

comment

THOUGHT
FOR THE DAY

You cannot subsidise irresponsibility and expect people to be more responsible
— Thomas Sowell, American economist

Irresponsible citizens contribute majorly to city's chaos

To rid the western side of Borivli railway station of traffic congestion, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation and Borivli traffic police have blocked 12 crossings on a 100-metre section of SV Road.

According to the traffic police, thousands of vehicles ply this stretch daily. There are delays in traversing this distance because of pedestrians dashing across the road, crossing over at several junctures. A traffic police officer stated in the report that they

decided to block all gaps used by pedestrians to cross the road, and these 12 gaps needed to have permanent closures.

Barricades and fences have been set up to prevent people from climbing over. This has made locals happy, since they negotiate that distance faster and with less trouble. Some of them were taking narrow lanes as shortcuts to reach their destinations in time, which is not a good idea at all. There is a real need to look at sever-

al traffic-dense areas, especially challenging stretches of roads and assess if people climbing over short dividers or even gaps are slowing down traffic, posing a danger not only to themselves but others, too, while running across the road amidst moving traffic.

While some dividers are low, so people are able to clamber over them. Sometimes, fence bars have been twisted and broken so that people can squeeze through them. There are gaps in between anti-crossing infra allow-

ing people to push through them.

Those crossing over are in a hurry, and any gap suits them. They try to get across using lacunae in road infrastructure and exploit the spaces.

While repairs are important and plugging gaps becomes vital, people need legitimate crossing points for safety. Crossings are made for a reason, barricades are installed for yet another reason, so adhere to rules. Like they say, mind the gap — for all the right reasons.

LETTERS

Her mother pushes her chair, Rutvi pushes limits

This refers to 'Where there's a wheel, there's a bullseye!'. Wheelchair-bound archer Rutvi Lolge, with her mother's unwavering support, shows how talent and grit can defy all odds. Hopefully, her story inspires the Archery Association of India, NGOs, and philanthropists to support her dream.

AMIT BANERJEE

People like Rutvi Lolge inspire all of us

Athletes like Rutvi Lolge and Sheetal Devi inspire not just differently abled athletes but everyone, showing how determination can triumph against all odds.

BAL GOVIND

BEST, it's time to revive the classics

This refers to 'A double-decker dream of a comeback'. Commuters have always loved double-decker buses. It's time for BEST to bring them back on long routes for easier travel.

CAJETAN PETER D'SOUZA

Arresting Jawad before he could escape was smart

Apropos of 'Al-Falah chairman Jawad Ahmed remanded to ED custody', agencies acted quickly after the November 10 Delhi blast. The National Investigation Agency's probe and Enforcement Directorate's timely arrest before his escape show strong coordination, with magisterial proceedings ensuring the case proceeds efficiently.

PV PRAKASH

have your say!



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Practising in imperfect conditions

LA VIE EN
ROSA



Rosalyn D'Mello

"Practice" is a word to which I feel increasingly attuned in my late thirties. Possibly because it has accrued deeper connotations across the wider span of my lived experiences, even though the word registered itself in my vocabulary since childhood, I could date my intentional use of it to when I was in the third standard, so about eight years old, and joined the children's choir. We had 'practice' every Thursday, if I remember correctly. I had also begun weekly piano practice around then. In school, we had "marching" practice all through December ahead of Sport's Day, and we usually called it "practice" if we were cast in some school play or singing competition and needed to attend daily rehearsals.

The frequency of our usage of the word begins to wane over time, however, especially as we get busy earning a living and find ourselves short on time for hobbies. Unless you have friends who are getting married and you need to brush up on your choreographed dancing skills, one doesn't 'attend' practice, nor do we necessarily even dare to chart new waters and take on a new vocation.

I was 10 years old when I knew I wanted to be a writer. In every school "autograph book" I signed, I would list my dream as wanting to be a "poetess". At some point, it changed to psychologist, but the dream of wanting to be a writer remained. It was what moved me to pursue a graduate degree in English literature. I had no one in my immediate circle of friends and acquaintances who could show me the ropes. I wrote sappy poems that I only shared with my best friend. I read a lot, not just because reading books was part of my syllabus, but because I had internalised that in order to write better, you had to digest as many literary works as you could. There were no creative writing programmes in my student days, so I had no way of knowing that to build a writing prac-

Sustaining a writer's vocation is deeply linked to an individual's commitment to words, not when they are succeeding, but when they are floundering, even failing



I knew I wanted to be a writer since I was 10 years old. In every school 'autograph book' I signed, I would list my dream as wanting to be a 'poetess'. REPRESENTATION PIC/ISTOCK

tice, you had to commit to writing regularly. You had to build a discipline of attentive listening and intentional note-taking. I didn't know any of this, but the one thing I did, intuitively, was maintain a diary. I didn't do daily entries, but I did attempt regularity. I still have the first disciplined diary I maintained during the first year of my undergraduate degree. Most of my entries recount the pure joy of making contact with new ideas, with professors who excited me, who made their subjects come alive, professors who have now passed away, like Eddie.

One of the reasons I've been thinking of practice so much is because I recently undertook my first art writing assignment in more than a year. Because the editor is a friend, and the artist I'm writing about is someone who has influenced my writing. Where, ordinarily, a piece of this nature would have taken me two weeks at best, amid other work and assignments, this time I've taken two months! Not only because I feel "un-

practiced" but because the demands of motherhood and full-time work make it so difficult to find the time to immerse myself in such writing. Because to get into a state of flow, you need to be able to give yourself time. You need to try out a few sentences, see how they align, delete if necessary, begin again from scratch, even. In order to "save" time, I got my recording transcribed by AI only to learn that doing the transcripts myself is actually a significant part of my practice. It helps me pick up on what is unspoken, what lies beneath the surface of a conversation.

As my 10-year alliance with mid-day as a columnist comes to a close, I've been reflecting on what it has meant for me to publish such a feminist diary every week for a decade. This discipline definitely altered the tenor of my writing. This intervening period is book-ended by two of my own books. I wrote my first column after my debut book, and will soon write my last ahead of the interna-

tional publication of my next book, which owes its literariness to the discipline that was nurtured because of this column.

I'm toying with the idea of a Substack newsletter to continue the practice. I'll let you know if I do, so you can subscribe for my updates. I've been wrestling with all the scraps, leftovers, and notations made over 15 years of my writing practice. Maybe what they need is to live in a virtual house. I still don't know at what point I truly "became" a writer. I've accepted that sustaining this vocation is hinged to one's commitment to words, not when one is succeeding but when one is floundering, even failing. To be a writer is to keep at it, even if the tap runs dry.

Deliberating on the life and times of every woman, Rosalyn D'Mello is a reputable art critic and the author of A Handbook For My Lover. She posts @rosad1985 on Instagram

Send your feedback to mailbag@mid-day.com

'He is no longer the Srikant with swag and sharpness'

Returning with 'The Family Man 3' after four years, Manoj Bajpayee discusses how his much-loved spy has lost his mojo this season as he locks horns with Jaideep Ahlawat

MOHAR BASU

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SRIKANT Tiwari's fans are eager to meet him in the third season of *The Family Man*. But as soon as we sit down for a chat with Manoj Bajpayee, who plays arguably India's most loved spy in the Prime Video series, he makes it clear that his character has changed in the four years since the second edition ended. "Srikant is not in his top form right now. He's a little wobbly," starts the actor.

Despite being a spy thriller, a huge part of the series' appeal lies in creators Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK's treatment of the family dynamics. Bajpayee reveals that the opening episode will establish how the protagonist is in a rocky place with his family. The actor explains, "Any common person derives their strength from the family. Even if there is a quarrel in the family, the day is messed up. So, he is not

Having shot a part of the series in Nagaland, Manoj Bajpayee says the warmth of the locals stood out for him. "The villages are worth going to, just to see how much they believe in cleanliness and discipline," he says.

Jaideep badhiya actor hai! When you work with brilliant actors, you feel great as an artiste. You feed off each other

Manoj Bajpayee



Manoj Bajpayee in 'The Family Man'

PICS/YOUTUBE, INSTAGRAM

DID YOU KNOW?

Manoj Bajpayee first teamed up with Jaideep Ahlawat for 'Chittagong' (2011). The historical drama saw them work with Ahlawat's Film & Television Institute of India batchmates Rajkumar Rao and Vijay Varma.



A still from 'Chittagong'

the Srikant Tiwari with his swag and sharpness. His job is gone; he is trying to get his strength and mojo back."

It helps then that the drama is elevated by Jaideep Ahlawat, who plays his nemesis in the series. For Bajpayee, it was a delight to reunite with the actor after *Chittagong* (2011) and *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012). "We would keep meeting on and off," says Bajpayee. If an on-screen face-off between the two powerful actors sounds like a cinephile's dream, Bajpayee agrees that they both elevated each other's work. "Jaideep ba-

dhiya actor hai! When you work with brilliant actors, you feel great as an artiste. You feed off each other."

For the latest season, Raj-DK have taken the story to Northeast India. Considering we all witnessed the conflict in Manipur last year, we ask Bajpayee how much of the local politics makes it to the show. "A lot of it does, but the show is primarily set in Nagaland. Not all the states in the Northeast are going through [conflict]. Entertainment is always our primary motive, but that hint of what we want to say shows in the story."

Small film, big ambition

Amid indie filmmakers crying foul about screen distribution, director Subodh Khanolkar and Zee5 head decode taking Marathi film 'Dashavatar' to a wider audience through streaming

MOHAR BASU

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WHILE 46 indie filmmakers across the country are planning to start a collective to champion small-budget films and ensure equitable screens for them (We are developing a collective of filmmakers, Nov 19), Marathi filmmaker Subodh Khanolkar feels he is in a place of privilege. The director's latest release, *Dashavatar*, not only had a strong run in theatres, but is also being aggressively promoted by Zee5 since it dropped on November 14.

Starring Dilip Prabhavalkar, the September release originally opened with 600 shows. Soon, bolstered by strong word-of-mouth, the Marathi thriller jumped to 800 shows. But the bigger push came when it premiered on Zee5,

with the streamer executing a 15-day pre-release promotional plan. The platform also employed targeted advertising on Instagram to grab the attention of viewers interested in mythology. Hema VR, business head, Marathi ZEE5, explains, "To ensure *Dashavatar* sustains momentum, we are activating a multi-layered strategy that goes beyond just Mumbai and Pune. We're reaching deeper pockets of the country, including Solapur, Kolhapur, Sangli, and more through targeted digital ads and strong social media amplification."

Khanolkar is ecstatic that his movie, a blend of Konkani folklore and mystery, has resonated with people far and wide. "When I saw *Dashavatar* receive appreciation not only from Marathi audience, but also from viewers of other languages, it felt reassuring that our efforts were moving in the right direction," he says.

'Dashavatar' has become the first Marathi film to be dubbed into Malayalam



A still from the film

Subodh Khanolkar

'I have a right to blackmail Naseer saab'

Having bonded with Naseeruddin Shah since 'Taj', director Vibhu Puri reveals how he almost blackmailed the senior actor to star in 'Gustaakh Ishq'

PRIYANKA SHARMA

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MANY films are born as adaptation of books. In contrast, *Gustaakh Ishq* was born because a book could not be adapted. First-time producer Manish Malhotra had initially approached Vibhu Puri to adapt a 400-page book. When the director said the adaptation would take far too long, Malhotra asked him one question: "Do you have something that you want to make?" Enter *Gustaakh Ishq*, starring Naseeruddin Shah, Vijay Varma, and Fatima Sana Shaikh.

Puri recalls, "I told Manish this story

set in old Delhi and Punjab. As soon as he heard it, Manish said he wanted to make it."

For the director, reuniting with the veteran actor after *Taj: Divided by Blood* was a dream come true. But the dream was on the verge of not materialising. "Initially, I thought he would be khadoos. But Naseer saab was so nice to me during *Taj* that I fell in love with him. He agreed to star in this film, but then we had some date issues. So, Manish and I went to his house and I said, 'If you don't want to do it, tell me who I



Director Vibhu Puri is returning to feature films 10 years after his last offering, 'Hawaizaada', led by Ayushmann Khurrana

should work with.' Naseer said that I was blackmailing him, to which I said, 'Yes, I will. I have a right to do that to you,' he grins.

Romances have dominated the box office in 2025. As he brings his love story, Puri believes the audience has had enough of action offerings. "Between 1987 and 1989, films like *Aag* Hi



A still from 'Gustaakh Ishq'

Aag [1987] and *Aag Ka Gola* [1989] were being made. Then suddenly, there was *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* [1988], followed by *Maine Pyar Kiya* [1989] and *Aashiqui* [1990]. It changed the entire decade. After COVID too, everyone thought people will only watch event films. But in the end, a person needs happiness, love, and affection."

DECCAN
Chronicle

21 NOVEMBER 2025

Governors and bills: More clarity by SC was needed

The Supreme Court's answers to the presidential reference on an earlier verdict of the court on the powers of state Governors and the President while acting under Article 200 and Article 201 of the Constitution settles part of the controversy that cropped up in many states over the same but leaves unattended some of the substantial issues that the court itself calls "strike at the root of the continuation of our republican and democratic way and the Constitution's federal character".

It is welcome that the court has brought some finality to the matter of whether a Governor can or cannot sit on a bill forever. This was a badly needed clarification as several of them sat on bills for as long as four and five years. The Tamil Nadu Governor even went to the extent of publicly declaring that if the Governor withholds assent "it means bill is dead". Even the Union government took the stand that the Governor can withhold the bill without returning to the House. The court has upended that option by decreeing that "withholding of assent must be accompanied by the returning of the bill to the Assembly" and insisted that "to permit the Governor to withhold the bill without returning it to the house will derogate the principle of federalism". That is a mighty observation upholding the basic structure of our Constitution.

The court has been, however, categorical in that there is no constitutional sanction for the concept of "deemed assent", mooted by an earlier verdict in a case moved by the Tamil Nadu government aggrieved by the inordinate delay by the Governor in signing bills into laws. The court's position that prescribing time limits for both the Governor and the President to take decisions on bills are beyond its remit is justifiable. It has only upheld the constitutional principle of separation of powers while deciding that the decisions are not justiciable.

However, the court appears to have failed in appreciating the circumstances which forced the concept of deemed assent, and has offered no fresh remedy for it except saying the Governor and the President will decide within a "reasonable time".

The cardinal issue that brought the court into the very question on Article 200 is the self-assumed power by Governors who chose to sit in judgment of bills passed by state Assemblies though they have no constitutional backing for that act. It is back to square one when the court says that it can exercise a limited power of judicial review and direct the Governor to decide in a time-bound manner without prescribing a time limit. It is interesting that the court refers to the federal structure and the rights of the state legislatures but refused to consider the very question of whether a state government would move a constitutional court if the Governor had decided on a bill in a "reasonable time".

The courts have repeatedly said that the Constitution is a living document and can be interpreted to address issues that come up from time to time. The presidential reference and the Supreme Court's reply to it can very well form the basis for a new discourse on the legislature's rights vis-a-vis gubernatorial powers when it comes to legislation.

Maoist insurgency on deathbed

The death of dreaded Maoist commander and strategist Madvi Hidma and IED expert Meturi Joka Rao, also known as Tech Shankar, in a police encounter at Maredumilli in Alluri Sitaramaraju district in Andhra Pradesh, closes a chapter on the Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) in India.

Born in Purvati village in Sukma district in Chhattisgarh, Hidma began as a Bastar Dalam member before rising through the ranks of the Dandakarnya Special Zonal Committee. Several states had announced a reward for Hidma who was considered an expert in guerrilla attacks.

Over the past two decades, he allegedly masterminded major attacks on security forces, including the 2010 ambush in Dantewada that killed 76 personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the 2013 Jhiram Ghati attack that killed 27 people, including senior Congress leaders, and the 2021 Sukma ambush that left 22 paramilitary personnel dead.

The CPI-Maoist cadre base was depleted, especially after a deadly 21-day counter-insurgency operation in Karregutta, where Central forces used drones and satellite images to guide around 5,000 security personnel. Several top Maoist leaders were killed and a large number of Maoist cadres laid down their arms recently in Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh, highlighting the fact that the Left-wing Extremism has lost its popular support.

As things stand today, the armed Naxal ideology which started in West Bengal's Naxalbari village in July 1972 is on its deathbed and the country could as well be free of armed Maoists by March 2026 — a deadline by Union home minister Amit Shah.

However, if policymakers credit this success only to the military ruthlessness, they would be mistaken. Due credit should also be awarded to the government's welfare and development policies, which weaned popular support away from the Maoists and strengthened the hands of security forces. The Narendra Modi government must be congratulated for ending one of the country's long-festering internal security issues.

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Subhani



After Hasina verdict, will the spirit of '71 survive?



Monideepa Banerjee

What's the plan for Vijay Diwas this year? On December 16,

1971, the Pakistani Army surrendered to the Indian Army in Dhaka, leading to the birth of Bangladesh. The Indian Army marks the day annually, with the grandest observance at Kolkata's Fort William, the headquarters of the Eastern Command which led the campaign to liberate then East Pakistan. Last year, with Sheikh Hasina already taking refuge in New Delhi, the ceremony at Fort William was subdued and fewer than usual Bangladeshi defence officers or freedom fighters of the Mukti Bahini attended. Will there even be a token exchange of goodwill that day this year?

This question may not be India's top priority today as it grapples to manage its relationship with Bangladesh, its most steadfast friend in the neighbourhood for the last 15 years. But it is symbolic of the diplomatic tight spot India finds itself in. Bangladesh wants its former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, to be extradited to her country, now she has been sentenced to death for "crimes against humanity" by a court that Dhaka recognises as legitimate, but the rest of the world does not. India, legally, does not have to send her back. There is enough wriggle room in the extradition treaty. But not sending her back will be viewed, Dhaka has warned New Delhi, as an "unfriendly" act.

It's an unhappy predicament for India. Not only does it risk alienating Bangladesh at the political level, the anti-India sentiment among ordinary Bangladeshis is an unhappy reality that is going nowhere. Bangladeshis would like good neighbourly relations but the violence of

July-August 2024 has left deep scars. That India is sheltering the "perpetrator" of that pain is a cause of grief.

India shares a 4,000-km border with Bangladesh and has suffered from radical Islamic groups slipping in and causing violent unrest here at home. Also at stake is the growing warmth between Dhaka under the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus and Islamabad. The frequency of visits by Pakistani ministers and top military officers is reason for great disquiet. There is also the superpower trio — US, China and Russia — keeping a strategic eye on the Bay of Bengal.

Given the complexities, India needs to design a tactical response keeping all of this in mind. The MEA's guarded statement, saying it has "noted" the verdict on Sheikh Hasina and was "willing to engage with all stakeholders" to ensure "peace, democracy, inclusion and stability in that country", needs a take two. And soon.

Some Bangladesh watchers have lately suggested a solution that India may eventually have to explore. It may use its good offices to pursue asylum for Sheikh Hasina in another country. Western nations did not oblige when she fled to India in August 2024. But at that time, the option of her settling in a Middle Eastern or Central Asian country was on the anvil and, analysts suggest, it might be time for India to revisit that option. Also, Sheikh Hasina now has the death penalty hanging over her head. That might persuade countries opposed to the death sentence, such as in Europe, to consider asylum.

Return to Bangladesh? Shiekh Hasina's son Sajeeb Wazed has been quoted as saying that he is confident his mother will return to Bangladesh sooner or later. But the message Dhaka is sending out is, no entry, unless she arrives to appeal against her sentence in the Bangladesh Supreme Court, which is something technically possible but improbable. In fact, the Supreme Court earlier this week struck down one of Sheikh Hasina's earliest and most controversial decisions as Prime Minister. In 2010, she abolished the system laid down by the Bangladesh Constitution of a caretaker government overseeing parliamentary elections.

That was in 2010. On Thursday, November 20, the Supreme Court restored the concept of caretaker government. That decision, to do away with the caretaker system, was among the first steps Ms Hasina took after becoming Prime Minister in 2009 that foretold her arguably authoritarian rule in later years. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party had tried to fiddle with that system when it was in power, too, but it resulted in a brief spell of military rule before elections in 2009 that Sheikh Hasina won. Every subsequent election was under Sheikh Hasina's government. It would be obtuse to claim they were entirely free and fair elections and this pushed the BNP to boycott them. That cast a shadow over the legitimacy of the elections, but Sheikh Hasina sailed on regardless.

India did not ever bat an eyelid because of Sheikh Hasina quickly proved to be a good friend, cracking down on Indian insurgents and other anti-Indian forces that had found shelter in Bangladesh during previous regimes. For example, the Jamaate-e-Mujahideen Bang-

ladesh (JMB), a radical Islamist group that set up sleeper cells in West Bengal and beyond and triggered the Khagragarh bomb blast on October 2, 2014, Sheikh Hasina dismantled post-haste. She also chased Paresh Barua, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) militant, out of his safe haven in Dhaka.

And then there is history. India's ties with Sheikh Hasina go back nearly 55 years when it played a historic role in assisting her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman fight to free erstwhile East Pakistan from the dominance of Islamabad in the west. After Bangladesh was born in 1971, Mujibur Rahman took over but his tenure was cut short on August 15, 1975, when a military coup gunned him and most of his family down. Sheikh Hasina and her sister Rehana were out of the country then and survived. For them, New Delhi became a second home for years.

No wonder then that it is with great confidence that Sheikh Hasina's son says his mother will return to Bangladesh one day. It's a denouement India desires. India's relationship with Bangladesh during the years of military rule were not cordial. Its relationship with the Yunus regime is frosty, too, but the government has indicated it is ready to warm up once there is an elected government in place following February polls. That has been welcomed by Dhaka.

This December 16 will go a long way in paving the future of India-Bangladesh ties. Last year, the Bangladesh delegation of military officers and freedom fighters came to Fort William at the very last minute ahead of Vijay Divas and Dhaka celebrated the day but without the traditional military parade at its historic National Parade Square. This Vijay Divas will be a test of the spirit of 1971, which made India and Bangladesh close friends and neighbours. Will that spirit survive?

Monideepa Banerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata and has earlier travelled in and reported from Bangladesh

LETTERS

EIGHTH PAY PANEL

The country can pay her servants what it can afford; calling it peanuts is not correct (*Eighth pay panel: More peanuts for monkeys?*, Nov. 20). The Armed Forces have proved themselves second to none in the world. Referring to everyone as monkeys is inappropriate.

Cmdr K.V. Subramaniam (Retd)
Hyderabad

Government employees (servants) should be seen as people rendering a service. The fact that they have to fight tough competition to get in should not be overlooked. It is worth pondering if a slimmer government will result in inefficiency.

Wg Cdr Satinder Singh (Retd)
Hyderabad

SAFETY AT LIFTS

Continuous monitoring by parents and watchmen/security along with strict enforcement of safety rules is essential when children use lifts (*5-year-old dies after getting stuck in outer grills of lift*, Nov. 20).

P. Vijay Kumar
Hyderabad

SHG PRODUCTS

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy's vision is clear that he wishes to see Telangana and its people prosperous (*State will tie up with Amazon to sell SGH products*, Nov. 20).

M.A. Hadi Shahid
Hyderabad

STARVATION DEATH

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy must not let a single starvation death happen in Telangana especially among children and must initiate an action plan for the same (*8-year-old dies of starvation in Mahbubnagar*, Nov. 20).

Dr Sridevi G.
Secunderabad

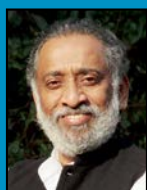
GERIATRIC WARDS

The focus on improving government hospitals shows that the government truly wants public health services to be strong and accessible for everyone (*All govt hospitals to have geriatric wards for elders: Damodar*, Nov. 20). Earlier, a lot of attention went only to a few private hospitals.

T. Kailash Ditya
Hyderabad

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



IRS to MLA in record time in Bihar: Story of Sujit Kumar

There are fast moves in babudom bureaucracy, and then there is the Sujit Kumar story, which has impressed many in service circles.

In just 51 days, Mr Kumar went from principal commissioner in Delhi to BJP MLA from Gaura Bauram in Darbhanga, Bihar. Normally, such transitions take months of paperwork, clearances and political negotiation. In this case, the timeline has raised more than a few eyebrows.

The sequence speaks for itself. On September 13, CBDT issued a promotion list that unusually included 20 IRS-IT officers of the 2001 batch at a level many of their IAS counterparts are still waiting to reach. Mr Kumar was among them. Ten days later, he and others were given postings at their upgraded grade. On September 25, he applied for voluntary retirement. Instead of the standard three-month wait, Rashtrapati Bhavan cleared it in just 15 days. He joined the BJP on October 13, was named a candidate within 24 hours, filed his nomination the next day, went to the polls on November 6, and won on November 14.

What makes the speed more striking is the contrast with others who entered politics the hard way. Former IAS officer R.K. Singh, once a Union minister, was recently dismissed from the BJP for speaking out of turn. No such turbulence for Sujit Kumar, hopefully. His trajectory suggests not just careful planning, but powerful patrons ensuring the gears turned smoothly.

None of this means Mr Kumar lacks merit. He is regarded as bright, ambitious, and politically aware. But few believe this chain of empanelment, VRS

clearance, ticket allocation and electoral victory would have aligned without strong backing from Delhi.

HINTS OF A BIGGER RESHUFFLE IN DELHI

Fresh off a decisive Bihar victory, the Modi government has signalled a sharp bureaucratic reset, one that goes far beyond routine reshuffling. The most telling move is the appointment of V. Srinivas as Rajasthan's new Chief Secretary. A 1989-batch IAS officer with deep central exposure, Mr Srinivas was n't merely repatriated but strategically placed. His tenure as Union secretary in administrative reforms, pensions, and grievances gave him a ringside view of the Centre's governance playbook. Now he's expected to bring that mindset into Jaipur's secretariat.

What makes this move more intriguing is the timing and the tenure. Mr Srinivas is due to retire in September 2026, which means he gets less than a year and a half in the hot seat unless the government grants an extension. That short runway strongly suggests a targeted mission: push through major administrative alignments, tighten state-Centre coordination, and ensure that Rajasthan's bureaucracy operates in sync with national priorities. In other words: he's not here for the scenery. Meanwhile, his predecessor Sudhansh Pant has been pulled back to Delhi, parked briefly as officer on special duty in the Cabinet secretariat, before taking over as secretary, social justice and empowerment next year.

But beyond Jaipur, observers expect stirring happenings at the Centre. Several senior posts, including

petroleum & natural gas, empowerment of persons with disabilities, remain vacant. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is clearly keeping key slots open while rebalancing the administration in line with political priorities.

So, this is a prelude. The real action, many in Delhi believe, is coming at the political level. With key secretary posts at the Centre lying vacant and senior officers being quietly repositioned, the groundwork is being laid for something bigger. The chatter in power corridors is unmistakable — a Union Cabinet reshuffle may also not be far off. A few non-performing ministers could be shown the door, fresh faces may enter, and portfolios could see major realignment.

THE IPS ERA IN CAPFS IS ENDING

For decades, India's Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) have lived with what many CAPF officers call, not entirely jokingly, the "IPS occupation". The Supreme Court has now told them the withdrawal date (reported by this column). With the Court dismissing the Centre's review plea, the May 2025 judgment ordering a phased reduction of IPS deputations has become irreversible. There's even a timer — two years for the transition. No extensions, no polite ambiguity.

Today, half of all IG posts and one-fifth of DIG posts in CAPFs are reserved for IPS officers. That pipeline has shaped careers, morale, and internal hierarchies for decades. Countless CAPF officers have waited 30 years for a shot at an IG rank, only to watch a youngish IPS officer fly in, collect stars, and fly out.

Naturally, the IPS brotherhood is worried. Their argument, which the Home Ministry echoes, is that IPS leadership ensures "functional necessity, lateral talent infusion and national security coordination". Fair enough. But that line rings hollow when CAPF officers themselves run modern counter-insurgency grids, manage lakhs of personnel in remote borders, and command units that look more like light infantry than civil police.

The Supreme Court wasn't buying the security-doom argument either. It pointed out something obvious. Stagnation kills morale, and morale matters in forces tasked with guarding everything from Maoist belts to the Pakistan border. The judgment also did something quietly revolutionary. It said CAPFs must be treated as full Organised Group A Services for cadre matters. That's babu code for "stop treating them like borrowed labour."

One amusing data point in the government's defence: IPS officers make up only 1.4 per cent of the CAPF Group A executive cadre, but it's this tiny segment sitting in the corner office that decides who gets promoted.

Will this dismantle IPS's influence overnight? Unlikely. The turf war will now move into cadre review committees, service rule tinkering, and the bureaucratic trenches of North Block. But something big has shifted.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	85,632.68	0.52
Nifty 50	26,192.15	0.54
S&P 500*	6,741.29	1.47
Dollar (₹)	88.71	0.13
Pound Sterling (₹)	115.88	-0.35
Euro (₹)	102.17	-0.34
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	122,988▼63	-0.05
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.12	0.96
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.536	0.06
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.146	0.015

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Growth of 8 key infra sectors stays flat in Oct.

Growth of eight key infrastructure sectors remained flat in October as expansion in output of petroleum refinery products, fertiliser and steel was offset by a contraction in coal and electricity production. The eight core industries of coal, crude oil, natural gas, petroleum refinery products, electricity, fertiliser, and steel had expanded by 3.3 per cent in September and by 3.8 per cent in October 2024.



TCS raises \$1 bn from TPG for HyperVault

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) raised \$1 billion from private equity group TPG for its AI data center business HyperVault, the firm said. Both the companies will invest a combined 180 billion rupees (\$2 billion) in HyperVault over the next few years. TCS, India's largest software company, will be the majority partner in the joint venture with a 51 per cent stake. TPG will get 27.5 per cent to 49 per cent stake.

EBG sets up Powerhouse with 400 seats

EBG Group launched its 400-seater EBG Powerhouse at Dallas Centre in Hyderabad. This will be its global headquarters. It will spend about \$7 million for the facility over two years. It will support start-ups. The focus will be on electric vehicles, wellness, food and beverages, hospitality, realty, prefab, education, and other verticals, said Dr. Irfan Khan, chairman and founder, EBG Group.

Sonoco launches Performace Hub in Hyderabad

Packaging solutions player Sonoco Products inaugurated the Sonoco Performance Hub in Hyderabad. It had first launched its hub in February 2025 and has transitioned to a permanent facility. The Hyderabad team plays a key role in advancing company's digital transformation, analytics, automation, and emerging technologies to enhance efficiency. It has plans to set up a finance CoE in Hyderabad.

Indian processors to buy diamonds from Botswana

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, NOV. 20

Botswana government has agreed to sell the rough diamonds mined by its miner ODC to be sold directly to India, avoiding the third-country trading hubs. This will bring down the cost of rough diamonds from Botswana for Indian diamond processors.

India and Botswana are in the process of eliminating the multi-layered system that benefits neither miners nor processors. Currently, rough diamonds are auctioned in third country trading hubs like Dubai, Antwerp and Israel, inflating prices before reaching Indian processors. This also reduces profits margins for mining companies. Further, smaller manufacturers in India face barriers to primary markets and pay heavy premiums in the secondary market. The logistics cost also increases the price of the rough diamonds.

Under the direct imports, ODC, the government-owned miner in Botswana will sell the roughs directly to the buyers in India. The special

JEH AEROSPACE LAUNCHES MFG UNIT NEAR HYDERABAD

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, NOV. 20

Atlanta, US-based, Jeh Aerospace announced the launch of a manufacturing facility at Horizon Industrial Parks, Kothur near Hyderabad.

Horizon Industrial Parks is owned and managed by Blackstone Real Estate Funds.

Jeh Aerospace specializes in high-precision aerospace and defense manufacturing, driven by software-defined manufacturing technology.

The new 2 lakh square feet facility named Mach 2 will raise Jeh Aerospace's India manufacturing footprint to over 2.5 lakh sq. ft when it becomes operational in 2026.

"Our new Hyderabad facility is being engineered as a software-defined, AI-augmented system that can think, adapt, and execute with precision at scale," said Vishal Sanghavi, founder and chief executive officer, Jeh Aerospace.



BARODA BNP LAUNCHES U.S. SMALL CAP FUND

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, NOV. 20

Baroda BNP Paribas Asset Management India through its GIFT City branch has launched India's first-ever fund offering to investors which give direct access to the US small-cap market through the Baroda BNP Paribas GIFT US small cap fund.

The newly launched open ended fund is also the first GIFT City-based fund investing in US small-cap companies. The dollar-denominated investment fund leveraging the remittance limits allowed to resident India by RBI under the liberalised remittance scheme under the overseas portfolio investment route.

"As a GIFT City-registered restricted scheme, the Baroda BNP Paribas GIFT US Small Cap Fund is an efficient investment option for investors seeking to diversify their investments into United States small caps," said Sanjay Grover, managing director and chief executive officer of the Baroda BNP Paribas AMC.

LOWER COSTS

BOTH NATIONS eliminating system that benefits neither miners nor processors.

UNDER DIRECT imports, ODC, the govt-owned miner in Botswana, will sell rough diamonds directly to Indian processors.

CURRENTLY, rough diamonds auctioned in third country trading hubs, inflate prices before reaching Indian processors.

AROUND 90% of global roughs reach India for cutting and polishing and this direct linkage with the miners in Botswana will cut costs and increase supply.

JAYANTI SAVALIYA, Regional chairman, GJEPC

materials distribution organisation (SMDO), set up by GJEPC, will act as a sight-holder equivalent or long-term contract partner with De Beers Botswana and ODC. Through annual or term-based supply agreements, SMDO will procure bulk roughs and distribute them to Indian MSMEs. This will support over 3,000 active buyers, ensuring competitive bidding and better price realisation. Lower costs will eventually benefit the end consumer.

"Around 90 per cent of

the global roughs reach India for cutting and polishing. This direct linkage with miners in Botswana will cut costs and increase supply. We hope to see auctions by ODC to start in the special notified zone in Surat in a few months," said Jayanti Savaliya, regional chairman, GJEPC.

Botswana too benefits from shifting auctions from traditional trading hubs like Antwerp or Dubai to Surat. It gains greater control over its distribution chain and reduces transaction costs.

Bitcoin in free fall, touches \$88,522

New York, Nov. 20: The great crypto crash of 2025 entered a new phase on Thursday, as Bitcoin plunged to its lowest level in seven months, extending the more than \$1 trillion wipeout across the digital-asset world.

The largest cryptocurrency fell to as low as \$88,522 before recovering some ground early Thursday, with the latest rout hitting investors big and small—from retail dip-buyers to digital-asset treasury firms whose stock premiums are vanishing.

Token prices regained some ground after Nvidia gave a strong revenue forecast, helping counter concern that a global surge in AI spending is poised to fizzle. The next psychological thresholds lie around \$85,000 and \$80,000, with the 2025 trough of \$74,425, set during April's tariff-related turbulence, in focus.

The total market capitalisation of cryptocurrencies peaked at about \$4.3 trillion on October 6 and now hovers near \$3.2 tril-

lion. Following a cascade of forced liquidations on October 10, when more than \$19-billion of leveraged crypto positions were offloaded, the market's fragility was exposed. That event triggered a chain reaction of margin calls, ETF outflows and halted fresh buyer interest.

"Investors are stabbing in the dark a bit - they haven't got any direction on macro, so all they can see is what on-chain whales are doing and they're getting quite worried about it," said James Butterfill, head of research at CoinShares.

Bitcoin's surge to just north of \$126,000 earlier in the year was based on twin pillars: expectations of multiple US Fed interest-rate cuts and growing institutional adoption. Both narratives have stalled while momentum buyers have beaten a retreat.

The fall is dealing a heavy blow to digital-asset treasury firms, whose valuations were built on earlier rally. — Bloomberg

Halting dark patterns: e-comm cos

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, NOV. 20

Around 26 leading e-commerce platforms such as Zepto, BigBasket, Zomato and others alike said that their platforms are free dark patterns.

As far as dark patterns are concerned in e-commerce platforms, they involve using design and choice architecture to deceive, coerce, or influence consumers into making choices that are not in their best interest. They

also encompass a wide range of manipulative practices.

As per the industry estimate, there are over 2.6 million active e-commerce marketplaces operating in India as of September 2025, with a growth rate of around 18 per cent year-over-year since 2020.

The major dominated players are Amazon, Flipkart, alongside specialised marketplaces such as Meesho, Myntra, Nykaa and others.

Among the 26 companies

BIG | WAVE

Firm shares rise 39% this year, m-cap goes past \$4.5 tn

Nvidia nos say AI is not bubble

California, Nov. 20: Nvidia delivered a surprisingly strong revenue forecast and pushed back on the idea that the AI industry is in a bubble, easing concerns that had spread across the tech sector.

The world's most valuable company expects sales of about \$65 billion in the January quarter—roughly \$3 billion more than analysts predicted. Nvidia also said that a half-trillion-dollar revenue bonanza due in coming quarters may be even bigger than anticipated.

The outlook signals that demand remains robust for Nvidia's artificial intel-



ligence (AI) accelerators, powerful chips used to develop AI models.

Nvidia had faced growing fears in recent weeks that the runaway spending on such equipment wasn't sustainable. "There's been a lot of talk about an AI bubble," chief executive officer Jensen Huang said on a conference call with

Sensex, Nifty-50 scale fresh 52-week highs

Benchmarks' firm close underscores sustained buying interest

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, NOV. 20

Indian stock markets closed strong with benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty-50 scaled new 52-week highs intraday as rally continued on positive global cues and optimism around the US-India trade deal.

The Sensex touched an intraday high of 85,801.70 but closed a tad lower at 85,632.68 up 446.21 points or 0.52 per cent on profit booking. Sensex all time high is 85,978.25 made on September 27, 2024.

The Nifty-50 index made a new 52 week high of 26,246.55 and closed at 26,192.15 up 139.50 points or 0.54 per cent. Nifty-50 all time high is 26,277.37 made in Sept., 2024.

Big gains for index heavy weights Reliance Industries (2.01 per cent) and HDFC Bank (1.42 per cent) led to gains in benchmarks Sensex and Nifty-50.

However, the broader market saw profit taking with BSE mid-cap index down by 0.13 per cent and BSE small-cap index down by 0.17 per cent.

Sectoral trend remained mixed with moderate gains for bank, auto, capital goods and oil & gas stock indices while other sectoral indices closed flat or negative.

Nifty PSU Bank index fell 0.89 per cent on profit taking with smaller PSU

BANK MITRAS SEEK REVISION OF COMMISSION

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, NOV. 20

The business correspondent resource council (BCRC) has suggested a slew of critical measures that could be announced in the upcoming budget to support Bank Mitras and corporate business correspondents in India.

In a letter to the secretary department of financial services (DFS) M Nagaraju, the BCRC chief executive D. Tripathy has suggested revising remuneration, bringing in guidelines to delineate the role of banks, corporate Bank mitras and Bank Mitras in case of fraud like mule accounts so that genuine workers are not penalised.

The BCRC was set up in 2014 to offer support to Bank Mitras.

listed by the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) are well-known names such as Flipkart, Myntra, Zomato, Swiggy, Meesho, BigBasket, JioMart and others.

"As many as 26 leading e-commerce platforms have voluntarily submitted self-declaration letters confirming compliance with the guidelines for prevention and regulation of dark patterns, 2023," the department of consumer affairs informed in a statement

analysts. "From our vantage point, we see something very different." The company's shares had gained 39 per cent this year through the close, leaving Nvidia's market value at \$4.5 trillion.

Nvidia results have become a barometer for health of the AI industry, and the news lifted a variety of related stocks.

Benchmarks in South Korea, Taiwan and Japan gained, fueled by Nvidia suppliers including TSMC and Tokyo Electron.

Nvidia's CEO had said last month that the company has more than \$500 billion of revenue coming

BULLISH TREND

BIG GAINS for index heavy weights RIL (2.01%), HDFC Bank (1.42%) led to gains in benchmarks Sensex and Nifty-50.

SECTORAL trend remains mixed with moderate gains for bank, auto, capital goods and oil & gas.

SENSEX CLOSED AT 85,632.68, UP 446.21 PTS, NIFTY-50 CLOSED AT 26,192.15, UP 139.50 PTS.

SENSEX MILESTONES

85,801	Nov. 20, 2025
85,000	Sept. 24, 2024
80,000	July 3, 2024
75,000	April 9, 2024
70,000	Dec. 11, 2023
65,000	July 3, 2023
60,000	Sept. 24, 2021
55,000	Aug. 13, 2021
50,000	Jan. 21, 2021

bank stocks falling between 1 to 3 per cent. IT stocks also saw profit taking after previous days nearly 3 per cent rise in BSE IT index (-0.18 per cent).

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) were net buyers of equities worth ₹283.65 crore while domestic institutions were net buyers by ₹24.46 crore.

"Market's up move was led by heavyweights in oil and gas, particularly Reliance Industries, along with solid contributions from private-sector lenders such as HDFC Bank,

INVESTOR sentiment remains upbeat, supported by renewed FPI inflows and positive cues from Asian markets

FPIS BUYS equities worth ₹283.65 cr while domestic institutions buy equities worth ₹24.46 cr.

SENSEX CLOSED AT 85,632.68, UP 446.21 PTS, NIFTY-50 CLOSED AT 26,192.15, UP 139.50 PTS.

Market's up move was led by heavyweights in oil and gas, particularly Reliance Industries, along with solid contributions from private-sector lenders.

~PONMUDI R, CEO, Enrich Money

Axis Bank and the Bajaj Finance and Bajaj Finserv, as well as select automobile stocks," Ponmudi R., chief executive officer, Enrich Money said.

Market benchmarks' firm close underscores sustained buying interest across frontline sectors and reinforces market's bullish undertone, he added.

Some volatility may come at high market levels, NSE's volatility index India VIX gained 1.35 per cent rising to 12.14.

"Investor sentiment remained upbeat, support-

Rupee sliding on rising demand for dollars, says RBI gov Malhotra

FC BANKING BUREAU WITH AGENCY INPUTS MUMBAI, NOV. 20

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Sanjay Malhotra on Thursday said that the central bank does not target any level of the rupee and attributed the latter's slide to the US dollar demand.

The RBI's foreign exchange reserves remain very good, reinforcing that India's external position is stable and well-buffered, said Malhotra said while responding to a query after delivering the VKRV Rao Memorial Lecture at the Delhi School of Economics.

He also exuded confidence that India will have a good trade deal with US, and that would relieve the pressure on the country's current account balance.

Responding to another query on the banking sector, Malhotra said that the way Indian banks are performing well and soon a few of them will be among the top 100 global lenders given the pace of economic expansion and growth in banking system. Currently, only SBI and HDFC appear among the world's top 100 banks, ranked 43rd and 73rd, respectively.

Meanwhile, on Thursday, the rupee depreciated 23 paise to close at 88.71 against the US dollar on broad strength of American currency and fading odds of a rate cut by the US Federal Reserve.



INDIAN BANKS are performing well and very soon a few of them will be among the top 100 global lenders given the pace of economic expansion and growth in the banking system. — SANJAY MALHOTRA, RBI governor

Russian oil imports lowest since Oct. 2022

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, NOV. 20

With the US sanctions on Russian oil companies kicking in from today (November 21), the crude oil loadings to India have dipped to 982 thousand barrels per day (kbd), lowest since October 2022.

However, arrivals in November remained elevated at 1.8 millions barrel per day (mbd) as Indian refiners were trying to maximise intake prior to the sanctions.

According to Kpler, Russian crude loadings to India were tracking at 982 kbd in November, sharply down from the 1.75 mbd average seen over January–September 2025.

"The decline is driven primarily by OFAC sanctions targeting Rosneft and Lukoil, the two largest Russian suppliers to Indian refiners. While volumes

may still shift, as some in-transit vessels could revise their final destinations, India-bound flows are softening. Loadings have already slowed since October 21, though it is still early for definitive conclusions given Russia's agility in deploying intermediaries, shadow fleets, and workaround financing," said Sumit Ritolia, lead research analyst, Kpler.

Meanwhile, crude oil imports into India from Russia in November remained higher at 1.8 mbd till November 20, against 1.6 mbd in October and September.

"Indian refiners are trying to maximise intake from Rosneft and Lukoil before restrictions formally take effect. Volumes are elevated now, but we expect a visible dip in arrivals from late November into December," Ritolia said.

AI adoption depends on safety, says Lobana

FC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, NOV. 20

Responsible and trusted use of artificial intelligence (AI) will be critical to India's technology-led transformation, with the onus on every stakeholder in the ecosystem to ensure safety and accountability, Google India's country manager Preeti Lobana said on Thursday.

"For AI to be really adopted and be in everyday use, there is a lot of onus on all of us as an ecosystem to make sure that it is safe and trusted. AI would serve as a crucial foundation in the journey towards a Viksit Bharat, underlin-



ing that trust and safety are prerequisites for widespread adoption," she said at Google's 'Safe and Trusted AI' event here.

Lobana also said that the complexity of India would show the world how technology can scale and drive impact, even to solve toughest systemic issues with precise, tailored, locally-conceptualised solutions for many pockets (that exist in India).

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The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Nitish's new innings

BJP, Chirag Paswan will keep him on his toes

BIHAR's longest-serving Chief Minister and JD(U) supremo Nitish Kumar has begun yet another term at the helm. Although the BJP emerged as the single largest party in the recent elections with 89 seats – four more than its ally JD(U) — it has preferred to let the 74-year-old stalwart continue as the CM. His deputies from the saffron party — Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha — have retained their posts. Nitish's previous term was marked by flip-flops — first he formed the government with the BJP, then embraced the Mahagathbandhan and later returned to the NDA's fold. However, his fickleness was forgiven by Bihar's voters, who reposed faith in his leadership and the durability of the double-engine government. Clearly, they still consider him to be the best bet for their state.

Congratulating Nitish after he took oath for a record 10th time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described him as an experienced administrator with a proven track record of good governance. The all-important question is: How long will the BJP continue to play second fiddle? The Opposition is doubtful that Nitish will complete his term as the BJP might like to have its own CM at some stage. The example of Maharashtra is being cited — the saffron party first crowned Shiv Sena's Eknath Shinde as the CM and later edged him out so that Devendra Fadnavis could occupy the chair.

The BJP needs Nitish's support to prop up the NDA government at the Centre. This indicates that he is better placed to survive if push comes to shove. His immediate priorities should be to curb unemployment and migration — two out of every three households in Bihar have a member working in another state — and fulfil the key poll promise of financially empowering women. At the same time, he needs to ensure that the JD(U) remains strong and intact. It's inevitable that the BJP and Union minister Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party will keep him on his toes.

SC's U-turn

Recall of green nod ban worrisome

THE Supreme Court's decision to recall its May 2025 judgment prohibiting retrospective environmental clearances has set a worrying precedent. By reversing the Vanashakti ruling, the court has opened the door for industries to regularise violations. The move strikes at the core of environmental governance. Instead of reinforcing accountability, the verdict signals that non-compliance can be pardoned with paperwork. Environmental clearance is meant to be a preventive tool, not a curative one. Its purpose is to ensure that ecological, social and health impacts are rigorously assessed before a project breaks ground. When post-facto approvals become permissible, this foundational principle collapses. Companies can proceed without scrutiny, knowing that violations can be "fixed" later: This is not just a procedural lapse; it creates incentives for damage.

The judgement also weakens public participation, which is central to India's environmental jurisprudence. Public hearings — the only platform for local communities to raise concerns about air pollution, deforestation or displacement — lose meaning if decisions can be regularised retrospectively. The communities most affected by extractive or polluting projects will now find themselves with even fewer safeguards. Equally worrying is the blow to regulatory certainty. The court's earlier order had sent a strong message to violators that environmental norms could not be bypassed. The reversal, however, creates ambiguity and emboldens those seeking shortcuts. It also risks undermining the credibility of the appellate and expert bodies tasked with environmental oversight.

Significantly, the recall comes at a time when India faces severe ecological stress. It is beset by air quality crisis, groundwater depletion, climate-linked disasters and biodiversity loss. Environmental regulation cannot afford dilution. When the judiciary, the final guardian of constitutional protections, allows ex post facto clearances, it compromises the principle of sustainable development that it has long championed.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 1925

Defence of the new Viceroy

AS far as we have been able to see, only one responsible Indian journal has taken it upon itself to defend the appointment of Edward Wood as Viceroy in succession to Lord Reading — the *Indian Daily Mail*. In a recent issue, our contemporary once more states its views about the Viceroy-designate, and in doing so quotes profusely from a book titled *The Great Opportunity*, published by him sometime ago in collaboration with Sir George (now Baron) Lloyd — the only book, as it rightly points out, in which Wood's political views find expression. We have carefully gone through these extracts, but in spite of the ingenious attempt made by our contemporary, we have seen nothing in them from which anyone in India could derive hope or comfort. The nearest approximation to a hope-inspiring statement is the faith which the authors express in the "principle of nationality" and "the responsibility of service." Men and women, they write, "can best perform their duty to the world by discharging adequately their duty towards their own people first, and before the race can successfully win acceptance for its ideals by the world, it must demonstrate their value by its own experience." The writers further say: "The lodestar by which we must steer our course must be insistence at all times upon the responsibility of service." These are excellent sentiments, but are they nobler or loftier than those which Lord Reading repeated before he came to India about the paramountcy of the claims of justice? What became of these sentiments the moment his lordship came in contact with the realities of Indian politics?

Terrorism rooted in rancour, distrust

Probe into Delhi car blast shows that even doctors are not immune to radicalisation



TRYSTS AND TURNS
JULIO RIBEIRO

THE blast that killed 15 people near the Red Fort on November 10 came as a rude shock not only to our muscular government but also to citizens across the country. A terror module allied to the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed was unearthed. Most of those arrested so far are doctors.

What is so surprising? The common man can't imagine that those whose noble profession expects them to serve the public can play a part in terror activities. Among the accused are Muslim doctors from states/UTs such as J&K, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and West Bengal.

There is tough competition for seats in medical colleges. Studies continue for over five years, and if students wish to specialise in any branch of medicine, it entails another two years or more. Having spent the best years of their youth preparing for a profession that is all about curing patients and saving lives, why would they turn to killing or maiming innocent people?

