

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Cost of energy relief package planned by Germany for 2027

13.3 € billion. The German government plans an energy cost relief package for businesses and consumers worth €13.3 billion (\$15.2 billion) in 2027, to be drawn from the Climate and Transformation Fund, the Finance Ministry said on Wednesday. REUTERS

Number of Ebola cases in Democratic Republic of the Congo

2,000 More than 2,000 Ebola cases, including 754 deaths, have been recorded in the DR Congo, where the World Health Organization warns the outbreak may be two to four times larger than official figures suggest. AFP

Persons affected due to flood situation in Arunachal Pradesh

1 lakh. The flood situation in Arunachal Pradesh worsened on Wednesday, with 26 of the State's 28 districts affected and the number of people hit by the deluge crossing one lakh, an official bulletin said. The floods and landslides have so far claimed seven lives and injured 29 people across the State. PTI

Value of goods exported on India-U.K. trade pact's first day

140 \$ million. India has exported goods worth \$140 million to the United Kingdom at zero duty under the comprehensive economic and trade agreement (CETA), which became operational on Wednesday, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said. PTI

Dementia risk that could be prevented or delayed

45 in per cent. Up to 45% of dementia risk could be prevented or delayed, the World Health Organization said on Wednesday, citing modifiable risk factors such as tobacco and air pollution. It is the seventh leading cause of death. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us facebook.com/thehindu X.com/the_hindu instagram.com/the_hindu

The problem with China's 4.3% growth

It's the slowest growth since 2022, when China was still in the grips of the pandemic, and below the government's already-lowered annual target of 4.5-5%; the country is facing multiple challenges of a real estate slowdown, sluggish consumption, and serious challenges in the job market

WORLD INSIGHT

Ananth Krishnan

China's economy grew 4.3% in the second quarter of 2026, according to data released on Wednesday by China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). With growth falling to the lowest in more than three years and below the government's already lowered annual target of 4.5-5%, attention has turned to how the Chinese government is likely to deal with multiple challenges of a real estate slowdown, sluggish consumption, and serious challenges in the job market.

A meeting of the ruling Communist Party's Politburo slated for July-end is likely to offer some clues. China's surging exports have emerged as a bright spot for Beijing, while raising questions for India and other trade partners that are grappling with ever-widening trade imbalances.

What does the latest data show?

China's GDP expanded by 4.3% in the second quarter, down from 5% in the first quarter. This marked the slowest growth since 2022, when China was still in the grips of the pandemic. Significantly, growth fell below the annual target. In March 2026, China's National People's Congress (NPC), or Parliament, announced a 4.5-5% target for the year, which was the lowest since 1991.

Other economic indicators released on Wednesday showed a 5.7% drop in fixed-asset investment and sluggish retail sales — an important marker of consumption, which the government hopes will drive future growth for a historically investment-reliant economy.

In May, retail sales fell 0.6% from last year, another low since the pandemic. June showed a slight recovery to a 1.1% increase in retail sales of goods. Usual caveats apply about China's economic data, which China's former Premier Li Keqiang himself reportedly once advised were for “reference only” (and that other indicators, such as freight and power consumption, were arguably more revelatory about the state of the



China's GDP expanded by 4.3% in the second quarter. The numbers reveal how the government wants to portray the state of the economy and may signal potential policy changes. GETTY IMAGES

economy). At the same time, it is important to note that economists still closely study China's official data, as numbers reveal how the government wants to portray the state of the economy and may signal potential policy changes. Most economists have noted improvements in the reliability of statistics, with numbers becoming harder to fudge coinciding with the global integration of China's economy and more transparency into the performance of Chinese companies, many of which are publicly listed.

What is driving down growth?

If real estate is about “location, location, location”, China's slowdown story is in many ways about “real estate, real estate and real estate”. In the first half of the year, property investment fell 18%, a remarkable statistic for an economy once driven by real estate growth. This isn't only about the property sector. The spillover effects are hard to overstate.

An entire swathe of the economy is in a slump, from construction to every related industry that has for decades relied on a booming property sector, from lighting to furniture. Then there is the psychological impact in a country where most people's savings are locked into real estate given

the low returns from regulated interest rates that make bank deposits unappealing. Investing abroad is also not an option given the tight capital controls, although the stock market has emerged as an alternative avenue despite its volatility.

This has further dampened the willingness of Chinese consumers to spend, along with other persisting anxieties such as rising healthcare and education costs. Still, there are bright spots for the Chinese economy such as the rapid growth in China's high-tech industries and the continuing expansion of Chinese exports, from electric vehicles to most recently, an extraordinary surge in the exports of air-conditioners to Europe amid a summer heat wave. Trade still remains robust for China, growing 17% in the first half of the year. Exports grew for 11 consecutive quarters to \$2.1 trillion in the first six months of the year.

How is the government likely to respond?

All eyes are on an upcoming meeting of the Politburo, the top policy-making body of the Communist Party of China, set for late July. Mao Shengyong, deputy director of the NBS, said on Wednesday the government was likely to “introduce targeted, more proactive and effective

policies in response to changing circumstances”, without specifying.

Boosting domestic consumption and minimising job losses are likely to top its concerns, especially with many graduates currently entering the workforce. Urban unemployment remained flat at 5% in June. Mr. Mao said “efforts will be stepped up to secure the steady development of employment”, with a target to create 12 million new urban jobs in 2026, despite the concerns about hiring impacted by AI. Earlier this week, China announced a first of its kind five-year plan for consumption, with a 2030 retail sales target of 60 trillion yuan (\$8.86 trillion), a 20% rise from 2025.

Addressing the property sector — the elephant in the room — is one major challenge. The government has walked a tightrope of avoiding what it calls “systemic risks” while trying to protect buyers (as it needs to, if consumption is to revive) while not bailing out many developers. This is part of an ongoing effort to reform the sector and curb speculation, after Chinese President Xi Jinping's declaration in 2016 that “houses were for living in and not speculation”.

The broader problem for Beijing is that it's not only property developers but local governments also have been hard hit by the slump, with real estate sales a major contributor of revenues. Many tier-two and tier-three cities have seen a major cash crunch, impacting spending on infrastructure and social services. The extent of the crunch remains unclear with some taking to fudging data to mask the state of their finances, as the Communist Party's own anti-corruption watchdog warned recently. It cited the example of one plot of land being sold “18 times” in the southern city of Nanning “without ever changing hands”, reported the *South China Morning Post*, with the fudge allowing “the city government to artificially shore up its fiscal revenue by 2.83 billion yuan (US\$416 million) in 2024”.

“Captivated by quick gains,” it warned, “some authorities engaged in accounting gimmicks to reflect substantial rises in fiscal revenue, masking actual budget strains.”

THE GIST

Economic indicators released on Wednesday showed a 5.7% drop in fixed-asset investment and sluggish retail sales — an important marker of consumption, which the government hopes will drive future growth for a historically investment-reliant economy.

The broader problem for Beijing is that it's not only property developers but local governments also have been hard hit by the slump, with real estate sales a major contributor of revenues.

Digitisation and efficiency in criminal justice system

The shift in approach to justice has contributed to making the criminal justice system more citizen-oriented

LETTER AND SPIRIT

C.B.P. Srivastava

Recently, the Centre has announced that India aims for full digital rollout of its criminal justice system from July 1, 2027 after which the procedures related to investigations and trials under the new criminal laws will be recorded digitally through the Interoperable Criminal Justice System. The efficiency of any criminal justice system largely depends on the procedural efficiency beginning from the registration of the first information report (FIR) to investigation, filing of chargesheet outlining specific charges levelled against the accused and presenting the evidence and witness testimonies gathered to substantiate them, trial and finally the disposal. In the

digital system the data is stored on the government's cloud platform, MeghRaj.

Understanding criminal justice system

The criminal justice system comprises the police, courts, prisons, forensics, and prosecution services, and aims at ensuring that individuals who suffer injury or loss at the hand of others can present their cases and seek justice.

Justice cannot be delivered unless the rights of the accused and the interests of the victim and the society are balanced. This has been the fundamental principle of the criminal justice system, particularly in common law countries that follow the adversarial system. These countries base their legal systems primarily on judicial precedents and uncodified case law rather than strict statutory codes. This principle also gives the accused a fair chance to present his case in accordance with the tenets of natural justice, that is,

the rule of fair hearing (*Audi alteram partem*). In other words, no person should be condemned unheard. The system seeks to ensure procedural fairness. On the other hand, the inquisitorial system is practised in civil law countries, where rules are codified into comprehensive written statutes rather than shaped by judicial precedent. Under this system, the judge plays an active role in investigating the facts and determining the outcome of the case on the basis of inquiry and investigation. Thus, the precision of decision depends largely on the skills and prudence of the judge concerned.

Changed attitude

The reforms in the criminal law have opened a new avenue for the delivery of justice. To be more appropriate, the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) have been replaced by the *Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita*

(BNS) and *Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita* (BNSS) with the idea of transformation. While the erstwhile penal code was implemented with an idea to punish the accused, the BNS believes in the delivery of justice through retribution. The new code has a democratic approach, placing greater emphasis on individual than on the state in matters relating to crimes. The criminal procedure code believed that trial of a ‘criminal’ was being conducted whereas the BNSS considers an accused as a citizen whose rights should be balanced with the interests of the victims without any prejudice. Thus, the shift in approach to justice has contributed to making the criminal justice system more democratic and citizen-oriented, while strengthening the protection of the principles of natural justice that are embedded constitutional framework of India.

Reforms in the system

It is well established that every system requires periodic reform to remain responsive to changing needs and circumstances. The judiciary plays a vital role in this process by guiding the state through its directions and rulings. Against this backdrop, it is important to note that courts have laid down procedures governing several aspects of the criminal justice system. Through their decisions, courts often seek to fill legislative gaps in

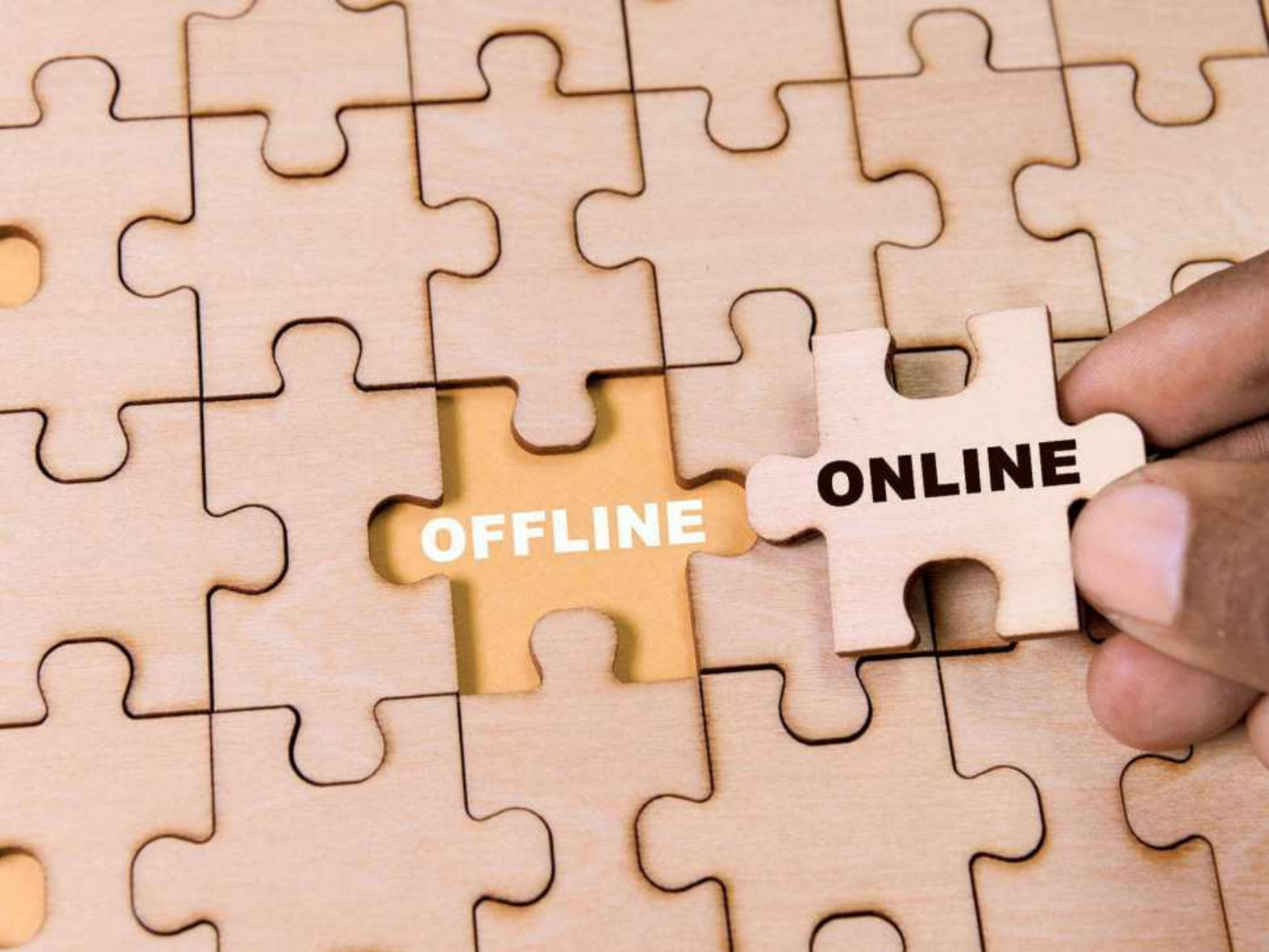
areas where the law is silent, thereby ensuring the effective administration of justice. For example, the Supreme Court in *Visakha v. State of Rajasthan* (1997) gave guidelines to prevent sexual harassment of women at workplace holding that such an act violates Articles 14,15 and 21 of the Constitution.

The recent announcement by the Centre to enhance the efficiency of the criminal justice system through digitisation assumes considerable significance. In the field of forensics, the new criminal laws have made forensic examination of crime scenes mandatory for offences punishable with imprisonment of seven years or more. In view of this requirement, the number of forensic laboratories has increased from 129 in 2023 to 154 in 2025. However, according to the National Crime Records Bureau, only 46% of FIRs were digitally transmitted to courts. Since this accounts for less than half of all registered cases, it suggests that the digital chain of the criminal justice system remains incomplete.

Although most states have implemented various components of the criminal justice digitisation system, progress remains uneven. In this context, full digital rollout by 2027 will fill this gap and make the system more efficient.

The author is President, Centre for Applied Research in Governance, Delhi.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Online culture is no longer a subset of culture, but its very foundation, with the digital space now serving as the primary space where culture is being created. GETTY IMAGES

From creators to memes: how the Internet came to shape culture

As the boundary between the real and the virtual blurs, three books explore how the Internet has transformed everyday life, suggesting extremely online humans are no longer an aberration, but a product of the world where identity and meaning are increasingly shaped by screens and algorithms

Abhishek Baxi

For much of its early life, the Internet was an escape from the real world, a place one “went” to. In India, in the beginning of the digital revolution, many of us often visited booths to access the Internet – mostly to check our emails or search for information on Google. With the Internet now ubiquitous and available to all, that distinction has collapsed. Today, we live in a culture shaped by both the real and the virtual, often at the same time. The shift is so complete that it is almost invisible.

How do we understand this transformation? Three books – Taylor Lorenz’s *Extremely Online* (Simon and Schuster), Anurag Minus Verma’s *The Great Indian Brain Rot* (Bloomsbury Publishing India), and Santosh Desai’s *Memes for Mummyji* (HarperCollins India) – approach the subject from different angles, but together they show how the Internet has become our primary cultural habitat.

From a tool to a stage

Lorenz’s work provides the global scaffolding for this story. Drawing on years of reporting on Internet culture for *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Atlantic*, she chronicles the rise of creators – the people who are online to make money – and how the Internet turned ordinary people into commentators and performers, in *Extremely Online*.

She provides a rosy picture of the Internet, as a place of endless opportunity and democratisation. She writes, “Blogs offered readers everything that legacy media couldn’t, revealing what writers really thought.” These blogs and forums, she argues, evolved into a culture where visibility slowly became a form of currency. As a result, the self is now curated; it is constantly fed into algorithms. The shaping and evolution of the self has become a public project. Lorenz tries to capture the moment when not just us, but the Internet itself transformed – from a tool to a stage, which then became the default mode of being for many of us.

The Indian story

Her book provides the global story. But when it comes to India, there is something far more chaotic taking place. Verma’s *The Great Indian Brain Rot* argues that India’s digital life cannot be understood through the western lens. His essays, written with a satirical edge, show how caste, class, aspiration, and misinformation shape the Internet. The “brain rot” he describes is not a lament about screen addiction or cringe content online; it is a commentary on how digital life amplifies the tensions in society.

According to Verma, the Indian Internet is a place where the earnest and the frivolous, the ordinary and the bizarre, coexist. As we scroll, we come across political propaganda right after an astrology reel. Or we see caste-based trolling thriving alongside self-care

content. For many creators, the Internet is a platform that fulfils their desire for upward mobility as well as virality; the latter often helps them achieve the former. Cheap data and inexpensive smartphones have ensured that everyone has access to the Internet, which in turn has created a cultural churn that is still unfolding.

The digital and the domestic

Desai has long been one of India’s most perceptive observers and interpreters of the everyday life. In *Memes for Mummyji*, he argues that the meme, the WhatsApp forward, the short video, and even the AI slop that we all consume are not trivial artefacts; they contain our humour, anxieties, and aspirations, and give us a sense of belonging.

His observations reveal how deeply the smartphone has embedded itself in the Indian household, just like the pressure cooker. It has changed how people think and express themselves. We see it around us: our parents, who once struggled with technology, now send us emojis. And family WhatsApp groups, like drawing rooms, are arenas for affection, conflict, and negotiation. In short, the digital and the domestic are no longer separate spheres.

What these three books show is that online culture is no longer a subset of culture, as it once was, but its building block. In other words, the online space is where culture is now being made. On platforms such as Instagram, strangers unknowingly shape our identity and how

we present ourselves. On YouTube or X, we post jokes and then watch nervously to see how quickly they travel, how viral they become. We share political statements through memes and hilarious videos.

Of course, this does not mean that the offline world has disappeared. For instance, when a protest begins online, it can gain momentum on the street, as we saw recently with the Cockroach Janata Party movement. We share memes online, but also discuss them in everyday conversation. If you happen to be a chronically offline person, taking part in daily conversations can be challenging if you are not up-to-date with the latest Internet lingo.

Lorenz reminds us that the Internet has given voice to people who were once excluded from public discourse. Verma warns us that the same systems can deepen inequalities and amplify prejudices. Desai shows us that our digital life is shaped by our everyday existence – our rituals, vulnerabilities, and negotiations.

Together, these three books suggest that “extremely online” humans are no longer an aberration. They are a product of the world we have built – a world where our identities, our sense of community, and the meaning of life itself are constantly mediated and determined by screens and algorithms.

Abhishek Baxi is an independent journalist covering the intersections and faultlines of technology, society, and culture.

THE DAILY QUIZ

The late great Sam Neill delivered versatile performances far beyond Jurassic Park. A quiz on his horror movie exploits

Mohammed Hidhayat

- QUESTION 1**
The actor portrayed the adult Damien Thorn, the Antichrist, in the third instalment of this famous film franchise, which centres on a child born to the Devil.
- QUESTION 2**
Shot in West Berlin, Neill acted opposite Isabelle Adjani in this psychological horror drama, which has attained cult status since its release.
- QUESTION 3**
Neil took a sinister turn in this sci-fi slasher set aboard a haunted spacecraft, delivering the famously chilling line: “Where we’re going, we won’t need eyes to see.”
- QUESTION 4**
He starred in genre master John Carpenter’s lovecraftian homage as an insurance investigator probing the disappearance of a horror writer.



Visual Question: Sam Neill plays a corporate criminal-cum-vampire who plans to profit from a company that sells blood. Name the film which stars Ethan Hawke in the lead role. LIONSGATE

- Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:**
- The original name of the platform followed the then popular trend of dropping vowels from the domain name. What was the original name and who coined it? **Ans: Twttr and Noah Glass**
 - Twitter originally had a 140-character limit for tweets but it was later increased to 280 characters. When was the change introduced and what was the reason for the original limit? **Ans: 2017 and so tweets fit into single SMS messages**
 - Which astronaut sent the first tweet live from outer orbit? Also mention the year the tweet was posted. **Ans: Timothy Creamer and 2010**
 - Which politician, who once used the platform to declare victory in the Presidential election [“four more years”], is among the most followed accounts on X? **Ans: Barack Obama**
 - Which user proposed the introduction of a popular feature of the platform used to categorise content on the platform? Identify the feature. **Ans: Chris Messina and Hashtag**
 - Visual: The iconic blue bird logo became synonymous with the platform. Who were the designers who designed it? **Ans: Philip Pascuzzo and Douglas Bowman**

Early Birds
Nobody answered all the questions correctly.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the meaning of ‘heist’? (V. V. Annapoorani, Bangalore)

First, let’s deal with the pronunciation. The “ei” is like the “y” in my and by. “Heist” can be used as a noun and a verb. When used as a noun, it means robbery or theft. Here are a few examples.

The heist didn’t go according to plan. Several people were killed.

Did you know that there was a jewellery heist this afternoon?

When you “heist” someone, you rob him of something. The word can also mean “to steal”. Here are a few examples.

Ranjit heisted a car and drove it all the way to Shillong.

After they had heisted the passengers they began to kill them.

Is it OK to say “parapet wall”? (P. V. Srinivasan, Chennai)

The dictionary defines “parapet” as a “low wall at the edge of a high roof, bridge, etc”. Since the word “parapet” means a wall of some kind, you needn’t say “parapet wall”. But you do hear a lot of people saying exactly that.

When someone says “Would you mind repeating what you just said?”, should the reply be “Not at all”? (S. S. Saravanan, Madurai)

Well, it depends on what you mean. If you don’t mind repeating what you have just said, then the reply “Not at all” is correct. If, on the other hand, you say “Yes”, it implies, “Yes, I do mind repeating what I just said”. Many non-native speakers of English have problems with such questions.

What is the difference between ‘expire’ and ‘die’? (M. Damodaran, Trivandrum)

The word “die” is the informal of the two. “Expire” is considered by many to be literary. When you “die” you cease to live; all signs of life cease to exist. The word can be used not only with people, but also with things; things which have the appearance of life – echo, topic, music, etc. Here are a few examples.

The smile that was splitting Hema’s face died when she saw Arun.

The firemen were waiting for the flames to die out.

The word “expire”, on the other hand, means “to breathe out air through the lungs”. When you say that someone has “expired”, what it means is, the person has expelled air for the last time! In other words, he has stopped breathing and is therefore dead.

Like the word “dead”, “expire” can be used with things as well. When you say that something has expired, it implies that it has reached its limit and cannot be further extended. When something “expires”, its ending is usually gradual and is expected; when something dies, its ending may be sudden and totally unexpected. For example, people usually die in an accident; they do not expire in one. When you cannot extend your lease, you say it has expired; you cannot say that it has died.

Farheen’s contract with the company expired last week.

The battery died the second week.

Published in *The Hindu* on April 17, 2001.

Word of the day

- Convalescence:**
gradual healing (through rest) after sickness or injury
- Synonyms:** recuperation, recovery
- Usage:** During my convalescence, I thought that others in the world must be suffering like me.
- Pronunciation:**
newsth.live/convalescence
- International Phonetic Alphabet:** /ˌkɒn.vəˈles.əns/

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

A new era of Indian ecology looks to its horizons, and to the ground

Ankita Rathore
SONEPAT

5 ND-NDE



READ. THINK. SHARE.
Scan the QR code to
explore curated
editorials and opinions
from leading voices

One Nation, One Election will not fix what is broken



VIJAY KELKAR
AND AJIT RANADE

INDIA'S PARLIAMENT is set to take up the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill to synchronise Lok Sabha and all state assembly elections, inserting a new Article 82A and amending Articles 83 and 172. The Bill requires a two-thirds majority in both Houses and ratification by half the states. After a High-Level Committee (HLC) chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind, the government has committed to this push. The scale of the constitutional intervention demands rigorous scrutiny of the claimed benefits.

The HLC report rests on four pillars: Cost savings, relief from "policy paralysis" caused by the Model Code of Conduct, reduced burden on government manpower, and an economic growth dividend. Its economic anchor is a striking claim: Research by Prachi Mishra, N K Singh and colleagues finds that real GDP growth is approximately 1.5 percentage points higher following simultaneous election cycles. That single finding must be examined carefully.

The paper compares the simultaneous election era (1952–1967, partially until the mid-1980s) with the subsequent asynchronous period. But before reaching for the econometrics, consider the plain historical record. The era produced what economists call the "Hindu rate of growth": Around 3.5 per cent annually, decades of the licence raj, import substitution, and a closed economy. India's genuine high-growth era came entirely under asynchronous elections: The 8 to 9 per cent annual growth of 2003–2011 was achieved with staggered state polls running through every single year. If simultaneous elections drive growth, this history is very difficult to explain. The macro confounders — trade liberalisation, the IT boom, global capital flows, financial deepening, and the 1991 reforms — are too large to control away. More consequentially, the paper's own results show the growth effect operating partly through higher fiscal deficits and greater

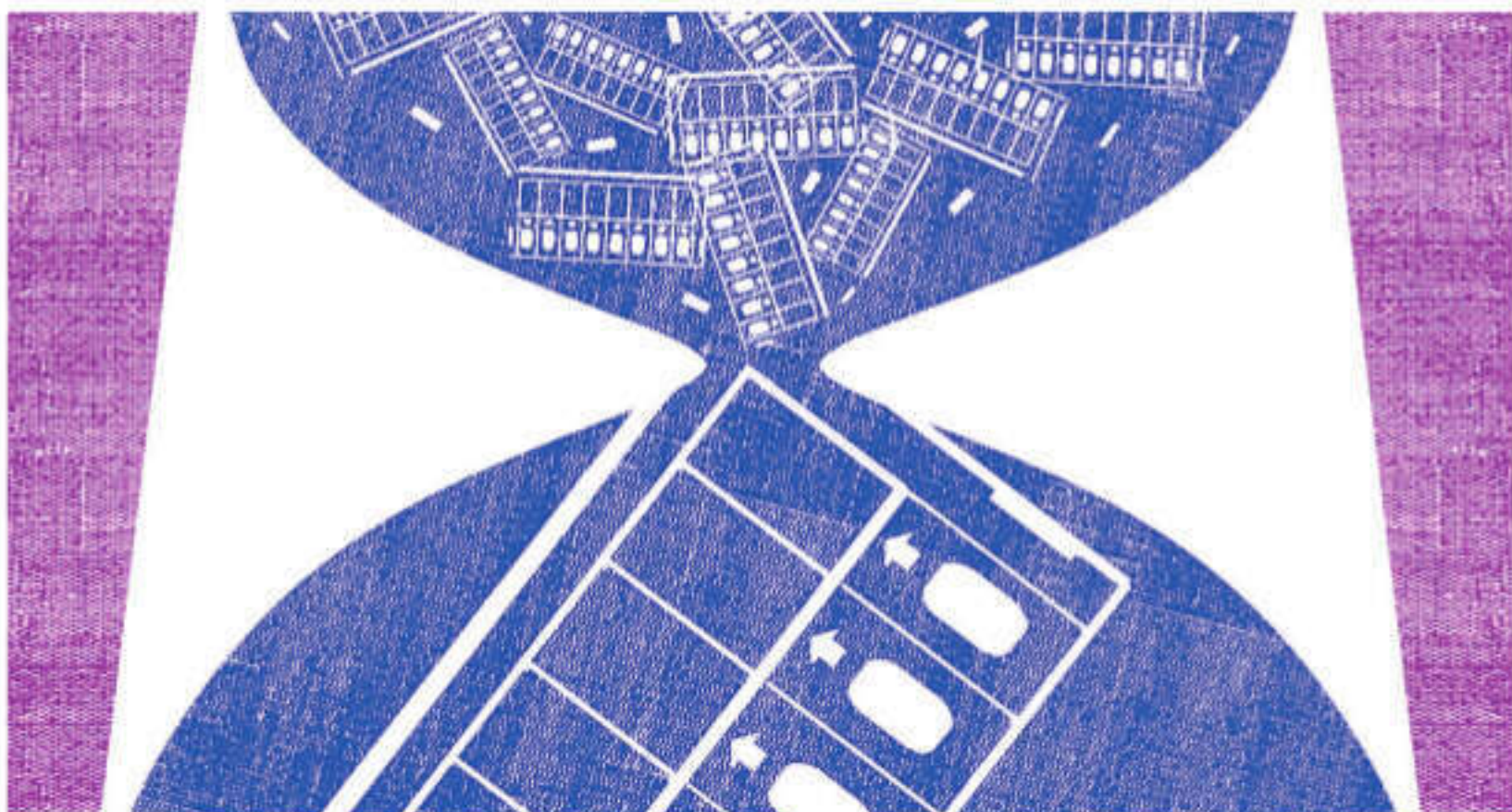


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

government spending: Structural improvement, or a political business cycle merely compressed in time? A constitutional overhaul cannot rest on correlations that India's own history contradicts.

On costs, the argument collapses once you ask a simple question: Who is actually spending? The government's election expenditure is not even 0.1 per cent of its own budget, as ECI accounts confirm. The "excessive" spending is by candidates and parties. But the telling detail is this: Per audited accounts submitted to the ECI, the average official expenditure by candidates is 50 per cent of the permissible ceiling. Candidates are, on paper, underspending, not overspending. The implication is inescapable: The real money is not in any account. It is black money, unaccounted and untraceable, which the Centre for Media Studies estimates at over Rs 1,00,000 crore for the 2024 Lok Sabha election alone. No electoral calendar reform can touch this. The same political economy of cash, patronage and opacity prevails whether elections happen every year or once in five years. ONOE does not reduce election spending; it merely concentrates it.

On the Model Code of Conduct: The MCC restricts government announcements for roughly 45 to 60 days per election. Because India holds state elections in a rolling fashion, NITI Aayog estimates

some part of the country is under the MCC for about four months every year. Under ONOE, that rolling freeze becomes a single national freeze every five years, simultaneously halting developmental announcements across every state. The disruption is not eliminated; it is nationally concentrated and potentially more distorting. Calling this "policy paralysis" mistakes democratic restraint for administrative dysfunction.

The deeper objections are constitutional. The Supreme Court in *Kesavananda Bharati* has held that parliamentary democracy and free and fair elections are part of the Constitution's basic structure, a threshold even amendments cannot cross. Three specific tensions arise. First, parliamentary government rests on collective responsibility: The executive holds office only so long as it commands legislative confidence. Under ONOE, a government losing its majority would either continue without a legitimate mandate or trigger President's Rule — neither is acceptable. The HLC's proposed "constructive no-confidence motion", requiring any no-confidence vote to be paired with a simultaneous confidence vote for an alternative, is borrowed from Germany and distorts India's parliamentary tradition. As Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy researchers point out, it would incentivise minority governments to cling to office despite lacking popular support.

**These require targeted reform:
Mandatory disclosure of all
donations, enforceable
expenditure limits,
disbarment of criminally
tainted candidates, and a
genuinely autonomous
Election Commission**

Second, reaching the first synchronised cycle requires extending or curtailing multiple state assembly terms. Articles 83 and 172 deliberately use the words "no longer" — a phrase the Constituent Assembly inserted to bar extensions beyond five years. Extending terms without fresh mandate breaches the voters' contract; curtailing them denies voters the period they voted for. Either way, the electorate's will is overridden.

Third, simultaneous elections structurally disadvantage regional parties, and the republic's federal character. Research shows a consistent "wave effect" when national and state elections coincide. Voters tend to choose the same party at both levels, giving large national parties a decisive advantage. Regional concerns such as agrarian distress in Vidarbha, coastal livelihoods in Kerala, or flood management in Assam, find parliamentary voice through regional formations. Bundling elections risks submerging these voices under national campaigns.

The ONOE framework also ignores elections to India's constitutionally protected third tier of government. The 73rd and 74th Amendments placed panchayat and urban local body elections under State Election Commissions, not the ECI, guaranteeing their autonomy. These are not minor contests. Mumbai, Pune and Bengaluru have budgets larger than many Indian states, and their elections are high-stakes political battles. Folding them into ONOE would violate the spirit of these amendments; keeping them separate undermines ONOE's own rationale. Substantial expenditure, security deployment, and governance disruption would continue through every panchayat and municipal cycle, leaving the claimed savings largely illusory.

What makes this particularly dispiriting is that the genuine pathologies of elections go untouched: Unlimited party spending, cash distribution to voters, criminalisation of politics, and misuse of state machinery. These require targeted reform: Mandatory disclosure of all donations, enforceable expenditure limits, disbarment of criminally tainted candidates, and a genuinely autonomous ECI. All these reforms are achievable without touching the Constitution's federal and parliamentary foundations.

The ONOE Bill reorganises the democratic calendar. It does not fix what is broken.

The writers are respectively, vice president and senior fellow, Pune International Centre

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Deletion menace

DENYING PEOPLE whose names are missing from the voters' list the benefits of the state's welfare schemes and the renewal of passports reveals the government's hostility towards them ('One deletion, cascading civil disabilities', *IE*, July 15). This move contradicts the Election Commission's much-touted stand that the SIR is meant only for preparing electoral rolls and that deletion, apart from barring those affected from voting, will have nothing to do with other spheres. It is now spilling over into other walks of life: It is being used to deprive elderly persons of old-age pensions and poor families of various welfare benefits and medical facilities. It is thus playing havoc with people's lives.

SH Quadri, Bikaner

Caste data

WHILE CODIFYING caste census data can streamline data compilation, the core bottlenecks remain largely intact ('In Census, caste category must not be open-ended', *IE*, July 15). The overarching emphasis has always been on affirmative action. However, a core issue — demographic equity at the cost of earned merit — continues to be an administrative blind spot. Coupled with the implementation gaps in reservations under the EWS category and the application of the creamy layer principle, the prevailing systemic paradigm continues to erode trust.

— Raghvi Sharma, Sunam

J&K question

THE CENTRAL government had promised in no uncertain terms that the statehood of J&K would be restored ('Omar is spot on, doesn't need Trump clickbait', *IE*, July 15). However, the government's silence on the matter raises concerns that it may not walk the walk. J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has rightly questioned the government for not following through.

— Aanya Singhal, Noida



AALOK THAKKAR

EVERY TIME you book a ride, your driver asks you for an "OTP". Increasingly, that OTP is no longer a one-time password. A quiet substitution has spread through India's ride-hailing apps. Rapido and Namma Yatri took the OTP and turned it into a standing PIN: One fixed value tied to the account, repeated on every trip. Uber has since adopted the same model in India while keeping a fresh per-ride code in the US. The question is: What can an OTP do that a fixed PIN cannot?

A PIN authenticates a person; it says that whoever offers it knows a secret belonging to the account. A one-time password authenticates an event; it says that this specific booking is the one this driver is about to begin. Three properties follow from this that no fixed number can reproduce.

The first is scope. An OTP is valid for a single booking, and only while it is live, so the same value is never correct twice. A PIN is correct for every ride an account will ever take, so it carries no information about which ride is which. It cannot tell apart the trip you booked from a trip booked in your name by someone else. The second is resistance to replay. An OTP expires when the trip begins. A PIN cannot be spent. This induces a deeper difference about threat actors: An OTP is built for a world in

**An OTP limits the damage
caused by insider threats,
opportunistic data breaches,
and leaked credentials**



ADRIJA ROYCHOWDHURY

WHERE IS Shahjahanabad? In the mental map of the modern Delhiite, the name barely exists. One knows it as *Purani Dilli* or Old Delhi, sometimes as the Walled City — that part of the city with the famous *paranthe wali gali*. There is also Chandni Chowk, the name originally assigned to one square on the street that stretches out from the Lahori Gate of the Red Fort to Fatehpuri Masjid. Ask Google Maps for Shahjahanabad and it will redirect you to Old Delhi — one might be thankful that modern technology at least has some remembrance of the name that gave Old Delhi its unique character.

The Shahjahanabad Redevelopment

OTP or fixed PIN? It's a question of security

which the driver is an untrusted party. With a fixed PIN, the driver receives a secret that keeps working, and the rider's safety comes to depend on his choosing not to retain it. The third is freshness. Because an OTP is generated at the moment of booking and delivered to the rider separately, producing the correct one is evidence that its holder is the person who just booked and is present.

These properties share a virtue. Each lets the system assume less. A spent OTP is worthless, so even if someone breaches the booking database, they recover a pile of dead numbers. A standing PIN is a permanent credential, so that same database becomes a store of working secrets for every user. The static model assumes the backend will not be breached, or that a breach is survivable. Detection matters, too. Because each one-time code maps to one booking, misuse is visible in principle, and expiry cancels the code automatically. A leaked PIN produces a fraudulent ride indistinguishable from a real one, with no automatic revocation and no natural habit of rotation. Any case for the substitution has to be measured against these losses. The argument most often made is convenience: A fixed number spares the rider the effort of noting a new figure before each trip. But on a per-ride sys-

tem, the code appeared on screen the instant the booking was made. The substitution removes only the act of reading a fresh number. The stronger arguments are engineering ones. Generating and delivering a fresh code for every booking is expensive at scale. Message delivery in some parts served by Uber is unreliable. A static code is a coherent answer to those constraints.

The point is not that the PIN is an objectively wrong choice, but that it carries a security cost the convenience framing hides. The right question is what threat model each design encodes. An OTP limits the damage caused by insider threats, opportunistic data breaches, and leaked credentials. The fixed PIN shifts more trust onto drivers, backend protections, and post-hoc fraud detection than a one-time code does.

The lesson is finally one about names. Calling a PIN an OTP blurs an information security boundary, and users tend to believe that the same trust assumptions hold behind the two. Whichever we choose, the choice should follow from an honest account of the threat model: Who the adversaries are, which assumptions we are willing to make about them, and what the cost of getting those assumptions wrong turns out to be.

The writer is assistant professor of Computer Science, Ashoka University. Views are personal

The long goodbye to Shahjahanabad

Corporation was perhaps among the few formal government institutions to preserve the historic name of the city. With the body being renamed as the Indraprastha Virasat Punarvikas Nigam, the city has lost its last remaining link with Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, whose ideas of a glamorous imperial capital had given birth to Shahjahanabad.

One can read this as an obvious move by a government obsessed with renaming projects and streets. But the erasure of Shahjahanabad goes back to the time when the British established a new imperial capital adjacent to the Mughal city, increasingly referring simply to "Delhi" rather than Shahjahanabad. The walled city underwent a rapid transformation after the revolt of 1857. The British army captured the Red Fort and demolished a number of palaces, replacing them with barracks. Outside the fort, several

shops, *havelis*, public buildings and mosques were destroyed. Among the demolished structures was the bustling marketplace built by Shah Jahan's daughter, Jahanara Begum, on the street that we now know as Chandni Chowk. The name Chandni Chowk, in fact, was reserved for the marketplace alone, as seen in maps predating 1857. Maps of the city after 1911 show the entire street named as Chandni Chowk. By this

**Maps of the city after 1911 show the
entire street named as Chandni
Chowk. By this time, the British
had built New Delhi as their capital.
Shahjahanabad increasingly came
to be known simply as Old Delhi**

time, the British had built New Delhi as their capital. Shahjahanabad increasingly came to be known simply as Old Delhi.

It saw another wave of changes after Independence, amid large-scale riots following Partition. With thousands of Muslims leaving for Pakistan and Hindu refugees coming in from West Punjab, the demographic character of Old Delhi underwent a significant shift. It accelerated the transformation of Shahjahanabad into a wholesale commercial district. Chandni Chowk emerged as its commercial centre, gradually becoming shorthand for Shahjahanabad itself.

In electoral geography, the entire area comprising Shahjahanabad came to be known as Chandni Chowk from 1956. After the 2008 delimitation, when the nearest Metro station was being named, it was on the insistence of traders' bodies and residents'

welfare associations that it came to be called Chandni Chowk instead of "Delhi Main", the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation's suggestion.

The name Shahjahanabad encapsulates the grand ambitions of a ruler to move out of his father's shadow and build, brick by brick, a magnificent city of his own. That vision bears little resemblance to reality today. Centuries-old heritage coexists uneasily with chronic congestion, crumbling infrastructure, and mounting conservation challenges. Much in Shahjahanabad needs to be revamped. Retaining the name of its redevelopment body, however, might have served as a reminder of the urban imagination of the emperor who conceived the city.

*Roychowdhury leads the research section at Indianexpress.com.
adrija.roychowdhury@indianexpress.com*



ILLUSTRATION: TANUSHRI MITRA

giving a final shape to the Bill that was presented in the Legislative Assembly after the cabinet's approval.

The Act adopts a broad definition of "agriculture" and "farmer" in line with the National Policy for Farmers (2007), and includes any person who is engaged in crop husbandry, animal husbandry, poultry, fishery, agro-forestry, vermiculture, mushroom cultivation, and primary processing, either as owner or labourer. A woman engaged in any of these activities can apply for a Woman Farmer Certificate (WFC) either to the gram sabha or nagar panchayat. This certificate will formally recognise the woman as a farmer and effectively de-links the requirement of owning land. Going forward, the WFC will give women farmers greater access to entitlements under government schemes, extension services, credit and market opportunities. It will help the government design gender-responsive schemes for skill development and provide targeted support for single women farmers.

A digital registry of women farmers backed by a special fund, a state level empowerment cell and designated officers at district and sub-district levels will facilitate the implementation of the law. A state-level monitoring committee headed by the chief secretary will facilitate coordination and ensure effective implementation. A governing council headed by the chief minister will provide guidance and oversee the implementation.

This landmark law is an important first step towards social change to address deeply entrenched inequalities in access to land, water and other natural resources. The increasing migration of men in search of employment is leaving women to shoulder the responsibility of food and nutrition security in the midst of the growing challenge of climate change and depleting natural resources. It is globally observed that women are among the strongest drivers of adaptation to climate change. Proactive policy support will enable them to play this role even better as we work together for inclusive and sustainable agrifood systems.

Swaminathan is chairperson, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, and Fadnavis is Chief Minister, Maharashtra

A law to give women farmers their due



SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN
AND DEVENDRA FADNAVIS

MAHARASHTRA HAS become the first state to enact a law for the empowerment of women farmers. The Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Act, 2026 is a path-breaking initiative. Women across the globe do much of the work across agrifood systems from production to processing, yet their contributions are not recognised. They face challenges in access to credit, insurance, extension services, technology and markets. Government benefits are often linked to land ownership, usually held by men. It is against this backdrop that 2026 is being observed as the International Year of the Woman Farmer, calling for "fairer, more inclusive and sustainable agrifood systems for all."

Maharashtra is a state that has long shaped India's social reform movements with stalwarts like Savitribai Phule, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Maharshi Karve, Pandita Ramabai, Lokahitwadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh and Gopal Ganesh Agarkar working tirelessly for women's rights and gender equality. The state has also seen positive interventions in recent times. The Fourth Policy for Women, 2024 commits to facilitating gender-inclusive agriculture development, including "access to, control over, and ownership of land and other productive assets, as well as access to entitlements" and "enhancing the role of women in decision-making and control over agricultural income".

A large majority (82 per cent) of the rural female workforce in Maharashtra is employed in agriculture as compared to 58 per cent of rural men, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey, 2025. (The corresponding all-India figures are 73 per cent and 47 per cent respectively). However, less than a fifth of operational landholdings are in the names of women. Late last year, the Government of Maharashtra embarked on the groundwork to give shape to a law for the empowerment of women farmers. The M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) has been a partner in this effort, together with the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy (Maharashtra).

Women farmers engaged in different agricultural and allied activities, civil society organisations and networks, bankers, lawyers, researchers and frontline government officials have all participated in the consultations. A special session was organised jointly with the state legislature on the occasion of International Women's Day. Following this, a committee was constituted to draft the Bill, which was presented and discussed at regional consultations. The feedback and suggestions received contributed to



@ieExplained

#ExpressExplained

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

• POLICY

Green energy push, 7.5-GW capacity target: Gujarat’s data centre policy

Ritu Sharma
Ahmedabad, July 15

THE GUJARAT government last week announced a data centre policy for 2026-29, targeting investments of Rs 6 lakh crore and the creation of 7.5 gigawatts (GW) of capacity, which it says would be the highest in the country. The policy lays out a wide range of incentives for investors, including duty and tax exemptions, relief in Floor Space Index (FSI), uninterrupted water and power supply and relaxations in building norms. The Viksit Gujarat Data Center Policy (2026-29) follows Reliance Industries Ltd’s announcement last month of a partnership with Meta to lease its first AI-enabled data centre in India, at Jamnagar in Gujarat. Telangana was the first state in the country to announce a data centre policy in 2016, followed by Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Maharashtra, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh.

Stress on green energy

Gujarat has claimed that its policy is among the most ambitious state-level frameworks for hyperscale, AI-ready data centres, with a strong emphasis on green energy. The policy aims to enable the establishment of up to 7.5 GW of data centre capacity. Under the policy, a data centre entity must ensure that at least 51% of the electricity consumed for core operations comes from green and renewable sources. This comes amid a larger push for green energy in the industry. Google has announced plans to build an AI data centre campus in Andhra Pradesh powered entirely by clean energy. The Adani Group has announced a 5 GW data centre platform across India through its AdaniConneX joint venture, which will be powered by the Adani Green Energy park at Khavda in Kutch district. P Bharathi, Secretary of Gujarat’s Department of Science and Technology (DST), told *The Indian Express*: “Gujarat is the first state to announce the largest capacity (hyperscale) data center as well as the first to have a dedicated policy in the country specifically designed for green AI data centres. More importantly, other states are working on a case-to-case basis and not under a dedicated policy like Gujarat.”

energy in the industry. Google has announced plans to build an AI data centre campus in Andhra Pradesh powered entirely by clean energy. The Adani Group has announced a 5 GW data centre platform across India through its AdaniConneX joint venture, which will be powered by the Adani Green Energy park at Khavda in Kutch district. P Bharathi, Secretary of Gujarat’s Department of Science and Technology (DST), told *The Indian Express*: “Gujarat is the first state to announce the largest capacity (hyperscale) data center as well as the first to have a dedicated policy in the country specifically designed for green AI data centres. More importantly, other states are working on a case-to-case basis and not under a dedicated policy like Gujarat.”

Financial incentives

The Gujarat government has offered to exempt stamp duty and registration fee for leasing or buying land. It has also offered 100% reimbursement of electricity duty for 20 years and a subsidy at the rate of Re 1 per unit of power consumed by a data centre entity for 20 years, both starting from the date of commencement of commercial operations. The policy provides full reimbursement of eligible expenses on plant and machinery, building infrastructure and services for up to 20 years. It offers financial assistance for desalination plants to meet the sector’s high water requirements.



Drishti IAS



IAS GS Foundation Course

Offline & Live Online Batches

Centre	हिंदी माध्यम	English Medium
✦ Korol Bagh	22 जुलाई शाम 6:00 बजे	28 July 6:00 PM
✦ Noida	15 जुलाई दोपहर 3:00 बजे	10 July 6:00 PM
✦ Indore	27 जुलाई शाम 5:30 बजे	27 July 8:00 AM
✦ Lucknow	20 जुलाई शाम 6:00 बजे	17 July 8:00 AM
✦ Prayagraj	30 जुलाई सुबह 8:00 बजे	3 August 5:30 PM
✦ Ranchi	14 जुलाई शाम 5:00 बजे	7 July 5:30 PM
✦ Patna	16 जुलाई शाम 5:30 बजे	30 July 8:00 AM
✦ Jaipur	6 अगस्त सुबह 8:00 बजे	11 August 5:00 PM

drishtiias.com

 Call Us **87501 87501**

• GLOBAL

In China’s new ballistic missile test, the worries for Indo-Pacific region



EXPERT EXPLAINS

SUYASH DESAI

POLITICAL SCIENTIST AND NON-RESIDENT FELLOW WITH THE FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, PHILADELPHIA

CHINA TESTED its sea-based long-range intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) last week (July 6), marking its first-ever test of a submarine-based ballistic missile in international waters. This is the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) second launch of a ballistic missile in international waters since 1980. China conducted a land-based ICBM test on September 21, 2024. The latest test missile was reportedly launched from a submarine in the South China Sea. It was carrying a dummy war-

head that covered a distance of 7,300 km, reportedly flying over the Philippines, before landing in the Southern Pacific Ocean. The dummy warhead landed within an area designated under the Treaty of Rarotonga’s South Pacific nuclear-free zone (where testing or stationing of nuclear explosive devices is barred), after it flew over the Exclusive Economic Zones of Micronesia, Nauru, Kiribati and Tuvalu.

What is known about this missile test? It is difficult to determine if the missile was Ju Lang 2 (JL-2) or the latest Ju Lang 3 (JL-3). Both JL-2 and JL-3 are submarine-launched ICBMs, jointly developed with DF-31 and DF-41, respectively. ICBMs generally have a range of at least 5,000 km, and the JL-2 is capable of travelling 8,000-9,000 km. The JL-3 reportedly has a range of over 9,000 km. Both delivery systems can be paired with China’s Type 094 SSBNs (nuclear-powered submarines with ballistic missiles).

Why is Beijing testing now? Since the turn of the decade, and especially in the past two years, Beijing has



The ICBM being tested on July 6. X/@MND_CHINA

not shied away from overtly tom-tomming its improving nuclear capabilities. It has constructed multiple missile silos — without camouflaging them and with the awareness that they will be noticed by American satellites. Additionally, it displayed new and advanced nuclear delivery

systems in its 2025 military parade and carried out a land-based ICBM test in the Pacific Ocean in 2024. China wants the world, and the US in particular, to take note of its improving nuclear capabilities. These developments can be attributed to factors such as China’s efforts to demonstrate the construction of its nuclear triad (having the capability to deliver nuclear weapons via land, sea and air). It could also be attributed to China attempting to improve its second-strike capabilities, which are an extremely important part of its deterrence posture, since only India and China are the two declared “No-first-use” nuclear weapons states. Beyond these simplistic explanations, these developments could also be attributed to China’s attempts to construct a nuclear shield, attain great-power status, or improve theatre-level nuclear dominance in the Indo-Pacific region.

Do these developments mean China’s nuclear strategy has changed? No. The important pillars of China’s declaratory nuclear strategy are: i) No-first-

use nuclear policy, ii) Assured retaliation, iii) Not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or in nuclear-weapon-free zones. However, China also subscribes to a “minimum nuclear deterrent” posture. With recent changes in size, diversity, accuracy, and posture, there is evidence that China is shifting away from its minimum nuclear deterrence approach. For instance, China could possess around 1,000 nuclear warheads by 2030. It is shifting at least a part of its force towards a “launch on warning” operational readiness posture, which Beijing refers to as “early warning counter-strike” — wherein Beijing initiates a counter-strike once a launch warning has been received but before targets in China have been hit.

What are the implications for Indo-Pacific actors, including India? For New Delhi, the recent test reinforces the widening strategic gap between India and China’s nuclear arsenal and delivery capabilities — both qualitatively and quantitatively. While India has operationalised its

nuclear triad by activation of the Arihant-class SSBNs, its submarine-launched ballistic missiles have shorter ranges. The Chinese demonstration adds urgency for India to deploy its longer-ranged K-5 and K-6 missiles to ensure parity in second-strike survivability. With the launch of the JL missile from the fortified South China Sea, Chinese submarines reduce their detection risk. Thus, India needs to expand its anti-submarine warfare capabilities and seabed domain awareness, at least across the Indian Ocean Region. Regional actors would also be aware that China’s improved capabilities raise the cost of outside intervention in its sphere of influence during any contingency. The test, however, comes at a time when, under Donald Trump, uncertainty around expectations of US military support has heightened. For the US and the rest of the world, the launch was a direct demonstration of the maturation of China’s nuclear triad and its improved deterrence capabilities. It complicates US missile defence planning and may compel it to refocus its attention and resources from West Asia to East Asia.

• GOVERNANCE

Ladakh’s 7 councils & the decentralisation debate



DEEPTIMAN TIWARY

THE LADAKH administration’s decision to constitute Autonomous Hill Development Councils (AHDCs) in the Union Territory’s seven districts has reopened a debate over how political power should be distributed in the region. While the administration says the move will deepen grassroots governance, the two civil society groups negotiating with the Centre — the Apex Body, Leh (ABL) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) — argue it could weaken the representative political structure they demand under Article 371. The disagreement also reflects a widening trust deficit between Ladakh’s leadership and the Centre since the region became a Union Territory in 2019.

