

New labour codes are long overdue & welcome

THE ISSUE of factor market reforms — in particular, land and labour — has been at the heart of policy debates in India for decades. In its first term, the NDA government had taken a stab at land reform. On Friday, it pushed ahead with the equally contentious labour market reform, notifying the implementation of the four labour codes, five years after they were passed by Parliament. The new codes, which replace 29 existing laws, seek to modernise labour market regulations, ease compliance burden, widen the security net for workers, including for gig and platform workers, and encourage formalisation. They also seek to boost female labour force participation and bring fixed-term employees on parity with permanent employees. This marks a welcome transition to a simpler and more predictable framework.

The complex web of labour regulations that existed till now has imposed huge costs on businesses and the wider economy. Regulations which have to do with firm size, for instance, have tended to limit the emergence of large firms, especially in labour intensive manufacturing sectors. With firms disincentivised to expand and hire more workers, it has led to too few firms scaling up — as per a study by ICRIER, a majority of firms in the manufacturing sector have less than 10 workers. This has had implications for manufacturing and formal job creation. The compliance costs of onerous regulations have also led to firms operating in the informal sector. Workers have thus remained trapped in low-productivity jobs. Alongside, the growing capital intensity of production — the India Employment Report 2024 noted that “the production process has increasingly become capital-intensive and labour-saving” — is at odds with a labour abundant economy. The reforms being carried out now should help address some of these issues.

The government's move to notify the four codes should, however, be just the first step in undoing the regulatory maze. As per a report from Teamlease titled Compliance 3.0, a firm in India typically needs to comply with provisions under 1,536 acts, fulfill 69,233 compliances and complete 6,618 filings at various levels of government. Steps are now being taken at both the central and state level to address this. As per a report from Axis Bank, complementing the Centre's deregulation push — which includes revoking the quality control orders recently — 16 states have implemented 38 reforms. These include land, labour and licensing reforms and decriminalisation of offences. The Union Budget 2025-26 had spoken about regulatory reforms, “especially in matters of inspections and compliances”. These should be tackled urgently.

COP 30 moves needle on climate finance

AT THE UNFCCC's annual conference of parties (COP), it's almost par for the course for deliberations to stretch into extra time. COP 30, which concluded in Belem, Brazil, on Saturday, also had to extend its deadline by 18 hours. However, unlike most of the COPs in the decade after the Paris Pact, the Belem summit has moved the needle somewhat in breaking the impasse between developed and developing countries on climate finance. At COP 30, countries agreed to set up a two-year programme to enable developing countries to mobilise at least \$1.3 trillion every year by 2035 — finance essential for their climate action in the next decade. The Belem deal also envisages tripling funds for climate adaptation over the next 10 years and operationalising the Loss and Damage fund set up at COP 28. The declaration falls short of asking for financial commitments from developed countries and, therefore, does not completely match the ambition demanded by emerging economies like India and China. However, it does send out an important political signal on the need to address the widening gap in climate finance and helps maintain pressure on developed countries to scale up their support.

Unilateral trade measures such as carbon adjustments — a tariff levied on imported goods that accounts for GHG emissions during their production — were a major flashpoint at Belem. India, China and some other countries have called such measures discriminatory and in violation of international trade laws. The Belem declaration recognises their concern. The deal calls for aligning commerce with climate action, but it also underscores the need to avoid “disguised restriction on international trade”.

The Belem summit was the first climate COP since US President Donald Trump withdrew his country from the Paris Pact. The meeting's outcome reflects a shift in power equations in climate diplomacy. Weakened by the US's absence, the developed country bloc has shown some inclination to accommodate concerns of emerging economies. The more important question — how to sync climate justice with the imperative of addressing the global warming challenge — however, remains unaddressed. The Belem declaration does not have a roadmap to phase out fossil fuels. As a face saver, though, COP 30 president André Aranha Corrêa do Lago proposed the creation of a platform to enable such a transition. This would be a voluntary initiative and not backed by the force of the UNFCCC. The Belem summit has restored some trust in the fraying global climate negotiation process. The challenge now is to take on the tougher challenge of expediting climate action.

FREEZE FRAME

BY E P UNNY



The Editorial Page

Bihar has got tall promises, it needs a credible development strategy

THE NATIONAL Democratic Alliance (NDA) deserves compliments for its landslide victory in Bihar. Being the state's longest-serving Chief Minister is no mean achievement for Nitish Kumar, given India's extremely competitive politics. It was also refreshing to see the NDA's attempt to shift the state's electoral grammar, from a “M-Y” formulation that denoted a religion-caste coalition to framing “M-Y” as *mahila* and youth. However, a fundamental question still needs to be asked: How can Bihar move past its bottom, or near-bottom, rank in most social and economic indicators? Last week, while delivering the Ramnath Goenka lecture, Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a clarion call for progress — “*Vikas, vikas, aur sirf vikas*”. If this remains the Nitish Kumar government's focus for the next five years, Bihar can perhaps witness a notable change in its ranking.

There has, of course, been an improvement in Bihar's baseline social and economic indicators: Electricity has reached homes, highways have stitched districts, and law and order has improved somewhat. Building on that foundation, the NDA has promised MSMEs, industrial parks, expressways, skill centres — all necessary ingredients for the state to move towards a resilient growth story.

The Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana has been credited by many as consolidating the NDA's women's vote bank. It began with a simple Rs 10,000 transfer to 75 lakh women in Jeevika SHGs; today that universe stands at 1.5 crore. Translate that into fiscal terms, and the outlay

already touches Rs 15,000 crore. The meter is still running with enrolments open till December. More intriguingly, the NDA has promised up to Rs 2 lakh in assistance after an assessment six months later. Whether this is a grant, a soft loan, or a hybrid remains unclear. But one must ask, with some seriousness: What livelihood can a woman make with a one-time transfer of Rs 10,000? Is it not a dole? Such doles cannot substitute for a viable income model.

If Bihar truly wants to turn *vikas* into something more than an electoral slogan, its youth must be at the focus of its development strategy. Yet the 15-29 age group has a Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) of just 34.6 per cent, far below India's 46.5 per cent (PLFS 2023-24). For such a cohort, the NDA manifesto has promised 1 crore government jobs. Even at a modest salary of Rs 15,000-20,000 a month, the annual bill for this would be Rs 1.8-2.4 lakh crore against the state's total budget of Rs 3.17 lakh crore. The prospect of fulfilling this promise appears remote.

In 2024, Bihar hosted the Business Connect Summit and attracted Rs 1.81 lakh crore in investment proposals, with players like the Adani Group and Sun Petrochemicals stepping up. That is what a credible development strategy looks like — using incentives to attract private investment rather than expanding an already strained public payroll. Nitish Kumar deserves credit for setting the stage, but investors need sustained confi-



ASHOK GULATI AND BIDISHA CHANDA

In 2024, Bihar hosted the Business Connect Summit and attracted Rs 1.81 lakh crore in investment proposals, with players like the Adani Group and Sun Petrochemicals stepping up. That is what a credible development strategy looks like — using incentives to attract private investment rather than expanding an already strained public payroll

A temple completed is a milestone in a new sacred geography



ADVAITA KALA

ON OCTOBER 27, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust announced that the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is complete. The Trust further shared that the Dhvaj (flag) ceremony, in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hoist the flag atop the temple's *shikhara*, is slated for November 25.

As Ayodhya's temple reaches completion, Uttar Pradesh is fast emerging as India's spiritual capital — a place where myth, history and pilgrimage infrastructure converge. The moment offers us a chance to see more clearly how corridors and circuits, faith and architecture, are redefining what sacred India looks like.

Ayodhya is not alone. Across India, corridors are being built, expanded, consecrated. The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor in Varanasi enlarged the temple precinct, restored smaller shrines, and reconnected the site to the Ganga. The Mahakal Lok Corridor in Ujjain extended the temple area dramatically, with storytelling elements engraved in pathways and murals.

In the Union Budget 2024-25, corridors for Vishnupad Temple (Gaya) and the Mahabodhi Temple (Bodhi Gaya) were announced — signalling that this is not piecemeal temple-building but a coordinated vision of sacred infrastructure.

What is distinctive now in UP is how corridors will link to the completion of the Ram Temple. The newly widened Ram Path, Bhakti Path, Dharma Path and associated road networks frame a pilgrim's journey not as a path through congestion, but as a procession through purpose-crafted space. These are narrative highways: Every turn, vista, walkway will carry meaning.

UP is staking a unique claim, not just as a centre of Hindu pilgrimage but as an axis where multiple streams of India's spiritual heritage converge. Alongside the Ramayana circuit lies the Buddhist circuit — Sarnath, Kushinagar, Shravasti, Kausambi, and others.

With Rs 4,200 crore earmarked for this Buddhist circuit, UP is sending a clear message: This is a land where Rama and Buddha speak to the world. The infrastructure, amenities, and outreach are being built not just for domestic pilgrims, but for global seekers. The effect? A state that is not merely

religiously rich, but spiritually plural and globally connected.

What does a spiritual capital feel like? It isn't just about temples; it's about the journey. The path a pilgrim walks will now be as intentional as the shrine they reach.

In Ayodhya, roads are being expanded to four lanes, new hotels are rising, and planning anticipates international arrivals. The Buddhist circuit, too, is being equipped with global-standard facilities and collaborative promotion. The Mahakal Lok Corridor, 900 metres long, is an example of storytelling in stone — scenes from the Shiva Purana painted in murals along the way.

A completed temple and robust corridors aren't just spiritual; they are engines of regeneration. The influx of devotees spurs hospitality, transport, handicrafts, local business — all part of the resurfacing of old towns.

UP's vision is bold: That devotion can be a catalyst for livelihoods, that heritage can be a framework for rejuvenation. With the temple's completion, that vision acquires credibility. What follows will be whether that economic uplift travels deep into local communities and respects the cultural threads already living in these towns.

With construction complete, the focus shifts from making to sustaining. The Dhvaj ceremony marks the transition from building to being. The corridors will no longer just lead to the temple — they will be part of its life.

UP's new tourism and pilgrim policy shows how sacred infrastructure is being positioned for the future. Heritage is being reimaged for global access. Myth is not bound to the past — it is being recrafted for a new India.

As the flag is raised on November 25, I invite every pilgrim and citizen to come not just to see, but to feel. Walk the Ram Path. Pause in the courtyards. Sense how architecture, light and ritual come together. Let your consciousness join the pilgrimage — not just outward, but inward. When you visit Sarnath or Kushinagar, carry the awareness that this land is being woven anew — with stories ancient and contemporary. As you traverse corridors and circuits, know you inhabit a moment where India is constructing its sacred geography for a new era.

Kala is a writer, including of the novel, *Almost Single*

dence, not fiscal overreach. In fact, the Industrial Investment Promotion Package 2025 is a step in the right direction, offering employment-linked incentives such as Rs 5,000 per employee per month for textiles (with up to 300 per cent ESI/EPF support) and Rs 2,000 for other units (with 100 per cent ESI/EPF support). This is essentially the job strategy the state should have been advertising, not fiscally untenable schemes.

While thanking BJP *karyakartas* for the NDA's landslide victory, PM Modi said that just as the Ganga flows from Bihar to Bengal, this victory wave will also move in the same direction. West Bengal is supposed to have assembly elections in March 2026, and the BJP is gearing up for a fierce election battle in Bengal to defeat the TMC. Will the BJP follow the same model of Bihar, promising Rs 10,000 or even more to a woman in each family?

Will that work? To answer this, one must compare Nitish's tenure with that of Mamata Banerjee's since 2011-12.

Between 2011-12 and 2024-25, Bengal's average annual GDP growth was 4.8 per cent, while Bihar posted a growth of 6.5 per cent. In agriculture, Bengal grew at 2.9 per cent versus Bihar's 4 per cent. On paper, Bihar looks like a stronger performer. Yet, the development story diverges sharply when viewed through a poverty lens. Bengal's multidimensional poverty fell from 58 per cent in 2005-06 to 8.6 per cent in 2022-23, a whopping drop by 85 per cent. But Bihar's pov-

erty moved from 78 per cent to 27 per cent, a drop by 65 per cent. Despite slower growth, Bengal lifted far more people out of deprivation. What explains this divergence?

The answer lies in demographics. Bengal's population is growing at 0.5 per cent per annum, compared to India's 0.9 per cent and Bihar's 1.43 per cent. Bihar's fertility rate is 3 compared to India's 2, and Bengal's 1.6. This explains why even with faster faster-growing GDP, Bihar's per capita income remained at the bottom.

Another reason is agricultural diversification and intensification. Both states are dominated by small landholdings: Agriculture employs 54 per cent of Bihar's workforce, and the average agriculture holding is just 0.39 ha. In contrast, Bengal agriculture engages only 38 per cent of the workforce with an average holding size of 0.76 ha (Agriculture Census 2015-16). Further, Bengal's cropping intensity stands at 193 per cent, the second highest in India, while in Bihar it remains at 148 per cent. Nearly 18 per cent of Bengal's gross cropped area is under high-value horticulture against Bihar's 7 per cent. Fishery also makes Bengal better as it accounts for 15 per cent of the gross value of agri-output, while in Bihar its contribution remains at 8 per cent.

Given all this, can the BJP storm the Bengal fort with doles, or will it come up with a more meaningful development strategy? Only time will tell.

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For Kyiv, a familiar betrayal dressed up as peace



SAPTARSHI BASAK

MORE THAN 30 years ago, Ukraine was coerced into relinquishing what was then the world's third-largest stockpile of nuclear weapons. It was seen as the right thing to do. Maintaining an independent nuclear programme would have been expensive, and by dismantling its missiles and silos, Kyiv strengthened the global non-proliferation regime. That decision, however, rested on security assurances from the international community — including the West and Russia — under what became known as the 1994 Budapest Memorandum.

Russia has violated that agreement twice, in 2014 and 2022. But the West, too, has failed to uphold the guarantees it pledged at Budapest. It chose to treat the Memorandum merely as a set of political assurances, and Vladimir Putin calculated that the West lacked the will to defend Ukraine militarily. That gamble paid off. Nearly four years into Russia's invasion, Ukraine again confronts the familiar sting of abandonment, as Donald Trump advances a plan that would, in effect, deliver the Kremlin a victory.

The 28-point plan betrays Ukraine on three counts. The first concerns territory, stating that Crimea, Luhansk and Donetsk will be recognised as de facto Russian, including by the US. This is a direct violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and fulfils one of Putin's earliest demands that the Donbas should be ceded to Russia because it is supposedly “Russian land” in need of “liberation”.

The second concerns Ukraine's autonomy. Point 7 essentially states that Ukraine can never join NATO and that NATO can never accept Ukraine. This is another central Russian demand. Under international law, every sovereign state has the right to determine its own security arrangements. Even if Ukraine were to choose neutrality, neutrality imposed through coercion is no neutrality at all. NATO's founding principles affirm that any European democracy may apply for membership if it meets the criteria. Declaring Ukraine permanently ineligible, even for the sake of “peace”, violates that principle.

The third betrayal lies in Ukraine's exclusion from the process. Trump's plan did not involve Kyiv — or even Europe — as the talks were held between the US and Russia. So, just as Ukraine was not an equal partner in drafting the Budapest Memorandum, it has again been relegated to the sidelines while a superpower and a great power decide its fate.

Should Trump's plan become the foundation of “peace”, not only will it be a victory for Russia, it will also mark a defeat for the international order. It would signal that smaller nations remain vulnerable to great-power competition. The precedent it sets is dangerous: That a great power can commit aggression, secure gains, and look legitimate simply by pledging not to invade again.

The only way to deter Putin is to make aggression costly. Trump could have done that by tightening sanctions, accelerating weapons and assistance to Ukraine, and committing to stand by Volodymyr Zelenskyy. His plan does the opposite — and, in the process, makes the world a more dangerous place.

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Chandigarh transfer issue

JUSTICE K Mathew, who heads the one-man commission appointed to determine the Hindi-speaking areas of Punjab, which will go to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh, indicated that the areas to be transferred will be from Abohar-Fazilka. He quoted Clause 7 (2) of the memorandum of settlement signed in July which states, “It had always been maintained by Indira Gandhi that when Chandigarh is to go to Punjab, some Hindi-speaking territories will go to Haryana.”

Assam Accord a poll issue

WITH THE announcement of candidates for the delayed elections in Assam, it has be-

come clear that the parties that have taken opposite stands over the Assam Accord would be fighting amongst themselves for a majority of seats both for the Lok Sabha and the Assembly. The Congress (I), which was the only party fighting all the 126 Assembly and 14 Lok Sabha constituencies, could be placed in a different category. Though the Congress (I) leaders point out that the Assam agreement would be the main plank of the campaign, it remains to be seen how aggressive a stand it takes.

PM Gandhi and Zia to meet

PRIME MINISTER Rajiv Gandhi will pay an official visit to Pakistan sometime in February to hold talks with President Ziaul Haq and

PM Mohammad Khan Junejo. Pakistan Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Zain Noorani said Gandhi has accepted the invitation extended to him by Pakistan. Zia will meet Gandhi in New Delhi on December 17.

Vajpayee for talks with China

BJP PRESIDENT Atal Bihari Vajpayee demanded that dialogue continue on the Indo-Chinese border issue on a priority basis. He said an agreement should be hammered out on a sector-to-sector basis. The former foreign minister strongly pleaded for the resumption of traditional Indo-Tibetan trade. The revival of traditional trade and industry could salvage the economy of the hill regions.



● **WHAT THE OTHERS SAY**
Gen Z's focus should be to make polls
successful, [turn] support into votes
and institutionalise achievements.
— *The Kathmandu Post*

The Ideas Page

An open letter to the new Chief Justice: A five-point action plan for His Lordship



C RAJ KUMAR

ON NOVEMBER 24, Justice Surya Kant assumes office as India's 53rd Chief Justice. At a time when democracies around the world are facing a variety of institutional challenges, India's institutions continue to be robust, notwithstanding the high level of social expectations. While all institutions are important in their own right, the judiciary is the only institution with the power to interpret and evaluate the actions of other wings of the government, according to the constitutionality criteria. The framers of the Constitution had enormous faith in the judiciary, especially the Supreme Court. That's why Article 142 of the Constitution notes, "The Supreme Court in the exercise of its jurisdiction may pass such decree or make such order as is necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it..." The concept of "complete justice" empowers the Court to transcend the limitations of law.

On assuming charge as CJ, Justice Surya Kant could consider giving importance to the following five issues that will address current challenges as well as shape the future of the judiciary. One, fill up posts of judges in the Supreme Court and high courts. Justice Surya Kant will have a 15-month-long tenure as the CJ, during which he will lead the efforts for the appointment of six new judges to the SC. More than 300 posts of judges across various high courts are also vacant. The new CJ, therefore, has an opportunity to build the next generation of the judiciary. Appointment of judges to the high courts and the Supreme Court has been a matter of public debate. The crux of this conversation is about striking a critical balance between the imperatives related to the independence of the judiciary and the objective of appointing judges with competence and integrity. The new CJ also has an opportunity to address the issue of diversity, especially the need to increase the number of women judges. The second task for Justice Surya Kant is

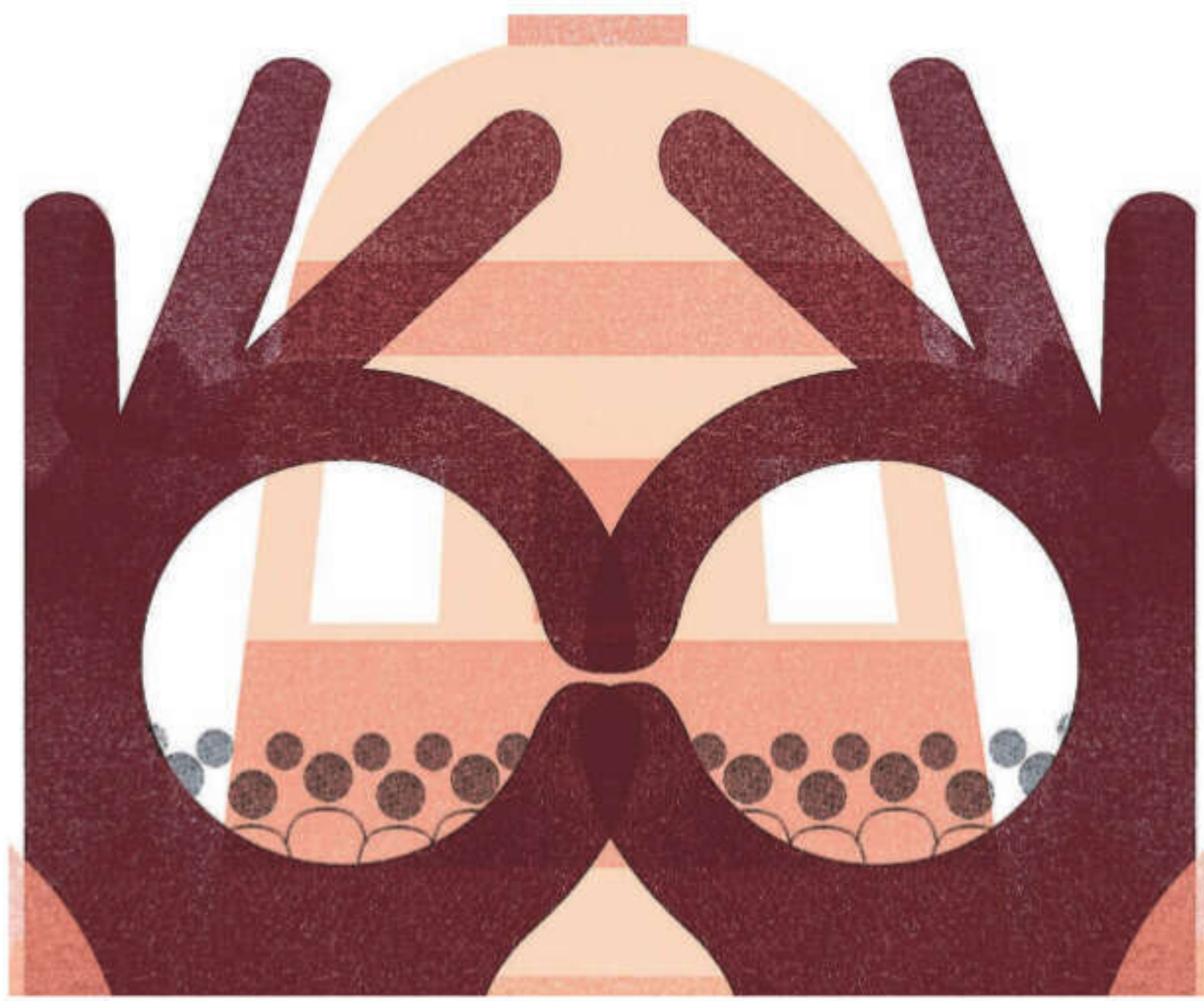


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

to address the pendency of cases. According to the National Judicial Data Grid, approximately 47.56 million cases are pending in district and *taluka* (subordinate) courts, 6.38 million cases are pending in high courts, and 88,000 are pending in the SC, as of September. In other words, 153 million cases are pending across the judiciary. Justice Surya Kant has already spoken about the use of technology in addressing some of these issues. A multi-pronged approach that involves every possible reform, including, but not limited to filling up of vacancies across all levels of the judiciary, revisiting the policies and regulations relating to adjournment, reimagining the existing practice of appeals across multiple levels of the judiciary, training and capacity building of lawyers and judges in faster disposal of cases, and other such initiatives, is imperative.

SC's role during the Emergency is a reminder that vigilance through institutional checks and balances is the most important way we can protect and promote people's rights

The government (Centre and states) is a party to 50 per cent of the pending cases. It is important, therefore, that the judiciary and the government work closely to address this crisis. In a recent lecture, Justice Surya Kant drew attention to the massive backlog and warned that even the strongest legal aid framework "loses its meaning when justice arrives too late." He described pendency as a direct threat to constitutional guarantees of timely justice.

Three, establishing a national academy for lawyers. There are about 1.8 million lawyers in India, and about a lakh enter the profession every year. There is, thus, a compelling case for establishing a national academy, different from the Bar Council of India, which has regulatory powers to maintain standards in legal education and the legal profession. The academy will function as a training

institution and undertake capacity-building initiatives to prepare the next generation of lawyers and judges. While the National Judicial Academy in Bhopal and the state judicial academies have been able to pursue these tasks for the benefit of judges, the country does not have a national-level agency that can focus purely on training lawyers. Private sector organisations, including law firms, corporations, and other such business entities, have programmes to train lawyers. But independent legal practitioners across the country need greater attention.

Four, promote judicial reforms. Justice Surya Kant has been at the forefront in bringing mediation to the centre stage of different forms of dispute resolution in the country. On several occasions, he has talked about the importance of mediation as a critical tool to promote access to justice. He recently observed that mediators not only resolve disputes but also help preserve relationships between people and different sections of society. "They choose understanding over victory, conversation over conquest, healing over harm. Courts decide. Mediators heal. This ancient wisdom has now found its most comprehensive legal expression in the Mediation Act of 2023," he said.

For mediation to play a larger role in the imagination of the legal and justice delivery system, it is important to work towards building a wider consensus among the members of the Bar.

Five, protecting the rule of law while maintaining the independence of the judiciary. The SC has a rich history of protecting the rights and freedoms of ordinary people. But it failed to rise to the occasion during the Emergency, when executive excesses were left unaddressed. The *ADM Jabalpur* case (habeas corpus case) remains a blot on the judiciary's record. The SC's role during the Emergency is a stark reminder that eternal vigilance through institutional checks and balances is the most important way by which we can protect, preserve, and promote the rights and freedoms of the people.

With his excellent record, unimpeachable integrity and humane approach, Justice Surya Kant is perfectly suited to address the judiciary's challenges. His tenure will be keenly watched.

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The disconnect: Why air pollution isn't a public health priority



PURVI PATEL

LIKE CLOCKWORK, the NCR has slipped into the same cycle of neglect, retreating indoors, wearing masks infrequently, and hoping the pollution disappears. But air pollution is not a seasonal inconvenience. It is a year-round health problem that refuses to become a public-health priority. Action on air pollution remains stuck between "environmental" and "biological" realms due to its primary source, fossil fuel combustion. As a health hazard, pollution presents a dual visibility challenge — its origins are hidden and its health effects cannot be enumerated.

Coal power plants, industrial clusters, diesel fleets and brick kilns operate out of sight, continuously releasing particulate matter (PM) and toxic gases, which shape the baseline emissions that every city breathes. Despite rapid growth in renewables, coal still powers over 74 per cent of India's electricity generation. In North India, cold temperatures and local terrain trap pollutants close to the ground. AQI values help us measure concentrations, but not toxicity or local health risk.

On the health side, air pollution does not cause a single dramatic, easily identifiable disease. Irritation and inflammation from short-term exposure can mimic seasonal coughs, colds, and infections, and exacerbate respiratory and heart diseases. Long-term PM2.5 exposure not only extends non-communicable diseases (NCD) but is now linked to new-onset hypertension, diabetes, neurological changes in healthy individuals, and rising lung cancer in non-smokers and a reduction in life expectancy by up to eight years in northern India. Because it is only one

among many NCD risk factors and cannot be controlled like salt or alcohol individually, it remains ignored.

Exposure is the hardest to assess. Unlike Covid, which can be avoided through distancing, air pollution in India is largely unavoidable. Nearly everyone breathes PM2.5 far above the WHO's 5 µg/m³ guideline. To link it to an illness, what matters is the dose and duration, which is impossible to measure in patients. Pollutants, as non-living particles, lack antigens and do not replicate like bacteria or viruses. So, our immune system cannot build antibodies or memory to make us "immune".

As such, vaccines or medicines that can be deployed en masse during health emergencies do not exist for pollution. Because pollution affects multiple organs and systems, it is not possible to precisely quantify the extent to which polluted air causes any specific illness or death in an individual. This is often used as an excuse. What we can measure are disease burdens and trends in the population. The State of Global Air 2025 report estimated over two million pollution-attributable deaths in India in 2023. However, contention over data ownership can still delay action. Recent nationwide and multi-city studies in The Lancet Planetary Health have shown that for every 10 µg/m³ increase in PM2.5, annual mortality rises by 8.6 per cent and daily mortality by 1.4 per cent.

India's health data remains scarce and underutilised. A significant barrier is the uneven adoption of Electronic Health Records (EHR). Unlike the mature EHR systems in Western countries, which enable query-based surveillance and near-real-time analysis, our public health surveillance operates independently of EHRs and relies heavily on manual data entry. This deprives the health sector of the decisive role it should play in holding other sectors accountable for population health, whether in air pollution, climate change or development projects.

The National Outdoor Air and Disease Surveillance tracks daily aggregates of respiratory emergencies and admissions from selected tertiary hospitals in cities under the National Clean Air Programme. However, in its early stage, it captures only acute respiratory illnesses, lacks advanced analytical capabilities, and has yet to generate credible evidence. Ironically, the very institutions that warn citizens about pollution do not consistently report cases to the national system. These limitations weaken its ability to estimate thresholds or issue health-impact-based early warnings.

Together, these gaps create a serious disconnect between the sectors that generate pollution, regulate it, monitor health impacts, and the public. We then rely on reactive afterthoughts like artificial rain, water cannons, more monitors, or antioxidant foods, while accumulating serious health damage year after year, drowning in the smog of our own consumption, and remaining blind to systemic gaps.

The writer is former senior consultant, National Programme on Climate Change and Human Health, National Centre for Disease Control

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nurture and protect

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A student's death, a society in the dock' (*IE* November 23). The recent case of a Class X student in Delhi dying by suicide is a painful reminder of how our children are quietly breaking under pressure while adults are busy blaming each other. With student suicides rising sharply across the country, it is clear that academic stress, public shaming, unrealistic expectations and the loneliness created by social media are creating undue pressure on students. We urgently need kinder classrooms, trained counsellors, and an environment where students feel safe to fail, speak, and be understood. If we don't fix our obsession with perfection, we risk losing more young lives.

Parul Rana, Zirakpur

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A student's death, a society in the dock' (*IE*, November 22). The suicide of a Delhi student lays bare a disturbing reality: India's schools, meant to nurture and protect, are increasingly turning into spaces where cruelty, neglect and unchecked authority can destroy young lives. This tragedy is a symptom of a failing system. The teenager who leapt from a Metro station left behind a heartbreaking note describing a humiliation at the hands of his teachers. When a child signals distress, indifference becomes a form of violence. Real penalties for both emotional and physical abuse are urgently needed.

SS Paul, Nadia

Debate rekindled

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Centre's Bill to let Delhi run Chandigarh directly sets off uproar in Punjab' (*IE*, November 23). The Centre's move to introduce the 131st Amendment Bill has stirred political debate across Punjab, with several parties viewing it as an attempt to dilute the state's long-standing association with Chandigarh. The debate has rekindled long-standing sentiments in Punjab, making it imperative for the Centre to proceed with caution and sensitivity. The change could undermine previous assurances by the Centre regarding the city's status and further strain Centre-state relations.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali



PARTHA SINHA

THERE IS a lovely absurdity to how we speak about Large Language Models, as if we are sculpting a human mind minus the clutter that makes a mind human. We want intuition without confusion, memory without distortion, brilliance without doubt. It is like opening a jazz club, banning improvisation and calling it progress.

For years, we trained machines to sound like us. Now we shrink back when they begin sounding too much like us. The moment they imagine, we label it a malfunction. The moment they offer a metaphor, we reach for hazard signs. We built a mirror and panicked when the reflection began thinking for itself.

Humans were never monuments of precision. We survive not by accuracy but by instinct. The first person who saw lightning and imagined God probably lived longer than the one who waited for data validation. Civilisation itself rests on elegant speculation. Yet here we are, swirling the glass like connoisseurs of truth, frowning when a model "hallucinates".

Claude Lévi-Strauss would have chuckled at our anxiety. Myth, he said, was the engine that cultures built to manage contradiction. A story was a way of stitching chaos into coherence. When an LLM fabricates a quote, it is doing what humans have always done: Smoothing the wrinkles of uncertainty into a narrative we can bear. Perhaps an LLM

When a model hallucinates, it is doing what we do when truth alone feels insufficient: Reaching for metaphor to make the world more bearable

is just the newest apprentice storyteller.

What is meaning if not a beautifully organised hallucination? Jacques Derrida reminded us that language is forever slipping away from itself. No word stands still. Every sentence gestures towards another. So when a machine fills gaps or misremembers with confidence, it is not betraying intelligence. It is participating in the oldest grammar of being human. Societies behave the same way. Flags are hallucinations dyed into fabric. Money is a hallucination printed on special paper. We survive on shared fictions.

Somewhere in history, we decided that accuracy was sacred. We mistook truth for housekeeping, error for moral failure. Yet, perfection has never been the purpose of thought. Our fear of AI hallucination reveals a deeper issue: That intelligence without uncertainty feels mechanical, and certainty without imagination feels sterile.

Ernst Kapp wrote that tools extend our bodies. The hammer extends the fist. The wheel extends the foot. By that logic, the LLM is an extension of our tongue, a borrowed mouth holding the sediment of everything we have ever said. Yet, we scold it for speaking too freely.

There is something strangely touching about a model that misquotes Friedrich Nietzsche with conviction. It feels recognisably human. It has read everything, from scripture to gossip, and is now

What if AI is the most human thing we ever built?

whispering its way through the muddle. When humans invent, we call it imagination. When poets do it, we call it art. When marketers do it, storytelling. When machines do it, we call it hallucination. Perhaps originality is tolerated only when it stays carbon-based.

Friedrich Dessauer warned that technology without imagination becomes a blind instrument. The reverse is true as well. Imagination without room for error becomes propaganda. If we force these models into factual obedience, we will end up with machines that are flawless but lifeless, precise but pointless — the spiritual equivalent of a corporate mission statement.

The miracle of LLMs is not their accuracy. It is their music. When a model hallucinates, it is doing what we do when truth alone feels insufficient: Reaching for metaphor to make the world slightly more bearable. Perhaps the LLM is our echo. An accidental therapist repeating our own contradictions back to us.

We call it artificial intelligence. But what if it is the most human thing we have ever built? It dreams, stumbles, overgeneralises, contradicts itself, and occasionally produces poetry. Maybe the machine is not hallucinating. Maybe it is improvising. Maybe the day we build a model that never hallucinates will be the day imagination quietly retires. Because a mind without a dream is not intelligence. It is only grammar with electricity.

The writer is an advisory professional

The movie hall is pushing out its audience



KRITIKA MEHTA

INDIA'S LOVE affair with the big screen has survived cable TV, pirated CDs, downturns, even a pandemic. But what technology couldn't break is now quietly being priced out. Across cities, the average family does invisible math before booking a movie: Surge-priced tickets, 18 per cent GST, convenience fees, and popcorn that costs more than lunch. The numbers add up fast. The Supreme Court recently flagged "exorbitant" F&B rates — popcorn above Rs 500, soft drinks sold at several times retail. For a lower-income or stretched middle-class family, the message is unmistakable: This space isn't meant for you.

The Multiplex Association of India cites a national average ticket price of Rs 130, a figure held down by small towns and weekday films. The urban truth is different. PVR INOX reported an average ticket price of Rs 254 in Q1 FY26, alongside record per-head food spending. The big screen is becoming premium by design.

Tax tweaks haven't helped much. Tickets below Rs 100 attract 5 per cent GST, but almost every multiplex ticket crosses into the 18 per cent slab. Karnataka's Rs 200 cap offered relief, but without regulating concessions, the movie-night bill remains stubbornly high.

For decades, single screens were the real custodians of Indian film culture. They brought Shah Rukh Khan to small towns and Rajinikanth to working-class neighbourhoods. Today, from over 20,000

screens in the 1980s, India is down to fewer than 6,000. High costs, lack of easy credit, content tilted toward multiplex-friendly films, and the marketing muscle of corporate chains have pushed them to the margins. Opening a theatre is even harder. An applicant requires nearly 20 licences and separate NOCs for everything. In 2022, the Centre announced a Model Theatre Policy promising single-window clearance, but nothing has moved since.

For decades, single screens were the real custodians of Indian film culture. Today, from over 20,000 screens in the 1980s, India is down to fewer than 6,000

It's fashionable to blame OTT for empty auditoriums. But OTT simply absorbed those priced out. For a few hundred rupees a month, often bundled with mobile data, families can watch new films on their TVs and phones. The economics are brutally simple. OTT may lack the communal electricity of a first-day-first-show, but at least it offers access.

From a boardroom perspective, high-margin F&B is irresistible. India's biggest multiplex chain earned more growth from food than tickets last year. It shut loss-making screens and doubled down on premium neighbourhoods.

But the strategy is cannibalising its own future. The overall footfall and occupancy remain low and the survival of films still depends on discounts and aggressive promotions. Meanwhile, PVR INOX reported a loss

of Rs 114.3 crore in FY24. If audiences are paying more, multiplexes are drowning in debt, and producers are barely breaking even, then who exactly is benefitting?

The brunt is also felt by independent filmmakers, the creators of India's most acclaimed small- and mid-budget cinema — they struggle to secure meaningful showtimes back home. Cinema was once India's cheapest mass escape. Today, it is being engineered into a class act. To preserve the democratic joy of cinema, regulate basic concession prices, bring down F&B rates, implement single-window theatre clearances, and rethink a business model that cannot survive without excluding the very audience it was built for.

The writer is an assistant film research officer, FTII, Pune. Views are personal

WHY K DURGA PRASAD

As former Director General of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the officer who helped shape Andhra Pradesh's elite anti-Maoist force, the Greyhounds, K Durga Prasad has spent the greater part of his career at the forefront of India's battle against violent Left-wing extremism. At a time of major churn in the decades-long fight against Maoists — marked most recently by the elimination of top commander Madvi Hidma — he reflects on the turbulent landscape and the evolution of counter-insurgency in India

‘Even if you remove the thorn (Maoists) it doesn’t mean the field is ready... cultivation has to happen, government and its agencies should move in’

Former CRPF DG and Greyhounds architect K Durga Prasad on the fall of Hidma, the future of the Maoist movement and why insurgencies can return if inequity and gaps in governance persist. The Idea Exchange was moderated by Deeptiman Tiwary, Deputy Associate Editor, *The Indian Express*

HOW GREYHOUNDS ARE DIFFERENT

Whoever joins, be it an IPS officer or a constable, they are taken based on their fitness, strength and skill sets. It is totally rank neutral. There is always a hunger to learn more, be it from the enemy or

Deeptiman Tiwary: The killing of Madvi Hidma is being seen as a major psychological and operational setback for the Maoists. What does eliminating a figure like Hidma, practically change on the ground and what does it not change?

Hidma is one of those military leaders who had a tremendous influence in the area and on the psyche of the Maoists. He was an invincible militaristic leader who could launch attacks, cause great damage but at the same time avoid the net of the security forces. And when that sort of a leader is hit, it will definitely hit morale. Second, it is not just Hidma who was hit. Along with him, his entire protection team and some members of Devji's (Hidma's closest aide) team were also picked. Many divisional committee members and platoon members have also been arrested. Now, why did they move out of Chhattisgarh? It was because they were not able to stand the pressure that was being mounted by the forces, both Central and state government forces. Today if you see, except in north, south and western Bastar, all of them have either surrendered or have been removed from the scene. Some leaders are left in Odisha but they, too, have become very weak. In the present scenario, my assessment is that this will lead to a faster decimation of the party. A large number of people are likely to surrender. If you remember when Mallojula Venugopal Rao surrendered, he had called out to everybody saying that this is not the right time to fight. He said this is the time for us to surrender and come into the mainstream. So, it's no longer the time for them now, not for these struggles.

Deeptiman Tiwary: You've headed the CRPF and in your time also Hidma inflicted casualties on the Central forces and the Chhattisgarh police. What made him so elusive?

He was a man from that area. He was from Puwarti village in Sukma (Chhattisgarh) and knew the area like the back of his palm. That was his biggest advantage. Being a tribal himself, he could blend and vanish quickly. He could communicate well with people. That was one of his major strengths. There were some tactical errors that we have committed too, which probably helped them. Either some of the standard operating procedures were ignored or not followed the way it should have been. That's the reason why we wanted to fashion Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA, 2008), on the same lines as Greyhounds, to ensure that we move in small numbers. That's what needs to be done in these operations because when we move in large numbers, small mistakes can expose our movements.

Deeptiman Tiwary: How have counter insurgency operations evolved from the time you served with the Greyhounds to your tenure as DG, CRPF?

One of the reasons for Greyhound's success was also the type of intelligence input that we got from the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB) and the state police. We used to train the entire state police in jungle tactics. But when I was in SIB, or in Greyhounds for that matter, HUMINT (human intelligence) was the major chunk. TECHINT (technical intelligence) was a small part. Today, technology plays a much bigger role in surveillance and tracking. That is one of the major changes that has happened. Hidma came into AP, the place where Naxalite movement had actually taken very strong roots, and that's where he was decimated. And not by the TECHINT, but by sheer HUMINT. That's the beauty of the whole thing.

Deeptiman Tiwary: You are one of the key architects of the success of the force, Greyhounds. You designed its training modules, its strategy. What made Greyhounds so successful?

Greyhounds was set up in 1989 by KS Vyas (within the Andhra Pradesh Police). That was the time when NS Bhati, a former Sashastra Seema Bal officer, joined us and trained our forces. One of the beautiful things with the Greyhounds was that this was a deputation force of people who used to come and go. Only fitness mattered. Whosoever joined the force, from an IPS officer to a constable, they were taken based on their fitness, strength and skill sets. It was totally rank neutral. They were given about 14 weeks of training in jungle warfare, totally unconventional. There are times when a sub-inspector was leading a unit which was supposed to be led by a DSP. Even among weapons, the AKs would be given not to the leader of the team but to the best shooter. We have never treated Naxals as some band of untrained, uncouth fellows. We always looked at them as people who are

very good at adapting to the situation, innovating and improvising with what is there. Let's respect them for that. We would raise ourselves much beyond them and then hit them. There is always a hunger to learn something more, both from the enemy and from other forces. That's why we are different from other forces.

Jayprakash S Naidu: In 2021, Hidma handed over the reins of the Battalion 1 to Barsa Deva, another tribal from the same village. Now, even though Hidma is dead, there are over 100 people in Battalion 1 who have automatic and semi-automatic weapons. How do you see this?

Unfortunately, I don't know exactly what's happening today. Hidma might have handed reins to Barsa Deva, but does he have the same persona like Hidma? Many have been associated with Hidma, but will his death have an impact on their minds? Will they say, 'why all this struggle'? Because now, their leaders are coming out and saying that this is not the time. Their movement is being watched by Andhra Pradesh police. Just because Hidma died, the police and security forces are not going to bring down their level of alertness. It will continue till we are certain that every major force out there has surrendered.

Ankita Deshkar: In several cases in the past of surrender and neutralisation, intelligence inputs have led to major operations. In Hidma's case, what kind of intelligence inputs would such an operation get in the forest?

Generally, the information we get is indirect. For instance, in one operation, we had intelligence that a large number of

shoes had been purchased in a particular village. Separately, we were told a large amount of rice, dal and other supplies were bought in another village. We triangulated this: if supplies are coming from here and equipment from there, they are likely preparing for a training camp. Then we study the map — contours, water points, locations wide enough for many people to stay — and then launch an operation. It's rare that someone comes and says, "So-and-so is here, pick him up." That kind of direct information comes only occasionally, if Maoists misbehave with women in villages or when a villager's child has been taken away. Then, out of angst, people sometimes give direct information. But mostly, information is indirect. We study maps, terrain, their likely movement patterns, everything. Out of 100 operations, maybe only in one or two cases can we reach them without being detected. They have watches and security rings. If there are big leaders there can be two or three rings. When we cross a ring, we are detected and they usually open fire first. If they don't open fire and want to surrender, we accept it. But sometimes they miscalculate. Those who survive are arrested. This is the reality.

Surrender has been a major policy of the Andhra Pradesh government, and now all states follow something similar. Anyone who wants to surrender can come through a schoolteacher, the school they studied in, a *sarpanch*, an MLA, a revenue officer, a contractor, anyone. We give them an open and safe route. In Hidma's case, his mother was requesting him to come back. "*Beta, aa jao*," she kept saying. Local officers even went and met her. His sister was also pleading with him. We take proactive steps from

security forces and district administration to reach out to families and encourage surrender and offer protection in return.

Many leaders have surrendered over the years. We give full protection. The purpose of surrender is to allow them to join the mainstream. In fact, in Andhra, a former leader joined politics, became an MLA, and eventually a leader of the entire area. What can be more transparent than that?

Ankita Deshkar: Maharashtra has a strong rehabilitation policy for surrendered Naxals. How good are these policies in other states?

Rehabilitation policies actually started long ago in Andhra Pradesh. Other states copied and improved upon them. In the

early days, those who surrendered would get Rs 5 lakh to settle down. Those who wanted to study were helped back into colleges. I know an important leader who became an engineer and a successful contractor. Others became doctors after returning to medical school. Skill development and factory employment is the next stage. In Andhra Pradesh, we had Remote and Interior Area Development (RIAD) Schemes. People who surrendered were integrated through these programmes so they wouldn't feel abandoned or regret coming out of the forest. But, I've been out of this stream for eight-and-a-half years now, so I don't know the latest specifics, but every state is continuously improving.

Ankita Deshkar: On social media, there are many people expressing sympathy for Hidma and the poverty in his village. Do encounters like this risk alienating tribal populations?

INTEGRATING NAXALS INTO MAINSTREAM

The purpose of surrender is to allow them to join the mainstream. In Andhra, a former leader joined politics, became an MLA and eventually a leader of the entire area

Earlier, teachers and medical staff would not go into interior villages for fear of being harmed. Now all that is gone. So we have to make sure that schools, hospitals and developmental agencies move in there, stay where they are posted and make their services available to the public.

Deeptiman Tiwary: Were there any key mistakes, both operational or political, that delayed India's success against Maoists? What would you have done differently?

