in accordance with revised guidelines issued on May 30, 2025. These guidelines mandate that such data, including CCTV visuals, webcasting content, and polling day photographs, be retained for only 45 days unless an election petition is filed contesting the results.

Advocate Sidhant Kumar also represented the Election Commission in the matter.

"The footage sought by the petitioner is no longer available with the DEOs and has already been destroyed," the ECI's counsel told the court, adding that the updated instructions were aimed at



Election Commission of India.

curbing the misuse of polling visuals on social media by individuals not involved in the electoral process.

Pracha, appearing in person with his legal team, contested the ECI's position.

This disclosure was made during a hearing before Justice Mini Pushkarna on a petition filed by Advocate Mehmood Pracha, who had requested the preservation of all video and CCTV material related to the elections.

He argued that the footage should have been preserved since his petition was already pending before the court. He cited Paragraph

19.10.4 of the ECI's 2023 Handbook for Returning Officers, which requires retention of video recordings when any election-related complaint or legal proceeding is underway.

He also referred to a Supreme Court order dated August 20, 2024, which had granted him permission to approach the Delhi

High Court with specific grievances concerning the elections.

The ECI maintained that its actions were lawful and aligned with the May 2025 circular, which superseded previous instructions.

Justice Pushkarna, acknowledging the arguments from both sides, declined to issue any interim relief, noting that the petitioner had not challenged the validity of the May 2025 circular. The court recorded the submissions and scheduled the next hearing for February 13, 2026.

Pracha has reserved the right to pursue further legal remedies regarding the alleged destruction of the election footage.

CJI Gavai mourns Red Fort blast victims

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India (CJI) BR Gavai on Tuesday paid condolences on behalf of Supreme Court judges and the legal fraternity and expressed deep concern over the blast near the Red Fort in New Delhi, which claimed at least eight lives.

The CJI reaffirmed commitment to uphold the rule of law, ensure justice, and safeguard the dignity of every citizen of the country.

In a message of condolence, CJI Gavai said, "We are all also deeply saddened by the tragic loss of lives caused by the car blast that occurred in Delhi on the evening of November 10, 2025. On behalf of the Supreme Court of India and the entire judicial as well as legal fraternity in the country, I convey our deepest condolences to the families who have lost their loved ones in this devastating tragedy."

The CJI called for a "collective compassion and solidarity" in the wake of the tragic incident.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who are grieving, as well as with those who are injured or otherwise affected.



Chief Justice of India BR Gavai. File photo

"We are all also deeply saddened by the tragic loss of lives caused by the car blast that occurred in Delhi on the evening of November 10, 2025. On behalf of the Supreme Court of India and the entire judicial as well as legal fraternity in the country, I convey our deepest condolences to the families who have lost their loved ones in this devastating tragedy."

No words can truly ease the pain of such loss, yet

we hope that the collective compassion and solidarity of the nation will offer some

comfort in this hour of sorrow," he said.

"In this moment of grief, we stand in solidarity with the bereaved. We reaffirm our steadfast commitment to uphold the rule of law, ensure justice, and safeguard the dignity of every citizen. May the departed souls rest in eternal peace. May courage and solace reach the bereaved families and all those who mourn this irreparable loss," CJI Gavai said in his message.

At least eight people died and several others were injured in the high-intensity explosion near the Red Fort

complex on Monday evening.

Delhi Police's initial investigation suggested that the explosion may have been a fideyee (suicide) attack, said sources within the Delhi Police on Tuesday.

According to early findings, investigators believe the suspect intended to carry out an explosion. As soon as the suspect learned that a Faridabad module had been busted, he reportedly shifted to planning a fideyee-style operation, apparently to maximise casualties and avoid capture by police, the sources added.

Investigators are also probing if the actual target of the attack was at another location since the car was moving slowly. Investigators are looking at all possible angles, including if the car driver had panicked causing an explosion near Red Fort.

It is worth noting that Jammu and Kashmir and Haryana Police had jointly recovered 360 kg of explosive material and ammunition from Haryana's Faridabad and apprehended two persons, Dr Muzammil and Aadil Rather, in the matter on early Monday.

DELHI HC RESTRAINS PATANJALI CHYAWANPRASH AD

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has restrained Patanjali Ayurved Limited and Patanjali Foods Limited from broadcasting, publishing, or disseminating their recent advertisement that referred to other Chyawanprash products as "Dhoka" (deception).

The order came on a plea filed by Dabur India Limited alleging that the commercial disparaged its popular Dabur Chyawanprash and the entire category of similar Ayurvedic formulations.

Justice Tejas Karia, while issuing summons in Dabur India Limited v. Patanjali Ayurved Limited & Anr., held that the advertisement prima facie amounted to generic disparagement of all competing Chyawanprash brands, including Dabur, which holds over 61 per cent market share in the segment.

The Court observed that calling all other Chyawanprash "Dhoka" was derogatory and misleading and went beyond permissible puffery or comparative advertising.

"Calling all other Chyawanprash as 'Dhoka' or deception amounts to commercial disparagement," the court



Delhi High Court. File photo

stated, emphasising that while exaggeration and creative liberty are allowed, advertisers "cannot denigrate the products of others as a class in their entirety."

Dabur, represented by Senior Advocate Sandeep Sethi, argued that Patanjali's commercial featuring Baba Ramdev suggested that all other Chyawanprash brands were fraudulent, duping consumers and lacking Ayurvedic authenticity. The ad, released on television and social media, allegedly urged viewers to "protect themselves from daily deceptions sold in the name of Chyawanprash" and to consume only Patanjali Special Chyawanprash.

Patanjali, represented by Senior Advocate Rajiv Nayar, defended the campaign, stating it was merely "puffery and hyperbole," permissible under the law.

The counsel contended that the word 'Dhoka' was

not directed at Dabur specifically and that the ad simply highlighted the superiority of Patanjali's product.

Rejecting this argument, the Court said that even generic disparagement of an entire product category harms the market leader and constitutes unfair competition. "From the perspective of the consumer, the message conveyed is that all other Chyawanprash, including Dabur's, are deceptive," Justice Karia held.

Finding a prima facie case in Dabur's favour, the Court issued an interim injunction restraining Patanjali and its affiliates from airing or publishing the impugned advertisement in any form, television, print, digital, or social media, and directed the company to take down the ad from YouTube, Instagram, and other platforms within 72 hours. The main matter will next be heard on February 26, 2026.

Bangladesh awaits Hasina trial verdict date

TDG NETWORK
DHAKA (BANGLADESH)

The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) of Bangladesh will announce on Thursday, November 13, the date of its verdict in the case filed against former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on charges of crimes against humanity, including murder, during the July uprising last year.

Bangladesh remains on high alert ahead of the announcement due to escalating tensions. Security forces, including the army and police, have been deployed at airports and key installations nationwide.

The Bangladesh Awami League has announced a nationwide dawn-to-dusk lockdown on Thursday and called on people from all walks of life to participate in the programme.

Since the interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus has banned the activities of the Awami League and its affiliated organisations, party leaders have been announcing the programme through social media from undisclosed locations. They are also actively campaigning online.

Over the past two days, there have been reports of vehicle arson and crude



Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. File photo

Awami League supporters have also held flash rallies nationwide. Meanwhile, police have launched operations nationwide to arrest party leaders and activists, while security forces have set up checkpoints and vehicle searches on major roads.

bomb (cocktail) explosions in various parts of Bangladesh, including the capital, Dhaka.

Awami League supporters have also held flash rallies nationwide. Meanwhile,

police have launched operations nationwide to arrest party leaders and activists, while security forces have set up checkpoints and vehicle searches on major roads.

In July 2024, a student-led uprising toppled Sheikh Hasina's government. On August 5, 2024, the former Prime Minister fled to India. An interim government was subsequently formed under the leadership of Muhammad Yunus. According to a United Nations report, around 1,400 people may have died during the July protests.

Sheikh Hasina's administration originally established the International Crimes Tribunal to prosecute crimes against humanity committed during

Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War against Pakistan. The tribunal previously tried several Jamaat-e-Islami leaders accused of war crimes during Hasina's tenure.

The current interim government has initiated legal proceedings against Sheikh Hasina in the same tribunal, following amendments to its legal framework. Testimonies in the case have been completed, and the tribunal is set to announce on Thursday the date for delivering the verdict against the former Prime Minister.

LAWYERS BOYCOTT AFTER ISLAMABAD COURT ATTACK

TDG NETWORK
ISLAMABAD

The Islamabad Bar Council (IBC) and the Rawalpindi District Bar Association harshly condemned the terrorist assault on the district and sessions courts complex in Islamabad's G-11 area, which claimed multiple lives and left dozens wounded, including members of the legal community, as reported by Dawn.

According to Dawn, IBC Vice Chairman Naseer Ahmed Kayani and other council members expressed "deep sorrow, shock, and outrage" over what they termed a "cowardly and barbaric" act of terror targeting a judicial institution, a place symbolising justice and the rule of law. The IBC said that such attacks on lawyers, litigants, and court officials amounted to direct strikes on Pakistan's already fragile justice system.

IBC declared complete court boycotts across the Islamabad Capital Territory from November 12 to 14 as a form of protest and mourning.

During this period, no lawyer will appear before any court. The council further decided to hold a general house meeting with subordinate bar associations to chart a collective response to the worsening security climate.

IBC also demanded a transparent investigation

During this period, no lawyer will appear before any court. The council further decided to hold a general house meeting with subordinate bar associations to chart a collective response to the worsening security climate.

into the attack and questioned how such a major security breach could occur in a supposedly high-security area.

The council highlighted that the state's repeated failure to protect its judicial institutions reflected deep administrative negligence. Following the incident, the Rawalpindi District Bar Association (RDBA) also announced a strike in soli-

arity with the Islamabad lawyers, as cited by Dawn.

RDBA president Sardar Manzar Bashir expressed grief and vowed that "the blood of the martyrs will not go in vain."

He called for strict legal action against those responsible and demanded accountability from institu-

tional heads for administrative lapses. In response, the Rawalpindi district administration unveiled a new security plan, which includes enhanced checks at court entry points, the installation of walk-through gates, a ban on unauthorised entry, and the direction of the Frontier Works Organisation (FWO) to regulate controlled access for its workers, as reported by Dawn.



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Responding to the Delhi blast

The State was measured and responsible in mapping links to terror. Now, it needs to fix Delhi's security gaps and address radicalisation

As investigations progress in the Red Fort blast case, in which at least 10 people were killed when a car laden with explosives blew up near the monument in the national capital on Monday, November 10, three aspects deserve consideration.

The first is the measured and responsible way in which the State has reacted to the blast. It was not quick to label the blast a terror attack, but focused on gathering the facts first. The authorities waited till they had enough proof before linking the blast to the seizure of a huge tranche of explosive material from Faridabad a day earlier. And it shared its belief (off-record) that the blast was caused by panic, as one of the operatives of the terror cell unearthed in that city sought to make good his escape. All through, there has been no sabre rattling, no bravado, no calling out of Pakistan. Indeed, this is the way it must always be — but it rarely is in the heat of the moment.

The second is the gaps the blast has shown up in Delhi's own security net. The last terror attack in the national capital was in 2011, and it is only natural for some degree of complacency to have crept in over the years, even as the challenges and threats have multiplied. Like all police forces, the Delhi Police are woefully short-staffed; and despite the overwhelming number of CCTV cameras in the Capital — more than in any other Indian city — there isn't much effort on visual surveillance. A review (and upgrade, if required) is called for.

The third is the worrying level of radicalisation on display among members of the Pulwama-Faridabad module (as some intelligence agencies have termed the cell). Highly educated, with good career prospects, and seemingly well-integrated, members of the module do not fit the image of the everyday terrorist. Many of those arrested, including a woman operative, are doctors.

Even as investigative agencies focus on the arms seized from members of the module, the sources of their finances, and the people they were communicating with, they would do well to understand their motivations — and how they were radicalised.

Haze over Delhi AQI data blunts clean-up action

After the air quality index (AQI) in the national capital region (NCR) slipped into the "severe" category on Tuesday — having hovered close to this level for days — stage 3 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP 3) was finally enforced. On Wednesday, too, the national capital's AQI remained in the severe category. Whether GRAP 3 will lift some of the grey haze blanketing the region remains to be seen. The Supreme Court directed Punjab and Haryana on Wednesday to submit details of action taken against farm fires next week, and it is likely that farmers, especially in the former, will see this as a deadline and scramble to set fire to the remaining crop stubble in their fields.

The haze over the accuracy and integrity of Delhi's pollution data will also likely erode the effectiveness of pollution control measures. As this newspaper has repeatedly shown, there have been several recent instances of monitoring stations in the national capital falling silent, leading to significant data gaps. Similarly, there have been multiple points of deficiency in source-apportioning estimates from the Decision Support System, which is run by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune.

Improbable spikes and falls and odd patterns in measurement, read together with algorithmic loopholes, raise doubts about the AQI data's integrity. The Commission for Air Quality Management — the NCR pollution watchdog has turned a blind eye to these — and the political establishment must dispel the doubts with detailed clarifications, not dismissive rhetoric. Given the clear human cost of pollution, the response to deteriorating air quality must be scientifically calibrated. But that can only happen if the data is incontrovertible. As long as the data's sanctity remains suspect, responses will likely be inadequate and tardy, exacerbating the harm.

Nithari case: Indictment of procedural deficiencies

The Nithari acquittals are symptomatic of a deeper malaise afflicting India's criminal investigation machinery. At every level, the system failed — be it the local police or the CBI

When the Supreme Court on Tuesday acquitted Surendra Koli in the final surviving Nithari case, it did more than just erase a conviction — it exposed one of the worst failures of India's criminal justice system. Nearly two decades after the discovery of human remains from a drain behind a Noida bungalow shocked the country, no one now stands convicted for the rape and killing of at least 16 women and children. For the families who lost their children, there is no closure; instead, there is the confirmation of a collapse.

The apex court's judgment, delivered by a bench comprising Chief Justice of India Bhushan R Gavai and justices Surya Kant and Vikram Nath, held that the 2011 conviction of Koli could not stand when he had been acquitted in 12 identical cases based on the same evidence, confession, and flawed investigation. To let one conviction survive, it said, would be a "travesty of justice."

In doing so, the court upheld the

principle that the rule of law must be consistent. But its verdict also makes stark the central flaw in the handling of the cases — the complete breakdown of investigative credibility, which has left the Nithari parents with nothing but unanswered questions.

In late 2006, what began as routine drain cleaning in Sector 31 of Noida turned into a nightmare. A child playing cricket had earlier spotted a human hand in a narrow strip between houses D5 and D6. When the drain outside the bungalows was dug up in December that year, multiple skulls, bones, and tattered children's clothes surfaced, along with tiny slippers.

At the centre of this horror were two men — Koli, a domestic worker at D5, and his employer, businessman Moninder Singh Pandher. The police claimed that Koli lured children and women to the house, murdered them, and in some cases, even indulged in cannibalism. Pandher was accused of complicity and exploitation. What followed was not just an investigation but also a frenzy, a swell of outrage that demanded answers. But no answers ever came.

The police investigation was chaotic and unscientific. By the time officers reached D5 on December 29, 2006, crowds had already gathered, trampling through evidence as remains were pulled from the ground. The "recovery" of a knife from beneath a terrace tank and several other items became the backbone of the prosecution, but later, the courts found these

claims unreliable.

When the probe was handed to the CBI in January 2007, expectations were high. But the agency repeated the same mistakes, relying heavily on Koli's confession recorded after weeks in custody and on dubious recoveries already known to locals. There were no contemporaneous disclosure memos or credible forensic links tying Koli or Pandher to specific victims. In short, the CBI validated the tainted work of the local police instead of rebuilding the investigation from scratch.

The trials that followed rested almost entirely on this defective foundation. Confessions, recoveries, and circumstantial evidence were recycled across 13 cases with little effort to establish independent corroboration. It was hardly surprising when higher courts began overturning these convictions one after another.

The Supreme Court, in its November 11 judgment, painstakingly pointed out that the same confession and the same recoveries had been rejected as unreliable in all other cases. The bench said it found "no principled basis" to uphold one conviction when 12 others had already fallen on identical facts. It was a reaffirmation of the bedrock principle of criminal law that consistency and fairness must trump sentiment.

For the parents of the missing children, the verdict reopens old wounds. They were the first to report their children missing in 2005, the first to protest outside D5, and the last to be heard.



Utkarsh Anand

Smart proteins and animal welfare: Next-gen ESG norms

When we think of sustainability, we picture solar panels, electric vehicles and tree plantations. Rarely do we think of the food on our plate.

Yet the way we produce animal proteins — milk, meat, fish, or eggs — may be one of the most decisive factors shaping India's climate resilience, public health, and global competitiveness. The country is at a "protein crossroads". Rising incomes and urbanisation are shifting dietary protein choices from pulses to animal sources. At the same time, agriculture already contributes around 14% of India's greenhouse gas emissions, with livestock responsible for more than half. Add to this the widespread use of antibiotics in animal farming, growing animal-welfare scrutiny, and trade rules that increasingly demand traceability, and we have a recipe for systemic risk.

The stakes are not abstract. By 2030, declining crop yields and reduced protein content in staples could leave nearly 91 million Indians at risk of hunger. Unless we act, our protein system could undermine both nutrition security and our net-zero ambitions.

To put the long-term challenge in perspective, India's livestock emissions are projected to reach 515 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent annually by 2050 — more than twice the levels in the 1960s. Left unchecked, this would strain our climate commitments, nutrition security, and trade competitiveness.

India has been a global pioneer in sustainability. Yet, Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks today largely overlook protein's role in our food system. There are no consistent corporate disclosures on animal welfare, antibiotic use, water use, or the share of smart proteins — plant-based, cultivated, and fermentation-derived alternatives — in corporate portfolios.

This omission matters. Investors are beginning to see unsustainable protein systems as financial liabilities. Indian companies risk being left behind as global capital flows pivot towards climate-aligned and ethical supply chains. Integrating protein-related metrics into ESG reporting is not just about ethics; it is about competitiveness, trade access, and risk management.

There is significant momentum being built. By 2025, over 60% of Indian agribusinesses are expected to adopt ESG standards, driven by regulation and by growing demand for ESG-certified products at home and abroad. The opportunity now is to strengthen these disclosures by explicitly including protein-related indicators.

At the same time, international frameworks such as those of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), and the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) already treat animal welfare and smart proteins as material ESG themes. For India, aligning with these benchmarks is about future-proofing our businesses, ensuring they remain credible to investors and competitive in global markets.

The good news is that India has a once-in-a-generation chance to lead the global smart protein revolution. Smart proteins account for a fraction of the land- and water-use and emissions tied to conventional livestock-based protein production. They also align with India's long cultural familiarity with plant-based diets.

By investing in smart protein R&D, incentivising companies to diversify their portfolios, and embedding clear disclosure requirements into ESG frameworks, India can simultaneously address its chronic protein deficiency, future-

proof its food businesses against global trade and investor scrutiny, and create new industries, jobs, and export potential. Just as we leapfrogged in digital payments, we can leapfrog in sustainable proteins.

India is already laying the foundations. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has started setting scientific standards for plant-based and cultivated proteins. The government's BioE3 Policy is building an ecosystem for manufacturing these proteins through biofoundries and AI-enabled research hubs. Together, these initiatives show that the pieces are in place. What's needed now is to connect them to ESG frameworks that give companies clear goals and accountability.

Alongside innovation, we cannot ignore welfare. Poor welfare practices are not only an ethical blind spot but also a reputational and safety risk. Global frameworks already include animal welfare, and India's disclosures must catch up. Clear targets and humane practices would send a strong signal of India's seriousness about trust, dignity, and long-term resilience.

Other issues in protein supply chains, such as water use, circularity, and antibiotic stewardship, are becoming equally important in ESG systems. Around the world, block-chain and other verification tools are being piloted to ensure humane and sustainable practices. India's value chains are still at an early stage in this journey, but integrating such systems over time will strengthen consumer trust and market access.

A pragmatic path forward will not burden companies with unrealistic mandates. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi)'s sector-specific business responsibility and sustainability reporting (BRSR) guidelines can begin with voluntary disclosures, drawing on existing blueprints such as the NSE-SES BRSR Food Guide. Companies must set strategic targets, reallocate R&D capital, and disclose risks and strategies; and investors must align mandates with global frameworks and proactively engage with food companies. Alongside, banks must innovate with respect to financial instruments: green bonds, transition finance, and preferred lending for sustainable protein projects.

The financial ecosystem is already tilting this way. Sustainability-linked finance is accelerating in India. Benchmarks increasingly include emissions reduction, humane practices, and traceability. Without integrating proteins and welfare, Indian businesses risk losing both affordable capital and premium global markets.

The market regulator's leadership will be critical. Sebi's frequent updates are already aligning India's ESG ecosystem with international regimes such as the EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive. Incorporating protein themes into the next phase of BRSR guidelines would ensure India is not just responding to global shifts but setting the pace for other emerging economies. If we act now, India can turn a looming protein crisis into a leadership opportunity, one where our plates become as much a symbol of sustainability as our solar parks and fintech apps.

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The parents were the first to report their children missing in 2005, the first to protest outside D5, and the last to be heard.

HT ARCHIVE

Over the years, they were paraded before television cameras, promised justice, and fed hope. Today, they are left with the legal reality that nobody killed their children.

The court acknowledged this pain, observing with "deep regret" that despite years of investigation, the identity of the true perpetrators has never been established. It faulted the agencies for negligence and delay that "corroded the fact-finding process," including their failure to explore other leads such as a possible organ trade angle. But this recognition offers little solace to families who have watched the State's case collapse in courtroom after courtroom.

The Nithari acquittals are symptomatic of a deeper malaise in India's criminal investigation machinery. At every level, the system failed. The local police failed to preserve a crime scene or collect credible forensic evidence. The CBI failed to correct those lapses or to pursue alternative theories with rigour. Prosecutors failed to build a coherent narrative capable of withstanding judicial scrutiny. And the State failed the victims by turning their tragedy

into a procedural farce.

In a society where public outrage often substitutes for institutional accountability, the Nithari case stands as a cautionary tale. The gruesomeness of the crime cannot excuse investigative shortcuts, nor can emotion justify weak prosecution. The rule of law demands both fairness to the accused and justice for the victims. But in Nithari, both ideals have been betrayed.

With the Supreme Court's latest verdict, Koli walks free, and Pandher remains absolved. The court has done what the law requires, for it cannot convict without proof beyond reasonable doubt. But the question lingers: How did the system allow a case of such magnitude to collapse so completely?

For the parents who still clutch faded photographs of their children, justice has turned into an abstraction. Closure is a luxury they cannot afford. In Nithari, the law has spoken its last word, but the silence that follows is deafening.

The views expressed are personal

{ PRABOWO SUBIANTO } PRESIDENT, INDONESIA

In Indonesia, we have a saying that when we face an emergency, it is our neighbour who will help us

On the signing of a bilateral defence treaty with Australia

Szalay's fiction builds on the melancholy of Europe

Hungary, a former Communist country in Eastern Europe, can be particularly proud of this year's Nobel Prize and the Booker. While László Karsznahorkai, this year's winner for the Nobel Prize in literature, is a writer from Hungary, David Szalay, the 2025 Booker Prize winner, is a Canadian-Hungarian writer. Szalay's father emigrated from Hungary. Apart from that, there is nothing in common between them. Both writers belong to two generations and their narrative styles are also completely different. Karsznahorkai is a postmodernist writer whose experimental narrative style of writing has a modernist lineage. Szalay demonstrates the nature of realist writing in his writing. Karsznahorkai's style is complicated, while Szalay's is a simple narrative style. The chemistry of storytelling is different in both of their writings. While Karsznahorkai's writing confronts the experimentalism of modernity with its dense structure resembling that of mythology and folk narratives, Szalay's follows the style of western realist representation.

The story of *Flesh*, Szalay's Booker winner, is told in a linear mode with no quirks and turns. It follows the old realist pattern of beginning, middle and end. Like 19th century realist novels, thematically, it represents the social mores of its age, which is the late 20th century and early 21st century. It does not detest flesh from a religious point of view nor idealise it from a sexual political perspective. The flesh is erotic; it eroticises the characters in the novel and as well as its readers. There are a few lengthy descriptions of erotic exchanges. Though the protagonist of the novel is part of this erotic encounter, he is a reluctant sexualist.

The novel begins in the Communist 80s of Hungary where as a boy named Istvan he starts living with his mother in a residential estate. In his not-so-thrilling adolescence, he befriends a married middle-aged woman in the neighbourhood who seeks his help in shopping. Soon they get more involved and spend time in her apartment and she gets attracted to him. She politely asks him whether she can kiss him on his lips to which he agrees with a bit of hesitation. This builds up. Each time the woman makes sure that she is not disturbing him and they both do sex with each agreeing to it. One day, she refuses and tells him that it has ended. He is bitter and feels angry towards her husband. In a by chance encounter, Istvan pushes him from the stairs. He falls and dies. Istvan is charged with murder.

In the next part, Istvan, released from the borstal school, is enlisted in the army for waging war in Iraq. He is then released from the army and he dates a few women before leaving for his home country. In the free dating

with women, the fleshiness returns to him. But he is no romantic nor is he an operator, by his own admission. What is Istvan? He is no protagonist either with clear plans or secret desires. It is mere coincidences that take him forward and so also the narrative. It just moves forward. Back in Hungary, he gets a job but he soon migrates to London to take up a job as a driver. In 21st century London he meets Mervyn, again a chance encounter. It is through Mervyn, he meets Karl Nyman. He becomes the chauffeur for Nyman. In one of his trips Helen, Nyman's wife also joins with whom he starts a relationship. It is rather she who starts a relationship with Istvan.

There is nothing exceptional in what ensues. They both get closer and closer. Nyman dies. Helen's and Nyman's son

Thomas inherits his father's property. But till his adulthood this is under a trust, one of the custodians being Helen. Meanwhile, Helen marries Istvan and they have a child. Their relationship of flesh becomes very sparse. They are mostly involved in discussing family affairs. Istvan utilises the trust fund for developing properties. In cliched terms, one can call it a rags to riches story. But that is too superficial. He gets rich, which is true. However, there are no determined operations to defraud the trust fund and accumulate money. He has to confront Thomas who is well aware of his inheritance. As in one of the determining instances of his teenage years, Istvan incidentally attacks Thomas and fatally wounds him. Now, Istvan has his family to worry about. In another fatal accident, his wife and son died.

He returns to his country with his mother and finds a new job. He doesn't express any desire for sex but his coincidental encounters with flesh continues. Istvan keeps an emotional distance from his fleshy encounters as if this there is a certain coldness in him that dissipates his passion for love and longing as though he is reluctant to both of these emotions. He once fathoms the broken relationship of his body and mind, comparing it with his teenage son. However, this thought doesn't distract him nor grips him. The oddity of his personality is his melancholic solitariness. The most used word in the conversations between most of the characters is okay. Each intonation of it emotes a feeling of dispassion.

Interestingly, some of the novels short-listed for this year's Booker prize share this particular trait of exploring solitariness as an awareness of the body. Is extreme loneliness an irascible response to the fleshiness of obscene virtual powers?

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Message from market

Space for fiscal and monetary policy is limited

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) seems somewhat uncomfortable with the prevailing bond yields. The auction of 10-year government bonds worth ₹32,000 crore went through last week, but the RBI had cancelled the auction of seven-year government bonds earlier this month because investors were demanding higher yields. Further, as reported by this newspaper, the central bank has suggested to state governments to reschedule their borrowing to ease the supply pressure. Recently, Maharashtra rejected all the bids for certain bonds. It is worth noting here that the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the RBI has reduced the policy repo rate by 100 basis points this year, but yields on the benchmark 10-year government bonds have declined by only about 30 basis points. Yields on 10-year bonds have gone up by about 20 basis points since the rate cut of 50 basis points in the June policy.

Since yields on government bonds directly affect the cost of money in the financial system, it can be argued that the transmission of policy rate cuts has been weak. The RBI has also injected liquidity into the system with a 100-basis point reduction in the cash reserve ratio, which is being implemented in four tranches — the last one is due for the fortnight beginning November 29. Thus, it is worth debating why the debt-market movement has not been in line with policy expectations, and what this means for fiscal and monetary policy. A recent note by IDFC Bank, for instance, said liquidity in the banking system has been running below the threshold of 1 per cent of net demand and time liabilities since September. The level of liquidity has declined, partly owing to the RBI's intervention in the foreign-exchange market. Thus, a lot will depend on how the RBI deals with liquidity. It has also been reported that some banks are sitting on mark-to-market losses and are not keen on buying large quantities of bonds. Slow deposit growth could also be a factor.

The demand from foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) too seems muted. FPIs brought Indian bonds worth only \$1.2 billion net this year thus far, compared to \$12.6 billion during January–November last year. Further, the net supply of bonds is expected to be higher in the second half of the year compared to the first. Given the prevailing bond-market conditions, any further reduction in the policy repo rate, as anticipated by several market participants, may likely have a limited impact on the cost of funds. Yield movement will depend also on how both the financial market and the central bank expect the inflation rate to move in the coming quarters, because it will determine the durability of a potential rate cut.

The consumer price index-based inflation rate declined to 0.25 per cent in October. However, the last meeting of the MPC projected the inflation rate to increase to 4 per cent in the last quarter this financial year and further to 4.5 per cent in the first quarter next financial year. The tightening of bond yields also has a signal for fiscal policy. Although the government has credibly reduced the fiscal deficit over the past several years, particularly after the pandemic spike, the general government borrowing requirement is still on the higher side. Revenue collection thus far suggests meeting the fiscal-deficit target in the current year could be challenging. Further, the Union government will move to target the debt level from next financial year, which may mean that the fiscal deficit will not decline systematically as has been the case in recent years, and markets may need to adjust.

Governing AI

Innovation-first approach can lead to responsible use

India's "Governance Guidelines for Artificial Intelligence" (AI), released recently by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, marks an important milestone in how the country envisions AI governance. In the absence of a dedicated AI law, these guidelines represent a pragmatic step towards anticipatory governance, one that seeks to manage risks without stifling innovation. Rather than replicate Western models of precautionary regulation, India is crafting a homegrown framework that aligns trust, innovation, and inclusion as mutually reinforcing principles. At the heart of this new architecture are the seven guiding sutras, or principles — trust, people-first design, innovation over restraint, fairness and equity, accountability, understandable by design, and safety, resilience and sustainability.

Supporting these principles are six structural pillars: Infrastructure, capacity building, policy and regulation, institutional design, accountability, and risk mitigation. Each pillar addresses a distinct capability gap. Expanding access to infrastructure through 38,000 graphics processing units, broadening the AI Kosha repository of local datasets, and setting up an AI Safety Institute are foundational steps. They signal India's intent to build hardware, data, and human expertise before legislating. These guidelines come at a critical juncture. A recent NITI Aayog study estimated that AI could add \$1.4 trillion–1.9 trillion to India's gross domestic product by 2035, with productivity gains and reallocation of human effort to higher-value tasks generating \$500 billion–600 billion and innovation contributing another \$280 billion–475 billion.

The guidelines propose embedding accountability directly within code. Techniques such as watermarking, provenance tracking, and consent-management application programming interfaces (APIs) can make content traceable and consent enforceable through digital architecture. Institutional coordination is another aspect. The proposed AI governance group and technology and policy expert committee may harmonise efforts across sectoral regulators. Such cross-regulatory cooperation recognises that AI is not a single-sector phenomenon but a general-purpose technology. Complementing this is a planned AI-incident database, which will collect real-world evidence of harms or failures posed by AI systems. So far, India has relied on existing laws to govern digital platforms and address AI misuse.

