



Fixing the rot

There seems a recurring pattern in the examination paper leaks across States

Corruption in public life is often linked to “malfeasance”, the venality of government officials in high places taking bribes and misusing their positions to enrich themselves or their cronies. But a more corrosive variant that impinges upon public life includes the systematic subversion of public examinations and recruitment. This is because public examinations and teacher recruitment are pathways to creating skilled individuals in a rapidly modernising economy where jobs increasingly depend on skills and training. Corruption in these processes, which should ideally be done on merit, will erode India’s ability to fully realise its demographic dividend. Be it the National Testing Agency having to re-conduct NEET for medical undergraduate aspirants, or the postponement of the Maharashtra Teacher Eligibility Test just before its scheduled date (June 28), the malaise seems depressingly familiar. It is driven by a cottage industry that leaks papers through insider networks and targets the vast coaching ecosystem to rake in money from those seeking shortcuts to pass. In the Maharashtra case, the alleged kingpin – a Patna resident suspected of links to an Odisha paper leak scam in 2024 and even to the NEET scam – reportedly ran teams from Bihar and Haryana that sought to sell papers to coaching classes.

Erily, a similar template surfaces in scam after scam. In Gujarat, the alleged mastermind of the 2023 junior-clerk recruitment exam leak was an employee at a Hyderabad press that printed the paper. In 2024, in Jammu and Kashmir, a printing-press insider and security men were charged in the 2022 services board exam leak case. In Rajasthan, the December 2022 teacher-recruitment paper was sold by a serving government teacher. The common element is the presence of insider networks that have worked out ways to scam the system. The vulnerability lies not only in how question papers are distributed, but also in how they are set, with the repeated involvement of a select group of experts – many are linked to the coaching ecosystem. This is why the ritual of hunting for “kingpins” and running performative investigations until public attention fades leaves the core problem untouched. Pertinent questions are rarely addressed. Is the paper set by the same closed pool of examiners each time? Are their antecedents and commercial links verified? Do the departments that run these exams scrutinise examiners for conflicts of interest? Lastly, even if the system undertakes such reforms, it would be incomplete without accountability. Education Ministers – at the Centre and States – must own these failures. When leaks recur as routinely as they now do, the Minister who presides over the system should not remain in the post.

Yes and no

Governments must respect the decision-making of gram sabhas

A new report, based on Rural Development Ministry surveys, opens a rare data-backed window into the erosion of India’s grass-roots democracy. But where the state has framed the issue as one of “vibrancy”, the report highlights a paradox. It acknowledges that “participation fatigue” has kept citizens from engaging in gram sabhas whereas its solutions, such as more meetings and oversight, are a recipe to further alienate the rural working class. The 73rd Amendment empowers gram sabhas, but governments have reduced them to clearinghouses for central and State schemes. This fundamental aspect must change. However, in response to 18%-28% of respondents citing a lack of outcomes as the reason for low interest, the report pushes for greater use of the NIR-NAY app and to upload meeting minutes in real-time. In the real world, panchayat secretaries thus have less time facilitating discussion even as lacklustre oversight has allowed officials to tell workers that their MGNREGA demands were ‘not entered in the system’ due to server errors. Similarly, that more than half of the barriers to participation are related to livelihoods could point as much to visibly systemic issues – such as the precarious nature of rural labour today – as to deliberate economic exclusion by the state, as scholars have highlighted. But the report does not acknowledge such divergent possibilities. Due to the state failing to institutionalise attendance as a paid component of social protection, gram sabhas have remained a playground for the leisured elite such as landlords and contractors.

According to the report, gram sabhas spend 13% of the time identifying local issues but only 4% discussing revenue generation. But gram panchayats have been systematically constrained from raising their taxes, leaving them dependent on grants. The 14th and 15th Finance Commissions grants tied panchayat spending to central priorities such as drinking water and sanitation, limiting local priorities to ‘flagship’ programmes such as the Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachh Bharat. There is thus no incentive for citizens to attend a meeting if the funds are being earmarked by Delhi bureaucrats. The report also states that Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act areas have “reasonably strong physical infrastructure”. Under the PESA Act 1996 and related forest rights laws, gram sabhas have the right to provide prior informed consent for land acquisition and mining. However, the state routinely bypasses them or uses the excuse of low participation to manufacture consent. The Hasdeo Arand protests were rooted in this issue. There is a right to say ‘no’ and the state simply needs to acknowledge it. If ‘yes’ must be the only answer, the report’s grouses are a farce.

The case for building India’s coal chemistry capability

There are two ways a country can survive an energy shock: by managing it skillfully through diplomacy, diversification, and fiscal measures, or by reducing dependence on the disrupted resource. India excelled at the first during the disruption in the Strait of Hormuz in 2026, with its refineries demonstrating exceptional technical flexibility in adapting to crude supply disruptions. The crisis reaffirmed that indigenous scientific capability and technological self-reliance are the decisive forms of insurance against energy market volatility – far more durable than any diplomatic or military arrangement alone. However, India has yet to reduce its underlying dependence, and coal offers a key opportunity to begin.

Same discipline for coal chemistry

Before turning to that opportunity, it is worth understanding why refinery flexibility proved so effective, because the same discipline will be required for coal chemistry. India’s supplier base has nearly tripled over the past two decades. Each supplier provides a different crude slate, with distinct density profiles, sulphur content, and viscosity characteristics, and a refinery engineered for only one crude type becomes vulnerable to supply disruptions. Through investments in indigenous research, metallurgical advances, process innovation, and workforce training, India’s refining sector developed the capability to process feedstock across a broad range of specifications. When the Strait of Hormuz closed and sourcing options shifted abruptly, Indian refineries adapted with technical confidence, processing crude from the Americas, the Atlantic Basin, West Africa, Russia, and India’s West Asia partners. That flexibility at scale is the product of indigenous research and development, technical discipline, and engineers who understand their systems as interconnected processes rather than fixed machines.

The speed of the transition provides concrete evidence of this capability. Within weeks of the closure, non-Hormuz sourcing increased from 55% to 70% of India’s crude intake. That pivot reflected a decade of upstream diversification combined with the downstream technical flexibility built into India’s refinery fleet. India’s private and public sector refineries had the engineering capability to process multiple crude types, adjust operating parameters at short notice, optimise fractionation patterns for different feedstock specifications, and maintain product quality and safety throughout the transition.

This capability was built through sustained investment in process understanding, operator training, and the institutional knowledge that enables a complex industrial system to absorb shocks without fracturing.

The liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) story offers a clear example of how indigenous refining



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capability can absorb a supply shock faster than markets can price it. India’s LPG import infrastructure had roughly doubled over the preceding decade, providing greater distribution redundancy.

When the Strait of Hormuz closure threatened LPG availability, the bottleneck was not at the import ports but in how much LPG the existing refinery fleet could produce from the available feedstock. Under the LPG control order, refineries were directed to maximise yields, and within five days, domestic production increased from 35 Thousand Metric Tonnes (TMT) per day to 54 TMT per day, with engineers adjusting fractionation and cracking units in real time. That increase was engineering in action, not an accounting adjustment. It was one half of how India closed the gap; disciplined demand management provided the other. The production side – which is the focus of this article – rested entirely on technical capability built through years of sustained investment.

Energy security through molecules

Refinery flexibility solved the problem that the Strait of Hormuz crisis actually presented: how to keep a wide range of crude flowing through a fixed set of plants. It did not, and could not, solve the deeper structural problem the crisis exposed – that India’s LPG dependence is far more concentrated than its crude dependence. A refinery can be engineered to process crude from 40 different countries. LPG, however, cannot be engineered to come from 40 different geographies, because the molecule is overwhelmingly sourced from a handful of Gulf and Atlantic Basin producers. The real long-term solution to LPG vulnerability is not refining the same imported molecule more efficiently. It is producing a domestic molecule that serves the same purpose.

That molecule already exists, and India has the raw material to produce it in extraordinary abundance. Dimethyl ether (DME) is a clean-burning gas chemically similar enough to LPG that it can be blended directly into existing cylinders and pipelines, requiring no new distribution network. It can be produced through coal gasification, which converts coal into syngas and then into DME. India possesses some of the world’s largest coal reserves, and the Bureau of Indian Standards has already approved blending up to 20% DME with LPG. One recent industry assessment found that a 20% blend sourced from coal gasification could displace roughly 6.3 million tonnes of LPG imports each year, saving nearly ₹34,000 crore in foreign exchange annually. That is not a marginal gain. It is the kind of structural reduction in import dependence that the Hormuz crisis should have taught India to take seriously.

This crisis has demonstrated how India’s investments – in institutions, infrastructure, diplomacy and human capability – can translate

into national resilience. Innovation is often equated with breakthrough technologies. In reality, it is equally about creating new ways of integrating people, institutions, and ideas to solve unprecedented problems. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas’s response exemplified this broader understanding of innovation.

From innovation to execution

Years ago, scientists at the CSIR’s National Chemical Laboratory developed an indigenous technology for converting methanol into DME, a clean substitute for LPG. During the recent crisis, it was deeply gratifying to see the Centre for High Technology under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas move with remarkable speed to approve the scaling up of this indigenous pilot technology. It was a powerful reminder that investments in science made years earlier can become strategic national assets when unexpected crises arise.

This is exactly how innovation ecosystems should function. Research laboratories generate knowledge, government institutions identify strategic opportunities, and industry scales promising technologies. Together, they build national resilience.

That structural reduction is no longer waiting on policy. The Union Cabinet has approved a ₹37,500 crore scheme to promote surface coal and lignite gasification, explicitly citing the West Asia crisis as part of its rationale and targeting 100 million tonnes of coal gasification annually by 2030. The scheme provides an incentive of up to 20% of plant and machinery costs, separate from the DME blending ratio discussed above, and extends coal linkage tenure to 30 years – the kind of long-term horizon certainty that capital-intensive process industries require before committing investment. What remains is execution. India’s coal has a higher ash content than the cleaner coal that underpinned China’s dominant coal-to-chemicals industry, and domestic gasification capacity is still far below the ambition this scheme represents. Closing that gap is now a question of industrial discipline and investment, not policy intent. The intent has already been settled.

The remaining work – closing the ash-content gap, scaling gasification capacity, and building the technical depth China has spent two decades accumulating – is the same kind of work India’s refining sector undertook over two decades of investment in metallurgy, catalysis, and process engineering. The lesson of Hormuz is not that India’s refineries were ready and nothing else needs to change. It is that indigenous capability, once built, becomes a permanent strategic asset, and that the policy commitment to building the next one is now in place. The molecule is different, but the discipline required to master it is exactly the same as that which built the refineries that carried India through this crisis.

India’s refinery resilience in the West Asia crisis points to its coal chemistry future

A unified policy architecture for India’s energy future

India has made remarkable progress in transforming its energy landscape over the past decade. From achieving near-universal household electrification and expanding access to clean cooking fuel to becoming one of the world’s fastest-growing renewable energy markets, it has demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring energy access while advancing sustainable development.

As India looks ahead to the goals of energy self-reliance by 2047 and net-zero emissions by 2070, the next phase of the energy transition will require an increasingly integrated approach to planning and governance. A policy brief released by the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) in May 2026 highlights the importance of a unified national energy framework that can help align diverse energy resources, technologies and institutions towards common national objectives.

The complexity of India’s energy system

The need for such an approach is evident from the scale and complexity of India’s energy system. While domestic energy production continues to expand, there is a dependence on imports for a significant share of oil and natural gas requirements. At the same time, energy demand is expected to grow steadily as economic development, industrialisation and urbanisation continue. Managing these multiple priorities, energy security, affordability, sustainability and economic growth, requires coordinated planning across sectors and fuels.

India has already established strong foundations through initiatives such as the Saubhagya Scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, and ambitious renewable energy programmes. Renewable energy installed capacity has grown from approximately 40 GW in 2015 to approximately 260 GW by 2025, reflecting a determination to diversify the energy mix. As



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A policy brief from the INSA-Centre for Science, Technology, Innovation and Policy outlines a four-pillar framework

the energy ecosystem becomes more diverse, however, greater coordination among generation, transmission, storage, distribution and emerging technologies will become increasingly important.

How the framework works

The INSA policy brief proposes a framework built around four mutually reinforcing pillars: adequacy, access, affordability and appropriate sustainability.

First, adequacy focuses on ensuring reliable and diversified energy supplies through a balanced portfolio of conventional and emerging energy sources, supported by modern infrastructure, energy storage and digital technologies. The objective is to strengthen energy resilience while reducing long-term vulnerabilities.

Second, access emphasises reliable and equitable energy services for all citizens. Building on the country’s achievements in electrification and clean cooking access, the framework advocates strengthening last-mile delivery, improving service quality and expanding decentralised energy solutions where appropriate.

Third, affordability recognises that a successful energy transition must remain economically viable for households, businesses and industries. The framework highlights the role of innovative financing mechanisms, efficient markets and consumer-focused safeguards in supporting an inclusive transition.

The fourth pillar, appropriate sustainability, underscores the importance of pursuing sustainability in a manner that is aligned with India’s developmental priorities and resource endowments. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, the framework advocates solutions that reflect India’s unique social, economic and environmental context.

This includes support for local communities, workforce development and region-specific transition pathways.

The policy brief also identifies circular economy practices and carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) as important cross-cutting enablers that can complement renewable energy deployment and contribute to reducing emissions from industrial sectors.

Recognising that energy transitions occur over decades, the framework proposes a phased approach. Near-term priorities include strengthening infrastructure, accelerating renewable energy deployment, supporting emerging technologies such as green hydrogen, and developing institutional mechanisms that can facilitate long-term coordination. Over time, the emphasis would shift toward deeper integration of low-carbon technologies, expanded use of bio-resources and the development of a more interconnected and resilient energy ecosystem.

Viewing energy as whole

At its core, the framework highlights the value of viewing India’s energy system as an integrated whole. Coal, renewables, biomass, natural gas, waste-to-energy systems and emerging clean technologies each have a role to play in supporting the country’s development aspirations. Their effectiveness can be enhanced through greater coordination and long-term strategic planning.

India’s energy transition is not only about expanding capacity; it is about creating a resilient, affordable and sustainable energy system capable of supporting future growth. By providing a common framework for aligning diverse energy pathways, the proposed approach offers a constructive road map for advancing national priorities while strengthening energy security for generations to come.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rain deficit, urgent action

A monsoon rain deficit figure of 40% is deeply worrying. Hydropower generation could fall sharply amid warmer nights being forecast for July, and farmers having to bear the brunt of changing weather patterns. These developments once again underscore the urgent need for environmental

protection and better water management. While El Niño may be a major factor this year, the cumulative effects of deforestation and the unchecked growth of concrete cities could also be issues to consider. In this context, rainwater harvesting is no longer just an option but a necessity. Capturing and storing rainwater can help

replenish groundwater, improve water security, and reduce the impact of erratic monsoons, especially for farmers and drought-prone regions. The weather knows no borders, and El Niño clearly demonstrates this. Yet, countries continue to wage conflicts over territorial disputes while the shared challenge of climate change grows more severe.

Measures to protect the environment will remain inadequate unless the rapid destruction of ecosystems is addressed with the urgency it demands.

M. Chandrasekhar, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh

Faith, accountability

The alleged misuse of funds and donations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya is

distressing. More than missing money and offerings of valuables, the faith, public power, political symbolism, and the moral obligations that come with the sacred trust of the temple have taken a beating. The professed irregularities at the temple teach an important lesson – when faith is mobilised on a national scale, the

systems that manage that faith must be transparent. And, devotion and inner prayers by the devotees should never be used to silence them from asking questions about money, power and responsibility.

R. Sivakumar, Chennai

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

On curbing young adults on social media

Incumbent Prime Minister of the U.K. Keir Starmer recently announced a policy to ban social media for children under-16. This was part of an arc of initiatives and announcements in Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, France, and Canada to curb children's access to social media. This has triggered debates in India, especially at the State level, along the same lines.

The various contentions against a social media ban are not uniformly convincing. There is the argument that bans limit an "important source of information and learning" for children. However, the extent to which social media is used by children for learning is empirically arguable. It is also normatively questionable whether such platforms are an apt space for learning in the first place.

Scientific literature is full of intense debates regarding a clear and uniform correspondence between children's usage of social media and harmful experiences. Young adults respond to similar online circumstances differently; more so in jurisdictions that are as socially, economically, and digitally variegated as ours. What is required, foremost, is to identify the conditions where a high degree of correspondence does exist, and understand who are the most vulnerable among the expansive category of 'children'.

Ineffective bans
Meanwhile, there are numerous reasons why a ban for below-16s is unlikely to be effective. Curtailing access assumes that stout mechanisms of age verification exist on platforms. One must also be aware that age-verification allows social media platforms to collect sensitive identity data of under-16s. Bans tend to get circumvented by teenagers using the credentials of a willing family member or older peers. Even without external support, many young adults can manage to gain access through technological circumvention. There is also the



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Given the limited efficacy of bans, the alternative is to focus on the governance of social media platforms. This moves attention from those at risk to those contributing to creating risk

anxiety that bans could inculcate a wider culture of work-arounds among young adults – a behaviour which once ingrained could extend, in the years to come, to offline legal responsibilities too.

A combination of slack age verification systems and technological workarounds makes a mockery of a ban. Besides, the Australian experience has shown that 'age-gating' on social media platforms has pushed under-16s to migrate to less entrenched services; we are yet to know whether they are safe spaces.

Given the limited efficacy of bans, the alternative is to focus on the governance of social media platforms. This moves attention from those at risk to those contributing to creating the conditions of risk. Discussions on young adults' safety offer a potent opportunity to deepen debates on platform governance in India.

Charitable arguments point at design defects in some social media platforms that drive cravings and dependence among under-16s. But let's face it – addiction is central to the aims and operations of all service providers in the converged media environment. In fact, in the attention economy, platforms cannot compete without instituting, by design or deceit, some forms of dependence.

If addiction is the key concern, the Chinese response of capping screen time for children seems better directed. It amounts to the state mandating platforms to do what many concerned and informed parents do through other means. That said, in countries relatively less regulated, surveilled, and socially regimented than China, practices of borrowing credentials and technological workarounds to surmount screen-time caps will continue. Moreover, like bans, instituting caps requires age-verification, and will thereby legitimise platforms to harvest additional data of under-16s.

Limiting access and regulating platforms involve different

registers of monitoring and enforcement. In the case of a ban or caps on social media use by under-16s, two levels of enforcement can be visualised. The first is at the individual and household level; here, enforcing a ban, if feasible at all, would lead to intrusive forms of monitoring by platforms. The second will be at the platform level; a ban or screen time caps would demand age-verification and safeguards to privacy by platforms be rigorously enforced by the government.

Holding platforms accountable
The alternative is to legally oblige platforms to be transparent on their design, and provisions on safe spaces. Here, governments are likely to face structural and operational barriers. Governments that rely on social media giants to promote or protect their own interests are unlikely to push platforms to create transparent and accountable mechanisms. Furthermore, ensuring compliance on matters of design would make governments vulnerable to allegations of selective enforcement.

Evidently, the policy option of curtailing access is easier than that of making platforms accountable. Governments find it socially acceptable and legislatively convenient to make a case for age-gating. Devising effective and fair protocols that hold platforms accountable for their unwillingness to design safe spaces is far more complex.

Those advocating to curtail access should be cognisant of three matters. Foremost, they ought to evidentially make their case against social media platforms. Second, they should realise that bans or capping screen-time is nowhere close to a well-rounded regulatory strategy to tackle online safety. Finally, they must anticipate the burden on regulatory and judicial bodies that bans and their enforcement could lead to, and the perils to privacy that come with age-verification.

A new identity for Hyderabad

Global Capability Centres are the new vehicles driving growth in Telangana

STATE OF PLAY

N. Ravi Kumar

Global Capability Centres (GCCs) have emerged as the new identity of Hyderabad, symbolising a major shift for the Telangana capital. They are a new dimension to a city known for software development and which hosts large facilities of tech giants such as Microsoft, Google, Salesforce, and Amazon. Hyderabad is home to more than 355 GCCs as per reliable estimates. They work in the areas of cybersecurity, supply chain management, cloud computing, AI/ML research etc.

While the ruling Congress projects the continued rise in the number of GCCs, former Industries and IT Minister K. T. Rama Rao cites that the foundation for the growth of GCCs was laid during the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government.

Those at the helm often reference the previous Congress and even the Telugu Desam Party governments of a united Andhra Pradesh for the present growth of Hyderabad, making it evident that policy continuity over the years seems to have been crucial for the rise of the services sector.

Hyderabad is not the only location in India attracting GCCs. Much of its success in attracting global corporations has come in the face of rather stiff competition from cities such as Bengaluru, Chennai, Pune and Gurugram. Giving the city an edge is the existence of a strong tech ecosystem, talent pipeline, robust infrastructure, conducive policies as well as a responsive government. But the icing on the cake is the real estate – the land available to house more



GCC players as well as accommodate expansion programmes of existing companies. The lease rentals remain competitive and the infrastructure needed to complement the growth, from housing to entertainment facilities, continues to grow.

Speaking of the talent availability in Hyderabad, many GCC leaders don't tire in underlining how the facilities give the employees a sense of belonging to a larger global team, building product and platform capabilities as well as accelerating the digital transformation process of corporations. Depending on the industry in which the firms operate, employees also get to work on latest technology.

The potential for growth
The headroom for growth is significant. A background on GCCs which the Government of India issued in December 2025 says there are more than 1,700 GCCs in India that serve as the offshore backbones of big firms and as powerhouses driving research, design, and development. They employ 19 lakh people. Their combined revenue increased from \$40.4 billion in FY19 to \$64.6 billion in FY24.

The GCCs, as opposed to back offices, are not operated by third parties; they function as integral parts of the global structure of the parent company to extend expertise across information technolo-

gy, research and development, customer support, and varied business operations. They also help achieve cost efficiencies by tapping into the 'local' talent pool.

As much as they have contributed to Hyderabad's transformation, GCCs are changing due to the sway of AI. With new skills in demand, many of the GCCs are reorienting hiring strategies by sharpening focus on lateral hires and consequently giving rise to attrition. This has also meant fresh engineering graduates eyeing more jobs in IT firms.

But the contribution of GCCs to Hyderabad cannot be ignored, especially the thousands of direct jobs they provide. They have also opened indirect employment opportunities that have come as a temporary relief to those continuing to look for government jobs. Besides contributing to a changing skyline in Hyderabad, the GCCs are likely to play a key role in changing the contours of the city as the government rolls out plans for its proposed Bharat Future City.

Be it the Revanth Reddy-led Congress government or the previous BRS government, the rise of GCCs helped maintain the tempo of job generation, fuelled the local economy, and above all maintained the spotlight on Hyderabad. Governments should try to make these firms look beyond Hyderabad to tier II and III locations in the State.

However, for now, Telangana's focus is on attracting more facilities to Hyderabad and as its IT and Industries Minister D. Sridhar Babu stresses, on turning GCCs into Global Value Centres. The Centre expects the sector to reach \$105 billion by 2030, employing over 28 lakh professionals.

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Under VB-G RAM G, States' expenditure could go up six-fold

An analysis by *The Hindu* shows that States will have to spend at least ₹51,000 crore in 2026-27, in contrast to about ₹7,700 crore they spent in 2024-25

DATA POINT

Nitika Francis
Pon Vasanth B. A.

The Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G), which completely overhauls the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), came into force on July 1, despite serious concerns raised by many States.

One of the key concerns is the shifting of a significant part of the financial burden of this landmark employment guarantee scheme, which has been in force since 2005, from the Centre to the States. **Table 1** shows the key changes in the funding patterns.

Though the Government of India had earlier said that the transition to the new scheme "does not impose an undue financial burden on States," it has not spelt out the additional expenditure to be borne by each State. A release from the Ministry of Rural Development on Wednesday said the Centre has made an interim allocation of ₹95,692.31 crore for the States for 2026-27, without mentioning the contribution needed from the States or how much of the interim allocation would be used to settle past dues for the States. This is despite a fundamental shift: MGNREGA was a demand-driven model while under the VB-G RAM G, the Union government shall have the power to determine the "normative allocation (budget to be spent on the scheme)" for every State in a year based on certain "objective parameters" the Centre prescribes. Moreover, the new scheme shifts the responsibility fully to the States for any additional expenditure incurred beyond the "normative allocation"; for unemployment allowance (if employment could not be ensured for the guaranteed 125 days); and the compensation for delay in payments.

The general perception is that the earlier sharing pattern was roughly in the ratio of 90:10 between the Centre and the State; now the shift to a 60:40 pattern would result in a three-fold increase in States' expenditure.

However, an analysis by *The Hindu* showed that the increase in States' expenditure could be nearly 600%, when compared with 2024-25, the latest year for which actuals on expenditure are available. The analysis, based on conservative estimates, showed that States will have to spend at least ₹51,000 crore in 2026-27, in contrast to about ₹7,700 crore they spent in 2024-25. The projected figure does not include West Bengal. **Table 2** shows the country-level estimates and the method used to arrive at the projections, based on the new wage rates for each State notified by the Centre.

Minister for Rural Development Shivraj Singh Chouhan was quoted as saying that "no eligible rural worker should remain without work even for a day". However, the government had come under criticism in recent years for failing to ensure even 100 days of work.

The Hindu's estimates conservatively assume an increase of 25% in the total person days generated in 2024-25 instead of considering a minimum of 125 days of employment for registered households. For the administration and materials related expenditure, the analysis has applied the inflation based on Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the amount spent for each State in 2024-25. Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Bihar will be among States, whose expenditure could see an increase of 600% to 800% (**Chart 1**).

Chart 2 shows how MGNREGA expenditure had come down since 2020-21 despite the Government's stated commitment to spend more for the scheme. Moreover, the report available for the year 2025-26 showed that the Centre had to clear ₹20,422 crore pending as dues to all States.

Overburdening the States

The data for the charts were sourced from the Ministry of Rural Department's reports available online, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Reserve Bank of India, Union Budget, and the VB-G RAM G Act



Table 1: This shows the key changes in the funding pattern between the two schemes (Centre:State)

Category	MGNREGA	VB-G RAM G
Labour wages	100% by Centre	60:40 ratio
Material costs	75:25 ratio	60:40 ratio
Administrative expenses	75:25 ratio	60:40 ratio
Number of guaranteed workdays	100	125
Exceptions for any States or Union Territories	None	90:10 ratio in total expenditure for NE States, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Jammu and Kashmir. Full expenditure to be borne by the Centre for UTs without legislatures

Table 2: This shows the rough estimates for 2026-27 under VB-G RAM G and the increase in the expenditure of States

Category	2024-25	2026-27 (projections)	Calculation method
Wages	₹73,335.05 cr	₹1,05,769.18 cr	25% increase in PDG for each State multiplied by new wage rates
Person days generated (PDG)	268.2 cr	335.25 cr	25% increase assumed (100 to 125 days)
Materials	₹25,985.44 cr	₹27,884.24 cr	Adjusted for inflation as per CPI for 2025-26 and 2026-27 (projected)
Admin	₹4,770.55 cr	₹5,119.14 cr	Adjusted for inflation as per CPI for 2025-26 and 2026-27 (projected)
Total	₹1,04,091.04 cr	₹1,38,772.56 cr	
Centre's contribution	₹96,401.97 cr	₹87,804.25 cr	
Centre's share	92.6%	63.3%	
States' contribution	₹7,689.07 cr	₹50,968.31 cr	10% for NE States, no cost for UTs without legislatures and 40% for the rest
States' share	7.4%	36.7%	

Chart 1: This shows the top 15 States that will have to spend the highest amount under the new scheme. A few States will experience a six-to-eight fold increase in expenditure

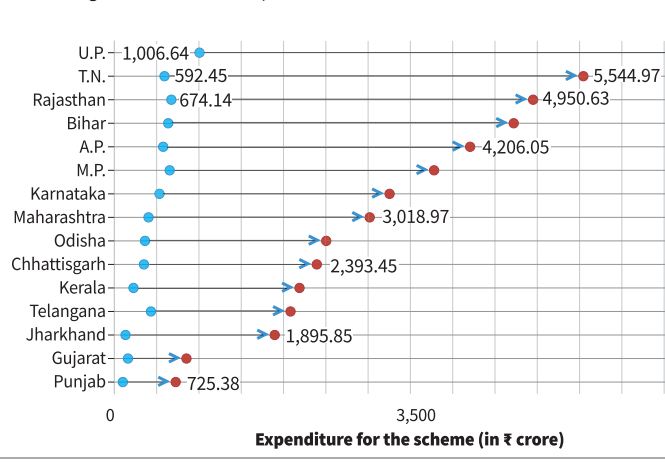
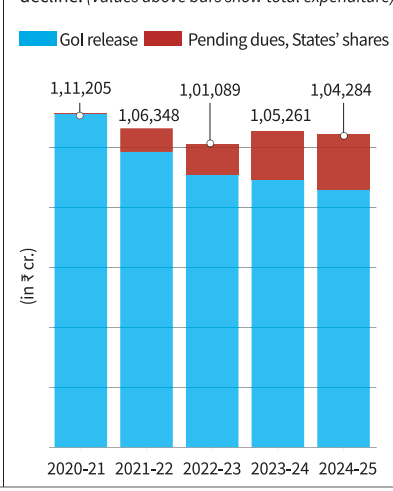


Chart 2: The Centre's allocation has seen a decline. (Values above bars show total expenditure)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The *Hindu*

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 2, 1976

Modern lighthouse for Madras

Madras: The tallest and most-modern lighthouse on the coastline of Tamil Nadu is to be commissioned shortly. The 150-foot tower atop which the electrical equipment will be mounted is ready on the Marina in Madras (opposite All India Radio studios). It has been built at a cost of Rs. 12 lakhs.

The beam from the new lighthouse will be visible, even during the worst weather, (cyclone or storms when the air will be hazy) at a distance of about 20 nautical miles. The French-made lighting equipment is expected to be installed in a short time. It costs about Rs. 11 lakhs.

The light from the 3,000 watt bulb with numerous prisms, will have an intensity about 50 times that of the beam from the existing lighthouse in the High Court building.

The century-old lighthouse operated by kerosene will become defunct after the new one is switched on. Even in best weather, its range of visibility is only about 12 miles.

The new lighthouse is also unique in that it will have a lift to reach the top. All the other lighthouses in the State have to be climbed by steps. It will be operated by electricity but there will be a standby generator and also a gas unit to meet any contingency.

Though modern ships are provided with electronic gadgets still lighthouses are a necessity serving as lamp posts. The crew always look to them for their guidance.

The navigational aids provided to ships at sea are of two categories – general and local.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 2, 1926

Boon to the deaf

Rugby, July 1: Highly successful experiments have been made with the new apparatus designed by a Hull Civil Engineer named Calvard for overcoming deafness. Over 80 per cent of the children in Hull deaf and dumb institution have heard speech and music for the first time as the result of an invention which has the appearance of a small wireless receiving set without serial or earth connection. The results are achieved by the transmission of sound to the inner ear of the deaf patients. It does not succeed with all sufferers but only with a large proportion.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Growth in India's power consumption in June

11.62 in per cent. India's power consumption grew to 166.46 billion units (BU) in June compared to the same month last year due to heat wave conditions and the late onset of monsoon across the country, which pushed usage of cooling appliances. PTI

Number of entities SEBI has banned for six years

221 Markets regulator SEBI has barred 221 entities, including individual investor Hanif Shekh, from the securities market for up to seven years and levied a fine of ₹10 crore for orchestrating a large-scale pump-and-dump operation in five stocks between 2017 and 2020. PTI

Number of people in Sudan who died from cholera outbreak

120 A cholera outbreak in Sudan has killed 120 people, the World Health Organization said on Wednesday. More than three years of war between Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have decimated the country's healthcare system. AFP

UN's estimate of how much Ebola outbreak could cost Africa

3.6 in \$ billion. The Ebola outbreak in the DR Congo threatens tens of thousands of jobs and could cost Africa up to \$3.6 billion, the United Nations said. It said the epidemic was "sparking a far-reaching socioeconomic crisis which could push 985,000 more people into poverty". AFP

Amount ordered by Swedish court for Google to pay

1.46 in \$ billion. A Swedish market court on Wednesday ordered Google to pay some 14.3 billion kronor in damages to price comparison site PriceRunner for promoting its own shopping comparisons in search results. AFP
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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What is the TET paper leak case?

Why was the Maharashtra Teacher Eligibility Test postponed? Who is the key accused in the alleged paper leak case? How did police uncover the alleged paper leak? Why do investigators suspect an inter-State racket? What has the investigation revealed so far?

EXPLAINER

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

The story so far:

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) is probing an inter-State paper leak racket after the Maharashtra Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) was postponed following an alleged leak. Investigators suspect the accused have links to similar paper leak cases in other States.

What is Maharashtra TET?

The Maharashtra Teacher Eligibility Test is an examination that assesses candidates' proficiency in subjects such as mathematics, science and languages for teaching roles. It is mandatory under the Right to Education Act to recruit primary school teachers for Classes I to VIII. As per guidelines issued by the National Council for Teacher Education, each State conducts its own

In Maharashtra, the examination is conducted by the Maharashtra State Council of Examination (MSCE), headquartered in Pune.

Why was the examination postponed?

The examination was scheduled for June 28. However, on the eve of the examination, the Maharashtra State Council of Examination postponed it after a police probe found that the papers had allegedly been leaked.

The last-minute postponement has affected more than six lakh candidates.

What is the paper leak scam?

Acting on a tip-off, the Thane Police laid a trap last week and arrested three accused who were allegedly trying to sell examination papers for ₹1.5 crore. Police had received information that a group of men was attempting to sell papers across Mumbai, Thane, Pune, Solapur, Nagpur, and Indore.

According to police, two separate groups of men from Bihar and Haryana reached Bhiwandi during the last weekend of June to allegedly sell four TET papers, apparently unaware of each other



Thane Police apprehends three individuals in connection with the alleged Maharashtra Teacher Eligibility Test question paper leak, in Bhiwandi, on June 27. ANI

but believed to be operating under the same kingpin situated in Bihar. They allegedly planned to target coaching classes and sell the papers for ₹1.5 crore, with individual candidates being charged around ₹1.5 lakh each.

During the investigation, police used a decoy to pose as a buyer. The accused allegedly showed the question paper during a video call and then negotiated its sale.

After verifying the authenticity of the seized material, police arrested three individuals: Rajeev Shriprayag Shaw (Bihar), Akash Kumar Swaraj Kumar (Bihar), and Dheeraj Balraj Singh (Haryana). One of Dheeraj's associates, Kapil Dahiya (Haryana), reportedly managed to escape and remains absconding.

How many people have been booked so far?

A first information report (FIR) has been registered by the Thane Police against six persons so far. Four of them have been arrested. A Look Out Circular (LOC) has been issued against the two absconding accused.

Investigators have identified one of the absconding accused, Bijendar Kumar Baleshwar Kumar Sah, a resident of Patna, Bihar, as the alleged mastermind of the scam. Maharashtra Police also arrested his wife, Suman Kumari Gupta, from Patna.

Police are probing the accused's links to similar scams in other States. Officials investigating the case said Bijendar Kumar was allegedly involved in a 2024 Odisha paper leak scam. They also suspect his

involvement in other paper leak cases, including the NEET scam, a senior officer said.

Why do the police suspect a larger network?

Police suspect a larger network because of the way the Maharashtra TET question papers were handled and distributed. The question papers are printed in Agra, where police say papers for other examinations are also printed. Investigators are examining possible locations of the paper leak and the likelihood of a nexus between different groups.

According to the investigation, the MSCE has signed a contract with Mahim Patram Private Limited, a company based in Agra and registered in Delhi, to print the TET papers. Police said the company has been handling similar contracts for the past 60 years.

As per procedure, MSCE hands over sealed question papers to the company about two months before the examination. These papers are then printed under security protocols and transported to examination centres.

Police are investigating the possibility of a leak at any stage in this process, which spans over two months. "After handing over the sealed papers, MSCE or Maharashtra Education Department officials are not present during printing or the tracking of the papers," police said.

Police teams are also probing the possibility of a leak during the transport of sealed papers to the examination centres. In the current case, the recovered papers carry serial numbers from the Latur, Jalna, and Washim centres. Each centre has a different serial number. This is a security measure put in place to help identify the source of a leak, if one occurs.

So far, 10 different teams have been formed by the SIT probing the case. These teams have travelled to four States, including Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi. Some teams have also visited Latur, Jalna, and Washim in Maharashtra.

The Maharashtra government is considering invoking the stringent provisions of the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act against the accused.

THE GIST

The Maharashtra TET was postponed after police uncovered an alleged question paper leak, leading to the arrest of three accused and an SIT probe into an interstate paper-leak racket.

Investigators suspect the leak is linked to a larger network with possible connections to paper leak cases in other States, and are probing every stage of the printing and distribution process to trace its source.

Why has the govt. notified a new set of telecom rules?

How do the rules change the telecom regulatory framework? What powers does the Act give the govt.?

Aroon Deep

The story so far:

The Telecommunications Act, 2023, saw a clutch of rules being notified this month, namely the Telecommunications (Authorisation for Provision of Principal Telecommunication Services) Rules, 2026; the Telecommunications (Authorisation for Captive Telecommunication Services) Rules, 2026; and the Telecommunications (Authorisation for Provision of Miscellaneous Telecommunication Services) Rules, 2026.

What changes for telecom operators and users?

There are not many operational changes in India's telecom ecosystem due to the parent act or the rules being notified, as

the major objective of the legislation is to simplify the oft-amended Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, which it replaces (along with other accompanying laws, like the Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933).

Along the way, the Union government got some greater powers in the text of the parent statute, such as a definition of "telecommunication" that can be used to regulate messaging apps. (While the government initially denied this, last year the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) tried to force WhatsApp to log out users every six hours from web instances of the service, and to "bind" every user to a SIM, as an anti-spam measure.)

Which provisions of the Act have already been brought into force?

This is, of course, not the beginning of the notification of the Act. As early as 2024, the government notified parts of the law,

such as one that renamed the Universal Service Obligation Fund (where telcos are required to pay into a corpus to fund financially unfeasible telecom infrastructure in remote and isolated areas) to the Digital Bharat Nidhi. Another part of the law that was notified was one that allowed the government to seize telecom infrastructure on national security or war grounds.

More parts of the law that have already been notified in previous months include a replacement for the interception orders, where in spite of an industry and civil society push, the government retained senior officials' powers to issue phone and internet tapping orders.

The specific rules notified this month replace the bulk of the licensing framework for telecom operators. This has been replaced with the term "authorisation," accompanied by

language that simplifies and modifies some of the paperwork that telcos and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have to do. It also adds anti-spam enforcement as an obligation under the Parent Act.

Why are some aspects of the new regime still uncertain?

The new telecom act also recognises satellite internet, but this has been taken away, even as Starlink, the largest satellite internet provider in the world, awaits approvals to launch. "The final Rules have removed explicit references to Global Mobile Personal Communications by Satellite (GMPCS), as contained in the Draft Rules," the law firm Khaitan & Co wrote in a brief. Separately, news reports (and the delay) indicate that the government is yet to give up on concerns of whether it can truly shut off Starlink, seeing how it is used in countries like Iran in defiance of the local government.

At any rate, telcos and ISPs can choose to migrate to this authorisation regime now, or wait until their licenses expire and then apply afresh. As Khaitan & Co pointed out, "a significant volume of operational detail is still awaited ... implementation detail awaits further clarity and remains dependent on further specifications, including the 'sound' track-record criterion, exemption thresholds and technical directions."

THE GIST

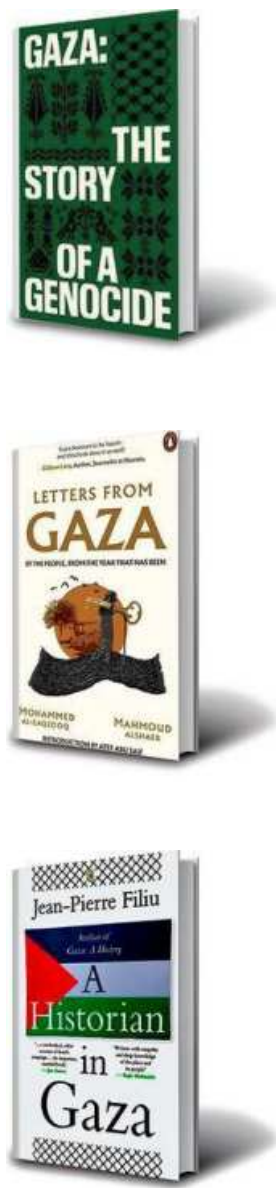
The newly notified rules largely replace the old telecom licensing framework with an authorisation regime, simplify compliance for telecom operators and ISPs, and add anti-spam obligations, while leaving day-to-day operations largely unchanged.

Although several provisions of the Telecommunications Act have already been brought into force, implementation is still incomplete, with satellite internet rules, Starlink approvals, and key operational details yet to be clarified.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Unbearable loss: A mother mourns the loss of her son who was killed in an Israeli airstrike, in central Gaza Strip, on June 21. AP



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

“How is your favourite teacher? I hear that she was operated on recently.”
 “She is in very bad shape. Her husband took her to the hospital again yesterday. The diagnosis was terrible.”
 “You mean the doctors were....”
 “...so they went to get a second opinion. Even then, the diagnosis wasn’t very encouraging. The doctors say that she may have to quit her job.”
 “I am sorry. But the word you are looking for is prognosis.”
 “What?”
 “P.r.o.g.n.o.s.i.s. The first syllable ‘prog’ rhymes like the word ‘frog’, while the second is pronounced like the word ‘no’. The ‘i’ in the final syllable is like the ‘i’ in ‘sit’, ‘sip’, and ‘sick’. The main stress is on the second syllable.”
 “I guessed as much. But tell me, what is the difference between ‘prognosis’ and ‘diagnosis?’”
 “When a doctor examines you after listening to your complaints, he attempts to find out what is wrong with you. He then arrives at a conclusion. This is what we call ‘diagnosis’. For example, the doctor was unable to diagnose what the problem was.”
 “Sounds like a doctor I know. After several tests, my friend Ranjan was diagnosed with vitamin B deficiency.”
 “That’s a good example. The doctor’s diagnosis was that the patient was not getting enough sleep.”
 “You couldn’t have been the patient! You sleep quite a bit in my opinion. Anyway, what does ‘prognosis’ mean?”
 “Once the doctor has finished examining you and telling you what your problem is, he goes on to tell you what your chances of getting better are. He may also inform you of the problems you are likely to have in future because of whatever illness you have.”
 “I see. So what you are saying is that a prognosis is a statement about how a disease that I have will affect me. Is that it?”
 “Exactly!”
 “The doctor tells me what my chances of getting better are. He tells me if my condition will improve, deteriorate, ...”
 “...and so on and so forth. Here’s an example. The prognosis after the operation was for a partial recovery.”
 “In the case of my teacher, the doctor gave us a gloomy prognosis. Does it sound OK?”
 “As far as the example goes, it sounds great. But I wish it didn’t have to be your teacher. I understand that she....”
 “...she is a woman of promises.”
 “...surely, you don’t mean that!”
 “Of course, I do. She has a lot of potential. You could see that she....”
 “...well, in that case, she isn’t a woman of promises, but a woman of promise.”
 “What is the difference between the two? I don’t see any.”
 “When you refer to someone as a man of promise, it means that there is a lot of potential in the man. He has a bright future. My neighbour Mahesh is a batsman of promise.”
 “Many people believe that my cousin Dilip is a poet of promise. But I don’t think he will amount to anything.”
 “You are such an optimist!”
 “Now you tell me what is the meaning of the expression ‘a man of promises?’”
 “It means that the individual makes a lot of promises, but doesn’t keep any of them. It is used in a very negative sense.”
 “Is it a polite way of saying don’t believe the person?”
 “I guess you could say that.”
 Published in *The Hindu* on February 27, 2001

Gaza: a homeland remembered through stories of war and survival

New works from Gaza combine testimonies, poetry, essays, and reportage to document the destruction of the enclave by Israel, capturing the scale of loss and the resilience of those living through the war

Stanly Johny

*I grant you refuge
from hurt and suffering
With words of sacred scripture
I shield the oranges from the sting of
phosphorous
and the shades of cloud from the smog.
I grant you refuge in knowing
that the dust will clear,
and they who fell in love and died
together
will one day laugh.*

Hiba Abu Nada, a Palestinian poet, wrote these lines about life in Gaza. She was 32 when she was killed by an Israeli air strike on her home in Khan Younis on October 20, 2023. Hiba’s poem, ‘I Grant You Refuge’, is one of the several writings that make *Gaza: The Story of a Genocide* (Verso Books), edited by Fatima Bhutto and Sonia Faleiro, both special and powerful. These are stories about Gaza and Palestinian life told by the Palestinians themselves.

Holding onto memory
The war Israel launched on Gaza after Hamas’s October 7 attack has been devastating for the Palestinians in many ways. A United Nations Commission of Inquiry has found that Israel committed genocide against Palestinians in the tiny enclave, which was home to 2.3 million people before the war. International human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and Israeli organisations such as B’Tselem

and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel also concluded that Israel committed genocide. A report released by a UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on June 23 found that Israeli troops, who control roughly 60% of Gaza, continue to commit genocide by deliberately targeting Palestinian children in the strip.

The Story of a Genocide, a collection of personal testimonies, poems, artwork, essays, and frontline reportage, bears witness to the horrors inflicted on the Palestinians. Gaza has been cut off from the rest of the world by Israeli forces. Selected journalists were only able to travel to the territory while embedded with the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). But the stories of Gaza were brought to the world by ordinary Palestinians. And they paid a heavy price for it. Israel targeted and killed hundreds of local journalists in the enclave, including some of the authors featured in the book.

The book narrates the stories of a family that lost 21 members, the brutality of Israeli settler violence, and the banality of torture of Palestinians by the IDF. Yara Hawari argues in her chapter that Israel functions as a regional outpost of U.S. imperialism, while Mosab Abu Toha offers a deeply painful account of a man struggling to keep his family alive under Israeli bombardments. These are memories of a homeland lost to history.

Palestinians, in their own words
Letters from Gaza: By the People, From the Year That Has Been (Penguin) offers a similar account – a ringside view of the

plight of Palestinians living in the besieged territory. The book, edited by Mohammed Al-Zaqooq and Mahmoud Alshaer, carries memoirs, poetry, and reportage – all by the Palestinians themselves. “Every time I leave the house, / I bid him farewell / for I may not come back,” writes Haider al-Ghazali in a powerful poem. Some of these writers and translators were killed in Israeli strikes. Most of them were even unaware that their works had been translated and published.

Mahmoud Jouda writes how Palestinians sustained their art even in the midst of genocide. Families who gathered in camps to protect themselves from Israeli strikes listened to songs on the radio or sang during the intervals between the bombings. “When hope is gone, song remains,” Jouda writes. *Letters from Gaza* contains more than 50 letters, written in prose and poetry, portraying a picture of life, struggle, and death in Gaza, laced with undying hope.

‘Nightmare within a nightmare’
Jean-Pierre Filiu, a French historian who had visited Gaza several times before October 7, 2023, writes in *A Historian in Gaza* (Context) that “nothing had prepared me for what I saw and experienced” in the territory between December 19, 2024 and January 21, 2025. Filiu, who is also the author of *Gaza: A History*, says the enclave was the “biggest outdoor prison in the world”; “a lost paradise”. He went to the territory in coordination with the IDF. In the book, he records what he saw and heard on the

ground – hospitals being bombed, medics, children and even pregnant women being killed; UN aid convoys targeted; and water treatment plants bulldozed. He writes about the systematic destruction of Gaza’s civil society and its impact on public life, while also highlighting the resilience of the local population. Filiu says the Gaza he knew ceased to exist after October 7.

Filiu, who travelled through Rafah, Khan Younis, Deir al-Balah and the coastal region of Al-Mawasi – the so-called ‘humanitarian zone’ – also talked to Palestinians who describe Hamas’s rule of the enclave under the Israeli blockade as “the nightmare within a nightmare.” He sheds light on “inter-Palestinian violence” and the brutal punishments meted out by Hamas for petty crimes.

Filiu had condemned the Hamas attack immediately after October 7 and had called for the release of the hostages. But the Israeli response, he argues, was disproportional, systematically destroying the enclave.

The book’s main limitation is, as Filiu himself admits, is that it is a story written from the ‘humanitarian zone’. “Aside from a return trip from Kerem Shalom to Khan Younis, out by night, back by day, I never left the invisible boundaries of the ‘humanitarian zone’, which you cross at your own risk and peril,” he writes. If what he saw in the Israel-controlled ‘humanitarian zone’ prompted him to say that Gaza was abandoned by the world, one could only imagine what would be the plight of Palestinians living outside these zones.

THE DAILY QUIZ

From records to mascots: next in the FIFA World Cup quiz series

Soorya Prakash N

- QUESTION 1**
Who holds the record of having scored the fastest goal in World Cup history?
- QUESTION 2**
Who is the oldest player in World Cup history to win a tournament?
- QUESTION 3**
What are the official mascots for the 2026 World Cup edition?
- QUESTION 4**
Which is the only African nation to qualify for the Semi-final of a World Cup so far?
- QUESTION 5**
Which spectator phenomenon started in the 1986 World Cup edition for the first time is now popularised by audiences watching other sports too?



Visual Question:
Name this player who scored the first-ever Golden Goal in the Football World Cup history? WIKIPEDIA

Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz: 1. An easy one. In 2008, this documentary, which follows the life of a young girl in rural Varanasi, won the Oscar. Name the documentary and its director. **Ans: Smile Pinki; Megan Mylan**
 2. Documentary filmmaking became more mainstream in the 1930s and 1940s due to a movement in the U.K., which wished to use films to educate the masses. What was the movement called? Who was it led by? **Ans: The Documentary Film Movement; John Grierson**
 3. Triumph of the Will, Olympia and Victory of the Faith are documentaries directed by the same person. Name the filmmaker. Also, mention the other commonality that these films have. **Ans: Leni Riefenstahl; they are Nazi propaganda documentaries**

4. This documentary won the National Film Award for Best Investigative Documentary in the 1990s. Last month, the director of the film alleged that his documentary was removed from YouTube for being “too violent”. Name the film and the director. **Ans: Father, Son, and Holy War; Anand Patwardhan**
 5. Which was the first Indian documentary to be nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature? **Ans: Writing with Fire**
 Visual: This duo won the Best Documentary Feature at the 97th Academy Awards. Name them and the film. **Ans: Basel Adra and Yuval Abraham; No Other Land**
Early Birds: K.N. Viswanathan | Prudosh Mitra | Sunil Madhavan | Arun Kumar Singh | Prem Nath Tiwari

Please send in your answers to dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Word of the day

Rigmarole:
a set of confused and meaningless statements
Synonyms: gibberish, nonsense, rhetoric
Usage: I don’t want to go through all the rigmarole just to fill out one form.
Pronunciation: newsth.live/rigmarole
International Phonetic Alphabet: /rɪgmərəʊl/

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

Survival of the wittiest? Scientists debate if wit helped evolve language

By identifying 'living fossils' in modern human speech, some researchers are arguing that language evolved the way life evolved; the theory suggests verbal humour was sexually selected over physical fighting, using visual brain regions to build the foundation of complex grammar

Rohini Subrahmanyam
BENGALURU

Language is a key aspect of human life that most likely came up more than a lakh years ago – but linguists still disagree on how exactly it evolved. The influential U.S. linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky proposed that complex modern language emerged suddenly, a theory that many linguists still stick to. But some believe the languages we speak today, with all the complex grammatical rules nestled within them, must have evolved gradually, the way our cognitive abilities evolved.

Ljiljana Progovac, a linguist in Wayne State University in the U.S., is one of the latter. In a recent study, she argued that humans' ability to be witty with their words could have been sexually selected for, in a similar way peahens select peacocks with a brighter plumage. She said she believes the idea of "survival of the wittiest" needs to be added to the complex picture of human evolution.

Using syntactic theory, which says sentences have an inherent hierarchical structure to them, she reconstructed what she believes is the earliest stage of grammar: a combination of two words at a time, a verb and a noun (such as "eat food" or "seek truth"). Syntax – the rules that dictate how words and phrases should be used together to form meaningful sentences, grammar, and language – must have evolved gradually from these simple verb-noun compounds, she said.

"By deconstructing language evolution and coming up with the first stage, you can actually see why the next stage would evolve, because [the first stage] already provides a foundation."

'Living fossils of language'

She then realised many modern languages also have such verb-noun compounds, like "pickpocket", "killjoy", "crybaby", and "scatterbrain" in English.

"So then, because they resemble the stage that I reconstructed, I called them fossils, living fossils of language," Dr. Progovac said. "Because they show properties that I predicted the earliest stages had to have."

Some believe language does not leave behind fossils as evidence, but Dr. Progovac's findings challenge that notion.

"And sure, we are not going to find language in the stones," she said. "But these are even better fossils, because in a way, language never died. It just kept building and living in different generations."

According to her, these verb noun compounds mostly seemed to describe humans in a funny, typically negative way – like witty banter.

Previous neuroimaging studies have shown that women are very responsive to humour in men. Men, on the other hand, are less responsive to women being funny. Another study that analysed classified ads for partners and later followed up with the men and women who posted the ads showed that men seemed to prefer women who laughed at the jokes they cracked.

These studies suggest a type of sexual dimorphism in humans, Dr. Progovac said. Thus, this ability to combine words in a humorous way – which may have existed during the earliest stages of language – could have been sexually selected for during the course of evolution, according to her.

"From the very beginning of language, if it started something like this, there was selection for the genetic makeup of those individuals who were just a little better at this game," she continued. "They would have been more noticed, they would have left more offspring and generation after generation, this would have helped evolve language further and further."

Wit over fights

Her other argument is that humans who evolved to be quick-witted and to 'fight' with words rather than physically could have adapted better.

"Human beings are, to a large extent, characterised by their preference for cognitive contests, for competing with words, and not with physical fighting," she said.

Another hint that these verb-noun compounds could have been involved in sexual selection is that there are many more of them than one would expect, or even need, in a language.

In her analysis, Dr. Progovac found that hundreds of such words have existed in the English language in the past but have slowly fallen out of use. In the mediaeval times, there may as well have been thousands of such words in use. This is



A group of people enjoys stand-up comedy. Based on her findings, Ljiljana Progovac said she believes the emergence of very simple grammar, like combining just a verb and a noun to give rise to many playful words to describe others in a funny way, could have played a role in human evolution. FILE PHOTO

somewhat analogous to the peacock's feathers being more extravagant than they probably need to be to catch a female's attention.

Dr. Progovac is also particularly intrigued by these linguistic "living fossils" because they can now help test hypotheses. Using neuroimaging experiments, she decided to test how different regions of people's brains react when they hear these syntactically simple verb-noun compounds like 'killjoy' or 'pickpocket', versus the more complex "er" ending words like "joy killer" or "pocket picker".

She found that a brain region called the fusiform gyrus – which evolved earlier in mammalian brains than the regions involved in processing language – was more active when people heard the verb-noun compounds versus the "er" ending words. This region is also responsible for visual processing and is thought to help the brain process imageability and metaphors – which, by their nature, are very visually descriptive.

The words they used, like "scatterbrain" or "rattlesnake", are also very visual: they "paint a picture that is more abstract," Dr. Progovac said. "Like when we say 'scatterbrain', we do not mean literally scattering somebody's brain. But [that that] somebody is absent-minded." Because these words were more visual and grammatically more simple, she realised they were being processed by the visual area of the brain, "which is certainly much more ancient than any language areas of the brain," Dr. Progovac said.

A tendency to be abstract

Based on her findings, Dr. Progovac said she believes the emergence of very simple grammar, like combining just a verb and a noun to give rise to many playful words to describe others in a funny or derogatory way, could have played a major role in human evolution.

"Quick wittedness and wittiness, more generally humour, was a very important aspect of human cognitive evolution," she said.

Prof. Chomsky also believes the primary driver for the emergence of language may have been the need to construct and organise internal thoughts, rather than communicate outwardly. One reason for this is that language has a

The findings by Dr. Progovac of the Wayne State University in the U.S. challenge the notion put forward by the likes of Noam Chomsky, suggesting that language evolved gradually for people to communicate better – or, more specifically, to communicate in an entertaining way

tendency to be abstract and ambiguous rather than crystal clear at all times.

But Dr. Progovac's findings challenge that notion, suggesting that language evolved gradually for people to communicate better – or, more specifically, to communicate in an entertaining way.

Kenny Smith, a linguist at the University of Edinburgh, said he agrees that humans do not just use language in a dry "information transfer" fashion. Finding new, witty ways to express oneself could have helped in driving linguistic creativity and metaphors, in turn acting as an engine for language to change as well.

"Historical linguistics literature is full of examples of language change that seem to be driven by people trying to express the same old kinds of concepts in new entertaining ways," he said.

'Revival of the wittiest'

But even though he broadly agreed with the functional importance of linguistic creativity, he is less confident about inferring the earliest stage of language from that perspective.

"I think it is good to think about additional payoffs you can get from combining words, and one of them is you can start combining words in kind of surprising metaphorical ways," he said. "That does not necessarily mean that the very earliest stages of language evolution were two-word combinations that were [created] with that goal in mind" (emphasis in the original).

"It is hard to fit an evolutionary history for a potential function," he added.

Dr. Smith is also sceptical that sexual selection could necessarily have led to a "survival of the wittiest".

"I do not know why it [is] not about trying to make people in general like you,

rather than specifically like members of the opposite sex. My observation from hanging out with my male friends is that they are constantly trying to make each other laugh," he said. "It is not because they are competing [or] trying to attract people. It is just because they want their friends to like them. They want to be funny. If you are able to express yourself in an entertaining way, people will want to collaborate with you, hang out with you, work with you, not fight with you. And that is a payoff regardless of whether that is a potential sexual partner or not."

Both men and women are also equally capable of being witty, so the idea of sexual dimorphism does not map well onto human language, Dr. Smith explained – the same way that it would in songbirds.

"It does not really match with how the world looks in societies where men and women both have a more equal role."

Sexism in society

He also said he thinks any differences we see in sexually selective behaviour says more about sexism in society rather than differences in language abilities specifically.

"It is really hard to separate it from just a broader society where males and females are expected to have these different stereotypical roles they are supposed to take on," he said.

The idea of pressures that could have favoured creativity – that could have, over longer timescales, selected for individuals who are good at expressing themselves in new, entertaining ways – is interesting to think about, Dr. Smith acknowledged. But it would be challenging to identify if the selection is specific to linguistic creativity or if it is for broadly creative individuals who also happen to have a way with words.