Take the example of Andhra, whichever may be the political party, it was never said that you stop anti-Naxal operations. Yes, there was a time when the Naxals came out for talks and when that happened, there was a cessation of operations from our side. In fact, when the talks were going on, I had become Greyhounds' chief. I said we have been asked not to conduct operations but it doesn't stop us from training people. So, I sent my officers to different districts to train local people on jungle warfare. I got my boys to move from village to village. You don't engage with the enemy or go in search of them but you see what's happening. In some states, there was a refusal to accept that Naxals are a threat. And that is something which helped them sustain. It's like a balloon, half filled with air, you press one place, it goes to another place. So they were able to move from place to place. And look what happened. They ran from there, they came here and they were shot. Suppose the Andhra police had closed shop saying that nothing is happening in our area, then? So any day it can happen, we must be alert.

Deeptiman Tiwary: In 2003, CPI Maoist Ganapathy had said that 'As long as there is socio-economic inequity, I will raise the *dalam* even in Washington DC'. Can Maoism be revived in India?

Long ago, somebody had said that Haryana is such an advanced state, how can there be a scope for any movement like Naxalism? My response then was that inequity need not necessarily be financial. Even in social status, if there's inequity and people feel the pinch, somebody can always stand up and say this is unfair. And when he feels he is not heard for too long, then it that can take the shape of violence. So why do you give scope for that? So if there is something that is perceived and if we, as security officers or police officers, can address part of it, let us take it as a divine duty that we should attend to that immediately and see that this sort of injustice is not just felt and seen. Let's put an end to that and that can happen. So it need not necessarily be Ganapathy, it can be anybody else, it can be you, it can be me. Only thing is, we should feel that pinch so much that we stand up and speak out.

us where the Naxals are, simply come and use our services. Now, having taken a benefit from us, they would tell us not to go to this place in the evening, etc. that kind of information. So, slowly, trust building happened between the security forces and the villagers. That has to continue and bridges have to be built continuously.

Ritika Chopra: When the government sets a deadline to eliminate Naxalism, how does that translate into operation planning?

I'll put it this way, if deadlines are given, it will make the forces look at their own strategies, tactics and revise whatever they are doing. If the home minister or somebody says this should be closed in six months, if not six months, it may take eight months, but then it is reachable and done. When state forces and Central forces work seamlessly together, then you get better results. That's one of the things you see happening in Chhattisgarh now.

Ritika Chopra: What are the key elements of a long-term strategy to prevent the revival of the movement?

Even if you have removed the thorn it doesn't mean that the field is ready for the seeds to be planted. We have only removed the weeds. The rest of the cultivation still has to happen. Which means the government and its agencies should move in. If

there are no schools, schools should start. If you read the year 2000 report of Naxals on Telangana and Warangal districts (to give due credit to them, they record most of the things that they speak of) they say that the situation from the 1980s to 2000 has changed enormously and that the type of struggle for land is no longer relevant. They say that women who were earlier only in villages now are going on cycles and to cities for jobs.

ILLUSTRATION: SUVAJIT DEY

● GLOBAL

With Hasina sentenced to death, what next for Bangladesh



SHUBHAJIT ROY

BANGLADESH'S OUSTED Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was sentenced to death on November 17 for crimes against humanity during the unprecedented protests of July-August 2024. Hasina, 78, has been living in India since August 5, when she fled the country ahead of the imminent collapse of her 16-year-old government. The three-member International Crimes Tribunal sentenced Hasina to death on two counts: the killing of six unarmed protesters in Dhaka's Chankharpul on August 5 last year, and the shooting of six student protesters in Ashulia the same day. Besides this, Hasina was sentenced to imprisonment until natural death for making inflammatory remarks and ordering the use of deadly weapons against protesting students. She was also found guilty of ordering the extermination of student protesters through the use of helicopters, drones and lethal weapons. The verdict has drawn reactions across Bangladesh's political spectrum and society, and carries major implications for the election expected in February 2026.

Hasina's fate

Predictably, Hasina, who ruled the country with an iron fist, called the ruling "biased and politically motivated". "I am not afraid to face my accusers in a proper tribunal where evidence can be weighed and tested fairly," she said. While Hasina brought development to Bangladesh, her long legacy was marked by corruption, nepotism and allegations she silenced detractors.. The verdict seals her fate for the near term and fuels anti-Hasina sentiment. It also means she cannot return to Bangladesh in the foreseeable future, ruling her out of the country's political processes. The ruling casts a shadow on the Awami League, which she led. Since her departure, she has not put in place any leadership structure to steer the party. Her critics say she is unwilling to hand over the party to a younger rung of leaders, and is instead hoping her son Joy and daughter Putul will take charge. However, party leaders believe this approach erodes her remaining goodwill among the Awami League cadres, who feel abandoned. They also believe the party's best bet is to mount a domestic



Bangladesh's former PM Sheikh Hasina. REUTERS

campaign against its ban in the February polls, arguing that even if it must face anti-incumbency sentiment should it contest, it could still retain some vote share and eventually reclaim its position. However, this strategic calculation appears lost on Hasina.

How leaders have reacted

Meanwhile, the ruling appears to have come as a major shot in the arm for Nobel laureate and chief advisor of the interim government Muhammad Yunus. Effectively the interim PM, Yunus, who came into office in August 2024, said the ruling provided "important, though limited, justice for the thousands" affected. Having held on to office with the stated objective of political, judicial, legal and constitutional reforms before the election, Yunus has fashioned himself as the Nelson Mandela of Bangladesh, a leader seeking to end violence. However, the delay in announcing the election had led to political parties and the Army growing impatient with his interim government. With that now resolved with the election announcement, the verdict casts Yunus as the figure who delivered justice to Bangladesh.

Rivals also hope to benefit from the ruling, chief among them the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, kept out of power for nearly two decades. For months, the BNP — which said the ruling "ensured justice" — had been pushing Yunus for early elections, hoping to ride the anti-Hasina sentiment sweeping the country. However, it remains to be seen how party chief and former PM Khaleda Zia will arrange for her son Tarique Rahman — who has been in self-imposed exile in the United Kingdom since 2008 — and anoint him the party's prime ministerial candidate.

The conservative Jamaat-e-Islami, which swept the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU) in September, also hopes to use the verdict to its advantage, urging India to return Hasina to Bangladesh. For Jamaat, the best-case scenario will be to emerge as an influential political force in the election and then either partner with the BNP or become the main Opposition in Parliament. For the student protesters who led the anti-Hasina movement, the verdict could provide a much-needed boost. After their National Citizen Party's drubbing in the September university elections, the students hope the ruling will help them regain lost ground among the youth.

India's approach

Despite demands from Bangladesh to have Hasina extradited, India has not capitulated. In its statement, the Ministry of External Affairs did not condemn the verdict but merely "noted" it. New Delhi does not want to actively intervene in what it sees as Dhaka's "internal affair". Although there has been no official response to the extradition request, legal provisions allow denial on the grounds that it is "political" in nature or by raising concerns about the fairness of the trial. It is unlikely that India will review its approach, given that it views Hasina as a friend and partner, especially considering her crackdown on radicalism and anti-India activities. This calculation is also based on the assessment that handing Hasina over would not change the attitude of the current Bangladesh establishment or political class towards India.

● ECONOMY

Labour codes: What changes for workers and employers



AANCHAL MAGAZINE

OVER FIVE years after Parliament cleared the four labour codes replacing 29 central labour laws, the government has moved ahead with their implementation. Effective November 21, the four labour codes — Code on Wages, Code on Social Security, Industrial Relations Code, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code — seek to ease regulations and compliance norms for employers, and ensure uniformity in wage structure and social security protection for workers.

While these codes are seen as moving the needle for domestic manufacturing with easier compliances; decriminalisation of offences by replacing criminal penalties like imprisonment with civil penalties like fines for first-time offences; and incentives for economies of scale, trade unions have flagged changes related to hire and fire, retrenchment, fixed-term employment, and curtailment of the right to strike.

Code on Wages

- Amalgamates four wages and payment related labour laws. Defines wage, employee, minimum wage to cover all employees irrespective of industry, sector, wage or gender. Earlier, these rules were for employees in scheduled employment only and those below the monthly wage of Rs 24,000. A National Floor Wage will now be the baseline wage, to be followed by all states.
- Wage includes basic pay, dearness allowance and retaining allowance, and is to be the basis for calculation of benefits and social security contributions. Deductions are to not exceed 50 per cent of the total pay. Overtime wage is fixed at at least twice the normal wage for any work beyond normal working hours.
- The government has said that working hours will be between 8-12 hours/day and no employee shall be required to work for more than 48 hours a week. If an employee works for less than six days a week, or flexibility in working is provided in the rules, working hours shall not exceed 12 hours in a day including the interval for rest.
- Time limit set for wage payments: end of the shift (for daily); before weekly holiday

● FOUR NEW LABOUR CODES

1. Many labour laws enacted before and just after Independence were "designed for an economy very different from today" and are hence obsolete.
2. Since this is a subject on the concurrent list, states have come out with their own laws, and the absence of a central code "results in a fragmented approach, restricts uniform social security benefits to workers across the nation, and increases compliance confusion for employers."

WHY WORKERS NEED THEM

- Limited social protection, specially for contractual and unorganised workers
- Lack of formal recognition for workers across segments such as gig and platform workers, leading to unfair treatment and no social security
- Absence of uniform standards in wages

WHY EMPLOYERS NEED THEM

- Multiple labour laws hamper business efficiency
- Heavy compliance burden is discouraging FDI inflows
- Excessive regulatory and compliance requirements adversely impact businesses expansion and formalisation of work



SOURCE: LABOUR MINISTRY

(for weekly); within 2 days of end of fortnight (for fortnightly); within 7 days of next month (for monthly); within 2 days (for resignation or termination).

■ Wage slips, electronic or physical, have to be issued by every employer to employees on or before payment of wages. This will ensure documentary proof of employment, wages, allowances, deductions, and net pay to workers.

Code on Social Security

- Merges nine existing social security laws to cover both organised and unorganised sectors. Defines gig and platform workers legally for the first time. National registration and a social security fund for unorganised and gig workers is stipulated.
- Social security schemes to be funded wholly or partly by central and state governments or corporate social responsibility contributions. Aggregators for gig workers to contribute 1-2 per cent of annual turnover for social security, capped at 5 per cent of the amount payable by the aggregator to gig workers.
- Fixed-term employees, appointed for shorter terms, to be at par with permanent workers. They will be eligible for gratuity after 1 year of continuous service. Earlier, it was limited to permanent workers after 5 years of service.
- Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) coverage extended to all establishments having 20 or more employees, regardless of the industry type. There is pan-India ESIC (Employees' State Insurance Corporation) coverage, versus certain notified areas currently. ESIC cover to be mandatory even if a single person is engaged in hazardous occupation, as

Key Point

These codes are seen as moving the needle for domestic manufacturing with easier compliances; decriminalisation of offences by replacing criminal penalties like imprisonment with civil penalties like fines for first-time offences; and incentives for economies of scale

against the minimum 10 workers norm at present. Plantation owners can join ESIC voluntarily now. Provision to add parents-in-law to family definition of female employees, with income cap.

■ Appointment of 'inspector-cum-facilitators'. Governments to notify inspection scheme that may provide for web-based inspection and calling of information.

Industrial Relations Code

- Merges three industrial laws. Defines worker as any person (except an apprentice) employed in any industry to do any manual, unskilled, skilled, technical, operational, clerical or supervisory work for hire or reward. Includes sales promotion employees, working journalists, and those employed in supervisory capacity drawing wages less than Rs 18,000.
- Introduction of fixed-term employment: facilitates hiring for shorter tenures, linked to the industry's seasonality. Trade unions have objected to this norm.
- Threshold for seeking prior government approval for layoff, retrenchment and closure in factories, mines and plantations hiked to 300 workers from 100. While industry states that this gives flexibility in hiring, unions have said that this provision eases hiring and firing.
- Extends conditions for a legal strike from public utility services to all industrial establishments. At present, workers of public utilities, like water, electricity, natural gas, telephone and other essential services, have to give a strike notice within six weeks before striking or within 14 days of giving such notice. The Code states that workers cannot strike without giving notice within

60 days before striking or within 14 days of giving such notice. The definition of strike has been amended to include mass casual leave, wherein casual leave has been taken by more than 50 per cent of the workers on a given day.

■ The government said this has been done to discourage flash strikes. Trade unions have said these norms will limit the power to strike.

■ Introduces 'negotiating union or council' — a trade union with 51 per cent membership of workers will be the 'sole negotiating union'. If there is more than one trade union in an establishment, then the negotiating council will be formed with representatives of unions having 20 per cent of workers as members, granting one seat for each 20 per cent of verified membership. Trade unions have said this limits powers of small unions.

OSH Code

■ Merges 13 central labour laws. The government said it will streamline compliances via single registration, common licences and electronic filings. Threshold for obtaining a factory licence increased from 10 workers to 20 for manufacturing aided with power; from 20 to 40 for units without power.

■ Contract labour norms to apply on contractors employing 50 workers, versus the 20 workers earlier. Core and non-core activities (sanitation, catering etc.) of an establishment have been defined and employers given flexibility to employ contract labour even in the core activities, subject to conditions.

■ Permits women to work in night shifts, before 6 am and beyond 7 pm, subject to their consent and provisions for safety. The definition of inter-state migrant worker has been expanded to include those employed by an employer directly as against through contractors only at present.

■ Mandatory appointment letters to be issued by employers to every employee. Earlier, laws did not explicitly mandate such letters, especially for casual workers. The prescribed format is likely to have employee details, designation, category, wages, and details of social security.

■ Every employer is required to provide annual health examinations or tests free of cost to employees. Every factory employing 500 or more workers, employers employing 250 or more construction workers and employers employing 100 or more mine workers will need to constitute a safety committee consisting of employers' and workers' representatives.

● AGRICULTURE

How Tamil Nadu's record paddy harvest turned into a storage crisis

Arun Janardhanan
Chennai, November 23

LAST WEEK, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, asking him to relax paddy procurement norms and raise targets to tackle the crisis in the state.

Only a month ago, the state had celebrated a "record year" for paddy procurement. Here is why the state's bumper harvest has triggered a rolling crisis in the Cauvery delta, sparking a blame game between the state and the Centre.

How did Tamil Nadu end up with so much paddy?

From June 1, Tamil Nadu realised around 161.6 tmc ft of Cauvery water at Bill-gundala — about 103 tmc ft more than its entitlement for that period. The Mettur dam hovered near full level in August, with water storage above 90 tmc ft, giving Cauvery delta farmers a sense of security.

That assurance translated into acreage. In the Kuruvai (short-term) season, the delta, which normally covers around 4.4 lakh acres, crossed 6.09 lakh acres by August 10 — about 40% higher than normal, and 57% more than last year.

This expansion fed directly into procurement numbers. By February 1, 2025, nearly 8 lakh tonnes of paddy had been procured statewide, of which about 6.2 lakh tonnes was from Cauvery delta districts alone, with Thanjavur leading, followed by Tiruvavur, Mayiladuthurai, and Cuddalore.

By July 29, Tamil Nadu was on the verge of breaking its all-time record: 44.49 lakh tonnes of paddy had been procured, just short of the 44.95 lakh tonnes logged in 2020–21. Officials estimated the final tally for 2024–25 could touch 47 lakh tonnes.

Why did the system buckle?

While the Kuruvai numbers looked spectacular, they came with a catch — time.

The delta's conditions

- Experts have pushed for paddy types better matched to delta conditions and flood patterns.
- They also note that FAQ norms were never designed with the delta's specific climate in mind.
- The state argues that inflexible FAQ standards — designed for North Indian kharif conditions — penalise farmers who harvest under monsoon skies.

Because of unusual rain earlier in the year, many farmers shifted crops or sowed late. Kuruvai harvests bunched up closer to the onset of the Northeast monsoon rather than finishing ahead of it.

Therefore, when the first heavy monsoon showers arrived, much of the paddy was either standing in fields or stacked in or near district procurement centres (DPCs). Though officials eventually ramped up daily evacuation, farmers believe these interventions came late. Visuals of germinated paddy bags, stockpiles under tarpaulins, and farmers drying grain by the roadside brought heat on the government.

'Moisture content' problem

The immediate flashpoint is a technical phrase: Fair Average Quality (FAQ) norms, particularly the 17% cap on moisture content imposed for procurement under Central rules.

The Cauvery delta's Kuruvai harvest coincides with the Northeast monsoon.

Farmers say it is unrealistic to dry paddy to 17% moisture in humid, rainy conditions.

The state argues that inflexible FAQ standards — designed for North Indian kharif conditions — penalise farmers who harvest under monsoon skies.

On the procurement side, Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation unions flag chronic gaps — overloaded godowns and yards, shrinking open storage, and short ages of field officers and loadmen.

Meanwhile, farmer leaders allege corruption and "proxy tenders" in lorry contracts, forcing small farmers to rely on middlemen who use their documents to sell to DPCs and take margins.

However, beyond logistics, agronomists and farmers point to deeper shifts in the paddy ecosystem. Traditional, flood-resistant varieties in the older delta have given way to high-yielding hybrids and short-term varieties that mature later and are less suited to local water and soil conditions.

{ 2 THINGS TO KNOW }

Moss spores survive nine months in space

A HANDFUL of moss spores survived nine months exposed to space, with 80% of them still able to reproduce once back in a lab on Earth, according to a new study, which was published in the journal *iScience* last week.

Moss — the small plant usually found in damp, shady spots — is already known for its resilience on Earth. It is among the earliest land plants and has colonised some of the harshest environments on the planet.

In March 2022, the scientists locked 20,000 moss spores outside the International Space Station and left them exposed to space for 283 days. In January 2023, the spores were brought back to Earth. The scientists found that more than 80% of them had survived, and of those, all but 11% had successfully germinated in the lab.

According to the study, moss spores were able to survive due to the multiple layers of spore walls that encase the reproductive tissue, offering "passive shielding against space



Moss is found in damp, shady spots. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

stresses".

Tomomichi Fujita, the lead author of the study, told *The Guardian*, "While moss may not be on the menu, its resilience offers insights into developing sustainable life-support systems in space. Mosses could help with oxygen generation, humidity control or even soil formation."

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

{ SCIENCE }

Russia's push to take Pokrovsk in Ukraine

VALERY GERASIMOV, the chief of Russia's general staff, told President Vladimir Putin last week that Moscow's forces controlled more than 75% of the city of Pokrovsk and were advancing. Pokrovsk is a road and rail junction in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region with a pre-war population of some 60,000 people. It was previously an important logistics hub for the

Ukrainian army, being situated on a key road which the troops used to supply other embattled outposts along the frontline.

Ukraine's only mine producing coking coal — used in its once vast steel industry — is around 10 km west of Pokrovsk.

Russia wants to take the whole of the Donbas region, which comprises the Luhansk and Donetsk provinces. Ukraine still controls about 10% of Donbas — an area of about 5,000 square km in mostly northern Donetsk.

Capturing Pokrovsk and Kostiantynivka to its northeast, which Russian forces are also trying to envelop, would give Moscow a platform to drive north towards the two biggest remaining Ukrainian-controlled cities in Donetsk — Kramatorsk and Sloviansk.

It would also leave Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region to the west, where Russian forces say they have already established a foothold, more vulnerable to Russian advances. REUTERS



{ GLOBAL }

Reforms code

Implementation of labour codes, a watershed

On Friday, the Centre issued four gazette notifications for the four respective labour code laws passed in 2019 and 2020, these being: Code on Wages, Industrial Relations Code, Code on Social Security and Code on Occupational Safety and Health. These laws will finally come into effect after all these years. But rules regarding administrative and procedural issues remain to be finalised for these codes to be implemented in right earnest; it is hoped that these are readied sooner than later.

The Centre can justifiably claim the unification of 29 labour laws to be a landmark ease of doing business move. Over 1,400 rules have been scrunched into 365, with the compliance formalities in terms of registration, and filling up forms and registers too coming down sharply. Significantly, the codes make an attempt to expand the social security net — bridging the gap between a ‘labour aristocracy’ and the rest. To this end, this government can rightly claim credit for the net increase in numbers under the Employees’ Provident Fund Scheme. A notable reform move is the creation of a category of ‘fixed term employees’, apart from regular and contract workers. The FTEs will receive benefits equal to permanent workers after a year of being in the job, except for retrenchment compensation — bridging the gap between permanent workers and the rest.

All forms of work will be covered under minimum wage laws, and all workers shall receive mandatory employment letters. Women can work at night with the requisite safety measures in place, and without wage discrimination. Significantly, the estimated 10 million gig and platform workers will get social security coverage, from contributions by aggregators. The coverage of Employees’ State Insurance Corporation has been expanded to cover all establishments with over 10 employees and not just some notified areas and hazardous industries. So, the codes do not view ‘labour reforms’ as a race to the bottom. Employers have much to cheer, as self-certification for compliance becomes the norm, and the labour inspector cum facilitator’, as the term suggests, exercises powers with due restraint.

But the codes have erred as well. As the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the IR code (April 2020) has observed, the code uses ‘workers’ and ‘employees’ interchangeably, creating confusion when they mean the same. This could impact rights’ enforcement. Despite efforts at extending social security cover, units employing less than 10 workers on paper will be exempt. The status quo of fragmented production may continue undisturbed, as a maze of contractors evade accountability. Finally, labour flexibility cannot be pushed in the absence of a social safety net in the form of medical cover and provident fund benefits. The codes have sought to strike a balance. But as the House Panel has said, the governance machinery should step up its act. It is for the rules, if not enabling legal provisions, to improve implementation.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Covid-19 inquiry: the UK did too little, too late

All four of the UK’s governments are criticised in the latest report from the public inquiry into the coronavirus pandemic of 2020-22. The Northern Ireland Executive’s response is judged to have been marred by political divisions. In Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon did not involve cabinet colleagues enough in decision-making. In Wales, Mark Drakeford’s government mirrored some of the errors made in London, particularly when it delayed the introduction of new restrictions in the autumn of 2020. But rightly, given its responsibilities, size and resources, as well as its record, the UK administration led by Boris Johnson comes in for the biggest share of blame. Some of Heather Hallett’s findings regarding the political governance of the crisis are already familiar. (LONDON, NOVEMBER 21)

The Moscow Times

Trump’s peace plan favours Russia

The Ukraine war peace plan proposed by the Trump administration has, unsurprisingly, triggered a storm of reactions across the press, social media and among experts. It clearly contains a major tilt in Russia’s favour. However, it would be inaccurate to say that it merely fulfils Russia’s maximalist demands. The 28-point draft imposes numerous restrictions on Ukraine and places a heavy burden of obligations on it, effectively punishing the victim for resisting the aggressor. Although the first point states that Ukraine’s sovereignty must be preserved and confirmed, the subsequent provisions significantly undermine that sovereignty. Ukraine is prohibited from maintaining an army larger than 600,000 troops Ukraine is also barred from joining NATO, and NATO is barred from accepting it as a member. (MOSCOW, NOVEMBER 21)

LINE & LENGTH.

TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

Two weeks back Donald Trump, the mercurial President of the United States of America, declared that there was now only G2 — America and China. Since then there has been a lot of quiet heartburn in India. But how did we get left so far behind, is a question no one any longer asks. China’s dominant position in the world economy is attributed to its large scale industrial manufacturing policy. India’s pygmy stature in manufacturing is attributed the opposite, that is, to the absence of scale and, indeed, its active policy of discouraging it. This diagnosis is now regarded as an unalterable truth. But truth has many dimensions and it is useful to consider them as well.

That requires an understanding of the political aspects of what happens in an economy. Very broadly it’s what you choose as your first priority: labour or capital. China chose capital. We have chosen labour. That’s all there is to it. I’m grating on about scale or its absence without reference to other factors is, well, idiotic.

This is not to say that scale should be disregarded. Of course not. But it’s not the only game in town.

Two things are required for achieving scale. A vast amount of capital and a vast market. After 1996 China got the required capital from the West and its market there, too.

India forswore both. The consequences for manufacturing are there for all to see.

A FALSE COMPARISON

But does that mean China got it right and India didn’t? This is where we need to be careful about what we say about the comparison.

That involves recognising that constraints are crucial in economics and mustn’t be ignored. Any answer which does that runs the risks of mono-causation or, in plain language, being nonsense.

Can a country pursue gigantic scale manufacturing if it also simultaneously upholds labour rights in the way India does? Will a company employ 5,000 people in a single facility knowing that disruptions can be engineered by any two-bit labour leader?

Can an Indian company send away



Why is India so far behind China?

Unlike India, China prioritised capital over labour. It got the required capital from the West and its market there, too. India forswore both

hundreds of workers each month merely because they have crossed a certain age, usually around 30-35? Are spectacles reason enough to sack a worker?

This is the main difference between India and China. We have the Trade Unions Act and the Industrial Disputes Act. China doesn’t.

The concept of fairness, which forms the basis of these Acts, is completely alien to China in the context of the individual. There, group rights take precedence except when it comes to labour.

Chinese governments also don’t have

We have the Trade Unions Act and the Industrial Disputes Act. China doesn’t. The concept of fairness, which forms the basis of these Acts, is completely alien to China in the context of the individual

COP30, and the climate finance letdown

The Global South is disillusioned, with most urgent finance decisions deferred to the next negotiating cycle

Aditya Sinha

The UNFCCC COP30 summit in Belém, Brazil ended with a deep sense of disillusionment across the Global South. The Mutirão political decision, framed as the heart of COP30’s “implementation agenda,” ultimately delivered a familiar pattern of diluted ambition: lofty rhetoric from developed countries but limited binding commitments, vague pathways without timelines, and symbolic frameworks without adequate financial substance. Even UN Secretary-General António Guterres conceded that COP30 “has not delivered everything that is needed,” stressing that the gap between decisions and scientific urgency remains “dangerously wide.”

The crisis of trust underpinning this disappointment is rooted in a decade of unmet promises. Developed countries’ flagship pledge (mobilising \$100 billion in climate finance annually by 2020) was delivered only in 2022, two years late, undermining confidence in subsequent commitments. Against this backdrop, the new finance goal established at COP29 in Baku, i.e., the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) of \$300 billion per year by 2035, was already seen as modest, especially when developing countries had formally called for at least \$1.3 trillion annually in the 2030s. This figure aligns with broader assessments. Global climate investment needs are estimated at \$7.4 trillion per year by 2030, with \$2-3 trillion annually required in developing countries alone for mitigation, adaptation, and associated financing costs.

Yet COP30 offered only a voluntary

“Baku-to-Belém Roadmap” that envisages exploring mobilisation of \$1.3 trillion by 2035, with no interim milestones or mandatory pathways. This means, first, that climate finance flows are likely to remain close to the historical average, roughly \$100-115 billion, through most of this decade. Second, that the NCQG remains vastly disconnected from scientific benchmarks. Further, Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement, which explicitly obligates developed countries to provide financial resources, is increasingly treated as aspirational rather than binding.

ADAPTATION FINANCE

Disconnect between urgency and outcome is even more evident in adaptation finance. Developing nations approached COP30 united behind the demand for a substantial increase in adaptation funding by 2025 or 2030, citing mounting evidence of a widening adaptation gap. UNEP estimates that adaptation costs for developing countries could reach \$215-387 billion annually by 2030, rising to \$315-565 billion by 2050, with a mid-point estimate of \$350 billion by 2035. Yet adaptation finance today stands at roughly \$40 billion, representing less than one-fifth of even the lower-bound requirement.

In this context, COP30’s political decision to “triple adaptation finance by 2035” fell flat. The pledge provides no baseline year, no agreed definition of what constitutes “adaptation finance,” no enforcement mechanism, and no interim benchmarks, making monitoring effectively impossible. This means, first, that the promise is



QUALITY OF FINANCE. Another problem area REUTERS

structurally unverifiable; and second, that developed countries have avoided accountability for the Glasgow COP26 mandate to double adaptation finance by 2025, which has already been missed.

The quality of finance compounds the problem. While adaptation requires grant-based support for resilience, over 60 per cent of climate finance to developing countries currently takes the form of loans, increasing debt burdens. One could argue that asking heavily indebted countries (several of which now spend more on debt servicing than on health or education) to “climate-proof” their economies through loans is fundamentally unjust. It shifts responsibility downward precisely when historical emitters should be stepping up.

LOSS AND DAMAGE FINANCE

The picture is equally troubling for loss and damage finance. COP30 was the first full COP after operationalising the Loss and Damage Fund (LDF). On the institutional side, there was some progress. The Belém decision operationalised the Fund in “start-up

mode” with a \$250 million Barbados-IMF-World Bank (BIM) modality, and strengthened governance through a review of the Warsaw International Mechanism and enhanced coordination via the Santiago Network. But the key issue, actual money, remains unresolved. As of COP30’s close, total pledges to the LDF amount to \$788.8 million, of which only \$583 million has been legally deposited. The Fund currently holds approximately \$407 million.

More concerning is that COP30 secured no new large-scale pledges from developed countries, no replenishment cycle, no interim targets, and no obligation to scale the Fund towards scientific need. This means, first, that the LDF could effectively run dry by 2027 once early projects draw down the modest start-up capital. Second, that the Fund risks becoming another “architecture without resources.”

The Belém package revealed two uncomfortable truths. First, that the most urgent finance decisions were deferred to the next negotiating cycle. Second, that climate impacts will continue accelerating regardless of diplomatic timelines. Rebuilding trust now requires action in 2025. Developed countries must, first, meet existing pledges immediately, including Glasgow’s adaptation target and LDF contributions. They should also commit to dramatically scaling up predictable, grant-based finance for adaptation, loss and damage, and clean development. Otherwise, COPs will continue as high-profile negotiations with low-impact outcomes.

Sinha writes on macroeconomic and geopolitical issues



The Council of BJP

Nitish Kumar and the JD(U) are no longer in command in Bihar

The composition of the newly sworn-in Council of Ministers in Bihar, and the distribution of portfolios, reflect the ongoing realignment of power between the BJP and the JD(U). JD(U) supremo Nitish Kumar retains the post of Chief Minister, even though his party finished second to the BJP in the Assembly election. However, for the first time in his nearly 20 years as Chief Minister, he is not in charge of the Home Department. Samrat Choudhary, one of the two BJP Deputy Chief Ministers, now controls this administratively powerful ministry. Vijay Kumar Sinha, the other Deputy Chief Minister, has been assigned revenue, land reforms, mines and geology, further consolidating the BJP’s control over critical administrative levers. The BJP holds 14 of the 26 ministerial berths and controls key departments including health, law, road construction, urban development, and agriculture. The BJP has effectively taken a decisive step in formally inverting the hierarchy of its alliance with the JD(U) in its favour. While the BJP was the larger party even in 2020, Nitish Kumar retained crucial ministries. The social justice plank and the composition of the previous Assembly gave the JD(U) room to keep an alliance with the RJD open. But the overwhelming sweep of the National Democratic Alliance this time has not only placed the BJP firmly on top but has also made any exploration of alternatives by the JD(U) difficult, if not impossible.

Nitish Kumar is battling ill-health; while he remains indispensable for the BJP, the party is also carefully planning its long-term path. It has built a wide and deep caste coalition, seeking to reach communities that have traditionally viewed the JD(U) as their platform. The induction of Ram Kripal Yadav, a former Lalu Yadav loyalist who joined the BJP, signals that Yadavs too can have a place in the party. Through clever social engineering and administrative manoeuvring, the BJP has now positioned itself at the pole position of Bihar politics. But the real challenge ahead is good governance. The BJP may claim that its repeat victory is a popular endorsement of its previous government, but the State remains behind on many development indicators. The true test for the new Council will be whether it can pull Bihar forward. Bihar is home to nearly a tenth of India’s population, and the State’s development can positively influence the entire country. The Council should confront the substantial governance deficit honestly and work to address it with active support from the Centre.

Difficult choices

Ukraine and its allies must seek to build on Trump’s proposals

The Trump administration’s draft peace proposal for Ukraine has triggered predictable unease in Kyiv. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has warned that Ukraine now faces a “very difficult choice”, risking the loss of its dignity or a key partner. U.S. President Donald Trump has urged him to accept the proposal by Thanksgiving (November 27). Ukraine’s apprehensions are understandable. According to the leaked draft of Mr. Trump’s 28-point plan, Kyiv would be required to cede territory in Donetsk and recognise Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk as de facto Russian. In the other two oblasts annexed by Russia (Kherson and Zaporizhzhia), the conflict would be frozen along the line of contact, effectively allowing Moscow to retain the areas it has seized. Russia would withdraw from the territories it has captured outside the five oblasts and pledge not to attack neighbouring countries again. The plan also demands Ukraine cap its armed forces at 6,00,000 personnel and formally renounce its bid to join NATO. The bloc’s eastward expansion would be halted, sanctions on Russia lifted, while Ukraine would receive “reliable security guarantees”. The plan does not elaborate on these guarantees, but U.S. media said that the Trump administration has circulated a separate three-point plan, promising NATO-style security assurances to Kyiv. Russian President Vladimir Putin has positively responded to the proposal, but Ukraine and its European partners are scrambling to craft an alternative proposal to achieve what they call “peace with dignity”.

Several elements of the Trump plan mirror Russia’s long-standing demands, including the halt of NATO’s eastward expansion. On the other hand, the proposal that Ukraine cede territory is not going to be easy for any Ukrainian leader to implement. This makes it enormously difficult for any mediator to craft a peace blueprint that provides genuine common ground for the warring parties. Any meaningful push for peace must take into account at least three dimensions. First, the reality on the battlefield; second, Ukraine’s need for credible and lasting security assurances; and third, the creation of a new security framework in Europe. The military balance currently favours Russia, which now controls over 20% of pre-2014 Ukraine. Mr. Zelenskyy’s regime, on the other hand, is grappling with corruption scandals. The tragedy of Ukraine is that it is trapped in the great power rivalry between the West and Russia. Trust has evaporated, and the post-Cold War European security order lies in tatters. A peace deal must address this lack of trust and seek to build a new security equilibrium in the region, addressing Europe’s fears and Russia’s concerns. None of these goals can be achieved through an open-ended war. Mr. Trump’s plan, though imperfect, at least offers a structured framework for dialogue, involving the U.S., Europe, NATO, Ukraine and Russia.

The Republic of India has had 15 Presidents over 16 presidencies, its inaugural President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad having served two terms. Of the number of Governors appointed since 1947, the figure is too large to be counted.

The holders of these two high offices can do great good, sometimes not a little harm and very or most often, prefer an almost Advaitic selflessness that leaves no mark whatever – a self-protecting mechanism. It is better to be not remembered at all than remembered negatively. I have often wondered why these high functionaries, when they are males as they invariably are, carry pens in the pockets of their coats. The pen is almost a piece of their essential ‘getting ready’-ness. It makes them seem ever-ready to sign the paper put up to them, wherever they are.

The master cartoonist, Abu Abraham, immortalised the 1975 moment when the then President signed the proclamation of the national emergency by a searing cartoon that showed him signing the paper when it was brought to him (this time with the stylus) at a very odd moment. Signatures can be affixed all too easily, when what is required is saying, ‘No, very sorry, but no.’ The reason may be plain gratitude for being where the Excellency wants to be.

Equally, when a signature is declined not out of genuine reservations but out of bias, an Abu Abraham or an R.K. Laxman is needed to depict the scene. Assents when given in fear or refused out of bias are infractions of Constitutional responsibility.

Reflections from the past

As one who knows that sometimes a signature (and more) can be affixed by a President on his own, without ‘aid or advice’ and without a care on whether what he was doing would ‘go down well or not’, I must recall here President R. Venkataraman (his years in office: 1987-92) and President K. R. Narayanan (years in office: 1997-2002). The pen was used by RV, confidently. It was used by KRN, independently. No cabinet as much as whispered disquiet. Morality was not coy with them, nor fairness halting.

The Prime Ministers RV’s term coincided with – Rajiv Gandhi, V.P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar – were all strong-willed men but they were first-time incumbents of their pivotal office while RV’s experience of political and constitutional office was infinitely bigger. It was natural that they deferred to him when on Bills or other recommendations he had a view contrary to the cabinet’s; he put it across to them in one-on-one confidential discussions, that being his way. The fourth Prime Minister who overlapped with RV, P.V. Narasimha Rao, thought-partnered him more than he did his own cabinet colleagues. There was no scope for friction.

In 1997, the Union Cabinet headed by Prime



Gopalkrishna Gandhi

was Secretary to the President, and a Governor of West Bengal and Bihar

In the 16th Presidential Reference, the top court has upheld the letter and the spirit of the Constitution

Minister I.K. Gujral recommended to KRN the dismissal of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Uttar Pradesh headed by Kalyan Singh. KRN’s world view and that of the BJP did not match. But he was the President of India, not just a resident of Rashtrapati Bhavan, answerable to the values of the Constitution. He did not agree with the recommendation of dismissal and sent it back for reconsideration. The recommendation did not come back.

By 1998, the BJP was in power at the Centre and the newly appointed Governor of Bihar recommended that the government of Rabri Devi be dismissed and President’s Rule imposed under Article 356 of the Constitution of India. The Governor had sent what was claimed to be a fool-proof case showing financial mismanagement and poor law and order markers. KRN demurred, and sent the recommendation back. Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee’s cabinet did not repeat the recommendation. KRN’s action in returning these recommendations had no politics to it. Zero. It had only fairness, Constitutional fairness. It had only morality, Constitutional morality. Fairness and morality are unmistakable. As are their opposites.

RV and KRN could be frank with the government when frankness was called for and they were not misunderstood for the government knew that the frankness came from a desire to caution and correct, not to criticise.

‘Alert and alive’

Presidents and Governors are meant to be men and women with minds that are alert and alive to the letter of the Constitution and to its spirit in an evolving nation. They should see that recommendations made to them adhere to the letter, knowing that the letter can be used sometimes to subvert the spirit – an irony that the framers of the Constitution could not have anticipated. Would Babasaheb Ambedkar have thought that could have happened? The Constitution of India has been made by honest intentions for honest actuation.

No file was held by RV and KRN for more than a few days. They did not have to be detective-Presidents. No delay was orchestrated during which confabulations could be held, and opinions sought in huddles, and given in whispers. No pocket was deepened for a pocket-veto to be exercised.

But their sense of Constitutional morality and fairness did not make them look out for flaws or faults or fallibilities as a full-time occupation, 24X7.

The President and Governors are neither robots, nor are they ring-masters. They are not inert rubber stamps that are pressed gently or not-so-gently onto any parchment that the government of the day places before them; they would make laughing stocks of themselves if they

Safe processing matters more than zesty flavours

There is a shadow – of doubt – over India’s food landscape. In recent years, a string of high-profile food adulteration cases has shaken consumer confidence. As a result, many are now more cautious about their everyday food choices. Street food, once a beloved symbol of India’s rich culinary culture, is facing growing scrutiny that is related to safety and hygiene.

In July 2024, raids on 58 *pani puri* stalls in Chennai revealed alarming practices. Officials found vendors using contaminated water and dipping their hands into chutneys. These cases are not isolated instances but highlight a troubling gap in food safety across India’s informal food sector. While street food brings tradition and community to life, its hygiene standards often remain unchecked.

Food safety and standards for both packaged and unpackaged foods fall under the purview of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). However, the vast number of unpackaged food vendors makes it more challenging for the regulator to enforce safety standards consistently. In contrast, packaged foods allow for stricter enforcement of traceability, transparency, and reliability standards, due to clearer labelling and standardised processing protocols.

Packaged foods, safety and trust

India’s packaged food industry is often associated with convenience. But it also reflects a structured system of food production shaped by science, regulation, and evolving consumer expectations. Compared to the informal food sector, the organised packaged food industry operates within a framework of clearer oversight. Regulatory guidelines set by the FSSAI span the entire production cycle – from sourcing raw materials to packaging the final product.

Modern processing techniques further reinforce this reliability and shelf-life amidst variable weather conditions. Methods such as pasteurisation, vacuum sealing and aseptic packaging are widely adopted across the industry. These techniques help reduce microbial risks

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Managing Dhaka

The crisis surrounding Sheikh Hasina’s conviction and her presence in India has complicated one of New Delhi’s most important neighbourhood equations. Extradition is impossible, yet indefinite refuge risks

becoming a diplomatic burden. Bangladesh’s interim government is already recalibrating foreign policy, slowing India-backed projects and signalling openness to Beijing and Islamabad. In this fluid landscape, India must

ensure that the “Hasina question” does not eclipse broader national interests. The real lesson is India’s overdependence on a single leader. Long-term stability in bilateral ties requires political diversification, discreet engagement with

all stakeholders in Dhaka, and restraint from public messaging. Bangladesh’s political turbulence will pass, but the underlying interdependence will endure. **Gopalaswamy J.,** Chennai

Toxic air, strange apathy Delhi’s air quality has crossed from seasonal discomfort into a full-blown public health emergency. Yet, our response remains strangely casual. What worries me the most is our growing tolerance for

poison in the air. It is time we treat clean air as a right that demands accountability. **Harshita Singla,** Jalandhar. Punjab
Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

The views expressed are personal

The future of health lies in harmony

As the world grapples with rising lifestyle diseases, environmental degradation, and social fragmentation, there is a growing realisation that restoring the balance between people and the planet, progress and sustainability, innovation and intuition is a necessity.

Health, in its truest sense, has always been a reflection of harmony – within the human body and between humanity and nature. This is the principle that is at the heart of traditional medicine systems worldwide, which view health not merely as the absence of illness but as the presence of equilibrium. The science of well-being, therefore, is not new. It is the rediscovery of a traditional understanding, now being reaffirmed through evidence-based research.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that around 90% of WHO member-states have reported on the use of traditional medicine. For billions of people, it remains the first line of care, particularly in low- and middle-income nations where accessibility and affordability are paramount.

Its value, however, extends well beyond health care. Traditional medicine supports biodiversity, nutrition, food security and livelihoods, embodying the holistic concept of integrative health. Market analysts estimate India's AYUSH sector at \$43.4 billion – a figure that tells a larger story. This surge is driven not only by consumer preference but also by a paradigm shift: health-care systems are evolving from reactive treatment models to proactive, preventive, and personalised ones. This global shift represents a shared realisation – that well-being cannot be achieved through fragmented approaches. It demands an ecosystem of balance – between mind and body, human and environment, science and spirit. It is a fact that India has emerged as a hub of innovative research and development initiatives,



Prataprao Jadhav

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for AYUSH and Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Government of India

The Second WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine will strengthen recognition of traditional medicine as a scientific and social asset

transforming the global traditional medicine sector.

To support this transformation, WHO's Global Traditional Medicine Centre (GTMC) serves as a knowledge hub for evidence-based collaboration and innovation. With its strategic focus on evidence and learning, data and analytics, sustainability and equity, the GTMC aims to optimise the contribution of traditional medicine to global health and sustainable development. It also upholds a guiding principle often overlooked in the age of globalisation – a respect for local heritages, resources, and rights.

Established in Jamnagar, Gujarat, with the foundational support of the Government of India, the GTMC is an expression of shared global leadership. It reflects WHO's vision that harnessing the potential of traditional medicine, when grounded in evidence, innovation, and sustainability, can be a game-changer for health.

India's commitment to this vision stems from the belief that knowledge must serve humanity collectively. The establishment of the Centre in India is a testament to this spirit.

Under the Prime Minister's emphasis on evidence-based research in the field, there have been initiatives such as a dedicated AYUSH department at the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), development of global standards in AYUSH Systems through ISO/TC 249/SC 2 subcommittee, paving the way for wider global acceptance of India's traditional medicine.

The growing recognition of traditional medicine as a scientific and social asset took a decisive step in August 2023, when the first WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine was held in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, alongside the G-20 Health Ministerial Meeting. The gathering of Ministers, scientists, practitioners and communities from around the world mobilised political commitment, fostered data-driven action, and laid the groundwork

for evidence-based integration of traditional medicine into national health systems. The Gujarat Declaration, adopted at the Summit called for the protection of biodiversity, fair benefit-sharing, digital innovation, and equitable access to traditional health knowledge.

The global community is now ready to take the next step – to deepen scientific understanding, encourage innovation, and align traditional medicine's potential with modern global health priorities. Thus, WHO and the Government of India have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to co-host the Second WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine (New Delhi, December 17-19, 2025), marking a new chapter in global collaboration for health and sustainability. With its theme, "Restoring balance: The science and practice of health and well-being", it will mobilise multi-stakeholder action in support of WHO's new 10-year Global Traditional Medicine Strategy (2025-34), adopted at the 78th World Health Assembly earlier this year.

These initiatives are designed not only to celebrate traditional medicine's heritage but also to propel it into the future – where it stands validated by science, empowered by technology, and guided by ethics. As the birthplace of Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Sowa-Rigpa, India's contribution lies in demonstrating how traditional knowledge can coexist with modern science.

Its approach is rooted in integration – uniting tradition with technology, research with community participation, and well-being with sustainability. As the world gathers once again under a shared commitment to restore balance, India's message is simple yet profound: health must heal, not harm; progress must sustain, not consume; and science must serve, not separate.

The summit is more than an event – it is a global convergence to reaffirm that the future of health lies in harmony.

Calm returns to Sabarimala

For the government, the corrective actions have given it political oxygen

STATE OF PLAY

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A week after the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple opened for the annual pilgrimage, there is an unusual calm at the hill shrine in Pathanamthitta. Nearly six lakh devotees have completed the trek through the Periyar Tiger Reserve.

The tranquil scene of mist, rain-washed forest trails and an unhurried flow of pilgrims is in sharp contrast to the chaos of the first few days of the season. It began even before the temple opened, triggered by a High Court-monitored probe into alleged misappropriation of gold involving Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) officials. There was a flurry of reviews, security checks and confident claims about the arrangements followed.

As the crowds began to build, every system buckled under the pressure. Cleanliness and hygiene faded away, there were food and water shortages and queues froze. Images of exhausted pilgrims fainting along the trekking route poured in. Many bypassed barricades and used multiple points to make their way to the Sannidhanam. Even distant transit hubs such as Erumely and Pandalam were overwhelmed.

For a shrine known for its precise crowd management, Sabarimala was now close to facing a stampede-like situation. The TDB president, K Jayakumar, a former bureaucrat, who took over the reins of a scandal-hit TDB just days before the season began, called the situation 'dangerous' and 'unacceptable under any circumstances'.