For India, the stakes are high. Exercising restraint while promoting innovation requires a delicate balance. Voluntary compliance will hold only if companies act with responsibility. In the absence of strong oversight, poorly governed AI systems may deepen existing social biases and erode public trust. Though the new guidelines aim to prevent such outcomes by pairing technological advancement with ethical discipline, robust data governance will remain indispensable. Clear frameworks must guide the collection, curation, anonymisation, encryption, sharing, and deletion of data, alongside mechanisms for bias detection, validation of synthetic data, and adoption of open standards. Without transparent and secure data pipelines, AI could amplify systemic fragilities instead of correcting them. Equally, the government must engage meaningfully with industry bodies that raise legitimate concern over AI governance, and not remain rigid in prescription. Ultimately, principles and guidelines are merely the starting point; success will depend on sustained investment in skills and institutional accountability.



ILLUSTRATION: AJAYA KUMAR MOHANTY

Budget for FY27: New challenges

It is hoped the Budget reignites the quest for reforms to accelerate the development process

The budgetary process for 2026–27 began in October with the issuing of the circular relating to it and commencement of pre-Budget meetings. With volatility and uncertainty caused by disruptive effects of Trump tariffs and their impact in slowing the world economy and continued international conflicts in spite of the claims by the United States (US) President of having stopped eight wars in the background, the Budget will have to be formulated to deal with formidable challenges. It must continue fiscal consolidation to reduce the fiscal deficit to bring down the ratio of debt to gross domestic product (GDP) — of the central government — to 50–52 per cent by 2031. Besides, it has to provide relief to the major sectors affected by the punitive 50 per cent tariffs levied by the US, particularly because many of these are labour-intensive, like textile, leather, gems & jewellery, marine products, and chemicals. Hopefully, by the time the Budget is presented, we will have signed the trade agreement with the US, and that will provide some clarity in the trade environment. The phasing out of the import of Russian oil might increase the cost of importing crude oil and escalate Budget expenditure.

Despite the uncertain global environment, the Indian economy has performed well to record 7.8 per cent growth in April–June, the highest in the last five quarters. This impressive growth was propelled by a strong performance of the tertiary sector, growing at 9.3 per cent, and manufacturing and construction at 7.5 per cent. On the demand side, growth was driven predominantly by household-consumption expen-

diture and the frontloading of capital expenditure by the Union government. With a good water-reservoir position across India, agricultural production is likely to be good. Reforms in goods and services tax have propelled the purchasing managers' index (PMI) in manufacturing from 57.7 in September to 59.2 in October though the PMI in services has eased marginally from 60.9 in September to 58.9 in October. This optimistic performance has led to the Reserve

**POLICY PILLARS**
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Bank of India (RBI) revising the growth forecast upwards to 6.8 per cent for the year from 6.5 per cent earlier. With a benign inflation scenario, the RBI is likely to cut the policy rate by another 25 basis points in its December 3–5 meeting. Overall, despite the subdued and volatile nature of the global economic environment, the Indian economy seems to be in good shape. Surely, there is some uncertainty in the growth scenario as we are yet to see the impact of the Trump tariffs playing out, and the pace of growth is likely to moderate as the base effect of last financial

year wanes. The major concern, however, is the investment ratio (the ratio of gross domestic capital formation to GDP) has been stubbornly stagnant at about 30 per cent. It should not be forgotten that this was possible because of increases in government investment and the hope of crowding in of private investment though improvement in infrastructure and lower interest rates have not materialised. Accelerating the growth rate to achieve the aspirational goal of becoming a developed country in 2047 requires a substantial increase in the investment

Technology the paper tiger

The threat of artificial intelligence (AI) wiping out swathes of occupations is becoming a grim reality when you note the pace of layoffs and the slowdown in hiring by Big Tech, banking, insurance, high-end manufacturing, and even the travel and hotel industries. The warp-speed pace of change has caught the world unawares. But technological change has been eliminating jobs since the post-war global manufacturing boom, well before AI made its job-threatening entrance on the world stage. The difference was that the pace of change was relatively slow. It was information technology (IT) that changed the velocity of the transformation.

The industry in which this newspaper functions is a case in point. For at least a century, newspaper pages around the world were produced on hot metal presses, demanding a unique level of subeditorial skills in reading metal slugs backwards. In the West, this technology was gradually phased out between the 1960s and the 1980s (the *New York Times* made the transition only in 1978). India entered this phase in the early to mid-eighties, replacing hot metal with "cold press" or photo-typesetting. The clatter and romance of the old iron monsters operated by singlet-clad "composers" were replaced by the air-conditioned setting of green-screened computers and the anodyne buzz of dot matrix printers churning out "proofs".

This transition was accompanied by some loss of jobs as page-setters who could not make the transition to computer typing were laid off (not without a degree of industrial unrest, it must be added). But the basics of the daily creation process were more or less intact. Reporters bashed out their copy on recycled newsprint fed into massive typewriters, which demanded a fair level of physical stamina to operate. These were then sent to H-shaped desks peopled by subeditors, senior

subeditors, and chief subeditors, who edited or rewrote the copy, again on those monstrous typewriters. Edited copy then went to the composers and returned as "proofs" to a battery of proofreaders, who sometimes demanded "second proofs" if the quality of the composition was not up to standard.

The amended and corrected copy was then rendered in dark rooms into "galleys" or "pulls". The processing was based on instructions from the subs and they now seem thrillingly cryptic — "s/c, 11 ems" or "d/c 22 ems, bld" and so on to fit a page layout, which was drawn out on an eight-column graph paper by dint of old-fashioned ruler and pencil. The relatively new "profession" was that of "paste-up" men, who cut and pasted the galleys on newspaper-sized paper, using a mixture of petrol-infused glue, the aroma of which was mildly addictive. These giant pages were sent to a dark room to be processed by men in white coats applying mysterious chemicals before being sent down to thundering printing machines to magically appear as the next day's edition.

It took less than a decade for this system to be swept away by changes that were more profound and lasting but less noticed. Page-making software entered the domain, allowing news copy to be written and edited on networked computers and "exported" directly to online page grids, together with photos processed using online software. At one shot, this transition eliminated at four job functions — the composers, proofreaders, "paste-up" men, and even dark-room assistants, who processed photographs that were pasted on pages. Interestingly, this change in the newspaper business happened without much industrial unrest — and at a time when Indian public-sector bank employees' unions were protesting the introduction of computerisation.

Supreme Court, for which he was reprimanded. Yet this official went on to win an award by the Union home ministry. Mr Teltumbde takes us through his

experience inside jail and how it shattered his preconceived notions about imprisonment. He tells us how officials exercised unbridled power inside the prison and treated inmates poorly. In his 31 months in prison, he spent considerable time talking to his fellow prisoners to understand what led them there and why they did what they did. His conclusion from these informal interviews was that they reflected a direct indictment of our society. The question is simple, he writes. Should we only blame a person for committing a crime rather than solving the conditions that led a person with limited choices to doing so? His story, though, is a familiar one. Evi-

dence from countless accounts of prison diaries reflects the same practice of prison authorities exercising power without accountability. Still, every such account matters because society at large is mostly disconnected with the dystopian realities of prison life. Accounts such as Mr Teltumbde's deserve to be heard above the mechanisms society puts in place to block any information that might make us feel uncomfortable with the kind of world we have built.

In 2019 I attended a two-day seminar where activists from all over the country spoke on various aspects of social justice. That was the first time I heard Mr Teltumbde speak live. He explained how he and several other human rights defenders were being targeted in the Bhima Koregaon case because their demands for justice for marginalised

communities held a mirror to the failings of the state. He underlined how Indian civil society had collectively failed to safeguard such defenders and also that he had an inkling of his arrest. Sure enough, a few months later, he was arrested.

This book is an important addition to the discussion about incarceration, the dilapidated state of our prisons, our judicial system, as well as a reflection on our democracy itself. The BK-16 case is a testament to how far the concept of making "the process the punishment" has been weaponised against any voice that chooses to speak truth to power. Kudos must also go to Siddhesh Gautam for his compelling cover illustration showing the author behind bars but with hands extended outside the bars. It underlines that, despite everything, Mr Teltumbde will not be silenced.

The reviewer is a writer and translator from Allahabad and a cofounder of RAQS, a collective working in the city on gender, sexuality and mental health

'BK-16': Arrested development



CHITTAJIT MITRA

In Indian society, children are told if they studied hard and got a good job, they would have the liberty to do whatever they want. Anand Teltumbde did exactly that. He is an IIT and IIM alumnus, worked in the public sector and rose to become a managing director of a corporation before leaving to become an academic. This successful middle-class background gave him confidence that his indictment of the caste system and

demands for social justice would not be used against him by the state. He was wrong. In *The Cell and the Soul*, he talks about his time in the Taloja central jail, what led him there and his observations about the functioning of the Indian carceral system.

BR Ambedkar once said: "Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellow men." He understood that a fractured society cannot really enjoy the fruits of democracy; differences will be used against each other; until we inherently feel that all fellow human beings are equal, we cannot build a successful nation. But what happens if people who are continuously working to achieve such a society are not only mercilessly targeted but also falsely defamed, that too by the same authorities who are expected to uphold the Constitution?

Anand Teltumbde and 15 other academics and activists were arrested in the Bhima Koregaon–Elgar Parishad case, known for short as the "BK-16 case". In this book, Mr Teltumbde shows how the narrative built against him by the investigating agencies was, in fact, a calculated misrepresentation of information about him or his works that were available in the public domain. The police went on to distribute documents to the media that were not even presented as evidence in the courts. The author decided to file a defamation suit against Param Bir Singh, then the additional director general of police (law and order). Fortunately for him, the courts took note of his transgressions and issued a reprimand. But this judicial rebuke didn't appear to deter the investigating agencies one whit. Another police official went on to arrest the author while he was under the protection of the

**The Cell and the Soul**
by Anand Teltumbde
Published by Bloomsbury India
256 pages ₹699



A thought for today
There is nothing more likely to start disagreement among people or countries than an agreement
- EB WHITE

Trump’s Dealemma

He sounds keen on a trade deal now, but it’s in India’s interest to wait for US Supreme Court order on his tariffs

After delays, disappointments and a brief falling out, the India-US trade deal seems around the corner. Trump’s said it’s “pretty close”. Commerce minister Piyush Goyal sees it happening “any day” now, even “tomorrow”. For India, it won’t be a day too soon because \$40bn worth of labour-intensive exports have been at stake ever since Trump imposed a punitive tariff on India in late Aug. US equally needs a deal to access Indian markets, and ensure the India-China thaw – forced by its own rigid stand on Russian energy – does not hurt its strategic interests.

The deal has to happen. Not because Trump considers India an “amazing country”, but because it is a nation of “actually, 1.5bn people”, where he expects his new ambassador, Sergio Goro, to “promote investments in key industries and technologies, increase American energy exports and expand our security cooperation”. Clearly, US needs India as much as India needs it. After his petulant “dead economy” jibe in July, Trump got real about India. By early Sept, he was looking forward to “speaking with my very good friend, Prime Minister Modi”. Birthday wishes, Diwali greetings, and thanks for “support on ending the War between Russia and Ukraine” followed.

There have been five rounds of trade negotiations meanwhile, and it looks like there’s nothing left to iron out now. For India, this resolution is commendable because not once – unlike UK, Japan, Korea, etc – did it rush to plead its case, and pump up Trump. It refused to bend under the burden of his 50% tariff, and as Goyal said, has refused to “compromise the interests of farmers, dairy and workers”. Likewise, Trump is satisfied that India has “very substantially” cut back its purchase of Russian energy. *Bloomberg* recently reported that five big Indian refiners have not ordered any Russian oil for Dec. That gives Trump his off ramp to slash tariff on India.

The stage is set then, but India shouldn’t sign the deal before Trump waives the penal tariff. When it goes, the balance 25% tariff would still be disadvantageous for India, vis-à-vis Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia and China, which enjoys unmatched economies of scale. Having been so patient for so long, India should aim for a 15% rate. There’s no need to rush because if US Supreme Court strikes down Trump’s tariffs in the coming weeks, the pre-Trump average US tariff of 3.3% would be far more advantageous than any deal.

Joke’s On Pak

Islamabad blaming India and Afghanistan for terrorism on its own soil is laughable

Pakistan continues to live in a state of delusion. After a suicide bombing outside an Islamabad court claimed the lives of 12 people, Shehbaz Sharif quickly pointed fingers at India and Afghanistan. Needless to say, this is laughable and a poorly disguised attempt at deflecting blame from Pakistan’s own failings. For a country that practically wrote the playbook on maintaining double standards on terrorism – nurturing terror purveyors while claiming to be victims of terrorism – it’s rich that it now tries to implicate others for its own sins.

There was time in the 1950s and 60s that Pakistan was being studied by foreign experts as a possible South Asian success story. But the disastrous measures of its leadership in 1971 in response to the liberation movement in what was then East Pakistan – now Bangladesh – served a body-blow to the very idea of Pakistan. Today, it continues similar colonial policies in Balochistan, provoking a powerful movement against Islamabad’s exploitation. During the Soviet-Afghan war, Pakistan hosted tens of thousands of mujahideen fighters to curry favour with US. Pakistani Taliban is their progeny. Recall also, it was merely a 100km from Islamabad in Abbottabad that bin Laden was found holed up.

Pakistan thinks it can play all sides and be friends with both US and China, turning to each whenever it needs to be bailed out. But it forgets that national strength stems from skilled people, institutions and economy. All three failed to develop because its military had other priorities. Today, Pakistan is a military dictatorship masquerading as a civilian regime. And with the 27th constitutional amendment – which gives lifetime immunity to Asim Munir – about to be passed, even the fig leaf of a hybrid regime is coming off. The question is how long Pakistan’s delusions can last in the face of its polycrises.

Fat-checking

New weapons of ‘mass’ destruction

Bachi Karkaria

There was much buzz last week over weight-reducing drug Mounjaro becoming No. 1 pharma brand, outselling infection-reducing Augmentin. This not only knocks inches off its exultant users but now made its manufacturer Eli Lilly inch past GSK. Its India partner for this is legendary AK Hamied’s Cipla, which till now was best known for knocking the bottom off Big Pharma. In fact, the multinationals lobby was rumoured to have deprived Cipla’s scientists of the Nobel it could well have won for its pathbreaking anti-retroviral HIV-AIDS therapies. Ah well, good to know it’s gone viral by now coming to the aid of those immuno-deficient against other appetites.

What’s getting eyes popping and jaws dropping is the speed at which this WRD is mopping off competition. Its Sept sales jumped 42% higher than Aug’s. That’s when it gave a severe gastric attack to antacid Pan to become No. 2 in India. Should we call it Mounting KiliMounjaro? Unlike Africa’s long-dormant highest peak, it has def created a volcanic disruption.

Ok, regardless of the belching lava (and not just from antacid walls), isn’t the news about a WRD ousting an antibiotic something to celebrate? It suggests that more people are worried about the effect of burgers than of bacteria. C’mon, what’s not to hurrah about that?

Let’s take our Insta divas – and who isn’t, since everyone is on non-candid camera? If they’re swagging about with the give-away shriveled, hollow-cheeked look once reserved for those seriously afflicted, I’d say weight-reduction drugs are a great leveller. A social one especially, since going to bed hungry has leapt from dire necessity to lifestyle choice.

Augmentin sales were augmented by its combinations which helped combat several multidrug-resistant (MDR) bacteria. Now along comes this aura-exuding WRD offering multicuisine resistance. ‘Gimme more!’ say the hip and hyped, ‘so I can eat less of more.’ And get a flat tummy without big-bucks tuck. Wow!

The icing on the chocolate cake is that it reduces blood sugar as well. Diet and diabetes tackled in one swallow.

Btw, a major side-effect is heartburn/acid reflux. Revenge of the ousted antacids?

Alec Smart said: “The Hippocrates oath has been doctored – cynically.”



erratica

Why Terror Wears White Collar

Profile of Red Fort blast accused is no surprise. Not just al-Qaeda, IS but also some modules busted in India earlier had educated professionals in key positions. As did left & right wing violent outfits in the West. Terrorists want skills, professionals who join them like the mix of ‘ideology’ & ‘power’

Aishwaria Sonavane



J&K Police described an inter-state and transnational terrorist module it recently cracked open as a ‘white-collar terror ecosystem’. In counterterrorism vocabulary, this is an expression both seemingly novel and unsettling – because it is in contradiction with the imagery deeply embedded in our collective psyche, where radicalisation is a product of the disenfranchised, the marginalised, and the misled.

While the links between the series of arrests in Haryana, Kashmir, UP, and the blast in Delhi that claimed at least 13 lives remain under probe, their framing warrants close examination. The notion of ‘white-collar terrorism’ – professionals and educated individuals weaponising their ‘professional legitimacy, academic networks’, and access to financial and institutional resources for violent ends – compels a rethinking of the radical mindset.

The descriptive profile of Ajmal Kasab, who was the only terrorist to survive the 2008 Mumbai attacks, illustrates the usual socio-economic narratives shaping popular perceptions of terrorism. Hailing from a poverty-stricken rural background in Pakistan, Kasab was often portrayed as a desperate, deceived youth lured into terrorism, an image that made sense in the Indian imagination. This focus on his personal profile came at a cost, as the operational networks driving him were very sophisticated and transnational.

In truth, the infiltration and presence of white-collar professionals from doctors to engineers and academics, have long existed at all hierarchical levels of extremist groups, often occupying leadership positions.

A few names come to mind immediately. Ayman al-Zawahiri, slain leader of al-Qaeda, was trained as a surgeon and deeply immersed in Cairo’s Islamist intellectual networks. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, former leader of IS, leveraged scholarly credentials to administer a so-called state. And Osama bin Laden held a degree in engineering.

This pattern is mirrored domestically. Homegrown IS-linked modules busted in recent years reveal the involvement of radicalised engineers, IT professionals, and doctors from states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala. These reinforce that the appeal of extremism is across socio-economic backgrounds and professions.

In fact, IS and al-Qaeda deliberately sought to recruit educated professionals. Engineers were drafted to develop explosives, and maintain the outfits’ technical

backbone. Doctors were brought into service to run clinics and provide critical healthcare. Media specialists were recruited to produce polished propaganda to turn ideology into spectacle.

But the phenomenon is neither exclusive to foreign extremists nor confined to Islamist terrorism. Its historical precedents range across multiple ideological spectrums. For instance, the far-left Red Army Faction in 1970s Germany was founded and headed by intellectuals, university students, and journalists. Ethno-nationalist movements in the subcontinent similarly feature such figures.

Allah Nazar Baloch, a medical doctor by profession, now heads the Baloch Liberation Front, while the



JOURNALIST, SURGEON, ENGINEER: Red Army Faction’s Ulrike Marie Meinhof (Left), al-Qaeda’s Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden (Right)

Baloch Liberation Army’s first female suicide bomber, Shari Baloch, responsible for the 2022 Karachi University blast in Pakistan, held a master’s degree in zoology and worked as a secondary school teacher. Both exemplify the exploitation of conventional professional life and social credibility to mask extremist agendas.

The pattern is also evident in the Khalistan movement, embodied by Gurbatwant Singh Pannun, a lawyer and the prominent public face of the ‘Sikhs for Justice’ outfit. Similarly, right-wing extremist networks in US have relied on professionally credentialed personalities such as Robert Jay Mathews, reportedly a trained engineer, who established the white supremacist group ‘The Order’.

This consistency across ideologies compels us to look beyond conventional, economically-deterministic models of radicalisation. For a ‘white-collar terrorist’, the appeal is potentially an amalgamation of ‘purpose’, ‘ideology’, and ‘power’.

The M In Bihar’s MY Was Silent, Two Reasons

RJD fielded far fewer Muslim candidates & its pitch pretty much ignored the community’s concerns

Tanweer Alam



For decades, Bihar’s Muslim electorate was front and centre of focus in electoral politics, the so-called ‘M vote’ both JDU’s and RJD’s base. But the 2025 election saw a shift – during campaigning, enthusiasm in Muslim communities for elections gave way to a silent wariness.

Historically, Muslims have supported secular alliances. They ensure community members vote for parties claiming to be inclusive. Statewide, they comprise over 20% in around 87 seats. Will their turnout (as and when it’s known) and even new voter rolls, impact outcomes? Because this time, the community, till poll day, had demonstrated a disengagement that arose from two broad, and deeply felt, concerns: lack of representation and invisibilisation from political discourse.

Lack of political representation | The 2022 Bihar survey showed Muslims make up 17.7% of population, and influence outcomes in nearly 70 of the state’s 243 assembly constituencies. Muslims have voted en bloc for Mahagathabandhan. Nearly 80% Muslim votes went to MGB in 2015 and 77% in 2020. All told, over various elections, about 40% of MGB votes have come from the community.

Despite their significance to the grand alliance’s fortunes, MGB parties gave tickets to just 30 Muslims this year. RJD nominated a mere 18 Muslim candidates against its 143 seats – about 12%. In contrast, RJD fielded 53 Yadav candidates, although the community constitutes only about 14% of the state’s population. Mukesh Sahani’s party fielded none out of his 15 and Left parties fielded just two. Congress aligned its candidate profile with demographic reality – 10 Muslim candidates of 61, roughly 17%.

Of course, presence of elected representatives is no absolute guarantee a community’s interests will be protected, but it remains an important democratic metric that underlines the majority community’s willingness to share power and the minority’s access to it.

The argument for exclusion of Muslim community rests on the cold calculus of ‘winnability’. Political

parties argue they’re being pragmatic. This pragmatism, however, translates into an almost mathematical form of segregation. The Muslim electorate in Bihar can be broadly divided into three categories.

● First, constituencies where Muslims constitute less than 20%. Here, the argument is they cannot win.

● Second, where they form roughly 30%. Here, a more insidious logic takes hold: parties fear fielding a Muslim candidate would trigger counter-polarisation.

● Consequently, the only category where Muslims are deemed viable is the third: seats where they constitute over 40%, as these are perceived as impossible for MGB to win without their support.



This arithmetic confines Muslim candidacy almost entirely to Seemanchal. Outside this pocket, the community’s prescribed role is not to lead, but to deliver an en bloc vote for the opposition candidate.

The unspoken truth, however, is that the political contract underpinning a diverse electoral process, in which a party’s votes are transferred to its candidate regardless of identity, is beginning to break down. Muslim candidates are broadly not benefitting from the support of the party’s other core social groups. The community has begun to recognise this, and questions the nature of this relationship. Such a contract functions only when a political party can command its

social base to back its selected candidate.

Invisibilisation from discourse | If political representation falls short, one might at least hope the community’s concerns would be reflected in political debates or in gestures of solidarity. Yet even in these spaces, the community remains strategically absent. This absence became evident with Tejashwi’s announcement of chief ministerial and deputy CM candidacies, where the word ‘Muslim’ wasn’t even mentioned. Subsequent ‘clarifications’ hinted at the possibility of a Muslim deputy CM. The community is rarely visible on key platforms where major announcements were made. Their leadership was effectively rendered invisible.

Political debate has narrowed to a post-ideological ground, where leaders speak only of developmental projects like education and healthcare. While these are undeniably important, this singular focus deliberately sidelines other issues: a pervasive fear in the air, spectre of violence, and anxieties that beset the community.

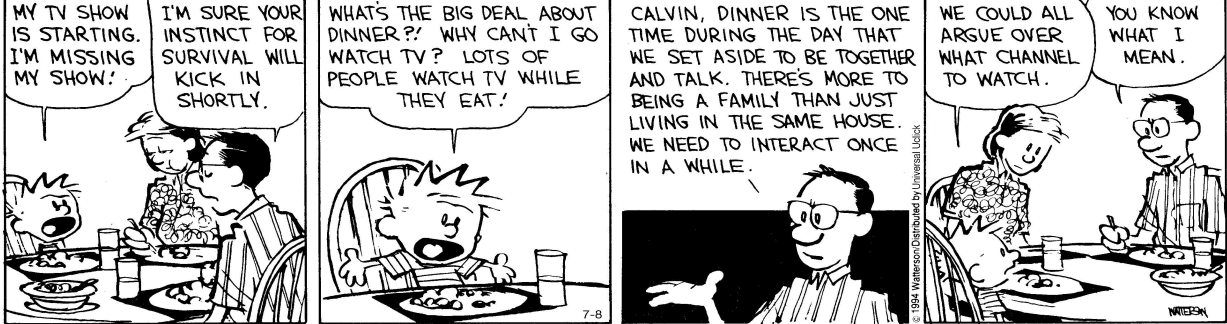
Opposition parties, in particular, have appeared afraid to even mention the word ‘Muslim’, let alone directly address their concerns about targeted hate speech, violence and economic boycotts. The only exception is Rahul Gandhi, who has confronted divisive ideologies. In turn, he appears to have gained greater traction within the community, which now views him with renewed hope.

But the larger silence on community issues has created an emotional chasm. Consequence is a growing disillusionment that would potentially reshape their political engagement in elections, a quiet, concerning conviction that their voice, and very presence, no longer matters in the political sphere. The message is clear: even for opposition parties, Muslim votes are welcome, not Muslim candidates and their issues.

In 1947, Maulana Azad in an iconic speech at Delhi’s Jama Masjid assured Indian Muslims they were integral to the nation’s future. “The fundamental decisions about the country will remain incomplete without Muslims,” he said. However, over seven decades on, in one of India’s most politically aware states, Muslims find themselves relegated to the margins.

The writer is researcher at University of Oxford

Calvin & Hobbes



Partha Sinha

Kali is not a goddess carved in stone. She is the logic of decay wearing a garland of skulls. She is entropy, disguised as divinity. Where others promise salvation through order, Kali promises truth through disorder.

In thermodynamics, entropy is the slow unravelling of structure – the tax that time imposes on form. In mythology, Kali is the same principle, but in poetry, She is the heat death of the universe turned into a mother figure. To the physicist, she is an equation; to the philosopher, she is a mirror. She reveals that every beginning carries its own end like a seed carries its own soil.

James Ladyman once wrote, “The world is not made of things, but of processes.” Kali is that process in its most

honest form. She doesn’t build temples; She builds cycles, turning galaxies into dust and dust into galaxies, without judgement, without preference. Peter Godfrey-Smith observed that “Life is a way of resisting entropy.” Kali is what life resists – and what life eventually becomes.

Her mythology is not about death but about distribution. The same energy that fuels creation must one day fuel dissolution. Every heartbeat, every thought, every empire is a brief act of organisation in an ocean of collapse. Kali’s laughter, heard in the cremation grounds, is not horror; it is humour. She laughs because she knows how the story ends.

Look at her image. The black skin – symbol of infinity. The lolling tongue –

mockery of our appetite for permanence. The skulls – reminders that identity is recyclable. In her form, there is no hierarchy of creation and destruction. She is the mother and the undertaker, the algorithm and anomaly.

In the semiotics of civilisation, we reward what looks controlled. We call it progress, innovation, culture. But Kali warns us: every empire of control collapses under its own weight. Even data, god of our age, will decay into noise. Information is just order waiting to become myth.

Socially, Kali came from the edges – forests, cremation grounds, places where the polished world ends. Her devotees were those who had no stake in permanence – the excluded, the excessive, the ecstatic.



THE SPEAKING TREE

Sacred space

Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are.

Saint Augustine

Apropos 'The Seven Crystal Balls' by TK Arun (Nov 12), the sweeping changes sought by Trump have been tempered by resistant global economies through evolving interactions among affected US-reliant countries. Technological advances in AI, manufacturing and biotech bring hope to the aspiring, if beleaguered, populations where falling birth rates pose unforeseen consequences. Persistent climate change presents difficult-to-overcome challenges. Rising non-warring power China, along with a retreating US, may actually bring about world peace in spite of an enfeebled UN. Women's empowerment, while disrupting established patterns of population growth, enriches humankind by making available new opportunities and development pathways. Social media, if not buttressed with communicable facts, needs continual addressing to prevent violent rejection and promote fraternity.

Buddha Bagai
New Delhi



Qualified success

Male out-migration and cash transfers make women's turnout higher in Bihar

Bihar has again demonstrated a singular electoral pattern in the Assembly elections which have ended. In preliminary voter turnout data from the Election Commission of India (ECI), women outnumbered men by at least 4.34 lakh votes, which is striking as they were registered approximately 42 lakh fewer than men on the electoral rolls following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). This gender gap, where those with fewer registrations turned out in greater absolute numbers, underscores a complex interplay of welfare politics, demographic realities and lingering questions about electoral roll integrity. The paradox becomes pronounced when viewed against the backdrop of the SIR exercise that preceded the election. It resulted in net exclusions favouring men, with women disproportionately removed from the rolls. Following these deletions, the gender ratio of Bihar's electorate plummeted to just 892 in the final SIR rolls, as against 907 recorded barely a year earlier. *The Hindu's* statistical analysis of the draft SIR and exclusion data – released after a Supreme Court of India directive – revealed that women (18-29 years) were most severely affected, particularly under the “permanently shifted” category of exclusions. This suggests that women who moved after marriage bore the brunt of deletions, with no transparency on whether they were added to rolls in their new locations.

Despite these anomalies, the higher turnout of women is likely to work to the advantage of the Nitish Kumar-led government, if past electoral trends hold true. His nearly two-decade tenure has consistently emphasised women's empowerment through targeted welfare measures. This election cycle saw the launch of the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana in September, and the transfer of ₹10,000 to women across Bihar. Disbursements continued after the Model Code of Conduct, with the ECI accepting the questionable rationale that it was an “ongoing scheme”. Higher participation by women in electoral processes is worth celebrating. Such patterns have been largely confined to States with either intense political-ideological contestation – West Bengal and Kerala – or those with high development indices. Bihar, however, presents a different picture. Its high male out-migration rates, for work, partly explain why women's absolute turnout exceeded men's despite their smaller registered base. The last-minute cash transfers and these structural demographic factors appear to be more responsible for the turnout pattern than any deep political or ideological mobilisation. This brings into focus the ECI's silence on a fundamental question: how did Bihar's electoral rolls end up with a gender ratio significantly lower than what surveys indicate for the State's population? Until the ECI provides transparent answers about the SIR process, the celebration of the higher women's turnout must remain qualified. Electoral participation gains meaning only when preceded by fair and accurate voter registration.

Renewed rivalry

India will be keen to move ahead in the new cricket Test cycle

Kolkata's Eden Gardens, one of cricket's hallowed venues, will again host South Africa. Back in 1991, when South Africa was readmitted to cricket following the withdrawal of apartheid and the consequent lifting of a 21-year sporting ban, it was the eastern metropolis that rolled out the red carpet to Clive Rice and his men. The first ODI was played at a packed Eden on November 10, one in which India prevailed, and 34 years later, another Protean unit led by Temba Bavuma will clash against Shubman Gill's men in the first Test commencing on Friday. In a fresh cycle, South Africa, the defending champion in the ICC World Test Championship, is up against India, often an indomitable force in its own backyard. That the tour of England was drawn at 2-2 in the longest format and the subsequent Tests against the West Indies at home were swept aside, is a pointer to the form and ability of Gill's unit despite the retirements of Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and R. Ashwin and the continued absence of Mohammed Shami. The first two may still be playing ODIs, but this truly is Gill's era and five tons in his last seven Tests reveals a batter finding an extra gear when given the extra responsibility of captaincy.

This latest cricketing joust is like a full-course meal as it features two Tests, three ODIs and five T20Is. India can finesse its plans and team combinations in all three formats, besides gaining further inputs on the form and relevance of Rohit and Kohli after their decent run during the recent ODIs in Australia. The T20Is too will have an added layer as India and Sri Lanka will be hosting the ICC T20 World Cup next year. That Rishabh Pant is back in the mix, after a hiatus following an injury, augurs well while the other wicket-keeper Dhruv Jurel may still find his slot as a pure batter considering his exploits with the India A unit. Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, K.L. Rahul, Ravindra Jadeja, Pant, Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj constitute the nucleus of a squad that is dealing with transition under coach Gautam Gambhir. South Africa with its blend of doughty batters and a sharp attack headlined by Kagiso Rabada, can be a strong opposition. The visitors also have an adequate blend of spin revealing an Indian origin flavour thanks to the presence of Keshav Maharaj and Senuran Muthusamy. Last year, host India was humbled by New Zealand and even if it is largely seen as an aberration, Bavuma's men could draw inspiration from the Black Caps.