What has the administration announced? On Monday, the Ladakh administration announced that an Autonomous Hill Development Council would be constituted in each of the Union Territory’s seven districts. Until now, such councils existed only in Leh and Kargil. The move follows the creation of five new districts — Drass, Sham, Nubra, Changthang and Zaskar — in April. Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra said the new councils represented “a major step towards democratic decentralisation”. He also said discussions with the Centre had broadly agreed on creating a Union Territory-level representative body under a customised framework under Article 371, which would exercise legislative, executive, financial and administrative powers. The administration argues that the two initiatives are complementary. Section 3 of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act provides for the constitution of a council in every district, and officials say the creation of seven districts logically necessitates seven councils. The government also points to Ladakh’s unique geography. Spread across nearly 60,000 sq km but home to barely 3 lakh people, it is India’s largest Union Territory by area and among its least densely populated regions. Many villages are separated

• GOVERNING LADAKH: LARGEST UNION TERRITORY

60,000 sq km

Ladakh’s size, making it India’s largest Union Territory by area

3 lakh

Its population, making it among the country’s least densely populated regions



How do Ladakh’s hill councils compare with similar bodies elsewhere?

- Autonomous District Councils under the Sixth Schedule in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura can make laws on subjects such as land, forests, village administration and customary practices, subject to the Governor’s assent.
- But Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils do not enjoy constitutional status, independent legislative powers or judicial authority over customary matters.
- They are broadly comparable to statutory autonomous councils in states such as Manipur, though experience there also illustrates the limitations of statutory autonomy.

**THE QUESTION:** Ladakh’s geography requires administrative decentralisation. But how fragmented should representative politics be in a Union Territory with barely three lakh people?

by mountain passes and several hours of travel, making decentralised administration a longstanding demand.

Why are Ladakh’s civil society groups opposing the move? Neither the ABL nor the KDA disputes the need for decentralised administration. Their objection is to what they call the fragmentation of political authority at a time when negotiations are underway over a representative political framework for Ladakh. ABL co-chairman Chherring Dorje Lakruk argues that empowering seven district councils could leave little meaningful authority with the proposed representative body under Article 371. “This is a plan to dilute the powers of the proposed representative government that is going to take shape under Article 371. If all the powers are going to be given to the hill councils, what will the representative government do?” he told *The Indian Express*. KDA co-chairman Sajjad Kargili termed the move “maximum government and minimum governance”, questioning how seven councils would improve governance when, according to him, even the existing councils have steadily lost powers. Civil society leaders argue that once seven hill councils, Panchayati Raj institu-

Procedure problem

According to Ladakh leaders, the proposal for 7 hill councils figured in the Minutes of the May 22 meeting. They refused to sign that version, after which a revised record, without the proposal, was signed.

• They now argue the Centre went ahead with the announcement without consulting them.

tions, the Union Territory administration and a future Article 371 representative body all coexist, the lines of political accountability may become blurred. “With so few people and so many representative institutions, what meaningful role will eventually remain for the territorial government? And where does Panchayati Raj fit into this?” said a Ladakh leader associated with the negotiations. Their opposition has also been sharpened by procedure. According to Ladakh leaders, the proposal for seven hill councils figured in the Minutes of the May 22 meeting between the Centre and Ladakh representatives. They refused to sign that version, after which a revised record, without the proposal, was prepared and signed. They now argue the Centre has proceeded with the announcement without consulting them.

Why such distrust? The initial enthusiasm following Union Territory status gave way to disappointment after it became clear that, unlike Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh would not have a legislature. Negotiations over Sixth Schedule-like safeguards and later an Article 371 framework have moved slowly, with civil society leaders accusing the Centre of delaying substantive political reforms.

• ECONOMY

India-UK FTA kicks in: What changes for consumers and industry

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, July 15

AMID A fracturing world trade order, the India-UK free trade agreement (FTA) came into effect on Wednesday. The deal, negotiated over four years and marked by major political volatility in London, is India’s first comprehensive deal with a developed country. The deal laid the framework for India’s negotiations with the European Union. With the deal, India’s labour-intensive goods exports, such as textiles, footwear and gems and jewellery, could get a boost. Indian consumers can access British cars, scotch and chocolates at lower prices. India has reduced tariffs on around 90% of products and the UK has eliminated tariffs on 99% of Indian exports.

Changes for consumers

For the first time, India has given major concessions to imported cars and alcoholic beverages in an FTA, reducing tariffs for British cars from up to 110% to 30% in year one. The duty will go down to 10% by year five of the deal coming into effect. The an-

nual quota for British cars starts at 20,000 vehicles and peaks at 37,000 by year five. India has also given major concessions to British alcoholic beverages by reducing tariff from 150% to 75% initially and then to 40% by year 10. According to Delhi-based thinktank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), this is a major concession as India is one of the world’s largest and fastest-growing spirits markets and the UK is the world’s largest whisky exporter. Indian textile exports currently face tariffs of up to 10% in the UK. The trade deal could place India on a more level playing field with competitors such as Bangladesh, thereby boosting exports. India’s gems & jewellery exports, along with footwear exports, will also get a boost as duty in the UK has been eliminated from up to 12% and 16% respectively.

Customs changes

For the first time in an FTA, India has allowed a system of self-declaration of origin by exporters or producers in the United Kingdom, replacing the conventional system of certificates issued by designated

More choices, lower prices

- Indian consumers can access British cars, scotch and chocolates at lower prices.
- Tariffs for British beauty and cosmetics and sports equipment have also been removed or reduced.

authorities, which often causes delays and hurdles. Experts said this could become the custom norm for exporters in developed countries such as the EU and US, making it comparatively easier for them to ship goods to India. This customs change comes as India is also aiming to reduce its dependence on Chinese and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) exporters. India’s dependence on Chinese medical devices has been a concern. Now, New Delhi has removed up to 14% tariffs on the UK’s medical devices, with phased tariff reductions for some sensitive items.

Quota on steel exports

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agarwal at a press briefing said quotas allocated by the UK will ensure that India’s iron and steel exports go up. A government official said India’s iron and steel exports will grow from around \$850 million to over \$1 billion. The curbs on steel imports announced by the UK after the trade negotiations had become a major flash point before the deal came into effect.

Concessions for professionals

The Commerce and Industry Ministry said that the deal on social security contributions would benefit 75,000 Indian Professionals and around 900 firms by providing exemption from contribution to UK National Insurance for five years. It covers the most important element of avoiding double contribution, exempting employees of Indian companies in the UK from contributing to the UK system.

The challenges

A commerce and industry ministry official said the labour and environment chapter of the India-UK agreement is not binding. Experts said this is a big win for India, as western countries have strong labour and environment norms that tend to act as a non-tariff barrier for exports from developing nations. However, India did not get an exemption from the UK’s proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (a pricing framework to ensure imported carbon-intensive goods face a carbon cost comparable to domestic products), which come into effect from January 1 next year.

Smoke and noise

Ethanol push has left consumers confused

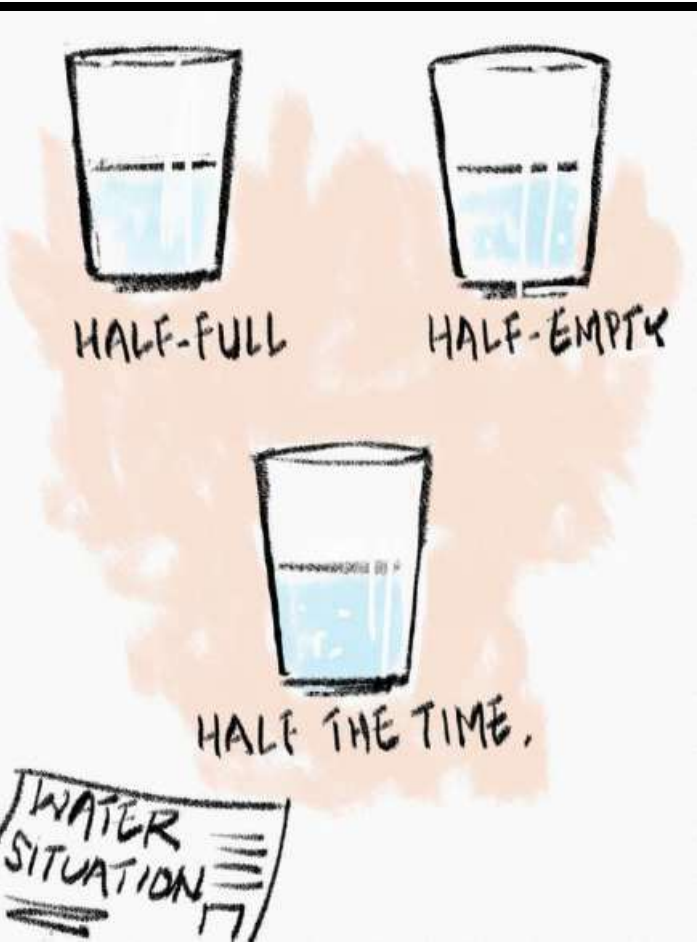
Auto vehicle users have raised an outcry over the impact of the ‘E-20 mandate’. The consumer debate centres around two aspects: the impact of a 20 per cent ethanol blend on fuel efficiency, and on the wear and tear of the vehicle engines. Consumers claim that the impact on both counts is negative, whereas the Centre has said, through a recently issued FAQ on ethanol blending, that fuel efficiency does indeed fall but there is no evidence of vehicular damage. The second assertion is rather confusing.

To put this debate in context, the Centre has mandated that all BS VI vehicles are required to “fully meet” E20 emission standards” from April 2026. Meanwhile, the availability of E-20 petrol is already in place. Thanks to 1,100-1,200 crore litres of ethanol being produced annually now, the 20 per cent blending target was achieved last July — five years before target. With this rapid transition, consumers have been caught off-guard. They want clarity on whether their vehicles are fit for E-20 fuel. Many would perhaps be willing to pay for ethanol-free petrol, but that has virtually vanished from the market. The FAQ says supplying unblended petrol in small quantities is not feasible when the distribution has moved to ethanol. Yet, it is vague on whether the existing vehicles should be modified or replaced. It says that Maruti Suzuki serviced 1.5 crore older vehicles ‘that were never originally certified as E-20 compatible’ without any damage to rubber components, fuel lines and engines, as claimed by consumers. If this is so, the need for ‘E-20 compatibility’ seems unclear. Consumers need clarity on their options. With E-20 becoming mandatory, they have been forced to accept a fuel efficiency reduction of 3.5 per cent with respect to the E-10 base, and nearly double that from petrol as base. Auto firms must be open on their plans, so that consumers can exercise an informed choice, which includes moving to EVs or CNG.

The energy shock has infused a sense of urgency into the ethanol push. Assuming a ball park figure of ₹2 lakh crore in petroleum imports, a 20 per cent reduction in quantity of crude imports is expected to save ₹30,000-40,000 crore — without taking into account losses in fuel efficiency. This is a huge benefit, and to push this cause the government purchases ethanol at attractive prices. The consumer pays more as a result of this incentive to grain and sugarcane farmers. The issue of grain diversion, which accounts for two-thirds of ethanol supplies, is not addressed here, nor is the problem of water use. Of course, politically speaking, the ethanol focus can help in the elections next year in Uttar Pradesh and other States where sugarcane, paddy and maize farmer lobbies are strong.

The Centre must take a long-term view on fuel choices, which reconciles multiple objectives — curbing imports, securing lifecycle environmental benefits, and keeping consumer costs down. A combination of EV batteries, ethanol, CNG and petrol needs to be visualised.

POCKET



AMITABH RANJAN

In 2025, India lost a whopping ₹22,495 crore to cybercrimes, saw 28.15 lakh reported cases, a 24 per cent surge in complaints over 2024, a year which witnessed an over 200 per cent year-on-year to ₹22,845 crore. Can a nation haemorrhage over ₹22,000 crore a year from its digital economy and still credibly aspire to be Viksit Bharat by 2047? India’s digital transformation is a genuine achievement. UPI processes billions of transactions monthly. Aadhaar has redefined identity at scale. But every revolution has a side-effect; for Digital India, it is the sprawling criminal ecosystem, now ranked among the most consequential threats to the country’s development ambitions.

THE SCAM FACTORIES
The most chilling dimension of this crisis is transnational. Across the Golden Triangle, the tri-junction of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand, and in compounds along the Cambodia-Thailand border, organised syndicates, many with Chinese backing, run industrial-scale scam operations. Young Indians, lured by fraudulent job offers, have been trafficked into these compounds, then scripted and deployed as callers running investment scams and Digital Arrest frauds targeting people globally. The digital arrest scam is amongst the most psychologically brutal financial crimes. A caller posing as a customs or narcotics officer tells the victim about his/her Aadhaar being linked to trafficking or money laundering, then placing the victim under a fake ‘video surveillance arrest’, and systematically drained of the hard-earned savings. Reported cases climbed from roughly

40,000 in 2022 to 60,000 in 2023 to nearly 1.24 lakh in 2024, with cumulative losses crossing ₹2,600 crore by early 2025, according to Ministry of Home Affairs data. In January 2026, Delhi Police’s Special Cell dismantled a Taiwan-linked syndicate, handled from Pakistan that defrauded citizens of nearly ₹100 crore by posing as Anti-Terrorist Squad officers. Another incident just recently highlighted the scale, in form of some Chinese battery management apps shooting down the e-Rickshaw operations in Delhi creating havoc with traffic and threatening people’s lives. The government promptly ordered the removal of these apps from app-stores. These are not disorganised, opportunistic crimes; it is a cross-border enterprise with outstanding supply chains and geopolitical enablers. India’s critical infrastructure has repeatedly proven to be vulnerable. In November 2022, a ransomware attack on AIIMS Delhi crippled outpatient, inpatient, laboratory and billing services for nearly two weeks, corrupting files on five servers and encrypting roughly 1.3 terabytes of data. The breach was feared to have compromised records of 3-4 crore patients. The government later confirmed the attack to Parliament. CERT-In, Delhi Police, MHA and NIA were mobilised and investigators traced digital trails to Hong Kong and China. Separately, questions have been raised about the integrity of the CoWIN platform after

Financial losses from cybercrime grew roughly 41-fold in four years, from ₹551 crore in 2021 to over ₹22,800 crore in 2024, with investment-related scams alone now accounting for over three-quarters of the money lost

allegations of a 2023 data exposure. India has repeatedly featured among the world’s most-targeted nations in industry cyber-threat assessments. Financial losses grew roughly 41-fold in four years, from ₹551 crore in 2021 to over ₹22,800 crore in 2024, with investment-related scams alone now accounting for over three-quarters of the money lost. Every fraudulent transaction erodes household savings that would otherwise fuel consumption; every ransomware attack disrupts productivity; every major breach raises the cost of capital for firms courting foreign investment. Cybercrime is not merely a law-enforcement problem that occasionally hurts the economy, it is a structural drag on growth. Singapore has built cyber-resilience into its economic brand; Israel has turned it into a strategic industry. India, aspiring to be the preferred partner for next-generation digital supply chains, cannot afford to be cyber-vulnerable. The scale of the problem has become a “cyberdemic”. A retired civil servant loses a lifetime’s savings to a fake stock advisory on WhatsApp; a young graduate is trafficked into a scam compound; a senior citizen is held in psychological captivity for days by a voice claiming to be from the CBI. NITI Aayog has also acknowledged that the emotional toll of such crimes frequently exceeds the financial one. Generative AI is accelerating the threat. Deepfake audio and video are increasingly used to impersonate family members, executives and officials in real time and digital literacy without accompanying cyber literacy is dangerously incomplete, particularly among India’s newest internet users in Tier-2 and Tier-3 towns.

FIVE-POINT PLAN
India’s institutional response has begun. I4C has helped freeze over ₹8,031 crore in fraudulent transactions, and the Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting System has saved over ₹7,130

crore across 23 lakh complaints. These are meaningful but the scale of the challenge demands a quantum jump. First, cybersecurity must become a whole-of-government priority, with real-time coordination between I4C, CERT-In, RBI, intelligence agencies and state police. Second, cyber hygiene needs to become a national movement, embedded in school curricula and corporate onboarding with the urgency once reserved for financial literacy. Third, India must dramatically expand its cyber-forensic talent pipeline where shortages at the investigative level remain acute. Fourth, India must deploy AI defensively, to flag mule accounts and behavioural anomalies in real time, building predictive threat intelligence rather than reactive policing. Fifth and most urgent, India must pursue sustained bilateral and multilateral engagement; extradition frameworks, mutual legal assistance, Interpol coordination and direct diplomatic pressure to dismantle the scam-compound ecosystem in South-East Asia at its source.

The notion of Viksit Bharat rests on trust. Trust that UPI transactions are safe. Trust that a hospital’s servers will not be held hostage. Trust that an Aadhaar-linked identity cannot be weaponised by a criminal operating out of a compound thousands of miles away. Without trust, the digital economy cannot realise its potential, however brilliant its architecture. India’s adversaries in this century will not always come in uniform. They infiltrate networks, exploit stolen identities and drain the savings of the middle class from behind a screen. Securing this digital frontier is no longer optional. This “cyberdemic” must receive the same attention that building highways, ports and factories get.

The writer is Registrar, Indian Institute of Public Administration. Views are personal

The case for hydrogen trains must be studied

India’s first hydrogen train could generate practical knowledge in fuel-cell operation, storage, safety and long-term reliability

Sudhanshu Mani

After more than three years of ambitious announcements, social media teasers and repeated postponements, Indian Railways’ (IR’s) first hydrogen-powered train is finally ready. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to flag it off later this week. The train will operate between Jind and Sonipat and consists of two hydrogen-powered driving power cars, each producing 1,200 kW of traction power, and eight passenger coaches. The launch deserves recognition. Hydrogen fuel cells generate electricity while emitting only water vapour, and the train represents a significant engineering achievement. Although the fuel-cell stack itself is imported, an Indian company has successfully developed the propulsion, control systems and overall integration. India thus becomes only the third country, after Germany and China, to introduce hydrogen trains in commercial passenger service. Yet technological milestones should encourage informed debate rather than unquestioned celebration. Germany, which pioneered hydrogen rail technology with the Alstom Coradia iLint in 2022, has already scaled back many of its operations, with several routes shifting towards battery-powered

trains after encountering issues such as fuel-cell degradation, supply chain challenges and operational reliability. Japan, Sweden, South Korea, Switzerland and the US have confined themselves largely to demonstration projects while continuing to evaluate the technology. India is perhaps the only country to run a hydrogen-powered passenger train on a fully electrified route under the wire; hydrogen trains are designed as an alternative to polluting diesel trains on non-electrified regional lines. **HERITAGE ROUTES** As an afterthought, therefore, it changed the discourse to ‘Hydrogen for Heritage’, declaring that 35 such trains shall be developed for eight scenic, ecologically sensitive narrow-gauge and metre-gauge heritage routes. The concept has merit. Heritage railways traverse environmentally sensitive regions where conventional electrification may be undesirable, and hydrogen could potentially offer a cleaner alternative. However, these routes are small, geographically dispersed and located in remote areas. Establishing hydrogen production, storage and refuelling infrastructure at each location would be expensive and operationally demanding. Moreover, despite a budgetary allocation of about ₹2,800 crore three years ago, little



HYDROGEN TRAIN. A vital case study *ANI*

visible progress has been made towards developing these heritage train prototypes. The broader question concerns hydrogen itself. Hydrogen is often described as the fuel of the future, but it is more accurately an energy carrier than a primary fuel. Unlike coal, petroleum or uranium, hydrogen must first be manufactured using energy before it can be used. It is then compressed or liquefied, transported, stored and finally converted back into electricity inside a fuel cell. Every stage consumes energy, leaving hydrogen with significantly lower overall efficiency than battery-electric systems. However, inexplicably, IR has not yet pursued battery-powered trains in any significant way. Hydrogen’s environmental

credentials also depend on how it is produced. More than 95 per cent of global hydrogen is currently derived from natural gas, a process that emits carbon dioxide. Truly green hydrogen, produced by splitting water using renewable electricity, remains considerably more expensive. Unless the electricity used for electrolysis itself comes from renewable sources, hydrogen cannot be described as a completely green fuel. Despite these challenges hydrogen offers considerable promise in sectors where batteries face fundamental limitations, such as green steel production, fertilizer manufacture, long-distance shipping and perhaps aviation. Railways, however, present a far more nuanced case. The Jind-Sonipat prototype will nevertheless provide invaluable operational experience. Indian engineers will acquire practical knowledge in fuel-cell operation, hydrogen storage, maintenance, safety and long-term reliability. That experience makes the project worthwhile, provided future decisions are guided by evidence and close study of international experience rather than by technological enthusiasm.

The writer is Retd. General Manager/Indian Railways, Leader of Vande Bharat project & Independent Rail Consultant

● **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to bleditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to ‘Letters to the Editor’, The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Inflation concerns
The recent rise in retail inflation is a worrying development that deserves urgent policy attention. Although CPI inflation at 3.9 per cent remains slightly below the RBI’s projection, persistent increases in food, transport and restaurant prices continue to erode household purchasing power. Below-normal monsoon rainfall has heightened concerns over agricultural output, raising the risk of further food inflation. At the same time, higher petrol and diesel prices are increasing transportation costs

and are likely to trigger a broader pass-through effect, pushing up the prices of essential goods and services. In this challenging environment, the Monetary Policy Committee must strike a careful balance between containing inflation and sustaining economic growth. **M Jeyaram** Sholavandan (TN)
Positive development
This refers to the article ‘Not a taxing matter’ (July 15). The growing shift in behaviour among Indian taxpayers

from ‘tax adventurers’ to ‘tax compliant’ is a positive trend that supports the country’s long-term financial health. Entities are increasingly realising the futility of loophole-hunting in tax legislation, which typically results in lengthy and costly legal battles. Simplifying and rationalising complex, cumbersome laws, implementing them transparently through a high level of digitisation, enabling real-time data tracking by multiple agencies, and setting fair, reasonable tax rates have made tax compliance the least risky option,

one with the highest long-term value for most entities. **Kamal Laddha** Bengaluru
Realigning education
This refers to the article ‘Industry-academia alignment must for growth’ (July 15). The article highlights critical challenges in making India’s academia more impactful from a global perspective. The article succinctly highlights the importance of new age technology to be embedded in our curriculum. At the same time the need for closer



Sanctions, tariffs are back

Using these unlikely to help end Ukraine, Iran wars

Sridhar Krishnaswami

At a time when the Trump administration is getting fully involved in Phase Two of the Iran war through renewed hostilities in an around the Strait of Hormuz and retaliatory strikes across the Gulf nations, it has opened the prospect of another front by way of punitive measures against a small clutch of countries.

The US Senate — with the full blessings of the White House — seems to be working overtime to give finishing touches to the bipartisan Graham-Blumenthal Bill as a way of paying high tributes to Senator Lindsey Graham who suddenly passed away. Senator Richard Blumenthal is a Democrat from Connecticut.

The senior Republican from South Carolina intended to punish countries like China and India who in his view were bankrolling President Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine.

BIPARTISAN INITIATIVE The bipartisan initiative that has been doing the rounds since April 2025 originally intended to slap 500 per cent tariffs on top buyers of Russian oil and gas, but the revised bill places the cap at 100 per cent.

Those lawmakers eager to push the bill across the Senate floor are worried that President Trump's attempts to add Iran and Hezbollah provisions could derail the process. There are at least 26 co-sponsors of the current bill.

From a sweeping 500 per cent to 100 per cent is not the only change. Apparently there is an exemption for countries that import less than 15 per cent of Russia's natural gas exports, but punitive measures are planned for Russia's shadow fleet — on that country's central bank and on state owned energy projects.

It remains to be seen what exactly the White House wants of Iran and Hezbollah. Some reports suggest that the intention is to target Russian defence industries that may be working with Tehran. "With all due respect to the President, he has approved this bill, and we should move forward with this bill rather than opening it... to other potential targets," Senator Blumenthal has said.

India has long been on the radar of Senator Graham for being one of the largest buyers of discounted Russian crude knowing full well the implications of slapping additional tariffs and restrictions on Indian exports,



PUNITIVE STEP. US Senate finalising Graham-Blumenthal Bill

especially at a time when New Delhi and Washington are giving finishing touches to a trade deal. It is a known fact that while India's import of Russian gas is negligible, it is one of the top importers of Russian crude, accounting for around 35 per cent of its total crude imports.

On top of this, India is said to be one of the top refiners of Russian crude for jet fuel and diesel.

In the rush to give finishing touches to the legacy of Senator Graham, one wonders whether the implications of the punitive measures are being thought out carefully. To believe that Beijing will be a passive spectator to sweeping 100 per cent tariffs and sanctions is naïve.

A strong economy like China has shown the Trump administration that it is no pushover when it comes to retaliation — the tariff wars since February 2025 are a testimony to that.

Further, it showed Washington that it could use its muscle in critical minerals to impact American defence and hi-tech industries, not to speak of its own export controls. Tariffs and sanctions could bite China's economy, but not for long.

WON'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE But the big question that lawmakers would have to ask is whether further sanctions on Russia is going to make any difference to the Ukraine war which is already in its fifth year. Time and again Moscow seems to have re-worked its strategies on the battlefield, but hardly on its objectives.

Tightening sanctions on Russia or widening the scope of the Graham-Blumenthal Bill to include Iran would do little to end two conflicts in different theatres.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and United Nations



MRIDUL SAGGAR

Business as usual by international organisations in the hope of not upsetting the apple cart defined by the power structures may invite redundancy. They need to quickly revamp themselves by actions but restrict themselves to their core-competencies.

The July 2026 IMF World Economic Outlook (WEO) update made only minor adjustments to global growth but included a surprisingly large upward revisions to inflation forecasts (0.3 percentage point (ppt) for 2026, 0.2 ppt for 2027). These were driven by expected higher energy and food prices. But the IMF's optimism that this won't spill over into core inflation contradicts its own growth projections, which lack the demand destruction needed to keep core inflation steady.

The sharp revision in inflation forecasts came from a 8.6 per cent jump in its oil price forecast after it took into account the oil future curve of June 10 in place of March 10. However, the forecasts are distorted by giving equal weight to WTI, Brent and Dubai Fateh even though Brent sets the price for roughly two-thirds of globally traded physical crudes.

This past week, oil futures for some tenors surged by about 15 per cent, making the IMF's macroeconomic forecasts questionable. Whenever there are spikes in energy prices, the IMF's macroeconomic forecasts have a structural disconnect with macroeconomic realities. The cascading impacts do not sufficiently get captured in their models. Crude oil futures are not an optimal predictor of their future spot prices. Given high volatilities, why does the IMF rely on a single day's futures curve for energy prices, rather than modelling country-level energy supply and demand dynamics?

The IMF devotes disproportionately large resources to climate issues in relation to energy issues. It is trying to fix the big gaps in the International Financial Architecture (IFA) with several global common (supranational) issues coming to fore. Climate change, pandemics, cyber risks, maritime blockages and seabed resource exploitations, all carry large negative externalities.

They need to be dealt with. But the IMF was conceived for none of these when the Harry Dexter White's Commission laid its blueprint.

Yet, the IMF has happily extended its mandate to cover the IFA gaps as there had been no traction in the G20 for alternative structures. Even the Eminent Persons Group chaired by



REUTERS

IMF must stick to its core competencies

OFF COURSE. The IMF must pull back from areas like climate finance where it lacks expertise, and focus on resolving the ever-growing debt bubble

Tharman Shanmugaratnam under the German Presidency focussed only on fine-tuning and fell well short of recommending an alternative architecture. The G20 Expert Group, Co-Chaired by Larry Summers and NK Singh under the Indian Presidency, had a much narrower mandate confined to Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs).

Though tasked to deal with trans-boundary challenges such as climate change and health, it got bogged down by seeking consensus on resource augmentations for the existing MDBs than conceiving a blueprint for a structural change of the IFA.

As gaps persisted, the IMF, which neither had expertise in climate, nor in energy, integrated climate finance in its Article IV consultations on the grounds of macro-criticality.

But mitigation, adaptation and green transition are big issues that can best be addressed by creating a separate multilateral institution. The IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Facility is grossly insufficient to meet the climate

Whenever there are spikes in energy prices, the IMF's macroeconomic forecasts have a structural disconnect with macroeconomic realities

finance goals. Instead, it diverts scarce IMF resources from providing global financial safety net.

There is some justification behind the US Treasury Secretary, Scott Bessent's criticism of the "mission creep" that has knocked the IMF and World Bank off course from their mandate. It is a different matter that the US Administration's commitment to multilateralism is itself questionable and is the cause of these intuitions going downhill.

IMMEDIATE ACTION AGENDA

While the geopolitical conflicts have accentuated, the fiscal and monetary space looks enervated. The IMF must reconsider its ability to handle financial crashes. It must get into action to increase its core crisis-handling firepower and re-look how it uses it. Three immediate actions that the IMF need to take are:

The 16th General Review of Quotas (GRQ) along with the NAB (New Arrangements to Borrow) rollback approved by the Board of Governors in 2023 is as good as dead. Despite four extensions, the US, with its 16.5 per cent vote share, will block it from getting requisite consent from 85 per cent vote share. So, the IMF must move to raise supplementary resources from NAB and BBA (Bilateral Borrowing Agreements) and get them weight in the quota formula in the 17th GRQ.

The IMF taking leadership to

resolve the ever-growing debt bubble with global public debt to GDP ratio expected to touch 100 per cent by 2029. The Brady Plan launched in 1989 in similar circumstances had chinks of moral hazard. So, the new plan should focus on mitigating various risks attached to emerging market economies' bond issuances.

The IMF's 2026 Comprehensive Surveillance Review need to pull back from further mission creep and completely abstain from looking at poly-crisis interlinking crises on which the IMF does not have expertise — environment, social unrests, cyber-risks, pandemic, gender, etc.

Instead, it should develop more even-handedness in its policies that has taken a dent with exceptional financing. It hasn't even explained why the FSAP (Financial Sector Assessment Programme) of the most systemically important jurisdiction — the US — has still not been completed or released? Also, why have there been repeated failures of its borrowing programmes, evident in Pakistan borrowing 24 times and Argentina 23 times.

It is time that the IMF comes transparent on its constraints, as sitting out till 2029 will not solve anything, especially if another global financial crisis strikes earlier.

The writer is Professor at IIM Kozhikode. He was formerly RBI ED and had represented India at G20 IFA Working Group. Views are personal

thehindubusinessline. TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

July 16, 2006

NPCIL gets going on additional nuclear capacity

State-owned Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL), the nodal agency for harnessing nuclear power in the country, is working on setting up additional nuclear generation capacity of between 6,000 and 10,000 MWe (mega watts electrical) on the four new sites sanctioned by the Government.

Deviations in VAT rate contained to 3%

The VAT Panel has said the deviations in rates among the implementing States have been contained to a mere 3 per cent of the total universe of 703 items under the new tax system. "The deviations in VAT rates are within 20 items in contrast to the 703 items under the VAT system," Dr Asim Dasgupta, Chairman of the Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers on VAT, said.

Road operations turn profitable for Government

Instead of paying up (subsidy) to get highways constructed, the Government can expect making substantial money for some stretches. An increasing section of the private sector has started perceiving road operations as profitable venture and is ready to shell out money (called negative grant) to the National Highways Authority of India for building and managing roads.

Boeing unveils new 737 line to boost output

Siddharth Philip

Boeing Co. formally opened its fourth 737 Max assembly line near Seattle on Friday, as the US planemaker looks to cash in on its growing backlog, though output from the factory will initially be at a low rate.

The line inside Boeing's Everett site, where it mainly produces its wide-body models such as the 777, 767 and upcoming 777X, will initially employ about 1,000 workers, Jennifer Boland-Masterson said, a senior director at the company, said during a media tour.

Boeing will adopt a low build rate to iron out any kinks and ensure operations run smoothly, Boland-Masterson said. She declined to specify how quickly the line will scale but said Boeing will add more workers as production increases.

The new assembly line is a key component of Boeing's attempt to ramp up output of its workhorse 737

Max family after the Federal Aviation Administration capped production at 38 planes a month in 2024 following a near-catastrophic accident that led to a wholesale switch of senior leadership.

In May, Chief Executive Officer Kelly Ortberg said the planemaker had been authorised to increase output to 47 planes a month.

RAISING OUTPUT

Boeing eventually aims to raise 737 monthly output to 63, key to paying pay down debt, improving its finances and challenging Airbus SE's dominance in the money-spinning single-aisle aircraft segment.

Boeing's tour showcased an array of tooling and work stations as well as machines hauling a sheathed fuselage that will be assembled on the new production line. Boeing builds 737 Max fuselages at its site in Wichita, Kansas, and transports them by rail to Seattle.

It came days before airlines and parts



BOEING. Looking to clear production backlog with fourth assembly line REUTERS

suppliers from around the world converge outside of London for the Farnborough airshow, with Boeing and Airbus jockeying to unveil blockbuster plane orders.

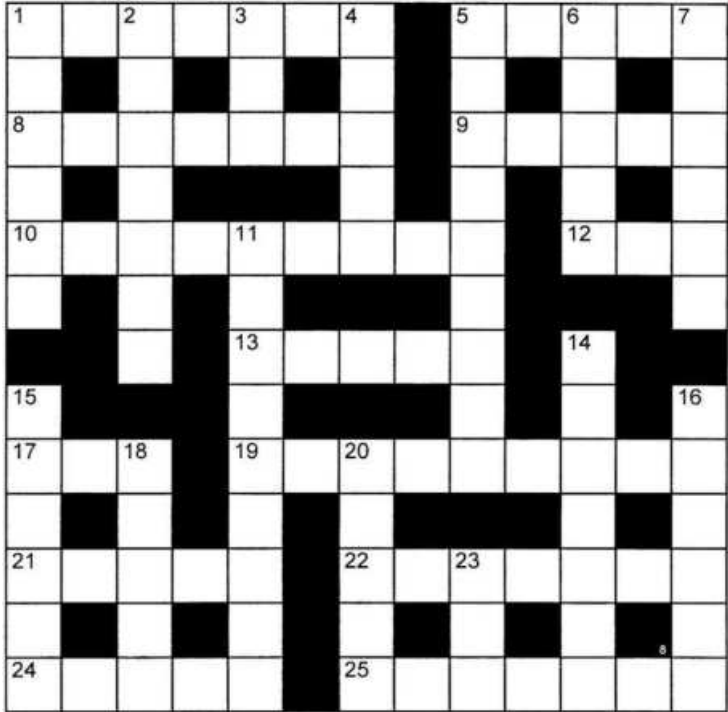
The world's largest planemakers face hurdles to their growth plans, including conquering parts and labour shortages lingering from the coronavirus

pandemic. Airbus has struggled with supply chain constraints while it works to ramp up output of its rival A321neo model and has had to repeatedly push back its target of achieving a production rate of 75 planes a month. This week, workers in Spain kicked off a labour strike in a protest over work conditions over the past years.

The area for the new 737 North line was previously used to assemble the 787 Dreamliner before production of that model was consolidated in North Charleston, South Carolina. Given the space was previously used to build bigger aircraft, Boeing is using the extra floor area to adapt to changing cabin trends.

As airlines add more lie-flat seats to narrow-body aircraft to target premium fliers, the new line has additional stations that give workers time to install complicated interiors without disrupting the rest of the line, Boland-Masterson said. BLOOMBERG

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2694



EASY

ACROSS

- Hold in regard (7)
- Young horses, junior players (5)
- Citizens of Troy (7)
- Unclothed (5)
- Entangle, involve (9)
- Be visually aware (3)
- Lets fall (5)
- Mat (3)
- Cheered (9)
- To faint (5)
- Unhappy, unlucky (7)
- Division of act (5)
- Add sugar (7)

DOWN

- Sell to the consumer (6)
- Ceased (7)
- An age, particular period (3)
- Opera by Puccini (5)
- Admitted (9)
- Is fond of (5)
- Edged along sideways (6)
- Poverty, need of subsistence (9)
- Quietly happy (7)
- Appointments to meet (6)
- Better than even betting price (4,2)
- Feel one's way blindly (5)
- Plant-louse (5)
- Dish with pastry crust (3)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Proper feeling in this regard (7)
- Young animals that were meant to be shot (5)
- They worked hard at an opera by Berlioz (7)
- Dane was upset about king who had nothing on (5)
- Limit pace so that it could involve others (9)
- Understand it to be the domain of a bishop (3)
- Ceases to take liquid medicament (5)
- Half of a game for fifteen gets trodden underfoot (3)
- Made happy to have land edged in such a way (9)
- So now is put out by a fainting fit (5)
- Unlucky chap loses his head, getting a smaller amount (7)
- Bit of a fuss made where crime is committed (5)
- In the teens, we turn and sugar the pill (7)

DOWN

- How to sell a litre of it (6)
- Having shortened the vibrating length, didn't go on (7)
- A time that occurs in a December afternoon (3)
- An opera by Puccini for turncoats (5)
- It is admitted one feeds NCOs like this (9)
- Is partial to silk that is woven round end of tie (5)
- Was fawningly moving crabwise (6)
- Might need icing if showing need of subsistence (9)
- Is quite happy with what's inside it (7)
- Attempt to take nothing from sots at such meetings (6)
- A better than even chance that dons do wrong (4,2)
- First get on the line and blindly feel one's way (5)
- Garden pest that could destroy a ship (5)
- Something crusty to be as sweet as (3)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2693

ACROSS 1. Thumb 4. Unkempt 8. Nadir 9. Hen-coop 10. Use 11. Unreeling 12. Tusk 13. Dada 18. Intrinsic 20. Ugh 21. Termite 22. Franc 23. Resists 24. Spell

DOWN 1. Tongue-twister 2. Undress 3. Barium 4. Ushers 5. Kennel 6. Maori 7. Topographical 14. Adulate 15. Visits 16. Osiers 17. Scoffs 19. Terms

A pragmatic turn

Dixon-Vivo joint venture indicates a practical approach

The government last week permitted Dixon Technologies to undertake a joint venture (JV) with smartphone maker Vivo, a company based in China. The Chinese company will have 49 per cent in the venture, with its partner assuming majority control. The government’s permission is required for such enterprises under the revised Press Note 3 rules. This decision illustrates a shift towards greater pragmatism in how investment from China is being dealt with. While it might have felt more secure to completely rule out such investment, it turns out that both the capital and the technology that accompany it are too vital for various frontier sectors, including smartphones.

The JV will take over the Chinese company’s factory in Greater Noida, and the Indian manufacturer believes that it will add about 20 million units to its current production of 35 million smartphones. Some of that production might be for other brands, and there are also hopes that a fraction of what is produced might be exported. While Apple Inc has indeed exported some high-end electronics from its subcontractors’ facilities in India and now accounts for well over half the country’s mobile electronics exports by volume, the government has hoped for some time that similar success stories would emerge at the middle and low end of this market. Chinese companies hold almost three-fourths of the Indian market, with Vivo itself accounting for almost a quarter. But they have not scaled up manufacturing and exports from India to meaningful levels. Presumably the government believes that permitting the Vivo-Dixon JV is one way to address that situation.

The initial move in 2020 to shut off all Chinese investment followed the clashes on the Line of Actual Control in the Himalayas. It was reflective of a moment in which complete decoupling from the Chinese economy was considered the only option. But it was clearly not sustainable over time. Naturally, some restrictions need to be retained in critical sectors where credible fears on national security exist. But in other parts of the economy, the government seems to have decided that the benefits are strong enough to outweigh any threat perception.

There is a broader lesson here. New Delhi has come to realise over the past few years that it will not easily break into complicated supply chains, especially those in electronics, while also locking out Chinese investment and technology. This should not come as a surprise. While European and American investment might continue to be useful in high-end manufacturing processes and services, the fact is that much low-end and labour-intensive production is now dominated by China, or has supply chains in which Chinese companies have a major presence. The natural course of economic development will require these companies to invest in India as an additional hub for these supply chains. All countries that have developed an export-focused sector have benefited from external investment provided by the current market leaders in this manner. Over time, JVs, as well as the human and physical capital built up through investment, allow the newer manufacturing location to achieve dominance in certain sectors in turn. The globalised economy enforces cooperation even in an uncertain security landscape.

Monitoring measures

New services index will help gauge activity over time

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (Mospi) on Tuesday released the trial index of services production (ISP), which will act as a high-frequency indicator to gauge short-term economic momentum in the services sector. Although an overall index number has not been given, it is a significant addition in measuring activity in services, which accounts for over half the economic activities in the country. With a base year of 2024-25, the index tracks 19 formal subsectors, covering about 60 per cent of the services economy. The first release for April 2026 shows broadbased strength, with 14 of the 19 subsectors recording double-digit growth in April 2026 compared to April 2025. Accommodation and food services expanded by 37.2 per cent, followed by retail trade (30.8 per cent), administrative and support services (28.7 per cent), and real estate (27.7 per cent). Sectors with a high weighting, such as information technology, retail trade and banking also recorded robust gains, suggesting that services remained resilient despite global uncertainties. However, air transport contracted 14 per cent, compared to a 4.5 per cent increase in the corresponding period last year.

Earlier attempts to construct a services production index were constrained by the absence of reliable monthly data. The expansion of the goods and services tax (GST) network and the growing availability of administrative datasets have changed this. This has made it possible to develop the ISP, providing a monthly snapshot of the services sector comparable to the index of industrial production (IIP) for manufacturing. Equally important is the effort to improve the measurement of real output. Since the index measures changes in the volume of services produced, while the underlying data captures only the value of transactions, the nominal turnover must be adjusted for price changes to estimate real output. At present, wholesale trade is deflated using the wholesale price index, whereas other services segments are adjusted using either relevant consumer price indices (CPIs) or the nearest available proxy CPI in the absence of sector-specific measures. International statistical standards favour producer price indices (PPIs) as the appropriate deflators for converting nominal turnover into real output. In this context, the recent launch of output PPIs — the trial input PPIs for manufacturing and services PPIs covering seven services sectors — should help over time as they improve.

Advanced economies such as the United Kingdom, South Korea and members of the European Union have long used monthly services production indices as an integral part of macroeconomic monitoring. In the Indian context, the trial index should be viewed as a work in progress rather than a definitive measure of India’s services economy. By design, it captures only the formal sector because it relies primarily on GST data. The informal sector, which accounts for nearly one-third of services gross value added (GVA), remains outside the index’s ambit owing to persistent data gaps. Public administration, defence and several non-market services are also excluded, while health and education will be incorporated only after data from the Annual Survey of Incorporated Services Sector Enterprises (ASISSE) becomes available. Now that the foundation has been laid, seasonal adjustment to reduce fluctuations in monthly readings, broader sectoral coverage, improved data quality, and continuous methodological refinement will determine whether the experimental series matures into a robust economic indicator.

Giving farmers the reins

Why producer-controlled organisations should lead agricultural transformation rather than bureaucrats



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Farmers in India are developing their agricultural practices mainly through improvements in traditional areas, with new seeds, chemical fertilisers and pesticides, mechanised modes for managing cultivation, and, occasionally, the adoption of new crops. Some farmers also depend substantially on government fertiliser subsidies and on government procurement of food grains.

Most of the government purchase and the bulk of the fertiliser and food subsidies are for the production of paddy and wheat. In 2023-24, the value of output of these two principal crops was ₹7.5 trillion, while the budgetary cost of fertiliser and food subsidies was ₹4 trillion. More than 800 million people receive these food grains free of cost from the central government.

If one looks at the growth areas in agriculture in the 12 years between 2011-12 and 2023-24, production of paddy and wheat rose by just 27 per cent. Fruit and vegetable production rose by 52 per cent, and milk production by 85 per cent, even though they did not receive any substantial support by way of subsidies or minimum support price procurement by the government. The true growth areas in agriculture are out of direct central government support and depend largely on producer enterprise.

The most interesting example of producer-managed growth is the substantial increase in milk production, which has been boosted by the effectiveness of milk producer cooperatives. The earliest instance was in Gujarat, where the milk producers in Anand set up a cooperative named after their district, Kaira, and labelled their product as Amul, which is the abbreviation of Anand Milk Union Limited. It developed as a response to the heavy dependence of milk suppliers on purchases by the sellers of Polson milk in Bombay. Tribhuvandas Patel led the initiative, and Verghese Kurien came in as the executive head. Their initiative has culminated in the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation, which is perhaps the largest food products marketing company in India and is owned by 3.6 million milk producers.

This focus on production control was the basis for

the management of the National Dairy Development Board set up in 1965 by Kurien and supported by the then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, who saw merit in relying on producer-controlled cooperatives. Kurien was particularly strict about keeping bureaucrats at a distance from programme control. Operation Flood, which brought in financial support and milk supply (including free milk provided by Europe), came in 1970 and enabled the country-wide cooperatives to dominate the urban market through institutions like Mother Dairy.

This sector, controlled by producer and not dependent on government procurement and minimum support prices, has boomed faster than the agricultural sector, particularly the growth in the production of paddy and wheat, which has been dependent on government support. In 2023-24, the value of output of cereals (mainly paddy and wheat) was ₹8.5 trillion, while the value of the largely cooperative-controlled milk sector was ₹12.2 trillion.

The role of the producer- and cooperative-controlled sector may be relevant for an emerging option that could be a substantial source of income for farmers and also contribute significantly to our long-term challenge of coping with climate change. It basically involves the supply of electricity from farm fields.

Electricity pricing for agriculture is heavily subsidised, with farmers typically paying a fraction — or nothing — of the average cost of supply. One way of reducing these losses is to see how power use in rural areas can be met by local sources. In fact, it is also possible to make agricultural areas a source of solar power that will contribute to the management of climate change. An option that has been designed, called agri-voltaics (Agri-PV), basically involves installing solar power at an elevated level above areas sown with crops that can cope with partial sunlight. It may be one way to overcome the difficulty in securing large areas of land, mainly in rural areas, for standard solar power units.

The central government has a programme, elaborately entitled but more easily referred to as



NITIN DESAI

Inside India’s million-plus cities

Cities drive prosperity. As hubs of talent, firms and investment, they lift productivity, jobs and living standards. Barely a third of India is urban, yet its cities account for much of the country’s output, and a single tier carries most of that weight — the 46 cities with a million people or more.

Until last month, we could not read these cities individually since India’s statistical system was built to see states. That changed when the National Statistics Office released “Labour Market Dynamics in Million-plus Cities”, the first dedicated profile of all 46, made possible by a redesign of the Periodic Labour Force Survey, which from January 2025 treats each city as its own stratum. A first reading points to something most commentary misses: The important divide is not between these cities and the rest of the country, but between the cities themselves.

That is easy to miss because on the headline measures the big cities look ordinary, their joblessness of 4.9 per cent sitting similar to urban India’s 4.8. But unemployment is only part of the story. Look instead at how many hours people work and what those hours earn, and the cities stop looking alike. They diverge in ways a national average would not reveal.

In Chennai, the average worker puts in 45.6 hours a week, in Kolkata 46.4, and both are service economies, with roughly three in four workers in the tertiary sector and a little under a quarter in industry. At the level of broad sectors, the two look alike. Yet among regular salaried employees, a Chennai worker earns about ₹29,000 a month against ₹19,000 in Kolkata. This divergence widens beneath that. Only 51 per cent of Kolkata’s workers hold salaried jobs, against 71 per cent

in Chennai, while 40 per cent are self-employed, against Chennai’s 24 per cent. Those self-employed earn ₹18,000 a month in Kolkata, against ₹30,500 in Chennai, barely three-fifths as much. Kolkata pushes more of its workers into working for themselves, but they still earn less. What a worker earns depends on the city in which they work, since the composition, quality and likely productivity of sectors vary across cities, and these differences are reflected in workers’ earnings.

This is where the more familiar story about big-city jobs needs qualifying. It is true that these cities have more salaried work and higher average earnings than urban India as a whole. But an average can be lifted by a well-paid few while most workers see little of it. A city can post a respectable mean because its top firms pay well, even as the median clerk earns modestly. Million-plus cities offer higher wages than the rest overall, but the relevant question is not how high the average sits, it is how far those gains extend across the workforce.

It becomes more concerning through the gender lens. A high female participation rate does not necessarily mean equitable earnings. Take Greater Visakhapatnam, where 34.6 per cent of women are in the labour force, healthy by Indian standards. Women there work about eight hours a week less than men, yet salaried women earn barely 54 per cent of what men do, ₹18,330 against ₹33,707. They put in four-fifths of men’s hours for half the pay. Women are present in the workforce but not rewarded within it: A gender penalty that participation figures alone conceal.

Across the larger cities the same wedge recurs. In every one of the 13 with the largest samples, women in

KUSUM¹, which is aimed mainly at promoting the use of captive solar power for pump sets. This has to compete with the substantial subsidy or even free use of electricity provided to rural areas by state-level distribution companies. But KUSUM also covers the possibility of support for Agri-PV projects, which combine the use of land for agriculture and for photovoltaic establishment to generate solar power for sale. This presents an interesting possibility of raising the returns from the ownership of agricultural land through the dual use of land for agriculture and for solar power generation for use and sale.

A recent project implemented by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations provides an interesting analysis of Agri-PV and evaluates the implementation of this dual use of land for agriculture and solar power generation in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. What it does bring out is the substantial increase in farmers’ income resulting from this dual use of land.

The other point that comes across is the huge level of investment required to set up solar power capacity — it was approximately ₹18.5 crore for the 15-acre land plot in Madhya Pradesh and approximately ₹2 crore for the 3-acre land plot in Rajasthan. Because of this high investment cost, relying largely on individual landowners will limit the impact.

Some improvement may come from commercial developers who will share income with the landowners. But real transformation can come mainly from community-based groups, organised as cooperatives or producer-based companies, which can combine small and medium landowners for implementing the dual use of land in Agri-PV. Do note that the average per capita ownership of agricultural lands in India is just 1.08 hectares and hence relying on individual landowners will greatly limit the impact of Agri-PV.

At present, the promotion of Agri-PV is essentially through the central-sector scheme KUSUM, run by bureaucrats. Given the high investment cost, it may generally involve community- or sub-community-level cooperation. I would suggest that application system for Agri-PV be run by an organisation that directly involves the producers and not be left to bureaucrats. The application is likely to vary greatly across different ecological zones, as agricultural conditions differ considerably from one locality to another. Moreover, the Agri-PV system requires judgements about crops that can tolerate reduced solar exposure, which can be assessed only by farmers at the local level and not by bureaucrats.

The example of the cooperative institutional arrangement that has been responsible for the boom in milk production and marketing may provide an answer not just to Agri-PV, but also to the promotion of other products, such as fruits and vegetables, which are often produced by small landowners. The essential point is that we should rely more on producer-controlled organisations, such as cooperatives or producer companies, rather than on schemes controlled by bureaucrats for the modernisation of, and higher production in, agriculture.

desaiand@icloud.com

1. Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthan Mahabhayan

2. Ashok Gulati and associates, *Harvesting Sun and Soil: India’s Agri-PV Future*, ICRIER, 2026



CONURBATION
AMIT KAPOOR

Iranians in ‘internal exile’



KANIKA DATTA

Sustained US-Israeli attacks on Iran since February 28 and the near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz have thrown the world into turmoil as countries scrambled to manage oil and gas supply disruptions. But how have ordinary Iranians coped with the sustained bombings and internal crackdowns on civil rights? Prolonged information blackouts by Iran’s theocratic regime have muffled the voices of its citizens for years. Of course, the upsurge of serial anti-government protests since 2017 over rising prices, corruption, and women’s rights is the clearest indicator that the regime’s

grip is weakening — notwithstanding the impressively orchestrated mourning at Ayatollah Khamenei’s funeral. After the Women! Life! Freedom! movement of 2022, for instance, women can walk around scarf-less and unmolested. But these are incremental gains still. For most Iranians living under an unpopular regime that is fighting a war against a hated superpower and its detested ally has been a schizophrenic experience.

Tehran Diaries: Dispatches from Iran under Siege does not indulge in polemics. Both dispiriting and uplifting, this slim book is a collection of dispatches by the academic and dissident Raha Nik-Andish for the *London Review of Books* blogs. It is a simple and evocative recounting of how ordinary citizens cope with the daily internal and external threats to life and livelihood.

The book is bracketed by the US-Israeli attacks in 2025 and 2026. The editors chose a somewhat disorienting receding timeline. It begins in March

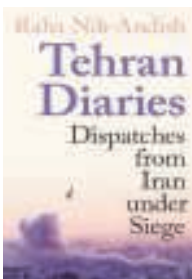
2026, about 10 days after the US-Israeli attacks resumed on February 28, moving backwards through the 12-day war (June 12-23, 2025) — which was supposed to have annihilated Iran’s nuclear capabilities — and ends in May 2025.

“In going backwards we attempt to ask how we got here,” the editors explain. War is now the “ongoing reality in Iran and across the Middle East,” they add, “but before war and during it, there was life too.” Nik-Andish is a pen name for a writer who worked through an intermediary to smuggle his writings out of Tehran, a project that could have resulted in a death sentence if discovered.