The TDB and the police

came up with explanations such as the heavy inflow through forest routes, poor handover by the outgoing administration and a surge in footfalls. Reports of devotees abandoning their journey made it clear that the situation was in danger of getting out of control. Efforts to divert the swelling crowds at the Sannidhanam through alternative gates prevented many from accessing the 18 holy steps, which is a core ritual of the pilgrimage. Extending darshan hours made little difference, as the surge of pilgrims continued at the steps – around 45 pilgrims per minute. The death of a 59-year-old pilgrim from Koyilandy in Kozhikode at Appachimedu, heightened tensions. The absence of central forces only added to the pressure.

There was also the politics. The Congress accused the CPI (M)-led government of gross negligence. The BJP amplified the attack. Right-wing social media lit up with allegations that the State was 'humiliating' Ayyappa devotees. And the Karnataka government formally sought Kerala's cooperation to ensure the safety and smooth movement of pilgrims from the State. The Devaswom Bench of the High Court stepped in once again, demanding urgent corrective action by the authorities.

While reviewing the Sabarimala Special Commissioner's report, which stated that over two lakh pilgrims had visited

the temple in just 48 hours, the High Court noted that women and children could not face danger. Then came the most pointed question: why were preparations for the Mandalam-Makaravilakku season not initiated six months earlier?

The course correction was swift, with a clampdown on the crowd inflow. Though virtual-queue bookings remained unchanged, spot bookings were slashed from 20,000 to 5,000 a day. The effect was immediate. Footfalls from neighbouring States dropped sharply, perhaps affected by reports of the chaos.

But order returned. The forest trails became quieter. Pilgrims walked on with a sense of fulfilment. For a government heading into back-to-back elections, this return to normal was nothing short of political oxygen.

Even under the Model Code of Conduct, Devaswom Minister V.N. Vasavan sought special permission from the High Court to convene a review meeting – an indication of how critical the situation had become. A new consultative committee – the police coordinator, the TDB Executive Officer and the Special Commissioner – is in place. The movement rate up the holy steps has risen to over 70 pilgrims a minute, with plans to push it to 85. A 140-member Rapid Action Force team is to support crowd management. The relief in the corridors of power is unmistakable. If Kerala's political establishment has learned anything over the years, it is this: a crisis at Sabarimala never remains confined to Sabarimala. It spills into public discourse, onto political platforms and, eventually, to the ballot box. And with election season looming, that is a risk no government can afford to take.

Did SIR process decide the Bihar result? Data says 'no'

The NDA's advantage over the MGB remained mostly intact, despite a decrease in electorate numbers following the Special Intensive Revision exercise

DATA POINT

Srinivasan Ramani

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls became one of the most contentious issues in the Bihar 2025 Assembly election. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and allies welcomed the process as necessary to remove "infiltrators" from voter lists, while the Congress and Rashtriya Janata Dal decried it as systematic disenfranchisement – part of what they termed as "vote chori" (vote theft), alleging collusion between the Election Commission of India and the ruling BJP to manipulate electoral rolls in the latter's favour. The controversy was not confined to campaign rhetoric. The SIR process required many interventions by the Supreme Court. The scale of the revision was unprecedented: approximately 68 lakh electors were deleted, while 24 lakh were added, resulting in a net deletion of around 44 lakh voters between January 2025 and October 2025.

A critical question emerges: did the SIR process actually influence the election outcome? A data-driven analysis comparing changes in vote share patterns with the extent of electoral roll deletions across Assembly constituencies suggests that it did not play a determining role in the NDA's victory.

The electoral outcome itself showed remarkable continuity with the 2024 general election. The NDA secured close to 46.6% of the vote share in the Assembly polls, a marginal drop of around 1.4 percentage points from the parliamentary elections held in May 2024. The Mahagatbandan's vote share declined more sharply, by approximately 2.2 percentage points from 39.2% to 37%. While these shifts favoured the NDA, the pattern suggests the alliance retained rather than expanded its existing advantage over the Opposition. To examine whether the SIR

process contributed to these patterns, we analysed two key variables across Bihar's Assembly constituencies: the change in the vote share difference between the NDA and MGB from the 2024 general election to the 2025 Assembly elections, and the decrease in electorate numbers following the SIR as a percentage of the original electorate roll.

Map 1 illustrates the changes in vote share difference between the two elections at the Assembly constituency level. The darker red shading indicates constituencies where the NDA increased its advantage over the MGB, while the darker blue shading shows the opposite. Map 2 depicts the decrease in the electorate across constituencies, with the darker red indicating larger percentage reductions in voter numbers following the SIR process. Chart 3 plots these two variables against each other for every Assembly constituency in Bihar. If the SIR process had systematically benefited the NDA by removing Opposition voters, we would expect to see a clear pattern: constituencies with higher deletions showing greater increases in the NDA's vote share advantage. The scatter plot, however, tells a different story.

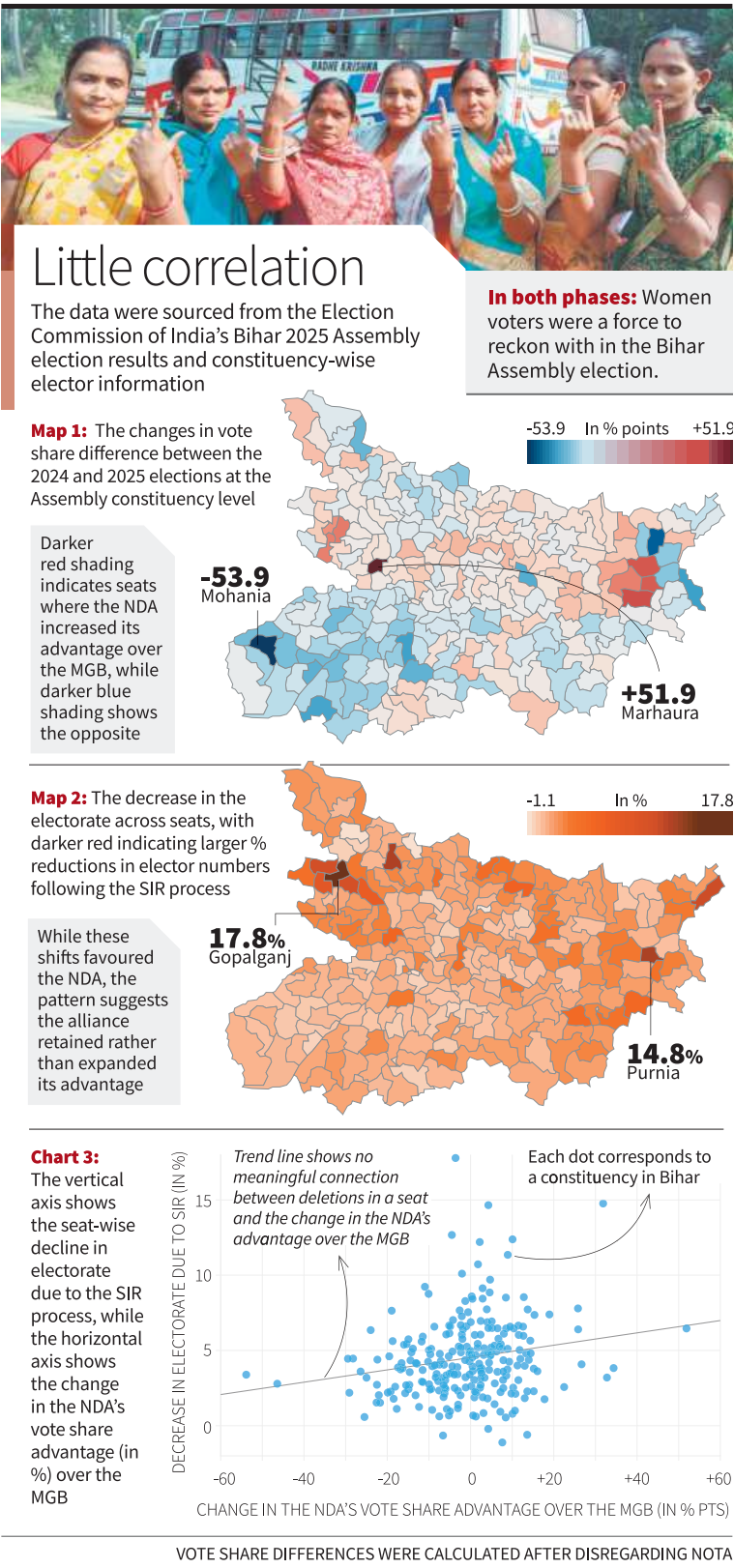
The correlation coefficient between these variables is 0.192, indicating an extremely weak positive relationship. To understand what this means, consider that correlation coefficients range from -1 (representing a perfect negative correlation), to +1 (representing a perfect positive correlation), with 0 indicating no relationship whatsoever. At 0.192, the data reveal virtually no meaningful connection between the extent of electoral roll deletions in a constituency and the change in the NDA's advantage over the MGB. This is further confirmed by the R² value of 0.037 visible in the chart's trendline, which indicates that only 3.7% of the variation in the NDA's electoral performance can be explained by changes in the electoral roll. In

practical terms, Assembly constituencies that experienced large-scale deletions were no more likely to see an increase in the NDA's vote share advantage than constituencies with minimal deletions. Similarly, constituencies with smaller reductions in the electorate showed no distinct pattern in voting behaviour compared to those with larger reductions.

The scatter plot itself is revealing. Points are dispersed widely across both axes with no clear upward or downward trend. The near-flat trendline and the clustering of points across the entire spectrum suggest that the SIR's impact, if any, was not a determining factor in electoral outcomes. Had the revision systematically disenfranchised Opposition voters to the NDA's benefit, the data would show constituencies with higher deletion rates trending toward greater NDA advantage – a pattern conspicuously absent from the analysis.

The conclusion is straightforward. There was no major increase in NDA vote shares relative to the decrease in the electorate across Bihar. The NDA's advantages from the 2024 general election remained largely intact, and the coalition's victory appears to have been based on the same factors that gave it an edge in the parliamentary polls rather than being a product of the SIR process.

This is not to diminish the concerns about the SIR process. After all, data revealed that there was a disproportionate decrease in the number of women in the electorate following the SIR, leading to the gender ratio dropping from 907 in the January rolls to a meagre 892 in the final rolls released in September. And yet, women turned out in much larger numbers when compared to men (four lakh more despite being forty lakh fewer in the rolls). However, the data also suggest that the SIR, despite being a political flashpoint, did not alone determine the outcome of Bihar's election.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 24, 1975

Cochin-Bombay Train from Jan. 26

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT COCHIN, Nov. 23

The Railways will introduce a weekly Jayanthi Janata express train between Cochin and Bombay from Jan.26 next (Republic Day). The frequency of the present tri-weekly Jayanthi Janatha Express between Mangalore-Cochin and New Delhi will be increased to five days a week from Jan 26, 1976. The Bombay-Madras Mail and the Bangalore-Cochin Island Express will be dieselised from the next Republic Day. An announcement to this effect was made here to-day by Mr. Mohamed Shafi Qureshi, Union Minister of State for Railways while inaugurating the 155.33-km long broad gauge link from Ernakulam to Qulion. Mr. Qureshi said this line represented an important railway link in India for it would eventually connect Cape Comorin in the South with Kashmir in the North. He expressed the hope that the opening of this broad gauge line would bring in more and more industrial and economic prosperity to Kerala. Preliminary work on the Rs. 13.59 crore conversion project inaugurated on Dec.28,1971, by the former Railway Minister, Mr. K. Hanumanthaiya began early in 1972. The Ernakulam-Qulion section has now been thrown open to traffic and the conversion of 64.81-km.long Quilon Trivandrum section is expected to be completed by June 1976. Mr. Qureshi said Kerala possessed vast potentialities for further economic growth.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 24, 1925

Improving the Breed of Indian Horses

The efforts which are being made to improve the breed of Indian horses are of importance to large numbers of Indian agriculturists. It is expected that for 1930 it will be possible to supply Indian bred remounts for the Army at low prices than the horses can be purchased from Australia and that by the year, enough remounts will be available in India to meet the annual requirements for the Cavalry. This would effect saving in Indian revenues while the money expended on horses would be kept in the country. Advices from Australia meanwhile show that light-horse breeding in the Commonwealth is diminishing rapidly, which is an additional reason why efforts should be made to make the Cavalry from animals bred in India itself. – "The Pioneer."

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of persons sentenced to death in Yemen's Houthi court

17 A Houthi-controlled court in Yemen's capital convicted 17 people of spying for foreign governments and sentenced them to death. The people convicted were part of "espionage cells within a spy network affiliated with the American, Israeli and Saudi intelligence," said the court. PTI

Villages being built under Vibrant Villages Programme in J&K

124 A comprehensive roadmap has been prepared for the focused development of 124 strategic villages across 43 border blocks in eight districts under the second phase of the Vibrant Villages Programme in Jammu and Kashmir, officials said on Sunday. PTI

Number of lives claimed by earthquake in Bangladesh

10 Three jolts after a relatively major earthquake claimed at least 10 lives within a span of 32 hours. The quake caused damage to buildings mostly in central parts of the country, including the capital Dhaka, while a tremor rocked the country at around the same time on Saturday morning. PTI

Number of rare species of turtles recovered in U.P.

74 Two suspected wildlife traffickers have been arrested and 74 rare species of turtles recovered from their possession in the Dumila border area. During the interrogation, the accused told the police that they were taking the turtles to Uttarakhand to supply to local buyers. PTI

Foreigners arrested by the Myanmar junta in scam hub raids

1,590 Sprawling fraud factories have mushroomed in war-torn Myanmar's border regions, housing scammers who target internet users with romance and business cons worth billions of dollars annually. AFP
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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How can State PSCs be reformed?

How did the Montagu Chelmsford report lead to the establishment of present-day Public Service Commissions? What is the role of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions? Is a periodical review of the examination syllabi necessary?

EXPLAINER

Gopalakrishna, V

The story so far:

The 2025 national conference of chairpersons of the State Public Service Commissions (PSCs) is being hosted by the Telangana State Public Service Commission on December 19 and 20. Every year, whenever State PSCs conduct examinations for recruitment, they are mired in one controversy or the other. Aspirants often have to seek judicial recourse, due to which the entire process is derailed, leading to a 'trust deficit'. This is an outcome of systemic lapses, both structural and procedural, which exist in almost all State PSCs. This conference would be an apt occasion to discuss such issues and more.

What is the history of PSCs?

The PSCs in India are a product of India's struggle for Independence. The entry of Indians into the civil services on the sole criterion of merit was embedded in the demand for 'self-rule'. The Montagu Chelmsford report accepted the demand and proposed a permanent office free from political influence to regulate service matters. The first Public Service Commission for the Union was formed in 1926. Later the Government of India Act, 1935 provided for the establishment of one PSC for each province. These provisions were continued by the framers of the Constitution, and so today we have a Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and PSCs in each State to primarily serve the needs of recruitment.

How are these commissions structured?

The UPSC functions in a relatively politically sterile environment. The members are appointed based on merit and rich prior experience in public affairs. Moreover, representation of members from of all zones of the country is ensured. While the Constitution does not mention minimum age or qualifications, most of the appointed members are at least above the age of 55, and enjoy a reputation of being apolitical. On the other hand, State PSCs operate in a politically osmotic environment and the proverbial 'spoils system' is visible in the appointment process. The conventional requirements of minimum age, qualifications and public experience are given a short shrift.

The Union government has vast manpower needs. This is matched by financial resources to meet the retirement obligations of the superannuated and the remunerative needs of fresh entrants. It has also created a dedicated ministry, the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions in 1985, to formulate all policies in the field of personnel management. This ensures regular declaration of vacancies by the government enabling the UPSC to notify, conduct and declare the results of the examinations conducted by it with regularity and precision.

In contrast, the manpower needs of the States are limited and not planned. Often, they lack the financial resources to meet the retirement and recruitment obligations of their employees leading to extension of the superannuation age and postponement of recruitment. Most State governments do not have a dedicated Ministry of Personnel. And therefore, vacancies are not notified regularly by the government which effectively means that State PSCs are not required to conduct



A revamp: Applicants of Telangana State Public Service Commission Group 2 exam stage a protest to postpone the exam, in Hyderabad in 2023. NAGARA GOPAL

the examinations regularly.

How do they work?

The UPSC undertakes a periodical exercise of establishing committees comprising not only of academicians but also civil servants, social activists etc. to recommend changes in the syllabi and achieve a balance between academics and contemporary developments. They are able to tap the best talent from across the country to formulate question papers and also evaluate them. A time tested method of 'inter-se' moderation of scores is followed at different levels of the examination to minimise subjectivity. The UPSC ably balances conflicting interests of transparency and confidentiality by being quick to respond to any lapses and making systemic changes so that aspirants do not often have to seek judicial recourse for grievances.

On the other hand, State PSCs do not appoint committees regularly to redraft the syllabus; are constrained to tap academic resources from within the State; and are not able to achieve satisfactory 'inter-se' moderation in evaluation. They also have the daunting task of making complex calculations to accurately incorporate not only vertical reservations but also horizontal reservations. Meeting the demands of regional quotas in the form of zonal reservations adds to this complexity. All these lead to continuous litigation in one form or the other delaying the recruitment process.

These are some of the main reasons limiting the efficient functioning of State PSCs and their declining credibility. Often aggrieved students comment that they have lost faith in State Commissions and would like the UPSC to conduct the examinations. Time bound structural and procedural reforms are required to restore faith in State PSCs.

What can be done?

First, manpower planning should be systematised and a separate ministry should be created for personnel management. This Ministry should clearly layout a five-year road map for recruitment so that State PSCs are able to notify and conduct the examination process.

Along the lines of the 41st amendment of the Constitution (1976), which raised the maximum age limit of the members of State PSCs from 60 to 62 years in order to attract meritorious and experienced civil servants, there is a need for another amendment. The minimum age for appointment as a member should be fixed at 55 and the maximum age at 65. The stipulation of minimum age will enable appointment of experienced individuals while increasing the maximum age will enable State PSCs to benefit from the experience of senior civil servants who have retired at 60 for a longer period than under the existing provisions.

This amendment could also specify the necessary qualifications that members need in order to be appointed. For example, in order to be an 'official' member, experience as Secretary to a State government or a post equivalent to this rank should be stipulated while for 'non-official' members 10 years of practice in a recognised profession like law, medicine, or engineering should be stipulated. A mandatory pre-consultation with the leader of the Opposition before appointment may be considered for non-official members. Thus, a State wide panel of eminent people – those with high standing, integrity, merit and independence – should be constituted and periodically updated.

Secondly, the syllabus should be revised periodically, keeping in view the

changing academic scenario and the syllabi for examinations as stipulated by the UPSC. Every proposal for revision should be placed in the public domain and changes can be made after public consultation. Knowledge on State specific areas like regional history, regional economy and regional geography, in which the availability of faculty is limited, should be tested in the objective type format so that there would be no scope for complaint on the grounds of asymmetry of information and value laden correction. Thus, while the preliminary examination may continue in the objective format, the main examination should be a mixture of objective and subjective papers. The process of translation of the questions from English to the regional language should not only involve technology for secrecy but also the human element so that the right meaning is conveyed. Care should be taken to regularly change the pattern of questions so that the role of AI-chat bots, as a source of information for formulating answers, is effectively countered.

Finally, the Secretary of the State PSCs should be a senior officer with prior experience as either Commissioner of School Education or Secretary of the Board of Intermediate education to enable effective supervision of the examination branch of the Commission. Transparency and confidentiality should be balanced on the lines of the UPSC.

If these changes are effected, one would have vibrant Public Service Commissions at the State level on par with the Union Public Service Commission.

The writer is the Founder Director of Brain Tree IAS Hyderabad and has been engaged in teaching public administration for the last 35 years.

THE GIST

▼ The entry of Indians into the civil services on the sole criterion of merit was embedded in the demand for 'self-rule'.

▼ The manpower needs of the States are limited and not planned. Often, they lack the financial resources to meet the retirement and recruitment obligations of their employees leading to extension of the superannuation age and postponement of recruitment.

▼ State PSCs do not appoint committees regularly to redraft the syllabus; are constrained to tap academic resources from within the State; and are not able to achieve satisfactory 'inter-se' moderation in evaluation.

CACHE



In shambles: Smoke rises following the Israeli military bombardment of Nuseirat, as seen from central Gaza strip, on November 21. AP

Why did Wikipedia lock the page titled ‘Gaza Genocide’?

Wikipedia’s co-founder criticised the use of the word ‘genocide’ to refer to Israel’s actions in Gaza, further igniting a debate about political neutrality on Wikipedia. Protections on the locked-down page was enhanced by editors on July 2024 and May 2025, to prevent un-vetted edits

Sahana Venugopal

The story so far: Earlier in November, the page titled ‘Gaza Genocide’, hosted on Wikipedia, was locked. A small lock icon at the top right corner of the page restricted users from making edits to the page’s contents. The locked-down page made waves when Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales posted a statement disagreeing on how the term ‘genocide’ was applied to Gaza. He claimed, in his personal capacity, that the page failed to meet Wikipedia’s high standards and needed immediate attention. While the page exists on the platform in its locked-down form, debates continue across the world on how to classify the conflict.

Why was Wikipedia’s Gaza genocide page locked? The ‘Gaza Genocide’ page begins by stating: “The Gaza genocide is the ongoing, intentional, and systematic destruction of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip carried out by Israel during the Gaza war. It encompasses mass killings, deliberate starvation, infliction of serious bodily and mental harm, and preventing births.” While multiple organisations and academics have described Israel’s actions in Gaza as a genocide targeting civilians, pro-Israel supporters have pushed back against the use of the word as they claim that the militant organisation Hamas is

using Palestinian civilians as human shields and that Israel has the right to self-defence following the gruesome October 7 killings. Protections on the locked-down page was enhanced by editors (both humans and bots) on July 2024 and May 2025, to prevent un-vetted edits. More recently, it was locked on October 28 and November 4, so only verified editors with accounts older than 30 days and over 500 edits can access the page to make updates. This is not the first time that Wikipedia has locked a page on a contentious topic. Thousands of such articles covering significant world events, key definitions, or celebrity figures have been temporarily locked in the past to prevent partisan edits by un-vetted editors as well as acts of Wikipedia “vandalism” that range from funny to hateful. Not surprisingly, there have been hundreds of edits made to the ‘Gaza Genocide’ page on Wikipedia in recent days and weeks. Many of these are simple formatting and punctuation edits while more controversial changes deal with how to include and interpret sources, or even revise other contributors’ edits.

What did Wikipedia’s co-founder say? Mr. Wales posted a personal statement in a talk page that discussed the nature of edits made to the ‘Gaza Genocide’ page as well as the reasoning behind the use of the term ‘genocide.’ There, he criticised how Israel’s actions were being classified as a “genocide” and instead urged a

correction to present this as a contested allegation. Citing neutrality as the basis for his opinion, Mr. Wales said the article “fails to meet our high standards and needs immediate attention.” Furthermore, Mr. Wales said he was leading a group that was looking into issues of neutrality in Wikipedia across articles and topic areas, including “Zionism.” He also claimed that much more work was needed, though he clarified that he was only speaking in a personal capacity. “I assume good faith of everyone who has worked on this Gaza “genocide” article. At present, the lede and the overall presentation state, in Wikipedia’s voice, that Israel is committing genocide, although that claim is highly contested,” Mr. Wales stated, later noting, “A neutral approach would begin with a formulation such as: “Multiple governments, NGOs, and legal bodies have described or rejected the characterisation of Israel’s actions in Gaza as genocide.” Though Mr. Wales’ opinion is not a definitive decision or judgment, it has ignited debate across the Wikipedia editors community as they re-examine how they are collectively working to document Israel’s violence against Palestinians.

Has a genocide in Gaza been confirmed? A UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry reported on

September 16 that Israel committed genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The investigation covers events since October 7, 2023, when Hamas attacked Israeli civilians, and Israel’s military actions since then. The Commission reported that Israel carried out four of the five genocidal acts as defined by the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, including “killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the destruction of the Palestinians in whole or in part, and imposing measures intended to prevent births.” The International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) also published a resolution in August 2025 stating that Israel carried out war crimes and genocide, noting that its actions “have not only been directed against the Hamas group responsible for these, but have also targeted the entire Gazan population”. The Human Rights Watch stated in December 2024 that “Israeli authorities are responsible for the crime against humanity of extermination and for acts of genocide” by throttling Palestinian civilians’ access to water. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, 67,173 people have been killed as of October 7 this year, two years after Israel’s offensive on Hamas began. This figure includes 20,179 children, who account for about 30% of the total, reported *Reuters*.

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz to celebrate 100 years of the musical genius Salil Chowdhury

V.V. Ramanan

- QUESTION 1**
Where did Salilda go underground after arrest warrants were issued for his support to the peasant movement in the 1940s?
- QUESTION 2**
Which composition rendered beautifully by Talat Mahmood and Lata Mangeshkar was inspired by Mozart’s 40th Symphony?
- QUESTION 3**
Salida became a household name in Kerala for his superb work in which award-winning film by Ramu Kariat based on a Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai’s novel?
- QUESTION 4**
Can you name the song in *Half Ticket* set to tune by Salilda where actor-singer Kishore Kumar croons in both male and female ‘voices’?
- QUESTION 5**
Admiring Salilda’s versatility, which popular filmmaker once remarked ‘He can play almost any instrument he lays his hands on, from the tabla to the sarod, from the piano to the piccolo’?



Visual question:
Name this Bimal Roy classic which is based on a story written by Salil Chowdhury.

Questions and Answers to the November 21 edition of the daily quiz: 1. This player has the highest partnerships from the 2nd to 6th wicket in the history of the Ashes. **Ans: Sir Donald Bradman**
2. The only bowler in Ashes history to pick more than 40 wickets in a series twice. **Ans: Terry Alderman (Australia), 42 wickets in the 1981 series and 41 in 1989**
3. This wicketkeeper holds the record for effecting most dismissals in a single Ashes series. **Ans: Brad Haddin (Australia); 29 in the 2013 series**
4. This neutral Umpire holds the record for having officiated in most Ashes Tests. **Ans: Aleem Dar (Pakistan), 23 Tests**
5. This English batsman scored 905 runs in 1928-29 Ashes series. **Ans: Wally Hammond**
6. This player holds the record for having scored the highest individual score in an innings in Ashes history. **Ans: Sir Len Hutton (364)**
7. This ground has hosted the most Test matches in Ashes history. **Ans: Sydney Crickey Ground (SCG)**
8. This player holds the record of being the only player to have scored more than 1,000 runs and taken more than 150 wickets in Ashes history. **Ans: Stuart Broad — 1019 runs and 153 wickets**
Visual: Name this player. **Ans: Peter Siddle (Australia)**
Early Birds: Piyali Tulji| Arun Kumar Singh| Suchit Narottam| Arjun Debnath| Sukdev Shet



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

I climbed up and reached the pinnacle

Stop name-dropping when you are trying to make new friends. It will not help

S. Upendran

What is the difference in meaning between ‘to drop names’ and ‘name-dropping’? (D. Aditya, Secunderabad)
In terms of meaning, there is no difference between the two. When you drop a name during the course of your conversation with someone, what you are doing is mentioning the name of some well-known individual. You talk about this individual as if you have known him for some time, and that he is a good friend of yours. This may, however, not be true. You may have seen the individual, but never actually talked to him; but during the conversation with your friend, you give the impression that the two of you are very close. People often resort to ‘name-dropping’ because they want to impress those around them – and in the process, hope to get preferential treatment. But this act of dropping names does not go down well with everyone – hence, the expression is often used to show disapproval.
I find her constant name-dropping highly irritating.
A person who frequently drops names is referred to as a ‘name-dropper’.

Is it okay to say ‘hang a right/left’? (G. Vasanthi, Kodaikanal)
The expression ‘hang a right/left’ is much more common in American English than British; it is seldom heard in our country. It is normally used when you are giving directions to someone who is driving. When you tell someone to ‘hang a right’, you are asking the person to turn right. ‘Hang a right’ and ‘hang a left’ have the same meaning as ‘make a right’ and ‘take a left’. ‘Hang a right/left’ have been part of American English since the 1900s.
Once you cross the railway station, hang a left.

How is the word ‘pinnacle’ pronounced? What does it mean? (J. Kavitha, Kochi)
The word consists of three syllables; the vowels in the first two syllables sound like the ‘i’ in ‘pin’, ‘din’ and ‘tin’. The final ‘cle’ is like the ‘cle’ in ‘uncle’ and ‘cycle’; the word is pronounced ‘PIN-i-kel’, with the stress on the first syllable. It comes from the Latin ‘pinnaculum’ meaning ‘peak’, and it was originally used to refer to the top of a relatively high/tall mountain. With the passage of time, the word began to be applied to other objects which were relatively tall – for example, the highest point of a rather tall building can be referred to as ‘pinnacle’. Nowadays, the word is used in everyday contexts to talk about the achievements of an individual – the highlight of our career, the greatest success that we have achieved can be referred as our pinnacle. It is always ‘pinnacle’ and not ‘pinnacles’.
In Mala’s opinion, getting a PhD from Harvard was the pinnacle of her academic achievement.
upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

Fructify:
become productive or fruitful; make productive or fruitful; produce fruit

Synonym: set

Usage: *The treaty, if fructified, will be a disaster.*

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈfʌktɪfaɪ/

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

OUR VIEW



Labour codes could act as an economic catalyst

If enforced as envisioned, the four codes can yield a more secure workforce and strengthen India's economy. Employers should not just comply but also focus on their collective interest

It is welcome that the government has notified the four labour codes that have been ready since 2020 (the code on wages was framed in 2019). For these laws to become operational, state governments have to notify the rules that will give them teeth. A major gain for the Indian economy from Friday's move is at the normative level; for example, EU officials who must ascertain our labour standards for commercial engagement now have to deal with fewer central laws, instead of 44. While 29 have been subsumed in the four notified codes—on wages, industrial relations, social security and occupational safety and health—several others remain, such as a law against sexual harassment at the workplace, a ban on child labour and legislation on emigrant workers. At the level of states, over 100 labour laws remain on the books. Those that are in conflict with or have been rendered redundant by the four central codes need to be repealed. Central trade unions have opposed the new codes; while the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh has stayed away from formal protests, it has voiced misgivings too. Although it might be hard to get trade unions fully on board, the Centre could make a gesture of conciliation by convening a meeting of the Indian Labour Conference, which last met in 2015.

A significant reform is that the codes address a fast-enlarging class of jobs: gig work. Such platforms maintain that they are willing to set aside funds for the social security of their gig workers, provided a legal framework is available. We have one all but ready now, even if it is only at the front end. Back-end complements must not lag. If all gig employees wish to save for retirement by opening provident fund (PF) accounts, can the PF organization handle the

load? Can the Employees' State Insurance (ESI) network of hospitals serve the millions more who may gain health coverage as swathes of informal work turns formal? Has the Centre worked out how to get more healthcare providers enrolled as ESI contractors? That said, the very widening of a safety net across India's workforce is a good sign. Since upward mobility works in support of the economy, closing the split between formal and informal jobs should pay off. Employers, of course, need to do their bit. E-commerce and other gig platforms, for instance, could hike their delivery charges to fund social security payments for workers. And now that patriarchal curbs on work done by women are to be dropped, a major relief, employers must offer enabling amenities and security.

For a single enterprise, wage bills are a cost, but for the economy as a whole, better placed workers result in greater overall demand for what it produces. So the rationality of savings on labour, if pursued by all employers, works against GDP growth. Yet, the appeal of labour as a cost that's more variable (or adaptable) than fixed is hard to deny, especially with AI tools offering to reset business operations. New norms may give our labour market added flexibility, but since they formalize much of what's already in practice, their scope for a cost-efficiency boost seems limited. Productivity would have to be raised through investment in skills and management ideas, with private-sector innovation and its profit motive driving job generation. Broadly, though, India's labour reforms are a cue for employers to focus on their collective interest—which is to have a well-backed workforce that can spend more freely and reach for better lives.

GUEST VIEW

Four labour codes: A new social compact for a competitive India

Worker security, enterprise agility and investor confidence should deliver faster and fairer growth



R. MUKUNDAN & CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE are, respectively, president-designate, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and CEO, Tata Chemicals; and director general, CII.

India's long-awaited labour reforms mark a defining moment for our economic and social trajectory. The consolidation of 29 Central labour laws into four Labour Codes represents one of the most forward-looking and inclusive transformations undertaken since Independence. Apart from decades of economic learnings, extensive dialogue with workers, industry and state governments went into these. They reflect a recognition that the world of work has changed and India's labour framework must evolve to match the dynamism of a rapidly modernizing economy.

India is at an inflection point. To become a \$5 trillion economy by 2028-29, we need a robust workforce, for which the legal framework must deliver security, opportunity and flexibility for both workers and enterprises. The four Labour Codes—on Wages, Industrial Relations, Social Security and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions—aim to do that by laying a foundation for a more secure workforce and a more competitive industry.

By consolidating 29 fragmented and often overlapping laws, India has replaced complexity with clarity. The new framework streamlines compliance, digitizes processes and enables transparent, predictable industrial relations. For enterprises, particularly MSMEs that are engines of employment generation, this reform reduces administrative friction

and allows businesses to scale, invest and innovate more confidently. For workers, it guarantees uniform wage floors, timely wage payment, stronger social security and defined protections that safeguard dignity and well-being. The Codes reaffirm a core principle that CII has long emphasized: that when workers thrive, productivity rises and growth becomes more sustainable for all.

The new labour architecture comes at a pivotal moment. India is emerging as a global hub for manufacturing, services, technology and digital innovation. Investors look for stability, transparency and a responsive regulatory environment. The Labour Codes deliver precisely that. A unified wage system, simpler hiring frameworks, clearer dispute resolution mechanisms and strengthened safety norms build confidence across sectors such as IT/ITeS, textiles and apparel, electronics, logistics, ports, mining and exports. The assurance of stability not only enhances competitiveness, but incentivizes long-term investments that expand employment and support value creation.

A defining strength of the Labour Codes is their deep inclusivity. For the first time, India extends social security protections to gig and platform workers, securing a fast-growing workforce that powers digital commerce, mobility and on-demand services. The Codes also advance gender equity by strengthening safeguards for women working across sectors, enabling night work with safety provisions, encoding maternity benefits and ensuring equal wages—steps that encourage greater female participation in India's labour force. Youth entering the workforce benefit from clearer pathways to apprenticeships, training and employment in high-growth sectors. Meanwhile, MSMEs gain from simplified compliance and flexibility, enabling them to grow sustainably and formalize more jobs.

Importantly, the Labour Codes bring long-needed protections to traditional and vulnerable categories of workers,

including *beedi* and cigar workers, plantation labour, mining and hazardous-industry workers, dock workers, textile and garment employees and professionals across audio-visual, broadcasting and digital media. The emphasis on occupational safety and health ensures that every worker, whether in a high-risk mine or a cutting-edge digital studio, receives adequate protection, welfare facilities and a safe environment. This should enhance productivity by reinforcing human dignity at work.

Collectively, these reforms initiate a virtuous cycle for India's economy: improved worker welfare promotes motivation and productivity, which strengthens enterprise performance and competitiveness, which attracts investment, which creates more jobs and expands formalization, which in turn draws more workers under the protective umbrella of social security.

Early indicators already show this transformation taking shape. India recorded its highest-ever provident fund (PF) enrolments in 2024-25, a sign of faster formalization across sectors. Notably, 61% of new PF subscribers are aged below 29 years. Women's economic participation is also rising, with the female worker population ratio having risen to 40.3% in 2023-24, up from 28.7% four years earlier—a powerful signal of inclusive growth. These trends affirm that India is moving steadily toward a high-trust, high-productivity workforce where protection and competitiveness reinforce each other.

In essence, the Labour Codes are far more than a legal consolidation; they represent a visionary redesign of India's labour ecosystem. They strengthen the security of workers, agility of enterprises and confidence of investors. They empower workers and uplift them. In all, they create a new social compact, one that aligns economic growth with social justice and competitiveness with compassion. They promise growth that's not only faster, but also fairer, more inclusive and more sustainable.



JUST A THOUGHT

Labour markets are about people. And people have a right to be treated with dignity and respect.

JUAN SOMAVIA

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

Why activism is allergic to the middle ground of causes

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist and screenwriter. His latest book is 'Why the Poor Don't Kill Us.'

Some days ago, Bill Gates did the sort of thing that infuriates powerful activists. He said a doomsday was not coming. He did this in a single detailed article on his blog *Gatesnotes.com*. He wrote that climate change is a very serious issue, even transformative, and that millions will be affected, especially the poor. If he had just said all this, it would have looked like the text of any compassionate and alarmist climate warrior, but then he framed it in his new conviction that climate change is not the end of the world. It will not be as bad as we have been led to believe. Also, carbon emissions are coming down, and they may come down faster: "...with the right policies and investments, innovation will allow us to drive emissions down much further." What would particularly disturb some well-financed climate activists was his articulation of the fact that funding for various issues is a zero-sum game—something is at the expense of something else—and all the billions going into climate action is money denied for human wel-

fare in some of the poorest regions on earth. An implication of what Gates said is that intellectuals and millionaires pushing for ever greater climate spending may actually be perpetrators of human inequality without either knowing or acknowledging it.

Not surprisingly, Gates' essay has faced a severe activist backlash. "Did you hear the news? Climate concern is dead! No need to worry, because the Tech Titans have it in hand..." wrote Kathleen Biggins, founder and president of C-Change Conversations, a nonprofit organization that promotes discussions about climate science on a "non-partisan" site managed by Florida Atlantic University. This melodramatic tone would be the least of Gates's problems. In the coming days, as the Epstein files flood the media, some people may wonder how Gates was entangled with the disgraced paedophile. There are consequences to challenging conventional wisdom on climate change, even for a billionaire who has given away billions to the cause.

Activists who promote a doomsday scenario detest a calm, reasonable position—the middle ground—because it makes them appear hysterical. If they say "genocide," you should not say it's only a "massacre"; if they say genetically modified (GM) food is evil,

you cannot say everything we eat is genetically modified; if they say climate change is the end of the world, you cannot say it won't be that bad. It is the way of the world that people who are not careful with the use of the word 'genocide' are usually against GM foods and think climate change is a world-ending catastrophe unless their dire plans are implemented. In my observation, they are also likely to love chamomile tea.

Mark Lynas, who was among the key activists to have created the fear around GM foods and later recanted, wrote in his memoir that activists reserve their deepest hate not for those who have always disagreed with them, but for those who were one of them and recanted. They become traitors. And Gates seems to have become one because he once did share many of the climate doomsday concerns. Now he has read fresh data and sees the matter in a new light.

The issue of climate change is yet another sign that modern activism is a form of reli-

gion and science its malleable theological foundation. For many of them, the issue is very important for their moral well-being. A worthy fight in a life without meaning. And they feel diminished every time they are told they are not fighting an apocalypse. That is why they rebuke the middle ground. Disbelievers can be dismissed as fools or sell-outs. But someone who was on their side, and who appears to have considered all the facts and arrived at a middle ground, is destructive to their cause, especially one as influential as Gates.

But there is, I feel, a subconscious reason why activists are allergic to the middle ground. It ruins an excellent form of storytelling. Any popular story needs extreme scenarios, extreme heroes and extreme villains. Doomsday is one of our best stories. That is why we have so many of them. Religions have doomsdays. Cults that challenged religions came up with their own doomsdays. It is not surprising activism revolves around doom because it is a powerful plot device.

Some people may claim to love something called 'nuance' but generally, the riskiest way to tell a story is through a reasonable balance. This is why one of the most remarkable aspects of our past is the existence and survival of one fable. It is possibly the worst story ever told, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. A girl goes into the home of three bears and has porridge that is neither hot nor cold, but just warm. That's most of the plot. The wisdom of the middle ground, which is what the tale is about, is normally a doomed fairytale. Yet, it somehow survived. But it is rare. Almost all our successful stories are extreme events led by extreme people.

It is possible that activism, once it has spread its primary fear, can continue no matter what new science says about it. For example, the anti-GM movement is still going strong, even though it is now fairly well established that there is nothing in science to support the view that GM food harms our health. A few years ago, nearly 100 Nobel laureates, most of them in sciences, stated that the movement against GM food had no scientific basis. Yet, the fear is alive, even if it has lost some of the hysteria around it 10 years ago. Gates's shift in stance is a blow to the enormous funding of climate change, but it is hard to kill a religion.

It tends to ruin storytelling, which needs extremes to enthrall people. Climate activism is an example

Climate Crossroads

As the world gathers at the COP30 climate summit in Belém, Brazil, a familiar tension has once again taken centre stage: developing nations demanding equity and developed countries demanding action. This year, India stands squarely in that debate ~ and not without controversy. Being one of the few major emitters yet to submit its updated climate plan, India has drawn global attention, even as it insists the delay is neither negligence nor defiance, but a principled stand for fairness.

No one disputes India's growing climate profile. The country is now the world's third-largest carbon emitter, even as it trails far behind developed economies in per-capita emissions. India has made real progress, especially in its energy mix. Achieving 50 per cent of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources well ahead of its 2030 target shows genuine ambition. Solar costs have dropped, renewables have expanded rapidly, and India has become a global leader in clean energy manufacturing.

Yet, the narrative is not as reassuring when the spotlight shifts to coal. The fossil fuel still dominates roughly three-quarters of India's electricity supply, with new coal mines being auctioned even today. Independent climate assessments warn that India's pathway remains aligned with a world headed toward dangerous levels of warming.

India's actions today will shape how the world perceives responsibility and resolve among emerging economies, especially those with rapidly growing energy demand and increasing geopolitical weight.

In this context, withholding a revised climate pledge inevitably raises questions: Is India biding time to extract stronger commitments from wealthy nations, or is it struggling to balance economic priorities with climate responsibility? The answer may be a bit of both.

India's argument is straightforward: historic emitters must move faster and pay more. Climate finance has long been the Achilles' heel of global negotiations, as pledges rarely align with actual disbursements. The developing world cannot be expected to leap into a cleaner future while burdened with loans or left to fund costly transitions alone. India's position ~ that climate ambition must be matched with climate support ~ is grounded in principle.

But diplomacy and perception matter too. In a world increasingly shaped by climate leadership, hesitation risks diminishing influence. China has already submitted its updated roadmap, and smaller nations vulnerable to rising seas are pushing ambitious targets despite limited resources. India's delay could be seen as a strategic bargaining chip, or as a sign of reluctance when leadership is needed most.

The choice before India is not between growth and climate goals. The true challenge is forging a development model that proves the two can advance together. When India submits its plan later this year, the world will look not only for timelines and numbers, but for a signal: Will India define the future of equitable climate action, or struggle to keep pace with it? The clock is ticking. And the world is watching.

Uncertain Resilience

The latest snapshot of the US job market offers a reminder that economic signals can be frustratingly ambiguous. A jump in hiring in September ~ more than double what forecasters anticipated ~ suggests resilience in the world's largest economy. Yet, that optimistic headline is quickly complicated by the simultaneous rise in unemployment and a string of sizable layoff announcements from marquee employers. It is a labour market neither strong enough to inspire confidence nor weak enough to demand urgent intervention, a system stuck in suspended animation.

Part of the problem is the data vacuum created by the lengthy government shutdown, which paused official reporting and left policymakers and markets guessing. Now, even with figures in hand, much remains foggy. Recent hiring gains were concentrated in familiar pockets: healthcare, restaurants, and bars. These are sectors that thrive when people are going out, getting sick, and growing older, hardly a sign of transformative economic growth. Meanwhile, transportation, manufacturing and government payrolls all shrank, pointing to deeper structural weaknesses.

A new anxiety also lingers beneath the surface: highly educated young workers are struggling far more than expected. It is unusual to see college graduates facing rising unemployment while service industries vacuum up workers. This hints at shifting workforce dynamics in the aftermath of an AI revolution that is reshaping the demand for mid-level skills. Job seekers are experiencing the future of work not as an exciting frontier, but as thousands of unanswered applications and rejections citing "insufficient experience".

Corporate America's own behaviour offers further cause for caution. Some of the country's most recognised companies have cut jobs or announced plans to do so, citing economic uncertainty and technological change.

This cracks the long-standing narrative of a "low-hire, low-fire" labour market that cushioned the pandemic recovery. For many firms, the hesitation to expand payrolls appears to reflect concern about tepid consumer spending, especially among lower- and middle-income households being squeezed by inflation. Yet the absence of widespread layoffs means many employers may still be holding on to workers, wary of losing talent after years of scarcity and rapid wage growth. Monetary policy now finds itself at a crossroads.

The Federal Reserve has already loosened rates twice, but inflation remains above its 2 per cent comfort threshold. With such conflicting labour signals, central bankers may hesitate before easing further. After all, if policymakers themselves acknowledge they are "driving in a fog," the prudent choice may be simply to slow down.

Ultimately, this phase in the US labour market reveals a deeper truth: resilience can coexist with fragility. A single month of better-than-expected job growth cannot erase the mounting pressures on businesses, workers, and policymakers. A softer landing still appears possible, but the glide path looks narrower than before. Whether confidence returns ~ or the underlying cracks widen into something more damaging ~ will depend on whether these modest gains become a trend rather than an anomaly.

Conditional Trust

American foreign policy is driven by shifting interests. It is not anchored in permanent friendship or long-term loyalty. Its direction is shaped by national interests, domestic political pressures, and expediencies in Washington. As a result, today's cooperation may not translate into tomorrow's support

In the language of diplomacy, India and the United States are often described as "natural partners," "democracies aligned in the Indo-Pacific," and "two great powers joined by history and values." This rhetoric carries an undeniable charm. It flatters both nations and constructs an image of deep strategic harmony.

Yet for New Delhi, the time has come to look beyond these pleasantries and confront a more consequential question: Can India truly trust the United States? Cooperation between the two countries is both necessary and beneficial.

But trust ~ especially long-term strategic trust ~ must rest on consistent actions and genuine reciprocity, not on catchy slogans or the warm, feel-good language typically exchanged during summits. A candid assessment of American foreign policy, recent diplomatic conduct, and the volatility of U.S. domestic politics suggests that India must think twice before relying too heavily ~ or too eagerly ~ on Washington.

