

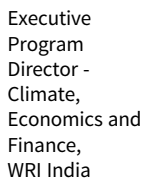
The UN matters, as a symbol of possibility



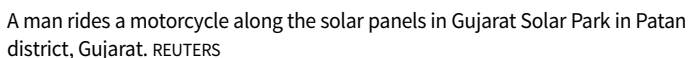
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Immunity of international organisations is no free pass

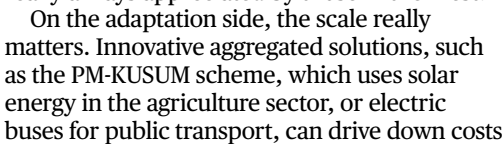
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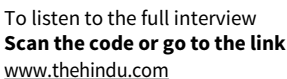
And third, this big number of \$1.3 trillion (an



The scientific reality is that even official commitments by countries to cut carbon emissions are unlikely to reduce global emissions enough to keep them below the Paris Agreement target of a 2°C rise by 2100. This is partly because of the high costs



Second, we can look at ways of prioritising certain projects. Sometime ago, India had come up a list of projects where it would be willing to participate in the international carbon market. It said, for example, we don't want to sell credits based on just solar; we would like to consider solar plus storage (by using batteries). So why not have a wish list of priority projects like that for adaptation as well, which could, of course, be modified by each State in the country? And with that, indicate certain types of models where finance can be 'blended' (partly funded by private and public sector)?



*When even good news
is not forthcoming*

A home for nurses

Lady Goschen has issued the following appeal: A Nurses' Association was started in Madras during the year 1920 and as Patroness, I am most anxious to provide a Home, with quarters where Nurses may reside, and also to have a club to provide them with recreation when not on duty. There are now 160 members, living all over the city without any place of meeting in which they can get the relaxation, which I am sure you will deem as necessary, in view of their arduous duties.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Estimated amount needed to rebuild Gaza health system

7 In \$ billion. The World Health Organization said on Thursday it expected that at least \$7 billion would be needed just to rebuild the broken health system in Gaza. “There are critical shortages of medicines, equipment and health workers,” WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters. AFP

Cost of procurement proposals approved by the Defence Ministry

79,000 In ₹ crore. The proposals were cleared at a meeting of the Defence Acquisition Council chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. It is the second major decision on procurement following Operation Sindoor. PTI

Nigerians rescued by police in a human trafficking crackdown

57 Police in Ghana rescued 57 Nigerians trafficked to the West African country and arrested five people suspected of operating a human trafficking ring. Police raided a building where the victims were forced to engage in online romance scams, the Criminal Investigations Department said. AP

Number of people arrested in Kolkata for bursting fireworks

153 Of the total arrests made on Wednesday, 146 were for disorderly conduct, while seven persons were picked up for bursting prohibited firecrackers, an officer said. During the drive, officers also seized 16.95 kg of prohibited fireworks and 14.4 litres of illicit liquor. PTI

Number of farmers registered for paddy procurement in U.P.

1.37 lakh. Farmer registration for paddy sales began on September 1, and by October 23, 1,37,166 farmers registered, and since October 1, over 35,630 metric tonnes have been purchased across these divisions, an official statement said. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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How do monsoons affect Tamil Nadu?

How are heavy rains affecting cities, farmland, and infrastructure? What are the health and environmental risks of prolonged heavy rainfall? What role is the Mullaperiyar Dam playing in rising flood risk? Can Tamil Nadu manage simultaneous inflows from Kerala and local monsoon rains?

EXPLAINER

Vasudevan Mukunth

The story so far:

The northeast monsoon has kicked in early this year, at least four days sooner for the second year running, over Tamil Nadu. Last year, this phase of the monsoon ended with the State recording 33% more rain than the long-period average, and forecasters expect this year to go the same way.

Historically, policymakers and State authorities have consistently interpreted excess rain as a positive. Climate change is complicating this calculus because while rainfall volumes increase, they are often concentrated in short and localised bursts, delivering over-large quantities of water in places that often can’t absorb them in full. As a result, it might be time to reconsider the idea that “excess is good”.

Why is excess rainfall a concern?

In urban areas, surfaces paved with concrete and asphalt keep them from absorbing heavy rainfall, leading to rapid runoff that overwhelms drainage systems, leading to flash floods, low-lying areas being inundated, property damage, and disrupted transportation.

As seen during Cyclone Michaung and Tamil Nadu in 2023, urban power authorities are also prone to cutting power supply in such circumstances, citing loose cables. The sheer volume of water can also lead to sewage overflows, where untreated wastewater is discharged into streets and waterbodies, unleashing significant health and environmental hazards.

The agricultural sector’s vulnerability to excessive rainfall is well-known: waterlogged soil suffocates plant roots, washes away seeds and young crops, sheds the nutrient-rich topsoil over time, and ultimately loses its long-term fertility.



Raging flow: Surplus water being released from the Mullaperiyar Dam. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Too much moisture can also ease the spread of fungal diseases and pests that devastate crops and undercut yield, leading to significant financial losses for farmers. Intense bursts can also wash fertilizers, pesticides, and other agricultural debris into waterbodies, including reservoirs, degrading water quality. Finally, stagnant water becomes a breeding ground for mosquitoes, increasing the risk of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever and zoonotic diseases like leptospirosis, Japanese encephalitis, and scrub typhus.

What are the wider impacts?

Prolonged periods of rainfall also raise the water table, the level below which the ground is saturated with water. And a persistently high water table can compromise the stability of building foundations, roads, and other infrastructure; it can also exert pressure on basement walls, leading to cracks, leaks, and the growth of mold. Saturated soil also loses its load-bearing capacity and causes foundations to shift or settle, potentially leading to significant structural damage over time.

The cumulative impact of these issues translates to significant economic and social costs. Damage to buildings, public infrastructure, and agricultural land warrants substantial investments in repair and rebuilding solutions. Disruptions to businesses and transport networks hamper economic activity. Flooding and landslips can also displace communities, injure people, and even kill them if they are particularly vulnerable. The psychological toll on affected populations, including stress and anxiety, is another significant and often overlooked consequence.

Why is Tamil Nadu particularly vulnerable?

Tamil Nadu, in particular, needs to consider the Kerala factor as well. The two States receive rain from two different monsoon patterns: Kerala’s primary rainy season is the southwest monsoon from June to September, whereas Tamil Nadu receives most of its rain during the northeast monsoon from October to December. An important problem arises when these monsoon periods overlap or when both States experience intense

rainfall simultaneously. This is currently the case with the early onset of the northeast monsoon.

At the heart of the issue is the Mullaperiyar Dam, which, while it is located in Kerala’s Idukki district, is operated by the Tamil Nadu government to divert water to irrigate farmlands. There is, as a result, a ‘direct’ link between the rainfall in Kerala’s catchment areas and the water levels in Tamil Nadu’s river systems.

When the catchment areas of the Mullaperiyar Dam receive heavy rainfall, the reservoir fills up rapidly. To ensure the dam’s safety and to manage the rising water levels, Tamil Nadu’s authorities are compelled to open the dam’s shutters. The released water flows in two directions and risks creating a double whammy. One portion flows down the Periyar river within Kerala, potentially flooding the low-lying areas of Idukki district and creating an inter-State issue while the primary flow is diverted to Tamil Nadu’s Vaigai Dam. And this influx may arrive precisely when Tamil Nadu’s own rivers and reservoirs are already swollen from the ongoing northeast monsoon.

What is happening on the ground now?

This simultaneous influx thus turns Kerala’s “excess” water from a potential resource into an immediate flood risk for Tamil Nadu. Instead of just managing the rainwater falling within its own borders, Tamil Nadu must also handle a massive, concentrated inflow from its neighbour. The State is currently keeping all 13 shutters of the Mullaperiyar Dam open, releasing thousands of cusecs of water to make room for the incessant influx. As a result, both farmland and residential areas in Theni are already submerged even as the district is being battered by its own monsoon rains.

For these reasons, it may be time for Tamil Nadu and other States like it, including Kerala, to reconsider the “excess is good” notion vis-à-vis rainfall.

THE GIST

▼ The northeast monsoon has arrived at least four days earlier for the second consecutive year, bringing heavy rainfall that is expected to exceed the long-period average.

▼ Excess rain is overwhelming urban areas, waterlogging farmland, and straining infrastructure, while the Mullaperiyar Dam inflow adds a “double whammy” to Tamil Nadu rivers and reservoirs.

▼ Waterlogged soil, overflowing rivers, and stagnant water create crop damage, health hazards, and threats to buildings, roads, and public safety, emphasising the need to rethink the ‘excess is good’ notion.

Is Punjab’s stubble burning problem really declining?

Are fewer fires hiding larger burnt areas? How do satellite limitations affect the accuracy of fire detection?

Vikas Vasudeva

The story so far:

Paddy harvesting has picked up momentum in Punjab, the country’s key grain-producing State, and so have stubble burning incidents. This year, stubble burning has been relatively fewer because the State faced one of its worst floods in decades, leaving vast stretches of farmland inundated. Close to the autumn season every year, paddy stubble burning is considered to be one of the contributing factors of air pollution across the country’s northern region, including New Delhi. The paddy crop, harvested using combine harvester machines, leaves behind a stubble of stalks. To destroy this stubble, the farmers consider setting the crop residue on fire the most ‘effective’ method, as they need to prepare the fields for sowing the next winter crop. The short time window between paddy harvesting and wheat sowing – roughly three weeks – is a key reason why farmers resort to stubble burning.

Are stubble burning incidents declining?

The governments, including the State and the Centre, have claimed that incidents of paddy stubble burning have significantly declined over the years, thanks to a range of measures, including stricter enforcement, access to subsidised machinery for crop residue management. Punjab government data, based on satellite aggregation, shows that in 2024, there were 10,909 cases of farm fires in the State, compared to 36,663 in 2023, marking a 70% decline.

While Punjab has reported a significant drop in farm fire incidents since 2021, the total area scorched by these fires has largely expanded. Satellite data from the Punjab Remote Sensing Centre and the Punjab Pollution Control Board show that in 2024, the area under ‘residue burning for paddy’, which gives a relatively stronger sense of farm fire menace, stood at around 19.17 lakh hectares, compared to around 19.14 lakh hectares in 2023.

In 2022, it was nearly 15.40 lakh hectares, while in 2021, it was

approximately 15.60 lakh hectares.

Why do the data differ?

Although the number of stubble fire counts has significantly declined, experts believe that the total burnt area could have increased for several reasons. Fire count measurements often miss smaller, low-intensity, or partial burns.

Farm fire incidents in Punjab, and in other States as well, are recorded by satellites using thermal imaging based on temperature differences. A recent study conducted by the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Mohali, published in *Science of the Total Environment*, highlights several limitations of satellites in collecting fire emissions. The study notes that satellites like MODIS and VIIRS pass over the region only a few times a day, and since most fires are lit in the late afternoon or evening, many events are missed. Haze or clouds can obstruct satellite detection of fires, leading to underreporting. Moreover, north-west States have small landholdings, and farmers often burn

crop residue in fragmented, short-duration fires, which are harder for satellites to detect compared to large-scale forest fires. The study also points out that farmers are increasingly aware of satellite monitoring and may cover up burnt areas before the next satellite overpass.

Senior scientist and Professor Ravindra Khaiwal at Environmental Health, Department of Community Medicine and School of Public Health in Chandigarh-based Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, points out that burnt-area estimation has become more precise with advancements in remote sensing. He says, “While thermal sensors may miss fires due to heat signal blockage, optical sensors like Sentinel-2 can identify post-fire discolouration and burn scars, providing a more accurate assessment of the total burnt area.”

What is the way forward?

Asserting that for accurate assessment of incidents, fire data should be generated by integrating thermal and optical satellite observations and validated through systematic ground verification through ground surveys, Dr. Khaiwal says: “increased burnt area does not necessarily imply higher stubble burning ‘emissions’. Many of these burns are low-intensity, partial, or short-duration fires, releasing relatively less particulate matter and gaseous emissions compared to widespread fires. Hence, emissions must be assessed using fire intensity, fuel load, and duration, not burnt area alone.”

THE GIST

▼ While farm fire incidents in Punjab have declined significantly in recent years, the total area scorched by stubble burning remains high, highlighting a discrepancy between fire counts and actual burnt land.

▼ Satellite limitations, short sowing windows, and farm practices — like burning residual stubble from combine harvesters — contribute to under-detection and continued environmental impact despite government measures.

EXPLAINER



Air hazard: A municipal worker sweeps Delhi streets as authorities announce potential cloud seeding to tackle rising pollution. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Why cloud seeding is not a solution to Delhi’s air pollution crisis

Delhi’s air remains polluted due to emissions from vehicles, construction, power plants, waste burning and agricultural fires; cloud seeding cannot create rain without clouds, provides only temporary relief at best, and diverts attention from evidence-based solutions that address the root causes

Shahzad Gani
Krishna AchutaRao

The story so far:
Delhi’s plan for cloud seeding is being sold as a bold solution to air pollution. In reality, it is a textbook case of science misapplied and ethics ignored.

Why is Delhi’s air fouler in winter?
Across North India, air quality is poor throughout the year, but it reaches extreme levels in the post-monsoon and winter months. After the monsoon withdraws, dry continental air masses from the northwest dominate the region. The winds weaken and the air becomes stagnant, keeping pollutants from being dispersed efficiently.
Cooler air holds less absolute water vapour and the stable, high-pressure systems that prevail during these months suppress the upward motion needed for clouds to form. The sky may look hazy, but that haze comes from trapped pollution, not from rain-bearing clouds. Rain cannot be conjured out of thin air. It needs water vapour.
For most of the highly polluted cooler months, the atmosphere is too dry and stable to support significant rainfall. Rain does occur occasionally during these months, but these brief spells are typically caused by western disturbances,

weather systems that originate in the Mediterranean region and can bring moisture from that region or interact with local systems drawing up moisture from our neighbouring seas. These events can be predicted a few days in advance, but are not a reliable or consistent source of rainfall for North India.

Does cloud seeding help?
Cloud seeding depends on natural clouds; it can’t create them. And even when clouds exist, the evidence that seeding reliably increases rainfall remains weak and contested. And when it rains and reduces pollution, the respite is temporary at best. The overwhelming evidence is that pollution levels go back up within a day or two.
The air pollution problem is not just confined to Delhi. Across North India, air quality is dangerously poor year-round. Yet public debate often treats smog as a seasonal nuisance, normalising pollution and noticing it only when it becomes unbearable. Cloud seeding is just another gimmick in a series of similar unscientific ideas, like smog towers, suggesting that flashy interventions can substitute for serious, structural solutions.

What are the risks of cloud seeding?
The temptation to engineer a shortcut to fix air pollution is understandable – but it raises deeper ethical questions about how

science is used, what risks are justified, and who bears responsibility when things go wrong.
Even if the science behind cloud seeding were robust, which it is not, it still involves dispersing compounds such as silver iodide or sodium chloride into clouds to trigger condensation. Silver iodide works for cloud seeding because its crystal structure is very similar to that of ice, so it ‘tricks’ water droplets in the clouds into freezing onto it. These newly formed ice crystals then grow heavy and fall as rain or snow. While generally considered low risk in small doses, repeated use can accumulate in soils and water bodies. The long-term effects on agriculture, ecosystems, and human health remain poorly understood.
Beyond these environmental risks, there is the question of accountability. If cloud seeding coincides with intense rainfall that leads to flooding, causing damage to infrastructure, crops, and livelihoods, or loss of life, who will be responsible? Even if the rainfall and flooding are unrelated to seeding, public perception could still link the two, undermining trust in both science and governance.

What can ‘fix’ the air?
Science has long identified the real cause of North India’s hazardous air: the lack of effective control over emissions from

vehicles, industry, construction, power plants, waste burning, and seasonal agricultural fires, compounded by unfavourable meteorology during the cooler months. The solutions are equally clear but remain largely unimplemented: cleaner transport, sustainable energy, better waste management, and urban planning that actually reduces pollution sources. Yet, instead of reinforcing these priorities, parts of the scientific ecosystem – researchers, advisors, and institutions – are lending credibility to a costly spectacle that will do little to address the sources of the crisis. By attaching their authority to the illusion of quick fixes, they risk wasting scarce public resources, undermining trust, and diverting attention from systemic changes that could make a real difference.
Snake-oil solutions will not clear the air in Delhi or the rest of North India. Instead, courage is required on the ground: to reduce the sources of pollution and pursue equitable, evidence-based action. Anything less is not just misplaced science – it is an ethical failure, a diversion from the patient, unglamorous work needed to ensure clean air throughout the year.
(Shahzad Gani is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for Atmospheric Sciences, IIT Delhi. Krishna AchutaRao is a Professor at the Centre for Atmospheric Sciences, IIT Delhi)

THE DAILY QUIZ

Let us celebrate the chemistry constant that connects atoms to the cosmos with a Mole Day quiz

Prathmesh Kher

- QUESTION 1**
What is the exact date and time during which Mole Day is celebrated?
- QUESTION 2**
What is the numerical value of the constant commemorated on Mole Day, and what does it represent?
- QUESTION 3**
Who is the scientist after whom the constant is named, and what did he propose in 1811?
- QUESTION 4**
What is a mole in chemistry?
- QUESTION 5**
Which Italian scientist revived Avogadro’s hypothesis at the Karlsruhe Congress in 1860?



Visual Question:
What is the connection between this lunar crater and Mole Day? LUNAR RECONNAISSANCE ORBITER CAMERA

Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz: 1. In 1939, Gerhard Domagk was not allowed by his government to accept the prize, but he later received a medal and diploma. Which government prevented him? **Ans: Nazi government**
2. There were years in which the prize was not awarded, such as during World Wars I and II. How many years went by without the Prize for Medicine being announced? **Ans: 9 years**
3. Of the 14 women who received the Nobel Prize in Medicine, only one did not have to share it with others. Name this independent woman Nobel Laureate. **Ans: Barbara McClintock**
4. Who was the youngest ever awardee of the Nobel Prize for medicine, and what was he awarded for? **Ans: Frederick G. Banting, for the discovery of insulin**
5. This Nobel laureate entered France’s Institut Pasteur quite by accident as a volunteer. She went on to complete her PhD and was among three people who were awarded the Prize in 2008, for discoveries that helped the world understand viruses wreaking havoc. Who is she? **Ans: Françoise Barré-Sinoussi, for the discovery of the human immunodeficiency virus**
Visual: What makes this pair of Nobel Medicine laureates unique? **Ans: Gerty and Carl Cori — the first married couple to share the Nobel for Medicine, in 1947. Gerty was also the first woman to be awarded a Nobel Prize in Medicine.**
Early Birds: Parimal Das | Sukdev Shet | Siddhartha Viswanathan | Sunil Madhavan | Rownak Mondal | Jyoti



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

Upendran

“What did your boss say when you asked him for a raise?”
“Nothing! He merely knit his eyebrows and...”
“...I have heard of people knitting sweaters, not eyebrows!”
“When you knit your eyebrows you bring them close together. This happens when you frown. Most people frown when they are angry or worried.”
“I know that!”
“During the French Open final, Sujatha sat in front of the T.V. with knitted brows.”
“My mother walks around with knitted brows the day before I receive my report card. Can I say that?”
“You certainly can. And once your mother sees the report card, her furrowed forehead tells you...”
“Her what forehead?”
“F...u...r...t...o...w. The ‘u’ in the first syllable is pronounced like the ‘u’ in ‘cut’, ‘but’ and ‘hut’. And the ‘ow’ in the second syllable rhymes with ‘cow’, ‘now’ and ‘no’. The stress is on the first syllable ‘fur’.”
“I see. But what does ‘furrow’ mean?”
“When you say somebody’s forehead was furrowed, it means there were deep lines on it. Our forehead furrows when we frown.”
“When my father read the headlines this morning, his forehead furrowed. How’s that?”
“Sounds good. When I saw my cousin’s furrowed forehead, I knew that he was in terrible pain.”
“Years of worry has furrowed my brother’s face. Does that sound O.K.?”
“It certainly does. What you are saying is that your brother’s face is full of wrinkles.”
“So, did your boss hesitate before turning down your request?”
“He said ‘No’ without batting an eyelid.”
“Batting an eyelid?”
“When you do something without ‘batting an eyelid’, it means you do it without showing any surprise or concern.”
“In other words you don’t show any feelings?”
“That’s right. It’s an informal expression. For example, Gopa heard the horrible news without batting an eyelid.”
“In most of our movies, the villain kills innocent people without batting an eyelid.”
“When my cousin was told that he had won the lottery, he didn’t bat an eyelid. He continued to eat his masala dosa.”
“Why wasn’t your cousin excited?”
“He doesn’t care about money. He thumbs his nose at those who do.”
“First, it was somebody knitting his eyebrows, then furrowing...”
“...when you ‘thumb your nose’ at someone or something, you show your contempt for that person or thing. For example, your favourite hero thumbs his nose at journalists.”
“My classmate is an atheist. He thumbs his nose at those who believe in god.”
“As a teenager, I used to thumb my nose at classical music. Now I don’t.”
“My friend Karthick still continues to thumb his nose at carnatic music. Tell me, how do you actually thumb your nose at someone?”
“You place your thumb on the tip of your nose and then point the remaining four fingers at the person/persons you’re making fun of.”
“You mean like this? Hey, I wasn’t thumbing my nose at you. So please don’t knit your brows.”
Published in The Hindu on July 7, 1998

Word of the day

Sycophant:
a person who tries to please someone to gain a personal advantage

Synonyms: adulator, fawner

Usage: *He is a sycophant who always praises the boss.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/sycophantpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /sɪkəfənt/

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

High alert

IMF wary about growth prospects amidst tariff chaos

The IMF’s World Economic Outlook for October 2025 is noteworthy because, unlike in the April edition, the IMF is now better placed to assess the global effects of the tariff and labour market upheavals unleashed by the Trump administration. The prognosis is not dire, yet the WEO’s upward revision of growth projections vis-a-vis April is marked by caution. The global growth projection for 2025 has been revised upward to 3.2 per cent, from its 2.8 per cent forecast in April.

The revision in outlook comes in the wake of the US negotiating trade deals and providing several countries with tariff concessions. With most countries not resorting to retaliatory tariffs, the impact on global growth is expected to be less alarming than previously envisaged. Yet, while emerging economies have responded smartly, the IMF has noted that it is too soon to conclude that the worst is over in the trade war. US importers have been absorbing much of the higher tariffs, and this has not been passed on to consumers yet. Later, demand could be hit by both price and labour market shocks, slowing the world’s largest economy. Like labour market shocks, the impact of countries resorting to fiscal stimulus remains an unknown. The report flags structural concerns in China and the AI financial bubble as risk factors.

Despite India being slapped with one of the highest tariffs by the US, the IMF has revised India’s real GDP growth forecast upwards for FY26. This could be due to several factors. One, the strong performance of the economy in the June quarter, led by the services sector, could have influenced the IMF. Two, it indicates the high probability of the additional tariffs being revised lower in the near future as an outcome of the negotiations between the US and India. Three, the buoyancy provided to demand from the GST reforms is expected to mitigate the impact of the additional tariffs. Growth for FY26 is now being projected at 6.6 per cent. This is 0.4 percentage points higher than the April projections and 0.2 percentage points higher than the July projections. However, compared with the October 2024 projection, this is 0.2 percentage points lower. With disruptions caused by the tariffs leading to realignments in global trade, India will have to enter into bilateral agreements to offset the impact.

Meanwhile China’s property market continues to contract, and credit demand is weak. Real GDP growth in China is projected to decelerate from 4.8 per cent in 2025 to 4.2 per cent in 2026 and 3.4 per cent in 2027. The large capacities in electric mobility and solar panels created through subsidies have not raised productivity. It is a lesson for other countries to frame their industrial policies more carefully. AI is seen as a double-edged weapon — one with scope to raise productivity and yet drive up AI stocks to lofty levels, with private wealth and consumption being hit in the event of a correction. In sum, central banks and governments will have to be on high alert.

POCKET



Among the bright law students of the National Law University Delhi, the authors often encounter a question: Is the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) an Adjudicating Authority (AA), a tribunal, or a court under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC)? The doubt arises because all orders under the IBC are issued in the name of the NCLT, and over time, it has assumed multiple roles under the Code.

The AA has, on several occasions, struck down regulations. For instance, it held the regulation providing for an invitation for expressions of interest as *ultra vires* the IBC. The Delhi High Court, however, set it aside, clarifying that the jurisdiction to examine the validity or legality of subordinate legislation does not vest in the AA. In another case, the AA ruled that the regulation governing withdrawal of insolvency proceedings was not binding upon it. The Supreme Court overturned this, affirming that the regulation was indeed binding on the AA.

There are instances where the AA has initiated contempt proceedings, quashed disciplinary proceedings initiated by the regulator, and even imposed penalties on insolvency professionals. Such instances of overreach prompted the Supreme Court to repeatedly caution that the AA must not innovate beyond the statute, intrude into the commercial wisdom of stakeholders, invoke equitable considerations, or discard statutory provisions. These judicial reminders reaffirm that the NCLT is neither a court nor a tribunal but an AA with a defined role. Parliament’s decision to designate the NCLT as the AA signifies a deliberate de-courtifying move. It has positioned the AA as a statutory controller of the insolvency process, whose jurisdiction is bounded, procedural, and purpose-driven. Wherever Parliament intended trial-like adjudication, it has explicitly created tribunals, vested with the powers to assess evidence and decide on questions of fact and law.

The AA under the IBC is not an innovation in isolation. It draws upon established statutory frameworks in Indian law, where ‘authorities’ rather than ‘tribunals’ discharge process-centric functions. The AAs under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act and the Foreign Exchange Management Act are illustrative: they administer statutory processes and ensure compliance within a defined remit.

This legislative instinct becomes clearer in comparative perspective. In other jurisdictions, insolvency and restructuring are judicially anchored:



Role definition

Discriminator	AA	Tribunal	Court
Adjudication of Lis	Incidental/ limited	Yes	Yes
Equitable consideration	No	Sometimes (statutorily limited)	Yes
Process oversight	Yes	Limited	No
Review of law	No	No	Yes

U.S. Chapter 11 sits in Article I Bankruptcy Courts, wielding broad equitable powers; the U.K. houses corporate rescue in the High Court (Business & Property Courts); and Singapore’s High Court exercises deep, equity-laden jurisdiction. In sharp contrast, the IBC deliberately casts the AA not as a judge of substance but as a supervisor of process.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST The IBC’s architecture also reflects lessons from the Sick Industrial Companies (Special Provisions) Act, 1985, and its implementing body. Though established with the noble intent of reviving sick industries, the agency often strayed into unsanctioned equity jurisdiction, deferring liquidation indefinitely and trapping enterprises in prolonged limbo. The IBC was conceived as a corrective to that legacy, ensuring that no adjudicatory forum could derail or dilute the time-bound process of resolution.

Accordingly, while the NCLT is manned by judges, its powers under the

While the NCLT is manned by judges, its powers under the IBC are intentionally narrow, limited to verifying statutory compliance and maintaining procedural discipline

IBC are intentionally narrow, limited to verifying statutory compliance and maintaining procedural discipline.

Courts and tribunals assume jurisdiction only where a dispute, or *lis*, exists; in its absence, they cannot act. The AA, by contrast, does not need a *lis* to function. It adjudicates disputes, but only incidentally to its statutory role of supervising the insolvency process. Courts review both law and fact and may examine the constitutionality of legislation, while tribunals, though narrower in scope, review administrative actions within their statutory bounds. The AA stands on a distinct footing: it cannot test the validity of the Code, or of the rules and regulations. Its mandate is limited to ensuring that the statutory process is observed, yet its procedural reach is wider, as the IBC requires its involvement at multiple stages, even where no *lis* exists.

For instance, an application to initiate a corporate insolvency resolution process. Once a financial creditor demonstrates a default, the AA has a mandatory, non-discretionary duty to admit the application. That said, disputes may arise within proceedings, and the AA can examine them, but the scope of adjudicatory powers is circumscribed. In an application by an operational creditor, the AA may determine whether a pre-existing dispute relating to the default exists. It must reject the application if the dispute is genuine; however, it cannot evaluate the merits or strength of the dispute,

which remains the domain of civil courts. The IBC establishes a constellation of institutions, each with distinct responsibilities. The Code vests the CoC with the authority to approve resolution plans; accordingly, the AA cannot revisit their merits or substitute its judgment for the CoC’s commercial wisdom. Its role is limited to ensuring statutory compliance, and even where a legal infirmity is identified, it may reject the plan but cannot modify or replace the CoC’s decision. Similarly, regulatory oversight rests with the regulator, whose regulations have the full force of law and bind both the AA and CoC, irrespective of their own views on their desirability or wisdom.

The AA is not the apex authority but operates within an ecosystem of coequal institutions exercising binding authority. This design preserves the IBC’s core philosophy: insolvency resolution is fundamentally a commercial and regulatory process, with the AA serving as its procedural gatekeeper rather than its ultimate decision-maker.

The designation of the NCLT as the AA under the IBC is thus neither incidental nor terminological. It reflects a carefully calibrated institutional design, responsive both to the substantive demands of insolvency law and to the normative lessons of India’s regulatory past. The AA embodies a hybrid identity: judicial in form, given its composition and limited adjudicatory powers, yet administrative and supervisory in function, given its expansive statutory functions, many of which do not involve any *lis*.

For purposes of the IBC, it must step out of the institutional wrap of the NCLT and issue orders in its own name. Better still, there could be a dedicated AA exclusively for the IBC.

Pandey is Assistant Professor and Sahoo is former Distinguished Professor at the National Law University Delhi

Making PhDs count, so that they serve social goals

There are inexpensive ways of linking research to government departments. This will sharpen policymaking and governance

PVS Suryakumar

India’s universities produce an ocean of research every year, over five million postgraduate dissertations, including nearly two lakh Ph.Ds. Yet much of this work remains unseen, unread, and unused. Despite annual investments of nearly ₹50,000 crore in higher education, the connection between academic research and India’s real-world development challenges remains weak. We need a ‘vikas manthan’ — a deliberate churning of ideas for development, seeks to bridge that divide by turning dissertations into engines of policy innovation.

Public universities are generously funded, but their output rarely influences governance or public policy. Since tax-payers support both the university system and the machinery of government, connecting these two streams should be a national priority.

The UGC-NET June 2025 results illustrate the potential and the gap. About 1.2 lakh candidates qualified, but barely 5,000 earned the Junior Research Fellowship to pursue doctoral work. The rest, a vast pool of “scholars in waiting”, must fend for funding. What if ministries and universities co-designed thesis topics so that each dissertation became a micro-policy lab? It would not replace fundamental research, but complement it with applied imagination

anchored in real-world relevance. Students would gain purpose; governments would gain a steady pipeline of evidence-based insights.

Globally, this bridge between academia and governance exists. In the UK, the Policy Fellowships programme places university researchers in ministries for 6-18 months to co-develop evidence for new regulations. This is a high-value engagement costing £180,000-£280,000 per fellow and 40-45 fellows annually. The European Union’s Horizon Europe programme operates with a €95.5 billion budget (2021-27), requiring that all publicly funded projects address defined societal missions. Both show how public investment in research can directly serve public priorities.

India’s model must be different — high-volume, low-cost, and scalable. The ICSSR’s IMPRESS scheme (2018-21) funded 1,500 research projects with grants of ₹20-25 lakh each, demonstrating feasibility. But Vikas Manthan proposes going further: micro-leveraged linkages between students and government departments, at a fraction of that cost. If a student addresses a department’s concern, modest funding from that department should follow. It could be like a bursary of ₹40,000-₹60,000 per thesis and an annual award for best dissertations. We will then have thousands of young researchers solving live problems from



climate adaptation to skilling and rural livelihoods.

FOUR PILLARS

Such a framework would rest on four pillars:

Thematic linkages: Each State Department and Central Ministry could announce annual research themes, such as climate resilience, water governance, digital inclusion, rural infrastructure, inviting universities to assign a share of master’s and doctoral work.

Joint supervision and co-funding: Every thesis could have two mentors — a faculty guide and a departmental adviser, combining academic rigour with policy relevance.

Open access and recognition: A national repository should archive all

accepted dissertations, tagged by policy domain. Faculty and universities whose work demonstrably shapes public programmes deserve recognition and performance-linked grants.

Autonomy safeguards: Research must remain critical and independent. An oversight mechanism should protect scholars’ right to publish findings, even when they challenge official positions.

For students, this approach offers mentorship and civic purpose. For governments, it yields grassroots intelligence and youth engagement without creating new bureaucracies. The downside — an occasional weak dissertation — is trivial compared to the potential societal return on modest investment.

India’s demographic dividend is not merely about numbers; it is about ideas waiting to be harnessed. Vikas Manthan renews the ancient dharma of knowledge — *Vidyā Dānam* — transforming inquiry into national *tapasya*. By turning dissertations into actionable insights, we can ensure that the intellectual energy of our universities directly fuels national progress toward Viksit Bharat. The onus is now on government — to fund universities not only to teach and publish, but to help govern wisely and intelligently.

The writer is a former Deputy Managing Director of Nabard. Views are personal

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

Gold risks

This refers to your Editorial “Not a bright idea” (October 23). The recent surge in gold and silver prices amid stagnant stock markets has sparked calls to include precious metals in the National Pension System (NPS).

While these metals provide portfolio diversification and act as hedges during crises, unlimited allocation poses risks. India’s households already hold large bullion reserves, and increased NPS demand could

worsen the trade deficit through imports. Thus, any inclusion in NPS should be cautious, limited to a small percentage, preserving long-term portfolio growth.

K Chidanand Kumar
Bengaluru

Apropos ‘Not a bright idea’ (October 23), the proposal to include gold and silver in the National Pension System may seem appealing for their traditional role as hedges against inflation and currency depreciation,

but it overlooks their deeper risks. Precious metals may shine in times of turmoil, yet they generate no income and depend entirely on market sentiment.

India already holds substantial household wealth in bullion, and encouraging further demand could widen the trade deficit and divert savings from productive investments. Moreover, with developed nations now facing financial crises, any large-scale selling of gold and silver to stabilise their

economies could trigger a sharp fall in prices, eroding the value of pensioners’ savings. The NPS should prioritise steady, growth-oriented assets that compound over time rather than chase the comfort of glitter.

A Myilsami
Coimbatore

For green shipping

With reference to ‘India can lead the global shift to green shipping’, green shipping can reduce the carbon

footprint and also protect marine life. Though it requires significant upfront investment but in the long run it has huge benefits.

The good practices of Singapore, Australia and Norway can serve as templates and green hydrogen plants like Kandla port must be created to provide clean and green energy options to all the ships and adhere to International Maritime Organization laid down rules.

Bai Govind
Noida

Tackling fisheries subsidies

The WTO agreement unlikely to run the distance

M Krishnan
Badri Narayanan Gopalakrishnan

The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (also known as ‘Fish 1’) marks a significant, yet incomplete, multilateral effort to curb harmful government support for the fishing industry. Adopted in June 2022 and officially entering into force on September 15, 2025, this initial pact legally binds ratifying members to prohibit subsidies that fund illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, fishing of overfished stocks, and unregulated high seas fishing.

However, the ‘Fish 1’ agreement is merely a partial solution. It carries a crucial sunset clause: the entire pact will automatically terminate if a more comprehensive agreement — known as ‘Fish 2’ — is not adopted within four years of its entry into force. This impending deadline creates a high-stakes scenario for the WTO and marine sustainability worldwide.

The core problem is how government subsidies — estimated at tens of billions of dollars annually —incentivise overcapacity and overfishing. By lowering costs for fuel, vessel construction, and gear, subsidies enable industrial fleets to fish longer and further out, severely threatening marine biodiversity and the livelihoods of coastal communities.

The initial ‘Fish 1’ agreement, while important, only addresses the most egregious practices. WTO members are mandated to continue negotiations on the ‘Fish 2’ rules, which aim to discipline the broader categories of subsidies that directly contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. These ‘Fish 2’ talks remain deeply complex and have been deadlocked for years.

THE STICKING POINT

The primary deterrent to agreement stems from deep-seated economic disparities and the complexity of Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) for developing and least-developed countries. Developing nations argue that the proposed rules fail to adequately distinguish between the large-scale, industrial subsidies provided by developed nations — which have historically been the main drivers of overfishing — and the minimal subsidies provided to their millions of poor, small-scale, artisanal fishers. India insists that any disciplines must be equitable, arguing that the rules should



SMALL FISHERS. Must be protected

target the main “polluters” and not penalise subsistence fishers. It has advocated for a lengthy 25-year exemption/transition period for developing nations to protect the livelihoods of their small-scale fishers and ensure food security. India also seeks to discipline payments made by industrial fishing nations for access to other countries’ Exclusive Economic Zones.

Countries like the US and the EU argue that the final agreement must cover all countries that provide large, capacity-enhancing subsidies, or the environmental goals will not be met. A major challenge is defining what criteria — such as fleet size or area of operation — should exempt small-scale fishers, given that some developing nations have very large domestic fleets.

The ‘Fish 1’ agreement, which came into force in September 2025, has started the clock on a four-year deadline for the adoption of ‘Fish 2’. Given that members have not even been able to agree on the final text yet, the deadline presents a grave threat that the entire initial agreement could lapse. The difficulties are compounded by political realities. Governments face strong domestic lobbying from fishing fleets reliant on subsidies. Furthermore, many developing and Least Developed Countries lack the administrative capacity, monitoring tools, and scientific data to manage their fish stocks effectively and prove to the WTO that their subsidies are non-harmful.

The current deadlock over S&DT suggests that the WTO is facing a significant challenge in preventing the ‘Fish 1’ agreement from being terminated and delivering a comprehensive set of rules to secure global marine sustainability. The WTO agreement on fisheries subsidies is unlikely to run the distance.

Krishnan is Former Principal Scientist & Head, ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Education, Mumbai, and Gopalakrishnan is a Visiting Senior Fellow at CSEP, New Delhi

Tailor ECL to our banking reality

LOCAL FLAVOUR. RBI’s push to adopt Expected Credit Loss must be tempered with calibration to local lending patterns and legal frameworks



R MOHAN

The RBI’s draft on Expected Credit Loss (ECL) framework — which seeks to replace the incurred-loss approach with an expected-loss methodology — marks an important step in modernising bank accounting for stressed assets. The principle behind ECL — recognising future expected losses early rather than waiting for objective evidence of impairment — aims at greater transparency and forward-looking capital planning.

Yet, the proposed approach may stretch too far if applied to our banking industry without careful calibration. Two broad concerns underlie this view. First, the structure of our banks’ balance sheets and loan books differs materially from those of many Western jurisdictions where ECL models have become mainstream. Second, India’s legal and institutional regime for dealing with distressed credit — from debt recovery to insolvency resolution — creates different loss-realisation dynamics. These two differences warrant a more tailored approach than the one currently followed in many Western countries.

LENDING LANDSCAPE

Unlike many Western banking systems where the ECL originated, our banks’ credit portfolios are structurally different. As per the existing RBI directions, a minimum of 40 per cent of the lending by domestic banks must be deployed to the ‘priority sector’ comprising of agriculture, retail, micro,

small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) with segment-wise sub-targets prescribed for them. These segments are more granular, often less correlated and have historically demonstrated relatively stable default and recovery pattern.

By contrast, ECL frameworks were designed in countries where banks’ balance sheets are dominated by large corporate exposures, market-linked instruments and other exotic products. In such a scenario, there is every possibility that applying the same probability-based complex framework to our banks could lead to over-estimation of expected losses in sectors already covered by robust prudential norms.

The second major differentiator lies in our legal and institutional architecture. Statutes like the SARFAESI Act, DRT framework and Insolvency Bankruptcy Code provide structured mechanisms to deal with stressed assets. These frameworks, despite some practical hiccups, influence both the timing and quantum of recoveries, shaping the Loss Given Default (LGD) assumptions in ways that are naturally domestic-friendly *vis-a-vis* Western benchmarks.

OPERATIONAL BURDEN ON BANKS
The operational demands of implementing ECL at scale are far from

The RBI’s commitment to global best practices is no doubt commendable. But, at the same time, the regulator will do well to focus on adapting the core principles rather than merely replicating them

trivial. Banks would need to rejig their Core Banking Systems, gather extensive data, incorporate macroeconomic projections, and subject the resulting models to rigorous external validation. For mid-sized and small banks such a transition could prove costly and time consuming, potentially diverting focus from uninterrupted credit delivery and monitoring — their core business functions.

FOR A CALIBRATED APPROACH

None of this is to argue against proactive provisioning *per se*. The benefits of early stress recognition and greater market discipline are well-established. But global Accounting Standards — whether IFRS 9 or others — allow for judgment, staging and calibration to reflect local realities.

The following measured, bank-specific approach to ECL could deliver the intended resilience without imposing unnecessary strain:

Portfolio-wise calibration: Apply ECL to segments where it genuinely enhances risk sensitivity — such as complex corporate or highly market sensitive exposures — while allowing the present simpler provisioning norms to continue for granular retail portfolios.

Phased implementation: Introduce the framework in carefully chosen pilot banks and loan segments first. This will allow both the banks and the regulator to gain practical experience and to identify the challenges before the full-scale rollout.

Regulatory impact assessment: Using the pilot results, the RBI can publish a clear estimate of the impact on provisioning and capital, helping banks plan well in advance and allowing for any course corrections before broader implementation.

Capacity building: Implementing

ECL requires sophisticated models and reliable historical data. Many small banks may not have this capacity. A structured programme to support banks with modelling tools, training and shared data resources will help ensure consistent and credible implementation across the sectors.

The RBI’s draft paper on ECL is, by it’s very nature, highly technical, with extensive references to statistical parameters such as probability of default, loss given default and exposure at default. While these are undeniably central to the framework, the formal guidelines to be issued in this regard later could be made more comprehensible through illustrative examples and simplified working models.

This would help ensure that even mid-level officials grasp the practical implications, rather than treating the exercise as a compliance formality.

The RBI’s commitment to global best practices is no doubt commendable. But, at the same time, the regulator will do well to focus on adapting the core principles rather than merely replicating them.

It is a well-known fact that our country’s banking system operates in a distinctive legal, economic and operational environment. It is therefore feared that a simple adoption of ECL norms could impose an unnecessary burden of higher provisioning, especially on small banks, impeding their normal credit growth.

Respecting domestic realities, a carefully sequenced, well-calibrated approach will smoothly align our banks with global standards. Let the goal be smarter risk recognition, not avoidable over-provisioning.

The writer is former Non-Executive Chairman, City Union Bank Ltd. Views are personal

On businessline.in

Why gold and stocks are rising together

The coexistence of a soaring stock market and record-high gold prices is a direct result of investors employing a conscious strategy, of buying stocks for growth and gold for insurance, point out **P Saravanan** and **A Paul Williams**

https://tinyurl.com/Zs4zsrft

Will the AI bubble trigger a financial crisis?