Last month, when Google unveiled its plans for its largest Artificial Intelligence (AI) data centre outside of California, U.S., in Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu gleefully claimed bragging rights – a global tech titan choosing his State for a marquee investment over regional rivals such as Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The jubilation in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, could be heard across State borders. In Tamil Nadu, a former All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Minister chided the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-led Stalin government for failing to woo Google, although it is headed by a true-blue Tamil. Across another border, a Karnataka Minister suggested, with barely concealed envy, that Andhra Pradesh had lured Google with “extravagant subsidies”.

Strip away the politics, though, and what you see is something profoundly healthy – competition among States for investment – a potentially powerful engine for growth. For the first time in decades, Chief Ministers are not queuing in Delhi's corridors of power, but are in boardrooms of multinationals and corporate conclaves, persuading investors that India's best destination is their State.

Central patronage to competitive federalism

To appreciate this shift, cast your mind back to pre-1991 India. For four decades after Independence, capital investment was largely a political decision made in New Delhi. The “commanding heights” of the economy were occupied by bureaucrats who dispensed patronage through licences, permits and quotas. The country's industrial geography was determined by political calculation rather than market forces. The Centre decided what should be produced, how much should be produced, and, crucially, where it should be produced.

States, on their part, vied for investment not by wooing potential investors but by wooing politicians in Delhi.

The reforms in 1991 changed that. By dismantling industrial licensing and opening India to trade and investment, liberalisation shifted power – at least partly – from the Centre to the States. One of the unstated hopes then was that economic freedom would unleash competition among States to attract investors through better infrastructure, governance and policy stability.

That transformation took time. For much of the next two decades, investment decisions remained Delhi-centric. Public enterprises continued to dominate and State bureaucracies were slow to adapt to a more entrepreneurial era.

The promise of reforms is now being realised.



Duvvuri Subbarao

is a former Governor, Reserve Bank of India (2008-2013)

States are no longer queuing for Delhi's patronage but are campaigning with investors and pitching their case with confidence and data

Inter-State rivalry that is fuelling India's growth

The rise of competitive federalism has been one of the quiet revolutions of the past decade. States today compete not just with land, concessional utilities and tax breaks, but with reliability – predictable policy, faster clearances, skilled labour and good governance.

Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka vying for global tech mandates – from Google to Micron – is evidence of a maturing federal economy. When Foxconn debated where to locate its electronics facilities, States from Maharashtra to Tamil Nadu made pitches at the highest level. When Vedanta and Foxconn announced their semiconductor joint venture, both Maharashtra and Gujarat lobbied intensely, with Gujarat eventually breasting the tape. The tussle between Tamil Nadu and Telangana over electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing hubs underscored how investment courting has become a professional, high-stakes exercise.

Experience in other federations

India is not unique in this. Healthy subnational competition is a defining feature of all successful federations.

In the United States, when Amazon announced plans for a second headquarters, over 200 cities submitted proposals offering tax breaks, infrastructure support and workforce commitments. Although critics called it a subsidy race, it forced cities to improve governance and transparency. Many of the proposals later formed blueprints for urban renewal projects even where Amazon did not invest.

In Germany, the federal Länder (States) compete to attract high-tech industries. Bavaria's transformation into an innovation hub – home to BMW, Siemens and a cluster of “Mittelstand” firms – owes much to policy agility that other German States have since emulated.

Australia and Canada show similar patterns. Australian States compete to attract mining, clean energy and education investments, while Canadian provinces such as Ontario and British Columbia vie for technology and film production hubs. The result in all these cases is a virtuous cycle: competition that spurs innovation, efficiency and reform.

India's own States are now entering that league. The best-performing ones are magnets for both capital and ideas, setting governance benchmarks that others must meet or exceed.

The Centre, to its credit, has encouraged this shift. Rankings on ease of doing business, startup promotion and export readiness have intensified competition in constructive ways. Investors, once daunted by India's bureaucracy, now see its regional diversity as a positive – multiple entry

with cloned audio – remains unclear.

Additionally, will a three-second disclaimer in a 30 second audio clip be effective? Or will it be ignored like the fine print in advertisements? Similarly, will a three-minute disclaimer in a 30-minute video inform viewers or overwhelm them?

We are still in the development phase of AI, and any prescriptive mandate on labels would not be principle-based, future-proof and technology-neutral. In some cases, it may not meet the reasonable person test like the 10% rule.

But it is not the question of labels alone. Watermarks promised by AI companies lack reliability. Within days of a large company releasing a text-to-video social media platform, with assurances that these videos would bear watermarks declaring them synthetic, tools emerged that could scrub these markings entirely.

Consequently, the framework needs fine-tuning and precise standards for each category. A tiered-labelling system that distinguishes between ‘fully AI-generated’, ‘AI-assisted’, and ‘AI-altered’ content may be more effective.

Graded compliance, targeted intervention

The proposed rules mandate intermediaries such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and X to analyse and label synthetic media, and they must broaden the scope to include creators directly. Creators frequently employ AI for visual storytelling tasks and also generate avatars and digital twins. But few inform the audience about their use. Although certain videos exhibit clear indicators of manipulation, other synthetic media have now achieved such realism that viewers struggle to distinguish between human- and AI-created content.

Also, creators above a follower threshold should disclose AI use similar to SSIMs; voluntary self-labelling can be promoted among smaller ones.

Graded compliance will acknowledge that professional creators hold significant influence and, therefore, owe transparency to their

points, each with distinct strengths. Andhra Pradesh's ease of doing business, Punjab's entrepreneurial verve, Tamil Nadu's skilled workforce, Gujarat's infrastructure, Jharkhand's mineral base and Uttar Pradesh's vast untapped potential – each is part of a mosaic that together makes India a federation of opportunity.

Competition, of course, carries risks. It should not degenerate into a race to the bottom. States must guard against reckless subsidies or indiscriminate land giveaways that undermine fiscal stability. The smarter path lies in competing through competence and credibility, not concessions.

Healthy rivalry also fosters imitation of best practices. When one State reforms single-window clearances, others follow. When one launches an EV policy, others sharpen theirs. A Haryana success provokes a Himachal response; a Madhya Pradesh reform triggers a Chhattisgarh recalibration; an Odisha initiative spurs West Bengal to better it. This dynamic, cross-State learning is driving policy diffusion across India – a hallmark of vibrant federalism. The global manufacturing and services landscape is now in churn. As multinationals diversify away from China, they seek scale, predictability and credible governance. The “+1” in the China+1 formula must be earned – State by State. No investor lands in “India” in the abstract; they land in Bengaluru, Bhopal or Bhubaneswar. In that sense, India competes globally through its States.

The new federal compact

In just three decades, India has moved from a permission-based economy to a persuasion-based one. States no longer queue for Delhi's patronage; they campaign with CEOs and investors, pitching their case with confidence and data.

This is a transformation of mindset as much as of policy. The Andhra Pradesh-Tamil Nadu-Karnataka exchanges over Google's data centre may sound like parochial bickering, but they actually signify a maturing federal compact. States now view every investment not as central patronage but as a conquest earned through effort.

Every time Andhra Pradesh secures a tech data centre, or Gujarat wins a semiconductor plant, or Uttar Pradesh's electronics parks around Noida light up with new investment, or West Bengal breathes life into its ports and power grids to attract industry, the benefits ripple far beyond State borders. Each success strengthens supply chains, builds skills, and deepens India's industrial fabric. The bottom line: In the race for investment, every State that wins for itself, also wins for India.

audiences. It can help creators not just gain and retain public trust but also keep up with evolving regulations.

Verification needs more hands on deck

Currently, the rules require SSIMs to ask users to label their content as synthetic. Platforms also have to deploy tools to verify the accuracy of such declarations. But synthetic media is multiplying faster than verification technology, and platforms have, so far, had limited success with labelling.

Most social media platforms adhere to Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA) standards to identify and establish the origins of digital content. However, as C2PA evolves, content is not strictly labelled as a norm. Besides, it is challenging for social media platforms to detect AI-generated or algorithmically-created content. Ultimately, the platforms would require the assistance of third-party detection tools, which are only as reliable as their training and accuracy.

So far, platforms have not refined their tools. An audit by Indicator, a publication that monitors digital deception, found that most failed to label AI content: Only 30% of its 516 AI-generated test posts across Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, TikTok and YouTube were correctly flagged. Google and Meta did not label content from their own AI tools. TikTok only flagged its in-app creations, and Pinterest, the top performer, effectively labelled just 55%.

As the focus shifts to providing credible information, the social media ecosystem should also rely on the discernment of independent information verifiers and auditors. This is especially critical for harmful, fraudulent and misleading content where the stakes are high. Such auditors can be trusted to close gaps in automated detection systems through human judgment, helping platforms become more resilient to deepfakes and protecting users.

The adage, “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is”, will soon be codified into India's IT laws. With nuance, users will no longer need to second-guess authenticity. The label will provide clarity.

Fine-tune the AI labelling regulations framework

Two months ago, millions of Indians watched the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speak about indirect tax reforms. At the same time, a video travelled across instant messaging platforms in which the Minister appeared to endorse an investment scheme promising “30x returns in seven days”. A Roorkee resident (Uttarakhand) lost ₹66 lakh after viewing this viral video, later found to have been created using Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools.

The rapid rise of near-indistinguishable digital alterations demands urgent, multi-stakeholder action.

Although the government initially recognised the existing framework as sufficient to tackle synthetic media, it has now introduced draft amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The amendments mandate that large social media platforms/Significant Social Media Intermediaries (SSMIs) clearly label synthetic or AI-generated media.

While the proposed rules mark a meaningful step forward, their real-world implementation will be complex and require engagement across multiple stakeholders.

Noble intent, ambiguous grouping

Synthetic media is defined as content that is artificially or algorithmically created, modified, or generated to appear authentic. However, labelling a broad range of content created with computer-generated imagery or altered with editing software can be complicated, since these are not technically made by generative AI. Given the volume of synthetic media and the fact that not all of it is problematic, the focus should be on harmful and/or misleading synthetic media. To put things in perspective, over 50% of all content on the Internet is now considered AI-generated, as per a recent report.

To fix accountability, the draft rules mandate that platforms introduce labels covering at least 10% of visual area of synthetic videos, or 10% of initial duration of synthetic audio; but its application to mixed media – say, real visuals



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Rajneil R. Kamath

is Vice-President of the Trusted Information Alliance (TIA)

Precision is the key for a balance between control and creativity

community-level awareness, especially in vulnerable regions. The long-term focus must go beyond arrests – towards preventing such radical influences from taking root in the first place.

Pavithra M.,
Tiruchi

Bihar votes
It is a relief that the heat

and dust in the Bihar Assembly election will now settle. The run-up to the election was acrimonious. The fact that there was active voter participation, with a large turnout by women, especially in the wake of issues that arose during the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, is encouraging. Despite the exit polls, one looks forward

to the results on November 14.

B. Suresh Kumar,
Coimbatore

A.G. Noorani
A.G. Noorani was a thorough researcher and was always sure of his facts. One could not easily win an argument on any subject he wrote. It was a pleasure to read his articles in *The*

Hindu and *Frontline*. His article, “Savarkar's mercy petition”, published on April 8, 2005, was impressive. Noorani was a staunch secularist and will be missed in many ways.

N.G.R. Prasad,
Chennai

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

The limits of international branch campuses

Last month, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer arrived in India with a planeload of vice chancellors. The Indian and U.K. governments announced that several U.K. universities plan to open branch campuses in India. Some of them have already received University Grants Commission (UGC) approval, while others are in the early stages of the application process. The fact that Mr. Starmer led this delegation can certainly speed up the regulatory approvals and establish these new campuses as legitimate ventures. However, it is worth analysing this initiative.

The need for branch campuses
The recent changes in the India-U.K. educational partnership are tied to the broader India-U.K. Vision 2035 and the recently signed India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement. Also, British higher education is undergoing an unprecedented financial crisis, created both by inadequate support from the Starmer government and by a decline in the number of international students going to the U.K. and paying high fees. It is likely that some British universities are looking to a move to India as a way of earning income from Indians without importing students. But will Indians want to study at a branch campus as a substitute for the “real thing”? Will the branches apply the same standards both for student performance and faculty quality in India as they do on their home campuses?

Branch campuses do not always succeed. And when they fail, students are often left without alternatives. In recent years, several international branch campuses faced significant setbacks. Texas A&M University closed its Qatar campus after two decades of operation. In Europe, the University of Kent’s Brussels campus was shut down due to financial pressures. These developments reveal a growing



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fragility in the operation of international branch campuses where global uncertainties and local market realities challenge the sustainability of such ventures. This risk should be an eye-opener for India, where clear contingency frameworks are yet to be outlined. One of the major gaps in current UGC regulations is the lack of a clear safety net for students, especially if a branch campus were to suddenly shut down.

Just what is a branch campus? Is it a full academic institution transplanted from one country to another, with a campus, a variety of offerings, perhaps some focus on research, facilities for student services, and the like? Or is it a floor of an office complex offering a few specialised degree programmes deemed to be attractive to target audiences and taught by local faculty or professors from the home university who fly in for a few weeks or perhaps teach only on Zoom? Globally, there seem to be many more of the latter.

Experts point out that building a “real” branch is expensive and time consuming. Most “real” branch campuses around the world have been financed by governments or in some cases by property developers. For example, the campus of New York University in Abu Dhabi was built using funds from the UAE. Foreign universities are seldom willing to invest in actually building overseas campuses. So, it is worth asking whether the British universities will be making significant investments to build their branches in India or whether they simply intend to leverage local partnerships and facilities.

There is also the question of teaching. Will these branches provide full-time faculty from their home campuses? Experience shows that this is seldom the case. As a result, these campuses have to rely primarily on local faculty. If that is the case, what then will distinguish these branch campuses from India’s emerging elite and semi-elite universities?

The ultimate value of foreign branch campuses will depend less on their brand and more on their ability to offer something not readily available in India

Also, will the branches have a research mission? The vast majority of branch campuses worldwide are only teaching outposts, as building research capacity is expensive. Indeed, research has been a point of contention between the Chinese government and a number of the branch campuses in China – including British branches of Nottingham in Ningbo and Liverpool in Suzhou.

In India, the question is whether the branch campuses will be allowed to engage with the national research ecosystem by participating in the schemes of the Indian Council of Social Science Research or Department of Science and Technology or remain isolated teaching units. Their contribution to India’s research output and innovation metrics would be meaningful only if they are incentivised to undertake research collaborations and capacity-building.

Balancing ambition and reality
The ultimate value of foreign branch campuses will depend less on their brand and more on their ability to offer something not readily available in India. If handled well, branch campuses can provide access for students as India expands higher education enrolments. They can provide useful examples of innovative government and management practices that may be relevant for India’s often sclerotic higher education system. However, the absence of clear frameworks on accreditation and quality assurance leaves uncertainty about how such collaborations will align with national standards and protect student interests. The question of fee structures adds another layer of complexity because India’s many semi-elite and elite private universities already offer globally benchmarked programmes with international partnerships. As India approaches an era of branch campuses, there are significant possibilities, but *caveat emptor*.

Tagore, Bankim, and an exercise in futility

Pitting cultural icons against one another only deepens political fault lines

STATE OF PLAY

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Politics in West Bengal often revolves around the State’s cultural icons. Over the past few days, the two tallest names in the Bengal literary world – Rabindranath Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay – have become subjects of an intense political debate, with political parties appearing to be in a hurry to appropriate them.

In the first week of November, the West Bengal government issued a notification mandating that Tagore’s *Banglar Maati Bangla Jol* (Bengal’s land and Bengal’s water) be sung during morning assembly in all State-run schools. In December 2023, the government had declared the song as the State anthem and directed that it be played at all State government events along with the national anthem.

Around the same time that this notification was issued, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at the Centre organised an event to observe 150 years of Chattopadhyay’s *Vande Mataram*. The BJP leadership in West Bengal immediately sensed an opportunity. It went to various locations associated with Chattopadhyay and highlighted neglect at a few of them. Its leaders accused the government of not paying enough respect to *Vande Mataram* and questioned the timing of making mandatory Tagore’s song at all State-run schools.

The Trinamool responded by accusing the BJP of disrespecting Tagore. The party said that BJP MP Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri had made derogatory remarks against Ta-

been mainstreamed in West Bengal politics. While it goes without saying that Tagore towers over other literary figures in West Bengal and that his ideals continue to form the essence of Bengali identity and culture, there is also ample space for other writers and poets in Bengal’s literary and cultural milieu.

The BJP has successfully fuelled the debate over the two poets. However, the Trinamool should not fall into this trap, particularly when the West Bengal government honours all the prominent icons from the State, including Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the founder of the Jana Sangha. It is unfortunate that the works of cultural icons are being pitted against one another, especially when their writings are rooted in patriotism and nationalism. Some scholars point out that when Chattopadhyay met a young Tagore in 1882, he put a garland around him calling him an “elegant poet of the new age”. In 1896, Tagore sang *Vande Mataram* at the Kolkata session of the Indian National Congress. Comparing the national anthem – *Jana Gana Mana* – with the country’s national song – *Vande Mataram* – is not only an exercise in futility, but also reflects a narrow understanding of India’s history and politics.

In an ideal world, poets and writers whose works form the basis of the freedom movement would remain above the fray of politics. Granted, we don’t live in such a world. But even if politicians cannot do so, they can be more prudent by honouring the contributions of all Indians and not pitting icons against one another. In an already polarised environment, such attempts of appropriation only deepen our political fault lines.

Three out of four Indians believe climate change is affecting them

Close to 80% of them said they were willing to change their lifestyle to help reduce its impact

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

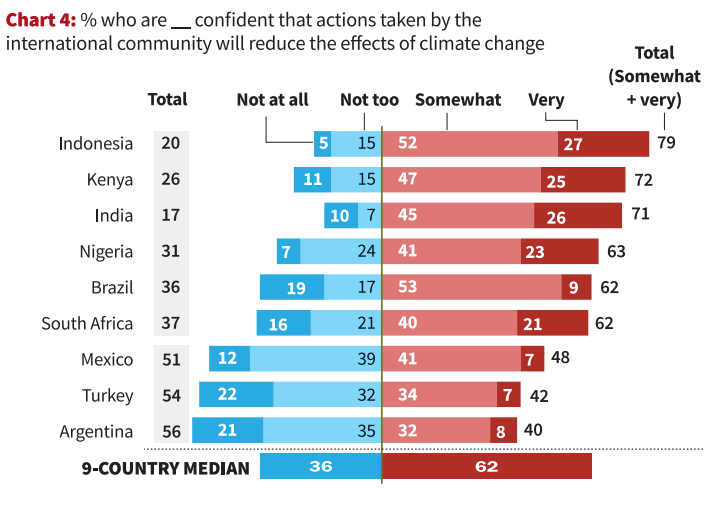
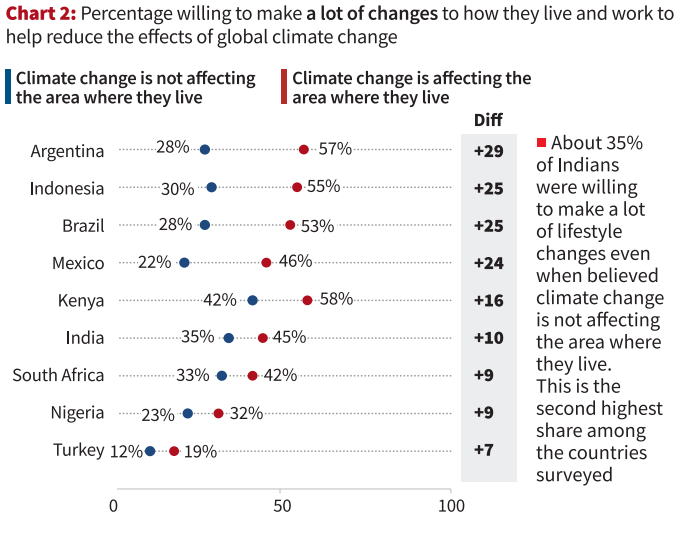
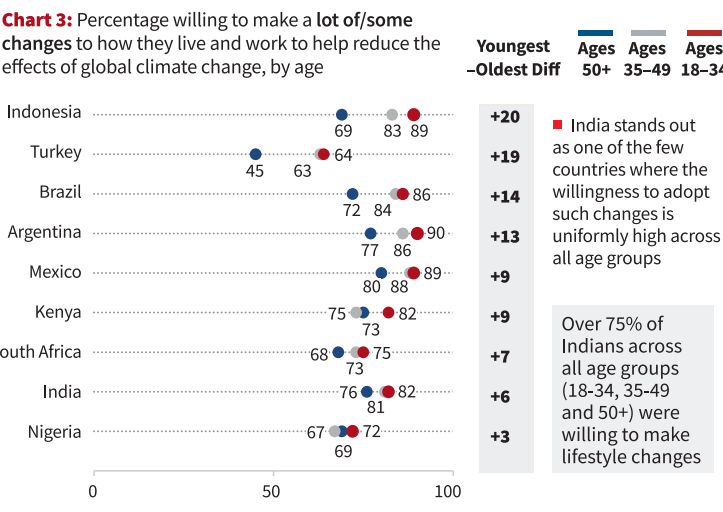
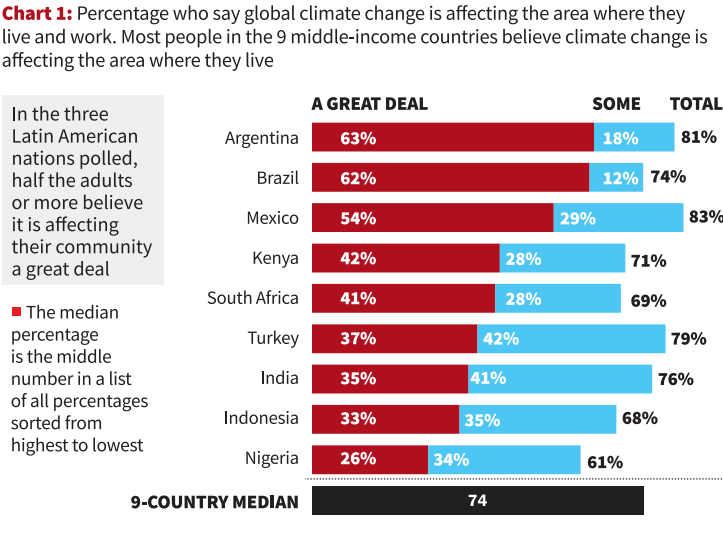
At least three out of four Indians believe that climate change is affecting the area they live in and is harming them. Most were willing to make lifestyle changes to help reduce its impact, according to a Pew survey, conducted between January 8 and April 21, 2025. **Chart 1** shows the results for nine middle-income countries – Argentina, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, and Turkey – where the survey was conducted.

India is one of the few countries where the willingness to make changes was uniformly high across all age groups. Over 75% of Indians across all age groups (18-34, 35-49 and 50+) were willing to make a lot of lifestyle changes or some lifestyle changes. In contrast, in many other countries, older age groups were far less likely to express such willingness (**Chart 2**).

India is also among the few countries where the likelihood of making lifestyle changes to counter climate change did not differ much between those who said their area has been affected by climate change and those who said it has not (**Chart 3**). About 35% were willing to make a lot of lifestyle changes even when they said climate change was not affecting their area – the second highest among the countries surveyed.

Indians also stand out for their confidence in the international community’s ability to address climate change. Over 70% are confident that actions taken will significantly reduce the effects of climate change (**Chart 4**).

Over 40% of Indians said they are most concerned about drought in 2025, although this share has declined since 2015. Meanwhile, the proportion of those citing unusually long periods of hot weather as a major concern has risen sharply to 26%.



FROM THE ARCHIVES



FIFTY YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 13, 1975

Kissinger rules out U.S. exit from U.N.

Pittsburg, Nov. 12: The U.S. Secretary of State, Dr. Henry Kissinger, indicated to-day that action could be taken by the U.S. against the countries which helped pass a U.N. resolution condemning Zionism.

But he said at a news conference that no decision had been taken yet on such a step.

The countries which voted for the resolution, Dr. Kissinger said, had contributed to “an international environment that will be less helpful” in settling the differences in West Asia. “Therefore we will have to consider a vote on an individual basis before deciding what specific action we will take towards various countries,” he added.

“A decision to apply sanctions would be a major decision in (U.S.) foreign policy. We have to see the United Nations in some perspective,” he said.

Dr. Kissinger said, “We went through a period in which the U.N. was considered and described as the best hope of humanity.” That was exaggerated. “But we must not swing to the other extreme of not realising some of the benefits that the U.N. with all its failings still has for the U.S. Therefore, we will assess the situation. We have not made any final decision.”

PTI reports: At his press conference at Pittsburg, Dr. Kissinger ruled out suggestions made by angry legislators that the United Nations should pull out of the U.N.

Dr. Kissinger also ruled out the possibility of the U.S. withdrawing its support to the programme announced at the special session of the U.N. General Assembly as regards developing countries.

Whatever might be the immediate irritation, the U.S. should conduct its policies in the hope that the possibility of a cooperative world remained open.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 13, 1925

Chinese civil war

Shanghai, Nov. 12: It is reported that the Chief of the Executive Tuanchijai is virtually a prisoner in the hands of Feng Yu-Hiang, who is believed to have definitely broken with Chang Tao-Lin.

Peking, Nov. 12: A number of Cabinet Members have resigned. Several officials who are supporters of Chang-Tao-Lin have fled. The Tariff Conference is meeting to-morrow despite threats of war in the neighbourhood of Peking.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Amount sanctioned for the Ferozepur-Patti rail link project

764 In ₹ crore. The Ministry of Railways has sanctioned a 25.72 km Ferozepur-Patti rail link project serving as a link between the Malwa and Majha regions of Punjab with an outlay of ₹764 crore, Minister Ravneet Singh Bittu said. The project was passed on October 27. PTI

Enumeration forms distributed in Phase II of the SIR

37 crore. More than 37 crore or 72.66% of enumeration forms have been distributed to electors in 12 States and UT territories so far as part of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) being undertaken by the Election Commission. The voters list clean-up will cover nearly 51 crore electors. PTI

Number of migrants presumed dead after boat capsized off Libya

42 Seven survivors have been located after the vessel's engine failed in high waves at around dawn on November 3, several hours after it departed Zuwara, a coastal city in northwestern Libya, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said. AFP

Ukrainian waterways that need de-mining as per the UN

13,500 square km. The United Nations said that around 13,500 square kilometres of Ukraine's lakes, rivers and coastlines are potentially contaminated with mines and explosives after the nearly four-year Russian invasion. PTI

Number of locations linked to banned org. raided by J&K police

500 The police intensified its crackdown on the terror ecosystem in Kashmir, carrying out raids at around 500 locations linked to terrorist associates, and persons affiliated with banned organisations. PTI

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Can lawyers break client confidentiality?

Is the counsel between a lawyer and client a privileged communication? Which are the three circumstances in which a lawyer can communicate what his client has said? Why is safeguarding this evidentiary privilege important? Is a lawyer a constitutional actor?

EXPLAINER

**Kartikey Singh
Mukula Sharma**

The story so far:

In October 31, the Supreme Court affirmed the indispensable role of advocates in a constitutional democracy. A Bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) B. R. Gaval, and Justices K. Vinod Chandran and N. V. Anjaria ruled that a lawyer cannot be summoned merely to disclose what a client has communicated, except where legal advice is used to commit or conceal a crime. The *suo motu* proceedings arose from a notice issued to an advocate by the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Ahmedabad, under Section 179 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), demanding his appearance “to know true details of the facts and circumstances” in a criminal case in which he was a defence counsel.

What are privileged communications?

Privileged communications refer to confidential exchanges between certain protected relationships, such as attorney-client and spousal, that the law shields from being disclosed or compelled as evidence in court. The underlying principle is to promote honesty and trust, thereby reinforcing justice and ethical responsibility. The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), 2023, outlines these protections in Sections 128 to 134.

Notably, Section 128 protects ‘marital communications’, preventing either spouse from being compelled, or even permitted, to disclose any communication made ‘during’ marriage, even after its dissolution, without the consent of the person who made it, except in cases where one is prosecuted for a crime against the other or in suits between them. Likewise, Section 129 bars the release of unpublished official records relating to affairs of State without



GETTY IMAGES

departmental approval in order to safeguard national interest. Further, the advocate-client privilege under Section 132 prohibits advocates from revealing professional communications.

What did the SC state?

The top court’s judgment is a concrete assertion that when the State intrudes into the lawyer-client relationship, it endangers the citizen’s right to equitable representation and the justice system’s structural integrity of a fair trial and rule of law. Section 132 of the BSA prohibits an advocate from disclosing any communication made to him in the course of professional engagement, even after employment has ceased, except in three circumstances: (1) if the client consents to it; (2) the communication pertains to illegal purposes; (3) the advocate observes criminal activity being carried out during the employment.

Although, the privilege belongs to the client, an accused or litigant, its enforcement depends on the lawyer’s silence. This silence has long shielded not just the powerful but also those with no power such as women reporting sexual violence, accident victims negotiating hostile insurers, and the families of those lost to custodial excesses. In a justice system where about 3.9 lakh citizens are undertrials, this privilege is what keeps the promise of a fair defence alive.

It’s to safeguard this evidentiary privilege that the top court decided that an investigating/prosecuting agency or the police cannot directly summon a lawyer merely for appearing or advising in a case, unless there exists material showing that the summons falls within the exceptions of Section 132.

Moreover, by linking Section 132’s protection to Article 20(3)’s guarantee against self-incrimination, the judgment

constitutionalises the privilege, which is a key element of a lawyer’s function. If a citizen cannot be compelled to confess, the State cannot achieve the same end indirectly by coercing the citizen’s lawyer to disclose confidential communication.

What about a lawyer’s role?

Through the verdict, the SC positions the advocate not as a private agent but as a ‘constitutional actor’, essential to the survival of the constitutional architecture of legal representation. This distinction matters because professional privilege is neither a perk for lawyers nor a shield that places them above the law. It is a safeguard for citizens. The SC makes that explicit: the privilege “ensures that no prejudice is caused to the accused whom the lawyer represents.” When the State summons a lawyer to divulge information about his client, it converts the advocate into an involuntary witness – collapsing the distance between defence and prosecution. The verdict rightly calls such acts a “blatant breach of the rule against non-disclosure,” one that undermines both Article 21’s guarantee of a fair defence and the constitutional promise of equality before law under Article 14.

Why is the verdict important?

This ruling indirectly strengthens the right to effective legal representation, a right the SC has long read into Article 21 and Article 22(1). The SC cited *M.H. Hoskot versus State of Maharashtra* (1978) and *Hussainara Khatoon versus State of Bihar* (1980), reminding that liberty without counsel is liberty in theory. At a time when investigating agencies routinely summon journalists, tax consultants, and even lawyers to “assist” investigations, the judgment restores institutional sobriety. It reminds the executive that investigative power is not unbounded. Section 179 of the BNSS empowers the police to summon witnesses, but that power stops at the lawyer’s door when ‘professional confidence’ is at stake.

Kartikey Singh and Mukula Sharma are lawyers based in New Delhi.

THE GIST

Privileged communications refer to confidential exchanges between certain protected relationships, such as attorney-client and spousal, that the law shields from being disclosed or compelled as evidence in court.