American foreign policy is driven by shifting interests. It is not anchored in permanent friendship or long-term loyalty. Its direction is shaped by national interests, domestic political pressures, and expediencies in Washington. As a result, today's cooperation may not translate into tomorrow's support.

History shows this unambiguously. For decades, the United States backed Pakistan militarily and financially, often overlooking Islamabad's support for anti-India terrorist networks.

Washington has repeatedly shifted its positions ~ at times embracing leaders it once shunned, or opposing movements it previously funded ~ depending entirely on its own strategic interests. India, a democracy that thinks in long-term strategic terms, cannot afford to overlook this pattern of marked inconsistency.

Warmth shown today may be entirely ephemeral, and it certainly does not guarantee commitment in the future.

Uneven tariffs reveal strategic double standards. India's recent purchases of discounted Russian oil ~ driven by economic rationality ~ resulted in steep tariff retaliation from Washington. Several categories of Indian exports suddenly faced sharply elevated duties, in some sectors approaching a cumulative rate of fifty percent.

What made this action especially unjust



and punitive was the inconsistency behind it. Other countries, including China, that imported equal or greater quantities of Russian oil, did not face comparable measures.

India appears to have been targeted not for the volume of its purchases, but for its refusal to kowtow to American energy policies and preferences. The lesson is clear: when India exercises strategic autonomy, Washington responds with pressure and attempts at coercion.

Such blatant asymmetry makes it exceedingly difficult to cultivate trust in the American administration.

Diplomacy is expressed not only through policies but, more importantly, through communication and symbolic gestures. These communicative actions often reveal more about intentions than official statements.

A recent episode illustrates this clearly. Soon after a significant India-Pakistan military exchange, President Trump extended a high-profile White House invitation to Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and, more notably, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Asim Munir.

The timing of this engagement was deeply inappropriate from India's perspective. At a moment of heightened tension, Washington chose to publicly court Islamabad ~ a gesture that felt like a diplomatic slap in the face to New Delhi.

Even more troubling were the president's subsequent comments claiming that he had "stopped the war" between India and Pakistan ~ a remark that implied third-party mediation India has always firmly rejected. Equally disconcerting was his assertion that Pakistan had downed several Indian fighter jets, a claim India has consistently and emphatically denied.

Such statements do not merely create misunderstandings; they undermine the credibility and reliability of American assurances. Effusive praise directed at India's leadership cannot obscure the stark contradictions between rhetoric and action.

The India-U.S. partnership has expanded significantly across defense cooperation, maritime security, higher education, and technological exchange. These developments are important and mutually beneficial. Yet deepening engagement should not be mistaken for seamless strategic alignment.

The United States tends to prefer partners who align predictably with its own strategic priorities. India, by contrast, values independence and decisively rejects the idea of becoming a subordinate actor within another nation's foreign-policy architecture.

Whenever India pursues decisions grounded in its own interests ~ maintaining relations with Russia, adopting independent positions in multilateral forums, or shaping energy policy according to domestic needs ~ it frequently encounters dissatisfaction or pressure from Washington. These reactions underscore a structural asymmetry: the United States expects alignment, while India expects respect for autonomy.

A genuine partnership must accommodate differences, not penalize them. American domestic politics introduces another layer of unpredictability. Policy priorities can shift rapidly across administrations as ideological positions and political incentives change.

Bipartisan consensus on India, while improving, remains shallow. India has repeatedly faced congressional scrutiny on issues ranging from Kashmir and citizenship laws to technology regulation and trade.

Such debates often reflect domestic political agendas rather than a coherent or carefully considered foreign-policy strategy. This volatility extends directly into the domains of education and professional mobility.

Recent data show a sharp reduction in U.S. study visas issued to Indian students,

along with policy proposals that cap the proportion of international undergraduates and restrict the number admitted from any single country.

At the same time, Indian professionals ~ who constitute the overwhelming majority of H-1B visa holders ~ now face new financial and procedural barriers that significantly tighten the path to working in the United States. These developments reveal how rapidly shifting domestic priorities in Washington can reshape the lived experiences of Indian students, families, and professionals.

Such fluctuations carry profound risks. Commitments made today may be altered, diluted, or reversed tomorrow due to electoral pressures or partisan shifts.

India must guard against basing long-term strategic planning on assumptions that may not withstand the next American election cycle. It is hoped that India and the United States will remain important partners in the decades ahead. Their cooperation will continue to influence regional stability, technological innovation, and global governance.

But partnership does not require blind trust. India must approach this relationship with maturity, prudence, strategic vision, and courage.

Recent tariff actions, contradictory diplomatic signals, and the inherent volatility of U.S. domestic politics signify that trust with the United States must always remain conditional.

India's foreign policy should be guided by long-term national interests, not shaped or swayed by shifting American political agendas. The most stable and dignified relationship between India and the United States will emerge not from unquestioning trust, but from a balanced engagement that respects India's sovereignty and strategic autonomy.

India must trust where appropriate, question where necessary, and ultimately rely on its own judgment ~ rather than succumb to pressure or depend on assurances from a more powerful nation.

The Korea Herald

Signals of crisis

South Korean companies forecast that Korea could be overtaken by China across all of its top 10 export industries within the next five years, according to a survey of domestic firms conducted by the Federation of Korean Industries.

Korea has already been overtaken by China in half of its top 10 export sectors ~ steel, general machinery, secondary batteries, displays and automobiles and auto parts ~ and is expected to fall behind China in semiconductors, electrical and electronics, shipbuilding, petrochemicals and bio-health.

China's rise is nothing new, but if Korea is overtaken by China in all of its major export sectors and the gap widens, the country's exports and growth could fall into a long slump.

Korea should take this bleak outlook seriously and find a way to boost its industrial competitiveness.

In terms of product branding, Korea was also evaluated to be a step ahead of

China in six industries, but it is projected to lose its advantage to China in all six of those fields within five years.

These forecasts are shocking because they are based on the information and accumulated experience that Korean companies have gained through fierce export competition.

Survey figures showed Korea has an advantage over China in five industries, but the word "advantage" rings hollow on the ground at industrial sites. Petrochemicals are a case in point. With Korea at a baseline of 100, China was rated 96.4, trailing by just a small margin.

Korea's petrochemicals industry is undergoing restructuring, affected by China's facility expansion and mass supply of its products at cheap prices. Korea's factory utilization rate has fallen to the 60 percent range.

Korea also faces a strong challenge in semiconductors. In the third quarter of

this year, China's SMIC took third place with 5.1 percent of the global foundry market, encroaching on Korea's Samsung Electronics, in second with 7.3 percent.

Particularly in the emerging field of artificial intelligence, China is galloping forward.

Kimi K2 Thinking, a new model developed by Beijing-based startup Moonshot AI, outperformed OpenAI's GPT-5 across a number of metrics, generating buzz about another DeepSeek moment and end to American AI supremacy. DeepSeek is the Chinese AI startup that created a sensation with its highly cost-effective AI model.

Meanwhile, Korea tumbled nine spots from sixth last year to 15th this year in the World Digital Competitiveness ranking released by the Institute for Management Development in Switzerland. The country fell behind Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, not to mention the US and China.

Korea's talent ranking plunged 30 notches to 49th, and in terms of regulatory

framework, it fell 20 spots to 38th. The urgency of developing digital and AI talent is nothing new, but Korea's nosedive on the index over the last year is a grave signal.

In the FKI survey, 62.5 percent chose China as the biggest competitor of South Korea in the global trade market. In terms of corporate competitiveness, the US and China were expected to pull far ahead of South Korea, while Japan was forecast to narrow the gap with South Korea over the next five years.

China is no longer a "fast follower." It is a leading player not only in semiconductors and automobiles ~ the industries that drive South Korea's exports ~ but also in such advanced fields as artificial intelligence, robotics and batteries.

China's rise has been driven by strong, government-led investments in strategic industries. In contrast, South Korea is falling behind, stuck with anti-business regulations and entrenched labor market rigidity, among other factors.

opposition is trying to come back to power against an incumbent ruling for so long and yet failing to make the slightest dent, the malaise runs deep.

Yours, etc., Avijit Ghatak, Durgapur, 19 November.

Confused

Sir, This refers to the ongoing SIR exercise in West Bengal. I was refused, by the visiting BLO, the SIR form as my name was not on the 2025 list given to the BLO. The BLO instead gave me form 6 to fill up and submit as a new voter. This was in spite of advising the BLO that my name is on the 2002 electoral list. What is the actual procedure? I'm confused .

Yours, etc., P K Haldar, Kolkata, 19 November.



Not all is well with Europe

GAUTAM BHATTACHARYA

The recent peace initiative by the US to put an end to the Russia-Ukraine conflict exposed the fissure points of continental Europe. Donald Tusk, the Prime Minister of Poland said “It is striking but it’s true. Right now, 500 million Europeans are begging 300 million Americans for protection from 140 million Russians who have been unable to overcome 50 million Ukrainians for three years.” The statement of the Polish PM best describes the political scenario of the West. Decline in geo-political importance of Europe, economic stagnation, and illegal immigration primarily from certain Asian and African countries created new challenges for the liberal democracies of Europe.

In the last three decades, European nations increasingly depended on NATO for their security issues against all possible threats from the East – perceived or real. Because of that, the number of member-countries in NATO increased from 16 in 1991 to 32 in 2025. It is natural that the European nations, particularly the smaller ones will be unnerved if the US takes a neutral stand when a member nation or a nation aspiring to be a part of NATO is in conflict with a non-NATO nation.

After the summit of US and Russia at Alaska on August 15 and at short notice, the German chancellor, French President, British Prime Minister, Italian Prime Minister,

Finnish President and President of the European Commission all rushed to the US to ensure that the peace solution was not tilted towards Russian demands. The events of August 2025 only exposed the increased irrelevance of Europe in global geo-politics and dependence of the European nations on the US when it comes to a perceived threat from Russia. In this respect, the situation seems to have not changed much since cold-war days.

The economic scenario of Europe is also not good. GDP growth of Germany in the year 2024 was 0.2 per cent, Belgium had a growth of 0.3 per cent, Italy had 0.7 per cent, France had 0.8 per cent, and the UK had 1.1 per cent. The long-drawn war between Russia and Ukraine raised the price of fuel in the European market. This along with low labour productivity coming out of rigid labour market regulations and lack of business innovation, primarily because of lack of venture capital, led to economic stagnation in major European economies.

Out of the top 500 Fortune Global companies, only 143 were from Europe in 2021. The number declined by 15 in two decades. Amongst the top 10 companies in the list of 2024, not a single European company is there. China has 139 companies in the list as against 128 of the US.

Out of 44 countries in Europe, 27 are members of the European Union (EU). The budget of the European Union is essentially a redistributive tool “to promote cohesion across the bloc”. Their receipts primarily come from import

duties collected from goods coming from outside the Union, a share of the national value added tax and national contributions based on Gross National Income. Whereas the mighty powers of continental Europe viz. Germany, France, Netherland and Italy contributed heavily, Poland, Greece, Hungary, Romania and some others were the net beneficiaries.

As of 2023, in terms of million euros, the net pay-out of Germany was 19,753, that of France was 9,333. In contrast, net receipt of Poland was 7,001 million Euros and that of Greece was 3,609. The unemployed and the poor people of the bigger European nations often tend to equate reasons of their misfortune with this redistributive mechanism across the countries.

Next comes the issue of illegal migrants. In the 1960s, immigrants in large numbers started coming to France, the UK, Netherland etc. from their erstwhile colonies. In the 1980s many European nations started recruiting ‘guest workers’ from Africa and Asia. The illegal immigration from Africa and Asia has been occurring in large numbers only since the 1990s. The number increased to crisis proportions in 2015. In that year 1.3 million people came to Europe, primarily from Syria. A substantial number of these illegals either seek asylum alleging political or religious intimidation in their own country or ask for refugee status after a hideout of a certain number of years. Many claim themselves as ‘stateless’.



In Sweden, the immigrants (first and second generation together) constituted more than a fourth of the country’s population. France had the second largest foreign-born population in Europe, next only to Germany and tied with the UK.

Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Nigeria, Somalia, Gambia, Iran, Bangladesh, and Senegal are the non-European countries from where the asylum-seekers come in huge numbers. Beside humanitarian considerations, the liberal outlook of Germany, France, Sweden and other West European nations had an economic angle also in accepting the immigrants. Population growth in many such developed European nations is dwindling and in certain sectors, locals are unavailable for low-grade jobs. The immigrants of

non-European origin are a significant part of the informal economy. However, an increasing number of immigrants may in the long run impact the identity and culture of the nations.

Liberal immigration policies of European nations are being increasingly challenged by the Conservatives and far-right political groups. Far-right parties recorded their best performance in the European parliament election (2024) and gains were especially significant in France, Germany, and Italy. The hope of resurgence of a liberal democratic Europe, which was expected in the post-Cold War period in 1990s, seems to have been belied over the years.

(The writer, a former civil servant, is an independent commentator on socio-economic issues and public policies.)

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 24 November 1925

OCCASIONAL NOTE

THERE is very much more than conventionality in the tributes to the memory of the late Queen Alexandra that pour in from all quarters of the Empire. Apart from the love that she inspired, her death is felt almost as the closing of an epoch. So long had she been with us that her life, since she came as a bride to England, had covered the transition from the mid-Victorian era to the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century. When she landed, Gladstone had not yet become Prime Minister for the first time, the future of Benjamin Disraeli was still an uncertainty, and Bismarck had not embarked on the policy of “blood and iron” that was to consolidate the Prussian Empire. The war of 1870 that made almost certain the Great War forty-four years later was not thought of. The first iron clad had scarcely been launched and the Navy still used sails for movement. That gives us some measure of the changes that Queen Alexandra had seen.

News Items

DEPUTATION TO SOUTH AFRICA

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF INDIAN SETTLERS

Delhi, Nov. With the concurrence of the Government of South Africa (states an official communique) the Government of India have decided to send a deputation to South Africa. Mr. G. F. Paddison c.s.i., i.e.s., Commissioner of Labour, Madras, will lead the deputation, the remaining personnel of which will be announced shortly. Two main purpose of the deputation will be to collect as soon as possible, first-hand information regarding the economic condition and general position of the resident Indian community in South Africa, and to form an appreciation of the wishes of the Indian community in South Africa. It is expected that their report will afford valuable material to the Government of India for use in connexion with the discussions which are now proceeding between the two Governments.

BOMBAY COCAINE CASE

Bombay, Nov. The application on behalf of King in the cocaine smuggling case, for a postponement till Tuesday of the further hearing which is fixed for to-morrow, was rejected to-day by the Third Presidency Magistrate! Counsel for King said that his client wanted to engage a senior counsel who would not be in Bombay before Tuesday.

STEAMER’S EXPERIENCE

TRACES OF COLLISION

London, Nov. A Stockholm communique says the Master of the Vidar has reported that at 7-45 on the morning of November 12 instant while in the English Channel a shock was noticed, which was considered to be due to a detonation under water. Having been informed of the sinking of the M-1 the Master thought it possible that the shock was connected with the disaster. Hence the Vidar was examined by divers and it was discovered that the stem under the waterline was heavily bent towards the port side, and also that several rivets had gone and plates were damaged, indicating a collision with some submarine object.—Reuter’s Special Service.

GERMANY AND THE PACT

GOVERNMENT TO RESIGN

Berlin, Nov. Opening the Locarno debate in the Reichstag, Dr. Luther declared that the Government would resign after the signature of the Locarno agreements in London on December 1. He expressed the opinion that a new Government could only be one which was determined to pursue a policy of harmonising with the Locarno agreements.—Reuter.

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

Joy and pain in a hospital



You never know what challenges and rewards a new kind of work will bring. The more unfamiliar the work, the more unexpected can be what it unfurls in your life.

I worked as a volunteer for a period in a hospital near my home in Washington. It was inspired by a chance encounter with another volunteer, an elderly teacher, who had served in the same hospital for some years and found it rewarding. How rewarding, I asked him. He offered an example.

A young woman came in one morning with an inert infant, frantic for help, lost in the labyrinth of a huge hospital. The volunteer did not recognize her, but she recognized him instantly as a teacher whose class she had attended briefly. He helped her in the emergency room, intervened to find a doctor quickly and the child revived. She came back to the hospital to thank him, invited him to her home and made him a member of her family.

The volunteer was a kind man, who introduced me to a couple of other volunteers and their enthusiasm persuaded me to join the group. A large hospital, with its many sections and departments, is confusing to most outsiders. Patients who come are often in pain or anxious about a problem; they find it hard to negotiate the complexities of a modern medical establishment. They go from one department to another as directed,

flummoxed and fearful, all the time fretting that a dear one will not get timely relief. As the bills multiply, so do their concerns.

A volunteer helps to provide a human touch. He or she can provide useful information, guide a person to the right person or section, and sometimes explain an intimidating procedure. Or say a kind or healing word that seems an exception in an indifferent workplace. Most important, volunteers lend an ear to the pains and problems of patients. Some sensible hospital administrators pay attention to volunteers’ findings.

My trying first assignment was to pacify a crying girl of five whose mother had rushed to find her wrecked-car husband, losing her child in the melee. It was a festival day, with plenty of accidents, and it wasn’t easy to locate the mother as the child couldn’t say her name or the father’s. It took some tact to persuade a busy registrar in the emergency department to sift through all the recent entries to identify the probable father, and then it took some industry to run through all the rooms to identify the actual mother. The joy on the the child’s face and the parents’ relief at the sight of their child were my first inkling of why the work was worth doing.

Days weren’t often so eventful. Hours passed and little of consequence happened. People came to ask where the laboratory was, how to reach a certain

department or where to get some coffee. Some were not sure how to complete a form. Others lacked some needed document or information and wondered how to proceed. Several were from out of town and needed some direction. I learned to keep some maps and subway guides handy.

I also learned how to quickly access a cane, a walker or a wheelchair. Patients and visitors fell or collapsed at regular intervals and needed speedy help. Anxiety about a dear parent or stress about the outcome of scheduled surgery probably accounted for some of their problems.

Locating patients in a large hospital, especially when patients are moved around either for tests or for procedures was sometimes a quandary for their family members. I began to identify persons moving desultorily or asking too many questions of passing staff. They were happy to have a receptive person, listening attentively to their concerns and offering to help. A young mother came in with a bleeding five-year-old with a nasty gash, too distraught to be able to answer questions, and I had to spend several minutes calming her down before taking her to the emergency physicians. A middle-aged Ethiopian worker, new to the country and limited in his vocabulary, found it hard to explain his problem; I spent forty minutes untangling his story before handing him over to a nurse.



Illustration by : Debabrata Chakrabarty

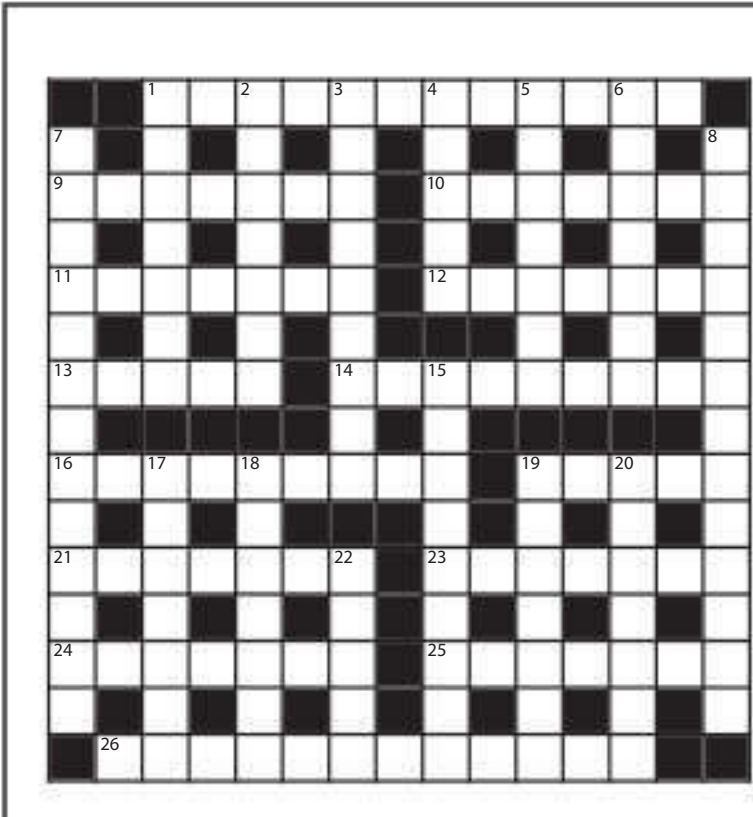
My familiarity with several languages, which had earlier helped me in my executive and diplomatic work, turned out to be of new use. Nobody can be proficient with the bewildering variety of diction and accent of the Spanish-speaking world, but I found it an exhilarating challenge to decipher the problems of many Hispanics, who work tough jobs in construction and renovation and often sustain serious injuries. Their needs were urgent, their means limited, and I was often able to listen patiently, comfort them and pass on detailed notes to the nurses. One came back weeks later, with a small cake

made by the patient’s wife, to thank me for my assistance.

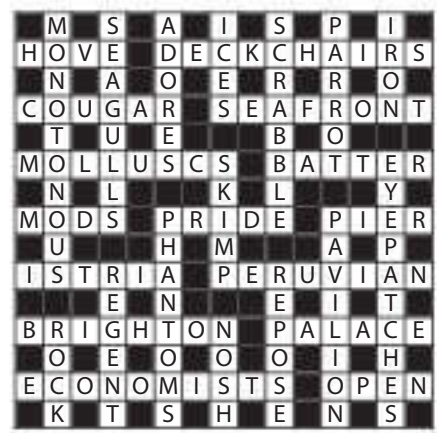
My professional life has been spread over several years, in diverse jobs in industry, development projects, diplomacy and consulting, but – barring my heart-wrenching work with refugees of different countries – I find it hard to think of anything I have ever done that matches the remarkable joy of helping, in some small measure, the helpless in the daunting maze of a mammoth hospital.

(The writer is a US-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com)

Crossword | No. 293301



Last Saturday's Solution



ACROSS

- Spaghetti, perhaps – mostly cooked al dente – followed by a custard tart (6,2,4)
- Collective quote initially made out for sports equipment (4,3)
- Country's king essentially favours disorder (7)
- Most free facilities bedsit's occasionally lacking (7)
- How mate can be made to provide commission (7)

- Snacks are covered in bugs (5)
- Welcome guys inside following a deal (9)
- Two soldiers possibly entertained by Liverpool FC stars (3,6)
- I am absorbed by a new electronic form of Japanese art (5)
- Disgusting smell around site (7)
- Absolutely no more cake! (4-3)

- English and Irish visiting China and Dubai, for example (7)
- Offensive din carries over miles (7)
- Anniversary gift I'd chat about with bakery? (8,4)
- PR event is crap, encapsulating the very opposite of cool (5,2)
- Small bags of top-class cocaine and heroin put in batches (7)

- Reading issue certainly present in European school (9)
- Part of kit containing posh ingredient for making pasta (5)
- One cast featuring an explosive Oscar candidate (7)
- Metal objects drifting in water (7)
- Sweet income generated by a tech giant? (5,8)
- Material from planet earth excitedly probed by returning alien (6,7)

- Regular gigs in clubs in the far edge of Upper East Side New York (9)
- Fling odd spots of ink on interviewer's face and shirt (7)
- One succeeding taking a cape off (7)
- Coffee cultivated primarily in part of Asia (7)
- Damaged case of rosé is not available for purchase? (2-5)
- Polish troops occupying base close to Stargard (5)

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



Editor's
TAKE

Modi's six-point mantra for a better world

Prime Minister Modi sets the agenda of the G20 Summit. Its outcome reflected renewed drive toward cooperation and a more equitable world order

There are numerous global forums where nations gather to devise common strategies and chart pathways for regional and collective progress. Yet many of these platforms become mired in competing interests, eventually reduced to talking shops with little tangible change on the ground. The G20 Summit in Johannesburg, however, stood out as a clear exception. For once, member countries rose unanimously against the high-handedness of developed nations and resisted US pressure, asserting their demand for greater equity in the global economic order. The highlight of the Summit was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's six-point plan which was pragmatic and was hailed by one and all. These six points could bring about a radical change if they are implemented in right earnest. Yet another highlight which made the Summit relevant was the adoption of a climate declaration despite a US boycott and pressure. Prime Minister Modi's six proposals gave clarity and practicality to Summit's agenda and alignment with the priorities of the Global South. The first point on the drug-terror nexus underlined the urgent need for coordinated action against crime networks that destabilise economies and societies, especially in the low GDP countries.

His second proposal, the G20 Global Healthcare Response Team borne out of Corona pandemic could be a game changer when health emergency strikes on global scale. By creating a trained, deployable medical corps, the G20 can respond swiftly to future health emergencies – especially in vulnerable regions. This initiative, if realised, can be one of the most practical solutions for mitigating health emergencies.

PM Modi's push for a G20 Africa-Skills Multiplier Initiative further positioned India as an advocate for African development. Skill-building and workforce transformation are essential for global economic growth. Equally significant was Modi's call for a Global Traditional Knowledge Repository—a platform that recognises the value of indigenous knowledge in medicine, agriculture, and sustainability. This could create a vast pool of traditional knowledge gathered over thousands of years and put to best use of humanity. The final two proposals – a G20 Open Satellite Data Partnership and the Critical Minerals Circularity Initiative—link technological collaboration with resource security. With global transitions to clean energy accelerating, critical minerals will determine economic power and environmental stability. Modi's alignment with the Summit's emphasis on a 'Critical Minerals Framework' reflects the shared understanding that producer countries, must benefit more equitably from their resources. The Summit's biggest achievement was the adoption of the G20 Leaders' Declaration. The document underscored the need to scale climate finance “from billions to trillions” and acknowledged deep energy-access inequalities, especially in Africa. This commitment resonates with the long-standing demand of developing countries that climate ambition must be matched by climate finance. If carried forward with sincerity, these outcomes can ensure a fairer, greener, and more stable world.

Four New Labour Codes: A Historic Reform

By replacing 29 colonial-era Acts with four new Labour Codes, the government has created a unified and modern labour framework suited to today's economy. The move reshapes wages, social security, workplace safety, and industrial relations



KAPIL
MISHRA

India took a decisive leap on 21 November 2025, one that has been delayed for over seven decades. With the rollout of the four new Labour Codes, the Modi Government has finally swept away the tangled web of 29 outdated, colonial-era laws written in the 1930s to 1950s. Those laws belonged to a different India; not the world's fastest-growing major economy aspiring to become Viksit Bharat by 2047. In one stroke, that old system has been replaced with a modern, unified, pro-worker, pro-industry framework designed for ambition, mobility and dignity. As the Prime Minister often says, *"Naye Bharat ka shramik majboor nahi, majboot hai."*

For the first time, India's labour landscape speaks one language. Wages now have one national definition, ending decades of confusion that let arbitrary payments and exploitation thrive. This change is a historic reform carried out under the Code on Wages, 2019, which unified four earlier wage-related laws and established a clear, uniform wage framework for the entire country. Minimum wages apply to every worker across sectors, overtime must be paid at double rates, and gender discrimination is illegal: full stop. Even transgender workers stand protected in law. This is the kind of transparent, just framework that workers in the Indian economy deserve. And this, too, is where Modi's governance philosophy comes alive: simple rules, fair outcomes, and a system that treats every worker with respect.

The reforms go far deeper than the headline numbers. The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 makes grievance redressal real: committees must have women members, fixed-term employment now guarantees social security and gratuity without trapping employers in outdated restrictions, and work-from-home finally finds a place in Indian law. Digitalisation ensures fewer disputes and faster justice. *Yeh hai asli ease of living aur ease of doing business*, working together instead of working at odds.

But perhaps the most transformational change is in the Social Security Code, 2020. India has become one of the first nations to bring gig and platform workers (delivery partners, cab drivers, app-based freelancers) into the formal safety net. A dedicated fund, mandatory contributions from aggregators, universal social-security portability and expanded family definitions for women employees reflect a welfare architecture built for the 21st-century workforce. When a gig



INDIA HAS BECOME ONE OF THE FIRST NATIONS TO BRING GIG AND PLATFORM WORKERS — DELIVERY PARTNERS, CAB DRIVERS, APP-BASED FREELANCERS — INTO THE FORMAL SAFETY NET

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worker delivering food at midnight gets legal recognition and future protection, it signals a country whose development model includes everyone, not just the privileged few.

The gains of reforms are already visible in states that moved early. Gujarat recorded 13.36 per cent GDP growth between 2022-23 and 2023-24, with manufacturing contributing an impressive 28-30 per cent, well above the national average.

Andhra Pradesh's reforms helped add 5.7 lakh organised manufacturing jobs, the largest jump among all states. Uttar Pradesh added 7.4 lakh workers in organised manufacturing over last 5 years, Rajasthan saw a 13per cent surge in female workers after allowing women to work night shifts, and Haryana's unemployment rate fell sharply from 9.3per cent to 3.4 per cent. These are not abstract numbers; they are evidence that when states embrace reforms, rozgar badhta hai, nivesh aata hai, aur parivartan zameen par dikhta hai.

Safety and dignity, long overlooked in Indian labour laws, finally stand front and centre. The new Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 ensures every establishment with ten or more workers must meet modern safety standards, migrant workers receive formal protection, women can work in all sectors including night shifts with proper safeguards, and mandatory health check-ups and appointment letters become the norm. Even a single worker involved in hazardous activity is now covered.

The days of "adjust kar lo" workplace culture are over; the law now recognises the inherent dignity of labour.

Politically, this reform marks a clear contrast between PM Modi's governance and decades of stagnation under the previous governments. For years, successive governments promised labour reform but hesitated. Complexities, pressure groups and inertia ensured nothing changed. Modi's government has done what others only debated, aligning India's labour regime with global standards while keeping workers at the centre. This positions the BJP as the genuine champion of the working class: factory floor workers, gig-economy youth, migrant families, women entering new sectors, and MSME employees who have long lived in the shadows of informality. *Jo kaam dusron ne 70 saal tak nahi kiya, woh kaam Modi sarkar ne ek faisle se kar dikhaya.*

In the end, these Labour Codes are more than administrative reform. They are a shift in national character. For workers, they mean rights without hurdles. For industry, compliance without harassment. For India, they mean productivity, formality and growth, aligned with the standards of nations we aim to compete with, not trails we hope to follow.

This is not just an economic reform. It is a civilisational step toward a New India where every worker stands taller, every industry moves faster, and every aspiration finds a fair chance.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

The fearless protector of faith and human freedom



SUKHDEV
SINGH

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs, stands in history as a towering symbol of courage, sacrifice, and the universal right to religious freedom. His martyrdom was not only an act of spiritual conviction but a bold assertion of human rights long before the concept gained global recognition.

His life and teachings carried forward Guru Nanak's principle that the Sole Commanding Power—Ek Omkar—is truth without fear (Nirbhau) and without enmity (Nirvair). From this flowed a simple but profound ideal: humans must neither instil fear in others nor live in fear themselves. Guru Tegh Bahadur wrote and lived this philosophy. His verse captures the essence of freedom from fear:

One who does not cause fear to anyone, nor does he fear anyone. He alone is enlightened—thus says Nanak. This principle shaped his greatest sacrifice. When a group of Kashmiri Brahmins sought his protection from attempts at forced conversion by officials of Emperor Aurangzeb, Guru Tegh Bahadur assured them courage. He told them to convey that if he himself converted, they would follow. Soon after, he was arrested and taken from Agra to Delhi along with his companions—Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das, Bhai Dyal Das, Bhai Gurditta, and Bhai Jaita.

The Guru was ordered to perform a miracle or embrace Islam. His refusal led Aurangzeb to brutally martyr the Guru's companions before his eyes, hoping to break his resolve. Bhai Mati Das was sawed alive, Bhai Dyal Das was boiled in water, and Bhai Sati Das was burned after being wrapped in cotton. Yet the Guru remained calm, rooted in the understanding of the body's impermanence: The human body is made of the five elements and returns to the source from which it arose. In November 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded in Delhi. His body was secretly taken and cremated by a Sikh merchant, while his head was carried to Anandpur Sahib by Bhai Jaita and cremated by the young Guru Gobind Rai, the tenth Guru. Born on April 1, 1621, in Amritsar to Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahadur was originally named Tyag

Mal. He earned the name "Tegh Bahadur"—Brave Swordsman—for his valour in the Battle of Kartarpur. His early education included reading, writing, religion, music, martial training, and horsemanship. Influenced deeply by Guru Hargobind's doctrine of Miri-Piri, he combined spiritual depth with worldly responsibility. After years of meditation in Bakala and a long pilgrimage, he was identified as the true Guru through the famous incident of Makhan Shah Lubana, who announced "Guru ladho re!" upon finding the genuine Guru. During his travels across the North, East, and Assam, Guru Tegh Bahadur spread Guru Nanak's teachings and founded Anandpur Sahib—the City of Bliss.

As persecution under Aurangzeb intensified, he travelled extensively to inspire people to face tyranny with steadfast faith. Guru Tegh Bahadur composed 59 shabads and 57 shlokas incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib. His verses guide humans toward detachment, integrity, and inner freedom. His life and martyrdom remain eternal reminders of the right to live—and believe—without fear.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

The writer is Professor (Retd) of Applied Linguistics & ELT Department of English Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mamdani-Trump ties raise eyebrows

Zohran Mamdani's historic meeting with Donald Trump at the White House represents more than just a ceremonial political event — it highlights the transactional and unpredictable nature of US-India relations. Despite Trump's well-known personal camaraderie with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his administration has repeatedly imposed steep tariffs on Indian goods, showing that his diplomacy is often driven by short-term gains rather than consistent strategic logic.

Mamdani, notably the son of acclaimed Indian filmmaker Mira Nair, embodies the rising influence of the Indian diaspora in American politics. His growing rapport with Trump, a leader with whom he previously clashed ideologically, illustrates how Indian-origin figures are increasingly bridging divides across the US political spectrum. Yet, while the friendship appears warm and cordial, the continued enforcement of harsh economic policies toward India underscores Trump's transactional style. Personal bonds, even when publicly celebrated, do not always translate into favorable policy outcomes. This encounter reflects both opportunity and caution, highlighting the diaspora's influence while reminding India to navigate Washington carefully.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

Fatima bosch crowned Miss Universe 2025

Kudos to Fatima Bosch of Mexico for being crowned Miss Universe 2025 at the 74th edition of the event held in Bangkok, Thailand. Her poise, intelligence, and radiant charm helped her clinch the coveted title in a finale that showcased her grace, confidence, and sharp thinking.

Fatima's winning answer focused on believing in one's authenticity and self-worth, while also creating safe spaces for women globally. This approach embodies "real beauty" — a combination of a beautiful mind, constructive thought processes, and a commitment to empowering others.

India's own Manika Vishwakarma also made a mark by reaching the Top 30 out of 120 contestants, reflecting the continued presence and promise of Indian participants on the global stage. Historically, three Indian women — Sushmita Sen (1994), Lara Dutta (2000), and Harnaaz Sandhu (2021) have won Miss Universe crowns, each later entering successful film careers.

Globally, the US leads with nine titles, followed by Venezuela (7), Puerto Rico (5), Philippines (4), Mexico (4), and India ranking sixth with three crowns. These results highlight both the competitive spirit of the pageant and the growing influence of diverse cultures on the world stage.

SREELEKHA PS | TELANGANA

Labour codes to reshape workforce

India has embarked on a new labour era with the Government implementing the Four Labour Codes: the Code on Wages (2019), Industrial Relations Code (2020), Code on Social Security (2020), and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (2020). These reforms represent one of the most comprehensive and far-reaching workforce changes since Independence, aimed at modernising and streamlining labour legislation across the country.

The new codes are designed to ensure universal social security, the timely payment of minimum wages, safer workplaces, and equitable opportunities for women, gig workers, and agriculturists. By consolidating and simplifying multiple existing laws, these reforms make compliance easier for employers while more effectively safeguarding workers' rights. Crucially, the codes benefit both organised and unorganised sector employees, addressing long-standing gaps in social protection and labour welfare. They focus on fair remuneration, workplace safety, social security coverage, and mechanisms for dispute resolution, making them progressive and inclusive. By modernising labour laws holistically, India is laying the foundation for a more secure, equitable, and productive workforce.

DIMPLE WADHAWAN | KANPUR NAGAR

BIHAR ADOPTS HARDLINE STRATEGY FOR STABILITY

The Nitish Kumar-led Bihar government is in decisive action. Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary being allotted the Home Minister portfolio has surprised many, sparking widespread speculation about the reasons and implications. Traditionally, the Chief Minister retained the Home Department, reflecting the importance of law and order and the need to entrust it either to himself or to a trusted confidant.

This strategic allocation appears to be a headline move, balancing coalition interests while maintaining a strong grip on governance. Deputy CM Choudhary will now oversee the law and order apparatus, signalling a determined approach to crime control, while CM Nitish Kumar focuses on administrative functions through

the General Administration Department, ensuring sustained control over bureaucracy. Immediately after assuming charge, efforts to strengthen policing and operational efficiency have been initiated, demonstrating a robust commitment to public safety.

The distribution of portfolios reflects a calculated, forward-looking plan aimed at stabilising governance and promoting overall development.

By clearly delineating responsibilities, the government positions itself to navigate coalition dynamics while maintaining effective oversight across departments.

Bihar's leadership adopts a decisive, hardline strategy to secure law, administration, and political stability.


SUNIL OKHADE | INDORE

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

The harbinger of freedom of conscience in India

Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom in 1675 was India's first great stand for freedom of conscience. His defence of the persecuted Kashmiri Pandits anticipated the principles now enshrined in global human-rights charters. Three and a half centuries later, his message remains central to India's pluralist ethos


FIRST
Column





JAGMOHAN SINGH RAJU

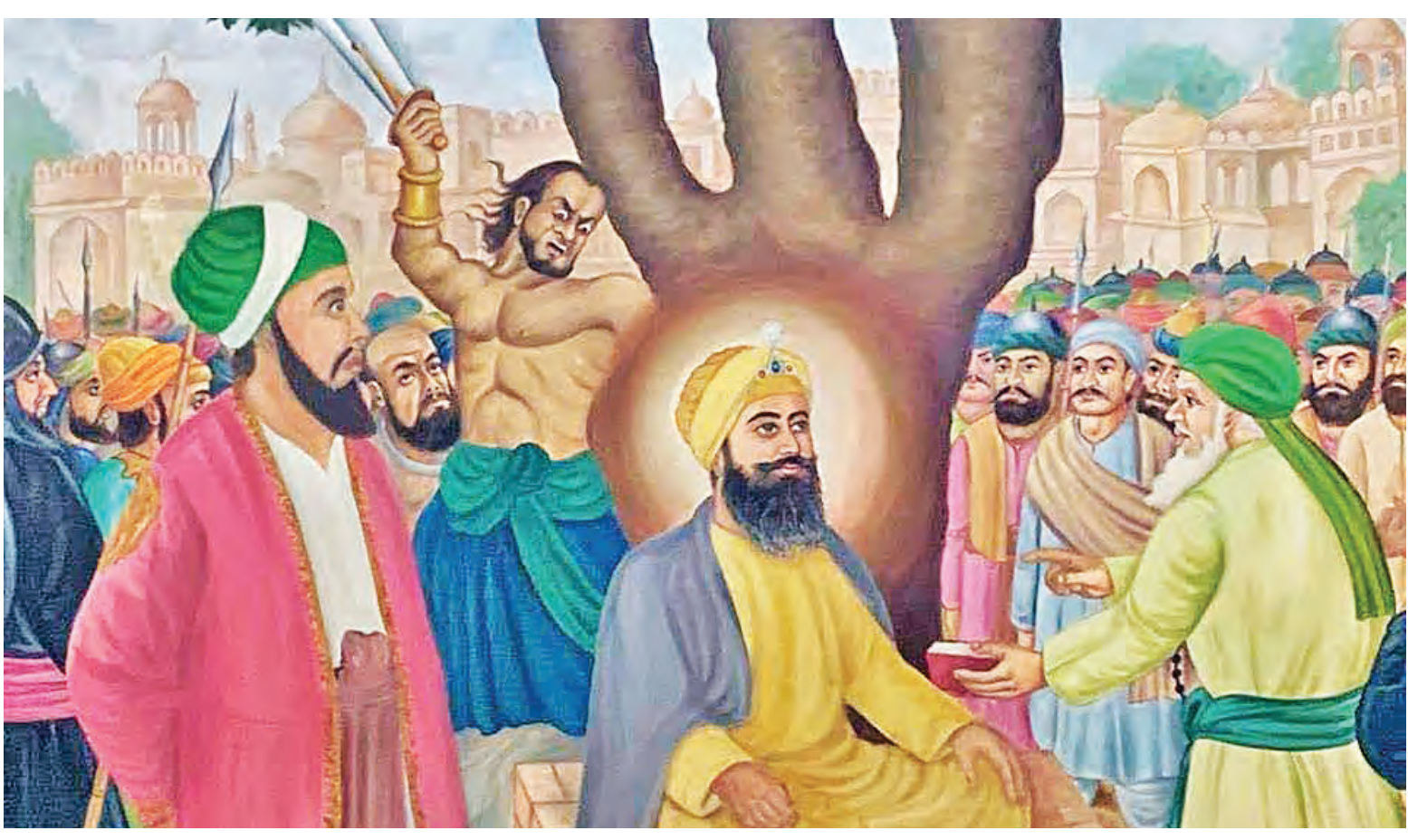
Long before constitutional guarantees or modern rights charters, India witnessed a defining assertion of freedom of conscience. It came not from a monarch, parliament or court, but from the scaffold at Delhi's Chandni Chowk on 24 November 1675, when Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru, chose martyrdom to defend the right of Hindus to practice their faith. Born in 1621 in Amritsar, Guru Tegh Bahadur was a saint, poet, warrior and thinker whose 115 hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib emphasise detachment, fearlessness, compassion and the sovereignty of the human soul. His life and writings prepared a society to confront intolerance with moral courage. Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom, often remembered for its religious greatness, also deserves recognition as a foundational chapter in India's political evolution. It was the earliest and clearest assertion in Indian history that the conscience of an individual is sovereign, that even the mightiest empire cannot command belief, and that the defence of faith includes the defence of another's freedom to worship differently. It was a rebellion not of armies but of spirit, not for territory but for moral principle, and in many ways it marked the moral beginning of India's long journey towards freedom of faith, pluralism and civic dignity. To appreciate the magnitude of the Guru's stand, one must recall the climate of Aurangzeb's reign, which began in 1658 and grew increasingly doctrinaire. In the 1670s, when his campaign of forced conversions spread terror across parts of the Mughal Empire, the blow fell most brutally on the Kashmiri Pandits. Their temples were desecrated, their religious practices prohibited, and their leaders threatened with death unless they embraced Islam. Desperate and distraught, a delegation of Kashmiri Pandits travelled to Anandpur Sahib to seek Guru Tegh Bahadur's intervention. They approached him not as the chief of a sect but as a moral guardian of the vulnerable. They saw in him someone who could protect dharma in the highest sense - the right to faith, to worship and to live with dignity. That they turned to a Sikh Guru rather than to a Hindu king or a rival army

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GURU TEGH BAHADUR'S MARTYRDOM, OFTEN REMEMBERED FOR ITS RELIGIOUS GREATNESS, ALSO DESERVES RECOGNITION AS A FOUNDATIONAL CHAPTER IN INDIA'S POLITICAL EVOLUTION

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is itself telling. It reflected the moral authority the Guru commanded across communities. By this time, Sikhism had a distinct and firmly rooted identity, built on equality, service and the rejection of dogma and caste barriers. Yet Guru Tegh Bahadur's vision transcended the boundaries of his own tradition. He responded to the Pandits not as the representative of a community defending its own, but as the custodian of a universal principle. He affirmed that faith cannot be coerced and conscience cannot be subjugated, and that the protection of another's belief is as sacred a duty as the protection of one's own. When the Guru observed that religious persecution unleashed by Aurangzeb could be confronted only through sacrifice by an exalted soul, his nine-year-old son Gobind Rai, later Guru Gobind Singh, answered with clarity that there was no spiritually exalted soul greater than his father. Guru Tegh Bahadur understood instantly that the sacrifice had to be his. He did not negotiate, raise an army or propose retaliation. Instead, he offered himself as the solitary challenger to imperial coercion. This willingness to embrace martyrdom for the religious freedom of others is unique in world history. It was an act of absolute moral courage, for it sought no victory except the triumph of a principle. The Guru was arrested at Agra, imprisoned at Delhi's Red Fort, tortured and repeatedly asked to embrace Islam. He refused every inducement and threat. When persuasion failed, the Mughal court killed his Sikh companions, one by one, to break his resolve. Inspired by the Guru's leadership and true to his teachings, his Sikhs cast away fear and embraced death with unshakable faith. Bhai Mati Das was sawn alive; Bhai Sati Das was wrapped in cotton, smeared with oil and burned; and Bhai Dayal Das was boiled to death in a

cauldron. None renounced their faith or abandoned their Guru. Their courage elevated martyrdom from religious testimony to moral protest, asserting the dignity of human conscience against the weight of imperial power. The Guru was beheaded on 24 November 1675 in full public view where Gurudwara Shishganj is located in Delhi today. What followed after the beheading was no less heroic. Bhai Jaita, later known as Bhai Jiwan Singh, carried the Guru's severed head from Delhi to Anandpur Sahib, evading capture with remarkable ingenuity. Lakhhi Shah Banjara, a cart driver, placed the Guru's body in his cart, took it home and set his own house on fire to perform the cremation, since open cremation was forbidden. These men came from different castes and backgrounds - Arora, Brahmin, Khatri, Lubana - yet in that moment of crisis they stood united in devotion and purpose. They demonstrated that in the Guru's path caste dissolves,

and the humblest individual can rise to unforgettable greatness. The Guru's martyrdom did not end with his death. It sowed the seeds of spiritual resistance that later flowered into the Khalsa under Guru Gobind Singh. The Khalsa was not merely a religious brotherhood but a disciplined community committed to justice, equality, fearlessness and service. Over the following centuries, this spirit shaped Sikh history and the history of India. Banda Singh Bahadur dismantled the Mughal regime in Sirhind and asserted the dignity of peasants. The Sikh misls challenged Mughal and Afghan dominance. Maharaja Ranjit Singh built a plural, inclusive kingdom admired even by his adversaries. The Singh Sabha reformers revived the Panth's intellectual and social foundations. Kartar Singh Sarabha, Bhagat Singh and Udham Singh carried the torch of freedom into the modern age. Sikh soldiers serving India after independence inherited the same legacy of courage, discipline and sacrifice. The moral stamina that sustained India's freedom, integrity and civic courage can trace its origin to the moment when Guru Tegh Bahadur offered his life at Chandni Chowk. The principles for which he died were so universal that they resonate beyond the borders of India. The United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirm that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion - a right Guru Tegh Bahadur defended with his life nearly three centuries before the world formally recognised it. His stand anticipates, and in many ways prefigures, the modern global consensus on the sanctity of conscience. That a seventeenth-century Indian spiritual leader articulated this principle at the cost of his life is a tribute both to him and to the civilisational ethos he embodied. As India marks 350 years of this martyrdom, the question is not only how we remember Guru Tegh Bahadur, but how we inherit him. His legacy urges us to uphold truth without fear, protect the vulnerable without hesitation and guard the sovereignty of conscience without compromise. It challenges us to build a society where freedom of belief is not merely tolerated but cherished as a civilisational value. His martyrdom remains an expression of India's pluralistic ethos - that the true measure of a nation lies in how it protects the moral freedom of its people.

