



OPINION

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{ OUR TAKE }

The changing ground in Bihar

NDA seat deal makes evident the shift in the power dynamic between the BJP and JD(U)

The subtext of the seat deal announced by the NDA for the upcoming Bihar assembly polls is that the Janata Dal (United) or JD(U) is no longer in pole position. Since 2005, the JD(U) has made it a point to contest more seats than the BJP in all assembly polls, sending out the message that the former, which claims the inheritance of Mandal politics in the state, is the coalition leader. This time, the BJP and the JD(U) will contest the same number of seats — 101 each — suggesting an impending transition in Bihar politics. The shift in the balance of power within the NDA is also a reflection of a generational change at the top in the making — it has been looming since the sub-par showing of the JD(U) in the last assembly election, and needs to be seen in the context of the indifferent health of chief minister (CM) Nitish Kumar. That finer points of the seat deal remain open suggests unresolved tensions within the alliance.

Mandal and its message of electoral empowerment of OBCs have determined the political imaginary in Bihar since the 1990s. Between Lalu Prasad and Nitish Kumar, it completed a political arc that forced all other groups to align with either of the two leaders, who spun the narrative in the state. The BJP was wise enough to read the mood on the ground, play second fiddle to JD(U), and expand its footprint in the state by riding with Kumar. In 2025, the signs are evident: Kumar is now more of an NDA icon rather than the general of its troops, useful to consolidate the non-Yadav OBC votes, especially the extremely backward castes (EBCs), and to emphasise the “jungle *raj*” under Lalu and the RJD. In some ways, Lalu’s retreat from electoral politics may have diminished the electoral utility of Kumar, though his legacy as a Mandal face and “*sushasan babu*” (good-governance leader) makes the NDA campaign a layered one.

Not surprisingly, one of the interesting questions regarding the outcome is about Kumar and the JD(U). In the 2020 assembly elections, the BJP won 74 of the 110 seats it contested and ended up with a vote share of 19.46%, ahead of the JD(U), which won 43 of the 115 seats it fought with a vote share of 15.39. Can Kumar rally his cadre, consolidate his support base, and guard his ground this time around? A third player, Jan Suraj Party, in the fray can upset the bipolar character of Bihar elections and influence the outcome, just as Chirag Paswan’s Lok Janshakti Party-Ram Vilas Paswan upset the JD(U)’s prospects in 2020 (it is now part of the NDA). November 14 will be interesting.

Roads to perdition for pedestrians

Nearly 100 pedestrians die in road accidents every day in India. Against this backdrop, there is an urgent need to implement the directives on making Indian roads safe for those on foot — including compliance with the standards specified by the India Road Congress — issued by the Supreme Court earlier this month. Several aspects of road infrastructure, governance, and use need fixing if pedestrian deaths are to be brought down.

To start with, roads in India are designed with only vehicular traffic in mind: Pedestrians are an afterthought, as evident from the lack of functioning footpaths. The design problem is rooted in a capacity deficit, with very few people trained on designing with a holistic perspective on safety and ease of traffic. Similarly, regulatory authorities oversee construction quality and efficiency, and not enforcement based on street planning and management. This deficit is compounded by outdated procedures, where the absence of urban designers and landscape specialists afflicts tender evaluation, with features seminal to pedestrian ease being thought of as ancillary deliverables rather than a primary ask from a project.

Additionally, policing of traffic in most cities is virtually non-existent, except for rent-seeking. This pushes up safety risks, especially for pedestrians who, to be fair, often do not follow the rules, crossing roads where it takes their fancy instead of using foot overbridges or subways. Without urgent changes here — strict implementation of parking rules, stoppages at red lights, mandatory zebra crossings and enforcement of pedestrian rights, and policing jaywalking — the necessary discipline among citizens and safe traffic behaviour will remain elusive. Civilised road use needs improved road governance and behavioural change among people on the road — on foot and in vehicles.

Between New Delhi & Kabul, a fine balance

Pragmatism and convergence on Pakistan have replaced ideology and legacy concerns as the main drivers of India-Afghanistan relations

On December 24, 1999, an Indian Airlines flight (IC 814) operating between Kathmandu in Nepal and New Delhi was hijacked, and after moving through a few cities, eventually taken to Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, the ideological home of the Taliban. The hostage crisis ended on December 31. During this period, India’s current National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval, was one of the main negotiators. A then middle-level Taliban official, Amir Khan Muttaqi, was director general of administrative affairs. Twenty six years later, both these personalities are at the centre of an unconventional geopolitical reality, a quasi-normalisation between the Taliban-led interim government in Kabul and the Indian government as interim foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi arrived on his maiden visit to New Delhi.

The chaotic withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in August 2021 was a watershed moment. While an upending global order today makes the events of that time less relevant and prevalent, the US fighting a 20-year war against terrorism only to end up replacing the old Taliban with a new one, via the 2020 agreement between

the two sides signed in Qatar under President Donald Trump’s first term.

A US withdrawal was always imminent, leaving behind both a threat and an opportunity for regional powers to securitise their interests with an insurgency now back to running a State. Within this construct, every neighbour took an individualistic strategic approach as convergences on how to deal with the Taliban became minimal.

Central Asia, in large, decided to engage economically almost immediately. Iran became a core political and economic partner as well. India played the long game culminating in hosting Muttaqi this month, committing to upgrading the “technical mission” in Kabul to full embassy status, and re-committing to a slew of developmental projects aimed at the betterment of the Afghan people. Many of these neighbours of Kabul had actively promoted anti-Taliban movements in the 1990s.

For the Taliban, the visit is a political victory. India is the largest economic power in the region, and with Afghanistan’s economy riddled with sanctions and lack of funds, getting any aid and investment into areas such as food and health security is critical to maintain the group’s domestic checks and balances. Despite the veneer of power, Afghanistan under the Taliban remains flimsy. Over the past four years, the interim government led by the likes of Mullah Baradar, Sirajuddin Haqqani (the interim interior minister), Mullah Yaqoob (Mullah Omar’s son and interim defence minister)

along with Muttaqi amongst others, have attempted to promote an ideologically pragmatic approach. This, increasingly, was seen as a challenge to *emir-ul-momineen* Hibatullah Akhundzade’s ideological centrality from Kandahar. In 2025, this gap has shrunk. Kandahar, arguably, has much greater control over Kabul. Before Muttaqi’s arrival, reports had suggested that Akhundzade had given special directives over the trajectory of the India-Afghanistan bilateral.

However, for New Delhi, while hosting Muttaqi is a realistic and unavoidable strategy, the dance is delicate. Today, for both India and the Taliban, an unsaid convergence is on Pakistan. India had started taking baby steps with its Taliban engagement in 2021 itself with foreign secretary Vikram Misri meeting Muttaqi in Dubai in January. Operation Sindoor along with the Taliban’s own deteriorating security and familial feuds with Pakistan’s military and intelligence have since turbo-charged the outreach. The Taliban had condemned the Pahalgam terror attacks and rejected the Pakistan-pushed propaganda of Indian missiles targeting Afghan soil. This led to the first phone call between minister of external affairs S Jaishankar and Muttaqi in May. Since then, India upped its risk and ultimately gave the Taliban what they wanted, institutional access to New Delhi.

This rattling of status-quo reverberated in Pakistani power corridors, with reports suggesting air strikes conducted against the Tehrik-e-Taliban



For New Delhi, while hosting Muttaqi is a good and unavoidable strategy, the dance is delicate.

Pakistan (TTP) in Kabul, a militant group and its affiliates Rawalpindi tries to peddle as India-backed due to its own incapacities of cleaning their own home of extremism. During Muttaqi’s press conference at the Afghan embassy in Delhi, he reiterated that the patience of Afghans should not be tested as witnessed by the erstwhile Soviet Union and later, the US. This message from the Taliban, aimed at Pakistan, from New Delhi, carries strategic benefits for the short term at least.

India’s own push in its talks with Muttaqi was mostly about development, something the Afghan people associate the country most with. This course correction was needed after New Delhi stopped issuing visas in 2021. In essence, the message remains that New Delhi will continue to help with projects aimed at betterment of the people. Within this as well, the announcement of helping to build housing for displaced Afghans, being

pushed back across the border by Pakistan in their thousands, adds another layer of building capacities via positive narratives.

Finally, Muttaqi may have also received some indirect feedback on social issues. His visit to the Deoband seminary in Uttar Pradesh, the intellectual home of the Deobandi movement which underlines the Taliban’s ideology, is expected to push for a more inclusive Afghanistan. The seminary elders, while celebrating the Taliban’s ouster of the US, had pushed for the same, including schooling for girls but remaining in favour of gender segregation in educational institutions. All in all, the visit has opened a delicate new chapter between India and the new powers in Afghanistan.

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Why India does poorly in building large companies

We had in an earlier article (‘Superman entrepreneurs driving the Indian economy’, August 24) described how Superman entrepreneurs (SEs), a force-of-nature kind of entrepreneur, had been driving India’s growth by overcoming the odds and creating dynamic companies. However, one common complaint about Indian entrepreneurs has been their general inability to create real-scale global-sized companies. Indian labour laws are one factor inhibiting size, but importantly, the superpowers that helped these SEs build their companies, in the lingo of popular comics, after a certain size, become their kryptonite. They fail to find leverage for themselves and become the bottleneck for their company’s continuing growth. So many of these companies get stuck in the ₹5,000 to ₹15,000 crore range trap.

True leverage: Finding true leverage or finding trustworthy lieutenants is not easy for them. They are used to the loyal order takers who can execute. Finding people who can work with vision and autonomy is not easy for them. Their personality type makes true delegation unnatural for them. To break out of the mid-income trap, they must overcome their own biases and inhibitions. This is the only way in which they will be able to truly create what they set out to do — build a global market leader that can outlive them. India, more than ever, needs them to do so.

SEs need to understand themselves and accept the kind of people they truly gel with. They may want to hire pedigreed branded talent to tell others, but they need people whose judgement they learn to trust, and equally those who understand and fit in with them. They could consider using a coach to help them understand themselves. Thereafter, they must find people who can share their vision but must have a mix of alignment, chemistry, loyalty and performance that SEs seek. They don’t need many such people, but they do need a few core people. These people can mix the grand vision with the granular details and truly understand the growing need for adulation that SEs often crave, and help provide it, not compete with them.

Talent density: Once they have reached a certain size, say ₹10,000 crore in revenues, SEs need to seriously build talent density in the company at the entry and middle levels. They need to go beyond their original recruiting pool and overcome the organ rejection that comes about in bringing in fresh talent by creating a survival bulk (enough outsiders) that they have an internal support community. There are different ways to do this, but ignoring this need will limit their growth over a certain level.

Children and succession: Succession is emo-

tionally fraught and difficult for them. It is also very difficult being the children of an SE. For SEs, their whole life has been focused on building their business. They may have begun without wealth. Their children grow up with much greater wealth. They may have different life preferences. But only the children who are as driven and involved as they are provide comfort to SEs. These children must have the skill to navigate the SE, figure out how to obtain the outcomes they seek, rather than expect a disciplined process of succession and handover. The child must be able to live up to the SE’s expectations. Different models are helpful in grooming succession, but there is no right model. However, not having any plan will leave the future of the company to serendipity.

Culture and SEs: As SEs start to step back, they need to be properly acknowledged. They should be celebrated within the company. Culture lives in stories, and we think it is important for the SEs to tell their story — of how they started, the challenges they faced and what drove their success — to the entire organisation. Often this can take the shape of a book or a video, or even a values/culture guide. Embedding these stories in the organisation’s folklore is important both for the SEs and for preserving the culture that made their companies special. Finally, as the SEs age, they should find other interests that give them purpose. To give back or engage in some things they truly care about — nation building, industry shaping, or personal passion — so that they can truly delegate and allow the next generation with autonomy to continue the company’s journey and write its next chapter.

Governance structure: The governance structure of the company should evolve with size. If it becomes a conglomerate, then an appropriate structure, a holding company perhaps, is needed. The Holdco should manage the portfolio of businesses, reviewing capital needs, talent, risk, major actions, and returns relative to expectations. If it is a monoline business, a proper management structure is required with decision rights being created based on the importance of the decision — capital limits, mergers, acquisitions and joint ventures, irreversible commitments, brand and reputational risk. The governance body should be subject to some discipline — time management in meetings and clarity on why issues are being discussed — for decisions, information and review, obtaining alignment or learning. The data source and depiction should be standardised, but as far as possible, decisions should be taken at the rock face. The structure should facilitate effective decision-making where the right data and connected people are present when the issue is discussed. Once and done should be the motto.

SEs have been a driving force for the Indian economy. The nation, government, and they themselves need to see their company pass into the next orbit. They must heed advice, or as Francis Bacon said, “Things alter for the worse spontaneously, if they be not altered for the better designedly.”

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{ S JAISHANKAR }

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER

When we look at Canada, we see a complementary economy, we see another open society, we see diversity and pluralism ... the basis for a long-term cooperative framework

On improving India-Canada relations

India’s drug regulation is stuck in a time warp

Earlier this month, at least 20 children died in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan after consuming Coldrif cough syrup, which tested positive for diethylene glycol (DEG) — a highly toxic industrial chemical known to cause kidney failure. This tragedy is not an isolated event. In 2022, dozens of children in The Gambia, Uzbekistan, and Cameroon died after ingesting India-made cough syrups (manufactured by Maiden Pharmaceuticals) that also contained DEG.

To be the world’s pharmacy is both an honour and a profound responsibility. India produces roughly one-fifth of the world’s medicines and an even larger share of its generics. The pharmaceutical industry contributes nearly 6% of export earnings and provides essential drugs for citizens. Yet, drugs fail for two main reasons: Some are counterfeit, containing no active ingredients, while others are contaminated due to poor manufacturing practices. In the case of Coldrif, it is likely that the manufacturer used industrial-grade glycerin or propylene glycol already tainted with DEG, rather than the more stringently controlled pharma-grade version. A 2023 survey found that around 3% of drugs sold in India were substandard — but such cross-sectional surveys rarely capture episodic manufacturing failures that lead to tragedies like this one. Moreover, it is seldom that anyone connects deaths occurring in different locations to a single causal agent — a defective drug. The true risk of substandard medicines is, thus, likely far greater than the data suggest.

India’s system for regulating drug manufacturers dates back to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 1940 (and its 1945 Rules), a framework designed to ensure safety, efficacy, and quality. Authority under this law is shared: The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), led by the Drugs Controller General of India, oversees new drug approvals, imports, clinical trials, biologics, and enforcement coordination, while State Drug Controllers license most manufacturers and conduct inspections within their jurisdictions. In practice, this has created a race to the bottom. In competing for investment, some states relax oversight, knowing that drugs produced locally can be sold nationally. The result is that lax regulation in one state can endanger patients everywhere.

India has an estimated 10,500 pharmaceutical manufacturing units, yet only about 1,300 comply with the WHO’s good manufacturing practices (GMP). Gujarat alone hosts nearly 5,800 licensed manufacturers. By contrast,

India has just 36 major licensed vaccine manufacturing facilities. Quality lapses in vaccine production are comparatively rare, and most are caught through batch testing or post-market surveillance before causing widespread harm. The lesson is clear: Having fewer, larger facilities that consistently meet global standards can reduce the risk of catastrophic failures. The pharmaceutical industry has long viewed limited government interference as essential to its success, operating on an unspoken pact — that self-regulation, driven by market incentives, would safeguard quality while exports and jobs benefited the nation. But as the recent tragedies show, this social contract is fraying. A handful of negligent players can damage the credibility of an entire industry. Calls for tighter government oversight are justified, yet regulation alone may not suffice in a system vulnerable to corruption. The profits are high, and smaller firms often cut corners — accepting the risk of penalties if disaster strikes. Arrests and shutdowns do little for the children already lost. What India needs is a national, industry-wide quality standard — a binding commitment to GMP, enforced at the central level. The state-by-state licensing system, created for an earlier era when it was difficult to inspect provincial manufacturing units from Delhi, is no longer fit for purpose.

The solution is already in sight. The New Drugs, Medical Devices and Cosmetics Bill, 2023, awaiting passage, represents India’s most ambitious effort to modernise the 1940 law. It introduces risk-based classification, centralised licensing for high-risk drugs and biologics, online approval, pharmacovigilance networks, and stricter penalties for spurious drugs. It preserves federal balance but empowers the Centre to reclaim regulatory authority where national or international interests are at stake. Its progress, however, has been slowed by disputes over online pharmacies, opposition from small manufacturers who fear tougher scrutiny, and resistance from a few drug-producing states reluctant to forgo licensing revenue.

The government must act decisively. The Coldrif tragedy should be the last time a parent loses a child to a preventable regulatory failure. Passing the new Bill swiftly — and ensuring its rigorous enforcement — would honour both India’s role as the world’s pharmacy and its duty to protect every life that depends on it.

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Receding South Asia focus

Adversarial neighbours and growing role of China is responsible

AT A TIME when adverse headwinds buffet global trade, India is intensifying its trading relationships with important developed and developing countries. A sharper focus on Asia, including the neighbourhood, has been advocated by the CEO of the official think-tank, NITI Aayog, BVR Subrahmanyam. Most countries do have maximum trade with their neighbours, like the US, Mexico, and Canada or the European Union (EU). The big question is, why this isn't happening in India's case beyond what he says is the "misfortune that we are in a very difficult geography"? It is no doubt true that Indo-Pakistan tensions are largely responsible but the regime change in Bangladesh—that is our largest trading partner in the neighbourhood—is also adversarial to India's interests. Besides such neighbours, a more potent reason why India is not trading more with the region is that China is already doing so. In this milieu, South Asia remains a diminishing focus accounting for only 2.8% of India's overall trade. Currently, we have good relations with the Maldives, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and are resetting relations with Afghanistan.

India's reset with Taliban-run Afghanistan is taking place at a time when the latter's relations with its erstwhile ally, Pakistan, have deteriorated with clashes across their borders. China has a head start with Kabul by exchanging ambassadors and making huge investments. India is upgrading its technical mission to the status of an embassy. Afghanistan's foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, during his visit to India committed that his nation will never be used as a base for cross-border terrorism against India and condemned the attack in Pahalagam much to Pakistan's chagrin. India has been a first responder in sending relief when earthquakes recently hit Afghanistan. We have also been a significant provider of food assistance to a country in which 34% of its population of 43 million faces food shortages. Acute malnutrition is worsening. More trade with Afghanistan, however, is predicated on the US sanctions on Iran's Chabahar Port being eased. Being a go-to option for neighbours in crisis is one reason why India has a closer engagement with the Maldives and Sri Lanka despite the dragon's growing influence.

India's biggest challenge is to defend its turf against the dragon's growing trade—that is almost two times larger than ours—with South Asia. That it has become Bangladesh's and Pakistan's largest trading partner is a painful reminder to India of its failure to deepen regional integration. Looking eastwards towards Asia, including China, is challenging as we have not been able to sell much to the dragon. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) might be the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation without Pakistan. But with the chill in our relationship with Bangladesh, taking forward BIMSTEC through a free trade agreement (FTA) is unlikely.

As for our FTA with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, India is reviewing it as its concerns are similar to what it had in opting out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), notably that it was a deal with China by stealth. Making this FTA work is in India's interests as it will increase its confidence levels to rejoin the RCEP in the future. An Asia focus therefore appears highly problematic even as India ramps up trade with the UK and negotiates deals with the EU and the US, besides several developing nations.

China's visa uproar is part of a DeepSeek illusion

YOU MIGHT HAVE thought Beijing's effort to attract global STEM talent would fire up legions of patriotic keyboard warriors eager to celebrate America's relative decline. Instead, the launch of a new work visa has sparked an online furore that highlights the soft underbelly of China's much-vaunted industrial policy.

The decade-long Made in China campaign to ensure the country can compete with the best of the West in 10 key industries—including robotics, electric vehicles and pharmaceuticals—has been largely successful. The technical prowess, exemplified by January's DeepSeek moment, has fired up the stock market. But it's not been enough to fill the gap left by the collapse of the property sector, which once accounted for as much as 32% of the economy. Consumer pessimism has on display last week when the country wrapped up an eight-day holiday break. Fresh data suggest travellers were pinching their pennies. Spending was subdued, road trips replaced flights, and box-office sales missed expectations, according to *Bloomberg News*.

Against this backdrop, it wasn't an ideal time to debut the Kvisa—what some have called China's equivalent of the H-1B. For now, details are still scant, though it comes as part of Beijing's post-pandemic moves to loosen restrictions on dozens of countries to revitalise travel and consumption.

Announced in August, the new category drew little attention until President Donald Trump introduced a \$100,000 fee on the highly coveted H-1B, which has brought millions of ambitious foreign workers, especially from India, to the US since 1990. Following the announcement, Indian media began to speculate on if China's ascendant tech firms might offer an alternative pathway if the US effectively closes its doors. Some of the resulting backlash on Chinese social media has been downright xenophobic and even racist. But much of the discourse has been more constructive, serving to reinforce Asia's staggering jobs crisis that is disproportionately affecting Gen Z.

In China, the problem is particularly acute because of the sheer size of the deflated real estate sector. For years, property firms followed a simple blueprint: sell homes before they were finished. This model, introduced in 1990s, was able to keep up with surging demand as the country urbanised. The revenue funded the industry's breakneck expansion. That method worked until about five years ago when the government cracked down on excessive borrowing, eventually triggering the downturn. In 2021, when mega developer China Evergrande Group defaulted on its debt, the industry's proportion of economic activity was almost double the 18% recorded in the US at its height. Because property assets make up about 70% of family wealth in China, the impact on spending has been so large that it has been impossible to substitute with growth in other areas.

China's tech and consumer giants have had a disruptive influence on overseas markets. At home, though, their expansion hasn't translated into rising tides for everyone. In fact, the tech sector now makes more headlines for cutting positions, especially people over 35 years old, than hiring. In a speech last month, Yao Yang, a professor at the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, said despite its travails, real estate remains China's largest and most important sector. Bailing it out will require the central government to set up a national team to buy foreclosed homes, estimated at one million this year, as part of a push to stabilise the market, he added. In the meantime, Beijing's Big Tech does have a responsibility to do more to protect its workforce, though it will struggle to add headcount in the way real estate had done. *Bloomberg Economics* estimates tech's collective contribution to GDP is slowly but surely climbing as the economy looks for new growth drivers. By 2026, the tech industry—defined broadly as including research, medicine, and advanced equipment—is expected to grow to 27 trillion yuan (\$3.8 trillion), or just over 18% of GDP. At that level, it is still several percentage points short of property's contribution during its peak 2015-to-2018 years and much less impactful in terms of job creation.

DeepSeek's surprise emergence has done a lot for China tech. It has kicked off an equities rally, turned the tide on the tech war with the US, and even conferred an aura of cool on the whole sector. But the industry is struggling to pull its weight on employment. No wonder China's young job seekers are so upset. The Kvisa was introduced at the worst possible time. Its days may be numbered.

GROWTH INDICATORS

THE BEST OPTION APPEARS TO BE MORE EXTENSIVE & REGULAR SURVEY DATA WITH DISTRICT AS A DOMAIN

Improving economic statistics

THERE ARE SOME new initiatives from the ministry of statistics and programme implementation to enhance survey-based estimates in socio-economic sectors and the delivery of statistical products to users. Base years over a decade old have been used for economic indicators like GDP, index of industrial production (IIP), and consumer price index (CPI), now they are being revised. Survey-based monthly labour force indicators and quarterly sectoral surveys have been instituted; and an improved website-based data dissemination is in place. Above all, the long overdue population census operations are, at last, underway. These are indeed welcome after years of near slumber and silence, especially when its data failed to support the political narrative of the day.

Sub-national GDP: While the steps to update the economic indicators are long overdue, the extent to which these will improve the sub-national indicators begs examination. In particular, the revision of gross state domestic product (GSDP) is critical for the states, as it is crucial in deciding the state borrowing limits and is used by the Finance Commissions in their criteria for devolution of funds. It is often a normalising denominator for fiscal and other indicators for inter-state comparisons. Presently, for estimating GSDP, states are dependent on the National Statistics Office for allocating/apportioning national figures in several sectors. The use of centralised databases like MCA-21 or the use of a commodity flow approach generally excludes state-wise information. Even the presentation of GSDP does not help reveal the structure of a state's economy. Significant sectors are clubbed together as "other services" while several sub-sectors with negligible shares at the state levels are given following the national practice.

One of the major grievances with the last base year revision of GDP was the

increased use of allocation principles for GSDP estimation. For example, the establishment-level data from the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) was earlier used for the organised manufacturing sector. With the base year revision, data from annual filings of manufacturing companies are used at the national level and then allocated to states using certain indicators.

Corporate manufacturing, despite forming only 30% of the units in ASI, accounts for over 80% of the gross value added from this sector. This is then allocated to states. For unorganised manufacturing, certain benchmarking/extrapolation is first used at the national level and then distributed to states on the basis of indicators. The new GDP series and other initiatives will likely rely more on data from e-commerce and other digital platforms. These centralised databases are unlikely to strengthen the sub-national economic indicators.

District domestic product: The estimation of district domestic product (DDP) at present is more of a mechanical exercise using very little district-level data (except for agriculture output) for most of the states. Proportionate allocation based on outdated population or other means leads to near-identical growth rates for the districts of a state, defeating the very purpose of compiling DDP. The alternative is to build estimates from the bottom and

aggregate upwards. GDP arises from economic activities within a defined geographic boundary. At the national level and to a certain degree at the state level, the boundaries of economy are well-defined. At the district level, the use of labour input from household labour force surveys has limitations as it covers households in the district. There is no way of accounting inter-district worker movements to estimate the actual district-level production. Currently, there is no tracking of non-agricultural activities within a district except for the rare economic censuses. The absence of state participation in the current Periodic Labour Force Surveys and the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises also precludes district-level estimation possibilities using any direct survey data.

It is possibly in this context that states like Uttar Pradesh are attempting to build up DDP and hoping for possible aggregation of these to get GSDP. Given the current state of availability of district-level data, such exercises have to adopt indirect estimation for most sectors. GDP is an aggregation of value addition from every type of economic activity, and the lower we go the greater would be the role of assumptions and apportioning. The resulting aggregate GSDP would be distant from reality, leading to trends that conflict

In spite of being declared as the nodal statistical agency in the state, the statistics directorates play a subordinate role in administrative hierarchy

The importance of innovation



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The future of growth models will be driven by innovation, and this is both a challenge and an opportunity, as reflected in this year's economics Nobel winners

THE STORY OF Kodak is now well-known to all—how the leader in the business of cameras became outdated. The same story was witnessed in areas such as music, where cassettes gave way to CDs that have now been replaced by the virtual delivery of content. Businesses built on these edifices have closed or had to innovate to remain viable. A similar wave can be seen in the electric vehicle or renewable spaces where the future of a petrol-driven car can be uncertain given how the world is moving. The oil-producing nations are cognisant of these changes.

At a more macro level, AI has swarmed all businesses, and everyone is trying to balance its use with the given skill sets. Job losses are being spoken of in hushed tones. This is something which was never envisaged and jobs done by AI—starting from a rudimentary search on the Internet—have changed the way in which business operates. What does all this mean?

The future of growth models will be driven by innovation, and this is both a challenge and an opportunity. This is what Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion, and Peter Howitt have studied for decades. Their work on the subject has been rewarded with the Nobel Prize in Economics this year.

The role of innovation in driving economic growth is not new, though its importance is greater today. Innovation was also highlighted by economists such as Robert Solow who spoke of the importance of technology in getting out of the low-productivity trap. There were limits to

productivity of labour and capital, which tended to come down beyond a point. The only way forward was to bring in technology to improve productivity given the same levels of factors of production (land and labour) and eschew the economic process of diminishing returns.

The Nobel winners have worked on this subject more at the macro level with mathematical models showing how progress in terms of growth can be accelerated with the use of innovation. The underlying concept, however, is the same.

Quite significantly, they draw a lot from Joseph Schumpeter's concept of creative destruction where a natural process for obsolescence comes in. Economic evolution begins with inventions that take countries by storm, just like the Industrial Revolution did in the mid-19th century. But, after a point of time, there is a tendency to imitate where it becomes difficult to distinguish superiority or quality of products. Thus, monopolies turn to what economists call "imperfect competition". With innovation, there would be a natural process of creative destruction—those who innovate move ahead, while the others wither away. This engenders subsequent growth cycles, seen when innovative products in automobiles, electronics, engineering, etc. replace existing ones.

Innovation has driven the East Asian story or the ascent of China. The same held for Japan in the '60s and '70s and the Asian tigers subsequently.

Mokyr, Aghion, and Howitt did not just stop at these principles but also emphasised the role of the state. This is critical because countries need to have systems that encourage such creative processes. For that, countries need to invest a lot in R&D which can happen if there are high savings. Mokyr specifically spoke of distinguishing between what he called propositional knowledge, which is theoretically sound but not practically feasible, and prescriptive knowledge, which is what really works in the real world. So to derive the best results there is a need for support from the financial system that provides funds at competitive interest rates even as cost of experimentation can be high and results uncertain. This is probably why some economies of the West and East have galloped at high growth rates for sustained periods while those in say Africa, or even Latin America, have seen slower progress.

The question that comes up is how India stacks up in this theory of innovation-led growth. Significant strides have been made in several sectors, manifested not just by innovative products and processes but also in start-ups that have leveraged

with the central data systems.

Statistical capacity: There is also a question mark on the states' capacity in undertaking nuanced, data-based exercises. Various schemes and assistance for states to improve their statistical capacity has not led to any standardisation of the procedures or strengthening capacity at the state level. The National Sample Surveys also have a state sample component surveyed by state statistical staff. The pooling of both these data was expected to provide reliable district-level data. But most states do not tabulate the pooled data or even the state sample data. Similar is the case with efforts by states to replicate CPI, IIP, and the ASI that can possibly help produce better district-level indices.

There is also no uniformity in the structure or the functioning verticals within the state statistical organisations. In spite of being declared as the nodal statistical agency in the state, the statistics directorates play a very subordinate role in the administrative hierarchy. There is also an increasing centralisation of administrative data gathering through portals dedicated to various schemes. These data, mostly shown in dashboard formats, have uncertain definitions and coverage, limiting their usability for statistical purposes. Occasionally, rankings of states and even districts using the sustainable development goal indicators or multi-dimensional poverty index framework using data from such sources generate contradictory rankings.

The uneven capacity and importance attached to official statistics at the state level is a serious obstruction to bringing data standards and aggregation. Much-touted databases from goods and services tax, ministry of corporate affairs, or digital sources have issues of access and classification for sub-national use. Under these circumstances, the best option appears to be more extensive and regular survey data with district as a domain by agencies like the National Sample Survey Office.



JULIANA LIU

Bloomberg

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tata transparency

Apropos of "Tata Sons must list" (*FE*, October 13), the call for Tata Sons to go public is not merely a regulatory necessity but a test of moral evolution in Indian capitalism. Legacy alone cannot sustain credibility in an age where transparency defines trust. A public listing would not dilute the Tata ethos; it would dignify it, translating inherited moral capital into verifiable accountability. For a group that shap-

es nearly every sector of India's economy, remaining shielded from public scrutiny risks diminishing the values it stands for. Listing Tata Sons would institutionalise openness, democratise ownership, and reaffirm the group's leadership in ethical business. It would also set a precedent for other Indian conglomerates still operating behind opaque structures. True stewardship today demands not secrecy but transparency and by embracing an initial public offering, the House of Tata

would once again lead by example. —Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh

Time to burnish legacy

The Tata group commands unmatched respect in India's corporate landscape. Yet in an age where global benchmarks are set by transparency and market discipline, more is needed for preeminence. It's time to burnish its formidable legacy with a dash of ambition, embracing market dynamics, and nurturing its subsidiaries. List-

ing Tata Sons would repose increased confidence in them. Market scrutiny can coexist with prudent stewardship. When Ferrari was spun off from Fiat Chrysler in 2015, sceptics feared a loss of soul. Instead, the listing multiplied its worth and prestige while sharpening brand identity. For Tata, a similar transition could unite purpose with performance, heritage with ambition. —R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

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Pakistan must be targeted for suppressing its people

HARSHA KAKAR

The recent protests in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir are the result of anger built up over the years due to forced suppression by the state. This is a region Pakistan proudly calls 'Azad Kashmir,' but it is anything but 'Azad.' It is worse than a colonized state, denied basic rights, lacking an independent voice and whose resources are looted to benefit Punjab. POK has no representation in Pakistan's parliament, is administered like a colony from Islamabad, controlled by the army and is constitutionally prevented from making any statement on Kashmir other than what is the stand of the government.

There is never a mention of plebiscite in POK, as Rawalpindi, which suppresses the populace and muzzles dissent, realizes that its residents would prefer India, aware of vast differences in every aspect of life. Pakistan's own human rights body, HRCP (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan), which anyway has limited influence, has courageously mentioned on multiple occasions that POK remains 'politically disenfranchised' with no avenue for dialogue.

The Mangla Dam alongside others generate electricity for the state, but it is POK which faces maximum power cuts and huge electricity bills. Roads and other basic amenities like schools and hospitals are almost non-existent. Protests against plunder of the region and denial of rights are met with internet blockades, media censorship and brutal state power.

The recent protests resulted in a complete shutdown for 10 days. The region was isolated with all roads blocked while people faced shortfalls of food and healthcare. Electricity was cut and people

lived in darkness as in prison camps. Security forces were brutal in their approach. Official figures mention over a dozen killed while the real numbers could be far more. A communication blackout was imposed. The organizers were forced into capitulation and into accepting Islamabad's demands.

Hypocrisy knows no bounds when Pakistan calls the region 'Azad.' Indian foreign ministry officials rightly commented, "We believe that it is a natural consequence of Pakistan's oppressive approach and systemic plundering of resources from these territories, which remain under its forcible and illegal occupation. Pakistan must be held accountable for its horrific human rights violations." The spokesperson added, "Those territories (POK) are our inalienable part."

And Pakistan blames India for human rights violations in Kashmir! Al Jazeera reported in the third week of September that officials in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) accused Rawalpindi of employing aircraft to bomb villages in the province resulting in over 30 deaths, including those of women and children. This is the latest in a series of horrific attacks on innocent civilians in the guise of targeting terrorists. While Islamabad maintained silence, local politicians raised their voice in the provincial assembly and at the centre.

Babar Saleem Swati, the provincial assembly speaker tweeted, "When the blood of our own people is made so cheap and bombs are dropped on them, it is a fire that can engulf everyone." His calls for an investigation went unanswered. Even HRCP demanded an inquiry. But all that flowed from Rawalpindi and Islamabad was silence. The dead were ignored. Anger is rising and will soon spill on to the streets.

Which civilized state, in present times, employs air power against its own populace?

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have accused the Pakistan army of resorting to torture, intimidation, extra-judicial killings and mass detentions in the region, largely aimed at Pashtuns. No wonder the region is unstable. To justify its actions, Pakistan claims that all terrorists, who emerge due to security suppression and highhandedness, are sponsored by India and Afghanistan. Rawalpindi even launched air strikes on Kabul attempting to target the leader of the TTP, which failed.

Balochistan, the region Pakistan claims is endowed with rare earths and reserves of gold, is fighting for independence since being deceitfully occupied by Pakistan in 1948. The struggle is led by the BRAs (Baluch Raji Ajohi Sangar), an amalgamation of multiple groups. With the CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) moving nowhere and a rare earths deal signed with the US, the Pakistan army is facing pressure to deliver. Its response is to brutally suppress the population.

A UN Human Rights experts body mentioned a few months ago, "We urge Pakistan to establish independent and effective search and investigation mechanisms to identify the fate and whereabouts of those forcibly disappeared, criminalise enforced disappearances and hold perpetrators accountable." There has been no action.

Latest reports mention that Pakistan is utilizing services of ISKP (Islamic State Khorasan Province), a known terrorist group, to run death squads in the region. It has also appointed a pointsman, Mir Shafiq-ur-Rehman, for the purpose. The intent is to avoid



being accused of targeting its own. This is the same Pakistan which claims it is fighting the ISKP, while Afghanistan accuses it of supporting it.

Pakistan's record of genocide against its own populace, who demand basics, is well known, commencing from erstwhile East Pakistan to the present. The regions rising in anger are the most ignored and exploited provinces of the country.

All they have been demanding are basic rights and a stop to exploitation of their resources but in return have faced bullets, suppression, communication blackouts, military brutality and enforced disappearances. Those organizing non-violent protests, seeking justice for enforced disappearances and torture vanish into dungeons run by security agencies.

The result is increased attacks on security forces. Today residents of Balochistan, KP and POK no longer consider themselves as Pakistanis. Whatever feelings they had have been washed away by suppression of the state and highhandedness of security forces.

To hide its own actions against its populace, Pakistan attempts to deflect global pressure by accusing India of human rights violations in Kashmir. There is no global forum where it does not do so, from the UN to the UNHRC. Its strategy is simple, block communication from its own troubled provinces, force its media to push one-sided narratives, deflect blame to India, hide reality and accuse others of being behind the violence.

It terms members of these groups as 'Indian-sponsored Khawarij (rebels).' Pakistan's current strategy no longer holds ground. Protests against Pakistan's atrocities are rising globally, led by those who left these regions for the West.

India is the nation which should raise its concerns on human rights abuses in Pakistan. It is time to stop responding to Pakistan's accusations but force it to defend its brutal actions against innocent women and children. India must now adopt a proactive strategy rather than a reactive one.

(The writer is a retired Major-General of the Indian Army.)

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 14 October 1925

OCCASIONAL NOTE

MANCHESTER is said to be very pleased at the American Government's cotton crop report, which indicates the largest yield that has ever been recorded. The Egyptian Government also reports a very good crop, practically a hundred per cent of the normal. As America and Egypt supply practically all the long stapled cotton that is used in Lancashire it is not surprising that spinners should be optimistic. Big crops mean cheap crops and a corresponding ability on the part of spinners and manufacturers to quote prices which will bring them larger orders. Although fairly large quantities are now being exported, the shortness of the staple of Indian cotton prevents its entering into serious competition with Egyptian and American cotton; and that is why the condition of the Indian crop has little effect upon the Manchester market. That may not be the case in the future, for experiments being made in India show that it is not altogether impossible to produce in the valley of the Indus a plant as valuable as that which is grown in the valley of the Nile. The climatic conditions are almost identical in both places and if the hybrid bred by Indian agricultural experts does not throw back and the Sindhi peasant can be induced to cultivate it, Lancashire may yet be entirely independent of Egypt.

News Items

BURDEN OF EMPIRE

LIABILITY OF SMALL COMMUNITIES

LONDON, OCT.

SMALL communities of the Empire have been very much in the limelight for the past week. After Malta, on which attention was focussed owing to the presence in London of Dr. Mifsud, the first Maltese Premier to visit England since grant of Self-Government to Malta, come the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

There has long been a controversy over the proposal of the latter for small self-governing communities to pay an annual quota to the Imperial funds. The Government has now presented the States concerned with a document paying tribute to their loyalty and sacrifice during the war, but pointing out that owing to no machinery existing their undertaking in the financial burden is not commensurate with their resources. They have hitherto escaped the appalling economic heritage under which ex-belligerent countries are suffering. The Government accordingly submits that Guernsey and Jersey should meet a liability aggregating £2,000,000, which it has paid out in respect of war pensions to Islanders by a lump sum or the equivalent. The proposals, it is reported, have staggered the Islanders.—Reuter.

SIR GEORGES-LLOYD

SUCCESSOR TO ALLENBY DEPARTS

LONDON, OCT.

SIR George and Lady Lloyd left Victoria Station at 11 A.M. to-day to spend a few days in Paris. They will embark at Marseilles on October 16, and are due in Cairo on October 21.

A number of friends bade them farewell at the station, including the Egyptian Charge d'Affairs (who presented Lady Lloyd with a beautiful bouquet of white roses tied with ribbon of the Egyptian colours), Lord Willingdon, Sir Geoffrey Archer, Russell Pasha, General Sir Thomas Scott, Sir William Tyrrell, and Sir Dhunjibhoy and Lady Bomanji. Lady Bomanji handed Lady Lloyd a large bouquet of pink carnations and lilies.

Sir George Lloyd declined to discuss the new position the importance of which, he said, could not be estimated.

The carriage was half-filled with flowers and gifts from Egyptian residents in London.—Reuter.

BENGAL IRON COMPANY

SHAREHOLDERS' COMMITTEE APPOINTED

AT the Bengal Iron Company's meeting to-day, the Chairman regretted that the report did not show better results and agreed to a small committee of shareholders being appointed to confer with the directors on the position of the Company. The meeting was therefore adjourned.—Reuter.

A Korea-Japan economic community?

LEE BYUNG-JONG

The notion of a South Korea-Japan Economic Community may sound utopian — an idea fit only for idealists. Given the deep scars of Japan's colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula and unresolved territorial disputes, most observers would dismiss the concept as naive or politically impossible. Yet one of Korea's most influential business leaders, SK Group Chair Chey Tae-won, has long argued that deeper integration between the two economies is not only desirable, but necessary to survive the growing wave of global protectionism. At first glance, Chey's proposal may seem overly ambitious. But economically, his argument carries weight.

If South Korea and Japan were to integrate their economies in some form, their combined gross domestic product would reach roughly \$7 trillion — placing the bloc behind only the United States, the European Union and China. Together they would account for about 5 per cent of global output. Such economic scale would give them significant bargaining leverage in negotiations with the US, China and other major powers. In an era marked by tariff threats and unilateral trade measures, acting in tandem may offer better protection than

going it alone. "This is the age of trade protectionism," Chey remarked in a recent interview. "Given our shared geopolitical situation, Japan is the only country that can share the effects of cooperation."

The industrial complementarities between the two countries are another compelling factor. South Korea leads in semiconductors, batteries, displays and shipbuilding, while Japan holds strengths in advanced materials, components and precision machinery. A joint economic framework could create greater efficiency across industries and reduce duplication. Lowering trade barriers and easing regulations would expand market access and streamline production networks. A combined economic bloc would also diversify and reinforce supply chains, lessening dependence on China and Western markets while increasing resilience in moments of global shock. Joint investment in research and development — particularly in artificial intelligence, quantum computing and next-generation manufacturing — could also reduce costs, accelerate innovation and speed up commercialization.

Still, the obstacles to such a community are formidable. Dormant historical tensions related to wartime issues and territorial claims could easily re-emerge. Political leaders in both capitals would risk significant domestic criticism if they appeared

too conciliatory. Labour groups and strategic industries could resist integration if they feared job losses or competitive disadvantages. Despite complementarities, South Korea and Japan remain direct competitors in key sectors such as automobiles and electronics.

Prior experience offers little encouragement. In 2019, tensions between Seoul and Tokyo plunged to their lowest point since diplomatic normalization in 1965. What began as a dispute over historical justice soon spiralled into trade and security retaliation. South Koreans launched a widespread "No Japan" campaign, boycotting Japanese products and cancelling travel plans en masse.

Relations have since improved. Under the previous Yoon Seok Yul administration, Seoul took major steps toward reconciliation, partly nudged by Washington's desire for trilateral cooperation among the US, South Korea and Japan. The current administration of Lee Jae Myung, despite initial fears that his nationalist leanings would reverse course, has largely maintained the engagement trajectory. High-level diplomacy has resumed, summit exchanges have become routine and trade and tourism between the two countries have returned to — and in some cases exceeded — pre-2019 levels.

Against this backdrop, Chey has revived his call for an ambitious

economic partnership. He often cites the example of France and Germany — longtime adversaries who helped create and sustain the European Union despite centuries of enmity. "The conflict between Germany and France was worse than that between Korea and Japan, yet they managed to move past it," he has said.

Still, the European Union is not a model without complications. Nearly 75 years after its early steps toward integration, it faces ongoing tensions over sovereignty, fiscal policy and social norms. A fully unified Korea-Japan economic community is perhaps unwise to pursue in a single leap. A more practical path might resemble the phased approach of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations bloc that emphasizes limited but achievable cooperation without demanding deep political integration.

Whatever form such a community takes, closer economic coordination between South Korea and Japan would likely strengthen both nations in a world where protectionism, economic nationalism and supply chain disruptions are becoming the norm. The biggest question is political will. Leaders in both countries face electorates sensitive to historical grievances and wary of perceived concessions. President Lee has, in principle, supported



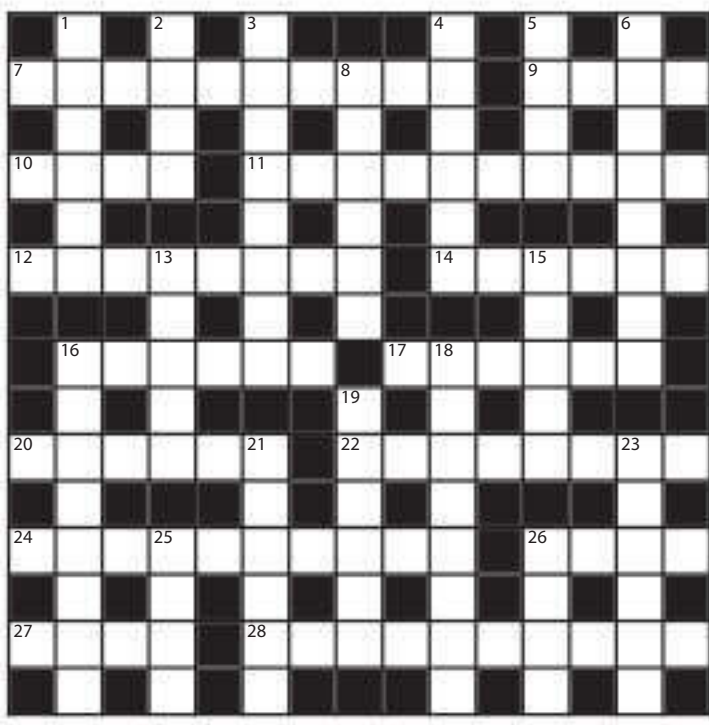
cooperation with Japan on economic matters, but his stance could shift if Japan's next prime minister — Sanae Takaichi, known for her nationalistic rhetoric — reverts to more hard-line positions.

For now, Chey's vision hangs in the balance. Whether it evolves into a phased partnership, a treaty mechanism or merely remains a provocative thought experiment will depend on how leaders in Seoul and Tokyo navigate domestic pressures and geopolitical realities.

If political courage matches economic logic, the idea could eventually gain traction. If not, it will remain a daring dream, perhaps ahead of its time, but not entirely detached from the possibilities of tomorrow.

The Korea Herald/ANN.

Crossword | No. 293262



Yesterday's Solution

C	R	E	E	T	A	C	E
N	O	C	E	N	T	A	L
F	A	U	N	T	A	O	
O	F	F	S	P	I	N	N
E	O		E	A	E	I	
I	R	O	N	S	E	D	
T	E	N	D	E	R		
L		P		O			
C	O	M	P	L	E	X	I
Q	R	N	N	T			
N	U	D	E	T			
E	F	I	L	E	S	S	
I	N	S	I	G	N	A	
T	X	E	Y	R	A	I	

ACROSS

7 This signals puzzling galore with Phi — source of happiness? (10)

9 Last of wine provided by vineyard has dull colour (4)

10 Understood reversed article to be ancient dress (4)

11 Sound upset, drunk, staggering (10)

12 Mostly distribute soldiers around one? That sounds bad (6,2)

14 Enquiring cry? There's nothing in the first room (6)

16 Badly convey Mike's opinion (6)

17 British composer, mentally confused, abandoning carnival city (6)

20 Sets up European clergy (not men) (6)

22 Island resident against weaponry is penning article (8)

24 I scorn struggling to take in difficult English novelist (10)

26 Wanted to dump man in fact (4)

27 Power-crazed, facing setback in the rain? (4)

28 Pressure if parable gets amended in religious document (5,5)

DOWN

1 Person Paris no longer nurtured: old, English, with zero support? (6)

2 Girl's name partly hidden, in actuality (4)

3 Obstacle to soldiers encourages uproar (8)

4 Bit of racket in the silence indicating work on farm? (6)

5 Important teacher picked up dismissing component of education (4)

6 Dour, sour, nasty — like excrement? (8)

8 University in peak position: new perception (6)

13 Sport, mostly pleasant, involving curious old characters? (5)

15 Banking not about to be providing dodgy data? (5)

16 Artist capturing energy in fellow — it's nutty but sweet (8)

18 Embroid knight in elegant twists (8)

19 Perhaps Tom's finished the sauce (6)

21 Fellow's upset about rebuke for heavenly figure (6)

23 Name of Russian beer that is picked up after a kiss (6)

25 Maori group heads for Hamilton and Auckland, having turned up (4)

26 Fuel used in older vehicles (4)

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











epaper.thestatesman.com

The Indian EXPRESS

Trump, disruptor-in-chief, becomes the unlikely peacemaker; what next depends on Hamas and Israel moving to Phase 2

AFTER TWO YEARS of unrelenting bloodshed, it is difficult to overstate the significance in West Asia of the events of October 13. In line with the ceasefire signed between Israel and Hamas less than a week ago, Hamas freed all 20 remaining Israeli hostages (with the planned release of 28 dead hostages, only four bodies having been reportedly returned so far). Israeli ministers, in turn, approved a list of over 1,700 Palestinian prisoners for release, some of whom were taken by bus to Gaza and the West Bank shortly after the hostages were freed. This exchange marks an enormously welcome breakthrough — the closest the region has come to a conclusion of the brutal war that has killed at least 66,000 Palestinians and 2,000 Israelis and sparked a famine in parts of the Gaza Strip. At the centre of it all is US President Donald Trump, who flew to Israel and was given a standing ovation in the country's parliament. The polarising President and disruptor-in-chief is now the unlikely peacemaker in one of the world's most intractable conflicts. His claim of a lasting peace may be premature but if it happens, it will be a remarkable achievement.

In his speech to the Knesset, lasting over an hour, Trump said that the ceasefire signified not only the end of the war but also of the "age of terror and death". Even as Israeli officials who spoke before him, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, lavished praise on Trump, the US President lauded Israel, directed Netanyahu to "be nice", suggested to Israel's President that Netanyahu be pardoned, presumably for his pending corruption cases, hinted at a potential deal with Iran. Amid the jubilation at the Knesset, Trump made only passing references to Gaza, saying that the Palestinian people deserved a better life with dignity, stability and economic development — there was no mention of a two-state solution or Palestinian self-determination, even as the latter is included in his 20-point peace plan. His claim that Israel has "no more to achieve on the battlefield" and his shifting the burden to "build their people up" onto the Palestinians signal the difficult challenges that still lie ahead. For now, however, the ceasefire that Trump has forced upon Netanyahu offers long-awaited relief to Gaza.

That is where the Gaza Peace Summit, co-chaired by Trump in Egypt immediately after his Knesset visit, will be critical. The next phase of the peace plan depends on the deliberations initiated at Sharm el-Sheikh: Gaza's governance and reconstruction, the withdrawal of Israeli troops, the future of Hamas, and most importantly, the path towards Palestinian self-determination and statehood. It is immensely heartening that the guns have fallen silent, the hostages have returned home, and the spotlight is on Palestine. Will Hamas disarm and Israel withdraw? If Hamas digs its heels in, that will affect the future of the "stabilisation force," and give Israel the reason it needs to stay there. A long-term and workable solution to ring in the new requires both sides to discard the old, to ensure that the current ceasefire is not a pause before the next wave of hostilities but the giant first step to peace.