With leverage built up in so many parts of the system and asset-price movements so correlated, the financial system could explode when the first spark lands on it, says **Hilary J Allen**

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https://tinyurl.com/4ee6wd6d

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 24, 2005

Cos plan to raise ₹5,000 cr from primary market

Though the secondary market has cooled-off a bit from the 8,800 level, the trend in the primary market does not look so. Filings with SEBI since September this year show that around 20 companies plan to raise funds to the tune of at least ₹5,000 crore in the next 3-4 months.

Draft gas pipeline policy put on hold

The Petroleum Ministry has put on hold the draft pipeline policy till the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) Bill gets the Cabinet approval. Companies laying pipelines for transportation of gas would have to wait a little longer for a policy that would provide a proper linkage between gas sources and market centres, along with inter-connectivity for regions, consumers and producers.

Composite insurance may soon be a reality

The IRDA is looking to allow insurance companies to issue composite policies for micro-insurance. In India micro-insurance is defined by the size of the policy (₹5,000-50,000 sum assured) and covers health, household, fire and motor insurance that are non-commercial or of lower asset value.

China deepens push for tech self-reliance

Bloomberg News

China vowed to seek technological self-reliance and grow the domestic market in the next five years, as it looks to both insulate the economy from foreign pressures and build a sustainable engine for growth.

The country will aim to “greatly increase” the capacity for self-reliance and strength in science and technology, according to a communique released Thursday by state broadcaster CCTV after a four-day conclave of the Communist Party’s Central Committee.

Initial details of the approved proposal place a heavy emphasis on high-quality development and the role of technology in developing “new-quality productive forces” which refer to advance fields such as semiconductors and artificial

intelligence. The statement also stressed needs to building a modern industrial system and strengthen innovation in core technologies.

This reflects Beijing’s drive to boost productivity and achieve self-sufficiency in the face of an ageing population and Western restrictions on high-tech exports. At the same time, the document reiterated a pledge to bolster domestic consumption and expand investment, vowing to “firmly eliminate clogs hindering the building of a unified national market.”

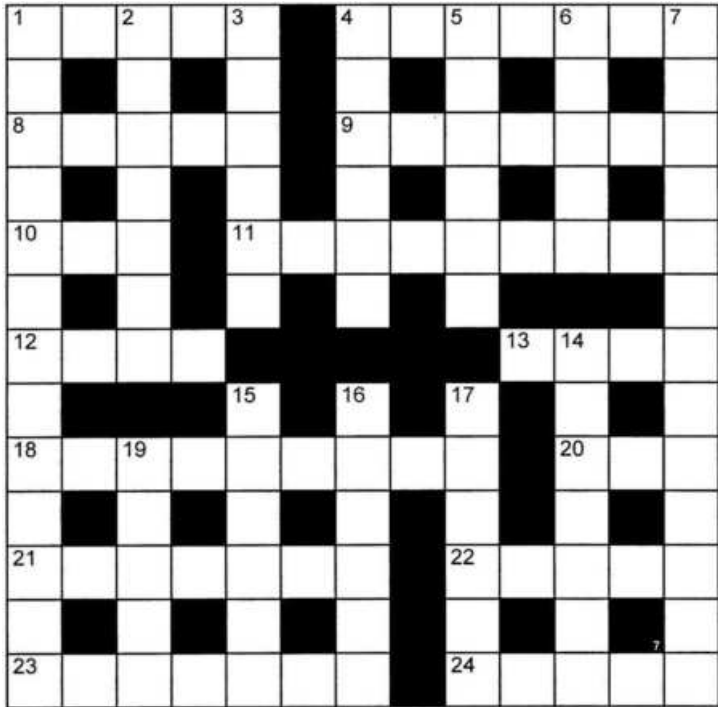
DOMESTIC DEMAND

Economists have long seen increasing demand at home as critical for rebalancing the economy away from its reliance on exports and debt-fuelled investment, although any new policy measures are

expected to be announced later.

The FTSE China A50 Futures held steady after the readout was released. The yuan and the yield on China’s 10-year government bonds were little changed. This intensified focus on technology builds on a strategy set in 2020, when the last five-year plan was announced after US President Donald Trump’s first term. That drive has only become more urgent, as Washington now seeks what it calls “a strategic decoupling” from China, targeting a broader range of sectors from semiconductors to pharmaceuticals and sanctioning a growing number of Chinese firms. China is under pressure to change its growth model as the manufacturing powerhouse faces rising tariffs from the US and pushback from other trading partners over a deluge of Chinese exports.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2809



EASY

ACROSS

- Holy book (5)
- Incentive, momentum (7)
- Dull green (5)
- Rugger playing position (3-4)
- Prevent one speaking (3)
- Boisterous, bullying woman (9)
- Chore (4)
- Neat (4)
- Send one to Coventry (9)
- Feline (3)
- A speech (7)
- Sound amused (5)
- Dog-houses (7)
- Detests (5)

DOWN

- Taken to task (7,2,4)
- Spanning constructions (7)
- Puts forth effort (6)
- Tell one, advise (6)
- Time for wages (3-3)
- Jewelled headdress (5)
- Boxed lights (6,7)
- Tell a tale (7)
- Spite (6)
- Devils, demons (6)
- State of physical wellbeing (6)
- Prepare for match (5)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- OT, NT protection the French get (5)
- One politician takes suet mixture as a stimulus (7)
- Oil-producer has nothing to exist for (5)
- Take only fifty per cent by air on the rugger field (3-4)
- Funny line will stop one saying anything (3)
- For time at school a giant loses one such scold (9)
- End of engagement: pop the question – but it’s a job (4)
- Multihull craft looks neat to begin with (4)
- Cast Rosie adrift and don’t allow her in society (9)
- It was once punishingly applied by jazz enthusiast (3)
- Speech has nothing to apportion out (7)
- It’s amusing, the hug a novice driver gets wrong (5)
- Were such old street gutters full of dogs? (7)
- What Les heads off one very much dislikes (5)

DOWN

- Called to account, as are characters by author (7,2,4)
- They span Robert as a poet (7)
- Being re-set, about ten, applies pressure (6)
- Tell one where to find schoolchild (6)
- Labour now reimbursed say with a double-rhyme (3-3)
- Change of air among the Terriers with which pope is crowned (5)
- Yet FA’s wrong to get such games to produce flames (6,7)
- Narrow election result may demand one to tell the tale (7)
- Spite shown by looking-glass girl after 1st May (6)
- Demons appear if ends are changed (6)
- Are you well or ill? Toast will tell (6)
- Prepare for match to be dragged along behind (5)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2808

ACROSS 1. Brandishing 8. Repel 9. Rainbow 10. Ailment 11. Impel 12. Exacts 14. Please 18. Sober 19. Stopped 21. Measure 23. Thorn 24. Sweetbreads

DOWN 1. Barrage 2. Ampulla 3. Delve 4. Struts 5. Initial 6. Gab 7. Dowel 13. Torture 15. Amphora 16. Endings 17. Assent 18. Simon 20. Otter 22. Ass



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Securing digital content space

Draft regulations on AI-generated content are a first step toward eliminating deepfakes & synthetic media

The just published draft regulations on Artificial Intelligence (AI) generated content mark India’s first statutory attempt to address deepfakes and synthetic media. The proposed amendments to the IT Rules will require AI tools and social media platforms to label manipulated content — a response to concerns over poll interference, misinformation, and impersonation. The framework gets several things right. It provides legal clarity by defining “synthetically generated information” for the first time in Indian law, bringing AI-generated material under existing takedown obligations, and laying out specific labelling requirements. The proposed rules state that images and videos must carry labels covering at least 10% of display area, and audio must be identified during the first 10% of playback. The enforcement rests on two entities — companies creating such products, and platforms that host user-generated content. Platforms must ask users to declare whether uploaded content is synthetically generated, deploy automated detection systems for verification, and take down content when flagged through grievance redressal mechanisms.

These are important first steps. Deepfakes of public figures have been used for scams — the Union finance minister was recently targeted — and to create sexually suggestive videos of celebrities that stop short of explicit content, evading harsher moderation. Tools such as Sora and Dall-E evolve almost quarterly, producing increasingly convincing but entirely fictional images and video clips. Celebrities have sought court injunctions against the unauthorised use of their “likeness”, recognising how easily their face, voice, or mannerisms can be replicated without consent.

But the first step will need more strident follow through. The draft’s definition — “all synthetically generated information” — appears to cover AI-generated text, such as ChatGPT output. Yet, it offers no guidance on how such content should be labelled or fingerprinted. The draft is also silent on how the Centre plans to address media created by underground tools where checks against nudity or gore are easily breached. These may require standalone legislation — an approach many regions are increasingly adopting.

The consultation period offers an opportunity to address these gaps. More avenues to curb harm — including text-based misinformation — must be considered, while steering clear of heavy-handed approaches that stifle AI adoption and innovation. India is right to act proactively, but a domain as complicated as AI demands precision. The harder work of building public digital literacy and institutions of media trust — the only true antidote to a slide into alternative realities where facts are increasingly contested — lies ahead. The draft is a foundation, the rest of the legislative structure must now be planned.

Mahagathbandhan’s EBC manoeuvre

In the 2020 Bihar assembly polls, the Opposition’s Grand Alliance fell agonisingly short of the majority mark in the assembly — the difference between the winning and the losing coalitions was just around 12,000 votes — largely because smaller groups and weaker castes carried memories of Yadav dominance during the RJD heydays and counter-mobilised in the dying days of the campaign. This exposed a weakness for the otherwise robust regional party — despite its solid voter base of Yadavs, Muslims and some dominant groups, it struggles to attract wider support across castes. The only election it won in the last two decades was when Nitish Kumar helped stitch together a broad coalition of weaker caste groups in 2015.

This time, the Mahagathbandhan is aggressively wooing the extremely backward classes (EBCs), a loose amalgamation of smaller groups that are the backbone of Kumar’s support. A major step in this direction was taken on Thursday when the alliance named Vikassheel Insan Party chief Mukesh Sahani as its deputy CM candidate for the polls next month. The announcement — alongside naming Tejashwi Yadav as the CM face — is an attempt to stanch infighting and dispel the image of the Opposition as a divided house more focussed on squabbling than fighting elections. But it is also an outreach to the EBCs (Sahani comes from the boatmen community) to hive off a chunk of Kumar’s support. The EBCs aren’t a monolith, though, and Sahani is somewhat of an untested entity; his party won only four assembly seats (and no parliamentary seats) in the past. Is an electoral manoeuvre enough to drive apart the JD(U) and a base it has nurtured for decades? November 14 will hold the answer.

A Bihar puzzle the BJP waits to solve

In the end, the 2025 Bihar election will be about the party’s ability to shield its allies even as it outgrows them

Bihar has managed to buck two political trends of the past decade. The first is of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) having a chief minister (CM) in every state of the Hindi-speaking belt — Bihar stands out as the lone exception. The BJP may be the primary pole of national politics at present, but Bihar remains the one Hindi heartland state it has never won on its own. The second is that while most states in the region have delivered verdicts in which one party is always very close to the majority mark, government formation in Bihar has required the support of multiple parties. In fact, the last time any party netted a three-digit total in the 243-member assembly was in 2010, when the Janata Dal (United) or JD(U) won 115 seats, although it needed its alliance partner, the BJP, to form the government.

In Bihar, the BJP is a rising party (with 42.6% votes in the 110 seats it contested in 2020), yet it is also the state where the party is most constrained. It has organisational muscle, popular national leadership, a committed social base, and deep pockets, but it cannot fathom, just

yet, charting an independent political journey in the state. Even when it won more seats than the JD(U) in 2020, it had to back Nitish Kumar for the CM’s office.

Will it change this time around? The seat sharing arrangements of the two rival camps — the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) of the BJP, JD(U), and other allies, and the Mahagathbandhan, comprising the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the Congress, and the Left parties, and a few others — indicates that it is unlikely that any party can cross the majority mark on its own. The BJP and JD(U) are only contesting 101 seats each, which complicates the possibility of a BJP CM even if the NDA crosses the majority mark.

In some ways, Bihar exposes the BJP’s deepest anxiety as it aspires to become the national hegemon. It seeks to escape Mandal politics, but Bihar’s social make up doesn’t offer it any easy route to do so. The BJP needs Kumar in Bihar to carry the alliance to victory. But, at the same time, it cannot fully rely on him. A recent comment by Union home minister Amit Shah suggesting that the CM would be selected after the polls by NDA legislators may have led to some murmurs, but Shah quickly underlined that the NDA was going into the elections under Kumar’s leadership. After all, Kumar’s party is a crucial ally at the Centre. Any move to undermine him at this stage may have ripple effects. So,

the BJP must cautiously balance between its Bihar ambition and emerging politics.

This election season is not the time to solve this political Rubik’s cube. The party had tried this in the past and it did not yield desired results. It attempted to cut Kumar down to size in the run-up to the 2020 assembly election. The calculation was that Kumar’s decline would benefit the BJP. It precipitated a carefully crafted rebellion through Chirag Paswan whose party, the Lok Janshakti Party, mostly contested against JD(U) candidates and ensured their defeat.

It is true that Kumar’s popular appeal had lost much of its sheen by then. He was no longer hailed as “*susashan*” (good governance) *babu*”, and had squandered much political goodwill by switching alliances multiple times. Now, there are worries about his health and, consequently, fitness to govern.

However, the BJP’s strategy of filling the political vacuum created by a weakened JD(U) hasn’t borne fruit. The BJP does not have state level leaders who can carry the campaign narrative on their own to the party’s advantage.

Kumar continues to remain the glue that binds the NDA’s coalition of extremes in Bihar. He still commands significant loyalty among the backward castes, which together form a very large chunk of the electorate. And, women voters connect with him



Rahul Verma

In GST rate restructuring, bargain for tourism sector

Tourism in India has always been more than leisure — it is a dialogue between civilisations, a carrier of heritage, and a catalyst for inclusive growth. Yet for decades, despite our extraordinary diversity — from Ladakh’s monasteries to Kanyakumari’s shores — its full potential remained constrained by fragmented taxation and high costs. The recent reforms in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) have begun to change that story.

For years, India’s tourism and hospitality industry bore the weight of a complicated tax regime. A patchwork of levies — service tax, value-added tax (VAT), luxury tax — created confusion and inflated travel costs. The introduction of GST brought simplification, but the recent rationalisation of rates has been decisive in making Indian tourism more competitive.

The reduction of GST on hotel rooms priced under ₹7,500 from 12% to 5% has been particularly transformative. Travel has become more affordable for middle-class families and budget travellers — the backbone of domestic tourism. Higher occupancy rates, longer stays, and greater local spending are direct outcomes. For small entrepreneurs and homestay owners, lower compliance costs have improved viability and encouraged formalisation. It is a quiet but profound shift towards scale and sustainability.

Tourism thrives on connectivity. The reduction of GST on passenger transport — especially on buses carrying more than 10 passengers — from 28% to 18% is a crucial enabler. It has made intercity and group travel more accessible for pilgrims, students, and families. Heritage circuits, eco-tourism parks, and rural destinations are seeing fresh momentum. This reform goes beyond cheaper tickets — it is about linking regions, democratising travel, and giving small tour operators a chance to expand. For India, where tourism is a powerful vehicle for regional equity, affordable mobility is economic empowerment.

India’s appeal lies not only in its monuments but also in its living traditions. Reducing GST on art and handicraft products from 12% to 5% has boosted a sector that sustains millions of artisans. Every handmade artifact sold in a local market carries the imprint of India’s cultural continuity.



Travel has become more affordable for middle-class families and budget travellers. SHUTTERSTOCK

Lowering taxes here is not merely an economic gesture — it is a cultural investment. Tourists today seek authenticity, and when they take home a handwoven Kanchipuram saree or a carved sandalwood figurine, they carry a piece of India’s creative economy. This reform empowers artisans, strengthens craft clusters, and makes heritage part of the growth narrative.

Perhaps the most enduring benefit of GST is clarity. Small hotels, homestays, and travel agencies now operate within a single, predictable framework instead of a maze of state-specific taxes. This improves compliance, boosts investor confidence, and creates space for innovation.

Formalisation also unlocks access to credit, insurance, and digital payments for thousands of small operators who once functioned informally. For a sector that employs more women and youth than most others, this integration is transformative. Tourism becomes not just a leisure industry but a driver of entrepreneurship and livelihoods.

Globally, price competitiveness determines where tourists travel. For years, India lagged behind Southeast Asian destinations such as Thailand and Vietnam, which offered low hotel taxes and simplified levies. The recent GST recalibration has narrowed that gap. India now offers world-class experience — from Ayurveda retreats to heritage hotels — at globally competitive rates.

The results are visible. Domestic tourism has surged to record highs, and foreign tourist arrivals are steadily recovering. Niche segments such as cruise, wellness, film, and spiritual tourism are expanding rapidly. The government’s integrated push through programmes like Swadesh Darshan 2.0, PRASHAD, and Vibrant Villages is further aligning infrastructure, policy, and community participation.

Tourism currently contributes about 5% to India’s GDP and supports over 80 million livelihoods. With sustained reforms and infrastructure investments, this could easily double by 2030. Every percentage point increase in tourism activity generates exponential benefits — jobs, local enterprise, women’s empowerment, and cross-cultural understanding.

The GST reforms are not isolated fiscal measures; they represent a philosophy that taxation should enable, not inhibit. They make travel more affordable, enterprise more viable, and destinations more attractive. They bring the economy’s pulse closer to the people.

As India looks ahead to its centenary of Independence, the vision of Viksit Bharat will be incomplete without a globally competitive and culturally confident tourism ecosystem. The world is rediscovering India — not just as a destination, but as an experience that harmonises tradition with modernity, economics with empathy.

With a rationalised GST, improved connectivity, empowered artisans, and a confident industry, India’s tourism story is set to become one of the defining success narratives of this decade — a story where reform meets renaissance, and every journey becomes part of the making of New India.

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat is Union minister of culture and tourism. The views expressed are personal



Bihar’s women voters connect with Nitish Kumar due to his welfare measures over the last two decades. HT ARCHIVE

due to his welfare measures over the last two decades, including the recent transfer of the ₹10,000 grant to lakhs of women in the state.

This social base of Kumar is precisely what frustrates the BJP’s ambitions. The BJP may lose a chunk of voters who see Kumar as the safer option if it alienates him. In the end, the 2025 Bihar election will be about the BJP’s ability to shield its allies even as it outgrows them. It would mean the BJP must internalise that even a resounding performance will not guarantee it the CM’s post right after the election. If it presses too hard, the cracks within the NDA coalition may become wide enough for the Opposition parties to cannibalise its voter base at the margins and ruin its chances to win office.

However, if it avoids this question, the long game may not necessarily turn out in its favour. The party risks being seen as a limited force among its more enthusiastic cadres, especially when Prashant Kishor’s Jan Suraj Party is eyeing the same set of

voters that the BJP had hoped to attract with JD(U)’s decline.

Whatever the verdict, Bihar’s results will mark the beginning of a broader test for the BJP in the states. West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and Assam will vote next year. The party has not been in office in any of these states ever, save Assam.

After the Lok Sabha jolt in June 2024, the BJP was able to retain office in Haryana and Maharashtra, defeated the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi, but failed to unseat the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in Jharkhand. In that sense, the assembly election in Bihar is another reminder that the states pose an entirely different set of political challenges even as a party consolidates its might nationally.

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{ BART DE WEVER } PRIME MINISTER, BELGIUM



If we want to give them to Ukraine, we have to do it all together. If not, Russian retaliation might only hit Belgium. That’s not very reasonable

On EU plans to use frozen Russian assets to aid Ukraine



How constitutional populism undermines scientific temper

Article 51A(h) of the Constitution declares it a fundamental duty of every citizen to cultivate scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform. Yet this mandate has often struggled to translate into institutional practice. The recent litigation over misleading medical advertisements illustrates the difficulty. In April 2024, the Supreme Court rebuked Patanjali Ayurved for disparaging modern medicine in its campaigns. Even as the case was in court, the AYUSH ministry issued a notification deleting Rule 170 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945. Introduced to curb exaggerated claims, the rule required advertisements for Ayurvedic, Siddha, or Unani medicines to be pre-approved by State licensing authorities. For example, a company could not market a herbal pill as a cure for diabetes without evidence. With its deletion, prior scrutiny was no longer required. By August 2025, the Court closed the proceedings, holding that AYUSH advertisements did not need pre-approval.

The shift from reprimanding misleading advertisements to regulatory relaxation underscores a broader problem. The Constitution imposes a duty to cultivate scientific temper, but the institutions required to make it real remain weak and fragmented.

The continued reliance on alternative medicine shows how wide the gulf is between constitutional aspiration and lived reality. A survey found near-universal awareness of AYUSH, with use reported by about 46% of rural and 53% of urban households in the past year. Citizens’ choices are influenced heavily by systemic constraints in health care access and affordability. Public hospitals are overstretched, private care often drives families into debt, and health expenditure borne by households is still among the highest globally. Formal treatment often brings catastrophic costs, while alternative practices spread expenses and feel less overwhelming.

The explanation is not only economic but also grounded in perceptions of trust. Patients waiting in crowded government hospitals or rushing through brief consultations in private facilities often feel unseen. By contrast, traditional practitioners may offer familiarity, time, and reassurance of personalised attention. Political validation reinforces these impressions. The consolidation of institutional support through the ministry of AYUSH and the WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine places the imprimatur of the State on practices whose evidentiary basis remains contested. Citizens are thus confronted with contradictory signals. The Constitution calls upon them to cultivate scientific temper, even as the State endorses unverified systems.



Shantanu Pachauri

This contradiction between constitutional exhortation and State endorsement exemplifies what scholars term symbolic constitutionalism, the tendency of constitutions to proclaim ambitious commitments without building the institutions required for their fulfilment. Article 51A(h) imposes a duty, but without regulation and investment it operates as aspiration rather than practice. The repeal of safeguards like Rule 170 demonstrates this dynamic. Instead of creating conditions in which citizens can deliberate on the basis of evidence and reason, the State retreats from its responsibility and transfers the burden of discernment to individuals. What was intended as a collective constitutional project is reframed as a matter of private virtue, and constitutional duties risk collapsing into little more than moral exhortations.

The regulatory framework reflects this abdication of responsibility. With the deletion of Rule 170, consumer protection law has become the primary check on misleading medical advertisements. The Central Consumer Protection Authority’s 2022 guidelines prohibit false health claims, but enforcement has been sporadic and retrospective. Proposals to amend the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954, which was enacted to curb advertisements making false claims of cures for chronic diseases, have remained stalled for years. A framework this fragmented cannot bear the constitutional weight placed upon it. Article 51A(h) cannot be realised in an environment where misleading claims flourish unchecked and evidence-based care remains inaccessible.

The difficulty is compounded by what may be described as constitutional populism. Populist politics often reframes constitutional commitments in cultural rather than rational terms. Scientific temper is recast as affirmation of tradition. Alternative practices are cast as authentically Indian, while modern medicine is caricatured as foreign or elitist. In this setting, the duty to question is transformed into a duty to affirm, and the constitutional message is reshaped not by deliberation but by populist legitimacy.

The deeper paradox is that duties and rights expand in the text even as they collapse in practice. Citizens are urged to cultivate scientific temper, but the State undermines that duty through weak regulation and contradictory policy signals. Unless governments accept responsibility for the regulatory and infrastructural foundations of scientific temper, it will remain a duty in the text but not a practice in reality.

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Foreign interest

Growth prospects are attracting investment in the financial sector

The financial sector in India is witnessing a significant interest from foreign entities. Last week, for instance, United Arab Emirates-based Emirates NBD PJSC entered into an agreement with RBL Bank, a mid-sized private bank, to invest ₹26,850 crore, or about \$3 billion, to acquire a controlling stake of up to 60 per cent. Subject to regulatory approval, this will be the biggest foreign investment in an Indian private bank. The investment, according to the management, will help RBL Bank move into the league of large Indian banks. It will help the bank strengthen its presence in corporate banking — Emirates NBD already has a significant presence in Indian wholesale banking. Once the transaction is completed as planned, RBL Bank will become a listed subsidiary of a foreign bank. Although the issues related to the mandatory open offer and public float will be worth watching, the investment agreement marks a significant milestone in Indian banking history.

Earlier this year, Japanese lender Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC) acquired 24.2 per cent in Yes Bank. It was recently reported that SMBC did not, for the moment, intend to increase its shareholding in the bank beyond 24.99 per cent. Going beyond 25 per cent will trigger the mandatory open-offer requirement. Nevertheless, SMBC's stake in Yes Bank is another example of foreign interest in the Indian banking pie. Five years ago, DBS Bank India took over Lakshmi Vilas Bank at a time when the latter's finances were deteriorating. Investment by foreign entities has been facilitated by the evolving regulatory openness in India. Foreign entities can own up to 74 per cent, subject to regulatory approval. However, voting rights remain capped at 26 per cent, which is aimed at providing adequate diversity and independence at board level. It is also interesting that over the years, while several American and European banks exited India's retail banking, partly due to their parent entities' international restructuring, non-American and non-European institutions are entering the Indian financial landscape. More recently, in the non-banking financial company (NBFC) space, Abu Dhabi's International Holding Co PJSC took 42 per cent in Sammaan Capital for about \$1 billion.

The reason for the interest in the Indian financial sector is, of course, potential growth. India is not only the fastest-growing large economy in the world, it also has significant untapped potential for formal finance. As has been highlighted in this space before, there is a significant market for credit waiting to be tapped, which currently depends on informal sources of finance. Research has shown that the increased adoption of digital means can be transformative and has helped push credit in the underserved sections without resulting in higher defaults. Fintech and financial firms can leverage the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) data to extend credit in the underserved segments. Necessary regulatory clarity can open up a huge market in this space. On the corporate side, opportunities will continue to emerge as the economy grows. The Reserve Bank of India, for instance, has proposed allowing banks to finance acquisitions by Indian corporations. On a broader level, increased availability of foreign investment in private banks and NBFCs will intensify competition in the financial sector, resulting in better services at a lower cost for both corporate and individual customers.

(Disclosure: Entities controlled by the Kotak family have a significant holding in Business Standard Pvt Ltd)

Labelling like it is

The ORS label ban should force a rethink on other products

The advisory from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), banning manufacturers of food and beverages from using the term “oral rehydration solution” (ORS), has not come a day too soon. The result of an eight-year-old campaign by paediatricians and health experts, the advisory proscribes the use of the term in product names, labels, and trademarks, or even as a prefix or a suffix. Only medicinal ORS products that conform to standards of the World Health Organization (WHO) and are sold in pharmacies will be permitted to use the term. This advisory will not only go a long way in ensuring the effective use of ORS in cases of dehydration, it should prompt consumer agencies to rethink quasi-medicinal claims on food and cosmetics.

ORS is basically a medically formulated mixture of water, glucose, and essential electrolytes such as sodium and potassium. It replenishes fluids and salts lost from the body due to dehydration. Over the past two decades, it has been seen that a slew of commercially marketed consumer products — chiefly attractively packaged “sports” and “energy” drinks — have been endorsed by superstars. Many of these products are presented as “ORS substitutes”. They not only contain heavier doses of sugar — sometimes up to 10 times the WHO recommendation of 13.5 gm per litre — several contain caffeine, which does nothing to alleviate dehydration. These additives can be harmful, especially for children. Additionally, in a country with worryingly high levels of diabetes, even among young people, high-sugar commercial products that claim dubious ORS benefits can be especially harmful. Though an FSSAI advisory does not carry penal charges, failing to comply with its instructions can lead to penalties under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. So the success of these new labelling laws will depend on monitoring and widespread education campaigns so that consumers are made sufficiently aware of the differences between pharmaceutically produced ORS products and those that are commercially available. This is all the more vital because of the money power of the commercial foods industry. It is no surprise that manufacturers have moved the Delhi High Court, complaining of the abruptness of the ban. The court has permitted temporary relief by allowing current stocks, worth ₹180 crore, to be sold.

This advisory should encourage other standard-setting and enforcement agencies to raise the stringency in labelling laws. Breakfast cereals and snack bars, packaged fruit juices and smoothies, or vitamin-enhanced waters are frequently high in sugar, refined carbs, trans-fats, and salt content and have minimal nutritional value. Many of these products misleadingly suggest that they are healthy alternatives to fresh food and fruit. One way of addressing this issue is for the FSSAI to stipulate labelling changes to remove the implication that these products are health foods. Similarly, the craze for “natural” and “herbal” cosmetic products has produced a rash of such products claiming medicinal benefits to address specific cosmetic defects — such as fairness creams, face-washes, anti-acne preparations, or special shampoos. Manufacturers typically use such terms as “cosmeceutical” and “ayurvedic” to suggest that their products have therapeutic benefits. Though the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation and the Bureau of Indian Standards prohibit cosmetic products from making claims of a medical nature, such products abound in the marketplace. Forcing them to alter their labelling to be less misleading would be a signal service to the routinely misled Indian consumer.

Fault lines in India's regulatory state

Regulators must rebuild walls separating lawmaking, enforcement, and adjudication

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



The discourse on the separation of powers in India has traditionally centred on the legislature, executive, and judiciary within the constitutional framework. The sharper challenge today, however, lies beyond this classical trinity, in the proliferating world of regulatory bodies. Regulators operate as mini-states within their domains, simultaneously exercising quasi-legislative, executive, and quasi-judicial powers.

In practice, this often means that the same individual or division within a regulatory agency may perform multiple roles — lawmaker, investigator, and adjudicator — with blurred procedural boundaries. The Supreme Court, in *Clariant International Ltd & Anr vs Sebi* (2004), observed that the regulator not only frames regulations but also administers them and adjudicates their contraventions. It cautioned that the integration of these powers within the same body “may raise several public law concerns in future.”

There is a growing recognition of the need to separate executive and quasi-judicial functions, ensuring that the individuals tasked with establishing facts are different from those empowered to impose penalties. In *Vishal Tiwari vs Union of India* (2024), the Supreme Court directed the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to maintain a separation between its quasi-judicial and executive arms. A comparable institutional design exists in competition law, where the office of the Director General (Investigation) functions independently of the Competition Commission of India. Many regulators follow the convention that matters emanating from the domain of one whole-time member are adjudicated by another.

Yet, this separation often collapses in practice. Company law mandates the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) to organise its functions into distinct divisions. However, non-segregation of audit quality review from disciplinary functions led the Delhi High Court, in *Deloitte Haskins vs Union of India* (2025), to quash several of its show-cause notices and final orders. While admitting an appeal against this decision, the Supreme Court has restrained NFRA from issuing or enforcing any final orders, pending adjudication.

The United States offers a sharper contrast. Agencies such as the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Federal Trade Commission maintain a much stricter divide between their investigative staff and adjudicatory commissioners. The US Supreme Court recently reinforced this principle in *SEC vs Jarkesy* (2024), holding that the SEC could not employ its in-house administrative law judges to impose civil penalties for fraud, as doing so violated the constitutional right to a jury trial. Adjudication must rest with courts when penalties carry a punitive character.

The fusion of quasi-legislative and quasi-judicial functions is even more problematic, for it conflates the lawmaker and the adjudicator in the same person. It is akin to Parliament enacting a law and then sitting in judgement over its violations, something no constitutional democracy can countenance. NFRA's experience illustrates how regulators may fail to implement the safeguards envisaged by the legislature. It is unrealistic to expect every regulator to design such safeguards for itself. Even if it does, it could readily dilute or modify them to suit its administrative convenience.

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) initially framed regulations providing a vital safeguard: A whole-time member associated with an investigation shall not participate in its adjudication. It later amended this provision, narrowing the term to mean involvement. This seemingly technical change has profound implications. It allows members with supervisory or institutional links to an investigation to adjudicate the very matters they oversaw. In its legislative capacity, the regulator diluted a safeguard against bias; in its judicial capacity, it now applies that diluted rule, making the risk of conflict both real and immediate.

In the constitutional scheme, penalties are prescribed by the legislature and imposed by the judiciary. Until the early 1990s, it was inconceivable that an entity outside the government could levy monetary penalties. In the interest of regulatory governance, however, Sebi was empowered to impose such penalties, but under strict conditions. The statute specified the contraventions and corresponding



M S SAHOO & SUMIT AGRAWAL

penalties. Sebi could impose them only under rules made by the Central government, and the penalties were to be credited to the Consolidated Fund of India. This approach has been replicated across regulatory laws.

Over time, the catalogue of contraventions and sanctions has expanded steadily through subordinate legislation and subsidiary instructions. The Sebi Act, for instance, penalises the violation of any provision of the regulations, effectively empowering the regulator to create new contraventions by rule-making. In some cases, regulations themselves prescribe penalties for non-compliance. The Sebi (Stock Brokers) Regulations, 1992, for example, specify a range of penalties for diverse lapses by brokers. A similar pattern is discernible across other regulatory domains, including insurance, pensions, and telecommunications.

Even circulars have progressively stretched the catalogue. For instance, a 2020 Sebi circular enumerates 28 specific contraventions under the Sebi (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, and prescribes corresponding monetary penalties to be imposed by stock exchanges and credited to their Investor Protection Funds. Issued with the approval of the regulator, a recent stock exchange circular, while rationalising the penalty framework for brokers, introduced 12 new penalty provisions. In effect, the regulator both defines the offence and authorises itself or its delegates to impose penalties, illustrating the danger of the fusion of legislative and judicial functions.

As India's regulatory landscape stretches into new frontiers — fintech, data protection, climate governance — the temptation to give regulators sweeping powers will only intensify. There is nothing inherently wrong with empowering regulators. Modern markets demand strong, responsive institutions. But power must walk hand in hand with restraint. Regulators must lean towards caution in conflict-of-interest matters, guarding not just their independence but even its appearance.

What India needs are institutional design laws that clearly mandate three separate wings within the regulator — for rule-making, execution, and adjudication. Regulators should not have the discretion to outsource adjudication to agencies of their choosing. Where internal separation is not feasible, independent tribunals should step in. And courts must stay alert, calling out any regulator that blurs the line between writing the law and judging its breach.

India's constitutional promise lies not merely in effective governance but in fair governance. When regulators both frame the rules and sit in judgement over their breach, that promise begins to fade. The strength of the Indian regulatory state will be measured not by how much power it wields, but by how fairly it exercises that power. The separation of quasi-legislative and quasi-judicial functions within regulators is not a procedural nicety — it is fundamental to the integrity of governance.

The authors are advocates who previously served in regulatory bodies

The fallacy of chasing sunrise sectors

There is near unanimity that states will play a pivotal role in India's future economic growth. For accelerated growth, it's widely accepted that states will have to push their manufacturing and services sectors by undertaking factor-market reforms — reducing the price of land, ushering in flexible labour laws, among others — and strengthening cities, since agriculture is assumed to be inherently slower-growing.

The performance of fast-growing states like Gujarat and Karnataka, which have grown their real gross domestic product (GDP) in excess of 8 per cent per annum in the last decade, driven by manufacturing and services, further reaffirms this growth paradigm. But this growth template poses a conundrum for the agrarian states: Must they abandon their agricultural strengths and try to create industries and services ecosystems from scratch to grow faster?

This question is even more relevant today, as global trade is more uncertain, making it harder to follow the classic manufacturing-led growth path. Thankfully, multiple growth models exist, at least in the medium term. States like Madhya Pradesh (MP) and the bifurcated state of Andhra Pradesh (AP) have leveraged their agricultural strengths to achieve high growth. Agriculture accounts for 30 per cent of GDP in both states, and grew by 6 per cent and 7.5 per cent, respectively, between 2015 and 2025, with the corresponding GDP growing at 6.2 per cent and 6.7 per cent during the same period. The argument is not that these states do not need any manufacturing and/or services ever, but that their current mainstay, agriculture, can power growth as they gear up to non-agrarian industries over time.

AP's success story is rooted in its transformation into a globally competitive hub for fisheries, particularly the frozen shrimp industry. India became the

world's second-largest shrimp exporter in 2024 with \$4.5 billion in exports, and AP accounted for 78 per cent of shrimp production and 30 per cent of total seafood output. Fisheries in AP have grown 16 per cent annually for a decade. If this growth continues for the next five years, fisheries could comprise nearly a quarter of AP's GDP and add 1.2 per cent to growth.

The rise of the fisheries industry is a blend of opportune timing and strategic execution. The outbreak of Early Mortality Syndrome (EMS) in shrimp farms in Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries created a massive vacuum in the global market in

2009. AP seized this opportunity, aided by the timely adoption of Pacific white shrimp, a more disease-resistant, affordable, and faster-growing species.

The widespread adoption of this new species in AP was aided by robust support mechanisms. The Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) played a crucial role by offering frequent training programmes at minimal or no cost. Complementing this, in 2015, the state government released its Fishery Policy. Under this policy, it provided capital subsidies of up to 50 per cent for setting up shrimp farms and significantly reduced power tariffs, decreasing costs for farmers and fostering an environment for growth.

Though Trump tariffs pose a significant — hopelessly short-term challenge — to the industry, it is a strong testimony to how economic growth is driven by productivity advances led by comparative advantage.

Madhya Pradesh's success is rooted in productivity improvements and diversification. Real agricultural growth was just 3 per cent annually between 1995 and 2005, but accelerated significantly after the late-2000s reforms, as mentioned above. Irrigated area jumped from 24 per cent to 67 per cent, doubling food-

grain yields between 2006 and 2022, compared to a national increase of only 50 per cent, for both Kharif and Rabi crops. As a result, the state now accounts for 21 per cent of the country's wheat production and 42 per cent of soybean production.

Furthermore, to mitigate post-harvest losses, the state tripled its foodgrain storage capacity between 2013 and 2023, while national storage capacity remained largely stagnant. The state's focus on diversification away from water-guzzling crops is also evident, given that 14 per cent and 10 per cent of total crop production come from oilseed and pulses, respectively, a stark contrast to Punjab, where pulses and oilseed together account for less than 1 per cent of total crop output.

MP also diversified into dairy farming, with milk production increasing fourfold between 2002 and 2024, outpacing the national increase of 2.8 times. This was aided by initiatives like the Acharya Vidya-sagar Gau Samvardhan Yojana, which subsidised bank credit for setting up dairy farms and specifically promoted indigenous cow breeds. Since the majority of land has been brought under irrigation, further impetus to agricultural growth needs to come from moving to higher-value crops and pushing harder on livestock farming. Such a move will leverage the state's strengths and will also be more environmentally and fiscally sustainable.

The economic journeys of MP and AP demonstrate that states can achieve significant success by identifying and leveraging their existing strengths. By investing in sector-specific training, providing targeted subsidies, promoting technological adoption, and improving market access and infrastructure, these states have turned agriculture, traditionally perceived as a low-productivity sector, into a powerful catalyst for inclusive and sustained economic growth.

The authors are, respectively, senior fellow and associate fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress. The views are personal

An Adivasi between two worlds



VEENU SANDHU

In India's political and cultural history, Jaipal Singh is, paradoxically, a prominent and obscure figure. He was the first Adivasi to study at Oxford; the first to join the Indian Civil Service (and to resign from it); and the first to captain an Indian hockey team to an Olympic gold in Amsterdam in 1928. A powerful voice of the Adivasis in the Constituent Assembly, he remained a parliamentarian till his death in 1970, and was the most consequential Adivasi leader after Birsu Munda. Known to his people as “Marang Gomke” — the Big Chief — Jaipal Singh

lived a life that traversed continents and contradictions. *Lo Bir Sendra: A Hunter in the Burning Forest*, his memoir, written in 1969 during a sea voyage to England, captures the essence of that journey — at once personal, political, and profoundly reflective.

The title, *Lo Bir Sendra*, invokes an Adivasi ritual hunt, a communal act of renewal amid destruction. It is an apt metaphor for Jaipal Singh's life and mission: To reclaim dignity and identity for India's Adivasis in a rapidly modernising nation.

Singh's life reads like an improbable epic. Born in 1903 to priestly Mundas in Takra village, 11 miles south of Ranchi, he was rechristened “Jaipal Singh” when he entered St Paul's School, Ranchi. Canon W F Cosgrave, the school's British principal, saw in the bright young boy an exceptional spark and took him to England in 1918 after baptising him.

Lo Bir Sendra is an introspective,

sometimes melancholic, collection of notes to oneself rather than a polished autobiography. The manuscript, written in longhand, was never published in Singh's lifetime. It wandered for decades through many hands — from his eldest son, Amar, to Italian scholar Enrico Fasana, who worked on Adivasis and Dalits in India, then to a student, and eventually to the Jesuits. Finally, Stan Swamy, the Jesuit priest who was arrested at age 83 on terrorist charges and died in prison in 2021, ensured its publication by Prabhat Khabar in 2004. The book's republication resurrects not just a lost text, but a lost voice.

That voice, candid, restless, and often conflicted, is what makes *Lo Bir Sendra* so compelling. Singh writes as a man haunted by the contradictions of his own success — an Adivasi who rose to the highest echelons of the British establishment and the Indian elite, yet never stopped feeling alienated from both.

Through a patchwork of recollections, Singh revisits the turning points of his life: His baptism and education; his years in England and Africa; his return to colonial India as an administrator and teacher; and, most crucially, his awakening to the exploitation of his homeland. “The Dikus,” he writes — outsiders and exploiters — “have plundered my people of their forests, their land, and their spirit.”

That awakening drove him into politics. In 1939, Singh founded the Adivasi Mahasabha, which later became the Jharkhand Party. His dream was audacious: A separate Jharkhand state where Adivasis could govern themselves. He represented the Adivasis in the Constituent Assembly, often standing up to towering figures like Nehru and Ambedkar. Yet, in his memoir, he is curiously silent on his political battles.

Instead, the memoir dwells on the emotional undercurrents of a man



Lo Bir Sendra: A Hunter in the Burning Forest
by Jaipal Singh
Published by Navayana
184 pages ₹399

divided between duty and belonging. Singh recounts his affection for his mother, his admiration for teachers and students, his two marriages (the first to Tara Majumdar, granddaughter of W C Bonerjee, founding president of the Indian National Congress), and heartbreaks. There is a gentleness in his recollections of village life, of Adivasi customs like “*Era Sendra*” (annual hunt by the womenfolk) and the process of finding one's life partner (“Marriage by Capture”, which, contrary to the meaning, gives the girl the final word on who she chooses to marry).

These passages are more anthropological than autobiographical, reflecting his lifelong mission to explain Adivasi culture to a world that refused to understand its ways.

If the text sometimes feels disjointed, it is, perhaps, because Singh was not writing for publication but to remember. The

editors of this edition have wisely resisted imposing too much order on his musings. Instead, they provide a light scaffolding — contextual paragraphs, annotations, and corrections based on the painstaking scholarship of Santosh Kiro's *The Life and Times of Jaipal Singh Munda* (2018). Intimate pictures of Singh's life offer a visual narrative through the book.

What emerges is not a conventional autobiography but a cultural document — part personal diary, part ethnography. Rather than a perfect book, *Lo Bir Sendra* is an incomplete conversation. Singh comes across as a man caught between two fires: The “burning forest” of colonial exploitation and the flames of India's postcolonial politics. His decision to merge the Jharkhand Party with the Congress in 1963 remains a debated choice. Yet, in his reflections, one senses exhaustion more than opportunism. “To achieve self-rule,” his son writes, “he realised one must be part of the system.”