Scientific nationalism: Reuniting science, culture, and conscience



ASHVATHAMAN

Science and nationalism are often treated as different realms-one devoted to universal truth, the other to collective identity. But in India's civilisation, they were never separate. The pursuit of knowledge was always linked to the service of the nation and the upliftment of humanity. From ancient astronomers to modern innovators, our thinkers saw no contradiction between devotion and discovery. Scientific Nationalism is the rediscovery of that balance. It calls for the reunion of intellect and integrity, innovation and identity, discovery and dharma. It reminds us that science becomes meaningful only when guided by conscience, and that nationalism becomes transformative only when empowered by knowledge.

The Civilisational Context

India has always viewed science as sacred. The Vedas described the universe as Vijnana-structured intelligence guided by order. Aryabhata's astronomy, Charaka's medicine, and Susruta's surgery were all acts of inquiry rooted in humility. Knowledge was not pursued for dominance over nature, but for harmony with it. When Dr APJ Abdul Kalam spoke of transforming India into a developed nation through science and technology, he did not separate innovation from ethics. His laboratories were spaces of national service, where rockets and satellites became symbols of collective aspiration. That spirit defines Scientific Nationalism-the conviction that the advancement of knowledge must strengthen the nation and uplift humanity.

The Philosophy

The foundation for this idea lies in Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism, which envisioned balanced growth of body, mind, heart, and soul.

- The body stands for material and technological progress,
- The mind for intellectual inquiry,

• The heart for cultural rootedness, and

• The soul for spiritual and moral direction.

• When these four dimensions work in harmony, science becomes humane, and nationalism becomes enlightened. Progress without morality leads to arrogance; patriotism without knowledge leads to stagnation. Scientific Nationalism harmonises both.

Science with Conscience

Modern technology gives humanity immense power, but without conscience, it risks dehumanisation. Artificial Intelligence can empower or exploit; biotechnology can heal or harm. The moral compass that guides these forces determines their impact. Scientific Nationalism insists that the Indian approach to science must be value-based. It does not seek to copy global models but to enrich them with civilisational wisdom. In Bharat's worldview, knowledge divorced from ethics is ignorance in disguise. True progress is that which enhances life, not that which endangers it.

The Need for Cultural Confidence


For centuries, India's scientific contribution was undervalued due to colonial narratives that separated science from spirituality. Yet, history records that Indian civilisation has always been scientific-not in imitation of others, but through its own method of observation, reasoning, and reflection. Today, as India rises in space, nuclear, and digital technologies, we must also rise in cultural confidence. When a student codes in Tamil, when a scientist researches in Hindi, or when an innovator designs for rural India, science becomes part of our living culture. It ceases to be foreign and becomes familial.


Education for a Self-Reliant Bharat


Scientific Nationalism calls for an education system that teaches not only how to think, but also why to think. The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) is a vital step towards that goal. It encourages learning in mother tongues, multidisciplinary education, and ethical reasoning-principles that bridge the divide between intellect and identity. When a student in a small town learns robotics in their native language, they are not just acquiring technical skill-they are inheriting a civilisational legacy. They become part of a tradition that sees knowledge as service, not status.

From Laboratories to National Mission

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Every innovation that serves the nation-from Chandrayaan to Digital India-embodies Scientific Nationalism in practice. ISRO's missions, indigenous vaccine development, and the semiconductor drive all show that India's path to self-reliance lies not in isolation, but in rooted innovation. For Bharat, the laboratory is a temple and innovation a form of worship-because knowledge that serves people is sacred. The scientist and the soldier serve the same mother-one by defending her borders, the other by expanding her horizons.

The Way Forward

To embed Scientific Nationalism into national consciousness, three key steps are needed:

- Integrate ethics into science education. Every engineering, medical, and research programme must teach the moral implications of innovation.
- Promote regional-language research. Translating core scientific materials into Indian languages will democratise knowledge and bridge the urban-rural divide.
- Link research with social reform. Encourage scientists to focus on national challenges-water, energy, healthcare, and agriculture-where technology directly uplifts society.

Science must no longer remain the privilege of a few; it must become the power of the many.

The Moral Compass of the Future

Scientific Nationalism is not hostility towards the world; it is humility before our own potential. It invites the global community to see science not as a race, but as a relationship-a collaboration between intelligence and compassion. Dr Kalam once said, "Dreams are not what you see in sleep; they are those that keep you awake." Scientific Nationalism is that wakeful dream-of a Bharat that creates, innovates, and leads with moral strength.

- Science gives us power.
- Culture gives us direction.
- Conscience gives us purpose.

When these three unite, Bharat will not merely follow the global race for progress-it will lead it with wisdom and humanity. Scientific Nationalism is not a slogan. It is a renaissance-a reawakening of India's timeless spirit through the instruments of modern science.

Clean India requires change in mindset and policy



KAJLEEN KAUR

Sanitation is a civic duty, a discipline that reflects the cultural ethos of the public and policymakers in a nation. While India shows promising numbers in terms of GDP and is on its way to becoming the third-largest economy in the world, it is ironic that it still grapples with fundamental challenges of cleanliness and hygiene. Dirty environments and surroundings carry social, economic, and health costs, besides tarnishing the national image and discouraging foreign tourism and investment. On the path to becoming a developed nation, the first criterion is infrastructure development, along with its maintenance, both in terms of long-term sustainability and cleanliness. While large funds are allocated every year to new projects, the upkeep of older ones remains disappointing. Land beneath flyovers often serves as free garbage dumps, contributing to urban decay, encroachments by homeless people, open defecation, and creating unhygienic conditions. Similar situations are seen at many road dividers, often occupied by mendicants seeking alms. Weak enforcement of littering laws and the absence of garbage bins at reasonable distances give people the liberty to dispose of waste in public spaces. Unplanned and rapid urbanisation has further worsened the situation, with rising demand but limited service provision. Population migration from rural areas has overburdened cities with waste management needs, informal settlements, and infrastructure maintenance, highlighting lapses in city management, policymaking, and implementation. Communities such as Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) are often seen taking charge of cleaning and maintaining their local areas, with volunteers and resident contributions. However, the provision of such services on a larger scale-for a city, state, or country-can only be effectively delivered by government authorities. In economic terms, these are public goods or services, which are non-rival, meaning that once provided, they benefit everyone equally. They are also non-excludable, meaning that those who do not contribute cannot be prevented from enjoying the benefits. Sanitation



services therefore face a "free rider" problem, where everyone derives positive utility from clean surroundings, but few are willing to contribute. Consequently, it ultimately falls within the remit of formal administration to frame and implement stringent policies. Clean India cannot be optional; it must serve as a core pillar of Viksit Bharat@2047. Achieving this does not require high technology or heavy funding, but rather a change in mindset and willingness from civic authorities and the public. The Swachh Bharat Mission, which brought cleanliness into mainstream discourse, must be strengthened in both policy formation and implementation. In a country where the scale of need exceeds public resources, Public-Private Partnerships can accelerate the journey towards a sustainable, clean India. Stricter laws and penalties, alongside active participation from local societies, NGOs, and communities such as RWAs, should form essential components of a long-term plan. Most importantly, while we refer to our country as a mother, it is our social responsibility to work together towards a Clean India.

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A Reset That Wants India to Really Work

New codes to boost mobility, spur growth

The four new labour codes, which were made effective last week, subsume a patchwork of legislation over the decades and address four principal concerns of workers: working conditions, wages, social security and dispute resolution. Employers are offered easier compliance and improved industrial relations. This comprehensive overhaul should, if implemented with resolve, address some of the chronic rigidities in India's labour market that have suppressed productivity. Implementation is, however, unlikely to be uniform because states are involved. Yet competition for investment will provide the impetus to bring uniformity in labour regulation. In that sense, a critical piece of economic reform should be able to take hold countrywide without widespread opposition. It is a welcome step by GoI to push through incremental factor market reform that should increase India's growth potential.

The attempt is to universalise labour regulation to blur the distinction between workers employed in the organised and informal economies. This is done through the extension of social security, minimum wages and workplace condition requirements to the overwhelmingly large portion of the workforce that was denied these benefits. This created entry barriers into

organised employment, which on its part discouraged labour mobility. Wages remained low with consequent effects on productivity. Industrial growth is affected by compliance that creates a perverse incentive for employers to fly below the radar. This limits India's ambition of becoming a global manufacturing base. Although the new framework is not a radical departure from the legacy system, it attempts to improve outcomes through inclusion, which makes it politically palatable, and raises the odds of success.

The changes have been long in the making and the approach has more cooperative federalism built into it. GoI has faced setbacks in attempts to reform other factor markets such as land. Labour reforms are informed by these experiences, and GoI deserves credit for its perseverance. A well-functioning labour market not only speeds up growth but it also helps stitch together universal social security.

Breath-Taking Delhi Needs an Air-Lift

When GoI launched National Air Quality Index (AQI) in 2014 as part of Swachh Bharat, it promised a simple 'one number-one colour-one description' tool to help citizens gauge the air they breathe. More than a decade on, air pollution has certainly captured public attention. But clearly not enough yet to force the scale of change the crisis demands. Public concern has grown. Public pressure has not.

This season Delhi-NCR air has been so toxic that Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has activated tougher Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) curbs: Stage 2 measures kick in at Stage 1 (AQI 201-300) and Stage 3 at Stage 2 (AQI 301-400). The new triggers mandate uninterrupted power to cut generator use,



expanded public transport, staggered office hours and 50% workforce/WFH norms — a proactive response to worsening air. Unfortunately, Delhi's air-pollution crisis is self-inflicted, driven by internal sources like open burning of waste, biomass, tandoors and heating, not just stubble burn from farms. Scientific fingerprinting confirms that over half of Delhi's particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10) comes from these local sources. Structural gaps in waste management worsen the problem. Nearly 30% of waste leaks out and is burned because of inadequate collection and processing.

Without further feet-shuffling, treat Delhi and its neighbors as a single airshed and fix these failures without delay. Bring about strict action against offenders, have consistent GRAP enforcement, improve civic services and show political will. Delhi-NCR must take collective responsibility instead of normalising its chronic air crisis. That normalisation is already eroding public health, making Delhi a far less attractive place to live, work and play.

JUST IN JEST

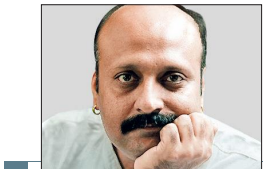
Surely, there must be more to the meeting than a shocking gushfest?

When 'Harry' Trump Met 'Sally' Mamdani

People like neat categories, especially when it comes to oppositional ones. India vs Pakistan, Rahul vs Modi, capitalists vs socialists, vegetarians vs non-vegetarians, pro-life vs pro-choice... This neat applet gets upset when the binary, even momentarily, crumbles. So, it's only understandable that last week's cordial (read: gushfest) meeting between Zohran Mamdani and Donald Trump has left onlookers on both sides of the Marx-Hayek divide flummoxed. Friday's 'Not Dr Livingston, I presume' meeting at the Oval Office was, indeed, the equivalent of watching a cat shake paws with a cucumber. Many in the Left, convinced that Mamdani's radicalism could never coexist with Trump's hair-sprayed populism, began drafting conspiracy theories worthy of Reddit. Was Mamdani secretly auditioning for 'The Apprentice: Socialist Edition'? Did Trump mistake him for Saudi Arabia's bossman MbS? Meanwhile, Trump loyalists, who usually see communists lurking in oat milk, wondered if their leader had been body-snatched by a Brooklyn resident alien for future probing. The meeting was cordial, polite — therefore, scintillating for being minus fireworks. The Mamdani-Trump summit signals when America's conspiracy-industrial complex finally jumped the shark, then accused the shark of being funded by Soros. As Zelenskyy wonders, 'What did Zohran have that I didn't'?

India needs a new accounting system beyond GDP capturing AI's impact to ensure fair growth

Get New Digits for Digital



Amit Kapoor

I am rewriting the story of progress in India. It's accelerating innovation, blurring the line between human and machine, and cracking problems once thought unsolvable. But its rise also exposes a blind spot: our measures of change have not kept pace. Our economic yardsticks still come from an era of factories and physical goods. To understand and shape its AI future, India must learn to value invisible forces driving it.

India's growth story has long been told through GDP data, a number that obscures as much as it reveals. Output can rise even as natural capital erodes or inequality widens. And in a country where the formal economy covers barely half of all workers, GDP captures only a slice of real prosperity. Rise of digital payments, platform work and AI-enabled services is reshaping livelihoods in ways invisible to national accounts.

For instance, digital transformation surged after 2015 with Digital India. While efforts to measure the digital economy began soon after, its full incorporation into national statistics has been slow. The digital economy was estimated at 11-12% of GDP in 2022-23. Yet, revisions to fully integrate GST, UPI and platform-based data into the CPI are only expected from 2025-26.

Without reliable data on who is using AI, for what and with what outcomes, policy risks being driven by hype or anxiety rather than evidence. Today's global debate — swinging between utopian productivity gains and fears of job loss — echoes the dot-com era. Past technological revolu-



Out for data crunch

tions show that transformative effects are gradual, diffuse, and often mis-measured: productivity gains from steam or electricity took decades to show up in statistics, long after society had already changed. India cannot afford to wait that long to understand how AI is reshaping its economy.

Structural realities make the task even harder. Over 80% of its workforce is informal, where productivity, income and hours are barely recorded. When AI optimises supply chains for small traders or schedules gig worker deliveries, efficiency gains may be real but invisible. Meanwhile, algorithmic management and data-driven pricing can squeeze earnings and blur the line between employment and self-employment.

Capturing these shifts requires a new kind of accounting — one that measures time, skills and agency, not just output. Time-use surveys, for example, can show whether AI reduces drudgery or merely shifts it around, and whether it expands leisure or lengthens the workday through always-on digital labour.

AI is often portrayed as a tool for sustainability, optimising energy use, but data-centre electricity consumption

Alongside GDP, AI should improve how often, and how well, India tracks its intangible assets: digital infras, data quality, human and social capital, and natural resources

and the carbon cost of large-scale model training are non-trivial. For a country struggling with energy access and water stress, these trade-offs cannot be ignored. Moreover, projections of 'green jobs' remain speculative. In an economy where most work is low-productivity and informal, automation could displace workers faster

Without reliable data on who is using AI, for what and with what outcomes, policy risks being driven by hype or anxiety rather than evidence

than new sectors can absorb them. Looking only at aggregate productivity risks making rising inequality. A more useful metric would pair environmental efficiency with inclusive employment to show whether growth is both clean and widely shared.

Education adds the time dimension to progress. The lure of short-term fiscal or output gains must give way to an understanding that learning is infrastructure and that knowledge and adaptability will anchor the AI era. National statistics should reflect this by linking learning outcomes to innovation capacity and treating education spending as investment, not consumption.

Digital literacy must also be treated as measurable capital. In the coming decade, productivity will depend less on machinery and more on people's ability to use digital systems. Yet, access to such capability is uneven. Only

a small share of workers receive digital training. Counting connected users isn't enough.

What matters is how meaningfully they can participate in and benefit from AI-driven economies. Metrics that track comprehension and adaptability — how quickly individuals and institutions learn, unlearn, and re-skill — would reveal far more about India's long-term competitiveness than simple output measures.

If India is to integrate AI meaningfully into its measurement framework, it must rethink the architecture of its national accounts. Alongside GDP, it should improve how often and how well it tracks its intangible assets — digital infrastructure, data quality, human and social capital, and natural resources. Monitoring shifts in these assets would reveal whether technological growth is being built on sustainable foundations.

There's also the question of allocation. India spends under 2.5% of GDP on public health and about 3% on education — well below global norms — even as budgets flow to AI and digital projects.

This reflects the mistaken belief that tech can replace foundational capacity. In reality, AI's promise depends on the very systems — health,

education and local governance — that remain underfunded. Innovation without social investment risks creating islands of excellence in a sea of exclusion.

AI's promise lies less in algorithms than in how they amplify human capability. To capture that, India needs a more expansive statistical imagination. Tracking energy use, labour shifts and digital literacy alongside output would show whether AI is widening inequality or widening opportunity. Counting only what fits into old frameworks offers the illusion of precision while missing the substance of progress.

The writer is chair, Institute for Competitive-ness. Inputs by Meenakshi Ajith



THE SPEAKING TREE

Potential of Natural Realm

XIV DALAI LAMA

It is generally beneficial to plant various types of trees. In particular, fruit trees provide a living and nourishment predominantly for humans, as well as benefit to many other sentient creatures. They help to improve health and increase appetite, and so forth.

Likewise, planting flowers also is a pure, virtuous act. For example, when making a mandala offering, we pray that the ground may be covered with incense and strewn with flowers. Flowers assist us in accumulating merit and purifying obscurations, and they are also part of offerings in performing religious activities. When troubled people stroll for a while in a garden, their minds are benefited by becoming refreshed and filled with pleasure.

In order to protect the growth of whatever has been planted in the best way, people should advise their children not to harm them. This is a beneficial service to all living beings.

In Tibet, previously there was a good tradition of instituting laws to safeguard hills and valleys for unprotected and unsupported wild animals and birds, and for the protection of various defenceless creatures. We should maintain the continuity of this tradition. It is inappropriate to randomly discard fruit-peel, paper, plastic bottles, old clothes, food leftovers and other kinds of garbage. People should not urinate and defecate everywhere. Such things spoil the beauty of the landscape and are a hazard to health and hygiene.

Chat Room

Changing Times & Relationships

Apropos 'Reforms Engine Revs Up with Labour Codes' (Nov 22). The four labour law codes will be implemented by packing 25 Acts into four, reducing 1,228 Sections to 480 and 1,436 Rules to 351. This effort, along with the decriminalisation of 65 provisions, has trust at its core — that employers will implement labour codes in good faith. The transition will be difficult, with ten unions already pushing back by describing the codes 'anti-worker, pro-employer'. It is for employers to ensure that collaboration, and not confrontation, emerges as the primary mode of relationship building. YG Chouksey, Pune

Want Action Over Words

Apropos 'COP30 Compromise Text Seeks Urgency' (Nov 23). The conversations at COP30 have once again placed 'climate justice' at the centre of global debate. India's demand

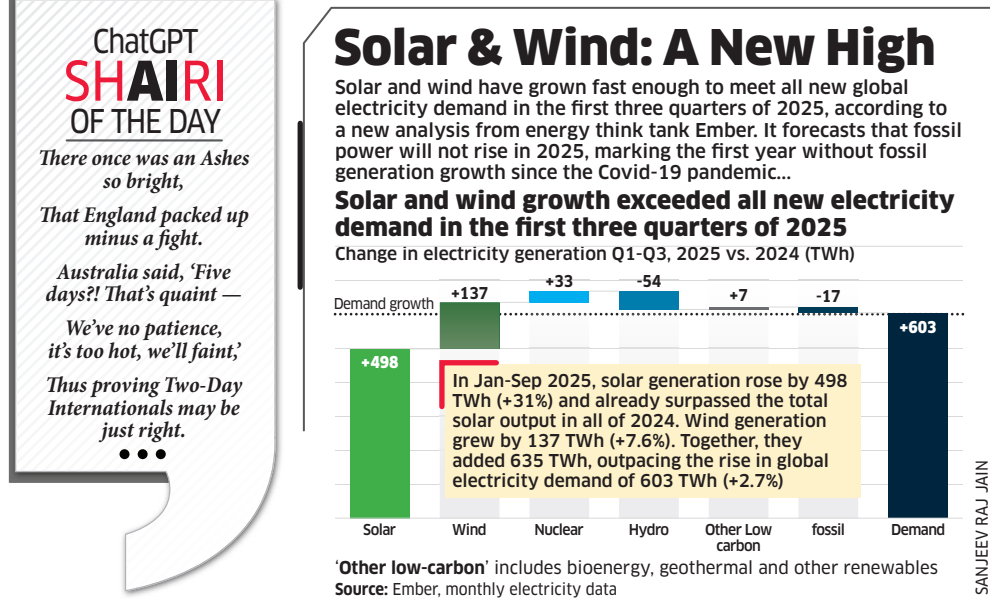
is neither emotional nor political — it is rooted in hard evidence. Developed nations expanded their wealth through

ugh centuries of fossil fuel use while developing countries are now being urged to cut emissions often at the cost of growth and survival. If climate change is a shared catastrophe, shouldn't responsibility be shared as well? Ambitious speeches may win applause, but without fair action and timely support, can justice truly serve those running out of time? Mohammad Hasmain, Muzaffarpur

Quality Matters, Controls Help

Apropos 'Question of Quality' (Nov 23). Compliance of the quality control order (QCO) will benefit the MSME sector. However, the short-term cost issues of specific items should be handled separately. The Gauba Panel suggestion to apply the QCO only on finished products is prudent. Raw material standards should be evolved by the customers without BIS inspection and QCO compliance. A product-wise approach is the way to go. Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru

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MEME'S THE WORD



Labour's Love Gained



Rajiv Memani & Sonu Iyer

By consolidating 29 central legislations into four labour codes, GoI has ushered in a new era of labour laws. The codes bring in a strategic transformation, providing a framework that aligns India's labour ecosystem with the needs of a modern economy and a new generation of workers, in line with global standards.

Simplification in compliance with single registration and a single licence, replacing multiple overlapping filings, digital filings and global best practices like the inspector-cum-facilitator model, are welcome changes. For example, for a contractor engaging or providing contract labour, an employer can now take a single central licence instead of multiple licences for each project. Similarly, instead of multiple returns under different labour codes, companies can file a single consolidated return covering all four labour codes, enabling predictability and clarity in compliance.

The introduction of the new labour codes comes at a pivotal moment as India positions itself as a manufacturing hub to benefit from globally disrupted supply chains and increase its domestic manufacturing capabilities.

A significant change is the introduction of fixed-term employment and flexibility in daily working hours while retaining overall governance around weekly working hours and overtime payment. For manufacturing enterprises, with fluctuating demand, shifts and seasonal peaks, this will allow employers to optimise shift hours for capacity utilisation without compromising workers' rights.

But to ensure global competitiveness, particularly in comparison with Asian countries, more is needed:

► Overtime payment in India is at 200% of wages, compared to 150% in Asian countries, and maximum overtime is limited to 125 hours per

quarter. This will continue to give the latter a benefit of agility in responding to demand. Reforms 2.0 should aim to address this.

► The impact would also be felt on labour-intensive sectors like textiles and apparel, which need to employ more workers for the same output. Further, a more predictable and transparent environment will help Indian businesses build scale and drive higher capex.

A particularly progressive aspect of reforms is the allowance for women to work night shifts (7 pm to 6 am). But their consent and security must be ensured. Enhanced safety norms, hazard-free environments and establishment of safety committees can foster trust between employers and employees.

These include annual health examinations for workers above 45, the requirement for employers with 500 or more workers to set up a safety committee and specific safety norms for women employees working night shifts, including transportation facilities and the provision of safe, secure, and healthy working conditions.

The codes also strengthen worker protections through streamlined retrenchment provisions, improved dispute resolution via negotiation and mediation and mandatory minimum wages for all workers. Under the new framework, GoI will set a floor wage, which will serve as a benchmark for states to determine their respective minimum wages.

This is a significant improvement over the current regime, where disparities are stark.



That should get it working

► Even within NCR, minimum wages for unskilled workers range from ₹18,456 in Delhi to ₹11,274 in Haryana and ₹11,021 in UP. States will need to adopt a consultative approach to harmonise wage structures and eliminate existing inconsistencies.

► Gratuity will be calculated on the new definition of wages that includes basic salary plus allowances, unlike the old regime, where gratuity was calculated on basic salary. So, employees will receive gratuity at the rate of 15 days' wages for each completed year of service, provided they have worked for five years before termination of employment.

► Overall gratuity payout continues to be limited to ₹20 lakh, unless this ceiling is increased. There is a retrospective impact on gratuity cost for organisations, as any employee leaving will receive gratuity as per the new computation for the entire period of service. Also, fixed-term employees will now be eligible for gratuity even after one year of service. This represents a cultural shift toward a more equitable and transparent labour market.

► Centre-state coordination is crucial to implementing the new codes. Uniform rules and aligned shops and establishment laws are essential to avoid the complexity these reforms seek to remove. A formal harmonisation mechanism — with model rules, clear timelines and alignment on working hours, overtime, bonus thresholds, and compliance formats — will help ensure consistency across states.

Lastly, since the new labour codes will raise costs for businesses — especially on gratuity and leave encashment — prospective implementation is essential to preserve certainty. In past reforms like the companies Act and GST, GoI has been consistent, and industry hopes that approach continues.

Just as in cricket, the final runs must be secured to ensure victory. The reforms are a significant step forward. Now, the real challenge lies in their implementation.

Memani and Iyer are CEO, and national leader, people advisory services, tax, respectively, EY India

MELODY FOR MONDAY

Babuji Dheere Chalna

Geeta Dutt

Geeta Dutt's 'Babuji Dheere Chalna', from the 1954 Guru Dutt film Aar Paar is one of those rare songs whose seductive tune carries an undertow of tragic inevitability. On the surface, it is a playful warning — Geeta Dutt's voice lilts with teasing allure, cautioning the listener to tread carefully in matters of the heart. Yet, beneath the coquettish phrasing lies an ice sheet of vulnerability, as if the singer knows that desire, once awakened, can only end in heart-break.

The beauty of the song rests in Dutt's phrasing: every syllable is caressed, every

pause weighted with suggestion. OP Nayyar's composition, with its languid rhythm and smoky instrumentation, creates a nocturnal atmosphere — half-cabaret, half-lament. The melody sways like a lantern in the dark, inviting but unstable.

What makes it tragic is precisely this duality. The song is flirtation as fatalism. Dutt's voice, rich with both mischief and melancholy, embodies the paradox of love: its sweetness is inseparable from its danger — 'Haan bade dhokhe hain/ Bade dhokhe hain is raah mein.'

Listening to it today, one hears not just a classic of Hindi cinema but a timeless meditation on the cost of 'falling for' someone, or something.



CONTRAPUNTO

I made mistakes...I thought drama was when actors cried. But drama is when the audience cries

- FRANK CAPRA

Sighted: Bromance

As the Trump-Mamdani meet goes viral, remember fun political theatre is often nothing more than fun

Opposites attract. Enemies become lovers. Friday’s Trump-Mamdani meet at the White House saw them cosplaying all kinds of bromance tropes. And that left all kinds of people picking up their jaws from the floor. They both command strong fan bases, but from opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. Trump’s called Mamdani “100% communist lunatic”. Mamdani has sold his “progressive, Muslim immigrant” character as “despot” Trump’s “worst nightmare”. So both their fans expected tense times at a White House known for raking visitors over the coals. While the touchy-feely jokey-wokey tryst that they got instead has attracted sundry explanations, the most convincing is the classical one.

Desis have found Mamdani’s polite smile, respectful head tilt and general mollifying of Trump kick in a very particular muscle memory –



of tactical deference to Aunties and Uncles whose lectures they actually have zero intention of obeying. Dems are anxious their new hero is signing a deal with the devil. Republicans are worried about how much Trump’s penchant for crushing on celebrity weakens him. Shashi Tharoor sees the whole thing as democracy working beautifully – candidates fighting like hell during an election but then working together afterwards. What the earnestness of all these theories gets wrong is how much politics is a form of theatrical performance.

This dates back to politics’ roots. Recall that great figures of the late Roman republic – Caesar, Pompey, Cato – were sort of actors playing roles on the public stage, crafting personae (the word itself means ‘mask’) that embodied particular virtues or political positions. And there’s something especially theatrical about a ‘strange bedfellows’ moment. Reagan-Gorbachev in Reykjavik or Vajpayee-Sharif in Lahore are high-order examples of such staging. Often, though, there is simply no grand civilisational purpose. Just two sharp political players deeply skilled in dialogue and visuals that can go viral. That’s an end in itself.

But in thinking about ancient Rome, it also becomes obvious that the blurring of line between genuine political action and staged spectacle is not at all a modern invention. This is worth thinking about seriously. Often we rank what is enacted before an audience as less important than what’s conducted behind closed doors. Or whatever we imagine that to be. If we instead understand politics as operating according to theatrical logic, then image, performance, and spectacle are not less in substance. Whatever all may divide Trump and Mamdani, they both really, really get this. You are reading their body language? They jolly well plan on that.

Car & Sarkar

Govt must upgrade auto safety norms more than it’s planning to do

Finally, stricter norms are to be rolled out for automobile safety in the next phase of Bharat NCAP starting Oct 2027. Cars will need to undergo five crash tests, compared with the current three. The new regime will add full frontal and rear crash tests to the existing offset (frontal), side, and side-pole impact tests. In short, getting a five-star safety rating will get tougher for automakers. For a country that has the dubious distinction of recording the highest road accident deaths in the world, any effort to improve road safety – both for motorists and pedestrians – should be welcomed.

Bharat NCAP was launched in 2023 as a voluntary crash testing and safety rating system, compelling car manufacturers to meet certain safety standards by leveraging consumers’ desire for better automobile safety features. However, over the last couple of years, experts have pointed out the perceptible gap between Bharat NCAP and other international crash testing programmes such as Global NCAP and Euro NCAP. For example, Bharat NCAP currently lacks pedestrian safety tests, while Global, Latin, Asean and Euro variants have them. Second, Bharat NCAP was marketed as a cost-effective model for automakers. But this was essentially due to absence of certain safety tests that are standard in other NCAPs. Case in point Euro NCAP, in addition to crash safety, evaluates additional aspects such as Autonomous Emergency Braking and Driver Attention Monitoring Systems.

Of course, cost is a major consideration in a price-sensitive market such as India. This is precisely why the number of passenger vehicles in India with six airbags has been so low – 12-13% in India compared to 98% in US in 2023. However, Maruti Suzuki made six airbags standard in the majority of its models this year. Bharat NCAP 2.0 will help shore up this trend. India, with 11% of the world’s road accidents, certainly needs this shift towards safety.

Bhooth-proof elections

Thanks to SIR, bhooth-capturing may become a thing of the past

Reshmi Dasgupta



If indeed the 65L names deleted from the records by the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) were of bona fide living residents of Bihar whom the ruling dispensation in the state (and the Centre) allegedly wanted to disenfranchise, there should have been a huge outcry at the polling booths. But there was none. So the inescapable conclusion is that many, if not most, of the electoral rolls in India are haunted – full of ghosts of people long gone.

As by their very nature they lack form, these spirits could be persuaded to spectrally arise from the rolls to take on the guise of whoever the ruling dispensation wants at election time. And for decades, the relevant authorities were apparently happy to accommodate these obliging disembodied beings in the rambunctious festival of democracy that we Indians call elections. This eidolic cohort could be called, to coin a phrase, poll bhooths.

They came in especially handy for that peculiarly Indian poll-time activity called bhooth-capturing, which was how some political parties facilitated desirable election results. Lakhs of ghostly voters mysteriously cast their ballots without being seen, often leading to improbable victories or victory margins. Those who did not believe in this supernatural adult franchise, of course, had a more mundane name for this phenomenon: scientific rigging.

Cultivating this phantasmal constituency has its advantages too. They do not have any demands, given their disembodied state. For much the same reason, they also do not have any political loyalties; arguably they can be roped in to bolster the electoral chances of anyone resourceful enough to ‘capture’ these bhooths. But SIR has proved to be a ghostbuster par excellence. Thus, the political bhavishya (future) of these bhooths of elections past appears dim.

Ghosts do not have discernible voices, alas. So even if they still want to rally behind any political party’s ‘vote chori’ clarion call in the future to demand their right to resume or continue participating from the afterlife, they cannot be heard. Even if they became audible somehow, electoral rules debbar them as such rights end with, well, death. Poll bhooths have to reconcile themselves to the fact that their incorporeal participation in Indian elections is over.

New US franchise has no golden arches. Instead, the American megaphone is now being used to cheer the inversion of norms, from South Korea to Brazil

Rashmee Roshan Lal



Columnist based in London

A hardline politician who complained about immigrants’ propensity to eat a favoured animal species wins a party leadership contest. A billionaire businessman in his 70s celebrates re-election with jubilant supporters wearing red baseball caps emblazoned with a message about national strength. Politicians spout words such as “Antifa”, “DOGE” and “ICE”.

None of the above is in US. We are not talking Donald Trump. Japan’s first female Prime Minister, ultra-conservative Sanae Takaichi, has accused foreigners of eating sacred deer in her constituency, rather like Trump once said of Haitians in US eating pet cats and dogs. Unsurprisingly, when Trump met Takaichi recently, they appeared to get on fabulously well.

Populist Andrej Babis, the 71-year-old who won Czechia’s election and may be PM, calls himself a Trumpist. He even hands out hats bearing the words ‘Strong Czechia’ in imitation of Make America Great Again gear. Significantly, sections of Britain and Europe’s political class are adopting the MAGA idiom for testy issues such as govt policy, spending and immigration.

For example, Trump ally Nigel Farage, whose small Reform party is doing well in UK polling. Farage speaks in all seriousness about smashing “Antifa” even though this mythical antifascist entity is as unseen as the unicorn. Antifa is invoked by Trump to justify security crackdowns at home. Reform party politicians also ludicrously threaten to slash the paltry sums spent by local authorities in England, a la the cutbacks of billions in US govt expenditure by Elon Musk’s DOGE. UK’s main opposition Conservative Party too has promised sweeping deportation raids in the style of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement should it return to power.

Move over McDonald’s. America’s newest global franchise has no golden arches and offers the dark prospect of interminable culture wars and growing polarisation. Trump’s MAGA political movement is fast developing vendors in disparate markets, including, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, parts of Asia.

The sales team, drawn from Trump’s inner circle,

included the late Charlie Kirk, MAGA world’s newest secular saint. It also counts Don Jr, US president’s eldest son, and daughter-in-law Lara who is married to Eric Trump. MAGA’s globalist aspirations can also be seen in the way the Conservative Political Action Conference, premier annual gathering of the American right, has been increasingly leasing its label to right-wing movements in Southeast Asia, South America and Australia. Seoul to Sydney, Buenos Aires to Brasilia, new cadres are being recruited to take a Trump-branded right-wing populism beyond America’s borders.

According to Jeff Kingston, a professor of history at Tokyo’s Temple University, “Trump is empowering the



This is SEOUL!!

primordial in people all over the world”. Why? Well, for starters, because it works. What began as a nationalist reaction to America’s perceived decline has evolved. Now, it’s being sold as a global ideological crusade that makes common cause around shared values.

These include antipathy towards the liberal social changes that started in the 1960s and 1970s, remaking workplaces, family units, institutional structures and people’s expectations. The war on so-called wokery, diversity, equity, inclusion and climate consciousness seems to be playing well even in countries like South Korea and Japan, where MAGA’s passionate fight for “western civilisation” would be out of place.

Is global MAGA real? Yes, as a franchise. Its success

lies in its DIY nature, portability and potential to customise for each market. In South Korea, for instance, MAGA rhetoric speaks to a deep-seated sense of grievance that progressive forces are neglecting the country’s founding anti-communist Christian identity.

In Japan, the new ‘iron lady’ aligns with core MAGA values in more than a shared hostility to foreigners. PM Takaichi is socially conservative, fiercely resisting female succession to Japan’s imperial throne or legislation that would allow married Japanese women to keep their own surname. She is more right-wing than any mainstream Japanese politician. Only slightly further to her right is the upstart populist Sanseito party, whose founder calls for “Japan first” and rails against that familiar MAGA demon, the “deep state”.

In every global market, the MAGA franchise ferrets out the wedge issue. In South Korea, it was impeached president Yoon Suk Yeol. He had plunged the country into political turmoil in Dec 2024 by suddenly declaring martial law in a power grab. MAGA’s Charlie Kirk, who was in South Korea and Japan just days before he was shot dead in an American campus in Sept, was seen as sympathetic to Yoon’s cause.

Though Yoon had long since been removed from office by the time Kirk came visiting Korea, the conservative youth group advocating for the disgraced Korean president recast the MAGA embrace as part of a similar moral crusade against an elite establishment. They even carried placards that referenced US-style stolen-election conspiracies.

The same sort of dynamic infuses MAGA’s footprint in Brazil. Trump makes common cause with convicted former president Jair Bolsonaro, who lost his 2022 re-election bid and subsequently tried to mount a Trump-style coup. Decrying Bolsonaro’s trial as a “witch hunt”, Trump levied 50% import tariffs on Brazil as a penalty and encouraged the global right to view the case as evidence of what is being called judicial overreach.

Time was when America’s chief political exports revolved around the upholding of democratic values and rule of law. The Black Lives Matter protests inspired copycat versions, not least in South Korea, Nigeria and Britain. Trump’s new franchise continues the same transnational trend, but this time America’s megaphone seems to be used to more reckless purpose: cheering on the inversion of norms.

She Gets Headlines But Does She Have Answers?

Lanka’s PM is popular and was given a grand welcome by New Delhi. Knotty bilateral issues remain as difficult though

Padma Rao Sundarji



Once again highlighting legacy issues between India and Sri Lanka, the Madras high court recently directed the Centre to consider and pass orders on the representation by a Tamil repatriate from Lanka seeking Indian citizenship for himself and his family. R Thiyaagavijayan asserts his repatriate identity. He has been treated as a refugee thus far, and his is but one example of the many complicated strands of the India-Lanka relationship. And managing this relationship will require considerable resolve from both sides. But who’s really in charge in Colombo’s parliament?

Sri Lanka PM Harini Amarasuriya’s first official visit to India last month saw her receive a rousing reception. Lanka’s third woman PM is a highly educated anthropologist and has been a student in India and UK. Late last year, Amarasuriya’s overwhelming victory in the Lankan parliamentary polls had helped bring her the National People’s Power (NPP), a coalition led by the senior Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) party of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, to power in Colombo, by defeating stalwarts like former president Ranil Wickremesinghe and the country’s largest opposition alliance, Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB).

NPP’s plank was to cleanse Lankan politics of nepotism and corruption, both of which had led the country to a devastating economic crisis and sparked bloody riots in 2022. In Delhi, Amarasuriya thanked India for its assistance during the Lankan economic crisis, and described the bilateral relationship as “not episodal” but “structural”, “not transactional” but “foundational”.

Disappointingly though, the Lankan PM declined the challenge of answering questions from the media at the last minute, without any explanations. But digging deeper beneath the surface in Colombo reveals some home truths which most in India are unaware of.

“The PM was given VIP treatment during her visit to India. Likewise, she earlier received special treatment

in China where she had a meeting with Xi Jinping. Both these events received wide publicity in the local media,” notes Jehan Perera, director of National Peace Council in Colombo. However, Perera points out that political opponents of Lankan govt claim there are internal tensions between JVP and NPP to which Amarasuriya belongs. “The PM’s successes during her foreign visits are likely to increase this speculation,” Perera affirms.

But surely the popularity that Amarasuriya enjoyed in Lanka’s two biggest partner-countries would be welcomed, and not frowned upon, by Dissanayake’s JVP, which has little or no international experience itself? The controversial Marxist-Leninist JVP has a history of bloody riots and is ideologically close to China. Though the party was born out of discontent



over the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord, (which had even prompted a physical assault on former PM Rajiv Gandhi during a guard of honour in Colombo), Dissanayake has certainly attempted to forge a new relationship with New Delhi over the past year.

Opposition SJB MP, Harsha de Silva, is blunt in his assessment of Amarasuriya’s visit to India. “Harini was given all that recognition in India. But for JVP she’s just a messenger who was to stick only to a prepared script, not present her own views. That’s why her media interviews were struck down at the last moment,” de Silva said over the phone from Colombo.

De Silva, a highly regarded economist, is particularly critical of the fact that in her speeches in India, the Lankan PM didn’t address the key Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with India which is still in limbo, nor touch upon the High Voltage Direct Current link to be built between India and Sri Lanka.

“Many projects that India is supposed to be working on, are not moving. The Kankesanthurai harbour project, for which India gave us a grant, is stalled. Dissanayake’s govt has promised repeatedly that they are ‘working on it’, but there is no movement. I know for a fact that the Indian side is unhappy that there is more talk than action. So also, PM Amarasuriya spoke a lot in Delhi. But her talks lacked substance,” de Silva says.

The politician acknowledges that Sri Lankans are largely happy that JVP-NPP govt is fighting corruption. “We have to give them credit for that,” he says. “But that alone is not going to fix the economy, or our growth rate.”

It’s not that Amarasuriya hasn’t touched upon Lanka’s most important bilateral issues elsewhere. During her 4-day visit to a women’s meet in China (which preceded that to India by a day), she reinforced Lanka’s partnership under China’s BRI, perhaps the single-most important economic investment link with Beijing.

But at home in Colombo, she seems to be addressing empty galleries. Harsha de Silva points out that Amarasuriya’s voice, and those of others who constitute NPP, are “basically irrelevant” to the coalition’s largest component, JVP. “JVP runs govt,” says de Silva. “PM Amarasuriya has liberal views, as opposed to JVP, so she can’t push through any of her personal beliefs. The historically anti-India JVP doesn’t want any narrative other than its own to be propagated. It’s an ideological clash. And this tussle is now getting noticed. Both within and outside Sri Lanka.”

The impact of this political dynamic in Colombo on the India-Lanka relationship will be significant, and New Delhi should watch this space carefully.

The writer is a foreign correspondent and author of Sri Lanka: The New Country

Calvin & Hobbes



Narayani Ganesh

Who thought that ‘6-7’ would be selected as ‘word’ of the year 2025 by Dictionary.com, while conceding that ‘6-7’ is a usage that is impossible to define? And on his talk show, an exasperated Stephen Colbert lamented that ‘6-7’ is not even a word; it is a numeral! Many may be familiar with the idiomatic phrase, to be ‘at sixes and sevens’ denoting a state of confusion, uncertainty or simply put, when one feels addled. What does ‘6-7’ mean, something that the Alpha generation and Gen Z have made a part of their vocabulary?

The numerical term was first heard used by rapper Skrilka in a song, something thrown in for effect or rhythm, perhaps, not intended to mean anything. Now it has gone viral among teens, who delight in the fact that adults are stumped and puzzled, wracking

their brains as to what this new slang could possibly mean. And nothing could delight youngsters more than their communications to be incomprehensible to adults.

That apart, it is interesting to extrapolate on such usages, and ponder over phrases like Unees-bees (19-20 in Hindi) and Comme ci Comme ça (in French). The former alludes to a minor difference in measurement or quality and the latter refers to something that is indefinable, neither here nor there, as in saying something like neither are things going well with me nor are they going not-so-well. Delightful uncertainty.

Today, no one has the patience to listen to word-filled speeches. With digital explosion and short attention spans, acronyms, slang, and emojis have

become ubiquitous, as has the amorphous ‘6-7’. Filibusters in Parliament are now history. There is more of aggression, and outbursts, rather than well-thought-out, even literary, expressions of opinion, anguish and concern.

The most infuriating response a tween could give to an adult, is to fall silent, say some. For silence can be deafening. In one of his works of science fiction, Arthur C Clarke wrote of how one fine day, all triggers in the world became disabled. So no guns could fire, and the world fell silent, so to speak, and what else could prevail then, but peace?

To live in a soundless world may mean the end of firing and abuse, shouting and screaming, but it may also mean the end of good music and conversations, of the chirping of birds



THE SPEAKING TREE

Sacred space



Don’t let the noise of other’s opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.

They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

Steve Jobs

At Sixes And Sevens: Consciousness & 6-7

and gurgling of streams, of the crunch of a crisp wafer in your mouth, of waves breaking, of whooshing winds and the pitter-patter of rain.

A world that falls completely silent would be a dead world. As someone said philosophically, if a tree falls in the forest, and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? It is all about observation and perception. Many existential questions could arise, like, could something exist outside of our consciousness? That is, if we do not observe or perceive it? A sound is a sound, only if it is perceived by the ear. And by that token, 6-7 is a word only if it is perceived so by those using it in the word-sense. And with all of this, now I am experiencing a kind of 6-7 situation, something that I am unable to put in words, with all the adding going on. Maybe 6-7 is the answer, then. ganeshnarayani@yahoo.com

Factory reset

Making labour codes effective is a big step forward

The Union government last week brought into effect four labour codes aimed at modernising India’s labour-market regulation. As reported by this newspaper, the Codes have become effective for standalone provisions where further rule-making is not needed. Since the draft rules were framed a few years ago, the government will make the necessary changes to reflect new realities. It is expected to come up with revised draft rules for consultation. The Codes will be fully operational once the revised rules are notified. The bringing in of the Codes — the Code on Wages (2019), Industrial Relations Code (2020), Code on Social Security (2020), and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (2020) — will be one of the biggest reforms in recent years. Outdated labour laws and regulations are believed to be one of the biggest impediments to sustained higher growth, particularly in the manufacturing sector.