WESTERN DISTURBANCE

Ties between Rawalpindi and Kabul are a major factor in regional stability. Delhi must watch developments closely

THERE IS AN understandable, if sometimes counterproductive, tendency in New Delhi to view Pakistan's internal tensions and contradictions only through the lens of a troubled bilateral relationship. The clash between Pakistani and Afghan forces during Afghanistan Foreign Minister and Taliban leader Amir Khan Muttaqi's visit to India, and its fallout, is a case in point. The current round of violence began with Pakistan carrying out airstrikes inside Afghan territory, and the latter retaliating by capturing military posts across the Durand Line. Security personnel have been killed on both sides. The state of ties between Rawalpindi and Kabul is certainly of strategic significance to India in particular and the region as a whole. It is also important, however, to understand the broader historical and cultural underpinnings of the current conflict, and gauge whether the leadership across the border is capable of drawing the right lessons from it.

In August 2021, when the US withdrew from Afghanistan after two decades, Islamabad did little to disguise its jubilation. It saw the return of the Taliban as an opportunity to chase, once again, the chimaera of "strategic depth". That triumphalism, however, was short-lived. Fundamental issues between the two countries that go back to Partition remained unresolved. Kabul does not recognise the Durand Line, and the Pakistani establishment's fear of "Pashtunistan" continues to colour its approach to the frontier. Rawalpindi and Islamabad accuse the Taliban of sheltering the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and providing a haven for terrorists who attack from across the border. At the same time, the Pakistan army and government have given short shrift to bodies like the Pashtun Tahafuz (self-respect) Movement — a peaceful organisation that seeks a dialogue on rights and autonomy. Kabul, for its part, has long resented Rawalpindi viewing it as a puppet.

The people of Pakistan, and those across countries who have suffered the consequences of the adventurism of its military-intelligence complex, are the victims of a cruel irony. Its policies have tied Islamabad's hands, and violence has become a common currency in the country's politics: Protests against Israel by the fundamentalist Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) have also witnessed violence and the deployment of security forces. The use of religion and fundamentalist non-state actors to pursue strategic ends can have no happy ending. India will closely observe the developments in Pakistan and the degree of maturity the government and army show in dealing with discontent and strategic challenges. An unstable Pakistan does not augur well for regional security.

THREE INNOVATORS

Economics Nobel is a nod to the idea that progress needs constant cultivation of innovative mechanisms

DOES INNOVATION IPSO facto spur economic growth, and does that, in turn, raise living standards? It's often tempting to answer in the affirmative. History, however, shows that the links between the three are not straightforward. At a moment when the world is on the cusp of a tech revolution that could upend conventional notions of labour and creativity, raising optimism and creating disruption, the Nobel Committee has honoured three economists who have shone a light on why innovations enhance human well-being. Together, the work of Joel Mokyr at Northwestern University in the US, Philippe Aghion at the London School of Economics and Peter Howitt of Brown University explains why the world began growing at an unprecedented pace over the last two centuries, how societies sustained growth, and what happens when innovation is stifled. Mokyr, an economic historian, was awarded half of the prize "for having identified the prerequisites for sustained growth through technological progress". Innovation has been a longstanding feature of human societies, but it became a driver of economic growth only after the Industrial Revolution. As his work shows, technology becomes a harbinger of social prosperity only when there are scientific explanations for how things work. How to sustain that creative impulse? Aghion and Howitt use a mathematical model to explain what they call "creative destruction" — when a new and better product enters the market, companies selling older products lose out. The innovation represents something new and is thus creative. However, it also outcompetes an existing product, and is destructive.

The three laureates show the importance of managing the turbulence that usually follows far-reaching technological changes. Aghion has been a critic of protectionism, and Mokyr emphasised the importance of society being open to new ideas. Their work carries another message — progress is not guaranteed and requires nurturing innovative mechanisms.

RTI is dead, long live RTI



NIKHIL DEY AND ARUNA ROY

Rules against disclosing personal information in Digital Personal Data Protection Act undermine RTI

BEAWAR, IN CENTRAL Rajasthan, likes to call itself the "RTI City". Today, it stands at a crossroads of historical significance for India's democracy. On October 12, the RTI Act completed 20 years, and Beawar marked 30 years of its struggle for the path-breaking legislation. It was a moment when people could, with justification, say they created history.

This sense of accomplishment led the municipality of Beawar to unanimously, and across party lines, resolve to build a memorial at the Chang Gate — where a protest was held in 1996 to demand transparency in information — to mark Beawar's contribution to the RTI movement and the powerful law that followed.

When Beawar became a district in 2023, the municipality passed a resolution to set aside land for an RTI Museum to document and exhibit the contribution of ordinary people to the movement, and to serve as a resource place and inspiration for the further expansion of the people's right to know — and the deepening and strengthening of Indian democracy. At the site where the museum is being built, the MKSS and the School for Democracy held the first RTI Mela — it will be an annual event to make the people's initiative for transparency and constitutional values a part of the area's cultural ethos.

Ironically, however, October 12 was a moment of celebration as well as a time for disappointment and deep apprehension for the people's Right to Information. The RTI Act has been celebrated as one of the most powerful citizen-centric measures that opened up government and redefined the relationship between citizens and the state. It also became an important tool to change the imbalance of power within the system.

But the recently passed (but yet to be implemented) Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA) threatens to completely destroy the power and utility of the RTI Act, as well as severely curtail freedom of expression in the country. Section 44(3) amends the RTI Act by essentially using the excuse of protecting "privacy" and "personal information" to ensure that, after the Act is notified, nobody will be entitled to ask for, or obtain, the name of any

person for their acts of omission and commission. The devastating effect of the amendment is clear to all those who have been using the RTI Act to demand accountability.

In a meeting in Beawar on the eve of their unique celebration, one of the speakers made a very interesting comment. He said, "We fought for and obtained the people's Right to Information, in which the sealed vessel containing information was opened and exposed. We celebrated this, and used it to demand accountability and helped establish that 'the right to know is the right to live'. However, we now discover that through the DPDPA, the government has very cleverly made a hole at the bottom of the vessel, so that everything of meaning is leaked out, and we are left holding an empty vessel called the RTI. The shell of the RTI Act remains, but the information that empowers us has disappeared."

It is a very apt story, because at the moment when India should be celebrating the Right to Information Act, one amendment has rendered the landmark law meaningless.

We need to understand exactly what the DPDPA does to the RTI Act. Section 44(3) amends other acts, including Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act. Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act creates a harmony between the Right to Information and the Right to Privacy by exempting from disclosure "information which relates to personal information the disclosure of which has no relationship to any public activity or interest". This section, therefore, also clarified that information related to public activity or interest could not be private or personal. The importance given to public interest is clear from Section 8(2), which creates a public interest override for the exemption clause - the "public authority" has the right (as it should) to disclose any information in public interest. It, however, must be kept in mind that the power of the public authority is a discretionary power of the government — it essentially empowers the state in any pressing circumstances to disclose information. It has introduced a blanket exemption on "personal information" without any qualifiers. Also, the decision to override the exemption is a discretionary power of the government, and not

The DPDPA goes further: It not only shields the corrupt from being exposed, but also gags anyone from revealing the truth without permission from the person being exposed. It invites fines of Rs 250 crore. A law that should have been made only for a handful of metadata companies has been applied to all citizens, including journalists, academics, politicians, and RTI activists. It is one of the worst legal threats to Indian democracy.



AAKASH JOSHI

A BIG, BEAUTIFUL PRIZE

Giving Donald Trump the Nobel might have helped the cause of peace

THERE ARE, FOR the layman, two kinds of Nobel Prizes. The first — given for chemistry, physics, medicine and economics — are given to technical and academic experts. While every award can be contested, there is a broad acceptance that a certain level of expertise in these areas is a prerequisite. Literature and peace, though, are far more subjective. Here, politics and culture, historical bias and competing ideas in morality and aesthetics rule the roost. After all, Mahatma Gandhi didn't win the peace prize. But maybe, just maybe, Donald Trump should have.

Around 30 heads of government or state have got the peace prize, many of them while holding office. Often, they have been awarded for their work and image in the moment, as in the case of Barack Obama or Yitzhak Rabin. Obama went on to use drones and US armed forces abroad, with several reports of civilians being killed. Rabin's work, such as it was, lies in tatters in Palestine today, with years of Benjamin Netanyahu's excesses finally paused thanks to a Trump-brokered "peace plan". Even less controversial awardees like Muhammad Yunus and Aung San Suu Kyi have, over time, lost their moral halo.

The distinction between Obama and Trump, between a "statesman" and a boorish disruptor, then, might be the only difference that matters. In essence, Trump doesn't look and sound like a peacemaker — even when he wants to end a war, it's about being a good "dealmaker". The cause of peace should go beyond the cosmetic. And if giving the business-

man an award helps ensure it, why not? The values the Nobel committee appears to champion stem from a tradition that seeks to elevate a particular kind of person and organisation. Anti-war protesters who have taken on powerful forces — the student movement against the Vietnam War, for example — did not get the millions of kroner of prize money. Anti-colonial activists suffer a similar fate. And while Martin Luther King Jr was a worthy candidate, and won, it is unlikely that Malcolm X and others who questioned systemic racism and White supremacy in the US more militantly were even considered.

Now, to play devil's advocate for Trump. In his first term, the Abraham Accords were a major breakthrough in West Asia, paving the way for diplomatic ties between moderate Gulf monarchies and Israel. If the current peace in Palestine holds, and if he also succeeds in helping end the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, doesn't he deserve the prize? Going by the words of praise for him in the Knesset, and the images of happy Israelis on the street, there are enough people who think he should.

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Trump didn't get the prize, and likely won't, because the Nobel Peace Prize committee, like so many other corporate social responsibility outfits, isn't about either rewarding or promoting peace. And those running the show don't really know what they are about.

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a power that lies with citizens.

One of the most powerful provisions in the RTI Act is the line that explicitly equates the power, authority, and privilege of the ordinary citizen with the elected representative, who they elect through their vote. It is quite unique in Indian law and states, "Provided that information that cannot be denied to a legislature or Parliament, cannot be denied to a citizen." This has been deleted through the amendment.

The RTI has empowered people to identify and expose and reform, with the help of proof, officials engaged in corruption, and mitigate the arbitrary exercise of power. It helps in holding accountable those who block the realisation of our rights and entitlements. Without names being revealed, the RTI will only become a platform for propaganda. The DPDPA goes further: It not only shields the corrupt from being exposed, but also gags anyone from revealing the truth without permission from the person being exposed. It invites fines of Rs 250 crore. A law that should have been made only for a handful of metadata companies has been applied to all citizens, including journalists, academics, politicians, and RTI activists. It is one of the worst legal threats to Indian democracy.

It is not as if there have not been protests. More than 150 MPs, more than 2,500 journalists and 22 national journalist associations, countless civil society organisations, and lakhs of people have submitted strong objections in writing to the government. But it refuses to engage in democratic consultation.

But the people will not give up. The ordinary people in and around Beawar fought for RTI and its use when there was no law. That is why the museum they are building will not be a place to remember a "dead law", but a living space that will inspire more and more battles for open and accountable government. The government should remember that it can amend a law, but it cannot stop or cancel a movement.

The writers are social activists and founder members of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)

OCTOBER 14, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

CONTAINING PAKISTAN

THE PRIME MINISTER, Rajiv Gandhi, has said India can "contain Pakistan at any time, whether they have the bomb or don't have the bomb". *The New York Times* quoted him as saying in an interview: "It is just a question of spending more money and diverting resources, which we don't like to do. But if we are forced to do it, we are forced to do it." Gandhi declined to say what India would do if it was proved that Pakistan had developed a nuclear bomb.

ITALY DEFIES US

A MAJOR ROW loomed between Rome and

Washington after Italy freed a Palestinian leader wanted by the United States over the hijacking of the cruise liner *Achille Lauro* and the murder of an American passenger. The Foreign Ministry said Italy would reply formally to the US protests in the next few days.

ARAFAT AND UN

AFTER A THREE-WEEK debate on the international situation, the UN General Assembly gets ready for a 10-day commemorative session that is expected to bring more than 80 world leaders to the forum. Controversy threatens the opening day as the assembly takes up a resolution co-sponsored by India and five other non-aligned countries that

proposes an invitation to PLO leader Yasser Arafat and SWAPO president Sam Nujoma.

UK AGAINST TERROR

THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER, Margaret Thatcher, has affirmed Britain's support for the stability and unity of India and asserted that she does not want any Sikh extremist plotting to destabilise the world's largest democracy. The British government was only "too anxious and willing" to take action against the extremists but it could act only when there was evidence to prosecute them, she told PTI correspondent M K Razdan on the eve of the visit of the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, to London.

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THE IDEAS PAGE

Let me tell you a gur-chana story

Three recent incidents show that caste is not our past, it is very much our lived reality. And that education and jobs are necessary, but not sufficient, for countering caste inequalities



THREE RECENT INCIDENTS reminded me of the gur-chana story I heard some 25 years ago. I used to know this bright and outspoken Dalit student, who cleared a competitive exam and joined as an officer. I met him shortly after his marriage to a girl from a relatively privileged family, who was keen to shed the “SC” tag and blend into the “normal” society of officers. So was he, perhaps. Before I could comment on his tempered self, he sheepishly said, “Adjustment *kar liya hai, sir*”. I marvelled at the elasticity of this very Indian expression that covers anything from accommodation to assimilation to submission.

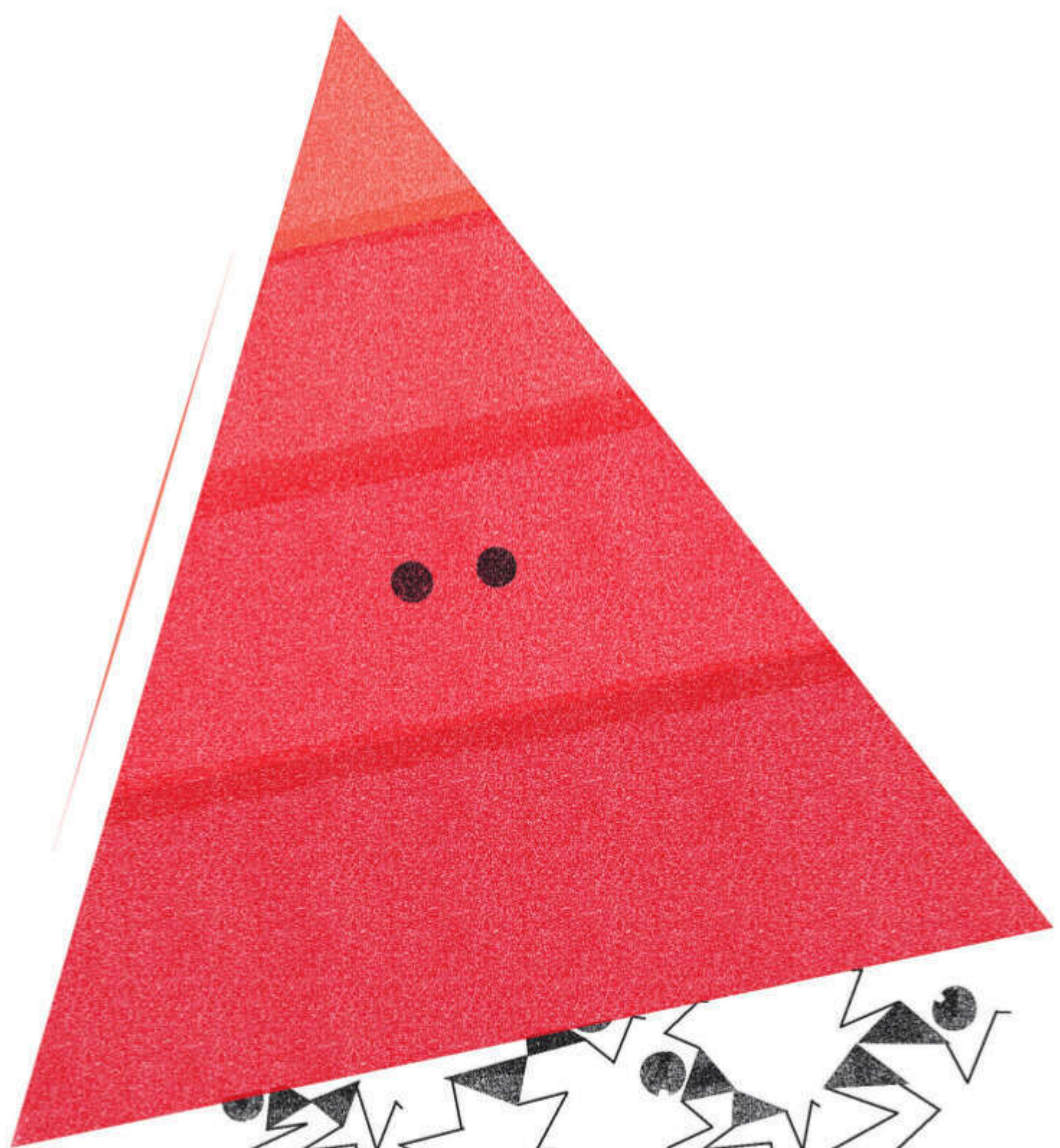
So I was startled to see an Ambedkar portrait in their drawing room when I visited him after a couple of years. He saw the question in my eyes and before I could ask, narrated a story. The day their firstborn started walking, he and his wife shared their joy with their neighbours in the Officers’ Colony by distributing gur-chana, as was their custom. In the evening, while taking a walk, the couple noticed that more than one neighbour had thrown their gur-chana in the waste heap outside their houses. No one said a thing, no caste slur was uttered. Yet, in an instant they knew the sociological truth: *Yeh jati hai ki jate nahin*. The tag they wanted to shed wouldn’t leave them. So they embraced it.

I have narrated this story umpteen times to make three simple points. One, caste is not our past; it is very much our present lived reality. And it threatens to remain a part of our future. Two, it is not limited to the rural or traditional pockets of “backwardness”; caste wears new masks in modern sections of our society. Rarely does caste-based oppression and injustice announce itself as such. It comes wrapped in layers that need to be peeled off. Three, caste is sticky; eliminating its effects is tricky. Education and jobs are necessary for countering caste inequalities, but they are not sufficient.

All three lessons came back to me last week, following three incidents — the lynching of Hariom Valmiki in Rae Bareilly, the suicide of IPS officer Y Puran Kumar in Chandigarh and the attempt to hurl a shoe at CJI B R Gavai inside his courtroom.

There is nothing to connect these three very different occurrences, directed at three persons of very different standing, except that all of them happen to be Dalit. The fact of the victims being Dalit does not, by itself, put all these cases in the category of caste-based oppression. As per media reports, Hariom was lynched not because he was a Dalit but because he could not offer coherent answers to the crowd that suspected him of being a thief. Supposedly, Justice Gavai’s attacker did not invoke his caste, but his alleged affront to Hinduism. And, as per bureaucratic whispers, Puran Kumar fell to intra-office rivalry more than the caste-based discrimination he mentioned in his suicide note. This is what the dominant common sense would have us believe.

We must peel off this deceptive layer by asking a counterfactual question: What if the persons in question were not Dalits? What if they have met the same fate? What if Hariom, surrounded by a crowd that suspected him of being a thief, had shouted that he is a Thakur? He may not have escaped some humiliation and beating. But would he have been beaten to death, with



CR Sasikumar

no one coming to his rescue? Would his body be left to rot, to be discovered by the police next day? Would the police and administration delay action for as long as they did? Hariom suffered this fate not because he was suspected to be a petty criminal, nor because he was mentally challenged, but because he was a Valmiki.

Or, take the case of what happened in CJI Gavai’s court. You cannot rule out a deranged person doing something like this in any court, irrespective of the social background of the judge. But would an otherwise “balanced” lawyer do this in the CJI’s court if there was nothing in his eyes that lowered the stature of his position? Was the invocation of affront to the “Sanatan” by him limited only to religious tradition? Or, was there a sub-text of caste Hindu supremacy in what he said? In other words, was he reacting not just to what was said, but also to who said it? N Sukumar characterises it as “casteist manifestation of hatred” that has been normalised in our times.

What if an incident like this had happened in the court of CJI D Y Chandrachud, and the offender was a Muslim? Would the entire country respond as placidly as it did in this instance? Would the Home Ministry and the national security establishment respond the way they did? Would TV channels not feast on this for days on end? Would we have seen the offender getting away with a series of soft interviews? Can we imagine social-media campaigns to support and glorify

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the offender, as happened in this case? Justice Gavai may occupy the highest judicial position in the constitutional order but it appears that that does not alter his position in the social order.

Finally, let us ask: What if Puran Kumar was not a Dalit? Again, rivalry among officers and persecution of the inconvenient voices is not unheard of in the world of *babudon*. But Kumar’s final note narrates a story of isolation, of marginalisation by successive bosses. Was it just the isolation of a dissenting voice or was there an element of social marginalisation? Would he have faced this had he been surrounded by a social network of officers of his own community? He himself identified the root cause of his persecution as caste discrimination. While there is widespread concern and coverage of the incident, including a letter of support from the IAS association and a belated and perfunctory letter from the IPS fraternity, there is little acknowledgment of and discussion on the caste angle of this incident. As Sumeet Mhaskar and Prabodhan Pol pointed out in this newspaper, this incident proves once again that the “casteless bureaucrat is a myth”.

The gur-chana story I heard resulted in the installation of Babasaheb’s image. Would these three stories result in the re-installation of Babasaheb’s resolve for annihilation of caste?

The writer is member, Swaraj India, and national convener of Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The war that has been going on in the Gaza Strip for 20 months already has once again shown how hard it is to end wars or to achieve ‘total victory,’ as Netanyahu has promised. Military pressure alone will produce neither security nor victory.” —HAARETZ, ISRAEL

In Bihar, the old, the new & the new old

Regardless of who wins and who loses, the entry of a third player is an opportunity to remake ‘the people’, put older contestants on notice



WITH THE BUGLE for the Bihar polls sounded, courting of one of the most intensely political and politicised electorates is officially on. In Bihar, far too much still depends upon the state and almost every question becomes one that is posed to the government. At the same time, it is also a place where a now-dwindling army of “JP-wallahs” and their legates is still active on the ground to wage a daily fight for justice, armed with nothing more than a healthy scepticism of the state, whichever the government, and a *jhola*-full of resolve to forge wider civil society solidarities.

When an election comes to Bihar, even in the most denuded and impoverished settings, and especially vividly in those, you sense the power of the vote. You are likely to come across voters who say that, for them, winnability may not be the overriding criterion — that they will vote not for the government, as is conventionally done, but for the Opposition, because a democracy needs a strong opposition. Or that they will calibrate their Lok Sabha-assembly choices to ensure that power is not concentrated in the hands of one individual or party, because that is not good for democracy.

For years now, though, this state of the engaged and discerning voter has been trapped in a prolonged political plateau. The Mandal mobilisations of the 1990s led to the radical upending of caste equations by Lalu Prasad. The Lalu era came to an end because he did not have the imagination or vision to take his own magnificent achievements to the next step, link them to an agenda of governance. He was complicit, therefore, in the shrinking of his formidable 1995 coalition of the backward and poor into spectres of deinstitutionalisation, “Yadav *raj*” and “Jungle *raj*”, which still haunt the Tejashwi-led RJD.

The Lalu era paved the way for the quieter reconfigurations wrought by Nitish Kumar. Nitish put together a social coalition of extremes and carved out valuable political space in the middle — for restoring the authority of the state and underlining the importance of development or *vikas* alongside *samajik naya* or social justice.

But the Nitish transformations have also long hit a dead end. Stories of change were scattered across the state in the 2010 election that brought him his most fulsome mandate — from dramatic improvements on the law-and-order front to the building of bridges; from the cycles for girls that enabled them to cover the distance to school instead of being forced to drop out to new stirrings among the EBCs relegated by the dominant OBCs. In the last few years, however, Nitish has been in power as a wain figure hidden from public view by a coterie, switching sides and running out of ideas, resorting to proliferating cash transfers and the strong-armed prohibition policy.

Now, the entry of a third player, Prashant Kishor’s Jan Suraj, in the broadly bipolar contest in Bihar — NDA vs

Mahagathbandhan — brings with it a promise. It may or may not shape a new outcome, but it could put the older players on notice. It is an opportunity, also, to remake “the people”.

For too long, “the people” of Bihar have been defined in fixed and unmovable ways, all the better to fit the established players’ formulas and strategies. The gap between the churn on the ground and the political framing has been growing. A new player, asking uncomfortable questions, calling out solidified pieties and hurling challenges — as Kishor seems to be doing while playing expertly to the media gallery — could bring a welcome disruption in the older ways of seeing.

It is true, for instance, that caste identities are salient in Bihar. They are etched into the land, spatially dividing the village into caste clusters, apart from providing bounded categories of political and electoral mobilisation. It is true that to remove inequalities on the basis of caste, it is necessary to foreground caste. But the reality also is that “the people” are more varied and fluid. Just as caste chips away at Hindutva’s imagined monolith, people across castes can also be defined and addressed along other intersecting axes — as the migrants and the unemployed, and as parents of children who receive a standard education in schools.

To travel in Bihar in the last few years has been to encounter a growing clamour by parents at the lower ends of the caste and class ladder who say that they want a better quality of learning in the *sarkari* school — it must be a place where teachers teach, they say, instead of being the site for primarily dispensing the free midday meal or *khichdi*. Waiting to be punctured in Bihar, as in other states, is a stereotype that is convenient both to the political player and the election analyst — that the citizen, and especially the woman voter, can be reduced fully and unresistingly into the *labharthi* or passive beneficiary of the designed-by-government welfare scheme.

The welfare architecture put in place in 20 years of Nitish Kumar in the state and 11 years of Narendra Modi at the Centre — from free foodgrain to the latest cash transfer of Rs 10,000 to women under the Mahila Rojgar Yojana — is ambitious in its sprawl. But the people of Bihar, including and especially its women, may be far more ambitious and aspirational, and much less willing to be taken in by the largesse-distributing state that evades its more fundamental responsibilities.

Both in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, where post-poll analysis found it all too easy to credit the BJP’s latest election victories almost entirely to its governments’ women-centric cash transfer schemes, this reporter, among others, found many women voters on the ground who said that the scheme is not enough. They asked for more and better — jobs, lower prices of essential commodities, a higher quality of life, for themselves and their children.

Here, then, is the best version of the contest that lies ahead: Regardless of who wins and who loses, the new player in Bihar could help enlarge the possibilities of *badlaw* or change in a state that has lived too long with a dispiriting sense of its limits.

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SHALINI LANGER

A turtleneck kind of girl

Diane Keaton stood out for not conforming to Hollywood norms

“A TURTLENECK KIND of girl.” Diane Keaton’s character described herself thus in *Something’s Gotta Give*, a movie she would come to call one of her favourites. It was, to say the least, fitting.

More than any actor before her — and perhaps after — what the 79-year-old actor who died late Sunday morning put on her slight frame told a story. Of a woman who did not conform to any Hollywood norms, sporting on the red carpet men’s suits, waistcoats and bowler hats, blazers and ties and glasses. Keaton, who spoke openly about her struggles with bulimia when in her 20s, rose above size by overwhelming and undermining it.

She showed that leading ladies — and not just leading men — could be “kooky”, her words again, and dress just a bit crooked, like that tie she wore half-tucked. For countless little girls and young teens seeking to find a reflection of themselves on the big screen, or of anything other than the “normal”, there she was, in all her awkward glory. Long before actresses would be hailed for ditching

contact lenses for glasses at the Oscars, she was there everywhere in hers.

Keaton may have come to stardom as the wounded wife of *The Godfather*, whose shattered face marks the end of innocence of Michael Corleone, but rarely again — starting with *Annie Hall*, and right through multiple awards for her work both on the stage and screen — would she play a role where her destiny was shaped by another. That included not choosing to ever get married, something rare for a woman who was in her 70s, as Keaton noted once. Instead, what she had were romances, including a great one with Michael Corleone or Al Pacino himself, and another with Woody Allen — romances that linger on in memory precisely for remaining unfinished.

In his tribute to Keaton, Allen called her “unlike anyone the planet has experienced or is likely to ever see again”; someone for whom all rules and everything else “stand suspended”. Allen, who directed and starred in *Annie Hall*, would know that better than anyone else — being in many ways the true soulmate of that immortal Keaton character

who, unlike her, has strived since to hold on to its spirit.

If her self-assured, distinctive strength marked Keaton, so did her encompassing warmth. No one could look into her smiling eyes and not find a grin forming along one’s lips. As Meryl Streep said in a speech that went viral following the announcement of Keaton’s death, “Diane Keaton, arguably the most covered-up person in the history of clothes, is also a transparent woman. There is nobody who stands more exposed, more undefended, more willing to show herself inside and out, than Diane.”

Streep went on to describe Keaton’s portrayal of Annie Hall as that of a “hummingbird”, so small and so hard to pin down, yet so hard to miss. This is where Keaton differed from other colleagues, including Streep — if the latter embodies formidable perfection, Keaton’s was an accessible imperfection. Her 2014 memoir *Let’s Just Say It Wasn’t Pretty*, on the ups and downs of living and working in a world obsessed with beauty, is dedicated to “all the women who can’t get to right with-

out being wrong”, with Keaton talking about being “inept, inexact, imprecise”, and mangling her sentences when growing up.

In *Then Again*, Keaton again wrote about the burden of correction. “The exhausting effort to control time by altering the effects of age doesn’t bring happiness,” she wrote. “Why try to appeal to everyone?” was her calling card.

Like that turtleneck she made her own (partly to keep off the sun after surviving skin cancer), it is fitting that she also wrote a book called *Fashion First*, in collaboration with Ralph Lauren. In a chapter on paparazzi shots, she wrote, “If I were to describe my so-called ‘street style’, I would say, GET RID OF MY ENTIRE BODY, including my eyes, my nose, my mouth, all of my legs, and the rest of me. Sadly, I need a nose and a mouth to live and breathe, but that doesn’t mean I need to show them off.”

“La-di-da, la-di-da, la-la,” we say, like Annie Hall.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ENERGY TRANSITION

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Power of green’ (*IE*, October 13). It is heartening to see India’s leadership through the International Solar Alliance receive such support from partners like the UK and many others. As every nation works to build its own clean-energy capacity, policies that encourage open markets and shared innovation will accelerate progress for all. The enthusiastic appreciation for shared goals shown by global partners proves that a sustainable future is a goal we can and will achieve together.

Krishan Kumar Chug, New Delhi

TRAIN FARMERS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Focus on Rabi’ (*IE*, October 13). While the piece rightly stresses the need for irrigation and climate-smart farming, the deeper issue lies in how India measures agricultural success. Yield alone can no longer be the benchmark; sustainability must be. With climate volatility becoming structural rather than seasonal, investment in micro-irrigation, rainwater harvesting, and soil health mapping should be prioritised over short-term procurement or fertiliser subsidies. Equally, farmer education remains under-emphasised. The government’s push for drones and digital tools will only bear fruit if farmers are trained

to use them effectively. Agricultural universities and Krishi Vigyan Kendras must become engines of field-level innovation, not mere data collection centres.

Ritika, Chandigarh

NEED TO DECONGEST

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘To mend a broken system’ (*IE*, October 13). Though the writer correctly emphasises the need to rebuild trust in public service recruitment, I want to argue about the urgent need to decongest this arena altogether. Intense competition automatically increases the chance of corruption, owing to high demand for scarce positions, which ultimately leads to systemic failures destroying public trust, exacerbating inequality and blocking a traditional pathway for upward social mobility. As Sanjeev Sanyal, a member of the PM-EAC, mentioned, when only a few thousand people are going to get in, lakhs of people spending their best years trying to crack an exam makes no sense. Moreover, any public service exam is intended to recruit individuals to serve the public’s needs, and those who do not really want to do this will become frustrated through the course of their career. Alternatively, if that energy is channelled into doing something else they are interested in, it could be a lot more beneficial for the country.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh



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

After Sharm El-Sheikh: easy part over, peace plan test begins

ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 13

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump has declared the war in Gaza "over" as he heads to the Red Sea resort city of Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt for a peace summit that marks the release of the Israeli hostages and Palestinian detainees. All 20 living hostages held in Gaza and hundreds of Palestinian prisoners were freed on Monday.

This was the easy part. The question is what comes next.

The hurdles

The hostage exchange was point number one in Trump's 20-point plan. The heavy-lifting comes now, including issues such as the disarming of Hamas, the security guarantee for Gaza, and the far bigger task of rebuilding the destroyed enclave.

Then follows the painstaking task of re-

habilitating the displaced and getting them continuing aid. And even if all this is done, the bigger question is: who will govern Gaza, if not the Hamas or the Palestinian Authority, as has been suggested in the deal? There's one vague reference to Palestinian statehood, but no tangible commitment to that in the text that follows. What happens to that festering issue?

The problem with the spectacle likely to unfold at Sharm El-Sheikh is that it will be just that — a spectacle. None of the leaders assembling there have a shared vision of what to do next; they want to be seen as following the lead of Trump. The common Palestinians have had no voice in this peace plan; they were not even at the table.

"If Hamas refuses to disarm and relinquish control over Gaza, today is little more than a temporary cease fire," Jonathan Conricus, Senior Fellow at the Washington DC-based non-profit Foundation for Defense of Democracies and former IDF spokesper-

son, said in a post on X.

Also, there is a chance that after the bash at the Egyptian resort is over and everybody goes home, the situation could go back to where it started, according to Nader Hashemi, Associate Professor of Middle East and Islamic Politics at the Edmund A Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University.

The basic questions at the heart of this enduring conflict have been largely ignored in Trump's so-called peace plan. And that's the issue of the occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel — and the inability, or the refusal, of the international community to deal with it.

Is Hamas sincere about eventually handing over all functions of the government to someone else in Gaza? Looks unlikely.

The international stabilisation force in Trump's plan, which is supposed to consist of Arab and Muslim states, is unlikely to

make a dent without Hamas agreeing to disarm and allowing this force in. Hamas has not said anything about disarming as yet.

Trump's leverage, and interests

The big positive in the larger picture is Trump's extraordinary leverage over Israeli

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Netanyahu has repeatedly described Trump as "the best friend Israel has ever had in the Oval Office".

Netanyahu has previously scored political points by browbeating American democratic administrations and exploiting political divisions over the Palestinian issue in the US.

While former president Joe Biden, in all fairness, did kick off parts of this peace plan, including the process of hostage release, he was faced with a wrangling within his party, especially from some of the left-leaning members, which Netanyahu exploited to the hilt. With Trump, he can't do any of that.

EXPLAINED
GLOBAL

EXPLAINED **ECONOMICS**

SHARM EL-SHEIKH: RESORT TOWN, HOST TO MANY INTERNATIONAL MEETS

WORLD LEADERS gathered at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt on Monday to discuss plans for ending the two-year long conflict in Gaza.

Strategic location

Sharm el-Sheikh lies on a promontory overlooking the Straits of Tiran, at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba. Once a sleepy fishing village, Sharm el-Sheikh today is a bustling resort town.

Strategically located — Israel's only direct access to the Red Sea lies through the Straits of Tiran — Sharm el-Sheikh emerged as a major naval base for Egypt by the 20th century. It was conquered by Israel during the Suez Crisis of 1956, overseen by a UN peacekeeping force from 1957 to 1967, retaken by Israel in 1967, and held by the Israelis until 1982.

When being handed back to the Egyptians in 1982, the country's then President Hosni Mubarak designated Sharm el-Sheikh as the "City of Peace". By 2000, it had emerged as a major hospitality hub, with almost 100 resorts.

International conferences

Israel-Palestine talks, 1999: On September 4, Israel Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestine National Authority (PNA) Chairman Yasser Arafat signed the historic 'Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum' in a meeting overseen by the US, Egypt and Jordan. The meeting was an attempt to break the deadlock between PNA and Israel; among other things, the memorandum agreed to establish Palestinian self-governance in Gaza and the release of Palestinians from Israeli prisons.

Emergency Summit, 2000: On October 17, Sharm el-Sheikh hosted a meeting in which Arafat, Barak, US President Bill Clinton, Mubarak, King Abdullah of Jordan, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and EU High Representative Javier Solana gathered to discuss the outbreak of the Second Intifada.

Sharm el-Sheikh Summit, 2005: On February 8, a high-profile diplomatic



Sharm el-Sheikh prepares for the Peace Summit, Monday. AP

summit, hosted by Mubarak, and attended by King Abdullah, Israel PM Ariel Sharon, and PNA chief Mahmoud Abbas came together to bring an end to the on-going Second Intifada. Abbas and Sharon agreed to a ceasefire, although the fighting continued, led by groups such as Hamas, which was opposed to the PNA.

WEF on MENA, 2006, 2008 & 2014: The World Economic Forum (WEF) holds regional meetings around the world. Sharm el-Sheikh has hosted three WEF on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) meetings. The summits have discussed security, economic, climate, and regional co-operation, among other things.

EU-Arab League Summit, 2019: Leaders of the EU and the Arab League met on February 25-25 in Sharm el-Sheikh for the first ever summit between the two regional blocs. Among other things, discussions were dominated by issues of migration, security, and the wars in Yemen, Syria, and Libya.

COP27, 2022: The 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) took place in Sharm el-Sheikh on November 6-20. The conference concluded with a historic decision to establish a loss and damage fund, a financial mechanism established at COP27 to help developing countries cope with the severe, unavoidable consequences of climate change

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

UDIT MISRA

NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 13

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences has awarded the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 2025 to Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt "for having explained innovation-driven economic growth". The award comes with a prize money of 11 million Swedish kronor; half the prize money has been awarded to Mokyr and the remaining half will be shared between Aghion and Howitt.

On the face of it, this was an odd pairing to share the award. Mokyr, an economic historian, has received the Nobel for his work that used historical sources to uncover the causes of sustained growth in the world, while Aghion and Howitt have been recognised for their mathematical model which, instead of looking into the past, analysed how individual decisions and conflicting interests at the level of firms can lead to steady economic growth at the national level.

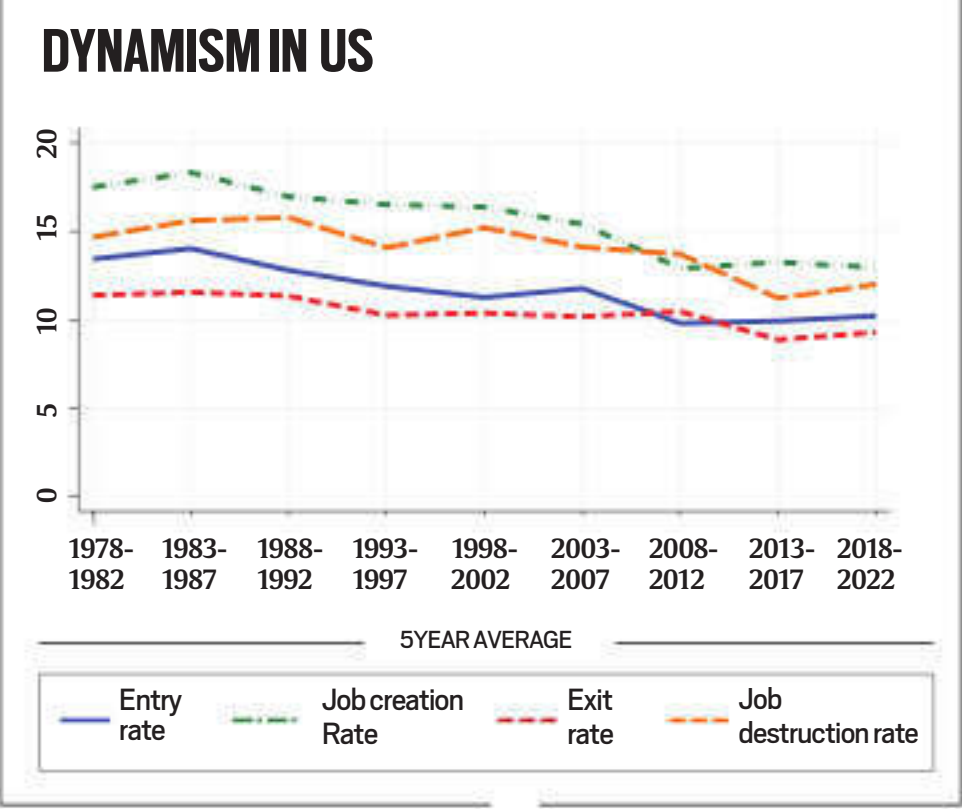
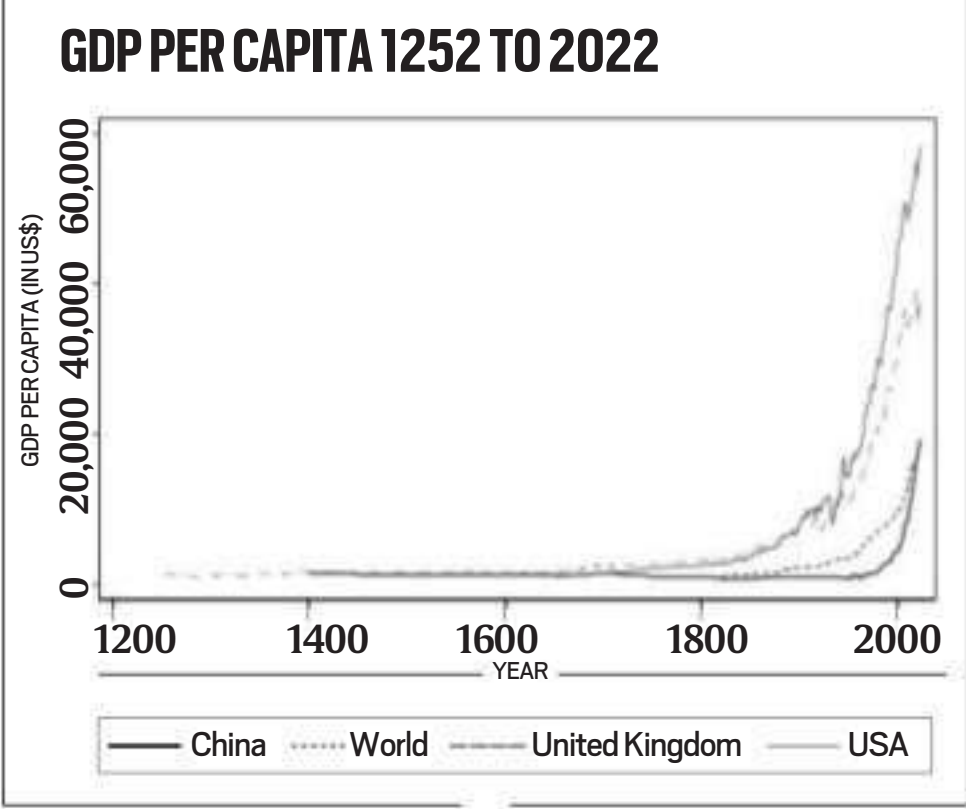
The commonality lay in their ability to explain why humans have managed to achieve sustained economic growth over the past two centuries when for most of human history, economic stagnation was the norm.

Mokyr's contribution

These days there is hardly a debate that does not reference a country's economic growth. Countries such as China and India have grown at more than 7% for decades now, pulling millions out of abject poverty. However, fast economic growth of this kind has not only been absent for most of human history, in fact, it has been unheard of. As *Chart 1* shows, the norm has been economic stagnation, despite technological advancements. So what changed over the past 200 years such that sustained economic growth became the new normal?

Through his historical research, Mokyr showed that prior to the Industrial Revolution, technological innovation was primarily based on "prescriptive" knowledge. That is, people often knew "how" things worked but they did not have the answer to "why" things worked (which is what Mokyr calls "propositional" knowledge).

But this changed over the 16th and 17th centuries as the world witnessed the Scientific Revolution as part of the Enlightenment. According to Mokyr, scientists began to insist upon precise measurement methods, controlled experiments, and reproducible results. This led to the "how" and "why" queries get-



2025 NOBEL PRIZE FOR ECONOMICS

JOEL MOKYR, 79
Northwestern University, the US

PHILIPPE AGHION, 69
Collège de France, INSEAD, France, and London School of Economics

PETER HOWITT, 79
Brown University, the US

ting answered to produce "useful" knowledge.

For instance, the steam engine was improved thanks to contemporaneous insights into atmospheric pressure and vacuums, and advances in steel production were made due to the understanding of how oxygen reduces the carbon content of molten pig iron.

That said, this confluence of "how" and "why" was also not enough to propel the world on the path of sustained economic growth. The last piece of the puzzle, according to Mokyr, was the society's openness to change, another key attribute of the Enlightenment.

Growth from technological change produces both winners and losers. Unless a society is willing to accept this process of "creative destruction", a term first used by economist Joseph Schumpeter in 1942, change will not happen. Mokyr found that this acceptance was a critical difference.

Aghion & Howitt's model

Aghion and Howitt tackled the same question or phenomenon — how technological advancement leads to sustained growth — but their approach was very different. Instead of looking back, they studied the modern economy and found that under the calm waters of stable economic growth at the national level, lay a lot of upheaval at the firm level.

As shown in *Chart 2*, in the US, for example, over 10% of all companies go out of business every year, and just as many are started. Among the remaining businesses, a large number of jobs are created or disappear every year. While these numbers may vary, the pattern of economic growth is the same in other economies.

Through a mathematical model presented in the shape of a paper in 1992, Aghion & Howitt showed how this kind of creative destruction, while looking massively upset-

ting at the level of an individual company, could lay the foundations for stable macroeconomic growth. Here's a brief: imagine an economy where the rules are such that companies with the best technology can take out patents on their products. The protection from patents can create a monopoly that creates profits and pays for the production costs. However, a patent offers protection from competition, but not from another company making a new patentable innovation. This creates an incentive for others to compete and out-innovate in bid to create monopolies and profits.

However, money for investment in R&D of companies originates in households' savings. How much households save, in turn, depends on the interest rate. That, in turn, is affected by the growth rate of the economy. Production, R&D, the financial markets and household savings are therefore linked. Aghion and Howitt's model was the first macroeconomic model for creative destruction to have "general equilibrium" — that is, when all these different markets are in balance.

Policy implications

The work of the newly minted Nobel laureates lies at the heart of many of the burning debates at present. Should governments subsidise R&D in companies? Would that help the society or the company or the company that out-innovates the first company? Another, if not an alternative, question is whether governments should subsidise social welfare and create a social safety net, to ensure the society does not lose its openness to change.

Why UNESCO's new Virtual Museum of Stolen Cultural Objects matters

POULOMI DEB

NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 13

"WHEN A cultural object is stolen, we lose a part of our identity. Learning about these missing objects is the first step toward their recovery," reads an introductory note of UNESCO's newly launched Virtual Museum of Stolen Cultural Objects.

The museum, launched last month at UNESCO's MONDIACULT conference, is "an innovative digital platform [which] re-connects communities with their stolen cultural treasures", and seeks to confront the illicit trafficking of heritage items, particularly as a result of colonialism.

The museum collection

The digital museum currently displays almost 240 missing objects from 46 countries, a number that is expected to grow, but also eventually fall. This is because the museum aims to "gradually empty itself",

as the objects are recovered, and returned to their countries of origin.

Images of some of these items are so scarce that artificial intelligence was leveraged to recreate spinnable digital versions. Users will be able to access the museum's design, interactive tools and digitised objects on their own devices or via dedicated screens at the MONDIACULT conference.

Pritzker Architecture Prize-winner Francis Kéré has designed the visual structure of the website in the form of a baobab tree, which is a noted symbol of strength in the African continent. Clicking on it leads to different "rooms" — the Stolen

Cultural Objects Gallery, the Auditorium, and the Return and Restitution Room — where one scrolls from animal fossils and statues to idols and paintings, which are searchable by name, material, function, and colour.

The website also features testimonies from affected communities, and points to locations on a map from where the objects

TWO SCULPTURES FROM INDIAN TEMPLE

■ The museum depicts at least two objects submitted from India: ninth-century sandstone sculptures from the Mahadev Temple in Pali, Chhattisgarh.

■ The first, a Nataraja figure, is described as showing Shiva in his cosmic dance, one hand raised in assurance and another crushing a small demon, symbolising the triumph of knowledge over ignorance. His bull mount, Nandi, gazes upward, reinforcing Shiva's role as both protector and destroyer.

were stolen.

"This symbolic structure will host exhibitions that highlight successful restitution cases, best practices, and the devastating impact of cultural loss on communities. It will also serve as a platform for dialogue,

■ The second figure, of Brahma, the creator, is shown seated in lalitasana with three visible faces and four arms holding sacred emblems like a rosary and the Vedas. A goose at his feet represents wisdom and clarity.

■ Together, the two sculptures express the balance of creation and dissolution central to Hindu belief, and illustrate how temple imagery once gave physical form to complex philosophical ideas.

bringing together governments, museums, law enforcement, and civil society," UNESCO stated.

The museum is financially supported by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the project was developed in collaboration

with the INTERPOL.

Significance of online repatriation

Since UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's) original founding vision in 1945 of restoring physical schools, libraries and museums in Europe after World War II, the body's purpose has evolved, most prominently into facilitating the "promotion of education, science, culture, and communication". Among other purposes today with its 194 member states, it lists "responding to artificial intelligence" and "safeguarding heritage".

"The virtual presence of anything in today's world is often treated with the same attention as those in reality," says Sunanda K Sanyal, Professor of Art History & Critical Studies at Lesley University.

Repatriation, or the return of an object to the country of origin, has been a "hot issue" in Western museum circles for decades, he told The Indian Express. "Simply put, it is a sort of atonement for

the... exploitation of those societies by the colonising forces. There has also been significant push-back and reluctance from a section of the museum elite, arguing that returned artifacts would not get the same protection in their home cultures due to lack of infrastructure and systemic corruption. This stance, in turn, has been identified by its critics as one of the surviving tropes of colonialism; patronising, at best," he said.

Repatriating virtually may help ease the "complicated logistics" of transporting objects, Sanyal added.

Other scholars, however, fear that the use of the word 'repatriation' for the online realm poses risks for defining ownership of cultural objects at large. An oft-quoted paper by such critics is 'Virtual Repatriation: It's Neither Virtual nor Repatriation' (2012) by Robin Boast and Jim Enote raises concern over associating the idea of repatriation with "projects that seek to improve data sharing and even direct engagement of source communities with their patrimony".

OUR VIEW



The impact of AI looms over the 2025 Nobel nod

Three professors share this year’s Nobel Prize in economics for their work on growth driven by innovation. The spotlight role of technology includes ‘creative destruction’—as AI promises

Over the last two centuries, the world has seen sustained economic growth that has lifted vast numbers out of poverty. How much did technology contribute to this remarkable achievement? A great deal, according to the Nobel Prize Committee. In recognition of the role of technology in “creating new products and production methods, replacing old ones in a never-ending cycle, providing the ‘basis for sustained economic growth,’ resulting in a better standard of living, health and quality of life for people around the globe,” the Nobel Foundation on Monday awarded this year’s Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences to a trio. Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt won for academic work that explains how innovation drives progress. Mokyr, a professor at Northwestern University, US, used historical sources to show how sustained growth became the new normal by demonstrating that if innovations are to succeed one another in a self-generative process, we not only need to know that something works, but also why it does—i.e., the science of it. This was often scarce before the industrial revolution, making it hard to build upon new discoveries and inventions. Mokyr shares half the prize money with the other two awardees, who split it equally: Aghion, a professor at Collège de France and Insead, Paris, and The London School of Economics and Political Science, UK, and Peter Howitt, a professor at Brown University, US. They both studied mechanisms behind sustained growth. In a 1992 article, they built a mathematical model for ‘creative destruction.’ This coinage is attributed to economist Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950) and refers to a process

by which new and better ideas, methods, technologies and products shake older ones out of the market, creating fresh avenues for growth while destroying what cannot compete. Innovations often result in exactly that. The destructive bit, controversially so. As the citation puts it, “In different ways, the laureates show how creative destruction creates conflicts that must be managed in a constructive manner. Otherwise, innovation will be blocked by established companies and interest groups that risk being put at a disadvantage.” While Nobel awards are given every year to those who “shall have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind,” they have never been very far from controversy. Like beauty, what’s good for humanity is often subjective. In this case, the facts are beyond dispute. The role of technology in our lives is obvious. We see it not just in the realm of commerce, but in every aspect of our lives. Indeed, the pace of technological change has quickened over the past few years. What remains open to debate, however, is the role of a particular technology in today’s context: artificial intelligence (AI). Given how it could effect a paradigm shift greater than what tech advances of the past did, AI’s creative impact must be weighed against its destructive potential with that much more care. As with other powerful technologies (think of nuclear power), where AI takes us depends on how we humans use it. Deployed well, it could foster a creative boom. For those of us who take economic growth as a given, John Hassler, chair of the panel for this prize, had a word of caution. “Economic growth cannot be taken for granted. We must uphold the mechanisms that underlie creative destruction, so that we do not fall back into stagnation.” Growth is not on auto-pilot. Nor should it be.

