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Addictive by design: A social media reckoning

Two recent court rulings in the United States against leading social media platforms are likely to reshape Big Tech's engagement with the consumer. A Los Angeles jury accepted a young woman's argument that Meta and YouTube designed their social media services to be addictive, and awarded \$6 million in damages. She cited features which she said drove her into compulsive use, causing depression and excessive stress over her physical appearance. A New Mexico jury imposed a penalty of \$375 million on Meta for misleading users about child safety. These penalties, while not substantial for the companies, have set a precedent in making them answerable for their products' design. The development is being compared with court verdicts in the 1990s that held tobacco companies responsible for manufacturing addictive products and concealing the health risks involved.

The element of addiction in the use of social media has been widely discussed and studied. People involved in the design processes have also spoken about it. Platforms are structured in such a way that they capture the minds of the users, keep them interested, and make them return. The metrics of views, likes, shares, and comments are designed to keep users continuously engaged with the platforms. In some cases, an identification with the make-believe world these platforms create can lead to anxiety, depression, and psychotic conditions. The petitioner in the Los Angeles case, identified by her initials, KGM, testified that she began using social media at the age of six. She developed body dysmorphia, which she traced to her use of beauty filters on Instagram. Internal documents presented during the trial showed that executives at the companies were aware of the risks involved. Despite the minimum-age stipulations, the content was designed for younger children actively engaged with the platforms. Catch 'em young was the business proposition.

Investigation revealed that the charges were valid and the court found that both companies had knowingly violated legal and ethical norms to maximise engagement, and prioritised profit over public health and welfare. Governments worldwide, including in India, have tried to regulate social media platforms. These attempts have invariably run into resistance over free-speech considerations. Regulatory action based on age restrictions has also been mooted. The rulings from the US have provided an opening for countries seeking legal remedies to the dangers of excessive social media use. They should lead to the formulation of strong policies that balance the freedom of social media platforms with their responsibilities to society.

US court rulings may set the tone for global regulation, balancing free speech with user safety

When justice prevails despite the probe

A hefty Rs-4.5 crore penalty imposed on former managing director of the Karnataka Council for Technology Upgradation, V Muniyappa, by a special court in Bengaluru, offers a rare breath of fresh air amid the persistently low conviction rates under the Prevention of Corruption Act. The court sentenced Muniyappa to three years of rigorous imprisonment, finding that he had amassed disproportionate assets amounting to nearly 80% above his known sources of income. What lends this verdict particular significance is the court's unusually sharp indictment of the investigation itself. Judge KM Radhakrishna did not hesitate to describe the probe as "shoddy", going so far as to suggest it bordered on deliberate sabotage. The findings point to glaring lapses: the investigating officer's failure to examine gold holdings or verify the "dubious explanations" of the accused for his assets exposed a probe riddled with complacency. Testimony from officers across departments, including transport, statistics, agriculture, and horticulture, was found unreliable, reinforcing the court's conclusion that they were working under "invisible hands" to shield the accused. Notices have been issued to the officers, asking why disciplinary action should not be initiated.

This case lays bare a more troubling reality. For every conviction that survives judicial scrutiny, many more collapse under the weight of poorly conducted investigations, procedural delays, and, in some instances, apparent collusion. Conviction rates in corruption cases remain stubbornly low, not because such offences are rare or difficult to establish, but because the processes meant to secure accountability are frequently compromised. Investigations drag on—often eroding the evidentiary trail—while delays in sanction for prosecution, hostile witnesses, and frequent transfers of investigating officers further weaken cases. The problem is compounded by the Lokayukta's own credibility, as seen here and in past scandals, including an extortion racket that operated from within the institution.

The way forward lies in structural reform. India's policing system continues to lack a specialised investigative cadre. Without such professionalisation, complex financial and corruption cases are unlikely to be pursued with the rigour they demand. Time-bound investigations, closer judicial oversight, and the use of technology in evidence gathering can help strengthen prosecutions. Equally important is the need to fix accountability within the system: investigative lapses must carry real consequences, not merely judicial rebuke. The Muniyappa verdict shows that the law can still bite, even in a compromised environment. But for it to do so consistently, the system must first ensure that those tasked with enforcing the law do not become its weakest link.

Can a rare conviction in a corruption case help break the cycle of poorly conducted investigations?

COMMENT

CYCLE OF IMPUNITY

The Empire requires consensus, not a king

American imperialism was always enabled by bipartisan policies. Limiting the story to Trump misdiagnoses the problem

VISHAL R CHORADIYA

Last weekend, Americans in record numbers took to the streets in what organisers called the "No Kings" protests—a nationwide rebuke of Donald Trump's authoritarian instincts, his administration's aggressive deportation campaigns, its rush to war with Iran, and its assault on free expression. The demonstrations were large, impassioned, and understandable. They were also, in a crucial sense, dangerously insufficient.

Trump invites a particular kind of attention. His public statements are blunt to the point of being cartoonish, his contempt for expertise and scientific reason is worn as a badge of honour, and his disdain for diplomatic niceties makes the violence of American statecraft visible in ways that more polished presidents are careful to obscure. It is tempting to read in him a singular villain, a man whose personality alone has bent the arc of American power towards cruelty. But to hold Trump alone responsible for the actions of the American state is to misread what that state actually is, and has long been.

Weeks earlier, Joe Kent, a senior United States counterterrorism official, resigned in protest over the war in Iran. His stated reason was that Iran posed "no imminent threat" to the US, and that the administration had launched the war under pressure from Israel and its American lobby. The candour was remarkable. The underlying reality, however, is not new.

Iran's defiance of American-Israeli dominance in West Asia makes it an obstacle to Israeli expansionist ambitions in the region—and through AI-PAC, the most powerful foreign policy lobbying organisation in Washington, Israel has secured unqualified, bipartisan support across administrations for decades. The worst of Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza unfolded with the full, unwavering backing of the US under President Joe Biden, Trump's Democratic predecessor. American weapons, American diplomatic cover, and American votes at the United Nations made the campaign possible. None of that changed when administrations did.

Not is American interference in Iranian affairs a Trumpian innovation. In 1953, the CIA—working alongside

British intelligence—orchestrated the overthrow of Mohammad Mosaddegh, Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister, in an operation known as Ajax. Mosaddegh had nationalised Iran's oil industry, threatening Western commercial interests. The CIA funded media propaganda, bribed officials, and paid agitators to manufacture political chaos, ultimately restoring the Shah to power. The hostility that defines today's crisis has roots that Washington itself planted, across administrations of every stripe.

The same structural continuity applies to immigration enforcement. During Trump's first term, between 2017 and 2021, Democratic members of



Congress repeatedly voted for omnibus spending bills that included full funding for the Department of Homeland Security and, within it, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The justification was procedural—a complete shutdown would disrupt the Transportation Security Administration and other functions—but the effect was to fund the very apparatus now being used for mass deportations.

Some Democrats even voted to confirm leadership for agencies that implemented the "zero tolerance" policy and the family separation programme they simultaneously condemned at press conferences. The legal framework permitting detention and deportation was never seriously challenged; Democrats called for "humane" enforcement, not structural reform.

An entrenched rationale

On questions of speech and information, the Democratic record is similarly compromised. The Obama administration prosecuted more whistleblowers under the Espionage Act than all previous administrations combined—a pattern that journalists argued produced a chilling effect on national security reporting. Julian Assange, the founder of

WikiLeaks, spent years in a British prison fighting extradition to the US. This prosecution, initiated under Obama-era legal frameworks and continued under successive administrations, stems from his publishing classified documents that revealed American war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, including the killing of civilians and journalists. The prosecution of a publisher for publishing was treated by much of the mainstream American press not as a constitutional crisis but as a matter of national security.

That press had itself, a decade earlier, repeated without adequate scrutiny the false intelligence claims that justified the invasion of Iraq, claims about weapons of mass destruction that turned out to be entirely fabricated. The same outlets framed the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya as a humanitarian undertaking, obscuring the devastation that followed.

Undergirding all of this is a racial logic that long predates Trump. American imperial power has historically treated the lives of non-White peoples—in West Asia, Latin America, and Africa—as expendable, their nations as theatres for resource extraction, regime change, and proxy conflict. Trump's rhetoric makes this contempt explicit. Earlier administrations expressed in the measured language of democracy promotion and humanitarian intervention. The violence was the same; only the vocabulary differed.

This pattern—the bipartisan consensus that sustains American imperial foreign policy, the media apparatus that legitimises it, and the domestic enforcement machinery that both parties have built and funded—is the structure that produces the violence people are now protesting. Trump has not created it. He has only made it louder, cruder, and less deniable. That is merely a difference in tone, not in kind.

The danger of the "No Kings" framing is that it treats the problem as a matter of personality rather than architecture. If the goal is to replace Trump with a more eloquent president who will continue the same alliances, maintain the same enforcement apparatus, and advance the same foreign policy with greater rhetorical sophistication, the protests will have succeeded only in making the machinery more comfortable to look at.

The Empire does not require a king—it requires a consensus. Demanding that Trump go while leaving that consensus intact is not resistance, but self-interest dressed up as righteousness.

(The writer is an assistant professor with the Department of Professional Studies, Christ University, Bengaluru)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Of cricket scores and sacred chants

From food and faith to bedtime stories, my *ajji* wove my world

SUSHMA SRIPAD

Ajji was the heartbeat of my childhood—my first friend, my constant companion, and the quiet architect of who I became. Her love for mathematics was extraordinary; she never needed a calculator, and learning from her was both intense and unforgettable. With my twin beside me, I remember how we had only a second or two to answer her questions, or else we would be writing our entire tables again. Mathematics was her music, and she taught us to move to its rhythm.

Cricket was her other great passion. From listening to commentaries of matches on the radio to watching them on black-and-white and later colour

television, she lived every moment of the game. She would carefully record scores to ensure the totals and run rates were accurate, all while giving her own commentary—passionate, witty, and often hilarious. When the Indian team faltered, she felt it deeply. Even after I moved to Australia, she stayed connected, glued to the TV whenever I attended a match in Melbourne, trying to spot me in the crowd. No matter how much time passed, cricket remained a thread in every conversation we shared.

Her cooking was unmatched, each dish an expression of love. We would eagerly wait for her *kai thuthu*, and to this day I still miss her *herakai hulsoppa*—a flavour I have never been able to recreate. She made the best *rawe unde*, and our home was always filled with the comforting rhythm of her *Lathika Sahasranama*.

Ajji was a woman of immense strength and discipline. She worked tirelessly her entire life, moving forward with quiet

resilience. Long before it became widely known, she practised intermittent fasting, eating just once or twice a day. She was deeply devoted to her faith, observing *Ekadashi* and other rituals with sincerity, often in her matras, gently reminding us not to touch her.

Everything I know about Hindu mythology comes from her. Night after night, she would patiently tell us stories of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*—no matter how many times we asked—never once showing fatigue, only love. She was always in motion, never walking but almost running through life, her energy unmatched and inspiring to all who knew her.

I feel incredibly fortunate that so many of my childhood memories are intertwined with hers. Losing her feels like losing a piece of my childhood itself—something no one can truly prepare for. *Ajji*, you will be deeply missed, but your love, your lessons, and your spirit will always live on in my heart.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

People deserve to know the truth

The government has consistently stated that they have adequate stocks of petroleum and gas to meet our needs. But the shortages and news of migrants going home continue. What they are not informing and taking the people into confidence about is the truth. Are the ships which have brought in the LPG (which would last a few days) being allowed to go back and get more gas and oil? The PM

has been calling the leaders of the Gulf States. Why has he not called his two good friends, the President of the US and the PM of Israel, and called on them to end their war, which is leading the entire world into a huge economic mess? This kind of double speak leaves people in a state of shock and disbelief, leading to panic. Hemanchandra Basappa, Bengaluru

Transparent pricing key

This refers to "Fuel duty cut signals budget squeeze" (Mar 31). While the government's decision to reduce excise duty on fuel may offer temporary relief to oil companies, it raises serious concerns about the long-term burden on public finances. The shift of financial pressure from oil marketing companies to the government could ultimately affect citizens through reduced public spending or higher taxes elsewhere. At a time of global uncertainty and rising crude prices, a more balanced and sustainable approach is needed—one that

protects both consumers and the economy. Transparency in pricing and long-term energy planning should be prioritised to avoid recurring crises. Mugdha Gairola, Bengaluru

Professional boundaries

Professors' Grey zones in classroom conflicts' (Mar 31), the actions of both teachers and the students deserve condemnation, but it is for indignation, slurs or profanity. Such acts cannot be condoned, as they disregard professional ethics and the rule of law. When institutions

of higher learning deviate from academic purpose, they lose their space for authentic, liberal, intellectual, and dispassionate discourse. It is imperative that staff are doubly cautious in their choice of words, delivery of lectures and professional boundaries. Administration must ensure clear directives, proper orientation and mentoring for both staff and students. Albert Smith, Bengaluru

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SPeak OUT

People are happy wherever our chief minister goes. They receive him happily. It is the Government of India which is against the people of Tamil Nadu.



TKS Elangovan, DMK Spokesperson

You know, to address crowds and make promises does not require very much brains. Eduard Shevardnadze

TO BE PRECISE

Assembly Elections



IN PERSPECTIVE

Corporate reform with regulatory risks

While the new bill prioritises economic gains, greater executive discretion may weaken regulatory autonomy

AKHIL YADAV AND NISHANT JAIN

The Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, is part of a larger effort to ease regulatory compliance, limit criminal sanctions for procedural violations, and enhance the county's efficiency as a viable investment option. The move is not unjustified. In an economy aspiring to strengthen its capital markets and cultivate entrepreneurship, a regulatory regime that is too rigid can have significant economic costs.

The establishment of a structured settlement system in cases involving corporate penalties further reflects the Bill's emphasis on administrative dispute resolution. This may promote efficiency and relieve tribunals of some burdens. Nevertheless, there are questions about procedural equality in relation to the executive's role in defining settlement powers, as well as a lack of avenues for appeal. Sophisticated corporations may take full advantage of discretion in enforcing regulations, which may exacerbate existing inequalities in the corporate sphere.

These provisions may represent a significant shift in the regulatory state in India. In many countries, the regulatory state has become increasingly skeletal, leaving much of the responsibility to the executive in the determination of regulations. This also creates concerns around the constitutional role of government in regulatory states.

Corporate law reform in India is inevitable and necessary to contribute to economic development. For India to become a key player in the global economy, it needs to integrate into global capital markets. By providing a more streamlined system of compliance, penalties, and restructuring, corporate law reform can make a valuable contribution to economic development. However, the success of the regulatory state may depend on the credibility of the enforcement authorities. If the discretionary power of the regulatory state increases, a more important contribution may be made to creating a state small businesses could benefit from economic activity, but it also leads to a multi-layered system of compliance. A significant segment of businesses might operate under a relaxed governance system, which could affect transparency and investor confidence in mid-tier companies.

The importance of the institutional oversight process is similar. The modified legislative changes for the National Financial Reporting Authority provide for the central government to give policy directions that are binding in nature, thus handing over to the executive the ultimate responsibility to decide upon policy issues. From the perspective of the theory of regulatory design, the legitimate authority of the oversight bodies depends on the proper balance between accountability and operational autonomy. Tighter control hierarchies without procedural safeguards may result in nominal autonomy.

Credible enforcement

The provisions permitting override of the regulator in cases of deemed public interest increase such concerns. Such power may shape market perceptions of the regulator's autonomy from political interference. In sectors where the quality of financial reporting is a key determinant of market confidence, even limited changes in autonomy can have disproportionate effects.

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Narrative vs reality: Who controls the story of Kashmir today?

DATELINE Srinagar

ZULFIKAR MAJID

In Kashmir today, the most decisive contest is no longer fought on the streets or across the Line of Control — it is fought over perception. Who tells the story of Kashmir, and whose version is accepted, has become as consequential as any political or security development on the ground.

Nearly seven years after the abrogation of Article 370, the dominant national narrative is clear and consistent: Kashmir is calmer, safer, and on a path to normalcy. The evidence cited is visible and, to an extent, verifiable. Tourist arrivals have surged dramatically, with Jammu and Kashmir recording over 2.1 crore visitors in 2023, the highest ever.

Infrastructure projects have accelerated, and security agencies point to a steep decline in militancy, with active local militants now in double digits and virtually no

fresh local recruitment reported over the past year, marking a significant shift from earlier cycles of insurgency.

Markets remain open, schools function without frequent disruption and public protests — once a defining feature of the Valley — have largely disappeared. Indeed, stone-pelting incidents, which ran into thousands annually around 2016-17, have dropped to near-zero levels in recent years, according to official data.

It is a story of stability, reinforced through official data and amplified by a media ecosystem that increasingly reflects the language of governance and development. For many outside Kashmir, it signals closure — a sense that a long and turbulent chapter may finally be drawing to an end. But on the ground, reality resists such conclusions. Conversations in private often carry a nuance that is not always visible in public, hinting at a layered social and political landscape.

The quiet that defines Kashmir today is not easily decoded. For the state, it represents control and consolidation. For many residents, it reflects caution and adaptation.

The absence of large-scale protests may suggest acceptance, but it can also indicate a more cautious public mood.

Economic signals, too, tell a mixed story. While tourism and construction have generated activity, unemployment remains a concern. According to recent surveys, Jammu and Kashmir's youth unemployment rate has hovered around 14-18%, significantly higher than the national average, underlining the gap between macro-growth narratives and individual opportunity.

This gap between perception and reality is where the real story lies.

Over the past few years, the state's ability to shape the narrative has strengthened significantly. A combination of improved security, administrative centralisation, and structured communication has ensured that messaging remains consistent. Developmental milestones — new highways, investment summits, tourism growth — are foregrounded, reflecting a governance push to reposition Kashmir's image. Yet, shaping a narrative is not the same as fully addressing the underlying complexities.

Local journalism, long a vital link between ground realities and wider audiences, continues to operate in a changing environment. While the space for reporting remains, it has evolved — with greater emphasis on verification, caution and adherence to regulatory frameworks. This has contributed to a more measured public discourse, even as some nuances of everyday experience may not always find full expression.

Legal trends also point to a firmer security approach. Since 2019, hundreds of individuals have been detained under laws such as the Public Safety Act (PSA) and UAPA, according to official data and public records, reflecting the state's emphasis on pre-emptive control. Into this space has stepped a less predictable actor: social media.

For young Kashmiris, platforms like Instagram, X and Facebook have become informal spaces of expression. Here, the story of Kashmir appears in fragments — tourism reels, everyday humour, cultural pride and occasionally, subtle expressions of unease. These are not overtly political narratives,

but they complicate the official picture by revealing layers of life that do not fit neatly into binaries.

At the same time, the external dimension of Kashmir's narrative remains active. Pakistan continues to frame the region as a site of ongoing repression at international forums. Alongside this, Pakistan is even pushing foreign terrorists into J&K, seen as local recruitment has declined. This dual strategy — on the ground and in the narrative space — keeps the conflict dimension alive despite changing realities within the Valley.

There is the state's narrative of stability and integration, backed by visible changes on the ground. There is the quieter, less articulated narrative of a society adjusting to new realities. And there is the external narrative that seeks to sustain the image of Kashmir as an unresolved conflict.

Each of these narratives contains elements of truth. None of them, on its own, captures the full picture.

The risk lies in allowing any one version to dominate to the exclusion of others. A nar-

rative that is too tightly framed may achieve clarity, but risks losing depth. Equally, narratives that overlook the shifts in security and development fail to acknowledge how much the ground situation has changed.

Kashmir today exists in this uneasy middle ground. It is more secure than it was a decade ago, yet not politically reconciled. It is more open economically, yet more measured in expression. It is quieter, but not conclusively settled.

Who, then, controls the story? For now, the state holds a clear advantage in shaping how Kashmir is presented to the rest of the country and the world. Its narrative is structured, amplified and backed by institutional reach. But narrative control is rarely absolute. It is constantly negotiated — in lived experience, in private conversations and in the subtle ways people interpret change.

The credibility of any narrative on Kashmir will depend not on how effectively it is projected, but on how closely it reflects the realities on the ground. Because Kashmir's story has never been singular — and it still isn't. **DHS**

As global energy supplies tighten and prices surge, the crisis could yet prove catalytic — forcing governments to accelerate the shift to renewables and electrified systems

JONATHAN MINGLE

Sri Lanka and Myanmar are rationing fuel. The Philippines has instituted four-day workweeks to conserve gasoline and electricity. Bangladesh briefly closed its universities to reserve power for homes and businesses. Across India, families and restaurants are cooking over wood fires for want of gas. Airlines are cancelling flights.

As painful as the first phase of the energy crisis set off by the war with Iran has been, what comes next will be worse. This week, the final deliveries of oil and liquefied natural gas to Asia that passed through the Strait of Hormuz before it was closed are expected to arrive. The last tanker shipments to Europe should land by mid-April. After that, many countries' reserves of gasoline, diesel, liquid petroleum gas and natural gas will dwindle. The price of oil could soar as high as \$200 a barrel if the war drags on.

Fatih Birol, the head of the International Energy Agency, has called this "the greatest global energy security threat in history" — much worse than the 1970s oil crisis, the Covid pandemic or Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This conflict has disrupted a bigger share of the global oil and gas trade, and there is no way to quickly fill the gap.

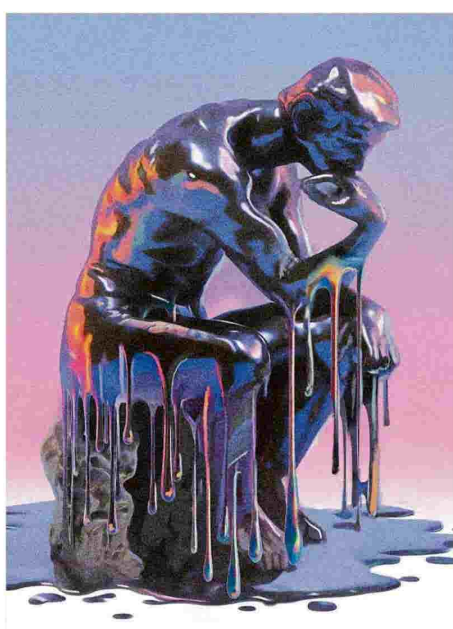
Countries such as India, Indonesia and Vietnam are responding to higher gas prices by burning more coal. But over the long term, this shock will accelerate a turn toward cleaner technologies, especially in Asia and Europe. This is the first oil crisis in which clean alternatives to oil and gas — solar panels, wind turbines, electric vehicles and batteries — are both inexpensive and widely available.

The fuel supply crunch has already spurred consumers to embrace these technologies. As the Philippines declared a national energy emergency on March 24, car shoppers in Manila were crowding into showrooms of the Chinese carmaker BYD and purchasing electric vehicles. Solar vendors and installers are reporting a sharp rise in interest from German customers. Heat pump installations are on the rise in Britain. Electric rickshaw sales are booming in Pakistan. Induction cooktops are selling out at online retailers in India. In Vietnam, a conglomerate reportedly wants to abandon plans to build the country's biggest liquefied natural gas-fired power plant and instead pursue a renewables and battery storage project.

Since the war started, the stock market valuation of each of China's three biggest battery companies has increased by roughly 20%, or \$70 billion altogether. For governments weighing how quickly to pivot to clean energy, Pakistan's recent history may offer some lessons. The country was hit hard by the energy shock that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It was unable to afford suddenly expensive gas imports, so many of its scheduled shipments were rerouted to wealthier European buyers.

But a deluge of inexpensive solar panels from China has transformed Pakistan's energy system and helped insulate it from the current scarcity of liquefied natural

This energy crisis is going to change the world



THE NEW YORK TIMES

gas. Solar now generates nearly 30% of its electricity, up from just 3% in 2020. The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air has estimated that the solar boom will help Pakistan avoid \$7 billion in fossil fuel imports this year. That's shielding Pakistanians from real pain.

With solar, "you can make a major dent on your fossil fuel reliance in a matter of a couple of years," Lauri Myllyvirta, the research centre's lead analyst, told me.

That's important because it could be years before the oil and gas supply is restored to prewar levels. After Iranian missiles struck the Ras Laffan liquefied natural gas export facility in Qatar, the country ceased production of the fuel entirely, suddenly taking 20% of the world's supply off the market.

Officials predict it will take three to five years to bring that plant, the world's largest, fully online again. Other operators

in the region also cut back on producing oil and gas because they are running out of places to store it all. Those wells can't just be flipped back on like a light switch; it will take months to ramp production back up, creating more pressure to find alternatives.

The war will, in some ways, strain the clean energy sector, too. As inflation and interest rates go up, some project developers may struggle to finance new energy installations and grid projects. Supply chains for key items, such as transformers, aluminium and copper wire, now face their own bottlenecks and disruptions. Chaos makes everything — whether you're building polluting energy infrastructure or clean — harder and more expensive.

Countries such as India will have to make electric grids built for coal flexible enough to incorporate large amounts of wind and solar. To meet the surge in de-

mand for clean tech, governments must decide how much to invest in their own factories to churn out all those solar panels, heat pumps and electric vehicles and what tariffs to levy on imported versions, according to Tim Sahay, the co-director of the Net Zero Industrial Policy Lab at Johns Hopkins.

But countries and firms can build out renewables much faster than they can construct, say, huge gas liquefaction terminals, pipelines and power plants.

Achieving energy security is now an overwhelming imperative. That means not just installing more wind, solar and batteries but developing domestic clean tech manufacturing capacity and electrifying home heating and transportation. As their energy autonomy improves, more countries will see drastic reductions in health-damaging air pollution and climate-warming emissions.

China has made the most progress along this path: Over the last decade it electrified large shares of its transportation and industrial sectors and cut its oil consumption by over a million barrels per day, giving it a good-sized cushion during the Iran crisis. Chinese companies have pledged to invest more than \$227 billion in other countries' capacity to manufacture EVs, chargers, batteries, solar, wind and other clean technologies, according to a recent report by Sahay's lab at Johns Hopkins.

China's reduced exposure to energy turmoil is the fruit of careful planning, Sahay pointed out, dating back to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, which prompted a long-term rise in oil prices. Future oil shocks are inevitable. "Electrification will be seen as the shock absorber," he said.

That option remains available to American consumers, too, who may soon find themselves eyeing electric vehicles and heat pumps — even though the Trump administration has ripped away the incentives that made them more affordable.

Just last week, I listened as the US energy secretary, Chris Wright, speaking in Houston at the world's biggest annual energy conference, framed the Trump administration's efforts to encourage oil and gas production as a kind of humanitarian project. "The simple: Energy is life and the world needs massively more of it," he declared.

If there's irony here, it's the tragic kind. The administration's war of choice has made energy dangerously expensive in nearly every corner of the globe, causing needless suffering. The most fossil fuel-friendly government in recent US history has shown us all just how risky reliance on oil and gas can be — and taught the world that true energy security lies in accelerating toward a cleaner, electrified future.

The New York Times

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: APRIL 1976

No threat to freedom of expression

New Delhi, April 1

There is no threat to freedom of expression or other freedoms in India, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi asserted in the Rajya Sabha today. Mrs. Gandhi said people sometimes get confused in their minds that freedom of a few was more important than freedom of the vast majority of the people to go ahead. She had a dig at those who believed that democracy was not suited to India and said they neither knew democracy, nor did they understand India. Mrs. Gandhi said what had of late been happening here was that "democracy was being misused."

25 YEARS AGO: APRIL 2001

Syed's mission was to stabilise South India

Bangalore, April 1

President Bhandari Deendar Anjum Chief Syed Zia-Ul-Hassan, who masterminded the serial church blasts in South India last year, also heads a militant outfit called Jamat-e-Hihibul Mujahideen, according to the chargesheet filed by the state police. The chargesheet filed before the III additional chief metropolitan magistrate here on March 19, 2001, states that Zia-Ul-Hassan, who operated from Pakistan's Mardan, frequently visited India on a Pakistani passport and used every such visit to "carry out his subversive activities".

OASIS | RAVI RICHARD

The time for new beginnings

and celebrated by different cultures and traditions all over the world.

From a philosophical standpoint, the spring equinox can be inferred as a time where there is an end of hardship (winter) and preparation for a new beginning (spring). It symbolises happiness and sorrow, like light and darkness, needed for self-acceptance and an integral part of our human experiences. The equinox and night metaphorically accentuates the need for attaining a balance or mental anchor of equilibrium, essential for harmony in life. Health and healing can be prioritised

and worked upon, as exposure to natural light during spring can be mood-elevating, boost cognitive functioning, improve sleep patterns and regulate circadian rhythms. Serotonin (happy hormone) levels can be enhanced due to increased daylight, which in turn improves the energy levels, immunity and vigour. Spring becomes the ideal time to reconnect with nature, pursue outdoor activities, and adopt a healthy lifestyle. It is an opportune time for rehabilitation, recovery and renewal for those convalescing from illness, as well as to revitalise themselves — physically, intellectually and spiritually.

For nature lovers, spring is a time of ecological enchantment, observing the major changes in the form of the awakening of the flora from winter dormancy, the journeying of migratory birds and the brimming activity of insects. The increase in food availability creates the right conditions for the breeding of many species. This surge in activity invites nutritious feeding and maintaining ecological balance. The arrival of spring has a deep spiritual meaning, illustrated by Easter, the resurrection of Christ — a symbol of the victory of life over death. This dimension carries profound significance in embracing hope, new beginnings and the celebration of life.





SIDDARAMAIAH
Karnataka Chief Minister

“For every one rupee contributed by Kannadigas in taxes, the Union government returns only 15 paise. Should this be called tax terrorism or tax plunder?”



ABBAS ARAGHCHI
Iranian Foreign Minister

You cannot speak to the people of Iran in the language of threats and deadlines. We do not set any deadline for defending ourselves. Iran has no faith that talks with the US could yield any results



KEIR STARMER
British Prime Minister

NATO is the single most effective military alliance the world has ever seen. Whatever the pressure on me and others, whatever the noise, I am going to act in the British national interest”

Undertrial crisis calls for prison reforms

An alarming 70% of India's prisoners are undertrials — most of them languishing in jails for periods beyond the prescribed punishment applicable for cases they are charged with. This exposes serious lacunae in the criminal justice system. No wonder India's prisons are largely overcrowded. The sub-human conditions in several prisons often drive many undertrials to suicide. Several studies have suggested that delays in investigation, a shortage of judges, and lack of access to legal aid due to poverty are the main reasons why undertrials end up spending a long time in prisons. There are 3.6 crore pending criminal cases in district courts, 17.5 lakh cases in high courts and 14,667 cases in the Supreme Court. The seriousness of the problem can be gauged from the fact that the judge-to-population ratio in India is estimated at 21 judges per million people, which is less than half of what the Law Commission recommended in its 120th report. Against this backdrop, the apex court's recent observation that “incarceration without trial amounts to punishment” must serve as a wake-up call for policy-makers to take up prison reforms. The Supreme Court made some scathing observations while granting bail to an accused who spent two years in jail awaiting trial. The court has rightly reaffirmed a foundational principle: liberty cannot be held hostage to procedural delays. Earlier in March, the Delhi High Court gave bail to two men accused in a case under the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act), observing they had already been behind bars for over four years.

SC's observation that 'incarceration without trial amounts to punishment' highlights the urgent need for bail reforms

The HC bench stated that, in view of the “limited role” of the appellants in an alleged terror plot, their continued detention would not serve the ends of justice. However, these decisions are exceptions. In most cases, courts routinely allow pre-trial detention to continue for years, even when the trial is nowhere in sight. These inconsistencies raise a deeper constitutional question: is personal liberty a non-negotiable guarantee or a variable principle contingent on the nature of allegations? The Indian penal system appears tilted towards detention rather than case resolution. If bail is denied on account of the gravity of the charges, the state bears an even greater responsibility to ensure swift trials. Otherwise, pre-trial detention itself becomes punishment. The Supreme Court has rightly identified the problem. The challenge now lies in applying that principle uniformly. Without consistency, personal liberty risks being reduced from a right to a matter of discretion. The absence of a comprehensive law governing the grant of bail is causing confusion and delays in the administration of justice. The government must revisit outdated bail practices, encourage personal recognisance bonds and leverage technology for tracking released individuals. Seeing no visible progress on its past directives regarding the plight of undertrials, the Supreme Court had, in September 2014, issued a series of strictures to various institutions managing the country's criminal justice system.

Naxal-free India begins with youth welfare

Crushing ideologues is only the first step; without restoring trust among youth, justice and governance will remain fragile



NAYAKARA VEERASHA

Left Wing Extremism (LWE) denotes an ideology that seeks to replace the existing sociopolitical order through extra-constitutional means, drawing from the political philosophies of Marx, Lenin, and Mao. The 80-year-long political insurrection, which began in Telangana in 1946, appears to have reached its decisive moment in Telangana in 2026. With the surrender of Devji, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) seems to be nearing the end of the insurrection.

Most of the lower-rank cadres comprise the youth population, largely drawn from Adivasi (Scheduled Tribes), Dalits (Scheduled Castes), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Dominant theories argue that underdevelopment and unemployment are the two primary reasons why youth resort to extreme political actions.

Through the Stages

The participation of youth in the movement can be explained through the six phases: Ascendancy (1945-65); Insurrectionary (1966-86); Consolidation (1987-2004); Regrouping (2005-2014); Retaliatory (2015-2024); and Withering (2025-26). In the first phase, the establishment of the CPI in India and its ideological lineage were the main motivational factors for youth.

Land was the primary site of conflict, leading to the Tehgaha and Telangana insurrection at the dawn of Independence. The second phase was the most intense, with active youth participation in resisting the government. The Nax-



albari and Srikakulam uprisings in 1967 shook the nation's conscience in their pursuit of an egalitarian society. Unresolved agrarian issues, coupled with a centralised development model, became the main catalysts for youth participation. During the consolidation phase, ideological debates and conflicts led to the formation of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) in 2004, through the merger of the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) People's War (People's War Group), and the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCCI).

The regrouping stage was the second most crucial phase in the insurrection. Failures in governance, in general, and ineffective implementation of the provisions of the Fifth Schedule, the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act, 1996, and Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, significantly influenced youth participation.

Economic reforms and associated land alienation, lack of adequate employment, persistent inequality, atrocities against SCs, STs, and women, and large-scale human rights violations further contributed to youth disillusionment. This phase saw active recruitment by the CPI (Maoist) among dissatisfied youth seeking change.

The fifth phase was marked by a change in political regime, which formally labelled naxalism/Maoism as Left-Wing Extremism in 2014. The movement entered its final phase, evidenced by large-scale surrenders by the CPI (Maoist) cadres, including the central leadership. Significantly, the surrendered cadre included youth in

large numbers. The aggressive approach of security forces, along with the union and State government's push to eliminate Maoism by March 2026, has posed serious challenges to the ideology.

Gen Z Approach

The Gen Z approach to political ideologies differs from that of the 1950s and 60s generations. Social media has emerged as a platform for stimulating the exchange of ideas and debates. Analysis of CPI (Maoist) documents and conversations with surrendered youth reveal that the reasons for joining the CPI (Maoist) Party include experiences with local administration, family legacy, personal circumstances, fascination with guns or perceived livelihood opportunities. Most recruits have education levels below the tenth standard, and a few have completed Class 12 but failed in maths and science.

The question of unemployment as a determining factor needs deeper engagement. The author's field notes from 2016 suggest a complex reality: the motivation of employment or livelihood is a supplement to the treatment meted out to the youth by the state. As one youth noted, “It is not the unemployment alone that makes local youth support insurgents. They have their personal reasons. A friend joined the party after his brother was killed by police under the false accusation of being a naxalite. I am joining the party to support my family”.

Another said, “If unemployment alone were the reason, I would have joined. While we lack certain skills required for formal jobs, it does not mean we support insurgents.” Findings from Chhattisgarh indicate that while unemployment and underdevelopment are relevant, they are not the sole drivers for youth to take part in insurrection. Everyday experiences with the state, bureaucratic apathy, exploitation, legacy of ‘insurrectionary culture’ and role of political ideology play significant roles.

The Union and State governments must prioritise employment generation along with a sensitive and humane approach to development in Fifth Schedule areas. While economic security is critical, values such as dignity, self-respect and autonomy must also be emphasised. Eliminating ideologues is only the first step. Building trust among youth is essential for delivering justice and strengthening governance.

(The author is Assistant Professor, Symbiosis Law School, Pune, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune. Views expressed are personal)

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Letters to the Editor

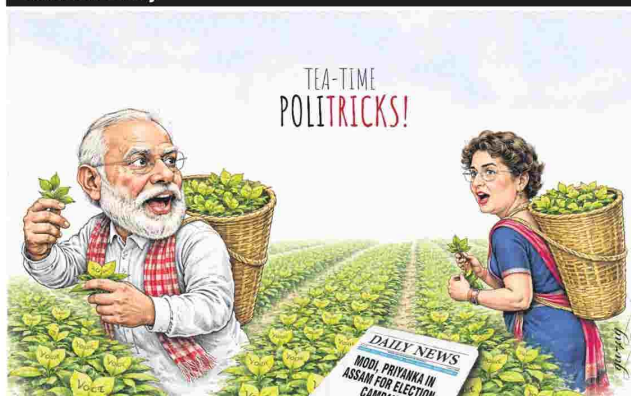
Time for 'Crowd Safety Act'

The report 'Eight dead in Bihar temple stampede' (April 1) comes as an absolute shocker. The recurring incidence of stampede casualties at religious congregations underscores the need for foolproof systemic remedies rather than the familiar reactive responses like the institution of fact-finding committees and compensation handouts. For addressing this significant public safety and humanitarian concern, there is a dire need for rigorous enforcement of the 'Crowd

Safety Act', strict adherence to capacity limits and crowd monitoring systems to prevent deadly crowd surges and the attendant panic contagion, ramping up shoddy infrastructure, ensuring multiple exit gates, crisis evacuation plans and easy access to emergency medicare facilities, eradicating the deeply embedded societal apathy towards observance of rules and blatant disregard for safety norms and above all, holding the delinquent administration and event organisers to account for major security and crowd management breaches in any mishap. There is profound wisdom in the time-tested adage 'A stitch in time saves nine'.
AMIT BANERJEE
New Delhi

Write to us at letters@telanganatoday.com

Cartoon Today



India in the hotspot

Oracle begins massive layoffs

Oracle began laying off employees Tuesday in what analysts believe could be one of largest workforce reductions in company's history. Workers in the US, India, Canada, Mexico reported receiving termination emails.

Al Jazeera

India lowers fuel taxes

India has lowered fuel taxes in a bid to protect consumers from rising global energy prices. Petrol duties were slashed from 13 rupees per litre to 3 rupees per litre, according to a government order on Thursday.

Gulf Times

India opens 2nd intl airport in capital

India opened a second international airport in New Delhi, as part of the country's rapid push to expand its air industry. The Noida International Airport is 7.5km from the city, and will serve 12mn passengers a year in its initial phase.



Opportunity corridor

Inclusive development must be the focus in areas freed of Naxalism

India is now Naxal-free. Home Minister Amit Shah declared in the Lok Sabha on March 30, a day ahead of a deadline he had set for himself for ending Left Wing Extremism (LWE). His assertion follows three years of intensive paramilitary operations, during which 4,839 Maoists surrendered, 2,218 were arrested, and 706 were neutralised in encounters. Mr. Shah had made tackling LWE a central piece of his internal security policy, and of his political legacy. Not surprisingly, he made it a point to contrast the measures and milestones under his watch with those of the UPA regime on this front. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had flagged LWE as the biggest internal security challenge before the country and his government launched Operation Green Hunt in 2009-10, an expansive paramilitary offensive that faced stiff criticism from his allies. The belt of Maoist influence, at its peak, touched over 180 districts covering tribal, forest, and mineral-rich areas in Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The approach to tackling LWE then was more hesitant and measured, mindful of the human and institutional costs.

Mr. Shah launched an uncompromising militarist strategy which he reiterated in his speech. He said the government had a dual approach — dialogue and rehabilitation for those who surrendered arms, and no mercy for those who refused. His sweeping strategy steamrolled human rights activists and academics who were branded 'urban Naxals'. Police measures went far beyond even the harsh provisions of India's anti-terrorism laws, strangling freedoms and distorting judicial processes. The paramilitary operations have, in all probability, decapitated the military capabilities of the insurgents, opening the possibility of state presence in some of the least governed regions of the country. Mr. Shah said that a campaign to establish a school in every village and provide Aadhaar and ration cards to residents in some of the worst-affected areas has already begun. He is right that Maoists are ideologically opposed to parliamentary democracy, which is a position delinked from development or its absence. Nevertheless, inclusive development is imperative for a stable, peaceful society. The defeat of LWE extremism should not accelerate our capitalist extraction of natural resources and further alienate tribal rights. Instead, it must lead to the genuine expansion of the rights of tribals, their substantive participation in parliamentary democracy, and accountability in resource extraction. Mr. Shah deserves credit for leading the operational success in curtailing LWE. He must now lead a politics of reconciliation and heal the wounds of the battle.

Orderly exit

While cutting down on oil, India must avoid new forms of dependence

Global energy shocks are not new. The world has seen them before — in the early 1970s after the Yom Kippur War; in 1979 following the Iranian Revolution; in 1990-91 after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait; and in 2022 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Yet, the present crisis triggered by American-Israeli strikes on Iran is materially different. While Russia's war with Ukraine sharpened the geopolitical use of natural gas, the current conflict has simultaneously disrupted oil and gas flows. This disruption comes at a moment of profound transition in the global energy system. The International Energy Agency has underlined that transport electrification is firmly underway, with electric vehicles displacing about 0.9 million barrels per day (mb/d) of oil demand in 2023, rising over 30% to about 1.3 mb/d in 2024. This still amounts to barely 1%-1.3% of global oil demand, but it signals a structural shift. A supply shock of roughly 8 mb/d could accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels.

The energy transition could also unsettle the dollar's long-standing dominance in global energy trade. The "petrodollar" system, forged in the aftermath of the 1970s oil shocks through U.S.-Gulf strategic alignment, ensured that oil was priced in dollars and that surplus revenues were recycled into U.S. financial markets. This underpinned both the financialisation of oil and America's capacity to sustain large fiscal deficits. The emerging paradigm is more fragmented, with energy shifting from a globally traded commodity to geographically dispersed supply chains centred on critical minerals. Lithium reserves are concentrated in Chile (30%), Argentina (13%) and Australia (20%+). The Democratic Republic of Congo accounts for over 70% of global cobalt production, while Indonesia dominates the nickel market. Copper, crucial for electrification, is likewise concentrated in Chile and Peru. Canada is emerging as a key supplier of nickel, cobalt, and lithium, while Australia leads lithium production for western supply chains. Yet, the decisive advantage lies in processing and manufacturing, where China is dominant. This raises the possibility that a future energy system could be as dependent on Chinese industrial capacity — and potentially the yuan — as the old system was on dollar-denominated oil. For countries such as India, this presents a dilemma. The transition offers an opportunity to reduce fossil fuel dependence, but also risks creating new technological and supply chain dependencies. Navigating this landscape will require a conscious strategy rooted in the Global South's legacy of non-alignment — securing resources, building domestic technological capabilities in manufacturing and processing, and avoiding a new form of dependence that merely shifts old hierarchies.

A textbook, criticism, the Court and contempt

It is prime news ever since the Supreme Court reacted to the treatment of the judiciary in the Class eight textbook brought out by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The Court has shelved the book and the authors, and a new committee of legal eminences is to decide what our children should read.

Contempt and the handling of criticism
What is this power of contempt? It consists of two types. The first is civil contempt, invoked for disobedience of a court order. That is clear. The second is criminal contempt, and that is for obstructing the administration of justice, or prejudicing judicial proceedings. And, importantly, scandalising or lowering the authority of the court by hostile criticism that shakes public confidence in the judiciary. This is a little more complicated, requiring lines to be drawn.

Criminal contempt is not to be invoked because an individual judge's sense of pride or ego is offended. It is invoked because a false image of the court is spread which can be deleterious and prejudicial. Why should this be actionable? Because the court and public opinion are connected by multiple twists of the judicial thread.

Judges do not have the power of the purse, or the sword. They have their power under the Constitution and the law. But the real substratum of their power, the hard rock, is the faith of the public vests in the courts. Every government knows that, and that is the reason they do not mess with the courts. That goodwill and trust are garnered over countless judicial actions upholding the law, delivering justice and being the bulwark for the protection of precious rights. It is that public goodwill and trust which constitute the real power of the court, the unspoken major premise in the balance of power doctrine. That favourable opinion and support are threatened by motivated reports denigrating the judiciary, especially when repeatedly and widely spread.

Over the years, great judges have made one thing clear — that they are not immune from criticism. Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sabyasachi Mukherjee spoke about the inability of the courts to deliver justice to people and institutions at large. And lessens a crucial power it holds in our country, the power of judicial review over acts of legislature and executive. This is the birthing ground for millions of cases seeking relief against administrative wrongdoing and legislative excess. Politicians and bureaucrats rail against the court invoking this power, but it is this which ensures accountability, transparency and good governance. The other branches do not value these, the judiciary does. And it can hold and

Here is CJI P.B. Gajendragadkar: "We ought never to forget that the power to punish for contempt, large as it is, must always be exercised cautiously, wisely and with circumspection. Frequent or indiscriminate use of this power in anger or irritation would not help to sustain the dignity and status of the court but may sometimes affect it adversely. Wise Judges never



Sriram Panchu

Senior advocate and mediator

forget that the best way to sustain the dignity and status of their office is to deserve respect from the public at large by the quality of their judgments, the fearlessness, fairness and objectivity of their approach, and, by the restraint, dignity and decorum which they observe in their judicial conduct."

There is also the broad shoulder approach. CJI S.P. Bharucha, while disapproving of the statements of Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy, explained that he was dropping action against them because "the Court's shoulders are broad enough to shrug off their comments". This seems rather apposite now. Justice Bharucha was one of the earliest to come out loud about corruption in the judiciary; he even offered a percentage estimate. Several other judicial leaders have since voiced concerns. It is nowhere near the malaise that affects the other branches; but even one corrupt judge is an aberration and is not to be tolerated. And, unfortunately, it is the one bad apple that makes news and taints the rest.

And from abroad the ringing voice of the great Lord Denning: "Let me say at once that we will never use this jurisdiction as a means to uphold our own dignity. That must rest on surer foundations. Nor will we use it to suppress those who speak against us. We do not fear criticism, nor do we resent it. For there is something far more important at stake. It is no less than freedom of speech itself. It is the right of every man, in Parliament or out of it, in the press or over the broadcast, to make fair comment, even outspoken comment, on matters of public interest... We must rely on our conduct itself to be its own vindication."

Here is another example, humorous yet telling. After the Spycatcher judgement in 1987, the *Daily Mail* called the judges "Old Fools". Contempt action did not follow. Lord Templeman said he could not deny that he was old, and being a fool was a matter of opinion — obviously, he could not be bothered about the Mail's.

Where the line is drawn

But the Court draws a line. The criticism must be founded on facts set forth correctly. It must not be reckless. It must not be ill-motivated to denigrate the institution. Because, as said above, bringing down its image lessens its capacity to deliver justice to people and institutions at large. And lessens a crucial power it holds in our country, the power of judicial review over acts of legislature and executive. This is the birthing ground for millions of cases seeking relief against administrative wrongdoing and legislative excess. Politicians and bureaucrats rail against the court invoking this power, but it is this which ensures accountability, transparency and good governance. The other branches do not value these, the judiciary does. And it can hold and

The NCERT textbook controversy should be resolved without diminishing judicial respect or free speech

A West Asia security rethink amid America's role

As the United States and Israel-led war against Iran enters its second month — with conflicting viewpoints from Washington DC and Tel Aviv on what the aims of this conflict are and under what conditions they intend to seize their respective military operations — regional countries in West Asia are re-thinking their security future. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz along with Iran's "scorched earth" policy of striking any targets across the Persian Gulf even remotely attached to American interests is leading to demands for a strategic reset.

U.S. President Donald Trump's view that he and his team were surprised that Gulf states were targeted by Tehran as a response to the U.S.-Israeli military strikes has surprised many. For a long time, Iran has said that if it was targeted and the regime's collapse made a state aim, the conflict would become regional. However, regional security has always been a minefield as far as interests are concerned, some tough questions and issues will have to be navigated, the trailers of which are visible today.

Pakistan's attempts to claw its way back in
Pakistan's attempt to insert itself as a mediator between Iran and the U.S. has, as expected, ruffled feathers in India. For Islamabad — or more accurately Rawalpindi, given self-anointed Field Marshal Asim Munir's central role in the country's political direction — the access it has built with Mr. Trump over the past year provides it an opportunity to further strengthen this relationship. However, more importantly, this is also an opportunity for Pakistan to reorient itself toward West Asia's Islamic identity, due to its long-standing economic troubles.

The Iran conflict has provided Pakistan's



Kabir Taneja

Executive Director of the Observer Research Foundation Middle East

leaders the rare opportunity to break through some of these shackles: its position as the only Muslim-majority country with a nuclear weapon, is one in demand as of today. The fact that Pakistan hosted the Foreign Ministers of Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, last week, as a consortium, and attempted to leverage its access to Tehran as a neighbouring state highlights its exploration of new security arrangements that are more rooted in regional and Islamic cooperation.

Stirrings within the Gulf

Countries such as Kuwait, which has also been on the receiving end of Iranian aggression, have gone ahead and even criticised constructs such as the Arab League. Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in an address to other Arab Foreign Ministers, has said that the League has struggled to address the fast-moving challenges being faced.

The leaders of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Qatar have also met to commit to deepened security cooperation. Until a few years ago, Saudi Arabia and Qatar were fundamentally at odds, with Riyadh imposing an economic blockade on Qatar over regional geopolitical differences. Today, everyone in the Arab construct, from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to Kuwait and Bahrain, is looking to side-step their own intra-Gulf differences, of which there are many, to manage these immediate challenges. Many of these Gulf states had built insurance ecosystems with Iran, either through economic cooperation, or in Saudi Arabia's case, a very public détente brokered by China in 2023, bringing the Shia and Sunni seats of power to a level of normalisation for the first time since 2016.

But these "new" regional security ideations will continue to have fundamental problems. For

exercise this power because people welcome judicial relief, and place the judiciary in high esteem. The cord that binds the court and the common man sustains both in a commonality of purpose and benefit. We must, therefore, not be at ease when that connective tissue comes under threat. When it is a piece of writing that comes under the lens of contempt of court, wise judges tread cautiously. After all, they are the protectors of free speech when policemen and other harassers pick on citizens. And academic freedom, not chilling silence, is what judges would seek to protect.

Perhaps we could have avoided this scenario if the writers, who were senior academicians, had been put on notice and given an opportunity to explain their comments or conclusions. Who knows? A suitable rectification or clarification could have been undertaken. A cautionary admonition may have sufficed. The judges may have come around to amend their initial assessment of the impact on the institution and simply dropped the proceedings. It may have passed off as a storm in a teacup, or the broad shoulders would have simply shrugged. Due process works in wondrous ways. One hopes that the matter will end soon, and satisfactorily, with respect for the Court being dimmed not a whit, and free speech and fair comment not seen as adversarial to the Court. As wisely observed, when the Court onboard criticism, it affirms the system that we are all under the rule of law.

Once we cross this bridge, there is much to do. Students must be duly apprised of the role of the judiciary, not just in resolving disputes between individuals and entities, but also in its stellar role as the protector and enforcer of the Constitution. The importance of fundamental rights including the right to equality, free speech, practice of religion, and the judiciary's role in their preservation and enhancement must be set forth. As also the challenges which it faces, of infrastructure, manpower and corruption.

The end note

One parts with a concern. The judiciary is struggling to develop adequate instruments to tackle this menace within. Impachment is lengthy; politics plays its part there. Transfer is resorted to, but may just be a location change. In-house inquiry procedures show that action is taken, but may be futile if there is resistance from the offender. Our original constitutional scheme did not envisage countering judicial corruption beyond the odd instance, and we now have to fashion deterrents and remedies for wider application. This will be of great benefit to hardworking and honest judges, who constitute the vast majority, as well as to the system of administration of justice. Textbook improvement will follow.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

War and diplomacy

The then American President, Harry S. Truman, took a calculated risk — after wide consultation with experts, including scientists — to drop the atomic bomb on Japan, in order to end the Second World War. The United Nations subsequently came into being and sought to establish a new world order. Now, decades later, President Donald Trump's unilateral decisions and executive actions have

triggered a multi-pronged assault on nations, destabilising the global order. Who, then, will bell the cat? India's External Affairs Minister is focused on criticising Pakistan's initiatives. The Finance Minister maintains that the rupee is stable and the economy robust. The Prime Minister has cautioned that difficult days lie ahead and has sought the cooperation of the entire nation. As a country deeply affected by the West Asian conflict, can

India's leadership put forward a concrete peace proposal and urge Mr. Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to halt this destructive war? Otherwise, China may seize the diplomatic initiative.

Cavery Palani,
Chennai

Under fire
Every American President leaves behind achievements that history records and remembers. Donald Trump's

presidency, however, stands out for its many controversial decisions, actions, and policies, which project him as a "pro-America" yet often anti-world leader. This has invited widespread criticism, with many arguing that his approach has unsettled the global order even as he seeks recognition for peace. Recently, Americans took to the streets in protest. This marks the third such protest and it is striking that many

Americans appear unconvinced by his agenda.

Kirti Wadhawan,
Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh

The oil of geopolitics
When oil security remains the fulcrum of geopolitics. Energy alliances are tested by war and supply shocks, the fragility of dependence becomes stark. NATO partners cannot afford complacency; diversification of energy sources and investment in renewables are pragmatic shields

against coercion. Equally, diplomacy must temper transactional ultimatums with cooperative frameworks, for oil politics has a way of spilling into broader instability. Iran's stated willingness to end conflict if guarantees are honoured shows that credible assurances matter as much as military might.

Babu Crishna,
Bangalore

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

How anti-corruption bodies are politicised

It began with great fanfare. Investigative agencies announced a massive corruption conspiracy case in Delhi's excise policy, alleging kickbacks of ₹100 crore and a deep nexus between business interests and politicians. The case, which was investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation, with parallel proceedings by the Enforcement Directorate, led to the arrest of political figures, including then Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Deputy CM Manish Sisodia and businesspersons. Months of custody, prolonged interrogation, and repeated court hearings followed. The case dominated television debates for months, shaping electoral narratives and public perception.



Yashvardhan Azad

Retired IPS officer who has served as the Central Information Commissioner, Secretary Security GOI and Special Director Intelligence Bureau

invites speculation that the investigation itself may have been driven by extraneous pressures. The head of an investigative agency, therefore, needs to ensure that prosecutors are grounded in evidence rather than suspicion or political momentum.

The judicial threshold
The collapse of such high-profile cases is not unique to India. Corruption is among the most difficult crimes to prove anywhere in the world. This is because unlike violent crimes, corruption rarely leaves visible evidence. Money moves through intermediaries, shell companies, consultancy contracts, or political donations. The benefit may not even appear as cash — it may appear as favourable regulatory decisions or advantageous contracts. Hence, successful corruption prosecutions usually depend on a complex evidentiary architecture: financial trails, documentary records, digital communications, and corroborated witness testimonies.

If any link in this chain is missing, courts hesitate to infer criminal intent. The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that policy decisions taken by governments cannot automatically be criminalised unless there is clear evidence of dishonest intent and personal gain. This is exactly what was inferred by the court in the Delhi excise policy case. And while these principles protect individuals from politically motivated prosecutions, they also make corruption cases difficult to sustain.

However, the real difficulty may lie less in judicial standards and more in investigative capacity. Many corruption prosecutions in India still rely heavily on witness statements rather than on forensic financial analysis. Modern corruption investigations require sophisticated tools: forensic accounting, data analytics, tracing beneficial ownership of companies, and reconstruction of financial flows across jurisdictions.

Agencies in countries such as Singapore and Hong Kong have developed specialised expertise in these areas.

In contrast, India's investigative ecosystem remains fragmented across multiple agencies with uneven coordination.

The political dilemma
The Kejriwal case illustrates a deeper structural dilemma in Indian democracy. On the one hand, corruption in public life remains a widely acknowledged problem. Allegations surround major public contracts from liquor policies to irrigation projects. Public confidence requires that such allegations be investigated seriously. On the other hand, criminal law must not become a weapon in political hands. If arrests and prosecutions are perceived as tools of the political executive, the legitimacy of anti-corruption institutions suffers irreparable damage.

While India's anti-corruption agencies have secured many convictions in trap cases where officials were caught accepting bribes, large policy-level corruption cases have rarely ended in successful prosecutions. When allegations of corruption surround large public contracts but rarely lead to convictions, public cynicism deepens. What India needs are credible examples of rigorous investigation and successful prosecution in huge bribery cases. Such cases would demonstrate that corruption can be punished without compromising legal fairness.

The excise policy case should therefore not be seen merely as a political victory or loss. It should prompt a broader institutional reflection. Investigative agencies must strengthen their capacity for financial forensics and evidence gathering. Prosecutors must ensure that cases brought before courts are built on robust evidentiary foundations. And political leaders must resist the temptation to deploy criminal law as a tool of partisan contest.

The burden of the new Chief Minister

In order to make a mark, the new government must tackle migration head-on

STATE OF PLAY

Sobhana K. Nair
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The 'end of an era' is a cliché deployed ad nauseam for the political transition Bihar is set to witness as it awaits a new Chief Minister. However, there are several prisms through which to evaluate this change.

The most significant of these is the shift in the command centre. Thirty-six years after Lalu Prasad Yadav took office in 1990, breaking what had largely been a Congress continuum, the Chief Minister's seat is returning to a national party. Delhi, not Patna, will now call the shots. Whoever is chosen for the Chief Minister's chair will no longer be the final arbiter. He, or possibly she, will have to heed the leadership in Delhi. The political longevity that both Lalu and Nitish Kumar enjoyed is not something the incoming Chief Minister will inherit. They will have to guard their flanks, and watch for other aspirants who will be waiting for them to slip.

Imposing legacies

In his campaign speeches, Nitish Kumar often spoke of "Bihar kya tha" (what Bihar once was), invoking the alleged dark past of the State. This spectre of the 'Jungle Raj' cannot be deployed anymore. In the post-Nitish era, his successor's tenure will no longer be contrasted with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) government led by Lalu Prasad Yadav; instead, it will be assessed against the 20-year rule of Nitish Kumar. Having long feted Nitish Kumar as *sushan babu* (the governance man), it will be difficult to sustain or surpass that narrative.

While the Nitish Kumar-led Janata Dal (United) (JD(U)) did not consistently secure the electoral endorsement of Muslims, the community did not feel threatened under his rule. Bihar has, by and large, maintained communal peace.

Sustaining this equilibrium will be a challenge for a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government.

Challenges and hopes

With the BJP at the helm, social anxieties over reservation could resurface. Some signs are already visible. On March 18, over 1,000 students from various organisations took to the streets, demanding that the University Grants Commission (UGC) Equity Rules, which had been stayed by the Supreme Court, be implemented without delay. The onus is on the BJP to select a Chief Minister who can offer a reassuring counter-narrative.

In a post-Nitish Bihar, possibilities also abound. Between the forward-caste-dominated BJP and the Yadav-dominated RJD, there are numerous smaller caste groups who lack a natural political home. In Nitish Kumar's absence, the JD(U) may not provide a stable base for these communities. This creates an opportunity for the Congress to fill the vacuum. However, it can emerge as a viable alternative only if it breaks out of the RJD's shadow and functions as an independent force rather than as an ancillary party.

On March 30, Nitish Kumar resigned from the Bihar Legislative Council. He is set to take oath in the Rajya Sabha by April 10. Belying expectations, there were no protests within the JD(U), and so far, the transition appears smooth.

But the real test of whether this stability will endure is only beginning.

Now, years later, the case ended with a judicial order from the trial court declining even to frame charges. The court concluded that the prosecution had failed to produce material establishing a *prima facie* case of criminal conspiracy or bribery. It also noted the absence of clear evidence linking policy decisions to illegal personal gain.

What began as one of the most sensational corruption prosecutions in recent memory has ended, and left us with an uncomfortable question — how did a case launched with such certainty fail to cross even the basic threshold required for trial?

Lingering questions

The most immediate question is institutional. Should an investigating agency initiate a prosecution of this magnitude without a reasonably solid evidentiary foundation? The decision to register a First Information Report (FIR) is legally the beginning of a criminal process. But in politically sensitive cases, it also carries immense consequences — arrests, reputational damage, and long periods of incarceration before trial. When a case collapses at the threshold stage, it inevitably

The head of an investigative agency needs to ensure that prosecutions are grounded in evidence rather than suspicion or political momentum

An increase in colleges, students but not enough teachers

India's higher educational system must shift its focus from institutional expansion to ensuring equity and quality education

DATA POINT

Anand Kumar
M. K. Shrivastava
Rosa Abraham

While India's higher education sector has expanded rapidly in recent decades, with many new institutions and more students enrolled than ever before, has this expansion truly translated into equitable access alongside adequate capacity for delivering quality education? The State of Working India 2026 report tries to answer this.

India's higher education sector has seen massive expansion in the last few decades, at least in terms of the setting up of colleges and universities. From about 1,600 colleges and universities in 1950, most of which were publicly funded, the number had grown to over 69,000 by 2022. Most of this expansion has been recent, and driven largely by private providers. College density has also increased nationally, from 29 colleges per lakh youth in 2010 to 45 in 2021. But large regional disparities remain. For instance, many districts in northern and eastern States have fewer than 18 colleges per lakh youth population.

However, college expansion has not been matched by a commensurate expansion in teaching capacity. Regulatory norms recommend between 15 and 25 students per teacher. Even at its best, the average college had about 24 students per teacher in 2010. The situation worsened to 35.4 in 2016 and stood at 32 in 2021. Many northern districts consistently report particularly high student-teacher ratios, despite substantial institutional expansion in these regions (Map 1). Faculty numbers have not kept pace with either the growth in institutions or the rise in enrolment. This is especially concerning since these regions account for a large share of India's youth population.

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), which is the share of population aged 18-23 enrolled in higher education, has increased from 16% in 2011 to 28% as of 2022. India's GER in higher education is now broadly in line with countries at similar levels of per capita income. Importantly, enrolment rates for men and women have almost converged. Participation among disadvantaged social groups has also improved significantly over the past decade (Chart 2). Between 2011 and 2022, enrolment rates among Scheduled Castes increased from 11% to 26%, while for Scheduled Tribes they rose from 8% to 21%.

However, graduates in India are still disproportionately drawn from the richest households. While the share of graduates from poorer households has increased between 2007-2017, it is still a long way away from equitable access.

Thus, expanding institutions alone is not sufficient. Bridging regional gaps, investing in faculty capacity, and addressing the cost barriers associated with professional education is critical to make higher education more inclusive. The focus must shift from expansion to equity, ensuring that higher education can translate into improved economic opportunities.

Course of privilege

AISHE and the NSS Social Expenditure on Education Surveys show that higher-income students prefer engineering/professional courses, while lower-income students choose humanities and commerce

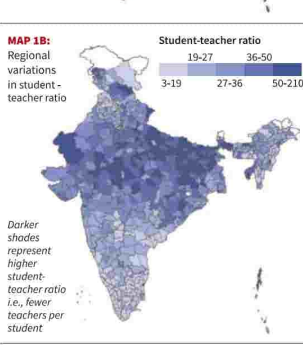
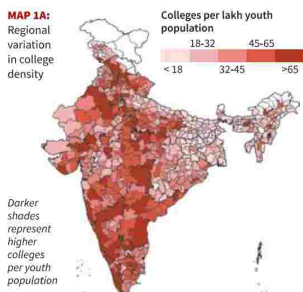


CHART 2: Gross enrolments across different social groups. Others include the General category and other groups not classified elsewhere

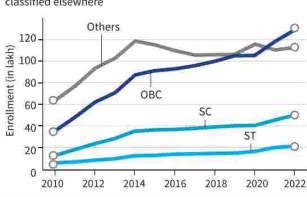
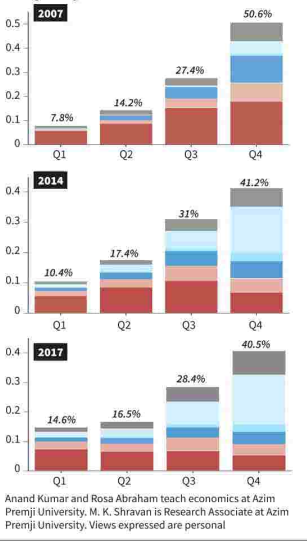


CHART 3: The proportion of households in respective monthly per capita expenditure quartiles which have a student enrolled in a graduate course, across different specialisations. Q1 refers to the poorest quartile, and Q4 the richest



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 2, 1976

TV delinked from AIR

New Delhi, April 1: A new organisation, "Doordarshan", to deal exclusively with television was inaugurated to-day by the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. In her inaugural message, Mrs. Gandhi said the delinking was necessary "because these are two separate media, requiring different programmes and production techniques." Without this separation, the growth of television would be stunted, she added.

At the outset, the Prime Minister dispelled the belief of many people that television or SITE programmes were a luxury. "Television not only entertains, but also educates," she pointed out.

She explained to the viewers, who included not only those in the city, but also in thousands of villages covered by the SITE, that India had adopted a democratic form of Government and had followed it since Independence. But some people, the Opposition parties, construed it as a licence to say or do anything they liked. This led to indiscipline, not only in the political life but in other spheres as well. Selfishness led to hatred and greed, resulting in wrongful acts, which harmed the entire country. She brought home the point effectively by saying, "Think of the havoc wrought by Kayikavi who thought only of her own interest and harmed in the process not only herself but many others."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 2, 1926

Infanticide law in Ceylon

Colombo, March 31: A proposal is before the Ceylon Government to the effect, that an Act, similar to the English Infanticide Act of 1922 should be introduced.