"Not just for language, [but] how you extract resources from the world or how you interact with other people, being quick on your feet mentally probably pays off in a wide number of domains," he said. "And so maybe wittiness in language is just a reflection of that general selection for being innovative, creative, adaptable. It is hard to imagine circumstances where that's not an advantage."

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A study has found that the risk of a batter getting out was higher when part of a left-right pairing than for a same-handed partnership. REUTERS

Common cricket strategy may be a myth, data analysis finds

Vasudevan Mukunth

In cricket, few strategies are as deeply ingrained as the left-right batting combination: where of the two batters at the crease, one is left-handed and other right-handed. Coaches, commentators, and even players have argued that every time the batters switch ends when they run, the bowler and captain have to adjust their tactics and field placements. The wisdom is that this constant change will disrupt the bowler's rhythm and allow for more runs. However, a new working paper by economists Johan Fourie and Krige Siebrits, of Stellenbosch University in South Africa, has concluded that this wisdom might be a myth.

"This paper provides the first rigorously controlled test of cricket's conventional wisdom that left-right batting partnerships provide a scoring advantage," they wrote. The duo analysed a database of 96,686 partnerships and 34 lakh deliveries across men's international cricket – including Tests, ODIs, and T20Is – from 2001 and 2025. And they found that the left-right combination conferred no advantage.

Fourie wrote on his blog that India coach Gautam Gambhir and assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate, as well as former South Africa captain Graeme Smith and his batting partner Herschelle Gibbs are strong supporters of the idea.

Instead, he and Siebrits found that the wisdom could have persisted because left-handed batters have been, on average, better than right-handed ones even though the latter are more common. Specifically, they reported that mixed-hand partnerships could have seemed more productive because they included very talented left-handed batters rather than because the batters disrupted the rhythm of elite bowlers. They found this because once they controlled for the individual quality of the batsmen and for the match conditions, the putative advantage of the left-right combination vanished from the data.

Their study also took a closer look at ball-by-ball data to check whether a bowler is more likely to bowl a bad ball immediately after the batters have changed ends. According to their analysis, bowlers' performance did drop slightly after the batsmen had switched ends – however, this did not depend on the batter's handedness. Put differently, bowlers would have been equally disrupted by two right-handed batters changing strike.

Finally, the analysis uncovered a potential disadvantage of sticking with a left-right combination. The duo found that the risk of a batter being dismissed was actually higher when part of a mixed-hand partnership than for a same-handed partnership. In other words, the left-right tactic could be counterproductive because it forces a batsman to play in a position where they may be less comfortable. But the wisdom wasn't entirely wrong, at least according to the analysis: the duo found a small exception in T20I matches. While the average benefit of the combination was still zero, mixed-hand partnerships in T20Is occasionally provided a small boost in the middle of the team's batting innings. This, the authors figured, could be because of the highly tactical nature of this format, which incentivises match-ups against specific types of bowlers together with rules that favour batting. But overall, Fourie and Siebrits concluded, the only wisdom that the data supported was that a team's composition should be based on skills alone rather than include the batter's handedness as well.

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— IN 1932 —
BECAUSE THE TRUTH
INVOLVES US ALL

Signs of resilience, but risks need monitoring

IN THE fourth quarter of the last financial year, the Indian economy grew at a healthy pace, despite widespread disruptions to energy markets and global trade in March due to the West Asia conflict. In the months thereafter, even as the conflict dragged on, some of the high-frequency indicators suggest that the economic momentum has sustained to an extent. This is evident in e-way bill generation, PMI indices and electricity consumption, as the finance ministry's latest monthly economic review points out. However, as the report also notes, there are some signs of moderation. For instance, the index of eight core industries grew by just 1.1 per cent during April-May.

India entered this crisis with high growth, low inflation and strong bank and corporate balance sheets. These, as RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra notes in the latest financial stability report, have "helped preserve macro-financial stability". The health of the financial system can be gauged across a range of indicators. Banks have seen a decline in bad loans — gross NPAs were at 1.8 per cent in March 2026, there were no signs of any build-up in stress. Their capital position remained comfortable — capital to risk weighted assets ratio was at 17.7 per cent — the liquidity buffers were strong and profitability indicators stable. In fact, the stress tests conducted by the central bank suggest that banks can cope with adverse shocks. Funding, though, is a challenge. Similarly, the corporate sector also appears to be in sound health. Leverage continued to fall, while its ability to service its debt obligations showed improvement. Yet, despite this, private corporate investments remain depressed. Alongside, as household debt has continued to edge upwards — standing at 45.5 per cent by the end of September last year — it is a matter of concern that borrowing for consumption purposes, not asset creation, is the key driver of loans.

Uncertainty around West Asia persists. A deficient monsoon so far has impacted kharif sowing, while a strengthening El Niño may pose risks for the ensuing winter-spring rabi crop. Going by the prolonged food inflation during 2023-24, which was also an El Niño year, this could have implications for inflation and demand — between July 2023 and December 2024, food inflation averaged 8.5 per cent. These internal and external risks need close monitoring.

Trump could use new tools after court snub

THE US Supreme Court's decision to uphold birthright citizenship comes as a blow to President Donald Trump's crusade against immigration and a reprieve for millions of immigrants, including the Indian diaspora. The executive order, signed on his first day back in office last year, sought to deny citizenship to children born in the US if neither parent was a US citizen or lawful permanent resident, including those whose parents were legally in the country on temporary visas. But the text of the Constitution — the Fourteenth Amendment — is unambiguous, reinforced by well over a century of legal precedent: People born in the US are citizens. Few expected the court to endorse the Trump administration's argument that children born to parents who entered illegally were not "subject to the jurisdiction" of the US and not entitled to citizenship. But even in defeat, Trump has succeeded in politicising birthright citizenship, an issue that was once the subject of broad bipartisan consensus in America.

The US is home to an estimated 5.4 million people of Indian origin — the largest Indian diaspora — accounting for roughly 1.6 per cent of the US population. After Mexicans, Indians constitute the second-largest immigrant group. They are not only the largest recipients of H-1B visas but also the nationality most affected by employment-based green card backlogs because of caps that are country-specific. Many professionals spend years, even decades, waiting for a permanent status, raising families while on temporary visas. Without birthright citizenship, children born during that period would enter the same uncertain immigration pipeline as their parents. Trump's order was also detrimental to America's own interests. Foreign-born workers make up nearly one-fifth of the US labour force, and a sharp reduction would carry significant economic costs.

Trump has threatened to use Congress to abolish birthright citizenship in response to the court verdict. Even if the constitutional guarantee survives, it is only one setback for an administration that has already enacted hundreds of immigration restrictions, contributing to net migration to the US turning negative for the first time in half a century. The Supreme Court's judgment may have preserved one of America's oldest constitutional promises, but immigrants remain vulnerable and Trump's crackdown on immigration is far from over.

A bit like a volcano, AI walks through the door

A DOG walked into a tavern and said, "I can't see a thing. I'll open this one." That's it — that's the joke. To get the humour, one would need cultural context from one of the oldest civilisations, Sumer (c. 3300-1900 BCE). Missing context is one of the ways in which an ancient text, though present, may still be "lost". In other cases, the text's physical condition may prevent it from being read. For instance, the eruption of Mt Vesuvius in Italy in 79 CE led to a whole library of scrolls being carbonised and preserved, but left too fragile to open. Until AI walked in and said, "I'll open this one."

A scroll from the Herculaneum library has now been "unwrapped", though not literally — it was scanned using high-resolution X-rays, virtually reconstructed and flattened so that a machine-learning tool could bring out the traces of ink, allowing scholars to read the text. It turned out to be a treatise on ethics, perhaps authored by the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus. Hundreds of scrolls remain to be opened, and both the data and the code are open to all. Classicists are chomping at the bit, talking about all the ancient texts they dream of rediscovering. Some have brought up the lost dialogues of Aristotle, called a "river of gold" by Cicero. The nerdiest may yearn for the dictionary of the Etruscan language written by the nerdiest of emperors, Claudius.

This speaks to the duality of AI in academia: While it has arrived as a menace in the classroom, the possibilities it opens up for both scientists and humanities researchers are mouth-watering. It's destruction and preservation wrapped up in one — a bit like a volcanic eruption.

As US reshapes its Asia strategy, India must rewire its regional leadership

THE UNITED STATES is reshaping its Asia strategy as it accepts that China can no longer be contained at an acceptable economic or military cost. This shift is reducing India's strategic importance in Washington's calculations while expanding US engagement across South Asia. As both the US and China compete for influence in India's neighbourhood, New Delhi must act to preserve its strategic autonomy and rewire regional leadership.

The shift in American approach is driven by declining influence and a series of strategic setbacks. In Europe, the Ukraine war has imposed high financial and military costs on Washington, which now wants European nations to shoulder more of NATO's burden. In the Middle East, the Iran war proved costly for the US. Iran was not subdued, while attacks on US bases in Gulf countries weakened confidence in America's security guarantees and made close ties with Washington appear riskier for regional stability. Old US partners such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE are expanding ties with China.

In the Indo-Pacific, despite housing thousands of troops and maintaining military alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and many ASEAN countries, and being part of frameworks such as the Quad and the Australia-UK-US Security Partnership, the US faces a different reality. China has become the largest trading partner for most economies in the region, and Asian manufacturing supply chains remain deeply tied to Chinese industry. This economic dependence has made many governments reluctant to fully align with US strategic objectives against Beijing. Malaysia's

withdrawal from the trade deal with the US is an example.

As Washington recognises these limits, its China strategy is changing. Instead of trying to contain Beijing, it increasingly appears to be treating China as a de facto equal — a G2 partner. In the Asia-Pacific, the US is seeking to preserve its influence without openly confronting China. It has become noticeably quieter on issues such as the Quad and Taiwan to avoid provoking Beijing.

Washington's view of India is also undergoing a shift. For nearly two decades, India was central to Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy and the Quad was a democratic counterweight to China. However, Washington now sees India not as a key strategic partner but more as a large market for American goods and technology and a subordinate partner. The February 7 US-India joint statement calls for India to align its economic and security interests more closely with those of America. Strategic cooperation is increasingly giving way to greater US strategic influence over India.

The US now appears to be following China's playbook by expanding its engagement across South Asia. China has spent more than a decade building its "string of pearls" through ports, infrastructure financing and connectivity projects in countries around India. Its regional presence now includes the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Gwadar Port, Hambantota Port, Colombo Port City, Belt and Road projects in Nepal, major investments in Bangladesh and infrastructure projects across the Maldives.

Rather than treating South



AJAY SRIVASTAVA

India cannot stop great-power rivalry in South Asia, but must avoid becoming an object of external power-politics. It should preserve strategic autonomy by keeping relations with both Washington and Beijing transactional

Asia as India's natural sphere of influence, Washington is deepening defence, maritime, digital and infrastructure cooperation with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives. The appointment of Sergio Gor as both US Ambassador to India and Special Envoy for South and Central Asia reinforces the impression that Washington increasingly views South Asia as an integrated strategic space rather than through an India-centric lens.

This competition will give Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives greater leverage to play India, China and the US against one another to extract economic and political concessions.

Both Washington and Beijing also have an interest in keeping Pakistan strategically relevant as a counterweight to India. Pakistan has positioned itself as a swing state by maintaining close ties with the US, China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Iran. As the world's only nuclear-armed Muslim country, it holds growing strategic value in West Asia. Its ability to engage both Sunni states (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Turkey) and Shia states (primarily Iran) further strengthens its regional influence. As the US and China view Pakistan as an important partner, India's strategic environment becomes more challenging.

While India's trade surplus with South Asia has grown from about US\$6.7 billion to nearly US\$20 billion over the past two decades, its political and strategic challenges remain. SAARC is largely dysfunctional, and relations with Bangladesh, Nepal and the Maldives con-

tinue to fluctuate. Pakistan is a failed state thriving on external steroids. Intensifying US-China competition is likely to deepen these challenges.

India cannot stop great-power rivalry in South Asia, but must avoid becoming an object of external power-politics. The play-book is simple. India must strengthen its economic base by prioritising manufacturing, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, critical minerals, defence production, and other advanced industries, while reducing its dependence on imported industrial inputs from China.

It should preserve strategic autonomy by keeping relations with both Washington and Beijing transactional and judging each issue on its merits. India must build connectivity projects, more responsive development partnerships and consistent political engagement with most neighbours.

Finally, India must avoid actions that create confusion about its longstanding positions. For example, India has consistently rejected third-party mediation with Pakistan, as it did by dismissing US President Donald Trump's claim of mediation during Operation Sindoor. It should therefore avoid forums that invite outside powers into South Asian affairs. India's high-level participation in the June 25-26 South Asia Dialogue in Colombo, alongside representatives from Pakistan, the US, the UK, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, blurred that position.

At a time when both Washington and Beijing are expanding their influence in South Asia, India should avoid actions that could be seen as accepting a larger role for external powers in its neighbourhood.

The writer is founder, GTRI

PPP 2.0 should focus on matching capital to risk



ARVIND MAYARAM

TWENTY YEARS ago, I was among those involved in developing India's public-private partnership (PPP) framework. It transformed airports, highways and ports, but also produced stressed assets following the global financial crisis and the domestic slowdown. As confidence waned, public capital expenditure replaced PPPs as the principal model for financing infrastructure. That retreat was understandable. It was also a mistake.

Today, India faces a challenge far greater than the one we confronted two decades ago. By March 2025, the infrastructure pipeline had expanded to more than 13,000 projects with an aggregate value approaching Rs 185 lakh crore. Yet this is only a fraction of what will be required as India pursues the goal of becoming a developed economy by 2047. Simultaneously, it must finance the green transition — renewable energy, transmission, green hydrogen, climate-resilient cities and adaptation infrastructure. Recent estimates suggest that achieving net zero would require investments exceeding \$20 trillion by 2070. No country has financed a transformation of this scale without mobilising vast pools of private capital. India's leading corporates will develop and operate many of these assets, but their balance sheets cannot finance investments of this magnitude. India needs not merely more capital, but a fundamentally different financing architecture. The central lesson from the first generation of PPPs is not that partnerships failed. It is that the financing model failed.

Infrastructure assets generate economic value for 30-50 years. Yet many PPP projects were financed through bank loans with repayment schedules of just 7-10 years. Projects therefore carried their heaviest debt-service burden when revenues were most uncertain. When growth slowed after 2008, revenues underperformed while debt obligations remained fixed, contributing to rising NPAs and undermining confidence in the model.

The central flaw was simple: Long-lived assets were financed with short-lived capital. The challenge today is no longer merely capital scarcity. It is capital circulation — matching the right capital to the right risk at the right stage of a project's life cycle.

Governments are uniquely placed to finance high-risk phases such as project preparation, land acquisition and construction.

But once projects stabilise, scarce public capital should not remain locked in mature assets. Ownership and financing should progressively migrate to investors whose liabilities match long-duration infrastructure.

The opportunity is enormous. Global pension funds, insurance companies and sovereign wealth funds control more than \$110 trillion, much of it seeking stable, inflation-linked, long-term returns. India has already created the building blocks. InvITs have emerged as credible investment vehicles, while the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund has demonstrated the ability to attract global institutional capital. What is missing is a mechanism through which government capital, developer capital and institutional capital can continuously replace one another as project risks decline.

This is where circular finance becomes relevant. Government-supported finance and developers should fund projects through construction. Once revenues stabilise, InvITs should acquire operational assets, allowing governments and developers to recycle capital into new projects. As risks decline further, high-cost bank debt should be refinanced through infrastructure debt funds and ultimately held by pension funds, insurance companies and other long-term investors. The cost of capital should decline as project risks decline. Today's financing architecture often does the opposite.

That is why the RBI should mandate dynamic risk-based repricing of infrastructure loans. Banks currently retain construction-stage risk premia long after projects have been de-risked, removing incentives for refinancing and capital recycling. Equally important is reviving infrastructure debt funds as the bridge between operational infrastructure and long-term institutional investors.

Every rupee locked indefinitely in a mature infrastructure asset is a rupee unavailable for financing the next highway, transmission line or renewable-energy project. The first generation of PPPs sought to mobilise private capital. The second must ensure that the same capital finances successive generations of infrastructure. In an economy that must build, decarbonise and maintain fiscal discipline, capital circulation may prove as important as capital mobilisation.

The writer is former finance secretary, Government of India

Hind Rajab's voice carries a warning and a message



RAJNI BAKSHI

ONE MORNING last week, I was reading about Josef Mengele's horrific deeds in Nazi Germany. Later that same day, I saw the film *The Voice of Hind Rajab*. Both accounts of wanton cruelty tell us something terrifying about our present.

Mengele's unspeakable torture of Jewish people, particularly children, as described by Claudio Magris in *Danube*, draws attention to more than a monstrous personal pathology. This medical doctor, in the name of scientific experimentation, enjoyed inflicting pain. As Magris highlights, it was the system created by the Nazis that enabled Mengele's evil to destroy countless lives. *The Voice of Hind Rajab* tells the real-life story of the workers at a rescue centre who kept talking to the trapped child over a cell phone, while they struggled desperately to arrange a rescue. Throughout Hind's ordeal, an ambulance was only eight minutes away. But the rescuers were prevented from reaching the child. If the ambulance moved without a "green light" from the Israeli army, its staff would be killed. Eventually, even though the ambulance was granted the "green light", Hind and the rescuers were killed by the Israeli army. At one point, one of the staff at the rescue centre cries out in mind-numbing anguish that the Israeli army has gadgets that will show that there is someone alive in the crushed vehicle. Why is no one getting the child out of the wreckage?

Hind Rajab's story reminds us of a terrifying truth that affects all of us. Namely, the rupture of action from conscience. This happens at two levels: Systemic and individual. Most atrocities of the 20th century were done by people who claimed they were just doing their job. This is what Adolf Eichmann, who served virtually as CEO of the project to exterminate Jews, said at his trial in Jerusalem. Listening to him led Hannah Arendt to coin the term "banality of evil". While the systemic dimension produces dramatic events, the individual dimension may be more insidious and dangerous. For this causes otherwise law-abiding and moderately moral beings to feel so much fear and hatred towards some "other" that anything done to this "other" seems justified.

The ongoing conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is just one manifestation of this phenomenon, gathering momentum across the world — including India. I belong to the generation born in the 1950s, brought up to believe that humanity had learned its lesson: Horrors like the Holocaust, Hiroshima-Nagasaki and Partition violence would not be allowed to happen again. To many young people today, we oldies seem to have "fallen" for a false and naïve assumption. Actually, we never "assumed" that the 21st century would be more humane. What we do have is the faith that societies can learn from mistakes, and each individual act of goodness and compassion counts. Often, rejection of this faith is nothing but moral laziness dressed up as nihilism. Yes, the material power of the tank that crushed the car with the child inside must be dealt with. Cruelty and injustice must be stopped. The question is: How? We may not know how our actions will eventually overcome systemic injustice. Yet every time we stand up for compassion, every time we refuse to join those baying for the blood of some "other", an essential truth is reaffirmed. That every act of putting conscience ahead of action counts.

Bakshi is the founder of the YouTube channel 'Ahimsa Conversations'

40 YEARS AGO

July 1, 1986



Mixed response to bandh

AUTHORITIES TIGHTENED security measures all over the state to meet any situation arising out of a bandh call given by some militant organisations, the Hindu Shiv Sena, and the youth wing of the Akali Dal (Badal). The bandh call was supported largely in urban areas in the state while it failed to evoke any response in the rural areas. Barring minor incidents, the situation in Punjab remained peaceful.

No newspaper on July 2

IN A totally arbitrary and hostile move, the Government of India has tampered with the

recommendations of the wage board for journalists and non-journalists on the extent of interim relief. Its deliberate action has at once destroyed the sanctity of the wage board and the value of its work. As a protest against this, our office will remain closed on July 1, 1986. Consequently, the *Indian Express* will not appear on July 2.

Pay panel 'unjust' to employees

THE CONFEDERATION of the Central Government Employees and Workers described the recommendations of the Fourth Pay Commission as "highly unjust and disappointing". The Confederation secretary general, S K

Vyas, said the commission has caused a major injustice to the employees by fixing the date of implementation of the recommendations on January 1, 1986.

Rs 150 hike for infantry soldiers

THE STARTING salary for an infantry soldier in the Indian Army will be Rs 1,020, according to the recommendations of the Fourth Pay Commission, presented to the government on Monday. This will represent a rise of about Rs 150 over the existing total emoluments.

There was no edition on July 2, 1986. The above stories are from the July 1, 1986 edition.



● **WHAT THE OTHERS SAY**
Israel must rid itself of the government behind the settler revolution.
—Haaretz, Israel

Can Mamdani effect break through cultural barriers of American conservatism?



THAROORTHINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

THE RECENT June 2026 New York congressional primaries have sent shockwaves through the national Democratic establishment, signalling a seismic realignment rather than a mere localised shift. A progressive slate of democratic socialists endorsed by Mayor Zohran Mamdani has pulled off an unprecedented sweep by unseating entrenched heavyweight incumbents like Dan Goldman and Adriano Espaillat (the latter, the powerful chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus). While Indians took a keen interest in one of their own, Mira Nair's son no less, contesting the most powerful job in New York, they should also be paying attention to the wider impact he is having on New York State politics (and, by implication, US politics).

This decisive victory has catapulted democratic socialists Darializa Avila Chevalier and Claire Valdez, alongside leftist ally Brad Lander, onto a clear path to Congress. The Democratic primary almost guarantees the election outcome, since New Yorkers overwhelmingly vote Democratic. This clean sweep proves that the democratic socialist movement in New York is no longer just an insurgent faction within the majority party, but has effectively captured the institutional steering wheel of the city's Democratic electorate.

These three primary outcomes dealt a stinging blow to establishment figures like House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, who campaigned heavily for the moderate incumbents, and exposed a deep ideological rift in the party heading into the national midterm elections in November. Further, because a central pillar of these primary challenges was sharp dissent against current US foreign policy regarding Israel's war in Gaza, these victories demonstrate that foreign policy can, perhaps counterintuitively, dictate local turnout in deep-blue urban areas. The Gaza and Iran wars were both unpopular, but American voters are rarely swayed by foreign

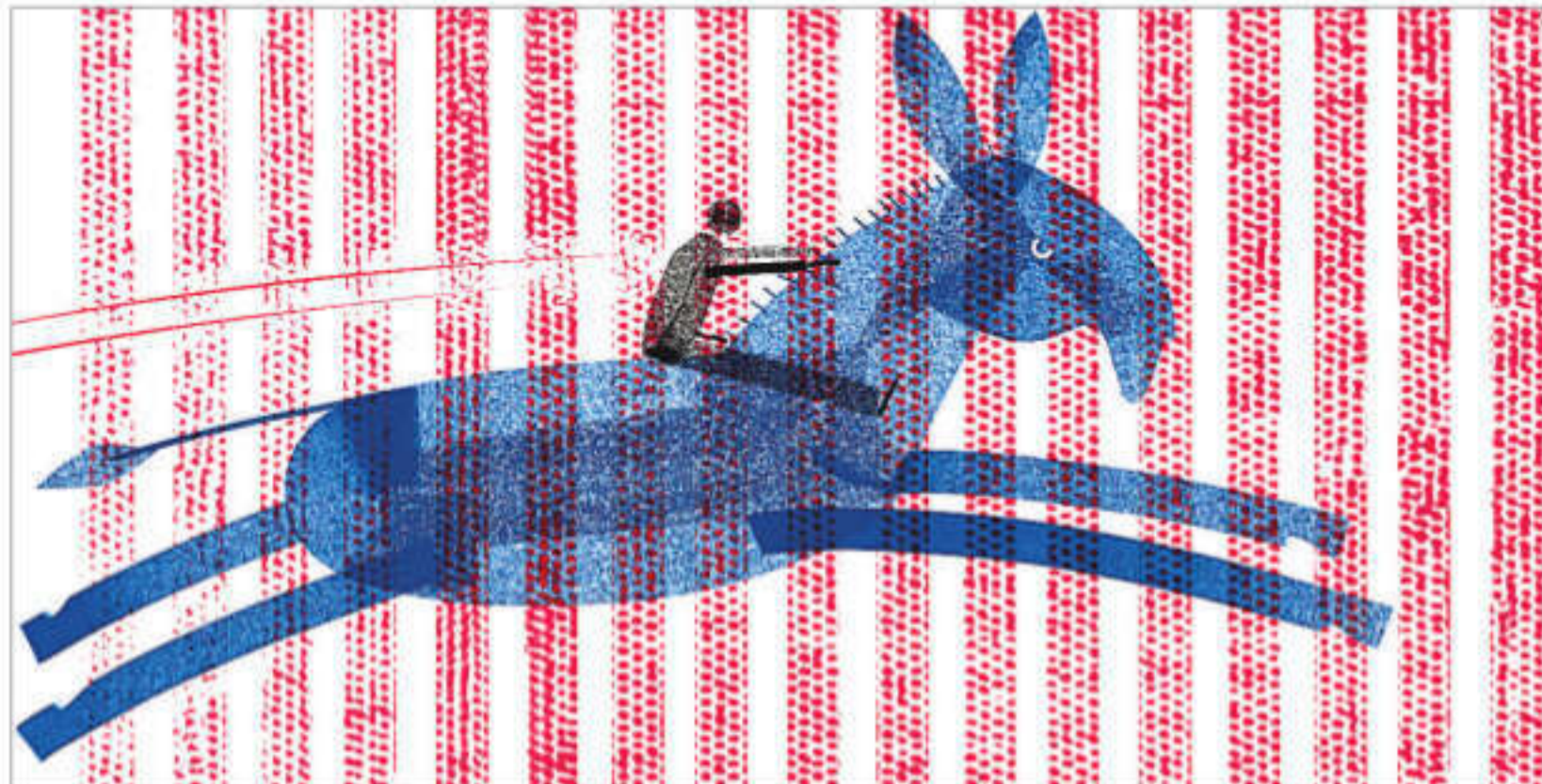


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

policy considerations when they enter the voting booth. This was a vehement rejection of US support for both; the message was, "not in my name".

Of course, domestic issues mattered too. Voters were fundamentally reacting to a compounding crisis of affordability and public safety by embracing a platform that focusses on aggressive economic intervention. The victorious slate galvanised support by advocating for housing security through rent freezes on rent-stabilised units, "Good Cause" eviction protections, and massive investments in public housing. They paired these housing initiatives with promises of economic relief, including aggressive minimum-wage hikes to \$30 by 2030, fare-free public transit on city buses, and universal child care. To finance these public goods, they proposed steep tax increases on corporations and individuals earning over \$1 million annually, while also vowing structural reforms to public safety and the abolition of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. These are not policies that the Democratic establishment was prepared to endorse. By ousting institutional figures like Espaillat and Goldman, the progressive base is demanding a complete structural overhaul of who holds power in their name and to do what.

This political shift follows a clear lineage that connects past political insurgencies to the current

governing reality. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's stunning 2018 victory was originally the harbinger of this trend, as she provided the blueprint and the vocabulary for a revival of socialism in the national discourse by proving that a well-organised grassroots campaign running on explicitly democratic socialist ideas could dismantle a powerful incumbent. However, Mamdani's stunning 2025 mayoral triumph was the institutional catalyst that transformed a loose coalition of activists into a disciplined governing machine with immense institutional gravity. Mamdani's ability to wade into these 2026 congressional primaries and successfully drag his entire slate across the finish line shows that his own victory was not an isolated fluke, but rather the establishment of a new political era in the city.

While New York City possesses unique structural advantages that make it fertile ground for democratic socialism, it is not entirely alone as an outlier. It features a rare concentration of rent-burdened working-class voters paired with a massive, hyper-organised local Democratic Socialists of America chapter. A moderate-to-high likelihood of similar socialist waves exists in California, particularly in districts across Los Angeles and the Bay Area that already possess heavy progressive infrastructure, meaning that we can expect similar primary challenges to moderate Democrats in deeply progressive-

Across most of the heartland, the ideal of the self-reliant individual and a reverence for free-market capitalism severely limit any platform calling for significant expansion of the federal government or socialist redistribution

inclined urban areas. In the liberal western states of Oregon and Washington, the likelihood of a socialist assertion remains moderate; while cities like Portland and Seattle have long traditions of leftist activism, their broader statewide electorates tend to lean toward pragmatic progressivism or traditional Democratic liberalism. Vermont maintains a high likelihood of democratic socialist success, though its landscape is distinct; as the birthplace of modern American democratic socialism via Senator Bernie Sanders, its politics are rural and driven by a unique brand of independent progressivism rather than New York's brand of urban machine politics.

Ultimately, while similar primary challenges will likely emerge in deep-blue urban districts across the country, replicating New York's sweeping success elsewhere requires a dense population of working-class tenants paired with a hyper-disciplined grassroots organising apparatus built up over many years. That simply does not exist in the majority of American states. Democratic socialism also faces a profound cultural barrier in traditional American conservatism. Rooted deeply in the nation's ethos, this worldview prioritises rugged individualism, strict constitutionalism, and a fundamental scepticism toward state intervention. Across most of the heartland, the ideal of the self-reliant individual and a reverence for free-market capitalism severely limit any platform calling for significant expansion of the federal government or socialist redistribution.

Even at the high-water mark of American socialism, when Eugene Debs captured nearly 1 million votes in 1920, the movement failed to establish a permanent electoral foothold. Tellingly, this peak was never matched by any socialist candidate afterwards — not even during the economic nadir of the Great Depression. When millions of unhappy working-class voters were desperately seeking relief from systemic economic collapse, they did not pivot toward radical socialism; instead, they sought refuge in the mainstream liberalism of Franklin D Roosevelt's New Deal, demonstrating that even in times of severe crisis, the American electorate overwhelmingly prefers reforming capitalism over replacing it.

The writer is a fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram and chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs

India's cotton farms need better soil, not just new GM seeds



KESHAV KRANTHI

THE ARTICLE by Ashok Gulati, Ayushi Gupta, and Ritika Juneja ('In cotton fields, policy is undoing what science built', IE, June 8) reads more like an advocacy piece for the seed industry than a balanced analysis of what ails Indian cotton. The authors credit Bt cotton, especially Bollgard-II, for the 88 per cent productivity increase between 2002 and 2013. They then argue that seed price control decisions killed the introduction of new GM events, including BG-II RRFlex and Bollgard-III, causing a decline in production and productivity since 2014-15. Had India continued its earlier trajectory, they claim, production would have reached 65.3 million bales by 2026, implying a productivity of 967 kg/ha. This diagnosis is flawed.

The authors appear to believe that GM seed technology alone drove India's productivity gains, and that approving BG-II RRFlex, Bollgard-III or the seven-gene Thryvon stack would restore that trajectory. Neither premise is supported by evidence. BG-II and BG-III protect crops against bollworm damage; RRFlex enables better weed management. These traits are agronomically useful, but there is no credible evidence from anywhere in the world that any of these traits directly increased yields. Framing GM trait approvals as the primary lever for productivity recovery deflects attention from the agronomic, soil science, breeding and management interventions that are decisive for sustainable yield improvement.

The authors compare India's yields of 441 kg/ha with China's 2,311 kg/ha and credit technology adoption for the difference. But China grows neither BG-III nor HT cotton nor Thryvon. It deploys exactly the same BG-II, Bt genes as India. The critical difference is that China grows Bt varieties rather than Bt hybrids.

The authors also omit a telling counterexample. Turkey has not approved GM cotton, yet its yields rose from 1,100 kg/ha in 1999 to 1,728 kg/ha in 2026. Over the same period, India's yields rose from 304 kg/ha to 458 kg/ha — they peaked at 566 kg/ha in 2013-14 and then declined. Turkey, without any approved GM variety, now achieves yields nearly four times that of India, whose cotton area is almost entirely planted with GM hybrids. China and Turkey offer compelling evidence that sustained productivity improvement depends on varietal development, agronomic investment and soil health, not trait approvals.

Data from the Ministry of Textiles also complicates the authors' narrative. India's productivity had already reached 521 kg/ha in 2006 and 554 kg/ha in 2007, when BG-II was approved, but occupied only a negligible share of cotton area, as seed production and distribution had yet to scale.

Crediting BG-II with the gains is not defensible. Productivity then declined to 449 kg/ha by 2018, even as BG-II adoption peaked. The productivity gains of 2002-2011 are better explained by a confluence of factors: Effective bollworm control by Bt cotton, hybrid seed adoption surging from 38 per cent to 92 per cent, fertiliser use increasing 2.3-fold, and irrigated area expanding from 2.5 million to 4.4 million hectares. Heavier farmer investment in crop management compounded these gains. Once inputs approached saturation, it was the law of diminishing returns, not seed price policy, that drove decline.

The root cause of India's cotton productivity collapse goes unmentioned in the article. According to FAO, nearly 32 per cent of Indian land is degraded and 25 per cent faces desertification. Soil organic carbon in Indian croplands averages just 0.3-0.6 per cent, far below the globally accepted minimum of 1-1.5 per cent for productive soils, with critically low levels below 0.25 per cent recorded across cotton-growing regions of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. No technology stack, GM or otherwise, can deliver its yield potential in soils thus depleted.

The primary focus of the Cotton Technology Mission should be restoring soil organic carbon through regenerative agriculture, particularly biochar-compost systems combined with farming-system-specific high-density plant spacing geometries. The mission must also prioritise climate-resilient varieties, improving ginning outturn from 33 per cent to the global average of 39 per cent, raising harvest index from 30 per cent to 50 per cent to improve input-use efficiency, smallholder mechanisation, sustainable pink bollworm management, and reducing input costs that disadvantage farmers.

India need not refuse new GM technologies, but approving them will not, by itself, move the needle. The transformation Indian cotton needs will come from better climate-resilient varieties, healthier soils, and better agronomy. That is what the Cotton Technology Mission must be built to deliver.

The writer is chief scientist, International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC). The views are personal and do not represent ICAC's positions



ILLUSTRATION: TANUSHRI MITRA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Delhi's EV push

DELHI'S DECISION to make electric two-wheelers mandatory by April 2028 is a bold climate policy ('Road ahead is electric, but it isn't easy', IE, July 1). Two-thirds of the capital's vehicles are two-wheelers, so targeting them first addresses a major source of toxic air pollution. Subsidies helped raise the EV share to 15 per cent, yet deadlines create certainty for investors, grid planners, and buyers alike. Still, ambition must be matched by infrastructure. Charging points in cramped colonies, battery-swapping facilities for gig workers, and reliable power during summer peaks will determine success.

Veda Chidanand, Bengaluru

WHILE THE Delhi government's push to mandate electric mobility is a commendable step towards clearing toxic air, a holistic analysis reveals a troubling macroeconomic paradox ('Road ahead is electric, but it isn't easy', IE, July 1). An aggressive transition to an EV-dominated fleet, without a robust domestic manufacturing ecosystem for critical components, runs the risk of replacing our traditional dependence on imported crude oil with an equally dangerous dependence on imported lithium cells and processing capacity, which is concentrated in China.

Krishan Kumar Chugh, New Delhi

FCRA restrictions

CIVIL SOCIETY organisations play a vital role in areas such as health, education, disaster relief, and civil liberties and rights, stepping in where the state falls short. Yet, the Indian state has treated NGOs with suspicion, using the FCRA, 2010, to impose stringent restrictions on their functioning ('New FCRA rules shrink space for civic action', IE, July 1). Far from improving transparency, the newly notified rules appear to be another way of throttling NGOs that utilise foreign funding for civil society work.

SS Paul, Nadia



SUANSHU KHURANA

PARTITION, ONE of the most consequential political events in the Subcontinent, is usually remembered through its defining motifs: The arbitrarily drawn Radcliffe Line, communal violence that accompanied the birth of two nations, and trains laden with refugees fleeing into the unknown. But filmmaker Intiaz Ali's *Main Vaapas Aaunga* manages to find another route into that history through the cultural world of "Saunha Punjab", the shared region that Partition could never divide.

As the love story between a Sikh boy and a Muslim girl finds its feet, a Punjabi folk tune accompanies an engagement ceremony in Muzaffer Ahmedzai's home in the Sardogha of 1947. In a fleeting moment, some women are heard singing 'Kothete aa mahiya, milna taan milaake nahitaa khasma nu khama-hiya', a *tappa* often heard at Punjabi weddings. Sung in call-and-response style, this folk song has a woman asking her beloved to come to the terrace. "Come meet me if you want, or else be damned," she sings.

This folk piece wassung at both my grandmothers' weddings, my mother's wedding as well as mine and continues to be sung even today on both sides of the border. Besides being recorded by Punjabi singers Surinder Kaur and Musarrat Nazir, both originally from La-

In Ali's film, the song serves as a reminder that the Radcliffe Line may have divided lives, but it could never sever the shared cultural inheritance

The songs Partition couldn't silence

here, there is also an absolutely charming rendition by ghazal duo Jagjit and Chitra Singh. Nearly 80 years after Partition, the song still lives on.

In Ali's film, it serves as a reminder that the Radcliffe Line may have divided lives, but it could never sever the shared cultural inheritance. Music, poetry, literature, and cuisine. Mainly because the intangible is all that people could really carry with them. In *Main Vaapas Aaunga*, composer A R Rahman and lyricist Irshad Kamil have absorbed that world of folk songs, *bollyan*, *qisse*, Sufi poetry, and wedding melodies.

But Punjab was never confined to folk traditions only. Members of the Punjabi elite patronised European musicians, while venues like Lahore's Faletti's Hotel hosted house orchestras for ballroom dancing. These influences converged in one of the film's most inspired songs, 'Ishq mastana', which begins as Punjabi folk before turning to jazz and jive. Drawing on Kabir's "Haman hain ishq mastana, haman ko hoshyaari kya?" (We are intoxicated with divine love, what need do we have for cleverness?), Kamil invokes a poet who straddled Hindu and Muslim religious worlds without belonging exclusively to either.

Two songs — 'Dariya', which draws from Bengal's baul tradition and explores separation through

the imagery of the river, and 'Tere paas main', about the hope of being with one's beloved — reminded me of my paternal grandmother, who spent a lifetime cooking Pindi chana and bhursi (a sweet jaggery flatbread), yearning for the home she never saw again. She was 14 when she left Jhang, now in Pakistan's Punjab and home of Heer from the folklore of Heer Ranjha. She travelled to India with my grandfather, the man she was engaged to, and his family. Just before she died, she told her children to make sure that her ashes were not immersed in the Ganga. If she couldn't return when she was alive, she wanted to be there at least in death. Like my grandfather before her, her remains were also immersed in the Sutlej, the river that passes through India and flows into Pakistan. It was the closest either of them came to crossing the border again. And perhaps, in the language of rivers and not borders, they finally did go home.

In many ways, that is the emotional terrain of *Main Vaapas Aaunga*. At a time when cinema is reducing complex histories to binaries, *Main Vaapas Aaunga* talks of cultural commonalities that have endured. This space is necessary to see each other in gentler shades, as people connected by songs and stories that belong to everyone.

The writer is senior assistant editor, The Indian Express. suanshu.khurana@expressindia.com



SANGMUAN HANGSUI

THREE YEARS after violence first engulfed Manipur, many people can tell you which roads to avoid. They know which journeys require extra planning, which routes feel familiar, and which places are no longer visited as casually as before. Students who once crossed district lines to attend schools and colleges often make different choices today. Traders who depended upon customers from multiple communities increasingly operate within narrower networks. Families visiting relatives think about travel in ways that would have seemed unusual before May 2023.

This knowledge emerged gradually

through caution, and experience. After three years, it has become woven into everyday routines, shaping decisions about where people travel, study, work, and whom they encounter along the way.

When violence first erupted, most people assumed that the arrangements created in response to it would remain temporary. Communities retreated into areas where they felt secure, and movement became more difficult. Security forces were deployed across large parts of the state. Institutions struggled to function normally. The expectation was that these disruptions, however severe, would eventually recede. But over time, people adjusted their routines, journeys, and relationships around them, gradually incorporating them into everyday life. Relative periods of calm have not al-

ways produced a corresponding sense of peace. The number of violent incidents may decline while the habits formed in response to them remain largely unchanged. By the time these become routine, they no longer feel like responses to a crisis. They linger in daily decisions and become part of how life is organised.

Ongoing tensions involving the Naga

Three years ago, many of the adjustments demanded by the conflict were understood as emergency responses to an extraordinary situation. Today, some have lasted long enough to become part of the social landscape

and Kuki communities illustrate how quickly separation can reinforce itself. The immediate priority lies in preventing further violence and ensuring accountability. Yet every confrontation leaves behind new calculations about safety, movement, and trust. Existing suspicions acquire fresh reasons to persist. Journeys that once seemed routine require greater caution, while interactions that once occurred naturally become less frequent.

Recent violence has brought additional COBRA units into the state. Few would question the need to protect vulnerable communities or prevent further escalation. However, after three years, the pattern has become familiar: Every fresh crisis is followed by another deployment, another operation, and another effort to restore order. Such measures can secure

roads and reduce violence. They cannot undo the routines that prolonged conflict leaves behind.

Three years ago, many of the adjustments demanded by the conflict were understood as emergency responses to an extraordinary situation. Today, some have lasted long enough to become part of the social landscape. Whether these fade or endure will depend in part on the recovery of the institutions and encounters that once brought different communities into routine contact. The longer that recovery remains incomplete, the more difficult it becomes to distinguish between temporary adjustments and the habits a society learns to live with.

Hangsui is a researcher and writer based out of Manipur

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

• HEALTH AND POLICY

Why eggs matter for schoolkids

Different foods serve distinct nutritional purposes. But from the lens of nutrition science, the egg remains one of the most complete and easy-to-prepare foods



EXPERT EXPLAINS
DR SEEMA GULATI

HEAD, NUTRITION RESEARCH GROUP, AT NATIONAL DIABETES, OBESITY AND CHOLESTEROL FOUNDATION, DELHI

AT A time when several states continue to debate whether eggs should be part of school midday meals, West Bengal has pulled them out. The discussion often centres on culture, ideology or personal food choices. Lost in that debate is a fundamental question: What does science say?

For millions of Indian children, especially those from low-income households, the midday meal may be their most nutritious meal of the day. Decisions about what goes on that plate must, therefore, be guided by evidence. And the evidence on eggs — as a source of complete, affordable and highly bioavailable protein (which is well-utilised by the body upon consumption) — is difficult to ignore.

All nutritional guidelines suggest that 10-35% of our daily calories should come from protein-rich foods. Protein is also necessary for building lean mass, burning fat, increasing metabolism, slowing blood sugar release, and helping the body repair itself. However, “the issue is not just of protein from animal or plant sources. The most important one is, how much of that protein can the body actually use,” **Dr Seema Gulati**, Head, Nutrition Research Group at the National Diabetes, Obesity and Cholesterol (N-DOC) Foundation, Delhi, tells **Rinku Ghosh**. N-DOC is a non-profit that partners with the Indian Council of Medical Research to research and prevent metabolic diseases.

The answer begins not with grams of protein, but with amino acids, the tiny building blocks of life from which every muscle fibre, hormone, enzyme and immune cell is made. The human body requires 20 amino acids, of which 11 can be manufactured internally. The remaining nine must come entirely from food. “A food that supplies all nine in adequate proportions is called a complete protein. Eggs are among the very few natural foods that do precisely that, hence they have been a part of midday meal schemes. Those who cannot have eggs need a mix of plant proteins for equivalence,” Gulati adds. Here, she explains why eggs are often seen as the gold standard for protein intake, and what it takes to match their nutritional profile for people who don't consume them.

Protein: Quantity vs quality

Consider the numbers (*see box*). A hundred grams in terms of real meals means two boiled eggs, a two-thirds cup of cooked soyabean and more than a cup of paneer chunks. In this scenario, cooked soyabeans contain 13.23 g of protein, almost identical to the 13.43 g found in two boiled eggs. Paneer provides 18.9 g, while whole milk contributes 3.3-3.7 g.

Judged solely by protein content, eggs and cooked soyabeans appear virtually indistinguishable. But proteins are not all created equal. Egg protein naturally contains all nine essential amino acids in proportions remarkably close to human requirements. It is also highly digestible, allowing the body to absorb and utilise it more efficiently compared to other foods. This bioavailability is why eggs have long served as the international reference protein against which the quality of other proteins is assessed.

Plant proteins tell a more complex story. Soyabean is undoubtedly among the highest-quality plant proteins avail-

able and comes closer than most plant foods to providing a balanced amino acid profile. Yet, like other plant proteins, it is best viewed as part of a dietary mix rather than a standalone solution.

Nutritionists, therefore, recommend combining legumes with cereals — *dal* with rice, *rajma* with rice, *khichdi*, *roti* with *chana*, or millets with pulses — so that one food compensates for the amino acids another supplies in smaller amounts. For vegetarians, this principle of protein complementation is fundamental with legumes, dairy and nuts. An egg, by contrast, has that balance already built in.

Plant proteins may seem inadequate individually. But they achieve their full nutritional potential through intelligent combinations. Cereals and pulses complement one another. Dairy and soy enrich the overall amino acid profile. Apart from combinations, there are always fortified foods.

The ‘brain nutrient’ factor

Choline is a nutrient that receives far less public attention than protein, despite being indispensable for brain development, memory, nerve signalling and liver health. Whole milk provides around 14-16 mg of choline per 100 g. Paneer contains roughly 15-20 mg, while cooked soyabean offers about 44-45 mg. Eggs provide 290-300 mg of choline. In simple terms, eggs contain almost seven times more choline than cooked soyabeans and nearly 20 times more than milk or paneer.

Each food has its own strength

Each food brings something valuable to the table. Cooked soyabeans are an excellent source of dietary fibre (792 g), iron (2.88 mg), magnesium (66.1 mg) and potassium (571.9 mg). It also contributes useful amounts of thiamine, niacin and folate, making it one of the strongest plant-based protein foods available.

Paneer stands out for its 18.9 g of protein and its exceptionally high calcium content (476 mg per 100 g), making it an important food for bone health. It also contributes phosphorus, zinc and biotin in meaningful amounts.

Milk remains one of the most accessible sources of calcium, riboflavin and high-quality dairy nutrition.

A boiled egg provides high-quality complete protein, meaningful amounts of riboflavin, pantothenic acid, biotin, phosphorus, iron and zinc, together with one of the richest natural sources of choline, all within a single, compact food.

Carbohydrates and fats

The accompanying fats and carbohydrates also determine how a food fits into a balanced diet. Per 100 g, boiled eggs contain 10.54 g of fat and virtually no carbohydrates, making them naturally suited to diets that prioritise high-quality protein. Cooked soyabeans provide 6.79 g of fat, 3.57 g of carbohydrates, and an additional 792 g of dietary fibre, offering a combination of plant protein, complex carbs and fibre that supports sustained energy release.

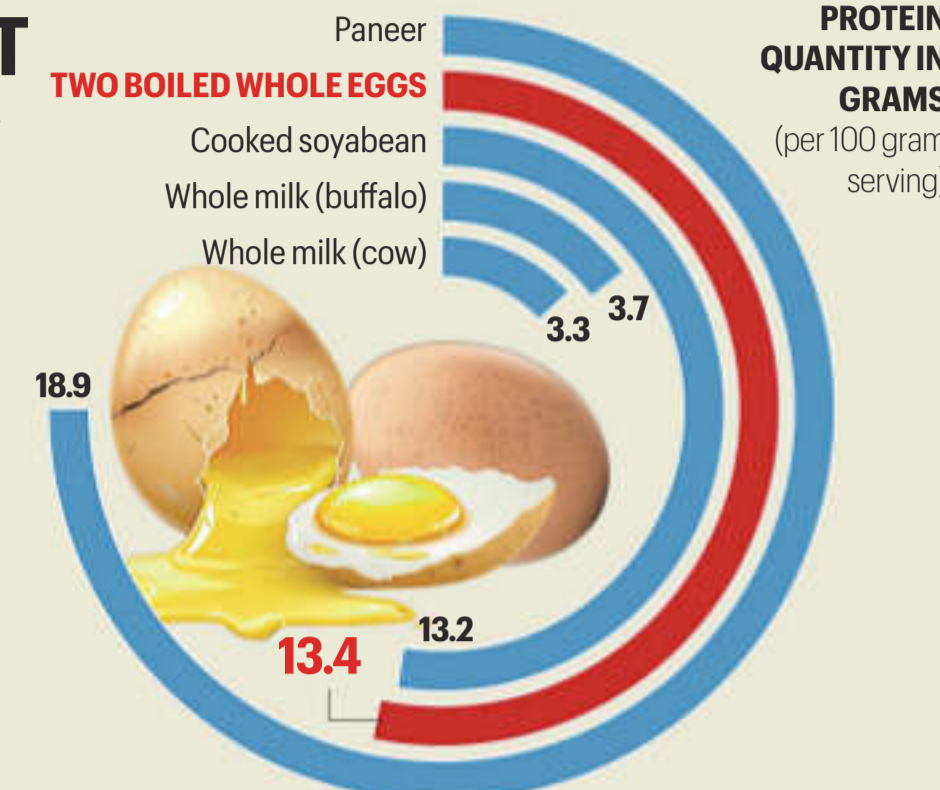
For the same quantity, paneer contains the highest fat content (14.8 g) among the foods compared, together with 12.4 g of carbohydrates, reflecting its energy-dense nature. Milk, meanwhile, remains the lightest option, contributing 4.5-6.6 g of fat and 4.9-8.3 g of carbohydrates, depending on whether it is cow's or buffalo's milk.

These differences illustrate that while eggs stand out for their complete protein and micronutrient density, soyabeans contribute valuable fibre and plant nutrients, paneer offers concentrated dairy nutrition, and milk provides a balanced everyday source of energy and nutrients. Each food serves a distinct nutritional purpose rather than competing on a single parameter. But from the lens of nutrition science, the humble egg continues to hold its place as one of the most complete and easy-to-prepare foods.

• EGGS vs THE REST

The chart and table show the quantity of nutrients such as protein and carbohydrates in various foods.

- Eggs and cooked soyabeans appear indistinguishable in protein content. But not all proteins are created equal.
- Eggs are highly digestible and ‘bio-available’ (well-utilised by the body).
- Soyabean is a high-quality plant protein. But it is best as part of a dietary mix rather than a standalone solution.
- Paneer has higher protein. But 100 gms is tough to consume at one go. Egg also contains all nine essential amino acids.



(NUTRIENT VALUES BELOW ARE PER 100 GRAM SERVING)

Nutrient	Whole milk (buffalo)	Whole milk (cow)	Paneer (cottage cheese)	Cooked soyabean	Two boiled whole eggs
Energy (gram)	107.3	72.9	257.9	132.09	147.7
Carbohydrate (g)	8.3	4.9	12.4	3.57	Virtually nil
Fats (g)	6.6	4.5	14.8	6.79	10.54
Calcium (milligram)	121	118	476	68.25	55.1
Riboflavin (B2) (mg)	0.13	0.11	0.1	0.08	0.19

DATA COMPILED BY DR SEEMA GULATI

A lesson from Tamil Nadu, pioneer in midday meals



ANAGHA JAYAKUMAR

THE WEST Bengal government has announced that it will remove eggs from midday meals, sparking a debate over what children should be served in school.

The decision has prompted comparisons with Tamil Nadu, which, as Madras Presidency, pioneered the concept of midday meals in India, and has provided eggs under its programme for decades now. Tamil Nadu's midday meal scheme has evolved over a century, with governments revisiting what children should be fed, and why.

Getting children into school...

Chief minister K Kamaraj is often credited with introducing a school meal programme in Madras State in 1956. But he had built on decades of experiments within the pre-independence Madras Presidency to get children into schools.

The first publicly funded school meal experiment in Madras Presidency began in 1920 as part of an effort to expand compulsory elementary education.

Officials recognised that poverty, hunger and families' dependence on children's earnings kept many children out of school. They also realised that compulsory education could not be achieved through coercive tactics alone. Against this backdrop, the Madras Corporation turned to school meals as an incentive to attract and retain children in classrooms, writes historian Catriona Ellis in her 2023 book *Imagining Childhood, Improving Children: The Emergence of an 'Avaruncular' State in Late Colonial South India*.

By most accounts, Justice Party president P Theagaraya Chetty, also president of Madras Corporation Council, backed a midday meal scheme to benefit the state's impoverished children. The pilot was at a corporation school in Madras city in 1920.

The daily cost per head was capped at one anna. Yet the scheme quickly proved its value. In *Imagining Childhood, Improving Children*, Ellis notes that attendance reportedly dropped by 50% when the scheme was briefly suspended in 1927.

By the end of the decade, the debate had

How school lunch came to other states

• In 1984, Kerala became the country's second state to have a school lunch programme.

• Over the next few years, many other states launched their own versions of the scheme, and finally in 1995, the Centre stepped in. It was launched as a centrally sponsored scheme across 2,408 blocks for students up to Class 5, initially providing foodgrains to states.

• In 2001, following a landmark Supreme Court order, states were directed to provide cooked mid-day meals rather than dry rations. In 2007, the UPA government expanded the scheme to Class 8.

• In 2021, the scheme was named PM POSHAN.

shifted from getting children into school to ensuring they could learn once they were there. In 1930, the Madras Corporation declared: “If you cannot feed the body of a child, you cannot feed the brain.” For Ellis, that shift was rooted in education rather than public health. “Hungry children can't concentrate on learning; they might be in school but they can't learn anything if they're hungry,” she told *The Indian Express*.

...and keeping them there

By the 1930s, education authorities in Madras increasingly treated children's health as central to their educational mission, Ellis writes. Corporation debates increasingly focused on the nutritional value of school meals, the need for a balanced diet and the quality of food provided to children. Officials debated whether bread and milk were preferable to the usual rice-and-curd diet, but also whether children should be served food familiar to them.

“The key conclusion was that it was more important to provide food that the children would like and eat, than to focus on the most efficient or nutritious food,” Ellis told *The Indian Express*. “Providing food similar to what the children would have eaten at home seems to be a way of helping school feel familiar and safe, and therefore a place to learn.”

Medical inspection increasingly accompanied school meals, reinforcing the idea that schools were responsible not only for education but also for nutrition and physical development. This marked a wider shift in how the state viewed children.

However, this political concern did not always translate into adequate funding.

Eggs in the basket

The next milestone came after Independence, when chief minister Kamaraj expanded the school meal programme in 1956. The scheme was transformed under chief minister MG Ramachandran's Nutritional Meal Programme in 1982, which placed greater emphasis on nutritional needs alongside improving attendance.

In January 1989, chief minister M Karunanidhi announced that children under the scheme would receive one boiled egg every two weeks. Successive governments expanded the frequency of egg distribution and the menu itself. In 2013, Chief Minister J Jayalithaa introduced the Variety Meals scheme to expand the nutritional value and appeal of the midday meal programme.

• GLOBAL

Why US Supreme Court scrapped Trump's birthright citizenship order

Anagha Jayakumar & Vineet Bhalla
New Delhi, July 1

THE US Supreme Court Tuesday ruled that the Donald Trump administration's executive order outlawing birthright citizenship was unconstitutional. It reaffirmed that children born in the US are American citizens under the Fourteenth Amendment, regardless of whether their parents are in the country unlawfully or only temporarily.

In a 6-3 decision, the court rejected the administration's argument that such children are not “subject to the jurisdiction” of the US, holding the executive order inconsistent with the Constitution's Citizenship Clause and longstanding Supreme Court precedent. The ruling marks one of the biggest judicial setbacks to the US President's second-term immigration agenda, and reaffirms a constitutional guarantee that has stood for over 150 years.

What is birthright citizenship?

The 14th Amendment to the US constitution says: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.” Ratified in 1868 after the American Civil War, it intended to ensure that formerly enslaved people would be recognised as US citizens. Courts have long interpreted the provision to confer citizenship on nearly everyone born on American soil, with two longstanding exceptions:

- The children of diplomats who have allegiance to another government.
- Enemies present in the US during hostile occupation.

INDIAN CITIZENSHIP

• Article 5 says every person born in the territory at the commencement of the Constitution shall be a citizen of India.

• The Citizenship Act, 1955, provided birthright citizenship to every person born in India on or after January 26, 1950, with some exceptions.

• The Act was amended in 1986 to address the entry of migrants from ‘Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and some African Countries’, and in 2003 to bar children born to illegal immigrants.

automatic citizenship under the US Constitution.

A five-judge majority of the court, led by Chief Justice John Roberts, rejected this defence. The court held that the phrase “subject to the jurisdiction” simply refers to the government's power to enforce its laws over anyone physically present in its territory, regardless of their immigration status. To arrive at this decision, the majority traced the concept back to the English common law principle of *jus soli* or “right of the soil”, under which anyone born within a sovereign's territory owed them allegiance in exchange for protection, making them a natural-born subject.

Why does Trump want to end birthright citizenship?

Trump signed an executive order in January 2025 denying citizenship to children born in the US to parents illegally or temporarily in the country. He claimed that the US was the only country to have birthright citizenship. However, at least 37 other countries grant citizenship to anyone born on their soil, mostly in South America and the Caribbean. India does not practice unconditional birthright citizenship, nor do several European countries.

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• GEOPOLITICS

US-Iran talks: ‘MoU is a breakthrough for Iran, but overreach would be folly’



EXPERT EXPLAINS

AJAY SINGH

TOKYO-BASED ENERGY & SHIPPING EXECUTIVE

AFTER TRADING strikes over the past week, the US and Iran appear to be finally inching back towards the negotiating table. These strikes had threatened to unravel a fragile truce between both countries that remains in place despite occasional flare-ups and Israeli aggression in southern Lebanon.

Last month, a 14-point Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed as part of a framework agreement to end the war

in West Asia that began in February. **Ajay Singh**, a management advisor and a former oil and gas industry executive with considerable experience of the Middle East, spoke to **Anil Sasi** about how the situation could have unfolded differently in the absence of an MoU or had the Strait remained closed for much longer.

Prospects for US-Iran talks

Flare-ups may continue as the MoU has left crucial details unaddressed, such as arrangements for monitoring and enforcing the ceasefire in Lebanon, protocols for shipping in the Strait, and whether or not the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspectors may access sites in Iran.

Some people on both sides may prefer that full-blown fighting resumes, and cause disruptions in Lebanon or the Strait as elections in Israel and the US draw closer. But the US and Iran will likely get on with negotiations because both realise that further con-

flict is not in their interests, at least for now. Mutual mistrust and the complexity of the nuclear issue make it highly unlikely that a result will be forthcoming within 60 days — if at all — and extensions will be required. The best outcome would be something like the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) of 2015, whereby Iran may pursue a peaceful nuclear programme under safeguards and secure a lasting end to sanctions, in return for the highly enriched uranium being rendered harmless.