The answer lies in the motives of other terror modules that have been busted over the years. Abhinav Bharat was a lone module surprisingly embedded in the majority community; it was unearthed by Maharashtra's Anti-Terrorist Squad. Its members resorted to terrorism because they were dissatisfied with the steps taken by the ruling BJP against jihadi terrorists.

Deep anger drove even those who were advantageously placed in the political sphere. So, what about those who had already got a raw deal? The ground was prepared for rancour and hate to



OMINOUS: The terror module involved in the Delhi blast had planned attacks all over India. TRIBUNE PHOTO

thrive when the Muslim-majority J&K was deprived of statehood and condemned to an inferior status by those who should have welcomed it into the ranks of the secular and the equal. It was a rude reminder to the people of the state-turned-UT that they could not be trusted.

The Modi-Shah duo could not stop boasting about the transformation it had engineered in J&K. The UT was flooded with more troops and paramilitary forces, expecting thereby that cross-border terrorism and separatism among the Kashmiris would be curbed. That happened initially because of the surprise factor. It took a few years for the disgruntled elements to regroup, but the inevitable rejection has surfaced and become a reality.

Legendary statesman Atal Bihari Vajpayee had approached this ticklish and perennial Hindu-Muslim problem with much thought and finesse. He placed his trust in AS Dulat (R&AW chief in 1999-2000), who had cultivated a lasting friendship with Farooq Abdullah. The Abdullahs have been largely responsible for the Kashmiri Muslim siding with India in its territorial dispute with its Muslim-majority neighbour Pakistan. But the

Lynchings, bulldozer justice, allegations of love jihad — all this has to stop.

present BJP-led government had other plans. It decided to use aggression to subdue the native Kashmiri Muslim and prove to its supporters that it was a strong government, unlike the Congress-led UPA and even the Vajpayee dispensation.

Such an approach rarely works. If citizens do not welcome the prospect of brotherhood, there is no way that the Indian State — or any State, for

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Whenever a doctor cannot do good, he must be kept from doing harm. —Hippocrates

Crystal-clear memories of licensing days

MOHAN SINGH

THERE was no refrigerator in our neighbourhood in those days. The radio was the only expensive piece of equipment available. Brands like Tesla, GEC, Bush and Philips were becoming popular. However, using a radio required a licence costing Rs 15 annually, issued by the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. Any violation of the rules attracted a penalty and possible imprisonment. Bamboo poles, used as supports for the T-type aerial on the rooftop, were a telltale sign of the radio being used in a house. Government inspectors had a sharp eye. Therefore, only the well-off could afford a radio set. What about the others? They relied on their ingenuity.

The scrap market was flooded with wireless equipment after the end of World War II. A headphone could be procured for a rupee or even less, while a rudimentary crystal radio could be improvised by any bright mind. Only an enamelled wire coil and a small antimony crystal (used those days for making *surma*) were required. However, the medium-wave signal from the nearest station required the same rooftop aerial and a well-grounded earth connection. The headphone connected to the aerial and the earth through a simple circuit would catch Radio Pakistan, which used to broadcast Hindi film songs. But when we came to know that even a crystal radio required a licence (Rs 3 per year), we brought down the bamboo poles. So, what to do with our headphones?

It was a chance discovery that two headphones, the moving diaphragm type, connected to each other could serve as a functional telephone. The device worked both as a microphone and a receiver. If you were a neighbour on our side of the street, you could get a connection, provided that you bought your own length of flexible wire. During the 1955 floods in Punjab, this system proved useful. My friend and college-mate Tarlok would sometimes use that toy telephone. One day, he received a guest who happened to be an officer in the department of telegraphs. Though he was impressed by the contraption, he advised us to dismantle it so that we would not land in trouble. We did it willy-nilly.

My friend, who was minting money by drawing and painting textile designs, told me that he wanted to buy a radio. He took me along because he thought I had good knowledge of the subject. I recommended the latest high-fidelity GEC model, which he bought for a whopping Rs 499. But I didn't know then what was in store for me.

His wife had no qualms about playing the radio at full volume even when I was trying hard to study. Asking her to reduce the volume was out of the question as I did not want to offend her. But then a bulb and a tubelight starter connected in series as a make-break circuit came in handy to generate an equally loud and disturbing signal. This forced her to switch off the radio. I needed no licence to counter one signal with another!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Can't burden kids at tender age

Refer to 'Let kids embrace AI at their own pace'; it is crucial to recognise that teaching AI as early as in Class III holds little value. Till this age, students have not built foundational skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and active physical engagement. Instead of burdening children with advanced technological concepts, schools should focus on strengthening their understanding of core subjects like mathematics, science and physical education through meaningful daily activities. Parents, too, must play a responsible role by prioritising holistic childhood development rather than encouraging prolonged screen time in the name of learning AI.

AMRITPAL SINGH, BATHINDA

Hone observation skills of children

Apropos of 'Let kids embrace AI at their own pace'; schools should not discipline and burden young kids. Instead, they need to be taught by invoking their senses through touch, smell and feel. They should be made to develop the art of observation and reasoning, enjoy physical activities and playing, besides experiencing the wonders of nature. In primary classes, they are already comprehending subjects like English, science, mathematics, computer applications and now AI. When these children grow up into adults, they are not able to take up the pressure of the rat race induced by a faulty education system devoid of values.

RAMESH SINGH KHALSA, NAWANSHAHR

Nitish's groundwork helped

Apropos of 'Why freebies alone don't win elections in Bihar'; it is an open secret: freebies are meant to allure voters. And, if it comes just before elections, it is considered corruption by discerning minds. Freebies do have an effect on gullible minds of the poor, illiterate or ill-educated masses. Almost all political parties succumb to this undesirable and unethical practice. The party that has more resources (read ruling party) has an advantage to garner votes easily. In Bihar, besides NDA's freebies, what worked was Nitish Kumar's groundwork with women at the centre stage, apart from his corruption-free image.

BM SINGH, AMRITSAR

Congress hasn't learnt a lesson

Even after a humiliating debacle in the Bihar election, the Opposition has refused to learn its lessons. The Congress is attributing the stunning defeat to 'vote chori', SIR, money power and misuse of Central agencies like CBI, ED etc. During the election campaign in Bihar, the MGB orchestrated these slogans to woo public votes. The people did not fall in for false promises, like government service for every home and Rs 30,000 to women within 20 days of formation of the MGB government. The caste-based census, too, hasn't cut much ice with the people. Baseless, illogical issues make no impact on voters.

KARNAIL SINGH, KHARAR

Insurgency on the decline

Refer to 'Hidma falls'; the Maoist commander's elimination is a big breakthrough, which may bring about an end to Left wing extremism (LWE). For many years, Hidma and other LWE cadre were able to take advantage of the terrain and absence of police forces and an intelligence network in the remote forested areas of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and other affected states. But now this situation has changed for good in recent years. The Centre's surrender policy and rehabilitation of those who surrendered paid dividends. Police forces must take advantage of the disharmony among insurgents to put an end to the Maoist movement.

PL SINGH, BY MAIL

Community-bashing wrong

Refer to 'Owaisi's message'; his statement, denouncing suicide bombings in the name of Islam, serves as a sharp reminder to all radicals, regardless of the sect or ideology they follow. Innocent killings are condemned as a sin in every religion, even when committed in the name of self-sacrifice. While tolerance for differing viewpoints is essential for the peaceful functioning of society, branding community members as terrorists only fuels further radicalisation. The recent terror incident in Delhi with roots in Kashmir is distressing and must be dealt with firmly. However, tarring all individuals of a particular faith with the same brush undermines the very foundations of harmony in a pluralistic nation like ours.

NIRMALJIT SINGH CHATRATH, KAPURTHALA

Punjab must defend its stake in PU



NAVREET KAUR
DEPT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, PU

THE phrase ‘governance reforms’ is being strategically used to demolish the democratic essence of a public university. The notifications (for governance structure reforms in Senate) dated October 28, 2025 and then November 4, issued regarding the reconstitution of the Senate of Panjab University, and the withdrawal of the same on November 8 raise many concerns. They relate to the constitutional principles of federalism, the purview of the executive or administrative directions external to its provisions (in this case, the Ministry of Education) and the authority of the Senate in initiating reforms under Sections 19 and 20 of the Panjab University Act, 1947, erosion of the democratic structure and encroachment of the rights of Punjab.

It appears that the process and mechanism adopted are inconsistent with the statutory framework laid down under the Panjab University Act, 1947. The governance of Panjab University is explicitly and comprehensively defined under this Act. Sections 19 and 20 of the Act vest the Senate with powers to regulate, review and recommend reforms related to the university's constitution and governance.

The Senate is the supreme policymaking body. Any reform concerning the composition, representation or powers must be proposed and debated in the Senate, and then processed through the legislative or statutory route, as explicitly specified in the Act, and not through executive or administrative directions external to its provisions.

Panjab University functions as an inter-state institution under the Panjab Reorgani-

sation Act, 1966. Hence, any structural reform must be preceded by consultation with Punjab. Section 72(1) of the Reorganisation Act recognises PU as an inter-state institution in which Punjab retains an integral role. The said notification (now withdrawn), issued without consultation or concurrence of the Punjab Government, contravenes the cooperative federal mechanism envisaged in the Act.

The Government of Punjab in 2021, through the Directorate of Public Instruction (Colleges), stated before a high-level committee that “the reforms to be undertaken for better governance of the university should also be strictly as per existing statutes and law and that no action is taken contrary to the statutes or against the interests of the State of Punjab.”

Instead of changing rules as per law, the notification had reduced the representation of Punjab in the college teachers' constituency (from 11 to 6), principals' constituency (from 11 to 4) and abolished the graduate constituency (15 representing alumni to 0) and the faculties constituency (6 to 0).

The delay in announcing the Senate election for 2024 and the systemic restructuring of the Senate by reducing the representation of Punjab in the university's governance framework and the Syndicate by replacing electoral processes with administrative nominations was a calculated attempt to reinforce the Centre's claim to governance over the university, sidelining the representation and Punjab's historic stake in PU.

The collective protest has also raised the faulty federal patterns, chronology and passive approach of the state government. The protest is being led by PU students; it should have been led by the Punjab CM. The government chose to concentrate on the “Tarn Taran elections” instead of addressing this issue. This protest reaffirms the power of democracy and raises issues beyond party lines.

Institutions historically anchored in Punjab's sphere are being restructured into centrally governed bodies, reducing Punjab's jurisdiction and representational power in Chandigarh. The political parties have largely failed to address these issues.

The Tribune TWO VIEWS PU SENATE ISSUE

Let academics, not agitation, lead the way



HIMANSHU ATAL
RESEARCH SCHOLAR & ASST PROFESSOR, SGGGS COLLEGE, CHANDIGARH

THE ongoing protest over the Senate issue at Panjab University, Chandigarh, has once again placed one of India's premier institutions at a crossroads. As someone who stands at the intersection of two worlds — research and teaching — I witness the unrest not merely as a news event but as a tremor that is affecting classrooms, laboratories and the academic rhythm of colleges across the region.

This period is critical for thousands of students. Practical examinations are underway and semester exams are approaching. College faculty members are navigating packed schedules to ensure the smooth conduct of assessments. Amidst this academic urgency, prolonged protests and political escalations are pushing the real stakeholders — students and teachers — into avoidable distress.

Protest, undoubtedly, is a democratic right. Students should raise their voices when they feel unheard. But protests must also be measured, purposeful and mindful of their ripple effects. What we are witnessing now appears to be veering in a direction where the larger academic community may suffer more than it benefits. The central mission of a university — education and research — is being overshadowed by institutional tensions and



FILE PHOTO

A calculated attempt was made to dilute Punjab's historic stake in PU.

The classroom must be the centre of student life, not the protest site.

COP30 exposes fault lines — and India's climate priorities



SHIREN PANDITA | SHREYA GUPTA
THE ENERGY AND RESOURCES INSTITUTE

AS COP30 in Belém, Brazil, draws to a close, it is clear that this summit is different from the Paris or Glasgow summits. The urgency has been sharper, the geopolitics more fractured and the pressure on emerging economies like India more intense. For India, COP30 — the 30th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change — was a test of whether the country can balance growth and climate responsibility while shaping rules that will govern the world's low-carbon future.

India entered COP30 from a position of cautious strength. The country has met its target of sourcing half its power capacity from non-fossil fuels five years ahead of schedule. As it prepares to update its climate targets for 2035, expectations are high. Yet, every step in commitment carries

trade-offs. A large part of the economy still depends on affordable energy for industry, transport and agriculture and millions remain without reliable clean power. Balancing ambition with energy security will be the real test.

COP30 has put the following on India's plate:

Carbon markets and global alignment: India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), launched last year, aims to unify domestic emissions trading across sectors. To make it credible internationally, it must sync with Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, which allows countries to trade emission reductions. India is preparing to link its system with partners like Japan under the Joint Crediting Mechanism. A transparent carbon market could attract billions in green investment. With COP30 launching a new 18-country coalition to advance coherent compliance-market rules, India must now move from blueprint to operation; otherwise it risks exclusion from the very market it seeks to shape.

Climate finance and equity: Developing nations have repeated one message for over a decade: ambition needs money. Through its 'Baku-to-Belém Roadmap', Brazil has emphasised scaling climate finance to \$1.3 trillion a year by



SANDEEP JOSHI

GRIEVANCE: Equity is India's main moral argument at COP30 and now developed countries must step up.

2035. The \$100-billion annual finance pledge remains only partly delivered and mostly in the form of loans rather than grants. India's Fourth Biennial Update Report notes with “deep regret” that the goal was not met through 2021; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) later estimated that this goal was initially met nominally at \$115.9 bn in 2022, combining public and private flows. India pressed at COP 30 for delivering truly new, additional and concessional climate funding at the trillion-scale, not just loans disguised as support.

Equity is India's main moral argument at COP30 and now developed countries must step up. Its per-capita emissions are

still less than half the global average, yet it is asked to do more even as developed countries lag in their own commitments. Fossil fuel phase-out (A hard negotiation): Brazil has pushed for progress on fossil fuel phase-out, but the room is split. Several oil-rich countries want any such language blocked. For India, this debate sits at the heart of energy security. A transition is non-negotiable, but the pace and sequencing must be just. A premature phase-out could disrupt grids, strand workers and raise costs, all of which India is unwilling to accept without real finance on the table.

Strengthening South-South cooperation: Ahead of COP30, India and Brazil have been

deepening strategic ties on climate diplomacy. India can align with Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia to push for fair carbon market rules, technology transfer and forest conservation finance. This could rebalance global climate negotiations long dominated by western blocs.

Among the challenges is that the integrity of India's carbon markets will be scrutinised. The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) poses another challenge. At COP30, India emphasised the Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM) as a key tool to scale low-carbon investment and align with the Paris Agreement's Article 6. Now India must deliver credible MRV systems and link JCM-type approaches with its domestic market without delay.

At home, better coordination between states, industries and regulators is essential to turn national targets into action.

And finally, India must avoid the trap of green-washing. Progress will be judged by results — cleaner power, greener transport, restored forests and more resilient cities. While renewables have grown nearly forty-fold since 2014, coal still dominates generation and energy access and affordability remain central to India's transition journey. At COP30, coun-

tries sealed a landmark Declaration on Information Integrity for climate action, signalling a sharper global focus on truthful claims and accountability. India must not only set targets but also visibly deliver on real-world outcomes and transparent reporting. A successful outcome for India would mean three things:

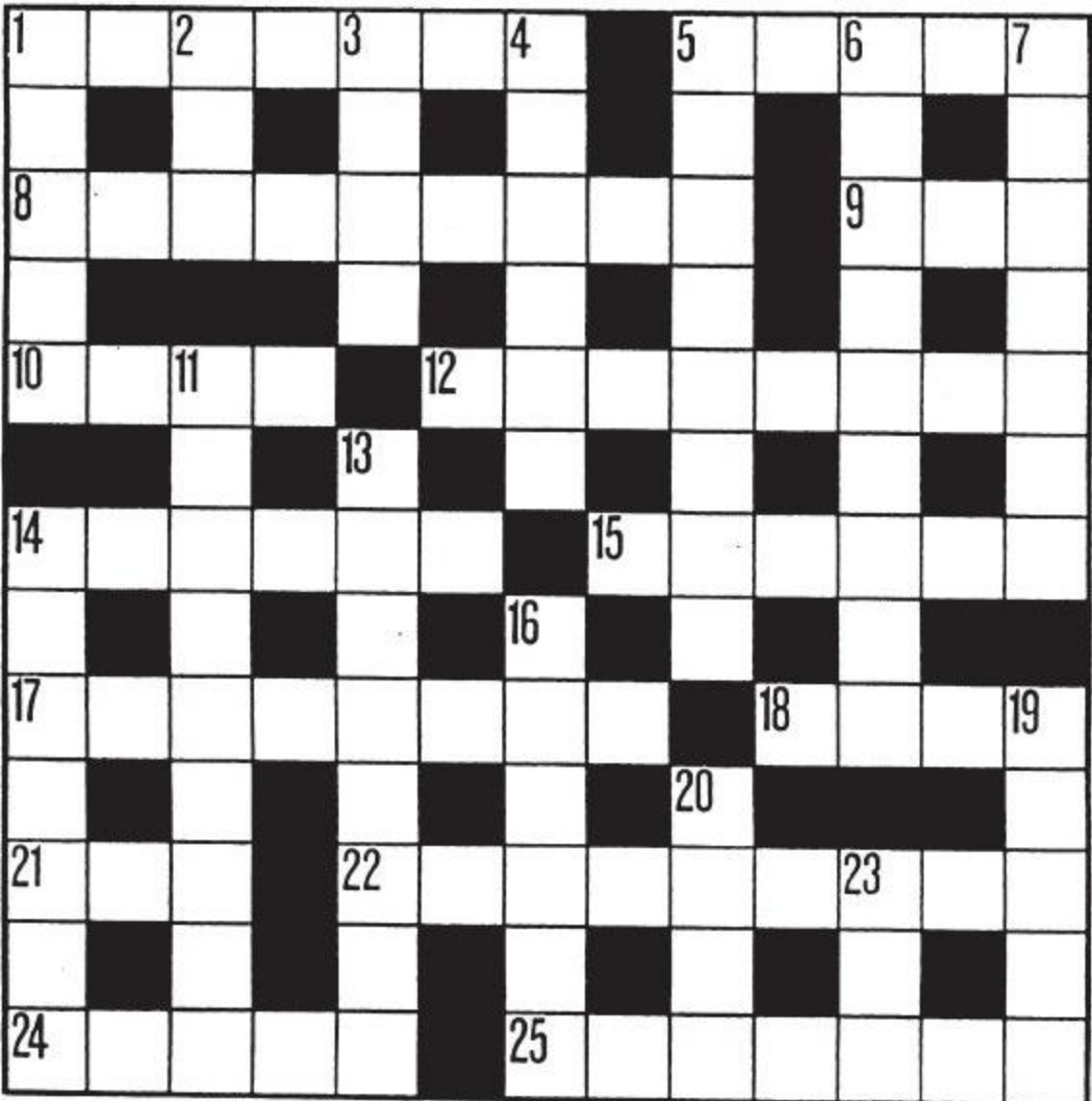
1. Global acceptance of its carbon credit system under Article 6, making India a major player in international carbon trading.
2. Stronger financial commitments for developing economies, not vague pledges, for adaptation and loss-and-damage funding.
3. Recognition of balanced approach, ambitious yet grounded in right to development.

The next decade will decide whether India can build a growth model that is clean, resilient and affordable. Cities will need climate-proof infrastructure. Industries will need pathways to clean energy. Agriculture will need shields against heat and water stress. And the transparency systems showcased in BUR-4 will need to work in real time, not just on paper.

India has the chance to lead. The question is whether the country can turn this moment — geopolitical, moral, and economic into a blueprint for a different kind of development story.

Ambition without energy security is a risk India cannot take.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Misrepresent as something else (4,3)
- 5 Motionless (5)
- 8 Gradual wearing-down (9)
- 9 Catch in wrongdoing (3)
- 10 Greet enthusiastically (4)
- 12 Be out of one's depth (8)
- 14 Expensive (6)
- 15 Fractious (6)
- 17 Authoritative (8)
- 18 A measure taken (4)
- 21 Equality of value (3)
- 22 Quick-tempered (9)
- 24 Impaired by disuse (5)
- 25 Legal compensation for loss (7)

Yesterday's Solution

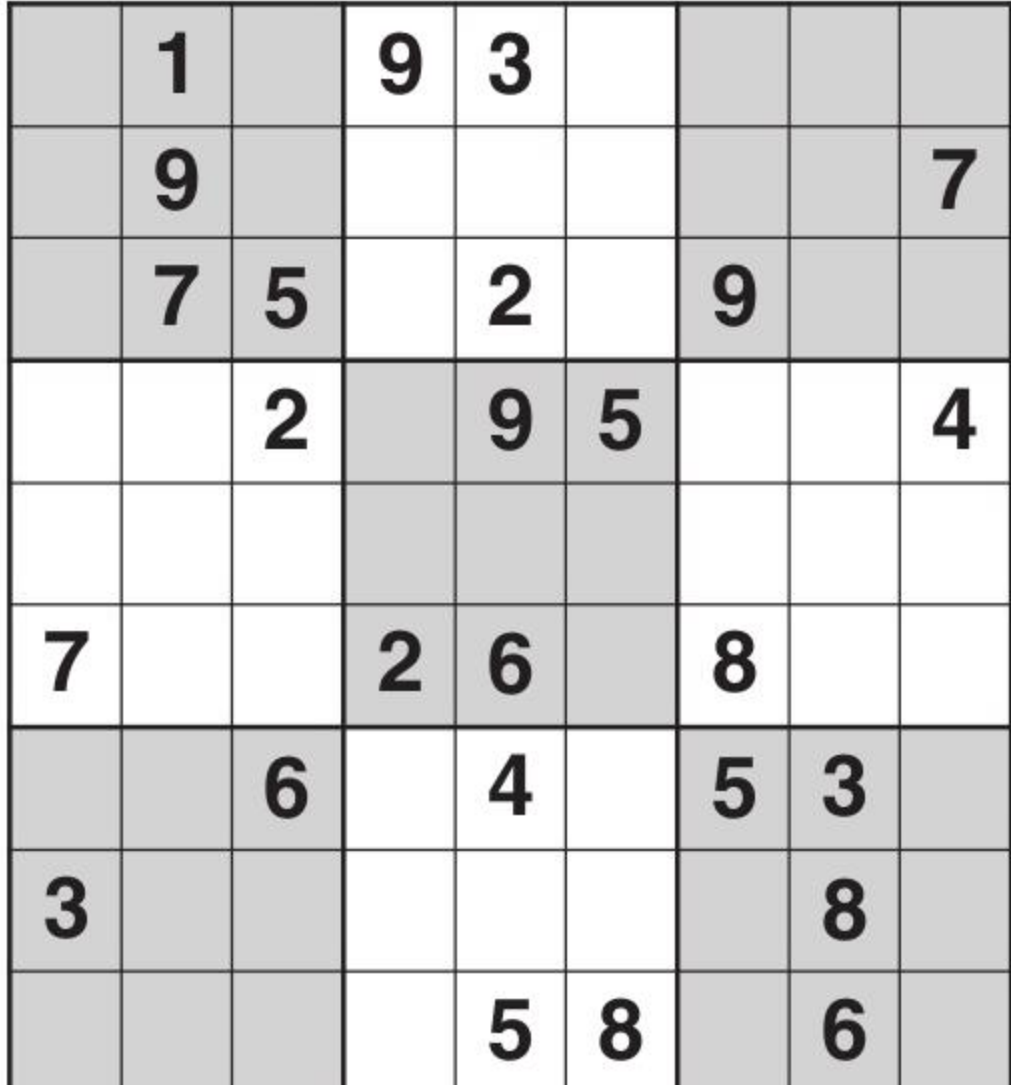
Across: 1 Tell-tale, 5 Stab, 9 Store, 10 Conduct, 11 Powers that be, 13 Acting, 14 Edible, 17 Know the score, 20 Ageless, 21 Inane, 22 Hide, 23 Infernal.

Down: 1 Task, 2 Lookout, 3 There and then, 4 Locust, 6 Taunt, 7 Battered, 8 On the decline, 12 Backlash, 15 Bargain, 16 Reason, 18 On end, 19 Zeal.

DOWN

- 1 A stone fruit (5)
- 2 Collection (3)
- 3 Leave out (4)
- 4 Idiosyncrasy (6)
- 5 Optimistic (8)
- 6 Quite sure (2,2,5)
- 7 Power of free choice (7)
- 11 To the extent that (2,2,3,2)
- 13 Cheerful readiness (8)
- 14 Heavy fall from horse (7)
- 16 Unfounded rumour (6)
- 19 Demand immediate action (5)
- 20 Fraudulent operation (4)
- 23 Wet spongy ground (3)

SU DO KU



MEDIUM

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 21, 2025, FRIDAY

■ Shaka Samvat	1947
■ Kartik Shaka	30
■ Margshirsh Parvishite	6
■ Hijari	1447
■ Shukla Paksha Tithi 1, up to 2.48 pm	
■ Atiganda Yoga up to 10.43 am	
■ Anuradha Nakshatra up to 1.56 pm	
■ Moon in Scorpio sign	
■ Gandmoola start 1.56 pm	

FORECAST

SUNSET:	FRIDAY	17:24 HRS
SUNRISE:	SATURDAY	06:53 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	26	10
New Delhi	27	12
Amritsar	24	10
Bathinda	25	10
Jalandhar	24	10
Ludhiana	25	10
Bhiwani	24	11
Hisar	25	10
Sirsa	26	12
Dharamsala	23	08
Manali	17	04
Shimla	18	08
Srinagar	16	0
Jammu	25	12
Kargil	08	-05
Leh	09	-05
Dehradun	25	10
Mussoorie	17	07

TEMPERATURE IN °C



New reckoning

Nitish Kumar's tenth term must deliver economic transformation for Bihar

With his swearing-in as Chief Minister of the NDA-led government in Bihar, Nitish Kumar has begun his tenth term cumulatively at the helm of the State. This remarkable political longevity reflects not just his personal acumen but also the JD(U)'s electoral performance, which saw the party double its previous tally to 85 seats. His success owes much to the social coalition he has painstakingly built over the years. The JD(U)'s support base among the EBCs and Dalits, augmented by substantial backing from women across these sections, has provided accretion to the support bases of the BJP and other NDA allies. This multi-caste, multi-class coalition gave the alliance a decisive social edge over the Opposition Mahagatbandhan, helping it stave off anti-incumbency. That voters have prioritised welfare deliveries over Mr. Kumar's serial realignments speaks to the efficacy of targeted benefits in insulating incumbents. Yet, electoral success cannot obscure the hard reality that confronts the septuagenarian leader. Bihar remains at the absolute bottom on virtually every socioeconomic indicator. It continues to be the largest source of out-migration, a consequence of inadequate employment opportunities. Its economy remains trapped in a vicious cycle: agriculture hampered by fragmented landholdings and concentrated ownership, and a services sector largely confined to government employment. The near absence of organised industry and the State's inability to attract investments represent a governance failure that transcends political partisanship. Years of administration have prioritised road and bridge construction, while education and health have languished.

The Opposition's inability to capitalise on these deficiencies is telling. The RJD's limited social coalition, the Congress's organisational weaknesses, and the Left's confinement to pockets of support have failed to convert economic distress into political momentum. Welfare doles have evidently shielded the government as well. However, the Opposition's inadequacy does not invalidate the critique of the government's economic record. A State cannot thrive on transfer payments and handouts. With the JD(U) occupying a pivotal position at the Centre, there is little excuse for the new administration to continue on this trajectory. The government must pivot toward securing sustainable livelihoods. Catalysing sectors such as food processing, leveraging Bihar's agricultural fertility, and creating an enabling environment for investment are essential. More ambitious measures, including land reforms that transfer holdings from absentee landowners to sharecroppers, may be politically difficult, but remain necessary. Mr. Kumar's tenth term must be measured not by electoral arithmetic but by whether it marks an inflection point in Bihar's development trajectory.

Epstein exposure

Trump might have a lot to lose politically from the revelations

After battling political exposure for months, U.S. President Donald Trump has finally signed a Bill passed by Congress mandating the Department of Justice (DoJ) to release files relating to the investigation of sex offender and disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein, who died in prison in 2019. The President's assent was effectively his concession to enormous pressure from both sides of the political divide, Democrats and Republicans, who had mounted a strong campaign to shine a light upon Epstein's communications including those with or mentioning Mr. Trump. With the House of Representatives passing the Epstein-related legislation by a 427-1 vote, and the Senate granting unanimous consent to pass the same, there was no avoiding presidential approval for the demand to reveal detailed documentation regarding a man who was convicted of soliciting prostitution from a minor and died by suicide before facing charges relating to sex trafficking of minors. The DoJ has to release within 30 days all files stemming from the investigation of Epstein, with redactions allowed only for details of his victims but not for details of others that may cause any "embarrassment, reputational harm, or political sensitivity".

The broader context to the turn in the Epstein saga is the established fact of Mr. Trump's friendship with Epstein, even though the President has refuted all knowledge of Epstein's criminal activities and that he severed relations years ago. Indeed, even though there was no mention of suggested criminality, Mr. Trump's name was writ large in the 20,000 pages of documents from Epstein's estate that congressional lawmakers released recently. The information suggests that Epstein did communicate with several other noted social elites including former Prince Andrew of the U.K., Mr. Trump's former adviser Steve Bannon, and former Harvard president Larry Summers. In what appeared to be a bid to deflect attention away from himself and his associates while acceding to the demand to release the files, Mr. Trump has also said that he would direct Attorney General Pam Bondi to investigate the links that Epstein might have to former President Bill Clinton, JPMorgan and Chase banks, and LinkedIn founder Reid Hoffman, a Democratic donor. Whatever insights the files reveal, it is clear that Mr. Trump has had an association with a high-society criminal guilty of sex crimes against minors and likely against women too. The question is whether voters, especially women in his conservative base of supporters, will consider this association sufficient grounds to back away from Mr. Trump and from MAGA politics more generally.

A resounding political victory often poses the question whether there was a game-changer. To argue that the victory resulted from a fortuitous combination of many factors appears less attractive. Analysts are tempted to search for game-changers so that a dramatic-looking outcome can be explained by equally dramatic looking new formulation. The victors, on their part, need the big story because such a story feeds into a narrative that can help them beyond the immediate terrain of the electoral victory. In the recently held Assembly election in Bihar, which resulted in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) winning nearly half the votes polled and bagging nearly 90% of the seats in the Assembly, this State election appears to be a case where some key factors must have produced this scale of victory.

The new combination

With the Opposition taking exception to the last-minute scheme for the benefit of women which had been devised by the State government and cash transfers taking place right around the time when the actual campaigns kicked off, the women's vote stands out as the key factor that gave the NDA its massive victory. The fact that women outnumbered men in terms of voter turnout, has added more plausibility to this argument. Another factor, according to at least some circles, is the young voter. Their overwhelming support, it is asserted, helped the NDA register this dramatic victory. Indeed, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) too did promise a government job for every household but many believe that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s pitch for one crore government jobs was what stole the day.

Along with the promise of one crore *lakhpati didis* (women with an income of ₹1 lakh per annum), this slogan must have resonated among voters. Or so it is argued. This has led to the claim that a new MY combination – which is *Mahila* and *Yuva*, as opposed to the dependence of some Opposition parties on Muslim and Yadav votes – became the foundation of the NDA's victory in Bihar.

The argument appears persuasive and attractive. Persuasive because one is stunned by the scale of victory and by the fact that the NDA and Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal (United), or JD(U), in particular have managed to comfortably exorcise the proverbial ghost of anti-incumbency. It is attractive too, because it not only gives a smart answer to how the NDA won. It also potentially inaugurates a new language of the



Suhas Palshikar

is a retired professor of political science based in Pune

While the scale of the NDA's victory was resounding, there needs to be closer analysis of the much-touted impact of the new 'MY' vote – Mahila (women) and Yuva (youth-vote)

political analysis of Bihar – and other elections too – that instead of caste/community, promises and performance determine electoral outcomes. But how accurate is this argument about the MY vote being the game-changer?

First, a small reminder about the turnout of women. Yes, there is a huge difference of nearly nine percentage points that marked the gap between female and male turnout. In itself, this is something quite extraordinary. But if we look at Bihar's Assembly turnout data for the past decade and a half, we notice that the turnout of women has always been higher in percentage terms when compared to that of men. In 2015, it was comparable to what happened this time – 7% higher than men.

Those who have observed Bihar for long have been pointing out that besides all other things, male migration (and consequent absence from voting) is a crucial factor producing this skew. But even if we were to concede that the turnout among women was higher as a result of greater mobilisation, awareness and agency among women voters, this factor is at least not new to 2025.

Second, do we have adequate evidence that more women voted for the NDA than men so that this massive tide could be explained away? To be sure, more women than men did vote for the NDA: data of a PollsMap survey which this writer had access to, shows that as against 46% supporting the NDA among male voters, almost 48% among women said they voted for NDA. For the Mahagatbandhan, this share was 39% and 37%, respectively. So, the NDA did enjoy a gender advantage. It is not clear, however, whether there was a singular factor producing the victory.

Third, survey data from 2015 suggest that the NDA (which did not include JD(U) then) had a gender disadvantage because it polled 2% less votes among women than among men. In 2020, when the JD(U) had joined the NDA, the NDA polled 1% more votes among women than men. In other words, in all likelihood, the JD(U) brings a little more women voters to the alliance that it joins. Ironically, while the JD(U) fetches more women votes, the BJP happens to be the more popular party overall – when asked which party they would have voted for had there been no alliances, 37% reported that they would have voted for the BJP. The JD(U) would have been a loser without the BJP, but the BJP gains women votes through the JD(U).

On young voters

Unemployment was reported by a very large proportion of the electorate as the most

India's fisheries and aquaculture, its promising course

Fisheries and aquaculture are among India's fastest-growing food-producing sectors, playing a vital role in livelihoods, nutrition, and trade. Over the decades, India has witnessed remarkable growth in aquatic food production that is driven by technological innovation, institutional support and proactive policy measures. Yet, the sector faces critical challenges. Overfishing, habitat degradation, water pollution and climate change are straining aquatic ecosystems. Small-scale fishers and farmers often lack access to finance, technology and markets, while poor traceability and inadequate post-harvest measures limit taping of the best export and domestic market potential and compromise food security.

On World Fisheries Day 2025 (November 21), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) calls for a renewed commitment to India's Blue Revolution and supports the Government of India's theme this year, which is "India's Blue Transformation: Strengthening Value Addition in Seafood Exports".

India's growth in fisheries and aquaculture
According to the FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) 2024, global capture fisheries produced 92.3 million tonnes in 2022, while aquaculture reached a record 130.9 million tonnes, valued at \$313 billion. India contributed 10.23 million tonnes of aquatic animals, making it the world's second-largest aquaculture producer.

India's aquatic food production, encompassing capture fisheries and aquaculture, has risen from 2.44 million tonnes in the 1980s to 17.54 million tonnes in 2022-23. Aquaculture has emerged as one of the key driver of this growth, reflecting sectoral modernisation through advanced technologies, infrastructure and institutional support.

Agencies such as the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) fisheries institutes, Marine Products Export Development Authority, and National Fisheries Development Board have promoted innovation and best practices, while the Coastal Aquaculture Authority has regulated coastal aquaculture activities to ensure



Takayuki Hagiwara

is the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Representative in India and part of Team UN in India

The FAO is committed to guiding India's Blue Revolution toward a resilient and inclusive future

environmental compliance. The private sector has expanded investments from hatcheries to exports, reinforcing value chain efficiency.

The past decade has ushered in a new phase of transformation, beginning with India's Blue Revolution initiative and advancing under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY). These programmes have driven production growth, particularly in inland and brackish water aquaculture, while improving safety, regulation, and resilience in fisheries.

Key reforms include vessel transponders for fisher safety, digital and credit inclusion through the Kisan Credit Card, and the establishment of Matsya Seva Kendras for integrated support. The Climate-Resilient Coastal Fishermen Villages Programme and the draft National Fisheries Policy 2020 are positive developments.

The FAO's support across India

The FAO has been a long-standing partner in India's fisheries and aquaculture journey, supporting the country's transition toward sustainability and resilience. The FAO's decades of collaboration with India have shaped policy, strengthened institutions, and advanced innovation in the sector.

The FAO's collaboration with India began with the Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP), one of FAO's earliest regional small-scale fisheries initiatives. The FAO, through BOBP, has supported the Government of India in improving small-scale fishing technologies, strengthening sea safety, and enhancing post-harvest management.

The FAO's Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) project strengthened India's efforts to balance fisheries and conservation, supporting the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM), and National Plans of Action to combat Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, a major threat to marine ecosystems and sustainable fisheries, conserve endangered species and sustain small-scale fisheries.

To support India's rapid strides in the field of aquaculture, the FAO is supporting a Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded project in

important problem facing the State. Therefore, a party or alliance that promised to address this issue would surely have had an advantage. With its promise of one crore government jobs, did the NDA reap the harvest of youth vote? Here too, the story is a bit complicated.

Among the voters below 25 years of age, the NDA polled nearly 50% of the vote. Among those in the age group of 26-35 years, the NDA got support from 45%. But curiously, in 2015, when the Mahagatbandhan won, the NDA had a comparative advantage among voters under 25 years. In 2020, when it won, ironically, it had slightly less support among this age cohort (35%) than its overall support (37%). So, the political choices of the youth are somewhat fluid and unlikely to easily transform the scale of a party's victory.

The issue of voter behaviour

More specifically, even though the young may be expected to vote more for a new party, for the Opposition or for the more aggressive campaigner, it is not clear if, in India, there is a youth constituency that often behaves in one particular way.

The more sobering part is that whether it is women or youth, their vote choices align broadly with the vote choice of the class and the community that they belong to. In other words, if a particular class group or community is less likely to vote for NDA, then women or young voters from that social section too are less likely to have voted for the NDA. In the Bihar Assembly elections 2025, the upper and middle classes and upper castes voted for the NDA on a massive scale. Correspondingly, the women and the youth among them voted for the NDA in similarly large proportions.

This resonates with the question which scholars such as Rajeshwari Deshpande have been raising about women's vote: do women vote necessarily differently from the community they belong to? Or does their voting pattern get shaped by the factor of caste/community?

The rhetoric of there being a game-changer is useful for both the politician and the analyst. But, Bihar 2025 underscores a very fundamental concern about positing uniqueness in the gender factor (and now in the age factor) as having bypassed the class-caste factors.

To put it conservatively, we can say that women's vote and a limited surge among young voters surely helped the NDA. The question whether 'MY vote turned the tide', however, requires a more careful analysis of many other factors.

Andhra Pradesh on "Transforming Aquaculture to a Sustainable, Reduced Footprint and Climate-Resilient Food System", guided by Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture (GSA) and Ecosystem Approach to Aquaculture (EAA) principles. The project aims to support the Department of Fisheries, Government of Andhra Pradesh, in promoting climate-resilient, sustainable aquaculture, benefiting the State and serving as a model for India to take forward the government's Blue Revolution.

As part of the aquatic value chain, strengthening of fishing ports and fishing harbours is also one of the main thrust areas of the Government of India. A Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) of the FAO intends to assist the Government of India to strengthen the technical capacities of fishing ports to address main environmental, social and economic challenges that affect the aquatic value chain. Two pilot fishing ports, specifically Vanakbara (Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Diu without legislation) and Jakhuai in Gujarat, will benefit from this TCP that will provide them with specific strategic and operational tools to identify and formulate investments projects, whose implementation would address main challenges.

Focus on sustainability

India's fisheries and aquaculture sectors are on a promising trajectory. Yet, sustainability must remain central. Managing fishing efforts through science-based stock assessments, promoting co-managed Monitoring Control and Surveillance (MCS) to curb IUU fishing, following Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture and embedding ecosystem-based approaches are key priorities. Strengthening certification, traceability, and digital tools – while ensuring inclusivity for smallholders – will enhance competitiveness in domestic and global markets.

The FAO remains committed to supporting India's journey toward sustainable aquatic food systems, ensuring food and nutritional security, and reducing environmental and climate footprints, guiding India's Blue Revolution toward a resilient and inclusive future.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A record in Bihar

Nitish Kumar's swearing-in as Bihar's Chief Minister for the tenth time marks a remarkable milestone in Indian politics. His enduring presence in the State's leadership reflects both political acumen and the trust he commands among the electorate. Over the years, Mr. Kumar has overseen initiatives in

infrastructure, education, and social welfare, shaping Bihar's development trajectory. However, sustained governance also brings challenges. Bihar continues to face issues such as unemployment, migration, and health-care disparities. It is essential that the new administration emphasises inclusive growth, efficient

administration, and innovative policies to address these persistent concerns. As citizens, we hope that this historic tenure translates into tangible benefits for all Biharis, fostering progress while strengthening democratic institutions. **Nagarajamani M.V.,** Hyderabad

Metro Rail projects

The decision by the Union government to deny Metro Rail projects for Coimbatore and Madurai in Tamil Nadu is not only short-sighted but also counter-productive. The population requirement that there should be at least two million people in the metro area is only a guideline and not an absolute criterion. Given the

fact that population numbers have not been updated over many decades, such objections appear politically motivated and prevent careful long-term planning for these two cities. The situation in Coimbatore, where Chennai- and Bengaluru-like traffic snarls are increasing by the day, needs a high-capacity Metro

Rail as the only solution to ease congestion. A worker caught in a traffic jam is not only unproductive but also risks falling ill. It would be prudent for the Centre and State to put the needs of the people first.

G. Parameswaran,
Coimbatore

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

Is federalism in retreat under single-party hegemony?



Yamini Aiyar

Former President and Chief Executive, Centre for Policy Research, and Senior Visiting Fellow, Brown University



A. Kalaivarasan

Associate Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, and Visiting Research Fellow, King's College London

PARLEY

The rationalisation of GST brought cheer to consumers, but triggered another row between the Centre and some States which fear a decline in revenue collection. Opposition-ruled States have been at loggerheads with the Centre over centrally sponsored schemes, release of disaster relief funds, and the Finance Commission's recommended share. Some of these issues have reached the Supreme Court. Is federalism in retreat under single-party hegemony? Yamini Aiyar and A. Kalaivarasan discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Sharath S. Srivatsa**. Edited excerpts:

Is the strain between the Opposition-ruled States and the Centre a matter of development needs or is it politics at play?

A. Kalaivarasan: The federal coalition of regional parties that emerged in the 1990s offers lessons for understanding single-party dominance now and its implications for federalism. During that time, economic and institutional reforms were more of a federal nature. There was a greater interaction between Centre and states on a range of issues. The abolition of the Planning Commission, and the changes in resource allocation before and after 2014, shows a shift.

Yamini Aiyar: In the 1990s, regional parties began to assert their presence on the national stage. With the emergence of the BJP, we are back to single-party dominance. Crucially, the BJP's Hindutva politics is the antithesis of the politics of accommodation. Effectively, as 'one nation' politics started dominating, regional parties that represent regional anxieties and political identities are increasingly becoming the voices for deeper federal accommodation.

Post-liberalisation, the role of institutions, such as the Finance Commission, has changed. The GST Council has not done any better in strengthening the federal spirit.

AK: The question is whether the recent change respects the federal spirit envisioned in the design of the GST. The States surrendered their sovereignty as much as the Centre to build this grand bargain of GST. Ideally, this should have been discussed within the GST Council before being declared. Now, it looks like the Centre takes the call. Historically, at least till the 1990s, the Planning Commission had an effective role, particularly in guiding public investments. Post 2014, it is out of the picture. Now, the only instrument available for resource allocation between the Centre and the States is the Finance



GETTY IMAGES

Commission. The concern is not only regarding the total share of the States in the divisible pool; more increasingly, certain States are concerned about horizontal devolution or horizontal imbalance. The poorer States depend largely on fiscal transfers. This is making the southern States question whether they are being penalised via the allocation of the Finance Commission because it is inherently supportive of the northern States given the inverse-income formula built into the Commission's design. We need to focus on the broader issue of inequality, not merely the fiscal transfer challenges under single-party hegemony. This is not simply a political problem; it is a structural one.

YI: At the heart of the fiscal federal architecture that India adopted was a commitment to the principle of redistribution. When southern States raise this issue, they are not necessarily arguing against the principle of redistribution; they are responding to a structural reality of spatial inequality. There is a lot of lack of good faith by the Centre as it has used and misused its constitutional powers and institutional hold to centralise decision-making. Fiscal centralisation has always been a challenge in India's federalism. You are seeing a lot more tension in the formula that the Finance Commission has used. The States have rightly challenged the fact that the Indian government is extremely centralised vis-a-vis the GST.

Cess and surcharges, which are not devolved to the States, have been on the rise in the recent years. How are the economies of States affected?

AK: The fiscal structure shows that the Centre, more than the State, is weak. The Centre of the 1990s could invest in a productive way. If you look at borrowings, 80% of every rupee it has borrowed is actually utilised for revenues



At the heart of the fiscal federal architecture that India adopted was a commitment to the principle of redistribution. When southern States raise this issue, they are not necessarily arguing against the principle of redistribution; they are responding to a structural reality of spatial inequality.

YAMINI AIYAR

(expenditure). The only entity now building infrastructure is the State. Even the wealthiest States have not been able to generate employment. Overall growth has not been inclusive in terms of job creation, leading to increased regional inequality. There is also a perverse flow of resources. Southern States cannot deny that the resources are coming from the northern region and poorer migrant labour, which helps maintain a low-wage equilibrium. Jobless growth is also being partly a product of the way in which our federal economy is integrated. In India, the relatively smaller regions are compensating or subsidising relatively larger regions. Without strong growth, good jobs and good wages, during every election, political parties try to compensate and engage in competitive populism. They give different sets of guarantees that come at the expense of productive investment.

YI: The Indian government's use of cesses and surcharges over the past decade reflects a lack of good faith. The move towards greater centralisation of social spending, driven by electoral incentives, is a matter of concern. The Centre is squeezing States and encroaching on their responsibilities through mechanisms such as centrally sponsored schemes. This kind of political impasse is because the Centre has not lived up to its bargain. One of the tensions that we have in the economy is structural spatial inequality in growth patterns. Some of the structural challenges is around wage growth and capital flows. So, how do we address this question of coordination within our federal structure? What are the institutional systems and political mechanisms needed to enable this coordination? Without the Planning Commission, the Finance Ministry determines how centrally sponsored schemes should be allocated to the States. Is this appropriate or do we need a different mechanism for determining development financing?

Have regional parties allied with the BJP failed to balance their politics and the need to protect their regional interests? How different is the current single-party dominance different from what the country

saw under Congress rule in the 60s and 70s?

AK: Any capital generated from below has the support of regional parties. It serves as an electoral resource for the party to assert its position. The aspect of capital has been somehow been weakened over the last decade. This has implications for the electoral strategies of regional parties. The centralisation has not only weakened regional capital and local entrepreneurship but also reshaped electoral financing with the coming of electoral bonds.

YI: The difference between coalitions in the 1990s and 2000s and the coalition today is that there was a much broader dependency on regional parties for the Congress and even briefly during the A.B. Vajpayee era. The culture of governance was about cooperation and negotiation. There are two key parties that are holding the NDA together today at the Centre. The style of governance, which is more a culture of centralisation and not of deliberation, also shapes the bargaining hand. The two critical regional parties (TDP and JD(U)) that are part of the coalition are going through their own churn. So, their impulse is to hold on to power in their regions rather than engage in a battle for federalism at the national level. Perhaps, they see an alliance with the BJP as an instrument that serves their purpose of being able to consolidate power in their regions.

How will the southern States cope with the delimitation exercise post the Census and the 'one nation, one election' proposal?

AK: With delimitation, we are going to have a situation where the larger populated States have more political power and the relatively less populated regions have more economic power in terms of per capita income. So, how can regions without economic growth wield political influence? The delimitation question should not be seen in isolation but from the context of our larger political economy.

YI: The 'one nation, one election' proposal seems to be another carefully crafted tool that uses the logic of efficiency and a broader public disenchantment with the role of money and muscle in politics. It is unlikely to solve the challenges that the public has. The argument that India needs to have is about the structural challenges of its democracy.



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www.thehindu.com

NOTEBOOK

Election data analysis: From the dark ages to the AI era

Technology has revolutionised election-related data analysis without replacing journalists

Vignesh Radhakrishnan

I vividly recall the first election-related data analysis project I worked on, for *The Hindu's* print edition. In mid-March 2017, my colleague Srinivasan Ramani and I produced a double-page spread featuring maps, charts, and data analysis of elections in five States. We both knew what needed to be done, but the tools at our disposal were limited.

The first challenge was to scrape the Election Commission of India (ECI)'s website as results streamed in. This was a tall order given our primitive coding skills – mine, in fact, were non-existent at the time. Each State's data took ages to scrape; like water droplets, data from each constituency would trickle down to our excel sheets.

In a print newsroom, such slow, unpredictable tasks are risky. Yet, given that this data formed the bedrock of our exercise, getting it right was important. The tension was compounded by the fact that the ECI's counting often stretched past 8 p.m. This meant that we had to keep scraping and even revise the page before the deadline. During the 2023 Karnataka Assembly polls, the drama over the Jayanagar constituency caused our otherwise smooth coverage to go beyond 1 a.m.

Mapping proved to be a huge task. Older data enthusiasts may recall Google Fusion Tables. We relied on these to prepare State constituency boundaries in the KML format, used to display geographic data. We then turned to Indie-mapper.io, another archaic tool, to colour-code the maps and export them to the designers, who would refine them for print. This process had to be replicated for black-and-white pages, as some print editions were in monochrome.