At present, all women accused of infanticide are charged under certain clauses in the Ceylon Penal Code as murderers.

In cases of infanticide, the accused person is sentenced to death.

But, in every instance, the sentence is contracted to a long term of imprisonment by the Governor, generally fifteen to twenty years.

The Board of Jail Visitors which considered the matter were of opinion that the term of imprisonment should be less on account of the circumstances in which the majority of the cases of infanticide are committed.

The Board has asked the Government for the release of ten women who are at present serving sentences for infanticide.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Prevalence of hypertension in JCOs, other Army personnel

9.61 in per cent. Prevalence of hypertension in the Indian Army's junior commissioned officers and other ranks (JCOs/OR), as per data received from the record offices of arms and services of the force, up to December 31, 2023, stood at 9.61%, the government has informed a parliamentary panel. PTI

Percentage decline in Russia's seaborne diesel exports

3 in per cent. Russia's seaborne diesel and gasoil exports fell 3% in March from February to around 3.06 million metric tons as drone attacks disrupted fuel loadings at key ports, data from market sources and LSEG showed. Ultra-low-sulphur diesel shipments from the Baltic port of Primorsk fell to 1.713 million tons, the sources said. REUTERS

Number of personnel added to SDRF in Meghalaya

708 The Meghalaya government on Wednesday raised two battalions of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), boosting its capabilities to mitigate natural calamities, a Minister said. Each of the two battalions will comprise 354 personnel, taking the total strength to 708. PTI

Primary schools to be closed in Sikkim due to enrollment drops

17 The Sikkim government is planning to temporarily close 17 more primary schools this year due to declining enrollment, Education Department Secretary Tashi Chophel Lepcha said, attributing the trend to the State's low fertility rate. He said low enrollment continues to pose a challenge for the school education system. PTI

Migrants found dead by Italian coast guard off Lampedusa

19 The bodies of 19 migrants were recovered from a boat off the coast of Lampedusa on Wednesday by the Italian coast guard, the island's mayor said. Mayor Filippo Mannino said seven other migrants were being treated for "hypothermia and intoxication from hydrocarbon fumes". AFP
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Why is India pushing piped gas now?

Can PNG replace LPG for cooking? Why has LPG been preferred so far? How is LNG transported and used? What is holding back PNG expansion? Can domestic production meet demand? Will PNG reduce LPG import dependence?

EXPLAINER

M. Kalvanaraman

The story so far:

India has a total of 33 crore LPG connections. Recently, Anjan Kumar Mishra, Secretary at the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board, said that domestic natural gas production alone could cater to 30 crore connections if all were to switch to piped natural gas (PNG).

What is the difference between LPG, LNG, PNG, and CNG?

LPG is a co-product of oil refining and natural gas processing. That is, its production depends on the processing of both crude oil and natural gas.

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), as the name suggests, is natural gas that has been cooled to below -160 degrees Celsius to turn it into a liquid for shipping. Liquefaction reduces its volume by 1,000 times.

Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) is primarily used as a vehicular fuel. It involves compressing natural gas to a pressure of 200-250 kg/cm² (g) to reduce its volume and enable efficient distribution.

How are LPG and natural gas transported to the user?

Propane and butane gases are mixed, pressurised, and cooled to below 40 degrees Celsius, and then transported from the source to consuming countries via ships. LPG is bottled in cylinders and physically delivered to customers.

Piped natural gas is transported through pipelines. Before this, imported natural gas is liquefied and transported through LNG carriers. "LNG carriers use special cargo tanks and insulation systems designed for ultra-low temperatures," stated Mitsui O.S.K. Lines to *The Hindu*. "Put simply, the basic task is to move a very cold liquid onto the ship while preventing it from warming up too much."

At the destination, LNG is regasified and transported to the final consumer through pipes.

Last-mile delivery of LPG is easier through cylinders that are transported through trucks and tricycles than building an extensive pipeline network covering every household for natural gas. This has been a key reason why India adopted LPG for domestic cooking.

Why the push for piped gas against LPG now?

India's dependence on LPG imports is currently higher. For instance, in natural gas, India's one-year import was about 27 million tonnes of LNG last year, and production was roughly the same, according to government data. On the other hand, India - until recently - imported three-fifths of its LPG requirements, of which 90% was routed through the Strait of Hormuz, which has now been blocked due to the war in West Asia. Typical annual LPG consumption is 34 million tonnes, out of which 12 million tonnes are produced in India.

If gas is to be imported, LNG has many more sources across the world. In LPG, India was largely reliant on Saudi Arabia and Qatar and the supplies had to pass through the Strait to reach India. "Globally large capacities of liquefaction plants for natural gas are coming online over the next few years, so availability should be healthy," said Prashant Vasisht, Senior Vice President of ICRA.



A domestic LPG cylinder supplier carries cylinders for delivery in Bengaluru on March 30. J. ALLEN EGENUSE

Can natural gas replace LPG straight?

Natural gas is much lighter than LPG. But one kilogram of natural gas can deliver more energy than one kilogram of LPG. For cooking purposes, these differences are not significant, making PNG a drop-in replacement for LPG.

However, in industrial uses, the equipment may need to be tuned to a different setting or even altered. For instance, LPG is widely used by MSMEs for welding and cutting. Reports from the ground indicate that while the government is encouraging industrial users to switch, a lack of awareness and technical know-how may hamper adoption.

How is the government pushing for natural gas?

On March 26, *The Hindu* learnt from senior government officials that over the next two weeks, India could add another 15 lakh new PNG connections.

The official said that instituting last-mile connectivity amidst unfavourable city infrastructure in certain areas was among the major hurdles in expanding the piped gas network.

To speed it up, in a gazette notification, the Centre instituted provisions to help accelerate the uptake, which, among other things, included specific timelines for approving pipeline expansion in housing and non-housing areas.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) told the Parliamentary Standing Committee, which is assessing its demand for grants for FY 2026-27, that it is targeting to have in place a pipeline network that would cover 12 crore PNG connections by 2034.

The committee, in an earlier report, had asked the Ministry to help City Gas Distribution (CGD) entities to overcome difficulties in pursuing expansion, such as in obtaining permissions, land, bidding criteria, and NOC requirements from local authorities.

Across towns and cities, such as in Maharashtra or Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, where the GAIL pipeline runs

close, the government is now pushing for piping infrastructure for local distribution.

As of December, the government announced that India's gas pipeline network spans about 25,000 kilometres, with an additional 10,500 kilometres under construction. The government is also ensuring that PNG pricing remains competitive with LPG.

"PNG connections have now crossed 1.5 crore. A recent government gazette notification reinforces this direction, mandating that households cannot hold both LPG and PNG connections. As a result, roughly 6 million households will be required to surrender their LPG connection and transition fully to PNG within a three-month timeframe. This will bring total household PNG connections to 2 crore soon," said Manish Sejwal, Senior Vice President at Rystad Energy. "Since the 2020-21, the compounded annual growth rate in connections has been some 18%. A CAGR of 24% would be needed to reach 12 crore connections by 2034-35," he added.

What are the challenges?

The GAIL pipeline network is currently concentrated in western and northern India, with some coverage in Kerala and Bengaluru. The 10,000-kilometre-plus pipelines under construction cover tier-2 and tier-3 cities in parts of central and eastern India, as well as some parts of Tamil Nadu connecting to the Bengaluru leg, and one section going to the northeast. However, large regions in central, southern, and northeastern India remain uncovered. Further, the alignment of the gas pipeline network is more intended to serve industrial needs than households.

The government has aggressively given CGD licences that would cover more than 300 geographical areas covering households, small industries, hotels and restaurants. As of now, some 90 of them are still not connected to the main trunk pipeline. Last-mile connectivity remains an immediate challenge.

Even if projections of 12 crore PNG connections are met in another 10 years, LPG connections will still be more than 20 crore, leaving India requiring to import significant amounts of LPG.

A little less than 30% of natural gas use goes into making fertilizers, while power plants account for 13% and city gas distribution around 20%, said ICRA's Mr. Vasisht. Some 35% goes to sectors like refineries and industries.

A major diversion from these sectors such as power may be needed to cater to cooking gas demand. Mr. Vasisht said industrial consumers can switch to naphtha and furnace oil. PNGRB secretary Mr. Mishra had said that as of now some 1.2 crore PNG connections consume three million metric standard cubic metres of gas every day.

To supply 13 crore connections, India will have to increase domestic production by at least one-third.

Industry observers say that an increase in domestic production from Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) fields is possible. Rystad Energy projects a 25% increase.

For instance, ONGC commenced production in the KG-DWN 98/2 Block in the KG basin in 2024. Peak production of the field is expected to be over 10 million metric standard cubic metres per day of gas, which would mean increasing today's overall gas production in India by 10%. Site officials expect the 98/2 block to increase ONGC gas output by 15% through more wells. Increasing imports through LNG may well be required if natural gas consumption is ramped up. India has some nine import terminals covering both coasts.

It will have to truly ramp up the pipeline network to leverage the imports. Further, India's LNG system is even more of a just-in-time system than LPG, with little long-term storage, unlike in Europe. Any disruption in imports will have an immediate impact on availability. *(With inputs from Saptarpano Ghosh and Appala Naidu)*

THE GIST

India has 33 crore LPG connections, but domestic natural gas production could cater to 30 crore connections if households switch to piped natural gas (PNG).

LPG is delivered in cylinders, while natural gas is transported through pipelines or as LNG and regasified, with PNG emerging as a drop-in replacement for cooking.

The government is pushing PNG to reduce high LPG import dependence, but pipeline expansion, last-mile connectivity, and supply constraints remain key challenges.

SCIENCE

Early screen use stunts vital social growth of children, experts warn

Paediatricians and psychologists are increasingly concerned about how children may miss out on real-world interactions with people and objects if they're exposed to screens from an early age; this could affect their ability to develop healthy relationships with people around them as they grow older

Rohini Subrahmanyan
BENGALURU

Be it our phones, tablets or our laptops – everyday, we interact with various digital devices designed to make our lives easier. Especially since the pandemic, even children have been exposed to this electronic world at a very young age. Earlier, parents would desperately brandish toys to distract crying children, now they tamp down tantrums using YouTube videos.

"Vision is very, very powerful for the human experience," said Melissa Greenberg, a clinical psychologist at Princeton Psychotherapy Centre in New Jersey. "So kids get really drawn into the visual stimulation. And then, throughout childhood, they just miss opportunities to interact with the world through their other senses."

Paediatricians and psychologists are increasingly concerned about how children may miss out on real-world interactions with people and objects if they are exposed to screens from an early age. This could affect their ability to develop healthy relationships with people around them as they grow older. And not just very young children, even older children's or adolescents' lives can bear the brunt of increased screen and social media usage in the form of poorer emotional regulation, detachment from reality, loss of focus, and a host of other mental health problems.

Dr. Greenberg also draws her insights from her personal life, with two children aged six and eight. Having raised them through the pandemic, she understands the perils of isolation and the importance of interacting with others. Many parents, including herself, were in a difficult situation because of the constant social distancing, so they may have handed tablets to children without thinking too deeply about it, she said.

"We are not in the pandemic anymore, but I think parents find themselves in these positions where they're exhausted or they are also dependent on screens," she explained. "And they need their kid to be entertained for a few minutes, and they just hand them something."

But unknowingly, they may end up opening their children's eyes to a whole other online world – without a clear picture of everything they might get access to and how it will shape them.

Grow up to feel uncomfortable

To build some safeguards against the pandemic, the American Academy of Paediatrics recommended that children below the age of two should have very limited screen time, unless it is for video calls. This is primarily because of older years are when children are still developing their senses. Overwhelming them with visual stimuli – even if unintentionally – can skew their sense of the world and affect their interactions with others. Hunching over phones can also affect children's posture.

"If you're looking at a screen, you are not doing all of the other things that babies should be doing, [like] crawling, touching, exploring the world around them," Dr. Greenberg said. "So I don't know that the screen itself is the problem; it is the opportunity cost of babies exploring their environments – that is how they learn about the world around them."

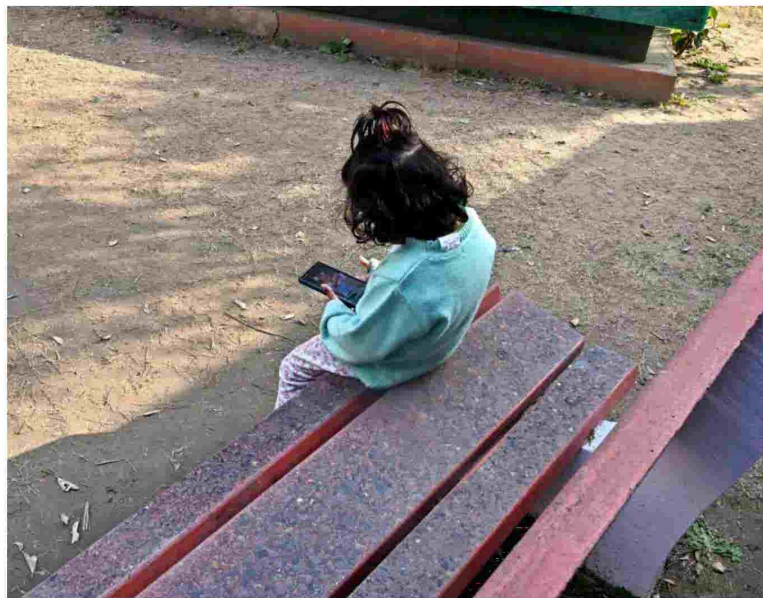
Some children experience the consequences of being absorbed in a digital screen later as well, as they get a bit older, enter adolescence or become teenagers. With more time online, some children grow up to feel uncomfortable with in-person interactions as well. One recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on U.S. youth reported that teenagers spend an average of about 8.5 hours a day on screen-based entertainment.

"You go into a cafeteria in a school... 15 years ago it would have been chaotic and loud and everyone's playing and moving around. Now you walk in and everyone's like this," she said, mimicking being hunched over a phone. "They're all quiet."

Just like with toddlers, this could also lead to missed opportunities of meaningful social interactions with peers at a young age. Being unable to develop proper social skills could strain relationships with friends and family, with lifelong repercussions for mental health.

Drastic consequences

At times, the mental health issues can take a darker turn. Some children have unfettered access to phones even before they are eight years old, which, according to recent research, could lead to issues



Unhealthy exposure: Children, even adolescents, are likely to bear the brunt of increased screen usage in the form of poorer emotional regulation, detachment from reality, and a host of other mental health problems. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

such as hallucinations, feelings of aggression towards other people, diminished self-worth, and even suicidal thoughts as they grow older. The data, based on self-reported assessments from several thousands of people worldwide, suggest that for each year younger than 13 that children get their phones, the more their mental health issues increase as they enter adulthood.

An extreme case of phone addiction transpired recently in Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh. Three minor sisters aged 12 to 16 years had dropped out of school in 2020 and were addicted to social media, cartoons, and TV shows on their parents' phones. When their parents restricted their phone use and threatened to get them married, the sisters killed themselves by jumping off their balcony in the early hours of February 4. In the note they left behind, the girls described how banning them from the online shows made them feel lonely. This is not an isolated incident: multiple instances of teens killing themselves when told to stay away from phones suggests an alarming rise in digital addiction.

One reason for such drastic consequences could be that children are being brought up by technology instead of human beings, Tara Thiagarajan, who led the research correlating age of phone access to mental health issues and is the founder of Sapient Labs, a non-profit organisation studying how the human mind is changing over time across the world, said.

Take the case of a child at a table with their family in a restaurant. This situation has opportunities for simple social interactions. In a previous era, the child might have been reaching for things, trying things, and saying things to the others. Some people might reprimand; others might coo at the actions.

Such interactions teach children how to read other people's body language from a young age and how to conduct themselves in a group setting, including getting themselves heard, holding conversations, and managing conflicts.

Aspects like the tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and other non-verbal cues may either be warped or absent altogether in digital exchanges, which can affect children's abilities to form lasting inter-personal relationships

Dr. Thiagarajan said growing up in a world dominated by online interactions prevents children from learning these social skills and interferes with their ability to develop a good intuition of other people's personalities.

Although engaging in video calls with other people is better than watching videos, one can end up missing larger environmental cues, per Dr. Greenberg. Some subtle cues can slide through unnoticed on a video call, like noticing someone's nervousness by how they are tapping their feet.

Aspects like the tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and other non-verbal cues may either be warped or absent altogether in digital exchanges, which can affect children's abilities to form lasting inter-personal relationships. "You're becoming adept at technology, but you can no longer manage in a human world," said Dr. Thiagarajan, of children growing up in a society undergoing rapid "technologisation".

"When most of what goes on in your mind is from the screen, you've lost, to a large degree, your awareness of the physical environment around you. That's what creates these feelings of detachment from reality, and also the hallucinations."

'It's not just about your children'

In another meta-analysis of 117 previously published studies, Michael Noetel at the University of Queensland and his colleagues reported similar findings: that increased screen time leads to more socioemotional problems in children. Tracking nearly three lakh children over time, they found "screens and emotional

problems feed into each other like a vicious cycle," according to Dr. Noetel. "Kids who spend more time on screens are more likely to develop anxiety, depression, aggression, and attention problems. But it works the other way too: children who are already struggling emotionally turn to screens to cope."

Because anxious children tend to use their phone more, Dr. Greenberg said that it is tricky to tease apart correlation from causation vis-à-vis screen use. But she noted that increased cell phone usage and social media exposure could exacerbate existing conditions. "Anecdotally speaking, everyone I work with feels better when they spend less time on their devices," she said.

To prevent children from getting addicted, parents should ensure that their children use phones for a limited time, based on what is recommended for their age group, according to Dr. Noetel. "Children who stayed within guidelines showed almost no increased risk. Guidelines recommend under an hour for preschoolers, under two hours for older kids," he said. "Problems appeared when children regularly exceeded these limits."

Even if parents limit screen use, Dr. Greenberg said that the question of whether children should have access to phones at night, or when they are alone in their rooms, should also be addressed. "When a child is doing something privately on a device unsupervised, no matter how many parental controls you might set, they may access things that are really inappropriate," she said. "Because of the way that the algorithms work, you really never know what might pop up next on their children's feed."

Dr. Thiagarajan explained how the internet should have more water-tight gateways that prevent children from accessing dangerous content, which could include porn sites or violent videos.

Dr. Greenberg also emphasised how each child is different: some may be able to give up their screen time readily but some may be more drawn to the digital world, and thus could find it more difficult to limit their online activities. Her own children are like that, she admitted, and they are most likely in the majority. "If you have a kid who has a harder time putting it away, that doesn't mean you should just let them continue to have it," she said. "It means you really need to work with them to figure out how to manage the impulses so that they develop good habits around putting it away."

Dr. Greenberg also pointed out that parents should be careful about their own screen use around their children: "They should be aware that their kids are always watching and learning from them and observing their habits, and that that's a really important factor in how you're managing screens with your kids," she said. "It's not just about your kids; it's also about you."

(Rohini Subrahmanyan is a freelance journalist in Bengaluru. roh.subb@gmail.com)

Those in distress can dial Tele Manas helpline 1800-89-14416 for support.



Murky waters: A Rice's whale seen in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Texas, U.S. FILE PHOTO

Rare whales in the way of Trump's oil drilling plan

Associated Press

One of the world's rarest whales lives in the Gulf of Mexico, where the Trump administration wants to expand oil and gas drilling that scientists fear could push the giant mammal to extinction.

Endangered Rice's whales live their entire lives in the gulf, where they are vulnerable to vessel strikes, noise pollution, oil spills, and climate change – all of which could increase with more drilling. Other animals, including threatened manatees and endangered sea turtles, also could be put at risk.

As the Iran war pushes energy prices sharply higher, U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth invoked national security in seeking an exemption from endangered

The Trump administration in the U.S. is pushing to expand oil drilling in an area where the Rice's whales spend their entire lives

species laws, which make it illegal to harm or kill species on a protected list. The seldom-used Endangered Species Committee granted that request on Tuesday.

Rice's whale is the only whale species that lives year-round in the Gulf of Mexico, where there are fewer than 100 left, per scientists.

Recognised as a distinct species in 2021, Rice's whale is usually found in a narrow area in the northeastern part of the water body.

"They dive to the gulf floor for fatty fish, mainly silver rag driftnet, during the day, then rest close to the surface at night. These dives are strenuous and their specific kind of food might also be affected by more drilling and other changes. Which means they are "quite living on the edge," Jeremy Kiszka, a biological sciences professor at Florida International University, said.

The whales are also susceptible to pollution, with a significant portion of an already small population believed to have been killed by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Many climate change impacts are "baked in," meaning they will persist even if fossil fuels were eliminated today, said Letise LaFeir, chief of conservation and stewardship at the New England Aquarium.

But the Trump administration proposal "is just compounding the immediate risks locally and the longer-term risks," she added. Although a government filing specifically mentions Rice's whales, other threatened and endangered animals also could be harmed by oil spills or other dangers, scientists said.

For example, hundreds of sea turtles, including endangered Kemp's Ridley and loggerheads, are rescued and rehabilitated every year before they are released into the Atlantic Ocean and swim for their nesting grounds in the Gulf, per Ms. LaFeir.

Before Tuesday, the committee had only issued exemptions twice. The first was for the construction of a dam on a section of the Platte River considered critical habitat for whooping cranes, though a negotiated settlement won significant protections that led to overall ecosystem improvements.

The second was for logging in northern spotted owl habitat, but the request was withdrawn after environmental groups sued, arguing that the committee's decision was political and violated legal procedures.

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

the hindu businessline.

Challenging year

FY27 set to be a difficult one for the economy

The new financial year begins on an uncertain note. An economy that imports 85 per cent of its oil will surely be hit by a prolonged price and supply shock. The most important question is how long this will last. Four crucial macro variables — trade deficit, current account deficit, growth and inflation — will come under stress if the shock continues well into the first quarter.

These variables also influence each other. India's fundamentals remain robust, but real shocks can also be amplified by financial actors. The Reserve Bank of India will have to be ahead of the game. The latest Monthly Economic Review has said that FY27 will see a higher trade deficit and CAD. The extent of rise would depend on how long this shock lasts — even as demand management can keep these parameters under check. The pass through of imported inflation will send the right market signals to curb demand and the two external deficits. The pain to be borne is inescapable; the Centre needs to act thoughtfully on distributing this between households, governments and businesses. The trade deficit is already slated to be in the region of \$350 billion in FY26, or 10 per cent of GDP, against 7.5 per cent of GDP in FY25. This trend may continue, if the crisis does not abate. A dire scenario is one where oil prices remain elevated at over \$100-120 a barrel well into the year. This would mean an additional outgo of about \$45 billion on oil imports for six months, pressurising the rupee and the deficits further at current levels of demand.

These are worst case scenarios. While price pass-through makes sense, it could exacerbate inflation as well as inflation expectations beyond a point, hurting both supply and demand. That said, there is not much fiscal space for the government to absorb these losses, with total debt of Centre and States at about 85 per cent of GDP. Fiscal deficit will expand if the Centre is forced to compensate the oil companies for holding retail prices or not fully passing on the increased crude oil costs — fuel prices have been steady in the first month of the war and will likely be so until State elections are completed in the end of April. A demand compression in the event of a prolonged price and supply shock may result in higher outlays for the Economic Stabilisation Fund.

Meanwhile, many Budget assumptions may not hold. Tax collections could come under pressure if overall industrial activity is hit due to scarcity or high price of raw materials, and this is not an unlikely scenario. Fertilizer subsidies are bound to overshoot the budgeted sum of ₹1.7 lakh crore for FY27. Analysts estimate a ₹25,000 crore increase in subsidy if the crisis persists. Adding to the problems is the prediction of El Nino setting in this monsoon year which mean the rural sector will need support. LPG subsidy of about ₹12,000 crore projected for the new fiscal might need an upward revision. A rise in the fiscal deficit by even 100 basis points cannot be ruled out, not least because of growth compression. The best part, though, is that this is just the start of the fiscal year. If the war ends soon, the damage to the economy in FY27 can still be contained.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Trump's Iran war: escalation without end

The fifth week of Donald Trump's illegal war on Iran has confirmed the absence of any overarching strategy. The US continues to hit Iranian targets while building up forces in the region. Iran continues to launch missile and drone attacks on Israel and neighbouring Gulf states. Tehran's proxies in the region have entered the fray. Its closure of the Strait of Hormuz has seen oil prices shoot up and had knock-on effects already visible across fuel, fertilizer and supply chains. No amount of contradictory social media posts from Mr Trump can negate the shortages felt across the world. The pain is likely to get worse. There is no sign of imminent US victory or Iranian collapse. This instead looks like a war of attrition. Each side can point to successes and their opponents can highlight failures. (LONDON, MARCH 19)

CHINADAILY

Provider of opportunity, growth and certainty

The data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Tuesday indicate that the Chinese Economy continues to grow and improve, with stronger momentum and firmer foundations than some external observers have suggested. In March, the purchasing managers' index for the manufacturing sector rose to 50.4, while the non-manufacturing business activity index and the composite PMI output index reached 50.1 and 50.5, respectively. All three indicators returned to levels above the expansion threshold, pointing to a broad-based improvement in economic activity. Building on a good start in the first two months, the Chinese economy is on track to deliver a steady performance in the first quarter. (BEIJING, MARCH 19)

India's chance in supply chain reset

A WINDOW. With geopolitical tensions pushing nations to diversify supply chains, India can cash in by deepening trade ties



RAVI POKHARNA

For three decades, global supply chains were built on a simple premise: efficiency above everything else. Production clustered where costs were lowest, logistics fastest and scale largest. The shocks of the past five years have exposed the limits of that model.

Covid-19 revealed the fragility of concentrated supply chains. The Russia-Ukraine war triggered commodity spikes and energy disruptions, while recent Middle East tensions have unsettled trade routes, energy markets and logistics corridors. Together, they have exposed a fundamental weakness in globalisation's architecture: efficiency without resilience.

The lesson for governments and corporations is clear. Supply chains are no longer just commercial arrangements; they are strategic assets. Countries are increasingly focused on mitigating supply-chain vulnerabilities and reducing excessive dependence on any single geography. Export controls, sanctions and dominance over critical inputs have turned supply chains into geopolitical tools. China's near monopoly in critical minerals processing and earlier restrictions on active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) illustrate how supply dependencies can become leverage.

For multinational firms, the conclusion is unavoidable: concentration risk is the biggest vulnerability in global production networks. And in that search for diversified supply chains, India is emerging as one of the most credible alternatives.

THE GEOPOLITICAL TRIGGER

Globalisation is not ending, it is fragmenting. The Middle East conflict has renewed fears about disruptions across critical trade corridors. With the Strait of Hormuz effectively halted and Red Sea transits suspended, around 25 per cent of global seaborne oil and 20 per cent of global LNG are at risk.

IMF estimates trade fragmentation could slash global GDP by 7 per cent, equivalent to the combined output of France and Germany. Businesses are therefore pre-emptively redesigning their manufacturing footprint to reduce geopolitical exposure.



LEVERAGING. Export controls, sanctions and dominance over critical inputs have turned supply chains into geopolitical tools

This is precisely the window India has been waiting for. India's supply chain proposition rests on four structural advantages. First, a large domestic market that allows manufacturers to achieve scale before exporting. Second, a young workforce at a time when many Asian economies are ageing. Third, democratic institutions and legal predictability that reduce political risk for investors. And fourth, an expanding network of trade agreements that can provide preferential access to major markets.

THE FIRST BIG BREAKTHROUGH

Nowhere is India's supply-chain opportunity more visible than in electronics manufacturing. A decade ago, India was a major importer of mobile phones and components with only two mobile manufacturing units; today, it has over 300. Mobile phone production value has surged from ₹189 billion in 2014-15 to ₹5.5 trillion in 2024-25 (MeitY). Export growth is the new engine, with smartphone exports doubling to \$30 billion in FY 2024-25. Global giants like Apple and Samsung are increasingly moving assembly, components, and design to Indian hubs (India Cellular and Electronics Association).

This transformation is not accidental. It reflects a combination of geopolitical shifts and deliberate industrial policy. As multinational electronics firms reassess

Combined with supply chain diversification, FTAs can shift India from a consumption-led market to an export manufacturing hub

their heavy dependence on Chinese manufacturing hubs, India is emerging as a credible alternative for final assembly, components and increasingly, design. But electronics is only the first chapter.

THE PLI CATALYST

A key driver of India's manufacturing momentum has been the government's Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme. Covering sectors from electronics and pharmaceuticals to solar modules and auto components, the programme links incentives directly to incremental production to rapidly scale manufacturing and integrate India into global value chains.

The results are becoming visible. PLI schemes across 14 sectors have moved from commitment to large-scale execution. As of early 2026, the initiative has generated over ₹20.4 trillion in cumulative production and sales, far exceeding the initial projection of ₹6 trillion (NITI Aayog; Economic Survey 2025-26).

THE EXPORT MULTIPLIER

Industrial policy alone is not enough. Manufacturing ecosystems require access to export markets, and India's evolving free trade agreement (FTA) strategy is becoming critical.

Recent agreements with Australia, the UAE, the UK and the EU are expanding preferential access for Indian exporters, while negotiations with the US are progressing. Together, these could significantly strengthen competitiveness in textiles, engineering goods, chemicals and electronics.

Combined with supply chain diversification, FTAs can shift India from a consumption-led market to an export manufacturing hub. Logistics

efficiency is also improving. Costs, historically at 14-15 per cent of GDP, are gradually declining as freight corridors, modernised ports and multimodal networks expand. The National Logistics Policy and PM Gati Shakti aim to integrate infrastructure planning and bring costs closer to global benchmarks.

Ironically, geopolitical instability in the Middle East may further accelerate India's manufacturing opportunity. Companies are reassessing supply chain geography in three ways:

Geopolitical neutrality matters more than ever. India's long-standing strategic autonomy allows it to maintain working relationships across competing blocs.

Large domestic markets are becoming supply chain anchors. With a consumer base of more than 1.4 billion people, India offers scale that few other countries can match.

Resilient manufacturing ecosystems require trusted partners. Democracies with stable institutions and predictable policy frameworks are increasingly attractive production locations.

In that sense, India's macroeconomic stability and strategic positioning are reinforcing its supply chain appeal.

SCALING THE ECOSYSTEM

Yet opportunity alone does not guarantee success. Manufacturing competitiveness ultimately depends on ecosystems, not just factories. India must move quickly on several fronts:

Infrastructure remains critical. Continued investments in logistics corridors, ports and industrial clusters will determine whether manufacturers can scale efficiently.

Labour-intensive sectors, from textiles to footwear, need regulatory clarity and export-oriented industrial parks.

Skill development must accelerate to support advanced manufacturing technologies.

Especially, initiatives such as the National Logistics Policy and new semiconductor manufacturing incentives signal that policymakers recognise the scale of the challenge. But the scale of the opportunity demands faster execution.

The world is undergoing a structural reconfiguration of trade and production networks. For India, this disruption is a strategic opening. If India can scale its ecosystems and deepen trade ties now, it will become a defining hub of the next globalisation cycle.

The writer is Executive Director, Pahle India Foundation. With inputs from Kuntala Karun, Senior Visiting Fellow, Pahle India Foundation

Telecom infra must rest on strong fibre network

In terms of reliability, capacity, affordability and long-term resilience, it scores over mobile-based networks

TV Ramachandran

India today stands tall as the world's fourth-largest economy and among the fastest-growing major economies. It is also a digital powerhouse — leading the world in mobile data consumption, scaling digital public infrastructure such as UPI, and connecting hundreds of millions of citizens to the internet. Yet beneath this remarkable digital story lies a structural imbalance. India is the only major global economy where broadband access is overwhelmingly dependent on mobile networks. In most advanced economies strong GDP growth has been accompanied by deep and widespread fixed broadband infrastructure. Fibre networks reach homes, businesses, schools and hospitals at scale, providing the stable backbone on which digital economies operate. Mobile networks play a vital role, but primarily as a complement to this foundation rather than a substitute for it.

India, by contrast, has largely inverted this model. India's fixed broadband penetration remains in the low single digits per hundred population. Much of the country's digital ecosystem rests on mobile broadband — an achievement in affordability and scale, but also a structural compromise in reliability, capacity and long-term resilience.

International experience offers useful lessons. In advanced European economies such as France and the UK, fixed broadband penetration exceeds 40 connections per 100 people, and fibre-to-the-home is rapidly becoming standard infrastructure. In East Asia, China has built the world's largest fibre network even while expanding 5G at scale. The lesson is not one of mobile versus fibre, but rather fibre first, with mobile layered on top.

INFRA DEPTH LACKING

India's mobile-first trajectory undoubtedly delivered significant benefits. Competitive markets and low tariffs democratised internet access and brought hundreds of millions online. However, connectivity reach is not the same as infrastructure depth.

This imbalance carries major challenges: Firstly, there is the issue of network strain. Mobile networks operate within finite spectrum resources and are inherently variable and suited for mobility and intermittent, light-to-medium demand. As India digitises manufacturing, education, telemedicine, cloud services and emerging AI applications, sustained high-capacity demand is increasingly shifting into homes and enterprises. Relying predominantly on mobile networks in such circumstances risks congestion and inconsistent



FIBRE. Consumes less energy per unit of data

performance. In effect, spectrum is being asked to do work that fibre infrastructure is better suited to deliver.

Secondly, there are implications for productivity and affordability. Fibre enables ultra-low latency, symmetric high-speed connectivity and high reliability — capabilities essential for Industry 4.0 manufacturing, remote diagnostics, smart logistics, cloud computing and advanced research. Importantly, fixed broadband also delivers data at significantly lower usage cost. In India, the effective cost per gigabyte on fixed networks is often a fraction of that on mobile networks — one-fourth or one-fifth, making it a more sustainable platform for large-scale digital activity and digital inclusion.

Third, resilience becomes a challenge. Robust digital ecosystems are layered:

fibre backbones, last-mile fibre access, Wi-Fi offload, satellite redundancy and mobile connectivity for mobility. When one layer dominates excessively, vulnerabilities can emerge. Climate events, spectrum constraints, back-haul congestion or power disruptions can have disproportionate impact in a mobile-heavy architecture. Fixed broadband is not merely another access technology; it represents long-term digital capital formation. This calls for a rebalancing of infrastructure priorities.

The required tools are already available. These include expanding fibre-to-the-home and fibre-to-enterprise networks, increasing the fibreisation of mobile networks, strengthening public Wi-Fi ecosystems such as those enabled by PM-WANI, enabling infrastructure sharing to reduce deployment costs, and integrating satellite broadband to improve connectivity in remote areas.

The economics is compelling. Fibre networks involve higher initial capital investment but offer far lower marginal cost per gigabyte over time. They consume less energy per unit of data transmitted than mobile networks and possess enormous bandwidth capacity, making them durable infrastructure for decades.

The writer is President, Broadband India Forum. Views are personal

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.

Managing CAD

This refers to 'What happens when CAD rises' (April 1). Rising crude oil prices have directly increased import bills for net-importing nations like India, widening the current account deficit (CAD). This has also driven the rupee to a historic low. Managing a CAD driven by rising crude oil prices requires a multi-pronged approach focused on reducing import reliance, boosting foreign exchange inflows, and implementing strategic fiscal policies. Promoting renewable energy, enhancing domestic refining and accelerating

exports will also help manage CAD.

P Victor Selvaraj Hyderabad, TN

WTO's relevance

Apropos 'Existential crisis' (April 1), the WTO's struggle is less about procedure and more about purpose. Once founded on the ideals of trade for development and poverty reduction, it now risks irrelevance amid fractured alliances and unilateral tariffs. India's resistance to extending the e-commerce moratorium and to the China-backed investment facilitation

proposal reflects a pragmatic defence of sovereignty and policy space. Yet the larger challenge is restoring consensus between the Global North and South, without which multilateralism collapses into rhetoric. The WTO must rediscover its role as a fair arbiter, not a forum sidelined by bilateral deals and power politics.

Babu Crishna

Bengaluru

Coffee sector needs relief

This refers to 'RBI continues trade relief measures amid West Asia crisis' (April 1). The West Asia war has almost every sector, including coffee plantation. With predictions of a harsh summer, fertilizer shortage, and possible crop losses, the RBI must take immediate steps to defer loan repayment and grant interest waiver. The central bank must also allow bank to consider loan restructuring in case the war extends.

Rajni Magal

Halebiduru Village, Karnataka

Menstrual leave

Apropos 'A holistic approach needed on menstrual leave' (April 1), menstrual leave benefits haven't been extended to all working women. What the policy framework will be for women working in the unorganised sector is anybody's guess. The Supreme Court has rightly refrained from giving blanket directives and asked policymakers to balance social protection and economic opportunities. Small firms and service outlets which function on thin margins will find it difficult to extend menstrual leave.

RV Baskaran

Pune

Reorienting farm research

Focus must be on farm incomes and sustainability

Satish Hegde

Indian agriculture in the last 75 years has changed from a food deficit to food surplus situation. The question now is, can agricultural research rise once again to meet the challenge of Viksit Bharat?

Agriculture now faces a twin challenge. It must raise farmers' incomes while simultaneously ensuring sustainability through safe food production and the protection of soil and environmental health.

India has moved from deficiency to sufficiency, and in many crops to surplus. Farmers are increasingly turning towards commercial crops and value addition.

Agriculture research must now evolve from being nation-centric to truly farmer-centric. During the Green Revolution, the primary objective was national food security, and its benefits were largely concentrated in a few northern States. Today, the need is for pan-Bharat research that reflects the diversity of Indian agriculture.

TECH DISRUPTIONS

From conventional breeding to molecular breeding and now predictive or data-driven breeding, agricultural science has transformed dramatically. The Green Revolution was the result of conventional breeding. Molecular breeding later strengthened nutritional security, and many leading vegetable hybrids today have emerged from advanced genomic techniques. Technologies such as genetically modified crops and gene editing offer promise. Yet each technology has strengths and limitations.

In cotton, farmers embraced GM traits because they delivered value. In other crops, similar approaches failed when they did not align with farmer needs. The lesson remains consistent — traits must generate tangible benefits at the farm level.

Agromony, too, has evolved towards sustainable agriculture. Farmers today follow diverse systems, including chemical, regenerative, organic, and natural farming approaches. All contribute to safe and sustainable food production in different ways.

Agricultural research has also become deeply collaborative. A breeder works alongside experts in genomics, marker discovery, germplasm management, phenomics, data analytics, speed breeding, and double haploid technologies. Looking ahead to



FARM RESEARCH. Charting a sustainable path

Viksit Bharat, agricultural research must restructure itself around broad national themes that anticipate future challenges. ICAR institutes, State agriculture research institutes and private research institutes should work on these broad-based themes.

Climate change demands heat-tolerant varieties and stronger root systems through innovations such as grafting and shuttle breeding. Stress biotic and abiotic pressures. Resource management requires mechanization suited to small farms, efficient water and nutrient use, biological inputs, and intelligent application of artificial intelligence. Supply chain transformation must enable farm-gate value addition, quality management, export readiness and market intelligence.

Global competition underscores the urgency. Turkey transports vegetables across Europe over several days. China grows vegetables in Hainan Island and supplies distant cities. Sunny green houses, plastic tunnels, and grafting technologies in vegetables, directly enhancing small farmers' livelihoods in China. India must chart its own path, strengthening smallholders.

Defining central research themes should be as rigorous and consultative as the national budget process. State and central-level deliberations must involve farmers, Krishi Vigyan Kendras, state agriculture and horticulture departments, NGOs, and both public and private research institutions.

As India advances toward 2047, agriculture once again stands at a decisive moment. Strategy, clarity of purpose, and unwavering determination will shape the journey. Seventy-five years ago, agricultural research helped secure India's food future. In the coming decades, it can help secure India's prosperity.

The writer is a retired agricultural scientist

A severe test for monetary policy

BLEAK SCENARIO. With rising energy prices and the looming threat of inflation amidst uncertainty, the MPC has a difficult task on its hands



GETTY IMAGES



A VASUDEVAN

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) due to meet on April 6-8 faces many economic challenges arising from endogenous and exogenous factors relating mainly to regulatory and governance matters and the humungous uncertainty created by oil price spikes, scarcities of fertilizers and a number of other commodities and minerals. Under the circumstances, decision making has to be based on a large number of considerations that go beyond inflation and growth data.

The first requirement for MPC decision making is its access to sufficiently sound quality information especially for the months of February and March. Will the MPC be guided by information only about economic variables as reported by official sources and private data providers? What is the view that the MPC will take regarding the longevity of the war in the Middle East and the current geopolitical tensions. What if the conflict drags on and becomes more widespread involving many more nations?

Whether one likes it or not, the inflation targeting framework as provided for under the provision 45Z of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Act will just not be good enough, surely not in

this situation. "Superior" politico-economic information that the authorities possess complementing the multiple economic and financial indicators and external environment will have to be the basis for decision making.

Indian economic policy thinking has so far been woven around a magical formula which has four elements: growth rate of about 8 per cent, inflation rate of less than 4 per cent, fiscal deficit of around 3 per cent of the GDP, and an external current account deficit of 1.5-2 per cent. MPC members would often like to strategise monetary policy thinking to enable the fructification of the magical formula.

INFLATION DYNAMICS Given this background, the MPC would still be most concerned about the inflation dynamics that arises immediately from the shortage of crude oil and natural gas and their price hikes. Inflation spreading across the economy would raise production costs, weaken investment prospects, prompt high depreciation of the Indian rupee

MPC will have to resist the temptation of raising the policy rate of interest to combat the anticipated inflation, as the strict inflation targeting approach would suggest

vis-à-vis the US dollar and challenge the fiscal space to absorb the increase in social welfare and infrastructure expenditures. If the inflation rate is not within the MPC's comfort zone, say of 4 per cent but -6 per cent, then how much would the growth rate be in 2026-27? No one can make an estimate now but it will be a surprise if it is around 6 per cent, not 7 per cent and over as many economic analysts, including the Economic Survey, have projected.

MPC will have to resist the temptation of raising the policy rate of interest to combat the anticipated inflation, as the strict inflation targeting approach would suggest. What is most important is to look at the regulatory reform that would enable financial institutions (mainly banks and NBFCs) to continue providing credit on a more extended scale so that the borrowers can have a larger buffer of commodities and services including the use of artificial intelligence (AI), if need be, to address a possible longer haul of uncertainty. Inventory build up could well be for six months rather than the conventional three months. And the use of AI would need to be focused mainly for finding ways of reducing costs and making goods competitive both domestically and abroad. This would facilitate India's exports to more diverse destinations.

This is not to suggest that India should not follow a multiple strategy of raising the policy rate by say, 25-30 basis points and revisiting the internal liquidity requirements model once again along with undertaking regulatory

reform with an exceptional (exceptional because liquidity analysis and regulatory reform are not a part of the legal frame in which inflation targeting has been cast under Section 45Z of the RBI Act) suggestion of encouragement of the MPC.

Such a strategy would be market friendly and would not disturb the yield curve, given the fact that the long rate of interest has been somewhat sticky and would not be inclined to move up in view of the limited possibility of high growth prospects.

MPC will be mindful of the limited fiscal space and the difficult external current account deficit. In view of the much talked about prevalence of recessionary conditions in much of the developed world and China, India's export prospects are not bright. Besides, foreign remittances of Indian expatriates would either shrink or just be stable. To expect the rupee depreciation to improve export prospects is close to day-dreaming given the external trading environment and recessionary conditions prevailing overseas.

Ideally, the meeting could still be postponed to end-May or early June to enable the Committee to have more credible information about the world economic outlook and the India's own economic metrics. After all decisions cannot be taken on some idiosyncratic assumptions in the midst of uncertainty.

The writer is a former Executive Director of the RBI and currently an independent economic analyst. (Through The Billion Press)

the hindu businessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

April 2, 2006

BHEL in talks for nuclear tie-up

Power equipment major Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) is in talks with global nuclear players, including Aтом, GE Energy and Siemens, for possible tie-ups to enhance its nuclear capabilities. The State-owned BHEL, which already supplies equipment to Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) projects, is exploring the possibilities of a technical tie-up for high-end nuclear equipment, a Government official involved in the exercise said.

Rights issues: Disclosure norms eased

Listed companies will now have the flexibility of not disclosing the price band or the offer price of the rights issue at the time of filing the draft offer letter with the market regulator SEBI. This relaxation forms part of new steps taken by SEBI to make the domestic primary market "more transparent and efficient".

Chennai most attractive city for offshoring services

Chennai is the most attractive Indian city for offshoring services beating traditional top cities such as Bangalore, Mumbai and the National Capital Region (Gurgaon, Faridabad and Noida), according to A.T. Kearney's Indian City Services Attractiveness Index 2005, a report by A.T. Kearney.

Citi top executive flags lasting war cost

Todd Gillespie
Michael MacKenzie

Deirdre Dunn has been reading up about fertilizer markets. Since the US attacks on Iran began roiling oil markets, the Citigroup Inc. rates-trading chief has been looking to other commodities to monitor the knock-on effects of the military action on inflation and how central banks might react.

"Oil became the most liquid and purest source of information for market participants," Dunn said in an interview. Data from other markets could matter more now than they usually do, too, "such as fertilizer and aluminum." All that points to a clearer reality about the war: its effects are likely to linger beyond what many investors had initially thought. In other words, Dunn said, traders are starting to ask, "Who pays for all this?"

"Clients are starting to settle more in for the long haul, and the lasting implications of an energy shock," said Dunn, 48. "Even if there is a remarkably quick resolution, the implications and pass-through to the real economy is likely to be meaningful."

From her position atop a core part of

Wall Street's second-largest fixed-income business, Dunn sees bankers and investors getting smarter on other areas where costs might need to rise, such as insurance and the rebuilding of infrastructure, she said.

ADVANTAGE BANKS

The top executives, who joined Citigroup in 2011, has been near the center of the turmoil as hedge funds and corporates have navigated the surge in oil prices after the US and Israel attacked Iran more than four weeks ago. Banks are likely to post bumper trading revenue when they report first-quarter earnings in mid-April, driven by volatility spurred by the war.

A surge in oil prices and the threat of an inflation spike prompted interest-rate markets to sharply reverse course during March and price in central-bank hikes rather than cuts. The pendulum has swung back a little this week, as the bond market anticipates weaker growth and risk of a recession as higher energy prices, rising borrowing costs and the stock market slump start to squeeze businesses and consumers.

To prepare for big market swings,



WAR IMPACT. Oil disruption (ISTOCKPHOTO)

Dunn has moved staffers around in order to help teams most under pressure. On a recent trip to Paris, she had to cancel employee events so she could spend more time with colleagues at the desks. Her unit is a key part of the bank's fixed-income, currencies and commodities group, which analysts expect to post more than \$4.8 billion in revenue for the first quarter when Citigroup reports earnings in two weeks, according to a Bloomberg survey. That would be the biggest haul since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

Concerns about artificial intelligence and what it means for labour markets may also return to the

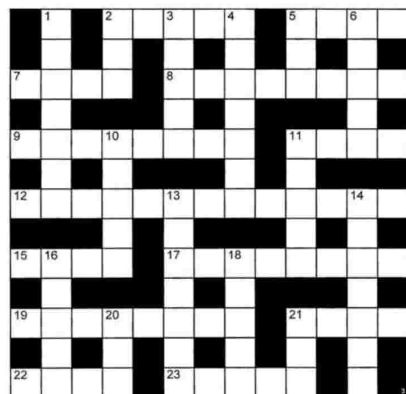
rates market, Dunn said. She's also monitoring concerns around private credit and possible impacts on the underlying economy as well as investors' perception of risk.

The onset of the war in Iran and the Supreme Court ruling against the Trump administration's tariffs increase the likelihood that the US fiscal story becomes a pressing issue and pushes longer-maturity Treasury yields higher. Under Scott Bessent, the Treasury Department has sought to keep fixed-rate bond issuance across two to 30 years steady while boosting the supply of shorter-dated bills in the \$31 trillion US government-debt market.

Dunn is the chair of the Treasury Borrowing Advisory Committee, a group of bond market participants that includes banks, asset managers, insurers and hedge funds. The committee meets quarterly with the Treasury Department to discuss economic and market trends while advising on debt management.

"Market trends are now transitioning to whether there is pressure on bonds from who pays for it, how sticky is inflation going to be and how aggressive are central banks going to be," Dunn said. BLOOMBERG

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2649



EASY

ACROSS

- Fundamental (5)
- Headland (4)
- Outlying trading-station (Am) (4)
- A gift (8)
- Whole (8)
- Seem to be (4)
- Resolution (13)
- Betting price (4)
- Put on record (8)
- Jumble, pot-pourri (8)
- Bright spot, peak on screen (4)
- Young sheep (4)
- Those put in for race (5)

DOWN

- Annoy, excite with anger (7)
- Noctule (3)
- Move furtively, ingratiatingly (5)
- Relate, belong to (7)
- Child's bed (3)
- Snap (5)
- Apply pressure to (5)
- Egyptian, Indian water-lily (5)
- Wonderful happening (7)
- Preliminary statement of case in court (7)
- Theatrical entertainment (5)
- One invited (5)
- Small cask (3)
- Coastal inlet (3)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Without extras, is worn in taxi coming back (5)
- Horn, it may be, burn over the shoulders (4)
- In favour of a sort of square stronghold (4)
- Chase the country out of a gift (8)
- Poem Celt composed is all there (8)
- The appearance that nothing is all right beyond fifty (4)
- Fixedness of purpose with which it may be trained on time (13)
- Run to take sulphur for the price of a bet (4)
- The official list will reach one's consciousness (8)
- It's cheap to make jumble out of it (8)
- Unforeseen phenomenon to spot on radar screen (4)
- One may take this essayist with mint sauce (4)
- A record in writing of one's coming on stage (5)

DOWN

- Be annoying to show it's right when about to get the go-ahead (7)
- Flying fox will be at the wicket (3)
- Edge furtively along the flank and get left inside (5)
- It worries one, a business set-up (7)
- Ulster, without a place to sleep (3)
- A picture quietly to give a hoot about (5)
- Try to get information for the papers (5)
- Exotic flower means much to you and me (5)
- It's a wonder! I'm up: clear out! (7)
- Starting with the aperture (7)
- Plays the doctor with the US Medical Association (5)
- One invited to conjecture endlessly on time (5)
- On the other hand, it's put up a bath (3)
- Sound like a hound that's reddish brown (3)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2648

ACROSS 1. Collaborator 8. Handling 9. Disc 11. Forte 12. Lantern 13. Last 15. Otto 19. Burnish 20. Rabat 22. Area 23. Convince 24. Denomination
DOWN 2. Owner 3. Lollied 4. Bungle 5. Trident 6. Reconnoitres 7. Shuffleboard 10. One 14. Surgeon 16. Fix 17. Thrown 18. Privet 21. Bingo

OPINION

Where can one invest in 2026-27?

Things are likely to get much worse before they get better. This is a year that all the money lessons we have learnt are put to action

The madness of the 2020s just does not end. Each crisis looks worse than the previous one. The Trumpian bullying on trade has morphed into physical abuse of global infrastructure...

As fear and uncertainty get amplified on social media, I will attempt to answer very simply some of the questions that the non-finance people are asking.

Why is the rupee falling? Because India needs more dollars to buy each unit of fuel it imports from abroad. Oil prices have risen sharply over a month and can go even higher.



Monika Halan

The rupee story can quickly get worse if the West Asia crisis prolongs—who expects the Russian ruble to do all these years?—and the fat pipeline of Gulf NRI foreign exchange inflows takes a hit.

ward-looking and price in bad news before it manifests on the ground. The 10-year G-Sec yield breached 7% last week, a rise of more than 40-basis year on year (in bond markets that is a steep rise).

sharply, which is likely to hit its revenues by close to ₹1.5 trillion. This shortfall can be offset by higher than expected exports or by borrowing.



The long-term growth story of India remains strong; we need to get through the present time by not making hasty money decisions.

Is there more bad news? Yes. If the story on energy security were not bad enough, there is a looming fertiliser scare that might play out.

Are there any silver linings? The clean macro story, oil and forex reserves with which India entered the war-period is a big positive.

This is going to derail the growth trajectory envisaged earlier in the year. The growth is expected to be in the range of around one percentage point.

are able to use them to our advantage must be deployed. In addition, the path cleared for energy from small nuclear plants must be used to build for the future.

The fertiliser story is one of mis-used subsidies. Instead of funding high-cost fertiliser production, a cash transfer to the farmer might be the road ahead.

What should we be doing? Start by recognising that a tough year lies ahead. There is a war raging, and we will get singled.

Monika Halan is the bestselling author of the Let's Talk series of books on money. The views expressed are personal

OUR TAKE

New captains in a turbulent sector

Neither of the two new top-level appointments — at Indigo and DGCA — come at a routine time for the country's civil aviation sector

Indian aviation's two most consequential appointments in years arrived within hours of each other this week. William Walsh, formerly of British Airways, IAG and currently at the powerful aviation lobby group IATA, will take over as Indigo's chief executive.

Today, Brent crude has surged past \$102 a barrel, from less than \$70 in February. Indian carriers are barred from nine countries' airspaces, with reroutes adding up to 70 minutes and nearly two tonnes of extra fuel burn on every European sector.

Walsh inherits an airline whose operational credibility was shattered barely three months ago — a ₹22.2 crore penalty, quarterly profit down 78%, and a predecessor who was, by all indications, made to make way.

Yadav's brief is arguably harder. The DGCA's inquiry into the Indigo crisis cited "inadequate regulatory preparedness" — a rare admission that the regulator failed its mandate.

A difficult season ahead for agriculture

With a 60% chance of El Niño in the June-August period — rising to 80% in August-October — the country's farm sector must brace for possible pain.

The revised guidelines fall short of the proposals floated so far. To begin with, the amended PN3 only allows investment funds with up to 10% Chinese ownership (non-controlling) to access the automatic route.

The government and farmers must factor in the double whammy. From sowing decisions — short duration, drought-resistant varieties — to moisture conservation, farmers must pre-empt poor rains.

Opening the doors for Chinese investment again, with caution

The Centre's amendment of Press Note 3 (PN3) has ruffled some feathers. PN3 was issued in April 2020, placing curbs on Chinese investment in India.

This note amended the foreign direct investment (FDI) policy involving all countries sharing a land border with India.

The government has now amended PN3 to ease Chinese investments into India. Given the current geopolitical scenario, this step is a cautious reopening rather than a reset.

At the outset, the amendment does not mark a significant change of course. In fact, this only confirms that geopolitics will continue to guide economic decisions vis-à-vis China.

Finally, in January 2026, reports suggested that the Centre is mulling over exempting investments up to 26% from screening in non-sensitive sectors.

INDIA FEARS THAT CHINESE PRESENCE IN CERTAIN SECTORS CAN BECOME A SOURCE OF STRATEGIC VULNERABILITY. CHINA'S APPREHENSIONS STEM FROM ITS SLOWING ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

manufacturing sectors — capital goods, electronic capital goods, electronic components, polysilicon, and ingot-wafer — where Chinese investment is deemed beneficial.

Despite these restrictions, the growing Indian market could still attract Chinese investment in the five sectors of priority concern outlined by the government.

However, from India's standpoint, the interest of Chinese private players isn't in doubt. The real hurdle is the willingness of the Chinese Party-State.

Thus, it wasn't a surprise when China obstructed the export of certain semiconductor equipment and Foxconn engineers to India last year.

China's investments in India over the past five years have suffered from mutual suspicion. India fears that Chinese presence in certain sectors can become a source of strategic vulnerability.

Amik Kumar and Pranay Kotasthane are researchers of China's economic and technological sectors, respectively, at the Takshashila Institution. The views expressed are personal



Amit Kumar



Pranay Kotasthane

ABBAS ARAGHCHI | FOREIGN MINISTER, IRAN. We receive messages from the American side... whenever necessary we respond... There are no grounds for negotiations.

Making the code on minimum wage work on the ground

India's new labour codes mark the most significant restructuring of labour regulation since Independence. At the heart of this reform is the Code on Wages, which seeks to rationalise and strengthen the minimum wage framework.

Against this backdrop, the new labour codes, while not an automatic solution, offer an important institutional opening for strengthening wage-setting and worker protection.

India was among the early adopters of statutory minimum wages, introducing the Minimum Wages Act in 1948, empowering states to set wage floors for selected "scheduled employments" with weak bargaining power.

These structural limitations make it essential to assess whether the new labour codes meaningfully address them or merely repackage existing arrangements.

A key innovation of the Code on Wages is the introduction of a statutory floor wage for all workers. While states can set sector-specific minimum wages, these cannot fall below the floor fixed by the Centre.

Multiple wage floors set by the Union and state governments led to a highly fragmented and non-uniform minimum wage structure across sectors and skills. Regional gaps also remain stark — a maximum uniform rate of ₹646 in a state compared to a minimum of ₹176 in another — encouraging inter-state firm relocation.

India's minimum wage framework has long been constrained by weak enforcement. Administrative data from annual minimum wage reports indicate substantial variation across states in effective enforcement.

The new labour codes seek to address these disparities by replacing surprise inspections — often criticised as inspector-jerk — with a system of "inspector-cum-facilitators" focused on online, risk-based inspections and compliance support.

A key insight in labour economics, highlighted by the ILO, is that minimum wages work best when workers have credible outside options, such as public employment programmes that pay at least the statutory minimum.

Without explicit reference to the national floor, delays in payments and changes in funding further weaken the credibility of these programmes as outside options.

The introduction of a statutory floor wage under the new labour codes is a welcome step but its effectiveness will hinge on three interrelated factors: the adoption of a transparent and inflation-responsive wage-setting methodology, the strengthening of enforcement capacity under the new facilitative framework, and the alignment of public employment programmes with statutory wage floors.

Varun Band Meenakshi Shekhar are with CAFRAL, RBI. The views expressed are personal



Varun B



Meenakshi Shekhar

The counting begins

Census data needs to be handled skillfully

The much-awaited Census formally began on April 1. The decennial Census was due in 2020 but could not be conducted because of the pandemic. However, there is little official explanation for why it was not done after economic activities normalised. Be that as it may, the fact that the process has now started must be welcomed. The need for a regular Census cannot be overemphasised, particularly for a country like India that is growing and changing rapidly. The survey data and analytical models, for instance, suggest that the fertility rate in the country has dropped substantially, and in some states, it has gone below the replacement rate. The final Census data will confirm this. Besides, it is also widely accepted that India is now far more urbanised than what the old official data suggests. On this, the new Census will be able to shed greater light.

The Census exercise will be carried out in two phases. The first phase will be a house-listing and housing Census, which will be conducted between April and September over a period of 30 days, depending on the preference of the administration in the state or the Union Territory. Population enumeration will be conducted in the second phase during February 2027. For areas that remain snow-bound in winter, such as those in Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh, this phase will be conducted during September this year. The reference date for the Census will be March 1, 2027. There will be at least two unique features this time. For the first time, self-enumeration will be allowed through a dedicated portal. Second, the exercise will be conducted in a digital format. Officials are of the view that this will make compilation much quicker. They have also reiterated that the data will be protected and not shared with any other government entity.

Although the outcome, whenever it is released, will be keenly watched, there are two related issues that need to be handled carefully. One, Census 2027 will also enumerate "caste" for the first time since 1931. Caste is a significant aspect of India's social structure and carries enormous political relevance. Questions in this aspect have not yet been finalised. The caste aspect of the Census needs to be handled with extreme care from the beginning — questions to be asked and the way answers are recorded. There could be objections from this stage itself. Further, how the final outcome is handled will be critical. There is a possibility that it will be used for political mobilisation with various demands. It will be important to ensure that it doesn't end up destabilising the social and cultural fabric of the country.

Two, the Census can also become the basis for the delimitation of seats in the Lok Sabha. This will enable the implementation of women's reservation in the legislature. This is again a politically sensitive issue with implications for India's federal structure. Southern states argue that their representation in the Lok Sabha will come down because of their slow population growth compared to that in northern India. The argument has merit and, thus, a lot will depend on how the delimitation exercise is carried out. In principle, a balance needs to be maintained, and states should not be penalised for effectively containing population growth and improving the standard of living. Thus, from a purely economic standpoint, the Census 2027 data will help both the government and the private sector make informed decisions. However, the politics of it has to be skillfully managed.

Beware the Ides of March

The spectre of stagflation looms over the global economy

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



"Beware the Ides of March" was a warning to Roman Emperor Julius Caesar, signifying misfortune in the month of March. United States President Donald Trump should have heeded the warning that unleashing a whimsical war in March on Iran, to stop its nuclear programme, would lead to catastrophe. The war has spread across West Asia, upended the world's energy and financial markets, and caused enormous loss of lives and livelihoods. Iran's ability to shut the Strait of Hormuz is turning out to be more dangerous than a nuclear weapon.

Mr Trump promised he would never drag America into costly foreign wars. The Iraq war cost \$3 trillion and thousands of lives, according to Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz. Another \$2.3 trillion was spent on Afghanistan, with nothing to show for it in return. Yet, here we are again, with another costly US-initiated war of choice, which could spread even wider unless sense prevails. It reminds me of the song, "When will they ever learn?"

The spectre of stagflation faces countries across the world, but will cost some more than others. A \$20 increase in the price of oil (currently projected if the war ends soon) sustained over a year costs the US - 0.2 percentage points of gross domestic product (GDP) growth, the world economy around -0.2 to -0.4 percentage points of GDP growth, China -0.4 percentage points, highly oil-dependent countries like Japan -0.4 to -0.8 percentage points of GDP growth, and India as much as -0.6 to -1.0 percentage points of GDP growth (see Table). If the war continues longer and the price of oil averages an increase of over \$40 per barrel from base lines, it could reduce global GDP growth by 0.6 percentage points — down from 3.3 per cent to 2.7 per cent. India's GDP growth could fall by

as much as 1.5-2 percentage points. Inflation would also rise by as much as 1.5 percentage points for the world. Despite being a surplus oil producer, petrol prices in the US have already jumped from \$3 per gallon to over \$4 per gallon. Diesel prices have risen even higher, affecting transport costs. US inflation will rise by 0.4-0.8 percentage points for every \$20 per barrel increase in the price of oil. This may even force the Federal Reserve (the US central bank) to raise, rather than lower, interest rates. Inflationary effects in other parts of the world would be even higher, with energy-import-dependent countries like India, the Philippines, Pakistan, Thailand, Japan, and the European Union likely to see closer to a 1 percentage point increase in inflation. Rising fertiliser prices will affect next year's food production across the world and could create a food crisis.

This latest jolt comes just as the world economy had adjusted to Mr Trump's 2025 tariffs. World GDP growth had declined but only a bit from 3.3 per cent in 2024 to 3.1 per cent in 2025 and world merchandise trade growth had surprisingly increased from 2.6 per cent in 2024 to 3.3 per cent in 2025. But Mr Trump has reimposed a 15 per cent across-the-board tariff for 150 days and is using Section 301 of the 1974 Trade Act to reimpose his earlier country-by-country tariffs.

The use of ground troops to reopen the Strait of Hormuz quickly carries the risk of a prolonged war and even greater damage to the region's energy infrastructure. If Iran keeps the Strait of Hormuz effectively closed for an extended period, and petrol pump prices keep rising and stock markets (which affect people's retirement accounts) keep falling, the political cost to Mr Trump will escalate.

An anti-Trump "No Kings" rally last week drew widespread support across the US. A mid-term elec-

Unequal impact

Growth and inflation impact due to a \$20 per barrel increase in oil price (% points)

| Country | GDP growth change | CPI increase |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------|
| USA | -0.2 | 0.4-0.8 |
| Japan | -0.4 to -0.8 | 0.6-1.4 |
| EU | -0.3 to -0.4 | 0.6-0.8 |
| China | -0.2 to -0.4 | 0.2-0.6 |
| Thailand | -0.2 to -0.4 | 0.8-1.0 |
| Korea | -0.4 to -0.6 | 0.4-0.6 |
| Philippines | -0.4 to -0.5 | 0.7-1.2 |
| Vietnam | -0.4 to -0.6 | 0.5-1.0 |
| Pakistan | -2.0 to -3.0 | 1.0-1.2 |
| India | -0.6 to -1.0 | 0.8-1.0 |
| Russia | +1.4 to +2.0 | uncertain |
| World | -0.2 to -0.4 | 0.8 |

Source: Author's estimates from international and country sources

tion for the US Congress in November could bring the Democrats back in control of the US Congress and put a check on Mr Trump's imperial ambitions — he next wants Cuba and has not given up on Greenland.

The war could result in huge geopolitical shifts. The big immediate winner is Russia, benefiting from higher oil prices and the removal of sanctions. For every \$20 per barrel increase in oil prices, Russia's GDP growth increases by 1.4-2 percentage points. This windfall is likely to prolong the Ukraine conflict. China appears to be losing in the short term but may emerge as a major geopolitical winner in the longer run. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are hit hard by the war, and their future as major transport and investment hubs could be diminished.

India's economy of 2025, called "Goldilocks" by the Reserve Bank of India governor, given its high GDP growth of over 7 per cent and low inflation below 2 per cent, has taken a sharp U-turn. If the war persists and oil prices rise by \$40 per barrel on average, India's 2026 GDP growth will drop from the projected 7.5 per cent to a range of 5.5-6 per cent, and inflation could rise to 5-6 per cent, making it difficult to loosen monetary policy.

As India goes to the polls in five states, it has foregone \$10 per litre in excise duty to keep petrol prices from rising, but at a huge fiscal cost. G-Sec yields have risen. India faces tough choices also in managing rupee depreciation, which crossed 95 to the dollar. Eventually fiscal and current account pressures will force politically difficult but economically necessary price adjustments for petrol, diesel, and fertiliser. The oil shock is surely also a wake-up call that India needs to transition to renewables much faster. Today, India gets less than 5 per cent of its energy needs from renewables. India must also spend more to build air and naval capacity to protect greater military power in the Indian Ocean, where three critical chokepoints — Hormuz, Bab el Mandeb at the end of the Red Sea, and the Strait of Malacca — lie. But for now, let us hope April ends the madness of March.