Soumya Sarkar



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Businesses in India have typically treated water as a steady input—not perfect, but reliable enough. Climate change is unravelling that assumption. Variable rainfall, falling groundwater tables, depleting aquifers and intensifying floods are reshaping how firms source this most basic of industrial inputs. Water has quietly become a new frontier of business risk. Rising temperatures, erratic monsoons, frequent droughts and increasingly likely extreme weather events are reducing reliable water availability while driving up demand, especially from water-intensive industries like power generation, textiles and steel. By 2030, for instance, 70% of India’s thermal power plants are projected to face severe water stress, threatening energy security. India’s economy is thirsty. Besides agriculture, textile factories, power plants, steel mills, food processors and drugmakers have long relied on abundant and predictable water supplies. This certainty is receding. As much as 17% of India’s groundwater blocks

are already overexploited and the situation is worsening every year, according to the Central Water Commission. The Niti Aayog warns that almost 600 million Indians live under high to extreme water stress. These numbers matter to business even if Indian industry, unlike farming, does not dominate India’s water withdrawal. Industries rely on consistent quality and timely supply. A thermal power plant cannot run if its cooling water fails. Textile dyeing, pulp and paper mills and steel production all suffer when water fails in quantity or reliability, or is too polluted. In India’s energy sector, where about 70% of electricity generation depends on thermal plants, water is both lifeblood and liability. In 2016, several plants in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu were forced to shut down when reservoirs ran dry. More than 40% of India’s thermal capacity is in areas of high water stress, according to the Central Electricity Authority. With climate change making rainfall more erratic, irrigation, power generation and municipal supply will vie harder for water. Each constraint raises costs and slows generation, even as warming increases demand for cooling purposes. In the textile hub of Tiruppur, groundwater depletion is worsened by erratic mon-

soon recharge. Factories face rising pumping costs and saline intrusion. Huge investments in wastewater recycling and zero liquid discharge infrastructure have kept it afloat, but at a steep cost—raising operating expenditure by 10-15%. Lacking such infrastructure, smaller clusters elsewhere remain exposed. The shift is clear: water risk is no longer about absolute shortage but volatility. Businesses built for stability must plan for fluctuations. This escalating water risk demands a reorientation by policymakers and businesses. It is not just an operational headache, but a macro risk. National modelling by the World Bank suggests unmanaged scarcity could shave as much as 6% off India’s GDP by mid-century. Companies that do not price in water stress will face rising insurance premiums, tighter financing conditions and reputational blowback from investors. India must integrate water scarcity into carbon pricing mechanisms, adopt dynamic water pricing that reflects scarcity and pro-

mote market-based water trading to reward efficiency. A rapid scale-up of circular water economy models like water-as-a-service, industrial symbiosis and digital water intelligence platforms could drive profitable conservation. Government initiatives like Atal Bhujal Yojana and nationwide aquifer mapping show rising awareness in India. Yet, industrial oversight is patchy, focused more on compliance than resilience. The opportunity is clear. The circular use of water—reuse, closed-loop systems and real-time monitoring—could be a competitive advantage. Firms that treat water as a strategic variable will lead. Early movers gain advantages of lower energy intensity, reduced penalties and better access to finance. For businesses that require reliable water, the risk must move from the margins of planning to core strategy. Risk assessments should include basin-level projections of rainfall and recharge; contracts should

assume potential supply disruptions; and capex should account for reuse, treatment, buffer storage, flexible cooling systems or alternative water sources. Firms that take pre-emptive action can protect productivity, reduce costs and guard reputations. Those that do not will find themselves exposed. Water will not stop flowing for everyone at once. But in a warming world, the places where supply fails first will set new cost, constraint and opportunity patterns. It will force investment decisions, regulatory design and corporate responsibility to change. Reforms could generate net benefits of ₹2-4 trillion over two decades, as estimated, though this depends on consistent policy implementation and sustained technology adoption—difficult tasks, given our ground realities. India’s economic growth and energy transition hinge on reliable water. Yet, that reliability is slipping. Firms cannot diversify away from it, nor insure against it meaningfully. The only path forward is adaptation through foresight, efficiency and cooperation between industries, governments and communities sharing the same basins. As rainfall patterns shift, groundwater levels drop and hydrological regimes change, water is no longer just another input. It has become a barometer of resilience.

Threads of trade ties across the world’s oceans must never snap

Geopolitics and hard power are taking apart the global fabric of prosperity and roiling our oceans



GAUTAM CHIKERMANE is vice-president of Observer Research Foundation.

Technologically, Beijing attempted to infiltrate and capture the world’s data through its 5G infrastructure; nations saw the threat and secured systems. The BRI now creaks under its own contradictions, even as Beijing tries to recast itself as a champion of globalization, while also using policy tools that choke the free flow of trade. Driven by domestic political compulsions, since February 2025, US President Donald Trump has been spraying the trade fabric with tariff bullets. These take the shape of trade barriers, but serve as weapons of mass intimidation, designed to bring adversaries and allies alike to their knees. From Canada and Mexico to allies in Europe to groupings such as Brics and countries such as India, few have been spared. Even the World Trade Organization finds itself incapable of settling disputes. The sole exception: China, which Trump can’t bully without consequences. Consequently, the tapestry that lifted ideas, goods, jobs and prosperity has been getting tattered. Where are we headed? Let’s ocean-gaze for clues. Once symbols of openness, they are embroiled in a power contest. Global trade in 2024 surged to over \$32 trillion: almost \$23.5 trillion in goods, nearly \$9 trillion in services. As much as 80% of the world’s merchandise trade moved across seas and oceans. More than a quarter of this sailed through 10 major sea routes; nearly a fifth, through just five—the trans-Pacific route, Europe-Asia route via Suez, Strait of Hormuz, North Atlantic route and Strait of Malacca. Moreover, every digital service—movies and music, gaming and education—relies on ocean-bed fibre cables, tying the fate of virtual commerce to geopolitics. Each passage is now an active war-zone of influence. The Suez Canal faces sabotage, targeted by Houthis of Yemen. The South China Sea teems with skirmishes and China’s claims against its southeast Asian neighbours and Taiwan. The Panama Canal is a theatre of a

US-versus-China contest for dominance. The Strait of Hormuz, an oil life-line for Asian consumers, is perpetually threatened. Melting Arctic routes are becoming new battle-zones, with Russia and the West racing for supremacy. The Strait of Malacca, through which a quarter of the world’s annual oil and container traffic squeezes, could see the next US-China face-off. Ironically, the tariffs imposed by Trump could push Beijing and New Delhi into an uncomfortable alliance of convenience. And if the US exits the Indian Ocean region, a zone of rivalry between two great powers could transform into one of strategic collaboration between two regional powers. Beneath ocean surfaces, finance moves faster than goods. Undersea optic cables transmit \$10 trillion of flows every day. Beyond commerce, oceans contain vast natural riches too. Seas around Hawaii and Tahiti may hold 100 billion tonnes of rare earths. Across the world, resource exploration is underway. Invert the gaze and look at the world from the water’s perspective and what we see is that oceans, not land, are likely to see a major build-up. Around 730 million people live on 11,000 islands today; but more than 1 million lie uninhabited. Several islands could host strategic bases for defence, connectivity and economic vitality. India’s Great Nicobar Island project is an example. Building artificial islands is an entirely new idea of sovereignty extension and infrastructure build-up, though it may clash with international law. Across millennia, oceans have nurtured and nourished nations. Now, they are becoming aquatic battle-zones. Powerful states are bent on taking apart trade ties, while trying to push weaker countries to the fringes. The fabric of trade has suffered enough. It is important for the world’s future that it does not get shredded beyond repair. The threads of commercial ties that bind the world must not be allowed to snap.



THEIR VIEW

Climate change has turned water into a business risk

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Businesses in India have typically treated water as a steady input—not perfect, but reliable enough. Climate change is unravelling that assumption. Variable rainfall, falling groundwater tables, depleting aquifers and intensifying floods are reshaping how firms source this most basic of industrial inputs. Water has quietly become a new frontier of business risk. Rising temperatures, erratic monsoons, frequent droughts and increasingly likely extreme weather events are reducing reliable water availability while driving up demand, especially from water-intensive industries like power generation, textiles and steel. By 2030, for instance, 70% of India’s thermal power plants are projected to face severe water stress, threatening energy security. India’s economy is thirsty. Besides agriculture, textile factories, power plants, steel mills, food processors and drugmakers have long relied on abundant and predictable water supplies. This certainty is receding. As much as 17% of India’s groundwater blocks

are already overexploited and the situation is worsening every year, according to the Central Water Commission. The Niti Aayog warns that almost 600 million Indians live under high to extreme water stress. These numbers matter to business even if Indian industry, unlike farming, does not dominate India’s water withdrawal. Industries rely on consistent quality and timely supply. A thermal power plant cannot run if its cooling water fails. Textile dyeing, pulp and paper mills and steel production all suffer when water fails in quantity or reliability, or is too polluted. In India’s energy sector, where about 70% of electricity generation depends on thermal plants, water is both lifeblood and liability. In 2016, several plants in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu were forced to shut down when reservoirs ran dry. More than 40% of India’s thermal capacity is in areas of high water stress, according to the Central Electricity Authority. With climate change making rainfall more erratic, irrigation, power generation and municipal supply will vie harder for water. Each constraint raises costs and slows generation, even as warming increases demand for cooling purposes. In the textile hub of Tiruppur, groundwater depletion is worsened by erratic mon-

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Businesses can no longer take it for granted as an input and must view it as a strategic vulnerability



Editor's
TAKE

The Arithmetic of Seats, the Calculus of Votes

As the Bihar elections heat up, the NDA balances caste equations while the Mahagathbandhan struggles with internal contradictions

Bihar elections are round the corner, and the political cauldron of the state is boiling. Bihar is a state where caste politics reigns, and one who can manage its caste equations well and forge alliances takes all. Right now, the NDA seems to be doing well in getting the caste equations right and also managing its allies well.

With the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) unveiling its seat-sharing formula, the stage is set for the forthcoming elections. In a move that defines the NDA's coalition strategy, the BJP and JD(U) will contest 101 seats each, Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) on 29, while Jitan Ram Manjhi's HAM and Upendra Kushwaha's RLM will fight on six seats each. It has two messages: the BJP's quiet ascendancy and the rise of Chirag Paswan as Bihar's new Dalit face. The 101-101 split between the BJP and Nitish Kumar's JD(U) is more than mere arithmetic; it signals that the BJP would not play second fiddle in the state. By maintaining parity this time, the BJP wants to take the driver's seat in the near future.

Equally significant is Chirag Paswan's elevation. Allocating 29 seats to his LJP (Ram Vilas) – a remarkable leap – is a strategic masterstroke. In 2020, Chirag's rebellion severely undercut Nitish Kumar's performance. Now, by embracing him, the NDA has both neutralised a spoiler and amplified its Dalit outreach. His inclusion also reflects the NDA's deeper recalibration – from dependence on Nitish to diversification through newer, charismatic faces. For Nitish Kumar, the equation is more delicate. Once the unchallenged "Sushasan Babu", he now finds his junior partner catching up with him. Yet, the alliance's strength lies in its structure – a blend of caste arithmetic, local leadership, and an extensive party machinery that the NDA is harping upon.

In contrast, Tejashwi Yadav's Mahagathbandhan faces an uphill climb. The young RJD leader may have matured politically since 2020, but the road ahead is cluttered with hurdles. Prashant Kishor's entry threatens to fracture the Yadav vote bank. The AIMIM's presence could eat into Muslim support, while Congress's hesitation to project Tejashwi as the CM face exposes internal uncertainty. Add to this the family frictions within the Yadav clan and the Left parties' bargaining for seats, and the Mahagathbandhan's "unity" appears more fragile than firm. Moreover, the M-Y (Muslim-Yadav) factor – once RJD's greatest strength – has become both a foundation and a ceiling. Unless Tejashwi breaks beyond identity politics to attract EBCs, women, and youth voters, he risks repeating 2020's narrow defeat. As the campaign heats up, the NDA enters with clarity, cohesion, and a carefully balanced caste equation. The Mahagathbandhan, meanwhile, struggles with fragmentation, leadership ambiguity, and internal contradictions but is drawing big crowds. Bihar voters are both pragmatic and emotional; whom they will favour this time will be known only on November 14!

Celebrating the legacy of Operation Pawan

Swami Vivekanand Subharti University honours 1,171 IPKF soldiers on Operation Pawan's 38th anniversary, celebrating their bravery while felicitating veterans and Veer Naris with wreaths and shared experiences



RS
SIDHU

Commemoration of 38th Operation Pawan Day

Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, is a premier higher education organisation known for promoting a nationalist agenda amongst its extensive student and faculty body by holding symposiums, motivational programmes, and commemorative events to felicitate freedom fighters and war heroes of the Indian Armed Forces.

This year, the University held a remembrance event on October 11th, 2025 to pay tribute to the 1,171 gallant soldiers of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka, who made the supreme sacrifice during Operation Pawan, and also to felicitate the War Veterans and Veer Naris of this significant chapter of the Indian military.

Significance of 10th of October 1987

This year marks the 38th anniversary of the commencement of active military operations on October 10th, 1987, against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a Sri Lankan Tamil rebel group. The Indian Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi and the President of Sri Lanka Shri Julius Jayawardene had earlier signed the India-Sri Lanka Agreement (ISLA) on 29th July 1987 to bring peace to the island, which was in the throes of a decades-long Sri Lankan Tamil insurgency against the Sri Lankan Government.

The ISLA aimed at mitigating the ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka, protecting the Sri Lankan Tamil minority from state-sponsored discrimination, and ensuring the unity and territorial integrity of the island nation. It led to the deployment of the IPKF at the request of the Sri Lankan Government to guarantee adherence to the ISLA by the warring parties – namely, the Sri Lankan security forces and the Tamil militants. The 54 Infantry Division of the Indian Army was inducted as the IPKF on 29th July 1987 into the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. The military operation was code-named Operation Pawan.

The LTTE, the largest Tamil militant group, was reluctant to support the ISLA. Its leadership wanted an independent Tamil homeland carved out from Sri Lanka. For two months, it refused to surrender its weapons and ammunition in terms of the ISLA and continued to indulge in militant activities. Finally, on 6th October 1987, the LTTE leadership declared hostilities against the IPKF. In retaliation, the IPKF launched full-scale military action against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on the night of 10/11 October 1987 by executing an audacious but weakly planned coup de main heliborne mission, employing a team of 10



The Pioneer SINCE 1865

OPERATION 'PAWAN' IS A TESTAMENT TO INDIA'S COMMITMENT TO REGIONAL PEACE AND STABILITY. POST OCTOBER 1987, THE OPERATION PAWAN WAS EXPANDED TO BECOME THE LARGEST JOINT SERVICES MILITARY OPERATION CONDUCTED OVERSEAS BY INDIA

The writer is Col RS Sidhu, Sena Medal, an Operation Pawan veteran, strategic thinker, and author

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 The Pioneer

PARA COMMANDO and advance elements of 13 SIKH LI to neutralise the headquarters of the LTTE, assessed to be located in Jaffna University. The heliborne operation encountered fierce resistance from LTTE cadres due to the advance leakage of information about this military operation. Nearly 50 soldiers of the two units were killed in action (KIA).

Despite inferior numbers and limited availability of ammunition, the Indian soldiers fought on bravely and staved off several assaults until they were successfully extricated by a larger force.

A total of 13 Vrc, including four from the IAF, apart from other awards like SM, etc., were awarded in this operation – a record of sorts for any single operation in the annals of the history of the Services.

Legacy of Operation Pawan

Operation Pawan is a testament to India's commitment to regional peace and stability. Post-October 1987, Operation Pawan was expanded to become the largest joint services military operation conducted overseas by India – a 32-month campaign from July 1987 to March 1990. Over and above the initial deployment of the 54 Infantry Division in the Jaffna Peninsula, three additional formations – 4 Infantry Division, 36 Infantry Division, and 57 Mountain Division – were inducted into the Vavuniya, Trincomalee, and Batticaloa regions, respectively.

This led to the establishment of Headquarters IPKF, a Corps-size tri-service organisation with nearly 100,000 troops from the three services under its command.

The human cost of Operation Pawan was enormous. 1,171 Indian soldiers were killed in action (KIA), and more than 3,500 were gravely wounded. Hundreds of wives were rendered widows, children left fatherless, and parents left without support in old age. The IPKF's bravery was recognised with 1 Param Vir Chakra, 6 Maha Vir Chakras, 98 Vir Chakras, and countless other gallantry awards. Despite these sacrifices, the

operation remains underappreciated on home soil.

There is a sense of profound injustice felt by veterans and families of the fallen alike. Unlike the 1971 Indo-Pak War and the Kargil conflict, Operation Pawan has not received the same level of official commemoration at the National War Memorial in New Delhi.

The absence of such recognition is a source of profound hurt for the veterans who served, as well as the families who lost their loved ones in the line of duty.

Adding to their anguish is the fact that while Sri Lanka has honoured these soldiers by erecting a prominent war memorial in Colombo, India – on whose behalf they made the ultimate sacrifice – has failed to extend similar public tribute. Some of the graves of Indian soldiers who died during the operation still lie in Sri Lanka, further compounding the sense of neglect that surrounds their memory. In the words of the war veterans, "The greatest irony is that while our sacrifices are acknowledged and respected by Sri Lanka, our own Government and military leadership have shown a remarkable apathy to commemorate the lives of the 1,171 soldiers killed in action during Operation Pawan."

Remembrance of IPKF Bravehearts

In the face of continued Government apathy towards official remembrance of the 1,171 bravehearts of the IPKF, the felicitation of the IPKF Veterans and Veer Naris by Swami Vivekanand Subharti University comes as a breath of fresh air that further adds to the nationalistic credentials of this organisation.

The event will commence with the laying of a wreath at the Swami Vivekanand Subharti University War Memorial, followed by the felicitation of Operation Pawan Veterans and Veer Naris, and sharing of battle experiences by the veterans of 10 PARA COMMANDO, 13 SIKH LI, and helicopter pilots who participated in this heliborne operation.

PIC TALK



Devotees thronged Paonta Sahib as the shrine prepared to close for the winter following heavy snowfall.

PHOTO: PTI

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BETWEEN GENOCIDE ALLEGATIONS AND ISRAEL'S SELF-DEFENCE CLAIMS

As a fragile ceasefire takes hold in Gaza, Palestinians hope it will mark the beginning of a permanent end to a devastating two-year conflict that has claimed over 67,000 lives and left nearly 170,000 wounded. Large parts of the Gaza Strip now lie in ruins, symbolising the immense human and infrastructural toll of prolonged warfare.

A UN commission and multiple human rights organisations have accused Israel of committing genocide – a charge Israel vehemently denies, insisting its military operations were acts of self-defence in response to the Hamas-led attack that killed around 1,200 Israelis and resulted in 251 hostages being taken.

The debate now extends far

beyond the battlefield. Analysts say the conflict has triggered a reassessment of global norms governing warfare, particularly around civilian protection, proportionality, and humanitarian accountability. The distinction between legitimate self-defence and potential war crimes is becoming a focal point of international scrutiny. As investigations unfold, the world faces a complex moral and legal dilemma – whether the Gaza offensive represents a justified response to terror or crosses the threshold into genocide. The answer will not only shape Israel-Palestine relations but could redefine the global understanding of justice in modern warfare.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

Women's health: Why early detection matters



HENA
KAUSAR

2ND THE PIONEER OPINION

Fibroid uterus is a condition that affects a wide segment of women. They are benign tumours of the uterus which can cause heavy menstrual bleeding, abdominal pain, or lower abdominal pressure. Though awareness about fibroids is picking up, mainly in urban and semi-urban areas, early diagnosis and management remain a major concern.

Whether it is young women struggling with fertility or older women facing heavy bleeding and anaemia, fibroids often go unnoticed until symptoms worsen. This can be very traumatic for young women who want to start a family, as untreated fibroids can damage fertility. Fibroids also impact women over 45 years, with many suffering from pain, heavy menstruation, or anaemia.

They need immediate attention and treatment so that complications can be prevented. Early diagnosis through regular follow-ups and imaging tests like ultrasound can totally change the treatment outcome.

Fibroids are usually treated with surgery. Laparoscopic surgery is nowadays commonly practised in all hospitals. It is less invasive, with smaller incisions, and women recover fast.

However, in big hospitals, an increased number of robotic surgeries are being done, with even more accuracy, specifically for women with large or multiple fibroids. Not only does surgery cure symptoms, but it also increases the likelihood of conception for women who desire children and provides relief and improved quality of life for women of a specific age as well.

These advanced techniques have made fibroid treatment safer, and they reduce blood loss, shorten hospital stay, and allow women to return to work and family duties quickly.

Some hospitals are also using advanced technologies like 3D imaging during surgery to ensure that the procedure is very precise. The main challenge is to make these modern options available not just in metro cities but also in tier-2 and tier-3 towns, so that more women can benefit without delay. The challenge, however, lies with access to facilities that use modern technology.

While specialised surgeries are available in urban hospitals, they remain largely inaccessible in rural areas. This raises the need to train doctors at primary health care centres in understanding the symptoms of fibroids and referring patients to the nearest city hospital for treatment.

Fibroids can affect women of any age, and the causes may vary from hormonal changes to genetics. However, early treatment is important in all cases. In some instances, doctors may initially prescribe medication to manage the symptoms if they are not very severe or if the fibroid is very small, in addition to regular scanning to monitor it.

Sometimes, medication or hormonal therapy can help control bleeding or pain. Surgery is usually considered only when the fibroid is large, painful, or affecting fertility. Generally, when women hear about a fibroid, they panic. However, it needs to be understood that treatment is available, but it may depend on the type and size of the fibroid. In conclusion, while more women are becoming aware of fibroids or rasauli, as it is commonly called, especially in urban areas, the real challenge remains timely diagnosis and access to proper treatment.

Dr Hena Kausar is Consultant Laparoscopic Gynecologist and Obstetrician

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Breaking caste boundaries in Assam

In a rare gesture at the late iconic vocalist Zubeen Garg's cremation site in Assam, a youth publicly tore off his sacred thread (lagun in Assamese), traditionally worn by Brahmins, and declared he would live only as a human, rejecting caste and religion.

Sun Bhagawati, a youth in his early thirties, asserted that he was only following the ideals of his idol Garg and appealed to people to live only as humans by breaking the boundaries of caste and religion. "By birth, my caste is Brahmin. But I have no caste, no religion. We must live as humans. Here I break it," Bhagawati told reporters, pulling out the thread from beneath his clothes and tearing it in front of the cameras. Bhagawati's action has drawn the attention of netizens, with the video going viral.

While most people have welcomed the gesture, some criticised it too. Assam minister Pijush Hazarika slammed the youth and said the investigation into Garg's death is going on efficiently. "But I am strongly opposed to anyone publicly tearing his lagun in front of the cameras. I strongly condemn this incident. This is against our sanatani tradition," he said. The celebrated singer died in Singapore on 19 September while swimming in the sea. He had gone to the Southeast Asian nation to attend the fourth edition of the North East India Festival.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Rare feat for 'Tell That to Bangalore'

Tell That to Bangalore, the popular quiz show on Doordarshan Chandana, is poised for a landmark celebration as it approaches its 5,000th episode – a feat unmatched in Indian television history. Scheduled to air on October 13, the special episode will mark over two decades of uninterrupted success since the show first began on January 4 2002.

Recognised in the Limca Book of Records, the programme is now moving towards securing a place in the Guinness World Records for its extraordinary longevity.

The grand celebration will be held on October 11, at the Dr Babu Rajendra Prasad International Innovation Centre on the GKVK campus, beginning at 10:30 am. The milestone is more than just a number – it reflects Doordarshan's enduring relevance and the trust it continues to inspire among viewers.

For journalism and media students, the success of *Tell That to Bangalore* stands as proof that quality programming and consistency can thrive even in a rapidly changing media landscape.

As the show steps into history, it reinforces a simple truth – that perseverance and passion can make any medium, old or new, a platform for lasting success.

HARISH AMALAGONDI | TUMAKURU

Dollar faces geopolitical crossroads

Under President Trump, the United States has begun to wield the dollar not as a symbol of global assurance but as a weapon of assertion. Through economic sanctions, tariff wars, and trade restrictions, the world's reserve currency has become an instrument of coercion.

The proposed renaming of the Department of Defense to the Department of War aptly mirrors this aggressive posture – signalling a shift from passive dominance to active enforcement of primacy.

Since the Bretton Woods Agreement of 1944, the dollar represented trust and stability, anchored to gold until President Nixon's 1971 decision severed that link. Freed from restraint, the US borrowed endlessly, financing consumption and military expansion while outsourcing manufacturing – especially to China, which amassed vast surpluses and industrial might. Europe, meanwhile, grew dependent on American defence and energy policies, losing both autonomy and vitality. Now, as US debt surges and global faith in the dollar wanes, the currency once symbolising stability stands on fragile foundations. The dollar that built American hegemony may precipitate its decline – its transformation from the world's pillar of trust to its most potent geopolitical fault line.

R NARAYANAN | MUMBAI

A shocking breach of decorum in the Supreme Court

The shoe hurling incident in the Supreme Court has shocked the nation. While the Chief Justice, displaying remarkable composure, refused to press charges and directed that the offending lawyer be let off with a warning; while the CJl's response reflected personal magnanimity, it sets a dangerous precedent



HASAN KHURSHID

In an unprecedented and shocking incident, a 71-year-old lawyer, Rakesh Kishore, took his shoe in his hand and tried to hurl it at Chief Justice of India B R Gavai on 6 October 2025, in full view of the ongoing court proceedings in the Supreme Court of India.

The CJl remained unfazed during and after the reprehensible incident. Expressing his gracious attitude, the CJl asked the court officials and security personnel present inside the courtroom to let off the offending lawyer with a warning, saying, "Don't get disturbed by all this. We are not distracted. These things do not affect me."

Subsequently, on 7 October 2025, the CJl, during the hearing of a batch of pleas seeking review and modification of the Vanashakti judgement, made observations that he and Justice K Vinod Chandran were shocked when a lawyer attempted to hurl a shoe at him on 6 October 2025, but the issue is now a "forgotten chapter."

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta termed the act unpardonable but hailed the CJl for his magnanimity and "majesty." The top law officer, in his overheated gesture, forgot to mention that the attack was not on an individual but on the Chief Justice of India, who is the custodian of the Constitution of India.

As such, this was an attack on the Constitution of India, the dignity of the judiciary and the Rule of Law. With this view, the CJl and the top law officer are legally and constitutionally responsible for initiating legal action under the prescribed and established law of the land to protect the dignity of the judiciary from being abused.

Any attempt to brand the episode as a "forgotten chapter" will not only bring disrepute to the judicial system but will set a wrong and damaging precedent. Therefore, no amount of magnanimity can here be justified.

The Condemnation of the Act

There are loud voices, including those of Narendra Modi and Sonia Gandhi, calling the act of Rakesh Kishore misconduct, reprehensible, disorderly and intemperate, but no one is voicing legal action against him, barring Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, who was sharing the Bench in the Vanashakti hearing. He differed with the course of action adopted towards the errant lawyer and said, "I have my own



THERE ARE LOUD VOICES, INCLUDING THOSE OF NARENDRA MODI AND SONIA GANDHI, CALLING THE ACT OF RAKESH KISHORE AS HIS MISCONDUCT, REPREHENSIBLE

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views on this. He is the CJl; it is not a matter of joke!" Justice Bhuyan said the attack was "an affront to the Supreme Court" and that due action should have been taken.

The Legal Action

The police interrogated Kishore for three hours inside the Supreme Court premises and then allowed him to go, saying that no formal complaint was received by them. Even his shoe, which should have been confiscated, was returned to Kishore respectfully.

Ironically, besides contempt of court, the incident attracts criminal action for assault, defamation and parts of the terrorist act. If the same type of crime takes place on the street, the police swing into action, while for the crime committed in the highest temple of justice, the police remain inactive.

With regard to motive, the perpetrator claimed that he was unhappy with the

CJl's remarks during a recent hearing of a plea seeking the restoration of a Lord Vishnu idol in the Khajuraho temple complex in Madhya Pradesh. While leaving the courtroom, the erring lawyer allegedly raised a slogan, "Sanatan Dharm ka apman, nahi sahega Hindustan" (India will not tolerate the insult of Sanatan Dharm).

The Contempt of Court Act, 1971, was made for keeping the administration of justice pure and undefiled.

The Law on Contempt of Court

Contempt of Court can be civil or criminal in nature. Section 12(1) of the Act provides punishment for contempt of court. Section 14(1) provides for the procedure where contempt is in the face of the Supreme Court or High Court: "When it is alleged, or appears to the Supreme Court or High Court upon its own view, that a person has been guilty of contempt committed in its presence or hearing, the

Court may cause such person to be detained in custody and, at any time before the rising of the Court, on the same day, or as early as possible thereafter shall."

With regard to contempt jurisdiction, the Supreme Court has held in Supreme Court Bar Association vs. Union of India (1998) 4 SCC 409 that the plenary power and contempt jurisdiction of the Supreme Court came up for consideration of this Court and in that context Articles 129, 142, 144 and 215 of the Constitution were noticed.

The Court held that the courts of record enjoy power to punish for contempt as part of their inherent jurisdiction; the existence and availability of such power being essential to enable the courts to administer justice according to law in a regular, orderly and effective manner, to uphold the "majesty" of law and to prevent interference in the due administration of justice.

No Act of Parliament can take away that inherent jurisdiction of the Court of Record to punish for contempt. Power to investigate and punish for contempt of itself vesting in the Supreme Court flows from Articles 129 and 142(2) of the Constitution independently of Section 15 of the Contempt of Court Act, 1971.

Rules Governing Contempt Proceedings

In exercise of the powers under Section 23 of the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, read with Article 145 of the Constitution of India and other powers enabling it in this behalf, the Supreme Court has made, with the approval of the President of India, rules called The Rules to Regulate Proceedings for Contempt of the Supreme Court, 1975, which came into force on 29 May 2014.

Part I of the Rules includes Rule 2(1), which says that where contempt is committed in view or presence or hearing of the Court, the contemner may be punished by the Court before which it is committed, either forthwith or on such date as may be appointed by the Court in that behalf. (2) Pending the determination of the charge, the Court may direct that the contemner shall be detained in such custody as it may specify; provided that the contemner may be released on bail on such terms as the Court may direct.

In Part II, Rule 3 says that in the case of contempt other than the contempt referred to in Rule 2, the Court may take action: (a) suo motu, (b) on a petition made by the Attorney General, (c) on a petition made by any person, and in the case of a criminal contempt, with the consent in writing of the Attorney General or the Solicitor General.

Eroding Public Confidence

In State of Andhra Pradesh vs. Dr A Gopal Menon, 1996 (3) ALD 675: 1996 (2) Andh LD (Criminal) 386, it was held that "The test for determination to find out whether this kind of contempt has been committed is the act of having a tendency to pollute the fountain of justice and whether it has a tendency to destroy the confidence of the common man in the administration of justice."

Refusal of Legal Action

With all such provisions and powers prescribed by the law of the land, the refusal of the prescribed legal action against the contemner is blasphemous.

A rejuvenating retreat amid nature's grace in Morni Hills and Tikkar Taal



ASHIM KUMAR GHOSH

Spending two serene days — 3 and 4 October — at Morni Hills and Tikkar Taal in Panchkula district of Haryana was an experience that blended refreshment, learning, and reflection in the lap of nature. Accompanied by my wife, Smt Mitra Ghosh ji, I found these days not merely a break from the routine but an opportunity to reconnect with the environment and rediscover the subtle harmony between nature and the human spirit.

Nestled in the lower Shivalik ranges, Morni Hills offered a mesmerising panorama of lush greenery, mist-kissed mountains, and serene walking trails. The air was crisp, the silence therapeutic, and the calmness deeply rejuvenating. The visit to Tikkar Taal, with its twin lakes surrounded by forested hills, was equally enchanting — an ideal spot for quiet contemplation and observation of local flora and fauna. The experience of boating amidst nature gives one a sense of deep and lasting connection with it.

If one seeks an escape from the crowded plains and wants to reconnect with nature, Morni Hills and Tikkar Taal deserve a place at the top of their travel list. Morni Hills offer a cool climate, scenic vistas, and multiple opportunities for trekking, rock-climbing, and other adventure pursuits — an ideal retreat combining peace and activity.

At an elevation of approximately 3,600 feet, Morni Hills are home to diverse flora and fauna. Pine trees blanket the hilltops, while the slopes are adorned with neem, oak, jamun, and flowering trees that bring colourful views during their bloom. Wildlife and bird-watching enthusiasts, in particular, will appreciate spotting quails, doves, jackals, sambarh, and even jungle cats in these hills.

A highlight, as I mentioned earlier, is the twin lakes known as Tikkar Taal. Though separated by a hillock, the water levels in both remain mysteriously synchronised. Locals regard them as auspicious, with a small temple on their banks containing a Trimurti figure dating back to the 12th century. For visitors, these lakes offer not just tranquillity but scenic beauty and photographic appeal.

The food served at the Mountain Quail Tourist Complex, Morni, and the Tikkar Taal Tourist Complex, Tikkar Taal, under Haryana Tourism, was of excellent quality — sumptuous, flavourful, and truly satisfying. The staff at both



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locations were courteous and attentive, offering commendable service. Their warm hospitality and genuine care for guests reflect the standards every tourist hopes to experience from their hosts.

The region also boasts heritage value. The Morni Fort has been converted into a museum and learning centre, showcasing flora, fauna, and environmental conservation themes. Moreover, an ambitious World Herbal Forest project is underway in Morni, planting hundreds of medicinal species to elevate ecological awareness and tourism appeal.

Let us also take note of the fact that tourists play a far greater role in the local economy than what meets the eye. Every visitor who travels to a destination contributes not only through direct spending on hotels, food, and travel but also through a ripple effect that touches almost every layer of society. Tourism creates jobs, nurtures small businesses, preserves culture, and encourages infrastructural development, making tourists active partners in our collective progress.

When you visit a tourist destination, you bring demand for a wide range of goods and services — from accommodation, transportation, and restaurants to handicrafts, local produce, and entertainment. This demand generates employment opportunities for local residents, including guides, artisans, drivers, and hospitality workers.

The money spent circulates within the community, benefiting farmers, shopkeepers, and service providers alike.

Moreover, tourism stimulates investment in infrastructure such as roads, communication

networks, sanitation, and healthcare, improving living standards not only for tourists but for residents as well. Tourism also preserves local art, crafts, and traditions that might otherwise fade with time. When visitors show appreciation for regional cuisines, music, and handicrafts, it gives artisans both economic support and a sense of pride.

Environmentally responsible tourism promotes eco-awareness and encourages local authorities to conserve natural habitats, wildlife, and heritage sites.

Such practices ensure that development and sustainability go hand in hand. In essence, every tourist acts as a silent ambassador of progress. By choosing to explore responsibly and spend locally, tourists help communities prosper, strengthen cross-cultural understanding, and fuel the inclusive growth of the nation.

Therefore, easily accessible — about 45 km from Chandigarh and less crowded than many other hill destinations — Morni Hills and Tikkar Taal are perfect for weekend getaways or extended stays. Whether you are a nature lover seeking calm, an adventurer seeking thrill, or someone interested in local heritage and ecology, these destinations offer a unique blend of all.

Plan your visit when the weather is pleasant, pack your walking shoes and camera, and experience the charm that Morni Hills and Tikkar Taal so naturally bestow on each visitor!

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GEETA SINGH

For decades, women in Indian sports have battled odds that go far beyond the playing field. Their journeys are marked not only by medals and records but by resilience against cultural bias, lack of infrastructure, unequal pay, and limited representation. Yet, time and again, they have proved that talent and tenacity can overcome even the toughest barriers. From P T Usha's electrifying sprints that made India dream in the 1980s to Mary Kom's world titles in boxing, Saina Nehwal and P V Sindhu's Olympic glory, and Mirabai Chanu's weightlifting triumphs, Indian women have redefined what was once seen as a man's domain. More recently, athletes like Nikhat Zareen, Lovlina Borgohain, and Harmanpreet Kaur have taken the baton forward, proving that women are not just participants — they are pioneers. Yet, beneath these shining achievements lies a challenging reality.

A majority of female athletes in India, especially from small towns and rural areas, continue to face social and financial hurdles. Gender stereotypes persist — girls are often told that sports are "unfeminine" or a distraction from domestic expectations. Even those who make it to national or international platforms often struggle with poor training facilities, lack of sponsorship, and minimal media coverage compared to their male counterparts. The gap begins early. Many talented young girls drop out of sports due to inadequate support systems — from the absence of safe training environments and proper nutrition to limited access to quality coaching. While India's sporting infrastructure is growing, inclusivity remains a challenge. The result: for every celebrated champion, countless others remain unseen, their potential stifled by circumstance.

It is in this backdrop that initiatives like the Stree India Sports Foundation (SISF) and events such as the Stree India Sports Conclave 2025 emerge as beacons of change. At Maharashtra Sadan, New Delhi, the Stree India Sports Conclave 2025 unfolded not just as an event, but as a movement to reclaim space and recognition for women in sports. Organised by SISF, the conclave united athletes, policymakers, educators, and social leaders under one vision — to create a fair, safe, and inclusive sporting ecosystem for women.

The conclave was inaugurated by Shri Pravech Sahib Singh, Cabinet Minister, Government of NCT of Delhi, who set a powerful example by personally adopting five young women athletes, pledging to fund and mentor their journey. His com-



mitment symbolised what genuine allyship looks like in action — not token acknowledgement, but sustained support. A major highlight of the conclave was the launch of SISF's official podcast and website, envisioned as digital platforms to bring to light the stories of women athletes — especially those from small towns and marginalised communities — whose grit often goes unnoticed. The gathering featured an inspiring line-up of icons: Padma Shri Dr Deepa Malik, India's first woman Paralympic medallist; Smt Rivaba Ravindra Singh Jadeja, MLA, Gujarat; Dr Jaideep Arya, Chairman of the Haryana Yog Aayog; Shri Ashok Kumar, Vice Chancellor, Sports University Haryana; and accomplished athletes such as Yogesh Kathuniya, Seema Tomar, and Arundhati Chaudhary. Their presence underscored the collective call for change — from policy to mindset. Smt Geeta Singh, President of SISF, captured the essence of this mission when she said, "When women choose sports, they are often told, 'This is boys' work.' We want to change this mindset because change begins at the foundation. Our mission is to make sports a safe, inclusive space where every woman has the chance to dream, train, and win."

The conclave also included performances by children from Yogasana India, symbolising that the future of sports lies in early encouragement — where discipline meets joy, and ambition meets opportunity.

By the end of the day, the Stree India Sports Conclave 2025 had achieved more than celebration. It had reignited a conversation about equity and empowerment in Indian sports — one that acknowledges the extraordinary women who have paved the way, while demanding systemic reform for those yet to come. If India is to truly become a global sporting powerhouse, it must ensure that every girl with a dream gets the chance to chase it — not despite her gender, but because her nation believes she can win.

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Talking to Taliban

India must be wary of terror groups, even if they are in power

Marked by controversy, Afghanistan’s Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi’s ongoing visit to India was meant to signal a major reset in ties between New Delhi and the Taliban. The visit was his first since the Taliban grabbed power in 2021, as was his meeting with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval. It was made possible by the UN Security Council’s Sanctions committee that waived the travel ban on Mr. Muttaqi, who is on the list of sanctioned terrorists since 2001. New Delhi has strategic reasons for the warm welcome and enhanced relationship. Close ties neutralise the considerable security risk and terror threat from India’s western flank, and protect India’s personnel and considerable investment in projects there. The deterioration in Afghan-Pakistan ties indicates that the Taliban, as an “enemy’s enemy”, could prove a valuable ally. Given that the Taliban now control nearly all of Afghanistan, it would seem pragmatic to engage with them at the level other regional powers including Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian states do. India has announced that it would upgrade the Indian Embassy in Kabul, a “technical mission” thus far, and that both sides will exchange diplomats. This takes India a step closer to recognising the Taliban government, something only Russia has done. India also announced initiatives to build hospitals, provide humanitarian assistance and enhance trade levels. Significantly, both sides “emphasized respect for each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity” – indicating that neither side accepts Pakistan’s territorial claims. Mr. Muttaqi also affirmed that the Afghan government will not allow its territory to be used against India, a considerable shift from 2001-21 when Taliban forces targeted India’s missions and infrastructure projects.

While the text of the joint statement was substantive, the headlines of the visit have been overshadowed by several missteps and poorly structured optics. The press conference at the Afghan Embassy, and the attempt to raise the flag of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was one. It also emerged that no women journalists had been invited, leading to outrage. Two days later, Mr. Muttaqi held another, all-inclusive press conference. The government, which distanced itself from the event, missed an opportunity to express its stand on the wider question of the Taliban’s ban on women’s education and employment, lack of an inclusive political process, treatment of minorities and past attacks by the group. While engaging the Taliban is no doubt important, and vital, for regional security, India must clarify how far it plans to go down the road of appeasing the group, and risking its reputation, towards that end.

Testing governance

National security and ecological responsibility reinforce each other

Fresh impetus for the Sawalkote Hydroelectric Project, planned as a 1.8-GW scheme on the Chenab, coincides with India’s unilateral suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) after the Pahalgam terror attack, giving it a geopolitical symbolism that risks overshadowing questions relating to the environmental impact. The Union Ministries of Power and Home Affairs have repeatedly stressed its strategic value to press for exemptions from impact and carrying capacity studies. But other factors cannot be wished away with a magic wand. The Chenab already hosts the Dulhasti, Baglihar and Salal projects, in a “bumper-to-bumper” hydropower corridor. Ignoring cumulative impact here means underestimating compounded sediment loads and slope instability. The gravity dam proposed at Sawalkote, despite being described as run-of-river, will form a reservoir of over 50,000 crore litres, rendering it functionally closer to a storage dam. Its estimated cost has risen by ₹9,000 crore due to inflation and prolonged administrative uncertainty. The NHPC Limited’s recent record in comparable Himalayan projects shows many schedule slippages and cost overruns. Finally, rehabilitation costs account for just 0.6% of total expenditure whereas nearly 1,500 families will have to be resettled and 847 hectares of forests will have to be diverted.

In strategic terms, the project’s timing signals India’s intent to operationalise its entitlement over western rivers following the IWT’s suspension. Keeping the treaty in abeyance also removed procedural constraints, allowing projects such as Sawalkote and the Wullar Barrage to go ahead. However, this approach risks diminishing India’s credibility as a riparian state that abides by treaties, particularly in fora where it advocates rule-based transboundary governance. Pakistan has already challenged the suspension’s legality *vis-à-vis* the 1960 framework. Should India proceed with multiple large projects without cooperative mechanisms, future negotiations may potentially invite third-party scrutiny – precisely what New Delhi has long resisted. In any case, strategic assertion should come with ecological restraint, and would require regional studies and protocols to manage sediments for all future projects, regardless of treaty status. India should also institutionalise data transparency through regional or multilateral platforms, converting hydrological monitoring from a security risk into a confidence-building measure, which would also align strategic autonomy with stewardship. Sawalkote’s legacy will ultimately depend on whether India realises that national security and ecological responsibility reinforce each other.

Several authors, including us, have argued that a growth rate of 6.5% appears to be the potential growth rate of India as of now. But the first quarter growth rate of 2025-26 is estimated at 7.8%. Does this alter our perception about the potential growth rate?

The first quarter real GDP growth in the post-COVID-19 years, from 2022-23 to 2024-25, has averaged 9.9% as compared to corresponding average levels of the second, third and fourth quarters of 7.0%, 6.9% and 7.5%. Thus, a 7.8% real GDP growth in the first quarter of 2025-26 is below the average for the first quarter of the previous three years. The annual real GDP growth rates for 2022-23 to 2024-25 were at 7.6%, 9.2% and 6.5%, respectively.

On the output side, real GVA growth in the first quarter of 2025-26 was 7.6%. This was also lower than the corresponding average GVA growth of 9.5% in the previous three years. The GVA growth in the first quarter of 2025-26 was largely based on improvements in the growth rates of manufacturing and the three important services sectors. It was mainly in manufacturing that the first quarter 2025-26 growth at 7.7% was higher than average first quarter growth for the previous three years at 5.8%.

Potential growth rate and ICOR

We may note that in the three important service sectors – namely trade, transport and others, financial, real estate and others, and public administration and others, growth rates in the first quarter of 2025-26 were quite high at 8.6%, 9.5% and 9.8%. But these were still lower than their corresponding averages in the previous three years at 12.9%, 11.3% and 13.1%, respectively. An increase in potential growth rate would require a sustained increase in growth in all these sectors. It is also important to note that the real gross fixed capital formation rate (GFCFR) in the first quarter was nearly the same in 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26 at 34.5%, 34.6% and 34.6%, respectively. Thus, there is no structural break.

The estimation of 6.5% as potential growth rate in our article, “Potential growth stays at 6.5%”



C. Rangarajan

is Chairman, Madras School of Economics, and former Governor, Reserve Bank of India



D.K. Srivastava

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Positive and negative forces may balance themselves out, leaving a figure that is close to 6.5%

(*The Hindu-BusinessLine*, July 4, 2025) is based on the behaviour of GFCFR and Incremental Capital-Output Ratio (ICOR). While the GFCFR does not fluctuate too much, the ICOR is very volatile. The probable reason is that it is not estimated independently. It is derived from dividing the real GFCFR by real GDP growth rate. Thus, the fluctuations in growth get reflected in the ICOR. It is notable that the real GFCFR has been stable at 33.6%, 33.5%, and 33.7% of GDP during 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25, respectively. Using an average ICOR on the GFCFR, the potential growth rate may be derived. With the GFCFR remaining at an average of 33.6% and an ICOR of 5.2, the potential growth rate remains at around 6.5%. For potential growth to rise above this level, it is important that the GFCFR improves tangibly above this average level for the previous three years or the ICOR falls below 5.2.

It may be noted that growth rates and the ICOR have been volatile in recent years because of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent adjustments. In estimating India’s potential growth rate, one has to look at its performance over a much longer period. India’s real GDP growth rate during 2011-12 to 2023-24 averaged 6.1%. In assessing a country’s growth potential one may have to give greater weight to recent performance.

On public sector investment

The ICOR is a reflection of how efficiently capital is used. Technology and management ultimately determine the ICOR. One can be confident of sustained higher growth only if fixed capital formation rate goes up. A recent phenomenon in gross fixed capital formation is the bigger role played by government expenditure. In recent years, the share of the public sector in total real GFCF has increased from 21.6% in 2021-22 to 25.1% in 2023-24. Public sector investment is largely focused on infrastructure which has a high sectoral ICOR.

The surge in public sector investment was largely led by the central government. However, that momentum appears to be slowing down.

A green transition accelerating at express speed

The successful trial of India’s first hydrogen-powered coach at the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) in July 2025 is more than a technological breakthrough. It is a testament to Indian Railways’ accelerating green transition.

As one of the largest rail networks in the world, the Indian Railways is undertaking a transformation with few global parallels, with the aim of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2030, four decades ahead of the national target.

This ambitious shift is not just limited to clean energy adoption but also extends to a fundamental rethinking of infrastructure, operations and financing models, placing the Indian Railways at the forefront of India’s sustainable development agenda.

With over 24 million passengers and three million tonnes of freight moved daily, the decarbonisation of India’s railways has direct implications for national climate targets.

The initiatives undertaken

In the last 10 years, the Railways has electrified close to 45,000 kilometres of its broad gauge network. As a result, over 98% of its broad gauge network stands electrified, reducing diesel dependence and cutting emissions sharply. The transition is complemented by large-scale renewable integration, with 553 MW of solar, 103 MW of wind and 100 MW of hybrid capacity (756 MW in total) already commissioned. More than 2,000 stations and service buildings are powered by solar energy, while several railway buildings, including in the Northeast Frontier zone, have secured the Bureau of Energy Efficiency’s “Shunya” net-zero label. Innovation in clean traction is exemplified by the first hydrogen-powered train, part of a wider “Hydrogen for Heritage” initiative to deploy 35 such units.

Parallel measures include shifting freight from road to rail to raise its modal share to 45% by 2030, introducing biofuel blends, constructing green buildings, and operationalising Dedicated Freight Corridors which are expected to avert 457 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) over 30 years. These steps signal a technological



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If done right, the decarbonisation plan of the Indian Railways can prove that state-run systems can bring about change without derailing fiscal discipline

transformation and a systemic reimagining of the Indian Railways as a climate-positive backbone of national mobility.

Climate finance takes the main line

The decarbonisation drive is increasingly underpinned by a robust and evolving green finance architecture. Since FY2023, the government has issued sovereign green bonds worth ₹58,000 crore, with the transport sector emerging as a major beneficiary. According to data from the Ministry of Finance, approximately ₹42,000 crore has been allocated for the procurement of electric locomotives and metro and suburban rail expansions. These allocations integrate climate objectives into the very core of capital budgeting.

At the institutional level, the Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) has played a pivotal role in mobilising climate aligned capital. Beginning with its \$500 million green bond issuance in 2017 which was utilised for the re-financing procurement of electric locomotives, the IRFC has steadily expanded its green financing footprint. Most recently, it extended a ₹7,500 crore loan to NTPC Green Energy for the development of renewable power capacity, signalling a growing trend of cross-sectoral financing aimed at strengthening India’s low-carbon infrastructure.

Multilateral agencies have also supported the green transition of the Indian Railways. In June 2022, the World Bank approved a \$245 million loan for the Rail Logistics Project, aimed at enhancing rail freight infrastructure, decongesting corridors and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Yet, more can be done. The first priority is to match electrification with genuinely decarbonised electricity. If the additional traction power is drawn from a coal-heavy grid, climate gains will be diluted. A solution lies in directly procuring large volumes of renewable energy through long-term contracts with solar and wind producers, a step that has already seen some progress. This would ensure that “green trains” are powered by truly green power, making emissions reductions real rather than notional.

Growth in the Centre’s capital expenditure was at 39.4%, 24.4%, and 28.9% in 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24, respectively. However, this growth fell to 10.8% in 2024-25.

In order to increase the potential growth rate above 6.5%, we will need to increase the GFCFR by about 2% points from the recent average GFCFR which is around 34%. This will call for an increase in the share of real investment of the private corporate sector in total GFCF which has fallen from 37% to 34.4%, during 2021-22 to 2023-24. This may be supplemented by a reduction in the ICOR.