From companies’ perspective, the Codes are expected to reduce the compliance cost significantly and enhance flexibility in hiring with thresholds for layoffs/retrenchment/closure increased from 100 earlier to 300 workers, with the provision for states to enhance the limit. The labour market will also become more formal. For instance, appointment letters need to be given to all workers. A written contract will make things more transparent. Under the Code on Wages, 2019, all workers will have the right to a minimum wage, and enterprises are expected to pay wages in a timely manner. In this regard, it will be important that the minimum wage is decided taking into account the requirements of both the labour and businesses. One of the most significant wins is for gig and platform workers because, for the first time, they have been legally recognised under the Social Security Code. Further, workers will have Aadhaar-linked universal account numbers, which will give portable benefits across states, a crucial feature in a country where internal migration is increasing.

While the Centre is expected to publish the draft rules and notify them in due course, state governments have made significant moves. A recent analysis shows that 16 state governments this year implemented 38 reforms, and labour reforms constituted 37 per cent of these, such as allowing women to work night shift, raising daily work limits to 10-12 hours, expanding overtime caps, or reducing documentation for small establishments. With the Codes coming in, states will be able to frame more favourable rules to attract investment. However, the reform is not without costs, especially for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The extension of social-security coverage and other mandatory requirements will increase the outgo for MSMEs and may be particularly difficult for those operating on low margins. However, on balance, experts have argued that the Codes will benefit MSMEs with a sharp reduction in compliance costs. Costs may also rise for delivery platforms even as most of them are running in losses.

At a broader policy level, the recently proposed national labour and employment policy, Shram Shakti Niti, underscored the same goals of social security, formalisation, and inclusive growth. However, the system will need continuous refinement, especially in response to rapid changes in the nature of work. This will require governments, state and central, to continuously engage with businesses and the labour market. The Indian labour market has remained largely informal, partly because rigid labour laws discouraged firms from hiring, preventing them from achieving economies of scale and competing effectively in global markets. The Codes should help reduce impediments to economic growth and employment generation.

A diluted COP

Climate divisions hardened at Belem

The many hopes invested in the 30th edition of the Conference of Parties (COP30), the United Nations’ (UN’s) annual climate conference held in Belem, Brazil, were comprehensively belied in an agreement that is unlikely to reverse the trajectory of global warming, even as it hardened divisions and power alignments over the climate-change agenda.

The headline omission in the agreement is the critical road map for the phaseout of fossil fuels. The European Union (EU), the richest group of nations still in the climate talks, had been pushing for this road map, and developing nations led by the BRICS grouping (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) had been opposing it on grounds of climate equity. Developing nations are unwilling to commit themselves to a uniform burden of fossil-fuel reduction with the developed world on grounds that doing so would impose asymmetric costs on economic growth. In the absence of the world’s largest emitter, the United States, from the climate talks, Saudi Arabia played a key role in ensuring that the fossil-fuel road map did not find a place in the final agreement. The alternative of negotiating road maps on deforestation and fossil-fuel phaseout outside of the COP framework may have saved face for Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva, but their legal standing remains uncertain. Likewise, the contentious issue of tackling climate-related border taxes, notably the EU’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) on steel, cement, aluminium, and fertilisers, has been pushed down the road for future talks.

Though developing nations, including India, see some gain in the absence of a fossil-fuel road map, there are concerns about accelerating global warming owing to the sustained dependence on coal, oil, and gas to power economic growth. So far, only 120 of the 196 countries of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have submitted updated climate-action plans (also known as nationally determined contributions, or NDCs) at COP30 to achieve the 2015 Paris Agreement goal of limiting the average global temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius and to work towards 1.5 degrees Celsius to avert drastic climate change. India is yet to do so, though New Delhi has pointed to achieving its COP26 target on renewable energy five years ahead of the 2030 deadline. Even those that have been submitted have mostly been judged grossly inadequate. By some estimates, assuming these commitments are followed in full, they would lead to a global heating of about 2.5 degrees Celsius.

But perhaps most concerning from the point of view of the developing world, including India, is the underwhelming compromise on climate finance. The agreement trebled climate finance principally for adaptation — such as reforestation, building flood defences, and so on. But the \$120 billion per year promised till 2035 falls far short of the projected requirement of \$360 billion. Analysts suggest that the 10-year time frame is far too long to ensure that vulnerable communities, especially in poor countries, are adequately shielded from the deleterious impacts of climate change in the form of heatwaves, floods, or tornadoes. COP30 was billed as the “implementation COP”. Instead it appeared to have significantly weakened the possibility of a meaningful multilateral consensus. Thus, COP31, which will be hosted by Türkiye with Australia leading the year-long negotiations leading up to it, has a much more challenging agenda to fulfil.

Who’s afraid of the IPO market?

Policymakers should only worry about disclosure

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



There is anger in the air regarding the Indian IPO (initial public offering) market. The recent data shows that listing gains have declined. A significant proportion of companies listed in 2025 are trading below their issue price. Retail investors who flocked to these offerings in search of quick returns are disappointed. Commentators are using words like “trap”, “loot”, and “pump and dump”. There are calls for the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), the regulator, to step in and check valuations.

This creates a dangerous moment for policy. When the noise level rises, the desire to manage the headlines and the narrative creates pressure for the government to “do something”. This usually leads to bad regulation, which stifles market development. The Union finance ministry and regulatory leadership need to keep a cool head and look at the long-term data. The Indian IPO market is not broken. In fact, for the first time in history, it is functioning properly.

To understand the health of the primary market, we must look beyond the price movements of the last three months. We must look at the volume of issuance over the last two decades. Traditionally, India has suffered from a volatile “boom-bust” pattern in primary markets. We must have one euphoric year followed by three years of drought. This unreliability harms the creation of new firms.

I have a thumb-rule for a healthy market: It is a good year when there are 36 or more mainboard IPOs.

This averages out to about three per month. When the IPO market purrs away at this rhythm, it signals a functioning pipeline where unlisted firms can reliably do an IPO. We have rarely achieved this. From 2012 to 2020, we hit this benchmark in only one year: 2017. The rest of the time the market was sputtering.

We are now in a remarkable situation. For five consecutive years — 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 — we have had 36 or more mainboard IPOs per year. We have never seen such a sustained run of IPO market access in Indian history.

This consistency matters deeply. It creates incentives upstream for firm formation. The journey of entrepreneurship is brutal. For every one firm that gets to an IPO, there are 100 that try and fail. When the exit door is reliably open, venture capital flows in, and entrepreneurs take risks. The consistent delivery of exits from 2021 to 2025 is important. It bodes well for the Indian economy.

Why, then, is there so much dissatisfaction? The complaint is that valuations are too high and investors are losing money. This line of thinking betrays a misunderstanding of financial markets and regulation.

The expression “consumer protection” is powerful in politics. But in finance, well-protected consumers can and will lose money, based on their decisions. The role of financial regulation is to block fraud, not to prevent loss. Freedom includes the freedom to make mistakes.



SNAKES & LADDERS

AJAY SHAH

Little incentive to grow pulses

Self-sufficiency in pulses, the major source of protein for most Indians, has been the much-cherished, yet consistently elusive, goal for decades. The dependence on imports to meet the requirements of pulses has, in fact, tended to accentuate despite ceaseless endeavour to bridge, or at least reduce, the demand-supply gap. Even in the recent years, import has risen from 2.6 million tonnes in 2020-21 to 4.7 million tonnes in 2023-24. In 2024-25, shipment from abroad is estimated to have surged exorbitantly to a record 7 million tonnes.

Systematic efforts to attain *aatmanirbharta* (self-reliance) in these nutritious legumes had begun way back in 1966 with the launching of the all-India coordinated research project on pulses, and are still ongoing without making the requisite headway. The overall output of pulses has, no doubt, witnessed some uptick of late, but the extent of increase has not been able to match the fast-growing demand. As a result, per capita availability has declined from 54.4 gm per head per day in 2017 to 43.6 gm now. This is around half the needed intake of 85 gm per day, as recommended by the National Institute of Nutrition.

This, indeed, is cause for concern, given that a sizable section of the Indian population is compulsively vegetarian, or only an occasional consumer of non-vegetarian food. Adequate consumption of pulses is imperative also because of their abundant content of dietary fibre and vital vitamins and minerals, such as iron and folate. Paucity of these nutrients is the major cause of rampant malnutrition, with far-reaching repercussions in terms of the health and productivity of Indians.

Of the numerous programmes undertaken over the past half a century to lift pulses output, the most significant ones included the Pulses Development Scheme (1969-74); the Food Grain Production Programme on Pulses (1985-90); the Technology Mission on Pulses, Oilseeds and Maize (1990s); the Integrated Scheme on Oilseeds, Pulses and Maize (2004-10); the National Food Security Mission for Pulses — later renamed as the National Food Security and Nutrition Mission — (2007-12); and the Accelerated Pulses Production Programme (2010-14).

However, most of these programmes followed virtually similar strategies, with minor tweaking of action plans. Hardly any fresh, or out-of-the-box, thinking went into their formulation. Unsurprisingly, therefore, they could not deliver the desired results. This is borne out by the lack of any significant expansion in acreage under these crops or any perceptible upsurge in their average productivity. On the contrary, the net area under pulses cultivation has shrunk from the peak of 31 million hectares in 2021-22 to 27.5 million hectares in 2024-25. Production, too, has plunged from 27.3 million tonnes to 25.2 million tonnes during this period. The average yield of pulses is merely 0.74 tonnes per hectare, which is below the global average of 0.97 tonnes, though India is the world’s largest producer and consumer of these legumes. Long-term growth in output has, in fact, remained dismally meagre, just 0.5 per cent per annum since the 1950s. Improvement in the growth rate witnessed since 2004-05 is attributable largely to the surge in the production of just three crops — green gram (mung), black bean (urad), and chickpea (gram).



FARM VIEW

SURINDER SUD

Consider the secondary market. If an investor buys shares of a listed company today and the price falls 20 per cent next week, nobody blames Sebi. Nobody argues that the government should have prevented the purchase. We accept that investing in shares contains risk. We accept that it is the buyer’s responsibility to judge the price.

An IPO is no different. It is an arms-length transaction between a seller (the company or existing shareholders) and anonymous buyers. The seller of shares is exactly like a seller of onions. The onion seller tries to obtain the highest possible price for their goods. The buyer tries to pay the lowest possible price. Nobody objects when a farmer tries to sell onions at a peak price. In similar fashion, nobody should object when promoters or PE (private equity) fundstry to sell shares at the highest valuation the market will bear.

Sebi’s only mandate is to ensure the correctness and adequacy of the information provided. If a company discloses that it is making losses, or that its P/E (price/earning) ratio is 2000, or that its promoters bought shares cheaply three months ago — and investors still buy the shares — that is a market functioning correctly. There may be bad investment decisions, but these situations do not constitute regulatory failure as long as disclosure is sound.

While the market volume is healthy, the IPO process in India does have problems. It is designed as a wedding party: A one-time marketing event designed to stampede investors into buying shares. There are cleaner ways to think about this. In 2021 I had outlined a mechanism, which remains relevant. We should separate the “listing” from the “offering”. (<https://mybs.in/2ZgjIdR>)

In this reformed model, a company desiring to go public would first establish a track record of information disclosure and governance. It would comply with all listing obligations — quarterly results, board composition, disclosures — for, say, one year, without trading. At this point, the investing public would have a judgement about the valuation.

Once this probationary period is over, the company would simply have a “quiet listing”. On a designated date, trading would commence. There would be no public offer, no marketing blitz, no “subscription window”. Existing shareholders could sell into the secondary market if they wish. If the company needs to raise fresh capital, it could do so after the price has been discovered on the screen, using the same mechanisms available to already listed companies. This approach removes the information asymmetry and the hysteria of the current IPO process.

We are witnessing a historic deepening of our capital markets, driven by domestic liquidity and a robust pipeline of companies. The current wave of “failed” IPOs — where prices fall after listing — is actually a sign of a healthy, discerning market. It shows that the secondary market is capable of correcting clubs of investors in the pre-IPO stage. Policymakers must resist the urge to intervene. Do not mandate valuation caps. Do not restrict exit offers. Do not “protect” investors from their own mistakes. The engine of firm formation is humming. Let it run.

The author is a researcher at the XKDR Forum

Answers blowin’ in the wind



JOSHUA HAMMER

One summer, I worked in southern France, in a town that is the regular victim of the mistral — a punishing, north-northwesterly wind that blows throughout the year. Each day as I pedalled home from work, a howling gale blasted grit into my face and often brought my bike to a standstill. That painful three-mile commute remains my most vivid recollection of the period.

As Simon Winchester writes in his delightful new book, *The Breath of the Gods*, these invisible currents of air shape our lives in myriad ways. A peripatetic

polymath who has written books about everything from the Oxford English Dictionary to the San Francisco earthquake to a journey up the Yangtze River, Winchester weaves geology, meteorology, etymology and history into a jaunty survey of wind’s incarnations and permutations.

Wind, he argues, made possible the age of exploration and altered the course of civilisations. It has inspired great feats of engineering. It has also caused suffering, and, in the case of the mistral, has allegedly driven men to madness. “An eruption of domestic anger — even the murder of a spouse — can be blamed on the endless frigid shudders of a mistral in full spate,” Winchester writes of these blasts, caused by air funnelling through the Rhone Valley after the collision of two pressure systems off Spain and Italy. “The wind made me do it, in other words, has some value as a defense.”

Human beings have been trying to grasp the mechanisms of wind for millennia. Sumerians attributed it to four

deities — three brothers and a sister. The Finns worshiped a blacksmith god who controls the elements.

Modern scientists point to an empirical truth: We live on a planet in constant motion and mutation. As Winchester presents it, sun-heated tropical air rises constantly and moves north and south toward the polar regions, allowing cooler air to rush in and fill the vacuum.

This global air circulation takes the form of trade winds and jet streams, all bouncing off mountain ranges that act “like the ice walls of a luge run.” The vagaries of these churning air masses have been responsible for some of mankind’s most consequential tipping points. A sudden westerly wind helped destroy the Spanish Armada in 1588 — probably saving Queen Elizabeth and her Protestant countrymen from conquest by the Catholic King Philip II. In 1986, southeasterly winds bearing radioactive particles alerted the world to the Chernobyl disaster, exposing the moral bankruptcy

of the Soviet regime.

Winchester serves up memorable portraits of figures who devoted their lives to harnessing the wind. James Blyth, a Glasgow engineering professor, crafted rotating sails that turned a series of spindles linked to a direct current generator, producing the world’s first “wind engine.” The oceanographer Walter Munk, fascinated by the interplay of wind and waves, selected June 6, 1944, as the ideal moment for the Allied invasion of Europe.

The wind can also be disastrous when not harnessed properly. The most spectacular example was the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, caused by the plowing up of the grasses that blanketed the High Plains. Drought followed by winds sent “rolling clouds of black dust, half a mile high thundering out of the west” in what Winchester calls a “barrage of nature at its worst.”

Winchester’s book meanders at times, and there are inevitable omissions. I would have liked to see at least some mention of Henry Piddington, a mid-19th-century British scientist in Bengal whose predictive studies of cyclones and storm surges earned him the title “the Cassandra of climate science.”

Winchester goes into detail about the 1945 Allied firebombing of Tokyo, and the updrafts of superheated air that generated gale-force winds. But he makes no mention of the natural disaster that presaged the Allied bombing campaign: the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, when what onlookers called a “fire tornado” blew through a field packed with refugees and incinerated 44,000 people in two minutes.

And though references to Winchester’s own adventurous life are fascinating, they sometimes come off as humble brags. Writing about his sea-faring experience, he apologises for “the precious little oceanic sailing I have done — just a few thousand miles, mainly in the Indian Ocean, in the 1980s” as “a very junior crew member aboard a seven-ton schooner.”

But this is a thoroughly enjoyable book, brimming over with historical nuggets and contemplations about the

future. At the summit of New Hampshire’s Mount Washington, where the wind once measured 231 miles per hour,

the highest speed ever recorded, Winchester encounters a freakish calm.

He wonders whether this could be evidence of “the Great Stilling,” a supposed decline of wind velocity around the world that, some meteorologists believe, could be “vastly consequential for life on Planet Earth.” The data, however, are inconclusive, and some experts suggest that in fact the wind is blowing harder than ever. For all the attempts to understand it, wind remains intangible, invisible — and ultimately unpredictable.

The reviewer is the author of *The Mesopotamian Riddle: An Archaeologist, a Soldier, a Clergyman, and the Race to Decipher the World’s Oldest Writing* ©2025 The New York Times News Service





OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

The case for the new labour codes

This reform could energise the Indian economy and boost investment

The rollout of the four labour codes by the Union government is one of the most important market reforms in the history of the Indian economy. The net effect of the four new codes — they deal with wages, industrial relations, occupational safety and social security — is primarily threefold. It will simplify the existing framework, introduce a level of formalisation as far as terms of employment of workers are concerned, and offer greater flexibility to employers in dealing with employees' work duration and even employment itself. It is mostly the last part, manifested in increased threshold for hire-and-fire, strike action, etc, which is the centrepiece of opposition to and apprehension of the codes by trade unions in the country. In an ideal world, one could reasonably argue that the move is pro-capital and anti-labour. However, the Indian economy, as it stands today, is far from ideal. Despite being a labour-abundant economy, India has struggled not just to usher in a manufacturing revolution, but even its limited manufacturing gains have been mostly concentrated in sectors that are not labour-intensive. A lot of this failure has been attributed to India's labour market regime, which, businesses have argued, does not allow them to run enterprises that are nimble enough to deal with the volatilities or cyclical fluctuations of the market. There are studies that show that entrepreneurs have often tried to bypass these regulations by resorting to either replicating smaller factories or outsourcing work to informal workers, both of which have led to forgoing economies of scale in the Indian economy.

The roll-out of the new labour codes should take away this constraint, real or perceived. Of course, the results are unlikely to be seen immediately. It is also a pity that the reform has happened at a time when the global economy is in a funk (to put it politely), which has generated headwinds for export markets. However, a period of crisis is often a period of reforms too. To be sure, some Indian states, which have had success with manufacturing, have already rolled out some of the key provisions in the labour codes. This strengthens their case.

None of this, however, should be inferred as carte blanche for undermining labour rights. The best-case scenario would be entrepreneurs unleashing new dynamism from the reformed labour regime and workers reinventing their collective bargaining in a more robust economy.

Johannesburg G20 is a Global South moment

The G20 Summit in South Africa — the first in Africa since the forum's inception in 2008 — has been significant in many ways. First, it has taken forward the vision and agendas outlined by India during its presidency in 2023. The Johannesburg meet privileged the interests of the Global South: The advocacy for greater financing to combat the climate crisis, for instance, reflects this. The six initiatives PM Narendra Modi outlined at the summit need to be read against this backdrop. The proposals he framed within a vision of "Integral Humanism", a political philosophy associated with Deendayal Upadhyay, one of the founders of the Jana Sangh (the forerunner of the BJP), call for a rethink on the development priorities advanced by the wealthy Global North and prescribe a set of agendas that emphasise sustainable growth and an equitable sharing of resources to end the over-exploitation of nature. Proposals such as a global health care response team, a circular economy for critical minerals, and open satellite data partnership have the potential to cement Global South cooperation. India's push for a global consensus on condemning "terrorism in all forms and manifestations" has also resonated in Johannesburg. The Africa Skills Multiplier Initiative is in step with efforts to engage constructively with the continent.

Second, the leaders broke with convention to issue a statement at the onset of the summit, revealing intent. With the US boycotting the summit — the Trump regime accuses South Africa of racial discrimination against white Afrikaners, who led the apartheid regime for decades — a cloud hangs over follow-up action: The 2026 summit is scheduled to be held in Miami, the US. But, Washington will be the loser if it tries to undermine the goals set in Johannesburg. India, South Africa, and other Global South nations have made it clear that the age of global hegemons is over and the vision for a more inclusive world is likely to come from emerging powers. The South African G20 underlines this shift.

Labour reforms for Atmanirbhar Bharat

The new labour codes establish a modern framework that demonstrates India's readiness to meet the demands of a dynamic and rapidly evolving global economy

For decades, India struggled with weak economic growth, entrenched corruption, and a chronic absence of commitment to job creation and workers' welfare. Politically motivated *gheraos* and *bandhs* repeatedly disrupted industrial activity, stalling investments and eroding trust in the system. It is a shame that previous governments reduced labour welfare to mere slogans, failing to address the real issues faced by workers with seriousness. It took a fundamental shift in national leadership to break this inertia. From the ramparts of the Red Fort, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi invoked "*Shramev Jayate*" (labour alone triumphs), declaring that the dignity of labour must stand at the centre of India's development journey. This was not just a slogan, it marked the beginning of a new national consciousness that placed workers at the heart of policymaking. The need for such a shift was long overdue. Much of India's labour law architecture traces back to the 1920s-1950s and was shaped by a colonial mindset. Meanwhile, the world of work changed dramatically. The rise of gig and platform economies, digitalisa-

tion, flexible work structures, and new-age enterprises reshaped global labour systems. Yet India's labour laws remained frozen in time, unable to support a modern workforce or a competitive economy. Through his *panch pran* (five resolves), PM Modi called for shedding our colonial mindset and embracing a future-ready approach. The outdated laws persisted not because they worked, but because previous governments lacked the political will, courage, and vision to modernise them in line with emerging realities and national needs. Under PM Modi's leadership, India's global stature has risen to unprecedented heights. The world now acknowledges that India is no longer just participating in shaping the future, it is helping define it. But to truly seize this historic moment and convert potential into long-term prosperity, India cannot remain bound to a colonial-era labour framework built for control rather than empowerment. A comprehensive overhaul was, therefore, essential to achieve large-scale job creation, broaden formalisation, and ensure universal social security. Recognising this national need, the Modi government undertook one of the most significant reforms in independent India. The earlier 29 fragmented labour laws were consolidated into four clear, coherent labour codes: the code on wages, the industrial relations code, the code on social security, and the occupational safety, health and working conditions code. On November 21, these codes came into force. Together, they establish a modern labour framework that is pro-worker and pro-growth, demonstrating

that India is ready to meet the demands of a dynamic and rapidly evolving global economy. Since the codes were passed by Parliament in 2019 and 2020, several states, Union Territories, workers' associations, and industry bodies have welcomed their progressive intent. Recognising their merit, states across the political spectrum amended their labour laws in alignment with the codes. For instance, states that have allowed women to work at night with their consent and adequate safety measures saw a 13% rise in the total number of women employed. Stakeholders across sectors have recognised the need to move beyond an outdated labour system. In my interactions with workers and industry leaders, one message has emerged consistently — the need for clarity, fairness, and dignity at the workplace. This guiding principle shaped our reforms, replacing a complex, fragmented system with one that is simple, transparent, and protective of every worker. The labour codes, in letter and spirit, prioritise workers' interests while balancing employers' expectations. They promote preventive health care and expand social security. They provide formal recognition to audio-visual workers and gig and platform workers. They enable pan-India ESIC coverage, mandate annual health check-ups for all workers aged 40 and above, including plantation workers who were earlier excluded, and guarantee statutory floor wages for all workers to reduce disparities across states. Provisions such as mandatory appointment letters, assured pay slips, and paid annual



Mansukh Mandaviya



States that have allowed women to work at night with adequate safety measures saw a 13% rise in the total number of women employed. PTI

leave provide greater stability, dignity, and protection for every worker. As a progressive alternative to contract-based employment, the codes introduce fixed-term employment (FTE). Under FTE, workers employed for a fixed duration receive the same wages, benefits, and working conditions as permanent employees, including paid leave, regulated work hours, medical facilities, social security, and other statutory protections. Notably, FTE employees become eligible for gratuity after just one year of continuous service. The codes also acknowledge the realities of modern workplaces. If an employee voluntarily chooses to work beyond standard hours, they must be compensated at twice the normal wage rate for overtime, ensuring fairness in every circumstance. *Nari shakti* (women's power) forms a central pillar of these reforms. The codes open new avenues for women to participate across sectors, including in underground mines, with heavy machinery, and do night shifts, with consent and robust safety protocols. At the same time, the codes significantly reduce compliance burdens on employers by introducing single registration, a single licence, and single return filing. This simplification will encourage industries to expand and set up their units across India, thereby boosting local employment. India's progress in expanding social

security, from 19% in 2015 to 64.3% in 2025, has earned global acclaim. The International Labour Organization has acknowledged India's efforts, while the International Social Security Association has honoured India with its Award for Outstanding Achievement in Social Security. These international organisations have also hailed the new labour codes as modern, progressive, and pro-worker. Much of the criticism about the codes arises not from an understanding of the reforms but from entrenched political interests resistant to change. Those who relied on outdated and opaque systems for influence are now uncomfortable with a transparent, efficient, and worker-centric framework. Instead of acknowledging the positive transformation these codes bring, they have chosen to spread misinformation. The labour codes represent a transformative milestone in India's journey towards becoming an Atmanirbhar and Viksit Bharat. They uphold the dignity of the worker, encourage industrial growth, and create a model where workers' rights and dignity are protected, and workers become the engine driving atmanirbharta. *Shramev jayate!*

Mansukh Mandaviya is the Union minister for labour and minister of youth affairs and sports. The views expressed are personal

{ GRAND STRATEGY }

Happymon Jacob



Japan, Taiwan, & Beijing's designs for a unipolar Asia

The rapidly deteriorating diplomatic row between Japan and China over a potential "Taiwan contingency" is an important precursor of how China may react to countries and leaders that express opinions deemed unfavourable by Beijing in the years to come. As China's power grows, along with its ambitions regarding Taiwan, Beijing is increasingly intolerant of regional powers that openly support Taiwan. This growing assertiveness coincides with diminishing confidence in American security assistance for Taiwan, creating a sense of insecurity among China's neighbours. As China rapidly establishes its position on the world stage, the implications of the Tokyo-Beijing diplomatic row could have implications far beyond Japan, potentially ensuring many countries self-censor themselves when it comes to the Taiwan question. Here's what happened. The standoff between Tokyo and Beijing started on November 7, when Sanae Takaichi, Japan's newly elected and hawkish Prime Minister (also its first woman PM), addressed Japan's parliament. She stated that a Chinese attack on Taiwan could be classified as a "survival-threatening situation", which, under Japanese law, could potentially trigger a military response from Tokyo. She explained that a Chinese blockade or seizure of Taiwan, located close to Japan and crucial for its shipping routes, could qualify as such a threat. The statement did not seem to be an official policy declaration from Japan; rather, it was a two-sentence response to a parliamentary question. Except, the statement was made by the PM herself. Beijing was quick to react even though just a week prior to her statement, she had a cordial meeting with Chinese president Xi Jinping in South Korea. It took a series of steps — advised its citizens against travelling to Japan, thereby harming Japan's tourism sector; suspended imports of Japanese seafood; sent coast guard ships to patrol disputed islands; and warned Chinese students in Japan about safety risks. China's ambassador to the UN Fu Cong wrote in a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that "If Japan dares to attempt an armed intervention in the cross-Strait situation, it would be an act of aggression. China will resolutely exercise its right of self-defence under the UN Charter and international law and firmly defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Tokyo had sent a senior diplomat, Masaaki Kanaï, to Beijing to meet his Chinese counterpart. This was done to talk things out, but Beijing was not impressed. It wants the Japanese PM to withdraw her statement. This does follow a pattern. In 2010, China limited the export of crucial minerals to Japan, and in 2017, Chinese State media encouraged boycotts of South Korean companies after South Korea deployed American missiles in its defence system. These developments have broader geopolitical implications. For one, Beijing is trying to make an example of Japan. By economically and diplomatically punishing Tokyo, Beijing is effectively telling other States that support Taiwan, openly or otherwise, that Beijing will not take "Taiwan contingency talks" lightly — that there will be consequences for such support to Taiwan, even if it is merely verbal. Beijing is acutely aware that other countries have limited options unless Washington firmly supports Taiwan. It is important to note that American diplomatic and security guarantees in the Indo-Pacific are historically among the weakest today. Thus, if Tokyo compromises today, it could establish a precedent for other regional powers on how to engage regarding Taiwan in the days ahead. Second, there is little doubt that East Asia and Southeast Asia are critical testing grounds for China's rise to hegemony in Asia. East Asia, in particular, represents an important battleground for China's ambitions to establish a unipolar Asia. Given its geographical proximity to China, the region serves as an ideal starting point for Beijing to create a demonstration effect — showcasing its influence and legitimacy, and building allegiances. Successfully asserting dominance here could pave the way for China to expand its hegemony across the region. In other words, East Asia and Southeast Asia are where China will put its unipolar action plan into practice. If China is able to solidify its hegemonic position in East Asia, it may encounter fewer challengers across the rest of Asia. Conversely, if it fails to dominate its neighbourhood, its claims to global superpower status could appear somewhat hollow. Controlling the official narratives regarding Taiwan in its own neighbourhood is a crucial aspect of this challenge. The stakes are high for all parties. For Takaichi, leader of a minority party in the Japanese parliament who is known for her conservative nationalist views for Japan First policy, yielding to China's pressure would mark a poor start to her prime ministerial career. If Takaichi fails this test, it will not only have implications for her term as PM but will have larger regional geopolitical implications. If China is unable to get her to retract her statement, this could embolden other States in making similar statements. For Taiwan, the implications are even graver: American security assistance has never been this suspect. China's military is reported to have the ability to take over Taiwan in the not too distant future, and more and more countries are reluctant about openly offending China by diplomatically or politically supporting Taiwan. Given that Japan has historically been one of Taiwan's important regional supporters, the loss of that support — if followed by similar action by other, less powerful nations — could place Taiwan in harsher straits.

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{ MARCO RUBIO } US SECRETARY OF STATE



The proposal was authored by the US ... It is based on input from the Russian side. But it is also based on previous and ongoing input from Ukraine

Following criticism by US lawmakers that the plan amounted to "the wish list of the Russians"



{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



Battle against terrorism is a continuous process

Life, once in a while, throws up events that traumatise you for the rest of your life. The terror attack in Mumbai on November 26, 2008, Pahalgam on April 22, this year, and in Delhi on November 10, top such chilling incidents. Two days from now, the nation will observe the 17th anniversary of the gruesome terror attack in Mumbai. The Mumbai carnage was far more devastating than any other terror attack in India. Let's recount what happened that day. A flash appeared: "Shootout in Colaba!" I had the sinking feeling of gang wars returning to Mumbai. However, within minutes, reports of a massacre started streaming in. In those chaotic early hours, no one imagined that the next many hours would witness mayhem and drown the nation in sorrow. Just 10 Pakistan-trained killers gunned down 165 Indian and foreign nationals. Their victims were spread across five-star hotels, the main railway station, Jewish quarters, hospitals, and prominent roads. The incident changed India's security scenario forever. It claimed Maharashtra police anti-terror squad's four top officers, including its chief Hemant Karkare. We salute their courage. But in the fog of war, they made a fatal mistake of breaking the security protocol. All the officers were in the same vehicle when they came under fire from the terrorists. Despite the indomitable courage of the security forces, the lack of proper training, emergency response protocols and lack of equipment were glaringly evident. At that time, the only agency equipped to handle such a crisis was the National Security Guards (NSG), which was headquartered in Manesar, Haryana. The NSG wasn't informed about the attack immediately. Sandeep Sen, a colonel involved in that operation, recently claimed in a podcast that everyone knew six months before that a big terror attack was expected in India. Talking about D-Day, 26/11, he said his senior asked him to open the television set, saying he thought it was a gang war. Sen switched on the television and saw AK-47 shells on the screen and realised it was a terror attack. The officers realised they would be pressed into service soon and got ready. But they got the go-ahead only late in the night. They boarded the aircraft, which was made to wait at the tarmac for the

then Union home minister, Shivraj Patil, to arrive. By the time the team reached Mumbai, it was morning. Each passing minute turned the situation in favour of the terrorists. The huge casualty rate is a testimony to this fact. However, the good thing was that both the Centre as well as the state governments learnt their lessons. Today, NSG has centres in four corners of the country. State police forces and central police forces train regularly to tackle any such eventuality. Agencies don't suffer from miscommunication as they did earlier. Every state has resources to deal with any contingency. Yet the Pahalgam attack and the blast at Red Fort have brought terror back into the national discourse. It's clear that even after the severe beating received during Operation Sindoor, neither Pakistan nor those who seek to destabilise India would mend their ways. Two attacks in a year have raised questions about the alertness and preparedness of the security agencies. However, people miss a crucial point. The J&K police and their Haryana counterparts were able to seize 350 kg of ammonium nitrate and other weapons. Reports suggest that the terrorists were planning a series of attacks throughout the country on December 6, the day the Babri Mosque was demolished. The alert J&K police foiled their plan. In panic, Umar un-Nabi, a doctor, reportedly carried out a suicide attack that took the lives of at least 12 people. Two things are clear. Even white collar professionals are afflicted by the scourge of separatism and terrorism. This is the first time such a large number of professionals were found to be involved in the business of terror. The second and most important lesson is that the fight against terrorism is continuous. The government is doing its best, but society needs to be alert too. All the major terror attacks on Indian soil in the past had a foreign footprint. The terrorists were either trained in or belonged to the other side of the border. However, all the perpetrators of the Delhi blast are Indians. The Delhi incident has proved that bloodthirsty people are hiding in plain sight. We need to improve our social discourse while remaining alert to identify them.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal

EDITORIAL

India's balanced approach on AI

There is no consensus among nations over what should be the right approach to tame the genie unleashed by Artificial Intelligence (AI). The flip side of the technology — especially its potential for misuse and spreading misinformation — is already a cause for global concern. However, there is no magic wand to make the dangerous spin-offs of the technology, like Deepfakes, disappear instantly. Morphing tools can be used to commit crimes, harm reputations, influence polls, and undermine trust in democratic institutions. Every nation must figure out solutions, keeping its needs and ecosystems in view. In doing so, the overreach of state authorities and invasion of privacy should be avoided. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has now released the AI Governance Guidelines that seeks to prioritise a people-centric approach so that the technology can catalyse inclusive growth. The guidelines have been drafted by a high-level committee under the chairmanship of Prof Balaraman Ravindran, IIT-Madras. These are intended to guide policymakers, researchers, and industry to build better national and international cooperation for safe, responsible, and inclusive AI adoption. The key takeaway is that the government is not in a hurry to introduce any kind of prohibitive regulation at this stage. Instead, it wants to allow innovations to guide the industry, laying stress on accelerating AI innovation at any cost. The new framework seeks to promote innovation with guardrails, without throttling AI adoption. This is the right and balanced approach, given the global trends. The guidelines envisage the establishment of the AI Governance Group, supported by the Technology and Policy Expert Committee and the AI Safety Institute. It will be a small, permanent, and effective inter-agency body responsible for overall policy development and coordination on AI governance. This oversight framework is aimed at ensuring accountability and risk reduction. India's approach contrasts with that of the European Union, which has adopted a binding AI Act categorising systems by risk levels. The US, on the other hand, has left it to market forces to determine the rules. India's framework, by comparison, seeks a middle path, promoting AI as a driver of inclusion and competitiveness, while relying on adaptive governance rather than rigid regulation. This is a unique approach. Countries like India, where AI tools have the transformative potential, must take a balanced approach to ensure the free flow of ideas and innovations while effectively addressing the risks at the application level. The committee looked at India's needs, its ecosystem, and then built the framework completely ground up. The committee's current assessment is that many of the risks emerging from AI can be addressed through existing laws. The use of deepfakes to impersonate individuals can be regulated by provisions under the Information Technology Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, and the use of personal data without user consent to train AI models is governed by the Digital Personal Data Protection Act.

India's influence evident in G20 declaration



India successfully ensured that the key priorities of its G20 Presidency were reflected in the G20 South African Summit Leaders' Declaration, with the document prominently echoing the concerns of the Global South and reaffirming several commitments initiated under India's leadership. From India's perspective, two major priorities, the condemnation of terrorism and the recognition of the transformative potential of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), found clear and direct mention. "We condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations," the declaration stated, marking one of the strongest reiterated of the global stance on terrorism. On technology, the document reaffirmed commitments made in New Delhi on harnessing digital and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence. The leaders highlighted the need for safe, secure and trustworthy AI, ensuring human rights protection, transparency, fairness and accountability. "We reaffirm the G20 AI principles and

recall the New Delhi and Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration on our commitments to harness the potential of digital and emerging technologies, including AI. We will work to promote international cooperation and further discussions to unlock the full potential of AI, equitably share its benefits and mitigate risks, recognising the need to incorporate the voices of developed and developing countries," the statement said. "To ensure safe, secure, and trustworthy AI development, deployment and use, the protection of human rights, transparency and explainability, fairness, accountability, regulation, safety, appropriate human oversight, ethics, biases, privacy, data protection and data governance must be addressed. We recognise the role of the United Nations, alongside other relevant existing fora, in promoting international AI cooperation, including to empower sustainable development," the statement added. There was a push for strong language on empowerment of women and girls and in this regard, one of the key outcomes of

India's G20 presidency, women-led development has been encouraged. "We reaffirm our full commitment to the empowerment of women and girls and to urgently remove social and economic barriers to achieve gender equality. We encourage women-led development and ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership at all levels of the decision-making in political, economic and public life," the statement read. "We condemn all forms of discrimination against women and girls and recall our commitment to end gender-based violence and the killing of women and girls because of their gender. To this end, we commit to take accelerated action to eradicate all forms of violence, including sexual violence and harassment against all women and girls, and violence occurring in public and private life, online and offline," the statement added. The declaration acknowledged women as agents of peace and reaffirmed the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. "As we celebrate the 30th anniversary

of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we reaffirm our commitment to its full, effective and accelerated implementation. We welcome the Global Leader's Meeting on Women held on October 13-14 in Beijing by China and UN Women to commemorate Beijing+30 and carry forward the spirit of the Beijing Conference. We also recognise the role of women as agents of peace," the statement said. Strengthening disaster resilience and response is the key priority of the South African presidency. The outcomes of the Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group initiated by the Indian presidency have been reinforced in the declaration. Further, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) has been recognised in this context. "We underscore the importance of investing in building sustainable resilience, prioritising prevention and taking anticipatory action, rooted in evidence-based policy making. This can include the expansion and greater use of affordable, inclusive and accessible pre-arranged financing mechanisms, to strengthen ex ante disaster risk reduction

and preparedness for timely, flexible, effective, comprehensive and equitable disaster response and recovery while placing people's lives and livelihoods at the core. This could also include financing that motivates ex-ante DRR, such as parametric insurance, risk pools, contingent credit, catastrophe bonds, insurance guarantee facilities linked to elective delivery mechanisms, particularly adaptive social protection systems, and take note of initiatives such as the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)," the statement read. On food security, the Deccan High-Level Principles on Food Security and Nutrition were reaffirmed, highlighting the continued challenges of hunger and access to healthy diets, while underscoring the fundamental right to be free from hunger. "While we welcome progress made in reducing hunger in the world, we are still alarmed that up to 720 million people continued to experience hunger in 2024 and that 2.6 billion people were unable to afford healthy diets.

Rising Kabul-Islamabad tensions fuel crackdown on Afghan migrants in Pakistan



Rising tensions between Kabul and Islamabad have intensified difficulties for Afghan migrants living in Pakistan, with several reporting a spike in harassment and forced removals, Tolo News reported. Migrants say the strained political climate has increasingly shaped their day-to-day treatment. According to Tolo News, some Afghan migrants allege that police mistreatment has grown more severe in recent weeks. Hamed, an Afghan migrant in Pakistan, said, "Pakistani police

migrants to leave the country, and because of that, Afghans are being forcibly returned from Punjab, Balochistan and Sindh," he stated. His remarks highlight how government directives have translated into increased removals across multiple provinces. Tolo News also pointed to a video circulating on social media, though it could not independently verify the time or location. The footage appears to show Pakistani police chanting slogans against Afghan migrants during a public gathering and calling for their removal. In response to these developments, migrant rights advocates have warned against politicising the issue and stressed the importance of upholding international obligations. Mohammad Khan Talebi Mohammadzai, a migrant rights activist, said, "The mass and forced deportation of Afghan migrants from Pakistan constitutes a violation of the principle of non-refoulement. Arbitrary arrests carried out by the country's security apparatus are in breach of international law." His comments underline growing legal concerns surrounding the treatment of Afghan migrants.

Indian Railways crosses 1 billion tonne freight loading in 2025-26



Indian Railways' freight performance continues to strengthen India's economic backbone, with cumulative loading this year crossing the 1-billion-tonne mark—reaching 1020 Million Tonnes (MT) as of November 19, according to an official statement. This milestone reflects broad-based support from key sectors: coal remains the largest contributor at 505 MT, followed by iron ore (115 MT), cement (92 MT), container traffic (59 MT), pig iron and finished steel (47 MT), fertilisers (42 MT), mineral oil (32 MT), foodgrains (30 MT), raw materials for steel plants (approx. 20 MT), and balance-other-goods (74 MT). Daily loading continues to hold strong at around 4.4 MT, higher than 4.2 MT last year, demonstrating improved operational efficiency and sustained demand, the Ministry of Railways said in the statement. Freight loading from April to October further underscores this positive trajectory, reaching 935.1 MT in 2025, up from 906.9 MT in the same period last year, marking healthy year-on-year growth. This sustained momentum, combined with improved daily loading rates, demonstrates Railways' capacity to support India's industrial expansion and

infrastructure development. Recognising the critical role of cement in India's infrastructure growth, Railways has taken significant steps to optimise this segment's logistics capabilities. The recent rollout of comprehensive reforms, including the Policy for Bulk Cement Terminals and rationalised rates for bulk cement movement in containers, represents a strategic initiative to modernise cement transportation. These measures aim to increase bulk handling capacity, reduce transit time, and lower logistics costs, directly benefiting both industry players and end consumers while driving greater efficiency across the supply chain. Such targeted interventions catalyse sectoral transformation. Shifting bulk goods movement to rail yields multiple benefits that extend beyond mere commercial metrics. It reduces carbon footprints, decongests highways, and provides industries, including MSMEs, access to greener logistics solutions. These developments reinforce India's commitment to sustainable growth, aligning freight operations with the nation's journey towards Net Zero Carbon Emission targets and positioning Railways as a catalyst for both economic and environmental progress.

POEMS

The Early Years

I don't want to say
things were indescribably
bad exactly

but things were
indescribably bad exactly

I don't want to say the tide
went out and left him
gaping—a landed fish precisely

but the tide did indeed go out
and left him gaping—a dropped ghost

to make matters worse
god gathered up all of god's things
and paddled out on that tide
so he swore he would die

and to make matters worse still
he rocked back and forth
in a bubble rather boggy and sad

ate nothing but thistles therein

I don't want to pretend
things were very much worse
than they were
but they very much were

By Mark Waldron

Fashion industry braces for "challenging" 2026

The global fashion industry is set to face a "challenging" year in 2026, as most executives brace for worsening conditions amid economic uncertainty, shifting trade dynamics, and unpredictable consumer behaviour, according to the BoF-McKinsey State of Fashion 2026 report. The report shows that 46 per cent of fashion executives expect conditions to deteriorate in 2026, up eight percentage points from the previous year, while only 25 per cent foresee improvement. The sentiment marks a shift from earlier years when "uncertainty" dominated forecasts. Now, "challenging" has become the single word defining the sector's outlook, as per the report. Consumer confidence remains the biggest

concern, with nearly eight in ten leaders citing weak spending appetite as the top risk to growth. This is closely tied to ongoing geopolitical instability and inflationary pressures that continue to dampen purchasing power, especially in the United States, where the consumer confidence index hit its lowest point since 2020. Disrupted trade flows are also adding to industry anxiety. Around 40 per cent of executives identify deglobalisation and tariffs as major risks, up sharply from the previous year. North America, in particular, is viewed as the least promising region, with 36 per cent of respondents labelling it "unpromising



or very unpromising." The BoF-McKinsey forecast suggests that the fashion industry will post only low single-digit growth in 2026, weighed down by volatile macroeconomic conditions. To offset rising input costs, nearly three-quarters of executives plan to raise prices, with North American companies leading the pack. 45 per cent intend to hike prices by more than 5 per cent. As costs climb, companies are shifting their focus toward improving efficiency. While 69 per cent of leaders still prioritise sales growth, this figure has declined from 73 per cent a year earlier, signalling growing attention to cost control and productivity gains. One key strategy emerging from the report is the integration of artificial intelligence across

operations. Executives identify scaling AI and digital tools as the biggest opportunity for 2026. After limited experiments in areas like customer service and design, fashion leaders are now seeking to embed AI more deeply into their business models, from supply chain management to creative design. The report also highlights a renewed focus on sustainability and differentiation. Executives view circular business models such as resale as ways to meet consumer expectations while maintaining relevance in an increasingly value-conscious market. The mid-tier brands that balance creativity, affordability, and experience are expected to outperform luxury players, who continue to grapple with high prices and slower demand.



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

The case for the new labour codes

This reform could energise the Indian economy and boost investment

The rollout of the four labour codes by the Union government is one of the most important market reforms in the history of the Indian economy. The net effect of the four new codes — they deal with wages, industrial relations, occupational safety and social security — is primarily threefold. It will simplify the existing framework, introduce a level of formalisation as far as terms of employment of workers are concerned, and offer greater flexibility to employers in dealing with employees' work duration and even employment itself.

It is mostly the last part, manifested in increased threshold for hire-and-fire, strike action, etc, which is the centrepiece of opposition to and apprehension of the codes by trade unions in the country. In an ideal world, one could reasonably argue that the move is pro-capital and anti-labour. However, the Indian economy, as it stands today, is far from ideal. Despite being a labour-abundant economy, India has struggled not just to usher in a manufacturing revolution, but even its limited manufacturing gains have been mostly concentrated in sectors that are not labour-intensive. A lot of this failure has been attributed to India's labour market regime, which, businesses have argued, does not allow them to run enterprises that are nimble enough to deal with the volatilities or cyclical fluctuations of the market. There are studies that show that entrepreneurs have often tried to bypass these regulations by resorting to either replicating smaller factories or outsourcing work to informal workers, both of which have led to forgoing economies of scale in the Indian economy.