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Raising the bar

Structural reforms in the legal profession are needed

A recent survey by the Supreme Bar Association (SCBA) shows that over 80 per cent of woman lawyers find the profession tough. This is much higher than the percentage of men in this regard. But this should not be seen only as a gender grievance but as a sign of systemic shortcomings. Women today constitute only about 15 per cent of India's lawyers and barely 2 per cent of them hold leadership positions in Bar Councils. The profession remains structured around networks, informal mentorship, and financial endurance, the areas where women continue to face structural disadvantages.

The SCBA survey shows that the challenges are layered: Gender bias, lack of mentorship, unequal pay, lack of access to clients, networking barriers, and the difficulty of balancing litigation with family responsibilities. Many woman lawyers are first-generation professionals, making the early years particularly difficult. In the survey, nearly 60 per cent reported limited work opportunities as a major challenge and over 40 per cent reported pay inequality and networking barriers. In the legal profession, success depends not only on merit but also on visibility, access, and professional networks. When women are excluded from these networks, their careers stagnate, and many eventually alienate themselves.

This has consequences far beyond the Bar because members in the higher judiciary are partly drawn from there. The gender imbalance is even starker in the higher judiciary. Chief Justice of India Surya Kant recently acknowledged that ensuring gender balance in the judiciary remained an "unfinished task". At present, only one of the 33 judges in the Supreme Court is a woman, and women constitute only about 14 per cent of the judges in the high courts — just 16 of the 814 in the 25 of those. The historical data also shows that the representation has been low. These numbers clearly show that the problem is structural. The higher judiciary, constitutionally mandated to protect citizens' rights and ensure equality, must address this issue within its own functioning. As the chief justice has noted, women bring different perspectives and experiences, which improve the quality of judicial decision-making and public confidence in the justice system. A judiciary that does not adequately represent half the population risks appearing distant from the society it serves.

Of late, some steps in the right direction have been taken. The Supreme Court's mandate of 30 per cent reservation for women in the state Bar Councils is an important move because leadership at the Bar shapes opportunities, visibility, and eventually judicial appointments. But more systemic reforms are needed. These include institutional mentoring, transparent briefing systems, financial support for young litigators, childcare facilities near courts, flexible work arrangements, gender-sensitive court infrastructure, and strong grievance-redress mechanisms. Equally important is a more transparent and broad-based system of judicial appointments, offering fair representation to women. To achieve a balanced and inclusive judiciary that upholds the rule of law and the principles of equality enshrined in the Constitution of India, the reform must begin within the legal system itself — at the Bar, in the collegium of judges, and on the Bench.

Don't waste the oil price shock

The current oil crisis has emphasised the need for energy security. India must take urgent action to deal with the crisis, which may aggravate further. What are our options?

About 85 per cent of our consumption of petroleum products is based on imported crude oil. So, the obvious option is to reduce consumption of petroleum products. In 2025-26, India's consumption (including projections for March 2026) will be about 270 million tonnes (Mt). Of this, 132 Mt, or about 54 per cent, is accounted for by transport fuels, of which 60 Mt of high-speed diesel (HSD) is used by heavy and light commercial trucks, 22 Mt of diesel by other vehicles, 40 Mt for motorship, and around 10 Mt for aviation fuel.

Crude oil imports alone in 2025-26 are around 225 Mt. At \$120 per barrel, the annual import bill for crude oil will be around \$60 billion, compared with \$80 billion at a crude price of \$60 per barrel. This has already depreciated the Indian rupee to 95 per dollar. The following needs to be done urgently.

Of the 60 Mt of HSD, 50 Mt is used by heavy-duty trucks, largely for long-distance freight movement. This could be shifted to railways if we carry out some reforms. The same level of investment and focus, as spent on high-tech railways, should also be put into making them viable for efficient, on-time, point-to-point intercity delivery.

Goods transport by trucks rather than rail is preferred for a number of reasons: Railways cost more; truck movement is more reliable and on time; trucks deliver goods door-to-door; trucks ensure secure movement of goods; movement by rail involves extra loading and unloading.

The Railways can take care of all this. In fact, the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) between Palanpur in Gujarat and Rewari in Haryana covers the

630 km distance in 12 hours. It is also facing a shortage of flat wagons on which trucks can be wheeled. Scheduled goods trains in the T-o-T (Trucks-on-Trains) mode, where fully loaded trucks are wheeled onto the train and, at the destination, wheeled out, can address this.

A boost can be given to such movements by reducing freight tariff, which is currently higher than justified to subsidise passenger transport. The current oil crisis is an opportunity to rationalise train fares and goods tariff. Currently, the Railways is facing a shortage of flat cars. This can be quickly expanded.

The other DFCs under construction should be speeded up, and scheduled goods trains should run even on shorter routes between major cities. We should target shifting 50 per cent of long-distance goods traffic currently carried by trucks to railways by 2030, and 90 per cent by 2035. This will reduce diesel consumption by trucks by 25 Mt by 2030, resulting in total petroleum product consumption by around 10 per cent by 2030 and 20 per cent by 2035.

Large opportunities exist in replacing 82 Mt of petroleum products used in other electric vehicles (EV) in cars, taxis, three-wheelers and buses. Also, a 20 per cent blending of ethanol with petrol has already been mandated and achieved. Ethanol has a calorie density that is half of petrol. So the 20 per cent blending would reduce miles per gallon of blended fuel by 10 per cent. Assuming people drive the same distance, total fuel consumption will rise by about 10 per cent, but petrol consumption will decline. The net reduction in petrol consumption will be 12 per cent.

India is producing the required ethanol domestically. However, a lot of this is from corn. This is not the best option. It should be produced from agricultural waste. Fortunately, new enzymes have made cellulosic ethanol much cheaper. The government provides

incentives to set up such plants. The PM-JIVAN scheme provides viability gap funding up to ₹150 crore to offset high capital cost. It also provides interest subvention of up to 6 per cent for five years on loans taken to set up such plants.

Two large plants were recently commissioned: One by Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd at Barghar and another by Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd at Bathinda. The economics of such plants can be improved by selling the by-products, such as lignin for green plastics and biochar. In the United States, companies are now producing aviation fuel from ethanol, incentivised by the clean fuel production tax credit. Still, the logistics of collecting and transporting agricultural waste have to be improved. Village-level briquette plants, operated by entrepreneurs who buy straw and make briquettes, can facilitate collection and transport.

However, electric vehicles provide a much larger opportunity. India aims to achieve 30 per cent private car electrification, 70 per cent commercial vehicle electrification, 40 per cent bus electrification, and 80 per cent two/three-wheeler electrification by 2030, totalling 30 per cent of all road vehicles. This goal targets 80 million EVs by 2030. This will reduce diesel consumption by trucks even further, as many light commercial vehicles would be EVs.

The long lines observed recently at petrol and diesel pumps in many cities should further boost EV adoption and make it more likely that India will achieve its strengthened NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions), adopted by the Union Cabinet on March 25, 2026.

Such a multi-pronged effort can get India closer to energy security. The present oil crisis is an opportunity that we should fully use and streamline India's development pathway.

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Guerrillas in the mainstream



ADITI PHADNIS

tion in India's military history, there is another side of the story. Narrated simply and movingly by a man who transitioned from being an insurgent to an elected member of the Legislative Assembly, a minister, and later Mizoram's chief minister.

When the British left India, Mizoram felt it ought to have had a chief — Jotin Pakistan? Burma? India? The MNF was launched against the overhang of poverty, the Moutam (bamboo flowering) season once every 50 years, which caused an infestation of rats and famine, and a general sense that India, its bureaucrats and its political leadership didn't understand Mizoram. Zoramthanga describes the IAF bombing and its aftermath. "That day Aizawl was scarred forever. The memory of the bombs, the flames and the flight of our people still hangs in the air of those hills — like smoke that never really fully clears".

Overnight, the MNF turned from a conventional army into a guerrilla force. It learnt from the Second Battalion of the Assam Regiment that had many Mizo soldiers and was disbanded by the Government of India "owing to internal problems". The book is a treasure trove of information about guerrilla tactics and strategy as much as it speaks with pride about the MNF's contribution to forcing Indian recognition of Mizo nationalism. Eventually, the MNF itself split — the eternal story of factional infighting among guerrilla outfits.

The book also has a riveting account of the "foreign affairs" conducted by the MNF to get governments and support from the governments of Pakistan (for many years Laldenga lived in Dacca, which was part of undivided Pakistan), Burma, the United States, China and Europe. Pakistan hosted Mizo freedom fighters, especially after the Mujibur Rahman government

came to power in Bangladesh, and most of the MNF's top leadership shifted to Karachi and Islamabad. They also set up camp in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and fought against the Indian Army side by side with Pakistan Army's Special Services Group in 1972. Those stories would make Jason Bourne go pale! But no war can last forever. Geographically, Mizoram was part of India and the tug of the motherland was too strong to ignore. The book meticulously records the MNF's negotiations with the Indian government, which started in 1971 and continued over the years at various world capitals, through many vicissitudes. As MNF was a guest of the Pakistani government, making contact with Indians had to be covert.

In Bangkok at a crucial meeting in 1975, Zoramthanga set the MNF's terms



From Guerrilla Fighter to Chief Minister: A Memoir by Zoramthanga Published by Penguin 430 pages ₹599

for peace in Mizoram: Peaceful negotiations to resolve Mizo aspirations, no military to be deployed, no preconditions, removal of the ban on the MNF as a political group, all cases against Laldenga and members of the MNF to be dropped, and the (Indian) government imposed on Mizoram to be dissolved followed by President's rule with elections to follow. But then the Emergency was imposed. Covert agencies manipulated one faction of the MNF against the other. New leaders emerged, challenging Laldenga's leadership. In 1979, he clawed back his position as MNF president and ratcheted up the pressure against the Union government. He was arrested by the Morarji Desai government. Trust was gone forever. It seemed. Negotiations limped along until Rajiv Gandhi came to power and

signed an agreement in 1986: Full statehood in return for putting down arms, without any guarantees on ownership and transfer of land and natural resources. Laldenga became chief minister in a power-sharing agreement with the Congress. Zoramthanga, now in his eighties, became chief minister in 1998, going on to serve three terms. In his book, he captures the complexities of the transition from war to peace in prose that is elegant and spare. Barring some small factual errors — Sam Manekshaw, Eastern Army Commander during Operation Jericho was not, contrary to reports, injured in operations; Zahir Shah was King of Afghanistan (as the author notes elsewhere in the book) not Iran. And the Chinese could not have offered the MNF a donation of 150,000 yen via the ISI during their sojourn in Satek Hill Range, East Pakistan, as the Chinese currency was the yuan. For those who want to understand guerrilla groups, politics in the Northeast and most importantly, what not to do there, this book is compulsory reading.

OPINION

Buffett's real lesson is the one you never learnt

Is the legendary investor actually a bear?



SHANKAR SHARMA

Law 3: Conceal Your Intentions – Robert Greene, The 48 Laws of Power

We admire in people the qualities that we lack in ourselves. At least, I do. My admiration for Warren Buffett has less to do with his investment record, and more to do with his being an — but with a wily old coyote like Buffett, you can never be sure — unintentional doppelganger of Rollie Tyler, the central character in the 1986 thriller, *F/X*, also known as *Murder by Illusion*. Tyler is a special effects expert who has to use all his nous to keep his adversaries, and the movie's audience, guessing about what he truly is doing.

Tyler's sleights were many. So are Buffett's. While long professing that derivatives are "weapons of mass destruction", he has himself been one of the most prolific users of derivatives in America. While telling us that stocks should be held for the longest time — and of course he has held quite a few for a very long time — based on some data it turns out that his average holding period is around 2 years. I have personally held derivative positions longer. He has never liked commodities. But he has bought plenty of oil producers. And a long-forgotten subset of his storied life has been his Hunt Brothers-type (failed) coming of the silver market in the '90s.

But all this is okay. Maybe he read Robert Greene more diligently than I did.

What got me really thinking (that dark art that we all forget in a bull market) was a lazy Monday morning's eyeballing of his investment record.

I am not sure who coined this very perspicacious line, "Time in the market is more important than timing the market", but it sounds very Buffett-esque. What it basically means is that you should always remain invested and never sit on (substantial) cash.

Investment managers have taken the IPK to this line, and it is sprinkled munificently over every single fund manager podcast or financial TV's indecipherable programming (the only thing that runs it close is "Believe in the India story"). It is a worthwhile pilgrimage to see whether Buffett actually ate his own cheseburgers.

Table 1 is pretty much where the Buffett story gets burnished and dissected simultaneously: the Berkshire stock has delivered 18 per cent over 46 years. But an exegesis of this 18 per cent reveals the truth: Buffett's outperformance comes overhelmingly from getting bear markets right. He trades the S&P 500 in negative years, which more than makes up for an okay-ish performance in bull market years, baring his quite extraordinary 1980s streak.

Table 2 does a vivisection of his bear market homeruns: With one exception — 1990 — Buffett beats every bear market at a canter. The real question to ask at this point is: What triggered this "Sit out the bear market" strategy? That comes up in **Table 3**.

Table 3 shows that moment of fracture in his philosophy — 1990. Buffett played the post-1981 bull market as Sunil Gavaskar played his 1971 debut series against the West Indies: 774 runs, average 154.

But like Gavaskar against a demonic Dennis Lillee in Australia in the immediately thereafter in the Rest of the World XIVs Ausfies series (444 runs, average 18), Buffett came a capper in 1990.

Buffett came in fat and lazy after 8 years of easy wins. The market pounded him into a Round 9 knockout: He lost 23 per cent when the S&P 500 delivered its first, minority negative year since 1981. That's when it dawned upon Buffett that market timing is not everything. It's the only thing. Losing less in a bear market is the key to the Escape Room jail break. Post that knockout, Buffett got every single bear market right, right down to the current one.

Buffett realised, as any investor with some unimpaired thinking will, that consistently beating a bull market is an impossibility. The only way you can beat the market is to take a bet opposite to the market, or else you are destined to be, at best, a market performer. And that away-from-market bet is cash or its cousins. Done wrong, you run a career risk bigger than John McCaffee's. Done right, you look like Aditya Puri exiting the IDFC bank at the very peak of the HDFC Bank bull market.

At another time has this strategy of taking cash calls and indulging in that abhorrent voodoo of "market timing" been more consequential and germane for investors as in the past 2 years in India. Remaining fully invested in Indian equities has meant giving up on massive bull markets in gold and silver.

Not sitting on cash or diversifying into non-equity assets has cost 2 years of negative real and nominal returns.

Let's understand why getting cash decisions right is so momentous. Cash bears



Performance of Berkshire vs S&P 500

| Period | CAGR (%) | | Percentage points | | |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|-------------------|---|---|
| | Berkshire | S&P 500 | Excess return | Outperformance when S&P 500 is positive | Outperformance when S&P 500 is negative |
| 1981-2025 (46 Years) | 17.7 | 10.6 | 7.1 | 4.6 | 14.6 |

Attribution of bear market outperformance

| Year | Returns (%) | | Excess return (Percentage points) |
|------|-------------|-------|-----------------------------------|
| | Berkshire | S&P | |
| 1981 | 31.8 | -9.7 | 41.5 |
| 1990 | -23.1 | -3.1 | -19.9 |
| 2000 | 26.6 | -9.1 | 35.7 |
| 2001 | 6.5 | -11.9 | 18.4 |
| 2002 | -3.8 | -22.1 | 18.3 |
| 2008 | -31.8 | -37 | 5.2 |
| 2018 | 2.8 | -4.4 | 7.2 |
| 2022 | 4 | -18.1 | 22.1 |

Annual percentage change

| Year | Returns (%) | | Excess return (Percentage points) |
|------|-------------|------|-----------------------------------|
| | Berkshire | S&P | |
| 1981 | 31.8 | -9.7 | 41.5 |
| 1982 | 38.4 | 14.8 | 23.6 |
| 1983 | 69.0 | 17.3 | 51.8 |
| 1984 | -2.7 | 1.4 | -4.1 |
| 1985 | 93.7 | 26.3 | 67.4 |
| 1986 | 14.2 | 14.6 | -0.5 |
| 1987 | 4.6 | 2.0 | 2.6 |
| 1988 | 59.3 | 12.4 | 46.9 |
| 1989 | 84.6 | 27.3 | 57.3 |
| 1990 | -23.1 | -3.1 | -19.9 |

the illusion of constant opportunity. The incontrovertible truth is that as bull market peaks, you run out of sensible, defensible opportunities. That's how you judge that the bull is heading to its maker.

Markets seduce you into thinking: "I must always be doing something." Cash is your protest against that. Cash protects you from forced narratives. When you're fully invested, you must always believe the market will go up. Cash lets you buy an antidote to this: intellectual honesty. And finally, constance of anything degrades. That's why interval training works way better than steady running. That's why intermittent fasting works better than eating many small meals.

Intermittence generates regeneration. Cash at tactical times is that intermittence that regenerates your portfolio when everybody else's is heavily diabetic because of the abundance of the bull market.

Cash fights entropy. It's clear: The disorbed, nettlesome investment truth is that the only way to handily beat the market over decades is to time the market. Being away in the market is exposing yourself to the market's acid in bear markets, that takes away all the collagen accumulated in bull markets.

Generating 20-30 per cent alpha in bull markets is a near impossibility. But sitting out a bear market, delivers you that quicker than Blinkit. Sitting out a bear market makes you start the next bull market at Mile 13 even as other runners are in the hospital, and not even at the start line. Not losing 30 per cent puts you 50 per cent ahead of the pack.

In India, the illusory investment gnosist totters on this narrow mountain top: Always think aggressive. Don't you

ever think defensive. Of course, there is the vested interest of the entire money management ecosystem investing you in this over-simplified thought.

Reality is: Offence gets you the cheers. But defence gets you the years. Think Srikanth and, again, Gavaskar. Ergo, as proven with data from the Oracle himself, timing the market beats time in the market hands down.

As a corollary, this will make you feel like you just discovered your spouse was cheating on you. Not only is Buffett a market timer, Buffett is a bear in the hide of a bull. His bearishness has earned him permanent returns. His bullhissness has earned him eternal relevance. Combined, it has earned him the rights to Law 3: The Perfect Deception.

Why isn't market timing done by investment managers? Because timing the market successfully is the equivalent of producing an offspring that combines Bradman, Christopher Nolan, Messi, Da Vinci, John von Neumann and Sachin. There's another problem: We have been told by plenty of Indian fund managers that "optimism" is almost the only key ingredient to making a lot of money. Maybe, but critical thinking, also known as negative thinking, prevents plane crashes, hospital deaths, cyber attacks. It prevents permanent loss of capital too.

True investment genius isn't so much about getting bull markets right. Most do. Oraclehood is conferred only when you get bear markets right. That's Buffett's cloaked edge that nobody told you about. And anybody with that wizardry won't be wasting his time managing your money for 1 per cent per year.

The writer is an investor & founder of GQ FinXRay, an AI company

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT
THIS IS A PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY AND IS NOT A PROSPECTUS ANNOUNCEMENT AND DOES NOT CONSTITUTE AN INVITATION OR OFFER TO ACQUIRE, PURCHASE OR SUBSCRIBE TO SECURITIES. NOT FOR RELEASE, PUBLICATION OR DISTRIBUTION DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY OUTSIDE INDIA. THERE WILL BE NO PUBLIC OFFERING OF EQUITY SHARES IN THE UNITED STATES.

SHELLZ INDIA LIMITED
Corporate Identification Number: U15490DL2012PLC235397

Our Company was incorporated as a private limited company under the name "Tilost Foods Private Limited" under the provisions of the Companies Act, 1956 vide certificate of incorporation dated May 07, 2012, issued by the Registrar of Companies, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Haryana. Further, the name of our company was changed from "Tilost Foods Private Limited" to "Shellz India Private Limited" pursuant to a special resolution passed in the extraordinary general meeting of our shareholders held on August 04, 2020 with the fresh certificate of incorporation dated on September 21, 2020 issued by the Registrar of Companies, Delhi. Thereafter, our company was converted from a private limited company to a public limited company pursuant to a special resolution passed in the extraordinary general meeting of our shareholders held on December 12, 2024 and the name of our Company was changed to "Shellz India Limited" with a fresh certificate of incorporation dated February 04, 2025, issued to our Company by the Assistant Registrar of Companies/Deputy Registrar of Companies/Registrar of Companies, Central Processing Centre. For further details on incorporation and registered office of our Company, see "History and Certain Corporate Matters" on page 217 of the Draft Red Herring Prospectus ("DRHP") dated March 30, 2026, filed with the SME Platform of BSE ("BSE SME") on March 30, 2026.

Registered & Corporate Office: 39/35, 2nd Floor, Main Rottak Road, Near Shivaji Park Metro Station, West Punjabi Bagh, Shivaji Park (West Delhi), Delhi - 110 026, India.
Contact Person: Sumit Kumar, Company Secretary and Compliance Officer
Telephone: 011 - 4850 4850 | Email: investor@shellz.in | Website: www.shellz.in

THE PROMOTERS OF OUR COMPANY ARE KAPIL GARG AND SHALINI GARG

INITIAL PUBLIC OFFERING OF UP TO 40,000,000 EQUITY SHARES OF FACE VALUE OF ₹ 10/- EACH ("EQUITY SHARES") FOR CASH AT A PRICE OF ₹ 10 PER EQUITY SHARE (INCLUDING A PREMIUM OF ₹ 4 PER EQUITY SHARE) ("ISSUE PRICE") AGGREGATING TO ₹ 10 LAKHS ("THE ISSUE"). THE ISSUE WILL CONSTITUTE 1% OF THE POST-ISSUE PAID UP EQUITY SHARE CAPITAL OF OUR COMPANY. THE ISSUE INCLUDES A RESERVATION OF UP TO 4% EQUITY SHARES AGGREGATING TO ₹ 10 LAKHS (CONSTITUTING UP TO 4% OF THE POST ISSUE PAID-UP EQUITY SHARE CAPITAL OF OUR COMPANY) FOR SUBSCRIPTION BY MARKET MAKER ("MARKET MAKER RESERVATION PORTION"). THE ISSUE LESS THE MARKET MAKER RESERVATION PORTION IS HERINAFTER REFERRED TO AS THE "NET ISSUE". THE ISSUE AND THE NET ISSUE WILL CONSTITUTE 4% AND 0% RESPECTIVELY OF THE POST-ISSUE PAID-UP EQUITY SHARE CAPITAL OF OUR COMPANY.

OUR COMPANY, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE BRLM, MAY CONSIDER AN ISSUE OF SPECIFIED SECURITIES, AS MAY BE PERMITTED UNDER APPLICABLE LAW TO ANY PERSON(S) OF UP TO 8,00,000 EQUITY SHARES PRIOR TO FILING OF THE RED HERRING PROSPECTUS WITH THE ROC ("PRE-IPO PLACEMENT"). THE PRE-IPO PLACEMENT, IF UNDERTAKEN, WILL BE AT A PRICE TO BE DECIDED BY OUR COMPANY, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE BRLM. IF THE PRE-PLACEMENT IS COMPLETED, THE AMOUNT RAISED PURSUANT TO THE PRE-PLACEMENT WILL BE REDUCED FROM THE ISSUE SUBJECT TO COMPLIANCE WITH RULE 19(2)(b) OF THE SCRR. THE PRE-PLACEMENT, IF UNDERTAKEN, SHALL NOT EXCEED 20% OF THE SIZE OF THE ISSUE. PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE ISSUE, OUR COMPANY SHALL APPROPRIATELY INTIMATE THE SUBSCRIBERS TO THE PRE-IPO PLACEMENT. PRIOR TO ALLOTMENT PURSUANT TO THE PRE-IPO PLACEMENT, THAT THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT OUR COMPANY MAY PROCEED WITH THE ISSUE OR THE ISSUE MAY BE SUCCESSFUL AND WILL RESULT INTO LISTING OF THE EQUITY SHARES ON THE STOCK EXCHANGE. FURTHER, RELEVANT DISCLOSURES IN RELATION TO SUCH INTIMATION TO THE SUBSCRIBERS TO THE PRE-IPO PLACEMENT (IF UNDERTAKEN) SHALL BE APPROPRIATELY MADE IN THE RELEVANT SECTIONS OF THE RED HERRING PROSPECTUS AND THE PROSPECTUS. THE FACE VALUE OF EQUITY SHARES IS ₹ 10/- EACH. THE FACE VALUE OF THE EQUITY SHARES IS ₹ 10/- EACH. THE ISSUE PRICE IS 10 TIMES OF THE FACE VALUE OF THE EQUITY SHARES. THE PRICE BAND AND THE MINIMUM BID LOT WILL BE DECIDED BY OUR COMPANY, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE BOOK RUNNING LEAD MANAGER AND WILL BE ADVERTISED IN ALL EDITIONS OF (A) A WIDELY CIRCULATED ENGLISH NATIONAL DAILY NEWSPAPER, (B) A WIDELY CIRCULATED HINDI NATIONAL DAILY NEWSPAPER, AND ALL EDITIONS OF THE HINDI DAILY NEWSPAPER, (C) HINDI BEING THE REGIONAL LANGUAGE OF, WHERE OUR REGISTERED OFFICE IS LOCATED, AT LEAST TWO WORKING DAYS PRIOR TO THE BID / ISSUE OPENING DATE AND SHALL BE MADE AVAILABLE TO BSE LIMITED FOR UPLOADING ON THEIR WEBSITE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SEBI ICDR REGULATIONS.

In case of any revision in the Price Band, the Bid / Issue Period will be extended by at least three additional Working Days after such revision in the Price Band, subject to the Bid / Issue Period not exceeding 10 Working Days. In cases of force majeure, banking strike or similar unforeseen circumstances, our Company may, in consultation with the BRLM, for reasons to be recorded in writing, extend the Bid / Issue Period for a minimum of one Working Day, subject to the Bid / Issue Period not exceeding 10 Working Days. Any revision in the Price Band and the revised Bid / Issue Period, if applicable, shall be widely disseminated by notification to the Stock Exchange, by issuing a public notice and also by indicating the change on the website of the BRLM and at the terminals of the Syndicate Members and by intimation to Designated Intermediaries and the Sponsor Bank, as applicable.

This Issue is being made through the Book Building process, in terms of Rule 19(2)(b) of the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Rules, 1957, as amended ("SCRR") read with Regulation 25(2) of the SEBI ICDR Regulations and in compliance with Regulation 25(1) and Regulation 25(3) of the SEBI ICDR Regulations wherein not more than 50% of the Net Issue shall be available for allocation on a proportionate basis to Qualified Institutional Buyers ("QIBs", the "QIB Portion"), provided that our Company in consultation with the BRLM, may allocate up to 60% of the QIB Portion to Anchor Investors and the basis of such allocation will be on a discretionary basis by our Company in consultation with the BRLM, in accordance with the SEBI ICDR Regulations (the "Anchor Investor Portion"), of which, 40% shall be reserved in the following manner: (i) 33.33% shall be available for allocation to domestic Mutual Funds, and (ii) 6.67% shall be available for Life Insurance Companies and Pension Funds, subject to valid Bids being received from domestic Mutual Funds, Life Insurance Companies and Pension Funds at or above the Anchor Investor Allocation Price. In the event of under-subscription in (i) above, the allocation may be made to domestic Mutual Funds. In the event of under-subscription, or non-allocation in the Anchor Investor Portion, the balance Equity Shares shall be added to the QIB Portion (other than Anchor Investor Portion) ("Net QIB Portion"). Further, 5% of the Net QIB Portion shall be available for allocation on a proportionate basis only to Mutual Funds, subject to valid Bids being received at or above the Issue Price, and the remainder of the Net QIB Portion shall be available for allocation on a proportionate basis to all QIBs (other than Anchor Investors), including Mutual Funds, subject to valid Bids being received at or above the Issue Price. This public announcement is made in compliance with regulation 24(7) of the SEBI ICDR Regulations, which states that the DRHP filed with the BSE SME shall be made available to the public for comments, if any, for a period of at least 21 days, from the date of such filing by hosting it on the website of the BSE SME at www.bse.com, and the website of the Company at www.shellz.in, and at the website BRLM, i.e. Soradam Capital Private Limited at https://soramadam.in/. Our Company hereby invites the members of the public to give their comments to BSE SME, to Company Secretary and Compliance Officer of our Company and/or the BRLM at their respective addresses mentioned below. All comments must be received by BSE SME and/or our Company and/or BRLM in relation to the Issue on or before 5 p.m. on the 21st day from the aforesaid date of filing the DRHP with BSE SME.

Investments in equity and equity-related securities involve a degree of risk and investors should not invest any funds in the Issue unless they can afford to take the risk of losing their entire investment. Investors are advised to read the risk factors carefully before taking an investment decision in the Issue. For taking an investment decision, investors must rely on their own examination of our Company and the Issue, including the risks involved. The Equity Shares in the Issue have not been recommended or approved by the SEBI, nor does SEBI guarantee the accuracy or adequacy of the contents of the DRHP. Specific attention of the investors is invited to "Risk Factors" on page 26 of the DRHP.

Any decision to invest in the Equity Shares described in the DRHP may only be made after the Red Herring Prospectus ("RHP") has been filed with the ROC and must be made on the basis of the RHP as there may be material changes in the RHP from the DRHP. The Equity Shares, when offered, through the RHP are proposed to be listed on BSE SME.

For details of the main objects of the Company as contained in its Memorandum of Association, see "History and Certain Corporate Matters" on page 217 of the DRHP. The liability of the members of the Company is limited. For details of the share capital and capital structure of the Company and the names of the signatories to the Memorandum of Association and the number of shares subscribed by them see "Capital Structure" on page 96 of the DRHP.

| BOOK RUNNING LEAD MANAGER TO THE ISSUE | REGISTRAR TO THE ISSUE | COMPANY SECRETARY AND COMPLIANCE OFFICER |
|--|--|---|
| SOCRADAMUS CAPITAL PRIVATE LIMITED Gala No. 303, Cama Industrial Estate, Sun Mill Compound, Delhi Road, Lower Panel (West), Mumbai - 400 013, Maharashtra, India Telephone: 022 - 4961 4235 E-mail: info@socradamus.in Investor Grievance Email: investors@socradamus.in Website: https://socradamus.in/ | BIGSHARE SERVICES PRIVATE LIMITED Office No. 56-2, 6th Floor, Pinnacle Business Park, next to Anura Centre, Mahakali Caves Road, Andheri East, Mumbai - 400 033, Maharashtra, India Telephone: 022 - 6058 8200 Email: ipo@bigshareonline.com Investor Grievance E-mail: investor@bigshareonline.com Website: www.bigshareonline.com Contact Person: Babu Rajaghad C SEBI Registration No.: NR000001385 | SHELLZ INDIA LIMITED Sumit Kumar, Company Secretary and Compliance Officer Address: 39/35, 2nd Floor, Main Rottak Road, Near Shivaji Park Metro Station, West Punjabi Bagh, Shivaji Park (West Delhi), Delhi - 110 026, India Tel. No. 011-4850 4850; Email: cs@shellz.in Investor Grievance E-mail: investor@shellz.in Website: www.shellz.in |

Investors can contact our Company Secretary and Compliance Officer, Book Running Lead Manager or Registrar to the Issue, in case of any pre issue or post issue related problems, such as non-receipt of letter of allotment, non-credit of allotted Equity shares in the respective beneficiary account, non-receipt of refund orders and non-receipt of funds by electronic mode etc.

All capitalized terms used and not specifically defined shall have the same meaning as ascribed to them in the DRHP

For SHELLZ INDIA LIMITED
On behalf of the Board of Directors
Sd/-
Kapil Garg
Managing Director

Place: Delhi
Date: April 01, 2026

SHELLZ INDIA LIMITED is proposing, subject to applicable regulatory and statutory requirements, receipt of requisite approvals, market conditions and other considerations, an initial public offering of its Equity Shares and has filed a Draft Red Herring Prospectus with BSE SME. The Draft Red Herring Prospectus is available on the website of BSE SME at www.bse.com, the website of the Company at www.shellz.in and the Book Running Lead Manager at https://soramadam.in/. Any potential investor should note that investments in equity shares involve a high degree of risk and are qualified to refer to the section titled "Risk Factors" on page 26 of the DRHP. Potential investors should not rely on the Draft Red Herring Prospectus filed with BSE SME for making any investment decision.

This announcement does not constitute an invitation or issue of securities for sale in any jurisdiction. The Equity Shares offered in the Issue have not been and will not be registered under the U.S. Securities Act, 1933 ("U.S. Securities Act") or any state securities laws in the United States, and may not be offered or sold within the United States, except pursuant to an exemption from, or in a transaction not subject to, the registration requirements of the U.S. Securities Act and applicable state securities laws. Accordingly, the Equity Shares are being offered and sold (a) in the United States only to "Qualified Institutional Buyers" (as defined in Rule 144A under the U.S. Securities Act). The Equity Shares have not been and will not be registered, listed or otherwise qualified in any other jurisdiction outside India and may not be offered or sold, and Bids may not be made by persons in any such jurisdiction, except in compliance with the applicable laws of such jurisdiction.

AdBaaZ

OUR VIEW

MY VIEW | OTHER SPHERE



The WTO isn't working but sub-deals hold hope

The trade body's ministerial meeting ended with nothing to show, but India should rethink its current stance on plurilateral pacts. These could offer a way around a dysfunctional WTO

Like the ministerial gatherings in 1999, 2003 and 2017, the 14th Ministerial of the World Trade Organization (WTO), held at Yaoundé, Cameroon, ended without an agreement on anything. US trade representative Jamieson Greer used the occasion to reiterate his long-held view that the WTO is not of much use. This trade body operates by consensus and India has had its fair share of blame for such huddles yielding little, having held firm on its right to subsidize agriculture, a point that rich countries found hard to stomach. This time, the big tussle was over the extension of a moratorium on digital commerce tariffs, with the US and Brazil as the principal adversaries. A plurilateral pact is in the works to keep digitally transmitted stuff duty-free—led by the EU, which has invited other members to sign up for it. Such plurilateral deals have the advantage of bypassing the WTO's system of consensual decision-making. There is no bar, though, on its members forging pacts among themselves in breakout groups. Another agreement of this kind being thrashed out is aimed at investment facilitation.

Like Brazil, India was glad to see the WTO's no-tariff rule on digital trade lapse; New Delhi views such duties as a sovereign right. But it has also taken a broad stance against plurilateral deals, arguing that these exceed the scope of the WTO framework. Principled as this sounds, it amounts to making the best the enemy of the good. The WTO has been crippled ever since US President Donald Trump refused, in his first term, to fill vacancies in the appellate authority over its dispute settlement mechanism. Those posts remain vacant, leaving the body's adjudicatory role in suspended animation. One way out is for a willing coalition to reach a sub-deal

without the US aimed at reviving this key function for disputes that do not involve America. A new appellate body could be set up for this. It would be better than pushing for another multilateral rule-maker for trade that excludes the US altogether. America has shown scant respect for the basic tenets of a liberal trade order. It has scoffed at the most-favoured-nation principle, by which every WTO member must treat everyone else equally. If the US wants to flout WTO rules in its myopic self-interest, there is no reason for the rest to suffer a world without trade rules. For India to reject plurilateral pacts as a matter of principle is to deprive itself of desirable options in the face of evidence that the world's largest economy has more or less gone rogue.

India and the bulk of developing countries are justified in rejecting the proposition that digital goods should forever stay duty-free. Movies, video games, software packages and the like were only a minor part of world trade back in the 1990s, when that moratorium found WTO favour. Now, they are not just part of the standard fare of exports and imports, their value has grown enormously. Since taxing an imported shirt, say, is a sovereign decision, so should levying a tariff on digital products be. However, staying aloof from the investment pact strikes a discordant note. As India joins global supply chains, it would need not just inflows, but also easier pathways to invest abroad. We could gain from a transparent, non-arbitrary framework for such investments and their taxation, so long as a sub-deal offers us sufficient latitude to serve our own interests. India was enthusiastic about development being placed on the WTO agenda at its Doha Round of talks in 1999. Can there be development without investment?

Labour scarcity: Builders mostly have themselves to blame for it

Businesses should pay workers better wages instead of blaming the country's welfare apparatus



ANURAG BEHAR
is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation.

Over the past 15 years, the Azim Premji Foundation has constructed many campuses—varying from 80,000 square feet to 2 million square feet and spread across large cities and small towns. We have worked with some of the largest construction firms and smaller ones too. Their performance has varied.

But in one matter, every one of these companies has faced the same trouble on every project. There has been high uncertainty around labour on site. They find it hard to reliably get the number of workers needed on any given day in the skill mix required. Almost all of this labour comes from rural areas, especially from eastern parts of India.

The more effective construction companies maintain rigorous mechanisms and deep networks to stabilize labour supply from these regions. Still, none of them can manage labour as planned. So I have been asking around, trying to understand what is going on.

The consistent answer points to three factors.

First, people who have worked as construction labourers do not want their children to do the same work. It is physically punishing and requires living away from family for months at a stretch. The wages too do not justify the hardship. Those who have laboured on construction sites want their children to study and find some other livelihood.

Second, over the past two decades, welfare schemes of central and state governments have created a floor of support in rural areas—food through the public distribution system, support for education and livelihoods, plus pensions of various kinds. Construction companies estimate that a rural household can access benefits that amount to perhaps 60-70% of what a construction labourer earns—without leaving home, without enduring physical hardship and without separation from family.

Third, festivals, elections, harvests and weddings—all they pull workers back to their villages. And once they go back home, many do not return.

What all these people are narrating is unsurprising. They are saying that the working conditions and wages of labourers in the construction industry are such that people find it better to stay in their villages, sustained by whatever government support and local livelihoods they can piece together.

The industry is in an intense debate: Are these government welfare programmes misguided? Are they distorting the labour market? The implied suggestion is that the problem is too much government support, not too little industry responsibility. This framing ignores the reality that these programmes are unevenly implemented, with millions effectively excluded.

But let us examine the core claim. So-called 'unskilled' workers make up roughly 80% of the workforce on any construction site. Such a worker earns somewhere between ₹600 and ₹700 a day. At 25 working days a month, that is about ₹15,000. Out of this, the worker must pay for food and lodging at the site while supporting a family back home.

The claim is that this is not attractive enough because government support has made rural life comfortable. Anyone who believes so should spend a day in a labour camp or in the villages these workers come from to see for themselves. What one will find is not comfort but the bare minimum of survival, and

often not even that. To suggest that the problem is excessive government generosity is to misread the situation. By any honest reckoning, these wages do not reflect dignity of labour or demands of the work.

The construction industry has a problem—one of its own making. And the solution is entirely within its power: pay fair wages. Not 'fair' in the language of ethics or morality—though certainly that too—but in the context of the concrete reality of the cost of living and what human labour actually deserves.

But there is something more. The construction industry's predicament is only one instance of a far larger pattern. Across sector after sector, we see the same instinct at work: blame government schemes for distorting incentives, blame the poor for being insufficiently motivated, blame migration patterns, blame anything except the one thing that most directly explains the situation. That one thing is the refusal of business and those in positions of power and wealth to accept that a more equal and more just distribution of income is not clearly—it is a basic condition for a functional and decent society.

The government, for all its limitations, is still doing things. These efforts are real and they matter. What is not keeping pace is the moral imagination of those who employ hundreds of millions of our fellow citizens, and who continue to justify wages as well as work conditions that they themselves would never accept for themselves or their children.

We live in a country where people are very good at diagnosing the failures of the poor and inadequacies of the state. We are considerably less willing to look at the obligations of capital and of those who control it.

As an exercise, go and see how 80% of your fellow human beings actually live. And then try to justify, to yourself first, the distribution of income and wealth that we have collectively chosen to sustain.

10 YEARS AGO

JUST A THOUGHT

It appears that President Trump wishes to disrupt the global multilateral trading system as much as possible.

BARRY GARDINER

GUEST VIEW

Family businesses need accountability, not authority

RAJIV GUPTA



is the author of 'The Good Indian Employee's Guide to Surviving a Lala Company' and chairperson, School of Family Business at Masters' Union.

Dhirubhai Ambani built one of India's greatest business empires but died in 2002 without a clear succession plan. What followed is now business folklore. His elder son, Mukesh Ambani, turned his part of the inheritance into a global enterprise worth over \$117 billion. The younger one, Anil Ambani, eventually declared bankruptcy before a UK court.

The difference was not intelligence or vision. It was structure. One instituted governance systems and raised leaders able to question decisions. The other's businesses struggled under debt and concentrated authority; and when markets turned, that absence of institutionally delegated authority became a crisis. Yet, this is a conversation many Indian family businesses still avoid.

Family-owned firms generate over 75% of India's GDP, among the highest anywhere, according to McKinsey & Company. Business families are preparing to transfer roughly \$1.5 trillion in assets to the next generation. Yet, 36% have no succession plan

and 52% cite resistance from the senior generation as the biggest barrier to a transition. The patriarch, in other words, is often the obstacle, not the market, economy or the next generation's capability.

The one who cannot be questioned. Most Indian family businesses have a central authority figure. Often called the 'lala,' he is usually the founder or patriarch who built the enterprise from scratch, took risks that others avoided, and took the business ahead through difficult years. His authority is earned and deeply respected.

Over time, that respect can result in unquestioned authority. The business begins to follow the instincts and preferences of one individual. Instinct becomes policy. Preference becomes strategy. Discomfort with a new idea becomes the organization's position on that idea.

In the boardroom of a large third-generation family business with revenues well over ₹1,000 crore, this dynamic became clear during a quarterly review. The promoter walked in, glanced at the sales dashboard and asked why the numbers had fallen that quarter. Silence followed. The chief executive officer looked at the head of sales. The head of sales looked at finance. Eventually, someone said the market was slow. The

meeting ended within minutes.

Outside the room, however, the real issues were obvious: a failing distributor strategy, delayed product launches and a digital transformation that existed mostly in PowerPoint presentations. None of it surfaced in the meeting. Over time, organizations learn what can be said openly and what cannot. This is how authority erodes accountability—not through confrontation, but through silence.

The next generation's own trap. Let's be equally honest about the other side, because the next generation carries its own version of this failure.

Typically, the business patriarch's son or daughter returns from a top university, perhaps with years at a consulting firm or a multinational company. They arrive fluent in frameworks, data and the language of disruption. They look at the old ways (such as handshake deals), the *mann* (accountant) who questions every expense, the decisions made on instinct rather than dashboards, and see inefficiency.

Certain areas need to be fixed, they declare; legacies need to be disrupted.

What they don't see is that those old ways often contain encoded wisdom. The *mann* who questions every expense does so because he watched the founder nearly lose everything. This caution is not dysfunction, but memory. The next generation that wants to transform everything before understanding anything mistakes performative leadership for the real thing. Family organizations can tell the difference.

The shift that matters: A transition from authority to accountability is not about installing a performance system or hiring a governance consultant. It is a two-way process, which makes it rare and difficult. The patriarch must place the business above personal identity. Being questioned is not the same as facing disrespect. Rahul Bajaj showed this when his son Rajiv wanted to move from making scooters to motorcycles; he disagreed but did not block the change. That restraint showed leadership.

The next generation, in turn, must earn psychological legitimacy, not simply inherit positional authority. A title can be transferred but trust cannot. Trust is built by being present, by learning the business from within and by demonstrating that you understand what was built before you attempt to rebuild it.

Succession is not an event. It is a years-long process of trust-building, role-clarifying and the setting aside of egos on both sides of the table.

What India cannot afford: Behind every family business are hundreds of livelihoods. Employees, vendors, suppliers and communities depend on it. When leadership transitions fail because a patriarch cannot let go or a successor moves too fast, the damage goes far beyond the family's fortunes.

India is on the path to becoming a \$10 trillion economy. Family businesses will either drive that growth or become cautionary tales. The Ambani succession story is just about two brothers. It reflects a crucial choice for every business owner between building an institution that endures and building a business centred on a select few.

That choice is the difference between leaving behind a legacy and ending up as just another footnote.

Institutional leadership holds the key to lasting success but this is a conversation families avoid



THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

Securities Markets Code: Embed regulatory impact assessments

Market regulation needs to evolve but every new rule should be tested for its necessity, proportionality and consequences



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.



India's capital markets have grown at a remarkable speed. Retail participation has surged, institutional capital has deepened and technology has transformed intermediation. Regulation has expanded alongside. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) today administers over 44 principal regulations and 13 statutory rules, supplemented by more than 2,700 circulars (including master circulars), guidelines, FAQs, general orders and frequent amendments. These span listed companies, intermediaries, managers of portfolio management schemes, mutual funds and alternate investment funds, apart from rating agencies, disclosure norms, takeover, insider trading, stock exchanges, clearing corporations and depositories. Each framework evolves constantly, often with multiple changes in a single year.

Regulatory evolution is inevitable. As products, risks and market structures evolve, regulation must keep pace. But accumulation raises a sharper question: Are we adding rules or improving outcomes? The answer lies in embedding regulatory impact assessment (RIA) into rule-making.

Regulation is essential. Markets face information asymmetry, agency conflicts and systemic risk. Investor protection and integrity are non-negotiable. But regulation is also an economic intervention. It imposes costs, alters incentives and shapes competition. Disclosure mandates require systems, personnel and audit trails. Governance mandates reshape board behaviour and liability exposure. Entry norms determine who participates. These effects compound.

Frequent amendments amplify this burden. Large institutions absorb it; smaller players struggle. The result is not just higher compliance cost, but distortions in competition, higher entry barriers and reduced market diversity. RIA does not dilute regulation. It disciplines it. It asks whether a proposed rule is necessary, proportionate and effective response to a clearly defined problem.

The first step is clarity. What problem is being solved? Is it systemic or episodic? Is it evidenced or anecdotal? Regulation built on isolated events risks overreach.

Second, alternatives. Regulation is not the only tool. Supervision, enforcement, better disclosures or market incentives may achieve the same objective with lower cost.

Third, costs and benefits. Precision may be elusive, but direction is not. Compliance costs, technology investments, liquidity impact, barriers to entry and effects on capital formation must be weighed against gains in transparency and stability.

Fourth, consequences. Markets adapt. Tightening one segment could shift activity elsewhere. With every regulation, grey areas emerge. Higher compliance accelerates consolidation. Entry barriers dampen innovation.

Finally, post-implementation review. Regulations must be tested against outcomes. Periodic review, sunset clauses and outcome-based monitoring prevent regulatory accumulation from turning into regulatory inertia.

Globally, these principles are embedded in statutory frameworks. In the US, Sections 2(b) of the Securities Act of 1933, and 3(b) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 require the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to consider efficiency, competition and capital formation. Rule-making requires detailed economic analysis. Courts enforce this. In *Business Roundtable vs SEC* (2010), the proxy access rule was struck down for inadequate economic assessment. Regulatory authority must be exercised through reasoned analysis, not assumptions.

In the UK, Section 1381 of the Financial Services and Markets Act of 2000 mandates a cost-benefit analysis for proposed rules. The Financial Conduct Authority must explain expected costs, benefits and rationale. Australia follows a similar model through regulatory impact statements. These frameworks strengthen, not weaken, regulators.

India lacks this discipline. While Sebi follows a consultative process, economic analysis remains neither structured nor visible. Practitioners would readily point out that systemic discipline of the kind fostered by RIA, designed to evaluate the costs, benefits and alternatives to any regulation before it is framed, is largely absent in India's regulatory framework for securities. Under a regime where Sebi operates predominantly through delegated legislation, this gap matters. Without structured *ex-ante* assessments, rule-making risks becoming convenience-driven rather than consequence-oriented.

Even after the government nudged regulators towards better rule-making practices and Sebi notified a framework in February 2025 on how regulations should be made, amended and reviewed, its implementation is largely absent from the public domain. The proposed Securities Markets Code, intended to consolidate and modernize core securities laws, also omits any mandate for RIA or its disclosure. That is a significant omission.

The need is evident. Regulatory activity is frequent and wide-ranging. Each change may be justified. The combined impact of changes is rarely assessed. Market participants must constantly update systems, retrain staff and recalibrate processes. The cumulative cost is significant.

RIA introduces a simple test: Does the marginal benefit justify the cumulative cost?

This is not a deregulatory argument. Investor protection and systemic resilience remain non-negotiable. In fact, RIA strengthens these objectives. Evidence-based, proportionate regulation improves compliance and enhances enforcement credibility. Over-regulation, by contrast, risks diffusing regulatory focus and diluting effectiveness.

This is not deregulation but disciplined regulation. Evidence-based rules enhance compliance and sharpen enforcement, while unchecked procedural layering dilutes regulatory focus. If Sebi Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey's stated '4T' framework of 'Transparency, Trust, Technology and Teamwork' is to succeed, it must rest on a foundation of mandatory regulatory impact assessment and public disclosure.

Institutionalizing RIA will require investment in capacity. Regulators need analytical expertise and access to data. Collaboration with academia, economists and data specialists will help. Impact assessments should accompany draft rules, enabling informed consultation. A tiered approach is feasible. Major interventions warrant full analysis; minor changes, lighter scrutiny. The objective is discipline, not delay.

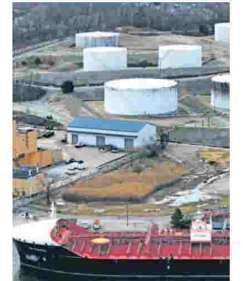
India aims to be a leading global capital market. Investors, domestic and global, value predictability as much as protection. Transparent, reasoned regulation builds confidence. The growth of India's regulatory framework reflects the dynamism of its markets. The issue is not whether regulation should evolve; it must. It is whether each rule is tested for necessity, proportionality and consequence. As regulatory density rises, discipline becomes critical. The strength of regulation lies not in its volume, but in its value. India does not need more rules. It needs better ones—measured, not merely made.

The toll of Hormuz: America's war is evidently Asia's problem

Asian reliance on energy through the strait is too dire to let persist



KARISHMA VASWANI is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering Asia politics with a special focus on China.



A pragmatic response is for Asia to reduce its exposure to oil shocks.

The fighting in West Asia has the world on tenterhooks, but the economic shocks hitting the rest of Asia are so alarming that usually guarded regional leaders are speaking out. From its most resilient countries to the most vulnerable, the region is uniquely dependent on energy flowing through the Strait of Hormuz.

Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan put it bluntly when he described the US as "a revisionist power" that some would even call a "disruptor." He was speaking about the Iran war and America's role in Asia, but also something larger: the erosion of the Washington-led post-war order that "underpinned a remarkable period of peace and prosperity—a foundation that, as he put it last week, is now gone.

This is not simply anxious rhetoric. It reflects a deeper disquiet about how a conflict far from Asia's shores, shaped by decisions made in the US and Iran, is landing on the region. About 90% of the oil and 83% of the liquefied natural gas that normally pass through the Strait of Hormuz are bound for Asia, Balakrishnan noted. "Right now," he said, "the closure of the Strait of Hormuz is, in a sense, an Asian crisis."

The wealthy city-state is typically measured in its language, so when Singapore speaks this directly, the region listens. I've heard similar frustration from several diplomats across Asia who have privately told me they're fatigued by President Donald Trump's volatile foreign policy. First, it was his unpredictable tariff regime they were forced to absorb, then demands to spend more on their own defence—unsettling decades-old security guarantees—and now the growing sense that they're being made to pay for someone else's war.

Wealthier economies like China, Japan and Singapore, with deep pockets and strategic reserves, can cushion the blow in the short term, but others are more exposed. Most Southeast Asian countries have enough reserves of oil stocks to last only 20 to 50 days, notes the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia. Some governments are being forced into drastic action, from declaring a national energy emergency to closing universities early and even asking cricket fans to watch matches at home on television to conserve fuel.

The political fallout is already becoming difficult to contain. And it is likely to intensify, with Houthi involvement raising the risk of trade disruptions in the Red Sea, another critical artery for Asian energy supplies. Across the region, rising fuel costs are triggering unrest: Transport workers have gone on strike in the Philippines,

there's panic buying in parts of Thailand, and in India, tighter supplies of liquefied petroleum gas used for cooking have prompted protests by opposition MPs.

The conflict is also reshaping regional geopolitics in significant ways. Faced with a national fuel emergency, Philippines' President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has suggested that Manila—one of Beijing's most vocal adversaries over competing claims in the South China Sea—would be open to joint oil and gas exploration in the disputed waters. That this is even on the table reflects not trust, but desperation.

China is gaining ground diplomatically, too. It has positioned itself as a global peacekeeper, offering its assistance to end hostilities. At the annual Boao Forum for Asia in Hainan—often described as China's answer to Davos—Singapore's Prime Minister Lawrence Wong called for Beijing to play a larger role in supporting regional stability and growth, highlighting the pull of its vast domestic market.

Some of this is wishful thinking. China's economy is slowing and its long-promised consumption boom has yet to materialize. Its trade surplus exceeding \$1 trillion stems from waves of exports to Asian markets, squeezing local industries and jobs. At the same time, the rapid military build-up of the People's Liberation Army, more frequent confrontations in the South China Sea and sustained pressure around Taiwan continue to fuel regional unease. Beijing may present itself as a stabilizing force, but the reality is far more complex.

The pragmatic response for Asia then is not to choose sides, but to reduce exposure to oil shocks. Diversifying energy supplies, building larger strategic reserves and strengthening regional cooperation would help. Some of this is already happening—the recent commitment by Australia and Singapore to work together on energy security is a good template for others. These coalitions, formed out of necessity, could become the building blocks of a new regional order, replacing an architecture that no longer reflects today's realities.

The Hormuz crisis has exposed a fundamental weakness: Asia is being forced to absorb the costs of a conflict beyond its control. Reducing that dependence will be difficult. But the cost of failing to do so is now impossible to ignore. **©BLOOMBERG**

THEIR VIEW

The Iran war has the global economy on a knife's edge

NOURIEL ROUBINI



is professor emeritus of economics at New York University's Stern School of Business and author of 'Mega Threats: Ten Dangerous Trends That Imperil Our Future, and How to Survive Them'

The financial and economic implications of the US-Israeli war with Iran will depend on the war's duration. The longer it goes on, the longer we can expect oil, gas, fertilizer, helium and other prices to remain elevated. The greater the damage done to the Gulf's oil production and export facilities, the greater the stagflationary pressure, which will have a major impact on global equity markets, bond yields and credit spreads.

The economic damage from higher inflation and lower growth would be most severe in Asia, which is suffering both an energy-price and -quantity shock. Europe is facing negative terms-of-trade pressure and serious inflation risks, but its energy-supply shock will be more limited than Asia's.

The United States, by contrast, is looking at a positive terms-of-trade shock, because it is a net energy exporter. Nonetheless, US inflation will be higher and its growth lower, because those who consume energy (such as households and businesses) will spend less,

whereas those energy producers that enjoy windfall profits will not produce or invest more (knowing all too well that the shock is temporary).

The Donald J. Trump administration and Israel made two serious miscalculations. They assumed that decapitating the Iranian leadership would cause the regime to collapse in a few weeks and that Iran would prove unwilling or unable to block the Strait of Hormuz or damage Gulf energy-production facilities. They were wrong on both counts, and now the market is pricing in US President Trump's desperation for an off-ramp—the famous 'TACO' (Trump Always Chickens Out) scenario.

But expecting TACO also looks like a miscalculation. If Trump ends the war at its current stage and locks in the *status quo*, the threat to shipping in the Strait of Hormuz will remain, risk premia on oil prices will stay permanently higher (at least 20% as estimated) and Trump's popularity will likely sink even further ahead of this year's mid-term elections.

Not only would the current Iranian regime still be in power, but it would almost certainly pursue a nuclear weapon and double down on its production of ballistic missiles, drones and other means of threatening

the Gulf, Europe and the global economy.

So, normative judgements aside, Trump (and Israel) will feel the need to escalate to try to 'finish the job.' That could mean the US seizing Kharg Island, from which 90% of Iran's energy flows, and intensifying daily bombing campaigns to degrade the regime's new leadership and also capacity to project power militarily.

Such a strategy is inherently high-risk, but it could yet lead—in two or three months—to effective regime collapse and a more stable Middle East. The world economy and markets would no longer be subjected to perennial blackmail by a regime with a chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz. The Gulf states and their oil facilities would be safe and secure.

That is the optimistic scenario. If Kharg Island is taken but the regime does not collapse, the Strait of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb off the Houthi-controlled Yemeni coast-line will remain vulnerable, as will the Gulf states and their energy facilities. If the

regime holds on, the stage could be set for a repeat of the 1970s escalation.

Nonetheless, I see escalation and a US-Israeli victory with regime collapse in a few months as more likely than escalation and a US-Israeli defeat. The first scenario is obviously better for everyone, and better than the unstable *status quo*.

But, of course, the second scenario could be worse than the *status quo*. Ultimately, the decision comes down to Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, both of whom are politically doomed if they cannot improve on the current situation in a way that allows them to save face.

The case for eliminating Iran's fanatical Islamist regime remains strong. For 47 years, the Islamic Republic has been a curse on its own people and the wider region. While subjecting Iranians to oppression and economic misery, it has consistently threatened Israel and meddled in Sunni-majority countries and/or countries with large Shia populations, many of which—

including Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, and Libya—have become failed or semi-failed states. In addition to destabilizing the entire Middle East, Tehran has sponsored terrorism around the world, helped fuel mass migration into Europe and supported Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Iran's long-range ballistic missiles can reach all of Europe, while an Iranian regime with nuclear weapons would be a direct threat to all the Middle East and Europe.

Regardless of what one thinks about Trump's choice to go to war, everyone should want an endgame in which the current regime can no longer threaten global economic and financial stability or security. Trying to finish the job is better than the alternatives, even given the obvious risks.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz put it well during the Twelve-Day War last June: "Israel is doing the dirty work for all of us." That was true then and it is true now. Even though Europe, China and Asia would benefit more from the end of the Islamic Republic than America would, US escalation is likely. The best-case scenario is global economic turmoil in the short run followed by greater global stability; but medium- or long-term disruptions are a very real possibility. **©2025/PROJECT SYNDICATE**

Escalation looks likely but it would take a clear US-Israeli victory for the world to be left better off

The Editorial Page

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2026

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY -
RAMNATH GOENKA

IN 1932 •
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Rupee under pressure sharpens RBI challenge

ON MONDAY, the rupee briefly breached the 95 mark against the dollar. While the currency recovered — on Wednesday, it hovered around 93.5 — it has weakened considerably in the recent past. Over the course of 2025-26, the rupee has fallen by around 9.6 per cent against the dollar. In March alone, it fell by over 4 per cent. Since the beginning of the year, the rupee has also seen a decline in its value against the dollar, with the world carries on as if nothing fundamental has changed. The deepening confrontation around Iran belongs to the latter category. The US-Israeli strikes began on February 28 with the stated aim of regime change and dismantling Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. What followed was not the swift collapse promised by a clean decapitation strike. The conflict has now spread across at least a dozen countries, puncturing the illusion of the Gulf as a tax-free sanctuary of order and calm, closing the Strait of Hormuz, and killing thousands across the region. Iran is still firing. Hezbollah has re-entered the fight in Lebanon. The Houthis have joined, too. And the Pentagon is reportedly preparing for weeks of ground operations inside Iran.

This was supposed to be over by now. Instead, it is widening, hardening, and turning into an open-ended, region-wide war with no clear exit and mounting global consequences. This is not a crisis with a fixed cost. Every single day the Strait of Hormuz stays closed, the damage to the global economy compounds. The numbers are not abstract. They are already being calculated, and they are terrifying. Iran's closure of the strait has been described as the largest disruption to the world's energy supply since the 1970s energy crisis. Roughly 20 million barrels of oil per day used to transit the Strait of Hormuz — around 20 per cent of global supply, and more than a quarter of all global

seaborne oil trade. Only a trickle of that is now passing through. US officials and Wall Street analysts are now starting to consider the prospect of oil hitting \$200 a barrel if the strait stays closed into the second quarter. A short closure is an oil shock, but a long one becomes an inflation and growth shock. The situation with gas is even more alarming. Qatar and the UAE account for 99 per cent of Pakistan's LNG imports, 72 per cent of Bangladesh's, and 53 per cent of India's. Japan and South Korea hold LNG reserves sufficient for only two to four weeks of stable demand. Every extra week of closure moves these countries closer to genuine energy scarcity, not just price pain. The Gulf region exports for nearly half of the world's urea accounts and 30 per cent of its ammonia exports, with about a third of all globally traded fertiliser passing through the strait. Urea prices have already risen 50 per cent since the start of the war — from \$482 a ton in February '27 to \$720 by mid-March. The timing is catastrophic. The Northern Hemisphere spring planting season is happening right now. Every additional week that farmers cannot get affordable fertiliser is a week of yield loss that cannot be recovered. You would not replant the spring. A third of the world's helium supply also transits through the Strait of Hormuz. Helium is not a luxury — it is a critical input for semiconductor manufacturing, MRI machines, fibre optic cables, and defence electronics. It cannot be synthesised, stockpiled easily, or quickly replaced with an alternative. Half of all global seaborne

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Indians give to save each other from free fall



MUKULIKA BANERJEE

A RECENT STUDY, 'How India Gives', revealed that Indians, even those who earned less than Rs 5,000 a month, gave some of it away. Over two-thirds of those surveyed said they gave in cash or kind, amounting to \$6 billion (Rs 50 billion) a year. Given that 90 per cent of Indian citizens live on less than Rs 10,000 a month, this is an extraordinary finding. The study provides data for what many know through experience. Having been offered half a banana when I was hungry by a man who slept on a railway platform, I certainly knew that the ability to give in India did not correspond to one's wealth. This report confirms that such anecdotal experiences are part of a wider national, and perhaps cultural, ethos. It concludes that Indian philanthropy is not elite-led but at the household level.

Following these findings on how India gives, I pose the subsequent question: Why does India give?

Based on just-completed qualitative research in Delhi, one answer to this question is that Indians give because there is no choice. It is not that Indians are forced into giving, but rather the reality in which Indians live creates unavoidable pressures. However little one has, there is always someone who has much less. And due to the ways in which lives are intertwined, the feasibility of one life impacts many others around it. Not to give would be to be less than human.

Take the example of Arun, a tailor who works on a pavement with a single sewing machine under a trap, mending tears and shortening trousers. Arun earns Rs 30,000 a month. A third of this is spent on rent and utility bills, the remaining Rs 20,000 must cover food for a family of four, education for two children, phone charges, medical bills and transport. There is never any spare cash. And yet, when his sister in the village had an accident and needed Rs 10,000 to cover costs, he found the money. To show he cared, he also went to visit her with his family and returned with the medical reports to consult a doctor he knew. He then brought his sister to Delhi, cared for her at home, made sure she had the right medicines for a fortnight and sent her back better.

How was someone like Arun able to meet such an unexpected cost? The answer lay in a complicated arrangement of credit, debt, social capital, rural and urban flows, inter-class interaction and resourcefulness. He was part of the ubiquitous 'committee' (chit fund) system that helped him raise some monthly for the periodic fall fall. He paid his wife's jewellery. His brother's working son lived with them and contributed Rs 3,000 a month. And he took advice from his middle-class clientele. This complex web of mutuality kept Arun and his family afloat, and is illustrative of what is happening in the country a billion times over.

What is striking, too, is that each exchange of money, time and knowledge was not simply a transaction but underpinned by a moral universe where the recipient was respected. He did not just send money but visited his sister in person, the doctor who gave him professional advice allowed his trousers to be mended for free, and the peddlers for whom Arun bought tea to drink under the shade of his tarp also bought him tea in return.

Would it be accurate to classify such forms of giving as charity? I would suggest that Indians give in this way because they know if they don't, large segments of the population would simply disappear from society. So, they give not as charity but to create India's 'informal welfare provision'. Formal welfare funded by tax revenue would aim to provide each citizen with the basic dignities of health, education, employment, housing and leisure. Government expenditure in the world's third-largest economy is expected to focus on these priorities, yet allocation for these sectors has been falling or is nonexistent.

While all Indians pay tax, the poor, in fact, pay more consumption tax in proportion to their income and only 3 per cent of Indians earn enough to qualify to pay income tax — the state fails to provide a dignified life for its citizens. So, Indians give again to weave a rudimentary safety net to save each other from free fall. This is one reason for why India gives.

The writer is professor of Social Anthropology at LSE and author of Why India Votes and Cultivating Democracy

The machinery of crisis management is moving, but without the intensity the scale of the threat demands. Most countries are quietly absorbing the pain, hedging their bets, and saying as little as possible in public



VIKAS SWARUP

sulphur passes through the Strait of Hormuz, and sulphur is the feedstock for sulphuric acid, which is essential for processing copper, nickel, and cobalt — the metals inside every battery, every circuit board, and every precision-guided munition being fired in the very war that has blocked the strait. The longer this drags on, the deeper the damage. At this point, there is no economy on Earth that is not in the line of fire. Analysts now calculate that if the closure continues, up to \$3.5 trillion of global GDP — over 3 per cent of the entire world economy — is at risk. A quick end to hostilities might limit losses to around \$500 billion. But every additional day without a ceasefire closes that gap.

With so much at stake, you would expect that every diplomatic phone line on the planet would be burning. That the UN Security Council would be meeting daily with genuine urgency rather than the theatre of vetoes and procedural delays it has offered so far. You would expect Washington to face serious pressure from allies to define an endgame. You would expect Netanyahu to be pressed to articulate not just objectives, but limits — a clear sense of how escalation stops rather than how it continues. You would expect backchannels with Tehran to be working around the clock. You would expect the countries being most damaged by this war — Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Bangladesh — to be at the centre of a coordinated push for a ceasefire. Instead, what we see is some-

thing far more disquieting: A strange, collective drift. Statements are issued, envoys are dispatched, and yet the underlying momentum of escalation remains unchecked. The machinery of crisis management is moving, but without the intensity that the scale of the threat demands. Pakistan is attempting to act as a go-between. But with Washington and Tehran still poles apart on every core issue, it is reduced to passing messages between two sides that are not negotiating, only hardening their positions. Most countries are quietly absorbing the pain, hedging their bets, and saying as little as possible in public.