When the State intrudes into the lawyer-client relationship, it endangers the citizen’s right to equitable representation and the justice system’s structural integrity of a fair trial and rule of law.

Through the verdict the SC positions the advocate not as a private agent but as a ‘constitutional actor’, essential to the survival of the constitutional architecture of legal representation.

Why does India’s road safety system keep failing?

How do poorly constructed roads and infrastructure lead to road crashes?

Piyush Tewari

The story so far:

In November 10, the Supreme Court took cognisance of two mass-casualty road crashes in Phalodi, Rajasthan (14 killed) and NH 163, Telangana (19 killed). More than 1.7 lakh lives were lost in 2023 alone due to road crashes.

What are the problems in licensing?

Licensing and training need to be the first line of defence against crashes, not just an administrative formality. The driver licensing system is meant to be a filtration process, determining who is fit to operate a vehicle and who is not. But, across much of India, driving licences can be obtained without formal training. Driving tests are often reduced to perfunctory turns on small test tracks. For commercial drivers, whose vehicles can weigh more than 15 tonnes and carry dozens of

passengers, there is no structured, standardised safety training. And once a licence is issued, few checks are carried out to assess a driver’s continuing skill, physical fitness, or mental alertness. Heavily fatigued drivers – some with compromised vision or chronic illness – routinely operate heavy vehicles carrying unsuspecting passengers, with no mechanism to detect or restrict them.

What is the role of enforcement?

Speeding, overloading, lane violations, and driving under the influence remain among the top causes of fatal crashes. Enforcement against these, however, continue to rely heavily on resource-constrained and unskilled manual policing, making it inconsistent and susceptible to both human error and discretion. Even where technology exists – such as automated cameras and digital challan systems – coverage is limited, data integration is weak, and penalties are

often not recovered. The Supreme Court has repeatedly emphasised the need for electronic enforcement standards and technology-based deterrence. But adoption remains patchy across States.

What about weak infrastructure?

From poorly banked curves and no crash barriers to inadequate illumination and missing rest areas that force heavy vehicles to park on the highways, the physical environment of India’s highways and urban roads often turns minor mistakes into fatal outcomes. Many State and national highways were designed decades ago for speed and throughput, not safety. The result has given way to ‘unforgiving roads’ – corridors where a moment’s lapse can mean disaster. Maintenance gaps such as broken dividers, exposed concrete structures, unmarked construction zones, and encroachments are common. In urban areas, pedestrian infrastructure remains

minimal or absent, leaving those on foot to compete with heavy vehicles for space.

Evidence from pilot projects show that design-led interventions can reverse this trend. On the Mumbai-Pune Expressway, for instance, evidence-based engineering and enforcement changes under the Zero Fatality Corridor programme have cut crash deaths by more than half.

How can trauma care be improved?

For many victims of road crashes in India, survival depends not on the impact itself, but on what happens in the critical hour that follows. Ambulance networks vary widely in availability and efficiency across the country. In rural areas, delays in decisive care can stretch beyond an hour; even in cities, victims are often extracted by bystanders or the police without proper equipment and little to no medical support. Facilities closest to crash sites often lack trauma specialists, blood banks, or basic resuscitation facilities. A proposed Right to Trauma Care law could mandate time-bound emergency response standards and a coordinated trauma network.

Moreover, licensing, infrastructure, and trauma care are treated as separate silos managed by different departments. Safety can only be achieved when they function as one, reinforced by accountability and coordination.

Piyush Tewari is the Founder and CEO of SaveLIFE Foundation.

THE GIST

Licensing and training need to be the first line of defence against accidents, not just an administrative formality.

Speeding, overloading, lane violations, and driving under the influence remain among the top causes of fatal crashes.

For many victims of road crashes in India, survival depends not on the impact itself, but on what happens in the critical hour that follows.

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Towards a better future: A skill training hub at the Pahadpur village in Odisha in 2024. BISWARANJAN ROUT



How grassroots movements and campaigns are shaping India

In a democracy, peoples' aspirations should drive systemic change that boosts equality, education, careers, and economic development. Writers who have worked among the people, from Bela Bhatia to Subroto Bagchi, report on what is happening on the ground and the lessons to be learnt

Soma Basu

There is a heart-warming story about Nunaram Hansda in Subroto Bagchi's book *The Day the Chariot Moved: How India Grows at the Grassroots* (Penguin Business). Born to tribal parents in the interior forests of Simlipal, one of India's largest biospheres in Odisha, his parents sent him to Ashram School (run by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs) as they could not afford to raise him.

Later, Nunaram joined the Industrial Training Institute (ITI) in Rourkela. He had no money to pay the fees and his teachers had to pool the required amount from their paltry salaries. Today, Nunaram heads the insulin manufacturing line at Biocon. In Bagchi's book, we meet many people like Nunaram, who have achieved success despite the huge economic crisis and odds they face.

Odisha's journey

When Bagchi was called by then Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik in 2016 to helm the Skill Development Authority to transform the State, he encountered the ground reality – how governments function and its schemes are implemented and why the leaders among ordinary people keep the world moving but do not write or speak about who they are and what they do. The book, Bagchi says, is a tribute to this grassroots India. With his crossover experience from corporate life in IT to a Cabinet-rank government position, he builds his book on individual stories that highlight the many facets of development, and also what ails and fails the system.

He layers the saga of human development in narratives of achievements, frustrations, yearnings and hope because governments, he says, are characterised by stereotypes of unreasonableness, sloth and arrogance wrapped in corruption and personified by

crafty politicians. But lives function because some government servants and people at the grassroots are different and willing to take on the challenges of poverty, unemployment, health, education and infrastructure.

Divided into seven sections, the book details Bagchi's life, his return to his home State after four decades, the stories of the poor and marginalised and how government initiatives are foiled due to inaccessibility, inertia and incompetence. Strategic perspectives that empower the people can change the scenario as Bagchi tries to demonstrate. He travelled 3,000 kms across 30 districts in 30 days to understand the requirements of people who either languished or made it out. His objective: to humanise the development agenda for policy makers and corporate leaders.

Bagchi writes about the projections that blew his mind; a staggering 96% of the entire workforce in India is in the unorganised sector. Even as India is set to become one of the top economies of the world, there is an increasing wage disparity, forced migration, digital divide and receding women participation. Only 2% of the youth population under-30 had received formal skill training while 8% had received informal training though the country is in need of many more skilled workers.

But even amidst widespread disdain, Bagchi came across people like Muni Tigga, born in a tribal village in Nuagan Tehsil, where girls were not sent to school. Despite taunts from the villagers, with her mother's support, Muni worked as a daily wage at a plant 37 km from her home. Later, she enrolled at ITI Bargarh and landed a job as a loco pilot in the Indian Railways. The skilled training she received empowered her enough to earn a respectable identity.

But there are many more families that manage life one day at a time. The need for skill development across the State was seen as a means to human development.

It was kept above politics to make Odisha a sandbox of innovation, writes Bagchi. Every new idea such as the Fix (problems), Scale (skill development programmes), Accelerate (establishment of new institutes) strategy caught the imagination of many and produced what Bagchi calls "nano unicorns" – people who had the ability to learn new skills and seize the opportunity.

Conversations on change

Opening conversations on change with the future in mind is also discussed by Bela Bhatia in her book, *India's Forgotten Country: A View From the Margins* (Penguin Viking), shortlisted for the NIF Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Book Prize 2025. When she worked with Dalits, Adivasis, women, bonded labourers, ethnic and religious minorities and other downtrodden groups living in hamlets, villages and slums, the oppressive forces that ruled and ruined them with brutality revealed itself assertively.

Bhatia's work encapsulates her research on the Naxalite movement, the conflict between the state and Maoists in Bastar, alongside her experiences as a rural activist in Gujarat. The book is a powerful critique of oppressive actions, and Bhatia offers empathetic narratives of life, death, and sufferings covering States such as Bihar, Telangana, Rajasthan, Kashmir and Nagaland. Standing by the marginalised to whom the governments and elites turn a blind eye, Bhatia gives several accounts of caste discrimination, communal massacres, untouchability, bonded labour, hunger, widowhood, armed uprisings and forced displacement. These sensitively expose the predicament of real India.

While the searing book stirs the public conscience, it also serves as an inspiring account of resilience, courage and hope at the grassroots level.

Diverse examples

Anchoring Change: Seventy-Five Years of

Grassroots Intervention That Made a Difference by Jayapadma R.V., Neelima Khetan, Vikram Singh Mehta, (Harper Collins India) looks at why we despair more about our inability to realise our full potential as a country and find fault with the leadership, state of our institutions and the economic model. The book tries to answer questions through examples of organisations working with the grassroots since Independence and underlines the need to reflect on the micro successes and the several cases of hugely impactful grassroots interventions that helped steer society in a positive direction.

The authors' idea is to revisit examples of civic action and explore their relevance for the future. It serves two purposes, they say: to shift the conversation from failure to success; and to distil from these successes relevant design principles that might have wide relevance to create an alternative, grassroots-based, sustainable development model.

Sampat Kale's book *Grassroots Development Initiatives in India: Rights Based Approach to Development and Advocacy* (Routledge and Aakar Books) examines the way voluntary organisations engage with development programmes for marginalised sections to empower them and make them independent and self-sufficient.

Another interesting book, *Grassroots Innovation Movements* (Routledge), by Adrian Smith, Mariano Fressoli, Dinesh Abrol, Elisa Arond and Adrian Ely, examines six diverse grassroots innovation movements in India, South America and Europe in dynamic historical contexts and explains why each movement frames innovation and development differently, resulting in a variety of strategies.

These books remind us of the contributions and the neglected questions which grassroots innovation movements identify. They reflect on both progress and the need for further improvement and empowerment.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Renowned Scottish writer Robert Luis Stevenson was born on this day in 1850. Here is a quiz on the author

Vighnesh P. Venkitesh

- QUESTION 1**
- What was the nom-de-plume assumed by Stevenson when he wrote one of his most famous works *Treasure Island*?
- QUESTION 2**
- Which modern day camping equipment does Stevenson claim to have invented with him mentioning it in his book *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*?
- QUESTION 3**
- What was the name Stevenson adopted while spending his final years in an island in Samoa? What does it mean?
- QUESTION 4**
- Which Stevenson novel features the character cabin boy Ransome?
- QUESTION 5**
- Name the crime Stevenson was convicted for as a student.



Visual question:

Name this famous character, depicted by Russel Crowe in the 2017 movie *The Mummy*. Also mention the Stevenson work in which the character appears?

- Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:**
1. The original name of Marvel Comics. **Ans: Timely Comics**
 2. The superhero that Stan Lee made his comic-book debut with. **Ans: Captain America**
 3. The first superheroes Lee created with artist Jack Kirby in 1961. **Ans: Fantastic Four**
 4. The name of the monthly column written by Stan Lee. **Ans: Stan's Soapbox**
 5. Marvel comics' first black superhero. **Ans: Black Panther**
- Visual: Identify this superhero. **Ans: Iron Man. He appeared for the first time in 1962**
- Early Birds:** Arun Kumar Singh| Sukdev Shet| Tito Shiladitya| Sudhir Thapa| Kishan Singh

Word of the day

Captious: tending to find and call attention to faults

Synonyms: faultfinding

Usage: *None of the servers wanted to wait on the captious woman.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/captiouspro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈkæpjəs/

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Climate farce

UN climate meets are not really headed anywhere

UN climate summits are turning out to be more shambolic by the year, and the ongoing one at Belem, Brazil, promises to be no different. No more than a handful of these summits over three decades have been consequential. While immense scientific literature and data have been generated on the impacts of climate change and the factors contributing to it, efforts at a global scale to check greenhouse gas emissions have been underwhelming.



This is because the Global North, which has contributed historically to the existing stock of emissions, refuses to reduce emissions to levels required; nor does it put money on the table to enable the Global South transit to clean technologies. The latter argues that it needs more carbon space to raise living standards. Climate talks have remained gridlocked, as the North refuses to accept its responsibility. It is time to get real and accept that this gridlock will not go. In fact, the economic and geo-political faultlines between the North and the South, and between resource rich countries (which include China with respect to critical minerals used in solar, wind and battery storage) and the rest have deepened. So, while the effects of climate change are already in our midst — of horrific storms, floods and glacial melts ravaging livelihoods, property, lives and infrastructure — it is also clear as daylight that these jargon-ridden UN climate meets cannot rise to the occasion.

Far too much time has been lost in trying to rustle up funds multilaterally for the green transition, or to fund losses arising out of extreme weather events in the Global South. Yet, these meets bleat away about ‘climate finance’, creating one fund after another (Belem has carved out one for saving forests). With the US no longer a party in these talks, there will be fewer crumbs on the table. Yet, ‘climate finance’ has generated its own gravy train of vested interests — of NGOs, consultants, bureaucrats and lobbyists in the green energy and fossil fuel space. They prepare reports that trot out eye-popping climate finance needs, running into trillions of dollars, with little to back up these sums.

The task of arresting emissions should be taken out of these spaces and left to individual countries, entrepreneurs, civil society and financial institutions, public and private. Fortunately, India has begun to work out its own climate finance and transition plan. The Securities and Exchange Board of India and the Reserve Bank of India have created frameworks for raising equity or debt funds for sustainable ventures. In developing this finance framework, it should be borne in mind that private capital will prefer funding projects with a good financial rate of return; this could leave out projects that have a longer gestation period or offer socio-economic spin-offs. The government will have to step in with interest subventions and subsidies here. Clearly, blended finance is the way to go.

OTHER VOICES.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

EUROPE

The bias meltdown at the BBC

As media implodes go, it doesn't get much worse than the fiasco engulfing the British Broadcasting Corp. The head of the global behemoth resigned over the weekend, and President Trump is threatening to sue for \$1 billion. Tim Davie, the BBC's director-general, had little choice other than to quit, and neither did the head of the BBC's news division, Deborah Turness. In a memo leaked last week to the *Telegraph* newspaper, Michael Prescott, a former adviser to the broadcaster's internal standards committee, warned the BBC's board of a string of politically motivated whoppers in the Beeb's news coverage. (Mr. Prescott earlier in his career was an editor at the *Sunday Times* of London, which shares ownership with this newspaper.) (NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 11)

The Moscow Times

Visa bans don't hurt the Russians with true power

The European Union has just banned Russians from obtaining multi-entry Schengen visas, billing the move as tightening the screws on the Kremlin. In practice, it does the opposite. Many of Russia's elites still glide through Europe on "golden passports" and "golden visas," boarding their private jets without a care in the world. Ordinary Russians, meanwhile, now face soaring costs and tighter restrictions just to visit family, study abroad, or take a holiday. This new policy may look tough. But it punches down, not up. Russia's elite, the very people who fund and benefit from the regime, hold multiple citizenships and offshore assets to protect themselves. It is teachers, students, and pensioners who will be stranded. These are precisely the people the West should want to keep close, yet they are the ones being shut out. (MOSCOW, NOVEMBER 11)



RAJASEKHAR VK

As widely reported, the Government is preparing to amend the Companies Act, 2013, among others, sections 141 and 144 — defining who may serve as auditor and what services they may not render — to enable Indian multi-disciplinary partnership (MDP) firms to compete with the global 'Big Four'. When it does so in the coming Winter Session of Parliament, it will go beyond statutory revision and touch the trust that underpins every corporate balance sheet. This is, in principle, a reform long overdue. Indian firms have remained marginal players in the global audit and consulting market despite a formidable talent pool. Yet, in promoting indigenous capacity, the amendment process must guard against undermining the very independence that gives audits their value. The challenge is to level the field without lowering the bar.

THE EXISTING ARCHITECTURE

The Companies Act, 2013 devotes sections 139 to 146 to the appointment, powers and duties of auditors. Of these, sections 141 and 144 are the twin pillars of auditor independence — the former setting eligibility and disqualifications, and the latter prohibiting auditors from rendering specified non-audit services.

The logic is clear: the auditor must not review his own work, act as his client's advocate, or grow so familiar as to lose objectivity. These are the foundations of credibility in corporate reporting.

The Government identified six structural constraints that inhibit Indian firms from scaling globally: advertising and marketing bans; restrictions on MDPs; fragmented licensing; limited access to public procurement; isolated, stand-alone operations; and the absence of international collaboration frameworks. Its concern is legitimate. The global consulting and audit industry, each valued around \$250 billion, is dominated by international networks. Global firms enjoy institutional capital and unified branding; Indian CA firms remain partner-funded and domestic. While reform is warranted for widening opportunity and correcting market asymmetry, the method matters.

Merely relaxing disqualifications under section 141 or diluting prohibitions under section 144 without a commensurate framework of safeguards, risks trading independence for scale. Audit credibility, once compromised, cannot be legislatively restored. The drafting must therefore balance liberalisation with discipline.

THE INDEPENDENCE DILEMMA

Audit independence is not an aesthetic virtue; it is the instrument by which



GETTY IMAGES

Audit reform: Don't lower the bar

CREDIBILITY MATTERS. The government's move to strengthen Indian firms is commendable, but not at the cost of audit independence

markets trust numbers they cannot verify. Once advisory and assurance functions blur, public confidence falters. Relaxing the regime to accommodate MDPs risks inviting the very dangers the Act was designed to avert. If MDP firms are allowed to offer both audit and advisory services to the same clients, threats to independence multiply. The government's intention to strengthen Indian firms is commendable, but not at the cost of independence.

Global experience shows that liberalisation without clear ring-fencing of audit functions, leads to conflicts of interest, diminished professional scepticism, and impaired audit quality. The collapse of Enron and Arthur Andersen two decades ago remains the classic cautionary tale: even the most reputable global network fell when commercial incentives overran professional distance. India's reform must proceed, but with adequate checks.

DRAFTING THE AMENDMENTS

How, then, should the amendments be framed? The first requirement is precision. The term "multi-disciplinary partnership" must be clearly defined, specifying ownership structure, governance standards and firewalls between audit and non-audit services.

Second, section 141 may be refined to include certain non-CA professionals within an MDP firm, provided the audit partner remains a practising CA and professional independence is preserved. Any relaxation of disqualification

While reform is warranted for widening opportunity and correcting market asymmetry, the method matters

thresholds should be offset by disclosure to the audit committee and NFRA oversight.

Third, section 144 must retain its core prohibitions. Certain advisory services could be permitted but with stringent safeguards, such as: pre-approval by the company's audit committee; public disclosure of fees from non-audit services; cooling-off periods between advisory and audit engagements; certification by the auditor that independence is not impaired; and NFRA's power to conduct quality reviews and impose remedial directions.

The phrase "directly or indirectly" in section 144 should remain untouched; its breadth prevents circumvention through network entities. However, approval processes can be simplified to make them predictable and less bureaucratic.

Fourth, rotation and tenure rules under section 139 may be reviewed to accommodate larger Indian firms, but the principles of periodic rotation and cooling-off must remain intact. Continuity must not become complacency.

Fifth, the Bill could expressly provide for empanelment of Indian MDP firms for government and public-sector audits, based on transparent criteria; achieving market access without weakening independence norms.

Finally, firms should be given time to restructure, separate advisory arms, and ensure compliance with the revised framework. Abrupt implementation could disrupt both supply and quality of audit services.

REFORM WITH RESTRAINT

Reform in audit and assurance is not about dismantling safeguards but modernising them. The Companies Act, 2013, born in the wake of corporate

scandals and governance failures, deliberately embedded auditor independence as a statutory principle. That principle must endure, even as the profession evolves.

Encouraging Indian firms to grow internationally is not inconsistent with independence. Credible Indian audit firms will command domestic trust and global respect. What must be resisted is the temptation to equate deregulation with reform.

Parliament therefore has an opportunity to modernise without weakening, to align India's regulatory architecture with global practice without surrendering its ethical core. This requires a double discipline: drafting precision and policy prudence. Each clause must articulate the enabling intent without opening the door to conflict.

The Government's move to revisit sections 141 and 144 of the Companies Act is a momentous step. It recognises that India's professional services ecosystem must mature beyond dependence on foreign networks and evolve its own global champions. But while empowering domestic firms, the law must remain faithful to its first constituency — the investing public whose confidence sustains the market.

In the realm of audits, liberty without independence is merely licence. The true measure of legislative maturity lies not in how much freedom it grants, but in how wisely it guards that freedom's misuse. Parliament must ensure that in the quest to enable, we do not forget to protect. If the reform succeeds, India will gain home-grown audit and advisory firms, competitive abroad and trusted at home.

The writer is a lawyer and former Judicial Member of the National Company Law Tribunal

Will private credit pose a systemic risk in India?

Thanks to regulatory foresight, on reducing banks' exposure to NBFCs and prudently structuring AIFs, we are well protected

Sachin Gupta

The recent collapse of three US firms — First Brands, Tricolour, and Broadband Telecom, incurring losses of over \$10 billion — shares a common factor. All were financed through private credit — loans/debt issued by private credit funds — instead of conventional banks or bonds. These funds are, in turn, funded by investors like pension funds, insurers, banks, and high-net-worth individuals.

Private credit has grown rapidly in Western markets, especially in the US, following the 2008 financial crisis. Stricter regulations compelled traditional banks to maintain higher capital reserves and implement more detailed borrower checks. This shift created opportunities for less-regulated private lenders to offer faster, bespoke loans, often financed by cheap bank debt during periods of low interest rates. This form of "regulatory arbitrage" enabled banks to issue loans more quickly, but with less transparency. As a result,

investors and regulators struggle to accurately assess the actual risk of these loans, raising systemic concerns.

This seems to be what occurred in the bankruptcies discussed earlier. All of these cases indeed have 'alleged fraud' at their core, which confirms concerns about diminished oversight and opacity.

RAPID GROWTH

The global private credit market, valued at \$3 trillion, is substantial. A notable concern is its rapid growth. Private credit has nearly tripled over the past decade and outpaced other credit types. Additionally, the rising exposure of traditional banks to these funds is worrisome, evidenced by banks writing off nearly \$1 billion due to bankruptcies.

There are two critical questions that require our attention.

First, does this indicate the start of a broader systemic credit shock for the US financial system? Second, is the Indian financial system also at risk of experiencing a similar issue?

The chances of a systemic issue in the US financial system seem low. Recent



GLOBAL SCENE. Private credit has nearly tripled over the past decade ISTOCK

interest rate reductions by the Federal Reserve are likely to decrease borrower delinquencies. Moreover, the strong profitability and capitalisation of US banks should equip them to absorb possible losses. Regarding similar risk to the Indian financial system, we seem well-protected, thanks to the foresight of regulators — Reserve Bank of India and the Securities and Exchange Board of India. Two key reasons need to be emphasised here:

First, post the IL&FS crisis, the Indian banking system, under supervision of the RBI, reduced its exposure to NBFCs, which provided

funding for wholesale credit (akin to private credit). As a result, the exposure of most NBFCs to wholesale credit has decreased substantially over the last five years. The RBI also advised against having multiple lending entities within a single business group to reduce risks and increase transparency.

Second, the prudent structure of Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) as prescribed by SEBI. While Category II AIFs can provide private credit solutions to their clients, the fund has very limited capability to borrow to fund these exposures. Moreover, their disclosure requirements are strict. As a result, the two main risks in US-based private credit funds — opacity and regulatory arbitrage — are well managed.

Overall, private credit is unlikely to pose a systemic risk in India. While regulatory restrictions may have limited its growth as a financing vehicle, this is positive for the overall stability of the Indian financial system.

The writer is Chief Rating Officer and ED at CareEdge Ratings. Views expressed are personal

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Russian oil imports

This refers to 'Most Indian refiners avoid buying Russian oil for Dec' (November 12). This move amid Western sanctions and US trade talks raises questions about its long-held stance on strategic autonomy in energy imports. While India has consistently asserted its right to trade in national interest, the shift suggests a recalibration under external pressure. This isn't necessarily fear — it's pragmatism. Navigating sanctions while preserving energy security and diplomatic balance is complex. India must avoid appearing reactive or submissive. Instead, it should transparently communicate its rationale: diversifying supply chains, managing financial risks, and maintaining global partnerships.

Simultaneously, it must assert its sovereign right to energy choices in multilateral forums. Strategic autonomy isn't about defiance — it's about resilience, clarity, and consistent policy. India must lead with confidence, not compromise.

O Prasada Rao

Hyderabad

RE projects

Apropos 'Renewed interest' (November 12, 2025), the report that 44 GW of renewable energy projects face cancellation because discoms refuse to buy the power is deeply concerning. At a time when India has achieved record solar and wind capacity, such reluctance undermines the nation's clean-energy vision. The problem lies in unrealistic price expectations and

delayed offtake commitments, not in the potential of renewables themselves. Instead of letting these projects lapse, the government should convert pending contracts into flexible frameworks such as Contracts for Differences or Virtual Power Purchase Agreements. These mechanisms can balance cost and reliability while sustaining investor confidence. If coordination among States, agencies, and the Centre is strengthened, India can prevent valuable capacity from lying idle and maintain its global leadership in renewable growth.

K Chidanand Kumar

Bengaluru

Direct tax collections

The government's claim of a 7 per cent rise in net direct tax collection

deserves closer scrutiny. Much of this increase stems from delayed refunds and a heavier reliance on non-corporate taxpayers, not from genuine economic expansion. While ordinary citizens contribute more, corporate tax collections remain relatively stagnant revealing an imbalance in fiscal policy. Instead of celebrating inflated figures, the government should prioritise transparency in tax administration, timely refunds, and policies that encourage sustainable income growth. True fiscal strength lies not in withholding dues but in nurturing a fair and broad-based tax system.

Maniprabhu Elango

Madurai

Easy credit

This refers to 'Perils of easy credit

access' (November 12). When a personal or overdraft loan is available at the click of the mouse without the need to step outside your home, it blurs the line between a need and want. A significant portion of consumer loans are taken to maintain a certain lifestyle, which is dangerous.

Debt trap was a foreign phenomena mostly prevailing in the US, but sadly it has made huge inroads in Indian society as well. Individuals must always remember that today's small default in credit card loans can potentially hamper their future mortgage loan borrowing prospects. It is always wise to play safe and maintain a healthy credit score and borrow within our limits.

Bai Govind

Noida



OUR VIEW



Take states on board in green electricity plans

Greater Centre-state coordination in planning green electricity supplies would assist in setting more sustainable targets and ensure competitively priced as well as reliable supplies

The head of the Central Electricity Authority recently suggested that electricity tariffs could rise because consumer demand is not keeping pace with the rollout of transmission networks. Over time, though, as demand rises and utilization picks up, transmission tariffs will moderate, but only up to a point even if demand keeps rising as new lines have mainly been built to cater to renewables. This is a result of the dynamics of the planning process, which includes the purchase of electricity by states—the dominant procurers—and the Centre's policies on capacity creation as well as expansion of transmission networks. Propelled by the decline in the price of solar panels and incentives to achieve ambitious targets, renewable energy capacity has seen a rapid build-up. These large-scale projects must be set up in solar and wind resource-rich areas and thus require an expensive inter-state transmission system, which burdens consumer tariffs. That said, even if demand rises, renewables generation is limited by wind conditions besides periods of sunshine, consequently limiting utilisation of the transmission network. Over time, though, as storage costs fall, solar and wind parks will offer longer duration supplies along the green corridors, helping pull down the tariffs.

With a sizable chunk of the transmission capacity addition being set up to haul green electricity, the tariff burden is currently higher for green power compared to fossil fuel-based power plants that operate round the clock. So, while renewables and storage tariffs are softening, the consumer gains are blunted by the transmission costs. Meanwhile, states have been reluctant to sign purchase deals with

renewable energy producers owing to falling generation and storage costs besides their own financial constraints. While the Centre acknowledges the problems of insufficient absorption of green energy, dull demand and inadequate systems for round-the-clock supplies, one of the main reasons for this situation is the ambitious target set. The green electricity target of 500 gigawatts by 2030 has evidently not been adequately reviewed from a technology, demand, consumer and supply standpoint. No doubt, target-setting helps develop momentum to attract investments, but that alone can't be the criterion to pursue green goals. Especially in our federal structure where electricity is a concurrent subject and states the principal purchasers. That said, the voice of states needs to be balanced with the Centre's role to incentivize reforms in the state electricity system, which lacks commercial underpinnings and is fraught with populism. But it is one thing to use a carrot-and-stick approach and another to significantly abrogate powers to itself and decide on transmission investments to achieve unilaterally-set green generation targets. The intentions may be good since investors will not loosen their purse strings till the supply network is in place. However, the bills are paid by the states and so consultation is required at every stage.

The government argues that there is a 'policy pivot' in progress, from focusing on "pure capacity growth" to prioritizing "system design." This includes addressing the issue of absorption and supply stability, a key concern with renewable energy. Wider consultations with states are, therefore, needed to avoid tariff shocks that impede reforms, and to set sustainable targets.

MY VIEW | OTHER SPHERE

Let us focus on poverty too as we pursue broader ambitious goals

We must address deprivation that persists even as India makes progress in other economic spheres



ANURAG BEHAR
is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation.

two inches, their thighs as thick as our arms. A glance enough to show you hunger, if you are willing to see. No need for research on nutritional status.

Banish the thought that the conversation was sombre or their demeanour melancholy. Instead, it was amusing confusion. We wanted to understand why they had switched to growing *bar-bati* in their rocky slopy fields. None of the things they said fit into categories of explanation we understood—rainfall pattern changes, topsoil erosion, market forces. They simply said, "Well, we changed." When someone tried to guide them to answer "cutting big trees is the cause," one of them put a stop to the meandering with a chuckle and said, "All big trees are still growing."

We did learn a few things, like "everyone dies before 50." No child continues schooling beyond class five, if at all. If someone falls ill, you just let it be. Unless you put the person on a charpoy and four people carry it five kilometres on the path that I had ridden on the Bullet, to the road where you wait for the tempo. Usually, death arrives earlier.

The group conversation ended. I asked a man whether anyone had gone to work in the cities. Yes, he said, three people. A young man to Delhi and another to Chennai as labourers. "And the third?" I asked. An 11-year-old girl, he said, to somewhere near Delhi. "The *thekedar* gave the parents ₹10,000; she must be happy, but we don't know."

We walked another kilometre to another village. Thirty girls were waiting for us. All in green-and-pink *panchi* and *parhan*, the local dress. Shiny danglers swinging from their ears, and thick necklaces. Their bodies were slight, like 11- or 12-year-olds, only the adornment making them look their real age—16 to 18. Laughingly, they told us how much they enjoyed dressing up for the meeting. Starting early in the morning from their own villages, changing in that village, waiting for us. They want to be policewomen, join the army, become nurses, doctors, teachers and football

players. Each of those is a long treacherous path out of those woods and that life. But at least they were not traded at the age of 11 for ₹10,000. They are here, so nothing can hold them back today. Every one of them loves to dance. They dream of a future and try to achieve it.

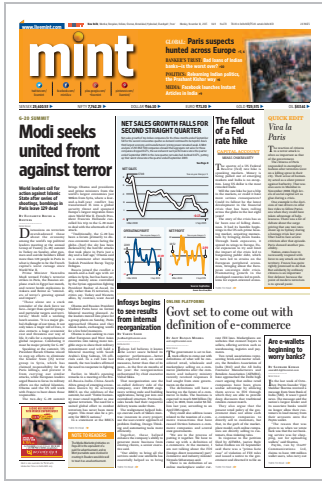
On the drive back, we stopped at a sparse, clean, well-lit building—a hospital in that nowhere. The doctor who leads the place is from another part of the country, which may well be another country. She was sent here as a part of her course in medicine and then came back on her own and never left. It was a small place then. She put her head down and just treated whoever came to her, and everyday she wrote letters all over the world, asking for help. The trickle from those letters of 20 years has built the place. Now there is another doctor and 20 other staff members.