Notably, the US-Israeli attacks have not legitimised the regime for ordinary Iranians. This is well documented in the introduction titled “Hell Has Arrived”, which highlights the absurdities of the information blackout following the US-Israeli bombings. The author learns from a London-based Persian TV service that Ayatollah Khamenei has been assassin-

ated. There’s no confirmation from state media, which continues with upbeat TV programmes. But the people have heard and emerge from their homes in suppressed celebration. “Everyone in the high-rise apartment buildings around me and across Tehran has come out onto their balconies. The entire nation is taken by surprise... Completely empty streets suddenly fill up with people. It’s a party. People shout and honk their horns.” Emboldened, people openly mock the Basiji — the state’s “volunteer” paramilitary militia — who retaliate with customary brute force. Official mourning is imposed the next day with religious people commanded to “cry and heave in supposed collective grief”. Among everyone else, the mood is lighter — the author notices one of many images of Khamenei stencilled across city walls has been disfigured with garden soil.

Since the bombings began, the



Tehran Diaries: Dispatches from Iran Under Siege
by Raha Nik-Andish
Published by Hachette
90 pages ₹250

regime has made concerted attempts to rally the nation. Every night from 9 pm to midnight, the Basiji gather in city squares to shout anti-Israeli and anti-US slogans. “This is the government’s attempts to bully ordinary Iranians into silence. However, for the majority of us, their songs and slogans are meaningless. We’ve heard them ad infinitum since 1979.” In January 2026, Raha Nik-Andish describes the national protests that resulted in almost 30,000 deaths and one of the longest internet blackouts in its history. The people

were egged on by Reza Pahlavi. The author may be unaware that this former crown prince, who is seeking a restoration of the monarchy, is a US stooge with no grassroots base in Iran. As it was, these protests, for which he provided no meaningful support, resulted in unprecedented and frighteningly vicious violence by state security forces. Raha Nik-Andish describes a plain-

clothes policeman sitting on top of a very young boy and repeatedly stabbing him with a knife.

Even as the regime lavishly celebrates a “victory” when the bombing abruptly stopped after 12 days, life for less jubilant Iranians is reduced to a tiring struggle for food, basic necessities, safety — and parrying official corruption. Raha Nik-Andish is a freelance university lecturer who augments his pay of 35 cents (35,000 toman) an hour driving for Snapp!, a ride-hailing service, at night. It is a job that enables him to take unfiltered soundings from ordinary Iranians riding in his cab.

As he writes, “These days, the condition of being Persian defies simple categories. It is full of deep contradictions about one’s country: caught between pride in a rich cultural past and shame over the current political reality... These feelings are shaped by a kind of internal exile — even while you’re in your own home.” The last chapter underlines the bleakness. It is titled “Looking for a Job, Living and Dying,” all of which — even the latter — involve unique challenges in this tragic nation.

Calcutta Stock Exchange, R.I.P.

Let pangs of nostalgia not cloud reason

While well-intentioned, the enthusiasm of the new BJP government in West Bengal to revive Calcutta Stock Exchange (CSE) is quite misplaced. Over 25 regional stock exchanges have shut down in India since 2012 when Sebi imposed minimum turnover restrictions. The idea was to move trading into large exchanges that possess adequate liquidity for price discovery. Exchanges in Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad have closed, while those in Delhi, Ahmedabad and Pune have ceased independent operations. They all faced a common structural problem of declining trading volumes that increased transaction costs and made operations unsustainable. Getting the Kolkata bourse, inactive since 2013, up and running would be to err on the side of logic. It assumes a special economic dispensation where none exists beyond nostalgia.

Reopening the exchange, which in itself is a formidable endeavour, is the easy part. As a specialised bourse for small companies in eastern India, CSE is setting itself up for a mediocre future. As small companies grow, they migrate to larger exchanges, in effect, draining better assets. Companies growing rapidly need visibility and access to deeper pools of capital. Technology drives modern trading, and small exchanges struggle to make continuous investments in advanced architecture. Fewer regulatory resources and asymmetric information erode investor trust. CSE has experienced all of this. Reviving it will set the downward spiral off again at a large cost to its shareholders, which includes the Bengal government.

West Bengal is seeking to reindustrialise after decades of apathy and needs to improve its investment climate. Struggles of a resurrected stock exchange would be a mixed signal for investors and a digression the state can do without. Since private equity is driving the growth of India's startup ecosystem, the state government could turn its attention to fostering an environment for innovation. It is immaterial where a startup eventually lists, as long as it finds the right conditions to grow in a region.

English, As Indian As Languages Come

The fact that you're reading this column without realising you're proficient in a 'foreign' language should be evidence enough for the Supreme Court to conclude that English has become an 'indigenous' Indian language. That the same word — 'English' — pertains to the language, people of England, as well as anything connected to that British country may have confused sceptics. It shouldn't. Like any other import, this colonial one, too, has grown roots as one of the many languages at the disposal of India's voluble citizenry. English, as used in India in its many accents and forms, is a classic case of healthy appropriation. The fact that it is shared globally adds to, not subtracts from, its identity as a global Indian language.

Indian English — a regular option, like American English or British English, on any online drop-down language menu for a user to choose from — is a language of foreign origin that has been forged and shaped for our own communicative purposes. Apart from words singularly Indian like 'prepone', 'chargesheet' and 'godown', English has curried favour with all things 'India' and has gained it. 'Language Nazis' who believe angrezi to be exclusively a BBC bhasha or the language fit only for English people, are as anachronistic as those who still see it as 'colonial'. Genius of English lies precisely in its 'impurity', and ability to thrive by linguistic theft. It has no canon (like French) and, therefore, isn't ossified. This promiscuity is its superpower, giving it its super reach. English in India is Indian by naturalisation. It has flourished here not because it was imposed from outside but because it was appropriated. Languages, like food, are not defined by where they come from, but by where they end up being consumed.



JUST IN JEST

As far as misleading words go, this one's right on top

Who Says Ceasefire Is Fire Being Ceased?

Ceasefire: a word that promises serenity, a pause, a collective sigh of relief. Yet, it's stashed with diplomatic irony, considering as we see in the context of Hormuz, a ceasefire isn't really the cessation of unfriendly fire. One might imagine generals ordering the suspension of hostilities, a cessation in strikes. Instead, ceasefires are often little more than war by other means that does not include sports. The absurdity lies in the semantics. 'Cease' suggests a halt; 'fire' suggests the thing to be halted. Put together, they should mean, well, no fire. But ceasefires are riddled with caveats, violations and loopholes. They are less about stopping missile or drone strikes than about buying time — to reload, regroup or renegotiate to one's (military) advantage. As we have realised by now, the ceasefire is not a peace treaty but a coffee break for combatants.

Diplomats, of course, dress it up in solemnity. Press releases strum it as 'on the verge of success', as if being on the verge is the destination. Civilians, meanwhile, learn to treat them with suspicion, with the ceasefire becoming a word that means its very opposite. It is the linguistic equivalent of 'jumbo shrimp', a phrase that is held aloft by its own contradictory petard. And, yet, we never cease to marvel at how a ceasefire hardly ceases, long after the fire has *not* ceased.

Two opposing views on India pressing its foot down on the ethanol pedal — is it vroom or doom?

OIL CH₃CH₂O HCHANGE

Jump on This Bandwagon



Ravi Gupta

Long before EVs and hydrogen became part of the global energy transition conversation, ethanol was already powering engines. The first ethanol-powered engine was developed in 1826 by Samuel Morey, and Henry Ford's first automobile, the 1896 Quadricycle, was designed to run on ethanol.

Some 200 yrs later, ethanol has become an integral part of the transport fuel strategy of more than 60 countries. India may have joined this journey later than many of its peers, but it's now emerging as one of the world's fastest-growing ethanol economies.

Ethanol-blending involves mixing ethanol, a renewable biofuel produced from agricultural feedstocks, with petrol. Flex-fuel vehicles (FFVs) extend this concept by allowing motorists to use higher ethanol blends depending on availability and price. Although these technologies are often viewed as relatively new in India, they are supported by decades of global experience.

Oil crises of the 1970s established ethanol's strategic importance because countries resorted to domestic alternatives to costly imported crude. Brazil launched its National Alcohol Programme, Proálcool, in 1975 and built the world's most successful ethanol ecosystem. The US later instituted growth through its 2005 Renewable Fuel Standard. With growing climate concerns in the following decades, countries such as Canada, Thailand, Argentina and the Philippines adopted blending mandates, turning ethanol into a mainstream component of energy policy.

During much of this period, India's priorities were understandably different. It was focused on ensuring food security, strengthening agricultural production and supporting economic development. While India launched its Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme in the early 2000s, progress remained slow for over a decade. Limited ethanol availability, inadequate procurement mechanisms, unattractive producer economics, feedstock constraints and policy uncertainty meant that blending stood at only about 1.5% in 2014.

The transformation since then has been remarkable. Through consistent policy support, assured pricing, expansion of feedstock options, investment in distillation capacity and stronger coordination between farmers, industry and oil marketing companies, India has rapidly scaled up ethanol production. It achieved 10% blending ahead of schedule in 2022, and increased blending from 12.06% in ethanol supply year (ESY) 2022-23 to 14.60% in ESY 2023-24. India also crossed its 20% ethanol blending 5 yrs ahead of schedule.

The country's progress is particularly significant because it has benefited from decades of international experience. Many of the concerns often raised today — food security, crop diversion, pricing, fuel economics and vehicle compatibility — had been debated in Brazil, the US and several other countries years ago. These countries have demonstrated that, with sound policy design and continuous technological improvements, ethanol can become a reliable component of a country's transport fuel mix, while supporting farmers, strengthening energy security and reducing emissions.

The next phase of India's ethanol journey will require moving beyond blending targets to building a complete consumption ecosystem. This includes expanding ethanol retail infrastructure, encouraging flex-fuel vehicles, competitive fuel pricing, increasing consumer awareness and ensuring confidence in higher ethanol blends. GoI's approval of fuels like E85 and E100, along with introduction of India's first commercial FFVs last month, represents an important step in that direction.

Benefits of the programme are already becoming evident. According to GoI, EBP Programme has generated payments of more than ₹1.5 lakh cr to farmers, displaced over 289 lakh t of crude oil imports, and reduced net CO₂ emissions by nearly 869 lakh t. At a time of volatile global energy markets, domestically produced ethanol has emerged not only as an environmental solution, but also as a strategic tool for enhancing energy security, reducing import dependence and creating additional value within the rural economy.

Ethanol's story is one of evolution, going beyond experimentation. Countries have embraced it to strengthen energy security, support agriculture, reduce emissions and cushion oil-price volatility. India may have started later than its peers but it has progressed rapidly. The question is no longer whether ethanol belongs in its energy future, but how its use can expand while balancing energy security, farmer welfare, sustainability and consumer interests. Better late than never, India Inc is now positioned to help shape ethanol's next chapter.

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars



Chalti ka naam energy security

to GoI, EBP Programme has generated payments of more than ₹1.5 lakh cr to farmers, displaced over 289 lakh t of crude oil imports, and reduced net CO₂ emissions by nearly 869 lakh t. At a time of volatile global energy markets, domestically produced ethanol has emerged not only as an environmental solution, but also as a strategic tool for enhancing energy security, reducing import dependence and creating additional value within the rural economy.

Ethanol's story is one of evolution, going beyond experimentation. Countries have embraced it to strengthen energy security, support agriculture, reduce emissions and cushion oil-price volatility. India may have started later than its peers but it has progressed rapidly. The question is no longer whether ethanol belongs in its energy future, but how its use can expand while balancing energy security, farmer welfare, sustainability and consumer interests. Better late than never, India Inc is now positioned to help shape ethanol's next chapter.

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars

The writer is executive director, Shree Renuka Sugars



Ateesh Tankha & Sudhir K Joshi

In ancient times, alcohol was used either as a safer source of nutrition than contaminated water, or to reduce noxious effects of bacteria by mixing it with water in a fixed proportion. Not too dissimilarly, countries like Brazil, battered by the 1973 oil crisis, turned to ethanol as an alternative sustainable fuel, or as an additive to dilute the devastating impact of any future oil shock.

Today, alcohol has outlived its purpose as a water decontaminant. And ethanol — despite its value as a greener feedstock replacement for petrochemicals, and as a core ingredient in sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) — is increasingly being passed over as a cleaner-burning or sustainable fuel for ICE, in favour of new technologies.

So, two questions need to be considered in the context of India's current



push for E20, blend of 20% ethanol and 80% petrol.

● Will ethanol drive higher vehicular efficiency and lower emissions? Ethanol has a high-octane rating — it offers greater acceleration and better anti-knocking (uncontrolled autoignition) performance in an engine's cylinder.

But this is only discernible in high-performance or turbocharged engines. Furthermore, while ethanol is safe to use in both new and older vehicles (of BS IV and BS VI vintage), it is hygroscopic (affinity to absorb moisture) and can corrode metal parts. Higher the proportion of ethanol, greater the chances that rubber hoses and gaskets in older cars will be damaged.

On the flip side, because ethanol burns more cleanly than fossil fuels — emitting less CO₂ and almost no CO — it is more environmentally friendly, both in its pure form and as a blend, than petroleum fuels. But since it has a 33% lower fuel density than petrol, mileage is affected in equal measure.

As a result, under perfect driving conditions — in India, the outlook is somewhat worse — E10 and E20 are likely to show mileage degradations of 3.5% and 6.5%, respectively. Since fuels are not priced in India based on energy content, this impact will become much more perceptible in the future if ethanol production increases.

None of these are, however, dealbreakers. By following the Brazilian model of phasing out older

vehicles, providing consumers with choice at the pump — as road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari reiterated this week in a ToI interview — and offsetting any loss of mileage through differential pricing, GoI could take care of these issues.

But India in 2026 is not Brazil in 1976. Its growth objectives are tied to energy, food and environmental security, which cannot depend on older technology that provides an incremental benefit to one area while adversely affecting another. On the face of it, ethanol — of which India consumes some 11 MMT annually — is the perfect antidote to India's oil addiction. The country can fully depend on its domestic production capacity, which is expandable and renewable, to reduce the energy import bill, allow farmers to earn more from a cash crop and demand fewer subsidies, and utilise a cleaner biofuel.

Economics, however, is a subset of the natural environment, not conventional mathematics. Nothing is boundless or infinitely sustainable. To produce 1 MT of ethanol requires about 2.6 t of maize or 12.5 t of sugarcane.

The trade-off lies in the fact that, for India to have achieved its E20 target 5 yrs ahead of the 2030 target date set by National Policy on Biofuels, 2018, 13.7 mn ha and 5.4 mn ha of land were allocated for maize and sugarcane production, respectively. Since GoI intends to divert another 8 mn ha by 2030 to meet domestic growth requirements, ethanol feedstock will command a fifth of India's net sown area.

Moreover, the impact on India's fast-depleting water table may be even more concerning. It takes between 2,000 and 10,000 l of water to grow and process feedstock for 1 l of ethanol compared to, say, a similar amount required to extract lithium and produce an EV battery.

Consequently, pursuing a strategy that develops even more highly concentrated ethanol fuels and promotes flex-fuel vehicles (FFVs) to justify their use, or increasing production area and volume to export ethanol to countries with feedstock deficits, will be counterproductive.

● Is ethanol a credible answer to India's energy security dilemma?

Because of the points mentioned above, no.

India's long-term energy security goals will be best served by investing in renewables for tomorrow's wholly electric, solar, nuclear or hydrogen-powered world. In the short term, it could balance some of its energy security needs by issuing oil bonds, while meeting consumer vehicle demand by subsidising and promoting mild, full and plug-in hybrids.

Ultimately, a commitment to fund ethanol production and expansion today is akin to building massive alcohol vats for potable drinking water. With cleaner and cheaper technology on the horizon, abstinence may be cheaper than the cure.

Tankha is MD, eTrans Solutions, and Joshi is former director (finance), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd



Keep on Movin'

SANT RAJINDER SINGH

How do we remain steadfast and hold onto faith when life's challenges feel overwhelming? There are times when illness, emotional pain, relationship struggles or other hardships may feel overwhelming. In such moments, we should do everything we can to address difficulties before us, seeking help, guidance and solutions wherever they may be found. Yet, when, despite our best efforts, the burden remains, we must learn to draw upon a deeper source of strength.

Humanity has endured war, famine, displacement and countless hardships, yet, people have continued to persevere. The source of this resilience lies within. The saints tell us that a tremendous power resides in us because power of God is within each of us. Whether we recognise it as such or not, this power is always present, waiting to be accessed. Meditation is how we connect with it.

To stop trying is not a solution. Rather, we must keep at it, trusting that with perseverance, time and grace, our circumstances can improve. The spiritual path is a path of positivity and hope. Whatever challenges we may face today, we should hold firmly to the conviction that things can and will get better. When we live with this principle and continue to put forth sincere effort in that direction, we find the strength to navigate life's difficulties and move steadily toward our goal.

STEP UP TO THE PLATE

Eight Calgary, Canada

Eight is one of Calgary's most remarkable dining experiences. Hidden behind an unmarked door inside Alt Hotel East Village, the secrecy adds to the anticipation, but once inside, the intimate 8-seat chef's table feels less like a restaurant and more like an exclusive culinary performance. Chef Darren MacLean and his team combine storytelling, precision cooking and warm hospitality into an unforgettable evening. The tasting menu, which of ten stretches beyond 20 courses, celebrates Canada's diverse landscapes through hyper-seasonal, locally sourced ingredients. Every dish arrives with a story, highlighting regional traditions, indigenous influences and exceptional producers. Standout creations have included geoduck sashimi with spring pea purée and black garlic, Nova Scotia lobster dumplings, and an inventive chocolate tart with roasted mushrooms and smoked whipped cream.

Reservations are notoriously difficult to secure, but Eight justifies the effort. Ending the evening at the elegant bar for cocktails is the perfect finale to one of Calgary's most immersive, innovative and memorable dining destinations. And, yes, there's a no-photography policy to encourage everyone to stay present and fully appreciate the experience.

se landscapes through hyper-seasonal, locally sourced ingredients. Every dish arrives with a story, highlighting regional traditions, indigenous influences and exceptional producers. Standout creations have included geoduck sashimi with spring pea purée and black garlic, Nova Scotia lobster dumplings, and an inventive chocolate tart with roasted mushrooms and smoked whipped cream.

Reservations are notoriously difficult to secure, but Eight justifies the effort. Ending the evening at the elegant bar for cocktails is the perfect finale to one of Calgary's most immersive, innovative and memorable dining destinations. And, yes, there's a no-photography policy to encourage everyone to stay present and fully appreciate the experience.

Chat Room

Farm to Fork To Forbidden

Apropos the Edit, 'Firm Up Farm Product Quality Control' (Jul 15), GoI and the concerned regulator must recognise the need to be in line with global best practices and standards to protect public health and citizens' rights. And why should we depend on revelations by foreign organisations or alerted by proscriptions by international regulators? When we make in India, should we also not test in India? Our regulatory agencies need to be resourceful, vigilant and impervious to industry influence or political pressures. Civil society voices must also ensure that regulatory agencies remain committed to the protection of public health. Pradeep Kumar Surat

Correction

In 'CETA, Not Quite a King's Ransom' by Jayant Dasgupta and Abhijit Das (Jul 15), the pound-rupee conversions should have read as ₹9.8 bn (₹1.26 lakh cr), ₹15.7 bn (₹2.03 lakh cr), and ₹10 bn (₹1.29 lakh cr), and not as published. The error is regretted.

—Editor

Oh, What a Lovely War, Delulus!



Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar

New research has uncovered names of an additional 9,909 Indian soldiers who died in WW1 but were not accounted for earlier. This flows from a 5-yr research project — The Punjab Registers: Recovering the Names of India's Fallen Servicemen — of Commonwealth Graves War Commission, UK Punjab Heritage Association (UKPHA), and University of Greenwich. On the 100th anniversary of WW1 observed over 2014 and 2018, media overflowed with tales of courage of 1.4 mn Indian troops at Flanders, Gallipoli and other battlefields.

More relevant would have been to bemoan the voluntary conversion of so many Indians into cannon fodder in a fight between colonial powers. WW1 was a tale of folly and futility, of soldiers galore being slaughtered whenever they tried to attack a trench defended with machine guns. British PM David Lloyd George is credited with saying it was 'just blood, mud, and futility'. No glory accompanied soldiers being sent 'over the top' to near-certain death.

Joan Littlewood's satirical 1963 musical, Oh, What a Lovely War!, starts with soldiers in a trench singing: *Up to your waist in water, Up to your eyes in slush —*

Using the kind of language, That makes the sergeant blush; Who wouldn't join the army? That's what we all inquire, Don't we pity the poor civilians sitting beside the fire.

News of hundreds of mutinies on both sides was suppressed to maintain the fiction of heroism of the war effort. Littlewood's play has a scene with an officer telling his troops to charge to attack enemy trenches. The soldiers refuse to move. The officer asks, 'Do you want to be shot for mutiny?' No, they don't. And so, reluctantly, they charge forward, bleating like sheep to the slaughter. That is what bravery in WW1 amounted to.

The rah-rah crowd extolling Indian soldiers in that war does not find it ironic that those soldiers fought not for India, a nation that did not yet exist, but the British colonial power. Through history until very recently, soldiery was a profession, not a patriotic calling. Soldiers fought for whoever paid them. It was called being loyal to their salt. They were not loyal



Nothing to die for: In the trench, Gallipoli, 1915

al to any country because countries did not yet exist, only kingdoms and empires did.

I certainly don't condemn the Indians who fought for the British in WW1. They were doing what they had done for centuries. But I cannot get teary-eyed over the supposed bravery of professional mercenaries. Bravery is not a distinguishing characteristic of WW1. Courage has existed in every army since antiquity. Soldiers at Kurukshetra, Kalinga, Panipat, Plassey, Waterloo and Stalingrad all displayed courage under fire. So did Roman legionaries, Mongol horsemen and Zulu warriors. There is no reason to praise an Indian sepoy at Ypres any more than a Chola infantryman, a Maratha cavalryman or a German conscript.

British, French, German, Austrian and Russian soldiers also enlisted for pay, adventure, tradition or duty, and marched obediently into slaughter. Their willingness to obey orders did not prove exceptional heroism. It merely proved that politicians and

generals can convert people into cannon fodder and then, tearfully, hail their bravery. Societies commemorate military bravery because it provides meaning to otherwise senseless death. Calling soldiers 'heroes' helps families bear loss and helps governments justify wars. It is psychologically and political-

ly useful. But it can also obscure the larger truth: that the greatest achievement would have been to avoid the war altogether.

In that sense, 'bravery' can become a moral sleight of hand. It shifts attention from those who decided upon war to those who suffered its consequences. Politicians make catastrophic decisions; soldiers acquire medals. The danger of glorifying bravery and courage is that it sanitises war. If every battlefield becomes a stage for heroism, then every war acquires a halo, however futile its objectives.

One can acknowledge that soldiers endured fear, pain and death without calling them heroes or transforming them into icons. Courage is a human quality, and not a uniquely military one. Firefighters entering burning buildings, miners trapped underground, doctors confronting epidemics, and ordinary civilians protecting their families often display equal courage. We do not build national mythologies around them because their courage does not serve a political narrative.

Perhaps the real issue is not how brave Indian soldiers in WW1 were, but whether bravery is the right lens at all. A nation secure in its history need not romanticise death in battle. It can honour the humanity of those who fought while refusing to convert them into symbols of martial glory. The most fitting memorial to the Indian dead of WW1 is not the inscription of their names on India Gate or setting their names in archives. It may be to recognise the universality of their bravery. And universality of the tragedy that consumes it in war.



A thought for today

Maybe there is a beast...
maybe it's only us

WILLIAM GOLDING, *Lord of the Flies*

Gangs Of Men

A Nashik family's nightmare experience speaks to a danger lurking across India's public spaces

A family picnic represents a refresh button: To enjoy fresh air, sunlight, green grass, and good food, in the good company of one's loved ones. But the whole thing's also a risk. Because safety in our public spaces has become so dodgy. As a Nashik family found out firsthand this weekend. They were visiting Bhavli Dam, where the monsoon should only have improved the picnicking. Instead, it all turned into a nightmare. A group of men, police say, first whistled at the women in the family. Afterwards, another group attacked their car and chased it for nearly 15 km. The problem India has is that this wasn't an all that unusual experience.

Women, of course, are always mentally mapping public spaces for ambient risk. Still, they can never know when a group of men at a park or market, religious or secular festival, will escalate its



catcalling into something worse. That's what keeps women out of the workforce and tourists out of the country. They're told, always move in company, and then even that doesn't protect them. Remember what happened near Karnataka's Sanapur Lake last March? This is also a stunning picnic spot, and the five people for whom it turned into a nightmare,

must have felt safe in their numbers. A group of men came along and shattered that notion, with gang-rape and murder.

India's problem is part of a wider global rise of hostile masculinity. This is a performance primarily for status in the peer group. It isn't just a law and order mess. Society is failing in some bigger way. What's breaking outside the home is deeply connected to what's happening inside. Lazy punditry explains group male aggressions by saying life's no longer working out as it used to be for their fathers. But the sane answer to change cannot be violence. Men need to be developing a broader repertoire of their roles and functions. For example, NSO's last time use survey tells us that 82% of females above 6 years participate in "unpaid domestic services for household members", compared to 27% of males. There's plenty of work to be done at home, instead of ganging up with the boys, destroying the peace of neighbourhoods, beaches and hill stations alike – and frequently, committing terrible crimes.

A healthy society means public spaces filled with families, children, lovers...not fear. The lumpenisation of male leisure has endangered all this. It must be repelled in mission mode. And because the aggression's being performed mostly for other men, they must call it out as the garbage that it is.

Dal Is A Bright Idea

A weak monsoon should nudge farmers to grow more pulses, oilseeds and millets, not thirsty sugarcane

Weknew in April this was going to be a weak monsoon. With half of July gone, around 400 of India's districts have a rain deficit. That's a challenge for Indian agriculture, which is still highly rain-dependent. Govt data shows about 45% of our net sown area is rain-fed. So, this was an opportunity for govt to nudge farmers towards hardy, nutritionally superior and environment-friendly crops, like millets, oilseeds, and pulses. Instead, as **TOI** reported on Tuesday, total acreage under these three crop categories has fallen sharply – pulses 23%, coarse cereals 22%, and oilseeds 21%.

This is clearly a costly problem. Pulses are a key source of protein in Indian diets. They also boost soil fertility. But in a good year, India imports about a fifth of its requirement. This time, it will need to import much more. Likewise, about 55% of India's edible oil requirement is normally met through imports. With sown area down, expect a bigger import bill. Millets aren't a major import, but when production falls, prices will rise, and the campaign to make them popular will suffer.

Given the monsoon situation, perhaps some of this decline is unavoidable. But what's shocking is that, despite the rain deficit, sown area under sugarcane – the most water-hungry crop – has *increased*. Why are farmers running their tubewells overtime, depleting ground water, for this cash crop? The answer is cash. Since petrol is now mandatorily sold with 20% blended ethanol, and sugarcane is feedstock for it, its cultivation has become remunerative. So, instead of being guided by govt's well-intentioned "Missions" on pulses, oilseeds and coarse cereals, farmers are simply following the money, even if it involves environmental and social costs. Govt should take notice, and tweak its support-price signals.

Home is where?

The heart is not always its GPS marker

Bachi Karkaria

The news refuses to go away even when you think you've got away. The first visual at London's Museum of the Home' was of 'Bunoo', an ayah brought to England from Calcutta in 1878 'to look after the Stevenson family's children during the long voyage', and then sent packing. 'Deported' was nowhere in the text, but throughout my afternoon there, similar headlines from back home kept echoing inside my head.

Built in 1924 over a cluster of 14 early 18th-century almshouses, the museum began capturing how each immigrant wave crashing on Brit shores turned four alien walls into a familiar home. It was expansively and expensively redeveloped in 2021 to engage with issues of 'belonging, inequality, and ecological sustainability'. The mission was to 'reveal and rethink the ways we live, in order to live better together'. High minded. But today's looming reality is 'Home Soured Home'. Everywhere.

In my native West Bengal, the 3D of 'Detect Delete Deport' has overtaken the 2D of 'Didi'. Newly swept-in CM crowed that 5,000 'illegal Bangladeshis' had been swept out within days of the BJP coup. Just months earlier, SIR had made 2.7mn long-time locals electorally homeless. Even in my adoptive city – far, far from that pesky border – the just-elected saffron mayor pronounced that Mumbai's most pressing problem was *not* crumbling civic services, but, 'illegal Bangladeshis'.

That was Feb. Last week, even as I walked through London's Museum of the Home, back in Mumbai, the physical contours of home were being obliterated by flood and landslide. Whole buildings, not just ramshackle shanties, gone in a scream, courtesy mindless road-concretising, preening infrastructure, and greedy 'development'. In Mumbai (or Wayanad), home *was* where the heartless builder-politician's.

Chew on this: 'Home'/'hole', the interchange of one little letter encompasses a huge, multi-layered loss.

As for smug you and me who fear neither monsoon flood nor season-neutral bulldozer, or even 'Keep Out' rules of co-op housing societies, we can no longer flash our arrogant passports. Now that's no guarantee of 'home' either.

Alec Smart said: "Needed soon, a (human) Agony Aunt for AI relationships."

IT AIN'T ENOUGH FOR CHINA

One new tech can't rescue Chinese economy buffeted by powerful negative forces



Ruchir Sharma

For all the worry about how America has become one big bet on AI, a similar but perhaps more alarming story is unfolding more quietly in the other economic superpower: China's vaunted AI prowess is concealing deep rot elsewhere in its economy.

Though many forecasters keep expecting China to surpass US as world's leading economy, its rise peaked in 2021. Since then, China's share of global GDP has fallen in nominal terms from 18% to 16.5%, while the US share has risen to 26%. China's growth rate has dropped below the rest of the world, including US. In real terms, independent estimates now put China's growth closer to zero than to the official target of 4.5-5%.

Even by official data, AI is just not providing a big enough lift to overcome other forces weighing on China, including its shrinking workforce, rising indebtedness, a bust property market, revival of a meddlesome regulatory state, and the resulting exodus of capital and people.

China's working-age population is on pace to shrink by 75mn every decade this century. Historically, fewer workers have always meant slower growth. And for China, given the scale of its demographic bust, AI is unlikely to replace human workers fast enough to ease the economic blow.

Of course, without the AI boost, China would be much worse off. After adding little in the 2010s, net exports now account for about a third of China's growth, driven mainly by AI-related goods. But this is a large external contribution to an otherwise weak domestic economy. Chinese hyperscalers are on track to invest just \$100bn in AI projects this year, compared with \$750bn by US rivals, yielding far less of a pop to growth. And while every country now hopes for an AI-driven productivity miracle,

the expected boost in China is about a third of a percentage point by 2030, hardly enough to halt its decline.

The structural challenges are too daunting. In the last five years, the augmented govt deficit (which includes off-budget spending) has reached nearly 15% of GDP – higher than any other major country – pushing augmented debt to 135% of GDP. Unlike US and most other countries, China is seeing debts mount rapidly in the private sector as well. Total debt amounts to nearly 350% of GDP, that is higher than US. In a country with much lower per capita incomes, this burden is more difficult to manage.

China's economic model now rests more on debt than on advanced technology. Beijing responded to the global financial crisis of 2008 by pumping credit into that oldest of old economy sectors: real estate. An overstimulated property market became the main contributor to growth last decade and the main source of family wealth and consumer confidence.

Then the bubble popped. Yes, also in 2021. As property wealth shrivels, so does consumer confidence, and retail sales are falling.

Meanwhile, Beijing has moved on from property to pump credit into new manufacturing industries, effectively replacing one debt bubble with another. It is pushing the bad habit of extending new loans, and pretending they don't exist, to new extremes. Even many of China's most profitable high tech firms are in "strategic industries" that benefit from export subsidies and other forms of state support.

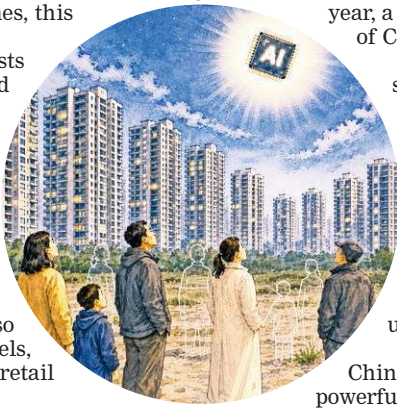
The stock market reflects this distorted economy and has gone nowhere for years. Earnings are strong

for firms that supply the AI stack, weak for just about every other sector, including consumer-facing companies.

In late 2020, Beijing had launched a stunning regulatory crackdown on its big tech firms. Now, after retreating for a couple of years, an index tracking regulatory pressure in China is surging again. Many foreign multinationals have given up on making money in China and are scaling back operations. Net foreign direct investment is negative. Last year, a record \$425bn in capital flowed out of Chinese financial markets.

People are leaving too. The immigrant share of population is stuck at just 0.1%, a fraction of the share in India (which is just as populous) or in Japan, which is even more famously insular. The number of Western expats living in China has fallen markedly. It is hard to think of any major power in history that had so little allure for foreigners and foreign money, unless it was in its twilight.

The sun is far from setting on China. But the growing hype around its powerful and cost-effective AI models does not change the fact that 2021 was peak China. Given its demographic challenges and heavy debts, Beijing can't do much more to prop up domestic growth. It has shifted instead to dumping its manufactured exports abroad, but the resulting backlash is spreading rapidly from Asia, including India, to the Americas, which limits this strategy going forward. And AI isn't a fix for everything. Its impressive powers may be the answer to many problems, but they can't reverse the forces driving China's decline.



Message From Ayodhya: Wake-Up Call, Not Poll Bugle

Two analysts look at the fallout, electorally, and from a religious philanthropy perspective, to measure the implications of the Ram temple theft



Badri Narayan

We kill greed, yet it rises again. All Asian cultures criticise and condemn greed, reflected in folk cultures and oral traditions. Yet, it reappears, repeatedly. Incidents over the last few months, such as NEET-paper leak or the Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir theft, all reveal the root cause – greed.

The Ram temple embezzlement severely jolted people's faith, raising urgent ethical and moral questions. It is more a socio-ethical and transparency issue, but is evolving as a political issue by the day, with opposition parties amplifying the matter particularly in UP, headed for assembly elections in months.

Opposition, without a political narrative for years, finds in the Ram Mandir theft a key issue to battle BJP and its ideological-political ecosystem. It is interesting that faith, at the core of Hindutva movement and the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign, which provided BJP its political power for decades, is now opposition's instrument for counter-polarisation against BJP.

Opposition is projecting this issue as 'messing with the faith' of common people, tying in corruption with Ram Mandir management team's moral decay, to generalise against the Hindutva ecosystem. Now, BJP's social engineering and Modi's charisma and trust value have contributed to the party's multiple electoral performance for years. And it is true Hindutva sentiment is hurt, expressed by Hindutva public on social media.

Moral positioning of Hindutva campaign is in crisis. However, some BJP netas like UP deputy CM KP Maurya have attempted to describe Champat Rai as dedicated to the Hindutva cause, an ascetic and victim of miscreants. So, BJP govts at the Centre and in UP, free from any big allegation of corruption all these years, are feeling uneasy in this instance. BJP forged connect with public through various social, religious, and cultural issues. The party would want to keep intact its socio-cultural image.

Nripendra Misra, Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust chair, and close to Modi, said PM is worried about devotees' money and the lack of transparent, accountable, and financial

control. This statement is crucial in communicating to Hindu public that Modi is concerned. Quick action by Yogi in setting up an SIT to investigate, also showed the state's seriousness. SIT's quick submission, speedy FIR and arrests of those alleged to be behind the crime, may help the party recover some loss of face.

Yogi, BJP's leading face in UP, understands the serious political implications – disillusionment can spread among a section of Hindu public. However, it is difficult to convert such disillusionment into a vote against BJP, so the electoral impact can likely be contained. First, opposition parties at the grassroots are not effective in converting social psyche into votes. Second, Yogi's gone all out to subvert the political discourse, trying to evolve a counter narrative by highlighting opposition's stance on Ram Janmabhoomi temple.

He challenges Samajwadi Party and Akhilesh to come forward and back the Ayodhya movement. In every rally, he submits details and data of BJP govt's contribution to the 'liberation' and renovation of many temples across the state, and reiterates BJP's seriousness about protecting the Hindu cause.

Recently, Dattatreya Hosabale, RSS general secretary, also showed sangh's commitment by demanding strong action against the culprits. This will inject confidence in the Hindutva socio-cultural and political ecosystem.

Upshot is, there's a fight between opposition and BJP to prove genuineness, and concern for Hindu faith. Both are trying to claim their entitlement to working for the Hindu cause. But one thing is clear: While the embezzlement may emerge as a dominant discourse ahead of poll campaigns, and Hindutva politics will be discussed threadbare in UP's electoral rallies, it is difficult to claim that it can lead to BJP losing its Hindutva power. Hindu public's faith in their religious deities is not fragile. It never weakens from such incidents.

The writer is VC, TISS



Pushpa Sundar

The large-scale embezzlement of donations at Ram Janmabhoomi temple at Ayodhya, by unscrupulous temple officials and others, has brought to the forefront the question of temple management and governance.

Unlike in the West, there is a resurgence of religious feeling in India today. As times turn uncertain and pressures of life cause unbearable stress, more people are turning to religion for solace. Religious organisations of all faiths, and particularly of Hindu dharma, are seeing increasing numbers of devotees contributing increasing amounts of money and valuables to their faith's organisations.

Number of devotees runs into lakhs. Tirupati, for instance, receives over 1L devotees daily, especially on festival days.



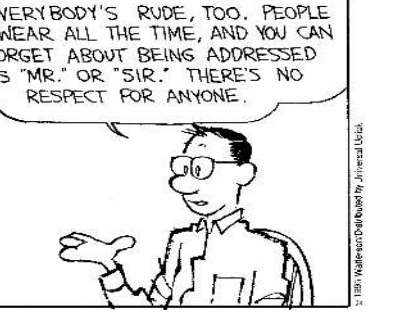
Ram Janmabhoomi temple already receives 70k-80k visitors daily. Studies by the erstwhile Sampradaan Indian Centre for Philanthropy, and more recently, by Centre for Philanthropy

of Ashoka University, show that amounts donated to religious organisations are far bigger than what is contributed to secular organisations.

Tirupati's annual income is estimated around ₹5,456cr, of which donations into the hundi alone account for ₹1,880cr. Annual income of Ram Janmabhoomi temple is pegged at Rs 327cr, of which direct donations account for ₹153cr. Again, this figure is bound to grow as the temple gains in fame. Given this scale of operations, which resemble the administration of a small district, there is clearly need for professional governance structure and standard operating procedures for management and accounting of donations received, and public audit of the same.

As Ram Janmabhoomi temple construction committee chair Nripendra Misra rightly pointed out, misuse of donations damages public faith in the

Calvin & Hobbes



Rath Yatra Brings Krishn Back To Vrindavan

Chanchalapatih Dasa

Why did Krishn leave the residents of Vrindavan? Why did he not return, even though they longed for him? Chaitanya Mahaprabhu explains this through a profound spiritual understanding. For him, the devotion of residents of Vrindavan represents the highest expression of love for Krishn.

Generally, people think of God as the all-powerful Supreme Lord, controller of the universe, maintainer of all living beings, full of majesty and opulence. Almost all religious traditions, including the Vedic tradition, describe God in terms of aishvarya, His unlimited power and greatness.

However, awareness of God's greatness also creates a certain distance between the devotee and Lord. When devotees worship

the Divine with constant awareness of His majesty, there is reverence. But in Vrindavan, the devotees do not think, 'Krishn is the Supreme Personality of Godhead.'

Mother Yashoda does not think: 'This is God Almighty.' Every morning she bathes Krishn, dresses him, adorns him with ornaments, feeds him, thinking, 'He is my dear son'. If she were conscious that he is the Supreme Lord, that spontaneous motherly affection would disappear.

For this reason, the love of residents of Vrindavan is unique. Krishn demonstrated that theirs is the highest expression of devotion; they possess the deepest love for him. Within this highest love are two experiences: the joy of meeting Krishn and the pain of separation from him.

Meeting the Lord brings immense happiness, but separation intensifies that love even further. This is known as *viraha*, or divine separation.

According to the Lord's divine plan, residents of Vrindavan manifested this highest mood of separation so that the world could understand the meaning of viraha-bhakti. In such separation, remembrance of Krishn becomes constant and uninterrupted. Krishn immediately becomes present within the heart of such a devotee.

This is a unique *ras*. Being with Krishn, being separated from Krishn, and longing for him are spiritual experiences that cannot be understood merely through intellectual discussion. One must become spiritually qualified to experience them.

It is like describing the taste of a sweet. One may explain how delicious it is, but unless a person tastes it, the experience cannot be understood. In the same way, these are truths that must be experienced. This understanding also reveals the deeper symbolism of Rath Yatra.

During Rath Yatra, Jagannath travels from His main temple to the Gundicha Temple. The main temple represents Dwaraka, while the Gundicha Temple represents Vrindavan. Thus, the deeper meaning of Rath Yatra is Krishn's return from Dwaraka to Vrindavan.

This was the very mood in which Chaitanya Mahaprabhu participated in the festival. He pulled Jagannath's chariot, absorbed in the mood of Radharani, praying, 'Please come back to Vrindavan.'

The writer is vice-chairman and co-mentor, Hare Krishna Movement



erratica



Editor's
TAKE

India and Britain’s trade deal finally gets real

The India–UK Trade Agreement came into force on July 15, and the real test of whether it lives up to its billing as a ‘gold standard’ pact now begins

Trade deals are easy to sign and hard to deliver. India and Britain took three years and more than fourteen negotiating rounds to reach an agreement in 2025; they now have to prove that the paperwork translates into shipments, jobs and investment. From Wednesday, roughly 99 per cent of India’s tariff lines will enter the UK duty-free, while India begins dismantling tariffs on about 90 per cent of British goods. A parallel Double Contribution Convention will spare workers on short assignments from paying social security contributions twice – a small but real win for India’s mobile professionals. The gains look genuine and impressive, but they have to be implemented in the right earnest.

Labour-intensive Indian sectors – textiles, leather, footwear, marine products, gems and jewellery – get immediate duty-free entry into a market where they previously paid tariffs of 4-16 per cent. That is meaningful for employment-heavy industries in states such as Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Punjab. Britain, in turn, gets a foothold for Scotch whisky, whose Indian duty falls from 150 per cent to 75 per cent immediately and to 40 per cent within a decade, along with phased openings for automobiles, machinery and financial services.

London’s own estimates put the long-run boost to UK GDP at roughly £4.8 billion – modest in percentage terms, but the Government calls it Britain’s most significant bilateral deal since Brexit. The nuances matter as much as the numbers. India’s own tariff cuts are staggered over years, even as Indian exporters gain near-immediate access to the UK – a sequencing that favours Indian industry’s adjustment window. Automobiles are capped by tight quotas, meaning the celebrated UK carmakers’ win is really a boutique privilege for a handful of luxury brands rather than a mass-market opening. Sensitive items on both sides - dairy, apples, sugar, gold and smartphones – remain largely untouched, a reminder that “comprehensive” still leaves room for domestic politics.

The pitfalls deserve equal billing. Civil society groups under the Forum for Trade Justice have warned that CETA leans on voluntary rather than compulsory licensing for medicines, a shift that could complicate India’s public health flexibilities under WTO rules. Digital trade provisions that limit India’s ability to demand source code access for imported software have drawn similar unease over regulatory and security sovereignty. On the UK side, farm groups worry that Indian antimicrobial-use standards could undercut British livestock producers who have spent years reducing antibiotic use.

And non-tariff friction – Britain’s tightening steel regime, its carbon border tax, and rules of origin that Indian MSMEs are still learning to navigate – could blunt gains that look impressive on paper. CETA’s success, in other words, will be decided less by the signing euphoria than by the unglamorous machinery of implementation: customs registration, origin certification, and whether both governments actually help exporters use the access they have won. July 15 is a beginning, not a verdict.

Uttar Pradesh: Can the BJP hold its bastion?

With Uttar Pradesh once again emerging as the country’s principal political battleground, the contest is shaping up as a test not only of competing campaign strategies but also of contrasting visions for India’s future



KALYANI SHANKAR

With the UP elections drawing closer, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is rolling out a comprehensive, strategic plan aimed not only at retaining power in the state but also at solidifying its influence across India.

The strategy emphasises uniting the NDA and addressing local issues that resonate with voters. Still, it would benefit from detailing how the BJP plans to tailor its messages to specific caste and regional concerns to demonstrate a nuanced understanding of voter diversity.

The BJP has identified 100 constituencies as particularly important for electoral success, but including the criteria or process used to select them would clarify how these priorities were determined and their significance.

The party plans to appoint local organisers known as booth palaks, who will energise grassroots engagement, making voters feel that their concerns are valued and understood, and booth pravasis, who will facilitate outreach and mobilisation efforts.

These local representatives will play a crucial role in liaising with residents, understanding their concerns, and ensuring that the party’s messages resonate effectively within their communities.

The party plans to launch extensive social media campaigns and targeted advertisements to reach diverse demographics, with tailored digital strategies designed to inspire confidence in the campaign’s effectiveness across regions and age groups.

The BJP is promoting a message of inclusive development. The party is committed to supporting various demographic groups, particularly farmers and women. The schemes launched would benefit farmers and women’s self-help groups, uplifting these communities.

Nationalism remains a cornerstone of the BJP’s identity and messaging.

The party seeks to project itself as a guardian of national interests, particularly regarding national security. By emphasising robust defence policies and a strong stance on terrorism and internal security, the BJP aims to resonate with voters who favour a strong, secure government. This approach seeks to galvanise support by appealing to citizens’ desire for protective leadership that adequately addresses threats.

The economy will also be a focal point of the BJP’s campaign. The party intends to showcase its efforts to revive the economy, with particular emphasis on job creation initiatives.



THE COALITION IS FOCUSED ON MAKING AYODHYA CENTRAL TO ITS ASSEMBLY ELECTION CAMPAIGN, SEEKING TO USE ALLEGED DONATION IRREGULARITIES TO CHALLENGE THE BJP’S CLAIM OF BEING THE SOLE DEFENDER OF HINDU INTERESTS

The writer is a popular columnist

Programmes such as the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, which aims to incentivise domestic manufacturing and attract investment, will be highlighted.

The messaging will aim to reassure voters, especially young people, that the BJP can stimulate economic growth and create employment opportunities.

In addition, the BJP is preparing to robustly counter any opposition criticism of its governance. The strategy includes demonstrating that the Opposition is fragmented and lacks a coherent governance plan. By drawing sharp contrasts between its own successes and the failures of opposing parties, the BJP seeks to bolster its image as an effective and reliable party.

While the BJP stands as a formidable national presence, it also recognises the importance of building local alliances. The party is likely to seek partnerships with regional and smaller political parties to enhance its electoral prospects, fostering hope that such cooperation will strengthen governance and community representation.

The BJP’s strategy for the upcoming elections emphasises clear communication, community engagement, national security and economic recovery.

The party aims to address voters’ concerns and has developed an “election-ready” framework that strengthens grassroots outreach and booth-level committees while incorporating more young people and women into its leadership.

Poll-bound states, including Uttar Pradesh, have been instructed to prepare for potential early elections.

The Opposition in Uttar Pradesh is gearing up for the upcoming elections with a concerted effort. Around 23 parties have united under the INDIA coalition, aiming to present a formidable challenge to the ruling Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP).

The Opposition is preparing for the polls with a clear five-point strategy. This strategy focuses on important issues that matter to voters, such as unemployment, economic inequality and social justice. By emphasising these topics, the Opposition hopes to show that it cares about the needs of ordinary citizens and to set itself apart from the ruling party.

The Opposition emphasises grassroots engagement and is maximising its efforts. Local leaders and representatives from various parties are mobilising to connect with voters directly, understand their concerns, and present a united front against the BJP. This engagement strategy includes town hall meetings, rallies and community events to reinforce the coalition’s message and build trust among constituents.

The coalition is working to counter the BJP’s narratives on governance and development by presenting a clear plan that highlights the ruling party’s shortcomings and persuades voters that it provides a viable alternative.

The coalition is focused on making Ayodhya central to its Assembly election campaign, seeking to use alleged donation irregularities to challenge the BJP’s claim of being the sole defender of Hindu interests.

Social media and digital platforms are also integral to the Opposition’s campaign efforts.

Overall, the Opposition’s preparations indicate a focused attempt to consolidate its efforts, enhance community engagement, and present clear alternatives to the BJP’s policies.

The Opposition has a well-defined strategy and collaboration among various political entities. The INDIA coalition hopes to repeat its 2024 success, but it has cracks.

Since Uttar Pradesh is politically important, it remains to be seen how both sides perform.

PIC TALK



People offer prayers to Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Goddess Subhadra at a temple on the eve of Rath Yatra, in Ahmedabad. PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer @TheDailyPioneer
instagram.com/dailypioneer linkedin.com/in/The Pioneer

TEACHERS HOLD THE KEY TO FUTURE-READY EDUCATION REFORM

Apropos the opinion piece, “Are Schools Preparing Children for the Future?” by Sakshi Sethi, published on July 15, 2026, the article rightly stresses that education must go beyond marks and memorisation and equip children with critical thinking, financial literacy, public speaking and AI awareness.

However, these reforms require teachers who themselves possess these competencies. Unfortunately, recruitment in most government schools and colleges continues to be largely subject-centric. A teacher may be proficient in a subject but lack the skills to nurture creativity, entrepreneurship, public speaking or problem-solving. Therefore, expecting such skills to flourish in children without preparing their teachers first is

unrealistic.

There is a growing gap in the education system between formal schooling and the skills future generations require, as many parents, apart from paying for schooling, also spend money on private tuition, coding classes and personality development courses.

While the NEP 2020 emphasises experiential and competency-based learning, its implementation also requires continuous teacher training, periodic upskilling, and recruitment policies that value creativity, innovation and practical exposure alongside academic qualifications.

Infrastructure alone cannot transform education. Hence, the quality of the teacher remains the most decisive factor.

SOURAV ASH I KOLKATA

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

Let us take shelter of God, not of human beings



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2ND OPINION

Lord Krishna has very emphatically instructed us to treat all souls equally. Aren’t we all parts of God? (The Bhagavad Gita 15.7) Let us see what these instructions are. In the verse #5.7, Lord Krishna states, “A karma Yogi considers souls of other persons similar to his. “Wise persons have equal vision in those who are blessed with knowledge and humility, in a Brahmin and even in an outcast.” (5.18) “One who is equally disposed towards all beings attains the supreme devotion towards Me.” (18.54) The Lord teaches us that external differences like status, etc. are just temporary garments. True wisdom lies in seeing the divine equality — the same eternal essence within everyone, with no exceptions.

Why then we don’t have equal vision towards all souls? Why do we raise some of them to a higher level than us



to the point of taking their shelter, which position is strictly reserved for God? Lord Krishna is very emphatic about taking His shelter, not of anyone else. (18.66) Yes, we can take guidance from a learned person (4.34), help from a highly placed person, etc., but to take shelter of another person is not at all wise.

Let us see what do we lose by taking shelter of anyone other than God. “Worshippers of gods go up to gods, that is they can obtain what gods can give. Worshippers of God go up to Him, that is they can get God’s mercy.” (9.25) In another verse, Lord Krishna states, “Those People, bereft of knowledge, caused by passionate desires, take

shelter of other gods.” (7.20) Just imagine taking shelter of human beings, who are placed lower than gods. This cannot be classed anything like intelligence.

Before I take up benefits of remaining in shelter of God, we must understand more as to why God is so strict about us not taking shelter of another human being. Such a relationship is extremely limited; it can be temporary only. Another is helplessness of all souls without any exceptions, all being small, intrinsically. All depend on God for whatever they need.

Now I come to some benefits of staying in shelter of God. The first one has to be guidance, because direction is all-important, and God is Omniscient. He knows exactly what will suit an individual. And God is there to help where we fall short, which is often, due to us being small, helpless and ignorant too. God does not stop there, if we remain in His shelter; He provides what we need and protects what we have. (9.22) We all have many desires; God fulfils them, the ones according to dharma (highest principles). Once God is in the loop, success is assured in whatever we take up. Forget fears, depression, etc; peace will be ours.

In order to gain all these benefits, we must stop looking for shelter where it is not, neither in human beings nor in material objects like wealth, fame, etc. Just remain in shelter of God now and forever.

The writer is a spiritual teacher

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Transparent governance wins trust

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has, over the years, shown a consistent inclination towards data-backed governance, and his recent initiative to promote data-driven governance for real-time development fits that pattern. Linking AI-based governance tools to grievance redressal is also a sensible step, as technology works best when it is tied to citizen-facing outcomes rather than being used only for internal reporting. The push for zero pendency in the Public Grievance Redressal System, if implemented effectively, could significantly reduce delays faced by ordinary citizens in matters such as land records and other public services.

However, the success of this initiative will depend entirely on how transparently the data is shared. If the Monthly Economic Report remains confined to internal government circles, its purpose will be undermined. It would be beneficial if a simplified public version, with key indicators explained in plain language, were released alongside the official report.

This would enable citizens, researchers and independent economists to assess the State’s progress objectively rather than relying solely on official claims, thereby strengthening transparency, accountability and public trust in governance.