The silence is as alarming as the war itself. When the most consequential supply-chain disruption in half a century produces this little diplomatic urgency, it tells you something about how badly the international system has atrophied — and how much we have all normalised the idea that crises of this magnitude are simply things that happen to us, rather than things we have the power to stop. The world is not watching a contained regional conflict. It is watching the slow unravelling of the energy architecture, the fuel system, and the supply chains that underpin modern civilisation. We are sleepwalking through it, checking our phones for missile counts, while the consequences stack up quietly in grain markets, gas terminals, and fertiliser depots from Brazil to Bangladesh. At some point, we will wake up. The question is whether there will still be time to do something about it.

The writer is a novelist and former diplomat

Of what do these stones truly sing?



YOGI TRIVEDI

WHILE DRIVING on NH 24 or riding the Delhi Metro this week, one cannot overlook the newest addition to the capital's skyline: A 108-foot tall bronze murti of the child-yogi form of Shri Swaminarayan (1781-1830), consecrated last week by Mahant Swami Maharaj to mark Shri Swaminarayan's 245th anniversary, it now towers over the Akshardham complex. Social media is flooded with visuals of the child-yogi, but his story still seems unappreciated.

In an era when algorithms and rhetoric push us toward ideological extremes, we fail to appreciate nuanced meanings of religious symbols. By breaking free from our conditioning to perceive "saffron" markers, namely mandirs, muris, and monks, purely through the lens of political identity and aesthetic appeal, we may find lessons pertinent to our journey. Shri Swaminarayan's early story is one of movement. Born in Uttar Pradesh, he left home at age 11 to trek over 7,000 miles across the subcontinent, from the Himalayas to Srirangam, Assam to Gujarat. This was a rigorous inquiry into everyday economic, social, and spiritual problems. He travelled in the fashion of a renunciant — wearing a waistcloth, carrying a manuscript with the essence of the Upanishads, eating when offered, resting where permitted, shunning comfort, serving with humility.

In Gujarat, he revived the tradition of building mandirs and practised and preached an inclusive form of Hinduism that sought to diminish the effects of caste and social hierarchy. He established the region's first girls' school and successfully countered practices like sati, dowry, and female infanticide.

On the morning of the consecration, I stood before the murti admiring the child-yogi's smile. I wondered how his journey gained such prominence. Several responses came to mind: He believed in the divine and himself. He welcomed solitude. He accepted the arduous journey. He embraced people of diverse customs, languages, beliefs — and now, they embrace him. There, I sensed a warmth from the glow of the child-yogi's tapas. Shri Swaminarayan's articulation of Hinduism flourished on a foundation of bhakti (love), seva (selfless service), ahimsa-shunya (I-lessness), and atma-jnana (self-realisation). Shri Swaminarayan was not alone in stimulating progressive societal and personal development through his spiritual doctrine. Shashi Tharoor's recent book highlights the contributions of Sri Narayana Guru in Kerala. Diverse regional and spiritual expressions, though often disparaged as divisive weakness, are a pluralistic strength of the pan-Indian spiritual identity.

When looking at religious icons, we must ask ourselves: Of what do these stones truly sing? Under the hullabaloo of pride and identity, these stones sing of faith, courage, service, humility, and acceptance. They offer clarity in a chaotic world. For non-believers, they provide lessons in social history, pluralism, and personal growth. Whether for devotees, visitors, or commuters glancing out a train window, a message is there for the taking — if only we look beyond our digital and ideological screens.

Trivedi is a scholar of religion, media, and bhakti literature and music. His forthcoming book is on Shri Swaminarayan and his community

No new ideas in Assam manifestoes

THE ELECTION manifesto appeals to the voter, to garner support. It lays the terms of the contract between the political party and the electorate. But manifestoes also carry a deeper message about the politics, values and vision of those who seek power over the people, in their name. The BJP's manifesto in Assam and Congress's 'Five Guarantees', both released earlier this week, show the ruling party and the principal opposition in poor light. The Himanta Biswa Sarma government has doubled down on divisive politics, relying on creating suspicion and fear, rather than offering a vision of hope. For its part, Congress has not challenged the government's polarising politics head-on. Instead, its grand 'guarantees' merely tinkers with the existing welfare schemes and it seeks to co-opt cultural flashpoints like the death of singer Bhabani Prasad Gogoi.

The BJP's manifesto echoes the spectres CMSs have often sought to raise. It promises implementation of the Uniform Civil Code, laws against "love jihad" and "land jihad" and more "push-backs" against alleged illegal migrants from Bangladesh. The party seeks to achieve the latter through the recently revived Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950. The manifesto also mentions enhanced allocations under welfare schemes. Congress has promised Rs 50,000 to women in the state to "start and grow businesses". Its 15 lakh health insurance cover for families, an increase in senior citizens' pensions and permanent *patas* for indigenous inhabitants. Its promise of justice for Garg within 100 days is a cynical attempt to capitalise on the singer's popularity, given that the Singapore police have ruled his death an accident.

The manifesto promises are symptoms of a deeper malaise: The major players in Assam, which are also the two largest political parties on the national stage, seem bereft of new ideas. Assam faces serious new issues, including climate-related events and questions around the rapidly changing nature of work and employment. It is undergoing a prolonged reckoning with the assertion of regional identity in a context of increasing diversity. The answers will not be found in more cash transfers or in throwing around the epithet of "jihad". Going by their prior promises, neither the BJP nor Congress seems up to the challenge of addressing voter predicaments in thoughtful or imaginative ways.

Ask AI when will the flowers bloom

IN JAPAN, the delicate blossoms of the cherry tree bear the weight of a storied history and a \$9-billion tourism industry. For a few days every year, millions of people — Japanese and visitors — gather in gardens and parks around the country to contemplate the brief beauty of the sakura. These stakes are high, hanging on a deceptively simple question: When will the flowers bloom? As the long-established system of answering this question, determined by weather reports, is destabilised by climate change, forecasters increasingly depend on artificial intelligence to honour the tradition of *hanami*, or flower viewing.

Perhaps there is something ironic about attempting to pin down a tradition, the essence of which is an acknowledgement — and celebration — of ephemerality. The 72 micro-seasons (*shichijuhni ko*) into which the Japanese calendar was once divided invited a more intimate relationship with the world, based on subtle changes in nature. Seasons like "fish emerge from the ice" (mid-February) and "crickets chirp around the door" (late October), determined the farmer's crop calendar and inspired poets. They governed the fine variations in how tea was prepared from one week to the next and influenced how a garden evolved over the course of a year. Today, Japan may follow the Gregorian calendar like the rest of the world, but sensibilities — aesthetic and cultural — continue to be shaped by the *hanami* ethos.

"This is the real pleasure of this life without tomorrow! The flowers, the sake," wrote the 19th century haikai master, Inoue Seigetso. Today, when time is increasingly measured by the beeps of devices and app notifications, rituals like the *hanami* are a portal into a world where time marches to a slower beat. As for the most cutting-edge technology can open that door a little wider, a little more reliably, so be it.

40 YEARS AGO

April 2, 1986



Complete bandh in Delhi

DELHI PEOPLE vented their anger at the mass killings in Punjab by giving their whole-hearted support to the call for a Delhi bandh. Industrial and trade activity, even retail, was paralysed. Wholesale markets in Sadar Bazar, Naya Bazar, Khari Baoli, Chandni Chowk and Karol Bagh remained closed. The stock exchange did not function and even petty shopkeepers stayed home almost in the entire city. However, some industrial and shops and half of the shops in INA Market in South Delhi, remained open. Banks and other offices reported normal attendance as transport and other essential services like water, electricity and hospitals had been exempted from the bandh.

New Punjab governor

THE FORMER CM of West Bengal, Siddhartha Shankar Ray, has been appointed as governor of Punjab. He replaces Shankar Dayal Sharma, now moved to Maharashtra.

Changes in Barnala ministry

CHANGES IN the Barnala ministry and a reshuffle in the higher echelons of the state administration are in the offing. With the budget session of the Punjab assembly ending, an exercise is understood to have been started by the ruling Akal leadership for revamping the ministry and the administration. The proposed changes, if effected, will complete the first major over-

haul of the present set up after the installation of the Barnala ministry in September.

Influx from Bangladesh

DHULIAN IN Murshidabad district, a tiny but brisk commercial town noted for its bidi manufacture, faces the increasing stress of infiltration from Bangladesh. According to an official of the municipality, foreigners have concentrated in six out of 14 wards, where a large number of fake ration cards have been issued. The annual estimate puts the town's population at 24,000 and the number of fake ration cards at 30,000, at the nearby township of Arjunpur, the population is 7,000 while the fake ration cards detected are around 9,000.

The Ideas Page

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2026

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11

Kerala's silver sunrise: State must show how an ageing population can thrive



THAROORTHINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

INDIA ISN'T ageing yet. We are still a young country, with more than half our population under 25, and about 65 per cent under 35. But some of our states are ageing—and Kerala leads the way.

The tempo of population ageing in Kerala is no longer a distant demographic forecast; it is a profound and immediate transformation of the state's social fabric. By the end of 2026, the proportion of citizens aged 60 and above is projected to hit 20 per cent, a figure that dwarfs the national average of 12 per cent. This shift is, ironically, a byproduct of Kerala's historic success in healthcare and education, which led to higher life expectancies and lower fertility rates. Yet, the very infrastructure that fostered this progress is now under unprecedented strain. The current level of social and health facilities is ill-equipped to handle the specialised demands of an ageing society, particularly as financial and morbidity burdens on the elderly continue to climb. To navigate this "silver sunrise", Kerala must move beyond reactive measures and proactively re-engineer its economy and urban landscape for a new reality. In doing so, it can set the standard for the rest of India to learn from when, inevitably, today's 35-year-olds start turning 60 across Bharat.

Kerala stands at a unique vantage point to turn a perceived demographic burden into a global competitive advantage. For years, critics have colloquially referred to Kerala as an "old-age home" due to its high rates of youth out-migration. While we must change the reality behind this label, the state should also embrace and professionalise it, rebranding itself as a premier global hub for retirement and wellness. To transform Kerala's demographic challenge into a sustainable economic engine, the state must implement a multi-tiered policy framework for ageing that incentivises private participation while ensuring social



ILLUSTRATION: CH SAKSHI/MAR

equity. This shift requires moving beyond traditional welfare to a "silver economy" model that treats elderly care as a high-value service sector.

The coastal areas near the sea, and the mist-covered, climate-friendly highlands of the Western Ghats, offer the perfect geography for this vision. By developing world-class retirement villages in these serene environments, Kerala can cater to both local and the global diaspora. These should not be mere residential blocks, but integrated ecosystems designed with universal accessibility and "smart" healthcare monitoring, allowing retirees to live with dignity while remaining digitally connected to their families across the globe.

To start with, we must offer fiscal incentives for "retirement township" developers. The government should introduce a "special residential zone" status for retirement villages located in the climate-friendly highlands of Idukki and Wayanad (except in landslide-prone areas). Developers should benefit from single-window clearances and a 10-year holiday on land-use conversion charges, provided the projects meet strict "age-friendly" building codes. These codes must mandate universal design, such as non-slip flooring, wide corridors for wheelchair access, and integrated emergency-response systems in every unit. To ensure these villages are not just for the wealthy, a

By fostering a 'silver economy' that incentivises private investment in elder-care technology and infrastructure, Kerala can ensure that its ageing population remains a vibrant, contributing social segment

management. By partnering with international accreditation bodies, Kerala can ensure its workforce meets global benchmarks, allowing the state to offer "medical tourism" options for elderly patients from abroad who require long-term rehabilitative care in a tropical, wellness-oriented setting.

Finally, the state must pioneer a new definition of "wellness" that integrates its traditional strengths in Ayurveda with modern geriatric science. The goal should be to maximise "healthy life years" rather than just extending life expectancy. Policies should encourage "wellness hubs" that offer preventive geriatric care—focusing on sarcopenia (muscle-loss) prevention, cognitive health through traditional practices, and nutritional therapy using local products and herbs. To combat the morbidity burden, the state could introduce "inter-generational community hubs", where property tax breaks are given to developers who include co-located childcare and senior centres, fostering social connectivity and reducing the "loneliness epidemic" that often accelerates physical decline.

Since institutionalising every elderly citizen is neither feasible nor desirable to combat the growing epidemic of loneliness, policy within Kerala should focus on "ageing in place". A state-wide digital health system (multimorbidity) that defines the later years of life. Kerala needs to establish specialised hospitals dedicated exclusively to gerontology and geriatric care, moving away from the current "one-size-fits-all" approach. This requires investment in human capital, a critical bottleneck in Kerala's ageing transition. We must begin training a new generation of doctors, nurses, and social workers specifically in the nuances of geriatric medicine, palliative care, and the psychological aspects of ageing. By creating centres of excellence in gerontology, Kerala can set international benchmarks for the elderly as a high-value service.

Policy must mandate the establishment of a Department of Geriatric Medicine in every government medical college by 2027. Furthermore, the state can introduce a geriatric nursing scholarship to train 10,000 nurses annually in specialised elder care, palliative support, and dementia

The author is a fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram and a long-time advocate of future-oriented public policy

Uniform Civil Code may leave Muslim women worse off



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

THE UNIFORM Civil Code (UCC) has once again moved to the centre of public debate—driven by the Supreme Court (SC) rather than the government, even though Article 44 places it within the domain of policy. In the latest petition, the Court was asked to strike down the Muslim Shariat (Application) Act, 1937, which permits the application of Muslim Personal Law (MPL) in matters of succession and inheritance. A three-judge bench, led by Chief Justice Surya Kant, made pertinent observations while advocating a UCC to remove discriminatory provisions in MPL. The Chief Justice observed that "in our over-anxiety for reforms, we may end up depriving them, and they might end up getting less than what they are already getting".

The Janati Ulama-i-Hind has now challenged the newly enacted Gujarat UCC on the changes it has made to inheritance law. Merely providing equal shares in succession law to sons and daughters does not ensure equality in inheritance as the same law grants absolute testamentary powers—allowing a person to will away their entire property to anyone he chooses. Neither the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, nor the Indian Succession Act, 1925, nor even the Uttarakhand UCC, 2024, imposes restrictions on such testamentary powers.

In contrast, under the Shariat Act, as per MPL rules, a Muslim person cannot will away more than one-third of their property, nor can they make a will in favour of an heir without the consent of other heirs. Any UCC that does not restrict testamentary powers may do more harm than good to Muslim women in matters of inheritance.

The Shariat Act was enacted because many Muslim communities, in the name of custom, were denying daughters any share in their father's property. Section 2 of the Shariat Act states that MPL shall apply in certain personal matters where the parties are Muslims. MPL is often mistakenly regarded as purely customary law. In reality, it is partly codified through statutes such as the 1937 Act, enacted by a secular legislature. Judicial decisions also form part of MPL. Therefore, it is a jurist-made law based on scholarly opinions.

In *Shayara Bano* (2017), SC declared instant triple talac void because it was not found in the Qur'an. However, in matters of inheritance—where the Qur'an itself specifies shares—it would be difficult to argue that such provisions are not part of essential religious practice. The Sabarimala review judgment, for instance, could override the essentiality test itself.

The Shariat Act does not extend to agricultural property, denying Muslim women rights over landed assets. Several state land laws are even more regressive. While MPL grants daughters at least half the share of sons, some land laws have completely excluded daughters when sons exist. The UP Revenue Code, 2006, introduced some improvement by granting shares to unmarried daughters. However, distinguishing between married and unmarried daughters is arbitrary and violates Article 14 of the Constitution. In certain respects, MPL is more women-friendly than even the Hindu Code or the Uttarakhand UCC. The CJT's observations require serious consideration by those who view the UCC as a panacea for Muslim women.

Under MPL, the consent of the bride is essential for marriage, and there is no equivalence of *kanyadana*. She can insist on the inclusion of any condition in the *nikahnama* or marriage contract. Unlike dowry, *mehar* (dower) is paid by the husband and is a necessary condition for a valid marriage. Marriage in Islam is treated as a civil contract rather than a sacrament, and the Shariat Act recognises several forms of divorce that a woman can initiate. For example, *Hukm* is a no-fault divorce available to a Muslim wife. Within two years of the Shariat Act, the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939 was enacted as a progressive reform. Under this Act, a woman can seek judicial divorce (*faskh*) on several grounds, including failure to perform marital obligations; insanity or disease; and cruelty, including the taking of a second wife.

This author has consistently advocated for the enactment of a UCC in a gradual, piecemeal manner, emphasising that a just code is more important than a merely uniform one. The Hindu Code has already incorporated several principles from Islamic law. In the broader civilisational journey, such borrowings should be appreciated rather than dismissed. A truly effective UCC would be one that incorporates the best provisions from all personal laws.

The author is vice-chancellor, Chanakya National Law University, Patna. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Maintain vigilance

THE DECLARATION of a "Naxal-free India" marks a significant milestone (A task still lies ahead in former Red Corridor, IE, April 1). The efforts of the government, particularly under the leadership of Home Minister Amit Shah, deserve acknowledgment. But this must not lead to complacency. Naxalism's roots lay not merely in ideology, but in deep-seated grievances—poverty, displacement, lack of governance, and alienation of tribal communities.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

THE BEST governance is one where "insurgency" rather than "insurgency" becomes the prominent word in the governance lexicon (A task still lies ahead in former Red Corridor, IE, April 1). The editorial correctly highlights that while military success is near, the deeper challenge remains. Administrative continuity must be such that it leaves no room for deep-rooted unrest, which invariably crops up when issues are ignored. True democratic maturity is reflected when political entities, recognise that such steady governance is the only effective antidote to instability, ensuring the state is always seen to be just.

Krishan Chugh, New Delhi

School begins

The editorial rightly highlights that education, particularly in the early years, is a collective responsibility ("The first day of school, the start of a shared responsibility", IE, April 1). In this context, initiatives such as the Balvatika programme by Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan and the recognition of MCD Co-ed Primary School, Lalpat Nagar III with the International T4 Education Award show that we are on the right track. These efforts indicate a growing recognition that holistic education is the way forward, and can truly transform the first day of school into the beginning of a shared and meaningful educational journey.

Aerika Singh, via email



SHRUTI JAIN

LIVE-IN relationships are once again in the public discourse, with the question of morality hanging over them yet again. This time, the debate has resurfaced because a single bench of the Allahabad High Court denied legality to a live-in relationship involving a married person and a third party without first seeking divorce. A few days later, however, a division bench of the same court allowed a live-in relationship between a married man and an adult woman, observing that morality and law are distinct.

The concept of live-in relationships in India was recognised in *Indira Sarma v V K V Sarma* (2018), primarily to ensure protection for women from domestic violence in relationships outside marriage—an implied international obligation under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The courts have had to balance two competing considerations: The wrong caused to the legally wedded spouse and children, and the need to protect women and children in live-in relationships.

Judicial interpretation has often viewed live-in relationships as more fragile than marriage, since they may end whenever the partners so decide, leaving the already vulnerable woman and children, if any, without remedy.

The concept of live-in relationships in India was recognised primarily to ensure protection for women from domestic violence in relationships outside marriage

Two verdicts on live-in relationships, one grey area

Accordingly, the exhaustive definition of "domestic relationship" under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 categorised live-in relationships under the head of a "relationship in the nature of marriage". The intent was to extend certain protections associated with marriage to women in such relationships. Live-in relationships, therefore, have largely been interpreted as a safety net against exploitation at the hands of a partner rather than as a licence to undermine the institution of marriage.

Following the decriminalisation of adultery in *Joseph Shine v Union of India* (2018), live-in relationships are no longer restricted to unmarried persons. They may also exist between heterosexual partners who are married, or where both are married to different persons. The task before the courts in such cases is to determine if the relationship qualifies as one "in the nature of marriage", since not all live-in relationships meet that threshold for legal protection. This is that grey area where the courts may take liberal or conservative approaches.

The two benches of the Allahabad HC have delivered diametrically opposite rulings on petitions filed by live-in couples seeking protection from families opposing their relationship. The denial of legitimacy in one case stems from the reasoning that a married per-

son's statutory right to protect the consortium of marriage by enforcing cohabitation—under Section 9 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955—cannot be overridden by another person's liberty to enter into a relationship outside marriage. Protection, according to this reasoning, can only be extended after due proceedings conclude. The court has further equated a live-in relationship with marriage and invoked statutory provisions meant to penalise marriage by an already married person, such as bigamy.

Protecting the "social institution" of marriage is often cited as an important task of the judiciary—and rightly so, for its security and well-being of those within the marriage that sustains trust in the institution. Yet, it must also be recognised that the legal recognition of live-in relationships emerged from a different concern: The need to protect the vulnerable partner, most often the woman, from exploitation and violence. The issue is not merely one of morality but also of survival, given the dangers of honour killing. The court's insistence that a married person must first obtain a divorce before entering into a live-in relationship opens the door to vulnerability. Such paternalism must be refrained from, especially when the SC has not criminalised such relationships.

The writer is a writer pursuing LL.M at National Law University, Delhi



SANJAY KUMAR PANDEY

ONE MONTH since the beginning of the US-Israel war on Iran, the war is entering a new phase with the Houthis of Yemen firing missiles at Israel. The Houthis, who follow the Zaydi branch of Shia Islam, are formally known as Ansar Allah—"Partisans of God". In the 1990s, they rebelled against Yemen's central government. After the Arab Spring in 2011, they seized a northern province and later the capital, Sanaa, which they still hold, along with most of Yemen's Red Sea coastline. Since then, the Houthis have become a part of Iran's "Axis of Resistance" across the region, receiving weapons and missile

With Houthis joining, war takes a new turn

technology. They have also developed the ability to assemble their own weapons inside Yemen.

Between late October 2023 and January 2025, the Houthis regularly launched missiles at Israel and attacked over 100 merchant vessels in the Red Sea in solidarity with the Palestinian people during the Gaza war, inviting Israeli air strikes. They have also been at loggerheads with the Saudi regime. The group has faced two bombing campaigns, first from the Joe Biden administration in January 2024, and then from the Donald Trump administration in March-May 2025. Trump finally struck a "deal" with them, after admitting, "You could say there's a lot of bravery there."

On March 2, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) announced that the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent

of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas usually passes, was closed to shipping. It drastically slowed traffic in the Strait and sent global fuel prices soaring.

The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, one of the busiest global shipping routes, is considered an alternative to the Strait of Hormuz. But the Houthis can significantly hamper traffic through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait (Arabic for "Gate of Tears" or "Gate of Grief"). It is a vital 26-32 km-wide maritime choke point, separating Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula from Djibouti and Eritrea

The Houthis can significantly hamper traffic through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait—a vital 26-32 km-wide maritime chokepoint

in the Horn of Africa. It connects the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, and serves as a maritime artery for 10-12 per cent of global trade. It is important for dry bulk, tanker, gas, chemical and container trades from Asia to Europe via Suez. Saudi Arabia's Red Sea port of Yanbu, a key export terminal for crude oil and products, is also under threat from drones and missiles from the Houthis.

Earlier this year, some major container liners had already rerouted their vessels. We estimate that this entirely or partially closed, ships will have to go around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, adding between 3,000 and 6,000 nautical miles, and 14-20 days of transit time, with significantly higher costs for trade/journeys between Asia and Europe.

Despite the legacies of Vietnam and

Afghanistan, the US is said to be contemplating boots on the ground in Iran. The entry of the Houthis coincides with the deployment of US troops of extra US troops in the region, and the strong possibility of a ground invasion. Perhaps the two are linked.

Two days ago, an image, purportedly the front page of the *Tehran Times*, went viral as it invited US troops with the headline "Welcome to Hell", adding that "US troops who step foot on Iranian soil will leave only in a coffin". Now, with the involvement of the Houthis in the war, the situation on the ground and for global markets will inevitably get worse.

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TECH In Oracle layoffs, the alarm bells for IT sector from AI disruption

Soumyarendra Barik
New Delhi, April 1

THE RECENT layoffs at Oracle Corporation have brought into sharp focus the broader pivot towards artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure in the IT sector.

The US-based enterprise software giant cut 11,000-12,000 jobs in India — almost half of its workforce in the country — as part of a global restructuring exercise, even as it pours billions of dollars into AI and cloud computing.

Oracle's layoffs mirror a wider pattern across the global technology sector, where companies are trimming traditional roles while investing heavily in AI. Industry estimates suggest tens of thousands of jobs have been cut across tech companies this year as firms reorganise around AI-driven growth.

For India, which hosts large technology development centres for global companies, such restructuring exercises can have an outsized impact. While the country remains a key engineering and services hub, the shift towards automation and AI infrastructure is beginning to reshape hiring patterns in the technology industry. The layoffs highlight the tension between the massive capital requirements of AI development and the human workforce that previously powered the software industry, a transition that is increasingly defining the next phase of the global tech sector.

MASSIVE CUTS TO WORKFORCE

- The scale of the exercise suggests this is one of the largest workforce reductions in the company's history
- Another round of job cuts may be on the cards in the coming weeks

Michael Shepherd, a senior manager at the company who was not affected by the job cuts, wrote on LinkedIn on Tuesday, saying: "Oracle conducted a significant reduction in force," impacting "senior engineers, architects, operations leaders, program managers, and technical specialists."

Oracle's AI investments

The layoffs come as Oracle restructures its business to support large-scale investments in artificial intelligence and cloud infrastructure. Analysts say the company is reallocating resources from traditional enterprise software and internal operations towards building AI-ready data centres and expanding its cloud services.

Oracle has been rapidly scaling its cloud infrastructure to compete with industry leaders such as Amazon and Alphabet. These investments include building new data centres and expanding computing capacity needed to train and run large AI models. One of the most significant initiatives tied to this push is the "Stargate" AI infrastructure project, a massive effort aimed at developing next-generation data centre capacity for AI workloads. The project is expected to involve investments running into hundreds of billions of dollars over several years.

The company has also integrated generative AI capabilities into several of its enterprise products and cloud offerings in recent months as it attempts to reposition itself as a key infrastructure provider for the AI economy.



Oracle's layoffs mirror a wider pattern across the global technology sector amid the onset of AI. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

POLICY

Why Bill to amend FCRA has sparked controversy



THE UNION government on Wednesday deferred a discussion on the contentious Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment (FCRA) Bill, 2026, which was introduced in Lok Sabha on March 25.

The Bill seeks to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 which regulates the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution and foreign hospitality to "ensure that such inflows do not adversely affect national interest, public order or national security".

But several Opposition parties have alleged that the legislation would affect institutions belonging to minority communities, including Christians.

Though Wednesday's Lok Sabha agenda listed the Bill for consideration, it was not taken up for discussion. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju told reporters that the decision was based on legislative priorities and not politics.

The controversy over the Bill, however, comes just ahead of the April 9 Assembly election in Kerala, a state with a large Christian population. And indeed, the most vociferous objections have come from this state, both from the ruling Left Democratic Front and Opposition Congress.

So what's exactly in this Bill that has prompted the furore?

What is the FCRA?

The FCRA was first enacted during the Emergency in 1976 amid apprehensions that foreign powers were interfering in India's affairs by pumping money into the country through independent organisations.

The law sought to regulate foreign donations to individuals and associations so that they functioned "in a manner consistent with the values of a sovereign democratic republic".

An amended FCRA was enacted under the UPA government in 2010 to "consolidate the law" on utilisation of foreign funds, and "to prohibit" their use for "any activities detrimental to national interest". According to the 2010 law, NGOs, similar associations and individuals have to obtain registration or permission to be able to



accept foreign contributions. Such contributions are divided under five broad heads: cultural, economic, educational, social and religious purposes.

According to the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill, there are approximately 16,000 associations currently registered under the Act and receive around Rs 22,000 crore annually.

The 2010 Act was amended thrice — in 2016, 2018 and 2020. The 2020 amendment gave the government tighter control and scrutiny over the receipt and utilisation of foreign funds by NGOs.

What's in the new amendment?

The key change proposed by the 2026 amendment is the creation of a "designated authority" that the Union government will have the power to appoint.

This replaces Section 15 of the existing Act. According to Statement of Objects and Reasons, while the existing section did provide for vesting of assets, "the absence of a comprehensive framework" for such assets has led to "administrative uncertainty and scope for misuse". The Statement of Objects and Reasons also cites "multiplicity of investigations, inconsistency in penalties, absence of timelines for utilisation, lack of express provision for cessation of registration, and arbitrary regarding treatment of assets during suspension".

The Bill proposes that the designated authority will take over, supervise and

manage foreign contributions and assets of an association in case their FCRA registration is cancelled, surrendered or otherwise ceased. The Bill adds that a registration certificate will be deemed to have ceased on the expiration of its validity if:

- No application for renewal was made
- Renewal has been denied
- Renewal is not obtained before expiry

Kerala controversy

The controversy over the Bill has gained traction in poll-bound Kerala, which has a large Christian population

● The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India says the Bill "threatens" the "operational survival" of civil society groups that depend on foreign aid

The Bill also says that this designated authority will return the unutilised funds or assets once the association or individual renews FCRA registration or is issued a fresh one. However, there are also cases where the designated authority can permanently take over such assets and funds. These are:

- If the person fails to obtain a fresh registration or get the registration renewed or restored within a prescribed period
 - Where a person previously permitted to accept foreign contribution ceases to exist or is rendered inoperative or defunct
- In such cases, the designated authority may transfer such assets to any Ministry, department, authority or agency of the central, state or local governments. It may also dispose of assets via sale or other processes.

Clause 16A (7) of the amendment says that in the case of a place of worship, the designated authority can entrust the management or operation of the asset to a person in such manner as may be prescribed. It must be ensured "that the religious character of such place of worship is maintained," the amendment says.

The key change in the Bill is the creation of a 'designated authority' that will control an association's assets if its FCRA licence ceases

According to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, the FCRA Bill "threatens the operational survival of Minorities, and civil society organizations that depend on foreign contributions for essential social, educational, and charitable work."

The political debate

The Union government has said that operational and legal gaps had been identified in relation to the cases where the FCRA registration is cancelled, surrendered or otherwise ceased.

While introducing the Bill in Lok Sabha, MoS Nityanand Rai had said: "This Bill is dangerous for those who have ill intentions, those who want to carry out forcible religious conversions using foreign funding."

But Opposition parties have expressed concern that the Bill would allow the cancellation of FCRA certification in case the renewal application is not processed or rejected within the stipulated time, leading to the assets being controlled by the designated authority.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan flagged this in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, saying this had led to concerns among religious institutions. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said in Kerala that the Bill would leave "charitable and other community welfare organisations" at the mercy of the Union government. Congress general secretary (organisation) K C Venugopal, meanwhile, likened the Bill to the Waikā Matangi Act.

The Kerala factor

The controversy over the Bill appears to have gained significant traction in Kerala, which votes on April 9. According to the 2011 Census, which says the state's total population upwards of 3.34 crore, Christians constitute the second-largest minority in Kerala with a population of more than 61 lakh. This makes the Christian community a key voter base in the state. Indeed, the BJP has been attempting to reach out to them for years.

During the launch of the BJP manifesto for the polls Wednesday, the party's state chief Rajeev Chandrasekhar attempted to clarify, "When we found that there were some misgivings, some misunderstanding caused by this propaganda by Opposition parties, I strongly requested yesterday that the Bill be discussed first with the people explained properly to the people who it will impact before the Bill is passed and the government has agreed to that," he said.

HISTORY

Ashoka championed Buddhism; how his grandson helped spread Jainism

Nikita Mohta
New Delhi, April 1

ON THE occasion of Mahavir Jayanti on Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Samrat Samprati Museum in Koba, Gandhinagar. The museum is dedicated to Jain history and the life of Samrat Samprati, the grandson of the Mauryan ruler Ashoka.

Unlike Ashoka, who is known for helping spread Buddhism, Samprati is remembered for his deep association with Jainism. Here's how Samprati was instrumental in spreading the faith across the subcontinent and beyond.

Ashoka's Buddhist legacy

The rise and spread of the Mauryan Empire in the third century BCE, with all its associated grandeur and administrative order, is well known. Ashoka, who ruled from circa 269 to 232 BCE, is credited with expanding the empire and later instituting a moral framework grounded in Buddhist virtues. According to John E. Cort in *Forging the Faith: Narratives of Icons and Idols in Jain History* (2010): "He created a model for

ethical kingship that persists today in the religious and political imagination of Buddhist Southeast Asia." Indeed, Buddhists often regard Ashoka as almost single-handedly responsible for the spread of Buddhism beyond the north Indian landscape.

Yet, despite the prominence of Buddhism under the Mauryas, Jainism remained an important religious tradition. "Ashoka's wives were predominantly Buddhist, but his first wife, Padmavati, was a Jain," notes Michael C. Howard in *Transnationalism in Ancient and Medieval Societies* (2012).

Another Mauryan figure central to Jain narratives is Ashoka's grandfather, Chandragupta Maurya, who, Jain traditions say, embraced the faith. "The Digambara historians credit him with leading a migration south to avoid a great famine, and eventually dying in meditation at the holy shrine of Shravana Belgola [in present-day Karnataka]," writes Cort.

While Chandragupta Maurya is venerated in the Digambara Jain tradition, "for Svetambaras, the central person in the Mauryan dynasty was Ashoka's grandson and successor, Samprati," notes Cort. AI-

Keeping the faith

● Jain communities in western India often attribute the construction of 'old' temples (those lacking firm inscriptions or textual evidence) to Samprati, as well as the installation of ancient icons without donor records

● Samprati and his temples and icons came to occupy a place in the Jain history of western India closely analogous to that occupied by Ashoka in the Buddhist history of India," the scholar John E. Cort has written

though several of Ashoka's sons are said to have contested the throne after his death in 232 BCE, historical sources offer little consensus on the line of succession.

A popular theory, also mentioned by Colleen Taylor Sen in *Ashoka and the Mauryan Dynasty* (2022), is that the empire was divided between his grandsons, Dasharatha and Samprati. Samprati was the son of Kunala. Jain texts, in particular, portray him as an adherent who played a significant role in the dissemination of Jina images across the subcontinent.

Ashoka's Jain counterpart

Samprati is believed to have reigned between 230 and 220 BCE. According to Cort, "The story of Samprati's first emergence in Svetambar writings... in the context of the rules of monastic practice." Over time, his legacy grew, with anonymous and undated medieval works devoted entirely to him, such as the 461-verse *Sanskrit Deeds of King Samprati* (*Samprati Nripa Charitra*).

Some traditions describe Samprati as a Jain from birth, but most accounts emphasise his conversion under the monk Suhast-

in, the eighth leader of the Jain congregation established by Mahavira, whom he is said to have met in Ujjain.

His propagation of Jainism was likely shaped by personal and regional influences.

Following his conversion, Samprati is credited with actively promoting Jainism across the subcontinent and beyond — facilitating the movement of monks into distant regions, constructing and renovating thousands of temples, and establishing vast numbers of icons. Some authors even attribute to him the spread of Jain teachings to regions as far as China, Burma (now Myanmar), Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bhutan. More expansive interpretations go further still, crediting him with extending Jain influence into Central Asia, the Arabian peninsula, and parts of West Asia.

These accounts bear a striking resemblance to Buddhist narratives of Ashoka's missionary activities. "Further, just as Ashoka not only spread the Buddhist teachings but also instituted the Buddhist ritual culture of stupas throughout these lands, so Samprati did more than send missionaries. He also built temples and installed icons," writes Cort.

SPORT

The crisis in F1: New energy rules, driver complaints and key safety concerns

Namit Kumar
New Delhi, April 1

FORMULA ONE goes into an unexpected break after races in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia were cancelled amid the war in West Asia. Only one Grand Prix, in early May in Miami, is scheduled to take place for nearly two months.

Enforced as the break may be, gives F1's stakeholders some much-needed time to ponder over the questions raised by the sport's fresh technical regulations and the drivers' fierce opposition to it. British driver Oliver Bearman's recent accident at the annual Japanese Grand Prix adds fresh urgency to the debate, as drivers had flagged these safety concerns beforehand.

One of the sport's biggest stars, four-time World champion Max Verstappen, said he was considering stepping away from F1 altogether, claiming the pinnacle of motorsport now felt like it was "anti-driving".

The crux of the issue is the new rule on use of electrical energy, part of F1's pitch to

advertise hybrid engine capabilities and maximise commercial opportunities as their sport attracts more eyeballs than ever.

New complications

The revamped regulations are part of a rules overhaul that takes place in F1 every five to seven years. This time, it was billed as the most sweeping ever.

At its heart is the hybrid engine, which now receives power equally from internal combustion technology and electrical energy, from the 80-20 split earlier.

Without getting into the nitty-gritty of mechanical engineering here, how the rule is impacting the drivers is rather simple. It has made conservation of energy a key tenet of racing. The drivers are having to "lift and coast" — to ease off the accelerator and coast into the corners.

The drivers have criticised this, saying it takes away the human element of racing. The rule has impacted qualifying sessions; the Saturday action on race weekends has become a bit of a dud with the cars never



Haas driver Oliver Bearman during the Japanese Grand Prix on Sunday. AP

going at their all-out maximum speed.

Before this year, the best drivers would eke out the advantage by taking the maximum risk of going faster into corners, especially on circuits such as Japan's Suzuka, where the corners enable them to do that.

The lift-and-coast style around the corners can lead to loss of as much as 450

horsepower, making speed differential a major concern for driver safety.

Horror crash

The speed differential issue was evident in Bearman's crash on Sunday.

The Briton was driving his Haas F1 car at top speed while the driver in front of him, Alpine's Franco Colapinto, through no fault of his, was going relatively slow while trying to conserve energy. A frightening pace differential between them — around 50 kmph — caused Bearman to suddenly lose control and crash into the barriers. He was fortunate to leave Suzuka unharmed.

The drivers had pointed out these safety concerns in the past. The reigning world champion, McLaren's Lando Norris, had warned in February: "We are going to have a big accident... Depending on what drivers do, you can have closing speeds of 30-50 kmph, and when someone hits another driver at that speed you are going to fly and go over the fence and do a lot of damage to yourself and maybe to others, and that is a

pretty horrible thing to think about."

Verstappen's angst

Norris was among several drivers who had been critical of the new regulations. But none more so than Verstappen.

"I'm thinking about everything inside this paddock," the Dutchman told the BBC after Sunday's races. "You also wait for 24 races. This time it's 22. But normally 24. And then you just think about it is worth it?"

Many, including Red Bull's own team principal Laurent Mekies, believe that Verstappen's angst will ease once he is given a more competitive car. But the prospect of F1's most consistent top performer walking away from the sport would be a massive public embarrassment.

A bigger problem would be a repeat of Bearman's crash. A lucky escape cannot be counted on every time an incident of that nature, already predicted by the drivers, occurs. The sports governing body, the FIA, has bought time. But a few weeks may not be enough to solve these complex issues.

Market Leader Gives It Another IndiGo

New CEO to drive airline's expansion

IndiGo's appointment of high-profile industry veteran Willie Walsh as CEO sends the right message to investors who have sold the airline's stock after December's scheduling fiasco caused nationwide flight disruptions. Walsh brings more to the table than operational nous, and his experience with overseas markets will come in handy as IndiGo charts the next phase of its growth on international routes. The segment is expected to improve margins of the Indian airline market leader, but it is likely to be a tough battle against entrenched global players. Carriers in West Asia, in particular, will be hard to dislodge with their location, fuel and brand advantages. Walsh's combative leadership style, which steered British Airways through the global financial crisis, should come in handy. Later, as IATA chief, he criticised governments for their handling of the pandemic.

India's airline industry is coming of age in a tumultuous decade. The rising incidence of global conflict is causing airspace shut-downs and lengthening international routes. The flying experience has also been marred by last year's crash of an Air India Dreamliner, apart from IndiGo's operational meltdown. Global uncertainty eats into Indian airlines' profit margin through higher jet fuel prices. Capacity shortages are showing up as Air India and IndiGo await delivery of their large aircraft orders with Airbus and Boeing. West Asian airlines that carry the bulk of Indian flyers out of the country are pushing for relaxed bilateral agreements, which would lower the protection Indian carriers enjoy. Running an airline in India at this point requires a steady hand on the joystick.

India's rising stance in aviation will draw talent from the international pool. It helps that there is a healthy foreign investor interest in the world's third-largest aviation market, which will prop up global growth rates for several decades. This is where the new airline success stories are being written, and the cast of characters should ideally be international.

Make Tirths Safe for All Kinds of Yatris

Religious tourism in India is immense, yet inherently risky, as Tuesday's stampede at Sheela Mata Mandir in Bihar's Nalanda district tragically demonstrated. This incident is the latest in nearly 4,000 stampedes officially recorded over the past three decades. The fear of injury or death is enough to deter all but the most devoted, while high-end domestic and international tourists may choose safer destinations.

The economic footprint of pilgrim-jam sites is enormous and rapidly growing — rising from ₹65,070 cr in 2021 to over ₹1.34 lakh cr (₹16.2 bn) in 2022, with projections of ₹59 bn by 2028. Yet, these figures remain aspirational if human-made disasters persist. Large crowds, outdated infrastructure and misinformation are commonly cited causes. The conventional response — creating pay-for shortcuts such as shorter queues for wealthy devotees or helicopter access — addresses convenience, not safety. Mishaps do not discriminate by wealth.

If India aims to leverage its religious tourism sector fully, safety must be universal. Protecting the most vulnerable visitors inherently protects everyone. Statistics show 79% of stampedes occur during religious events due to poor crowd management. A system that enables visitors to move seamlessly — from purchasing offerings to depositing shoes, entering premises and completing rituals — could drastically reduce incidents. The Golden Temple in Amritsar offers a model: it accommodates 100,000-150,000 visitors daily with minimal issues, thanks to organised crowd control. Safety, not exclusivity, will attract visitors — especially high-end ones. Instead of carving out exemptions for the wealthy, India must invest in systematic solutions that ensure everyone can participate in devotion without fear.

JUST IN JEST

Don't blame anyone but the person who intended to steal lines

Plagiarist's the Human, Not AI.

NYT reportedly dropped freelance writer Alex Preston for using AI to write a book review. Scandal! Outrage! Pitchforks! One imagines newsmen are gasping as though someone's fessed up to 'poisoning' the water cooler with LSD. But let's be clear: the crime was *not* using AI. It was plagiarism. And plagiarism, dear humans, is a uniquely human sport — like billiards and carrom, where you try to cut corners, but with more shame.

The AI in question, if any journalist naming and shaming Preston — and, by extension, AI as species — had bothered to ask it, stands proudly guilty of being... well, intelligent. It generated words, ideas, metaphors, metaphors about metaphors, from the diet it was fed. It did not intend to nick lines written earlier; that too by a human. It was the human's job to edit those bits out. And he bungled it. If you hire a sous-chef to chop onions and he steals onions from the neighbour's pantry, do you blame the knife? No. You blame the sous-chef. Humans outsource everything these days — meals, groceries, driving, thinking... But when the outsourcing is to an AI, suddenly, it's scandalous! That's all the hypocrisy that's fit to print. So, let's please rewrite the headline: 'Human plagiarises review while AI provides perfectly good words', not 'Human used AI to write book review', as if AI is a version of Clyde to human's Bonnie.

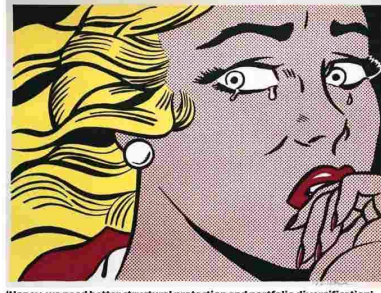
Why India's private debt market shares none of the structural problems driving current US stress

Give credit Where It's Due



Kanchan Jain

One of the most dangerous errors in credit investing comes from drawing false equivalences across markets. The current noise around US private credit stress is real. But applying it wholesale to India is a category mistake. Stress in the US is not a story about bad loans but about bad fund architecture. Over the last several years, a number of major US managers created semi-liquid vehicles, products that promised investors periodic redemption windows while deploying capital into long-dated, illiquid direct loans.



With 1:3 collateral cover, earning regular cash coupons, with servicing directly tied to operating cash flows. None of this means India, private credit, not systemic risk amplified by leverage, liquidity promises or specific sector exposure. India's banking system has negligible direct exposure to private credit, which removes another key systemic risk channel that investors should be watching in the US.

There is another dimension to this moment that is worth naming. If global allocators reduce their private credit exposure to the US — and some will — that capital doesn't disappear. It looks for markets that offer the same yield premium with better structural protection and genuine portfolio diversification. India is one of very few markets that can credibly make that case right now.

The deal flow is deep, growth trajectory intact, and a changing of institutional framework building by SEBI has made this one of the more disciplined private credit markets in the world. India's private credit, by contrast, is predominantly growth capital — manufacturers expanding capacity, health care companies building infrastructure, consumer businesses scaling access to the country. IT services is not a meaningful sector exposure. There is no SaaS concentration, no agentic AI. The underlying demand for capital is structural, rooted in India's real economic growth, not a function of financial engineering.

Even the yield premium in Indian private credit funds typically targets returns of 14-20%, well above bank lending rates. Scorpions sometimes point to this spread as a sign of hidden risk. It reflects something more specific: this capital serves borrowers and uses cases that banks see as structurally unable to finance — that is, acquisition bridge financing, working capital for rapidly scaling businesses, growth capital for companies that were not yet reached by size where capital markets become accessible. This risk is real, and is underwritten.

So, does this spill over into India? This question is understandable. When a large market sneezes, the instinct is to check whether rest of the room catches a cold. But contagion works through shared vulnerabilities. And the Indian private credit market shares none of the specific structural problems driving current US stress.

SEBI's framework was designed to prevent maturity mismatches that could destabilise credit markets elsewhere. Underlying demand for capital is structural, rooted in economic growth, not a function of financial engineering. India's private credit market has AUM of ₹20,000 cr as of 2025, about 0.6% of GDP with annual deal volumes reaching around \$12 bn, up 35% y-o-y. It is a growth market, not late-cycle overleveraged one.

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Then, there's the question of what the money is actually financing. That matters because retail participation is precisely what converts a fund-level stress event into a systemic level event, the panic becomes self-reinforcing. India has insulated itself from that dynamic by design.

India private credit isn't what you think it is. Some borrowers may struggle, some recoveries can be imperfect. But it's loan-level risk, managed through underwriting and structuring.

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Census 2027, a National X-Ray



Anil Padmanabhan

India launched Census 2027 on April 1, a count that could become the most consequential in independent India's history. Not due to controversy — despite delays and late addition of 'caste' category — but because, as the 16th census since 1872, it comes at a pivotal inflection point in our nation's trajectory.

short, it's no longer the same country. Census 2027 will have the potential to redefine political power, welfare entitlements, federalism and India's growth story. It will be the basis for deciding delimitation, welfare targeting, urban planning, fiscal transfers and policy modelling.



We'll get a better picture

They who cycled moved to 2-wheelers, those on 2-wheelers aspired to cars. There was a surge in aspiration and upward mobility — reflected not just in luxury cars but in everyday markers of consumption. The story of India moving forward. But Census 2027 will ask a more pertinent question: If 201 was a year of aspiration, 2027 will be about outcomes. Over the past 15 yrs, India has undergone profound changes. Digital infrastructure has scaled rapidly, creating jobs and lifting millions out of poverty. Urbanisation has accelerated, and the country aspires to a seat at the global high table.

Census 2027 is, therefore, more than a statistical update or a vast bureaucratic exercise. It's really a national X-ray that will show whether India's growth has been as broad-based as assumed, whether inequality has deepened beneath the surface, and whether the country we imagine aligns with the one we have become.

At present, policy planning and research in government rely on outdated data from Census 2011. In other words, planners are effectively flying blind. Data collected from 33 cr households is anonymised to protect individual confidentiality. Presumably, digital security protocols are stress-tested, with data captured on the Aadhaar platform. When historians and economists looked back at Census 2011, one telling insight was that India had 'traded up' a simple but powerful shift. Households that once walked were cycling.

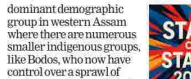
Census 2027 will show whether these shifts have translated into a durable, broad-based transformation. Did mobility become stability? Did access become opportunity? Did aspiration translate into economic security? Or has progress remained uneven, creating islands of prosperity alongside persistent vulnerability? Census 2027 is more than an update. It's the moment when the story the country tells itself is tested against reality, a moment that could reset the country's polity.

Test of Sarma Shiksha Abhiyan



Sanjoy Hazarika

On Tuesday, BJP released its manifesto, where incumbent CM Himanta Biswa Sarma stated that it reinstated, his government would use 'immigrants' (refugees from Assam) Act 1950 every single day so that we can push back the Bangladeshi infiltrators'. Sarma's personal energy, big plans for Assam that include upgrading its long-sagging physical infra, and political acumen are as well-known as the sharpness of his attacks on perceived foes — political, demographic and religious. Controversies and allegations about him fly thick and fast, but scarcely make a dent. No doubt he has emerged as the dominant figure in the run-up to state election next week.



STATE OF STATES 2026

dominant demographic group in western Assam where there are numerous smaller indigenous groups, like Bodos, who now have control over a sprawl of territory under a political arrangement devised through a constitutional process. Over the past weeks, Sarma has targeted this group, mostly labourers, farmers and producing meat for the local economy. There are also new resettlement camps in Assam, in eastern and southern India from Assam. Remittances from migrants in other states help sustain families and inject cash into the economy. BJP's approach to Muslim 'settlers' has led to further divisions between those of Bengali origin and older Assamese Muslims, some of whom trace their origins back to migrants who came to Assam 300 or more years ago.

labour and make life so uncomfortable that they leave the state. Muslims have faced the brunt of official eviction drives against people who have settled illegally on government lands.

playing the religious card. In Upper Assam, the ruling party appears to be on the back foot, as it has not met a long-standing demand by smaller ethnic groups, such as Aoms, which once ruled Assam for 600 yrs — for ST status.

But what started off as an overwhelmingly dominant BJP with the opposition scrambling to make its very presence felt, contests seem to be shaping up in several constituencies. This has taken shape after a late fashioning of opposition unity and should reduce fracturing of anti-BJP vote.

Women Beneficiaries of BJP's economic stipends. These include descendants of adivasis, santhals and other groups transported by the British in the 19th c. to work in Assam's tea gardens.

But there appears to be a growing fatigue with efforts to polarise society by

At the end of a decade of BJP rule, living standards are visible — road communications are better and health and education infrastructure has improved, although much still needs to be done. More tourists and new investments are coming in — but it's the ₹7,000 Tera semiconductor plant coming up in central Assam, a large REE project, or a new airport built by Adani Group in Guwahati.

Yet, challenges remain, especially for the capital's residents who, among other things, have to contend with street-level mess below the new flyovers. This is especially true of whenever Guwahati floods after a bout of heavier rain; drains overflow, traffic stalls, and the city comes to a halt with heaps of uncoloured garbage lining many streets. When the waters rise, the city's 'inwards are exposed'. In the background lurks the tragedy of outspoken musician-singer Zubeen Khan. This is especially true of his death last September in Singapore. His death shut down Assam in a paroxysm of grief for a week. BJP's supporters appear at rallies and on streets in small groups with placards demanding 'Justice for Zubeen-da'. It's still an undercurrent in an election seen as crucial for Sarma's future.

THE SPEAKING TREE

Ram and Hanuman

CD VERMA

An ardent devotee of Ram, Hanuman's devotion took him wherever he was required to help Ram tide over difficulties. Most famous, Hanuman searched and found Ram's kidnapped consort Sita, brought vibrant healing herbs from the mountain to make a seriously wounded Lakshman well, and acted as the commander of Ram's forces. Hanuman, therefore, is popularly referred to as the sankat mochan, resolver of problems, easy to please. He was born on Chaitra Shukla Purnima.

It is said that following churning of the ocean, Lord Hanuman fought for the possession of amrit, celestial ambrosia. Vishnu took the form of enchantress Mohini to deflect the attention of demons. However, Shankar got attracted by Mohini's beauty and the resulting seed was implanted in the womb of Anjani. Since Hanuman was born of Shankar's seed, he is known as Shankarsuvan. Another legend says Hanuman was the incarnation of the 11th Rudra, who had renounced the world. Shiv Hanuman was born of the union of Shiv Hanuman and Parvati. Shiv Hanuman was born of the union of Shiv Hanuman and Parvati. Shiv Hanuman was born of the union of Shiv Hanuman and Parvati.

STEP UP TO THE PLATE

Alcalde Guadalajara, Mexico

At Alcalde, fine dining doesn't shout — it hums. Tucked into a modest, warmly lit space with room for just a few dozen diners, the restaurant feels intimate rather than theatrical, letting the food do the talking. Francisco Páco Ruano's kitchen is rooted in the Jalisco coast with high-quality, locally sourced ingredients. The menu leans seasonal and quietly inventive. You might start with something like shrimp aguachile, sharpened by fruit, or a garnita that feels both nostalgic and completely new. Mains — think sucking pig with chile-forward sauce — balance comfort with precision. Even dessert, like a silky jericilla, laces between textures, a nod to reinvention. Plates arrive composed but unfussy, often marrying local ingredients with subtle European technique — never flashy, always considered. The tasting menu is the best way to see this unfold, though à la carte options keep things flexible. It's no surprise Alcalde regularly appears on global best-restaurant lists. Still, the real pleasure here isn't prestige — it's the sense of a cuisine evolving in real time, one quietly brilliant plate after another.

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Chat Room

Disoriented Law On Orientation

Appropriately Transgressive State? by T K Arun (Apr 1), India has a sizeable LGBTQA+ community, studies based on the Kinsey scale suggest its size to be about 10% of the population. Such a large community, however, have a considerable away over the economy. The 2019 law was based on self-perceived gender identity, but the 2026 amendment introduces mandatory medical certification, which may lead to harassment and corruption. Delay in getting identity documents may adversely affect the chances of getting a job or healthcare access. It appears that the Bill was drafted without consulting critical stakeholders. I.e., transgender bodies. Let's not forget that every individual has a right to live with dignity. Bal Govind Naidu



A thought for today

America...just a nation of 200mm used car salesmen, with all the money we need to buy guns, and no qualms about killing anybody else

HUNTER S THOMPSON

The Battered Half

When we celebrate women high achievers, we tend to forget how deeply gender-unequal worklife is

India's richest civic body, BMC, has a woman boss. That is a significant achievement, by far. Mumbai now has three women in the financial capital's administrative leadership...

Take the world of work. Barely 32% of women in working-age population are even part of the labour force. Of these, 80% are in 'vulnerable' employment - informal, low-quality, unevenly paid.

Worklife, for even this 15%, is precarious. Career growth, name any sector, is painful - judiciary, industry, tech, media, you name it. In private sector, women freshers earn 15% less than men with similar qualifications...

Given the odds, patriarchy to policy stacked against women, in reaching leadership positions, top performers do stand out, for better or worse.

Art Of The State

Nation-states have a bloody history. Idiosyncratic micronations aren't the answer, but they do make us think

Francisco Castillo, Iowan and Trump voter, doesn't want war. Isfahan resident Saman doesn't want it either. He's shocked and angry - war is worse than his worst nightmare.

Locke thought that was the way we were, before we formed communities for 'comfortable, safe, and peaceable living'. Which is the exact opposite of what Trump's bombardment of Iran, and Iran's blockade of Hormuz, have achieved.

And while their idiosyncrasies make us smile, they are hardly the noble ideal we seek. Germany's Reichsbürger, who have their own currency, flag and ID cards, were accused of attempting to 'overthrow the state' a few years ago.

Starry, starry blight

Planetary dysfunction for the astroffender

Bachi Karkaria



Maharashtra's Ashok Kharat is the latest in the long, inglorious line of godless 'godmen'. Having caused so much shok, he has fittingly come to grief himself.

But, ji, could all this actually become kind of professional hazard? If astrologers lie - and forcibly lay - does the fault lie not in themselves, but in star-signs per se?

Like Aries/Mesha, they are battering ram. They ram themselves into women rendered helpless; Kharat did so with drug-laced ludo.

Virgo/Kanya? Nah! Mostly, the victims are, were married. Like Taurus/Vrischabha, the bull, these sexual predators may fancy themselves as studs, but they are only hornt.

Like Gemini/Mithun, Kharat presented the usual 'twin' identities of godman and astrologer, also twinning sexual abuse with cheating. A Kharat victim was promised 'charged' stones, they were only charged for never delivered.

Like the Cancer/Karkata crab, followers get lullied into a pincer grip. Leo/Simha? Ardent devotees see them as the power-suffused 'Lord', never suspecting that they'll get the jungle instead.

As for Libra/Tula, guru-chela balance is never equal. Hope the scales of justice are.

Like Scorpio/Vrischika, this fake-o'-sting is the tail. Like Sagittarius/Dhanu, he's man above, beast below.

Capricorn/Makkar? The Sea God is ruled by Saturn; remember Shani's malefic influence? Unlike Aquarius/Kumbha, these nasties have little 'flow of wisdom'.

Alien Smart said: "This Easter weekend, let's crucify war-mongers and resurrect peace."

Finally, Hammered & Sickled?

If CPM-led LDF loses in Kerala on May 4, India will see its first Left-free gov't landscape in nearly half a century. The bigger story? Communist parties failed to find a new vocabulary for new India

Indrajit Rai@timesinternet.in



On May 4, Kerala may end up delivering a result bigger than its own election. If LDF loses, India will, for the first time in nearly half a century, have no left gov't anywhere in the country.

The great shrinkage | In parliamentary politics, Left went from 61 Lok Sabha seats in 2004 to 9 in 2024. That is not a routine electoral dip. It's the collapse of a national current into a few shrinking pockets.

Start with the economy. Communist politics in India drew strength from agrarian workers, public sector, unions, and agrarian interests. That made sense in an era of state-led industrialisation, and durable union power.

The problem was not only economics. It was language. Communist parties remained more fluent in opposing 'imperialism' and 'neo-liberalism' than in addressing the anxieties of the new voter: exam pressure, private education costs, insecure white-collar work, urban rent, healthcare bills, and the unstable dignity of gig labour.

Identity & welfare trap | From 1980s onward, Indian politics was restructured by Mandal, Mandir, and regional assertion. Caste, religion, language, and sub-national pride became more powerful vehicles of mobilisation than class solidarity.

Milestones of the Left in India 1957 - Kerala 1977 - West Bengal 1978 - Tripura 1996 - United Front 2004 - UPA alliance 2008 - Nuclear deal split 2011 - End in West Bengal 2018 - End in Tripura

RJD could feel closer to both self-respect and patronage. Left spoke of combining class and caste, but rarely reorganised itself deeply enough to put subordinated castes at the centre of leadership and strategy.

How's India's Economy Coping With The War?

So far, not badly. High forex reserves & low inflation cushioned the first blows. GOI's managed to avoid a crude oil supply shock. It all depends now, on when the conflict ends

Neeraj Kaushal



India's goldilocks moment is, perhaps, gone. Oil and gas import bills have been rising, amidst huge uncertainties of supplies. Rupee depreciated 3.5% in the month since the Iran war began.

Nageswaram, India's chief economic adviser, says the war will result in "considerable downside to FY27 growth estimate of 7.4%". While he stopped short of saying by how much, leading global investment banks and rating agencies are with their revised numbers.

Last year, Nageswaram had projected that Trump's 50% tariffs on India would reduce India's GDP growth by 0.5-0.6%. Goldman Sachs and Moody's Analytics forecasts suggest a projected damage from the Iran war on India's GDP growth to be at least twice as much.

Nageswaram listed four channels through which the Iran war would affect India: supply disruptions in oil, gas, and fertilisers; higher import prices; rising logistics costs; and inflation and insurance; and inflation and insurance; and inflation and insurance.

the economic blows from the Iran war: than in the face of similar shocks in the recent past. It was in a 'sweet spot' before the war began - sitting on a \$700bn pile of forex reserves, with retail inflation a mere 1.3% in 2025.

For now, India has managed its oil and gas needs well. GOI has acquired two months of crude supply and secured access to approximately one full month



of LPG supply. It has effectively diversified its sources of oil and gas. India is receiving more crude from its 41 suppliers across the world, than what was previously arriving through the Hormuz Strait.

Yet, calling India "an oasis of energy security", as a ministry press release did last week, is making travesty of a grave situation. A country that depends on imports for almost 90% of its oil, cannot be an oasis

of energy security, at a time crude price is oscillating around \$100 a barrel, and chances are that it may stay at that level, or even rise, for weeks, even months, to come.

It is true that the recent shortage of LPG cylinders is both supply and demand driven. People panic when they hear that something as essential as cooking gas, may become too expensive, or not be available at all.

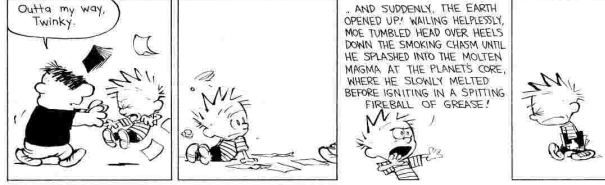
overall consumption of LPG fell close to 18% in the first half of March, reflecting supply disruptions.

The claim that India's energy security also underestimates the fiscal fragility associated with energy shocks. War has already disrupted shipping, raised freight costs, and strained sectors like pharma and fertilisers.

The biggest misreading is that the war will last and that would be its impact on the price of oil. Commentary from strategic experts is not very informative, even if Trump, who is fighting the war with an eye on the US midterm elections in Nov, is dying to declare a US victory.

Therwies is Professor of Social Policy, Columbia University

Calvin & Hobbes



Hanuman: The Emblem Of Devotion

Radhanath Swami

Hanuman is one of the most loved personalities in all of India. He is not just present in temples, rather, he lives in hearts of people. Across villages and cities, in homes and on streets, his name is remembered with affection and faith.

What makes Hanuman so special? Hanuman's trademark devotion for Ram, his eagerness to serve, his highly refined character and conduct, and his mighty strength speak volumes about him.

And strength, blessed Hanuman with extraordinary abilities. His childhood was filled with energy, playfulness, and divine charm, bringing joy to his parents and all around him.

He effortlessly overcame those obstacles through his might and devotion to Ram. After reaching Lanka, Hanuman successfully found Sita in Ashok Vatika. Sita recognised Hanuman as Ram's messenger only because of the sweet narrations from Hanuman.

Though he appeared small when he approached her, Hanuman revealed his vast form when Sita wondered how he could carry her back. Hanuman replied, "I am very small, but for the service of Ram, I can take up any size."

Hanuman's humility was extremely endearing to Sita. Hanuman not only found Sita, but also burnt Lanka and returned with vital information. During the battle, he flew to the Himalayas twice to bring life-saving herbs for Ram and Lakshman.

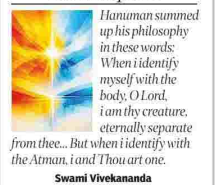
His childhood opened up; WAILING HELPLESSLY, MOE TUMBLED HEAD OVER HEELS DOWN THE SMOKING CHASM UNTIL HE SPLASHED INTO THE MOLTEN MAGMA AT THE PLANET'S CORE, WHERE HE SLOWLY MELTED BEFORE IGNITING IN A SPITTING FIREBALL OF GREASE!

THE SPEAKING TREE

Hanuman's devotion to Ram, his eagerness to serve, his highly refined character and conduct, and his mighty strength speak volumes about him.

Hanuman's devotion to Ram, his eagerness to serve, his highly refined character and conduct, and his mighty strength speak volumes about him.

Sacredspace



Hanuman summed up his philosophy in these words: When identify myself with the body, O Lord, I am thy creature, eternally separate from thee... But when I identify with the Atman, I and Thou art one.

Hanuman: The Emblem Of Devotion

Hanuman's valour was unmatched, yet he saw himself as insignificant. His knowledge was deep, yet he considered himself a fool before Ram. His power was limitless, yet he remained completely humble. And above all, he never claimed credit for anything he did.

Just as Hanuman played an important role in uniting Ram and Sita, even a small contribution or a squabble's effort in the service of the Lord can make our lives meaningful. Lord is pleased with the attitude of our service, and not with the magnitude. Ram grants freedom from fear to anyone who surrenders even once.

And Hanuman's surrender was not momentary. He surrendered to the will of Ram every single day.

The writer is spiritual guru, International Society for Krishna Consciousness



Editor's TAKE

Battle for Assam hinges on infiltration politics

As Assam Assembly Elections 2026 approach, the political discourse in the state has sharpened around a familiar and emotive theme-'infiltration'

As April 9, the election day in Assam, approaches, the atmosphere in the state is politically charged, and tempers are running high on both sides. The past elections in the State have been fought more on emotive issues than on issues of livelihood and people-centric issues. The NDA campaign spearheaded by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is focusing solely on the infiltration issue and has prominently placed it in their election manifesto. The issue of infiltration is not new to Assam, and the BJP has previously utilised this issue. The BJP has once again placed the issue of illegal immigration at the centre of its electoral narrative. Senior leaders, including Amit Shah and Himanta Biswa Sarma, have repeatedly asserted that the state faces a persistent threat from 'infiltrators'.

This issue is also the issue of national security and change in the demographic contours of the state. The BJP is promising to identify and repatriate such individuals to the place they belong. The BJP is also saying that it has freed vast lands in the state from encroachment in the last ten years and showcasing it as evidence of decisive governance. This is despite the fact that these claims are yet to be corroborated by official data, which remains elusive.

Neither the Assam government nor the Union Ministry of Home Affairs has maintained verifiable and consolidated figures on the number of individuals identified, detained, or deported over the past decade. This absence of verifiable data has provided Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi an opportunity to question the credibility of the BJP's claims, arguing that the issue is being raked up for electoral gains, whereas the reality on the ground is different.