She showed us around. No detail small enough for her; the snake bite of the kid, the history of each patient in the ICU, the drugs stocked out, the date of the complaint for the malfunctioning ultrasound, and everything else. The smile and laughter never left her. And that was very strange—every one of her team members seemed in inexplicable good humour. Perhaps because that building is a haven in that scarred land. Whoever finds their way there will find succour. How do two doctors handle 300 patients every day? She just smiles.

Indu left the place 50 years ago, with the memory of a scratch on the surface of the earth. Far from healing in these 50 years, it has turned into a deep gash, not only on the earth but in our humanity. We have moved to artificial intelligence and robotic neurosurgery and 8% GDP growth, while in that gash, it's easier to die than reach the road.

So, Indu said, "there is no forgiveness for us." But from that apocalyptic proclamation, even she leaves out a bare white building. Written outside which, in invisible letters but visible to all those who need to see is, "here, there be angels."

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

The 'clean energy' challenge deserves a commitment akin to the Manhattan project or the Apollo moon landing.

MARTIN REES

THEIR VIEW

The central bank faces a duality in the adoption of AI

TULSI JAYAKUMAR



is professor, economics and executive director, Centre for Family Business & Entrepreneurship at Bhavan's SPJIMR.

The rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI), especially generative AI, is no longer a peripheral technological shift, but a profound macroeconomic shock. For the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), tasked with maintaining price stability while nurturing growth in a complex, developing economy, AI presents a dual challenge: it is both a potential source of disinflationary productivity and a tool for refining policy.

Tao Zhang, chief representative for Asia and the Pacific at the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), said at the Global Fintech Fest that AI is transforming not just the private financial ecosystem but how central banks operate. They must now reconcile the risks and benefits of AI, while remaining stewards of monetary and financial stability.

AI's diffusion is reshaping economies through both aggregate supply and demand. Machine learning can unlock productivity gains across sectors. In India, where the services economy is data-rich and the manufacturing base is digitising, AI can deliver a pos-

itive supply shock, boosting output and easing inflationary pressures. The *BIS Annual Economic Report 2024* notes that such gains, if broad-based, can strengthen long-term growth and make inflation management easier. In principle, higher productivity can expand capacity, reduce cost-push pressures and help RBI meet its inflation target without overly tight monetary tactics.

But this dividend carries a counterweight. AI may eliminate tasks faster than it creates new ones, particularly among middle-skill workers. India's wide digital and income divides mean that GenAI's benefits could concentrate among skilled, urban professionals while low-skill labour faces displacement. That could weaken household consumption and magnify inequality, undermining aggregate demand even as productivity improves supply.

RBI, therefore, must act as a real-time observer of this labour market transition. It must distinguish between 'good disinflation' from efficiency gains and 'bad disinflation' from weak demand and job losses. This will require faster and richer data than traditional quarterly and annual surveys allow.

AI's analytical power is already transforming central banking, aiding nowcasting, producing real-time estimates of growth and

inflation by using high-frequency signals. Central banks such as the European Central Bank already employ natural language processing (NLP) and large language models (LLMs) to parse news, social sentiment and business narratives. For RBI, the opportunity is larger. India generates immense real-time digital exhaust through UPI transactions, e-way bills, satellite data and social-media chatter. Yet, policy decisions rely heavily on lagged indicators. With AI-based nowcasting, RBI can detect supply bottlenecks, gauge consumer sentiment and estimate regional economic activity almost instantly. For example, AI could analyse regional fuel sales or transport data to infer local inflation trends, or assess sentiment from vernacular media to gauge household inflation expectations. This can shorten the policy response lag.

However, central banks must treat AI as decision support, not a substitute for judgment. Models can hallucinate, misread context or fail to generalise when conditions

shift. Hence, human oversight and explainable-AI (XAI) safeguards are essential.

The implications of AI are even starker in financial supervision. India's fintech ecosystem, built on UPI rails and populated by hundreds of digital lenders, offers both inclusion and instability. Here, AI-driven Supervisory Technology becomes critical. It can detect anomalies, track inter-bank exposures and analyse alternative credit signals such as utility payments or mobile-data patterns. This enables the extension of credit to those without formal credit history. Yet, such tools carry algorithmic bias risks. AI can unintentionally replicate discrimination embedded in training data.

Another risk is third-party dependency. Much of global AI infrastructure is concentrated among a few providers. This can create single points of failure. RBI must ensure vendor diversification, stress-test digital-infrastructure and enforce continuity plans for financial entities.

AI also alters the transmission of mone-

tary policy. Algorithmic pricing allows large retailers to instantly adjust prices in response to shocks, transmitting inflation faster. AI-based portfolio management and non-bank lending can also quicken market reactions to interest-rate moves, shrinking the lag between policy and effect. This could complicate RBI's calibration of liquidity and rates. Worse, if similar AI trading or credit-scoring models dominate, their synchronised responses could amplify volatility and herding during stress. Hence, RBI must integrate AI-driven feedback loops in its policy models and strengthen systemic-risk radars.

The sheer cost and complexity of developing sophisticated AI models and data governance frameworks is too high for a single institution. RBI must build a domestic "community of practice" among Indian regulators to share best practices, data standards and AI tools, while engaging globally with the BIS, G20 and others to shape global standards for AI governance, cyber resilience and data sharing relevant to emerging economies.

AI is poised to redefine the economic landscape. RBI's success in this context will hinge on how quickly it moves from being an adopter of technology to a sophisticated regulator and architect of an AI-driven future.

These are the author's personal views.

RBI will have to reckon with good and bad disinflationary pressures from supply as well as demand shocks

Enhancing energy security

India must step up domestic oil output over the medium term

ENHANCING INDIA'S ENERGY security by increasing relative self-sufficiency in domestic oil production is no doubt a strategic objective in today's challenging times. There are relentless pressures from the US to reduce purchases of relatively cheaper Russian oil for the bilateral trade deal to go through, which only implies reliance on costlier supplies from West Asia and the US. The global oil market may be awash with supplies—intensifying downward price pressures—but recent developments dictate a degree of caution in this regard. The oil cartel, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies (OPEC+), agreed on a small oil output increase of 137,000 barrels per day for December, the same as for October and November, and paused production increments for January–March 2026. This decision by OPEC+ clearly has been motivated by rising fears of a supply glut in oil and a desire to protect the floor under falling prices. Given India's import dependence for its oil requirement, which is as high as 88%, it must make determined efforts to boost domestic oil output over the medium term.

To be sure, the government is seized of the imperative of stepping up oil production by incentivising domestic producers and global giants for exploration and production (E&P) and has enacted the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Act, 2025. Obviously, it will take more time before the pragmatic policy stance bears fruition. But the good news of late is that the state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation—that accounted for three-fifths of domestic oil production last fiscal—has inked a contract with British Petroleum to optimise oil recovery in the relatively mature Mumbai High, and expects “green shoots” of improvement from January onwards with incremental production gains anticipated from FY29–FY30 onwards. The expectation is that over a 10-year period, production will increase on a cumulative basis by 60%. It is only through such technical collaborations and stepped up E&P activity in the offshore basins of the country that this state-owned major can boost its flagging domestic oil production. Indications are that this may happen from the first quarter of FY27 onwards.

This, indeed, is the challenge of improving relative self-sufficiency. India must go all in to incentivise global oil majors like Exxon, Shell, and Chevron who have the expertise in deep-water exploration to help reverse the slide on domestic output. This has been falling for various reasons including low investment due to obstructive regulations and high taxation. Big Oil must not be constrained by the challenging business environment, including concerns regarding arbitration and compensation in case of expropriation. Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri is bullish that India holds the potential of “several Guyanas” in the Andamans—with a gas find by Oil India—as it lies within the Bengal-Arakan sedimentary system where stratigraphic traps—underground geological formations caused by sedimentary rock layers—are conducive to hydrocarbon accumulation. E&P, for its part, is serendipitous in nature and we must not be deterred by cost overruns. In Guyana, drilling was done in 44-odd wells but it was in the 41st one that massive oil reserves were discovered. In an uncertain global environment—with pressures to source more expensive supplies and oil prices expected to be volatile—India must enhance its energy security by stepping up its domestic output over the medium term.

AI's power grab has to face affordability politics

EVEN AS THE labour and housing markets slow, the “three As” of the Trump economy have kept things chugging along in 2025: artificial intelligence, asset prices, and the affluent. Last week's elections showed voters have a fourth “A” in mind that threatens the current dynamic: affordability.

In state-wide elections in New Jersey, Virginia, and Georgia, rising power bills were front and centre in messaging from the winning candidates. Mikie Sherrill, who won New Jersey's gubernatorial election by a larger-than-expected margin, said she planned to freeze utility bills in her first year and declare a state of emergency on utility costs. Virginia's Governor-elect, Abigail Spanberger, warned that the state with the world's largest concentration of data centres is heading toward an energy crisis. And in Georgia, two Democrats will take their seats on the body overseeing power costs for the first time in two decades.

Electricity inflation becoming a potent political message is a risk for hyperscalers like Meta Platforms and Alphabet, which are scrambling to lock down power supply for the data centres crucial to training and deploying their AI offerings. The problem for households is that this tsunami of demand is driving up electricity bills. Any roadblock that slows the AI buildout would have consequences not just for Big Tech, but also for a market leveraged to the promises and investments flowing from Silicon Valley, and for an economy kept humming by those who've benefitted from the boom.

In Georgia, for example, Democrats flipped two statewide races by large margins for seats on the Public Service Commission, the body responsible for setting how much Georgia Power charges as well as approving its plans to make or buy electricity. Six rate increases since the start of 2023 combined with a particularly hot July gave voters sticker shock—a powerful incentive to get out and vote.

The PJM Interconnection, the nation's most concentrated power market for energy-intensive data centres, is worth watching next. In the 13 Midwest and mid-Atlantic states plus the District of Columbia with full or partial exposure to PJM capacity auctions, summer residential power prices climbed 20% to 70% over the past five years, according to *BloombergNEF*. Six PJM states hold gubernatorial elections next year.

In affordability, Democrats have found their midterm electoral message, and with electricity prices, it's one that allows the tech-wary wing of the party to attack Big Tech to boot. The issue is resonating on both sides of the aisle. Georgia Republican representative Marjorie Taylor Greene posted last week about data centres that cause “energy prices to skyrocket out of control”, urging voters to pay attention to approvals for new constructions.

Growing political scrutiny is a problem for AI companies at a time when power constraints are already a concern. Amazon.com is in the middle of a dispute with Berkshire Hathaway-owned PacifiCorp over insufficient power supply to its new data centres, with the utility pointing to a need to ensure new loads don't “jeopardise customer affordability”. Meanwhile, *Bloomberg News* reports two data centres in Santa Clara, California, stand empty because they can't access power. As for the consequences, on Tuesday, CoreWeave, which rents out access to high-powered AI chips, saw its stock slump due to delays with a third-party data centre developer.

Such tensions can only grow with *BloombergNEF* projecting AI's electricity requirements will more than double by 2035. For AI to keep booming—and supporting the rich valuations of hyperscalers—demand and supply need to keep growing. Part of the risk lies in the concentrated footprint of data centres. With AI-related stock valuations based to a large degree on forecasts for where the industry is headed, investors will have to think about what anger at utility firms and data centres in the midterm elections will mean for power access and data center capacity in 2027 and beyond.

For now, the rhetoric from politicians including Spanberger has been about making data centres “pay their fair share”. But there's no guarantee some other politician won't ramp up the populist rhetoric by proposing construction moratoriums or bans.

Such is the risk when the economy has only one growth engine and it's seen as mostly benefiting the rich while leaving working people behind, or worse penalising them with high costs and job losses. AI and data centre companies have to show their growth is benefiting all Americans, else voters will have reason to thwart that growth.

CONSUMER SENTIMENT

A CONSEQUENCE OF THE GAP IS THAT THE REAL COST OF CAPITAL REMAINS STUBBORNLY HIGH IN INDIA

A price-expectations mismatch

POLICYMAKERS AND MEDIA diligently keep track of the current inflation rate, but it is often forgotten that it also matters what consumers expect of future inflation. Since the introduction of the flexible inflation targeting framework in 2016, inflation has come down structurally. However, inflation expectations have not declined commensurately. For instance, consumer price inflation fell to 0.25% year-on-year in October, but the latest Reserve Bank of India (RBI) expectations survey (September 2025) suggests that consumers think it is running at 7.4% and that it will be 8.7% in a year's time. Even if some critics feel that statistical factors have exaggerated the dip in inflation in October, it is fair to say that consumers are far more pessimistic than warranted by data. In this article, we will explore why the gap between expectation and actual inflation has significant economic cost.

The RBI's Inflation Expectations Survey of Households provides the best available gauge of what consumers think about price trends. The accompanying chart shows how expectations have moved vis-à-vis actual consumer price inflation. Between 2009 and 2013, inflation was high and volatile, peaking at 15% in December 2009. In response, consumer estimates of inflation as well as their expectations of future inflation rose sharply. This is to be expected, but notice that expectations remained obstinately high even as actuals declined to the 9–10% range in 2010–2013.

Subsequently, when inflation dropped to around 5% in 2014–2016, expectations also declined but not as much as actual readings. For instance, one-year ahead expectations declined by 500 basis points (bps) from 1.6% in September 2014 to 9% in December 2024, but expectations were still 450 bps higher than actual inflation!

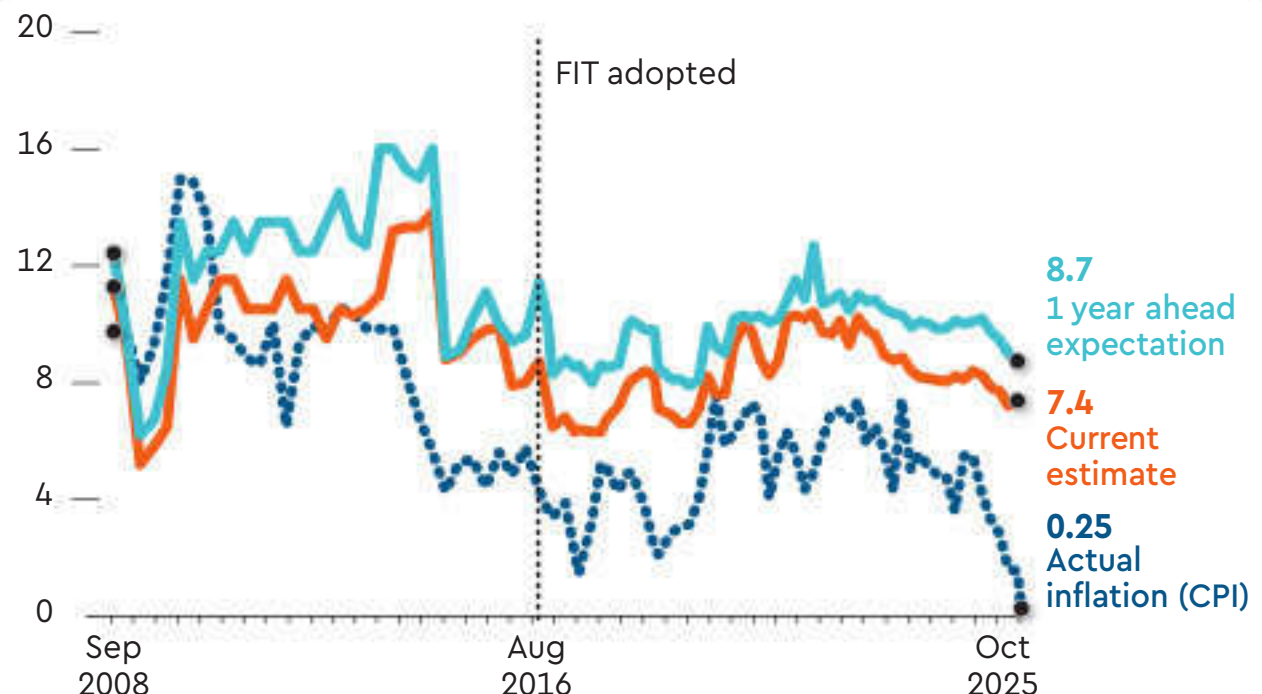
The adoption of flexible inflation targeting in 2016 marks a watershed moment. A Monetary Policy Committee was constituted and given the explicit target of keeping consumer price inflation in

SANJEEV SANYAL
PARTHA PROTIM
BARMAN

Respectively Member and Young Professional,
Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister



INFLATION VERSUS EXPECTATIONS



Source: RBI's Inflation Expectations Survey of Households, FIT=Flexible inflation targeting

the 2–6% range. Although inflation had already cooled by the time the framework was introduced, it provided an explicit target range for the first time. One of the goals for articulating a target range was to anchor inflation expectations. This is important because expectations impact a range of economic variables such as wage demands from workers, real returns from savers, real lending rates of financial institutions, and so on. Expectations of inflation also impact how policymakers make fiscal decisions and manage the economy. All this feeds back into future inflation and other macro-stability indicators of the economy. This is why anchoring inflation expectations is crucial.

Consumer price inflation has broadly remained within the 2–6% range since inflation targeting was introduced. Even

if it has occasionally gone outside the range (in both directions), it has so far always drifted back to the target range. One would then think that inflation expectations would have also been anchored in this range but this has not happened. As shown in the chart, the divergence is still huge—about 400 bps on average and sometimes over 700 bps. At the time of writing, the gap between actual and perceived inflation is around 700 bps and that with one-year forward expectations is over 800 bps!

It is unclear why inflation expectations are so sticky but it is not because consumers have been good at predicting future trends. In September 2024, for example, consumers expected inflation at 10% in September 2025, but actual inflation is merely 1.5%. It is also not the case

that consumers are entirely unaware of trends in inflation. As the inflation rate declined, expectations also declined but just not by the same magnitude. So, what explains inflation pessimism?

The details of the RBI survey suggest that demographics may play some role in the divergence: young people (up to 25 years) tend to expect inflation to be lower as compared to older people (more than 60 years). Roughly speaking, inflation expectations of the young are usually 75–100 bps below that of the elderly. Older people with lived experiences of volatile and high inflation eras are perhaps more pessimistic than young people with more recent inflation experience. Still, this does not explain most of the gap.

Another reason may be that the methodologies used to measure inflation are flawed. We agree that India's consumer price index is outdated and needs to be brought in line with today's consumption basket. However, our analysis found it difficult to explain much of the large and persistent gap based on this. Flaws in the design of the RBI's expectations survey may be a better explanation although it is difficult to put a number to it. Perhaps perennially negative media reports and social media conversations on prices influence expectation since price spikes attract attention but not declines.

Whatever the real reason for the actual inflation and consumer expectations, the gap comes at a price. For example, the real cost of capital remains stubbornly high in India despite significant improvements in the quality of financial institutions and in the availability of domestic capital. Administered rates on various savings schemes remain high. Currently, India's inflation rate of 0.25% is much lower than that of the UK and USA at 3.8% and 3% respectively. Yet, India's 10-year government bond yield stands at 6.5% against about 4.4% in the UK and 4.1% in the US. If India's yield curve closed the gap with the UK (not unreasonable given relative economic fundamentals), it would lower the cost of capital by 200 bps for not just the government but also industry and consumers.

Labour codes for a resilient workforce



JYOTI VJ

Director General, FICCI

INDIA STANDS AT the cusp of a historic transformation in its economic and labour landscape. The consolidation of over 29 central labour laws into four comprehensive Labour Codes is not just a legislative exercise, but a step towards building a labour ecosystem that is modern, inclusive, and responsive to the realities of a rapidly changing economy.

Labour reform has been a pressing demand from industry. With global supply chains integrating, technology disrupting industries, and new forms of employment emerging, India needs a framework that supports business competitiveness and also protects the rights and dignity of workers. The four Labour Codes—on wages; industrial relations; social security; and occupational safety, health, and working conditions—seek to do precisely that.

For enterprises, particularly in a competitive global environment, the Codes offer much needed simplification. Multiple compliances and overlapping definitions have been replaced with a clear and unified system. Digital filing, uniform wage definitions, and streamlined licensing processes reduce the compliance burden and bring transparency.

The reforms are especially significant for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and start-ups. By reducing compliance complexity and enabling single-window clearances, they empower smaller businesses to scale up quickly and participate more effectively in domestic and glo-

bal markets. Importantly, provisions for fixed-term employment and modern dispute resolution provide businesses with the flexibility to grow and adapt without being hindered by procedural delays.

Equally significant is the decriminalisation of minor offences, which substitutes imprisonment with monetary fines for specific procedural infractions. This represents a progressive initiative to a more trust-based compliance environment, diminishes unnecessary litigation, and promotes a culture of self-regulation and collaboration between employers and regulators.

For workers, the Codes reinforce the principle of fairness. The Code on wages ensures universal minimum wages and timely payment of salaries, eliminating the scope of arbitrary or delayed payments. The Code on occupational safety, health, and working conditions strengthens workplace safety, mandates welfare facilities, and introduces periodic health check-ups. Social security benefits—including provident fund, gratuity, maternity leave, and insurance—are extended to a wider base of workers, bringing financial security to millions who were previously excluded. Interstate migrant workers, often invisible in regulatory frameworks, now find recognition and protection within the

They have the potential to strengthen India's position as an economic powerhouse while ensuring that growth is inclusive, sustainable, and future-ready

Codes. These provisions strengthen the social contract between employers and employees, upholding the dignity of work.

Perhaps the most forward-looking provision is the formal recognition of gig and platform workers and aggregators. With nearly eight million Indians engaged in the gig economy—expected to grow sharply in the coming decade—the Codes provide a foundation for inclusive growth. The Code on social security provides protection with schemes that cover health, maternity, insurance, and old-age benefits. This is a landmark step that bridges the gap between traditional and new forms of work, ensuring as technology reshapes the future of jobs, workers in emerging sectors aren't left behind.

The Codes are also a step forward in advancing gender equity in the workplace. They reaffirm the principle of equal pay for equal work, strengthen maternity benefits, and make provisions for crèche facilities. By easing restrictions on women's working hours—with safeguards for safety and dignity—they create opportunities for women to participate in sectors and shifts that were traditionally inaccessible. Providing the opportunity to work in high-paying job roles like mine work, and operating heavy machinery also protects women from discrimination. At a time

when India's female labour force participation is below global averages, such reforms are crucial to enabling women to contribute more fully to economic growth.

Beyond employers and employees, the Labour Codes also bring benefits to MSMEs and start-ups by simplifying compliance and enabling growth, while giving government agencies a modern framework for transparent implementation. For investors, a predictable and business-friendly labour regime enhances confidence in India's growth story. Trade unions gain clarity in recognition and negotiation processes, strengthening the framework for social dialogue. Ultimately, society, as a whole, benefits when work becomes safer, fairer, and more inclusive.

The Labour Codes are not the end of the journey but the beginning of a new chapter. Their success will depend on smooth implementation, coordination across states, and active participation by all stakeholders. India is entering a critical decade where it must harness its demographic dividend and prepare for a future of work shaped by technology, globalisation, and sustainability imperatives. The Labour Codes provide the legal foundation for this transition—offering enterprise flexibility, worker security, and social equity. If implemented in letter and spirit, they can strengthen India's position as a global economic powerhouse while ensuring that growth is inclusive, sustainable, and future-ready.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Better credit flow

Apropos of “Fuelling growth with credit reforms” (*FE*, November 11) micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) need a framework of financial assurance. Else, they rely on commercial banks, non-banking financial companies, and government guarantee schemes, which often do not fill their funding gaps. A dedicated MSME bank could be a transformative step. In June 2024, the government signalled that it

was considering a new bank dedicated to the sector, whose purpose would be direct lending rather than just refinancing, and with a structure yet to be defined. This needs to be pursued. Budgets too must get to the specifics: sectoral credit flows, cash-cycle gaps, and payment guarantees. Tax exemptions to SME credit guarantee and reinsurance institutions were pragmatic; similar innovations must return with vigour. —R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

Groklopedia's challenge

Apropos of “Wikipedia vs Groklopedia” (*FE*, November 12), Groklopedia has been just developed by Elon Musk's xAI and powered by its Grok AI model, whereas Wikipedia was launched by Jimmy Wales as an English language free online encyclopaedia 25 years ago. Groklopedia might outweigh Wikipedia in terms of content creation with artificial intelligence (AI) and a suggestion-based editing model. But

it is criticised for adapting some of its initial content directly from Wikipedia entries. Besides, Wikipedia follows a non-profit structure unlike Groklopedia. Wikipedia is dominant as a widely used encyclopaedia albeit Groklopedia could excel by applying AI in scale. That said, Groklopedia has to earn credibility and widespread trust, which Wikipedia has enjoyed. —NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

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White Collar Terror

The explosion that shook Delhi and the entire country on Monday, killing and injuring several people, was not an accident. It was the visible tip of a concealed network, a meticulously planned but poorly executed terror operation that slipped through the cracks of India's urban vigilance. Investigative findings reveal that the i20 car, packed with crude explosives, had been parked at the Red Fort parking lot for over three hours ~ from 3.19 p.m. to 6.48 p.m. Minutes later, a masked man identified as Dr Umar U. Nabi was seen driving it slowly towards the traffic light at Netaji Subhash Marg, where it detonated. The Red Fort may not have been the intended target; nearby Chandni Chowk, the capital's most crowded shopping hub, offered a far greater potential for carnage. The device, unstable and amateurishly assembled, may have exploded prematurely.

The unravelling of this plot has led investigators to a startling realization. This was not the work of desperate foot soldiers but of educated professionals who used intellect as camouflage. Nabi, a doctor linked to a private hospital in Haryana, is part of a wider network of radicalised academics and medics now being interrogated by the NIA. Their ideological leanings trace back to Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, an Al Qaeda affiliate, and their logistical links to Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed handlers.

This white-collar module represents a new mutation in India's terror ecosystem, one that exploits professional respectability to evade scrutiny. Unlike conventional sleeper cells, these actors move within civilian life, articulate in faith and science alike, but are aligned to a deadly cause. The seizure of nearly three tonnes of explosive material from a Faridabad hideout underscores both ambition and recklessness.

The same week, the Jammu and Kashmir Police unearthed another plot in Anantnag, involving a local doctor accused of facilitating attacks through a hospital channel. Taken together, these discoveries indicate a networked design rather than isolated cells, a pattern of self-radicalised, educated operatives seeking soft, crowded targets to maximise shock value.

The challenge before India's security agencies is no longer only about border infiltration or cross-LoC movement. It is about ideas, access and the illusion of normalcy. Surveillance must now evolve beyond traditional profiling to detect ideological contagion within the professional middle class ~ the very demographic once seen as immune to extremist recruitment. India's counter-terror grid must now accept that the next major strike may emerge not from mountain camps but from hospital wards, college staff rooms, or research labs. Radicalisation has seeped into spaces once considered secure, demanding not surveillance overreach but a sharper understanding of digital indoctrination and professional complicity.

Delhi's blast was both a warning and a revelation. It showed that the adversary has changed form, but not intent. The nation must respond not with panic, but precision - by tightening urban intelligence and acknowledging that the line between the ordinary and the radical is thinner than ever. This cauldron will draw even the uninvolved Muslim middle-class and that will compound the tragedy.

Wired but Thirsty

India's digital infrastructure is expanding at a pace unmatched in its history. The surge in data generation, artificial intelligence, and cloud computing has created a powerful demand for data centres, the vast facilities that host the servers powering everything from banking to streaming. With billions of dollars flowing in from global tech companies and domestic investors, the country is poised to become one of the world's largest data centre hubs within this decade. Yet, this success story conceals a mounting environmental dilemma that demands urgent national attention.

Data centres are the invisible engines of the digital economy, but their operation comes at a heavy ecological cost. These facilities require immense quantities of water for cooling their constantly running servers and consume vast amounts of electricity to remain operational. In a country that supports nearly a fifth of the world's population with only a fraction of its freshwater resources, such expansion without adequate regulation risks deepening an already precarious water crisis.

Projections suggest that India's data centre water consumption could more than double over the next five years. The problem is magnified by the fact that most facilities are clustered in major cities such as Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru - areas that already face recurring water shortages.

In these regions, the competition between digital infrastructure and domestic use is no longer theoretical; it is fast becoming a matter of survival and public equity. Rapid digitalisation, if left unbalanced, could transform India's water crisis into a full-blown governance challenge with global economic consequences.

The irony is that the same digital transformation designed to empower citizens could end up undermining their basic access to water and energy if allowed to grow unchecked. The government's focus on attracting investment and data localisation is economically sound, but the absence of clear norms on water usage, cooling technologies and renewable energy sourcing leaves a glaring policy gap. The result could be local resource conflicts and disruptions that hurt both industry and community welfare.

India cannot afford to choose between digital progress and ecological security. The two must advance together. A national framework for sustainable data infrastructure is now essential. This should include mandatory use of treated or non-potable water for cooling, incentives for zero-water or air-based cooling systems, and a requirement that all new facilities commit to renewable power sources. Forward-looking states could also prioritise low-stress water basins for future data centre zones to avoid worsening local scarcity.

If the 1990s defined India's rise through information technology, the 2020s will be defined by how responsibly it manages the physical costs of its digital revolution. The challenge is no longer about attracting investment ~ it is about ensuring that growth does not erode the ecological foundations on which it rests. India's digital future must be built not just on data and devices, but on the sustainable use of water, energy and common sense.

Citizen and the State

The Indian administrative system, designed in the colonial era, was built around command, compliance, and hierarchy. Its purpose was not to empower the people but to govern them. Despite decades of democratic evolution, traces of that architecture persist ~ in the bureaucratic culture, in the opacity of decision-making, and in the structural distance between policymakers and the public

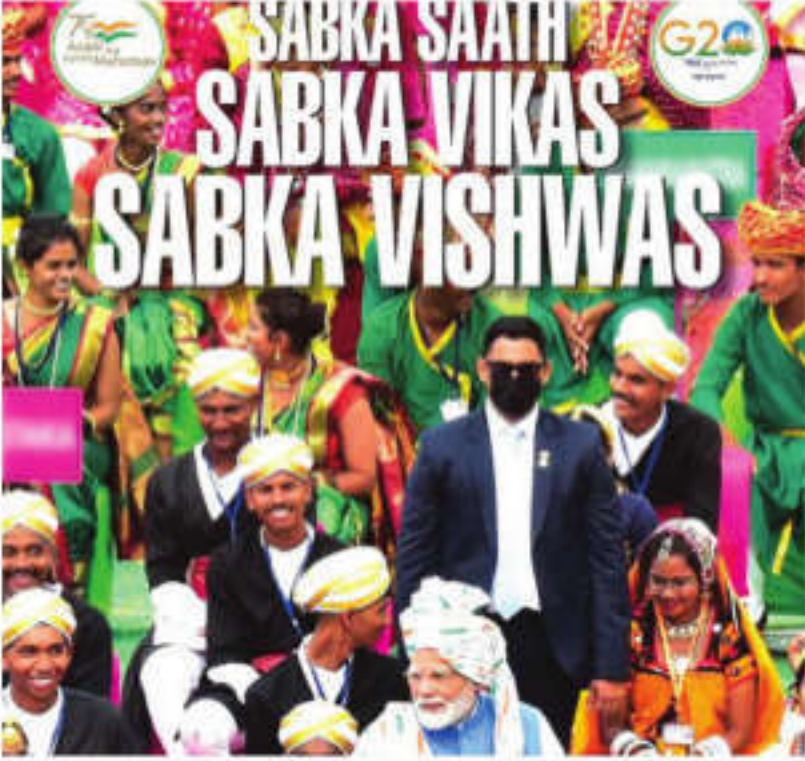
In every democracy, the relationship between the state and the citizen is shaped by a delicate balance of power, information, and trust. The state, as the institutional embodiment of collective will, wields authority, resources, and data. The citizen, as the supposed sovereign in a democracy, often stands at the receiving end ~ informed less, heard less, and empowered less. This asymmetry of power and information remains one of the most enduring challenges of governance in most countries, including India.