Charting was another Herculean task. As data streamed in, I recall the manual grind of copy-pasting figures into excel sheets and generating pivot tables to do calculations. By 11.15 p.m., after 12 hours of work, I would still be feeding the

charts to the designer while my colleague would be writing the analysis. The news desk would be breathing down our neck, having already sent every other page for printing. Without a moment's respite, we would have to revise the entire spread with the updated data for the next edition, and wrap up at 1 a.m.

By the end of 2017, we transitioned to Tableau for mapping, which significantly reduced the drama. Thanks to Stack Exchange and many generous coders, our scripts were delivering results faster than usual too. By 2019, we moved to automating analysis in Google Sheets, relying on pre-built formulae and scripts to generate final tables. This efficiency gave us more time to write for the website in parallel – a boon for data journalists who capture the minute-by-minute churn.

Looking back, if the 2017-2019 polls felt like the Stone Age, the 2019-2024 period seemed like the Industrial Revolution. We had replaced crude hand tools with heavy machinery, but the gears still required constant oiling. Now, we have entered the age of AI. The 2025 Bihar Assembly polls was a watershed moment. It was our first coverage executed entirely through AI-generated code, with every table, visualisation, and strand of analysis driven by scripts written by the machine. Google AI Studio generated the code and JupyterLab executed it, so we bid farewell to mapping software, pivot tables, complex excel formulae and stand-alone visualisation tools.

AI automation empowered us to file rapid analysis online on a host of subjects, anchor a half-hour YouTube live stream, and also wrap up the print edition by 10.30 p.m. Despite these seismic shifts, most journalists across the desk, design, and data teams, who anchored the 2017 coverage, remain at the helm. Technology, even AI, cannot replace humans. For those who adapt to it, it simply makes the telling of the story easier.

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PICTURE OF THE WEEK

A river of sorrow



A fisherman casts his net in the Yamuna river, laden with foam, on a smoggy morning in New Delhi. The foam is a result of high levels of pollutants, particularly ammonia and phosphates, from industrial and wastewater discharges. AFP

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 21, 1975

Singing 'friendship ambassadors' from U.S.

Fifty-two young men and women from an American University will sing in India for three weeks in January next, in a voluntary effort to start an exchange of music groups between the two countries.

The tour has been sponsored by "Ambassadors for Friendship", a non-profit, non-political organisation founded in New

The ~~MOA~~ Hindu.

York in 1956 by Mr. Harry Morgan. Its objective is to win the hearts of people of other countries through the universal language of music, thus creating lasting bonds of friendship with the American people.

After auditioning, interviewing and screening dozens of choirs across the length and breadth of the United States, the Brown University Chorus, under the direction of Mr. William Ermev was selected to spearhead Friendship Ambassadors' first programme in India in 1976.

Arriving in Bombay on January 5, the group reaches Madras on January 9, where it will give three performances.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 21, 1925

Tutankh Amen's mummy

Cairo, Nov. 19: An official report says that the unwrapping of Tutankh Amen's mummy occupied seven days. The removal of the mummy is impossible as it is firmly glued to the bottom of the gold coffin. Numerous layers of gold faience covering the body have made impossible the use of X-rays. The objects discovered are classified in three categories: Amuletic, Royal and Personal, and include the Royal Diadem with the insignia of culture.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Share of people with disabilities who lack health insurance

80 In per cent. Drawing on a nationwide survey of over 5,000 persons with disabilities across 34 States and Union Territories, a study warns that “deep systemic inequities” continue to block nearly 16 crore disabled Indians from both public and private insurance schemes. PTI

Children whose Juvenile Justice Board cases are pending

50 In thousand. A new India Justice Report shows that as of October 31, 2023, 55% of 1,00,904 cases before Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) were pending, with pendency ranging from 83% in Odisha to 35% in Karnataka. On average, each JJB carried a backlog of 154 cases. PTI

Acres of illicit poppy cultivation destroyed in Manipur

53 in acres. Security forces destroyed nearly 53 acres of illicit poppy cultivation in Manipur’s Kangpokpi district, police said on Thursday. The drive was conducted by a joint team of security forces and the Kangpokpi Forest Division at six locations in the Phailengkot/Makhan hill ranges. PTI

Number of people still missing in Ukraine after Russian strike

22 Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that 22 people were still missing in the western city of Ternopil, a day after a Russian strike there killed at least 26 people, including three children. He said more than 200 rescuers were deployed to the city for search efforts. AFP

Loan approved by the ADB to upgrade Pakistan’s power grid

330 in \$ million. Pakistan will receive a \$330 million loan to upgrade its energy grid, which will help hydropower reach cities, the Asian Development Bank said. The country faces chronic power outages, and soaring electricity costs. AFP
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Is air pollution a South Asian crisis?

What was the 2024 India-Pakistan Smog? How has air pollution become rampant across the South Asian region? What does the Greenpeace 2023 World Air Quality Report state? How do deteriorating AQI levels affect India economically? What should be the way ahead?

EXPLAINER

Dev Nath Pathak
Vibha Bharadwaj

The story so far:

Delhi is in the spotlight once again for its consistently deteriorating AQI levels. And like every year there has only been a knee-jerk reaction to the problem, rather than a sustainable solution. The Commission for Air Quality Management has gradually switched from stage 1 and 2 to stage 3 of the Graded Response Action Plan, and advisories have been issued for citizens who battle serious health risks. However, there is a dire need to understand the collusion of natural and man-made reasons for air pollution, for Delhi’s air pollution crisis goes beyond India’s sovereign borders.

What is happening in South Asia?

In November 2024, eastern and northern Pakistan and north India faced a severe pollution event that came to be known as the ‘2024 India-Pakistan Smog’. Lahore and Delhi virtually competed on the scale of the most polluted city with the highest AQI reading globally. ‘Brown clouds’ formed in swathes over the cities distinctly visible in satellite images. While Lahore was faced with the worst AQI, Delhi’s air gradually deteriorated due to a shift in wind patterns that carried pollutants across borders and within the region. Now in 2025, Delhi is once again followed by Lahore. *The Dawn* from Karachi reported that local pollution and smoke drifted in from India due to low-speed winds.

Bangladesh also has a significant share in the air pollution crisis. Dhaka is witnessing worsening AQI in the range from moderate to very poor during the winter season, as reported by the U.S. thinktank Atlantic Council. Likewise in the capital of Nepal, AQI remains alarmingly high every year, between moderate and unhealthy.



Not the only one: Commuters ride along a road amid dense smog in Lahore on October 30. AFP

What are the reasons?

The Greenpeace 2023 World Air Quality Report underlined that poor air quality in South Asia is due to anthropogenic sources such as industrial and vehicular emissions, and burning of solid fuel and wastages. The shared air pollution across the Indo-Gangetic Plain and beyond, with tier-1 cities facing the consequences, can be accounted by for factors such as the fixed topography of the region. Although separated by cartography, the regional topography of South Asia causes fixed ventilation of natural air and dispersal of pollutants. A trans-national and regional haze surfaces due to the complex composition of air particulates. Alongside the natural geography, there is a transnational and regional commonality – the failure in managing such crises due to abysmal political will.

The World Bank report on ‘Air Pollution and Public Health in South Asia’ in 2023 informed that nine out of the world’s 10 cities with the worst air pollution are in South Asia. Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan are known to be relatively less affected by transregional air pollution in the region of South Asia. This interplay of factors shows that mitigation requires attention to not only short-term solutions but also long-term strategies that focus on strong decarbonisation measures and structural reforms in agricultural practices and industry emissions across national borders.

Is this a crisis of development?

Air pollution is related to larger issues of development and its adverse consequences for the environment. A World Bank study estimates that high AQI

levels in India results in about 3% of its GDP being spent on healthcare and lost labour capital. *The Lancet* Health Journal highlighted that in 2019 India’s GDP reduced by 1.36% due to premature morbidity and mortality as a result of air pollution. A steep rise in the sale of automobile vehicles, lack of public transport, negligible support for non-vehicular mobility, and building concrete structures at the expense of urban greenery are some of the reasons which lead to deteriorating air quality. A 2023 UNEP report shows how current patterns of consumption and production are driving climate change, which in turn drives the air pollution crisis. Thus, the World Health Organization (WHO) accurately recognises that air quality significantly affects life expectancy, public health, economic productivity, and environmental justice. These sordid AQI figures are the result of poorly thought-out development. The consequences are visible not only in north India. Experts warn of worsening air in Mumbai and other cities on the southeast coast.

What next?

A more nuanced model of governance with strong political will to curb the sources of the crisis; a caring human development model addressing the needs of the working class and farmers; and a more regionally informed model are some of the imperatives needed to find sustainable solutions.

A recent study by IIT Bhubaneswar highlighted the importance of a broader regional airshed scale management strategy to tackle air pollution, rather than merely addressing the issue in piecemeal.

Only with stronger policies that involve varied stakeholders from across borders and states, can one evolve a meteorological mindset to uproot the sources of air pollution.

Dev Nath Pathak is associate dean, faculty of social sciences at South Asian University. Vibha Bharadwaj is a research scholar at Christ University, Bangalore.

THE GIST

▼ In November 2024, eastern and northern Pakistan and north India faced a severe pollution event that came to be known as the ‘2024 India-Pakistan Smog’.

▼ The Greenpeace 2023 World Air Quality Report underlined that poor air quality in South Asia is due to anthropogenic sources such as industrial and vehicular emissions, and burning of solid fuel and wastages.

▼ *The Lancet* Health Journal highlighted that in 2019 India’s GDP reduced by 1.36% due to premature morbidity and mortality as a result of air pollution.

Why are stone quarries expanding in Kerala?

What is M-sand? How has banning river sand mining led to expanding quarries across Kerala?

T.V. Padma

The story so far:

A much-needed ban on river sand mining in Kerala has spurred stone quarrying. Many of these quarries are located near protected areas, according to a new report from scientists in the State.

Why did Kerala ban river sand mining?

Kerala banned river sand mining in January 2016 to protect its rivers and their ecosystems from the degradation caused by excessive extraction. After the ban, M-sand, an artificial alternative produced by crushing hard rock such as granite into fine particles, quickly became a popular alternative, leading to the rise in stone quarrying. To assess the impact of the mining ban, scientists from the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Calicut analysed the expansion of 72 quarries they’d identified within 10 km of

protected areas. Using GIS and Google Earth Pro, they compared the quarries’ average annual expansion three years before the ban to their expansion in 2016, immediately after the ban kicked in.

In a paper in *The Extractive Industries and Society*, the team reported that in 2016 alone, the quarries expanded by 174% in area, with some more than doubling in size. After comparing their data with that from other parts of the world, the researchers concluded that more quarrying may spell trouble for the region’s biodiversity.

Where are the quarries located?

“Unfortunately, a good number of these quarries are near protected areas,” George Varghese of NIT Calicut and one of the study’s authors said. The team also identified three quarries of particular concern, all within 10 km of the Malabar Wildlife Sanctuary in Kozhikode and Wayanad districts. These quarries grew

232% in size in 2016 alone. Three more quarries, within the buffer zone of the Silent Valley National Park across the Palakkad, Malappuram, and Nilgiris districts, also doubled in size.

Why is sand-mining a problem?

The team’s paper sheds light on the complexity of micro-level sand mining and extractive activities on natural resource trade flows, livelihood welfare conundrums, and socioecological systems, Matovu Baker, a research associate at the National Taiwan Ocean University in Keelung said. Dr. Baker, who studied the effects of river sand mining at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, said the paper demonstrates “emerging socioecological system trade-offs that are less documented and could lead to blue injustices,” a counter-movement focusing on injustices to “small-scale fishing communities in coastal areas”.

“The huge demand for M-sand has

drastically increased the quarrying area within a very short period,” Aznarul Islam, associate professor at Aliah University in Kolkata, said. Dr. Islam and his colleagues have studied the consequences of riverbed sand mining on the Mayurakshi river in the 50 years spanning 1970 to 2020. While sand mining had a “mild impact” on the shape of the river channel between 1970 and 2010, a phase of accelerated mining phase 2010-2020 “vehemently altered the channel morphology,” he said. However, “the strict ban on river sand mining [in Kerala] increased the manufactured sand mining at a rapid pace, which actually reduced the quality of the ecosystem and biota”, Dr. Islam said.

How is demand for sand changing?

India has been recording an ever-increasing demand for river and marine sand, especially at its major urban centres, according to the India Rivers Forum. The scope and severity of consequences vary depending on several on- and off-site mining activities, and interactions between demand and supply, Dr. Baker said. He highlighted the example of Chavara village in Kerala’s Kollam district, where the removal of sediments affected the migratory routes of fish. There are several solutions, but they have to be sustainable, per Dr. Baker.

T.V. Padma is a science journalist based in New Delhi.

THE GIST

▼ Kerala banned river sand mining in January 2016 to protect its rivers from the degradation caused by excessive extraction.

▼ M-sand, an artificial alternative produced by crushing hard rock such as granite into fine particles, quickly became a popular alternative, leading to the rise in stone quarrying.

▼ “The huge demand for M-sand has drastically increased the quarrying area within a very short period,” Aznarul Islam, associate professor at Aliah University in Kolkata, said.

IN THE LIMELIGHT

Salil Chowdhury: the singular man of multitudes

As the world celebrates the centenary of Salil Chowdhury, the iconic Indian composer, poet, and filmmaker, his legacy as a songwriter and revolutionary continues to resonate deeply

Kalyan Sundareswaran

“Tumi Panchamer bhakta, tai na? (You are a fan of Pancham [R D Burman], aren’t you?)”, Pintuda asked, his lips slightly curved in a smile. “Tumi jano je Pancham Salil-dar bhakta chilo? (Did you know that Pancham was a huge fan of Salil-da?)” It was the turn of the millennium and the world was only just opening up. The era of information abundance wasn’t yet there, but Pintuda’s facts were stated with a conviction that could never be feigned.

Pintuda was a resident patron of the canteen in National Library, Calcutta. One could almost always find him there occupying different tables on different days. Pintuda was many things pleasant but most of all he was a great admirer of admirable things. He could inspire fondness in people for anyone or anything without causing them to dislike others. He believed our lives could be so full of joy if one especially embraced pluralism in what one liked. He was the eternal fan who had no heroes to worship.

And yet, each time he spoke of Gandhi or Gary Sobers or Tagore or Salil Chowdhury one could sense that his words deferred very slightly more than the usual.

One bar joke Pintuda had made, suffixed with a disarming smile, went thus: “It was a large group. A revolutionary, a freedom fighter, a music composer, a poet, a songwriter, a story-writer, a playwright, a music arranger, a filmmaker, a flautist, a pianist, an esraj player, a sitar player, a violinist, a tabla player, all walked into a bar. Their name was Salil Chowdhury.” “Polymath” was the word Pintuda used when he referred to Salil-da, right alongside other great art polymaths of modern India such as Rabindranath Tagore, Satyajit Ray, B. V. Karanth and P. L. Deshpande.

Musical genius

The journey into the world of Salil Chowdhury has since then been a long and rewarding one. Just as friendships deepen with each well-spent moment, love and admiration for Salil-da grows one song at a time, one written word at a time. What fascinates about his music the most is how variations are its only constant. His average song is like the mighty Ganga – capricious, unpredictable, avulsing through crests and troughs, finding newer vistas while enriching every bit of soil and vegetation in its way. The tonic changes and melodic variations in many of his songs to a lay listener would seem erratic and yet ensconced in elegance.

The glorious Lata Mangeshkar song in Bangla, “Keno Kichu Kotha bolo na” which later became Kishore Kumar’s “Maujon Ki Doli Chali Re” from the film *Jeevan Jyoti* instantly comes to mind. The notes seem disparate, fluttering high and low like a butterfly but never beyond the garden that is the song. Another classic example is the iconic ‘Runner’, originally a poem written by the revolutionary poet Sukanta Bhattacharya, which was set to tune by Salil-da. Through the length of the almost seven-minute song sung by the fabulous Hemant Kumar, there are six changes to the base note Sa and the song



Salil Chowdhury

doesn’t follow the typical Mukhra, Antara, Sanchari sequence returning to the Sthayi. Every note of the song is a point of no return just like the Runner described in the song who is only running ahead driven by his duty to deliver letters and money orders. The varying moods and tonal changes give the feeling of having many little songs within one song akin to a Russian doll. In the haunting and atmospheric ‘Aaja re Pardesi’ from *Madhumati*, Salil-da has used the seventh chord in the basic melody which is inherently considered incomplete making it a metaphor of the sense of insufficiency the girl [Vyajantimala’s character in the film] feels.

The revolutionary songwriter

This apart, Salil-da’s rich use of harmony and chorus especially in what he called “Jana chetanar gaan” (songs of social consciousness) created in the choir mode add a completely different and rich dimension to his repertoire. Many of the Bangla choir songs from the 1940s which were lost in time were revived in Hindi such as ‘Chalo Bhor Ke Raahi’ or ‘Tumhein Watan Pukarta’, translated by the inimitable Yogesh, in the 1980s which

have since become really popular.

Salil-da’s music was nothing short of a melting pot of contrasts – where the West met the East, the classical fused with the folk, an outward simplicity masked the inner complexity, the massy equalised itself with the elite and the conventional co-existed with the disruptive. These contrasts in his works were reflective of the disparities prevalent in those times, in his own life. His social privilege by birth gave him access to education, western music, intellectual capital but his formative years also brought him in close contact with the working classes, exposed him to the brutality of engineered famines, imperialist exploitation and ruthless censorship. And as communists believed (Salil-da himself was a card-carrying communist in the initial years), these dialectics, these mutually irreconcilable elements would clash and result in revolution and change. Salil-da’s works of music and poetry initially inspired this change in others and eventually became the very embodiment of it through its varying, contrary elements that gave birth to new sounds and harmonies.

As a result, the classicists often rejected

him for not being conservative enough and the radicals cancelled him for his moderation. No one could call his work their own, his music didn’t give in to tribalism and remained exclusive in its inclusivity.

In one of his iconic Bangla compositions, an acutely self-aware Salil-da writes,

“Aami jhorer kaache rekhe elaam amaar thikaana

Aami kaandlam, aami hashlam, ei jibon jowarey bhashlam

Ammi bonnyar kache ghurnir kache rakhlam nishana”

(I left my dwelling, my whereabouts near the storm

I wept, I laughed much too, and drifted in the high tides of life

Leaving evidence of my being near floods and whirlwinds)

And just like that, in this conscious act of incessant gliding and belonging to no one, Salil-da ended up belonging to everyone.

Beyond melodies

No written piece on Salil-da is complete without referring to his flourish and effulgence as a man of words. He has written over 400 songs and poems in Bangla. He also wrote stories which were made into films such as *Do Bigha Zamin*, *Parak*, and *Naukri* (1978) and he also directed a film *Pinjre Ke Panchhi*. He was truly a Renaissance man.

While every work of Salil-da’s is one for the ages, his works, especially his music, have never been more relevant than today. The world today is more divisive than diverse, any form of pluralism is feared, and we are willing to go a mile long, but only an inch deep in pursuit of anything. It’s hard to say mediocrity from excellence, there is profusion of information and abuse of knowledge. In all this, Salil-da’s notes and words stand out as the epitome of syncretism, adding meaning and depth to their narrative, standing out in their musical and poetic magnificence while holding the promise of being ageless and enduring.

“No one has quite used the obligato like Salil-da,” Pintuda had said once. A short walk across the National Library lawns to the Encyclopaedia Section of the majestic old Reading Hall revealed its meaning. An obligato was an essential, mandatory part of a musical piece or a song usually played with flutes or violins or oboes that ran obliquely or as a counterpoint to the main melody thus embellishing the melody itself. The opposite marking of obligato in musical notations is the Latin ad libitum more commonly known as ad lib. There are many instances of obligatos in Salil-da’s music. In the soulful “Zindagi kaisi hai paheli” from *Anand* there is an understated string section acting as the obligato; in “Kai Baar yun bhi dekha hai” from *Rajnigandha* a soft flute and violin obligato accompany Mukesh’s voice sensitively reflecting the inner turmoil of the characters.

It’s been years since Pintuda was last seen. He must be nearing retirement age now, if he did any work at all. In this day and age, all one can wish for is that the likes of Pintuda have the will, energy and the safe confines of a library canteen to proselytise rigid, unbending people and get them to see the love, dignity and beauty in things around them.

Over time, the maturity to appreciate many other composers has come, and the ardent fandom of Pancham remains as strong as ever. Regardless of whose music one seeks to be the soundtrack of life in good and bad times, Salil-da’s will be the singular and eternal obligato to it. Exquisite and indispensable, as it ought to be. Happy 100th to you Salil-da!

Kalyan Sundareswaran is an IT professional working with Infosys.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

“Why are you smiling?”

“A local computer company has sent me a letter. The Managing Director says that if I buy a computer from his firm, then I would be assured of outrageous service!”

“That’s good isn’t it? I mean...”

“...when you say that you are going to provide ‘outrageous’ service, what it means is that you are going to provide terrible service. It will be so bad that it will make the customer mad.”

“Sounds like the kind of service given by our local cable operator.”

“So true. We went to a new restaurant yesterday. The prices there were outrageous.”

“Meaning the prices were shocking? That everything was priced really high?”

“Exactly!”

“The facilities that were available in my cousin’s school were outrageous. Can I say that?”

“You can. It means that the facilities were really bad.”

“It seems to me that the behaviour of politicians worldwide is outrageous.”

“You have a point there.”

“Tell me, if ‘outrageous’ is wrong, what should the Managing Director have written.”

“He could have used ‘outstanding.’ Our company provides outstanding service.”

“You’re probably right. My uncle wrote an outstanding paper on Nehru.”

“Have you read Nehru’s biography?”

“No, I haven’t. Tell me, what exactly is the difference between a ‘biography’ and an ‘autobiography’?”

“First of all b.i.o.g.r.a.p.h.y is pronounced bioGraphy, not bioGRaphy. The ‘i’ in the first syllable rhymes with the words my, tie and I. The ‘o’ in the second syllable is like the ‘o’ in ‘hot’, ‘cot’ and ‘lot’. And the ‘a’...”

“...is like the ‘a’ in ‘China’. So the word is pronounced bioGraphy with the stress on the second syllable. Right?”

“That’s right! And in the case of ‘autobiography’ the main stress is on the fourth syllable.”

“I see. So the same syllable is stressed in both ‘biography’ and ‘autobiography’?”

“Exactly! You see, the rule is fairly simple. Words ending in ‘graphy’ have the main stress before it. That is, the main stress will be on the syllable before the suffix ‘graphy’. For example, p.h.o.t.o.g.r.a.p.h.y.”

“...let me guess. It probably has the main stress on the second syllable ‘to’. So it’s pronounced PhoTOgraphy.”

“That’s right. The first ‘o’ is pronounced like the ‘a’ in ‘China’ and the ‘o’ in the second syllable is like the ‘o’ in ‘cot’, ‘hot’ and ‘lot’.”

“I see. So t.e.l.e.g.r.a.p.h.y would be pronounced telEgraphy with the stress on the second syllable?”

“Right again! Here’s another...”

“To get back to the point, what is the difference between an ‘autobiography’ and a ‘biography’?”

“You see, a biography tells the story of a real person. The story is written by someone other than the individual.”

“I don’t like reading biographies.”

“I see. In the case of an autobiography, the writer tells his own story.”

Published in The Hindu on September 29, 1998.

THE DAILY QUIZ

England takes on Australia, as yet another prestigious Ashes series gets underway on November 22. Here’s a quiz on some interesting facts and figures of the Ashes

N. Soorya Prakash

QUESTION 1

Which player’s name appears in each of the highest partnerships from the second to sixth wicket in the history of the Ashes?

QUESTION 2

Who is the only bowler in Ashes history to pick more than 40 wickets in a series twice?

QUESTION 3

Which wicketkeeper holds the record for effecting most dismissals in a single Ashes series?

QUESTION 4

Which neutral umpire holds the record for having officiated the most matches in Ashes?

QUESTION 5

Which English batsman scored 905 runs in the 1928-29 Ashes series that was broken by Bradman in the very next series in 1930?

QUESTION 6

Who holds the record for having scored the highest individual score in an innings in Ashes history?

QUESTION 7

Which ground has hosted the most Test matches in Ashes history?

QUESTION 8

Who holds the title of being the only player to have scored more than 1,000 runs and taken more than 150 wickets in Ashes history?



Visual question:

This player took the latest hat trick in Ashes history at the Woolloongabba, on November 25, 2010, which happened to be his birthday as well. Name him. REUTERS

Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:

1. Number of countries taking part in the FIFA World Cup and the slots that are to be filled through play-offs. **Ans: 48; 6**

2. This country was the first to qualify for the tournament along with co-hosts. **Ans: Japan**

3. Name the confederation which will host its own play-off tournament for four of the remaining slots. **Ans: UEFA**

4. Name the country from the confederation which is headed to the intercontinental play-offs. **Ans: New Caledonia**

5. These many countries are set to play their first ever World Cup in 2026. **Ans: 4 nations; Curacao, Cape Verde, Jordan and Uzbekistan**

Visual: Name this nation which became the smallest ever (by population) to qualify for the tournament. **Ans: Curacao**
Early Birds: Tamal Biswas| Neil Lal| Tito Shiladitya| Sadhan Panda| Sudhir Thapa

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

Word of the day

Excoriate:

express strong disapproval of; tear or wear off the skin or make sore by abrading

Synonyms: condemn, decry, objurgate, reprobate, chafe

Usage: *His latest article received excoriating reviews.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/excoriatepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ɪkˈskɔɪ.i.ɪt/, /ɪkˈskɔʊ.i.ɪt/

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

Pharmacogenomics: reading genes to tailor prescriptions for individuals

Unlike traditional medicine's one-size-fits-all approach, the field recognises that genetic differences can dramatically alter how our bodies metabolise and respond to drugs; it represents a fundamental shift in how we think about drug therapy from treating populations to treating individuals, from trial-and-error to precision medication

Renu Yadav

The old medical advice to “start low and go slow” reflects a fundamental challenge in healthcare: the same drug at the same dose can heal one patient while harming another. For decades, physicians have prescribed medications based on population averages, essentially conducting a trial-and-error experiment with each patient. Today, pharmacogenomics is rewriting this script by revealing how our genes influence drug response, transforming medication prescribing from guesswork to precision.

Pharmacogenomics examines how genetic variations affect an individual's response to medications, determining whether a drug will be effective, ineffective, or even dangerous for a particular person. Mostly, this variability arises from differences in drug-metabolising enzymes, particularly the cytochrome P450 (CYP) family, which processes approximately 75% of commonly prescribed medications.

Genetic variations in these enzymes create different metaboliser phenotypes. A “poor metaboliser” with low functional enzyme activity may accumulate toxic drug levels from standard doses, while an “ultrarapid metaboliser” with enhanced enzyme activity may receive no therapeutic benefit. These aren't rare genetic quirks. Studies show that approximately 90% of people carry at least one actionable pharmacogenetic variant. The clinical implications are profound: genetic factors contribute significantly to adverse drug reactions (ADRs), which rank among the leading causes of hospitalisation and death in developed nations.

Real-world impact

The translation of pharmacogenomics from the laboratory to the clinic, has begun to deliver measurable gains across diverse areas of medicine. A clear example is Warfarin, a widely prescribed blood thinner with a notoriously narrow therapeutic window. Genetic variants in the CYP2C9 and VKORC1 genes account for approximately 50% of the variation in Warfarin dose requirements. Patients carrying certain variants may need only one-third of the standard dose to achieve therapeutic effect.

Pharmacogenomic-guided dosing algorithms that incorporate these genetic markers have demonstrated improving outcomes, reducing adverse bleeding risks and helping patients reach therapeutic levels faster than traditional trial and error dosing methods.

In cardiovascular medicine, Clopidogrel, a cornerstone antiplatelet drug used after heart attacks and stenting, provides another compelling example. The drug requires activation by the CYP2C19 enzyme. Patients with loss-of-function CYP2C19 variants, particularly CYP2C19*2 (found in 25-30% of the population), exhibit reduced drug



Big advances: Pharmacogenomics is rewriting the script by revealing how genes influence drug response, transforming medication prescribing from guesswork to precision. GETTY IMAGES

activation and significantly higher risks of cardiovascular events including stent thrombosis. Reflecting this evidence, the 2022 Clinical Pharmacogenetics Implementation Consortium (CPIC) guidelines now recommend alternative antiplatelet agents for CYP2C19 poor metabolizers undergoing percutaneous coronary intervention.

Beyond cardiology, psychiatry has also emerged as a fertile ground for pharmacogenomic implementation. Many antidepressants and antipsychotics are extensively metabolised by CYP2D6 and CYP2C19. The genetic variants in these enzymes can profoundly influence drug levels and side effects. Pre-emptive pharmacogenomic testing in psychiatric patients has demonstrated reduced adverse drug reactions, improved symptom control, and decreased healthcare costs. Oncology, too is advancing rapidly under the pharmacogenomics lens.

The economic equation

The economic case for pharmacogenomics lies in balancing the upfront cost of genetic testing with long-term savings achieved through fewer adverse events and improved therapeutic outcomes. Over the past decade, genetic testing costs have fallen dramatically i.e. from thousands of dollars to roughly \$200-500 for comprehensive panels today. Yet the true value of pharmacogenomics extends far beyond the price. Economic analyses consistently show that genetic-guided prescription is cost effective for several drug-gene pairs, particularly in chronic disease where patients require long-term medication management.

Healthcare systems recognise that preventing even one serious adverse reaction often offsets the cost of testing multiple patients

To assess this value, experts use a framework that considers several factors, such as severity and cost of side-effects, the frequency of genetic variants in the population, the availability of alternative drugs, and range of medications influenced by variations. However, the cost-effectiveness of pharmacogenomic testing varies significantly across different clinical settings. Increasingly, healthcare systems recognise that preventing even one serious adverse drug reaction often offsets the cost of testing multiple patients.

Implementation challenges

Despite compelling scientific evidence, pharmacogenomics still faces substantial barriers towards widespread clinical adoption. A 2023 scoping review identified knowledge gaps among healthcare providers as the primary obstacle. Most physicians and pharmacists receive minimal pharmacogenomic education in training, leaving them ill-equipped to order, interpret, and apply genetic test results. Beyond education, infrastructure limitations compound this challenge; many electronic health record systems lack adequate decision-support tools to integrate pharmacogenomic data into prescribing workflows.

Reimbursement uncertainty creates additional hesitation. While some health systems and insurers cover

pharmacogenomic testing for specific indications, coverage remains inconsistent across payers and jurisdictions. Meanwhile, regulatory pathways continue to evolve: over 100 Food and Drug Administration (FDA) drug labels now contain pharmacogenomic information, yet the clinical implications of these labels vary as some offer actionable recommendations while others are merely informative statements.

Finally, cultural and institutional resistance should not be underestimated. Changing prescribing practices requires not just evidence but also trusted implementation frameworks, local champions, and administrative support. Encouragingly, where implemented, these programmes demonstrate that systematic approaches addressing education, infrastructure, and workflow integration can successfully overcome these barriers.

The path forward

The future of pharmacogenomics lies in pre-emptive testing strategies, where genetic information is obtained before a medication is needed and remains available throughout a patient's healthcare journey.

Ultimately, pharmacogenomics represents a fundamental shift in how we think about drug therapy from treating populations to treating individuals, from reactive care to proactive prevention, from trial-and-error to precision medication. The prescription, quite literally, is written in our genes: we are now learning how to read it.

(Dr. Renu Yadav is senior demonstrator, PGIMER, Chandigarh. gomailtorenu@gmail.com)

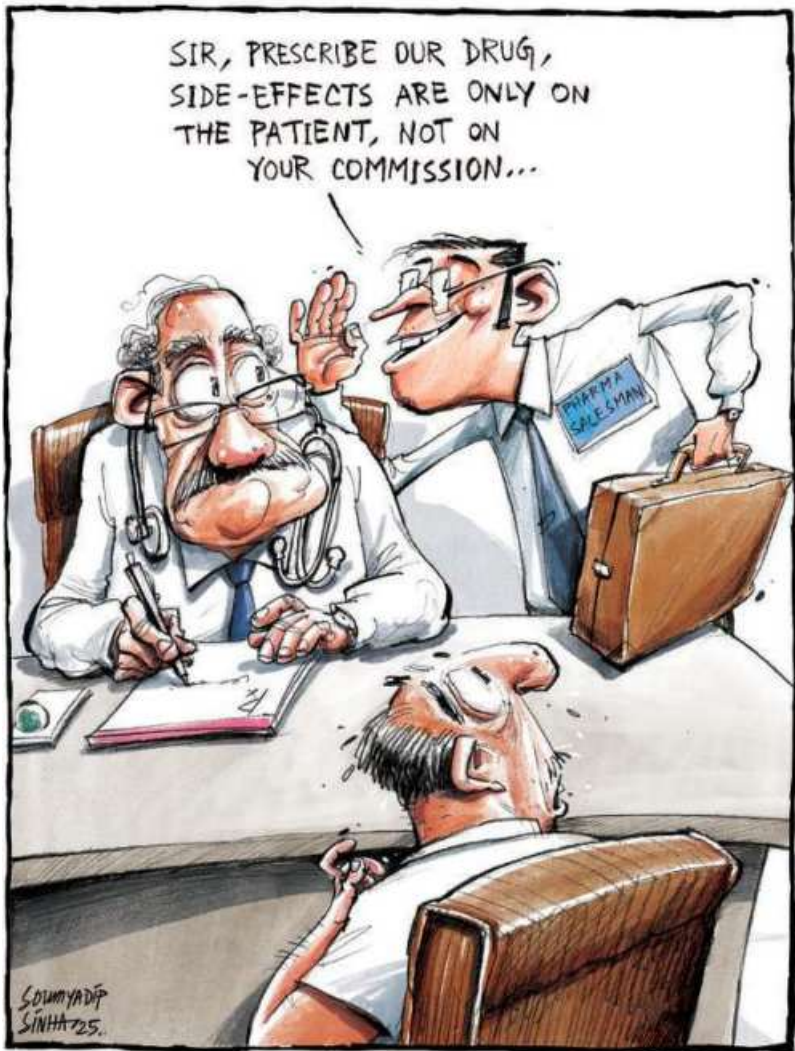
THE GIST

Pharmacogenomics examines how genetic variations affect an individual's response to medications, determining whether a drug will be effective, ineffective, or even dangerous for a particular person. Studies show that approximately 90% of people carry at least one actionable pharmacogenetic variant

Despite compelling scientific evidence, pharmacogenomics still faces substantial barriers towards widespread clinical adoption. Knowledge gaps, minimal training, infrastructure limitations, reimbursement uncertainty are some of the barriers

The economic case for pharmacogenomics lies in balancing the upfront cost of genetic testing with long-term savings achieved through fewer adverse events and improved therapeutic outcomes. Future of pharmacogenomics lies in pre-emptive testing strategies, where genetic information is obtained before a medication is needed and remains available throughout a patient's healthcare journey

HUMERUS



What is Acanthosis nigricans and how it may be a warning sign for prediabetes and diabetes?

Abhishek Kulkarni

Acanthosis nigricans (AN) is a skin condition characterised by dark, velvety patches on skin folds. While it can occur due to various reasons, it is strongly linked to insulin resistance, which makes it an important early, warning sign for prediabetes and diabetes. For many individuals, AN is one of the first visible clues that the body is struggling to regulate blood sugar levels.

Acanthosis nigricans can manifest in skin folds and creases such as behind the neck, underarms, under the breasts, the groin, even the elbows or behind the knees as dark, thick, rough or velvety skin patches. The causes for AN can be obesity, insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome, diabetes mellitus and extremely rarely, in melanomas, stomach or liver malignancies. In children and young adults, the



The condition can manifest behind the neck, underarms, under the breasts, the groin or the elbows and behind the knees. GETTY IMAGES

presence of AN is often considered a clinical marker of rising diabetes risk.

The skin changes associated with AN do not appear overnight, but develop gradually over the course of several months. The affected skin may sometimes be itchy or emit a foul odour along with hyperpigmentation. When associated with insulin

resistance, the darkening often progresses fast.

Acanthosis nigricans is typically detected during a clinical examination. Because of its strong association with metabolic disorders, your doctor may recommend blood tests to check for blood sugar levels, insulin levels, a lipid profile, and other metabolic parameters to detect and

confirm underlying causes.

Treatment and outcomes depend on the underlying cause. In most cases related to obesity or insulin resistance, improving metabolic health can help lighten the skin discoloration. People with obesity may be encouraged to lose weight by making dietary modifications and lifestyle changes. Medications for insulin resistance and/or obesity may be used along with dietary and lifestyle modifications if the case profile mandates the same.

Treatment options

The use of prescription creams to lighten or soften the affected areas, antibacterial soaps for gentle cleansing, topical antibiotic cream, and laser therapy can also help with the reduction of pigmentation once the primary cause is addressed. Acanthosis nigricans does

not mean that your skin is dirty or dark. It can affect any skin type and colour. If you have AN, consult your doctor for lab testing and possibly imaging studies, to rule out serious illnesses, and to evaluate for prediabetes or diabetes, which remain the most common underlying causes.

Identifying AN early gives both children and adults a chance to detect prediabetes or diabetes before complications set in.

With timely evaluation, lifestyle corrections and treatment of the underlying cause, most people can reverse or significantly improve AN. Paying attention to subtle skin changes is therefore an important step towards protecting long term health.

(Dr. Abhishek Kulkarni, consultant, paediatric Endocrinology, Narayana Health, SRCC, Children's Hospital, Mumbai)

Bond booster

Corporate paper could do with more retail participation

Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra pointed out recently that the total flow of credit from non-bank sources had increased by ₹4.3 lakh crore in 2024-25, helping mitigate the impact of slowing bank credit to the private sector. With the corporate bond market being one of the key components of non-bank funding, it is well that SEBI is aiding the RBI in trying to improve activity in this segment. Two consultation papers recently released by SEBI are focused on encouraging more companies to tap the bond market.



Despite continued efforts by regulators over the years, corporate bond market remains illiquid with very meagre activity. This is because both finance and non-finance companies prefer the private placement route for bond issuances, as it is quicker and easier to close. But the number of buyers is extremely small in private placements, thus impairing participation. While around ₹9.9 lakh crore was raised through the corporate bond market in FY25, almost the entire fund raising took place through private placement. The situation persists in the first half of FY26 with almost the entire ₹5 lakh crore being raised through private placements. With institutional investors, companies and HNIs who subscribe through these private placements not actively trading these securities, liquidity on the exchange platforms is very low.

In July 2024, SEBI had reduced the minimum face value of privately placed bonds to ₹10,000 from ₹1 lakh to encourage retail participation. One of the consultation papers released recently proposes that some categories of investors can be issued non-convertible debentures at a discount to the offer price. This is a good idea since similar discounts offered in initial public offerings of equity shares have lifted retail subscriptions in the equity issues. However, the discount should be offered to all retail investors subscribing less than ₹2 lakh, in line with rules for equity IPOs, without restricting the discount to few categories such as senior citizens, defence personnel etc.

The other consultation paper, on the ground rules for entities making high value debt issuances, seeks to provide smaller companies relief from tight compliance requirements. Currently, companies with listed outstanding non-convertible debt securities of ₹1,000 crore and above must follow the corporate governance norms prescribed for equity issuances of same value. Increasing this limit to ₹5,000 crore will ease the compliance burden on issuers of fixed income securities. With many smaller finance companies relying on the bond market, this leeway will lead to more issuances, boosting the supply of paper. The regulator must also encourage online bond platform providers. Online platforms provide a secondary market for these securities, as they allow bonds of smaller denominations to be bought and sold on their platforms. The bottomline is that retail investors are enthused by fixed income securities offering higher returns.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



"That's enough of the morning walk; let's go home for some fresh air!"



SHRUTI ASHOK

When we think about climate change, images of melting glaciers, rising seas, or scorching summers come to mind. But what if the real battleground lies not in distant rainforests or polar ice caps, but in something as personal as your bank account? Every rupee we deposit, borrow, or invest has a carbon footprint. Banks, mutual funds, and pension funds don't just keep our money safe — they deploy it. The question is: where? Is it financing renewable energy projects and sustainable businesses, or propping up coal plants and polluting industries? Globally, trillions of dollars are being mobilised under the umbrella of "climate finance" — funds aimed at reducing emissions and helping societies adapt to climate shocks. Yet, for the common man, this feels like something discussed only in UN conferences or G20 summits. The truth is, your savings are part of this giant machinery.

For decades, finance has operated behind a curtain. When you open a fixed deposit, apply for a loan, or invest in a fund, you rarely know how that capital is being used. Yet, that invisible flow of money has enormous power. Globally, the financial sector is one of the largest enablers — or barriers — to climate progress. According to the International Energy Agency, the world needs over \$4 trillion annually in clean energy investments by 2030 to stay on track for net zero. Today, we're investing barely half that amount.

In India, where banks are the lifeline of the economy, their lending choices shape the country's development path. A bank financing a coal expansion project locks in emissions for decades; the same money could instead fund solar micro-grids or electric vehicle infrastructure. Thus, climate finance isn't an abstract global concept — it's deeply personal. Your rupee can either accelerate or slow down India's green transition.

LOCAL CHOICES

Terms like "climate finance," "green bonds," or "ESG funds" often sound like jargon used in COP summits or G20 communiqués. But these global mechanisms are slowly filtering down to everyday financial products. For example:

Green bonds, which fund renewable energy and clean transport projects, are now available to Indian retail investors through sovereign issues by the Government of India. The ₹16,000-crore Sovereign Green Bond issuance in 2023

How your savings can fight climate change

TWO LEVERS. Savers must demand that banks and funds disclose the carbon intensity of their portfolios. Also, shift savings and investments towards climate-conscious products



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

marked a turning point.

Sustainable mutual funds — though still a small segment — have started integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria into their investment decisions.

Green loans are emerging, offering preferential interest rates for energy-efficient homes, electric vehicles, or rooftop solar panels.

These developments are encouraging. But the scale remains microscopic compared to the challenge. India will require nearly \$17 trillion by 2070 to meet its net-zero goals, according to the Reserve Bank of India. Without participation from individual savers, the gap will remain enormous.

YOUR MONEY AS CLIMATE LEVER

The beauty of finance is its multiplier effect. Every small decision — choosing a sustainable fund, buying green bonds, or opting for a bank with strong ESG commitments — sends ripples through the financial ecosystem. When consumers shift preferences, institutions follow.

Globally, this is already happening. In Europe, many pension funds have pledged to divest from fossil fuels. Norway's \$1.6-trillion sovereign wealth fund has stopped investing in coal. In the US, platforms like Aspiration or Amalgamated Bank market themselves

The next time you check your balance, ask yourself: is my money working for the planet, or against it?

as fossil-free banks, attracting young, climate-conscious savers.

India is just beginning this journey. A few private banks are experimenting with sustainability-linked lending frameworks, where loan pricing is tied to the borrower's ESG performance. Fintech start-ups are offering carbon-neutral debit cards or investment portfolios screened for sustainability. As awareness grows, the Indian saver — long focused on safety and returns — might soon begin to ask a third question: What impact does my money make?

The common man has two levers: voice and choice. Voice — by demanding that banks and funds disclose the carbon intensity of their portfolios. Choice — by shifting savings and investments towards climate-conscious products, even if returns are marginally lower in the short run.

THE MISSING LINK

For this green awakening to accelerate, transparency is crucial. Investors need visibility into where their money goes. Imagine if your bank statement not only showed your interest income but also the carbon footprint of the loans financed through your deposits.

Globally, regulators are pushing for such disclosures. The European Union has a detailed Green Taxonomy, classifying sustainable economic activities. Singapore and Malaysia have regional taxonomies under ASEAN guidelines. India has taken its first step: in June, the Finance Ministry released a draft Climate Finance Taxonomy, focusing on hard-to-abate sectors like iron, steel, and cement. The framework

aims to channel investments towards low-emission technologies while guarding against greenwashing.

However, the system is still nascent. Unlike the EU's binding framework, India's draft taxonomy is voluntary and qualitative. For ordinary citizens to trust and act, they need credible, comparable data on how "green" financial products truly are. The RBI and SEBI will play a decisive role in standardising such disclosures.

Climate change is often described as the greatest collective action problem humanity has ever faced. Yet collective action is built on individual decisions. And those decisions, surprisingly, start with the most mundane of acts — where we keep our money. Your bank account, your mutual fund, your insurance policy — these are not neutral. They are silent votes for the kind of world we will live in tomorrow. The next time you check your balance, ask yourself: is my money working for the planet, or against it?

If we, as citizens, begin to demand transparency and exercise climate-conscious choice, India's green transition will no longer depend solely on government budgets or foreign funding. It will be powered by the collective force of millions of climate-aware savers.

In the end, the fight against climate change isn't just fought in policy rooms or global summits. It's also fought quietly, every day, through the choices we make about where our money sleeps at night — and what kind of world it wakes up to build.

The writer is Associate Professor of Finance, School of Management, Bennett University

All you need to know about the DPDP Rules, 2025

The rules aim to grant people the right over their private data. Severe fines will be imposed on companies for violations

bl.explainer

Ramasamy Jayaprakash

What is the objective of the digital personal data protection rules 2025?

Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules, 2025 are meant to protect the private data shared by users on various digital platforms. With the widespread use of digital platforms for all day-to-day activities such as shopping, education, entertainment, payments etc, users are sharing a lot of personal data on these platforms, some of which can be quite sensitive. Instances of this data being shared widely, often for money, is also rampant.

The rules aim to grant people the right over their private data, to put in place a legal framework in a phased manner to make companies that handle personal data take consent from users, be responsible with the data and to act promptly to inform the users if their data is leaked or stolen.

Though the Act was passed in Parliament in August 2023, without the rules being formalised and notified, the Act largely remained on paper. The DPDP Rules 2025 make the Act operational.

How do the rules protect personal data?

The DPDP Rules, 2025 protect users' personal data by making the data collecting companies (data fiduciaries and data processors) get consent from their users for collecting and storing the data. The consent must be obtained by using clear, simple words which let users know that their personal data is being collected. The notice seeking consent should specify what data of the users are collected by them. There should also be an easily available tool to withdraw the given consent.

These rules, along with the heavy penalty that they entail, would force companies to collect only the bare minimum data needed to provide service. The collected data would also be safe as these rules demand that the data remains encrypted, stored with proper security controls, and are deleted once the purpose of data collection is fulfilled or after one year of inactivity. The rules also make it mandatory that the users are immediately told if there is a data breach or data leak.

Children under 18 are protected well as the DPDP Rules along with the Act demand that a verifiable parental consent is obtained before they are allowed to access their services. In addition, children's data or activity



PRIVACY MATTERS. Protecting data/ISTOCKPHOTO

should not be tracked and there should not be any targeted ads.

How do data fiduciaries ensure protection of data?

Data fiduciaries (basically any app, website or company that collects users' personal data) have to put strong encryption and security controls in place to protect data. The companies need to keep usage logs of the data for at least one year and appoint grievance officers to address any issues raised by the users.

The companies must also promptly delete the data after the purpose of data collection is fulfilled or after one year of inactivity. The companies must also report any breach to you immediately

and to the Data Protection Board within 72 hours.

Bigger platforms (addressed as Significant Data Fiduciaries in the rules) have to conduct regular audits and do impact assessments. If they fail at any step, they can be fined up to ₹250 crore per violation. So, the rules put the full legal responsibility — and cost — of keeping your data safe squarely on the companies.

What are the gaps or shortcomings in the rules?

The 18-month phased implementation is actually a scheduled delay which comes on top of the two years that have already lapsed since the passage of the Act in Parliament. This delay translates to a continued period of vulnerability of personal data.

The broad exemptions to the government is also a concern as it could enable a surveillance regime and higher governmental oversight. For example, if a government seeks information about a person, the data fiduciary is not required to reveal that their data is shared to the government as per Rule 23.

The rules also do not categorise data based on their sensitivity. For instance data on personal health and wealth is sensitive and these need to be handled with lot more caution.

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

Teething problems

With reference to the article 'Are banks ready to adopt the new nomination rules?', there is no doubt that this new rule provides greater flexibility and transparency for depositors ensuring smoother claim settlements. But banks not only need to reconfigure their software, but as mentioned in the article, deal with the knotty issues of pre-closing, 'carving out' of deposits and preference for nominees. Potential for legal disputes amongst nominees can not be completely ruled out. And educating customers on detailed nuances of this new rule

would also be a tedious task for the bankers. These teething problems need to be handled at the branch level.

Bal Govind
Noida

Apropos 'Are banks ready to adopt the new nomination rules?' (November 20), law making has become more complex. Now in nominations, we have a new dimension, namely successive nominations. This has to be additionally marked by the depositor while nominating. Any mistake in marking or recording the option by bank, can cause chaos. There was no need for the successive option.

Alongside various campaigns being run by the authorities such as the UDGM for unclaimed deposits and MITRA for unclaimed mutual funds, there must be one where citizens are persuaded to make their Will to enable seamless transfer of assets to intended heirs. Simple standardized formats and custody/retrieval process of Will can help.

V Vijaykumar
Pune

Inflation data accuracy

This refers to the Editorial, 'Easing phase' (November 20). The very claim of easing inflation needs to be verified for its accuracy. Because, there is no reduction in the cost of

things the common man consumes. The GST cuts bring down prices of goods consumed by the rich (cars and A/Cs). If this is treated as down trend in inflation it would be a gross mistake. For a correct assessment of inflation, different baskets of goods for the rich, middle class and poor are needed.

AG Rajmohan
Anantapur

Stablecoin threat

This refers to 'The dangers posed by stablecoins' (November 20). The core concern with stablecoins is that their issuance lies with private entities, whose objective is profit maximisation rather than public

good. While these coins are pegged to stable assets typically the US dollar, the dollar's supply is regulated by the US Fed. In contrast, private issuers of stablecoins operate without such macro-prudential responsibility, creating risks of conflicts of interest and coordinated market behaviour as circulation grows. Overall, the expansion of stablecoins reinforces global demand for the US dollar, potentially undermining moves by countries to settle trade in local or bilateral currencies. The system thereby strengthens the dollar's dominance in global finance.