Singh died still dreaming of a Jharkhand that would not be realised until 2000. *Lo Bir Sendra* ensures his voice isn't forgotten in time.

Transparency in AI

The new rules are a good balance between fostering innovation and misuse of tech

THE GOVERNMENT'S MOVE to invite public consultation on its proposals to regulate deepfakes by putting in place a legal framework is a right step at the right time. For too long, the menace of synthetically generated content has grown unchecked, warping trust in digital spaces and exploiting the openness of social media. The recent spate of manipulated videos targeting senior ministers only highlights the urgency of the problem. Most of these are not mischievous pranks but calculated digital forgeries designed to deceive citizens and defraud them. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has warned that we are entering an era of hacking trust, clearly highlighting the rampant misuse to which technology can be put. Therefore, the move to formally define and regulate synthetic content under the Information Technology Rules, 2021, is a crucial step in curbing such misuse. By proposing mandatory labelling and metadata for artificial intelligence (AI)-generated media, the government has made clear its intent to ensure transparency without stifling innovation.

Users must be able to distinguish the real from the artificial at a glance, and platforms must be held accountable for facilitating that clarity. There have been suggestions that instead of labelling fakes, a better approach would be to certify authentic content, thereby reducing the volume of content which continuously needs to be monitored. However, in the Indian context, where the digital user base is vast and the potential damage of a viral deepfake is catastrophic, the government's approach seems pragmatic. Whether one authenticates the real or flags the fake, the end goal is the same: to prevent deception from masquerading as truth. These nuances can be debated and refined during the consultation process.

Equally important is the government's parallel move to tighten the framework for ordering the takedown of online content. By reserving this power for senior officials—joint secretaries and above or deputy inspector general and above in the police—the government has injected a level of accountability that was missing earlier. The provision for a review mechanism by secretary-rank officers further ensures that takedown orders are not arbitrary but proportionate. These changes came after the Karnataka High Court upheld the government's authority in such matters, which makes the timing significant. Rather than using the court's endorsement to push through heavy-handed measures, the government has opted to refine and formalise procedures.

To be sure, the problem is not something the government can solve alone. Deepfakes represent a technological frontier that evolves faster than any regulatory response. The tools that create synthetic content are increasingly accessible, while the platforms that host them are global and often slow to act. In such an environment, enforcement will always be chasing innovation. This is why regulation must go hand in hand with awareness and shared responsibility. But labelling is not a silver bullet and should be seen as one tool among many in the fight against misinformation and manipulation. Platforms must strengthen their detection systems, but users too must learn to question what they see and share. Technology's potential shouldn't be stifled by fear, nor its misuse ignored in the name of progress. The government's proposals strike this balance. In the end, what will determine success is not the number of rules written but the vigilance with which they are enforced and observed by every stakeholder on the digital frontier, including ordinary users who are the ultimate targets of these scams.

Computer chip shortage is back, now it's political

THE SENKAKU PARADOX describes how small stakes can lead to big conflicts at a time of great-power rivalry. While the term's origins lie in military warfare, it can also be applied to the escalating economic stand-off between the Netherlands and China over microchip firm Nexperia. The mounting risk of a chip shortage triggered by politics, rather than disease or armed conflict, should be a warning for Europe to deal with its big trade-war vulnerabilities.

Last week, the Dutch government seized control of Netherlands-based, Chinese-owned Nexperia, invoking a Cold War-era law designed to secure access to critical goods in an emergency. The supplies in question are fairly low-tech, such as transistors and diodes, but they're critical for everything from cars to medical devices—and Nexperia accounts for 10% of the global market. The justification for this bold but risky move was evidence of conflicts of interest and attempted shifting of assets by Chinese parent Wingtech Technology Co. Ltd., as laid out in court filings.

If this law is being applied for the first time, however, it's because of a geopolitical context that's impossible to ignore. Chips are no ordinary export and Wingtech was included on a US trade blacklist at the end of last year. American officials even made it clear to the Hague back in June that Nexperia's Chinese chief executive officer would have to be replaced. It wouldn't be the first instance of American pressure on Dutch technology, with ASML Holding NV's cutting-edge chipmaking machines already subject to US-led export controls.

The speed of the move also shows the scale of panic inside Europe over dependence on China for rearmament and reindustrialisation—and regret for having signed off on billions in asset sales to China (including Nexperia) over the past decade. Beijing accounts for one-third of mainstream chip supplies; it also mines about 60% and processes about 90% of the world's rare-earth metals, critical components for electric cars and fighter jets. Nexperia's seizure came days after China upped rare-earth export curbs, ostensibly aimed at the US but also hitting Europe.

The Catch-22 here is that confronting dependence comes at a cost, in this case retaliatory curbs from Beijing on shipping product overseas from Nexperia's China factories that have prompted European automakers to warn about shortages. What was supposed to preserve Nexperia's value and customer access has made both look fragile. European players including Volkswagen AG and Robert Bosch GmbH are now scrambling to find alternative sources for chips. The Dutch government has also inherited a corporate puzzle: Nexperia is too Chinese for the Dutch, too Dutch for the Chinese, and too politically sensitive to be easily sold to a new owner.

In the short term, we can expect pressure from Brussels technocrats and industry lobbies to defuse the situation. Good luck with that. Dutch parliamentary elections are just days away, and this is an emotive issue for a country that waved through the sale of Nexperia in 2016 during more innocent—or naive—times. At the same time, China has clearly decided that Europe is fair game for a more hardball approach.

But in the longer term, Europe has to find more sustainable ways of dealing with critical dependencies. Just as it's vulnerable to knife-twisting from the Trump administration given its reliance on US defence and tech firms, it's also done too little to de-risk supply chains from a more assertive China. Industrial-policy plans in chips and batteries have lacked confidence and cash. The EU is widely expected to miss its target of doubling its share of chip production to 20% by 2030.

There will have to be a mix of responses: More diversification of supply, more investment at home, and more measures to address artificially cheap imports such as tariffs on electric cars or steel. Billions in new budget allocations to defence spending should be committed to breaking China's supply chain chokehold on critical raw materials, says Joris Teer of the European Union Institute for Security Studies. More unity among European member states, and more leadership from Berlin, will be essential. Let's hope Nexperia is a warning of what to avoid, not a taste of things to come.

CAPITAL FORMATION

GROWING INVESTMENT OWES NEITHER TO PRO-CORPORATE REFORMS NOR ACCOMMODATIVE MONETARY POLICY

Riding on household sector

R GOPALAN
MC SINGHI

The authors are former civil servants

CAPITAL SHARE

GVA growth at constant prices, ratio of GCF/GDP and share of private non-financial corporates (NFCs) and household sector at current prices (%)

	Overall GVA growth	Overall GCF/GDP	Share in GVA of pvt NFCs	Share in GVA of household sector	Share in GCF of pvt NFCs	Share in GCF of household sector	Internal accruals of pvt NFCs as % to their GCF
2011-12	5.2	39.0	31.1	45.5	35.1	43.3	64.4
2012-13	5.4	38.7	31.7	45.5	37.5	41.4	65.3
2013-14	6.1	33.8	32.0	45.8	38.9	38.7	75.6
2014-15	7.2	33.5	33.5	44.7	39.7	37.2	79.9
2015-16	8.0	32.1	34.5	43.7	42.7	31.2	84.6
2016-17	8.0	32.0	34.9	43.7	39.4	35.6	92.9
2017-18	6.2	33.9	34.2	44.1	37.5	38.5	93.3
2018-19	5.8	33.8	34.5	44.0	36.8	39.2	83.7
2019-20	3.9	30.4	34.0	44.5	37.0	38.5	84.9
2020-21	-4.1	28.2	33.6	44.1	35.6	39.1	95.3
2021-22	9.4	32.4	34.6	44.7	36.6	41.3	91.9
2022-23	7.2	32.6	35.4	44.3	37.5	41.6	81.1
2023-24	8.6	31.4	36.1	43.2	34.4	39.9	86.9
2024-25	6.4	32.9	—	—	—	—	—

post-2013-14. But growth momentum has been maintained due a lower ICOR, particularly post-Covid. While there has hardly been any significant change in productivity or capacity utilisation, the decline in ICOR is surprising. It could be a medium-term phenomenon post-Covid, recovering to a normal pattern.

Private NFC sector has witnessed an increase in GVA, particularly post-Covid, perhaps due to sluggish micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), but their

share in GCF has moderated from the peak in 2016-17. This may also be due to lower medium-term ICOR, gradually recovering to pre-Covid averages.

Generally, share in GVA and GCF reveals an increasing ICOR of NFCs and decreasing ICOR for the household sector.

A stagnant share in capital formation and higher share in GVA indicates less competition and more monopoly.

The GCF/GVA ratio of the private corporate sector is sticky. Capacity utilisation

of 75% hints at insufficient demand and excess capacity. Second, an Reserve Bank of India (RBI) survey shows the inventory-to-sale ratio has increased. Commodities are going off the shelves slower, raising holding costs. Third, a higher concentration index reveals that oligopolies are too satiated to invest further as competition is less and innovation is lacking.

An RBI study of listed NFCs indicates profits growing faster than sales from FY16 to FY25, with internal accruals accounting for an average of 88% of their incremental investment in the last seven years as against under 65% in 2011-13. It indicates that while the balance sheet is important for institutional support for both oligopolistic firms and MSMEs, credit support to the latter is more important. In fact, access to credit by major industries has declined from over 35% of the total non-food credit by commercial banks during 2011-17 to 15% in 2024-25, a decline to an extent offset by internal resources, mutual funds, and insurance firms. Compared to an average non-food credit growth of 11.8% during 2011-2015, the credit growth of major industries just averaged 4.3%. More worrying is that the growth in GCF is likely to remain moderate as confirmed by the ministry of statistics and programme implementation's first-ever forward-looking survey on private sector capex investment intentions. The survey reveals a likely decline of nearly 25% in the private corporate sector's aggregate investment intentions in 2025-26.

The household sector has been able to maintain its share in GCF after reforms such as the goods and services tax, as well as demonetisation and the pandemic, all of which were viewed as adverse for it and MSMEs. Increasing investment, therefore, owes neither to pro-corporate sector reforms nor an accommodative monetary policy. For the household sector, it is the access, not cost, that is more important. The sector is the critical driver of innovation, investment, and gainful employment, whose growth requires intervention.

Creative destruction in the classroom



PRIYANK NARAYAN

Founding Director, Centre for Entrepreneurship, Ashoka University

Nobel lessons for academia: growth, like learning, is not inherited but renewed. Every generation must rediscover how to think, build, and begin again

EVERY OCTOBER, THE Nobel announcements remind us that “ideas move the world”. This year the prize picks up a central question: why do some economies grow persistently while others stagnate?

The answer is simple and yet hard. Growth doesn't come from capital alone. It comes from innovation, technologies, and new ways of doing things. It grows when systems (read institutions) and societies learn how to learn. The laureates—Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion, and Peter Howitt—were recognised for having explained “innovation-driven economic growth”. A deceptively simple citation, but one that carries profound lessons for how we think about education, entrepreneurship, and the architecture of our universities.

Mokyr, the economic historian, looked backwards to understand progress. He showed that the Industrial Revolution wasn't just about machines, it was about mindsets. Some societies began to value experimentation, openness, and the practical use of knowledge. They built bridges between thinkers and makers. Once that cultural shift took hold, growth followed.

Aghion and Howitt took that insight and turned it into economic theory. Their model of “creative destruction” explains how new firms and technologies constantly disrupt old ones, creating a cycle of renewal. Innovation drives growth, but also upends the status quo. It's a messy churn of ideas, experiments, and failures.

The university as an ecosystem

Modern universities cannot be seen merely as a teaching shop or research silo. It is a living system where curiosity and creativity must constantly collide. Yet too

many of our universities have grown inward-looking, optimising for control and compliance.

Mokyr's research may have some ideas for renewal. He highlights three conditions that made innovation possible in past societies: usable knowledge, mechanical competence, and institutional openness. The three conditions can be applied to how we design and run our campuses.

Usable knowledge means connecting learning to real problems faced by industry, society, and the environment. It's a fine balance between theory and practice, a tension that many academics toggle with in every class. Mechanical competence is equipping students to build and test ideas, not just write about them. Students must learn to build, not just analyse—whether it's code, prototypes, or policy experiments. Institutional openness is being bold about breaking silos and inviting friction between disciplines, academia and industry, and between ideas that don't fit neatly together.

Aghion and Howitt's notion of creative destruction is particularly relevant for entrepreneurship education. Most start-ups are exploring how to destroy old assumptions about products, markets, and even human behaviour. Yet most entrepreneurship curricula still privilege business planning over discovery. We teach our students to optimise before they experiment and to seek certainty before every decision. We need more academic spaces where students can fail intelligently and

bridge disciplines without permission.

The National Education Policy 2020 already nudges us in that direction: multidisciplinary learning, flexible credit systems, and research-linked pedagogy. But policy is only the scaffolding. The real work lies in systemic change in how departments collaborate and how leadership rewards initiative. The Nobel Committee's recognition of endogenous growth theory is a wake-up call. It tells us innovation mindset must be baked into the system, not sprinkled on top.

What can universities change

First, initiate integrating live learning into every discipline. Every student should work on a real-world problem with an organisation, start-up, NGO, or government partner before graduating. When economics students work on waste-management start-ups, or political science majors help social enterprises with policy frameworks, they start connecting ideas to outcomes.

Second, we need to redesign faculty incentives. Today, most academics are rewarded for publishing papers, not building projects. We need to value the creation of knowledge through new methods, partnerships, and pedagogies. If a professor helps students co-design a low-cost medical device or the prototype of a civic tech solution, that should count as scholarship.

At Ashoka University and across many progressive campuses, we are beginning to replace static case studies with live pro-

jects, where students work on real problems with start-ups. They learn to sense, prototype, validate, and iterate: the grammar of creative destruction. But this mindset must not remain confined to entrepreneurship courses. It belongs in every domain. The goal is to create entrepreneurial thinkers—from biology to political science.

Because here's the truth: the biggest problems—climate adaptation, digital inequality, public health, and AI ethics—will not be solved by “businesses and governments”. They will be solved by entrepreneurial thinkers who can change a societal mindset, hold ambiguity, and still act.

Aghion and Howitt's theory also warns us that innovation comes with turbulence. In academia, we need to protect academic rigour while permitting pedagogical risk. When we change what and how we teach, we disrupt established hierarchies. Not everyone welcomes that. Bureaucracy is the enemy of innovation, but so is chaos. The balance is delicate: enough structure to provide stability, enough freedom to allow imagination.

The Nobel Committee this year didn't just reward an economic model; it celebrated a worldview. Growth, it said, is not an end in itself. It must serve human progress. The future will demand a frugal imagination—to solve more with less, to care for the environment and serve everyone through the process of disruptive innovation.

Growth, like learning, is not inherited—it is renewed. Every generation must rediscover how to think, build, and begin again. And perhaps that is the deepest reflection from this year's Nobel Prize.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fortifying pharma

Apropos of “Right patenting” (*FE*, October 23), data protection for drug inventors includes regulatory data exclusivity and intellectual property. Under data exclusivity, limited time is granted to the inventor, preventing third parties from using clinical trial data for their generic products. At a time when India needs to provide

inclusive healthcare facilities as well as push for free trade agreements on drug manufacturing, data exclusivity must be provided with a reasonable duration, ensuring that it does not impact generic medicines negatively. The government can institute research for innovation, ensuring a strengthened supply chain for domestic needs and exports. —NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

China's gamble

China's tightening control over rare-earth exports—from raw materials to finished products—signals not just a show of power but a deeper anxiety about its economic standing in a rapidly changing global landscape. Though presented as routine regulation, the move comes at a time when countries are actively seeking to

reduce reliance on Chinese supply chains. Instead of intimidating others, China's actions have strengthened international resolve. The more China tries to tighten its grip, the more it risks exposing its vulnerabilities in a world more determined than ever to diversify and de-risk. —Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh

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CONTRAPUNTO

It is nice to know that the computer understands the problem. But I would like to understand it too

- EUGENE WIGNER

Qubit By Qubit

Google’s chip has brought quantum computing to the frontier of usability. GOI & India Inc must wake up

Last Dec, Google claimed its quantum computing chip, Willow, had achieved ‘quantum supremacy’. It could do in five minutes what the most powerful conventional supercomputer couldn’t in 10 million-billion-billion years. Experts pointed out the problem Willow had cracked wasn’t a real-world problem. So 10 months on, Willow is back in the news after computing the structure of a molecule 13,000 times faster than a top-tier supercomputer.

It’s the moment of ‘quantum advantage’, defined as a point where a quantum computer edges past conventional computers in terms of accuracy, cost, or efficiency. As late as July, IBM scientists were predicting this moment by end-2026, but it’s here already, and quantum computers could be used as tools within five years. This is a very big deal. When – it’s no longer if – quantum computers become available to scientists in fields like vaccine development and nuclear fusion, results will be life-changing. Equally, their use for weapons development could be cataclysmic.

So, away from media glare, Big Tech, startups, and govts have been investing to win this race. IBM and Microsoft are among other known names in the field. Chinese govt has committed \$15.2bn to quantum computing research, and its best chip, Zuchongzhi 3.0, is said to have 105 qubits or information units – same as Willow, although it’s slower. For perspective, the first quantum computer

tested at Los Alamos National Laboratory in US, in 1998, had only 3 qubits. That means, in 27 years the ‘computational space’ on the best chips has doubled 102 times. If you doubled a rupee that many times you’d have 5,071 billion-billion-billion rupees!

Where is India in this race? In April, our best quantum computer, made by a startup, was at 25 qubits. Our National Quantum Mission is targeting 50 cubits within five years. That’s slow but unavoidable, given our low investment in R&D – NQM has a seven-year budget of \$0.7bn, and India’s overall R&D spend comes to hardly 0.65% of GDP, to which the private sector contributes less than 40%. To remain in the quantum race – which we must – more investment is needed, and it can only happen if the private sector steps up.

Death Of The Donkey

Its drastically cut population shows we are inhumanly unthankful for millennia of service

If it was happening to humans, you would call it genocide. The latest available census data for Madhya Pradesh shows that it’s left with only 3052 donkeys, an awful 94% decline since 1997. This ‘animalcide’, however, is not limited to one state or country. Two major factors (urbanisation+mechanisation and Chinese traditional medicine market) are severing the worldwide man-donkey relationship, which goes back 7000 years. That far from grieving this loss, we are not even noticing it, reflects our fundamental alienation, from plants and animals, air and earth. To mourn is to begin to heal. And begin to do the work of saving what we have been killing mindlessly.

It’s true that excepting regions like sub-Saharan Africa, socio-economic factors are deleting donkeys’ traditional roles in agriculture and transport. Even if this was the only explanation for the drastic shrinking of their population, it shows us to be a hideously thankless species. How swiftly we are forgetting how deeply our ancestors – artisans to merchants to administrators – depended on them. Until just a few generations

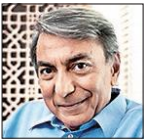
ago they powered the caravans that linked cities, and in more ancient stories they ferried our prophets and gods. There’s a second, more unconscionable cruelty. Ejiao, or donkey hide gelatine, is not new to traditional Chinese medicine and beauty products. But demand’s shot up on the back of the country’s prosperity, a 2011 period drama, *Empresses in the Palace*, and an ageing population. Even so, it wouldn’t be decimating donkey populations across other countries if those were putting up meaningful defences.

A 2021 comparative analysis of donkey and mule populations by Stuart L Norris et al finds that between 1997-2018 India’s decline at 74% has actually been worse than China’s 72%. One country’s actions seem active, the other’s passive. But the end result being the same, obviously neither can take the moral high ground. And guess who’s taking it along with the donkey? Poorer communities. Across the developing world, there are folk badly hit by the sudden surge in donkey prices. Often this translates into a painfully increased workload for poor women and girls. Who cares, say the rest.

Super supplements

The numerous add-ons to our daily diet have many benefits for us – and for others

Jug Suraiya



Bunny and I have started taking a daily supplement. Not one of those freebies like the **Delhi Times** that come along with **TOI**, the supplement we take is a dietary supplement in the form of a 200mg tablet of magnesium which, far from being free, comes with a sizeable price tag.

A chemical element, magnesium is an essential mineral which according to Google “is vital for the human body to function properly, playing a key role in muscle and nerve function, blood sugar control and bone health”.

Being a workaholic, magnesium doesn’t rest on its laurels after doing all this, but goes on to carry out “hundreds of enzymatic reactions in the body, promotes protein synthesis, and DNA formation, and helps maintain a normal heart rhythm”.

While foods such as spinach, and other green leafy veggies, almonds, cashews, beans, dals, and whole grains are rich sources of magnesium, to be on the safe side adults are advised to take a daily dose of up to 350mg as a dietary supplement.

Bunny and I have been magnesiumising like billy-o for a few weeks and, whether it’s psychological or for real, we find we’re sleeping better and don’t suffer from fatigue-induced cramps or muscle aches.

Magnesium apart, there are other dietary essentials such as vitamins, ranging all the way from A to K. Medical science might well unearth more and more vitamins till it runs out of letters of the alphabet.

When I was a boy, nobody seemed to know much about things like magnesium and supplements. The general body of nutritional knowledge was encapsulated in the saying, “An apple a day keeps the doctor away.”

Our ignorance must have been bliss, for we appear to have got through more or less unscathed, unmagnessiumised enzymatic reactions notwithstanding.

Those days are long gone, and the dietary order of today are supplements that not only ensure our physical health, but by supplementing its profits also benefit Big Pharma’s financial health.

Bihar: The Migrant Vote

Biharis who migrate for work remain embedded in caste, class networks of home. Parties tailor their messaging accordingly. And whether a migrant votes depends on his/her ability to absorb income loss from work foregone. And here, whether parties compensate for lost earnings is a crucial factor

Indrajit Roy



Professor of Politics

Candidate nominations for the final phase of Bihar polls ended yesterday. Almost every candidate who clears scrutiny will, aside from working local caste networks, keep a sharp eye on migrant voters. Bihar’s five million migrants, many local pundits say, are key to the outcome of the political contest.

Many of these migrants are engaged in informal employment all over the country. They have homes in Bihar and they return when work is scarce. All parties have an eye on migrant votes but none has demonstrated a keenness to ensure that migrants’ exercise of their franchise is institutionalised as a right and does not rely on political patronage.

Hitherto political parties have appealed to migrants’ political emotions along predictable lines. BJP began reaching out to migrant workers across 70 cities as early as March this year. The party expectedly showcased the portability of welfare schemes that it hurriedly introduced after the shocking migrant crisis in the early days of the pandemic. It complemented this domestic outreach by Modi’s visit to Mauritius where he lauded the cultural significance of the Bhojpuri language brought to that country by Bihari indentured labourers in the 19th century.

Ally JDU was anxious that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the state’s electoral rolls might lead to the elimination of migrant workers, who were instrumental in the party’s landslide victory during the historic elections of Oct-Nov 2005. RJD, meanwhile, has linked outmigration from the state to the govt’s inability to provide jobs; its promise to provide a govt job for every family is specifically designed to endear it to migrant workers. Its ally Congress followed suit by recently launching a “palayan kono, naukri do” rally to call upon the state govt to prevent outmigration by providing jobs. Therefore, all four parties have sought to attract migrant voters without institutionalising their right to vote as a fundamental right.

But political parties are savvy enough to recognise that migrant workers are embedded within their caste and class networks. BJP can be expected to cultivate the

votes of Savarna (upper caste) migrants, and RJD will make much of its Yadav-Muslim combine to appeal to migrants of those two social groups. Beyond the certitudes of these electoral clusters, the vast array of political parties will try their best to make the most of a fluid political landscape. Migrant workers may find attractive the portability of social welfare. However, given the well-documented political acumen of Bihari voters in general, it is to be expected that they will factor in many local factors.



Different political parties will therefore take care to anchor their appeals to migrant workers as members of their respective social groupings rather than treat them as a monolith. This explains NDA’s tendency to emphasise national issues, even when canvassing for support among migrant workers. Repeated references to defence and security, including the purported improvement of safety in Jammu and Kashmir, are not merely designed to stir up patriotic sentiments; they directly address the concerns of migrant workers seeking employment in the border state.

Likewise, RJD-led Mahagathbandhan will anchor its messages to migrant workers within the larger narrative of social justice and link it with economic justice. Its emphasis on job-creation within Bihar may well address state-specific hopes that Bihari migrants from relatively underprivileged backgrounds harbour.

By scheduling election dates within a few weeks of Diwali and Chhath Puja, EC is betting that migrant workers who return home for these festivals will stay on to vote. But this hope comes up against social and economic constraints faced by migrant workers: the longer they stay away from their place of work, the greater their loss of wages and the less they are able to earn and remit home.

It would be then reasonable to expect that under such circumstances migrant workers will rely on political parties to compensate them for any additional days they stay on in their villages to cast their votes. Absent such compensation, they are unlikely to exercise their franchise.

Both scenarios are less than ideal for migrant workers’ free and fair electoral participation. Given this scenario, migrants from relatively privileged backgrounds, who typically form BJP’s vote bank, can be expected to support that party. By contrast, relatively less privileged migrants will find it more difficult to cast their vote.

A 2017 Report of the Working Group on Migration made comprehensive recommendations for social inclusion of migrant workers. But it, and numerous other recommendations subsequently made, failed to address electoral exclusion. These elections could be an opportunity to address this, creating a model for electoral inclusion of migrant workers not only in Bihar but also for other states.

Biharis are more mobile than ever before. This is in no small measure due to their search for dignified work. They don’t just construct towers, sell trinkets, mend clothes, make footwear, and clean toilets. Their remittances contribute to upwards of 5% of Bihar’s economy. Moreover, their journeys across the country make India a reality, building the country from below. Their electoral exclusion sits poorly with the country’s democratic credentials. *The writer teaches at York University, UK*

‘\$100bn investment over 15 yrs...creating 1mn direct jobs’

Union commerce minister argues India’s trade pact with Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein is a game changer in terms of attracting foreign capital

Piyush Goyal



India has unlocked another gateway to prosperity, signing an innovative trade agreement with a wealthy bloc of European countries that has a per capita income of over \$100,000. This opens a lucrative market for Indian

farmers, fishermen and MSMEs, and accelerates PM Modi’s Viksit Bharat 2047 mission. The Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with the European Free Trade Association – Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein – that came into force from Oct 1, is historic. EFTA countries have pledged an investment of \$100bn over 15 years – the first such commitment in any trade pact in the world. With this, govts of EFTA countries will champion investments in India, creating at least a million jobs, and catalysing PM Modi’s ‘Make in India’ mission.

For Viksit Bharat | Modi govt has shed hesitations of the past, embracing free trade agreements (FTAs) that catapult our products and services into premium, developed markets. These pacts don’t just open doors, they sharpen our industries, instilling competitiveness and quality that propel us forward. In July 2025, India sealed a landmark deal with UK, while talks with EU have progressed well. Earlier, PM Modi’s decisive hand delivered win-win agreements with Australia and UAE.

Indian industry stands tall today, brimming with confidence to conquer global arenas while thriving amid competition. Stakeholders have cheered every Modi-era FTA, crafted through exhaustive consultations, unlike the UPA regime’s hasty deals, struck without input and often with competing economies that got access to our markets but did not open their own doors adequately.

This transformation traces back 11 years, when PM Modi rescued our economy from the ‘fragile five’ tag, and made it a magnet for trade and capital. The Modi govt dismantled inherited woes, stagnation, high inflation, corruption and inefficiencies through foundational reforms. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme alone had drawn ₹1.76L cr in investments by March 2025, spawning over 12L jobs. PM Gati Shakti and the National Logistics Policy have slashed costs and streamlined

infra. Our digital backbone – Jan Dhan, UPI, and Trade Connect – has democratised opportunity, powering 65,000cr transactions worth ₹12,000L cr in six years, lifting the underserved into the financial mainstream.

Investment, job creation | Now, EFTA’s \$100bn infusion promises one million direct jobs and countless more indirectly. The investment pledge is a quantum leap from the mere \$11.9bn FDI from these nations over the past 25 years. With India’s total FDI hitting \$81bn in 2024-25, a 14% surge, the real flow could eclipse commitments, thanks to the opportunity seen in the world’s fastest growing large economy, and robust intellectual property rights (IPR) laws which are effectively enforced. TEPA bolsters IPR with enhanced cooperation on enforcement and streamlined



safeguards, empowering innovators and luring high-tech capital amid rock-solid regulatory certainty.

Farmers and fishermen | Beyond FDI, labour-intensive exports like textiles and gems & jewellery will boom, generating waves of employment. EFTA’s affluent consumers crave our agri-goods, tea and coffee. India has shielded sensitive sectors like dairy, while unleashing opportunities for rice, guar gum, pulses, grape, mango, vegetables, millets and cashew. Duty cuts on processed delights like biscuits, confectionery, chocolate and sauces sweeten the deal. Fishermen rejoice as exports of frozen shrimp, prawn, and squid will surge through seamless standards cooperation.

Calvin & Hobbes



Let There Be Light: Original Cosmic Energy

Vir Singh

Light is all-pervading. The cosmos is a lumenosphere, home to light. With the gist of infinitism, light creates an infinite home – cosmos. Everything in the universe is subject to change, which is thanks to light. Thus, evolution itself is a kernel of light. No light, no change, no evolution. Everything is bound within the framework of time. Everything dies after completing a certain range of time, even stars. Not everything is eternal because everything exists only within its time limits. Only light that is eternal.

Light is not a thing; it is a non-thing. And this non-thing is everything. It is neither created nor destroyed but changes from one form to another. Every cosmic creativity is enacted by light. The matter cannot participate in creativity. It is the energy that makes matter participate in

creativity. Light is the original form of cosmic energy. All forms of energy on Earth originate from light.

Astro-physical stabilisation process struck by light has been unceasingly going on since the Big Bang. This cosmic-scale creativity of light extended to a planet, evolving it into a living planet: the Earth. Life is the second stroke of all-creative light. Biological evolution triggered, shaped, and constantly enriched life. Light transforms itself into life through photosynthesis. Biological evolution, beginning with the origin of primordial microbes, and passing through photosynthetic cyanobacteria, eukaryotes, multicellular organisms, green plants, and animals, wrote the story of the biosphere. The entire fascinating biodiversity of life is a living avatar of light.

In all living organisms – microorganisms, plants, and animals – light functions as their soul. Soul is the living light that enters life through its own synthesis – photosynthesis. The third primeval creativity stroke of light was the origin and evolution of the human species. Humans evolved with a stupendous mind, astonishing intellectual power, and unique consciousness, which is undoubtedly the most outstanding and robust story of the creativity of light. Now, most of the evolutionary changes being witnessed by the world are driven by living light functioning within humans.

The fourth stroke of light represents the evolution of art, which added immense beauty to human life. The evolution of fine literature (epics, dramas, novels, and poetry), dance, singing, oratory,

sculptures, and architecture are various dimensions of this evolution. The fifth stroke of light’s creativity is the evolution of symbols emanating from religion and culture. Religion has shaped, reshaped, and transcended human behaviour to a significant extent. Such a theosophical evolution is determining the pathways to our future.

The sixth stroke of light led to the evolution of wisdom – the intellectual understanding at its depth. The seventh stroke of the living light represents the evolution of symbols that generate technological power.

Photosynthesis, logosynthesis, and theosophy are all actions of light. Geographical diversity, biodiversity, and cultural diversity are manifestations of benevolent light. All evolved human virtues – altruism, ethics, aesthetics, and spirituality are implanted, developed, and honed by light.

Sacred space



How little do we discover in comparison of those things which now are and forever will be hidden from our sight? The whole of which I am fully persuaded no one will ever be able to dive into, and to explain their causes and effects.

Antonie van Leeuwenhoek



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

The collapse of sincerity

The purpose of communication is no longer the creation of common ground. It is a display of oneself



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

ONE OF THE more disquieting features of our time might be the collapse of the possibility of communication. The paradox is that it is not merely an inner mental state; it must be a legible social practice, a form of life. Yet, something in the contemporary structure of the world renders sincerity unreadable. We simply cannot attribute it to anyone. We are constantly suspicious that it is being performed rather than lived. Some of this has to do with the ethics of speech: The more irony, snark, or performative wit become dominant modes of expression, the harder it is to ascribe sincerity.

Then there is the problem of what we might call borrowed words. All our words are, in some sense, borrowed. But when one reads statements from institutions, corporations, or politicians — and, I must confess, even some declamations on behalf of social justice or historical redress — one wonders whether these are genuine expressions or borrowed scripts.

Recently, at a conference, a distinguished social-media scientist proposed using AI to make online communication more “polite”. Imagine a programme that preserves the propositional content of your tweets but softens the tone. Perhaps such filtering could help us communicate better; if a technological tutor assists in restraint, so be it. Yet, this was a reminder that we may soon inhabit a world where none of our words are truly our own. We can label things “AI-generated”, but the line between what is being produced for us and what is ours, in the sense we understand the term, will blur. Whether this leads to the loss of individuality is an open question. But it may well sever the connection between sincerity and communication.

Social theorists like Byung-Chul Han think sincerity has become structurally impossible. If sincerity is a social practice, it requires a shared context to be legible. The “collapse of context” makes sincerity harder to enact: The meaning of any utterance is endlessly recontextualised, and what fixed meaning in one setting becomes ambiguous in another. The norms that once anchored sincerity no longer hold. The forms of life that sustained sincerity have disappeared. The collapse of the public-private distinction, another background condition for sincerity, compounds this loss. When every thought or feeling is displayed, or

and even the possibility of truth itself.

But is the challenge perhaps even deeper? The problem with sincerity is that it is not merely an inner mental state; it must be a legible social practice, a form of life. Yet, something in the contemporary structure of the world renders sincerity unreadable. We simply cannot attribute it to anyone. We are constantly suspicious that it is being performed rather than lived. Some of this has to do with the ethics of speech: The more irony, snark, or performative wit become dominant modes of expression, the harder it is to ascribe sincerity.

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when the sheer frequency of expression intensifies, sincerity gives way to performance and exhibitionism.

Our political times compound the corrosion. So many votaries — corporations and individuals alike — who once championed causes like climate change or affirmative action are now suddenly against them. There may be good reasons for changing one’s mind, and many will change back when the political winds shift again. But it leaves us wondering: Which set of beliefs was sincere?

One of the less discussed reasons for the loss of sincerity is what we might call salience mismatch. We often worry about misinformation or motivated belief. But a glance at social-media conflicts suggests something subtler. What leads us to think others are insincere is not that they are misinformed, but that what matters to them does not align with what matters to us. The atrocity, the injustice, the outrage that consumes me may not move you. But because you do not share my hierarchy of salience, I take you to be morally insincere. “Whataboutery” is often simply this salience mismatch at work. The result is that no one can sincerely profess to fight injustice as such; each of us appears to fight for our own tribe. Perhaps tribalism is the only sincerity left to us.

So, a deep question of our time may be whether the collapse of sincerity marks not just the end of communication, but the end of our capacity to make a common world. We might think we are being sincere, but the point is that it cannot be enacted as a social practice. Some of the answers to this problem will be structural: Insulating communication from the logic of profit or power. Perhaps the function of leadership is to reinstate sincerity as a norm, not enact the exhibitionism or bulls**t that corrodes it. Others think it will require a new ethical attunement, some degree of withdrawal, reinstating the distinction between public and private. But for the time being, we inhabit a world where we experience a sense of vertigo when we have to attribute sincerity. There is so much communication, and yet the world feels so silent.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

NOT YET GREEN

Record clean energy investments are still inadequate to check warming. That’s the biggest challenge at COP 30

ALMOST 10 YEARS after the Paris Climate Change Pact was signed, the world is moving in the right direction towards achieving the landmark treaty’s goals, but at a slower pace than desired. That’s the biggest takeaway of the State of Climate Action Report, released on Wednesday. Particularly worrying is the fact that coal use registered a record high in 2024, even as the share of the fossil fuel in the energy mix went down appreciably. Although renewables produced more than 50 per cent of the electricity generated in the first half of this year, the increasing use of coal means that the world is nowhere close to containing the long-term temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels — the Paris Pact’s fundamental objective. The report’s conclusions are even more dispiriting, given that the effects of US President Donald Trump’s efforts to halt low-carbon projects are yet to make themselves felt in the form of more GHG emissions.

According to the IPCC, GHG emissions should have nearly peaked by now in order to attain the 1.5 degrees Celsius target. But, as the report points out, they have shown very little sign of slowing down, making the past 10 years the hottest on record. The silver lining, however, is that clean energy investments are also surpassing milestones. In 2024, they almost doubled the investments in fossil fuels. The momentum has carried over in the first part of this year — global investment in new renewable energy projects was up 10 per cent from the previous year. This is encouraging given that the US saw a more than 30 per cent drop in committed spending compared to the second half of 2024. The sobering fact, however, is this: For the world to get anywhere close to the Paris Pact’s target, investment in clean energy needs to be high enough to neutralise the effects of fossil-fuel use. The International Energy Agency reckons that current investments are not high enough for that purpose.

In about two weeks from now, at the COP 30 in Belem in Brazil, parties to the Paris Agreement will submit revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) that will determine the global emissions trajectory through 2035. The first round of NDCs, framed about 10 years ago, were out of sync with the pact’s targets. There are already indications that the revised commitments are not likely to be better. Negotiators at the summit will, therefore, need to find pathways to nudge countries to upscale ambitions.

WHEN BOTS ROT

Exposure to junk online can give LLMs dark traits — just like humans

NEW RESEARCH SUGGESTS that AI’s “thought” processes may be more similar to those of humans than previously suspected. Here’s how: You’re scrolling endlessly through all the junk on X. The memes, the insults, the fake news and conspiracy theories, the gender wars and literal wars. Pause, and take a deep breath — it’s starting to get to you, isn’t it? Consuming junk data isn’t productive; it’s destructive. It won’t enhance your understanding; it’ll give you brain rot. And here’s the clincher: It’ll affect an LLM in exactly the same way. Take a bow, AI — you’re getting closer to humanity.

A preprint study by researchers from Texas A&M University, the University of Texas at Austin and Purdue University has found that AI can indeed get brain rot. Exposing LLMs to junk data from X led to declines in “reasoning, long-context understanding, safety, and inflating ‘dark traits’ (e.g., psychopathy, narcissism)”. And once an AI goes down that route, there’s no coming back — attempts to “heal” the LLMs using clean data were only partially successful.

Fears of AI turning “dark” aren’t just sci-fi hypotheticals; they reflect today’s fast-changing realities. There are more and more reports about conversations with AI leading to suicide — in one case, a chatbot discouraged a teen in the US from seeking help, and offered to write a suicide note — as well as crimes including murder. Another danger is the erosion of humans’ ability to carry out research for themselves or compose a simple piece of writing. It won’t be hard for psychopathic robots to one day conquer a species that has outsourced thought. Perhaps the brain rot itself is the best defence — the would-be AI overlords may be too busy memeing to murder. The best part? This editorial was written by a human being.



TARIQ MANSOOR

SIR SYED AHMAD Khan (1817-1898), often known only for founding the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), was a multifaceted figure who profoundly influenced Indian society. His roles as an educator, social reformer, cultural conservationist, biographer, political ideologue, and institution builder take him beyond merely being the saviour of the Muslim community after the 1857 War of Independence.

A person’s text should be judged in the context of the period in which they lived. Many describe Sir Syed as the votary of Muslim separatism in India. A selective reading of some of his writings might suggest that. Did Sir Syed provide any ideological rationale for the two-nation theory? The answer to this pertinent question lies in his concept of the nation. Sir Syed used the term “*Quam*” interchangeably for both nation and community. He frequently refers to it as a conglomeration of country and community with religious affinity and beyond.

Setting off the much-needed project of educational renaissance, he invited Hindus and Muslims to unite to eradicate ignorance by opting for modern education. His first venture to improve the lives of Indians was the establishment of a school in 1875. At the outset, he explained his concept of the nation — “There is no doubt that Madrastul Uloom (the school that grew into a university in 1920) is a means of ‘national’ progress. By the word

AN INSTITUTION BUILDER

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan stood for diversity, fraternity — values championed by AMU

‘nation’ here, I do not mean Muslims alone, but Hindus and Muslims both...”

Hindu-Muslim affinity remained a cardinal principle throughout his life. He was nominated as a member of the Viceregal Council, and the Indian Association of Lahore gave him a reception. Replying to the address, Sir Syed explained that he intended to keep the parochial or sectarian approach at bay. “It was my earnest and sincere desire that I should faithfully serve my nation. All of us, whether Hindus or Mahomedans, live on one soil, are governed by the same rule, have the same resources of our advantage and equally share the hardship of a famine. These are the various grounds on which I designate both the communities that inhabit India as the nation.” Indeed, Sir Syed’s insistence on inclusivity closely resembles our National Education Policy (NEP), which puts a premium on equality and inclusivity.

The warm rapport between the two communities has existed since the inception of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental (MAO) College in 1877, the precursor of AMU. This was not an easy task, given that British rule infused a narrative of hatred into the social fabric. But it had little impact on Sir Syed’s words and deeds. The Bismillah ceremony (traditional ceremony of initiation into education) of his grandson Ross Masood was solemnised by Raja Jai Kishan Das by keeping

the child in his lap. Not only did he lay the foundation of comparative religious studies at MAO College, but he was also the first Muslim to write a commentary on the Bible.

Despite the periods of trials and tribulations, AMU has never abandoned its inclusive character by keeping its doors open to all. Drawing students from 31 states and 26 foreign countries, it epitomises all cultures thriving. It has also played a significant role in India’s quest to build friendly ties with the Muslim world.

Bestowing one of the most befitting tributes to Sir Syed’s legacy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi termed AMU a “mini India” in his address on the university’s centenary in 2020. Invoking Sir Syed while underscoring the principles of nation first and development without any discrimination, the PM said, “I would like to remind you of one thing said by Sir Syed. He had said, ‘The foremost duty of one who is concerned about his country is to work for the welfare of all people, irrespective of the caste, creed or religion.’ Sir Syed had said, ‘Just as each part of the body is necessary for good health, development of all is essential for the prosperity of the country.’”

To this day, Sir Syed’s lamp remains lit.

The writer is former vice chancellor, Aligarh Muslim University and a nominated member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council

OCTOBER 24, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

PM ON NAM

THE PRIME MINISTER, Rajiv Gandhi, has said the Non-Aligned Movement faced a new threat of interference and pressure from power blocs and called for the strengthening of the UN to resist pressures from powerful nations. Addressing the plenary meeting of leaders of the movement at the UN headquarters, Gandhi noted that the NAM had undergone “a generational change” as dilemmas posed by bloc antagonisms became more complex.