A MYILSAMI I COIMBATURE

Power must not be wasted

Apropos the report on India’s clean energy transition, the country has reached an unexpected milestone. The challenge now is not merely to generate renewable power but to use it efficiently. With solar power reportedly curtailed by around 750 GWh in May 2026, it is evident that inadequate storage capacity and limited grid flexibility are struggling to keep pace with the rapid expansion of renewable energy. Ideally, coal- and gas-fired power plants should reduce output when renewable generation is abundant, thereby conserving fuel and lowering emissions. However, many thermal plants cannot ramp production up and down quickly. Some also operate under contractual minimum-generation obligations, while grid stability still depends on their inertia and dispatchability. Battery Energy Storage Systems, pumped-hydro projects and time-of-day electricity pricing are gathering momentum. Emerging technologies such as sodium-ion batteries, flow batteries and green hydrogen also promise to expand storage options and strengthen energy security.

Simply adding more solar panels is no longer enough. India’s clean energy transition will ultimately be judged not only by how much renewable power it generates, but also by how efficiently every unit is stored, managed and delivered to consumers.

R NARARYAN I NAVI MUMBAI

Peace ensures maritime safety

The tragic death of an Indian sailor and the injuries sustained by ten others in an Iranian strike have once again highlighted the dangers faced by civilian seafarers operating in volatile regions. This incident is yet another reminder of the need for stronger protection of maritime personnel. The increasing frequency of attacks on commercial vessels also threatens the stability of global trade and supply chains. Therefore, ensuring the safety of merchant ships must remain a shared responsibility of the international community. Diplomatic efforts should focus on preventing conflicts from spilling over into vital maritime routes.

India must continue to engage with affected countries and international maritime organisations to safeguard its citizens working overseas. Shipping companies, too, must enhance security measures, strengthen emergency response systems, and provide comprehensive insurance and welfare support to seafarers and their families.

This tragedy is a reminder that peace at sea is inseparable from peace on land. Greater international cooperation, respect for humanitarian principles, and sustained diplomatic dialogue are essential to prevent such incidents and ensure that innocent seafarers can carry out their duties safely.

RUKHMA SHARMA I JALANDHAR

India can be a trusted textile manufacturer the world is looking for

India’s textile moment has arrived. The world is looking for a trusted manufacturing partner. The question is not whether India can lead, but whether it can execute with the speed and certainty this moment demands



Few countries are better positioned than India to answer this call. Yet India accounts for only about USD 37 billion in textile and apparel exports today-far below its potential. Opportunities of this scale do not emerge often. When they do, countries either build industries around them — or spend decades wondering what might have been.

India possesses a complete textile value chain, deep manufacturing capabilities, a large domestic market and a young workforce. Yet positioning alone does not win markets. Investment does. Execution does. Policy certainty does.

The next decade will not be won by the country that produces the cheapest T-shirt. It will be won by the country that global buyers trust the most.

If India is serious about achieving USD 100 billion in textile and apparel exports by 2030-31 and building a USD 350 billion textile economy, it must prepare for one of the largest investment cycles in the sector's history.

India's textile and apparel market today stands at approximately USD 194 billion, comprising exports of around USD 37 billion and a domestic market of nearly USD 157 billion. Reaching the 2030-31 vision requires the creation of almost USD 156 billion of additional market opportunity within the next five years. This is not incremental growth. It is structural transformation.

Industry assessments suggest that nearly USD 60 billion of fresh investment may be required across the value chain-from fibre and spinning to weaving, processing, garmenting and technical textiles. Beyond exports, this investment can create large-scale employment, strengthen rural economies, deepen manufacturing capabilities and reinforce India's position in global value chains. As one of India's largest employment-generating sectors, textiles can convert manufacturing growth into broad-based economic opportunity.

For decades, textile competitiveness was measured largely through labour costs and production efficiency. Today, the equation has changed. Global buyers increasingly evaluate sourcing destinations through a broader lens: reliability, compliance, sustainability, traceability, resilience and execution capability. The experience of leading exporting nations demonstrates that long-term success is built not only on cost competitiveness, but on buyer confidence. Trust has become a strategic asset.

India's opportunity, therefore, is not simply to become a larger textile producer. It is to become the world's most trusted textile manufacturing partner.

What makes this moment exceptional is not merely the global supply chain shift. It is the convergence of three conditions that rarely align simultaneously.

First, political intent is clear. Initiatives such as PM MITRA, Production Linked Incentive schemes and support for technical textiles demonstrate recognition of textiles as a strategic manufacturing sector.

Second, the administrative machinery is increasingly focused on enabling investment and competitiveness through compliance rationalisation, infrastructure development and ease-of-doing-business reforms.

Third, industry is ready to invest. Across the value chain, companies are evaluating capacity expansion, technology upgradation and sustainability initiatives.

When political leadership, effective governance and industry commitment move in the same direction, nations create industries that endure for generations.

Recent trade agreements and ongoing negotiations are helping address long-standing market-access disadvantages faced by Indian exporters. The India-UK

Global supply chains are being reconfigured at a pace not seen in decades. The world is no longer merely open to alternatives-it is actively searching for them. For the first time in modern textile history, major consumer markets are simultaneously seeking diversification, resilience and trusted manufacturing partners.



CHINA PLUS ONE IS NO LONGER A THEORY; IT IS INCREASINGLY REFLECTED IN SOURCING DECISIONS ACROSS GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS. BUYERS ARE ACTIVELY SEEKING RESILIENCE, DIVERSIFICATION AND TRUSTED PARTNERS. THE FUTURE WILL BELONG NOT MERELY TO THE LOWEST-COST PRODUCER, BUT TO THE MOST TRUSTED MANUFACTURING ECOSYSTEM

The writer is Chairman, ASSOCHAM National Council on Textiles and Technical Textiles

FTA, progress in negotiations with the European Union and agreements with key trading partners are steadily improving India's competitive position in global markets. However, market access alone is not enough. Preferential tariffs without competitive supply remain an unrealised opportunity. Trade agreements create openings. Competitiveness converts them into exports.

Raw material competitiveness remains critical. Manufacturers making decade-long investment decisions need confidence that internationally competitive fibre and raw materials will remain available throughout the life of those investments. Similarly, export remission frameworks such as RoSCTL and RoDTEP require continuity, predictability and appropriate upward revision to keep pace with rising domestic costs and unrebrated taxes. These mechanisms are not incentives; they are essential competitiveness tools that neutralise embedded taxes and levies and help maintain a level playing field for Indian exporters. Policy certainty is often the difference between investment announced and investment implemented.

India must also accelerate the development of a textile machinery manufacturing ecosystem. The country continues to import significant volumes of advanced machinery every year. India should not aspire only to manufacture textiles. It should aspire to manufacture the machinery that manufactures textiles. Targeted foreign direct investment, technology partnerships and phased localisation can build capabilities not only in textile production but in textile technology itself. Manufacturing competitiveness ultimately rests on technological competitiveness.

Technical textiles represent one of India's most promising growth frontiers. From medical textiles and geotextiles to filtration fabrics, defence applications and advanced industrial solutions, this segment combines strategic relevance with high-value manufacturing potential. It offers India an opportunity not merely to participate in global markets, but to build leadership positions in emerging applications where demand is expected to grow rapidly in the years ahead.

China Plus One is no longer a theory; it is increasingly reflected in sourcing decisions across global supply chains. Buyers are actively seeking resilience, diversification and trusted partners. The future will belong not merely to the lowest-cost producer, but to the most trusted manufacturing ecosystem.

India possesses the raw materials, entrepreneurial talent, manufacturing depth, domestic demand and demographic advantage required to emerge as a global textile powerhouse. The question is no longer whether India can achieve USD 100 billion in textile and apparel exports. The question is whether we are willing to make the investments, undertake the reforms and create the policy certainty required to get there.

India's textile moment has arrived. The world is looking for a trusted manufacturing partner. The question is not whether India can lead, but whether it can execute with the speed and certainty this moment demands.



VK BAHUGUNA

Baba Fakir Singh Khalsa, entered the complex and built a clay platform (Chabutara) inside the premises, placed a picture or symbol of Lord Ram and wrote "Ram Ram" in charcoal on the walls. They performed a Vedic havan and left. An FIR was later registered against them on November 30, 1858 by the mosque muezzin. This action by the Nihangs is a crucial document proving that Hindus had been worshipping here for a long time. Then again, in the night of December 22-23, 1949, a group led by Mahant Abhiram Das entered the locked Babri mosque and placed a nine-inch metal idol of Ram Lala beneath the central dome.

A large gathering of thousands thronged the site, and to prevent communal escalation the administration locked the outer gates but allowed a Hindu priest inside to perform limited daily puja and bhoj offerings to the idol. The then Prime Minister Nehru directed that the idol be removed, but the District Magistrate KK Nayar took a pragmatic decision to avoid communal tension by sealing the main building and allowing a lone priest to perform basic puja only; this continued until February 1986, when the locks were opened under a court order officially granting Hindus access to the inner section for worship. The rest is history until January 22, 2024, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the majestic temple constructed after the November 9, 2019 Supreme Court verdict.

Why write this article now, when the Ram Temple is in the news for the wrong reasons? The immediate cause is the public uproar regarding theft of donations and an alleged financial scam in which staff responsible for its safekeeping were siphoning off crores. Some quick action has been taken and things are on the right path, but baying for the blood of the people at the helm who trusted these thieves — due to lack of administrative acumen — and smearing the entire temple management is undesirable and suggests ulterior motives. Such things can happen in any religious institution.

For example, a massive Vatican financial scandal involving Cardinal Becciu began in 2019; he was stripped of his rights as a cardinal and, after trial, was convicted in December 2020. Similarly, the Caritas Luxembourg 61.2 million bank and donation fraud case began in 2014 and continued until 2026. In October 2024 former congregants filed a major financial fraud lawsuit against Gateway Church of Texas. These accusations were often directed at top management, whereas the Ram temple case appears to involve petty thieves and not the trustees. It is therefore highly undesirable to accuse senior management without evidence.

Likewise, in Islam the misuse and diversion of zakat — which is analogous to donations - has been a persistent issue. Investigations into the Bashir regime in Sudan revealed that funds intended for the poor were routinely diverted to entities linked to the regime. Similar inquiries have been reported against various charities in the Middle East. These incidents, including Ayodhya, underscore the global challenge of maintaining transparency and the need for continuous oversight over massive flows of donations and gifts, and they call for strict internal audit and modern accounting and management procedures.

It seems many people want to take advantage of this event politically, particularly those who opposed the Ram temple's construction and who pander to vote bank appeasement politics. In reality, portraying the issue as an attack on the Hindu religion — ostensibly at the behest of "woke" Western elites with double standards — misreads the situation. The global progressive movement vocally supports land-back movements, the return of sacred sites to Native Americans, and the decolonisation of African and Australian spaces. Yet when the same logic of decolonisation and the restoration of sacred indigenous geography was applied to Ayodhya — backed by an exhaustive, multi-decade legal process and conclusive archaeological evidence from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) - it was branded regressive by some of their Indian cohorts.

Thus, in global media, academic circles and certain domestic intellectual hubs, the event leading to the Ram temple's construction was frequently framed not as a moment of cultural healing but through the modern lens of hyper-nationalism and as an instance of majoritarianism. This globalised "woke" framework inherently struggles to accommodate non-Western civilisational icons. The Anglo American woke club views the world from an exclusive Western template. Christianity and whiteness are historically associated with institutional power and colonial expansion. But when it comes to India, any attempt to promote cultural renaissance is instantly mapped to Western imperialism, dismissively ignoring Hinduism's history as a victim of brutal, multi century colonial and imperial onslaughts, and viewing the assertiveness of Hinduism with suspicion.

Therefore, when Hindus pointed to archaeological and historical evidence of a temple being demolished to build a mosque, the narrative was systematically suppressed or downplayed by Marxist and progressive historians for decades. Lord Ram is not only a deity but an icon of righteousness and the soul of the foundations of Indian civilisation's core elements of governance. Unlike many ancient pagan or indigenous civilisations that were entirely erased by global colonial movements, India's indigenous civilisation survived. The reclamation of Ayodhya is a manifestation of that survival.

For global critical theorists, an indigenous majority asserting its historic rights and building a monument to its survival disrupts the standard post colonial narrative, which often prefers indigenous cultures to remain permanently oppressed. Thus the controversy surrounding the Ram Mandir is a clash between a globalised intellectual elite and an assertive India. The "woke" view sees the Ram Mandir as a fracture in secularism, whereas the vast majority of India views it as the healing of a historical wound. India is asserting its right to define its own modernity, its own secularism, and its own path towards justice.



The U-turn we all need: Rediscovering the life we forgot to live



For many, this question arrives late — after years of chasing promotions, possessions, recognition, and approval. We spend our youth building a future, but sometimes forget to ask whether that future will truly make us happy.

The modern world has created an unusual paradox. We have more comfort, technology, and opportunities than previous generations, yet many people experience increasing stress, loneliness, and dissatisfaction. We are connected to everyone, but often disconnected from ourselves.

Perhaps the problem is not that we are moving too slowly. Perhaps the problem is that we are moving without checking the direction.

A meaningful life is not created by constantly adding more achievements. It is created by understanding what truly deserves our time, energy, and attention.

The cost of always moving forward

From childhood, we are trained to move ahead —

score better, earn more, achieve bigger goals. Ambition is valuable, but ambition without awareness can become a never-ending race.

Many people reach milestones they once dreamed about and still feel something is missing. The reason is simple: success achieved without personal meaning can feel surprisingly empty.

Modern studies on human well-being often emphasise that happiness is not determined only by external achievements. Our health, relationships, sense of purpose, and ability to make authentic choices play a much deeper role in creating a satisfying life.

The real question is not only: "How much have I achieved?" It is also: "What has my achievement turned me into?"

Health: The first responsibility we neglect

One of life's greatest ironies is that people often sacrifice their health while trying to build a better future, only to spend that future trying to regain their health.

Sleep is reduced, stress becomes normal, and the body is treated as if it has unlimited capacity. But the human body keeps a record of everything we ignore.

Health is not merely the absence of illness. It is the ability to wake up with energy, think clearly, and experience life fully.

A balanced life does not always demand dramatic changes or complete transformation. Often, the most meaningful improvements come from



simple and consistent choices — respecting the body's need for proper sleep, eating with awareness, staying physically active, and creating moments of silence away from the constant noise of modern life.

These small habits may appear ordinary, but over time they shape our energy, emotions, and overall quality of life. A peaceful mind is not a luxury reserved for those who have achieved success; it is the foundation that allows success to have real meaning.

Relationships: The people behind our purpose

At the end of our journey, we rarely remember only our achievements. We remember conversations, laughter, support, and the people who stood beside us.

Research on human happiness has consistently shown that meaningful relationships are among

the strongest contributors to long-term well-being. Yet modern life often creates a strange situation — we have countless online connections but fewer moments of genuine connection.

A relationship cannot survive on occasional messages and digital reactions. It needs presence.

Sometimes the most valuable thing we can give another person is not advice or solutions, but our undivided attention. A successful life becomes meaningful only when there are people with whom it can be shared.

Work: Achievement with purpose

Work occupies a significant part of our lives, but its purpose should extend beyond simply earning a living. True fulfilment comes when our efforts create value — not only for ourselves but also for the world around us.

Instead of measuring success only through income, positions, or recognition, we must ask deeper questions: Are we learning? Are we growing? Are we creating something meaningful? A person who finds purpose in their work does not avoid challenges; rather, they accept difficulties because they understand the reason behind them.

The aim is not to escape responsibility, but to ensure that our responsibilities are connected to a larger purpose, allowing our work to become a source of growth, contribution, and personal satisfaction.

The courage to choose your own path

Perhaps the hardest part of life is not working hard

— it is being honest about what we are working toward.

Society often provides ready-made definitions of success. It tells us what careers to admire, what lifestyles to follow, and what achievements to chase.

But a life designed only around expectations can become a life lived by someone else's rules.

Choosing your own path requires courage because it may not always receive immediate approval. Saying "no" to certain expectations may feel uncomfortable, but sometimes it is necessary to protect your peace.

You cannot build a meaningful life by constantly trying to satisfy everyone else.

The real meaning of a U-turn

A U-turn is usually seen as a mistake on the road. But in life, it can be a sign of maturity.

Changing direction does not mean losing everything you have built. Sometimes it means using your experience to choose better.

The wisest people are not those who never change their path. They are those who recognise when their current path no longer matches their values. Life is not a race where the fastest person wins. It is a journey where direction matters more than speed. A U-turn in life is not about starting over; it is about having the awareness to pause, the courage to change direction, and the wisdom to move toward a life that truly belongs to us.

The writer is a Nutritionist, Wellness Coach and Health Writer

Bengal cannot afford to miss the AI bus

ALAPAN CHAKRABORTY

West Bengal's 2026-27 budget, presented on June 22, put artificial intelligence and global capability centers onto the state's technology agenda. But putting AI in a budget is not the same as building an AI economy.

Bengal has heard of technology ambition before. In the 1990s, as India's IT-services boom was taking shape, the state had talent and Salt Lake Sector V. STPI-Kolkata became operational in 1995-96 with 25 approved units and exports of Rs 7.61 crore. What it did not build early enough was the compounding ecosystem that Bengaluru and Hyderabad created around anchor firms, export infrastructure, managers, global customers and professional mobility. The sequence was decisive. Bengaluru had already attracted Texas Instruments in 1985; Hyderabad moved through STPI, HITEC City and Microsoft's development center in 1998. The gap is visible today. In 2024-25, Kolkata's STPI software exports were about \$1.5 billion, compared with \$14.7 billion for Hyderabad and \$48.1 billion for Bengaluru. This is not nostalgia. It is the arithmetic of missed compounding.

The mechanism is simple. Technology ecosystems do not form merely because a region has educated people. They form when companies, managers, engineers, customers, investors, universities and public policy reinforce one another over time. Once that flywheel turns, late entrants cannot catch up by announcing parks, missions or incentives. They need a new wedge. AI can be that wedge, but only if Bengal understands what is new about it. AI has not levelled the field; frontier AI is still dominated by capital, compute, research density and US-China scale. But AI has reopened parts of the field where adoption, integration, evaluation, security and domain deployment

matter more than training the largest model. Bengal should not try to win yesterday's IT-services race or today's frontier-model race. It should compete where AI has to become useful inside real institutions.

The cost curve explains why this is a real opening. Stanford's AI Index found that the cost of querying a GPT-3.5-level model fell from \$20 per million tokens in late 2022 to \$0.07 by late 2024, a decline of more than 280-fold. Frontier training remains expensive, but application-layer experimentation has become dramatically cheaper. New clusters can form around applying models to difficult workflows, messy data and institutional problems.

That is why AI is not simply "more outsourcing." The classic Indian IT model converted labour into export revenue through Y2K remediation, application maintenance, testing, support, BPO, ERP implementation, staff augmentation and cost-efficient coding. It rewarded headcount scale and process reliability. AI attacks the bottom of that pyramid. EY India has estimated that GenAI could raise productivity in India's technology sector by 43-45 per cent over five years, with software development seeing around 60 per cent improvement and BPO around 52 per cent. For firms that move up the stack, that is opportunity; for firms dependent on volume, it is margin pressure.

The new stack is not coding with copilots. It is data engineering, model integration, agent design, AI governance, cybersecurity, model evaluation, enterprise workflow redesign, domain-specific copilots, production operations and applied product engineering. In the old model, headcount created scale. In the AI model, capability density creates leverage. A smaller team that understands a bank's risk process, a hospital's workflow, a logistics network or a government file system may create more value than a large team doing repeatable delivery work. That should define

Bengal's strategy: not building the biggest models, but making AI reliable, safe and deployable for demanding institutions. The next generation of global capability centers should not be old back offices with "AI" pasted on the signboard. They should host teams that automate finance operations, modernize insurance workflows, monitor cyber threats, evaluate model behavior, build internal agents, clean enterprise data and integrate AI into production platforms. Bengal's pitch cannot be cheaper seats. It must be exportable applied-AI capability.

The most underappreciated wedge is AI assurance. A fluent model is not automatically ready for a bank, hospital, court, factory or government department. Can it be audited? Can it leak private data? Can it be manipulated? Does it hallucinate under stress? Can bias be measured? Can performance be monitored after deployment? Who is accountable when a decision goes wrong? Red-teaming, privacy testing, model-risk management, compliance engineering, security review and incident response are becoming industrial infrastructure. Bengal does not need to own the largest models to build a global business around making AI trustworthy.

Enterprise modernization is the adjacent opportunity. Most organizations do not fail at AI because they lack a demo. They fail because data is fragmented, workflows are undocumented, legacy systems are brittle, procurement is slow and users do not trust the tool. Real AI adoption is not a software purchase; it is institutional rewiring. Firms that connect models to actual work will matter more than firms that sell prototypes. If Bengal wants high-value AI work from global firms, it must understand what those firms actually buy when they choose a location. The Bay Area is useful not as glamour, but as evidence of how technology density works. In 2024, it reportedly



drew nearly \$70 billion of the world's \$134.6 billion in AI funding. That is not just a capital story; it is a density story. Researchers become founders, engineers leave platform companies to build start-ups, customers become design partners, investors understand technical risk and managers know how to scale. Ideas circulate.

Companies such as Microsoft, Google, NVIDIA, OpenAI and Anthropic cluster where this density exists. They do not arrive because a region declares itself futuristic. Google began as a Stanford research project before becoming a company; the lesson is not academic prestige, but the conversion of research into product, talent into teams, and teams into firms. Bengal's academic base matters only when connected to funded applied labs, industry problem statements, faculty-founder pathways, paid pilots, start-up procurement and commercialization discipline.

There is also a role only government can play: becoming the first demanding customer. The proof of Bengal's AI ambition should not be a summit photograph. It should be a citizen getting a service faster. Santa Clara County's AI-assisted work on millions of property deed records shows the point: government AI becomes real when it reduces bottlenecks in messy public records, not when it generates a press release. Land records, mutation workflows, hospital queues, grievance triage, welfare leakage, procurement analytics and

municipal routing are precisely the problems through which local AI capability can be built. The systems must be secure, auditable and human-supervised. A government that buys intelligently can create a market faster than one that merely promotes AI.

The talent warning is urgent. Bengal should not prepare young people for the bottom of a shrinking pyramid: commodity BPO, manual QA, low-end coding, data-entry-heavy operations, routine maintenance, generic support and certificate-driven "AI literacy." The better path is harder but more valuable: data engineering, model evaluation, MLOps, cybersecurity, product architecture, UX, compliance and domain-heavy deployment. The goal is not a workforce that can repeat AI vocabulary. It is a team that can ship reliable systems.

Bengal's failure in the IT boom was not a failure of intelligence. It was a failure to convert intelligence into density, confidence and compounding. AI offers another opening, but technology openings close quickly. Other regions will specialize, attract capital, build talent pipelines and saturate the markets that now look available. That happened in the IT boom. It can happen again. The next wave will not reward the state that speaks the language of AI. It will reward the state that learns to ship it.

The writer is a technology leader with experience in the US software industry, including at Microsoft.

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 16 July 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

THE courts in England have decided, not for the first time, that a scout of the Automobile Association commits no crime in warning motorists of the existence of a police trap. In spite of an earlier decision there has been doubt on the point, but the ruling which our cabled message records is probably decisive. The decision is in line with elementary justice. A man cannot be wrong in warning others not to break the law. He is acting the part of a good citizen. But the judges have made the situation difficult indeed for the police in days when motor scouts are on every frequented road, for if these can give warnings the police have no chance of catching the speeding motorist who is breaking the law. The law is antiquated. It has no relation to every day occurrences in Great Britain, and the best thing that can happen is that it should be changed. Reckless driving is not wholly a matter of speed. There are situations in which ten miles an hour is a dangerous pace.

News Items

WIRELESS TELEPHONY

FUTURE OF TRANS-ATLANTIC SERVICE

(BRITISH OFFICIAL WIRELESS.)
RUGBY, JULY

THE Postmaster-General, Sir W. Mitchell Thomson, referring to the high-power station at Rugby stated that reports showed that in general and exceptional disturbances they could be pretty certain that any message sent out from Rugby would reach any ship almost anywhere in the world.

Wireless telephonic communication across to Atlantic by means of Rugby was first established on February. Since then the possibility of inter-communication in the absence of any abnormal atmospheric disturbances almost throughout the four-hours had been established. The problem of linking a radio telephonic service with the land trunk line service appeared to have been solved. They were getting appreciably nearer when the Trans-Atlantic telephonic service would be a practical commercial proposition.

NATIONAL DAY SCENES

UNINVITED VISIT TO PARIS

(SPECIAL CABLE.)
LONDON, JULY

THE liveliness of General Primo de Rivera's sojourn in Paris is described by the Manchester Guardian correspondent, who says that rarely has a foreign head of a Government had such a hostile Press, and declares that particular offence was taken to the fact that he invited himself.

The Quotidian dwells on the indignation of all French democrats at the, sight of an implacable enemy of democratic institutions attending the commemoration of the foundation of democracy, July 14, celebrated in Europe.

When the train arrived at the Quai D'Orsay, the locomotive gave a pro-longed whistle. "It has begun already," murmured a Foreign Office official in the ear of M. Briand, who was waiting to receive the Spanish Dictator. The remark was justified for, as the motor car left the station, it was greeted with a hideous blast of whistling by the crowds.

The Parisian does not express his dislikes by booing in the English man-ner, but pulls a key or pea whistle from his pocket, from which he extracts ear-piercing shrieks. Notices are displayed in taxi-cab garages telling the chauffeurs to whistle when the Dictator passes.—Copyright.

DRASTIC REFORMS IN BELGIUM

ARRESTING SLUMP OF THE FRANC

BRUSSELS, JULY

A THOROUGH-GOING plan of reforms, evolved by the Government in view of the anxious financial situation, aims at stabilising the franc well below 200, prohibiting the export of capital and foodstuffs, and the restriction of consumption of luxurious commodities.

A Bill has been tabled conferring extraordinary powers on the King for a period of six months, to take opportune steps to arrest inflation, secure the repatriation of capital, regulate the sale of sequestered ex-enemy property, and check the spread of reports detrimental to the credit of the State. —Reuter.

Lessons from Mahabharata for Nepal's elite

PUSHPA RAJ JOSHI

One month ago, a Kantipur op-ed article and its subsequent translation sparked a debate over whether the traditional intellectual community is perturbed by Prime Minister Balendra Shah's unconventional leadership style, or whether a section of that community has shifted its allegiance toward the ruling faction. As of yet, several articles for and against this narrative have been published in Nepali print and online media. Since then, the so-called intellectual community seems to be divided on how to perceive the Gen Z movement and the government formed subsequently.

In the aforementioned article, the scribe recounts his experiences in Paris and Amsterdam, portraying a positive image of Nepal and the Nepali passport. However, the strength of Nepal's passport is not measured in a random café in Paris but at international immigration. The Henley Passport Index shows that Nepal's passport ranking has slightly improved in 2026 compared to 2025, but this cannot be exclusively attributed to the Gen Z movement or to the current government's positive image. The slight improvement of passport ranking is consistent with the trend observed over recent years. Moreover, since January, the United States has included Nepal

in the expanded Visa Bond Program, which some interpret as an indication of the declining strength of the Nepali passport. The overwhelming electoral triumph of the Rastriya Swatantra Party is an outcome, to a certain extent, of the inefficiency of the old leaders and the bad governance of previous governments. In addition, a perception has been cultivated that the RSP is a beneficiary of the Gen Z movement.

However, the well-documented moral and physical support of the leaders and cadres of the party during the uprising warrants serious investigation. PM Balendra Shah's involvement, in his role as then Mayor of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City, was evident through his late mobilisation of water tankers to douse fires and his soft call on social media platforms inviting people to join the protest.

A section of the intellectual community seems to have shifted its loyalty towards the current government, ignoring the background on which it was formed. The KP Sharma Oli-led government is to be blamed for the casualty of September 8, but the stakeholders of the Gen Z movement also need to take responsibility, to a certain extent, for the casualty and devastation caused on September 9. This is supported by the recently published report of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) that categorically alleges several RSP leaders, including

17 parliamentarians, were directly involved in the violent activities on September 9. Ignoring this fact, a faction of the intellectual community that has shifted its loyalty is repeating the trend that was observed after the Maoist insurgents joined mainstream politics and subsequently formed the government in 2008. The violent activities committed during the Maoist insurgency were glorified by this intellectual faction, and the everyday actions of Maoist leaders Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai were glorified as a discontinuation of traditional practices.

The recent activities of PM Shah, including disrespecting the sovereign Parliament, are being deceptively applauded as the discontinuation of conventional parliamentary proceedings by the pro-government intellectual community and the loyalists of RSP. Anyone familiar with global parliamentary proceedings should be aware that PM Shah's disregard for Parliament is entirely unparliamentary conduct. The RSP and its lawmakers are treating these issues, ignoring the fact that parliament is not merely a gathering of political parties but a representation of the nation's citizens. Hence, PM Shah's impertinence towards parliament is not just his ignorance towards the opposition parties but sheer contempt for the people's verdict. Still, the so-called unconventional intellectual community seems to encourage the PM to continue his

unparliamentary behaviour. Global examples have shown that a section of the so-called intellectual community always aligns with the ruling faction irrespective of its merits and demerits. This shift among intellectuals - moving away from traditional principles to align with whoever holds power - has accompanied every change in Nepali politics, from the Rana rule to multiparty democracy, the Panchayat era, reinstated democracy, and ultimately, republicanism. This has destabilised the political landscape of Nepal, thereby triggering frequent government and/or regime changes.

Ideally, the intellectual community should act as a watchdog and deliver constructive criticism to the rulers. As governments are formed to perform, the intellectual community holds the government responsible by raising issues when the government is off track. In contrast, the aforementioned article sugarcoats the misdoings of the present government and PM Balendra Shah as a discontinuation of conventional practices. In addition, the scribe, in an interview, claims that he is responsible only for the narration he had conveyed. However, an op-ed article not only conveys the literal message that is written between the lines, but it also has a deep unwritten message beyond the lines. Hence, the article does not address and analyse the current government's dubious actions, including the mishandling of informal settlers,

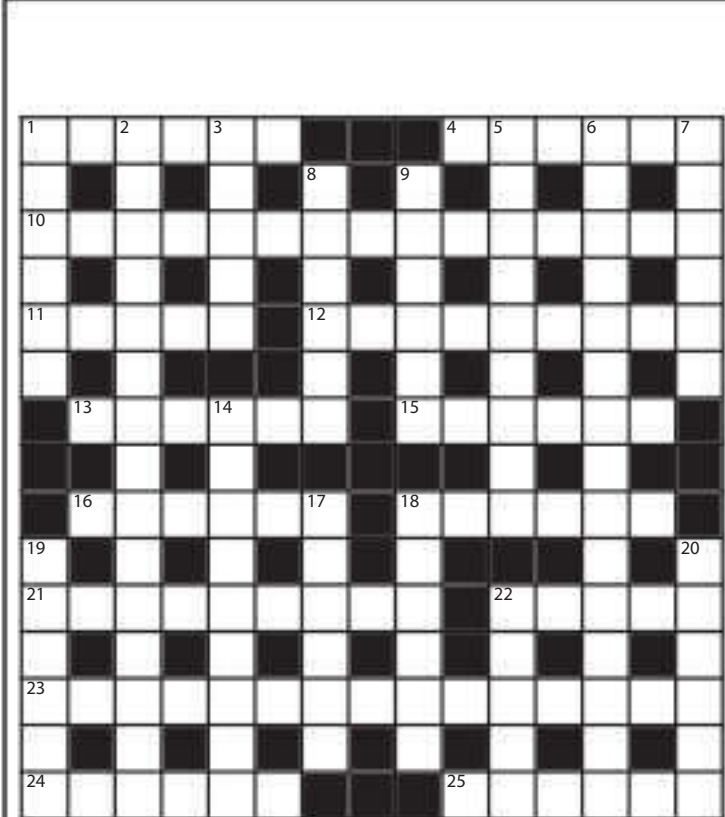
the controversy surrounding the appointment of the Chief Justice, the appointment of an allegedly incompetent Attorney General, and the ongoing spree of unconventional practices.

If the intellectuals do not relay their intellectuality, their existence is considered vague. To draw an example from the Mahabharata, Emperor Dhritarashtra's court was home to some of the greatest intellectuals and warriors of the era, including Bhishma, Dronacharya, Kripacharya, and Karna. Yet, their silence - or in some cases, direct support - for Duryodhana's unjust actions ultimately contributed to the outbreak of the devastating Kurukshetra War, a conflict that claimed countless lives, including those of these very intellectuals themselves. If only one of these intellectuals had protested against Duryodhana's actions, the war would have been averted.

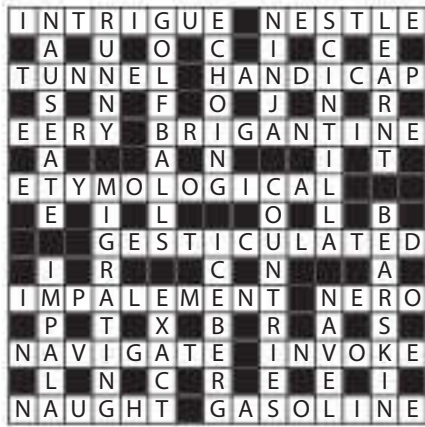
The constructive criticism of the intellectual community is crucial in bringing the government on the right track. In contrast, the blanket support of the government's every action, just or unjust, will motivate the government to follow authoritarianism. Hence, what we need today is a Vidura in Dhritarashtra's court - not more Bhimas, Dronas, Kripas, or Karnas who remain silent in the face of injustice.

(The Kathmandu Post/ANN.)

Crossword | No. 293522



Yesterday's Solution



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



The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Bridge the divide

Wangchuk's protest deserves empathy

INDIA's democracy has long drawn strength from its ability to accommodate dissent. It is this spirit that is being tested as educator and innovator Sonam Wangchuk's indefinite hunger strike over alleged irregularities in the examination system enters a critical stage. Reports of his deteriorating health — significant weight loss, falling blood sugar and increasing weakness — should prompt immediate concern, irrespective of one's political views or opinion on his demands. Wangchuk is not protesting for personal gain. The campaign by the Cockroach Janta Party, that he has endorsed, reflects the anxieties of lakhs of students and parents whose faith in competitive examinations has been shaken by repeated allegations of paper leaks and compromised processes. Whether every allegation withstands scrutiny is a separate matter. What cannot be disputed is that public confidence in high-stakes examinations has suffered and deserves urgent restoration through transparent reforms and greater accountability.

In a democracy, the government must listen to citizens who question its policies. Responding to peaceful protest with silence only deepens mistrust. Dialogue does not signify weakness. At the same time, hunger strikes carry ethical and medical implications. The State has an obligation to protect life, while respecting an individual's autonomy. Any medical intervention should be guided by law and medical ethics.

The present impasse serves no one. The government need not concede every demand to initiate talks. Equally, protesters should remain open to constructive engagement. A credible committee, a time-bound roadmap for examining concerns and communication can help bridge the trust deficit. The immediate priority, however, is humanitarian. The Centre must recognise the emotions driving this movement, respect the democratic right to peaceful protest and break the ice through sincere dialogue. Wangchuk's health cannot become the price of administrative inaction.

Seafarers' safety

Tracking dashboard is a welcome step

THE escalation of hostilities in West Asia, particularly the attacks on commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, has prompted India to establish a real-time operational dashboard for tracking Indian seafarers. The move acknowledges the rapidly deteriorating situation, which has heightened the vulnerability of civilian maritime workers caught in geopolitical conflicts. India is one of the world's largest suppliers of skilled seafarers, with thousands serving aboard foreign-flagged vessels across international waters. Their contribution to global trade and energy supply chains is indispensable. Yet, they often remain exposed to security threats without adequate protection or coordination. In this context, the government's "Seafarer First" approach marks a significant shift from reactive crisis management to proactive preparedness.

The proposed dashboard, offering real-time information on vessel location, ownership, crew welfare, cargo, threat assessment and voyage details, will strengthen monitoring and facilitate faster emergency responses. The appointment of dedicated liaison officers for affected seafarers is expected to ensure that families receive timely updates, medical assistance, repatriation support and guidance on compensation. Such institutional mechanisms can greatly reduce uncertainty during emergencies.

India must continue its diplomatic efforts to uphold freedom of navigation, engage with governments in the region and press for adherence to international maritime law. In recent weeks, the government has summoned both US and Iranian envoys to lodge a protest against strikes on vessels that caused Indian fatalities. Any disruption in strategic waterways such as the Strait of Hormuz threatens not only energy supplies and global commerce but also the lives of those who strive to keep these routes operational. Protecting Indian seafarers, therefore, is a strategic national priority, not just a humanitarian obligation.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, JULY 16, 1926

The next stage

IN a significant article under the headline "Hindu and Muslim", the London *Times* attempts a forecast of the next stage in the evolution of the Indian Constitution. Prophecy, however dangerous, has a strange fascination for certain minds, especially when it is but another name for the wish that is father to the thought; and where the question is one of the desirability or otherwise of extending the sphere of political liberty, even a tyro knows which way the wish of the *Times* would lie. There is, therefore, nothing to surprise one in the following observations with which the journal concludes its article: "The Hindus demand an extension of self-government based upon majority rule. The Moslems (and the Sikhs), speaking generally, oppose extension except on condition that their special and communal representation in the Councils and in the Assembly is maintained. These demands and the quarrels to which they have given rise do not justify the inference that no change should be made in the present Constitution of India. To argue that the status quo must be maintained until the inhabitants of a number of large Indian cities have attained moral and political perfection is illogical and unjust. But the strength of "communal" feeling does most certainly justify the demand that the next instalment of Reforms should continue to safeguard the rights of the very important religious and political minorities of the Indian Empire. A time may come when the political education of India will be sufficiently advanced for these safeguards to be dispensed with, but that time is not yet."

OPINION

All is not well in Balen's Nepal

Recent protests are a warning to the PM that Gen Z doesn't entirely consist of blind camp followers



NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST

NEPAL Prime Minister Balendra "Balen" Shah cultivated the image of a disruptor even when he was the Kathmandu mayor from 2022 to January 2026. And it was this trait of the rapper-turned-politician, minus the baggage of the previous generation of Nepali politicians, that proved so attractive to voters in the national elections earlier this year.

The passage of a hundred days since he assumed the office of PM has not dented his popularity, which propelled the fledgling Rastriya Swatantra Party's (RSP) sweeping electoral victory, among millions of his fans. He has earned praise for acting swiftly to expedite the delivery of some public services and signalled that he is serious about prosecuting corrupt politicians from previous regimes.

However, a streak of authoritarianism is evident in many of his acts of commission or omission. His disregard for due process, reclusive decision-making and bypassing of his cabinet on important decisions have left even those who voted for him angry, worried or just plain puzzled.

On July 12-13, sections of "Gen Z", whose anger against the corruption of entrenched political elites toppled the KP Oli government, took to the streets once again to protest two unrelated events. One was the bulldozing of long-standing hutment colonies on the banks of the Bagmati river in Kathmandu that left their residents without viable accommodation in the rainy season. The other was the death by suicide of a 25-year-old ride-share app driver, who immolated himself, reportedly after being fined by traffic cops in Kathmandu. It was a fine he could ill afford to pay. The protests coalesced, appearing to warn Balen that Gen Z does not entirely consist of blind camp followers.



DISRUPTOR : Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah (right) with President Ram Chandra Poudel. PH

Balen's response to both protests has been silence. Even as mayor, he did not interact with Nepal's media. During the elections, he barely uttered a word at his campaign rallies. As Prime Minister, he seems to have taken a leaf out of PM Narendra Modi's book. He has given no interviews so far, and does not meet the media. His occasional posts on social media are read like tea leaves. "When a young man has immolated himself and the atmosphere on the streets is charged, remaining silent can also be seen as a lack of empathy," said Bishwas Baral, Editor of *Kathmandu Post*.

At the same time, offices of the *Post* and other media organisations, as well as the residence of Nepali Congress President Gagan Thapa, were barricaded by cars parked across their entrances, as if to send out the message that if the media found the traffic rules too harsh on the public (even more draconian changes are in the offing), it should not complain about wrongly parked cars.

Balen's contempt is not reserved for the media alone. His walkout from the first session of Parliament midway during the President's address caused outrage among the intelligentsia. His absence from subsequent sittings of Parliament has also raised concerns. Balen's supporters say he has no time for all this due to the long hours he puts in daily at "work". Whereas his predecessors would meet their cabinet

Indian and Chinese envoys, along with other diplomats, have lost their privileged status in Kathmandu's ruling party circles.

colleagues, officials and party workers at home all day and night, Balen is at the secretariat by 10:30 am every day and leaves at 5:30 pm. A recent profile published on the eKantipur site said he plays video games at home.

Balen's relations with RSP leader Rabi Lamichhane are also being watched. The latter, a former broadcast journalist, formed the RSP four years ago, and for a newbie did well enough in the 2022 elections to be wooed into joining the ruling alliance led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda", the Nepali Communist Party leader who would form the government that year. In the 2026 elections, he refrained from pro-

jecting himself as his party's candidate for the PM's post, as graft cases are pending against him, and welcomed Balen into the party. But this is also the first time in the history of Nepali politics that the prime minister is not in charge of his party. A recent amendment to the RSP constitution empowering the party chairman (Lamichhane) to remove the leader of the parliamentary party (PM Balen), has increased speculation that the two are on a collision course.

For those who expected miracles from Balen, his inexplicable silence on foreign policy is a huge concern in a country that is a theatre of geopolitical rivalries, landlocked as it is between India and China. After Balen stopped the practice of one-on-one meetings with diplomats, both the Indian and Chinese envoys, along with other diplomats, lost their privileged access to Kathmandu's ruling party circles. As optics go, this has been welcomed by the public as putting an end to foreign interference in Nepal's domestic politics. But there is also the gnawing realisation that this cannot be a substitute for foreign policy.

Last month, Vikram Misri, India's Foreign Secretary, had to cancel a visit to Kathmandu, where he was going with an invitation to Delhi for Balen, after it was announced that the Nepal PM would meet only his equal in rank. Sergio Gor, the Delhi-based US envoy for South and Central

Asia, was also unable to meet him.

In the Chinese camp, there are concerns about the fate of its many infrastructure projects in the hands of an unpredictable and inaccessible leadership. Suspicion is rife that the US is leveraging its influence in Nepal to push the Tibetan cause. For the first time, the Tibetan refugee community in Nepal celebrated the Dalai Lama's birthday without the event being disrupted by the police. Kathmandu-based Western diplomats, including the US Ambassador, attended it.

Seven former ambassadors of Nepal to Beijing shot off a strong condemnation of the event, as did former PM Jhala Nath Khanal, saying that it endangered China-Nepal relations.

Kathmandu journalists recall the time the US envoy was often asked why his government saw Nepal through an "India lens", but no longer. In what is now a three-way contest, India is seen in Kathmandu circles as having played its own card after Balen's rebuff to Misri. Delhi's invitation to Lamichhane, and his arrival with Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal, is perceived as a calculated move by Delhi to cultivate a different, and potentially opposing, power centre in Nepali politics.

A recent invitation to former PM and Communist leader Baburam Bhattarai to deliver the Yadunath Khanal annual memorial lecture at the Institute of Foreign Affairs in Kathmandu has created more ripples.

The institute is run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bhattarai had a narrow escape when his home was burnt down by protesters during last year's uprising. He is also as different as chalk and cheese from Yadunath Khanal, a pioneer Nepali diplomat and King Mahendra's chosen envoy to Delhi, Beijing and Washington DC. On social media, speculation centred on the perceived proximity of Bhattarai, a JNU alumnus, to the Delhi establishment.

In a sign that Balen realises he cannot close his eyes to the many moving parts of a politician's life in Nepal, particularly in the light of the new dynamics in the party, the PM has now reportedly indicated that he wants to visit Delhi "soon". He will no doubt receive a warm welcome.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The India-Nepal border should be a bridge which helps bring prosperity to both sides. — Narendra Modi

Walking barefoot with a purpose

DC SHARMA

WATCHING pilgrims walk barefoot through the crowded bazaars of Kangra on their way to the Mata Bajreshwari temple brings back memories of my parents, who made it a daily practice to walk barefoot.

My father passed away at the age of 101. I often marvel at how he remained active and cheerful until his last day. He enjoyed lunch with the family and, as was his daily habit, took his afternoon nap under the shade of a tree he had planted in his youth. My mother also lived to complete a century. They cherished each other's company. We fondly remember their half-hour barefoot walk — on the cool green grass during summer and on the smooth mud floor in the courtyard of our ancestral home in winter.

My family lived in a modest mud house with five rooms: a *baithak* (drawing room), a kitchen and three rooms for living and sleeping. There was no electricity in our village in those days — kerosene lamps and lanterns illuminated our nights. During summer, we slept under the sky in the courtyard, while in winter we retired to our rooms. Fresh vegetables and pulses came from our fields, nourished not by chemical fertilisers but by cow dung manure. Pure, fresh milk was always available from our cows.

We owned a battery-operated radio, which kept us connected with music and the news. There were no telephones; communication with relatives depended entirely on the postal service. We travelled short distances by bicycle and longer journeys by bus or train. Life was simple, peaceful and deeply satisfying.

Today, even a small child craves a smartphone. We are constantly exposed to radio-frequency emissions from mobile phones, Wi-Fi and countless electronic devices — even while we sleep. At the same time, we blame climate change for our declining health and shorter lifespans. We hear complaints of fatigue, headaches, poor eyesight, stress and other health problems.

For many years, I did not realise that reconnecting with the earth could have a positive effect on my health. Gradually, I began to notice how my body responded the moment my bare feet touched the ground. It felt as though my entire physiology had changed — a remarkable reminder of the earth's natural energy. Laziness, stress, anxiety and negative thoughts have steadily diminished. I simply walk barefoot for about half an hour every day. No wonder I have experienced a noticeable improvement in my health and overall well-being.

The writer taught at MCM DAV College, Kangra

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Countering Chinese dominance

Refer to 'India's Eastward pivot irks China'; India's outreach to Japan and other Indo-Pacific partners is a timely response to China's assertiveness along the LAC. Beijing's objections ring hollow as it ignores India's security concerns while continuing to arm and abet Pakistan. However, stronger cooperation in defence, technology and maritime security is crucial to uphold a free and rules-based Indo-Pacific. Since no country can contain China's expansionist designs alone, India, Japan, Australia and ASEAN nations must forge a united front, deepen strategic cooperation and collectively deter Chinese hegemony to ensure lasting regional stability.

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

China cannot subdue India

Refer to 'India's Eastward pivot irks China'; every nation has the freedom to take appropriate measures for its own benefit, provided they do not adversely affect other nations. If India is strengthening its strategic relations with East Asian countries, why should China object? China keeps doing what it deems fit for itself, without even paying heed to a superpower like the US. India certainly occupies a strategic place in the geopolitical framework of the region, which none of the so-called strong nations can afford to ignore. By supporting India's immediate neighbours, China should not believe that it can subdue India.

DEEPAK TAAK, PANCHKULA

Rivers are living assets

Refer to 'China's hydel project bodes ill for India'; Medog is not just a power project; it is a strategic and humanitarian issue. India must build a strong, evidence-based diplomatic case supported by data and facts. We should engage riparian nations and raise the issue at multilateral forums like the UN. Simultaneously, India must invest in real-time monitoring and early warning systems on the Brahmaputra. Treating rivers as living assets, not political bargaining chips, is the only way forward.

V SUBRAMANIAN, MADURAI

Religious overtones

Apropos of 'What makes *Satluj* so special'; the movie is not a mode of entertainment to generate revenues for the filmmakers. It is a recollection of memories by those who lost their loved ones during militancy days in Punjab. It depicts emotions attached to the killings of innocent people. Many people lost their lives in police encounters or at the hands of militants. The movie should be viewed as an issue brought before the audience with an effort to present the poignancy of those times. The film should not be turned into a religious, political or state agenda to trigger violence or communalism.

ABHILASHA GUPTA, MOHALI

Hydrogen train a good beginning

Apropos of 'Haryana powers hydrogen rail revolution'; the step has ushered in development, new infrastructure and indigenous technology. The hydrogen train is a step towards the fulfilment of the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* vision. A hydrogen train runs on electricity generated by hydrogen fuel cells instead of using diesel or overhead electric wires. The hydrogen train is completely environment-friendly as water vapour is the only byproduct of this process.

HIMANSHU GOYAL, KATHAL

Conduct poll exercise sincerely

The stated purpose of the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls is removing names of deceased, duplicate, permanently shifted and ineligible voters while ensuring that every eligible citizen is included. The Supreme Court has also recognised the Election Commission's authority to undertake such a revision. The process must be implemented with utmost transparency, fairness and strict adherence to constitutional and statutory safeguards. It should be ensured that no eligible elector is omitted or disenfranchised due to procedural deficiencies, administrative lapses or inadequate verification mechanisms.

AMARJIT SINGH, BY MAIL

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

When Teja S Samundri won the Morcha



NEERA BURRA
SOCIOLOGIST AND
AMATEUR HISTORIAN

VERY few people will remember the contribution of a great national leader like Sardar Teja Singh Samundri who died 100 years ago — on July 17, 1926 — at the age of 44 in the Lahore Fort. He was incarcerated there by the British government for being part of an agitation to reinstall the deposed Maharaja Ripudaman Singh to the Nabha throne.

I first learnt about Teja Singh Samundri from the unpublished diaries of my great grandfather, Prof Ruchi Ram Sahni. At a very young age, the professor had decided to prepare a “History of My Own Times” (HOMOT), in which he hoped “to catch a glimpse — it may be but a faint glimpse — of the stirring times” through which he was privileged to live, and “fix it in words” for his readers. One of these was a volume on the Akali movement.

Sahni’s introduction to the Akali movement was the Guru-ka-Bagh *morcha* in 1922-23. This was a non-violent movement of the Sikhs, undertaken because a former *mahant* of the Guru-ka-Bagh gurdwara objected to the age-old practice of cutting *kikar* trees from the gurdwara lands as firewood for the *langar*. In August 1922, the British sided with the *mahant* and arrested five Sikhs on the charge of trespassing. In response, the SGPC arranged for five Sikhs every day to cut firewood. They were daily met with beatings and harassment by the British.

The SGPC issued an appeal for other Indians to bear witness to the struggle at Guru-ka-Bagh, that generated a great deal of interest in the Press. The Punjab Provincial Congress Committee deputed Sahni and Mian Fazal Din to

assess the situation. Sahni was profoundly moved by what he saw: “I confess, till I saw some of the things with my own eyes, I did not believe all the recorded stories of the Sikh martyrs and their Gurus having gone through extraordinarily severe ordeals not only unflinchingly but with beaming faces and gladness in the hearts, because they were convinced that the *Akalpurkh* (the timeless one) expected such services of them. I wish to record my personal testimony of such sufferings borne with the inspiring words, *Wahe Guru, Wahe Guru Ji*, on the lips by hundreds of men, day after day, at Guru-ka-Bagh, suffering ordeals which I have not heard of being borne by the members of any other community.”

Sahni was a Trustee of *The Tribune* and asked the newspaper to make him its Special Representative so that he could report on what was happening at Guru-ka-Bagh. He walked daily with the *jathas*, and also worked behind the scenes with the SGPC. His reports were published in *The Tribune*, and later became the basis for a book *Struggle for Reform of Sikh Shrines*.

In the book, Sahni gives a vivid description of the *jathas*: “It was an inspiring sight that one saw morning after morning in front of the Akal Takht before the daily *jathas* started for Guru-ka-Bagh. At sunrise, members of the *jatha* assembled on the spot after a dip in the ‘tank of immortality’.... Before they left the Akal Takht and marched forth in procession along the marble pavement of the sacred tank, singing hymns from the Sikhs’ scriptures, sometimes five Sikhs on the charge of trespassing. In many cases, the SGPC arranged for five Sikhs every day to cut firewood. They were daily met with beatings and harassment by the British.”

The *jathas* were met with



FIRM : Teja Singh Samundri had a ‘calm and unruffled temper in the midst of a tumultuous sea of troubles.’ When required, he would give the word of command, knowing it would be implicitly obeyed. TRIBUNE ARCHIVES

brutal violence. Sahni himself faced *lathi* blows on many occasions. But the Akalis did not waver from their promised path and continued towards the gurdwara.

The leadership of the *morcha* was in the hands of the SGPC, whose chairman was Teja Singh Samundri. Almost 20 years younger to Sahni, he was admired immensely: “Samundri had a remarkably keen and sound judgement. He could grasp the essentials of a proposition immediately and examine them separately from the non-essentials.... He was accommodating in the extreme so far as the non-essentials were concerned, but on points which he considered to be essential and fundamental, he would stand firm like a rock. A born leader, as he was, I have known him in those great days to sense a critical situation immediately and act promptly in a manner which astonished many of us.”