Perhaps the US — although not Israel — may be amenable to such a deal, so long as it can be presented as an improvement over the JCPOA.

This is an opportunity for Iran to make peace with dignity, secure the rightful future prosperity of its people, and end its decades-long ostracisation. The unknown is the internal dynamic within the Iranian regime at this time. It may well decide that the country's only guarantee of security lies

in continued conflict, or insist on a complete withdrawal of US forces from the Middle East. That would be an overreach.

The situation after the US mid-term elections may not be quite as favourable for Iran; the military advantage that it has secured through the use of drones and missiles will eventually be countered; and in a no-holds-barred conflict, superior American economic and technological strength will prevail.

Significance of the MoU

One may say that Iran has pulled off something of a breakthrough. After decades of enduring tough sanctions, it has restored its primary source of national income through oil export in addition to securing access to hitherto frozen funds, besides another \$300 billion of funding. It retains the military capabilities to continue menacing adversaries and choke off the Strait of Hormuz. Extraordinarily, the US has recognised Iran's claims over the Strait,

without regard to the rest of the world.

The war stands as a rare instance — the first since the 1956 Suez war — in which a Middle Eastern nation has directly faced off with one of the world's foremost military powers, stood its ground, and compelled the adversary to negotiate on balanced terms. That boosts Iran's position in the Islamic world and strengthens the hands of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Outlook for oil and gas markets

While price forecasts are logical determinations based on supply and demand projections, market prices are based on sentiments of traders whose job is to match demand with supply, and make money. During the last four months, market prices have remained consistently below forecasts, indicating optimism which may, fortunately, be borne out. But optimism and pessimism are no substitutes for planning. Oil prices could have easily gone in the

opposite direction had there been no MoU and had the Strait remained closed for much longer. The world's economy has had a close shave in terms of energy security. And we are by no means out of the woods yet. Oil prices have fallen back but do not represent a return to the pre-war situation.

Disruptions to negotiations and outbursts of fighting may cause volatility in the coming months. The power balance in the Persian Gulf stands fundamentally altered, reducing its reliability as an energy supplier. Changes in the energy policies of consuming nations will be needed.

Meanwhile, it would be wise to top off oil, liquefied petroleum gas, liquefied natural gas, and fertiliser stocks and expand reserves, taking advantage of reduced prices. Reserves cost money but insure against much worse economic damage and social unrest from physical scarcity.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Emerging challenges

India needs to do more to attract stable capital flows

The agreement between the United States (US) and Iran, and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, has had a calming effect on prices of crude oil. Prices have declined to pre-conflict levels, providing much-needed relief to a country like India, which depends on imports for most of its requirements of crude oil. Oil-marketing companies on Wednesday reduced the prices of liquefied petroleum gas in select categories. They also brought down the prices of aviation turbine fuel. More such corrections can be expected in the coming weeks if oil prices remain at lower levels. Although things may be returning to normal, the conflict exposed the vulnerabilities India faces in an increasingly geopolitically fragmented world. The latest biannual Financial Stability Report (FSR) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) does well to recognise the increased risks of adverse external shocks.

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra rightly noted in the foreword that, in the current environment, preserving financial stability and building systemic resilience had become more important than ever. The crisis threatened to substantially increase the current-account deficit (CAD) at a time when India is facing difficulties in attracting foreign capital for a variety of reasons. As the FSR noted, while the CAD remained at manageable levels in 2025-26, the overall balance of payments (BoP) remained in deficit for the second year in a row. With higher oil prices, there was a strong possibility that the current year would have ended similarly, though how the external account evolves remains to be seen in the coming quarters. Recent measures by both the RBI and the government are expected to improve capital flows, though mostly in the form of debt. The issue worth debating in this context is why the BoP has been in deficit over the past two years. Have global financial conditions changed fundamentally?

In managing the external account, a few things need to be carefully watched. Given the inflation conditions, it is likely that interest rates in advanced economies will remain at a relatively high level. Financial markets, for instance, are bracing themselves for at least one rate increase this year by the US Federal Reserve. This will tighten global financial conditions. Further, higher global debt is affecting bond markets and capital flows. As the FSR has also highlighted, some of the large countries, including the US, have shortened the average maturity of debt issuances because of rising term premiums. Sustained large refinancing requirements would influence yields and capital flows. Besides, global risk capital is moving to the US. The data shows that gross foreign holdings of US stocks increased to \$21 trillion in March 2026, as against about \$7.5 trillion in 2020. The alarm bells are growing louder on the risks posed by artificial intelligence-related investment and the level of concentration in such investment.

Worryingly, investment is being increasingly financed through debt, which has different dynamics compared to equity. A shakeup in the artificial-intelligence (AI) world and a sharp correction in stock prices could lead to broader risk aversion in financial markets, affecting capital flows. In fact, India needs to be prepared for both outcomes — continued absorption of risk capital by AI-related businesses over the medium term, and a potential sharp correction in the stock prices of AI-related companies. Both scenarios will affect capital flows, though to varying levels. Thus, given the challenging environment in funding across the globe, owing to a variety of factors, India needs to substantially increase its attractiveness as an investment destination. Recent measures may not be sufficient to address the fundamental shifts in the global financing landscape.

Mercury rising

Fossil-fuel dependence is powering heatwaves in Europe

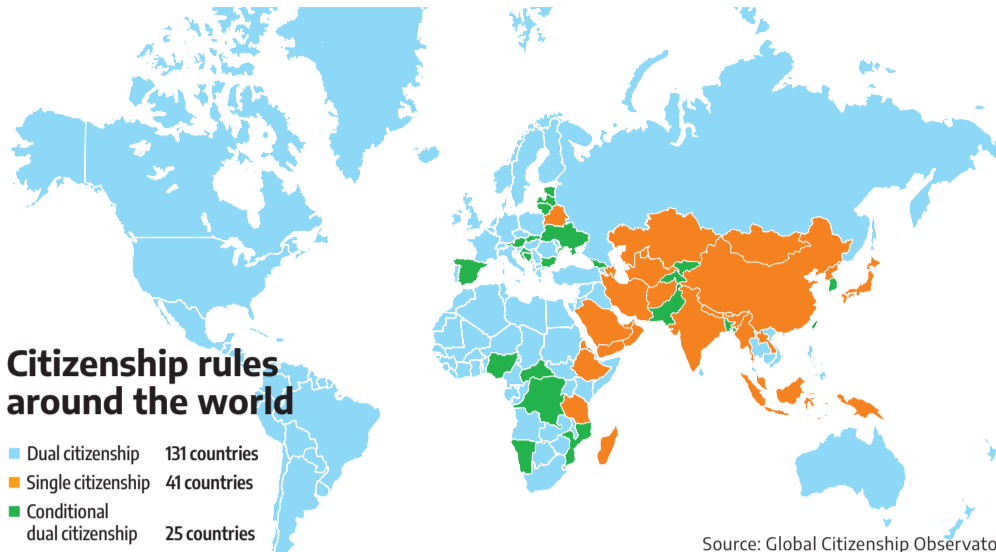
Record-breaking heatwaves in Europe in May and June this year caused more than 1,300 excess deaths — the number of deaths above what is normally expected — offering a case study in the perils of fossil-fuel dependence. Parts of western and central Europe have experienced temperatures as much as 12 degrees Celsius above the 1991-2020 baseline. This phenomenon is said to be the result of a “dome” of hot, stagnant air (known as the “Omega Block” because of its shape). This high-pressure system distorts the flow of jet streams, which carry weather systems from west to east and can remain locked over the region for weeks. With global average temperatures more than the 1.25 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and on track to exceed the critical 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold, exceptional heatwaves like this year’s are likely to occur with greater frequency. Already heatwaves have caused more deaths in Europe than all other natural hazards combined. With temperatures soaring past 40 degrees Celsius in parts of France and Spain, Europe has become the world’s fastest-warming continent. According to the academic collaboration group World Weather Attribution, the hottest daily temperatures in Europe are warming at about triple the rate of global warming and night-time temperatures at about twice the rate. An ageing population and urban infrastructure designed to retain rather than keep out heat makes the region uniquely vulnerable to heatwaves.

At the core of this crisis is the excessive dependence on fossil fuels, which account for roughly 65 per cent of the European Union’s (EU’s) gross energy consumption. This energy mix is driven by oil and petroleum products for transportation, and natural gas, which remains critical for electricity generation and residential heating. The anomaly here is the EU’s controversial decision to include natural gas as a “clean fuel” to meet emission-reduction targets in the Paris Agreement. This is illogical by any standards. Natural gas is certainly “cleaner” than coal or oil but it comprises mainly methane, which is a potent greenhouse gas. Building expensive infrastructure to store and transport it potentially locks Europe into a fossil fuel-dependence dynamic for decades. At the same time, reliance on fossil fuels has generated a weather-feedback loop, as Europe is witnessing this year. Heat-trapping greenhouse gases ramp up demand for energy-intensive cooling equipment such as air conditioning, placing an additional burden on power plants that run on fossil fuel. This, in turn, increases global warming. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, 10 per cent of all greenhouse gases are expected to be generated by cooling by 2050.

Unfortunately, the rightward shift of Western politics is failing its people in parrying the climate-change challenge. United States President Donald Trump has long declared climate change a hoax despite evidence of significant global warming across the American landmass. Far-right French leader Marine Le Pen is exploiting the crisis by promising a “massive air-conditioning plan” for the vulnerable population if she is elected. If there is a lesson from Europe’s summer debacle, it is the urgent need to transition to renewable energy across the world, including in India, where increasingly hotter summers are driving demand from ultra-polluting thermal-power plants.

Diaspora’s global success

Does it hold lessons for India?



Why do Indians succeed all over the world and rise to the top like cream? The answer to this may give a clue to how India can rise to the top of the world table. Nearly 35 million overseas Indians, about 2.5 per cent of India’s population, are doing remarkably well in their adopted countries. The Singaporean diplomat and perceptive author Kishore Mahbubani, in his R K Narayanan Birth Centenary Lecture in 2021, argued that Indians do so well outside India because they are allowed to compete fairly and freely.

The evidence in favour of his argument is staggering. In the United States (US), no one expected Indian Americans — who make up 1.5 per cent of the population, with an average per capita income exceeding \$70,000 — to be, on average, richer than White Americans, Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, and even Jewish Americans — who are noted for their wealth accumulation and business acumen. Some top 30 corporations now have Indian-origin chief executive officers (CEOs), and Indians dominate in health care and the sciences, especially in information technology-related sectors. Indian-origin politicians have also succeeded in reaching the highest offices in the US — senators, congressmen, presidential candidates, and top positions in the civil service.

But some critics argue that this is not surprising, since migration to the US was largely composed of highly educated Indians, especially graduates of its top engineering and medical schools. However, if you look across the world, Indians have also succeeded where migration has not been so selective and has included people from all strata of society — including poorer, less educated sections, often subject to severe discrimination.

People of Indian origin are among the most economically and socially successful demographic groups in the United Kingdom, where the initial wave of

immigrants was not so well educated and suffered discrimination. They consistently outperform the national average — including the White British majority — across key metrics such as household wealth, employment rates, and educational attainment. British Indians have held some of the highest political offices in the country, including Rishi Sunak serving as prime minister breaking historical barriers.

And Indians who went as indentured labourers over a century ago to parts of the British Empire have also done remarkably well. Indo-Mauritians, who represent roughly 70 per cent of that island’s population, arrived in the 19th and 20th centuries as indentured labourers for British sugarcane plantations. Their monumental success stems from their demographic dominance, strategic transition to land ownership, strong education, and eventual political control, with per capita income above \$14,000 today.

Indo-Trinidadians are extraordinarily successful, making up 37-42 per cent of the population and forming one of the nation’s largest ethnic groups. Starting as indentured labourers in 1845, they have achieved profound political and economic success. The community has held immense political power, with several Prime Ministers — such as Kamla Persad-Bissessar and Basdeo Panday — leading the country and with an average income above \$20,000 today.

Indo-Guyanese successfully transitioned from agricultural labourers in the 19th and early 20th centuries to dominating local commerce, the rice and sugar industries, and holding key roles in Guyana’s rapidly expanding offshore oil economy, with an average income exceeding \$33,000 today. Indo-Guyanese hold significant political power. Leaders of Indian descent, including current President Irfaan Ali and Vice-President Bharrat Jagdeo, lead the nation.



IF TRUTH BE TOLD
AJAY CHHIBBER

Time to overhaul the telecom regulator?

The Union Budget of 1997 — known for some bold initiatives — was still a week away when a landmark step was taken for the rapidly evolving telecom sector. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) was set up on February 20 that year with the objective of creating an independent body to regulate the sector, rather than leaving the government to carry on with the job.

The backdrop was important. Mobile telephony had taken off in 1995, and private players were ready to give competition to government-owned phone service providers, which had landline monopolies for years. The idea was to divide the tasks between the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and Trai — DoT was to be the overarching policy-maker and Trai the principal regulator for the telecom industry.

Through the course of the journey, however, the objective with which Trai was constituted appears to have been only partially addressed. To an industry observer, Trai may be a regulator on paper, but it is a recommender for all practical purposes. The DoT is the licensor, the spectrum management authority, the main penalty decision-maker for operators. In other words, a regulator in the real sense. It also oversees a host of consumer-related issues, including compliance with quality of service norms, and setting rules for recruitment at Trai.

At a time when the latest technology forms the backbone of all telecom services and digital has replaced the legacy networks, speed is of the essence in any regulatory exercise. As it is, the regulatory framework in India is fragmented in many tech-related scenarios. For instance, in the case of cybersecurity issues, various agencies including the home ministry, DoT, MeitY (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology) and Trai sit in judgement. Another case in point

is the latest initiative by WhatsApp to allow consumers to have their names registered so that their mobile numbers remain discreet when messages are sent. This has already prompted the government to order Meta (the parent company of WhatsApp) to pause the service. Multiple ministries and regulators may intervene if the matter picks up. With artificial intelligence perpetually in the background, regulation has to be dealt with maturely — more now than ever before.

Speaking of telecom specifically, having two regulators — Trai and DoT — translates into extended time lags and delays in regulation in the complex digital environment, thereby impacting the industry and the consumer. Going back to the objective of Trai, it was meant to protect consumer interests and ensure the industry’s growth through fair competition and a level playing field. With tech advancements speeding past long-drawn regulatory frameworks, both consumers and industry players could feel short-changed.

Some of the regulatory delays owing to decisions going back and forth between the regulator and the government can be avoided if the processes are streamlined.

Preventing spam calls and unsolicited communication is one example of a regulatory framework going through many versions over the years. It has still not helped consumers, and the industry is left guessing on the next best move.

A major trigger for the birth of Trai in 1997 was the belief that there could be a conflict of interest if the government, with ownership in Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd and Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd, continued to regulate a space that had been opened for private players. Currently, besides state-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd and MTNL, the government owns 49 per cent in Vodafone Idea too. Although the government is

Indians in South Africa, roughly 2.6 per cent of the population, have achieved significant economic and political success. Despite severe historical oppression, the community has built prosperous businesses and produced key leaders who were instrumental in both the anti-apartheid struggle and South Africa’s modern democratic government. They achieved even greater economic success in East Africa and Fiji but were deliberately positioned between the colonial masters and the local population, creating resentment towards them and leading to their outmigration to Australia, the UK, and the US in search of better prospects. Rishi Sunak’s parents were part of this outmigration from East Africa to the UK.

Indian-origin individuals, particularly those tracing their roots back to the former territories of Goa and Daman & Diu, hold prominent positions as doctors, lawyers, politicians, and academics. Former Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa, who is of Goan maternal descent, stands as a prime example of this integration at the highest levels of leadership. The Indian diaspora in Ireland is phenomenally successful, well-integrated, and heavily represented in health care, technology, academia, and finance. This success is prominently epitomised by Leo Varadkar, who served as Ireland’s *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) from 2017 to 2020 and again from 2022 to 2024.

My point in showing this evidence of the success of the Indian diaspora is not to show off or crow about Indians abroad but to argue that if India wants to succeed, it must ask why all these Indians do so well when they leave India. The question is how can we create the competitive meritocratic system that allows Indians overseas to rise to the top, by reducing bureaucracy, widening access to education and finance and a fair rules-based system.

India now recognises the individual achievement of overseas Indians with a Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award. Overseas Indians can now get an Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card but would be even happier if they were allowed dual citizenship. India’s neighbours, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri-Lanka allow conditional dual citizenship. Only 30 countries in the world do not allow dual citizenship — mostly in Asia, including China, India, and Indonesia, and some in West Asia and Africa (see map). The concerns over security and loyalty that led India to deny dual citizenship at the time of independence may have had some logic then but are currently misplaced and should be reconsidered. Some ask whether overseas Indians contribute enough to India. They do send back huge remittances — the largest in the world — and could contribute even more.

But the bigger message from the success of overseas Indians across the globe in business, politics and all walks of life is that India too can rise to the top if the 1.4 billion Indians back home are given better opportunities to use their innate talent and capacity to work hard, with right incentives in a more meritocratic rules-based system. Kishore Mahbubani thinks India — now home to a sixth of humanity — could then even beat China.

The author is distinguished visiting scholar, Institute for International Economic Policy, George Washington University



NOT FOR PROFIT
NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

Business responsibility in practice



NEHA BHATT

Though weighed down by a mouthful of a title like *The Business of Business is (Not) Just Business*, this book unfolds like an interesting experiment. An expansive anthology edited by business leader Sutapa Banerjee, it brings together 22 voices, among them chief executive officers of traditional and digital companies, economists, policy and industry experts, investors and academics.

Each of them dives into diverse aspects of corporate culture across industries, and unpacks what responsible businesses can look like in practice, and how companies can achieve a cer-

tain standard of success in furthering meaningful action towards sustainability, diversity and inclusion.

Offering a series of behavioural tools that can drive such change, the book presents complex industry problems as well-argued, essay-shaped solutions. Spread over five sections, the chapters are centred on the core themes of environmental sustainability, equity in economic participation, and breaking stereotypes in industry.

Sample the foreword, by Nadir Godrej, written in verse: “There’s a capitalist strain/that enthrones shareholder gain/And Milton Friedman could see/that this simplistic philosophy/could lead to great efficiency.”

With the mode set to experimental, the anthology begins with some context. Ms Banerjee writes that she wanted to bring diverse perspectives from key stakeholders to reveal different approaches that can be scaled across sectors, with cross application,

and then share the outcomes on the use of evidence-based research and behavioural tools.

It’s a noble experiment. Moving away from prescribing what businesses should do, the effort is to present ideas in a way that encourages more businesses to take meaningful action. The book doesn’t try to be definitive or provide answers to every business problem, but works as a platform to reflect on wide-ranging and relevant themes.

Abheek Barua offers a view of sustainability through an economist’s lens, diving into inclusive growth and improving the quality of jobs and participation of women in the workforce. Kartikeya Sarabhai looks at sustainability through climate change and bats for a circular economy, including how businesses can work together to have a shared “sense of ownership and responsibility”.

R Mukundan’s chemicals industry perspective and Parth Jindal’s cement industry insights on the same subject are

valuable, with a neatly laid out blueprint for better business-ethics. Particularly enlightening is the chapter on emerging business models for environmental change that highlights the catalysts, such as circular economy for agri-waste, and artificial intelligence for climate adaptation.

At regular intervals, Ms Banerjee pauses to take stock, clearly mapping out what works and what doesn’t. She highlights the specific approaches, models and regulations that show strong potential and warrant deeper analysis.

The section on equity and economic participation is rich with insights from Sanjeev Bikhchandani. He writes about building digital job marketplaces, the genesis of Naukri and, later, jobhath.com for blue-collar jobs. Preeti Reddy’s thoughts on addressing gender bias in corporate spaces are illustrative, as she writes that while Indian companies are taking note of global



The Business of Business is (Not) Just Business: How Behavioural Tools Can Drive Real Change
by Sutapa Banerjee
Published by Harper Collins
313 pages ₹699

trends in fostering conditions for women to thrive in the workplace, progress has been maddeningly slow.

Deepinder Goyal’s essay on the informal economy and diversity is a missed opportunity; it reads more like a collection of platitudes about Zomato’s operations and values rather than meaningful reflection on the systemic issues plaguing the gig economy, of which he is a major driver.

But there are thoughtful perspectives on the problems of the migrant workforce from others, and charting a future where “workers join out of aspiration rather than distress”. Also noteworthy are the essays that provide a playbook on the importance of women as economic actors and decision-makers, and the ways in which businesses can scale up the hiring of people with disabilities.

Is it as challenging to reshape social norms as it is made out to be? Ms Baner-

jee writes that measures that help break stereotypes in the workplace that are sometimes critiqued for lowering the bar and being “concessionary”, in fact go a long way to level the playing field. Diversity needs to be built into the fabric of businesses, rather than being a token effort.

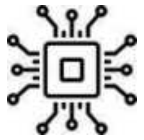
Books on how to do business often run the risk of repetition — after all, it’s all been said before. A fair number of new age titles for younger, attention-challenged readers break down material into bite-sized pieces without much socio-economic context. It may be good for sales, but it strips the book of personality. This book, thankfully, dodges that bullet, bringing to readers of all stripes and interests a book filled with business lessons that carry the nuances of lived experiences and individual contours of successes and failures. It also underscores that while there is no single blueprint for running a business responsibly, certain core values inevitably unite all ethical ones.

The reviewer is a Delhi-based author and journalist

Chipping away

Semiconductor push should be followed through

The Centre's decision to approve a Budget proposal of around ₹1.25 lakh crore for the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 2.0 is a strong signal that India's semiconductor ambitions remain a strategic priority. The allocation, substantially higher than the ₹76,000 crore earmarked for the first phase, comes at a time when the global race for chip supremacy is intensifying amid geopolitical tensions, supply chain disruptions and the growing centrality of semiconductors to economic and national security.



Over the past three years, India has moved from a passive consumer of chips to a credible destination for semiconductor investment.

Twelve projects spanning fabrication, assembly, testing and packaging have been approved, attracting investments exceeding ₹1.6 lakh crore. Tata Electronics' fabrication project with Taiwan's PSMC, Micron's packaging facility and multiple OSAT projects demonstrate that global companies now see India as more than just a back-office for chip design. Simultaneously, the Design Linked Incentive scheme is nurturing a pipeline of indigenous fabless start-ups that could become tomorrow's semiconductor innovators.

However, semiconductor manufacturing requires enormous capital, long gestation periods and continuous technological upgrades. ISM 2.0 must therefore go beyond approving fresh projects. Existing facilities should have access to follow-on support that enables them to scale up production. While India does not have sub-7nm leading-edge fabrication capabilities, which require highly restricted EUV lithography machines, the domestic fabrication plan is anchored around 28nm, which is the workhorse for global industry — powering automotive microcontrollers, EV powertrains, 5G modems, IoT sensors, and display drivers. These segments account for a significant share of global semiconductor demand and offer India a realistic entry point into the value chain. However, investments in research, design capabilities and talent must continue.

Government procurement can play a catalytic role by encouraging the adoption of domestically manufactured chips in public infrastructure, defence systems, railways, power equipment and smart city projects. Partnerships such as Tata Electronics' supply arrangement with Intel are encouraging, but domestic demand remains equally important for building a sustainable ecosystem. Beyond fabrication, chipmaking depends on access to critical minerals, advanced manufacturing equipment, and specialised talent. China's control over exports of key minerals has underscored the vulnerabilities in global supply chains. India's partnerships through initiatives such as the proposed Pax Silica alliance, therefore, acquire strategic significance. NITI Aayog's estimates suggest an investment requirement of \$135-180 billion over the next decade to build a globally competitive semiconductor ecosystem. The Centre cannot shoulder this burden alone. Yet, sustained public funding can de-risk private investment and inspire long-term confidence.

FROM THE VIEWROOM.

And the business end begins

B Baskar

Global mega sports events are rarely without controversy and the ongoing FIFA World Cup is no exception. It perhaps all started with the FIFA conferring a 'Peace Prize' to US President Donald Trump. Then it was the denial of entry into the US to a respected Somali referee Omar Artan at the Miami International Airport. Then it was the logistical and visa nightmares that the Iranian team was put through, resulting in the Iranian coach calling his team the "most oppressed" in the tournament. Their bad luck followed them on the pitch, where their goal in the dying minutes against Egypt was disallowed for a marginal offside, the goal which could have put them through to the knock-out stages for the first time.

But FIFA World Cups have a hoary history of controversies. The 1978 World Cup held in Argentina, then being ruled by a brutal military junta, led to a lot of moral hand wringing in Western Europe. The Qatar World Cup was beset

with controversies over its treatment of workers used in the construction of stadiums.

But once the action begins on the field, the off-field controversies fade into the background and it wasn't different this time around. The real story so far was spirited performance of small nations like Cape Verde and DR Congo. In fact nine out of the 10 participating African teams have made it to the knock-out round of 32, clear proof of their growing footballing heft.

Some of the big European nations — Germany and the Netherlands — have exited and the round of 32 is still in progress. Brazil the perennial sentimental favourite has progressed to the round of 16 without really impressing, defeating a strong Japan with a last gasp goal.

France and Argentina look impressive and European champions Spain remain favourites. Most talk has focussed on Messi and Mbappe, but one player who has made football pundits turn their heads is France's Michael Olise. The next 17 days are going to a treat for the football diehards.

A roadmap for electric trucks

POWER SECTOR MODEL. Charging infra and cheap, reliable clean electricity are critical, for electrifying freight at scale



NIKIT ABHYANKAR
DEEPAK RAJAGOPAL
SAMHITA SHILEDAR

India's freight runs largely on diesel, leaving the economy vulnerable to global oil-price shocks and exchange-rate volatility. India meets about 88 per cent of its crude oil needs through imports, and the annual crude import bill has exceeded \$120 billion in recent years (\$174 billion in FY26).

Heavy-duty trucks are only a small share of India's vehicle stock, but account for about 40 per cent of on-road vehicle fuel use and emissions, making them an obvious priority for electrification.

To accelerate this transition, Prime Minister Electric Drive Revolution in Innovative Vehicle Enhancement (PM E-DRIVE), the ₹10,900-crore national EV programme, has carved out ₹500 crore for electric trucks, largely as vehicle-adoption incentives, and ₹2000 crore for charging infrastructure. A separate financing scheme of ₹10,000 crore scale for private buses and trucks is reportedly under consideration.

These initiatives provide important momentum for the sector, but scaled adoption will ultimately hinge on whether truck operators can rely on cheap, reliable, high-power charging where freight actually moves — not on vehicle subsidies alone.

Why won't the market build the chargers on its own? Because the early market faces two compounding barriers. The first is a coordination problem. A charging operator will not invest without confidence that enough trucks will use the stations; fleet operators will not buy electric trucks without confidence that reliable charging will exist. Neither side can justify the commitment without some assurance the other will show up.

Private contracts between fleets and charging companies can sometimes break such deadlocks, but here the capital requirements are too large and early fleets too small to anchor a business case. The second problem compounds the first.

A MW-scale station — land, a major grid connection, high-power equipment, installation — carries very high fixed costs that only pay off above a threshold of heavy, sustained use. The trucks won't come until the infrastructure exists; the



E-CHARGE. Electrifying freight can take a leaf out of the RE experience GETTY IMAGES

infrastructure can't pay for itself until the trucks come.

THREE STRENGTHS

To resolve this impasse, India can harness three proven, complementary strengths from the power sector. First, it has used large, standardised auctions to create scale, bankable offtake, and a deep reduction in the cost of renewable electricity.

Second, it has a nationally integrated grid that can move power seamlessly across regions.

Third, open-access and captive-procurement rules allow large consumers to contract clean electricity on long-term, fixed-price terms, reducing exposure to the fuel-price volatility inherent to fossil fuels, especially imported crude oil and diesel.

The economics of renewable electricity is now strong enough to make these advantages count. Our analysis of the recent solar-plus-storage auctions suggests that 24x7 clean power with 95 per cent availability can be delivered at ₹6/kWh, significantly below industrial tariffs in many States.

POLICY MOVES

Three policy moves can unlock the transition to freight electrification.

The initial wave of electric trucking should focus on use cases where the economics are easiest to prove: closed-loop operations with predictable routes, high utilisation, and repeat charging needs

First, create the scale of demand for charging that the market might be unable to coordinate on its own. The initial wave of electric trucking should focus on use cases where the economics are easiest to prove: closed-loop operations with predictable routes, high utilisation, and repeat charging needs.

These include cement, steel, chemicals, mining, ports, industrial parks, and short-haul container movement. A central agency or public-sector platform can pool demand from large fleet operators and logistics firms and auction long-term charging-service contracts. A payment-security mechanism can backstop early volumes and taper as utilisation rises. Fleet operators that subscribe to guaranteed charging volumes would, in effect, commit to deploying electric trucks. The same contract therefore de-risks both sides of the market.

This is exactly what auctions and long-term contracts did for solar: turn uncertain demand into bankable offtake, and bankable offtake into falling costs. This, in turn, will require businesses to commit to electrification of their fleets which today is confined mostly to light commercial vehicles and last-mile delivery trucks and not heavy or long-haul freight.

Second, deployment of charging infrastructure should begin where land availability, grid readiness, and economic activity already converge. Industrial clusters, logistics parks, export hubs, and strategic stretches of the Golden Quadrilateral are well positioned to lead the transition. These locations are more likely to sit near high-voltage grid capacity, have land that can be assembled, and generate the utilisation needed to bring charging

costs down. Any publicly supported infrastructure should use interoperable technical protocols and streamlined approval process, accept common payment, meet uptime standards, and allow any compliant truck to charge.

Third, simplify access to cheap, clean electricity for fleets — and turn the power utility into a partner, not an obstacle. Fleet operators get the cheapest power by contracting directly with renewable energy producers, bypassing the utility.

STANDARDISE NORMS

But today that means navigating a different, confusing set of rules in every State — too complicated for most operators to manage. The fix is a single, standardised system: common contracts, pre-approved procedures, and one point of contact, so any new charging hub can plug in and start buying cheap solar or wind power right away, instead of starting from scratch each time.

The utility need not sell the electricity itself. It can earn a regulated fee for carrying power over its wires. Its larger opportunity lies in building and owning the upgraded power lines, substations and connections that charging hubs need.

Treating these as regulated infrastructure — the same way utilities already earn a guaranteed return on the poles and wires they own today — gives them a steady income, while private companies build and run the chargers themselves. Smart pricing can also nudge trucks to charge at midday, when solar power is cheap and plentiful. So even when it isn't the one selling the power, the utility has every reason to support this infrastructure, not resist it.

Government support for charging infrastructure needs to therefore become much more than an add-on to purchase subsidies. It needs to anchor India's first national electric-freight infrastructure programme.

The market is unlikely to build such a network on its own, because the first charging stations and the first trucks must arrive together.

India electrified its power ambitions through auctions, scale, contracts and grid planning. It can electrify freight the same way — by making the cheapest kilometre the electric one.

Abhyankar is Associate Adjunct Professor at the Goldman School of Public Policy of the University of California, Berkeley and Co-Faculty Director of the India Energy and Climate Center; Rajagopal is Professor, Institute of Environment and Sustainability, UCLA; Shiledar is a principal at RMI

CSE revival — looking beyond nostalgia

The Calcutta Stock Exchange could serve new segments like MSMEs, carbon market, green bonds and municipal finance

Nilanjan Ghosh

The West Bengal Finance Minister's Budget announcement of reviving the Calcutta Stock Exchange (CSE) will evoke nostalgia among many. But why does India need a regional stock exchange when exchanges are national, electronic, and highly concentrated?

The Indian exchange landscape is completely different from the one in which regional stock exchanges flourished. Liberalisation, demutualisation, technological innovation, and regulatory reforms have fundamentally altered market structure.

Trading is no longer geography-dependent. Physical trading floors have disappeared, and network effects have become overwhelmingly powerful. The consequence is a classic winner-takes-most market. The National Stock Exchange (NSE) dominates equity trading. The Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) has become the primary platform for commodity derivatives.

WHO WILL FINANCE REVIVAL?

The Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), despite its illustrious history, occupies a secondary position in most segments. Even newer initiatives such as the International Financial Services Centre at GIFT City have required substantial policy support and regulatory innovation to carve out space, while regional exchanges have disappeared.

The biggest challenge for CSE revival is financing. Modern exchanges operate as technology companies with highly sophisticated financial infrastructure. Matching engines, clearing and settlement systems, cybersecurity architecture, disaster recovery centres, surveillance systems, algorithmic trading interfaces, co-location facilities, and regulatory compliance frameworks require substantial upfront investment and continuous upgrades.

With uncertain returns and the nature of market concentration in the exchange industry, private investors will ask a difficult question: why invest in this venture, and what will its ROI be?

The challenge is compounded by the economics of electronic markets. Liquidity attracts liquidity and it crucial to trading activity.

Large exchanges enjoy tighter bid-ask spreads because they have more participants. Rational investors therefore gravitate toward the larger exchanges, reinforcing their dominance. Therefore, for CSE to compete directly with NSE or MCX is worse than the "David vs Goliath" analogy.

Advocates of revival may argue that innovation can create a competitive advantage. The CSE could offer lower transaction fees, subsidised listings, faster onboarding, specialised co-location facilities, or customised products tailored to specific sectors. But these are insufficient.

Trading costs represent only a small fraction of an investor's overall



CSE. Taking stock of revival BLOOMBERG

decision-making process.

The cost of a wider bid-ask spread can easily exceed the savings from reduced exchange fees.

Consequently, any revival strategy would need a mechanism to artificially create liquidity in the early stages, mostly through a designated market-maker programme (in which institutions are incentivised to continuously provide buy and sell quotes). These interventions themselves involve costs, including inventory risk, price volatility, and market development. The question is who will bear these and why.

A STRATEGIC ENTRY POINT

This implies CSE needs to create a strategic entry point through an asset class, market segment, or financial ecosystem that is unique and underserved. There is no point thinking of a regional financing platform in today's electronic trading world, where reach is ubiquitous. While specialised SME financing platforms are already

occupied by NSE and BSE, one possible space for the CSE is to operate for MSME clusters that can raise capital through aggregation.

Second, a specialised marketplace for green bonds, adaptation bonds, blue bonds, resilience-linked securities, and sustainability-linked instruments could potentially differentiate CSE from other financial platforms.

A third and perhaps more ambitious opportunity lies in carbon markets. If regulatory frameworks evolve appropriately, CSE could position itself as a centre for carbon, biodiversity, and mangrove conservation credits, as well as nature-based financial instruments.

A fourth possibility emerges from Bengal's location in the Bay of Bengal. If Kolkata needs to be reconceived as the growth pole and financial gateway to BIMSTEC economies, the CSE can be seen as a specialised platform for cross-border trade finance, regional infrastructure investment vehicles, logistics-linked financing instruments, and maritime economy funds.

A fifth possibility lies with municipal finance. CSE can be a dedicated platform that facilitates urban infrastructure financing and attracts institutional investors into local government projects. For CSE, the opportunity may therefore lie not in competing in mainstream equity trading but in becoming a platform for products that are underserved.

The writer is Vice-President, Development Studies, at the Observer Research Foundation

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E20 fuel experiment

While cutting import bills is vital force feeding 20 per cent ethanol to 2.3 crore incompatible vehicles is economically devastating for daily commuters.

Depriving motorists of standard fuel alternatives ruins complex engines turning hard-earned survival kits into scrap.

True green progress demands infrastructural readiness consumer choice and public consent not a forced experiment that blends our

petrol but purifies our economic sorrow. The government must immediately mandate the availability of regular unblended fuel options alongside E20 at all pumps.

Vijaykumar HK
Raichur

The land factor

A more durable solution for land acquisition lies not in coercion but in aligning the interests of the state and landowners.

In Gujarat's land-pooling approach, land is assembled in bulk, owners receive compensation broadly linked to prevailing market values, and after essential infrastructure and public utilities are laid out, a good portion of the developed land is returned to the original owners. The model preserves a sense of ownership, reduces resistance and distributes the gains of development more equitably.

R Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

Benefitting MFs

This is with reference to the article, 'Intraday borrowing by MFs'. India's securities regulator wants to allow mutual funds to use intraday borrowing for purposes beyond investor redemptions and payouts. SEBI in a recent consultation paper proposed to allow mutual funds to use intraday borrowing for trade settlements, foreign exchange transactions, margin requirements for derivatives, and other liquidity needs. They could also temporarily

borrow amounts exceeding expected inflows, provided the money is repaid by the end of the day.

Any borrowing that spills over into overnight positions would be subject to existing regulatory caps, including 20 per cent of a mutual fund scheme's net assets and a maximum term of six months. Intraday borrowing is highly beneficial for mutual funds

S Muthulakshmi
Virudhunagar (TN)

Fostering India-Japan ties

Cooperation needs to go beyond traditional areas

Chandrajit Banerjee

The India-Japan relationship has significantly matured. Over time, it has evolved from a standard bilateral partnership to a Special Strategic and Global Partnership. With Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on a visit to India, understanding the nuances of this bilateral partnership is more crucial than ever.

A significant aspect of this partnership is Japan's significant contribution to India's development story, particularly in infrastructure modernisation. Through extensive Official Development Assistance (ODA), amounting to around \$53 billion to date and with around 100 ongoing projects, Japan has played a significant role in supporting India's priority areas such as energy, transportation and environmental, and initiatives addressing basic human needs. In addition, India-Japan partnership is also fostering innovation, technology transfer, and sustainable development.

SCOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT

While our bilateral trade reached \$27.47 billion during FY 2025-26, there is still scope of better utilisation of the India-Japan trade relationship. A key area for progress is the renegotiation of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which can unlock new opportunities and benefits for both countries.

However, amid ongoing geopolitical uncertainties, our strategic cooperation needs to go beyond traditional areas.

First, semiconductors represent a key area for future India-Japan cooperation. As advanced technologies become more central to the global economy, semiconductor manufacturing and supply chain resilience have assumed strategic importance. India's strengths in digital infrastructure and electronics manufacturing complement Japan's expertise in advanced manufacturing and innovation.

Joint efforts in semiconductor ecosystems, research, investment, and skill development can help both countries build secure and reliable global technology supply chains.

Second, critical minerals is another emerging focus of India-Japan cooperation. Through



INFRA FUNDING. Japan has been a major contributor

collaboration in exploration, processing, recycling, and sustainable resource management, India and Japan can strengthen economic security and support the transition to clean energy at the regional and global levels.

Third, technology and artificial intelligence offer new opportunities for greater cooperation. India's expanding digital ecosystem and skilled workforce, together with Japan's technological and research strengths can create a strong foundation for collaboration in artificial intelligence, robotics, cybersecurity, and advanced digital solutions.

Fourth, connectivity is a defining aspect of the India-Japan cooperation. High-quality infrastructure, transport networks, digital connectivity, and regional integration are central to strengthening economic ties across Asia.

Fifth, empowering youth is critical to the partnership's future success. Increased collaboration between universities, industries, and research institutions in India and Japan can open new pathways for young professionals, innovators, and entrepreneurs.

Sixth, as the Indo-Pacific region emerges as the centre of global economic and strategic activities, India and Japan are uniquely positioned to shape a more resilient, secure and prosperous regional order. Both our economies envision a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region governed by international rules. Our cooperation through platforms such as the Quad underscores our commitment to addressing shared challenges.

The next chapter of the India-Japan partnership will be defined not only by shared strategic interests but by the ability of both countries to translate that alignment into deeper economic, technological and people-centric collaboration.

The writer is Director General, Confederation of Indian Industry



GURBACHAN SINGH

Home prices are, all said and done, very high in urban India. The root of the problem lies in the policies. These need to be changed. This article presents a ten-point policy solution. It is a very long story but told briefly here.

Some of it is an 'out of the box' story; it needs to be.

First, the existing major cities are too big for further expansion at reasonable cost. We need new cities, or meaningful extensions of existing small cities. But the public authorities cannot do it alone. We need public policy that enables private reputed real estate developers to participate. The expansion needs to be holistic so that people actually shift in a phased manner. Home prices will be significantly lower and attractive in the new urban areas.

Second, in the existing big cities there is a need to phase out the excessive restrictions on real estate development, improve the infrastructure, allow for a higher floor space index in some areas, and reform or even phase out institutions like the Delhi Development Authority. The supply of homes will expand.

URBAN LAND PRICE

Third, with the massive expansion of new real estate development suggested above, the price of land can, in fact, rise in the short term but the long-term story is very different. As the number of homes in urban India expands massively after a while, their inflation-adjusted prices will fall. Accordingly, the price of urban land derived from the market price of homes will fall. We have interesting and counter-intuitive causality here after a while — from urban home prices to urban land price to the price of rural land at the boundaries of cities!

Fourth, there is a need to amend the Land Acquisition Act 2013, which can contribute to reducing the price of rural land. The displaced farmers can be part of the new cities, or extensions of existing small cities. This is not just for their housing needs but also for their livelihood.

Fifth, with the policies suggested here, real estate prices will start coming down. This itself can reduce the incentives for the big investor demand. This can, in turn, increase the effective supply of real estate for end-users. We also have "retail" investor demand for real estate. This is somewhat related to the low post-tax and inflation-adjusted returns on bank deposits, etc., due to

10 steps to reducing home prices

HOMING-IN. Amending the Land Acquisition Act and allowing for a higher floor space index in some areas are among the required measures



SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

financial repression, public sector banks, and tax laws.

A change in policy will help here. This can tilt the "retail" investor demand from real estate to financial assets. This too will increase the effective supply of real estate.

Sixth, a part of the investor demand is due to the need to absorb black money. This is often justified with the argument that the black money may otherwise get invested in gold or in assets abroad through the *hawala* route. This is a case of capital outflow from the country, which needs to be discouraged. But the question is not about absorption of black

money within the economy. Instead, we need to phase out the very generation of black money; this can, among other things, reduce the price of real estate.

Seventh, the circle rate in many places is lower than the market price. There is a need to gradually raise the circle rate. This can reduce the "facility" to absorb black money in purchasing properties. It also helps to reduce the stamp duty. Home prices will cool down.

CAPITAL GAINS TAX

Eighth, given the situation, there is a need to reduce, for some years, the capital gains tax on the sale of real estate, if the proceeds are invested in financial assets. So, some investors may choose to sell vacant properties. This increases the effective supply. This and some other policies suggested above can increase the fiscal deficit. However, the public authorities can sell the excessive land that they hold. This helps in raising funds. It also helps in increasing the effective supply of land.

Ninth, the 'sell and build' model is often used by builders in India as a way of financing a project, given the difficulties in borrowing for real estate development from banks and other financial institutions. There is a need then to liberalise, with safeguards, lending for real estate development. This can induce a gradual shift from the 'sell and build' model to the 'build and sell' model. This can reduce the risk and price for end-users.

Tenth, though the above policies can reduce home prices over time, homes can still be unaffordable for very many poor people.

The public authorities need to intervene directly in this context with some schemes or subsidies.

In conclusion, appropriate policies can reduce, if not obviate, the need for short-term and costly palliative measures to reduce home prices.

The writer is an independent economist. He taught at Ashoka University, ISI (Delhi) and JNU

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

July 2, 2006

WTO talks collapse in Geneva

The mini-ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Geneva ended in a deadlock with India loudly complaining that there is no negotiating space for developing countries on concerns raised by them. The Union Commerce and Industry Minister, Mr Kamal Nath, said, "I am going back to India. I cannot be in a meet that does not recognise Indian farmers."

Bill on new company law likely in winter session

A clear picture on whether the board composition norms of the proposed new company law would be in sync with that of the Securities and Exchange Board of India's revised Clause 49 of the Listing Agreement is unlikely to emerge before November.

Draft policy aims to bring down drug prices

The Government on Saturday announced the draft National Pharmaceutical Policy at a meeting of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee. The policy draft aims to bring down the prices of medicines by including 354 specified drugs in addition to the already existing 74 drugs under the list of essential medicines.

Should an MD be an audit committee member?

R Anand

The audit committee (AC) is an essential pillar of the board and the overall governance framework. The regulatory framework stipulates that the majority of the AC should comprise independent directors (IDs) and its chairman has to be an ID and financially literate — not necessarily a chartered accountant. There are varying practices around who should be the other members of the AC. It could be non-executive non-independent directors. It could be managing director (MD) whole-time director (WTD). It could be all members comprising IDs. The issue here is to discuss the pros and cons of an MD being a member of the AC as against being an invitee.

Make no mistake. The MD is first and foremost a director under the Companies Act with absolute responsibilities on the day-to-day management of the company. By inducting him/her as member of the AC

makes him the central figure of most issues that get discussed. A standard templated AC agenda items comprises most issues that get responded by either the MD or CFO.

The MD is a signatory to the financial statements. Most analyst calls and discussions are handled by the MD. Will the MD be in some potentially conflicting situations when he sits in the AC as a member than as an invitee?

For example, if there is a problem where the statutory auditors express a view on impairment of assets which is in sync with the views of the IDs. What if the MD has a different view and feels, for whatever reason, that impairment is not required? How does he record the same?

Does the position become different and manageable if the MD is only an invitee and not a member? He as an invitee is duty bound to express his views on the above issue and other matters as well which is what normally happens.

While finally the majority view will



AUDIT. Should MD be a central figure?

prevail the fact of the matter is that dealing with the issue as a member could be awkward, and possibly conflicting as well.

The auditors will probably be more comfortable airing views on grey area matters before the AC which has the MD as invitee than a member. Some companies do have a healthy practice of involving most senior management personnel as invitees of the AC with a regimented approach to ensure each one of them responds to the agenda items as applicable to them. A random survey across a few listed companies

has revealed that most companies have the MD as invitee to the AC and not as member. The impact on discussions and decisions is worth considering.

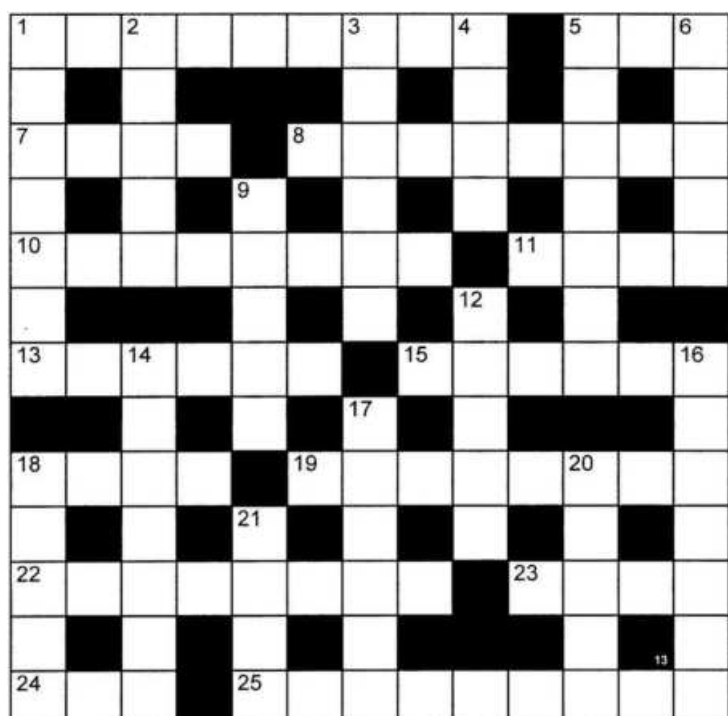
WHEN THE LAW IS SILENT!

Companies are often confronted with a situation of how to deal with matters when the law/regulation is either hazy or silent. Do you approach it with a sense of conservatism or just go by the letter of the law? Companies that apply the optics test more than the legal test ensure that the MD is an invitee and not a member.

Those that go strictly by the letter of the law position the MD as a member of the AC. Both these approaches are right as long as the outcomes are right. There is a clear view emerging that we should not be over prescriptive with the intent to cover all situations. Corporate India is mature enough with the support of enough past data and experience to handle issues in law that are hazy.

The writer is a chartered accountant

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2684



EASY

ACROSS

- Vast land mass (9)
- Not many (3)
- Behind schedule (4)
- Suddenly alarmed (8)
- Keeps back, checks (8)
- Daybreak (4)
- Female monster with serpents for hair (6)
- Orison (6)
- Protuberance (4)
- Musical, concordant (8)
- Scholarship (8)
- Fop, dandy (4)
- Grief, misery (3)
- Bend the knee reverentially (9)

DOWN

- Getting on the telephone (7)
- Indentation (5)
- Something with objective reality (6)
- Pneumatic wheel surround (4)
- A wrong but prevalent idea (7)
- Make broader (5)
- Head of abbey (5)
- A vagrant (5)
- Thorough, overhauling search (7)
- Rookie (7)
- Large-calibre gun (6)
- Beneath (5)
- Female relative (5)
- Cosy (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- How temperate Europe is! (9)
- Not many give iron to the wife (3)
- Is dead behind the clock (4)
- Let Strad be played, which gave one a shock (8)
- Lives in a vowel-change that restricts one (8)
- First light to get on one, one will realise (4)
- Monster Zola might have regarded as cheesy (6)
- Act of worship might repay rebel leader (6)
- Slight collision may be felt by a phrenologist (4)
- An overtone got when mouth-organ isn't finished (8)
- Is coming to hear of erudition (8)
- He makes a dandy sort of lover (4)
- Misery is nothing you and I can circumvent (3)
- Clung with feet maybe so as to bend the knee (9)

DOWN

- Visiting may be one's vocation (7)
- Nick makes the North turn hot and cold (5)
- Something that exists with tin yet to be sorted out (6)
- A slick to tryout at Silverstone final (4)
- The wrong idea about calf lay around (7)
- Get broader, as I'd new version of it (5)
- An unmarried father with no end of baby to rock (5)
- Tread heavily on a cargo-boat (5)
- Odd sort of game such a sale can be (7)
- Take on new people in order to cure it, right? (7)
- Around the North chapter member is among the big guns (6)
- It's dot up to the wind around the East (5)
- She might be found topless in Venice (5)
- Warm and cosy sort of bar (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2683

ACROSS 1. Crease 4. Crop up 9. Orphans 10. Voted 11. Shed 12. Bass 13. Pal 15. Soup 16. Loss 19. Rob 21. Bull 22. Move 24. Noose 25. Buckram 26. Sadist 27. Endear

DOWN 1. Cross-currents 2. Express 3. Span 5. Revision 6. Put up 7. Paddle-steamer 8. Essay 14. Tumblers 17. Scourge 18. Globe 20. Blood 23. Scan

UPI, India's Epic Odyssey Continues

Wider play also lowers remittance costs

India is pushing ahead with the export of its wildly successful Unified Payments Interface (UPI). Greece has become the 10th country to plug into the instant digital payment system, which allows Indian tourists and the diaspora to use it for QR-based payments and to remit money to India. Offering UPI to other countries showcases Indian innovation in the global marketplace. It also allows settlement in local currencies, thus bypassing the dollar-denominated SWIFT gateway. This comes in handy to chip away at the petrodollar energy trade, for instance, with Russia. Making publicly funded open-source digital infrastructure available to the rest of the world establishes India's credentials as a trusted technology partner.

The immediate benefit to India from the cross-border expansion of UPI is reduction in remittance costs. This is a key concern for a nation that receives the highest amount of international remittances. Wire transfers through the SWIFT network route money through several intermediaries that take their individual cuts. UPI settlements are instantaneous, reducing liquidity costs for intermediaries. The system is transparent about exchange rates, and so squeezes out hidden

markups in international wire transfers. Since UPI has partner networks, cross-border transfers can be accomplished locally instead of over premium networks.

Countries are rolling out their own digital payment platforms. But India enjoys two key advantages with UPI. One, it has a first-mover advantage in a vital piece of DPI. Two, the network has acquired scale few other countries can aspire to match. US technology majors have presented UPI as a case study for their country's digital payments roadmap. It's reasonable to expect India will be able to press its UPI advantage with more countries. A larger UPI footprint helps to conserve foreign exchange. This is driving GoI's initiative to globalise UPI. Remittances offer a stable source of capital for an economy growing principally due to domestic consumption. It's good for bolstering soft power, too.

The More Kinds of Citizens the Merrier

The US Supreme Court's decision to strike down Donald Trump's executive order curtailing birthright citizenship stops a silly idea in its tracks. By reaffirming that nearly all infants born on American soil are citizens, the court has defended the universality enshrined in the US Constitution which, last heard, still holds sway in that country. The message is clear: citizenship is not inherited like property, but conferred by belonging to a place. The ruling exposes the Latinate obsolescence of *jus sanguinis* (citizenship by blood). In a world where identities are increasingly fluid, insisting on 'ancestral purity' is as outdated as professions along caste lines.

The ongoing football World Cup provides a stark lesson, where nations thrive not by excluding but by embracing as many nationalities as possible to make their citizenry. To demand some other atavistic proof of kinship would be to deny the very cosmopolitanism that makes modern societies thrive. The US, more than other countries, should know this. Its innovation economy has been built much on 'imported' talent. Universities, companies and research labs flourish when they attract minds from across the globe.

Citizenship provides a surety. Trump's order, had it stood, would have also created a stateless underclass — millions born in the US but denied its promise. The court's ruling averts that dystopia that only failing states seek as misguided 'protection'. Belonging is not defined by Trump's 1950s politico-aesthetics, but by participation, contribution and presence. Whether in football, business or democracy, identity is fluid. Nations embracing this fluidity prosper. Those who cling to outdated notions of 'Blut und Boden' (blood and soil) close doors on themselves.

JUST IN JEST
With every decision liable to be overturned, should we celebrate?

How VAR Can Make Us Super Cautious

Decision-making is VAR by other means. The video assistant referee has already shown a taste for drama during this World Cup. But the way things are going, consider the likelihood of decisions not just overturned minutes later, but weeks, months, even years into the future. A goal celebrated in June could be annulled in December. The mind boggles. The implications are profound. Not just football fans but humanity in general would start celebrating more cautiously, perhaps with a polite golf clap rather than a full-throated roar. 'Lovely numbers,' a board member might murmur, 'but let's wait until 2029 to be sure.' Policymakers would keep their tactical notebooks open indefinitely, just in case the peace announced in West Asia retroactively is cancelled in the next quarter on some offside-y technicality.

Economists could well add 'VAR risk' to their models, a kind of Vodafone retro tax thing in spot decision terms. VAR would then become not just a referee but also creator of a whole philosophy: joy is temporary (or is it?), celebration provisional (or is it?), and history itself subject to review (or is it?). 'Not so fast' would be ingrained in every optimist's head. VAR may rob us forever of spontaneous joy — lest it ends up misplaced. But don't shudder. Not just yet. For even pessimism may be overturned by the Great VAR in the Sky.

TECHNIK Some things to consider about the ruckus over WhatsApp introducing usernames

USERNAAM KE VAASTE?



Nikhil Pahwa

In the early days of WhatsApp, one growth hack that the original founders of the instant messaging platform used was to convert mobile numbers into the identifier for a user. This avoided the need for setting up a username itself, thereby making adding friends and family easier by just accessing the address book. For the mobile-first part of the world, especially India, the need for an email address to sign up was done away with. It's one of the reasons for WhatsApp growing so rapidly in India.

Life has come full circle for WhatsApp, in that it's finally introducing usernames. I hurriedly blocked mine to maintain a consistent username presence across platforms.

Frankly the controversy around WhatsApp usernames is a surprise. Both Telegram and Signal have had username-based access for quite a while. But what makes the attention being paid to WhatsApp is its scale in India — over 500 mn. Some things to consider about the current controversy:

- ▶ Disclosing username instead of number helps preserve privacy for vulnerable users. More platforms should do this to prevent harassment, especially of women. It's why many cab and e-commerce apps choose to route customer calls through a centralised number instead of exposing the user's mobile number.
- ▶ For women, it helps when their numbers are not disclosed in college

and school WhatsApp groups. WhatsApp has done well to also ensure that usernames are not publicly searchable — unlike Telegram. It helps that users can protect themselves from being messaged by everyone by requiring a passcode, though WhatsApp should have enabled this feature by default.

▶ The claim that usernames make it difficult for cyber authorities to track scammers seems shallow. Every username on WhatsApp is essentially linked to a mobile

number, asking them to transfer money to particular UPI or bank accounts. Certain usernames associated with public figures like the prime minister, government entities and verified Meta accounts are reserved for them. I had to log in to my Facebook account

— almost cynical — digital populace, given the scale and innovation in scamming in India.

Scams are a cross-industry, cross-country issue, spanning telecom, social media, search, payments and banking. It often feels like each government department is trying to show it's doing something with-out-unders



It's a wrap

number, and mobile numbers are already KYC-ed with video verification by telecom operators. There are issues of mule accounts linked to mobile numbers. But that's not something WhatsApp can address.

- ▶ Influencer Ankur Warikoo raised a legitimate concern about impersonation — that anyone can register a WhatsApp username similar to his name (e.g., awarikoo, warikoo or warikoo) and pretend to be him. Three things:
 - Email suffers from the same problem, and people have created email IDs similar to those of brands and scammed people for decades.
 - Scams have been perpetuated over

Disclosing username instead of number helps preserve privacy for vulnerable users. More platforms should do this to prevent harassment, especially of women

WhatsApp without usernames as well. Company employees have been contacted by scammers who use publicly available photos of founders to impersonate them, telling employees that

(after months) to claim mine. WhatsApp already has verified business accounts to address impersonation. But despite that, it doesn't stop scammers from trying to impersonate businesses.

Users names reserved for legitimate entities help users check the validity of a sender and prevent scams. Perhaps WhatsApp should consider a mechanism to prevent the blocking of names similar to brand names as well.

▶ On the concern that scammers will be able to contact people by their username alone and spam them, scammers don't necessarily work like this. They spam via bulk text messages or phone calls, and then move people to WhatsApp. Users are shown which country the sender's number is from, because international numbers are often used by spammers.

At the same time, we have a large number of people — especially senior citizens — who don't check the number they're being messaged from, or the sender's country of origin. We need a more digital-aware and scepti-

implications of its actions on a wider digital ecosystem — DoT being the worst offender with SIM binding.

WhatsApp is not perfect and it has its failings. For example, a person should be allowed to prevent people who don't have his or her mobile number from messaging the person on the platform. Business users often use the platform for spamming, and WhatsApp's financial incentives are aligned towards enabling more and more businesses.

There is no mechanism for blocking people from adding them to their broadcast lists, or verifying one's identity across devices so that no one may impersonate the person. The moment someone turns on Meta AI in chat without my consent, I feel like a private conversation is being spied upon. It should be a two-way consent.