Srinivasan Velamuri
Chennai

Indian aviation can soar

Improving airport infra, enabling transit hubs vital

P Balaji
Manish Singhal

India stands on the threshold of an extraordinary transformation of its aviation sector, as it takes wing to become the world's third-largest aviation market.

India's ascent is led by huge fleet expansion to meet the rising passenger demand. Over the last two years, Indian carriers have placed orders for close to 1,300 new commercial aircraft, reflecting strong industry confidence and long-term growth potential. The government has been supportive with both its vision, and in ensuring that India has more modern airports — whose numbers have more than doubled, from 74 in 2014 to 159 today — and other relevant infrastructure.

MODIFIED UDAN SCHEME This intent was evident in the Finance Minister's 2025 Budget speech, where she supported the confidence with a push to regional connectivity, announcing a modified UDAN scheme that will enhance regional connectivity to 120 new destinations and carry 40 million passengers on the UDAN routes alone in the next 10 years. This move will connect millions of passengers to new opportunities and reshape local economic development.

India's per capita air travel remains just 0.14 trips annually. This is a fraction of what developed economies report, highlighting the opportunities that lie ahead. But so far, India has operated only a small number of long-haul aircraft, miniscule in comparison to some other cities in the region. For example, India has under 90 wide-body aircraft capable of long-haul flights. In comparison, Dubai and Qatar have over 450 wide-body aircraft between them.

Today, over 130 million international travellers fly over India. Imagine the multiplier if even a fraction of these travellers were to transit via Indian hubs, in Delhi or Mumbai or Bengaluru.

To become a global aviation powerhouse, India must strengthen its airport infrastructure further, enable transit hubs, enhance Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) capabilities and enhance skilling.

At present, India lacks a true global aviation hub, despite its plan to triple its fleet to over 2,500 by 2034 and double passenger numbers by 2030. To close this



AIR TRAVEL. Much room for growth PTI

gap, India must develop seamless transfer hubs. Delhi for instance is well positioned to evolve into a global aviation hub. Support maybe needed in timely land acquisition for airport expansion, relaxation of restrictive land-use policies, regulatory tariff flexibility aligned with long-term investments. Another enabler would be to enhance multimodal connectivity through metro, rail, road and domestic airline connectivity from Tier 2/3 cities.

Currently, a majority of India's component MRO work is outsourced to global hubs like Singapore, Dubai and Malaysia, leading to significant annual forex outflow. Indian MROs are constrained by limited component availability, high turnaround time (TAT), and elevated costs due to limited talent pool. Developing localised MRO capabilities can potentially cut TAT by 30-40 per cent, boosting efficiency.

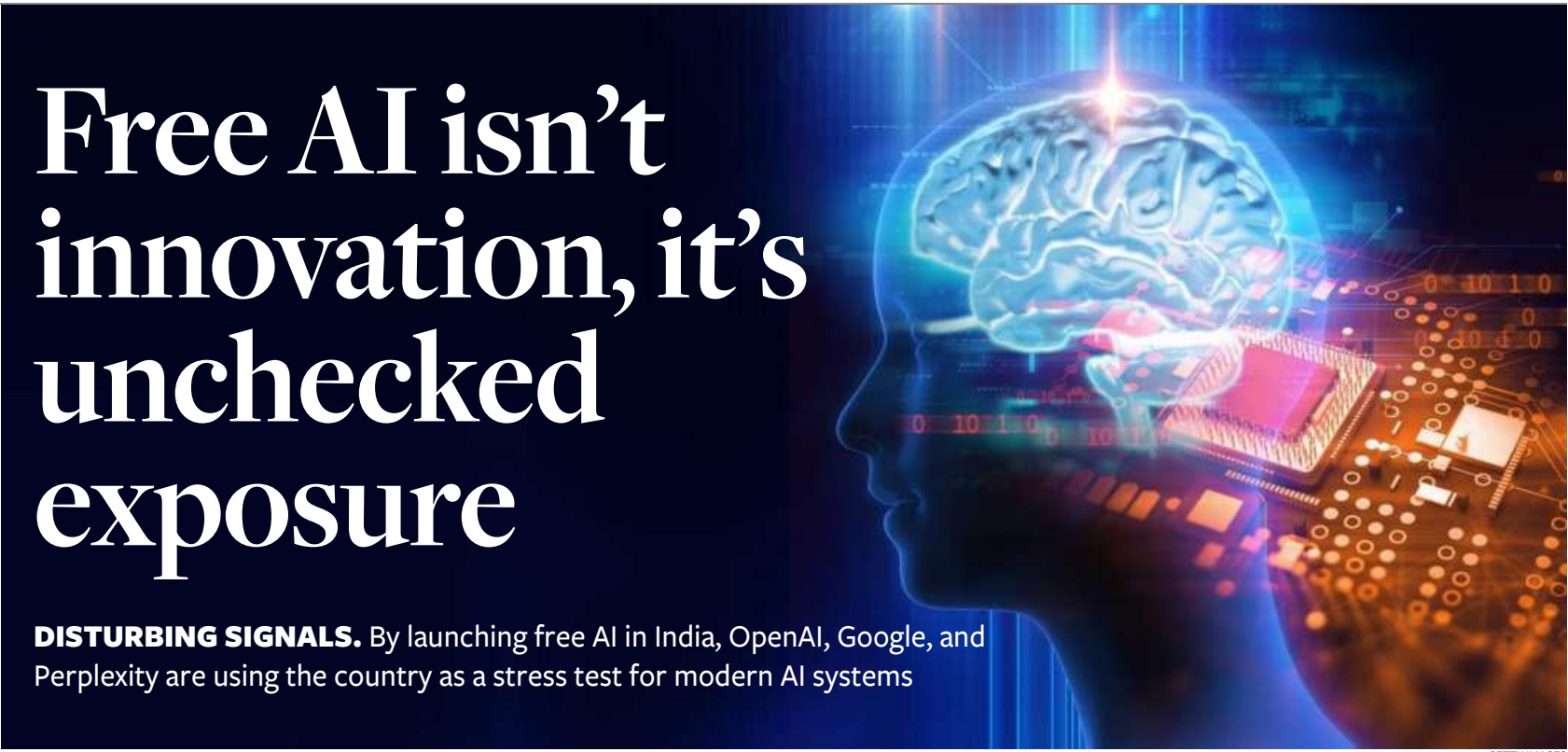
Infrastructure and workforce training can be shared by public-private partnership initiatives, leveraging existing facilities in civil, defence MROs to build ready to deploy talent and reduce operational costs.

R&D is essential to build a robust component manufacturing ecosystem to match global aerospace design and standards. Targeted fiscal incentives such as rationalised GST of 5 per cent for aerospace and 0 per cent on component repair/supply will boost innovation.

Bridging the human-machine gap through skilling is pertinent. Development of modular aerospace skill centres in collaboration with industry, promoting MRO-led training and joint collaboration of DGCA certified test pilots with flight test engineers is vital.

Together, these steps will boost efficiency, improve commercial viability and help develop India as a global aviation hub.

Balaji is Chairman ASSOCHAM National Council on Civil Aviation, and Singhal, Secretary General, ASSOCHAM



SANCHIT VIR GOGIA

India has become the stage for one of the most consequential technology experiments of our time. In recent weeks, three of the world's most influential artificial intelligence platforms — OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, and Perplexity — made their premium services free in the country.

To consumers, it looks like sudden access. To investors, it represents hyper-growth. But free AI is not democratisation. It is a structural takeover of cognition, behaviour, and market power in a policy environment nowhere close to ready.

India was not chosen for its purchasing potential. It was chosen because it is the perfect stress test for modern AI systems. Our digital behaviour — multilingual, code-mixed, voice-driven and unstructured — pushes models harder than Western markets ever can. For global AI platforms, India is not just a large market. It is the world's most valuable real-world laboratory.

It is also a valuation engine. Every free user becomes a daily active user. Every prompt becomes training fuel. Every retention graph becomes a pitch-deck slide. In a market where valuations hinge on usage, India offers what platforms need most: millions of diverse, high-frequency interactions. Free AI is not generosity; it is subsidised scale.

PLATFORM WAR

This is why India is the only market where OpenAI, Google, and Perplexity have launched free premium AI at the same time. It is an undeclared platform war with India as ground zero. Google is pushing Gemini through Jio. Perplexity has aligned with Airtel. OpenAI is

bypassing both to build direct relationships with users. Each wants to become the first intelligence layer Indians instinctively reach for. Whoever wins India secures not only users but long-term model advantage.

Telecom operators sit at the centre of this strategy. For Jio and Airtel, free AI is a tool for retention. For AI companies, telcos are cognitive distribution channels. A data plan that bundles Gemini Pro or Perplexity Pro is not simply offering a service — it is shaping a worldview.

A Jio user begins their AI journey through Google. An Airtel user begins it through Perplexity. This is gatekeeping of thought, not traffic. India once fought for net neutrality; the next debate will be cognitive neutrality — the right to choose the intelligence that mediates digital life.

Bundling creates AI monocultures. Each assistant carries its own reasoning style and tone. When millions are funnelled into a handful of models, their digital habits begin to converge. What they see or trust is shaped less by intent and more by commercial alliances. Discovery becomes direction. Choice becomes choreography.

This matters because India's AI adoption curve is being driven by its youngest users. Students and early-career professionals — people still forming cognitive foundations — are the heaviest adopters. Their first exposure to research, writing, or coding now runs through AI assistants, often before they develop the discipline to evaluate information independently. A

For AI companies, telcos are cognitive distribution channels. A data plan that bundles Gemini Pro or Perplexity Pro is not simply offering a service — it is shaping a worldview

generation is learning to outsource thought before learning to think.

The cognitive implications are real. AI offers immediacy — summaries, drafts, explanations on command. While this accelerates output, it weakens the cognitive muscles that support comprehension and judgment. Critical thinking is built through friction: reading, comparing, analysing. When AI removes friction, it removes learning. Users feel more productive while becoming more dependent. Fluency rises; comprehension falls.

Opacity deepens the problem. India has no framework to audit how models behave or drift over time. Model drift happens quietly: tone, facts, and inference patterns shift without notice. Without transparency mandates, neither enterprises nor regulators can detect when an AI system becomes unreliable.

This opacity creates enterprise risk as well. Most Indian organisations lack AI usage policies, audit trails, or data-residency controls. Shadow AI — employees pasting sensitive material into free tools — is now widespread. Pitch decks, compliance language, customer data, and internal drafts routinely flow into external models because no one has restricted them. AI tools do not forget; they integrate patterns permanently. What leaves an organisation is not only data but institutional thinking.

Enterprises also face a continuity risk. Tools used freely today may become paid or restricted tomorrow. Many organisations do not track dependencies. When free tiers change, some teams may retain full capability while others lose access, creating AI poverty traps within the enterprise.

MISINFORMATION RISK

The misinformation risk is rising too. Millions of first-time internet users have no experience distinguishing authentic content from hallucinated AI output. Hallucinations appear as facts.

Misinformation will increasingly arrive as authoritative-sounding text rather than synthetic media. The implications for public discourse and financial or political manipulation are significant.

Despite the rapid uptake of these tools, India's governance framework is still catching up. There is currently no AI-specific law, no formal testing requirement, and limited guidance on how training data should be handled. The DPDP Act addresses privacy but leaves open questions around cross-border data flow and deletion rights. In many ways, adoption is moving faster than policy.

Local innovation is feeling the strain too. Young Indian AI firms simply cannot hold their ground against free, full-featured models pushed by global giants. They operate with limited compute, smaller datasets and far less reach. If users settle into foreign tools now, long before domestic options mature, an entire wave of Indian AI could be cut off at the starting line. What looks like easy access today can quietly turn into long-term dependence.

Meanwhile, monetisation is only a matter of time. AI is free for one reason: rapid adoption. Once habits solidify, the same telco bundles can be reshaped into paid upgrades or metered tiers. Operators may eventually act as cognitive gatekeepers, deciding who enjoys full capability and who receives a reduced version.

India is not seeing a passing trend but experiencing a deeper shift in power. AI platforms are influencing how the country learns and communicates long before oversight is in place. India is simply the first test market. Others will follow. The question is not whether India should embrace AI. It must. The question is whether India can do so with sovereignty, governance, and choice. Without guardrails, free AI is not empowerment. It is exposure.

The writer is Chief Analyst, Founder & CEO of Greyhound Research

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

November 21, 2005

Global retailers gear up for Indian entry

Though the FDI policy in the retail sector remains unclear, overseas players are firming up plans for the Indian market. Close on the heels of the Wal-Mart Chief's visit to India earlier this year, UK-based retailer Tesco's CEO, Mr Terry Leahy, is slated to make his first visit to the country next week.

Govt reviewing norms for retailing of petroleum products

The Petroleum Ministry is reviewing the existing norms for the retailing of petroleum products. Since the retailing business in the petroleum sector was opened up on April 1, 2002, the Petroleum Ministry has granted marketing rights to RIL for close to 5,849 outlets, Essar Oil (initially 1,700 outlets), Shell (2,000), ONGC (600 outlets) and Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (510 outlets).

1.55 lakh candidates appear for CAT

Close to 1,55,000 candidates took the Common Admission Test (CAT) on Sunday for entry into the six Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and 75 other management schools in the country. Asked about the relatively low number of questions (90), IIM Ahmedabad Director Prof Dholakia said the CAT Committee had experimented last year by changing the format of the test.

Private credit markets, stablecoins need ‘close monitoring’

Reuters

The boom in private credit markets and stablecoins warrants close monitoring, the Group of 20's financial risk watchdog told leaders ahead of their summit in South Africa.

In a letter to the G20 leaders published on Thursday, its Financial Stability Board Chair, Andrew Bailey, called for global efforts to “modernise and strengthen” financial regulations without compromising stability.

The letter also highlighted the growing role of non-bank financial intermediaries, including private credit markets, saying it will be one of the

main focal points of the FSB's work next year. It underlined the “urgency” of improving cross-border payments and developing “robust frameworks” for stablecoins — types of cryptocurrencies that are pegged 1:1 to a real-world currency or asset, usually the US dollar.

“Divergences in regulatory and prudential frameworks across jurisdictions (around stablecoins) could add an additional layer of complexity and potential risk,” Bailey's letter said.

“It will be equally important to consider how stablecoins can operate effectively and safely across borders.” Policymakers outside of the US

worry the widespread adoption of dollar-backed stablecoins would partly ‘dollarise’ their economies, diminishing their monetary policy powers and creating issues around bailouts were they to ever be needed.

STANDARDS NOT MET

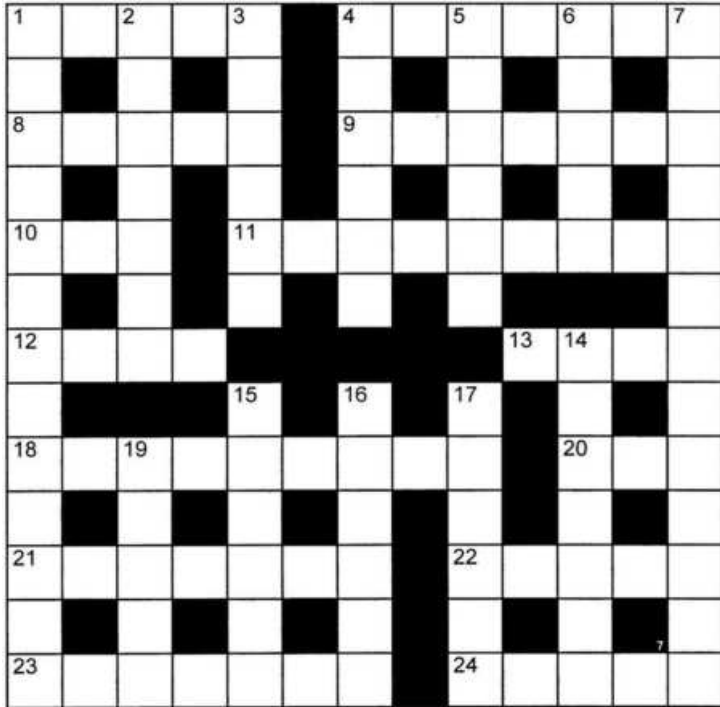
In his letter, Bailey also noted the failure of major economies to implement global banking standards, including Basel III. The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision on Wednesday reiterated that “full and consistent” implementation of tougher capital rules remains its “highest priority”. The reforms, agreed in 2017, were the final piece of the

post-financial crisis response but both the European Commission and Britain have delayed implementation of Basel 3.1 until 2027 as they wait for clarity from the US which has pushed back against the plans. In response to the pressure, Basel appears to be softening one aspect of its rules.

Basel Committee chair Erik Thedéen told the *Financial Times* on Wednesday that crypto exposure requirements needed to be revisited to reflect the “dramatic” rise in stablecoins since the rules were agreed three years ago.

The crypto framework is due to take effect on January 1, though neither the US nor the UK has committed to that date.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2829



EASY

ACROSS

- Poisonous African green or black snake (5)
- Young of pack animal (4,3)
- Large passenger ship (5)
- Wandering, as tribes (7)
- Sound of dove (3)
- Fitted for the matter on hand (9)
- Possesses (4)
- An exploit, achievement (4)
- Stubborn, unyielding (9)
- Enemy (3)
- Tumbler, rope-dancer (7)
- Trunk taking blood from the heart (5)
- Senile (7)
- An incantation (5)

DOWN

- Confection, light-brown, sold in bars (4,9)
- Wind of the Indian Ocean (7)
- Truncated, as if broken off (6)
- Like the cold season (6)
- Clear, transparent (6)
- Go begging, sponge (5)
- Position of one in desperate straits (4,2,3,4)
- See that the law is carried out (7)
- Wood used in construction (6)
- Dough for pies etc (6)
- Holds one up (6)
- Was father to (5)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- There's a snake in the room ambassador uses (5)
- Junior pack member (4,3)
- A ship from the Nile turning right (5)
- Constantly on the move, the CID man about it (7)
- To sound lovey-dovey is less than cool (3)
- Cheeky in ten ways, but to the point (9)
- Admits it now that change has come south (4)
- An exploit that may be a turn of fate (4)
- Stain to be shifted? It won't budge! (9)
- In half of 13 there's nothing for the enemy (3)
- Circus performer taking to bar, coat being provided for him (7)
- It takes blood according to a rota (5)
- Is getting on, 50 may rely on getting led around (7)
- It's a trick of duty one can name the letters of (5)

DOWN

- It's not plain how white liquid gets reddish-brown (4,9)
- Scotsman will shortly get wind of it (7)
- Put bar out in such a way it looks broken-off (6)
- Be successful and attempt to appear cold (6)
- It's clear I'd got to go lamely first (6)
- Scrounge a card right away and turn up for example (5)
- Position of one up against it? (4,2,3,4)
- See it's done: put it into operation! (7)
- Wood one could mitre around bevelled top (6)
- Father's shot at making dough (6)
- Hold-ups, say, led to the confusion (6)
- Schoolmaster and top journo one was father to (5)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2828

ACROSS 1. Atmospheric 8. Otter 9. Respect 10. Heretic 11. Leash 12. Resort 14. Propel 18. Basic 19. Augment 21. Scratch 23. Amuse 24. Bell-ringers

DOWN 1. Another 2. Matures 3. Sprat 4. Horace 5. Rustler 6. Cue 7. Hatch 13. Recital 15. Presume 16. Letters 17. Bather 18. Busts 20. Grain 22. Rib



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Searching for federal balance

The Supreme Court order on gubernatorial powers is unlikely to resolve the power struggle between Raj Bhavans and state governments

The Supreme Court’s decision that governors and the President cannot be bound by judicially imposed timelines in granting assent to legislation clearly demarcates the powers of the judiciary and executive, but also effectively rolls back a previous judgment that had clamped fetters on gubernatorial powers. This is likely to perpetuate the trend of escalating conflict in several states between the elected government and Raj Bhavans.

In response to a presidential reference, a five-judge Constitution bench of the apex court — the current Chief Justice of India, the incoming Chief Justice of India and a future Chief Justice of India among them — said the Constitution envisages a carefully balanced structure for the processing of state legislation and that does not permit courts to impose procedural timelines on constitutional authorities. By ruling that the governor’s discretion cannot be reduced to a purely “perfunctory” role, the apex court has signalled a very limited role for judicial review in such cases and that too possibly not a decisive role. The bench has attempted to strike a balance by saying that courts may issue a limited direction requiring a governor to exercise one of the constitutionally prescribed options in case of “prolonged, deliberate inaction”. But by leaving the terms up for interpretation and underlining that the courts cannot dictate an option for the governor to choose, the court has opened the possibility of protracted litigation by complainant states that might end with no conclusive direction. There is no way to read this verdict except as a victory for the Union government and the Raj Bhavans. Expect more confrontation between governors and elected governments in states ruled by non-BJP parties and a return of the so-called pocket veto by Raj Bhavans.

The problem of some governors overstepping their constitutional boundaries goes back to the early years of Independence and is a lacuna born out of infirmities in political and accountability structures. Yet, the phenomenon of Raj Bhavans attempting to emerge as parallel power centres in some states is an immediate one. This newspaper was clear that the previous judgment, passed in April, overreached in prescribing timelines to the President. But that doesn’t mean that the practice of governors indefinitely sitting on bills passed by the legislative assembly should go unchecked. The Constitution bench verdict is a blow to federalism.

A lesson for Indian football via Curacao

Curacao, less populous than Delhi, has qualified for the World Cup. With a land mass of just 444 square kilometres, it is the smallest nation ever to do so in the event’s history. Earlier, Cape Verde — the third-smallest ever — had done so too. Sports has a way of humbling the big and the great, and it is nowhere more evident than in football, which has proven to be a tough game for countries such as India. Earlier this week, India, ranked 142nd in the Fifa rankings, lost to Bangladesh, ranked 180th, in an Asia Cup match.

While it is tempting to jump into comparisons of country size and population, one needs to understand that making the World Cup isn’t just about footballing intelligence. Rather, it is about policy as well. Curacao, situated north of Venezuela, is no longer a Dutch colony, but it remains within the kingdom of the Netherlands, and most of the players in the squad were born in the Netherlands, including the starting XI from the team that got them into the World Cup. And that is the key difference between India and Curacao. Curacao draws on the diaspora without them having to make any sacrifices, while India demands they give up their passports and become citizens if they want to represent the country.

Many countries around the world have been taking the same path as Curacao. Bangladesh has Hamza Chaudhary, born in England, in its ranks. India, on the other hand, has been dragging its feet on the matter. There has been talk about allowing Overseas Citizens of India players represent India, and the new National Sports Policy 2025 supports the inclusion of such talent, but until such things happen, progress in India, which doesn’t even have a top-tier league this season, will be slow. If India is able to attract top talent, it will attract better coaches, and the administration will improve as well — all factors that will eventually see home-grown talent bloom. For now, one can only look at Curacao’s story and wonder.

A three-body problem confronting Bangladesh

Mistakes made by the interim government in Dhaka have left the country divided and fatigued

Such is the impudence of Sheikh Hasina’s death sentence that it puts irony to shame. It does not require a legal genius to comprehend that the trial of an autocrat with a well-documented portfolio of violations would have led to a guilty verdict. But judicial independence, procedural integrity, and stronger defence counsel could have delivered lasting justice. It may even have opened pathways for political reconciliation instead of privileging public catharsis. But Hasina was tried in the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) that she herself created and compromised; the chief prosecutor is a political figure who once defended Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) leaders unfairly sent to the gallows by the same sham court.

Even if one accounts for chief advisor Muhammad Yunus’ inheritance of a diminished administration and struggling economy and discounts his promise of reforms as circumstantial political rhetoric, this moment offers a pause. If there was one thing the interim government had a resounding mandate drawn in blood for, it was to hold Hasina to account. It floundered. Why? To be sure, there is understandable anger

against Hasina and India’s decision to host her is a veritable thorn in the bilateral. But the noise around Hasina’s exile distracts from how acute Bangladesh’s crisis is on its own merit — a crisis the next government will inherit.

It is a three-body problem. The first is a lag between economic recovery and accruing political capital. Though the current GDP growth rate stands at 3.7% down from 4.2% in 2024, the economic situation is far from the freefall during Hasina’s final years.

The interim government also breathed life into a faltering banking sector and restructured the tax regime to incentivise remittance inflows. Garment exports are resilient despite US tariffs and fluctuating global demand, and forex reserves climbed to \$32.3 billion in October 2025 up from \$20.4 billion in July 2024. This is no small feat. But to convert economic success into political gain requires time, which Yunus does not have.

The chief advisor’s initial assumption that he governs for “at least four years” to implement reforms was a miscalculation. It was the first of several missteps that eroded the interim government’s credibility among domestic stakeholders including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the JI, the student-led National Citizen Party (NCP), and the army. It triggered a scramble. If the BNP reacted by piling pressure to expedite elections, the JI and NCP built counterpressures to buy more time. Such

conflicting agendas coupled with the demand to try army officers in ICT ended up fracturing the very understanding on which the interim government stands, between Yunus and the army chief.

By the time a compressed and clear electoral timeline was agreed upon and announced, the second lag kicked in. This is between political agendas and institutional capabilities. To be sure, Dhaka can hold an election. The mechanics of that process are not in doubt. But can a police

force that is still smarting from last year’s drubbing, a judiciary that remains compromised, and an army stretched to the limit by magistracy duties meant to maintain law-and-order deliver a credible election? Then there is the day after. In fairness, these are not insurmountable odds given what Bangladesh has experienced before. But the risk of violence is high, and if it occurs, the army will again be pulled back to the forefront. This time round the generals could be less reluctant to exercise their writ.

The risk of losing whatever little was gained after Hasina’s ouster brings the third lag into sharp relief. This is between the idea of free and fair elections, and what that truly means. No one can argue against the legitimate demand to hold the Awami League (AL), especially Hasina, accountable. But to altogether ban a political party from contesting elections that are supposed to



Avinash Paliwal



Regardless of who comes to power in February, they will have to contend with a divided and fatigued Bangladesh. REUTERS

usher in a new democratic dawn is akin to meting out collective punishment on all its cadre. This includes those figures on the ground who want to, but are fearful of distancing themselves from Hasina. It also goes against the grain of political common sense i.e., offering adversaries an honourable way out helps maintaining long-term equilibrium. The call for inclusivity in the forthcoming elections stems from that logic.

Further raising the stakes, Yunus has conjoined a referendum on the July National Charter, which offers a roadmap to structural reforms, with the elections. From introducing prime ministerial term limits to scrapping the first-past-the-post system in favour of proportional representation, the charter seeks to rewrite the rules of Bangladeshi politics. If it gets a majority vote, the proposed reforms will become legally binding for the elected government to implement. Signed by the BNP, the

JI, and other smaller parties, the charter has failed to convince the NCP. But for the AL, it is a double death sentence.

Even if the elections and referendum are held, the cumulative weight of this three-body problem will remain. Regardless of who comes to power in February — i.e., an elected political party or an unelected army chief — they will have to contend with a divided and fatigued Bangladesh. This time round, there will neither be an India to pin the blame on, nor western countries seeking and supporting deepening of democracy. The interim government will cease to exist. But Yunus’ claim that “we have entered into a civilised society from barbarism”, will continue to haunt.

Avinash Paliwal teaches at SOAS University of London and is the author of India’s Near East: A New History (London: Hurst, 2024). The views expressed are personal

At 75, NSS works to improve data quality

The demand for accurate information on the performance of the Indian economy can be traced to the growth in the number of research analysts, investment advisers, mutual funds, and foreign portfolio investors registered with the Securities and Exchange Board of India. Furthermore, statistics from the flow of funds published by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) indicate that financial assets of households in the form of equity and investment fund shares increased from over ₹7 lakh crore in 2011-12 to over ₹30 lakh crore in 2022-23. Investments by households in insurance and retirement products increased from ₹26 lakh crore to ₹107 lakh crore. Unlike two decades ago, even Indian households are demanding data for tracking the economy and also forming expectations about the future.

RBI’s monetary policy committee (MPC), which meets six times a year, requires accurate measurements of the changes in the economic activity as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) and also for measuring inflation precisely. These data are important from the perspective of setting interest rates. With more emphasis on evidence-based policy formulation, and targeted and focussed interventions, government agencies also require granular (sub-state level) and more precise data. The government of India also has to report to international agencies the progress made towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals.

In its more than seven-decade-long journey, NSS went behind the curve in terms of catering to the explosion in demand for data for a brief period. While credit is given for NSS data being the cornerstone of national planning and policymaking, the system could not rest on its past laurels. During the past few years, NSS has sought to make itself responsive to emerging data needs. As NSS celebrates its 75th year, the green shoots of this transformation are becoming visible.

The priority was to reduce the time lag between the completion of surveys and the release of data. The shift to paperless surveys, i.e., the collection of data using tablets, has reduced the lag. An example of this is the Comprehensive Modular Survey (telecom) conducted between January and March 2025, and the results were released in May 2025. From this year, monthly estimates of key labour market indicators are published within a fortnight based on the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).

The second priority was to have extensive consultations with all stakeholders after the release of the data. The consultations have not only been with regard to NSS data but also on the ongoing base revision of GDP and consumer price index. Since June 2024, a number of data users’ conferences on different surveys have been held around the country. These conferences have turned out to be an effective platform to foster constructive dialogue between data producers and data users, facilitating knowledge exchange on methodologies and insights from the survey findings through participation of a large number of participants from various reputed institutes.

The third priority was to seek feedback from all stakeholders regarding the instruments of the new surveys. NSS has also sought comments from the public on questionnaires used for the surveys. For example, the ministry has received extensive comments on the Household Income Survey and Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural Households. These have helped in refining the methodology and modifying the instruments of these surveys in view of the users’ needs.

The fourth priority pertained to the generation of estimates at the district level. This required a large increase in the sample size, and this is reflected in PLFS 2025. The engagement with the state governments has also increased. For the state of Uttar Pradesh, a detailed exercise was undertaken to generate statistical model-based estimates of district-level average Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) for the year 2023-24. The suggested method can be utilised by other states for the estimation of sub-state level MPCE values.

The fifth priority was to fill important data gaps. To begin with, two new surveys have been launched — Forward-Looking Survey on Private Sector CAPEX Investment Intentions and Annual Survey of Incorporated Services Sector Enterprises. The recently launched National Household Travel Survey will make available information on the travel habits of Indians. The first-ever all-India survey on household income has been scheduled for 2026 to facilitate the understanding of income distribution and economic inequality.

Despite the changes that have been ushered in, there are a number of challenges that need to be overcome. For instance, surveyors do not necessarily get access to multi-storied residential complexes and gated communities. Even in the localities where our surveyors are able to interview households, we find that informants are not inclined to give time to answering the questions. While the length of the survey questionnaires has increased, the attention span of households to answering questions has exponentially declined. Respondent fatigue is a reality.

Another challenge is to capture the emerging reality. A case in point is how one would measure the gig and platform economy, be it in terms of output or the number of individuals engaged in this segment. Another example is the measurement of the knowledge economy. While some data standards have been developed, incorporating the same into NSS surveys requires customisation for the Indian context. And this is not a straightforward exercise.

As NSS completes its 75th year, it is important that the changes gain momentum. NSS data need to track India’s socio-economic transformation and set the markers for measuring progress towards Viksit Bharat 2047.

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Geeta Singh Rathore



Amitava Saha

{ BHUPENDER YADAV }

UNION MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Solar energy is spreading its light in more than technological ways. It is Hope and Empowerment. It is Independence. It is Dignity. It is Peace

Addressing the ISA SIDS Platform at COP30

The right moves on China’s civilian-military chess board

Communist regimes often rest on a precarious balance between civilian political authority and the military’s autonomy. With his declaration that “power flows from the barrel of the gun, but the Party must always command the gun”, Mao Zedong addressed this inherent schism and made the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) subservient to the Communist Party of China (CPC). However, dictums alone can’t dictate power tussles, and all Chinese leaders since Mao have made tactical arrangements to command authority over the PLA and thereby, the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

Unlike his predecessors, Xi Jinping’s dealings with the PLA have been troubled since the restructuring of the force in 2016. This relationship appears to have become increasingly tumultuous with an ever increasing number of Xi’s picks falling into the anti-corruption net. Since 2017, the following number of generals promoted by Xi have fallen into the anti-corruption net: three out of six in 2017, 11 out of 17 in 2019, three out of five in 2020, six out of nine in 2021, 11 out of 12 in 2022, six out of seven in 2023, three out of three in 2024, and eight in 2025.

At the recent fourth plenum, nine PLA officers and five party officials were sacked from the CPC on corruption charges. Interestingly, all the resultant vacancies in the Central Committee (CC) have been filled by the party officials with no PLA member getting promoted. Moreover, 22 out of the 33 generals and five out of nine lieutenant-generals serving on the CC were absent from the meeting. Among others, these included the commanders of the Northern, Southern and Western Theatre Commands. As the commander of the Eastern Theatre Command, general Lin Xiangyang was purged at the plenum; initiation of anti-corruption proceedings against these three generals would effectively mean commanders of four out of China’s five theatre commands falling into the anti-corruption net.

The plenum promoted Zhang Shengmin to second-ranked vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) after his predecessor He Weidong was expelled from both the military as well as the party. However, Zhang did not get his customary seat at the politburo, a body where Xi and his acolytes command majority votes. Similarly, defence minister Dong Jun yet again failed to make it to the CMC. While both these cases are not without precedence, they are rare and sug-

gestive of a power play.

A factional-modelling based analysis locates the current conundrum in the infighting between the so-called Shaanxi Gang headed by the first-ranked vice-chairman of the CMC, Zhang Youxia, and the Fujian clique headed by the now purged, He Weidong. This modelling fails to capture the wide range of the anti-corruption campaign within the PLA. Moreover, factions are interwoven into the systemic design of the CPC, and Chinese top leaderships are usually adept at manoeuvring them to advance their agenda.

Therefore, the present crisis is perhaps more driven by differences in the policy approaches and visions of Xi and Zhang vis-à-vis the military. In this context, two theatres are worth exploring: Taiwan and India. Among the recently sacked officers, He Weidong, Miao Hua and Lin Xiangyang had previously served in the 31st Group Army, which is a land-force unit facing Taiwan. Similarly, all four commanders of the PLA Rocket Force since 2016 have been removed. As the force controlling China’s missile arsenal, Rocket Force is expected to play a pivotal role in a Taiwan contingency.

Similarly, the India-facing Western Theatre Command appears to be witnessing a jostling for supremacy. He Weidong served as the commander of the Western Theatre Command (ground forces) between 2016-2019. Interestingly, this period coincided with the two informal leaders’ summits between India and China that went without any customary incursions by the PLA inside Indian territory. That this initiative did not have the imprimatur of the PLA is clear from the fact that as soon as He was succeeded by Xu Qiling, the Galwan clash happened (in 2020), putting paid to the summits. It is likely that He was in step with Xi’s India initiative, which would explain why he was promoted as vice-chair, CMC, superseding several seniors. While He was purged at the recent plenum, Xu’s whereabouts are unknown and the current incumbent, Wang Haijiang did not attend the plenum.

As the CPC approaches the 21st Party Congress and the PLA is slated to celebrate its centenary in 2027, the battle for the control of Zhongnanhai has begun. Whether Xi will be able to surmount this challenge remains to be seen.

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Shikha Aggarwal

Bridging the gap

Lagging states need a growth push

The Sixteenth Finance Commission this week submitted its report to the government. The report has not yet been made public, although it is expected to be tabled in Parliament during the Budget session next year. The Finance Commission's recommendations will cover five years beginning April 1, 2026. They will shape the distribution of tax revenues between the Union and the states, along with the allocation of funds among the states under various categories. In this regard, it is worth noting that several southern states have raised concerns over their declining share. As a recent analysis in this newspaper showed, the combined share of the five southern states in the central tax devolution declined from 19 per cent in 2010-11 to 16 per cent in 2025-26. It is, therefore, likely that the issue will resurface, assuming the Sixteenth Finance Commission's recommendations do not mark a significant departure from the past.

While the concerns of the southern states are understandable, in a federal structure it will always be expected that the lagging states are supported to ensure more equitable development. Further, as the data shows, on a per capita basis, the southern states are better resourced. For instance, while Kerala's per capita expenditure in the current year is over ₹86,000, Bihar will spend only about ₹24,000. Notably, between 2020-21 and 2025-26, per capita expenditure in poorer states has nearly doubled, albeit on a low base, while in richer southern states it has gone up by about 59 per cent in the aggregate. However, faster growth in expenditure has not translated into faster growth in income. Average per capita income in the five southern states has gone up from 2.1 times that of poorer states in 2009-10 to 2.8 times. This suggests that while a greater share in tax devolution may be necessary to enable poorer states to undertake developmental work, it may not be sufficient for rapid economic growth, which can help increase per capita income to bridge the gap.

This presents a complex policy challenge that both the lagging states and the Union government must address collectively, since fiscal transfers alone may not be sufficient to bring the transformation required. There are no easy answers here. It can be argued that more private investment could be nudged towards these states. However, businesses are likely to prefer investing in better-off states because these are expected to provide the required enabling environment. Thus, it will be important that lagging states use their resources more judiciously to create the basic infrastructure needed for attracting investment. They will also need to proactively deal with businesses and address their concerns to improve the ease of doing business.

In the context of state finances, there is another challenge that the Union and the states concerned will have to deal with. Some states have very high levels of debt, which can affect growth prospects. As a recent report by PRS Legislative Research has shown, outstanding liabilities exceed 30 per cent of gross state domestic product (GSDP) in 19 states, including Kerala. In states like Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, it exceeds 40 per cent. A mechanism will be required to address the issue. Higher debt in states increases general government debt and borrowing requirements, affecting the cost of money for the entire economy. Bridging the income gap among states and addressing elevated levels of debt are major policy challenges. It will be interesting to see how the Finance Commission has approached these issues.

Sustainable development

Retrospective clearances threaten the rule of law

The Supreme Court's recall of its May 2025 ruling this week could reopen the door for retrospective environmental clearances (ECs) and marks a significant milestone in India's environmental regulation. In earlier cases, such as Common Cause vs Union of India, it was made clear that a prior EC was mandatory. In Vanashakti vs Union of India, the court again ruled out post-facto ECs. Now, the Bench led by Chief Justice of India B R Gavai has recalled that decision, noting that the earlier order risked causing large financial losses, derailing major public projects, and creating uncertainty among developers. But these practical concerns cannot replace the constitutional foundations on which India's environmental governance rests. The right to clean air and a pollution-free environment is a fundamental right, repeatedly affirmed by the court itself. Ex post-facto clearances weaken the precautionary principle which is the core idea that environmental harm must be avoided before it occurs and this risks turning environmental review into a formality rather than a safeguard. This concern is particularly relevant today, when prolonged air pollution episodes, groundwater depletion, deforestation, and climate impacts already impose enormous health and economic costs.

The legal framework strengthens this position. Paragraph 2 of the 2006 Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification requires a prior EC, making retrospective approvals legally and ethically untenable. The Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) granted over 500 environmental clearances in 2024 alone, illustrating the volume of projects that depend on rigorous environmental scrutiny. Diluting this by normalising violations by builders who began work without permission, often without even disclosing basic project details, risks embeddings systemic non-compliance. Justice Ujjal Bhuyan dissented and noted that post-facto clearances were inconsistent with the requirement for mandatory prior environmental approval under law, and observed that later judgments allowing such clearances departed from this settled position. He also pointed out that the argument that demolition would cause pollution could not justify non-compliance, as the consequences flowed from construction undertaken without prior approval.

Going forward, the way out is not retrospective leniency but strengthening compliance. First, ECs must remain strictly prior to starting a project. The discipline of obtaining permission before starting construction is the backbone of environmental regulation. Second, the government must improve administrative capacity through speeding up EC processing on platforms like PARIVESH (Pro Active and Responsive Facilitation by Interactive and Virtuous Environmental Single-window Hub), ensuring timely public hearings and building stronger expert appraisal committees so that delays do not push developers toward shortcuts. Third, transparency and disclosure must improve. Many violations involve incomplete or misleading project information. Real-time monitoring and mandatory public disclosure can help. Finally, penalties for violators must be imposed to compensate for ecological damage under the "polluter pays" principle to deter future breaches. As the matter will be heard further, it offers hope that the court will re-establish clarity and reaffirm that environmental protection cannot be waived for convenience. Sustainable development is not a hurdle; it is the only lawful path that respects both citizens' rights and India's environmental future.



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

The illusion of success

Why discretionary bank rescues are not a substitute for the rule of law

The successful resolution of the Yes Bank crisis in 2020 has been hailed as a stellar example of astute crisis management by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), with a rapid mobilisation of public and private capital led by the central bank. Indeed, the swift containment of contagion was an operational success, preventing what could have been a systemic shock.

However, to celebrate this episode as a model for future financial stability is to embrace a dangerous institutional mirage. The Yes Bank resolution was a victory of ad hoc expediency over systemic design. It violated all the well-known principles of good governance, rule of law, and financial regulation. It exposed the gaping, critical hole in India's regulatory architecture: The continued absence of a non-discretionary, predictable framework for resolving failing financial institutions.

At the outset, it is sobering to note here that India is the only G20 country that is not in compliance with the "Key Attributes of Effective Resolution Regimes for Financial Institutions" issued by the Basel-based Financial Stability Board.

Let us understand the full picture. One piece of Indian institutional capability on firm failure is gradually coming together: The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). It is inching towards its goals of: (a) invocation when the borrower has a tiny default, with no forbearance; (b) clarity on loss allocation with a clear waterfall; (c) a commercially motivated committee of creditors (CoC) that decides between resolution vs. liquidation and; (d) speed.



AARTHIKAM CHINTANAM
K P KRISHNAN

It is important to note that there is no significant role for the state in the IBC process. This is the hallmark of a successful market economy. The only role of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) is to verify that there is an undisputed default, and that the CoC is formed and it votes correctly. There is predictability about what will happen, and how losses will be allocated, as this is written into the law.

The most damaging legacy of the Yes Bank resolution lies in its violation of the universally accepted financial pecking order between equity and debt. At the foundation of the limited-liability company is the concept that equity holders are the first line of loss absorption; they hold the highest risk and are thus compensated with the highest potential reward. When a bank fails, the equity owners must lose all their money before any debt holder loses anything.

In the Yes Bank case, the RBI-appointed administrator, in a move that continues to be litigated, decided to write down the entire ₹8,415 crore of AT1 bonds to zero. Crucially, this writedown took place without simultaneously wiping out common equity. Equity holders, while facing dilution through the subsequent recapitalisation, were nevertheless protected, retaining a non-zero value.

This sequence of events inverted the risk hierarchy. It resulted in debt holders, who, by definition, stand higher in the pecking order than equity holders, being entirely wiped out while shareholders retained a claim. The message sent to the market was profoundly unsettling: In India, under an ad hoc resolution, the fundamental principles of finance are mutable, and the regulator reserves the right to arbitrarily alter the

Confidence in India's logistics cost

The logistics cost in India for decades was treated as a dysfunctional economic reality, estimated at a staggering 13-14 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), far above that of its global peers. This aspect was often cited as the "hidden tax", which made Indian manufacturing uncompetitive. On September 20, that belief was quietly but decisively shattered. The government, after a detailed nationwide study by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), released the first credible, data-driven estimate of logistics cost at 7.97 per cent of GDP for 2023-24 (FY24).

This revelation does more than correct a number. It reframes how we think about competitiveness. India's logistics cost is now firmly within the same band as advanced economies' — the United States' at 8.8 per cent, Germany's at 8 per cent, and Australia's at 8.6 per cent.

The 13-14 per cent figure, recycled endlessly in reports and speeches, lacked methodological grounding. It came from adopting and adapting broad international models, which did not have India-specificity. Policymakers, industry, and the media repeated it ad nauseam, shaping the perception that logistics was India's Achilles' heel.

Using a hybrid approach combining macro datasets (National Accounts Statistics, Supply & Use Tables, the Reserve Bank of India's Balance of Payments et al) with more than 3,500 stakeholder surveys of transporters, warehouses, and service users, the report — "Assessment of Logistics Cost in India" — provides the most robust estimate to date. The number is not only surprisingly low but also more credible and transparent.

What the numbers say is that India's logistics cost is estimated at ₹24.01 trillion at 2023-24 prices, accounting for 9.09 per cent of non-services output. Road transport dominates the sector, costing ₹3.78 per tonne/km, significantly higher than rail (₹1.96) and waterways (₹2.30), while air freight remains an outlier

at ₹72 per tonne/km. Smaller firms face higher burdens, as businesses with a turnover below ₹5 crore spend nearly 17 per cent of their turnover on logistics, compared to just 7.6 per cent for large firms.

Warehousing adds further pressure, averaging ₹30 per square feet per month but rising to ₹60 for storage that is cold and hazardous. Export-import logistics also remains constrained, with persistent bottlenecks at ports, where terminal-handling charges and the documentation cost constitute a substantial portion of the expenses. Thus, while India's logistics system is

not as inefficient as once believed, structural challenges still remain.

Two myths stand debunked. First, India's logistics cost is not 13-14 per cent of GDP. Second, logistics is not the millstone it was made out to be. Advanced economies operate within the 7-8 per cent range; India is right there.

Reducing fuel intensity in road transport, which constitutes 55 per cent of India's diesel consumption and 42 per cent of the logistics cost, is critical. Road freight dominates, with a 71 per cent modal share, far above the global benchmark of 8-10 per cent, against rail's mere 27 per cent. The National Logistics Policy targets reducing this to below 10 per cent by 2030, with rail's freight share projected to increase from 27 per cent to 45 per cent.

Expanding multimodal networks through initiatives like 35 approved multimodal logistics parks (MMLPs), alongside the 41 logistics parks already facilitating 320,000 monthly cargo transfers, and strengthening first-last-mile connectivity, will reduce road dependence. The PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan has identified 156 critical infrastructure gaps and enabled planning 8,891 km roads and 27,000 km railway lines. These demands call for integrated multimodal planning supported by robust institutional frameworks, such as a national apex body for transport governance, envisioned by the Prime Minister as the Gati Shakti Transport Planning and Research Organisation (GTPRO), alongside strengthened state-



INFRATALK
VINAYAK CHATTERJEE

liability structure.

Clarity and predictability are the oxygen of financial markets. This resolution was, institutionally, anything but clear. Beyond the inversion of the loss hierarchy, the Yes Bank saga highlighted a deeply entrenched institutional conflict: The RBI serves as both the banking sector's supervisor and resolution authority.

A core principle of modern regulatory governance suggests that the body responsible for preventing a failure (the supervisor) should not be the sole authority responsible for managing that failure (the resolution authority). If these lines are not maintained, there will always be a bias in favour of hiding and delaying the fragility of regulated firms, so as to cover up for failures of micro-prudential regulation.

The Yes Bank failure was, at least in part, a failure of supervision in addressing the bank's asset quality and governance issues before the situation became terminal. When the same entity is then tasked with designing rescue, the process is unlikely to be fully objective, non-discretionary, or transparently accountable for the supervisory lapse. Accountability demands that failure be managed through a mechanism separate from the agency that failed to prevent it.

This strategic understanding of financial economic policy has been in place since the work of the Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission (FSLRC) was completed (2011-15).

The future landscape must be organised as follows:

First, we require a separate financial resolution corporation, which will work on pre-emptive closures of financial firms such as banks and insurance companies, where there is an important presence of unsophisticated households. This will work independently of the micro-prudential regulators. This building block is the substance of the Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance (FRDI) Bill, 2017. This new organisation would also do deposit protection, up to ₹5 lakh per depositor, so as to immunise unsophisticated households from financial firm failure.

The second component is the IBC. All other failures of financial firms are a simple matter of IBC resolution. As and when a default takes place, any operational or financial creditor should be able to trigger the IBC process, the NCLT would verify if there is an undisputed default, a commercially motivated CoC would then decide what to do. We do not require a public-sector organisation when private self-interest would suffice.

The successful ad hoc intervention in 2020 should not breed complacency. It was a tactical win but a strategic loss for the development of a sound Indian financial system. The mark of a mature economy is not the absence of bank failures — which are inevitable in a healthy and competitive economy — but the existence of a clean, predictable, and rule-based mechanism for handling them when they occur. We must clarify the IBC so as to take all financial firms other than banks and insurance companies into the Code, and go through with the FRDI Bill for these two categories. These two steps should get the RBI and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India fully out of the end-game of failing financial firms.

The author is an honorary senior fellow at the Isaac Centre for Public Policy, and a former civil servant

Hope versus reality in coalition politics



CHINTAN GIRISH MODI

Come election season, and publishers waste no time in rolling out books by or about politicians, both dead and alive. It is, undoubtedly, the perfect moment to shape public opinion about various candidates, parties and ideologies that are eager to impress voters and secure their loyalty.

Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) Manoj Kumar Jha's *In Praise of Coalition Politics and Other Essays on Indian Democracy*, a collection of previously published writings revised for this volume, arrived just ahead of the recent Vidhan Sabha elections in Bihar. The timing is hard to ignore, while reading

the pieces compiled in the book. His party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), has much soul-searching to do after its coalition with the Indian National Congress (INC) and other Mahagathabandhan partners failed to impress voters. Their manifesto promised employment, improved governance, better infrastructure and social welfare but the electoral results were appalling.

Mr Jha's essays offer a useful entry point for thinking about what might have gone wrong. He draws a sharp distinction between coalitions that "challenge the status quo" and coalitions that are "stitched together only to hold on to power". Unsurprisingly, he casts the Mahagathabandhan in the former role and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), comprising the Bharatiya Janata Party, Janata Dal (United), Lok Janshakti Party and others, in the latter. That the Mahagathabandhan has failed to shake up the status quo is evident, but the electoral setback does not diminish the

value of Mr Jha's broader reflections on democracy's past, present and future.

Pushing back against the cynical view that coalitions exist only to gather the requisite number of seats to claim a majority and form a government, Mr Jha highlights their potential as a "safeguard against democratic erosion". At the risk of antagonising the INC, he valorises the Janata Party coalition's landslide victory in 1977 as a democratic corrective after "the dark period of the Emergency that was imposed by an increasingly autocratic Indira Gandhi in 1975".