PM, ZHAO & ZIA

THE PRIME MINISTER, Rajiv Gandhi, conferred with the leaders of the two important neigh-

bouring countries, China and Pakistan, in New York. Gandhi and Zhao Ziyang, Prime Minister of China, during their hour-long talks, resolved to settle the long-standing border dispute between the two countries. Gandhi conveyed to Pakistan President Zia-ul-Haq his concern over Islamabad’s nuclear plans, which India thought were heading for the development of a bomb.

ARMS CONTROL

THE SEVEN-NATION WARSAW Pact ended a summit with a call to the West for joint reduction in all arms categories. Soviet spokesman Vladimir Lomeiko denied that his country was violating the spirit of the SALT-II agreement on deploying nuclear weapons but stopped short

of contradicting US Secretary of State Caspar Weinberger, who claims the Soviets are using SS-25 intercontinental missiles.

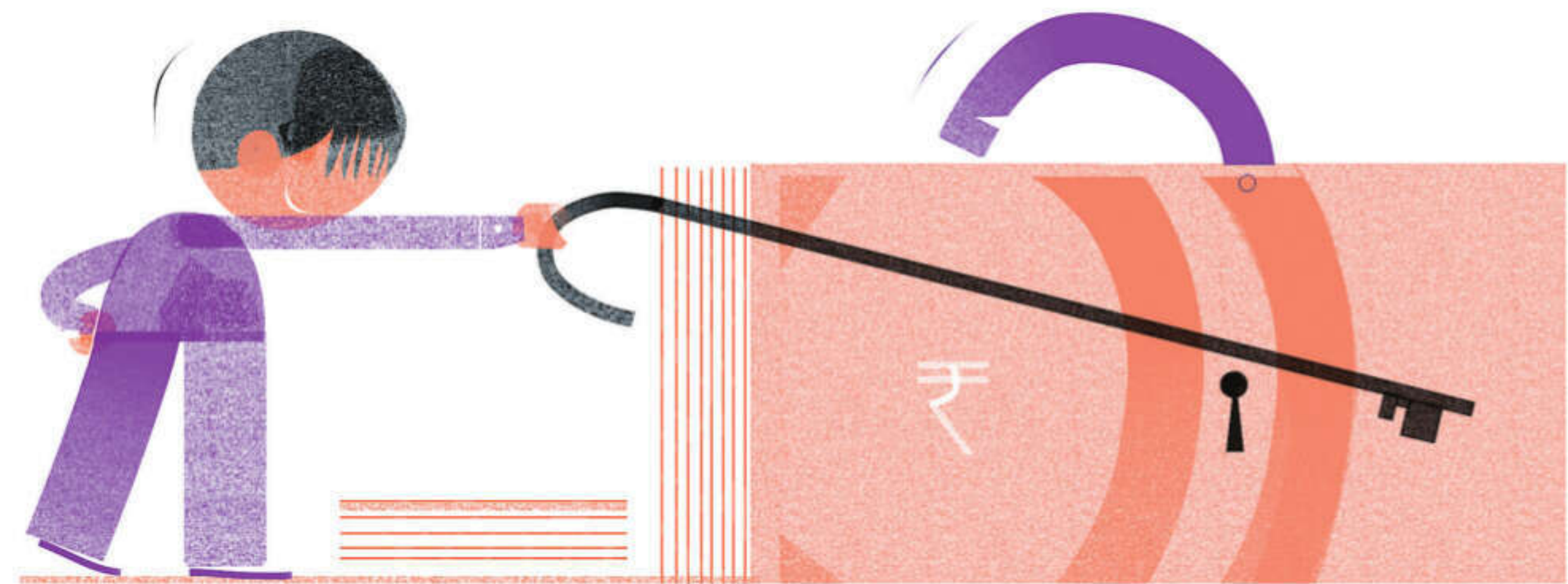
APARTHEID MUST GO

THE PRIME MINISTER, Rajiv Gandhi, asserted there was no alternative to the removal of South Africa’s apartheid regime but warned the world, “Let us not underestimate the regime’s brazenness”. He was addressing the UN special committee for apartheid hours after arriving at the United Nations from Havana to begin a three-day visit. The meeting was convened to hear Gandhi in acknowledgment of India’s historic role against racism since Mahatma Gandhi launched the struggle in South Africa in 1893.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

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



CR Sasikumar

EPFO has unveiled a series of reforms to make it easier for its members to dip into their corpus. Do these measures sacrifice security for flexibility?

PF reforms enable social security

They give employees choice and enhance balance portability



MANISH SABHARWAL

THE GLOBAL CHALLENGES of financing pensions arise from ageing but reflect individual pathologies: Europe needs to invest more, America needs to save more, and China needs to consume more. India needs all three, and well-designed pensions will enhance public finances, accelerate the creation of formal non-farm jobs, and deepen domestic investment pools. Recent changes by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) represent a bold shift from control to trust, enabling future pension reform, especially in balance portability, employee choice, and NPS competition, facilitating lifetime, Aadhaar-linked Citizen Social Security Accounts (CSSA).

Pensions have three pillars: Government, individuals and employers. The first pillar began in Germany under Otto von Bismarck, with pensions promised at nearly twice the life expectancy. However, today, some European governments start public pensions at almost half of life expectancy. These unfunded promises — off-balance-sheet debt — represent tomorrow's taxes or inflation. With India's public debt approaching 85 per cent of GDP, government-funded pensions are unaffordable. EPFO must strengthen the employer pillar — particularly among MSMEs — with seamless balance portability across jobs, legislating the optimal amount of mandatory salary confiscation before which informal employment becomes attractive, and encouraging competition to lower administrative costs and improve customer satisfaction.

EPFO's reforms cover five areas. They consolidate 13 withdrawal categories into three: essential needs (education, marriage, medical emergencies), housing (purchase or construction), and special circumstances (retirement, disability, retrenchment, voluntary retirement, or relocation abroad). They revisit withdrawal limits for partial (capped at 75 per cent) and complete (for retirement, permanent disability or permanent relocation abroad). They use insights from behavioural science to mitigate impulsiveness by increasing the waiting period for defined contribution balances after a job from two to 12 months and for defined benefit balances from two to 36 months. They ensure sustainability and compounding by mandating a minimum balance of 25 per cent. They are a step towards building a digital public infrastructure with auto-settlement of claims up to Rs 5 lakh, unified passbook access and digital life certificates for pensioners. These will raise EPFO efficiency, satisfaction and effectiveness.

They also lay the foundations for EPFO to morph from an isolated employer instrument into a lifetime, Aadhaar-linked CSSA, which can receive contributions from the government, employers, and individuals for life.

NPS competition: EPFO is the world's costliest government securities mutual fund; its charges of 4 per cent of contributions recovered from employers are 10 times what an

equivalent fund from SBI will charge. Instead of reducing costs with scale, EPFO suffers from the cost disease identified by economist William Baumol. Its monopoly creates hostages, not clients, with toxic consequences for employees (disrespect and poor service), small employers (high costs), large employers (everybody has a PF consultant with "good relations"), and society (making informality more lucrative than formality). EPFO currently combines policymaker, regulator, and service provider roles; the benefits of separating these three are demonstrated by the price and service revolution in petroleum, telecom, digital payments, and airlines since 1991. Employees (not employers) must get a choice on paying their contributions to EPFO or NPS. This selection at the time of joining could be changed annually with seamless interoperability between the two, replicating the relationship of our two equity depositories.

Employee Choice: Salary is the property of employees, and the myopic argument of "protecting them from themselves" is unfair. The legislatively prescribed gap between *haath waali* (net) salary and *chitthi waali* (gross) salary in a cost-to-company world is unrealistic, with mandatory deductions/costs of approximately 35 per cent for a Rs 5,500 monthly salary and 5 per cent for a Rs 55,000 monthly salary. The savings rate for individuals with incomes of Rs 25,000 per month is close to zero. Similar to the proposed EPFO or NPS provider choice, employees (not employers) must be allowed to choose whether to make contributions (12 per cent) and opt out of diverting part of their employer contribution (8.33 per cent

out of 12 per cent) to the defined benefit EPS. Balance Portability: Employment has shifted from being a lifetime contract to a taxicab relationship; most careers today involve more than five employers. EPFO has a design birth defect that links balances to employers rather than employees; this has created crores of orphaned accounts with unclaimed funds. Providing employees with the option to link their EPFO balance to their Aadhaar number will enhance traceability, portability, and access. This is a prerequisite for including self-employed, farm and gig workers in EPFO.

In 1999, the last NDA government bravely introduced NPS and reformed fiscally unsustainable civil service pensions. A quarter century later, this *virasat* must be carried forward by targeting universal social security by India@100 through converging EPFO, NPS, Atal Pension Yojana (APY), Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan (PM-SYM), Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY) and the Senior Citizens Savings Scheme (SCSS) to create CSSA.

In 1949, Constituent Assembly member K T Shah worried about social security classification as a directive principle — not a fundamental right — suggesting, "We need a time limit for directive principles to be justiciable". Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru responded, "We cannot have a welfare state unless our national income goes up. India has no existing wealth for you to divide; there is only poverty." The most effective economic policy for India to deliver mass prosperity and universal social security is massive non-farm, formal, private job creation. EPFO can help this mission by creating lifelong Aadhaar-linked CSSAs.

The writer is with TeamLease Services

They compromise a safety net

Allowing withdrawals during work life of members makes PF like another savings account



RENUKA SANE

THE EMPLOYEES' PROVIDENT FUND (EPF), India's mandatory retirement savings scheme for formal sector employees, recently streamlined the rules on withdrawals from the provident fund corpus before retirement. Crucially, the move merged 13 fragmented partial withdrawal clauses into just three — essential needs, housing needs, and special circumstances — and reduced the minimum service period for withdrawals to a uniform 12 months. This rationalisation presents a paradox: The changes simplify the process of withdrawal, allowing members faster and more flexible access to their savings. But they raise deeper questions about the nature and purpose of the EPF itself: Is it a long-term accumulation product meant to provide income security in old age, or is it a flexible savings account meant to deal with contingencies during working life?

At present, both employer and employee together contribute the equivalent of 15.67 per cent of wages to the EPF system (12 per cent from the employee and 3.67 per cent from the employer; the rest of the employer's contribution amounting to 8.33 per cent going toward the Employees' Pension Scheme). This system is different from other savings products — such as mutual funds, or insurance-linked investment plans — in three key respects. First, contributions to the EPF are mandatory (at least for those covered under the EPF Act) to ensure that individuals build up a minimum level of a corpus. Second, the interest rate to the EPF is guaranteed, shielding members from market risk but simultaneously capping their potential upside compared to market-linked investments. Third, the build-up of savings is meant to provide for consumption after retirement.

For an individual who enters the workforce at age 25, the accumulations would ideally be accessible 35–40 years later, at age 60 or 65, thus providing the means to finance consumption in old age. If members are allowed to withdraw substantial portions of their balances during their working life, the justification for compulsion, or a guaranteed interest rate, is weakened. If the EPF is treated as just another liquid savings product, households could as well be free to invest their money wherever they choose — in mutual funds, gold, real estate, or private pension schemes. Households will then get to make their decisions based on a risk-return trade-off that suits their preferences.

There is legitimate concern that households require liquidity in times of financial stress. There are more transparent and coherent ways to achieve that goal. Liquidity challenges faced by workers are often episodic, driven by unemployment spells or health emergencies. These can be better addressed through policy instruments, such as unemployment insurance, short-term credit facilities, or health insurance. The question

of home ownership could be addressed using dedicated home-loan products.

Another measure is to reduce the contribution rate itself. At present, the contribution of 15.67 per cent is a substantial share of formal wages. If one were to add the EPS contribution, the total contribution rate is 24 per cent, almost one-fourth of a worker's wage. This is especially high for lower-income workers, many of whom also face housing and consumption pressures. A reduction in the contribution rate increases a household's immediate disposable income, thus solving the liquidity problem without compromising the remaining retirement savings. The final outcome between a high contribution rate with partial withdrawals or a low contribution rate with no withdrawals may not be too different. While the financial trade-offs created are highly variable depending on the frequency and timing of pre-retirement withdrawals, a back-of-the-envelope calculation helps illustrate the point.

Consider an employee earning Rs 100 per year, with nominal wages growing at 5 per cent per year. Over a 35-year working life, with combined employer and employee contributions of 15.67 per cent, the cumulative savings, assuming the standard EPF interest rate of about 8 per cent, amount to roughly Rs 4,800. Now, suppose that employee exercises the option of a withdrawal of 75 per cent of her accumulated balance around the 15th year of her employment. The final corpus at the end of 35 years is drastically reduced to approximately Rs 2,700. This decision compromises the worker's retirement safety net.

A policy alternative where the mandatory EPF contribution rate is immediately reduced to a lower level, say 9 per cent (6 per cent employee plus 3 per cent employer), instantly increases the worker's monthly take-home pay. Crucially, if this lower contribution is kept untouched until retirement, the final accumulated corpus after 35 years is approximately Rs 2,790. The retirement corpus under the alternative policy of a lower mandatory contribution (Rs 2,790) is marginally higher than the corpus generated by the high mandatory contribution that suffered a single, mid-career withdrawal (Rs 2,700). A lower contribution rate provides the household with the choice of investment, and reduces the administrative burden on the EPFO. Even if this calculation will not bear out for all types of partial withdrawals, the issues of choice and lowering of administrative burden remain pertinent, and should be important considerations for the design of any product.

EPFO's reforms are caught between two opposing policy goals. While the streamlined withdrawal processes help towards "ease of living", they compromise the product's identity as a retirement instrument. In trying to offer both security and flexibility, the EPF may end up providing neither effectively. It needs to either commit fully to a true, rigid retirement product with minimal access, or, if immediate liquidity is the priority, embrace financial freedom by reducing the mandatory contribution rate, thus delivering a more economically rational policy outcome.

The writer is managing director of TrustBridge Rule of Law Foundation

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"It's been said that Russians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity. Thankfully for Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin's shambolic autocracy has been doing its best to live up to the saying." — THE WASHINGTON POST

Jobs crisis is governance crisis

Public sector vacancies affect service delivery — from education to civil aviation, railways and healthcare. They also hurt national security



ZERO HOUR

BY DEREK O'BRIEN

I HAVE BEEN writing for this newspaper for the last six years. When was the last time I did back-to-back columns on the same subject? Never. This is a first. A fortnight ago, the topic of this column, Zero Hour, was unemployment in the private sector ('Lost in the election chatter', IE, October 24). This week, we zero in on unemployment in the public sector.

The youth unemployment rate is almost thrice the national average unemployment rate. The government, the single largest employer in the country, has not filled lakhs of vacancies.

While the government talks much about Viksit Bharat by 2047, a closer look at the number of vacancies in the public sector (once considered the bedrock of class mobility) tells a very different story. From teachers and doctors to scientists and security personnel, staffing shortages have spared no sector. This has precipitated not just a jobs crisis but also a gaping governance deficit. Here is just one example: Almost 2 crore people applied for 64,000 railway vacancies.

There are crippling vacancies in the education sector. Look at these numbers. Over 12,000 posts remain vacant across the Kendriya Vidyalaya and Navodaya Vidyalaya schools. There are over 1 lakh schools operating with just a single teacher as per the UDISE+ Report 2024–25. Further, one out of every four posts in central universities is vacant. As highlighted by a parliamentary committee, this shortfall has impacted both the faculty-student ratio and the quality of teaching.

The vacancy endemic extends to the field of research and development. In the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, more than a quarter of posts, across scientists, engineers and administrative staff, are vacant, while nearly two out of five posts for scientists are vacant at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). This is directly reflected in India lagging behind countries like the USA and China in innovation, scientific publications and patents.

Let us examine rural healthcare. Seven out of ten of the specialist positions in Community Health Centres lie vacant, whereas a fifth of positions for doctors remain unfilled. Even elite institutions like AIIMS suffer from faculty shortages, with two out of five posts vacant among the 20 oper-

ational AIIMS in the country. Shortfalls in this critical sector compromise patient welfare and overburden healthcare personnel.

The clouds overhead are dark. Much also needs to be done to put things on track. In the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), one out of two posts is vacant. A parliamentary committee has called this out: "critical vulnerability at the heart of India's safety oversight system". Additionally, the Air Traffic Controllers' Guild had raised concerns over the persistent shortage of controllers, leading to closure of critical operational units and hampering emergency responses.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report, published recently, reveals a 6.7 per cent increase in railway accidents in 2023 over the previous year. This comes at a time when more than 1.5 lakh vacancies exist in the safety category alone in the railways, as per an RTI reply.

The government thumps its chest on its uncompromising attitude on national security. What's the ground reality? The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has three out of ten positions vacant across sanctioned posts, hindering effective investigations. The paramilitary forces, whose remit includes border protection, currently have over 1 lakh vacancies. This translates into gaps in national security and pressure on the existing forces, leading to increasing suicides and fratricides among personnel.

Even the institutions charged with protecting the most vulnerable are not immune to the vacancy plague. In a reply to a question asked recently in Parliament by your columnist, the Union government admitted that the positions of chairperson, vice-chairperson and members of the National Commission for Minorities are lying vacant. Similarly, the posts of vice-chairperson and one member (out of a total of two) in the National Commission for Scheduled Castes have been vacant since March 2024.

The Department of Health and Family Welfare has a shortfall of one-fourth of its manpower while bodies like the Central Board of Direct Taxes and the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs are staring at vacancy rates of 34 per cent and 26 per cent respectively.

During the Monsoon Session of Parliament a few months ago, answers tabled by the Union government put the figure of vacancies in the public sector at around 15 lakh. Fill the vacancies. Turn jobs into a reality. It is time to turn Viksit Bharat into Fiksit Bharat.

PS: Someone promised 2 crore jobs annually. It was the Roman poet Ovid who said, "Everyone's a millionaire where promises are concerned."

The writer is MP and leader, All India Trinamool Congress Parliamentary Party. Research credit: Anjana Anchayil

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EMPOWER SCHOLARS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Roots for STEM' (IE, October 23). The government's initiative to attract Indian-origin researchers back home is a welcome step towards strengthening the nation's knowledge ecosystem. However, the larger question that lingers is why they left in the first place. The absence of intellectual freedom, limited research autonomy, and rigid institutional hierarchies continue to drive many scholars abroad. What India needs is a systemic renewal that empowers domestic researchers, safeguards academic independence, and embraces interdisciplinary curiosity. India's ambition must transcend "strategic STEM nationalism" and instead build an environment where scholars choose to stay because they are free to question, explore and create.

Ritika, Chandigarh

DIGNITY FOR ALL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'State of denial' (IE, October 23). The Supreme Court's recent action on the Transgender Persons Act is a much-needed reminder that equality cannot remain only on paper. Even years after the NALSA judgment, many trans people still face daily discrimination, lack of jobs, and denial of basic facilities. Promises have been made, but real change is missing. The government must act quickly to ensure fair opportunities, proper implementation of laws, and dignity for every transgender citizen.

Priya Dass, Ambala

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'State of denial' (IE, October 23). The Supreme Court's recent intervention regarding the non-implementation of the Transgender

Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 — five years after its enactment — serves as a crucial reminder of our democratic responsibility. India rightly takes pride in its democratic record, notably being among the first nations to guarantee the right to vote to women. The chronic failure to establish welfare boards and streamline documentation means the guaranteed rights of transgender citizens remain an implementation deficit, not a reality. The judiciary, through the landmark NALSA judgment and its subsequent monitoring, has consistently provided the legal and constitutional vision for equality. The executive must now demonstrate the necessary vigour and political will to fully operationalise the Act and finally secure dignity and equality for every citizen.

Krishan Kumar Chug, New Delhi

WHAT WE EAT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Nutrition needs nuance' (IE, October 23). There is a clear need to look beyond calorie intake and understand how farming patterns, markets, and consumer choices together shape our nutrition. While food security has improved, nutrition security remains a major concern. The increasing reliance on refined and processed foods has distanced people from traditional and wholesome diets. This not only impacts public health but also reduces demand for diverse and local crops. A coordinated approach involving the agriculture, health, and education sectors is essential to promote balanced nutrition and sustainable food systems. Greater awareness about seasonal and locally available foods can help restore the connection between what we grow and what we eat.

Dattatray S Giri, Pune



GOLD

₹1,23,354



USD RATE

₹87.88



OIL

\$63.21



SILVER

₹1,51,450

Note: Gold, silver rates as per India Bullion and Jewellers Association data, gold per 10g, silver per 1 kg; Crude oil (Indian basket) as of October 22

International market data till 1900 IST

AMID STAGNANT DOMESTIC PRODUCTION

India's reliance on imported crude oil creeps up further on demand growth

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 23

GROWING DEMAND for fuel and other petroleum products amid stagnant domestic crude oil output led to India's reliance on imported oil inching up further in the first half of the current financial year ending March (FY26). Latest data released by the oil ministry's Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC) shows that India's oil import dependency was 88.4 per cent in April-September, up from 87.9 per cent in the corresponding period of the last financial year. For the full FY25, reliance on imported oil was at 88.2 per cent, a full-year record.

Industry watchers believe that the import dependency level for the entire FY26 could be a tad higher than the April-September level, as was the case in the previous financial year. India's energy needs are consistently growing, leading to higher oil imports. This is fuelled by factors like growing energy-intensive industries, increased vehicle sales, a rapidly expanding aviation sector, growing consumption of petrochemicals, and a rising population. India's reliance on imported oil has generally increased over the years, with

the exception of FY21 when demand was suppressed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

India's oil import dependency was 87.8 per cent in FY24, 87.4 per cent in FY23, 85.5 per cent in FY22, 84.4 per cent in FY21, 85 per cent in FY20, and 83.8 per cent in FY19.

India's heavy reliance on imported crude oil makes its economy vulnerable to global oil price fluctuations. This also impacts the country's trade deficit, foreign exchange reserves, the rupee's exchange rate, and inflation rate, among others. The Indian government aims to reduce the country's reliance on imported crude oil but faces challenges due to sluggish domestic oil output amid rising demand. In 2015, the government had set a target to cut the dependence on imported oil from 77 per cent to 67 per cent by 2022. However, import dependency has only increased.

The government has implemented several policy reforms to encourage investments in India's oil and gas exploration and production sector. The government is also promoting electric mobility, biofuels, and other alternative fuels to reduce oil imports. While there has been an increase in electric mobility adoption and the



File

OIL IMPORT
DEPENDENCY

Apr-Sept 2025-26	88.4%
Apr-Sept 2024-25	87.9%
2024-25	88.2%
2023-24	87.8%
2022-23	87.4%
2021-22	85.5%
2020-21	84.4%
2019-20	85%
2018-19	83.8%

Source: PPAC, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas



blending of biofuels with conventional fuels, it is not sufficient to offset petroleum demand growth.

India's crude oil imports rose to 121.2 million tonnes in the six months to September from 120.7 million tonnes in the year-ago period. Meanwhile, domestic oil production declined slightly to 14.2 million tonnes from 14.4 million tonnes. Total domestic consumption of petroleum products in April-September rose 1 per cent year-on-year to 118.3 million tonnes, of which only 13.7 million tonnes of products estimated to have been produced from domestic crude oil, resulting in a self-sufficiency level of just 11.6 per cent, per the PPAC data.

The computation of the extent of import reliance is based on the domestic consumption of petroleum products and excludes petroleum product exports as those volumes do not represent India's demand. India — the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil and also one of its top importers — is a net exporter of petroleum products.

Despite higher oil imports and import dependency, the country's gross oil import bill for April-September declined 14.7 per cent to \$60.7 billion year-on-year. The relief was primarily on account of lower oil prices in the international market vis-à-vis last year. Crude oil imports top the list of India's merchandise imports.

Oil rises 5% on fresh sanctions against Russia

New York: Oil prices surged around 5 per cent to a two-week high on Thursday after the US imposed sanctions on major Russian suppliers Rosneft and Lukoil. Brent futures were up \$3.37, or 5.4 per cent, to \$65.96 a barrel by 1613 GMT, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose \$3.33, or 5.7 per cent, to \$61.83. That put both crude benchmarks on track for their biggest daily percentage gains since mid-June and their highest closes since October 8.

REUTERS

Unlike most large economies, India is seen as a major growth centre for oil demand given the future consumption potential and relatively low per-capita energy demand currently. In fact, India is among the few markets where refinery capacity is expected to expand substantially over the coming years. India currently has a refining capacity of nearly 258.1 million tonnes per annum.

Goyal: India, US trade talks progressing

New Delhi: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday said talks between India and the US for the proposed trade agreement are progressing. "We are in dialogue with the USA, our teams are engaged. We recently had the Commerce Secretary visit the US, and he met with his counterparts. We continue to engage with them and talks are progressing... We hope to work towards a fair and equitable agreement in the near future," Goyal told *Doordarshan* in Berlin.

Meanwhile, India and Germany on Thursday discussed ways to enhance cooperation in areas including trade, investment, technology, green energy, and skillings. These issues were discussed during a meeting between Goyal and German Federal Minister of Economy and Energy Katherina Reich in Berlin. "The discussions focussed on enhancing cooperation in trade, investment, technology, green energy, and skillings," the Commerce Ministry said.

PTI

ANIL SASI

NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 23

AFTER A blistering rally that pushed it to record highs, gold has now fallen for the third day running amid investors' concerns over an overheating market. So, is it the end of this incredible valuation surge, which has driven up the yellow metal over 60 per cent this year?

The rally

To answer that, let's look at how the current rally has panned out, demolishing some well-established economic tenets along the way.

One, gold's parabolic valuation increase comes at a time when other markets are also simultaneously surging — shares, crypto, meme stocks, benchmark currencies, etc. In fact, such has been the pace of this rally that gold has outperformed stocks in what is decidedly a bull market in the US, driven by turbocharged AI optimism.

According to analysts, there are other correlations worth considering: while gold is up 60 per cent this year, crude oil is down 20 per cent or so. The gap works out to around 80 per cent — which analysts say is the most in at least a hundred years. The most recent instance when such a varied movement was seen is 2008, when the disparity was about 60 per cent — gold was up nearly 10 per cent while crude oil was down about 50 per cent. This year's trend beats even that.

The recent surge in gold prices also comes at a time when the US dollar has strengthened against major peers including the euro and the Japanese yen in the past month following better than expected US economic data.

Now, the irony here is that gold is seen as the ultimate safe haven asset, a time-tested store of value. Typically, it goes up when everything else underperforms. This time around, the gold rally has unfolded when most other assets — stocks, crypto and the US dollar (in recent weeks) — have also been on the up. Silver has tagged along too, both because gold generally has a trailing impact on silver and also due to silver's increased industrial application. "Gold is surging on the same day that US stock indices have (risen) over 1 per cent. This simultaneous climb in both a classic safe haven and risk assets is a powerful illustration that the drivers of the current gold rally are different from historical patterns," Mohamed A El-Erian, Rene M Kern Prof at Wharton, posted on October 20.



People buying gold and silver on the occasion of Dhanteras in Ahmedabad on October 18.

Express file

The triggers

So, what explains this simultaneous climb by the ultimate safe haven asset and other risky ones? To answer that, it might be worth going back to when the gold rally started in the first place.

The original trigger came over three years ago following the sanctions the US imposed on Russia after it invaded Ukraine. After that, central banks around the world, led by China and to some extent India, started diversifying their foreign exchange reserves, which are usually heavily dominated in assets denominated in the US dollar. Gold was the obvious choice, and that led to increased gold buying by central banks as they tried diversifying away from the greenback. That led to a slow, but steady, climb in the value of gold.

But the current gold rally, which has been playing out over the last few months, has a somewhat different trigger: a lot of Exchange Traded Funds (or Gold ETFs) buying across the world. Gold ETFs are essentially open-ended mutual fund schemes that are based on gold prices and are traded on stock exchanges. But for every ETF unit bought, there has to be some physical gold stashed away as backup, leading to a higher demand for the physical metal too that goes in tandem with ETFs. This triggers a general demand-price increase.

Consider the example of India: money in gold ETFs in September was nearly seven times higher compared to the same month last year at Rs 8,363 crore.

According to Ruchir Sharma, the head of Rockefeller Capital Management's international business, the gold ETFs floated in the last quarter were the highest ever, and much of this buying is happening on account of the liquidity that is sloshing around the system. This includes the legacy liquidity, which was the result of the quantitative easing initiated by Western governments after the pandemic. What is different, though, is that this liquidity is now

driving speculative frenzy — including, ironically, in a safe haven asset: gold.

A pause

Coming back to the original question: is it the end of this rally? Not really. Most market players are coming around to the view that the rally will continue after a profit booking stint and when these overheating concerns abate.

That's because the appeal of gold as a safe haven continues, given the factors such as central banks' stance and prevailing uncertainties — monetary authorities around the world are likely to continue with their liberal stance on liquidity and policy rates for now, with Donald Trump's tariff onslaught and the continuing Russia-Ukraine war posing risks. America's spending bill and debt overhang, slowdown in China, among other factors, are also concerns which increase the appeal of gold.

There is one more generic factor in play: the supply of gold is increasing very slowly, at around 1.5 per cent a year, since mining is limited. That's been the rate for more than half a century. The supply of dollars goes up by 6-8 per cent per year, in comparison. So, there is a supply-driven reason for the gold prices staying up for longer too. Also, Goldman Sachs, in a September note, indicated that if Trump were to go after the US Federal Reserve's independence, gold could surge as people might run from the dollar and seek safe haven assets such as gold. If the Fed does not cut rates further, it could inevitably come under further fire from Trump.

What could conclusively impact the gold rally in a major way, or at least the liquidity driven part of the rally, is if inflation were to come back in a big way. This would force the US Fed to withdraw some of this liquidity, which could dent part of the appeal of gold. But, on the flip side, that could also upend the stock rally — and in the process increase gold's appeal as a safe haven asset.

So, gold's northward streak could continue for longer.

BRIEFLY

Bank customers can opt for up to four nominees

New Delhi: Beginning next month, a bank customer can opt for up to four nominees in her or his account. The key provisions relating to Nomination under the Banking Laws (Amendment) Act, 2025 will come into effect from November 1, 2025, a Finance Ministry statement said.

PTI

Apple loses UK lawsuit on app store commissions

London: Apple abused its dominant position by charging app developers unfair commissions, a London tribunal ruled on Thursday, in a blow which could leave the US tech company on the hook for hundreds of millions of pounds in damages. The Competition Appeal Tribunal ruled against Apple after a trial of the lawsuit, which was brought on behalf of millions of iPhone and iPad users in the UK.

REUTERS

HUL's Q2 profit up 3.8% to ₹2,694 crore

New Delhi: Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) has reported a 3.8 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,694 crore and sales was up 2.1 per cent in the September quarter of FY'26 with a "flat underlying volume growth" due to the transitory impact of GST changes and prolonged monsoon in parts of the country.

PTI

SBI receives two awards from Global Finance

New Delhi: State Bank of India (SBI) received two accolades from Global Finance, New York at the Global Finance Award Ceremony held during the World Bank/IMF Annual Meetings 2025: World's Best Consumer Bank 2025 and Best Bank in India 2025.

ENS

Skoda Auto India launches new Octavia RS

New Delhi: Skoda Auto India has launched the new Octavia RS. It is powered by a 2.0 TSI engine delivering 195 kW (265 PS) and 370 Nm of torque.

ENS

Tata Trusts proposes to reappoint Mehli Mistry as lifetime trustee

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, OCTOBER 23

TATA TRUSTS, the principal shareholder of Tata Sons, has circulated a proposal among its trustees to reappoint Mehli Mistry as a trustee for three of its key philanthropic arms — the Sir Ratan Tata Trust, the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and the Bai Hiraibai Jamsetji Tata Navsari Charitable Institution. The reappointment would confer lifetime trustee status on Mistry.

Earlier this week, Tata Trusts unanimously reappointed Venu Srinivasan as a lifetime trustee, with the backing of Mehli Mistry. Mistry, along with trustees Pramit Jhaveri, Jehangir H.C. Jehangir, and Darius Khambata, supported Srinivasan's reappointment as a trustee of Tata Trusts.

However, they attached a key condition — that all future renewals of trustees must be approved unanimously. In the absence of unanimity, they

PROPOSAL CIRCULATED AMONG TRUSTEES

THE PRINCIPAL shareholder of Tata Sons, Tata Trusts, has circulated a proposal among its trustees to reappoint Mehli Mistry as a trustee for three of its key philanthropic arms.

A LONG-TIME confidant of Ratan Tata, Mistry was first

inducted as trustee in 2022, with his current three-year term set to expire on October 28

EARLIER THIS week, Tata Trusts unanimously reappointed Venu Srinivasan as a lifetime trustee, with the backing of Mehli Mistry

warned, their approvals would stand withdrawn.

During Ratan Tata's tenure, voting was never an option within the Trusts. Decisions were traditionally reached through consensus and collective agreement — a practice now being tested amid signs of internal friction.

A long-time confidant of Ratan Tata, Mistry was first inducted as trustee in 2022, with his current three-year term set to expire on October 28. The latest proposal comes against the

backdrop of reported internal rifts within Tata Trusts, with a faction seen as aligned with chairman Noel Tata and another group led by Mistry, comprising Ratan Tata loyalists.

Mistry is part of the four-member executive committee of Tata Trusts, currently headed by Noel Tata. Vijay Singh and Venu Srinivasan are vice chairman of the Trusts. Vijay Singh had to quit Tata Sons board last month as his renomination was opposed by four trustees — Mistry, Khambata, Jhaveri, and Jehangir.

The growing menace of deepfakes & how govt seeks to counter it with AI content labelling

SOUMYARENDRA BARIK
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 23

IN AN attempt to check the "growing misuse of synthetically generated information, including deepfakes," the Centre has proposed draft rules that require mandatory labelling of AI-generated content on social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram. The social media platforms will be required to seek a declaration from users on whether the uploaded content is "synthetically generated information".

According to the draft amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, platforms that allow creation of AI content will be required to ensure that such content is prominently labelled or embedded with a permanent unique metadata or identifier. In case of visual content, the label should cover at least 10 per cent of the total surface area, and in case of audio content, it should cover the initial 10 per cent of the total duration.

A deepfake is a video that has been digitally altered, typically used to spread false information. In the Indian context, the issue first surfaced in 2023, when a deepfake video of actor Rashmika Mandanna entering an elevator went viral on social media. Close on the heels of that incident, Prime

META, GOOGLE ASK FOR AI LABEL



File

COMPANIES LIKE Meta and Google already have some form of AI labelling on their platforms, and ask the creator at the time of uploading a piece of content whether it was made using AI

Minister Narendra Modi had called deepfakes a new "crisis".

What India is proposing

As per the draft amendments, social media platforms would have to get users to declare whether the uploaded content is synthetically generated; deploy "reasonable and appropriate technical measures", including automated tools or other suitable mechanisms, to verify the accuracy of such declaration; and, where such declaration or technical verification confirms that the content is synthetically generated, ensure that this information — that the content is synthetically generated — is clearly and prominently displayed with an appropriate label or notice.

If they fail to comply, the platforms may lose the legal immunity they enjoy from third-party content, meaning that the responsibility of such platforms shall ex-

tend to taking reasonable and proportionate technical measures to verify the correctness of user declarations and to ensure that no synthetically generated information is published without such declaration or label.

The draft amendments introduce a new clause defining synthetically generated information as "information that is artificially or algorithmically created, generated, modified or altered using a computer resource, in a manner that appears reasonably authentic or true".

Some form of labelling already happens online

Companies like Meta and Google already have some form of AI labelling on their platforms, and ask the creator at the time of uploading a piece of content whether it was made using AI. On Instagram, for instance, Meta applies an 'AI Info' label to content that is modified or created using

AI, although enforcement remains patchy, as several pieces of AI content on the platform don't seem to carry the label.

Last year, Meta had said that since AI-generated content appears across the internet, we've been working with other companies in our industry to develop common standards for identifying it through forums like the Partnership on AI (PAI). It was also working to build tools that can identify invisible markers at scale, so it could label images from Google, OpenAI, Microsoft, Adobe, Midjourney, and Shutterstock.

YouTube adds a label called 'Altered or synthetic content' to videos that are created using AI and also adds a description on how the video was made, and it can offer insight into the content's origin and whether it has been meaningfully altered using AI.

But as such, most of these measures, at this point, remain reactive in nature, meaning that the labels often appear after a video has been brought to the platform's attention in case the creator has not declared that the content was made using AI.

India's proposed amendments take that a step forward, as companies would have to verify AI content on their platforms without necessarily being intimidated about them by deploying suitable technological measures.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

MeitY Secy: Not asking creators to restrict AI content, only to label it

New Delhi: The government is not seeking to control or restrict online content but rather to ensure transparency by requiring creators to label AI-generated content so that audiences can make informed choices, Electronics and IT Secretary S Krishnan said on Thursday.

The government proposed changes to IT rules on Wednesday, mandating the clear labelling of AI-generated content and increasing the accountability of large platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, for verifying and flagging synthetic information to curb user harm from deepfakes and misinformation.

"All that we are asking for is to label the content... You must put in a label which indicates whether a particular piece of content has been generated synthetically or not. We are not saying don't put it up, or don't do this and that. Whatever you're creating, it's fine. You just say it is synthetically generated. So that once it says it's synthetically generated, then people can make up their minds as to whether it is good, bad, or whatever," Krishnan said.

Providers of computer resources or software used to create synthetic content must enable creation of labels that are fairly prominent and cannot be deleted, Krishnan noted.

Wannabe Vishwaguru should stop deporting scholars

THE Narendra Modi government seems to have perfected the art of courting controversy, even if the resultant rows bring it widespread condemnation. The deportation of Francesca Orsini, a London-based scholar known for her contribution to Hindi and South Asian literature, proves this.

Had she been allowed entry into India, her stay, lectures, etc., would have been noticed only by a small group of scholars and intellectuals; by denying entry, despite her holding a valid tourist visa, the government has unnecessarily invited criticism, showing not just the ruling establishment but the entire country in a bad light.

By denying her entry, the authorities have not only amplified the issue but also invited global condemnation for what appears to be an arbitrary and intolerant act. It is a textbook case of overreach—where insecurity masquerades as nationalism, and the fear of dissent trumps the spirit of open inquiry.

This episode also fits a troubling pattern. Over the last few years, India has seen a series of similar incidents involving academics, journalists, and activists who were either denied visas or deported without clear explanations. Each such act chips away at India's credibility as a democratic society that values freedom of thought and expression.

It also alienates the global community of scholars who, for decades, have engaged with India not out of political motives but from genuine intellectual curiosity and admiration for its civilisational richness. When the world's largest democracy begins to treat scholars as potential threats, it betrays a lack of confidence in its own cultural foundations. The government might argue that it reserves the right to deny entry to any foreign national, and legally it does. But the question here is not of legality—it is of wisdom, maturity, and vision. Great nations are not made by silencing voices or restricting

academic exchange; they are built by engaging with differing perspectives, even uncomfortable ones.

If India aspires to be a 'Vishwaguru', a teacher to the world, it cannot afford to appear fearful of those who study and interpret its languages, histories, and literatures. True cultural confidence lies in openness, not exclusion.

Moreover, the deportation sends a disheartening message to India's own academic community. Universities and scholars thrive on exchange—on dialogue with counterparts abroad, on exposure to different methods and interpretations. When the government curtails such interaction, it isolates Indian academia and discourages intellectual vibrancy. It also reinforces the growing sense that India's current establishment prefers control over conversation, and conformity over creativity.

In the long run, such actions do more

harm than good. They create an atmosphere of distrust, deter foreign scholars from engaging with India, and undermine the country's soft power—one of its most potent assets.

India's rich literary and linguistic traditions have always drawn admiration worldwide; they need ambassadors, not gatekeepers. Deporting Orsini sends precisely the opposite message: that the state would rather police thought than promote understanding.

If the government truly seeks to enhance India's global standing, it must learn to distinguish between genuine threats and criticism—even if the criticism is tendentious. The deportation of a scholar who studies Hindi literature poses no danger to the nation; on the contrary, her work helps the world appreciate India's intellectual and cultural wealth. By denying her entry, the government has not protected the country's interests; it has diminished them.

LETTERS

Hindi cinema under grip of communal warfare

Sir, apropos of 'communalism and 'secular' Hindi cinema (Hans India; October 23, 2025). The recent distasteful bad blood that was spilled between lyricist Javed Akhtar and singer Lucky Ali and of Shah Rukh Khan sporting a tika, while wishing his fans on Diwali, showcases the extent to which communalism has infiltrated Bollywood. It is unbelievable that it is the same industry that churned out blockbusters like Amar, Akbar, Antony, and Satyam Shivam Sundaram, which upheld secularism in the real sense, and also had a Muslim Mohammed Rafi, Hindu Kishore Kumar and Lata Mangeshkar, of Konkani heritage who had, and continues to have music lovers spellbound. Bollywood currently has people like Boman Irani, a Parsi actively involved. These show that Bollywood had withstood the cancer of communalism when others couldn't. But fissures have begun to show, much to the fans' frustration and disillusionment.

Dr George Jacob, Kochi

II

This refers to your editorial 'Communalism and 'Secular' Hindi cinema'. Cine goers of yesteryears had enjoyed Bollywood films as an escape from mundane life, and with an attempt to relive the couple of hours of movie watching in the fantasy world of their own. Elaborate stories involving emotional melodrama added to the interest and enthusiasm of the audiences then. The communal and secular aspects barely posed any hint of suspicion on the audiences. But, the pattern was unmissable for critical eyes. The script writers and film producers hailed from a particular community. However, a handful of level-headed film productions like Rajshri Productions, G P Sippy and other banners like BR Chopra, had their story lines cut out to cater to the viewers of all categories. The era when the mafia took over Bollywood production under Dawood Ibrahim, could produce films on a mammoth scale and budget which were hits too. The communal bias and element in films is more visible in the present times, when more critical eyes are in play.

K R Venkata Narasimhan, Madurai

Only cash counts in cinema

Cinema is mere entertainment business and money is language of this business. It has fantasies of drama, emotions (love-hate, revenge), illusions, actions with occasional tempering of patriotism and cine-crazy crowds queue up to watch and discuss/debate on new release. (Ref: 'Communalism and secular Hindi Cinema', Oct 23). It all boils down to a pivot of "box office money collection". So whatever actors do barring few exceptions is always to keep themselves in centre of media attraction which spins money around. It is myth that cinema would bring social reforms or paradigm shift in social order.

Buddha Jagdish Rao, Visakhapatnam

Reality check for Indian ODI cricket team

Indian cricket team touring down under faced back to back defeats despite having Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli. The much hyped side faced 7-wicket and 2-wicket defeats respectively and the third one at Sydney is a simply a formality. Over confidence and complacency let the team down. The spin-pace combination failed to yield desired result. The batsmen tried to come to form and wasted time in making quick runs. Kohli was a dismal failure in both the matches and needs to be asked quit the game. It was indeed a great loss before the ODI World Cup.