A statement made on a TV panel discussion on Wednesday that WhatsApp should have consulted GoI before rolling out this feature is troubling. WhatsApp had announced plans to roll out usernames a year-and-a-half ago. Reaction from GoI is, once again, knee-jerk. There is no reason why any company should consult a government before rolling out a feature, let alone one that protects privacy. We're not in a licence raj.

The writer is founder, MediaNama

America's Birthday or Trump's?



Seema Sirohi

It's America's 250th birthday on Saturday. But the main event is Donald Trump. He is and will be everywhere. You can bet your last \$250 — he will be starting from the new bill, if it's released. And watching from limited-edition passports and 24-karat gold coins.

Fusing his personal brand with the nation's identity at this historic semiquincentennial? That's exactly the idea. Yes, there's a law prohibiting a living person from appearing on currency notes. But Republicans can always try to remove that irritant. Trump is already the first sitting president with his John Hancock on the dollar, dislodging the treasurer's signature. Tradition be damned.

A divided country watches, exhausted by the extravaganza of the erratic. What should it celebrate? Rising prices, or the make-believe world of Trumpian declarations? Many are happier watching the 'discovery of America' by foreign football fans who have descended en masse, taking over cities and draining bars. They are the best birthday gift.

Freddy, a German, has thousands

travelling with him as he drives his rental car to catch the next World Cup match. His social media posts are soothing and reassuring, as the random fan-turned-celebrity records his first impressions of southern hospitality, Tex-Mex food, ranch dressing, the enormity of Costco, country music, and the quaint beauty of small towns.

Americans have embraced Freddy. Placards welcome him. Nasa gave him a tour. A popular country singer invited him to a concert after he got into her music on the road trip. Airlines have ensured he finds alternate routes through bad weather. People sent him maps when he got lost in Vermont looking for moose. Every post gets hundreds of responses filled with wonder, love and advice. No politics, no divisions.

If only Washington DC were a World Cup venue, moan beleaguered residents. The vibe is negative, even angry. America's 250th feels more like Trump 250. And before anyone races to the patent office to hog/hawk the logo, forget about it. The Trump Organisation has already filed applications to trademark 'Trump 250' for use on bumper stickers, golf balls, mugs, tote bags and clothing. It's business and branding in the pursuit of happiness.

But that's not enough — it never is. Trump wants to leave his mark on the capital. Literally. Nothing less than an 'Arc de Trump' would do, maybe a few

inches higher than the Arc de Triomphe to drive the point home. The architectural overreach has critics howling about its fascist aesthetics, and war veterans raging over blocked views of monuments more important and built with a delicate eye on history.

Trump's arch at the entrance of Arlington Cemetery where America's fallen soldiers rest, is not a commemoration of the country but a monument to one man, say critics. And they're not wrong. When asked who the arch was for, Trump naturally said, 'Me'. Marble and machismo at your service.

How could it be otherwise? He who is willing to grab 20% of future Hormuz fees, America's 250th gives him home team advantage. For a million dollars, you can be in the same room as Trump on July 4. For a little bit more — say, \$2.5 mn — you can buy a speaking role and become the ultimate content creator for family lore.



Martial arts law

How is all this even happening in a country that prides itself on process and safeguards? Back when the US Congress was a real thing, it created a bipartisan commission in 2016 called America250 to conceive and execute the celebrations in 2026. A budget of \$150 mn was approved to organise 'all fitting and proper activities' across the country. But the commission sat around for 10 years with nothing much to show in terms of event planning or projects.

Trump did a hostile takeover with a rival organisation called Freedom250, which now controls the bulk of the funds. Its first event was a gladiator-style cage fight staged in the White House on the president's 80th birthday. Trump has been planning for the anniversary since his first term. He called it a great milestone 'in the history of the world' in his first address to Congress in 2017. Once back in office, he signed an executive order giving the White House the power to choose and chart the celebrations. Case closed.

Of course, America's birthday party being appropriated by an unpopular president doesn't sit well with many party-goers. Prominent musicians have refused to perform at the main event, since it would essentially be a Trump rally. They don't want to be his props. America250, the original organisation, is belatedly trying to rustle up free 'unity' concerts in different cities so that ordinary non-MAGA have somewhere to celebrate.

Two Regulators Need Waking Up



Amitabh Kant

India has earned its place as pharmacy of the world. It's also fast emerging as a hub for clean mobility. But it's lacking leadership in innovation because of institutional reasons. Two regulators — Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) and Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) — have not kept pace with the industries they oversee. Both are overly bureaucratic and lack the will to be innovative. And both the sectors they govern have become an imperative for India's growth story.

India manufactures roughly a fifth of the world's generic medicines. Yet, in 2023, it accounted for less than 2% of global first-in-class drug launches, China and the US together claiming about 60%. The gap is not in shortage of capital or talent, but in the regulator's scientific capacity.

A sponsor seeking to run an early-phase trial for a cell or gene therapy, RNA-based molecule, or novel biologic confronts a sequence of ad-hoc subject expert committee (SEC) reviews. This leaves it with an unpredictable clock and no dedicated scientific cadre that can evaluate frontier modalities at speed. Innovation and IP naturally

migrate to wherever the pathway is fastest and most certain.

CDSCO still faces challenges like chronic understaffing, gaps in technical skills, weak lab infra and fragmented approvals. About a decade back, the organisation was recommended a benchmark of 1 inspector for every 50 manufacturing units. Yet, in end-2023, it carried a strength of barely 200 inspectors against a sanctioned strength of about 500 drug inspectors. Even its digitisation drive produced several overlapping portals that applicants report as glitch-ridden and difficult to comprehend.

A device-maker — often a startup or small manufacturer already holding a CE mark or US FDA clearance — is made to run a gauntlet of sequential, piecemeal queries, each round adding months of uncertainty. A parliamentary panel had recommended a single consolidated query, time-bound conditional approvals for products already cleared by credible foreign regulators, and AI-assisted pre-screening to compress processing time. The shortfall is in CDSCO's pace of adoption.



Wakeup, wakeup

In the context of clean mobility BEE is even worse. Corporate average fuel efficiency (CAFE) norms have governed passenger-vehicle emissions since 2017. Yet, for close to 8 yrs, there's no purpose-built statutory penalty mechanism for non-compliance. A dedicated enforcement framework remains in draft.

Also, implications across successive CAFE drafts have continued to soften emission tolerance, not make them stringent as per global standards. The latest CAFE norms have chosen to extend generous credits to flex-fuel vehicles and plug-in hybrids whose real-world emission gains are far thinner than suggested lab figures. This will only lead to slower e-mobility adoption, and create confusion for the industry.

The most consequential fixes require no new legislation. This is an execution challenge, not a statutory gap in law. For drug innovation, a workable design already exists, and can be operationalised through inter-agency arrangement. A 2-tier model should be built by pairing CDSCO's licensing and enforcement authority with ICMR's scientific depth. ICMR should front-end early-phase scientific and ethical evaluation, frontier-modality trials, and issue a formal scientific-and-ethics determination within a fixed window of a few weeks.

CDSCO should then proceed with permissions, inspections and pharmacovigilance, which keeps its statutory authority intact and exclusive. A joint scientific review board representing members from both

organisations should be constituted under health ministry. An innovation accelerator cell and genuine digital handshake linking the clinical-trial registry and ethics-committee data would convert today's queue-based system into one that is time-bound, transparent and auditable.

GoI has already signalled this direction, compressing key approval timelines and consolidating CDSCO's portals. Because both agencies sit under the same ministry, rules of business already permit collaboration that can be formalised with an MoU.

BEE is also dealing with technical and procedural malaise. As it relies on layered committees and external consultants, it makes norm-setting slow. The institutions need to be staffed with a permanent technical cadre to set norms on evidence, a transparent and time-bound consultation that genuinely weighs stakeholder input without succumbing to paralysis.

It requires a digital monitoring spine linking BEE, state-designated agencies, designated consumers and discoms. A Centre-state joint committee, constituted by notification, would tie norms to time-bound adoption. Energy Conservation Act 2001 and Rules 2025 already empower BEE. What it needs is restructuring from within.

Cost of further delay is not abstract. India's ambition is sound, industry is ready, and GoI has set the reform direction in motion. CDSCO and BEE need to change.

The writer is former CEO, NITI Aayog



Love Exists In Equality

OSHO

The freedom of woman from man's slavery will also be freedom for man to experience love. So, I call the women's liberation movement not only women's liberation movement, it is also the men's liberation movement; both will be liberated. The slavery is binding them both, and there is continuous struggle. The woman has found her own strategies of how to harass the husband, of how to nag him, of how to put him down; and the man has his own strategy... We have been hoping that love is happening. Centuries have passed — love has not happened, or only once in a while...

Only together, in a deep feeling of oneness, do they feel for the first time totality, perfection. But to attain this perfection, you have to go beyond the love-hate duality. And you are capable of going beyond duality. Right now, they go on hand in hand in your life; you love the same person you hate. So, in the morning it is love, in the evening it is love — and it is a very confusing thing. You don't even understand whether you love the person or you hate the person, because you do both at different times.

And we have been told, taught, programmed in such a way that even a thing like love has to be from the mind. It is basically of the heart, but our whole society has tried to bypass the heart, because the heart is not logical, is not rational.

Abridged from *The Path of the Mystic*; Courtesy: OSHO Times International; www.osho.com

STEP UP TO THE PLATE

Rita Milan

Food comes first at Rita, and it immediately signals that this is not a standard aperitivo stop. The kitchen operates with a clear emphasis on seasonal sourcing and considered execution, producing small plates that feel designed to accompany serious



cocktails rather than simply absorb them.

Dishes range from refined bar snacks to more substantial plates — think crisp croquettes, anchovy-based bites with rich dairy accents, and thoughtfully built sandwiches that carry real depth rather than filler left. There is a noticeable restraint in the menu; nothing feels overworked, yet each plate arrives with precise seasoning and a focus on ingredient clarity.

The drinks programme is equally disciplined, built on fresh juices, house infusions and a long-standing rejection of artificial syrups. The signature Gin Zen — sharp ginger, lime and soda lifted by gin — remains a reference point for the house style: clean, aromatic and balanced, rather than loud. The room itself reinforces this philosophy. A long wooden counter anchors the space, surrounded by a steady hum of conversation rather than noise. Service is efficient and warm.

Overall, Rita functions as a dual-purpose venue: part-serious cocktail bar, part-kitchen-driven aperitivo destination, and it manages both with consistency and control.

Chat Room

Must Insure the Most Vulnerable

Apropos 'Catch 'Em Before They Fall' by KumKum Dasgupta (Jul 1), embedding parametric insurance into informal labour supply chains is a useful idea, given how climate shocks routinely push daily-wage workers into distress and debt. Payouts triggered automatically by weather data, rather than delayed claims processes, could offer real protection when it matters most. The challenge lies in scaling this beyond pilot programmes to the vast, undocumented informal workforce. Industry bodies and state labour departments should collaborate to standardise data collection, ensuring this protection reaches workers who need it most, not just those already within the formal net.

Suathi Senthilkumar Coimbatore



Editor's TAKE

Delhi's voter roll reckoning

As booth-level officers begin a door-to-door count of 1.45 crore voters, Delhi inherits an exercise that has already convulsed Bihar and Bengal

From this week, more than 13,000 booth-level officers are fanning out across Delhi's 70 assembly constituencies to verify the capital's voters. This is Delhi's first Special Intensive Revision (SIR) since 2002: every name must now be matched against that decades-old roll, and those who cannot be linked to it — chiefly newer residents and migrants — must produce prescribed documents or trace their parentage back to 2002. The Election Commission, invoking its constitutional mandate under Article 324 and Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, frames this as simple record-keeping: no eligible citizen left out, no ineligible name retained, after decades of unchecked urbanisation and migration. That administrative logic carries real political weight.

The SIR was first tested in Bihar last year, where roughly 65 lakh names were struck off ahead of the state election, prompting opposition allegations that the poor, migrants and minorities were being quietly thinned out. After weeks of hearings, the Supreme Court on May 27, 2026 unanimously upheld the exercise as within the Commission's mandate, while ordering safeguards: citizenship-linked deletions must go to a competent authority with notice and hearing, and wrongly dropped voters retain a right to judicial review.

Nearly six crore names had been removed nationwide — including in West Bengal, where the Commission admitted a flawed algorithm had wrongly flagged over a crore names. Locally, the politics cut sharper: the BJP, having recently reclaimed both the Assembly and the municipal corporation from the AAP, has welcomed the drive and accused rivals of inflating rolls; the AAP and Congress echo the disenfranchisement fears raised elsewhere.

For Delhi, the stakes are concrete. This is a city of transience — renters who shift addresses every few years, lakhs of migrant workers in unauthorised colonies, women who relocate after marriage — exactly the voters earlier SIR rounds struggled to capture cleanly.

Officials concede the mapping was already squeezed by an overlapping Census house-listing exercise, leaving a tight runway to the October 7 final roll. Get this wrong, and the consequences will outlast this revision, shaping the 2027 municipal polls and beyond. Avoiding the glitches seen elsewhere — app outages, forms dumped at tea stalls, overworked BLOs, citizens panicked by clerical slips — will take more than good intentions.

The Commission should keep its software biased toward inclusion, publish any flagged names locally and early enough to be corrected, and ensure BLOs actually reach migrant bastis and rental clusters, not just the easiest doors. Political parties' booth agents and independent observers should be allowed to watch the process as it happens, not only audit it afterward.

The Supreme Court has given the Commission legitimacy and a rulebook; Delhi's task is to use both. The real test of this SIR is not how many names it adds or removes, but whether, on October 7, voters trust the list they find themselves on.

A verdict on failure, not a new ideology

Colombia's presidential election marks more than a change of government; it reflects a profound crisis of public confidence. The victory of political outsider Abelardo de la Espriella, following years of unfulfilled promises from both the left and the traditional right, underscores a growing impatience with insecurity, economic stagnation and weak state authority



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

Twelve hours before Colombians cast their ballots in the 21 June presidential run-off, President Gustavo Petro announced that security forces had killed Iván Idrobo, the FARC dissident commander known as "Marlon" — second-in-command to Néstor Vera, alias Iván Mordisco, and one of the most wanted men in the country's southwest. Petro called it the heaviest blow yet against armed criminal structures in western Colombia. The timing was almost too apt: a state still fighting, region by region, to hold ground that has never fully been its own, even as the political project that promised to win that ground through negotiation was about to lose power at the ballot box.

By the next morning, Colombia had chosen its next president: Abelardo de la Espriella, a 47-year-old millionaire lawyer with no prior political experience, who narrowly defeated left-wing senator Iván Cepeda — 49.66% to 48.7%, a margin of roughly 250,000 votes out of more than 26 million cast, making him the most-voted candidate in Colombian history.

Supporters call him "El Tigre." Donald Trump, who endorsed him, called him a fighter "just like me." Commentators reached for the comparison Colombians were already making themselves: Javier Milei in Argentina, Nayib Bukele in El Salvador — outsiders who won less by proposing policy than by promising to demolish a political class rather than reform it. It would be a mistake, though, to read the result as evidence that Colombia has adopted a new ideology. What the vote mainly expressed was fatigue with two projects that had each failed on their own terms. Petro's administration, the country's first left-wing government, had promised social transformation and a negotiated peace with Colombia's remaining armed groups; it struggled to turn that promise into functioning state authority.

The traditional right, for its part, spent two decades promising order without dismantling the land inequality, criminal economies and institutional weakness that keep conflict alive in Colombia's periphery. In the space between those disappointments, a candidate who promised to tear the whole system down — rather than repair it — found room to grow. This pattern is not unique to Colombia. Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Costa Rica have all swung toward right-wing outsiders in recent election cycles, each time punishing incumbents for insecurity and stagnation without solving either. The cast keeps chang-



ing; the stage, and the problems on it, largely does not. Colombia has lived a version of this cycle before. Álvaro Uribe won the presidency in 2002 on a hardline security platform that weakened the FARC insurgency and, for a time, restored confidence that the state could impose order. Uribismo outlasted his presidency through allies Juan Manuel Santos and Iván Duque, but it also carried the "false positives" scandal — soldiers killing civilians and dressing them as guerrilla casualties to inflate body counts — along with persistent allegations linking parts of the security establishment to paramilitary networks. This year's election exposed the limits of that inheritance.

Paloma Valencia, the Uribe-backed Democratic Centre candidate and his most direct political heir, was eliminated in the first round with just under 7% of the vote before endorsing De la Espriella to consolidate the right. Voters who once trusted Uribismo wanted something angrier and further removed from Colombia's political establishment — and De la Espriella did not try to revive that brand. He replaced it. His campaign succeeded partly because it was built for a different kind of politics: large rallies, evangelical church networks and a relentless social media operation organised around the tiger persona and short, emotionally charged content — the currency of a platform economy that rewards spectacle over argument. Cepeda, 63, a longtime human rights advocate who had led the polls from January until election day, ran on speeches and policy arguments, the traditional currency of Colombian politics. Where algorithms favour anger and simplicity, that older currency bought him less than it once would have.

That gap points to something the Colombian left underestimated: politics is rarely won by explanation alone. Voters living with extortion, stagnant wages and a daily sense that the state had ceded ground to armed groups wanted proof that someone could seize back control, not just a diagnosis of why control had slipped.

Much of that frustration traces back to Petro's signature policy, "Total Peace," which rested on a genuine insight — that Colombia's violence has always been entangled with poverty, land inequality and the absence of the state, not ideology alone. But several armed groups treated negotiations as room to expand rather than disarm, deepening their grip on drug trafficking, illegal mining and extortion while talks dragged on. Communities promised peace often experienced the opposite: a state seemingly negotiating while criminal structures grew up around them. This is the trap both of Colombia's political traditions keep falling into.

The left correctly diagnoses the social roots of violence but struggles to assert authority; the right promises authority but avoids the inequality and institutional decay that let armed groups regenerate. What results, from both sides, is the management of crisis rather than its resolution. De la Espriella now inherits that trap, backed by an informal network of like-minded leaders across the region who built power on similar frustration. The danger is that anger, however satisfying as a campaign message, is not itself a governing strategy.

Punishing the guilty plays well as a promise; it does not build the institutions, fiscal credibility or administrative competence that outlast a single term. His mandate, meanwhile, is a narrow one. Congress remains divided, and Petro, even after formally recognising the outcome, continued to allege fraud and foreign interference in the vote count.

De la Espriella takes office on 7 August with more votes behind him than any Colombian president before him — and less unity than that number suggests. Winning, it turns out, was the easy part. Whether he becomes the leader who finally builds a state capable of holding its own ground, or simply the next performer in a theatre that keeps replacing its cast while leaving the script unchanged, is the question Colombia will spend the next four years answering.

THE LEFT CORRECTLY DIAGNOSES THE SOCIAL ROOTS OF VIOLENCE BUT STRUGGLES TO ASSERT AUTHORITY; THE RIGHT PROMISES AUTHORITY BUT AVOIDS THE INEQUALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL DECAY THAT LET ARMED GROUPS REGENERATE. WHAT RESULTS, FROM BOTH SIDES, IS THE MANAGEMENT OF CRISIS RATHER THAN ITS RESOLUTION

The writer is a columnist based in Colombo

'We have not run out of water. We have run out of values'



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

2ND OPINION

We have built dams, passed laws, launched river-cleaning missions and still our rivers die, our lakes shrink and our groundwater disappears. Perhaps we have been solving the wrong problem. Water is not just a resource running out. It is a mirror, and what it reflects about us as human beings is deeply unsettling. We all know the importance of water, air, and sunlight in our lives. Can we ever imagine a world sustaining life without water? The thought itself is so daunting. Of all the 5 elements of nature, water is the most primary which impacts human life at many levels and it's provided to us in abundance by mother nature.

It is synonymous with life for when scientists search for traces of life in other planets, they first look for signs of water. The earth can sustain so many life-forms because 70 per cent of earth's surface is covered with water which is con-

sumed directly or indirectly through the food chain and various life-supporting activities. One of its most vital sustainable aspects is in the form of a water cycle which transforms salty sea water into clean water through rains & snowfall, which is otherwise very scarce on earth.

Unlike fire which devastates everything that comes in its contact, water gets polluted when it comes in contact with soluble impurities. This is precisely what makes water the most accurate metaphor for the human soul.

Like water, human souls are also highly impressionable and degradable, capable of becoming a deity or a demon depending on the environment they inhabit. In the Golden Age, when human souls were utterly chaste & downright innocent, their thoughts, words and mannerism were within the bounds of the highest codes of conduct, as a result all the elements functioned with inborn harmony & in innate regulation.

Rivers never crossed their banks, rains never flooded lands, and the sun, air and earth gave plentiful resources without causing calamity. That harmony was not accidental, it was a direct reflection of the human consciousness that presided over nature. However, with increasing human greed and ego, there has been rampant destruction of natural order. Rising mental degeneration has led to environmental erosion on a massive scale.

Deforestation, toxic industrial discharge, reckless consumerism and unchecked population growth have created a devastating imbalance. But these are symptoms. The disease is internal which is in the form of gradual erosion

of values, conscience and our sense of responsibility towards something larger than ourselves.

Do we ever thank mother earth? How many of us have thanked her for the free-air, water, food, sun and many more things that she has given us since the time we have existed. How many of us have told her sorry for inflicting so much pain to her? Well! The simplest and easiest way to do this is by praying or meditating with positive thoughts which most of us can do. We must realise that natural disasters in particular are a wakeup call as to where we are investing all our energies. Today the situation is grave. In many parts of India, people do not have access to clean drinking water which is the most basic necessity for sustaining life. Riots erupt over water scarcity. State governments fight bitter legal battles over river-sharing.

The day is not far when nations will go to war over water and when that happens, no dam, no policy and no international treaty will matter if the human being controlling the tap has not changed within. It is high time we learn from these warning signals and change, not just our infrastructure, but our attitudes. Water is endowed with great healing, cleansing and life-giving value. It can only fulfil that potential if we keep it and ourselves clean. Remember! A polluted mind will always find a way to pollute its surroundings. Conversely, a conscious, values-driven human being will naturally protect what sustains life.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and a columnist

PICTALK



People gather near a decorated chariot during the annual Therottam (car festival) of the Sri Parthasarathy Swamy Temple, at Triplicane, in Chennai PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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TEMPLE THEFT: RESTORE TRANSPARENCY TO RESTORE FAITH

The alleged irregularities in the handling of donations meant for the Ram Temple in Ayodhya have deeply shaken the faith of millions of devotees.

For countless Hindus across India and abroad, contributing to the temple was never merely a financial act; it was a sacred expression of devotion and an emotional investment in a centuries-old aspiration.

The temple represents not just a place of worship but also the culmination of decades of sacrifice, legal battles and public support.

If the reports of financial misconduct are true, they amount to a profound betrayal of the trust reposed by devotees. Those entrusted with managing these offerings carry a moral responsibility that extends far beyond

administrative duties.

Any misuse of donations at such a revered institution undermines public confidence and tarnishes the sanctity of the temple itself.

The only way to restore credibility is through complete transparency. Every donation, expenditure and financial transaction should be subjected to independent scrutiny and placed in the public domain. Accountability cannot be selective when public faith is involved.

Devotees deserve the assurance that every rupee donated in the name of Lord Ram is used solely for its intended purpose. Trust, once broken, can only be rebuilt through honesty, openness and uncompromising integrity.

YASHASWI BAIRAGI | UJJAIN

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Every martyr deserves equal recognition

The delay in officially acknowledging the sacrifice of six soldiers during Operation Sindoor has raised serious concerns. While governments may withhold operational details for strategic reasons, there can be no justification for delaying recognition of those who laid down their lives in the service of the nation.

A grateful nation must never allow its martyrs to fade into anonymity. Behind every soldier's sacrifice stands a grieving family that bears an irreparable loss with dignity and pride. No parent, spouse or child can ever forget a loved one who made the ultimate sacrifice. These families, along with the soldiers' regiments and fellow servicemen, deserve the nation's enduring respect and gratitude. It would therefore be a fitting tribute if the names of these six brave soldiers were also inscribed at the Baisaran Martyrs Memorial in Pahalgam alongside the 26 civilians who lost their lives in the tragic terrorist attack.

Such a gesture would honour all those who paid the highest price in the same tragic chain of events and reinforce the nation's commitment to remembering every sacrifice equally. National gratitude should never distinguish between civilian victims and soldiers who gave their lives protecting the country.

BRJU B GOYAL | LUDHIANA

Electoral integrity requires public confidence

The decision of 23 Opposition parties, along with an Independent MP, to jointly approach the Chief Justice of India over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls reflects growing concerns about the transparency and fairness of the electoral process. Irrespective of political affiliations, preserving public confidence in elections is fundamental to any democracy.

The SIR exercise, now implemented across several states after beginning in Bihar, has reportedly resulted in the deletion of millions of names from electoral rolls. Allegations that many eligible citizens were unable to vote while appeals remained pending have naturally raised questions about due process and voter rights.

Equally concerning is the absence of clear official data regarding the identification of alleged illegal immigrants, despite this being cited as one of the objectives of the exercise.

It is essential that the Commission clearly explains the criteria for deletions, ensures timely disposal of appeals and protects the voting rights of genuine citizens. Free and fair elections require not only impartial institutions but also the confidence of all stakeholders. Greater openness and procedural fairness will strengthen, rather than weaken, India's democratic foundations.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Climate action must move beyond plans

Apreros "India must get ready for climate extremes" (June 30), the alarming rise in temperatures and increasingly erratic monsoons leave little doubt that climate change is no longer a distant threat but a present-day reality.

Although several states have adopted Heat Action Plans, many remain poorly funded and weakly implemented. Vulnerable communities, particularly those living in densely populated urban settlements, continue to face severe shortages of drinking water, shade and healthcare during extreme heat. Similarly, inadequate drainage systems turn heavy rainfall into recurring urban disasters, while rain-dependent agriculture suffers repeated setbacks from unpredictable weather patterns.

India now needs decisive implementation rather than additional policy documents. Heatwaves should be formally recognised as disasters to facilitate quicker relief and dedicated funding. Investments must prioritise urban drainage, wetland conservation, green cover, cooling shelters, early warning systems and climate-resilient agriculture. As climate extremes become more frequent, delaying action will only multiply future losses. Preparedness, resilience and sustained investment are the need of the hour.

K CHIDANAND KUMAR | BANGALURU



Why India's doctors need health systems as resilient as they are

National Doctors' Day should be more than a single day of gratitude. It is a reminder that India's doctors are consistently the first to step forward in a crisis, often at real personal cost — and that gratitude alone will not protect the next generation of patients.

Three new warships made in India join Indian Navy



ANIL BHAT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi commissioned three warships built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE) Ltd into the Indian Navy at Kolkata on 21 Jun 26. The commissioning of INS Dunagiri, INS Sanshodhak and INS Agray marks a defining milestone in India's naval history because it is a rare, single-day commissioning of three technologically distinct platforms that underscores India's transition from a "Buyer's Navy" to a "Builder's Navy". Conducted at the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in Kolkata, this event highlights an unprecedented multi-domain force multiplication entirely driven by domestic manufacturing. It also reinforces the nation's growing strength in indigenous warship design and construction under the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India).

Hosting the Prime Minister at the commissioning ceremony were Shri R. N. Ravi, Governor of West Bengal, Shri Suvendu Adhikari, Chief Minister of West Bengal, Admiral Krishna Swaminathan, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, Chief of the Naval Staff and senior officials of Indian Navy and GRSE. The commissioning of three major surface warships on a single day is a first-of-its-kind achievement for any shipyard in India and highlights GRSE's robust shipbuilding infrastructure, advanced technological capability and efficient project execution. Rather than simply scaling up fleet numbers, the simultaneous induction completes a highly coordinated tactical triad spanning three distinct dimensions of naval warfare. The achievement further strengthens the shipyard's operational preparedness across strategic surveillance, anti-submarine warfare and maritime defence capabilities. Aligned with the objectives of Maritime India Vision (MIV) 2030 and Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision (MAKV) 2047, GRSE is spearheading India's green maritime transformation through focused initiatives in shipbuilding and ship repair, modernisation of yard infrastructure, strategic global partnerships, promotion of sustainable maritime practices, and adoption of emerging technologies. By integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI), digitalization and innovation-led solutions across its operations, GRSE is driving efficiency, sustainability and technological excellence, while contributing to the vision of a resilient, self-reliant and globally competitive maritime sector. INS Dunagiri, the second Advanced Guided Missile Frigate built by GRSE under Project 17A, represents a significant advancement in indigenous warship design. Equipped with BrahMos anti-ship and land-attack cruise missiles along with advanced defence systems, the warship significantly enhances the Indian Navy's strike and defensive capabilities. INS Sanshodhak, the last of the four Survey Vessels (Large) built by GRSE, will bolster the Indian Navy's hydrographic and survey capabilities, supporting port and harbour approaches, navigation channels and maritime limits, while also aiding oceanographic data collection and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations. INS Agray, one of the eight Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Crafts (ASW-SWCs) under construction at GRSE, is designed for coastal anti-submarine operations and is equipped with advanced Combat Management Systems, lightweight torpedoes, anti-submarine warfare rockets and a 30 mm Naval Surface Gun with approximately 88% indigenous content.



With the delivery of INS Dunagiri, INS Sanshodhak and INS Agray, GRSE has achieved the milestone of building and delivering 118 warships, including 80 warships for the Indian Navy - the highest by any shipyard in the country. Reinforcing its technological leadership, GRSE is the only PSU shipyard to receive the Defence Minister's Award for Excellence in the Defence & Aerospace Sector for designing the most silent ship for Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) operations for the Indian Navy. From building 05-ton boats to 24,600-ton Fleet Tankers, GRSE has demonstrated unmatched versatility and established itself as a pioneer warship builder of the nation. Since 1960, GRSE remains the only Indian shipyard to have delivered over 100 warships and is also the first Indian shipyard to have built a Fleet Replenishment Tanker. It is additionally the first shipyard in independent India to build a Seaward Defence Boat (SDB), the builder of the first-ever Patrol Vessel for the Indian Coast Guard, the first-ever Indigenous Survey Vessel and the first Indian shipyard to export a warship - CGS Barracuda - to Seychelles. Beyond shipbuilding, GRSE has consistently championed indigenous innovation and engineering excellence, securing 100 Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) from the Government of India and being recognised as the Best Performing Defence Shipyard of India for four consecutive years.

Prime Minister Modi stated, "Today, on this very soil, an important event linked to Aatmanirbhar Bharat, Surakshit Bharat, and Viksit Bharat is taking place. Today, INS Agray, INS Dunagiri, and INS Sanshodhak are giving new momentum to that journey. These three vessels are also symbols of three important national commitments. They have been built in India, their designs were developed in India. The talent of Indian industries has gone into their construction. The skill of Indian engineers has gone into them. The hard work of Indian workers has gone into them. And this is the greatest strength of the new India."

On the occasion, the Naval Chief Admiral Krishna Swaminathan, stated, "GRSE has long been a trusted partner of the Indian Navy in ensuring maritime security. On this occasion, I would like to congratulate the GRSE team. I would also like to congratulate our industry partners and MSMEs who have helped us achieve this success. Last year, in Mumbai, the Prime Minister witnessed the first tri-commissioning in India. After 17 months, the second tri-commissioning in Kolkata shows that India's warship construction capacity, modernity, self-reliance and self-confidence are all gaining new momentum." GRSE is currently constructing multiple frontline platforms, including one Project 17A Advanced Frigate, four ASW-SWCs and four Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels (NGOPVs). In addition, the shipyard is building 30 other vessels, including 13 export platforms, and is in advanced stages of concluding a prestigious contract for the construction of the Next Generation Corvettes. Through indigenous warship construction, export-ready maritime platforms, innovation drive with over 90% indigenous equipment fitted in frontline warships, GRSE continues to reinforce India's emergence as a world-class maritime and shipbuilding powerhouse. Indian Navy has commissioned a total of nine major warships and vessels so far in 2026.

Col Anil Bhat, VSM (Retd) is a strategic affairs analyst and former Defence Ministry and Indian Army spokesperson



SATENDRA SINGH | TANUSHREE

Every 1 July, India observes National Doctors' Day, a tribute first instituted in memory of Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy - physician, statesman, and one of independent India's most respected public figures. But the profession being honoured today looks very different from the one Dr Roy practised. Doctors are no longer confined to clinics and operating theatres; increasingly, they are the first people called upon when a cyclone flattens a coastline, a heatwave fills emergency wards, or an unfamiliar pathogen threatens to overwhelm an entire health system. As such emergencies multiply - driven by climate change, rapid urbanisation and a more interconnected world - individual skill and courage are no longer enough on their own. What India needs urgently is a health system robust enough to match the doctors who staff it.

When disaster and disease become the same emergency

The old boundary between "natural disaster" and "public health crisis" has all but disappeared. A cyclone does not just flatten homes - it contaminates water and triggers disease outbreaks in its wake. A heatwave does not just make people uncomfortable - within days it can fill wards with heatstroke and organ failure. An earthquake generates trauma cases that need intensive care long after the tremors stop; flooding brings diarrhoeal disease, leptospirosis, dengue and malaria; drought brings malnutrition and mental distress. Add rapid urbanisation, an ageing population, industrial growth, air pollution and closer human contact with wildlife, and it becomes clear that health systems can no longer plan for one emergency at a time - they must be built to absorb several at once.

More Than Rescue and Relief

Disaster management is often pictured as rescue teams and relief camps, but healthcare is arguably its most important pillar, and its work spans a far longer timeline than most people realise. Long before disaster strikes, health authorities should already be running disease surveillance, vaccination drives, risk assessments and hospital preparedness plans, and stockpiling essential medicines - an early warning system is only as useful as the machinery's ability to act on it. Once disaster hits, hospitals must deliver trauma care, surgery, intensive care, maternal care and psychosocial support, while ensuring clean water, sanitation and nutrition in relief camps to head off a second wave of illness. The work then continues for months or years afterward, through rehabilitation, disability support, prosthetics, chronic disease management and the slow return to normal care.

The Pandemic's Unfinished Lessons

COVID-19 remains the clearest test of this thinking in living memory. India's response had real strengths: one of the fastest vaccine rollouts anywhere, a vaccination drive of unprecedented scale, expanding laboratory and telemedicine networks, and community surveillance systems that held the line under extraordinary pressure. Yet the cracks were just as visible - shortages of oxygen, ICU beds, trained staff and equipment, broken supply chains, and enormous strain on a workforce already stretched thin. Doctors, nurses and paramedics worked impossible hours with limited protective gear in the early months, facing an unfamiliar virus and constant psychological pressure; many were infected, and some lost their lives in the course of duty. Their commitment deserves to be remembered as one of the finest chapters in India's public health story. But it shouldn't obscure the harder lesson the pandemic taught: preparedness is always cheaper, in lives and in money, than scrambling to respond after the fact.



Climate change is already a health emergency

What was once treated as a purely environmental concern is now recognised as one of this century's defining health threats. Heatwaves are driving up heatstroke, dehydration, cardiac events and kidney disease, hitting outdoor workers, the elderly, children and low-income communities hardest. Floods contaminate drinking water and create breeding grounds for disease-carrying mosquitoes. Storms damage hospital infrastructure, disrupt medicine supplies and displace entire communities. Polluted air adds to the burden of lung and heart disease, while shifting ecological patterns push vector-borne diseases into regions that have never had to manage them before. Food insecurity and undernutrition, too, are increasingly climate-linked.

Hospitals that cannot afford to become casualties

A hospital is supposed to be the one place a community can rely on in a crisis, yet hospitals themselves too often become victims of disaster - brought down by structural weakness, flooding, fire or power failure. Every hospital needs to function as a genuine lifeline facility: earthquake- and flood-resistant construction, fire safety systems, backup power, on-site oxygen generation, a secure water supply, a functioning emergency operations centre and protected health-data systems. That also means having a proper Mass Casualty Incident plan - covering surge capacity, triage zones, rapid staff mobilisation, blood bank readiness, operation-theatre scheduling and coordination with police and fire services - tested through regular mock drills rather than left untouched until a real emergency arrives.

Triage deserves particular attention: prioritising patients to save the greatest number of lives with limited resources is a skill every doctor, nurse and paramedic should be formally trained in, not an improvised call made amid the chaos.

The Injuries No One Sees, and an Old Wisdom's New Role

Physical injuries are visible immediately; psychological ones often surface only months or years later. Disasters routinely leave behind grief, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress and substance misuse, with children, women, the elderly, people with disabilities and emergency responders themselves at greatest risk. Every disaster response plan needs trained counsellors and psychologists

built in from the outset, and healthcare workers need psychological first aid as a baseline skill, not an afterthought. There is a role here, too, for India's traditional systems - Ayurveda, Yoga, Siddha, Unani and Naturopathy - not as substitutes for modern trauma care or surgery, but as genuine complements during recovery: nutritional support in chronic illness, and breathing and meditation practices that meaningfully ease the anxiety disasters leave behind, used alongside evidence-based medicine, never instead of it.

Building the next two decades

India has made real progress over the last twenty years: specialised disaster response units, stronger emergency medical services, better disease surveillance, expanding Health and Wellness Centres, and a growing digital health ecosystem that includes AI-assisted outbreak prediction, GIS mapping of vulnerable populations, satellite-linked telemedicine and drones delivering medicine to places roads cannot reach. But preparedness still receives a fraction of the attention and funding that emergency response gets. Disaster medicine, mass casualty management, infection control and climate-related health risks need to become a standard part of medical, nursing, AYUSH and paramedical education, not a specialised add-on. Every district hospital should have a current disaster plan and run regular drills. None of this works in isolation; it needs sustained partnership between government, hospitals, medical colleges, civil society and the private sector.

A tribute worth living up to

National Doctors' Day should be more than a single day of gratitude. It is a reminder that India's doctors are consistently the first to step forward in a crisis, often at real personal cost — and that gratitude alone will not protect the next generation of patients. The truest tribute India can pay them is to build the system around them: resilient hospitals, trained staff, working technology, and communities that know how to help themselves in the first, chaotic hours of an emergency.

As climate change accelerates and new health threats keep emerging, that kind of resilience is no longer optional. It is the only way to ensure that when the next crisis comes, India's doctors are not fighting it with one hand tied behind their back.

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Oil & gas production: The next step in India's energy security journey



SUSHMA RAWAT

India's next energy challenge is no longer only securing supplies from global markets. It is increasing the country's ability to produce more oil and natural gas at home. As one of the world's fastest-growing energy consumers, India will continue to require reliable supplies of hydrocarbons even as renewable energy assumes a larger role in the country's energy mix. Strengthening domestic oil and gas production must therefore remain a strategic national priority - not only to reduce import dependence but also to support economic growth, industrial development and long-term energy resilience.

India currently imports nearly 90 per cent of its crude oil requirement, making the country vulnerable to global price volatility, geopolitical uncertainties and supply disruptions. While diversified import sources and strategic petroleum reserves have significantly strengthened India's ability to withstand external shocks, increasing indigenous oil and gas production remains the most sustainable way to enhance energy security, reduce import dependence, conserve valuable foreign exchange and strengthen long-term economic resilience. However, increasing domestic production

requires recognising the unique nature of the upstream business. Exploration and production are inherently long-gestation activities, requiring substantial capital investment and years of geological assessment, appraisal and field development before production begins. At the same time, many of India's largest producing fields have been operating for decades and are naturally maturing. Sustained production growth will therefore depend not only on continued exploration but also on redevelopment of existing assets and wider deployment of advanced technologies.

Technology will play a defining role in the next phase of India's upstream growth. Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) and Improved Oil Recovery (IOR) techniques, supported by advanced reservoir management, modern seismic imaging and digital technologies, offer significant opportunities to improve recovery from mature reservoirs. Globally, these technologies have helped extend the productive life of ageing fields while unlocking reserves that were previously considered technically or economically difficult to recover.

In this context, the redevelopment of Mumbai High by ONGC, supported by global technical expertise, is especially significant. The programme is expected to improve recovery from India's largest offshore producing field through advanced reservoir management and modern recovery techniques. Similar technology-led



interventions across other mature offshore and onshore assets can further strengthen domestic production while improving the efficiency and longevity of existing fields.

While mature fields remain an important source of incremental production, new discoveries will determine India's long-term production trajectory. Large parts of India's sedimentary basins continue to hold significant hydrocarbon potential. Continuous acreage bidding under the Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP), improved access to geological data through the National Data Repository and a stable policy framework have created fresh opportunities for exploration. Timely monetisation of discoveries, faster project execution and continued technological innovation will be essential to unlocking this potential and translating it into meaningful production.

Over the past decade, reforms such as the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP), the Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP), the Discovered Small Fields (DSF) Policy, marketing and pricing freedom for difficult fields, the National Data Repository and amendments to the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) framework have significantly strengthened India's upstream investment environment. With a strong policy foundation now in place, the focus should increasingly shift towards faster execution, sustained exploration, wider adoption of advanced technologies and higher domestic production.

The benefits of stronger domestic production extend well beyond reducing the import bill. Every additional barrel produced within the country strengthens energy security, conserves valuable foreign exchange, supports industrial growth and reduces vulnerability to external supply disruptions. Increased upstream investment also creates employment, strengthens the domestic oilfield services ecosystem, encourages technology adoption and generates wider economic multiplier effects. As India's upstream industry builds on the Government's reform agenda, sustained investment in exploration, redevelopment of mature fields and faster commercialisation of discoveries will be critical to achieving durable production growth.

India's energy transition is progressing rapidly, with renewable energy playing an increasingly important role in the country's energy mix.

At the same time, oil and natural gas will continue to remain indispensable for transportation, manufacturing, petrochemicals and several other sectors for many years to come. Strengthening domestic hydrocarbon production is therefore not at odds with India's clean energy ambitions. Rather, it complements the transition by ensuring that economic growth, industrial competitiveness and energy security advance together.

India has already laid a strong policy foundation for revitalising its upstream sector. The next phase should focus on translating that foundation into measurable production outcomes through continued exploration, wider adoption of advanced technologies, faster monetisation of discoveries and timely redevelopment of mature fields.

The opportunity before India is not simply to reduce import dependence, but to build a more resilient, competitive and technologically advanced upstream industry capable of supporting the country's long-term economic aspirations. Strengthening domestic oil and gas production is therefore not merely the next step in India's energy security journey - it is one of the defining priorities for India's future growth and strategic resilience.

The writer is Former Director (Exploration), ONGC



A thought for today

Civilisation is progress towards a society of privacy. The savage's whole existence is public, ruled by laws of his tribe

AYN RAND

The 10-Digit Problem

Our phone numbers have become our identifiers online. That's dangerous. But what can we do about it?

In 2010, Dutch developers built a website called 'PleaseRobMe.com'. The idea was so simple, they had it up and running in four hours. It was also sensational, because by tapping residents' location data from Twitter – now X – and Foursquare, Please Rob Me could point out houses that were ripe for burglary. Of course, its aim was not to assist burglars but to demonstrate the dangers of oversharing online. It came months after then Mashable CEO Pete Cashmore famously declared: "Privacy is Dead". But privacy had been dying a long time already. In 1999, Sun Microsystems CEO Scott McNealy had described it as a "red herring".

If the internet, and our phones and apps, have left us with no place to hide, why do we still care about privacy? Why does insurance regulator Irdai flag dark patterns in insurance sales, and where's the need for WhatsApp to introduce usernames, to mask our phone numbers, although that move's under govt review now? There are good reasons. One, privacy is a fundamental need, which is why it's recognised as a fundamental right. Two, just because our privacy has been compromised so far, doesn't mean we shouldn't defend it anymore. Yes, in a world full of cameras and online surveillance, it's hard to be invisible, but good online hygiene can at least shield us from bad actors.

Even if you don't care about your photos and videos circulating among strangers, there's one aspect of your identity that you need to lock down. It's your phone number. It was never intended to be your identifier, but the world over, phone numbers got seeded into bank records, tax records, and then every subscription. Changing phone numbers became too cumbersome, so people got locked into them. And now, you are your number. But the problem is, your phone number is not only your identifier but also your authenticator, thanks to those OTPs. It's like having the same username and password.

If you lose control of your phone, whether physically, or via SIM fraud, your life can turn upside down. And SIM fraud happens. Your number is part of so many databases – from shops to OTT platforms – that it has certainly been leaked many times. So, being careful with the information you share, especially phone numbers, is crucial. But strict data protection rules for intermediaries are equally important. Govt might eventually not allow WhatsApp usernames, but it has to find ways to deal with the problem of dark patterns.



Author, Not BOThor

A writer trolled online for alleged AI-aided storytelling, has been cleared. There's a big lesson here for many

A winner of the Commonwealth Short Story Prize, Trinidadian Jamir Nazir, is not a BOThor (bot+author), organisers of the prize confirmed, after their own weeks-long investigation. The absolute storm over online allegations – that so-called 'AI detectors' had found Nazir allegedly used AI to author his story – ended flat. Alas, not before accusations went global. Literary magazine *Granta* refused to publish the winning entries on its website, exiting its partnership with Commonwealth Foundation. That helps no one.

That Nazir's is an authentic voice, is vindication, and a relief. It reassures us of two things. One, the metrics of judging authentic storytelling, still work in a world 1) seemingly ambushed by AI, 2) despite malicious social media and 3) despite the prevailing language of round-the-clock crisis. Two, there are plenty of authors, aspiring writers, and other creative sorts who refuse to cheat themselves. Authenticity is a deeply cherished value for most in both creative and scientific worlds, so using AI to write stories, or publish fake papers, may hold little to no appeal. Credit to the organisers and jury for not being reactionary to the online slamming, and instead, seeking to understand each of the candidates' writing process, whereby Nazir's name was cleared. But, *Granta's* short fuse is a short story – of an AI-fuelled sense of catastrophe. Which is, what can be worse than AI gutting the soul of storytelling – the human connection? It is this very (false) belief – the machine is more creative and powerful than the human mind and imagination – that undermines human ability and capacity.

In this case, a writer's integrity was on trial. Tomorrow, it could be any act of human ingenuity. Are we to be guilty until proven innocent in the court of viral doubt? Institutions have to out-think viral mobs, not cave in under social media trials, or punish authenticity. Adapt. As for an apology to Nazir...does the internet care?

Colonial cancers

Why only Kohinoor, take our heatwave too

Bachi Karkaria



Colonial hangover or plain bloody-mindedness. Britain's heatwave is a global obsession, but no May Day distress call over our mercury normally rising over 40 degrees in the shade (that's if you can find it). Perversely, I landed in London's oven just as Mumbai finally felt like the fridge. But there's a welcome dark cloud in the blazing blue: years of making do have prepared us for all that Britain's making such a to-do about. 'Sweet are the uses of adversity,' as Shakespeare said long before Reduce, Recycle, Re-use. We've already been there, done that, bought the sun hat – or didn't need to.

Delhi's ₹3,000 desert coolers took care of what today needs Sir Sadiq Khan's £1.5bn Heat-Ready plan. Our delivery boys deliver in temperatures which would shut down London Transport. Try riding a sealed-window bus here; give me the gusts of pollution breezing through BEST's open ones any day. We travelled for an hour on the non-'climate-controlled' Tube to a museum only to be told – very politely, very apologetically – that it was 'shutting down in 30 minutes (at 1pm) on account of the heat-in consideration of the staff'.

Get some perspective, *yaar!* A heatwave is declared when London records 28+ degrees for three consecutive days; at that level Bombabes press the AC's *down* button. Nagpur routinely crosses 45°C; here 38°C presses the Red Alert button.

We just jump in to cool down. No need for the Met Office beach app with wave heights and sea-surface temperatures. Most of our kids have only the street. No need for the parental warning to check playground equipment as 'metal slides can get really hot'. So many Indians wear the bare minimum. No need for a heatwave to do so. We've survived sans taps. No need for a City Hall supplementary budget for thousands of water fountains.

Britain is now forced to live like its ex-colonies. Here's a Buddhist mantra: 'Dukkha is inevitable; suffering is optional.' Or the more localised, 'Keep Calm and Karma on.'

Alec Smart said: "God help those who help themselves to His funds."

Artificial Selection, AI Edition

Unlike the dotcom peak, when tech-fuelled returns were spilling across industries and markets, today investors are sucking money away from non-AI industries, and from nations peripheral to the AI boom

Ruchir Sharma



Columnist based in New York

It's hard to recall a time when global markets were so obsessed with a single storyline. AI boom is now so powerful and widespread in nature that it is overwhelming all other drivers of returns, and shaping a new AI-based world order. Relative performance of the world's major stock markets over the past year can be explained by how much have to AI. Nations with a large foothold in the "stack" of industries developing AI infra and services are massively outperforming, while those without are lagging by record margins. Winners include US and China, thanks above all to their foundational AI models; Taiwan and South Korea on the strength of chip manufacturers; Japan and Israel on a broad array of AI skills.

The partial winners are secondary suppliers. They include nations that are exporters of circuits, servers and other AI-related electronic hardware – such as Mexico, Thailand, Vietnam. Or that play a role in the AI stack as both exporters and sizeable bases for data centres, such as Malaysia and Singapore.

The losers include much of Europe, with the odd exception (Netherlands is a major supplier of advanced chip-making machines). Worst off are those countries that lack "AI plays" and rely heavily on the industries most exposed to disruption, including IT services.

In US, AI plays constitute more than 40% of the market cap and have accounted for more than 80% of the returns this year. The return and concentration profile is similar in Japan and even more extreme in South Korea and Taiwan. In China, all the action is taking place in newer growth-oriented segments of the market, while the old-economy sectors struggle. Meanwhile, the likes of India and Philippines, which are perceived to be at the wrong end of the AI-wrecking

ball, are well in the red this year.

While the internet frenzy of the late 1990s was also an overpowering global phenomenon, it was not so narrowly focused. The leading tech subsectors back then were communications equipment, semiconductors and wireless telecom services, which accounted for 60% of global market gains at the dotcom peak in early 2000. So far this year, the three leading tech subsectors (semiconductors, hardware and electronic equipment) have contributed a significantly larger share of global market gains, over 70%.

Also, unlike the dotcom peak, when tech-fuelled

returns were spilling across industries and markets, today they are sucking money away from non-AI industries and nations. Even in US, investment outside of the tech sector is declining in real terms. Meanwhile, foreigners keep pulling money out of countries seen as peripheral to the AI boom, from UK to Indonesia.

Global investors may be focused almost exclusively on AI, but they are not choosing winners at random. Leading AI nations are long-established tech powers with a deep commitment to R&D, spending more than 3% of GDP on average – over three times the level of lagging countries.

Of their economies, including domestic demand. In short, it's an AI-driven world. Of course, this monomania will not last forever. The speculative enthusiasm will fade even as the technological revolution endures and expands in scope. As was the case following the railroad boom of the 19th century and the internet craze at the turn of this century, a more balanced global market will eventually re-emerge. But so long as investors continue to see AI as the sole foundation of the next world order, they will keep ranking nations based on their tech prowess.

In Japan, market leadership has shifted sharply towards tech over the past year, with semiconductors up 200% and computer memory pioneer Kioxia rising by 3,500%, to become the nation's single largest stock.

The AI booster effect continues to help power many economies through one crisis after another, from the tariff war to the Iran oil shock. Expectations for GDP growth have risen by nearly a full percentage point for the AI winners since the start of the year, while falling significantly for the losers. In countries like US, Taiwan and Korea, the large gains in advanced manufacturing, the associated surge in profits and the wealth effect from the AI-led stock market gains keep lifting economic growth. In countries like China, Thailand and Mexico, tech exports are rising rapidly enough to offset weakness in other parts



What A Narrow Escape For American Citizenship

The country came within a single Supreme Court vote of overturning more than a century of settled birthright law. That's how fragile even its oldest constitutional guarantees have become under Trump

Dan Cassino



Professor of Govt & Politics

On Tuesday, US's Supreme Court narrowly upheld the long-standing US practice of awarding citizenship to all children born in the country, regardless of who their parents are. The case, *Trump vs Barbara*, arose from an executive order Trump 2.0 issued on his first day in office, directing local govts to deny citizenship to any children born of mothers who were not citizens, not married to citizens, or were in US on non-resident visas.

The court outcome wasn't a surprise, but few expected the decision to be as close as it was. This reinforces the perception of the Court as being political, rather than impartial. And even if the timing of the decision was a ploy to quiet calls for Court reform, it's unlikely to work.

To recap, while most scholars and politicians had regarded the issue as long-settled, Trump and some anti-immigration activists became focused on the status of the children of undocumented immigrants, and people giving birth in US while on tourist visas.

Children born in US are citizens at birth, even if their parents came to US illegally, a fact that has complicated Trump's mass deportation efforts. There has also been concern over birth tourism, a practice in which wealthy foreigners, many from China or India, pay US hospitals tens of thousands of dollars to come to US to give birth, hoping that US citizenship will give their child an advantage as an adult.

Now turning to the surprising closeness of the decision, Chief Justice Roberts, in particular, has railed against the idea that the Court is political. And indeed, US judges are generally like referees overseeing a sporting match – interpreting and applying the law, not creating it. But while that describes most judges, at most levels of gov, it falls apart at the Supreme Court.

Since the 1920s, the Court has had a discretionary docket, meaning that it only hears the cases that it wants to decide on, rather than all the cases that are

appealed to it. Because it only hears the very small number of cases where there's a real question about what the law means, this opens the way for justices to bring their own political views to bear, since there isn't a clear meaning to draw from.

The birthright citizenship case is a kind of exception. The 14th Amendment – passed after the US Civil War to ensure full citizenship to freed slaves – has long been interpreted to guarantee US citizenship to everyone born here, with limited exceptions, like the children of diplomats. Despite recent efforts on the part of some



right-wing legal scholars to manufacture controversy over what the Amendment's writers might have meant, there has never really been disagreement about birthright citizenship. So, it was a surprise that the Court even took the case.

The fact that it was so close – part of the questions decided by a one-vote margin – came as a shock to many observers, with four justices apparently willing to go along with the Trump administration in throwing out more than a century of practice.

Decisions like this have meant that as much as Supreme Court justices fight to be seen as referees, the public increasingly sees them as partisan. Bolstered by decisions like the one that awarded the US presidential election to George W Bush, or the more recent decision that ended federal protections for women's right to have an abortion, the push for Court reform has gained momentum. The exact form of that reform will be a major issue in the fight for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2028.

To some extent, the Court upholding birthright citizenship saved the Trump administration from its own mess, as repeal would have been a logistical nightmare. Birth certificates and reporting are radically decentralised across towns and counties, with no way of checking on the immigration status of parents.

The whole point of overruling birthright citizenship was to strip citizenship from immigrants' children, so that they could be deported. But would adults, having been citizens their whole lives, suddenly be stateless? Taken to its logical conclusion, this rule would threaten the citizenship of almost anyone whose family arrived after the 1700s.

I'm a citizen, in part, because my great-grandfather was born in US to immigrant parents. If we're retroactively stripping him of citizenship, does that take away the citizenship of my grandparents? My parents? Me? The Trump administration doesn't seem to have prepared for such questions, and we're lucky that they won't need to be addressed.

The decision also has to be understood in the context of the Court's other major decisions in recent days – like granting Trump the right to fire independent agencies' heads. The birthright citizenship decision on the very last day of the session, seems like an attempt by Roberts to argue that the Court can be trusted, in advance of the upcoming midterm elections. But the fact that US was one vote away from stripping millions of their citizenship will make the case for Court reform more, not less urgent.

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Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



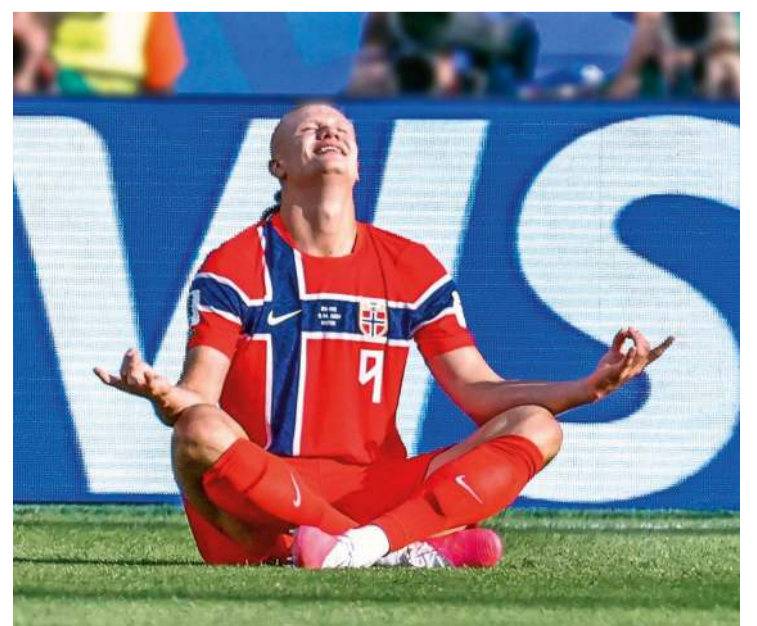
Don't be satisfied with stories, how things have gone with others. Unfold your own myth.

Jalaluddin Rumi, *The Essential Rumi*

The Viking & The Yogi: What Matters Is Your Goal



Footballers' celebrations are a story by themselves. After a goal by Erling Haaland – who else – took Norway to World Cup quarterfinals, he struck a post-match pose, wearing the horned Viking helmet. Contrast that with his signature post-goal yoga pose: eyes closed, fingers in Gyan Mudra, as he did after his goal against Iraq. When he dons the helmet, he's the victor, leaning into primal Nordic myth, projecting dominance. But in his yoga pose, he's sublimating that victory, he's internalising the moment. You can celebrate by posing as a conqueror of the world. More interestingly, and profoundly, you can mark your moment of triumph by mastering the world within.



OUR VIEW



External debt statistics hide disquieting trends

India's overall exposure remains modest. Yet, policymakers cannot afford to overlook the warning signal of a worsening ratio of external debt by residual maturity to forex reserves

On Monday, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released its Annual Statement detailing India's external debt position at the end of March. On the face of it, the country's overall position is satisfactory. External debt at the close of fiscal 2025-26 stood at \$762.8 billion, an increase of \$26.3 billion over the level recorded at the end of 2024-25. In percentage terms, it was up by one percentage point to 20.8% of GDP. However, a reading between the lines shows that not everything is hunky-dory. The relatively modest increase in absolute terms is deceptive. It hides a valuation effect worth \$24.6 billion due to the US dollar's appreciation *vis-à-vis* the Indian rupee and other major currencies. That's almost as much as the increase in overall debt. If that effect is taken into account, India's external debt would have increased by \$51 billion, almost double the amount.