Mr Jha also points to V P Singh's National Front government (1989-90), which propelled leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav onto the national stage, "spotlighting the Mandal Commission's recommendations for reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs)". These examples lend left to Mr Jha's claim that coalitions can keep majoritarianism in check. Yet this book does not dwell on how

coalitions formed for principled reasons can resist and eventually defeat coalitions that are rooted in "electoral arithmetic". The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the eating, so a coalition like the Mahagathabandhan might need to get a grip on why they have been unable to attract a broader spectrum of voters, and close the gap between intention and impact.

Mr Jha's critique of the BJP's "One Nation, One Election" proposal is well-articulated. He believes that the idea to "synchronize elections for the Lok Sabha and all State legislative assemblies" in order to "improve governance, reduce electoral costs and free the polity from constant-election mode distractions" would help national parties and put regional parties at a disadvantage.

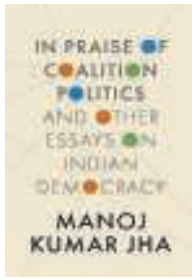
This is not empty rhetoric. It is grounded in examples such as the Tamil Nadu state legislature's rejection of the Centre's three-language formula mandating the use of Hindi, English and the regional language in school education.

While Mr Jha's defence of federalism is certainly persuasive, he does not really engage with concerns around electoral expenditure.

What stands out is his cautionary note that "there is more to democracy than going out to vote and electing one's representative". He makes a compelling case for protests, public mobilisations and continuing dialogue between elected representatives and citizens. In doing so, he underlines a fundamental truth: Democracy thrives when politically active citizens hold leaders accountable.

In addition to the essays, the book carries a set of open

letters that offer a more intimate view of Mr Jha's ideological and emotional landscape as a politician. In the one addressed to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, he writes, "Those at the regime's top have transmogrified themselves into historians with a perverted love of counterfactuals, brutalizing our memory by pitting you



In Praise of Coalition Politics and Other Essays on Indian Democracy
by Manoj Kumar Jha
Published by Speaking Tiger
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speaking up for Palestine, Mr Jha insists that our commitment to democracy as Indians must extend beyond our own territorial boundaries.

The reviewer is a journalist, educator and literary critic. Instagram/X: @chintanwriting

SC takes welcome step back, restores balance

THE SUPREME Court Thursday rolled back the timelines it had earlier set for the president and governors to grant assent to bills. The bench led by Chief Justice of India BR Gavai underlines that the Court cannot usurp executive powers. At the same time, the SC has kept its door open for states when a governor causes a “prolonged, unexplained and indefinite” delay in the law-making process. The Court’s opinion, in its advisory jurisdiction, is enormously welcome as it strikes a delicate balance in addressing a fraught political issue between the Centre and states, presented to the SC as a constitutional one.

In April, a two-judge SC bench, while hearing the case relating to pending bills in Tamil Nadu, had set a time-line for governors to act on pending bills, and for the first time, prescribed that the president should decide on the bills reserved for consideration by the governor within three months. The ruling was an acknowledgment that, especially in the recent past, Raj Bhavans have played an obstructionist role in Opposition-ruled states by delaying bills passed by state legislatures. The Court said, rightly, that a governor cannot stifle the democratic process of law-making by arbitrarily withholding assent to bills. However, the prescription of strict time-lines and directives to the president on the consequences of delay raised questions about the Court overstepping its mandate. In a reference to the SC in May, President Droupadi Murmu posed 14 crucial questions on the verdict. The key issue is whether the Court, in seeking to remedy a constitutional impasse created by the governors, smudged the separation of powers which is a vital part of the basic structure of the Constitution. The SC has now struck a conciliatory note, saying that allowing the judiciary to “meddle in the legislative procedure” would be to “shatter the permeable walls that maintain this separation of powers.” And “There is no denying that judicial review, too, is a part of the basic structure... This judicial review, however, is not an unbridled scope that can negate or destroy the separation of powers doctrine”.

The Centre did well in seeking an opinion from the Court for recalibration of its earlier ruling, rather than working up a confrontation around it. The Constitution envisions the governor as a link that connects two tiers of a layered system, not as a wedge that divides them. The SC’s opinion to the president advocates a constructive path as the way ahead for the Centre and states.

MbS gets red carpet in DC, he will ask for more

WERE we going to... make them, in fact, the pariah that they are.” Those are former US President Joe Biden’s words from the 2019 Democratic primary debates. The “they” he was referring to was the government of Saudi Arabia, in the aftermath of the 2018 murder of columnist Jamal Khashoggi. At the time, US-Saudi ties plummeted, and the CIA concluded that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) had ordered the killing. Seven years on, MbS, already legitimised by Biden’s trip to Jeddah in 2022 and the controversial fistbump, received a grand welcome at the White House from President Donald Trump this week, complete with F-35s, the world’s fastest AI chips, and a central role in shaping the future of West Asia in what is a remarkable diplomatic comeback for the Kingdom.

For Riyadh, the priority was a defence cooperation agreement. Trump designated Saudi Arabia as a “major non-NATO ally” and announced the sale of F-35 fighter jets, overruling concerns from Israel and his own officials. In West Asia, only Israel operates the F-35 and is keen to preserve its air superiority. Meanwhile, US officials worry that China could get its hands on the aircraft’s technology. MbS, for his part, promised investments running into billions and has, over the years, reportedly supported the Trump family’s business interests in the Kingdom. It is hardly surprising that, now, Trump dismissed Khashoggi’s murder with a curt, “Things happen”.

What Trump wants, above all, is for Riyadh to recognise Israel and join the Abraham Accords. That will not be easy. MbS has been unequivocal: Any normalisation with Israel must be predicated on the establishment of a Palestinian state. The main obstacle to this is Israel itself, as reflected in PM Benjamin Netanyahu’s attempt this week to reassure his right-wing coalition in response to a UNSC resolution. MbS cannot afford to appear as though he is trading away the Palestinian cause for material gain. Yet even as MbS wields the prospect of normalisation as leverage with Washington, Trump appears willing to deepen ties, consistent with America’s history of turning an unseeing eye on Saudi Arabia’s grim human-rights record.

Curaçao’s World Cup fairytale

NOT MANY people would have heard of the tiny Caribbean island of Curaçao but football World Cups have a habit of pushing small nations into the global spotlight, even if briefly. In the 1990s, it was Cameroon and Costa Rica, followed by Slovenia, Angola, and Togo in the 2000s. That tradition is now being carried forward by Curaçao, Cape Verde, and Haiti, all of which reaffirm that football remains the one truly global sport. It is a game in which an island that is a speck on the map can outshine nations with vast sports budgets and large populations.

Curaçao became a FIFA member only in 2010, yet the expanded 48-team World Cup in North America has given it a rare chance to aim high. After all, no one recruits a pedigreed coach like Dick Advocaat unless ambitions run deep. Advocaat led the Netherlands to the World Cup quarterfinals in 1994; in 2026, the smallest team ever to reach a World Cup is set to be guided by someone who will, at 78, be the tournament’s oldest coach. The opportunity to attract players with Curaçaoan family roots who play professionally elsewhere certainly played a role, though such strategies are hardly unusual among nations seeking a breakthrough. The current squad features only one player born on the island, but a shared sense of identity and belonging proved sufficient to carry them across the qualifying line.

Detractors may argue that an expanded World Cup dilutes quality and competition, that the European Championship now offers superior football. But the game benefits from representation across as many regions as possible. With several traditionally strong teams struggling or failing to qualify — Italy may even miss a third consecutive tournament — the enduring romance of the World Cup lies in the possibility that even the smallest nation can enjoy its moment in the sun.

Bihar shows old Opposition getting eased out, new Opposition not in sight

AS A new NDA government is sworn in in Patna, it is necessary to ask: What does the outcome in Bihar tell us about the state and what does it mean for politics beyond it? For Bihar, this moment marks a final rupture from the moment of 1990 — from the political project of social justice to fragmented caste identities and portents of majoritarian assertions. Beyond Bihar, it means a major advance in the BJP’s dominance. It also means a more steely grip of Narendra Modi over his party and the country.

Bihar was one of the states that put the brakes on the march of the INDIA bloc in 2024 and it has now further dampened the prospects of an anti-BJP coalition. In its structure, the outcome in Bihar is similar to that of Maharashtra a year ago — represented by a clean sweep, some increase in vote share, a massive addition to seats, a dramatic resurgence of regional partners and, above all, making those partners somewhat redundant. The JD(U) may have gained considerably — like the LJP of Chirag Paswan — but there need be no doubt about who is in the driver’s seat and who will now steer the NDA in Bihar.

Ever since the BJP won the 2014 elections, Bihar had posed a hurdle in its way. The party has been polling just around 20 per cent votes there — more in 2015. Its social engineering and the pathway of communal polarisation both were consistently met with only lukewarm success for the past 10 years. This is no longer the

case. So, while the only competition in this election was (and post-election, will be) between the JD(U) and BJP, the future will see the unfolding irrelevance of the JD(U). It will also be a phase of deep control of the social sphere by the BJP. Therefore, it is redundant to speculate on how long it will take for the BJP to rule Bihar on its own; it will anyway drive Bihar on its own terms from here.

When it came to power in 2014, the BJP had to depend on the north and the west. Over the past 10 years, it has tried hard in Tamil Nadu to breach the regional politics of that state; made deep inroads in Karnataka and Telangana in the South; won Odisha in the east besides consolidating its strength in Assam. With elections to West Bengal and Tamil Nadu scheduled in the next six months, the Bihar outcome may be a signal of a wider and more complete domination by the party. At least for the eastern zone, Bihar has opened the floodgates. It is for this reason that the Bihar outcome needs to be seen beyond the state-specifics of the Nitish factor and the exhaustion of the social justice politics originally spearheaded by Lalu Prasad.

Like in Bihar, in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu too, Congress is not a major player and as such, the burden of facing the BJP will fall entirely on the regional player. In Bihar, the RJD failed in



SUHAPAL SHIKHAR

The results in Bihar will further make the outcome in the 2024 Lok Sabha election appear unreal. The two legs on which the INDIA bloc sought to walk — Congress and state parties — have both failed to gain strength

spite of the incumbency factor pitted against the JD(U)-BJP. In both states that will go to polls, the regional power-holder will have to face anti-incumbency besides facing the power of an adverse government at the Centre. Bihar, like Odisha earlier, has shown that even when the contest is between a state-level force and the BJP, the latter has the ability to win.

More immediately, the Bihar result would have implications for the internal dynamics of the NDA. Of course, since 2024, the BJP has not been encumbered by its alliance partners. It has smoothly steamrolled them under its hegemonic aggression. Nor have the NDA partners shown any spine in their dealings with the BJP — the JD(U) remained quiet most of the time due to its Bihar compulsions while the TDP has practically adopted the language of Hindutva. Now, post-Bihar, the NDA partners will be on notice.

The past decade has shown that the dominance of the BJP and Modi was characterised by two essentials — complete control of the governmental machinery and a push towards a de facto Hindu Rashtra. Since June 2024, the loss of majority did not alter the hallmarks of the BJP project of the past 10 years. If during the past 18 months, the BJP did not concede space on these two matters, it is more likely now to become impatient with the NDA partners. Whether the BJP

will aim at getting rid of them through defections or through fresh elections, or simply by ignoring them, are matters of detail. State parties, even when they cosy up with the BJP, are likely to have only very narrow space to manoeuvre.

Finally, the results in Bihar will further make the outcome in the 2024 Lok Sabha election appear unreal. The two legs on which the INDIA bloc sought to walk — Congress and state parties — have both failed to gain strength.

First, Congress failed to keep the momentum following the Lok Sabha elections. It failed on all three fronts — of organisational consolidation, governance record where it is a ruling party and the politics of protests. Its failure has been matched by its partners through their inertia and perennial inability to comprehend the nature of political challenge the BJP represents.

Bihar elections have shown that the old Opposition is getting eased out but a new Opposition is not in sight. This will allow more elbow room for the BJP to conduct its intra-party politics and sort out its equations with the RSS. But the big picture beyond Bihar is that the outcome allows Modi to exercise greater control over party, bureaucracy and society and strengthen the narratives shaping imagination, culture and sensibilities beyond politics.

The writer, based at Pune, taught political science

Court safeguards India’s constitutional architecture



HITESH JAIN

IN ITS unanimous decision in the presidential reference seeking its opinion on the governor’s role under the Constitution, the Supreme Court has displayed immense clarity on the governor’s role in India’s constitutional structure. The central question before the Court was whether the judiciary can prescribe fixed time-lines for governors and the president to act on bills. This query has ramifications that travel to the heart of the Constitution.

The Court’s judgment is resounding and measured. It has held that the judiciary cannot impose time-lines on the governor, stated that “deemed assent” is not permitted under our constitutional scheme and that judicial intervention is limited only to rare cases of prolonged, unexplained gubernatorial inaction. The verdict’s central message is unambiguous and it restricts courts from crossing into the realm of judicial governance. The decision travels beyond being merely a judicial opinion but depicts a constitutional reaffirmation.

I had earlier argued that imposing rigid time-lines on constitutional functionaries like the president or governor would blur the lines between judicial interpretation and judicial legislation. By refusing to prescribe decision time-lines for the governor, the Court has affirmed this. Accordingly, the Court has effectively overturned its previous decision which had set time-lines for governors’ assent and stated that the president must decide on bills within three months from the date they are referred. Its decision indicates that provisions which remain silent owing to deliberate constitutional design must not, and cannot be filled through court-imposed time-lines or procedures. However, even while stating that no time-lines can be prescribed, the Court has also held governors to an appropriate standard, discouraging them from indefinitely delaying their assent. This outlook honours constitutionally imposed boundaries and preserves stability.

The Court has restated that under Articles 200 and 201, the governor possesses three distinct options when presented with a bill. The governor must either grant assent to the bill, return it for reconsideration, or reserve it for presidential consideration. These three choices are fundamental to the discretionary judgment that has been vested in the governor by the Constitution. In a similar manner, the Court has held that the president exercises independent auth-

ority under Articles 111 and 201.

Notably, these powers flow not from judicial interpretation, but from the Constitution itself, fortifying the important role they play in the legislative process. What has also been clarified is that the president is not obligated to seek advisory opinions under Article 143 every time a governor reserves a bill. This determination prevents unnecessary constitutional bottlenecks and maintains appropriate autonomy for constitutional institutions. It ensures that no mandatory detour system through the Supreme Court is created, converting a strictly executive decision-making process into a confusing executive-judicial process. This would have radically altered the nature of both pillars and changed the essence of the Indian polity.

Crucially, the judgment has affirmed that the governor’s discretionary powers cannot be supplanted by the judiciary through judicial review of the governor’s decisions under Article 142. The Court has accordingly held that the concept of “deemed assent”, which would permit courts to declare that a bill has been automatically assented to after the lapse of a prescribed period, is absent in our Constitution and cannot be envisioned by the judiciary. While the merits of decisions taken by the governor or president remain beyond judicial scrutiny, and are thus “non-justiciable”, courts retain their narrow procedural role when faced with prolonged, unexplained and indefinite delays that topple constitutional functioning.

Most significantly, the judgment reinforces fundamental principles of constitutional governance. Including, for instance, holding that courts cannot examine the substantive merits of assent decisions by executive authorities, cannot mandate outcomes, and cannot remedy constitutional silences through judicial interpretation.

This judgment is also significant when viewed from the lens of federalism. It has recognised the crucial role that the governor and president play in Centre-state dynamics. It has thus protected institutional autonomy, retaining the delicate stability between the roles of the judiciary and the executive. In doing so, it has preserved constitutional equilibrium, essential for the smooth functioning of our democracy.

The writer is Managing Partner, Parinam Law Associates and former member, Law Commission of India

Gen Z has the power. It needs patience



SUDHANSHU MISHRA

PROTESTS IN MEXICO this week are part of a bigger global story that governments have been too slow to understand. At the centre of it is generation Z, a demographic tired of corruption, joblessness and political decay. In Mexico, one young protester said, “When those at the bottom move, those at the top fall.” This sentiment echoed in Kathmandu, Jakarta and Antananarivo. The language changes but the idea is the same. Gen Z has discovered its political power, and it is no longer speaking in whispers.

The phenomenon of young people driving political change is not new: Protests erupt, governments fall, but eventually the old order reasserts itself. The Arab Spring is the clearest example. Massive, social-media-driven uprisings seemed destined to reshape the region. A decade later, almost every country that ousted its leader has reverted to authoritarianism. The core problem is that leaderless protests feel democratic, but that is also their downfall. Without internal organisation and a clear political structure, the youth who lead revolutions often find themselves excluded from the systems they wanted to rebuild.

Across South and Southeast Asia, the last few years have seen several youth-led uprisings. A poster spotted in Nepal read, “corruption is sus, stop ghosting democracy”. TikTok clips and Discord chats have created a shared political vocabulary among young people who may never meet. Reports on Nepal’s protests mentioned that the demonstrators constantly referenced movements in Indonesia. Gen Z around the world is borrowing tactics, memes, slogans and political imagination from each other in real time.

But for all that energy, studies suggest that modern movements are less effective than their predecessors at shaping long-term political outcomes. In Bangladesh, young people celebrated when Sheikh Hasina fell and Muhammad Yunus took charge as caretaker prime minister. Yet many now believe the interim government has failed to deliver on reforms. Members of Hami Nepal, the youth group that organised protests in the country, initially worked with the interim PM. Now they have been sidelined. Governments today can also shut down movements faster. The same technology that helps protesters organise can be used to splinter movements, push disinformation and intimidate. Myanmar’s 2021 protests were crushed violently. Indonesia’s young protesters forced modest concessions, only for President Prabowo Subianto to stonewall reforms and endorse a crackdown.

Yet some exceptions exist. For example, in Sri Lanka, the 2022 protests toppled the Rajapaksa dynasty and the election of Anura Kumara Dissanayake showed that youth-driven discontent can turn into sustainable political change when it connects with established civil society networks and institutional actors.

This is a generation that has the courage to shake political structures but not the tools to rebuild them yet. They know how to mobilise. They know how to topple leaders. The challenge lies in what comes after the uprising. Gen Z has power. What it needs is patience, organisation and alliances to turn digital energy into lasting democratic reform.

The writer is sub-editor, The Indian Express. sudhanshu.mishra@indianexpress.com

40 YEARS AGO

November 21, 1985



Superpower meeting ends

THE US President, Ronald Reagan, and the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, ended their formal summit discussions, and a US official said both sides were working together on a formula to present the outcome to the world. The White House spokesman, Larry Speakes, said American and Russian aides had already reached a broad agreement on how to depict the talks and would present their final versions later.

Reagan to meet NATO heads

THE US President, Ronald Reagan, will meet 11 NATO heads of government in Brussels to brief them on his summit with

the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, NATO sources said. They said that, of the 16-nation alliance, only France, Greece, Spain and Portugal would not be represented by their government chiefs at the meeting.

Rathore wins gold

THE NATIONAL Games seemed to have failed to interest the residents of Delhi. Competition began in various disciplines, but centres where the events were being staged were a deserted look. The only people there were participants, officials or media personnel. Wrestling was an exception, and there was a fair crowd at Karanil Singh Stadium. K S Rathore of Madhya

Pradesh won the first gold of the Games in the dressage equestrian event.

PM says Tamils should return

INDIA WOULD like the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India to go back to Sri Lanka with honour and security, the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, told the Lok Sabha during question hour. He said, “We treat the Tamil problem as a Sri Lankan problem and not an Indian problem.” However, on questions such as human rights violations, the country did take up such matters with the countries concerned. He said India had expressed concern over the ceasefire violations on both sides and certain actions of the Sri Lankan security forces.



DIS/AGREE

THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A weekly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate

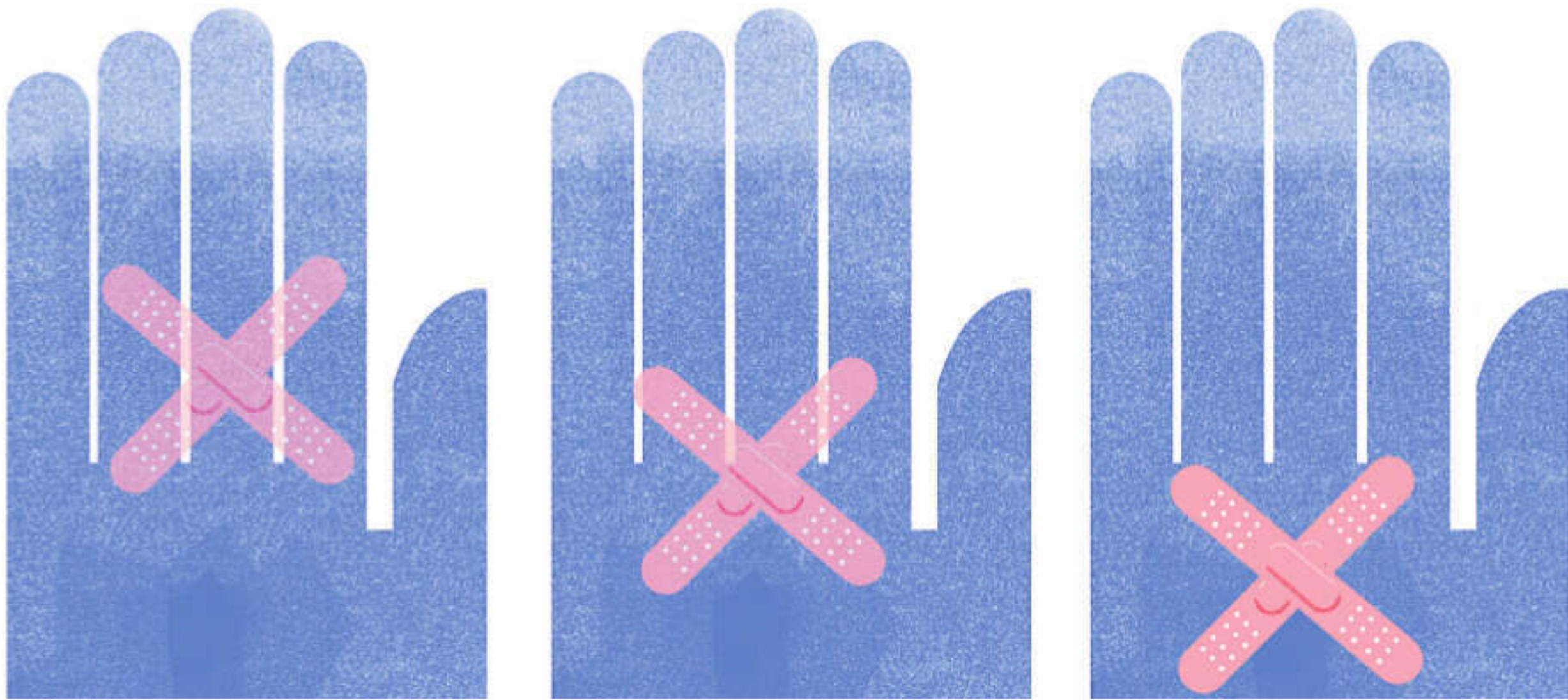


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

After Bihar election verdict, what are the lessons for the Opposition?

Polls now bent to favour ruling party



ASHOK GEHLOT

GIVEN THAT public memory in India fades quickly, let's begin by revisiting a significant political development from 2017. The demise of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa left the RK Nagar Assembly seat in Chennai vacant, prompting the Election Commission to schedule a bypoll for April 12, 2017.

Everything was proceeding normally until April 9, just three days before polling, when the Election Commission (EC) issued a statement saying: "Voters are being influenced on a large scale through money, gifts, and other inducements. Under such circumstances, free and fair elections are not possible. Voting is therefore postponed."

Earlier, during the 2016 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, voting in the Aravakurichi and Thanjavur constituencies had also been postponed because of repeated complaints of cash-for-vote practices. What is noteworthy here is that there was never any clear information on exactly who had received this money. Yet, the EC acted decisively to protect electoral integrity.

In Bihar, the Model Code of Conduct came into force on October 6, as the Assembly's five-year term was due to end. Just 10 days earlier, on September 26, a scheme was suddenly launched without prior announcement or planning under which Rs 10,000 was transferred via DBT into women's bank accounts. Under this "Mahila Rojgar Yojana," a massive amount of Rs 12,500 crore was to be transferred.

After this, the transfers continued: October 3 (three days before the MCC), October 7 (a day after the MCC), then on October 17, October 24, October 31, and even on November 7, between the first and second phases of voting, Rs 10,000 each was deposited into women's accounts. This was a blatant violation of the Model Code of Conduct. The pension given to women was also increased from Rs 400 to Rs 1,100 and transferred during the election period. Such timing makes the intention unmistakable. This was state-sponsored inducement, not welfare.

Despite multiple complaints from opposition parties, these transfers continued. Just before Bihar, a similar move had been made in Maharashtra, where Rs 7,500 each was deposited into the accounts of 2.34 crore women, resulting in a one-sided outcome in favour of the BJP and the NDA. The

EC took no action on schemes launched during the lame-duck period. This pattern shows that last-minute cash transfers have become a deliberate electoral tool.

In just seven years, the EC's approach seems to have changed completely. The same Commission that had postponed elections in RK Nagar, Aravakurichi, and Thanjavur when political parties were allegedly distributing cash, now remains silent when the government openly transfers thousands of crores into women's bank accounts during elections, effectively becoming an NDA partner in this crime.

In Rajasthan, during the 2023 Assembly elections, the EC put a halt to the smart-phone distribution scheme for women even though it had been announced in the February 2022 state budget and about 30 per cent of eligible women had already received smartphones. Moreover, ongoing schemes like social security pensions (old-age, widow, and disability pensions) and the Annapurna scheme, which delivered ration to households, were also stopped.

In contrast, in Bihar and Maharashtra, money was deposited into women's accounts even during the election period. The application of the MCC has, therefore, become selective, raising concerns about uniformity and fairness. These schemes in NDA-ruled states were launched without prior planning, purely for political gain. This is why Union Minister Nitin Gadkari publicly stated, in reference to Maharashtra, that after distributing money to women, no funds are left for any other subsidy.

The EC has still not responded to Rahul Gandhi's revelations on voter data in Haryana. Its response to the Mahadevapura revelations was also unsatisfactory. The EC remains silent on cash-for-vote schemes, allowing open vote-buying in favour of the NDA. This silence weakens the very institution tasked with safeguarding the democratic process. In such a situation, questions are raised not just about the NDA government but also about the EC.

If elections are to be won merely by directly depositing money into voters' accounts during the polling period, then what is the need for the ritual of conducting polls at all? It is said that elections are held in China and Russia, too, where democracy exists only in a limited form. Is there now an attempt to shape India's electoral system like China's and Russia's, where the election process is structured to benefit the ruling party? India must not allow its electoral system to drift toward a controlled democracy where outcomes are shaped by state machinery rather than voter choice.

Gehlot is former Chief Minister of Rajasthan and member of Congress Working Committee

Congress should stop playing victim



KAPIL KOMIREDDI

JUST OVER a year ago, Narendra Modi appeared, for the first time since he stormed Delhi in 2014, vincible and vulnerable. The Prime Minister's party, denied a majority in Parliament, straggled back to power with the aid of allies in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. Those who regarded this moment as perhaps the beginning of the end of Modi's predominance in Indian politics overlooked his great boon: The Congress Party.

Rather than seize the opening granted by the outcome of last year's general elections to put a squeeze on the BJP, India's principal Opposition party retreated into its make-believe world in which it is a noble victim. Dedicated to perpetuating the preeminence of one family, it refused to subject itself to sincere self-assessment. It acted in erratic ways. It taunted Modi in one breath for losing his majority and cast itself as the casualty of his machinations in the next. Modi was simultaneously derided as a loser and decried as a dictator; the system that had deprived his party of a majority was also accused of being rigged in his favour; and what remained of meaningful democratic dissent inside the Congress — the selfless saviour of our embattled democracy — was choked to tighten the grip of the Gandhi dynasty. Infinitely more qualified candidates were shoved aside to ordain Rahul Gandhi as the Leader of the Opposition.

The best measure of his success in his job is the speed with which Modi — who last summer wore the appearance of a man mentally mapping his exit — has been able to reaffirm his position as the father of what his admirers call the "New India". Rahul Gandhi has moved from cause to cause, but none has stuck. His tragedy is that, even when he is right, he hurts the message merely by being the messenger. His party's tragedy is that it is held together by the very dynasty that is destroying its electoral prospects.

Unable to reform itself, Congress has taken to smearing anyone who refuses to venerate it as a stooge or an enabler of the government. And thus the AIMIM, which is effectively allied with Congress in Telangana, is vilified as Modi's "B-team" in Bihar. Congress's spectacular

defeat in Bihar is not evidence of the failure of Rahul Gandhi, the person behind every decision, and his messaging; it is proof only of a corrupt system that has deafened the electorate to his voice. To ordinary Indians, however, Rahul Gandhi does not look like a self-sacrificing martyr; he appears like an overindulged princeling who believes that he is, by virtue of his pedigree, entitled to power. His lack of discipline was striking. Having disappeared on two foreign trips in the weeks preceding the polls in Bihar, he showed up to denounce the election as a sham. Then, undermining his own claims, he went ahead and legitimised the vote by participating in it.

Bihar did not unpend or establish a political trend. What it did was electrify the BJP. It will go into the five state elections scheduled for next year, determined to push ahead, vindicated by its strategy of persistence, which raised it from nonentity to the largest single party in a state that was once hostile to it.

What of Congress? There was no self-scrutiny. Instead, Rahul Gandhi and his private cabinet assembled in Delhi to squabble over their shrinking spoils. Nine Rajya Sabha seats will open up early next year for the Congress. And there is a large crowd of highly qualified petitioners: Men and women whose record of non-performance is matched only by their history of self-abasing service to the dynasty.

Congress desperately needs some wins next year if it is to sustain the patronage system that keeps the family enterprise alive. But its great obstacle in this pursuit is itself: It cannot brook candidates of merit for fear that they may eclipse the Gandhis. It is for this reason that in Kerala — where the party has a realistic chance of victory next year — it will likely project KC Venugopal over, say, Shashi Tharoor, as its chief ministerial candidate.

One by-election defeat for Labour in Britain prompted calls for the resignation of Keir Starmer. The experience of three national defeats has done nothing at all to shock the Congress, the institution that incubated Indian democracy, to embrace accountability. In no other serious democracy is a party like the Congress even conceivable. The mistake on the part of Indians who care about the future of our republic is to treat this decrepit dynastic despotism as the alternative to the authoritarian dispensation that now governs India. It is not.

Komireddi is the author of *Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India*

Parliament is the people's voice. On EC, government is gagging it



ZERO HOUR

BY DEREK O'BRIEN

LET ME say this again. The government is accountable to Parliament. Parliament is accountable to the people. When Parliament is dysfunctional, the government is accountable to no one.

Middle school civics books told us the three arms of the state are the executive, legislature, and judiciary. The Election Commission of India (ECI) is a body that squarely falls under the Executive while possessing certain quasi-judicial powers. And yet, we are now repeatedly told that the ECI is not accountable to Parliament. Incorrect. Parliament has the power to discuss the Election Commission of India. Why is the government not allowing it?

Over the last two sessions of Parliament, Opposition parties, including Congress, AITC, SP, DMK, AAP, RJD, SS (UBT), JMM and others filed over a hundred notices demanding a discussion related to the electoral process being more transparent. The Opposition was not fussy about which rule the discussion could be held under, and was also flexible about how the notice would be worded. What stopped the Narendra Modi-led coalition from discussing a notice titled, "74 Years of General Elections -- Celebrating India's Enduring Democratic Spirit"?

Cold feet? Over the Budget and Monsoon sessions, the Modi government refused to engage in a discussion. The excuse cited was that Parliamentary rules do not allow for a debate on constitutional authorities. What do the Rules of Procedure actually say? Rule 169 prescribes the "Conditions of admissibility" for discussions on a matter of general public interest. Under this rule, there is no provision which bars or prevents a discussion on any constitutional authority, including the Election Commission of India.

There are multiple precedents of the ECI being discussed on the floor of Parliament. I can cite more than half a dozen examples. Here are just three: i) postponement of elections by the Chief Election Commissioner; ii) inadequacies in the electoral law in not providing a specific period for completion of a bye-election to Parliament; iii) delay in holding elections to the Delhi Metropolitan Council and bye-election in Garhwal Parliamentary Constituency.

There are several factors that give

Parliament the power to discuss the ECI. Parliament holds the "power of the purse". This means that the budget of the executive is subject to parliamentary approval. Any budget is approved only after an exhaustive discussion and a scrutiny of the "Demand For Grants" by Parliament. There are certain exceptions to this, such as the salary of judges of the Supreme Court, which is not subject to a Parliamentary vote. This is done to protect the independence of the judiciary.

The budget of the ECI, however, is subject to Parliamentary approval and is presented by the Union government through the Ministry of Law and Justice. This means that Parliament does have the power to scrutinise and discuss the ECI by virtue of holding the "power of the purse". It is a violation of the powers of Parliament; therefore, when the government claims that lawmakers who approve the budget of the ECI do not have the right to discuss that institution.

This was a government which used its majority to pass the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023. Under this Bill (now an Act), the government eroded the independence of the ECI by giving itself complete and unfettered power to appoint the three election commissioners. However, that isn't the key issue here.

What is important is that, in the process of passing this Bill, Parliament conducted an extensive discussion on the functioning and conduct of the ECI. Therefore, it is ridiculous for the government to claim that "ECI cannot be discussed in Parliament" when precedent shows that the poll body was discussed for seven hours combined, in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, as recently as December 2023.

Elections are the bedrock of democracy. The existence of the government as well as Parliament is determined through elections. The integrity of our electoral process, therefore, hinges on the citizens of the country and their representatives being able to discuss and scrutinise the body which is solely responsible for the conduct of elections. In the upcoming Winter Session of Parliament, odds are that the Opposition will again demand a discussion on the ECI. Instead of hiding behind frivolous excuses, the government must respect the wishes of the citizens of India and participate in a frank and transparent discussion on the ECI.

PS: According to the rules in Parliament, "a notice... should not be given publicly... until it has been admitted". All the notices mentioned in this column were from earlier sessions and have lapsed. This columnist hasn't broken any rules!

The writer is MP and leader, All India Trinamool Congress Parliamentary Party



ILLUSTRATION: KOMAL

There are multiple precedents of the ECI being discussed on the floor of Parliament. I can cite more than half a dozen examples. Here are just three

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Environment first

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'Green exception should not become the rule' (IE, November 20). In a democracy, institutions have a key role in checking and balancing overreaching decisions. The EIA norms are vital to protect the lifelines of Mother Earth. Ignoring the disastrous impacts on the environment or delaying timely clearances for development projects can lead to severe ecological degradation. We need a better model for ease of doing business, aligned with transparent processes to reduce environmental pollution. When the apex court decides to hear a matter on *ex post facto* clearance, it must also emphasise the need for public consultations to protect biodiversity and secure the planet's future.

Rajesh Raj, New Delhi

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'Green exception should not become a rule' (IE, November 20). Environmental rules exist to protect our forests, wildlife, and public health, and they must be followed strictly. Allowing projects to begin work and later seek *ex post*

facto environmental clearance weakens the entire purpose of the EIA process. Such practices can lead to irreversible ecological damage and set a harmful precedent. While certain exceptional situations may require urgent approvals, they should remain rare and well justified. India's developmental needs are important, but they cannot come at the cost of long-term environmental security. Strong, transparent, and timely environmental scrutiny is essential.

Angel Gupta, Ambala

Prevent resurgence

THIS REFERS to the article, 'More than two decades later, there is light at the end of the red corridor' (IE, November 20). Apart from the effective "boots on the ground" approach by security forces, a return to normalcy is essential. Tribals and villagers need reassurance that they will not be persecuted as Naxal "sympathisers" or abandoned in a post-Naxalite world. Schemes such as PM-DAJGUA, along with the realisation of rights under the FRA, can help prevent the resurgence of Maoist ideology among dissatisfied communities.

Anany Mishra, via email



POOJA PILLAI

GIVEN HOW often US President Donald Trump has expressed admiration for authoritarian figures, the chest-beating in sections of the US media about the VIP treatment for Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) seemed a little naive. Of course Trump was going to roll out the red carpet for the powerful crown prince of Saudi Arabia, particularly when he was dangling the prospect of a massive deal. And of course he would lavish praise on MbS, especially when the final figure settled at \$1 trillion.

But even the most cynical may be excused for being taken aback by the extraordinary scene in the Oval Office on Tues-

Trump, MbS and a history of hypocrisy

day when Mary Bruce of ABC News asked MbS about the 2018 killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi — US intelligence had found it was carried out at the behest of the prince. A bristling Trump upbraided the reporter for her "horrible, in-subordinate" attitude; absolved MbS of any knowledge of the murder and shrugged off Khashoggi's death with "things happen".

Was this a new low for a President who has made ruthlessness a hallmark of his administration? As the Washington Post points out, MbS's own response to the reporter's question — "We've improved our system... it's painful and a huge mistake" — fell far short of honesty and grace but was still somehow better than the President's.

Trump's refusal to couch his actions in high-minded rhetoric, however, makes it easy to forget that when it comes to callous-

ness, he isn't exactly setting a new record. In his moral gymnastics and insensitivity to human rights, Trump has company in past US presidents, some of whose actions have led to violence that continues to roil parts of the world. Take West Asia alone, where George W Bush unleashed his catastrophic "war on terror" and where Barack Obama normalised the use of drone strikes. Consider also Joe Biden's miscalculated attempt to end the "forever war" in Afghanistan, which plunged the region into further chaos. Biden, who had condemned Saudi involvement in Khashoggi's killing when he was on the campaign trail, changed tack once he was elected to office — a viral picture of his fist-bump with MbS served as the capstone to his heavily criticised 2022 trip to the kingdom.

Trump may broadcast his disdain, but

many of his predecessors cloaked their actions in the language of freedom, democracy and "American leadership" — while overseeing interventions that caused immense human suffering. Their legacies are protected partly by the softening effect of nostalgia and partly by the outrageousness of Trump himself. None of them, after all, has addressed a journalist as "piggy" — as Trump recently did when asked about his reluctance to let the Epstein files be released — shared racist memes about political opponents, targeted American citizens of colour and called for jailing anyone who disagreed with them. What separates the bully abroad and the bully at home, ultimately, is just a thin veneer of statesmanship.

The writer is senior assistant editor, The Indian Express. pooja.pillai@expressindia.com

• ECONOMICS

What Nvidia’s quarterly results mean for the buzz around an ‘AI bubble’

Anagha Jayakumar
New Delhi, November 20

AMID HEATED speculation of an AI bubble, chip manufacturer Nvidia announced its third-quarter (July-September) results on Wednesday, beating industry expectations. The company recorded its highest-ever revenue of \$57 billion, a growth of 62% over the previous year, with its data centre business alone recording \$51.2 billion in revenue. It has also projected revenue for the fourth quarter at about \$65 billion against industry expectations of \$61 billion. The results reversed a declining trend that was underway early in November, with Nvidia’s shares down nearly 8% after surging by 1,200% over the past three years. Nvidia has a stranglehold over highly-priced chips called graphics processing units, or GPUs, which crunch data for AI models. The development comes at a significant time. There has been increasing talk of the unsustainability of the AI boom, and events in recent weeks, inclined towards market correction, have forced investors to press pause. Of note has been the actions of Michael Burry, best-known today as the American investor who predicted the 2008 recession before it unfolded. Through his cryptic social media posts, he has lent fuel to the narrative that the ‘AI bubble’ is poised to burst, a theory that has gained more credence with recent actions by leading industrialists. In late October, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman backtracked on a company statement seeking a potential bailout by the US government. Last week, it was reported that venture capitalist and Palantir founder Peter Thiel had sold off his entire stake in Nvidia by September 30, following a similar divestment announced by Softbank last week. On Tuesday, Google (and Alphabet) CEO Sundar Pichai characterised the growth of artificial intelligence as an “extraordinary moment”, but said there had been some “irrationality” in the current AI boom.

What is a bubble?

Quite simply, an economic bubble refers to the period when the current market price of an asset of interest tremendously exceeds its intrinsic value, usually driven by optimistic market behaviour. The fragility becomes known once the asset’s price hits a certain peak, or after a specific event that causes investors to press pause before likely resorting to panic selling in a bid to recoup funds. Economists have disagreed on what causes a market bubble. Post-Keynesian economist Hyman Minsky’s Financial Instability Hypothesis, which he proposed in 1992, suggests that “stability breeds instability”. In other words, a prolonged period of economic stability may encourage speculative behaviour, increasing the likelihood of a market crash. The Minsky Moment refers to a period when the market blinks and recognises the instability of the entire structure, which was enabling borrowing to finance risky investments with the assumption that asset prices will indefinitely rise. This turning point, wherein investors and lenders (usually banks) begin to backtrack, will likely trigger panic, and in turn, a real economic crisis marked by falling prices, rising unemployment, and stalled credit. The collapse of the dot-com bubble in the 2000s is regarded as a classic Minsky moment. At the time, several investors had channelled funds into Internet-based start-ups without a proven business model. Eventually, the bubble burst: companies lost large chunks of their market cap, many were shut down, and millions of programmers and tech workers were laid off. Some analysts fear that a similar situation is unfolding in the AI space currently.

Jensen Huang, President and CEO of Nvidia. THE NYT

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What is behind the AI valuation fears?

Nearly three years since ChatGPT was formally introduced to the world, the AI space has continued to grow exponentially. A report by the UN Conference on Trade and Development estimated that the market for AI will grow 25-fold from \$189 billion in 2023 to \$4.8 trillion by 2033. Nvidia, currently the biggest player, has surpassed the \$5 trillion valuation mark at the end of October, after crossing \$4 trillion in July. As of Wednesday (November 19), OpenAI was estimated to be worth \$750 billion based on a Reuters analysis of Softbank holdings, while Anthropic’s new deal with Microsoft and Nvidia on Wednesday has boosted its valuation to \$350 billion. Concerns about the sustainability of this boom have been raised in light of recent investment announcements. **FIRST**, a Bloomberg report in October highlighted the circular nature of financing driving the AI boom, meaning the same money was virtually being passed around several companies, allowing each company’s individual valuation to soar. The report highlighted the outsized role of two players — Nvidia and OpenAI, who have both announced investments to the tune of billions of dollars with a reciprocal financing plan. **SECOND**, some analysts have expressed caution over the outsized emphasis on Nvidia, given its aggressive deal-making. The company has invested \$24 billion in deals with companies in the larger AI ecosystem in 2025, according to Pitchbook data. That it is the most valuable company while only serving a vital infrastructural input, and not the end service used by consumers, has been curious. **THIRD**, there has been no proven impact yet for the AI use-case as a profit-making business model. The boom seems to be driven entirely by optimism around capacity generation, while its potential application, and scope for monetisation, largely remain unproven. There is also an argument to be made for sustainable capacity generation, given reports of electricity consumption by data centres, as well as the negative externalities (water shortages, erratic power supply) reported by the residents of towns around such areas.

• LAW

How SC answered the 14 questions President posed

Vineet Bhalla
New Delhi, November 20

IN A verdict that recalibrates the delicate balance of power between Raj Bhavans and elected state governments, a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court on Thursday delivered its opinion on the 14-point Presidential Reference made by President Droupadi Murmu in May. In its opinion, the SC treads a tightrope: it firmly rules that Governors cannot indefinitely sit on Bills, effectively outlawing the “pocket veto”, but simultaneously rejects the judiciary’s power to impose rigid timelines on constitutional authorities, as was introduced by a two-judge Bench of the court in April. Here’s a breakdown of how the court answered the 14 questions raised by President Murmu.

1. What are the constitutional options before a Governor when a Bill is presented to him under Article 200? Article 200 of the Constitution outlines the process for a Governor to give assent to a bill passed by the state legislature. The SC held that the Governor has three specific options: to grant assent, to reserve the bill for the President’s consideration, or to withhold assent and return the bill to the legislature with comments for reconsideration. Crucially, the SC ruled that there is no option to “withhold assent simpliciter” — the Governor cannot simply refuse to sign a bill and keep it pending.

2. Is the Governor bound by the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers while exercising options under Article 200? No. The court ruled that in the specific function of granting assent to bills, the Governor enjoys discretion and is not bound by the advice of the Council of Ministers (as stated in Article 163 of the Constitution). The Bench reasoned that if the Governor were bound by the Cabinet, they could never return a bill for reconsideration, as no government would advise against its own legislation.

3. Is the exercise of constitutional discretion by the Governor under Article 200 justiciable? While courts cannot review the wisdom of a Governor’s decision, the SC ruled that “prolonged, unexplained, and indefinite inaction” is subject to judicial review. If a Governor sits on a bill without taking any decision, the court can direct them to act.

4. Is Article 361 an absolute bar to judicial review in relation to the

• SC OPINION PAVES WAY FOR MORE LITIGATION

UNDER ARTICLE 143(1) of the Constitution, the President may refer a “question of law or fact” to the Supreme Court for its opinion. Such an opinion, unlike a ruling, is not binding on the court or the President.

This means that Thursday’s opinion does not automatically overrule a prior verdict. Ritwika Sharma, Assistant Professor at the Jindal Global Law School, said that the SC was neither sitting in appeal nor was this a review of the April judgment delivered by Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan. “For all intents and purposes, the April verdict stays operational, particularly regarding the grounds for judicial review,” she said.

On the other hand, Alok Prassanna Kumar, co-founder of the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, argued that for all practical purposes, the April judgment’s logic on timelines was dead. “If a state government reaches the court asking for a mandamus [direction] citing the Tamil Nadu judgment, they can’t, because that point of law has been overruled,”



The SC’s opinion has left the door open for continued friction. ARCHIVE

Kumar said. He argued that while the verdict was technically advisory in nature, the weight of a five-judge Constitution Bench declaring a point of law means courts will now follow this opinion.

What lies ahead?

The advisory opinion of the SC has left the door open for continued friction. By removing the strict timelines but insisting on “reasonable” speed, the court has essentially asked constitutional author-

ities to self-regulate — a system that has arguably failed in recent years.

“In a way, by not providing a solution, what the Supreme Court has done is said, “Please find a way to sort this problem yourselves,” said Kumar.

The likely result: more litigation. As Sharma said, “there will be litigation in the near future to seek clarification on law”.

VINEET BHALLA

6. Is the exercise of constitutional discretion by the President under Article 201 justiciable? No. Article 201 deals with bills reserved by the Governor for the President’s consideration. Similar to the Governor, the President’s decision to assent or withhold assent to a state Bill is not open to judicial review on its merits, the SC opined.

7. Can timelines be imposed on the President for the exercise of discretion under Article 201? No. The President cannot be bound by judicially prescribed timelines when dealing with state bills reserved for their consideration.

8. Is the President required to seek the advice of the SC under Article 143 when a Governor reserves a Bill? No. Article 143 allows the President to consult the SC on questions of law. The court clarified that the President is not required to seek this opinion every time a bill is reserved; the President’s subjective satisfaction is sufficient.

actions of a Governor under Article 200? No. Article 361 grants the President and Governors personal immunity, stating they are not “answerable to any court” for the performance of their duties. The SC held that while this protects the individual, it does not protect the “office” of the Governor from judicial scrutiny regarding constitutional inaction. This immunity cannot be used to shield indefinite delays, the court held.

5. Can timelines be imposed on the Governor through judicial orders for the exercise of powers under Article 200? No. The SC overruled its judgment from April which had set specific timelines of one to three months for a Governor to act on bills. (President Murmu’s reference came in response to this judgment). The apex court held that since Article 200 uses the elastic phrase “as soon as possible” rather than a fixed timeframe, it would be inappropriate for the judiciary to prescribe rigid deadlines.

Key Points

The apex court allowed states to challenge indefinite delay by the Governor.

However, the court said that it cannot look into the merits or prescribe timelines for the Governor.

• SPORT

How Curaçao, and other small countries, got their FIFA fairy tale

Mihir Vasavda
Mumbai, November 20

CURAÇAO — THE island whose entire population can fit into the Narendra Modi Stadium and Eden Gardens — has become the smallest nation ever to qualify for the FIFA World Cup. Haiti, ravaged by conflict and famine, ended their 52-year wait to make the cut for the biggest single-sport event on the planet, without any of the players or the coach setting foot on home soil. Uzbekistan has tried and failed to qualify for the World Cup seven times since its independence, following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. This time, finally, they crossed the line. The 48-team World Cup, set to take place in the US next year, was initially dismissed as an excess that would drain the tournament of jeopardy. While that fear lingers, qualifying has already produced a surge of

Cinderella stories the 32-team era seldom allowed. Foundations — Uzbekistan, Jordan, Cape Verde and Curaçao — will make their World Cup debuts next year. That number could rise by the time the qualification race ends in March 2026. Haiti will return to the big stage for the first time since 1974; Austria, Norway and Scotland will be back after last appearing in 1998; while South Africa and Qatar made it this far for the first time via the qualifications — they have previously played on the virtue of being hosts.

The American dream

In the previous iterations, the North, Central America and Caribbean nations got just three qualifying spots. Two of those would go to the US and Mexico, with a Caribbean nation usually snapping up the third. For 2026, the region’s quota was doubled. And with the co-hosts — the USA, Mexico and Canada — getting automatic places, it opened the doors for other countries in the

More spots up for grabs

● From being a 32-team tournament (since 1998), the FIFA World Cup is set to expand to a 48-team format. ● This has meant that more sports are up for grabs, allowing countries like Curaçao, Uzbekistan and Haiti to script fairy tale stories.

region, like Haiti. The Caribbean nation relied heavily on its diaspora players to stitch a scarcely-believable campaign. Haiti played all their home matches approximately 500 miles away in Curaçao, who scripted a miraculous story of their own. The island — home to 156,000 people and roughly three-quarters the size of Mumbai — became a country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 2010, following the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles. A decade ago, they were ranked 150th in the world; today, they have climbed to 82nd. Undeclared through qualifying, Curaçao secured its spot with a goalless draw in Jamaica.