Prospects of growth

Some of the influences that may affect the long-term potential growth on the positive side would include the impact of changing technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Gen AI. On the negative side, there would be the impact of a growing share of capital consumption as capital stock becomes older and new technologies call for a replacement of old capital at a faster rate. These forces may balance themselves out, leaving India’s long term potential growth close to 6.5%.

The global trade environment also remains challenging for India. Given the tariff and supply chain uncertainties, much depends on the pace at which India is able to diversify its trade destinations and investment sources globally. After remaining positive for the previous four consecutive quarters, the contribution of net exports turned negative at (-)1.4% points in the first quarter of 2025-26. This trend is likely to continue. We may recognise that a potential growth rate of 6.5% is, in the present world environment, a reasonably high level, although for creating a higher growth of employment, we do need to push our potential growth further. For this, we need to get the private investment rate to move up. Policymakers need to address this issue at the aggregate and sectoral levels. They must understand what is holding back private investment and suggest appropriate remedies.

The views expressed are personal

Second, last-mile connectivity must be approached with a climate lens. Railway stations should evolve into multi-modal green hubs, seamlessly integrating electric buses, bicycle-sharing networks and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. For freight, the low-carbon advantage of rail must be preserved through cleaner first-and-last-mile links, whether through electric trucks, Liquefied natural gas-powered vehicles, or emerging hydrogen mobility solutions.

Third, rolling stock innovation must keep pace with global benchmarks. Hydrogen fuel cell trains could be piloted on select non-electrified branch and heritage lines where full electrification is not cost-effective. In parallel, the adoption of lightweight coaches, aerodynamic locomotive designs and Artificial Intelligence-driven energy optimisation systems can reduce traction energy needs and improve operational efficiency.

Finally, technology alone will not drive transformation; behavioural change is equally critical. Green certification for trains, carbon labelling of freight services and public awareness campaigns can make passengers and businesses conscious participants in climate action. With its vast daily reach, the Indian Railways can shape public perception of sustainable mobility in a way no other transport system can.

Meeting the challenge

By 2030, if the net zero target is achieved, Indian Railways could prevent over 60 million tonnes of annual CO₂ emissions which is equivalent to taking 13 million cars off the road. The financial case is equally compelling: electrification and energy efficiency measures are projected to generate cumulative fuel cost savings of over ₹1 lakh crore by the end of the decade.

The challenge is not in setting targets but in mobilising and managing the capital to meet them. Done right, India’s railway decarbonisation plan could become a global benchmark, proving that large, state-run transport systems can transition to low-carbon operations without derailing fiscal discipline.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Beyond the accord

The Gaza peace accord marks a hopeful step, but peace without reconstruction is incomplete. The world’s attention must now shift from ceasefire diplomacy to rebuilding lives and livelihoods. Hospitals, schools and civic infrastructure lie in ruins, while thousands of small traders and resellers – once the city’s economic lifeline – have lost everything. World leaders and international agencies must fix clear responsibilities for humanitarian relief and reconstruction. Without rebuilding Gaza, the accord risks becoming a hollow promise. Real peace begins

when the displaced return home and hope is restored.

Gopalaswamy J.,
Chennai

End this war

In his second tenure, U.S. President Donald Trump has done quite a marvellous job in terms of brokering peace. As a peace-loving nonagenarian, one hopes that Mr. Trump does his best now to stop the Russia-Ukraine war. My wish is that the new year should begin with some good news on this front.

Mani Nataraajan,
Chennai

Press meet in Delhi

The incident where women journalists were neither

invited nor allowed into a ‘males only media professionals’ press conference held by the Afghanistan delegation in New Delhi was shocking. The delegation might have tried damage control by holding a second press conference but what happened earlier was not in good taste. There are many stalwarts among women journalists and one fails to understand why the Afghan delegation did what it did. The explanation of it being due to a “technical error” is weak. It is true that the Indian government had nothing to do with the press conference but there should have been a statement of regret. The male journalists

ought to have walked out of the press conference but why they appeared disinterested is best known to them.

J.P. Reddy,
Nalgonda, Telangana

Under lock and key

On October 12, my family and I set out from Manamadurai in Tamil Nadu to visit the Aralipparai Murugan temple in Sivangangi district. We were there from 7.45 a.m. to 9 a.m., but, to our great disappointment, found the temple closed. On making enquiries in the village, we were informed that a certain priest has the key to the sanctum (*karuvurai*) and that he pays a visit

occasionally to perform the pooja. No one had any further details. There were no sign boards or contact details at the temple to help devotees find out who to approach or what the temple timings or methods of access are. The temple is a very ancient Murugan temple and it is appropriate that arrangements are made to have at least three poojas a day or ensure that the temple lamps are lit on a regular basis. From what we gathered, it appears that the temple is managed by some individual or private entity, which makes it unclear why such an important responsibility and the temple key should be given

to a person who is not available.

Senpagaraja P.,
Manamadurai, Tamil Nadu

Celebrate and clean up

Deepavali is just days away and one is sure to find burnt firecracker litter and waste the next day. If we look forward to the freedom to enjoy the festival without a ban on firecrackers, is it not our responsibility too to ensure that we clean up the firecracker waste? Why are we selfish in leaving the task to conservancy workers?

R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

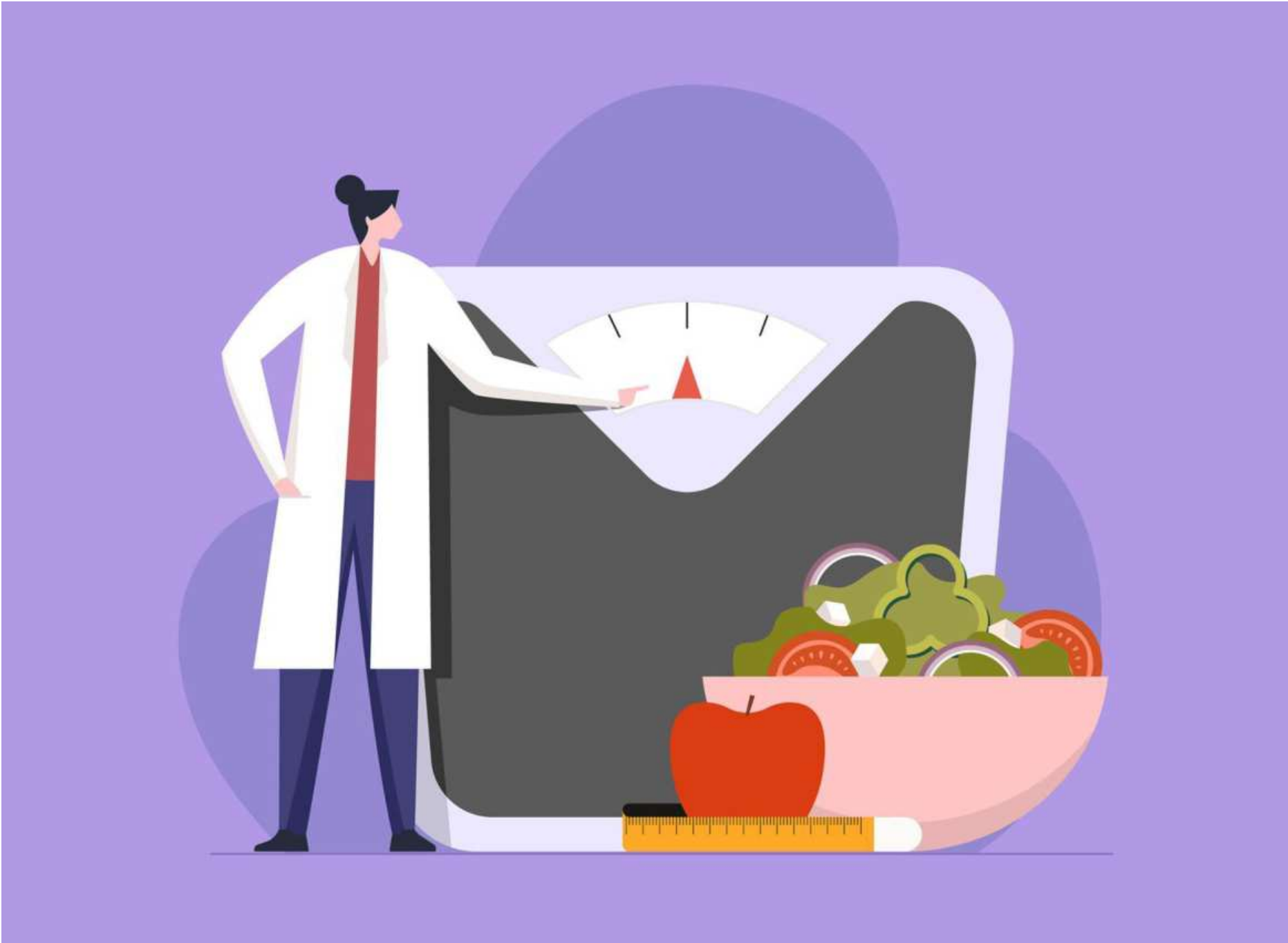
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THE HINDU

47,126 A recent survey by the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation found that the city has 47,126 stray dogs, about 3.62% of its 13 lakh population. Of these, 23,047 are males and 15,552 females. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

KEYWORD



GETTY IMAGES

Counting calories: a brief history of how the unit of food was conceptualised

Science alone didn’t make the calorie a household name. Fashion did. Physician Lulu Hunt Peters, in her blockbuster book, brilliantly linked calorie counting to the trendy ‘flapper’ ideal: a thin, boyish figure that symbolised a modern, liberated lifestyle

Jahnavi Phalkey

Ever glanced at the back of a food packet and seen that bold number staring back at you? Calories. For over a century, this single unit has dominated our conversations about food, health, and weight. We count them, burn them, and often, feel guilty about them. But have you ever wondered where this powerful little number came from? The story is a fascinating journey involving French chemists, German physiologists, American innovators, and surprising facts you won’t find on any food label.

How ‘calorie’ came to be
The story begins not in a kitchen, but in a Parisian laboratory in the 1780s. The brilliant French chemist Antoine Lavoisier proposed a radical idea: breathing is a form of combustion, just like a candle burning. To prove it, he and his colleague Pierre-Simon Laplace built a device called an ice calorimeter, large enough to house a guinea pig. By measuring the heat the animal produced (by how much ice it melted), they linked the energy of life to the physics of heat. Soon after, the word “calorie,” from Latin for heat, was coined

to measure this energy.
For decades, the calorie remained a tool for physicists and engineers. Its journey into our diets began with a German baron, Justus von Liebig, who was concerned about malnourishment. In the 1840s, he developed a concentrated beef extract to provide cheap, energy-rich food for the poor: a product we know today as the Oxo cube. His students, inspired by his work, began meticulously measuring the energy the human body extracted from different foods. One of them, Max Rubner, established that proteins, fats, and carbohydrates could be measured by their equivalent heat value. This simple idea – that different foods could be compared through a single number – laid the groundwork for every diet fad to come.
The calorie truly went global when an American chemist, Wilbur Olin Atwater, who studied in Germany brought the science back to the U.S. In the 1890s, he published influential government bulletins that calculated the energy values of hundreds of foods. It was Atwater who established the capitalised “Calorie” (actually a kilocalorie, or 1,000 small calories) that we now see on U.S. food labels.

But science alone didn’t make the calorie a household name. Fashion did. In the roaring twenties, physician Lulu Hunt Peters published her blockbuster book, *Diet and Health*. She brilliantly linked calorie counting to the trendy “flapper” ideal: a thin, boyish figure that symbolised a modern, liberated lifestyle. Suddenly, counting calories wasn’t just for scientists; it was a chic tool for self-transformation. The ordinary act of eating was forever changed, governed by arithmetic.
However, the original motivation for counting calories wasn’t personal health or beauty. It was about social control and efficiency. Early nutritionists studied prisoners, factory workers, and the impoverished to determine the minimum amount of fuel needed to keep them productive without causing food riots. The goal was to find the cheapest way to feed the masses in institutions such as schools, the military, and workhouses.
A question of justice – how to feed the hungry – was reframed as a problem of cost and management.
Looking beyond
Today, science is revealing the limits of this 18th-century idea. The simple model

of “calories in, calories out” is being challenged. We now know that the numbers on food labels are averages, with significant margins of error. More importantly, our bodies are not simple furnaces. How we absorb energy depends on our unique genes, gut bacteria, and even the way food is cooked. Not all calories are created equal; 200 calories of almonds are processed very differently from 200 calories of fizzy drink.
The future of nutrition lies in a more personalised and complex understanding. Fields such as nutrigenomics are exploring how our individual genetic makeup interacts with the food we eat. We are slowly moving away from the simple act of counting and towards understanding the intricate relationships within our bodies.
Calories gave us a language to talk about food energy, but it’s a language that’s now due for an update. So, the next time you look at that number on a label, remember its rich and complicated history – a story of guinea pigs, beef cubes, and flappers – and know that we are far more complex than a simple calculation.
Jahnavi Phalkey is the founding director, Science Gallery Bengaluru.

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on the Cuban Missile Crisis

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1
The Cuban Missile Crisis lasted from October 16 to 28, 1962. It began when U.S. spy planes photographed Soviet nuclear missile sites being built in Cuba. This was because Fidel Castro had agreed to host Soviet missiles as a deterrent against another U.S. invasion after the failed _____ attack in 1961. Fill in the blanks.
QUESTION 2
The crisis was resolved when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev agreed to withdraw the missiles from Cuba in exchange for the U.S. pledging to not do what?
QUESTION 3
While it wasn’t known at the time, U.S. President John F. Kennedy — for his country’s part in the missile crisis — secretly agreed to remove the 15 Jupiter missiles his government had installed in _____ by

March 1962, in the face of stiff opposition from Kennedy’s senior advisors. Fill in the blank with the name of the country.
QUESTION 4
One of the more popular outcomes of the Cuban Missile Crisis was the nuclear _____, a direct and secure communications link between the Pentagon and the Kremlin. While it’s also been called the “red telephone”, it was never a telephone: it was first a teleprinter, than a fax machine, and since 2008 a computer link supporting a form of email. Fill in the blank.
QUESTION 5
The crisis prompted American, British, and Soviet negotiators to ramp up their efforts, and thus they came up with the Partial Test Ban Treaty, which would prevent _____ nuclear testing. While Khrushchev was keen to defuse the crisis, he was concerned that this ban would give the U.S. the upper hand because the USSR was better versed with this form of testing. Fill in the blank.



Visual question:
The name of this gemstone is also the name sometimes given to the scandal involving a KGB member who defected to the U.S. in 1961 and who was key to the U.S. government uncovering the Soviets’ missile build-up in Cuba. Name the scandal.

Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz: 1. In 2025, four faculty of this U.S. institution have won the award in a single year. **Ans: University of California**
2. The latest category of the Nobel was established by this entity. **Ans: Economic sciences; Sveriges Riksbank (Sweden’s central bank)**
3. The last time there was no Nobel Prize for this category was in 1972. **Ans: Peace**
4. This category has had the most laureates with 232 since inception. **Ans: Medicine**
5. The last individual to win a second Nobel prize. It was in this category. **Ans: K. Barry Sharpless in Chemistry (2001 and 2022)**
6. The common link between the five Peace laureates. **Ans: They were all under arrest at the time of the award of the Nobel Prize**
7. The surname of the only siblings to have won the Nobel Prize, with one sharing the 1969 Economics prize and the other the 1973 Medicine prize. **Ans: Tinbergen**
Visual: Identify this man. **Ans: Le Duc Tho**
Early Birds: Sujith. BJ Gargi Ahirrao| Tito Shiladitya| Sukdev Shet| Tamal Biswas



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

Upendran

“How is Chennai?”
“Terrible. It is hot and sticky. And what’s worse, there’s an acute power shortage right now.”
“Power shortage! I believe that’s a chronic problem in Chennai.”
“I don’t know if it’s a chronic problem, but right now it’s an acute problem. In some areas, on some nights, there is no power for hours together.”
“Anyway, what’s the difference between ‘chronic’ and ‘acute’?”
“When you say something is a chronic problem, it means that it stays or lingers for a long time. For example, there is a chronic shortage of housing in Bombay.”
“Meaning, finding a house in Bombay is always a problem?”
“You could say that!”
“There’s a chronic water problem in Hyderabad. Can I say that?”
“You can! Here’s another example. My neighbour has a chronic knee problem.”
“Tell me, what does ‘acute’ mean?”
“When you say there’s an acute power shortage in Chennai, it means there’s a severe shortage of power. This severe shortage may have come about all of a sudden and may last only temporarily. Whereas when you say that something is a ‘chronic’ problem...”
“... it’s a problem that has existed for some time.”
“Exactly! My neighbour has a chronic knee problem. The pain becomes acute on the days it rains.”
“Last year my father’s company made a lot of money. During the past two months they’ve had acute financial problems.”
“Excellent example. My friend felt acutely embarrassed when he slipped on the banana peel and fell.”
“Meaning he felt extremely embarrassed?”
“Right!”
“Gopa is a chronic complainer. He always has an inquiry about everything you say.”
“Not an ‘inquiry’, but a ‘query’ about everything you say.”
“A what?”
“Q...u...e...r...y. The ‘ue’ is pronounced like the ‘ea’ in ‘ear’, ‘fear’ and ‘dear’. The ‘i’ in the second syllable is pronounced like the ‘i’ in ‘fit’, ‘pit’ and ‘bit’.”
“What’s the difference between ‘query’ and ‘enquiry’?”
“When you make a ‘query’, what you are basically doing is asking a question.”
“A single question?”
“Yes. One of our clients had a query and we sent him to the Manager.”
“When our Principal announced the new rules and regulations, there were several queries from concerned parents.”
“The new Minister was unable to answer the query.”
“That’s nothing unusual. You become a Minister to make money.”
“And once you make your money there’ll be an enquiry.”
“What does ‘enquiry’ mean?”
“When you enquire about something, you ask for information about something. So you could end up asking one question or more than one question.”
Published in The Hindu on June 2, 1998.

Word of the day

Languish:
lose vigour, health, or flesh, as through grief; have a desire for something or someone who is not present; become feeble
Synonyms: pine away, waste, ache, yearn, fade

Usage: The prisoner has been languishing for years in the dungeon.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/languishpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈlæŋ.gwɪʃ/

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The rise of hope

Prisoner release by Hamas, a tentative step for peace

For the hundreds of Israelis who poured into the streets of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem early on Monday to welcome the 20 hostages released by Hamas, the moment came two years too late. Equally, for the scores of Palestinians who have returned to northern Gaza since last Friday’s ceasefire, all that awaits in place of their homes is rubble under which their loved ones are still buried.



Yet, on both sides, there is a rare if fragile sense of relief — and even a flicker of gratitude towards US President Donald Trump, whose 20-point peace plan is, against all odds, beginning to take shape in the region this week. In exchange for the release of hostages by Hamas, Israel shall free nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners — a scale of exchange unseen in decades. Trump’s team has managed what the international community could not for 736 days: a ceasefire and an initial framework for dialogue after a war that has claimed an estimated 70,000 lives, most of them women and children in Gaza. Multiple factors have contributed to forcing the plan including Israel’s growing international isolation and strategic overreach including bombing of a residential neighbourhood in Qatar. The stunning military strike in Doha, which provoked outrage across the Gulf, reportedly spurred Trump and his advisers to lean heavily on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to accept a truce. However, there is understandable scepticism regarding the long-term plausibility of the peace plan.

Netanyahu’s intransigence and Trump’s idiosyncratic approach to diplomacy have left many doubting the plan’s durability. The President’s negotiating team — property developer Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner — replaced seasoned diplomats, while Qatar, Egypt and Turkey assumed the role of intermediaries. The arrangement has produced results, for now. There would yet be obvious obstacles to the phased peace plan that these negotiators have hammered out, starting with the overwhelming presence of the Israel Defence Force (IDF) in Gaza which is expected to withdraw. Netanyahu has already indicated that the forces will remain till Hamas disarms. Hamas has agreed to hand over the hostages but whether it will completely disarm is arguable.

There is also a visible lack of consensus on the proposed Gaza authority which is to be governed by a temporary committee of Palestinians and international experts and overseen by a board of peace chaired by Trump until control can be handed over to a “reformed” Palestinian Authority (PA). While Hamas has been pointedly excluded from this, the plan is also not acceptable to Netanyahu who, even while standing next to Trump at the White House last month, has opposed the PA *per se* — unless it undergoes a “radical and genuine transformation”. These issues, along with the sequencing of withdrawals and aid deliveries, are expected to dominate the summit in Egypt, where Trump, Netanyahu and PA president Mahmoud Abbas are due to meet. The Cairo meet brings hope to a region ravaged by war.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



Creating balance in India-EU FTA

CHECKLIST. India should shield exports from excessive environmental rules; ensure EU climate finance promises are met



SANGEETA GODBOLE

While US tariffs have hogged headlines, the end of 2025 deadline for India-EU Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) looms large. India has consistently sought a “balanced and mutually beneficial” FTA. That balance is key. Potential headlines such as “EU reduces tariffs on 99 per cent of goods, India on 94 per cent” hide the fact that nearly 80 per cent of Indian exports to the EU even now face miniscule tariffs below 1 per cent. The only sector with genuine scope for gains is textiles, now under pressure from US tariffs. Agri-goods look less promising since EU tariffs are complicated, and access based on shifting standards.

Since talks resumed, the EU has added several new chapters on non-trade areas such as state-owned enterprises, energy, transparency, sustainable food systems, and anti-corruption. These go far beyond the single “Trade and Sustainable Development” chapter that existed before 2013. India has resisted these demands.

A Chief Trade Enforcement Officer has been recently appointed in Brussels to monitor compliance. India has no comparable structure, creating an inevitable asymmetry.

The EU is increasingly aggressive in enforcing its FTAs. It now pressures partners on issues ranging from coal use to alcohol taxes and labour laws. Countries such as Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Canada have been forced to amend domestic laws and ratify ILO conventions because of EU demands.

CRAFTING A BALANCE

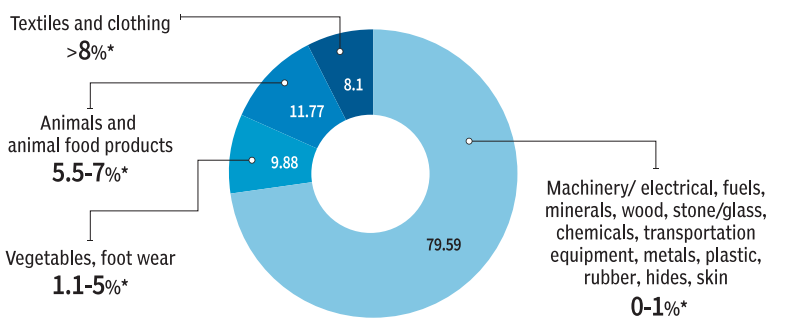
Since the BTIA will tilt towards the EU both in market access and in non-trade commitments, India requires balancing provisions to find compelling value in the BTIA. Some possible asks in non-trade issues are:

Investment-linked trade access: EU investment in green sectors under India’s Paris Agreement commitments should be tied to tariff concessions. Real climate finance has been missing, while EU companies spend crores on doubtful carbon credits claiming green action.



India’s exports to EU in 2022 (% share)

*EU applied tariff range



Source: Author’s calculations, WITS database, Sep 12, 2025

Such commitments will enable to act as the climate leader in deed.

Regulatory carve-outs: India’s exports must be shielded from excessive EU environmental rules such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), the Deforestation Regulation, and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive. These rules are already straining EU industry, especially SMEs, and risk pushing production outside Europe. The EU has carved out exemptions for the US. Granting exemptions to the biggest polluter on the one hand, and pushing developing country imports to submit to one-sided regulatory burdens, will prove a dampener on whatever little tariff

By constantly expanding the non-trade agenda and dragging talks for almost two decades, the EU has lost valuable market share in India

advantage is gained through the BTIA

Equal say in rule changes: India should be consulted whenever EU regulations affecting its exports are amended. Brussels is keen on influencing public policy of its partner countries through its market-muscle. Consultations built into the FTA would obviate the constant tussle with each relevant partner. For instance, CBAM challenged formally and informally; EUDR challenged formally and so on.

Safeguards in dispute settlement: Any attempt by the EU to raise non-trade issues which are outside the DS (Dispute Settlement) chapter should allow India to reverse trade concessions. While EU avers one thing in the texts, it begins consultations/disputes on areas that were never meant for being disputed. Korea was quite surprised with the auto dispute based on labour rights. Vietnam would have to lower taxes on alcohol, or that it would have to change its labour laws so fundamentally pursuant to the FTA.

Such guardrails would prevent EU’s non-state actors from misusing FTA

Identifying vital aspects that sustain growth

The Laureates Mokyr, Aghion, Howitt explain the role of innovation, prescriptive knowledge, creative destruction

ECONOMICS NOBEL.

Amaresh Samantaraya

The Nobel Prize in Economics for 2025 has been awarded to Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt. The award recognises their contribution in explaining long-run sustained economic growth through the self-generating process of innovations, as also the institutional mechanisms supporting innovations and creative destruction. Vital insights drawn from their work can help the world avert economic stagnation as witnessed prior to the Industrial Revolution in Britain.

Leading OECD members such as the US, the UK and Germany have been successful in sustaining economic growth for almost the last two centuries. The standard of living of their citizens has improved remarkably. Maintaining per capita income growth of 3 per cent can help citizens of a country to double their standard of living every quarter of a century. Theories of economic growth explain the various contributory factors, and several economists in the past have received the Nobel for their valuable contribution in this area.

Robert Solow, who won the Nobel in 1987, explained long-term economic growth in a country largely through

accumulation of factors of production and improvement in total factor productivity (TFP). The latter is mainly driven by innovation and improvement in the skills of labour through education and training.

While Solow treated technical change as exogenous, Paul M Romer (Nobel winner in 2018) explained the process of innovation through R&D, as part of the production process in an economy driven by the profit-maximising behaviour of the producers. The Nobel laureates of 2024, Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James A Robinson, identified the role of inclusive institutions as a fundamental factor in creating a conducive atmosphere for entrepreneurs and workers to contribute their best towards promoting long-term economic prosperity.

The contributions of this year’s Nobel laureates in this regard are summarized below:

Role of prescriptive knowledge: Based on historical evidence, Joel Mokyr underscored that innovation (new idea) *per se* is not enough to sustain growth. He distinguished propositional knowledge — which describes working of something — from prescriptive knowledge — which entails a blueprint to explain why and how something does work. Mokyr cited innovations or enlightenment in the form of



GROWTH DRIVERS. Vital contribution by Nobel Laureates REUTERS

propositional knowledge, that occurred in Sweden and the UK during the 14th to 18th centuries, which did not translate to sustained growth. On the contrary since the Industrial Revolution, manifested ideas found practical application and commercialisation use, which in turn stimulated newer ideas facilitating a continuous flow of ideas and their applications. This was vital for sustaining growth.

A macroeconomic model of innovation: In their oft-cited 1992 paper, Aghion and Howitt developed a macroeconomic model that linked investment in R&D to household savings and financial market. The state of the economy, in turn, influences the saving behaviour and the financial market conditions. Thus, they have taken into account the interlinkages amongst

texts with innovative interpretations and increase trust in EU.

Health emergencies: EU must agree to TRIPS waivers for medicines and vaccines in crises, necessary for the health of populations of the entire global south. The commitment should entail an automatic TRIPS waiver for related pharmaceutical products from EU companies once a pandemic has been declared by the WHO.

Consumption cuts: The EU should commit to per capita consumption cuts in line with India’s LiFE principles, for fundamental climate action. EU’s per capita consumption is way above global averages. Social cost of carbon in \$220 per tonne of carbon US Environmental Protection Agency.

Climate finance: EU promises on climate finance must be implemented and be subject to review. In 2023 EU applied only €0.1 billion of its ETS (Emissions Trading System) €46.7 billion revenues on international finance. If tied to trade and market access, EU will have to prioritise its climate finance promises. That will help EU stand true to its promises and in its bid to be seen as the chief global actor in the arena of climate change. Investment in India will give much better returns in terms of emissions reduction.

A NARROWING WINDOW

The BTIA has been under negotiation for nearly 20 years. India has moved forward, while the EU has lost ground both in India’s market and in its own manufacturing strength. The imbalance is stark: India gives the EU a growing market, while EU’s own growth is under question.

By constantly expanding the non-trade agenda and dragging talks for almost two decades, the EU has lost valuable market share in India. In 2010, its share of India’s imports was almost 12 per cent. By 2025 it had dropped to just over 8 per cent, while China’s rose sharply to over 15 per cent. At the same time, India’s own manufacturing has strengthened, while Europe’s reliance on China has only grown.

If EU industry and policymakers continue to chase regulatory overreach, they may miss out altogether. For Europe, the smartest move now is to recognise how much the ground has shifted, accept a fair deal, and conclude the agreement with the world’s fastest-growing economy.

The writer is former IRS and trade negotiator. She researches and teaches the intersection of environment and trade governance

Rethinking takedown laws

Sahyog can be recast vis-a-vis new Section 69A

Mahwash Fatima

Recently, in X Corp. v. Union of India, the Karnataka High Court upheld the government’s use of the Sahyog portal — a digital platform for content takedown requests. While the court treated Sahyog as a valid administrative tool, its ruling went further: it endorsed a parallel system of takedowns under Section 79(3) of the IT Act, sidestepping the safeguards built into Section 69A.

In doing so, it brushed aside principles of due process recognised by the Supreme Court in its landmark Shreya Singhal judgment. The real issue, however, is not the portal itself but the law behind it: India’s takedown regime is increasingly out of step with the demands of a digital democracy, where both state accountability and citizen rights need stronger guardrails.

The portal itself is not the problem. The problem is that it has been tied to a legislative route that lacks adequate checks. By giving officials powers to order takedowns without transparency, oversight, or independent review, the system leaves wide scope for arbitrary use.

Interpreting Section 79(3)(b), meant to be the legal shield that ensures platforms are not held liable for what users post, as an independent takedown authority flips this protection on its head, stretching the statute far beyond what Parliament ever intended.

Section 69A embeds strong procedural safeguards to ensure transparency, accountability, and recourse for affected parties, but these protections come at a cost. The elaborate procedure slows the takedown process, meaning that by the time safeguards are observed, unlawful content may already have gone viral and caused irreparable harm.

By contrast, Sahyog’s workflows are entirely digital and automated with no requirement for explanations or review. The mechanisms under Section 69A and Section 79(3) thus sit at opposite ends of the spectrum. One is burdened with procedure and delay and the other functions without any procedural guardrails whatsoever.

The Karnataka High Court’s judgment appears to endorse the government’s intent to move away from the stricter safeguards of Section 69A. At first glance, this is troubling. A closer reading, however, shows the Court acknowledging the real challenge of unlawful content spreading rapidly before procedural steps



TAKEDOWN RULES. Platform design plays a crucial role/ISTOCKPHOTO

are completed. The answer, though, is not to legitimize takedowns without checks, but to update the legislative framework for today’s digital ecosystem. What is needed is a statutory rethink that retains the efficiency and intent of the Sahyog Portal, while embedding safeguards that balance urgency with accountability. Only then can the portal’s purpose be achieved without undermining due process or free expression.

What could such a framework look like? First, takedown powers must be anchored in primary legislation, not delegated rules. Second, Section 79(3) should be restored to its original purpose, ie, safe harbour immunity, subject to compliance with lawful orders.

Instead, Sahyog’s role could be recast within an amended Section 69A under a two-track model: (i) Emergency Blocking Orders for imminent harms like incitement or terror content, issued by a narrowly defined set of trained officers and subject to automatic expiry and mandatory review, and (ii) Standard Takedown Orders for all other unlawful content, processed under clear statutory procedures with notice, reasoned orders, and independent review. In every case, orders should clearly state the legal ground justifying the restriction on free speech.

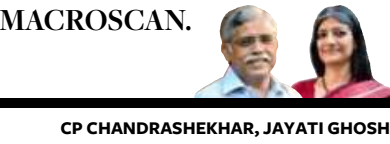
But in an increasingly digital world where information spreads at lightning speed, harm prevention cannot rely on takedowns alone. The longer-term solution lies in redesigning platform incentives, encouraging product choices and architectures that slow virality, curb amplification of harmful content and reward responsible behaviour online. A modernised framework must therefore go hand in hand with nudges that push platforms to be designed better. Only then can urgency, accountability, and systemic safety coexist.

The writer is Manager at the public policy firm The Quantum Hub (TQH)

Wage trends: A complex picture

Global wage growth continues to lag behind GDP growth, but wage inequality seems to have come down, thanks to China

MACROSCAN.



CP CHANDRASHEKHAR, JAYATI GHOSH

Recent research from the ILO delivers some very interesting new results about the trends in global real wages and their distribution (Global Wage Report 2024-25, ILO, Geneva). The Report finds that — contrary to widespread perception — wage inequality has actually been decreasing across the world and in most regions since the turn of the century.

Using recent survey data on hourly wages for 82 countries, which together account for about 76 per cent of the global population of wage employees, the report examines both trends in average wages and how they are distributed across region and by gender. The first important point to note is expressed in Chart 1, which shows annual real (constant price) growth in GDP and real wages for the world economy as a whole.

Real GDP growth has been faster than real wage growth, pointing to the continued tendency for wage shares of national income to fall. Indeed, the Report finds that on average, labour productivity in high-income countries increased more rapidly than real wages over the period 1999-2024 (29 per cent compared to 15 per cent).

However, the picture of global wage growth is hugely influenced by the trend in China, which outperformed the rest of the world by far. Since China accounts for around one-third of the wage workers covered in this survey (32 per cent in both years), it serves to push up the impression of significant real wage improvement in the world as a whole.

CHINA’S WAGE GROWTH

Chart 2 makes this clear: throughout the period from 2006 to 2024, real wages in China grew much faster than in the rest of the world. While the gap in growth rates has reduced over time, it still remains significant, at more than double.

Chart 3 shows that China’s real wage trends have been exceptional even when compared to other Asian countries that are widely perceived to be “success stories” in recent decades, such as India, Thailand and Vietnam. Among these countries, only Vietnam shows anything approaching Chinese trends in real wage increases. The wage growth data for Vietnam however do show greater volatility, which may also reflect data gaps.

Meanwhile, India and Thailand both show less impressive real wage growth. And in both countries it has declined substantially in recent years, especially in the period of the Covid-19 pandemic and after.

One very interesting set of results in the Report relates to wage dispersion. The Report provides the first comprehensive assessment of trends in global wage distribution, of course with all the caveats that such global datasets necessarily require.

The ILO is fortunately aware that such estimates of wages based on paid employment are necessarily inadequate indicators of labour incomes because of the significance of non-wage workers in many parts of the world, particularly in middle and low income countries.

In such countries, non-wage workers — including employers, own-account workers, contributing family workers or workers in cooperatives — represent a large proportion and often the majority of workers, such as in South Asia and Sub Saharan Africa.

The Report uses the latest available data from around 2020 for about 50 countries to show that the dominant employment status in low- and middle-income countries is that of



REAL GAINS. Wage inequality has reduced since 2006

non-wage workers, while they are in the minority in high-income countries.

Further, even this category of non-wage workers excludes the workers (largely women) who are described as “not in the labour force” but nevertheless contribute economically significant unpaid labour within families and communities. Obviously, measured inequality would increase, probably substantially, if non-wage workers are included, but data difficulties make this estimation near impossible.

With this caveat, the Report finds there has been a decline in wage inequality both globally and across regions and categories of countries, even though it still remains unacceptably high. Table 1 provides an estimate for 2021, using different measures of wage dispersion. The Palma ratio is the ratio of the income share of the top 10 per cent (or decile) of the population relative to the bottom 40 per cent (or bottom four deciles).

D9/D1 compares the extremes: it is the ratio of the wage share of the top decile relative to the bottom decile. D9/D5 provides an estimate for the upper half of the population, comparing the wage shares of the top decile with the fifth decile. D5/D1 shows the picture for the bottom half of the population, comparing the fifth (middle) decile with the bottom decile.

The data show that levels of wage inequality differed significantly across countries in 2021, with low income countries displaying, on average, the highest level of wage inequality and high income countries the lowest. (Unsurprisingly, the Report also finds that men earn more than women in all country income groups and across the entire wage scale.)

DECLINING TREND

In terms of trends over time, around two-thirds of the countries studied in the Report showed reductions in wage inequality from 2006 onwards, using any of these measures of inequality. In general, this decline occurred in both the upper and lower tails of the wage distribution. Table 2 provides the results on average by income group.

The Palma ratio fell across all country groups, but the other measures indicate a more complex picture. For most countries extreme wage dispersion (the D9/D1 ratio) also fell, other than in lower middle income countries (which is influenced by the large share of India, where it increased). Wage inequality also declined in the upper half of the distribution except in low income countries. It increased, quite significantly, in the lower half of the distribution, once again influenced by India.

Much of this was due to lower increases — or even declines — in wages at the top end of the scale (the upper 10 per cent). This needs to be analysed in more detail to understand the processes that enabled this trend.

Clearly, recent global trends in wage inequality point to a complex picture, with an outsized role played by some countries with large populations — most of all China.

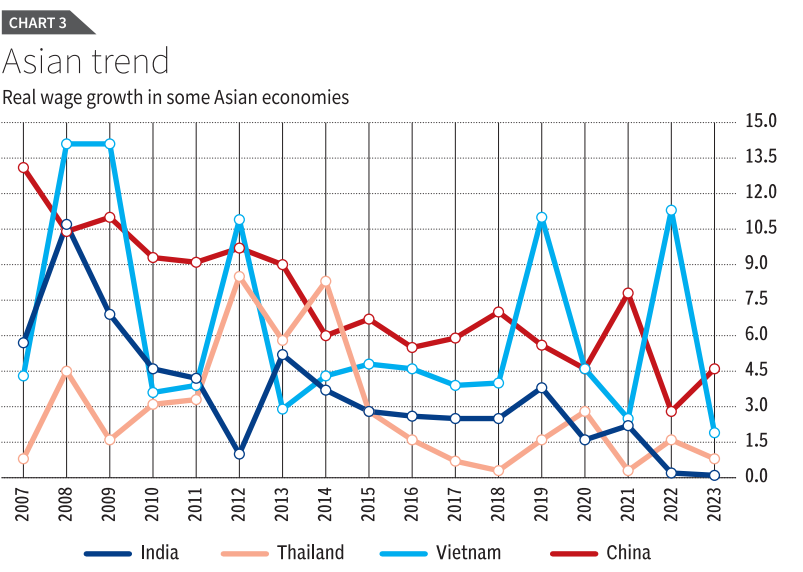
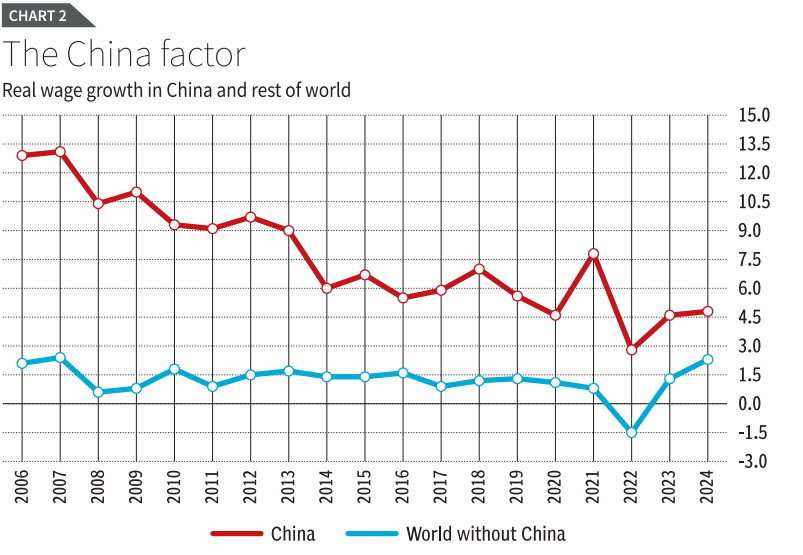
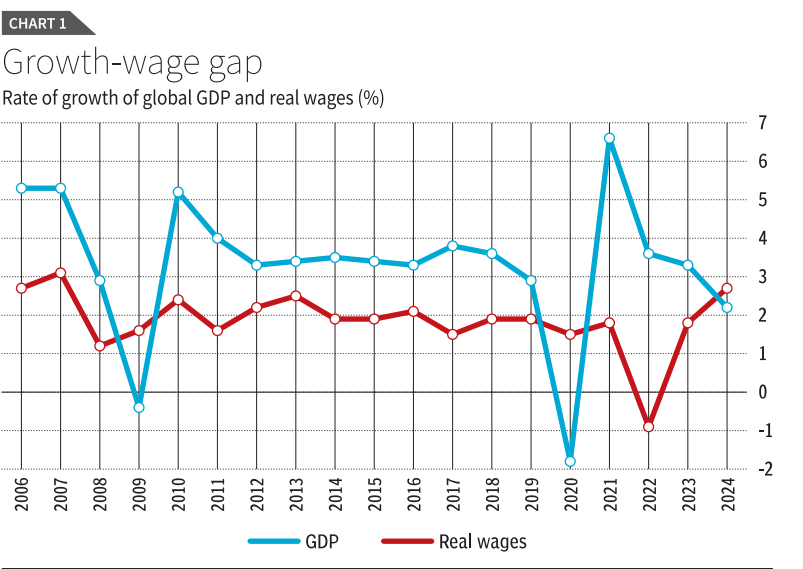


TABLE 1
Region-wise profile
Global wage inequality measures, 2021

	Palma ratio	D9/D1	D9/D5	D5/D1
Global	4.82	16.82	4.96	3.39
High income countries	1.44	4.75	2.36	2.02
Upper middle income countries	2.24	6.57	2.6	2.53
Lower middle income countries	3.16	8.29	3.04	2.69
Low income countries	5.28	15.88	3.82	4.16

Note: See text for explanations of measures

TABLE 2
Inequality dips
Changes in wage inequality measures (%), 2006-2021

	Palma ratio	D9/D1	D9/D5	D5/D1
Global	-31	-28	-35	11
High income countries	-35	-39	-17	-26
Upper middle income countries	-24	-20	-15	-6
Lower middle income countries	-12	3	-12	16
Low income countries	-2	-3	6	-9

Excluding non-wage workers, the Report finds there has been a decline in wage inequality both globally and across regions and categories of countries, even though it still remains unacceptably high

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 14, 2005

BP-HPCL to form 50:50 joint venture

Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) today signed an agreement with BP plc (formerly known as British Petroleum) to form a 50:50 strategic joint venture partnership that would operate in the oil refining and marketing sector in India. This could be India's first significant multinational participation in the refining sector. One of the joint venture's major projects will be the construction of HPCL's Rs 12,000 crore Bhatinda refinery project in Punjab.

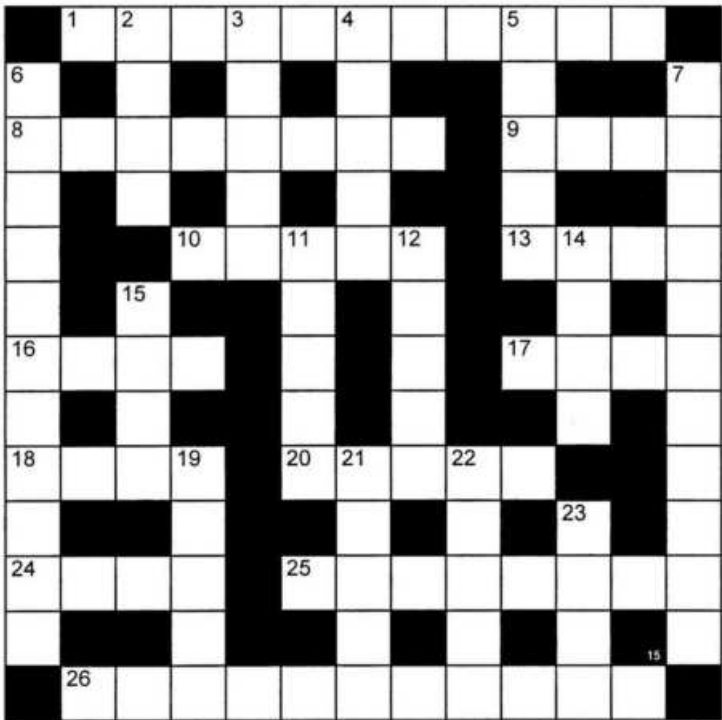
Oil marketing cos to buy bio-fuel at Rs 25 a litre

The Petroleum Ministry has announced that beginning January 2006, public sector oil marketing companies (OMCs) will have to purchase bio-diesel extracted from plants such as Jatropha and Pongamia for mixing with diesel at Rs 25 a litre.

Tech cos set to become largest employers in pvt sector

Indian tech services companies are poised to become the country's largest employers in the private sector. The end of the second quarter this fiscal saw TCS crossing the 50,000-mark in employment with 53,329 people on its rolls. "This makes us the largest private sector employer in the country," said Mr S. Padmanabhan, Head Global, Human Resource Development, TCS.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2802



EASY

ACROSS

- Having good reputation (11)
- One turning hand to useful jobs (8)
- Footway (4)
- Practises boxing (5)
- Instrument face (4)
- Flat, level (4)
- The heart of something (4)
- Watch-pockets (4)
- Come down on with a rush (5)
- Wicked(ness) (4)
- Get lighter (8)
- Clothing care process (3,8)

DOWN

- Vast ages (4)
- Settle what is due (3,2)
- Professorial appointment (5)
- Negligible payment (7-4)
- Throwing down the gauntlet (11)
- Otherwise known as (5)
- Gunfire salute (5)
- Figure of worship (4)
- Plant used for flavouring (4)
- Tarnish reputation (5)
- Not as good (5)
- Church instrument (5)
- Daze (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- It is tidy as a sum, and not immoral (11)
- Close by, a husband is a useful person about the house (8)
- This way is apt to change when hydrogen finishes it (4)
- Even in a steamship, these may be of wood (5)
- Laid-back way one may try to get through (4)
- Nevertheless, its first four are still upset (4)
- Remove centre of fruit with carbon and mineral (4)
- They were originally watched in pairs of trousers (4)
- Make a sudden attack and sow disorder before work (5)
- This eye looks harmful when Satan loses his head (4)
- To look more cheerful is correct in a mountain peak (8)
- Process by which it is suitably given a new look? (3,8)

DOWN

- They create an eternity that is nothing in three points (4)
- Having a rise, honour debt! (3,2)
- Do house-cleaning and include one professorship (5)
- Offer to take in physical education for man, for instance (5)
- Very little financial return may be acceptable to birds (7-4)
- Wrongly calling hen George initially, I am issuing a dare (11)
- Aka - oh, dear me - one being involved in it (5)
- A saving clause for a salute from the artillery (5)
- I act with Labour leader, and I have my fans (4)
- Cook may need it to be taken out of the other basin (4)
- Completely changing Science for Fiction will tarnish it (5)
- A better antonym for the sower, maybe (5)
- It may have two manuals on something such as liver (5)
- To have given up being potty may be stupefying (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2801

ACROSS 1. Tipstaff 4. Spat 8. Awn 9. Henna 10. Owe 11. Crowned 12. Erica 13. Celebration 17. Model 18. Chortle 20. Oar 21. Named 22. Awn 23. Task 24. Clutches

DOWN 1. Trance 2. Polio 3. Fined 5. Proviso 6. Toecap 7. Parenthood 9. Hinterland 14. Endures 15. Impost 16. Tennis 18. Camel 19. Teach



A thought for today
As legend has it you
Are quite the pyro
You light the match to watch it blow
TAYLOR SWIFT, song

Green, Hot Air

Another Diwali, another round of litigating how to do it right, and maybe only rain can help

Diwali déjà vu is nice. We are looking forward to the lights and festivities. And Diwali déjà vu is maddening. In NCR and many other of the country's urban centres, a large constituency of unwell citizens and those with children and pets who are scared by firecrackers or find breathing hard in smoke's wake, are dreading the onset of bad air. The apex court itself has been deeply engaged in this conversation for a decade, as have several govt bodies, civic organisations, business lobbies etc. But here we are yet again, relitigating the same issues all over again, just as we did last year and the year before that.

Doesn't the NCR ban on firecrackers hurt the spirit of Diwali? Shouldn't green firecrackers at least be permitted? But is there any such thing as a firecracker that's green? Isn't it a false impression being created that these are environmentally safe? But where is the data showing that it's the firecrackers that cause the bulk of Diwali pollution?



Round and round we go, as if determined to make no progress whatsoever.

If the stop, start, kneejerk measures are helping, we are not doing any proper measuring of it. When GRAP restrictions delayed the recarpeting of a Delhi runway last year, we didn't tally the emissions of the thousands of waiting and hovering aircraft. BJP to AAP, the past years have seen different political parties pass the buck, without wholehearted focus on finding a way out. If NCR is set on a green firecrackers path this Diwali, it will be with the full foreknowledge that all kinds of pollution will fly through this net. Testing infra is absurdly inadequate to cover all the points of sale.

The consensus that's been missing so far is not going to drop down from the smog tomorrow either. Public policy expert Michael Munger underlines how the adoption of the US constitution itself defied preexisting rules for consensus, and how *lucky* this was for America. He sees the role of constitutions as enabling politics, which in turn is a process of deciding on rules, such that even the losers accept as legitimate. When the tree-lined Cheonggyecheon was brought back to life in central Seoul, it meant fighting back disagreements as much as a vast elevated highway. But it's a vision that's paid back South Korea a million-fold. Restoring India's rivers, forests, air and soil to health will certainly not be cost-free. But just as certain is that the costs of failing will be nightmarishly higher.

Buffer Against Buffering

Patchy connections let down India's internet cover. Making govt payouts dependent fully on e-KYC warrants a rethink

Adoption of tech has made governance smoother and more efficient. But direct cash transfers aren't the magic bullet promised – to a great extent because the state has replaced a direct interface with beneficiaries with electronic KYC: 'identity markers' on a computer screen. And the onus of ensuring these 'identity markers' are updated on govt portals is entirely on beneficiaries. Who, in turn, are dependent on availability of internet that remains inconsistent across rural India. Every e-KYC season, it's a scramble to locate a steady internet connection with reasonable speed for sufficient time.

Therefore, as TOI reported, that in a Maharashtra village, of 100 women attempting to update details to avail a women's payout, just 5 received an OTP is not surprising. They walked 30 minutes to a point known to receive internet – a phone hung from a tree branch. It would be comical if people's earnings, livelihoods, weren't held hostage to it. Given this reality – no secret to any branch of govt – what is shocking is state's inflexibility, which made e-KYC mandatory without backup options. In Maharashtra, in this instance, deputy CM Ajit Pawar has said e-KYC is "non-negotiable". Challenges with Aadhaar-linked verification are not of internet availability only. But that poor internet coverage can stall beneficiaries from claiming their due highlights how tricky total surrender to tech can become.

It is not about unreliable internet alone either. India leads in internet shutdowns – Sept alone saw shutdowns in Haryana (teacher's death), UP (Bareilly), Leh (Sonam Wangchuk's arrest), and in Oct in Cuttack (Durga puja immersion), while J&K continues to lead with maximum shutdowns, internet almost always blocked in some or the other district. It's like having piped water without water supply. Or power connections without electricity. Govts really have to ensure digital exclusion doesn't reverse strides made in financial inclusion – physical verification must not be binned altogether.