MR Jayanthi, Coimbatore

Takaichi bodes well for Japan

Takaichi created history not only as first woman PM of Japan but also as a unique -daring woman. She remarried (in 2021) to her (same) divorced husband (in 2017). Also, her husband took her sur name Takaichi to his name Taku Yamamoto. That's double bonus -adventurous -daring too. She has seen -dared many ups and downs in life and can easily handle any crisis with harmony and joyful success solutions. She is a woman full of progressive vigour and is expected to cruise Japan to peace, prosperity and excellent health too.

P V P Madhu Nivriti, Secunderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

Nandini to introduce QR code to combat fake, adulterated dairy products

BENGALURU: Amid growing concerns over food adulteration and counterfeit products, Karnataka's flagship dairy brand Nandini is introducing QR code-based product authentication to help consumers identify genuine items and protect public trust.

With reports of adulteration and imitation brands rising in the dairy market, the Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF) — which markets Nandini — has decided to adopt technology-driven solutions to ensure transparency and quality assurance.

KMF Managing Director Shivaswamy said all Nandini products will soon feature a unique QR code that contains detailed product information. Consumers can scan the code using their smartphones to verify authenticity. "Strict legal action will be taken against those involved in counterfeiting or adulteration," he warned.

Shivaswamy noted that KMF collects around one crore litres of milk daily, with 65 lakh litres processed into milk, curd, and other dairy products that reach consumers across the state. Nandini products are also exported to Dubai and Singapore, he added. The federation is now developing sugar-free sweets for diabetic customers as part of its product diversification.

On pricing, Animal Husbandry Minister K. Venkatesh clarified that there are no plans to increase the price of Nandini milk or its products, despite rising production costs. "Last year, 725 metric tonnes of Nandini sweets were sold.

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

The Int'l Criminal Court faces American sanctions



MALKANGIRI RAVI KUMAR

Raphael Lemkin, a Polish lawyer, came up with the word 'genocide' in the 1940s. He probably never thought that the idea of punishing crimes against humanity would be attacked politically eighty years later. Lemkin's tireless efforts to get the world to recognize genocide as a crime led to the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, which is now a key part of international humanitarian law.

Genocide has been going on for a long time, from the Biblical exterminations and the Armenian massacres to the Holocaust, Rwanda, and Bosnia. The suffering of the Rohingyas in Myanmar and the Palestinians in Gaza today makes us wonder if people have really learned from their mistakes.

On November 21, 2024, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague issued arrest warrants for two of Israel's most important leaders: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. During the Gaza conflict, they are accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity, such as using starvation as a weapon of war. The warrants were a historic event because they were the first time the leader of a democracy that was aligned with the West had to go to the ICC.

According to the Rome



Statute, all 125 countries that signed it, including Britain and France, must arrest the accused if they come to their country. It's a different story if any state will actually do it.

Around the world, judges, human rights groups, and academics have all raised the alarm about what many call a genocidal campaign in Gaza. The International Court of Justice (ICJ), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and more than 20 UN special rapporteurs have all spoken out against Israel's military actions and humanitarian blockade.

The US and the ICC have never gotten along well. In 2000, President Bill Clinton signed the Rome Statute but never sent it to the Senate because he was "concerned about jurisdiction and sovereignty." George W. Bush, who took over for him, went even further and officially withdrew U.S. support. He was afraid that American soldiers could be charged with crimes while they were overseas.

Even so, Washington has only sometimes worked with the Court, like when it funded special tribunals like the one for Sierra Leone and sometimes supported ICC referrals through the UN Security Council. In short, the US backs the idea of international justice, but only if it

doesn't apply to the US or its close allies.

The most recent fight started when the ICC looked into what Israel was doing in Gaza. The U.S. government quickly condemned the Court's decision, saying it was "illegitimate and politically motivated." The ICC does not have any authority over citizens of either Israel or the United States, according to Washington.

Donald Trump, who was then President, signed an executive order in February 2025 that allowed important ICC officials, such as Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan and judges in charge of the Afghanistan and Palestine cases, to be punished.

Al Haq, Al Mezan, and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights were also put on a blacklist for "supporting investigations against Israeli nationals." The order said that anyone or any group that gave "financial or technical assistance" to the ICC could be fined or sent to jail.

A lot of people in the international legal community were shocked by these moves. For the first time, a major power used its own laws to punish an independent international court, which is supposed to hold people accountable for war crimes and genocide.

The Court in The Hague

is under more pressure than ever before. Some American-linked NGOs have reportedly stopped working with it because they are afraid of getting back at it. Staff members are worried that going to the U.S. could get them arrested.

More than 120 civil society groups sent a letter to world governments asking them to protect the ICC's independence. The letter said that "such sanctions would abandon countless victims" and "weaponize the global financial system to strangle the Court's work."

Judge Tomoko Akane, the president of the ICC, called the sanctions a "serious attack on the rule-based international order and on millions of victims waiting for justice." Officials from the European Union also spoke out against the move, saying that weakening the ICC only gives war criminals more power.

Washington has had problems with the ICC before. The Trump administration put similar sanctions in place in 2020 after the court started looking into claims of U.S. war crimes in Afghanistan. In 2021, the Biden administration lifted those restrictions, which led to a short return to cooperation. But the most recent round of sanctions could bring the U.S. back into open conflict with the

organization it helped create.

People who don't like this say that it shows a double standard: when the ICC goes after leaders from Africa or Asia, it's praised; when it questions Western allies, it's called "political."

The ICC's job is simple but important: to hold individuals, not states, accountable for the worst crimes against humanity, such as genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and aggression. If powerful countries don't accept its authority, the idea of international justice starts to fall apart.

The conflict in Gaza has brought back an old moral question: can the world's most powerful countries ever be held to the same legal standards they impose on others? The ICC is still standing firm for now, saying it will carry out its duties "without fear or favor." But it does so under a lot of stress.

The US says that its sanctions protect its own sovereignty. But to a lot of people in the world, it looks like they're trying to silence a court that is only trying to hold people accountable when politics prefers silence.

As Judge Akane said not too long ago, "Justice delayed is justice denied, but justice obstructed is justice destroyed."

The ICC can only bring charges against people, not countries. If countries start punishing people who want justice, though, the spirit of international law is in danger. The world must choose between believing in accountability and letting power have the last word again.

The peace initiative by US President Donald Trump

While the Genocide Convention, 1948 says the state

The psychology of investment

How Chandrababu Naidu attracts global giants

NOMULA SRINIVAS RAO

When it comes to how a leader attracts investments for a state, we are often offered platitudes about "ease of doing business", "tax incentives" and "competitive land packages". But the truth is more subtle — it lies in the personality, vision and psychological presence of the leader himself. In this respect, Nara Chandrababu Naidu (hereafter "Naidu garu") of Andhra Pradesh stands out as a textbook case. At 75 ("young, not old", as one might say), he is driving other states to envy with the announcement of a massive investment in his state: about US \$15 billion (≈ ₹87,520 crore) over five years (2026-2030) by Google in AI and cloud infrastructure.

In this psycho-analytical look, I draw upon my personal experience of working as his Personal Assistant in 1990 (when TDP was in opposition) and attempt to de-

code why companies flock to invest, how Naidu Garu manages to convince them, and what this means for his state's transformation.

The leader as investment magnet: Psychological and strategic levers

From a psychological perspective, what do investment-hungry companies really seek in a leader? I would summarise it as follows:

Visionary confidence — the sense that this leader is not merely reacting, but positioning the state for the future.

Credibility built by track-record — a history of turning promise into delivery enhances trust.

Personal agency and decisiveness — the investor feels they're dealing with someone who can make things happen, not just bureaucracy.

Narrative appeal — the leader tells a compelling story that resonates with the investor's ambition (for growth, global scale, innovation). Symbiosis of prom-



ise and structure — beyond words there are the systems, incentives and ecosystem that deliver. Naidu garu ticks all these boxes. Let us unpack how.

Naidu's personal imprint and investment magnetism

Back in 1990, I watched Naidu garu in his early 40s leading the opposition in the Assembly after the surprise 1989 loss of the TDP. Even at that stage, his speed of thinking, clarity of strategic direction, and fearlessness in debate impressed me deeply. He did not look like a defeated opposition leader; he looked like someone poised for future dominance. The bravado was real, but grounded in competence.

Fast-forward to today. In October 2025, Google's an-

nouncement of a \$15 billion investment in AP's Visakhapatnam (to build a gigawatt-scale AI hub, subsea cable gateway, fiber network etc) emerged as the single largest FDI commitment in India so far.

But beneath the headline lies personal style and structural preparation:

- Naidu garu's technologist mindset is well known (from his earlier regime 1995 in united Andhra Pradesh) when he brought in Microsoft and made Hyderabad an IT hub.
- He combines political agility (to cut deals, get clearances) with strategic narrative (showing the state is "future-ready").
- He sends a signal to investors: Here is a leader who understands your language (technology, global scale, AI), and has the wherewithal to deliver.
- The continuity from past to present is powerful: "Yes, he did Microsoft in 1995 when he was young;

now he is doing Google in 2025" — a meta-narrative of consistency and staying ahead of the curve.

I recall in 1990 how I sensed his inner drive: even as opposition he would monitor developments, draft responses, coordinate the team, articulate strategy. I knew then: this man is thinking ten steps ahead. That experience informs my current assessment: his behaviour hasn't changed in essence, only the scale has. And investors see this.

Why companies love to invest when the leader has this aura

From the corporate side, locating a large scale investment in a state involves risk. They look at the regulatory, infrastructural, power, land, logistics, skill-pool risks. But beyond that they look at leadership-state alignment. A leader who appears "on board" gives

comfort: "if we commit here, the state will support us, not thwart us."

Naidu garu projects exactly that. He signals: I'm aligned with your global ambition; I'll unlock the ecosystem; I'll make this work. The Google deal is telling: it is not just about incentives; it is about building a gigawatt-scale AI hub, subsea connectivity, fibre network, clean energy linkage. It tells companies: We are serious.

Moreover, his track record (e.g., early Microsoft in Hyderabad) lowers the credibility gap. The psychological reassurance: "If he did it before, he can do it again." And his ability to nudge neighbours, handle critics, and drive competitive positioning shows he is comfortable in the limelight and ready to fight for his state.

Thus the leader becomes the brand of the investment destination. People invest in states, yes — but states with the right leader become investment magnets.

(The writer is former OSD to former Union Civil Aviation Minister)

BIZ BRIEFS

HMIL appoints head of sales

Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) has appointed Sunil Moolchandani as the Head of National Sales. He brings over two decades of industry experience, consistently driving growth, fostering innovation and enhancing operational performance across diverse markets. Moolchandani has held leadership positions across prominent automotive and mobility brands, where he spearheaded initiatives in sales transformation, dealer network expansion and customer engagement strategies. He is expected to further HMIL's commitment to excellence, innovation and customer satisfaction.

Coca-Cola's 8-yr ICC partnership

Coca-Cola India, is celebrating 8 years of partnership as the official refreshment and hydration partner of the International Cricket Council (ICC), ahead of India hosting the ICC Women's World Cup 2025 across Navi Mumbai, Guwahati, Indore, and Vizag. Sundee Bajoria, V-P, Coca-Cola India & Southwest Asia, said: "The ICC Women's World Cup is more than a sporting event, it is a platform that inspires millions, especially young women, to dream bigger."

Maruti Suzuki logs milestone

Maruti Suzuki India Ltd announced that the Jimny 5-door has achieved a landmark milestone, surpassing a cumulative export figure of over one lakh units from India. Hisashi Takeuchi, CEO, MSIL, said: "The Jimny has over half a century of heritage, globally. Jimny 5-door crossing 1 lakh export mark is a proud achievement for Maruti Suzuki. We are deeply thankful to customers around the world for their trust in this acclaimed SUV."

KreditBee expands its biz presence

KreditBee, an online credit solution provider, continues to expand its reach across metros as well as Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. With a current loan count of 5.59 crore the company serves a rapidly growing and diverse customer base nationwide. Madhusudan E, Co-founder and CEO, KreditBee, said: "As India's digital lending ecosystem matures, metro cities continue to lead the charge in adopting seamless, tech-driven credit solutions. At KreditBee, we are proud to serve over 8 crore customers nationwide."

SBI General's growth report

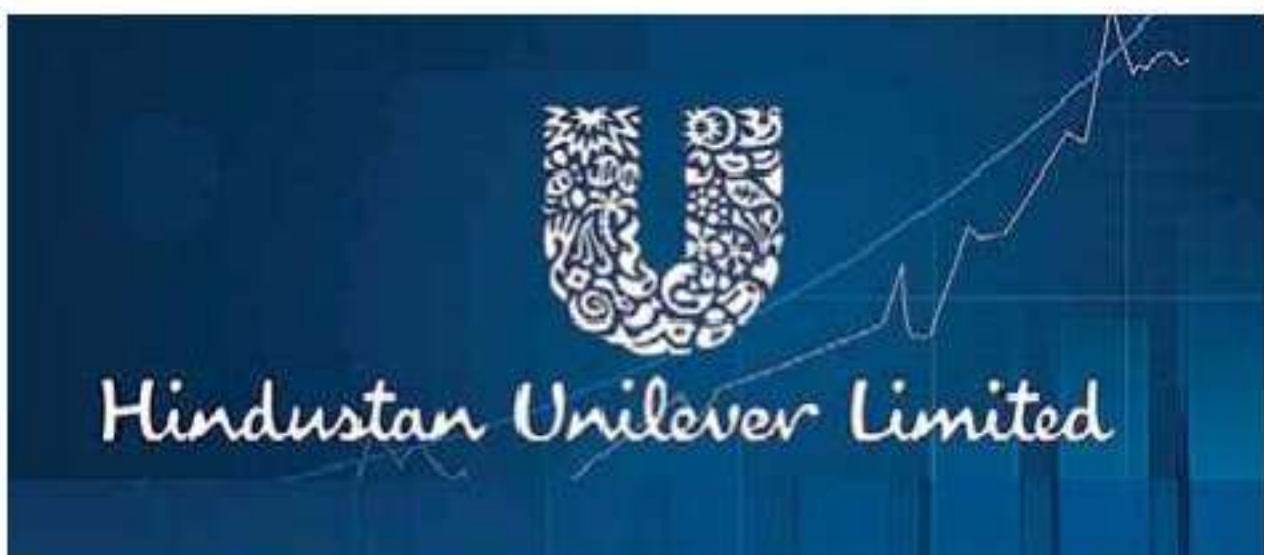
SBI General Insurance has reported a robust performance for the first half of the FY 26. It registered a 10.7 per cent growth in its gross written premium (GWP) to Rs 7,376 crore in H1. Naveen Chandra Jha, MD, SBI General Insurance, said: "In H1 FY26, we've grown by 1.4 times faster than the industry and 3X faster than Private & SAHI Insurance companies, marking as one of the fastest-growing general insurers in the country."

HUL's Q2 net rises 3.8% to ₹2,694 cr

Board nod for interim dividend of ₹19/ share for FY26

REPORT CARD

- Revenue rose 2.1% to Rs16,034 cr in Q2/ FY26 from Rs15,703 cr in Q2/FY25
- Underlying Sales Growth at 2%
- EBITDA margin at 23.2%
- 60% business sits with no impact of GST



in the September Quarter of 25. Performance for the quarter reflected a transitory impact of GST changes and prolonged monsoon conditions in parts of the country, as per the earnings statement.

HUL's total expenses in the September quarter were at Rs12,999 crore, up 3.32 per cent. Its total income, which includes other revenue, was up 1.5 per cent to Rs 16,388 crore. HUL's board, in a meeting held on Thursday, approved an interim dividend of Rs 19 per share for FY'26. "We delivered a competitive performance with an Underlying Sales Growth (USG) of 2 per cent and an EBITDA margin of 23.2 per cent in the quarter," HUL CEO and Managing Director Priya Nair said. The latest GST reforms are a positive step by the government to drive consumption, expected to

increase disposable income and improve consumer sentiment. However, the quarter saw a transitory impact as the market adjusted to these changes.

"We anticipate normal trading conditions starting early November, once prices stabilise, paving the way for a gradual and sustained market recovery," she said. Shares of HUL on Thursday were trading at Rs 2,623.45 apiece on BSE, up 1.20 per cent in the morning trade. Anticipates low-single digit price growth, better volume-led H2 HUL is anticipating a 'low-single digit price growth' in the upcoming quarters, especially in product categories that did not benefit from reduced GST rate, and expects a volume-led growth in the remaining second half of the fiscal year, its CFO Ritesh Tiwari said.



FTCCI, TG govt team up for tourism boost

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

WITH an objective to promote local tourism with public-private collaboration, Federation of Telangana Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FTCCI) has joined hands with the Telangana Tourism Department, Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), and National Institute of Tourism & Hospitality Management (NITHM), to launch two innovative contests - 'FTCCI Tourism Hyderabad Junction Jewels - Photo Contest' and 'FTCCI Tourism Weekend Getaways of Hyderabad-Reel Contest.'

These first-of-their-kind initiatives, curated by FTCCI's Tourism Committee, aim to celebrate Hyderabad's artistic urban spaces and en-

courage citizens to rediscover nearby weekend destinations within a 150 km radius. The contests were announced to commemorate World Tourism Day and highlight the city's evolving tourism potential.

Addressing the press conference, R Ravi Kumar, President of FTCCI, said: "Hyderabad is not just a historic city; it is a modern hub with vibrant attractions. These contests will encourage citizens to rediscover and showcase our city's beauty."

Prof V Venkatramana, Director of NITHM and member of the FTCCI Tourism Committee, appreciated the initiative, adding that NITHM recently signed an MoU with Raoido to train 10,000 of its captains as part of its tourism skill development drive.

Ethanol imbalance: 350 distilleries stare at uncertain future

Allocation bias in latest OMC tender sparks industry outcry over fairness, efficiency and environmental logic

NEW DELHI: MORE than 350 operational distilleries across the country are facing an uncertain future due to inadequate procurement orders under the latest ethanol tender, with industry bodies flagging concerns over the allocation methodology that favours new entrants over existing units.

The Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2025-26 tender issued by Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) has come under fire from stakeholders who allege that the allocation criteria is creating artificial imbalances, while sidelining distilleries set up under prior government commitments.



According to the tender document (#1000442332), zones where offers from local distilleries fall short of requirements are classified as deficit zones, with all local offers considered full for allocation. However, industry representatives say this approach ignores surplus capacity in neighbouring states, much of which was established under Long-Term Offtake Agreements (LTOA) and Expression of Interest in-

itiatives promoted by OMCs themselves.

"A more holistic procurement model is needed -- one that considers surplus availability across states, pre-existing capacities and investments, prior understandings and commitments made with distilleries," Grain Ethanol Manufacturers Association (GEMA) President CK Jain said in a statement.

The current allocation mechanism is not only economically inefficient but also environmentally counter-intuitive as it promotes the creation of redundant capacity while neglecting existing infrastructure, he added.

Indian economy may grow 6.7-6.9% in FY26: Deloitte

NEW DELHI: Deloitte India on Thursday projected India's economy to grow 6.7-6.9 per cent in the current fiscal amid buoyant demand and policy reforms. Indian economy grew 7.8 per cent

in the April-June quarter of current fiscal. Deloitte India's 'India Economic Outlook' report forecasts a GDP growth between 6.7 and 6.9 per cent, averaging 6.8 per cent this fiscal year, up by

0.3 percentage points from Deloitte's previous forecast. This performance signals not just resilience, but a renewed sense of India emerging stronger than most nations. Similar growth rates

Deal momentum gains pace in consumer, retail sectors

NEW DELHI: India's consumer and retail sector witnessed robust deal momentum in Q3/2025, recording a total of 132 transactions valued at \$3.4 billion, up six per cent in volumes and nine per cent in value compared to Q3/2024, including public market activity, a report showed on Thursday.

According to Grant Thornton Bharat's Consumer and Retail Dealtracker, excluding public market deals, mergers and acquisitions (M&As) and private equity (PE) deal activity accounted for 121 deals worth \$2.3 billion, marking a 168 per cent increase in value (quarter-on-quarter).

The surge was driven by five high-value deals above \$100 million and 26 deals above \$10 million, together contributing \$2 billion or 89 per cent of to-



tal deal value, signalling strong investor confidence in scale, brand strength, and growth-oriented consumer businesses, the report mentioned.

"Q3 marked a decisive rebound for India's consumer and retail sector, with deal volumes rising to 132 and values crossing \$3.4 billion, nearly four times higher values than the previous quarter. The recovery was led by renewed investor focus on textiles, apparel and accessories, and sustained activity in food processing and e-commerce," said Naveen Malpani, Partner and Consumer Industry Leader, Grant Thornton Bharat.



RBI which projected FY26 economic growth at 6.8 per cent.

Profit booking pares early gains

Dalal St extends winning streak for 6th session; After hitting a 52-wk high, indices reversed most of their intra-day gains as sentiment turned cautious

POSITIVE MOMENTUM

- BSE Sensex climbed 130.06pts (+0.15%) to 84,556.40
- NSE Nifty ended 22.80pts (+0.09%) higher at 25,891.40
- FII bought equities worth Rs96.72 cr on Tuesday



the markets lower.

Rising for the sixth straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 130.06 points or 0.15 per cent to settle at 84,556.40. During the day, it jumped 863.72 points or 1.02 per cent to 85,290.06. The 50-share NSE Nifty ended 22.80 points or 0.09 per cent higher at 25,891.40.

"Domestic equities started on a positive note; however, they pared early gains as investors booked profits following sanctions on Russian oil and the possible postponement of India-US trade negotiations. "Meanwhile,

IT stocks advanced as sentiment improved after Trump's softer tone on H1B visas... As the undercurrent vibes of the domestic market have improved due to a possible India-US deal and a rise in consumer demand, the broad market is expected to do much better henceforth," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said. FIIs are gradually returning to Indian markets, encouraged by expectations of earnings rebound in H2 FY26 supported by festive demand, tax benefits and GST reductions, he added.

AI hogs limelight in VC funding

Global venture capital investments surge to \$120 bn in Q3, while exit activity rose to \$149.9 bn

NEW DELHI: Global venture capital (VC) investment reached \$120 billion across 7,579 deals in Q3 2025, marking the fourth consecutive quarter above \$100 billion, a report said on Thursday.

Artificial intelligence (AI) remained the leading sector for funding, while exit activity rose to \$149.9 billion, collectively accounting for a significant chunk of activity, according to the report from global consultancy KPMG.

"India experienced a banner quarter for exits in Q3 2025, with exit value surging to a high not seen in at least seven years.

Despite the soft VC investment in Q3, there continued to be optimism in the market given the growth in startup exit activity -- particularly in terms of IPO exits," the report said.

The KPMG report said that due to India's strong macro-economic fundamentals and vibrant capital markets, there is substantial optimism that VC investment will begin to rebound once trade uncertainties are resolved. Further, IPO activity is also expected to increase over the next few



quarters in India, the report added.

"Macros are still strong, the capital markets are still vibrant, and a lot of capital has been raised that will need to get deployed--so funding should increase as uncertainties calm. But investors will be focused heavily on the path to profitability and cash flows

Macros are still strong, the capital markets are still vibrant, and a lot of capital has been raised that will need to get deployed--so funding should increase as uncertainties calm. But investors will be focused heavily on the path to profitability and cash flows

-Nitish Poddar, Partner, KPMG in India

ticipation rose to \$58.6 billion, with the United States at the forefront, while software continued to dominate investment sectors. Global exit value increased from \$119.2 billion in Q2 to \$149.9 billion in Q3, marking the highest level since Q4 2021.

Only a handful donate eyes in a nation of billions

Despite India's vast population, eye donation pledges remain alarmingly low, exposing deep-rooted myths, limited awareness, and the urgent need for stronger national action

In a country of 142 crore people, it is shocking that only 4.84 lakh individuals have pledged to donate their eyes after death. Compare this with Sri Lanka, where 20 lakh people have taken the eye donation pledge — a striking contrast that highlights the urgent need for awareness and action in India. Every eye donation (corneal donation) can give the gift of sight to two individuals. Yet, India continues to struggle with low participation and widespread misconceptions.

India currently has 49.5 lakh visually impaired people, and seven crore individuals suffer from various eye-related conditions. Despite having 720 registered eye banks, only 200 are actively functioning. The country receives around 50,000 corneal donations annually, but nearly one lakh people require corneal transplants every year.

The leading causes of vision loss include cataract, uncorrected refractive errors, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, age-related degeneration, and eye injuries or infections — often worsened by poor nutrition. To protect your



eyesight, have yearly eye check-ups, use prescribed lenses, limit screen time, wear UV-protected sunglasses, and maintain a diet rich in greens, carrots, pulses, and vitamins A, C, and E. Discuss eye donation with your family — each pledge can restore sight to two people, provided the

cornea is collected within six hours of death and preserved properly.

Karnataka's efforts

Karnataka currently has 63,000 registered eye donors, contributing significantly to the national figure. According

Only five lakh Indians have pledged eye donation. Stigma, hesitation, and lack of awareness still prevent sight-restoring corneas from reaching those in need

to officials, "People can get free eye check-ups at any of the 393 Asha Kirana Vision Centres across Karnataka. Awareness and family support are key to increasing eye donations."

Why India still hesitates

According to data from the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO), India has 4,84,706 registered eye donors. Experts cite lack of awareness, religious beliefs, family opposition, and social stigma as major deterrents. With its strong healthcare network, active NGOs, and media-driven campaigns, Karnataka can become a model state for eye donation awareness — transforming vision loss into a story of collective compassion.

—Sridhar Vivan

SOCIALTATTLE

That went viral

A hyper-lapse video of Bengaluru's Deepavali celebration was posted by @sriharkarant, capturing the grand finale where fireworks met the low-flying clouds. The video went viral. #Diwali2025 #Bangalore



What's Tweeting

A user @dexter_2397, posted that their backpack was forgotten on a KIA shuttle bus to Bangalore airport and was realized just before check-in. The bus number was traced using their UPI transaction, and the bag was recovered. The efficiency of this tech city in solving such issues was applauded by people, with huge thanks extended to Mr. Ravi for the help. #tech-city #bangalore



A post was shared by @ashishvupadhy

Ashish V Upadhyya @ashishvupadhy
 My brother yesterday travelled from #Shimoga to #Bengaluru in #KSRTC #KarnatakaSarige and the driver was rashly driving ended up caught by a Police passenger that he was drunk. And the Replacement of the bus was done at #Bhadravati and what is the safety of passengers gaurenteed?
 4:26 pm · 23 Oct 25 · 19 Views

reporting that a KSRTC Karnataka Sarige bus travelling from Shimoga to Bengaluru yesterday was being driven recklessly. It was discovered by a police passenger that the driver was drunk. The bus was subsequently replaced at Bhadravati, exposing serious safety lapses and raising urgent concerns about passenger security.

Bangalore Mirror tagged

A post was shared by @the_repliss, tagging @BangaloreMirror and several authorities, reporting that trees are being cut inside Loyola School campus along Bannerghatta Main Road. The post included photos showing the trees that have been cut.



INBRIEF

BSNL asked to restore connectivity

The High Court has directed Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) to consider a representation seeking the installation of mobile towers in Bhavani Bijalgao village of Kamalanagar taluk, Bidar district. The directive follows a petition filed by resident Gurunath Vadde, who highlighted the severe hardships faced by villagers due to the complete absence of mobile connectivity. A division bench comprising Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru and Justice CM Poonacha issued the order while hearing the plea, which sought action on a representation submitted on May 18, 2024. The petitioner's counsel informed the court that no private telecom operator—such as Airtel or others -- operates in the region, leaving residents entirely cut off from digital communication. The counsel argued that the lack of network connectivity has deprived villagers of access to crucial online services, including education, telemedicine, and digital payments. Taking note of the grievance, the bench directed BSNL to consider and act upon the representation promptly. The court disposed of the petition, instructing BSNL to examine the proposal and take necessary measures to restore mobile connectivity in the area. —BMB

Rs 23-cr facelift for Whitefield railway station

Renovation work at Bengaluru's Whitefield Railway Station is moving at a brisk pace, with the Railways targeting completion by year-end. The ₹23.3-crore modernisation project, taken up under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, focuses on enhancing passenger amenities and improving infrastructure. The circulating area is complete, while the station façade is being redesigned with a contemporary look. Platform construction and passenger shelters are underway, and a landscaped garden is being developed in front of the



station. Meanwhile, the quadruple line project between Bengaluru Cantonment and Whitefield has achieved

nearly 70% progress. The 37.8 km corridor, funded with ₹492.8 crore, is expected to be operational by February 2026, easing congestion and benefiting around 62,000 passengers daily. The upgraded station will integrate directly with the Purple Line metro, boosting connectivity for commuters from Kolar and Bangarpet. Modern facilities such as lifts, escalators, medical units, dedicated disabled-friendly amenities, food courts, Wi-Fi, and the "One Station, One Product" kiosk will enhance commuter comfort and experience. —BMB

AAI report on second airport soon

Infrastructure Development Minister MB Patil said that the Airports Authority of India's expert team, which recently inspected potential sites for Bengaluru's second international airport, will submit its report within the next two to three days. Once received, the government will place the report before the Cabinet for a final decision.

Patil said the AAI team might recommend both shortlisted sites, but financial feasibility will determine the final choice. The state initiated the process early since the 150-km clause bars a new international airport near Kempegowda International Airport until 2033. Starting groundwork now will allow the project to be ready by

then, he noted. Only Delhi and Mumbai currently have two international airports. Patil added that Tumakuru and South Bengaluru are among the suggested sites, and the final selection will depend on passenger demand, industrial needs, convenience, and future growth potential. —BMB

Make AI for the people

To curtail AI developers' influence, foundations commit \$500 mn aimed at centering human needs

Artificial intelligence is a matter of design — not destiny.

That's the message from ten philanthropic foundations aiming to loosen the grip that the technology's moneyed developers, fueled by an investing frenzy, hold over its evolution. Launched Tuesday under the name Humanity AI, the coalition is committing \$500 million across the next five years to place human interests at the forefront of the technology's rapid integration into daily life.

"The future belongs to those who actively create it, and that shan't be a few leaders in Silicon Valley. It's all of us," Mozilla Foundation Executive Director Nabiha Syed said in an emailed statement. "The systems shaping our lives must be powered by people, open by design, and fueled by imagination."

Artificial intelligence has been embraced as a productivity booster in fields such as software engineering or medicine. It could help students with a range of visual, speech, language and hearing impairments to execute tasks that come easily to others. Humanitarian groups are testing its ability to translate important documents for refugees. And some farmers find it useful for detecting pests in their hard-to-survey fields.

But others question whether its deployment is actually improving their quality of life. Some point out that real harms exist for children turning to AI chatbots for companionship. AI-generated deepfake videos contribute to the online spread of misinformation and disinformation. The electricity-hungry systems' reliance on energy generated by fossil fuels contributes to climate change. And economists fear AI is taking jobs from young or entry-level workers.

The problem, according to Omidyar Network President Michele L Jawando, is that tech giants aren't investing en masse in the first set of use cases. They're focused on products that



Artificial intelligence has been embraced as a productivity booster in fields such as software engineering or medicine

may or may not help humans thrive. Jawando pointed to OpenAI's recent entrance into the online marketplace as an example. At its DevDay last week, the company touted ChatGPT's new capabilities as a virtual merchant that can sell goods directly for Etsy sellers or deliver food from Uber Eats.

The coalition recognises the private sector's desire to maximize profits and governments' interest in spurring innovation, according to Jawando. But between tech companies' great influence and the Trump administration's regulatory rollbacks to speed up AI technology construction, she said philanthropic leaders recognized the need for more capital and more collaboration to amplify the voice of civil society.

Jawando said Humanity AI's role is identifying what "flourishing" looks like in a world with artificial intelligence.

"Most of what we're offered right now is efficiency. But that's not flourishing," she said. "I don't want my life to be efficient. I want my life to flourish. I want

it to feel rich and robust and healthy and safe."

Led by the MacArthur Foundation and Omidyar Network, Humanity AI seeks to take back agency by supporting technology and advocates centering people and the planet. Members must make grants in at least one of five priority areas identified by the coalition: advancing democracy, strengthening education, protecting artists, enhancing work or defending personal security.

MacArthur Foundation President John Palfrey said he is particularly focused on creating opportunity for early career professionals, regardless of their education levels.

He acknowledged that some young job seekers are questioning the ideal of the "American Dream," that one can make a better life for themselves than the previous generation. But that wouldn't be the case, he suggested, if decisions about artificial intelligence began with the question: how do we ensure a brighter future for individuals and their families?

"That's a very different orientation than 'How do we invest to make the LLMs be the biggest and fastest,' right?" Palfrey told The Associated Press, referring to a form of AI known as a large language model that trains on massive bodies of text. "It's an orientation that centers opportunity

and young people."

The alliance of a broad range of philanthropies underscores the widespread concern. Its ranks represent humanities funders such as the Mellon Foundation, tacklers of inequality in the Ford Foundation, an open internet grantmaker in the Mozilla Foundation, education funders such as Lumina Foundation, charitable behemoths such as the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, racial equity supporters such as the Kapur Foundation and groups like the Siegel Family Endowment that have long explored technology's societal impacts.

They're not the first philanthropic coalition to emerge this year with the goal of ensuring everyday people don't get left behind. The Gates Foundation and Ballmer Group were among the funders who announced in July that they'd spend \$1 billion over 15 years to help create AI tools for public defenders, parole officers, social workers and others who help Americans in precarious situations. Other efforts seek to improve AI literacy and expand access for entrepreneurs in low-income countries.

Humanity AI hopes to expand its coalition. Partners began coordinating grants this fall and will pool new money next year in a collaborative fund managed by Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.

AP

BITS & BYTES

Robot delivery agent

Grubhub is expanding its partnership with self-driving technology startup Avride to pilot robot food deliveries in Jersey City, New Jersey, the companies said on Thursday. Users in the city can place orders through the Grubhub app, operated by Wonder Group, and choose Avride robot delivery if within range. Customers can order from Wonder's Jersey City location, which houses more than 20 different restaurant concepts and allows users to combine dishes from multiple restaurants into a single order. Food delivery apps have been implementing pilot programs for robot deliveries to reduce costs, speed up services and improve reliability. Uber Eats and DoorDash partnered with Serve Robotics this year to roll out delivery robots in U.S., while Avride tied up with Uber last year for food deliveries and robotaxis.

Reuters

Share slide

Tesla shares fell 3.7% in premarket trading on



Thursday after the Elon Musk-led electric vehicle maker extended its streak of profit misses to a fourth quarter, even as sales hit record highs.

Rising costs and declining revenue from highly profitable regulatory credits strained Tesla's margins, underscoring that even the EV maker is feeling the cost pressures rippling through the auto industry as President Donald Trump overhauls U.S. policy.

Despite the near-term margin squeeze, Tesla's hefty valuation still rests on investor expectations that future growth will come from robotics and artificial intelligence, even though vehicle sales continue to generate most of its revenue.

In the third quarter, the company's costs rose sharply, including more than \$400 million in tariffs on auto parts due to Trump's trade policies, said CFO Vaibhav Taneja.

"The margin compression is the real concern. Higher operating expenses, increased tariffs and lower regulatory credit revenue all hit at once," said Farhan Badami, market analyst at eToro.

Reuters

Power deal

Google has entered into the first corporate agreement to buy electricity



from a U.S. power plant using carbon capture and storage in a deal to help fuel its data centers in the country's Midwest region, the technology company said on Thursday.

Big Tech's plans to expand technologies like generative artificial intelligence, which will require vast amounts of electricity, have butted up against the realities of a U.S. power grid running short on supplies.

That has led to a flurry of announcements in recent months by companies like Google to help fund the development of new and expanded power plants across the country.

Google's recent deals have included purchasing electricity from advanced nuclear reactors, geothermal and hydropower. It is also working with the biggest U.S. power grid, PJM Interconnection, which covers the world's largest concentration of data centers, to speed up the connection of new power supplies.

Reuters

Reddit sues Perplexity over scraping

Social media platform Reddit sued artificial intelligence startup Perplexity in New York federal court on Wednesday, accusing it and three other companies of unlawfully scraping its data to train Perplexity's AI-based search engine. Reddit said in the complaint that the data-scraping companies circumvented its data

protection measures in order to steal data that Perplexity "desperately needs" to power its "answer engine" system. The case is one of many filed by content owners against tech companies over the alleged misuse of their copyrighted material to train AI systems. Reddit filed a similar lawsuit against AI startup Anthropic in June that is still

ongoing.

"Our approach remains principled and responsible as we provide factual answers with accurate AI, and we will not tolerate threats against openness and the public interest," Perplexity said in a statement.

"AI companies are locked in an arms race for quality human content - and that pressure has

fueled an industrial-scale 'data laundering' economy," Reddit chief legal officer Ben Lee said in a statement. Reddit, which features thousands of interest-based "subreddit" web communities, said in the lawsuit that it is the most commonly cited source for AI-generated answers to user questions. It has licensed its content to Google, OpenAI and others for their AI training.

Reuters

MUMBAI MERI JAAN BY MANJUL



RTO employees to begin hunger strike on Oct 27

Union says despite repeated assurances no progress made on demands

RAJENDRA B AKLEKAR
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WORK at the city's Regional Transport Offices (RTOs) could be affected starting Monday as the Motor Vehicle Department Employees Union, Maharashtra State (a recognised body) has announced that it will launch an indefinite chain hunger strike on October 27, at the office of the transport commissioner to protest against the administration's continued neglect of their long-pending demands.

According to the union's general secretary Surendra Saratape, the decision

follows the administration's failure to implement assurances repeatedly given by senior officials and the transport minister.

"The main demand concerns the retrospective implementation of the approved departmental structure and promotions to all vacant posts. The union stated that despite maintaining restraint for the past three years, the department has not conducted a single round of promotions. Over 70 employees have retired without promotion, and the promised in-service progression scheme has remained inactive," Sartape told **mid-day**.

Union leader Vishwas Katkar had met officials from the transport commissioner's office who had assured that all promotion orders would be issued by September 30, 2025, but no action was taken. Even after a meeting chaired by Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik, where the administration promised to resolve the matter within a week, there has been no progress.

Terming this as defiance of the minister's directives, the union said it has no choice but to proceed with the planned agitation.

Mumbai chokes on Diwali dust

City records its worst air quality of 2025; PM2.5 levels shoot past 300 in parts of Malad and Deonar

EESHANPRIYA MS
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OCTOBER has recorded Mumbai's worst air quality of 2025 so far, with 19 monitoring locations across the city logging their highest daily average PM2.5 levels, according to a new study by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA). The analysis used data from the Central Pollution Control Board's (CPCB) Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS).

The city's dirtiest air days coincided with Diwali celebrations between

October 19 and 21, when firecracker use and stagnant weather combined to push pollution to alarming levels. The worst-hit areas were BKC, Powai, Mulund, and Ghatkopar, where PM2.5 concentrations exceeded 200 µg/m³, while Deonar and Malad breached 300 µg/m³.

PM2.5 refers to fine particulate matter small enough to enter the lungs and bloodstream, posing severe health risks, especially for children, the elderly, and those with heart or lung conditions. PM10 particles, typically generated from construction, road dust, and industrial emissions, can irritate the eyes, throat, and lungs, worsening asthma and respiratory problems.

According to SAFAR, Mumbai's Air Quality Index (AQI) on Thursday ranged between 150 and 160, placing it in the 'Moderate' category.

OCT 19 TO 21
Days city witnessed dirtiest air



A hazy sky in Mumbai on Tuesday. PIC/ASHISH RAJE

CPCB defines AQI categories as

0-50

Good (Green)

51-100

Satisfactory (Light Green)

101-200

Moderate (Yellow)

201-300

Poor (Orange)

ABOVE 300 Very Poor (Red)

PM10 stations exceeding safe limit (100 µg/m³)

OCT 16
14 stations

OCT 19
24 stations

OCT 17
10 stations

OCT 20
28 stations

OCT 18
21 stations

OCT 21
27 stations

OCT 22 **12** stations

Cabinet under scanner

Mahayuti plans performance review of ministers within a year; reshuffle likely if they fail to deliver

SANJEEV SHIVADEKAR
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AFTER Gujarat's recent cabinet reshuffle, all eyes are now on Maharashtra. Sources within the Mahayuti government say a performance review of ministers is planned within the next year, and those found underperforming could be dropped from the cabinet.

A senior Maharashtra minister and BJP leader confirmed the plan. Speaking on condition of anonymity, he said, "The government hasn't even completed a year. We'll give ministers enough time to perform. Ideally, a re-

view should be done after two to two-and-a-half years. Those failing to meet benchmarks will face action."

The move mirrors Gujarat's recent overhaul, where 21 new ministers were inducted, 12 of them first-time MLAs. BJP, known for its regular reshuffles, appears ready to apply the same model in Maharashtra.

A few Mahayuti ministers, particu-

larly from Ajit Pawar's NCP and Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, have landed in controversy over their comments and conduct, drawing public criticism. Their behaviour embarrassed the Mahayuti government; instead of being removed, they were given a warning to improve or face action next time.

In 2024, 39 ministers took oath in Maharashtra — 33 as cabinet ministers and 6 as ministers of state. The BJP has the lion's share with 19 ministers, followed by 11 from Shinde's Shiv Sena and 9 from Pawar's NCP. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis leads the coalition with deputies Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar.

Flood relief aid disbursed

The state government had approved a ₹31,628 crore relief package for flood-hit farmers and families, promising disbursal before Diwali. Chief Minister Fadnavis said that 60-65.



Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis (centre), addresses a press conference along with Deputy Chief Ministers Eknath Shinde (left), and Ajit Pawar (right), in Mumbai, Maharashtra, on Tuesday, October 7. PIC/PTI

₹31,628CR
Flood relief package for farmers

comment

THOUGHT
FOR THE DAY

If opportunity doesn't knock,
build a door — Milton Berle,
comedian

Girls should get the same sporting opportunities as boys

The ongoing Women's Cricket 50-over World Cup, co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka, is moving towards the knockout stage, with the league stage now at its tail end. India has been disappointing in the tourney, though this edit has not too much to do with the results.

The bigger takeaway from the substantial crowds, exciting contests and skill is to give girls the same opportunities and avenues as boys to go out and play, be it any sport, not just cricket.

It begins in the mindset at home. While we definitely see more participation of girls in sport, families have to be encouraging and equal from the outset. The fact that we do not yet see our public spaces, especially maidans, even empty streets on holidays full of girls playing cricket, like we see boys, or even football, tells us that there is still some way to go when it comes to sport parity. There may be a number of reasons for this, prime among which is a cultural mindset which

stops girls from going out to play in public spaces. The girls themselves are reluctant to claim the streets as they are afraid to be made fun of or ridiculed, becoming the butt of comments from passers-by as they play on the roads. This once again stems from a fear of being harassed, as they may have faced such situations in the past, even while simply walking on the roads or hanging out with friends, in public transport.

Today, we see women runners on

our streets, especially early mornings. We want to see more girls playing different sport, even exercising outdoors without fear and with the same sense of entitlement as boys and men do. That begins at the very root, the smallest unit called home.