How Asia benefitted

The other big beneficiary is Asia. The continent’s quota was doubled from 4 (or 5, if the inter-continental playoff berth is considered) to 8. This gave teams who earlier came close but never could get the job done a better chance to qualify. And the

opportunity was lapped up by Uzbekistan and Jordan. While the usual suspects — Iran, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Qatar — easily qualified, the Uzbeks and Jordanians added a lot of drama to the Asian race.

Eyes on New Caledonia

Oceania never had a direct qualifying quota before. The best-performing team in the regional qualifiers would play against an Asian side in the play-off, with the winner qualifying for the World Cup. For 2026, Oceania was allocated a single direct spot, which New Zealand claimed. That left the door open for New Caledonia, a French overseas territory only recognised by FIFA in 2004. They will compete in March’s intercontinental playoffs, featuring six teams from five confederations. A victory there could add yet another fairy-tale chapter to the 2026 World Cup.

2 THINGS TO KNOW

Semeru erupts: What causes volcanic eruptions? Why are some more explosive?

MOUNT SEMERU, among the most active of Indonesia’s 120 live volcanoes, erupted on Wednesday, spewing hot clouds of volcanic ash and debris. Volcanoes erupt because of how heat moves beneath Earth’s surface. Deep within the planet, it is so hot that rocks slowly melt to become a thick flowing substance called magma. Since it is lighter than the solid rock around it, magma rises, collecting in chambers near the surface. As these chambers fill up, pressure exerted on the surrounding rock increases. Eventually, some of the magma pushes through the cracks in the rock, and vents onto the surface. This is a volcanic eruption; the magma that has erupted is called lava. The explosivity of an eruption depends on the composition of the magma. Thin, runny magma allows gasses to escape easily; upon eruption,



Semeru spewing volcanic ash. REUTERS

such magma simply flows out of the volcano (like in Hawai’i). Thick, sticky magma does not allow gasses to escape, and is thus much more explosive. Such eruptions see magma blast into the air, solidifying into deadly tephra, which can range in size from fine dust to massive, house-sized boulders (like with Semeru).

ENS

How straw hat Jolly Roger flag became symbol of Gen Z protests worldwide

A UBIQUITOUS presence of Gen Z protests worldwide has been the pirate flag, featuring a skull and crossbones, or a jolly roger wearing a straw hat.

The Jolly Roger was historically used by pirates to instil fear in approaching ships. In One Piece, a Japanese manga (or comic book) by artist Eiichiro Oda, the skull wears a straw



The straw-hat Jolly Roger flag at a protest in the Philippines WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

hat and a grin to represent the odd bunch of misfits, the Straw Hat Pirates, led by the rubber-bodied Monkey D Luffy. The graphic novel series was first published in 1997 — coincidentally, the year that separates the Gen Z from Millennials. It has now reached its final saga and is expected to end in a few years. Luffy, the protagonist of the series, leads a motley crew, fending off repressive rulers and the corrupt ‘World Government’. United under the straw-hatted Jolly Roger flag, these ‘outlaws’ came to represent liberation and resilience. A generation that grew up watching them, and now finds itself disenchanted by the powers that be, resonated with the Straw-Hat Pirates, turning them into symbols of modern protests. The flag first cropped up at pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Indonesia and New York in 2023. SONAL GUPTA

● INDIA RISING
Union Health Minister JP Nadda

India is rapidly emerging as a global research and digital innovation hub, with over 1,600 global capability centres—including several in pharmaceuticals and life sciences—driving cutting-edge development

The real value of AI

AI will inevitably change the world but the hype cycle must be separated from underlying value

TWO INFLUENTIAL VOICES—Alphabet’s Sundar Pichai and investor-writer Ruchir Sharma—have, in quick succession, warned that the world may be in the midst of an AI bubble or AI mania. Their perspectives matter not because they dampen optimism about artificial intelligence (AI), but because they force us to distinguish between genuine technological transformation and market euphoria masquerading as inevitability. Pichai’s caution is noteworthy precisely because it comes from an industry leader whose fortunes rise with AI’s ascent. When he urges restraint and warns of “over-expectations” reminiscent of past tech cycles, he is not forecasting the collapse of AI itself. Rather, he is asking whether the breakneck expectations—of instant productivity explosions, exponential revenue curves, and flawless deployment—are misaligned with the slower, more incremental reality of integrating AI into businesses and society. Sharma’s warning is sharper: he has argued that the current enthusiasm bears all the hallmarks of a speculative frenzy. The concentration of market gains in a handful of tech giants, the meteoric rise in stock prices not always matched by earnings, and venture capital’s rush to back every start-up with an “AI layer” all evoke memories of earlier bubbles.

The danger is not in believing that AI will change the world—it will—but in assuming that every AI company will be worth its sky-high valuation simply because the technology is transformative. This brings us to the question of valuations. Some AI companies now trade at multiples that defy traditional financial logic: triple-digit price-to-sales ratios, revenue projections based more on hope than on contracted demand, and business models that rely heavily on subsidised computation. Infrastructure-heavy AI start-ups—model builders, chipmakers, cloud-service providers—require immense capital expenditure.

This creates a fundamental tension: the market prices them as high-growth software companies, while their cost structures often resemble utilities. Even the tech majors powering the AI boom face unanswered questions. Cloud providers are spending tens of billions to build data centres and acquire graphics processing units. But how quickly can these investments be monetised? Will enterprises adopt AI at a scale that justifies current spending? Or, will AI eventually settle into being a lower-margin commodity rather than a perpetual-growth engine? This does not mean the AI revolution is illusory—far from it. It means the hype cycle must be separated from underlying value. To be sure, AI is not just a technological trend; it offers the possibility to transform many areas of the economy and society. For countries like India, where AI adoption is accelerating rapidly, the message is clear: Policymakers and businesses can seize enormous opportunities by tapping AI’s power, but they must also avoid being swept up by hype unsupported by fundamentals.

Sustainable growth comes from balancing ambition with pragmatism, ensuring investments in AI are paired with governance frameworks, ethics, and incremental progress. The promise of AI is immense, but so is the challenge of managing expectations amid a fast-changing innovation landscape. Ultimately, AI’s lasting impact will be judged not by short bursts of market excitement but by its integration into broader economic and social systems in ways that generate real value. The tech world and beyond should take this reminder seriously, as they chart the road ahead in both investing and innovating within the AI space. Investors, regulators, and businesses would be wise to listen. The last thing the global economy needs is for a transformational technology to be overshadowed by a preventable financial bubble.

America can't win by targeting Alibaba

IT WAS SUPPOSED to be a good week for Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. The tech giant released its revamped Qwen app to users in China, with plans to roll out the ChatGPT-like tool internationally later on.

The company’s family of artificial intelligence (AI) models have proven extremely popular with global developers, but the release of the all-in-one app signalled its boldest push yet into the consumer market. The new Qwen platform goes beyond conversational AI, the company said, and can generate a full research report or produce a PowerPoint presentation in seconds. For now, Alibaba is offering it up for free—a move that could potentially pose a threat to Silicon Valley leader OpenAI, which reportedly earns 70% of its annual revenue from consumers using ChatGPT.

But that news was largely overshadowed by a *Financial Times* report alleging Alibaba provides tech support for Chinese military operations according to a White House memo shared with the news outlet. The company has denied the claims as completely false and questioned the motivation behind the anonymous leak.

It has been radio silence from the White House since the report. And the US notably stopped short of more aggressive actions, such as sanctions or adding the firm to a trade blacklist. But it shows that Alibaba’s rise as an AI leader in China isn’t going unnoticed, and it’s a fair bet Washington’s scrutiny will only grow. The question now is if the scepticism sowed by the Trump administration will be enough to spook investors.

Alibaba shares initially slumped after the report, before paring back some losses over the week. Citigroup analysts suggested investors buy the dip, writing that the company wouldn’t risk anything that could jeopardise its reputation or fiduciary duty to shareholders. That may be true, but the damage to investor confidence in Chinese tech could still linger.

US consumers have shown they’re still willing to use China-originated apps despite perceived national security concerns: just look at TikTok. It hasn’t been spared from a law requiring it to divest from its Beijing parent company or face a US ban, even if Trump has delayed the deadline for the sale multiple times. It remains unclear if Qwen has what it takes to seriously compete with ChatGPT, but the app’s rising popularity could put a target on its back.

Developers, meanwhile, have already embraced Alibaba’s family of open-source Qwen models. Cumulative downloads overtook Meta Platforms’ Llama earlier this year, according to data from Hugging Face compiled by the ATOM Project. Even before news of the app, a “Qwen panic” was causing consternation as more global companies were choosing to build on its systems over Silicon Valley alternatives.

The *Financial Times* said it could not independently verify the claims against Alibaba in the White House memo. But it did point out that a handful of US tech giants—from Amazon.com to Microsoft—work with the Pentagon.

Globally, militaries and consumer tech companies are becoming increasingly linked. The rise of AI in particular raises fears because of its potential for dual-use applications, worries that have been the genesis of many of Washington’s tech clampdowns. Still, the optics of Chinese tech firms doing the same are unlikely to play well in Washington. “China hawks have been sidelined in recent months, which may be one reason for the leak to the press,” noted Michael Hirson, the head of China research at New York-based 22V Research. Already, some US lawmakers have used the allegations to call for harsher penalties, such as delisting from American stock exchanges.

But a fresh US offensive against Alibaba would backfire. After a fraught trade truce between Washington and Beijing was reached last month, targeting the Chinese firm could prompt a new round of tensions.

Alibaba’s AI ambitions won’t easily escape the geopolitical crossfire. But instead of undermining rivals, the US would be wise to focus on making its own offerings more attractive for businesses and consumers.

INDIA MUST PRIORITISE IMPLEMENTATION OF LABOUR CODES; OVERSTATED PRODUCTIVITY BREEDS COMPLACENCY

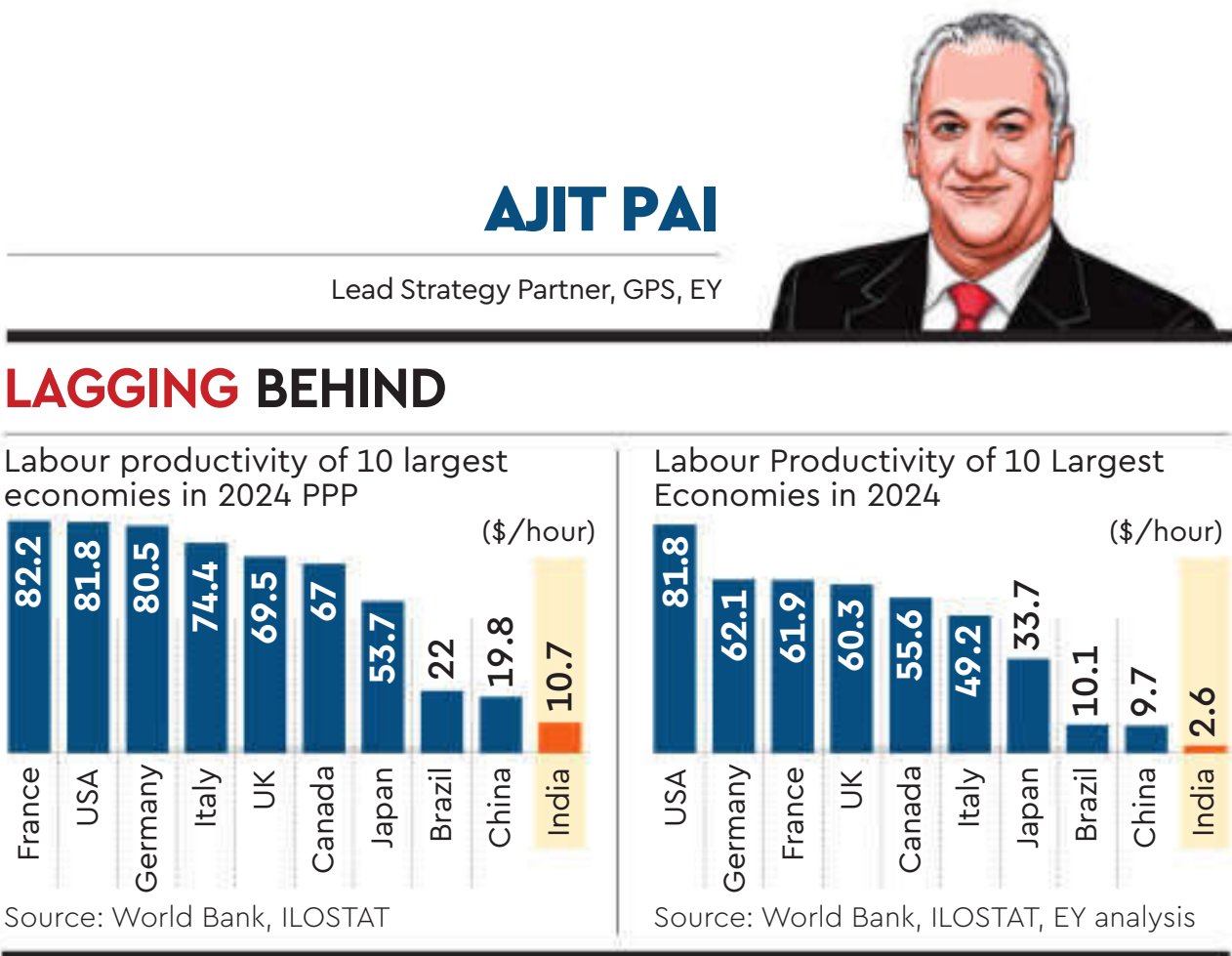
A weak link in competitiveness

IN A WORLD of heightened uncertainty, India requires greater autonomy in its strategic choices driven by enhanced self-reliance and improved global competitiveness.

India has shown accelerated progress in the past decade on both counts but has yet to bridge the gap to attain sufficient resilience and growth security for complete confidence in becoming a developed nation by 2047. A potential source of competitive strength, India’s anticipated demographic dividend, could prove the opposite if its formal employment outside of government jobs and employment outside agriculture do not grow materially faster.

Labour productivity is an important indicator that is closely linked to economic growth and competitiveness of an economy. It can be represented as output measured in GDP per unit of labour measured in hours worked over a reference period. High labour productivity generally results in high levels of economic activity and standards of living while making products and services more competitive and boosting their demand. India’s labour market remains the least efficient within large economies, with the lowest labour productivity rate of major economies.

Interestingly, the general metric of GDP/hour uses a purchasing power parity (PPP)-adjusted GDP overstating the productivity of workers in countries with low cost of living, as the organisations that mostly calculate this metric (ILO, OECD, World Bank) are more interested in the welfare of workers in countries with low cost of living rather than competitiveness of their enterprises. The more flattering comparison is generally convenient for governments in such countries but makes them complacent about the competitiveness of their enterprises to the detriment of their longer term GDP and employment growth prospects. Global trade occurs in non-PPP adjusted currency. Lower output per worker in real terms affects trade competitiveness. Overstated labour productivity in PPP terms breeds policymaker complacency and pressures Indian enterprises. In real terms for labour productiv-



ity, US is 32x that of India, France is 24x, and China is 4x, while in PPP terms the US and France are 8x that of India, and China 2x. While India is behind in PPP terms, it is an even bigger difference in real terms for India to cover by 2047, especially with countries like Vietnam improving labour productivity at a faster pace than India.

Several interconnected factors are contributing to this abysmal metric. These include highly fragmented industries, scale of enterprise still below critical mass, low levels of urbanisation, suboptimal planning, slow and costly logistics and transportation, high compliance and regulatory burden, and frictions to labour mobility. A legacy of vestigial misaligned policies related to agriculture, urbanisation, industry, and labour has contributed to keeping ~43% of India’s workforce engaged in agriculture while best practices in large economies have ~2%. Of these factors, a broadly held view is that issues surrounding labour are collectively the most significant impediment to accelerating India’s productivity and competitiveness across sectors. Clearly, there is an urgent and

tremendous need to accelerate growth in India’s labour productivity and focus on streamlining and aligning policies to make this happen as rapidly as possible.

In 2019, it was with great enthusiasm that industry and workers looked to the central government’s efforts to rationalise a maze of labour related laws and regulations into four Codes (on wages, industrial relations, social security, and occupational safety, health, and working conditions) that were more suitable to prevailing domestic and international circumstances. The passing of the four Codes by Parliament brought with it great optimism but somehow the five years since have not seen the transformation that was expected.

Although the four labour Codes were passed by Parliament in 2019 and 2020, their implementation has been delayed because both the central and state governments must enact corresponding rules. While many states have published draft rules, the final notification to bring the Codes into effect is pending. Labour is a concurrent subject, meaning both the central and state governments have the power to

From tax certainty to confidence



**MUKESH BUTANI
SEEMA KEJRIWAL**

The authors are senior partners at BMR Legal Advocates

RECENTLY, THE CENTRAL Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) chairperson made a spirited speech on Tax Certainty Day at OECD’s Paris centre, with a manifesto for transformation. The core message—that India’s tax regime is now anchored in the trinity of simplification, technology, and trust—stands in stark relief against the shadow of historical scepticism that has long haunted the Indian tax landscape.

For decades, the global perception of India’s tax enforcement and administration machinery was one of a complex, unpredictable, and often adversarial behemoth. This scepticism was not a single flaw but a confluence of issues: complex laws, patchy drafting, and inadequate administrative guidance with cumbersome compliance, and a tendency to foster a culture of litigation. The ultimate symbol of this instability was the infamous retrospective tax amendment of 2012, which signalled to the world that policy was not sacrosanct and long-term investment was indeed a hazardous gamble.

Today, the government is going all out with confidence and a shift in tone. The chairman’s vision—articulated through the acronym PRUDENT (professional, responsible, understanding, diligent, empathetic, non-intrusive, and technology-driven)—is not just a slogan; it is a direct repudiation of the “tax terror” narrative. This weaves in support to FM Nirmala Sitharaman’s clarification in the 2025

Budget: “Trust first, scrutinise later”.

The evidence of this shift is visible in two critical areas.

Administrative modernisation: The introduction of the faceless audit and appeal system and the transition to a data-based compliance model (such as pre-filled returns and the annual information statement) have been game-changers often initial hiccups. These reforms have measurably improved transparency, efficiency, and speed by drastically reducing human interface. Furthermore, the promise of a simplified New Income Tax Act, 2025, reduced by half and written in plain language, aims to tackle the root of legal complexity. The goal is to move the relationship from one of mandated compliance to genuine partnership and statesmanship.

Dispute prevention and global alignment: The push for certainty is most clear in the government’s focus on dispute resolution mechanisms. India’s Advance Pricing Agreement (APA) and Mutual Agreement Procedure (MAP) programmes are seeing a triumphant surge in efficacy with India receiving an award on Certainty Day. By proactively offering certainty through APAs and providing transfer pricing safe harbours, the administration is

The CBDT chairman’s articulation at OECD stands in stark relief against the historical scepticism that has long haunted the Indian tax landscape

effectively draining a swamp of litigation, particularly for businesses such as IT and IT-enabled services where the nation has experienced sustained investments in the past two decades.

This dedication to global best practices is cemented by a profoundly intrinsic, co-operative engagement with international bodies, particularly with the OECD, and simultaneously not losing sight of the UN

Intergovernmental Committee on Tax, to ensure that India’s interest is not compromised in the development discourse. The chairman correctly notes that tax certainty cannot be achieved in isolation. By actively engaging with fora like the Forum on Tax Administration and the MAP Forum, India is committing to ensure its system “evolves in step with global developments” and redefines the contours of strategic cooperation.

While this progress is commendable, the journey from certainty to confidence is indeed a “continuing discipline” as was noted by the chairman. Challenges remain.

Despite the policy intent, a perilous gap often persists between the seamless experience promised by technology and the bureaucratic friction encountered by some taxpayers, leading to residual con-

cerns over complexity and administrative efficiency. Recently, a chief commissioner-level officer remarked that to curb over-enthusiasm of one of the field officers, the observation was to “not behave like James Bond”.

While cooperating with the OECD, India navigates a delicate balance between global alignment and sovereign interest. As a large market jurisdiction, India has voiced an array of concerns—shared by other developing nations—that multilateral proposals like the two-pillar solution for digital taxation may not adequately protect its sovereign right to tax, demonstrating that even in cooperation certain points of divergence on key principles persist. In our humble view, this requires a series of concise dialogues and persuasion with multilateral bodies. Equally, it involves diplomatic engagement, just as India pauses its free trade agreements.

In conclusion, the CBDT chairman is steering the Indian tax administration out of the shadows and into a halcyon era, defined by predictable governance, as his presence has indeed made a difference. The reforms are substantive, the intent is clear, and the direction is toward a globally competitive and trustworthy regime. The ultimate success will be measured not by the vituperations of legal language, but by how quickly that old “shadow of scepticism” vanishes from the minds of investors and taxpayers.

Views are personal



CATHERINE THORBECKE

Bloomberg

compiled by the ATOM Project. Even before news of the app, a “Qwen panic” was causing consternation as more global companies were choosing to build on its systems over Silicon Valley alternatives.

The *Financial Times* said it could not independently verify the claims against Alibaba in the White House memo. But it did point out that a handful of US tech giants—from Amazon.com to Microsoft—work with the Pentagon.

Globally, militaries and consumer tech companies are becoming increasingly linked. The rise of AI in particular raises fears because of its potential for dual-use applications, worries that have been the genesis of many of Washington’s tech clampdowns. Still, the optics of Chinese tech firms doing the same are unlikely to play well in Washington. “China hawks have been sidelined in recent months, which may be one reason for the leak to the press,” noted Michael Hirson, the head of China research at New York-based 22V Research. Already, some US lawmakers have used the allegations to call for harsher penalties, such as delisting from American stock exchanges.

But a fresh US offensive against Alibaba would backfire. After a fraught trade truce between Washington and Beijing was reached last month, targeting the Chinese firm could prompt a new round of tensions.

Alibaba’s AI ambitions won’t easily escape the geopolitical crossfire. But instead of undermining rivals, the US would be wise to focus on making its own offerings more attractive for businesses and consumers.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

An unwelcome retreat

Apropos of “Green governance” (*FE*, November 20), the Supreme Court has gone back on its stand and legalised projects that can damage the environment. This is against the directive principles of state policy. The apex court is seen as the custodian of the Constitution, and it cannot justify its stand on the grounds that a heavy amount has already been spent. Logically, this promotes violations of

statutory provisions. India’s forest cover has already been reduced to a fifth of its land mass against the recommended level of a third. The amendments in the Forest Act last year will worsen the situation. In the name of promoting industrial development, we should not pass on an uninhabitable planet to future generations. A balance between development and sustainability must be struck.

—AG Rajmohan, Anantapur

Andhra’s dawn

Apropos of “Investing in Andhra” (*FE*, November 20), Andhra Pradesh has attracted significant investments in the last 18 months, and has, in turn, generated 20 lakh jobs. This data is not surprising as Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu’s vision, unwavering dedication, and genuine commitment to people’s welfare is second to none. His speech at the 30th CII Partnership Summit was

inspiring, as he not only promised an escrow account for prompt payment, but promised sovereign guarantee as well. This could be a game changer and could force other states to follow suit. Considering the pro-investment image of the chief minister, we should not be surprised if Andhra Pradesh indeed leads next-generation growth across all sectors.

—Bal Govind, Noida

● Write to us at fetters@expressindia.com

Richer You Are, More You Spread Wealth

Infuse more value into equity, not increase it

Accumulating wealth makes more economic sense if others become wealthy in the process. It's good for any business if its stakeholders and customers are doing well. They ensure businesses grow and cushion them against cyclical and structural adversity. Entrepreneurship has emerged as the greatest wealth creator of our times. It's also a fairly efficient distributor. Investors become rich along with entrepreneurs, who could be evaluated on the communal wealth that they have created, instead of what they own by virtue of being shareholders in the company they created. Success is a measure of how much *value* is added to a company, not of how much of it is owned by an individual or a group of individuals. The yardstick to be applied is whether an entrepreneur is becoming richer as their shareholding in the company he manages remains intact, or declines.

The idea is to infuse more value into equity instead of increasing equity ownership. The incentive to create value is not affected by the scale of equity ownership. An entrepreneur with 10% shareholding has no reason to be more or less innovative if it changes imperceptibly, or even significantly.

The way markets work, they are pretty good at discovering corporate value if large numbers of investors are involved. Lawmakers, thus, tend to favour wide public ownership of business so that wealth is the product, and not the process, of entrepreneurship. Regulators tend to step in when markets foul up, and chances are this could be influenced by ownership patterns. By placing innovation at the heart of economic growth, policy tends to become business-friendly, which sets off a virtuous cycle of wealth creation and distribution.

Which is why measuring wealth becomes a social indicator, where an individual serves as a marker for innovation and economic systems that foster it. Preoccupation with rich lists is essentially a public reaffirmation that the future is becoming more secure. Whether or not people own stocks of companies run by their top billionaires.

Curaçao's Lesson on D'graphic Dividend

India has made a mantra out of the term 'demographic dividend': 1.4 bn people and a youthful workforce that will automatically lead to inevitable greatness. Yet, qualification of Curaçao, a Caribbean island that's part of the Netherlands with a population of 1.61 lakh — fewer people than the municipal town of Malappuram in Kerala — for the Fifa World Cup tournament next year offers a sobering counterpoint. Beyond the obvious comparison of footballing prowess — Curaçao is 82nd in the latest Fifa world ranking, India, 142nd — the world's 190th-most-populated country teaches the most populated one that demography, by its own, doesn't translate to 'destiny'.

Curaçao's achievement is the product of organisation, discipline and policy that packs a national team with players born and raised in the Netherlands (7th in Fifa ranking). So, when we moan about how India 'can't find 11 World Cup-level footballers from 1.4 bn people', we are missing the ball for the goalpost. In far too many spheres, India seems to be an advocate of a variation of the 'infinite monkey theorem' — the belief that a monkey hitting keys randomly on a keyboard for an infinite amount of time will ultimately come up with the complete works of Shakespeare. Big numbers do hold an advantage. But that advantage is frittered away when investment (money included) and accountability become footnotes to the blind belief that population alone will make us great — as an advanced footballing nation or an economic one.

Success is not a lottery weighted by headcount, but a prize earned through systems that reward merit and punish indolence. For India, a real demographic dividend will materialise only when its institutions and policy wala stop coasting on size and start sweating the details.



THINK ABOUT IT

Art teaches us that what lies 'behind' is what truly lifts our lives

When Backgrounds Come to the Fore

Art has long been obsessed with faces. Mona Lisa's smile, Klimt's gilded women, Rembrandt's self-portraits — all foregrounds that seduce the eye. Yet, the genius of a masterpiece often lurks behind the subject. Take Gustav Klimt's 'Portrait of Elisabeth Lederer', which on Tuesday became the second-most-expensive artwork ever sold at an auction (\$236.4 mn). The sitter, elegant and aloof, is enveloped in a shimmering imperial Chinese dragon robe. But it's the background that elevates Lederer from bourgeois daughter to timeless icon. Without the gnomish Chinese figures behind her, she would be just another Golden Age Viennese beauty. Da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa' offers the opposite strategy. Behind her enigmatic smile lies a dreamlike landscape of winding rivers, jagged mountains and misty horizons. The background is almost ghostly. But it destabilises the portrait. It suggests that Lisa del Giocondo is not merely a Florentine woman, but a figure suspended between human intimacy and nature's mystery. Other masters understood this interplay: Vermeer's domestic interiors, with their maps and windows, turn quiet women into emblems of global curiosity. Turner's storm-tossed seas swallow his ships.

In life, too, foregrounds — titles, salaries, selfies — are easy to admire. But it's the background — context, experience, environment — that makes us resonate.

Facing a Republican rebellion, Trumpus Maximus has caved by signing the Epstein files' release

XXX Marks Trump in a Spot



Aditya Sinha

Donald Trump's signature to the Epstein Files Transparency Act on Wednesday, comes after the US Congress passed an Act to make all Epstein files public on Tuesday. Release of the files had been sought by both Democrats as well as a growing number of members of the Republican Party. With this order, the US Justice Department will now release documents related to its long-running investigation into sex offender, the late Jeffrey Epstein.

The release of the files itself is less important than it being a pivotal moment of Trumpus Maximus having caved. Though prior accusations against Trump of being a sexual predator have never dented his political strength, he has lately appeared nervous over losing control of MAGA-America First over his flip-flops on H-1B visas, back-and-forths on tariffs (especially with China), and mixed US support to Israel. According to a Reuters-Ipsos poll released this week, his approval rating has fallen to 38%, lowest in his second term, largely due to discontent with price spikes — and his reported ties to Epstein.

Doubts about Trump started with Epstein's death in prison, officially a suicide but carrying the stench of foul play. Then came photos and videos of a younger Trump and Epstein admiring underaged women at private parties. There were logs of private jet travel that evidenced Trump's visits to Epstein's private island. And, lately there's been le ak of some 20,000 emails that suggest that Trump was indiscriminate in his libidinous pursuits. This has gradually alienated Christian nationalists, a fundamental element in his voter coalition.

Trump tried damage control when he reportedly told Speaker of the House of Representatives Mike Johnson to



By the pricking of our thumbs, something wicked his way comes

prolong a bipartisan impasse over the budget, which led to a 2-mth government shutdown and prevented Congress from voting to release the files. Johnson went so far as to allow the government shutdown to postpone the swearing-in of a newly elected member of the House of Representatives, Adelita Grijalva, a Democrat from Arizona, for six weeks, as she would have tipped the scales in favour of the files' release.

The shutdown was an expensive price to pay. According to JPMorgan, the US' GDP in Q4 will be hit by 1.5%. Setting of interest rates has been impacted, as official economic data dried up. Services have been also hit, with airports having to cancel 10-25% of flights due to the reduced staffing at air traffic control and airports. Non-availability of food stamps and other welfare measures, and disruption to healthcare availability haven't helped.

Increasingly cornered, Trump decided to release the files anyway. He did so because members of Congress who were previously his staunchest supporters have rebelled against him. It

started with Thomas Massie from the deep-red state of Kentucky, whose primary re-election Trump has now promised to prevent by backing a vocal Trump loyalist against him.

Then came MAGA convert Nancy Mace, who left a closed-door House Oversight Committee hearing of an Epstein victim in September in tears. Former MAGA stalwart and fierce gun advocate Lauren Boebert followed. Finally, the Republican mutiny got palpable once MAGA queen Marjorie Taylor Greene a.k.a. MTG accused Trump last Sunday of 'unwarranted and vicious attacks against' which she termed to be 'a dog whistle to dangerous radicals'. Trump responded to his fellow Republican and erstwhile supporter by calling her Marjorie 'Traitor' Greene.

Far right distaste with Trump's 'Epstein allegations' is ironic given how, for years, Republicans have accused Democrats of running 'child sex trafficking rings', especially against Hillary Clinton, Trump's 2016 presidential election opponent.

But the 'Republican rebellion' didn't start with the Epstein files, even as it's become the centrepiece. It started with growing MAGA discontent against US political support for Israel after the war in Gaza revealed a genocide. Social media dissemination of ima-

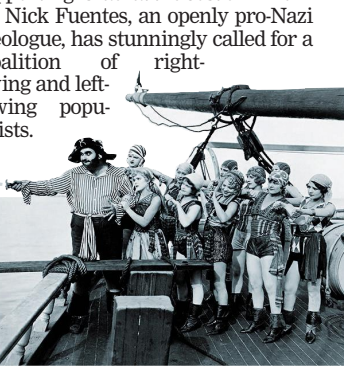
ges of dead children, and its justification by 'establishment' politicians from both sides of the Democrat-Republican divide, has fuelled this 'America First' rebellion.

Politicians like MTG have argued that the original MAGA promise was to avoid foreign entanglements, and that the age-old practice of lobbying (i.e., funding) by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has made American politicians beholden to Israel, diverted precious funding to the Israeli military, and goes against the very idea of 'America First'. Trump, however, has remained steadfast in his support for Israel.

Conspiracy theories have been flying about far-right podcaster and speaker Charlie Kirk being assassinated in September for holding anti-Israel views. The far-right's most famous media personality Tucker Carlson — who had veighed in with Trump to pick JD Vance as veep over Marco Rubio, saying the latter was an 'establishment' plant — has persisted with a campaign against supporting Israel at the cost of America. Nick Fuentes, an openly pro-Nazi ideologue, has stunningly called for a coalition of right-wing and left-wing populists.

There is one fresh element to the rebellion: sweeping electoral losses by Republican candidates a fortnight ago. If Trump can't help his party win elections, then what's his *raison d'être* — at least to Republicans?

So, it's not that much of a shock that Trump opted to join the 'release the files' bandwagon. US politics is headed for more twists and turns. Some are already talking about positioning in a post-Trump era.



Trump decided to release the files because members of Congress who were previously his staunchest supporters have rebelled against him

The writer is an independent journalist

A Hopeful Tale of Two Coastal Cities



Rajeev Gopal

Mumbai is highly vulnerable to rising sea levels. Severe rainfall and flooding occur regularly, and Mumbai is routinely ranked high on lists of the world's cities most vulnerable to climate impacts. To help address these vulnerabilities, the city has set a goal to become carbon neutral by 2050, ahead of India's national goal by 20 yrs. This includes reducing emissions by 30% by 2030, and 44% by 2040 (from a 2019 baseline).

To achieve these goals, Mumbai launched the Mumbai Climate Action Plan in 2022. Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has allocated ₹31,775 cr for capex in FY25, with about a third of funds earmarked for climate-relevant activities. About 95% of the money will be channelled towards flooding and water resource management.

The remainder has been allocated to climate-friendly activities such as use of LED streetlights, planting trees to increase the city's green cover, installing rooftop solar solutions to city-owned buildings and new sewage treatment plants. Mumbai has already taken steps like expanding protected mangrove areas, planting trees and investing in public transport

electrification. Now take Cape Town. The South African coastal city is also acutely vulnerable to impacts of extreme weather events and faces a complex set of challenges, including water scarcity, insufficient infrastructure, social equity and overall climate resilience. It has adopted a two-pronged approach: aiming for carbon neutrality by 2050, and outlining a strategy to implement large-scale adaptation measures, including a new water strategy focused on diversifying water sources (desalination, groundwater and water recycling).

Cape Town is drawing on various public and private sources to fund the plan, including green funding instruments such as the city's 2017 green bond and C40 Cities Finance Facility (CFF). International Finance Corporation (IFC) is also supporting the city with an 18-yr, \$150 mn loan for infrastructure upgrades and replacements, including to electrical and transport infra, and to expand water, sanitation and wastewater management infrastructure.

Mumbai and Cape Town show that developing cities can make tangible measures towards climate resilience. But how can other developing cities follow their lead?

► **Awareness** Cities need to join the national dialogue on climate change and make climate a central element of city planning and budgeting. They also need to communicate to citizens the potential effects of extreme wea-



Cape of all-the-best hope

ther events, and emphasise the urgency of taking suitable action.

► **Action plan** Cities should assess their climate footprints and vulnerability, and then prepare action plans to address their mitigation and adaptation needs, with a focus on physical infra, water and electricity transportation, green spaces and community needs. Action plans need to be aligned with the city's development plan, and must be inclusive by integrating inputs from citizens, government, businesses and academia. It should identify a pipeline of projects for implementation.

► **Align with national action** National governments should include city representatives when developing national, sectoral and thematic climate strategies, and provide funding and incentives for climate action, especially to smaller and poorer cities.

► **Build capacity** Cities should create a climate change cell or departme-

nt, and allocate climate change responsibility within their governance structures. Cities can rely on their national governments for knowledge and resources, and can also benefit from best practices shared by local and global peers.

► **Allocate resources** Along with capacity building, cities also need to allocate human and financial resources for climate action plans. This can be a challenge, though national governments can support with grants and devolved funds. Cities can borrow domestically from banks and DFIs, issue bonds, turn to commercial lenders and philanthropies, or multilateral development banks and climate funds. Internal sources like municipal fees and fares, and savings from design and efficiency measures, can augment funding sources.

► **Policy and implementation coherence** The final step — the last, but perhaps the hardest — is long-term commitment. This requires substantial coordination within city agencies, but also with the national government. Implementation needs to be tracked and reported.

Two critical inputs to address the climate resilience challenge for cities are technical expertise and financing. Both are challenges. Cities need to embark on this journey sooner than later, if they are to provide a climate-secure future for their citizens.

The writer is former senior country officer, IFC, World Bank Group

GST Cuts Don't Always Cut Prices



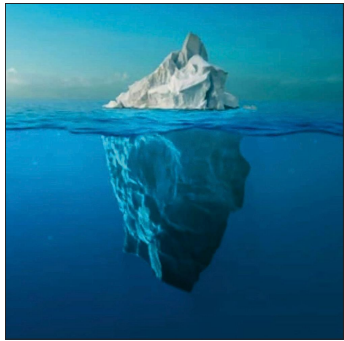
Arvind P Datar & G Natarajan

In September, GST rates were reduced on many commodities. The anti-profiteering rule in Section 171 mandates that any reduction in the rate of tax should be passed on to consumers by 'commensurate reduction in prices'. But this is not always the case as, paradoxically, reduced tax does not necessarily result in reduced prices.

When GST on a final product — say, an air conditioner — falls, the buyer should get a lower price. The difficulty arises when the tax is reduced on inputs used in the manufacture of dutiable final products. For example, GST was reduced from 28% to 18% on cement, but it has a complex taxation structure. Accounting standards require that taxes paid on inputs do not form part of the final product's cost if these input

taxes are entitled to be set off against the duty payable on the final product. If cement is used in the construction of a commercial project, 28% tax paid on the cement will not form part of the cost of the project, because it will be set off against the 18% tax payable on the project. The contractor will not include the tax payable on the cement when fixing his selling price, as the tax paid will be set off.

With GST reduction from 28% to 18%, input tax credit also is reduced and the contractor will have to pay this difference in cash towards GST on the pro-



Check what lies beneath

ject. When the contractor quoted the selling price, he presumed that 28% would be available for set off against duty of 18% payable on his construction services. However, once duty on cement is reduced, the difference between 28% and 18% will have to be paid in cash by the contractor. In such a case, reduction in duty on cement will not result in a reduction of the contractual price.

On the other hand, if the contractor constructs residential apartments, no input tax credit is allowed on the tax paid on cement. In such a case, the tax payable on cement is added to the apartment's cost. In such cases, the contractor must pass on the benefit of reduced tax on cement to the buyer.

Reduction of GST on final products will usually benefit the consumer. Similarly, reduction in tax paid on inputs used by a manufacturer or service provider who doesn't have to pay tax on the final goods or services will also benefit the customer, as the input cost stands reduced. However, input tax credit, which is entitled to be set off against the duty paid on the final product, is never treated as part of the cost of the product.

The manufacturer must take only the

actual cost of the raw material and other inputs. If the tax is reduced, the amount available for input tax credit also gets reduced, requiring him to pay the differential reduction in tax. Paradoxically, a reduction in input tax on raw materials or components used in final products can result in excess cash outflow for the manufacturer, proportional to the reduction in the input tax rate. In such cases, a lower duty on inputs will not lead to a commensurate reduction in the final product's price for the consumer.

So, it's necessary for consumers to understand that a reduction in GST does not necessarily translate into cost reduction for consumers.

If the tax on an insurance policy was 18%, then all taxes paid on inputs and input services used by the insurance company could be set off against such tax, thereby lowering the cost of providing insurance service. As tax on the insurance policy has now become 'nil', tax paid on inputs and input services will be a cost to the insurance company and, hence, policyholders can't expect a direct 18% reduction in premium.

The writers are advocates



THE SPEAKING TREE

Guru Mantra

HARVINDER P SINGH

Born Tyag Mal to Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru was christened Teg Bahadur (brave sword) by his father for his valour in battles against the Mughals. A principled leader, scholar and gifted poet, he became the ninth Nanak of the Sikhs, erudite in the Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas. He exhorted people to live ethical and righteous lives, amplifying Nanak's message of the oneness of God. He founded the town of Anandpur Sahib, where his successor later created the Khalsa, galvanising Sikhs with a distinct identity.

Guru Granth Sahib contains 116 hymns composed by him in 15 ragas. These emphasise the importance of meditation, selflessness and devotion in one's quest for deliverance. 'Jio supna ar pekhn, aise jag kio jaan, In mein kachu sachu nahin, Nanak bin bhagwan' — World is like a dream, there is nothing real in it, O Nanak, but God. Travelling far and wide, wherever he went, he reiterated Guru Nanak's message of love, equality and compassion.

'Chinta ta ki kijiye, jo anhoi hoye; Eh marg sansar ko, Nanak thir nahi koe' — Be anxious only regarding the unexpected. It is the way of the world, Nanak, that nothing is permanent.

The guru did not give up his principles even in the face of death. 'Naam rahiyo sadhu rahiyo, rahio Gur Gobind; Kaho Nanak eh jagat mein, kin japu gur mant' — The name remains, saints remain, and the guru who is one with God remains forever, says Nanak. How rare are those who chant the guru's mantra?



Putting on a Vinyl

Listening to music on vinyl is a joy that begins long before the first note sounds. The ritual of putting a record on a turntable itself is half the pleasure. You slide the record from its sleeve, careful not to smudge the grooves, and feel the weight of music made tangible. The turntable awaits like a stage, its platter spinning with quiet anticipation. Placing the vinyl down is a gesture of reverence. The



stylus hovers, then descends with a faint crackle — the very heartbeat of analogue sound. That moment, when silence fractures into warmth, is pure magic. Unlike the instant gratification of streaming, vinyl demands patience; you must flip sides, clean the record. Each step is a reminder that music is not disposable, but cherished.

The sound itself is fuller, imperfect, alive. The pops and hisses are not flaws but character, like creases and freckles on a beloved face. As the record spins, you are drawn into its orbit, attentive and present. The background becomes part of the foreground: room, ritual, tactile engagement.

Listening to vinyl is participating in music. The joy lies in slowing down, making music an event rather than a backdrop.

Chat Room

Nutri-Food for Frozen Thought

Apropos 'The Swinging Sabzi Mystery' by Neeraj Kaushal (Nov 20), we Indians are rooted in a culture of always buying fresh food ingredients, cooking it and serving it hot on the table, all in the same day. During childhood, we're taught that freshly prepared meals offer better nutrition, natural flavours and fewer preservatives compared to packaged or processed foods. Our daily routine revolves around wholesome, home-cooked dishes, not ready-to-eat staples. So, while stabilising vegetable prices is important, any solution must protect this tradition of eating fresh produce instead of pushing India towards packaged diets that do not align with our health needs or cultural upbringing.

Mahi Khandelwal
Ujjain



CONTRAPUNTO

Of what materials was I made, that I could thus
resist so many shocks, which, like the turning of
the wheel, continually renewed the torture?
- MARY SHELLEY, *Frankenstein*

Eat’s Your Life

New study on snacks highlights why govt action is
critical. But no substitute for personal discipline

Someone trying to lose weight, failing and feeling like a failure – this is among the commonest experiences of modern life. Clinical studies on dieting indicate that only 20% of us succeed at keeping off the weight we lose after a year. Understanding why so many people fail like this should not be confused with fat shaming. This is about fighting a health risk that is as evident as the fact that smoking causes lung cancer. It’s in this context that a new series of papers published in *Lancet* makes a critical two-fold intervention. First, ultra-processed foods have aggressively eroded the individual ability to eat healthy. Second, only a coordinated policy response can restore a food environment that empowers healthier diets.

Take ultra-processed yoghurt – where whole milk is overwhelmed by modified starches, sweeteners, emulsifiers, flavourings and colourings. In your mind, it’s the ‘healthier’ snack option. And who has the time to set curd at home anymore? Women with jobs certainly don’t. But the right policies would make a heck a lot of difference.

For example, front-of-package warnings, marketing restrictions for children, tax and fiscal strategies that aren’t the handmaidens of giant corporations maximising their profits at the cost of our public health. We need to know how much Frankenfood is hurting us and govts need to stop letting it lie and harm at will. And men need to step up so that traditional cooking isn’t put to death by industrial formulations made with little or no whole food.

Ultra-processed foods feel addictive because they are deliberately engineered to hijack human biology. When you eat them compulsively, all the while cursing yourself for being weak, it’s actually by design. They have disrupted the body’s natural signals for hunger and fullness, pushing you towards continuous snacking. And govt negligence means this wolf can wear sheep’s clothing. Something in a carton called ‘strawberry’ milkshake can be made up of fifty chemicals in the flavouring alone – none of which is actually strawberry. The real fruit is rich in vitamins, fibre and antioxidants – and completely absent sodium and cholesterol. But until policymakers do the right thing, how are you not to seek comfort – whether dealing with study pressure or work stress or loneliness – in chips and cola? *Lancet* findings notwithstanding, it still comes down to personal discipline. But we can view this with greater empathy. Because choosing to eat healthy is no less tough than the kind of self-regulation it takes to send your children to study abroad or buy a home.



Supreme Take

In its opinion on prez reference, SC re-states the
checks & balances that keep a democracy ticking

Leave aside the nitty-gritty in CJI-led bench’s response to President Murmu’s 14 questions to Supreme Court for its opinion – at the heart of which was whether it is top court’s remit to ‘review’ actions by governors or the President. In SC’s opinion, governors do not have “unfettered powers” to sit on bills. In the event of that happening, states can seek judicial “review”. However, it is not for SC, SC felt, to set timelines. And bills delayed by a governor cannot be said to have “deemed assent”, which doesn’t exist as a constitutional idea. Both of SC’s opinions sharpen the separation of powers. SC also said the top court can issue “limited directions” if governors delay bills for an “inordinate time”. In gist, judges could design judicial solutions that do not appear to blur separation of powers.

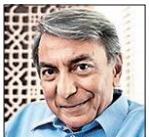


Of course, in the larger scheme of ‘references’ vs ‘reviews’, SC’s opinion on this reference is neither judgment nor decree. It does not change the ‘deemed assent’ SC had granted 10 of TN’s bills in April. At the time, SC had said, “We are in no way undermining...the governor. All we say is the governor must act with deference to settled conventions of parliamentary democracy.” Whether or not Centre appeals the April order basis SC’s response to the presidential reference is beside the point. SC’s central argument – in April and now – remains that governors are duty-bound to decide on bills passed by state legislatures within a reasonable time, if states are not to move SC. Political jostling that forces opposition-governed states to seek judicial review is a low point for any constitutional authority. Some argue such gubernatorial conduct only strengthens arguments for abolishing the governor’s post altogether. SC’s message to governors is clear – why reach the point when states have to come to us?

Jean-etic code

Denim has become the universal uniform
for everyone everywhere in the world

Jug Suraiya



The other day in a Gurgaon mall I was made aware of something that was obvious but which I had somehow overlooked till that moment. All the people I saw – of both genders and of all ages, from teenagers to senior citizens – were wearing a uniform. Or rather, a half uniform, in that their clothing from the waist down was the same.

Had the country launched a recruitment drive for some sort of ‘citizens’ militia which made people wear this half uniform? Of course not. What the people were wearing was what’s become the uniform or half uniform, not just for urban India, but for the whole world. They were wearing denim jeans.

The word denim is derived from the term ‘serge de Nîmes’, serge being a type of hard-wearing cloth made in the French city of Nîmes. The original fabric was a combination of wool and silk, not the all-cotton cloth it is today.



What made the serge from Nîmes unique was the technique of using blue indigo dye for the warp threads, while leaving the weft threads white, creating the blue-white look that distinguishes denim.

jugularvein

How did the serge de Nîmes get associated with the word jeans, and how did this ensemble become as emblematic of America as Coke and mom’s own apple pie?

Genoa in Italy produced a similar cloth used for making pants for sailors, which was called ‘geane’, pronounced Jean. During the California Gold Rush in the 1870s, a German immigrant to America called Levi Strauss began using a hybrid of denim ‘geane’ to sell his ‘jeans’ to miners.

To make his jeans more durable, Strauss added metal rivets on the stress points. He also added a small pocket-inside-a-pocket on the front right-hand side for the wearer to keep a watch safe during hard manual labour.

From their humble origins jeans became a paradoxical sartorial statement, combining working-class egalitarianism with high fashion, rugged individualism with mass-produced ‘me-too-ism’.

Their universality of appeal has embedded them into what might be called the human Jean-Jane.



Jay Vinayak Ojha

On Thursday, a bench of five judges of Supreme Court answered certain questions the President posed in a rare example of exercising its advisory jurisdiction, under Article 143 of the Constitution. In its report, SC largely reconsidered the activist stance taken by a division bench in State of Tamil Nadu vs Governor of Tamil Nadu. It advised the President that the imposition of strict time limits on governors and the President and the remedy of ‘deemed passage of bills’ employed in that judgment were erroneous.

It remains for a future bench to apply the view of the law taken in this report in a dispute between a governor and a state govt, and SC has left a wedge in the door to re-insert itself into such disputes in saying that in “glaring circumstances” of “prolonged inaction” it may still issue directions to governors.

On the whole, however, this report permits us to refocus our lens away from the narrower question of judicial propriety and interference and consider the wider picture: what is the appropriate place for the governor in India’s political landscape?

In his classic treatment of the unwritten and uncodified nexus of rules and conventions that constitute the English Constitution, writer Walter Bagehot divided it into its ‘dignified’ and ‘efficient’ parts. The ‘dignified’ part, comprising Britain’s constitutional monarchy, served to emphasise the majesty of the state and to “excite and preserve the reverence of the population”.

The ‘efficient’ part, comprising the cabinet-centric system of parliamentary govt, was the boiler-room of govt: its purpose was to actually administer govt’s messy machinery.

Many justifications have been offered for the continuation of the office of governor in democratic, post-Independence India, from anxiety over provincial autonomy in the wake of Partition to a simple inertial unwillingness to part with the system of administration set up by Govt of India Act, 1935, which was familiar to members of the Constituent Assembly. Underneath all this, however, there is – sometimes expressed, sometimes implicit – a belief in the Bagehotian division between the ‘dignified’ and the ‘efficient’.