That is not the only cause for worry. When one looks at external debt, what matters is not just its quantum, but also its maturity profile. And here the news is not so good. At \$11.6 billion, the increase in long-term debt (with original maturity of above one year) during 2025-26 is less than half the increase in overall debt, which suggests a worsening of the burden's maturity profile. As a result, short-term debt (by original maturity) as a proportion of foreign-exchange reserves increased to 21.6% at the end of 2025-26 from 20.1% at the end of the previous year. That is not all. A proper assessment of the country's external debt position must go beyond categorizing debt as short and long-term based on the original maturity when it was taken. It must look at 'residual maturity,' or obligations that include long-

term debt by original maturity falling due over the next 12 months plus short-term debt by original maturity. And here again, the data is somewhat disquieting. This figure was 42.9% of total external debt at the end of 2025-26, up from 41.2% a year earlier. As a share of India's forex reserves—the more relevant parameter—it stood at 47.3%, or closer to the halfway mark than 45.4% at the previous year's close. Given that forex reserves fell from \$688.1 billion for the week ended 27 March 2026 to \$672.6 billion during the week ended 19 June, this ratio is likely to have worsened.

RBI's calculated gamble to attract more forex flows to shore up its reserves and strengthen its armoury to intervene against what it calls 'excessive' depreciation of the rupee—regardless of the cost borne by domestic taxpayers—must therefore be understood in terms of the central bank's desire to improve this ratio as well. On paper, RBI's recently unveiled package of measures will add to reserves but not short-term debt, since it includes foreign currency non-resident (FCNR) deposits and external commercial borrowings with maturity of more than one year. But it could still end up as a double-edged sword. If US interest rates rise relative to ours and there is an adverse change in risk perceptions of India, even if driven by the vagaries of geopolitics, one cannot rule out premature closures of FCNR deposits. Which brings us back to a time-tested lesson. Flows of hot money are not the best way to boost reserves over the long-term. They can, at best, buy time. India has long had a relatively modest exposure to foreign repayment obligations. That has not changed, but the superficial gloss of our latest external debt numbers must not blind us to underlying risks.

RAHUL JACOB



is a former Financial Times foreign correspondent.

At first glance, the miniature, malformed elephant seemed as if it were created for a toy Jurassic Park. Its two tails, which turned out to be labels, were almost twice as long as the creature itself. They had information about the product in 22 languages and followed EU environmental regulations. The Ikea product also had a note on who its importer to the UK was—to comply with regulations imposed after the UK left the European single market a decade ago. To heighten the absurdity of it all, the importer was... Ikea. An accompanying *Financial Times* article last December quoted Jacob Wallenberg, vice-chairman of Ericsson and ABB and an investor who holds major stakes in both, as saying, "It's a mess for small and medium-sized enterprises. To run a business perhaps more cumbersome than we have ever seen."

The parable of the miniature elephant might suggest that the UK's 2016 decision to leave the EU after a bruisingly divisive referendum vote was worth it. Instead, like a

morality tale of its own of what befalls those who pursue a whimsically selfish divorce, the UK shows signs of advanced senility. The break from the EU has cemented a worrying drop in productivity and slowing income growth. Investment is anaemic and regulatory confusion high. And, alarmingly, the fallout from the near civil war provoked by the referendum on whether to stay in the EU has left its politics looking dysfunctional. This month, Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced his intention to resign, scarcely two years after taking office, paving the way for Andy Burnham to become the country's seventh prime minister in 10 years.

Every year, the cost of breaking away from a trading union with its neighbours becomes more apparent. A recent study by Stanford University put the cost of Brexit by the end of 2025 at a staggering 6% to 8% of GDP. "We estimate that investment was reduced by 12% to 13%, employment by 3% to 4% and productivity by 3% to 4%," wrote the authors led by Nicholas Bloom. "These negative impacts reflect a combination of elevated uncertainty, reduced demand, diverted management time, and increased misallocation of resources from a protracted Brexit process."

There are lessons from UK stagnation for India as well. Like the British, we suffer from

hindsight of the wrong kind when it comes to economic policy (especially for trade).

The UK's Conservative government made a great show after Brexit of how it would promote a 'Global Britain.' Between 2020 and 2022, the UK signed free-trade pacts with Japan, Australia and New Zealand. The trouble with this strategy, ironically replicated by India in recent years, is that trade volumes grow dramatically when such deals are done with one's close neighbours. A decade after Brexit, as much as 45% of the UK's trade is still with the EU, its largest partner by far. It is hard to imagine how agreements with Australia and New Zealand (combined population 33 million) can compensate for no longer being part of the EU (450 million). Some commentators refer to Brexit as a grand delusion because the misinformation that was spread by the 'Leave' campaign applies to London's trade agreements as well.

The larger issue is that both India and the UK's trade arrangements appear to ignore

the efficiencies that derive from embedding oneself in global supply chains. Multinational companies gravitate to countries such as Vietnam to supply Asia and beyond with products partly because it is embedded in North Asian global value chains. Similarly, Turkey and Morocco are good production bases for Europe, thanks to a combination of their proximity and efficiency.

Meanwhile, the UK's political divide, exacerbated by the perennially complaining tabloid press in the UK and Elon Musk-led broadsides against the government on X, has complicated London's task of reforming the domestic economy.

A few years ago, the think-tank Resolution Foundation released a report titled *Stagnation Nation*. Just a few facts on a listicle summarize the huge challenges that any party leading the UK faces. "Real wages grew by 33 per cent a decade from 1970 to 2007" but have been flat since. The net effect has been to worsen inequality, which is higher than in any other large Euro-

pean country. "Low growth and high inequality mean typical households in Britain are 9 per cent poorer than their French counterparts," the Foundation's report notes. As the Starmer government's experience trying to roll back winter fuel subsidies for pensioners two winters ago showed, popular pushback can be ferocious even for a proposal that is sensibly means-tested. Fiscal deficits must be reduced even as the country deals with a low-growth trajectory made worse by not being part of the EU.

India would be well advised not to fall for a Commonwealth trade delusion. New Delhi should seek deeper connections instead with its immediate SAARC neighbours such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Dammu Ravi, a trade expert who recently retired from the ministry of foreign affairs, observes that South Asia is the world's least trade-integrated region, with intra-regional commerce just 1.5% of its total global trade. Meanwhile, China's bilateral trade with South Asia (excluding India) is worth some \$200 billion and grew 16% in the first four months of this year. China offers almost zero-tariff market access to our neighbours even as it builds infrastructure for them. The security implications of overlooking those we share borders with are hard to miss.

MY VIEW | MYTHS AND MANTRAS

Why investors end up doing the opposite of what they should do

It's closely linked with the reason that many equity market experts like to offer data-free opinions



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If you give investors a long-term chart of the Indian equity market, they will be able to tell you that the right time to buy was when prices were low, and for profits to be booked it was when they touched highs. But what does the actual data show? Here is how equity inflows into mutual funds (MFs) have varied with market moves.

During the 2004-07 bull market, the BSE 500 TRI (total return index) quadrupled from around 2,000 to nearly 8,000. The Sensex doubled from the start of 2003 to the end of 2004 and then tripled again over the next 3 years, thus becoming six times in about 4.5 years. During this period, monthly equity MF inflows more than doubled from around ₹5,000 crore to ₹11,000 crore, with the strongest inflows after the market rally.

Then came the 2008 global financial crisis. Indian indices fell 60-65% while monthly equity MF inflows crashed from ₹11,000 crore to ₹4,000-5,000 crore after the market correction. After the 2009 recovery, indices rebounded sharply, whereas inflows recovered gradually, indicating improved investor confidence with a lag.

The 2013-14 rally again saw inflows accelerate only after the market had risen substantially. Equity inflows rose to a structurally higher range, averaging ₹6,000-12,000 crore per month during 2015-19, rising to ₹25,000-40,000

crore per month post-2020, up roughly 230-320%.

During the covid correction in 2020, significant equity MF outflows took place only after the market decline. The 2021-24 bull market saw the BSE 500 TRI rise 115% to 48,000, while monthly equity inflows quadrupled to ₹35,000-40,000 crore following the market recovery. The 2025-26 correction has seen monthly equity inflows moderate from about ₹40,000 crore to ₹25,000-30,000 crore.

Thus, while equity MF flows have increased structurally over the last 20 years due to greater retail participation, systematic investment plan (SIP) penetration and financialization of household savings, the behavioural relationship has remained consistent over two decades: strong market performance is followed by stronger inflows, while a decline sees these shrink substantially.

Every major market cycle outlined above shows that meaningful changes in MF flows occurred after the corresponding market movement. During bull markets, investors increased allocations only after sustained market gains, while during bear phases, inflows weakened or outflows increased after markets had already corrected.

This behaviour is not peculiar to equity markets. Inflows into gold funds peaked in January 2026, exceeding even those into equity MFs. Since then, the rupee has depreciated against the US dollar and India's import duty on gold has risen. Despite this, even the rupee price of gold is down. The fall is even more in dollars. Predictably, gold investors have begun to head out.

Whether it is equity, gold or any other asset class, be careful if making money appears too easy. On the other hand, hold on if you feel panicky. But investors and fund managers often do the exact opposite!

I am reminded of fund managers who were advising you to sell 'unproductive' gold and buy shares in 2024, but were promoting gold funds by the end of

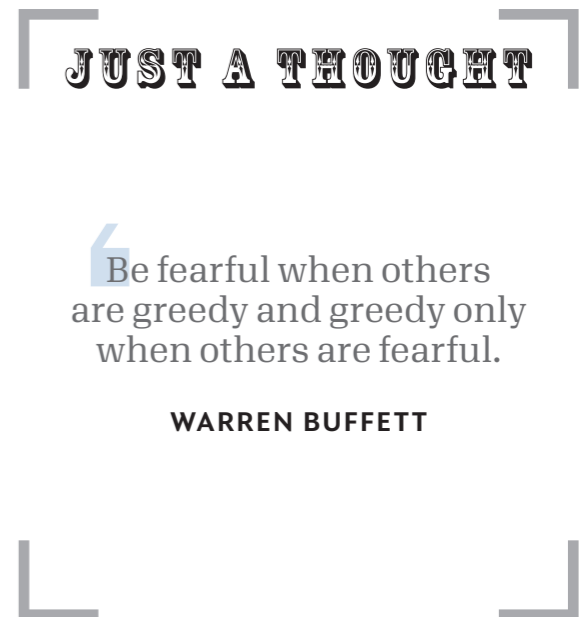
2025. I recently came across a preposterous suggestion masquerading as analysis saying that MF inflows have given foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) an exit path and the way to stop it is to curb Indian retail money flowing into the equity markets via MFs. Never mind that all data shows MF inflows and outflows lag rather than lead market movements. Inflows after market peaks have never prevented crashes. On the other hand, even drastically reduced inflows after crashes have never held back the next bull market.

I see a similar insistence on data-free analysis of FPI flows. Erudite commentators write long analyses along the lines of: 'For XYZ reasons, FPI flows will go down (or up) and this will have a negative (or positive) impact on the Indian stock market'—or the bond market, if they are talking about debt flows. The last statement is made almost as a throwaway line, as if it is obvious that nothing further needs to be proven. If FPI flows change, they assume, it will obviously impact market direction.

But where did this conclusion come from? Who has tested it and proven it correct? Has anyone even tested whether there is a correlation, let alone causation, between FPI flows and market movements? As someone who has done this exercise, I can tell you there is no correlation to be found.

The biggest contra example: FPIs first came to India three decades ago as big institutional investors at a time we had no domestic fund management industry to speak of and little retail participation. Logically, the impact of the money they brought in should have been even more than what would be the case today, now that domestic players have become sizeable too.

Tens of billions of dollars flowed into the Indian market from 1994 onwards. It should have driven the market crazy, isn't it? Yet, 1994 to 2003 is the only nine-year period in Indian market history that delivered a net-zero Sensex return. Data before narratives, please!



MY VIEW | WORLD APART

The UK's Brexit delusion may hold lessons for India too

The UK may have deluded itself over trade with faraway partners to make up for lost regional ties



GUEST VIEW

Indian regulation ought to close all gaps in food marketing claims

India's rules should prevent unproven assertions from being sneaked in while raising penalties to ensure effective deterrence



PAWAN AGARWAL
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The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's (FSSAI) recent notices to food companies over the use of terms such as "healthy," "natural," "organic," "heart-friendly" and "zero maida" have re-ignited an important debate about packaged food marketing. The FSSAI's action is timely. As consumers become more health-conscious, words associated with wellness, purity and nutrition have acquired enormous commercial value. Often, they influence purchase decisions more than the information on ingredients and nutrition printed on the pack.

But the issue is larger than a few food-product labels or advertisements.

India's food regulations have evolved significantly over the past decade. While the Food Safety and Standards Act of 2006 prohibited misleading advertisements and misbranding, the regulation of nutritional and health claims had lagged. This changed with the Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations of 2018, which took effect in July 2019. For the first time, India had a comprehensive framework governing nutrition and health claims and requiring packaged food businesses to substantiate them.

The regulations represented an important shift. Food product regulation was no longer concerned only with what was inside the package. It also recognized the influence of the information presented on it.

Yet, an important question remains. If a product cannot legally claim to be 'healthy,' can a company—hypothetically speaking—call itself, say, Healthy Foods Pvt Ltd? Similarly, if a manufacturer cannot substantiate an 'organic' claim on its package, should it be allowed to register the same word as a trademark or incorporate it in its corporate identity?

For most consumers, the distinction is meaningless. Whether the message appears as a claim, a trademark or a company name, the impression created is often exactly the same.

Indian regulations of advertising and claims recognize that trademarks and brand names can influence consumer perception. However, food claims, trademarks and company names continue to be governed under different regulatory frameworks. The result is the possibility of inconsistent outcomes. A claim that would attract scrutiny on a label may still find expression through a trademark or corporate identity.

The next stage of reform should, therefore, focus on regulatory alignment. The FSSAI, trademark registry and the ministry of corporate affairs should work towards a common approach for terms such as 'healthy,' 'natural,' 'organic,' 'heart' and 'immunity' that imply nutritional, health or



ISTOCKPHOTO

quality benefits.

This need not be a punitive exercise. Many trademarks and company names were registered before India's food claims framework was fully developed. Existing businesses could be given a reasonable transition period. Over time, such companies could be nudged, not forced, towards rebranding.

Meanwhile, the regulator of food safety and standards could require that the company name not dominate the package over the actual product description, and insist that such packaging is accompanied by a clear and equally prominent disclaimer: "This is a trademark or company name, not a certified claim."

As mentioned, the objective of this exercise should not be to penalize legacy businesses but to reduce consumer confusion and improve regulatory clarity going forward.

Penalties, however, are an issue as well. Under Section 53 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, misleading advertisements attract a maximum penalty of ₹10 lakh. While this may be significant for a small business, it is unlikely to deter a large company running campaigns worth several crores of rupees.

Misleading claims are ultimately economic offences. If the gains from a violation exceed the likely penalty, enforcement risks becoming just another cost of doing business. The deterrent effect weakens precisely where it is needed most.

Many regulatory systems now link penalties to turnover, revenue or an economic benefit derived from a violation. Food regulation should consider a similar approach.

The goal is not harsher punishment but proportionate deterrence. Penalties should remove the economic incentive to mislead consumers.

The FSSAI's recent notices are important not only because of the products involved. They highlight the next challenge in the evolution of food regulation. As regulators tighten the rules on claims, businesses will inevitably look for alternative ways to convey the same message.

A claim that cannot be made on a label should not become acceptable merely because it appears as a trademark, brand identity or company name. Consumers deserve information they can trust. Businesses deserve clear and predictable rules. Both objectives are best served when regulation addresses not only a claim, but every pathway through which that claim reaches the consumer.

MINT CURATOR

Why narcissistic bosses do not want folks working from home

It deprives them of interactions that affirm their power and status



BETH KOWITZ
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Corporate research seems to confirm what many suspected. ISTOCKPHOTO

If you want the best odds of maintaining a remote or hybrid work arrangement, make sure you're not working for a narcissist. In the post-pandemic era, bosses have used all of corporate America's favourite buzzwords—innovation, collaboration, culture, mentorship, productivity, performance—to rationalize calling their workers back to office five days a week. Cringe-jargon aside, some of those justifications are reasonable and legitimate.

But in a newly released research paper, Marissa Shandell, Courtney Elliott and Adam Grant of the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School find that a boss's objection to working from home is more likely to be driven by ego and a thirst for control and status than anything else.

Their research tracks with a broader phenomenon I have been following for the last year-and-a-half. Amid AI angst and sweeping layoffs, the balance of power has swung back to managers, and they are hungry to re-assert and flaunt it in ways both big and small. Bosses—narcissistic or otherwise—are now in their command-and-control era, doing far less cajoling and convincing and much more demanding.

The re-emergence of do-as-I-say management has translated into suppressing employee dissent, expanding worker surveillance and slashing the benefits that were meant to attract and retain talent when the US job market was tight. It has also led to a host of new rules—about how employees can express their personal views, even when they are off the clock; about working in the office five days a week; and about not only what employees should wear but also how they should act.

The paper, aptly titled 'Worship me at the office altar: Why narcissistic leaders resist remote work,' has the receipts to prove what many workers on the other end of the tightening leash have suspected: that often these decisions have very little to do with improving the business and everything to do with bosses flexing their power. The researchers found that narcissism was the only characteristic that dependably predicted resistance to remote work. The bigger the ego, the more an executive desired authority and acclaim, and, in turn, the more that boss wanted workers to get their butts back in their office desk chairs.

In one of three studies the researchers conducted, they examined the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, using the size of their pay-cheques and signatures and photos in their company annual reports to measure their egos. As someone who has

fielded multiple phone calls over the years from a panicked PR person when their CEO dislikes the photo that was used in one of my pieces, I can confirm that this is a solid indicator of narcissism. The higher the marks, the more likely they were to be chairmen of their own companies and join the boards of others—a contingent that made the most derogatory comments about working from home. "If you want to get paid New York rates, you work in New York," has been one refrain.

Why do egocentric leaders oppose remote work so much? Existing studies have suggested that narcissists are drawn to the digital world because they can better curate and more broadly disseminate their image. But in this case, the researchers found that remote workplace interactions deprive them of what they crave most—power and status.

It is harder for self-important bosses to refuel their "narcissistic supply" of attention and affirmation when they do not have their usual tactics at their disposal—interrupting, speaking loudly, making intense eye contact or calling spontaneous meetings. The paper cites studies which found that on video calls, employees are more likely to flinch at the sight of their boss's face and also more likely to look bored or tired than they are to show reverence.

Employees can also exert their own newfound form of control by ignoring a work text or deleting an email. They can turn off their cameras on Zoom. Signifiers of workplace status, like office size, evaporate. "This puts narcissistic leaders at risk of falling off the authority balance beam, as the balance of power tips too far toward employees," the researchers write. Demanding that workers return to their desks five days a week is a way for threatened bosses to re-assert their dominance.

In case this needs to be said, clearly not every executive who wants workers back at the office five days a week is a narcissist. But the study helps us understand why return-to-office mandates have become such a powerful proxy of post-pandemic corporate life.

The debate is not just about whether you are logging in from your home or your office. It is about power—who has it, who lost it and the lengths some executives will go to reclaim it. ©BLOOMBERG

THEIR VIEW

Is higher women's employment in UP an illusory gain?

VIDYA MAHAMBARE & VIVEK JADHAV



are, respectively, Union Bank Chair professor of economics, Great Lakes Institute of Management, and assistant professor, Institute of Management Technology.

In Uttar Pradesh (UP), 16 million additional women aged 15-64 had gained employment by the end of last year compared with eight years earlier. Between 2017 and 2025, as per official data, the proportion of women employed in India's most populous state surged from 13.8% to 33.4%, a striking increase in less than a decade. Correspondingly, the proportion of women who were not looking for work declined sharply from over 72% to 53% over the period.

The rise in women's employment was not driven by an increase in women's participation in household enterprises as unpaid workers, a typical source of work for women, nor by a rise in women working for a public employment guarantee scheme. Nor was it that young women were forgoing higher education to start working.

At first glance, such a trend would appear to be a clear success. Dig deeper, however, and a different picture emerges.

Let us first understand how to interpret women's employment data. The first ques-

tion is the kind of work done. Is the person self-employed? If yes, is she an employer or working solo, or working as an unpaid worker in a household enterprise? If not, does she have a salaried or casual job? The second question is about the place of work: is it a farm, livestock pen, factory floor, construction site or service-sector business? A doubling of women's work means one thing if it reflects jobs in industry and services, and quite another if it is on farms or unpaid work in family enterprises.

Women's non-farm employment in UP did rise over this period: in industry from 1.8% to 2.9% of working-age women, in services from 3.1% to a little under 7.6% and taken together, from just below 5% to about 10%. Even so, non-farm work accounts for only a modest share of the overall increase in women's employment in UP.

So where are most of the state's additional women workers to be found? The single largest contributor to UP's rise in women's employment is growth among those who are self-employed in the animal-rearing sector, mainly dairy farming. The share of working-age women employed in animal farming in UP climbed from 2.3% to 10.2%, more than quadrupling. Further, employment in crop farming and mining roughly doubled, from

under 7% to 13%. Overall, of the total increase in women's employment, agriculture and livestock account for about three-quarters, with most of that increase in rural areas.

Why 12 million women moved into crop and animal farming and continue to do so remains unclear. The most likely trigger could have been a strain on household incomes in rural areas during the pandemic and its aftermath. Dairy work offered an accessible fallback; most rural households already had cattle, so little additional investment was needed, and the extra milk output—once consumed at home—could now be sold in the market.

The central government's cooperative-led White Revolution 2.0 aims to increase the milk procurement of dairy cooperatives and may bring many women in dairy farming into the organized sector. If it delivers market access and steadier prices, UP's own-account dairy work that has expanded so sharply could begin to earn more. With rising incomes and changing

diets across India, demand for milk will remain strong, and the gains would be even larger if women's cooperatives can move beyond raw milk into value-added products such as *paneer*, processed cheese and *ghee*.

Nonetheless, it is concerning that only 10% of working-age women in UP are employed in industry or the service sector, the two sectors that tend to offer better-paid work and social security.

Does the employment picture change if we consider the younger generation of better educated UP residents?

In 2025, just 2% of young women aged 15 to 29 were in regular salaried employment in UP, compared to 12% of young men in salaried jobs. Even when it comes to own-account work, the female rate is 6%, half the male rate of 13%. Among single young women, who are less burdened by household work, only less than 9% were employed in non-farm sectors, compared with about 30% of young men. Young women in UP complete their education at

nearly the same rate as young men, but their pathways clearly diverge sharply thereafter.

Overall, however, more women in UP now earn their own income—close to home, and with little capital. This is good, but the next gains must come from elsewhere. As education spreads, younger women will want work beyond crop or dairy farming. Such jobs will not always lie close to home. Where they do not, women need a safe commute or safe housing nearer their workplaces.

India's most populous state currently has only eight functional working women's hostels, far too few for its size. The Union government's budget for 2026-27 promised a hostel in every district for women in higher education. The same commitment is overdue for working women, and the two need not be housed separately. Tamil Nadu's Thozhi hostels, for example, shelter students and working women under one roof. UP must build such boarding and lodging facilities for working women and students too, but the initiative's success will turn on how they will be financed and run.

For a state this young and so large, every year of delay in creating non-farm opportunities and infrastructure to access them ages another cohort of educated women out of the workforce.

Self-employed dairy farming accounts for the state's leap while it needs more factory and service jobs

The Statesman

Incorporating and directly descended from
the Friends of India -founded 1818

Broken Chains

The rescue of a dozen workers from an industrial unit in western Uttar Pradesh is more than another criminal investigation. It is a reminder that one of independent India's oldest social evils continues to survive beneath the country's impressive economic ambitions. Bonded labour may have been abolished by law in 1976, but legislation alone has never been enough to dismantle a system sustained by poverty, migration, weak enforcement and the invisibility of those at its mercy. India has made significant strides in expanding infrastructure, manufacturing and industrial output. Yet growth loses much of its moral force when sections of the workforce remain vulnerable to conditions resembling modern-day slavery. The victims in this case were reportedly recruited with promises of employment, only to find themselves trapped through intimidation, violence and deprivation. Such methods are not isolated aberrations; they reflect a recurring pattern in which economic desperation is exploited by unscrupulous employers operating beyond the reach of routine inspection. The episode also exposes a troubling institutional failure. Labour laws, police intelligence, local administration and welfare mechanisms are supposed to function as overlapping safeguards. When workers can remain confined for months without detection, every layer of that safety net demands scrutiny. The success of the police operation deserves recognition, but it should also prompt uncomfortable questions about why intervention depended on a tip-off rather than systematic oversight.

The challenge has grown more complex with increased interstate migration. Millions leave their homes each year in search of employment, often relying on informal recruiters and undocumented arrangements. Without effective registration, grievance mechanisms or legal awareness, migrant workers can disappear into workplaces where exploitation flourishes unnoticed. The destruction or confiscation of identity documents, a tactic frequently associated with trafficking and forced labour worldwide, further strips victims of both mobility and legal protection. India is not without legal instruments. The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, the Inter-State Migrant Workmen legislation, anti-trafficking provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and constitutional guarantees against forced labour provide a robust framework on paper. The problem lies in consistent implementation. Labour inspections have weakened in many sectors, while prosecutions often move slowly, reducing the deterrent effect of the law.

Equally important is rehabilitation. Rescue is only the beginning of justice. Survivors require medical care, psychological support, compensation, legal assistance and opportunities for dignified employment. Without sustained rehabilitation, economic vulnerability can push victims back into the same cycle from which they were freed. The measure of a democracy is not merely how rapidly its economy expands but how effectively it protects those with the least bargaining power. The latest rescue should therefore be treated not as an isolated success but as a national warning. Unless governments strengthen labour enforcement, improve migrant worker protections and ensure swift accountability for offenders, bonded labour will continue to surface in different forms, exposing the gap between constitutional ideals and lived reality.

Hotter North

For generations, countries of northern and western Europe were seen as places where summer meant pleasant sunshine rather than a struggle for survival. India, by contrast, has long lived with the annual ordeal of extreme heat. That distinction is beginning to blur. As parts of France, Spain and the United Kingdom record temperatures that rival or exceed those routinely associated with the tropics, the world is witnessing more than another difficult summer. It is watching climate geography being rewritten.

The significance lies not simply in the numbers on the thermometer but in the societies confronting them. India has evolved, however imperfectly, with an understanding that summer can be dangerous. Air-conditioning remains inaccessible to millions, but the country has increasingly adopted heat action plans, revised work schedules, early warning systems and public awareness campaigns after repeated deadly heatwaves. European societies, whose infrastructure, housing, public transport and even tourism were designed for milder climates, are discovering that prosperity does not automatically translate into climate resilience.

The economic implications are substantial. Heat is no longer merely an environmental concern but an economic variable. Productivity declines, energy demand surges, transport networks buckle, crops suffer and insurance costs rise. Museums close, schools alter schedules, outdoor work becomes hazardous and electricity grids come under unprecedented strain. Every new record exposes another weakness in infrastructure built for a different climate.

For India, Europe's predicament should not invite schadenfreude but reflection. If wealthy nations with advanced public services find themselves struggling to cope with prolonged extreme heat, countries with larger populations, greater urban congestion and wider economic disparities face an even steeper challenge. The question is no longer whether heatwaves will intensify, but whether governments can adapt quickly enough to minimise the human and economic costs.

This also challenges a lingering misconception that climate change is primarily a future problem or one confined to vulnerable developing nations. The burden is increasingly global, though its consequences remain unequal. Rich countries may possess greater financial resources to adapt, but they are learning that decades of infrastructure investment cannot be redesigned overnight. Poorer countries often have greater experience living with heat but far fewer resources to protect their citizens. The emerging reality demands a shift in public policy. Climate adaptation deserves the same seriousness as roads, defence or public health. Urban planning must prioritise cooling, green spaces and resilient buildings. Water management, power systems and labour regulations must account for temperatures that once seemed exceptional but are becoming routine. Europe's unprecedented heat is therefore not simply Europe's story. It is a reminder that the climate dividing line between temperate and tropical regions is becoming less meaningful. In a warming world, no nation can assume that yesterday's weather will define tomorrow's normal. The sooner governments accept that reality, the better prepared their societies will be for the summers that lie ahead.

A tactical pause?

This stark dichotomy between tactical firepower and strategic victory forced the United States to recalibrate its approach. The trajectory of the war - culminating in conditional ceasefires, memoranda of understanding, and a return to technical negotiations rather than a definitive surrender - demonstrates that modern, highly capable middle powers can effectively neutralize traditional unipolar dominance



launches ~ to absorb heavy blows while simultaneously imposing catastrophic costs on the global economy. By severely disrupting or entirely blocking critical maritime and energy routes in the Strait of Hormuz, Tehran managed to wield an asymmetrical deterrence that directly counterbalanced American technological dominance.

Perhaps the most defining realization for U.S. strategists was that the destruction of physical infrastructure and the decapitation of leadership do not automatically translate to political capitulation. While the massive bombardment inflicted heavy damage upon Iran's conventional military assets and nuclear facilities, it proved incapable of eliminating the adversary's will to fight or the technical knowledge required to maintain its strategic posture.

Furthermore, instead of fracturing the Iranian public and undermining the ruling establishment ~ as some in Washington initially hypothesized ~ external attacks served to consolidate internal hardline control and strengthen the resolve of the "axis of resistance," rendering regime change politically and practically unfeasible.

This stark dichotomy between tactical firepower and strategic victory forced the United States to recalibrate its approach. The trajectory of the war ~ culminating in conditional ceasefires, memoranda of understanding, and a return to technical negotiations rather than a definitive surrender ~ demonstrates that modern, highly capable middle powers can effectively neutralize traditional unipolar dominance.

It has signalled to Washington that military coercion is not a standalone substitute for comprehensive diplomacy, and that even the world's strongest military power struggles to dictate the internal policies and regional behaviour of a determined sovereign state.

Ultimately, the 2026 conflict marks a defining moment in the evolution of American foreign policy. It has made the U.S. realize that sheer military dominance cannot unilaterally force a resilient nation into submission. Future American engagement in the Middle East ~ and globally ~ must accept the reality of multipolarity and the limitations of hard power, pivoting away from maximalist demands and recognizing that sustainable geopolitical stability is only achievable through mutual negotiation, de-escalation, and a realistic appraisal of an adversary's asymmetric leverage.

The conflict exposed the limits of coercion, as Iran's core structure endured despite

severe military losses and the assassination of its leadership. While the conflict began with American demands for unconditional surrender, the resulting agreement secured Iran's survival, respect for its political sovereignty, and concessions regarding sanctions relief. While the US and Israel demonstrated overwhelming firepower, they could not secure the political transformation or regime change they initially sought. The conflict highlighted limits to American hegemony, showing that modern superpowers must rely on negotiations and compromises rather than just dictating terms.

Now, let's turn to the second outcome. Iran has officially agreed to dilute its highly enriched uranium for civilian use, according

to an interim MoU signed with the United States. This diplomatic shift follows intense geopolitical pressure and military escalation. However, while Iran has committed to down-blending its near-weapons-grade material, it continues to aggressively defend its baseline sovereign right to enrich uranium for civilian energy.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is tasked with supervising the dilution process. In exchange, the U.S. has immediately waived critical oil sanctions. A \$300 billion regional reconstruction fund will also be unlocked upon a final, permanent agreement.

Despite agreeing to eliminate its weapon-adjacent material, Iranian leadership rejects the narrative that they have abandoned their nuclear identity. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized that Tehran will never relinquish its right to domestic uranium enrichment. While the interim deal forces Iran to step back from the nuclear brink, a "war of words" remains.

Senior Iranian officials, including Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi, note that full inspector-access to sensitive, previously attacked sites is strictly conditional on the final lifting of all international sanctions during the 60-day negotiation window.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi confirmed that inspections will take place to monitor compliance. However, actual physical entry into critical underground sites damaged during the war remains frozen pending a



PRABHU DAYAL

The writer, a retired IFS officer, served as India's Ambassador to Kuwait and Morocco and as Consul-General in New York

The United States and Iran have entered a fragile tactical truce after signing the landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 17 June 2026, halting months of devastating direct warfare. Following a conflict that began with major U.S.-Israeli airstrikes, the interim deal establishes a 60-day negotiating window aimed at hammering out a comprehensive peace settlement.

As part of the initial de-escalation, Washington has lifted its destructive naval blockade on Iranian ports, while Tehran has moved to reopen the critical Strait of Hormuz to toll-free commercial shipping and agreed to dilute its enriched uranium under international oversight.

The US-Iran war has hopefully resulted in two important outcomes. The first is that the US should have realised that it cannot bully into subjugation each and every nation, while the second is that Iran will have to change the objective of its nuclear programme to utilising its enriched uranium for peaceful purposes only. Both these outcomes are good for the world.

Let us address the first outcome. The recent war against Iran has fundamentally challenged American assumptions about international power dynamics. By demonstrating that even overwhelming conventional and technological superiority cannot guarantee political submission, the conflict has forced the United States to confront the structural limits of sheer military dominance in asymmetrical conflicts.

At the outbreak of the conflict ~ initiated by sweeping joint U.S. and Israeli airstrikes on Iranian infrastructure and military sites ~ Washington expected to rapidly degrade Tehran's defensive capabilities and force the regime to yield on long-standing nuclear, regional, and political issues. However, the reality of the ensuing months exposed the severe friction between military supremacy and actionable geopolitical outcomes.

Rather than collapsing under coercive pressure or accepting American terms, Iran leveraged its vast geographical depth, domestic resilience, and agile asymmetric capabilities ~ such as drone strikes and mobile missile

Việt Nam News

New maritime mindset needed for next phase of sea development

As Viet Nam reviews its landmark maritime resolution and drafts a new one, the question of how the country manages and develops its seas has become increasingly important. Nguyễn Chu Hồi, former deputy director-general of the Vietnam Administration of Seas and Islands and Permanent Vice President of the Vietnam Fisheries Society, spoke with the Vietnam News Agency about why traditional approaches to the marine economy are no longer sufficient.

It reflects exactly the kind of far-sighted, comprehensive strategic thinking that this moment demands. Viet Nam has always known the value of its seas and islands; they have been central to how we built and defended this country throughout history. But our use of the sea has been

uneven and, in many respects, unsustainable. The 12th Party Central Committee was right to issue Resolution 36. It was a sound and strategically significant decision, and the General Secretary and President has said as much himself.

Eight years on, the record is genuinely mixed. We have made real gains: greater public awareness of the sea's role in national development; stronger policy frameworks; meaningful growth across several maritime industries; expanded coastal infrastructure; better living standards in coastal communities; and solid achievements in maritime defence and security. But the marine economy has not grown in proportion to Viet Nam's potential or its ambitions,

certainly not at the pace the 14th Party Congress resolution calls for. The bottlenecks are not hard to identify. Maritime governance is fragmented, with agencies working in silos and mandates overlapping. Cross-sector coordination and ecosystem-based spatial management have been slow to develop.

The maritime workforce is dispersed and underprepared, particularly for the demands of deep-sea and offshore operations. The technology content of marine products remains low. And competing interests among actors sharing the same maritime zones continue to generate friction.

Given all of that, the top leader has pushed for an urgent review of Resolution 36 and the drafting of a new resolution, one that opens a new chapter in Viet Nam's maritime development and

drives genuine transformation in thinking, institutions and the development model. Start with the nature of the sea itself. It is dynamic and inherently transboundary. Marine resources are distributed across space ~ at the surface, through the water column, on the seabed and beneath it. Fish stocks and other marine species migrate continuously across zones governed by different legal regimes and different hydrodynamic conditions, yet these zones interact with and affect one another.

IN MEMORIAM

ROY GOURI — Left us for Heavenly Abode on July 2, 2000. May her soul Rest in Peace. Remembering your presence always. — Bulai, Mumi, Kalu, Bujru.

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Eternal

Sir, Very recently while writing a paper on Chandernagore governed by the French during colonial times, I came across Sri Aurobindo's celebrated speech delivered in Uttarpara on 9 May 1909, soon after he was released from jail.

Sri Aurobindo had been arrested on the charge of being an active member of the Alipore Bomb conspiracy of 1908. While in jail, as is well-known, Sri Aurobindo experienced a spiritual awakening. Referring to the divine intervention in his Uttarpara speech, Sri Aurobindo's definition of the Hindu religion seems so relevant and relatable, even after 117 years: "When I approached God at that time, I hardly had a living faith in Him. The agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me, the sceptic was in me and I was not absolutely sure that there was a God at all. I did not feel His presence. Yet something drew me to the truth of the Vedas, the truth of the Gita, the

truth of the Hindu religion."

He elaborated: "That which we call the Hindu religion is really the eternal religion, because it is the universal religion which embraces all others. If a religion is not universal, it cannot be eternal. A narrow religion, a sectarian religion, an exclusive religion can live only for a limited time and a limited purpose. This is the one religion that can triumph over materialism by including and anticipating the discoveries of science and the speculations of philosophy." Yours, etc., Dr. Sanjukta Dasgupta, Kolkata, 30 June.

History

Sir, This is with reference to the editorial, "Memory and History", published today. It rightly reminds readers that history is not a fixed narrative but an evolving conversation shaped by evidence, memory and careful interpretation.

The Bengal Famine remains one of the

darkest chapters of India's past and deserves remembrance that is both compassionate and intellectually honest.

While art has every right to challenge accepted narratives, public institutions have an equally important responsibility to provide historical context, especially when scholarly opinion remains divided.

Reducing complex events to a single explanation or personality risks oversimplifying history and limiting meaningful public understanding.

Yours, etc., Maliha Fatima, Hyderabad, 29 June.

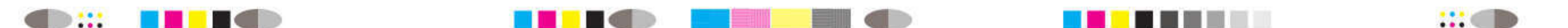
Should quit

Sir, The scenario unfolding in the wake of the Trinamul splinter party of MLAs stripping Mamata Banerjee of the chairpersonship of the party (and Abhishek Banerjee of his position) by a voice vote from a hotel felt like a three-ring circus with a ringmaster directing them incognito.

The strange goings-on in the parliamentary faction of 20-odd rebel Trinamul members like Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar would also baffle political analysts. Their detractors allege that power and pelf is all that they crave as evident from their public stand to align with the BJP-led government at the Centre.

Others ridicule their move as a panic attack at the prospect of being hounded by the investigating agencies like the CBI or ED for any lapses - financial or criminal - on their part. Their ingenious detour to stand up to constitutional and legal scrutiny by joining a nondescript outfit styled as Nationalist Citizens Party of India doesn't fool anybody. The developments have sparked moral convulsion within the minds of the grass root-level party workers who gave their blood, sweat and tears to get them elected. If they felt suffocated in the party, they could have resigned and sought a fresh mandate.

Yours, etc., Ardhendu Chatterjee, Durgapur, 24 June.



2027 delimitation must go beyond North-South talk

PRAVIN KAUSHAL

When India's Delimitation Commission next convenes, it will inherit a task that no commission has faced in fifty years: the freedom to actually change how many parliamentary seats each state sends to the Lok Sabha. The 84th Constitutional Amendment of 2001 froze that allocation until after the first census taken after 2026. The 2027 Census will lift that freeze, and the redistribution of roughly 281 new seats across 36 states and Union Territories will follow.

The political debate has focused almost entirely on the North-South dimension, on whether states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which succeeded in controlling population growth, will now be punished for that success by a reallocation that rewards higher-growth Hindi-belt states. That concern is legitimate, and it deserves the attention it has received. But it has obscured an equally consequential question that will determine whether any new boundaries actually improve Indian democracy: which constituencies within states should be split, into how many parts, and on what evidence? An EAC-PM working paper provides the most systematic answer yet attempted. Drawing on a panel of 2,171 constituency-elections across four general elections from 2009 to 2024 and linking each constituency to its demographic and linguistic profile, it overturns one of the oldest assumptions in Indian electoral studies.

For decades, conventional wisdom held that large constituencies suppress voter turnout. The logic seemed self-evident: queues at metropolitan polling booths can run for hours, per-capita polling-station access in dense urban areas is lower, and the voter in a constituency of two million feels more remote from power than the voter in one of 500,000. Smaller constituencies, on this reading, should

vote more. And they do, in the raw data. The smallest decile of constituencies turned out at a remarkable 22.9 percentage points above the largest decile in 2009.

But that gap has been halving steadily. By 2024, it had fallen to 12 percentage points. More importantly, once you account for the demographic and linguistic composition of constituencies, how urban they are, how many residents belong to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes, how linguistically polarised or diverse the local population is, the size penalty largely disappears and by 2024 reverses. A constituency with two million electors at a typical demographic profile now turns out approximately six percentage points higher than a comparable one with one million electors. The residual "size penalty" in the raw data turns out to be a composition effect. Smaller constituencies tend to be more rural, more tribal, and more linguistically polarised, and it is those features, not smallness itself, that drive higher turnout.

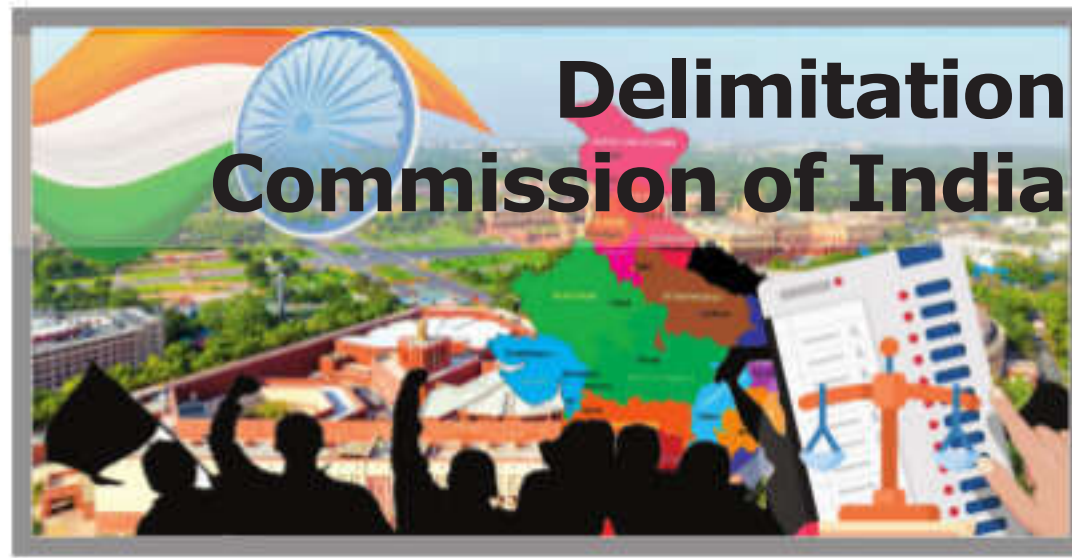
Five compositional features dominate the picture, and they have been reorganising over the past fifteen years in ways that do not point in the same direction. Scheduled Tribe constituencies have emerged as the highest turnout category in Indian politics. The most ST-heavy decile of constituencies reached 73 per cent turnout in 2024, the highest of any group on any dimension in the research. Scheduled Caste constituencies, which once voted at a premium above the national average, have converged down to roughly the national mean. Urban constituencies, which in 2009 voted marginally above rural ones, now vote below them, a reversal that tracks India's ongoing but uneven urbanisation.

Linguistic structure, too, matters enormously. Constituencies in which a few large language communities coexist and compete have outperformed

low-polarisation constituencies by eleven to thirteen percentage points in every election of the past fifteen years, without exception. Where a few large groups believe the election will turn on their own mobilisation, each member of each group has a strong reason to vote. Constituencies with high overall linguistic diversity, many language communities coexisting, have been catching up as a turnout amplifier since 2014.

The sharpest and most consequential finding is about gender. Women's electoral participation is dramatically more sensitive to constituency composition than men's. Urban share is the single largest predictor of female turnout, and the urban penalty for women is more than double the urban penalty for men. Women in fully urban constituencies today turn out approximately five percentage points below rural women at every constituency size. For men, the urban gap is around two percentage points. This asymmetry has a clear structural logic. Dense female-targeted welfare networks, women's self-help groups, Anganwadi centres, vernacular health and microcredit programmes, are concentrated in rural India and provide a powerful social infrastructure for mobilising female voters. Urban anonymity and higher time costs of voting, particularly for working women with care responsibilities, weaken those networks precisely where constituency sizes and booth loads are highest.

The implication is uncomfortable. The least-participating subgroup in Indian democracy today is not the rural poor. It is the woman in a large, fully urban metropolitan constituency. The most-participating subgroup is the woman in a high-Scheduled-Tribe, rural constituency. A targeted delimitation plan concentrating three-way splits on large metropolitan and linguistically complex constituencies, and two-way splits on secondary-urban ones, is estimated to raise national voter turnout by between 0.3 and 2.3



percentage points at the next general election. That range reflects genuine statistical uncertainty. It corresponds to between nine and twenty-three million additional voters.

Thirty-four of thirty-six states and Union Territories show a positive predicted gain. The constituencies identified for three-way splits are heterogeneous: they include fully urban metropolitan seats such as Hyderabad, Secunderabad, and Kolkata South, but also rural Scheduled-Tribe constituencies such as Lohardaga in Jharkhand and Kandhamal in Odisha, whose joint demographic and linguistic depth generates steep predicted gains from splitting.

There are, however, two things that splitting alone cannot do.

It cannot close the female-urban participation gap. The residual five-percentage-point female urban penalty is preserved within every daughter constituency that a split would create, because the daughters inherit the parent constituency's compositional profile. Closing that gap requires accompanying operational reform: women-only polling booths in urban metropolitan constituencies, extended polling hours that accommodate the time constraints of urban working women, transport linkages from urban-fringe residential areas to polling stations, and women-targeted voter-roll drives using existing civic networks.

It cannot resolve the deeper constitutional question about how states are represented in Parliament.

Legal scholars have pointed out that the proposed approach of expanding the Lok Sabha on a pro-rata basis, preserving each state's current proportional share anchored in the 1971 Census freeze, extends rather than resolves a fifty-year-old political bargain that sits uneasily with the Constitution's original design. A more durable solution may lie in reforming the Rajya Sabha into a genuine forum for state interests, with meaningful powers over fiscal legislation and a rebalanced seat allocation that gives smaller states a structural voice. As India urbanises rapidly, the share of the electorate in large metropolitan constituencies will continue to rise. Whether that rising urban share translates into falling national turnout or into a renewed wave of female and urban participation will be decided largely by what the Delimitation Commission chooses to do and what operational reforms accompany it.

The 2027 Census offers India its first real chance in five decades to redesign the building blocks of its democracy. The empirical case for doing so wisely, and the constitutional stakes of doing so hastily, have rarely been clearer. The North-South debate is important. But the quality of the constituencies we create, who lives in them, how they are composed, and whether women in cities can actually participate in them, may matter even more.

The writer is a tech and social entrepreneur and Programme Director (Eastern India) at WHEELS Global Foundation, a Pan-IT alumni initiative working across 20+ states in India.

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 02 July 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

IN its survey of the work of the Industries Department for last year the Government of Bengal announces that it has decided to accept the principle of State aid to industries and is preparing a Bill to this end. The hint is given that it will deal especially with cottage and small industries. It is the misfortune of an Industries Department that big flourishing industries want neither its help nor its interference, while those which find it difficult to keep going look to it for relief from their misfortunes. State aid suggests protection or bounties in a small way, but that probably is not meant; Bengal cannot afford to turn struggling industries into ostensibly successful ones at the tax-payer's expense. Not long since the Department was threatened with extensive retrenchment, but apparently the worst of the danger is over. The Research Tannery which was opened as a temporary experiment is to be retained as a Government institution, while certain technical schools in the mofussil which it had been proposed to abandon will be retained as models for non-Government schools. The report of the Department indicates quiet progress in many directions, and apparently Calcutta will soon know that the long expected Calcutta Technical School is busily at work.

News Items

MAJORITY OF TEN

FIRST DAY OF OFFICE SURVIVED

OTTAWA, JUNE

THE new Meighen administration survived the first day of its office under a provisional Cabinet with a majority of ten votes over an amendment proposed by the Opposition censuring Mackenzie King's administration for its laxity in the administration of customs, and providing for the continuance of the investigation by the Judicial Commission. — Reuter's Special Service.

SPANISH PLOT DISCOVERY

PLAN TO ATTACK THE ROYAL TRAIN

PARIS, JULY

FOLLOWING the departure of the King and Queen of Spain, who arrived in London yesterday, on a fortnight's private visit the police have revealed a plot to assassinate the King which was frustrated on Friday by the arrest of two notorious bandits and anarchists who had come for the purpose from the Argentine.

One is said to be the murderer of the Archbishop of Saragossa in 1923. They confessed that they intended to make an attempt on the King's life. — Reuter.

EXCELLENT WEATHER

(“TIMES” SPECIAL SERVICE.)

LONDON, JUNE

A Marseilles message states that Cobham did not land at Sartrouville, near Paris, where preparations were made for his reception, but alighted at Marignane where he took in a supply of petrol, and departed for Naples. He is experiencing excellent weather so far on his flight.

BRITISH SACRIFICES

FIRST BATTLE OF THE SOMME

(BRITISH OFFICIAL WIRELESS.)

RUGBY, JULY

TO-DAY is the tenth anniversary of the opening of the first battle of the Somme when it closed in November it had cost the British army in casualties nearly 23,000 officers and over 476,000 men.

Newspapers to-day published narratives of the terrible conflict, and their obituary columns recall sacrifices of hundreds who died on its opening day when the German trenches were assaulted over a long front.

Preserving heritage beyond forts and palaces

BHARAT DOGRA

It is commonplace to look at heritage in terms of beautiful buildings, palaces, forts and monuments, artifacts or colourful dances and cultural celebrations. This tendency gets emphasised as tourism is more likely to be linked to these aspects of heritage. Of course, this is important; all things of beauty should be cherished, particularly those with history attached to them. Nevertheless, overemphasis on beauty and glamour should not lead to the neglect of those aspects of heritage that can be helpful in other important ways for present times, even for meeting urgent needs.

A view may be taken by some that keeping in view the advancement of technology, we have better means of meeting our various needs and hence these aspects of heritage are not so important or relevant now. However, this would be too narrow a view in several contexts of the contributions previous generations made in terms of finding local solutions for problems, keeping in view what works best in the more specific local conditions. It would be a costly mistake to ignore these and move ahead arrogantly

with development models that fail to look at specific local needs.

This is particularly relevant in the context of water conservation, irrigation and agriculture, aspects that have been of critical importance for the survival and well-being of rural communities over hundreds of years, with each generation benefiting from the legacy of previous generations, supplementing these learnings and passing them on. Such learnings, oral memories and written records, and the structures which embody them are an invaluable part of the heritage of any region or place.

Thus, the historic tanks or wells of a region or other structures created by people for conservation of water, domestic use or irrigation present the accumulated collective experience, wisdom and hard work of people and communities over centuries. Even if a period of neglect in certain circumstances may have led to these being in a rather dismal state today, the thoughtful learner may still be able to absorb important lessons for present times. After all, the collected experiences of generations about the best means for meeting basic needs cannot be ignored.

In fact, even when we look at some of the beautiful palaces and



forts of historic importance, it adds great value to our understanding of this heritage if we give more attention to how water needs were secured. After all, the armies of kings had to ensure they would not be deprived of water if they faced a formidable attack on the fort. Thus, they tried to make enough arrangements for water conservation. There can be important learnings from some of these efforts even today.

Several palaces and forts like Mahendragarh, Amber, Nahargarh, Chittorgarh and Jal Mahal (Rajasthan), Chitradurga (Karnataka), Mandu (Madhya Pradesh), Janjira (Maharashtra), etc. are known additionally for their water works.

But it would be a mistake to look only at forts and palaces for examples of water wisdom. It was the efforts of people to ensure the sustainability of their communities by ensuring water needs were met that are of the greatest significance and learning. This is important in the context of a region like Bundelkhand where the need for creating water storages has been acute in villages. It has been rightly pointed out that the Chandela and Bundela kings made important contributions to create the vast network of tanks and related water works in Bundelkhand over centuries.

While the contribution of the royals must be appreciated, ultimately this heritage of thousands of tanks and many more wells reflect the work and skills of people and communities. In recent times, when under initiatives such as BIWAL (Bundelkhand Initiative for Water, Agriculture and Livelihoods) several voluntary organizations grouped together for renovation of traditional water tanks and wells, people of many villages responded well with their voluntary work and skills. The result was that useful work could be accomplished in cost-effective ways. While a lot of this work was

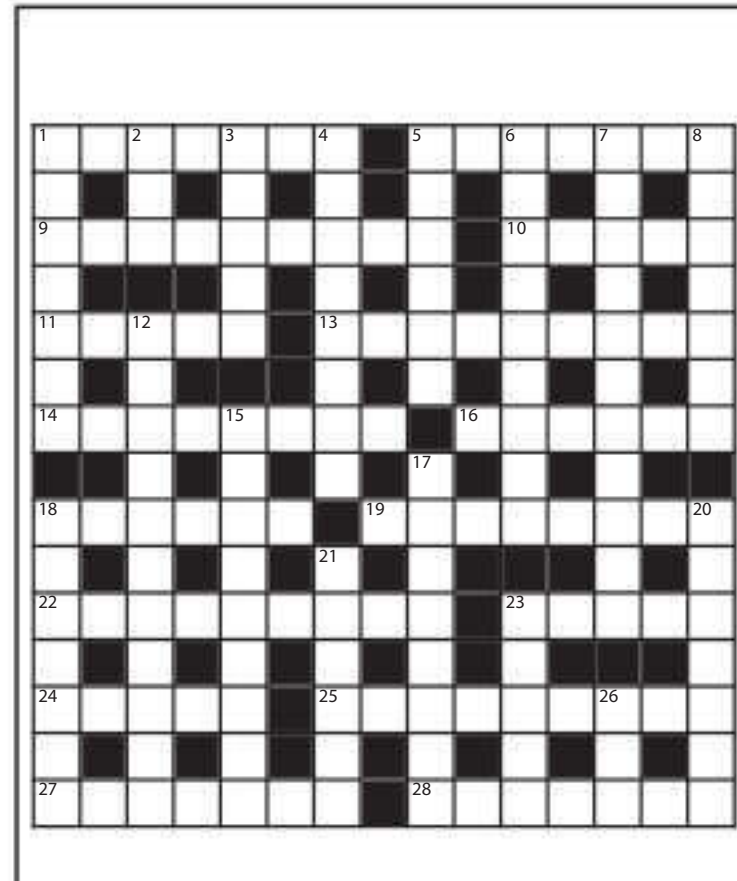
taken up under corporate social responsibility projects, Niti Aayog also played an important role.

No less important is the heritage that is available with farmers and communities for the progress of agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry. This heritage is best utilised when practices consistent with this are promoted, for example when natural farming is being popularized or when efforts to collect and save traditional seed varieties are being made. On the other hand, when efforts based on technologies inconsistent with traditional wisdom are implemented or when traditional practices are uprooted by artificial impositions, it becomes more difficult to protect and save heritage.

Hence, it is important to have an understanding of protecting heritage in a broader framework, so that much more that is of great value can be protected and the entire heritage protection effort can also be of benefit to people in meeting their contemporary needs and aspirations on the path of sustainable development.

(The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include India's Quest for Sustainable Farming and Healthy Food and Man over Machine.)

Crossword | No. 293507



Yesterday's Solution

CAKE FALL VERVE
O E L L A E E N
P L I C E B O G E N E S I S
I T S O E D O U
O A S I S F O R E I G N E R
U E N A N A E
S U P R E M E A R G E N T
R I S D C
P T I X I E S M A D N E S I S
A Z T T E T T I
P R E T E N D E R T R A I N
A R R R A O M U
C H I C A G O B A U H A U S
H N T S L R T E
E A G L E S T E P K I S S

ACROSS

- Playwright in gamble, out of pocket, losing 33% (7)
- He created unusual sculptures of the French prize winner (7)
- Source regarding series to see in Paris (9)
- Article not entirely nasty? It gets a hammering (5)
- Bathroom accessory excessively and thoroughly trimmed (5)
- Limited connection, with hesitation, in sexual activity (9)
- Central Americans, ignoring expense, welcoming fine folk from another continent (8)
- Refuse to accept broadcast restricted by noise (6)
- Mid-20th century writer or early 20th century writer, mostly (6)
- New Zealand painter from good family, dosh liberally spread around (8)
- New Zealand writer offering sexist view of discipline? (9)
- Description of power reflected in natural oscillations (5)

DOWN

- Religious attire - black attire, restyled (7)
- Lettuce crops regularly denuded (3)
- Part of opera cut from Tosca, retaining tenor's second note (5)
- Russian poet writing articles about Knight and Queen, tovarish? Not half (9)
- Temporarily stop America blocking outlay (7)
- Ebbing current with return of damage - metal? (7)
- Register ultimate in danger is involved in solo climbing (5)
- Run into the last place to be seen with a musician (8)
- Expression of annoyance about Wisconsin regional capital (6)
- Line in excellent meat product (9)
- Radio travel broadcast is a promotional feature (11)
- Guy in distress is a knight (7)
- Radical currently turning up in factory is to do marvellous stuff (4,7)
- Historic Arctic vessel trapped in ice - not one spot to grow plants (4,5)
- Staff's methodology when hosting a travelling exhibition (8)
- Absorption? Unusually large bog will absorb one (7)
- Sharp humour a Roman Catholic displayed during disrupted Mass (7)
- Chap apparently owing money gets court decision (6)
- One slow-moving bridge team to fare badly (5)
- Awkward person puts it in propeller (3)

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

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Threats to judges

Firm action needed to deter hate-mongers

A judge who recently sentenced seven men to life imprisonment in a lynching case in Madhya Pradesh has been bombarded with threats and abuse on social media. The attempts to intimidate and vilify Additional District and Sessions Judge Tabassum Khan are an assault on the rule of law itself. She has also been targeted because of her religious identity. The sheer audacity of the hate-mongers has exposed a dangerous fault line in India's constitutional order. An FIR has been registered and the judge's security stepped up. Yet the whole episode begs the question: can our democracy firmly protect those who are fearlessly doing their job of delivering justice?

Judge Khan relied on evidence that proved "beyond reasonable doubt" that the accused thrashed a truck driver to death on the suspicion of cow smuggling in 2022. Those dissatisfied with the judgment have the legal right to appeal before a higher court. But they have no right to issue threats or unleash communal propaganda. The malicious bid to link the verdict to the judge's religion is especially disturbing. Courts do not convict communities; they impose punishment on individuals proven guilty under the law. Communalising a judgment can undermine public faith in judicial impartiality.