Reflecting on Samundri in the HOMOTs, Sahni writes, “I find it difficult to convey to the reader anything like an adequate idea of the wonderful personality of the President [S Samundri], his calm and unruffled temper in the midst of a tumultuous sea of troubles, of insistent demands from various quarters and, not infrequently, uncomfortable information about what the high-placed and all-powerful authorities at Amritsar and Simla had done or were contemplating to carry out, his remarkable resourcefulness and the light-hearted manner

A Trustee of *The Tribune*, Ruchi Ram Sahni, reported on the Guru-ka-Bagh *morcha* in 1922-23, walking daily with the *jathas* & working behind the scenes with the SGPC.

The chemical cocktail of Sutlej’s black, brown waters



COL JASJIT SINGH GILL (RETD)
ENVIRONMENTALIST

IT is shocking but true: the Sutlej, the most majestic of the three rivers left with present-day Punjab, is dead ecologically. Before 1964, its flow in Ropar (now Rupnagar) closely followed the river’s seasonal pattern because the Bhakra Dam had not yet begun regulating the river.

After the Bhakra mainline canal was built, its flow in Ropar became more controlled as redistribution of water for irrigation and

power commenced.

The river passing the headworks was no longer the old Sutlej as the mandate to the technocrats designing the dam was to maximise the utilisation of the river waters for producing power and creating an irrigation network. Practically no attention was paid to having a regulated ecological flow to keep the river alive.

As a result, during the peak summer months and the lean period (from September to May), the river ran dry during the period 1963 to 2015, until the NGT in 2015 ordered an environmental flow of 640 cusecs in the river to keep it ecologically alive. The amount was about 15-20% of the average lean season discharge.

Hence the mighty Sutlej has been used for occasional floods control, rainy season

overflow and its bed kept free for legal and illegal mining.

River water channels are the biggest source of groundwater recharge. But the Sutlej, which passes through seven districts, is not able to carry out this function effectively. Simultaneously, it must be noted that Punjab has been effectively transferring its water extracted from 14.5 lakh tubewells at the rate of 3,500 litres for every kilogram of paddy produced and sent to the Central pool. The aquifers have been emptied up to three layers, with 111 of the 153 blocks of the state having been rendered water-stressed.

During both the summer and lean seasons, the Sutlej carries only 640 cusecs ecology flow. It reduces to a trickle near Phillaur due to evaporation while passing through huge mining pits. Then, at



FILE PHOTO

What actually flows through the Sutlej in the summer and the lean period is 640 cusecs ecology flow.

Ludhiana, the treated sewage water that becomes black, as it gets mixed with untreated dyeing and industrial waste from Bhattian STP, enters the Sutlej. In addition, the *Buddha nullah*, with its treated and untreated waters from sewage treatment plants, dyeing industry effluent plants and dairy solid and liquid waste, enters the river at Walipur. The heavy viscous water at this point is frequently photographed as it clearly shows the polluted black

waters of the *Buddha nullah* flowing alongside the brown waters of the Sutlej.

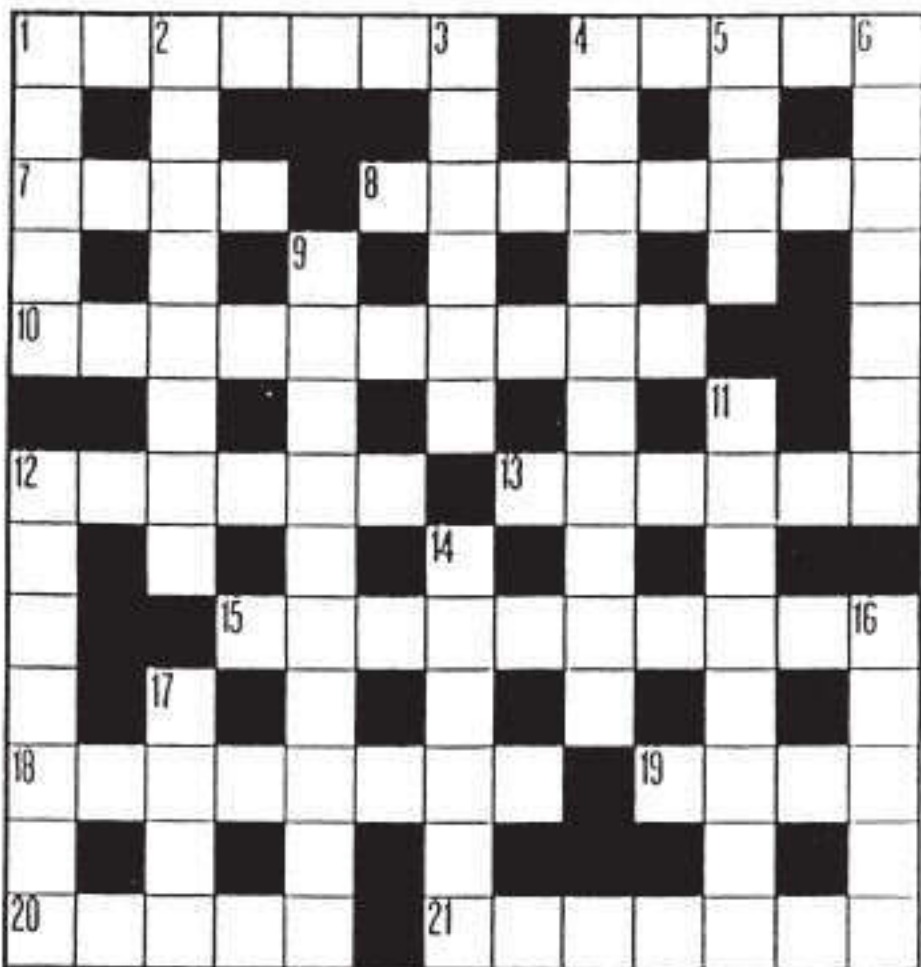
This chemical cocktail is joined by another deadly combination of treated, semi-treated and untreated sewage water of the tanneries from Jalandhar via the Kala Sangian drain. This 1,000-1,300 cusecs of highly polluted water, loaded with heavy metals, enters the Harike Lake. A Punjab Agricultural University-GADVASU study has found lead, zinc and chromium in the gills of fish inhabiting the lake.

The polluted Sutlej water then enters the Rajasthan canal and later the Sirhind feeder, which supplies water to Rajasthan up till Jaisalmer and the South Malwa area, respectively. Notably, the proposed Malwa canal with 2,000 cusecs capacity has a water

entry point before the Rajasthan canal. The public hearing that took place on its environmental impact flagged that polluted water was being fed to the canal. However, no Rajasthan-based political party or organisation has protested against these polluted waters.

So, how can we revive the Sutlej and, in turn, recharge the aquifers and basin areas? The Punjab government should ask the Centre to revisit the extra allocation of waters to Rajasthan due to increased population, and climate and environmental changes — the same reasons that were cited in 2023 by the Central government in a letter to Pakistan to reconsider the IWT, which has been in abeyance. The Sutlej needs to be flowing with 4,000 cusecs of water and this water should be shared by all states.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Gradual accumulation (5-2)
- Student (5)
- Roughly made (4)
- Suggestion (8)
- Stranded helplessly (4,3,3)
- Favourable (6)
- Robbery on high seas (6)
- Whatever happens (2,3,5)
- Full of twists and turns (8)
- A total failure (4)
- Evil spirit (5)
- Expressed in few words (7)

Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Sight unseen, 9 Trawler, 10 Obese, 11 Note, 12 Backward, 14 Odious, 16 Knotty, 18 Famished, 19 Mali, 22 Sonar, 23 Scratch, 24 Keep in check.

Down: 2 Inapt, 3 Hell, 4 Unreal, 5 Shocking, 6 Elegant, 7 Stand-offish, 8 See daylight, 13 Outstrip, 15 Immense, 17 Lessen, 20 Aztec, 21 Arch.

DOWN

- Ship's place at wharf (5)
- Needy (8)
- A caricature (6)
- Menacing but in fact feeble foe (5,5)
- An affected attitude (4)
- Soothing song (7)
- Gigantic (10)
- Carefully devised strategy (4,4)
- Intolerantly opinionated (7)
- Without abridgement (2,4)
- Theme of discourse (5)
- Fill to bursting (4)

SU DO KU

4	5	1			7
	7	1		9	2 3
			8 2		4
	9		5	2	4
3	4		7		6
4		8 5			
6 3	2		7 9		
2			3	5 6	

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

5	4	3	1	6	8	2	7	9
7	6	8	9	2	5	1	3	4
9	2	1	4	3	7	6	8	5
2	8	7	3	1	9	4	5	6
4	1	9	5	8	6	3	2	7
3	5	6	2	7	4	9	1	8
8	3	4	6	5	1	7	9	2
1	9	5	7	4	2	8	6	3
6	7	2	8	9	3	5	4	1

CALENDAR

JULY 16, 2026, THURSDAY

■ Shaka Samvat	1948
■ Ashadh Shukla	25
■ Shravan Purnashtami	1
■ Hijari	1448
■ Shukla Paksha Tithi 2, up to 8:54 am	
■ Siddhi Yoga up to 1:23 am	
■ Ashle Nakshatra up to 7:53 pm	
■ Moon enters Leo sign 7:53 pm	

FORECAST

SUNSET:	THURSDAY	19:25 HRS
SUNRISE:	FRIDAY	05:32 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	37	28
New Delhi	38	28
Amritsar	37	26
Bathinda	39	28
Jalandhar	37	26
Ludhiana	37	28
Bhiwani	40	28
Hisar	38	28
Sirsa	39	28
Dharamsala	32	21
Manali	27	19
Shimla	28	18
Srinagar	31	18
Jammu	35	25
Kargil	29	16
Leh	25	14
Dehradun	35	25
Mussoorie	26	18

TEMPERATURE IN °C

OUR VIEW



REUTERS

Intellectual property is getting redefined by AI

Apple's lawsuit against OpenAI in America signals a shift in what intangibles a company ought to guard in the age of AI. Corporate practices and protective laws will need to adapt

Apple's trade-secret lawsuit against OpenAI may look like another Silicon Valley dispute over employee misconduct. Viewed alongside Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella's observation of a 'reverse information paradox,' however, it illustrates how artificial intelligence (AI) has begun to transform intellectual property (IP). Companies have typically guarded their innovations through patents, copyrights, trade-secret laws and non-disclosure agreements. With frontier AI, though, the value of a document pales in contrast with that of judgement. The latter comprises the collective intuition of engineers who know specific model behaviour, how to improve output yields, effective evaluation methods or which architectural calls survived countless failed experiments. Such stuff is never fully documented. It resides in people's heads. And that is what makes the Apple-OpenAI case significant. It is not just about allegedly swiped files, but whether the knowledge carried by employees can, together with confidential papers or device access, enrich a rival business. California law has long sought a balance of principles: staffers must not embezzle trade secrets, but nor should employers stop them from applying the general skills and experience they acquire elsewhere. Now, just a handful of minds can shape products worth billions of dollars. As the value of individual expertise rises, so too does people's temptation to test the limits of what can legitimately move in lieu of a better pay package or role. The value that a firm sees at risk determines its will to litigate. Yet, talent mobility is only the first IP challenge of the AI age. The paradox of 'reverse information' points to a second dilemma. Workers routinely feed AI

systems with workflows, customer insights, engineering practices, internal terminology and decisional logic in a bid to enrich the context of prompts. Even if AI providers promise not to use enterprise data for training, AI users often have no privacy qualms as they loop these friendly models into daily decisions. A company's competitive asset, thus, is the institutional intelligence generated as AI interactions grow, creating what Nadella calls an "intelligence exhaust," a byproduct of everyday work that existing IP doctrines scarcely recognize. But can the legal system keep up? New AI models arrive every few weeks, even as hardware cycles shorten. By the time a case is tried, the competitive edge being contested could get blunted. Also, how does one keep AI learnings off a firm's proprietary processes from getting around? The law is relatively clear on the theft of confidential files, but was not designed for knowledge creation as a joint AI-human effort. An AI-infused economy would need the law to help firms fortify corporate intelligence as a whole. This may require a new set of IP protections that cover enforceable trust limits for enterprise AI, audit mechanisms for knowledge retention and rights over AI-generated artefacts and agent memory. While legal shields could take time, companies must rethink their internal AI security so that IP protection protocols can evolve from guarding documents to governing intelligence flows. Employers should ask employees to use only approved AI tools and crack down on unauthorized usage that might be leaking valuable fragments of their success formula. The defining IP battle of the AI era will be about who owns and gets to learn from the institutional intelligence that documents can never fully capture.

MY VIEW | MYTHS AND MANTRAS

Why euphoria has returned and some things simply don't change

The AI story bears signs of a bubble inflated by the greed of common investors fuelling this frenzy



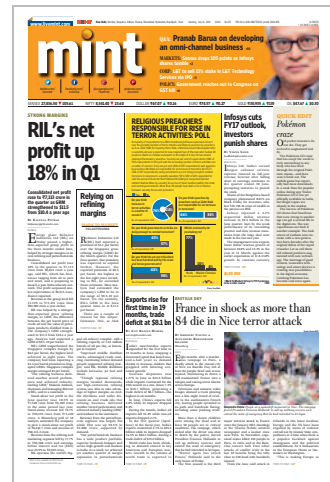
DEVINA MEHRA is founder of First Global and author of 'Money, Myths and Mantras: The Ultimate Investment Guide'. Her X handle is @devinamehra

Let me start with one of my favourite quotes from a book that explains financial bubbles elegantly, John Kenneth Galbraith's *A Short History of Financial Euphoria*: "There can be few fields of human endeavour in which history counts for so little as in the world of finance." The beauty of each such episode is that whether it is the non-fungible token (NFT) frenzy of 2021, the mortgage madness prior to the global financial crisis of 2008 or the Indian small and medium enterprises initial public offerings (IPO) boom of 2024, the template remains the same. During a classic bubble inflation, in the euphoric phase, every member of the mob believes they are smart and all the money being made by them is well-deserved. Those sceptical about the bubble are scoffed at as stupid for not making money. Even those who can see the problems jump in, thinking they can get out ahead of the crowd. Then comes the burst, which always comes with a bang; it never deflates slowly. All those who planned to exit also cannot do it. Following on its heels is a blame game. Some heads have to be sacrificed: whether of corporations, other entities or people. What remain sacrosanct are markets, including actions of the 'common' speculator. They are never blamed, but maybe they should be. Because every market madness is as

much about lay people being greedy, thinking that they have found a way to quickly multiply their money. It is a willing suspension of disbelief. This is different from real mis-selling, which also unfortunately happens in financial markets. We smile when we read of historical bubbles like the Tulip Mania or South Sea bubble, imagining that we would never do idiotic stuff like that. The height of the latter bubble was supposed to be money raised by a company for "carrying on an undertaking of great advantage, but nobody to know what it is." Who would fall for something like that, right? Now let me read you something from the SpaceX IPO prospectus, as cited on *CNBC.com*. SpaceX sees a total addressable market of \$28.5 trillion, and said in its prospectus that identifying and creating trillion-dollar market opportunities will be one element of its "repeatable business model." In simple language, SpaceX's business is to keep identifying trillion-dollar opportunities that are currently unknown. Same difference. Not only has SpaceX raised more than \$85 billion through its IPO on this promise (in addition to its massive pre-IPO raises), it has done so without giving new investors almost any shareholder rights, something I detailed in my article 'Space X IPO: Does Musk have a divine right to rule the business?' Not only that, Nasdaq, FTSE and several other index providers have diluted their norms to include this new listing in major indices, prompting massive purchases by passive funds, which now dominate global investing. All classic signs of chasing excess. One category of bubbles are, of course, those that have no real basis, and are more or less outright scams; NFTs are a recent example. But the huge losses are usually in technology-led bubbles. The counter-intuitive part is that the biggest damage is done not by technologies that fail, as this damage is on a relatively small scale.

The real trail of carnage is in industries and technologies that succeed. Human history, at least post the Industrial Revolution, is a tale of technologies that succeeded beyond measure but often still managed to bankrupt their investors. From railroads to automobiles, from aviation to the internet, there are technologies that fundamentally changed how almost every human being on earth lives but still proved to be graveyards for investors. This is due to a combination of over-investment and crazy valuations. The investments never manage to make economic rates of return and then the whole story unravels. Talking of what is happening currently, artificial intelligence (AI) mega scalars are investing around \$800 billion to \$1 trillion in a single year, about six times their capital expenditure in a normal year. In addition, most of this is in fast depreciating assets bought at inflated prices because it is a seller's market today for most semiconductor and hardware manufacturers. Add to it the fact that much of this spending is being funded through debt, and you have a build-up to a perfect storm. An additional level of risk arises from US margin debt—what investors borrow from their brokerages to buy securities. It rose 54% to a record \$1.4 trillion by the end of May 2026. Leverage amplifies both profits and losses—it reveals the greed of the 'common investor' in action. Much of the money is going into what are themselves leveraged technology and semiconductor exchange traded funds. The kind where the recent 10% single-day fall in Korean stocks caused a 30% drop in fund value. If an investor is leveraged on top of this, 90% of the value can vanish in a single day. Even the slightest prick can spiral out of control with leverage being built at multiple levels. It's clearly time for caution. As an aside, for those buying Gift City products for global investments from any and everybody, remember it is when the tide goes down that you know who is swimming nude.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

A company should be able to use a model without giving up the knowledge that makes it unique. That is the reverse information paradox we need to confront.

SATYA NADELLA

THEIR VIEW

Foreign currency deposits are arriving but with risks

MADAN SABNAVIS



is chief economist, Bank of Baroda, and author of 'Corporate Quirks: The Darker Side of the Sun'

Assume that a non-resident Indian (NRI) takes a 162 million yen loan at, say, 4% interest per annum and converts it to \$1 million. This amount can then be put in a foreign currency non-resident (FCNR) deposit at an interest rate of, say, 6.5% for 3 or 5 years. The bank gives these dollars to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), which in turn swaps them without any risk premium. This means that the bank can buy back the dollars at the present exchange rate at the time of maturity. Sounds good? Yes, this is how carry trade works, but the difference is that banks would normally not pay such high rates of interest, given the foreign exchange risk they bear, as reflected in the forward hedging rate of around 3%. The rupee has depreciated by an average 3% per annum over the past decade, which usually prevents such arbitrage and explains why banks had kept their FCNR deposit rates low. But with RBI now taking on the cost of an exchange-rate hedge, banks can safely offer high rates on NRI dollar deposits.

An NRI can borrow in any currency and convert it to dollars, but funds are cheapest in Japan. In the US, the cost of such loans can start from 6%, thus offering little scope for a net positive return. Borrowing in yen is far more attractive, but it entails the risk of yen appreciation. If that happens, returns could diminish or be in jeopardy. The yen has depreciated by almost 4% per annum from 109 per dollar before covid to around 162 now. This looks too sharp. Hence, it could possibly strengthen over the next 3-5 years. The use of leverage to invest in FCNR deposits is the idea's big appeal. Otherwise, flows into these deposits have been lacklustre. The last time such a scheme was drawn up, with a fixed swap rate offered by RBI, was back in 2013-14 when the forwards rate was almost double. From \$15 billion in 2012-13, deposits jumped to \$41 billion in 2013-14, but had declined to \$34 billion by 2025-26. Two factors explain this. *First*, RBI's special incentive was time-bound for those working on leverage. *Second*, non-leveraged deposits offer limited buoyancy as interest rates are continuously compared with local rates by prospective depositors. Estimates of what RBI's latest scheme can draw vary from \$40 billion to \$100 billion amid euphoria over it being a win-win game:

NRIs get higher returns than what they would earn in their country of residence, while banks get liquidity when they exchange dollars with RBI at a cost that is lower than of domestic funds (with RBI's zero-return cash reserve and statutory liquidity mandates thrown in). On its part, RBI gets to shore up its foreign exchange reserves—the swap cost does not really matter for a central bank. As a collateral gain, the dollars swapped for rupees with RBI leads to an infusion of liquidity into the system, thus helping address a shortfall in local deposits for on-lending. This is already showing in a decline in certificate-of-deposit rates. An interesting question that arises is whether the scheme could have been extended to all investors and not just NRIs. This would have helped widen the universe of potential investors and could have been called a special foreigner deposit programme. Another pertinent question is what happens after 3 or 5 years when these deposits

have to be redeemed. While inflows of \$40-100 billion are large, these can prove onerous if not renewed on maturity. Else, India's current account would have to support these flows. On the capital account side, inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI) and from foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) need to strengthen and turn significantly positive. Here, the 'FDI syndrome' is relevant—a situation we have faced for the last few years where gross inflows have risen to almost \$100 billion, but repatriations have increased too, thus resulting in unimpressive levels of net FDI. Several investors who invested in enterprises have moved out. Some have used initial public offerings as a way to take money out of India. A similar worry can arise for FCNR deposits when they are due for redemption. Interest rates in source countries could move over the next 3-5 years, with currency movements also hard to predict. All those taking loans right now to invest in FCNR deposits would have to estimate their risk

when it is time to pay back. Retail investors would not re-deposit the money if interest rates are cut. So India would have to keep a large stash of dollars available for FCNR redemptions. It would impact the country's foreign exchange reserves, which would dip by a matching amount. The central bank has been using buy-sell foreign exchange swaps to infuse greater liquidity into the system. So far in 2026, it has already bought \$25 billion from banks that will fall due after three years. As these swaps are part of its liquidity management framework, there is a possibility of more such swaps taking place in the future. Therefore, it is important to monitor all these flows even as we hope that other components of India's balance of payments would turn largely positive over the next 3-5 years. It will be useful to build suitable buffers for foreign exchange reserves to enable the smooth redemption of NRI deposits when the time comes. One can be sanguine that moves made by the government on the trade front, especially its new set of agreements, will bring about a substantial improvement in India's current account balance. The economy's growth story must continue to resonate with foreign investors. *These are the author's personal views.*

These offer a win-win for now but leveraged deposits aren't risk-free and India must plan for redemptions



| GUEST VIEW

Sebi's blind spot sits just above Tata Sons: it's time to address it

Disclosure rules protect investors in 26 listed Tata companies but not from shocks at a level that actually controls their fate



M. DAMODARAN & SUMIT AGRAWAL

are, respectively, chairperson, Excellence Enablers, and former chairman, Sebi, UTI and IDBI; and managing partner, Regstreet Law Advisors and a former Sebi officer.

On 18 August, Tata Sons will hold its annual general meeting (AGM) and only one of its two largest charitable trusts will be entitled to cast a vote. The Sir Ratan Tata Trust, which together with the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust accounts for just over half of the roughly 66% of Tata Sons held collectively by Tata Trusts, a network of some 15 family trusts, has been restrained from participating in trust decisions by the Maharashtra Charity Commissioner, pending an inquiry into the composition of its board, an order that Tata Trusts have publicly contested as procedurally irregular and issued without a hearing. A separate decades-old dispute, over the 1989 transfer of 833 Tata Sons shares from the Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust to the late Naval Tata, has since resulted in a formal complaint to the Commissioner and a remarkable demand from an incumbent Tata Trusts vice-chairman for an independent probe of his own institution.

Layer this onto the still-unresolved question of N. Chandrasekaran's third term as Tata Sons chairman, deferred at a board meeting in February and now pushed to the August AGM, and one has three live governance disputes with a direct bearing on who controls the promoter of 26 listed companies with a combined market value that Tata's own investor disclosures put at more than \$328 billion as of March 2025.

None of it has triggered a single disclosure under the Securities and Exchange Board of India's (Sebi) Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements (LODR) regulations of 2015. None of it need have. And that is the point.

The LODR's disclosure architecture, while extensively amended in recent years, is built around one governing assumption: that the entity making disclosures and the one whose governance matters to investors are the same, or at most one step removed through a 'material subsidiary.' Regulation 30 requires listed companies to disclose material events concerning themselves and their subsidiaries. It says nothing about material events at the level of the promoter above them that may control their board composition, capital allocation and, not infrequently, their very existence.

For most listed Indian firms, this gap is academic, since the promoter is an individual, a family or a company that is itself listed or closely held in a legally uncomplicated way. Tata Sons makes the gap impossible to ignore as the control chain runs through an unlisted core investment company regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for prudential purposes, sitting beneath charitable trusts governed by the Maharashtra Public Trusts Act and answerable to a charity commissioner, not Sebi, nor stock exchanges, and not to shareholders of group companies in any formal sense.



BLOOMBERG

Consider what this means in practice. When the board of Tata Sons deferred Chandrasekaran's reappointment on 24 February, a decision material enough to create a three-month leadership vacuum at the group's apex, not one of the 26 listed Tata companies was obliged to inform its own shareholders. When the charity commissioner restrained the Sir Ratan Tata Trust from functioning in May, pending an inquiry, the same silence applied. Investors in some of India's most widely held stocks learnt of both developments from newspapers, not from stock exchange filings because the LODR framework gave no listed company a legal hook on which to hang a disclosure.

This is not criticism of Tata Sons' compliance. Tata Sons has no LODR obligation to breach, because it is not listed. It is criticism of the framework. The Tata situation happens to be the clearest illustration that India's markets have produced of a structural blind spot that predates it and will outlast it. Every large business house built around a holding-company or trust structure above its listed operating companies, and there are several, sits in some version of the same gap. The difference is that at most of them, the upper layer stays quiet. At the Tata Group, three separate disputes have surfaced within months of one another, at three different points in the same control chain, making visible in real time exactly what the disclosure framework is not built to see.

The fix need not be as complicated as the problem looks. Sebi's regulatory toolkit already reaches deep into questions of beneficial ownership and control across entity lines: the concept of "persons acting in concert" under its Takeovers Regulations looks beyond immediate shareholders to connected parties, and LODR's related-party transaction framework looks beyond the immediate corporate entity to connected transactions. Both exist because control, not formal listing status, is what securities regulation is meant to police. There is no

principled reason that logic should stop at the boundary of an immediate listed entity. A workable fix does not require Sebi to regulate charitable trusts or unlisted NBFCs directly, which would exceed its mandate and invite jurisdictional conflict with RBI and state charity authorities. It calls for something narrower: a disclosure trigger that sits with the listed entity and is activated when a person or entity which controls its promoter undergoes a change in control, a material governance dispute, or a regulatory restraint with a clear bearing on that control, and is reportable by the listed company on the basis of information it can reasonably be expected to seek from its promoter.

This is close to how LODR's existing disclosure obligations already function: the obligation sits with the listed entity, but the trigger can originate upstream in connected or controlling persons. Extending the same logic to promoter-level control events would not be a radical departure from the LODR's architecture, but would complete it.

The timing is apt. The government has already introduced the Securities Markets Code, 2025, now before a parliamentary standing committee, to consolidate and modernize the foundational statutes underlying India's securities regulation. A code-level provision addressing promoter-level material events, rather than a piecemeal circular, would ensure that the fix survives the next round of holding-company litigation, whichever conglomerate it involves next.

The Tata Group's minority shareholders—and there are millions who hold Tata equity either directly and through mutual funds and insurance policies—have a clear interest in knowing who controls their companies' ultimate promoter and whether that control is secure, contested or under regulatory scrutiny. That interest does not currently show up anywhere in the disclosure regime built to protect it. It must. The earlier, the better.

This is the first of a two-part series.

MINT CURATOR

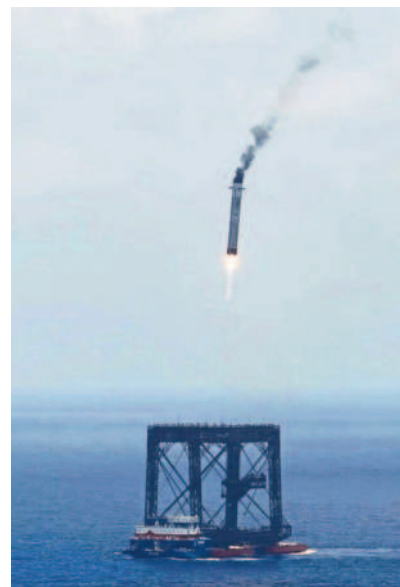
Will China's Long March blast past Musk's reusable rockets?

SpaceX can't take its space lead for granted with IOB hot on its trail



DAVID FICKLING

is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering climate change and energy.



China innovated in its landing of a reusable first-stage booster.

PTI

For all of China's breakthroughs in clean-tech and disruptive strength in AI, there is one area of frontier engineering where America is still way ahead: space. That may be about to change.

Last Friday's successful landing of a reusable first-stage booster for the Long March 10B rocket represents a leap beyond anything China's space industry has achieved. Such boosters provide the grunt work needed to get smaller second-stage and orbital vehicles into space, and were traditionally jettisoned with each launch.

Learning to recycle them allowed the Falcon 9 developed by Elon Musk's SpaceX to reduce costs by almost 90%. With a fleet of only a few dozen first stages, Falcon 9 has given SpaceX a seemingly unassailable lead. Its nearly 10,000 satellites represent more than two-thirds of all active orbiters.

The Long March 10B, whose first stage landed on an offshore platform after launch in southern China, is the first viable competitor outside the US. Getting a reusable rocket back to base is a real engineering challenge. Only one other company had achieved it until last week: the Jeff Bezos-backed Blue Origin, which completed just a single successful mission before its dramatic explosion on the launchpad in May. Left to its own devices, a booster would hit the ocean with the force of a freight train crashing into a cliff. Landing it gently enough to avoid damage and putting it back into service within weeks is a miraculous achievement.

Nor is China's 10B simply a carbon copy of the Falcon 9. Instead of using a reverse fuel burn to land on legs like the Falcon 9 and Blue Origin's New Glenn, it used a system of wires to catch its first stage, like a butterfly in a net. That may reduce stresses on the rocket's structure and eliminate the weight of landing gear, leaving more space for cargo. Whether the alternative system is a success or not, it is a sign that China's rocket scientists are coming up with innovative approaches of their own. That intellectual ambition should be as concerning for SpaceX's pretensions to unquestioned leadership as the 10B landing itself.

Surveying China's entire space industry, current conditions look remarkably similar to the state of the electric vehicle sector nearly a decade ago. Then, as now, Musk seemed to be in a race with himself, rather than foreign competitors. Back in 2017, Tesla's breakthrough Model 3 was embroiled in "production hell" as it ramped up output. The episode pushed the company to the edge of bankruptcy, but ultimately allowed it to capture more than

half the value in the global auto industry.

That victory-from-the-jaws-of-defeat trajectory is the one SpaceX would like to see for Starship, its fully reusable planned launcher. It is slated for commercial operations later this year, but has suffered failures on every one of its 12 test flights. If Starship succeeds, it will be able to carry at least five times as much cargo as Falcon 9 and squeeze costs further—to the point where orbital trips might become almost routine.

As in 2017, there is a potent competitor waiting in the wings. A decade ago, few took China's electric car industry seriously. Most vehicles sold were glorified golf carts with little chance of rivaling incumbent carmakers at home, let alone punching a hole in export markets.

BYD was already a clear leader, but the would-be entrepreneurs behind the likes of Nio, Li Auto, XPeng, Leapmotor and CATL seemed simply a confusing alphabet soup of also-rans with more hope than capability. Few would have guessed that the same names would have Toyota, Volkswagen and General Motors trembling less than a decade later.

Right now, China's nascent space industry looks a lot like that. Half-a-dozen private rocket companies are working on reusable launch vehicles, alongside groups affiliated with scientific institutes and China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, the state-owned company that built the Long March. It is anyone's guess which, if any, will succeed—but the sheer volume of competition resembles nothing so much as the ferment of private, provincial and national funding that created the country's current world-beating EV sector.

If Beijing's industrial policy plays out the same way in space as it has on roads and in solar panels, a decade from now we may be talking not about SpaceX's unimpeachable technological leadership, but about chronic involution in China's reusable-rockets industry. In that scenario, ruinous competition among mainland players would push costs down to undreamt-of levels, raising fears of technological dominance around the globe.

Musk's orbital spacelift dominance has gone unquestioned, but he should watch out for China Inc catching up. Keep your eyes fixed on the stars, and you may miss what's happening on Earth. ©BLOOMBERG

| THEIR VIEW

India could take the spice route to leadership of quality

ARPITA MUKHERJEE & ESHANA MUKHERJEE



are, respectively, professor and external consultant, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (Icrier).

India, with a share of over 40% in the global production of spices, produces over 75 different types of these and can lead the world in developing food safety standards for spices through the Codex Alimentarius. However, before that, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) norms must be uniformly implemented at home.

India is the host country for a Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs, with the FSSAI as its nodal agency. Codex is an initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization and World Health Organization that aims to set global food safety standards. India has been trying to align its food safety standards with Codex norms to ensure that what applies to imports also applies to domestic production. For Indian exports, the standards of import markets prevail, but as increasingly more developing countries adopt Codex specifications, a large part of the global market could soon have nearly uniform food safety standards. India has an interest in shaping these.

India has long been known as a standard taker rather than maker. This can and must change. The country has a global advantage in this exercise for multiple reasons.

First, India is the world's largest producer, exporter and market for spices.

Second, the FSSAI has already developed product-specific standards for 45 spices, while the current Codex has norms for only 14. So, the standards for many spices already set by the FSSAI, like coriander, could be pushed through the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs as globally applicable. For this, we need collaborations aimed at serving common interests with other spice producers like Sri Lanka.

Third, Indian consumers are not just becoming more health conscious, they are showing an interest in food safety standards and matters like curcumin content in turmeric. Growing domestic demand for products that are organic or free of chemical fertilizers is another indicator of it.

Revisit domestic standards for precision. Setting international standards by aligning them with Indian standards would demand that domestic standards are precise, clear and quantitative rather than qualitative, leaving less scope for interpretation. For example, in case of live insects in a product

like turmeric powder, the Codex requires "0 count/100g," while the FSSAI needs it to be "Free from mould, living and dead insects, insect fragments, rodent contamination" and the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) asks for it to be "Free from dirt, mould growth, and insect infestation." The FSSAI's scientific committee could review its qualitative standards to make them more precise.

Reduce overlaps: In India, multiple agencies set standards for spices. The BIS and Agmark are two such examples. While FSSAI standards are mandatory and should be strictly followed, the BIS and Agmark are voluntary standards and should ideally be tighter than FSSAI standards. However, this is not the case for spices. For example, for coriander whole, under 'odour, taste and flavour,' the FSSAI says it "shall have typical aroma and shall be free from mustiness" while the BIS says: "The taste and flavour of coriander whole shall have the characteristic pleasant taste and aroma. The material shall

be free from musty odour." The language differs but does not reflect higher standards.

Agmark standards are higher than Codex in some cases. A survey by the authors found industry players asking why India has two similar standards. The BIS standards like Agmark should be higher and cover additional properties.

For example, the BIS can set standards for different chilli varieties based on their pungency. For red chillies, Scoville Heat Unit or American Spice Trade Association values can be used. This would signal to consumers that a BIS or an Agmark stamp denotes superiority on some parameters. In developed countries, other standards are higher than those laid down by the food safety authority, or differ in some key ways.

Enforce FSSAI standards strictly along supply chains: Playing a leadership role in standard setting at a global forum would also require the FSSAI to ensure uniform implementation of its standards at home. Multiple studies, some by government agencies, have

picked up spice samples from *mandis* that do not meet FSSAI standards. An Icrier study (Policy Brief # 73) found that this is primarily due to three reasons. *First*, heavy use of fertilizer and pesticides by farms. *Second*, lack of modern post-harvest technology and poor storage conditions. *Third*, products from different farms get mixed up at *mandis* without any supply chain traceability.

The FSSAI has no mandate to regulate farming practices in the country. If the Prime Minister's call to reduce chemical fertilizers by 50% must be implemented on-ground, the FSSAI should be given the mandate to regulate agricultural production and implement food safety standards at the farm level. Today, export-control agencies like the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority or Coffee Board can reach farmers through their apps or by means of geo-tagging, but the FSSAI cannot.

For Indian spices to meet standards that would assure global consumers of quality, the FSSAI should oversee the entire supply chain all the way from farms to retail points. A reputation for top-notch quality within the country would ease India's path to leadership of global standards.

Samridhi Dube of Icrier contributed to this article. These are the authors' personal views.

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



OPINION

EDITORIAL

Private capital has a role to play in China’s climate resilience

Much of western Europe, parts of the US and Britain have been enveloped in a heat dome this summer. Typhoon Bavi, one of the most severe storms in years, wreaked havoc across East Asia. It battered eastern China, resulting in heavy rain and over 2 million people having to evacuate. Scientists say the developing “super” El Nino – caused by unusually high sea-surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean – is partly to blame.

Extreme weather events are occurring with increasing frequency. Few countries have been spared. China is one of the few that has made climate resilience a matter of national policy. Despite denials from some quarters, climate change is a global reality. Governments that are best prepared to mitigate its effects will be better placed to protect their economies and people going forward.

Besides leading the world in the transition to green energy and electrification, China is making massive investments in building more resilient infrastructure and disaster relief responses. Rather than reacting when disasters happen, Beijing is uniquely engaged in large-scale advance planning for natural disasters.

Even so, it remains a work in progress. While casualties are often reported, what is harder to determine is the number of lives saved as a result of such mitigation planning.

China is among the world’s most highly exposed countries to floods, with nearly 400 million people directly exposed to once-in-100-year floods, representing more than a third of global exposure, according to a World Bank study in 2022. The country loses an estimated 1 per cent of its gross domestic product each year to floods, with more than 640 cities subject to flood risks and 67 per cent of the population living in flood-prone areas.

Since 2015, Beijing has been rolling out its “sponge city” initiative to make cities better at absorbing excess rain. But it’s often not enough to mitigate severe flooding. Recent extreme floods in major cities prompted massive national investment plans. Ageing dams and underground pipelines are being identified as critical infrastructure. Billions have been invested in improving major coastal infrastructure. The central government has increased funding for flood control infrastructure, allocating 44.77 billion yuan (HK\$52 billion) for water conservancy and 160 billion yuan for urban drainage this year. However, local government debt and property market declines threaten the sustainability of future funding. Currently, bank loans and private capital only account for about 22 per cent of such financing. They need to play a much bigger role to provide the large-scale, long-term and low-cost capital needed for the kind of infrastructure development for true climate resilience.

Critics of pet-friendly eateries have choices

The saying “not my cup of tea” is commonly used to refer to someone or something you do not like. It was to be expected that some would react in that way when dogs were welcomed into restaurants and eateries. After all, not everyone is comfortable consuming food around dogs. About 940 outlets were licensed to admit patrons with dogs from last Thursday.

Negative reactions have not been all that common, even during the busy period on the weekend, if the relative handful of complaints received is any guide. Only about 20 had been received as of Monday, according to Albert Yuen Yuk-kin, director of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. Most were about minor issues such as leash length and seating arrangements. Online, however, the scheme has triggered a backlash, including clips of dogs licking plates and sitting on tables and chairs.

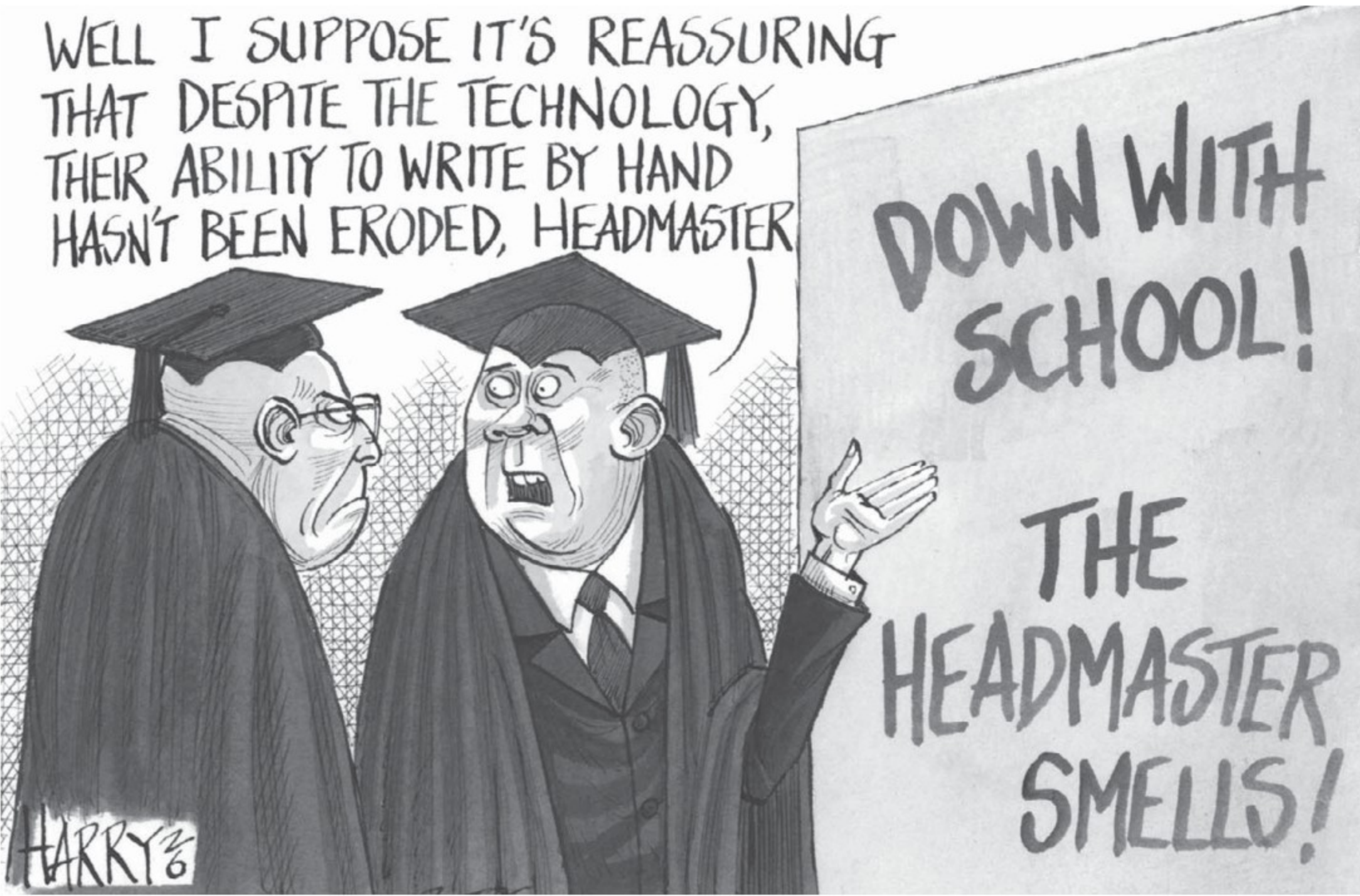
Yuen said a small number of restaurants had temporarily withdrawn from the scheme amid operational challenges, including staffing shortages and difficulties in separating dining areas.

Hong Kong banned dogs from restaurants in 1994 primarily to prevent the spread of disease, particularly rabies. The first phase of the relaxation of the ban attracted more than 1,600 valid applications. The scheme has proved popular with dog owners, but its success will depend on reciprocal respect and tolerance between them and people who do not like dogs or do not care to dine in proximity to them. It remains to be seen whether the scheme adds significantly to patronage of participating restaurants or whether places from which dogs remain banned perceive a loss of business.

After more than 30 years of a ban on dogs, it is to be expected that some businesses will eventually withdraw from the scheme because they do not see a positive effect on business. Yuen said that both the industry and the public need time to adapt.

The scheme will add colour and character to the city’s vibrant restaurant and eatery scene, from fine dining to budget fare. As Chan Hoi-yan, chairwoman of Legco’s food safety and environmental hygiene panel, reminded critics of the scheme, they have a choice of the remaining 90 per cent of restaurants without dog permits.

HARRY’S VIEW ON THE USE OF A.I. IN SCHOOLS



Clash of tech titans

Ravi Kant says at the heart of the battle for dominance of artificial intelligence and technology is a deeper contest between two different leadership styles

Great leadership doesn’t start with what you do but who you are. There are generally two leadership styles: loud and quiet. Loud leadership considers visibility for effectiveness and often focuses on showing dominance to drive results. Quiet leadership focuses on depth rather than volume. It is marked by clarity and consistency.

If the West favours highly visible, charismatic leaders, in the East, leaders are often valued for their discipline and vision. The rivalry between the East and West for global influence, led by China and the United States, is often seen as a contest of economic might, military power and innovation. But beneath these visible arenas lies a contest between two distinct leadership cultures.

The difference is clear in the leadership styles of President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump. It is also reflected in the two countries’ corporate figures.

In America, the likes of SpaceX and Tesla founder Elon Musk, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang and OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, apart from being business leaders and entrepreneurs, are also public personalities. Their companies have become some of the world’s biggest brands through breakthrough innovation.

In contrast, Chinese corporate leadership, while influential, tends to keep a low public profile. The likes of BYD founder Wang Chuanfu, Huawei Technologies founder Ren Zhengfei, Baidu CEO Robin Li and Tencent Holdings CEO Pony Ma have focused on building industrial capacity, manufacturing excellence and long-term national competitiveness.

The differences reflect two very different approaches to technological development. China’s rise as a technological nation was nothing like that of the United States. Over the years, China has spent a lot on infrastructure development, manufacturing

ecosystems, the creation of its own supply chain and supporting critical industries through coordinated industrial policies.

The Chinese government has made massive investment in roads, factories, local suppliers and other important industries. The goal was not simply to create successful companies, but to strengthen national capabilities across entire industries and sectors. One example of this approach is with electric vehicles.

While Musk’s Tesla was making a name for itself in electric cars, China was quietly building an ecosystem – investing in batteries, charging networks, mineral supply chains and manufacturing. In just a few years, BYD has overtaken Tesla as the world’s top EV maker and seller. While Tesla focused on product innovation, its Chinese competitors were nurturing an ecosystem capable of producing vehicles at scale.

Similarly, in robotics, the focus in the US has been on breakthrough innovations, such as through companies like Boston Dynamics, Tesla, Agility Robotics, Figure AI and Nvidia. The focus was directed towards humanoid robots, autonomous systems and AI-powered software. China, however, began by prioritising large-scale industrial deployment, integrating robotics and machine vision and intelligence into its factories.

This ecosystem-first approach extends beyond EVs and robotics to artificial intelligence. In Silicon Valley, AI is often seen as a race to build the most powerful, capable frontier models, whether from OpenAI, Anthropic or xAI. In contrast, China has followed a less public-facing approach.

Rather than seek to make AI a consumer technology or cultural phenomenon, companies such as DeepSeek, Alibaba Group Holding (which owns the South China Morning Post), Tencent, Baidu, Moonshot AI and Zhipu AI have worked towards

deploying AI across the real economy by embedding it into manufacturing, logistics, finance, healthcare, smart cities, transport and industrial automation.

According to Stanford University’s 2026 AI Index Report, US and Chinese frontier models have traded the lead several times since early 2025. By March this year, Anthropic’s top models were leading by just 2.7 percentage points. China also dominates AI patent output, with 74 per cent of global AI patent grants awarded to the Chinese in 2024, vs 12 per cent for the US. In global AI publications, China accounted for 17.8 per cent vs 7.29 per cent for the US. Yes, the US remains a leading AI power – but it no longer dominates.

Chinese AI companies compete against each other but also work in collaboration to raise economic productivity. America is good at building global platforms, while China is good at building integrated industrial ecosystems. The strengths of each model lie in its strategic priorities, as do the weaknesses.

China has a planned, centralised economy which helps in rapid resource mobilisation and when it wishes to better align economic priorities. The drawbacks are a lack of openness, limits to creativity and too much institutional dependency. But the American model is the opposite. The US supports risk-taking behaviours which help to produce globally competitive firms, but can also fail to maintain long-term strategic planning and policy continuity.

The global balance of power when it comes to AI is likely to depend on which set of qualities can respond more effectively to the pressures of the modern age. The lessons from history teach us that while game-changing innovations draw our attention, ecosystems decide the leader.

This century, the defining challenge will not be choosing between loud or quiet leadership but in combining creativity with discipline. True power may not belong to the loudest ones but to those who build the deepest foundations.

Ravi Kant is an analyst, writer and author specialising in economics, international politics and technology

Why is US attacking Nietzsche, Foucault and Sartre?

Alex Lo says a religious panel claims these philosophers’ ideas are corrupting, but Donald Trump may be the ultimate postmodern or post-truth politician

In May last year, US President Donald Trump established the Religious Liberty Commission. Last month, timed to coincide with the 250th anniversary of the United States’ founding, it released a 224-page draft report titled, “Americans’ First Freedom”.

I gather the current government and its key support base, the religious right, consider American society too secularised – to such an extent that it amounts to systemic religious discrimination.

That’s what the commission is tasked with rectifying. The report advocates a different understanding of the separation of church and state, and it makes various proposals to reverse entrenched secularisation in education, government, the military, employment and public healthcare. It also suggests setting up hotlines to rat out people in positions of authority who “discriminate” against people’s religious liberty.

Whether the US becomes a Christian theocracy, democracy or autocracy is none of my business. But as a lifelong student of philosophy, I do find it intriguing that the commission singles out Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault and Jean-Paul Sartre to blame for the secular corruption of American society. That’s rich coming from Trump and his allies in the religious right.

On page 41, under “Building Walls of Separation between Church and State”, it says: “In the 1900s, however, a new philosophy emerged in Europe, which laid the intellectual foundations for threats to American religious liberty which persist even today. Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Jean-Paul Sartre and others famously embraced the belief that ‘God is dead’,

rejecting God and dismissing ideals of objective truth and morality as simply pretences used to gain power.”

But so what if some dead European guys were atheists? That’s an issue because, the report continues, citing commission member Bishop Robert Barron, “this new ideology gave ‘complete prioritisation ... to individual autonomy, [the idea] that we decide value, we decide meaning, we decide purpose’ and that people who claim to know the truth just want power. ‘That philosophy – which is becoming ... increasingly influential in our society – rightly sees the classical religions as the chief opponent because [they] stand for objective moral values. [Classical religions] stand for God as the ground of those values...”

What strikes me as ironic is that Trump and his “tech bro” billionaire pals are exactly the type of people you would expect to find under what has been called the postmodern condition or in a post-truth society.

Using value, meaning, truth, purpose only as means to power? I wonder who those people are.

Trump was asked in interviews to name his favourite Bible verses, and he couldn’t cite a single one. How often does Trump lie or make inaccurate statements?

The Washington Post documented 30,573 false or misleading claims over four years in his first term, averaging roughly 21 erroneous statements a day.

An analysis of his statements by fact-checking outlet Politifact during his 2016 presidential election campaign showed that nearly 78 per cent of assessed claims were rated as “mostly false”, “false” or “completely false”.

Trump is not so much a liar as he is what the late US philosopher Harry Frankfurt calls a bull****er: someone who doesn’t care if what he says is true or not, or what the consequences of his actions are.

“He is not motivated by what motivates other politicians,” said his bestselling biographer Michael Wolff in a recent Daily Beast podcast. “He doesn’t really care about policy. He doesn’t really have an agenda. He doesn’t really think about his legacy. He thinks about whatever random thought comes into his head ... He’s always throwing out numbers that have no meaning. He’s always setting deadlines that are subject to extension.”

You can’t get any more post-truth or postmodern than that.

As for the tech bros, their companies and the government over which they exercise disproportionate influence know everything about you. I am not a Foucault fan but he does have a fundamental insight into the technology of surveillance.

He began his famous book, *Surveiller et punir*, with a long gruesome passage on the execution of the 18th century French regicide Robert-Francois Damiens and asked why such extreme public punishments became extinct in modern society. It’s not because we became more humane. Rather, state capacities for surveillance have become so organised and advanced that governments no longer need to scare people off sedition or rebellion with extreme public punishment.

Foucault died in 1984 and would have had no idea how far the technology he warned against would advance.

Alex Lo has been a South China Morning Post columnist since 2012, covering major issues affecting Hong Kong and the rest of China

CONTACT US

Tammy Tam Publisher

Chow Chung-yan Editor-in-Chief

Zuraidah Ibrahim Executive Editor Yonden Lhatoo Managing Editor

Zhang Jun Chief Technology Officer

Editorial office 19/F, Tower One, Times Square, 1 Matheson Street, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong

Editorial feedback, general inquiries 2565 2222, news@scmp.com

Advertising inquiries 2565 2435, advertising@scmp.com

Reprint permission 2680 8822, licensing@scmp.com

Place a classified or recruitment ad 2565 8822, classified@scmp.com

Subscription and delivery hotline 2680 8822, printsupport@scmp.com

Online / Digital inquiries 2565 9388, support@scmp.com

Charity giving 2680 8159, ocs@scmp.com

Events and conferences 2565 2435, live@scmp.com

Both SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST * and 南華早報 * are registered in the People's Republic of China.

CONTACT US

Agree or disagree with the opinions on this page? Write to us at letters@scmp.com

If you have an idea for an opinion article, email it to oped@scmp.com

OPINION

Time to tap the media

Chow Chung-yan says there is scope for the industry to fit into Hong Kong's first five-year plan

Mainstream media, particularly in Hong Kong, have historically been conservative in their research and development spending. Media executives prefer to shop for off-the-shelf solutions, treating technology as back-office support rather than a core growth engine.