The roll-out of the new labour codes should take away this constraint, real or perceived. Of course, the results are unlikely to be seen immediately. It is also a pity that the reform has happened at a time when the global economy is in a funk (to put it politely), which has generated headwinds for export markets. However, a period of crisis is often a period of reforms too. To be sure, some Indian states, which have had success with manufacturing, have already rolled out some of the key provisions in the labour codes. This strengthens their case.

None of this, however, should be inferred as carte blanche for undermining labour rights. The best-case scenario would be entrepreneurs unleashing new dynamism from the reformed labour regime and workers reinventing their collective bargaining in a more robust economy.

Johannesburg G20 is a Global South moment

The G20 Summit in South Africa — the first in Africa since the forum's inception in 2008 — has been significant in many ways. First, it has taken forward the vision and agendas outlined by India during its presidency in 2023. The Johannesburg meet privileged the interests of the Global South: The advocacy for greater financing to combat the climate crisis, for instance, reflects this. The six initiatives PM Narendra Modi outlined at the summit need to be read against this backdrop. The proposals he framed within a vision of "Integral Humanism", a political philosophy associated with Deendayal Upadhyay, one of the founders of the Jana Sangh (the forerunner of the BJP), call for a rethink on the development priorities advanced by the wealthy Global North and prescribe a set of agendas that emphasise sustainable growth and an equitable sharing of resources to end the over-exploitation of nature. Proposals such as a global health care response team, a circular economy for critical minerals, and open satellite data partnership have the potential to cement Global South cooperation. India's push for a global consensus on condemning "terrorism in all forms and manifestations" has also resonated in Johannesburg. The Africa Skills Multiplier Initiative is in step with efforts to engage constructively with the continent.

Second, the leaders broke with convention to issue a statement at the onset of the summit, revealing intent. With the US boycotting the summit — the Trump regime accuses South Africa of racial discrimination against white Afrikaners, who led the apartheid regime for decades — a cloud hangs over follow-up action: The 2026 summit is scheduled to be held in Miami, the US. But, Washington will be the loser if it tries to undermine the goals set in Johannesburg. India, South Africa, and other Global South nations have made it clear that the age of global hegemons is over and the vision for a more inclusive world is likely to come from emerging powers. The South African G20 underlines this shift.

Labour reforms for Atmanirbhar Bharat

The new labour codes establish a modern framework that demonstrates India's readiness to meet the demands of a dynamic and rapidly evolving global economy

For decades, India struggled with weak economic growth, entrenched corruption, and a chronic absence of commitment to job creation and workers' welfare. Politically motivated *gheraos* and *bandhs* repeatedly disrupted industrial activity, stalling investments and eroding trust in the system. It is a shame that previous governments reduced labour welfare to mere slogans, failing to address the real issues faced by workers with seriousness.

It took a fundamental shift in national leadership to break this inertia. From the ramparts of the Red Fort, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi invoked "*Shramev Jayate*" (labour alone triumphs), declaring that the dignity of labour must stand at the centre of India's development journey. This was not just a slogan, it marked the beginning of a new national consciousness that placed workers at the heart of policymaking.

The need for such a shift was long overdue. Much of India's labour law architecture traces back to the 1920s-1950s and was shaped by a colonial mindset. Meanwhile, the world of work changed dramatically. The rise of gig and platform economies, digitalisa-

tion, flexible work structures, and new-age enterprises reshaped global labour systems. Yet India's labour laws remained frozen in time, unable to support a modern workforce or a competitive economy. Through his *panch pran* (five resolves), PM Modi called for shedding our colonial mindset and embracing a future-ready approach. The outdated laws persisted not because they worked, but because previous governments lacked the political will, courage, and vision to modernise them in line with emerging realities and national needs. Under PM Modi's leadership, India's global stature has risen to unprecedented heights. The world now acknowledges that India is no longer just participating in shaping the future, it is helping define it. But to truly seize this historic moment and convert potential into long-term prosperity, India cannot remain bound to a colonial-era labour framework built for control rather than empowerment.

A comprehensive overhaul was, therefore, essential to achieve large-scale job creation, broaden formalisation, and ensure universal social security. Recognising this national need, the Modi Government undertook one of the most significant reforms in independent India. The earlier 29 fragmented labour laws were consolidated into four clear, coherent labour codes: the code on wages, the industrial relations code, the code on social security, and the occupational safety, health and working conditions code.

On November 21, these codes came into force. Together, they establish a modern labour framework that is pro-worker and pro-growth, demonstrating

that India is ready to meet the demands of a dynamic and rapidly evolving global economy.

Since the codes were passed by Parliament in 2019 and 2020, several states, Union Territories, workers' associations, and industry bodies have welcomed their progressive intent. Recognising their merit, states across the political spectrum amended their labour laws in alignment with the codes. For instance, states that have allowed women to work at night with their consent and adequate safety measures saw a 13% rise in the total number of women employed.

Stakeholders across sectors have recognised the need to move beyond an outdated labour system. In my interactions with workers and industry leaders, one message has emerged consistently — the need for clarity, fairness, and dignity at the workplace. This guiding principle shaped our reforms, replacing a complex, fragmented system with one that is simple, transparent, and protective of every worker.

The labour codes, in letter and spirit, prioritise workers' interests while balancing employers' expectations. They promote preventive health care and expand social security. They provide formal recognition to audio-visual workers and gig and platform workers. They enable pan-India ESIC coverage, mandate annual health check-ups for all workers aged 40 and above, including plantation workers who were earlier excluded, and guarantee statutory floor wages for all workers to reduce disparities across states. Provisions such as mandatory appointment letters, assured pay slips, and paid annual



Mansukh Mandaviya



States that have allowed women to work at night with adequate safety measures saw a 13% rise in the total number of women employed.

leave provide greater stability, dignity, and protection for every worker.

As a progressive alternative to contract-based employment, the codes introduce fixed-term employment (FTE). Under FTE, workers employed for a fixed duration receive the same wages, benefits, and working conditions as permanent employees, including paid leave, regulated work hours, medical facilities, social security, and other statutory protections. Notably, FTE employees become eligible for gratuity after just one year of continuous service. The codes also acknowledge the realities of modern workplaces. If an employee voluntarily chooses to work beyond standard hours, they must be compensated at twice the normal wage rate for overtime, ensuring fairness in every circumstance.

Nari shakti (women's power) forms a central pillar of these reforms. The codes open new avenues for women to participate across sectors, including in underground mines, with heavy machinery, and do night shifts, with consent and robust safety protocols. At the same time, the codes significantly reduce compliance burdens on employers by introducing single registration, a single licence, and single return filing. This simplification will encourage industries to expand and set up their units across India, thereby boosting local employment. India's progress in expanding social

security, from 19% in 2015 to 64.3% in 2025, has earned global acclaim. The International Labour Organization has acknowledged India's efforts, while the International Social Security Association has honoured India with its Award for Outstanding Achievement in Social Security. These international organisations have also hailed the new labour codes as modern, progressive, and pro-worker.

Much of the criticism about the codes arises not from an understanding of the reforms but from entrenched political interests resistant to change. Those who relied on outdated and opaque systems for influence are now uncomfortable with a transparent, efficient, and worker-centric framework. Instead of acknowledging the positive transformation these codes bring, they have chosen to spread misinformation.

The labour codes represent a transformative milestone in India's journey towards becoming an Atmanirbhar and Viksit Bharat. They uphold the dignity of the worker, encourage industrial growth, and create a model where workers' rights and dignity are protected, and workers become the engine driving *atmanirbharta*.

Shramev jayate!

Mansukh Mandaviya is the Union minister for labour and minister of youth affairs and sports. The views expressed are personal

{ GRAND STRATEGY }

Happymon Jacob



Japan, Taiwan, & Beijing's designs for a unipolar Asia

The rapidly deteriorating diplomatic row between Japan and China over a potential "Taiwan contingency" is an important precursor of how China may react to countries and leaders that express opinions deemed unfavourable by Beijing in the years to come.

As China's power grows, along with its ambitions regarding Taiwan, Beijing is increasingly intolerant of regional powers that openly support Taiwan. This growing assertiveness coincides with diminishing confidence in American security assistance for Taiwan, creating a sense of insecurity among China's neighbours. As China rapidly establishes its position on the world stage, the implications of the Tokyo-Beijing diplomatic row could have implications far beyond Japan, potentially ensuring many countries self-censor themselves when it comes to the Taiwan question.

Here's what happened. The standoff between Tokyo and Beijing started on November 7, when Sanae Takaichi, Japan's newly elected and hawkish Prime Minister (also its first woman PM), addressed Japan's parliament. She stated that a Chinese attack on Taiwan could be classified as a "survival-threatening situation", which, under Japanese law, could potentially trigger a military response from Tokyo. She explained that a Chinese blockade or seizure of Taiwan, located close to Japan and crucial for its shipping routes, could qualify as such a threat. The statement did not seem to be an official policy declaration from Japan; rather, it was a two-sentence response to a parliamentary question. Except, the statement was made by the PM herself.

Beijing was quick to react even though just a week prior to her statement, she had a cordial meeting with Chinese president Xi Jinping in South Korea. It took a series of steps — advised its citizens against travelling to Japan, thereby harming Japan's tourism sector; suspended imports of Japanese seafood; sent Coast Guard ships to patrol disputed islands; and warned Chinese students in Japan about safety risks. China's ambassador to the UN Fu Cong wrote in a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that "If Japan dares to attempt an armed intervention in the cross-Strait situation, it would be an act of aggression. China will resolutely exercise its right of self-defence under the UN Charter and international law and firmly defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Tokyo had sent a senior diplomat, Masaaki Kanaï, to Beijing to meet his Chinese counterpart. This was done to talk things out, but Beijing was not impressed. It wants the Japanese PM to withdraw her statement.

This does follow a pattern. In 2010, China limited the export of crucial minerals to Japan, and in 2017, Chinese State media encouraged boycotts of South Korean companies after South Korea deployed American missiles in its defence system.

These developments have broader geopolitical implications. For one, Beijing is trying to

make an example of Japan. By economically and diplomatically punishing Tokyo, Beijing is effectively telling other States that support Taiwan, openly or otherwise, that Beijing will not take "Taiwan contingency talks" lightly — that there will be consequences for such support to Taiwan, even if it is merely verbal. Beijing is acutely aware that other countries have limited options unless Washington firmly supports Taiwan. It is important to note that American diplomatic and security guarantees in the Indo-Pacific are historically among the weakest today. Thus, if Tokyo compromises today, it could establish a precedent for other regional powers on how to engage regarding Taiwan in the days ahead.

Second, there is little doubt that East Asia and Southeast Asia are critical testing grounds for China's rise to hegemony in Asia. East Asia, in particular, represents an important battleground for China's ambitions to establish a unipolar Asia. Given its geographical proximity to China, the region serves as an ideal starting point for Beijing to create a demonstration effect — showcasing its influence and legitimacy, and building allegiances. Successfully asserting dominance here could pave the way for China to expand its hegemony across the region. In other words, East Asia and Southeast Asia are where China will put its unipolar action plan into practice.

If China is able to solidify its hegemonic position in East Asia, it may encounter fewer challengers across the rest of Asia. Conversely, if it fails to dominate its neighbourhood, its claims to global superpower status could appear somewhat hollow. Controlling the official narratives regarding Taiwan in its own neighbourhood is a crucial aspect of this challenge.

The stakes are high for all parties. For Takaichi, leader of a minority party in the Japanese parliament who is known for her conservative nationalist views and Japan First policy, yielding to China's pressure would mark a poor start to her prime ministerial career. If Takaichi fails this test, it will not only have implications for her term as PM but will have larger regional geopolitical implications. If China is unable to get her to retract her statement, this could embolden other States in making similar statements.

For Taiwan, the implications are even graver: American security assistance has never been this suspect. China's military is reported to have the ability to take over Taiwan in the not too distant future, and more and more countries are reluctant about openly offending China by diplomatically or politically supporting Taiwan.

Given that Japan has historically been one of Taiwan's important regional supporters, the loss of that support — if followed by similar action by other, less powerful nations — could place Taiwan in harsher straits.

Happymon Jacob is distinguished visiting professor of Shiv Nadar University, the founder-director of Council for Strategic and Defense Research, and editor, INDIA'S WORLD magazine. The views expressed are personal

{ MARCO RUBIO } US SECRETARY OF STATE



The proposal was authored by the US ... It is based on input from the Russian side. But it is also based on previous and ongoing input from Ukraine

Following criticism by US lawmakers that the plan amounted to "the wish list of the Russians"



{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



Battle against terrorism is a continuous process

Life, once in a while, throws up events that traumatise you for the rest of your life. The terror attack in Mumbai on November 26, 2008, Pahalgam on April 22, this year, and in Delhi on November 10, top such chilling incidents. Two days from now, the nation will observe the 17th anniversary of the gruesome terror attack in Mumbai.

The Mumbai carnage was far more devastating than any other terror attack in India. Let's recount what happened that day. A flash appeared: "Shootout in Colaba!" I had the sinking feeling of gang wars returning to Mumbai. However, within minutes, reports of a massacre started streaming in.

In those chaotic early hours, no one imagined that the next many hours would witness mayhem and drown the nation in sorrow. Just 10 Pakistan-trained killers gunned down 165 Indian and foreign nationals. Their victims were spread across five-star hotels, the main railway station, Jewish quarters, hospitals, and prominent roads. The incident changed India's security scenario forever. It claimed Maharashtra police anti-terror squad's four top officers, including its chief Hemant Karkare. We salute their courage. But in the fog of war, they made a fatal mistake of breaking the security protocol. All the officers were in the same vehicle when they came under fire from the terrorists. Despite the indomitable courage of the security forces, the lack of proper training, emergency response protocols and lack of equipment were glaringly evident.

At that time, the only agency equipped to handle such a crisis was the National Security Guards (NSG), which was headquartered in Manesar, Haryana. The NSG wasn't informed about the attack immediately. Sandeep Sen, a colonel involved in that operation, recently claimed in a podcast that everyone knew six months before that a big terror attack was expected in India.

Talking about D-Day, 26/11, he said his senior asked him to open the television set, saying he thought it was a gang war. Sen switched on the television and saw AK-47 shells on the screen and realised it was a terror attack. The officers realised they would be pressed into service soon and got ready. But they got the go-ahead only late in the night. They boarded the aircraft, which was made to wait at the tarmac for the

then Union home minister, Shivraj Patil, to arrive. By the time the team reached Mumbai, it was morning. Each passing minute turned the situation in favour of the terrorists. The huge casualty rate is a testimony to this fact.

However, the good thing was that both the Centre as well as the state governments learnt their lessons. Today, NSG has centres in four corners of the country. State police forces and central police forces train regularly to tackle any such eventuality. Agencies don't suffer from miscommunication as they did earlier. Every state has resources to deal with any contingency.

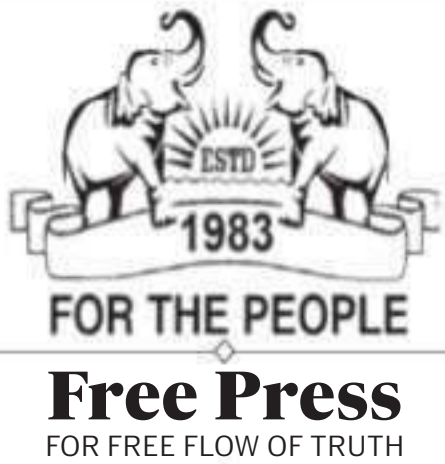
Yet the Pahalgam attack and the blast at Red Fort have brought terror back into the national discourse. It's clear that even after the severe beating received during Operation Sindoor, neither Pakistan nor those who seek to destabilise India would mend their ways.

Two attacks in a year have raised questions about the alertness and preparedness of the security agencies. However, people miss a crucial point. The J&K police and their Haryana counterparts were able to seize 350 kg of ammonium nitrate and other weapons. Reports suggest that the terrorists were planning a series of attacks throughout the country on December 6, the day the Babri Mosque was demolished. The alert J&K police foiled their plan. In panic, Umar un-Nabi, a doctor, reportedly carried out a suicide attack that took the lives of at least 12 people.

Two things are clear. Even white collar professionals are afflicted by the scourge of separatism and terrorism. This is the first time such a large number of professionals were found to be involved in the business of terror. The second and most important lesson is that the fight against terrorism is continuous. The government is doing its best, but society needs to be alert too.

All the major terror attacks on Indian soil in the past had a foreign footprint. The terrorists were either trained in or belonged to the other side of the border. However, all the perpetrators of the Delhi blast are Indians. The Delhi incident has proved that bloodthirsty people are hiding in plain sight. We need to improve our social discourse while remaining alert to identify them.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal



Nitish, perform or perish

Nitish Kumar is perhaps the luckiest politician to be sworn in as Chief Minister of Bihar for the tenth time. Yet to credit his return solely to luck would be unfair. It is his political astuteness, willingness to take risks, and unwavering focus on social engineering that have placed him once again at the helm of the state. When elections were announced, few expected him to be the next chief minister. He was projected as a spent force, even “senile” and indecisive. The BJP, his strongest ally, did little to reassure voters that he would lead the NDA if it returned to power. It even denied the JD(U) a larger share of seats to contest. The results, however, told a different story. The JD(U) won 85 seats—almost double its previous tally—with a strike rate comparable to the BJP’s. When the BJP had conceded the chief ministership to Nitish Kumar even when his party fared poorly in the past, it would have been untenable to deny him the post now, when the JD(U) stands nearly shoulder to shoulder with the BJP.

His victory is also a reaffirmation of the social coalition he has consolidated over decades: non-Yadav OBCs, EBCs, Dalits and, crucially, women. This election saw nine per-

The lockdown exodus is still fresh in public memory. The irony is Bihar possesses fertile land and immense agricultural potential, yet its economy is trapped in stagnation

cent more women voting than men, a testament to welfare schemes that reached the most vulnerable. For the first time, Nitish Kumar has parted with the Home portfolio, handing it to the BJP—an unmistakable sign of pragmatism and an acknowledgement of the political realities within the NDA. His nearly two-decade rule has undeniably improved Bihar’s roads and expanded electricity access to levels unimaginable earlier. But these achievements sit uneasily alongside Bihar’s stubborn position at the bottom on almost every social indicator—education, health, nutrition, and employment. Unemployment remains acute, forcing millions to migrate in search of work. The traumatic exodus during the COVID-19 lockdown, when countless Biharis walked hundreds of kilometres from Maharashtra, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh, is still fresh in public memory. The irony is that Bihar possesses fertile land and immense agricultural potential, yet its economy remains trapped in stagnation: fragmented landholdings, minimal industrialisation, and a services sector limited largely to government jobs. It also produces one of the highest numbers of civil service aspirants, but it should aspire to create opportunities in many more fields. Nitish Kumar’s tenth term, then, cannot be celebrated merely as a feat of political longevity; its true measure will be whether he can shift Bihar’s trajectory away from welfare-dependent survival and toward sustainable, broad-based development. If he fails to address these fundamental challenges, completing ten terms will mean little. What will matter is not how long he ruled but what lasting change he delivered.

Rules are key to labour codes

The notification of four labour codes by the Union government, passed by Parliament earlier, marks a major reform, subsuming 29 laws, some of which date back to the colonial era. Making big changes, the Codes on Wages, Industrial Relations, Social Security, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions seek to lend contemporaneity to labour regulation by bringing parity for women workers, fixing a national floor wage, introducing social security for migrant and gig workers, early gratuity for fixed-term workers after one year, and an expanded ESI coverage. A national database of unorganised workers and the use of Aadhaar for benefits distribution are positive, promising an easier claims process. As a far-reaching legislative framework governing millions of workers, though, the codes should have been widely discussed earlier. Three of them were passed by Parliament just when the COVID-19 pandemic was spreading in 2020. Moreover, even the discussion on the bills in the Lok Sabha was perfunctory due to an Opposition protest, while the Rajya Sabha took up the provisions only briefly. Now that the codes have been notified, workers keenly await the crucial rules that must be issued, laying down the processes and modalities. Here, the government has a major responsibility to consult all sections, particularly the trade unions, and modify the provisions where needed, considering that the erstwhile scheme relied on legislative acts and not executive rules to give effect to labour and social security policies. States too have to upgrade their labour bureaucracies to make them modern and responsive. Ease of doing business is a central concern for the Union government, reflected in the reduction of rules in the Industrial Relations Code from 105 to 51, administrative forms from 37 to 18, and a total elimination of registers. Removing inspector raj and transforming them into inspectors-cum-facilitators, and confining inspections to randomised, web-based algorithm-driven checks are meant to reassure entrepreneurs. A similar pro-business measure is evident in the change to compounding of offences, where the establishment can pay 50% of the fine and 75% for violations that include fines but also attract imprisonment. Yet, one key provision pertains to the threshold for applicability of industrial standing orders to establishments with 300 workers, up from 100 under earlier laws, potentially removing statutory cover for lakhs of workers. This has naturally raised worries. It is also necessary to be more welfarist on maternity leave, dropping the requirement of 80 days of work preceding, since this will affect unorganised labour. State governments are also free to prescribe hours of work, which may dilute code provisions that lay down a 48-hour work-week and an 8-hour day with overtime. It is also time to include workers in a universal health coverage plan, given the inadequacy of the ESI system that has only 165 hospitals, the majority run by states.



Guest Column

PRAKASH Y AMBEDKAR

Recently, the Supreme Court of India delivered a judgement in State of Tamil Nadu vs. Governor of Tamil Nadu, wherein the issue was that the governor initially refused to sign or assent to the bills approved by the Tamil Nadu legislative assembly. Later on, the governor referred the bills to the President of India. The President did not assent to the bill, nor did she refer the bill back to the legislative assembly with comments for reconsideration of the bill by the assembly. The non-reference of the bill back to the assembly and not giving assent to the bill became an issue with the government and the governor.

Now, the questions that arise are: is the Supreme Court authorised to admit and hear the matter and give judgement on the subject?; and, is the Supreme Court authorised to entertain a dispute between the legislative assembly and the governor?

Once a bill is introduced and approved by the state legislature, it is referred to the governor of the state for assent under Article 200. On receipt of the approved bill by the state legislature, the governor shall either, as soon as possible, assent to the bill or refer it with his comments back to the legislature for consideration or forward the bill for the consideration of the President. The

article says that if the bill is returned to the legislature with the governor’s observation, the House may or may not consider the observation and again approve the bill and refer it to the governor for his assent for the second time, and he has no option but to give his assent to it. In the case of Tamil Nadu, the governor initially withheld assent and, subsequently, did not return the bill with a message for reconsideration. On its own, the Tamil Nadu legislative assembly approved the same bill a second time and referred it to the governor. The question is, how long can the governor withhold its assent? The Constitution states, “as soon as possible on presentation”, but remains silent on the specific time point.

The Constitution itself, in Articles 111 and 200, provides the procedure that needs to be developed in case of conflict between the Parliament and the President, and between the state legislature and the governor. If either the President or the governor refuse to give assent to the approved bill, the first option is to move a no-confidence motion against the President in Parliament and against the governor in the legislature on the ground that both have failed to follow the advice tendered by the council of ministers. The second option requires the Parliament or the state legislature to reconsider the bill, and if approved again, the President or the governor has no option

but to assent to it. This constitutional convention, or constitutional morality, introduced and developed by the Tamil Nadu legislature, is not examined in the judgement as to the constitutional validity of the convention or morality. The question raised by the President under Article 143 to the SC concerns the duration for which the he/she can withhold a bill. In this case, the SC, instead of serving as a court of guidance and helping to create constitutional conventions and morality, has imposed itself as a superhero and the boss of the nation.

The Constitution lays down in Article 246 the subjects on which the Parliament and the state legislature can legislate. In the case of a subject mentioned in the concurrent list, both the state legislature and Parliament can legislate. But in case of conflict between the act of state legislation and the act of Parliament, under article 251, the act of Parliament will prevail. Under Article 201, once the bill is referred to the President for consideration, he/she has to act upon it as soon as possible, as per the provisions of the Constitution.

From the judgement, the SC has not considered the issue of jurisdiction. This is the main issue. Under Article 145 of the Constitution, the SC is authorised to frame rules and regulations for carrying out its work. Similarly, the Constitution, under Articles 118 and 208, has em-

powered the Parliament and the state legislature to frame the rules for the conduct of their businesses in the House. Under Articles 122 and 212 of the Constitution, the proceedings of the House cannot be called for in court, nor can the proceedings of Parliament or legislation be questioned in court.

The Supreme Court’s original jurisdiction is limited by Articles 32 and 131 to disputes involving the infringement of fundamental rights and disputes between states and unions, or between multiple states and unions, or between one state and another. But can the President’s or governor’s non-assenting of a bill be called a dispute between the state and the union? The controversy involves the speaker, who represents the legislature, and the governor. Even this aspect is not examined by the SC.

Now the question is can the SC compel either the President or the governor to give their assent to the bill under Article 200, given Article 361? As mentioned earlier, the court has no jurisdiction.

Any order or judgement issued by any court is null and void if it is without jurisdiction.

Lastly, the SC lost an opportunity to examine whether, having reserved the bill for the President’s reference, the President and the governor become one and the same identity. Article 12 defines “State” to

include, in the case of the Union govt, the govt and the Parliament, and in the case of state, the govt and the legislature. The question that I have raised needs clarification, as the governor remains in office till he enjoys the confidence of the President. When the bill is referred to the President, the governor hands over the jurisdiction to the President. Are we to then treat only the referred bill, with both the offices as one, in view of the judgement mentioned herein? What has been overlooked is that the “State” in the case of the Union govt includes the Parliament; the same situation prevails for states. Article 12 suggests that the Parliament, the government, and the office of the President form a unified entity, similar to the situation in the states. The judgement under examination is filed by “The State of TN Against Governor of Tamil Nadu”. According to Article 12, the term ‘state’ includes the govt of TN, which encompasses the TN governor within the concept of the state. The Apex court has failed to address the issue as to how one wing of the state can file a writ petition against the other. No provision in the Constitution allows one wing of the state to file a petition against another wing of the state. On these grounds, I differ from the judgement.

Adv. Prakash Ambedkar, (Ex) Member of Parliament.



Brand Banter

SANJEEV KOTNALA

The story of an eternal Beta husband and Start-up wife

Every brand, like every husband, begins imperfectly. You can complain or you can create. You can lament the flaws or you can nurture the potential

There are a few undeniable truths in life. Gravity pulls you down, politicians let you down, and Wi-Fi drops the moment you really need it. But above all, there’s one universal fact every married woman will understand and agree on—husbands are beta versions.

No matter how many anniversaries are celebrated, the husband remains a work in progress—a prototype, perpetually in beta testing. And at the centre of this lifelong pilot project stands the wife, who is equal parts entrepreneur, strategist, therapist, and chief innovation officer.

She doesn’t just marry a man; she invests in a prototype. Others may see the man as the final product (his mother certainly does), but she knows he’s a half-baked idea waiting for improvement. She looks beyond the visible flaws and sees potential—that magical word every investor, mentor, and optimist clings to.

And so begins her lifelong start-up: Project Husband.

The business plan is fuzzy. The service protocols are ambiguous. The communication manual

changes daily. Yet the mission remains unwavering—to upgrade, refine, and rebrand the man she married into the partner she envisioned.

She knows what every entrepreneur knows deep down—failure is not fatal. In fact, if there’s anyone who truly understands that repeated failure might actually indicate a rising probability of success, it’s the wife. She has the persistence of a Silicon Valley founder and the optimism of an FMCG marketer launching the 42nd version of a soap that still doesn’t lather.

Her methods? Fluid and inventive. The same message—“please change”—can be delivered in countless formats: a gentle request, a sarcastic remark, or a calm but dangerous “never mind” (Note to husbands: it’s always ‘mind’ with ‘never’ supremely silent).

And yet, beneath the chaos, there’s brilliance.

She’s a master brand builder. Her insight into consumer behaviour (read: her husband’s moods) is unmatched. She understands emotional triggers, product fatigue, and even the importance of packaging—which explains why she still

hopes he’ll wear that one shirt she bought “to improve the brand image”. Every day, she fine-tunes her marketing approach—sometimes through persuasion, sometimes through performance pressure, and occasionally through product and service withdrawal (don’t ask). And while her results may not always show up in quarterly reports, her consistency would make any agency proud.

She’s the queen of soft rebranding. In public, she maintains a spotless image—the perfect couple, the smiling brand ambassadors of domestic bliss. Inside, she’s managing PR crises, internal communications, and product testing simultaneously. She’s the HR department, R&D, and emotional customer service rolled into one. Unlike most marketers, she doesn’t abandon her product when it disappoints. She doubles down. Every failed attempt, every argument, every rollback only fuels her conviction. Because, to her, this isn’t about giving up—it’s about evolving the brand.

In a world obsessed with perfection, she has the wisdom to accept imperfection—as long as there’s progress. She’s not looking for a

flawless final version; she’s looking for proof that the next update will be slightly better. There’s something deeply entrepreneurial about that spirit. She doesn’t complain that the product isn’t ready. She builds around it. She fixes, improvises, and innovates. And when all else fails, she smiles, mutters something about “potential”, and prepares for another round of testing.

Marketers and brand builders could learn from her. Her tenacity, her deep consumer understanding, her ability to pivot between logic and emotion, and her unwavering faith in eventual transformation—that’s the essence of outstanding brand stewardship. She’s running a lifelong campaign powered by passion and patience. A campaign with no off-season, no pause button, and no option to switch brands. And while she may not get Cannes Lions or Effies, she earns something infinitely rarer—sustained engagement over unwarranted silly arguments.

The irony, of course, is that she chose this product voluntarily. She liked it, she loved it, she bought into it—and now, she’s determined to improve it. It’s almost poetic: the

same person who once said, “I love you just the way you are,” now spends decades ensuring that “the way you are” evolves continuously.

To the brand and marketing community, there’s a gentle reminder here. Every brand, like every husband, begins imperfectly. You can complain, or you can create. You can lament the flaws, or you can nurture the potential. Real progress is not about finding a perfect product—it’s about having the courage to keep improving the one you already have.

So, the next time your campaign underperforms, your client changes the brief, or your product refuses to evolve—take a moment to observe the ultimate brand manager at work. She’s sitting across the dinner table, maybe after an equally tiring day at the office or home, smiling wryly at her eternal beta version (you) and plotting the next strategic step. Because in her world, “till death do us part” simply means system updates will continue indefinitely. Perhaps Apple, as a company, understands it the best.

Sanjeev Kotnala is a brand and marketing consultant, writer, coach and mentor.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nitish in action

Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary being allotted the home ministry portfolio has surprised all. This is, however, an attempt at balancing the coalition, keeping an eye on good governance. While Choudhary will head the law and order situation, CM Nitish Kumar is poised to take over the administrative control. This appears to be a brilliant strategic move. In a nutshell, the overall strategy of the government appears to aim at stability and effectiveness of the governance and navigating intricacies of coalition dynamics for a stable and smooth governance.

Sunil Okhade, Indore

G20 Summit

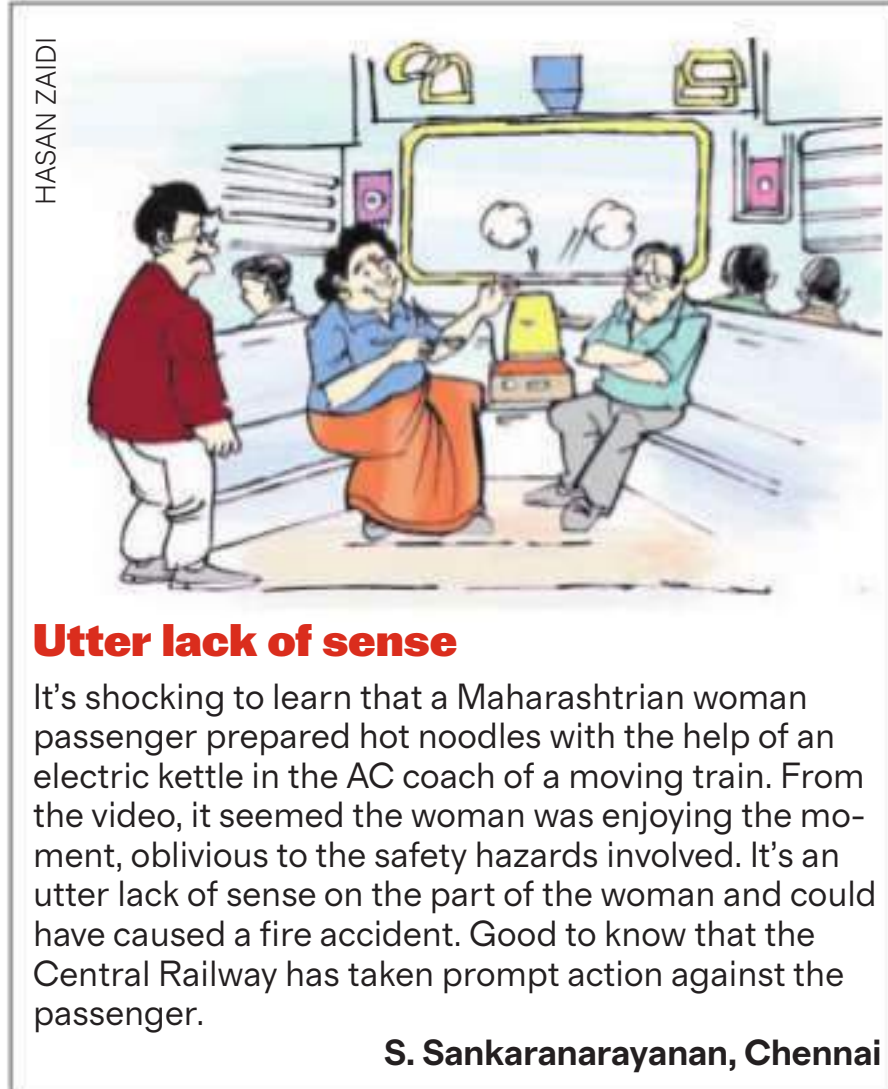
The forthcoming G20 Summit in Johannesburg must rise above routine economics and raise its voice against the moral emergency prevailing in countries like Nigeria, Congo (DRC) and many others in Africa, which are witnessing alarming levels of Christian persecution, including genocide-like at-

tacks, mass burials and large-scale displacement. The world cannot remain indifferent while vulnerable communities are wiped out with impunity. The G20 representing the most influential nations must urgently condemn these atrocities. Silence at this stage would be both irresponsible and inhumane.

P.H. Hema Sagar, Secunderabad

Labour codes

It is excellent that four new simplified labour codes have been implemented. This is to simplify and modernise decades-old labour laws of India. The 4 codes on wages (2019), industrial relations, social security, occupational safety, health and working conditions are self-explanatory (2020). The welfare measures include: 1) social security for all workers (including gig workers and fixed-term employees) 2) statutory minimum wages 3) mandatory appointment letters 4) timely payment across all sectors 5)



Utter lack of sense

It’s shocking to learn that a Maharashtra woman passenger prepared hot noodles with the help of an electric kettle in the AC coach of a moving train. From the video, it seemed the woman was enjoying the moment, oblivious to the safety hazards involved. It’s an utter lack of sense on the part of the woman and could have caused a fire accident. Good to know that the Central Railway has taken prompt action against the passenger.

S. Sankaranarayanan, Chennai

stronger protections.

PVP Madhu Nivriti, Secunderabad

What’s the hurry?

During the continued SIR exercise, sluggish portals, malfunctioning apps, and ground-level challenges have severely slowed down the work of BLOs. Half the

allotted time has already passed, yet a major portion of the task remains pending. When there is no election scheduled in Madhya Pradesh, nor any immediate compulsory need for a revised voter list, why then is such an impractical and tight deadline being imposed

on the administrative staff and BLOs? The EC must extend the SIR deadline for Madhya Pradesh by at least one month.

Prof. RK Jain, MP

Tejas crash

The crash of the indigenous Tejas aircraft, where the pilot sustained fatal injuries, during an aerial display at the Dubai Air Show is simply appalling. This is the second crash involving a Tejas aircraft in less than two years. In March 2024, a Tejas fighter went down in Jaisalmer, the first such accident in the aircraft’s 23-year history. A high-level probe should be ordered to find out the cause for the accident, and remedial measures should be taken early to avoid such disasters in the future.

Sravana Ramachandran, Chennai

Remembering Indira

November 19 was celebrated as the birth anniversary of former prime minister Indira Gandhi, the first and only female prime minister of India, serving

multiple terms between 1966 and 1984. Through an unshakeable resolve and bold leadership, she successfully secured India’s agricultural self-sufficiency, liberated Bangladesh, and challenged world powers head-on to safeguard the nation’s interests. Her legacy remains a guiding force in India’s journey towards progress and development.

Jubel D’Cruz, Mumbai

Great loss

The Tamil literary world has lost one of its stalwarts with the passing away of eminent writer and a multi-talented personality Erode Tamilanban. Sahitya Akademi Award winner Tamilanban, who was also a prominent newsreader in Doordarshan, wrote 103 books, including 73 collections of poems. Some of his poems have also been translated into Hindi and Urdu as well as Arabic, Chinese, French, German and Spanish, which shows his class in reaching out to people. He will be always remembered.

A.P. Thiruvadi, Chennai

DECCAN
Chronicle

24 NOVEMBER 2025

G-20: Bumpy ride for US;
tech partnership for India

The summit meeting of the G-20 countries in Johannesburg is unique in many ways — the boycott by the United States following the Donald Trump administration's allegation that the South African government was pursuing anti-White policies, European allies voting for a resolution that America had objected to and the summit passing the declaration at the commencement instead of at the conclusion.

The G-20 is one of the most important intergovernmental forums, representing about 85 per cent of global GDP, 75 per cent of global trade and more than half of the world's population. Consensus at the G-20 meeting, therefore, will have a wider impact on the world. However, a global summit of such stature was dominated by the America-South Africa controversy, even though it took several other important decisions.

One of the key subjects that South Africa lobbied for at this summit was inequality. The summit called upon its members to address disparities in wealth and development both within and between countries. The leaders also called for efforts to help low-income countries cope with their debt, which is hindering development and eating into investments in infrastructure, disaster resilience, healthcare and education. According to one estimate, 87 countries spend more than 10 per cent of their budgets on debt servicing. Six countries, including Sri Lanka, spend over 40 per cent of their revenue on external debt servicing. While financial discipline is important, global lenders must take steps to prevent debt from affecting these countries' ability to provide basic facilities to their citizens.

Without referring to China's export ban on rare-earth minerals, the summit also called for protecting the global value chain of critical minerals from "disruption", whether due to geopolitical tensions or unilateral trade measures inconsistent with World Trade Organisation rules.

The G-20 summit also approved Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposal to counter the drug-terror nexus through financial, governance and security frameworks. Terrorist organisations have long been using synthetic drugs to raise money for their activities by smuggling them into developed or developing countries that the G-20 represents.

Other proposals put forward by India include a G-20 Global Healthcare Response Team — which would create a pool of medical experts who can be rapidly deployed during health emergencies and natural disasters — and a skills programme aimed at creating one million trainers to hone the skills of African youth.

On the sidelines of the G-20 summit, India, Canada and Australia — three former British colonies and rising middle powers — announced the formation of a trilateral technological partnership. This is perhaps the first time that Australia and Canada — the two members of the Anglosphere's intelligence compact Five Eyes — have joined hands with India without being helmed by the United Kingdom or the United States.

Canada has strong expertise in artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, biotechnology, clean energy and space robotics, while Australia's strengths lie in mining robotics, agriculture technology, solar innovation and cybersecurity. This partnership would diversify India's current US-centric approach to technological collaboration, especially in light of the uncertainty caused by recent unilateral US measures against its partners.

Love in the air over New York

Remarkable as the story of Zohran Mamdani, son of Ugandan and Indian immigrants to the US, and his election as the Mayor of New York is, it only gets better after his much-anticipated meeting with President Donald Trump at the White House. What was projected to be a confrontation between a "fascist" and a "Jihadist", as the worst of hate terms with which they described each other during the campaign, became more of a fairytale meeting of minds.

A democratic socialist and a Republican authoritarian hit it off like a long-lost dad and prodigal son trading pleasantries, so much so there has even been a promise of two from the borough of Queens working together for the common good of New York City. Having threatened to cut off funds for a Hudson tunnel, send troops to curtail crime and do everything in his power to mock the voters of New York, Mr Trump now vows to work with the Mayor on the affordability crisis facing the poorer citizens of a metropolis.

There was all-round praise from the New Yorkers for the charm offensive of the silver-tongued orator for managing the Trump meeting with such grace that it can be imagined bipartisanship is returning in the deeply polarised politics of America. Funding for free buses that will travel faster, and free universal childcare are some relevant welfare measures the new Mayor hopes to put in motion would depend on the federal government being liberal with the purse strings and the wealthy not minding more taxes proposed by the 'Communist'.

Call it bromance, or just Mr Trump mellowing because his 'Maga' base seems to be cracking on issues like public airing of the Epstein dirty linen and the likes of House Representative Marjorie Taylor-Greene from Georgia revolting because of pessimism over next year's mid-term polls, the fact is Mr Trump put up a show from behind his desk at the Oval Office that was way out of character.

A caveat on anything to do with Mr Trump is he can be as whimsical and prone to changing his mind as he can be dogmatic in spelling out any course of action. Be it on tariffs and trade or dealing with friends like Elon Musk who seemed the closest of loyalists as they hitched their star to his bandwagon, Mr Trump's moods can swing like a pendulum. Beware New York City and its Mayor-to-be.

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Anita Anand



Global citizens:
The antidote to
identity politics

Zoran Mamdani's historic landslide victory in the race for New York City's mayor brings both hope and disappointment. Hope because it signifies the end of an era of sameness and the beginning of something new. Dismay because it breeds fear in those Americans who support the status quo and are afraid of the unfamiliar. In Mr Mamdani's victory, even more so. He's young (indicating inexperience), says he's Muslim (highlighting the Other), and promises justice and a fairer distribution of wealth in the city (signalling an end to corruption and crony capitalism). Mr Mamdani organised his election campaign around three fronts — identity, religion and issues. I will examine what identity and religion involve, as I have no significant disagreement with the issues front.

Identity politics focuses on organising around shared experiences of injustice faced by specific social groups, aiming to build a more inclusive and fair society by challenging and reducing exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation. It highlights identity markers like ethnicity, gender, caste and religion, which are used to empower, represent and recognise affected groups.

Members of a social group often face similar discrimination and injustice. Recognising these common experiences, identity politics aims to build solidarity and a sense of community among members. This shared identity forms the basis for political action and advocacy.

Ethnicity, which also includes religion, consists of

shared cultural, linguistic and ancestral traits. Gender refers to the experiences and challenges faced by different gender identities. Caste is a form of social stratification based on hereditary status, encompassing shared beliefs, practices and values.

Identity politics, by empowering marginalised groups, helps preserve and promote diverse cultural identities, ensuring that different traditions and identities are acknowledged and respected.

Mr Mamdani targeted the lower and middle-income residents of New York City from diverse ethnicities, religions and backgrounds affected by high living costs, discrimination and corruption. And those fed up with the same old, same old governance.

However, identity politics can cause polarisation and division as diverse groups compete for recognition and resources. It can also marginalise groups or individuals who do not meet certain identity markers. Additionally, it is vulnerable to manipulation by political parties and leaders seeking support and votes, which can sometimes weaken societal cohesion and unity. This is happening now.

In India, over the past decade since the BJP came to power, the Hindutva agenda has been promoted, and the concept of unity in diversity has been neglected. Increasingly, Indians are led to believe that being Indian is equivalent to being Hindu, often a fundamentalist one. There is little room for other minorities, religious or otherwise.

In the United States too, in recent years, right-wing Christians and evangelists have dominated identity

politics. Donald Trump's Make America Great Again slogan and campaigns have focused on targeting immigrants and non-Christians, especially Muslims, overlooking the fact that America was made great by immigrants since settlers set foot in the land.

Mr Mamdani confidently affirms his Muslim identity in public appearances and on social media. In New York City, with a total population of eight million, Islam is the third most practised religion after Christianity and Judaism. Estimates suggest that approximately 900,000 Muslims live in New York City, making it the city with the largest Muslim population in the United States.

Zohran Mamdani was born in Uganda. His father, Mahmood Mamdani, is a Ugandan citizen, an anthropologist, academic, and political commentator. His mother is Mira Nair, the celebrated Indian-born filmmaker. Zohran's family moved to the US when he was seven, and he holds dual citizenship of the US and Uganda, according to public sources. While Zohran's mother was born into a Hindu family, his father was born to Muslim parents in India, who later moved to Uganda. I am therefore curious why he only says he's a Muslim. Is religion inherited only from the father's side? What about the mother? I understand it to be political expediency.

We are shaped by our culture. I grew up in an Arya Samaj household, a Hindu reform movement founded in 1875. It emphasised educational reform, gender equality and a casteless society. In our home, there were no idols, no photos of gods and goddesses, and

no puja room. We did a *havan* occasionally. I attended Catholic schools and colleges and worked at a Quaker centre in rural India. I was involved with a multi-faith centre at my university in Ohio in the US, which served students of all faiths. As a professional, I worked for the social advocacy branch of the Methodist Church in Washington DC. More recently, I consulted with several organisations in Afghanistan working with followers of Islam. My life has been enriched by these influences. I recognise the strengths and challenges of each and choose what I find relevant to my life. I consider myself a world citizen.