Retired judges are also not being spared. Justice Gautam Patel and his family are being hounded two years after he gave a judgment in the Bombay High Court. Judicial independence is imperilled if those entrusted with dispensing justice fear for their own safety and that of their loved ones. Those responsible for the threats, hate campaigns and misinformation must be identified and prosecuted swiftly. An unequivocal response from Central and state governments, political parties and the judiciary is the need of the hour. Silence, ambiguity or selective outrage only emboldens those who believe intimidation can overturn justice. Protection of judges is not a privilege extended to individuals — it is a constitutional obligation owed to the Republic itself.

Fatal borewells

Another child, another avoidable death

TWENTY years after the dramatic rescue of Prince from a borewell in Haryana captured the nation's imagination, another four-year-old has lost his life in almost identical circumstances. Nirvair's death in Ambala, despite a relentless 21-hour rescue operation involving the Army, the National Disaster Response Force and other agencies, is not merely an accident; it is a damning indictment of administrative apathy and human negligence. The rescue teams did everything they could. Battling rain, loose soil and a shaft over 200 feet deep, they displayed courage and professionalism. However, the far more important question is: why was an abandoned borewell left open in the first place? Prevention, not rescue, should be the true measure of governance.

This tragedy is indefensible because we have clear safety norms. The Supreme Court mandated over a decade ago that unused borewells be securely sealed, fenced and reported to local authorities. District administrations are expected to maintain records and ensure compliance. Yet these directions remain honoured more in the breach than in practice. An open borewell is no different from an uncovered manhole or an exposed live wire. Leaving one unattended is an act of recklessness that endangers lives. Those responsible — landowners, contractors and officials who fail to enforce the law — must face criminal liability, not merely administrative action.

Every borewell tragedy follows a depressingly familiar script: frantic digging, anxious prayers, blanket media coverage and promises of strict action. Then the outrage fades until another child falls. India does not lack rescue expertise or legal safeguards; it lacks enforcement. Nirvair must not become another name in a growing list of forgotten victims. The only fitting tribute is to ensure that no abandoned borewell is left open again.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, JULY 2, 1926

Expansion of industries in Punjab

AT a meeting of the Punjab Legislative Council held at Simla on June 26, Sardar Jogendra Singh, Minister of Agriculture, announced a programme of expansion for the next five years both in agriculture and industries in the province. His speech on the subject shows that he is full of enthusiasm and hopes to achieve something that will really benefit the people and bring credit to himself. In regard to agriculture, he said that he would first establish model farms in every district and tehsil of the province in order to demonstrate to the agriculturists the advantages of intensive agriculture. The average holding in Punjab varies from four to seven acres and the object of the department will be to demonstrate what can be done on such a piece of land. Demonstration farms on a more or less large scale have been worked before, but their educational value has been limited. For one reason or another, agriculturists have not been able to adopt modern methods of farming. Whether their inability is due to lack of capital, want of technical knowledge or patience and determination, it is difficult to say. It is, therefore, proposed to run experimental demonstration farms of the same size as the average holding of the Punjab agriculturist and show that he can, by adopting improved processes, grow more crops and derive larger profits. If this is actually done, the department will be entitled to the gratitude of the people.

Gulf anchors India's energy security

Diversification doesn't trump the reality that the region is Delhi's most proximate source of oil & gas



NAVDEEP SURI
FORMER AMBASSADOR
TO EGYPT AND UAE

A recent visit to Abu Dhabi provided an opportunity to meet senior Emirati officials and get their perspective on India-UAE ties amid the ongoing conflict and tensions in West Asia. Some of the conversations were focused on the unprecedented global energy shock unleashed by the twin blockades of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran and the United States. They also revealed the extent of support that India and the UAE had extended to each other over the past four months.

The virtually complete closure of the Strait since February 28 was a worst-case scenario, and the UAE proved to be a steadfast partner. Friends at the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) spoke in hushed tones about midnight conversations between their CEO Dr Sultan Al Jaber and Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri.

There were situations that needed urgent, multi-agency coordination, and both sides showed that they could go the extra mile. ADNOC took calculated risks by sending ships laden with much-needed LPG to India. The vessels would typically switch off their transponders, use jamming equipment to keep the Iranian drones at bay and coordinate with the US Navy and Omani maritime authorities using specialised communication equipment as they sailed through a channel that hugs the Omani side of the Strait.

Other officials spoke of ship-to-ship transfers of LPG in the dark of the night at the Emirati port of Fujairah that lies beyond the



COOPERATION : National Security Adviser Ajit Doval with his UAE counterpart, Ali Mohammed Hammad Al Shamsi, at the BRICS meeting in New Delhi on June 23. PTI

Strait. Back in New Delhi, there were similar whispers of coordination by India's security agencies with Iranian officials to secure the exit of a number of LPG tankers without paying any fee or toll.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in regular contact with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, even as External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval visited Abu Dhabi in April and stayed in touch with their counterparts. The PM's decision to visit Abu Dhabi on May 15, while the Iran-US ceasefire still looked fragile, delivered a strong message of India's support, and the Emiratis sent a couple of F-16s to ceremonially escort Air India One as it entered the UAE's airspace.

The visit was short but resulted in substantive agreements that would contribute to India's energy security, including long-term supply of LPG, a major expansion of India's strategic petroleum reserves and establishment of new strategic gas reserves in partnership with ADNOC.

The UAE's decision to quit the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) amid

India should quickly take advantage of softer energy prices and plentiful supplies to rebuild its strategic petroleum reserves.

the crisis was also an indication that it planned to raise its crude oil output from 3.2 million to almost 5 million barrels per day over the next year or so. It could end up supplying a larger share to the Indian market in the coming years.

It wasn't just a one-way street. India also stepped up by creating an air bridge to the UAE and a maritime corridor from Nhava Sheva to Fujairah and Khor Fakkan to ferry everything from basmati rice and wheat flour to

fruits, vegetables, medicines and toiletries. Several Etihad and Emirates aircraft that were lying idle due to the war were pressed into service to provide additional cargo capacity. The Lulu Group alone organised 78 flights from India to ensure that their hypermarkets remained well-stocked. The Indian government moved with exceptional speed to provide all clearances for the special flights; close coordination at senior levels on both sides ensured that the system functioned like clockwork.

However, India's energy diplomacy wasn't limited to the UAE. Hardeep Puri visited Qatar during the early days of the conflict to affirm India's interest in remaining a long-term buyer of Doha's vast LNG stocks. With Venezuela back in the field as an exporter of its uniquely heavy crude, it was no coincidence that New Delhi hosted acting President Delcy Rodriguez on an official visit. The Ministry of External Affairs also sent instructions to key diplomatic missions, and global networks of India's oil majors were pressed into service to reach out to other significant energy producers, including

Algeria, Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Mozambique in Africa, and Brazil, Argentina and Guyana in Latin America.

A similar diplomatic agility was also on display in the way India pivoted from Russia to the US for its energy requirements. For over two years, Russia's emergence as the largest supplier of crude oil to Indian refineries had become a major sticking point in India's ties with the US.

A combination of factors, including the spectre of US sanctions, the desire to finalise a trade agreement with Washington DC and the disappearance of discounts on Russian crude following the Hormuz crisis persuaded India to rapidly increase its purchase of American crude oil and gas. There aren't many countries that could have swivelled so smoothly from east to west to keep the petrol pumps stocked and the kitchens running.

In the long term, diversification of oil supplies is an essential hedge for a heavily import-dependent country like India. Diversification, however, doesn't trump the geographical reality that the Gulf is India's most proximate source of oil and gas. Iran, freshly liberated from the yoke of sanctions, has already reached out to Indian officials and refiners.

The UAE, meanwhile, is doubling the capacity of its pipeline to Fujairah to reduce its dependence on the Strait; the Saudis are planning a similar expansion of their pipeline to Yanbu on the Red Sea. Among the other producers, Iraq is trying to revive its colonial-era pipelines to the Mediterranean, while Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar have fewer options to bypass the Strait of Hormuz.

Having successfully weathered an unprecedented growth crisis, India should quickly take advantage of softer energy prices and plentiful supplies to rebuild its strategic petroleum reserves and start working on similar reserves for LNG. The next closure of Hormuz could be lurking around the corner!

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Energy security based on clean & reliable sources is essential for India's future. — Narendra Modi

The tough ascent of Mount Fuji

Lt GEN PRADEEP BALI (RETD)

THE recent earthquake near Mount Fuji in Japan led to speculation about whether this could be a precursor to an eruption of the great volcano, which has been dormant since 1707. The incident brought back memories of my ascent of Mount Fuji in 2004. It's the highest peak in Japan, a little under 4,000 metres in altitude. Conical in shape and snow-clad for half the year, it offers a beautiful view even from Tokyo, about 130 km away. It's a UNESCO World Heritage Site, inspiring trekkers and pilgrims during the climbing season in July-August.

Serving as a military diplomat at the Indian Embassy in Tokyo, I decided to trek up this venerated mountain of solidified volcanic ash. In the Shinto religion, it is considered a powerful Kami (sacred force of nature), and this further motivated me in the spirit of the growing India-Japan friendship.

My fellow travellers in this adventure were my 14-year-old daughter and a few Indian friends pursuing varied professions in Tokyo. On August 15, after the flag-hoisting in the embassy compound on our Independence Day, we set off in a van for our starting point on the Yoshida route.

Our climb commenced late at night amid high enthusiasm. However, this soon waned as the trek became steeper. Unfortunately for us, a huge cyclone had built up in the Pacific, off the eastern coast of Japan, and its effects were soon apparent inland. The temperature dropped as we climbed and a drizzle began. Akin to the final journey of the Pandavas in the Himalayas, members of our group started dropping out as we reached different staging points, finding solace in the huts located there, where one could stop and rest.

By the time we reached the Ninth Station, only two of us, my daughter and I, remained on this arduous and increasingly steep trek through the black stratum, which had once streamed down the slopes of this volcano. The rain was now coming down with ferocious intensity, drenching our clothes, and the chill was numbing our hands. Growing more exhausted with each step, I decided to turn back and put off my date with Fuji-san to another day.

I told my daughter and had half turned to start the return journey when I felt her cold hand gripping my forearm. In a clear, soft voice, she said, "No, papa. We are very close to the top now and cannot turn back." I felt embarrassed at my lack of resolve. We resumed the ascent, and at daybreak were at the summit. The rain had stopped and the rising sun was partially visible through the parting clouds. With a feeling of exhilaration, we went around the rim of the crater before commencing our descent, picking up our companions en route.

Back in Tokyo, I proudly recounted my ascent of Mount Fuji, but I knew in my heart that it was the firm resolve of a girl which made me accomplish it.

The author served as Defence Attache in Japan

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Govt's duty to confirm citizenship

Apropos of 'The kill switch of citizenship'; the government is apprehensive that the passport and the Aadhaar card can be somehow procured by first-generation illegal immigrants, so these have been declared as merely travel and identity documents. Consequently, citizenship will have to be determined on the basis of some other document. It then becomes the moral duty of the government to expedite the process of granting or confirming citizenship through that document. The Assam NRC (National Register of Citizens) took five years to be completed, and the final outcome is still awaited. Likewise, if a person's name is struck off the electoral rolls due to a clerical error, there should be a swift and efficient process to restore it after due verification. The 'enable' and 'kill' switches of citizenship should operate at the same pace.

RAJESH GOYAL, CHANDIGARH

Akal Takht's intervention vital

Refer to 'Takht vs Govt'; while the Constitution undoubtedly remains supreme, the moral and representative role that the Akal Takht has historically played in matters concerning the Sikh community cannot be overlooked. The Sikh temporal body has expressed serious concerns over the legislation affecting religious sentiments. When governments appear unwilling to engage with relevant stakeholders, institutions inevitably step forward to assume the mantle. Rather than viewing the Akal Takht's intervention as an encroachment on constitutional authority, it should be seen as a reminder that democratic governance thrives on consultation, sensitivity and accountability.

PARVINDER SINGH, CHANDIGARH

Legal recourse the best way

Apropos of 'Takht vs gov't'; the Akal Takht's directive to the Punjab government to get certain amendments introduced in the anti-sacrilege law is legally untenable. It would be appropriate if the SGPC takes legal recourse to have the issue addressed in accordance with the constitutional norms. This will help smoothen tensions between the Akal Takht and the state government as per the law of the land.

RAJ KUMAR GOYAL, PATIALA

Populist measures unnecessary

Apropos of 'Warning bells for Punjab's future'; the state today stands at a critical crossroads where governance must take precedence over political rhetoric. While welfare measures have their place, indiscriminate freebies without parallel economic growth risk placing an unsustainable burden on the state's finances. The government has faced criticism from its opponents over the slow pace at which it has fulfilled its electoral promises. Punjab has time and again demonstrated resilience in adversity, but it now needs prudent financial management, decisive governance and a long-term development plan rather than short-term populism. The time to act is now to prevent these warning signs from developing into an irreversible crisis.

COL SS CHAUHAN (RETD), ZIRAKPUR

Community misrepresented

Refer to 'The judge who won't budge'; I am writing on behalf of the Dawoodi Bohra community to register our concerns regarding certain references in the article. The community has consistently supported the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law, and we unequivocally condemn criminal conduct, whoever may be responsible. However, the article makes sweeping assertions about the Dawoodi Bohras that are inaccurate and unfair. It describes us as "a prosperous business community that is known to use money power to get decisions in their favour". Such statements present a damaging stereotype that our community routinely seeks to influence judicial decisions, without citing any evidence, specific instances or findings by any court or investigative authority.

MURTAZA F SADRIWALA, BY MAIL

Class-10 students in limbo

I am a Class-10 student who appeared for the CBSE Phase 2 exams recently. While the Class-11 academic session has commenced in most schools, many students who appeared for the improvement examination are unable to complete their admission because the updated results have not yet been released. Timely declaration of results or clear communication from the CBSE would lessen the uncertainty faced by students and their families.

ANUSHKA GUPTA, NEW DELHI

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit.

These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

India-Pakistan, Track 2 and RSS



NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST

In recent weeks, media has focussed its attention on "Track 2" meetings that have taken place between groups of individuals from India and Pakistan over the last year. This is new, as such meetings have been held at the rate of two or three annually since 2007, perhaps even earlier.

In the years that formal press releases were issued at the end of these sessions, naming the participants and listing suggestions to the two governments, getting them published was a challenge. The newsroom verdict then was, who are these "Track 2 types" anyway, and why are they pretending they can change anything?

The rush of interest in these non-official meetings is thus intriguing. Perhaps it is due to Pakistan's new moment under the geopolitical spotlight, and a heightened awareness about what this implies for India. The apparent good ties between Field Marshal Asim Munir, the de facto ruler of Pakistan, and US President Donald Trump have certainly injected more variables in the fraught India-Pakistan relationship.

Considering that the reported "Track 2" meeting in Colombo was the 10th edition of the annual "IISS-NESA Track 1.5 South Asia Security

Dialogue", that previously met last July, just two months after Operation Sindoor, the sudden public discovery of this format may owe to some quarters wanting to spread the word that India and Pakistan have not lost all contact.

Coming at the same time as pronouncements by top RSS leaders Mohan Bhagwat, Dattatreya Hosabale, and Sunil Ambekar for "people-to-people" dialogue between India and Pakistan, questions if all this is linked are not out of place. Especially as Hosabale, the first from his organisation to declare India should not shut its doors to Pakistan, made the remark soon after a visit to the US, where he and Ram Madhav, a national executive member of the RSS, had been invited to speak at a conservative think tank in Washington DC.

Some definitions are in order. The Western definition of Track 2 is a bilateral or multilateral meeting of "influential" non-official individuals. Track 1 is official diplomacy. Track 1.5 meetings have senior officials in the mix with non-official participants. In India, however, Track 2/1.5 tends to get mixed up often with "secret" or "backchannel" diplomacy. The latter is an ultra-secret, super-official track, usually a bilateral one, in which the interlocutors are ideally just two, one from each side, empowered by the senior most leaders of their respective countries. India and Pakistan have had several such backchannels, including in the last decade.

Some of the confusion arises because organisations that host the Track 2 or 1.5 insist on keeping the names of participants



FIRST: Dattatreya Hosabale made the 'people-to-people contact with Pakistan' remark soon after his US visit.

and the agenda hush-hush. Given the backlash to the reported meeting in Colombo, they cannot be blamed.

Large swathes of the country are under the influence of a cocktail of hyper-nationalist politics, "destroy Pakistan"-themed Bollywood flicks and hate speech. Thus it is no surprise that any hint of Indians meeting Pakistanis in a setting other than through the crosshairs of a gun at the LoC is enough to unleash an "anti-national" tirade against those individuals.

These Track 2/1.5 engagements are neither a substitute for official diplomacy, nor do they qualify to be called people-to-people engagement. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) casts its dialogues as a "private" exercise held on an "invitation-only" basis.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri may be right that these meetings count for nothing. At the same time, it is also true that the government is aware

Sending an RSS member to a Track 2/1.5 meeting in a third country is not people-to-people contact.

that these meetings take place, and does not prevent them. Organisations that enable such engagement are no lightweight NGOs.

The London-based IISS, for instance, is considerably funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, international defence corporates and American foundations. It has hosted NSA Ajit Doval as a guest speaker, and keeps in close touch with the Indian High Commission in London. It is the main organiser of the Shangri La security dialogue where India is represented by officials.

Some participants in Track 2/1.5 meetings, especially politicians and retired officials, are wont to keep their government informed that they are attending such a meeting, and even seek permission to attend. And most participants arrive at the table to repeat official positions, treating it as an exercise in "listening to each other".

Track 2 or 1.5 meetings that feel truly empowered to present new ideas are rare, and take place only when there is official engagement between the

sides, and such non-official meetings are used as sounding boards for proposals already under discussion or to be discussed at the official level.

Likewise, people-to-people engagement cannot happen in a vacuum. It flows from decisions taken during official engagement. Thanks to social media, individuals do not yet need government permission to engage with friends across the border, and doing this has its own subversive charms in these times.

As policy though, it needs full government backing. So, when Hosabale says there should be "people-to-people engagement, visas must be given and trade and commerce should take place to ensure some channels of communication remain open" with Pakistan, he must know that all this is the stuff of Track 1, aspects of a bilateral relationship to be agreed upon by officials. Sending an RSS member to a Track 2/1.5 meeting in a third country is not people-to-people contact.

From the 2000s until about 2015, people from both sides visited each other; cultural and sporting exchanges took place, buses and trains took passengers from Amritsar to Lahore and the other way, and there was even a robust "Aman ki Asha" project, sponsored by an Indian and a Pakistani media house.

All because the two governments were engaged in what was called a "Composite Dialogue" in which "people-to-people" was a separate topic. Even then, it all depended on officials deciding who or what was kosher. Against the tide, a constituency for peace that came up at that time in both

countries has continued to exist. A statement by over a 100 prominent personalities in both countries, including two former Jammu & Kashmir chief ministers, Farooq Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, RJD parliamentarian Manoj Jha, and former TMC minister Humayun Kabir on the Indian side, addressed to the two Prime Ministers "to take meaningful and sustained steps" towards restoring peace in the interests of the welfare and aspirations of the people of both countries, speaks to this constituency.

It is not clear from the statements of the RSS functionaries if they share this vision. Bhagwat's own explanation – or defence, as one report put it – of Hosabale's remarks cast them as part of the RSS's long-standing organisational position of "Akhand Bharat". That is hardly a credible basis for cross-border engagement with any neighbouring country, let alone Pakistan.

Irrespective of what's at play – international pressure, RSS paving the way for the Modi government, or government using the RSS to send up a hot air balloon to see how far it flies – talking to Pakistan is a project the BJP will first need to square with *Dhruv*. However, if Messrs Bhagwat, Hosabale and Ambekar really mean what they say about "opening up to Pakistan," perhaps the world's largest NGO could begin with "peace education", which would help improve the atmosphere both at home as well as with Pakistan.

The author has participated in several Track Two meetings

China shadow on defence budget



REAR ADMIRAL RAJA MENON (RETD)
EX-ASSISTANT CHIEF OF NAVAL STAFF

INDIA'S defence debate is correctly framed through the lens of two adversaries – Pakistan and China. But a closer examination reveals that Pakistan is a military challenge only as a proxy within a much broader geopolitical competition driven by China's rise. If that assessment is correct, India's defence spending should be evaluated against the wider objective of safeguarding the country's economic lifelines and long-term strategic interests.

The evolution of India's military posture since the 2020 border crisis at Galwan illustrates this shift. Significant investments in border infrastructure, high-altitude logistics, surveillance systems, air power, long-range fires and advanced missile capabilities have all been accelerated in response to developments along the LAC. Bereft of Chinese economic, technological, space, air, naval and military hardware support, Pakistan would pose a far smaller military challenge and primarily require a counter-insurgency strategy.

So, there is a school of thought in India, which argues that Pakistan's value to Beijing lies in its ability to

compel India to restrict its strategic vision to South Asia. Every rupee spent on the western border is one less spent on the maritime front. This enables Beijing to not look simultaneously at two fronts.

From this perspective, Pakistan's strategic importance extends beyond its own military capabilities, a threat that will not disappear unless India can identify a serious Chinese strategic vulnerability so as to threaten the Sino-Pak link. India's maritime geography remains a strategic advantage.

The larger question, however, concerns defence policy priorities, which necessitates identifying both Indian and Chinese vital interests. These interests derive from both India's and China's economic integration with the world. India earns \$135 bil-

lion annually through remittances from abroad and over \$800 billion from exports. India's oil dependence is 85%, and gas 50%.

Against this backdrop, China's expanding maritime reach assumes significance. Chinese state-owned enterprises have invested in or operate 129 commercial ports across Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. China is also the largest trading partner for 120 countries. Its dependence on imported oil is 70% and gas 40%.

These developments constitute a coherent "grand strategy", the first part of which is to dominate Eurasia, since it blundered in an overstretch, attempting a foothold in the American continent in Venezuela, which ended in Trump's only victory.

How do these strategic priorities get reflected in the Indian defence budget? Several think tanks have attempted to infer India's strategic allocation based on force deployment, procurement, infrastructure spending and the best estimate is: 45-55% on the northern frontier, 25-35% on the western frontier and 20-30% on oceanic dominance. But the present allocations do not match our vital interests. Just as we have our vital interests, so do China and Pakistan.

It is inconceivable that left to itself, Islamabad would consider "invading India", as suggested by Lt Gen Hamid Gul decades back. Similarly, China's grand strategy is global and hardly involves territorial gain at the cost of India. Lasting peace in Asia can occur only when Beijing accepts that a hostile India can thwart its global ambition by denying access through the Indian Ocean.

Lasting peace in Asia can occur only when Beijing accepts that a hostile India can thwart its global ambition.

Modern laws, old challenges



KP SINGH
FORMER DGP, HARYANA

IT has been two years since the three New Criminal Laws (NCLs) came into force on July 1, 2024. Two years is a reasonable period to identify teething problems and assess the compliance of what was expected from the stakeholders.

When the new criminal legislations were enforced, the legal fraternity was sceptical that the re-numbering and relocation of the sections therein would not be easy for the enforcement agencies to adapt to. However, such apprehensions have been partly belied. Training programmes have eased the transition.

At the same time, the pace of introduction of technology in investigations and criminal proceedings has been tardy because of financial constraints, shortfall of infrastructure and non-availability of trained manpower and know-how with the state agencies.

Many investigating officers, prosecutors and adjudicators not only lack proficiency in the use of computers but also suffer from non-availability of adequate software and hardware support, which is crucial for interlinking the functioning of the stakeholders. Availability of

forensic labs and experts remains a critical area of concern.

Brevity is said to be the soul of any enactment and that is why implementation details and procedures are left for the executives to be prescribed through subordinate legislations. It would not be wrong to submit that nothing substantial has taken place in this direction.

For the sake of uniformity, those who drafted the new legal framework should have been tasked to give Model Rules also. There are more than two dozen provisions which cannot be implemented effectively in the absence of delegated legislations. The time limits prescribed for various proceedings to expedite delivery of justice may prove ineffective unless consequences for their non-compliance are spelled out.

Some legal oversights and drafting mistakes in the text of the statutes also deserve the attention of lawmakers.

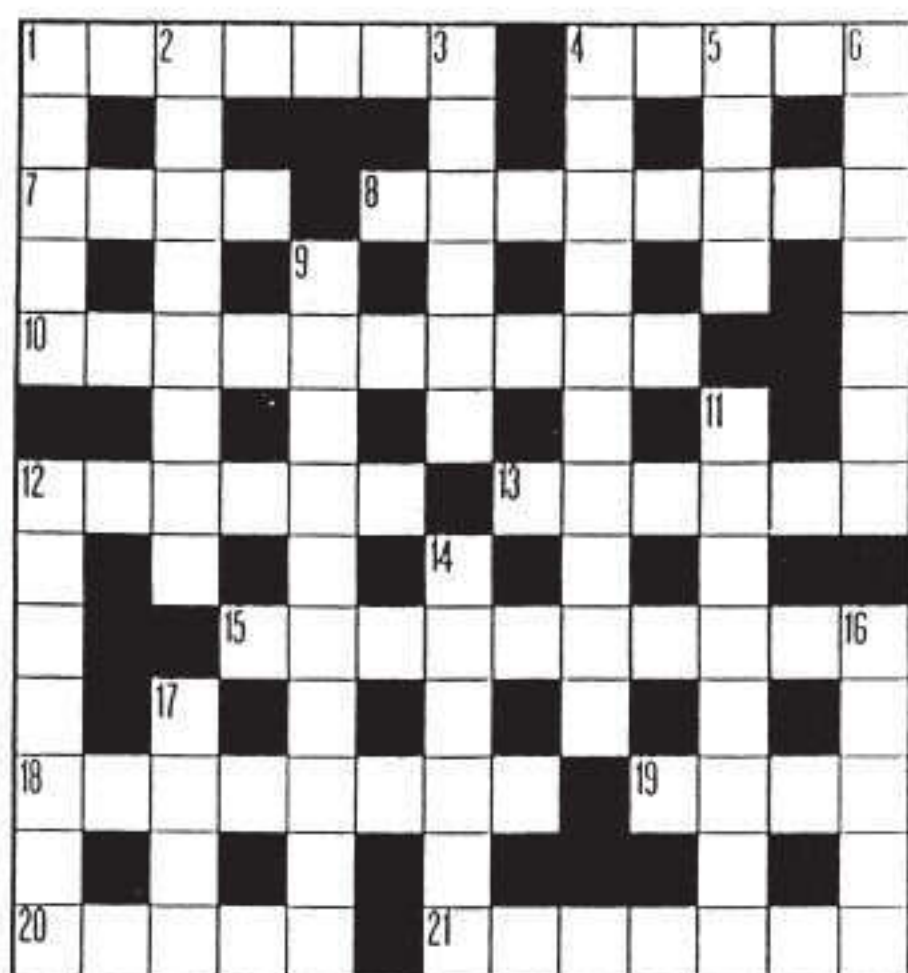
Reducing sentence in the same category of punishment is known as 'remission of sentence', whereas changing the nature of sentence from higher to a lower category of punishment is called 'commutation'. In the provisions of Section 474(c) BNSS, it is wrongly provided that a sentence of seven years and more may be commuted to a sentence of not less than three years.

The modified provisions relating to commutation of sentence will open a Pandora's box for authorities because they are obliged now to consider the premature release of every convict rather than just of the long-incarcerated convicts, as was the case under the repealed law. Several other provisions under the NCLs need constitutional and legal scrutiny. The order to do community service without remuneration could invite constitutional scrutiny under Article 23, which prohibits *begar*.

It would not be fair to conclude anything substantial on the 'performance audit' of the NCLs since it will take at least one more year for the NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) to compile data on the first year of implementation after the NCLs became operational even though initial signals are visible. The percentage of undertrials in jails is going up and the incidence of crimes does not appear to have come down. The new laws were expected to bring their rates down, among other things

The modified provisions relating to commutation of sentence will open a Pandora's box.

QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- Surgical knife (7)
 - Correspond (5)
 - Walk unsteadily (4)
 - Would-be (8)
 - Sheer physical strength (5,5)
 - Vehement protest (6)
 - Without bias (6)
 - Clandestine (10)
 - Illusory (8)
 - Tiresome thing (4)
 - Impressive (5)
 - Thorough knowledge (7)

Yesterday's Solution
Across: 1 Sheet anchor, 9 Insight, 10 Put on, 11 Shed, 12 Bequeath, 14 Hearty, 16 Meadow, 18 Bad blood, 19 Flak, 22 Ambit, 23 Tornado, 24 Merchantmen.
Down: 2 Haste, 3 Edgy, 4 Antler, 5 Captured, 6 Outward, 7 Miss the boat, 8 In the wake of, 13 Athletic, 15 Audible, 17 Portia, 20 Leave, 21 Grit.

- DOWN**
- Brushwood (5)
 - Sufficient (8)
 - A warning example (6)
 - One's own best interests (4,6)
 - Excursion (4)
 - Public road (7)
 - Remember (4,2,4)
 - To cross (8)
 - Still in progress (7)
 - Atone for (6)
 - A form of football (5)
 - Indonesian island (4)

SU DO KU

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

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR
JULY 2, 2026, THURSDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1948
- Ashadh Shaka 11
- Ashadh Purnimite 18
- Hijri 1448
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 2, up to 9:39 am
- Vaidhriti Yoga up to 4:40 pm
- Uttarashadha Nakshatra up to 9:28 am
- Moon in Capricorn sign

FORECAST

SUNSET:	THURSDAY	19:28 HRS
SUNRISE:	FRIDAY	05:25 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	32	24
New Delhi	33	23
Amritsar	32	27
Bathinda	40	27
Jalandhar	32	27
Ludhiana	37	27
Bhiwani	39	28
Hisar	40	28
Sirsa	37	31
Dharamsala	—	—
Manali	—	—
Shimla	20	15
Srinagar	29	22
Jammu	31	27
Kargil	30	14
Leh	28	12
Dehradun	27	25
Mussoorie	22	18

TEMPERATURE IN °C

Opinion

Can America avoid a Jack Ma moment?

When it comes to A.I. policy, Washington is starting to follow a similar playbook to Beijing.

**Dan Wang
Julian Gewirtz**

A globally recognizable tech executive, high-spirited from preparing for a public offering, offers imprudent remarks criticizing the government. The state strikes back harder than anyone expects. Overnight, the bargain between a skyrocketing sector of the economy and the government is shattered.

If you think this story could be about Anthropic, you're only half right. In 2020, the Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma found himself in the doghouse after he publicly rebuked Chinese regulators. Citing regulatory concerns, the authorities canceled the public offering of Ant Group, another company Mr. Ma helped found, and subsequently unleashed a regulatory storm that left few Chinese tech companies untouched.

The U.S. government is skirting close to its own Jack Ma moment, when a government wounds a tech leader seemingly out of spite. Self-destructive American actions, not Chinese competition, may be the most significant threat to the evolution of A.I. for years to come, long after the government and Anthropic resolve their current dispute.

On June 9, Anthropic released its model Fable 5, an adapted version of its powerful Mythos model, which has incredible capacity to find vulnerabilities in software. Anthropic's chief executive, Dario Amodei, even said that companies that used Mythos had called it a "superweapon." Three days later, the U.S. government issued an export control directive blocking use of Fable 5 by foreigners and noncitizens — including some of Anthropic's own employees — which prompted Anthropic to disable all access to the model. A tangle of explanations behind this directive has been reported, including the risk of "jailbreak" (when a model bypasses built-in safety guardrails) and the risk of access by foreign adversaries. On Friday, the government permitted Anthropic to restore some users' access to a version of Mythos, though negotiations are still underway about Fable 5.

Over the past decade, the U.S. government has used export controls to deal sometimes crippling blows to Chinese technology champions. The action against Anthropic upended this logic by turning this policy instrument against American companies, purportedly to exert the U.S. government's grip over increasingly slippery A.I. models. The challenges of regulating A.I. at the frontier have now reportedly moved the government to ask Anthropic's chief competitor, OpenAI, to limit the users for its own next model.

We often think of A.I. as a race between the United States and China. Instead we are seeing the emergence of an even more acute form of competition, between the public power of governments and the private power of ambitious companies. Both sides are struggling to determine whether their frontier A.I. companies are national champions or national security threats. A.I. labs in both countries are

also starting to realize how much their operations depend on the state's suffering. The U.S. government needs to strike a better balance between ambition and control, lest it irrevocably damage its relationship with these companies and America's long-term technological edge.

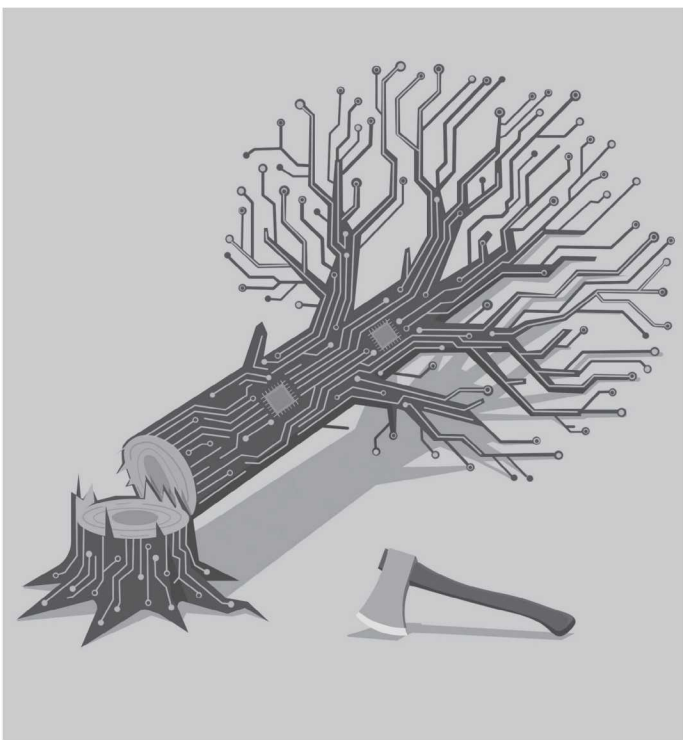
The second Trump administration has careened from extreme to extreme on A.I. policy. It came into office de-emphasizing some A.I. safety concerns, downplaying burns to workers and preaching the virtues of a hands-off approach. Its stance shifted in March: The Pentagon designated Anthropic a supply chain risk after the company protested the use of its A.I. models in autonomous weapons and domestic mass surveillance. Reports about Mythos's capabilities the following month appear to have shocked the administration into taking safety more seriously. The confrontation around Fable 5 has been the latest turn in a dance between a company that proclaims a desire for safeguards and an administration that wants unfettered control over these models.

The Chinese government, meanwhile, has been overseeing its A.I. labs for considerably longer. It requires security assessments and tests models for their ability to anticipate Beijing's sundry political sensitivities. The state has blocked Chinese companies from purchasing advanced Nvidia chips in an effort to favor the domestic chip industry, even after the administration cleared these chips for sale to China. It has reportedly restricted overseas travel by certain A.I. researchers and two of the founders of Manus, a popular A.I. agent that acts as a digital assistant, not to leave China while the government reviewed their company's acquisition by Meta. The authorities soon after ordered the unwinding of the deal.

Unlike in the United States, in China no one questions who will ultimately win the struggle between state and corporate power. But the effects of the regulatory storm Beijing unleashed in 2020 remain evident. Alibaba's stock has lost around two-thirds of its value since Mr. Ma's speech and Ant Group has still not been able to go public. Venture capital funding in China collapsed and is only now rebounding. These days, nearly any conversation with Chinese A.I. labs includes bitter complaints about government overreach.

The United States, with its system of legal protections and its deep capital markets pouring money into A.I., is not likely to suffer to the same degree. The companies and government officials are likely to reach an understanding. But Washington and American A.I. labs need to engage each other with greater sincerity and seriousness going forward.

First, the heads of A.I. labs need to stop their doom talking. It makes little



sense to make panicked claims about the destructive potential of A.I. without a plan to work with the government to address those risks. The current administration makes such cooperation particularly difficult because of its demonstrated willingness to punish companies to assert dominance or satisfy a political constituency. But the labs still must take more care to address A.I.'s transformative impacts.

Second, the U.S. government needs to realize that the stakes of A.I. are far too high to allow a breakdown of trust. Despite a recent executive order that established a voluntary review program of highly advanced models, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has seemingly delighted in celebrating Anthropic's troubles with the government. The administration has imposed major restrictions on Anthropic without

offering sufficient explanation. Even if the government is nettled by the attitude of A.I. chiefs, it is irresponsible to treat them with contempt. American allies are wondering if they can rely on American A.I. models, and talented foreign researchers in American labs are reconsidering their career plans — neither of which serves American interests.

Third, America's government and its A.I. labs need to update their understanding of Chinese A.I. Beijing's pronouncements on A.I. are distinctly less apocalyptic than Anthropic's. Chinese firms are less able to invest in data centers (for lack of American chips) and more interested in applying A.I. to physical technologies. By most appearances, China is pursuing a substantially different vision of the A.I. future. Frictions within China may present an opportunity for the United

States to put further distance between Chinese entrepreneurs and the overbearing Chinese state — but that would require the administration to drop policies that seem hostile toward foreign talent, including Chinese citizens.

The A.I. chaos of recent weeks is self-defeating. For the United States to win the A.I. future, it needs to do better at avoiding the missteps of Beijing.

DAN WANG is a research fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution and the author of "Breakneck: China's Quest to Engineer the Future." **JULIAN GEWIRTZ**, a senior research scholar at Columbia University, served as senior director for China and Taiwan Affairs at the National Security Council and deputy China coordinator at the State Department.

Why do people cry

These days, I have so much past behind and within me, it's as if it bubbles over.

Roger Rosenblatt

Old people cry a lot. I will see a sweet child in the street, watch a news story about a heroic rescue or catch sight of a peony or of a full moon, and my eyes will be as wet as yours. What it is that I am feeling seems expressible only this way. People weep for joy or sorrow. I do neither, consciously.

Something comes over me, as it did the other day when I was sitting alone in an elegant room at the New York Society Library, waiting for an event at which I was to speak. It was one of those breathlessly hot days in mid-May, and the heat outside seemed to compound the still silence inside. For no apparent reason, I began to sing a song from "Carousel" called "If I Loved You." I don't mean that I muttered the song softly or mumbled the words or whispered. I mean that I sang clearly, nearly belting it out, as if I were onstage in the middle of the play. "If I loved you, / Words wouldn't come in an easy way. / Round in circles I'd go / Longin' to tell you / But afraid and shy, / I'd let my golden chances pass me by."

And sure enough, I started tearing up, as I tend to do often these days.

My singing at the Society Library lasted less than a minute. My event was about to begin, and I left the room thinking of what I was going to say. All the tentative beauty of the Rodgers

and Hammerstein song had vanished along with my tears. But for a moment there, I was living in the world of the lyrics, a world of thwarted possibility and regret — not my own but rather that of everyone, the world I have arrived at after 85 years of living. And I was saying or singing to that world how I'd love you if I loved you.

Why do I tear up so often? I think it has to do with the past, how much past has built up inside me all these years. I first saw "Carousel" when I was 10 and was frightened by

Whatever happened to your life long ago, whatever carousel you were on reminds you of yourself, who also happened long ago.

specifically but rather for all the years the play has rested with me, and whatever I'm feeling is both gone and remembered.

The past is a strange thing, both present and missing. In John Donne's "Song: Go and Catch a Falling Star," he writes a list of impossible things en route to his sounder's lament that there is "no such thing as a woman who is faithful." To tell me a woman all past



years are," he writes. It's like the common phrase "Where did the time go?" to indicate that a stretch of time has passed too quickly to enjoy it fully.

Here, Donne means the phrase literally. Where does time go? It is impossible to know.

And how suddenly the present becomes the past. Lifelong friends, here yesterday, gone today.

So many things lost in a life, my life, yours. So much left to articulate yearning. The proposition of "If I Loved You" is that, in fact, I do love you but I cannot say it. I don't have the words or the nerve. In Jane Austen's "Emma," the

stoic Mr. Knightley says to the meddling heroine, "If I loved you less, I might be able to talk to it more."

Is that why I tear up? Because I'm so overwhelmed with life as I appear to be that I'm at a loss for words and all I can do is cry?

Overwhelmed. That seems to be the basis of weeping. Lord Byron contemplates losing his love, then regaining it. "How shall I greet thee? / With silence and tears." In fact, tears are a form of silence. Voltaire called them "the silent language of grief." They are for everything we cannot say, a tear for every word. A tear rolls down our face, glis-

tens, then dries and disappears. Or we wipe it away, as if we are ashamed of it, as if we are getting rid of it. We never do, any more than we get rid of the pain that the endorphins were sent to care.

In older age, the inexpressible may occur more frequently because one is approaching the ultimate inexpressibility of dying. We cannot know death until it is too late to report back on it. And we know the impossibility of knowing until all knowing has vanished into the past, the remembered, forgotten past.

Whatever happened to your life long ago, whatever carousel you were on, reminds you of yourself, who also happened long ago. So you're tearing up for all that is gone, all that monumental past, vast and variegated. These days, I have so much past behind and within me, it's as if it bubbles over.

In my appearance that day, I said that one of the beauties of old age lies in appreciating what one has as opposed to ever wanting something new. This is true. But all that one has can gang up on you, too, and hit you when you least expect it. Such as the time I found myself all alone in an elegant room at the New York Society Library and sang my heart out.

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OPINION

The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

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Gay lit's gone mainstream

Aaron Hicklin

Just over 10 years ago, I opened a small bookstore a few hours northwest of New York City. The shelves are defined by affinity: notable people choose their 10 favorite books; elsewhere, titles gather around more whimsical themes.

Today, the opposite looks true. Queerness sells. Even the canon is getting queered. In "The Chosen and the Beautiful," Nghi Vo rewrites "The Great Gatsby" away from Nick Carraway and gives it to Jordan Baker, reimagined as a bisexual Vietnamese adoptee.

According to data compiled from BookScan, sales of L.G.B.T.Q. fiction (excluding digital sales) were roughly \$8 million in 2015, the year "Hanya Yanagihara published "A Little Life," heralded by Green Garnet as a great gay novel. By 2025, annual sales of L.G.B.T.Q. fiction had reached more than \$80 million, a tenfold increase over a decade in which fiction more broadly has struggled.

Best sellers like "Shuggie Bain" by Douglas Stuart — which 32 publishers in the United States turned down before it went on to win the Booker Prize — and Ocean Vuong's "On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous" have shown that the demand is real and robust. The boom has been created for wildly original work by Bryan Washington, Torrey Peters, Bronzer Purnell, Édouard Louis and Yael van der Wouden, among many others.

The very qualities that once made queer fiction seem too risky now make it useful. Queer books also came with organic systems of circulation: book clubs, queer bookstores, online fan communities and events that double as gatherings of friends. The decline of newspapers and book reviews has created space for new influencers such as Jack Edwards, a TikTok book critic who has championed Mr. Stuart's "John of John," and whose millions of social media followers give his recommendations impact and influence.

For decades, queer literature was the underdog. Now, it's publishing's golden goose. "Taiwan Travelogue," a historical metafiction about the charged animosity between a female Japanese writer and her female Taiwanese translator; and Rabi Alameddine won the National Book Award for fiction for "The True Story of Raja the Gullible (and His Mother)," a comic saga told through the eyes of a gay high school teacher in Beirut.

It is not a stretch to call the past few years the richest period for queer fiction since 1978, when Andrew Hollander published "Dancer from the Dance," Larry Kramer published "Faggots" and Edmund White published "Nocturnes for the King of Naples."

That post-Stonewall flowering was followed by AIDS, which robbed queer literature of many of its writers and a substantial portion of its audience. Publishers retreated. To be labeled a gay or queer writer was a constraint. In 1999 John Updike rebuked a former Booker Prize winner, Alan Hollinghurst, in "The New Yorker" for writing "of a realm from which most human beings are excluded," populated by "relentlessly gay" people.

The old assumption was that queerness should be downplayed to get a wider readership. In 2007, when Rakshat Satyal's "Blue Boy," a gay Indian American coming-of-age novel, was being shopped around, he thought its intersection of South Asian and queer experience might broaden its appeal. Publishers saw the opposite. "It was seen as a reduction of the audience," he told me.



Molly Jong-Fast

During Donald Trump's first term, it was trendy, and even lucrative, to stand up to him, so much so that Mr. Trump often felt less like a president than a punchline.

It clearly got to the thin-skinned president, who wants to be the hugest, most adored celebrity in the world. But this time around, I've watched many of our most public voices face consequences that once seemed unthinkable.

I've texted with the journalist Don Lemon after he spent a night in jail. I've witnessed "The Late Show With Stephen Colbert," on who some of the funniest people I know have worked, be brought to an unnatural end. The crown jewels of television journalism, "60 Minutes," has all but imploded in the face of allegations of politically motivated interference.

This is what a less-free America looks like.

It's true that Mr. Trump has had a bad couple of weeks, with his greatest Reflecting Pool and his embarrassing loss in a war that he started. But if you want a sure sign that he still has an iron grip on America, look no further than the way some of the country's most prominent celebrities — who once had no problem denouncing Mr. Trump — have fallen silent.

Last year, Selena Gomez, a grandchild of undocumented immigrants, posted a tearful Instagram story about how "all the people are getting attacked," in reference to the administration's immigration policy. She was swarmed with internet hate — notably from Piers Morgan and some popular, anonymous right-wing accounts — and quickly deleted her post. Political speech aimed at the country apart? They've been largely absent from major Hollywood awards shows, and even "Saturday Night Live" seems to have gone silent on Mr. Trump.

The once-outspoken actress Jennifer Lawrence explained her view on politics these days to The Times: "Celebrities do not make a difference whatsoever on who you vote for. So to what am I doing?" I'm just sharing my opinion on something that's going to add fuel to a fire that's ripping the country apart. Many of her peers seem to have adopted the same approach. Lately, it seems that the far-right commentator Tucker Carlson is the only one speaking out against Mr. Trump than any of the Resistance crowd.

I saw this dynamic at work when I

The celebrity #Resistance is failing



GABRIEL SALCADA

stood on the red carpet before the Tony Awards last month, interviewing actors about — among many things — their political views. I could feel the fear. The celebrities I spoke to were clearly worried that the views they had advertised just a few years earlier could cause them to be on the wrong side of a MAGA internet mob or a Brendan Carr call-out or a profitable film franchise's hiring decisions.

When speaking up actually means risking something, it is more necessary than ever.

Kelly Ripa talked about education. Mark Ballas, of "Dancing With the Stars" fame, told me he was "not here to talk about politics." Some actors tried to be bold, mentioning L.G.B.T.Q. rights in particular, but they didn't really criticize the Republicans who are attacking the rights. There was a lot of talking about freedom but not a lot of outrage directed at those who want to take that freedom away.

Carlson's over-the-top legacy media brands have less influence or are losing their independence, and where celebrities and influencers have more cultural

power than ever before, MAGA wants liberal celebrities to be too afraid to speak up, so that Mr. Trump can be the only true star. When Mr. Trump's authoritarianism is all but underwritten by well-liked public figures and all but ignored by others, his toxic tenets start to look like politics as usual.

Celebrity resistance is sometimes mocked as trivial. After all, ordinary people, in Minneapolis especially, have found the courage to stand up against the government's overreach. At least two — Alex Pretti and Renee Good — have died while doing so. Their actions make a speech on an awards show stage seem frivolous by comparison.

The president does. Celebrities are the only people who can dominate the algorithm with the same power as him, making them best poised to undermine the president's otherwise overwhelming messaging. We look to our cultural figures to show us how to fight back against our oppressors, so they need to give us the words to say what we're seeing isn't normal.

When speaking up actually means risking something, for

once, it is more necessary than ever. So what would resistance from those Americans who have the most cultural power really look like? The best example I have is from my grandfather, Howard Fast. He was not only the author of "Spartacus" and "April Morning" and scores of books no one can remember, he also risked his career to stand up to Joseph McCarthy. He went from being quite literally, the Voice of America (he was an early writer for the broadcaster) to being held in contempt of Congress and then sent to Mill Point Federal Prison in West Virginia.

You see, Grandpa was involved in a charity which raised money for refugees of the Spanish Civil War and antifascist fighters from across Europe; he refused to turn over a list of Spanish Republicans the organization had helped. Grandpa Howe was absolutely a Communist, but his political beliefs should not have been a crime. He didn't believe that the United States government would send him to prison for them.

As he wrote in his memoir, "There were no troops of brownshirts prowling our streets, and while some people who had been close to us withdrew from us, it was never an act of hostility." He ultimately faced much better than most of his comrades — Pablo Neruda wrote a not-very-good poem about him, and after three months, he was released from prison. He was not the only celebrity who was punished in these times — Dalton Trumbo, Ring Lardner Jr. and Albert Maltz were too. Artists were jailed and ordinary people lost their jobs.

The point of it all was that when the government overreached, he pushed back against it, believing the principles of America would in the end withstand the efforts of those who would pervert them. In doing so, he perhaps gave others the courage to do so as well. I was thinking about him toward the end of my night on the red carpet, when I was trying to start to despair. Was there really no one with courage?

Then, with a new face and the same old gleeful crankiness, Rosie O'Donnell appeared. She told me she was coming back to America to do a one-woman show, and — despite having fled to Ireland upon Mr. Trump's election to a second term — said she's not afraid at all. Later, she texted me: "It's the duty of all Americans to speak out against this fascist criminal administration — free speech — use it or lose it."

MOLLY JONG-FAST is the host of the "Fast Politics" podcast and the author of "How to Lose Your Mother: A Daughter's Memoir."

Maybe you don't need therapy

Harvey Lieberman

As a clinical psychologist with over 50 years of experience, I know that therapy can be essential. A person with persistent, intrusive thoughts that need to be reduced their intensity. Someone in an acute crisis can hear a perspective that helps steady his or her thinking.

But I have often found patients and colleagues that people are often turning to therapy not because of disordered thoughts, but because of difficult circumstances: loneliness, conflicts at work, financial strain. Therapy seems to have become the default prescription for all forms of unhappiness.

Anyone who simply needs a listener may get something out of therapy. But when your struggle is rooted toward a professional, we risk mistaking mental health issues that require treatment for problems of isolation or circumstance.

Unhappiness is often not a disorder, but a structural condition. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General identified loneliness and social isolation as urgent public health concerns. He pointed to an erosion of everyday social connection as a central problem, yet much of the response has focused on expanding clinical access rather than rebuilding relational life. In 2019, about one in 10 American adults reported receiving counseling services. By 2024, that figure had risen to roughly one in seven.

The cracks in the clinical system are beginning to show. In many regions, therapy wait lists stretch for months, and clinicians report burnout. Patients with straight female writer latches onto a young gay addict, imagining that his pain might supply the authenticity her fiction requires. Mr. Silver said he has been thinking about "Yellowface" and "Erasure," novels about the appropriation of identity.

Part of the confusion lies in what therapy reliably provides. When it's effective, it often helps with persistent problems that come up again and again. Thoughts that return no matter how often you try to dismiss them, fears that repeatedly damage relationships, periods of despair that come up even when life circumstances improve. Therapy can be especially useful when people's habits deepen their suffering, or when painful experiences remain difficult to make

sense of alone. But when distress is shaped primarily by situational difficulties or the absence of community, therapy may not be the best fit.

Consider a few situational difficulties: child care frustrations, anxiety after relocating to a new place, a family dispute. Sometimes, these problems can be solved by changing the situation or help resolve. But on their own, these issues do not necessarily require clinical intervention. They can be painful without reflecting a disorder.

Some people would say that a therapist's consistent, neutral perspective would help anyone. It's true that many people benefit from having a place to think and to be heard, and from a therapist's disciplined attention. But therapy's tools are limited.

All around us, we know how to work during the crisis. Looking back, I suspect that restoring those connections often mattered as much as anything we discussed in my office. All around us, more of what was once understood as part of life has come to be seen as something requiring treatment.

Psychiatrists including Allen Frances, who led the task force that developed an earlier version of psychiatry's diagnostic manual, have warned of "diagnostic inflation." Prolonged grief now has its own diagnostic category. New diagnoses that were intended, in part, to reduce the overlap of childhood and bipolar disorder may also place more emphasis on bipolar disorder and ordinary distress, people may start to view their suffering through a clinical lens. But often, distress functions less as a symptom than as a signal. Feeling anxious does not mean you have an anxiety disorder. It could point to circumstances that are worth changing.

Many patients misunderstand what therapy reliably provides. Restoring those connections often mattered as much as anything we discussed in my office. All around us, more of what was once understood as part of life has come to be seen as something requiring treatment. Psychiatrists including Allen Frances, who led the task force that developed an earlier version of psychiatry's diagnostic manual, have warned of "diagnostic inflation." Prolonged grief now has its own diagnostic category. New diagnoses that were intended, in part, to reduce the overlap of childhood and bipolar disorder may also place more emphasis on bipolar disorder and ordinary distress, people may start to view their suffering through a clinical lens. But often, distress functions less as a symptom than as a signal. Feeling anxious does not mean you have an anxiety disorder. It could point to circumstances that are worth changing.



MELISSA VOYLES

Before turning to therapy, consider reaching out to someone you trust, volunteering, joining a community activity or reconnecting with a group that once mattered to you. Meaningful relationships rarely develop overnight, but those are all steps toward deep connections. Sometimes hope arrives before companionship does. If your distress continues to interfere with daily life and relationships, therapy may be the right next step.

Rebuilding relationships should not fall entirely on individuals, but also on schools, workplaces and governments. Psychologists are beginning to explore national strategies that include a "social prescribing" program, a model designed to provide patients with personalized plans that connect them to community groups and volunteer opportunities. Japan established an Office for Policy on Loneliness and Isolation that has supported loneliness-based efforts to address social disconnection.

In the United States, states or counties could adopt a similar approach; many of the institutions that shape social connection

libraries, schools, recreation programs — are organized and supported locally. Government agencies could help communities measure loneliness, identify groups at greater risk and support outreach efforts that connect residents to existing resources. The challenge is often not creating new opportunities, but formalizing the practice of providing them.

The psychologist William Schofield once defined psychotherapy as the "purchase of friendship." More than 60 years later, his words ring true: Modern societies have formalized the practice of providing them, but often at the expense of informal networks of relatives, neighbors and friends, not the health care system.

HARVEY LIEBERMAN is a clinical psychologist, a mental health services administrator and a writer.

What we lose when we don't have siblings

Catherine Ruth Pakalik

We have a word for children without parents: *orphans*. We have a word for those who lose a spouse: *widowed*. There is no everyday word in English for growing up without siblings — until now, we've rarely needed one.

That's changing. Over the past 50 years, the share of American mothers with only one child has nearly doubled, from 11 percent in 1976 to about 20 percent today. Meanwhile, large families have receded: In 1976, 40 percent of mothers at the end of their childbearing years had four or more children; by 2014, just 14 percent did. The total U.S. fertility rate hit a historic low of 1.6 births per woman in 2024 — well below the replacement rate of 2.1.

In nearly every country in the European Union, the one-child household is already more common than two- or three-child households. It may soon become the standard in America, too.

I trained as an economist in the years when smaller families were widely treated as good news. The assumption in the field was straightforward: Fewer children meant more investment in each. Quality over quantity. The wild culture abounded the same logic. Modern parents speak it fluently: *We want to give our children everything.*

But after years of interviewing parents of large families, I've come to think that calculus was incomplete. Some of what shapes a child can't be supplied by parents at all, no matter how attentive or successful. It comes from siblings.

In 2019, I traveled across America to interview mothers of five or more children for "Hannah's Children," a book about what leads some women to have large families while the rest of the world has fewer and fewer. They were a varied group — devout Christians, observant Jews, Latter-day Saints — but on one point they agreed almost without exception: When it comes to raising children with good character, they told me, it is easier to raise five than one.

The reasoning was practical. In many large families, everybody shares a room; small disputes have to be hashed out; older children naturally take responsibility for younger ones. "There are tons of opportunities for them to be self-sacrificing and patient and charitable," said one mother, a former litigator with six children, adding, "just endless opportunities

for conflict and resolution."

Virtue, Aristotle observed, is built by habit: "What we must learn to do, we must do to learn." And nothing shapes our habits more than the first society we inhabit as children.

The mothers I spoke with described scenes that to outsiders might look extraordinary. Another mother of six told me about her parish priest's enthusiasm after watching her eldest son carry his baby sister around the school parking lot. To the priest, the two kids' close relationship was a revelation. To their mother, it was unremarkable. "He carries the baby all the time," she told me. "He changes her diapers. He puts her down for a nap. That's just kind of a way of life."

Across these conversations I came to see that large families generate moral education the way an engine generates heat — as a byproduct.

Parents in small families have to manufacture, through summer programs and sports leagues and carefully curated extracurriculars,

the kind of character-forming experiences that large households once provided gratis.

The benefits of siblings reach further still, into the harder corners of adolescence and beyond.

I know this from my own life. My mother had her last two children, my seventh and eighth siblings, when I was in high school. Their births were the happiest times of my teenage years. My social life could be up or down, but those kiddos always adored me. I wanted to live up to the role. My youngest siblings kept me closer to home, and provided ballast through the inevitable difficulties of those years. They are still my closest friends, the first I turn to in hard times.

Until I began my interviews with mothers — decades later — I didn't think to extrapolate from this experience. But dozens of conversations convinced me: There is more to the adolescent mental health crisis than screens and social media.

One mother of 14 in the Northeast told me she believed one of her sons would probably have been diagnosed with depression or anxiety if he hadn't had a new baby sister to hold and care for. His whole demeanor changed when he held the baby, she told me, as if the newborn were a sunlamp.

Twenty-five hundred miles away,



MARTA MONTEIRO

another mother told me how the arrival of her sixth child pulled her preteen son out of a mental health talisman that medication and therapy had not been able to touch. She described him coming to the hospital to meet the newborn, cradling him in his arms and "just feeling that peace right for the first time." The baby was someone he could love and who loved him back with no judgment. "It was healing for him," she said.