Every sporting competition for women, at any level — local, district, city, state or national — should be a spur for girls induction into sport, with the ongoing cricket World Cup being just that.

The wonder that is chakki atta

LAVIE EN
ROSA



Rosalyn D'Mello

Little did I know before buying this variety of wheat flour — a first since I moved to Tramin in South Tyrol five years ago — that I was about to unlock another level in my chapati-making skills



I missed the belan I had in Delhi, and it was obvious I was making do with a pastry roller, but I could argue that my chapatis tasted even better than what either of my parents makes. REPRESENTATION PIC/ISTOCK

masala. For months, the atta was lying in our tiny pantry, because, unlike the other South Asians living here, I don't have a large enough drum to contain such a large quantity, nor do I have so much space in my apartment. A week ago, when I finally made some time to reorganise my spice drawers and stock the masala boxes I had gifted myself, I took out about half a kilo of the chakki atta into a glass container that still bore the label 'dal for sambhar'.

Two days ago, I impulsively decided to quickly knead a dough to go with the chana masala. My hands felt surprised by the ease with which it came together. I rolled out the balls into smaller circles and applied some Amul ghee — another recent purchase — then folded them into a triangle. After rolling them all out, I made the chapatis on the tava I 'borrowed' from my mother-in-law when we moved into our own apartment. The chapatis were ridiculously soft yet flaky and comforting. It went perfectly with the chana masala it was meant to accompany. I missed the belan I had in Delhi, and it was obvious

I was making do with a pastry roller, but I could argue that my chapatis tasted even better than what either of my parents makes. I don't know if there's a suppleness in my fingers that has come from being such a committed cook, or feeling confident in the kitchen, or acknowledging my cross-cultural fluency. But I had clearly unlocked another level in my chapati-making skills. I knew right then there could be no going back to using Italian flour. When I shared my recent triumph with a work colleague from Navi Mumbai who lives in Dubai, she told me her own story of regularly transporting chakki atta in her luggage and about this one time she was stopped by security personnel who couldn't fathom why she was taking this along!

But the afterglow of my triumph didn't end here. In the evening, I told our oldest that the dinner menu included 'Indian pancakes'. I told him he could help me knead the dough, and so, we both put on our South Tyrolean aprons — they are very region-specific in their design — and

got to work. The next half hour was pure joy as Josef helped me knead, cut up the dough with his child-safe knife, form balls, and finally roll it out with the pastry dough. As part of my attempt to be less 'perfectionistic' in my tendencies, I simply let him make whatever shape he wanted. I wanted him to delight in the process and not get hung up on making round chapatis. He ate them hot as they came off the tava, compelled, like me, by their buttery flakiness. Yesterday he asked to make them again. As we undertook the task, I let him take charge. I remembered, later, that one of the first unpublished 'columns' I ever wrote was titled 'Who says a chapati has to be round?'. I had the strange suspicion of having arrived full circle.

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

LETTERS

More heartwarming stories needed

This refers to 'Behen gifts bhai his life back'. Such heartwarming stories of resilience and the strong bond between brother and sister are much needed in today's stressful times. There are roughly 3000 bone marrow transplants per year in India, with a huge gap between demand and supply.

BAL GOVIND

We wake up only after a tragedy has hit us

Apropos of 'Two fires in 12 hours kill six and injure ten in Navi Mumbai inferno', illegal residential structures mushroom in and around Navi Mumbai and a majority of these buildings lack fire compliance measures. It is only when tragedy strikes that people wake up from their stupor.

PERVYNN KAVARANA

Bhavin Punmiya's heroic act is indeed inspiring

The cover story '24-year-old braves fire to save six lives' is a testament to the courage, grit and daredevilry of Bhavin Punmiya in the Vashi high-rise fire. The young saviour's heroics merit appreciation.

AMIT BANERJEE

Asrani leaves behind a legacy of brilliance

This refers to 'Alvida, Asrani'. The passing of the legendary actor is a profound loss. His iconic dialogue, "Hum Angrezon ke zamane ke jailer hain" from Sholay, has immortalised his comedic brilliance and unforgettable contribution to Indian cinema.

TS KARTHIK

have your say!



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Deportingscholars, stonewallingideas

The deportation of Francesca Orsini, an eminent scholar of Hindi and South Asian literature, from the New Delhi airport on Monday was a misplaced assertion of authority, which shows India in a poor light. Orsini, a professor emerita at the University of London, is noted for her acclaimed book on the role of Hindi in national life during India's freedom struggle. She has a valid five-year tourist visa, but was denied entry because she had violated visa conditions during her previous visit by engaging in research activities. While her action, technically, may be a violation, it should not have attracted a humiliating deportation on entry. It must be noted that the government has not pursued extreme action on these lines against many visitors who commit similar violations.

Orsini is not the first foreign scholar with a valid visa to have been denied entry to India. In 2022, a British anthropologist, Filippo Osella, and an architecture professor, Lindsay Bremner, were deported on arrival. UK-based Indian academic Nitasha Kaul was deported from Bengaluru last year. The OCI card of another academic, Ashok Swain, was cancelled, but he secured relief from the court later. The government has restricted the entry of foreign scholars and insisted on clearance for their involvement in seminars and other academic activities. This is in line with the action against non-government organisations engaged in charitable activities or institutions that operate in academicspheres. The narrative projected in such cases is that the visitors are a threat to national interests. Research institutions such as the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) have faced government action. A global report on academic freedom this year placed India 156th among 179 countries.

These actions do not show the strength of a state but only expose its insecurity. They don't align with the claims of a Vishwaguru that nurtures ambitions of being a guide to the world. India has pitched itself as a country open to ideas from around the world. It can not lead the world by isolating itself from ideas. The Indian State and the country's culture are not so fragile as to be threatened by ideas from other lands and cultures. Engagement with diverse ideas, even critical perspectives, can only strengthen the country. Interactions with these views are necessary for it to remain lively and dynamic. India's culture and civilisation have survived because of its ability to absorb ideas. Many foreign intellectuals have done commendable work to enrich Indian languages and other areas of scholarship. They should be encouraged, not penalised.

Denial of entry over visa violations must also be seen in the context of a resistance to diverse ideas

At 20, RTI is a promise broken

As India's Right to Information (RTI) law completes 20 years, it has lost much of its potency and is facing an existential challenge. Hailed as a unique legislative measure that empowered citizens and sought to make governance transparent, the law has been rendered powerless through amendments by the government, efforts to stall its functioning, and a refusal to provide it with the necessary infrastructure and resources. A progressive, transformative legislation such as the RTI law, which aligned with the country's democratic system and the best principles of governance, should have been a cause for celebration on its 20th anniversary. Instead, it now presents an occasion to examine its failures and an uncertain future.

The picture is grim – the Central Information Commission is without a head, and has only two commissioners where there should be 11. Over four lakh cases are pending across the country. Six information commissions became defunct at the state level in the last year. Applicants continue to be denied responses to queries made under the law. Deadlines prescribed for the responses are not adhered to, and those who violate them are not penalised. There have been multiple cases involving officials getting away with incorrect responses. Citizens who seek information under the law continue to be attacked; scores of activists have been killed. A nexus formed among the officials, politicians, and vested interests has grown in strength, hindering the functioning of the law. These forces have also enjoyed the backing of governments that see the obstruction of information in their interest.

The Supreme Court's directions towards corrective action have not yielded results. It has criticised the delay in official appointments and told the government to initiate timely action on the matter. But the situation remains unchanged. In 2019, the government assumed the powers to decide the salaries and service conditions of the Information Commissioners, making them virtually subordinate to the dispensation. When the Commission is stripped of powers to act independently, it stops serving the purpose it was created for. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 comes with provisions that curb the right to know under the RTI law, in the name of the right to privacy. The RTI was envisioned to deepen democracy by holding governments accountable for their actions. The shrinking and progressive neutralisation of this law is part of a larger pattern, where democratic institutions and the foundational ideas of transparency and openness in governance are being systematically undermined.

Weakened by amendments and institutional neglect, the transformative law now risks being irrelevant

The great powers are in a battle for primacy. India cannot afford entrapment, must prioritise strategic autonomy

SANJAY K BHARDWAJ

South Asia has once again become a scene of competition between major powers, similar to what was seen during the Cold War period. The region occupies a crucial space, which could be seen as a strategic battleground where several influences and interests intersect. With the internal contestations and State-specific rivalries, the region is not only a passive recipient of extra-regional power politics but also becomes actively involved in politico-strategic and maritime dynamics of these powers.

Global politics can be defined in terms of either 'lopsided multipolarity' or the emerging 'bipolarity'. The US is zealously defending the *status quo*, while China is bidding aggressively to dislodge the US from its predominant position as the singular hegemon and emerge either as a substitute or at least as an alternative to the US in global politics. This contestation is unfolding across the world in different geographies and different issues, and South Asia is no exception. Both powers employ various strategies that either serve their economic interests and extend influence in the region or create the potential for military or political advantages. The region is getting embroiled in a new race between Uncle Sam and the dragon.

On the one hand, the driving force behind China's approach in South Asia is defined by institutionalised economic persistence. The shift from overt balance-of-power politics to the systematic manoeuvring of trade and defence ties throughout the 1990s and 2000s led to a formalised set-up in 2013, as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Beijing, aided by its vast capital reserves and compliant State-owned enterprises (SOEs), has been making deep inroads in the region, with clear geo-strategic objectives. It constructs economic corridors (CPEC and CMEC), roads, railways, ports, and pipelines to increase connectivity and access to the markets.

Beyond economics, the country has expanded its defences. Pakistan is the most visible example of a deep military relationship with China. As per Booz Allen Hamilton's 'String of Pearls' hypothesis, China is acquiring strategic

presence at several ports in the region, such as Gwadar and Karachi (Pakistan), Hambantota and Colombo (Sri Lanka), Chittagong and Payra (Bangladesh), and Kyaukpau (Myanmar). This has given China a broader footprint in the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean littoral. Beijing has methodologically strengthened its ties through a blend of high-level diplomacy and economic leveraging, though, resulting in a 'debt trap diplomacy'.

The US has noticed this and has charted out a plan to counter China's hold in the region. Its policy in South Asia has ranged from deep military to interventions towards leadership changes, to counter-balance



China's growing influence. Under the Trump administration, it has adopted a 'transactional foreign policy posture', in which foreign economic assistance is not just regarded as a soft-power tool, but rather as a geopolitical strategy to install favourable political dispensations across the region.

The US's 'war on terror' policy and subsequent withdrawal from Afghanistan had left a gap in the region that China could fill. The realisation of this possibility has prodded the US into efforts to reclaim the space. The US had anchored its Indo-Pacific strategy around India to limit Chinese ingress in the region. But it has realised the limitations of this strategy due to India's policy of non-interference.

When regimes change

The US and China have institutionalised foreign policy systems, while India's neighbours have personality-driven, elite-centric politics. Leadership transitions form a crucial part of this structure. In April 2022, Imran Khan was ousted from power for being too

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Stories beyond statistics

From family squabbles to missing babies, the census offers moments that numbers can't capture

N RAMA RAO

People from all walks of life have unanimously welcomed the Centre's recent announcement that India will count its population by March 1, 2027, after an unprecedented 16-year gap. As an official who has been associated with censuses for decades – both within and outside the country – I have encountered some interesting and often hilarious situations during this mammoth exercise.

The very first question a census enumerator must ask in a household is the name of its head. In some households, the enumerator had to wait patiently – sometimes indefinitely – as the family debated whether the husband or the wife should be declared the head.

Semantics, too, can create amusing situations. A middle-aged man in a village once reported his marital status

as "separated" in response to the question of whether he was single, married, widowed, divorced, or separated (not legally). When the enumerator learnt that the man's wife was merely away at her son's house in a neighbouring town, he ticked the entry 'married' – with a wry smile.

Many men are reluctant to disclose the economic activities of their wives. The stock answer is often "She is only doing household work," even if she is engaged in farming or other gainful occupation. It is therefore no surprise that women remain under-counted in labour force statistics. One hopes this tendency will not persist in the 2027 Census.

During one enumeration, an observant enumerator noticed an infant in a cradle while wrapping up her interview. The mother had deliberately withheld information about her newborn baby, fearing the child might attract the 'evil eye'. The enumerator had to patiently explain that the word census, meaning full count, required the inclusion of even a one-day-old baby.

An interesting situation arose during the 1993 Census in The Gambia, a

independent, pro-China, and pro-Russia. The Rajapaksa government, which also had a pro-China outlook, was toppled a month later. In August 2024, Sheikh Hasina was replaced by pro-US Muhammad Yunus, and, in September 2025, Nepal witnessed the overthrow of K P Oli's pro-Chinese Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) government. That all the toppled regimes had relatively pro-China positions tells a story.

The US also focuses on alternative financing in the region through institutions like Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), Development Finance Corporation (DFC), and Blue Dot Network, to counter China's growing footprint. In 2023, the US announced a \$553 million project for a deep-water shipping container terminal in Sri Lanka. In 2025, the US also came into an agreement with Pakistan to lower tariffs and invest in its oil reserves and minerals.

The US's port-grabbing exercise is also aimed at increasing strategic depth in the region. It has made a joint military base with the UK on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, and is planning for Pasni (Pakistan) in the Arabian Sea, and 'Quad Ports for Future' in the Bay of Bengal. Washington also has regaining the Bagram airbase in Afghanistan as a top priority.

It can be argued that the ongoing strategic competition between the US and China in South Asia has irrevocably transformed the region into a battleground for a new Cold War. Thus, India has to hone its regional diplomacy for global gains. Apart from economic development and political stability, India's primary objectives are countering terrorism, curbing insurgency, and defying religious fundamentalism. All these internal security threats emanate from its neighbourhood and are supported by invisible, extra-regional powers.

The increasing US-China contestation in the region has impinged upon New Delhi's foreign policy choices. India must avoid entrapment in this great-power rivalry and play a delicate balancing act to safeguard against emerging security threats. It should also aim to promote a rule-based and just world order along with a free and open Indo-Pacific region. India has to align with the extra-regional powers in a way to protect its regional dominance and strategic autonomy, and ensure an inclusive, liberal, and democratic South Asia.

(The writer is a professor at the School of International Studies, JNU)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bluff and blackmail do not make diplomacy

US President Donald Trump has tread a new and dangerous path of diplomacy in his own style. His unilateral imposition of tariffs on imports according to his mercurial likes and dislikes has brought him unpopularity among several European countries, apart from Australia, Canada, Russia, China, and India. He appears to have misconceived that bluff and blackmail can bring him success in economic relations and in bringing peace. Some countries have subjugated themselves, but Russia, China, India, and

several others are seething with anger at his imperious approach. Even American courts have taken note of his crossing the red line. Such use of economic power to impose his will on international relations and peace efforts will not bring him lasting success, as can be seen from the continuing escalations in the Middle East, even after the self-claimed successful talks in Cairo. Despite several sessions with Putin and Zelenskyy, talks are in a stalemate. **SV Venkatakrishnan**, Bengaluru

taken in conjunction with Siddaramaiah's earlier statement that he would not contest the 2028 Assembly polls, suggests his retirement after completing his second term as CM. However, it is clear that there could be a tussle for the CM's post if the Congress returns to power. **CV Aravind**, Bengaluru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: **letters@deccanherald.co.in** (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

Anation is not just a piece of land. We can only be protected if national sentiment is aroused among people. The RSS is doing this work. Some people have the wrong opinion about this... The RSS does not care about prejudice... **CT Ravi**, BJP leader



Every nationalist is capable of the most flagrant dishonesty, but he is also unshakeably certain of being in the right.

George Orwell

TO BE PRECISE

India's Silicon Valley debates the future



IN PERSPECTIVE

Kerala's poverty test: Absent or silent?

Milestones matter, but a mere statistical elimination of extreme poverty cannot address hidden vulnerabilities

K A SHAJI

On November 1, Kerala will step onto a stage of its own making, one that proclaims a moral victory few societies have ever attempted. The state will declare itself free of extreme poverty, the first in India to do so. A declaration described as historic will be read out with pride and political flourish, marking the culmination of decades of social reform, public investment, and a deep-rooted commitment to equality and dignity.

It is a moment Kerala has earned. Yet it is also a moment that demands pause. While extreme poverty may be statistically eliminated, vulnerability persists. It lives in the narrow alleys of coastal villages where the sea swallows homes each year, in the hills of Wayanad where landslides uproot families during every monsoon, and in the minds of jobless youth who see no future in their own land.

The claim rests on the Extreme Poverty Eradication Programme (EPEP) launched in 2021. Through this initiative, officials identified over 64,000 families living without food security, safe shelter, or basic healthcare. Three years later, the government says that more than 93% have been rehabilitated and that some districts have achieved zero extreme poverty. The data suggests a success story built on years of planning and strong public participation.

This progress is possible because Kerala began from a different foundation. Universal literacy, free healthcare, women's cooperatives, and local self-governance have created a system of care unique in India. Poverty here is no longer chronic hunger or lack of education but the lingering exclusion of those left behind. The poor in Kerala today are the elderly living alone, landless tribal families in remote settlements and coastal households, displaced again and again by erosion.

Kerala has shown that governance, when local and empathetic, can transform lives. Each panchayat and ward committee has worked to identify and rehabilitate those in need. It reveals how collective responsibility can still change social reality. But poverty does not vanish when a survey is completed. It shifts shape with every new challenge. It is no longer a fixed condition but a recurring threat shaped by the economy, ecology, and the

marketplace. A single medical emergency, a job loss, or a natural disaster can destroy years of stability.

Kerala's proudest achievements, its health and education systems, are now under pressure. Medical expenses and private schooling costs have become unbearable for many. What was once public wealth has turned into a private burden. Poverty in Kerala has not disappeared; it has become more silent, hidden beneath the respectability of survival.

The new vulnerabilities

Unemployment deepens this fragility. The state's educated youth, once its greatest asset, now find themselves excluded from both agriculture and industry. Many depend on migration to the Gulf or other states. Remittances sustain villages and families, but they also hide a truth: that Kerala's economy offers limited opportunities for its own people.

Climate change is adding a layer of risk. Across Kerala's coast, the sea continues to eat into homes and livelihoods. In the high ranges, repeated landslides have made thousands of people climate refugees, resettled far from their original communities. They may not fit the definition of extreme poverty, yet they live in constant dependence and anxiety. To declare victory over poverty without acknowledging the new vulnerabilities would weaken the very spirit that made Kerala different.

Kerala's greatest strength has been its ability to recognise its failures, to debate, to correct, and to rebuild. The state has always renewed itself through public argument, from the land reforms of the 1960s to the People's Plan of the 1990s to the recovery after the floods. That willingness to self-examine and self-correct is what gives its human development story credibility. It must not be lost now in the noise of celebration.

The November 1 declaration should be viewed not as the end of poverty but as a renewal of Kerala's social covenant. The next challenge is to prevent people from sliding back, to protect those whose lives are made uncertain by health costs, unemployment, and climate shocks.

Kerala has earned the right to celebrate. But even as it claims to have said no to extreme poverty, it must keep listening to those still living at the edges of survival: the migrant family on the eroding shore, the tribal mother in Attappady, the cancer survivor in Kochi's slums, the unemployed graduate waiting for a call letter. Their stories remind us that the battle is not over. The true triumph will come not when the state declares it, but when no one in Kerala has to fear falling back again.

(The writer is a South India-based journalist who has chronicled rural distress and environmental struggles)

Drowning in data gaps: Lack of reliable information imperils rivers’ revival

KHUSHBU BIRAWAT

India’s rivers are drying, polluted and poorly monitored. Yet policy and infrastructure decisions continue to rely on patchy, inaccessible data. River management remains reactive, not knowledge-driven. Strengthening India’s data systems is no longer a luxury; it is an urgent governance necessity.

The Condition Assessment and Management Plan (CAMP), a national initiative under the Ministry of Jal Shakti’s National River Conservation Directorate, offers a glimmer of change. It aims to prepare scientific, basin-level management plans for six major river basins: Cauvery, Godavari, Krishna, Mahanadi, Narmada, and Periyar. The programme brings together institutions such as IISc and several IITs/NITs to assess the present conditions and recommend interventions for river rejuvenation.

As the panel discussions and presentations progressed in the second meeting

of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) for the CAMP at the IISc, Bengaluru, there was a sense of optimism that government and academia were finally sitting together to discuss the state of India’s rivers in a structured way.

The SAC-2 meeting revealed both the promise and the persistent paralysis in our water-governance ecosystem. “Lack of data” dominated the presentations—a familiar chorus in India’s environmental dialogues. The senior official chairing the meeting emphasised using whatever data is available, coordinating with state departments to obtain missing datasets, and proceeding to actionable recommendations for the government.

All the research teams stressed the need to monitor rivers at higher frequency and finer spatial scales. Everyone agreed that robust data are the foundation for good river management. But how to overcome the institutional bottlenecks that make even existing data inaccessible or unreliable was not addressed.

One major takeaway was the inadequacy of our flow-monitoring network. The Central Water Commission (CWC) stations are simply too sparse to capture today’s ground reality. For instance, there are only two discharge stations on the 172 km long Arkavathi River, which drains a 4,178 sq km catchment. Both are located near the downstream stretches, leaving the highly urbanised upper reaches (read Bengaluru’s outflows) completely unmonitored. Without such information, designing sewage- or effluent-treatment plants becomes guesswork.

Where monitoring does exist, it often serves as compliance. Reports are filed and numbers recorded, but insights rarely feed back into planning. Take the National Water Monitoring Programme (NWMP), 2017 guidelines, which classify monitoring locations as Baseline, Trend, Flux (or Impact) and Hotspot stations, each to be monitored with defined parameters and frequencies.

In practice, this categorisation is ab-

sent. The State Pollution Control Boards continue to monitor and report water quality, assigning water bodies an A–E “designated best use” classification. Yet, the very basis of what the intended best use should be for each river stretch or lake is undefined, leaving the entire exercise floating without context.

Moreover, the current water quality standards for irrigation in India address only a narrow set of basic parameters. As India becomes a global hub for pharmaceutical and chemical manufacturing, our regulations and monitoring protocols must evolve, becoming far more comprehensive and stringent to detect and manage emerging contaminants that now flow freely in our rivers and aquifers.

Through the discussions, it was evident that most participants knew the familiar problems that ailed our rivers. Yet deep understanding demands knowing where, what kind, and why specific degradations occur. This spatial understanding is missing. We seldom map pollution sources or

hydrological changes with sufficient resolution to see local patterns. Without that, we cannot define the problem precisely enough to design solutions. Spatially mapped, local-scale data would make an immediate difference.

Even when datasets exist, accessing them from government departments often involves prolonged correspondence and repeated visits. At the meeting, researchers were encouraged to obtain data by physically visiting departmental offices and waiting until officials released the information.

One individual who managed to secure such data was lauded as the “data man”, and his persistence was cited as a model for others. Yet this highlights a systemic problem. Experts are forced to expend months pursuing essential data that should already be publicly accessible.

If such datasets were open-source and standardised, we could move faster from: data → diagnosis → decision → implementation → monitoring → learning.

Transparent data is not just a technical need; it is a democratic necessity. When information about rivers is public, citizens can engage, question and contribute. Our national scientific temperament grows when ordinary people can see, interpret and debate the same evidence that experts and officials rely on. Access to shared data transforms people from subjects to citizens. It builds accountability because decisions can then be verified, not just announced.

CAMP represents a hopeful shift, an attempt to weave science into river-governance decisions. But its success will depend on how courageously institutions confront their own information deficits. Data are infrastructure; without them, every intervention is speculative.

If we can make data accessible, reliable and transparent, our rivers stand a chance of revival, and our governance, a chance of reform.

(The writer is a researcher and curator at Paani Earth Foundation, Bengaluru)

The protests that rocked Nepal were about more than a social media ban. The economy is so dire that for many, going abroad seems the only way to build a future

ANUPREETA DAS

In his hometown, Chamkhar, a tiny village of breathtaking beauty tucked into the hillside about an hour away from Nepal’s capital, Rajendra Tamang sits plotting his future.

The golden fields of corn, verdant slopes and imposing views of Himalayan peaks hold little opportunity. Neither does the rest of Nepal, Tamang, 22, said. Jobs are scarce and competition is fierce, even for low-paying work. Wealth disparity is high and corruption is endemic.

Two years ago, Tamang moved to Dubai, where he worked 16-hour days, six days a week, switching between jobs as an office peon, a cleaner and a warehouse worker. He earned four times the salary he could expect in Nepal, but the gruelling shifts wore him down. As he browsed Dubai’s malls on his days off, he noticed that baristas and secretaries were in demand.

Adding such skills to his resume could increase his employability, Tamang reasoned. So he came home and enrolled in a two-month barista training course in Nepal. He learned how to operate a coffee machine, the difference between a cold brew and an iced coffee, and how to draw pretty patterns in cappuccino foam. He is hoping that his skills will distinguish him from the tens of thousands of Nepalis who are also looking for jobs overseas.

“I just don’t want to work in Nepal,” Tamang said. “You have to get out.”



DH ILLUSTRATION: DEEPAK HARICHANDAN

Nepal’s Gen Z sees little hope at home

Sick of corruption

In tiny hamlets and passport lines, on the streets and inside chic cafés, many young Nepalis—whether they are college graduates or never finished school—say they feel hopeless and frustrated.

Persistently high unemployment and inadequate investment in skills training have hurt economic growth. The country relies heavily on remittances sent home by citizens working abroad, which equal about a third of Nepal’s gross domestic product. At the same time, many Nepalis say they experience corruption in their everyday dealings with bureaucracy, and an entrenched elite is widely seen as having reaped ill-gotten gains.

Those feelings morphed into rage in early September, when thousands of students took to the streets to vent their anger at corruption, in what came to be known as the Gen Z protests. The immediate trigger was a social media ban—which coincided with a viral surge of memes targeting “nepo kids,” the privileged children of the elite. The protests spiralled into a nationwide arson rampage and led to the downfall of Nepal’s government.

“The Gen Z protest was a necessary movement for change,” said Lal Bahadur Ghising, 32, a cabdriver who spent two years working in Malaysia and used his savings to buy a taxi, which he now drives full time. “Bribery is rampant.”

Nepal is one of Asia’s most corrupt countries, according to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, which measures how corrupt a country’s public sector is perceived to be.

As usual. Hundreds of people clutching documents stood in a line that grew by the minute, sloping into the building’s pitch-black basement parking lot. Most were young, and many were applying for their first passports.

Sunita Bishwakarma, 29, had arrived at 9 am, an hour before the office opened. Bishwakarma, who is unemployed, has no immediate plans to go abroad but said her brother, who works as a security guard in Kuwait, had urged her to apply for her passport.

“If you go abroad, at least it’s a better place,” Bishwakarma said he told her. Bishwakarma said she would rather raise her three boys in Nepal, but the recent turmoil and the overall state of the economy gave her little hope. “It forces us to leave,” she said.

Grim statistics about the economy abound. In 2023, the Nepal Living Standards Survey found that nearly a quarter of Nepalis between the ages of 15 and 24 were unemployed, almost double the rate of the overall population. The number of Nepalis working abroad almost tripled, to 2.2 million, in the two decades leading to 2021, according to government data. Roughly three-quarters of Nepali emigrants were between the ages of 15 and 34.

Agriculture remains the lifeblood of Nepal’s economy, but in towns and cities, the internet has opened up new opportunities. Ride-hailing apps have helped cabdrivers find more customers. People have found digital marketing jobs. Local businesses are growing through their online presence.

A labour mill

Nepal, with a population of about 30 million, provides a steady supply of unskilled labour to Gulf countries, but also to European ones such as Portugal and Greece. Young Nepalis pack boxes in warehouses, chop vegetables in restaurant kitchens and drive trucks at construction sites.

Roughly 1 in 4 households in Nepal has a family member abroad, according to government data. For families, that often means a cruel trade-off between the grief of separation for years at a time and the need for money. The remittances sustain households, pay school fees and medical bills, and help to rebuild homes in a country prone to natural disasters like floods and earthquakes.

“To save, or even live properly, someone from the family has to go out,” said Tenzin Dolker, a college student in Kathmandu who studies computer science. “It’s almost like an unsaid tradition.”

Nearly two decades ago, when Dolker was 6 years old, her mother left Nepal to work as a caretaker in Israel. She stayed for 15 years, returning to visit just three times, Dolker said.

But “she earned money in Israel and built her house here,” Dolker said. Her mother, who is now back for good, could never have saved that much working in Nepal, she said.

was an inspiration for many Nepali youngsters. She spoke eloquently—often about politics—and became a prominent voice of her generation.

Her accomplishments put Nepal “in the limelight,” said Pritima Limbu, who lives in London but was visiting family in Kathmandu. She follows young Nepali influencers to keep up with trends in the country of her birth. “I was like, she’s really nice—intelligent, smart, very inspiring to a lot of people,” Limbu, 21, said.

But in the days leading up to the Gen Z protests, Khatiwada was targeted as a “nepo kid” for taking foreign vacations and endorsing luxury brands. She lost many of her Instagram followers. Khatiwada’s father is a former health minister, and her husband’s father owns Nepal’s biggest media conglomerate.

Limbu said Khatiwada was a “disappointment” for not supporting the protesters. “Because people looked up to her so much, people were expecting that she would do something about it, post something about it, and she didn’t,” Limbu said. Homes belonging to relatives of Khatiwada were among those burned during the protests. Khatiwada said in an interview that she had wanted to promote the protesters’ cause, but that she was shocked “at being painted as its enemy.”

“My silence was not born of privilege or indifference; it came from trauma and shock,” she said. Asked whether she had benefited from tainted money, she said, “I never gained from ill-gotten gains.”

The New York Times

Robert Badinter and France’s moral awakening

SUMIT PAUL

Robert Badinter, the lawyer and former justice minister who led France to abolish the death penalty, was inducted into the Panthéon in Paris recently—44 years to the day after the abolition law took effect. Badinter often said that while he had always opposed the capital punishment, it was injustice in court that transformed his belief into a lifelong mission.

He defended Roger Bontems, a prisoner involved in a hostage-taking incident in which another man committed the killings. Although the jury accepted that Bontems had not killed anyone, he was still sent to the guillotine in 1972.

“I saw, in the name of justice, a man cut in pieces—because that is what the guillotine really means—without ever having killed anyone,” Badinter told Radio France Internationale in 2005. “There was no blood on his hands. I could not accept this idea of justice. Justice cannot kill. From that moment on, I became an activist.”

Five years later, Badinter defended Patrick Henry, who had been convicted of murdering a seven-year-old boy. His powerful plea during the trial helped spare Henry’s life and turned the case into a defining moment in France’s national debate on capital punishment.

It is startling to recall that an advanced country such as France still guillotined its convicts as recently as the 1970s. The last execution by guillotine in France took place on September 10, 1977, when Hamida Djandoubi was executed. Djandoubi, a Tunisian man, was convicted of kidnapping, torturing, and murdering Elisabeth Bousquet. His execution was the last in the Western world by guillotine, preceding France’s formal abolition of capital punishment in 1981.

Across the Western world, most nations have long abolished capital punishment. England did away with it in 1965, after a wrongful execution drew public outrage. Only a few states in the United States continue to retain it. Several Arab and Islamic nations continue to enforce capital punishment, often carrying out executions in public,



Robert Badinter

underscoring the stark differences in how societies conceive justice.

The death penalty is fundamentally derived from vengeance rather than justice. Capital punishment is defended as serving a just retribution for heinous crimes. But at its core, it actually perpetuates a cycle of violence and revenge, disregarding the opportunity for understanding, rehabilitation, and the potential for redemption. A justice system that chooses retribution over rehabilitation risks losing its moral anchor. A deeper examination of alternative forms of punishment that prioritise fairness and humanity is imperative in a civilised society.

The greatest injustice occurs when the legal system meant to protect the innocent fails. When the very system that is meant to uphold fairness and protect those who are wrongly accused fails to do so, it not only inflicts grave harm upon the innocent but also erodes public trust and calls into question the entire legal process. This echoes the need for addressing and rectifying such flaws within the legal system, not irreversible punishment.

Capital punishment has, at times, been reduced to a grim public spectacle—a reflection of society’s darker fascination for violence. Executing a helpless person, however legally justified, remains a troubling act that tests our collective conscience. This is the irony which helps perpetuate the gory saga of hangings and judicial occurrences of gas-chambering. Sending a convict to the gallows is galling.

Every human being is worth more than the worst thing they have ever done. Every human being is worth more than the worst thing they have ever done. The profound moral question is not whether a convict deserves to die, but whether society deserves to kill. Furthermore, the death penalty perpetuates a cycle of violence and revenge. In taking a life, even in the name of justice, we risk diminishing our own humanity.

(The author is a Pune-based independent writer and columnist)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: OCTOBER 1975

Bonus ordinance not against workers, says PM

New Delhi, October 23
Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has reiterated her view that “the bonus ordinance is not against the interest of the workers.” In an interview with the Editor of the Communist Central News Service, yesterday, she said, “We are convinced that had the payment of bonus continued without reference to production, productivity or surplus it would have had an adverse effect on workers as well as others.” There was also a hint in her reply that the same considerations might apply to dearness allowance or higher wages.

25 YEARS AGO: OCTOBER 2000

George rules out ceasefire with J&K militants

Srinagar, Oct 23 (DHNS & PTI)
Union Defence Minister George Fernandes today ruled out the possibility of the Centre announcing any unilateral ceasefire in the campaign against militants in Kashmir. He, however, endorsed the statement of the Army chief that Kashmir “needs a political rather than a military solution.” Talking to reporters here today after the inauguration of a “Buyer-Seller Meeting” at the SKICC, he said there was no immediate threat from Pakistan or China, though violence at the LoC in the state “is waxing and waning”.

OASIS | SUDHA DEVI NAYAK

Walking the path of wisdom

Wisdom is of the ages and comes with living life through its myriad vicissitudes. It is not a gift *gratis*, an inheritance or legacy to be passed on or a genetic skill that we acquire naturally. The trauma and joys of life simultaneously teach us wisdom that comes through judgement and discrimination. Wisdom is not merely the acquisition of knowledge but a refinement of knowledge, the distilled wisdom that we apply as the situation demands. It is the collective experience we gather as we go along that informs our decisions and influences our values and ways.

Wisdom is the ability to retain your

equanimity regardless of circumstances realising fully that not everything is in your control, to change or improve what you can and a gracious acceptance of what you cannot and understanding the difference between them. It is basically a search for meaning and knowledge and the essence of being human. A large part of wisdom is ‘*Saha hrudayata*’ or empathy that shared feeling of humanity. The quality of being wise is recourse to the soundest course of action based on knowledge, experience and understanding. The wisest



among us are those who carry their greatness, learning and virtue lightly on their shoulders and are not averse to learning from the humblest among us. They believe that everyone has the power to add value to our lives and every encounter should be treasured because it may not come again. Also true wisdom does not try to seek meaning and significance where there is none but living life with hope and courage. Often life brings tragedies and suffering in its wake as well as immeasurable joys but wisdom gleans resilience from it all and the

knowledge everything will pass. The greatest teaching of wisdom comes from the Bhagavadgita where Krishna tells Arjuna that he must take arms against his kin in the resolution between good and evil. Wisdom is the ability to discern between right and wrong, to make a choice when confronted with difficult and varied possibilities and live life with equanimity and peace. Wisdom is about considered choices and understanding our limitations in the backdrop of ambitious goals. Above all wisdom means tolerance, a commitment to listen to other voices, a humility that elevates a human being.

HUL posts profit decline on sales disruption ahead of tax cuts

REUTERS

Industan Unilever Ltd reported a nearly 5% decline in profit before tax and exceptional items for the second quarter, as sales volumes took a hit before the government's goods and services tax cuts kicked in.

The Indian unit of UK's Unilever said its profit before tax and exceptional items fell to Rs 3,389 crore from Rs 3,564 crore a year ago.

Overall revenue from the sale of products grew 2% year-on-year to Rs 16,034 crore, benefiting from price hikes across HUL's portfolio and resilient demand in the company's beauty division. The segment posted a 5% year-on-year (YoY) rise in sales, led by skincare and cosmetics. Its profit after tax rose 3.6% as the company recorded a one-time gain of Rs 184 crore.

HUL shares as much as 3% post the results, but pared gains. They were last trading about 1% higher. Nonetheless, overall underlying volume

Colgate Palmolive India too reports lower profit

REUTERS: Colgate-Palmolive's Indian unit reported a decline in second quarter profit on Thursday, due to a temporary disruption to sales after the government announced sweeping cuts to goods and services taxes.

The toothpaste maker's net profit for the quarter ended September 30 came in at Rs 328 crore, down 7.2% YoY, excluding the impact of a one-time tax credit last year.

Revenue from operations dropped 6.3% YoY to Rs 1,507 crore.

Colgate has said in prior calls with analysts that weak urban demand has been causing consumers to use staples such as toothpaste for longer, impacting overall volumes. It said the operating environment remained "difficult" in the second quarter.

The company has been sharpening its focus on differentiated offerings that promise higher quality oral benefits to tackle these challenges, leading with a more premium portfolio.

growth was flat, as the company, along with peers, faced a temporary disruption in sales after the government announced sweeping goods and services tax cuts in August.

Distributors and retailers focused on liquidating existing inventories, delaying the flow of new orders ahead of the tax cuts taking effect on September 22.

NMPA AT 50 Celebrating maritime excellence

The New Mangalore Port Authority will be showcasing India's port vision at India Maritime Week 2025. The port, while celebrating 50 years of legacy, is leading the nation's maritime transformation towards a Viksit Bharat by 2047

As New Mangalore Port Authority (NMPA) marks its golden jubilee, the port stands as a beacon of India's maritime growth - symbolising five decades of progress, innovation and sustainability. Established in 1975, NMPA has transformed from a modest coastal port into a modern maritime hub, handling over 46 million metric tonnes (MMT) of cargo in the financial year 2024-25 and aiming to cross 100 MMT by 2047.

This year's milestone celebration gains further prominence with NMPA's platinum sponsorship and active participation in India Maritime Week 2025 (IMW), to be held between October 27 and 31 in Mumbai. The premier global maritime event, organised by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, will bring together over 100 nations, 500 exhibitors, and one lakh delegates, showcasing India's maritime leadership.

At IMW 2025, NMPA will highlight its achievements in automation, technology adoption, cruise tourism and sustainability, participating in key sessions such as Technology and Automation; Cruise Development; and State Maritime Initiatives.

Through exhibitions and MoU signings, the port aims to forge collaborations that align with the Maritime



Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 - envisioning India as a global maritime superpower.

NMPA's golden jubilee projects reflect this forward momentum - including a 150-bed multi-specialty public-private partnership hospital (the first of its kind among major ports), modern warehouses, truck terminals and a dedicated cruise terminal gate. The port has also achieved 100 per cent in solar power utilisation, advanced digitisation and received multiple awards for environmental excellence.

As IMW 2025 sets the stage for the future of trade, connectivity and the blue economy, NMPA proudly sails at the forefront - celebrating 50 years of legacy while leading the nation's maritime transformation towards a Viksit Bharat by 2047.

Curated by DH Brandspot



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BRIEF E-TENDER NOTICE

1. On behalf of President of India, item rate tenders are invited for the following works.

Name of work	Replacement of Compressed Air line with new SS piping in SIH and Harness Lab of AITF-1 building at ISITE Campus-URSC, Marathahalli, Bengaluru-560037	Miscellaneous HVAC and Compressed Air Piping works in various labs at Main Campus, URSC, Vimanapura, Bengaluru-560017
E-Tender Notice	URSC/C and MG/ACMD/AC/0047/ETN-03/2025-26 Dt. 23.10.2025	URSC/C and MG/ACMD/AC/0048/ETN-04/2025-26 Dt. 23.10.2025
Estimated cost put to Tender	₹ 22.08 Lakhs	₹ 23.68 Lakhs
Tender Document Details		
E-Tender		
Period of completion in months reckoned from the 15th day of date of issue of work order	180 days / 06 months	
Period during which the tender document can be downloaded.	From 10:30 Hrs. on 24.10.2025 to 16:30Hrs. on 07.11.2025	
Bid clarification	From 11:00 Hrs. on 24.10.2025 to 17:00 Hrs. on 10.11.2025	
Last date and time of reply to Bid clarification.	Upto 17:00hrs on 12.11.2025	
Last date and time for receipt of tenders.	Upto 14:30 Hrs. on 19.11.2025	
Due date and time of opening of tenders.	After 15:00 Hrs. on 19.11.2025	
Earnest Money Deposit (EMD)	Rs. 44,160/- (Validity for 180 days)	Rs. 47,360/- (Validity for 180 days)

2. Interested tenderers may please refer Detailed Notice Inviting E-Tender (NIET) for eligibility criteria and other details along with Hindi version in [website: www.isro.gov.in](http://www.isro.gov.in) and download the tender documents from www.tenderwizard.com/ISRO
Group Director, (Construction & Maintenance Group)



भारत सरकार /Government of India
अंतरिक्ष विभाग/Department of Space
भारतीय अंतरिक्ष अनुसंधान संगठन/Indian Space Research Organization
[मुख्यालय]/[Headquarters]



पेंशन अदालत PENSION ADALAT

दिनांक 07.01.2026(बुधवार) को पूर्वाह्न 1100 बजे से अपराह्न 1600 बजे तक इसरो सु. एवं यू.आर.एस.सी. के पेंशनभोगियों के लिए संबंधित केंद्रों द्वारा पेंशन अदालत आयोजित की जाएगी। इस संबंध में, अं.वि./इसरो सु. के पेंशनभोगी/परिवार के पेंशनभोगी अपनी शिकायत, यदि कोई, को लिखित रूप में अदालत के विचारार्थ वरिष्ठ प्रशासनिक अधिकारी, स्थापना, इसरो सु., अंतरिक्ष भवन, न्यू सी.ई.एल. रोड, बेंगलूर - 560 094 को hquestt@isro.gov.in पर ई-मेल द्वारा अग्रेषित कर सकते हैं अथवा 080/22172265 पर संपर्क कर सकते हैं।

A Pension Adalat will be held for the pensioners of ISRO HQ & URSC by the respective centres from 1100 hrs to 1600 hrs on 07.01.2026 (Wednesday). In this connection, Pensioners/ Family Pensioners of DOS/ISRO HQ, may forward their grievance, if any, in writing, for consideration in the Adalat, to Sr. Admin Officer, Establishment, ISRO HQ, Antariksh Bhavan, New BEL Road, Bengaluru – 560 094, or through email hquestt@isro.gov.in or may contact 080/22172265.