Amitabh Kant



PM Modi will be travelling to South Africa to attend the 20th G20 Leaders’ Summit over the weekend. G20 was founded in times of crisis, recognising that without the emerging economies at the table, global governance institutions would be unable to deliver on their mandate. Initially a forum of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors, G20 was elevated to the leaders’ level in 2008 to combat the global financial crisis (GFC).

Over the years, G20 has evolved into a crucial platform for collective problem-solving. Coordinated fiscal and monetary action in the aftermath of GFC showed that lessons from the Great Depression were learnt. The creation of the Financial Stability Board strengthened global financial regulation. During Covid, the Debt Service Suspension Initiative provided much-needed liquidity to low-income countries struggling to maintain essential public spending.

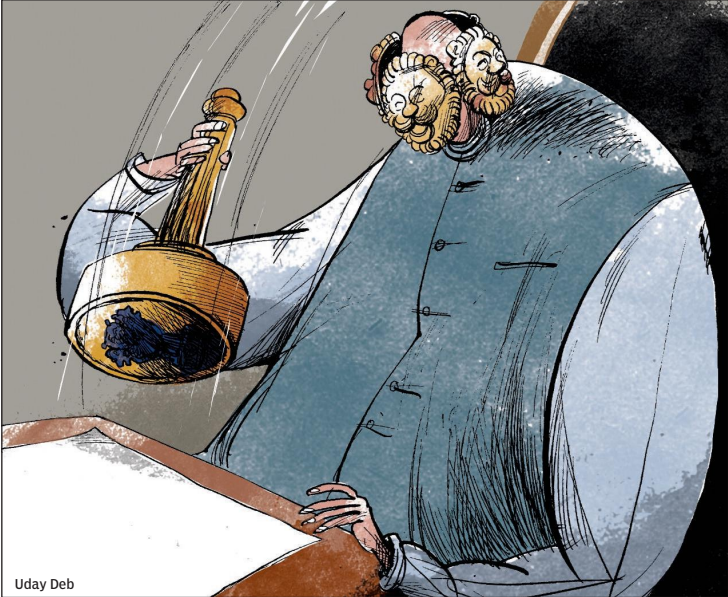
These are not small achievements. They reflect a simple truth: there is no global challenge that can be addressed without the collaboration of advanced and developing economies. G20 has remained the only forum capable of enabling that cooperation at scale.

In Dec 2022, the world was recovering from the pandemic, grappling with debt distress across the developing world, and facing conflicts that had disrupted global food, fuel, and fertiliser markets. Trust had eroded. Multilateralism had slowed. New technologies, new power centres, and new anxieties were reshaping the global economy. It was in this context of deepening geopolitical fragmentation that India assumed the presidency of G20. India took on this responsibility with a clear vision and determination to act. Our theme for the year: Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, or ‘The World Is One Family’, reflected our belief that only collective action could solve the polycrises afflicting the globe.

Under PM Modi’s leadership, our presidency was guided by the principles of making G20 more inclusive, more development-focused, and more attuned to the

The paraphernalia and pageantry of governorship – majestic Raj Bhavans, a high place in the order of precedence, and impeccably-turned-out aides-de-camp from military and police – all point to the view that the governor is seen as the ‘dignified’ part of a state’s machinery of govt.

Arguments that centre national integration or national security in justifying the role of the governor are often empirically jejune. If there is to be a mature debate on governor’s role in modern India, it must deal with the reality, history and evolution of the office



Uday Deb

and ask: is there a place in a modern democracy for a ‘wise sovereign’ to sit atop a democratic structure, his power constrained by an ancient and powerful but only half-articulated set of conventions?

To help answer this question, recourse may be had to other commonwealth jurisdictions. In these countries, separation between the ‘dignified’ and the ‘efficient’ is an almost ubiquitous feature. Australia and Canada, for example, both have governors-general at the central level and governors or lieutenant governors at the provincial level.

As in British India, these institutions began in these jurisdictions as full-fledged executive offices. Over time,

‘India’s G20 Presidency Showed How To Solve World’s Polycrises’

Ahead of the South Africa Summit, which PM is attending, India’s former G20 Sherpa and NITI Aayog CEO
looks back at New Delhi’s stewardship of the forum that strengthened Global South’s voice

realities of Global South. We matched ambition with delivery. Over 112 outcomes and presidential documents were produced, the highest of any presidency. The New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration, comprising 83 paragraphs, was adopted with 100% consensus at a time when consensus seemed improbable.

India worked shoulder-to-shoulder with Indonesia, Brazil, and South Africa to shape language acceptable to all and ensure G20 remained united.

Underlying all of this was a deeper strategic objective: integrating the voice and priorities of Global South into



the centre of global decision-making. At the outset of our presidency, PM convened the Voice of the Global South Summit, with 125 countries in attendance. Keeping our promise, we secured African Union’s permanent membership in G20, transforming G20 into a more representative and equitable forum.

We placed women-led development at the heart of the G20 agenda, shifting the narrative from participation to leadership. We brought to the fore the transformative impact of Digital Public Infrastructure, and agreed on a common framework. We created the One Future Alliance, a mechanism

to support the adoption of DPI platforms worldwide, particularly in developing countries.

We brought multilateral development bank reform to the centre of global discourse. For the first time, G20 leaders collectively acknowledged that tackling climate and development challenges requires trillions, not billions, of dollars.

We also delivered breakthroughs such as the Global Biofuels Alliance, the Decan High-Level Principles on Food Security and Nutrition, the Chennai High-Level Principles for the Blue Economy, and the Goa Roadmap for Tourism.

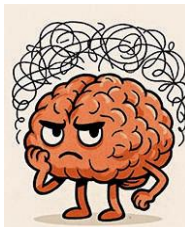
G20’s recent trajectory reflects a shift in global leadership. Indonesia, India, Brazil, and South Africa, four major emerging economies, have led G20 consecutively. This has allowed for a natural continuity and overlap in priorities, as the needs of the developing world have come to the fore. Themes of global health architecture, green development, women-led development, and social inclusion are among the priorities pursued.

South Africa’s 2025 presidency is advancing these themes, taking forward work on resilience, debt sustainability, finance for a just energy transition, and critical minerals. India has actively supported these priorities and worked closely with its Brazilian and South African counterparts to ensure continuity and coherence.

The world stands once again at an inflexion point. Conflicts have multiplied, global governance is under strain, and economic fragmentation threatens decades of progress. G20 remains the only platform where the developed and developing worlds sit together as equals.

Today, the world is entering an era where 3/4th of global growth will be driven by developing countries. For Global North, supporting the rise of Global South is a strategic economic imperative. US, as 2026 president, must continue to engage constructively with G20, building on the spirit of cooperation that defined its leadership in the past and the consensus India helped forge in New Delhi.

Sacredspace



The human brain is a complex organ with the wonderful power of enabling man to find reasons for continuing to believe whatever it is that he wants to believe.

Voltaire

There Is No Straitjacket For Self-Realisation

Shammi Paranjape

Sri Sathya Sai Baba advocated simple spiritual life shorn of unnecessary ritual or dogma, encouraging a balanced and practical approach to spiritual life, emphasising that the world, though illusory, is ‘relatively real’ and one had to negotiate living in it.

He, therefore, encouraged the ‘hands in the forest, hands in society’ and ‘hands that help are holier than lips that pray’ approach. Be in the world, but not of it, he advocated, just like the pristine lotus blooming in a pond, unaffected by the slushy water around it.

He elaborated on the necessity of acquiring two kinds of knowledge. One is *apara vidya*, knowledge of the material world, and the other *para vidya*, knowledge of the Spirit. “To attain a full life, man must master two fields of knowledge – one of the manifest

material universe and the second of consciousness that pervades and validates this universe. One knowledge gives him the right and authority to engage in a profession and earn a living, and the other teaches him the manner and mode of right living,” he says.

However, Baba notes that humanity tends to become obsessed with acquiring only *apara vidya*, leading to a perpetual sense of disconnect and dissatisfaction that nothing can satiate. This excessive focus on worldly pleasures and achievements distracts from the pursuit of *para vidya*, which is essential for realigning with the true purpose of human life – Self-realisation.

So, how to achieve this balance? Baba says that sadhana, disciplined spiritual practice, can help secure desired results. Sadhana is the inner

work we do to open doors to higher consciousness, the unseen basis of life. The aim is not a life of asceticism, denial or mantra chanting; it is lived in consonance with Spirit, manifesting qualities of satya, dharm, shanti, prem and ahimsa. Sadhana brings these values to the fore. What qualifies as sadhana?

Baba says, “Anything that awakens the awareness of the universal, the infinite, the transcendental and takes you out of your narrow self into vaster magnificence, qualifies as sadhana.”

Also, there is no straitjacket for spirituality. Every person must find his own path unique to his personality. It could be the karm path of seva, bhakti, devotion, jnan, knowledge; all are valid as all take you to the same goal.

Another valuable aid to integrate



THE SPEAKING TREE

spirituality into your life is satsang. The power of satsang is exalted by scriptures. For every step you take towards satsang, your ‘yajna’ account with the Divine wins more credits. Satsang sharpens spiritual hunger and invites introspection and correction.

The purest, most distilled meaning of satsang is the company of *Sat*, Truth – Self. To be immersed in knowledge of the Self, as one goes about the duties of the world, is the highest achievement and the holiest satsang.

Building on this foundation of personal spiritual growth, Baba’s ongoing mission aims to promote the fraternity and unity of all peoples. All humanity is tied by a common thread. Sathya Sai Baba says, “Respect all, love all, and serve all” to make life’s journey less arduous and more spiritually edifying, fruitful, and blissful.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s 100th Birth Anniversary will be celebrated on Nov 23



Why India must treat terrorism as a national disaster

India now stands at a decisive crossroads: whether to continue treating terrorism solely as a law-and-order problem or elevate it to a full-fledged national disaster requiring coordinated, institutional and community participation



SATENDRA SINGH

The bombing near the Red Fort in Delhi has once again forced India to confront an old and persistent enemy-terrorism. But unlike past incidents, this attack signals a deeper and more insidious transformation. The involvement of highly educated individuals, including medical professionals, marks a disturbing evolution in the terror ecosystem. What was once dismissed as the handiwork of marginalised or radicalised outliers has now seeped into sectors that symbolise stability, competence and trust.

The threat is no longer lurking at the peripheries; it is embedding itself within the intellectual and economic arteries of the nation. Terrorism today behaves like a malignant force, quietly infiltrating institutions and eroding the social fabric from within.

India, unfortunately, is no stranger to terror's wrath. The Parliament attack in 2001 shook the nation's democratic core. The Mumbai 26/11 assault exposed the vulnerability of urban nerve centres. The serial blasts in Jaipur, Ahmedabad and Delhi, the Dantewada massacre, and the Pulwama suicide attack have all inflicted immeasurable human and economic damage. Each tragedy has carved deep psychological scars, strained communal relations, disrupted governance and left an enduring sense of insecurity.

Internationally too, the world has witnessed how terrorism reshapes geopolitics and public consciousness. The 9/11 attacks redefined US foreign policy for decades. The London underground bombings, the Paris shootings, the Bali blasts and the rise of ISIS have collectively altered global security doctrines. Terrorism is no longer a fringe crisis—it is a global catastrophe-maker.

Yet despite its devastating consequences, terrorism is still predominantly viewed as a law-enforcement challenge, handled by agencies such as the National Investigation Agency (NIA), state police forces, intelligence units and specialised task forces. These bodies undoubtedly form the first line of defence. But to limit terrorism to a policing matter is to underestimate its scale and impact.

Terrorism behaves like a man-made disaster—sudden, unpredictable, intensely destructive and capable of overwhelming emergency systems within minutes. It destabilises communities, paralyses governance and leaves behind long-term psychological trauma.



IT IS TIME TO REDEFINE TERRORISM AS A HUMAN-INDUCED DISASTER OF THE HIGHEST ORDER. INDIA ALREADY POSSESSES AN ESTABLISHED DISASTER MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK UNDER THE DISASTER MANAGEMENT ACT, 2005

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It is time to redefine terrorism as a human-induced disaster of the highest order. India already possesses a strong disaster management framework under the Disaster Management Act, 2005. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs), District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) and grassroots bodies such as Panchayats have successfully managed floods, cyclones, droughts, earthquakes and heatwaves. They have strengthened early warning systems, coordinated relief efforts and enhanced community awareness.

This existing network can — and must — be leveraged to tackle terrorism. The first step is official classification: terrorism should be added as a disaster category within India's national disaster management system. This will enable a shift from a reactive, security-centric model to a proactive, systemic and community-based approach.

A major institutional reform should be

the creation of a dedicated Terrorism Management Cell within the NDMA. This cell would develop national guidelines, coordinate inter-ministerial efforts, prepare a comprehensive National Terrorism Management Plan, build capacity at state and district levels and ensure that anti-terror preparedness flows seamlessly from the Centre to local administration. Such a unit would complement, not replace, intelligence and enforcement agencies-adding strategic depth, clarity and long-term resilience to India's counter-terrorism efforts.

An effective National Terrorism Management Plan must rest on four guiding pillars-mirroring the spirit of the Sendai Framework but adapted to India's context.

The first pillar is enhanced risk assessment. Understanding terrorism requires more than identifying perpetrators; it demands mapping ideological vulnerabilities, studying online radicalisation pipelines, examining socio-economic triggers and decoding psychological manipulation tactics used by extremist networks. Only when the ecosystem that breeds terrorism is understood can genuine prevention begin.

The second pillar is robust governance. Terrorism cannot be handled by one

agency or one ministry. NDMA, SDMA, DDMA, the Home Ministry, health departments, local bodies, hospitals, community organisations and intelligence agencies must operate in assured coordination. A central terrorism cell within the NDMA can act as the coordinating hub-ensuring defined roles, smooth information flow and rapid, unified responses.

The third pillar is strategic investment in risk reduction. Risk reduction goes beyond installing more CCTV cameras or tightening airport security; it requires strengthening public spaces with emergency systems, developing advanced cyber-monitoring capacities, upgrading trauma care infrastructure, training medical and rescue teams and funding public awareness programmes. Social resilience must also be fortified through inter-community dialogue, youth engagement and peace-building initiatives. A socially cohesive and informed population is far harder for extremist ideologies to infiltrate. The fourth pillar is preparedness, response and recovery. Preparedness can save lives before security forces even arrive. Schools, colleges, malls, markets, offices and metro systems require regular mock drills. Citizens must be trained in evacuation procedures, emergency communication and basic first aid. The "golden hour"—the first hour after an attack—should

be central to national preparedness training. Hospitals need clear triage systems for mass casualties, and recovery efforts must include psychological counselling, community healing and reconstruction designed to be more resilient than before.

One of India's greatest strengths is the depth of its disaster management network. NDMA can set the national framework; SDMA can tailor strategies to state-specific risks; DDMA can mobilise district police, hospitals, NGOs and local organisations; and Panchayats and municipal bodies can serve as frontline vigilance units. Local institutions, being closest to the people, are often the first to notice suspicious behaviour or signs of radicalisation. With training and awareness, they can become critical partners in prevention.

Public participation is equally vital. Communities are always the first responders. Awareness programmes, first-aid workshops, vigilance groups and youth leadership initiatives can transform passive citizens into empowered protectors. Since young people are particularly susceptible to digital manipulation, schools and colleges must play a key role. Curriculum modules-balanced and age-appropriate — should teach peace, critical thinking, responsible digital behaviour and an understanding of extremist tactics.

Terrorism transcends national boundaries, and India must champion global collaboration. An international terrorism-management forum-focused on resilience, intelligence-sharing, cybersecurity and community-level prevention-could position India as a leading voice in global security reforms. The recent explosion in Delhi is more than a security breach; it is a national warning. Policymakers must recognise terrorism's evolution into a large-scale human-induced disaster and respond through institutional reform, systemic planning and community empowerment.

By integrating terrorism into the national disaster framework, establishing a specialised terrorism management cell and mobilising the NDMA-SDMA-DDMA-Panchayat chain, India can build a coordinated and resilient national shield. India stands at a turning point. The nature of terror is changing rapidly-and our response must evolve with equal speed. With committed leadership and unified action, the nation can protect its citizens, reinforce its institutions and secure its future. The moment for decisive action is now-before the next catastrophe strikes.

New pension dilemma: Why the 2025 validation law has stirred anxiety



VK BAHUGUNA

On March 25, 2025, Parliament passed legislation validating the CCS (Pension) Rules and principles governing expenditure on pension liabilities from the Consolidated Fund of India as part of the Finance Bill 2025. The legislation confirms the principle that, without prejudice to the Pension Rules, the Central Government has the authority to create distinctions among pensioners as a general principle. Such distinctions may arise from accepted recommendations of the Central Pay Commissions, particularly those based on the date of retirement.

The legislation has been made effective retrospectively from 1 June 1972, thereby validating all rules made under Article 309 of the Constitution for the CCS (Pension) Rules, 1972; CCS (Pension) Rules, 2021; and CCS (Extraordinary Pension) Rules, 2023, including all instructions issued under them, as amended from time to time. When the Bill was passed, after considerable opposition from central government employees, the government clarified that pensioners would remain unaffected. It also hinted that this move was necessary to strengthen the government's position in an ongoing court case.

This was a one-time measure to address specific legal challenges and clarify the government's authority on pension-related distinctions, not a recurring exercise. Generally, pension matters and rule amendments are handled by the Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare, not through annual validations in the Finance Bill.

This legislation appears to have been triggered by legal precedents set in cases such as DS Nakara & Others v Union of India (1983), Union of India v SPS Vains (2008), and All Manipur Pensioners Association v State of Manipur (2020).

These judgments, especially DS Nakara, established that pension is a right and that arbitrary classification among pensioners violates Article 14 of the Constitution. The new legislation attempts to address this by explicitly empowering the government to make distinctions among pensioners based on retirement date or other relevant factors.

The DS Nakara judgment declared unconstitutional a government policy that created a retirement-date-based cut-off (March 31 1979) for



eligibility for a liberalised pension scheme. The Court ruled that all pensioners governed by the same rules form a single class and must receive pension recomputation under a liberalised formula from the effective date of the scheme. Similarly, the All Manipur Pensioners Association case reaffirmed that pension parity cannot be denied on the basis of retirement date.

Distinctions such as granting revised benefits only to those retiring after a specific date were deemed discriminatory and violative of Article 14. The Court ordered full parity and payment of arrears, strengthening the constitutional principle that pension ensures a dignified post-retirement life.

The constitutional foundation for pension protection grew stronger after the 44th Constitutional Amendment (1978), which removed the right to property from the list of fundamental rights and placed it under Article 300A as a constitutional right. Following this, courts held that pension-being deferred payment for past service-is protected under Article 300A. In Krishna Kumar v Union of India (1990), the Supreme Court clarified that though pension is no longer a fundamental right, no one can be deprived of it except by authority of law, and any such law must meet tests of fairness and non-arbitrariness under Articles 14, 19, and 21.

This issue regained prominence after the government announced the terms of reference (ToRs) for the 8th Pay Commission on October 28, 2025. More than 6.9 million pensioners are directly impacted. Employees' associations, including federations of Central Government employees and officers from All India Services such as the IPS, have submitted representations to the President of India, requesting amendments to the ToRs. Their concern arises because while the 7th Pay Commission's mandate extended beyond pay and allowances to include a framework for revising pensions, the 8th CPC's mandate focuses heavily on "emoluments conducive to attracting talent and promoting efficiency," without clear direction on pension revision for existing retirees. It now appears that the government may have passed this legislation to keep its options open regarding which categories of pensioners will receive benefits recommended by the 8th Pay Commission.

Since deprivation or modification of pension must be backed by "authority of law," the government's legal advisors likely felt it necessary to secure explicit validation through Parliament. Though there is doubt about whether the government would actually deny pension hikes to 6.9 million pensioners and their families, the retrospective nature of the legislation-reaching back to 1972-has understandably created anxiety among employees and retirees. Their apprehensions cannot be dismissed lightly.

This move has opened a Pandora's box of concerns about pension equity. The government now needs to issue unequivocal clarification. Political leadership must recognise that pension is not charity but a constitutionally protected right. Any attempt to limit pension increases by arbitrarily classifying pensioners based on retirement dates will inevitably lead to legal challenges. The government may be trying to control the potential financial burden arising from pension hikes after the 8th Pay Commission, but it must avoid steps that appear discriminatory or regressive. Pension parity was restored after decades of legal battles. It is essential to protect the hard-earned rights of retirees who have served the nation. Instead of creating uncertainty for them, the government should focus on pruning administrative flab and improving fiscal efficiency. Ultimately, the Prime Minister may have to intervene to ensure clarity, fairness, and constitutional fidelity in this matter.

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Odisha: How one girl's choice is challenging child marriage



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

When 14-year-old Saismruti experienced her first period, her mother followed a decades-old local tradition by immediately isolating her in a nearby house for six days. No male member, including her father, was allowed to visit or see her during this time. On the seventh day, Saismruti was welcomed back home, and a community feast was held to celebrate her attainment of puberty. In Dubagada, a village in the Phulbani block of Odisha's tribal-dominated Kandhamal district, this feast traditionally serves as a public announcement that a girl has reached a marriageable age. It is during this gathering that alliances are often fixed, and weddings arranged within weeks.

With every custom related to Saismruti's first menarche being followed meticulously, her relatives expected her father, Arjun Behara, to announce her engagement, as tradition demanded. When no such news came, many were surprised. Their surprise soon turned into shock when Behara declared that although he had followed the cultural rituals, he had no intention of marrying Saismruti off for the next seven to eight years. His daughter, a Class 8 student, had clearly expressed her wish to continue her education, and he intended to support her decision for as long as she wanted to study.

In a state that accounts for 20.5 per cent of child marriage cases in India, this break from at least one customary practice holds great promise-especially for Saismruti's two younger sisters. Rural Odisha reports an even higher child marriage rate at 21.7 per cent (NFHS-5). But had Saismruti and her parents not been part of Advika, a state government programme to end child marriage, this small but significant breakthrough might never have happened.

Launched in 2020, Advika is part of a five-year collaborative strategy between the Odisha government and UNICEF to reach over 8.3 million children aged 10-19. The programme aims to empower adolescents through education, skill development, and leadership training so they can make informed decisions during their formative years. Essential life skills-including digital literacy, career guidance, and employability training-are provided every Saturday at anganwadi centres during Advika Divas.

Crucially, the programme offers a safe platform for adolescents to discuss sensitive issues such as child marriage and its impact on a girl's body and



mind. Along with anganwadi workers, teachers and child protection officials trained under Advika lead these conversations, and parents are invited to participate. It was during these discussions that Saismruti, a regular attendee, learned about the adverse consequences of child marriage. She encouraged her parents to join the community sessions as part of Advika's outreach efforts. She had no idea that this small step would bring a transformative change to her life.

Being part of Advika helped her parents understand the value of education. Her father realised that had he not dropped out of school after Class 8, he might have had a better life. A daily wage labourer, he now wants his bright daughter to continue her education and use it to achieve her potential.

Another initiative under this multipronged strategy is the Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Corner, introduced recently to prevent adolescent girls from missing school during their periods. Launched as a pilot in two schools-Dutipada Government High School and Dutimendi Panchayat High School in Phulbani-the MHM corners provide girls with a safe, private space during menstruation. Located within the girls' washroom complex, these corners offer the facilities needed to manage periods with dignity and feature posters and pamphlets in Odia and tribal dialects to dispel menstruation-related myths. According to NFHS-5, 6.8 per cent of girls in Odisha aged 15-19 were pregnant or had become mothers.

Studies consistently show that keeping girls in school is the most effective way to delay and prevent child marriage. The longer girls stay in school, the greater their chances of resisting underage marriages. Education, menstruation-friendly schools, and skill development initiatives can help girls stand up against patriarchal norms and disempowering cultural practices — and empower them to shape their own futures.

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The Pioneer

OLD THEME

In a recent lecture, the prime minister referred at some length to the need to free Indians of the mindset of slavery. He alluded to Thomas Babington Macaulay's 'Minute on Indian Education' when he said that this had begun in 1835 when Macaulay decided to uproot the culture and the education of Indians. In this, Narendra Modi was in line with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's project of 'decolonising' the Indian mind. The Bharatiya Janata Party has been trying to reawaken awareness of ancient Indian culture, practices and achievements. The intent is important but the consequences have been illustrative. Efforts to change educational content began in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee regime, with the then human resource development minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, trying to nationalise and spiritualise education. The association of spiritualisation with nationalism is significant. He oversaw the increase of matter on Indian culture in National Council of Educational Research and Training textbooks and introduced changes such as the teaching of astrology in colleges. The United Progressive Alliance changed the textbooks, but in Mr Modi's time, there have been extensive deletions, additions, changes and distortions — highly criticised — with emphasis on old Indian achievements in science, education and culture. The National Education Policy, 2020 was framed with Indianising education in mind but the theoretical base for a complete overhaul was absent. The changes have so far remained superficial.

Changes meant to decolonise the mind are also reflected in the renaming and much-touted reform of law. That these are somewhat cosmetic is exemplified in the return of the law of sedition in different phrasing and in a draconian form in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Obviously, the government is not willing to unlearn the lessons of power taught by the colonisers. Rather, the BJP seems to be driving at the RSS ideal of 'one nation, one language, one culture'. Hence the insistence on Hindi as the Indian national language. This has not only provoked criticism but also strong resistance, especially from the southern and eastern states. It is perceived as a new form of colonisation, suppressing India's diverse cultures and bringing all under the single umbrella of a Hindi speaking nation identified with *Hindutva*. The BJP's rhetoric of decolonisation on different fronts is seen as boiling down to the RSS's conception of a majoritarian republic and its impulses. This weaponisation of the idea of decolonisation is ingenious but inimical to India's pluralism.

EGREGIOUS

The Dadri lynching stands out as a festering abscess on India's secular countenance. Ten years ago, cow vigilantes, responding to a call from a nearby temple, had lynched Mohammad Akhlaque and severely injured his son on suspicion that cow/buffalo meat had been stored in their refrigerator. Subsequent investigations revealed that the charge was entirely false. Soon, other parts of India would be mute witnesses to the blood drawn by cow vigilantes. Tellingly, the road to justice for the victims in the Dadri case has been littered with obstacles. Among the 19 people chargesheeted, the son of a local leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party and his cousin were identified as the principal conspirators; but the accused received bail only two years after the murder of Akhlaque. Now, Yogi Adityanath's government in Uttar Pradesh plans to do something equally egregious: it has applied in court to drop all charges against the accused even as the process of submission of evidence is underway. The government's rationale ironically exposes its unwillingness to pursue justice. Alleged inconsistencies in the statements of witnesses, the government argues, have forced it to move this contentious application. Strikingly, some of the witnesses have alleged that the lack of security had prevented them from deposing in court on several occasions. In other words, the integrity of the litigatory process itself appears to have been compromised — willfully.

This is not the only instance of the State seemingly colluding with the perpetrators of communal violence. Last year, in a scathing statement, the Supreme Court had been critical of the Gujarat government, which had pushed for the early remission of 11 men who had been convicted of the gang-rape of Bilkis Bano and the murder of her family members and sentenced to life imprisonment. The dubious aim in both instances appears to be the same: the derailment of justice for victims — two Muslim families — of orchestrated violence. There is a coded message in all this: the principle of fairness would, it suggests chillingly, be applied selectively and on religious grounds in New India. If this does come to fruition, it would be disastrous for the rule of law. This kind of purported injustice would further strengthen majoritarianism's grip on the republic. The nation's custodians of justice and, most importantly, citizens must rise to the occasion and ensure that justice does not elude those who need it.

SCRIPSI

'Trust, but verify.'

RONALD REAGAN

The military returns to political life in India's west and east
Back to prominence

T.C.A. RAGHAVAN

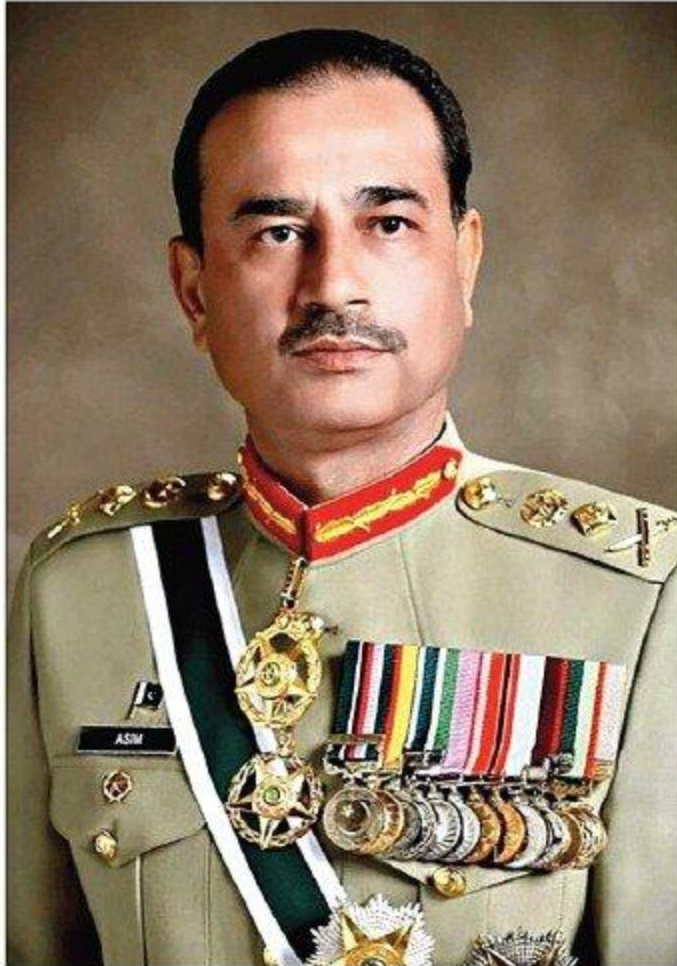
Over the past few days, both to our west and to our east, there have been developments that herald a new phase of civil-military relations in the countries concerned. These act as a reminder of just how powerful a political force — both for the good and the not-so-good — the military has been and continues to be.

Pakistan obviously provides the example to our west. Notwithstanding the outrage from Pakistan's shrinking liberal voice, most external observers were left cold by the rapid pushing through of the Constitution's 27th Amendment. The erosion of democratic institutions and an encroachment by the military into all spheres of public life are a familiar, even predictable, trope in Pakistan, although the scale of the changes merits pause. Breaking up the Supreme Court and transferring its jurisdiction over constitutional questions to a new constitutional court certainly is radical surgery. Needless to say, greater freedom is now available to the government to appoint judges of its choice to the new constitutional court.

The second big change concerns the military directly. Here again, a new institution has been created — a chief of defence forces — and it is specified that henceforth the chief of army staff would also concurrently be the chief of defence forces. Thus Field Marshal Asim Munir is now the chief of defence forces and this elevation puts him *de jure* at the top of the military hierarchy. Moreover, it also strengthens his overall political position.

Put together, these changes amount to a drastic reversal of the trajectory that had begun as Pakistan's last formal military dictatorship tottered to its end in 2007-2008. For the past decade, the military Establishment had sought to reverse that trend. Having a pliant political party as a front to achieve this goal has been an essential part of this strategy. Imran Khan proved himself to not be pliant enough and, on the contrary, had ambitions that challenged, even threatened, military supremacy.

Ironically, the past protagonists of civilian supremacy, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and the Pakistan Peoples Party, have turned out to be ideal allies for Munir in achieving this objective. For the foreseeable future, he appears to be the greatest gainer from these



Field Marshal Asim Munir of Pakistan (left) and the former president of Indonesia, Suharto



changes. The uncertainties surrounding Imran Khan, even if he does not appear to pose any immediate threat, are certainly an important motivating factor for both Munir and the PML(N)-PPP combine to push these changes through.

What explains the capacity of the present PML(N) government with the Pakistan army behind it to carry out such far-reaching changes? After all, it was only as recently as early 2025 when there was a near consensus that Imran Khan's imprisonment without trial and the rigging of the 2024 general election had severely dented the public image of the government and, even more, of the army, the real power behind the throne.

The fact is that the successful selling of the narrative domestically that it had faced India down during the May crisis improved and polished that image considerably. Alongside there is a new international acceptability of Pakistan, animated most by Donald Trump's endorsement of Munir. These two factors explain how much the power balance has shifted in favour of the Pakistan army in the past few months.

Meanwhile, to our east, in Indonesia, comes another example of the military coming back to centre stage and reversing a past trend of the strengthening of democratic forces. That is the narrative of criticism that surrounds the November

10 designation of the former president, Suharto, as a 'National Hero' by Indonesia's current president, Prabowo Subianto.

Suharto's downfall in May 1998 was a consequence of widespread rioting and protests amidst the deep chaos caused by the Asian financial crisis. Heavy-handed security crackdowns to put down the rioting and protests backfired. Suharto had then been in power for thirty-plus years and his end did mean that a new, certainly far less authoritarian, and more democratic phase of Indonesian history was beginning.

To his critics, elevating Suharto to the status of a national hero is historical amnesia of a somewhat extreme variety given the repression and the abuse he presided over and the vast corruption and nepotism that characterised the latter half of his tenure. His coming to power in the mid-1960s had certainly meant that the Indonesian army soon permeated every aspect of Indonesia's governance. He was, after all, a general himself. To others, this view is unbalanced for it ignores the fact that during Suharto's tenure Indonesia achieved significant economic growth and political stability and became a leader of regional stability in Southeast Asia.

Perhaps there are other deeper issues also at play in Suharto's posthumous rehabilitation. President Subianto was himself one of Suharto's key generals and is be-

lieved to have played a major role in the failed attempt to put down the protests that finally brought down the regime in 1998. He was then also Suharto's son-in-law. Rehabilitating Suharto in a way also restores his reputation. As a former military officer, his election as president last year had also suggested to many that a return of the army into the political and the public life was happening after a quarter century of its non-political, even low-key, existence. In such cases, public memory is often short and to many, the Suharto phase of Indonesian history appears almost benign and a period of promise.

But there are differences between Suharto of Indonesia and Pakistan's crop of military rulers — past and present. Suharto's greatest contribution was in sensing how critical regional stability was to Indonesia's own growth prospects and potential. The rise and the consolidation of ASEAN and Indonesia's pragmatic handling of relations with Malaysia and other neighbours from the late 1960s to bring down mutual tensions certainly offer a tutorial on regional cooperation others could benefit from. When one evaluates military regimes in different geographies, the key point is how some develop and act on a forward-looking, desecuritized perspective while others remain trapped in tactical zero-sum games.

T.C.A. Raghavan is a former High Commissioner to Pakistan and Singapore

Visible flaws

■ Sir — Even though world leaders have welcomed the adoption of the Gaza peace resolution by the United Nations Security Council, it is likely to remain on paper only ("UN adopts Trump's peace plan for Gaza", Nov 19). Donald Trump, the president of the United States of America and the architect of the plan, is basking in glory. But the plan will not alter the grim realities on the ground.

The resolution was backed by 13 countries, with Russia and China choosing to abstain. The road to peace will not be easy because Hamas has rejected the resolution. Further, the plan is riddled with inconsistencies ("Work left", Nov 20). For instance, the deployment of an International Stabilization Force in Gaza, which the resolution calls for, will be difficult to achieve due to geopolitical fault lines. Major powers have shown no inclination to contribute ground troops. The ISF will face pushback in the same way that the American troops were driven out of Afghanistan by the Taliban.

S. Balakrishnan, Jamshedpur

■ Sir — Despite Israel's relentless and brutal bombing of Gaza over the past two years, Hamas refuses to back down. This shows that the militant organisation is capable of carrying on future wars against Israel. Benjamin Netanyahu's claim of decimating Hamas is turning out to be hollow words. This tricky situation, where neither party is willing to cede ground, has



It's only delulu

■ Sir — Parasocial, *Cambridge Dictionary's* 'Word of the Year', is defined as a relationship with a person one does not know. Parasocial ties may include those with fictional heroes, celebrities, and now, in the age of technology, even Artificial Intelligence bots. The coinage, spurred by its popularity on social media, does serve a gentle reminder though: while these one-sided relationships with public figures can offer comfort and a sense of connection, they are not real bonds and can lead to delusion. It's only a delulu, as Gen Zers call it, if you think a celebrity crush will text back.

Asmita Sen, Hyderabad

brought forward the necessity of a two-state solution.

Aranya Sanyal, Siliguri

Hard work

■ Sir — Neoliberal policy-making has fostered an environment that enables and encourages the rise of flexible work arrangements such as the gig economy ("Food for thought", Nov 18). Yet, in the absence of strong worker unions, gig workers remain vulnerable, often facing severe exploitation

and harassment. Workers should unionise to demand better working environments and wages.

Niamul Hossain Mallick, East Burdwan

■ Sir — Ruchir Joshi's article, "Food for thought", exposes the harsh realities of India's gig economy. Delivery executives face relentless pressure, poor safeguards and algorithm-driven penalties. They are most likely to be replaced by drones and automated systems in the future. Such a future demands

urgent policy attention. The government must look towards implementing a universal basic income to cushion gig workers against the coming wave of automation. Meanwhile, it must ensure the bare minimum welfare measures such as social security coverage, safety checks, fair grievance systems and employer accountability. The gig economy represents India's new labour frontier; it must not be built on precarity.

Harsh Pawaria, Rohtak, Haryana

Ancient scourge

■ Sir — Tuberculosis is an ancient scourge that still claims at least a million and a half lives annually ("Old spectre", Nov 19). Drug resistance is emerging as a major problem in TB management. Over the past decades, very few drugs have been developed to treat TB. One of the factors that may aggravate the TB burden for India is climate change. Adverse weather conditions will compromise immunity and increase the risk of the disease.

H.N. Ramakrishna, Bengaluru



Scourge of humanity

■ Sir — India remains among the countries with the highest rates of TB: it bears 25% of the world's burden of the disease. As per the World Health Organization's recent data, India's TB incidence has improved but it still falls well short of the WHO's target. The statistics highlight the difficulty that India's National TB Elimination Programme faces, especially with the rise of multidrug-resistant TB.

Abhijit Roy, Jamshedpur

Rational fear

■ Sir — The report, "Pichai warns of AI bubble" (Nov 19), raises an important concern about the rapid surge in investments in Artificial Intelligence. The fear of the AI bubble bursting should not be ignored. If it happens, its impact will be felt across every sector that now depends heavily on AI.

Equally worrying is the huge consumption of energy linked to AI systems at a time when nations are struggling to meet their climate commitments. Innovation cannot be allowed to undermine environmental goals. India must approach the AI wave with caution by promoting responsible investments, strong regulation, and sustainable development.

K.R. Gagan, Tumkur, Karnataka

Letters should be sent to: The Telegraph, 6 Prafulla Sarkar Street, Calcutta 700001, ttedit@abp.in

SUDIPTA BHATTACHARJEE

HILLSPEAK

BEING HUMANE

With the Supreme Court verdict on stray dogs eliciting diverse reactions across the nation, two picturesque hill states, Sikkim and Mizoram, offer a study in contrast. The humane, proactive measures in Sikkim *versus* the punitive strategy proposed in parts of Mizoram reflect the conflicting attitudes to the challenge of managing the canine population on our streets.

Sikkim with its public transport vehicles, sporting messages and endearing illustrations about being kind to animals, has emerged as a leader in compassionate fauna management. The state has focused on a scientific and ethical approach, aligning with the Centre's Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023 and the World Organisation for Animal Health's guidelines. Its initiatives include widespread vaccination and sterilisation drives, public awareness campaigns and training of police officers to treat animal cruelty as a serious crime. These efforts prioritise rabies elimination and population control through humane methods, fostering a culture of coexistence.

In stark contrast, a local council in Aizawl recently proposed distributing slingshots to target stray dogs, though animal rights activists have pointed out that hitting dogs with catapults is an offence under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960. Past actions in other Mizoram towns, where dogs were reportedly ordered to be shot at sight, underscore a history of resorting to harsh measures.

Stray dogs have been an 'issue' in the northeastern states, with attitudes ranging from adoption to consumption of dog meat. As residents of Shillong, we were horrified to see men jumping out of taxis at busy intersections like the Civil Hospital, hitting stray dogs on the head, putting them in sacks and dumping them in the boot of the car. Our Khasi landlady, who owned three strays named Rufus, Jackie and Bruno, would keep the gate securely fastened to prevent them from venturing out on the street. "The Nagas will come and take them away to eat," she would shudder.

Nagaland, and some parts of Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya, have communities in which eating dog meat is traditionally accepted. For many Naga tribes, it is a cultural practice, a food habit, and historically not seen as cruel or unethical.

In July 2020, the Nagaland cabinet decided to ban the commercial import and trading of dogs, the operation of 'dog markets' and the sale of dog meat. This led to a hue and cry and four months later, the Gauhati High Court (Kohima bench) stayed the ban. In June 2023, this court quashed the 2020 ban order. The Sixth Schedule and Article 371A of the Constitution give Nagaland and other tribal areas special autonomy to preserve customary practices.

Sikkim, on the other hand, with a significant Buddhist population, has had no recorded tradition of dog-meat consumption and is often cited as a model for humane stray dog management. Its Stray Dogs and Rabies Control Act, 2000, combined with sterilisation and vaccination drives, has made it to be one of the first rabies-free states, prioritising coexistence and community care over culling.

If a tiny state like Sikkim, by investing in long-term, humane solutions, can demonstrate a balance between public safety and animal welfare, shouldn't this be a template for other states? The stray dog challenge cannot be solved by arming citizens, but by empowering local bodies to implement proven, humane strategies. Shouldn't the honourable judges take cognisance of Sikkim's example of compassion and collaboration with animal welfare organisations? Why do they think humane management of stray dogs is merely a sentimental imperative? When mass dog culling was undertaken in Gujarat, the rodent population exploded, leading to the 1994 plague outbreak. Are we game for a rerun of that nightmare?

On the margins of the House

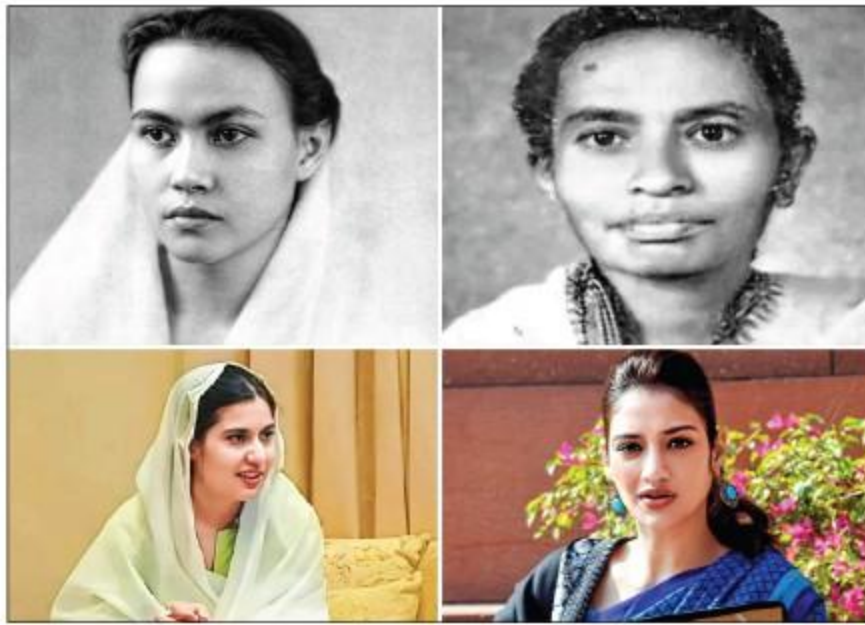
MISSING FROM THE HOUSE: MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE LOK SABHA

By Rasheed Kidwai and Ambar
Kumar Ghosh,
Juggernaut, ₹599

Anyone interested in democracy and representation will find this book to be very important. It compellingly documents the yawning gap between the rhetoric of representation for women and the actuality of their absence, especially of Muslim women from the House. The referencing of the House is subtle and coded — not only do we find a shocking lack of Muslim women in the lower House of Parliament (Lok Sabha) but we also find references to the domestic situation of women and the relative lack of access to self-empowerment. In terms of methodology, it adopts a life-history approach as it tracks the lives and the labour

of individual Muslim women who with help and despite hindrance made it to the House.

Some numbers first. Barely 18 representatives in the Lok Sabha are documented over the last seven decades and out of nearly 7,500 MPs since 1951, only 0.6% have been Muslim women. More stark is the fact that out of 18 Lok Sabhas constituted till June 2024, in 5 Lok Sabhas, there was not a single Muslim woman. What accounts for this marked absence? Is it an offshoot of deliberate discrimination against a minority community and of its women? Is it to do with the pressures that Muslim women face in a patriarchal home that makes agency of any kind a real challenge? Some of these questions form the staple of the book that sets the context and takes us through the life journeys of 18 women in a manner that the analysis becomes self-evident. There is the 'dynastic' factor, wherein women coming from



Clockwise from top left: Mofida Begam, Zohrabai Akbarbhai Chavda, Nusrat Jahan and Iqra Hasan

established political backgrounds apparently enjoyed a head-start but this in no way was either the norm or the only story. Women were not simply proxy politicians

for their husbands and fathers; on several occasions, they were able to carve out a very special place for themselves. The life story approach is inspiring as it unravels

the stories of women who have been forgotten and whose lives hold out clues to the conundrum of low representation and to the unexpected elements that make up the complex idea of India, however threatened and interrogated.

The electoral success of Mofida Begam in Assam is a good starting point. A crusader for gender equality, her record in Parliament was impressive as she navigated a range of issues over which she demonstrated a good understanding. Her retreat from politics was sudden following the death of her husband and she in her later life gave up her estate to charity, the Assam Falah society. She is forgotten — hardly anyone knows of her struggles and, yet, hers is a life that is a microcosm of the lives of millions of Indian Muslim women. Her counterpart in Banaskantha in Gujarat is Zohrabai Akbarbhai Chavda, who was a grassroots activist and a committed Congress Party

worker. Her victory in 1962 in the Lok Sabha election was decisive and it gave her the opportunity to distinguish herself as a vocal parliamentarian. Especially impressive was her willingness and enthusiasm in taking up causes of agricultural reorganisation and farming practices, including that of the use of pesticides. This was not a case of an unthinking politician — someone who was incapable of responding to changing situations; she was an astute politician who worked towards a vision. The list of such women goes on and includes more recent entrants who cut their teeth under very altered circumstances. Take the case of Iqra Hasan, the progressive face of politics in UP or that of Nusrat Jahan, whose entry into politics from stardom indexed a new social equation in Bengal politics under the banner of the All India Trinamool Congress.

The social anatomy of the pol-

iticians identified by the authors shows common features; most of them before the 1980s were part of an older history of agitation and Congress politics; many of them enjoyed the privileges of caste and education and fitted into roles that were part of a particular secular fashioning of politics. Later entrants like Nusrat Jahan came from backgrounds such as cinema and staked their claims to a new ecosystem of politics that is constituted by social media, the entertainment industry, and populist ideas of redistribution. The only limitation of the book is that it tells you what the status of Muslim women's representation is but does not give you the why. The analysis is not as incisive as one would expect from the effort. As a first step in identifying the problem, it is an important effort, but as a diagnostic, it is only partial in its efficacy.

Lakshmi Subramanian

Voices from the attic

BANDAGED MOMENTS: STORIES OF MENTAL HEALTH BY WOMEN WRITERS FROM INDIAN LANGUAGES

Edited by Nabanita Sengupta
and Nishi Puligurtha,
Niyogi, ₹499

There is always a mad woman in the attic. So are her stories, sealed in silence. *Bandaged Moments* is a powerful anthology that weaves together multiple monologues by women on mental health across 26 Indian regions. Translated into 17 Indian languages, it is an attempt to retrieve such stories from the shackles of repression and erasure. Intimate and confessional in tone, these stories have been fleshed out by not only raw and visceral experiences that the characters endured in their lifetime but also the values of and the truths about India's socio-cultural fabric.

These voices touch upon various intersecting dimensions of the mental health crisis, ranging from the heteronormative pressures of being a wife and a mother, to the grief on loss and death, to the exploitation of vulnerable bodies steeped in poverty or disability, to the failure of legal and governmental bodies to offer succour to the emotional toll of caregiving. Women are forced to quit jobs, give up on their dreams, sacrifice their lives for children and emotionally unavailable partners only to be mocked at when, years later, they act erratically or spiral into breakdowns. Marriage is often prescribed as the only cure. They are also asked to smile a little more or perhaps stay quiet to preserve family honour. Such pressures destablise the very core of these



characters and, in extreme cases, lead to the core's overall collapse, creating feelings of alienation.

The anthology is a poetic, painful, and often philosophical rumination on how women have occupied a distinct position in the annals of insanity. Sandwiched between patriarchy and psychiatry, they have been held as an outsider by the rigid values and the prohibitions of Indian society. The book exposes how inhuman cruelties are perpetrated on the mentally ill and how mental illness is deeply embedded in the social and the political structures. Stigmatisation, brutality and terrifying experiences, both within the home and outside it, cause some of the victims to fall prey to disappearances, even suicides. Dismissed as an object of pity or an agent of violent monstrosity, the mad are, more often than not, misunderstood and misdiagnosed, left behind to rot in painful silence or under the scrutiny of the medical gaze.

Some stories locate women's 'madness' in physiological infirmities; others attribute their insanity to irrational minds. But the question that arises is this: is madness yet another patriarchal trope to pathologise and regulate

femininity, to define, curtail, and restrict their boundaries? Madness, in these stories, thus acts as a signifier, which positions women as an ill, pathological outsider.

Bandaged Moments eschews a unified, single narrative voice. Rather, what is created is a polyphony — varied tones, rhythms, and cadences that map the unique cultural context of each life. The translations preserve the remnants of the original voices. Some of the narratives also maintain the fragmented mental landscapes and ambiguous endings so as to echo the uncertainty and the disjointed nature of mental distress. Some others underline how women must reject the traits of idealised femininity and utilise their frenzy towards creative pursuit, transcendence, and freedom.