Nobel Intentions

These respond to Pavlovian conditioning, until they don't

Anil Abraham

The local Resident's Association has chosen to give me a Lifetime Achievement Award, I announced proudly to Kamala. She was less than impressed. 'You've walked around reminding them that you are a good candidate for the Prize and listing your imaginary achievements for one year now. They were left with no other option!' she said disdainfully.

It's the trend nowadays, Kamala. If you feel you deserve an award you must announce it yourself – and corner the committee into giving you the blessed thing. Actually, it's a scientific fact proved by an experiment conducted by a Russian scientist called Pavlov. His famous Pavlovian studies were on conditioning dogs by associating food with the sound of a bell. He found that the dogs salivated when they heard the bell, even if there was no food in the vicinity. Some celebrities demonstrate the same reaction every time they hear the word Nobel, even if nobody takes them seriously.

Some of them are more deserving of another award, aptly named the Ig Nobel. This is a satirical prize that aims to first make people laugh – and then think. A lot of stand-up comics would be good candidates for that award. Kamala suggested wryly. Winners have included real scientists who did research on the possibility that black holes fulfil all the technical requirements for being the location of Hell. And those who studied the 'five-second rule', a tongue-in-cheek belief that food dropped on the floor will not become contaminated if it is picked up within five seconds. There are awards for everything. From the Filmfare Awards for movies to the Nobel Prize for Physics or Peace. And yet, some celebrities come away disappointed every year. They find themselves on the list for whom no bells toll.

Kamala was worried about our neighbour Donne Thimappa who felt he deserved the award more than me because he had broken up several fights between neighbours in the area. Who was going to bell the cat and let him know that he was not getting the Prize this year? I offered to be the one, promising to mention him in my acceptance speech and to dedicate the award to him, with the noble intention of maintaining peace in the neighbourhood. Now I'm not surprised if that rings a bell – because similar trumped-up stories have been in the news recently.

Eco Nobel & CreAItive Destruction

The three laureates did their work pre-AI. But their research showed how important rules are for humanity to gain from massive tech disruption. But is the madness of this tech without a method?

Sugata.Ghosh@timesofindia.com



Diverse geography, turbulent history, and disparate cultures separated them. But somewhere along the way, an unstated, sometimes less appreciated, element overlapped between the two great stories. The Protestant ethics of thrift, hard work, and disciplines may have laid the Western foundations of capitalism. Almost a century later, when Asia rose to claim its place under the sun, the plinth was built on Confucian values. Yet, the link between the two, often taken for granted by most, except by economists, was the formidable power of technology.

It came as a reminder on Monday when the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences announced the winners of the 2025 Nobel economics prize. The award went to Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion, and Peter Howitt for "having explained innovation-driven economic growth".

Mokyr was honoured "for having identified the prerequisites for sustained growth through technological progress", while Aghion and Peter Howitt were awarded for the "theory of sustained growth through creative destruction". Creative destruction of course is a term coined by Joseph Schumpeter, the Austrian economist who was the most complex, yet charismatic, figure in the history of the dismal science.

No one would, however, miss the timing. While Aghion and Howitt's original article dates back to 1992 and Mokyr's seminal work was published in 1998, their Nobel arrives at a moment when 'artificial intelligence' has pushed the frontiers of technology to a realm of unknown-unknown.

The Academy skirted the huge body of work on trade and tariffs – a volatile subject when liberalisation, hounded by politics, is on retreat – to alert, even warn, about the impact of a new force that a world, settled into the grooves of internet and leaps in computing power, is today waking up to.

The trio isn't the first to explore the coupling of technology and growth. In 2004, Finn E Kydland and Edward C Prescott won the Nobel for their work on connecting the oscillations in technology and short-term business cycles – how economies react to shocks and spurts in productivity.

Two decades later, such shocks have acquired a hitherto unknown scale, tempting to change the rules

of the game with a scary clinical efficiency – from warfare to espionage, from shop-floor dynamics to education, from healthcare to romance; replacing not just tedious manufacturing labour, but even programmers with white coders.

But, like schools of historians, who over the ages have differed on the role of individuals, vis-à-vis the structural forces in shaping societies and lives, Aghion-Howitt-Mokyr treaded a road different from their enigmatic forebear.

Schumpeter was fascinated by the part played by the



cast of entrepreneurs in different eras, the bursts of exotic innovations coming in unexpected intervals, throwing up new products and leaving a trail of destruction in the form of closed factories and obsolete goods and withering away of fleeting profits of once-redoubtable monopolies.

While Mokyr explored the historical genesis of creative destruction, Aghion and Howitt strived to decipher its mechanism with a mathematical model. The Nobel winners of 2025 have, however, reposed their faith in an orderly progress of technology, where ideas

will spring organically from commitments to research and development, where institutional finance will back and promote them, patents would ringfence them, and regulations would govern them.

But in some ways their beliefs are a harbinger of the almost forgotten trust once placed by one of the greatest minds of 19th century, John Stuart Mill, on the forces of political economy. Unlike Marx – the enfant terrible of economics who published *Manifesto* in the same year as Mill's *Principles* to predict a classless society – Mill was confident that capitalism would evolve and preserve liberties of individuals in their pursuit of wealth.

Mill's controversial challenger in the aftermath of the industrial revolution may have lost a lot of his relevance in popular imagination, but nonetheless he may still continue to remind the world that the clash of technology and humans is rarely a plot that plays out in predictable ways.

Today, anyone, actors in almost every walk of life, from students and consultants to technocrats and industrialists, would refrain from betting that AI, by far the most potent technology, with all its pitfalls and threats of future conquests, would unfold systematically. Indeed, the madness may lack a method.

But, herein lies the gem wrapped in the thinking of today's Nobel winners – and perhaps a script to rein in unsettling madness. If ideas spring from institutions and societies, if the businessman has the luxury to pick and choose the technology for society to witness a "vertical progress", rules become paramount for humanity to gain. The work of Aghion-Howitt-Mokyr is an attempt to lend a structure to Schumpeter's broad sweeping style of the 1940s while simultaneously differing with it. It was certainly not inspired by the disruptive nature of today's AI. But it may offer hints for navigating the path that lies ahead.

Schumpeter had famously said, "I wanted to be the greatest economist in the world, the greatest horseman in Austria, and the best lover in Vienna. Well, I never became the greatest horseman in Austria." Two of his fond dreams turned true. Close to a century later, economists today are grappling for answers to ever-changing questions while technology threatens to redefine 'love' by altering the boundaries of attachments. The Austrian thinker, with his flair for drama, may have the last laugh.

Trump Delivers, But Peace Won't Break Out

Release of Israeli hostages is no guarantee against resumption of West Asian conflict. Palestinians must prove they want to demilitarise Hamas. Israelis can't remain hostile to idea of Palestinian statehood

Attila Somfalvi



Columnist based in Tel Aviv

The end of a war is always a time of optimism – a collective sigh of relief marked by celebrations, bursts of joy, and a kind of selective amnesia that turns the bloody days of fighting into a hazy memory few wish to revisit. As societies rush towards calmer days, they tend to forget what led them into conflict in the first place, investing their

energy instead in rebuilding, planning, and dreaming of a better future.

Yet in West Asia, periods of euphoria are short-lived. History teaches us that too quickly – far too quickly – the grim routine of tribal warfare reclaims the grand visions of statesmen who promise peace and a bright future. Trump managed to engineer an end to the two-year war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. But no president, not even Trump, has yet managed to change the bloody nature of this region. The return home of the Israeli hostages – freed from the brutal captivity of one of the most murderous terrorist organisations in the world – may signal the end of one war, but it could just as easily mark the countdown to the next.

Trump's peace framework rests on more than a ceasefire. It depends on cooperation and political determination from US, from moderate Arab states, and from European leaders. Without a concrete commitment to rid Gaza of Hamas's violent and oppressive rule, the region will soon find itself drawn once again into a renewed armed confrontation. Hamas's DNA has always been contaminated by terror and violence, but after Oct 7 and two years of war, it is abundantly clear that the organisation knows no other way to control the Palestinians trapped inside the Strip.

Disarming Hamas and removing it from the centres

of power are fundamental, non-negotiable conditions for the success of Trump's plan. Even if the winds of war die down in the coming days, the true test of Trump's accord will lie in whether Hamas can be removed from power – and whether its gunmen can ever become ordinary citizens.

The last two years have demonstrated more than ever the urgent need for a broad regional security framework. The shared interests of Israel and the moderate Arab states are stronger than ever; yet the question of a Palestinian state remains unresolved and

society of terror and violence, they will never persuade Israelis to believe again in the two-state option.

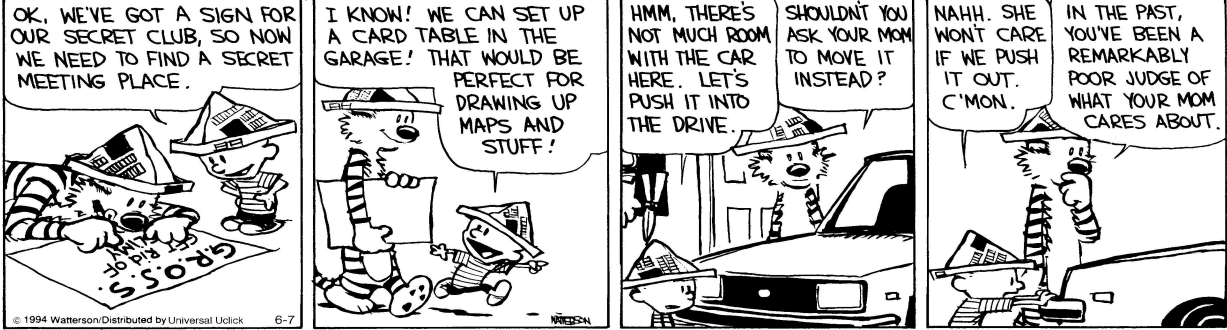
But Israeli fears are also the primary obstacle to full normalisation in West Asia. Senior Saudi officials have made it clear – even in recent days – that Saudi Arabia, the linchpin of any normalisation axis, will not establish open and official diplomatic relations with Israel until the Palestinian question is resolved. The Saudis, who had distanced themselves from the Palestinian issue just two years ago, can no longer ignore it after two years of bloodshed.

Trump and Netanyahu have succeeded – thanks in part to their close personal relationship – in constructing a delicate political architecture that brought about the release of the Israeli hostages and the end of the war. Politically, the move benefits them both. Even before the hostages returned home, Netanyahu's popularity in the polls had climbed by more than ten percentage points. It is reasonable to assume that after Trump's ongoing visit to Israel, his standing will rise even further. The question of whether Israel's elections will be moved up now tops the political agenda. For now, Trump remains firmly committed to Netanyahu and will likely do everything in his power to help him should early elections be called.

For the moment, Netanyahu's coalition stands solid. The far-right parties, masters of political threats, have pledged not to abandon the ship – despite the war's end and the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Netanyahu's partners are displaying a remarkable degree of ideological flexibility, allowing him to continue juggling countless political balls in the air. But in West Asia, as history constantly reminds us, even the most careful balancing act can be upended overnight – and the promise of peace can turn, once again, into the echo of distant explosions.

The writer is co-founder, Coalition for Regional Security

Calvin & Hobbes



Patience: Silent Rhythm Of Fulfilment

Partha Sinha

We live in an age where the world refreshes itself every few seconds. A click expects a result, a message expects a reply, and a thought expects an outcome – instantly. Patience, once revered as a virtue, now feels like an outdated app waiting to be deleted. Impatience wears the disguise of ambition. Quickness is applauded. Waiting is viewed almost as weakness.

This collective restlessness is not trivial. It is reshaping how we think, work, and even feel. We have become experts at beginning things and amateurs at staying with them. The moment something takes longer than expected – a career, a relationship, a skill, a spiritual practice – our attention drifts. We scroll away from discomfort. We move on before something has had a chance to mature.

Etymologically, the word patience comes from the Latin *patientia*, which means 'suffering' or 'enduring'. But its philosophical significance has always been closer to fulfilment than to suffering. Patience is not merely the ability to wait; it is the ability to inhabit the waiting fully. It is not about standing still while tapping your foot. It is about becoming quiet enough to notice the unfolding of the moment itself.

When we act with impatience, our focus is consumed by the result. We perform the act like a courier delivering a package – hurriedly, impersonally, eager to be done. Patience, on the other hand, allows us to savour the process. A musician who practises slowly, a potter who waits for the clay to set, a gardener

who tends to saplings through changing seasons – they all know that the real joy is not in the applause, the sale, or the bloom. It is in the act of becoming one with the process.

Impatience makes us spectators of our own lives. Patience invites us to become participants. Ironically, many of life's most meaningful outcomes refuse to obey our timelines.

A tree does not bloom because we are in a hurry. Healing does not accelerate because we check our watches. Love does not deepen because we demand it. These things mature according to their own inner rhythm. To be patient is to recognise and respect that rhythm.

In a world with shrinking attention spans, patience is a form of resistance. It is not passive resignation; it is active



Sacredspace

Do not let the hero in your soul perish in lonely frustration for the life you deserved and have never been able to reach. The world you desire can be won. It exists...it is real...it is possible...it's yours.

Ayn Rand



THE SPEAKING TREE

High-voltage reforms

Draft power law could be a game changer

The power sector was among the first to be opened up to private investment and structural reform in the early nineties. Since then, however, it has remained an underperformer relative to India's economic growth, requiring consistent government intervention. The principal reason for this is political: The massive subsidies that states have historically doled out to perceived vote-sensitive segments of the population. The result is that private investment in power generation has been robust — private generators account for more than half India's installed capacity — but power distribution remains mostly in the realm of shambolic state-owned enterprises, dependent on borrowing and heavy cross-subsidies by industry and rail utilities to finance underrecoveries. This deep-rooted infrastructural inefficiency has dragged down India's manufacturing competitiveness in the form of high electricity costs. Four bailout packages over the past two decades have failed to reduce state-owned discom dues to power generators. Discoms are facing accumulated losses at about ₹7 trillion. Now, proposed amendments to the Electricity Act, currently out for public consultation, could offer a solution of what is essentially a political impasse and positively alter the power sector in lasting ways.

The first is to make it mandatory for State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs), the key tariff-setting agencies in states, to determine tariffs that reflect the actual cost of generating and distributing it. To address the tricky question of targeted subsidies to farmers and so on, the amendment gives state governments the flexibility to provide advance subsidies on behalf of these groups. This would not only eliminate the complications of under-recoveries for discoms but also make power subsidies more transparent. The Bill also proposes to exempt manufacturing, railways, and metro railways from cross-subsidy obligations within five years. This proposal will go a long way in reducing transport and logistic costs and improve the efficiency and competitiveness of key freight and transport utilities.

Most significantly, the amendments propose to allow distribution licensees to supply power through shared networks. Currently, multiple licensees in the same area — which is principally restricted to a few urban areas in India — must maintain separate networks that add to costs and minimise competition and efficiency by depriving consumers of choice. This legal tweak solves the chronic last-mile problem, which discouraged multiple distributors from operating in an area and imposed monopoly suppliers on consumers with all the inherent disadvantages. This adjustment is likely to enable the original intention of open access — of enabling competition and choice for consumers.

Parallel to this is the proposal to allow the SERCs to exempt distribution licensees from the Universal Service Obligation to supply large consumers (defined as those with loads of 1 Mw or higher) that are eligible for open access (that is, the right to buy power from any supplier of choice). This, too, introduces a measure of flexibility to discoms operating in a genuinely competitive market to maximise supply efficiencies to domestic and smaller consumers. Taken together, these amendments skilfully address the major pain points that have afflicted the power sector for decades. If enacted, they have the potential to become game changers in a sector where deeper reform is long overdue.

A Nobel for innovation

Without a culture of creativity, growth will not happen

Unlike the Nobel Peace Prize, the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel is not generally considered a deeply political award. But it definitely does reflect broader trends in how economic policy is viewed in the mainstream. In the early years of the prize, from 1969 onwards, the development- and welfare-focused mentality of the policy profession was honoured. During the high tide of the Washington Consensus, the Chicago School archpriests of the neoclassical model were honoured one by one. More recently, the post-financial crisis turn to scepticism about perfect competition and concern about labour markets have led to a spate of honourees with relevant work. Now, for two successive years, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences has decided to award work that focuses on institutions, innovations, and culture. The 2025 recipients — Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion, and Peter Howitt — are best known for studying the ways in which economies and societies respond to innovation, and why innovative cultures take hold. This almost certainly reflects a broader malaise in the policymaking system about the sources of future growth — particularly in the West, which is concerned about losing a technological race to China.

While Prof Mokyr is an economic historian, Profs Aghion and Howitt use more traditional neoclassical methods. Their most cited paper, however, builds on the work of Joseph Schumpeter, one of the most influential economists of the early 20th century. They formalised Schumpeter's theory of "creative destruction" being at the heart of the capitalist growth process — in which old processes and technologies were continually replaced by new ones, leading to growth as a consequence — and linked it tightly to growth and investment rates. They basically demonstrated that long-term growth comes from innovation; that innovation comes from entrepreneurs seeking monopoly profits; and that new technology must displace old technology for growth to occur. There is a fundamental conflict between those who are rich today, earning profits from the status quo, and the putative entrepreneurs who seek to replace them.

Prof Mokyr's work, meanwhile, examines how and when the winners of growth can prevail over the losers. Only one previous Nobel — in 1993 — has been received by academics who identify themselves primarily as economic historians. The 1993 prize was awarded also for the study of past innovations and property rights; this year's award is in some ways a sequel to that one. Prof Mokyr complicates the Aghion-Howitt story by pointing out that it is culture — the status of new ideas and innovators in society, the prevalence of institutions that allow innovations to disseminate, a political belief in the need for change and creativity — that allow for innovators to triumph over the set of losers from growth. He applies this through painstaking studies of societies that have grown — such as Britain in the 1800s — and those that did not, although they should have — like China in the centuries immediately preceding that.

The lesson from last year's Nobel, which was awarded to scholars of institutional economics, was that long-term growth emerges from the institutional basis of an economy. If Indian policymakers are searching for a similar lesson from this year's award, then it is this: Innovation is the only way for societies to prosper, and that will not happen unless a predisposition to take risks and upend the status quo takes hold. If that is true, then the natural corollary is that India and its companies spend too little on research, and our reform process is too gradual and solicitous of those with a vested interest in the status quo.

Fashioning Tamil identity



ADITI PHADNIS

When does a social movement become a political party? How does ideology translate into practical politics? How does identity shape power politics? Some answers lie in the birth, evolution and growth of the Dravidian Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a political party founded in 1949 that has endured in Tamil Nadu and beyond. This deeply researched book seeks to answer these questions, unravelling methodological challenges and dissecting the various components that go into the making of identity.

The work reflects both rigour and

passion. The introduction and first chapter discuss research on Tamil Nadu's identity and caste politics by a range of scholars. The author investigates the work of scholars like MSS Pandian, Arun Swamy, Narendra Subramanian, Sumathi Ramaswamy and many others. Based on archival research and interviews, he contends that the DMK was — and continues to be — "an insurgent force against hegemonic nationalism, with elections not being an end in themselves, but rather a powerful tool to achieve its objectives".

And its objectives? The book traces the history of the DMK in the context of all the changing equations in Tamil Nadu from the days it was Madras Presidency, then Madras Province, and later Madras state. The external challenges the region faced were the freedom movement, the place of caste in the movement, and later, the rise of the thought of Ambedkar. The creation of states based on language, the

"imposition" of Hindi followed. What remained as an immutable strand was caste. This was — and continues to be — a powerful tool for political mobilisation elsewhere in India but in Tamil Nadu it got salience of a different kind. You are born into a caste. But it remains an ascriptive feature till you choose to assert it by joining a caste group. To turn caste into a political identity, you need groupings. In the case of Tamil Nadu, the DMK undertook the task of transforming caste into Tamil identity.

A crucial element in the process was the role played by Periyar. In response to the political disempowerment of lower castes, Periyar advocated *suyamariyathai* or self respect as central to his vision of the Dravidian-Tamil identity by positioning Hinduism and Brahmins as outsiders and "flattening a hierarchical Dravidian Tamil society, making it inclusive of marginalised communities, embracing those from other religions as

well". The book discusses the divergence and convergence between Periyar and Ambedkar.

Thinking is one thing. But if an ideology is to live, it has to disseminate itself. The author describes the "reading rooms" (*padipakkam*) that relayed the Dravidian-Tamil ethos. This exposition is the backbone of the book, for the author has gone into reading rooms in Virudhunagar, his region of enquiry, interviewed people who have been using them for years and how the character of these areas has changed over time. These reading rooms exist all over Tamil Nadu and were crucial meeting places, in addition to making available materials especially newspapers. *Murasoli*, the DMK newspaper, is counted as a powerful vehicle to disseminate the DMK's views. But the reading rooms provided not just caste publications but all kinds of periodicals. Thus the



The Dravidian Pathway: How the DMK redefined power and identity in South India
by Vignesh Rajahmani
Published by Westland Books
276 pages ₹799

overlay was caste but the publications offered a space for dialogue creating a democratic space rooted in equality, social justice, and empowerment.

The DMK offered itself as the political vehicle for this empowerment. The book discusses how the DMK managed to mould "identity-related vulnerabilities — stemming from caste, rural-urban mobility, and class inequalities — into political mobilisations, attracting individuals from non-elite, non-Brahmin, lower caste and lower class backgrounds...it created political communities beyond immediate caste/class associations".

Elections, with emphasis on Kamraj's electoral defeat in Virudhunagar in 1967, gave rise to the DMK's overarching presence in the state, replacing the then-dominant party, the Congress. The book has an interesting epilogue that dis-

cusses the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — supported by upwardly mobile lower-caste groups like Nadars and Gounders "who once benefited from the Dravidian movement" along with traditional elites like Brahmins and Chettians. There's new thinking in town — the Hindu-Tamil, seeking to displace the Dravidian-Tamil identity. It also discusses briefly, the rise of nativist Tamil nationalist groups like the Naam Tamilar Katchi.

But the book also raises questions: "Does the movement still have what it takes to accommodate the dynamic aspirations of the people? Do the political parties espousing the Dravidian-Tamil vision retain the ability to sustain their electoral viability while aligning with fulfilling those aspirations?" All valid questions. To this another question must be added: Will delimitation and the inevitable reduction of seats from Tamil Nadu (if the delimitation is to be based on population) become the new rallying cry of the Dravidian movement? No doubt, the author will come up with another excellent book that will have the answers.



ILLUSTRATION:BINAY SINHA

The global internet challenge

In the age of AI, internet governance will require agreement among governments and corporations that are providers or major users of the service

Over the past few decades, the most important technological advance has been in the development of new information technology. In 1990, the number of internet users was barely 3 million, mostly in the United States (US). Since then the use of the internet has expanded phenomenally, reaching around 5.5 billion users today. This includes 63 per cent of the population in developing countries and 93 per cent in developed countries. The development of mobile communication and mobile phones has been a major factor in this acceleration. It is clearly the fastest and largest technology advance that the world has experienced in recent years.

At the end of the 20th century, when the use of the internet had become quite widespread and increasingly commercially oriented, many governments wanted a greater say in decisions related to standard setting, the designation of institutions for allocation rights, and other aspects of internet governance. This led to the convening of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which met twice in 2003 and 2005 and called for the establishment of an Internet Governance Forum (IGF) within the United Nations (UN). The IGF has since met annually over the past 20 years.

In most development issues handled in the UN, the effective locus of control is at the national level, even for internationally linked activities like telecommunication. The internet is quite different. It is a global facility, and even those elements of the internet that have a national identity are global in character. Coordination of national policies alone is, therefore, not an adequate answer. The internet is very much a product of cross-border partnerships and, as such, its

management is not national management requiring global coordination but global management requiring national influence.

The IGF was set up in 2005 because governments other than that of the US lacked meaningful contact with the entities responsible for setting standards for the spread and use of the internet. Most norms and working practices of the internet were not set by governments but by non-governmental entities such as the Internet Engineering Task Force and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). The IGF had to be established as a multi-stakeholder forum, providing space to build consensus among different stakeholder groups before decisions were taken in other fora, thereby resulting in better quality outcomes.

The role of governments in influencing policy choices in internet governance has now been established. The previously dominant role of the US government has been diluted. Moreover, most governments have set up national-level governance mechanisms.

However, the governance challenge for the internet is now rather different.

The internet today is substantially different from what it was when the IGF began meeting in 2005. At that time, the commercial use of the internet had only just started. This has changed. What matters now for effective governance of the internet is its use in e-banking and e-commerce, which is now widespread; in the booming of social media, which allows users not just to access information but also to provide information and views that have an impact on politics; and in e-governance. The new thing now is the sharp rise in the application of artificial intelligence (AI) with its huge



NITIN DESAI

A clean slate for India and Canada

In international relations, pauses have a value of their own. Be it misunderstanding, estrangement, skirmish or even a war, a temporary freeze can allow the much-needed legroom for countries to step back and reset. As Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand arrived in New Delhi for a three-day visit, it is precisely such a moment for India-Canada relations. Exactly a year ago, bilateral relations between the two democracies seemed more frayed than ever, even as Canada labelled Indian diplomats as "persons of interest" in a pro-Khalistan murder case, and India expelled Canadian diplomats.

Changes in both internal and external environment in Canada have contributed to this shift. In Canada, a change of guard from the Justin Trudeau government to the current Mark Carney has resulted in a welcome change in attitude. A key moment was the meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr Carney in June on the sidelines of the G7 leaders' summit in Kananaskis. It was seen as the first opportunity for an offramp at the highest levels of both governments. The current visit marks a much-needed follow-up and may provide the moment for restoring trust.

The external environment for both countries — but especially for Canada as the second-largest trade partner of the US — has changed considerably since the swearing-in of Donald Trump. The unpredictability that has ensued has left most countries scrambling for stability. For Canada though, the malaise is much deeper. It remains the only country outside of G7 that has not secured a trade deal with the United States. Mr Carney came to office with one of his key promises being the improvement of Canada's econ-

omic situation, but Mr Trump's onslaught has prevented a laissez-faire-driven trade and commerce environment. US tariffs on steel, autos and other sectors continue to hurt the Canadian economy. Add to that Mr Trump's repeated calls about making Canada the 51st state of the US.

In the most recent meeting between Mr Carney and Mr Trump, the second between the two leaders, Mr Trump squarely placed the US-Canada relationship between "natural conflict" and "mutual love", hinting that the turmoil in bilateral relations is likely to continue. As such, Canada's need for trade and security diversification cannot be overstated. Minister Anand's visit to India will be followed by her visit to two other countries — Singapore and China — both critical to Canada's bilateral as well as global trade. That India is her first stop underscores a sentiment in Ottawa to put the relationship back on track.

The Canadian foreign ministry has clarified that India and Canada are moving towards "establishing a framework for strategic cooperation on issues such as trade diversification, energy transformation, and security." Ms Anand's visit to Mumbai, as an important leg of her three-day visit, and her meeting with the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry underscore the economic imperative. Both India and Canada had bilateral trade nearing \$10 billion in 2024, with potential to increase given the diaspora connections, cultural ties, and rising investments.

At the political level, Ms Anand's meeting with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is an exercise in building trust — a work in progress since the two Prime Ministers met in Canada, followed by the meet-



HARSH V PANT & VIVEK MISHRA

potential for affecting employment and productivity in a wide variety of areas that are not just for information provision but also for information use in the provision of goods and services.

The internet today is highly commercialised and influenced by the corporate providers of internet services. In fact, the globally dominant companies are mostly American. The domination in internet service is related not just to the content but also to the number of users. This leads to a single corporation becoming a winner and exploiting its competitive advantage, leading, at times, to a near monopolisation of some internet service. This domination can lead to privileged access to information about users and data colonialism. Today, the dominance of the US on the internet is less about the role of its government and much more about the global impact of its internet-linked corporations.

Right now, we are witnessing a major leap forward in information technology, which came into public view when ChatGPT became available in 2022. Since then, there has been a huge expansion in the spread of AI, which has certainly made access to information much easier — in fact, so much easier that many web-based information providers are now worried about their relevance declining.

However, the wider economic perspective is more seriously affected by the emergence of Generative AI. It is reputed to have the potential to replace the employment of people whose tasks involve processing information to produce and provide goods and services. But the hope is that, much like the development of electricity in the late 19th century, it will lead to rising productivity, gross domestic product growth and new types of employment generation.

At present, AI enterprises have become the primary focus of investment flows, mainly in the US. AI enterprises account for 80 per cent of the current boom in the US stock markets, with amounts committed far exceeding those seen during the dotcom boom of the 1990s. But, as with previous technological booms and breakthroughs, there will be a few winners and many losers. The US is likely to experience a similar corrective impact on the AI boom as it did during the dotcom boom at the end of the 1990s.

The crucial dimension for internet governance is going to be the heavy commercialisation of data and the potential impact of AI. One challenging matter is the access of AI providers to internet data, which is generally freely available but from which AI providers earn money. In fact, China's planners see data as a factor of production, alongside labour, capital, and land, and most countries are grappling with how to manage and control data.

However, the internet is inherently global, and national-level management is not enough. Global agreement will be required not only on the design of the internet but also on the legitimate use of the internet and AI. Effective internet governance will require agreement not just among governments but also among corporations that are providers or major users of the internet and AI. As a starting point, the Internet Governance Forum may be asked to work out a plan for formal consideration by governments.

The author chaired the working group that recommended the establishment of the IGF and then chaired for five years the organisation that arranged the IGF meetings. desaind@icloud.com

DIGITAL JOB MATCHING MUST FACE REAL-WORLD LABOUR CHALLENGES

THE draft Shram Shakti Niti 2025 released recently for public consultation marks a critical shift, proposing that the labour and employment ministry move beyond its regulatory role to act as a facilitator of employment. It envisions the ministry using digital tools to connect workers with jobs and align their skills with industry needs. This reflects recognition that employment cannot rely on government recruitment alone, that the State must support private-sector job creation through infrastructure, oversight, and digital assistance. The National Career Service platform is expected to serve as the public portal integrating job matching, skill training, and verification of worker credentials.

A major focus is on informal, gig, and rural workers, who make up more than 80 percent of India's workforce. Initiatives such as education-to-employment 'career lounges' aim to involve private industry in linking training to opportunities. Yet the ministry's ability to facilitate employment at scale remains largely untested. While digital systems work in cities, many informal and seasonal migrant workers face limited internet access, lack proper documents, and have little awareness of the available schemes. Previous attempts to unify platforms such as the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation, Employees' State Insurance Corporation, and e-SHRAM were slowed by weak co-ordination and fragmented databases. Some state-level examples offer lessons: Kerala's district-based registration and welfare mechanisms have achieved wider coverage of informal labour through on-ground coordination supported by digital tracking.

Digital solutions would not address some deeper structural challenges in India's labour market. Weak enforcement of labour rights and insufficient public investment in health, education, and skilling have prevented the development of a capable and secure workforce. Only a small segment of the formal sector benefits from statutory protections, while the majority remain in insecure, informal employment. Migrant workers are the most vulnerable, concentrated in low-wage, high-risk jobs with minimal regulatory oversight. Recruitment agents behaving as intermediaries further limit their bargaining power, reinforcing informality. Gender inclusion is another critical gap. The policy aims to raise women's workforce participation to 35 percent by 2030, but this goal is hard to reach when childcare is scarce, mobility unsafe, and part-time or flexible jobs are largely limited to metros. For Shram Shakti Niti to succeed, it will need more than digital platforms. It must address structural inequalities, bridge the digital divide, and build real institutions and support systems on the ground.

NAME MORE STANDS AFTER WOMEN CRICKET GREATS

SUNDAY will go down as a red-letter day in women's cricketing history for more reasons than one. Alyssa Healy of Australia accomplished the greatest run chase in women's one-day cricket against India at Visakhapatnam. If the ending of the World Cup match was awe-inspiring, its beginning at the YSR Reddy Andhra Cricket Association-VDCA stadium was about grateful remembrance. For only the third time in India, a stadium got stands and gates named after legendary women cricketers—a stand after former India captain Mithali Raj and a gate after Andhra Pradesh and India wicketkeeper-batter R Kalpana. Only two other venues in the country have honoured women cricketers in such a manner. In 2017, the Delhi District Cricket Association named two gates at what was then called the Feroz Shah Kotla stadium after former captain Anjum Chopra. Eight years down the line, the Cricket Association of Bengal honoured former captain and legendary pacer Jhulan Goswami with a stand at the Eden Gardens.

One cannot forget the hard work of legends who helped the women's game grow despite a severe shortage of money and infrastructure. Inscribing their names permanently at facilities to be used by fans and cricketers can instil pride and act as a great motivator. However, the Indian cricket board and its state affiliates can surely do more. Last year, selector Venkatacher Kalpana raised the issue that Shantha Rangaswamy, India's first women's team captain, was not on the list of legends being honoured with stands at Bengaluru's M Chinnaswamy stadium. Last week, several former India and Mumbai cricketers wrote to the Mumbai Cricket Association urging to name a stand after ex-captain Diana Edulji. Smriti Mandhana, vice-captain of the present team, has added her voice to the growing demand.

Such memorialising through naming is a norm in India and men have shared most of the honours. However, it must be noted that as the women's game has experienced a significant upward trend in recent years, so has the fame of some of its players. This is evident from the crowds thronging the Women's World Cup venues—though the stadiums are not full, their numbers are significantly larger than in earlier years. Hopefully, as the World Cup attracts more attention as it rolls towards the semifinals, the Indian cricket board and state units will consider expanding the inclusive trend in naming.

QUICK TAKE

ROLLING OUT AI

ARTIFICIAL intelligence is such a strong flavour of the season that a sprinkling of any offering with the term seems to impart zest. So the Centre's announcement that AI would be incorporated into class 3 curriculums from the 2026-27 academic year went down without a murmur. More than 18,000 schools already offer 15-hour AI skill modules from class 6; it's an optional subject for classes 9-12. What would AI for class 3 students look like? The announcement comes at the same time as the revelation that 1,04,125 schools across India have only one teacher. So the other question is about how these teachers would be trained along with their compatriots. A broader discussion first may serve the nation better.

THE Gaza war, now tapered into an awkward ceasefire, has left behind devastation beyond imagination. Israel fought with overwhelming force, Hamas remains battered but not erased, and the world once again confronts the familiar question that has shadowed the region for decades: who really gains when the dust settles? It may sound counterintuitive, but in the political and psychological sense, Hamas appears to have secured what strategists call 'perceptual victory', even as Gaza lies in ruins.

The October 2023 attack by Hamas was a meticulously planned but morally indefensible act of terror that shocked even those sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. The deliberate targeting of civilians is beyond justification. Hamas likely believed that only such a drastic act could revive global focus on a fading cause. With the Abraham Accords expanding and Saudi-Israeli normalisation on the horizon, the Palestinian issue risked permanent marginalisation. Strategically, the perception was correct; the method, however, remains unacceptable to the civilised world.

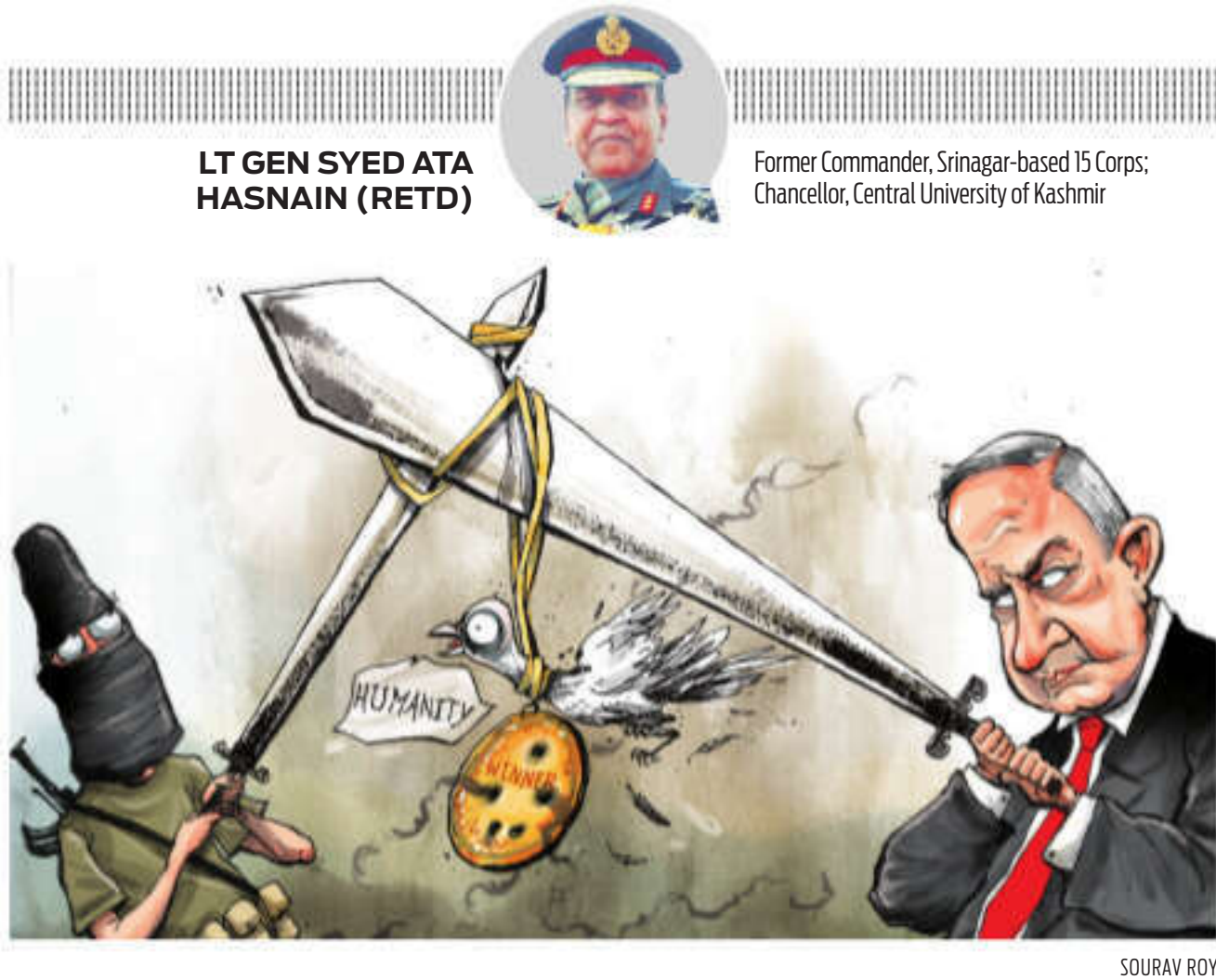
For Israel, the response was shaped by two impulses. The first was the national need for retribution—a visceral reaction to the scale of the assault, necessary to preserve deterrence and restore confidence among its citizens. The second was political. Benjamin Netanyahu's survival depended on projecting absolute resolve. A restrained response would have been interpreted domestically as weakness and internationally as loss of moral ascendancy. Yet, the ferocity of the Israeli retaliation, which blurred the line between combatant and civilian, ended up achieving the reverse—moral erosion in the eyes of much of the world.

Had Israel opted for a more selective approach—differentiating clearly between Hamas's armed elements and Gaza's civilian population—the story might have been different. But even then, the outcome may not have served Israel's core objectives. Precision targeting alone could hardly dismantle an organisation deeply embedded in a social and religious network. In asymmetric warfare, the stronger side is always constrained by its strength. Ethical restraint can appear a weakness; overwhelming force breeds resentment. Israel faced an unenviable choice, as either path would have led to strategic frustration.

What followed was a campaign that achieved tactical success but strategic ambiguity. Hamas's command structures

In asymmetric conflicts, military superiority doesn't ensure strategic success. Israel's use of overwhelming force has bred resentment around the world. The Palestinian cause has been resurrected

GAZA CONUNDRUM: HOW HAMAS GAINED DESPITE DEFEAT



were disrupted but not destroyed. Its fighters melted away into the urban maze. Its political narrative, meanwhile, gained renewed currency. Images of devastation and humanitarian suffering flooded global consciousness, shifting public opinion in many countries away from Israel's narrative of self-defence. The international community's sympathy, initially with Israel, slowly tilted towards the Palestinian people. This shift was not about ideology, but about the human cost that became impossible to ignore.

The paradox of modern conflict is clear: Wars are judged less by territory gained and more by legitimacy sustained. Israel's moral authority, once grounded in its democratic ethos and history of persecution, now faces growing challenge. Much of the Global South views Gaza through the lens of excessive force, while younger Western audiences question Israel's proportionality. Hamas, though con-

demned for terror, gains indirectly from this erosion of Israel's moral standing.

This dynamic is not new. History shows weaker actors often extract long-term advantage from apparent defeat. In 1973, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat launched Operation Badr; also known as 'Sharara' or spark, knowing Egypt could not win a protracted war. Yet, by regaining limited ground and restoring Arab confidence, he transformed the political reality, paving the way for the Camp David Accords. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka were annihilated in 2009, yet their cause continues to echo across the Tamil diaspora. In both cases, physical defeat could not extinguish the emotional and political narrative. Hamas's endurance, despite ruin, follows a similar pattern.

The regional consequences are also significant. The war has disrupted the momentum of Arab-Israeli normalisation.

THE QUEER HISTORY OF 'QUEER'

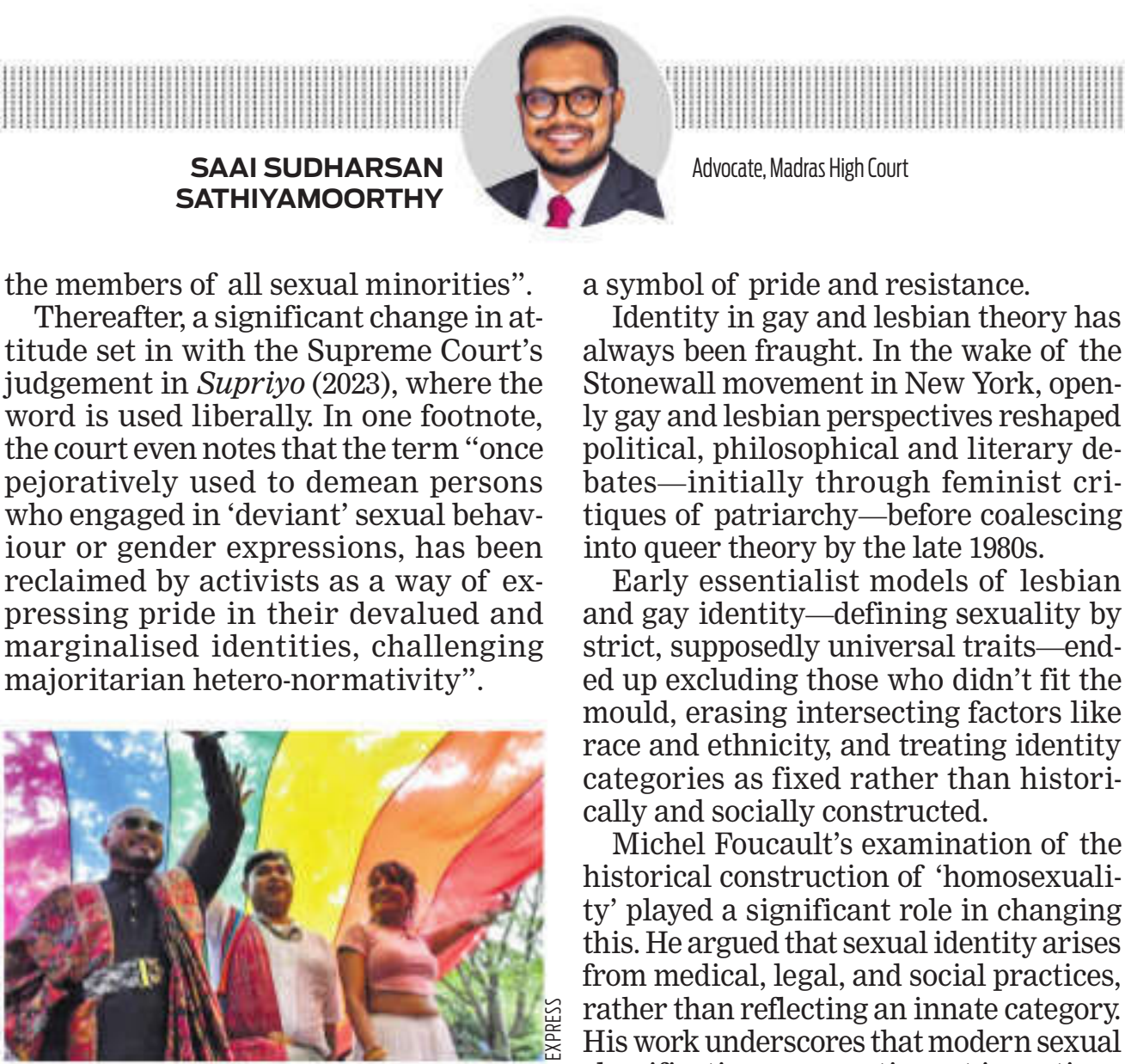
OVER the decades, as our constitutional courts came to be confronted with matters relating to homosexuality and the rights of persons from the third gender, the language employed by these courts evolved from clinical or derogatory to one of acceptance and affirmation. During this period, the natural meaning of the word 'queer', once used as a pejorative, has transformed into an inclusive umbrella identity, having been reclaimed by the LGBTQIA+ communities.

Equally, the evolution of the word's usage in today's constitutional jurisprudence represents a remarkable transformation from colonial criminalisation to constitutional affirmation, though its direct usage in judicial opinions still remains denotative, lexical and surprisingly limited.

From the early colonial period to the late 20th century, 'queer' was mostly restricted in usage in the context of 'strange or odd'. That's the sense in which it was used by the Madras High Court at one of the many proceedings related to the infamous liquidation of *Travancore National and Quilon Bank* (1941)—"it did strike him as queer". One of the very first constitutional cases to employ the word was *S B Trading Co* (1951), where the Calcutta High Court observed about different classes of tenants, "[t]hey are not similarly circumstanced individuals and if the effects are queer as indeed they are, even they cannot be said to infringe the constitutional guarantee of equal protection".

Decades later, when the Delhi High Court delivered the famous judgement in *Naz Foundation* (2009), 'queer' was employed once: "When everything associated with homosexuality is treated as bent, queer, repugnant, the whole gay and lesbian community is marked with deviate and perversity." In its judgement on the appeal, the Supreme Court chose not to employ the word at all, except while extracting the high court's judgement.

Thereafter, the Supreme Court in *Navtej Singh Johar* (2018) showed a pronounced alteration in its jurisprudential stance, using the word to note that the "LGBTIQ movements focused on... the interplay of oppressions arising from being both queer and lower class". It also quoted a judge of the High Court of Australia who found the word queer was being "sometimes used generically, usually by younger people, to include



the members of all sexual minorities". Thereafter, a significant change in attitude set in with the Supreme Court's judgement in *Supriyo* (2023), where the word is used liberally. In one footnote, the court even notes that the term "once pejoratively used to demean persons who engaged in 'deviant' sexual behaviour or gender expressions, has been reclaimed by activists as a way of expressing pride in their devalued and marginalised identities, challenging majoritarian hetero-normativity".



As the meaning of the word 'queer' has evolved, so has its use in juridical language. Michel Foucault's ideas helped frame its acceptance as a social construct rather than an immutable category. Activists later broadened its scope to non-normative experiences

In a recent judgement, however, a division bench of the Madras High Court found the term discomforting. As the court correctly notes, dictionaries define queer as 'strange or odd' and the phrase 'queering one's pitch' means spoiling something. From the bench's standpoint, using terminology that inherently suggests abnormality to describe citizens seeking equal protection under law seems counterintuitive, even potentially harmful. This perspective reflects a broader judicial responsibility: ensuring that legal language affirms dignity rather than diminishing it. What the court's analysis doesn't capture is the powerful history of linguistic reclamation that has transformed 'queer' from a slur to

a symbol of pride and resistance.

Identity in gay and lesbian theory has always been fraught. In the wake of the Stonewall movement in New York, openly gay and lesbian perspectives reshaped political, philosophical and literary debates—initially through feminist critiques of patriarchy—before coalescing into queer theory by the late 1980s.

Early essentialist models of lesbian and gay identity—defining sexuality by strict, supposedly universal traits—ended up excluding those who didn't fit the mould, erasing intersecting factors like race and ethnicity, and treating identity categories as fixed rather than historically and socially constructed.

Michel Foucault's examination of the historical construction of 'homosexuality' played a significant role in changing this. He argued that sexual identity arises from medical, legal, and social practices, rather than reflecting an innate category. His work underscores that modern sexual classifications are contingent inventions shaped by specific historical forces.

Queer theory contested the rigid definitions, showing how those supposed 'essences' excluded anyone whose experience—shaped by race, subcultural affiliation, or other differences—did not conform to the norm. It also challenged the idea that identity categories are timeless and immutable, instead highlighting the historical and social forces that morph them. By embracing 'queer' as an open-ended term—defined by its departure from whatever norm holds sway—queer theory and LGBTQIA+ communities have created room for a wide array of self-definitions. It reminds us that identity is something we construct, not something prescribed.

Thus, the court's discomfort with 'queer' reflects a deeper discomfort with any language that suggests deviation from a norm. But perhaps that's precisely why we should embrace it. It amounts to a rejection of the very concept of 'normal' and 'strange'. The court's approach should be celebrated—not as the final word, but as part of an ongoing conversation.

(Views are personal)
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Public anger in Arab capitals constrains governments from deepening ties with Israel. Iran's influence through Hezbollah, Houthis, and other proxies has gained new legitimacy under the banner of 'resistance'. Türkiye and Qatar have positioned themselves as interlocutors, expanding their diplomatic weight. For Pakistan and others in the Muslim world, the conflict has revived calls for solidarity that had long receded into rhetoric. A Muslim Nato is also being spoken of. The Palestinian question, once peripheral, is once again at the centre of global debate.

For Israel, the aftermath offers little comfort. The cost to its image, economy, and social cohesion is profound. Protests over hostages, divisions within its polity, and fatigue among its reservists point to a society strained by perpetual mobilisation. The strategic environment it faces now is not of its choosing: a hostile northern front, a restless West Bank, and diminishing international patience. The dream of absolute security remains elusive.

For Hamas and similar movements, the path ahead will be one of recalibration rather than retreat. They will rebuild quietly, drawing strength from symbolism rather than structure. In a decade or two, another generation may rise under the same banner, propelled by the same grievances. This is the enduring tragedy of the conflict—cycles of retribution that produce neither victory nor peace. Israel will live with neither full war nor genuine peace, while Gaza's people will remain trapped in despair.

The world must see this outcome not as a win for one side but as a collective failure of politics and humanity. Hamas's methods are indefensible; Israel's reaction proved counterproductive. The result is a temporary cessation of fighting, not a resolution. Yet, perception matters in geopolitics, and in that, Hamas has emerged as the side that forced the issue back to global attention. That is why, even amid destruction, it is viewed as the victor of this round—not for triumphing, but for enduring.

The Gaza war reaffirms a sobering truth. In the age of asymmetric conflict, wars are no longer decided solely by arms or alliances, but by narratives and endurance. Hamas may have paid an unbearable price and Israel may claim battlefield success, but neither has secured the future. The conflict pauses, not ends. As always in such situations, both sides lose—yet, by merely surviving, one side appears to win.

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MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Afghan reset

Ref: *India and Taliban* (Oct 13). India's recalibration of its ties with the Afghan group signifies recognition, and that complete isolation of the Taliban would only reduce India's influence in the region. However, India must continue to balance engagement on terrorism, human rights, and treatment of minorities.