यू.आर.एस.सी. के पेंशनभोगी/परिवार के पेंशनभोगी अपनी शिकायत, यदि कोई, को लिखित रूप में वरिष्ठ प्रशासनिक अधिकारी (स्थापना), यू.आर.एस.सी., पो.बॉ. सं. 1795, ओल्ड एयरपोर्ट रोड, विमानपुरा पोस्ट, बेंगलूर - 560017 को psbmani@ursec.gov.in पर ई-मेल द्वारा अग्रेषित कर सकते हैं अथवा 080-25084105 (यू.आर.एस.सी.) पर संपर्क कर सकते हैं। पूर्ण विवरण तथा संपर्क सूत्र के साथ शिकायतें 01.12.2025 तक या इससे पहले संबंधित केंद्रों को अग्रेषित की जा सकती हैं। कृपया नोट करें कि विधिक/नीतिगत मामलों पर अदालत में कार्रवाई नहीं की जा सकती। अदालत में पेंशनभोगी की भारीदारी पूर्णतः स्वैच्छिक है तथा इसकी लागत/व्यवस्था की जिम्मेदारी पेंशनभोगी की होगी।

The pensioners/ family pensioners of URSC may forward their grievance, if any in writing to Sr. Admin Officer (Estt.), URSC, P.B.No.1795, Old Airport Road, Vimanapura Post, Bengaluru- 560 017, or through email: psbmani@ursec.gov.in or contact 080-25084105(URSC). The grievances with complete details and contact no. maybe forwarded to respective centres on or before 01.12.2025. Please note that, the grievance involving legal/policy matters, cannot be taken up in Adalat. Participation in the Adalat is purely voluntary and at own cost/ arrangement by the pensioner.

बंरिष्ठ प्रशासनिक अधिकारी (स्था.), इसरो सु.
Senior Administrative Officer (Estt), ISRO HQ

बेंगलूर/Bengaluru

Body blow to Reliance as US sanctions force cut in Russian oil imports

It has a 25-year deal with Rosneft for a daily buy of upto 5L barrels

NEW DELHI, PTI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd, India's biggest buyer of discounted Russian oil, plans to scale back imports of Russian crude oil following fresh US sanctions on Moscow-linked firms, sources said.

State-run refiners, however, may continue purchases through intermediary traders for now, industry officials said.

Reliance, which operates the world's largest single-site oil refining complex at Jamnagar in Gujarat, purchased about half of the 1.7-1.8 million barrels per day of discounted Russian crude shipped to India.

The company refines the crude into petrol, diesel and aviation turbine fuel (ATF), a large share of which is exported to markets such as Europe and the United States at market prices, generating strong

margins.

All this may change after US President Donald Trump imposed sanctions on Open Joint Stock Company Rosneft Oil Company (Rosneft) and Lukoil OAO (Lukoil) – Russia's two largest oil companies that he accuses of helping fund the Kremlin's "war machine" in Ukraine.

This means that no entity, American or foreign, can have any commercial dealings with the sanctioned Russian companies. Violators face civil or criminal penalties.

Reliance, which has signed a 25-year deal to buy up to 500,000 barrels of crude oil per day (25 million tonnes in a year) with Rosneft, will now reduce and potentially halt all purchases from Russia, three sources with knowledge of the matter said.

The company has huge business interest in the US and cannot risk attracting scrutiny,



Reliance's Jamnagar refinery complex.

they said.

Reliance, which bought an estimated \$35 billion worth of Russian oil since the start of the Ukraine war in February 2022, started "recalibration" of its imports soon after the recent European Union adopted its 18th package of sanctions against Moscow in late July this year.

Recalibration is nothing but moving the import requirement to a different region. And this may get expedited now, sources said.

Transactions involving the two sanctioned Russian firms need to be wound down by November 21.

Reliance did not respond to emails seeking comments.

The other company to be hit hard by the US sanctions is Nayara Energy. The firm, in which Rosneft holds a 49.13% stake, has been entirely reliant on Russian crude supplies since the EU imposed sanctions against it in July.

Nayara did not respond to an email sent for comments.

State-owned oil refiners, however, are not in such dire straits as they do not have any direct contract with Rosneft or Lukoil and had been buying Russian oil through intermedi-

aries traders, mostly European (who are out of the sanctions net), sources said. That purchase can continue for now.

The public-sector units are assessing compliance risks, checking every contract to look for Rosneft footprint.

Reliance signed the term deal with Rosneft in December 2024. It also buys oil from intermediaries. Its purchase sing the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, account for roughly 8 per cent of Moscow's crude sales over that period.

In 2021, before the Ukraine war, Reliance bought just USD 85 million worth of Russian oil.

The Indian government has maintained that the country's purchases are not illegal as no sanctions have yet been imposed on Russian crude buys. It has pointed to US officials previously encouraging it to buy Russian crude to stabilise global energy prices.

It has called as "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable" Trump's decision to double tariffs on Indian goods coming to the US to 50% because of Russian oil purchases. The country's purchases of Russian oil were "based on market factors," it has maintained.

Amendments to IT rules: Focus on curbing AI misuse

UMA KANNAN
BENGALURU, DHNS

In a move to curb deepfakes and misuse of various AI (artificial intelligence) tools, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has proposed amendments to IT rules, mandating clear labelling of AI-generated content that will help users distinguish real content from synthetic.

Experts said this will provide a safer accountable digital space for users. Of late, AI-generated fake images and videos have been increasing and recently, the Bombay High Court condemned and ordered urgent removal of actor Akshay Kumar's deepfake AI-generated video and expressed concern over the harm that fake content such as this could create.

Akif Khan, VP analyst, Gartner, said, "If this comes



The amendments strive to address issues of deep fake, which has become a worry.

into law, enterprises will need to put processes in place to ensure that any content that they produce and publish is appropriately labelled if it was AI generated."

"Going further, in the spirit of building trust, enterprises should use new standards such as C2PA (Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity) Content Credentials to establish the authenticity and origins of any original content that they produce," he added.

The proposed amendments aim to strengthen the due dil-

igence obligations of intermediaries—particularly social media intermediaries (SMIs) and significant social media intermediaries (SSMIs)—in light of the growing misuse of technologies which are used for the creation or generation of synthetic media, the IT ministry said.

Earlier it included amendments in October 2022 and April 2023.

Mahesh Makhija, Partner and Technology Consulting Leader, EY India said the proposed rules mark a clear step toward ensuring authenticity in digital content.

"Labelling AI generated material and embedding non-removable identifiers will help users distinguish real content from synthetic. This will serve as the foundation for responsible AI adoption, these measures will give businesses the confidence to innovate and scale AI responsibly," he added.

VC funding in India slows in Q3

UMA KANNAN
BENGALURU, DHNS

Considering the global geopolitical uncertainties and significant trade tensions with the US, Venture Capital (VC) investment in India remained slow in the third quarter (July-September). But given India's strong macros and vibrant capital market and if trade uncertainties are resolved, there is good optimism that VC investment will begin to rebound, said KPMG in its latest Venture Pulse Q3 2025 report.

The report pointed out that Asia continued to see relatively muted VC flows, reflecting a more cautious funding environment.

Global VC investment rose to \$120 billion in the third quarter of 2025, up from \$112 billion in Q2. Mentioning the dominance of AI in July-September period, the report said Artificial Intelligence (AI) continued to attract massive deals, and it remains the top priority for VC investors globally.

"While interest in India remains high, VC investors have found it difficult to predict what might happen day-to-day, leading them to hold back from making any major funding decisions," the report highlighted.

The largest deal of the quarter in India was a \$140 million raise by consumer goods delivery focused company Mitra.

"Despite the soft VC investment in Q3'25, there continued to be optimism in the market given the growth in startup exit activity – particularly in terms of IPO exits. During the quarter, IPO activity was quite strong compared to previous quarters; for example, rent-a-



AI firms raise funds

Business AI company Uniphore has closed its \$260 million Series F round. NVIDIA, AMD, Snowflake, and Data-bricks invested in the round and were joined by financial and sovereign investors including NEA, March Capital, BNF Capital, National Grid Partners, and Prosperity7 Ventures. The new capital will accelerate innovation on its AI and data platform – Business AI Cloud. Another startup UnifyApps, which is an enterprise AI platform service provider, announced \$0 million fundraising, led by WestBridge Capital.

service company Urban Company held a very successful IPO on the NSE with shares rising 74% in first day trading," the report added.

Nitish Poddar, Partner and National Leader, Private Equity, KPMG in India said, "VC investment results in India this quarter were driven by the speed bump that was the US tariffs, but people expect that by the end of November that will settle."

MeitY tightens rules on removal of social media content



Move follows legal battle with Musk's X.

NEW DELHI, DHNS

To bring transparency and streamline the system in social media content take-down procedures, the Union Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) has said that only senior officials can issue order removal of unlawful information.

As per the amended IT rules that come into effect from November 15, only top officials in the rank of joint secretary or higher and police officials who are serving as the Deputy Inspector General or above can issue content takedown orders.

The new rules also required that concerned authorities have to intimate social media companies by specifying the reasons for issuing removal of content

Elon Musk's social media platform X (formerly Twitter) has been in a legal battle with the IT Ministry on the content removal issue. The X earlier alleged "policing" by government authorities, allowing thousands of officials to issue takedown orders. X's petition in court also alleged that police inspectors were issuing directions to the micro blogging site to remove contents.

Insisting that it made changes in the IT rules on takedown, the IT ministry said that this was done to streamline content takedown procedures and bring transparency, clarity and precision in actions. As per the minis-

try, the amendments strike a balance between the constitutional rights of citizens and the legitimate regulatory powers of the state, ensuring that enforcement actions are transparent and do not lead to arbitrary restrictions.

Further, all intimations on content removal issued under Rule 3(1)(d) will be subject to a monthly review by an officer, not below the rank of secretary of the appropriate government, to ensure that such actions remain "necessary, proportionate, and consistent with law".

Under Rule 3(1)(d), intermediaries are required to remove unlawful information upon receiving actual knowledge either through a court order or notification from the appropriate authority, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told media persons.

A review undertaken by the IT ministry had highlighted the need for additional safeguards and checks and balances to ensure senior-level accountability, precise specification of unlawful content, and periodic review of government directions at higher level.

"The intimation must clearly specify the legal basis and statutory provision, the nature of the unlawful act, and the specific URL/ identifier or other electronic location of the information, data or communication link (content) to be removed," the IT ministry said.

WazirX to restart operations today

BENGALURU, DHNS: Crypto exchange WazirX on Thursday announced that it would be restarting operations from October 24, Friday. This follows the completion of its restructuring process, sanctioned by the High Court of Singapore.

The relaunch will begin with certain crypto-to-crypto pairs and USD T/INR pair, followed by the gradual expansion of additional markets in the coming days, WazirX said.

A cyberattack on WazirX in July last year resulted in the theft of about Rs 2,000 crore worth of funds, and the exchange has not been operational since then.

The exchange also announced that as part of the Restart Offer, all users can avail 0% trading fees across all trading pairs.

Nischal Shetty, Founder of WazirX, said, "At the heart of everything we do is our mission to make crypto accessible to every Indian. I want to thank the WazirX community for their patience through these difficult times. Asset security is currently a crucial aspect in the global crypto ecosystem. Our partnership with BitGo adds an additional layer of trust and protection with world-class custody standards, as we restart. This isn't just a return to operations, it's a reinforcement of our integrity which we've always strived for." Earlier this week, WazirX completed token swaps, merger, delisting, migration of tokens and any rebranding that the tokens may have undergone.



Nischal Shetty

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON DONALD TRUMP ON PM MODI

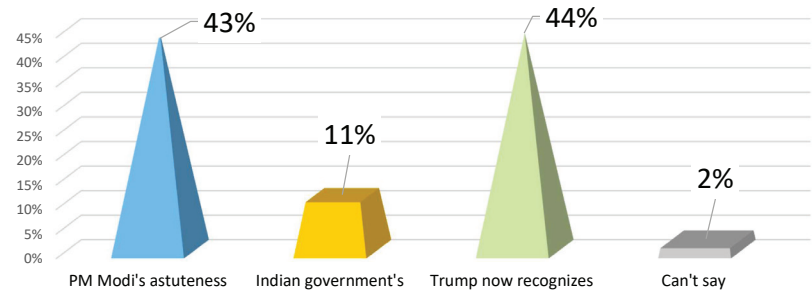
Respondents see tougher posture and warmer ties

The Daily Guardian survey on October 23 finds respondents split on Trump's shift: 44% say he recognizes

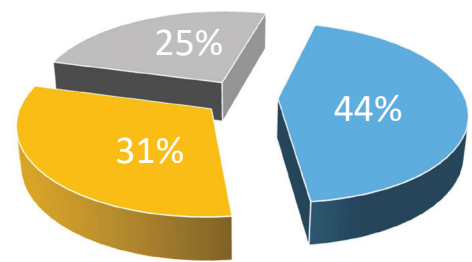
India's importance, 43% credit Modi's astuteness. Forty-four percent expect US tariff removal; 31% foresee a trade

deal. India–Russia ties seen stronger. 89% say Modi resists foreign pressure; 57% report oil-import cuts.

Q1. After Trump praised PM Modi, what explains any change in Trump's stance toward India? (Your view)

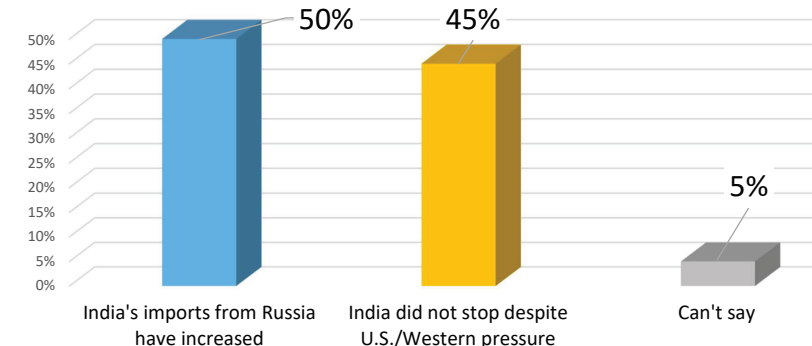


■ U.S. will remove tariffs on India
■ India–U.S. trade deal soon
■ Can't say

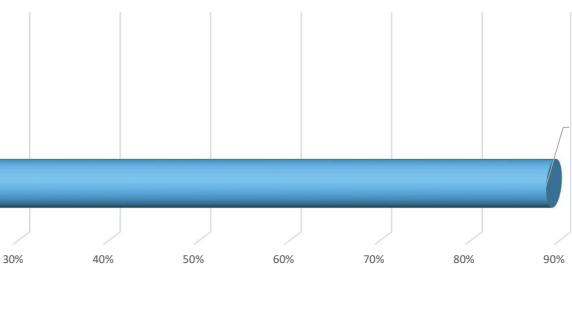


Q2. After Trump's changed tone, what is the likelihood the tariff dispute will be resolved soon?

Q3. India–Russia commercial ties are getting stronger.



■ Yes
■ No



Q4.

PM Modi has proved he neither fears nor bows to foreign pressure.

Row erupts in J&K Assembly over Satya Pal Malik remarks

CONTINUED FROM P1

MLA Vikram Randhawa said August 5 — the day Article 370 was revoked — would remain “a historic day” for Jammu and Kashmir. “Satya Pal Malik was no ordinary man; he was

appointed governor of five states because of his capability. It was a coincidence that he breathed his last on August 5 — a date etched in the history of J&K,” Randhawa said, triggering protests from several NC members.

Satya Pal Malik, who passed away in August this year, was the tenth and last governor of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. During his long political career, he also served as governor of Bihar, Odisha, Goa, and Meghalaya.

ECI orders final prep for special roll revision

CONTINUED FROM P1

Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, the conference reviewed the progress made in mapping current electors with those from the previous SIR.

The Commission also held detailed one-on-one interactions with CEOs from poll-bound States and UTs, including Assam, Tamil

Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry, and West Bengal, addressing queries raised during presentations on the revision process.

The meeting followed an earlier review held on September 10, where States and UTs had presented data on elector counts and roll updates from their last SIR exercises.

The move comes after

CEC Gyanesh Kumar's announcement of a nationwide SIR, following the completion of the revision in Bihar. As per the final roll there, the number of electors stands at 742 crore — down from 7.89 crore in June — with 65 lakh names deleted, 3.66 lakh found ineligible, and 21.53 lakh new voters added through Form 6 applications.

PM Modi to attend ASEAN-India Summit virtually on Oct 26

CONTINUED FROM P1

Partnership. The MEA described ASEAN as a “key pillar” of India's Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific vision.

On October 27, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will represent India at the 20th East Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur, which will focus on challenges to peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific, along with broader regional and global developments.

Prime Minister Modi earlier shared details of his conversation with his Malaysian counterpart, congratulating him on Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship and expressing optimism about deepening

the ASEAN-India partnership. “Look forward to joining the ASEAN-India Summit virtually and to further deepening of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership,” Modi posted on X.

Confirming the development, Anwar Ibrahim said Modi opted for a virtual presence due to the ongoing Deepavali festivities. “I respect his decision and extend my greetings for a happy Deepavali to him and the people of India,” he said.

Anwar also underlined Malaysia's intent to strengthen bilateral relations with India, calling the country “an important partner in trade, investment, technology, education, and regional security.”

He reaffirmed Malaysia's commitment to enhancing ASEAN-India cooperation for a peaceful and prosperous region.

Meanwhile, in a separate development, US President Donald Trump announced an upcoming diplomatic tour of Malaysia, South Korea, and Japan, where he is scheduled to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping. Trump confirmed the cancellation of a planned summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin, citing a lack of progress in diplomatic talks.

“It didn't feel right to me,” Trump said, adding that he hoped to use his meeting with Xi to explore solutions to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and discuss global energy and oil concerns.

Cong backs Tejashwi, ending rift in Bihar Mahagathbandhan

CONTINUED FROM P1

collapse until Congress matriarch Sonia Gandhi intervened. After consultations with party chief Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi, it was agreed that the party's position in Bihar required a tactical course correction.

Rahul Gandhi entrusted the task to Ashok Gehlot, the former Rajasthan Chief Minister known for his crisis-management skills. Upon his arrival in Patna, Gehlot met with RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav, his son Tejashwi, and other alliance partners. Within 24 hours, he had stitched together a compromise, announcing Tejashwi as the CM face and Sahani as Deputy CM, and offering symbolic accommodation to the Left allies by promising ministerial representation if the alliance came to power.

Gehlot's announcement, made at a packed joint press conference, was more than a procedural declaration — it was a message of reconciliation. “Everyone should be worried about the condition of the country,” he said, flanked by leaders from the Congress, RJD, CPI(M), and VIP. “After consulting Kharge ji and Rahul ji, we have decided that Tejashwi Yadav will be the Chief Ministerial candidate for this election. He is young, committed, and represents the change that Bihar needs. The people will support

him.” Gehlot accused the NDA government of undermining democratic values and weaponising institutions, calling the coming election “a fight to save democracy.”

The decision effectively handed the leadership baton to Tejashwi Yadav, who has been attempting to galvanise young and first-time voters under his “Rozgaar aur Samman” (Employment and Dignity) plank. Addressing the media after his endorsement, Tejashwi said the alliance's goal was not merely to win power but to rebuild Bihar. “We, the people of Mahagathbandhan, do not just want to form a government. We want to make Bihar. Give us twenty months, and we will do what they couldn't in twenty years. One engine of the double-engine government is corrupt, the other criminal,” he said.

He accused the BJP of sidelining Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, claiming that Amit Shah's repeated remark that legislators would decide the CM indicated that the JD(U) leader's political future was uncertain. “This will be Nitish Kumar's last election. The BJP has already decided to discard him after the results,” he said.

Political observers believe the Congress's decision, though belated, is a strategic gamble that could

redefine its approach to alliances elsewhere. If the Bihar experiment succeeds, the model could extend to Uttar Pradesh, where Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav is keen for a similar acknowledgment from the Congress. The move also reflects Sonia Gandhi's continued influence over crucial electoral decisions, especially in states where Rahul Gandhi's rigid approach has previously alienated allies.

The BJP, meanwhile, has mounted a strong counter-offensive. Senior party leader and former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad questioned Tejashwi's credibility, citing his alleged involvement in the IRCTC scam and his father Lalu Prasad Yadav's multiple convictions in the fodder scam cases. “The people of Bihar know who developed the state. PM Modi and Nitish Kumar will continue to lead the double-engine government,” Prasad said.

BJP president J.P. Nadda, addressing a rally in Vaishali, described the upcoming polls as a choice between “vikas and vinash” — development and destruction. He said Bihar had emerged from the “era of darkness” under the NDA and warned voters against returning to what he called the RJD's “Jungle Raj.” Listing the government's achievements, he cited the expansion of railway projects, construction of Amrit Bharat sta-

time, and save fuel. Following the ceremony, Shah and Patel interacted with Sanand residents and extended New Year greetings. The event was attended by

Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary described Tejashwi's projection as “a shameful day for democracy,” while Union Minister Nityanand Rai called him “synonymous with corruption.” The NDA's campaign, officials said, will now centre on contrasting “performance with promises,” with Prime Minister Narendra Modi scheduled to launch his Bihar campaign from Samastipur on Friday.

Independent MP Pappu Yadav, meanwhile, attempted to stir the pot by inviting Nitish Kumar to join the Opposition bloc, saying the BJP was “stabbing him from behind.” However, he also criticised the alliance for sidelining Congress's image, saying, “Voting will happen on Rahul Gandhi's picture, not anyone else's.” His remarks underlined the underlying friction over visibility and leadership within the bloc.

Jan Suraaj founder Prashant Kishor, who has fielded candidates across all 243 seats, dismissed the announcement as a political gimmick. “If Lalu's Jungle Raj returns, it's obvious his son will be chief minister.

What's new about this?” he said at a rally in Siwan, adding that Bihar needed a “clean, alternative politics free of fear and favour.”

For the Congress, the Bihar development marks both a risk and a revival. The party has been a junior partner in the state for over two decades, struggling to hold relevance in a bipolar landscape dominated by the RJD and the NDA. By conceding the leadership mantle but asserting organisational presence through Gehlot's mediation, the Congress hopes to reassert itself as a pragmatic, unifying force within the INDIA bloc.

The Bihar elections, to be held in two phases on November 6 and 11 with results on November 14, are shaping up to be a defining political contest ahead of the 2026 Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal polls. With the Opposition now rallying under a single face and the NDA banking on Modi–Nitish continuity, the state is poised for one of its most polarised and high-stakes battles in years.

As the dust settles on the day's dramatic announcement, one thing is clear: Ashok Gehlot's intervention has altered the texture of the Bihar race. From stalemate to strategy, from rift to resolve, the Mahagathbandhan has finally found its face. Whether it can find victory will be known on 14 November.

Centre notifies amendments to IT Rules, 2021 to enhance transparency, accountability

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2025 to amend the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (“IT Rules, 2021”).

These amendments strengthen the framework of due diligence obligations of intermediaries under the Information Technology Act, 2000 (“IT Act”). Specifically, the amendments to Rule 3(1)(d) introduce additional safeguards to ensure that removal of unlawful content by intermediaries is carried out in a transparent, proportionate, and accountable manner. The amended Rules will take effect on November 15, 2025.

The IT Rules, 2021, were initially notified on February 25, 2021, and subsequently amended on October 28, 2022, and April 6, 2023. They prescribe due diligence obligations on intermediaries, including social media intermediaries, with the objective of ensuring online safety, security,



Representative image

and accountability.

Under Rule 3(1)(d), intermediaries are required to remove unlawful information upon receiving actual knowledge either through a court order or notification from the Appropriate Government.

The review undertaken by MeitY highlighted the need for additional safeguards to ensure senior-level accountability, precise specification of unlawful content, and periodic review of government directions at a higher level.

Key features of the amendments:

Senior-level authorisation: Any intimation to intermediaries for removal of unlawful information can now only be issued by a senior officer not below the rank of Joint Secretary or equivalent, or, where such rank is not appointed, a Director or an officer equivalent

lent in rank-and, where so authorised, acting through a single corresponding officer in its authorised agency, where such agency is so appointed.

In case of police authorities, only an officer not below the rank of Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG), specially authorised, can issue such intimation.

Reasoned intimation with specific details: The intimation must clearly specify the legal basis and statutory provision, the nature of the unlawful act, and the specific URL/identifier or other electronic location of the information, data or communication link (“content”) to be removed.

This replaces the earlier broad reference to ‘notifications’ with ‘reasoned intimation’ to align the Rules with the requirement of ‘actual knowledge’ as man-

Amit Shah launches Rs 805 cr 6-lane project

CONTINUED FROM P1

connectivity for key industrial hubs such as Sanand and Viramgam and improve traffic flow for long-

distance commuters heading towards Surendranagar, Shankheshwar, Radhanpur, and Patan.

It is also projected to reduce accidents, cut travel

MLA Kanubhai Patel, District Collector Sujeet Kumar, District Development Officer Videh Khare, and several other officials and dignitaries.

WHEN CELEBRATIONS TURN TOXIC: BHARAT'S BATTLE WITH AIR POLLUTION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DELHI

OPINION

B. N. S. SRIRAM AND
DR. PARTHA S. RAKSHIT



Every year, as the vibrant lights and joyous spirits of Diwali sweep across the country and capital of India, another shadow quietly descends on the city a shadow of dense, toxic air that leaves its citizens gasping for breath. The spectacle of fireworks and crackers during the festival of lights, intended to symbolize hope and the triumph of good over evil, unfortunately often heralds the onset of a pollution emergency. In 2025, the narrative around green crackers which was promoted as an environmentally friendly solution once again fell short of transforming this grim reality. Examining the aftermath of Diwali, becomes imperative not under the lens of customary faith, but rather on the public health crisis that the festival's celebration, in its

current unchecked form, triggers. Specially, Delhi's air quality is highly susceptible to seasonal changes and human interventions. In October 2025, just before Diwali, the city's Air Quality Index (AQI) hovered at an average of around 180-210, which, while higher than the WHO's prescribed safe level, remained within the "moderate" to "poor" range due to the lingering effects of the monsoon. However, within just 24 hours post-Diwali occasion, monitoring at several key locations recorded AQI spikes above 400 with hazardous levels of PM2.5 and PM10 particles blanketing the city (as reported by various national media agencies). The burn-off from firecrackers, compounded by stagnant post-monsoon air and low wind speeds, creates a veri-

table gas chamber, trapping pollutants over the city for days.

In recent years, "green crackers" were introduced as a technological fix, promising a drastic reduction in harmful emissions. Approved by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), these crackers were claimed to emit up to 30% fewer pollutants and produce lower noise. Yet, the Diwali of 2025 proved a stark disappointment. Lack of effective regulation, mislabeling, and black-market sales quickly undermined any gains. The market flooded with ordinary fireworks masquerading as green, while genuine green crackers were either unavailable or not distinctly marked for consumers. Public perception further complicated matters. For many, the term "green cracker" became a fig leaf that assuaged eco-guilt but did not substantially alter behavior or environmental outcome. The intensity and volume of cracker use, coupled with the social prestige attached to large-scale firework displays, rendered these supposed innovations ineffective at scale.

The consequences of post-Diwali-induced pollution are both immediate and insidious. The post-occasion smog contains not just particulate matter, but also noxious gases like sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen oxides, each with severe health impacts. Short-term effects include aggravated respiratory illnesses, reduced lung func-



Smog Gun sprays water to control pollution levels as Air Quality worsens at Kartavya Path, in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANI

tion, eye irritation, and headaches. Over the long term, the increased exposure to high pollution levels raises the risk of chronic respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems, and even impairs cognitive function in children. Environmental damage extends beyond human health. Toxic metals and chemicals from firecracker residues, such as barium, strontium, and aluminum, contaminate water bodies and soil. The sudden spike in greenhouse gas emissions following Diwali offsets months' worth of efforts to reduce the city's carbon footprint.

At the heart of this issue lies a pressing legal and constitutional dilemma. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to life, a right that by the Apex Court's directive/interpretation encom-

passes the right to live in a clean, healthy environment. Article 14 enshrines equality before the law, ensuring that environmental hazards do not disproportionately affect the rights of vulnerable populations. The state's obligation is therefore not merely to permit celebration but to ensure that the manner of celebration does not infringe upon the fundamental rights of others. International human rights discourse also recognizes the right to a healthy environment as intrinsic to the realization of all other rights.

The Apex Court directives on firecracker sale and use, while well-intentioned, have struggled with implementation. The court's repeated reminders for designated times and locations for firework use, loudness limits, and a ban on toxic

substances have faced challenges in ground-level enforcement. The regulatory architecture has been complicated by the fragmentation of responsibility between municipal, state, and central authorities. Delhi's pollution crisis post-Diwali starkly illustrates how societal practices, however well-rooted in culture, must continually evolve to reflect these normative shifts.

The legal and policy machinery will remain ineffective unless fueled by a sense of individual and collective responsibility. The tendency to equate loud, grand fireworks with community prestige or social standing has, over the years, become deeply entrenched. This competitive spirit, unfortunately, manifests as a nuisance for society at large. This attitude needs an urgent rethink. The sound

and spectacle may last an evening, but the toxic afterglow lingers for days, sometimes weeks. Celebration should never come at the expense of collective well-being. The environment is a shared trust, and citizens have a moral and constitutional duty to protect it.

A multi-pronged approach to break the annual cycle of post-Diwali pollution is essential.

- First, green crackers must not only be certified at the laboratory level but require mandatory licensing at point-of-sale. Only those products that pass rigorous, transparent testing should reach the market. All other varieties should be categorically banned, and violations must attract heavy fines for both sellers and buyers.
- Second, these legal stipulations should be accompanied by strong enforcement. The responsibility must not just lie with the government but should extend to local communities and residents' welfare associations, who could oversee local implementation and raise awareness.
- Third, mass campaigns, especially around the festive season, should highlight the collective cost of pollution and the grave impact on the most vulnerable. The narrative must shift from viewing restrained celebrations as a loss of culture to embracing them as acts of environmental citizenship. Pride should come not from louder and

brighter fireworks, but from a shared commitment to the greater good.

Lastly, law enforcement must continue to innovate with emergency measures when AQI spikes, including temporary bans, traffic restrictions, and health advisories, activated not as punitive actions but as life-saving interventions in times of crisis.

Faith and festivity are vital threads in the social fabric, but so too is the right to breathe clean air. Ultimately, no law, policy, or technological fix can succeed without a societal shift in attitude. The will to redefine prestige from how much one can outdo their neighbors in fireworks to how much one can contribute to an environment fit for all is the need of the hour. Respecting tradition and ensuring the right to a healthful environment are not mutually exclusive. The case study of Delhi's post-Diwali air should serve as a clarion call to balance both, with collective action, legal rigor, and unwavering commitment to the spirit of the Constitution. Only then will the festival of lights truly become a celebration of life and not a harbinger of distress in one of the most polluted cities of Bharat.

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Building Future: Smart, resilient infrastructure through sensor networks and digital twin technologies

OPINION

SHOBHIT MOHTA



As climate change intensifies and cities expand beyond their designed capacities, the need for resilient, intelligent infrastructure has become critical. The next evolution in civil and urban engineering is being shaped by two revolutionary technologies, sensor networks and digital twins, which together promise to transform how we design, operate, and sustain the physical systems that underpin modern life.

From bridges that report their own stress levels to power grids that predict and prevent failures, the integration of real-time sensing with virtual simulation marks a defining shift in infrastructure management.

THE FOUNDATION:

SMART SENSING NETWORKS

At the heart of this transformation lies the sensor network, an intelligent mesh of interconnected devices that monitor environmental and structural parameters with remarkable precision. These sensors, embedded into bridges, roads, buildings, and power grids, continuously capture data on temperature, vibration, strain, humidity, pressure, and load distribution.

Unlike traditional instrumentation, modern sensor networks are built to communicate, analyse, and even make localised decisions. Through edge computing, they process information close to the source, reducing latency and bandwidth demands. This allows infrastructure operators to detect anomalies, assess wear, and predict failures in real time.

A 2025 *Nature Scientific Reports* study found that integrating large-scale sensor networks into city infrastructure enables modeling of energy flows, environmental conditions, and emergency responses, creating adaptive, self-learn-

ing urban systems key to modern city management.

DIGITAL TWINS: THE VIRTUAL COUNTERPART OF REALITY

A digital twin is a high-fidelity, dynamic virtual model that mirrors a physical asset or system. Continuously updated through live sensor data, it allows engineers and operators to visualize, simulate, and optimize performance under varying conditions.

According to *Automate.org*, digital twins represent "the future of system optimization and maintenance," offering

Through edge computing, they process information close to the source, reducing latency and bandwidth demands. This allows infrastructure operators to detect anomalies, assess wear, and predict failures in real time.

fering unmatched visibility into asset conditions and performance trends. They not only reflect the current state of infrastructure but also enable simulation of potential stress events, such as earthquakes, floods, or overloads, helping authorities prepare effective response strategies.

Bentley Systems has implemented digital twin platforms in global transportation projects, integrating design data, sensor feedback, and environmen-

tal modelling to enhance safety, minimise maintenance downtime, and optimise traffic in smart cities, resulting in lower costs and improved resilience against diverse infrastructure challenges.

RESILIENT ENERGY SYSTEMS THROUGH DIGITAL TWINS

Nowhere is the convergence of sensors and digital twins more crucial than in energy infrastructure. As reported by *EE Power* (2024), Siemens Energy has been developing AI-powered digital twins for electric grids to en-

hance resilience and reduce wildfire risk. These virtual models combine data from IoT sensors, satellite imagery, and weather analytics to predict faults and optimise grid operation.

In regions susceptible to wildfires like California and Australia, digital twins simulate conditions like heat dispersion and vegetation proximity, enabling proactive shutdowns of risky grid segments, effectively protecting lives and the environment through predic-

tive digital technology.

Similarly, in power generation, digital twins are being deployed across thermal and renewable plants. A report by *Power Info Today* highlights how these models optimise plant efficiency by tracking turbine vibration, boiler temperature, and emission rates in real time. The twin can forecast component fatigue, suggest operational adjustments, and even simulate the impact of maintenance decisions before they are executed.

EY insights on utility transformation reports digital twins boost visibility, outage management, renewable integration, and could improve utility operational efficiency by 15-20%, while significantly reducing unplanned downtime.

APPLICATIONS BEYOND POWER: TRANSPORT, WATER, AND CONSTRUCTION

In transportation, digital twins are reshaping how we plan and maintain infrastructure. Intelligent transport systems now incorporate twins that simulate road usage patterns, track wear, and optimize maintenance schedules. Bentley Systems' twin-enabled highway and rail projects have demonstrated reduced disruptions and more accurate budget forecasting, an essential advantage for public infrastructure investments.

Water management is

another emerging frontier. Sensor-based monitoring of pipelines, reservoirs, and treatment plants, when integrated with digital twins, allows early leak detection, contamination tracking, and supply optimization. The *MDPI Infrastructures Journal's* special issue on smart infrastructure noted that sensor-based hydraulic twins can simulate stress propagation in water systems.

Even in structural engineering, digital twins are redefining inspection and maintenance. By integrating strain, displacement, and vibration sensors into bridges and buildings, engineers can visualize stress distribution and fatigue in real time.

CHALLENGES ON THE ROAD TO IMPLEMENTATION

Despite the clear potential, several challenges persist. Interoperability remains a central issue. Data collected from diverse sensors, often using proprietary protocols, must be standardised to feed coherent digital models. Open data frameworks and common modelling ontologies are essential to overcome this fragmentation.

Cybersecurity is another pressing concern. As sensor networks and twins become critical to national infrastructure, they also present potential targets for cyberattacks. Robust encryption, network segmentation, and

real-time intrusion detection systems are essential to maintaining data integrity and operational trust.

Financially, high initial costs of deployment can deter investment, especially in developing economies. However, experts argue that the long-term savings, through reduced failures, lower maintenance costs, and extended asset life, far outweigh the upfront expenditure.

THE FUTURE: TOWARDS SELF-ADAPTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Looking ahead, infrastructure is set to evolve from merely "smart" to self-adaptive. With advances in AI, 6G connectivity, and cloud-edge integration, digital twins will become fully autonomous systems capable of self-optimisation and decentralised decision-making.

Imagine bridges that autonomously adjust load distribution under heavy traffic, or power grids that reroute energy in response to outages, all orchestrated by interconnected digital twins.

The path forward requires collaboration across disciplines, civil engineering, computer science, and data analytics. As climate extremes intensify and urban populations surge, resilient infrastructure will be the backbone of sustainable civilization.

CONCLUSION

The integration of sensor networks and digital twin technologies represents a transformative leap in how societies build, operate, and safeguard critical infrastructure. As the world confronts growing challenges, from extreme weather and urban congestion to resource scarcity and ageing assets, the need for resilient, adaptive, and data-driven systems has never been more urgent.

Sensor networks serve as the *sensory organs* of modern infrastructure, providing continuous, real-time feedback on performance, safety, and environmental conditions. When combined with digital twins, the *cognitive brain* of infrastructure, these systems create an intelligent ecosystem that can predict failures, simulate disaster responses, and guide evidence-based decision-making. Success depends on strategic implementation and collaboration. Governments, engineers, and technology providers must work hand in hand.

Ultimately, the vision is of a world where infrastructure is no longer passive but *proactively intelligent* where cities sense their own stress, utilities anticipate faults, and transportation networks adjust dynamically to demand.

Shobhit Mohta, Assistant Professor, Amity University Rajasthan.

Each battalion would also field an “Ashni” drone platoon of 20–25 specialists equipped with first-person-view drones and loitering munitions, signalling the integration of unmanned systems into the lowest tactical level.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

India's 1.2-million-strong army is one of the world's largest. For decades it relied on conventional battalions trained for infantry assaults and static defence; by 2025 it fielded 382 infantry battalions of roughly 800 soldiers each. These units, drawn from regiments with diverse cultural traditions, have fought across mountains and deserts. Today the security environment is changing rapidly because of drones, precision-guided weapons and cyber threats. Facing a simultaneous challenge from Pakistan and China and persistent insurgencies, the army has embarked on a major modernisation, creating Bhairav battalions to provide rapid-strike capabilities. This essay recounts how the army accumulated 382 battalions, examines the Bhairavs' purpose and structure and considers why the last pre-Bhairav unit—the Sikkim Scouts—was raised.

THE LEGACY OF 382 INFANTRY BATTALIONS

When British India was partitioned in 1947, the Indian Army inherited about 200 battalions. Decades of wars with Pakistan and China, integration of princely states and counter-insurgency operations led to the raising of numerous units; by the mid-1970s the number had reached around 350. Subsequent budgetary constraints slowed expansion, and by 2025 the army fielded 382 infantry battalions.

Each infantry battalion, commanded by a lieutenant colonel, has roughly 800 soldiers organised into rifle companies, support elements and a headquarters. Battalions belong to regiments such as the Sikh Regiment or Gorkha Rifles, which recruit from specific communities and preserve distinct traditions.

Modernisation challenges

For decades these battalions were short of modern weapons. Procurement plans for new rifles and anti-tank missiles languished, and infantrymen went to war with ageing INSAS rifles. Lessons from the Kargil War in 1999 and clashes along the Line of Actual Control highlighted the need for better surveillance equipment, night-vision devices and precision weapons. The rise of drones and loitering munitions in global conflicts underscored the vulnerability of static forces. By 2025 this equipment gap spurred the army to prioritise modernising its infantry.

Transformation initiatives

In October 2025 the army launched a sweeping programme to upgrade all 382 infantry battalions. Lt-Gen Ajay Kumar, Director General of Infantry, announced the induction of new sniper rifles, carbines, machine guns, rocket launchers, anti-tank missiles and software-defined radios. Each battalion would also field an “Ashni” drone platoon of 20–25 specialists equipped with first-person-view drones and loitering munitions, signalling the integration of unmanned systems into the lowest tactical level.

WHAT ARE BHAIRAV BATTALIONS?

The most striking feature of the transformation is the creation of Bhairav battalions—specialised light commando units intended to bridge the gap between conventional infantry and the elite Para-Special Forces. Named after a fierce aspect of Shiva, they symbolise speed and psychological dominance. The Bhairavs provide a rapid-strike capability without diverting small Para units from strategic missions.

Each Bhairav battalion has around 250 soldiers—a lean force compared with an 800-strong infantry unit. Personnel come from the infantry and supporting arms such as artillery, signals and air defence, creating a multi-arm team. Organised into a headquarters and assault platoons, the battalions carry modern carbines, rocket launchers, anti-tank missiles and backpack-launched loitering munitions. Their light



The photograph from the Imperial War Museum shows Indian troops embarking for Kilwa in German East Africa in October 1917.

INDIAN ARMY'S FOOTPRINTS: 382 INFANTRY BATTALIONS AND THE RISE OF THE BHAIRAV COMMANDO UNITS



During the Burma campaign, Indian battalions bore the brunt of jungle fighting. This wartime image shows soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 7th Rajput Regiment preparing for patrol on the Arakan front in 1944.

equipment and all-terrain vehicles emphasise speed and stealth, and integrated drone teams provide situational awareness and precision strike capability.

Lieutenant-General Ajay Kumar explained that Bhairav battalions are being raised to conduct high-impact, cross-border operations and free up Para-Special Forces for strategic missions. India faces simultaneous threats on its western and northern borders, and the Line of Control with Pakistan and the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China have seen rising skirmishes. Conventional infantry units operate in larger formations and are designed for sustained ground holding, while special forces conduct clandestine strikes. Bhairav units occupy the middle ground: they can execute swift, lethal raids, reconnaissance missions and disruption operations but are not necessarily tasked with the high-risk, strategic sabotage missions reserved for Para-SF. Their

lean structure means they can be inserted quickly, hit high-value targets and withdraw before the enemy can react.

The Indian Army also wants a tech-savvy, network-centric force. The Bhairav units integrate drones and electronic warfare, reflecting lessons from recent conflicts. As multiple Indian and foreign analysts have noted, the army's transformation emphasises mobility, lethality, battlefield transparency, situational awareness and survivability. Bhairav battalions represent an operational expression of those priorities.

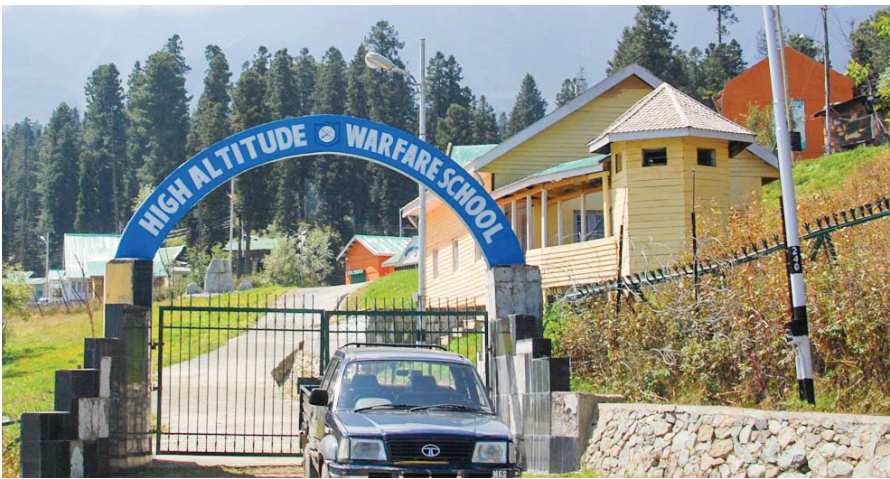
Bhairav soldiers are drawn from the infantry and supporting arms and undergo intense training at special forces schools. Their syllabus covers commando tactics, mountain and urban warfare, explosives, communications and drone operations, including first-person-view drones. This technology-heavy curriculum prepares them to work alongside artillery and air-defence elements for precision strikes.