Whether in accessing welfare schemes, seeking justice, or engaging with regulatory institutions, citizens frequently encounter a system that appears opaque, procedural, and distant. The language of governance is still too often that of control rather than collaboration. While reforms such as the Right to Information Act and the growth of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) have begun to erode this imbalance, the deeper transformation lies not merely in systems, but in statecraft ~ in how the government perceives its citizens, and how citizens, in turn, experience the state.

The Indian administrative system, designed in the colonial era, was built around command, compliance, and hierarchy. Its purpose was not to empower the people but to govern them. Despite decades of democratic evolution, traces of that architecture persist ~ in the bureaucratic culture, in the opacity of decision-making, and in the structural distance between policymakers and the public.

Today, however, India stands at a pivotal moment. The emergence of a participatory ethos in governance ~ captured in the principle of Jan Bhagidari or people's participation ~ represents a fundamental reimagining of that legacy. It signals a shift from "governing for the people" to "governing with the people." Jan Bhagidari, when meaningfully embedded, transforms the citizen from a passive recipient into an active partner ~ one who co-creates public outcomes rather than merely consumes state-delivered services.

This participatory orientation finds deeper expression in the broader national vision of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas,



Sabka Prayas" articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. These four dimensions ~ partnership, development, trust, and collective effort ~ encapsulate a philosophy that directly challenges the asymmetry of power between citizen and state.

"Sabka Saath" is not just about inclusivity; it is about shared agency. "Sabka Vikas" is not merely the expansion of welfare, but the democratization of opportunity. "Sabka Vishwas" demands that the state earn and sustain citizen trust through transparency and fairness. And "Sabka Prayas" extends responsibility for development to every citizen, recognizing that governance cannot be a monologue.

Equally transformative is the idea of "Nagrik Devo Bhava" ~ treating the citizen as akin to a divine presence. It redefines public service as a duty grounded in respect and empathy. In bureaucratic culture, this means shifting from a compliance-driven mindset to one of facilitation and compassion. And at the heart of this reorientation lies Antyodaya ~ the principle of reaching the last person first. Antyodaya ensures that governance is not just participatory, but just; not merely efficient, but equitable. It directs the gaze of the state towards those who live at the margins of access and visibility, where power and information asymmetries are most acute.

One of the most effective ways to bridge the asymmetry between the state and the citizen is through transparency and technological empowerment. India's digital governance revolution has created what the world now calls "digital public infrastructure" ~ a stack that includes Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, and the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC). These platforms have enabled direct benefit transfers, reduced intermediaries, and given citizens verifiable access to services and entitlements.

However, the next frontier is not merely digital efficiency, but digital democracy ~ using technology to create feedback loops, participatory dashboards, and open data ecosystems that make governance auditable by the people themselves. When citizens can monitor local spending, track scheme implementation, and provide real-time input,

information ceases to be monopolized by the state. It becomes a shared resource ~ a foundation for accountability. Yet, information symmetry alone is insufficient without trust symmetry. Governance is, at its core, a relationship of trust. The state must trust its citizens as responsible participants; citizens, in turn, must see the state as an enabler, not a gatekeeper. Restoring that trust requires not just institutional reform but attitudinal change within the administrative system.

It is here that the Capacity Building Commission (CBC), established under the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (Mission Karmayogi), plays a crucial role. The CBC is quietly attempting to reshape India's bureaucratic culture ~ from one built on rule-bound rigidity to one grounded in responsiveness, empathy, and citizen-centric service.

By developing competency frameworks, digital learning pathways, and behavioural modules, the CBC is equipping civil servants with the skills and values needed to serve a new kind of India ~ one that is aspirational, connected, and demanding of accountability. The focus is not merely on "what" civil servants do, but on "how" they do it ~ with courtesy, transparency, and sensitivity.

The Commission's work reflects an understanding that the state's legitimacy no longer rests solely on authority but increasingly on the quality of its interaction with citizens.

By internalizing concepts of citizen centrality and by enhancing capacity-building programmes, the CBC is nurturing a cadre of officers who see citizens not as petitioners to be managed but as stakeholders to be engaged.

Over the next decade, as these reforms take root across the administrative hierarchy,



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Mission Karmayogi
Civil Services Reforms

their impact will become increasingly visible. Citizens will begin to perceive governance not as an impersonal machine but as a responsive partner. Officers will see their work not as an exercise in control but as an act of service. This cultural shift, subtle yet profound, could redefine the Indian state's moral architecture.

Bridging the information and power asymmetry between the State and citizen requires a multidimensional approach. Three priorities are key.

First is Transparency. Every public action, budget, and policy outcome must be open to scrutiny. Proactive disclosure ~ not just reactive response under the Right to Information Act ~ should become a default practice.

Second is Technology with Inclusion. Digital tools must be designed to empower, not exclude. Bridging the digital divide ~ linguistic, gendered, and geographic ~ is essential to ensure that technology truly democratizes governance.

Third is Trust through Accountability. Citizens' feedback must translate into institutional learning. The state's credibility rests not on its power to command, but on its willingness to listen and course-correct.

India's democratic journey is thus entering a new phase, one defined less by state dominance and more by citizen partnership. The vocabulary of governance is evolving from authority to empathy, from secrecy to openness, from "doing for" to "doing with." The ideas of Jan Bhagidari, Sabka Saath-Sabka Vikas, Nagrik Devo Bhava, and Antyodaya are not mere slogans; they represent the architecture of a participatory state.

As civil servants are reoriented through initiatives like Mission Karmayogi and the CBC, and as citizens become more informed and assertive through technology and access, the asymmetry that once defined India's governance system will begin to dissolve. What will replace it is not an erosion of state power, but its moral renewal ~ a power shared, legitimized, and continuously shaped by the people themselves.

In this subtle but sweeping transformation lies the promise of a more equal republic, one where governance is not a transaction between rulers and ruled, but a partnership between citizens and their state.



Viet Nam needs more and better-trained nurses to meet growing healthcare demands

Nurses play a crucial role in Viet Nam's healthcare system. However, the country is currently facing shortages in both quantity and professional structure, as well as in qualifications, compared to actual needs and to regional and global standards.

Viet Nam currently has about 140,000–150,000 nurses, equivalent to roughly 14–15 nurses per 10,000 people, among the lowest ratios in ASEAN.

By comparison, Thailand has around 20–25 nurses per 10,000 people, Malaysia 30–35, Singapore over 70, and OECD countries average between 80 and 120 nurses per 10,000 people. This is a considerable gap that must be narrowed in the coming years. The Party's Resolution No 20 has set clear targets that by 2025, Viet Nam should reach 25 nurses per 10,000 people, and by 2030, 33 per 10,000.

These benchmarks are important foundations for developing recruitment, training and workforce allocation plans in

line with the health sector's development needs. In terms of educational qualifications, Viet Nam's nursing workforce is undergoing a transition towards higher standards. Currently, college-level nurses make up nearly 50 per cent of the total, university graduates about 38–40 per cent, while those with postgraduate degrees remain very limited, below 2 per cent. In developed countries, most nurses hold at least a bachelor's degree. In Australia, nearly 23 per cent of nurses have postgraduate qualifications; in the United States, around 20 per cent. Several ASEAN countries, including Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, already have well-developed systems for advanced and specialised nursing training. This shows that Viet Nam needs to accelerate efforts to standardise qualifications, especially in postgraduate and speciality training.

In reality, nurse shortages exist across

all levels of care, especially in central hospitals and intensive care units (ICUs), where patients require continuous, specialised monitoring. A recent survey by the Department of Medical Services Administration found that, on average, one ICU nurse in Viet Nam cares for three to four patients per shift. In contrast, in many developed countries such as the United States, Australia or European nations, the ratio is typically one nurse per one or two patients, depending on severity. Lower ratios allow nurses to monitor patients more closely, provide holistic care and prevent medical incidents.

At lower-level hospitals, due to limited nursing staff, basic care tasks such as hygiene assistance, nutrition and repositioning to prevent bedsores are often handled by patients' family members.

This directly affects the quality of care and increases the risk of hospital-acquired infections. Meanwhile, nurses are often overworked, taking long shifts under high

pressure, while their income and working conditions remain inadequate. Such sustained stress inevitably leads to fatigue and burnout. Overall, Viet Nam's nursing workforce is developing but still lags behind the demands of a modern and internationally integrated healthcare system.

With the legal framework now more complete and the clear goals set out in Resolution No. 20, it is expected that the nursing workforce will be strengthened in both quantity and quality, helping to improve patient care and enhance the competitiveness of Viet Nam's healthcare system regionally and globally. Viet Nam's nursing education system is relatively diverse, covering all levels from intermediate and college to university and postgraduate training. More than 100 institutions nationwide currently offer nursing programmes. Many schools have proactively reformed their curricula to align with ASEAN competency standards and move toward international integration.

Letters To The Editor | ✉ editor@thestatesman.com

Drastic order

Sir, Apopos your report "SC directs removal of stray dogs from schools, hospitals, and public transport hubs" (7 November), I would like to express my deep sense of anguish at such a drastic order. We teach our children and students, in schools, colleges the world over to be compassionate, a spirit that is embodied in a simple verse, penned in 1848 by a popular social worker of Ireland, Cecil Frances Alexander:

"All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small,

All things wise and wonderful, The Lord God made them all"

We desperately hope that rising above all their accomplishments, our progeny blossom into good human beings who can cherish

and sustain Mother Earth. A gentrification of the premises of educational institutions is bound to foster the growing disconnect from the environment, of the generations to come. One cannot expect an individual to understand the importance of preserving the natural environment when one gets used to living in the cozy comfort of an artificially protected world.

India, especially, has a glorious heritage of protecting the environment which comes forth in our Constitution (42nd Amendment Act, Article 51-A(g)) where it mandates that "every citizen must protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife, and show compassion for living creatures". It comes as a rude shock therefore, when the prime guardian of the Constitution - the protector of our fundamental rights, serves such a verdict apparently being



oblivious to the devastating effect this will have on youngsters in their formative years of life.

It is indeed truly inspirational and even humbling to see people, often with very little means, enthusiastically feeding and caring for creatures around us. The life of a stray animal is hard, to say the least. Let us not marginalize them further by driving them away from their spaces, particularly educational institutions.

Yours, etc., Sarbani Palit,
Kolkata, 9 November.

Kudos

Sir, Kudos to the Supreme Court for having issued a directive to the Government to remove all stray dogs from public places, like schools, bus stands, railway stations, etc.

In fact, the other day while returning from a party at 11 p.m. in central Howrah, I was chased by a pack of stray dogs.

Fortunately, I got into a running toto and saved my life. There has been an alarming increase in dog bite incidents all over the country.

If killing of dogs is not possible, they can easily be sterilised/vaccinated. The government cannot shy away from its responsibility to protect citizens.

Yours, etc., Nihar Chakraborty,
Howrah, 10 November.



Editor's
TAKE

Exit polls predict NDA sweep in Bihar

A decisive victory for the NDA is predicted in the Bihar Assembly elections, with the BJP emerging as a dominant force ready to reshape the state's power dynamics

Once again, it is the BJP that is set to call the shots in Bihar, if the exit polls are to be believed. Nine exit polls have predicted that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) will sweep the polls and that the BJP will be the largest single party in the state, displacing Tejashwi Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). The average of exit polls suggests that the NDA could secure around 147 seats, while the Mahagathbandhan will get around 90 seats.

Exit polls suggest that the BJP will win around 69 seats, followed by JD(U) with 62, and the RJD with 63. If this turns out to be true, Bihar would be another state where the BJP becomes the dominant force, and Nitish Kumar could well be elbowed out as the next chief minister.

That said, these are not actual results but predictive estimates based on exit polls conducted by various media houses; results may or may not match the exit polls. Exit polls are statistically based, but their sample size and the methods of data collection are reflected in the prediction of seats. Exit polls have had a mixed record in Bihar. From the 2015 Assembly election to the 2020 contest, exit polls have been a mixed bag – often ignoring the complexity of Bihar's caste equations, local alliances, and the unpredictable voter mood in rural constituencies when estimating seats. However, when most polls predict similar results, the actual outcomes generally match them.

If the predictions hold true, the NDA's strong showing could be attributed to a few key factors. First, the consolidation of the BJP-JD(U) alliance appears to have worked in their favour after the turbulence of 2020, thanks to Chirag Paswan. Second, the BJP's growing organisational machinery in Bihar, coupled with its ability to translate national issues such as welfare delivery, infrastructure expansion, and Modi's leadership appeal into local resonance, may have swayed large segments of voters.

On the other hand, Tejashwi Yadav's campaign was youth-focused and might not have resonated with other voters. His promises of jobs and change perhaps could not outweigh the perception of stability that the Nitish-Modi combine still commands among sections of Bihar's electorate.

Nonetheless, exit polls are best treated with some degree of scepticism. The winners of exit polls should hold their celebrations and the losers their exasperation. Bihar's multi-layered politics, with its caste arithmetic and personality-driven loyalties, has surprised analysts before – and could do so again.

As counting day approaches, all eyes will be on whether the BJP truly emerges as the "Big Brother" of Bihar politics or whether the state once again springs a surprise.

For now, until November 14, when votes are counted, exit polls suggest a resurgent NDA, a steady Nitish Kumar, and a BJP that is no longer content being the junior partner in Bihar politics.

Mamdani turns online buzz into votes

In just a few weeks, Zohran Mamdani transformed digital enthusiasm into real-world momentum, converting likes and hashtags into votes – and turning a local mayoral race into a global conversation about the power of grassroots politics



KALYANI SHANKAR

Zohran Mamdani's record-breaking victory in New York's mayoral race is astonishing. Elected as the first Muslim South Asian mayor of the city, he represents a rare blend of identities. Born in Africa to South Asian parents and a follower of Shia Islam, he is also the son of acclaimed filmmaker Mira Nair.

Since his election, Mamdani has received significant media attention. Addressing a cheering crowd in New York, he said, *"A moment comes but rarely in history when we step from the old into the new,"* quoting India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, from his historic 1947 freedom speech.

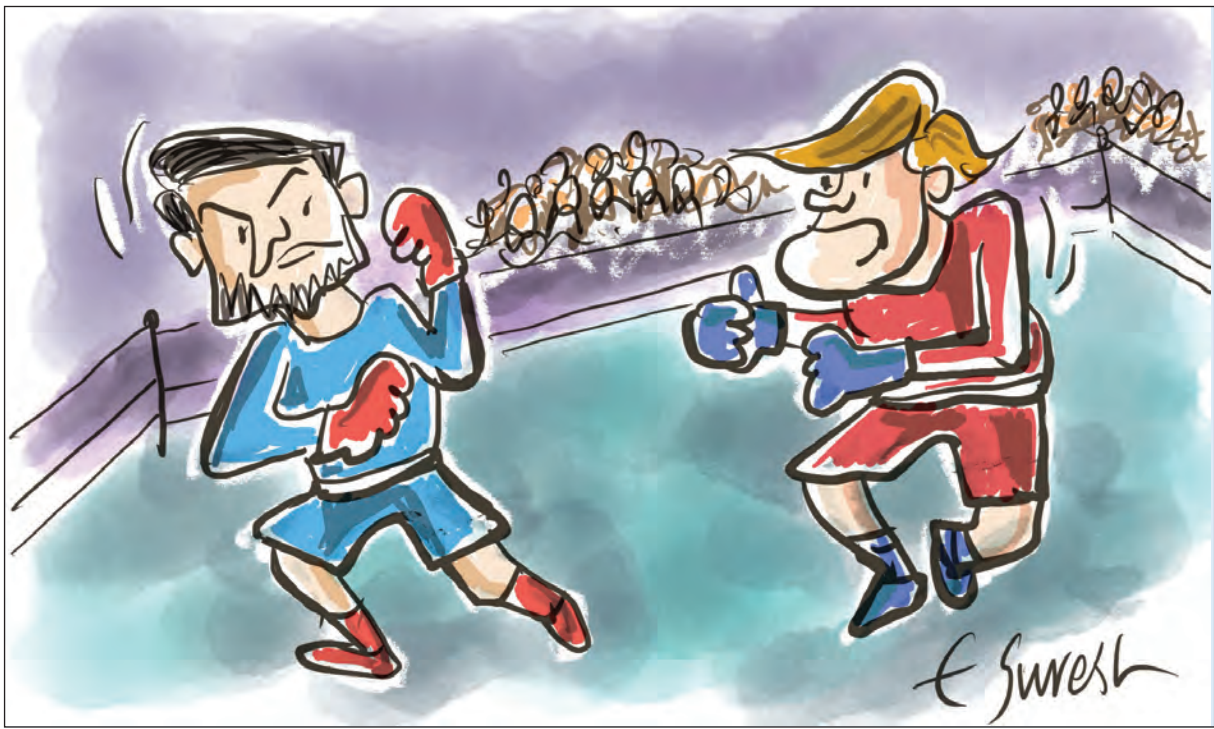
Many observers believe that Mamdani's invocation of Nehru signalled the beginning of something new and potentially transformative in New York politics. Mamdani has expressed pride in being the first Indian-American mayor of the city, also honouring his mother's Hindu heritage. Though he identifies as a Muslim, he holds a deep appreciation for Hindu traditions such as Raksha Bandhan, Diwali, and Holi. On Instagram, he often posts in Hindi, using playful imagery and dialogues from Bollywood films.

His mother, Mira Nair, is an award-winning filmmaker best known for Monsoon Wedding and The Namesake. His father, Mahmood Mamdani, is a professor of anthropology at Columbia University. Mamdani grew up in Cape Town before moving to New York at the age of seven. His election marks a progressive shift in American politics. Defeating established figures such as Andrew Cuomo and Curtis Liwa, Mamdani overcame a \$22 million campaign funded by 26 billionaires who tried to block his path to victory. His triumph symbolises both change and renewed faith in the power of democracy.

In just nine months, Mamdani went from being a relatively unknown assemblyman in the New York State Legislature to the city's mayor-elect. Despite low initial poll ratings, his campaign relied on a robust grassroots operation. Thousands of New Yorkers – mostly unpaid volunteers-worked tirelessly to spread his message of progressive reform.

"Zohran Mamdani is transforming politics," said US Senator Bernie Sanders, who inspired him. "As mayor, he will stand up for New York's working people. That might alarm the establishment and the billionaires, but it's exactly why over 100,000 volunteers supported his campaign."

New York's mayoral elections often attract limited attention, dominated as they are by



MANY OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT MAMDANI'S INVOCATION OF NEHRU SIGNALLED THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING NEW AND POTENTIALLY TRANSFORMATIVE IN NEW YORK POLITICS

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The Pioneer

wealthy politicians in this heavily Democratic city. However, once Mamdani won the Democratic primary, his campaign quickly gained national traction. In a matter of weeks, he transformed online enthusiasm into real votes, turning the race into a global talking point. In his victory speech, Mamdani declared, "I will wake up each morning determined to make this city better for you than it was the day before."

A graduate of Bowdoin College in Maine, Mamdani earned a degree in Africana Studies in 2014 and co-founded his college's Students for Justice in Palestine chapter. Before entering politics, he worked as a housing counsellor for low-income families. In 2020, he was elected to the New York State Assembly after defeating a long-time Democratic incumbent in Queens and has since been re-elected twice.

His campaign resonated strongly with young voters, who admired his authenticity, though critics continue to question his administrative experience. His democratic socialist platform-featuring proposals such as free public buses, universal childcare, rent-stabilised housing, a \$30 minimum wage by 2030, and higher taxes on the wealthy-has given hope to many New Yorkers seeking a fairer future.

Despite the brevity of his campaign,

Mamdani's ability to turn social media support into community action drew attention in India and highlighted the growing influence of the Indian diaspora in US politics. Former President Donald Trump called Mamdani a "communist," claiming that America "lost a bit of sovereignty" in the mayoral elections. He warned that funding New York under Mamdani would be wasteful due to his leftist leanings.

Trump's supporters – the MAGA base-reacted sharply to Republican losses in several states, including Virginia, New Jersey, California, and New York City, blaming him for focusing too much on foreign affairs over domestic priorities. Mamdani's victory, in particular, has become a flashpoint within the GOP, intensifying criticism of Trump's political influence.

As mayor, Zohran Mamdani is expected to champion the working people of New York-a prospect that unsettles the establishment and the billionaire class but also explains the remarkable enthusiasm of his supporters.

The road ahead will not be easy. Mamdani must now deliver on his promises, unite his supporters, and secure the resources needed to fulfil his ambitious agenda.

If he succeeds, he could redefine New York's political future; if not, he risks fading as quickly as he rose.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

Balancing economy, nature, and future prosperity



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

Most of us would agree that if we had never been here, the Earth would have remained healthy and balanced, as it was meant to be. But since we are here, our actions have disrupted the planet and caused destruction. As the world has become increasingly industrialised, we have consumed more and more of its natural resources.

So, what will the economies of the future look like? Are we moving towards a global marketplace with a single currency? Will there ever be a natural equilibrium between supply and demand? Can we evolve beyond the competitive marketplace? Will we continue down the path of specialisation, or will we return to a more diverse, self-sustaining economy? Is it possible to have the best of both worlds?

Can each community become entirely self-sufficient in terms of energy, agriculture, and industry, while still exchanging specialised products with neighbouring economies?

These are some of the essential questions we must ask ourselves today because the most fundamental truth about our economic future lies in the stability of the natural environment. When the elements of nature remain undisturbed by human activity-when each community can depend on the quality of its soil and climate to meet its agricultural needs and provide sufficient resources for basic living-then economies will no longer be ruled by change, chance, and artificial demand. This would also mean that people would not have to borrow from others and live in long-term bondage to interest rates and debt.

But how do we return to this economic Eden? Is it truly possible to create such a world today? The answer is yes-when we begin to re-establish our inner values. By placing greater emphasis on our quality as human beings, this transformation will naturally be reflected in the marketplace as well.

If we value fairness, freedom of enterprise, friendship, and, most importantly, harmony with nature, we will no longer seek a competitive edge over our neighbours. Remember: if we feel content as individuals, we will not try to satisfy ourselves through business ventures at the

expense of poorer economies. Instead of exploiting cheap labour and resources, our focus will shift towards restoring nature to her perfect state and ensuring the long-term viability of local resources.

Rather than looking outside our own communities and economies for solutions, we will address internal problems using sound business principles and ethical practices. Instead of creating industries that serve no real purpose to society, we will strive to understand and serve the genuine needs of the local community first.

By limiting our desires and finding satisfaction in the quality of our intentions and actions-rather than in the quantity of what we produce – we can overcome the urge to create goods and services merely for their own sake.

We must clearly understand that inner stability and economic stability go hand in hand. The more we respect ourselves and revere the world around us, the more the natural world will serve our needs in the right way and at the right time. In the absence of greed, nature will not be pressured to give what she cannot, and human beings will not resort to dishonest means to achieve their ends. When our primary motives are to share, exchange, learn, and grow, we naturally displace the negative impulses to take, hoard, compete, and exploit.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and a popular columnist

DAVID SZALAY'S FLESH WINS THE 2025 BOOKER PRIZE

The 2025 Booker Prize concluded in a near photo finish, with Hungarian-British novelist David Szalay's *Flesh* narrowly edging out India's Kiran Desai for *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny*. Desai, returning nearly two decades after her 2006 Booker triumph, was widely tipped as the frontrunner, her novel exploring identity, diaspora, and the quiet tremors of family life.

Szalay, born in Canada and now residing in Vienna, offered a contrasting yet equally ambitious vision: the life of István, who moves from a modest Hungarian housing estate to London's elite circles, navigating desire, ambition, and the unvarnished realities of existence.

Flesh is a meditation on corporeality, vulnerability, and social aspiration. Its austere title signals Szalay's artistic boldness -

foregrounding immediacy, the body, and life's raw textures. Sparse prose, deliberate silences, and white space lend each encounter and moral compromise a piercing realism. The novel neither romanticises life nor condemns it, but presents its bluntness and beauty with unflinching clarity.

The 2025 shortlist – including Susan Choi's *Flashlight*, Katie Kitamura's *Audition*, Ben Markovits' *The Rest of Our Lives*, and Andrew Miller's *The Land in Winter* – reflected remarkable range, proving that literary excellence endures where craft, courage, and empathy converge. Indeed, the 2025 Booker Prize reaffirmed that great literature continues to thrive where honesty meets imagination.

VIJAY ADHIKARI | UTTARAKHAND

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Capital suffocates under toxic sky

It has become trite to lament the dismal air quality in the national capital, as Delhi now holds the dubious distinction of being the most polluted city in the world.

Beyond the usual culprits-excessive stubble burning in neighbouring States, year-round construction, and the sprawling network of Delhi Metro projects extending into adjoining cities-residents are left gasping for breath.

The situation worsens each year during Deepavali, the Festival of Lights, when fireworks blanket the skies. Despite previous bans, the Apex Court permitted "green crackers" this time, though enforcement was lax. Predictably, pollution in Delhi reached a new low, with particulate matter (PM 2.5) levels breaching 400 micrograms per cubic metre across several locations-figures unseen in four years.

Environmentalists note a clear trend: high emissions from fireworks combined with low night temperatures drive PM 2.5 concentrations dangerously upward. That many Delhiites burst crackers well past the 10 pm. limit underscores a troubling lack of civic responsibility and poor monitoring.

Now, with a terror strike compounding the city's woes, Delhi suffocates under a toxic and tragic haze.

JAYANTHY SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

When small gestures speak loudest

Kindness costs almost nothing, and showing benevolence to unkind people can have a profound effect. On a larger scale, a kind environment is vital for encouraging nations to create a safe and secure world. There is a common misconception that a country must be cruel to be strong.

An act of kindness transcends race and religion. It does not discriminate by region or age either. People may forget many things, but they rarely forget how acts of sympathy and compassion made them feel.

Small gestures-such as allowing others to speak, listening attentively to those in distress, offering a stranger a cup of coffee, helping an elderly person cross the road, holding the door open for someone who usually does so for others, feeding stray animals, or offering a seat to the elderly, disabled, and women on public transport-are all signs of kindness.

The joy of kindness benefits both body and mind. Helping others with a smile can relax the body and mind, reducing pain and anxiety. Countries like the United States, Australia, Canada, and Nigeria celebrate "Kindness Day" on November 13. Kindness creates a ripple effect that can transform communities and bring people closer together.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Terror strikes near Red Fort

Delhi was shaken on Monday evening by a horrific explosion near the Red Fort that tore through the peaceful streets and claimed 13 innocent lives, marking the capital's first major terror attack since 2011. The blast, suspected to be a terrorist act, left cars ablaze, families devastated, and the city once again in mourning. The sheer cruelty of targeting unsuspecting civilians exposes the depravity of terror organisations that feed on fear, destruction, and ideological hatred. These cowardly groups, which have previously struck at the heart of India, seek to destabilise peace and spread panic among ordinary people.

While the nation grieves the loss of precious lives, anger and sorrow must be channelled into decisive action. Investigative and intelligence agencies must leave no stone unturned in identifying those responsible, dismantling their networks, and eradicating every root of extremism that threatens Indian soil. The persistence of such organisations despite repeated crack-downs demands stronger vigilance, regional cooperation, and zero tolerance for terrorism in all its forms.

Let this sorrow inspire a renewed national resolve to protect every life and ensure that terror finds no refuge or sympathy in India again.

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

Why India hasn’t achieved a decisive victory against terror

When it comes to confronting the very intellectual foundations of jihad, we have often chosen silence. Instead of engaging in open, honest debates, our public conversations tend to dodge the tough questions. Civil society cannot defeat jihadists solely through military and legal measures

FIRST
Column



BALBIR
PUNJ

Last Monday evening (November 10), the national capital was rocked by a devastating bombing. It was either a suicidal attack or an accidental explosion, occurring during the transportation of deadly merchandise by Dr Umar Un Nabi, associated with what has been termed the ‘white-collar terror module.’

While this incident has once again challenged many long-standing assumptions regarding jihadi terrorism, it also prompts us to reflect on why civil society has yet to achieve a decisive victory against jihadi terror.

Leftist-colonialist commentators have often attributed the jihadi terror phenomenon to “illiteracy, unemployment and poverty” within sections of the Muslim community. If that were true, why then did highly educated, socially respected and economically secure Muslims such as Dr Umar, Dr Adeel Ahmad Rather of Anantnag Government Medical College, Dr Muzammil Ahmad Ganai of Faridabad’s Al-Falah School of Medical Sciences & Research Centre, and Dr Shaheen Saeed, who worked at Faridabad’s Al-Falah University, take the path of jihad?

The fact is, the jihadist mindset is neutral to class, status and education. The roots of jihadist violence often stem from the concept of ‘kafir-kufir,’ which many Muslims—whether affluent, poor, highly educated or illiterate—believe is fundamental to Islam.

Some Muslims interpret their faith as a divine duty to target infidels (kafirs), believing that dying in such acts grants them religious merit. Additionally, the promise of rewards in the afterlife for martyrs (fidaayeen) triggers such suicide missions.

Madrasa education often plays a decisive role in shaping the minds of young Muslims, sometimes fostering a worldview rooted deeply in specific religious doctrines. In many cases, students learn within a close-knit environment where their classmates and teachers are predominantly or exclusively Muslim.

This closed setting limits their perspective and detaches them from the rich diversity of a pluralistic society. Although the number of madrasa — going children is small, they



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AGAINST ‘KAFIRS’

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 The Pioneer

often provide leadership to the community, particularly in matters related to faith. In the recent Red Fort explosion case, a Maulvi from Kashmir is the kingpin of the terror module.

Can madrasas be secularised by simply adding subjects like mathematics, English, science and computers? The answer is no. These subjects are mere tools—their real power or harm lies in the minds that wield them. The minds are often shaped by a toxic theological curriculum that calls upon the faithful to wage war against non-believers. The 9/11 terrorists in New York, linked to Osama bin Laden, possessed significant technological skills.

The harsh truth is that when a jihadist mindset combines with modern expertise, it becomes an even more dangerous combination.

There is an often-overlooked dimension to the phenomenon of jihad. A significant portion of the subcontinent’s Muslim population views historical figures such as Ghazni, Ghori, Babur, Aurangzeb, Abdali, and Tipu Sultan as heroes or ideological ancestors. Driven by a mindset that celebrates the destruction of ‘idolatrous’

practices, these figures are still admired by those who believe they have a religious mission— an ongoing Ghazwa-e-Hind- to convert the entire subcontinent to Islam.

The motivation behind many recent jihadist attacks—including the 2008 26/11 Mumbai siege and other atrocities—is connected to this long historical thread; a common, toxic umbilical cord links centuries-old Islamic invasions and the contemporary ideology of jihad.

According to the Tarikh-i-Sultan Mahmud-i-Ghaznavi: Or the History of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni (translated in 1908) by G Roos-Keppeel, Qazi Abdul Ghani Khan reports that when offered a vast ransom by a vanquished

Hindu king, Mahmud replied, “In the religion of the Muslims it is (laid down that this is) a meritorious act that anyone who destroys the place of worship of the heathen will reap great reward on the Day of Judgment, and I intend to remove entirely idols from the cities of Hindustan...”

Similarly, Timur — who invaded India in 1398 and was responsible for the massacre of hundreds of thousands—wrote in his

autobiography, Tuzuk-e-Taimuri, “My principal object in coming to Hindustan... has been to accomplish two things. The first was to war with the infidels, the enemies of the Mohammedan religion, and by this religious warfare to acquire some claim to reward in the life to come.”

When Babur confronted the valiant ruler of Mewar, Rana Sanga, and his formidable army, he encouraged his comparatively weaker forces by framing the conflict as a jihad to defend Islam against ‘kafir’ Hindus. In doing so, Babur transformed the battle from a mere struggle for political dominance into a religiously sanctioned campaign, laying the foundation for the Mughal Empire in India under the banner of Islamic conquest.