This mode of operation now faces an existential challenge amid the explosive growth of artificial intelligence (AI), large language models and Web3 technologies. Concurrently, these developments offer Hong Kong's media industry fresh opportunities, particularly as such innovations have been identified as key components of China's 15th five-year plan and, by extension, a focus of Hong Kong's alignment with the national strategy.

One of the bottlenecks in AI development is the lack of high-quality, verified data that encompasses local culture and nuances. Professional journalism, in-depth reports and historical archives held by traditional media can be a gold mine for good model training.

International publishers have already pivoted to monetise these assets. News Corp recently signed a deal worth a reported US\$250 million over five years with OpenAI. The Associated Press, Reuters and a growing list of publishers are building recurring revenue from content they already own.

Hong Kong has remained largely an idle observer. This passivity risks more than missed financial opportunities. It brings security and cultural concerns. As younger generations increasingly rely on AI models to synthesise information and understand the world, the data used to train these models becomes the new frontier of the global narrative war. The Hong Kong

government encourages AI adoption in traditional sectors through programmes such as the Enterprise Support Scheme (ESS) under the Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF). Yet as of March 2024, the ESS Assessment Panel had approved 220 projects out of 762 applications. Not a single media outlet was among them.

Industry inertia is the main reason. Hong Kong media outlets traditionally invest in tech applications rather than genuine innovation, rarely designing proprietary tools with the intention of spinning them off as commercial software products for global markets. Consequently, media applications struggle to prove commercial product viability under strict innovation and technology (I&T) definitions.

However, there is also the issue of bureaucratic silos. For decades, Hong Kong's media and creative industries have been isolated in a different administrative ecosystem from tech start-ups. Media is grouped with film, sports and entertainment under bureaus that prioritise artistic creativity, cultural impact and audience reach, while the ITF focuses on hard tech.

This division is outdated. Media operations—including speech-to-text, real-time multilingual translation, automated video generation, smart content recommendation and blockchain-based copyright protection—offer the most natural, high-density sandbox for developing and testing advanced AI technologies.

With the right policy support, the media industry can branch out beyond the narrowly defined "culture industry" into the media-tech sector. Nurturing such a new industry would broaden professional horizons for local tech graduates, who currently face limited options.

For this transformation to occur, we must dismantle institutional barriers. We

could consider classifying media-tech, generative AI content and digital language infrastructure as strategic technology industries. This reclassification would grant media organisations legal and administrative parity when applying for tech funding and resources, effectively moving them from the periphery of the cultural sector to the core of the I&T ecosystem.

For instance, Hong Kong currently offers a 300 per cent tax deduction for R&D expenditure, but media companies are excluded because content creation is not recognised as technical R&D. Policymakers should explicitly clarify that capital spent by media companies on developing proprietary software, algorithm engineering and data cleaning for AI training qualifies for these deductions.

More critically, the government must establish a modern legal and technical framework to protect local intellectual property from predatory mining. Hong Kong is updating its copyright laws by introducing a text and data mining exception into the Copyright Ordinance. While this amendment aims to allow AI developers to use copyrighted data for training without prior permission under specific conditions, it must include stringent safeguards, such as legal protections

for paywalls and mandate clear opt-out mechanisms for local media outlets.

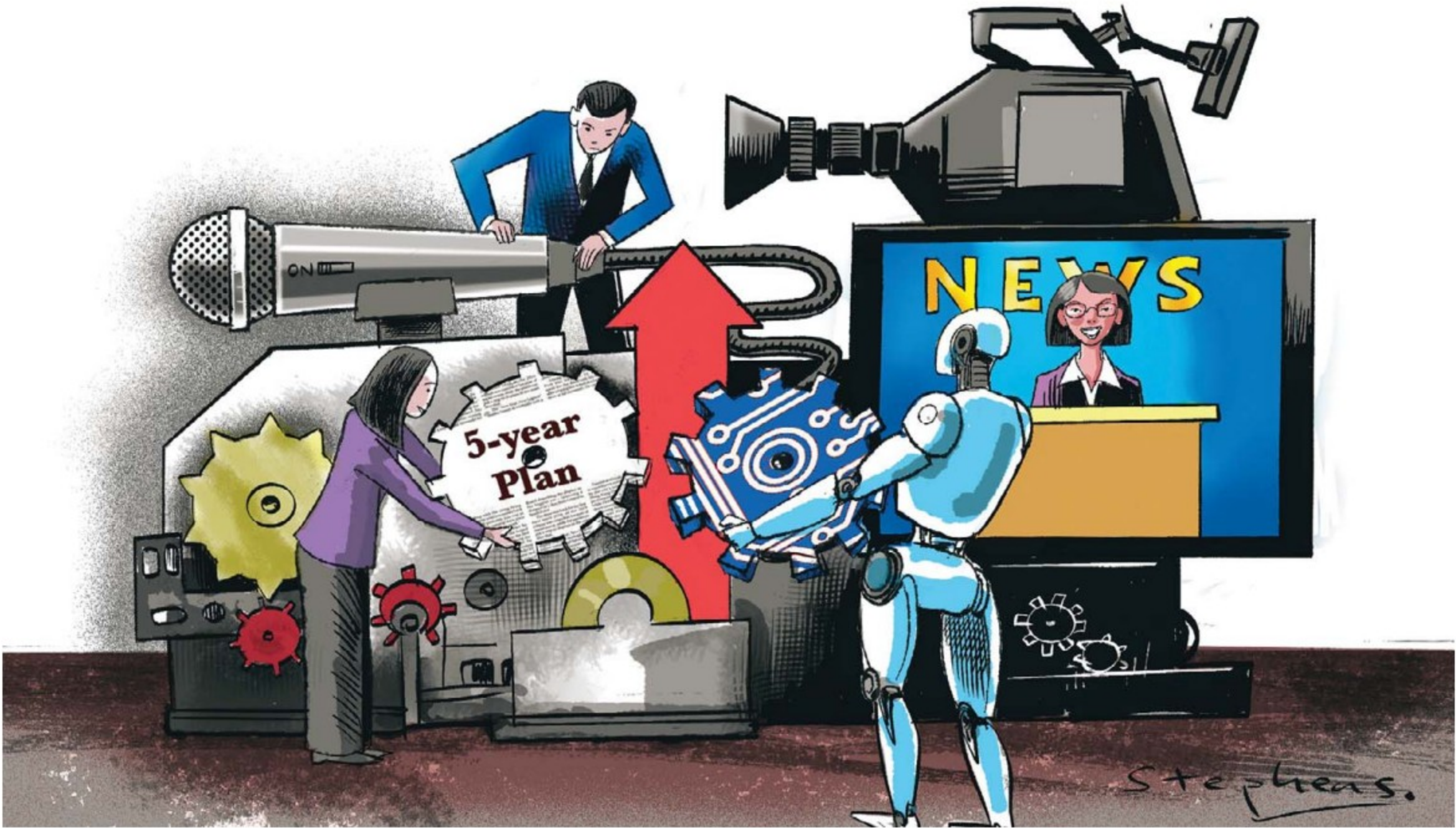
Because most traditional media companies lack the technical staff to build sophisticated digital walls against global AI scrapers, the government's Digital Policy Office should step in. The office can help build and deploy practical shared infrastructure to explicitly signal to global web crawlers that Hong Kong media archives are protected by copyright.

This regulation is not an invitation for the media industry to become free riders. Rather, it corrects a massive market failure where small local content creators face global tech monopolies. In this struggle between David and Goliath, the government cannot be just a passive referee.

Only by establishing a regulated and fair market can the industry stand a chance of investing in and commercialising data for AI development. Traditional media cannot fund multimillion-dollar research on declining advertising revenues. They need structured government matching and equity investments for these changes to take place. We do not need to invent new funds; rather, we should loosen bureaucratic constraints to make existing ones accessible to the media sector. Over time, the government can champion locally developed media tech by becoming the "first customer" that adopts tools such as public sentiment analysis and multilingual content creation.

By treating media-tech with the same financial and policy weight currently afforded to fintech or biotech, the Hong Kong government can convert a legacy industry into a vibrant node of new quality productive forces. This strategy would preserve local journalism while aggressively expanding Hong Kong's digital cultural footprint under the 15th five-year plan.

Chow Chung-yan is editor-in-chief of the South China Morning Post



Cambodia aims to shed dependencies and stay connected

Stefano Arroque says it must build diplomatic bridges with as much effort as it puts in for ports

Connectivity can be an ambiguous term. Different states use it in different ways at different times. In Southeast Asia, as in other regions where regional diplomacy exists in the backdrop of ever-stronger great power disputes, connectivity lies in the conflux of economics, trade necessities and the unyielding pressure of geopolitics.

In few countries is this more evident than in Cambodia, where investment in transport logistics has been a political and diplomatic fixture for at least two decades.

Last year's brief but intense armed conflict with Thailand, and the border closures that ensued, were a watershed moment. The border closures sent shock waves through Cambodia's economy. Until May 2025, the border was one of the main entry points for Cambodian goods into the global economy, benefiting from Thailand's port infrastructure and maritime network.

From the beginning of the hostilities, analysts questioned the nature of Cambodia's economic resilience. Reliance on Thai companies and exports in certain sectors such as oil and energy, the use of Thai roads and ports, and the prospect of a long war cast doubts on Cambodia's short-term economic prospects.

Phnom Penh had plans to turn the country into a major connectivity hub in the so-called Greater Mekong Subregion long before last year's conflict. As in much of Southeast Asia, Cambodian investments in transport logistics have been at once a means of increased integration into global

trade routes, as well as raising the country's profile. As the economy grew, so did demand for infrastructure.

Timing was also on Phnom Penh's side. China's Belt and Road Initiative saw a shift away from pure, classic geopolitics towards a more geo-economic understanding of great power disputes. Beijing's regional and global rivals reacted to the belt and road plan with their own spending pivots.

From Tokyo to Brussels, investment and infrastructure-building programmes were announced, with Southeast Asia as a key region. Where lines were once drawn by armies and gunboats, they were now being drawn in ports, canals and highways.

Since the ceasefire with Thailand, Cambodian policy has been one of accelerated connectivity development. Rather than changing plans or abandoning them altogether, the country has doubled down on transport infrastructure investment.

More than becoming a regional hub, Cambodia sought to leverage its connectivity boon to uphold economic sovereignty.

This, in Cambodian terms, entails reducing the two regional dependencies that have marked the country's recent history – on Thailand and Vietnam.

When it comes to connectivity in Cambodia, all roads and all vessels lead to Sihanoukville. The port city has been at the centre of several transport investment projects since at least the turn of the century. Sihanoukville is the country's main seaport and the only one with deepwater capacity.

Sihanoukville, besides being Cambodia's maritime door to the world, is a microcosm of its geoeconomics. The port was built with French support in the 1950s, hence its Gallicised name. It is presently undergoing an expansion with Japanese funding. From around 30 per cent of the region's ships reportedly calling at Sihanoukville, port authorities expect an increase to up to 98 per cent by 2027.

Inside the port's terminals, Chinese, French, Japanese, Thai and other firms and operators work alongside local ones. The highway between Sihanoukville and Phnom Penh is a belt and road project. Though another seaport is under construction, Sihanoukville may become one of the Mekong region's primary and busiest seaports following its expansion.

Beyond Sihanoukville, Beijing remains the dominant external player in Cambodia's connectivity efforts. Cambodia's plan to build an inland canal connecting Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville is being carried out with Chinese support and financing. The US\$1.7 billion, 180km-long Funan Techo

canal will connect the Mekong basin to the sea, thus reducing Cambodia's dependence on Vietnam's fluvial routes.

As Cambodia seeks upper-middle-income country status, Prime Minister Hun Manet has emerged as a strong supporter of the project, hailing it as fundamental to the country's development. Funan Techo is both a colossal infrastructural endeavour and a risky diplomatic gambit. Vietnam is suspicious of the project, on environmental grounds, but just as likely for economic and geopolitical reasons.

If Funan Techo is completed, Vietnam loses existing revenue from Cambodian vessels. The canal's financing by China, Vietnam's main rival for influence in the Greater Mekong Subregion, further adds to Hanoi's political and security concerns.

Cambodia's strategy showcases the inseparability of connectivity policy with hard geopolitics. In the Sihanoukville microcosm, one sees, at once, the successes and risks that come with embracing one's geoeconomic potential. Phnom Penh has, so far, weathered them well, even against unfavourable circumstances.

The border with Thailand remains tense. As projects advance in the Funan Techo canal, the risk of diplomatic rows with Vietnam remains. As Cambodia becomes one of the Mekong region's main connectivity hubs in the coming years, it will need as much acumen in building diplomatic bridges as it has had in building ports and canals.

Stefano Arroque is a researcher in EU affairs, Central European politics and EU-Southeast Asia relations

LETTERS

Share your views with us and other Post readers in a Letter to the Editor. Include your full name and address, plus a phone number for verification. Please keep your letter to a maximum of 400 words.

Email us at letters@scmp.com.

Address: 19/F, Tower One, Times Square, 1 Matheson Street, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong.

Smart way would be to let humans do the writing, not AI

Since artificial intelligence (AI) tools hit the scene, many companies have turned to them to cut writing costs. Because language is often the face of a brand – in publishing, advertising and beyond – humans are still in the loop. Staff give AI an outline, then check, iterate and polish the output so it won't feel hollow or pass off falsehoods as facts. In many ways, these texts feel much better than the slop that floods the internet, such as the AI-generated books people dump on online stores to make a quick buck.

But editing an AI first draft is not the same as writing from scratch. When a top writer builds from the ground up, they make unique choices throughout a text that give it a brand-defining style. Those nuances are lost because large language models predict the most probable next word, pulling prose towards the mean. At best, an AI-generated text is mediocre. At worst, it reads like every other AI text. Because this problem lies at the most fundamental level, surface editing can't elevate the work. And when companies demand "10x" efficiency, writers feel pressured to accept work that's merely good enough.

As someone who edits English language learning materials, I know the temptation to put AI in the driver's seat. The grammar seems flawless. The vocabulary doesn't feel out of place. For non-native speakers, having AI do the initial drafting can feel like a huge upgrade. But content writers shouldn't sacrifice their intrinsic voice for a polished first draft. They've experienced the second language learning process and can adjust tone, simplify concepts and scaffold language in ways a generic tool can't replicate. By maintaining this voice, they help define the publisher's identity.

The value of an authentic voice is exactly why the rush to automate is so risky. If AI makes every company's writing the same, whether it's about a product or a service, consumers have no reason to choose one brand over another. Competition shifts from quality to price, creating a race to the bottom.

The solution is simple: let humans write the first draft and use AI to brainstorm, test outlines and polish. It may not mean "10x" productivity, but it preserves originality while still letting companies leverage AI.

Sam Ho, Yuen Long

Do not exploit animals all in the name of therapy

Public interest in animal-assisted services has grown in Hong Kong in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the city saw a surge in pet ownership. Our research team at HKU's department of social work and social administration has received a growing number of invitations to collaborate on such services from schools, hospitals and community centres. While we are happy to see the rise in interest, we also see the need to rectify wrong assumptions and misperceptions about these services.

Animal-assisted services (AAS) is a relatively novel concept in Hong Kong. Typically, people assume the simple presence of animals at an event is therapeutic.

On the contrary, AAS should be structured and goal-oriented. Many providers of services involving animals are not aware that provision of ethical AAS is a professional discipline requiring rigorous and specialised training for both animal and handler. Good intentions do not always lead to good outcomes.

Unfortunately, we've come across cases where casual, often stressful human-animal interactions are branded as professional therapy, despite the people involved possessing only certificates obtained with little effort online and lacking supervised real-world practice. This is an ethical failure. By overlooking the complex behavioural and emotional needs of animals, even practitioners with genuinely good intentions end up ignoring their stress signals for the sake of human benefit.

On the whole, Hong Kong's track record in animal protection is less than impressive. In April, the ombudsman called on the government to strengthen the city's abilities to investigate animal cruelty cases and increase the penalties for offenders. Likewise, we should raise awareness of effective and ethical AAS and ensure animal welfare is well protected.

Dr Camille Chan, research officer, Chee Yan Lee, CARing Kids project manager, and Paul W.C. Wong, associate professor, department of social work and social administration, University of Hong Kong

HK public messaging at new depths of mediocrity

Alice Wu's excellent Opinion piece, "Anti-drug video fiasco not a vote of confidence in Hong Kong's AI goals" (July 6), underlines a marked decline in the city's creativity standards.

Having worked in advertising and marketing for longer than I care to remember, I can confidently say the work produced in Hong Kong has never been this mediocre and embarrassingly off-strategy. Mistakes like the "Obsession: The Sugar-Coated Trap" video show incompetence. Those held accountable can't just apologise and think that's the end of it.

Everything that comes out of and represents Hong Kong must reach a certain standard. If a work doesn't, it means those accountable are not good enough. Can companies, organisations and the government be entrusted to hire the best creative talent possible?

Hans Ebert, Wan Chai

COMMENT & FEATURES

THE JERUSALEM POST • WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 2026

THE JERUSALEM POST

Founded in 1932 by GERSHON AGRON

ZVIKA KLEIN
Editor-in-ChiefALEX WINSTON, News Editor ETHAN FREEDMAN, Night Editor
TAL SPUNGIN, Managing Editor
HERB KEINON and SETH J. FRANTZMAN, Senior Contributing Editors
ERICA SCHACHINE, Magazine Editor AARON REICH, Op-Ed Editor
AUDREY LYNN LEINOFF, Supervising Editor
MARC ISRAEL SELLEM, Chief Photographer ELAINE MOSHE, Archivist

Duty to warn

Active-duty generals, as a rule, should stay out of politics.

Their job is to fight wars and implement the security policies of the democratically elected government, not publicly intervene in setting that policy.

But every rule has its exception, and Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Eyal Zamir's recent letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and others warning against legislation that would freeze arrests of haredi (ultra-Orthodox) draft dodgers for seven months falls well within that category.

Zamir was unquestionably weighing in on a policy dispute. But this was not a case of a general expressing a political preference. It was a case of the country's top military officer warning the government that proposed legislation would make it harder for the IDF to fulfill the missions the government assigns it.

And if he chose to do so in a letter that he knew would almost certainly become public, it was presumably because he feared that a warning delivered only behind closed doors could too easily be ignored.

Zamir, who for months has warned that the IDF is facing a critical manpower shortage and needs an influx of 12,000 soldiers, wrote that the legislation would create a disincentive to report for military service since it grants immunity from prosecution and criminal proceedings during the freeze.

Rather than encouraging enlistment, what is now desperately needed, this would do precisely the opposite. And this, he wrote, is "fundamentally and unequivocally inconsistent with the operational needs of the IDF."

Moreover, he argued, it is inconceivable that the military itself – as suggested in the legislation – would be tasked with overseeing a mechanism granting amnesty from prosecution for draft evasion.

"Such a move would cause a rupture with those who have borne the burden of fighting for the past two and a half years, and would increase the sense of inequality."

He's right.

Many factors explain the IDF's success: talented officers, advanced technology, superior intelligence, and rigorous training. But nothing is more important than the morale of its soldiers, the esprit de corps that binds fighting units together, and a willingness to fight – and, if necessary, die – for the country.

Nothing chips away at that morale more quickly than their belief that they are suckers: that while they are risking their lives, the state and the army they are serving are permitting others to evade that same responsibility and, indeed, promising not to punish them for doing so.

Because of the unusual nature of the letter, Zamir predictably drew fire from coalition members backing the haredi-backed legislation, which they hope will preserve the alliance needed to form the next government. Just as predictably, he was praised by opposition figures such as Gadi Eisenkot and Naftali Bennett.

One of those who criticized Zamir was Likud backbencher Amit Halevi. In an Army Radio interview, echoing others in his party, Halevi argued that the chief of staff had stepped beyond his proper role and should focus instead on battlefield success.

"I suggest that he [Zamir] focus on military tasks," Halevi said. "There are plenty of them. He shouldn't be dealing with legislation; he should be dealing with what he's responsible for – and that's winning the war."

Zamir understands full well what his responsibility is. His letter makes clear, however, that he is concerned he will not be able to fulfill that responsibility if legislation like this deprives him of one of the most fundamental tools needed to fight and win wars: soldiers.

Warning that proposed legislation will make it harder to defend the country is not political advocacy; it is the chief of staff's professional duty to do so.

One of the most common arguments advanced by those around Netanyahu seeking to shield him from responsibility for October 7 is that the IDF and intelligence services failed to warn him of Hamas's planned invasion. The prime minister's policies toward Gaza, they argue, were based on information provided by the professional echelon. He was not warned.

Now, the head of the IDF is warning the government in no uncertain terms that the military lacks sufficient manpower and that the legislation being discussed will further impair its ability to fight.

Halevi and those echoing his criticism are attacking Zamir for issuing that warning. They must heed it.

INBAR ASHKENAZI, CEO Jerusalem Post Group

DROR RONEN, Director of Circulation
GALIT SASSON, Deputy CEO Commercial and Strategic Partnerships

EDITORIAL OFFICES AND ADMINISTRATION

The Jerusalem Post Building, PO Box 81, Jerusalem 9100002.

Telephone 02-531-5666, Fax 02-537-6553.

• CUSTOMER SERVICE *2421, 03-761-9056, 1800-547574,

Fax 03-561-3699.

PO Box 9344, Tel Aviv 6109202.

• ADVERTISING 15 Ha'achim Mislavita, Tel Aviv 6701027.

Telephone 03-761-9000, Fax 03-561-0777.

• SUBSCRIPTIONS E-MAIL SUBS@JPOST.COM

• ADVERTISING E-MAIL TRAFFIC@JPOST.COM

• READERS LETTERS LETTERS@JPOST.COM

• OP-ED SUBMISSIONS OPED@JPOST.COM

• COMMERCIAL GALITS@JPOST.COM

Published daily except Saturday, in Jerusalem, Israel by The Jerusalem Post Ltd. Registered at the GPO. © All rights reserved to The Jerusalem Post Group Ltd. Do not copy, distribute, replicate, photograph, translate, store on a database, transmit in any way (writing, printing or other media) or by any electronic means, optical, mechanical or otherwise, any part of this newspaper (including: text, drawings, photographs, pictures, maps and graphics) in textual form or on designed pages, including voice recording and typing, without the express permission, in writing, from the publisher The Jerusalem Post Group Ltd.

A tribute to Lindsey Graham

• By MIKE HUCKABEE

Some people are just hard to like. You see them coming, and you hope you can avoid them. Sen. Lindsey Graham was *not* that person.

The opposite was true of Graham. Being around him was like being around a true friend, and that's exactly what he was to me for over 20 years.

I last communicated with Graham just a few days before I received the message on Sunday morning that he had died. It took me a while to process that message. He was always so full of life that somehow the word "death" and Graham didn't belong in the same sentence.

For those who don't know, Graham grew up in the same kind of Southern poverty I did, but he faced some very tough challenges beyond just lack of money. His parents owned a bar and pool hall, and Graham worked cleaning it up after closing hours.

Within 15 months, both his parents died. Graham was 21 and left with the responsibility of either taking care of his little sister or standing by as she was declared an orphan and put into a foster home. He enlisted in the United States Air Force so he would have a paycheck and be able to support her, and legally adopted her to keep her from being put in foster care.

He could have complained and whined as to how unfair life was. He didn't. He worked – hard. He took care of his little sister as she grew up and watched her find her own success.

Graham completed college

and law school, became an officer in the air force, where he served in the reserves for 33 years, and completed his military service as a colonel. He was elected to the US House of Representatives and then to the US Senate.

He went from cleaning a bar to becoming one of the most respected and effective senators on Capitol Hill. He didn't talk about the American Dream – he lived it and demonstrated it.

He loved Israel. He loved Israel because he loved America and understood that the partnership between the US and Israel was an incredible benefit

to both nations and to freedom. He often said that Israel's enemies are America's enemies. He was right.

His critics called him a war-monger. Nonsense! He didn't love war, but he knew that nations built on hate and death like Iran were a threat to freedom and peace everywhere. His view was that strength is more likely to bring peace than weakness and capitulation. He was right again.

On several occasions, when I would be in Israel with a group of American pilgrims seeing the Holy Land, I'd see Graham at the David Citadel

Hotel or somewhere in Jerusalem. He was usually with his best friends, former senators John McCain and Joe Lieberman, or as McCain's daughter Meghan called them, "The three amigos."

GRAHAM HAD a sense of humor that was contagious, engaging, and disarming. If there was one thing I loved about him, it was that he took his work and the issues of the world seriously, but he never took himself that seriously.

Unlike many political figures I've known, he didn't elbow his way to every microphone

or jump in front of every camera to be seen or heard. He was great on TV for sure, but his real work was behind the scenes, working the room and winning over fellow Republicans and reluctant Democrats alike.

He was willing to do what he believed was right, even if it made some in his own Republican party livid. Yet despite those who unfairly labeled him a "RINO" (Republican in Name Only) and sought to defeat him, the people of his beloved South Carolina continued to reelect him.

He had a heart for the world, but he also always had time for kids who wanted to snap a photo with him or a veteran who wanted to ask his help. His love and patience with people extended to those who were just like he was growing up.

He never forgot where he came from or who he was. He was never ashamed of where he'd been because he could be grateful for where he'd come and where he was going.

America lost a true statesman. Israel lost one of its best friends and strongest defenders. South Carolina lost a very effective and compassionate senator. And I lost a dear personal friend.

But instead of being filled with sadness, I will rejoice and celebrate the life of one who left an indelible mark on us all. And as the Book of Psalms said, "Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning." Good night, my friend. I'll see you in the morning!

The writer is the US ambassador to Israel.

Funded Hamas, fooled the West

The lethal legacy of Qatar's late emir



• By AMINE AYOUB

The recent passing of Qatar's former ruler, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, has predictably triggered an avalanche of sanitized hagiography across Western capitals. Eulogists have rushed to celebrate the Father Emir as a visionary modernizer who transformed a desolate Gulf peninsula into an economic powerhouse. They point to the Doha skyline, the 2022 World Cup, and a staggering expansion of national wealth as proof of benign brilliance.

Yet, this glossy narrative deliberately obscures a far darker historical reality. Sheikh Hamad was the primary architect of modern state-sponsored Islamism, and a ruthless strategist who weaponized unimaginable energy wealth to institutionalize a toxic double game that continues to destabilize the civilized world.

The coup and the gamble

The blueprint for Qatar's malignant rise began in June 1995, when Sheikh Hamad deposed his father in a bloodless palace coup. Inheriting dormant natural gas reserves, the young ruler embarked on an audacious gamble. By aggressively tapping into the North Field, the massive natural gas reservoir shared precariously with Iran, he engineered a rapid economic explosion.

Within a decade, Qatar became the premier exporter of liquefied natural gas, generating capital that defied its tiny population. Crucially, this fortune was never intended for mere domestic prosperity. Sheikh Hamad recognized that in a volatile region, traditional military might was unattainable.

Instead, he converted Qatar's wealth into an asymmetric weapon, buying immense structural influence by deliberately empowering the most radical ideological movements in the Middle East.

The double game

The true genius of Sheikh Hamad's strategy lay in a cynical double game that insulated his regime from external threats while exporting chaos. In 1996, the Emir funded the construction of the massive Al Udeid Air Base, granting the United States military a permanent presence on Qatari soil. By providing



QATAR'S EMIR Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani talks during the UNCTAD XIII opening ceremony in Doha, in 2012. (Mohammed Dabbous/Reuters)

the Pentagon with a vital logistics hub, Sheikh Hamad secured an American defense umbrella that rendered Qatar untouchable.

Yet, in that same year, he established the Al Jazeera satellite network. While gullible Western observers celebrated the channel as a beacon of free press, Al Jazeera functioned as a sophisticated propaganda arm for the Muslim Brotherhood.

Under royal control, the network systematically mainstreamed virulent antisemitic tropes, glorified suicide bombers as holy martyrs, and provided an unrestricted megaphone to radical clerics. During the Arab Spring, Al Jazeera acted as an active combatant, stoking revolutions against moderate Arab governments to install Islamist regimes.

Financing jihad

Nowhere was the Father Emir's destructive ideology more visible than in his personal patronage of Palestinian terror. In 2012, Sheikh Hamad became the first foreign head of state to visit the Gaza Strip after Hamas violently seized control. This visit did not merely provide diplomatic legitimacy to a genocidal organization dedicated to the destruction of Israel; it opened a permanent financial pipeline that channeled billions of dollars directly to militants.

While Doha defended these cash infusions as humanitarian relief, the financial reality was unmistakable. Qatari funding subsidized the administrative expenses of the Hamas government, allowing the group to divert its internal

revenues toward building a massive subterranean fortress, acquiring weaponry, and executing catastrophic assaults against Israeli civilians.

To consolidate this alliance, Sheikh Hamad converted Doha into a sanctuary, hosting the political leadership of Hamas in five-star luxury as they orchestrated violence from the safety of air-conditioned high-rises.

The mediator myth

The embrace of Palestinian militancy reflected a systemic ambition to turn Doha into the capital of global radicalism. Under Sheikh Hamad's stewardship, the Qatari capital became a safe haven for exiled Islamists. The regime allowed the Taliban to open a formal political headquarters in Doha, shielded designated terrorist financiers operating with complete domestic impunity, and maintained deep economic ties with the mullahs in Tehran.

To protect itself from backlash, Qatar crafted a masterful diplomatic fiction, presenting itself as a neutral regional mediator. This narrative turns reality on its head through a calculated arsonist and firefighter dynamic.

Qatar does not resolve conflicts out of a commitment to peace. Instead, the regime systematically finances, protects, and legitimizes the extremist movements that ignite regional conflagrations.

When these crises become unmanageable, Doha steps forward as the firefighter, offering its unique access to terrorists to negotiate ceasefires. This enabled the Al Thani dynasty to market its complicity

as a diplomatic asset, forcing Western nations to thank the very state that funded the threat.

The enduring machine

When Sheikh Hamad abdicated the throne in 2013, passing leadership to his son, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, many predicted a pivot toward moderation. That optimism represented a fundamental misunderstanding of Qatari statecraft. The transition was a refinement of the Father Emir's machinery, not a rupture from it.

Tamim recognized that his father's overt support for Islamism had brought Qatar to the brink of regional isolation. His solution was to wrap the radical infrastructure in a multi-billion-dollar layer of Western public relations. Under Tamim, Qatar perfected the art of sports-washing, acquiring European football clubs, investing in Western real estate, and hosting the 2022 World Cup to project an image of hyper-modernity.

Yet, beneath this glamorous veneer, the underlying mechanics of state-sponsored extremism remained untouched. The safe havens remained open, the financial pipelines to radical actors continued to flow, and the toxic messaging of Al Jazeera shifted into subtle digital formats.

A call for Western accountability

As Qatar observes its official period of mourning, the international community must finally discard the dangerous illusions that have compromised Western policy for three decades. The global Islamist infrastructure constructed by Sheikh Hamad cannot be tolerated any longer.

Strategic realism demands that the United States and its allies cease treating Qatar as a benign partner or an honest broker. The West must hold the Doha regime accountable by demanding an absolute, verifiable end to its financial and logistical patronage of extremist networks.

Sheikh Hamad has passed away, but the devastating fires of radical Islamism he systematically ignited and funded continue to burn across the Middle East, and the civilized world will suffer the catastrophic fallout of his decisions until it finds the courage to extinguish the source.

The writer, a fellow at the Middle East Forum, is a policy analyst and writer based in Morocco. Follow him on X: @amineayoubx.

The Dreyfus test

Is Europe failing again?

• By MOSHE KANTOR

On July 12, Europe marks Alfred Dreyfus Day, commemorating the French Jewish army officer whose wrongful conviction for treason became one of the defining symbols of modern antisemitism. More than a century later, Europe likes to believe that the Dreyfus Affair belongs safely to history, a reminder of prejudices overcome and lessons learned.

Nonetheless, the uncomfortable truth is that while the language has changed, many of the underlying patterns have not.

The challenge facing European Jews today does not resemble the antisemitism of the late nineteenth century. It is rarely expressed through crude racial theories or open declarations of hatred. Instead, it increasingly arrives wrapped in the language of politics, activism, and social justice. The result is not always easier to recognize, but it can be just as damaging.

The murderous Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, and the war that followed transformed the landscape of antisemitism across Europe. What began as outrage over a conflict in the Middle East quickly spilled onto European streets, campuses, workplaces, and online platforms. Too often, the distinction between criticisms of the policies of the Israeli government and Jewish citizens living in Europe simply disappeared.

This is perhaps the most significant change of all. Increasingly, Jews in Paris, Berlin, Brussels, or London are

treated not primarily as French, German, Belgian, or British citizens, but as representatives of Israel, expected to answer for events thousands of kilometers away. Collective responsibility, one of history's oldest prejudices, has returned in modern form.

Jews are singled out in a way no other religious, ethnic or national community in Europe is that is connected to one of the dozens of conflicts currently raging across the globe.

The data reflects what many Jewish communities already know from daily experience. Record levels of antisemitic incidents have been documented across several Western democracies. Many Jews now avoid displaying visible signs of their identity, reconsider attending public events, or think twice before speaking openly about being Jewish. For many, security has become a permanent feature of ordinary life rather than an exceptional precaution.

Equally troubling is the evolution of language itself.

The word "Zionist," which simply means those who believe that the Jews have a right to self-determination in their ancestral and indigenous homeland, has been misappropriated by antisemites and is increasingly used as a substitute for "Jew."

Jewish students, academics, artists, doctors, and businesspeople often find themselves targeted regardless of their own political views or personal connection to Israel. What once would have been recognized immediately as antisemitic is now frequently presented as



ALFRED DREYFUS
(Wikimedia Commons)

acceptable political discourse.

Universities have become one of the principal battlegrounds. Debate over Israel and Gaza is entirely legitimate in democratic societies. Intimidation is not. Across Europe and North America, many Jewish students report harassment, disruption of Jewish events and pressure simply because of their identity. When intimidation replaces discussion, universities fail their own commitment to free inquiry.

The digital world has accelerated these trends further. Social media

rewards outrage, simplifies complex conflicts into moral absolutes and enables conspiracy theories and hatred to spread with extraordinary speed. Memes, slogans, and coded language often reach millions before facts have an opportunity to catch up, while algorithms amplify emotion far more effectively than nuance.

History reminds us that antisemitism has rarely remained a problem affecting Jews alone. It has consistently served as an early warning signal of wider democratic decline. Societies that tolerate the dehuman-

ization of one minority rarely stop there. The erosion of pluralism, the normalization of conspiracy theories and the justification of political violence ultimately threaten everyone.

That is why Alfred Dreyfus Day should not simply be an occasion to remember a historical injustice. It should be an opportunity to ask whether Europe is recognizing the warning signs before they become entrenched.

The response cannot rely solely on policing or legislation, important though both remain. The decisive struggle will be for the next generation.

Young people today encounter much of their understanding of world affairs not through classrooms or newspapers but through social media, short-form video, influencers, and online communities. This is where narratives are formed, identities are shaped, and prejudices can either take root or be challenged. If democratic societies fail to engage these spaces, others will fill the vacuum with extremism, misinformation and hatred.

Education must therefore evolve beyond Holocaust remembrance alone. Young Europeans need the tools to recognize how ancient prejudices adapt to modern language, how collective blame operates, and why democratic societies depend upon protecting minorities even during times of conflict.

At the same time, Europe should invest in something equally ambitious: building an Abrahamic alliance

for the 21st century.

Rather than allowing extremists to divide Jews, Christians and Muslims, governments, faith leaders, educators and civil society should work together through permanent partnerships dedicated to confronting hatred in all its forms.

Such an alliance would not erase political disagreements over the Middle East, and nor should it. Instead, it would establish a simple but vital principle: disagreement must never become dehumanization.

Joint educational programs, youth initiatives, exchanges between communities, and coordinated responses to hate crimes can create relationships that extremists struggle to undermine. Young people who grow up working together across religious and cultural lines become far less susceptible to narratives built on fear and division.

The Dreyfus Affair taught Europe the dangers of allowing prejudice to disguise itself as justice. Today's challenge is different in form but similar in essence. Once again, society is being tested on whether it can distinguish legitimate political disagreement from collective hatred directed at an entire people.

Remembering Alfred Dreyfus is important. Ensuring that Europe does not create the conditions for a new generation of Dreyfus cases is far more important still.

The writer is president of the European Jewish Congress, the representative organization of European Jewish communities.

Israeli nationalists are foolish to flirt with Romania's antisemites

Settler leader Yossi Dagan is the latest of the Romanian far-right's useful idiots

• By ANA MARIA FLOREA HARRISON

There appears to be a growing alliance between Israeli rightists and Romanian antisemites, built on the fantasy that both sides are united by a common enemy: Islam. Yossi Dagan, the prominent Likud figure and West Bank settler leader who has repeatedly embraced George Simion and his far-right AUR party, is only the latest and most striking example.

It is difficult to imagine a more foolish or morally obscene bargain than the one visible in Dagan's early July meeting with Simion (which, according to the leading Romanian newspaper *Evenimentul Zilei*, took place in Bucharest).

Dagan was quoted by the Hebrew site *Strugim* as saying they "share the same values."

He might be advised that AUR draws political and intellectual inspiration from movements that helped carry out the Holocaust in Romania, while its present-day representatives work to weaken Holocaust education, antisemitism legislation, and institutions that preserve the memory of murdered Jews.

Israelis who embrace such people are helping extremists launder antisemitism – an insult to Jewish history and Romanian historians, survivors, and civic leaders who spent decades forcing their country to face the truth.

Dagan and Simion have met at least three times – in January 2023, August 2023, and July 2026. Their August 2023 meeting, which also included Israel's then-ambassador

to Romania Reuven Azar, prompted criticism from Yad Vashem, Romania's Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust, and the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

AUR's European Parliament faction indeed opposed proposed European sanctions against settlers in Judea and Samaria – a seeming quid pro quo. But at the same time, its politicians traveled across Romania collecting signatures to repeal recently strengthened legislation against antisemitism.

Dagan's is hardly the only such flirtation by right-wing Israelis. In December 2024, Diaspora Affairs Minister Amichai Chikli held a supportive telephone conversation with Calin Georgescu, then the leading candidate in Romania's annulled presidential election and an outspoken admirer of Romanian political and military leaders responsible for the Holocaust.

Shortly afterwards, Romania's ambassador to Israel, Radu Ioanid, described Chikli as "*meshugeneh*" – Yiddish for "crazy" – and reportedly demanded an apology.

Chikli's outreach was part of a broader embrace of Europe's far right. In March 2025, his ministry organized an international conference on combating antisemitism in Jerusalem that included politicians from several European far-right parties with histories of antisemitism and extremist roots.

The guest list was so controversial that prominent Jewish figures, including Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt, French philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy, and British Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis,

pulled out or stayed away.

This marriage of convenience is particularly absurd in Romania. Unlike in much of Western Europe, mass Muslim immigration is scarcely a defining political issue. AUR's leaders have shown far more enthusiasm for rehabilitating Romanian fascists and undermining Holocaust education and Jewish institutions than for waging any meaningful battle against political Islam. The real beneficiary is therefore not Israel but Simion and his party.

Last year, Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar conceded that "some of these parties have bad roots," but "we judge them by what they do today." So let us examine what Simion and AUR do.

Founded in 2019, AUR combines ultra-nationalism with apocalyptic rhetoric, and leading figures associated with the party have praised leaders of Romania's World War II-era fascist movements, including the Iron Guard, as well as wartime dictator Marshal Ion Antonescu and other figures associated with the persecution and murder of Romanian Jews.

Romania was not merely an ally of Nazi Germany during the Holocaust. Under Antonescu's fascist dictatorship, Romanian authorities were themselves active perpetrators of genocide. Romanian soldiers, police, gendarmes, and officials carried out massacres and deportations, often with little or no direct German involvement.

The violently antisemitic Iron Guard murdered more than 100 Jews in the January 1941 Bucharest pogrom. Later that year, Romanian authorities murdered thousands in

the Iasi pogrom and forced thousands more onto sealed "death trains," where many died of suffocation, thirst, and heat.

After Romania invaded the Soviet Union alongside Nazi Germany, Romanian forces massacred tens of thousands of Jews in Bessarabia and Bukovina and deported many more to Romanian-administered Transnistria, where they faced mass shootings, starvation, and disease.

Romanian troops were also responsible for the October 1941 massacre in nearby Odessa, in which tens of thousands of Jews were murdered. Romania's own International Commission on the Holocaust, chaired by Elie Wiesel, concluded that Romanian authorities were responsible for the deaths of between 280,000 and 380,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews.

The historical record is unequivocal: the Romanian fascists whom figures associated with AUR have praised were not peripheral sympathizers of Nazism but independently persecuted, deported, and murdered Jews on a massive scale. Yet AUR described the history of the Holocaust as a "minor topic."

In 2021, it was the only Romanian political party to oppose legislation making Holocaust education mandatory in Romanian high schools.

This is particularly dangerous because almost no Romanian born during the communist regime was taught that Romanian authorities had been complicit in the Holocaust. The regime suppressed these facts and prohibited public discussion of them.

It has taken decades of determined

effort for the truth to be acknowledged at the highest levels of the Romanian state, and even today only about one-third of Romanians are familiar with the historical facts.

In 2025, AUR and POT – the party supporting Georgescu – opposed amendments strengthening Romania's legislation against antisemitism. During the parliamentary debate, members of both parties harassed the representative of Romania's Jewish community who had introduced the amendments. AUR and POT MPs eventually walked out of Parliament in protest.

ISRAEL'S PRESIDENT recently visited Romania to commemorate the Iasi pogrom, in which approximately 12,600 Jews were murdered over just a few days in June 1941. AUR did not participate in the commemoration.

And in May 2026, one of AUR's local branches petitioned the Romanian government and Parliament to dissolve the Elie Wiesel National Institute and the National Museum of the History of the Romanian Jews and the Holocaust.

After entering Parliament, Simion and his party sought greater respectability without alienating their extremist base. They adopted a strategy of calculated ambiguity, dog whistles, and coded messaging, allowing them to communicate different messages to different audiences.

AUR publicly rejects accusations of antisemitism and fascist sympathies while employing language, symbolic references, and historical narratives that resonate with nationalist and far-right supporters.

Rather than openly denying the Holocaust, which is a criminal offense under Romanian law, the party minimizes its significance by calling it a "minor topic" and opposing mandatory Holocaust education.

Simion describes the disappearance of Romania's Jewish population primarily as the result of "emigration," echoing narratives that minimize Romania's responsibility for the Holocaust.

Whenever confronted with accusations of antisemitism, AUR points to Simion's friendships with Jews – all while continuing to reassure its ultra-nationalist supporters.

Whether Israeli politicians understand AUR's true nature or not, they are becoming Simion's useful idiots.

Every handshake with an Israeli politician becomes another photograph he can display when accused of antisemitism; every expression of Israeli friendship becomes another alibi as his party attacks Holocaust education, antisemitism laws, and institutions entrusted with preserving the memory of Romania's murdered Jews.

If AUR eventually comes to power and reveals its true colors, it will not be the Israeli politicians who posed for those photographs who pay the price. It will be Romania's remaining Jewish community, now numbering only around 2,000 people.

Israeli politicians should be defending them – not helping their enemies convince the world that they are their friends.

The writer is a Romanian journalist based in Bucharest and a former reporter for Radio-France Internationale in Romanian.

LETTERS

Sinwar and nukes

Hamas chief Yahya Sinwar's letter revealing his belief that Israel might nuke Gaza, is instructive. The fact that he was willing to risk the annihilation of Gaza and all its inhabitants including himself shows both his complete lack of any moral considerations as we see them, but also his misunderstanding of Israel's mentality. He fell to the same mistake, which we did, prior to October 7, and which Donald Trump is still doing.

Sinwar believed that we would do what he would do if the situation was reversed. His beliefs are the same as those that are held by the Islamic regime that has such a tight grip on Iran. I believe that Trump is beginning to recognize this; I certainly hope so. Until Trump and the rest of the free world understands this, any negotiation with the Iranian regime is futile. The only solution is the removal of the regime

by force, however costly and unpalatable that may be.

STEPHEN COHEN
Ma'ale Adumim

A more balanced perspective

Regarding your editorial "Goodbye, Lindsey" and the several glowing articles about Senator Lindsey Graham on July 13, there are important facts that would provide readers with a more balanced perspective.

During the 2015-2016 Republican presidential primaries, Graham was one of Donald Trump's harshest Republican critics, warning that Republicans would "get destroyed" if they nominated him.

Graham also strongly supported or defended several controversial positions, including Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election, severe abortion restrictions,

opposition to many gun-control measures, support for fossil fuel industries, and interventionist foreign policies.

Although Graham was a steadfast supporter of Israel, his hawkish rhetoric – including suggesting that Gaza should be "flattened" – reinforced the perception among many that Israel's military response was excessively destructive. He also opposed a two-state solution, despite the view of many Israeli security experts that it offers Israel its best hope for greater security, improved international standing, and broader regional acceptance.

RICHARD H. SCHWARTZ, PHD
Shores

An election quandary

I never cared much for Yair Lapid's politics, and still don't. I have no doubt that he is a true Zionist and sincerely believes that he can "repair" the current divisive-

ness Israel is struggling with; I, though, do not believe that he can.

Nonetheless, his recent remarks from the Knesset plenum are difficult to turn away from ("The Lapid doctrine," July 14, 2026). Much of what he said cannot be discounted as campaign drivel but do indeed address issues that even the staunchest of Netanyahu's supporters cannot adequately explain... or forgive.

Lapid's promise to undo what he refers to as the coalition's "legislative blitz" cannot help but resonate, even among the center right. And that is the quandary that makes someone like me find the upcoming election in October more than a little troubling. For the first time since I've been in Israel, my readiness to vote for the Likud has been shaken. And I have, so far anyway, no confidence in any of the other declared candidates.

AMI SHIMON BEN-BARUCH
Be'er Ya'acov

Targeting Israel

From Ro Khanna in California on one end to Andy Burnham in England on the other end, progressives have Israel as their primary target in their political agenda.

What is behind it all? It is the ideology of dividing the world into two camps; the oppressed and the oppressors, colonizers and the colonized. Israel has been the paradigm of this group and therefore must be hated.

When offered the opportunity to see for themselves whether Israel fits the mold they have delineated, they refuse. Khanna was offered to meet with former hostages, to visit communities near the Gaza border, or meet with Druze, but he refused. He has an agenda, and reality can't get into the door.

FRED EHRLMAN
Ra'anana

Will we accept anyone as an ally?



• By ZINA RAKHAMILOVA

I'm struggling to find the words to describe how difficult and upsetting the last couple of days have been as an Israeli woman.

Everything surrounding the debate over the online looks-maxxing streamer Clavicular's visit to Israel, both publicly and privately within activist circles, has shown far too many women that there may be no line left that cannot be crossed.

When someone is politically useful, or their following can be leveraged, even allegations of sexual assault can suddenly become negotiable.

This has opened up an important conversation that we need to have within the Jewish and pro-Israel community. Are there lines that we simply should not cross? Have we reached such a low point that we will accept anyone as an ally?

Even a man who is friends with hateful groypers and who has been accused of sexually assaulting a minor? Are we really comfortable pimping out Jewish women to the manosphere for the sake of effective public diplomacy?

I had never heard of Clavicular before Thursday, when several social media content creators said they were planning on collaborating with him. Right away, it sparked a long and heated debate.

When his name was mentioned, the only thing I recognized him from was footage of the so-called "Miami Nazi Party," where he appeared alongside some of the worst antisemites on the internet.

The group included Myron Gaines, Nick Fuentes, Andrew Tate, Clavicular, and Sneako, all proudly singing "Heil Hitler."

Clavicular, whose real name is Braden Eric Peters, rose to prominence through "looks-maxxing" content promoting extreme cosmetic procedures, steroid use, and hypermasculine self-improvement.

He has openly said that, as a teenager, he repeatedly hit his own jaw with a hammer as part of a practice known as "bone smashing," claiming he believed it would stimulate bone growth and create a more angular, masculine jawline.

Clavicular has no shortage of legal controversies. In March 2026, he was arrested in Broward County, Florida, on misdemeanor battery and criminal conspiracy charges related to an alleged altercation between two women.

In May 2026, he and another influencer pleaded no contest to unlawfully discharging a firearm after a livestream showed them shooting at an apparently dead alligator in the Florida Everglades.

Right now, Clavicular is the



CLAVICULAR WALKS the runway during the 424 Menswear Spring/Summer 2027 show as part of Paris Fashion Week in Paris, last month. (Francois Durand/Getty Images)

defendant in a civil lawsuit filed by a young woman who alleges that, after meeting him when she was 16, he provided her with alcohol while she was a minor, injected her with what she claims was a mixture containing meth and a fat-burning substance without her informed consent, and sexually assaulted her while she was incapacitated.

Clavicular has denied the allegations, which have not been proven in court.

To most women, this is where the debate should have ended.

Yet despite all of this, there were people who insisted that engaging with him was still the right move.

They argued that his large Gen Z following, an age group that has been so heavily influenced by anti-Israel narratives, presented an opportunity to reach people who are normally exposed to nothing but anti-Israel propaganda.

IN MY line of work, I have met and learned from many people who once held

extremist and antisemitic views. There have been incredible cases where people fundamentally changed their beliefs, especially after visiting Israel and actually speaking with Israelis.

In almost every case, whether the issue was Israel or something else entirely, those individuals said they changed because people were still willing to engage with them patiently and respectfully.

That willingness to have difficult conversations is what ultimately helped pull them away from extremism.

This is why cancel culture is so dangerous and why I understand why certain people would want to engage with a figure like Clavicular.

But where is the line? When someone is accused of drug-ging and sexually assaulting a minor, do we look the other way?

When someone's entire online persona is built around demeaning and sexualizing women, do we still want them in our circle for the sake of views?

Even worse, do we put Israeli women in a position where they are encouraged to meet an alleged predator simply to show him how "hot" Israeli women are?

How is this any different from what happened with Graham Platner?

I criticized mainstream Democrats for ignoring his history of alleged sexual misconduct and his Nazi tattoo, and now people within my own community have shown me that they are willing to look the other way if they believe they can still benefit from the relationship.

Some people who are unfamiliar with the details have dismissed this as a simple disagreement over strategy, arguing that calling this out and creating internal conflict within the Jewish community is the wrong approach. I respectfully disagree.

When women's safety is at risk, and the people enabling that risk are men who are our friends, men we warned and pleaded with not to do this – then we have a responsibility to speak out.

This goes beyond strategy. It forces us to ask what our community is willing to tolerate and who we are willing to embrace.

These past few days have been incredibly painful, particularly for many of my female colleagues who work in media and public diplomacy.

What we have witnessed is that, in a post-October 7 world, there are still people who are willing to look the other way when it comes to allegations of sexual assault if they believe there is something to gain from it.

That realization has been truly heartbreaking.

The writer is the co-founder and CEO of Social Lite Creative, a digital marketing firm that specializes in geopolitics.

Shabbat battleground

• By ATARA RUDERMAN

A regular Saturday morning in Jerusalem offers a kind of peace and quiet unlike anywhere else in the world – construction halts, music is silenced, and most storefronts stay shuttered until the stars come out.

This past Saturday, that stillness broke, and one of the most polarizing issues in Israeli politics followed me to my doorstep.

As a new *olah* (immigrant) studying diplomacy and foreign affairs, I've spent the past year trying to understand complex issues compounding Israeli politics, and the fault lines running through them. For most of these issues, I've held back from taking a side, but this wasn't one of those days.

I sat on my balcony watching around 50 haredi (ultra-Orthodox) men and children harass a new cafe's patrons and staff in Jerusalem's city center, angry that it was operating on Shabbat. Cafe Basimta sat behind a police barricade most of the day. The protesters chanted "Shabbos" over and over – all day long, disrupting Shabbat rest for residents throughout the block, myself included.

I watched, horrified, as many of the residents in my building began retaliating. From their balconies overlooking an alleyway leading to the cafe, many of my neighbors started throwing garbage, fruit, spices, and even buckets of water at the protesting men and children below. I had to tell the young men in the apartment one floor below mine to stop spitting on them.

I didn't see the rest until later. Watching footage obtained by Channel 12 from inside the courtyard, I saw how the turmoil had taken a different shape entirely. As the protest continued, those enjoying the cafe rallied more community members until the line outside Cafe Basimta grew, and supporters flooded the courtyard.

Channel 12 reported that at one point cafe-goers started shouting "Enlist" back at the haredi men. A protest that started over a cafe staying open on Shabbat had become something much more political.

Right now, the IDF reports Israel is short some 12,000 soldiers. An estimated 80,000 men are not enlisting, about half of them confirmed haredi, and another quarter believed to be from haredi communities.

For many in that world, the draft isn't a policy dispute. It's an existential threat. Serving in the IDF means stepping outside a life built entirely around Torah study, and for a community whose identity has long depended on separation from secular Israeli life, that step can feel like losing everything that makes them who they are.