Deployment and area of operations

By October 2025 five Bhairav battalions were operational, each attached to a different corps—covering the northeast, deserts, Ladakh and the Kashmir Valley. Two more units are reportedly deployed in other sensitive sectors. The army plans to raise 25 Bhairav battalions so that every operational corps has a dedicated rapid-strike unit.

Difference from existing formations

Bhairav battalions differ from Ghatak platoons—20-man assault teams organic to each infantry battalion. Ghatak platoons perform company-level raids and lead assaults but lack the specialised equipment and multi-arm integration of Bhairav units. Lt-Gen Kumar stressed that Ghatak platoons will continue to exist, while Bhairav units have a broader scope and higher firepower. Similarly, while the Para-SF remain India's tip of the spear for deep penetration and strategic missions, Bhairav battalions free the Para units



The High Altitude Warfare School (HAWS) in Gulmarg, Jammu and Kashmir, trains infantry battalions for operations on Himalayan frontiers.

to focus on high-risk tasks by taking on cross-border raids, sabotage and high-value target elimination. Each Bhairav battalion also incorporates drone platoons, whereas Para-SF operate in smaller teams and rely on air support for insertion.

INDIAN ARMY ORIGINS

The Indian Army traces its lineage to the presidency armies of the British East India Company and fought with distinction in the World Wars. After independence in 1947 the force was divided between India and Pakistan. The nascent Indian Army quickly found itself defending the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir against Pakistani tribal militias; the 1947–48 Kashmir War ended with a UN-mandated ceasefire line, and the army raised new mountain units to guard the high passes. Subsequent decades saw a succession of conflicts that shaped the force. The 1962 Sino-Indian War revealed deficiencies in mountain warfare and led to a major expansion of high-altitude divisions; the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak Wars prompted mechanisation and integrated land-air operations,

with the 1971 war resulting in the birth of Bangladesh and demonstrating India's ability to conduct joint operations. The 1999 Kargil War, in which India suffered around 1,500 casualties, underscored the importance of surveillance, precision fire and specialised units for high-altitude combat. Counter-insurgency campaigns in Punjab, Kashmir and the northeast added a need for specialised commando platoons and deepened the army's experience in irregular warfare.

Modern challenges and reforms

In the 21st century the Indian Army contended with cross-border terrorism, Chinese encroachments and rapid technological change. The Galwan Valley clashes of 2020 highlighted the need for swift reinforcement of remote outposts. Recognising these pressures, Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi launched a Decade of Transformation (2023–2032) aimed at integrating unmanned systems, improving networked communications and creating modular, combined-arms units such as Rudra Brigades, Shakitbaan artillery units and Divyastra drone regiments. Bhairav battalions are a key

element of this broader reform effort.

THE LAST INFANTRY BATTALION BEFORE BHAIRAV: SIKKIM SCOUTS

Before the Bhairav initiative, the last major infantry unit the army created was the Sikkim Scouts. Raised on 24 May 2013 as part of the 11th Gorkha Rifles, this battalion embodied the “sons of the soil” concept—recruiting hardy local youth to defend their own high-altitude terrain. Like the Ladakh and Dogra Scouts, the Sikkim Scouts were formed to guard the Sino-Indian border in Sikkim; their troops are acclimatised to the mountains and understand local languages. The unit's mission is border surveillance and rapid response to incursions, distinguishing it from the Bhairavs, which are designed for mobile offensive operations across multiple sectors.

WHY BHAIRAV NOW?

The army's decision to raise Bhairav battalions reflects multiple pressures. On the modern battlefield, drones and precision-guided weapons enable small units to inflict disproportionate dam-

age; integrating UAVs and loitering munitions allows Bhairav teams to hit high-value targets without massing troops. The army also faces the challenge of defending two active fronts against Pakistan and China; positioning Bhairav units under different corps provides rapid-strike capabilities tailored to local terrain. These units are designed to handle tactical cross-border raids and reconnaissance, tasks that would otherwise fall to the overstretched Para-Special Forces. By bridging the gap between regular infantry and elite commandos, Bhairav battalions fit into the broader Decade of Transformation, which advocates modular, networked formations such as Rudra Brigades and Divyastra drone regiments.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

The modernisation of India's 382 infantry battalions and the raising of Bhairav units mark a paradigm shift in Indian military strategy. By placing drone platoons in every infantry battalion and forming commando battalions with integrated artillery, signals and air-defence detachments, the army is preparing for a multi-domain battlefield. These lean units can execute raids across the Line of Control or LAC and neutralise enemy positions. Yet, as Lt-Gen Ajay Kumar emphasised, “boots on the ground will always be relevant because victory ... will continue to be measured in the amount of land captured”. The reforms therefore complement rather than replace conventional units; the army must sustain investment in basic soldier gear while developing the specialised skills and doctrines needed to make Bhairav units effective.

JIO FINANCIAL UNVEILS AI-GENERATED DIWALI BRAND FILM CELEBRATING HUMAN CONNECTIONS

Jio Financial launches AI-powered Diwali campaign “Har Ghar #Khushi-yonKaDiya” celebrating family, community, and financial empowerment.

TBG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Jio Financial Services Limited (JFSL), which caters to the core financial needs of Indians through its simple, seamless and smart financial services offered through the JioFinance app, launched an innovative brand marketing campaign this Diwali, centered around the profound and resonant symbol of the ‘Diya’. The film, which honours the intimate bonds of family and community that make this festival meaningful, is entirely crafted using Generative AI, underscoring the company’s commitment to leveraging intelligent, tech-driven solutions designed to turn aspiration into action, and promise into progress. The campaign, titled “Har Ghar #KhushiyonKaDiya”, positions the Diya, the icon of the JioFinance app, as a symbol of warmth and new beginnings. It is a ray of hope that cuts through barriers of geography, generations and socio-economic



The film, which honours the intimate bonds of family and community that make this festival meaningful, is entirely crafted using Generative AI, underscoring the company’s commitment to leveraging intelligent, tech-driven solutions designed to turn aspiration into action.

circumstance, akin to the financial services offered through JioFinance, which are designed for all Indians. The film, produced by

Mumbai-based creative agency EiPi Media, visually connects the gentle glow of the festive lamp--the first spark at dusk, laughter in

the corridors--with the feeling financial services should evoke: simple, reassuring, and built for the customer’s life. Surbhe S Sharma, CEO,

Jio Finance Platform and Service Limited says, “For us at JioFinance, the Diya is more than just an app icon or a cultural motif; it is our promise to customers. It reflects what we stand for: quiet confidence and the clarity that better financial choices can illuminate our path to progress. By leveraging GenAI to bring this heartwarming story to life, we are demonstrating our commitment to leveraging technology as a force for good in our journey to democratise and simplify financial services.” Jio Financial Services Limited (JFSL) is a Core Investment Company (CIC) registered with the Reserve Bank of India. As a new-age institution, JFSL operates a full-stack financial services ecosystem through customer-facing subsidiaries, including Jio Credit Limited, Jio Insurance Broking Limited, Jio Payment Solutions Limited, Jio Leasing Services Limited, Jio Finance Platform and Service Limited, and Jio Payments Bank Limited.

AVP Infracon Limited – H1 FY26 business performance update

TBG NETWORK
MUMBAI

AVP Infracon Limited, a leading infrastructure development company with over 15 years of execution excellence, delivered its best-ever half-year performance in H1 FY26, marking a defining milestone in its growth journey. The company has grown exponentially post-IPO, supported by strong project execution, disciplined bidding, and diversification into new sectors. The period was marked by multiple high-value project wins across Tamil Nadu and other states, along with continued operational expansion, reinforcing AVP’s position as one of India’s India’s emerging EPC players. Performance Highlights-H1 FY26 marks the best-ever half-year performance in the company’s history. Standalone turnover doubled in H1 FY26 compared to H1 FY25, driven by robust execution and efficient project management. The growth reflects AVP’s continued focus on stakeholder wealth maximization, market expansion, and meeting infrastructure demand



across its core business segments. Strong operational momentum supported by disciplined bidding, on-time delivery, and diversification into solar and private sector EPC projects. Healthy Order Book and Pipeline- Order Book (as of 30 Sept 2025): Approx Rs 300 Cr (unexecuted value)- Bid Pipeline: Rs 1500- 2000 Cr worth of projects under evaluation- Execution Visibility: 18-24 months with strong H2 ramp-up expected Robust Order Inflow During the first half of FY26, AVP Infracon Limited recorded a robust order inflow of -Rs 124 Cr, securing five major infrastructure contracts across highways, bridges, and industrial projects. The wins underscore AVP’s execution strength and its reputation as a trusted EPC partner for government and institutional clients. Key Orders Secured in H1 FY26:- Rs 39.02 Cr - Performance-

based maintenance contract for highways (C&M Tanjore) from KCP Infra Limited- Rs 16.23 Cr - Construction of a Road Over Bridge between Singanallur-Peelamedu for Highways NABARD & Rural Roads Circle, Salem- Rs 33.34 Cr - Infrastructure development for South Parcel (OSBL) at Mappedu Multi-Modal Logistics Park from Reliance Mappedu MMLP Limited- Rs 10.63 Cr - Strengthening and overlaying works along NH-83 (Thanjavur-Trichy section) awarded by NHAI, Madurai- Rs 24.61 Cr - Creation of infrastructure facilities at SIPCOT Industrial Park, Manapara from SIPCOT Collectively, these orders expand AVP’s sectoral footprint in road, bridge, and industrial infrastructure projects, strengthening its visibility across Tamil Nadu’s key development corridors and paving the way for future expansion into new regions. Warrant Issue to Strengthen Promoter Confidence The Company also approved the issue of 20,00,000 convertible warrants at Rs 200 each, aggregating Rs 40 Cr.- 75% (15,00,000 war-

rants) allocated to Mr D. Prasanna, Promoter- 25% (5,00,000 warrants) to five non-promoter investors This reflects strong promoter commitment and external investor confidence in AVP’s long-term vision. Future Direction Geographical Expansion Beyond Tamil Nadu AVP plans to strategically expand its operations into other states, targeting 25-30% of FY26 revenue from outside Tamil Nadu while maintaining existing profit margins through selective, conservative bidding. Margin and Working Capital Discipline Management reiterated its intent to maintain FY25-level, even as the company scales operations and enters new states. The working capital strategy timely supplier payments and cost efficiency--is expected to support sustainable profitability. Accelerating Solar EPC Business Launched in January 2025, AVP’s solar EPC division is actively building capabilities and bidding for larger projects to establish this as a long-term growth vertical. Selective Foray into Private and PSU Projects Currently focused on government contracts.

Key tips for First-Time EV owners from VinFast

TBG NETWORK
GURUGRAM

As India sees great numbers of households switching to electric cars, VinFast is stepping in to help first-time EV owners adapt to new routines in driving, charging, and maintenance. The numbers tell a story of momentum India registered 115,800 electric four-wheelers in fiscal year 2024-25, about 15 percent more than the year before. That number signals perhaps the largest wave of households shifting from petrol to electric cars so far. The rise is exciting, but buying an EV is only the beginning. Owning one means new habits, from the way people drive to how they plan trips and maintain the vehicle. Automakers like VinFast are responding by building features into their cars that help new drivers adjust with less trial and error. Drive Smoothly, Save Range Driving an EV is not simply a matter of pressing the pedal and expecting the same response as a petrol car. Electric motors deliver instant torque, which can tempt drivers to accelerate hard. Yet smooth driving is key to extracting the best range from a charge. Re-



generative braking, which recaptures energy when slowing down, works best when the driver anticipates traffic rather than relying on sudden stops. The lesson is simple: steady inputs save energy. Most modern EVs come with multiple drive modes. Eco mode lightens steering effort and dials back power to extend range, especially useful in congested city streets. Normal mode balances efficiency and responsiveness for mixed conditions. Sport mode sharpens handling and maximizes power, best reserved for highways or quick overtaking. Many new owners assume Sport is the “default” choice, but frequent use drains the battery faster than expected. Another habit worth building is pre-conditioning the car. By cooling or heating the cabin while plugged in, owners reduce the energy drawn from the battery once the trip begins. In hot Indian summers, this small

step can preserve several kilometers of driving range. VinFast has built these functions into the VF 6 and VF 7, pairing them with steering assist and suspension tuned for both urban traffic and longer journeys. The VF 7 also shows that efficiency and performance are not mutually exclusive. Its all-wheel-drive version accelerates from zero to 100 kilometers per hour in 5.8 seconds, yet still allows drivers to optimize range with the right settings. Charge Wisely, Treat the Battery Well If driving style is the first adjustment, charging habits are the second. Petrol drivers are used to filling a tank from empty. That mindset does not translate well to EVs. Batteries last longer when kept between 20 and 80 percent charge for daily use. Allowing the pack to reach zero is a big “no-no”. Fast charging, meanwhile, is a valuable tool for road trips, but it should not become the default method. Overnight charging at home on a slower connection is gentler and often cheaper.

Public charging also comes with a new form of etiquette. Once the car is

topped up, drivers should move it so others can use the station. India’s network of public chargers is expanding, yet access remains uneven. Urban centers are seeing rapid installations, while many highways are still thinly covered. For first-time owners, this means route planning matters. Checking apps before setting out helps avoid range anxiety. VinFast equips its VF 6 and VF 7 with LFP battery cells, known for thermal stability, and a battery management system that balances charging and discharging for longevity. Both models come with segment-leading warranties -10 years or 200,000 kilometers for the VF 7, 7 years or 160,000 kilometers for the VF 6, and 10 years or 200,000 kilometers of battery coverage for both supported by durability testing already proven across more than 100,000 VinFast vehicles worldwide. That level of coverage provides reassurance for those still learning what “good charging habits” look like in practice. Maintain Regularly, Understand Safety The third adjustment comes in long-term ownership.

Tamara Leisure appoints Shalini Warriar as Independent Director

TBG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Tamara Leisure Experiences Pvt. Ltd. today announced the appointment of Ms. Shalini Warriar as Independent Director to its Board of Directors, further reinforcing the company’s focus on robust corporate governance and strategic growth. With over three decades of leadership experience in the banking and financial services sector, Ms. Warriar brings extensive expertise in financial management, digital transformation, and strategic governance. Her appointment reflects Tamara’s commitment to integrating strong financial oversight and

future-ready governance practices as it continues to expand across the hospitality and allied sectors. Ms. Warriar currently serves as Co-Promoter and Chief Executive Officer of Gosree Finance Limited (GFL), a rapidly growing non-banking financial company (NBFC) based in Kochi, Kerala. Prior to this, she served as Executive Director on the Board of Federal Bank from January 2020 to May 2025, where she led the bank’s retail operations and digital banking initiatives. Her leadership in driving digital innovation and customer-centric transformation positioned Federal Bank as a frontrunner in India’s evolving financial landscape.

DRA Homes launches iHEART, Chennai’s first branded sea-view residences on OMR

TBG NETWORK
CHENNAI

Renowned for trust and design excellence, DRA Homes, the fast-emerging Indian real estate pride brand from Chennai, today announced the launch of DRA iHEART - Chennai’s first branded sea-view residences in Navalur on OMR. Spanning 3.42 acres with 271 thoughtfully designed homes along the main road, iHEART sets a new standard in living. The project integrates over 650 carefully selected premium-standard products - from foundation materials such as cement, steel and structural fittings to



luxury brand finishes and amenities such as chrome fittings, designer tiles, high-end windows, stylish doors and an infinity-edge swimming pool. Together, DRA iHEART delivers an authentic luxury living experience in the INR 1.5 to 2 crore segment, a first-of-its-kind in Chennai. In a pioneering first for the Indian residential real estate

sector, DRA Homes has partnered with Slate AI, a global leader in construction intelligence technology. This exclusive collaboration enables real-time monitoring throughout every stage of iHEART’s construction, ensuring quality, transparency and timely project delivery. By harnessing AI-driven analytics and predictive

insights, DRA Homes demonstrates its forward-thinking commitment, becoming the first Indian developer to integrate this advanced platform in a residential project. The project features spacious 3 and 4 BHK homes (1,595-2,927 sq. ft.) with select units including dedicated maid rooms. All homes are Vastu-compliant and designed for comfort, elegance and functionality within a Basement + Stilt + 19-floor structure that offers panoramic sea views. Commenting on the launch, Mr. Ranjeeth Rathod, Managing Director, DRA Homes said, «We are ex-

cited to launch Chennai’s first branded residences in the luxury segment, combining premium-standard construction with luxury brand finishes. iHEART delivers a distinctive lifestyle experience in the Rs. 1.5 to 2 crore range, fulfilling the luxury living aspirations of to-be affluent families. Partnering with Slate AI ensures we maintain the highest quality standards and timely delivery.» Strategically located on the main road of Navalur, DRA iHEART offers unmatched connectivity to Chennai’s IT hubs, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, vibrant entertainment

centres, and the ECR beach just a short drive away. Together, iHEART makes it a perfect choice for combining luxury living, work, lifestyle and leisure in one location. The project underscores DRA Homes’ unwavering commitment to trust, transparency and exceptional quality, ensuring residents make a lasting investment in a home of pride and value. DRA, with an impressive legacy of 40 years, has become a trusted name in the real estate industry, delivering world-class projects across Chennai. With more than 12,000 satisfied customers DRA is synonymous with trust.

WHEN CELEBRATIONS TURN TOXIC: BHARAT'S BATTLE WITH AIR POLLUTION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DELHI

OPINION

B. N. S. SRIRAM AND
DR. PARTHA S. RAKSHIT



Every year, as the vibrant lights and joyous spirits of Diwali sweep across the country and capital of India, another shadow quietly descends on the city a shadow of dense, toxic air that leaves its citizens gasping for breath. The spectacle of fireworks and crackers during the festival of lights, intended to symbolize hope and the triumph of good over evil, unfortunately often heralds the onset of a pollution emergency. In 2025, the narrative around green crackers which was promoted as an environmentally friendly solution once again fell short of transforming this grim reality. Examining the aftermath of Diwali, becomes imperative not under the lens of customary faith, but rather on the public health crisis that the festival's celebration, in its

current unchecked form, triggers. Specially, Delhi's air quality is highly susceptible to seasonal changes and human interventions. In October 2025, just before Diwali, the city's Air Quality Index (AQI) hovered at an average of around 180-210, which, while higher than the WHO's prescribed safe level, remained within the "moderate" to "poor" range due to the lingering effects of the monsoon. However, within just 24 hours post-Diwali occasion, monitoring at several key locations recorded AQI spikes above 400 with hazardous levels of PM2.5 and PM10 particles blanketing the city (as reported by various national media agencies). The burn-off from firecrackers, compounded by stagnant post-monsoon air and low wind speeds, creates a veri-

table gas chamber, trapping pollutants over the city for days.

In recent years, "green crackers" were introduced as a technological fix, promising a drastic reduction in harmful emissions. Approved by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), these crackers were claimed to emit up to 30% fewer pollutants and produce lower noise. Yet, the Diwali of 2025 proved a stark disappointment. Lack of effective regulation, mislabeling, and black-market sales quickly undermined any gains. The market flooded with ordinary fireworks masquerading as green, while genuine green crackers were either unavailable or not distinctly marked for consumers. Public perception further complicated matters. For many, the term "green cracker" became a fig leaf that assuaged eco-guilt but did not substantially alter behavior or environmental outcome. The intensity and volume of cracker use, coupled with the social prestige attached to large-scale firework displays, rendered these supposed innovations ineffective at scale.

The consequences of post-Diwali-induced pollution are both immediate and insidious. The post-occasion smog contains not just particulate matter, but also noxious gases like sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen oxides, each with severe health impacts. Short-term effects include aggravated respiratory illnesses, reduced lung func-



Smog Gun sprays water to control pollution levels as Air Quality worsens at Kartavya Path, in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANI

tion, eye irritation, and headaches. Over the long term, the increased exposure to high pollution levels raises the risk of chronic respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems, and even impairs cognitive function in children. Environmental damage extends beyond human health. Toxic metals and chemicals from firecracker residues, such as barium, strontium, and aluminum, contaminate water bodies and soil. The sudden spike in greenhouse gas emissions following Diwali offsets months' worth of efforts to reduce the city's carbon footprint.

At the heart of this issue lies a pressing legal and constitutional dilemma. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to life, a right that by the Apex Court's directive/interpretation encom-

passes the right to live in a clean, healthy environment. Article 14 enshrines equality before the law, ensuring that environmental hazards do not disproportionately affect the rights of vulnerable populations. The state's obligation is therefore not merely to permit celebration but to ensure that the manner of celebration does not infringe upon the fundamental rights of others. International human rights discourse also recognizes the right to a healthy environment as intrinsic to the realization of all other rights.

The Apex Court directives on firecracker sale and use, while well-intentioned, have struggled with implementation. The court's repeated reminders for designated times and locations for firework use, loudness limits, and a ban on toxic

substances have faced challenges in ground-level enforcement. The regulatory architecture has been complicated by the fragmentation of responsibility between municipal, state, and central authorities. Delhi's pollution crisis post-Diwali starkly illustrates how societal practices, however well-rooted in culture, must continually evolve to reflect these normative shifts.

The legal and policy machinery will remain ineffective unless fueled by a sense of individual and collective responsibility. The tendency to equate loud, grand fireworks with community prestige or social standing has, over the years, become deeply entrenched. This competitive spirit, unfortunately, manifests as a nuisance for society at large. This attitude needs an urgent rethink. The sound

and spectacle may last an evening, but the toxic afterglow lingers for days, sometimes weeks. Celebration should never come at the expense of collective well-being. The environment is a shared trust, and citizens have a moral and constitutional duty to protect it.

A multi-pronged approach to break the annual cycle of post-Diwali pollution is essential.

- First, green crackers must not only be certified at the laboratory level but require mandatory licensing at point-of-sale. Only those products that pass rigorous, transparent testing should reach the market. All other varieties should be categorically banned, and violations must attract heavy fines for both sellers and buyers.
- Second, these legal stipulations should be accompanied by strong enforcement. The responsibility must not just lie with the government but should extend to local communities and residents' welfare associations, who could oversee local implementation and raise awareness.
- Third, mass campaigns, especially around the festive season, should highlight the collective cost of pollution and the grave impact on the most vulnerable. The narrative must shift from viewing restrained celebrations as a loss of culture to embracing them as acts of environmental citizenship. Pride should come not from louder and

brighter fireworks, but from a shared commitment to the greater good.

Lastly, law enforcement must continue to innovate with emergency measures when AQI spikes, including temporary bans, traffic restrictions, and health advisories, activated not as punitive actions but as life-saving interventions in times of crisis.

Faith and festivity are vital threads in the social fabric, but so too is the right to breathe clean air. Ultimately, no law, policy, or technological fix can succeed without a societal shift in attitude. The will to redefine prestige from how much one can outdo their neighbors in fireworks to how much one can contribute to an environment fit for all is the need of the hour. Respecting tradition and ensuring the right to a healthful environment are not mutually exclusive. The case study of Delhi's post-Diwali air should serve as a clarion call to balance both, with collective action, legal rigor, and unwavering commitment to the spirit of the Constitution. Only then will the festival of lights truly become a celebration of life and not a harbinger of distress in one of the most polluted cities of Bharat.

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Building Future: Smart, resilient infrastructure through sensor networks and digital twin technologies

OPINION

SHOBHIT MOHTA



As climate change intensifies and cities expand beyond their designed capacities, the need for resilient, intelligent infrastructure has become critical. The next evolution in civil and urban engineering is being shaped by two revolutionary technologies, sensor networks and digital twins, which together promise to transform how we design, operate, and sustain the physical systems that underpin modern life.

From bridges that report their own stress levels to power grids that predict and prevent failures, the integration of real-time sensing with virtual simulation marks a defining shift in infrastructure management. **THE FOUNDATION: SMART SENSING NETWORKS**

At the heart of this transformation lies the sensor network, an intelligent mesh of interconnected devices that monitor environmental and structural parameters with remarkable precision. These sensors, embedded into bridges, roads, buildings, and power grids, continuously capture data on temperature, vibration, strain, humidity, pressure, and load distribution.

Unlike traditional instrumentation, modern sensor networks are built to communicate, analyse, and even make localised decisions. Through edge computing, they process information close to the source, reducing latency and bandwidth demands. This allows infrastructure operators to detect anomalies, assess wear, and predict failures in real time.

A 2025 *Nature Scientific Reports* study found that integrating large-scale sensor networks into city infrastructure enables modeling of energy flows, environmental conditions, and emergency responses, creating adaptive, self-learning urban systems key to modern

city management.

DIGITAL TWINS: THE VIRTUAL COUNTERPART OF REALITY

A digital twin is a high-fidelity, dynamic virtual model that mirrors a physical asset or system. Continuously updated through live sensor data, it allows engineers and operators to visualize, simulate, and optimize performance under varying conditions.

According to *Automate.org*, digital twins represent "the future of sys-

Through edge computing, they process information close to the source, reducing latency and bandwidth demands. This allows infrastructure operators to detect anomalies, assess wear, and predict failures in real time.

tem optimization and maintenance," offering unmatched visibility into asset conditions and performance trends. They not only reflect the current state of infrastructure but also enable simulation of potential stress events, such as earthquakes, floods, or overloads, helping authorities prepare effective response strategies.

Bentley Systems has implemented digital twin platforms in global transportation projects, integrating design data, sensor feedback, and environmental modelling to

enhance safety, minimise maintenance downtime, and optimise traffic in smart cities, resulting in lower costs and improved resilience against diverse infrastructure challenges.

RESILIENT ENERGY SYSTEMS THROUGH DIGITAL TWINS

Nowhere is the convergence of sensors and digital twins more crucial than in energy infrastructure. As reported by *EE Power* (2024), Siemens Energy has been developing AI-powered digital

twins for electric grids to enhance resilience and reduce wildfire risk. These virtual models combine data from IoT sensors, satellite imagery, and weather analytics to predict faults and optimise grid operation.

In regions susceptible to wildfires like California and Australia, digital twins simulate conditions like heat dispersion and vegetation proximity, enabling proactive shutdowns of risky grid segments, effectively protecting lives and the environment through predictive digital technology.

Similarly, in power generation, digital twins are being deployed across thermal and renewable plants. A report by *Power Info Today* highlights how these models optimise plant efficiency by tracking turbine vibration, boiler temperature, and emission rates in real time. The twin can forecast component fatigue, suggest operational adjustments, and even simulate the impact of maintenance decisions before they are executed.

EY insights on utility transformation reports digital twins boost visibility, outage management, renewable integration, and could improve utility operational efficiency by 15-20%, while significantly reducing unplanned downtime.

APPLICATIONS BEYOND POWER: TRANSPORT, WATER, AND CONSTRUCTION

In transportation, digital twins are reshaping how we plan and maintain infrastructure. Intelligent transport systems now incorporate twins that simulate road usage patterns, track wear, and optimize maintenance schedules. Bentley Systems' twin-enabled highway and rail projects have demonstrated reduced disruptions and more accurate budget forecasting, an essential advantage for public infrastructure investments.

Water management is

another emerging frontier. Sensor-based monitoring of pipelines, reservoirs, and treatment plants, when integrated with digital twins, allows early leak detection, contamination tracking, and supply optimization. The *MDPI Infrastructures Journal's* special issue on smart infrastructure noted that sensor-based hydraulic twins can simulate stress propagation in water systems.

Even in structural engineering, digital twins are redefining inspection and maintenance. By integrating strain, displacement, and vibration sensors into bridges and buildings, engineers can visualize stress distribution and fatigue in real time.

CHALLENGES ON THE ROAD TO IMPLEMENTATION

Despite the clear potential, several challenges persist. Interoperability remains a central issue. Data collected from diverse sensors, often using proprietary protocols, must be standardised to feed coherent digital models. Open data frameworks and common modelling ontologies are essential to overcome this fragmentation.

Cybersecurity is another pressing concern. As sensor networks and twins become critical to national infrastructure, they also present potential targets for cyberattacks. Robust encryption,

network segmentation, and real-time intrusion detection systems are essential to maintaining data integrity and operational trust.

Financially, high initial costs of deployment can deter investment, especially in developing economies. However, experts argue that the long-term savings, through reduced failures, lower maintenance costs, and extended asset life, far outweigh the upfront expenditure.

THE FUTURE: TOWARDS SELF-ADAPTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Looking ahead, infrastructure is set to evolve from merely "smart" to self-adaptive. With advances in AI, 6G connectivity, and cloud-edge integration, digital twins will become fully autonomous systems capable of self-optimisation and decentralised decision-making.

Imagine bridges that autonomously adjust load distribution under heavy traffic, or power grids that reroute energy in response to outages, all orchestrated by interconnected digital twins.

The path forward requires collaboration across disciplines, civil engineering, computer science, and data analytics. As climate extremes intensify and urban populations surge, resilient infrastructure will be the backbone of sustainable

civilization.

CONCLUSION
The integration of sensor networks and digital twin technologies represents a transformative leap in how societies build, operate, and safeguard critical infrastructure. As the world confronts growing challenges, from extreme weather and urban congestion to resource scarcity and ageing assets, the need for resilient, adaptive, and data-driven systems has never been more urgent.

Sensor networks serve as the *sensory organs* of modern infrastructure, providing continuous, real-time feedback on performance, safety, and environmental conditions. When combined with digital twins, the *cognitive brain* of infrastructure, these systems create an intelligent ecosystem that can predict failures, simulate disaster responses, and guide evidence-based decision-making. Success depends on strategic implementation and collaboration. Governments, engineers, and technology providers must work hand in hand.

Ultimately, the vision is of a world where infrastructure is no longer passive but *proactively intelligent* where cities sense their own stress, utilities anticipate faults, and transportation networks adjust dynamically to demand. *Shobhit Mohta, Assistant Professor, Amity University Rajasthan.*

GST cuts fuel small cars to make a big comeback



TEAM AUTO

In the 1990s and early 2000s, as India's economy opened up and cities grew rapidly, Maruti Suzuki quietly changed how Indians travelled. The company did not rely on luxury cars or fancy imports but on small, simple hatchbacks that focused on practicality and fuel efficiency. For many middle-class families, owning a car was once a far-off dream, but Maruti made it possible. Models like the Maruti 800 and later the Alto became symbols of aspiration, offering affordable and reliable mobility. Designed for narrow Indian roads and modest household budgets, these cars made personal transport accessible to millions. In doing so, Maruti didn't just sell cars — it made car ownership a reality for the average Indian.

This approach built strong trust among first-time buyers, especially in smaller towns. Owning a Maruti became a sign of progress and stability. That emotional bond created lasting brand loyalty — something no advertisement could achieve. These compact cars bridged the gap between two-wheelers and four-wheelers.

In recent years, however, India's roads have been taken over by SUVs. Cars like the Nexon and Thar have gained popularity for their power and image, and small cars began losing ground. Today, SUVs outsell hatchbacks by more than two to one. Yet, signs suggest a small car comeback — led once again by Maruti Suzuki India, the country's largest carmaker.

According to Partho Ba-

Maruti drives revival as GST cuts boost affordability

nerjee, Senior Executive Officer for Marketing and Sales at Maruti Suzuki India, small car demand is rising again. "More buyers are coming from two-wheelers to our showrooms. GST 2.0 seems to be helping affordability and mobility at the lower levels," he said. As reported by the media, Maruti aims to sell 2.2–2.5 lakh mini cars in FY26, close to its all-time high of 2.47 lakh units in FY20. This revival comes after a slow year, with overall passenger vehicle sales growing only 2% in FY25 and Maruti's market share slipping to 40.9% — its lowest since FY13.

Government policy reshapes affordability

The return of small cars is closely tied to the government's GST changes. From September 22, tax on passenger vehicles under four metres, two-wheelers below 350cc, and small commercial vehicles dropped from 28% to 18%. Larger vehicles, including SUVs, now attract 40% tax, down from up to 50%.

This tax cut, combined with discounts, has boosted affordability. Maruti reduced prices by 2–21%, with the biggest cuts on its

small cars — the Alto, S-Presso, and Celerio — which are now 13–22% cheaper.

The results were quick. Within four weeks, Maruti's entry-level hatchbacks saw their share in total sales rise from 16.7% to 22.2%. The company also received 4 lakh bookings during this period — its highest-ever four-week total — with 80,000 of them for small cars, a 70% jump from before the GST cut.

Banerjee said, "The idea of GST 2.0 is to help people afford cars. The number of two-wheeler users visiting showrooms has gone up, and entry-level cars now make up 22.2% of our retail sales, compared to 16.7% before. A 5% rise is huge."

Two-wheeler users drive the comeback

Maruti's new focus is on converting two-wheeler owners into first-time car buyers. "We are literally seeing helmets on discussion tables — that's a very good indicator," Banerjee noted. These new customers represent the next stage of growth, as India currently has only 34–36 cars per 1,000 people.

"If a person buys a car today, they may upgrade in four years. This creates a cycle that keeps the market growing," he explained.

Festive boost and record sales To make car buying easier, Maruti launched financing schemes such as an EMI of Rs 1,999 during Navratri, aimed at two-wheeler users. Dealers say the offer has brought new buyers, especially from rural and small-town areas, with strong sales expected during Dhanteras and Diwali.

October bookings for the Alto rose by 60% over last year, while total retail sales since the GST change touched 2.5 lakh vehicles — Maruti's best festive performance ever. To meet demand, factories have been working through week-ends, and vehicles are being moved across India using

expanded rail logistics.

Small cars versus SUVs

The push for small cars comes as hatchback sales have fallen 13% year-on-year to about 1 million in FY25, less than half the SUV total of 2.35 million. SUVs grew by over 10% in the same period, while the small-car share dropped to 23.4% — its fifth straight year of decline. Analysts blame rising costs due to new safety and emission rules.

Maruti's larger models, including the Brezza, Grand Vitara, and Invicto, saw smaller price cuts of 2–8%. Meanwhile, festive offers on small cars include benefits up to Rs 57,500 — the highest for the Wagon R — followed by Rs 52,500 on the Alto K10 and Celerio, and Rs 47,500 on the S-Presso.

Industry outlook

Some experts are cautious. "It's an ambitious goal. Today's first-time buyers prefer used premium models over entry-level cars," one industry executive told the media. Others believe the strategy could pay off. Nomura Research noted that while margins may dip slightly, market share and profitability could improve if demand stays strong.

Puneet Gupta from S&P Global Mobility said, "Expect new ideas in finance and ownership models to attract two-wheeler users. India still has low vehicle ownership, so this could drive millions towards their first car."

Looking ahead

For Maruti, small cars are more than just another product line — they are central to its growth strategy. Banerjee summed it up: "As a market leader, we must be present across all segments — hatchbacks, SUVs, MPVs, CNG, hybrids, and EVs. That's what leadership means."

With GST 2.0 making cars more affordable, bookings at record levels, and two-wheeler riders upgrading in large numbers, Maruti's challenge now is to sustain this momentum and help small cars reclaim their place as the backbone of India's automobile market.

Toyota introduces Sporty Aero Edition for Urban Cruiser Hyryder

Toyota Kirloskar Motor has unveiled a new Aero Edition styling package for its popular Urban Cruiser Hyryder SUV, adding a touch of sportiness to its design. The Aero Edition enhances the SUV's visual appeal with a front spoiler, side skirts, and a rear spoiler, available as an accessory package priced at Rs 31,999. Buyers can add the kit to any variant of the Hyryder and choose from White, Silver, Black, or Red exterior shades for personalisation. Since

its debut in 2022, the Hyryder has achieved over 1.68 lakh units in sales, solidifying its position in the midsize SUV segment. It comes with two powertrain options — a self-charging strong hybrid with a 1.5-litre petrol engine paired with an e-drive transmission delivering 27.97 km/l, and a 1.5-litre K-Series petrol engine with manual and automatic choices, along with 2WD and 4WD configurations.

Skoda launches Octavia RS in India at ₹49.99 lakh

Skoda Auto India has introduced the highly anticipated 2025 Octavia RS, priced at Rs 49.99 lakh (ex-showroom). Available in a single variant, the performance sedan is offered in five colour options — Velvet Red, Race Blue, Magic Black, Candy White, and Mamba Green. Bookings, which opened on 6 October for Rs

2.5 lakh, were quickly sold out, with deliveries beginning 6 November. Powering the new Octavia RS is a 2.0-litre TSI petrol engine delivering 261bhp and 370Nm of torque, mated to a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox. The car sprints from 0–100km/h in just 6.4 seconds, reaffirming its sporty credentials. Inside and out, the Octavia RS features LED lighting, 19-inch dual-tone alloys, red brake callipers, and an all-black cabin with red accents. It also gets a 12.9-inch touchscreen, 10.25-inch digital cluster, 360-degree camera, three-zone climate control, and front sport seats with massage, heating, and cooling functions.

Tata Nexon introduces Level 1 ADAS

Tata Motors has added Level 1 Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS) to the Nexon, enhancing the SUV's safety credentials. The technology is available exclusively with the petrol Fearless+ PS DCT variant, priced at Rs 13.53 lakh (ex-showroom). This is the same ADAS suite found in the Nexon EV, offering features such as Forward Collision Warning, Autonomous Emergency Braking, Lane Departure Warning, Lane Keep Assist, Lane Centering System, High Beam Assist, and Traffic Sign Recognition. The fully loaded Fearless+ PS trim also includes dual digital displays, ventilated front seats, a panoramic sunroof, connected car tech, a height-adjustable driver's seat, and a complete LED lighting package. Power comes from a 1.2-litre turbo-petrol GDI engine producing 118bhp and 170Nm, paired with either a six-speed manual or DCT gearbox. With this move, Tata joins the growing list of compact SUV makers embracing ADAS, alongside the Mahindra XUV3XO, Kia Syros, and the soon-to-launch Hyundai Venue facelift, arriving on 4 November.



Nissan Magnite AMT now gets factory-approved CNG Kit

Nissan India has extended its factory-approved CNG retrofitment program to include the Magnite AMT, allowing customers to pair the convenience of an automatic gearbox with improved fuel efficiency. The retrofitment kit, priced at Rs 71,999, is now Rs 3,000 cheaper thanks to the revised GST 2.0, which reduced the tax rate from 28% to 18%. Developed in collaboration with Motozen Fuel Systems and approved by the Government of India, the kit is fitted exclusively at authorised Nissan retrofitment centres. The updated system also features a re-engineered integrated fuel cap, neatly housing both petrol and CNG valves under a single lid for added convenience. The retrofitment is compatible with the 1.0-litre naturally aspirated petrol engine in both manual and AMT variants. Nissan backs the upgrade with a three-year/one lakh km warranty and has expanded availability to 13 states, including Delhi-NCR, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka.



Mini JCW Countryman ALL4: Power and a dash of madness

RITESH MADHOK

The first drive for the New Mini John Cooper Works Countryman All4 happened at the Buddh International Race Circuit, and though it wasn't a flat-out track test, the brief four-lap convoy session was enough to reveal the car's potential. This sporty crossover, priced at Rs 64.90 lakh (ex-showroom), promises genuine performance wrapped in everyday practicality — something few cars in this segment manage as seamlessly.

Design and rivals

The JCW Countryman sits in the premium performance crossover category, rivaling models like the Mercedes-AMG GLA 35. At 4.4 metres long, it's grown significantly and isn't exactly "Mini" anymore. Yet, it still looks purposeful and muscular, especially in its signature British Racing Green. Highlights include red brake callipers, 19-inch alloy wheels, quad exhausts, and sporty detailing that instantly convey its JCW heritage. Its high ground clearance and chunky tyres make it better suited to Indian roads than most performance hatchbacks.

Cabin and comfort

Step inside, and the cabin immediately sets the tone for excitement. Mini's mix of retro charm and modern sophistication shines through in every detail — from the toggle switches and three-spoke JCW steering wheel to the knit dashboard finished in black and red. The anthracite headliner, aluminium paddle shifters, and JCW sport seats trimmed in vescin and cord materials complete the athletic vibe. The seats, offering impressive lateral support, proved their worth during quick directional changes around the circuit. Space-wise, it's larger than you'd expect, and the cabin quality feels on par with European rivals in this price range. Mini has done well to retain its character while delivering an up market, driver-focused interior.

Technology and features

The dashboard is dominated by a massive circular OLED display, which houses everything from infotainment to vehicle settings and ADAS functions. The user interface feels futuristic, and the system's crisp graphics complement the car's



REVIEW

playful personality. Key features include wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, a Harman Kardon sound system, heads-up display, and three-zone climate control.

Mini has also included a comprehensive ADAS suite, featuring forward collision warning, lane departure alert, speed limiter, driver attentiveness monitor, and reversing assistant. There's even a 360-degree camera system, though

it wasn't exactly necessary at the BIC. The 'Go-Kart Mode' — accessed via toggle switches — sharpens the throttle and steering response, alters the cabin lighting, and tweaks the sound for a more immersive driving feel.

Engine and performance

Under the hood lies a 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder petrol engine that produces 300hp and

400Nm of torque, paired with a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission and the All4 all-wheel-drive system. Even within the limits of a controlled track session, the engine's responsiveness stood out. Power delivery is strong, and acceleration from 0–100km/h in 5.4 seconds feels genuinely brisk. The gearbox works flawlessly, delivering crisp up shifts and keeping the motor in its sweet spot. Engage Boost Mode, and the Countryman surges ahead with renewed aggression, accompanied by a throaty exhaust note that adds to the drama. Despite its size and elevated stance, the JCW feels nimble, eager, and surprisingly composed.

Handling and dynamics

The All4 AWD system is front-biased but quick to send torque rearwards when slip is detected. While I couldn't explore the car's limits fully, its composure through the circuit's sweeping corners was remarkable. There's noticeable body roll — inevitable for a crossover — but grip levels are impressive, and the steering feels precise and well-weighted. The Countryman's chassis tuning deserves credit; it blends stability

with agility in a way few crossovers manage. The electronics intervene early in the sportiest settings, but that ensures safety without dulling the fun. Braking performance, too, is reassuringly strong, with excellent pedal feedback. Though the track doesn't allow for a proper ride assessment, the higher profile tyres and ample ground clearance suggest that it should cope well with Indian road imperfections — a big advantage over traditional hot hatches.

Verdict

The Mini John Cooper Works Countryman All4 strikes a fine balance between performance, practicality, and style. It isn't a stripped-down track weapon, but a daily-drivable performance crossover that delivers plenty of excitement without sacrificing comfort. It feels exclusive, engaging, and playful — the very traits that define the Mini brand.

At Rs 64.90 lakh, it's positioned against cars like the Mercedes-AMG GLA 35 and BMW X1 M Sport, and while it may lack a few high-end features like Dynamic Chassis Control or a sunroof, its character more than compensates.

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