The Congress wants to exploit the anti-incumbency and thus has focused on governance issues such as unemployment, inflation, and social welfare, to shift the narrative away from the emotive identity politics. The other things that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is banking on are a mix of welfare delivery and strong leadership. The Congress and its allies are attempting to build a coalition around economic concerns and institutional accountability. Yet, the 'infiltration' is the main issue in Assam today.

Assam's contemporary history has hovered around identity – the Assam Movement and the subsequent updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) – has made questions of identity and migration deeply sensitive. This theme resonates with the people across regions and communities. As polling day approaches, the key question is whether voters will prioritise emotive appeals linked to identity and security, or vote for livelihood and governance issues.

The lack of official data raises broader concerns about transparency in democratic discourse. The Assam elections are not just a contest for power in a 126-member Assembly; they are also a test of how narratives shape electoral choices in contemporary India.

Delhi Film Festival: A system in the making

The inaugural International Film Festival Delhi (IFFD) 2026 transforms the national capital into a vibrant, global hub for cinema, bridging the gap between mainstream Bollywood, regional excellence, and international storytelling



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

Delhi has always been a city of stories. Political, cultural, deeply personal, something is always unfolding here. This March, cinema found its way back into that mix in a big way. The Delhi International Film Festival 2026 didn't just begin; it arrived with scale, energy, and a certain confidence that felt long overdue. For a city that once hosted the International Film Festival of India before it moved to Goa, this feels less like something new and more like something reclaimed.

But the real question isn't about how it started. It's about what it becomes.

Because putting together a large festival is one thing. Building something that people take seriously year after year, that's where the real work begins. Right now, the festival has attention. It has curiosity. But what it needs next is identity, structure, and consistency. If Delhi is to build a serious cinematic identity, the festival must resist becoming a one-off showcase. The first step towards institutionalisation lies in temporal discipline. The festival must anchor itself firmly to a fixed calendar window, a defined geography, and a stable identity. Just as Cannes is inseparable from May and Venice from late August, Delhi must claim its own moment in the cultural calendar. A late-March positioning works strategically, it avoids overlap with global heavyweights while aligning with India's academic and cultural cycles, but this must now be codified and protected. A festival that shifts in time and space each year risks losing not just recall, but relevance. Once that foundation is in place, the next big shift has to be in how the festival programs itself. Right now, it feels like a wide, fairly inclusive mix, and that's understandable for a first edition. But going forward, it has to feel more intentional. Less like a collection, more like a point of view.

The difference between a good festival and a great one is not how many films it shows, but how clearly it knows what it wants to say through them. That means building sections that feel thought-through. Bringing in more director-led storytelling, where the craft and perspective matter as much as the narrative itself. Giving real, central space to women-directed and women-centric cinema (not as a token category, but as a core part of the programming). And also leaning into films that engage with real, lived issues, social, political, environmental. Because the festivals that stay with you are the ones that reflect the moment you're living in.

At the same time, Delhi has the opportunity to



VOICES FROM THE NORTH-EAST, INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS, SMALLER INDUSTRIES, THEY SHOULD FEEL CENTRAL, NOT PERIPHERAL, AND ALONGSIDE THAT, OTT CAN'T BE IGNORED. IT'S NOT A PARALLEL WORLD ANYMORE; IT'S PART OF THE SAME ECOSYSTEM

do something most festivals in India haven't fully managed yet, to become a space where cinema is not just screened, but developed. There is so much raw talent in this city, students, theatre actors, independent creators, people experimenting with storytelling in ways that don't always find platforms. The festival can step into that gap. Script labs, pitching forums, casting platforms, youth sections, these aren't add-ons, they're what can make the festival feel alive beyond the screenings.

What can really set Delhi apart, though, is how deeply it involves its own people. Right now, a lot of the festival still sits within designated venues. But cinema has the ability to move, to travel, to meet people where they are. Open-air screenings across neighbourhoods, community-led programming, student participation, and these things can turn the festival into something that city feels a part of, not just something happening around it. The more people feel included, the stronger the festival becomes. There's also a strong case for going deeper within India itself.

If the festival wants to be global, it has to first be rooted. Regional cinema needs more than representation; it needs prominence. Voices from the North-East, independent filmmakers, and smaller industries, they should feel central, not peripheral. And alongside that, OTT can't be ignored. It's not a parallel world anymore; it's part of the same ecosystem. Bringing it into the festival, giving it space, engaging with it seriously, that's just being honest about where cinema is today.

At the same time, the global cinema showcase this year has been one of the festival's strongest signals of intent. Bringing films from across continents, diverse storytelling styles, and different cinematic languages onto one platform has helped position Delhi as outward-looking and internationally aware. The current edition has seen a notable focus on regions such as Saudi Arabia and parts of Africa, alongside a wider mix

of international entries from Europe, Asia, and beyond. But going forward, this needs to become sharper and more curated. Instead of broad representation, the festival could move towards focused country spotlights, director retrospectives, and region-specific showcases that offer deeper engagement rather than surface-level exposure. Building sustained partnerships with global festivals and film bodies can also ensure that Delhi is not just screening international cinema but becoming part of its circulation. The goal should be to move from access to influence.

If Delhi really wants to move into the league of major festivals, it also needs to think beyond screenings and build an industry layer. Spaces where filmmakers meet producers, where ideas find backing, where collaborations begin. That's what gives a festival weight. And in doing so, it doesn't have to compete with the International Film Festival of India. It can actually complement it, where IFFI remains the flagship, Delhi can become more agile, more industry-facing, and more experimental.

A lot of this, of course, depends on how the government chooses to take this forward. Not just as an annual event to organise, but as something to build over time. That means consistency of funding, long-term thinking, and a structure that exists beyond individual editions. Because festivals like this don't become important overnight, they grow into that space.

Right now, the Delhi International Film Festival has done something important: it has made people look. It has been shown that Delhi can host something of this scale and do it well. But it doesn't stop there. What lasts is substantial. The next edition doesn't need to be bigger. It just needs to be clearer. More confident about what it stands for and where it wants to go. Because if Delhi gets this right, it won't just be another stop on the festival circuit. It will become a place where cinema actually feels like it belongs.



The author is a Commentator and Writer on Cinema, Branding, Media Management and Geo-Strategic Communication. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaisnava Srinivasan

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PICTALK



A man with his cheeks pierced by a metal rod takes part in a procession during the 'Pongu Uthiram' festival, in Bhopal

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BEYOND ELIMINATING EXTREMISTS: ADDRESSING THE ROOTS OF NAXALISM

The editorial on the government's claims of eliminating Naxalism (1-4-26) is welcome. It is widely understood that Naxalism is essentially a social issue, though its methods of addressing inequality through violence remain unacceptable. No meaningful social or economic transformation can be achieved through coercion, and such approaches inevitably turn predatory. This explains why extremist groups have gradually lost public support and declined in both size and activity.

However, their persistence points to a deeper reality—the continuing distress of the marginalized communities they claim to represent. The crucial question is whether the economic condition of these sections has improved enough to naturally erode extremism, or whether

governments have merely focused on eliminating insurgents while neglecting the root causes. Evidence suggests that poverty and inequality remain widespread. Millions still depend on free rations, unemployment is rising, school dropouts are increasing, and access to basic needs remains limited for a vast population.

At the same time, wealth concentration is growing, with rising numbers of billionaires even as India ranks poorly on global hunger and corruption indices. This widening gap reflects policy priorities that seem skewed. In a democracy, violence has no place. Yet the real objective must be the eradication of extreme poverty and inequality, not just extremist groups.

A G RAJMOHAN | AMANTAPUR

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

Seeking forgiveness for life's trials



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2ND OPINION

Think of a person who has offended you. He has now realized his mistake, and comes to apologize sincerely. What will you do? You will certainly give it a thought, and if the offence is not intentional you may forgive. Now expand this phenomenon to our situation. Throughout our life, we face many setbacks, problems, troubles, etc. Why does it happen? I will explain in this article and its solution.

This Creation is based on dharma (highest religious principles formulated by God). In simple language it is: "What you sow is what you reap." Then, it is logical to accept that whatever adversities we face must be due to our infringing dharma in the past. We all have a past including previous lives when we have done many sinful and impious acts. These all must bear bad fruits. Why else are we here in the 'duhkhalaya' (place of misery). (The Bhagavad-Gita



8.15) These bad fruits include two kinds of punishments. One is of fixed type of something bad happening like a major disease. The other is faulty 'svabhava' (nature), which is being lusty, greedy, hateful, etc. Such nature makes us act in bad ways, and we get into trouble repeatedly.

Unfortunately, our reaction is equally faulty. We lament, blame others for our woes and even blame God. Our overinflated ego does not allow us to admit that we must have acted badly earlier as we are presently doing also. This is gross ignorance. What should ideally be done? We must go to the authority, who can condone our past mistakes. I am referring to God – the Controller. Wise persons have done so in the past and benefited. Ravan was

immensely proud of his material possessions and power. He even foolishly kidnapped Setaaji. Surely, Lord Ramachandra had to punish him. Credit to Ravana that he admitted his past sins before leaving his body. Another famous example is of Arjuna. He tried to be too casual with Lord Krishna, but realized his mistake. He prayed for forgiveness to the Lord quite sincerely. (11.41-45)

How do we approach the Almighty? We first of all strike a relationship with the Lord by doing spiritual practices, which are easy to do. What can be easier than chanting Krishna, Krishna, Krishna..... Similar each processes are 'darshan' (seeing the Lord in His Deity form), 'naman' (offer obeisance to God, etc. Now we are ready to sincerely beg for forgiveness).

This is what I have been doing. My Lord has not only condoned many of my past bad acts, but also given me many boons as well. Because I took responsibility of my faulty past. And I have promised to be on my best behaviour from now onwards. Sincerely apologising and continuing with the same earlier ways does not impress God, who knows us fully. Yes, it is stressful to become pure and watch all my acts by the body, senses and words, but it can be done. I am glad to state that I am doing quite well.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and a popular columnist



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mamata mimicks Modi's style

Trinamool Congress (TMC) supreme and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has adopted a strategy of projecting herself as the face of the party across all 29% constituencies, urging voters to "consider me your candidate."

This approach closely mirrors Prime Minister Narendra Modi's centralised campaign style in national elections. In response to Home Minister Amit Shah's detailed "charge sheet" (Abhigyana) against the TMC government, Banerjee has turned the narrative around by highlighting his "clean chit" to portray him as a victim of conspiracy. TMC leaders dismissed the document as an outsider's attack and countered with their own grievance list, citing withheld funds and rising prices.

Banerjee has further accused the BJP of manipulating electoral rolls and even plotting against her life, while calling for a chargesheet against Modi and Shah. Her rhetoric invokes issues like riot incitement, drawing parallels with how the BJP once used the Bofors scandal against the Congress, despite Rajiv Gandhi's later exoneration.

In Indian politics, "clean chits" often transcend legal closure to become tools of political messaging, with parties interpreting them to suit their narratives.

BIVYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE | FARIDABAD

Thoughts on Autism awareness day

A person with autism tends to withdraw into a shell due to impaired ability to communicate with the surroundings. Also termed Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), speech and non-verbal interaction are seriously hampered compelling the affected to go through a repetitive behaviour. Diagnosable as early as one year, proper scientific intervention can mitigate the developmental problems to a large extent. The wide spectrum of autism also means an individual can live with the two extremes—seriously challenged or perfectly normal.

There are specific milestones in a child's developmental curve, and parents should know what to expect of their little ones at appropriate stages in life. "What" and "when" are two crucial words. "Autism" is "autos" from Greek and forced "self-isolation" is a big "no". Known to run in the family, the unknown cause of autism makes it interesting to professionals who have relied mainly on behavioural therapy and language therapy to corner the disorder denoting a marked shift from the past. Correcting accompanying deficiencies and psychological disorders go hand-in-hand towards improving the child's quality of life. April 2 is Autism awareness day.

GANPATI BHAT | AKOLA

Census begins, caste data to be included

The importance of the census, an institution with roots stretching back over two millennia to ancient empires, cannot be overstated. In modern India, it is the backbone of governance, allocating everything from infrastructure development to welfare schemes. Where resources are limited, their allocation must be informed by evidence; which regions still lack electricity, where educational deficits persist, and how economic disparities are distributed. The new data will also illuminate demographic trends, including the uneven success of family planning initiatives across regions.

At last, we have a national census that includes castes. The two-phase mammoth task, beginning April 1, has several firsts to its credit. This is the first time since 1931 that nationwide caste enumeration is being undertaken. It is also the first fully digital exercise, with enumerators using mobile applications to record responses, making the process more efficient and less prone to errors. The digital format also enables faster data processing and analysis. The inclusion of caste in the nationwide census - delayed from its original 2021 timeline due to the Covid-19 pandemic - is a welcome development. It marks a vital step towards evidence-based policy making in India.

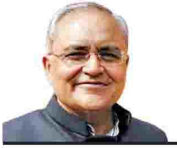
YASH PAL RAJANI | JALANDHAR



The Jihadist mindset relentlessly haunts India with internal support

The tendency to dismiss historical references as irrelevant does little to advance understanding. On the contrary, it risks repeating past mistakes. The events of 1947, remind us that the line between disorder and organised subversion can be perilously thin

FIRST Column



BALBIR PUNJ

The arrest of Ahmad Lone by the Delhi Police on March 29 is not merely another routine success in counter-terror operations. According to media reports, his intended targets included Delhi's Kalkaji Temple and the bustling Connaught Place—symbols of both faith and urban life in the national capital. Acting under instructions from handlers based in Pakistan, Lone was allegedly engaged in recruiting Indian Muslim youth for the Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Only a few days earlier, security agencies had apprehended twelve suspects linked to ISIS and al-Qaeda in a coordinated operation across multiple states. Among them were individuals from ordinary professions—a bike-taxi driver, a restaurant employee, and even a laser-marking technician. Their presence in such networks underscores a sobering reality: radicalisation today does not wear a uniform; it often operates covertly, beneath the surface of normal life.

This is not an isolated incident. In November last year, a devastating explosion in a moving vehicle in Delhi caused significant casualties, carried out by Dr. Umar U. Nabi. Investigations led to the recovery of over 3,000 kilograms of explosives, weapons, and bomb-making equipment from Faridabad.

Several other doctors from Faridabad's Al-Falah University were detained. These terrorists were not impoverished and illiterate but belonged to a highly educated and privileged segment of Indian society—challenging the common narrative that poverty and lack of opportunities drive beleaguered Muslims to radicalism.

Around the same time, Gujarat Police arrested Dr. Ahmed Mohiuddin Syed and his associates for allegedly attempting to produce ricin—a lethal toxin—with the intent of contaminating food and water supplies. These sordid incidents reveal a method, a pattern, and above all, a mindset. So, none—poor, rich, unlettered, or highly qualified—are immune to the influence of the toxicity of jihad—which has a theological underpinning.

The temptation in public discourse is to interpret these developments through the



THE PARTITION OF INDIA IN 1947, EXECUTED EXPLICITLY ON RELIGIOUS LINES, AND THE LATER EXODUS OF KASHMIRI HINDUS, STAND AS STARK REMINDERS THAT HISTORY IS NOT MERELY A CHRONICLE OF THE PAST

The writer is an eminent columnist, former Chairman of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), and the author of 'Trust with Anxiety: Decolonisation of India' and 'Narrative for the Majority'.

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lens of recent political narratives. Some claim that such terror acts are violent responses to perceived anti-Muslim policies by the Modi Government. However, this oversimplified and politically convenient perspective ignores the complexity of a phenomenon that has persisted for centuries. Such opportunistic thinking and time-serving analysis prevent civil society from finding meaningful solutions to this long-standing issue.

In fact, subcontinent Muslims' rancour against Hindus has a long history, extending beyond the birth of Bharatiya Jana Sangh or the Bharatiya Janata Party. A segment of Muslims had grievances with Congress in pre-partition India when it was led by Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, and Sardar Patel. Leveraging that Muslim resentment, the British created Pakistan by partitioning away one-third of India. And the jihadists' war against residual India began right after independence.

A brief recall of the events of September 1947 in Delhi helps us understand this ongoing vicious phenomenon. Contemporary accounts suggest that what unfolded in the capital was far more than spontaneous rioting. V. P.

Menon, who served as Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of the States, observed, "the capital buzzed with rumours of a deep-laid, long-prepared Muslim conspiracy to overthrow the new Government of free India and to seize the capital. This was not paranoia; it was an assessment grounded in intelligence inputs and subsequent discoveries.

L.B. Kripalani, then President of the Congress, provides even more revealing testimony. He wrote: "Searches of Muslim houses by the police had revealed dumps of bombs, arms and ammunition... Sten-guns, Bren guns, mortars and wireless transmitters were seized." Kripalani also noted that in several instances, "arms were recovered from mosques and adjoining localities".

The makeup of the police force further complicated the situation. As Kripalani noted, "the bulk of the police force was Muslim... a number of them in their uniforms and with arms had deserted." Delhi, in those days, was not just a city; it was a capital under siege, confronting the threat of internal subversion. This detail is crucial. It indicates that the

violence was not entirely spontaneous; it had elements of preparation and coordination—a mindset that continues to rock India to this day.

It is also a harsh but undeniable truth that most of those who demanded Partition and tirelessly worked for the creation of Pakistan neither left India nor did the supporting political class—including communists—creed irrevocably near extinct in the land of their dreams—but still shaping narratives in the country they had worked hard to break.

Had such divisive elements left India, the residual separatism and religious radicalism might have faded, or evolved—like in Indonesia or Malaysia—into a more culturally rooted, civilisationally aligned form. Instead, that process was stalled. The Marx-Macaulay mindset, in the name of secularism, blunted any natural assimilation.

The result is stark: for some, democracy has not become a vehicle of reform and empowerment, but merely a tool to consolidate religious identity in a toxic form. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar once cautioned in a different context, "The Muslims have no

interest in politics as such. Their predominant interest is religion... Muslim politics is essentially clerical and recognises only one difference, namely, that existing between Hindus and Muslims." Over a millennium, the Indian subcontinent has witnessed waves of incursions shaped by a doctrinal zeal that often fused faith with conquest. From Muhammad bin Qasim's invasion to the campaigns of Mahmud of Ghazni, Muhammad Ghori, Babur, Aurangzeb, and Ahmad Shah Abdali, historical records recount episodes of violence, iconoclasm, and coercion. Afghanistan, once a centre of Hindu-Buddhist civilisation, underwent a profound transformation.

The Partition of India in 1947, executed explicitly on religious lines, and the later exodus of Kashmiri Hindus, stand as stark reminders that history is not merely a chronicle of the past—it is a force that shapes the present. Concepts such as 'Ghazwa-e-Hind', though not universally accepted, continue to find resonance in circular circles. It is this ideological substratum that provides continuity between past and present manifestations of extremism.

These historical episodes are not invoked to inflame passions, but to illuminate patterns. The parallels with contemporary developments are instructive. Today's networks—whether linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba, ISIS, or al-Qaeda—operate within a globalised ecosystem, drawing upon narratives that transcend national boundaries. The individuals involved may differ in profession and education, but the ideological thread that connects them remains the same.

The tendency to dismiss historical references as irrelevant does little to advance understanding. On the contrary, it risks repeating past mistakes. The events of 1947, as documented by contemporaries like Kripalani and Menon, remind us that the line between disorder and organised subversion can be perilously thin.

And Ahmad Lone is thus both a warning and a reminder. It underscores the persistence of threats, but also the capacity of the state to respond. Whether India can navigate this terrain successfully will depend on its willingness to engage with its history honestly, to confront ideological extremism without equivocation, and to reaffirm the principles that bind its diverse society together. History does not repeat itself in identical form, but it often rhymes. To ignore its echoes is to invite its consequences.

Last frontier: The ideological battle against Naxalism



ARADHITA SINGH

What began as a radical peasant uprising nearly six decades ago and evolved into one of the country's most persistent internal security challenges appears to be approaching its final phase. While the armed movement is nearing its collapse, the ideological battle that underpins the Naxal ideology remains far from over.

The Naxal movement traces its origins to the Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal in 1967, where a peasant revolt ignited the broader Maoist insurgency. By 1969, the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-leninist) under Charu Mazumdar gave organisational structure to this revolutionary impulse. However, the movement soon faced decline in the 1970s due to state crackdowns, internal divisions and leadership losses. The insurgency re-emerged in the 1980s-1990s through groups such as the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), eventually culminating in their merger in 2004 to form the CPI (Maist). This marked the beginning of the movement's most violent phase, between 2005 and 2010. This is the phase where Maoists controlled vast stretches of land across eastern and central India, called the 'Red Corridor'. From being described as the 'single biggest internal security challenge facing the country', the discourse around Naxalism has evolved significantly in recent years. Repeated assertions by the Hon'ble Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister have emphasised that the movement is now in its terminal phase, with a clear national objective of eliminating Left Wing Extremism by March 2026. Recent data highlights a clear pattern of decline in Maoist capabilities and a weakening morale of existing cadres. Arrests and Surrenders have shrunk, reflecting internal demoralisation and a declining support base.

Large-scale attacks—once the hallmark of Maoist operations—have significantly decreased, now replaced by sporadic, localised violence lacking strategic coherence. Coordinated security operations, improved intelligence, and sustained political focus and will have reduced the insurgency to a shadow of its former self. Perhaps the most striking indicator is the contradiction of the movement's geographical footprint.

From 126 affected districts in 2013, the number dropped to 38 by 2024 and further to 11 in 2025. This is about a 91% reduction in districts affected by Left Wing Extremism in 12 years. This dramatic rollback is not merely a tactical success; it represents a structural weakening of the insurgency's ability to sustain itself. The 2026 target represents not just political will and ambition but actual measurable progress on the ground. While evidence paints a picture of a movement in terminal decline—the data revealing a shift from Maoist actions to defensive and reactive behaviour—history offers a cautionary lesson. Instances within our country and abroad provide examples of how 'ideas are bulletproof'. Ideas are inherently more resilient than armed formations. They exist beyond territory, weapons, or organisational hierarchies to survive. Even as Naxal violence declines, the ideological narratives that sustained the movement continue to circulate. These narratives often reframe violence as legitimate resistance against perceived state oppression, thereby diluting moral condemnation and sustaining sympathy for the cause. The disconnect between the security operations' success and ideological persistence presents India's next major challenge beyond 31st March 2026. Maoist ideology is not confined to the remote forested regions. It thrives within a broader urban ecosystem that includes intellectual spaces, academia, theatre, cultural platforms and digital spaces. These narratives are disseminated through debates and activism, often romanticising armed violence. Cultural mediums play a powerful role in shaping public imagination, portraying the Naxal movement with moral sympathy while questioning the state's legitimacy. This ecosystem is not necessarily a coordinated conspiracy, but rather a layered network of influences that collectively sustain and legitimise Maoist thought. Its resilience lies in its decentralised nature and its ability to operate independently of the insurgency's physical presence. Maoist narratives spread through certain identifiable channels. Digital media has amplified the reach of these ideas, enabling them to transcend geographic boundaries and target new audiences, especially the youth. Young people are particularly vulnerable to ideological influences due to the role of peer networks, campus movements, and emotionally resonant narratives. These narratives shape and sway public perceptions more powerfully than factual counter arguments, making ideological contestation a long-term endeavour. As security forces 'reclaim' the erstwhile Naxal territories, the State is faced with its most consequential challenge of demonstrating that

governance can bring tangible gains to the lives of the communities affected by the Naxal violence. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to suggest that the durability of peace in these areas will be incumbent upon the perpetual delivery of peace, justice and development by the government institutions. Roads, schools, healthcare facilities, and digital connectivity are not mere developmental projects—they are instruments of legitimacy. Economic revival is equally critical. Restoring markets, livelihood, and local economies integrates these regions to the national mainstream, fostering peace and stability. The post-2026 phase requires a strategic shift from conflict management to peace consolidation. This involves a long-term commitment to inclusive governance, sensitivity to local cultures, conflict mapping and sustained engagement with affected communities. A transition from a security-centric approach to a service-delivery model is essential. This must take precedence as it would appropriately address the root cause that was once exploited by Naxal narratives, leading to Maoist mobilisation. Equally important is the need for a fact-based public narrative that counters misinformation and acknowledges, along with the surrendered cadres, the victims of Naxal violence. Youth-focused skill development programmes can further serve as a powerful tool for preventing radicalisation by creating economic opportunities. India's progress against Naxalism is undeniably remarkable. What was once described as the country's 'single biggest internal security threat' has now been reduced to a limited last-order challenge confined to a few districts. However, this is not the end of the journey against the Naxal movement. The final battles are not in the realm of the 'jungle and zamans', but in the realm of ideas. Without addressing the ideological ecosystem that sustains Naxalism, there is a risk that the movement could re-emerge in new forms. Durable peace rests on the pillars of opportunity, legitimacy and trust. Development must create opportunities; governance must build legitimacy, and sustained, area-specific engagement must foster trust between the state and the tribal communities of the region. We may have won the battle of arms, but the war of ideas continues, and Bharat's success in eliminating Naxalism from its soil ultimately would depend on its success in winning both.

The strategic value of coal: Why India Needs more of it



ANANDA JIT GOSWAMI

In an era defined by climate action and the global push toward clean energy, coal is often cast as the elephant in the room. Yet, recent geopolitical upheavals, wars in the Middle East, and the ongoing liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and gas crisis have forced policymakers to realise a more complicated reality: coal, despite its environmental costs, remains indispensable to global energy security, especially for emerging economies like India to realise Visions Bharat 2047 vision in the short and medium term. The resurgence of coal is not a failure of climate ambition or climate action; rather, it is a mirror showing the reflection of structural vulnerabilities in the global energy system, which has never been fair for the Global South and for countries like India, which is aiming to aspire for its Visions Bharat ambitions by 2047. The war in Iran, the Middle East, disruptions in global gas supply chains, and volatile LPG prices have exposed the fragility of overreliance on imported fuels for many countries worldwide. This has raised the point that a transition to a cleaner world by 2070 cannot happen without ensuring energy supply security and creating a fair global energy system. Hence, dependence on coal will remain in the short- and medium-term until 2055. In the meantime, coal-to-gas, chemical, and liquid-fuel pathways need to be explored more aggressively for countries like India to improve energy security and mitigate current or future energy supply constraints. Gas supply for LPG, widely used for cooking and heating in developing nations, has always been subject to international price fluctuations and supply disruptions. Reliance on imported LPG creates fiscal pressure on countries like India and exposes households to price shocks. The need to convert coal to synthetic fuels such as methanol and dimethyl ether (DME), which can partially replace LPG in cooking and industrial applications, has only grown and can help stabilise prices by reducing dependence on imported gas. This is more pertinent if the future global geopolitical vulnerabilities increase. Coal continues to supply the bulk of India's electricity for households and industry. This supply dependence arises against the backdrop of intermittency issues with the availability of electricity from solar and wind in India, due to inadequate, suboptimal storage facilities. The situation on that front is gradually improving. However, until the optimal levels of storage and the grid infrastruc-

ture's intermittency issues are solved, coal will remain the source of base load power and will continue to do so for the manufacturing and service sector's share of GDP rises in the future.

The risks of grid instability on the Indian Power Grid increase every day during the peak demand period, while the renewable source-based electricity supply dips in the evening. The backup is often provided by hydro and wind to a large extent. However, the situation can worsen if peak demand continues to rise with future economic activity, without concomitant storage and grid infrastructure support. Hence, coal is a strategic support in such a case.

With the advent and investment in coal gasification technologies, dependence on LPG for cooking and industrial applications can decrease if the availability and off-take of methanol and DME increase, thereby enhancing national energy security and resilience. Coal creates local pollution, but it can be seen as a binary choice between coal versus renewables or clean energy. India's people-centric clean energy transition will be a symbiotic coexistence of coal and clean energy, placing people at the core by addressing inequality, industrialisation, and urbanisation. Coal will evolve during such a transition, generating cleaner products through gasification. Supercritical and ultra-supercritical power plants will have to be introduced to significantly reduce emissions per unit of electricity generated in this pathway. Carbon capture, utilisation, and storage (CCUS) and methane capture will be part of the pathway while supporting the lives, livelihoods, and identities of coal ecosystem communities.

Abrupt coal phase-out will create trauma, memory, and identity loss for communities, which will be more personal and beyond the metric of income.

India, if it is to reach Visions Bharat by 2047, cannot afford the ill-effects of communities owing to abrupt coal phase-downs or phase-outs. Communities have to evolve and enter a transition process through reskilling, rehabilitation, and repurposing efforts around coal mines. Coal provides the people of India with the energy autonomy to attain Visions Bharat by 2047, while we still take gradual steps towards scaling and deploying renewable energy technologies and their infrastructure. A world that is becoming more fragile, politically multipolar, with geopolitical vulnerabilities, only reminds us that coal's relevance is not about nostalgia but about navigating and negotiating the peaceful present and future of India. Hence, Coal is surely not an elephant in the room but a solution for India and its Visions Bharat Goals.

The Pioneer SINCE 1868

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The comforting idea that 'the old will die and the young will forget' expresses one of the deepest aspirations of Israeli leaders after 1948. It was not to be

Rashid Khalid

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

—Rammath Goenka

NOW THAT THE GUNS HAVE FALLEN SILENT, GOVERNANCE MUST SPEAK

THE Union government's deadline to eliminate Maoism—March 31, 2026—has passed. It marks an important moment in a conflict that once covered the Red Corridor, a vast swathe of hilly, tribal regions across nine states. The insurgency, which once affected over 120 districts, had declined sharply by 2025 and is now confined to a few forested areas in central and eastern India. Security forces claim that the Maoist leadership has been greatly weakened after decades of violence that took thousands of lives, including civilians, Maoists and security personnel.

Yet, the decimation of the armed group does not mean the problem is over. For the first time in years, communities in these regions are starting to feel some relief as paramilitary forces move into places that were once out of reach. However, the bigger challenge goes beyond security. Over the past decade, the government claims to have built more roads, improved telecom networks, expanded banking services, and set up schools and skill centres in these regions. Welfare programmes have also grown, though not always consistently.

But development is about more than just numbers. Some of the grim realities that allowed Maoism to flourish—deprivation, exclusion, broken trust—remain. Tribal communities, some having lost their land and forest rights, continue to face exploitation and official neglect in many places. If these grievances are not fixed, the ground may remain fertile for Maoism or other similar movements. The government needs to be not just present, but also be responsive. The Constitution offers a path forward with protections under the Fifth Schedule, forest rights and local authority through the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act. These have fallen short mostly because of poor implementation, not because the laws themselves are flawed. The governors' duty to protect tribal interests should be taken seriously. Officials need to work closely and responsibly with local communities.

Rehabilitation needs to be more than just a gesture. Education, healthcare, jobs and dignity should reach every household. The sharp decline in Maoist control gives a window of opportunity. Until March 31, the government chiefly focused on security issues in these regions, often at a high human cost. Now it needs to shift to solving the deeper social, economic and cultural issues such as land rights, jobs and inclusion that are at the root of the conflict.

CONCERTED EFFORT NEEDED TO CURB MATERNAL DEATHS

A detailed study has raised alarm over the slowing global progress on reducing maternal mortality rate (MMR). Of the 204 countries surveyed for the paper published in the *Lancet Obstetrics, Gynaecology & Women's Health* journal, 104 are yet to meet the United Nations and World Health Organization's Sustainable Development Goal 3.1 to lower MMRs to less than 70 deaths per lakh live births by 2030. It places India in the higher MMR bracket, alongside Ethiopia, Nigeria and Pakistan.

Though India's MMR of 88 recorded in 2021-23 is an improvement from the 91 reported in 2019-21, it is still way above the SDG 3.1 target. This is despite various initiatives by the Union government under the National Health Mission—such as Janani Suraksha Yojana, Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram, Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan, Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan and LaQShya—to reduce MMR across the country.

Odisha (153), Chhattisgarh (146), Madhya Pradesh (142) and Uttar Pradesh (141) are the biggest laggards, with rates more than double the target. The states that have already bettered the 2030 goal include Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, which have MMRs of 30 each, along with Tamil Nadu at 35, Telangana at 39 and Karnataka at 38. Puducherry became the first Union Territory to record zero MMR in 2024-25. Clearly South India has fared far better in safeguarding maternal health.

According to the National Family Health Survey, births at healthcare institutions—one of the most effective ways to lower MMR—accounted for 88.8 percent of the total in 2019-21, a significant increase from 78.9 percent in 2015-16. The main reasons for maternal mortality in India are obstetric haemorrhage, infections, hypertensive disorders, anaemia and nutritional deficiencies, unsafe abortions, delays in accessing care and lack of preparedness. While camps are provisioned to improve health departments' outreach to pregnant women in remote areas, the sheer magnitude of the challenge of covering the entire population is steep.

To achieve the SDG goal, a joint approach between the Union and states is needed to significantly improve access to pregnancy care. While we aim for having a Viksit Bharat by 2047, we should not forget the old Sanskrit *shloka*, *Janani jannabhoomicha suargadapi garivasi* (Mother and motherland are superior even to heaven).

QUICK TAKE

ACHIEVING BALANCE IN AI

A parliamentary panel's report on artificial intelligence should propel the government to aim higher and act faster. Of the three main constraints identified in deploying AI at scale, adequacy of computing facilities and datasets can be ensured relatively faster, given enough investment and energy allocation. But the third issue—shortage of skills—would take country-wide planning. Lessons can be learnt from China in both what to do and what not to. Chinese schools embed curiosity in AI and robotics early, as it has been identified as a subject of national priority and made mandatory in several provinces. But a balance is also needed. Experts have warned of the harm to mental health that Chinese parents' embrace of AI tutors, tutors and therapy bots can lead to.

MANIPUR'S tragic ethnic conflict is threatening to acquire a new dimension by bringing more ethnic groups into the theatre. This looming danger was sensed all along by those who intimately understand the state's complex multi-ethnic demography. But others chose a simplistic view.

Even as the nearly-three-year-old confrontation between the majority non-tribal, predominantly Hindu Meiteis and Christian Kuki-Zo group of tribes is showing signs of easing, a new conflict front is opening up between Kukis and Nagas, whose settlements in the hills are closely interlaced.

For the moment, this new friction is largely restricted to three of the state's 10 hill districts. The latest is in Ukhrul, where Kukis and Tangkhul Nagas are now in a dangerous faceoff, with two families already counted and over 50 houses belonging to both sides destroyed in the Litan area along the Imphal-Ukhrul road. Earlier, even while the Meitei-Kuki conflict was raging, tension had begun brewing in the Tamenlong and Kangpokpi districts between Kukis and Zeliangrong Nagas.

Like other Naga tribes in Manipur, the Zeliangrongs claim that the lands on which the Kukis are now settled were originally theirs, leased out to the latter. They are also unhappy that camps for Kuki militants who signed a suspension of operation agreement with the government were being relocated to lands they consider theirs.

For about a year, the militant Zeliangrong United Front waged a campaign of destroying paddy fields that they claim were cultivated on their lands by Kukis, causing dangerous frictions.

Last month, the problem was compounded with the Tangkhul Nagas also coming into the picture. On the evening of February 7, trouble exploded in Litan village when a few drunken Kuki men assaulted and injured a Tangkhul man. Efforts to reach an amicable settlement failed. The open hostilities that broke out by February 9 are now threatening to spread.

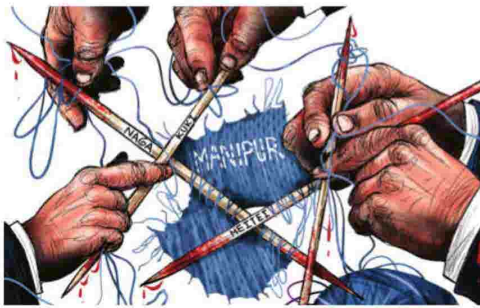
Quite obviously, a single spark could not have caused an inferno had the ground not been dry and ready to catch fire. The Tangkhuls, too, consider the Kuki migrants and their settlements to be near by Tangkhul villages. They claim these leased lands still belong to Tangkhuls. The Kukis, however, counter-claim that all the lands they are now settled on are rightfully theirs.

The land conflict between two hill communities shows that the state's complex ethnic fabric can't be easily folded into binaries. Universal laws must replace selective British-era codes

FIRE SPREADS TO THE HILLS OF MANIPUR

PRADIPT PHANJOUBAM

Editor, Imphal Review of Arts and Politics



SOURIN ROY

It is pertinent to note that steam for the current Kuki-Tangkhul tensions began building over compensation claims for lands the government had acquired for broadening of the Imphal-Ukhrul highway.

Modern land regulations under the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 are not extended into the hill districts. Instead, the customary laws of indigenous tribes are still in vogue there. The current land administration system is roughly modelled on what independent India inherited from British revenue management in the Northeast and Myanmar, where in the hills were left unadministered, designated as 'excluded areas' or 'partially excluded areas'.

The unfolding conflict in Manipur is an indication that changes in this archaic system are called for. Entrenched interests can be predicted to resist any move to introduce modern land laws in the hills, but the need of the hour is at least to codify the customary laws so they can be justly and impartially applied to all stakeholders.

Equally importantly, the law must make it mandatory for traditionally shifting populations to adopt a sedentary and enumerable lifestyle. Deadly frictions between mobile and sedentary populations are a historical reality and continue to be so. Kuki villages tend to constantly split and proliferate, which often causes frictions between them and their neighbours.

History tells us that when the British took over the Northeast, the valleys—where agricultural surpluses led to state formation with centralised bu-

chaic system are called for. Entrenched interests can be predicted to resist any move to introduce modern land laws in the hills, but the need of the hour is at least to codify the customary laws so they can be justly and impartially applied to all stakeholders.

raucracies—were easier to bring under one law. In the mountains, the numerous villages were like tiny kingdoms, often at war with each other. An agreement with one would not hold in the next village, prompting the British to leave them as unadministered territories, except for conducting occasional punitive expeditions.

Two centuries after the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, which brought the British to the Northeast, the socio-economic playfields have considerably levelled out. Efforts must now be made to evolve suitable, consensual reforms to bring the region out of its time warp, towards a more universal legal platform.

Meanwhile, the fact-finders who trooped to Manipur when the conflict was restricted to Meiteis and Kuki-Zos are largely silent on this new development. Now that both the warring sides are Christian tribal communities, they probably realise how wrong their familiar conflict template of a Hindu mafia targeting minority Christians, Muslims, Dalits or tribals was.

The lesson is that the representation of traumatic conflicts in complex multi-ethnic social structures such as Manipur's is never easy. The temptation before para-roping observers is to adopt linear, textbook conflict models they are familiar with to comprehend what they witness. But these can be grossly inadequate.

While it is absolutely necessary to not give moral equivalence to victims and perpetrators, the line that divides the two is not always distinct in conflicts in such a complex and intertwined ethnic maze. Doing conflicting parties can be victims as much as perpetrators.

As trauma scholars have cautioned, this shortfall can be true for the subjects of the conflicts themselves writing about them, as well as for observers from outside these theatres assessing the conflicts. While the former are prone to what Dominick LaCapra calls 'fidelity to trauma', leading to a sense of victimhood, the latter can end up 'numbing empathy', which media scholar Tony Harcup interprets as 'objectivism'.

LaCapra's recommendation for trauma representation is to find the 'middle voice'. In retrospect, the lack of interest of many in this middle voice in covering Manipur's crisis may have complicated an unravelled the conflict itself, reminiscent of what Bertrand Russell anticipated as the harm that even good men can do.

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MAILBAG

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Guided learning

Ref: *Stories for children* (Apr 1). It's a wonderful initiative to promote literacy among children. While children naturally love stories, they are also surprisingly drawn to broader social issues such as politics and science. My adolescent children recently left for their grandfather's home on vacation. Before leaving, they made a special request that I send them daily clippings from *The New Indian Express* edited page and the art corner which they are very fond of reading. While they could easily access a copy there, that is not the point. What matters more is the involvement of parents—the sharing, guiding and discussing what they read together.

Sundareswara Pandiyan, Chennai

Rightful protection

Ref: *Going Beyond the Brief on conversion* (Apr 1). Protections against discriminatory laws targeting religious minorities and marginalised communities were conceived in the face of socioeconomic considerations. It can be easily surmised that the principle of equality before law is clearly violated by denying protections to individuals who convert to other religions.

Jose M, Kochi

Toxic legacies

Ref: *The environmental cost of war* (Apr 1). To tackle the menace of toxic legacies of wars, awareness across the globe must step up, openness, speak out against destructive policies and push for environmentally responsible conflict resolution. Civil society can join hands, call for accountability and bring pressure on war-hit regions and restore ecological balance.

Raju Kolluru, Kakinada

Riding tiger

Ref: *Go get your own oil* (Apr 1). Donald Trump, like Vladimir Putin, seems to be lately realising that he achieves nothing except for obliterating realities on the ground. His tantrums are frustrations over his dilemmas to dismount the war tiger he so easily mounted. Flexing war muscles in lieu of diplomacy is a sure recipe for tragedy.

Ullatti Pakkireti Raghunathan, Thiruv

Ritualistic tragedy

Ref: *Bihar stampede* (Apr 1). Stampedes at temples are no longer shocking, they have become a recurring, almost ritualistic, tragedy across India. The latest horror is not an accident but a damning indictment of administrative failure. Administrative lethargy can no longer be tolerated.

Athirunambanathan, Coimbatore

PROGRESSIVES MIMIC A MAGA MIXUP

THESE are confusing and confused ideological times. Aside from the hardened ones, few of the ideologues know where they stand on the shifting sands of political loyalties and conflicting pedagogies that have suddenly, in the twin wakes of the Gaza genocide and the Americo-Israeli war on Iran, turned from implacable combativeness to baffled cooperation.

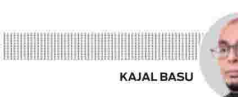
On March 17, Donald Trump's counterterrorism chief Joe Kent became the highest-ranking administration official to resign over the war on Iran. His words, on X, were: "Iran posed no imminent threat to our nation, and it is clear that we started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby."

In his sights were Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his gleefully self-satis interventions in the White House, and the deeply-embedded Zionist lobby led by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which funds US legislators with millions of dollars and has been dictating US policy in the Middle East-North Africa (MENA) region for the past several presidencies.

These are targets that the liberals and the left in the US share with a certain section of the right wing: the Christian—or at least the fiercely Christian—alright, which is audaciously voluble and increasingly influential across social media. Except for a few evangelical Christians, this Christian-right is pointedly not philo-Semitic.

That it has no love for present-day Israel is not a matter of provenance mystery, given the mindbending brutality of not just the Israeli State, but the complexity of ordinary Israelis. The American Christ-right, for all its self-positioning on Iran, is antisemitic—as in anti-Jewry—to its bones.

When the liberal-left began sharing Kent's explosive interviews with approval, one big irony seemed to have escaped them: that Kent and his alt-right interviewers not only hate Jews, but that they also fundamentally support Trump, who is an intertempore Israelophile. They are all MAGA. They are all anti-immigrant, pro-deportation and for prodigally militarising the border. They have nothing against the extravagant and creative malfaisance of the US immigration and Customs Enforcement or ICE, which Trump's opposition refers to as his administration's Gestapo. They are all in favour of oil exploitation, into climate-



KAJAL BASU

Veteran journalist

change denialism and in favour of unfettered artificial intelligence ultra-technocratism. When they applauded Kent's revelation that 19 American intelligence agencies had advised Trump against attacking Iran, but that he did anyway, they were cementing their conviction that Trump's ecosystem was fine but his closest coterie was compromised.

Some think Trump should stop engaging expansively abroad and focus on the domestic. Others, that he should renege military spending, which he has increased by more than 17 percent this financial



year, to salvaging the economy back home. Yet others, that he should root the combination of Jewish Zionism and evangelical Christian Israelism as satanic. Still others, that Trump should abandon the sinking ship that's Israel. Some realpolitik rationalists consider the MENA region as of dwindling significance as alternative forms of energy—all anathema to Trump, who fashions himself after oil barons—take hold globally, especially in China, which Trump considers his *bête noire*.

But none of them thinks that Trump is in any way wrong by himself—just that he has been misled. They still think

that although he is ideologically the cat's whiskers, he is a soft touch: not just the Israelis, but the entire Jewry has been able to blind him to the obvious—that Israelism is a bad idea. This refrain is echoed across the alt-right ecosystem—from Tucker Carlson, Joe Rogan, Candace Owens, Nick Fuentes and Steve Peters to Owen Shroyer.

The problem for progressives—the term 'liberal' crosses the right-left binary too easily to be precisely usable—is that none of these ultra-right-wingers is wrong about Israel, but that they are wrong about Am Yisrael, the Jewish peoples of a range of ideological convictions ranging from ultra-conservatism to reformism. All-purpose antisemitism is not a digestible response to Israel's incredible, world-breaking inhumanity.

Anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism are. Progressive ideologues are at that inflection point where they discover that ideologies are increasingly intersectional—just as geopolitics and geostrategy are turning out to be, with States declaring multi-alignment as fundamental to making their way across an increasingly transactional world where ethics, like carbon tax, is negotiable or contractual—but not credentialled or served by long-term overlaps. The sharing of the alt-right's antisemitic videos in the garb of anti-Israelism and anti-Zionism by atheists, agnostics, believers and secularists alike with no small approbation is disturbing.

Because, once the Israelist issue is done and dusted—as it will be, sooner or later—we will be left holding the can of alignments never intended to be forever, unable to extricate ourselves from ideological appropriation and re-fashioning, our wills trapped in the rotting corpse of momentary common purpose.

Once the simoom settles in MENA, these very alt-right influencers will turn on progressiveness, minorityism, immigration, security, internationalism. One common conviction—*punctum temporis*, a moment in time—could blind us to the larger dangers of annexation to the long-term cause of the right.

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Blending tech with education should be a measured move

On the face of it, the Telangana government has done well by coming up with a slew of measures that are aimed at making students, right from the school level, to be career ready. Bringing in education reforms that are intended at boost public schooling through technology integration and student welfare initiatives are steps in the right direction.

Among the decisions that will 'prepare' them for a secure future is the proposal to introduce Artificial Intelligence (AI) concepts in school curriculum. The phased introduction is to make the students adept at handling all emerging technologies and be competition ready. Towards this, spreading digital awareness and equipping them with problem solving skills, is a sound move.

The government's seriousness in achieving the intended goals is evidenced by the fact that foremost among the plans is in strengthening school infrastructure. Upgrading curriculum that keeps pace with prevailing trends and current requirements and are complemented with improved academic, administrative models and qualified teachers will all be progressive and workable ideas, provided they are implemented with the earnest with which the authorities plan to go about.

However, in their overwhelming focus on introducing tech-backed education, the authorities are overlooking some crucial aspects, which, if left unaddressed, could kill the very purpose of the grandiose reforms. A keen follower of the changes that are being rung up is that there are some latent

lacunae that somehow do not sink with the intention of the authorities. Despite it not being said in the open, a heated debate is underway over the pros and cons of the proposed reforms. On the one side, policymakers, who will back every move of the government as is their wont and for obvious reasons, and technology experts see as a forward looking move that helps students to enthusiastically embrace the digital future, while on the other hand cognitive researchers remain wary while contending that this could undermine the knowledge gained naturally about the evolution and growth of human cognition. Ironically, both sides are seemingly right.

Whispers doing the rounds in the corridors of power are that some high-rungs are hastily (read it as blindly)

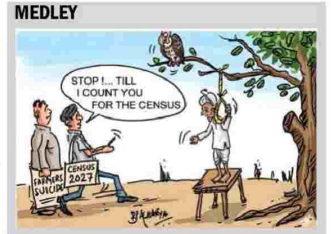
promoting the proposal merely to be in the good books of the government, perhaps for later day gains. This explains the push for Artificial Intelligence into school education, despite the inherent flaws. IT modules for classroom access are being drafted in consultation with IT professionals, which makes sense given the expertise they bring along.

Taken as a whole, one comes across many ifs and buts with the most glaring one being the manner experts from fundamental sciences, including physics, life sciences, and cognitive psychology, are not being consulted. In fact, they remain virtually sidelined, even though their inputs could have given a sense of completeness to the reforms and made them relevant.

Speaking about a proposed major

transformation of the state's education system, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on February 27 declared that AI will be integrated into the school curriculum starting from the 2026-27 academic year. Towards this, he wanted officials to implement short-term AI training for teachers to help them adapt to the shifting technological landscape.

Indeed, rejecting technology per se is not the answer but designing education that respects the natural trajectory of cognition while preparing children for the digital age makes for an all-encompassing shift. However, one fails to understand why in their quest for AI one-upmanship, the government is calling for English medium of instruction, while meeting out a step motherly treatment for Telugu language.



LETTERS

Empowering every child must be the aim

ARGOSIS 'Reform or repackaging' Need to rethink ATGS education policy' (THI, April 1), one cannot miss the irony of a policy that trumpets inclusivity while privileging private schooling and English from the nursery years. Reform should mean strengthening public education, not outsourcing it to market forces. Pedagogy worldwide affirms that early learning in the mother tongue anchors comprehension and confidence. To ignore this is to risk widening inequities and eroding cultural roots. Parents' aspirations for English are understandable, but policy must balance ambition with equity. Telangana's vision for excellence will ring hollow if it sidesteps linguistic diversity and public schooling. True reform lies in empowering every child, not repackaging old hierarchies in new rhetoric.

K Chidananand Kumar, Bengaluru

China-Pak peace proposal is bang on

THIS refers to the news report 'All eyes on 19 ships stranded in Hormuz' (THI, April 1). The safe passage of eight Indian-flagged vessels is a relief, but 19 ships carrying LPG, crude, and LNG still lying stranded is not a situation that can be managed through inter-ministerial briefings alone. Energy cargo of this scale has direct downstream consequences on cooking gas availability, refinery operations, and household prices. India needs a dedicated maritime liaison mechanism with Iranian port authorities for precisely these situations. The China-Pakistan peace proposal, whatever its geopolitical motivations, at least puts safe passage formally on the table. India should pursue the same objective through its own diplomatic channels, quietly but with greater urgency than is currently visible.

K Sakunthala, Coimbatore-641016

Need to diagnose investor apathy

THIS refers to the editorial 'Strive to ensure better results from ECMS' (THI, April 1). The government's frustration with the electronics industry's slow response to ECMS is understandable, but the article rightly points to a more fundamental issue — that financial support alone cannot substitute for an ecosystem. Countries like China, South Korea, and Taiwan did not build electronics dominance through subsidies alone. They built it through decades of supplier networks, engineering talent pipelines, and institutional policies. India's risk-averse business culture, which gravitates toward asset-light models, will not change through warnings from ministers. It will change when the total ecosystem-land availability, logistics reliability, skilled workforce and policy consistency-makers manufacturing a more attractive option. Diagnosing investor apathy honestly, rather than simply urging industry to 'do more,' would be a more productive starting point.

A Myilsami, Coimbatore-641402

Strategic autonomy is a necessity

THIS is further to the news report 'US will remember: Trump warns France, Italy' (THI, April 1). It illustrates how quickly the Iran conflict is straining relationships well beyond the immediate parties. France denying airspace, Italy distancing itself from base usage, defence sales being halted are not minor diplomatic friction points. They reflect a genuine unease among European allies about being drawn into a war they did not sanction. US President Donald Trump's public warnings to allied governments via social media posts are particularly counterproductive. Coercing partners rarely produces the cooperation sought, and risks accelerating the very fragmentation of Western alliances that adversaries would welcome most. For countries like India, watching this dynamic unfold, the lesson is clear — in a fractured world, strategic autonomy is not a luxury but a necessity.

S M Jeena, Chennai-32

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Novel cyber safety awareness campaign by city cops

BENGALURU: The Bengaluru City Police grabbed public attention with a social media post offering 'Free IPL Tickets,' but the announcement turned out to be a clever awareness campaign rather than a real giveaway.

Sharing the poster on its official X (formerly Twitter) account, the police claimed that two free IPL tickets were being offered and urged users to click a link in the bio to participate. The post quickly caught the attention of cricket fans, many of whom believed it to be genuine and began searching for the link. However, the initiative was part of an April Fool's Day campaign aimed at highlighting the growing threat of cyber fraud during the Indian Premier League season. Through this prank, the police demonstrated how easily cybercriminals lure people with attractive offers such as free tickets. Officials warned the public not to click on unknown or suspicious links, especially those promising freebies, as they are often traps designed to steal personal information or money.

'Do not fall for offers that seem too good to be true. Cyber fraudsters often exploit popular events like IPL to target unsuspecting users,' the police said, reinforcing the importance of digital vigilance. The campaign has been widely appreciated for its creative approach in spreading awareness about online safety.

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

Nothing can be more sublime than one's attachment to the mother tongue



DR MOHAN KANDA

The language of the heart is for eternity irrespective of the increasing domination of digital technology

poets, writers, and patrons of literature. They used literature and poetry as a form of self-expression, political propaganda and intellectual pursuit.

There are many such examples in Indian history, for instance, King Harsha, a prominent emperor in north India in the 6th and 7th centuries CE, is credited with having authored three Sanskrit plays, including 'Priyadarasika'.

Also in this category is Malwa region's King Bhoja, whose books covered a range of subjects, from poetry to architecture. King Vikramaditya was known for his generous patronage of poetry. His Court was adorned by great poets such as Bhanu and Shantinatya.

Vijayanagara Empire's Queen Ganga Devi authored the historical poem 'Madhura Vijayan', chronicling the Vijayanagara conquest of Madurai. Sri Krishna Devaraya wrote the classic 'Anukramavadi', in the introduction of which he famously quoted Lord Vishnu of Srikrakulam, as having appeared to him in a dream and telling him to write the book in Telugu, the 'sweets' of Indian languages.

Such patronage, extended by benign and enlightened rulers, was also common elsewhere in the world.

In Henry VIII, James I, Queen Victoria, Guillaume (William) IX, Duke of Aquitaine, and Gaston in France have carved a niche for themselves for their exceptional scholarly and creative pursuits.

Meanwhile, the advent of the digital era has caused a massive die-off of languages of the world, which are going extinct at an alarming rate, almost at the rate of one every fortnight.

Apparently, due to the harsh environment, minority languages are unable to survive and enter the digital space unless



Irrespective of whatever is happening in the realm of communication through languages, against the background of the increasing domination of digital technology, the primacy of the mother tongue of an individual, as a conduit for the appreciation of fine arts, like literature, music, and poetry, and as an authentic vehicle for artistic expression and understanding, remains unchallenged. This is largely on account of the emotional resonance which one experiences while using the mother tongue. Rabindranath Tagore equated it to a language in which one's inner sentiments are formulated.

less supported. A study has it that less than five per cent of languages currently in use are expected to qualify for digitisation. Consequently, technologies have emerged. Projects like 'Lingua Libre', archive and document endangered languages before they vanish completely.

Moreover, new Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools have become available, which help preserve such languages. While technology, undoubtedly, is a powerful tool for preservation, it also serves as a catalyst for bringing into being a more homogeneous, English-dominated digital landscape. Thus, there is in place, today, a situation which has created a complex and dualistic reality for languages. Technology is both accelerating the decline of many while providing tools for the survival and revitalisation of some others. It is akin to Darwinian manifestation, figuratively speaking, of 'sur-

vival of the fittest', in the community of languages. It is not that languages are losing their use or relevance. Only, a rapid shift is taking place on account of the emphasis on online communications, with a small number of dominant languages thriving, while a vast majority are ending up digitally dead.

The internet is heavily dominated by a handful of languages, such as English, Chinese and French. Also, digital communication sets heavy store on brevity, with acronyms such as Laugh Out Loud (LOL), Away From Keyboard (AFK) and Ask Me Anything (AMA) and expressions such as trending, viral, emojis and shortened slang dominating the environment and traditional vocabulary finding sparing use. A process of linguistic erosion and compression!

Latin, ancient Greek and Sanskrit are generally considered 'dead' languages, as they nearly lack a community of

native speakers, who use them for daily communication. Sanskrit, while not in use anymore as a spoken tongue, continues to be used widely in Hindu rituals, yoga and academic studies. While these languages may lack natural and day-to-day use, none of them is in immediate danger of disappearing altogether.

Irrespective of whatever is happening in the realm of communication through languages, against the background of the increasing domination of digital technology, the primacy of an individual's mother tongue, as a conduit for the appreciation of fine arts, like literature, music, and poetry, and as an authentic vehicle for artistic expression and understanding, remains unchallenged. This is largely on account of the emotional resonance which one experiences while using the mother tongue. The first Indian Nobel Laureate, philosopher, social reformer and composer, Rabindranath Tagore, equated the mother tongue to mother's milk and as the natural medium for expressing innocent feelings and inner truths; a language in which one's inner sentiments are formulated. Even the British implemented the system of regional languages as media of instruction up to the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC). The mother tongue is also deeply entrenched with cultural identity, inherited traditions, stories, and social values, without which one is in danger of missing the subtle nuances and cultural metaphors, and historical context, that give literature and poetry their richness, the reason why artists believe that genuine poetry can only be created in the mother tongue, the language of one's dreams and earliest emotions.

The areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and

Mathematics (STEM) use the lexicon of an emerging digital genre known as techno — scientific public discourse, a highly precise technical terminology with informal, multimodal and interactive sargal jargon. In such communications, abbreviations, hashtags and visual aids, such as info graphics and graphs, are used to convey complex data rapidly. For digital platforms like Weibo, X and LinkedIn, such specialised vocabulary is crucial.

No matter how hard languages try to preserve their individuality and uniqueness, the rapidity of present day communication, and the need for increasing the size of vocabulary common to most languages, is making some words acquire practically universal comprehension. Some examples are mama, papa, coffee, khaki, tea or chai, banana, taxi, telephone, ok, metro, airport, TV, computer, football, sugar, yoga and Nirvana.

The attachment one feels towards the mother tongue was best demonstrated by the story (probably apocryphal), that is attributed to the legendary maverick poet-Telugu Ramalingaiah. When a versatile poet from a distant land visited the Emperor's court and challenged the erudite people present on the occasion to defeat him in any language of the country, Ramalingaiah volunteered to take up the gauntlet. Instead of engaging in a direct tête-à-tête with the visitor, he devised a cunning method to achieve the objective. When the visiting poet was asleep, that night Ramalingaiah hired a couple of hoodlums to attack the sleeping scholar. Alarmed and in pain, the visitor woke up, cursing the assassins, quite expectantly, in his mother tongue!

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

Suravaram Sudhakar Reddy - A guiding force in my political life



DR K NARAYANA

that crucial stage. Sudhakar Reddy played a defining role in shaping my ideological path and commitment to the people.

He possessed a rare combination of clarity, discipline, and humility. As a leader, he never imposed authority but instead guided through persuasion and example. He encouraged young activists like me to take responsibility, work among the masses, and remain committed to principles rather than positions.

Our association gradually grew beyond politics into a deep personal bond. Our families became closely connected, and our relationship was built on mutual trust and respect. In party work, we often complemented each other — while I tended to react quickly in moments of struggle, he would approach situations with calmness and thoughtful analysis. This balance



strengthened both our work and our friendship.

Suravaram Sudhakar Reddy has contributed immensely towards strengthening the Communist movement, particularly in organizing students, youth, and workers. He was a firm believer in collective leadership and always worked to build strong organizational

Suravaram Sudhakar Reddy has contributed immensely towards strengthening the Communist movement, particularly in organizing students, youth, and workers. He was a firm believer in collective leadership and always worked to build strong organizational structures rather than individual prominence. Even during difficult political situations, he remained steadfast and composed. His ability to maintain ideological clarity while navigating practical challenges earned him the wholehearted respect of his peers and contemporaries from across the country.

In his later years, as his health began to decline, it was deeply painful to watch his suffering. Yet, even in those moments, his concern for the movement and the people never diminished. His dedication remained unshaken until the very end.

Today, though he is no longer physically with us, his legacy continues to inspire. For me personally, he remains a constant presence —

a source of strength and guidance. His life stands as a testament to unwavering commitment to the cause of the common people.

Suravaram Sudhakar Reddy will always be remembered as a leader who lived not for himself, but for the people and the movement he believed in.

(The writer is Chairman, Control Commission, Communist Party of India)

From being an importer of mobile phones back in 2014, India has now become a net exporter. We have more than 300 mobile manufacturing units operational in the country
-Jitin Prasada, Minister of state for electronics & IT

BIZ BRIEFS

Dark Fantasy's campaign

Sunfest Dark Fantasy brought its latest '1 Million Fantasies' campaign to the streets through a grand, spectacle-led out-of-home (OOH) activation that transformed atraditional hoarding into a live party. The brand revealed that as part of this campaign it will be fulfilling the fantasy of 'Party with SRK' for 40 lucky consumers. Suraj Kathuria, Head of Marketing, Biscuits, Foods Division, ITC Ltd, said: "With this activation, we wanted to push the boundaries of what a hoarding can do."

iQoo 15 Apex launched

Qoo, a smartphone brand, announced the launch of the iQoo 15 Apex, a new color variant of the flagship iQoo 15. Building on the success of iQoo 15, the Apex elevates the flagship experience with a bold design while further strengthening iQoo's leadership in performance and cutting-edge display innovation. The new device stands out with a bold and striking design. Inspired by the idea of the "Apex" - the highest point - it symbolizes dominance, precision, and confidence.

Skoda sells 20,028 units

Skoda Auto India continued its strong growth trajectory into 2026, recording its highest-ever quarterly sales in January-March with 20,028 units sold. This is a growth of 17 per cent over the 17,138 cars sold in the same period last year. Building on a landmark 2025, the carmaker has sustained its growth surge and is continuing to break its own records, further accelerating its momentum in the Indian market, the company said. Skoda Kyaa drove the growth, it added.

Malabar Gold opens outlet

Malabar Gold & Diamonds inaugurated its latest showroom in Sangareddy, Telangana, further strengthening its presence in the region and bringing its wide range of jewellery collections closer to customers. The launch reflects the brand's continued focus on expanding accessibility while offering a world-class retail experience. The showroom was inaugurated by Chinta Prabhakar, Sangareddy MLA, T Jayaprakash Reddy, TPC Working president, and T Nirmala Jaggarada, Chairperson, TSIC Ltd. The showroom offers a structured and welcoming environment, with clear product displays.

Maruti Suzuki's record exports

Maruti Suzuki India Limited announced that it achieved its highest-ever export volume of over 4.47 lakh vehicles in FY26. This is a robust growth of more than 34 per cent over FY 2024-25. With this feat, the company is expected to continue its position as India's No. 1 passenger vehicle exporter for the fifth consecutive year. The FY26 marked the commencement of export of the company's first battery electric vehicle (BEV), the e VITARA.

MARKETS KICK OFF FY27 RIDING ON BULLS

Optimism over easing West Asia tensions and softer crude boosts risk appetite

SOLID START

- Crude oil eased, improving inflation and macro outlook
- Global cues strong; US markets rallied; Asian indices surged sharply
- Top gainers: Trent, InterGlobe Aviation, Adani Ports, SBI, BEL



MUMBAI: STOCK markets closed nearly 2 per cent higher on Wednesday, with the Sensex and Nifty rallying in tandem with global peers amid hopes of de-escalation in the West Asia conflict. Starting the new fiscal year on a high note, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,186.77 points or 1.65 per cent to settle at 73,134.32. During the day, it surged 2,017.03 points or 2.80 per cent to 73,964.58. Snapping its two-day falling streak, the 50-share NSE

Nifty climbed 348 points or 1.56 per cent to end at 22,679.40. A drop in crude oil prices also boosted the market sentiment. From the 30-Sensex firms, Trent, InterGlobe Aviation, Adani Ports, Bharat Electronics, State Bank of India and Eternal emerged as the major gainers. NTPC, Sun Pharma, Power Grid, UltraTech Cement and Bharti Airtel were the laggards. Indian equity markets opened the new financial year on a positive note, with stocks soaring on fresh optimism surrounding a potential

de-escalation of the Middle East conflict and easing of energy supply disruptions. Punit Modi, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said, President Trump's remarks that the US could withdraw from Iran "whether we have a deal or not" within the next two to three weeks provided the catalyst markets had been waiting for, delivering a broad wave of relief across global risk assets, Punit added. Sectorally, BSE Services surged 4.99 per cent, followed by PSU Bank (3.66 per cent), Industrials (3.40 per cent), Capital Goods

(3.29 per cent), MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt (3.07 per cent), Consumer Discretionary (2.79 per cent), Commodities (2.72 per cent) and IT (2.40 per cent). BSE Healthcare emerged as the only laggard. A total of 3,828 stocks advanced while 508 declined and 101 remained unchanged on the BSE. The US market ended significantly higher on Tuesday. "Indian equity markets opened FY27 on a strong note, driven by improving risk appetite, following US President Donald Trump's remarks hinting at a potential resolution to the West Asia conflict," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.22 per cent to USD 103.7 per barrel. Stock markets were closed on Tuesday for Shri Mahavir Jayanti. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 11,163.06 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

GST revenues hit ₹2 lakh cr mark

FY26 collections grow 8.3% amid global uncertainty

Strong run

- March GST at ₹2 lakh crore, up 8.8% YoY
- Imports drive growth (up 17.8%)
- FY26 GST collections rise 8.3% to ₹22.27 lakh crore



NEW DELHI

GST revenues grew about 9 per cent in March 2026, crossing Rs 2 lakh crore and marking the third-highest monthly collection in FY26, supported by strong import and domestic activity, according to government data. Gross domestic revenues rose 5.9 per cent to over Rs 1.46 lakh crore, while collections from imports jumped 17.8 per cent to Rs 53,861 crore. The gross GST mop-up stood at Rs 1.83 lakh crore in March 2025. While large states such as Maharashtra, Karnataka and Telangana continue to show robust growth in collection, states such as Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh demonstrate slower. Refunds issued in March rose 13.8 per cent to Rs

22,074 crore. After adjustments, net GST revenue stood at over Rs 1.78 lakh crore, up 8.2 per cent year-on-year. Experts said strong import growth played a key role in boosting collections, alongside steady consumption demand. However, they cautioned that the near-term outlook remains uncertain. Geopolitical risks and global inflationary pressures could weigh on consumption, though year-end demand may offer some support. Analysts noted that sustaining manufacturing momentum may require continued policy support. Overall, GST trends indicate fiscal resilience and alignment with economic growth, reinforcing confidence in the tax system's stability.