Narayanan Kizhundayur, Thrissur

Spelling classism

Ref: *Word wreck* (Oct 13). Spelling bloopers and goof-ups have been the butt of many jokes and endless humour. Like poverty and injustice, the ridicule, sparked off by the spelling blunders, target the vulnerable segments more than the affluent, who dismiss the taunts with a stiff grin.

Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru

Grove grievance

Ref: *Serpent's gift* (Oct 13). In olden times, sacred serpent groves were a blessing. However most groves perish due to difficulty in maintaining their sanctity. But yes, offerings to serpent gods would never stop. The beauty of our culture lies in respecting and revering all life forms.

Rathi Sreekumar, Ernakulam

Women's resilience

Ref: *Honouring the unstoppable spirit of women* (Oct 13). Recognising women's contributions and resilience not only celebrates their success, but also reinforces the importance of empowerment. Such initiatives inspire others to strive for excellence and remind society that true progress is achieved through inclusivity and equal opportunity.

Farhana Shiril A T, email

Mamata's apathy

Ref: *Didi flags risk of nights out* (Oct 13). On top of continuing with patriarchal college rules, moral policing of women is an attack on their fundamental rights and liberties. Alienating them as 'outsiders' shows Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's apathy. Only robust law enforcement and moral responsibility by authorities can reduce crimes against women.

Ankit Mishra, Jaypore

Bihar gamble

Ref: *BJP, JD(U) to contest 101 seats each* (Oct 13). Granting 101 seats to JD(U) could backfire for the National Democratic Alliance. With Nitish Kumar's growing unpopularity and JD(U)'s poor performance in 2020, the move ignores the public opinion.

Aryan Singh, Dhenkanal

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The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Trump's gambit

Cautious optimism marks Israel-Hamas truce

US President Donald Trump has announced, with his trademark air of finality, that the Gazawar is over. West Asia and the world at large may not agree with him completely, but there is no doubt that his intervention has made the guns fall silent — at least for the time being. Trump arrived to a hero's welcome in Israel on Monday, even as Hamas released the last 20 surviving Israeli hostages under the US-brokered ceasefire deal. However, the Israel-Hamas truce remains fragile, and it will face an acid test in the days and weeks to come. Much will depend on efforts by key stakeholders to ensure durable peace in the strife-torn region. Another Herculean challenge is to rebuild Gaza, which has been reduced to a sea of rubble by the two-year-old war that has rendered the majority of its 2.2 million people homeless and hungry.

It is vital for both sides to fully implement the first phase of the agreement, which involves the release of hostages/prisoners; a surge in humanitarian aid to Gaza; and a partial pullback by Israeli forces from its main cities. Once all this is done, talks over the second phase can begin. That's the harder part — there are ticklish points such as how the densely populated territory will be governed once fighting ends for good and whether Hamas will be defanged permanently. As he entered the Knesset (Israeli parliament) amid blaring trumpets and a thunderous applause, Trump said Hamas would comply with a provision under his plan to disarm. The militant group, however, has ruled out this possibility before Palestine achieves statehood.

Trump is set to head an international body that will oversee the working of a 'temporary apolitical committee' to be entrusted with Gaza's governance. This politically emotive issue needs deft handling. What sticks out like a sore thumb is the absence of a clear timeline for a two-state solution. The US President can afford to pat himself on the back today, but he might realise tomorrow that he has bitten off more than he can chew.

Rain shock

Rethink farm policy for a changing climate

THE sudden spell of heavy rains in early October has once again exposed the fragility of India's agrarian economy, particularly across Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. What was meant to be a calm harvest period turned into a season of distress. Flattened paddy fields, rotting grain heaps and damaged apple orchards have left farmers anxious and state governments struggling to provide relief. These are not isolated events but symptoms of a changing climate that is steadily rewriting the rules of farming in north India.

Farmers, both in the plains and the hills, are increasingly at the mercy of erratic weather — delayed monsoons, sudden cloudbursts and untimely downpours. Traditional cropping calendars, once aligned with predictable rainfall cycles, now fail to match the new climate reality. Yet, adaptation on the ground remains painfully slow. The same water-guzzling crops dominate fields, encouraged by procurement policies that reward continuity rather than change. In the hills, deforestation and unplanned construction on fragile slopes magnify the damage even moderate rains can inflict.

Governments must go beyond the ritual of compensation and focus on resilience. Relief measures are necessary, but reactive firefighting cannot substitute for long-term planning. Climate-resilient and short-duration crop varieties, revised sowing schedules and real-time weather alerts must become the new normal. Strengthening crop insurance and ensuring timely disbursements are equally vital. The cycle of calamity followed by delayed relief has to end. Farmers need foresight, not just financial aid after disaster strikes. In Himachal's orchards and Punjab's plains, the warning is clear: the climate clock has shifted. Agricultural policy can no longer be built on assumptions of stability. It must be redesigned for a future of unpredictability. It must reflect a blend science, sustainability and state support to keep India's food security intact.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1925

Political apostasy

WE feel no hesitation in saying that the indignation which the action of Shripad Tambe, President of the Central Provinces Legislative Council, in accepting an appointment to the Executive Council of the province has caused in Swarajist circles is perfectly justified. The only defence of the action which Tambe himself has so far offered is that he has accepted the office in his individual capacity, and not as a member of the Swaraj party. But this is absurd on the face of it. The membership of a party has no meaning and no reality if an individual member could act as he pleased, to the extent of violating the most deeply cherished principles of the party, and then defend his action simply by saying that he had acted not as a member of that party but in his personal capacity. On such a basis, no party could exist even for a day. As Pandit Motilal Nehru points out in the admirable statement he has issued to the press on the subject, "Mr Tambe's action amounts to a most flagrant breach of the fundamental principle of the Swaraj party. His election to the office of President did not absolve him from the solemn obligation he owed to his party, his constituency and his country, to accept no office in the gift of the Government. It was his clear duty to resign his seat in the Council and with it the office of President, to which he was elected by the suffrages of his party, and declare his change of faith publicly before accepting a government post."

OPINION

A new blot on Indian pharma

Deaths caused by contaminated cough syrups lay bare a dysfunctional drug regulation system



DINESH C SHARMA
SCIENCE COMMENTATOR

THE spate of deaths of children, caused by the consumption of cough syrups adulterated with a toxic industrial chemical, has brought the focus back on India's dysfunctional drug regulation system. In recent years, several such tragic incidents have occurred in India and abroad, involving drugs manufactured in this country.

Our response is the same every time — deaths blamed on contaminated or substandard drugs, inquiries by state and Central governments, raids on some manufacturing units here and there, reporting of non-compliance of norms, suspension of manufacturing licences of some units, a directive from the health ministry to states to implement regulatory norms 'strictly' and a return to 'business as usual' in no time. No heads roll, no changes are made in the regulation, vacancies in drug regulatory bodies are not filled, no errant units are shut permanently, and nobody bothers to share findings of probes ordered into earlier episodes.

The culprits that make cough syrups toxic are well known by now: diethylene glycol (DEG) and ethylene glycol. Toxic effects of the two contaminants include abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, inability to pass urine, headache, altered mental state and acute kidney injury, which may lead to death. Apparently, the two chemicals get mistakenly used while manufacturing cough syrups, especially in syrups that use agents like propylene glycol and polyethylene glycol. After dozens of children died in The Gambia, Uzbekistan, Cameroon, Iraq and other countries after con-



LAXITY: Cough syrup makers have failed to prevent their products from getting contaminated with deadly toxins. REUTERS

suming 'made in India' products, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has been warning national regulatory and health authorities to notify if such products were detected in their respective countries. The agency has advised national authorities to test raw materials for the presence of DEG before use in medicines. DEG is responsible for the cough syrup deaths in Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh.

It is pathetic that cough syrup manufacturers are so careless that their products get contaminated with deadly toxins. It only goes to show that they are not adhering to mandatory Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) rules. Are they not following GMP, or is the government giving them a long rope? It is both.

After every death due to contaminated drugs, there is talk of implementing GMP or making them stricter. The moment this is done, industry associations representing small and medium drug manufacturers seek time to implement GMP rules or seek relaxations, citing the excuse that they do not have the capacity to implement the norms. The government, too, is sympathetic, as strict implementation or closure of non-compliant units

A review of product quality is required, involving analysis of data from batch records and critical process parameters.

could hurt its 'Make in India' programme. After the deaths of 68 children in The Gambia, Indian agencies even accused the WHO of not following procedures and saw a conspiracy to defame Indian exports. After the Chhindwara incident, the Drug Controller General of India has reiterated the need for drug manufacturers to comply with the Revised Schedule M of GMP. As per an official press release, he has noted that "certain firms which applied for the government's infrastructure upgradation scheme have been given an extension till December 2025" and urged states to strictly implement the revised GMP norms. It implies that as of now, the new schedule of GMP is

not being implemented.

The new schedule was introduced after an international uproar over deaths caused by India-made cough syrups in several countries. It became effective for large firms in June 2024, but small and medium-sized manufacturers (having a turnover of less than Rs 250 crore) were given time till December 2025, although most of the contaminated drugs were produced by such firms. The turnover limit was fixed in such a way as to cover a bulk of the manufacturers. Schedule M requires drug manufacturers to adhere to practices such as the Pharmaceutical Quality System, quality risk management and computerised storage systems.

A review of product quality is required, involving the analysis of data from batch records and critical process parameters. Manufacturers must retain samples of intermediate and final products for potential retesting.

So, norms are there, they are revised to make them more stringent, but there is no will to implement them. Central and state drug control authorities, tasked with enforcing the norms, are short of staff or are kept deliberately understaffed. An umpteen

number of expert panels, review committees and parliamentary panels have pointed this out in the past two decades, but the situation on the ground remains unchanged. Things are especially bad in states like Telangana, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh, which have a huge concentration of drug manufacturing units.

Drug regulation in India needs a fundamental change. The focus of drug regulatory authorities and the government is on the drug and pharmaceutical industry and not on consumer or patient interest. Norms are allowed to be lax, or non-compliance is tolerated to protect the industry. Otherwise, there is no reason DEG should have killed Indian children after the chemical was found responsible for the deaths of kids in The Gambia and other countries exporting cough syrups made in India. There should have been a nationwide crackdown on all manufacturers of cough syrups, and those found using DEG should have been identified and punished. All this did not happen, resulting in the Chhindwara deaths.

The 59th report of the Parliamentary Committee on Health and Family Welfare, presented in Parliament in 2012, had stated that "most of the ills besetting the system of drug regulation in India are mainly due to the skewed priorities and perceptions of the drug regulator. For decades together, it has been giving primacy to the propagation and facilitation of the drugs industry, due to which, unfortunately, the interest of the biggest stakeholder, i.e. the consumer, has never been ensured."

The panel recommended that the mission statement of the Central drug organisation should state that it was solely meant for public health. The statement was changed, but it has remained a cosmetic change, going by the recurring incidents of substandard and adulterated drugs killing people and industry interests taking precedence over people's health.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The care of the public health is the first duty of the statesman. — Benjamin Disraeli

A tale of two dogs and a delivery boy

COL TIRATH SINGH RAWAT (RETD)

DEHRADUN's winters are merciless. The cold seeps through walls, the mist clings to streets and the dogs in our colony strut about in their thick coats. Among them, two stand apart for very different reasons. One is Moti, the self-appointed watchman. Once abandoned, now everyone's pet, Moti is sharp, disciplined and on duty 24x7. No stranger enters the neighbourhood without hearing its sharp bark. Loyal, fearless and alert, it is the perfect four-legged alarm system with a wagging tail.

Then comes Sheru, a neighbour's pet and Moti's opposite. Sheru is enormous — a hulk with a back broad enough to double as a table. Its looks terrify visitors: it resembles a lion in disguise. Yet, the fearsome exterior hides a pampered aristocrat. It rarely barks, ignores intruders and spends its days on lazy strolls, leaving 'gifts' generously around the colony before polishing off the leftovers Moti rejects. Unless food is involved, Sheru is aloof, emotionless and entirely uninterested in the world.

It was on one such freezing afternoon that the drama unfolded. My doorbell rang and I saw a van with a delivery boy. Moti stood like a cop, ready to interrogate the intruder. The boy pleaded from inside the van, "Bhaiya, please pakad lo isko!" I grabbed Moti's collar with one hand while trying to scan the QR code with the other. Only then, reassured that Moti was under my grip, did he nervously get down from the van with my parcel. But Moti sensed the moment. Sliding forward, lips curling, it let out a strange half-growl, half-moan that sent shivers down the youngster's spine. His face turned pale. Fear froze him to the spot.

I tried consoling him. "Don't be scared. Dogs only chase those whom they don't trust." He nodded, trembling, eyes fixed on Moti. I then teased him, "Arrey bhai, you are so scared of Moti?" He turned to reply — and froze. Because silently, like a ghost, Sheru had materialised behind him. The beast blocked the lane with its massive frame. For the boy, this was no longer a routine delivery — it was a horror film. He didn't scream. Instead, he leapt straight onto me, dinging as if I were the only raft in a stormy sea. I was wedged between a trembling boy in front, Moti growling at one side and Sheru looming silently behind like a mountain that had suddenly grown legs.

Moti barked ferociously, Sheru towered menacingly, the boy shook like a leaf — and just then my phone buzzed cheerfully, "Payment successful", mocking the commotion. My neighbour rushed out to drag Sheru away, while I somehow restrained Moti. The boy sprinted down the lane like a man fleeing death itself. Since that day, he has never returned to our colony.

Dogs, after all, have unfathomable faithfulness. Sometimes they wag their tails, sometimes they guard their masters — and sometimes, in their own way, they gift an unsuspecting visitor a story he will never forget.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AI's quiet takeover

Apropos of 'AI and the Great White-Collar Recession'; the writer rightly captures the unsettling truth that artificial intelligence is no longer just a tool — it is a quiet takeover. For years, we believed that automation would replace only repetitive blue-collar jobs. But now, as the article highlights, even desk-bound executives and team leaders are realising they are not indispensable. AI neither tires nor negotiates a salary; it performs swiftly, accurately and without emotional baggage — a combination that makes even the most "secure" professions vulnerable. Instead of fearing AI, we must rethink our skills. The future will belong not to those who compete against AI, but to those who collaborate with it — using emotional intelligence, ethical judgment and human intuition where machines cannot reach.

ASHOK SINGH GULERIA, HAMIRPUR

From smog to sustainability

Refer to 'A green idea fails'; crop residue can be a raw material for making biodegradable utensils and other sustainable products. Treating farm waste as a renewable asset rather than a nuisance could fuel a circular rural economy. To translate this potential into practice, the government could engage students from the IIMs, IITs in the region and the PAU with projects to "buy, build and sell" solutions using crop residue. These young minds can devise economically viable and innovative models for biomass power, bio-CNG, industrial applications and eco-friendly products. Simultaneously, rational taxes, timely payments and state-supported logistics networks are essential to ensure regular straw supply.

HARSH PAWARIA, ROHTAK

West Asian diplomacy

Pakistan has been silently building bridges with the US and Saudi Arabia. To ace up, India should strengthen bilateral cooperation with Afghanistan extending beyond merchandise trade into infrastructure and even knowledge services. An enduring relationship would serve the interests of both countries and also maintain the balance of power in India's favour. India should also

expedite groundwork to revive the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor which was proposed during the 2023 G20 summit in New Delhi.

CHANDER SHEKHAR DOGRA, JALANDHAR

Pak trained Afghan mujahideen

Apropos of 'Af-Pak dashes'; Pakistan trained, armed and planned mujahideen in Afghanistan and coordinated direct attacks on its cities like Khost, Jalalabad and Kandahar. Help from Pakistan in terms of intelligence, logistics, armour, artillery, transportation and advisers transformed the mujahideen from guerrillas into soldiers. Now, Pakistan faces a dangerous situation, especially with the recent counterattacks by Afghanistan. India has always kept dialogue open with Afghanistan, and the present move to deepen its engagement with the Taliban can prove fruitful in countering Pakistan diplomatically and securing its strategic interests.

VAIBHAV GOYAL, CHANDIGARH

Affection wrapped in boxes

The Middle 'A box full of sweet memories' deeply moved me, for it mirrored moments from my own childhood. My late father, too, would arrive home on his bicycle, carrying boxes of sweets every Diwali and on our birthdays. Those simple gestures sweetened our lives. Even when illness dimmed his physical strength, he never gave up that ritual of love. Reading the piece transported me back to those fragrant evenings when affection was wrapped in boxes and sincerity in family bonds. Today, the rustle of a *mithai* box still evokes his memory — tender, timeless and soul-stirring.

SUNITA SIKRI, YAMUNANAGAR

Intellectually engaging articles

It is truly commendable that *The Tribune* still devotes two pages to editorials and authored articles. At a time when most newspapers, particularly in Hindi, have drastically reduced or sidelined the space meant for intellectually engaging articles, the newspaper stands apart. These pages help readers understand complex issues and encourage rational thinking.

NARESH KUMAR NIJHAWAN, KARNAL

Why did The System let Puran Kumar down



RAJBIR DESWAL
FORMER IPS OFFICER,
HARYANA

EVERY morning, as the world wakes to the hum of engines, office chatter and routine busyness, somewhere a human soul succumbs to silence. It may be in a government office, a corporate tower or a modest public department. The tragic end of an ordinary employee's life rarely makes headlines unless the victim happens to be "somebody important". Behind the cold reports of 'suicides' or 'sudden deaths' in the media lies a deeper narrative—the failure of systems to meet the most basic of human needs: empathy, dignity and humane engagement at the workplace.

This is not about the powerful few who dominate headlines and elicit ritual condolences. It is about the common individual—the clerk, the stenographer, the field worker, the constable—who finds the workplace a labyrinth of unfeeling procedures, biases and isolations. They are the faceless multitude caught in the gears of a machine that measures efficiency by files moved and compliance achieved, but forgets to measure humanity.

Psychologists observe that many such tragedies unfold

in the mornings—the hour of supposed renewal. Morning brings hope to most, but to some, it brings dread. For them, stepping into the office is like walking into a battlefield armed only with frailty. The corridors, the chairs, even familiar faces turn into silent witnesses of a slow psychological disintegration.

Why does this happen? Because the human spirit—the pulse that keeps any organisation alive—is throttled by systems built to operate without empathy. Bureaucratic structures, public or private, pride themselves on order, hierarchy and process. But in doing so, they become blind to the emotional undercurrents that sustain or destroy individuals within.

It often begins subtly. A bias—born of perception, prejudice or personal disfavour—creeps in. The victim may not even recognise it at first. Perhaps they questioned a wrong, spoke too frankly or simply failed to please the right person. From then on, every act, however trivial, is judged through that tainted lens. The system, instead of correcting itself, validates such bias through inertia. The person becomes the "difficult one", the "erratic employee", the "troublemaker".

Then begins the slow suffocation. No leeway is given; every rule becomes sacred. No sparing is shown; every lapse, however human, is magnified. The flexibility others enjoy becomes a luxury denied. Hounding and labelling follow, whispers turn into written notes, and "discipline" becomes a cloak for cruelty.



LABYRINTH: Behind the cold reports of 'suicides' or 'sudden deaths' in the media lies a deeper narrative. FILE

Nothing destroys a person more silently than being isolated in a space meant for collaboration. Colleagues withdraw, invitations dry up and even greetings grow hesitant. Desperate to reclaim belonging, the victim may act out—appearing emotional, erratic or defiant. That reaction then becomes proof of "instability", completing the vicious cycle: the system pushes, the victim reacts, and the system uses that reaction to push harder.

In recent years, a disturbing pattern has emerged across the country—of individuals in uniformed services and public employment taking their own lives after enduring prolonged oppression, hounding, systemic neglect or social bias. Whether in the bureaucracy, the police or the armed forces, the human cost of institutional indifference and discrimination is becoming painfully visible.

Several employees, particularly from marginalised

For every Puran Kumar whose story reaches the public, countless others remain unheard—clerks, constables, teachers, soldiers—quietly bearing indignity until it breaks them.

backgrounds, have left behind suicide notes narrating stories of humiliation, caste bias, professional hounding and administrative apathy. A few years ago, sub-inspector Karan Singh shot himself in Ambala, unable to bear the stigma of an alleged rape case registered against him. Head constable Jai Bir took his life inside a Panchkula police station, alleging hounding and framing by superiors. In Karnataka, government employee Chandrasekaran P ended his life after being accused of fund misappropriation, citing relentless harassment. In Chandigarh's PGIMER, radiographer Narinder Kaur's suicide exposed how workplace isolation and hostile transfers can erode a person's will to live. In the private sector, employees like Tarun Saxena of Bajaj Finance and Vivek Samdarshi of ICICI Bank succumbed to pressures and

bullying disguised as discipline and performance.

The recent case of IPS officer Y Puran Kumar stands apart—not only for its gravity but also for what it reveals about institutional silence. In his detailed note, Kumar spoke of persistent caste bias, denial of legitimate dues and emotional humiliation. His wife, Amneet P Kumar, who had served as ADC when I was SP in Ambala, has spoken of the deep pain he carried from official apathy.

I knew Puran personally—a gentle, upright and competent officer. The man who once cracked the steel frame of the civil service could not bear the unbearable: a silence too loud, a system too cold. He could not even wait for the outcome of a note reportedly moved by Rajesh Khullar, IAS officer, recommending that the issues troubling him be kept in abeyance—a gesture that came too late to matter.

When an officer of such calibre and sensitivity crosses the threshold of endurance, the question is not why he broke, but why the system let him. For every Puran Kumar whose story reaches the public, countless others remain unheard—clerks, constables, teachers, soldiers—quietly bearing indignity until it breaks them. The System's silence is not neutrality; it is complicity.

Rarely does one incident push a person to the edge. More often, it is the slow corrosion of being unwanted, unheard and unprotected. The warning signs are always visible—nervous silences, uncharacteristic absences,

erratic behaviour, sudden withdrawal. Yet The System is too busy to notice. Supervisors prefer paperwork over people; HR departments check compliance, not compassion.

If institutions truly wish to prevent such tragedies, they must embrace three humane duties: to save life—by ensuring psychological safety is valued as much as physical safety; to redress grievance—by hearing complaints without bias or vindictiveness; and to rehabilitate—by helping those crushed by pressure regain dignity and belonging.

A humane system is not one that never errs, but one that corrects itself with compassion. Efficiency without empathy becomes tyranny; control without care turns into cruelty. A living organisation must breathe—it must allow dialogue, dissent and forgiveness. The ability to listen, to understand and to accommodate must be seen as an administrative virtue, not weakness.

It is time to redefine performance itself. Discipline need not mean harshness; professionalism need not mean detachment. Compassion is not indulgence; it is the foundation of justice.

The tragedy is that institutions outlive individuals but lose their souls in the process. The files will move, the chairs will fill, the meetings will continue—but somewhere, a voice, a smile, a life will be missing. Let The System pause, just once, to look inward—before another morning turns fatal for someone who had only wanted to belong. Because no rulebook is worth the price of a human life.

When bureaucrats shared corridors with monkeys



ASHOK LAVASA
FORMER ELECTION
COMMISSIONER OF INDIA

IN the beginning of the 20th century, two men moved to India from South Africa; one to dismantle the edifice of the British empire and the other to build an edifice that would keep reminding us of our colonial past. Seventy-eight years after Mahatma Gandhi—who gave us his three famous ideological monkeys and led India to freedom—the government is moving out of the North and South Blocks designed by Herbert Baker. Both Gandhi and Baker came to India after spending many years of their professional life in South Africa.

When I first stepped into the North Block, joining the Ministry of Finance in the Department of Economic Affairs as a director on September 1, 1997, the inside of the building looked like an unkempt relic of the past. Soon, the same building will become a veritable treasure—a museum replacing a seat

of authority that once shaped the nation's future.

I was allotted a room on the ground floor. I was the director and later joint secretary in the DEA till 2002. I joined another ministry occupying the other end of North Block, the Ministry of Home Affairs, as joint secretary in 2009-10. I bid farewell to my career from North Block in 2017 as finance secretary.

The building will soon cease to be the nerve centre of governance. Internal security, finance and personnel, vital departments of the government, were housed in North Block facing its counterpart, the South Block that housed the critical ministries of defence, external affairs and the PMO. Both these Blocks stood guard to the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Coming from Chandigarh, the city planned by French architect Le Corbusier, to New Delhi, the city created by Lutyens, was like entering a time warp. The former is independent India's statement of modernity; the latter a glorious inheritance of an inglorious past. The rectangular grids of Corbusier are easy to understand but the circular layout of Delhi requires familiarisation, quite like its political milieu. The prominent roads of Chandigarh are named Uttar Marg, Dakshin



NATIONAL TREASURE: The building will soon cease to be the nerve centre of governance. TRIBUNE PHOTO

Marg and Madhya Marg, and residential areas divided into sectors that follow a numerical order. Delhi is history, ancient, medieval and modern, with some roads proclaiming the nation's accomplishments and political philosophy—Janpath, Rajpath, Vijay Chowk, Shanti, Niti, Panchsheel. The localities and other roads are a tapestry of its history—Ashoka, Akbar, Aurangzeb, Curzon, Kautilya, Chanakya, Rabindra, Lodhi.

On the first day, as I parked my Maruti 800 in North Block, I saw something frightening yet funny. On the bonnet of a car sat a monkey chewing the wiper, and on another, another monkey was playing with the rear-view mirror. Unsure whether this was a glimpse of bureaucratic

Any museum created in North Block would be untrue to history if it didn't depict the monkeys who were an integral part of the building.

shenanigans inside the building, I walked in nervously, now a part of the charmed circle of the power that the centre wielded over the states.

My nervousness turned into shock when my boss called me to his room after 5 pm, but my peon warned me against going. Puzzled by this power equation, as I prepared to step out, he said he would accompany me and quickly got hold of a tubelight rod that he kept behind the almirah like a secret weapon. With the rod in hand, he opened the door. The sight was enough for me to seek an immediate reversion from Central deputation—the corridor was full of monkeys and my peon's responsibility was to keep them at bay while I walked to my destination.

The administration tried everything to keep the simians away from interfering with people who were attempting to shape the history of a free nation that had commenced its march to modernity. Electronic devices were installed to emit sound waves to scare them, but like bureaucrats, they too seemed to have gotten used to unintelligible noise. Wire meshes were fixed to prevent them from trespassing into the corridors, but they came through the doors meant for humans. A man was employed to walk with a langoor whose dark face supposedly frightened the red-faced monkeys, but the financial adviser of the ministry objected to the procurement of their services without following the rules.

Gradually, I got used to walking in the mighty corridors, with monkeys strutting around or sitting on the almirahs, overflowing with files, lining the verandahs. Nobody could satisfactorily explain the presence of either the monkeys or the countless files.

It took Jaswant Singh to act when he became Finance Minister—removing inanimate objects from the corridors. However, the monkeys, witness to meetings with foreign delegations and economic reforms, management of the elite civil services and

mobilisation of the Central police forces, survived his initiatives to spruce up the building, install statues and carpet the main staircase.

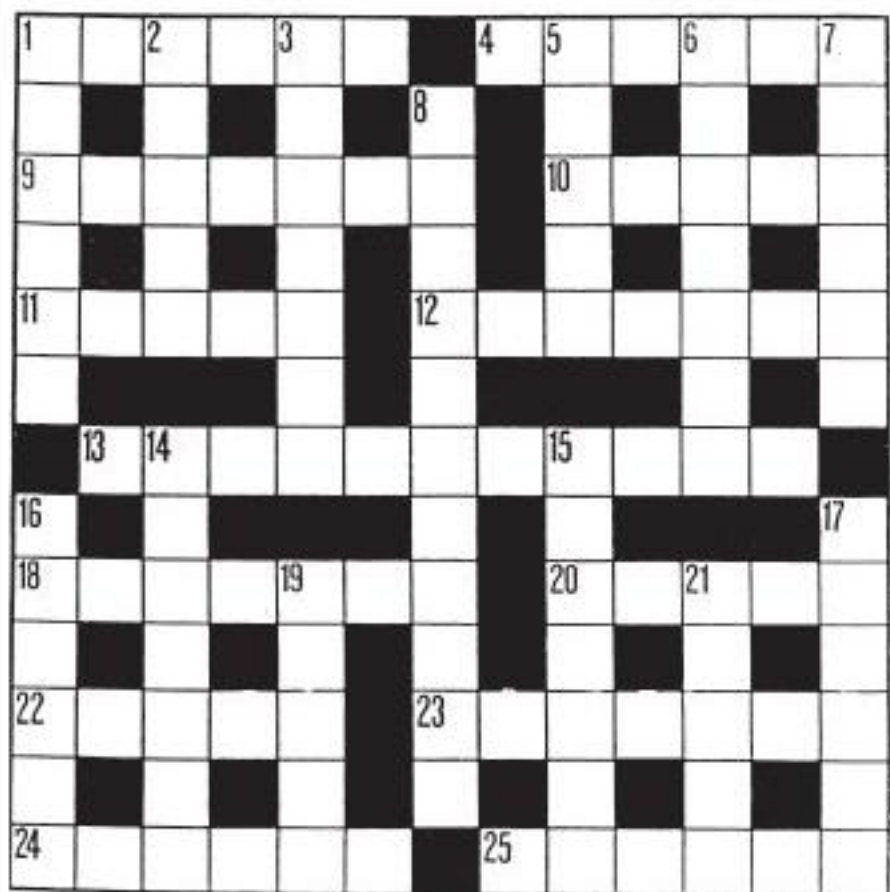
Any museum created in North Block would be untrue to history if it didn't depict the creatures who were an integral part of the North Block way-of-life and unfair to the four-legged animals who believed that it was the two-legged ones who had displaced them in the first place.

This process of displacement started in 1911 when the Crown decided to move the capital from Calcutta to New Delhi. Edwin Landseer Lutyens, British architect, was entrusted with the town planning for New Delhi, and Herbert Baker, another British architect, with designing North and South Blocks. It was a British design executed by Indian skills.

The construction contractors were Sardar Bahadur Basakha Singh Sandhu and Sir Sobha Singh. Their names are inscribed on a stone under one of the small canopies facing Vijay Chowk.

On days when I left office early, I admired the setting sun hiding behind the Rashtrapati Bhavan dome. The sun will soon set on these historic buildings as they move deeper into the recesses of history, housing memorabilia.

QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1 Astute (6)
 - 4 Short sleep (6)
 - 9 Unbeliever (7)
 - 10 Wrong opinion (5)
 - 11 Statement of belief (5)
 - 12 To prompt (7)
 - 13 Upset existing equilibrium (4,3,4)
 - 18 A brilliant display (7)
 - 20 Height or value reached (5)
 - 22 Take up and use (5)
 - 23 Surround entirely (7)
 - 24 Disposition (6)
 - 25 Caprice (6)
- Yesterday's solution**
- Across:** 1 Bolster, 5 Cubic, 8 Once and for all, 9 Drown, 10 Speckle, 11 Dither, 12 Garnet, 15 Awesome, 17 Rowan, 19 Stretch a point, 20 Tower, 21 Descend.
- Down:** 1 Brood, 2 Luck of the draw, 3 Trainee, 4 Radish, 5 Choke, 6 Black and white, 7 Collect, 11 Dead set, 13 Apropos, 14 Method, 16 Otter, 18 Noted.
- DOWN**
- 1 Transfer (6)
 - 2 Make vigorous search (5)
 - 3 Matrimony (7)
 - 5 An expert (5)
 - 6 State of bliss (7)
 - 7 Discuss terms with enemy (6)
 - 8 Able to think rationally (5-6)
 - 14 Inferior (2,1,4)
 - 15 South American country (7)
 - 16 Acquire (6)
 - 17 Careless (6)
 - 19 Absolute (5)
 - 21 Substantial suburban house (5)

SU DO KU



V. EASY

FORECAST

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION		
7	9	4
2	5	6
1	8	3
4	7	5
9	6	1
3	2	8
8	1	9
5	4	2
6	3	7

CALENDAR		
OCTOBER 14, 2025, TUESDAY		
■ Shaka Samvat	1947	
■ Aashwin Shaka	22	
■ Aashwin Parvishite	29	
■ Hijari	1447	
■ Krishna Paksha Tithi 8, up to 11:10 am		
■ Siddha Yoga up to 4:11 am		
■ Purnak Nakshatra up to 11:55 am		
■ Moon in Cancer sign		

FORECAST		
SUNSET: 17:53 HRS	TUESDAY	17:53 HRS
SUNRISE: 06:24 HRS	WEDNESDAY	06:24 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	32	18
New Delhi	33	20
Amritsar	30	19
Bathinda	33	17
Jalandhar	30	19
Ludhiana	30	18
Bhiwani	30	18
Hisar	30	18
Sirsa	30	19
Dharamsala	27	13
Manali	23	07
Shimla	24	12
Srinagar	26	07
Jammu	32	17
Kargil	17	01
Leh	14	00
Dehradun	30	16
Mussoorie	22	12

TEMPERATURE IN °C

Didi shocks nation, lets down girls in WB

SOMETHING seems to be seriously wrong with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Notorious for her virulent verbal attacks on her adversaries right from the time she shot to fame on the political firmament by spitting venom at CPM, she has periodically drawn flak for the manner she plays her cards, especially when her utterances result in severe backlash from all quarters, including the public. Driven to the wall, she has invariably reacted with customary ‘I have been wrongly quoted’ or ‘deliberately distorted’ pretexts. It is a different thing altogether that no one is buying her ‘lame’ excuses. Quite ironically, she seems unaware that pointing an ac-

cusing finger at opposition leaders is quite different from reacting to heinous crimes like rape-murder and gang-rapes happening in her own state. Her sordid comments after a 23-year-old second-year MBBS student at a private medical college in Durgapur was gang-raped around midnight on Sunday, is not only condemnable but hugely deplorable. Her reaction “How was she out at 12.30 am?”, has left outraged sections in the nation aghast because of her typical senseless blabber, which is unbecoming of a Chief Minister and a woman to boot.

It is ironic that not only has she defended herself by stating that she was quoted “out of context”, and

adding that the Bengal Police were taking all steps to track down the culprits, the Chief Minister has unabashedly shifted the blame on to the management of the private medical college where the victim, a Odisha native, is a student. Blaming the college for the “culture at night” that prevails, Banerjee quipped, “They (girl students) should not be allowed to come out. They must protect themselves. It is a forest area.”

Predictably, it has drawn criticism from all political parties, with the BJP accusing the Chief Minister of ‘victim shaming’. Not one to take the blame, she tried to turn the tables by hitting out at the BJP government in Odisha, and brought up rape cases

in the neighbouring state, Manipur, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Wanting to know what action those state administrations have taken against the perpetrators, Banerjee has exposed the double standards she employs. “Shameless @MamataOfficial a blot on womanhood, even more for being a CM. After RG Kar and Sandeshkhali, now this horrific case and instead of justice, she blames the victim!” is how BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia has reacted in a post on X.

This is not the first time that women have been advised against going out at night by the Bengal government. The barbaric rape and murder of a doctor at Kolkata’s R.G.

Kar Medical College on August 9, 2024 saw the government issuing such guidelines and calling upon management to reduce night duty for women. “In Bengal we have zero tolerance (against such crimes), and I will appeal to the boys and girls who come to study here not to venture out at night. This is because the police are not aware of who is coming out of hostels and when?” Does she mean that girls from her own state are less vulnerable or is it that they get more protection. It is a ridiculous argument. Fear was writ large in the reaction of the father of the student. “They could kill her here any moment. That’s why we want to take her back to Odisha. Trust has been lost. We don’t want her to stay in Bengal.” Miss Banerjee should know that there is no smoke without fire.

LETTERS

Mamata's utterances unbecoming of a woman

IN the aftermath of the shocking incident of a 23-year-old LMBS student's gang rape in West Bengal's Durgapur, the insensitive and irresponsible comments by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who tried to shift the blame on the student, and questioned the rationale for coming out of the campus in the midnight was baffling. This amounts to encouraging anti-social elements and soft-peddling of those involved in the crime, who are on the prowl to outrage the modesty of unsuspecting women. The State has become a den for rapes and political murders under the TMC government. Mamata Banerjee being a woman herself has failed to fathom the sensitivity of the situation and is oblivious of the agony of the victim and her anguished family. The state is perennially in the news for all the wrong reasons with the active connivance of Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamool Congress party.

K R Venkata Narasimhan, Madurai

Mamata must resign

WEST BENGAL Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is behaving as if she is not accountable for the safety and security of the people of her State. This is evidenced in the wake of the midnight gang-rape of a medical college student in Durgapur and her disgusting reaction to the incident. Wondering why the student had come out at such a time was a lame explanation and unbecoming of a Chief Minister. She should emulate the efficiency with which Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is handling and rounding up anti-social and rowdy elements. It is time Banerjee resigns as the state's Chief minister owning moral responsibility for heinous crime.

S Lakshmi, Hyderabad

A beacon of sustainability

I wish to applaud the Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha temple in Simhachalam for its exemplary commitment to environmental sustainability. This ancient shrine has set a remarkable precedent by seamlessly integrating eco-conscious practices into its sacred rituals. The temple's initiatives, such as adopting renewable energy, efficient waste management, and water conservation, are truly commendable. The introduction of electric buses and rainwater harvesting systems demonstrates a significant step towards reducing its carbon footprint. The strict ban on single-use plastics and promotion of biodegradable alternatives are practices that can be emulated by other religious institutions. Under the visionary leadership of Trust Chairman Ashok Gajapathi Raju, Simhachalam has become a model for sustainable pilgrimage infrastructure. His mantra, “Conserving nature is the true offering to the divine”, resonates deeply in today's environmentally conscious world. By working together, we can ensure a greener future for the future generations.

Raju Kolluru, Kakinada

Approach Afghan issue cautiously

THIS has reference to your editorial ‘Pak’s idiotic ‘strategic depth’ policy is killing its own soldiers’. When the US troops left Afghanistan in August 2021, there was jubilation in the military and political circles of Pakistan that they had another Islamist ally to fight against the ‘kafirs’ in the world, with a distinct and unmissable focus on India. The PAF helped liberate one of the provinces, Taloqon, tucked away in the mountains and impregnable, to make the job easy for the Taliban. The tables are turned against such strategic doctrine dreamt by Pakistan. India under any regime in Afghanistan has been helping that country, whenever natural calamities struck on purely humanitarian considerations. However, there is a need for India to evolve a cautious approach, since a country believing in ‘sharia’ - not believing in women’s right for education and social justice, can be enigmatic.

K V Raghuram, Wayanad

Streamline RTI Act on a priority basis

IT has been 20 years since the RTI Act was enacted on October 12, 2005. In these two decades it has emerged as one of independent India’s most powerful tools for promoting transparency and accountability in governance. Citizens across the country have used it to expose corruption, ensure timely delivery of public services, and make government institutions more responsive. However, despite these successes, several challenges threaten the enduring effectiveness of this landmark law - increasing delays in responses by Public Information Officers, misuse of exemption clauses, harassment of RTI applicants, and lack of awareness among the rural population are eroding its intended impact. Furthermore, recent attempts to dilute certain provisions, such as the tenure and autonomy of Information Commissioners, raise concerns about weakening its enforcement. It is imperative that both the government and civil society work together to strengthen RTI implementation through better infrastructure, protection for whistleblowers, and public awareness campaigns. Only then can the spirit of transparency envisioned in the Act be truly realized.

Sajid Farooq, Kurnool AP

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

1,092 trees to be axed from JP Nagar to Hebbal Kempapura

BENGALURU: Under Phase 3 of the Namma Metro project, construction of the new metro line from JP Nagar 4th Phase to Hebbal Kempapura will result in the felling of over a thousand trees. The BMRCL (Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited) has now received official approval to cut 1,092 trees for this corridor. The project, spanning 44.65 km, includes two main routes — JP Nagar 4th Phase to Hebbal Kempapura (Corridor 1) and Hosahalli to Kadabagere (Corridor 2). As per the Detailed Project Report (DPR), an estimated 11,137 trees were likely to be affected. However, officials have decided to remove only those directly obstructing the metro line and stations, while relocating the rest.

Bengaluru has already lost thousands of trees to various infrastructure works such as flyovers, suburban rail projects, and road widening. As the city expands rapidly, its green cover continues to decline year after year. The 10.88 km stretch from JP Nagar 4th Phase to Mysuru Road will feature a double-decker flyover carrying both vehicles and metro trains. Stations will come up at JP Nagar 4th Phase, JP Nagar 5th Phase, JP Nagar, Kadirenahalli, Kamakya Junction, Hosakerehalli, Dwarakanagar, and Mysuru Road.

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

19(1)(a) expression-Fear of weaponization haunts media fraternity



DR MADABHUSHI SRIDHAR ACHARYULU

THE fear of laws being used to suppress free speech—a phenomenon known as the “chilling effect”—is a growing global concern. Authorities and powerful private entities may weaponize vague or disproportionate laws to intimidate journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens who express critical or dissenting views.

It is weaponizing the law. It can be a more constant, haunting fear that is always present, even if the specific event isn’t around the corner but near about. Critics fear the government could use the law’s vague provisions to selectively target media organizations that are critical, sometimes even penal provisions of Act, especially the DPDP Act, 2023.

In 2023, amendments to India’s IT rules granting the government power to establish fact-checking units to censor online content were struck down by a court. Critics argued the rule gave the government excessive power to control speech related to its affairs.

Fear of legal repercussions causes individuals to self-censor and refrain from expressing legitimate views, stifling public debate and the “marketplace of ideas” essential for a healthy democracy. The intimidation

of the press and civil society by weaponizing the law weakens public scrutiny and accountability, potentially allowing governments to become unaccountable to their citizens and mark erosion of human rights. The suppression of free expression often facilitates further human rights abuses by removing one of the most effective tools for exposing wrongdoing.

The Act allows the central government to exempt its agencies from key provisions in the interest of India’s sovereignty, security, and public order. Critics contend these exemptions are broad, vague, and lack safeguards, potentially enabling mass state surveillance.

While celebrating two decades of Right to Information (RTI), the fear of abuse of freedom of speech and expression when rules are implemented in Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, as especially section 44(3) amended Section 8(1) (j) of the RTI Act. The amendment removes this public interest test, potentially preventing information about public servants involved in wrongdoing from being disclosed, thereby impacting the Data law.

Journalists argue that the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act as it stands, could severely impact press freedom by criminalising routine reporting, requiring consent for news coverage, and threatening source confidentiality. The ill consequences are explained by Justice A P Shah.

Significant Data Fiduciary (SDF) status: Media organizations that handle large datasets, like electoral rolls, could be designated as “Significant Data Fiduciaries,” facing increased regulatory scrutiny and burdens. Prob-



Journalists argue that the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act as it stands, could severely impact press freedom by criminalising routine reporting, requiring consent for news coverage, and threatening source confidentiality. The ill consequences are explained by Justice A P Shah.

lem is why should the Government ignore ‘exemption to expression’? Reasons are:

In the 2018, 2019, and 2021 versions of the data protection bill, exemptions were provided for journalistic purposes. The Justice Srikrishna Committee Report on Data Protection (2018) and the 2012 Group of Experts on Privacy headed by Justice AP Shah had also recommended exemptions for journalistic purposes. Why was the journalistic exemption removed from the final version of the DPDP Bill, which was enacted in August 2023?

If in the opinion of the ministry, no explicit exemption for journalistic purposes is required as the law does not to apply to journalistic work, which are the specific sections of the DPDP Act, 2023, that safeguard rights of entities and individuals and exempt them from ob-

ligations of data fiduciary if they are processing personal information for journalistic purposes? Please provide a list of such sections and an explanation on how they protect journalistic work.

Since the enactment of the RTI Act in 2005, information accessed under the law has become a crucial source for journalists and media. There are innumerable examples of important journalistic work in public interest which are based on records accessed under the RTI Act. Why was Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act amended through the DPDP Act to expand the scope of information exempt from disclosure?

Similarly, if in the opinion of the ministry, the right to access information under the RTI Act remains unchanged despite the changes made to Section 8(1)(j) through the DPDP Act be-

cause of the existence of Section 8(2) of the RTI Act, why was the RTI Act amended?

Data Act of Section 44(3) substitutes RTI Act Section 8(1)(j), making all personal data exempt from disclosure without the earlier public-interest override (see explanatory note). How will MEITY prevent this from hollowing out journalists’ access to corruption-related records?

Meanwhile, journalists’ bodies show two serious problems in S 7: It states that personal data of a “data principal” can be used only for the “specified purpose”. In such a case, how do these scenarios pan out for journalists and media organisations?

Suppose a person involved in journalistic activity is working on a story on denial of ration cards to people of a certain region due to mismatch with Aadhaar data and collects personal data of the affected people such as name, age, and place for identifying the extent of the problems. It raises some questions:

Is such journalist required to take “informed consent” from each individual for processing this raw data and using it in a coherent tabular format in an article to highlight the systemic problem in the public interest?

Second critical situation:

Suppose, a few months down the line, it emerges that starvation deaths have occurred in the same region due to lack of access to food and the previously collected data is used to establish a causal link between the deaths and problems with Aadhaar data, is the person involved in journalistic activity or the media organisation required to obtain fresh consent?

Interestingly, telemedicine has emerged as a potential solution to address rural pain management gaps. To enhance access and awareness in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, the top suggestions included local training programmes for general physicians, establishing regional pain clinics and government support for affordable pain medications

general physicians, establishing regional pain clinics and government support for affordable pain medications.

Despite the growing need, several doctors are refraining from pursuing pain management as a speciality. The reasons cited include lack of formal training opportunities, perceived low financial viability and limited institutional support in managing chronic pain cases. Commenting on the survey findings, Malavika Kaur Saxena, CMO at Rusan Healthcare, said, “Through this one-of-a-kind nationwide survey by RusanMed, we sought to capture the real voices of doctors across India and highlight the systemic challenges they face in addressing pain. We hope these insights will spark dialogue among policymakers,

healthcare providers, and stakeholders to bring pain management to the forefront of India’s healthcare agenda. Our commitment is to continue enabling knowledge, driving awareness, and fostering collaborations that can improve access and outcomes for patients everywhere.”

Notably, the representation was geographically diverse with 42.1 per cent of respondents from Tier 2 cities, 40.1 per cent from Tier 1 cities, 14.6 percent from Tier 3 towns, and 6.4 per cent from rural and underserved regions.

The majority had between five to ten years of clinical experience (33.9 per cent), followed by those with 11 to 20 years (23.9 per cent) and less than five years (23.3 per cent).



gaps identified were lack of trained healthcare professionals (52.8 per cent), insufficient patient awareness (48 per cent), and absence of dedicated pain clinics (43 percent). This has resulted in a growing trend of patient migration to urban centres for pain relief.

The survey also brought to light a critical concern — the lack of awareness and access to appropriate pain management options, which often leads patients to resort to self-medication. A significant number of patients attempt to manage pain on their own before consulting a doctor.

The most common choices include over-the-counter oral analgesics (69.6 per cent), pain balms or topical

applications (49.3 per cent), and herbal or home remedies (39.1 per cent).

Interestingly, telemedicine has emerged as a potential solution to address rural pain management gaps. About 41.3 per cent of respondents rated it as effective and another 20.1 per cent as very effective in extending pain care access to underserved areas. The survey also revealed that multimodal therapy (47.6 per cent) and patient education and counselling (36.7 per cent) were considered the most successful pain management strategies by participating doctors. To enhance access and awareness in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, the top suggestions included local training programmes for

THE ASIAN AGE

14 OCTOBER 2025

Deserving laureates get Nobels, including a champion of peace

One of the most anticipated Nobel seasons became more famous for the Norwegian Nobel Committee not handing the peace prize to Donald Trump, the obstreperous US president who literally demanded that he be awarded the coveted prize for peace. Instead, they picked a brave and committed champion of peace “who keeps the flame of democracy burning amid a growing darkness” in the Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado.

To be fair to Mr Trump, let it be said that his unceasing efforts to end wars, including those in which he was asked not to intervene like in the subcontinental conflict between India and Pakistan, did yield fruit as in the phase one of his plan for ending the Gaza War concluding successfully with the last of the live Israeli hostages being handed over to the Red Cross on Monday. To rein in the vengeful Israeli offensive of two years may have needed the best and worst of Trump’s virtually blackmailing style of negotiating.

Amid all that was said or left unsaid, including in the winner crediting Mr Trump as one deserving of the prize, what was not highlighted was that one of the defining clauses of the awarding of Nobel peace prize is that it should pertain to work in the “preceding year,”

which just means that Trump will be the consensus candidate for the prize next year, never mind if he stealth-bombed Iran’s nuclear fuel processing facilities and did more to prop up or support dictators, oligarchs and monarchs than for those upholding democracy.

Mr Trump was probably not exaggerating when he said he deserves the peace prize more than a predecessor in Barack Obama who may not have been as forceful a champion of the stopping of wars and conflicts. Considering the likes of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman did not get the Nobel for bringing World War II to a conclusion, let it be said that Mr Trump is a non-winner who is overtly sore about it. But then the committee did not even honour the ultimate apostle of peace in Mahatma Gandhi, which could lead the sceptics to ask what all the fuss regarding the Nobel Peace Prize is about.

The Nobel committee’s choices in the scientific Nobels were more readily understood by the community because they honoured achievements in fundamental research. Of course, much of the research in medicine, physics and chemistry that were awarded this year was pertinent to life in the modern era as they all led to discoveries like the ubiquitous cellphone without which life may seem unbearable, the reason why the body’s immune system does not attack itself leading to developments in cancer treatment and a way to satisfy a real world need like harvesting water from the air in dry places like desert fringes.

The season wound down with the economics prize, which has often proved contentious given the common understanding that if you put two economists in a room there may be three opinions or more on offer. In picking three economists for their identifying the prerequisites for sustained growth through technological progress and for postulating a theory of growth through creative destruction, the committee may have awarded people whose work will have a bearing on life in the planet even if it may not always be easy to spot how relevant the research is towards enhancing the quality and comforts of modern living.

As in its wisdom of leaving out Mr Trump this year, the committee must be lauded more than censured for its considered choices that carry so much prestige. However, the fact that online betting patterns showed the choice for the Peace Nobel may have somehow been leaked before Ms Machado was announced as the winner does suggest that there is no such thing as absolute secrecy in today’s world, nor perfection ever.

Rape in WB: Stop victim-blaming

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee’s response to the mid-night rape of a medico on a campus in Durgapur in the state can easily be termed one of the worst examples of victim-blaming and abdication of responsibility by a person at the wheel.

The chief minister was wondering aloud how the victim girl came out at 12.30 in the night. And worse, blaming the medical college and the girl, she suggested that girls should not be allowed to go outside in the night and that they have to protect themselves.

Protection of life and properties of the citizens is the prime responsibility of a government in a democracy and there are state instruments to ensure that. The state’s job is not to protect those who limit their activities to their homes alone but also to protect others who go out and engage in activities that do not violate the law.

Ms Banerjee was making an open admission that the administration she heads is not in a position to ensure protection to all people at all times when she questioned a rape-survivor’s right to go out at a time and to a place of her choosing. It also implies that criminals are free to act at a time and place of their choosing and it is for the law-abiding citizens to avoid them. It also conveys a message that those who choose to exercise their freedoms are doing so at their own risk and that the violators of the law have an excuse for their doing, however criminal it is.

People resort to victim blaming when they are not in a position to stop an unwanted event from happening. Principles of democratic governance in this age cannot condone a chief minister who is unequal to the task of implementation of the law and order. Ms Banerjee must withdraw her statement and publicly apologise to the victim and the people of this country for her irresponsible statement.