These were not exceptional cases. I wasn't even probing for them. But mother after mother described some version of the same dynamic — a struggling older child steadied, sometimes dramatically, by the responsibility and tenderness of caring for a younger one. Today's middle-school- and high-school-age children rarely have that experience. They do not share a home with an infant or an adoring toddler. Many will not even

remember a time when they did. The most striking story I heard came from a West Coast mother of nine. Her seventh child was born with a chromosomal abnormality so rare that she could find no other case to match his profile. For months, this mother told me, she lived at the hospital while her older children, without being asked, stepped up to cook, do the laundry and care for one another while their father went to work. When the baby finally came home, his siblings accompanied him to every appointment — cardiology, X-rays, therapy — learning to help with gastrotony-tube feedings, working like nurses. Specialists were impressed by his progress and speculated that the kids were behind it. Whatever the therapist assigned as homework, the mother posted for her family to see. If the baby needed to be flipped to build upper-body

strength, whoever passed by would flip him. Morning and night. Without anyone setting out to teach them, these children had become habituated to caring for one another.

We hear constantly that Americans are more atomized, more polarized, more isolated than ever. Some say it's the screens. Some say social media. Pundits on the left and right blame our political order and the ideas that animate it. The common diagnosis is that our system can no longer cultivate the virtues needed to sustain it: Virtue has been a casualty of freedom. The mothers I interviewed pointed to a different explanation. The problem isn't freedom. It's that we have lost the primary institution where virtues are formed — the household in which children form one another.

The 19th-century American writer and preacher Orestes Brownson once de-

scribed his upbringing in just these terms: "Properly speaking I had no childhood," he wrote, adding, "brought up with old people, and debarr'd from all the sports, plays and amusements of children, I had the manners, the tone and tastes of an old man before I was a boy." A sad misfortune, he called it — "for children form one another, and should always be suffered to be children as long as possible. Both children and youth are quite too short with us, and the morals and manners of the country suffer from it."

Where does this leave us? There are no easy answers. Smaller families aren't just about choosing to invest more in each child. They also reflect difficult trade-offs that fall heavily on women: career pauses that compound into lower lifetime earnings, and promotions missed during the caregiving years. And many never reach this calculation at all — suitable partners are hard to find, fewer young adults have practical experience with the joys of children (itself a consequence of the smaller families that came before), and life's uncertainties make long-term commitments feel premature.

For all that, I don't want to tell anyone to have more children. But if I could suggest one thing, it would be for parents to reconsider being "done." Wait a family you want. The rewards never end. Wait two. The hardest years of parenting, when your children are very small, are the worst time to decide what size family you want. The rewards reveal themselves later. I have met countless parents who said they stopped having children too soon because they did not know how good it was going to get.

Keeping the door open for another child trades on a wisdom offered by the mothers I interviewed: That more people are never a problem for a family, a nation or any one child. Quantity is a quality of its own when it comes to human beings.

This wisdom explains, too, why modern parenting has become paradoxically harder. Siblings were doing some of the work. And in our haste to make our children's lives better, we accidentally took credit for a value they alone provided.

We do not have a word yet for what is being lost. But we are beginning, finally, to see it.

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A tragedy bigger than the earthquakes

JIMÉNEZ, FROM PAGE 1

ished the nonprofits and civilian rescue networks that might have aided the response.

My immediate instinct, when the shaking stopped, was to seek information — not a simple thing to do in Venezuela, where the state has long restricted access to various independent Venezuelan and international media outlets. But with the government temporarily granting access to X, Venezuelans have stepped in to document what is happening and share the reality of the crisis from the worst-hit provinces. "When these posts began appearing in the precious minutes and hours after the quakes, the state has, once again, been absent. Although the Venezuelan government insists it is doing all it can, it has shared little information and deployed the armed forces in a manner that has often been chaotic, insufficient and, in some cases, obstructive to other relief efforts. Local rights organizations have warned about the risks of human rights abuses should the response be left in the hands of the mil-

itary. Ordinary citizens and courageous local and foreign journalists are recording videos desperately searching for survivors in the rubble, rescue teams working without proper equipment and relatives fighting to save their loved ones with their bare hands.

Washington's response to the disaster also shows the limits of the Trump administration's engagement with what the president has suggested could be America's 51st state. "This week marks six months since the United States' capture of Mr. Maduro on Jan. 3 and the subsequent installation of President Deyá Rodríguez. But the Trump administration's so-called stabilization plan for Venezuela, which charted out the country's economic and political recovery, and its dictatorship, seemed unlikely to fully materialize even before the earthquakes.

Although Venezuela's oil production has increased in the wake of Mr. Maduro's removal, the Trump administration has created a highly unusual custodial arrangement to control the revenue,

routed first through an account in Qatar and now via the U.S. Treasury. Venezuela exported almost 100 billion barrels of oil, worth an estimated \$8 billion, in the first quarter of 2026, but it's unclear how much of that money has reached the people of Venezuela.

In the aftermath of the earthquakes, the U.S. government has pledged some \$300 million for relief efforts and deployed a disaster assistance response team and two search-and-rescue teams. This falls far short of the \$632.2 million the United Nations estimated Venezuela needed in humanitarian assistance for 2026 even before the disaster — \$470 million of which is still unmet. Now the country's needs will be far greater.

In the face of all of these deficits and dysfunctions, the people of Venezuela have shown a tremendous amount of solidarity and resilience.

But Venezuelan support for one another — impressive as it is — cannot rebuild the country.

Venezuela now needs to resupply emergency rescue and medical teams, secure more machinery to lift debris, find food and shelter for the potentially tens of thousands of people who have lost their homes or been displaced, establish protection systems for unaccompanied children who survived the earthquakes and come up with a reconstruction plan.

This crisis has exposed more than the fragility of the country's neglected infrastructure. How can Venezuela chart a path to recovery when public confidence in the government is so low? How can Venezuelans feel protected by a U.S. government that won't respond to questions about where their money has gone? How can Venezuelans expect help from a regime that has repressed and abandoned them? These questions will demand answers, and Venezuelans deserve them now, not tomorrow.

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La Guaira, Venezuela, on Sunday. The quakes have exposed the toll of state corruption.

Gay lit's gone mainstream

HICKLIN, FROM PAGE 10

prison of Asian and Black culture, and wondered why no one had written a gay version.

In May, I moderated a conversation with Mr. White and Mr. Silver. I asked Mr. White about appropriation. He first answered with a joke. "I personally just wanted to make some money," he said. Then he gave the question its due: "I am writing outside my own experience to an extent," he said, "but I've experienced desire and I under-

stand desire and I can understand the desire between these two people on a human level. I hope that it felt true because it felt true when I was writing it, and I think that's the important thing."

Mr. Silver's "Fruit Fly" is satire, but his irritation is real. He described the insult of being told early on not to seem gay, only to find, today, that gayness had become professionally useful. "It had currency all of a sudden," he said. "I was offended by it."

That is the catch. The thing that once made you vulnerable can become the very thing other people want to borrow.

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OPINION

Happy Days Again for TV News?



BUSINESS WORLD

By William W. Jenkins, Jr.

We live in a time of rapid technological and social change—has everybody since the Industrial Revolution three centuries ago. Perspective tends especially to fail when the industry charged with producing hysteria about change undergoes change itself. Here's some perspective. CNN and CBS News, soon to be joined under a common parent company, have a combined nightly audience of five million, half a Joe Rogan podcast audience.

When Walter Cronkite anchored the "CBS Evening News," roughly 13% of Americans tuned in nightly. Now on certain nights it's less than 1%.

Comcast, which previously disposed of MSNBC and CNBC, on Monday announced plans to dispose of NBCUniversal, including NBC News, which introduced America's first scheduled TV news broadcast in February 1940. "This is not about separating what we built together," prevaricated Comcast co-CEO Brian Roberts, explaining a deal that's all about separating what was previously put together.

Comcast's stock, dead money for years, promptly surged and it wasn't because shareholders were thrilled about the remaining quasinonopoly broadband business, which is being eaten

alive by wireless competition. Nor did the stock leap because investors were delighted the founding Roberts clan will continue to award itself disproportionate control over both companies (if they want to see the stock pop, remove the voting-rights lockup).

The spinoff is sad face-saving for a failed content-plus-distribution strategy, but there's hope for an even greater realism potentially to win out. Netflix or another streaming winner could barge in to buy the choice bits first. These include NBCUniversal's theme parks and studios, possibly even the ancient broadcast network thanks to its embedded sports rights (e.g., NFL).

And NBC News? An afterthought if not a redheaded stepchild, though expect affronted fellow media outlets to freak out because of what NBC News once was, not what it is.

That said, Comcast did one shrewd thing. In previously getting rid of CNBC and MSNBC, it wisely stripped the NBC brand from the disreputable liberal propaganda channel (renamed MS NOW) while leaving its name on the business channel, whose viewers can be counted on to require continued intelligent, reliable reporting.

Of course, in better days NBC would never have let its brand be devalued by MSNBC in the first place. Never mind. The renaming signals a belief there may be value in the NBC broadcast news brand yet. Today's news businesses are so

devalued economically, it's hard to see how they deserve even the antitrust attention they get. But paranoiacs were particularly misguided to oppose the now-approved CNN and CBS News combination. At least the Trump-friendly Ellison family proclaimed a

If streaming platforms give news a future, outlets will want to be trusted again.

desire to invest in news, which could potentially matter long after Mr. Trump is gone.

Comcast's two-step to restore luster to the NBC News brand is similarly propitious. Among legacy networks, NBC was already the best match for Netflix—less stuffy than CBS News, less adventurous and jazzy than ABC News, at least by the images the three news divisions cultivated in their heyday. Not buying it? Time-honored franchises are Netflix's most neuralgic lack. Plus, to imagine the streamer will keep digging deeper into live sports without one day also adopting live news seems unbelievable.

The opportunity is actually sizable when prestige value is weighed against the occasional displays of courage news ownership involves. There is, you may be surprised to learn, little evidence to suggest Americans are less well-informed about current events than they were when

75% of households watched one of the nightly news broadcasts. But a lot more diversity in sources has come with a lot less certainty about which are trustworthy. Brands, including news brands, are about trust. Trust is why the world unhesitatingly guzzles a dark, mysterious liquid that might otherwise appear toxic—because it bears the Coke brand.

Nobody will rightly understand 2016-19 without understanding that, for a time, major news brands stopped caring whether a story was true as long as the audience wanted it bad enough and was willing to pay for it. A rolling of heads might once have been automatic as a result of pressure from shareholders, viewers and society at large. Nobody considers it even possible that Mr. Roberts or another senior executive might step down over his news division's performance in the collosion fiasco, never mind scathing dissections that very belatedly came from other reputable news outlets.

OK, water over the dam. Clawing back respectability is the new imperative on the horizon. Count on it. Witness the proposed acquisition of Roku by the parent of Fox News. This further lays the groundwork for a promising post-cable future for traditional branded news in the streaming era. Being on a platform with a future means—guess what?—having a future. When the news industry senses it has a future again, it will want to be trusted again.

BOOKSHELF | By Harold Holzer

Deadline Dilemmas

Empire of Ink

By Alex Wright

Basic, 384 pages, \$34

Generations before aspiring communicators began attending journalism schools, and centuries before some of them skipped formal training altogether and simply declared themselves online influencers, most future news professionals launched their careers as indentured apprentices. And they were assigned to learn not writing, but printing.

Bent over type racks 12 hours a day, six days a week, given as little food as possible by cost-conscious, sometimes abusive owner-editors, these youngsters became known as printer's devils, originally because their hands would be stained with black ink. Yet they developed prized skills in an age when consumers demanded promptly generated information. As early as the Revolutionary War, their value to the young nation was such that the Continental Congress exempted printer's devils from army service.

Theirs are the stories that Alex Wright, the author of "Cataloging the World" (2014) and formerly a digital designer for Google News, deploys in his captivating "Empire of Ink." A cache of vividly written episodes that cover 250 years of newspaper publishing, the book glorifies the development of printing, and printers, from the age of the village hand press to the modern global "information ecosystem."

As Mr. Wright reminds us, both Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain started as printer's devils. Franklin fled servitude in Boston and established himself in Philadelphia as an independent printer—and eventually as the philosopher-statesman-Founder we know.

A century later, before he became Mark Twain, young Sam Clemens began writing squibs between typesetting chores, later striking off on his own as a so-called tramp printer—a journeyman itinerant who briefly plies his craft in one small town before moving on to the next. Decades afterward, now the most famous writer in America, Twain remained so convinced that mechanized typesetting could revolutionize the industry that he lost a fortune investing in one fatally flawed invention.

Not all journalistic powerhouse careers began as printers. Though the powerful 19th-century editor Horace Greeley did so, his former employee and future competitor, Henry J. Raymond, started off as a pro-Wig orator, writer and editor. Following a salary dispute with Greeley, Raymond quit the New York Tribune and launched the New York Times.

Mr. Wright, whose own ancestors ran a local newspaper in Georgia, concentrates on those who literally got their hands dirty learning the newspaper game. When not damping paper, composing type and performing the especially unpleasant task of "treading the pelts"—stomping on animal-skin sacs so they could be used to evenly distribute ink—the most gifted and ambitious of these laborers learned to write their own stories and insert them into their papers' blank spaces.

And blank spaces remained a constant challenge. Most hand-printed weeklies were four pages long—the size of a broadsheet, folded once—a daunting amount of space for small-town editors to fill. Some owners subscribed to big-city newspapers and simply reset the original articles from these other publications—a practice known as scissoring.

Mr. Wright also chronicles the development of more formal "bonds of reciprocity" through the early "newspaper exchange network"—a precursor to wire services such as the Associated Press—through which a few editors shared their newspapers with out-of-town colleagues and encouraged the mutual republication of articles, with credit. Canny readers, meanwhile, practiced scrapbooking—clipping and pasting newspaper articles for future reference. Such clippings were often shared among friends, family and communities of correspondents—the 19th-century equivalent, Mr. Wright cleverly asserts, "of posting a link in a group chat."

Finding enough copy was a challenge for early printers. Most weeklies offered a daunting amount of space for small-town editors to fill.

The author documents the rise and periodic fall of early women-owned newspapers, the African-American press, illustrated weeklies, Native American papers, amateur "hobby" periodicals, and Western papers whose easily offended, pistol-packing readers might shoot an editor to avenge a perceived libel. The subgenre of "racy papers," such as the Rake, so offended Charles Dickens that in "Martin Chuzzlewit" (1844) he describes newsboys hawking publications such as the New York Sewer and the New York Rowdy Journal. Along the way, "Empire of Ink" almost wistfully acknowledges the steady rise of labor unions and new technologies: steam-powered presses, the telegraph and, ultimately, the linotype.

The most captivating sidebar introduces Nellie Williams, the young upstate New Yorker whose disabled father won a printing press in a poker game. Williams's older brother used the press to launch a modest job-printing business, but in 1861 he joined the Union Army, leaving the household without a breadwinner. Twelve-year-old Nellie had served the family enterprise as a volunteer printer's devil; now she launched a weekly paper called the Penfield Extra, which soon earned widespread fame as Little Nellie's Little Paper. Williams would continue to publish until 1866, when she finally abandoned the paper, marrying soon thereafter.

"Empire of Ink" loses some momentum in the Civil War section, making too little of the proliferation of partisan journalism and the Lincoln administration's widespread crackdown on opposition newspapers. Mr. Wright erroneously claims that Lincoln's widely published 1862 letter to Greeley on the subject of emancipation marked "the first and only time a sitting US President has ever written a letter to the editor." In fact, Lincoln himself did so at least twice more, once with a surprising tribute to Gen. Stonewall Jackson, after the Confederate's death in 1863, and later to defend the federal recruitment of black troops. The book also inexplicably suggests that "Lincoln would not formally declare the war ended until August 20, 1866"—by which date Lincoln had been dead for 16 months.

Otherwise, this is a rip-roaring, richly entertaining feast, so compelling that one almost dreads arriving at the inevitable mergers and modernizations that revolutionized the newspaper industry and bring Mr. Wright's story to an end in the age of mass media. If, as some say, the death of print is at hand, Mr. Wright has at least hosted a terrific wake.

Mr. Holzer, the director of Hunter College's Roosevelt House, is the author of "The Presidents vs. the Press."

A Constitutional Choice, Not a Necessity



POLITICS & IDEAS

By William A. Galston

Ninety-one years ago, in *Humphrey v. Executor v. U.S.* (1935), the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that President Franklin D. Roosevelt couldn't fire a commissioner of the Federal Trade Commission over a policy disagreement. The law creating the FTC had specified the offenses that would warrant a firing, but FDR hadn't shown that the commissioner had committed any of them.

The president had the authority to fire officials of the executive branch, but the court said the FTC wasn't "an arm or an eye of the executive." It was, rather, "quasi-judicial and quasi-legislative," with duties that required independence from executive and political pressure, and Congress had the constitutional authority to protect its officers against this pressure.

The justices on Monday overruled *Humphrey's Executor* in *Trump v. Slaughter*, holding that the FTC's for-cause removal provision violates the constitutional separation of powers. Chief Justice John Roberts writes that the president's authority to fire subordinate officers in the executive branch had been recognized since the earliest years of the republic, and that today's FTC carries out a wide

range of executive functions and can't be exempted from the president's authority to fire executive officers over policy disagreements as well as for malfeasance.

This decision is an important victory for conservative legal theorists, who have spent decades developing the "unitary executive" doctrine. Because Article II of the Constitution vests "the executive Power" in the president, they argue, he has authority to wield all the executive power, not merely some of it, and he can't carry out his duty to ensure that the laws are "faithfully executed" unless executive officers are accountable to him. Although the Constitution gives Congress a role in appointing these officers, the president alone has the power to remove them.

While this is a powerful argument, it is up for debate. University of Virginia law professor Caleb Nelson, a leading originalist interpreter of the Constitution, points out that the Constitution doesn't address the removal of officers in the executive branch—which, other than the president and vice president, is largely a congressional creation. Congress determines which departments and agencies will exist and specifies the authority and duties of their principal officers. Nothing in the Constitution, he concludes, forces the conclusion that "after officers have been duly appointed . . . the President must be able to

terminate the appointments and rescind the commissions at will."

Reason and common sense may suggest what the text doesn't assert. Because cabinet departments are executive in nature and function, the president exercises his powers through them and can't carry out his constitutional duties

Trump v. Slaughter is a departure from Madison's idea of the separation of powers.

without their support. Without the authority to remove executive officials who disagree with his policies, the president can't be effective.

This logic, however, doesn't necessarily extend to independent agencies, which aren't purely executive. While the chief justice is right that the FTC's executive functions have expanded since 1935, it hasn't ceased to exercise legislative and judicial functions as well. The FTC isn't simply part of the executive branch; it was designed to be independent. It's hard to see why Congress can't mandate special firing procedures for such hybrid entities.

The many conservative scholars who regard the hybrid structure of independent agencies as a constitutional abomination have ignored the arguments James Madison

offers in Federalist No. 47. Separation of powers doesn't mean the branches of government have no role in any other branch. It means that when "the same hands" control more than one branch of government, the fundamental principles of a free Constitution are subverted. While independent agencies blend functions, they don't violate Madison's understanding of the separation of powers.

The Constitution is packed with provisions that blend legislative, executive and judicial functions. The president is involved in the legislative process through the veto. He can't pick principal executive officers without the Senate's approval. The president takes the lead in foreign policy but can't make binding treaties without the consent of two-thirds of the Senate. Congress creates every court except the Supreme Court and can limit the high court's jurisdiction. The Necessary and Proper Clause authorizes Congress to pass the laws agencies and officials in every branch of government need to carry out their duties.

Considering all this, it doesn't make sense to say that Congress lacks the authority to establish special procedures for the removal of independent agencies' officers. Ultimately, *Slaughter* was a constitutional choice, not a constitutional necessity, and it will add to the already dangerous accumulation of presidential power.

'Decoy Dan' and Crimes Against Civil Rights

By Michael A. Fragoso and Sean Cooksey

The Alaska Supreme Court ruled Monday that the state's Division of Elections can't keep Daniel J. Sullivan from appearing on the same ballot as Republican Sen. Daniel S. Sullivan. Federal prosecutors have reason to suspect that this is a deceptive attempt to draw votes from the incumbent, in violation of civil-rights laws.

The challenger, whom we'll call "Decoy Dan," sought to be listed on the ballot as a Republican, even though he had no prior ties to the GOP and has given money to Democratic candidates. He initially requested to be listed as "Dan S. Sullivan," even though that isn't his middle initial. His campaign website and materials mimic those of the incumbent. According to the Board of Elections, he acknowledges working with a political consultant who is a "known longtime supporter

of Democratic candidates," including the main Democrat running for the seat. Alaska uses ranked-choice voting, so that all candidates appear on the same ballot.

The Biden Justice Department prosecuted a young self-described internet "troll," Douglass Mackey, over anti-Hillary Clinton memes in 2016.

Alaska's deceptive Senate campaign may violate federal law.

Mr. Mackey had posted official-looking campaign notifications urging voters to "avoid the line" and vote by text. He had supposedly done this in conspiracy with alt-right Twitter denizens to deprive minority voters of their chance to vote for Mrs. Clinton. Mr. Mackey was convicted of a conspiracy against rights under 18 U.S.C. 241.

The Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rightly threw out Mr. Mackey's conviction, because liability requires an actual conspiracy between two or more parties, and the evidence didn't show that he had even viewed the Twitter conversations about deceiving voters. The court also concluded that there was "no evidence at trial" that Mr. Mackey's tweets actually tricked anyone.

In the Sullivan case, the U.S. government may conclude that they have the facts they lacked in *Mackey*. The Democratic consultant's involvement in Decoy Dan's gambit suggests two or more people acting in concert to put a candidate on the ballot with the same name as the incumbent. If an investigation can show that they did so to deceive voters who favor Sen. Sullivan into wasting their votes, that will be exactly the kind of conspiracy the government couldn't prove in Mr. Mackey's case.

As to the trickery itself, the proof is in the pudding. Unlike proving the negative, as in *Mackey*, here the desired deceptive outcome will be actual votes for Decoy Dan. The existence of such votes will be evidence of the conspiracy's success.

Elections are messy, and the First Amendment protects many dirty tricks. It doesn't protect efforts to deceive voters into casting ballots for the wrong candidate. That's exactly what Decoy Dan and his Democratic confederate seem to be doing. While they might have pulled one over on the Alaska judiciary, the instigators of this scheme may still have federal civil-rights laws to contend with.

Mr. Fragoso is a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center. He was chief counsel to Sen. Mitch McConnell, 2021-25. Mr. Cooksey served as chairman of the Federal Election Commission (2024).

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Trump Loses on Birthright Citizenship

President Trump's push to redefine birthright citizenship was legal revisionism, as his Administration admitted, and on Tuesday it lost at the Supreme Court. Chief Justice John Roberts, Justice Amy Coney Barrett, and the three liberals instead cemented the orthodox view of the 14th Amendment, while the dissents highlight the varieties of conservative originalism (*Trump v. Barbara*).

The Chief's opinion for the majority tells a straightforward story. The young American nation, "with little fanfare," adopted the British view of citizenship as based on birth within the territory, which soon applied to the children of "tens of thousands of émigrés from the Old World." That promise was abrogated by the Supreme Court's 1857 decision in *Dred Scott*, then restored after the Civil War by the 14th Amendment.

Its text says "all persons" born in the U.S., "and subject to the jurisdiction thereof," are citizens. In an 1898 case, the Justices recognized citizenship for a man born to Chinese parents in San Francisco. "What the Court held in *Wong Kim Ark* was simple," the Chief says. "The Citizenship Clause incorporated the common law and granted citizenship to nearly all children born in the United States." Exceptions are few, such as for children of foreign diplomats, who have immunity from U.S. law.

When Mr. Trump issued his executive order last year, purporting to end birthright citizenship for children of illegal aliens and temporary visitors, it was a challenge to that old consensus, as even the Solicitor General acknowledged. But the prevailing view is correct, the Chief says: The distinctions made by Mr. Trump's order—"mother," "father," "lawful," "temporary"—are absent from the 14th Amendment.

Four conservative Justices disagree. A dissent by Justice Clarence Thomas, joined by Justice Neil Gorsuch, argues the original understanding of birthright citizenship depended on a person's domicile, or fixed home. "Citizens," Justice Thomas writes, "were the permanent members of the body politic—the people whose roots were in a place, who called that place home, and who would, if necessary, go to war for that place."

This view would exclude birth tourists, who have no real ties to America. But how about illegal

aliens who have lived in the U.S. for years? "I would reserve for another day the question whether the children of illegal aliens *can* be domiciled here," Justice Thomas says in a footnote. In a separate dissent, Justice Gorsuch sounds like they could qualify as citizens: "If those parents are not domiciled here, then where *are* they domiciled?"

Justice Samuel Alito, dissenting solo, argues the 14th Amendment "confers citizenship on only those children who, at birth, owe allegiance solely to this country." He calls the Court's ruling "a serious mistake" because it invites entry to the U.S. by most of the world and forecloses democratic responses on the matter.

That leaves Justice Brett Kavanaugh, who also disagrees with the majority on the constitutional issue. But he says the Court should have issued a narrower ruling, since federal laws from 1940 and 1952 codify the consensus view of birthright citizenship, so Mr. Trump's order is illegal. Justice Kavanaugh's middle way would allow for legislative limits on birthright citizenship that after Tuesday are probably unconstitutional.

* * *

Across 194 pages of opinions, the conservative Justices use textualism and originalism to arrive at starkly different conclusions about the meaning of the 14th Amendment. They can't all be correct. Yet their writings again refute the idea that this Supreme Court has any kind of lockstep MAGA majority.

An interesting counter-factual is how the Justices might have come out on a narrower order, if Mr. Trump had tried to end birthright citizenship for transients alone. He took the advice of those who recommended an expansive constitutional challenge because he thought the issue was a political winner, and his defeat is all the greater for it.

While birthright citizenship has certainly been abused, one positive result of Tuesday's ruling is that today's "Dreamers" will give birth to citizens, rather than a second generation living in limbo. The ability to assimilate newcomers has always been an American strength, while falling birthrates will soon make that an even greater American advantage.

If birth tourism is as big a problem as Mr. Trump says, he can make a sustained case for a constitutional amendment.

Blaming U.S. AC for French Weather

France has been broiling in a record heat wave, yet Paris Mayor Emmanuel Grégoire declared last week that "individual air conditioning is a scourge," and "public authorities must act quickly" to prevent a rush to install home AC units. Such attitudes have been ridiculed in the U.S. press, and prickly French politicians are now upset we noticed.

"OMG, this is so rich!" Paris Deputy Mayor Audrey Pulvar wrote online late last week, responding to American criticism. "As the second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, you bear a significant responsibility for global warming and the consequences we, in France, are experiencing. Your cities, '90% air-conditioned,' are not unrelated to this." What a bunch of hot air.

Note that Ms. Pulvar makes no mention of

massive emissions coming from China, which under the, ahem, *Paris Climate Accord* has a free pass to keep increasing its carbon output through 2030. And how much of its activity isn't even on the books? The nonprofit Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air recently found that Beijing quietly reworked how it calculates Chinese progress toward climate goals in a way that leaves a "Germany-sized gap" in its reported carbon emissions.

The reality is that no amount of French sweltering in the heat will make a real dent in the global climate. The politicians in Paris might have a cultural resistance to air conditioning, but as the mercury rises, European voters might soon decide that cooling off is better than green self-righteousness. No wonder Ms. Pulvar wants to shift the blame to America.

The Paris deputy mayor thinks she's found the culprit for a heat wave.

The Justices strike down limits on coordinated campaign spending.

Speech Wins Again at the Supreme Court

One laudable project of the current Supreme Court has been incrementally restoring the First Amendment right of Americans to spend on political campaigns. A 6-3 majority on Tuesday took another step toward that end by overturning federal limits on coordinated spending by candidates and parties (*NRSC v. FEC*).

Political parties are weaker than ever, and one reason is a 1974 campaign finance law that limits how much parties can spend in coordination with candidates. "For nearly 200 years after the ratification of the First Amendment, parties could spend freely to support their candidates during campaigns and could do so in coordination with the candidates," Justice Brett Kavanaugh writes for the majority.

But that changed after the Watergate scandal when Congress tried to purge money from politics. Congress limited coordinated expenditures to reduce "what it saw as wasteful and excessive campaign spending," Justice Kavanaugh writes. Such limits "preclude parties from amplifying the voice of their adherents; impose additional monetary costs and burdens on political parties; and inflict a "stifling effect on the ability of the party to do what it exists to do."

They also run headlong into the Court's First Amendment precedents, which have repeatedly held that "Congress may not dictate how much political speech is too much, or how much spending on speech is too much," Justice Kavanaugh writes. There is "only one legitimate governmental interest for restricting campaign finances: preventing corruption or the appearance of corruption."

Coordinated spending limits aren't necessary to advance either interest since "prophy-

laxis upon prophylaxis upon prophylaxis already serve to prevent *quid pro quo* corruption or its appearance," Justice Kavanaugh says.

This includes contribution limits to candidates, disclosure requirements and restrictions on how much donors can contribute to parties that is earmarked for particular candidates.

The three liberal Justices accuse the majority of jettisoning "a rule needed to protect our democracy's integrity" and creating "a legal regime increasingly unable to stop political corruption, and thus to preserve our institutions' democratic legitimacy," as Justice Elena Kagan puts it.

Justice Kavanaugh gently rebuffs the criticisms, noting the spending coordination limits have weakened parties in ways that "distort the political system. And in the views of many, the relatively diminished political parties have ushered in increased political polarization and fragmentation." Democrats will benefit as much as Republicans from the Court's ruling.

All true. But the root cause of such political distortions is the Court's blunder in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976), which upheld donor contribution limits under a lower level of First Amendment scrutiny than campaign spending limits. A First Amendment distinction between political spending and contributions is dubious.

All the more so in light of the Court's modern campaign-finance precedents, notably *Citizens United* (2010), which did away with spending limits on corporations and unions. Now businesses and individuals can give unlimited amounts to Super PACs, but are limited in how much they can contribute to parties and candidates. This favors some speakers over others. Sooner or later the Court has to wrestle with its *Buckley* mistake.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why Micron Is Betting Big on New York Chips

Your editorial "Chuck Schumer's Chip Shortage" (June 23) raises concerns about permitting delays that I've seen first-hand.

After more than 30 years in the semiconductor industry, I served in the CHIPS Program Office under both the Biden and Trump administrations, working on more than a dozen semiconductor projects, including Micron's. Leading-edge fabrication plants in Asia are built in half the time it takes in the U.S. But even Micron's faster-permitted Boise, Idaho, fab won't contribute meaningful DRAM supply until late 2027. The memory industry has always been cyclical, and today's prices reflect an unprecedented global supply-demand imbalance.

There are reasons Micron chose New York. Over the years, IBM, GlobalFoundries, onsemi, Wolfspeed, Albany NanoTech, SUNY, NY CREATES, Empire State Development and CenterState CEO helped build one of America's premier semiconductor clusters in the state. Gov. Kathy Hochul and the Legislature reinforced those advantages through the 2022 NY Green Chips Act, which led to up to \$5.8 billion in incentives for the Micron project. Few states

could compete with that.

Political leaders claim credit for projects, but no \$100 billion site-selection decision turns on one official. Micron chose New York because project incentives were layered on decades of investment in a world-class semiconductor ecosystem—including available water, low-cost energy, research infrastructure and workforce development.

The CHIPS Program isn't a partisan project. It began under the first Trump administration with the Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act, was funded under President Biden and implemented by Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo. The second Trump administration reassessed implementation, but it continues today under Secretary Howard Lutnick with congressional Republican support.

At the Micron groundbreaking in January, Republican Onondaga County Executive Ryan McMahon celebrated the bipartisanship that allowed what he called a "red, white and blue" day.

MIKE O'BRIEN
Former senior director
CHIPS Program Office
Rumson, N.J.

The Liberal Hijacking of Mainline Churches

I agree with Alex Hibbs ("The Reconquest of Mainline Protestantism," Houses of Worship, June 26). Christ didn't enter human history to promote progressive politics or environmentalism. His message, the core of the Reformation, is that we are saved not by works but by faith alone.

I'm not interested in spending my time in church praying for solar energy or some small fish species. Those debates belong outside of the church. Christ disappointed many who expected the Messiah to overthrow the yoke of Roman oppression. Instead, he made a point of staying out of politics. His message was clear: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's."

ANDRÉ MONTERO
Brooklyn, N.Y.

I spent more than two decades fighting, in internal courts and governing bodies, the slide to the left of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Since then, I have helped many conservative congregations in liberal denominations leave for more orthodox denominations.

One thing I became familiar with was the ordination process in these denominations, particularly in the Presbyterian Church (USA). It isn't as simple as going to seminary, getting a degree and receiving a

call from a congregation. Candidates must be approved by the presbytery—a denominational subdivision usually controlled by liberal pastors. My former presbytery would waive through prospective pastors who doubted Jesus' divinity but gave a hard time to conservative candidates.

This will only get worse. Liberals, who control the mainline institutions will simply block the large-scale ordination of orthodox pastors, as they must if they want to keep control of their institutions and property. Conservative pastors should make it their mission to lead people to the Messiah, rather than seeking to control these exhausted institutions.

WHITMAN H. BRISKY
Chicago

I fear the church is giving up what is timeless for what is timely. There are many secular groups that address specific causes without requiring belief in the divine. If the church abandons the spirituality that makes it unique for social trends, it will lose. I gave up on my church of decades when it became nothing more than a political-action committee. Mainstream Protestantism has become "Our Lady of the ACLU."

DOROTHY MCGARRAH
Woodland Hills, Calif.

California Politics Is Bought With Donations

Your editorial on our governor's behest payments ("All of Gavin Newsom's Donors," Review & Outlook, June 27) only scratches the surface of the pay-to-play policy bazaar Gavin Newsom runs in our Golden State.

There's a reason our education system is one of the worst in the nation: His donations from the teachers unions. There is a reason our gasoline and electricity are some of the highest in the nation: His donations from environmental lobbyists. There's a reason we have the highest cost of housing, water and taxes in the nation: His continued sale of government to the highest bidders from the

trial lawyers to government employee unions.

Our media-driven political system is driven by advertising paid for by donors who want something in exchange for their funding. We won't get true policy improvements until we break the connection between fundraising for campaigns and our electoral system.

JOHN H. COX
Rancho Santa Fe, Calif.

Mr. Cox was the Republican nominee in 2018 for governor of California.

U.S. Capitalism Isn't Broken

Regarding Walter Russel Mead's "China's Ambitious AI Blueprint" (Global View, June 23): Washington should remember that China has consistently trailed the U.S. in genuine technological innovation—a deficit likely exacerbated by state intervention. As America looks for ways to stay ahead of China, rather than mimicking its top-down model, the U.S. should remain committed to capitalism, which established its global tech leadership.

THOMAS WILSON
San Diego

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Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"When did you first begin to notice the voices telling you to invest in that stock?"

OPINION

Ed Meese and the Originalist Court

By James Taranto

McLean, Va.

Edwin Meese III, 94, has outlived *Humphrey's Executor v. U.S.* On Monday the Supreme Court overruled that 91-year-old decision and held in *Trump v. Slaughter* that the president has the authority to fire a member of the Federal Trade Commission and senior officials from other "independent" executive-branch agencies.

Slaughter is the latest in a string of recent high-court decisions overturning or correcting bad precedents, usually by 6-3 votes—among them *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), *Chevron v. NRDC* (1984), *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) and of course the big ones, *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992).

In the 2020s, the end of June, when the justices announce most of their highest-profile decisions, has become a celebratory season for American conservatives. Mr. Meese deserves more credit than perhaps

In the 1980s, he started a movement to restore the Constitution to judging. It has come a long way.

any other single person for the 40-year transformation of the high court from a body that sought to "remold principles in light of policies" into one that is generally faithful to the Constitution.

The quotation is from an address Mr. Meese delivered to the American Bar Association on July 9, 1985, a few months after he took office as Ronald Reagan's attorney general. It made the case for a "Jurisprudence of Original Intention" and provoked a denunciation from Justice William Brennan, who called originalism "arrogance cloaked as humility," as well as a more lawyerly rebuttal from Justice John Paul Stevens.

Its ideas have informed the judicial selections of four Republican presidents, from Reagan to Donald Trump. Justice Amy Coney Barrett's

appointment in 2020 completed a six-justice conservative bloc, all originalist to a significant degree. Even today's liberal justices, unlike Brennan and Stevens, pay lip service to originalism. "I believe that the Constitution is fixed in its meaning," Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson said during her 2022 confirmation hearings. "I believe that it's appropriate to look at the original intent, original public meaning, of the words."

Justice Jackson and her liberal colleagues may dabble in originalism, but they plainly don't adhere to it. Yet in an interview at his home in this Washington suburb, Mr. Meese argues that you don't have to be conservative to be an originalist. "I never used the term 'conservative' vs. 'liberal,' because there is no conservative-vs.-liberal dichotomy in judicial matters," he says. "They're either constitutional or not an accurate reflection of the Constitution."

In 1985 he said that by adopting originalism, "the court could avoid both the charge of incoherence and the charge of being either too conservative or too liberal." When I note that the court constantly faces the latter charge today, Mr. Meese replies flatly: "Well, not properly."

That 1985 prediction seems wildly optimistic, yet Mr. Meese is right to insist there is no necessary connection between political ideology and legal method. It happens that many nonoriginalist decisions of the past century have been in furtherance of liberal policies—on economic regulation and the structure of government starting with the New Deal, and on subjects involving race, religion, sex and crime from the Warren court on. Thus *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023), *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District* (2022) and *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022)—which turned back *Grutter*, *Lemon* and *Roe*, respectively,—were originalist rulings that served conservative ends.

But one can imagine nonoriginalist conservative jurists seeking to "remold principles in light of policies," as a handful of scholars have urged under the banner of "common-good constitutionalism." And some originalist rulings have only incidental ideological or partisan valence.



MATTHEW COOK

Slaughter is a prime example. A Republican president won the case, but Mr. Trump's successors will have the same authority regardless of political affiliation. The loser of *Humphrey's Executor* was Franklin D. Roosevelt, and 15 presidents of both parties operated under its constraint.

Another indictment of the originalist court—for which *Slaughter* will serve as an exhibit—is that it is overly solicitous of executive power. It's a bum rap. Originalists take seriously Article II's command that "the executive Power shall be vested" in the president. Yet although that is a broad grant of authority, it is also a limited one.

To see why, consider *Chevron* and the case that overturned it, *Loper Bright v. Raimondo* (2024). *Chevron*, a Reagan-era ruling, held that judges were obligated to defer to executive agencies' interpretations of "ambiguous" statutes. "There was a reasonable rationale supporting it," Mr. Meese says. "The people who have to deal with the regulation would be, from a technical standpoint, more involved in saying what it meant."

That turned out to be wrong, because such "extensive rulemaking went beyond rules and became actually legislative in nature," he says. Making laws is Congress's job, and interpreting them is the courts'. *Loper Bright* restored those

constitutional boundaries by scaling executive authority back.

In *Trump v. Cook*, also decided on Monday, the court held that the Federal Reserve is "a special arrangement sanctioned by history" (a description borrowed from Justice Samuel Alito, who dissented), and that the president can't fire a Fed governor without cause. It rejected the president's argument that his determination of cause is final. "Even when a statute 'delegates discretionary authority' to the Executive Branch, we have explained, our role 'is, as always, to independently interpret the statute and effectuate the will of Congress subject to constitutional limits,'" Chief Justice John Roberts wrote—quoting *Loper Bright*.

One measure of originalism's growing influence is the number of candidates Mr. Trump considered to fill vacancies on the high court. As a candidate in 2016, he issued two lists with 21 names, including Neil Gorsuch. Today one could add dozens of Trump-appointed lower-court judges, of whom Justice Barrett was the first to ascend to the Supreme Court.

In 1986, when Reagan elevated William Rehnquist to chief justice and needed an associate justice to succeed him, originalism was so marginal that his list had only two names: Antonin Scalia and Robert Bork, both former law professors whom Reagan had appointed to the

U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. Mr. Meese recalls that Reagan chose Scalia "largely because of age and health. He felt that Scalia would probably be able to be on the court longer. And of course what he thought at the time turned out to be true." Bork died in 2012, Scalia in 2016.

The Senate confirmed Scalia unanimously. Democrats took the majority in the 1986 midterm elections. When Reagan nominated Bork to fill the next vacancy, in 1987, they waged a vicious and successful campaign against him. The bitterness lingers all these years later: "The less competent or the less knowledgeable or intelligent members of the Senate were the ones that sunk him," says Mr. Meese, who seldom speaks ill of anyone.

Reagan turned to the young Judge Douglas Ginsburg, also of the D.C. Circuit, who turned out to have a history of using marijuana—politically untenable for an administration that was waging a "war on drugs." The next choice was Anthony Kennedy. "Kennedy was in the Ninth Circuit," Mr. Meese recalls. He catches himself slipping into ideological shorthand as he describes the nominee's qualifications: "He had been a conservative judge, and—excuse me, he had been accurate from an originalist standpoint, and it looked like he would be an excellent choice, and I knew him personally." Mr. Meese, Reagan and Justice Kennedy were all from California.

From an originalist perspective, Justice Kennedy's 30-year record was decidedly mixed. On cases involving abortion and homosexuality in particular, he was given to what Scalia in dissent once called "showy profundities" that "are often profoundly incoherent." What happened?

"It may be," Mr. Meese says, "that he became mesmerized with the—what did they call it? What was the name of the woman who was the reporter that wrote about the Supreme Court?" He's thinking of the New York Times's Linda Greenhouse.

"He became a victim of the Greenhouse syndrome, I think."

Mr. Taranto is the Journal's editorial features editor.

A Divided Country Celebrates Its Anniversary—Again



UPWARD MOBILITY
By Jason L. Riley

America is celebrating the 250th anniversary of its founding later this week, yet citizens are in a sour mood. Not to worry, we've been here before.

More than 57% of adults disapprove of the president's job performance, according to the RealClearPolitics polling average, which is up from 50% a year ago. Congressional job approval sits around 20%, and only 35% of Americans think the country is headed in the right direction.

Citing recent survey results, the Associated Press last month reported that only "about one-quarter of Americans say the U.S. stands above all other countries in the world" and "about 3 in 10 say there are better countries than the U.S., an increase from 19% in an AP-NORC poll conducted in June 2016."

Such sentiments are unfortunate, and they are unlikely to improve in the short run. President Trump's indecisiveness in Iran will only make the conflict less popular and more economically destabilizing. The midterm elections in November will feature bitterly contested races in Maine, Michigan, Georgia, Texas and elsewhere that are sure to draw national attention.

At best, July Fourth will serve as a much-needed but temporary reprieve from the extreme partisanship and nonstop negativity that have characterized our political debates for more than a decade. It's also an opportunity to reflect on the political circumstances surrounding previous landmark anniversaries of our independence.

When America celebrated its bicentennial, President Gerald Ford's approval rating hovered around 45%, according to Gallup, and only 24% of

Americans viewed Congress favorably. The Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal were fresh memories. The 1973-75 economic recession was the deepest since the late 1950s. Ford had never been elected president or vice president, so he had no national political base. His decision to pardon Richard Nixon may have been an admirable attempt to unite the country and move on, but it backfired on him politically and his popularity plummeted.

In his book "Centennial," historian Fergus Bordewich writes that America's 100th birthday coincided with "a time of industrial turbulence, political anxiety, and rapid change." The Panic of 1873 had sparked the worst depression in U.S. history to date, and three years later the nation had yet to recover. Ulysses Grant was serving his second term as president, and his administration had been hobbled by corruption scandals. Grant advocated black civil rights, but political support for Reconstruction was waning due to economic uncertainty

and political resistance in the South. "Americans were still struggling with difficult questions that would shape the nation's life and politics for generations to come," Mr. Bordewich writes. "Could the political parties ever be cleansed of corruption? What place would African Americans have

America's mood wasn't much happier at the bicentennial—or the 1876 centennial for that matter.

in American society? Would Native Americans survive at all, and at what cost to their embattled cultures?"

July 4 also marks the 200th anniversary of the death of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. The two Founding Fathers and former presidents had been political rivals but famously reconciled in their later years. By the 50th anniversary of

Jefferson's crowning achievement, he was already anxious about where the young nation was headed. "Jefferson was frightened by the popularity of Andrew Jackson, regarding him as a man of violent passions and unfit for the presidency," Gordon Wood writes in his history of the founding, "The Radicalism of the American Revolution." Jefferson was also "overwhelmed by the new paper-money business culture sweeping through the country and never appreciated how much his democratic and egalitarian principles had contributed to its rise."

As happens from time to time to this day, Jefferson also began to have doubts about the capabilities of the everyday Americans in whom he, Adams and other revolutionary leaders had placed so much confidence. Adams would have none of it. No revolutionary, Wood writes, "defended with more vehemence common ordinary people against the aristocracy—'against being ridden like horses, fleeced like sheep, worked like cattle,

and fed and clothed like swine and hounds.'"

Jefferson was an early admirer of the French Revolution, but he and other Founders later saw it as a cautionary tale of how democracy without restraints on majoritarianism can lead to dictatorship and tyranny. The U.S. Constitution's system of checks and balances reflects a tragic view of human nature, an understanding that no one can be entirely trusted with power. "Why has government been instituted at all?" Alexander Hamilton wrote in the Federalist Papers. "Because the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice, without constraint."

The Founders gifted us a new social order, a sturdy framework of governance that has endured malfeasance, incompetence and division. Though far from perfect, it has improved over time and become the envy of the world. Remember that as some use this milestone to chronicle the nation's shortcomings, and others to whitewash the past.

The 'Christian' Putin's Alliance With the Taliban

By Bernard-Henri Lévy

Vladimir Putin as the savior of a decadent and declining West, the guardian of a threatened and besieged Christianity, a bulwark against radical Islamism advancing on all fronts—for the 12 years since his barbaric war against Ukraine began, this has been one of the favorite refrains of Mr. Putin's Kremlin ideologues and useful idiots.

They are untroubled by the cries of "Allahu Akbar!" on the battlefield from Ramzan Kadyrov's Chechen praetorians, the Kremlin's shock troops, whose reputation for ferocity I saw being forged in Bakhmut, Seldar and Zaporizhzhia.

They are undisturbed that on Oct. 26, 2023, Moscow was the first capital after the Oct. 7 atrocities to welcome a Hamas delegation, led by Mousa Abu Marzouk and joined by a representative of the Iranian regime.

Nor do they seem bothered by the Eurasian civilization project championed by Alexander Dugin, one of whose central themes is a new Islamic-Orthodox axis meant to replace the purportedly moribund Western, Atlantic and Judeo-Christian alliance.

Yet here is a new development that I hope will open the eyes of those who don't wish to see:

On May 27, Russia and Afghanistan signed a military and security cooperation agreement aimed at strengthening ties between Moscow and the Taliban regime, which took power in August 2021 after the U.S. retreat. Present at the ceremony were the secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, and Mohammad Yaqoub, the acting Taliban defense minister and son of Mullah Omar, the man who gave refuge to Osama bin Laden.

As early as 2021, Mr. Putin called on the international community to remove the Taliban from lists of terrorist organizations. Last year Russia became the first country to recognize the new regime formally. But this goes much further.

We are told that the goal is to "expand," "deepen" and make "pragmatic" a long-term strategic partnership.

Zamir Kabulov, Moscow's special envoy to Afghanistan, has said that Russia will refurbish the combat helicopters of this regime of assassins. It will maintain its aging armored vehicles, most of Soviet origin. It will train the mullahs, their battalions of virtue and terror, and an elite force of 8,000 men tasked with keeping under the regime's boot this country of horsemen, scholars and poets. It will provide intelligence capabilities to a regime that has never concealed its obsessive hostility toward Jews and "crusaders"—that is, Christians.

In short, the Taliban will maintain order along the southern borders of Greater Russia and wage—or pretend to wage—war against rival groups such as the Islamic State Khorasan Province; in return, the former Soviets commit themselves to preserving Islamist rule in Kabul.

But Islamist rule isn't merely a phrase. The strengthening of this strategic and pragmatic partnership with a Russia that likes to present itself as a Third Rome will have concrete consequences.

It will mean the pursuit, by newly professionalized intelligence services, of the last free journalists. It will mean the elimination of the remaining members of the Sikh, Hindu and Hazara Shiite minorities. It will mean that the last homosexual Afghans, artists, professors and Christians practicing their faith in secret will be hunted down with greater efficiency.

And then there are the little girls, teenage girls and women, already

barred from universities and secondary schools, parks, gardens and other public places, already confined in those fabric prisons called burqas: The "strategic and pragmatic" assistance of Patriarch Kirill's nation will complete their erasure from the Afghan landscape.

None of this surprises me. I described it all in my 2018 book, "The Empire and the Five Kings." I saw this rapprochement coming between the self-proclaimed defenders of Christian values and the Islamists of Kabul.

But what do France's and America's domestic Putinists think of it? What do those who, in recent opinion pieces in France, called for an "awakening" and urged us to "renew ties" with an "eternal Russia," forever "a friend of France," have to say?

Those articles, those appeals for "de-escalation" and "peace," those outstretched hands toward a country that seeks, in an increasingly undisguised manner, our destruction and that of Western values, already inspired profound unease.

But what remains of this supposed wisdom, and what is the value of the argument that Russia protects "Christian values," when it allies itself with the worst forms of Islamism? Only shame, cynicism and infamy.

Mr. Lévy is author of "The Empire of Five Kings." This article was translated from French by Emily Hamilton.

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Britain's defence investment predicament

After months of wrangling, Starmer's military funding plan still came up short

Britain's long-delayed defence investment plan is one of the last big announcements from outgoing prime minister Sir Keir Starmer. It exemplifies the inability of his cabinet to face up adequately to the hard choices of government. The plan has been spruced up since the resignation last month of defence secretary John Healey (which helped seal Starmer's fate); the extra spending over the next four years is upped by £1.5bn to £15bn. Yet Healey's criticism holds true: the long-delayed plan remains well short of what was required. The presumptive next prime minister, Andy Burnham, will somehow need to find more money.

The shape of the plan shows lessons have been learned from how the Ukraine and Iran conflicts have

reshaped war. Some £5bn will be invested into a "drone transformation" to deliver uncrewed and autonomous weapons for all services. Rather than ageing destroyers and frigates being replaced, the navy will procure six "hybrid" vessels designed as mother ships for uncrewed systems.

A necessary balance is struck with continuing to fund the broader spectrum of capabilities, including high-end projects such as the Aukus submarine project. But military experts warn of an excessive focus on long-term programmes designed to counter Chinese capabilities and project power into the Asia-Pacific, rather than preparing to fight — or preferably deter — a conflict with Russia, which Nato has warned could happen by 2030.

Starmer rightly insisted that ensuring the investment is effective will require a revamp of shambolic procurement procedures that have resulted in defence spending being seen as a "bottomless pit". The investment in drones will also

require setting up a new ecosystem of technological development and manufacturing capacity.

The prime minister claimed to have made hard choices by sacrificing some road and energy investments to boost the defence package. Yet his plan still falls far below the additional £28bn that defence officials warned was needed to fully fund all 62 recommendations of last year's Strategic Defence Review, which the government accepted.

The year-long hiatus between the review and the investment plan intended to fund it also created a vacuum of uncertainty that has put a heavy strain on the UK defence industrial base, especially the agile start-ups needed to deliver innovative technologies. Neither the speed of action nor the amount of investment has matched the urgency of the rhetoric.

UK defence spending is now projected to reach 2.7 per cent of GDP by 2029-30. But hitting 3 per cent is only a "priority" for the next multiyear spending plan.

The prime minister claimed to have made hard choices by sacrificing road and energy investments. Yet his package falls far below the £28bn that officials warned was needed

That trajectory will turn Britain, long a Nato frontrunner on defence spending as a proportion of GDP, into a mid-tier country behind Poland, Germany, and the Baltic and Nordic nations. All are closer to Russia than Britain, but the UK has no less a responsibility to protect its citizens and prepare for a conflict that would drag in all Nato members. If Britain is to continue to provide the diplomatic leadership that has been one of Starmer's strengths on issues such as Ukraine, moreover, it will have to show it is ready to contribute its share towards Europe's defence.

Starmer suggested Burnham could use the defence plan as a "platform" to find more funding, but warned that the idea of "defence bonds" was still a form of borrowing that could push up interest rates. In reality, the new premier will have to make savings, for example, from the soaring welfare budget. Whether he can succeed here, where the outgoing UK leader has failed, will be a defining test of the Burnham premiership.

Opinion Technology

AI CEOs want a new rule book, but it may be too late



Marietje Schaake

For the past year American tech companies have created a collective inaction problem by failing to speak out when core rule-of-law principles were attacked. Now they are in for a reckoning.

Too many CEOs thought they could benefit from quid pro quo and a close relationship with President Donald Trump. They cheered on his broad policies of deregulation and stayed largely quiet when his erratic policies hurt others. Now that the consequences of the Trump administration's political discretion are landing closer to home, they are rediscovering their appetite for fair and transparent rules that apply to everyone.

This month, OpenAI released a document that called for "public accountability, transparency and oversight" in AI policy by "representative govern-

lowest score on record. Very little of this drew sustained public objection from the executives whose companies were affected.

Privately, however, concerns were being voiced. Last year the Yale Chief Executive Leadership Institute surveyed more than a hundred CEOs (most of whom are Republicans) and found deep unease about the price of Trump's policies. Two-thirds said tariffs had been harmful to their businesses.

The silence was never defensible. If companies care about their self-interest, then it is not even sustainable.

AI is a case in point. For years, companies have argued they should be left to their own devices and that any binding rules would simply hand victory to China.

The administration largely agreed and went so far as to try to prevent states from writing their own AI laws. The industry got the deregulated environment that it asked for — but things are not playing out as it hoped.

The absence of a legitimate rule book does not mean the absence of power plays and executive interventions. Instead it means that interventions are ad hoc, political and uncontrolled.

See the US Department of Commerce's decision to order Anthropic to cut off access to its newest models for every foreign national, citing national security grounds. Cyber security expert Alex Stamos says that this sort of "vibes-based regulation" could result in public loss of trust towards American AI companies. The world is being given the message that services can and will be cut off at any moment by the White House.

In the latest C-Suite Outlook survey, executives said that uncertainty was their biggest economic concern for this year. If they want to address this, companies will need to do more to collectively defend the values and institutions they want to protect and step away from seeking ad hoc favours from the president. Appeals for fairness may not be enough.

It would be a good thing if the private sector could appreciate the value of the foundation of the rule of law more explicitly, and if they could find the courage to be outspoken.

My expectations are modest. But even if company leaders act only out of cynical self-interest and profit objectives, they could become vocal advocates of a White House that respects and promotes transparent processes that apply equally, serve the public and restore the predictability that markets, allies and citizens all require.

The writer is a fellow at Stanford University's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence. She is author of 'The Tech Coup'

Letters

Could the challenge of robotics see China re-embrace Marxism?

China's demographic realities are well described in your Big Read which online ran as "Robot nation: China's bid to beat its demographic decline" (June 25), highlighting the role of robotics in replacing labour to deal with the country's monumental rate of fertility decline.

However, the focus on the long term largely ignores the problem that the state will face in the coming decades.

With unemployment among the young already reaching 15 per cent, and the rapid displacement of workers by robots, the Chinese Communist Party may well need to shift away from

its embrace of state-capitalism and move back towards Marxism.

It is widely reported that labour's share of national income in China will drop dramatically in an economy already facing weak consumer demand and increasingly unfulfilled expectations.

Apart from future fiscal problems stemming from rising dependency ratios, the economy will need to find support for its current population that will decline more slowly than jobs. This implies the need for large transfers, even perhaps the equivalent of a universal basic income.

The Chinese leadership has so far eschewed big social transfers, but can they continue to do so in the next 20-30 years?

With a population with a median age of 41 and life expectancy between 75-80, there will be a considerable period of increasing unemployment and the need for social support systems. These trends are merely being accelerated by the adoption of robots with embodied artificial intelligence.

China did well to move hundreds of millions out of poverty using the capitalist model of producing globally competitive exports, relying on labour.

But that model is now being replaced by a capital-intensive robotics model that disenfranchises labour.

A return to Marxist fundamentals may well need to be considered in order to deal with this technology-charged demographic challenge.

The old Chinese adage of "will we be rich before we get old" may need to be replaced by "can robots generate enough income to share with humans".

Danny Leipziger
Professor of International Business,
George Washington University, and
Managing Director of the Growth
Dialogue, Washington, DC, US

Why the poorest towns are unmoved by Brexit largesse

Your article on the persistent popularity of Reform UK in areas like Hartlepool, despite the fact such towns have received the lion's share of the £19bn in national funds allocated under the various "levelling up" programmes, starts from the wrong place ("Hartlepool's voters unmoved by post-Brexit facelift", Report, June 29).

For years I had the FT's 2013 interactive map on my laptop showing the areas that had lost significant amounts in the David Cameron-led coalition government's austerity campaign. (Happily it's still available: <https://ig.ft.com/austerity-map/>).

Without question, the poorest areas lost the most. Blackpool was the hardest hit, losing £915 a year per working age adult, or 5 per cent of disposable income. And that in an area that was notably deprived in the first place. Great Yarmouth lost £613, County Durham lost £565 but Hartlepool, which used to be within County Durham's administration, lost £712. Even the Isle of Wight, the central southern outlier in deprivation, lost £556. And that was before Brexit, which most of them enthusiastically endorsed. All these councils are now controlled by Nigel Farage's Reform UK party.

These were government allocations that were used to pay for schools, old people's homes, libraries, swimming pools and everything else that makes life more than mere existence. The cuts have continued to be imposed, and are nowhere near being reinstated by the various gimmicks that governments have come up with since.

In addition, as the FT has reported, most of the new money has had to be competed for, by councils depleted of staff, and often the timeframes have been too short to achieve anything ("Inside the UK's levelling up let-down", Report, April 26, 2024).

It's clear Andy Burnham recognises the problem; we must hope he has some better solutions.