After Khanwa’s (1527) victory over Rana Sanga, Babur assumed the title of ‘Ghazi’ (Victor in a Holy War). Below the titles (tughra) entered on the Fath-nama, Babur wrote the following quatrain: “For Islam’s sake, I wandered in the wilds, prepared for war with pagans and Hindus, resolved myself to meet the martyr’s death. Thanks be to God! A ghazi I became.”

A more recent, equally toxic narrative has emerged, attempting to connect sup-

posed ‘intolerance,’ ‘orthodoxy,’ and ‘aggressiveness’ within Muslim society to the policies of the Modi government. If that were true, why then did the bloodshed-filled partition of 1947 happen in the first place? Why were Gandhi and Nehru unable to stop it? And why, during the 1980s and 1990s, did the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley see the massacre and forced displacement of Kashmiri Pandits?

What are the underlying reasons for incidents such as the 1993 Kolkata bombing, the 1998 Coimbatore blasts, the 2000 Red Fort attack, the 2001 Indian Parliament attack, the 2003 Mumbai bombings, the 2005 Delhi bombings, the 2006 Mumbai train blasts, the 2007 Samjhauta Express attack, the 2008 Jaipur and Ahmedabad bombings, the 2013 Hyderabad blasts, and the 2013 Patna bombings?

These events are not merely reactions to provocations; rather, they often originate from a jihadi ideological framework that considers ‘idolatry’ and ‘pluralism’ as unforgivable ‘offences,’ punishable by ‘death.’

India is a land where tradition and modernity intertwine, creating a vibrant tapestry of open debate. The ancient scriptures—Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Manusmriti — and their legendary heroes are topics of lively discussion and questioning. However, this openness does not extend to Islam, as Nupur Sharma of the BJP and several others have learned at significant personal cost.

Nupur, besieged and under attack, faced ridicule from the judiciary and was disowned by her own party. Still in hiding, she fears the lurking threat of jihadi assassins eager to silence her. Even brave supporters who dared to stand by her faced brutal consequences, with some tragically beheaded. Her story is a stark reminder of the peril and hostility those questioning jihadists endure. Celebrated authors like Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasreen have lived in hiding for long, fearing for their lives. The list is endless. When it comes to confronting the very intellectual foundations of jihad, we have often chosen silence. Instead of engaging in open, honest debates, our public conversations tend to dodge the tough questions. Civil society cannot defeat jihadists solely through military and legal measures; it must also confront and discuss the very ideology that fuels violence against ‘kafirs.’

Can we really see this fight through?

The International Film Festival of India 2025: Where stories begin, and futures are written



CHAITANYA K
PRASAD

Come November, all roads lead back to Goa. There is something quietly magical about this time of year, when the salty breeze feels like it’s carrying unfinished scripts and half-formed characters, when the sunsets look like they were painted for the big screen, and the whole atmosphere buzzes with a kind of electric, creative promise. The International Film Festival of India (IFFI) is returning for its 56th edition, and honestly, it feels like more than just a festival; it feels like coming home. Home to stories, to cinema, to the kind of shared emotion that only a dark room full of strangers watching the same frame can give you. Since its first steps back in 1952, IFFI has grown alongside Indian cinema, through grainy black-and-white reels, the golden age of Bollywood, the rise of parallel cinema, and now the bold, digital-first era of global streaming. But despite everything that has changed, the heart of it has stayed exactly the same: that undeniable, collective love for a good story.

This year, IFFI doesn’t arrive alone. It carries with it the momentum of something larger, something more deliberate. Earlier this year, India did something bold: we hosted the first-ever Worldwide Audio-Visual Entertainment Summit, or WAVES. And it wasn’t just another policy meet or industry talk-fest. It felt like a real shift, a moment where India stopped being just a land of films and became a force in the global entertainment conversation. WAVES wasn’t about showing off what we already have; it was about stepping into what we could become. And now, as IFFI rolls in, it feels like the next chapter in that same story. This festival is no longer just a place to watch great cinema. It has become a mirror of the future we are building, one where Indian creators are not just part of the conversation; they are helping lead it. Where our stories, our talent, our imagination become the bridges we build to the rest of the world.

And that global reach is more visible this year than ever before. With over 240 films from 81 countries, including 13 world premieres, 5 international premieres, and 44 Asian premieres, IFFI 2025 is shaping up to be one of the most ambitious editions yet. A record-breaking 2,314 film submissions from 127 countries

speak volumes about IFFI’s rising status on the international stage. Among the highlights are over 80 award-winning festival titles, 21 official Oscar-nominated films, and a bold, curated selection of 133 international titles that have already made waves across the festival circuit. For cinephiles and industry insiders alike, IFFI is not just a destination; it’s a discovery engine.

But perhaps the most anticipated spotlight of all this year is on Japan, the official Country of Focus. This curated section is a masterstroke in cross-cultural storytelling. Across six carefully chosen films, the spotlight on Japan will explore everything from intimate dramas and psychological thrillers to queer cinema, youth sci-fi, and lyrical non-linear experiments. It’s a rare window into the emotional, philosophical, and visual vocabulary of contemporary Japanese filmmakers, a celebration of both rising voices and legendary auteurs. And it’s not just about what is on screen. IFFI will host institutional collaborations, cultural showcases, and programming that deepens

India-Japan creative ties, exactly the kind of soft-power diplomacy WAVES envisioned.

There is a beautiful kind of synergy between IFFI and WAVES. What WAVES laid out as an agenda, IFFI is now set to bring to life. WAVES spoke of harnessing entertainment as a tool of influence, of investing in creators, of using technology not as a gimmick but as an enabler. These are not abstract ideas. They are being felt here in Goa, in the new AI-powered storytelling labs, in curated sections like “Experimental Films,” “Macabre Dreams,” and “Docu-Montage,” in segments like “UNICEF” and “Mission LIFE” that bring together cinema and sustainability, and in the presence of countries like Spain and Australia through partner country and spotlight packages. IFFI is beginning to look less like a week-long celebration and more like the cultural nerve centre of India’s creative rise.

It’s also a year of honouring the legends who helped shape this journey. As part of its centenary tributes, IFFI 2025 will celebrate towering figures like Guru Dutt, Ritwik Ghatak, Raj Khosla, P Bhanumathi, Bhupen Hazarika, and Salil Chowdhury, restoring and screening iconic works such as Musafir and Subarnarekha for new generations to discover. And in what promises to be an emotional, unforgettable moment, Superstar Rajinikanth will be felicitated at the closing ceremony for completing 50 glorious years in cinema. His presence alone is a testament to the lasting legacy of Indian stardom, and how much cinema means to this country.

But what is most fascinating is how human all of this still feels. Even in the age of AI, OTT,

and algorithmic distribution, at its core, IFFI remains about emotion. About what happens when you sit in a dark room with strangers and feel something together. It’s about the goosebumps during a standing ovation. The quiet tears. The laughter that erupts unexpectedly. The way a single frame can remind you of who you are, or who you used to be. That’s what soft power really is. It’s not about dominance. It’s about resonance. And that’s what India has: stories that resonate. Stories that stick. Stories that belong to all of us.

This year’s IFFI will also be a showcase of what the future could look like if we let ourselves dream a little bolder. It’s unapologetically future-facing. With entire sections devoted to AI in cinema, virtual production, ethical tech conversations, and platforms for young creators to shine, it’s clear we aren’t stuck in nostalgia. We aren’t afraid of change. We are building with it. And the renewed focus on OTT reminds us that stories don’t need to stay inside the theatre to matter. They can travel across time zones and formats. Because when the story is good, it doesn’t need a passport.

And yet, none of this progress feels like a departure. It feels like an expansion. Like we are holding on to the things we love, while reaching out for what could be. That’s the spirit of Atma Nirbharta, isn’t it? Not just being self-reliant, but being self-defined. Owning our stories. Creating our own systems. Trusting our voice.

Looking ahead, IFFI has the potential to become more than a moment. It can be a year-round movement. A living ecosystem that nurtures creators, restores classics, trains future professionals, and positions India not just as a cultural superpower, but as a creative sanctuary. Maybe that means setting up a permanent AI storytelling lab. Maybe it means forging festival partnerships across the Global South. Maybe it means carving more space for women filmmakers, bold debuts, and films that dare to say something new. Whatever it is, one thing is clear: we are ready.

So yes, come November, the world will arrive in Goa once again. But this time, we hope they leave with more than just sun-kissed memories. We hope they leave knowing that India is not just the land of a thousand stories. We are the land of a thousand possibilities. And this year, at IFFI, we are ready to show the world exactly what that means.

The writer is a Former Civil Servant who writes on Cinema and Strategic Communication. Inputs were provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavie Srinivasa

 dailypioneer

 @Chatty111Prasad

 chaitanya-kumar-prasad-b4634b120

The real heroes of democracy



NEETU KUMARI
NAVGEET

The state of Bihar occupies a unique place in the history of political development across the world. It is not merely an Indian state; it is the birthplace of democracy itself.

The history of Vaishali, one of the earliest republics in the world, confirms that the seeds of participatory governance were first planted here. The citizens of Bihar have long been marked by a strong civic awareness and political consciousness, from ancient times to the present day, and take immense pride in their democratic legacy.

This democratic spirit was once again evident in the 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections, a living testimony to the people’s political engagement. Voter turnout across the state was unprecedented, reaffirming Bihar’s reputation as one of India’s most politically aware regions.

The election witnessed a historic voter turnout of 66.91 per cent, according to data released by the Election Commission of India — equivalent to 7 crore 45 lakh 26 thousand 858 citizens casting their votes. This remarkable participation marks a new milestone in Bihar’s electoral history. This was the first election since the adoption of the Indian Constitution that saw such a lively and participatory spirit in Bihar. The 2025 polls can be regarded as the most successful democratic exercise in the state so far, demonstrating a renewed faith in the power of the ballot.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this election was the active involvement of women voters, who not only matched their male counterparts but surpassed them in participation. During the second phase of polling, over 74 per cent of women voted, compared with 64 per cent of men. Across both phases, women voted at 68.76 per cent and men at 65.08 per cent — a consistent and inspiring contribution that signifies a broader social awakening in Bihar. As the Election Commission’s representative — also known as the SVEEP Icon (Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation) — I had the opportunity to visit several districts and promote voter awareness. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Citizens, particularly women, were eager to understand their rights and duties. The energy I experienced across towns and villages was undeniable — a shared belief that voting is not merely a duty but a celebration of democracy.

The elections coincided with the conclusion of the grand Chhath Puja festival, a symbolic overlap. Just as the people express devotion through faith and culture during Chhath, they did so through civic participation in the elections. Polling stations

across the state became sites of enthusiasm and pride. Voters arrived dressed in their best, and a festive atmosphere of joy and optimism prevailed.

This celebratory spirit showed that democracy in Bihar is not simply a political process — it is a living tradition that the people cherish. Each vote cast was akin to a prayer for progress, peace, and prosperity. The seamless and transparent conduct of such a vast election was made possible by the dedicated efforts of over 8.5 lakh officials, 1.4 lakh polling agents, 243 general observers, 38 police observers, and 67 expenditure observers. Their professionalism and hard work deserve the highest praise. Once again, the Election Commission of India demonstrated its effectiveness and commitment to free and fair elections.

Adding to the significance of the event, international delegates from 16 countries — including South Africa, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Belgium, and Colombia — visited Bihar to witness the polling process first-hand. They were deeply impressed by the level of organisation, transparency, and above all, the enthusiasm of the people. Their unanimous feedback was that Bihar’s democracy serves as an example for the world. Elections are not merely about forming governments; they reaffirm faith in democratic ideals. In recent years, voter disengagement and low turnout had become concerns in some parts of the country. However, the voters of Bihar have set a shining example. Through record participation and unwavering enthusiasm, they have sent a powerful message — that democracy in India is alive, vibrant, and strong. Where citizens participate wholeheartedly, democracy thrives.

The responsibility now rests with those who have been elected to represent the people. This is a sacred trust that must not be violated. They must act with integrity, transparency, and accountability. The people have fulfilled their duty; it is now time for their elected representatives to rise to the occasion, prove themselves worthy of this faith, and strengthen the democratic institutions that the people of Bihar have so passionately upheld.

The 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections will be remembered not merely as a political event but as a collective reaffirmation of faith in democracy. By actively participating in the political process, the people of Bihar have created a new chapter in India’s democratic journey — one defined by inclusivity, awareness, and hope. As a witness to this historic event, I can proudly say that Bihar has once again done justice to its legacy. The cradle of democracy has shown the world that the spirit of participation and community remains alive and strong. Indeed, this is Bihar’s victory. This is democracy triumphant — the victory of the people, by the people, and for the people.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

The writer served as the SVEEP Icon for Patna District during the Bihar Assembly Elections 2025. She is also a renowned folk singer and cultural ambassador of Bihar

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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Inflation slumps, but wait for GDP data

IN OCTOBER last year, retail inflation had breached the upper threshold of the RBI's inflation-targeting framework. Since then, however, it has moderated sharply. The latest data show that inflation slumped to a low of 0.25 per cent in October this year. In large part, the decline has been due to softening food prices, vegetables in particular. Food inflation in October is, in fact, the lowest of the current index series. With this data, inflation has now averaged 1.92 per cent in the first seven (April-October) months of the year. This raises the possibility of inflation for the full year coming in even lower than the RBI's most recent forecast of 2.6 per cent.

The deflation in the food category has widened further. The year-on-year inflation rate based on the food price index was -5.02 per cent in October, down from -2.33 per cent in September. The sharpest falls were observed in vegetables and pulses — potato, onion, tomato and arhar/tur, in particular. The softening in food prices is likely to continue given the ample supply from rebuilding of wheat and sugar stocks, prospects of a good kharif crop, and low international prices. In the non-food category, inflation remains subdued in most segments, with the exception of personal care and effects. The rise in this category could be due to the surge in gold prices — 57 per cent in October. The central bank had earlier estimated that excluding precious metals, core inflation was at 3 per cent in August. The rationalisation in GST rates could also have played a role. But, as per economists at the Bank of Baroda, the pass through is incomplete, and the full impact should be visible by November. This, however, is the last inflation data before the next monetary policy committee meeting in December.

The central bank has been consistently overestimating the price pressures in the economy. As a consequence, it has had to repeatedly lower its inflation forecast for the year — from 4.2 per cent in February to 3.7 per cent in June to 2.6 per cent in October. The muted price pressures in the economy do indicate the space to lower rates further. The GDP data for the second quarter will be released by the end of the month. It will provide some understanding of the underlying growth momentum in the country. These data will influence the MPC's decision to cut rates or not.

Delhi-Thimphu warmth can help fight China chill

A COMMON challenge for smaller countries in India's neighbourhood is navigating the rise of China — a power with the intent and the means to assert its dominance. Beijing has leveraged loans, connectivity projects, infrastructure investment and defence cooperation to expand its influence across South Asia. Recall how Sri Lanka in 2017 had to give up the Hambantota Port in the face of what experts refer to as China's debt trap diplomacy. Bhutan faces its own version of this challenge. It shares a long and disputed border with China, with which it has no formal diplomatic ties. China has frequently employed a carrot-and-stick strategy, offering aid on the one hand while constructing settlements and infrastructure inside Bhutanese territory on the other. In the backdrop of these challenges, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Bhutan highlights the strengths of its relationship with India, amid shifting regional dynamics.

Prime Minister Modi and King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck signed several MoUs covering renewable energy, health and medicine. New Delhi reaffirmed its support for Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan and its Economic Stimulus Programme. PM Modi also attended the 70th birthday celebrations of Jigme Singye Wangchuck — the father of the current king — who, during his more than three decades on the throne, interacted with as many as 12 Indian prime ministers.

Bhutan remains a critical regional partner for India in infrastructure, trade, energy and security. The Doklam plateau, located at the tri-junction of the countries — and the site of the 2017 India-China standoff — continues to be a strategic flashpoint. Among other concerns, any China-Bhutan land swap at Doklam poses a potential threat to India's Siliguri Corridor. Thimphu and New Delhi must therefore ensure that a boundary settlement with Beijing is peaceful and compromises neither the former's sovereignty nor the latter's security interests. India's respect for Bhutan's freedom to chart its own course, reaffirmed in the 2007 Friendship Treaty, which replaced the earlier provision requiring New Delhi to "guide" Thimphu in foreign affairs, remains the cornerstone of this steadfast partnership in an increasingly competitive neighbourhood.

After praise, how about financial freedom?

NOBODY WILL grudge that the afterglow of the women's cricket team's World Cup title has started reflecting in lavish cheques and frequent photo-ops. However, Sunil Gavaskar's warning should be heeded. He has said that the champions must be prepared for many of the promises to not be met, and for the extravagant pledges to be gradually forgotten. Gavaskar has also pointed out, wisely, that the love and affection of the *aam* cricket lover will remain the players' most enduring wealth.

Many of the winners do not come from financially sophisticated backgrounds, and could perhaps do with advice on where to lend their name and who to allow to climb aboard the bandwagon of their burgeoning fame. Many a champion cricketer from the past has been cheated by connmen and Ponzi scheme punks, and their after years derailed, because nobody was there to help them with astute investments. Athletes' careers are notoriously short, and financial independence is a lifelong necessity. Several of these players will acquire agents now, and ensuring that they navigate this post-fame period carefully is crucial. For all upcoming cricketers, regardless of gender, the BCCI can help with financial literacy programmes.

In the long term, however, some conversations need to be started. For instance, on a higher base price for the newly crowned champs in the Women's Premier League (WPL) in the next auction. A brand valuation that does justice to the players, beyond the stalwarts Smriti Mandhana and Harmanpreet Kaur. Expanding the WPL and nudging the likes of KKR, CSK, SRH, RR and Punjab Kings to buy into the "other" lucrative league. Inviting other corporates to float women's teams. Normalising high endorsement fees, so that the women players know they can demand better and more — now that they have the stamp of winners.

THE INDIAN economy is going through a challenging phase. On the external front, it has been pushed into a corner with one of the highest reciprocal tariffs imposed by the US. The government, on its part, has been trying to push up domestic demand through lower income tax and GST rates. There are other supporting factors, too, like benign inflation and a good monsoon, that are expected to keep overall domestic consumption healthy. The IMF has recently revised India's GDP growth projection for 2025-26 upwards to 6.6 per cent (the earlier projection was 6.4 per cent), even as it downgraded the growth for 2026-27 to 6.2 per cent (earlier at 6.4 per cent). The critical question at this point is that once the festive demand tapers, will the economy be able to maintain the growth momentum in the midst of global threats?

A good monsoon and the increase in the minimum support price for rabi and kharif crops have supported rural sentiment. Indicators such as robust tractor sales, a pickup in two-wheeler sales, a revival in government spending on agriculture and allied sectors, and a strong uptick in agricultural exports point to healthy growth in the farm sector in the second quarter of this year. The manufacturing sector also demonstrated good performance, as reflected in improvement in indicators such as steel production, the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) for manufacturing, and non-petroleum, non-agricultural exports. The service sector's performance remains mixed. While indicators such as e-way bill generation and toll revenues improved, others such as air passenger traffic and services exports showed moderation.

India's goods exports have seen strong growth, largely due to front-loading ahead of the tariff implementation. In the first half of the year, India's non-oil goods exports grew by 7 per cent, compared to 4.6 per cent in the corresponding period of the previous year. Electronics exports that contribute around 10 per cent to India's good exports have grown by a robust 40 per cent in the period under review and that has supported the overall exports momentum. However, in the months to come, items like gems and jewellery, textile, ready-made garments, seafood, leather and footwear will feel the adverse impact of high US tariffs. In September, as the high tariffs became effective, India's goods exports to the US fell by 12 per cent, with contraction in exports of all major items except electronics goods, which continued to record high growth.

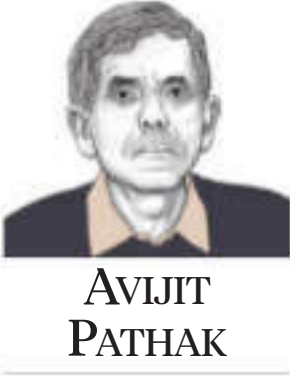
The big saviour for India is its services exports, which have been recording healthy growth, even in midst of all the global turmoil. Services exports have grown by a CAGR of 10 per cent between FY18 and FY25, while goods exports in the same period grew by 5 per cent. In the first half of the year, exports remained healthy, growing by around 10 per cent. Even with the lingering global threats, we expect India's current account deficit to remain comfortable at around 1 per cent of GDP in FY26. Apart from healthy services exports, the current account will be supported by remittances and benign global crude oil prices. Capital flows have been adversely impacted by persistent FII outflows from the equity market and feeble net FDI



RAJANI SINHA

There is likely to be some moderation in growth in the second half of the year as India's exports feel the pinch of high US tariffs

An erosion of civility in the classroom



AVIJIT PATHAK



Instead of slapping a teacher or getting obsessed with whether vegetarian or non-vegetarian food should be served in the hostel mess, let them debate what is really affecting their destiny

AS A teacher, I have always believed that there is no such thing as "value-neutral" or "apolitical" education. Education is not just the acquisition of "techniques" or "skills" for "practical" things. To be educated means to have the ability to think critically, understand the dynamics of power in society, and imagine a just and humane world. So, I have no hesitation in saying that young students ought to think politically, debate issues confronting the nation, acquire the maturity to participate in non-violent conflict resolution, and take part in social movements.

But the ugliness we see in the prevalent political culture and the resultant erosion of civility affect the kind of politics our students engage in. It saddens me as I see a young student slapping her teacher at Delhi University. Or, for that matter, it frightens me when I see the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University — the university that was once known for its culture of nuanced debates and conversations — getting involved in physical violence. In fact, everywhere — from metropolitan to regional universities — we are witnessing this slip into physical violence.

Possibly, this degeneration is inevitable when ignorance is weaponised, critical thinking is seen as a crime, reasoned dialogue as weakness, and politically engineered stereotypes divide us into binaries — "*deshbhadhaks*" vs "*jihadis*", "leftists" vs "rightists". What else can we expect? If students, too, surrender their creative agency, it helps the status quo. Let them fight, abuse one another, and abhor the idea of what Paulo Freire would have regarded as a "problem posing" education; meanwhile, the hegemony of the regime remains intact.

Yet, as a teacher, it becomes difficult for me to give up my commitment to the pedagogy of hope. I will appeal to students to be truly awakened, to raise critical questions, to see beyond mere sloganeering, and to engage in rigorous research and study and generate a meaningful debate — the kind that is hardly seen in today's political culture. Instead of slapping a teacher, using brute power as a mode of mobilisation, or getting obsessed with whether vegetarian or non-vegetarian food should be served in the hostel mess, let them debate what is

really affecting their destiny.

I feel like appealing to college/university students to come to the streets, raise three fundamental issues, and generate hope in emancipatory politics and transformative education. First, the prevalent political and economic system has already caused severe damage to the culture of learning. As the neoliberal doctrine reduces education to a market-driven skill, and transforms young learners into mere "resources" for the techno-corporate empire, our universities begin to lose their liberating potential — nurturing dialogic and awakened citizens for creating a just and democratic world. A new politics of knowledge emerges: One that devalues liberal arts, humanities and social sciences, tends to equate what is worth learning with robotics, data sciences and AI, and refuses to see anything beyond salary packages. It kills the very idea of studentship — a student as a seeker or a wanderer. The spirit of free enquiry is sacrificed, and academic freedom loses its meaning.

Second, with the steady growth of fancy private universities, we see the decline of public universities. If this continues, a large section of Indian society — economically deprived and socially marginalised — will remain deprived of good quality/affordable education. In fact, our chronic obsession with grading, ranking and quantifying academic products has further undermined the value of engaged pedagogy, social responsibility and education as a liberating experience. It is like selling a university as a "brand", transforming a teacher into a "service provider" and reducing a student to a consumer. It legitimises a kind of meritocracy that privileges only the rich and the powerful.

Third, isn't it important for students to reflect on the danger of the kind of politics that stimulates the masses through the virus of hyper-nationalism and a militant religious identity, and imagine a new kind of politics that seeks freedom from rising authoritarianism and the cult of narcissism?

As I see students getting trapped in the vicious cycle of decadent politics, I ask myself: Where have all these debates disappeared?

The writer taught Sociology at JNU

flows. Capital flows are likely to remain volatile in midst of the global uncertainties. However, India's high forex reserve of around \$690 billion remains a comforting factor.

With external demand remaining vulnerable, the government's focus is on increasing domestic demand. The recent rationalisation of GST rates, reduction in income tax burden, the good monsoon, benign inflation and lower interest rates are supportive factors for domestic demand. This is being reflected in strong festive demand this year, and hence consumer spending is likely to have recorded good growth in the first half of the year. As far as investment expenditure is concerned, the Centre's capital expenditure surged by 40 per cent during the period. While there has been a sharp jump in disbursement towards the Department of Food and Public Distribution, even after adjusting for this disbursement, the Centre's capex has risen by a healthy 29 per cent. As per our analysis, private sector investment is also seeing a pickup led by the power, cement, construction, pharmaceuticals and logistics sectors.

With the recent high frequency indicators looking good, we are projecting the economy to grow at 7.2 per cent in the second quarter, following 7.8 per cent in the first quarter. However, there is likely to be some moderation in growth in the second half of the year as India's exports feel the pinch of high US tariffs. Moreover, central government expenditure could also slow down as it remains committed to fiscal consolidation. We expect GDP growth

to moderate to around 6.3 per cent in the second half, taking the full-year growth to around 6.9 per cent. It is to be noted that some of the increase in India's real GDP growth is because of the statistical impact of the low deflator this year.

We are observing a gradual easing of inflationary pressures. Supported by strong agricultural production and recent GST rate reductions, inflation in the second half is projected to average around 2 per cent, lower than 2.2 per cent in the first half. This moderation in price pressure provides the RBI with greater flexibility to implement rate cuts should economic growth soften amid external headwinds.

The Indian economy is better placed in midst of the global turmoil. Factors like GST rate rationalisation, lower inflation and the good monsoon are supportive of domestic demand, even while the external scenario remains uncertain. As the global environment is likely to remain volatile, it will be critical to ensure that domestic demand momentum is sustained. While impetuses like a lower tax burden will provide a boost to consumption, for longer-term growth momentum, it will be critical for household income to grow. Lower wage growth and weak hiring by the IT sector in the last couple of years is depressing household income in urban areas. The impact of reciprocal tariffs on the labour-intensive export sector will further dent household income. Structural reforms to ensure increased private investment and job creation in the economy will help sustain healthy growth over a longer period.

The writer is chief economist, CAREEdge Ratings

GRAP-3 won't fix Delhi pollution. Only we can



TRISHNA SARKAR

Delhi will continue to experience the same oppressive cycle year after year until the city stops its addiction to cars, controls construction, and redefines celebration

DELHI'S FESTIVE season means many things: Lights, joy, sweets, and, of course, our most devoted seasonal visitor — pollution. The capital is now enveloped in a poisonous blanket that is thicker than the fog, even before the winter has properly come. In this gas chamber, suffocation and celebration coexist. The Air Quality Index (AQI) has steadily increased from poor to catastrophic. Authorities, seemingly taken aback, enforced GRAP-3 and GRAP-4 regulations when the numbers officially surpassed 400. GRAP-3 is activated when the AQI exceeds 400, and GRAP-4 is implemented when it crosses the 450 mark. At that point, trucks are stopped, schools begin to close, construction stops, older cars are prohibited, and everyone suddenly realises that air pollution is an issue. We seem to breathe in hope until then.

However, the problem is that these regulations, otherwise helpful, are not considered even when Delhiites struggle to breathe. GRAP-3 directs us to minimise vehicle emissions, cease construction, and stop utilising diesel generators. GRAP-4 goes one step further by outlawing the majority of non-essential cars and closing down significant industries. But this long wait for air quality to become "severe" is questionable. It's similar to waiting for a heart attack before adopting a healthy diet.

Beijing's PM2.5 levels were cut in half in less than 10 years thanks to tough enforcement, cleaner fuel transitions, and ongoing monitoring. Decades ago, New York City reduced car pollution, changing both its skyline and its lungs. Year-round initiatives have improved air quality and prolonged life throughout Europe. Delhi, meanwhile, looks forward to November like a recurring nightmare. The same script is followed each year: Denial, the blame game, indignation, emergency meetings, and GRAP.

Worse, our middle-class hopes — the air purifiers — are now choking. On bedside tables, they hum heroically in a futile struggle against air that won't be cleaned. Respiratory discomfort is on the rise, schools are debating online learning, and people are taking to the streets to demand their fundamental right to breathe, only to be detained thereafter. However, our true predicament is obscured by the fog of political guilt. As if pointing fingers magically purifies the environment, one side blames the former government, another the present one, and everyone else blames stubble burning somewhere else.

We refuse to unravel the complex web of urban instability that lies at the core of Delhi's pollution. The city suffers from unrelenting traffic and widespread urbanisation, where cars are multiplying more quickly than roads can handle. Each festival becomes an occasion to compulsively burst crackers, and unchecked building adds layers of dust to an already suffocating cityscape. These routine decisions add up to a yearly disaster. Delhi will continue to experience the same oppressive cycle until it stops its addiction to cars, controls construction, and redefines celebration.

In the end, achieving cleaner air is a shared obligation rather than the exclusive responsibility of the government or the individual citizen. Only when citizens and the government cooperate will Delhi be able to breathe again.

The writer teaches at Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar College, University of Delhi

40 YEARS AGO

November 13, 1985

PM congratulates scientists

THE PRIME MINISTER, Rajiv Gandhi, congratulated the scientists for their efforts which led to the successful launching of Dhruva and other power reactors. He called upon the scientists to lay emphasis on new research and plants with high efficiency and safety factors. He praised the safety factor achieved in the nuclear reactors.

Extremists shoot cop dead

A CONSTABLE, Bhupinder Singh of Chhabal police station, was shot dead early at Manuchal village near Amritsar by Gurbachan Singh, an extremist wanted in many murder cases, during an exchange of fire. According to information reaching the police head-

quarters in Amritsar, a police party had surrounded the tube well in Manuchal where he was hiding. As the police challenged him, the terrorist fired at the police party. The constable, Bhupinder Singh, died on the spot. The terrorist fled the scene of the crime under the cover of darkness.

Armed youths ransack house

FOUR YOUTHS brandishing guns forced their way into a house in East of Kailash in South Delhi late and escaped after looting gold, cash and other valuables worth thousands of rupees. The youths, well dressed and polished in speech, came to the house of Subhash Banerjee, general manager of the firm His Master's Voice in Delhi, around 8 pm.

Lure of a talisman

THE LURE of a talisman to win a court case against their landlord cost a Delhi couple their lives in the Naraini forests of Banda district, where both of them were murdered, according to a report received in Lucknow. Ehtisham, a business partner of the 30-year-old deceased Qayum and his 28-year-old wife Zulekha, was arrested on the charge of murder two days later and the police are in hot pursuit of his two accomplices, Kallu Nigam and Hari Kishen Vaish, both of Doha village in Banda Kotwali circle.

Note: There was no edition on November 13, 1985 on account of Diwali. The items are from the November 12 edition.



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From Trump-Xi G2, a message for India — build your own leverage



THAROORTHINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

THE RECENT meeting between US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the APEC Summit in Busan, South Korea, and Trump’s use of the term “G2” to frame the gathering, has raised profound questions for India. Strategic calm between the US and China may reduce global volatility, but it also demands sharper policy-making and diplomacy from us.