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KAUSHIK MITTER

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Subhani



Emigration policy evolving from welfare to facilitation



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

The decision of the Narendra Modi government to introduce the Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill 2025 in Parliament, replacing the existing Emigration Act 1983, marks a turning point in India’s evolving policy on the export of human talent and labour. What began half a century ago as a voluntary emigration of skilled, semi-skilled and even unskilled Indians to countries where employment opportunities were available is now becoming organised emigration facilitated by the government itself.

The government, in short, has taken upon itself the responsibility to help export Indians.

The idea that the Government of India needs a ministry that could connect with overseas Indians first found expression in the report of the L.M. Singhvi Committee on the Indian diaspora, commissioned by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in 2001. It was left to the Manmohan Singh government to create such a ministry and define its purpose. In May 2004 the Union ministry of non-resident Indian affairs was created, and very soon after that it was renamed, in September 2004, as the ministry of overseas Indian affairs (MOIA).

For a decade, the ministry stood on its own feet and focused on two tasks: connecting with overseas Indians and securing the welfare of Indian workers overseas. In 2016 MOIA was merged into the ministry of external affairs. Therein lay a policy change of substance. It was one thing for the ministry of external affairs to use its global reach to reconnect with people of Indian origin and overseas Indians worldwide. It was quite a different thing for the

MEA to then become the agency for the welfare of emigrant labour.

The original proposal of the Singhvi Committee has taken two very interesting turns and the proposed bill is, in effect, a third turn. Let me explain. As I have discussed in my recent book, *Secession of the Successful: The Flight Out of New India* (Penguin, 2025), the Vajpayee government decision to create an institutional mechanism to deal with the so-called Indian “diaspora” was motivated by a very different objective from the objective that defined the 1983 Emigration Act.

The latter was meant to protect the interests of the Indian working class employed, at the time, mainly in the Arab Gulf nations. The Singhvi report, however, sought to create a policy framework within which the BJP could connect with Indians, read Hindus, worldwide. After the creation of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the setting up of overseas units of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the VHP, RSS and BJP created a global Hindutva network that the Narendra Modi government began reaching out to in a more organised manner.

The official Indian policy of reaching out to overseas Indians had, therefore, two very different intentions. On the one hand, it was aimed at protecting the interests of overseas Indian workers and, on the other hand, it was aimed at imparting to India’s diaspora policy an ideological focus. As external affairs minister, Sushma Swaraj paid equal attention to both objectives and it is a matter of interest that the Modi government took great pride in the fact that an Arab country, home to lakhs of Indian workers, had become home to a Hindu temple.

In most other countries that are home to emigrant labour, an important factor contributing to emigration is distress at home. Indian officials and diplomats will fight shy of confessing to such distress.

When one examines closely the activities of the MEA and the diaspora division within the MEA over the past decade, it is clear that its policy walked on two legs — a policy for overseas Indian labour and a policy for overseas Hindus. The proposed Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill 2025 offers a third leg for the diaspora policy to stand on, namely, the “facilitation of emigration”.

The proposed bill states that it “envisages comprehensive emigration management, institutes a regulatory mechanism by developing a regime for safe and orderly migration governing overseas employment of Indian nationals and establishes a framework which creates policies and schemes for incentivising policy actions for the protection and promotion of welfare of emigrants”.

The decision to introduce this bill should be viewed in the context of recent initiatives of the Union government to actively facilitate the export of Indian labour.

Indian workers have been recruited by government agencies in several Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan, for employment in Israel, where local economic activity has been disrupted by the Israeli government’s decision to get rid of Palestinian labour. In yet another, if different, kind of initiative, the Government of India signed a memorandum of understanding with the government of Taiwan to export as many as 10,000 skilled Indian workers to be employed in the labour-seeking Taiwanese industrial sector.

These high-profile agreements seem to have trig-

gered a wave of ambition to explore new employment opportunities worldwide for Indians faced with unemployment at home. The ministry of external affairs has been at the forefront in exploring these opportunities. The external affairs minister, S. Jaishankar, was candid when he launched a private sector initiative aimed at exporting Indian talent.

Pointing to global demographic trends, to large-scale Indian emigration that had already taken place, the minister said: “There is a demand in the world, and availability in India, and the basic groundwork done to enable Indian talent to gain global access is there. Now, how well they do that and what will be the scale — I think that is up to us.”

With this objective in mind, it seems, the minister has come forward with this bill that not only focuses on the “welfare” of Indians working overseas, which was the focus of the 1983 Emigration Act, but also on “facilitating” such migration. Since policymakers in India are unable to help secure employment for Indians seeking it at home, they will now step in to help such unemployed citizens locate opportunities overseas.

India is not the only country that has a government actively seeking employment for its citizens overseas. There are others like the Philippines and Mexico.

In most other countries that are home to emigrant labour, an important factor contributing to emigration is distress at home. Indian officials and diplomats will fight shy of confessing to such distress, even when media reports draw attention to it, but that is often the bottom line defining the supply of manpower. It is not just global opportunity but domestic distress that is driving Indian emigration policy.

Sanjaya Baru is a writer and an economist. His most recent book is

Secession of the Successful: The Flight Out of New India

LETTERS

PHARMA MESS-UP

It is surprising that, despite its lapses, the Tamil Nadu-based Srisun Pharma, which manufactured the toxic Coldrif cough syrup, was allowed to continue. Now inspections by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation have found so many irregularities. Cough syrups manufactured in India are getting a bad name as a result of this oversight. After the deaths in Africa last year, drug controllers all over India should have been doubly cautious. Had the inspections been done meticulously, many lives could have been saved.

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

STABILISE GOLD

THE RECENT surge in gold and silver prices has caused deep concern among the public. Gold has reached Rs 2,15,000 per tola, rising by Rs 55,000 in a year, while silver prices are also climbing fast. This sharp increase has made it difficult for middle-class families, especially those who are preparing for weddings, to manage their expenses. The rise reflects global economic instability, inflation and currency pressure. The authorities must take strong and effective steps to stabilise markets and protect consumers from any further financial stress.

Md Hammad
Araria, Bihar

GOODBYE, DIANE

DIANE KEATON, born Diane Hall on January 5, 1946, in Los Angeles, began her acting career after training at the Neighbourhood Playhouse in New York, adopting her mother’s maiden name to join the Screen Actors Guild. Ms Keaton, who passed away on October 11 at the age of 79, leaves behind a profound legacy in Hollywood and around the world. Her iconic roles in *Annie Hall*, *The Godfather* and *Father of the Bride* resonated deeply with Indians worldwide, who admired her for portraying independent, witty and resilient women. Her performances highlighted universal themes of family, love, and self-discovery, inspiring audiences across generations. In India, she became a symbol of elegance and strength, influencing filmmakers and actors alike. Her passing is a significant cultural loss, felt both in Hollywood and among her devoted Indian fans worldwide.

Hasmain Rabbani
Mumbai

Aakar Patel



In 1991, China was at the same level as India. Now, why it’s five times ahead...

Thirty-five years ago, India chose to go down two paths, on both of which it remains. The first path was to move to a new form of economics. This was informally named “liberalisation” and involved opening up India to foreign capital, dismantling the so-called “licence raj”, and ending public sector monopolies.

Though this was unstated, the goal of liberalisation was to follow the path of Asian nations like Japan, Taiwan and South Korea and industrialise India. Another nation was attempting this at the same time as us, and that is China. On the cusp of liberalisation, whose date we mark as July 24, 1991 (when finance minister Manmohan Singh presented his Budget) India and China were at the same stage of economic development. The World Bank says both nations had a per person GDP of \$334 in 1991.

It is said that China had a bit of a lead because their process of opening up came just after Mao Zedong had died, a decade or so before India. But the People’s Republic of China was coming from a very dark place, with no private sector at all and a society that was wounded by the Cultural Revolution, hammered still by such cruelty as the one-child policy. So, it is fair to say that in 1991 we were actually even.

What has happened since then on this road is a story that can be understood when summarised by decade. By the end of the 1990s, China’s per person GDP was twice that of India’s.

The Atal Behari Vajpayee years that opened the next decade gave us the promise of “India Shining”. But by the end of the 2000s, China was ahead of us by three times. In the Manmohan Singh era, China was up four times. In Narendra Modi’s New India, up by five times.

Till the time of the global financial crisis of 2008, publications that tracked the global economy, such as *The Economist*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Financial Times* of London used to run features speculating that India was on the path to joining Japan, South Korea and China. That ended by the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was conceded that India was not doing and could not do what the Asian tigers had done, and was consigned to grow at more or less the same pace as its sisters — Bangladesh and, to a lesser extent, Pakistan.

The reasons for this were likely several, but the primary one was the inability of the State, meaning the apparatus of government, to effectively develop and implement policy. Today, India’s per person GDP is \$2,696, more comparable to Bangladesh (\$2,593) and Pakistan (\$1,484) than it is to China (\$13,303).

This is the reason why the majority of Indians are thought by the government itself to be in

need of food support and why jobs and gross inequality are the real problem behind the fables of development.

Though it is clear that it is not working as intended, India remains on the same economic path. The second path India chose to go down in 1990 also it remains on. This was to move away from pluralism and secularism and towards whatever utopia was promised by the BJP’s ideology, which it called “Hindutva” in its manifesto of 1996. The party’s successful campaign against the Babri Masjid and the pogroms that followed moved India away comprehensively in a new direction. The party formed in 1951 did not have a chief minister of its own, without a coalition, till 1990. Its national vote share was in the single digits for all these decades before doubling under Lal Krishna Advani after Babri Masjid’s demolition to around 18 per cent and then doubling again under Narendra Modi to 36 per cent.

Unlike the first path of development, the acceleration down this second path has been quite rapid. Under Atal Behari Vajpayee, the BJP was not as full-throated in its expression of anti-minority politics as it is today. This was because some felt that Vajpayee was soft, though it is true that he was dependent on allies and therefore forced to be hesitant. The events of 2002 changed that. The BJP found its new

leader, who personified both the directions. Coming from a state that had benefited most from the reforms of 1991, he claimed its relative progress was because of him. And the pogrom of 2002, and Vajpayee’s inability to get him removed, established him as the primary figure of the future, something that he was able to fulfil.

He promised progress down both the paths chosen by India in 1990, but was able to lead it on only one. Today, India is not compared to China and the government has given up on comparisons, along with the rest of the world. Instead, we have found comfort in internal persecution, fighting the Pakistani Army and the Bangladeshi refugee along the way. The electoral success of the BJP after 1990 has meant that this road will be difficult to leave, since these policies are rewarded.

For younger readers 1990 will seem a very long time ago, but for many of us it is recent memory. We can look at those decades and see what transpired, and why. The next decades will be similar: hesitant and slow travel on the road to becoming a wealthy and equal society and a rapid, confident march further into the Hindutva utopia.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar_patel

Govt plans bigger push for EV two-wheelers in new policy

The upcoming policy is expected to offer higher subsidies, tax benefits, and better charging infrastructure-particularly aimed at gig workers who rely heavily on two-wheelers for deliveries

PURNA SINGH
NEW DELHI

THE Delhi government is preparing to roll out the second phase of its Electric Vehicle (EV) policy early next year, with a stronger focus on promoting electric two-wheelers. The upcoming policy is expected to offer higher subsidies, tax benefits, and better charging infrastructure-particularly aimed at gig workers who rely heavily on two-wheelers for deliveries.

Under the current policy,

electric two-wheelers receive a subsidy of ₹5,000 per kilowatt-hour of battery capacity, capped at ₹30,000. Officials from the Transport Department revealed that the government now plans to double this limit. This means subsidies could rise to ₹10,000 per kilowatt-hour, significantly lowering upfront costs for buyers.

For three-wheelers, a flat subsidy of ₹30,000 per vehicle is currently offered, while the benefit for four-wheelers has already been discontinued. The initial phase of the

scheme was limited to the first 1,000 registered vehicles.

Officials say the main goal of the revised policy is to narrow the price gap between petrol-powered and electric vehicles. Although EVs cost more initially, their lower running and maintenance costs make them more economical in the long run.

The existing EV policy, which was set to expire this year, has been extended until March next year. The new policy will also include

additional tax benefits for people who scrap their old internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles and switch to EVs. Officials described this scrappage benefit as a "double incentive" that will both reduce pollution from old vehicles and accelerate the adoption of cleaner mobility options.

To make EVs more accessible to gig workers, especially delivery riders, the government plans to introduce low-interest loan schemes. It also intends to expand the charging net-



work by setting up e-bike charging points near markets and high-demand delivery zones to make recharg-

ing easier for commercial users.

Despite the growing EV adoption, petrol two-wheel-

ers still dominate Delhi's roads. In 2024, around 22,646 battery-powered vehicles were registered, while 8,684 EVs were sold. However, more than 2.5 lakh new petrol two-wheelers are expected to be added by the end of the year, not including festive season sales around Diwali. The new EV policy will remain in force until March 2026 or until the revised version is officially notified. It is expected to be implemented in the first quarter of 2026 following public consultation.

Meanwhile, the government is also addressing delays in disbursing pending EV subsidies worth ₹140 crore. Transport Minister Pankaj Singh has said that the amount will be released once verification is complete. A new online portal is being developed to streamline the process. Recently, the Delhi High Court directed the government to ensure timely payment of pending subsidies, ruling that procedural delays cannot be used as an excuse for withholding benefits from consumers.

'Tantrik' using AI-based videos to trap victims online, arrested

Rahul was promoting his reels through paid advertisements to increase visibility and lure more victims, primarily targeting emotionally vulnerable people seeking help for personal or relationship-related issues

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

A 20-year-old man from Rajasthan, who posed as a 'tantrik' (occultist) over social media and used AI-generated visuals to convince people of his supernatural powers, has been arrested for allegedly cheating more than 50 people across the country, police said on Monday.

The accused, Rahul, a resident of Jhunjhunu, allegedly ran multiple fake social media accounts and a bogus website under the name 'AGHORI_I_RAJASTHAN', projecting himself as a spiritual healer capable of solving personal and fam-

ily problems through occult practices, rituals and black magic, they said.

He would promote his reels through paid advertisements to increase visibility and lure more gullible victims.

"The accused used artificial intelligence (AI) tools to create convincing photos and videos showing ghostly figures and mysterious rituals. These visuals were then uploaded on his social media page and website to lend authenticity to his false claims," Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Devesh Mahla said in a statement.

The officer said, through

his posts, the accused offered services like "breakup problem solutions, love marriage, boyfriend control, family dispute resolution and removal of evil spirits".

"Rahul was promoting his reels through paid advertisements to increase visibility and lure more victims, primarily targeting emotionally vulnerable people seeking help for personal or relationship-related issues," the officer said.

Once people reached out, he manipulated them through phone calls and chats, often instilling fear that their houses were haunted or that they were under the influence of black

magic. After convincing them of the need for certain rituals, he demanded money through online transfers. The payments were collected via UPI accounts linked to his and his family's bank accounts. Once the money was received, the accused would block the victims and delete the chats, police said.

The Cyber Police Station, New Delhi, began investigating the matter after receiving a complaint on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal from a Delhi-based woman who had been allegedly cheated of Rs 1.14 lakh by the accused.

"She told the police that the online tantrik had

claimed to remove evil spirits haunting her home and sent doctored images of shadowy figures to scare her into paying for expensive rituals," DCP Mahla said.

Following a detailed probe, investigators traced the money trail to multiple bank accounts linked to Rahul and his family members. The mobile number linked with the social media handle was also registered in his name, the official said, adding the accused kept changing his locations to evade arrest. He was finally traced to Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan.

On October 9, a team conducted a raid and apprehended Rahul, police said.

COUNTERFEIT CIGARETTE SUPPLY RACKET BUSTED

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

POLICE here have busted a gang allegedly involved in supplying counterfeit cigarettes and seized around 2.4 lakh cigarette sticks, an official said on Monday.

Four men, identified as Parveen Singh (32), Puneet Gupta (35), Pawan Gupta (29) and Dilip Yadav (21) have been arrested, he said.

The police conducted the raid in West Delhi's Nilothi Extension area on October 9. During the operation, two suspects, Pawan Gupta and Pawan Yadav, were caught with a tempo loaded with 14 cartons of counterfeit cigarettes, around 1.6 lakh sticks, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Vikram Singh said. "The counterfeit nature of the cigarettes was confirmed on the spot by a representative of ITC Limited," the DCP said in a statement.

Based on questioning, two more accused -- Parveen Singh and Puneet Gupta -- were



apprehended from Chander Vihar Chowk area, and another vehicle carrying eight cartons (80,000 cigarettes) of counterfeit cigarettes was seized, the officer said.

In total, 2.4 lakh counterfeit and contraband cigarettes were recovered from the accused.

A case under relevant provisions of the BNS, Copyright Act, and the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) has been registered at the Crime Branch police station, the official added.

According to police, preliminary investigation has revealed that the accused

were part of a larger syndicate engaged in trafficking counterfeit cigarettes into Delhi, splitting large consignments into smaller lots and supplying them to street vendors and retailers in busy market areas and near metro stations.

The police said Parveen Singh acted as a key local operative managing distribution, while Puneet Gupta served as a coordinator overseeing sales and deliveries. Pawan Gupta handled the local supply chain in Nilothi and nearby areas, and Dilip Yadav, the youngest member, worked as a runner and storage handler.

Man charred to death in fire in Delhi's Tilak Nagar

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

A 52-year-old man was charred to death after a fire broke out at a house in west Delhi's Tilak Nagar area on Monday, police said. The fire, which had engulfed the ground floor of the building, was brought under control after efforts by the fire officials. Sunil Kumar Ginotra, a resident of Vishnu Garden, died in the fire.

According to police, a PCR call was received regarding a fire at a house in Tilak Nagar, following which a team from the local police station and the fire brigade personnel rushed to the spot.

"During inspection, Ginotra was found inside the premises with severe burn injuries. He was

declared dead at the spot. His body has been shifted to Deen Dayal Upadhyay (DDU) Hospital for post-mortem examination," said a police officer.

A senior police officer said preliminary inquiry suggests the fire started due to a short circuit in the office-cum-godown located on the ground floor of the building.

"The deceased was alone at the time of the incident. There are no indications of foul play so far. However, the exact cause of the fire will be ascertained after forensic examination," the officer added. Police said the property where the incident took place belongs to Ginotra's cousin. The crime and forensic teams have inspected the site and collected samples for analysis.

Duo held for duping people on pretext of providing jobs

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

DELHI Police has claimed to have busted an online job fraud racket with the arrest of two men who allegedly duped several people on the pretext of providing employment, an official said on Monday.

The accused have been identified as Mohammad Akbar (32), a resident of Garhi, and Rupender Kumar (36), from Dwarka, he said. Police said Rupender has two criminal cases -- robbery and arms offences -- registered against him in Delhi. The case came to light when a woman, a resident of Rohini, alleged that she was cheated of Rs 39,498 by a man posing as a job consultant from a website named 'steps4career.com'. Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) (Outernorth) Hareeshwar Swami said. The fraudster offered her a job as a panel advocate and asked her to pay for registration and document veri-



fication charges, he said.

Based on her complaint a case was registered under the relevant section of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and an investigation was launched.

"During investigation, police analysed bank account details and found that the cheated amount was transferred to two accounts -- one held by Akbar, and another held by Sanjay Ahirwal," the officer said.

The trail of money transfers and technical surveillance helped police zero in on Akbar, who was later arrested. During interrogation, he disclosed the

names of his associates -- Rupender Kumar and Sanjay Ahirwal, DCP Swami said.

Akbar further revealed that they were working at the behest of another man, Pradyuman Pandey, who is the alleged mastermind of the racket, the officer added. Police said Rupender acted as a coordinator, arranging multiple bank accounts through local contacts in exchange for a 10 per cent commission. Akbar provided his account for receiving the defrauded money, which was later transferred and withdrawn through different channels to conceal the trail.

2 held for ATM frauds; used glue to trap cards in machine

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

THE Delhi Police has arrested two men who allegedly cheated several people by fraudulently withdrawing money from their accounts after trapping debit cards using glue, an official said on Monday.

The accused, Raushan Kumar (23) and Pintu Kumar (32), were nabbed on Sunday from Neb Sarai area in south Delhi, he said.

The two accused were involved in over 50 incidents of fraud and attempted fraud at various ATMs across Delhi. So far, nine victims have been identified, with four FIRs and five complaints registered, he said, adding that 22 other potential victims have also been contacted. "The accused would apply glue or fevistik to the ATM card slot to trap customers' cards. They would then display a fake customer care number near the ATM. When victims called the



number, one of the accused would answer, impersonating a bank representative, while the other memorized the PIN entered by the customer. After the victim left, they would retrieve the trapped card and withdraw money using the obtained PIN," the officer said.

During the investigation, police recovered three ATM cards belonging to victims. One of the victims, Avtar Singh from Paschim Vihar, lost Rs 35,000 on September 27 after being duped at a private bank ATM in Paschim Vihar, police said. While Raushan has no previous criminal record, Pintu was previously involved in six criminal cases. Both accused have been arrested and further investigation is underway, they said.

2 held for snatching woman's ATM card; Rs 60k withdrawn

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

TWO men have been arrested for allegedly snatching a woman's ATM card and withdrawing Rs 60,000 from her account in Delhi's Bawana area, police said on Monday. The accused have been identified as Bittu (33) and Shishpal alias Leelu (35), both residents of Hisar in Haryana, they said. "A complaint was received from a woman, a resident of Bawana, alleging that her ATM card was snatched, and Rs 60,000 was withdrawn from her account. Based on her statement, a case was registered on October 3," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outernorth) Hareeshwar Swami said. Police examined hundreds of CCTV cameras and traced the movement of the suspects from Delhi to Haryana through technical surveillance and local intelligence. Following sustained efforts, the accused were arrested, and police recovered Rs 20,000 from Bittu and Rs 25,000 from Shishpal. An ATM card belonging to the complainant and the motorcycle used in the offence were also seized, the officer added.

Security tightened ahead of Diwali; over 20,000 police personnel deployed

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

THE Delhi Police has intensified security across the national capital, including major markets, temples, and other crowded locations, ahead of Diwali, to ensure the safety of citizens and maintain law and order, officials said on Monday.

Over 20,000 police and paramilitary personnel have been deployed across the city, they said.

CCTV surveillance, dog squads, and anti-drone measures have also been put in place, while emergency medi-

cal services and fire safety teams are stationed at prominent locations to respond swiftly to any untoward incidents.

Special vigilance is already being monitored at major markets, temples, and other crowded locations, with multi-layered security arrangements, anti-sabotage checks, and the deployment of quick reaction teams, SWAT commandos, and plainclothes personnel, a senior police officer said.

Traffic police will maintain restrictions on various routes to facilitate smooth movement. Additional pickets will

CCTV surveillance, dog squads, and anti-drone measures have also been put in place, while emergency medical services and fire safety teams are stationed at sensitive locations to respond swiftly to any untoward incidents



be set up at sensitive points, and patrolling has been intensified in public places in view of the festive rush. Ahead of the festival, the Delhi Police conducted a citywide 'General Gash' across all 15 districts during the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday. Senior officers joined regular personnel to ensure law and order, check traffic violations, and enhance public safety, an-

other police officer said.

Delhi Police Commissioner Satish Golcha visited several pickets and barricaded zones, including ITO, Shikarpur, Ghazipur border, and Hazrat Nizamuddin, to assess security arrangements and interact with officers on duty. DCP (East) Abhishek Dhanai said the General Gash aims to ensure citywide safety, monitor dark and vulnerable

areas, check traffic violations, and identify known criminals operating in various localities.

This initiative enhances police visibility and reassures residents of their safety during the festive season," the officer said. Officers carried out vehicle checks at multiple points, including Punjabi Bagh, Rohtak Road, and Kotla Mubarakpur, with temporary barricades in-

stalled at strategic locations. Coordination between local police and traffic authorities ensured smooth traffic movement while enforcing security checks. Security arrangements were reviewed at the entry points in the national capital from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh sides.

Officials reiterated that the presence of security forces, combined with public vigilance, is critical to ensuring a safe and peaceful festive season. Citizens have been urged to remain alert and report any unusual movements or activities to help authorities maintain law and order.

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Didi shocks nation, lets down girls in WB

SOMETHING seems to be seriously wrong with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Notorious for her virulent verbal attacks on her adversaries right from the time she shot to fame on the political firmament by spitting venom at CPM, she has periodically drawn flak for the manner she plays her cards, especially when her utterances result in severe backlash from all quarters, including the public. Driven to the wall, she has invariably reacted with customary ‘I have been wrongly quoted’ or ‘deliberately distorted’ pretexts. It is a different thing altogether that no one is buying her ‘lame’ excuses. Quite ironically, she seems unaware that pointing an ac-

cusing finger at opposition leaders is quite different from reacting to heinous crimes like rape-murder and gang-rapes happening in her own state. Her sordid comments after a 23-year-old second-year MBBS student at a private medical college in Durgapur was gang-raped around midnight on Sunday, is not only condemnable but hugely deplorable. Her reaction “How was she out at 12.30 am?”, has left outraged sections in the nation aghast because of her typical senseless blabber, which is unbecoming of a Chief Minister and a woman to boot.

It is ironic that not only has she defended herself by stating that she was quoted “out of context”, and

adding that the Bengal Police were taking all steps to track down the culprits, the Chief Minister has unabashedly shifted the blame on to the management of the private medical college where the victim, a Odisha native, is a student. Blaming the college for the “culture at night” that prevails, Banerjee quipped, “They (girl students) should not be allowed to come out. They must protect themselves. It is a forest area.”

Predictably, it has drawn criticism from all political parties, with the BJP accusing the Chief Minister of ‘victim shaming’. Not one to take the blame, she tried to turn the tables by hitting out at the BJP government in Odisha, and brought up rape cases

in the neighbouring state, Manipur, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Wanting to know what action those state administrations have taken against the perpetrators, Banerjee has exposed the double standards she employs. “Shameless @MamataOfficial a blot on womanhood, even more for being a CM. After RG Kar and Sandeshkhali, now this horrific case and instead of justice, she blames the victim!” is how BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia has reacted in a post on X.

This is not the first time that women have been advised against going out at night by the Bengal government. The barbaric rape and murder of a doctor at Kolkata’s R.G.

Kar Medical College on August 9, 2024 saw the government issuing such guidelines and calling upon management to reduce night duty for women. “In Bengal we have zero tolerance (against such crimes), and I will appeal to the boys and girls who come to study here not to venture out at night. This is because the police are not aware of who is coming out of hostels and when?” Does she mean that girls from her own state are less vulnerable or is it that they get more protection. It is a ridiculous argument. Fear was writ large in the reaction of the father of the student. “They could kill her here any moment. That’s why we want to take her back to Odisha. Trust has been lost. We don’t want her to stay in Bengal.” Miss Banerjee should know that there is no smoke without fire.



Mamata's utterances unbecoming of a woman

IN the aftermath of the shocking incident of a 23-year-old LMBS student's gang rape in West Bengal's Durgapur, the insensitive and irresponsible comments by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who tried to shift the blame on the student, and questioned the rationale for coming out of the campus in the midnight was baffling. This amounts to encouraging anti-social elements and soft-peddling of those involved in the crime, who are on the prowl to outrage the modesty of unsuspecting women. The State has become a den for rapes and political murders under the TMC government. Mamata Banerjee being a woman herself has failed to fathom the sensitivity of the situation and is oblivious of the agony of the victim and her anguished family. The state is perennially in the news for all the wrong reasons with the active connivance of Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamool Congress party.

K R Venkata Narasimhan, Madurai

Mamata must resign

WEST BENGAL Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is behaving as if she is not accountable for the safety and security of the people of her State. This is evidenced in the wake of the midnight gang-rape of a medical college student in Durgapur and her disgusting reaction to the incident. Wondering why the student had come out at such a time was a lame explanation and unbecoming of a Chief Minister. She should emulate the efficiency with which Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is handling and rounding up anti-social and rowdy elements. It is time Banerjee resigns as the state's Chief minister owning moral responsibility for heinous crime.

S Lakshmi, Hyderabad

A beacon of sustainability

I wish to applaud the Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha temple in Simhachalam for its exemplary commitment to environmental sustainability. This ancient shrine has set a remarkable precedent by seamlessly integrating eco-conscious practices into its sacred rituals. The temple's initiatives, such as adopting renewable energy, efficient waste management, and water conservation, are truly commendable. The introduction of electric buses and rainwater harvesting systems demonstrates a significant step towards reducing its carbon footprint. The strict ban on single-use plastics and promotion of biodegradable alternatives are practices that can be emulated by other religious institutions. Under the visionary leadership of Trust Chairman Ashok Gajapathi Raju, Simhachalam has become a model for sustainable pilgrimage infrastructure. His mantra, “Conserving nature is the true offering to the divine”, resonates deeply in today's environmentally conscious world. By working together, we can ensure a greener future for the future generations.

Raju Kolluru, Kakinada

Approach Afghan issue cautiously

THIS has reference to your editorial ‘Pak’s idiotic ‘strategic depth’ policy is killing its own soldiers’. When the US troops left Afghanistan in August 2021, there was jubilation in the military and political circles of Pakistan that they had another Islamist ally to fight against the ‘kafirs’ in the world, with a distinct and unmistakable focus on India. The PAF helped liberate one of the provinces, Taloqon, tucked away in the mountains and impregnable, to make the job easy for the Taliban. The tables are turned against such strategic doctrine dreamt by Pakistan. India under any regime in Afghanistan has been helping that country, whenever natural calamities struck on purely humanitarian considerations. However, there is a need for India to evolve a cautious approach, since a country believing in ‘sharia’ - not believing in women's right for education and social justice, can be enigmatic.

K V Raghuram, Wayanad

Streamline RTI Act on a priority basis

IT has been 20 years since the RTI Act was enacted on October 12, 2005. In these two decades it has emerged as one of independent India's most powerful tools for promoting transparency and accountability in governance. Citizens across the country have used it to expose corruption, ensure timely delivery of public services, and make government institutions more responsive. However, despite these successes, several challenges threaten the enduring effectiveness of this landmark law - increasing delays in responses by Public Information Officers, misuse of exemption clauses, harassment of RTI applicants, and lack of awareness among the rural population are eroding its intended impact. Furthermore, recent attempts to dilute certain provisions, such as the tenure and autonomy of Information Commissioners, raise concerns about weakening its enforcement. It is imperative that both the government and civil society work together to strengthen RTI implementation through better infrastructure, protection for whistleblowers, and public awareness campaigns. Only then can the spirit of transparency envisioned in the Act be truly realized.

Sajid Farooq, Kurnool AP

thehansreader@gmail.com



1,092 trees to be axed from JP Nagar to Hebbal Kempapura

BENGALURU: Under Phase 3 of the Namma Metro project, construction of the new metro line from JP Nagar 4th Phase to Hebbal Kempapura will result in the felling of over a thousand trees. The BMRCL (Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited) has now received official approval to cut 1,092 trees for this corridor. The project, spanning 44.65 km, includes two main routes — JP Nagar 4th Phase to Hebbal Kempapura (Corridor 1) and Hosahalli to Kadabagere (Corridor 2). As per the Detailed Project Report (DPR), an estimated 11,137 trees were likely to be affected. However, officials have decided to remove only those directly obstructing the metro line and stations, while relocating the rest.

Bengaluru has already lost thousands of trees to various infrastructure works such as flyovers, suburban rail projects, and road widening. As the city expands rapidly, its green cover continues to decline year after year. The 10.88 km stretch from JP Nagar 4th Phase to Mysuru Road will feature a double-decker flyover carrying both vehicles and metro trains. Stations will come up at JP Nagar 4th Phase, JP Nagar 5th Phase, JP Nagar, Kadirenahalli, Kamakya Junction, Hosakerehalli, Dwarakanagar, and Mysuru Road.

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

19(1)(a) expression-Fear of weaponization haunts media fraternity



DR MADABHUSHI SRIDHAR ACHARYULU

THE fear of laws being used to suppress free speech—a phenomenon known as the “chilling effect”—is a growing global concern. Authorities and powerful private entities may weaponize vague or disproportionate laws to intimidate journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens who express critical or dissenting views.

It is weaponizing the law. It can be a more constant, haunting fear that is always present, even if the specific event isn't around the corner but near about. Critics fear the government could use the law's vague provisions to selectively target media organizations that are critical, sometimes even penal provisions of Act, especially the DPDP Act, 2023.

In 2023, amendments to India's IT rules granting the government power to establish fact-checking units to censor online content were struck down by a court. Critics argued the rule gave the government excessive power to control speech related to its affairs.

Fear of legal repercussions causes individuals to self-censor and refrain from expressing legitimate views, stifling public debate and the “marketplace of ideas” essential for a healthy democracy. The intimidation

of the press and civil society by weaponizing the law weakens public scrutiny and accountability, potentially allowing governments to become unaccountable to their citizens and mark erosion of human rights. The suppression of free expression often facilitates further human rights abuses by removing one of the most effective tools for exposing wrongdoing.

The Act allows the central government to exempt its agencies from key provisions in the interest of India's sovereignty, security, and public order. Critics contend these exemptions are broad, vague, and lack safeguards, potentially enabling mass state surveillance.

While celebrating two decades of Right to Information (RTI), the fear of abuse of freedom of speech and expression when rules are implemented in Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, as especially section 44(3) amended Section 8(1) (j) of the RTI Act. The amendment removes this public interest test, potentially preventing information about public servants involved in wrongdoing from being disclosed, thereby impacting the Data law.

Journalists argue that the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act as it stands, could severely impact press freedom by criminalising routine reporting, requiring consent for news coverage, and threatening source confidentiality. The ill consequences are explained by Justice A P Shah.

Significant Data Fiduciary (SDF) status: Media organizations that handle large datasets, like electoral rolls, could be designated as “Significant Data Fiduciaries,” facing increased regulatory scrutiny and burdens. Prob-



Journalists argue that the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act as it stands, could severely impact press freedom by criminalising routine reporting, requiring consent for news coverage, and threatening source confidentiality. The ill consequences are explained by Justice A P Shah.

lem is why should the Government ignore ‘exemption to expression’? Reasons are:

In the 2018, 2019, and 2021 versions of the data protection bill, exemptions were provided for journalistic purposes. The Justice Srikrishna Committee Report on Data Protection (2018) and the 2012 Group of Experts on Privacy headed by Justice AP Shah had also recommended exemptions for journalistic purposes. Why was the journalistic exemption removed from the final version of the DPDP Bill, which was enacted in August 2023?

If in the opinion of the ministry, no explicit exemption for journalistic purposes is required as the law does not to apply to journalistic work, which are the specific sections of the DPDP Act, 2023, that safeguard rights of entities and individuals and exempt them from ob-

ligations of data fiduciary if they are processing personal information for journalistic purposes? Please provide a list of such sections and an explanation on how they protect journalistic work.

Since the enactment of the RTI Act in 2005, information accessed under the law has become a crucial source for journalists and media. There are innumerable examples of important journalistic work in public interest which are based on records accessed under the RTI Act. Why was Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act amended through the DPDP Act to expand the scope of information exempt from disclosure?

Similarly, if in the opinion of the ministry, the right to access information under the RTI Act remains unchanged despite the changes made to Section 8(1)(j) through the DPDP Act be-

cause of the existence of Section 8(2) of the RTI Act, why was the RTI Act amended?

Data Act of Section 44(3) substitutes RTI Act Section 8(1)(j), making all personal data exempt from disclosure without the earlier public-interest override (see explanatory note). How will MEITY prevent this from hollowing out journalists' access to corruption-related records?

Meanwhile, journalists' bodies show two serious problems in S 7: It states that personal data of a “data principal” can be used only for the “specified purpose”. In such a case, how do these scenarios pan out for journalists and media organisations?

Suppose a person involved in journalistic activity is working on a story on denial of ration cards to people of a certain region due to mismatch with Aadhaar data and collects personal data of the affected people such as name, age, and place for identifying the extent of the problems. It raises some questions:

Is such journalist required to take “informed consent” from each individual for processing this raw data and using it in a coherent tabular format in an article to highlight the systemic problem in the public interest?

Second critical situation:

Suppose, a few months down the line, it emerges that starvation deaths have occurred in the same region due to lack of access to food and the previously collected data is used to establish a causal link between the deaths and problems with Aadhaar data, is the person involved in journalistic activity or the media organisation required to obtain fresh consent?

Interestingly, telemedicine has emerged as a potential solution to address rural pain management gaps. To enhance access and awareness in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, the top suggestions included local training programmes for general physicians, establishing regional pain clinics and government support for affordable pain medications

general physicians, establishing regional pain clinics and government support for affordable pain medications.

Despite the growing need, several doctors are refraining from pursuing pain management as a speciality. The reasons cited include lack of formal training opportunities, perceived low financial viability and limited institutional support in managing chronic pain cases. Commenting on the survey findings, Malavika Kaur Saxena, CMO at Rusan Healthcare, said, “Through this one-of-a-kind nationwide survey by RusanMed, we sought to capture the real voices of doctors across India and highlight the systemic challenges they face in addressing pain. We hope these insights will spark dialogue among policymakers,

healthcare providers, and stakeholders to bring pain management to the forefront of India's healthcare agenda. Our commitment is to continue enabling knowledge, driving awareness, and fostering collaborations that can improve access and outcomes for patients everywhere.”

Notably, the representation was geographically diverse with 42.1 per cent of respondents from Tier 2 cities, 40.1 per cent from Tier 1 cities, 14.6 percent from Tier 3 towns, and 6.4 per cent from rural and underserved regions.

The majority had between five to ten years of clinical experience (33.9 per cent), followed by those with 11 to 20 years (23.9 per cent) and less than five years (23.3 per cent).

Pain specialists highlight barriers in awareness, access, and training

RUSANMED, an initiative by Rusan Healthcare, has released the findings of its latest independent survey on pain management in India, shedding light on the pressing challenges and systemic gaps that continue to impede effective pain care delivery in the country.

Conducted this year, the survey reached out to 1,000 medical professionals, of which 746 doctors responded, marking a significant rise from 350 respondents in 2024.

The participation spanned across multiple pain specialities, such as anaesthesia, pain and palliative care, orthopaedics, gynaecology, neurology, and surgery, providing a well-rounded understanding of the current state of pain care.

The survey is aimed at understanding from the medical community's perspective, the barriers, unmet needs, and possible pathways to strengthen pain management in India.

Nearly 44 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that pain management needs to be recognised and formalised as a dedicated medical speciality within

the healthcare system. Lack of awareness, limited education, and the absence of specialised pain clinics were seen as the primary obstacles to achieving effective pain care. Around 44.4 per cent of doctors identified lack of awareness and education as the biggest barrier, while 34.6 per cent cited lack of specialised pain clinics as a major concern. Around 46.6 percent of respondents highlighted the need for structured education and training programmes, establishment of comprehensive pain management centres, public awareness initiatives, and evidence-based clinical guidelines. Also highlighted was the delayed health-seeking behaviour at the patient level. About 47.3 per cent of doctors said patients often delay getting assessed for their pain.

Access to pain management services in rural and underserved regions remains severely limited. More than half the respondents (52.3 per cent) felt that such services were mostly unavailable or inadequate, while 30.8 per cent stated that services were only partially available. The top three

gaps identified were lack of trained healthcare professionals (52.8 per cent), insufficient patient awareness (48 per cent), and absence of dedicated pain clinics (43 percent). This has resulted in a growing trend of patient migration to urban centres for pain relief.

The survey also brought to light a critical concern — the lack of awareness and access to appropriate pain management options, which often leads patients to resort to self-medication. A significant number of patients attempt to manage pain on their own before consulting a doctor.

The most common choices include over-the-counter oral analgesics (69.6 per cent), pain balms or topical

applications (49.3 per cent), and herbal or home remedies (39.1 per cent).

Interestingly, telemedicine has emerged as a potential solution to address rural pain management gaps. About 41.3 per cent of respondents rated it as effective and another 20.1 per cent as very effective in extending pain care access to underserved areas. The survey also revealed that multimodal therapy (47.6 per cent) and patient education and counselling (36.7 per cent) were considered the most successful pain management strategies by participating doctors. To enhance access and awareness in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, the top suggestions included local training programmes for



CPI DROPS TO 1.54%, EIGHT-YEAR LOW

The decline was primarily driven by a sustained fall in food prices.

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

India's retail inflation fell sharply to 1.54 per cent in September 2025, marking the lowest level in over eight years, according to data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Monday. The decline was primarily driven by a sustained fall in food prices, continuing a trend of easing price pressures for the fourth consecutive month. The Consumer Price Index (CPI), which tracks the changes in the retail prices of goods and services, showed a notable drop from the previous month's reading, underscoring a broad-based moderation in price growth.

The Consumer Food Price Index (CPI) stood at -2.28 per cent, indicating that food prices have been in the negative zone since June 2025. "The year-on-year inflation rate based on the All India Consumer Price Index (CPI) for September 2025, compared to September 2024, is 1.54% (Provisional).



AT A GLANCE

- CPI at 1.54% (Sep '25) — lowest since Jun 2017; down 53 bps from August (MoSPI provisional).
- Food deflation leads: CPI -2.28%; negative since June; rural -2.17%, urban -2.47%; driven by vegetables, oils, fruits; aided by favourable base.
- Rural vs urban CPI: Rural 1.07%, urban 2.04%; non-food: housing 3.98%, education 3.44%, health 4.34%, transport/comm 1.82%; fuel & light 1.98%.
- Wide coverage: prices from 1,181 villages & 1,114 urban markets; -99.8% rural and 98.6% urban market coverage.

There is a decrease of 53 basis points in the headline inflation of September 2025 in comparison to August 2025. It is the lowest year-on-year inflation after June 2017," the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implemen-

tation release said.

It said rural areas recorded an inflation rate of 1.07 per cent, while urban inflation stood at 2.04 per cent. The data also revealed that food inflation was negative across both segments at -2.17 per

cent in rural and -2.47 per cent in urban areas, reflecting the impact of falling vegetable and edible oil prices. The ministry attributed the decline to "favourable base effects" and reductions in key food categories such

It is the lowest year-on-year inflation after June 2017," the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation release said.

as vegetables, oils and fats, fruits, cereals, pulses, eggs, and fuel & light.

In the non-food categories, housing inflation (measured only for urban areas) was at 3.98 per cent, education at 3.44 per cent, health at 4.34 per cent, and transport and communication at 1.82 per cent. Fuel and light inflation eased to 1.98 per cent, suggesting that energy prices remained largely stable during the month.

The price data for September were collected from 1,181 villages and 1,114 urban markets across all states and union territories. Coverage of rural markets stood at 99.83 per cent, while urban market coverage was 98.56 per cent, ensuring a comprehensive national representation.

Nifty -108, Sensex -450 on tariff shock

AGENCIES
MUMBAI



US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Domestic benchmark equities opened under pressure on Monday as selling returned to equities amid renewed global uncertainty following US President Donald Trump's announcement of fresh tariffs on China. The return of tariff tensions has once again unsettled global trade sentiment, making investors cautious across markets.

At the opening bell, the Nifty 50 index declined 108.05 points or 0.43 per cent to 25,177.30, while the BSE Sensex fell 450.25 points or 0.55 per cent to open at 82,050.57. Ajay Bagga, Banking and Market Expert, told ANI, "There is some risk coming to India via the listing of mega IPOs. The relief is that till Diwali just one IPO is planned so secondary market volumes will not suffer due to bunched-up primary offerings sucking out liquidity."

Buy the dip remains the US trade, we expect buyers to emerge in India as well at lower levels. US futures are up, cryptos

are seeing a recovery, but Asian markets are down." The pressure was visible across the broader market indices on NSE.

All major indices opened in negative territory, with the Nifty 100 down by 0.28 per cent, Nifty Midcap 100 lower by 0.20 per cent, and Nifty Smallcap 100 slipping 0.33 per cent. Among sectoral indices, except Nifty Media which was marginally up, all other sectors witnessed selling pressure. Nifty IT fell 0.45 per cent, Nifty Auto traded flat in the negative zone, and Nifty Metal declined by 0.61 per cent. Global cues remained weak

after U.S. stocks experienced an April-like fall following Trump's fresh tariff threat on China. The U.S. stock market capitalization fell nearly USD 2 trillion, triggering sharp declines across asset classes. The crypto market also witnessed heavy selling, with total market capitalization dropping by USD 800 billion as USD 19 billion worth of positions were liquidated, marking the biggest such move ever.

Commodities and safe havens also reacted sharply. Oil prices fell, while gold and other safe assets rose as investors moved to reduce risk exposure.

FY26 general govt capex likely ~5% of GDP, below FY25: Report

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The general government capital expenditure (capex) as a share of GDP in FY26 is likely to remain around 5 per cent, which is lower than 5.1 per cent in FY25P and much below the FY24 peak of 5.4 per cent, according to a report by Emkay Research. The report highlighted that public capex growth has remained strong in the first five months of FY26.

During this period, the Centre has already spent around 39 per cent of its budgeted capital outlay, recording growth of over 43 per cent. It stated "if the trend sustains, FY26 general government capex/GDP is likely to hit approx. 5 per cent, although it may still fall short of that in FY25P (5.1 per cent) and

log much lower than the FY24 peak of 5.4 per cent." States have also shown healthy momentum, with their capex tracking 14 per cent growth, though this is below their ambitious budget estimate of 30 per cent growth for the year. The report also noted that while factors such as base effects and sectoral anomalies have inflated the Centre's overall capex figures, the noise-adjusted "core capex" has also shown a solid increase over the past three quarters. This indicates a consistent improvement in productive capital spending. On the States' side, performance has been commendable in recent years.

States have achieved about 89 per cent of their budgeted capex in the last two fiscal years, compared to a 10-year aver-

age of around 80 per cent. This achievement has come despite challenges such as slower revenue growth and continued spending on welfare schemes that have kept revenue expenditure high. The report added that the Centre's healthy disbursement of the capex loan to States has played a key role in maintaining this momentum.

If the current trend continues, the overall general government capex-to-GDP ratio for FY26 is expected to reach around 5 per cent. For States, the capex-to-GDP ratio could improve slightly by 0.1 percentage point to reach 2.4 per cent in FY26, making it the second-highest level since FY17.

However, this would still fall short of their ambitious FY26 budget estimate of 2.7 per cent.

India-US BTA first tranche by fall: Sources

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

India and the United States are moving steadily towards the conclusion of the first tranche of their Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), with both sides expressing optimism about sealing the deal by the fall deadline, government sources said on Monday.

According to government officials, a high-level Indian trade delegation is set to travel to Washington this week for another round of negotiations aimed at resolving pending issues and finalising the initial segment of the agreement.

"The discussions with the US are progressing on a positive path."

Both sides are hopeful that the first tranche of the Bilateral Trade Agreement will be concluded within the stipulated fall

timeline," a senior government source told. The upcoming talks are expected to focus on key market access issues, regulatory cooperation, and expanding trade in energy and technology sectors.

India is also looking at scaling up imports of natural gas and renewable energy technologies from the United States as part of the evolving trade relationship. Sources noted that energy cooperation remains an area of mutual interest, with India keen to enhance its long-term LNG procurement and renewable energy collaboration with US firms. "India is exploring avenues to buy more gas and renewables from the US."

This aligns with our clean energy transition goals and helps diversify energy sources," the official added.

US' 50% tariffs batter textile exports: CITI survey

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

India's textile and apparel exporters are facing severe disruptions following the United States' imposition of a 50 per cent additional tariff, according to a nationwide survey conducted by the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI).

The survey revealed that the US, which accounts for India's 28 per cent of total textile and apparel shipments, has become significantly less accessible due to the steep tariff structure, eroding India's export competitiveness.

Nearly one-third of the respondents reported a turnover decline of more than 50 per cent following the tariff increase. The major contributing factors included requests for price



Representative image.

Nearly one-third of the respondents reported a turnover decline of more than 50 per cent following the tariff increase.

discounts from US buyers (30%), order cancellations or postponements (25%), and a reduction in order volumes (20%).

Around 85 per cent of the firms reported inventory build-up due to declining orders, while two-thirds were compelled to offer

discounts, mostly around 25 per cent, to retain business in the US market. Liquidity pressures have intensified sharply, with 82 per cent of respondents citing extended credit cycles, and more than half reporting an increase of three to six months.

'Foxconn commits Rs 15k cr in investments'

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Electronics giant Foxconn has announced a major investment of Rs 15,000 crore in Tamil Nadu to expand its advanced technology manufacturing operations.

The move marks a significant step in strengthening Foxconn's long-term partnership with the southern state and is expected to generate 14,000 high-value jobs, primarily for engineering graduates and skilled youth, Guidence Tamil Nadu post-



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin.

ed on social media 'X'. 'Guidance' is the Government of Tamil Nadu's nodal agency for investment promotion and sin-

gle window facilitation. The announcement came after Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin met with a Foxconn delega-

tion led by Robert Wu, the company's India Representative and senior global executive. The meeting, held in the presence of Tamil Nadu's Minister for Industries, TRB Rajaa, reaffirmed Foxconn's growing trust in Tamil Nadu's industrial ecosystem and its role in India's technology manufacturing push.

In a statement shared by Rajaa, the state confirmed that Foxconn will establish India's first-ever "Foxconn Desk" at Guidence Tamil Nadu, the state's investment promotion agency.

PWC: DIGITAL PAYMENTS & CARDS

India's digital transactions are projected to jump from 206B (FY25) to 617B (FY30), with value rising Rs 299T-Rs 907T. Credit card volumes/values may grow at 21.7%/20.8% CAGR, while UPI (~90% of volumes) could hit 1B/day by FY28. As UPI matures, new use-cases (credit lines, RuPay links) are key; debit card usage keeps falling.

PL CAPITAL: HOUSING DEMAND

Despite affordability pressure, urbanisation and rising incomes are sustaining housing demand. Prices are expected to stabilise in 2025; by

ECONOMY WRAP



FY26 the market may look balanced, favouring credible developers and green, energy-efficient projects. Potential rate cuts and strong launches/supply should support sales.

STEEL—CUSTOMISED COLD-ROLLED TUBES/PROFILES

The segment is expanding with

India growing at ~7.8% CAGR vs global 7.5%, led by auto, construction, renewables, machinery. The shift is toward value-added, precision components and integrated capabilities, boosting India's role in global steel forming.

HDFC BANK: CONSTRUCTION REVIVAL IN UP & BIHAR

Construction is powering growth: UP's construction GVA share 13.4%, Bihar 11.2% vs India 8.9%.

UP leads national construction GVA with a 12.5% share (FY24), aided by interest-free central capex loans. Public capex and housing/infra projects are driving a broader regional recovery.

PM Gati Shakti driving down logistics costs: Piyush Goyal

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal said on Monday that the government's ambitious PM Gati Shakti mission, aimed at transforming India's infrastructure and improving logistics efficiency, has begun to show a visible impact across sectors.

Addressing the gathering at the 4th anniversary of PM Gati Shakti, held at Bharat

Mandapam, Goyal highlighted that logistics costs, which had long been a challenge for India's competitiveness, are now declining. "There was recently a report which demonstrated that logistics costs have started coming down quite drastically, particularly with last-mile connectivity improving," he said.

He explained that earlier, industries faced multiple transfers of materials, from trucks to rail, causing



Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal.

inefficiencies and losses. The creation of direct rail, and non-plant sites, by way sidings at mining

and departments. Over the past four years, he said, the programme has evolved into a tool for co-ordination and effective planning across sectors. "Everybody can benefit," he added, pointing out that the latest compendium on the initiatives showcases how PM Gati Shakti is influencing various aspects of daily life. He announced that new digital tools are being launched to further strengthen the economy's interconnecti-

on, including a unified geospatial interface that will allow public access to PM Gati Shakti databases. "A very comprehensive multi-sector reporting system has been launched today, which will keep track of how PM Gati Shakti is impacting development through the area approach," Goyal said. He also urged all agencies to keep their data regularly updated to ensure accurate planning and execution. "The Ministry is driving a

to efforts directed at aspirational districts, noting that the area-based planning under PM Gati Shakti is designed not just to meet local needs but also to help these regions overcome infrastructure gaps.