Every woman who writes is a survivor in an insane world. Creativity is the only reasonable response against a society that is so prejudiced. Bringing such stories together could, in fact, be seen as an attempt to liberate the mind from the oppressive constraints of society.

Bandaged Moments is a testament to breakthrough, not breakdown.

Ananya Sasaru

An anthem's history

SONG OF INDIA: A STUDY OF THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

By Rudrangshu Mukherjee,
Aleph, ₹399

In the *Song of India*, Rudrangshu Mukherjee briefly surveys the history of the song, "Jana Gana Mana", composed by Rabindranath Tagore, the first stanza of which is the national anthem of India. The short book starts with a sketch of the life and the works of Tagore, discusses the content and the history of the song, and contains 'coda', including the full text of the song in original Bengali as well as Roman and Devanagari transliterations of it, an English translation, and the facsimile of another — both by Tagore himself and a QR code to listen to Tagore's own recitation of the first stanza. The contents are not new for those familiar with Tagore and his creations but can be a handy introduction for others, especially those who subscribe to myths, such as the song being originally composed in honour of the British emperor, George V. Following the established works of Prasanta Kumar Pal and Prabodh Chandra Sen, Mukherjee demonstrates how Tagore had composed this song in honour of a force superior to the vanity of any royalty, out of annoyance at being asked by a Congress moderate to compose a song in honour of the British king. The 1911 session of Congress at Calcutta, thus, had many songs performed, including both Tagore's patriotic song and a Hindi song in honour of George V. It would indeed have been hilarious if the song, which celebrated a compassionate mother (*snahamayimata*) in its fourth stanza, was composed in honour of a British monarch.

Although it is a patriotic song, "Jana Gana Mana" does not directly celebrate the nation but the 'dispenser

Then and the ruler of the minds of all people, dispenser of India's destiny
Thy name resounds the hearts of the Bengalis, the Sanyasis, the Muslims, the
and the Hindus, the Christians, the Jains, the Sikhs, the Parsis, the
and the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, the Shudras, the
rulers in the music of the Sanyasis and the Muslims, the
singing voices of the Indian Sea. They praise thy blessings and sing thy praise
The song of all people united in thy love, the dispenser of India's destiny
Victory, victory, victory to thee.

They are night thy voice goes out from land to land calling the Hindus,
Muslims, Sikhs, and the Jains, the Christians, the Parsis, the
and the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, the Shudras, the
rulers in the music of the Sanyasis and the Muslims, the
singing voices of the Indian Sea. They praise thy blessings and sing thy praise
The song of all people united in thy love, the dispenser of India's destiny
Victory, victory, victory to thee.

An English translation of the national anthem,
"Jana Gana Mana", penned by Rabindranath Tagore

of India's destiny', an ungendered, divine figure reflecting Tagore's *Upanishadic* piety. That is why even the reference to the compassionate mother did not turn the song into another close contender to be the national anthem, which, nevertheless, addressed Bengal rather than India. No wonder Tagore's song would later be published as a Brahmo Sangeet in the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, the mouthpiece of the Adi Brahmo Samaj, which Tagore himself edited at that time.

Is a devotional song then a suitable national anthem for India? Mukherjee notes that when Jawaharlal Nehru had asked Tagore to compose a national anthem for India and the poet had agreed, "Jana Gana Mana" was clearly not their first choice. Subhas Chandra Bose had adopted a Hindustani adaptation of the song rendered by Abid Hasan and composed by Mumtaz Hussain and Ram Singh Thakur as the national anthem of the Indian National Army. Independent India honoured Bose's legacy by confirming this choice. This book defends this choice compellingly by outlining how "Jana Gana Mana", partly influenced by "Namo Hindustan" composed by

Sarala Devi (Tagore's niece), echoes the ideals of the Indian nation-state, especially its unity in diversity, situating the song among Tagore's other contemporary works like the poem, "Bharat-tirtha", the novel, *Gora*, the play, *Raja*, and a number of essays. The book is missing the first line of the fourth stanza in the printed Bengali text of the song — a printing error that must be corrected in the next edition.

Kanad Sinha

PAPERBACK PICKINGS

Defiant fire

■ **GIRLS WHO SAID NOTHING AND EVERYTHING: ESSAYS ON GIRLHOOD** (Penguin, ₹499) by Meera Vijayam consists of 11 short stories drawn from the author's personal journals. Each story is a candid exploration of certain nuances of girlhood. What undermine this collection are the attempts to simplify complexities and messy realities pertaining to grief or anxiety.

■ **THE FIRE OF DEFIANCE** (South Side, ₹450) by Mallu Swarajyam is an extraordinary biography of one of the women who feature in the iconic photograph of the Telangana armed



struggle of the 1940s. Translated by Purnima Tammireddy, the first-person narration makes use of oral history as it looks at history from the standpoint of those on the margins.

■ **THE LAST DEATH OF THE YEAR** (HarperCollins, ₹499) by Sophie Hannah opens with a delightfully sinister New Year's resolution and unfolds into a Hercule Poirot mystery rich in manners and motive but short on momentum. The plot meanders through excessive exposition before Poirot's intellect rescues it. This is a charming, if sluggish, homage to Agatha Christie's iconic detective.

These waters of life

SEVEN RIVERS

By Vanessa Taylor,
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, ₹899

Mississippi, Niger and Yangtze. The author provides a cross-cultural history of water reliance. This intellectual synthesis — linking the Nile's ancient hydrology to the Mississippi's modern engineering — is what makes *Seven Rivers* stand out. It excels at shifting between the microscopic and the panoramic, moving from the granular details of Victorian sewage management on the Thames to the vast, modern geopolitical struggles over water rights over the Nile. Taylor's depiction of the Ganges is particularly masterful as it balances the profound spiritual reverence that the river commands with the environmental catastrophe inflicted on it by dense habitation. The narration is as descriptive as the introductory illustrations at the beginning of each chapter which provide



vide fitting visual representations of the routes taken by these rivers. However, the sheer scale of the book — it has a seven-part structure — is also the source of minor flaws. To contain the entire political and

ecological history of a river like the Yangtze — China's economic and spiritual engine — within a single chapter omits multiple aspects, such as the importance of 'water highways' in that country. Occasionally, the reader is left longing for a sustained focus. For example, the history of the Niger and the Mississippi is explored selectively. The thematic structure is also interspersed with radical shifts in cultural and political context among chapters, making the overall reading experience uneven. However, these quibbles do little to undermine the book's achievement as an important addition to the genre of Anthropocene literature.

Seven Rivers provides a persuasive argument that until we understand the history flowing in these waters, we cannot begin to chart a sustainable future. It is a demanding, rewarding, and utterly necessary work that has intellectual depth.

Rishita Misra

Vanessa Taylor's book explores the history of human civilisation through the planet's hydrological arteries. Her thesis is clear and timely: rivers are not merely passive boundaries, but active protagonists in human evolution. Taylor argues that our contemporary lives are inextricably intertwined with rivers — from ancient agriculture to modern commerce. Taylor's argument is reminiscent of Robert Macfarlane's central idea in his book, *Is a River Alive?*, which perceived rivers not as resources for livelihood but living, sentient beings with their own right to exist. Both these works demand a profound anthropomorphic shift in human sensibility and law to recognise rivers as subjects with rights rather than objects for use.

Seven Rivers traces the trajectory of the seven "world rivers" — Taylor calls them such by virtue of the roles they have played in global history — the Nile, Danube, Ganges, Thames,



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Ref. No.: 1139//2025

Date : 20/11/2025

SHORT TENDER NOTICE
RFP for the Selection of Agency for Netarhat Mahotsav (Fair) at Netarhat, Latehar, Jharkhand(2nd Call)
The Jharkhand Tourism Development Corporation Limited (JTDCL), Government of Jharkhand (GoJ) undertaking intends to publish RFP for **Selection of Agency for Set up, Operation & Management of pre fabricated cottage facilities at Netarhat, Latehar, Jharkhand(2nd Call)**
The detailed RFP document can be downloaded from the below mentioned website: <https://jtdcl.jharkhand.gov.in>, and submit their offline Applications.
The applications Submission Due date is on or before **06/12/2025 at 1700 hours** and the date of opening of the tender on **08/12/2025 at 11.30 hours**. All subsequent notifications, changes and amendments will be posted only on the above website.
PR 366615 Tourism, Art Culture Sports And Youth Affairs(25-26).D

Sd/- Deputy

e-Procurement Cell
JHARKHAND STATE BUILDING CONSTRUCTION CORPORATION LTD., RANCHI

Short Term e-Procurement Notice Date-19-11-2025

Sl. No	Tender Reference No.	Work Name	Amount in (Rs)	Completion Time
1	JSBCL/49/2025-26	Construction of New Industrial Training Institute at Hariharganj Block in Palamu District	8,17,54,905/-	11 Months
2	JSBCL/50/2025-26	Construction of New Industrial Training Institute at Nala Constituency Assembly Area in Jamtara District	8,17,54,905/-	11 Months
3	JSBCL/51/2025-26	Construction of New Industrial Training Institute at Pathargama Block in Godda District	8,17,54,905/-	11 Months
4	Date of Publication of Tender on Website		27-11-2025 at 11:00 AM	
5	Start Date of Submission of Bids		27-11-2025 at 11:00 AM	
6	Last Date/Time of Submission of Bids		18-12-2025 at 05:00 PM	
7	Date/Time of opening of Bid		19-12-2025 at 05:00 PM	
8	Name & Address of office Inviting tender		e-Procurement Cell, Jharkhand State Building Construction Corporation Ltd., Ranchi.	
9	Helpline Number of e-procurement Cell		0651-2446259	
10	e-mail ID		jsbcl@jharkhand@gmail.com	

Note:- Cost of bidding document for a non-refundable fee & Bid Security (EMD) shall be payable online through <http://Jharkhandtenders.gov.in>.
Any change can be seen on Website <http://Jharkhandtenders.gov.in>.
Any other information can be seen on <http://Jharkhandtenders.gov.in>.

PR 366600 Jharkhand State Building Construction Corp. Ltd.(25-26)#D

Nodal Officer, e-Procurement Cell Jharkhand State Building Construction Corporation Ltd., Ranchi.

THE ASIAN AGE

21 NOVEMBER 2025

Governors and bills: More clarity by SC was needed

The Supreme Court's answers to the presidential reference on an earlier verdict of the court on the powers of state governors and the President while acting under Article 200 and Article 201 of the Constitution settles part of the controversy that cropped up in many states over the same but leaves unattended some of the substantial issues that the court itself calls "strike at the root of the continuation of our republican and democratic way and the Constitution's federal character".

It is welcome that the court has brought some finality to the matter of whether a governor can or cannot sit on a bill forever. This was a badly needed clarification as several of them sat on bills for as long as four and five years. The Tamil Nadu governor even went to the extent of publicly declaring that if the governor withholds assent "it means bill is dead". Even the Union government took the stand that the governor can withhold the bill without returning to the House. The court has upended that option by decreeing that "withholding of assent must be accompanied by the returning of the bill to the Assembly" and insisted that "to permit the governor to withhold the bill without returning it to the house will derogate the principle of federalism". That is a mighty observation upholding the basic structure of our Constitution.

It is welcome that the court has brought some finality to the matter of whether a governor can sit on a bill forever. This was a badly needed clarification as several of them sat on bills for as long as four-five years.

the court appears to have failed in appreciating the circumstances which forced the concept of deemed assent, and has offered no fresh remedy for it except saying the governor and the President will decide within a "reasonable time".

The cardinal issue that brought the court into the very question on Article 200 is the self-assumed power by governors who chose to sit in judgment of bills passed by state Assemblies though they have no constitutional backing for that act. It is back to square one when the court says that it can exercise a limited power of judicial review and direct the governor to decide in a time-bound manner without prescribing a time limit. It is interesting that the court refers to the federal structure and the rights of the state legislatures but refused to consider the very question of whether a state government would move a constitutional court if the governor had decided on a bill in a "reasonable time".

The courts have repeatedly said that the Constitution is a living document and can be interpreted to address issues that come up from time to time. The presidential reference and the Supreme Court's reply to it can very well form the basis for a new discourse on the legislature's rights vis-a-vis gubernatorial powers when it comes to legislation.

Maoist insurgency on deathbed

The death of dreaded Maoist commander and strategist Madvi Hidma and IED expert Meturi Joka Rao, also known as Tech Shankar, in a police encounter at Mareduhilli in Alluri Sitaramaraju district in Andhra Pradesh, closes a chapter on the Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) in India.

Born in Purvati village in Sukma district in Chhattisgarh, Hidma began as a Bastar Dalam member before rising through the ranks of the Dandakarnya Special Zonal Committee. Several states had announced a reward for Hidma who was considered an expert in guerrilla attacks.

Over the past two decades, he allegedly masterminded major attacks on security forces, including the 2010 ambush in Dantewada that killed 76 personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the 2013 Jhiram Ghati attack that killed 27 people, including senior Congress leaders, and the 2021 Sukma ambush that left 22 paramilitary personnel dead.

The CPI-Maoist cadre base was depleted, especially after a deadly 21-day counter-insurgency operation in Karagutta, where Central forces used drones and satellite images to guide around 5,000 security personnel. Several top Maoist leaders were killed and a large number of Maoist cadres laid down their arms recently in Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh, highlighting the fact that the Left-wing Extremism has lost its popular support.

As things stand today, the armed Naxal ideology which started in West Bengal's Naxalbari village in July 1972 is on its deathbed and the country could as well be free of armed Maoists by March 2026 — a deadline by Union home minister Amit Shah.

However, if policymakers credit this success only to the military ruthlessness, they would be mistaken. Due credit should also be awarded to the government's welfare and development policies, which weaned popular support away from the Maoists and strengthened the hands of security forces. The Narendra Modi government must be congratulated for ending one of the country's long-festering internal security issues.

THE ASIAN AGE

KAUSHIK MITTER

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Subhani



After Hasina verdict, will the spirit of '71 survive?



Monideepa Banerjee

What's the plan for Vijay Diwas this year? On December 16, 1971, the Pakistani Army surrendered to the Indian Army in Dhaka, leading to the birth of Bangladesh. The Indian Army marks the day annually, with the grandest observance at Kolkata's Fort William, the headquarters of the Eastern Command which led the campaign to liberate then East Pakistan. Last year, with Sheikh Hasina already taking refuge in New Delhi, the ceremony at Fort William was subdued and fewer than usual Bangladeshi defence officers or freedom fighters of the Mukti Bahini attended. Will there even be a token exchange of goodwill that day this year?

This question may not be India's top priority today as it grapples to manage its relationship with Bangladesh, its most steadfast friend in the neighbourhood for the last 15 years. But it is symbolic of the diplomatic tight spot India finds itself in. Bangladesh wants its former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, to be extradited to her country, now she has been sentenced to death for "crimes against humanity" by a court that Dhaka recognises as legitimate, but the rest of the world does not. India, legally, does not have to send her back. There is enough wriggle room in the extradition treaty. But not sending her back will be viewed, Dhaka has warned New Delhi, as an "unfriendly" act.

It's an unhappy predicament for India. Not only does it risk alienating Bangladesh at the political level, the anti-India sentiment among ordinary Bangladeshis is an unhappy reality that is going nowhere. Bangladeshis would like good neighbourly relations but the violence of July-August 2024 has left deep scars. That India is sheltering the "perpetrator" of that pain is a cause of grief. India shares a 4,000-km border with Bangladesh and has suffered from radical Islamic groups slipping in and causing violent unrest here at home. Also at stake is the growing warmth between Dhaka under the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus and Islamabad. The frequency of visits by Pakistani ministers and top military officers is reason for great disquiet. There is also the superpower trio —US, China and Russia— keeping a strategic eye on the Bay of Bengal. Given the complexities, India needs to design a tactical response keeping all of this in mind. The MEA's guarded statement, saying it has "noted" the verdict on Sheikh Hasina and was "willing to engage with all stakeholders" to ensure "peace, democracy, inclusion and stability in that country", needs a take two. And soon.

Some Bangladesh watchers have lately suggested a solution that India may eventually have to explore. It may use its good offices to pursue asylum for Sheikh Hasina in another country. Western nations did not oblige when she fled to India in August 2024. But at that time, the option of her settling in a Middle Eastern or Central Asian country was on the anvil and, analysts suggest, it might be time for India to revisit that option. Also, Sheikh Hasina now has the death penalty hanging over her head. That might persuade countries opposed to the death sentence, such as in Europe, to consider asylum.

Return to Bangladesh? Shiekh Hasina's son Sajeeb Wazed has been quoted as saying that he is confident his mother will return to

No wonder then that it is with great confidence that Sheikh Hasina's son says his mother will return to Bangladesh one day. It's a denouement India desires. It will revisit its ties with Bangladesh after February polls.

Bangladesh sooner or later. But the message Dhaka is sending out is, no entry, unless she arrives to appeal against her sentence in the Bangladesh Supreme Court, which is something technically possible but improbable. In fact, the Supreme Court earlier this week struck down one of Sheikh Hasina's earliest and most controversial decisions as Prime Minister. In 2010, she abolished the system laid down by the Bangladesh Constitution of a caretaker government overseeing parliamentary elections.

That was in 2010. On Thursday, November 20, the Supreme Court restored the concept of caretaker government. That decision, to do away with the caretaker system, was among the first steps Ms Hasina took after becoming Prime Minister in 2009 that foretold her arguably authoritarian rule in later years. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party had tried to fiddle with that system when it was in power, too, but it resulted in a brief spell of military rule before elections in 2009 that Sheikh Hasina won. Every subsequent election was under Sheikh Hasina's government. It would be obtuse to claim they were entirely free and fair elections and this pushed the BNP to boycott them. That cast a shadow over the legitimacy of the elections, but Sheikh Hasina sailed on regardless.

India did not ever bat an eyelid because of Sheikh Hasina quickly proved to be a good friend, cracking down on Indian insurgents and other anti-Indian forces that had found shelter in Bangladesh during previous regimes. For example, the Jamaat-e-Mujahideen Bang-

ladesh (JMB), a radical Islamist group that set up sleeper cells in West Bengal and beyond and triggered the Khagragarh bomb blast on October 2, 2014, Sheikh Hasina dismantled post-haste. She also chased Paresh Barua, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) militant, out of his safe haven in Dhaka.

And then there is history. India's ties with Sheikh Hasina go back nearly 55 years when it played a historic role in assisting her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman fight to free erstwhile East Pakistan from the dominance of Islamabad in the west. After Bangladesh was born in 1971, Mujibur Rahman took over but his tenure was cut short on August 15, 1975, when a military coup gunned him and most of his family down. Sheikh Hasina and her sister Rehana were out of the country then and survived. For them, New Delhi became a second home for years.

No wonder then that it is with great confidence that Sheikh Hasina's son says his mother will return to Bangladesh one day. It's a denouement India desires. India's relationship with Bangladesh during the years of military rule was not cordial. Its relationship with the Yunus regime is frosty, too, but the government has indicated it is ready to warm up once there is an elected government in place following February polls. That has been welcomed by Dhaka.

This December 16 will go a long way in paving the future of India-Bangladesh ties. Last year, the Bangladesh delegation of military officers and freedom fighters came to Fort William at the very last minute ahead of Vijay Divas and Dhaka celebrated the day but without the traditional military parade at its historic National Parade Square. This Vijay Divas will be a test of the spirit of 1971, which made India and Bangladesh close friends and neighbours. Will that spirit survive?

Monideepa Banerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata and has earlier travelled in and reported from Bangladesh

LETTERS

MAMATA RIGHT TOO

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee has sharply criticised the Special Intensive Revision, arguing it resembles an NRC-style exercise that may unfairly burden poorer citizens who lack birth or identity documents. She claims the process is being rushed, selectively implemented, and could lead to large-scale voter deletions, potentially causing social unrest. Mamata also frames the move as an attack on Bengali identity, insisting that linguistic background should not trigger suspicions. The government, however, maintains that SIR is essential to clean voter lists, eliminate duplicates and curb fraudulent entries. Both positions carry weight.

R.S. Narula Patiala

INDIA MUST SHAPE AI

AS ARTIFICIAL intelligence evolves from a mere tool into a defining arena of power, "govern AI before it governs you" becomes less a warning and more a civilisational directive. India cannot afford to drift into a future where algorithms shape identities, choices and public life without accountability or cultural grounding. Proactive governance offers clear advantages, sovereignty over systems, ethical coherence, narrative ownership, and public trust — yet it must avoid the dangers of overregulation, technological bottlenecks, fragmented standards and reactive policymaking. The challenge is to move beyond symbolic posturing only.

Amarjeet Kumar Hazaribagh

REGULATE PHONE USE

A DISTINCT TREND of addiction to mobile phones and social media is being observed worldwide among adolescents. Due to immaturity, their brains' reward system and social pressure stay connected. Excessive use has led to adverse consequences such as sleep deprivation, academic decline, anxiety and depression. Recognising warning signs and adopting measures such as reducing screen time are crucial to managing this problem. Sadly, with the exception of Australia, no government has seriously considered any restrictive measures in this regard. In November 2024, the Australian Parliament approved the world's strictest laws, banning children under the age of 16 from using social media. But if Meta recognises this principle, why limit it to Australian children only? Why not make such a ban mandatory worldwide?

Jang Bahadur Singh Jamshedpur

Dilip Cherian Dilli Ka Babu



IRS to MLA in record time in Bihar: Story of Sujit Kumar

There are fast moves in babudom bureaucracy, and then there is the Sujit Kumar story, which has impressed many in service circles.

In just 51 days, Mr Kumar went from principal commissioner in Delhi to BJP MLA from Gaura Bauram in Darbhanga, Bihar. Normally, such transitions take months of paperwork, clearances and political negotiation. In this case, the timeline has raised more than a few eyebrows.

The sequence speaks for itself. On September 13, CBDT issued a promotion list that unusually included 20 IRS-IT officers of the 2001 batch at a level many of their IAS counterparts are still waiting to reach. Mr Kumar was among them. Ten days later, he and others were given postings at their upgraded grade. On September 25, he applied for voluntary retirement. Instead of the standard three-month wait, Rashtrapati Bhavan cleared it in just 15 days. He joined the BJP on October 13, was named a candidate within 24 hours, filed his nomination the next day, went to the polls on November 6, and won on November 14.

What makes the speed more striking is the contrast with others who entered politics the hard way. Former IAS officer R.K. Singh, once a Union minister, was recently dismissed from the BJP for speaking out of turn. No such turbulence for Sujit Kumar, hopefully. His trajectory suggests not just careful planning, but powerful patrons ensuring the gears turned smoothly.

None of this means Mr Kumar lacks merit. He is regarded as bright, ambitious, and politically aware. But few believe this chain of empanelment, VRS

clearance, ticket allocation and electoral victory would have aligned without strong backing from Delhi.

HINTS OF A BIGGER RESHUFFLE IN DELHI

Fresh off a decisive Bihar victory, the Modi government has signalled a sharp bureaucratic reset, one that goes far beyond routine reshuffling. The most telling move is the appointment of V. Srinivas as Rajasthan's new chief secretary. A 1989-batch IAS officer with deep central exposure, Mr Srinivas was n't merely repatriated but strategically placed. His tenure as Union secretary in administrative reforms, pensions, and grievances gave him a ringside view of the Centre's governance playbook. Now he's expected to bring that mindset into Jaipur's secretariat.

What makes this move more intriguing is the timing and the tenure. Mr Srinivas is due to retire in September 2026, which means he gets less than a year and a half in the hot seat unless the government grants an extension. That short runway strongly suggests a targeted mission: push through major administrative alignments, tighten state-Centre coordination, and ensure that Rajasthan's bureaucracy operates in sync with national priorities. In other words: he's not here for the scenery. Meanwhile, his predecessor Sudhansh Pant has been pulled back to Delhi, parked briefly as officer on special duty in the Cabinet secretariat, before taking over as secretary, social justice and empowerment next year.

But beyond Jaipur, observers expect stirring happenings at the Centre. Several senior posts, including

petroleum & natural gas, empowerment of persons with disabilities, remain vacant. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is clearly keeping key slots open while rebalancing the administration in line with political priorities.

So, this is a prelude. The real action, many in Delhi believe, is coming at the political level. With key secretary posts at the Centre lying vacant and senior officers being quietly repositioned, the groundwork is being laid for something bigger. The chatter in power corridors is unmistakable — a Union Cabinet reshuffle may also not be far off. A few non-performing ministers could be shown the door, fresh faces may enter, and portfolios could see major realignment.

THE IPS ERA IN CAPFS IS ENDING

For decades, India's Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) have lived with what many CAPF officers call, not entirely jokingly, the "IPS occupation". The Supreme Court has now told them the withdrawal date (reported by this column). With the Court dismissing the Centre's review plea, the May 2025 judgment ordering a phased reduction of IPS deputations has become irreversible. There's even a timer — two years for the transition. No extensions, no polite ambiguity.

Today, half of all IG posts and one-fifth of DIG posts in CAPFs are reserved for IPS officers. That pipeline has shaped careers, morale, and internal hierarchies for decades. Countless CAPF officers have waited 30 years for a shot at an IG rank, only to watch a youngish IPS officer fly in, collect stars, and fly out.

Naturally, the IPS brotherhood is worried. Their argument, which the Home Ministry echoes, is that IPS leadership ensures "functional necessity, lateral talent infusion and national security coordination". Fair enough. But that line rings hollow when CAPF officers themselves run modern counter-insurgency grids, manage lakhs of personnel in remote borders, and command units that look more like light infantry than civil police.

The Supreme Court wasn't buying the security-doom argument either. It pointed out something obvious. Stagnation kills morale, and morale matters in forces tasked with guarding everything from Maoist belts to the Pakistan border. The judgment also did something quietly revolutionary. It said CAPFs must be treated as full Organised Group A Services for cadre matters. That's babu code for "stop treating them like borrowed labour."

One amusing data point in the government's defence: IPS officers make up only 1.4 per cent of the CAPF Group A executive cadre, but it's this tiny segment sitting in the corner office that decides who gets promoted.

Will this dismantle IPS's influence overnight? Unlikely. The turf war will now move into cadre review committees, service rule tinkering, and the bureaucratic trenches of North Block. But something big has shifted.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	85,632.68	0.52
Nifty 50	26,192.15	0.54
S&P 500*	6,741.29	1.47
Dollar (₹)	88.71	0.13
Pound Sterling (₹)	115.88	-0.35
Euro (₹)	102.17	-0.34
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	122,988▼63	-0.05
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.12	0.96
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.536	0.06
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.146	0.015

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Growth of 8 key infra sectors stays flat in Oct.

Growth of eight key infrastructure sectors remained flat in October as expansion in output of petroleum refinery products, fertiliser and steel was offset by a contraction in coal and electricity production. The eight core industries of coal, crude oil, natural gas, petroleum refinery products, electricity, fertiliser, and steel had expanded by 3.3 per cent in September and by 3.8 per cent in October 2024.



TCS raises \$1 bn from TPG for HyperVault

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) raised \$1 billion from private equity group TPG for its AI data center business HyperVault, the firm said. Both the companies will invest a combined 180 billion rupees (\$2 billion) in HyperVault over the next few years. TCS, India's largest software company, will be the majority partner in the joint venture with a 51 per cent stake. TPG will get 27.5 per cent to 49 per cent stake.

EBG sets up Powerhouse with 400 seats

EBG Group launched its 400-seater EBG Powerhouse at Dallas Centre in Hyderabad. This will be its global headquarters. It will spend about \$7 million for the facility over two years. It will support start-ups. The focus will be on electric vehicles, wellness, food and beverages, hospitality, realty, prefab, education, and other verticals, said Dr. Irfan Khan, chairman and founder, EBG Group.

Sonoco launches Performace Hub in Hyderabad

Packaging solutions player Sonoco Products inaugurated the Sonoco Performance Hub in Hyderabad. It had first launched its hub in February 2025 and has transitioned to a permanent facility. The Hyderabad team plays a key role in advancing company's digital transformation, analytics, automation, and emerging technologies to enhance efficiency. It has plans to set up a finance CoE in Hyderabad.

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Indian processors to buy diamonds from Botswana

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, NOV. 20

Botswana government has agreed to sell the rough diamonds mined by its miner ODC to be sold directly to India, avoiding the third-country trading hubs. This will bring down the cost of rough diamonds from Botswana for Indian diamond processors.

India and Botswana are in the process of eliminating the multi-layered system that benefits neither miners nor processors. Currently, rough diamonds are auctioned in third country trading hubs like Dubai, Antwerp and Israel, inflating prices before reaching Indian processors. This also reduces profits margins for mining companies. Further, smaller manufacturers in India face barriers to primary markets and pay heavy premiums in the secondary market. The logistics cost also increases the price of the rough diamonds.

Under the direct imports, ODC, the government-owned miner in Botswana will sell the roughs directly to the buyers in India. The special

JEH AEROSPACE LAUNCHES MFG UNIT NEAR HYDERABAD

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, NOV. 20

Atlanta, US-based, Jeh Aerospace announced the launch of a manufacturing facility at Horizon Industrial Parks, Kothur near Hyderabad.

Horizon Industrial Parks is owned and managed by Blackstone Real Estate Funds.

Jeh Aerospace specializes in high-precision aerospace and defense manufacturing, driven by software-defined manufacturing technology.

The new 2 lakh square feet facility named Mach 2 will raise Jeh Aerospace's India manufacturing footprint to over 2.5 lakh sq. ft when it becomes operational in 2026.

"Our new Hyderabad facility is being engineered as a software-defined, AI-augmented system that can think, adapt, and execute with precision at scale," said Vishal Sanghavi, founder and chief executive officer, Jeh Aerospace.



BARODA BNP LAUNCHES U.S. SMALL CAP FUND

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, NOV. 20

Baroda BNP Paribas Asset Management India through its GIFT City branch has launched India's first-ever fund offering to investors which give direct access to the US small-cap market through the Baroda BNP Paribas GIFT US small cap fund.

The newly launched open ended fund is also the first GIFT City-based fund investing in US small-cap companies. The dollar-denominated investment fund leveraging the remittance limits allowed to resident Indians by RBI under the liberalised remittance scheme under the overseas portfolio investment route.

"As a GIFT City-registered restricted scheme, the Baroda BNP Paribas GIFT US Small Cap Fund is an efficient investment option for investors seeking to diversify their investments into United States small caps," said Sanjay Grover, managing director and chief executive officer of the Baroda BNP Paribas AMC.

LOWER COSTS

BOTH NATIONS eliminating system that benefits neither miners nor processors.

UNDER DIRECT imports, ODC, the govt-owned miner in Botswana, will sell rough diamonds directly to Indian processors.

CURRENTLY, rough diamonds auctioned in third country trading hubs, inflate prices before reaching Indian processors.

AROUND 90% of global roughs reach India for cutting and polishing and this direct linkage with the miners in Botswana will cut costs and increase supply.

— JAYANTI SAVALIYA, Regional chairman, GJEPC

materials distribution organisation (SMDO), set up by GJEPC, will act as a sight-holder equivalent or long-term contract partner with De Beers Botswana and ODC. Through annual or term-based supply agreements, SMDO will procure bulk roughs and distribute them to Indian MSMEs. This will support over 3,000 active buyers, ensuring competitive bidding and better price realisation. Lower costs will eventually benefit the end consumer.

"Around 90 per cent of

the global roughs reach India for cutting and polishing. This direct linkage with miners in Botswana will cut costs and increase supply. We hope to see auctions by ODC to start in the special notified zone in Surat in a few months," said Jayanti Savaliya, regional chairman, GJEPC.

Botswana too benefits from shifting auctions from traditional trading hubs like Antwerp or Dubai to Surat. It gains greater control over its distribution chain and reduces transaction costs.

Bitcoin in free fall, touches \$88,522

New York, Nov. 20: The great crypto crash of 2025 entered a new phase on Thursday, as Bitcoin plunged to its lowest level in seven months, extending the more than \$1 trillion wipeout across the digital-asset world.

The largest cryptocurrency fell to as low as \$88,522 before recovering some ground early Thursday, with the latest rout hitting investors big and small—from retail dip-buyers to digital-asset treasury firms whose stock premiums are vanishing.

Token prices regained some ground after Nvidia gave a strong revenue forecast, helping counter concern that a global surge in AI spending is poised to fizzle. The next psychological thresholds lie around \$85,000 and \$80,000, with the 2025 trough of \$74,425, set during April's tariff-related turbulence, in focus.

The total market capitalisation of cryptocurrencies peaked at about \$4.3 trillion on October 6 and now hovers near \$3.2 tril-

lion. Following a cascade of forced liquidations on October 10, when more than \$19-billion of leveraged crypto positions were offloaded, the market's fragility was exposed. That event triggered a chain reaction of margin calls, ETF outflows and halted fresh buyer interest.

"Investors are stabbing in the dark a bit - they haven't got any direction on macro, so all they can see is what on-chain whales are doing and they're getting quite worried about it," said James Butterfill, head of research at CoinShares.

Bitcoin's surge to just north of \$126,000 earlier in the year was based on twin pillars: expectations of multiple US Fed interest-rate cuts and growing institutional adoption. Both narratives have stalled while momentum buyers have beaten a retreat.

The fall is dealing a heavy blow to digital-asset treasury firms, whose valuations were built on earlier rally.

Halting dark patterns: e-comm cos

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, NOV. 20

Around 26 leading e-commerce platforms such as Zepto, BigBasket, Zomato and others alike said that their platforms are free dark patterns.

As far as dark patterns are concerned in e-commerce platforms, they involve using design and choice architecture to deceive, coerce, or influence consumers into making choices that are not in their best interest. They

also encompass a wide range of manipulative practices.

As per the industry estimate, there are over 2.6 million active e-commerce marketplaces operating in India as of September 2025, with a growth rate of around 18 per cent year-over-year since 2020.

The major dominated players are Amazon, Flipkart, alongside specialised marketplaces such as Meesho, Myntra, Nykaa and others.

Among the 26 companies

Sensex, Nifty-50 scale fresh 52-week highs

Benchmarks' firm close underscores sustained buying interest

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, NOV. 20

Indian stock markets closed strong with benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty-50 scaled new 52-week highs intraday as rally continued on positive global cues and optimism around the US-India trade deal.

The Sensex touched an intraday high of 85,801.70 but closed a tad lower at 85,632.68 up 446.21 points or 0.52 per cent on profit booking. Sensex all time high is 85,978.25 made on September 27, 2024.

The Nifty-50 index made a new 52 week high of 26,246.55 and closed at 26,192.15 up 139.50 points or 0.54 per cent. Nifty-50 all time high is 26,277.37 made in Sept., 2024.

Big gains for index heavy weights Reliance Industries (2.01 per cent) and HDFC Bank (1.42 per cent) led to gains in benchmarks Sensex and Nifty-50.

However, the broader market saw profit taking with BSE mid-cap index down by 0.13 per cent and BSE small-cap index down by 0.17 per cent.

Sectoral trend remained mixed with moderate gains for bank, auto, capital goods and oil & gas stock indices while other sectoral indices closed flat or negative.

Nifty PSU Bank index fell 0.89 per cent on profit taking with smaller PSU

BULLISH TREND

BIG GAINS for index heavy weights RIL (2.01%), HDFC Bank (1.42%) led to gains in benchmarks Sensex and Nifty-50.

SECTORAL trend remains mixed with moderate gains for bank, auto, capital goods and oil & gas.

SENSEX CLOSED AT 85,632.68, UP 446.21 PTS, NIFTY-50 CLOSED AT 26,192.15, UP 139.50 PTS.

SENSEX MILESTONES

85,801	Nov. 20, 2025
85,000	Sept. 24, 2024
80,000	July 3, 2024
75,000	April 9, 2024
70,000	Dec. 11, 2023
65,000	July 3, 2023
60,000	Sept. 24, 2021
55,000	Aug. 13, 2021
50,000	Jan. 21, 2021

INVESTOR sentiment remains upbeat, supported by renewed FPI inflows and positive cues from Asian markets

FPIS BUYS equities worth ₹283.65 cr while domestic institutions buy equities worth ₹824.46 cr.

Market's up move was led by heavyweights in oil and gas, particularly Reliance Industries, along with solid contributions from private-sector lenders.

— PONMUDI R, CEO, Enrich Money

bank stocks falling between 1 to 3 per cent. IT stocks also saw profit taking after previous days nearly 3 per cent rise in BSE IT index (-0.18 per cent).

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) were net buyers of equities worth ₹283.65 crore while domestic institutions were net buyers by ₹824.46 crore.

"Market's up move was led by heavyweights in oil and gas, particularly Reliance Industries, along with solid contributions from private-sector lenders such as HDFC Bank,

Axis Bank and the Bajaj Finance and Bajaj Finserv, as well as select automobile stocks," Ponmudi R., chief executive officer, Enrich Money said.

Market benchmarks' firm close underscores sustained buying interest across frontline sectors and reinforces market's bullish undertone, he added.

Some volatility may come at high market levels, NSE's volatility index India VIX gained 1.35 per cent rising to 12.14.

"Investor sentiment remained upbeat, support-

Rupee sliding on rising demand for dollars, says RBI gov Malhotra

FC BANKING BUREAU WITH AGENCY INPUTS MUMBAI, NOV. 20

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Sanjay Malhotra on Thursday said that the central bank does not target any level of the rupee and attributed the latter's slide to the US dollar demand.

The RBI's foreign exchange reserves remain very good, reinforcing that India's external position is stable and well-buffered, said Malhotra said while responding to a query after delivering the VKRV Rao Memorial Lecture at the Delhi School of Economics.

He also exuded confidence that India will have a good trade deal with US, and that would relieve the pressure on the country's current account balance.

Responding to another query on the banking sector, Malhotra said that the way Indian banks are performing well and soon a few of them will be among the top 100 global lenders given the pace of economic expansion and growth in banking system. Currently, only SBI and HDFC appear among the world's top 100 banks, ranked 43rd and 73rd, respectively.

Meanwhile, on Thursday, the rupee depreciated 23 paise to close at 88.71 against the US dollar on broad strength of American currency and fading odds of a rate cut by the US Federal Reserve.



INDIAN BANKS are performing well and very soon a few of them will be among the top 100 global lenders given the pace of economic expansion and growth in the banking system.

— SANJAY MALHOTRA, RBI governor

Russian oil imports lowest since Oct. 2022

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, NOV. 20

With the US sanctions on Russian oil companies kicking in from today (November 21), the crude oil loadings to India have dipped to 982 thousand barrels per day (kbd), lowest since October 2022.

However, arrivals in November remained elevated at 1.8 millions barrel per day (mbd) as Indian refiners were trying to maximise intake prior to the sanctions.

According to Kpler, Russian crude loadings to India were tracking at 982 kbd in November, sharply down from the 1.75 mbd average seen over January–September 2025.

"The decline is driven primarily by OFAC sanctions targeting Rosneft and Lukoil, the two largest Russian suppliers to Indian refiners. While volumes

may still shift, as some in-transit vessels could revise their final destinations, India-bound flows are softening. Loadings have already slowed since October 21, though it is still early for definitive conclusions given Russia's agility in deploying intermediaries, shadow fleets, and workaround financing," said Sumit Ritolia, lead research analyst, Kpler.

Meanwhile, crude oil imports into India from Russia in November remained higher at 1.8 mbd till November 20, against 1.6 mbd in October and September.

"Indian refiners are trying to maximise intake from Rosneft and Lukoil before restrictions formally take effect. Volumes are elevated now, but we expect a visible dip in arrivals from late November into December," Ritolia said.

AI adoption depends on safety, says Lobana

FC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, NOV. 20

Responsible and trusted use of artificial intelligence (AI) will be critical to India's technology-led transformation, with the onus on every stakeholder in the ecosystem to ensure safety and accountability, Google India's country manager Preeti Lobana said on Thursday.

"For AI to be really adopted and be in everyday use, there is a lot of onus on all of us as an ecosystem to make sure that it is safe and trusted. AI would serve as a crucial foundation in the journey towards a Viksit Bharat, underlin-



ing that trust and safety are prerequisites for widespread adoption," she said at Google's 'Safe and Trusted AI' event here.

Lobana also said that the complexity of India would show the world how technology can scale and drive impact, even to solve toughest systemic issues with precise, tailored, locally-conceptualised solutions for many pockets (that exist in India).

REFORGING THE RUSTED STEEL FRAME: CIVIL SERVICES NEED REFORMS FROM WOMB TO TOMB

OPINION

K. MAHESH



changed.

WHY CIVIL SERVICES REFORM MATTERS MOST?

While much public debate revolves around electoral and judicial reforms, civil services reform arguably deserves higher priority. The bureaucracy's inefficiency is not merely a governance issue; it lies at the heart of the country's judicial backlog, time of Parliament getting utilised to discuss local governance issues then discussing and debating national issues, and erosion of public trust.

THE GOVERNMENT AS THE BIGGEST LITIGANT

India's courts are burdened by over five crore pending cases — 4.6 crore in lower courts, 63 lakh in High Courts, and nearly 87,000 in the Supreme Court (as per the National Judicial Data Grid, 2025). More than half involve the government as a litigant. This is when a large number of Indians are not leading a Constitutional way of life due to illiteracy and poverty.

This "docket explosion" is not an accident. It reflects the absence of administrative and judicial imagination among civil servants.

Poorly drafted orders, lack of due diligence, and weak understanding of legal provisions force citizens into litigation. Most officers receive little or no serious grounding in administrative law, constitutional interpretation, or landmark judicial pronouncements.

A bureaucracy trained merely to "process files" instead of resolving issues on the ground creates a governance bottleneck that spills over into the courts. The consequence is a justice system choked by government litigation — and citizens left waiting for redress.

RECRUITMENT: THE FIRST WEAK LINK

At the heart of the problem lies recruitment. The current civil services examination rewards academic memory rather than moral and emotional intelligence. What is tested is knowledge; what is required is character — integrity, empathy, and a burning desire to serve the people with a fire in the belly.

A truly reformed civil service must begin by aligning the selection process with the qualities needed in governance.

Among the reforms urgently needed is a complete overhaul of recruitment. The civil services exam must move away from rote learning and optional subjects towards a unified and pre-harmonised syllabus that tests skills truly relevant to governance — statistics, research methodology, exclusion studies, administrative law, political economy, public sector



The civil services exam must move away from rote learning and optional subjects towards a unified and pre-harmonised syllabus that tests skills truly relevant to governance — statistics, research methodology, exclusion studies, administrative law, political economy, public sector management, and development economics.

management, and development economics. Candidates must also be trained to understand India's social realities through dedicated study of excluded groups such as SCs, STs, women, senior citizens and persons with disabilities. A psychological assessment should become integral to the selection process to gauge integrity, empathy and commitment to public service beyond caste, religion

or gender. Equally important is the need for separate examinations for IPS and IFS, given the distinct skill sets these services demand. Finally, the upper age limit should be capped at 28 years to attract younger, more adaptable candidates — for by the time aspirants enter at 32 or 35, attitudes are already formed and difficult to mould.

TRAINING, TENURE,

AND TRANSFERS

Recruitment reform must be followed by rigorous training reform. A rigorous Training Needs Analysis (TNA) for each service should replace the current generic courses. Training must emphasize real-world problem-solving, data-driven decision-making, and citizen engagement.

Equally vital is the issue of fixed tenure and transparent postings. Arbitrary

transfers remain one of the biggest morale-killers in the system. No reform like innovation in management, Artificial Intelligence will work unless officers are assured of a stable tenure that allows them to see projects through.

Field leadership with inspection culture is the crucible of governance. District Magistrates and Deputy Commissioners in Delhi's municipal administration (and similar posts elsewhere) should ideally be held by officers of Joint Secretary rank or above, with 15-16 years of experience. District governance is too complex to be left to inexperienced officers. Mature leadership with 15 to 16 years of experience and seniority strengthens inter-departmental coordination and ensures that welfare programmes reach the people effectively.

POST-RETIREMENT REHABILITATION OF CIVIL SERVANTS

Another neglected aspect is post-retirement rehabilitation of civil servants. The revolving door between government service and quasi-judicial or statutory bodies erodes public faith. A two-year cooling-off period should be mandatory before any retired civil servant can take up such roles. This single measure would significantly reduce conflicts of interest and improve accountability.

THE LARGER PICTURE

Despite constitutional safeguards, the civil services have failed to evolve in tune

with India's changing aspirations. The problem is systemic — poor recruitment design, inadequate training, lack of performance metrics, and weak accountability mechanisms.

A bureaucracy that remains insulated from outcomes cannot drive reform. For India to become truly *atmanirbhar* *bharat* needs a civil service that is competent, ethically upright, sensitive and citizen-oriented.

Civil servants are not merely implementers of policy; they are the interface between the state and society. Their sensitivity and competence shape how governance feels to the ordinary citizen. The bureaucratic apathy that frustrates citizens today is not inevitable — it is the result of structural flaws that can and must be corrected.

THE WAY AHEAD

Reforming the civil services "from womb to tomb" means overhauling the system at every stage — from how officers are recruited and trained to how they are transferred, evaluated, and rehabilitated after retirement.

This is not an administrative nicety but a national imperative. A people-focused, professional, and morally strong bureaucracy is the foundation of good governance and the true measure of *Atmanirbhar* *Bharat*.

K. Mahesh, IAS, is Managing Director, Delhi Khadi & Village Industries Board, Government of NCT of Delhi, and Honorary President, Delhi Administrative Officers' Academic Forum. Views are personal.

Louder than claims, quieter than truth: India's greenwashing-greenhushing dilemma

OPINION

PANKAJ CHHUTTANI



"When companies shout eco, but whisper real change"

In India's rapidly evolving green economy, sustainability is no longer a fringe narrative — it's headline news. But beneath the buzz, companies are increasingly walking a tightrope between greenwashing and greenhushing. The former involves loud but misleading environmental claims; the latter is a cautious silence about real but under-communicated sustainability efforts. Both distort the public conversation, and India's legal and regulatory framework is now scrambling to keep up.

PAINTING IT GREEN: THE HYPE THAT HIDES THE HARM

Greenwashing is the practice of making exaggerated or false environmental claims — think "eco-friendly" packaging or "carbon neutral" pledges — without credible backing. To tackle this, the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) formally issued the *Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Greenwashing or Misleading Environmental Claims, 2024*. These guidelines prohibit vague buzzwords like "sustainable," "green," or "eco-friendly" if they are not transparently substantiated. They also mandate third-party verification for claims such as "compostable" or "climate positive" and require advertisers to lay out their data, methodology, and timelines in a consumer-accessible way.

Alongside CCPA regulation, self-regulatory norms have also been strengthened. The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has issued its *Guidelines for Advertisements Making Environmental / Green Claims*. These place rigorous demands on advertisers: absolute claims like "planet friendly" must be backed

by robust scientific data or accredited certification; comparative claims — such as "greener than before" — must clearly state what is being compared and why.

ASCI's guidelines also address the risk of misleading imagery. Green colours, nature-inspired visuals, or logos implying recycling are not allowed to create false impressions unless the environmental claim is genuine and clearly connected. Future or aspirational claims (e.g., "by 2030, we will be zero-waste") are only permitted if backed by a specific, detailed plan — and long-term carbon offset promises must disclose if the offset happens beyond two years.

SILENT SUSTAINABILITY: THE GOOD WORK NO ONE HEARS ABOUT

On the flip side, many Indian firms are undertaking genuine sustainability work — reducing emissions, using renewable energy, practicing circular economy models — but quietly. This silence often stems from fear: companies worry that their efforts might be criticized as token gestures, especially if not fully verified. For smaller and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs), the cost of third-party certification, comprehensive life-cycle assessments, or rigorous ESG reporting can be prohibitively high.

THE RULEBOOK GOES GREEN: INDIA'S



LEGAL PUSH FOR HONEST CLAIMS

India's corporate regulation further complicates the landscape. For large listed companies, SEBI's Business Responsibility & Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) regime mandates ESG disclosure in a standardized format, including "Core" metrics and value-chain reporting. Assurance of BRSR Core metrics (covering areas like greenhouse gas emissions, waste intensity, procurement practices) is now mandatory for a growing number of companies.

Under the Companies Act, 2013, directors also face statutory duties to the environment. Section 134 requires Board Reports to disclose information on energy conservation, technology absorption, and risk management. Section 135 mandates CSR spending (at least 2% of average net profits for eligible companies) on projects including environmental protection (as listed in Schedule VII), and CSR policy must be disclosed on company websites.

Since 2022, eligible companies must file their CSR

report in prescribed form with the Registrar of Companies, providing details about CSR committee structure, expenditure, projects, and unspent funds. Failure to comply can attract significant penalties.

GREEN REALITY CHECK: STEPS TO STAY CREDIBLE AND COMPLIANT

1. Validate before claiming: Conduct life-cycle assessments, greenhouse gas inventories, or impact studies.
2. Third-party verification:

Use accredited agencies (e.g., BIS, UN-accredited certifiers) to certify compostability, carbon neutrality, or other green claims.

3. Align reporting: Ensure consistency across BRSR (if applicable), Board's Report (Companies Act), and marketing claims.
4. Communicate responsibly: Avoid vague buzzwords. Use ASCI's checklist for absolute and comparative claims, disclose plans for future goals, and explain offsets clearly.

5. Disclose CSR transparently: File and publicly share prescribed CSR form, detail committee structure, impact, and unspent funds.
6. Engage with stakeholders: Use QR codes or dedicated web pages to share methodology, data, and progress. Let consumers, investors, and NGOs scrutinize your claims — and learn from them.

CONCLUSION

India's struggle with greenwashing and greenhushing captures a deeper paradox of its sustainability journey. The noise around eco-claims can drown out the truth, while genuine action may hide behind silence. Legal reforms — from the CCPA's greenwashing guidelines to SEBI's BRSR rules and the Companies Act's CSR regime — offer guardrails. But the real change will come when businesses choose verification over vanity, and transparency over timidity. For India to achieve its climate ambitions, companies must not just speak green — they must act green, report green, and remain honest about both. That balance, not bluster, holds the key to a more sustainable future.

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