Understanding that fear does not make what I watched acceptable. The subsequent turmoil between secular and religious Israelis has gotten out of control, and far past the point of disagreement. We are forgetting each other's humanity beneath our differences, and both sides demonstrated that on Saturday.

The haredi protesters chose to harass a business full of customers rather than keeping the holy day themselves. A disdain for others and their beliefs proved stronger than their respect for Shabbat itself. And the residents in my building, some religious and some secular, threw garbage and spat on children.

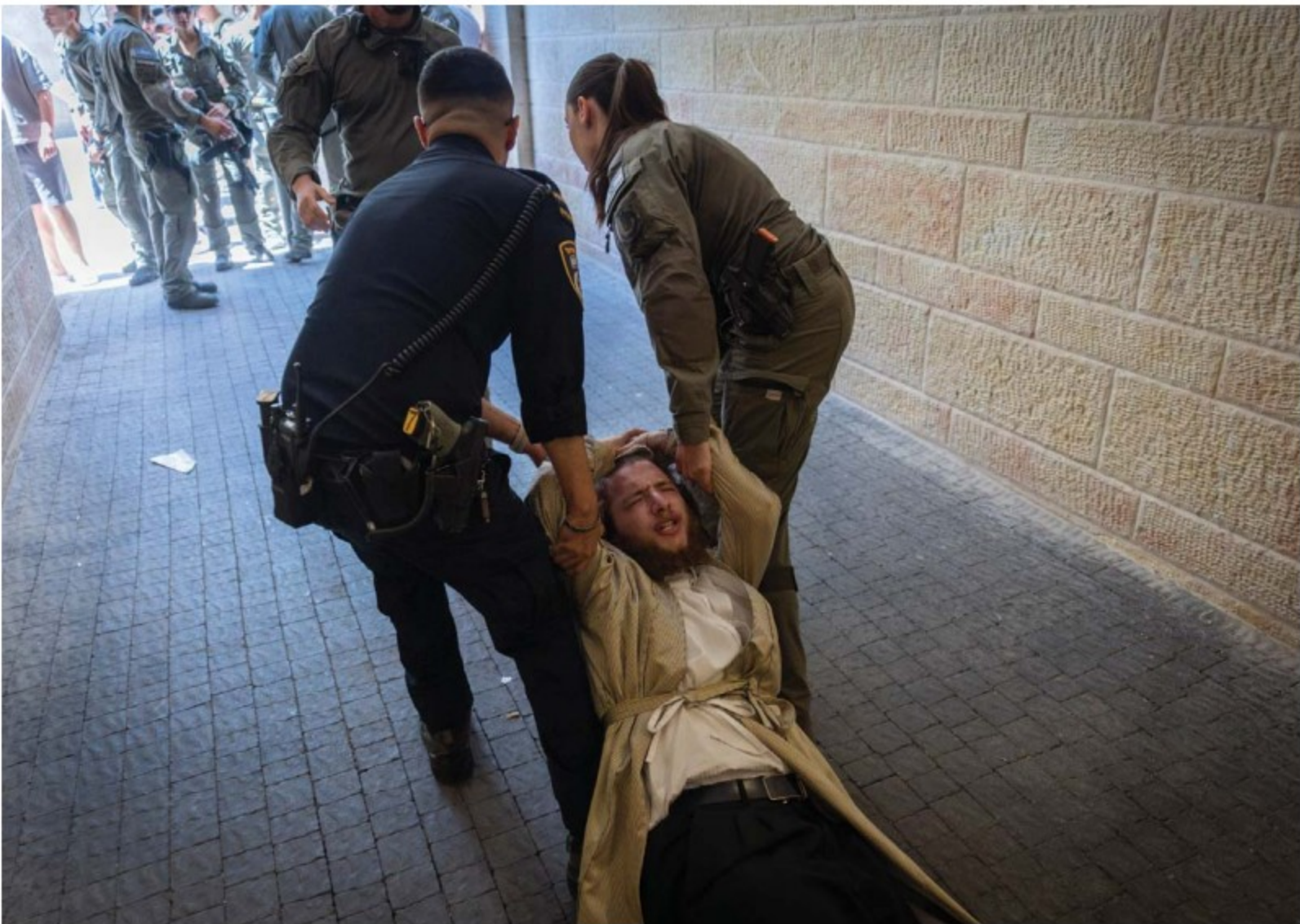
Both groups behaved in ways we would instantly categorize as hateful and intolerant if directed toward any minority in any other country.

Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East, which means its citizens have the right to choose how and whether to keep Shabbat. In Jerusalem, shared space means haredi Jews can practice as they see fit, but the standard extends to everyone else living alongside them. No one side gets to enforce their beliefs on the other.

I recognize that no one was fully right that day. As a new *olah*, I understand that this is one of the most fiercely debated issues in the State of Israel, and I am still working out where I stand on most of it. But I have eyes, and anyone with eyes can see that the divide has gone too far.

Cafe Basimta closed early that day. In the end, nobody won.

The writer is a new olah based in Jerusalem who recently served as the youngest participant in a multinational fellowship with Israel's Foreign Ministry, engaging directly with senior policymakers on Israel's geopolitical and public diplomacy strategy. She is a recent graduate of UC Berkeley, where she completed a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies focused on business, sociology, and media. She is now pursuing work in international affairs and diplomacy, and journalism covering Israeli society and current events.



POLICE ARE seen dragging an ultra-Orthodox protester away during a demonstration against a cafe operating on Shabbat while secular protesters demonstrate in support of the cafe in central Jerusalem, last week. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

Israel deserves 100 days of constructive politicking



CENTER FIELD
• By GIL TROY

The Knesset's newly announced election date, October 27, affirms Israel's democratic character, counter to the anti-Bibi protest movement's claims that Israel's democracy was dead. It also confirms that Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition will be the first Israeli government in 53 years to serve its full four-year term.

Such longevity is particularly surprising because, following United Torah Judaism's departure, this unstable 60-member coalition lacks a formal parliamentary majority. Even more stunning: if ever a government deserved to fall – long before the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led massacre – it was this one.

In 1969, prime minister Golda Meir secured a record-breaking 102-seat supermajority. Her Labor party – the Alignment – won 56 seats – another still-unbroken record. And reflecting Israel's post-1967 unity, Menachem Begin led his Gahal bloc into the coalition, joining the National Religious Party, the Independent Liberals, and four Arab MKs from Alignment-affiliated parties.

True, Golda's government also was surprised by a devastating attack – on Yom Kippur, 1973. But that catastrophe occurred as its term was ending. Forty-six days later, Meir's government approved a national commission of inquiry to learn from Israel's mistakes. The Agranat Commission issued its first Interim Report on April 1, 1974, 177 days after Egypt and Syria attacked Israel.

While neither mirror nor crystal ball, history can be a spotlight, illuminating similarities and differences. Today's Israeli government has consistently scorned what was in the DNA of Meir's government – a commitment to national unity. Too many cabinet members today are flame-throwing demagogues, and our prime minister keeps choosing to rile his base rather than unite the nation.

True, the government's opponents have also been tribal, polarizing, and often overzealous. But when democratically elected governments take the responsibility to lead the nation, they shoulder more of the blame – not all of it – when politics turns ugly.

This also was the government that couldn't govern straight – from its inception. What's fascinating about this coalition's pre-October 7 failures is how often the goon and lunatic ministers' poisonous polarization undermined their own goals.

Thoughtful, principled Likud supporters who wanted to see some much-needed judicial reforms should feel betrayed by the government's incompetent, self-sabotaging judicial reform campaign.

This blatant case of political malpractice belongs in the Hall of Fame of Political Backfires. Had Justice Minister Yariv Levin, Netanyahu and their colleagues implemented the program more thoughtfully, more subtly, less vengefully, they could have passed some important reforms and avoided the searing divisiveness that weakened Israel, leaving it so vulnerable to Hamas's attack.

MEANTIME, APPROACHING the election, every Israeli should demand more thoughtful conversation from every politician.

For starters – and this is a wish list, not a prediction – we desperately need a change in tone. Obviously, election campaigns usually run shrill, but this mutual demonizing of political opponents must end. It's unhealthy to frame every issue as a

tribal do-or-die war of us vs them. And the casual toleration of vile rhetoric and political violence – as long as it's targeting the others – is unacceptable, Left to Right.

The parties should launch the campaign by agreeing that, after the people speak on Election Day, the polls will discourage their own supporters from wielding the hooligans' veto. Haredim (ultra-Orthodox), pro-Bibi thugs, and the anti-Bibi protest movement must stop demonstrating violently, while also ending this despicable totalitarian practice of harassing political rivals and their families at their homes.

All leaders should learn to criticize their own side's excesses when necessary. And every patriotic Israeli should support a broad, effective law, modeled on RICO, America's anti-racketeering statute, that stops political violence while prosecuting those conspiring to unleash the violence too.

Similarly, every Zionist party should vow to implement a fairer, more broad-based draft, promising to shut out any party that encourages draft-dodging and opposes national service for every young Israeli. Our soldiers – in the reserves and the regular army – need more comrades. And those unsuited for military duty should, at least, devote two years to serving the nation in some civic capacity.

Israel can ease the transition by deploying Israeli-Arabs for national service in their own communities and by developing more exclusively ultra-Orthodox army units. But it's not fair to have our small society, facing such evil enemies and daunting challenges, overrun with freeloaders.

Israelis also need politicians willing to explain how to tackle some solvable problems that festered amid so many years of distracted and incompetent governance. Politicians should commit to fighting the murder spree in the Arab sector, combating protection rackets nationwide, and breaking the organized crime families.

Israel can learn from America's experience crushing the Mafia, as well as former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani's crime-fighting initiatives in the 1980s. These and other policies reduced American crime rates by over 50% since the 1990s. A task force of crackerjack prosecutors, backed by elite police commandos, should become Israel's Untouchables – honoring America's legendary federal crime-busters in the 1930s.

Finally, beyond the big questions of war and peace, Israel's wannabe leaders should address the little things that make life livable. My children and their friends worry about the soaring housing costs, overcrowded classrooms, understaffed hospitals, traffic-choked roads, foolishly managed construction projects, and unbearable tax burdens.

This government's ministers preferred governing by bombast and trashing anyone who dared to criticize them, rather than improving Israelis' quality of life.

Israelis deserve better. Wouldn't it be great if, rather than enduring the next hundred days of partisan posturing and personal bullying, we experienced one hundred days of creative brainstorming and thoughtful discourse? So many of our kids have fought and sacrificed so much for a better Israel. Now it's time for the leaders to step up and start realizing their dreams.

The writer is an American presidential historian and a senior fellow in Zionist thought at the Jewish People Policy Institute in Jerusalem. For America's 250th anniversary, he is publishing with David Suissa 250 Reasons to Thank America; and with the JPP, The Essential Guide to the US-Israel Partnership, the 250th Anniversary Edition.

Opinion

Code is free speech. Seriously.

We won't get the A.I. regulation we deserve until we treat coding as a basic right.

Paul Ford

The rollout of artificial intelligence technologies has landed at the worst possible time for humanity. (Well, the second-worst time: everyone having hallucinating robot friends during Covid would have probably been far worse.) At the same time, I'm a technologist who loves playing with all the new toys. So I was torn recent weeks during the release and withdrawal of a powerful new Anthropic model, and the subsequent row between the Trump administration and the A.I. company.

On June 9, Anthropic publicly released Claude Fable 5, a more powerful model than its predecessors that was particularly good at writing and debugging computer code. After a few days, the Trump administration banned the model for any non-U.S. citizens, citing safety concerns. Anthropic, lacking the ability to discern nationality among its users — and having been reportedly given only 90 minutes to comply with the administration's order — pulled access for everyone. The government eventually lifted its restrictions, saying it was satisfied with steps Anthropic had taken to detect and address safety risks. By July 1, Fable was back online.

I am pro-A.I. regulation. So when I first heard that the Trump administration was cracking down on Anthropic, I thought: Even if this is happening in the most chaotic, least transparent way possible, perhaps it's pointing in the right direction. But over the Fable-less weeks, I found myself getting increasingly angry, not simply because I couldn't gain access to the model I had paid to use, but also because it felt as if people were being censored, rather than protected. It agitated the same part of my brain that believes, quite deeply, in free speech.

And so what I've realized is that responsible A.I. governance may really come down to something resembling a First Amendment approach.

Before we get to that, take a step back. Do you vaguely remember hearing, back in April, about some big A.I. thing that could hack the planet? That was Mythos — the most powerful version of Claude, which hasn't been publicly released. Anthropic discovered that Mythos could be pointed at large repositories of software code and would find very serious problems no one and nothing else had found, even in code bases that were decades old. Everyone was freaked out by the velocity and the realization that a bad actor doesn't need to be a whiz kid to harness its power.

Those implications sent the global computer security status quo ablaze. Anthropic, trying to limit catastrophe, created a program for big companies, governments and open-source coding projects to get an early preview of the model so they could appear to it to find existing bugs and patch them up.

While it was figuring out how to deal with its new hacking superpowers, Anthropic added guardrails to Mythos that

would put the brakes on when you asked it to, say, design a bioweapon or hack into a server. The new model that resulted from that, Fable, was pretty sweet. Before it was yanked, it found over 100 dumb security errors in a hobby project I'm building.

But Anthropic isn't in the best of graces with this White House. (Remember how the Defense Department designated Anthropic a supply-chain risk when the company protested the possible use of Claude in autonomous weapons and domestic mass surveillance?) Many people assumed that the White House was out to get Anthropic and that its order to restrict the use of Fable by foreign nationals was motivated not strictly by national security concerns but also by antagonism toward the company.

Whether you take Anthropic's side here or the White House's, the events of the last several weeks are clearly a poor, disorganized way to approach governance of these models. I think they point to a troubling future. And that brings me back to the idea of free speech and code.

It's easy to see large language models and chatbots as exhibiting pseudoscience. But large language models are simply artifacts: objects made from the language expressed by tens of millions of people. And Anthropic, to me, is a software publisher. I do not see Claude as a living thing;

Like other free expression, the right to code implies a responsibility.

I see it as a reference work prone to glitching, a surreal encyclopedia with wild side effects. I pay for the privilege of using it to generate new things — code mostly, and industry research reports.

But, critically, the things it generates are then mine, and I use them as I see fit. And, also critically, if I share them with the world, I bear responsibility for them. You see this with lawyers who submit A.I.-generated briefs — judges have no empathy for "the bot wrote it" arguments.

Prudence and slow-rolling releases might benefit the public in the same way that crash-testing cars is of benefit. Standards are good. But if the government can't access it at will, we're starting down a slippery slope — the same slope we go down when we monitor library patrons and track what they read.

Now there are rumblings of ID-verification programs for A.I. users, to assure nationality. Do I need to be permitted to be an A.I. user, as I need to be to drive a car or own a gun? Do we want a future where Officer Claude pulls you over on the information superhighway and demands your license and registration?

If identity trends continue, these models are going to fit nicely into our phones or desktops, and they might be as likely to come from China as they are to be from one of the big labs in the United States. If the U.S. government wants to keep regulating A.I. as it just did Fable, it will need something like the Great Firewall of China to block advanced A.I. models from being downloaded.

We've been here before. During the Clinton administration, the government



did its best to lock down the export of advanced encryption technology. It didn't want foreign entities to be able to keep secrets from America, though these actions had the potential to weaken online privacy everywhere.

Some hackers protested by printing crypto code on T-shirts or tattooing it on their bodies. Their argument was simple: You can't censor math. Had these restrictions prevailed, the advancement of encryption might have suffered, making it hard to imagine how our global digital economy could work. You need provable security if you're going to transact — how you get Amazon, online banking, blockchains and Signal.

It is, I admit, appealing to imagine the government — well, maybe not this government — hitting the brakes on A.I. We

could all use a rest. But ask yourself: Are you willing to compromise your free speech rights in order to keep people from finding bugs in your word processor? That's what's increasingly being asked of us when the government restricts the use of these models by certain groups, with little transparency and poorly articulated reasoning.

If A.I. is the new interface for creating code, and code is a form of communication and expression, then it's incumbent to ensure only the most critical restrictions are applied to these models. And this is a new kind of technology, an industrial-treasure-generating power that often works in unpredictable ways. The balance is incredibly hard to strike, and it requires enlightened governance. Then again, there are established exceptions to free

speech in America. We are capable of discernment.

Like any other kind of free expression, the right to code implies a responsibility. We should have a conversation about this that assumes the person who uses a system is capable of rational, civic action — versus applying a paternalistic view to these models and haphazard decision making over what is too dangerous to be used by the public. Especially because these systems were trained on public data. That would be more interesting than the conversation the Trump administration wants to have. I hope we can have it soon.

PAUL FORD is the president of Aboard, an A.I.-powered software acceleration platform.

Trump is creating his own deep state

The president's meddling in the A.I. industry poses a direct threat to free enterprise.

David Lawrence

The U.S. Supreme Court last month expanded the powers of the unitary executive, raising fears among many that the presidency is becoming too strong. Yet as the ruling appears to take effect, it's worth the most concerning recent news about the accumulation of unchecked power in the Oval Office.

The day after the court's ruling on June 29, the Trump administration lifted restrictions it had imposed on access to top artificial intelligence models from Anthropic, a leading A.I. company, signaling on the condition that the company submit to ongoing government oversight. Last week, OpenAI finally announced that it will release broadly its new artificial intelligence model, GPT-5.5, access to which has been restricted at the request of the U.S. government. Only a limited set of customers — those approved by the Trump administration — have been allowed use of the A.I. tool.

These restrictions on the A.I. industry are the latest instance of the White House creating its own parallel administrative state, sidestepping Congress. Congress and the courts must push back. The right vigorously criticizes government control of private industry as a kind of communist central planning. Many Republicans objected to a rent freeze by New York's mayor, Zohran Mamdani — a policy that is being imposed through the public processes of a legally created oversight board. The president's unauthorized intervention in private business poses an even more direct threat to free enterprise.

True, the Supreme Court's ruling in June gave the president more authority over agencies that Congress had wanted to insulate from political interference, such as the Federal Trade Commission.

But agency leaders must still follow clear rules that Congress has written into the law. By contrast, the Trump White House's ad hoc interference in private business decisions — exemplified by but not limited to its recent meddling in the A.I. industry — has come without congressional sanction. President Trump is planning product releases and choosing customers of a key industry in America's ostensibly free-market economy.

No legislation authorizes the White

House's recent moves to effectively regulate domestic A.I. customers and the release timing. Congress has yet to pass comprehensive A.I. safety legislation, and the Trump administration has spent most of the past year and a half discouraging necessary lawmaking. The White House has filled the gap it helped create with whatever rules it sees fit to impose at any given moment.

In a normal process, an agency such as the Federal Trade Commission exercises

powers granted by Congress, subject to various forms of judicial review. If the agency exceeds the scope of its legal authority, the courts nullify its illegal actions. Only Congress has the laws.

Justice Neil Gorsuch's concurring opinion in last month's ruling reminded us that the founders feared "when the legislative and executive powers are united in the same person." Those fears should be especially great when unitary control is exerted over society-shaping technology. On A.I., the White House has effectively created and put into effect its own mini-regulatory administration. The Trump administration's directions to Anthropic and OpenAI follow its release last month of an executive order creating, by fiat, a regulatory framework for identifying "covered frontier models" and steering their release. The order contains some good ideas for Congress to consider, but it does not execute a law passed by Congress; it creates its own.

Apparently recognizing its lack of legal authority to do this, the Trump administration claims that compliance is "voluntary." Yet few would believe a request from this White House is merely that. The Oval Office commands enormous power to threaten and cajole private companies into compliance. Indeed, the administration has already moved to excise Anthropic products from the Pentagon after the company failed to cooperate with the executive branch's dictates.

After the Supreme Court ruling, the president has more power over the Federal Trade Commission and agencies with oversight of these companies. The boost in presidential authority will enhance the White House's ability to pressure businesses, which will want to avoid regulatory fights — even ones they are confident they would ultimately win in court. This dynamic, however, will not be new.

The A.I. business is not the only indus-

try that Mr. Trump has subjected to his new form of unitary executive. Under pressure, the Japanese company Nippon Steel and U.S. Steel last year granted a special "golden share" to the American government as part of a national security review of Nippon Steel's acquisition of the U.S. company. According to public reports, the White House now has authority over the company's plant closures, headquarters moves and job transfers.

Mr. Trump also pressured Intel into selling the government a 10 percent stake in the company and took a 15 percent cut of Chinese sales from the chipmakers Advanced Micro Devices and Nvidia. On his busy Truth Social account, the president has issued orders on the pricing of gasoline, where Apple should build phones and the content broadcast on late-night TV — each backed by threats to use state power to force compliance.

The White House's attempts to command the economy can and should be challenged in court. Model developers such as Anthropic and OpenAI may fear retribution too much to vigorously defend themselves. But those excluded from access to their products might have claims they can bring before judges.

The need to rebalance power in Washington was clear before the Supreme Court's latest round of rulings. It grows more urgent each time the executive writes and enforces its own rules. And Congress must take more control. If the safety risks posed by artificial intelligence did not already spur lawmakers to pass a comprehensive A.I. bill, the president's unbounded direction of the industry adds urgency. In the meantime, Congress should write laws to provide cover to those who incur retaliation for defying a presidential "request."

DAVID LAWRENCE is a legal scholar who, from 2019 to 2026, oversaw antitrust policy at the U.S. Justice Department.



REUTERS

OPINION

The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

J.G. SULZBERGER Publisher

JOSEPH LACROIX Executive Editor
MARK LACEY Managing Editor
CAROLYN RYAN Managing Editor
SUZANNE DALY Assistant Editor

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY Opinion Editor

MEREDITH KOPPEL LYNCH Chief Executive Officer
MICHAEL GREENSPAN Senior VP and General Manager
HELEN KONSTANTOPOULOS VP, International Circulation
HELENA PHUA Executive VP, Asia-Pacific
SUZANNE FERNANDES International Chief Financial Officer

Men need better fitness role models

Sebastian Langdell

I teach medieval literature, and so when I decided to go into better shape by lifting weights in early middle age, my references were not terribly contemporary. Medieval writers are always reminding us to keep our eyes on cultivating the soul. "Here is no home, here is but wilderness," Chaucer once wrote. If we're just pilgrims passing through this world, what need is there to focus on the body? But, my mind now countered, what if becoming bodily healthy would make me happier and lead to better work?

I went to the gym, initially after a friend's sudden death, to be strong enough to do the other things that matter to me in life, from family commitments to professional creativity. But, for men, getting stronger is all too often about competition. The more I hit the gym, the more I felt the need for some pointers. I dipped my toes in the bro-sphere of fitness podcasts. After a few weeks of listening, I had covered the basics: protein intake, intermittent fasting, sleep protocol, weights versus cardio ratios, gym frequency, supplements. But I found myself dancing around a certain void: Why did it all feel so empty?

In the medieval poem "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," an extravagant large and muscular giant challenges the intrepid knight Gawain to a contest. Gawain, thinking he has the game in hand, lobes the giant's head off with one swing of an ax. The giant gamely picks up his severed head and calmly dictates the terms of their continued competition. Physical prowess gives way to a minefield of moral quandaries. Gawain must navigate. The poem begins with the faculty of playing at the game of physical one-upmanship.

I think about Gawain a lot these days while listening to the podcasts of fitness influencers going on about "gains." Fitness media, particularly the kind aimed at men, encourages us to measure ourselves against other men (if not magical giants with heads that grow back). The simple idea of staying healthy has been surrendered to these looming strongmen peddling dogma on optimal running and protein-maxing. A handful of influencers has come to define what it means to be—and live healthily as—a man. A lot of it felt pretty unhealthy.

Most of the influencers I encountered greeted me like the Green Knight in that opening scene, heft and chutzpah on display, emotional vulnerability on the back.

I listened to the fitness guru Peter Attia brag about drinking "jet fuel" (synthetic ketones) in an effort to convey

taking blood plasma from his son; the youthful plasma will, he hopes, make him live forever—or at least, far longer. The pair bonded by counting pills and comparing physiques. The irony was striking: In his pursuit of ultimate longevity, Mr. Johnson appeared less human, increasingly robotic.

If the behaviors fitness influencers are promoting were extreme but effective, that would be one thing. But they are often ineffective and, sometimes, patently unhealthy. That father-son plasma transfusion? Didn't work. A list of supplements taken by Mr. Johnson, to which I excitedly compared my own intake, gave me no better sleep, no more energy and no greater happiness. All-meat diets? Harmful, with insufficient vitamin and fiber intake and increased risk of chronic illnesses, including cancer and heart disease. The ubiquity of intermittent fasting and hyper-restrictive diets can't lead to sustained health, as I learned the hard way.

It all felt like feeling lonely. And so I left the bro-sphere and sought out other creative potential in the utmost, but who also kept their bodies in fighting shape in order to fuel such creativity. And I found them.

There is the cartoonist Alison Bechdel, who in her book "The Secret to Superman Strength" could not talk about fitness without also talking about her private history of romantic relationships and the role exercise played in managing stress and quashing depression. She also wrote about overcoming alcohol dependency. At the core was a vulnerability otherwise entirely missing from mainstream fitness media.

The novelist Laura van der Berg turned to boxing to grapple with creative anxiety patterns—two hours a night, she says. She sleeps, writes and lives better. And I spoke with the poet Hanif Aburrahma about how running radically changed his life. It was about stress relief and managing clinical depression, he said. He logs an immense number of miles each day—and even started helping a friend train for a marathon, matching her long runs up to 20 miles, with no intention of running the marathon himself. In a recent interview with Haruki Murakami, the singer Harry Styles credited Mr. Murakami's book on running with freeing him "from the idea that music had to be an unhealthy profession and I had to be this tortured soul." Instead, "being healthy makes you able to be an artist for a long time."

These artists weren't going on about perfect bodies or maximum efficiency or tracking immense protein intake. They were about feeling alive in their bodies, sleeping well and having the stamina to do meaningful work. Health, for these artists, was the cornerstone of a creative life, the ingredient that made everything else possible. I didn't need to go back to my days sitting in a smoky Oxford room, holding a shivering contact lens in one hand as I perused over medieval literature, acknowledging (I thought) a perfect metaphor for the vision of the soul against the failure of the body. I could find a path in which physical health fueled intellectual health.

The artists also committed to helping people rather than besting them, Gawain-style. There might be an element of friendly competition, but they emphasized caring community and inclusion rather than optimization for the sake of optimization, or obsession with a specifically manly brand of might. Rather than follow the voice of one supposed strongman rattling off advice, I learned to favor a chorus—different approaches, at times discordant and at times harmonious, prodding me toward ever new realizations.

Those fitness podcasts, for me, now feel antiquated and outdated, like a dusty old poem no one reads. I have left that wilderness behind, instead on finding a new home.

SEBASTIAN LANGDELL is an associate professor of English at Baylor University.

This is the golden age of the crone



Tressie McMillan Cottom

Move over West Village Girls; Menopause Mavens are having a moment.

Melinda French Gates has called it a "menopause revolution." Olivia Wilde and Penélope Cruz are talking about perimenopause in a magazine interview. Halle Berry and Kate Winslet are promoting hormonal therapies. Being menopausal used to be embarrassing. Now it's a credential in a fast-growing, \$10 billion-plus market with little top-down competition for an "underground and undetected" consumer. Philanthropy and private equity are betting that menopause research and product development are the next wave of women's consumer future. It's a good bet. Most women will live up to a third of their lives after their reproductive years have ended. While this life stage has long been considered a salacious taboo, menopause and perimenopause women are in the process of upgrading sexist, ageist scripts about our biological reality. They aren't content to speak about that in euphemisms or to fall into the cultural abyss. A recent punk festival about menopause (called "Menopunk-palooza") made me ask: your youth-obsessed culture finally entering the golden age of the crone?

The feminist case for rebranding menopause has long been clear: American health care largely treats every woman as if she were either pregnant, pregnant or invisible. That sort of bias can be why medical providers deny women tubal ligations—"in case she changes her mind." This state of affairs is so demoralizing that a lot of women are relieved when they enter menopause. Sure, the symptoms may be mysterious and uncomfortable. But being invisible beats being an infantile, baby-making machine.

A new generation is not willing to settle for being invisible. Millennials get a lot of flak for being idealistic and demanding, but their generation impulse to demand better health care is making menopause easier for all of us. Millennial women, the oldest of whom are entering into or approaching their crone era, have more education, money and autonomy than their foremothers. Importantly, the elder millennials leading the charge aren't afraid to ask for more. That's a great model for women of all ages.

Unfortunately, those greater expectations are not necessarily realized in a consistent, effective women's health care system. Most women experiencing menopausal symptoms still do not receive any medical treatment for

them. As is often true, that bad news is even worse for Hispanic and Black women. Despite entering menopause earlier and having more health-related consequences (like fibroids), Black and Hispanic women are least likely to have medical support for menopausal symptoms.

In previous centuries, women have turned to communal health practices when science fails us. Sometimes, these folk practices got a little too folksy. I've been getting invitations to "celebrate my womb in a healing social circle." One such party asked guests to wear all white, which frankly seems like a bad idea for a bunch of women dealing with unpredictable cycles. I took that in stride until I read the part where there would be chanting. I screamed, "Let me be a crone in peace," loudly enough to scare the cat.

But communal medicine can also look like a new cadre of influencers and online community members discussed squarely on menopause. I was 17 years old the first time I asked a doctor if my allergy symptoms might be related to my hormonal cycle. He shrugged. No doctor whom I have asked since has ever followed through. During a debilitating flare-up six months ago, I skipped the doctor's office. Instead, I tried the viral anti-inflammatory hack I heard about online. It worked. Score for folk wisdom. It turns out that medical research has long understood the link between progesterone, estrogen and histamine responses. Why did it take social media celebrity

flipping in her car for me to get help? That's the thing—menopause support from the influencers is the best that many women can do.

Where there are influencers, there needs to be something to sell. And that bias can be anything else, the generational change in women's rights and expectations is reshaping the consumer market for all menopause.

Women's health issues are a transition into menopause products are difficult to verify. But, a survey of my own media just today shows: a menopause cream marketed like a luxury moisturizer; three menopause influencers; a red wine that won't trigger menopause migraines. That's a lot more women had even 15 years ago.

If you are in the market for something to manage your hot flashes or thinning hair, the menopause-industrial complex probably will be able to help you. But menopause is about more than these uncomfortable, embarrassing symptoms. For millions of women, menopause is a transition into new health risks. The race to sell menopause solutions to women isn't improving our health outcomes; it's obscuring chronic disinvestment in research that could save our lives.

In her book "A Terrible Strength," the board-certified gynecologic oncologist Dr. Kemi Doll argues that



menopause must be about more than managing symptoms. As Dr. Doll said at a recent book talk: "Treat any menopause advice that doesn't also mention cancer screenings with suspicion."

For one example of the way that menopause research is severely harming their health, look at uterine cancer. Entering menopause increases a woman's risk for uterine cancers. Roughly 75 percent of women diagnosed with uterine cancer are also menopausal. While mortality rates of many other cancers have declined, uterine cancer diagnoses and deaths are expected to increase substantially in the next 30 years. Early medical intervention could help, if women's health and concerns were taken seriously. While women's mortality rate from uterine cancer is expected to rise, but that of Black women will continue to climb even faster. The cruel optimism of drowning in menopause marketing while being at higher risk of dying from menopause-related cancers lingered after I finished the book.

There's a lot to say for elevating the menopause brand. A-list celebrities speaking openly about hot flashes can destigmatize. But a menopause revolution

can't come just rebranding age or offer us cosmetic solutions. To revolutionize menopause, we will have to revolutionize women's health care.

Funding may be most important. Gates recently announced a donation of \$215 million to fund, among many women's health issues, the menopause revolution. Even that whole sum would not be enough in the face of the sad, scary state of health care in President Trump's America. Stalled research. Shuttered hospitals. Doctors silenced. Expertise demolished. Abortions criminalized. Taken together, they're a more sobering depiction of women's future than the millennial-coded menopause being sold to us.

But the first step to solving this problem is recognizing it. We have earned this menopause makeover. Revel in its newfound punk ethos. Women should reinvent their crone years as their most powerful, authentic and healthy years.

Share the folk wisdom on histamines and hormones. Follow your favorite menopause influencers. Refresh the sexual freedom that reportedly comes with menopause. Ask your doctor about uterine cancer, early. Choose your own menopause adventure—just don't feel guilty for wanting more.

Fight shifts to the skies for Ukraine

SCHMEIMANN, FROM PAGE 1 said that in the intense Russian attack on July 6, Ukraine saw down drones and cruise missiles but did not have enough interceptors to stop a single ballistic missile. Ukraine simply doesn't have enough Patriots to do the job. Russia, meanwhile, is producing about 60 Iskander missiles — the one most often fired at Ukraine — per month, according to Ukrainian military intelligence.

So interceptors, and specifically Patriots, have replaced artillery shells as the indispensable weapon for Ukraine in what may well be the end game of this war. That was at least part of the thinking behind Mr. Zelenskyy's government request announced on Sunday: the "most important" matter for the new government to address, he said, was the procurement and production of Patriot missiles.

The money is there — NATO has pledged \$80 billion in military aid for Ukraine, and individual NATO countries have allocated billions more. President Trump also seems to be shifting his favor back toward Ukraine after its recent military successes. At the NATO summit meeting in Ankara, Turkey, last week, he called Ukraine's leadership "ingenious," and he praised Ukraine's military for the Patriot missiles it so urgently needs.

Mr. Zelenskyy, reflecting the hard lessons of a rocky relationship, told the Financial Times, "President Trump wants to be where there's success." Mr. Trump acknowledged that he had yet raised the lice-matting war with the two main manufacturers of the missiles, Lockheed Martin and RTX. And even if they were to agree, it would take years for Ukraine to start full production. In the meantime, Ukraine has to compete with U.S. armed forces and 16 other foreign clients waiting for Patriot deliveries,



EVGENY MALALATIA/ANSA/REUTERS

and these fancy weapons take time to put together. Each \$2.9 million missile takes about two years to make, and Lockheed currently produces only about 600 a year. In the 39 days of bombardment before the cease-fire with Iran began, the United States used up about half of its inventory of 2,330 Patriots, so just replacing them would take three and a half years, according to an estimate by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

That is not what Mr. Zelenskyy wants to hear. "It is simply absurd that, in the modern world, production has still not been scaled up to the level actually required to protect people from ballistic terror," he said in one of his nightly video addresses. But even if Ukraine were to receive all the interceptors Lockheed turns out, it would not be enough to block all the ballistic missiles Russia throws at Ukraine. That does not mean Ukraine is doomed. Far from it. The Ukrainians

have displayed remarkable ingenuity in adapting to new forms of warfare, most notably in the development of sophisticated, inexpensive and lethal drones. Following the old precept of "shoot the archer, not the arrow," Ukraine has been increasingly targeting military-industrial facilities deep in Russia with considerable effect, as evidenced by Russia's recent ban on the export of diesel fuel. Ukraine's relentless drone attacks on Crimea and Russian shipping in the Sea of Azov have also been highly effective.

Authorities in Crimea have declared a state of emergency because of acute fuel shortages and power outages. In addition to drones, whole battalions of tracked and wheeled robots fight on the ground, conducting thousands of missions every month to haul ammunition, evacuate the wounded, lay mines and hold land.

It was David Petraeus and Clara Kaludericovic, writing in The Wall Street Journal, called "adaptation warfare,"

and for now, Ukraine is doing it better. As Mr. Zelenskyy put it, "Today, I believe victory in this war belongs to whoever is smarter."

Overall, it is difficult to fathom how Russians have put up for so long with Vladimir Putin's maniacal mission to destroy Ukraine, given the growing pain of Ukrainian straits, a battlefield death toll of about 450,000, deteriorating living standards and the revival of a Soviet-style police state.

Yet Mr. Putin continues to believe that he can bring Kyiv to its knees with regular barrages. That makes it imperative for Ukraine, at this critical juncture of the war, to find ways of surviving the dearth of Patriot missiles while it hammers away at Russia. The Ukrainians are working with various European partners to develop their own missile defense systems and have already deployed an electronic warfare weapon called Lima, which messes with satellite navigation signals.

In the meantime, it is imperative for the United States and Europe to do what they can to help Ukraine protect itself. In his last undertaking before his death, Senator Lindsey Graham had traveled to Ukraine. From there, he said he had reached agreement with the White House on a bipartisan bill to allow Ukraine to use American-made missiles to strike targets in Russia. That bill should be quickly advanced. Mr. Trump also should urgently act on his pledge to grant Ukraine a license to produce Patriot missiles and to accelerate production at home and in Europe. Europeans, too, should share as many air-defense missiles as they can and redouble their efforts to help Ukraine develop new systems. That may not block Russian missiles right away, but it would be a powerful message to Mr. Putin that his time is fast running out.

SERGE SCHMEIMANN is a former Moscow, Bonn and Jerusalem bureau chief of The Times.

The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES

"Without fear and without favour"

ft.com/opinion

Brinkmanship in the Strait of Hormuz

America’s leader is trapped, but Tehran is overplaying its hand

This week marks the halfway point of the interim deal the US and Iran signed last month to extend a ceasefire 60 days and – crucially for President Trump – reopen the Strait of Hormuz. The hope had been that by day 30, which falls today, mines would be cleared from the waterway and shipping would be returning to prewar levels, toll-free. Instead, after days of tit-for-tat strikes, Iran announced at the weekend that it was once more fully closing the strait. The US president then said he would reimpose a naval blockade on Iranian ports that he had lifted after the signing of the memorandum of understanding (MoU). Vexed at his inability to impose his will on Iran, Trump insisted on Monday the US would charge a 20 per cent fee on cargo

through the strait then retracted his plan yesterday. All this would be farcical were it not so serious. The longer shipping through the strait is blocked the more pain will be heaped on the global economy, particularly on poorer energy importers. Before the war, a fifth of the world’s oil and gas passed through the narrow waterway, along with petrochemicals, helium and fertiliser feedstock. The longer the US and Iran battle over control of it, the greater the risk that the escalatory cycle plunges the region back into a full-blown war. The quagmire underlines once again the foolishness of the war launched by Trump against the advice of many of his allies and without much understanding of his enemy. A crisis of Trump’s own making has left Tehran with newfound leverage in the strait, which Iran had never before closed in the past. It has also led to the rise of a more hawkish leadership, emboldened by its ability to withstand US-Israeli bombardment and

raise the costs to the global economy. The Islamic regime is determined not to surrender control of the waterway. And for all Trump’s insistence that the US can reopen the strait, there is no chance of shipping returning to any semblance of normality as long as Iran is attacking vessels. Tehran is recklessly overplaying its hand. In the MoU, it committed to “make arrangements using its best efforts for the safe passage of commercial vessels”. Instead, it is attacking ships daily. For all its defiance, the Islamic republic suffered devastating blows in the war and its economy is in crisis, with inflation soaring to about 90 per cent. The angrier Trump becomes, the greater the risk he lashes out by targeting critical civilian infrastructure as he has threatened. There is still an exit route. The MoU has drawn much criticism, but it offered an alternative to endless war and was never meant as a final deal. It was designed to foster a de-escalatory cli-

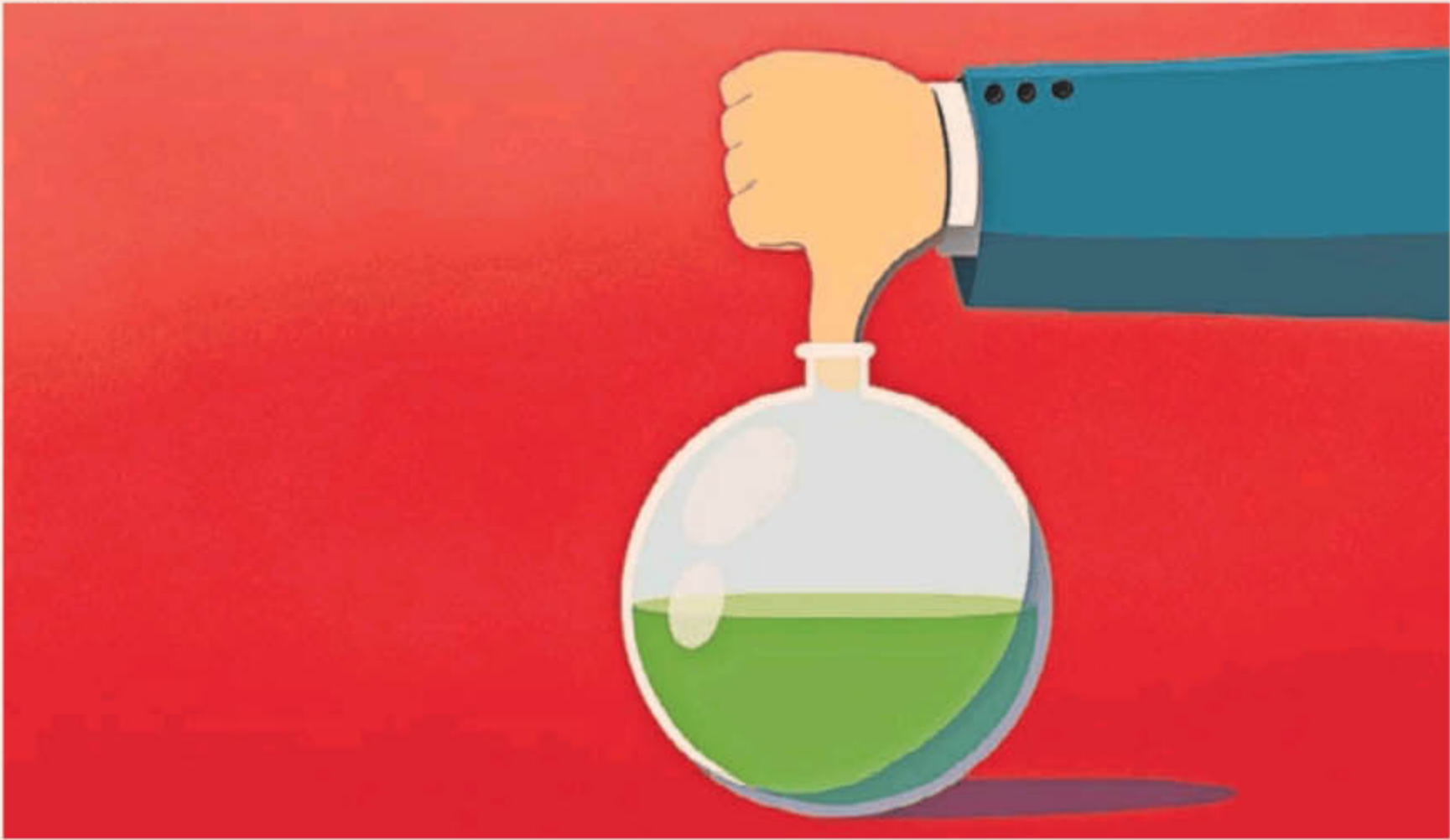
The longer they battle over control of the waterway, the greater the risk that the escalatory cycle plunges the region back into war

mate to allow talks on a final settlement, including on Iran’s nuclear programme. It gave both sides an incentive to pursue diplomacy. For Trump, restarting traffic through the strait would at least begin to ease the global energy squeeze. For Iran, it would have begun to unlock billions of dollars of its frozen funds. The significant sanctions relief Tehran desires would only come with a final deal. The battle over the strait has upended that process. A key problem is that Iran interprets the MoU’s language as enabling it to retain control over the waterway. The US, meanwhile, has encouraged ships to avoid Iranian waters and use a route along Oman’s coast, diluting Tehran’s influence. Unless this dispute is resolved, the path to a diplomatic end to the war is blocked. The only way to break the deadlock is for the warring parties to return to the negotiating table and work with mediators on a *modus vivendi* for the strait. If not, they will remain trapped in a deadly game of brinkmanship that neither side can win.

Opinion Science

Another nail in the coffin of US research

Andy Carter



At some point, the last nail will be hammered into the coffin and the lid firmly shut. For US science, that final nail might well be the bland-sounding Regulation for Federal Financial Assistance. If the draft rule, proposed by the White House Office of Management and Budget, comes into force in October as planned, political appointees at federal agencies will have the power to review research grants to ensure they “demonstrably advance the President’s priorities” and to abruptly terminate those, even ongoing clinical trials, perceived as out of line. New restrictions will apply to international collaborations and to any grants that reference diversity and gender in a way deemed contrary to state decree. The consultation period on the proposed rule closed this week, having

Political appointees will be able to review grants to ensure they ‘advance the President’s priorities’

drawn 300,000 comments. Rightly, there is vigorous opposition. “The proposal blurs the important distinction between elected leaders setting national priorities, which is appropriate, and political appointees deciding which projects to pursue, which is not,” wrote leaders of the American Physical Society. More than 30 professional groups, representing mathematicians, biologists, chemists and engineers, among others, have signed in agreement. United for Cures, a coalition of 57 patient groups, has urged Congress to block the proposal. Lawsuits are likely. Five agencies – the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, the National Institutes of Health, Nasa and the National Science Foundation – take the lion’s share of \$180bn-plus of annual federal R&D spending. Even set against the unprecedented funding, disruption and dysfunction that has dogged US science recently, the draft rule does not so much cross the line as bulldoze through the event horizon. It permits politics to override expert peer review; promotes scientific protectionism in a world of shared global challenges; micromanages the running of labs; and potentially conflicts with Congressional oversight. It replaces the decades-long, curiosity-

driven arc of research with a path vulnerable to ideological swerves every four years. “It’s very bad news,” James Wilsdon, professor of research policy at University College London, tells me, singling out the clampdown on foreign partnerships, including with China, as overkill. “Yes, there are areas of security concern . . . but there are many legitimate areas, like climate science and disease, where one wants to see the world’s two largest scientific powers co-operating for the greater good.” Trials of treatments for childhood cancers, for example, recruit internationally to generate reliable data. Wilsdon predicts that US retrenchment will reverberate globally, pointing to high-profile departures from the country, including chemist Omar Yaghi. The Nobel laureate left UC Berkeley for Tsinghua University in China this month. Under the proposed new rule, federally funded academics would need authorisation to share their work and ideas – a form of academic censorship. One representative of a UK learned society with international fellows, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told me the proposal “in effect ruled out federal funding for the membership of societies, publishing in journals and attending conferences, all the ways in which researchers have impact on the world”. That seems to be the point. Researchers have somehow come to be seen as enemies of the state. The OMB proposal takes aim at “woke ideology” and “far-left activists”. Yes, peer review is not perfect but, as MIT professor Carlo Ratti recently wrote in the FT, political review is unarguably worse. The OMB defends the proposals: “Wasteful and divisive activities unrelated to core purposes of Federal grant programs should not be subsidised with taxpayer dollars . . . [this] can only be stopped through adherence to strong internal controls at Federal agencies.” This, then, is the logical endpoint of President Donald Trump’s assault on science, scholarship and universities: political appointees patrolling the borders of knowledge. How Vannevar Bush, the early Manhattan Project organiser and architect of the postwar US research landscape who lionised intellectual freedom, would have recoiled. “Scientific progress . . . results from the free play of free intellects, working on subjects of their own choice, in the manner dictated by their curiosity for exploration of the unknown,” he famously wrote. Today, another nail hovers. If this proposal survives, it will be at the expense of America’s scientific research enterprise.

The writer is a science commentator

Letters

Military support for Ukraine needs a diplomatic endgame

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s framing of the war as a contest decided by drones and air defence, rather than territory alone, deserves serious attention from American readers, not just policymakers in Washington (“Battle in the sky will decide course of Ukraine war, Zelenskyy warns Putin”, Report, July 7). The technology angle is real. A conflict once measured in miles of front line is now measured in interceptor stock and drone production rates. That should worry anyone hoping for a quick resolution, because

technological races rarely end wars faster; they usually prolong them by raising the cost of stopping. What concerns me more is the drift towards treating this war as a permanent fixture of global politics, something to be managed rather than ended. Continued American support for Ukraine’s defence is reasonable and, frankly, necessary given what is at stake for European security. But support should be paired with a clear diplomatic objective, not simply more capability delivered without an endgame in view.

The world has absorbed the economic and humanitarian cost of this war for over four years now: disrupted grain markets, energy price shocks, and a refugee crisis that has strained neighbouring countries far more than distant commentary acknowledges. Every additional year of fighting adds to that toll, and it is ordinary families, in Ukraine and far beyond it, who bear it, not the leaders making strategic calculations. America has real leverage here, financial, military and diplomatic.

Using that leverage to keep pushing towards a negotiated peace, alongside continued support for Ukraine’s defence, would serve global stability better than either abandonment or open-ended escalation. Wars that drag on because ending them seems harder than continuing them rarely end well for anyone. Peace remains the only outcome that actually serves people, on both sides of this conflict and well beyond it. **A Mylsami**
Postgraduate Teacher (Retired), Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

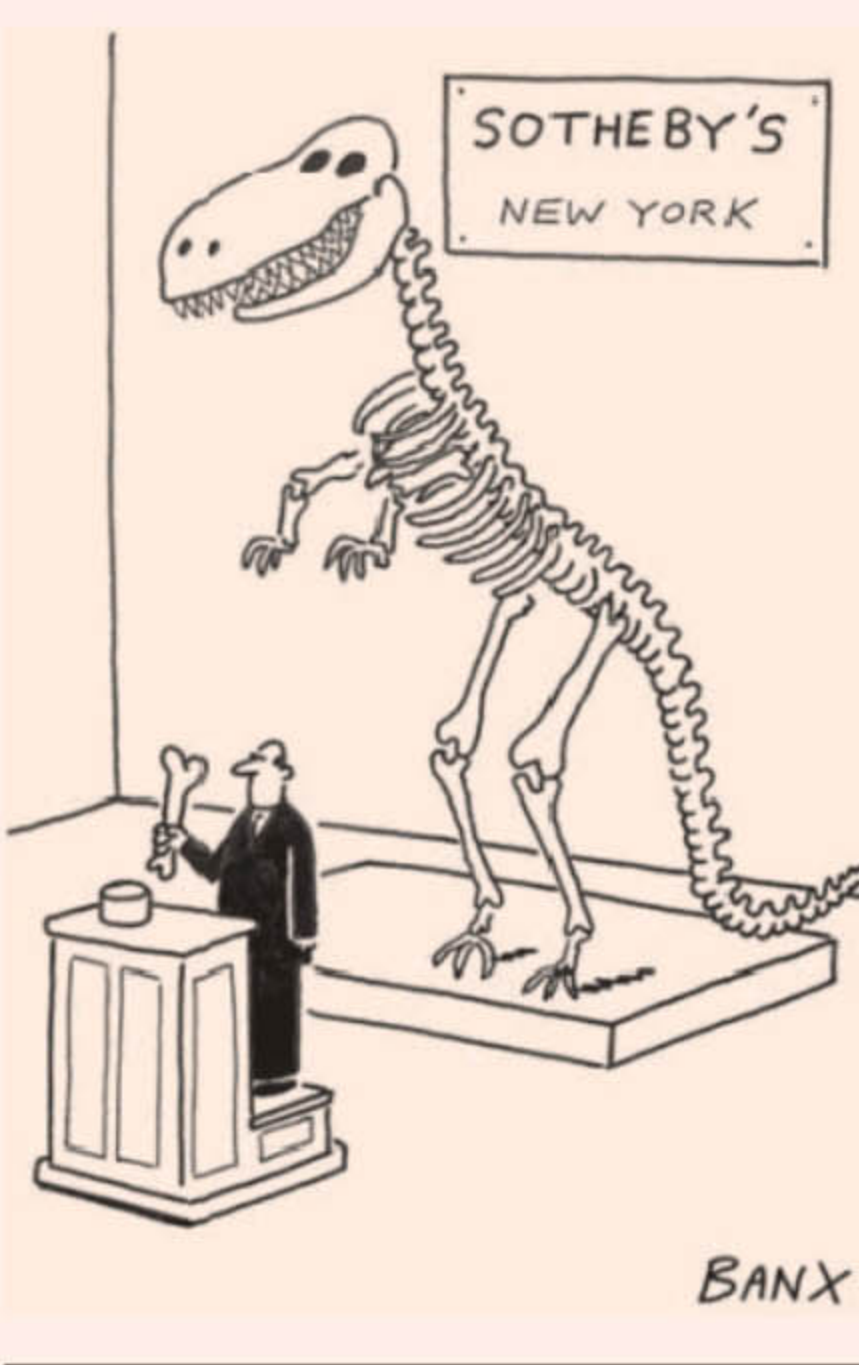
Don’t subsidise yesterday’s career ladder for youths

Subsidising corporations to train young people using semiconductor windfall revenues misses the point entirely (“How to stop AI becoming the enemy of younger workers”, Opinion, July 7). Throwing money at employers to keep junior seats warm in a corporate structure that no longer generates those roles organically is a temporary patch for a systemic collapse. Every major economy is scrambling for its own version of the same sticking plaster. China has written workforce adaptation into its latest Five-Year Plan to combat staggering youth unemployment. The European Commission is relying on regulatory pressure, with the AI Act imposing new workplace obligations by August 2026. Meanwhile, Washington has stalled, leaving multiple AI workforce bills stranded in committee since late 2025.