In recognition of stakeholders' contributions, Goyal announced the launch of LEAPS, the Logistics Excellence Advancement and Performance Shield, to honour outstanding performers in the logistics sector.

STRAY DOGS MANAGEMENT AND LEGALITY IN INDIA: BALANCING PUBLIC SAFETY AND FEEDING STRAY DOGS

OPINION

DR.S.KRISHNAN &
ANIRUDDH SINGH BHATI



The street dog population has been an important part of life in urban and rural areas of India. Known for their adaptability, resilience and ability to communicate with each other, street dogs are known to be visible across cities and villages. The canine beings, said to be man's best friend, have been in the eye of a debate that has arisen out of the scrimmage between man's love towards them, their right to live freely, and the health hazards posed by them to man such as rabies and incidents of dog bites. The big take debate is on how to treat these dogs—through control, sterilisation or free roaming.

By and large, the judicial history of India has changed milestones in court and laws to provide answers to the complicated question about street dogs, law and society. This blog takes into account the various laws concerning street dogs in India and outstanding judgments which have shaped the contours of animal welfare across the

country.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF STREET DOGS IN INDIA

The Supreme Court of India recently delivered a judgment in the Animal Welfare Board of India & Anr v. People for Elimination of Stray Troubles & Ors case, which has been a contentious 15-year-old issue. The case centered on whether municipal and local authorities can indiscriminately kill stray dogs to reduce the population and prevent rabies, or if they must follow the WHO-backed scientific approach of sterilization. Legally, the matter was framed as a battle between state/municipal laws that authorize 'culling' of stray dogs, and the central Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act and Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules that mandate sterilization instead of killing. This landmark judgment upholds the rights and welfare of stray dogs, setting an important precedent for animal protection in the country.

Regarding street dogs in

law, India pertains to the wider aspect of animal welfare. Huge developments have come up this area over the years. The prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960 lays the basis for any legal action regarding street dogs: it is a broad law that protects animals from cruelty and covers the various obligations on parts of the government, local authorities and citizens in ensuring animal welfare. The act prohibits cruelty against any animal including street dogs. It says every effort be sought to avoid harm, which includes providing for their basic needs food and water. Laws further recommend humane control methods: sterilization, immunization, etc for humane management of street dog population.

The central focus of the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2001, which emerged to manage the street dog population humanely, is sterilization, rabies vaccinations, return after all treatment of street dogs to their original localities. Here, the technique known as 'catch, sterilise and return' (CSR) is intended to match the animals' welfare with human safety.

Article 243W of the Constitution mandates municipalities for prevention of cruelty to animals while Article 51A(g) places a fundamental duty on citizens 'to have compassion for living creatures'. Supreme Court, in Jallikattu Case 2014, has interpreted the right to life and liberty (Article 21) as extending to animals as well.

The Supreme Court's observations about balancing animal protection with citizen concerns reflect the judiciary's recognition of competing interests that require consideration. One of the most famous recent cases is the 2016 judgment of the



Supreme Court of India concerning stray dogs and their rights in the aspect of safety for public. In its ruling, the Supreme Court emphasised the humane treatment of such street animals. The Court also emphasised the implementation of the ABC program as mandated under the Animal Birth Control Rules, which had largely been ignored by many local municipalities.

The Madras High Court pronounced another landmark ruling on the feeding of stray dogs in 2020. It concerned a challenge against people feeding dogs in public places, with allegations that it increased the dog population as well as concerns about public health. However, while noting such concerns, Madras High Court said it was a legal activity and could not be stopped. The Court ruled that animal welfare activists or feeders should be allowed to provide food and water to street dogs.

Feeding stray animals, especially dogs, is a widespread custom in India. Such acts

are protected within the legal framework against the prosecution of stray feeders: Ministry of Public Grievances (March 2008): Notification by the Ministry no hindrance or penalty by authorities or Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) for feeding stray animals.

Delhi High Court (2011): Instructs the police to stop harassing dog feeders and reiterates that feeding stray animals is illegal for any ban restriction, or interference.

MANAGING AND SHAPING PUBLIC SPACES?

Much has already been said about the legalities and shaky ethics behind the Supreme Court's order on Delhi's street dogs. But beyond the legal wrangling lies a deeper question: what sort of 'order' do we imagine for our public spaces, and who should shape it? Indian cities and towns are built on a particular conception of communal space, where boundaries, both physical and social, are porous. We ignore our footpaths, which are riddled with potholes, and walk instead on the roads alongside everything from bullock carts to cars, weaving between

moving traffic and street vendors. The street itself is an extension of the home: people chat on doorsteps, children play cricket, tents are routinely erected, and wedding or festival processions march through.

Within this setting, the colony or street dog is not a 'trespasser' but part of the community that lives in a long-standing partnership with residents, serving as watchman and companion. The dog occupies a distinctive niche in our sharply divided urban landscape. Moving with ease through slums and affluent neighbourhoods, gated enclaves and open apartment complexes, it is at home by the chawwallah, the temple gates, or in the manicured lanes where morning walkers pause to offer it a biscuit before continuing on their way. It survives on such gestures of casual care, even as it endures neglect or cruelty from others.

Removing street dogs would not just reconfigure our neighbourhoods' social character but widen the gap between those subscribing to imported ideals of private order and India's firmly rooted communal

approach to public space. Enforcement in our urban spaces, meanwhile, can oscillate between ruthless crackdowns and prolonged neglect, reflecting at best an ambivalent relationship between citizens and the state. Much like traffic rules or waste segregation, laws mandating the removal or confinement of every dog are misaligned with deeply ingrained notions of space and community, which is why they are meeting public resistance and are likely to see evasion and circumvention in the future.

Public safety is, of course, important: India accounts for roughly 35% of global rabies deaths, claiming 18,000–20,000 lives annually. Yet the Supreme Court's order to remove street dogs from Delhi-NCR risks contravening the Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules, 2023, which aim to manage stray populations humanely. The case of Lucknow shows what is possible: by achieving an 84% sterilisation target alongside active community participation, the city has gradually reduced stray dog populations without alienating citizens or erasing the character of pub-

lic spaces. The World Health Organization similarly notes that sustainable street dog management in India depends on local community involvement and context-sensitive approaches.

WAY FORWARD

Managing stray dogs is a complex challenge that needs a multi-pronged approach. A successful strategy must consider the many interconnected factors at play, including public health, animal welfare, legal policies, and economic and logistical limitations.

Stray dog management requires coordination among government agencies, animal welfare organizations, veterinary professionals, and community representatives. Policy decisions should incorporate scientific evidence, practices, and local factors. Sustainability requires funding mechanisms that can support programs over periods. Public-private partnerships and financing approaches may offer solutions. Technologies offer possibilities for stray dog management, including population monitoring systems, vaccination tracking, and community reporting platforms. GPS-based tracking and data analytics can improve program efficiency and outcomes measurement. Applications for bite reporting, veterinary service access, and community coordination represent tools that can enhance management approaches.

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Selective censorship: The CBFC's morality trap

The Central Board of Film Certification is not performing its inherent function of certification and doing censorship.

OPINION

ANUBHAV CHAUDHARY

On 26th September, Neeraj Ghaywan's film 'Homebound' entered the theatres. Before receiving the U/A certification by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), the applicant was asked to make 11 changes, including deleting a dialogue, censoring a cricket match scene, etc. This was not the first time CBFC exercised censorship instead of performing its actual function of certifying based on the type of content. Earlier this year, James Gunn's 'Superman' was also ensnared in the Board's morality trap, asked to cut down a 33-second kissing sequence to get the concerned certification. The issue arises when the board imposes its political and ideological leanings on the public by granting the same certification to other films while letting them carry similar scenes. These double standards cover sexual, violent, and other

content. For instance, the film 'Befikre' received an identical certification. Such arbitrary censorship stunts filmmakers' creative freedom and diminishes film industry's diversity.

THE HYPOCRISY OF CONTENT: OVER-REACHING THE CONSTITUTIONAL LINE

The CBFC derives this power of arbitrary censorship from Section 5B of the Cinematograph Act, 1952 (hereinafter 'Act'), which mentions the grounds such as decency or morality, public order, etc, based on which the Board reviews any film and Section 4(2)(iv) of the Act which gives the Board with the power to direct the filmmaker to make necessary excisions and modifications in the film which broadly means to ask for cuts of any required scenes. The vague grounds under section 5B allow different interpretations. For instance,

the differential application is evident: the Board permitted extreme brutality in 'Marco', while it prohibited the sexual content in 'Oh My God 2', which was for education. Even though both films were granted different certifications, it shows the Board's authoritarian intent in deciding what a person should watch. This inconsistency demonstrates that ideological leanings supersede objective certification standards.

SYSTEMIC BREAKDOWN: OPACITY AND INSTITUTIONAL ENTRENCHMENT

A breakdown of severe institutional governance and transparency compounds the CBFC's moral policing, for instance, since 2017, the Board has not submitted its annual report, which is a non-fulfilment of its duty under Rule 11 of The Cinematograph (Certification) Rules, 2024 (hereinafter 2024 Rules). When questioned, a ministry spokesperson claimed it's included in the consolidated annual report, implying the document is only circulated internally, unlike previous practice, and that an apparent lack of transparency and accountability. Last time it was in 2017 when the



members were officially appointed, having a tenure of 3 years as per Rule 3, which ended in 2020.

Since then, no appointments have been made; earlier members continue unofficially, leading one member to say, 'We don't know if we are still members of the board or if the board itself is functioning legally.' The Board has around 1000 advisory panel members who eventually constitute the Examining and Revising Committees (ECs and RCs). However,

for 'Homebound', the Board summoned T.S. Nagabharana from Bengaluru to Mumbai to constitute the RC, raising questions about why specific members lead most RCs despite local advisory panel availability. Also in 2023, a Tamil actor alleged that the Board asked for money in consideration of certification for his film, which shows that the long tenure has affected the integrity of the Board.

DISMANTLING CHECKS: THE

RETREAT FROM REFORM AND THE CALL FOR REDRESS

Instead of reforming this dysfunctional system, policymakers have actively dismantled the checks meant to restrain it. In 2023, several recommendations of the Shyam Benegal Committee were brought into effect; however, the recommendation of confining the Board's function to certification was clearly ignored. Earlier, the applicant had the remedy of approaching the Film Certification Ap-

pellate Tribunal (FCAT) in case of dissatisfaction with the decision of the Board, however in 2021, FCAT was abolished under the Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021 which led to the removal of accessible, quasi-judicial safety valve and now forcing the filmmakers to pursue lengthy and expensive High Court litigation.

The agency's actions demonstrate intent to preserve the archaic Censor Raj. The CBFC's constant

overreach is a direct betrayal of its name; it is a Certification board, not a censor board. The Kerala High Court recently underscored this distinction in a petition filed by Cosmos Entertainment.

The remedy lies in implementing the core Benegal reforms and restoring an accessible appellate body like the FCAT. An unfettered cinematic voice is not a privilege to be granted; it is a fundamental right essential for a vibrant democracy.

comment

THOUGHT
FOR THE DAY

A fool thinks himself to be wise, but a wise man knows himself to be a fool — William Shakespeare, English playwright and poet

It's crucial to recognise patterns of scams

What began as a side hustle ended in a massive cyber fraud for a 30-year-old Chembur resident, who was duped of ₹7.8 lakh by connen running a fake 'Google task' job racket. This edit space has often warned about how cybercriminals shift the contours of their scams, trying to cash in on current events and use a pattern of escalation. The escalation means the targets are first given easy or small tasks. They are told to

click links. Sometimes, they are instructed to fill in details in convenient forms provided on a website. It all begins as smooth and easy, barely taking a few minutes.

In this case, the victim, an employee of a private credit company, received a WhatsApp message on September 7 from an unknown number offering restaurant review assignments for ₹40 per review. He then shared a Telegram link for further communication. After joining a Telegram

group named "Google Mission India 190", here one must also note the impressive-sounding name, the victim was asked to post reviews and share screenshots as proof. It all seems too easy, quick, painless and paying. Initially, the victim receives payments of ₹120 and ₹200. Though small, these sums seem rewarding for such no-sweat tasks. This also convinces them that the job is genuine. Soon, like in this case, the fraudsters send "investment tasks", asking targets to

deposit more money for other tasks. The escalation has begun.

Here, the victim paid up substantial sums, but was told to release more money on some pretext or the other. It is then that most people smell a rat, and when they start demanding their money back, the scammers go incommunicado. Recognise the patterns and when the fraudsters begin preparing the net, casting their bait to reel you in. If you are aware, think, and question, scams will fail.

A guide to the uncivic Indian

I.M.H.O



C Y Gopinath

It was a slim book called *This Way Please*. Its author was, I remember, Eleanor Boykin. We were schoolboys, easily influenced, eager to be influenced. The book, written in a lively, friendly style, offered lovely advice we would never use on public behaviour, with chapters like *Learning to be at ease with people*; *Talk and popularity*; *Manners at the table*; *Rubbing elbows with the public*; *Good travellers*; and *Boys and girls*.

We didn't get to meet many girls, such were those times, and we were not frequent travellers, but we still loved Eleanor Boykin's book, because we knew that anyone who behaved like that would be respected and admired. They would be seen as people of good manners, a phrase no one uses any more.

They would be people with civic sense.

That's a phrase we're suddenly hearing a lot of these days, mainly because Indians, it seems, don't have much of it. I've been seeing the videos; so have you. They're all over YouTube, Instagram and Reddit. They feature our brothers and sisters doing unspeakable, shameless things in distant countries in broad daylight.

One shows a London fire hydrant covered with streaks of paan, exactly like every lamp post in every Indian city. Another shows a raucous crowd of bare-chested Ganesh worshippers marching through Paris streets on their way to a visarjan in the Seine River. A third video shows a gaggle of Indian 30-somethings breaking out in a Bollywood bhangra dance in New York's Times Square. They'd gone prepared to deafen, with amplifiers and boom bass speakers. It's a small matter that they instantly drowned out the jazz quartet that had already been playing there.

The world, it seems, is watching uncouth India, newly rich, suddenly able to travel to cities that they had only seen before in Bollywood romances and thrillers. Their sloppi-

As India emerges as an economic powerhouse and a global leader, some Indians are also showing the world their inner boor, with the uncouth moves of a juvenile delinquent



Festivities organised by the Sri Manicka Vinayakar Alayam Ganesh temple in Paris, France, in August. PIC/SORTIR À PARIS

ness and me-first behaviour are all over social media: eating wet food with their hands in a metro train, spitting, leaving a litter trail, breaking queues, talking loudly, treating waiters like lesser human beings, trying to leave the plane in a tearing hurry, and bargaining because it's such fun to haggle, but never buy anything.

And groping women. In the last few years, Thailand has seen a spike in the number of Indians requiring bail after being arrested by Thai police — for molestation.

Don't take my word for it. Watch YouTube Raja Gujar sidling up as close as he can to foreign women and showing off his unique harassment style to his 4 lakh followers. Bada neech admī hai tu, comments one of them with open admiration. Or watch him sprawled in a gondola in Venice, gesturing to

a senora on a bridge to join him in the boat. Aaja, rani, aaja, idhar baith. Watch YouTube's Malik Swash-buckler, bald and creepy, walking next to a young woman in Turkey, telling her in Hindi, Kya maal hai tu! He was arrested and deported later.

No Indian school has classes on how to behave in public; civic sense is not taught anywhere. There is no equivalent of Eleanor Boykin's *This Way Please* to guide our strutting, young, bearded hunks on how to be dignified, respectful, respectable human beings. As India Shining started to emerge from its woodwork as a growing economic powerhouse and a global leader — we also seem to be showing the world our current 'culture', with the crude moves of a juvenile delinquent.

Misbehaviour has become India's top export.

Really? Is this us? I put the question to

community of my readers who have joined Bombai Stories, my WhatsApp group. (Use the QR code on this page to join.) An interesting insight came from reader Akar Gosrani —

"The people who travel in the local train are the same people who use the metro, yet they behave very differently in these two spaces. One environment offers zero space and treats the passenger with disdain, the other offers some amount of dignity, even if modest. If the quality and design of our physical infrastructure is bad or non-existent, the civic sense will be similar."

You've seen that: if an environment is spick and span, no one wants to be the first to litter. But if it's already a dump, it's pre-approved for littering.

Reader Cheryl A. said a minority of boorish Indians were giving the country a bad name, and that she had seen Americans spit, litter, and talk loudly too. But the question is not who else is a slob but why we are.

Children who watch their adults cut lights, spit from the car window, argue with officials, evade penalties with bribes, learn quickly: following rules is optional, especially if no one's watching. Everything breaks down at once. Traffic lights are treated as suggestions. Rules become obstacles. Every regulation becomes a challenge to circumvent.

My auto was on an empty side road behind a lone motorcycle driving slowly, hugging the left kerb, but my driver kept honking till I asked him why.

"He will suddenly do something unexpected," he said. "Like trying to cross over to the other side. I have to assume that. Honking a lot is to let him know I'm behind him."

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LETTERS

Residents, BMC are both to blame for garbage

This refers to 'Address: Garbage dump'. This is a case of 'one can't clap with one hand'. The residents who dump waste on the roads are as much to blame as the BMC. Once cleared, the space needs to have a board stating the punishment for garbage dumping.

MAYA HEMANT BHATKAR

Skywalks are built for vagrants, hawkers

Apropos of 'Twin skywalks turn into shawmwalks', this is an all too familiar sight, whether in Virar or Mumbai. Skywalks, footbridges, and footpaths have been built not for the general public but for beggars, drug addicts, and hawkers, who occupy them as if they were their personal property.

MELVILLE X D'SOUZA

Kudos to state govt for mental health panel idea

With reference to 'Maha plans mental safety net for students in state', kudos to the state government for the formation of the much-needed mental safety expert panel for students as a way of addressing these high-stress times.

BAL GOVIND

Cosmetic changes to city can't hide its truth

In 'Hammers, tongs, and lasting impressions', Fiona Fernandez rips apart the polished facade of cosmetic changes undertaken at the time of VIP visits. Temporary camouflaging cannot hide the truth of this city.

AMIT BANERJEE

have your say!



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DECCAN HERALD

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Some hard questions on Machado’s Nobel

Maria Corina Machado’s Nobel Prize for Peace comes in honour of her “tireless work promoting democratic rights for the people of Venezuela and for her struggle to achieve a just and peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy.” The Nobel Committee’s choice has invited criticism, as some of its decisions have in the past. Machado has led a popular movement against the government in her country, which has been accused of authoritarian conduct. She has opposed Venezuela’s socialist governments, first under Hugo Chavez and then under the present President Nicolas Maduro. Machado has been in hiding since August last year, following Maduro’s victory in an election held amid allegations of fraud. Hers is an important fight, considering that various international agencies, including UN bodies, have indicted the Venezuelan regime for suppression of democracy and dissent.

The Committee said that as the leader of the democratic movement in Venezuela, Machado was an extraordinary example of civilian courage. It noted that democracy depends on people “who refuse to stay silent” despite grave risks, and who remind us that freedom “must never be taken for granted”. Machado has been a victim of repression and suffered for her resistance against the government. She was accused of treason and tried for it. She was stripped of her seat in the National Assembly and barred from contesting elections. The targeted attacks forced her to go into hiding and have made her a symbol of a fight for democratic and human rights in a world marked by rising authoritarianism.

There, however, are relevant grounds to question the Committee’s choice. Machado has made statements backing Israel, which has unleashed a war on Palestinians and has been censured for its brazen trampling of human rights. She is an admirer of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has equated Venezuela’s struggle to the “struggle” of Israel, and called Israel a “genuine ally of freedom.” She has also dedicated her Prize to United States President Donald Trump, who is among the most authoritarian of the world’s leaders. Can a person who supports a state known for its war crimes be considered a champion of peace and awarded the top prize for it? Machado has pushed back against the powerful for democratic rights in her country, but the fight for peace and human rights is not divisible; it cannot be tailored for different situations. Her win presents the world with an opportunity to remember My-anmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1991, and later voiced support for the suppression of the Rohingya in her country.

She has fought the tough fight at home, but that cannot mask her backing of oppression elsewhere

Bengaluru seeks intent, not excuses

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and Bengaluru in-charge D K Shivakumar has a novel cure for the capital city’s crumbling roads, endless traffic jams, and mountains of garbage, by pointing out that other cities are also a mess. London, Delhi, take your pick. Why bother fixing Bengaluru when you can prove that the rest of the world is equally miserable? It is a clever form of civic spin: your city is broken? Congratulations, you are in global company. Of course, traffic snarls and potholes are not an exclusive Bengaluru feature, but here is the catch: in London, the potholes are fixed within days; in Bengaluru, they become permanent fixtures. In other cities, garbage segregation is mandated and monitored; in Bengaluru, it fuels an entire “garbage mafia” economy that survives multiple governments and thrives on unbroken political patronage. Shivakumar’s inability to dismantle this reflects not his capacity, but convenient helplessness.

This is a city that has been neglected for decades. The BJP – which governed the city and for much of the past decade – can hardly claim innocence. Both parties have contributed generously to the civic mess we are in: one ignored the rot, the other perfected the art of excuses. There is also an entire ecosystem that seems to revel in Bengaluru’s miseries, taking perverse pleasure in amplifying every failure and celebrating each setback with glee. Rather than being bogged down by this cynicism, the DCM should see it for what it is: a city that is crying out for change.

And yet, if there is one leader who can bulldoze through the bureaucracy, it is Shivakumar. His leadership has been on display in projects such as India’s largest solar park at Pavagada. Why does that resolve fade when it comes to fixing Bengaluru’s most basic urban ailments? If comparisons must be made, let them be with Singapore’s integrated transport planning, Amsterdam’s water management, or San Francisco’s waste segregation. These are the gold standards Bengaluru should aspire to, not excuses for why we remain stuck in civic agony. Bengaluru is bruised, battered, and betrayed, but not beyond redemption. Shivakumar has the political heft and the reputation of a go-getter. It is time he used both to clean up not just the city’s streets, but also its governance. What Bengaluru needs is not defensive comparisons but a decisive leadership that is willing to stop playing the victim card and start wielding the reform hammer.

A deny-and-deflect approach will not fix the city’s civic failures. It will take a strong will for reform

THE GAZA PLAN

Trump secures a fragile peace. Will it hold?

The president says the deal is done, but unresolved demands, political divisions will pose a challenge

R SWAMINATHAN

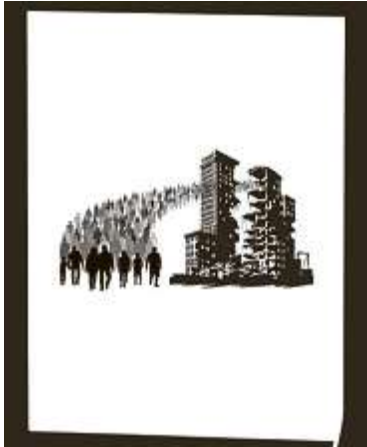
United States President Donald Trump is on a highly significant, eight-hour whirlwind diplomatic visit to Israel and Egypt to mark the ceasefire and advance the second phase of the 20-point comprehensive plan to end the Gaza conflict, which he presented on September 29.

Markedly, just before Trump arrived at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv, Hamas handed over seven of the 20 living hostages to the Red Cross. The remaining 13 have since been released. The trip was tightly scheduled to coincide with the release of the hostages, followed by Trump’s address to the Knesset, a meeting with the families of the hostages, and a visit thereafter to Sharm el-Sheikh for the US-Egyptian-led peace summit.

The return of the hostages after two years in captivity has triggered an outpouring of emotion and celebrations in Israel. Atrally in the Hostages Square in Tel Aviv two days ago, the US envoy Steve Witkoff was greeted warmly, with the crowd thanking President Trump effusively, but booing at the mention of PM Netanyahu, highlighting the deep divisions in Israel on his handling of the war.

The nature and context of the celebrations in Gaza were starkly different. In Israel, the reaction was characterised by overwhelming relief, joy, and emotional fulfillment over the imminent return of the remaining captives; in Gaza, the reaction was a mixture of jubilation, profound relief, and deep caution, born from two years of immense suffering.

The displaced population of Gaza has started returning to their destroyed homes. While humanitarian aid has commenced, the expectation is that UN agencies will soon be allowed to provide sustained and urgently-needed aid. Implementation of the first phase of the plan has moved rather swiftly on the ground, since Hamas’ acceptance of the plan, albeit with reservations.



Palestinian prisoners serving life sentences and 1,700 other detainees. Hamas insisted on the release of Marwan Barghouti, a leader of Fatah, a rival political party that effectively controls the Palestinian Authority (PA), representing the State of Palestine. Barghouti is widely seen as capable of uniting the fragmented Palestinian factions and a potential successor to the current PA President Mahmoud Abbas, who is perceived as ineffective. His release would allow Hamas to claim credit for liberating a national hero, thereby elevating it in the eyes of Palestinians, but Israel has rejected the proposal, precisely for these reasons.

Other significant differences remain. Hamas insists on full withdrawal of the IDF and emphasises that the present agreement constitutes “an end to the war on Gaza”. However, for a full withdrawal, Israel would insist on Hamas’ disarmament and destruction of its military infrastructure, including the

tunnel network. For PM Netanyahu, the deal provided a temporary pause to get the hostages released. Five of his cabinet colleagues from the two far-right parties on whom he depends for political survival voted against the cabinet decision, criticising the release of Palestinian prisoners and the ceasefire.

The past isn’t promising

There is a possibility that Israel may violate the agreement as it did in the past. The Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement concluded in January this year collapsed in two months as both parties were fundamentally unable to bridge the gap between their irreconcilable core demands. Secondly, in the context of Lebanon, Israel has continued to carry out aerial and drone strikes, claiming that the actions are necessary for self-defence and to target immediate threats, despite its November 2024 ceasefire agreement.

Hamas, however, has a card up its sleeve, which is the return of the mortal remains of the 28 hostages. While the Trump plan stipulated an immediate release of all the hostages, both dead and living, Hamas has claimed that due to the massive destruction in Gaza, the process of locating and retrieving the remains of the dead hostages may require more time and unimpeded access across the Strip than the 72-hour window allows. This gives tactical advantage to Hamas to prolong the ceasefire.

Implementation of the second phase will be even more difficult given the diametrically opposite views of Israel and Hamas shared by the Arab countries. But the Sharm el-Sheikh peace summit co-hosted by President Trump and President el-Sisi, attended by many Arab, Islamic, and European leaders at the level of Heads of States and governments, is intended to finalise the international framework for the subsequent phases of the Trump plan.

Another positive takeaway is that the Gulf countries are more proactively engaged this time. Their influence on Washington and the intolerance for the continued offensive on Gaza could sustain the plan. Significantly, Trump, before landing in Tel Aviv, declared that the two-year war in Gaza “is over”. The fate of the region would depend on the president staying the course.

(The writer is a former ambassador of India to Egypt and former Permanent Representative of India to the Arab League)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Different masters, different strokes

My heroes wielded rods and rulers, but the lessons outlast bruises

I P ANAND

Teachers are often remembered not only for their subject expertise but also for their peculiarities. As I bow in gratitude to my school teachers, who initiated me into the world of knowledge and learning, I fondly recall their personalised ways of teaching—each one with his own swag and style.

My first vivid memory goes to the short and stocky Sardar Kuldeep Singh, who taught us English in class 8, a subject introduced only in class 6. He would write difficult spellings or odd sentences for changes of voice or narration on the blackboard, along with their solutions. Then he would issue his trademark command: “About turn!” which we had to obey, reluctantly turning our backs to the board to face his volley of questions. We were often tempted to look back, and soon his cane would come to “correct” us. However

sore my back would become, I remember till today the spellings and grammar rules of the ‘Queer Quizmaster’.

Equally unforgettable was our heavily built, bespectacled drawing teacher. Before sketching a bird or an animal, he began with his typical phrase, “*Peh’ laan ik beja ban’anana vey*” (first, we must draw an irregular shape). Then, with a running commentary, he drew a few simple lines that magically transformed into a complete figure. We struggled to decipher *beja*, but were amazed and amused at the grandmaster’s magical manoeuvres.

Science had its own distinctive disciplinarian—tall, muscular Saif Saab. In his roaring voice, he would declare every day: “*Yaad kar ke aana, main kaal iss chapter mein se sawaal puchhoonga*” (come prepared. Tomorrow I will ask questions from this chapter). Fearing his thunder, I often burnt the midnight oil. Ironically, very often he forgot to ask promised questions, yet his awe and aura made us learn the entire chapter by heart. Such methods were, without doubt, supremely successful.

Unlike today, when corporal punishment is a criminal offence, our era

religiously followed the rule “Spare the rod; spoil the child.” The rod really reigned over us. And even in caning, individuality was evident. The maths teacher struck palms with his wooden ruler, chanting, “*Danda peer hai vigde tigdeyan da*” (the rod tames the wayward). Striking with a scale, the motherly Hindi teacher scolded softly, “*Sha’rm nahin aati sha’raar karti hue?*” (Aren’t you ashamed of doing mischief?) And the burly PT master struck and spoke: “*Laaton ke bhoot baaton se nahin maante*.”

The statements differed, and the strokes varied, but the essence was the same—a deep sense of commitment to discipline and an unshakable urge to educate. They, therefore, lashed and loved at the same time; hands were caned, but heads were caressed.

American author Guy Kawasaki rightly remarks, “If you have to put someone on a pedestal, put teachers. They are society’s heroes.” My heroes may have wielded rods and rulers, but they left me with lessons that outlast every bruise—discipline, respect, and the lifelong joy of teaching and learning.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why did India allow Taliban minister to dictate terms on its soil?

The recent reports about the Afghan Foreign Minister’s press conference, where the Afghan Government barred Indian women journalists from attending, are quite disturbing. It is peculiar that the minister, while on Indian soil, felt empowered to take such actions according to his own whims and fancies. The Indian Foreign Ministry’s excuse that the press conference was held at the Afghan embassy and therefore beyond their control is unacceptable. By washing their hands of the issue, they are essentially condoning the Minister’s behaviour. Inviting

the minister as a guest of the Government of India was a questionable decision, especially given the Taliban regime’s unrecognised status. Furthermore, allowing him to dictate terms on Indian soil is unbecoming. If women are not permitted to participate in official engagements in Afghanistan, that is their prerogative; however, such conventions should not be imposed on Indian soil, which has its own constitution and laws. The PM’s helplessness in this matter is regrettable.

A R Ravichandran, Bengaluru

Go beyond the rhetoric

Apropos ‘Trump treats Modi as great, personal friend: US envoy designate’ (Oct 12), the US Ambassador to India designate, Sergio Gor, recently met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and discussed the close relationship between PM Modi and US President Donald Trump. While the camaraderie between the two leaders may be touted as a significant development, it is essential to look beyond the rhetoric. The imposition of steep tariffs on Indian exports, the increase in H-1B visa fees to \$100,000, and the 100%

tariff on films made outside the US are all indicative of a relationship that is not as friendly as it seems. The opposition parties are right to question the significance of this friendship.

C V Aravind, Bengaluru

The Nobel bias

The announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize to Maria Corina Machado, Venezuela’s opposition leader, has raised questions. It is surprising to see the Nobel Committee overlooking contributions of several eminent personalities while choosing individ-

uals with questionable credentials. Henry Kissinger, who persuaded US President Nixon to bomb the peaceful Kampuchea (now Cambodia), was awarded the Peace Prize in 1973. Le Duc Tho of Vietnam, who was to receive the award with Kissinger, rejected the prize in protest. If such actions continue, the credibility of the Nobel Prize will be questioned.

S S Shashidhar, Bengaluru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: letters@deccanherald.co.in (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender’s postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

The Modi government, by bringing three new criminal justice laws, has not only freed the citizens from the symbolic laws of slavery, but is also realising the dream of ‘Doorstep Justice’... By adopting these three new laws, there has been a historic increase in the conviction rate in Rajasthan.



Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

More law, less justice.

Marcus Tullius Cicero

TO BE PRECISE



IN PERSPECTIVE

The economics of menstrual leave

With the right checks and guidelines, Karnataka’s policy can boost productivity and female labour force participation

RAJESHWARI U R

The decision of the Karnataka government to grant one paid menstrual leave per month for women employees across both government and private sectors marks a landmark moment in India’s labour policy. From an economic standpoint, this move carries several positive dimensions, especially when considered alongside international and other Indian state precedents. One of the most immediate and tangible economic benefits expected is the reduction of presenteeism, a situation where employees work despite health-related discomfort and are consequently less productive.

Menstruation often involves physical pain, fatigue, and psychological stress that may temporarily reduce concentration and efficiency. When women continue to work under such conditions, the economy suffers an invisible productivity loss. Granting one paid leave per month allows women to rest and recover, thereby improving performance and consistency on other working days. Over time, this approach may lead to higher overall productivity, fewer medical complications, and lower absenteeism due to untreated menstrual health issues. The potential benefits are particularly pronounced in sectors like manufacturing and Information Technology, both major contributors to Karnataka’s economy.

Another important positive effect is in terms of female labour force participation and retention. Measures that improve working conditions for women often help retain talent and reduce turnover. For women who might otherwise reduce hours, drop leaves without pay, or even exit the workforce due to unmanaged menstrual health burdens, this kind of policy can be a stabilising factor. Karnataka’s move may thus contribute to improved gender equity in employment. Over a longer horizon, this strengthens human capital accumulation, as more women remain active in employment, gain experience, skills, promotions, and contribute tax revenues.

Karnataka’s policy also generates positive social signalling and externalities. By formalising menstrual leave across sectors, the state normalises discussions around menstruation and its impacts, reducing stigma. This may lead to improved health outcomes, greater awareness, and investment in menstrual health infrastructure, such as workplace sanitation, access to hygienic products, rest facilities, and supportive health policies. Such infrastructure itself has economic returns: lower absenteeism, fewer medical complications, and enhanced dignity, which signals higher morale

among women workers.

Bihar provides a useful precedent. As early as 1992, it introduced a policy granting two days of paid menstrual leave each month to women government employees. Although this policy had a narrower scope, it demonstrates that such leave can be implemented over decades without collapsing labour market outcomes. Odisha, more recently, introduced a one-day menstrual leave policy for employees in the state government sectors. Kerala has taken another track, extending menstrual leave to female students in higher education institutions. Karnataka appears to build on these precedents by offering a more generous and broadly applicable policy, reducing differential treatment between sectors, and raising the standard of workplace welfare.

Internationally, several countries have had menstrual leave policies in place or in discourse. Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Zambia, the Philippines, and Taiwan are among the nations that recognise menstrual leave with variation in the number of days allowed, whether the leave is paid or unpaid, and eligibility conditions.

A national model?

Academic research comparing these jurisdictions often finds that there is concern over menstrual leave being underused (e.g. because of stigma) or misinterpreted by employers, but the net effect on labour market participation of women has not been clearly negative. Scholars emphasise that leave policies perform best when accompanied by legal safeguards against discrimination, transparency in leave usage, and cultural acceptance.

Critics argue that menstrual leave may inadvertently reinforce gender stereotypes or discourage employers from hiring women. Such risks can be mitigated through proper legal design and monitoring. Karnataka’s challenge will be to ensure that leave days are treated as legitimate health entitlements, not performance liabilities.

Transparent implementation guidelines, confidential leave application systems, and penalties for discrimination in hiring or promotions will be vital. Periodic evaluation of usage rates, productivity indicators, employee satisfaction, and firm-level outcomes can inform refinements.

From an economic perspective, Karnataka’s menstrual leave policy promises multiple positives. It has the potential to improve productivity, enhance gender equality in the workforce, reduce turnover, and produce important positive externalities in health and social norms. The examples from Bihar, Odisha, Kerala, and international jurisdictions suggest that such policies can be effective. If the results demonstrate improved retention, reduced absenteeism, and positive morale effects, Karnataka’s policy could serve as a model for nationwide adoption.

(The writer is an associate professor, Department of Economics, Christ University, Bengaluru)

Twenty years on, the RTI story is still being written

A M PRASAD

The Right to Information (RTI) Act came into effect two decades ago, following which the Karnataka Information Commission (KIC) was established on July 30, 2005. The Commission currently comprises the State Chief Information Commissioner and ten Information Commissioners, with permanent benches in Kalaburagi and Belgavi to ensure quicker disposal of appeals at the local level.

Each year, five to six lakh RTI applications are filed across the state, both online and offline, under Section 6(1) of the Act. During 2024-2025 alone, the KIC received 30,821 second appeals under section 19(3) (of which 4,516 were online) and 1,910 applications under Section 18(1) requiring inquiry into complaints filed by any person. While it disposed of 15,497 applications under second appeal, 1,483 complaints filed under Sec 18 were disposed of, imposing penalties Rs 33,11,000 on Public Informa-

tion Officers for delays in providing information. It also awarded compensation of Rs 12.16 lakh to 112 appellants under Section 19(8)(b) for loss or detriment faced caused by denial or delay.

The volume of second appeals filed in the Commission has grown exponentially—from 17,204 in the year 2020-2021 to 30,821 in 2024-2025. The highest number of applications comes from the departments of Rural Development and Panchayath Raj, Revenue, Urban Development, Social Welfare, Home, Water Resources and Forests. Among districts, Bengaluru Urban and Rural top the list, followed by Belagavi, Bagalkot, Daven-gere, Kolar, Mandya, and Vijaynagar.

As the RTI Act marks its twentieth year, it is time to reflect on how far India has advanced towards the vision envisaged in its Preamble—an informed citizenry, transparency of information to contain corruption, and accountability of governments to the governed.

The RTI Act deepened the participatory

nature of Indian democracy by empowering citizens and making officials more accountable. The Right to Life under Article 21 has been interpreted to include the Right to Know, and the Supreme Court's 2017 Puttaswamy Judgement affirmed that the Right to Privacy is essential to personal liberty. Together, these rights—knowledge, information, education, and privacy—form the pillars of transparent and accountable governance.

The RTI framework enables any citizen to seek information by filing applications under Section 6(1), appeals under Section 19, and complaints under Section 18. Information must be provided within 48 hours if it is related to human rights violations or corruption (Section 7). The Severability clause (under Section 10) allows partial disclosure by redacting exempt portions, while Section 8 protects privacy of and national interest by exempting matters related to sovereignty, court of law proceedings, parliamentary privilege, foreign affairs or

the safety of individuals. Qualified exemptions—such as commercial and trade secrets or fiduciary records, Cabinet papers, Person information—may still be disclosed in larger public interest. Section 11 restricts disclosure of third-party information without consent. Thus, the RTI Act strives to balance the citizen's right to know with legitimate privacy and security concerns.

The biggest shortcoming in RTI implementation remains the lack of proactive disclosure of information mandated under Section 4, which lists various categories of information that must be made public without any RTI request. It also prescribes the manner in which the information should be provided. Compliance with this section could reduce applications by nearly 70%, easing the burden on departments and curbing inefficiency and wrong doing. Yet, a recent survey found that most government departments have failed to comply, despite repeated directives.

In August 2023, the Supreme Court di-

rected the Central and State Information Commissions to monitor the implementation of Section 4 and ensure adherence to government guidelines.

Another major challenge is the volume and vagueness of requests. The High Court of Karnataka, in the *Department of Agriculture vs KIC*, held that applications lacking purpose or seeking voluminous, non-specific data may be rejected to prevent waste of time and public resources. Repeated or frivolous applications filed by the same individual also block genuine users' access. The CIC has advised public authorities to record such abuse and recommend non-entertainment of repetitive requests.

Delays in disposal of applications often stem from delay in appointment of Information Commissioners. The KIC, now functioning at near-full strength, has improved disposal rates—over 10,000 cases have been cleared this year—helped by regular hearings and voluntary disclosure by PIOs after several workshops conducted in districts.

The Supreme Court, in *CPIO vs S C Agarwal*, clarified that neither the right to information nor the right to privacy is absolute. The RTI Act contains a finely tuned balancing of interests, and privacy concerns of third parties cannot be disregarded without giving them an opportunity to object. Applicants, in turn, must seek information with precision and clarity.

Denying citizens access to vital information, however, impedes democratic processes and restricts access to essential services. As the Court noted in *State of Gujarat vs Mirzapur Moti Kasab Jamaat & Ors*, public interest encompasses public order, public health, public security, morals, economic welfare of community as well as the objects mentioned in Part IV of Constitution. RTI must continue to function as an enabler of transparency and accountability, not merely as a procedural tool.

(The writer is the Karnataka Chief Information Commissioner and a retired DGP)

Iran became a pioneer in gender transition operations by forcing procedures on LGBTQ Iranians. Desperate for cash, it is now hoping to attract trans patients from around the world

PRANAV BASKAR AND
LEILY NIKOUNAZAR

For 40 years, Iran has performed more gender transition surgeries than many other nations, largely a result of pressuring gay and gender-nonconforming citizens to undergo unwanted operations or risk the death penalty.

Now, faced with an economy crippled by war and sanctions, the Islamic republic is promoting its expertise to a global audience, hoping to attract transgender foreigners with the promise of inexpensive surgeries packaged with luxury hotel stays and sightseeing tours.

Desperate for foreign investment, Iran's theocratic government has set a goal of generating more than \$7 billion from medical tourism annually, according to Iranian state news media, about seven times as much as it earned last year. That objective has resulted in the proliferation of medical tourism companies, marketing not just nose jobs and hair transplants, but vaginoplasties, mastectomies and penis constructions through glossy English-language websites.



Arastu, holding a photo of himself taken before his transition in which he was preparing for a role in a television show. NYT

Forced to conform: Iran's transgender tourism trap

“The goal of these medical tours is probably to portray Iran as a paradise for trans people, which it isn't,” said Saman Arastu, a transgender Iranian man and actor who chose to undergo so-called top and bottom surgeries. “In my opinion, these are nothing but a show. The situation for trans people is dire.”

While precise figures are unknown, a report by the Home Office of Britain from 2022 found that roughly 4,000 people underwent transition surgery each year in Iran, a figure higher than the combined annual totals in Britain and France. Experts say a vast majority of patients come from inside Iran.

Iran's experience with transition surgery stems from a fatwa issued in the 1980s by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founding supreme leader of the Islamic republic, who declared that transgender individuals could gain legal recognition of the gender with which they identified, but only on the condition that they underwent transition surgery.

On the surface that policy inverts what many in the West expect from Iran, where gender norms are so strictly enforced that until recently women were punished for not wearing *hijabs* in public.

But transgender Iranians and experts say the government's embrace of surgery in no way correlates to advocacy for trans people.

Iranians who do not adhere to traditional norms of masculinity and femininity—including trans people who do not want surgery—are subject to violence, extortion or are pressured into operations.

Raha Ajoudani, 20, a trans woman and activist, made the opposite journey that many foreign tourists are making. She fled to Germany from Iran in 2024 to avoid a forced transition surgery and to escape state persecution for her activism. Ajoudani said that she was detained twice by authorities in 2022, after an ex-boyfriend collaborated with the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence, to facilitate her arrest. Her family, she added, is routinely hounded to get her to stop her activism.

“I never wanted to undergo gender reassignment surgery,” Ajoudani said. “I've defined myself outside of this binary. I didn't want to live according to the governmental definition of cultural expectations of being a woman or a man, nor did I submit to Khomeini's *fatwa*.”

Surgery is not a guarantee of acceptance or safety. Transgender people in Iran face murder and other forms of violence and harassment.

The tour companies include language to assuage foreigners of those fears in their advertising materials.

Amid glossy before-and-after photo illustrations of idealised pectorals and breasts, and copy that promises “budget-friendly” procedures, rapid visa approvals and help achieving “a strong feeling of happiness and relief,” the tour companies are also selling patients on what one calls Iran's “relatively progressive stance on transgender rights.”

Najafi, the tour manager, conceded that some foreigners feared running afoul of the authorities or the locals, but said that patients traveling with her company had

“never had any security issues.”

Transition surgeries are complex operations with a questionable record of safety in Iran. Some activists have likened the country's gender clinics to “butcher” shops.

Saghi Ghahraman, who led the Iranian Queer Organisation, said that while they believed treatment standards had improved, the change had come at a cost, as many gay people felt forced into operations that were like “experiments.”

A UN report on transition surgeries in Iran from 2015 described botched procedures that led to complications like “severe bleeding, severe infection, scarring, chronic pain and abnormally shaped or located sexual organs.”

Adding to the risks are some tour companies' promises of rapid procedures, which experts said should involve months of planning. Some market timelines as short as one week.

Shahryar Cohanzad, a urologist in Tehran who has performed around 300 transition surgeries, said the companies' aim to perform as many procedures as quickly as possible was unsafe.

“From what I know after 35 years of performing surgeries, it's critical for the surgeon to spend as much time as possible with the patient,” he said.

Eric, 45, a trans man living in Canada who requested anonymity to protect himself and his family from reprisals, said he had sought treatment in Iran because it was cheap. But he acknowledged the tension in seeking treatment in a place where others have it forced on them. **NYT**

VIBHAV MARIWALA

As India ages and faces a multitude of geopolitical challenges, its future lies not only in its youth but also in how it harnesses its older and more experienced workers. Its demographic dividend can be leveraged through its “experience dividend”.

India is the youngest large country in the world. Yet paradoxically, its future hinges on how it treats its older, more experienced workers, i.e., the silver generation. The real question is not whether India has a demographic dividend, but whether it can also mobilise an experience dividend. India's true edgelies in its dual dividend of both youth and experience. The former can build on the successes of the latter.

By 2047, India will be home to nearly 300 million older adults. To rely only on youth alone is shortsighted; self-reliance requires tapping into the experience dividend of those who helped build the economy of the last 30 years. Without harnessing the experience and knowledge of its older workers, India risks squandering this golden opportunity.

into youth training pipelines. There is growing evidence of organisations staffed by older workers and retirees that play important roles in providing mentorship, community building, and added support, but the state must find ways to harness them to support India's aspiration. It is a matter of economic and national importance.

Take foreign policy, for example, where India shaped global institutions and discourse on key issues, from Hansa Jivraj Mehta, who helped shape the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, who helped shape global health policies in the 1950s. These efforts, compounded with our foreign policy groundings in democracy, pluralism, and non-alignment, made us a model for emerging countries. India's outsized presence in global forums ensured that it was front and centre in mediating several global crises, from the end of the Korean War in 1953 to the Suez Crisis in 1956, and later on, a new cadre of diplomats used these learnings to lead the charge against Apartheid South Africa and the war in Vietnam.

Similarly, stalwarts like Manmohan Singh, I G Patel, and Montek Singh Ahluwalia heralded India's economic reforms in the 1990s, delivering sustained growth and creating space for a new generation of businesses to flourish. This is not to say the past alone is a guidepost for future growth and innovation, but drawing on the experiences of experts can help refine India's trajectory in the 21st century.

India need not only look overseas for inspiration. It can leverage its experience dividend to prepare for 21st-century challenges like artificial intelligence. Dominant AI models today are American or Chinese, but India's multilingual and context-rich environment demands its own. The technologists who built India's IT backbone can guide the creation of indigenous AI models to solve everyday Indian problems.

This century could truly be India's; it has many of the right ingredients but requires a concerted effort by the State, businesses, society, and institutions to harness its workforce for better economic outcomes. Leveraging the old to support the young, and tapping into decades of expertise can help prepare its burgeoning workforce to reach its full potential. With an ageing population already contributing to the economy and to addressing societal issues, they must be better intertwined with India's youth to harness their potential effectively.

(The writer is a Senior Policy Advisor at WisdomCircle)

Across the world, ageing societies are adapting to make the silver generation key to the economy. Germany relies on apprenticeships, Japan keeps its elderly engaged in community and social functions, and the largest proportion of entrepreneurs in the United States and the United Kingdom are aged 50 and above. Unlike the West, India is still early in its ageing journey, giving it a rare chance to design systems where the silver generation can train and guide its youth.

This positioning of two distinct yet highlighted productive demographic groups gives it time to design systems where older workers train and guide the young, making its demographic dividend a genuine asset.

A report by Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies, Ashoka, and Dalberg underscores the role this ‘experience dividend’ could play in shaping the economy. It is estimated that this segment could add another 1.5% to GDP if more of them re-entered the labour force. Structured corporate pathways, from providing mentorship in IT firms to shaping infrastructure projects and their implementation, have the potential to turn experience into a growth lever.

India has been at an analogous crossroads in the past and has always drawn on older technocrats and leaders with institutional memory—from building institutions in 1947 to opening the economy in 1991. Today's challenge is to embed that experience systematically

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: OCTOBER 1975

PM lambasts BBC for anti-Indian smear

New Delhi, Oct. 13
Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has accused the BBC of being “anti-Indian,” saying “its misrepresentation has now crossed the limits.” In an interview to the *Sunday Telegraph*, she said: “They seem to feel that anything is fair if it is anti-Indian. That BBC has been very anti-Indian has been conveyed to me by the heads of other countries for many years, not just now. When I have attended conferences of non-aligned countries and so on, my attention was drawn to this, but we did not do anything about it.”

25 YEARS AGO: OCTOBER 2000

South Korean President wins Nobel Peace Prize

Oslo, Oct 13 (AP)
South Korean President, Kim Dae-jung, won the Nobel Peace Prize today for his work towards peace and reconciliation with North Korea that led to a groundbreaking summit with his North Korean counterpart. “In the course of South Korea's decades of authoritarian rule, despite repeated threats on his life and long periods in exile, Kim Dae-jung gradually emerged as his country's leading spokesman for democracy,” according to the citation.

The Sports Day at a kindergarten annually showcased many colourful drills, a march past and races. The aim was not about winning or losing; it was seen more as fun and an opportunity for interaction between parents, children and teachers. Children absorb every new experience, and outdoor activity shapes them well beyond books.

Every year, teachers and staff dug deep and worked on all the detailing, and the efficient teamwork ensured no stone was left unturned for the event's success. From the time of their arrival, the parents captured every angle and move on their cameras. The excitement reached its peak when

their children lined up on the start line of the race. Right from the word ‘Go’, parents followed the little champs. Their loud cheering could be heard ringing all around the arena. Towards the finish, parents were again busy adjusting the camera, capturing the little steps into the winning frame. With their adrenaline pumping high, the race ended amidst millions of clicks. Calming themselves, parents then eagerly awaited the results. When results were announced, a few parents objected to this outcome and started to argue. In the aftermath, things led to an ugly



fight and discontentment. When things began to get out of control, management decided to step in, and eventually, the battle snowballed into the principal's office for reviewing the nail-biting finish in a 50 m race.

After a lot of discussions and dialogues, all contenders were given prizes. This disgruntled victory may have tasted sweet to a few parents, but the bitterness of that incident can still be felt by many parents. After that year the school closed its doors for parents on sports day, making it an ‘in-house’ affair. ‘Success tastes sweet when its secret is

sweat.’ Winning that race was not the end of the road; it was more as if the egos were at stake. A Buddhist quote reads, “Expecting and accepting are two different things in life. Where expecting ends in tears, accepting may bring some cheer.”

Success won on a battleground cannot guarantee happiness. After winning the great battle of Kurukshetra against their own cousins, the Pandavas never felt victorious or celebrated their success. The battle fought for righteousness and dharma witnessed only death and destruction, as war had consumed too many souls. Ultimately, they renounced the mortal world and moved beyond to the heavenly abode.



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