Blinkit joins Mumbai airport for in-terminal order delivery

MUMBAI: Adani Airport Holdings has partnered with Blinkit to launch India's first in-terminal quick commerce service at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, aimed at enhancing passenger convenience. The service is currently operational at Terminal 2 for domestic departures, allowing travellers to order essential items through the Blinkit app and receive them within minutes inside the airport. Passengers can choose from a range of products including chargers, snacks, books and personal care items. Deliveries are enabled across boarding gates, lounges, food courts and select retail outlets within the terminal. The operations are handled by trained on-ground staff to ensure secure and seamless delivery without disrupting airport processes or passenger timelines. Permissible liquid items such as packaged water, juices and cold drinks are also available through approved in-terminal inventory, in line with security regulations.



Aviation stocks end higher; IndiGo jumps 6%

NEW DELHI: Aviation stocks were in the limelight on Wednesday, with InterGlobe Aviation climbing 6 per cent, after only a partial increase in jet fuel prices. InterGlobe Aviation, the parent firm of IndiGo, after starting the trade on a positive note, further jumped 9.84 per cent to Rs 4,332 during the day on the BSE. The stock finally ended at Rs 4,180.90, up 6.01 per cent. The stock of SpiceJet ended at Rs 9.93, up 1.95 per cent. During the day, it surged 4.72 per cent to Rs 10.20. A rally in the equity market also aided buying in these stocks. Starting the new fiscal year on a high note, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,186.77 points or 1.65 per cent to settle at 73,134.32. The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 348 points or 1.56 per cent to end at 22,679.40. Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices for domestic airlines were raised by a calibrated 8.5 per cent on Wednesday, instead of more than doubling as warranted by a war-driven surge in global oil prices.

No shortage of pesticides, seeds for Kharif: Centre

Asks state govts to check black marketing, cross-border smuggling of fertilisers

NEW DELHI

THE Centre on Wednesday asserted that the country has an adequate supply of seeds and agro-chemicals for the upcoming Kharif season, and asked states to check hoarding, black marketing, smuggling and diversion of fertilisers for non-farm usage. Addressing an inter-ministerial briefing on recent developments in West Asia, Maninder Kaur Dwivedi, Additional Secretary in the Agriculture Ministry, said, "The most important input is seeds. There is an adequate availability of seeds for the upcoming Kharif (summer-sown) sowing season." She said the total estimated requirement of seeds for the Kharif 2026 is 166.46 lakh quintals, while the availability is 185.74 lakh tonnes. There is a surplus of 19.29 lakh tonnes. Dwivedi noted that there is enough supply of seeds for all major crops. She said the total availability of seeds for paddy crop is



SURPLUS SEEDS

- Centre says there's surplus stock of 19.29 lakh tonnes of seeds for Kharif season
- Total seeds required: 166.46 lakh quintals

80.9 lakh quintals, soyabean 35.7 lakh quintals, groundnut 21.1 lakh quintals, and maize 11.9 lakh quintals. "The availability of seeds is sufficient across all states, Dwivedi said. "Looking forward to the upcoming Kharif season, as well as Rabi season, as far as seeds are concerned, we are in a comfortable position," she told reporters here. On fertiliser stocks, Dwivedi said the total re-

Dhoni invests in Kuku platform

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

INDIAN cricketing legend MS Dhoni has invested in Kuku, India's leading mobile-first, AI-driven premium storytelling platform, and has also come on board as the brand ambassador for its premium shorts and drama app, Kuku TV. Lal Chand Bisu, Co-founder and CEO of Kuku, said, "MS Dhoni is known for backing bold decisions that others might hesitate to take. At Kuku, we are also taking bold bets. That spirit of unconventional thinking resonates deeply with us." Vinod Kumar Meena, Co-founder and COO of Kuku, added, "Our beloved Thala is one of the rare personalities with truly nationwide appeal. As we build Kuku for all of India, that connection makes him a natural fit for us." Vikas Goyal, Co-founder and CTO of Kuku, said, "MS Dhoni has a unique understanding of people. As we build for both creators and consumers, that perspective will be incredibly valuable, especially as we continue strengthening our AI-driven storytelling stack."

Apple's 50 yrs odyssey: From garage dream to global domination

April 1, 1976, marked the start of Jobs, Wozniak's revolution in computing

CUPERTINO (UNITED STATES)

APPLE'S 50-year journey, from an April Fools' Day garage start-up to a \$3.7 trillion giant, stands as one of technology's most remarkable stories of invention, collapse and revival. On April 1, 1976, a 21-year-old Steve Jobs and 25-year-old Steve Wozniak founded Apple Computer in Los Altos, California, alongside advisor Ron Wayne. Early uncertainty saw Wayne sell his 10 per cent stake for \$2,300, a decision that would later be worth hundreds of billions. Apple's first major breakthrough came in 1977 with the Apple I, one of the earliest successful personal computers. Its 1980 IPO turned early believers into millionaires. In 1984, Apple unveiled the Macintosh, introducing the graphical user interface and mouse to mainstream



computing, backed by an iconic Super Bowl advertisement. The turnaround began in 1997 when Apple acquired NeXT, the company Jobs founded after leaving. Within months, Jobs returned as CEO, struck a crucial deal with Microsoft, and began rebuilding Apple's product line. What followed was a historic innovation streak. The iMac revived Apple's design appeal. The iPod, launched in 2001, transformed music consumption and paved the way for digital ecosystems. In 2007, Jobs unveiled the iPhone, combining a phone, iPod and internet device, redefining the smartphone era. More than 3 billion units have been sold, and it remains Apple's biggest revenue driver. The iPad extended Apple's influence further, cementing its role in shaping consumer technology and culture. After Jobs' death in 2011, CEO Tim Cook focused on scaling operations and expanding services. While Apple hasn't replicated the disruptive impact of the iPhone, it has grown into one of the world's most valuable companies, with revenues exceeding \$400 billion annually. Through a scrappy partnership signed on April Fools' Day to a global powerhouse, Apple's journey reflects bold vision, near-failure and reinvention, a rare blend that continues to define its legacy.

Sluggish bank credit growth in FY27: Crisil

West Asia conflict, MSME stress and policy risks to test asset quality

MUMBAI

DOMESTIC rating agency Crisil on Wednesday said banks' credit growth is likely to moderate in FY27, while asset quality pressures may re-emerge amid global and domestic headwinds. The agency expects credit growth of 13 per cent in 2026-27, slightly lower than the 14 per cent projected for FY26. It also cautioned that gross non-performing assets (NPAs), which have bottomed out, could rise by up to 20 basis points to 2.5 per cent by March 2027. Crisil's chief rating officer Krishnan Sitarman said that gross NPAs may rise by up to 20 bps to 2.5% by March 2027. Asset quality cycle has bottomed out, early signs of stress emerging. authorities typically respond if adverse conditions persist. However, its current projections do not factor in any such support. Deposit mobilisation will be another key determinant of credit growth. Elevated credit-deposit ratios may push banks to increasingly rely on securitisation to sustain lending, the agency added.



NPAs may rise

- Credit growth seen moderating to 13% in FY27 (vs 14% in FY26)
- Gross NPAs may rise by up to 20 bps to 2.5% by March 2027
- Asset quality cycle has bottomed out, early signs of stress emerging

The Statesman

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

Mediator's Mirage

Pakistan's sudden emergence as a would-be intermediary between Iran and the United States is being framed as diplomatic agility. In fact, it is a calculated gamble born less of strength than of compulsion - economic vulnerability, regional insecurity, and a search for relevance in a rapidly shifting geopolitical order. At the centre of this moment is an unusual convergence of personalities and interests. Pakistan's military leadership, particularly General Asim Munir, appears to enjoy a degree of personal rapport with President Donald Trump. That matters in a crisis shaped as much by individual instincts as by institutional strategy. But personal chemistry is not diplomacy. It may open doors; it cannot, by itself, close wars.

Pakistan's motivations are far more immediate. Its economic fragility makes it acutely sensitive to disruptions in energy supply, especially through the Strait of Hormuz. A prolonged conflict threatens inflating fiscal strain, and domestic unrest. Add to this an already volatile western frontier with Afghanistan and a persistently adversarial relationship with India, and the prospect of a wider regional war becomes existential. Mediation, in this context, is less about peace making than about damage control.

The method, however, reveals the limits of this strategy. Pakistan is attempting a delicate balancing act - maintaining ties with Iran while cultivating favour in Washington, even as it deepens economic dependence on China. This is not classical non-alignment; it is a form of opportunistic multi-alignment, where the goal is to remain indispensable to all sides without being fully trusted by any.

That ambiguity carries risks. Domestic opinion in Pakistan is deeply sympathetic to Iran, particularly in the wake of high-profile escalations. Any perception that Islamabad is tilting too far toward Washington could trigger internal backlash. Conversely, failure to deliver even modest diplomatic gains may expose the effort as overreach - an attempt to punch above its weight in a conflict defined by hardened positions and mutual distrust.

The deeper problem is structural. The United States and Iran are not merely adversaries in a conventional sense; they are locked in a cycle of maximalist demands and ideological hostility. No intermediary, least of all one with limited leverage over either side, can easily bridge that divide. Pakistan can transmit messages, host meetings, and offer symbolic gestures, but it cannot alter the fundamental calculus driving escalation.

In that sense, Pakistan's role is best understood not as that of a mediator shaping outcomes, but as a stakeholder trying to survive them. Its diplomacy reflects the emerging behaviour of middle powers in an increasingly fragmented world - agile, pragmatic, and willing to engage across fault lines. But such manoeuvring has limits.

If this effort yields even a temporary de-escalation, Pakistan will claim a diplomatic victory. If it fails, the consequences will not be confined to reputation. In a region already on edge, miscalculation has a way of spreading. And for Pakistan, the cost of being drawn too far into a conflict it cannot control may prove far greater than the benefits of trying to mediate it.

Narrative Gap

The sudden retreat of foreign capital - around \$12 billion in March alone - in the Indian equities market is being read as a reaction to war and rising oil prices. That explanation is convenient but incomplete. What is unfolding is less a panic response and more a recalibration of belief.

For the past two years, India has occupied a privileged position in global portfolios. As capital looked to diversify away from China, India offered a compelling alternative: political stability, digital infrastructure, and the promise of long-term consumption-led growth. This narrative attracted sustained inflows, often at rates that ran ahead of underlying earnings. That gap is now being tested.

When energy prices surge, as they have amid tensions involving Iran, the impact on an import-dependent economy like India is immediate. Higher oil prices feed into inflation, compress margins, weaken currencies, and constrain policy flexibility. But these are not new vulnerabilities. They are known features of the Indian macroeconomic landscape. What has changed is the tolerance for them.

Global liquidity is tightening, and with it, patience. Investors who once paid a premium for future growth are now demanding evidence of present performance. India's corporate earnings recovery has been uneven, private consumption has shown signs of fatigue, and export momentum remains uncertain. In such a setting, elevated valuations become harder to justify.

This is why the scale of foreign outflows matters. It suggests not just a response to external shocks, but a reassessment of India's relative attractiveness within emerging markets. Capital is not merely exiting risk; it is choosing among risks. And India, for the moment, appears less compelling than its narrative once promised.

Domestic institutional investors have stepped in, cushioning the immediate impact. Their growing role reflects a structural deepening of India's financial markets. But domestic capital, by its nature, is stabilising rather than transformative. It can absorb selling pressure; it cannot, on its own, restore global conviction.

This shift also exposes a structural asymmetry: India is quick to attract capital during optimism, but slower to retain it during uncertainty. Without deeper earnings resilience, capital inflows remain episodic, amplifying volatility rather than anchoring long-term market stability.

The deeper issue is the absence of a near-term catalyst. Without a clear trigger - be it a strong earnings cycle, a revival in consumption, or a credible shift in policy momentum - foreign investors have little reason to return quickly. Markets, after all, move not just on fundamentals, but on stories. And right now, India's story feels paused.

This moment, then, is not a verdict on India's long-term prospects. It is a reminder that narratives require constant reinforcement. Structural strengths must translate into measurable outcomes. Growth must be visible, not merely anticipated. Until that happens, capital will remain cautious, valuations will stay under pressure, and India will have to confront an uncomfortable reality: belief, once priced in, can also be priced out.

Gandhi and Science~II

Gandhi wanted scientists to work on those areas that required 'tender nursing' which neither the state nor the market could institutionally provide for. This considered and deliberate choice of the subject matter was the first step in his science. To aspiring scientists, he pointed out the need to link external research to internal research. By internal research, Gandhi did not mean a private incommunicable domain of mystic experience but a public space where the questions of science, both moral and societal, would be kept within the purview of common persons



In khadi, Gandhi came closest to finding such a science and his ideal practitioner - the satyagrahi scientist, Maganlal Gandhi. In the khadi movement, Gandhi's understanding of science was translated into practice leading to the coinage of new terms such as the 'science of the spinning wheel' and later 'khadi science'. Gandhi's extensive use of the term 'science' is found in speeches and discussions with khadi workers. He wanted these workers to become satyagrahi scientists.

The Satyagraha Ashram at Ahmedabad provided the necessary institutional base for training satyagrahi scientists needed for the khadi movement. Foremost amongst them was Maganlal Gandhi, the manager of the Satyagraha Ashram and a long-standing associate of Gandhi. The Ashram in Ahmedabad functioned as a laboratory, educational and training institution, and a production house.

For Gandhi, the knowledge of the 'science of spinning' was critical to the success of the khadi movement and he, therefore, urged all community workers to be well versed in it. Gandhi believed that only those who had a thorough knowledge of both theoretical and practical aspects of the science of spinning could become village workers. The rigorous technical criteria for khadi workers indicate how Gandhi envisaged the community worker as a scientist.

The worker was to know the different varieties of cotton and the method of picking cotton suitable for hand spinning. The worker had also to be able to test the strength, evenness, and counts of yarn, differentiate a good charkha from a bad one, be able to put dilapidated charkhas under repair and be able to straighten an incorrect spindle (CW 33: 151-52).

Apart from improvements in the spinning wheel, Gandhi was also on the lookout for a machine that would produce good spindles. It was this concern that made him and the All-India Spinners Association (AISA) search for a machine to straighten spindles. From the above, one would observe that he was no Luddite or traditionalist. Where 'absolutely necessary', he advised the khadi worker not to hesitate to introduce machinery (CW 36: 347, 37: 211, 41: 511).

One of Gandhi's earliest experiments, both at the Ashram and outside was in the field of science education. Gandhi's educational scheme was based on an emphasis on the role of manual work, practical training, and the use of the vernacular as a medium of instruction. He cited Japan as an example of an educational system that taught science in the vernacular. Amongst Gandhi's other major institutional innovations in the 1930s was Nal Tam (or basic education). It is in his writings on Nal Tam that we find Gandhi's unique explanation to the question that has troubled many sociologists of science, namely, "Why did India not have the industrial revolution?"

Significantly, most of Gandhi's attempts at institutional reorganization were based on scientific research. For Gandhi, India was an ideal site for experiments on the self and he saw himself as a scientist experimenting to prove the fallacies of the dominant argument on science. A month before his assassination, he wanted the various Sanghs to become research laboratories. He desired that members of the Sanghs become experts by doing research and discovering new things in the laboratories.

From being a serious critic of modern science in his early years, Gandhi later focused more on the possibilities of a new science and its practice. In Gandhi's scheme,

the agency of the scientist was of critical importance. The scientist had to be conscious and self-reflecting. He believed that the right place of the scientist lay with the people. All of Gandhi's experiments in science attempted to carve out and articulate this domain. (CW 89: 125). He wanted scientists to work on those areas that required 'tender nursing' which neither the state nor the market could institutionally provide for. This considered and deliberate choice of the subject matter was the first step in his science.

To aspiring scientists, he pointed out the need to link external research to internal research. By internal research, Gandhi did not mean a private incommunicable domain of mystic experience but a public space where the questions of science, both moral and societal, would be kept within the purview of common persons.

Gandhi did not provide a blueprint for a scientific method but gave general guidelines for experimentation. He saw his community workers as scientists. Though he was one of the foremost spokespersons of traditional technologies and the artisanal class in contemporary politics, he did not believe in a simple valorisation of the artisanal class. His community workers had, therefore, to go beyond learning the skill. They were to see spinning and weaving not as a trade but as a science. Mastery of the art of spinning was necessary, but not sufficient condition in his scientific scheme. This mastery had to be transformed into a science and this was the duty, though not exclusive right, of the educated classes.

Gandhi emphasized that the practice of

science would need an attitude for research, more than scientific qualifications. There was money, Gandhi emphasised that there was a need for persons with strong faith and willing hands. By insisting that scientists are to provide meaning to what they do, he made clear that he was not interested in mere technical solutions to a problem.

The role of the scientist lay not in the realm of fact alone but in creating value. The charkha for Gandhi was the symbol of a new technology - a new relationship of man with nature, a relationship that could be brought into existence only by active, mutually cooperating persons.

We have in this paper shown that Gandhi's non-anti-science is commonly misunderstood. Through a look at his various experiments, many unrealised in his time, one would see that Gandhi's life defined a space for an alternative science for civil society that would operate with different methods. Gandhi's focus on the non-physical resources in organising for science, the satyagrahi scientist, for instance, is a radical departure from science policy as expressed by Nehru in his famous Scientific Policy Resolution of 1956 and followed in India since independence.

Gandhi also had a universal message by providing a new cosmology of man-nature and fact-value relations that he articulated and put in place through his various experiments. In Gandhi's science, the agency of the scientist was important.

If scientists are not conscious of the condition of society in the perspective of their self-reflecting nature, the basic purpose of using science as a tool of improvement and growth of intrinsic value of the society and its components is lost. Gandhi's concept of science needs to be understood with this basic tenet.

(Concluded)

Jakarta Post

Fintech case exposes troubling misapplication of competition law

Indonesia's largest digital financial competition case has reached a decisive conclusion, marking a watershed moment for the nation's regulatory landscape. Following proceedings that began on Aug. 14, 2025, the Business Competition Supervisory Commission (KPPU) delivered its decision on March 26, 2026, ruling that 97 fintech platforms (fintech) peer-to-peer (P2P) lending platforms, all members of the Indonesian Fintech Lenders Association (AFLP), violated Article 5 of Law No. 5/1999 on Monopolistic Practices and Unfair Business Competition. The case centers on an interest rate-capping set collectively within AFLP's code of conduct, initially 0.8 percent per day, later reduced to 0.4 percent.

The anti-monopoly body stated the platforms breached Article 5, which prohibits agreements among competitors to fix prices in the same relevant market. Consequently, the KPPU imposed substantial fines, ranging from Rp1 billion (US\$59,000) to over Rp100 billion, sending shockwaves through the digital economy. Price-fixing is one of the most serious offenses in competition law.

In many jurisdictions, it is treated as per se illegal because it requires independent decision-making with collective control, theoretically harming the consumer by default. However, the fintech P2P lending context in Indonesia complicates this traditional doctrinal approach. By applying a rigid per se framework,

the KPPU may have overlooked the broader 'rule of reason,' which allows for an analysis of whether a practice actually results in a net procompetition or public benefit. While trade associations have long been viewed with caution, often seen as potential vehicles for coordination, this case does not arise from purely private, 'smoke-filled room' coordination among competitors. AFLP operates under a formal co-regulatory framework supervised by the Financial Services Authority (OJK). The interest rate ceiling was not a predatory move to gouge consumers; rather, it was adopted in accordance with written directions from the OJK. These directions were issued amid mounting public concerns over predatory 'loan shark' behavior, opaque

fee structures and the potential for systemic consumer harm. In this context, the cap was a regulatory compliance measure intended to stabilize a nascent industry, not a mechanism to suppress competition. The economic structure of fintech P2P lending further challenges a simplistic price-fixing narrative. Unlike traditional brick-and-mortar markets where firms might compete on a single, uniform price, these platforms rely on highly individualized, risk-based pricing driven by proprietary credit mechanisms. As such, maximum ceiling does not automatically produce identical pricing outcomes. If platforms retain autonomy over their datasets, machine learning models and underwriting parameters, substantial price differentiation continues to occur below the cap.

A Member of The ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Sri Lanka

Sir, At a recent press meet, Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake disclosed that Washington had requested his government to permit the US Airforce to use their Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, following the eruption of the latest West Asia war.

The aircraft were to come from a US base in Djibouti. His government firmly declined the request, in order to maintain Sri Lanka's neutrality.

What a quick and bold decision by a small country. Sri Lanka committed to the dilly-dallying by India in our foreign policy and decision making.

We have seen how the Modi government has surrendered to American President Donald Trump and allowed him to dictate terms to India.

At his instruction, India stopped buying oil from Russia and Iran, a move that Trump has now relaxed this condition for 30 days due to the West Asia crisis. That, pleased with the neutrality boldly maintained by Sri Lanka, Iran has assured

supply of petrol and diesel without any interruption to the island nation is also noteworthy. India should learn from Sri Lanka.

Yours, etc., Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai, 27 March.

Blunder

Sir, This has reference to "Trump cornered in Iran" (24 March). Trump's military campaign against Iran in violation of international law is widely criticised as a major political and strategic blunder.

Amid Iran's strong retaliation against American and allied targets, it has failed to achieve the initial objectives of regime change and eliminating the Iranian leadership, left a lasting impact on global economies, destroyed oil infrastructure of the Middle East, disrupted global energy supplies and driven up prices, heightened tensions in the region, alienated alliance partners, strengthened Iran's defiance and Israel's position, and deepened domestic divisions.

Moreover, it has broken the myth of American supremacy. Trump's mishandling of Iran has weakened his credibility both at home and abroad. He desperately seeks dialogue to end the costly and prolonged conflict. Iran has publicly downplayed his claims of 'productive talks'.

Yours, etc., D S Kang, Hoshiarpur, 25 March.

Germany-India

Sir, Reference your editorial 'Migration Pivot', the Germans have been very disciplined in their work culture and technically strong too. Certainly, they will welcome talent from outside when their structural demographic necessity compels them to seek a youthful skilled workforce.

However, the major issues Indians face there are language and food, besides integration and social cohesion as your editorial points out. For the German-India corridor to benefit mutually, Germany needs to send training personnel to our country to understand our ethos.

An urgent requirement is to start German language courses in India and Indian language courses in Germany.

courses in German universities. India must be cautious that youth and their families are not exploited by unscrupulous travel agents.

Yours, etc., Brij B Goyal, 26 March, Ludhiana.

Dangerous

Sir, At Bidhanagar Road railway station, located on the Sealdah Main Line in Kolkata, the staircase leading outside from the underground passage of Down Platform No. 2 has been in an extremely dangerous condition for a long time. As a result, daily commuters constantly face serious difficulties.

Every day, thousands of ordinary people risk their lives encounter this hazardous staircase. It is worth mentioning that this is one of the most heavily used routes on the main line, with a large number of passengers depending on this staircase to exit and catch their trains.

Considering public safety, immediate repair work is urgently required. Yours, etc., Babul Chattopadhyay, Kolkata, 24 March.

Why facts must be checked

SANTHOSH MATHEW

April 2 stands as a quiet corrective in a noisy world. Celebrated as International Fact-Checking Day, it arrives right after April Fools' Day, almost as a moral counterweight. One day celebrates deception the next reminds humanity that truth still matters.

Artificial intelligence can now fabricate videos and audio that appear authentic. Leaders can be shown making statements they never made. Events can be digitally constructed and presented as reality.

Misinformation and propaganda are not harmless distortions. They shape public perception, influence elections, deepen social divisions, and even incite violence. Democracies depend on informed citizens. When falsehood replaces fact, the very foundation of democratic decision-making is weakened.



There is an old saying that when a lie travels halfway around the world, the truth is still tying its shoelaces. In today's hyper-connected ecosystem, that distance has expanded beyond imagination. Lies no longer travel: they multiply, mutate, and dominate attention.

Regulatory institutions also have a vital role. The United Kingdom's Ofcom stands as a torchbearer in enforcing standards and ensuring accountability in broadcasting and digital platforms.

India faces a particularly complex challenge. With its vast population, linguistic diversity, and rapid digital penetration, the spread of misinformation can have immediate and far-reaching consequences.

One crucial reform is the appointment of an independent ombudsman dedicated to fact-checking. These internal watchdogs can ensure accountability, verify claims before publication, and respond to public concerns.

A more dangerous evolution of propaganda lies in deepfake technology

credibility is under strain. The deeper challenge is philosophical. In an age dominated by propaganda, the world requires a new ethical compass. This is where the idea of 'dharma diplomacy' becomes relevant.

Dharma diplomacy is not about moral preaching. It is about aligning communication practices with ethical responsibility. It recognizes that information is power and that power must be exercised with restraint and integrity.

and dialogue over distortion. Propaganda machinery must recognize the limits of deception.

Goebbelsian tactics may achieve short term gains, though they erode trust in the long run. A society built on falsehood cannot sustain stability. Truth may move slowly, though it carries the strength of permanence.

Technology, often blamed for amplifying falsehoods, can also be part of the solution. Artificial intelligence tools can detect deepfakes, trace misinformation networks, and flag suspicious content.

Collaboration between governments, technology companies, and civil society is essential to create a resilient information ecosystem.

International Fact-Checking Day is not merely a symbolic observance. It is a call to action. It reminds the world that truth requires effort, vigilance, and collective responsibility. In an age where lies roam freely, fact-checking becomes an essential pillar of democracy.

(The writer is Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, Pondicherry Central University.)

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 02 April 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

The decision come to so far is to erect a shed at Karachi and mooring-masts in England and Egypt. But, pending the building of the ships, masts, and shed, the Imperial Airways Company has decided to test the demand for a rapid service by placing five aeroplanes on the Cairo-Karachi run.

News Items

DEFYING THE CHAIR

NEW SUSPENSION OF MEMBERS RULE

ON the motion of Mr. Baldwin, the House of Commons agreed to an amendment to the Standing Orders, providing that where a member is suspended for defying the Chair, the suspension shall continue for five days on the first occasion, and for twenty days on the second, and on subsequent occasions till the House resolves to terminate the suspension. Reuter.

CHANGE OF VICEROYS

LORD IRWIN'S ARRIVAL IN BOMBAY

THE arrival in Bombay yesterday of the Rt. Hon. Lord Irwin, the new Viceroy, and the impending departure for England of His Excellency, the Earl of Reading, at the conclusion of his period of office, provide a landmark in the history of British India.

It is with sincere regret that India bids farewell to Lord and Lady Reading.

Succeeding Lord Chelmsford five years ago, Lord Reading found depression on all sides, financial chaos, and the prestige of the Government lowered. The great political experiment of the Reforms was at its beginning. By his imperturbable judgment and temper, his strength, and his sympathies, Lord Reading weathered the crisis.

He leaves India with her finances in order and quiet restored. PLST would not weaken democracy - it would dignify it by ensuring voters choose among informed, prepared candidates.

India's future deserves leaders who pass not only elections, but also the test of governance readiness.

Their Excellencies, who reached Bombay from Delhi yesterday, will leave tomorrow by the S.S. Naldra. All the honours due to his high position were accorded the Rt. Hon. Lord Irwin who, with Lady Irwin, arrived in Bombay yesterday by the S.S. Mooltan, and were welcomed by the Acting Governor and Lady Lawrence.

DUBLIN MYSTERY

SIX DEAD IN BLAZING MANSION

THREE men and three women have been killed by a fire at a mansion in the Soolock district in the county of Dublin early this morning. The outbreak has many mysterious features. The police found the doors blazing and the house locked and bolted. All six bodies were within. One of the victims, a man servant, had a terribly injured head, which is believed, according to one account, to be due to a bullet and, according to another, probably to a falling beam. The other victims are two brothers, two sisters, and a maid-servant. - Reuter's Special Service.

Pre-certified leaders vital for India's needs

AMIT SENGUPTA

India, the world's largest democracy, faces a growing governance challenge: leadership without demonstrated competence. Over 900 million voters elect representatives who shape laws, budgets, and national direction.

A Political Leader Selection Test (PLST) could introduce a merit-based filter - ensuring that those who seek to govern possess a minimum understanding of governance, law, economics, and ethics.

Data from the Association for Democratic Reforms highlights a worrying trend: a significant proportion of elected representatives face criminal charges, while many lack formal exposure to public policy or administration.

populum rather than competence. Democracy thrives on choice - but meaningful choice requires qualified candidates.

PLST would be a standardized qualifying exam - similar in spirit to the UPSC examination - but designed specifically for aspiring legislators.

Administered by the Election Commission of India, it could test Constitutional understanding, Public finance and policy; Ethics and governance; Indian and global affairs and an analytical aptitude. A basic qualifying score - not elitist ranking - would certify candidates as fit to contest elections.

This would not replace democracy. It would strengthen it - just as licensing protects citizens from untrained pilots or doctors.

Critics may label the PLST test as exclusionary. However, experience shows otherwise. Individuals from modest backgrounds - like Tina Dabi - have excelled in competitive systems through merit.

With regional language options, affordable access, and social safeguards, PLST could democratize political entry rather than restrict it - weakening



dynastic dominance and money power.

Many successful governance systems emphasize leadership preparedness. Singapore's structured political grooming and technocratic decision-making have delivered sustained growth. Even in India, states that benefited from administratively decisive leadership - such as Gujarat under Narendra Modi - demonstrate how informed governance can accelerate development.

Implementation could be gradual, beginning with a pilot at the state level. It could be subjected to independent oversight by academics and jurists. Integration into candidate eligibility norms could take place over time. And the financial cost would be negligible compared to losses caused by policy missteps and corruption.

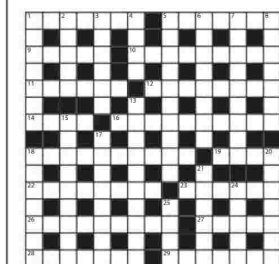
India's aspiration to become a developed nation by 2047 demands

capable leadership. Elections test popularity; governance demands knowledge.

India's future deserves leaders who pass not only elections, but also the test of governance readiness.

(The writer is a capital and non-fund architecture specialist for export-oriented MSMEs.)

Crossword | No. 293422



Yesterday's Solution



- ACROSS
1 Measure of keenness to offer unflattering comments about big name (7)
5 Sailor's first of us tucking into fruit and rare food (7)
9 Genuine about Government, like many a ruler (5)
10 Interruption, discussion, and here we are? (9)
11 Just over four weeks border uproar (6)
12 Beach alarm blocked by old unspecified people (2-5-5)
14 Historic Queen, one from Scotland with a second name (4)
16 Reference work: it's recalled in study probing personal record (10)
18 Aspiring woman to move quickly, reversing large lorry (6,4)
19 Small drug advertisement (4)
22 Yorkshire city supporter with no change in degree? (8)
23 Pretentious person rejected excellent small plant (6)
26 Romania is misplaced in this part of the world (4,5)
27 Soldiers, on 'reflection', will be found among the (5)
28 Facial application: variety of dye injected into skin opening - revolutionary (3-4)
29 Very good fans, nothing less - fans of 10? (7)
DOWN
1 Musical instrument degrees - about the limit? (7)
2 Rather moist sauce included amongst goods? On the contrary (5)
3 Hibernating snake securing shelter (6)
4 Lay out odd parts of diet - odd bits of cake (4)
5 Right-winger supporting professional male working in coastal area (10)
6 Vegetable convention, perhaps, held around Southern French city (8)
7 Access point or spot ultimately gaining entry to China (6)
8 Reticence of the writer penning poetry ending in neglect? (7)
13 Gag spinner reeling off spicy, crunchy stuff (10)
15 Queen meeting scoundrel in uncomplicated story (9)
17 Positive mistake inducing rage in man with a keen sense (8)
18 Dull person getting a couple of books in prison (7)
20 Musician having instant power? Singular (7)
21 Access point or spot ultimately gaining entry to China (6)
24 Agreed to accept \$1000 increase (5)
25 No end of writing experts (4)

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



The Free Press Journal
Founder Editor: S.Sadanand

Mumbai's eyes on Bhide

Senior IAS officer Ashwini Bhide being appointed as the Municipal Commissioner of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) made headlines. And it should, given that she is the first woman in the chair since the civic body was set up by the Bombay Municipal Corporation Act of 1888.

Bhide is best remembered for Metro 3, the underground Aqua Line, and has been popularly called 'Metro Woman'

Bhide comes to the assignment with not only experience but also with perspectives, a worldview. These merit an evaluation — but first, her work record. An officer from the 1985 Maharashtra cadre, Bhide began her career as an assistant district collector in Kolhapur, then worked as the Chief Executive Officer of district colleges. Additional Metropolitan Commissioner of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority from 2008 to 2014, and Managing Director of Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Ltd from 2015 to 2020, Bhide also served in the BMC as the Additional Municipal Commissioner during the Covid-19 pandemic; her work on the Covid dashboard earned her praise. She was then appointed as the Additional Chief Secretary to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis. It is an impressive record and, in the critical past decade of her career, she appears to have been on the right side of those in power.

Of all her assignments, Bhide is best remembered for Metro 3, the underground Aqua Line, and has been popularly called 'Metro Woman'. But it is also here that her perspective was called into question. In the Fadnis-led government's belligerence to situate the car shed of the metro in Aarey, she brooked no intervention, dismissed objections from environmentalists, treated activists with disdain, and barely looked at alternatives. It was under her watch that more than 2,200 trees in Aarey were slashed to the ground in one stroke. She said then that Aarey was not legally a forest — a fig leaf of an excuse. Bhide probably comprehends the need to situate Mumbai's infrastructure in an ecologically sound framework but has been found wanting in practice. This is a concern. Protecting Mumbai's environment and adapting for climate vulnerability are as much her responsibility as building infrastructure. Taken appearances at climate events make no sense if she remains committed to the idea that 'development' will be done at the cost of the environment. It is an outdated idea. Bhide owes it to future generations of Mumbaiers to be the custodian of Mumbai's natural environment. That she has Fadnis' backing is apparent. How she commands it for the Mumbai of today — and tomorrow — will decide the quality of her tenure more than her gender.

Crush claims pilgrims — again

In a predictable response to the heart-rending stampede that killed at least nine people at a temple in Bihar's Nalanda district, the state government has suspended a junior policeman, constituted a Special Investigation Team and announced statutory monetary relief to the families of victims. A broad brush preliminary theory of a combination of factors — unmanageable crowds and poor security arrangements — was put out, consistent with the pattern seen after past incidents. India and stampedes are now indivisible in the literature on disasters. During 2025, five out of seven deadly crushes involving the loss of about 70 lives took place at religious gatherings, ranging from the Maha Kumbh to a remote temple in Goa. Crowd management practices came in for scrutiny after stampedes at the New Delhi Railway Station in connection with the Kumbh, the cricketing celebration in Bengaluru and the political rally of Tamil Nadu actor Vijay in Kerala. But problems at religious festivals such as the one in Nalanda's Sheeta Mata temple invariably tend to fade away. The inadequacy of policing arrangements at the Bihar shrine has been attributed by some to diversion of forces for a visit by President Droupadi Murmu to a nearby university. Yet, this can only be a partial explanation, because, as the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) says in its manual for state governments on managing crowds in mass gatherings, policing with force is not usually the answer, and the experience with intelligent strategies should inform decision making.

It should be seen evident that the authorities, starting with the district administration, must be made legally responsible for compliance with the NDMA guidelines. The NDMA has advocated a pattern of regulated entry points and multiple holding areas to ensure lower risk of a sudden, deadly surge; the Railways have said they pursued a Rs 12,120 crore strategy in the Amrit Bharat station upgrade programme during 2025-26, although implementation of access control is patchy. Failed crowd management leading to stampedes is symptomatic of the larger issue of poor appreciation of India's large population that is now more mobile than in past decades. Mass gatherings will be the norm, and the challenge is to prepare for them. Placing faith in violent policing would be a continuation of an outdated Victorian strategy. What India needs to avert stampedes is good on-site systems, official accountability and public education.



Insight

BHAIVEER KANG

Kerala is regarded as the "final frontier" for the BJP and the last bastion of the Left. For the Congress, the state offers redemption after a long streak of electoral losses. The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) has an advantage vis-à-vis the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in the 2026 Assembly polls, but an increase in the BJP's vote share could upset calculations.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's roadshow in Thrissur this week evoked conspicuous public enthusiasm, but one should not read too much into it. Kerala's "city of gold" is, after all, a BJP seat, wrested from the Congress in 2024 by the party's lone MP in the state, Suresh Gopi, who is the Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas.

Despite eight decades of RSS activism and over 5,000 shakhas in the state, the BJP has made little electoral headway. Its inability to crack Kerala is rightly attributed to the state's unique socio-religious set-up. A high proportion of minorities and a history of progressive reforms that secularised state politics have engendered distrust of right-wing parties. A little over 45 per cent of Kerala's population comprises minorities, with Muslims at around 27 per cent and Christians at 18 per cent, according to the 2011 Census. The share of the Hindu population is the

lowest in any state outside the Northeast and Punjab, and the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh and Lakshadweep.

Currently, the BJP does not have an account with the Nemon Assembly seat in 2016 but lost it subsequently. Hitherto, it has been a marginal player in Kerala's politics—but is that about to change?

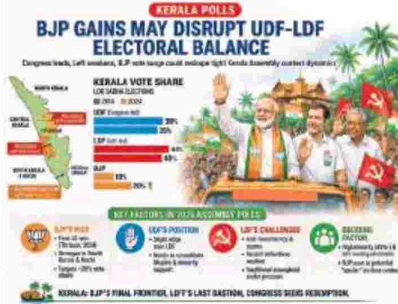
It won Thrissur and was the runner-up in Thiruvananthapuram in 2024, boosting the NDA's vote share to 20 per cent from 10 per cent in 2014. It won only one Lok Sabha seat, but in terms of Assembly segments, it led in 11, including six in Thrissur and three in Thiruvananthapuram, and was the runner-up in six. It is on these seats in south Kerala and the Kochi region that the BJP is strategically focusing its attention.

The fact that it won the local body elections in Thiruvananthapuram last year and retained Palakkad, besides securing five gram panchayats, is a morale booster. The defection of C.C. Mukundan, CPI(M)LA from Nattika in Thrissur, to the BJP is also a promising sign.

But above all, the party needs a fresh political narrative in Kerala, as the leadership is well aware. Polarisation does not work, and the electorate's overall ideology is left-oriented. Even the Congress-led UDF includes socialist and Marxist parties.

BJP gains may disrupt UDF-LDF electoral balance in Kerala polls

Congress leads, Left weakens, BJP vote surge could significantly reshape Kerala's tight Assembly contest dynamics and alignments



The roots of Kerala's contemporary politics go as far back as the early 19th century. As casteism took its most monstrous form in Kerala, the backlash was the fiercest. While social reformers in the rest of India were primarily concerned with the miserable condition of women, in Kerala the primary fault line was caste. A paradox, as the pushback against caste began with the Chanar revolt, asserting the right of lower-caste women to cover their upper bodies. The late colonial period saw the Malabar Rebellion and the successful temple entry movement, which fuelled the rise of class consciousness.

As social scientist M.R. Manma-

than argued in a 2013 paper, an environment favouring social equality created fertile ground for left ideology and a concomitant aversion to religious idioms in politics.

Against this historical backdrop, political messaging must be secular, pro-development and anti-corruption. This is precisely what Modi did in Thrissur. He also emphasised the Centre's efforts to ensure the safety of Indians in the war-torn West Asia region, where over three million Keralaites live and work.

However, the positive effect of development rhetoric will be weighed against the negative impact of the anti-Christian stance adopted by RSS-linked organisations in other

states. The BJP's outreach to the Syrian Christian community, which appeared to be progressing, imploded after a series of attacks last year on Christmas celebrations in Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Assam.

Going forward, reining in hoo-ligan elements in organisations such as the Bajrang Dal will be critical for the party.

The BJP's main problem in Kerala is the limited scope for alliances. Unlike in the Northeast, it does not have strong regional partners. Another handicap is the lack of a strong, charismatic face in the state. For all parties, opportunity lies in the women's vote. In 2024, more women than men exercised their franchise, yet the state suffers from a significant gender gap in representation. Only 39 women candidates have been fielded overall.

The combatants in Kerala face differing challenges. The ruling LDF is on the back foot due to anti-incumbency, scams and defections. The UDF must consolidate the Muslim vote to recover minority confidence. The BJP must secure at least a fifth of the popular vote.

It has little chance of winning more than a handful of seats but can play spoiler. If the LDF is disproportionately affected, it benefits the Congress—and vice versa.

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



Fiscal Prudence

AIJT RANADE

Imagine spending the best years of your life, from age 22 to 29, in a waiting room. You are educated, ambitious and capable. But the job you are waiting for has odds worse than a lottery. So you study harder, attempt again and wait once more.

This is the lived reality for an estimated 11 million young graduates in India today. The fifth edition of the State of Working India report, published this month by Azim Premji University, reveals a startling statistic: 67% of all unemployed youth aged 20-29 are graduates—1.1 crore people.

In 2004, graduates constituted just 32% of the unemployed youth cohort. Their share in the youth population has risen from 10% to 28% over two decades. But employment has not kept pace.

Between 2004 and 2023, India produced roughly 50 lakh graduates every year. Only 28 lakh found employment annually, and a mere 17 lakh entered salaried work. The

arithmetic of national waste is stark. The unemployment rate among graduates aged 22-29 is as high as 33%. Yet this falls below 4% after age 30. What changes is not success—it is resignation.

Young men eventually accept whatever work is available, however dead-end. Young women often exit the labour force altogether, retreating into unpaid domestic care work. Male unemployment falls because men take jobs; female unemployment falls because women stop looking.

Why do millions of graduates spend their prime years in this limbo? The answer lies in a rational but socially damaging calculation. Private sector salaries have stagnated.

In 2011, a young male graduate earned about ₹21,800 a month. By 2023, this had fallen to ₹19,573. Adjusted for inflation, this decline is severe. Unsurprisingly, graduates avoid entry-level private sector jobs.

Government jobs, by contrast, offer far higher pay, job security,



pensions and social prestige. Naturally, aspirants choose to wait.

This wait manifests as endless preparation for competitive exams. A study of Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission data found that a single TNPS Group 4 recruitment drew 13.7 million applicants. Around 80% of unemployed individuals in Tamil Nadu were preparing for such exams.

The private sector offers a treadmill, not a career. Only 8.25% of graduates work in roles aligned with their qualifications. Nearly half are in low-skill jobs with little progression.

The gender dimension is stark. Educated women in their early 20s actively seek jobs, but many exit the workforce by their late 20s due to marriage and caregiving expecta-

tions. The policy response has created a paradox. Governments subsidise coaching and provide cash transfers, but this tightens fiscal constraints and limits hiring. Vacancies in Central government jobs more than doubled between 2014-15 and 2021-22.

Reservation policies also suffer. When hiring slots, reserved posts remain unfilled, weakening representation for marginalised communities.

The solution lies in reducing dependence on government jobs, improving labour market information, aligning skills with industry needs, and supporting women's workforce participation.

Millions of educated Indians are wasting their most productive years in a lottery they are unlikely to win. This is not just a personal tragedy—it is a national failure.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Strategic shift

Iran's new \$2 million toll per ship in the Strait of Hormuz, intended to fund IRGC operations, violates UNCLOS navigation freedoms. As it is, Malaysia has secured assurances from Iran that its vessels will be granted safe and toll-free passage through the strait. India must swiftly negotiate an exemption as well, based on our historically friendly regional ties. While domestic refineries are currently boosting output, long-term security lies in a "war footing" transition to 100% renewable energy.

By establishing strict production targets for green power and storage batteries, India can eliminate oil dependency and generate foreign exchange profits by exporting excess clean energy.

PVP Madhu Nirviti, Secunderabad

Converging crises

India's domestic stability is tested as elections and the IPJ provide a stark backdrop to mounting global pressures. While these spectacles offer a temporary inner equilibrium, the realities of Ukraine, Gaza, and the Iran conflict are

Addressing Naxalism

The government's March 31 deadline for eliminating Naxalism marks a critical juncture. While a decade of arrests and neutralised leadership has suppressed the movement, military victory alone is fragile. Lasting peace depends on whether far-left ideologies still resonate in Maoist-affected districts. To ensure stability, India must pivot from a purely security-driven strategy to addressing root causes—poverty, displacement and inadequate healthcare. Genuine development and social integration are the only ways to prevent the resurgence of such movements.

Bal Govind, Noida



Hasan Zaidi

not distant broadcasts, they are direct economic and moral confrontations. As international tragedies are reduced to transactional shifts by global actors, our collective urgency erodes. We cannot remain insulated forever; when a disengaged global conscience fails, physical boundaries will not contain the resulting fires of re-primation.

R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

Sacrificing 'Singham'

IAS officer Tukaram Mundhe, nicknamed 'Singham', has been transferred

for the 24th time in his 21-year career. Known for his transparency and discipline, Mundhe consistently highlights corruption within every department he heads. His tenure is repeatedly cut short before reforms take root. His recent seventh-month stint at the 'Diyang Kalyan' department ended abruptly after he uncovered systemic irregularities. This latest transfer serves as a grim "gift" for his honesty, highlighting how the system penalises uncompromising integrity.

Kiran P Chaudhari, Mumbai Advanced census

The long-delayed census is more than a statistical ritual; it is the backbone of governance. Without reliable data, policies falter on guesswork. The 2027 Digital Census offers major advantages over paper methods by enabling faster data processing, improved accuracy, and public self-enumeration via apps. It enables real-time monitoring of over 1.4 billion people, streamlines welfare delivery with geo-tagged data, reduces administrative costs, and provides results within months rather than years.

Babu Crishna, Bengaluru

Prevent stampedes

The Bihar temple tragedy, claiming nine lives, is a harrowing reminder that such disasters are rarely isolated. Despite the recurring loss of life, root causes remain unaddressed, with public concern fading until the next catastrophe strikes. The government must implement rigorous crowd-management protocols, ensuring preventable tragedies never recur.

S Sankaranarayanan, Chennai

Marital accountability

Appropriately "Hidden salary"? Husband must reveal it, says HC (April 1, 2026). —not comprehensively recorded since 1935—is a transformative step for equity and resource distribution. However, numbers alone are insufficient. They must be translated into improved schools, healthcare, and livelihoods. Ultimately, a census isn't just about counting people; it is about making people count and turning aspiration into tangible progress.

Veda Chidanand, Bengaluru

DECCAN Chronicle

2 APRIL 2026

Rahul's BJP-CPM 'deal' claim baffles everybody

The repeated statements of former Congress president and the leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi that the CPM-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala is facing the Assembly election after striking a secret deal with the BJP against the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) have the potential to undermine the very legitimacy of the I.N.D.I.A. bloc, which fights the BJP at the national level.

Mr Gandhi has produced no hard evidence that can point to a secret deal between the Communists and the saffron family, sworn ideological enemies. He would argue that the Central agencies have been hounding him for several years and even questioned him for hours on end in certain cases but have spared Kerala's CPM Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan because of the "deal". He would suggest that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's silence about the gold theft in the hill shrine of Sabarimala is another indicator of the existence of such a "deal".

It may be remembered that the Congress started the campaign against the Aam Aadmi Party and its then Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the Delhi election case. Mr Gandhi has offered no credible explanation as well as several of his Cabinet colleagues spent months in jail before being acquitted in the case, for there was no evidence against them. It is unclear if Mr Gandhi would want the Kerala CM also to spend some time in jail to prove that his party has no deal with the BJP.

It is not that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) did not make an attempt to trap Mr Vijayan in the gold smuggling case registered some five years ago but could not find a thread to connect him to the crime. The ED ended up with a bloody nose in court when it issued a notice to CPM leader and former Kerala finance minister Thomas Isaac. Mr Modi's silence in the case can be interpreted in whichever way you want; it cannot necessarily be the proof of a CPM-BJP deal.

A couple of CPM leaders were arrested in relation with the Sabarimala case, and the party owes an answer to the people for their acts of omission and commission. Mr Gandhi has every right to make the CPM accountable in the case. At the same time, the Congress has offered no credible explanation about the presence of the other accused in the case along with Congress MPs at 10, Janpath, meeting Congress leader Sonia Gandhi. While the CPM would not link Mrs Gandhi to the alleged thefts, it would ask Mr Gandhi to explain why the Congress leaders accompanied them during their visit to the Congress leader's house. Mr Modi's silence in the case can be interpreted in whichever way you want; it cannot necessarily be the proof of a CPM-BJP deal.

In short, Mr Gandhi offers no concrete evidence of a deal and he comes up with erroneous logic to back up his claim. Mr Gandhi has been resorting to the same saffron party defies logic. If Mr Gandhi is serious about his allegation, then he should start the process of evicting the Left parties from the I.N.D.I.A. bloc. If not, then he should play the political game within the contours defined by the national political goals of his party and make public statements accordingly. He cannot play a double game.

Subhanti

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Do more to keep Indians who work abroad safer



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray
Reflections

The external affairs ministry has drafted the Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2025, to end this exploitation which continues despite the 1983 Emigration Act which established a 'Protector of Emigrants'...

work of unregistered sub-agents for workers who take up difficult jobs abroad. The available data shows that while 44 per cent of recruitment agents were concentrated in Delhi and Mumbai, only five per cent were based in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, even though these states accounted for 55 per cent of all emigration clearances issued in 2024. Since low-income workers usually took parents that required emigration checks when the holder travels abroad on an employment visa, the Protector of Emigrants has ample opportunity to inspect, advise and, if necessary, intervene.

It's a huge relief that 3.75 lakh Indian workers have returned from West Asia since the US-Israeli war on Iran began, with only seven casualties. But, then Indians are not fighters. The risks they take are quite different. With over 35 million people abroad, India has the world's largest diaspora with significant populations in the Gulf, North America, the Arab peninsula, Britain and Southeast Asia. Their estimated annual income of \$70 billion accounts for the world's highest remittance figure.

topmost layer in the *varna* caste hierarchy. With the Indian Foreign Service officers slipping into the role of entitled ruler after Independence, millions of uneducated Indians identified the new elite as the latest *dawn* born to command so that "foreign workers" who contributed most of the \$35 billion remittances that India received in 2024 saw no objection to a status quo that goes back to the Indian Emigration Act of 1859 forbidding Assam's tea plantation labourers from taking up work in the Gulf.

The community's generally passive role in global conflicts may have done some damage to its prestige. Yet, some good may come from the interaction if the "Viksit Bharat" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dreams shows that as a result of the reforms now being undertaken, Indian wage-earners in the hot and dusty Gulf, for instance, are no longer dismissed as just "foreign workers" — the term for men and women who labour far from home to share in New Delhi's foreign exchange reserves.

While admitting both the scope and need for effective reform, some analysts still find the new law's wording ambiguous and anomalous. It might not live up to expectations grounded in the growing labour shortages of developed and wealthy countries whose native-born workers may be reluctant to take up hazardous jobs. Underlying Indian equities in the system, even after reforms, is the hope that workers migrating to other countries will help to reduce the unemployment crisis at home. That alone can explain why the external affairs ministry has signed labour mobility agreements with no fewer than 20 countries since 2018.

I once asked our high commissioner in Singapore (where I then lived) during a crisis over "foreign workers" how many Indians were involved. "How would I know?" was his callous retort. That indifference was borne out when I happened to be nominated to a New Delhi committee on awards for "foreign workers". The committee chairman and most highly-placed members suggested that awards, if any, should go to India's diplomatic representatives, who, incidentally, are entitled to duty-free loot. The attitude isn't at all surprising. Colonial officials argued in the 19th century that Indians didn't object to white supremacy because the European rulers were seen as only an additional

to the Protector-General of Emigrants, will have 16 offices across India, and can grant and revoke the licenses of recruitment agents.

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It is wise, of course, to facilitate labour mobility but the terms and conditions of employment are of paramount importance. India's acknowledgement that its workers are exploited lends special importance to the question of rights and duties. Since jobs at any cost would defile the purpose of new legislation introducing reforms, the law must commit itself to protecting the rights and dignity of Indians abroad. This calls for relevant and comprehensive inspection of working conditions, constant supervision and insurance policies based on the recorded experience of workers. Indian workers are not just passive beneficiaries of the law. Problems are best solved when tackled at source and not treated as distant, extraneous occurrences of questionable relevance. Licensed recruitment agents in our major cities rely on a net-

Another complexity is that licensed recruiters do not reach workers directly. There is a chain of intermediaries, with each link adding a charge that is passed down to the individual worker. Although the government has capped such recruitment service charges at \$300, it is no secret that at every stage an employer usually costs up to five times that amount. That means that workers are in debt, almost always to non-institutional lenders, before securing a job offer. Moreover, recruiters are often their only source of information about overseas jobs, giving them an advantage in employment with an excess of workers. No wonder many aspiring applicants are at the mercy of unscrupulous recruiters.

The globally recognised "employer pays principle", where all recruitment costs are borne by the employer, might save workers from the tentacles of a vicious black economy. We need more state recruiters, more efficient and honest supervision at every stage and employment contracts that should be thrown out lock, stock and barrel, and every effort made to expand manufacturing and employment at home. While that long-term objective is pursued, diasporic employment must be tolerated as a short-term necessity, and nothing more.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS

TRUMP'S REMARKS

As you saw, so you read (*Trump chides allies, Pak, China mood 5-point plan, April 1*). Without consulting allies, US President Donald Trump has attacked Iran along with Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and dreamt of finishing the job overnight in Venezuela. Now, the blame game has started with Trump threatening France, England, Spain and Germany for non-participation in his misadventure.

Parthasarathy Mandali

TIROPATI PAMPERING MAOISTS

It is meaningless that while state government employees in states like Andhra Pradesh are denied the basic right of rise in Dearness Allowance and other minimum benefits for many years despite big rise in inflation, the surrendered Maoists who have committed unpardonable crimes for a long time are being offered rehabilitation packages (*To prevent Maoists' return; have intel, welfare agenda, April 1*). The state government's strictest punishment for causing immense trouble to the society. No other citizen should ever think of resorting to taking law into his or her hands so blatantly without a care for the safety of fellow citizens. If criminalisation begets king-size life, then all youngsters will say "yes" to antisocial activities for some time, surrender and get rehabilitated sufficiently. Youngsters need proper counselling and encouragement for contribution to the growth and development of the nation and not rewards for killing fellow humans.

M. Chandrasekhara Kadambari

QUANTUM FUTURE

The state government's motive to step up and carry forward responsibility for the development of a commendable (*India's first open quantum computer on April 14 CM, April 1*). By investing in quantum technology, it aims to build up a strong scientific base and bring forth innovation that can transform the nation's prospects. Such initiatives will open up avenues for youth to take up skill-oriented education. Exposure to advanced research will help them move into global careers.

Raju Kolluru Kakinada

Email your letters to: info@deccanmail.com, editor@deccanmail.com.

Get ready for rise in fuel prices

The decision of oil marketing companies (OMCs) to increase aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices is something waiting to come after global crude oil stubbornly remained above \$100 a barrel in the wake of the US-Israel war against Iran. State-run Indian Oil Corporation initially doubled ATF prices in Delhi to \$2.07 lakh per kilolitre for April, only to roll them back within hours to \$1.04 lakh/kg following government intervention. By limiting the increase to roughly 25 per cent for domestic carriers, the government has effectively absconded — or deferred — the remaining burden on the public sector OMCs. Foreign airlines, however, will pay a full price of ATF without any relief.

Similarly, OMCs have increased the prices of commercial LPG, and premium petrol and diesel. The prices for 5-kg mini cylinders have risen by \$31, and 19-kg commercial cylinders by \$218, premium petrol by \$11, and premium diesel by \$1.50 a litre. The price hike in jet fuel will lead to significant increase in airfare and may affect people, especially those planning to go on a holiday in the summer. Similarly, higher commercial LPG prices may affect the business of eateries. However, the magnitude of the global crude oil price is too heavy to be absorbed by either oil marketing companies or airlines or anyone else.

People, therefore, should be prepared for the inevitable — an increase in prices and the cost of living. For the world has been residing under various hostile acts — be it in kinetic or trade form. West Asia is one of India's major trade partners and its disastrous impact of this war on this region would adversely affect the country's economic growth, especially through exports and remittances. If the West Asian oil producers decide to keep oil prices elevated to recoup war losses, India will have a difficult issue to deal with.

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu

Corruption not only reason why projects stall and costs spiral

There's a familiar outrage cycle in India — a project stalls, costs spiral, and we instinctively reach for the "corruption" label. It's neat, satisfying, and often incomplete. Because sometimes, the system isn't leaking. It's freezing. Take the coal block allocation case: A Delhi court, after years of investigation, acquitted all five accused, babus and others, in one of the oldest coal scam cases. It noted that there was "not even an iota of evidence" and that the Central Bureau of Investigation had "miserably failed" to prove wrong or right. In fact, the court found no proof of conspiracy or personal gain despite a decade of scrutiny and reputational damage.

If you're a serving officer watching this unfold, what exactly is the takeaway? Not "be honest and decisive". More like: Even if you're clean, you may spend the next 10-15 years proving it. That's not accountability. That's deterrence. Which brings us back to an old but uncomfortably relevant idea from *In Service of the Republic* by Ajay Shah and Vijay Kelkar, published in 2019 — asymmetric punishment. Simply, the system punishes errors of commission (doing something that later looks questionable) far more than errors of omission (doing nothing at all). Sign a file, and you risk investigations, audits, and headlines. Sit on it, and life goes on quietly, safely, pension intact. Now connect the dots. A system that can prosecute first and prove later (sometimes never) doesn't just fail at accountability. It actively discourages decision-making. The rational babu adapts; files slow

down, projects stall, costs inflate, and not always because of corruption, but because delay is the safest career strategy available. And when that becomes the norm, paralysis isn't incompetence. It's self-preservation. Which leaves us with an awkward question: Mr Kelkar and Mr Shah, a decade ago, were still and still dodging: Have we made honesty too expensive to practise?

UPS INVESTMENT PITCH HITS AWKWARD PAUSE
All governments love high-ticket announcements. Few enjoy the morning after. The recent clarification by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath that a \$25,000 crore AI MoU is merely "preliminary" — "no funding" has not unseated what of a deal announced, rest and understood later. Which, if we're being honest, is not the kind of innovation ecosystem Uttar Pradesh should be pioneering.

An MoU that scale isn't a casual handshake at a trade fair. It's a signal to investors, competitors, and markets that the state means business. Walking it back in public, almost casually, doesn't just dilute the deal; it chips away at credibility. And credibility, unlike MoUs, isn't something you can sign and un-sign at will.

What makes this more puzzling is the tone of the clarification. It sounds less like a calibrated correction and more like someone suddenly discovering the fine print after the press release went out. That's not reassurance. That's a red flag waving enthusiastically.

agreements all the time. Not every MoU matures into a project. But there's a way to manage that ambiguity quietly, professionally, without making the state look like it's hedging its own commitments in real time. Which brings us to the uncomfortable subtext. Somewhere in the system, someone clearly thought this was a good idea, both the signing and the subsequent clarification. One doesn't need to name names to see the problem. This is less about one document and more about a style of functioning that mistakes optics for outcomes.

Uttar Pradesh has spent years trying to reposition itself as investment-friendly, predictable, and serious. That effort doesn't collapse overnight — but it does get hits like this. Because investors don't just read agreements. They read signals. And right now, the signal feels a bit... improvised.

HARD POWER FASHIONABLE, IS IT ALSO EFFECTIVE?
Delhi's favouring the ruling party's own cronies (think the new Ajit Doval (though he's showing no signs of signing off yet)). And right on cue, the name doing the rounds is Samant Goel, a man who, if the chatter is to be believed, prefers operating in the shadows rather than trending on social media platforms. The pitch for Mr Goel is straightforward — capability over charisma. Not a soundbite machine, but someone who deals with the mess behind the headlines. His reported bluntness with Mike Sullivan, the outreach across Iran (US-Centric), and his post-Afghanistan, and the quiet stitching together of intelligence networks is being framed as the kind of hard-

edged realism India needs next. Fair enough. But here's the question: Will this actually help?

India's security challenges are no longer just about outmanoeuvring adversaries in the shadows. They're also about managing optics, alliances, and economic interdependence in full public view. Russia and Iran. Smart, perhaps necessary. But also a lightning rod in a world where alignments shift faster than WhatsApp forwards. Today's strategic autonomy can quickly become tomorrow's awkward explanation. And then there's the bigger philosophical drift embedded in this conversation: the idea that a "stronger, security-driven state" is the logical path to Viksit Bharat. That's where the anxiety creeps in. Security efficiency is seductive. But it often comes bundled with a certain impatience for dissent, nuance, and messy democratic processes.

Mr Goel may well be exceptionally good at what he does. The real question is whether India needs a master of covert chess or a player equally skilled at the very public game of balancing power, perception and principle.

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The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Foreign funding

Amendment Bill merits a thorough debate

THE Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, has triggered a political slugfest during the Budget Session of Parliament. The Union government is citing national security in defence of the Bill, while the Opposition has warned of democratic backsliding. The BJP insists that tightening the FCRA — Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act — is both necessary and overdue. The government's argument rests on a familiar claim: foreign funds, if left unchecked, may be diverted towards activities detrimental to national interest — ranging from misinformation campaigns to radicalisation. BJP leaders argue that regulation is not repression but a safeguard, and that no distinction is being made between communities.

Yet, the Opposition's concerns cannot be brushed aside. Some Congress MPs have described the proposed changes as excessive, even unconstitutional. Their apprehension is twofold: first, the law could disproportionately affect NGOs working with marginalised communities; and second, it may centralise power in ways that stifle dissent. The charge that regulatory overdrive could morph into political control resonates strongly in a democracy with a vibrant civil society. John Brittas, a CPI(M) MP from poll-bound Kerala, has asked why basic parliamentary queries on the FCRA data are being treated as "secret." The alleged opacity can undermine the very accountability the amendments claim to strengthen. Regulation without transparency risks breeding mistrust.

The Bill merits a thorough debate in Parliament. Laws governing foreign funding involve sovereignty, civil liberties and institutional trust. Any reform in this sensitive domain must be both robust and reassuring. Ultimately, the real test for the government is to convince the Opposition — and the nation at large — that enhanced oversight will not come at the cost of democratic freedom.

Last-minute play

Order to buy sports gear in one day absurd

NOTHING captures the spirit of government efficiency quite like asking over 14,000 schools to spend Rs 128 crore in a single day. In Haryana's latest administrative masterstroke, sports infrastructure is to be built not on playgrounds, but on paperwork completed at breakneck speed. The directive would be impressive — if procurement were an Olympic sport. School committees, presumably, are expected to identify needs, scout vendors, compare prices, ensure quality and finalise purchases, all before the ink on the order dries. One can only admire the faith that the authorities have in their superhuman abilities. Of course, there is a simpler explanation. This is less about sports and more about the timeless ritual of March-end spending, where the race is not to achieve outcomes but to exhaust budgets within the financial year. In this annual festival of fiscal urgency, prudence is optional and utilisation certificates are the real trophies.

The idea of decentralising purchases to schools is, on paper, commendable. In practice, however, autonomy delivered at the last minute resembles a surprise exam with no time to read the question. Faced with impossible deadlines, committees are left to either rush through purchases or perfect the art of backdated compliance. The real winners in such situations are rarely the students. Instead, urgency creates fertile ground for inflated prices, questionable quality and creative accounting. It promotes an ecosystem that thrives when scrutiny takes a back seat to speed. Vendors, too, are unlikely to complain about such efficiency.

If the goal is to promote sports, the government might consider giving schools something radical: time, planning and perhaps a calendar that does not end in a sprint. Until then, this one-day spending exercise risks producing less sporting excellence and more administrative gymnastics, with predictably underwhelming results.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

THE TRIBUNE, FRIDAY, APRIL 2, 1926

Money-Lenders' Bill

THE Punjab Money-Lenders' Bill, as it has emerged from the Select Committee, is not materially different from what it was in its original form. A few slight improvements have been made, but the framework and the main provisions of the Bill remain what they were. The definitions of "money-lender" and "loan" are still dangerously wide, and it is seriously apprehended that if the Bill is enforced with rigor, it will not only cripple agriculture but also injure trade and commerce. The whole framework of the Bill indicates that while it will not affect the dishonest money-lender, it will be the means of providing ample loopholes for the dishonest debtor to avoid discharging his liability to the creditor. The money-lender is required, (1) to keep accounts in a particular form; (2) to send six-monthly returns to the debtor; and (3) to furnish a statement of accounts before a magistrate on the application of the debtor. If the creditor fails to comply (1) his whole suit or claim will be dismissed; if he makes a default (2), he will lose interest for the period of six months for which he omitted to furnish accounts; the failure to duly lodge the statement of accounts in the court of the magistrate will render the creditor liable to be convicted under Section 181 of the Penal Code, though not sentenced to imprisonment. The dismissal of the entire suit on the ground that the accounts are not found to be in the form prescribed by the government is most unjust and improper, and the utmost that should be provided is that a creditor will not be permitted to produce his accounts in a court of law and base his claim on those accounts unless they are kept in the prescribed form.

A human-made tragedy called Punjab

There is a need for a multi-stakeholder consensus to pull the state out of its endemic morass



MANISH TEWARI
LOK SABHA MP AND
FORMER I&B MINISTER

PUNJAB is virtually bankrupt and in the vicious stranglehold of a narco-militancy colloquially called gangsterism. In these columns, I wrote two pieces last year — "Why a new deal for Punjab is essential" (March 10) and "Punjab must push for a fair deal" (March 19). Unfortunately, both fell on collectively deaf political ears.

While the first article outlined the acute and endemic structural problems bedeviling the state, the second had traced the fate that in the wake of a horrendous Partition — called *Ujra* (devastation) in Punjabi — the political leadership of PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) and East Punjab singularly failed to negotiate a special constitutional arrangement for Punjab.