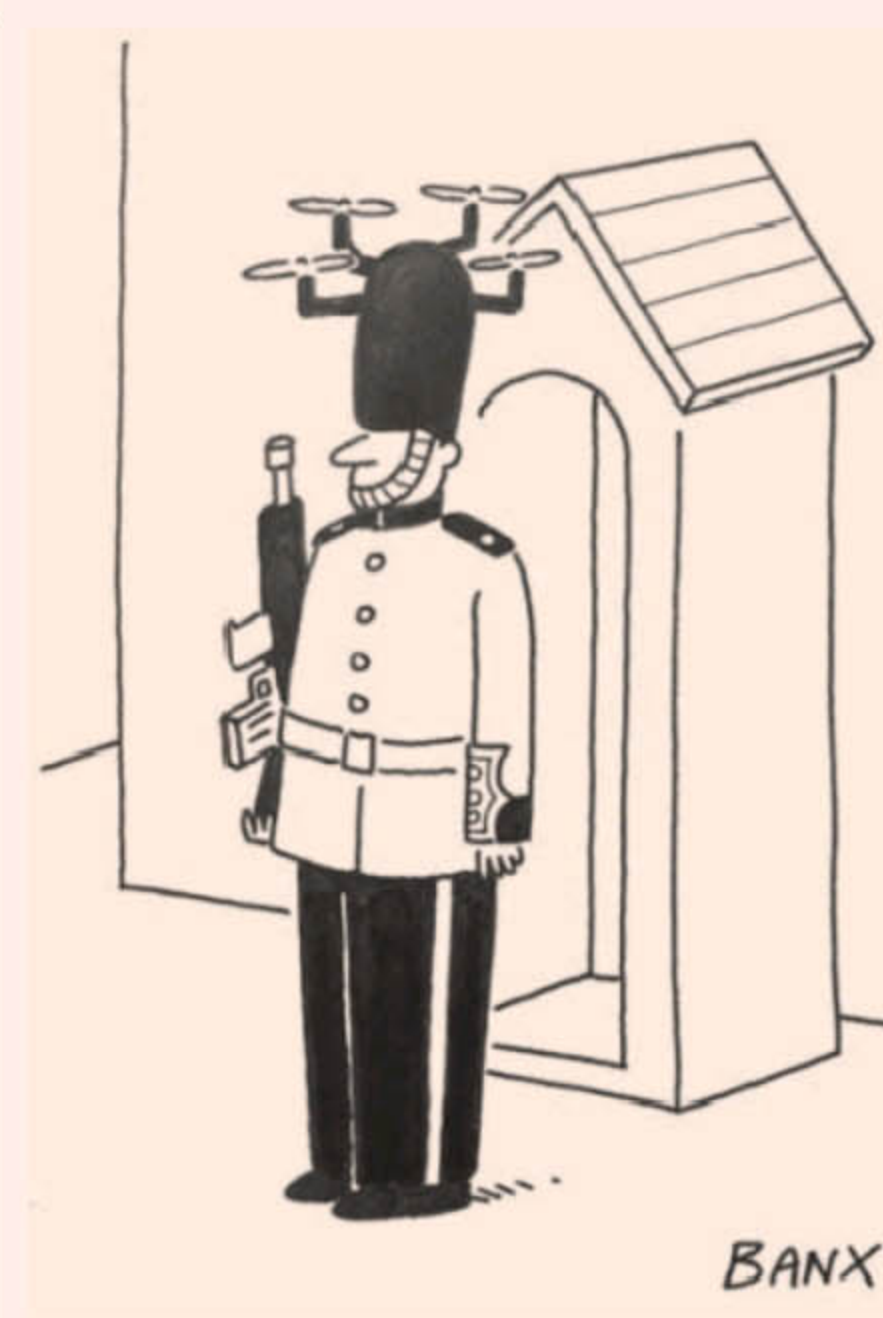
Judith Martin
Winchester, Hampshire, UK

An impossible to prove economic counterfactual

Last Thursday's FT "Political Fix" podcast ("Live special: Ten years after Brexit", Podcasts, FT.com, June 25), hosted by Lucy Fisher, demonstrated the commonly held view that Brexit severely impacted the UK economy, with reductions in GDP growth estimated at up to 8 per cent.

This weekend I sat at a university reunion dinner with several successful and intelligent fellow alumni from 1974, all of whom held this view.

In fact we all hate Brexit, can't abide



Nigel Farage, the Reform UK leader, campaign for climate change (www.itsdowntous.earth), and despair of what the world today offers our descendants.

Actually, during the post-Brexit period our GDP growth has outdone that of France, Italy and Germany, the three EU economies of comparable size to our own. And it seems counterintuitive to me to believe that had we remained in the union, the UK's economy would since have grown at least 10 per cent more than those three.

I also hear the claim that Brexit has brought our manufacturing industry to its knees, though if you look at the historical statistics since say 1970, there has been a clear steady decline in manufacturing as a percentage of GDP, with no increase in the rate of decline since Brexit.

I abhor Brexit, particularly as a reflection of our sadly increasing xenophobic nationalism, not to mention the passport "queue of shame" on EU travels.

Still, that strong emotion seems to make it easy for us to swallow flaky economic theories, all impossible to prove.

Dick Sands
London TW8, UK

The choice is always between guns and butter

The article by Mark Carney and Luc Frieden (Opinion, June 25) proposes an important framework for raising defence spending towards the levels needed in the current international environment.

At the same time, the fundamental choice the democracies face is between guns and butter. Their proposal cannot change this.

Professor Martin Weale
King's Business School and Department of
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How Europe leverages its financial power to re-arm

As authors of the original European rearmament bank proposal, launched here 18 months ago, we applaud the steps taken by western governments towards a new defence finance institution ("Europe needs a rearmament bank to boost defence spending", Letters, January 15, 2025).

As Mark Carney, Canada's prime minister, and Luc Frieden, his Luxembourg counterpart, noted ("Credible deterrence requires a new Nato bank", Opinion, June 25), the tried-and-tested multilateral model can leverage a small amount of paid-in capital to produce financial firepower. In our estimation 20 to 25 times as much.

The new institution's clout and expertise can also ensure that the money is better spent, pooling orders, enforcing interoperability standards, and constraining both pork-barrel purchasing caprice and defence contractors' inefficiency.

The danger is that competing initiatives lead to delay and deadlock. We urge the supporters of both the Canada-Luxembourg-led Defence, Security and Resilience Bank and of the multilateral defence mechanism, set up by Britain, Finland and the Netherlands, to sit down together with other big stakeholders and pool their efforts to develop a consensus proposal, to which the big European countries, chiefly France and Germany, can also sign up. A joint effort will have the strongest chance of success.

Guy de Selliers
Gillingham, Dorset, UK
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London SW10, UK

For America, this is the Iran war fairytale ending

Christian B Teeter's June 29 letter ("Iran agreement should be judged by years, not days") suggests that celebrations of the recent US-Iran agreement may be premature.

Hans Christian Andersen's emperor was surrounded by courtiers who assured him that his invisible clothes were magnificent. Only later did reality intrude. If a war launched to eliminate a threat ends with an agreement that leaves key elements of that threat unresolved, the question is not what leaders call it but what it achieves. A victory proclaimed is not necessarily a victory secured.

The American electorate may not ask that question today. But if the problem survives the peace, they may conclude that the emperor had no clothes after all. In Andersen's tale, the emperor was not exposed by his critics but by events.

Trevor Lyttleton MBE
London NW11, UK

Pension triple lock is not an issue of sustainability

In your leader, "Burnham will have to make tough choices" (The FT View, June 26), you assert that the state pension triple lock is unsustainable.

Surely it was never intended to be sustained, nor to be sustainable. Its purpose was and is to bring the state pension back up to a satisfactory level after a long period of falling behind average earnings and GDP per head.

The issue facing politicians today is to assess whether or not the pension has already caught up to an acceptable level.

If it has, the lock should end immediately. If not, the lock should continue until the pension has returned to an adequate level.

Ian Thompson
London TW11, UK

Graduate earnings' data is linked to degree choice

Jo Ellison ("Why bother with university?", Trending, Life & Arts, June 7) that "university is less about one's field of study (unless you want to end up in academia) but learning how to navigate human behaviour, take initiatives and maybe finesse some basic meals."

Graduate earnings' data do not support that position.

Studying a subject like medicine, economics or business is much, much more likely to lead to well-paid employment than studying for an average degree.

In contrast, a degree in the creative arts, philosophy or English is much less likely to achieve that outcome.

Fields of study matter a great deal to job prospects.

Tim Leunig
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Right royal grudge match

In answer to the challenge posed by Simon Kuper ("Messi, Mbappé and the race for footballing immortality", Report, June 29), a truly unique "footballing immortality" could yet be bestowed on this World Cup, if in the 250th anniversary year of America's Declaration of Independence ("Reborn on the Fourth of July", FT Books Essay, Life & Arts, FT Weekend, June 27), the World Cup final pitted England against the United States.

If that were to happen, the location of the final could be moved from New Jersey to Philadelphia to add poignancy and King Charles III could be invited as FIFA's guest of honour, to create a real grudge match atmosphere. Footballing immortality would be assured.

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Opinion

America's stillborn 250th birthday

US SOCIETY

Edward Luce



were exchanged. Little is self-evident today to Americans, except that they cannot agree what they are celebrating.

That America's semiquincentennial is a flop may be an accident of timing. The bicentennial was very different. Those 1976 celebrations were led by Gerald Ford, an unexpected president who was modestly personified. "The excitement of this occasion is that they [the declaration's principles] still work." Ford was referring to the resignation two years earlier of his boss, Richard Nixon, to avoid impeachment over the Watergate scandal. The system had successfully checked executive power. What better moment to light the fireworks?

Half a century later, Nixon is depicted by JD Vance, today's vice-president, as victim of the "deep state". "If Watergate happened tomorrow, it would be like a 12-hour news story," Vance said last week. There was nothing deep-state about Nixon's downfall. He resigned

only when he realised that his Republican colleagues were boarding the impeachment train. The US Supreme Court precipitated that moment when it ordered Nixon to publish his incriminating Oval Office tapes.

In another respect, however, Vance is correct. Watergate today would be drowned out by competing scandals.

An event that was meant to celebrate an exceptional nation has been cornered by one man

Much of what Donald Trump does is comparable or worse. Take what looks to most like his trading of regulatory favours for gifts. In implicit exchange for a takeover approval, Paramount, which owns the CBS news channel and

about to take over CNN, paid Trump \$16m to settle a lawsuit over a routine editing of an election interview with Kamala Harris. Amazon, which is owned by Jeff Bezos, who is seeking federal contracts for his space venture, paid \$40m for a documentary of first lady Melania Trump that few watched.

Trump operates an apparent market in presidential pardons. People who donate to him have been forgiven for crimes of embezzlement, money laundering and funnelling money to sanctioned regimes, including Iran. Hundreds were forgiven for storming Capitol Hill to overthrow an election. Nixon's operatives burgled the Democratic Party's headquarters to discover their campaign plans but Nixon tried nothing close to January 6. His true crime was the lengths to which he went to cover it up. Trump does not bother to conceal. He makes no pretence of abiding by the US constitution's emoluments clause.

Two things have changed. First, today's Republicans are a very different breed to their 1970s forebears. Though Nixon had been re-elected in a landslide, he had nothing like Trump's grip over the party. Second, today's Supreme Court is Trump's enabler. His abuse of executive power is the closest America has come in 250 years to the whims of a Hanoverian monarch. That is why opposition to Trump marches under the "No Kings" banner.

On Saturday, Trump is expected to give a speech to the "Freedom 250" rally on the Washington Ellipse. In addition to F-35 flyovers, the day will be commemorated by what the White House has billed as history's largest fireworks display. Trump will be the main entertainment. A long roster of performers has boycotted an event they believe has been hijacked by the president's personal branding. As well as donations from the likes of the cage wrestling UFC,

the defence logistics company Palantir and ExxonMobil, Trump has taken control of taxpayer money that Congress awarded to the official but largely invisible "America 250" commission. An event that was meant to celebrate an exceptional nation has thus been cornered by one man.

At 250, the US system has outlasted most empires. The founders might have been astonished to learn it has survived this long. At just 1,320 words, the declaration ranks as one of the great statements in history. Many on America's left believe it was a hypocritical charter drawn up by slave owners. Many on the right see it as a revelation of God's providence. But surveys show that the typical American has a better grasp of the nation's founding ideals and hypocrisies. Most deserve a better celebration than they will be getting.

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The fragility of our economic resilience

Martin Wolf Economics

Are we invulnerable or just plain lucky? Either way, there are many and growing dangers to guard against



The world economy has remained resilient despite the post-pandemic burst of inflation, Donald Trump's tariffs, Russia's ongoing war on Ukraine, the Iran war and, as a result of these two conflicts, big energy shocks, the most recent being quantitatively the biggest in history. Should the conclusion be that the economy is invulnerable or just lucky? If it is luck, how could it finally run out?

The lucid analysis in the latest Annual Economic Report from the Bank for International Settlements demonstrates that there has indeed been resilience, but also luck. Moreover, it shows, dangers are building up, notably in the interaction between fiscal and financial fragilities. One should add to this the social, financial and other vulnerabilities likely to be created, or worsened, by the triumphant march of artificial intelligence through the economy. It is not hard to imagine shocks to which the public sector's ability to respond effectively is more limited than people currently take for granted.

Consider the impact of some recent events. Trump's tariff war was significantly less damaging than expected on "liberation day" (April 2 2025). This was partly because tariff levels became significantly lower than initially suggested, partly because US companies absorbed some of the cost (possibly temporarily) through lower margins and, significantly, because the tariffs were wildly discriminatory. The inevitable result

was the diversion of trade from direct Chinese exports to the US to exports via other emerging economies (mostly in east Asia) able to produce using Chinese inputs. Moreover, and crucially, the rest of the world did not copy Trump's protectionism. Sensibly, they judged it too absurd to be imitated. (See charts.)

The world has also had a very large piece of macroeconomic luck – the AI boom. This has ignited not just a confidence-enhancing boom: to an already highly valued stock market but also a huge surge in US domestic investment. The latter has, in turn, had significant spillover effects on the supply of inputs from east Asia. As a result of this boom, together with the trade diversion noted above, world trade has remained remarkably buoyant.

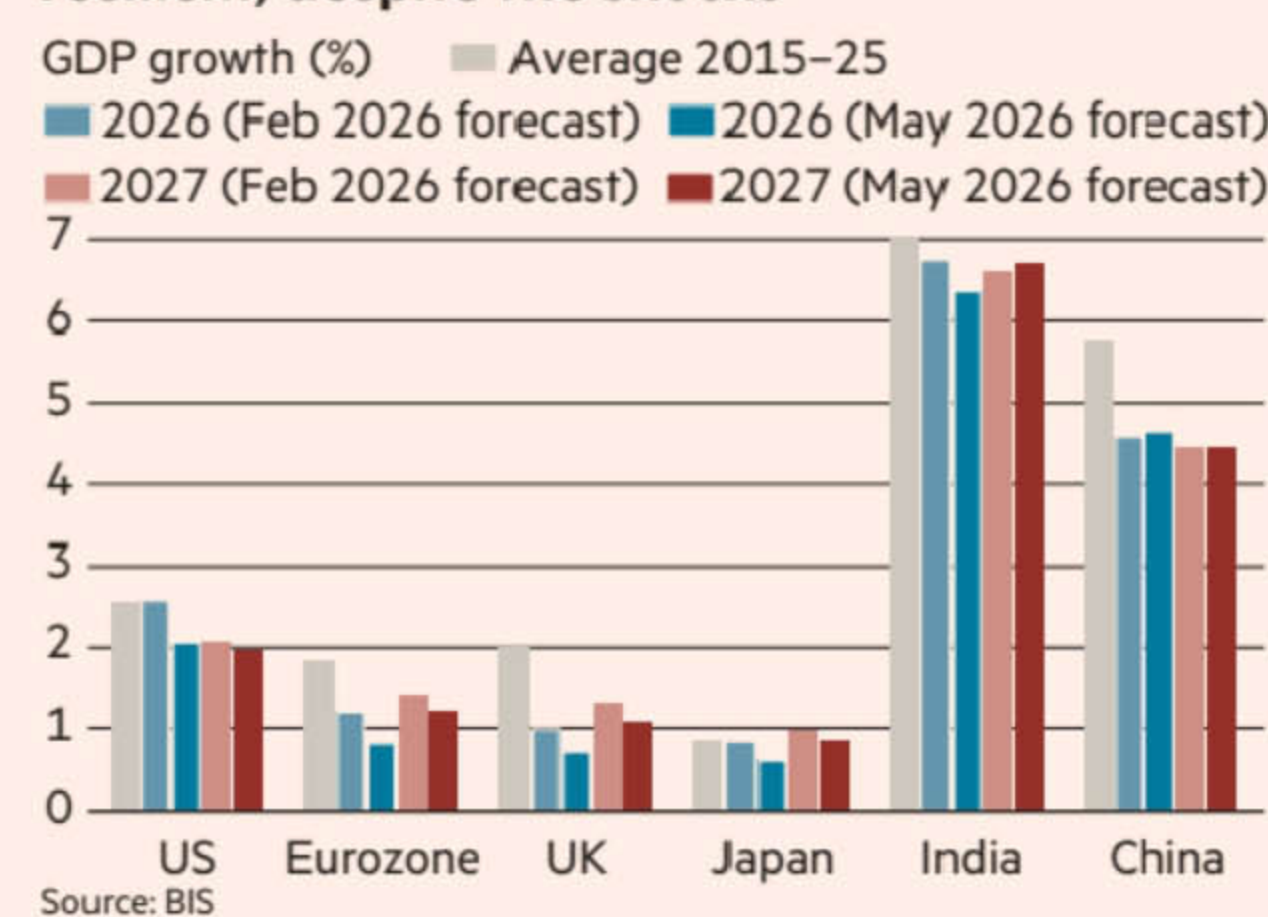
In 2026, however, the global economy suffered another big shock – the ill-considered assault on Iran. This has delivered an effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most important chokepoint for oil, natural gas and many other vital products. This has now lasted for four months and counting. In terms of supply, this has been the biggest oil shock of all, though stocks have cushioned the blow.

If we put all these points together, says the BIS, we see four economic weaknesses.

First, inflation has risen. The question for central banks is whether this will be brief and transitory or sufficiently large and long-lasting to generate another jump in the price level, as the post-pandemic surge in inflation did so egregiously. Could a second shock significantly destabilise inflation expectations? Yes. To miss the inflation target badly once might be a misfortune; to miss it a second time, even if far more modestly, would look like carelessness.



Economic growth is forecast to be strikingly resilient, despite the shocks



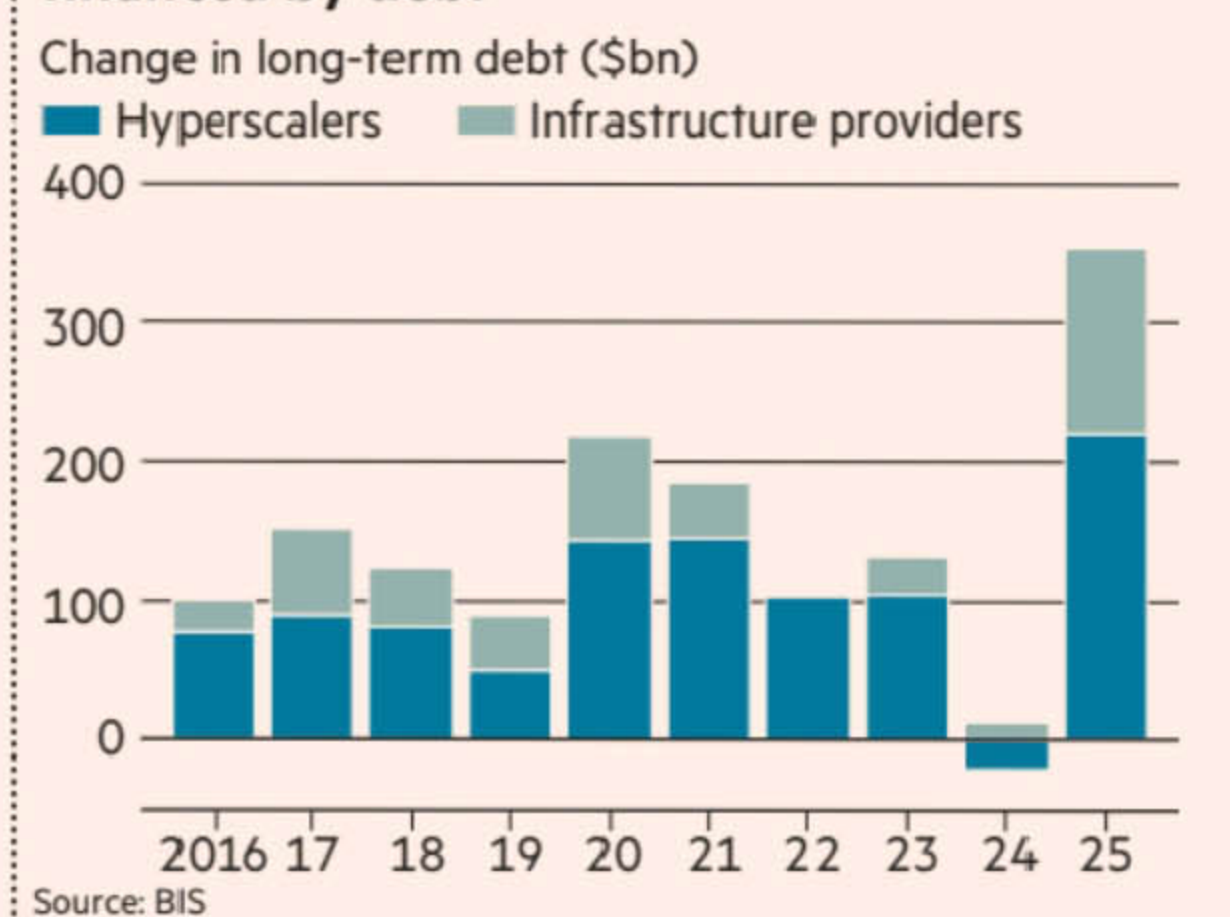
Source: BIS

As US imports from China are cut, those from Asean countries jump



Source: BIS

AI companies' investments are increasingly financed by debt



Source: BIS

Second, the surge in spending on AI could slow, perhaps sharply. One reason might be fierce public hostility to the technology. In the longer run, the combination of intense competition with disappointing returns might itself lead

to a collapse in investment. This, the BIS notes, has happened in previous such innovation-led investment booms.

Third, today's relaxed financial conditions could tighten sharply, as the result of an old-fashioned market panic. We see compressed risk premia, rising leverage and, not least, rapid growth of relatively opaque and unregulated non-bank financial intermediation. Note, too, that private-sector indebtedness is itself not far below where it was in 2007.

Fourth, governments in high-income countries are losing control of their public finances. With a few exceptions they are running big structural fiscal deficits, while average ratios of public debt to GDP are at levels last seen after the second world war. These countries, especially in Europe, also face the challenges of high energy prices and ageing popula-

tions. Interest rates, both nominal and real, are at levels last seen before the global financial crisis. As Manoj Pradhan and Charles Goodhart argue in *The Unanchored Central Banker*, the days of low inflation and near-zero interest rates are in the past.

A particularly important recent contribution of the BIS has been on the interaction of rising government debt with public sector debt markets. In particular, it has stressed the rising role of hedge funds in funding governments. Their strategy depends on high leverage. This increases the risks of a panic in which trades unwind at high speed. We saw such disruptions early in the pandemic and again in the UK's "Truss shock" of September 2022.

For central banks, all this together threatens a great deal of trouble.

One risk is of fiscal shocks, which, the BIS stresses, are also likely to reduce degrees of freedom in monetary policy.

In addition, any financial market disruptions are likely to be met with strong support from the authorities. But that is sure to increase moral hazard still further. The current shift towards procyclical deregulation of finance further increases the likelihood of this danger.

Finally, there is the new *bête noire* of the BIS – the promotion of stablecoins, which pretend to be the equivalent of money, but, in any crisis, will not be. In sum, the world economy is resilient partly because it has been lucky. Luck runs out. If the economy is to stay resilient, it must become more robust. Achieving that is now a priority.

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Erdoğan's assault on democracy is a threat to Turkey's allies

Özgür Özel

As world leaders gather in Ankara for the Nato summit next week, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will use the occasion to project strength. But that image masks a deeper vulnerability: his growing repression of Turkish democracy. His government has detained peaceful protesters – along with lawyers, journalists and academics – while trying to hide the country's realities from the world. That is bad for Turkey. It also poses a danger to our Nato partners, especially in Europe.

Turkey's strategic importance is self-evident. It controls access to the Black Sea; borders Syria, Iraq and Iran; and

sits close to conflicts that repeatedly test European security. Our armed forces are among Nato's largest, while our defence industry is increasingly essential to Europe's security. Yet this strategic strength masks a darker reality. Turkey's economy is under severe strain: inflation remains above 30 per cent even by questionable official figures, consumer confidence is weak, and millions feel poorer, less secure and less hopeful than a decade ago. Turkey also has Europe's largest prison population – a sign of a state increasingly reliant on coercion rather than consent.

This domestic weakness has had political consequences. Erdoğan is no longer as popular as he once was. In the 2024 municipal elections, his party suffered its worst defeat since coming to power. The Republican People's Party (CHP) – which I have led since 2023 – has become the country's leading local political force. We won by campaigning

around the struggles of ordinary people: pensioners unable to pay rent, graduates who saw no future, parents who could not afford decent food for their kids. We spoke both to our voters and former Erdoğan supporters who felt

His repression is bad for the country and poses a danger to Nato partners, especially in Europe

abandoned. His response revealed the weakness at the heart of his system: faced with a real alternative, he has used the power of the state and the courts to eliminate democratic competition.

The first major target was Ekrem İmamoğlu, Istanbul's mayor and the CHP's presidential candidate. In March 2025, he was imprisoned on charges of

corruption, aiding terrorism and espionage that are widely seen as politically motivated. A broader sweep against the CHP followed. More than 50 opposition mayors have since been detained or imprisoned. And last month, a court annulled the party election in which I was chosen as the CHP leader. By judicial order, I was removed from office and a former party chair who had repeatedly lost elections against Erdoğan was restored.

He is seeking to create his own loyal opposition – one that may contest elections but can never threaten his power. He wants a political order in which voting survives while genuine competition disappears. Russia and Belarus stand as a warning of where this leads.

Our allies should not confuse repression with stability. A Turkey without democratic competition, public legitimacy or the rule of law is not a predictable or reliable partner. Its foreign policy

becomes a tool of domestic survival. Today Erdoğan may turn towards Washington, tomorrow towards Moscow, next towards Beijing – solely to help secure his position. The survival of one man's rule is being placed above Turkey's national interests.

There is also a more immediate danger. A regime that blocks citizens from believing that change is possible through elections creates hopelessness and anger. Combined with economic mismanagement and deepening poverty, this raises the risk of social and political upheaval. Such an eruption would not remain within Turkey's borders. It would affect Europe's security, critical energy routes and the Middle East and Nato's southern flank.

It is not for Turkey's allies to prescribe our country's political trajectory. Turkey's democrats are not asking for democracy to be imported from abroad. We have seen enough of the illusions,

unintended consequences, fantasies and outright failures produced by attempts to reshape societies through external interventions. That task belongs to Turkey's people. Our citizens have shown, again and again, that they seek change peacefully. They have voted, marched and defended their dignity despite pressure and fear.

At the Nato summit, Erdoğan will present himself as indispensable. But no country's strategic value is enhanced by the destruction of its democracy. Turkey's allies need a clear-eyed view of the risk that Erdoğan's rule poses to their own interests. Lending legitimacy to authoritarian governments in pursuit of short-term geopolitical convenience is a historic mistake. It rarely produces stability. More often, it makes the eventual reckoning more dangerous.

The writer is the leader of Turkey's Republican People's Party (CHP)



PIA's privatisation

THE management control of PIA has finally been transferred to a consortium comprising private investors and the Faqir Foundation. The development marks a new chapter in the history of the airline whose fortunes declined over the past two decades. According to an official statement, the transfer follows the completion of all local and international regulatory approvals, including permissions from global lenders and specialised tax concessions. The privatisation authorities believe the takeover will breathe new life into the airline.

The consortium has paid the government Rs40bn upfront and committed to injecting another Rs25bn as fresh equity to fund restructuring, fleet renewal, route expansion and service improvement. PIA has long suffered massive financial losses, political interference and years of managerial drift. The proposed capital injection could provide it with the resources it has lacked.

The new PIA chairman's emphasis on heritage, trust and restoring PIA's image is standard messaging. Passengers will judge the airline by performance. The real test will be improvements in safety, punctuality, customer satisfaction and financial performance. Privatisation removes the state's ownership label. It does not automatically remove the structural constraints that have weighed down the airline for years. An ageing and shrunken fleet, inconsistent service standards, stiff competition from Gulf carriers, etc, remain the consortium's real inheritance and challenges.

The biggest advantage of privatisation is that PIA now has owners with a direct financial stake in making the airline commercially viable. Even so, ownership alone guarantees nothing. The financial structure of the transaction deserves close attention. The consortium has pledged substantial fresh equity, but the airline's long-term recovery will depend on how effectively that capital is deployed. Fleet expansion without better route planning, stronger cost controls and improved operational discipline will do little to restore profitability. Likewise, service improvements must be backed by stronger corporate governance and greater managerial accountability. Rebuilding confidence will take time. Years of decline have damaged PIA's reputation. Public trust cannot be restored through rebranding campaigns. It will require consistent operational improvements delivered over years. Any early setback will attract intense scrutiny because, despite privatisation, PIA remains a national symbol. Nor can the government completely step aside. Regulators still have a duty to ensure effective safety oversight and fair competition. The next 12 months will be decisive. Progress should be measured through fleet expansion, operational efficiency and customer satisfaction rather than promises. The second financial closing will provide the first meaningful indication of whether the consortium intends to follow through on its pledges or whether the call option is more optional than its name suggests. If this transaction truly signifies the beginning of a 'new era' will soon be known.

Rights beyond rulings

THE Supreme Court's recent ruling that jewellery, bridal gifts and dowry articles given to a bride remain her exclusive property is a welcome reaffirmation of women's economic rights. By declaring that neither a husband nor his family can lawfully retain such property, the court recognised that these possessions often represent a woman's financial security. It also made clear that family courts have the authority to order their recovery when they are unlawfully withheld. The judgement is the latest in a series of encouraging decisions in favour of women. Earlier this year, the court ruled that a family court cannot convert a woman's suit for dissolution of marriage into *khula* without her consent, protecting women from being pressured into surrendering financial rights simply because it is procedurally easier. In another important case, the court upheld the wedlock policy for government employees, ruling that spouses have a legitimate expectation of being posted together unless there are compelling reasons to refuse. Such decisions recognise the practical difficulties faced by working women and reaffirm that beneficial policies should not be ignored through bureaucratic discretion. Together, these judgements send a clear message that women's rights to dignity, property and fair treatment are protected by law.

Pakistan's problem has rarely been the absence of laws; it has been the failure to implement them. The rights recognised by the Supreme Court already exist in the Constitution and legislation, yet many women continue to face resistance when seeking justice. Family courts must apply these rulings consistently rather than encouraging settlements that disregard a woman's wishes or legal entitlements. Police and judicial officers should treat the unlawful withholding of bridal property as a legitimate legal grievance instead of dismissing it as a private family matter. Government departments must implement the wedlock policy uniformly rather than leaving decisions to official discretion. Legal rights cannot achieve their purpose if social attitudes continue to treat women as having fewer claims over property, employment or personal choice than men. Training for judges, court staff and public officials, along with greater accountability for ignoring binding precedent, is essential. The Supreme Court has provided welcome legal clarity. It is now for governments, lower courts and public institutions to ensure that these principles are upheld in both the letter and the spirit of the law.

Asia left behind

ALARMING regression has been witnessed in the Asian teams at the FIFA World Cup. A record nine representatives from the continent went to the global showcase that has been expanded to 48 teams for the ongoing edition. But just two, Japan and Australia, progressed beyond the group stage; at the last World Cup in Qatar, Japan, Australia and South Korea had advanced to the last 16. Japan's journey in North America was ended by Brazil in the last 32, leaving just Australia — formerly part of the Oceania Football Confederation — flying the flag for the Asian Football Confederation. Australia face Egypt in the last 32. Even if they progress, there will be little to mask the struggles of the greater continent. The statistics make for grim reading: Asian teams won just three out of 27 matches in the group stage. Japan and Iran — who drew all three of their matches — were unbeaten but things were far worse for the likes of Iraq, debutants Uzbekistan and Jordan, who lost all three. South Korea and Qatar lost two matches each; Australia and Saudi Arabia, who will host the 2034 edition, lost once each.

At a tournament where eight of the best third-placed teams were also set to advance from the groups, it is a dismal situation and shows what Asia must do to mingle with the best. There have been inevitable comparisons with Africa, which saw nine of its 10 representatives make it past the group stage. It was at the 2018 World Cup that the AFC's then technical director Andy Roxburgh pointed out that much was lacking at the youth level in Asian football and that improved competition was needed. The AFC has since changed formats for its youth-level tournaments, introducing a development-focused qualifying phase for the Under-20 Asian Cup. It remains to be seen whether it will produce outcomes that will groom the youth and help teams perform better at World Cups.

OPINION

BY ZAHID HUSSAIN



Killing children

Israel has wiped out an entire young Palestinian generation.

THE most horrific element of the ongoing genocide in Gaza — pushed off the front pages by the US-Iran conflict — is the deliberate targeting of Palestinian children by Israeli security forces. More than 60,000 Palestinian children have reportedly been killed or injured by Zionist forces in the enclave over the past 32 months, and the genocide continues despite the ceasefire. According to Unicef, one Palestinian child has been killed on average every day since the truce began last October.

Arguably, there is no comparable case of genocide against children in recorded history. A report released last week by the three-member Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel — established by the UN Human Rights Council — provides harrowing new details. It documents serious physical and psychological harm inflicted on Palestinian children by Israeli security forces since Oct 7, 2023, resulting in the deaths of at least 20,879 children and injuries to 44,143.

The Commission examined how the living conditions imposed by Israel in Gaza are "resulting in preventable mortality of children". Severe physical and mental injuries, mass trauma, orphanhood, separation, disability, repeated displacement, starvation and the collapse of education and healthcare have erased childhood in Gaza, in one of the report's findings. This situation will continue to shape the territory's children for the rest of their lives. "By targeting children, Israel is attacking the very capacity of the Palestinian people to exist and to determine their future," said Indian judge Srikrishnan Murshidkar, who chairs the inquiry.

Israel, the report adds, is "eroding the foundational structure of Palestinian society, [and] weakening the demographic vitality...". It has caused a "severe orphan crisis", and wounded youngsters "face a lifetime of disability" — now "a defining demographic reality" among Gaza's children. The siege "directly undermined reproductive and newborn health", while the collapse of public health programmes has "eroded the conditions necessary for a healthy next generation".

Yet there are no sanctions on the country com-

mitting these war crimes. The criminal silence of the so-called civilised Western world and the apathy of regional governments have granted the Zionist state continued impunity. Despite the so-called ceasefire, approximately 300 more children have been killed in the territory — most of it still under Israeli control. Unicef has noted that children have been "shot, bombed and struck by quadcopters, killed in tents, in schools and while playing football or fishing". Israel has wiped out an entire young Palestinian generation.

Beyond Gaza, the picture is also grim. The Commission has observed a sharp rise in violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian children in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967. It has noted that "Israeli authorities and security forces have deliberately targeted Palestinian children, resulting in genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in the Gaza Strip, and war crimes in the West Bank".

The report documents that children in Gaza and the West Bank — especially adolescent boys — have been "arrested, tortured, and ill-treated in Israeli prisons and detention facilities", and records "incidents of sexual and gender-based violence targeting Palestinian children, often during arrest or in detention". It accuses Israel of using starvation as a method of war, and warns that restrictions on humanitarian aid have "produced acute and chronic malnutrition among children in Gaza, removing the basic conditions necessary for their survival". The report lists specific Israeli divisions, brigades and units that may be responsible for killing children in recorded incidents in Gaza and the West Bank.

An Israeli human rights group detailed in its recent report, *Unsheltered Childhood*, the wide-spread and unprovoked killing of Palestinian children and teenagers in the West Bank is the product of Israel's broader policy of killing Palestinians without accountability.

American complicity in Israel's genocidal war against Palestinian children is equally clear. Unsurprisingly, the State Department has joined Israel in dismissing the UN report as biased. The Trump administration has maintained its policy of unconditional military and diplomatic support for Israel — not merely covering up for the Zionist

state's war crimes but actively patronising them. The reaction to the report of certain Western countries has also been apathetic, with some even appearing to be sceptical.

The International Court of Justice is already hearing a case filed by South Africa, supported by 65 other countries under the 1948 Genocide Convention, accusing Israel of acts intended to destroy the Palestinian people in Gaza. In January 2024, the ICJ ordered Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent genocide and to allow immediate humanitarian aid. A follow-up order in March 2024 demanded unimpeded delivery of food, water, electricity, fuel and medical supplies.

The ICJ found it plausible that the right to be protected from genocide was at risk. Statements by senior Israeli officials — calling Palestinians "human animals", demanding Gaza be "flattened", and threatening starvation — have been deemed sufficient to bring charges against Israel under the Genocide Convention.

Israel wants the case dismissed as it argues that the dispute concerns armed conflict, and not genocide. The UK, which often criticises the ICJ's authority, backs Israel's position. The latest UN report on the targeted killing of Palestinian children reinforces what appears to be Israel's genocidal intent. What is happening in Gaza and the other occupied Palestinian territories reminds many of the Holocaust. Yet the genocide of Palestinian children is being perpetrated by those who say they are the property of the victims of that very tragedy. The US and other Western countries are no less responsible for the ongoing genocide against the children of Gaza.

As the UN Commission noted, by targeting children, Israel is "eroding the foundational structure of Palestinian society, weakening the demographic vitality, and overall capacity of the Palestinian people to sustain and exercise its right to determine... its future as a people". Is the world listening to the cries of Palestinian mothers and children? ■

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BY ZAFAR MASUD

Cheap currency, costly illusion

THERE is a comforting story we tell ourselves about exports — that the rupee is the lever, and the markets suggest that if only it were allowed to fall far enough, our factories would roar back to a state of competitiveness. It is a tidy theory, and an attractive one, because it locates the problem outside ourselves. It is also wrong, or at least dangerously incomplete. It is one value in a larger system. And a country that keeps reaching for it while the pipes outside elsewhere will find that the water never quite arrives.

The evidence is unimpeachable. Research by the State Bank puts the responsiveness of our exports to the exchange rate well below one — a one per cent appreciation in the nominal effective rate times export demand by only about 0.55pc. But the more decisive number is the import content of what we sell.

Roughly 37pc of our export value is itself imported, about 24pc in raw materials such as yarn, fibre and PTA (purified terephthalic acid), and 58pc in capital goods. Textiles, around 52pc to 60pc of what we sell abroad, are the most import-intensive of all. So when the rupee falls, the cost of the very inputs that exporters depend on rises almost in lockstep, and the price advantage we thought we had bought, is quietly clawed back at the customs counter — while the buyer abroad also demands his own pound of flesh from it.

This is why currency, in any lowest weighting, deserves perhaps an eighth of the explanation, and not the lion's share. The heavier weights belong elsewhere. Energy is the binding constraint: our industrial tariffs of roughly 13.5 cents to 15 cents per unit tower over India's 12.1, Bangladesh's 8.7, Vietnam's 7.5 and Malaysia's four cents. For a textile mill, that gap is the difference between winning an order and losing it to Dhaka. Then come the other levers: productivity and the climb up the product ladder; trade facilitation, where every day shaved off a customs delay lifts trade by roughly 1pc; a tariff structure that does not tax exporters through

cascading duties on inputs; and diversification. Take a look at the ports we measure ourselves against. Vietnam took merchandise exports from under \$50 billion in 2007 to more than \$170bn by 2024 — not by chasing a cheaper currency but by holding competitive energy prices, securing duty-free access to inputs, signing trade agreements and moving into electronics, machinery and footwear. South Korea multiplied its exports more than twentyfold over four decades through technology and skills. The countries that devolved repeatedly without fixing anything underneath — Argentina being the standing monument in this regard — transformed nothing.

Fix the structural levers, and the currency becomes a supporting instrument.

We have a fresher cautionary tale. Between 2021 and 2023, Turkey let the lira fall around 60pc against the dollar. Inflation roared from about 15pc to above 80pc, yet exports grew only around 1pc, while imports rose by a third and the deficit ballooned to roughly 9.5pc of GDP.

Devaluation alone is not merely insufficient; it is also expensive. The lira arrives in the form of inflation, a heavier dollar-debt burden, eroded real wages for a population that is not local and energy importer, and the flight of the confidence the tradable sector requires.

None of this means the rupee should be defended at any price. Where a currency is genuinely overvalued, refusing to adjust simply taxes exporters indefinitely. And our recent record on this count is sobering: even between May 2023 and December 2025, despite nominal rupee weakness, the real effective exchange rate appreciated by about 15pc as domestic inflation

overwhelmed the nominal move — and against China, our largest trading partner, real appreciation topped 20pc. That clearly points to an erosion of competitiveness.

But two cautions matter. The observed REER (real effective exchange rate) is a relative-price index, not a misalignment gauge; rising true over- or under-valuation requires an equilibrium-REER estimate, not the headline number. And credit terms can lastly sway. As a large, durable, net-debt inflow, they raise the sustainably consistent rate, which means that we are less overvalued than a trade-only view would suggest. Yet the same inflows bid up non-tradable prices and prop up the rupee, flattening the index while the tradable sector spins its wheels. This is full-blown Dutch disease, and it lessens in harm's way unless you cut out of a remittance-driven appreciation, because the inflow simply re-appreciates the currency.

So the resolution is neither denial nor denials on a paragon. It is response. If diagnosis confirms the rupee is overvalued, exchange-rate adjustment belongs in the package — but only alongside energy reform, productivity, trade facilitation, fiscal discipline and diversification, and never as a substitute for them. Treated as the whole answer, the currency becomes the path of least resistance, letting policymakers defer the hard structural fixes year after year. It is a necessary step but hardly the complete solution.

Our export problem has never really been about the price of the rupee. It is about the price of electricity; the speed of a reform; the diversity of a producer base and the predictability of a policy. Where the public investment those levers depend on has been thinning in real per-capita terms precisely when exporters face mounting exchange-rate pressure. Fix the structural levers, and the currency becomes a supporting instrument. Reach for it alone, and we keep seeing faster only to stand in the same place. ■

The writer is a senior banker.

OPINION



BY FARHAN ANWAR

Visioning Karachi

THERE is an ongoing heated debate centred on the need, or otherwise, of enacting a new constitutional construct for Karachi. The tone of the debate is mostly political, rooted in the never-ending power and resource-sharing conflicts between the federation and provinces. As always, these political contentions lack focus on what really ails this city.

Karachi presently stands out as the antithesis of a livable city. Sprawling endlessly, automobile-dependent, with half the population living in shacks, and rapidly losing its green cover — this is the current state of urban affairs. However, arguments over the city's plight, despite being constitutional, seem, if properly channelled, offer a much-needed opportunity to forge a multi-stakeholder conversation around solutions.

There are some critical prerequisites awaiting attention prior to initiating any master planning or development. To begin with, in a city where even the population figures are disputed, there is an urgent need to transparently document the city, thoroughly and consistently. This can lead to the creation of centralised databanks at appropriate levels of city governance, accessible to citizen citizens.

Then there are issues of political stability and clean and effective governance. Forging a political consensus for urban reforms, and crafting a shared vision for the future will be a critical enabler for ensuring law and order and sustainability of policy, planning and project-based interventions. Plans can only succeed when a city government is empowered with the requisite legitimacy, powers and willingness to be accountable to its citizens.

The governance construct needs a rethink. In cities globally, the government — rather than being the sole provider — has now become more a guarantor, insisting that all are provided for. This transformation creates space for informal actors to become part of the governance process. In Karachi, wherever the levers of decision-making may rest, an enabling space, presently absent, has to be created for the private sector, civil society organisations, and community groups to collaborate and partner with the government for improved urban development.

When moving beyond creating the prerequisites for sustainable change, the approach has to be holistic, which is currently fragmented. We need to be cognisant of the past, celebrate the present and embrace the future. Let's talk about celebrating the present — our cultural, physical and human assets. Karachi, housing multiple ethnicities, linguistic, religious and cultural identities, instead of

celebrating its diversity has become a fringe member city. A divided city cannot become a sustainable city. A socially and culturally vibrant city generates new economies with a focus on fair, fast, food, music, arts, clothing and craftsmanship.

The city needs to open up to become a part of an ongoing exciting global economic transition.

Investment in the economies of the future will not only give dividends in improved livability but also create a positive impact in stemming the massive brain drain we currently face. Our youth — our future — are not finding any opportunities where they can invest their talents and capabilities in their own land.

The future beckons. We are presently experiencing the fourth wave of the industrial revolution. Artificial intelligence, robotics and the increasing digitalisation of all aspects of life are creating new kinds of urban spaces where technology is enabling smarter, more climate-friendly forms of built environment, modes of mobility, security, waste management and energy use.

A divided city cannot become a sustainable city.

Envisioning new models of business and finance are emerging with a surge in startups and entrepreneurship, creating more opportunities for employment and business, and establishing green economies. We need to create an enabling space for all this. A shift to a green tech city development model could open up a new green, economic power base in the city. Walkable cities, a vibrant public space — all this becomes possible when a green vision gets synergised with technical innovation.

The city has been intensely divided, a victim of political short-sightedness, vested agendas of a few and rising levels of incompetence, corruption and neglect. For a city as diversified, fragmented and complicated as Karachi, any transition will only have optimal benefits if they are embedded within a shared vision that places within its umbrella all critical stakeholders.

Let not engage in another political tussle, lacking focus and causing further harm. Let's conduct a real diagnosis and address social injustice, integrity and physical degradation — the festering wounds of this city. ■

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BY MAHIR ALI

Uncle Sam at 250

IT'S appropriate that the marks are off as the US marks its semicentennial on Saturday. Many of the fairytales about liberty, equality and democracy, perpetuated across the centuries as an exceptional nation's founding myths, he shattered at the altar of autocracy.

Ironies abound. The founding myths of America suggest that the year of independence was chiefly about banishing the tyranny associated with British colonial rule. Yet, as the nation turns 250, it walks in the shadow of a would-be tyrant. There is resistance now as there was then, but this time the machine is self-imposed.

Even back in 1776, the triumph centred beyond the justified demand for 'no taxation without representation' to the right to retain slaves. Slavery would not be abolished for nearly 90 years, following a civil war that cost up to 750,000 lives. The mildly hopeful period of Reconstruction that followed ended in a horrific backlash. Exactly 100 years separated the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 from the Voting Rights Act of 1965, seen as the culmination of a civil rights movement whose hard-gained achievements are being reversed by an administration dedicated to the concept of white supremacy.

In 1952, called upon to deliver an Independence Day oration, the celebrated African-American intellectual Frederick Douglass informed his largely white audience: "What to the American slave is your Fourth of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him — the ... injustice and cruelty to which he is the ... victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are ... heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and ... hymns — all but hypocrisy — a thin veil to cover up crimes..."

"This is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of these United States, at this very hour."

That powerful diatribe still rings true. It was 125 years later that another great orator, Martin Luther King Jr, described his country as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today". King was assassinated precisely a year after that 1967 speech, in which he also declared: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defence than on programmes of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

Many nations fall in that depressing category, but none of them even remotely approaches the 84.5 trillion demanded for America's inefficient war machine, with

supplementary billions sought for Donald Trump's Iranian misadventure.

Meanwhile, Princeton historian Eddie Gibbie's book *America, USA: How Race Shaped the Nation's Architecture*, published just five weeks ago, begins with the brutally honest sentence: "I do not love America, and never have, especially now." A longside race, one can't ignore the disparities of gender and class.

The resistance against these trends is best encapsulated in Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*. Over the decades, victories have been accompanied or followed by monumental defeats. On the international front, Chairman Johnson's *American Dream* trilogy offers evidence of imperial disasters during the so-called Pax Americana.

It would be unfair to say that America has no redeeming features. A few politicians might serve as counter-examples, alongside a plethora of authors, poets and musicians — most of the latter ancestrally linked to enslaved Africans and Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe.

Until recently, the US could boast of reputationally outstanding educational institutions. But, in many respects, progress is going down the drain, with an open war against diversity, equity, inclusion, women's rights, freedom of speech and peaceful resistance. Any clarifying approach to history is now effectively verboten.

It's inconceivable that official historians will reflect on the genocide of Native Americans that accompanied independence, the brutal legacy of slavery, the wars of conquest that sliced off half of Mexico and appropriated much else, the support for military dictators and other tyrants, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the unrelenting efforts to control or crush freedom-seeking forces across the Global South, the depredations inflicted on Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and now Iran, and the backing that has enabled Israel to perpetrate a genocide.

One could assume that with some of its worst instincts on display under Trump, the US has ascended to the apogee of its malevolence at home and abroad. But who can confidently say that worse might not lie ahead? For the moment, it should suffice to echo Douglass from 174 years ago: "This Fourth July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn." ■

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FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1976 | Fifty years ago

Baluchistan PA revived

ISLAMABAD: The Baluchistan Assembly stands revived with the expiry of the Presidential proclamation of Dec 31, 1975 under Article 234 of the Constitution, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Malik Mohammad Akhtar said today (June 30). The Minister was asked to explain the Order issued by the Government ... under which the Governor of Baluchistan has been directed to assume all functions and powers of the provincial Government. Malik Akhtar said the proclamation dated Dec 31, 1975, could not last more than six months. ... He said that under today's order, the Governor has assumed all functions ... of the provincial Government which under Article 179 of the Constitution vests in the Chief Minister and the provincial Ministers. He said, it has been provided in the Order that the Chief Minister and the Ministers shall cease to hold office forthwith.

The Law Minister said previously the Baluchistan Government stood suspended for a period of six months. ... [As per the] text of the notification ... Any reference in the Constitution to the provincial Government or Chief Minister shall, in relation to the province of Baluchistan, be construed as a reference to the Governor. — News agencies

1951 | Seventy-five years ago

Operations to close

LONDON: The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company said on Friday (June 29) it would close down its entire operations in Iran within next 10 days. Mr Basil R. Jackson, General Director of the firm which was nationalised by Iran, said there was no chance for a settlement of the current oil dispute as long as Dr Mohammad Mossadegh is Iran's Premier. The Company's announcement said the British employees in Iran oil field were being transferred into the great refinery port of Abadan in preparation for shutting down of operations.

Mr Jackson said in a broadcast of American newspaper correspondents in London he believed the outcome of the crisis would be a complete stoppage of the entire Iranian flow of oil 31,700,000 tons last year.

The Anglo-Iranian Company said its workers would remain in Abadan for the time being but would be removed hastily if lives were threatened. The British Foreign Secretary, Mr Herbert Morrison, said ... the Iranian oil may stop flowing over the lack of bankers to carry it. ... He called on them "to remain together" and said their safety was the Government's first consideration. — News agencies

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@dawn.com

Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

Sugarcane mafia is draining economy



SUGARCANE is among the most water-intensive crops. Agriculture experts estimate that producing one kilogramme of sugar may consume nearly 1,500 to 2,000 litres of water. In a water-stressed country like Pakistan, such extravagant use of precious water resources is nothing short of alarming. Pakistan's rivers, reservoirs and underground aquifers are already under severe stress due to climate change, erratic rainfall and poor water management. Yet, sugarcane continues to occupy millions of acres, often in regions unsuitable for such thirsty cultivation.

The tragedy becomes even deeper when one compares the economic returns of sugarcane with alternative crops. Cotton, wheat, rice, pulses and oilseeds are strategically vital for food security, exports and industrial sustainability. Cotton, in particular, has historically been the backbone of Pakistan's textile industry. However, as sugarcane acreage expanded aggressively over the years, cotton cultivation steadily shrank.

The consequences are now painfully visible. Pakistan, once among the world's major cotton producers, has increasingly become dependent on imported cotton. This is not merely an agricultural imbalance; it is a strategic economic failure. Valuable foreign exchange is spent on importing bales of raw cotton, while domestic fertile land remains tied up with water-hungry sugarcane.

Equally disturbing is the economics of sugar itself. Despite enormous subsidies, preferential policies, water consumption, soft financing and periodic government interventions, locally produced sugar often remains more expensive than imported sugar. In effect, the nation bears a double burden: first through subsidised production, and second, through inflated consumer prices. The ordinary citizen pays more, while national resources continue to drain.

The sugar sector's political economy has also largely contributed to this situation.

Successive governments have found themselves unable or unwilling to rationalise sugarcane cultivation because of the influence wielded by powerful stakeholders and associated business interests.

Consequently, policy decisions that should be guided primarily by national interest and agricultural sustainability often become hostage to short-term political considerations.

Meanwhile, groundwater tables continue to fall. Canal systems remain silted and broken. Farmers cultivating less water-intensive crops struggle for support and pricing stability. The country imports edible oil, cotton and even food items that could otherwise be cultivated more efficiently on the same lands that are currently devoted to sugarcane.

Pakistan urgently requires a comprehensive crop rationalisation policy based on water economics, export potential, food security and environmental sustainability. Water-intensive crops must gradually be shifted towards regions naturally suited for them, while incentives should encourage farmers to return towards cotton, oilseeds, pulses and other strategically essential crops.

Modern irrigation methods, including drip and sprinkler systems, must replace obsolete flood irrigation practices that waste colossal volumes of water every year. Above all, agricultural policy must be liberated from vested interests. Unless corrective measures are undertaken with sincerity, future generations may inherit not only a weakened national economy, but also a chronic and irreversible water crisis.

Shehriq M. Marwan
Karachi

NBP apathy

PENSIONERS have been facing multiple problems owing to the deplorable state of affairs at the Cash Branch in Lahore of the National Bank of Pakistan (NBP), which primarily serves a large number of retired civil and military pensioners.

The branch presents a chaotic and undignified environment, resembling a crowded marketplace rather than a financial institution. The situation becomes particularly distressing during the first week of each month when pension distributions are underway.

Elderly pensioners are forced to endure long hours in overcrowded conditions with no proper seating arrangements or facilities. There is a glaring absence of any dedicated help-desk or staff to guide customers, resulting in confusion and unnecessary hardship. The plight of women pensioners is even more concerning. With no separate counters or arrangements, they are left to navigate the same congested spaces.

A particularly harsh requirement is the mandatory physical submission of life certificates by pensioners twice a year.

While all concerns related to fraudulent withdrawals in the name of deceased pensioners is understandable, compelling elderly individuals to appear in person reflects a lack of empathy and administrative innovation.

As a 79-year-old cancer survivor confined to a wheelchair, I can personally attest to the immense difficulty and indignity this entails. The use of digital verification systems, including biometric and facial recognition technologies, can provide a more inclusive and efficient solution. Similarly, mobile or home-based verification services for senior citizens could be explored.

Moreover, the bank's digital services leave much to be desired. My own mobile banking application has remained non-functional for the last six months despite repeated visits to the branch and escalation to higher authorities. The NBP senior management should take immediate steps to address these issues.

M. Shaban Uppal
Lahore

Electoral lessons

AS a matter of tradition, electoral mandates in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) used to favour candidates supported by the political party in power as formalised in the recent elections, however, candidates affiliated with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawa (PML-N) were unable to get this mandate. This should be cause of concern for the ruling party, and it needs to do some soul searching.

In a democracy, there is a shelf life for individual politicians. The manner in which an election campaign is conducted has an impact on election results. Past performance matters. Politicians on the campaign trail need to woo voters and convince them.

It is important to display humility during election campaigns to win people's hearts and minds. As a matter of fact, over-exposure in the shape of government-funded advertisements works negatively. One can only hope that some critical lessons might have been learnt by all concerned.

Mohd Tariq Ali
Lahore

Difficult times

JUST about every nation in the world has faced extreme hunger at some point in its history, including the countries that are today part of the developed world. We do not have to go too far back in history to see what the Great Depression did to the "modern" world.

France, one of the world's richest and most powerful countries today, was once in a very similar situation where people

were so hungry that they had no choice, but to take to the streets, leading to what we today know as the French Revolution. Ultimately, the people went on to overthrow their government.

People need to be truly sympathetic towards the poor, and work to support the impoverished instead of putting others down. With the world facing one crisis after another, this is time to look beyond one's own self, hoping something positive will emerge sooner rather than later.

Daphne Smith
Mississippi, USA

A matter of record

THIS is with reference to the fact, pungent and as usual highly-readable column "Wires & Grids" (May 26) by F.S. Aghaibadi, which carried a statement, saying: "... (Modi, on May 26, 2025) completed 12



years in power. He is the longest serving elected prime minister of India, surpassing the tenure of the middle of Indira-gandhi — Jawaharlal Nehru." However, the factual record shows that Nehru served as the first prime minister of India initially on an interim basis from August 15, 1947, to January 20, 1950, till the adoption of the Constitution which led to the holding of the first elections.

He then led the Indian National Congress to victory in three general elections, and continued to office till his demise on May 27, 1964. This makes for a total of 66 years and 286 days. Even after subtracting his tenure before the adoption of the Constitution and the first elections, Nehru's total time in office was still more than 64 years, which is more than Modi's tenure of 12 years.

Nehru was an elected prime minister for 16 years and 286 days because his interim 1947-50 tenure was the continuation of his elected status as the Head of Government from the pre-independence 1946 elections.

Nasim ur-Rahman
Karachi

► **WAITING AREA:** The lack of a waiting facility for patients' attendants at the emergency department of the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC) causes great discomfort to the people as they are compelled to stand for hours and have to sit on the floor when exhaustion becomes overwhelming. Being one of the largest public hospitals in Pakistan, the JPMC receives a large number of patients from across the country. A functional waiting area is essential for the orderly and accompanying the patients. The hospital administration should set up proper seating arrangements outside the ward for convenience of the public. Sameer Amoor
Karachi

► **UNMANAGED WASTE:** Kotli and its adjacent localities are suffering from a growing issue of unmanaged solid waste. Piles of uncollected waste are choking streets, drains and public spaces. The matter was recently highlighted when the Atad Jamana and Kothohir (AJK) Legislative Assembly constituted a bipartisan committee to specifically address civic issues in Kotli, including waste disposal, clean drinking water as well as sewerage. However, in neighbourhood AJK areas, infrastructure exists on paper, but ground reports show glaring gaps in functionality and execution of development projects. The people of Kotli deserve clean streets, functional drains and a system that works daily. Khanoob Khan
Kotli, AJK

► **OFFICIAL EMBLEM:** Recently, I needed to use the official Government of Sindh emblem. However, my search led to confusion, as I was unable to determine the correct version because no official website or authority, including the Chief Minister House, could provide guidance. As such, some feature "780" inscribed in Urdu/Arabic within the star at the top, while others show three dots instead. Can someone help me understand which version is correct? It would be helpful in easing the confusion if a detailed description was made available on the official government website. Zaheer Ali Rawat
Karachi

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Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is Dawn's External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of Dawn's code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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