The deeper flaw lies in how we evaluate capability. Economists suggest AI primarily replaces codified junior tasks while augmenting the “tacit knowledge and interpersonal skills” of senior workers. But as Hyunjoong Kim, a 30-year-old Korean writer and close acquaintance of mine, rightly observes, the system is simply measuring the value of skills by standards it wrote for itself. To claim that meaningful collaboration requires decades of seniority is not an objective finding; it is a self-serving tautology. If the primary criterion for “interpersonal skills” were the ability to seamlessly collaborate across digital tools, diverse cultures and borderless networks, the generational advantage would instantly flip. The irony is palpable. For decades, labour policies were designed to protect older workers from ageism. Now we are drawing up blueprints to “rescue” the youth from obsolescence before their careers even begin. But the younger generation may not need the rescue. If traditional hiring structures refuse to open the gates, tech-savvy digital natives will simply bypass the queue entirely through alternative models such as fractional employment. In the US alone, 83mn people already freelance – 70 per cent of them are under 35. The author notes that “if you can’t join them, beat them”. This is how. **Yakov Filippenko**
Founder and CEO, *Intch*, New York, US

Nato would be backing a winner with Kyiv

“Trump threatens to pull troops out of Europe despite Nato weapons pledges” (Front page report, July 8). Why do we not let the US leave Nato and invite Ukraine in – we’d be backing a winner then! **Eugen Solf**
Kronberg, Germany



Shipowners need certainty to decarbonise further

Your report “Shipowners turn to dirty fossil fuels and nuclear power as green hopes sail away” (FT.com, July 6) raises important questions about confidence in shipping’s decarbonisation journey, but the picture is more complex than it may first appear to your readers. The International Chamber of Shipping’s recent Maritime Barometer Report does show that confidence has fallen in some areas. However, this should not be mistaken for a lack of commitment from the industry. Shipowners remain committed to decarbonisation, but confidence is being undermined by uncertainty over how the transition will be delivered in practice. This means shipowners are prioritising fuels with established supply chains, proven technologies and compatibility with existing infrastructure. What the industry urgently needs is a global regulatory framework that creates a level playing field by equalising the cost of conventional and low- and zero-emission marine fuels, since low- and zero-emissions fuels often cost upwards of four times the price of conventional fuel. Just as importantly, those fuels must actually be available at the scale and in the locations that the industry requires. These “future fuels” currently comprise just over 1 per cent of the world’s energy supply. Without reliable fuel supply and the supporting infrastructure, even the most ambitious regulations cannot deliver the transition. Shipping has demonstrated time and again that it can adapt to global challenges. With clear international rules and investment that accelerates fuel availability at scale, confidence will follow. **Thomas A Kazakos**
Secretary-General, International Chamber of Shipping, London EC3, UK

Ban non-competes to boost talent velocity

Your article on non-compete clauses confirms what British entrepreneurs and investors have known for some time: their widespread use is holding back productivity and innovation (Report, July 7). Those with experience in Silicon Valley know that banning non-competes was key to making it the hotbed of innovation it is today. The “Traitorous Eight” who defected from Shockley Semiconductor Laboratory in 1957 to found Fairchild Semiconductor are now part of Valley lore. The OECD research cited in your article demonstrates how far behind we are in the UK. Employers are stuck in a race to the bottom on non-compete clauses: nobody wants to be the only company without them. The only solution, now, is government intervention to ban their use. This intervention is long overdue. The previous Conservative government held a consultation on non-competes in 2023 and announced that it would limit them. The Starmer government held another consultation earlier this year. Soon, the Burnham government will have an opportunity to finally deliver much-needed reform. But it’s not just non-competes that are slowing down talent velocity. Over a third of businesses set notice periods for directors at six months. This delays their career progression, and it also leads to disengagement and reduced productivity. In addition to banning non-competes, the government should act to give workers a one-sided right to reduce their notice period to one month. **Eva Barboni**
Executive Director, Enterprise Britain, London W11, UK

Mental health reform requires more resources

Your leader (“Britain’s unsustainable mental health bill”, FT View, July 10) quite rightly focuses on the necessity of bringing Britain’s ballooning disability bill under control, particularly in relation to the Pip regime. But there is one crucial difficulty with this that is not mentioned in your leader, and that is the lack of professional resources to cope with the problem. It currently takes between 1 and 5 years to obtain an ADHD diagnosis, which means also that there is insufficient expert help available to allocate the appropriate level of support; that also has implications for analysing the extent of the mental health problems that seem increasingly to beset our society (“What’s really going on with mental health?”, Data Points, July 11). This will be a significant hurdle to resolving this issue. **Raj Parkash**
London W4, UK

China did not abandon its formal alliances

Manjari Chatterjee Miller’s argument that America is unwittingly adopting non-alignment (Opinion, July 9) is provocative, but rests on a claim that deserves correction. She writes that China “has not entered a formal alliance since the founding of non-alignment”. Yet in July 1961 Beijing signed the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance with North Korea, whose Article 2 obliges each party to render military assistance if the other is attacked. That treaty remains in force, renewed in 2021 until 2041. It is China’s one formal alliance and it postdates Bandung by six years. The omission matters because it complicates her cautionary tale. China’s problem is not that it forswore alliances after 1955; it is that its single treaty ally is North Korea. Nor should we forget that when Zhou Enlai spoke at Bandung, China was itself bound by its 1950 alliance treaty with the Soviet Union, which makes the professor’s opening image of Zhou urging that alliances be “abandoned” rather less Trumpian and rather more tactical than she suggests. Her larger point stands: the post-1945 alliance network is a strategic asset the US squanders at its peril. But the lesson of China’s experience is more precise, that is, the danger is not having no allies; it is having only the allies nobody else wants. **Naveen Parihar**
Bellevue, WA, US

Reset the WEF by shrinking its board

Your report on the stalemate over WEF board reform (July 11) points to the real issue: not who chairs the organisation, but the size of the board itself. Twenty-eight members is not a board, it is a small parliament, and no amount of process reform will produce sharp, candid debate around a table that large. This is not just common sense – Michael Jensen argued three decades ago that board effectiveness falls away well before half that number, and David Yermack’s landmark study found company value moving inversely with board size. Larry Fink’s apparent proposal to shrink the board follows that evidence closely. That Klaus Schwab, for all his ousting, is apparently still resisting it is telling. Switzerland’s own foundation regulator is said to agree a smaller board is overdue. After a chief executive’s resignation over Epstein links and two investigations into its founder, perhaps a genuine organisational reset should start there. **Alan Coppin OBE**
Former Non-Executive Director, Berkeley Group Holdings, Buckinghamshire, UK

Opinion

Democrats are not in great shape

POLITICS

Edward Luce



In Fifa terms, the Democratic Party stands before a wide-open goal. There is no daylight between an unpopular President Donald Trump and his reflexively loyalist Republicans. Instead of putting the ball into the back of the net, however, Democrats are squabbling in front of the goal. Trump’s single-mindedness is mirrored by a fractious opposition.

The odds are still that Democrats will regain the House of Representatives in November – midterms being essentially a plebiscite on the sitting president. Yet Democrats are devising ways

to push the Senate beyond their reach. The party is split between a radicalised younger vote, which is increasingly Maga-like in tactics and tone, and an ageing establishment that is short of ideas. The portents for the 2028 presidential primaries are not all good.

It is common at such moments for Democrats to tell themselves that someone will come along. There are as yet few clues as to who that might be. The likes of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, let alone Franklin D Roosevelt, do not grow on trees. The self-soothing fallback is that, regardless of who Democrats choose, Republicans will face a bigger handicap. Trump cannot run again and the battle for his mantle will be divisive.

Yet prospects for a replay of 2020 are real. It is easy to forget how badly Joe Biden was faring in the Democratic primaries until the party abruptly coalesced on his nomination. Until then, Biden had been drowned out by a

crowded stage of candidates vying over who could be the most progressive. Open borders and infinite genders were the mood of the day.

It is also easy to forget how fortunate Biden was to defeat Trump later that year. Not only had Trump squandered public confidence in his handling of the Covid pandemic but social distancing

The party is split between a radicalised younger vote and an ageing establishment

allowed Biden to avoid the demands of the campaign trail. Had he been subjected to a normal schedule his frailty might have been exposed. Either way, the terms of Biden’s nomination made him the centrist figurehead of a progres-

sive agenda. The surge in undocumented immigration under Biden’s US-Mexico border policy helped seed Trump’s 2024 revenge.

The party’s current infighting over various Senate nominations reveals a similar split to 2020. Of these, the most toxic is in Maine, where progressives had handpicked Graham Platner, a bad candidate whom they had not properly vetted. Platner was not the blue-collar candidate of their advertisements – he came from a wealthy background. In addition to a chequered record with women, he had an SS-associated tattoo emblazoned on his chest.

You might think that a Nazi tattoo would be a red flag but progressives convinced themselves it was a sign of Platner’s authenticity. Only highly educated people could be this dumb. Platner’s two chief campaign consultants, Morris Katz and Daniel Moraff, are both scions of great generational wealth. They are

also closely associated with the Democratic Socialists of America, which is making inroads into nominations across urban America.

Trump is making hay with their selections. Since late June, when DSA candidates pulled off upset victories in New York and elsewhere, Trump has invoked “communism” 94 times, according to Time. The term carries few negative connotations to anyone under 50. Nor does Bolshevism describe the DSA’s social democratic-type economics. Were the DSA simply advocating public healthcare and fair taxation of the AI oligarchs, Trump would not get much traction. Both are popular with median Americans.

But the DSA also comes across as anti-American, which does not play well in the heartlands. It is also hard to figure out which they disdain more, Trump or the Democratic Party. In the storied tradition of left sectarianism, the suspicion

is that Trump is the lesser of the two evils. On foreign policy, the DSA is critical of Israel, which captures the public’s mood, but at best ambivalent on Ukraine, which does not. At home, they have not met a border or a police department of which they approve. In short, they channel the Berkeley campus, not America’s suburbs.

More’s the pity because much of their critique of a timid and conformist Democratic establishment is merited. That Kamala Harris is readying herself for another run at the presidency is bad enough. That an official inquest into the party’s 2024 defeat could not bring itself to criticise Harris directly is worse. Eighteen months into Trump’s assault on the US constitution, the party is languishing at roughly the same high-thirties approval rating as the Republicans. Thereby hangs a warning sign.

edward.luce@ft.com

Is the US or Europe better off?

Martin WolfEconomics

Comparing them is hard and can lead to different answers depending on what is measured and how



The general view, not just in the US, is that the contemporary European economy is a dying duck. As the Nobel laureate Paul Krugman notes in a recent Substack on this question, which builds in turn on important earlier work by Seth Ackerman, “there is . . . a widespread perception that Europe is living off its past glories, that it is lagging behind America and China in ways that will undermine its ability to maintain its economic standing in the world”. Indeed, just this fear animates reports recently produced in Europe, notably the highly influential analysis by Mario Draghi, which was published in 2024.

Making such comparisons is difficult. There is no doubt, for example, that the US has long been in another league when it comes to advanced digital technologies and, today in particular, to artificial intelligence. Again, being a single state gives the US an insuperable advantage when it comes to creating and exercising instruments of national power.

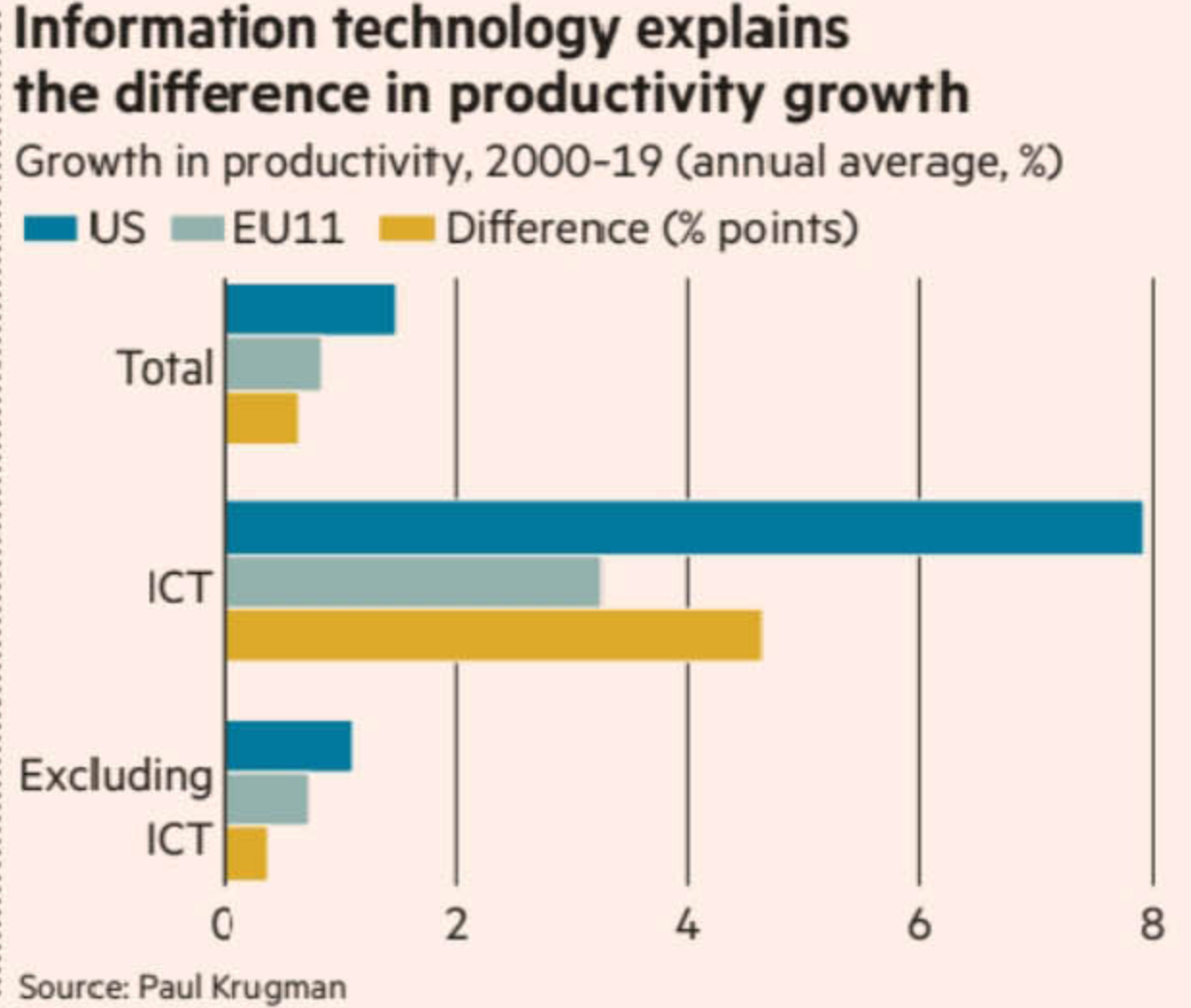
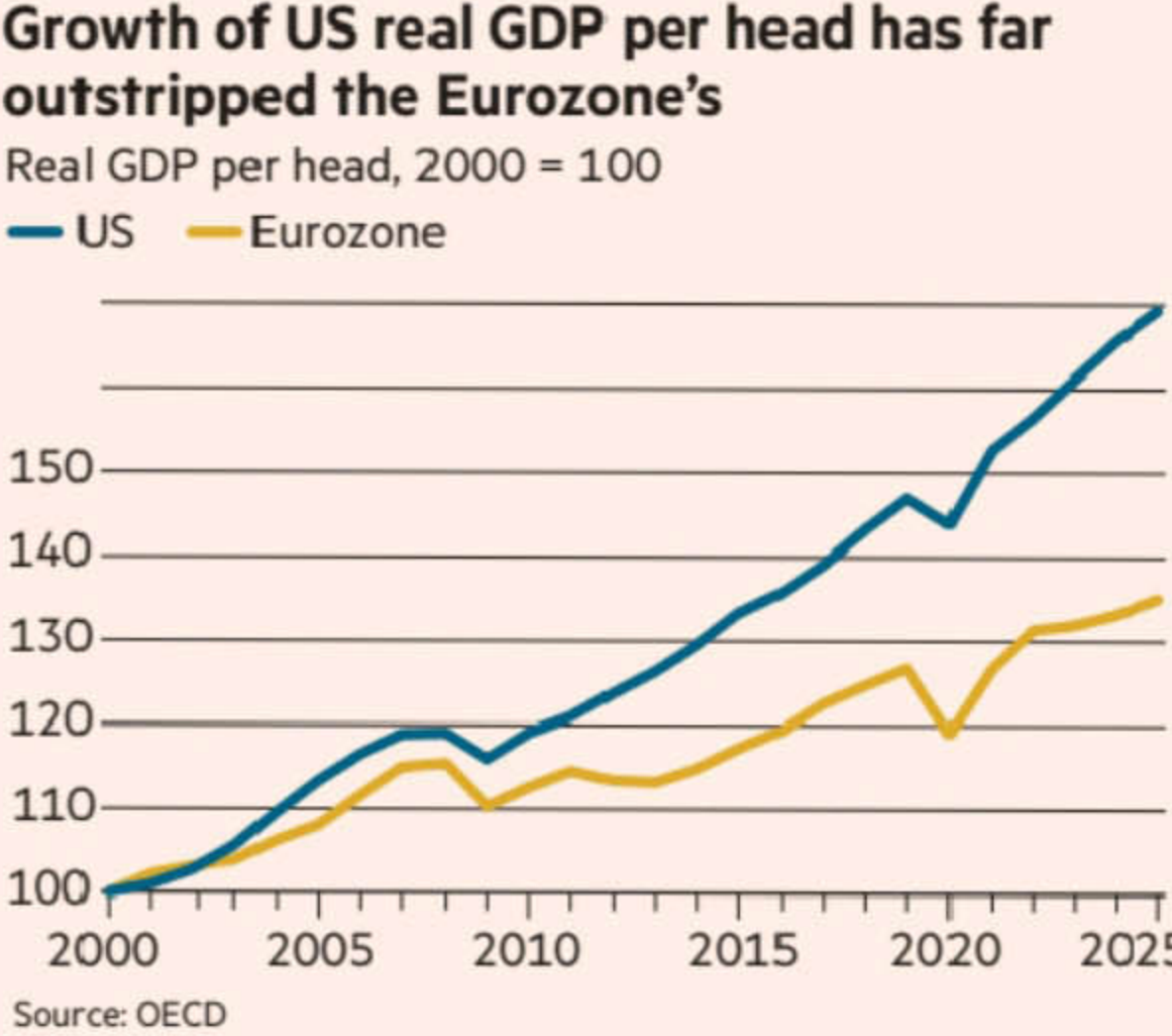
At the same time, we should remember those bold words about “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration of Independence. Life expectancy for US men was 76.5 in 2024, against an average of 80.5 in comparable high-income countries. For women, it was 81.4 against 84.8. That is despite spending a far higher proportion of its GDP on health. The US homicide rate was 5.9 per 100,000 in 2023, against 1.3 in France and 0.9 in Germany. Its

prison population was 542 per 100,000 in 2023, against 130 in France and 69 in Germany. Thus, if one takes a wider view of human welfare, the US is very far from superior. Indeed, it is arguably the reverse if one measures it against the aims of its founders. Yet, what about the economy more narrowly defined as the ability to produce the goods and services that are measured in GDP?

Here, Krugman argues, we find a fascinating paradox, which also confounds the conventional wisdom of European economic failure. He suggests there are two ways of comparing GDP performance: growth in real GDP per head over a period; and the relative level of GDP per head in any given year. It turns out that if one compares the US with the Eurozone on growth since 2000, its performance is hugely superior. But if one compares relative GDP per head, this is not true: Eurozone GDP per head has risen relative to the US’s. (See charts.)

How is it possible for one economy to grow faster than another and not end up relatively richer than at the start? To understand that one has to address the differences between what is being measured and how. These differences show the complexity of all such accounting.

What explains the discrepancy in growth in GDP per head? Strikingly, even though the tech sector was only 9.2 per cent of US GDP, against 5.4 per cent of the EU’s, almost half of the difference in productivity growth between the two economies was explained by



differences in the relative size of this one sector. Moreover, productivity growth in the EU’s (relatively small) tech sector was also measured as being lower than in the US one. So, overall, the tech sector alone accounts for well over half of the overall difference in growth of GDP per head.

A related explanation for the difference is problems in measuring growth. The extraordinarily rapid reported productivity growth in US tech depends on making “hedonic” adjustments in the

Why is it possible for one to grow faster than another and not end up relatively richer than at the start?

prices of products. This involves working out the value of increased processing power to consumers. But such measures are inherently highly uncertain. For this reason, the higher growth of productivity in the US tech sector (and so of US GDP per head) is questionable, not because it is wrong, but because this is a matter of judgment. Note, crucially, that productivity growth of sectors other than tech, in the two economies, which make up the vast bulk of both economies, is quite similar.

The problem of comparing GDP per head at purchasing power parity across countries at any point in time is also tricky, but simpler. One does not have to compare today’s car with one of two decades ago, but one in the US and Europe in any given year and then value both at the same price. This has been done

in the World Bank’s International Comparison Program for more than half a century. It is the only sensible way to compare standards of living across countries: money GDP per head is too volatile and, above all, grossly distorts comparisons of non-tradeables. Between two relatively similar economies, such as the US and Europe, these measures will be reasonably robust.

There are also some complexities introduced by the fact that European real consumption per hour has grown more slowly than in the US. But this too may partly be explained by differences in hedonic adjustments. Moreover, Krugman notes, the direct comparisons of consumption per head show the same pattern over time as for GDP per head.

So, what fundamentally explains the paradox? The answer, a simple model

explains, is that the US tech sector is a provider of a global public good: the most advanced technology. This benefits the non-tech world equally, at home and abroad, and so sustains relative standards of living. Of course, owners of US tech benefit from its profitability. But they can (and do) live anywhere.

The conclusion is that Europe does not suffer any disadvantage in relative welfare vis-à-vis the US. But – a crucial but – it is indeed far weaker. Not least, its ability to exploit the technological advances made in the US depends on access to US supplies. The big threats Europe confronts are not narrowly economic ones. They are those of security and defence. It must meet them.

martin.wolf@ft.com

We are not on course for a Nato divorce – yet

DEFENCE

Constanze Stelzenmüller



Nato’s Ankara summit went a lot better than feared: strong support for Ukraine, recommitment to collective defence and nuclear deterrence, as well as recognition of Europe’s surging defence spending, production and modernisation. Even the EU got a nod for its funding pledges to Kyiv.

Now for the hard part. For Ukraine and Europe this continues to be one of the most dangerous moments in decades. They face an aggressive Russia sustained by China and a US vacillating between support, disengagement and

hostility. Much work remains to be done.

There is no prospect of a ceasefire between Kyiv and Moscow. Ukraine has been gaining a significant advantage with drone operations and long-range deep precision strikes against Russian refineries and arms factories but is still weak on recruitment. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is reorganising his cabinet for the fourth time in as many years.

Russia proceeds with indiscriminate bombardments of civilian targets and is expanding hybrid warfare in Europe. A recent think-tank report described Russia mapping Nato’s air defence gaps in a nearly two-year-long drone campaign. Vladimir Putin and his inner circle cling to maximalist war goals. Expect the Kremlin not to reassess its options until after the US midterms, another brutal winter campaign and a prospect of an internationalist candidate winning the American elections in 2028.

Europeans need to plan for two distinct scenarios: a “fight tonight” contingency, or larger-scale military aggression in a few years. US support remains absolutely vital in the case of, for example, a sudden Russian attack on the Baltics in the near future. In the latter scenario, Europe stands a somewhat better chance, because its leaders are moving at pace to replace the range of US conventional capabilities.

The best possible case is some American support in the short term, and credible European rearmament over the next two to three years. Even then, a Nato

The best case is American support in the short term and European rearmament in the next few years

without the US will have to develop a “European way of warfare” that will differ in key aspects from the American model: less about shock and awe and winning, and instead based on denial, defence, resilience, industrial planning and integrated coalition command.

The real conundrum is that the military arm of the transatlantic alliance is constructed around US leadership. Plans to replace US four-star officers at the three Joint Force Commands in Norfolk, Naples and Brunssum with Europeans are under way. But the role of the US as a political offshore balancer in Europe is more or less irreplaceable; hence the focus on pragmatic “minilateral” coalitions with limited remits like the Joint Expeditionary Force.

All-European coalitions, however, will also be necessary – and require an almost heroic level of solidarity and unity, although that might now become slightly easier given southern European

worries about escalation in the Middle East. Western Europeans too are unnerved by President Donald Trump’s importunate demands for Greenland (which he repeated in Ankara) and their implications for the security calculus of other islands in the north Atlantic.

Smaller nations on the continent, moreover, have legitimate questions about the reliability of the Big Three: France, the UK and Germany. Will Europe’s two nuclear nations elect pro-Russian populist leaders? Could Europe’s economic powerhouse (where the far right AfD stands to win two state elections in the autumn) use its record-setting defence spending to dominate its neighbours? Even should none of this come to pass, Paris, London or Berlin can only lead by consent, and this consent can only be gained if they – like America in more benign days – exercise self-restraint.

Then there is the question of the exact

nature of Europe’s future relationship with the US in a Europeanised Nato. Threats of abandonment notwithstanding, we are not yet heading for a divorce. Ukraine has become a key testing ground for American weapons, doctrines and tactics, while Europe is an indispensable market for US arms. Some in the Maga-verse may even hope for a Europe run by rightwing “civilisational allies” armed to the teeth.

So, no need to panic. The confrontation with the US over Greenland in January taught Europeans that transatlantic dependence is mutual, and that a combination of political resolve, military signalling and a credible threat to impose economic costs works as a deterrent. Perhaps some day the insight will prevail that we have bigger adversaries than each other.

The writer directs the Center on the US and Europe at the Brookings Institution

Par Ridder
Publisher

Mitch Pugh
Executive Editor

Chris Jones, Editorial Page Editor

Chicago Tribune

Founded June 10, 1847

Stacy St. Clair, Managing Editor

DIRECTORS OF CONTENT

Amanda Kaschube, Sports and Audience
Todd Panagopoulos, Visuals

EDITORIALS

Platner’s implosion should be a dire warning to Democrats. Is the party listening?

Democratic socialists who have enjoyed a string of recent primary triumphs in New York City and Denver want to believe that the Graham Platner political disaster in Maine is a one-off and tells us nothing about whether far-left politics will play with Americans outside of gentrified urban areas.

Senate candidate Platner’s rise in Maine, just such a place, was supposed to help answer that question. Incumbent Republican Sen. Susan Collins, a moderate, has defied the state’s leftward drift for decades and is seeking her sixth term. In election cycle after cycle, Democrats have made her a priority target and have failed to unseat her. Any Democratic hope of retaking the GOP-led Senate in November rests on winning Maine.

Platner rose from obscurity, a Marine combat veteran in Iraq turned oysterman, straight out of central casting. His mission: reverse Democrats’ lack of appeal to white working-class voters, once a loyal Democratic constituency but now a critical part of Donald Trump’s base. But here was the real trick: Platner would use his “I’m one of you” story to convince those voters to support policies like Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders’ 5% national tax on unrealized wealth over \$1 billion, Medicare for All, abolishing Immigration and Customs Enforcement and ending all military aid to Israel.

Platner looked the part but his biography proved uncooperative. It turned out his oyster farming operation looked more like a hobby than a livelihood, and his principal customer was his mother’s restaurant.

Far more problematic, several women who had dated Platner in the past disclosed a pattern of abuse that supporters for months dismissed as irrelevant and even mainstream media appeared to soft-pedal. The New York Times in early June published reporting topped by a headline that described Platner’s behavior with women as “unsettling,” a choice that looked to many like a liberal media double-standard when it came to believing women. Jenny Racicot, one of the women quoted in that story and who was unhappy with her treatment in The New York Times narrative, subsequently alleged to Politico in agonizing detail that Platner once had drunkenly raped her



SCOTT STANTIS/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

during their on-again, off-again relationship. Platner vehemently denied her account, but had to withdraw from the race as his political backers abandoned him one by one.

The desperation to keep Platner’s storybook campaign on track was palpable in the repeated decisions by multiple parties, including Sanders himself whose endorsement late last year gave Platner’s campaign so much momentum, to ignore or play down the red flags. After the Politico story, even Sanders had to call on Platner to step aside; he was one of the last of the parade of supporters to do so.

As Maine Democrats ponder who they will run against Collins in November, Platner’s down-

fall should serve as a warning to a Democratic Party that is at risk of fumbling its midterm advantages inherent in a disgruntled electorate and an unpopular president.

And we don’t mean just in the obvious ways, which include failing to properly vet neophyte candidates who are appealing to younger, more liberal primary voters fed up with their graying lawmakers in Washington, D.C.

Even before the final revelation that capsized Platner’s bid for office, there were no signs his regular-man appeal was breaking through with working-class Mainers. Recent polls showed voters without a college degree backed Collins over Platner by margins well into the double digits. College-educated respon-

dents favored Platner by large margins. Where have we heard this story before?

Third Way, a moderate think tank, put the situation well in a Tuesday analysis assessing what happened in Maine. Noting that more than half of voters without a college degree told pollsters for The New York Times and Siena College that Platner was too far left, Third Way wrote, “There’s a reason for that. As an advocate for Sanders-style politics, he was too far left, and no amount of blue-collar cosplay was going to fix it.”

Democratic socialists keep believing that working-class voters will embrace a revolutionary, socialist reordering of America if only the right messenger

can be found. And working-class voters keep offering the same answer: No. Not something we want.

We wrote recently that centrist Democrats need to find their voice in the face of the challenge from the extreme left and in the interest of giving non-ideological Americans increasingly finding themselves politically homeless a reasonable option at the ballot box. If the country is going to tackle its many problems, MAGA versus socialism can’t be the binary choice.

Democratic socialists want desperately to sweep the lessons of the failed Graham Platner experiment under the rug. Pragmatic Democrats shouldn’t let them.

Property tax relief should mean relief for everyone

Property tax relief has become one of the few ideas capable of uniting politicians who otherwise agree on almost nothing. Across the Midwest, officials are advancing proposals to ease the burden.

In Michigan, a leading Democratic Senate candidate, Abdul El-Sayed, is calling for a property tax freeze for seniors. Ditto in Ohio, where Gov. Mike DeWine in June signed bipartisan legislation expected to provide qualifying seniors and disabled homeowners roughly \$500 in property tax relief.

Indiana Gov. Mike Braun has proposed eliminating property taxes altogether for seniors over 65.

In Illinois, by contrast, much of this year’s property tax debate centered not on homeowners but on property tax “certainty” for the Chicago Bears.

Conversations framed this way create winners and losers. Targeted relief doesn’t make the



Indiana Gov. Mike Braun prepares to board the inaugural run of the South Shore Line’s new Monon Corridor route on March 31 at the Hammond Gateway Station in Hammond. He has proposed eliminating property taxes for seniors over 65. **ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

bill disappear, it shifts who pays. The danger of carve-out politics is that it encourages every group to

ask the same question: Why them instead of us? Young homeowners struggling with today’s mort-

gage rates and property tax bills are hardly living lives of luxury. Neither are many families raising children. When relief is reserved for one demographic, everyone else is left to wonder why their financial strain counts for less.

None of this is to suggest seniors don’t face unique challenges. Many live on fixed incomes while property values — and tax bills — continue to climb. But that’s also true, in different ways, for young families, first-time buyers and many middle-class homeowners.

The point is, politicians seem well aware that property taxes are a pain point for everyone. Better to offer wide-ranging relief in this case, acknowledging that there’s plenty of pain to go around, rather than fostering an us-versus-them resentment among generations.

Politicians like targeted relief because it’s cheaper and easier than broad relief.

It’s not that seniors don’t need relief — it’s that everyone does. Meaning the best solution, instead of carving out relief for some, is to address the root of the problem. Not by expanding our long list of taxes, but by confronting the spending pressures that drive high property taxes in the first place rather than layering exemption upon exemption.

The growing bipartisan interest in property tax relief across our region tells us something important: Politicians know voters have reached a breaking point. This is an issue that can easily cross political lines because everyone feels it in one way or another.

Simply put, the problem is the taxes themselves, not the demographics. Tackling affordability means addressing the burden broadly rather than asking one group of homeowners to subsidize relief for another.

ON THIS DAY 16 YEARS AGO ALL COST, NO BENEFIT

President Ronald Reagan said, “There is nothing so permanent as a temporary government program.” President Barack Obama is not straining to prove him wrong.

Last winter, Obama persuaded Congress to give businesses a bonus for hiring people who had been out of work for 60 days or more. HIRE, for Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment, was supposed to stimulate job creation and add some juice to a gasping economy. In practice, it doesn’t seem to have worked. So what does the administration want to do? You guessed it: extend the program.

The initiative was supposed to cost \$13.5 billion, but far fewer companies have made use of it than expected, so the tab has come to \$8.5 billion. The Treasury Department thinks employers must not be aware of the incentives being offered: an exemption from the employer’s share of Social

Security payroll taxes for the rest of 2010 and a \$1,000 tax credit for each worker who is kept on for at least a year.

Maybe employers don’t know, but in an economy in which every nickel counts, it’s more likely they just don’t care. The incentives are too small to overcome all the woes facing managers: sluggish growth, huge budget deficits that portend tax increases later on, the cost of implementing health care reform and what the U.S. Chamber of Commerce calls “the unbelievable amount of new regulation that is in the pipeline.”

... The Treasury Department says 4.5 million people hired between February and May qualify for the benefits, but it doesn’t know if they would have been hired regardless. Their employment may just be attributable to economic growth.

Or the credit may simply induce them to take on Worker A, who has been out of work three months, rather than the slightly more qualified Worker B, who lost his previous job just six weeks ago. Again: all cost and no benefit.

... It would be far more helpful to scour the Federal Register to eliminate regulations that have outlived their usefulness or cost more than they’re worth. Cutting spending to diminish future tax increases would also give employers greater confidence that investments they make in workers will pay off in the long run.

Obama seems to think clever tax gimmicks can put the long-term unemployed back to work. But in this case, the best thing the federal government can do is not get in the way.

Tribune editorial board, July 15, 2010

OPINION

The socialists and moderates in the Democratic Party must work together to regain Congress



Laura Washington

The mendacity of the political left is audacious and delusional. Take this recent view from In These Times magazine, a long-time voice of the progressive left: “After New York’s Democratic primary shockwaves, there is no doubt: democratic socialism is on the march in the U.S.,” the headline declared.

“This summer, a seismic wave ripped through the foundations of an ossified Democratic establishment as a swell of left-wing challengers channeled disgust at party elites to jolt the entire political system,” according to the analysis.

It gleefully ticks off three recent primary wins by democratic socialists in New York City congressional districts. It goes on to hail other examples of “triumph,” as “(Democratic Socialists of America)-backed candidates won across the state and local levels, with the results sending shockwaves through the corridors of power. As a Fox News chyron blared: ‘SOCIALISTS WINNING EVERYWHERE.’”

When the left starts touting Fox News reports, you know we’re in a world of trouble. Are the socialists going to get tired of so much winning?

No serious political observer believes a few elections in New York City and Colorado will turn the tide for the moderate Democrats who have a serious chance in Senate races in Texas, North Carolina and Georgia. Those who do are whistling past their own graveyard.

Collaboration versus confrontation. The progressive and moderate wings of the Democratic Party must find a way to work together.

If progressives really want to see their party regain congressional majorities, they need look no further than their hated adversary, President Donald Trump. For years, Trump has rolled out tired, pathetic attacks on the “communists” and “socialists” in the Democratic Party as a ploy to jazz up his MAGA base. It has worked for him so far.

Now the president is desperate to avoid talking about affordability and his Iran mega-blunder. Yet, progressive Democrats are providing Trump with a golden opportunity to engage in the tired politics of McCarthyism.

Olivia Wales, a White House spokesperson, recently declared that “Democrats’ embrace of socialism and communism is an



U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, at lectern, and New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, second from right, at a campaign rally for House primary candidates in New York on June 18. From left: Brad Lander, Claire Valdez, Sanders, Mamdani and Darializa Avila Chevalier. ANGELINA KATSANIS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

If the Trump nightmare is ever going to end, Democrats need to be strategic and tactical. The strategy must be focused on the center. Don’t allow Republicans to splinter a base that is in the majority. The Democrats’ dysfunction must not be allowed to doom the party to infighting and distraction.

existential threat to our country,” adding that Trump will “keep calling out their radicalism and drawing a sharp contrast with his commonsense America first agenda.”

Socialists and communists? Bah, humbug. That’s a line of debate that Democrats cannot engage in. It’s a bludgeon that will demolish the Democrats’ big tent.

No matter how hard left-leaning Democrats and MAGA Trumpers try to portray themselves as being in the majority, they need to face the truth. The center is the majority. Collaboration, not confrontation, is the key to victory.

Roy Cooper, the Democratic nominee for the U.S. Senate in North Carolina, would be

kneecapped by a message in the midterms that swings heavily to the left. James Talarico, the Democrats’ Senate hopeful in Texas, would be hit with the same blowback.

Sure, New Yorkers may not be happy with their ridiculously high rents. Most politicians who are breathing realize that landlords are not a very popular constituency. Tenants everywhere will tell you that their rents are a problem. But when you start talking about the redistribution of wealth, centrist voters start getting clammy hands.

In Illinois, we saw what happened back in 2020, in the clash of the billionaires. Hedge fund investor Ken Griffin took on JB Pritzker over the governor’s

“fair tax,” a proposed constitutional amendment that would have replaced the state’s flat income tax with a graduated system.

The defeat of Pritzker’s crusade to tax the wealthy was a rare major loss in his years as governor.

If the Trump nightmare is ever going to end, Democrats need to be strategic and tactical. The strategy must be focused on the center. Don’t allow Republicans to splinter a base that is in the majority. The Democrats’ dysfunction must not be allowed to doom the party to infighting and distraction.

The American blue-collar vote, once a bedrock of the Democratic Party base, has been surrendered to the GOP, thanks to President Bill Clinton’s NAFTA disaster.

The latest version of that was the 2024 Democratic presidential nominee’s onetime support of access to gender-affirming surgery for people in prisons and immigration detention. Kamala Harris backed off that position during the presidential campaign, but the damage was done.

If that kind of mantra becomes a rallying cry for Democratic activ-

ists, the wilderness will look like a vacation for their party. The party has made too many unforced errors. It must stop supporting the wrong causes and candidates.

Graham Platner, Maine’s now-disgraced Democratic U.S. Senate nominee, was once hailed a progressive hero. He enjoyed the backing of U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, an icon of the left. His supporters argued that nominating the anti-establishment stalwart would be the key to Democrats winning control of the Senate.

Platner’s candidacy was subsequently shredded by multiple accusations of sexual misconduct, mistreatment of women and other scandals, and he was forced to withdraw from the race.

Democrats must learn: Putting ideology over practicality loses every time.

Laura Washington is a political commentator and longtime Chicago journalist. Her columns appear in the Tribune each Wednesday. Write to her at LauraLauraWashington@gmail.com.

Chicago families fill in the gap for underfunded schools — but that helps fuel inequities

By Erika M. Kitzmiller
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Chicago’s public schools are once again facing a significant budget crisis.

With schools under pressure to close drastic budget gaps, many school administrators and local communities are relying on an old and dangerous solution: raising private funds to support public education.

As a public school educator and administrator, I understand the temptation. Schools that can raise private funding can do so easily. School administrators simply ask affluent public school families to donate. Families care deeply about their children’s schools, their education and their interests. So, they create GoFundMe pages, open their Venmo and Zelle accounts, and donate what they can.

These donations are siphoned into a nonprofit foundation, which means these funds, unlike public dollars, are free from bureaucratic oversight and regulations. School administrators can use these funds immediately to cover expenses that the public dollars cannot, such as extracurricular activities, elective resources and other programs that augment the educational experiences that children receive.

Plus, these donations are tax-deductible, an added perk for the affluent families in the city who are the most likely to have the funds to give.

However, relying on private funding for public education fuels inequity in the city’s schools, often advantaging the already advantaged and disadvantaging the already disadvantaged.



Volunteers roll out a rack of spirit wear to stock in the Friends of Kenwood Academy booth before the eighth grade graduation ceremony at Kenwood Academy on June 1. STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

In short, public schools serving more affluent students are more likely to have access to families willing to donate private funds. This creates what I call doubly advantaged schools — institutions that serve more white and affluent students and thus can leverage and rely on private philanthropy to subsidize inadequate public aid. They are doubly advantaged because the children who attend these schools benefit from the social and economic capital their families possess, and the school, in turn, builds on these advantages by pressuring families to donate generously to their children’s

public schools.

The overreliance on philanthropy exacerbates and generates inequities, even in a single school district. Often, schools that are doubly advantaged are only a few city blocks away from schools that must rely solely on inadequate public support. When we don’t acknowledge these advantages and their corollary disadvantages, we can’t see the inequities that exist in our own communities and schools. Instead, we as a society often blame educators, families and youths for the inequities that we collectively generate.

Moreover, the overreliance on

private funds to support public schools masks the challenges that all schools face in underfunded school districts in rural and urban communities. This weakens our collective fight — across class, race and space — to secure more government funding for underresourced schools and communities.

Families want to donate to their children’s public schools, especially during a budgetary crisis. But there are ways to make it more equitable than it currently is.

School districts have required families who choose to donate to their children’s school to match

their donations to the school district, thereby increasing the funds available to schools that enroll children whose families do not have the income to make these donations freely.

Others have implemented regulations governing the resources that families can access, using these resources to mitigate the ever-increasing escalation of inequity in our public schools. Still others, including Chicago, have created centralized funds that solicit and manage private donations from residents and philanthropies.

In an ideal world, the public would fund our public schools. But as money pours in from families to subsidize inadequate public aid, it is critical for taxpayers to consider how overreliance on private funding exacerbates inequities and limits opportunities across the school system and our city. Private funding for public education has been and still is a way for the advantaged to remain advantaged in a system funded with inadequate public dollars in Chicago and beyond.

We must reckon with the inequities that this overreliance on private funding creates as public officials, once again, try to make the impossible possible: funding public education with insufficient government funds.

Erika M. Kitzmiller is a research associate professor at the University of Chicago. She is the author of two books: “The Roots of Educational Inequality: Philadelphia’s Germantown High School, 1907-2014” and “Unchartered: How One Public High School Transformed First-Generation High School Success.”

OPINION

The deadly cost of siloed governance when no one is in charge

By Forrest Claypool
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

When the Chicago-Cook County Violence Against Women Task Force issued its report on systemic failures affecting domestic abuse survivors, its conclusions were both damning and familiar.

As the Tribune Editorial Board highlighted, Cook County’s failed system revictimizes survivors in a culture of confusion, a maze in which victims are bounced between fragmented court divisions, police departments, state’s attorneys and clerk’s offices. Many orders of protection go unserved or unenforced, and domestic-related homicides remain high.

Most tellingly, the task force concludes that “no one institution is responsible for outcomes.” Responsibility is so thoroughly diffused that when the system fails, every agency can point a finger elsewhere.

The task force leaders, Chicago Ald. Silvana Tabares, 23rd, and Cook County Commissioner Donna Miller, deserve immense praise for diagnosing how institutional isolation fails the vulnerable. But the crippling diffusion of responsibility they uncovered is not an exception in our state and local government today; it is becoming standard operating procedure.

In my book “The Daley Show,” a biography of Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, I examined this exact organizational dysfunction, which was at the center of three 2003 tragedies: a crowded nightclub panic, a collapsed neighborhood balcony and a downtown fire that took 40 lives. Large institutions frequently fracture into insulated units. Employees focus on bureaucratic turf, losing sight of the broader mission. When no single entity owns the overall process, the result is often catastrophic.

History offers painful examples. In the early 2000s, General Motors engineers, lawyers and managers knew that defective ignition switches were killing drivers, yet no one acted because everyone assumed another department was handling it. An independent report noted that determining the actual deci-



Stephanie Brown stops to pray for the victims of the E2 nightclub tragedy on Feb. 17, 2005, in Chicago. DAVID KLOBUCAR/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

sion-maker was “impenetrable” — everyone had a responsibility to fix the problem, but no one took ownership.

In Chicago, deadly silos were at the heart of the E2 nightclub tragedy, when 21 people died in a panicked stairwell crush. The club was operating despite a court closure order for 11 building and fire code violations. City lawyers had been in court three times to enforce compliance. The Fire Department sent inspectors multiple times, but during the day, when the club was empty. Police responded to calls about altercations there, but were never made aware of the code violations and closure orders. Each department — buildings, law, fire and police — operated in isolation.

President Harry Truman

famously noted of executive power: “The buck stops here.” Effective management requires clear authority. Yet alarmingly, state and local policymakers have been actively dismantling direct accountability across core public institutions:

■ Public schools: At the urging of the Chicago Teachers Union, Gov. JB Pritzker signed legislation creating a sprawling 21-member elected school board to replace mayoral responsibility, despite a 25-year nationally acclaimed urban schools renaissance under Daley and his successor Rahm Emanuel.

■ Public transit: Recent legislation removed mayoral control of the CTA. When the buses are dirty and the trains are running late, riders can soon divide their frustration between the mayor, governor and

County Board president, none of whom will hold majority control and thus clear responsibility and accountability.

■ Public safety: The resignation of police Superintendent Larry Snelling, unfortunately at the height of the summer violence, underscores yet another misguided “reform.” In 2021, direct mayoral appointment of the superintendent was replaced by a convoluted multitiered process involving 66 elected community members and a 14-member commission to filter candidates.

This unfortunate trend represents a fundamental misunderstanding of democratic governance. Accountability to citizens requires unambiguous lines of authority. When responsibility is diffused among everyone, it

belongs to no one.

The findings of the Violence Against Women Task Force serve as an urgent warning. When government obscures who is in charge, ordinary citizens pay the price, sometimes with their lives. Splitting authority among overlapping bureaucracies or competing politicians does not empower the public — it shields decision-makers from consequences and entrenches the very silos that have repeatedly proved catastrophic.

Forrest Claypool is author of “The Daley Show: Inside the Transformative Reign of Chicago’s Richard M. Daley.” He served twice as Daley’s chief of staff and was CEO of Chicago Public Schools from 2015 to 2017.

Voice of the people

Fight for property tax fairness

In her July 13 opinion piece, Jennifer Custer encourages those involved in the Chicago Public Schools budget process to behave like adults (“Blame county’s delayed property tax bills for CPS financial woes, not the state”). She might begin by giving a fair account of why property tax bills were delayed last year.

Custer blames late tax bills on “the failures of Assessor Fritz Kaegi to get assessments done on time.” In fact, my office finished assessments on time at the end of 2024.

Custer cites a story from the Tribune that discusses the assessor’s annual transmission of data to the state. Last year, this process was completed by May 28. In 2024, it was completed by May 13. But tax bills last year were five months late — clearly, that delay can’t be explained by a two-week difference in the timeline of data transmission.

A letter I wrote with Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and Cook County Clerk Monica Gordon last October, addressed to Treasurer Maria Pappas, summed it up: The data transmission issue “had little to no impact on the work that needed to be done.”

Instead of misstating the facts, Custer has a golden opportunity, along with her colleagues on the Board of Education, to push forward the fight for property tax fairness. They can do this by focusing their efforts on assessment appeals.

Appeals are a leading cause of unfairness in the property tax system because they routinely push more of the tax burden onto homeowners. Taxing districts such as the city and CPS can intervene in these appeals with the goal of preserving fair assessments.

In 2025, commercial appeal reductions shrank the citywide tax base by \$8.4 billion. That hurts CPS’ ability to pay into its pension fund — if the tax base were \$8.4 billion larger, the pension levy could have brought in \$47 million more in annual revenue.

To fight against this issue, the Board of Education can and should call on the city and CPS to intervene as taxing districts.



Chicago Public Schools Board of Education member Jennifer Custer, center, attends a meeting at the Loop office March 4. JOHN J. KIM/TRIBUNE

They would join many suburban school districts, which file hundreds of interventions each year to protect their tax base. Custer is presumably aware of this valuable work from her own professional experience, which has primarily been in DuPage County.

My office has already met with Custer and other members of the Board of Education to inform them of the role they can play through interventions. We stand ready to provide them with the data and resources they need.

— Fritz Kaegi, Cook County assessor

How to help students flourish

A recent editorial is right: Summer jobs can teach young people responsibility, confidence and independence (“Why teens need summer jobs and why we worry they are disappearing,” July 6). But Chicago should aim higher than simply giving teens a shift and a paycheck. Public and private employers should create paid opportunities that also provide mentorship, career exposure and relationships that last beyond the summer.

I know the difference that kind of opportunity can make. I grew up in North Lawndale and am a first-generation college student at Northern Illinois University, studying psychology on a pre-med track. I have completed several summer internships through the

LEARN Charter School Network, my elementary school alma mater. My first job taught me how to show up on time and communicate with supervisors. But the biggest impact came from the people I met and the guidance I received.

Through internships, I learned how to introduce myself, ask questions, build a résumé and speak with professionals in fields I am considering. I have explored education, business, government and healthcare. This summer, I am participating in a University of Illinois Chicago College of Medicine pathway program, meeting medical students and doctors, volunteering at UI Health and learning more about careers in medicine. Because these opportunities are paid, I can explore my interests while earning money to support my goals.

For students who are the first in their families to pursue college or build professional networks, these experiences are especially important. Talent and ambition are everywhere, but access is not. Mentors can explain how to approach a professor or supervisor, prepare for an interview, ask for feedback and recover from setbacks. Students also learn from one another, sharing advice about workplaces, college and careers.

LEARN’s program offers a model other schools and youth-serving organizations can adapt. The model combines

meaningful paid work with professional development, financial literacy workshops, field experiences and ongoing support.

Chicago’s public sector has an important role in expanding youth employment, and the private sector must step up, too. Businesses, hospitals, universities, nonprofits and civic offices can partner with schools to offer paid internships, job shadowing, site visits and mentors.

Young people are ready to work. We need adults and institutions willing to invest in what comes next.

— Ashley Stevenson, Chicago

Confusion over pedestrian island?

Regarding Sarah Klose’s letter “Making it harder for drivers” (July 8): Klose writes that “on Montrose Avenue at Horner Park, a ride-through traffic island was created for cyclists to cross the street. But the opening in the island creates the illusion of a continuous road (rather than a bike path through Horner Park). If a driver attempts to drive through the opening in the island, they may end up with extensive damage to the front and undercarriage of their car. The city should change this design. Close the island opening and have cyclists dismount and walk through the pedestrian crossing about 4 feet away.”

This is an alarming paragraph to read! The only place to turn (and only left onto Manor) is a clearly marked turn lane, before the pedestrian island. And then there is the pedestrian island. The cut-through is at an angle; a driver can’t turn into it without great effort. From the opposite direction, there is a very large, clear sign telling drivers to go around the pedestrian island. *The only things connected to the pedestrian island are sidewalks. Does this mean that Klose is confused about where she should drive? Are there other Chicago drivers who don’t know not to drive on sidewalks? That’s*

concerning.

This letter, above all the others about bike lanes, narrates clearly that there are drivers who aren’t paying attention. Cyclists aren’t responsible for nonsense like this.

— Patric King, Chicago

Yes to licensing bicycle owners

Bravo to Louise Rohr’s sensible and commonsense letter suggesting license plates for bicycles (“License plates for bicycles,” July 11). Yes, indeed, if bicycle riders have access to the same busy roads as motorists with their own special lane, then they, too, should be accountable to the same rules of the road.

This is an excellent issue for state lawmakers in all 50 states. And it’s profitable as well.

— JoAnn Lee Frank, Clearwater, Florida

The point of Illinois’ alcohol tax

I’d like to compliment op-ed writers Adam Hoffer and Jacob Macumber-Rosin on their history and analysis of Illinois’ complicated “flawed system” (“Illinois’ alcohol tax is almost as old as America. It needs reform,” July 5). The whole argument breaks down, however, when they prescribe a fix for the system, specifically by taxing beverages by how much alcohol by volume is actually in them. They even suggest that their program would disincentivize the overconsumption of alcoholic beverages.

What they fail to understand, however, is that taxes are not imposed to disincentivize consumption. They are in place to do exactly one thing: Collect money. Our state and others are always scheming to find new ways to build revenue streams. Witness the recent licensure of marijuana dispensaries: ka-ching. As such, the state has no incentive at all to change the system.

Looked at from the perspective of a politician, the alcohol tax is a smashing success and not in need of any change whatsoever — except additional levies.

— David Umlauf, Deerfield

For online-exclusive letters, go to www.chicagotribune.com/letters. Email your letter submissions, 400 words or less, to letters@chicagotribune.com. Include your full name, address and phone number.