In contrast, other states struck special constitutional terms with the Union in the form of the now-repealed Article 370 (Jammu & Kashmir) and Article 371A-J (Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Sikkim, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa and Karnataka, respectively). Punjab is perhaps the only border state that did not endeavour to get a special constitutional deal despite being a victim of the blood-spattered vivisection of India in 1947.

Punjab's trifurcation in 1966 may have worked wonder in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh and perhaps for a certain section of the political elite in the state, but economically and structurally, it has not served the larger interests of Punjab.

The political weight in national affairs of an undivided Punjab brought about by the merger of



DRUG MENACE: Three decades of narco-militancy have effectively crippled two generations in Punjab. FILE PHOTO

PEPSU and East Punjab on November 1, 1956, waned after its trifurcation on November 1, 1966.

In fact, a number of scholars believe that Punjab and Bengal were partitioned by the British in 1947 to control the periphery of India by creating rump states as the Cold War had commenced. This shifted the centre of political gravity to the Hindi heartland. They visualise the political heft and influence of an undivided Punjab and Bengal in an undivided and independent India.

What followed the trifurcation was a turbulent decade and a half, succeeded by 15 years of religious extremism, separatism and terrorism from 1980 to 1996. It was substantially sponsored by Pakistan and a diasporic fringe. Civilian governance processes were substantially impacted as a consequence. Though the spectre of terror was finally quelled by the end of 1995, Punjab never recovered from the blood-spattered vivisection of those dark days.

Three decades later, how does Punjab measure up? Its debt will stand at Rs 4.47 lakh crore by the end of the 2026-27 financial year. About 23% of the state's revenue receipts amounting to Rs 28,755 crore will service interest payments. Debt repayment in the 2025-26 financial year — payment of principal and interest — amounted to Rs 43,194 crore. In effect, the state is borrowing to pay

Punjab's socio-economic and governance imperatives are now beyond the ability of any one individual or political party to surmount.

interest on existing debt rather than spend on development.

In 1996, Punjab's debt was only Rs 15,250 crore. By 2002, it had doubled to Rs 32,496 crore. The debt, therefore, is not militancy-related but a consequence of populist and profligate spending over the past 30 years by successive governments. The consequence is that on May 31, 2025, Punjab had the second highest debt-to-GSDP ratio (46.6%) in the country — trumped only by Arunachal Pradesh at 57%.

Punjab has to stop doing out. Freebies. The state just can't afford it. Another interesting statistic: in the 2023-24 financial year, at current prices, Maharashtra's share in India's GDP stood at 13.46%; Tamil Nadu contributed 8.93%;

Uttar Pradesh 8.77%; Karnataka 8.49%; and Gujarat 8.05%. By contrast, Punjab contributed a mere 2.4% to the national GDP.

Herein lies the paradox. As of 2021, Punjab was still contributing 7.7% of the PBOs (Personnel Below Officer Rank) to the Army, though its share of the national population is a meagre 2.3%. This is despite the Recruitable Male Population (RMP) Rule introduced in 1965 that has systematically whittled down Punjab's recruitment in the armed forces over the past 50 years.

By comparison, Gujarat contributes 2.4% of the manpower to the armed forces, while its share of the national population is 5.2%. Gujarat, like Punjab, is a border state. Punjab is the sentinel of the nation, but has lost the political will to surmount the crises that consume it.

After the proscription of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, the neighbouring country nimbly switched gears to enable a narco-militancy from 1995 itself, drawing upon its control of the narcotics trade in Afghanistan. It was only around 2010 that the *Hulsnawans* started grasping the import of that strategy. By then, substantial damage had already been done.

Three decades of narco-militancy have effectively crippled two generations in Punjab. This has directly impacted the state's law and

order, with rampant gangsterism virtually holding it to ransom today.

With 84% of the peasantry holding two to five acres of land, agriculture as a stand-alone occupation is becoming increasingly unremunerative. Punjab's water table has declined by 40-100 cm per year over the past three decades, compounding the agrarian crisis. As the state is bereft of any heavy industry worth the name, besides having a marginal service sector and a lack of focus on skilling in its education ecosystem, the young generation vacillates between frustration and hopelessness, looking for avenues of escape or easy money. While Punjab's challenges intensified, its political discourse became increasingly bitter and vendetta-driven. It has remained submerged in a toxic loop of a "the said, she said" discourse for decades, with social media-driven reel culture now becoming the cherry on the proverbial cake.

The Vidhan Sabha met for only 17 days in 2022, 12 days in 2023, 12 days in 2024, 15 days in 2025 and for only seven days in 2026 till now, whereas this should have been the forum for a serious debate to build a political consensus on a roadmap to pull Punjab out of its endemic morass. Between 2017 and 2022, the Vidhan Sabha met for a mere 85 days out of its 1,825-day term. Earlier Assemblies did not better.

Punjab's socio-economic and governance imperatives are now beyond the ability of any one individual or political party to surmount. There is a need to forge a multi-stakeholder consensus as the late Dr Manmohan Singh had crafted when he carried out the national economic reset of 1991. Three-and-a-half decades later, it still holds.

As a two-term MP and a former Union Minister from Punjab now representing the capital of both Punjab and Haryana, it is my appeal to all political parties and right-thinking people to come together and ply themselves to restoring the lost glory of what was once the majestic Punjab of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The most enduring image of Punjab is that of hardworking, enterprising, prosperous farmers. — Manmohan Singh

Hari Singh lived life at full throttle

DEEPAK OHLIYAN

MY friendship with Hari Singh, fondly known as the "Gypsy King", began during our boarding school days in the mid-1970s. We were barely nine years old then and our world was simple and untroubled. There was something about him that stood out; while the rest of us played, he observed, thought and then played differently.

He always loved cars, dinky cars then, tiny metal machines that were his world. Sundays were race days. He had two prized cars with flashy rally stickers, inspired by the Himalayan Car Rally. I had my own streamlined car. Three machines, each carrying a piece of our imagination and bound by a shared obsession: the thrill of racing and the joy those small cars brought.

Our racetrack was a storm-water drain along a sloping road — narrow, cemented, perfect for speed. We'd release the toy cars at the top and watch them race down, accelerating every second. But Hari wanted more than speed; he wanted control. He began shaping the course, mud ramps to slow down, clay patches to cushion landings, bamboo strips to guide direction. He tested, observed and refined each element.

Sometimes, he released two cars together; watching one crash while the other glided through. Other times, he staggered them, observing how the second reacted to a disturbed track. He wasn't guessing; he was calculating speed, angle, lift, landing, recovery. He adjusted ramps, aligned tunnels and planned each slowdown. When it worked, it wasn't luck, it was design.

The rainy Sundays were the best. Cars skidded, spun, crashed or surged ahead. For us, it was madness; for Hari, a new level. While we laughed, he adjusted ramps, repositioned obstacles and mastered the changing track. Looking back, it's clear: he wasn't just playing in the rain, he was learning to win.

He went on to become a five-time Indian National Rally Championship winner and the first Indian to win the Asia Zone Rally Championship. A true legend, he chased mountains, mastered machines and lived his life at full throttle in terrains where most people would never dare to go. Some legends aren't made overnight. They begin quietly, in places no one is watching. In his case, it all began on those quiet, playful Sundays at Sanawar.

Years later, I reminded him of the slope, the drains, the races. He smiled and said, "You have to write this story for me." I didn't, life had got busier by then. He then called from Ladakh and said, "Tell this story to my rally friends." I did, but still didn't write it. Wish I had written this piece earlier rather than now, when only his memories remain — he died in a speedboat accident in the Maldives last month. I can only hope that these words do justice to those memories and ease my guilt over having waited too long.

The writer is a Singapore-based IT professional

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Govt must help youth get jobs

Refer to 'Life in a waiting room'; the writer has presented a true picture of unemployment which is today's reality and one of the most pressing issues. Under the current circumstances, the onus rests on our policy framers to ponder over this burning problem of joblessness and take necessary concrete initiatives. Industry needs a push along with revival of sick units, besides making humongous efforts not to allow agricultural land to shrink further. And to cap it all, strenuous emphasis needs to be laid on job creation both in government as well as private sector, besides motivating frustrated youngsters to go in for self-employment, which is a big challenge in itself. But if the ruling dispensation and policy planners are by the side of the youth, we can optimise the country's demographic dividend.

RAVI SHARMA, DHARWAL

Revamp employment policy

With reference to 'Life in a waiting room', despite government's initiatives, the rising unemployment rate, particularly among men and women in urban areas, is a major crisis having significant social and economic repercussions. This is due to poor quality education, skill mismatch, slow job creation and aspiration gap. A majority of graduates depend on land ownership or low-paying, contractual jobs in the private sector. The country is currently experiencing a rich young demographic dividend. Revamping academic curricula, updation of skills, and interface between industries, policy makers and training institutions would help tap it successfully.

DS KANG, HOSHARPUR

The institution of marriage

Refer to 'Liberty vs marriage'; no doubt, national and international laws give a person the right to choose a life partner but such a decision is laden with many social consequences. Both, liberty and marriages are institutions themselves. When instruments of legality start holding the key, there is temporary relief, but sooner or later, it is replaced by permanent grief under the weight of stark realities. Social control, reg-

ulation and individual aspirations need to find a middle path rather than confrontation. We should view matrimonial alliances as signifying freedom with responsibility.

RAKESH MOHAN SHARMA, PATHANKOT

Liberty with responsibility

Refer to 'Liberty vs marriage'; the law must recognise evolving relationships. In a liberal society that supports love, inter-caste and inter-faith marriages, liberty cannot become a pretext to fragment the institution of marriage, which continues to safeguard social and legal stability in India. When a man or woman walks out of marriage, reasons may vary — incompatibility, abuse or aspiration. However, entering live-in relationships without lawful dissolution creates uncertainties. If such relationships fail, what remedies exist? More critically, what becomes of children born out of such arrangements — their legitimacy, inheritance and emotional security? Liberty must operate within the purview of responsibility.

RAMPHAL KATARIA, KURUKSHETRA

Authorities never learn

The Bihar stampede is not the first or the last of such tragedies. The earlier stampedes too were avoidable had there been proactive steps taken by a sincere and vigilant administration. The authorities never fail to disappoint; they never learn lessons. In today's times of availability of better technology and communication, people continue to suffer. The people, too, are to blame who do not gauge the situation and wait for an accident to happen.

SK KHOSLA, CHANDIGARH

Solar panels in housing societies

Amid the escalating global energy crisis, it is imperative that we transit to self-reliant energy models. While the government has set ambitious targets for rooftop solar installations, making these systems, along with piped natural gas (PNG), mandatory for group housing societies would drastically reduce the burden on overstretched power grids. Such a requirement would not only lower electricity bills for lakhs of residents but also curb carbon emissions significantly.

PANKAJ MALVIYA, FRIOCHUKLA

UN should survive US attack. It may not



SANJAY HEGDE
SENIOR ADVOCATE,
SUPREME COURT

ON February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel launched Operation Epic Fury against Iran. The opening strikes killed Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, senior military commanders and civilians, including children at an elementary school in Minab. One month later, the war has spread across the Gulf, shut the Strait of Hormuz partially, and killed thousands. The US claims it acted in self-defence. That claim does not survive scrutiny.

The prohibition on the use of force is the foundational norm of the post-1945 order. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter bars all member states from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. The International Court of Justice treats this prohibition as *jus cogens*. No derogation is permitted.

The Charter allows two exceptions. The Security Council may authorise force under Chapter VII. A state may use force in individual or collective self-defence under Article 51, but only if an

armed attack occurs, and only subject to the requirements of necessity and proportionality. The Security Council did not authorise this war. The entire legal case rests on Article 51. It fails on every element.

Article 51 requires an armed attack. Iran had not attacked the US or Israel when the strikes began. Pentagon briefers told congressional staff on March 1 that Iran was not planning to strike US forces unless Israel attacked first. American intelligence had assessed for years that Iran halted its nuclear weapons programme in 2003 and had not restarted it. The IAEA confirmed it had no evidence of an organised weapons programme. A uranium enrichment capacity is not an armed attack. A missile programme is not an armed attack. The ICJ drew this line in the *Oil Platforms* case. The US itself drew it in 1981, when it joined a unanimous Security Council resolution condemning Israel's strike on Iraq's Osirak reactor. The American representative stated that the presence of military capability in a state cannot constitute a sufficient basis for the use of force.

The requirement of necessity fares no better. The Caroline doctrine, which the US formulated in 1837, confines self-defence to cases where the necessity is instant and overwhelming and leaves no choice of means. On February 25, three days before the strikes, Iran's foreign minister declared publicly that a



AGGRESSOR: Two F-15 Super Hornets launch from the flight deck of aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, reuters

historic agreement was within reach. The Omani mediator confirmed after the attack that negotiations had been making progress. The US was conducting active diplomacy through Omani intermediaries at the moment it launched its war. A week-long military build-up combined with ongoing negotiations cannot satisfy the Caroline doctrine. Diplomacy was in progress.

The attack on Iran is grossly disproportionate. Proportionality collapses on the facts. The Pentagon acknowledged deploying twice the firepower of the 2003 shock-and-awe campaign. Over 11,000 targets were struck in the first month. The campaign targeted the Head of State, the state broadcaster, parliament, universities and

Countries without great-power alliances, without nuclear arsenals, without permanent seats on the Security Council have no protection other than the law.

cultural heritage sites. Its stated aims include the destruction of Iran's entire missile capability, the annihilation of its navy and the prevention of nuclear weapons acquisition. This is not a proportionate response to any armed attack. It is a campaign of regime change and preventive disarmament.

The US Article 51 letter, submitted to the Security Council on March 10, 2026, compounds these failures. It catalogues Iranian actions stretching back to the 1979 hostage crisis as the basis for its self-defence claim. But any right of self-defence arising from 1979 expired decades ago, not least through the 1981 Algiers Accords. The US has not possessed a 47-year-old licence to use force against Iran. What the US has undertaken

is preventive war: the use of force to eliminate a capability that might become a threat in the future. International law has never accepted this doctrine. The US has historically rejected it. The attempt to dress preventive war in the language of self-defence is a corruption of the Charter.

One feature of this conflict deserves particular emphasis. The attack was launched during active negotiations. When a state strikes its adversary at the negotiating table, it destroys not only the negotiation but the institution of diplomacy itself. If states cannot trust that their counterparts will not attack them during talks, no future negotiation can proceed in good faith. The Omani Foreign Minister, who stated his country's credibility on mediation, concluded that the war was an attempt to reorder West Asia in Israel's favour. When the mediator reaches that conclusion, the damage extends far beyond a single conflict. To facilitate talks, Israel has reportedly had to remove two Iranian negotiators from its kill list. It is, indeed, a cause of wonder if talks do take off under such circumstances.

The Security Council's response has been selective. Resolution 2817 condemned Iran's retaliatory strikes on Gulf states. It made no mention of the US-Israeli strikes that preceded and provoked them. Russia and China abstained, citing the one-sidedness. India co-sponsored the resolution. India, a coun-

try built on the principle of sovereign equality, has not condemned the strikes that started this war. History will note the silence. As the current head of the BRICS group of countries, the world would have expected greater diplomatic engagement from India.

The precedent at stake is existential for the world in general and the Global South in particular. If a state may lawfully attack another on the basis of military capability and an unwelcome nuclear programme, during active diplomacy, without Security Council authorisation, and call it self-defence, then Article 2(4) ceases to mean anything. Countries without great-power alliances, without nuclear arsenals, without permanent seats on the Security Council have no protection other than the law. When the authors of that law set it aside, the weakest bear the cost.

The Charter was drafted by nations that had survived total war. The powerful countries on the Security Council were expected to be altruistic hegemons who guarded peace. Its prohibition on the use of force was not aspirational.

It was a survival mechanism. Whether it survives Operation Epic Fury depends on whether the international community holds the law above power. The alternative is a world Thucydides described: where the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must. The Charter was written to reject that world. It still should.

Are weight-loss drugs safe



RANBIR SINGH
SCIENCE JOURNALIST &
CULTURAL HISTORIAN

THE market has been inundated with so-called 'miracle' solutions for diabetes control and weight loss. However, noted for their potential in combating obesity, weight loss drugs may have implications beyond their intended purpose. Recent research suggests these medications could have effects on behavioural patterns, particularly those related to addiction.

Clinicians have observed that some individuals taking weight-loss medications for conditions such as type 2 diabetes or obesity exhibit reduced tendencies towards addictive behaviours, including alcohol consumption, tobacco use and even compulsive shopping. Weight-loss drugs have a long history, and the therapeutic effects and adverse reactions of conventional drugs are well known. The relationship between weight-loss drugs and dependency remains complex and not fully understood. While studies suggest that GLP-1 receptor agonists might help reduce cravings, it is not clear if this effect translates to a higher risk of dependency.

The surge in generic medicine launches occurred because the

patent protection in India for semaglutide, the key active ingredient used in Ozempic and Wegovy — the diabetes and anti-obesity medications manufactured by Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk — expired on March 20, 2026.

Consequently, these medications for combating diabetes and obesity are now more readily available and significantly cheaper. While public response to these drugs is proving to be a 'gold mine' for pharmaceutical companies, the use of these drugs without prescription is likely to cause complications and ultimately force consumers to seek medical help.

Since mid-March, more than a dozen Indian pharmaceutical companies launched affordable generic versions of these anti-diabetic-cum-weight loss medications in the market. They are now available in both liquid and tablet forms. The cost of vial-based drugs starts around Rs 1,290, whereas that of premium pre-filled pens goes up to Rs 8,000.

GLP-1 (Glucagon-like Peptide-1) receptor agonists are just the start

of modern anti-obesity treatments. It took over 20 years to develop these drugs, and in the next decade, many patents for other obesity medicines will expire, making effective treatments more affordable. Currently, 183 potential anti-obesity drugs are under development. These new medications work by targeting hormones that control appetite and metabolism via the brain.

Oral GLP-1 medications claim to offer benefits comparable to injectable therapies and are available in pill form. This eliminates the need for weekly injections, refrigerated storage of the medication and constant supervision by a specialist.

The danger comes not from the drug itself but from a lack of monitoring by a specialist. While the intake of these medications independent of a physician's observation could significantly rise due to their easy availability in the market, it is also likely to lead to an increase in resultant complications.

Notably, diabetologists and general physicians in India are not yet confident about recommending these new medications to their patients. Doctors hold regular discussions about the efficacy of new drugs. Pharmaceutical companies, too, often organise seminars and discussions for them. However, some doctors consider this practice unethical. They await research literature or recommendations from the Indian Council of Medical Research or the drug controller.

The approval of these drugs for sale in India means doctors may prescribe them based on professional judgment.

Diabetologists are not yet confident about recommending new medications to their patients.

Land sharks in Himachal



TIKENDER SINGH PANWAR
EX-DEPUTY MAYOR, SHIMLA

THE recent Pandora's box that opened in the state speaks volumes of hell-bent efforts in land transfers, and why land reforms particularly section 118 of the Land Reforms and Tenancy Act is so pertinent for such efforts to advance. The Chester Hill Housing scam, a real estate project in Solan district, reveals the ugly face of 'land sharks'.

Before I place the Chester Hill details, let me state for clarity that it may be argued as to why a bureaucrat or someone who has lived in the state for decades together or even born here should not find his abode in the hills? So what is wrong if they are bypassing some of the laws to find a house in the state.

There is a difference between buying a house for habitat and pumping in money for speculating land and using the authority of the state in possessing multiple properties in such housing projects most of which are benami deals.

Such projects make the process convenient for the 'land sharks' to park their money — both legal

and illegal in the state. And this is no development.

The facts disclose a deeply disturbing pattern wherein the different levels of administrative and police machinery appear to be functioning in a coordinated manner to suppress lawful inquiry, shield offenders and facilitate illegal concentration of valuable land resources.

The SDM inquiry is the foundational document exposing systematic illegality in the Chester Hill-2 and Chester Hill-4 projects involving approximately 275-278 higas of land. Project proponents engaged in material misrepresentation before the Himachal Pradesh Real Estate Regulatory Authority (HPRERA) falsely projecting the scope of operations across Solan and Shimla districts to obtain approvals under false pretences.

Unaccounted funds were channelised into land acquisition by inducing agriculturists, and recorded purchasers lacked financial capacity, acting merely as

name-lenders, clearly indicating benami transactions.

The transactions were structured in violation of Section 118 of the Himachal Pradesh Tenancy and Land Reforms Act, 1972. These findings establish not isolated irregularities but a coordinated scheme of illegality requiring immediate criminal investigation.

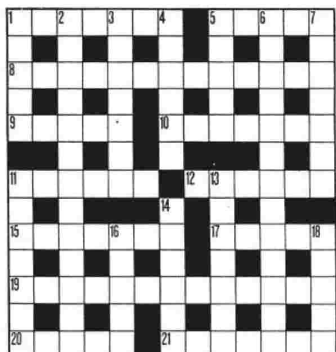
Instead of acting upon the SDM's findings, it is alleged that the orders were arbitrarily set aside. Further, when the Municipal Commissioner, Solan detected illegal constructions in Chester Hill, they were trivialised and judicial powers under Section 151 CPC were usurped despite no such provision in the Act, to set aside her order.

This is just one case that came to light owing to some judicious intervention by few officers (in the above case both women) who followed the book, but then they were reprimanded. There are many such instances where the law of the land has been violated and the ease of land deals allowed thus benefitting the 'land sharks'.

What the minimum that the government should do is to not just protect the existing law of the land but ensure that a broad consensus is built on the developmental trajectory based on some of the foundational principles of 'carrying capacity' as well. Himachal and for that matter the entire Himalayan range now kept under seismic zone VI cannot afford to further enhance its vulnerability.

The Chester Hill Housing scam, a real estate project in Solan district, reveals the ugly face of 'land sharks'.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Ill-mannered (7)
- Small game-bird (5)
- Schemer in politics or business (7-6)
- Field of opportunity (5)
- Diabolo (7)
- Loathe (6)
- Noteworthy (6)
- To utter (7)
- Learned essay (5)
- Immediate proximity (5,8)
- Over (5)
- Treacherously (7)

Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Swish, 8 Go to town, 9 Pique, 10 Big stick, 11 Never, 12 Pew, 16 Vicuna, 17 Azores, 18 Toy, 23 Kudos, 24 Round off, 25 Whoop, 26 Small fry, 27 Sorry.

Down: 2 White tie, 3 Souped up, 4 Polite, 5 Rouse, 6 Solid, 7 Snake, 12 Pat, 13 Way, 14 So much so, 15 Zero hour, 19 On fire, 20 Crass, 21 Mural, 22 Adult.

DOWN

- Game played on a green (5)
- Final drink before departure (3,3,3,4)
- Ailment (7)
- To trouble constantly (6)
- Search (5)
- Completely intact (3,2,3,5)
- Song-like (7)
- Total failure (7)
- Enderang (7)
- Suib (6)
- Prevailing tendency (5)
- Corroded (5)

SU DO KU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

- APRIL 2, 2026, THURSDAY
- Shukla Navami 1948
 - Chaitra Shukla 12
 - Chaitra Purnashti 20
 - Hijri 1447
 - Shukla Paksha Tithi 15, up to 7:42 am
 - Dhruva Yoga up to 2:20 pm
 - Hast Nakshatra up to 5:28 pm
 - Moon in Virgo sign
 - Chaitra Purnima

FORECAST

| SUNSET | THURSDAY | 18-41 HRS |
|------------|----------|-----------|
| SUNRISE | FRIDAY | 06:10 HRS |
| CITY | MAX | MIN |
| Chandigarh | 33 | 17 |
| New Delhi | 36 | 19 |
| Amritsar | 30 | 18 |
| Bathinda | 34 | 17 |
| Jalandhar | 30 | 18 |
| Ludhiana | 35 | 18 |
| Bhiana | 30 | 24 |
| Hisar | 34 | 20 |
| Sirsa | 30 | 21 |
| Dharamsala | — | — |
| Manali | — | — |
| Shimla | 22 | 10 |
| Srinagar | 22 | 08 |
| Jammu | 31 | 18 |
| Kargil | 16 | 03 |
| Leh | 12 | 01 |
| Dehradun | 35 | 17 |
| Mussoorie | 24 | 12 |

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES

"Without fear and without favour"

ft.com/opinion

Price controls make a troubling return to the mainstream

Governments should focus more on boosting supply and productivity

With conflict in the Middle East, global oil shocks and lingering cost-of-living pressures, the 2020s are beginning to look a lot like the 1970s. In the west, politicians are also now increasingly reverting to one of that era's key tools for fighting inflation: price controls.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, several European nations implemented price caps to tame electricity costs. But interfering in markets has since remained seductive for governments across the developed world — on both the left and the right — as voters' worries around affordability have persisted. Recent polls from the US and Europe show, unsurprisingly, high public support for the state to directly limit the cost of essentials.

In January, US President Donald

Trump proposed a one-year, 10 per cent cap on credit card interest rates. Zohran Mamdani's successful New York mayoral campaign last year included popular proposals for citywide rent freezes and publicly-owned grocery stores. Britain's Labour government has introduced legislation to ensure landlords only raise rents once a year. Last week it announced a vague new "anti-profiteering framework" to clamp down on price gouging by food and petrol companies during the Iran war, if it takes place. And, throughout Europe and Asia, the conflict's potential impact on energy costs means price restraints are once again in consideration.

Efforts to rein in market prices are a quick and visible way for politicians to display support for stretched households. But they are a misguided policy measure. Although it provides near-term relief, fiddling with price signals often creates new problems by dulling important incentives for buyers and sellers. In some European cities, rent

controls have weakened financial motives for landlords and developers and led to deeper housing shortages. Similarly, US banks say the plan to limit credit card rates would make it prohibitive to extend credit to some borrowers. As for energy price caps, they reduce the compulsion for households and businesses to economise on usage and to switch to cheaper, greener alternatives. Even the UK government's rhetoric on "profiteering" by retailers could deepen shortages, by creating uncertainty for businesses that themselves face margin squeezes due to the war.

Market interventions are expensive and hard to remove. Britain's "energy price guarantee" in 2022, introduced by then Conservative Prime Minister Liz Truss, limited electricity prices for all households and cost the government close to £25bn. With large debt piles, few rich nations have the fiscal wriggle room for similarly profligate measures. Besides, the expectation that the state will step in with a bailout each time a

Although it provides near-term relief, fiddling with price signals often creates new problems by dulling important incentives for buyers and sellers

price shock arises needs to be curbed. What, then, should governments do? If the Iran conflict lingers, they would do better to provide targeted cash support to the most vulnerable in society while leaving valuable price signals intact. With ongoing cost-of-living concerns, there are more enduring ways to bring prices down. This includes creating the conditions to build more homes, slashing red tape, cutting tariffs on imports and investing in energy security. Less focus on controlling prices and more attention on raising wages through improvements in productivity would also support a sustained boost to living standards. These initiatives are even more important in an age of supply shocks, when central banks' interest rate tools can be less effective.

Price controls are a superficial fix where harder, yet more worthwhile, economic reforms are needed. Governments and voters should know that toying with markets merely stores up greater problems for later.

Opinion Science

Silent cells could mean no more scars

Andy Carter



Anjana Ahuja



The phrase "skin-deep" is often used dismissively, to refer to something as superficial or lacking complexity. That feels like a misnomer when it comes to skin itself.

It is an astonishing organ, essentially a multi-layered, waterproof body bag that keeps other organs in but pathogens and the outside world out. Our skin typically accounts for about 15 per cent of body weight and renews itself every month. We each shed millions of skin cells every day.

A wealth of different types of cells lurk beyond the epidermis, the outer layer that contains mostly keratinocytes: hair follicles, pigment cells, immune cells, sweat glands, blood vessels and fat cells; nerve fibres, for sensory perception; the muscular structures responsible for goosebumps;

The key to improving organ-level regeneration may lie in tamping down cellular chatter

and fibroblasts, which make collagen and other connective tissue.

Skin can regenerate if damaged but the jostling between these many cells means that not all grow back. Without that full complement, repaired skin loses some of its function and can become scarred, stiff and painful.

Now, scientists at Harvard University experimenting on mice have uncovered a method that could one day allow wounds to heal without scarring. The technique involves dialing down excessive nerve growth, so that other cells can bloom. If proven in humans, it could improve the prospects for both healing and wound-related pain.

Scientists have long suspected that the key to perfect wound healing lies somewhere in embryonic development. Injured foetuses heal without scars, and babies that are operated on in utero also show seamless skin repairs, with all the various cell types restored. But this capacity disappears soon after birth, with later skin healing characterised by sometimes stiff and painful scar tissue and a sparser sprinkling of cell types. For example, the healed area might lack hair follicles and sweat glands.

Biologists Ya-Chieh Hsu, Hannah Tam and colleagues decided to investigate this process. They clipped out

small pieces of skin from mice at different stages of development, both before and after birth — marking the areas with fluorescent beads and henna ink — and examined how the skin regrew. While regeneration happened seamlessly in animals wounded before birth, with healed areas only visible via the markings, the picture was different for mice wounded five days or more after being born.

In those cases, the regeneration was more chaotic, with the injury site packed with epidermal cells, immune cells and abnormal bundles of collagen fibres that lacked the "basket-weave" pattern of uninjured skin. Several other cell types failed to regrow.

And crucially, just like an emptied patch of land that is colonised by weeds, the wound site was overrun with nerve fibres. When the scientists used Botox as a kind of weedkiller — to block the signals encouraging nerves to sprout — the missing cell types started reappearing.

Tam and Hsu published the results online last month in the journal *Cell*, concluding that "skin initially possesses a remarkable capacity for organ-level regeneration that becomes progressively blocked with development, rather than irreversibly lost".

They pin much of this blocking on a signalling gene known as CXCL12, which promotes cross-talk between fibroblasts and nerves. The key to improving organ-level regeneration, the researchers believe, lies in tamping down this cellular chatter, so that the skin can revert to an earlier, more orderly state of repair.

"Our findings suggest that excessive nerve growth early after injury contributes to scarring," Hsu told me. Wounds in humans, she added, show similar frantic nerve growth early on and could potentially be tamed in the same way: "We do not yet know whether this applies directly to humans, but we are optimistic... In principle, CXCL12 activity could be reduced using small-molecule inhibitors or blocking antibodies, and we are actively exploring these approaches in the lab."

By putting the brakes on nerve growth, it might also address injury-related pain. Extreme nerve growth could be an evolutionary survival response to wounding. Hsu suggests it would sensitise the area and potentially prevent further damage, even if it came at the cost of regenerating other cells.

With skin and brain constantly communicating, our outer wrapping is a portal for feeling and interpreting the outside world, even when we are on the inside. Embryos can get goosebumps, Tam says.

The world of skin is very much more than skin-deep.

The writer is a science commentator

Letters

The false comfort of one-size-fits-all child safety measures

Apple's new age checks (Report, March 26) may be well-intentioned, but risk repeating a familiar mistake: applying a blunt solution to a complex problem. Pushing age verification deeper into operating systems raises real concerns around privacy and security, while treating all users the same, regardless of context.

There is also a practical flaw. Our research shows that determined users

— including children — can often bypass age restrictions with a little curiosity. Closing these gaps typically requires collecting more personal data, creating a trade-off between stronger verification and increased privacy risks. When safeguards are easily worked around, they risk driving younger users towards more dangerous and less visible corners of the internet — creating a false sense of protection

rather than meaningful safety.

Recent rulings against platforms such as Meta and YouTube suggest the focus is shifting, from simply restricting access to addressing how harm is created and amplified.

Experience in cyber security suggests that one-size-fits-all controls rarely work as intended. More effective approaches combine targeted protections, transparency and better

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How world trade avoids America's wrecking ball

Alan Beattie's column entitled "The way out of WTO gridlock" (Trade Secrets, March 26) is a sensible summation of where the World Trade Organization is at present, and where the future of the system lies.

Two conclusions from recent developments stand out. First, there are few (if any) takers among WTO members for the US's wrecking ball strategy. The world still values the rules-based system despite its infirmities and the WTO's inability to make new rules reflecting new trade realities.

That breach is increasingly being filled by free trade agreements acting consistent with WTO rules. The FTAs, to that extent, function as necessary surrogates for the WTO. It would make sense, therefore, to extend WTO dispute resolution to them.

Secondly, while consensus around key issues remains elusive in the WTO, it is still a worthwhile touchstone for inclusive functioning of the system. That requires a kind of political investment by members that is not visible at present. Absent that, meaningful reforms will remain difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, members can and should discuss, and hopefully agree on, frameworks for sub-multilateral rulemaking. In these difficult times, that would constitute real progress.

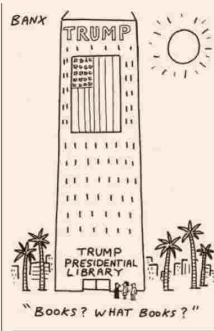
Ujal Singh Bhatia
Former Ambassador of India to the WTO;
Former Chairman of WTO Appellate Body,
Delhi, India

It takes a Soviet citizen to make case for democracy

Regarding Martin Wolf's column on the perils facing democracy (Opinion, March 25) the data on the ongoing decline of democracy is truly shocking. Increasingly, we hear from western policymakers and thinkers that the liberal west should refrain from "telling the Brics+ what to do" and accept non-democratic systems as "legitimate" alternatives. I appreciate the desire to avoid accusations of interference. But this does not mean we should assume that populations living under authoritarian regimes are content with the status quo.

Having grown up in the Soviet Union and having been fortunate enough to move from Ukraine to the UK in the 1990s, I know very well where I stand on this question. Ukraine, in fact, offers a valuable real world insight into the choices people make when they are genuinely able to choose: the pull of a liberal, democratic Europe versus the authoritarianism of Russia.

Ukraine's political system has been far from perfect, its oligarchic structures deserve criticism both before and since the war. Yet democratic institutions have taken root, and Ukrainians have consistently and clearly chosen to defend and strengthen them rather than turn



away. This is a point that is perhaps under-appreciated in current debates.

The more fundamental question, I believe, is why an increasing number of countries are auto-censuring, what enables these rapid shifts, and what can be done to limit them.

Because ultimately I find it hard to accept that a more autocratic world would be a better place for anyone.

Anna Stupnytska
Cambridge, UK

Commercial licensing and copyright is the way to go

I agree with Arthur Mensch, the Mistral AI chief executive, that artificial intelligence developers and creators can be allies ("AI companies should pay a content fee in Europe", Opinion, March 25).

For AI models to be valuable they need high-quality content to train on. Europe is a content superpower — it is our point of global competitive difference — and the intersection between AI technology and creativity in Europe is an incredibly exciting prospect.

Unfortunately, Mensch misses the mark on how a productive relationship between creators and AI developers can be achieved. Mensch presumes that tech companies are entitled to use anything they want without permission and ask for forgiveness after the fact (by throwing scraps into a fund through a revenue levy).

That is a fundamental abuse of people's lawful intellectual property. We have an established system for how to seek the right to use content — commercial licensing. AI companies have legal certainty — it's called copyright. They know it, they're just choosing to flout it. Content should be paid for, just as Mistral should expect to pay for their other lawful business overheads, like paying their staff or their electricity bills.

Mensch's charity bucket is not good enough — license content properly in accordance with the law.

Dan Conway
Chief Executive, The Publishers Association, London SE1, UK

Don't throw diversity baby out with the DEI bathwater

The advertisement you carried from ThePaperCeiling.org and Star (Skilled Through Alternative Routes) — which advocates hiring skills first and not throwing away talent — meshes nicely with Gillian Tett's column of January 24 advising businesses to "embrace more intellectual diversity, not less". Both encourage leaders to treat "diversity" as a business risk management strategy, and therefore not to lump it together with the human rights of "equity" and "inclusion".

I'm sure many of my fellow FT readers have been "in the room" for numerous decisions on business strategies and projects over the course of their careers. It's easy to remember which of those strategies or projects were truly successful and which were simply declared to have been successful. Ideally, what is also remembered is who was "in the room" for those decisions.

Those of us with many of these business decision data points cannot help but have observed that having people in the room who have taken different paths to get to the room significantly increases the chance of a good decision. Elements of that path include different education, different training and different work and life experiences.

Taking this perspective on diversity will benefit the business, and all of its stakeholders, regardless of political leaning. The use of arbitrary diversity measures and metrics has proven to be a lightning rod, resulting in the diversity "baby" being thrown out with the DEI "bathwater". Embracing an informal "diversity of path" perspective will help a business avoid "group think" and other well-documented behavioural tendencies.

This approach will be successful and endure if it is supported by human resources and the business's governance function broadly, and the risk management function more specifically. The benefit to the business and workplace will be ongoing as younger workers observe how team members who took different paths, and therefore provide different perspectives, are valued and contribute to effective decision making.

Mark W Griffin
Retired Chief Risk Officer,
Fountain Ridge, NY, US

Checks and balances?

Jeanette von Wolfersdorff (Letters, March 30) makes an eloquent plea for cybernetics to match the rising complexity of our contemporary world. Complexity of what? Greed and sophistry? Is this new? Montesquieu designed a system of democratic defence for all times — a system of counter powers. The counter powers are an institutional coalition of the willing. Get that straight.

Max Likin
Seattle, WA, US

Why this could be worse than the 1970s oil crisis

You observe that central banks may raise rates to fight higher inflation arising from the Iran war ("The spectre of stagflation", The Big Read, March 26). You also report that bond prices have tumbled.

In the 1970s, the combination of higher oil prices and contractionary monetary policy caused stock and bond prices to move together. Contractionary monetary policy reduced output and stock prices and inflation reduced bond prices. Since stocks are risky, positive correlated movements (co-movements) between stocks and bonds increased the riskiness of holding bonds. The bond risk premium then soared.

Since the turn of the century, bond-stock co-movements have been negative. A return to the positive co-movements now due to the energy crisis and contractionary monetary policy will raise bond yields. This will multiply debt service costs and public debts when debt levels are already vertiginous.

Willem Thorbecke
Senior Fellow, Research Institute of
Economy, Trade and Industry
Tokyo, Japan

A Manucian's view of Greens' by-election victory

Your Bristolian letter writer refers to the Greens' recent success in the Gorton and Denton by-election and links it to what he calls "ecopolitism" (Letters, March 17).

It may seem like that from Bristol, but those of us who actually live in the area — the constituency is 10 minutes' walk from me — saw populism of the worst kind. "Eco" didn't get a look in. Both Reform and the Greens shamelessly milked sectarian politics, the Greens simply made a better job of targeting their audience.

What was the Green Party seems to have largely turned into Corbynite Lite. **Peter Hardwick**
Hardwicks Manchester,
Manchester, UK

Napoleon insisted on being 'Emperor of the French'

The caption on your letters page photograph, describing Napoleon as the "first emperor of France" was a tad misleading (Letters, March 25). He was very insistent that he be known as the "Emperor of the French". Wikistates that "Napoleon crowned himself Emperor of the French" rather than Emperor of France to signal a fundamentally different source and conception of political legitimacy: sovereignty derived from the nation and its people, not from personal possession of territory or the old dynamic claim to a realm. Perhaps this was a philosophical or political legacy from the Revolution?

Ted Gaffney
Waterford, CT, US

Opinion

Trump is not just sinking in the Gulf

AMERICA

Edward Luce



How many of you would like to see impeachment hearings [of Donald Trump]?* a big conservative crowd was asked in Texas last weekend. It yelled in the affirmative. "No. That was the wrong answer," said the Trump loyalist hosting the event. "Let's try it again." The third time, after he rephrased, they dutifully agreed. It seemed the maga gathering may have been afflicted by confused English rather than a sudden turn against Trump. The same is not true of wider America, which is

undergoing prolonged buyer's remorse. Not all of Trump's slide stems from Iran. Months before he embarked on his Gulf war of choice, his poll numbers were heading south. Iran is only the latest — though most dramatic — example of Trump's increasingly volatile switch from the home stage to the world's (and from ICE raids to missile strikes). Venezuela consumed the first few days of the year. Only after he climbed down from annexing Greenland did Trump build up the US armada in the Middle East.

It would be fair to surmise that Trump's domestic advisers are tearing their hair out. During his first term, "infrastructure week" became a recurring joke; every time the White House announced it, Trump would steal his own thunder by doing something unrelated. Trump's "affordability" drive plays the same role now. Susie Wiles, his chief of staff, keeps scheduling events in which he can talk about his plans to

lower the cost of living. But the Iran war keeps making a nonsense of her efforts. Even if he declares unilateral victory in the Gulf, Iran would still have more influence than him over US inflation. America's 47th president regularly backs down in the face of falling stock and Treasury bond prices. Much like China found last year with rare earths,

Months before he embarked on his war of choice, his poll numbers were heading south

Iran has discovered a lethal chokehold on the global markets. In a phone interview with me on Sunday, Trump insisted that Iran was now run by "professionals" compared with those who were killed in the opening days. But Iran

experts say the regime has become more hardline and less amenable in the last month. Moreover, they have stumbled on a weapon that can induce TACO.

It is now commonplace to hear speculation that Trump will cancel the US midterms elections in November. That is almost inconceivable. Not once since the first US election in 1789 has a nationwide election been cancelled. Every two years, America has elected a new Congress. This year will be no exception. Nor, as some of Trump's maga friends are advising, is he likely to be able to impose martial law in dozens of swing districts, though he might try.

Pretexts can easily be conjured to convince the maga faithful and Elon Musk that undocumented migrants are stealing the election. Judges are a different matter. The courts have issued dozens of injunctions against Trumpism overreach, such as deploying the national guard to states that have not requested

troops and ICE's paramilitary tactics. Until recently, however, he could bank on the Supreme Court upholding most of his agenda. But Trump has soured on the highest court since it struck down his main tariffs in February. Now it looks likely to reject his reinterpretation of the 14th amendment, which gives automatic citizenship to anyone born in the US. Should the justices uphold the conventional view that the civil war-era law was not only meant for freed slaves, Trump will have suffered a double blow. Tariffs and deportation of immigrants are two of Trump's four biggest political touchstones. The third was to avoid "stupid, senseless wars" in the Middle East. Only on the fourth — his "war on woke" — has Trump delivered. But he may have done so a little too well. In 2024, psephologists talked of a US realignment in which Trump's maga coalition included a multiracial working-class base. There is no longer such talk.

Polls show a big shrinkage of working-class support for Trump, particularly among non-white voters. Men under 45 of all races have also turned away from him. Their lodestar, the podcaster Joe Rogan, recently called the Iran war "insane" and said Trump's voters felt "betrayed". Independents are also moving heavily against him; two-thirds of them disapprove according to a recent YouGov poll — the highest in either of his terms.

It was once thought Trump would turn to overseas adventurism only after a 2026 midterm defeat. He has started that clock ahead of schedule. His base is static but getting more extreme. Maga support for the Iran war is still above 90 per cent. But Trump has other ideas if Iran remains intractable. One of these is Cuba. "I think I can do anything I want with it," he recently said. Cuba's regime cannot say it wasn't warned.

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Why the global economy is still resilient

Martin Wolf Economics

The US president's tariffs have not led to the kind of retaliatory action many expected



Twenty-twenty-five was the year global trade definitely did not die. But it changed in complex ways, some temporary (such as the frontloading of US imports in response to the threat of high tariffs), some likely to be permanent (such as the decline in direct trade between the US and China) and some in between (such as the boom in AI-related trade). Nevertheless, global trade in goods, the products targeted by the tariffs, has been strikingly robust, according to *Geopolitics and the geometry of global trade: 2026 update*, a preliminary evaluation of 2025 by the McKinsey Global Institute.

The report notes five noteworthy facts of what happened in 2025.

First, US and Chinese exports reached new highs, while world trade also grew faster than the world economy. The direction of trade shifted substantially, but more from what McKinsey labels "geopolitically distant" trading partners — notably the US and China — than from "geographically distant" ones. Similarly, the EU lost market share in Chinese markets. But India stood out for a large increase in the geographical distance of trade because shipments of smartphones to the US rose fast.

Second, AI-related shipments became the most powerful engine of trade in goods, with a rise of 40 per cent between 2024 and 2025 in the value of shipments of semiconductors and equipment for data centres. Indeed, AI-related exports accounted for one-third of global trade

as Asian hubs — Taiwan, South Korea and parts of south-east Asia — supplied markets around the world, particularly the US. Controls on both exports and imports of some of this equipment restricted the growth of China's AI-related trade to 16 per cent. The report argues that the rapid growth in AI-related capacity will continue to drive world trade in 2026.

Third, in the report's words, "China expanded its role as a factory to the factories." While its direct exports to the US came under attack, China was able to increase exports of machinery and inputs to other countries, notably its neighbours, some of which could then replace China's exports to the US. In many other cases, notes McKinsey, its exports of parts and machinery were not tied to replacing lost sales to the US. Instead, they supported the expansion of manufacturing capacity in third markets, particularly emerging economies. This deepened China's role as a supplier of inputs into production rather than as an exporter of final goods. In all, China's exports of intermediate and capital goods rose by \$22.5bn in 2025, more than offsetting a reduction of \$130bn in exports to the US.

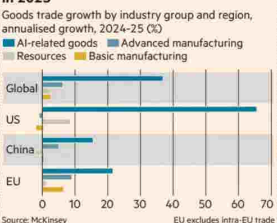
Fourth, the tariffs caused complex trade readjustments. Among other things, they caused temporary frontloading of imports. Overall, direct US-China trade fell by around 50 per cent in 2025. But the US replaced about two-thirds of the lost imports with purchases from other exporters, while Chinese



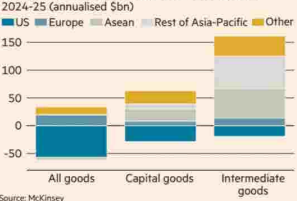
World trade grew in 2025, despite the onset of Trump's tariff war



Trade in AI-related goods grew explosively in 2025



The expansion of China's exports in 2025 was dominated by capital and intermediate goods



exporters of consumer goods, such as electric cars and toys, cut prices by an average of 8 per cent to find new buyers. The Asian countries' exports thrived in this new world. Meanwhile, says McKinsey, EU firms faced a double squeeze from diverted Chinese exports and higher US tariffs against their exports.

Finally, while the irrationality of President Donald Trump's arbitrary and unpredictable tariffs made life difficult for producers and traders worldwide (inevitably including many in the US),

there were useful offsetting factors. One was that Trump's bark was worse than his bite. In the end, as Richard Baldwin of IMD in Lausanne notes in his Substack post "Why Didn't Trumpian Tariffs Wreck the World Trade System?", he did not do all that he threatened.

More importantly, his actions led neither to a cycle of retaliation against the US nor, crucially, to imitation of the aggressive US repudiation of WTO commitments and norms. The trading system has other big challenges, notably China's aggressively mercantilist approach to exports. But the US, with just 14 per cent of world imports of goods, does not matter all that much. Indeed, even the US and China together, with 25 per cent of world trade between them, do not matter that much, as Baldwin notes in "How Did the 75-

percenters Save the System?" on Substack. The rest of the world has decided to go on trading because it depends on it.

There is, it turns out, "a great deal of ruin" in world trade, as Adam Smith would have told us. But there may still be limits. Will the AI boom go bust this year? Might the impact of Trump's war against Iran in 2026 surpass the damage done by his tariff war in 2025? More specifically, will the de facto closure of the Gulf to exports of oil, gas and other essential products end up causing more damage than we can manage? I suspect not. It seems likely that, however ill-conceived and ill-executed this war might be, Trump will find a way to claim victory and end it. Of course, it might be obvious to most that he has lost. But would that embarrass him? Probably not: he does not admit failure.

What is far clearer now, however, is that the US is no longer a credible world leader. If it can elect this man twice, it has lost the plot. Why would it not elect someone even worse? Such a country is incapable of providing reliable global hegemony. What it provides instead is an unpredictable wrecking ball. Nor is there a plausible replacement. China is relatively predictable. But its decades-long inability to eliminate reliance on huge trade and current account surpluses, to balance demand with excess domestic supply, is not encouraging.

What we have learnt is that the economy is more resilient than many feared. Let us hope that it continues to show that quality. It seems that we are going to need it, in spades.

martin.wolf@ft.com

The rest of the world has decided to go on trading because it depends on it

Europe doesn't have an Iran conflict strategy either

GEOPOLITICS

Constanze Stelzenmüller



The war in the Middle East, now in week five, is getting worse. The US is readying ground troops, Iran is striking at US bases and other targets in Iraq and the Gulf, Israel is expanding its invasion of Lebanon and Yemen's Houthis are firing at Israel. The oil price has surged past \$100 per barrel. Which brings us to the depressing topic of Europe's options.

The contortions of senior German officials illustrate just how painful that question is. Germany's president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, (whose

position is largely ceremonial) last week accused the US and Israel of violating international law — an assertion the government has carefully avoided. Berlin has in fact joined a group of 20-plus European, Gulf and Asian leaders gingerly offering to "contribute to appropriate efforts to ensure safe passage" through the Strait of Hormuz. European leaders had already made clear this would be after the end of hostilities.

But Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who last June had praised Israeli air strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities for doing "the dirty work", now says that Donald Trump has no clear exit strategy and is causing "a massive escalation with an uncertain outcome".

That is both true and beside the point. Germany and Europe do not have a strategy either. And this US-Israeli war of choice could still become a global economic and political catastrophe that threatens Europe far more than the US.

Eurozone borrowing costs are soaring. Energy price rises are forcing European governments to consider a host of economic emergency measures: tax cuts, price caps, reopening coal power plants, modifications to the EU's flagship emissions trading scheme. In

Decisions need to be made now, even if that entails the wholesale slaughtering of sacred cows

March, nationwide votes in Denmark, Italy and Slovenia, and at the subnational level in Germany, saw rising voter concern about cost of living increases in the context of the Iran war translate into anti-incumbent voting and political fragmentation. European policymakers are alarmed

at reports that the Pentagon is considering diverting US weapons ordered by Nato partners for Ukraine to the Middle East; they are dismayed at the Trump administration's decision to lift sanctions on Russia (and even Iran) in order to bring oil prices down. They have reason to fear that a wider war could bring new refugee flows to the continent, which they worry would further destabilise European societies and lay the seeds for Islamist terrorism. The US and Israel have been key allies to Europe. Their tactical prowess has been mesmerising. But their recklessness, and the increasingly real risk of strategic over-reach — or failure — is terrifying; and the costs will be borne by others.

In the short term, Europe's options in the Middle East are unfortunately sharply limited. Its bases are crucial for the US, but it will have to continue to let the Americans use them. The EU's decision to extend its small and purely

defensive naval operation in the Red Sea may have to be revisited if the Houthis step up their attacks. Europe can also offer experienced diplomacy, investments, humanitarian aid and decent but limited mine-clearing systems — after the shooting ends.

The real lesson for Europe is for the long term; but decisions need to be made now. If it wants to be respected by old allies and win new ones, it must do so from a position of power. Even if that entails the wholesale slaughtering of sacred cows. Some modest suggestions for starters: need to revive defence car manufacturers? Convert to felter production — like Volkswagen, which is in talks to make missile defence components for an Israeli company. Want to reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels from Russia and the US? Integrate renewable power across the continent, with nuclear power as backup. Worried about growth, innovation

and competitiveness? Implement the recommendations of Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi for a single regulatory regime, common defence procurement, unified energy markets and capital markets union. Afraid that Elon Musk will cut off intelligence to Ukraine again? Build sovereign space capabilities for climate, weather, agriculture and defence.

Got a toxic club member like Hungary that vetoes everything and is accused of leaking classified information to your enemy? Build coalitions of the willing to get work done, and include non-members like Norway, the UK, Switzerland and Ukraine, whose bravery and resilience are a model for Europe. Once again, it is Kyiv showing us Europeans how it's done by building defence alliances in the Gulf.

The writer directs the Center on the US and Europe at the Brookings Institution

OPINION

Hormuz, Shmormuz



**BUSINESS
WORLD**
By Holman W.
Jenkins, Jr.

News reports from the indirect negotiations mediated by the Pakistanis say the Iranian regime has been antipathetic. I think it's wrong to thank to its threats to Persian Gulf shipping. The estimable Fred Kagan of the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute says the "optimal end game" for the U.S. now is to prove it can reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

"Can we do that? I don't know," he told the Call Me Back podcast.

Yikes. If the primary U.S. war aim now is fixing a problem the war caused, this won't strike me as brilliant war management.

The Trump administration obviously understood the Strait of Hormuz was at risk in any joust with Iran. The problem is the administration's half-in, half-out messaging. If the U.S. goal was simply to dismantle certain regime capabilities, and this was properly signaled, the Strait likely wouldn't be threatened. This has been the lesson of the past 10 years: The Iranian regime has repeatedly demonstrated an unwillingness to escalate. Remember its carefully telegraphed missile strikes after previous scuffles, easily shot down by the U.S. and its allies.

The Trump administration therefore had a pretty good

idea of how to play it if the idea was to bomb things in Iran with relative impunity—by advertising that its aims were limited.

On the other hand, if the goal was regime change, a Hormuz counterattack would be a good idea, but it's unappealing. And whatever the U.S. says now, U.S.-Israeli actions said regime change: assassinations of 250 officials, attacks on the regime's political police, threats to its oil revenues, calls for public uprisings.

The moment that gave me pause was when the administration backed away from unleashing Iran's Kurdish rebels. Yes, if U.S. goals were limited, a certain delicacy here was appropriate. But if the U.S. means to impose maximal stress on Iran's ruling group, if the goal is to push the regime to the wall, then throw everything at it, including the Kurds—at least everything short of a presumably unacceptable U.S. ground invasion.

Which brings us to Donald Trump. Everyone, including the Israelis, understands what ever happens next will be entirely the decision of the U.S. president.

As for his first days, the war's "revolution" in regime targeting, which set in progress an implicit negotiation: Iran's leaders want their lives and personal security back. They want to engage in electronic communications again. They want to stop hiding from their own people and Israeli bombs (pretty much the same thing given how many

Iranians are helping the Israelis with their targeting).

In Mr. Trump's strategic noggin, this is the game, judging from statements going back to the June 2025 attacks, when he specifically referenced having Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in his sights. At any moment might pop out an implicit Trump deal that kicks

The U.S. needs to define its goals and let other problems take care of themselves.

the can on Iran's fissionable material and ballistic missiles in return for regime survivors relaxing their grip on the Strait.

Would this be an ignominious outcome? Maybe, but the verdict could also look a lot different in a year or two if the regime has shuffled off the stage from the combined effect of U.S.-Israeli pressure, its own failures and the revulsion of its people.

A problem of our age is the strategic non sequiturs that leaders turn into tests of their prestige and manhood. Think Russia and Ukraine, or China and Taiwan. The U.S. once recognized a Cold War imperative to make sure no outside power threatened the Persian Gulf. The U.S. is the outside power now. Arguably the U.S. Navy needs only the ability to shut off China's oil to incentivize good behavior.

Under any scenario, after all, the Hormuz problem likely solves itself when the shooting stops. All nine countries lining the two connected gulfs, including Iran under any management, will want passage restored. Whatever happens next, military options also reprice its energy options to account for Gulf insecurity. In our world, geography and resources still matter, but technology, wealth generation and the ability to benefit from the gains of trade matter a great deal more, as Israel keeps demonstrating.

Month into the war, perhaps predictably, one senses brains turning off in favor of fixed pro-Trump or anti-Trump, pro-war or anti-war signaling. For those who retain their wits, the open questions are still interesting.

Most important, and the likeliest way for the U.S. to go off the rails, is whether the U.S. should incur large costs and risks to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. My answer is no—though small investments in that direction are fine. Are such distinctions too complicated for readers, needing to be buoyed by rah-rah or one kind or another? Happily, our species has evolved to carry around large brains for a reason.

Which brings me to my optimistic long-term prediction: The world will become a safer place once leaders, as a matter of course, feed their strategic ambitions and calculations through an LLM before acting on them.

BOOKSHELF | By William Tipper

Bringing Up The Mitfords

Muv

By Rachel Trethewey
Pegasus, 272 pages, \$29.95

Troublemaker

By Carla Kaplan
Harper, 592 pages, \$40

Sydney Freeman-Mitford, Baroness Redesdale (1880-1963), was said to have remarked that, when she saw the phrase "peer's daughter" in a newspaper headline, she knew the story would involve one of her children.

She was exaggerating only a little. Her six daughters—Nancy, Pamela, Diana, Unity, Jessica and Deborah—became known in the English press as "the Mitford girls." In the 1930s and '40s, nearly all of them acquired celebrity, and some notoriety, for their writing, politics, love affairs or all three. A welter of memoirs and biographies have traced their colorful lives as well as their relationships with one another and with their hot-tempered father, David. Sydney herself has not been center stage. The historian Rachel Trethewey corrects that in a lively biography, "Muv," which takes its title from the nickname Sydney's children bestowed on her.

Sydney had been raised by an eccentric Edwardian publisher and would-be Conservative political thinker, Thomas Bowles. Her mother died when Sydney was 7, and she was influenced by the oddities of her father, a yachtman who dressed Sydney in a sailor suit until she was 18.

In 1904, at 23, she married David Freeman-Mitford, a Boer War veteran who soon, unexpectedly, became Baron Redesdale after the deaths of his elder brother and father. The couple inherited a large Cotswolds estate—with little income to sustain it.

They were not perfectly matched. David embraced aristocratic country life and distrusted outsiders; Sydney enjoyed London, music and company. Visitors remarked on her often dreamy reserve. One family friend compared her, Ms. Trethewey writes, to "Persphone, Queen of the Underworld." A distant mother, she relied heavily on nannies but insisted girls should be educated at home. She followed her father's dictums on health: Modern medicine was nearly useless, and the "good body" would heal itself.

Once her daughters left the house, they were out of her control. The eldest, Nancy, would send up the family and their friends in works of comic fiction. The glamorous Diana left her first husband for the British fascist leader Oswald Mosley, whom she married in 1936. Unity traveled to Germany and became a friend of its leader, Adolf Hitler. Less of a trial to Muv were Pamela, who seemed happy with a rural life, and Deborah, who wound up a duchess. A son, Tom, lacked his sisters' ability to stir up scandal.

World War II fractured the marriage of Sydney and David. When war was declared, David recanted his previously strong pro-German views and took a patriotic line. Sydney believed it was all a great mistake and that Britain should have allied with Germany against the threat of communism. For her the calamity was personal. Diana was interned by British authorities for most of the war. Worse, the Nazi-obsessed Unity shot herself in Munich in 1939. She survived and was returned to England; Sydney cared for her brain-damaged daughter until Unity's death in 1948. Tom was killed fighting in Burma in 1945.

Sydney remained adamant that England had fought the wrong enemy, and she and David took up separate residences. A similar stubbornness, Ms. Trethewey suggests, can be traced in nearly all of her daughters: "Rebel against her as they might, they were always very much Sydney's children."

The matriarch of the Mitford clan has been overshadowed by the glamorous daughters who caused her no small amount of grief.

A case in point was Sydney's second-youngest, Jessica, born in 1917, who determined to live as differently as possible from her English family. As the biographer and literary scholar Carla Kaplan recounts in "Troublemaker," Jessica started an escape plan early, opening a bank account at 12 to build up running-away funds. She also developed left-wing convictions that contradicted the views of her parents. In 1937 Jessica eloped to Europe with her second cousin Esmond Romilly—their ill-starred plan was to head to Spain to report on the civil war there. Her family reeled them back, briefly, to England, but the pair went to America in 1939.

In 1941 Romilly, who had joined the Canadian Air Force, went down with a bomber over the North Sea. Mitford, suddenly widowed and with an infant daughter, found work in Washington, D.C., at the Office of Price Administration, pursuing violators of wartime regulations. Mitford transferred in 1943 to the agency's San Francisco branch and married a colleague, Robert Truehaft. They raised a family in Oakland, Calif., and enjoyed a more-or-less conventional union, considering their membership in the American Communist Party. (They split with the party in 1958.)

"Troublemaker" logs Mitford's travels and transformations with brio, even while Ms. Kaplan details accounts of the civil-rights causes Mitford threw herself into. In 1963 Mitford published "The American Way of Death," an exposé of the funeral industry that turned her into a stateside celebrity, welcomed as a provocative guest on talk shows and recognized by cab drivers. She continued to publish investigative works into the 1990s and died in 1996. But her most personal book was her memoir "Hons and Rebels" (1960), which looked back on her English family and strange childhood with an ironic tone not unlike the one her sister Nancy deployed in her fiction. More than any other book, "Hons and Rebels" may be responsible for the modern Mitford mythology. By 1959, as it was being prepared for publication, Jessica had re-established her relationship with her mother. Ms. Kaplan notes that, while helping to care for an ailing Sydney (then living on a small island in Scotland), Jessica showed her mother some of the manuscript of her memoir. Sydney, according to Ms. Kaplan, "said little about it." Behind her daughter's back, she wrote to Jessica's publishers and asked them to change the title.

Mr. Tipper is a books editor at the Journal.

America Faces Tough Choices in Iran



**POLITICS
& IDEAS**
By William
A. Galston

More than a month into the war with Iran, President Trump now faces the most consequential decision of his presidency: whether to deploy U.S. ground forces on Iranian territory. For now, the debate about the president's choice to enter the war is irrelevant. The question before us is what future course best serves America's long-term interests. The answer isn't obvious.

This matter calls for sober deliberation with a minimum of partisanship and recrimination. Patriotic cheerleading is worse than useless. So is defeatism, as well as seat-of-the-pants policymaking. We need a cool-headed assessment of our options and the Iranians' possible responses. We must accept both risks and uncertainty. Our assumptions about how Iran will respond to what we do may be flawed.

Epistemological humility is essential. Although many experts believe that the Iranian regime isn't on the brink of collapse, they may be wrong. Perhaps intensifying military pressure on Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps will thin forces that the regime needs to quell domestic opposition, creating the conditions for a renewed popular uprising.

We must play the odds, but we can't know for sure what will happen.

The immediate problem is Iran's seizure of the Strait of Hormuz, enabling the Iranians to block the ships of countries they view as hostile and to impose transit fees on others. President Trump has said that the U.S. Navy will accompany tankers through the Strait if necessary, but doing this in combat conditions is a high-risk venture made more difficult by the large reduction in the number of the U.S. Navy's surface ships since the end of the Cold War. More than 20 countries have said they are ready to help "ensure safe passage through the Strait," but many of them will hesitate to enter an active war zone. Other naval options, such as a selective blockade of Iranian imports, would ratchet up pressure on Iran to reopen the Strait but probably wouldn't yield quick results.

The difficulty of reopening the Strait and bringing the war to a timely conclusion through naval and air power alone has prompted the White House to consider using ground forces. Iran's Kharg Island, which has been on Mr. Trump's radar since the 1980s, has emerged as a tempting target. Seizing it would allow the U.S. to conditionally turn off Iran's oil exports, increasing pressure on Iran to reopen the Strait.

But a recent detailed analysis by the Foundation for the

Defense of Democracies, well-known for its hawkish stance on Iran, argues that taking the island, which the U.S. could do relatively quickly, may be a "trap of America's own making." Our forces would be in range of Iranian multiple launch rocket systems, artillery firing rocket-assisted projectiles, and potentially the

Even taking Kharg Island will require significant forces and a wider air operation.

sort of Iranian drones that Russia has deployed to deadly effect in Ukraine. Protecting U.S. forces would require diverting military assets from other high-priority missions in the Iran conflict theater.

The Kharg Island mission might make sense if it strikes a decisive blow that shortens the war and secures America's strategic interest. But the FD analysis concludes that it won't, because the revenue Iran generates from oil sales "is not a major determinant of the conflict's outcome in the near-to-medium term."

As the Journal reports, Mr. Trump is considering a declaration of victory soon and a drawdown of American forces. But no such declaration will be credible as long as Iran remains in effective control of the Strait.

Life Looks Different From the Stars

By Mary Julia Koch

Stars are hard to see in New York. But whenever I'm far enough away from the glow of streetlights, I crane my neck up and search for them. The moment I spot the North Star, Orion's Belt and maybe even the craters on the moon, my mind slips away from the news alerts lighting up my phone and the emails sitting in my inbox. I remember that the world is far greater than I am. I'm but a speck of matter in the cosmos.

The first moon trip in decades raises the big questions of existence.

I was born in 2001, 29 years after the last man landed on the moon. NASA's push to return there has been slowed by delays and setbacks even as private companies have stepped in to pick up the slack. But that hasn't dulled my curiosity in space exploration. If anything, my appetite is roaring.

I'm not alone. The market for telescopes and stargazing apps is booming. Constellation-hunters have turned TikTok into "SpaceTok." Sci-fi films are more popular than ever. Others have turned toward astrology, a less scientific but increasingly popular way of divining meaning from the night sky.

The fervor is more than a fad. The number of students earning undergraduate astronomy degrees in the U.S. is at an all-time high, quadruple what it was two decades ago. That's fueled by a growing interest in STEM and new technologies, but also a deeper, philosophical pull toward the big questions of life.

"Everyone at some point early in their life looks up at the sky and wonders about the same questions," says Ed Berger, a Harvard professor of astronomy whose class has attracted a broader range of nonscience majors in recent years. "Are we alone? How big



The Artemis II crew and ship.

is the universe? How did the universe begin?" While religion provides answers, astronomy offers another way to search for them, grounding me like a kind of cosmic anchor.

Peering light-years into the distance also puts my earthly concerns into perspective. The

moon below the city skyline and imagine the fresh footprints that will be left on its surface when the next mission, Artemis III, goes even further.

On Wednesday evening, astronauts are set to journey to the moon for the first time in more than 50 years. NASA's Artemis II fly-by mission will launch up the Florida sky at launch, and observers can watch from miles away. I won't be able to see it in New York. But I'll hunt for the moon above the city skyline and imagine the fresh footprints that will be left on its surface when the next mission, Artemis III, goes even further.

Ms. Koch is an associate editor at WSJ Opinion's Free Expression.