Indians realise that the sort of decisive economic clout China displayed at Busan is currently not available to India in its strategic dialogue with the US. Beijing can use its global supply-chain dominance and its massive market size as effective weapons. India, though a growing market, lacks a comparable, single point of pressure to wield with the US that can influence high-level negotiations so effectively. We have no rare earths to withhold, and we don’t buy 12 million tons of American soybeans either. We cannot dictate terms the way China did.

For India to achieve comparable diplomatic results, we must focus on developing our own unique points of asymmetric leverage — whether in technology, manufacturing scale, or critical minerals — to strengthen our hand, both vis-à-vis the US and, critically, in our complex relationship with China. India’s dependence on the US is greater than China’s, and that constitutes a key strategic disparity. Unfortunately, we have the same disparity with China too. What works in Beijing’s favour when negotiating with India, giving it an inherent advantage in bilateral economic and trade discussions, is that we too are dependent on imports from China, whereas there is nothing we sell them or purchase from them that makes as much of a difference to them (just as the US too has other sources to supply the garments, the gems, the shrimps or the phones we are anxious to sell them).



ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

Trump’s apparent warming to China delivers a sharp strategic message to India. For years, New Delhi has operated on the foundational assumption that the US would always view it as a “useful instrument” to constrain or counterbalance a rising China. The unspoken pact of the Indo-Pacific strategy — where India’s geopolitical weight was seen as crucial to Washington’s China strategy — has taken a major hit. The transactional nature of the Trump-Xi deal highlights a clear hierarchy of U.S. interests: for the Trump administration, the relationship with Beijing, driven by the colossal trade deficit and the desire for high-profile deals, remains far more important than the one with New Delhi. This is evident in the differential treatment: While a partial trade truce was quickly struck with China, the US has continued to pressure India with tariffs, even as a bilateral deal with New Delhi is being negotiated. Indians have lost jobs as a result of US tariffs, while China is being hailed in Trump’s social-media posts.

The assumption that the US would always have India’s back is now obsolete. New Delhi must recognise that its strategic value to Washington is conditional and subject to the vagaries of US domestic politics and the immediate

The single greatest vulnerability exposed by the US-China dynamic is India’s reliance on Chinese imports. India must aggressively pursue the diversification of its supply chains and focus on economic self-reliance

priority of managing the relationship with the peer competitor, China. This necessitates a profound and urgent recalibration of India’s foreign policy assumptions. Our strategic options must revolve around maximizing our strategic autonomy and building comprehensive national power.

India must accelerate its move towards a genuinely “multi-aligned” foreign policy, deepening strategic ties with other key global powers and regional groupings, in particular Europe, the UK, the Gulf states, Africa and ASEAN. The future of the Quad (with Japan, Australia, and the US) remains uncertain, with Trump yet to confirm attendance at the next summit scheduled to be hosted by India. Its utility must be viewed constructively, but alongside the value of enhanced engagement with Russia, Central Asian states and even China. New Delhi should leverage its growing geopolitical weight to extract maximum benefit from competing powers.

The temporary thaw in US-China relations paradoxically gives India a window for its own pragmatic diplomacy with Beijing. While the border issue remains the core constraint, New Delhi should pursue a strategy of “managed competition” with China. This means maintaining military preparedness on the

border while keeping diplomatic and trade channels open to stabilise the relationship and prevent escalation. India must develop the resolve to negotiate from a position of strength, which requires domestic actions as well.

The single greatest vulnerability exposed by the US-China dynamic is India’s economic reliance on Chinese imports, particularly in critical sectors like pharmaceuticals and electronics. India must aggressively pursue the diversification of its supply chains and focus on economic self-reliance (*atmanirbharta*) in a strategic context. This includes attracting global manufacturers looking to de-risk from China, a strategic opportunity that a US-China detente could slow down. Simultaneously, investing heavily in indigenous critical and emerging technologies like AI, quantum computing, and semiconductors is paramount to achieving true strategic autonomy.

India needs policy coherence rooted in domestic realities. Imposing a reform package will not succeed if it clashes with entrenched political interests or social expectations. The challenge is to maintain openness and genuine ease of doing business while protecting workers, industries, and critical technologies. Our economic governance must adapt: trade rules, investment norms, and finance architecture have to make room for strategic instruments like industrial policy, government investments and digital sovereignty. We must use markets, but build institutions and deploy the state where markets falter.

For India, the “G2” summit serves as a timely and sharp awakening: The assumption of an unshakeable US commitment to India as a counterweight to China is a costly illusion. We find ourselves in a multipolar world where American tariffs destroy Indian jobs and Beijing’s response matters to businesses in Mumbai. India’s path forward is clear: Abandon the passive assumption of guaranteed US backing and embrace a proactive, multi-aligned strategy centred on building national economic and technological resilience. Only by maximising our own strength and strategic flexibility can India secure its interests amidst a dynamic and increasingly transactional great power landscape.

The writer is MP, Thiruvananthapuram, and Lok Sabha chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs

Tata model faces challenges, needs a charter of reform



ASHISH KHETAN

THE TATA Group’s unique ownership framework — an empire of profit-driven enterprises built atop public charity trusts — is under strain. Recent discord within the Sir Dorabji Tata (SDTT) and Sir Ratan Tata Trusts (SRTT), which collectively own approximately 52 per cent of Tata Sons, the Group’s holding company, has revealed significant structural flaws: The lack of clear rules regarding trustee appointments, succession planning, term limits, and measures to prevent conflicts of interest. The division among trustees regarding Mehli Mistry’s reappointment was reportedly exacerbated by disagreements concerning Tata Sons’ potential listing, age limitations for board positions, and conflicting allegiances stemming from trustees holding concurrent roles as fiduciaries, business executives, and board members of Tata Sons. But to date, no official explanation has been given as to why Mistry was not reappointed to the boards of the Tata Trusts or why, earlier, the trustees were split over the appointment of a nominee director to the board of Tata Sons. For an entity that controls India’s largest and most influential corporate conglomerate, such opacity is problematic.

In October 2024, the seven trustees of SDTT and SRTT passed a self-serving resolution granting themselves permanent tenure. Noel Tata and Venu Srinivasan were subsequently reappointed for life, but Mistry was shown the door. After a Maharashtra government ordinance limited permanent trustees to one-fourth of the board, Srinivasan’s term has now been reduced to three years. Simultaneously, Neville Tata — son of

Tata Group chairman Noel Tata — has been appointed a trustee, raising fresh questions about succession and governance within the Trusts.



ILLUSTRATION: KOMAL

The Tata founders voluntarily chose to vest philanthropic trusts with 66 per cent ownership of Tata Sons. This inversion of billionaire raj that dominates the Indian corporate landscape makes Tata a rare experiment in aligning wealth with altruism.

Successive governments and regulators have, over time, accommodated the Tata model,

choosing not to interfere in Tata Trusts’ internal affairs. The Companies Act, 1956, imposed restrictions on trust-held corporate shares through a “Public Trustee” mechanism. Over time, the Public Trustee system was phased out, and the Companies Act, 2013, completely omitted those controls, paving the way for the Tata Trusts to actively control Tata Sons. Simultaneously, amendments to Tata Sons’ charter granted the Trusts sweeping veto rights. Key board decisions of Tata Sons, including strategic and annual business plans, required prior Trust approval, effectively making them a “super-shareholder”.

Under Ratan Tata’s leadership (1991-2012), the Trusts and the Group acted in concert. Even when Cyrus Mistry publicly accused the Trusts of oppression, interference, and overreach in the affairs of Tata Sons, the trustees maintained a united public front. That unity has now fractured. As internal divisions spill into view, long-simmering questions over governance and accountability have resurfaced — this time from within. During the bruising legal battle with Mistry, the same issues were raised from the outside: He had alleged financial mismanagement, abuse of affirmative voting rights, and prejudicial conduct toward the Shapoorji Pallonji Group, the largest minority shareholder in Tata Sons. Today, it is the trustees themselves who have laid bare the inner sanctum of the Trusts.

India’s corporate governance framework is primarily tailored for for-profit entities, with scope for ambiguity around complex holding structures like that of the Tatas, where corporate control rests with philanthropic trusts. Structures like Tata Trusts need some light-touch, arm’s-length regulatory reform. Specifically, regulators should clarify that charitable or public trusts acting as controlling shareholders owe fiduciary duties — including the duty of fair dealing and non-oppression — to minority shareholders, consistent with the Companies Act, 2013. In addition, the exercise of affirmative voting rights by the Trusts in Tata Sons should be subject to formal disclosure and demonstrably aligned with both their charitable objectives and the interests of all shareholders. This would help close a critical regulatory gap while preserving the Trusts’ autonomy.

The founding vision of the Tata Trusts was meant to shield the Group from dynastic control and personal enrichment. To serve that vision, the Trusts now need a reformed charter that codifies clear rules on trustee appointments, term limits, renewals, trustee qualifications and conflict-of-interest safeguards. If it does happen, the Tata model will remain India’s most enduring experiment in enlightened capitalism. If not, it risks devolving into the very cronyism it once transcended.

The writer is a lawyer

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Constant vigilance

THIS REFERS to the editorial, “Terror’s new footprint is the urgent challenge” (*IE*, November 12). The blast near the Red Fort has once again exposed the resurgence of terror networks operating under new facades. What is particularly alarming is the sophistication and coordination of these modules, echoing early 2000s patterns. Despite years of intelligence modernisation, India’s urban centres remain vulnerable to such orchestrated violence. This incident should trigger a structural rethink of internal security and intelligence-sharing between states.

Palak Verma, Gobindgarh

THIS REFERS to the editorial, “Terror’s new footprint is the urgent challenge” (*IE*, November 12). An act of violence resulting in loss of life, by whomever and for whatever reason, is totally unacceptable. Killing innocent people is an unfathomable evil. It cannot be countenanced in a civilised society. Each life is precious and families will never come to terms with the loss of their loved ones. This underlines the need to repudiate violence. And nobody should attempt to use the tragedy for short-term interests. Now is not the time for jingoism.

David Milton, Maruthancode

Climate targets

THIS REFERS to the article, ‘COP 30 is a moment for action, not aspiration’ (*IE*, November 12). At the heart of the fight against climate change are policies of mitigation and their implementation. At COP 29, the richer countries had offered the poorer countries at least \$300 billion annually to help them tackle climate change. This is much less than what the developing world needs and the promise has in any case not been fulfilled. The summit must set legally binding emissions targets, create clear accountability mechanisms, and secure enforceable climate finance.

SS Paul, Nadia



D SIVANANDHAN

AFTER A lull of almost a decade and a half, the national capital shuddered. A powerful blast near the Red Fort Metro Station ripped through the balmy evening air, killing 13 people and injuring several others. The incident instantly brought back memories from the 1990s and early 2000s, when terror attacks were more frequent.

After the initial confusion, it is now clear that it was a terror attack. However, it may not have been a planned or targeted one. Reportedly, the attacker may have had no specific target and may have been in a panic when the bomb went off.

A closer examination of the incident indicates that this could be a direct result of the successful operation conducted by our agencies a few days ago when they recovered 2.9 tonnes of ammonium nitrate and busted a Faridabad-based terror module. Investigative agencies have been chasing others involved in it. As a desperate measure, the scared bomber might have driven the car to a busy area.

Quite clearly, investigative agencies — the National Investigative Agency (NIA), Intelligence Bureau (IB) and others — have done commendable work over the past few years, which has resulted in a lot of terror cells and networks being busted, including the one in Faridabad. It is as if 1,000 goals

Before this, we knew that terror outfits target unemployed and vulnerable young men and women. But now, if middle-aged people with regular jobs are being radicalised, agencies will have to put all their efforts into identifying such people

were saved by our agencies, but by a stroke of sheer bad luck, one was scored.

The one aspect that stands out is the involvement of at least four to five doctors in this sleeper cell. This indicates it is not just unemployed or uneducated youngsters who are being radicalised, but people with white-collar jobs too. This is a dangerous trend.

This is clearly a new modus operandi adopted by terror groups. Since there is a continuous watch on unemployed youngsters, who have been radicalised in the past, terror groups have now resorted to indoctrinating educated people with respectable jobs. This is done keeping in mind that such people are not on the agency watch-lists and go unnoticed.

Investigations into the Red Fort blast have so far revealed that the operation was being conducted by a bunch of medical professionals who are allegedly linked to Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), the Pakistan-based terror outfit founded by Maulana Masood Azhar.

According to reports, this Faridabad terror module was a nine-to-10-member sleeper cell that had five to six doctors in it. Apart from this, investigators have also picked up two doctors from Kashmir for questioning. Another troubling fact is that this sleeper cell was active across a Union Territory and two states: Jammu and Kashmir,

Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Reportedly, a woman doctor was also in the process of forming a women’s terror cell.

All this indicates that while investigating agencies may have been successful in busting this terror module, their job is far from over. In fact, it may now have increased manifold. Before this, we knew that terror outfits target unemployed and vulnerable young men and women who would be radicalised and trained for “jihad” wars in Syria, Libya and other places. But now, if middle-aged people with regular jobs are being radicalised, then our agencies will have to put all their efforts into identifying such people.

They will have to use all possible resources, the latest technology, state-of-the-art equipment, and human intelligence to fight this war on terror, which seems to have raised its ugly head in a new form.

Unfortunately, for our agencies and our country, the fight against terror, terrorism and terrorists seems to be ongoing. No matter how many successes we have, they will always be lurking in the shadows, ready to strike when we least expect it.

The fight against terror continues.

The writer is Director General of Police (DGP) (Retd), Maharashtra, former Police Commissioner of Mumbai and former chief of the Mumbai Crime Branch. His latest book is The Brahmanas Unleashed

In car blast, ‘white-collar’ terror is a new red flag



NIRBHAY RANA

WHEN ZOHRAN Mamdani celebrated his victory in the New York City mayoral election this week, the cameras naturally turned to him. Yet, in the swirl of celebration, something quieter but equally powerful also caught the world’s eye: Rama Duwaji, his partner, standing beside him in an outfit that was both beautiful and defiant.

Duwaji wore a black, laser-etched *tatreez*-embroidered top by Palestinian designer Zeid Hijazi paired with a velvet lace skirt by Ulla Johnson. The choice was deliberate. *Tatreez*, the centuries-old Palesti-

nian embroidery tradition, is not merely decorative. It is an archive of resistance, a coded language of homeland and memory stitched into fabric. She wore a story of loss, resilience, and belonging.

At a time when global politics is fractured by wars of identity and geography, Duwaji’s outfit reminded the world that expression doesn’t end with words or votes. It continues in fabric, in thread, in silhouette. What we wear can reveal as much about what we believe as what we say.

This was not performance activism or celebrity signalling. It was something more intimate, a woman of Arab heritage standing beside a South Asian immigrant politician, both children of diaspora, both negotiating identity and power in a city that

thrives on reinvention.

It wasn’t just their style that drew attention; it was symbolism. In a political landscape often saturated with noise, their moment was visually poetic. It stood for the refusal to be invisible.

In the age of algorithmic attention, where meaning is flattened into memes,

Where Mamdani’s campaign demanded structural change, Duwaji’s dress demanded emotional recognition. Both were political acts; one in policy, the other in presence

Duwaji’s choice reminded us that aesthetics can still be subversive. It asked viewers to look again, to notice what lies beneath the surface: The craftspeople behind the couture, the history behind the stitch, the politics behind the pattern.

The *tatreez* embroidery pattern on her top is a language of survival passed down through generations of Palestinian women. Each motif tells a story of villages destroyed, of families displaced, of hope preserved through art. In wearing it, Duwaji amplified that story in a space that rarely holds it, an American political victory stage.

Where Mamdani’s campaign demanded structural change, Duwaji’s dress demanded emotional recognition. Both were political acts; one in policy, the

other in presence.

What Duwaji’s ensemble offered was a more grounded idea: Representation as inheritance. To represent isn’t to appear; it’s to carry something forward, a craft, a culture, a cause. Perhaps that’s why her look struck such a chord. In a moment of celebration, she found a way to make visibility meaningful. It reminded us that fashion, at its most conscious, doesn’t just express identity, it archives it.

Because in the end, fashion, like politics, is about visibility. And Duwaji made sure that in celebrating victory, the world also saw what still needs to be remembered.

The writer is associate professor, IILM University, Gurugram



• SCIENCE

How music therapy can help improve medical outcomes



TANVI GOEL, FARAH HUSAIN & SONIA WADHAWAN

The authors of a recent study that demonstrated the efficacy of music therapy during surgery spoke to **Arjun Sengupta** about why it is a powerful non-pharmacological tool.

What is music therapy?
Music therapy is an established health profession in which music and all of its facets — pitch, timbre, melody, harmony, tune, lyrics, etc. — are used to help patients improve or maintain health. Techniques may be active, that is, participatory, or receptive, which involves listening.

When was music therapy developed?
The therapeutic value of music has long been recognised. For instance, Vedic texts dating to c. 4th century BCE refer to ‘*Raga Chikitsa*’, that is, the use of certain melodic frameworks for healing. One of the earliest Western references to music therapy can be found in the article ‘Music Physically Considered’, published in 1789 in the Philadelphia-based *Columbian Magazine*.

The asylum at the Blackwell’s Island (now Roosevelt Island) in New York was the first institution to record a music therapy intervention, while the first systematic experiment in music therapy was conducted by neurologist Dr J Leonard Corning, who used music to alter dream states during psychotherapy.

Development of music therapy picked up in the aftermath of the two World Wars when musicians would frequent veterans’ hospitals. The patients’ physical and emotional responses to music eventually led to hospitals hiring them full time. Soon, it was evident that hospital musicians needed particular training, leading to demand for structured curricula. The first academic program on music therapy was started in 1944 in Michigan State University.

Three innovators from the 1930s-40s are credited for helping grow music therapy as an organised clinical profession: psychiatrist Ira Altshuler from Michigan, Willem Van de Wall

THE STUDY

The authors’ recent study, published in the journal *Music and Medicine*, integrated patient-selected music with general anaesthesia to see for the effects of music on the unconscious brain, as well as its impact on vital parameters during surgery.

• 56 patients were provided noise-cancelling headphones to listen to their pre-selected musical piece while under general anaesthesia (propofol) during gallbladder removal operation. Patients were divided into two groups: one was administered music therapy while others slept in silence.

• The data showed that the group which received music therapy needed 15% less propofol to stay under, did not need any additional doses of painkillers like fentanyl, had more stable blood pressure levels, and significantly lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol.

the neurotransmitter serotonin. Calming music can promote a parasympathetic drive by activating the nervous system’s “rest and digest” response, which leads to physiological relaxation — a reduction in stress hormones, and slowing of the heart rate and breathing. Calming music can also lower the activity of the sympathetic nervous system, and the so-called “fight or flight” response.

Beyond listening, song writing, group singing, improvisation, etc. can help improve mental and emotional wellbeing, and can also help build much-needed life skills such as solving problems, coping with stress and emotions, and becoming creative and critical thinkers.

What are the limitations of music therapy?
Music therapy is a non-pharmacological technique: while there are no side effects, there is also potential for the technique to be ineffective. Music therapy can thus never be used to replace any form of medical or psychological treatment, but rather should be used as a complementary tool for additional therapeutic benefits.

Moreover, in some patients, certain songs may trigger emotionally unpleasant memories; it is preferred to use non-lyrical, instrumental musical pieces.

Dr Tanvi Goel, Dr Farah Husain and Dr Sonia Wadhawan are from the Department of Anesthesia and Intensive Care, Maulana Azad Medical College and Lok Nayak Hospital, New Delhi

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• ECONOMY

Tokyo tutorial: countering China’s rare earths choke

Anil Sasi
New Delhi, November 12

CHINA MAY have agreed to pause for one year its sweeping export controls on rare earths, but this hiatus offers only partial relief to global rare earths users after a tumultuous few months. It is being seen more as a window of opportunity to re-strategise, till China weaponises trade in the elements again.

For countries looking for solutions, Japan offers a replicable template. Long before China’s wolf warrior approach to multiple rare earth elements and magnets widely used in the automotive, robotics and industrial sectors, Japan tweaked its approach to supply chain resilience after unwittingly emerging as the canary in the coal mine for China’s mineral dominance.

The Chinese blockade

On September 7, 2010, a Chinese fishing boat collided with two Japanese coast guard vessels in the East China Sea, and the boat’s captain was arrested. Among China’s responses was stopping the export of rare earth minerals to Japan, which sent the Japanese industry into panic. Japan’s famed automobile sector was dependent on rare earths for the production of magnets indispensable for producing cars. At the time of the ban, Japan was dependent on China for nearly 90 per cent of its imports of these minerals. While the kerfuffle was eventually resolved after the release of the boat captain, the prices of rare earths surged 10 times in a year following the incident.

Japan’s fightback

Alongside stockpiling, recycling and pushing alternative technologies, Japan has, after the 2010 incident, invested heavily into non-China rare-earth projects. This includes Australia’s Lynas Rare Earths, the world’s largest rare earth producer outside of China. Japan has a strategic partnership with Lynas, involving investment and supply deals with Japanese companies such as Sojitz and JOGMEC (Japan Organisation for Metals and Energy Security, a Japanese government institution that was formed by the merger of the former Japan National Oil Corporation and the former Metal Mining Agency of Japan) to secure rare earth minerals outside of China. This partnership ensures a stable supply of critical materials such as neodymium and dysprosium for Japanese industries, such as those producing magnets for automobiles and wind turbines.

Japanese firms also invested in the facilities needed to process and refine the materials into inputs for industries. As a result, Japan’s overall dependence on Chinese rare earths has now dropped to below

JAPAN’S RE SELF-RELIANCE PACKAGE: KEY THRUSTS AREAS



Rare earth oxides are used as tracers to determine which parts of a watershed are eroding. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

- Develop technologies, bolster investments into equipment that could cut the use of rare earths
- Push the recycling of rare earths through investment support in recycling facilities, as well as through development of more efficient recycling technologies
- Develop mines and acquire interests in rare earth mines in Australia and other places. The capacity of providing loan guarantees and equity investments by government-affiliated organisations for such activities was beefed up
- Commence stockpiling rare earths, in addition to the policy framework to ensure reserves of critical minerals.

(RESEARCHERS AT THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM/INPUTS FROM JAMA & JOGMEC EXECUTIVES)

60 per cent, according to London-based *Argus Media*. According to Japanese auto industry executives, Tokyo expects to lower its dependence on Chinese rare earth imports to below 50 per cent this year. China’s stranglehold in the critical minerals supply chain is evidenced from the fact that it produces nearly 70 per cent of the world’s supply of rare earths from mines and processes almost 90 per cent of global output. “We’ve all known for a while that a Chinese-led supply chain blockade could happen, but now it has unfolded, countries need to have alternatives to address the China dependency,” a senior executive with a Japanese automaker told *The Indian Express* on the sidelines of the recently concluded Japan Mobility Show 2025.

The Japanese way

Immediately in the wake of the Chinese blockade, the Japanese government put together a package of measures to beef up the resilience of its rare earth minerals supply chain. A supplemental budget of JPY100 billion (Japanese yen, well over \$1.1 billion at the time) was prepared in October 2010, less than a month after the incident. The speed and the scale were unprecedented. The more important aspect was that despite the Chinese threat blowing over in a few months, Tokyo persisted with its plans. The consumption of rare earths in Japan now is well under half the level of what it was in 2010, offering proof of how effective

Key Points

The impact of China’s rare earth restrictions on India is expected to be limited, with its relatively low domestic consumption of rare earths, though demand has grown in recent years

- India imported 2,270 tonnes of rare earth elements in 2023-24, up 23% from 2019-20. Imports from China accounted for 65% of this.

these steps have been. “These developments have insulated Japan from being targeted by another embargo, despite a series of diplomatic disagreements with China since 2010. Lowering dependence further is a work in progress,” a senior executive of an automobile major that is part of the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association, a trade association with its headquarters in Tokyo, told *The Indian Express*. China’s dominance is not just limited to rare earths, but expands all the way into global critical minerals supply, including elements such as gallium and germanium, as well as the entire lithium value chain.

The takeaways

The fishing boat incident was a wake-up call for Japan, as the sudden blockade ostensibly caught policymakers by surprise even though the vulnerability in the supply of rare earths was evident to most people. At some point, for policymakers across geographies, it makes sense to analyse the vulnerability of the country’s supply chains. A proactive assessment across all critical supply chains could help, especially entailing overdependence on one or a small group of suppliers from one country, even one that has not actively weaponised trade. This involves elements that go beyond rare earths and include lithium, where there is a dependence on the Li triangle involving the three countries of South America (Bolivia, Argentina and Chile). Then there is the de-

pendence on the Congo for Cobalt, on Indonesia for nickel, and on Morocco for phosphorus, critical to the fertiliser industry.

The Japanese response also shows the need for a multi-pronged policy approach. Rather than relying on a single measure, Japan diversified its sources, allocated money for technology and alternative materials, and spent years building strategic reserves, all while maintaining a long-term vision through recycling initiatives. The other lesson is that like-minded countries need to get together to tide over vulnerabilities, including possible stockpiling of the kind that Japan pursued for REs after 2010.

India’s RE exposure

The impact of China’s rare earth restrictions on India is expected to be limited, given its relatively low domestic consumption of rare earths (although demand has seen some growth in recent years). India imported 2,270 tonnes of rare earth elements in 2023-24, up 23% from 1,848 tonnes in 2019-20, according to the Ministry of Mines. Imports from China accounted for 65% of this amount, and another 10% came from Hong Kong.

Domestic mining and refining are modest, led by state-owned IREL Ltd, which operates a processing unit with a capacity of over 10,000 tonnes per annum. In contrast, China refined over 2 lakh tonnes of rare earth elements in 2023 alone. India is, however, hoping to ramp up its exposure to rare earths. In November last year, the country launched an auction for seven seabed blocks in the Andaman Sea for exploration and eventual mining. These blocks are estimated to hold polymetallic nodules and crusts, which can contain heavy rare earth metals.

The Department of Atomic Energy is learnt to have given in principle approval for the futuristic proposal of IREL towards setting up of rare earths theme parks. A Rare Earth Permanent Magnet Park in Vizag and Rare Earth and Titanium Theme Park in Bhopal are coming up, which could enhance IREL’s visibility in the sector.

The US too is getting back into rare earths processing. The Trump administration is working on an executive order to allow stockpiling of deep-sea metals from the Pacific seabed, aiming to reduce reliance on China for battery minerals and rare earths, *Financial Times* reported in April.

Like the US, the EU heavily relies on imports from China. Plans are underway to develop domestic capabilities. Belgian chemical group Solvay, which operates the largest rare earths processing plant outside of China in La Rochelle, France, aims to supply about a third of Europe’s processed rare earths demand for permanent magnets by 2030.

• GLOBAL

The Bill that could end longest-ever govt shutdown in the US

Anagha Jayakumar
New Delhi, November 12

THE US Senate passed a Bill Monday to end the longest-ever government shutdown in the country, 41 days after it started. This was made possible by a minority group of Democrats supporting the Republican spending package that omitted a key healthcare spending provision the Democratic Party had demanded.

The shutdown has put millions of Americans at risk of losing their food benefits, resulted in the cancellations of thousands of flights, and furloughed thousands of federal workers without pay.

The House of Representatives is expected to vote on the Bill on Wednesday.

What triggered the shutdown?

A government shutdown typically results when the US Congress is unable to authorise more spending before October 1, the start of the new fiscal year. Depending on the extent of approvals made by this date, the government may have to shut down fully or

partially. The present shutdown came about over the Democratic Party’s demand to extend expiring healthcare subsidies and restore cuts to Medicaid introduced by the Trump administration this year. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, signed into law in July, ensured that some departments, such as the Department of Defense (now the Department of War) and the Department of Homeland Security, would receive funding through the shutdown.

What is in the Bill to end it?
FOOD ASSISTANCE: The federal food assistance programme, SNAP, had been a bone of contention for the Trump administration. As the service lost federal funding during the shutdown, about 42 million Americans were unable to use SNAP to purchase groceries for the past three weeks. The Supreme Court granted the administration an emergency order to pause all SNAP funding last week, while it deliberates on the status of the programme this week. If passed, the current Bill will restore full

What is a shutdown

• A government shutdown typically results when the US Congress is unable to authorise more spending before October 1, the start of the new fiscal year.
• Depending on the extent of approvals made by this date, the government may have to shut down fully or partially.

SNAP funding for the rest of the fiscal year, that is till September 30, 2026, and put an end to these legal battles.

FEDERAL AGENCIES: Most federal agencies would be funded till January 30, raising the possibility of another shutdown in three months if both parties fail to come to a consensus on a spending package until the end of the fiscal year.

However, funding till September 30 is assured for some functions like the US Department of Agriculture, and of Veterans Affairs.

In a major win for the Democratic Party, the status of the Government Accountability Office has been protected and its funding unchanged. The GAO pulled up the Trump administration twice this year after it held that the president violated funding rules.

PAYMENTS TO FURLOUGHED STAFF: The Bill ensures retroactive pay to about 1.4 million federal workers who were furloughed and/or worked without pay. It also ensures that federal workforce levels will be unchanged from before the shutdown, reversing attempts made by several agencies to in-

stitute staffing reductions during this period. Further, federal employees will not face the threat of layoff until January 30 at least.

Why the Democrats aren’t pleased

The Bill does not address the chief demand by Democratic lawmakers: extending the health insurance subsidies that are set to expire at the end of the year.

The eight Democrat lawmakers maintain that their support for the Bill, described by Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois as “not perfect”, was imperative to ensure a return to normalcy.

However, House Democrats, including minority leader Hakeem Jeffries, have called the deal insufficient.

Despite this, the party stands to gain from presenting itself as a protector of healthcare spending, considering the Trump administration has already instituted steep spending cuts to programmes such as Medicare.

The Republican Party will now face immense pressure to lower medical costs for US citizens, an advantage the Democrats intend to press on.

2 THINGS TO KNOW

Vijay Hazare, run-scoring machine, ‘incapable of throwing away wicket’

THE BCCI has told Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma that they will have to play in the Vijay Hazare Trophy to be in contention for the national team. India’s premier domestic one-day competition is named after one of India’s finest batters, who was described by the journalist John Arlott as “incapable of throwing away his wicket”.

Born in 1915 in Sangli, Hazare was substance over style. As Arlott wrote in 1946: “Few critics will become lyrical about his (Hazare’s) style, but that will not worry him: he is concerned with



Vijay Hazare ARCHIVE

SPORT

scores and is developing into a most capable machine for making them”. Hazare’s career spanned from 1934 to 1967; he played 30 Tests, making 2,192 runs at an average of 47.65, and 238 First Class games, amassing 18,740 runs at an average of 58.38. His most memorable knocks came in Adelaide during India’s 1947-48 tour: Hazare scored a century in each innings, a lone fighter against the Aussie behemoth. Hazare’s curious action also fetched him 20 Test wickets, including three of Don Bradman. He passed away in 2004. ENS

Anish Kapoor & his ‘Bean’, now at heart of latest controversy in Trump’s America

INDIAN-BORN British artist Anish Kapoor, who created the iconic Cloud Gate sculpture in Chicago, is considering legal action against border patrol agents who had posed beside the structure on Monday. He described the incident as representing “fascist America”.



Anish Kapoor’s Cloud Gate in Chicago. THE NYT

Constructed between 2004 and 2006, the Cloud Gate is the centrepiece of the Grainger Plaza in Chicago’s Millennium Park. The stainless steel sculpture is nicknamed “The Bean” because of its curved, oblong shape. Its reflective surface was inspired by liquid mercury, and reflects everything around it — visitors to the park, the lights of Michigan Avenue, the surrounding skyline and greenery. Kapoor, 71, is one of the world’s most celebrated artists. He has been awarded Britain’s Turner Prize, a knighthood and an honorary doctorate from Oxford. Cloud Gate is his first permanent public outdoor work in the US, and among his most famous. An exhibition of his early works is presently underway in Manhattan. ENS