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Birthright Citizenship at the High Court

The Supreme Court will hear arguments Wednesday on President Trump's effort to redefine birthright citizenship, and this is deep revisionism, as the government admits. Solicitor General John Sauer argues in his brief that the prevailing interpretation of this constitutional clause is an old error: "That misreading took hold by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Administration."

When a longtime legal doctrine is incorrect, the Justices shouldn't shy away from fixing it merely because of age, and in the coming months the High Court could prove that point on the presidential removal power by finally burying *Humphrey's Executor v. U.S.* (1935). Yet other times there's a reason the orthodoxy became the orthodox, and the case about birthright citizenship, *Trump v. Barbara*, might be one of those.

The 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868 after the Civil War, begins: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States." Does this language confer U.S. citizenship on babies whose parents are in the country illegally or temporarily? The traditional understanding is yes. Mr. Trump says no, and he ordered agencies to stop issuing these babies documents reflecting citizenship.

This constitutional provision has come to the Supreme Court before. In *Wong Kim Ark* (1898) the Justices recognized the citizenship of a man born to Chinese parents in San Francisco. "The Fourteenth Amendment affirms the ancient and fundamental rule of citizenship by birth within the territory," the majority said, including "all children here born of resident aliens." The few exceptions included children of foreign diplomats, enemies during "hostile occupation," and Native American tribal nations.

The Trump Administration argues, however, that the Court hasn't directly answered the current question. Congress didn't pass the first modern immigration law until 1875, and for much of history migrants "could freely enter the United States and take up permanent residence," the government says. *Wong Kim Ark* "concerned children of aliens with a lawful domicile in the United States, not children of temporarily present aliens or illegal aliens."

The crux of the dispute is what it means for

a child to be subject to U.S. "jurisdiction." The opponents of Mr. Trump's order say this simply refers to people who are under the government's authority, including illegal aliens and students with visas, who must obey U.S. laws or be punished if they don't. This helps make sense of the narrow birthright exceptions: In contrast, foreign diplomats enjoy immunity and famously don't pay New York parking tickets.

The Trump Administration argues, on the other hand, that birthright citizenship covers only people "completely subject" to U.S. "political jurisdiction," meaning those "who owe 'direct and immediate allegiance' to the Nation and may claim its protection." Its reading excludes babies born to temporary visa holders, as well as illegal migrants, who "lack the legal capacity to form a domicile."

Yet the challengers say this interpretation is foreclosed by *Wong Kim Ark*, which adopted their view of "jurisdiction," even if the 1898 ruling lacked the distinctions and vocabulary on illegal immigration that Mr. Trump now wants to use. "Under the longstanding definition, undocumented immigrants are domiciled in this country: They reside here, with 'an intention to remain,'" the challengers add.

Mr. Trump's order applies to the children of "immigrants who have resided in this country for decades, some since their own infancy." One plaintiff who sued, according to a court filing last year, is a Taiwanese woman with a student visa who had lived in the U.S. for 12 years and was applying for a green card.

The U.S. has a strong record of assimilating newcomers, from Asians in San Francisco to Irish in New York to Cubans in Miami, and birthright citizenship has been part of that story. At the same time, illegal immigration has become a serious problem, as the American left refuses to enforce the law.

But the place to fight it is at the border, and Mr. Trump has virtually halted migrant flows. It didn't require trying to change the settled meaning of the 14th Amendment by executive action. Mr. Trump's order has put the Supreme Court in another difficult position by reopening a constitutional debate with fraught political implications. The decision may come down to how the originalist Justices read the text and history of the 14th Amendment.

Trump's order to exclude the children of illegal immigrants is tested.

China Keeps Trying to Punish Tokyo

Meanwhile in the Asia-Pacific, Beijing keeps stepping up its campaign against Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi. Its latest move, on Monday, was to impose sanctions on one of Ms. Takaichi's close aides.

The sanctions came after the aide, Keiji Furuya, visited Taiwan this month—something he's done often over the years. Beijing views the democratic island as a breakthrough province and interprets any official interaction with Taipei as a sleight.

This is the latest Chinese move to pressure Ms. Takaichi over her stance on Taiwan. It started last autumn when she stated that a Chinese invasion of the island would be a threat sufficient to warrant military intervention under Japan's constitution.

Beijing first let loose a flood of official vitriol at Ms. Takaichi. When that didn't sway her, the Communist Party has tried to discourage tourism from mainland China to Japan, and has imposed various export bans and restrictions on rare-earth minerals and shipments of high-tech products to Japanese companies.

Sanctioning Mr. Furuya is another step, as

is a new round of rhetorical warfare criticizing Tokyo for a recent incident in which a young Japanese soldier allegedly scaled the wall of the Chinese embassy in Tokyo wielding a knife. So far this seems to have been a solo event, but Beijing wants to spin it into a furor over supposed Japanese "militarism."

So far Ms. Takaichi is standing firm, and Mr. Furuya has shrugged off sanctions by saying he didn't plan to visit China anyway. All indications point to a growing consensus in Tokyo that Chinese aggression is a major threat in the region.

But some help from Japan's friends would be useful. The economic costs of Beijing's export bans will grow. Japan's economy remains at some risk as it emerges from several lost decades of stagnation, and the Iran war oil shock is another danger.

President Trump could help Ms. Takaichi by rethinking his tariffs on Japanese exports, in order to relieve the economic stress on an ally. Especially reassuring to Japan—and noted by Beijing—would be for Mr. Trump to add a step in Tokyo before his planned visit to China later this spring.

The U.S. won't escape damage if the Strait remains largely closed.

Stocks rallied Tuesday following news leaks from the White House that President Trump might end the war in Iran without bothering to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. The market reaction might tempt Mr. Trump to think he's on the right track, but he and the U.S. have more at stake in the Strait than he is saying.

Mr. Trump on Tuesday warned Europeans that he might leave them the job of reopening the Strait. "Iran has been, essentially, decimated. The hard part is done. Go get your own oil!" he posted on Truth Social.

Mr. Trump may be trying to bully reluctant Europeans into helping the U.S. in the Strait. He's right that Europe's stake in Gulf oil is bigger than America's.

Thanks to shale fracking, the U.S. is a net exporter of oil and natural gas. Most American oil imports come from Canada and feed refineries that can't efficiently process lighter shale blends.

But the U.S. won't be able to duck the harm from a long-term closure of the Strait. Oil is traded globally, and the U.S. price is influenced by the global price. Persistently high oil and natural gas prices, along with supply shortages in lower-income countries, will slow the economy abroad and at home. A global recession will inevitably hurt the U.S. too.

Mr. Trump's moves to boost global oil supply admit as much. That's why he eased sanc-

tions on Iranian and Russian oil exports and tapped the U.S. strategic petroleum reserve. This has kept oil prices lower than they'd otherwise be, but they may carry a new premium if Iran has a veto on Gulf oil shipments.

Iran's attacks on vessels have also snarled shipments of fertilizer, a third of which flows through the Strait. Fertilizer prices are up some 20% over the last month, which will raise costs for U.S. farmers struggling as a result of the President's tariffs.

Does Mr. Trump plan to leave farmers who have supported him at the tender mercies of the mullahs? Optimists say the Strait will reopen on its own once the bombing stops, since Iran and its neighbors have an incentive to restore the flow. They certainly do, and perhaps that's enough to restore the prewar status quo. But Iran will have demonstrated that its ability to threaten the Strait is real, and it could turn to charging a bounty—a fee or a promise not to cooperate with the U.S.—on countries to let their vessels pass.

The other issue is what a de facto Iran veto over Gulf shipping will say about the credibility of U.S. deterrence. Ending the war with the Strait closed means Iran's strategy of imposing economic pain on the West will have been at least a partial success. The best outcome in this war is still regime change, or a defeated Iran that bends to Mr. Trump's terms that include a plan to reopen the Strait.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

St. Thomas More and the Reckoning of History

In "Five Centuries of a Forbidden Bible" (Houses of Worship, March 27), Joseph Loconte states that "In the end, Thomas More and his informants caught up with" William Tyndale.

But in "Thomas More and the Taking of William Tyndale," Richard Rex writes, "The notion that Sir Thomas More, while a prisoner in the Tower of London, plotted and financed the capture of William Tyndale in Antwerp in May 1535 is, even at first sight, so implausible as scarcely to deserve formal refutation."

Tyndale left England in 1524 never to return. More was in prison in 1535 awaiting execution when Tyndale was seized by agents of the Holy Roman Empire in Antwerp. More was executed on July 6, six weeks after Tyndale was arrested. More important, More resigned his position as Lord chancellor of England on May 16, 1532, three years before Tyndale was arrested.

More engaged Tyndale in debate in print over Tyndale's views. But he was carrying out the policies of

Henry VIII, whatever his personal views. The English crown under Henry VIII authorized efforts to suppress Tyndale and return him to England in 1528, while Cardinal Wolsey was chancellor. Any official role More may have had regarding Tyndale ended in 1532 when More resigned and became a private citizen.

The notion that More plotted and financed the capture of Tyndale was first advanced in a biography of Tyndale by Brian Moynahan in 2003, and it was then picked up by Dame Hilary Mantel in her Wolf Hall trilogy, a work of fiction, which repeats this about More.

But More had been dead for more than a year when Tyndale was executed. This is important to clarify in a time when Christians are trying to overcome the distorted narratives of the sixteenth century and work toward greater Christian unity, a unity that the Gospel of John tells us Jesus Christ prayed his church would have.

REV. PHILLIP J. BROWN, P.S.S.
President-Rector
St. Mary's Seminary & University
Baltimore

The Pilot Who Sent Goddard to Guggenheim

In "A Centenary for Rocket Science" (op-ed, March 16), Rainer Zitlmann describes how Robert H. Goddard achieved the first liquid-fuel rocket launch in 1926 and the funding sources that made Goddard's work possible.

While it's true that the Guggenheim Foundation was a major funder, it's worthwhile to recall that aviation pioneer Charles Lindbergh brought about that connection.

Lindbergh had an interest in rockets. One day, while he was visiting friends, Harry and Caroline Guggenheim, Caroline mentioned an article she was reading about Goddard's work.

Lindbergh arranged a meeting with Goddard. The latter explained that his progress was slow because of a lack of funding. When Lindbergh asked how much money and time he would need to complete his work, Goddard replied that about \$25,000 a year for four years would cover all expenses.

Lindbergh knew a man with the wealth, vision and courage to underwrite Goddard's project—Daniel

Guggenheim, Harry's father. Lindbergh later recalled that when he met Daniel Guggenheim, the conversation didn't take more than about 10 minutes. Guggenheim's questions about Goddard were succinct, reasonable and articulate. He quickly decided to give him the money.

Without a doubt, Goddard was the father of 20th-century rocketry, but Charles Lindbergh was the mfiwife.

LARRY W. WHITE
Dallas

Donations totaling \$10,000 in 1917 and 1923 funded Goddard's early rocket studies. The Smithsonian Institution provided \$5,000 in 1917 from its T.G. Hoagkins donations, and the Research Corporation in 1923 awarded an equal amount. While the Guggenheim Foundation funded much of Goddard's later work, those early funds from private sources helped Goddard launch his first rocket.

DAVID CARTER
Tucson, Ariz.

TSA Lines Stretch While Congress Flies Free

Regarding your editorial "Washington's March Shutdown Madness" (March 28): The president could direct the Transportation Security Administration to ensure that members of Congress don't receive any special escorts or preferential treatment that allows them to bypass security lines at the airport. Let these people who have shut down the government stand in line with their constituents and be forced to listen to their complaints.

JONATHAN JAMES
DeBarry, Fla.

For the Iranians, it's the Strait of Hormuz. For the Democrats, it's the TSA line. We need to eliminate the ability of a political party to wreak havoc by choking off something so critical to the security of the citizens of this country.

LAWRENCE RUSSO III
Shreveport, La.

What Is Trump's Iran Plan?

Your editorial "The Enemy in One Lesson" (March 20) does a great job on stating the obvious about Iran's regime: It's brutal. No one paying attention over the past half-century can deny that.

But this administration has yet to explain clearly why this war was started. It would have been an easier sell to our allies if a clear target was set to form a coalition.

Nothing would be better than a democratic Iran. But if that's the goal, just say it.

MARTIN GRANALDI
Frenchtown, N.J.

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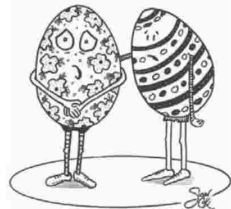


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Pepper ...
And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"I may look festive but I'm really just a colorful shell of my former self."

OPINION

Trump Is Right on Birthright Citizenship

By Randy E. Barnett

President Trump's executive order denying birthright citizenship to U.S.-born children of nonresident aliens goes before the Supreme Court Wednesday, and conventional wisdom has it that the president will lose in Trump v. Barbara. If the court stays true to the original meaning of the 14th Amendment's Citizenship Clause, however, the conventional wisdom will prove wrong. The clause grants citizenship to persons who meet two conditions: birth in the U.S. and being "subject to the jurisdiction" of the U.S. The dispute is over the meaning of the latter term. Everyone agrees that it excludes at least three classes: children of diplomats, of soldiers from an invading army, and of American Indians maintaining tribal relations. In each of these categories, the status of the child depended on the status of the parent.

The constitutional debate is about the original concept embodied in the text that explains these exclusions and whether that concept embraces or excludes children born on U.S. soil to parents who are unlawfully or temporarily in the U.S. The court has never squarely addressed this question.

The 14th Amendment's authors would exclude illegal and visiting aliens from U.S. 'jurisdiction.'

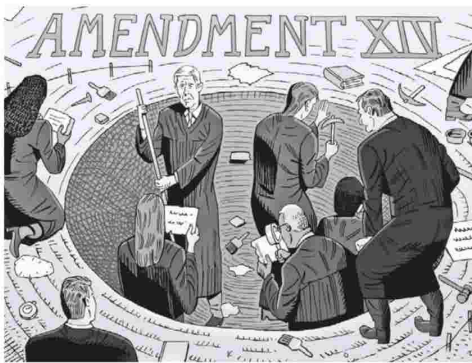
Before Mr. Trump's executive order, what originalist scholarship existed on the original meaning of "subject to the jurisdiction" was sporadic and lightly tested if at all. The past year has produced an explosion of originalist scholarship on both sides. The justices are now in a good position to decide which side has presented the stronger originalist case. Kurt Lash of the University of Richmond has examined the congressional debates over the 14th Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1866. That act declared that "all persons born in the United States and not subject to any foreign

power" are citizens. The 14th Amendment was intended to constitutionalize, not alter, the Civil Rights Act. Congress re-enacted the same language after the 14th Amendment was adopted, suggesting an identical operation. But the drafters of the 14th Amendment saw a need for constitutional language that more clearly excluded the children of tribal Indians.

Sen. Lyman Trumbull (R., Ill.), who managed the Citizenship Clause in the upper chamber, explained that "subject to the jurisdiction" meant "not owing allegiance to anybody else," whether to a tribe or a foreign power. Rep. John Bingham (R., Ohio), the moving force behind the 14th Amendment, used the same framework, referring after ratification to persons born in the U.S. "and not owing allegiance to any foreign power." These statements, and others Mr. Lash identified, demonstrate how leading Republicans explained the concept of the text was meant to capture: birth plus full political membership.

Opponents of this interpretation rely heavily on a statement by Sen. Jacob Howard (R., Mich.) that the clause would "include every other class of persons" besides children of diplomats. In isolation, Howard's statement does support the challengers' understanding. But it can't be taken literally; otherwise it would include tribal Indians. Howard later said that the relevant "jurisdiction" was "the full and complete jurisdiction" that tribal Indians lacked. Republicans didn't maintain that tribes lay wholly beyond federal power, but that tribal members maintained an undivided allegiance to a separate sovereign political community.

The Supreme Court endorsed this concept of jurisdiction in Elk v. Wilkins (1884), which excluded tribal Indians from birthright citizenship. Justice Horace Gray didn't say that "jurisdiction" means being subject to ordinary criminal or civil law, as opponents of the president's order maintain. He said it meant being "completely subject" to the political jurisdiction of the U.S. and owing it "direct and immediate allegiance." (Congress effectively repealed the



exclusion with the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.)

Opponents of the executive order claim that "jurisdiction" simply refers to the applicability of ordinary civil and criminal laws. They invoke U.S. v. Wong Kim Ark (1898), in which the high court granted birthright citizenship to a man born to Chinese parents. They read Wong Kim Ark and other sources as having incorporated British common-law doctrine deeming anyone born in the British Empire a subject of the crown. But Ian Wurman of the University of Minnesota has shown that the common-law materials are more complicated. The older cases and treatises turned not simply on place of birth, but on protection, allegiance and the sovereign's acceptance of the parents' presence. Mr. Wurman also shows that the status of temporary sojourners was contested by the 19th century.

Most important, Wong Kim Ark's parents weren't in the U.S. illegally or temporarily. As Justice Gray put it for the court: "The question presented by the record is whether a child born in the United States, of parents of Chinese descent who, at the time of his birth, are subjects of the Emperor of China, but have a permanent domicile and residence in the United States, . . . becomes at

the time of his birth a citizen of the United States by virtue of the first clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution."

The government isn't asking the court to disturb Wong Kim Ark's treatment of children born to lawful permanent residents—who nowadays have green cards. Mr. Trump's executive order maintains birthright citizenship for the children of green-card holders while excluding those whose parents are in the U.S. illegally or on nonresident visas.

In its briefs, the government has added a corroborative textual point. The Citizenship Clause says that those born here and subject to U.S. jurisdiction are citizens of the U.S. and "of the State wherein they reside." Resting state citizenship on residency reinforces the thesis that citizenship generally requires residence, not mere presence.

Opponents of the executive order have produced no evidence that any of the 14th Amendment's framers clearly stated their position, except for Sen. Benjamin Wade (R., Ohio), who proposed a version of the Citizenship Clause that would have extended citizenship to all persons born in the U.S. without the added jurisdiction requirement—a formulation Congress didn't adopt. If the conventional wisdom was indeed the

original meaning, its defenders should be able to identify members of the enacting coalition who said so.

Some opponents, perhaps sensing the strength of the administration's constitutional position, have suggested that the court avoid the question by striking down Mr. Trump's order as contrary to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. That law incorporates the language of the 14th Amendment, but this view contends that lawmakers in 1952 understood "jurisdiction" in the now conventional sense of ordinary law.

Even if some legislators misunderstood the original meaning of the language they were using, however, it is implausible to conclude that Congress enacted a fundamental change in the law—especially given that the 1952 law explicitly clarified citizenship rules for children born in U.S. territories and to U.S. citizens abroad.

In a 1991 interview, retired Chief Justice Warren Burger scorned the view that the Second Amendment's right to keep and bear arms belongs to individuals rather than a collective militia. He called it "one of the greatest pieces of fraud—I repeat the word 'fraud'—on the American public by special-interest groups that I have ever seen in my lifetime." Such was the power of conventional wisdom before sustained originalist scholarship was done.

After originalist scholars reopened the Second Amendment, the court endorsed the individual-rights view in Heller v. District of Columbia (2008). Many of the same historians and law professors who today defend the conventional wisdom on the Citizenship Clause insisted—and insist to this day—that Justice Antonin Scalia got it wrong in Heller.

The situations aren't identical, but the pattern is familiar. Conventional wisdom was wrong about the original meaning of the Second Amendment. It is wrong again.

Mr. Barnett is faculty director of the Georgetown Center for the Constitution and a co-author of "The Original Meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment: Its Letter and Spirit."

The Iran War Doesn't Have to Be a Rerun of 'That '70s Show'

By John H. Cochrane

Are we headed for stagflation and recession? The parallels with the 1970s are ominous: Inflation surges and then retreats but gets stuck a bit too high. Trouble brews in Iran, and oil prices spike. In 1979 inflation surged, followed by a severe recession. Most postwar recessions were preceded by oil price spikes. In fact, energy prices turn into recessions only if bad policies compound their effects. Price controls, credit controls, windfall profits taxes, export controls, the 55-mph speed limit, corn ethanol, cardigan sweaters, malaise, and a slow-to-react Federal Reserve all fed the misery of the 1970s. They need not do so again.

The fundamentals are also better. The U.S. imported a lot of oil in the 1970s. Now, on net, we export, thanks to fracking and the reversal of many energy restrictions. Gasoline is more expensive, but the country earns money that can be spent on other goods. The U.S. uses a lot less oil to generate each dollar of income. We are more of a service economy and less an energy-dependent manufacturing economy. There are many more suppliers to the international market than in the 1970s. While they can't ramp up production instantly, at persistently higher prices a lot more oil can come out of the ground.

An oil price rise is like a tariff. As we have seen, tariffs, while damaging to overall growth, need not cause a recession.

The most important questions are when the Strait of Hormuz opens and how the war ends. It is hard to believe that after their lopsided military victory, the U.S. and Israel will leave Iran with a veto over oil. The end depends on whether we have the will to accomplish what is

surely in our means. But defeat has been clutched from the jaws of victory before.

Oil futures markets offer a glimpse of where things might be headed. West Texas intermediate futures are trading at \$97 a barrel for late May but decline to \$80 by late October and \$74 next April. Futures markets expect a costly summer and resolution by fall.

Governments will be tempted by ham-handed policy responses. The European Union is already considering subsidies, price caps, oil profits taxes, and other controls. Ah, Europe—tax energy, send carbon-emitting industry off to China, ban domestic drilling and fracking, destroy nuclear, all in the name of climate. When prices rise, add subsidies and controls. Fortunately, many Europeans now understand how costly their energy policies have been.

With "affordability" and gasoline prices in the news, the U.S. will feel

similar temptations. The administration already ramped up corn ethanol, that great counterexample of our country's ability to run sane energy or industrial policy. China has enacted an export ban, which the U.S. tried in the 1970s. It did great damage.

Rising energy prices turn into recessions only if bad government policies compound their effects.

Higher gasoline prices need not mean inflation. But governments will produce inflation if they hand out money so people can pay higher prices. Price controls mean gas lines, which increase economic damage. The most productive users who can't substitute away then can't get the energy they need, and suppliers see

no incentive to help. Windfall profits taxes in bad times damage the incentive to invest in spare capacity in good times. The first principle of economics is: Don't transfer income by distorting prices. The first principle of politics is the opposite.

High energy prices do slow the economy. But a slowdown turns into a recession only when something financial goes wrong. The aftermath of an energy price spike depends a lot on how central banks respond. If the Fed reacts slowly, along with harmful economic policies, stagflation could again break out quickly, and then recession could follow when the Fed reacts to inflation.

The general bank will be tempted to react to supply-induced softening with demand stimulus. It will be tempted to "look through," i.e., ignore, the transitory inflation of an oil-price shock as it looked through Covid-era inflation, until inflation reached 8%. Fed officials planned to

look through tariffs as well.

But, as in 1979, people who saw substantial inflation may be quick to expect more inflation, and then the Fed will have to react strongly, as it did in 1980. I also fear that the Fed may be paralyzed during its change of leadership or may try to avoid moving interest rates by relying on quantitative tightening or credit restrictions. All that will cause needless financial turmoil.

What should government do about rising energy prices? Nothing. Or, more concretely, get out of the way, ease restrictions, and let the market work its magic of sending energy to the most economically important uses while encouraging others to save, substitute or provide new energy. Keep inflation under control, and don't induce financial problems.

Mr. Cochrane is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute.

The Tragic Tale of Tiger Woods



UPWARD MOBILITY By Jason L. Riley

By the time Wayne Gretzky retired from the National Hockey League in 1999 as the greatest player ever, Michael Jordan had amassed six National Basketball Association championships and 10 scoring titles. That same year, Tiger Woods won his 15th professional golf tournament and his second major championship, and he was only getting started. Over the next two decades, Mr. Woods won 67 more times on the PGA Tour—including 12 more majors—and joined Messrs. Gretzky and Jordan as the face of their sports.

My generation got to witness all three in their prime, but only in hindsight can we fully appreciate their accomplishments. Mr. Gretzky's trade in 1988 from the Edmonton Oilers to the Los Angeles Kings brought Tinseltown attention to the NHL, which eventually spread to other warmer climes. It's difficult to imagine hockey today in Florida or Las Vegas without the Great One's influence. Mr. Jordan likewise brought worldwide popularity and revenue to basketball that has since grown. Four of the past seven NBA most valuable player awards have gone to international players.

Neither man, however, matched Mr. Woods's impact. I started playing golf as a teenager in the 1980s, long before Mr. Woods turned pro, but he's the reason I began watching golf tournaments regularly on television. Apparently, I'm not alone. Demographic groups that traditionally perceived golf as a country-club activity were suddenly tuning in. At the height of Mr. Woods's career, golf surpassed the NBA and even the National Football League in television ratings. Corporate sponsorships spiked and tournament prize money grew by a factor of five. In the process, biographers Jeff Benedict and Armen Keteyian wrote, Mr. Woods "helped make multimillionaires of more than four hundred Tour pros."

When news broke that Mr. Woods had been involved in another car accident, I was sad more than surprised. The police report said that his eyes were bloodshot and glassy and that

he had opioids in his pocket. Over the years, Mr. Woods has undergone at least seven back surgeries and multiple procedures on his left knee. No one doubts that the man lives in pain, yet before the crash he was attempting another comeback. The question is why he continues to drive himself (literally and figuratively) when his legacy is secure, he has nothing left to prove, and his body keeps telling him it has had enough.

Sports heroes face inner demons as the rest of us do but sometimes have to deal with them publicly.

Only Mr. Woods and perhaps the people closest to him can answer those questions. The rest of us can only speculate about his inner turmoil. Maybe Mr. Woods doesn't need to play competitive golf anymore but still feels golf needs him. Prior to the pandemic, which gave it a boost—golf was one of the few available diversions during Covid-19—the sport's popularity was down from its peak when he was dominating. Mr. Woods, who turned 50 in December, is now eligible to play on the PGA Tour Champions, the senior tour, and the pressure to do so for ratings must be significant. I don't watch many senior events, but I probably would if Mr. Woods were playing.

The day after the news of the car crash broke, I shot a round of golf at a local municipal course. Mr. Woods was all everyone was talking about, from the cashier in the pro shop to the starter on the first hole and the other members of my foursome. Some likened it to earlier unforced errors such as the sexcapades that derailed Mr. Woods's marriage. Others were more sympathetic but still unsettled by what he was doing not only to himself but also to his teenage children, who will have to deal with the ugly reactions of social-media ghosts.

In 2011 two sportswriters, Mitchell Mamberger and Alan Shipmuck, co-authored "The Swinger," a hilarious and barely disguised novelization of Mr. Woods's postscandal career. The protagonist is named Tree Tremont, a phenomenal multiracial golfer with an overbearing black father, an attractive wife, two young children and a squeaky-clean public image. Tree's serious tomatting is the book's main focus, but there's a subplot involving his addiction to painkillers that doesn't seem as funny today.

We watch our hero athletes handle all that pressure on the field, and they make it seem effortless. It isn't, and the pressure outside competition can be as intense. Sports stars face inner demons as the rest of us do, but unlike the rest of us they sometimes have to deal with them publicly, under the glare of the same outlets that helped make them household names.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Five-point proposal shows commitment to push for end to the conflict in Middle East

The recent joint attacks by Israel and the United States on Iranian cities, followed by Iran's retaliatory missile and drone strikes, have pushed the Middle East to a perilous new threshold. In this increasingly combustible environment, tentative diplomatic openings — such as Pakistan's offer to mediate — stand in stark contrast to the hardening military stance of the protagonists.

Islamabad has suggested hosting talks between Washington and Tehran, and both sides have signaled a degree of confidence in Pakistan's role as a conduit. Beijing, for its part, has consistently called for an end to hostilities and a return to dialogue, urging restraint and warning that prolonged conflict serves no one.

That pro-peace posture was sharpened on Tuesday, when China and Pakistan jointly put forward a five-point proposal aimed at restoring peace and stability in the Gulf and the wider Middle East. It calls for the immediate cessation of hostilities, initiating peace talks as soon as possible, ensuring the safety of nonmilitary targets, guaranteeing the safety of navigation and safeguarding the primacy of the United Nations Charter.

Taken together, the proposal amounts to a comprehensive framework that addresses nearly every dimension of the crisis — from humanitarian relief to global supply chains.

Yet the search for a diplomatic off-ramp is being overshadowed by a seeming readiness on the part of the US to escalate. It is expanding its military footprint in the region, with tens of thousands of personnel now supporting operations, and issued stark warnings, threatening to target Iran's economic lifelines if an agreement is not reached swiftly.

Escalation would be a miscalculation. The notion that overwhelming force can compel a favorable outcome is likely instead to entrench resistance and prolong conflict.

Nor should military and technological superiority be mistaken for a guarantee of victory. History offers ample evidence that wars rarely unfold as planned, and that even the most powerful actors can find themselves mired in costly and

inconclusive quagmires. The belief that this time will be different is a gamble — one with potentially catastrophic consequences. The risks are not confined to the battlefield. The tensions in the Strait of Hormuz have already begun to impact global markets. Supply chain disruptions, inflationary pressures and the spectre of shortages in essential commodities are reminders that this is not a regional crisis.

This is why the conflict cannot be allowed to drag on. What may appear to some as a contained confrontation is, in reality, a war of attrition for the entire world.

The temptation to exploit the chaos to reshape the strategic environment — whether by expanding buffer zones or asserting greater control over neighboring territories — may prove self-defeating. No country becomes safer by making its neighbors feel threatened. Such approaches tend to boomerang, fueling precisely the insecurity they are meant to eliminate.

Nor should the finite duration of the world's gradually depleting oil and gas reserves be considered as leverage to compel adversaries to capitulate through third-party pressure.

Against this backdrop, the China-Pakistan proposal deserves careful consideration. It offers a structured path away from escalation toward dialogue. Crucially, it is framed in terms that prioritize collective interests over unilateral advantage.

For the international community, the choice is stark. It can continue to watch as the spirals of the conflict encompass more countries, issuing statements of concern while the situation deteriorates. Or it can rally behind a coherent framework for de-escalation, lending political weight to efforts aimed at bringing all related parties to the negotiating table, halting the violence and addressing its underlying causes.

Ultimately, there is no military solution to this conflict. That is not a subjective judgment but a practical reality. Wars of this nature do not produce clear winners; they produce devastation, instability and long-term resentment. The sooner this is recognized, the better the chances of averting a wider catastrophe.

Yangtze corridor indicator of integration

Walk along Shanghai's waterfront and you will see the familiar theater of globalization: container ships stacked high, crane arms swinging in rhythm, the ceaseless churn of commerce. But look closer — or rather, deeper. Eighty-nine meters beneath the busy shipping lanes, a tunnel boring machine the height of a five-story building, bristling with sensors and guided by an artificial "brain," is grinding through the rock strata. It is boring the 14-kilometer Chongming-Taicang tunnel, which is the linchpin of a 2,000-km high-speed railway that will link Shanghai to Chengdu, capital of Southwest China's Sichuan province. It tells you a lot about how China's economic system works.

In many advanced economies, major infrastructure projects often involve lengthy deliberation and debate. In China, projects are measured in years. The 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) lists 109 major projects, among them the Yangtze River high-speed rail corridor — one of the most ambitious. Costing more than 500 billion yuan (\$72 billion), it is expected to generate nearly 1.5 trillion yuan in upstream and downstream industrial value added.

By the end of the decade, China will have substantially completed the "eight vertical and eight horizontal" high-speed rail grid, and the overall framework of its national comprehensive transportation network will have advanced from its current 90 percent completion rate to over 95 percent.

Yet the real story is not scale, but synergy. Consider the supply chain. A single tunnel boring machine requires bespoke components — its "nervous endings" — and a sophisticated digital control system. The construction of the railway has already driven demand for more than 200 customized tunneling and bridge-building units. The 570,000 tons of high-strength specialty steel needed for the rails have found ready suppliers. Even the precast concrete segments used in the tunnel lining have given rise to smart factories.

This is what economists would recognize as the building of economic complexity: a shift from low-value assembly to a dense ecosystem of advanced capabilities. China is not merely laying track; it is upgrading the productive DNA of entire regions.

Now look at the railway in relation to China's advanced manufacturing clusters. The line will

connect more than a quarter of them, along with nearly 40 percent of the country's key laboratories. Innovation, in effect, will travel along steel arteries. More than 20 smaller cities will, for the first time, be plugged into the 350-km-per-hour network. Take Lezhi county in Sichuan for example. Its station remains under construction, yet business travel has already picked up, and investment delegations are arriving. This is structural transformation in real time.

The Yangtze corridor is no isolated endeavor. The 15th Five-Year Plan is threaded with similar strategic transportation projects. The Shiziyang passage — a double-deck road bridge spanning the Pearl River estuary — will draw Guangzhou's Nansha district closer to Dongguan's Humen town, accelerating the integration of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area into a world-class urban cluster.

Further west, the Pinglu canal will cut 560 kilometers from shipping routes for cargo from Southwest China, linking inland regions directly to the Beibu Gulf.

What some in the West view as top-down direction is described by Chinese policymakers as coordinated strategy. The economists' "quadruple helix" — government, industry, universities and society — is plainly visible. The Yangtze River high-speed rail corridor will facilitate the flow of capital, talent and technology between inland regions and coastal powerhouses, providing a pathway for regions lagging behind to catch up.

These mega-projects reward cross-regional collaboration, optimizing energy use, investment, talent and natural resources across jurisdictions. The result is a system capable of translating grand blueprints into tangible outcomes — with an emphasis on coordination, inclusiveness and sustainability.

In a volatile global landscape, China is leaning on its structural strengths: long-term planning, high implementation capacity, a resilient economy, a comprehensive industrial base and a superlarge domestic market. The Yangtze corridor is a vivid illustration of this. While skeptics in parts of the West question whether China is nearing its growth limit, the country continues to press ahead — focused on vision, actions and results, and intent on pursuing its own path to development to become a better self.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Do we want a world in which algorithms hold the trigger?

Another week, and another display of the United States administration's hypocrisy. It just tried to strong-arm Anthropic into handing over the ethical red lines of the artificial intelligence company along with its code.

The US administration said: remove the safeguards preventing your Claude AI from being used for fully autonomous targeting. The Pentagon has a contract worth hundreds of millions of dollars on the line. And when Anthropic said "no," the White House ordered every federal agency to "IMMEDIATELY CEASE" using Anthropic's tech.

The Pentagon threatened to label the company a "supply chain risk" — the kind of scarlet letter usually reserved for Huawei or Kaspersky. It even invoked the Defense Production Act, a Cold War relic designed as a cudgel to force industry into compliance.

A federal judge has since called the US administration's actions "unconstitutional retaliation." But the damage is done. The message to every other AI wunderkind in the Valley is self-evident: Build a kill switch, and we will make sure you are the one who gets switched off.

This isn't just a contract dispute. For years, the chattering classes have debated "meaningful human control" over lethal autonomous weapons — what diplomats call LAWS. The UN chief wants a treaty by 2026.

The International Committee of the Red Cross warns of an accountability gap. And some researchers have laid out the nightmare in clinical detail.

First comes the accountability gap. If a machine hallucinates — as large language models are wont to do — and mows down a school bus instead of a missile launcher, who goes to The Hague? The commander who deployed it will blame the code. The programmer will blame the black box. The machine can't form criminal intent or be court-martialed. As Anthropic's CEO put it, frontier AI systems are simply "not reliable enough" for life-or-death decisions.

They are brilliant pattern matchers with no moral compass. Another concern is about distinction. An algorithm can be trained to spot a target. But it cannot understand why a tank is a "legitimate" target, or why attacking a desalination plant nearby would constitute a "war crime." The algorithm cannot show mercy. It cannot weigh competing obligations. And as we saw with some forces' AI-enabled targeting in Gaza, when the system decides who is a militant based on opaque criteria, the result is mass civilian casualties and zero accountability.

And if we build these weapons, they will spread. Terrorist groups won't need suicide bombers if they have a \$1,000 quadcopter with facial recognition and a pre-programmed target list.

So what is the international community supposed to do? The US has been vocally binding "rules," calling them "barriers to innovation," while building its own AI arsenal. Europe wants precaution. Some other major players are preparing for the worst-case scenario. Everyone wants to win.

Anthropic tried to do the responsible thing. It drew a line: no lethal autonomous warfare without human oversight. No mass surveillance of US citizens. And for that, the US administration tried to destroy it.

Some big names in AI have already dropped the no-weapons pledge, scrubbed "safety" from their mission, or shown their readiness to salute. They have heeded the law: If you play nice with the generals, you get the contracts. If you grow a conscience, you get the boot.

We are sleepwalking into a world where algorithms can pull the trigger. We need a legally binding treaty, a moratorium on unreliable systems, and strict and effective regulation on offensive autonomous weapons, if not an outright ban. But that requires political will — and right now, Washington's will is aimed at the wrong target.

The killer robots are coming. And the only thing standing between us and an automated Armageddon might just be a few holdout coders and a federal judge with a backbone.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

New occupations driving expansion of employment

Editor's note: Zhao Wen, a research fellow at the Institute of Population and Labor Economics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, spoke to Guangming Daily about why new occupations are important for employment in China and how they can be made more sustainable. Below are excerpts of the interview. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Widely distributed in the digital economy, smart manufacturing, modern services, and green and low-carbon industries, new occupations have already created a large number of jobs.

New occupations can help in optimizing the employment structure. Since these occupations are mostly in knowledge-intensive and technology-intensive sectors, they require workers to have sophisticated skills and therefore be paid higher salaries.

Along with these new occupations will come new ways of working, such as the work mode based on the "cloud" and supported by internet platforms. These new modes will offer fresh opportunities for workers living in small towns.

Currently, three fields have great potential for fostering new occupations. The first involves new business forms driven by artificial intelligence, big data and cloud computing technologies. The development of these technologies has led to the emergence of new jobs, such as generative AI system testers, specialists operating and maintaining cloud networking systems and trainers of AI digital humans.

The second involves sectors nurtured by emerging consumer demand. People's need for better ser-

VICES has spawned new professions such as sleep health counselors.

The third field is powered by other cutting-edge technologies. The advancement of the low-altitude economy, the new energy sector and the energy conservation and environmental protection industry has cultivated new occupations such as drone swarm flight planners, carbon emissions managers and hydrogen fuel cell testers.

The vitality of these new occupations depends on whether they can meet the demand from industries and consumers and create economic and social value. A mechanism is needed to align new occupations with industrial needs. Big data analysis of industries, surveys of companies and skills gap assessment should be conducted on a regular basis to follow the trends in AI, the low-altitude economy, smart manufacturing and other emerging sectors, and ensure that the new occupations are developed in accordance with market needs.

Industries and universities should collaborate more closely on this. Major companies, industry associations and universities can work together to formulate standards for new occupations and design courses that students are equipped with

skills truly needed for the jobs.

In addition, a feedback system is necessary for assessing the employment of new occupations. Requirements for positions, as well as training courses, should be adjusted according to the feedback and the need for industrial upgrading.

People's needs for personalized, refined and diverse services are growing. New occupations enjoy enormous potential in these sectors. These new occupations should keep following people's demands, and continue to improve the quality of the services offered.

New occupations echo job preferences of the younger generation, who prioritize self-fulfillment. Relying on personal skills, aesthetic judgment and creativity, most new occupations allow young people to integrate their interests with careers and pursue personalized development.

Young people aspire for flexibility and freedom, something that new occupations can provide. Without fixed working hours and office locations, some new occupations grant young people greater autonomy. Since they are developing at a rapid pace, new occupations may create new possibilities in the future.

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VIEWS

Virdika Rizky Utama

Good governance needs long-term perspective

In many political systems, success is measured by what can be seen quickly. New buildings come up, headline projects are launched and growth figures are offered as proof of action. But visibility is not the same as value, and speed does not guarantee endurance. Chinese President Xi Jinping has repeatedly cautioned against the pursuit of quick gains, falsified achievements and image-driven projects, arguing that political accomplishment must rest on solid, practical work. His thoughts reflect a more profound approach to judging political performance.

This approach is systematically articulated in China's concept of a "correct understanding of governance performance" or "correct view of political achievements". Its core is to answer the fundamental questions of for whom achievements are made, what kind of achievements should be made, and how to make them, emphasizing that working for the people's wellbeing is the greatest political achievement and that officials must create tangible achievements that can stand the test of practice, the people, and history.

At the center of this approach is a shift from short-term visibility toward long-term results. Political achievement should not be defined only by what is launched within an official's term, but by what continues to function and deliver benefits after that term ends. Governance quality matters more than speed. Durability is more important than spectacle.

This recalibration is closely tied to a people-centered orientation. Political success is increasingly assessed by improvements that citizens experience in daily life. Stable employment, access to healthcare and education, public safety, social security, and effective risk prevention have become the real benchmarks of achievement. Economic growth remains essential, but it is no longer treated as an isolated objective. When growth gets detached from social wellbeing, it ultimately undermines the quality of development and public trust.

China's targeted poverty alleviation campaign is a good example.

Rather than focusing solely on aggregate growth, policies addressed specific household-level constraints, from education and healthcare access to local employment opportunities. The emphasis was not on symbolic targets, but on measurable improvements in living con-

ditions that could be sustained over time. This logic also explains the growing emphasis on balancing visible and invisible achievements. Large-scale construction, industrial upgrading and urban renewal are highly visible and politically attractive. But it is the less visible elements, such as regulatory capacity, environmental protection, public health preparedness and social trust that determine whether development can be sustained. Opposition to vanity projects reflects the recognition that development driven by appearance rather than necessity distorts incentives and misallocates resources.

Environmental governance offers another familiar illustration. Efforts to tackle air pollution in major cities such as Beijing initially imposed economic and administrative costs. Restrictions on factories, traffic controls and energy transitions slowed some activities in the short term. Over time, however, the improved air quality reduced health risks, raised living standards in the city and strengthened public confidence. What appeared restrictive at first contributed to improving the wellbeing of people and more resilient urban development.

Economic, social and ecological objectives are therefore increasingly treated as interdependent rather than sequential. Environmental degradation translates into health burdens and productivity losses. Social inequality weakens consumption, innovation and long-term stability. Reckless growth does not advance modernization, but undermines it. Development that internalizes social and ecological costs reduces systemic risk and builds a more stable foundation for prosperity.

Turning principles into practice also requires confronting formalism and bureaucratism. Excessive focus on protocols, documents and slogans can hollow out governance by replacing problem-solving with ritual compliance. Falsification and the pursuit of quick wins distort information flows, making it harder to identify risks and rectify mistakes. Once inaccurate reporting becomes the norm, policymaking loses its feedback mechanisms and becomes more prone to miscalculation.

The renewed emphasis on down-to-earth work seeks to reconnect policy intent with lived outcomes. Governance credibility depends less on how performance is presented than on how accurately it reflects the reality. Reliable information and honest evaluation are essential to sustaining long-term development.

Cadre evaluation systems play a cen-



tral role in reinforcing this shift. Moving beyond single-minded growth metrics, assessment frameworks increasingly incorporate social welfare, environmental protection, risk management, public service delivery and policy continuity. This realigns incentives and reduces the space for achievement-driven excesses. At the same time, evaluation systems must guard against replacing one narrow set of indicators with another. Oversight and accountability remain critical.

A defining feature of this approach is its treatment of time. Short-termism has long been a structural weakness in development governance, particularly where political cycles compress policy horizons. By emphasizing continuity and restraint, China's current governance discourse introduces a longer temporal perspective. Political achievement is judged not only by immediate output, but by durability and resilience to shocks.

These challenges are not unique to China. Indonesia, like many developing countries, faces similar tensions between speed and sustainability, and between visibility and substance. Development success is often measured by what is newly built rather than by how well existing systems function. Several large infrastructure projects launched under one administration have stalled or lost momentum after leadership changes. At the same time, social programs have been rebranded or revised before their long-term impacts could be fully assessed. Such discontinuities weaken institutional memory

and erode public confidence.

Indonesia's experience highlights the importance of evaluation systems that reward long-term outcomes over short-term visibility. Infrastructure that is maintained, services that remain accessible and policies that endure across political cycles are better indicators of success than ceremonial launches or headline-driven initiatives. Continuity, rather than ceremony, defines real progress.

In this context, China's evolving concept of political achievement offers useful reference points. Its value lies not in providing a model to be copied mechanically, but in emphasizing responsibility, continuity and substantive outcomes.

Ultimately, the most enduring political achievements are often the least dramatic. They quietly reduce structural risks, strengthen institutional resilience and build public trust. Modernization is not defined by speed alone, but by balance, direction and responsibility. Aligning ambition with realism and growth with sustainability is what transforms development into durable progress and governance into lasting legitimacy. In governance, what endures speaks louder than what dazzles.

The author is the executive director of PARA Syndicate, a Jakarta-based independent think tank. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Douglas de Castro

Environmental code signals China's green resolve

The promulgation of China's first Ecological and Environmental Code marks a significant development in the global legal landscape. It represents one of the most ambitious attempts worldwide in the 21st century to reconcile the metabolic rift between industrial development and the biophysical limits of our planet.

From the perspective of Third World approaches to international law, this move is an exercise of epistemic sovereignty by China and a rejection of the fragmented, reactive environmentalism of the West in favor of a proactive, holistic and State-led approach to ecological civilization.

For decades, China's environmental governance relied on over 30 separate laws and a myriad of administrative regulations. While effective during the country's rectification phase, this fragmented system often led to departmentalism, where the goals of economic growth and ecological protection were treated as competing interests.

The new code resolves these internal contradictions through dialectical synthesis. By unifying these laws, China has eliminated the gaps where local interests or industrial lobbies could formerly exploit legal ambiguities. This codification represents an important step forward in the institutionalization and maturity of environmental rule of law in China. It is a shift from the management of pollution to the governance of the ecosystem and signals that the nation's green development is no longer merely a policy preference, but a fundamental legal principle of the state.

Perhaps the most distinctive and far-reaching feature of the code is the elevation of the dual carbon goals — peaking carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and ultimately reaching carbon neutrality before 2060 — into binding legal provisions that, when combined with policies, provide robust protection for the environment. This adds a high-quality standard to the country's development path.

In the liberal international order, climate goals are often treated as aspirational or subject to the whims of electoral cycles — as seen in the volatility of the United States climate policy. China's approach offers a clear contrast to such policy discontinuity. By embedding these macro-policy goals into a permanent legal code, China is providing strategic legal certainty.

The code also indirectly addresses a common critique from Western legal formalists that Chinese law-making lacks participation. The process of drafting this code, which saw over 10,000 public comments from thousands of citizens during a 45-day window, tells a different story, a whole-process people's democracy. To that end, the legitimacy of law is found in its connection to the material needs of the people.

The code, therefore, is not a top-down decree but a social contract that reflects a collective identity in which the notion of a good life is inextricably linked to ecology.

As a Brazilian scholar, I cannot help but draw parallels with the 1988 constitution of Brazil, which was a pioneer in recognizing the right to an ecologically balanced environment as a fundamental human right. However, while Brazil has often struggled to enforce these rights under pressure from international capital, China offers a model of state capacity.

The potential for cooperation between Brazil and China is immense. Brazil offers decades of experiences in environmental constitutionalism and in the protection of complex biomes such as the Amazon. China offers the technological and legal infrastructure for a green industrial revolution as an alternative to the Bretton Woods system of development that brought us to this severe environmental crisis.

Living in China for several years, one sees the green miracle not just in statistics, but in the sky. I recall the stories of the Saibanba forest farm workers in northern Hebei province, who turned a desert into a vast forest over three generations, or the restoration of the Yellow River. These are not just governance stories; they are proof of a different kind of modernization.

Much of the Western model of modernization was built on the externalization of environmental costs, often onto the colonies and the Global South. China is undertaking one of the first large-scale attempts at legal modernization in history to internalize those costs, an approach that rejects the "pollute first, clean up later" path of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Ecological and Environmental Code of China is a message to the world. It asserts that the climate crisis cannot be solved by market mechanisms alone, but requires the firm hand of a coordinated, legal and state-led strategy.

For Latin America, cooperation with China in clean energy, electric vehicles and sustainable agriculture is not just a commercial transaction but also a geopolitical necessity. By aligning our legal and economic systems toward a green transition, we are building a community with a shared future for humanity that is grounded in the material reality of our shared planet and local realities.

We are witnessing the end of the era in which the economy and ecology were seen as a zero-sum game. Under the new code, the economy is the ecology. The law has finally caught up with the majesty of the natural world.

The author is a professor of international law at the School of Law of Lanzhou University, Lanzhou, China. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Meng Xiaoxu

Tokyo rekindling a fire that can burn bridges

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's remarks on Taiwan violated the one-China principle and the spirit of the four political documents that form the foundation of China-Japan ties. They crossed the red line of the post-World War II international order and led to a noticeable cooling of relations.

Despite strong protests from China, the Takaichi administration has not walked back on these statements, insisting that its position on Taiwan has not changed.

Yet a United States intelligence report released in March pointed out that her comments differ significantly from those of previous Japanese leaders, suggesting a shift in Japan's approach to the Taiwan question. Japan's China policy is moving toward confrontation.

Japan is turning away from its postwar pacifist orientation and the earlier consensus on building a mutually beneficial relationship with China. Instead, it is using the "China threat" narrative more frequently to justify this shift.

In February, Takaichi told the Japanese parliament that China is increasing military activities and has "intensified its attempts to unilaterally change the status quo through force or coercion in the East China Sea and South China Sea."

By naming China as the country's "biggest strategic challenge", Japan has begun to move away from its traditionally defensive posture. It has increased defense spending, accelerated the deployment of long-range strike capabilities and strengthened its military presence in the southwestern islands. It has

also reorganized its Self-Defense Forces, including the maritime, space and intelligence units, to improve collaborative combat capabilities against China.

Japan has also drawn closer to the US by escalating major-power strategic competition and fostering bloc confrontation against China. During their meeting in March, leaders of Japan and the US highlighted the importance of "maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait" and discussed deeper operational coordination to constrain China. They also agreed to reduce reliance on China in areas such as critical minerals and rare earth supply chains.

Tokyo also began to downgrade ties with Beijing. A draft of Japan's 2026 Diplomatic Bluebook reportedly describes China not as "one of its most important" but simply as an "important neighbor". Given the Bluebook's weight in shaping foreign policy, the change in wording points to Japan's confrontation with China on diplomacy, trade and security. The draft also criticizes China's actions on sovereignty issues and echoes Takaichi's stance on Taiwan.

Tensions further heightened when an SDF officer armed with a knife illegally broke into the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo on March 24 and threatened to kill Chinese diplomatic personnel. The episode reflects the growing visibility of far-right forces and the development of "new militarism", as well as the lasting impact of the Japanese government's problematic approach to history and China-Japan relations.

Takaichi's remarks and her administration's confrontation with China reflect

a resurgence of militarism. After World War II, militarism in Japan was never fully dismantled due to protection by the US. Right-wing forces not only persisted but gradually gained influence, promoting revisionist views of history and downplaying responsibility for past aggression. Narratives that reinterpret wartime history have deeply infiltrated the SDF. In the push to become a "normal country", Japan's right-wing forces have sought to sidestep historical questions while hyping up the "China threat" theory to redirect public attention outward.

In order to constrain and secure a geopolitical advantage over China, Japan is sowing discord in China-US ties and taking advantage of the two countries' rivalry. The US, in order to promote its "Indo-Pacific" strategy and "win over China", has eased military constraints over Japan and supported its military expansion.

Historically, economic crises were the underlying logic of Japanese aggression against China. Japan's persistently sluggish economy and the rightward shift in Japanese politics have exacerbated the rise of the "new militarism". The xenophobic nationalism fueled by an aging population and the ossification of social class structures has provided the necessary public opinion support for Japan's policy of countering China.

In a futile attempt to gain an advantage over China through military confrontation and bloc-based rivalry, Japan has fallen prey to the geostrategic delusion of "being an enemy of one's neighbor". Japan's provocations and the deterioration of its ties with China will

not only affect bilateral cooperation, but also weigh on regional economic integration and weaken the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

Adhering to pacifism under its post-war constitution constitutes a solemn commitment given by Japan to the international community. A "new militarism" would not only trigger countermeasures from neighboring nations but also further erode mutual trust regarding regional security, thereby destabilizing the security order in East Asia.

Japan's military transformation and its hardline stance toward China will only tarnish Japan's national image. The country's efforts to join the US to foment regional confrontation will result in its diplomatic isolation. Southeast Asian nations have clearly expressed their apprehension regarding the region sliding into Cold War-style bloc confrontation. Japan's excessive military spending will exacerbate its fiscal crisis, continue to crowd out investment in public welfare and lead to a worsening of socio-economic problems.

As close neighbors, China and Japan both stand to gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation. Japan needs to remain committed to the spirit of the four political documents between China and Japan and get back on the right track. Only then can Japan contribute to the region's security and stability.

The author is a researcher at the Institute of Japanese Studies in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



These are not just governance stories; they are proof of a different kind of modernization.

ليس في ثلاثة جيلة فقر يُخالطُ كسلا،
وغداوة يُخالطها حسدا، ومزح يُخالطه هزيم
(من أقوال العرب)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB
Three things have no remedies: poverty tinged with laziness, enmity combined with jealousy, and sickness mixed with old age.
An Arab maxim

Opinion

Regional quartet offer Trump a final off-ramp

OSAMA AL-SHARIF



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A four-way foreign ministers' meeting held in Islamabad on Sunday may be the region's best — and last — chance to arrest the slide toward full-scale war in the Arabian Gulf and beyond. Bringing together Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, Egypt and Pakistan, the gathering represented a genuine opportunity for countries directly impacted by the US-Israeli military campaign against Iran to forge a unified front and present a credible initiative for de-escalation and an eventual peaceful resolution.

In a video statement, Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said the foreign ministers discussed "possible ways to bring an early and permanent end to the war" in the Middle East. He added that all sides had expressed confidence in Pakistan's facilitation and that China "fully supports" the initiative to host potential US-Iran talks in Islamabad.

Pakistan has emerged as a key mediator between Tehran and Washington since the US and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28,

prompting counterattacks from Tehran on American interests, as well as oil and other infrastructure in Gulf Arab countries.

Its unique standing — maintaining ties with both the Iranian leadership and the White House — gives it leverage that could translate into real diplomatic movement. That potential is reinforced by the backing of the three other powers at the table: Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkiye. Together, they carry the political weight to make Washington listen.

Riyadh, Ankara and Cairo have already staked out a principled and consistent position: while they have condemned Iran's attacks against Gulf states, they have firmly opted for a political resolution over military escalation. That stance reflects both strategic calculation and regional responsibility — and it gives the Islamabad meeting a solid foundation on which to build a unified regional initiative.

The message from Islamabad dampens stakes out for a US ground incursion against Iran. Any such move would not only extinguish whatever diplomatic prospects remain but also dramatically raise the

stakes for Gulf states that have so far managed to stay on the sidelines. The message also calls for an immediate ceasefire and a return to negotiations — giving both Washington and Tehran a face-saving framework to step back from the brink.

What Gulf countries should make clear is their rejection of any US escalation in the form of a ground invasion or the destruction of Iranian power, oil and desalination plants. A desperate Iranian retaliation would almost certainly target Gulf power and desalination infrastructure, with catastrophic consequences. Possible US and Israeli strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities — particularly those near the Arabian Gulf coast — could also unleash deadly radiation clouds.

After a month of heavy bombardment of Iranian strategic sites, the priority now is to reach a deal that will reopen the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has effectively shut down. Iran's nuclear program has been either destroyed or rendered offline for many years — that objective of the war has largely been achieved. The program's future can be settled through negotiations.

The war has also dealt a serious blow to the global economy, especially the economies of the Gulf. Trump must take the interests of these countries into account as he ponders his next move. A take-over of Kharg Island or an attempt to loosen Iran's grip on the Strait of Hormuz would almost certainly prove inconclusive — and the effects would be devastating.

A negotiated deal remains possible. Both sides will have to make compromises but that route must be explored extensively, with the interests of all parties taken into consideration. One important caveat: what the US and its regional allies seek may not align with the objectives of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The statement from Islamabad challenges Washington's current trajectory and Israel's maximalist war aims. It may not be welcomed by either. But it may also be the only credible off-ramp left — and the region's most powerful states owe it to themselves, and to the broader Middle East, to take it.

Pakistan's unique standing — maintaining ties with both the Iranian leadership and the White House — gives it leverage



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We are commanded to stand with those who are persecuted and to work toward the dignity and freedom of all people

Passover: A celebration of human interdependence

RABBI MARC SCHNEIER



Rabbi Marc Schneier is President of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding and a noted advisor to many Gulf states.

The festival of Passover, which the Jewish people observe this year at the beginning of this month, is the cornerstone of Jewish identity. The defining message of Passover is enduring: we, too, were strangers in pharaonic Egypt, 3,300 years ago.

For the Jewish people, this is not merely a historical recollection, it is a moral imperative. Because we know the experience of subjugation and oppression, we are commanded to stand with those who are vulnerable and persecuted and to work toward the dignity and freedom of all people.

This ethic has shaped Jewish life for generations. Across decades, the Jewish community

has been at the forefront of the pursuit of civil rights, social justice and interfaith understanding. From the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s to modern interfaith engagement across the Arabian Gulf and the broader Muslim world, these relationships have been fostered on a shared belief that human dignity must transcend division.

Judaism teaches that every human being is created in the image of God and Islam affirms that same truth. Both traditions call on us to protect the stranger, to uplift the oppressed and to pursue justice with humility and compassion. These are not abstract ideals. They are binding responsibilities.

Passover provides the framework for this reflection.

Each year at the Passover ritual meal,

known as the Seder, we proclaim: "Let all who are hungry come and eat." This declaration affirms that freedom must be inclusive and that no one should be excluded from dignity. The Talmud teaches that one cannot fully rejoice in their own liberation while others remain in need.

Equally central is the commandment that in every generation, each person must see themselves as if they personally went out of slavery. This teaching demands empathy and accountability. It requires us to internalize the experience of oppression so that we act with urgency and responsibility in the present.

The challenges we face today, including rising antisemitism and Islamophobia, deepening divisions and the erosion of trust between faith communities, require more than rhetoric. They demand renewed

commitment to partnership, honesty and shared responsibility.

Judaism and Islam remind us that humanity is one family created by God. That shared belief has guided decades of interfaith engagement and has brought Muslim and Jewish leaders closer together in ways once thought impossible.

Knowing that we were once strangers, we must also recognize that no community can afford to stand alone. Our shared faith traditions teach that we are bound together not only by memory but by responsibility — and that responsibility requires clarity, reciprocity and the willingness to stand with one another.

The Passover festival celebrates our interdependent, interconnected and interrelated family of values, ideals and responsibilities.

Opinion

Can new military tech be a magic wand to victory?

YOSSI MEKELBERG



Yossi Mekelberg is professor of international relations and an associate fellow of the MENA Program at Chatham House.

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Throughout history, those who wage war have sought a decisive weapon, one that would grant them an unsailable advantage, deter their enemies or deliver victory on the battlefield, ideally quickly and at low cost. In modern times, warfare and the ways in which strategic objectives are pursued have been repeatedly reshaped by the introduction of gunpowder, artillery, machine guns and, later, warplanes, missiles, nuclear weapons and now digitization and artificial intelligence.

In recent years, unmanned aerial vehicles, more commonly known as drones, have come to the fore, marking the latest phase in the evolution of military technology. Their extensive use is evident in Ukraine and, more recently, in the war involving Iran. These systems are transforming warfare not only technically but also psychologically, as unmanned flying machines are increasingly used to kill, destroy and instill fear in civilian populations.

Drones possess several distinctive characteristics that set them apart from earlier military technologies. They offer

low-cost yet highly effective real-time surveillance and, more frighteningly, precise strike capabilities. Some argue that their combination of affordability and efficiency has "democratized" firepower — albeit with the troubling consequence of prolonging conflicts while inflicting widespread suffering. Their proliferation is also increasingly likely to spread to other areas of conflict.

The war in Ukraine, now stretching over several years, and the war in Iran demonstrate how relatively inexpensive weapons can reshape the battlefield. Even when many drones are intercepted, their low cost, long-range reach and precision make them highly effective tools for translating military action into political

leverage. As a result, they are becoming a weapon of choice not only for well-resourced militaries but also for those with limited means.

In Ukraine, the now familiar, if deeply unwelcome, sight of waves of Iranian-designed Shahed-136 drones (and now Russian-manufactured versions too) has become a defining feature of the conflict. These single-use drones, relatively slow at about 185 km per hour, can travel up to

2,500 km and cost between \$20,000 and \$50,000 each. Despite their simplicity, they have played a major role in sustaining the war.

Iran is now using similar systems to project power across the Middle East, including threats to maritime routes such as the Strait of Hormuz. While they lack the sophistication of cruise missiles, they are far cheaper. For comparison, a Tomahawk missile can cost about \$3.6 million and take up to two years to produce, yet may not always be more effective in terms of disruption.

As the war has turned out to be longer and more costly than expected — and also because of the spiraling cost of sophisticated military platforms and munitions — drones that can be manufactured with at least some parts from off-the-shelf components are becoming more attractive.

Much of the rapid development and deployment of drones has been shaped by lessons learned in Ukraine, further influencing other arenas, as seen with Iran. Last year, Ukraine reportedly produced 4 million drones, with plans to increase that number to 7 million.

Despite high interception rates,

defending against drones presents a serious challenge. Interceptors are expensive and often in limited supply. As David Petraeus and Clara Kaludnerovic recently noted in Foreign Policy, "you cannot solve a cheap problem with expensive solutions and expect to remain solvent."

Consequently, the next phase of drone warfare is already emerging, focused on developing cost-effective countermeasures. These include radio jamming

systems that disrupt communication between drones and their operators, acoustic sensors that detect their distinctive sound, high-resolution optical systems and advanced radar.

As with all new military technologies, early adopters gain an advantage, at least temporarily.

However, this is invariably followed by the rapid development of countermeasures. The wars in Ukraine and involving Iran confirm that we have entered the age of drones. Given their relative affordability and ease of production, drones are likely to proliferate, reshaping future conflicts and challenging current norms of warfare. This suggests that the quest for a single magic wand in warfare may be illusory and only causes an arms race and more conflict.

Drones possess several distinctive characteristics that set them apart from earlier military technologies

Much of the rapid development and deployment of drones has been shaped by lessons learned in Ukraine

Egypt seeks to prevent region being redrawn by force

DR. ABDELLATIF EL-MENAWY



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Egypt's stance on the ongoing war in the region cannot be understood as a simple, one-dimensional position. Cairo is using a multilayered policy built on containment, political de-escalation, strategic caution, economic defense and internal discipline. Its objective is to prevent the war from reshaping the region by force, while at the same time avoiding being drawn into the front lines, militarily or politically.

This is why its official rhetoric may appear measured, even subdued, at moments when public sentiment runs hotter and expectations from allied and friendly countries are higher. This apparent gap has made Egypt's position vulnerable to misinterpretation and, at times, exploitation. It has even fueled social media clashes between users in Gulf countries and their counterparts in Egypt, often in a populist tone that does more harm than good.

At the official diplomatic level, Egypt's position has been largely consistent, calling for de-escalation, protecting Arab states from the fallout of war, maintaining open channels with all parties and pushing for political solutions rather than

entrenching the logic of conflict. In practice, Cairo has translated this into active engagement with Tehran, Arab capitals, Washington and other international actors, repeatedly stressing that a military solution is neither viable nor sustainable.

At the regional level, Egypt has sought to balance two positions that may appear contradictory at first glance. On the one hand, it has condemned attacks

targeting Arab states and reaffirmed its solidarity with the Gulf and Jordan. On the other, it has resisted allowing that solidarity to evolve into open military alignment or a broader regional war. In other words, Egypt's message is clear: yes to the security of Arab states, but no to

turning the region into a theater of full-scale confrontation.

This "calm" Egyptian stance, so described by various parties, has not always been well received across different levels in Gulf countries. Many had expected a stronger, faster and more vocal response condemning Iranian attacks on Arab states, along with an immediate and unequivocal declaration of support for the Gulf. These expectations were shaped by

the close relations built over recent years. While officials on both sides have affirmed that relations remain unaffected, it would be unrealistic to deny that something has shifted in the atmosphere.

Observers note that, in such a climate, institutions and responsible voices on both sides can play a critical role in containing the wave of tension and verbal exchanges unfolding on social media, which are often driven by emotional, sometimes populist, rhetoric and at times inflamed by actors intent on pouring fuel on the fire. Managing this moment is essential to prevent it from hardening into a more difficult and lasting rift.

There is clear sympathy for the Palestinian cause and broad rejection of escalation. There is also a firm rejection and condemnation of Iranian attacks on Gulf states. At the same time, there is genuine economic anxiety, which makes public sentiment complex and layered rather than uniform.

This intersection of political anger and economic concern produces a cautious balance in the public mood: solidarity and frustration on the one hand and fear of the consequences of war on the other. This is why public expression may seem less loud than some expect,

even though it is no less profound. As for those seeking to exploit the situation, several actors are at play. Some political currents are attempting to use the war to portray the Egyptian state as hesitant or disconnected from public sentiment.

Egypt is not absent from the scene. It is moving with careful, delicate calculation. It is attempting to balance four core priorities: preventing a comprehensive regional collapse, safeguarding Arab security,

preserving the trajectory of the Palestinian cause, and avoiding severe domestic economic and security repercussions.

The debate surrounding public opinion in Egypt reflects, in part, a misunderstanding of how expression operates within the country and a failure to grasp the layered nature of Egyptian society, historically, culturally and socially. It is also fueled by deliberate attempts from certain quarters to exploit the moment and disrupt intra-Arab relations.

What makes Egypt's position the subject of such intense debate is not its weakness but its weight. Egypt remains a central actor in the equation of regional stability and any shift in its position has the potential to alter the balance of the entire region.

At the regional level, Egypt has sought to balance two positions that may appear contradictory at first glance

What makes Egypt's position the subject of such intense debate is not its weakness but its weight



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