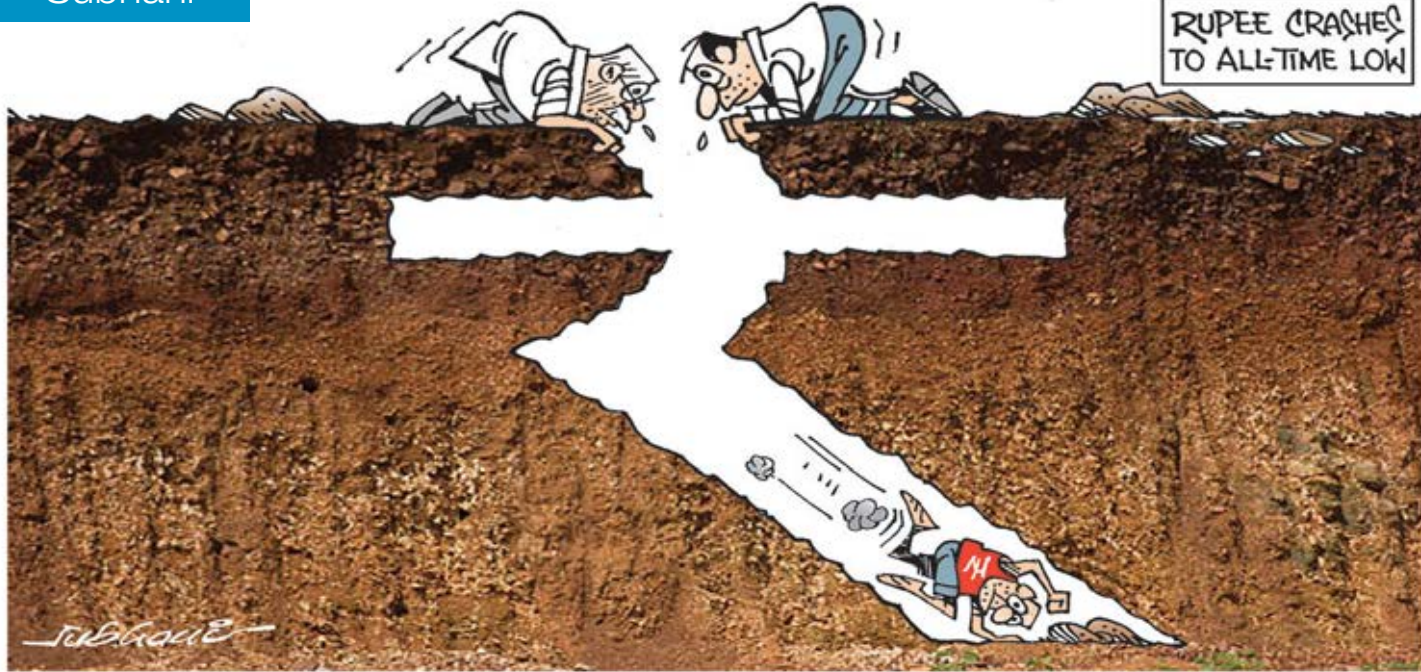
But I am not a politician. I understand why Zohran Mamdani emphasised his Muslim identity. And he is a progressive Muslim. His political party has a sharp vision — a good one.

However, I would have liked him to promote a vision where we see ourselves as seekers of truth, starting with what we inherit from any religion. We can aim to become the best versions of ourselves not by identifying solely with any particular group, whether minority or not, but as fellow seekers on a journey toward emancipation — free from bigotry, biases, dogma, customs or traditions that hinder us and cause us to be less open-minded and more violent in thought and action. We embrace the Other.

Our shared future depends on viewing ourselves as global citizens.

The writer is a development and communications consultant

Subhani



A mind in fear in India
of Gandhi and Tagore



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

A senior retired official of the Andhra Pradesh government recently posted a complaint addressed to Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on the social media. His son had sent him a book as a birthday gift but the Indian Customs department officials were holding it back, demanding all manner of paperwork and proof of identity and residence. The fact of his being a retired official and a member of the Indian Administrative Service was not adequate. The documents he submitted to the Customs authorities were returned six times as being inadequate proof of his bona fides.

All this, said the retired official to the finance minister, "for the Customs to clear a book sent by a loving son to surprise his father on his birthday". My wife had a similar experience receiving a book from overseas in which she had published a research paper. Governmental control on the import of books is an old *sarkari* disease.

The import and domestic publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was banned by a Congress government in the late 1980s. There are no angels in this game of mind management.

This official monitoring of the import of books and journals is one aspect of attempts at governmental thought control. There is more that has been happening, ranging from official sanction to school textbooks to the grant or denial of visas to scholars resident overseas. The debate on these issues has become so partisan that there are enough number of so-called intellectuals on both sides of the debate ready to defend or oppose government censorship and bureaucratic control.

Several foreign scholars have been denied entry into India without in fact a reason being specified, but ostensibly due to official Indian disapproval of their views.

Rather than invite them to Indian platforms where their views can be contested and debated, establishment intellectuals seem to prefer banning their entry. In a world connected through the airwaves and with online conferences, the prevention of physical entry through visa denial is a typically wooden-headed bureaucratic response.

It was none other than Mahatma Gandhi who had once famously said: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."

Every educated Indian is familiar with Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's famous prayer — "*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high/Where knowledge is free/Where the world has not been broken up into fragments/By narrow domestic walls...*"

What governmental dictates on monitoring import of books and visa for scholars is doing is to in fact impose such "narrow domestic walls".

At a recent media event, Prime Minister Narendra Modi added his voice to that of legions of Indian critics of the now infamous Lord Thomas Babbington Macaulay, stating that Macaulay's "Minute on Education" had "shattered our self-confidence" and that Macaulay had "infused a sense of inferiority within us. With one stroke, Macaulay threw thousands of years of our knowledge and science, our art and culture and our entire way of life into the dustbin".

As Macaulay's biographer Zareer Masani, son of the distinguished Minoo Masani, an intellectual leader of the Swatantra Party and a member of Parliament from Rajkot in Gujarat, has written, Macaulay was also the 'pioneer of India's modernisation'

It is true that Macaulay's primary objective was to create "a class of Indians who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern: a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". Much of the popular and populist criticism of Western scholarship and English education in contemporary India is derived from this view of Macaulay.

However, as Macaulay's biographer Zareer Masani, son of the distinguished Minoo Masani, an intellectual leader of the Swatantra Party and a member of Parliament from Rajkot in Gujarat, has written, Macaulay was also the "pioneer of India's modernisation". According to Masani, "Macaulay's educational minutes made it abundantly clear that he saw the teaching of English, far from replacing vernaculars, as a channel for the transmission of European knowledge into the vernaculars and through them down to the wide masses of the Indian population."

Masani quotes Macaulay as writing: "Twenty years hence, there will be hundreds, nay thousands, of natives familiar with the best models of composition, and well acquainted with Western science." It was the free flow of modern science into colonial India that enabled a C.V. Raman to earn a Nobel Prize and a Srinivasa Ramanujan to contribute to modern mathematics.

In 2025, a good three quarters of a century after Independence, it is a shame that India's political leadership, across the political spectrum, still blames the

past for the country's present inadequacies. It is the inadequate attempt by successive governments to translate global knowledge into "the vernaculars", that continues to privilege the English language in India.

It is also a fact that much of ancient Indian history and knowledge was unravelled by European scholars. From the discovery of the contribution of Buddhism, and of Buddhist sites from Nalanda to Ajanta, and of the roots of Indian languages, European scholarship made immense contribution to knowledge about our past. Rather than accept this fact and then proceed to invest in the creation of Indian scholarship, we continue to bemoan the past and the interest of "outsiders" in our history and society.

Prime Minister Modi referred to how China, Japan and South Korea have progressed as modern industrial nations without the dominance of English and by empowering their own languages. This is true, but all three of them borrowed heavily from Western scholarship and knowledge and today march ahead of the West in the most advanced fields of science and technology. They did not waste their time and energy glorifying their past without investing in the present and the future. India's challenge is to catch up with East Asian nations in the fields of science, technology and other areas of knowledge. It is the pursuit of this goal that has to take precedence over the language in which these goals will be pursued.

For India to catch up with East Asia as a knowledge-based economy, it must have its windows open, to use Gandhiji's metaphor, and break down "narrow domestic walls", as Tagore urged, with our "head held high" and a "tireless striving stretching its arms towards perfection."

Sanjaya Baru is a writer and an economist. His most recent book is Session of the Successful: The Flight Out of New India.

LETTERS

IN DEFENCE OF
UDHAYA

Deputy CM Udhayanidhi Stalin has been lambasted by BJP for saying at a book launch that Sanskrit is a "dead language".

The argument of the BJP leaders that he is anti-Hindu and hates them is unacceptable and politically motivated. Uday has rightly stated that the Rs.2,400 crore allotted for Sanskrit development by the Union Government was high when compared to Rs.150 crore allotted for development of Tamil which is "one of the oldest" languages. It is only in this context that he has made his statement. The irresponsible statement of BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia that Udhay is insulting and abusing Hindus and Hindu culture is mischievous, opportunistic, unwanted and more dangerous and despicable than the statement of the Deputy CM. But Udhayanidhi needs to control his tongue since assembly elections are fast approaching and his statements against any religion, beliefs, culture etc., could be used against the DMK government.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

SANSKRIT LIVES ON

Sanskrit still lives as a language of worship by millions of devout Hindus all over India. Most Dravidian Leaders who decry Sanskrit as a dead language have Sanskrit names of Hindu gods and goddesses. Sanskrit, a classical language like Tamil, needs to be revived. Except TN, no other State grows and harbours enmity towards Sanskrit. It is to be mentioned here that no group can claim exclusivity for learning it. Sanskrit is not a forbidden fruit and anyone willing to enjoy its sweetness is welcome to learn it at or through designated institutions free of cost.

Marudamalaiyan, Coimbatore

G-20 WITHOUT USA

The G-20 Summit held in South Africa for the first time was overshadowed by the conspicuous absence of the United States. It is paradoxical that Mr. Donald Trump aspires for the Nobel Peace Prize while nurturing hostility toward the very country hosting this global conclave. However, the US boycott has inadvertently opened the space for other nations to project their key proposals, particularly India. The Prime Minister effectively used the forum to spotlight the Australia-Canada-India Technology and Innovation Partnership aimed at accelerating progress in Artificial Intelligence.

Rajakumar Arulanandham, Tirunelveli

THE ASIAN AGE

24 NOVEMBER 2025

G-20: Bumpy ride for US; tech partnership for India

The summit meeting of the G-20 countries in Johannesburg is unique in many ways — the boycott by the United States following the Donald Trump administration's allegation that the South African government was pursuing anti-White policies, European allies voting for a resolution that America had objected to and the summit passing the declaration at the commencement instead of at the conclusion.

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One of the key subjects that South Africa lobbied for at this summit was inequality. The summit called upon its members to address disparities in wealth and development both within and between countries. The leaders also called for efforts to help low-income countries cope with their debt, which is hindering development and eating into investments in infrastructure, disaster resilience, healthcare and education. According to one estimate, 87 countries spend more than 10 per cent of their budgets on debt servicing. Six countries, including Sri Lanka, spend over 40 per cent of their revenue on external debt servicing. While financial discipline is important, global lenders must take steps to prevent debt from affecting these countries' ability to provide basic facilities to their citizens.

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There was all-round praise from the New Yorkers for the charm offensive of the silver-tongued orator for managing the Trump meeting with such grace that it can be imagined bipartisanship is returning in the deeply polarised politics of America. Funding for free buses that will travel faster, and free universal childcare are some relevant welfare measures the new Mayor hopes to put in motion would depend on the federal government being liberal with the purse strings and the wealthy not minding more taxes proposed by the 'Communist'.

Call it bromance, or just Mr Trump mellowing because his 'Maga' base seems to be cracking on issues like public airing of the Epstein dirty linen and the likes of House Representative Marjorie Taylor-Greene from Georgia revolting because of pessimism over next year's mid-term polls, the fact is Mr Trump put up a show from behind his desk at the Oval Office that was way out of character.

A caveat on anything to do with Mr Trump is he can be as whimsical and prone to changing his mind as he can be dogmatic in spelling out any course of action. Be it on tariffs and trade or dealing with friends like Elon Musk who seemed the closest of loyalists as they hitched their star to his bandwagon, Mr Trump's moods can swing like a pendulum. Beware New York City and its Mayor-to-be.

KAUSHIK MITTER

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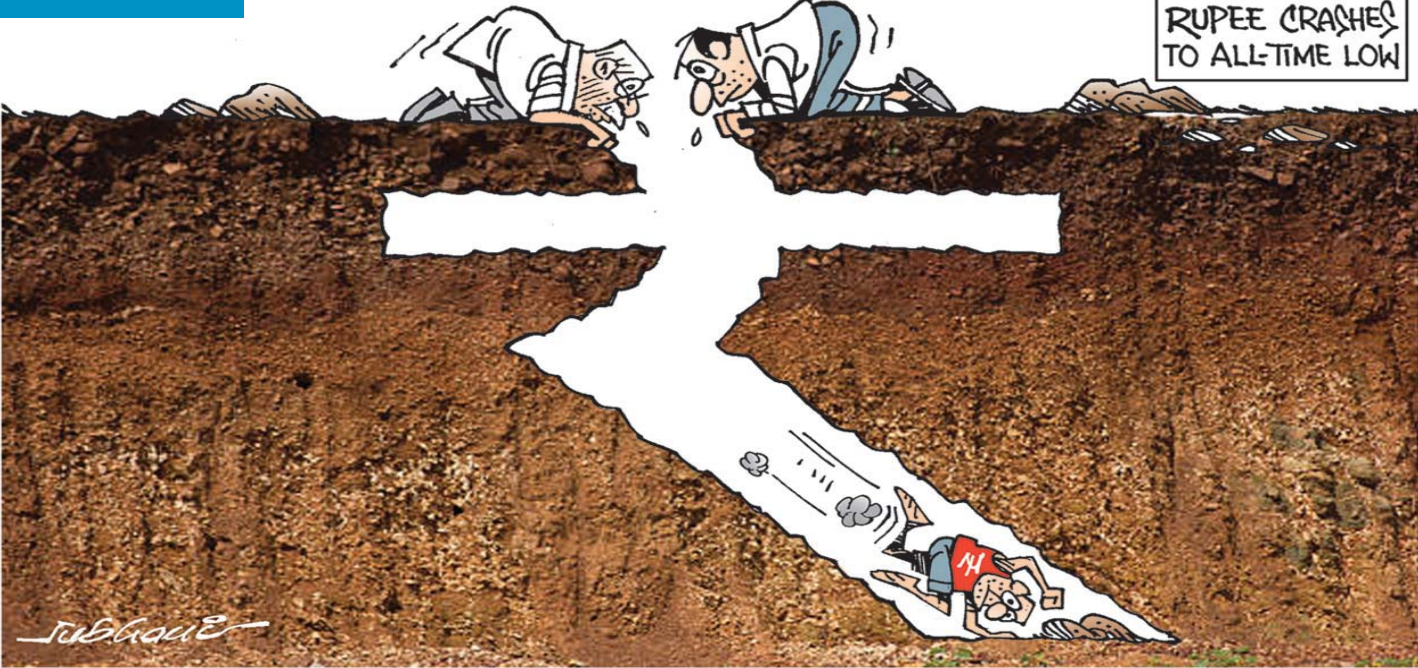
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Subhani



A mind in fear in India of Gandhi and Tagore



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

A senior retired official of the Andhra Pradesh government recently posted a complaint addressed to Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on the social media. His son had sent him a book as a birthday gift but the Indian Customs department officials were holding it back, demanding all manner of paperwork and proof of identity and residence. The fact of his being a retired official and a member of the Indian Administrative Service was not adequate. The documents he submitted to the Customs authorities were returned six times as being inadequate proof of his bona fides.

All this, said the retired official to the finance minister, "for the Customs to clear a book sent by a loving son to surprise his father on his birthday". My wife had a similar experience receiving a book from overseas in which she had published a research paper. Governmental control on the import of books is an old sarkari disease.

The import and domestic publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was banned by a Congress government in the late 1980s. There are no angels in this game of mind management.

This official monitoring of the import of books and journals is one aspect of attempts at governmental thought control. There is more that has been happening, ranging from official sanction to school textbooks to the grant or denial of visas to scholars resident overseas. The debate on these issues has become so partisan that there are enough number of so-called intellectuals on both sides of the debate ready to defend or oppose government censorship and bureaucratic control.

Several foreign scholars have been denied entry into India without in fact a reason being specified, but ostensibly due to official Indian disapproval of their views.

Rather than invite them to Indian platforms where their views can be contested and debated, establishment intellectuals seem to prefer banning their entry. In a world connected through the airwaves and with online conferences, the prevention of physical entry through visa denial is a typically wooden-headed bureaucratic response.

It was none other than Mahatma Gandhi who had once famously said: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."

Every educated Indian is familiar with Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's famous prayer — "*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high/Where knowledge is free/Where the world has not been broken up into fragments/By narrow domestic walls...*" What governmental diktats on monitoring import of books and visa for scholars is doing is to in fact impose such "narrow domestic walls".

At a recent media event, Prime Minister Narendra Modi added his voice to that of legions of Indian critics of the now infamous Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay, stating that Macaulay's "Minute on Education" had "shattered our self-confidence" and that Macaulay had "infused a sense of inferiority within us. With one stroke, Macaulay threw thousands of years of our knowledge and science, our art and culture and our entire way

As Macaulay's biographer Zareer Masani, son of the distinguished Minoo Masani, an intellectual leader of the Swatantra Party and a member of Parliament from Rajkot in Gujarat, has written, Macaulay was also the 'pioneer of India's modernisation'

of life into the dustbin".

It is true that Macaulay's primary objective was to create "a class of Indians who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern: a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". Much of the popular and populist criticism of Western scholarship and English education in contemporary India is derived from this view of Macaulay.

However, as Macaulay's biographer Zareer Masani, son of the distinguished Minoo Masani, an intellectual leader of the Swatantra Party and a member of Parliament from Rajkot in Gujarat, has written, Macaulay was also the "pioneer of India's modernisation". According to Masani, "Macaulay's educational minutes made it abundantly clear that he saw the teaching of English, far from replacing vernaculars, as a channel for the transmission of European knowledge into the vernaculars and through them down to the wide masses of the Indian population."

Masani quotes Macaulay as writing: "Twenty years hence, there will be hundreds, nay thousands, of natives familiar with the best models of composition, and well acquainted with Western science." It was the free flow of modern science into colonial India that enabled a C.V. Raman to earn a Nobel Prize and a Srinivasa Ramanujan to contribute to modern mathematics.

In 2025, a good three quarters of a century after Independence, it is a shame that India's political leadership, across the political

spectrum, still blames the past for the country's present inadequacies. It is the inadequate attempt by successive governments to translate global knowledge into "the vernaculars", that continues to privilege the English language in India.

It is also a fact that much of ancient Indian history and knowledge was unravelled by European scholars. From the discovery of the contribution of Buddhism, and of Buddhist sites from Nalanda to Ajanta, and of the roots of Indian languages, European scholarship made immense contribution to knowledge about our past. Rather than accept this fact and then proceed to invest in the creation of Indian scholarship, we continue to bemoan the past and the interest of "outsiders" in our history and society.

Prime Minister Modi referred to how China, Japan and South Korea have progressed as modern industrial nations without the dominance of English and by empowering their own languages. This is true, but all three of them borrowed heavily from Western scholarship and knowledge and today march ahead of the West in the most advanced fields of science and technology. They did not waste their time and energy glorifying their past without investing in the present and the future. India's challenge is to catch up with East Asian nations in the fields of science, technology and other areas of knowledge. It is the pursuit of this goal that has to take precedence over the language in which these goals will be pursued.

For India to catch up with East Asia as a knowledge-based economy, it must have its windows open, to use Gandhiji's metaphor, and break down "narrow domestic walls", as Tagore urged, with our "head held high" and a "tireless striving stretching its arms towards perfection."

Sanjaya Baru is a writer and an economist. His most recent book is Secession of the Successful: The Flight Out of New India.

LETTERS

FRIENDS, NOT FOES

The meeting between US President Donald Trump and New York City's mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani has followers of both leaders shocked. MAGA Republicans who have been busy demonising Mr Mamdani's socialism as a threat to the United States were surprised by Mr Trump's warm praise for Mr Mamdani.

And Mamdani supporters looking forward to the TV "encounter" hoping to see him get the better of Mr Trump, were equally discomfited. Both saw the cordial meeting as a betrayal. Mr Trump was effusive in complimenting Mr Mamdani on his plan to build more houses to bring down rent. Both had more in common than people thought.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

WE NEED A JP!

PAVAN K. VARMA'S column captures a pivotal moment in our political life. The Congress, despite its legacy, seems unable to undertake the structural reform needed to counter the BJP's relentless push towards a de facto Hindu Rashtra — a shift unfolding day by day. India urgently needs a credible national alternative rooted in constitutional values. If the Congress cannot transform itself, then, as Varma suggests, a new formation must arise. What the country needs now is the moral clarity and organisational courage once embodied by Jayaprakash Narayan: someone who can galvanise citizens across divides, restore democratic balance, and prevent further erosion of the republic's pluralistic foundations.

Harsh Pawaria
Rohtak

OVERWORKED BLOS

Shocked to note that the death of BLOs in quick succession in West Bengal makes no impact on the chief election commissioner. He is in no mood to address the problems of varied nature faced by booth level officers. BLOs are told to meet the deadline or face the music. Such a callous attitude on the part of the Election Commission has a telling effect on their mental health and the CM, Mamata Banerjee, has also expressed her concern in so many words. Will the apex court take cognizance of the matter?

Arun Gupta
Kolkata

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Kajal Chatterjee (Nov. 22). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Anita Anand



Global citizens: The antidote to identity politics

Zoran Mamdani's historic landslide victory in the race for New York City's mayor brings both hope and disappointment. Hope because it signifies the end of an era of sameness and the beginning of something new. Dismay because it breeds fear in those Americans who support the status quo and are afraid of the unfamiliar. In Mr Mamdani's victory, even more so. He's young (indicating inexperience), says he's Muslim (highlighting the Other), and promises justice and a fairer distribution of wealth in the city (signalling an end to corruption and crony capitalism). Mr Mamdani organised his election campaign around three fronts — identity, religion and issues. I will examine what identity and religion involve, as I have no significant disagreement with the issues front.

Identity politics focuses on organising around shared experiences of injustice faced by specific social groups, aiming to build a more inclusive and fair society by challenging and reducing exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation. It highlights identity markers like ethnicity, gender, caste and religion, which are used to empower, represent and recognise affected groups.

Members of a social group often face similar discrimination and injustice. Recognising these common experiences, identity politics aims to build solidarity and a sense of community among members. This shared identity forms the basis for political action and advocacy.

Ethnicity, which also includes religion, consists of

shared cultural, linguistic and ancestral traits. Gender refers to the experiences and challenges faced by different gender identities. Caste is a form of social stratification based on hereditary status, encompassing shared beliefs, practices and values.

Identity politics, by empowering marginalised groups, helps preserve and promote diverse cultural identities, ensuring that different traditions and identities are acknowledged and respected.

Mr Mamdani targeted the lower and middle-income residents of New York City from diverse ethnicities, religions and backgrounds affected by high living costs, discrimination and corruption. And those fed up with the same old, same old governance.

However, identity politics can cause polarisation and division as diverse groups compete for recognition and resources. It can also marginalise groups or individuals who do not meet certain identity markers. Additionally, it is vulnerable to manipulation by political parties and leaders seeking support and votes, which can sometimes weaken societal cohesion and unity. This is happening now.

In India, over the past decade since the BJP came to power, the Hindutva agenda has been promoted, and the concept of unity in diversity has been neglected. Increasingly, Indians are led to believe that being Indian is equivalent to being Hindu, often a fundamentalist one. There is little room for other minorities, religious or otherwise.

In the United States too, in recent years, right-wing Christians and evangelists have dominated identity

politics. Donald Trump's Make America Great Again slogan and campaigns have focused on targeting immigrants and non-Christians, especially Muslims, overlooking the fact that America was made great by immigrants since settlers set foot in the land.

Mr Mamdani confidently affirms his Muslim identity in public appearances and on social media. In New York City, with a total population of eight million, Islam is the third most practised religion after Christianity and Judaism. Estimates suggest that approximately 900,000 Muslims live in New York City, making it the city with the largest Muslim population in the United States.

Zohran Mamdani was born in Uganda. His father, Mahmood Mamdani, is a Ugandan citizen, an anthropologist, academic, and political commentator. His mother is Mira Nair, the celebrated Indian-born filmmaker. Zohran's family moved to the US when he was seven, and he holds dual citizenship of the US and Uganda, according to public sources. While Zohran's mother was born into a Hindu family, his father was born to Muslim parents in India, who later moved to Uganda. I am therefore curious why he only says he's a Muslim. Is religion inherited only from the father's side? What about the mother? I understand it to be political expediency.

We are shaped by our culture. I grew up in an Arya Samaj household, a Hindu reform movement founded in 1875. It emphasised educational reform, gender equality and a casteless society. In our home, there were no idols, no photos of gods and goddesses, and

no puja room. We did a *havan* occasionally. I attended Catholic schools and colleges and worked at a Quaker centre in rural India. I was involved with a multi-faith centre at my university in Ohio in the US, which served students of all faiths. As a professional, I worked for the social advocacy branch of the Methodist Church in Washington DC. More recently, I consulted with several organisations in Afghanistan working with followers of Islam. My life has been enriched by these influences. I recognise the strengths and challenges of each and choose what I find relevant to my life. I consider myself a world citizen.

But I am not a politician. I understand why Zohran Mamdani emphasised his Muslim identity. And he is a progressive Muslim. His political party has a sharp vision — a good one.

However, I would have liked him to promote a vision where we see ourselves as seekers of truth, starting with what we inherit from any religion. We can aim to become the best versions of ourselves not by identifying solely with any particular group, whether minority or not, but as fellow seekers on a journey toward emancipation — free from bigotry, biases, dogma, customs or traditions that hinder us and cause us to be less open-minded and more violent in thought and action. We embrace the Other.

Our shared future depends on viewing ourselves as global citizens.

The writer is a development and communications consultant

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Chandigarh row

Centre's move adds to distrust in Punjab

THE Central government's pushback on the proposed legislation to let Delhi run Chandigarh directly follows an uproar in Punjab that even the BJP's state unit was forced to lend its voice to. After the fiasco over restructuring of the Panjab University governance model, the Centre's latest move has only managed to add to a sense of distrust and resentment. It's well and good that there's been a retraction and the Bill will not be piloted in the upcoming winter session of Parliament. That still warrants answers to some tough questions. What exactly is the thought process in Delhi regarding Punjab and Chandigarh? Why this sudden urge to effect contentious changes that are bound to trigger protests in the border state? More importantly, why is there little effort to initiate a dialogue or debate, relying instead on an almost surreptitious fait accompli methodology?

Under the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill that was listed for introduction, Chandigarh was to be included under the ambit of Article 240. The bracketing with other Union Territories would have paved the way for appointment of an independent administrator, the Lieutenant Governor. Ever since 1984, the Punjab Governor has been holding charge of the Chandigarh Administrator. There are genuine concerns in Punjab that such a power shift will weaken its claim to Chandigarh, the capital of both Punjab and Haryana. Any notion of injustice and unfair treatment that Punjab harbours needs to be addressed urgently.

The controversies surrounding Panjab University and now Chandigarh have witnessed a fair degree of unilateralism that does not augur well for the federal ethos. It infuses unnecessary bitterness in the Centre-state relations, and diminishes the space for a healthy discourse on matters of disagreement. Allaying apprehensions and clearing any misunderstandings would be in national interest.

New labour codes

Ambitious reform, enforcement a challenge

INDIA's labour landscape enters a new era with the Centre notifying all four labour codes — on wages, industrial relations, social security and occupational safety and working conditions. The move, which replaces 29 Central laws with four codes, has been projected by the government as a historic reform that will simplify compliance, extend social security and strengthen worker protections. The rollout promises timely wages, formal appointment letters, minimum-wage guarantees and annual health check-ups for employees.

There is no denying that many provisions mark a long-overdue progress. The universal statutory right to minimum wages across sectors, mandatory written job contracts, improved gratuity access for fixed-term workers and clear norms on health and safety reflect a shift towards formalisation and transparency. Recognition of gig and platform workers within the social-security architecture is perhaps the single biggest structural change, acknowledging a segment long left outside the statutory net. The codes also mandate equality of employment conditions for women, expanding the scope of their participation in the workforce.

However, there are significant caveats. For example, the Industrial Relations Code raises the threshold for government approval for layoffs and closures from 100 to 300 workers. While industry celebrates this change as one enhancing flexibility, unions fear it will weaken job security. Several central trade unions have announced protests, arguing that the new regime dilutes collective bargaining space and tilts power towards employers. Implementation will also hinge on states, which must frame complementary rules; uneven adoption risks the creation of a unified national system. Ultimately, the success of the codes will depend on the integrity of enforcement — inspections that work, grievance mechanisms that deliver and social-security schemes that truly reach the informal workforce. India has rewritten its labour rulebook. Tangible change on the ground will take far longer to happen.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1925

Bombs in Bengal

THE alleged discovery of a "live" bomb, some revolvers and cartridges and a quantity of nitric acid in a house in Dakshineswar near Calcutta and the arrest of 9 persons who are alleged at the time to have been living in that house has given rise to a bitter and animated controversy between certain Indian and certain Anglo-Indian journals as to the true meaning of the incident. The Indian journals have more or less openly asserted that the placing of the bomb and the arms in the house may have been in all probability the work of police agents. In support of the assertion they point to the fact that this discovery took place almost on the morrow of the all-Bengal demonstration of protest against the detention of Babu Subhash Chandra Bose and other internees. If the Police wanted to make out a case for the continued detention of these men how could they do it better or more effectively than by a discovery of this kind? The Anglo-Indian journals have stoutly denied the allegation and strongly condemned the attitude of mind which bring such accusation against police agents without a scintilla of positive proof in support of it. In truth the accusation is not one which can be either proved or disproved without a regular, independent and impartial enquiry, for which there is no hope in the present conditions. No one can say that either revolutionary conspiracies or spies and agents provocateur have been unknown in this country during the last two decades. The existence of both was established in the past not only in courts of law but to the satisfaction of all reasonable and impartial critics; and there is nothing wrong in the assumption that what happened once may happen again.

OPINION

India remains on trade-turning pitch

The nation's path will remain unsteady unless it undertakes key reforms



SUBHASH CHANDRA GARG
FORMER FINANCE SECRETARY

BESIDES consumption and investment, trade balance is the third engine determining any country's economic growth and people's well-being.

The rude trade shock of merchandise trade deficit catapulting to \$42 billion in October, nearly 60% more than last year, may have serious implications for India's GDP growth and her people's well-being. Services exports have, however, continued to gain strength, and at \$38.4 billion, overtook merchandise exports comfortably. Its surplus of nearly \$20 billion, however, could not wipe out merchandise trade deficit, resulting in an overall trade deficit of nearly \$22 billion, 141% higher than October 2024.

Despite October's shocking trade performance, India's showing in the first seven months was not that bad. The total trade deficit in this period was only marginally worse than last year, by about 10%.

The big and burning question now is how India's trade performance will fare in the rest of the year. Optimists would like to believe that the October shock was a one-off event. Pessimists see it as an ominous portent of bad things to come. I would like to realistically assess India's future external trade trajectory and ask if India can get its act together.

For this purpose, it will be useful to divide India's merchandise trade into five baskets — agricultural commodities, old industrial goods (e.g. textiles, steel, ICE automobiles), new industrial goods (primarily electronic goods, solar energy products and chips), gold and precious metals/stones (captured in gold and gems and jewellery) and energy products (oil, coal, gas, hydrogen etc.).

Services trade can also be better



DELICATE: Global gold and silver prices are settling at high levels with serious concerns on India's trade balance. REUTERS

considered in terms of another fivefold services basket — information technology, education and health, financial, transportation and personal services.

India is now an established and stable exporter of agricultural goods and products despite resorting to occasional bans and price restrictions on wheat and rice exports generating close to \$40-50 billions of exports every year. India's structural commodities import dependence is also limited to edible oils, pulses and dry fruits. Agricultural exports consistently far exceed imports. With a steady export surplus, there is no material concern on agriculture trade front.

A major meltdown happened in the case of exports of old industrial goods in October. All major exports in this class — organic and inorganic chemicals, engineering goods, plastic and linoleum and cotton and man-made textile exports fell by 13%-22%. On the contrary, imports of many traditional industrial goods witnessed large increases. Fertilisers import went up by 87% and project imports by 46%. Others like machine tools, electrical and non-electrical machinery saw an import surge between 12% and 20%. India is not a major participant in global value chains of most old industrial

Despite October's shocking trade performance, India's showing in the first seven months was not that bad.

goods and continues to have major import dependence. There are no products which the world necessarily have to import from India. Worsening trade balance in this category is unfortunately likely to persist.

New industrial goods are global growth engines of production and exports. India is only a marginal player there. While India's electronic goods exports witnessed an impressive 19% growth in October, thanks largely to Apple, none of the other new industrial goods even figure in India's exports. On the contrary, India has enormous import dependence for these products. Electronics goods and

electrical and non-electrical machinery products, which include solar cells and modules, went up in double digits. India's electronics exports growth are slowing — only 19% in October, whereas the last seven months growth average is 38%. As exports of Apple iPhones mature and PLI on large electronic products gets wound up, there will be downward pressure on electronics goods exports.

India is a large importer of all fossil fuels, whether oil, gas and coal. International prices have been falling but are asymmetrically reflected in India's trade. While petroleum imports in value reduced by 4.5%, exports fell sharply by 16.3%. With renewable energy transition at a slow pace, India's dependence on energy imports will keep trade deficit under pressure.

India's fascination for gold has not seen any moderation despite gold prices shooting up by 50% in 2025. India imported nearly \$15 billion gold in October; a 200% increase, almost at par with petroleum products. Silver imports are up by 528%. International gold and silver prices are settling at high levels with serious concerns on India's trade balance.

India's gems and jewellery exports, despite rise in gold prices, witnessed about 30% fall in October. With Trump tar-

iffs hurting gems and jewellery exports, India seems to be on a sticky wicket.

Services exports continue to do well. In seven months, services exports grew by nearly 10%. Services imports, which are only about 50% of services exports, recorded smaller growth of a little over 3%. India's services exports though are hugely dependent on information technology services (more than 60%). A structural transformation is underway globally in terms of technology and immigration policies. While global capability centres (GCCs) exports from India are growing well, traditional business process outsourcing (BPO) and other IT services exports are slowing down/dedining.

With artificial intelligence, auto-programming and IT capabilities rising all over, IT services exports are unlikely to maintain a good growth over a longer time frame. India has not got its act together in most other services exports, whether travel, education, transport — our exports remain highly subdued, whereas imports keep growing. While India's edge in services exports seems secure for some years, its moderate growth will impact its trade surplus.

On the whole, India remains on a turning pitch. India's path will remain unsteady unless it undertakes fundamental reforms and measures. We need to conclude long-pending foreign trade and investment agreements/treaties with US, EU and also China to make India a production and export powerhouse for new industrial products (including automobiles). We need to open up education, health, accounting, legal and personal services and thoroughly overhaul travel and transport infrastructure and services to build new services export growth engines.

If we keep skidding from one negotiation to another without completing deals and don't undertake reforms, India's merchandise exports is likely to stagnate for many years. In the current year, merchandise trade deficit might end up around \$350 billion and overall trade balance might touch \$125 billion.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Much of our trading comes down to a battle between our patience and our impulses. — Steve Burns

In the langar at Golden Temple

RAMESHINDER SINGH SANDHU

THE volunteers at the world's largest free community kitchen at the Golden Temple in Amritsar come across not only a variety of attitudes among devotees, but also an array of eating habits. I have been volunteering for the past few years, at least two days in a week, and it's a live experience which has stayed with me.

I adore the joy on the faces of the young and the old, men and women from almost everywhere, as they walk in, ready for the grand culinary experience — a slowly cooked lentil curry (*dal*), a vegetable dish, rice full of aroma, *chapatis* and the rich and creamy rice pudding (*kheer*). While some requests are common, some aren't. 'Can you please pour *kheer* on the rice?' 'Please pour *dal* into my *kadhi* (curry). While some want more, some are very particular: 'not more than one or two spoons, please.'

Most foreign devotees prefer to roll their *chapatis*; some fill them up with the vegetable dish and slurp the spoonfuls of *dal* along. Most of them raise their thumb to flag the sumptuousness. The elderly always ask for the thin and soft *chapatis*, reminding the server "will be easy to chew." Some even say no to the *chapatis* bathed in clarified butter. The day black grams are served — some only ask for its gravy, while some want just the grams. On the day the *kadhi* is served, the demand for *pakoras* soars. When it comes to the next servings, besides *dal*, the rice inundated with soya chunks or veggies is very popular.

While many eat with spoons, there are many who prefer eating with hands, especially those from Himachal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and South Indian states. Most rice lovers usually have the *dal* poured over the rice, many make a little puddle in the centre for the *dal* and point it out to the serving volunteer. Many come up with requests for onion or pickle — lemon and mango pickles being the favourites.

There are also those who share their plates — from the newly married couples to the mother and child sitting adjacent to each other. If a child has his or her own plate, it's actively guarded by the mother who gives a green signal on what's to be served. The delectable *kheer* prepared with very less sugar, however, never gets a 'no'. Many don't mind another serving of this simple dessert, often loaded with dry fruits and seeds. How can I forget those who only take *chapatis* and *kheer* — a blend uniquely theirs!

The satiated faces after the last bite and the quiet gratitude in the air are unmissable. It's, of course, not just the palatable food that excites them but also the spiritual energy of the community kitchen and the thousands of shared meals that flows through the premises of the Darbar Sahib.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rationalist leaders must guide

Apropos of 'The Indian Muslim problem'; the real challenge is their growing radicalisation to the extent of perpetrating terror at the behest of their masters across the borders. Sadly, the silence of Indian Muslim leaders across the spectrum, except Asaduddin Owaisi, to condemn and negate jihadi terror, smacks of approval, if not blatant complicity. The onus is on nationalist and rationalist leaders to raise the ante to thwart death and destruction by the brainwashed, reckless few who bring bad name to the entire community.

LALIT BHARADWAJ, PANCHKULA

Easier said than done

Refer to 'The Indian Muslim problem'; a big gulf exists between Muslims and Hindus; both knowing well that they have to stay together forever. It is a serious matter why Indian Muslims participate in terror acts. When a Muslim is dragged from his house and lynched based on a rumour, it strains the already fragile relations. As a majority community, we must focus on our perspective and wherever the minorities are at the receiving end, we must sort out the problem amicably. However, it is easier said than done.

SUBHASH C TANEJA, GURUGRAM

Modern intellectual radicalisation

Radicalised networks are deliberately cultivating individuals who offer legitimacy, mobility and operational cover. Radicalisation now is being shaped through a modern intellectual interpretation of religious texts. Extremist influencers create a psychological and religious dependency by offering false emotional security. White-collar individuals give terror organisations social visibility, access to resources and institutions and the ability to mask logistical activities under professional legitimacy. Such profiles allow extremist groups to operate discreetly within urban environments. Radical recruiters exploit personal vulnerabilities such as identity crisis, academic stress and other grievances.

DEEPAK BHAN, BY MAIL

Prudence in space missions

Refer to 'Gaganyaan: Long haul before crewed flight takes charge'; India's space ambitions are laudable. However, the tearing hurry to rival the US, Russia and China and advancing without the correct test sequence seems imprudent. The article rightly questions the decision to launch G1 before the vital TV-D2 escape test and to field a scaled-down uncrewed mission with a basic crew module. Also, the abrupt shift from importing ECLSS from Russia to indigenously developing the life-support system reveals worrying gaps in readiness. As a human spaceflight cannot afford even minor lapses, ISRO must restore proper sequencing and prioritise absolute safety.

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

Address schoolkids' problems

With reference to '3 states, 3 tragedies'; sometimes, the parents don't take children's complaints and feedback seriously and fail to act urgently and decisively. Technology, with the social media playing a major role, has brought along a host of psychological issues for the children to cope up with. Working parents in a nuclear family setup has added to the woes. Private schools appoint temporary and underpaid teachers and staff and they, in turn, don't do justice to their work and are apathetic to the psychological and mental needs of students and vent their own frustrations on the hapless pupils.

MANMOHAN SINGH, KHARAR

Violation of model code of conduct

The Election Commission of India's reputation for neutrality and professionalism during the TN Seshan era is well established. But in recent years, the commission has faced increasing criticism. In the Bihar assembly election, the NDA government declared to pay Rs 10,000 to women just 10 days before the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) came into effect and continued to pay the said amount to beneficiaries during the election process, which is a clear violation. Can we call it a free and fair election?

SURINDER KUMAR KHANNA, AMRITSAR

Sacrifices of Hindus, Sikhs created new Punjab



PRITAM SINGH
PROFESSOR EMERITUS, OXFORD
BROOKES BUSINESS SCHOOL, UK

In my research on Indian and Punjabi politics and economics, I found that one of the most intriguing developments after 1947 was how consensus slowly grew around forming a Punjabi-speaking state. When momentous change happens, it usually results from both grassroots movements and shifts among those in power, i.e. the convergence of pressure from below and the movement from above. Antonio Gramsci, the great Italian Marxist thinker and revolutionary, theorised this process of reaching a social consensus as the emergence of an idea as hegemonic.

For example, in recent global history, the end of apartheid in South Africa and the collapse of the Soviet Union's central planning model (1989/1991) demonstrate this dual movement. In South Africa, years of organised resistance by the Black population — led by figures like Nelson Mandela — faced harsh crackdowns from the Whitesupremacist government led by FW de Klerk.

The key turning point came when President de Klerk

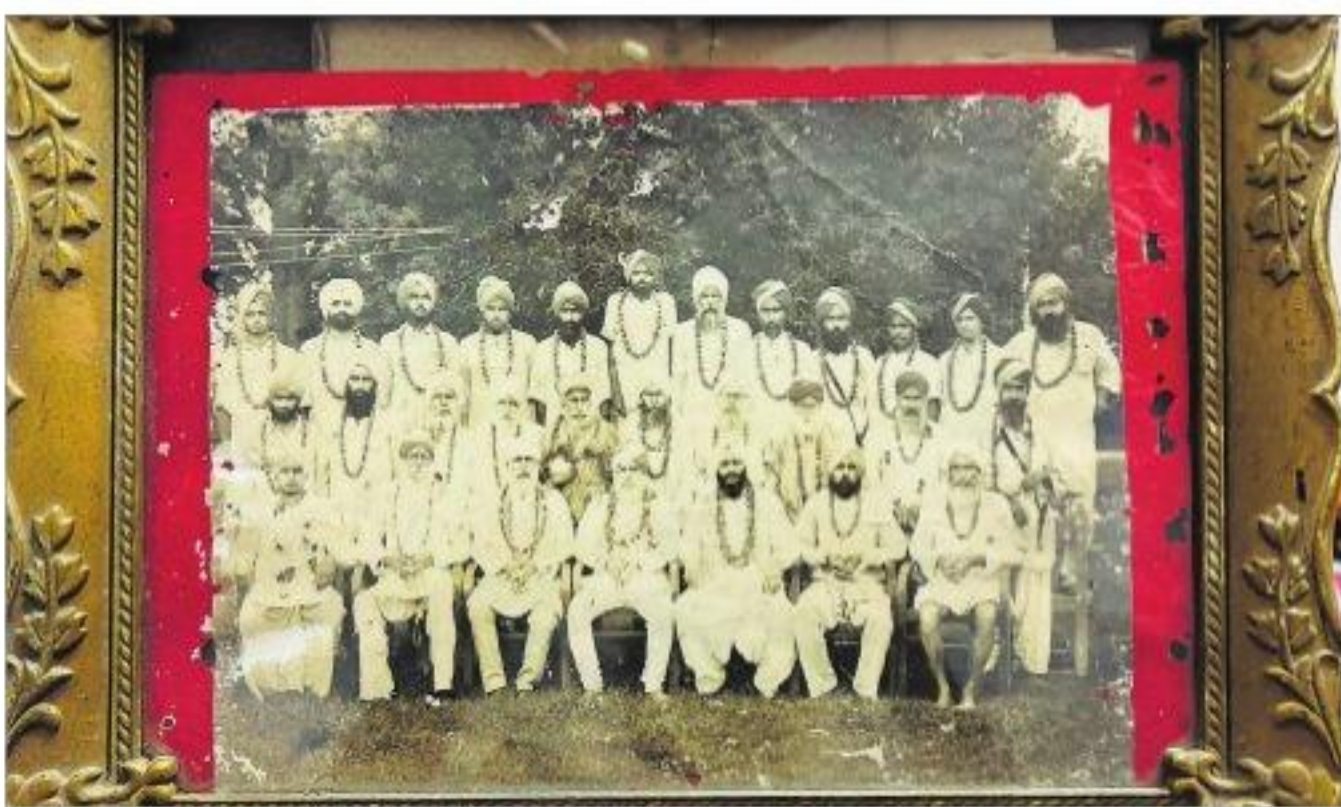
acknowledged that continued repression of the Black majority would lead to a dysfunctional society. He took the considerable risk of starting negotiations with Mandela, then in jail — eventually leading to his release, the inauguration of democratic rule and, ultimately, the election of Mandela as President in 1994.

Similarly, in the Soviet Union, the urge for democratic rights and demands for democratic socialist governance reform manifested through myriad forms — worker strikes, literary dissent and political protest. All such dissidence was repressed by the Stalinist and the neo-Stalinist state apparatus.

When Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1985 and the head of state in 1988, he realised that the political situation had grown a great distance from the teachings of Marxism. He initiated reforms aimed at democratising governance, which resulted in the collapse of rigid bureaucratic structures far beyond what he had probably envisioned.

In both cases, historic change depended on both grassroots activism and leadership willing to enact reform. Undoubtedly, there are revolutionary ruptures in societies where the movement from below is so irresistible that the ruling structures are overthrown, solely by pressure from below.

Compared with the situa-



PURPOSE: A jatha of Sikh volunteers of the Punjabi Suba movement. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

tions described above, the movement for a Punjabi-speaking state was modest in nature, i.e. seeking accommodative rearrangement within the federal structure of the Indian Union of states.

Nevertheless, the demand faced significant opposition at first. Initially seen as an Akali Dal-led initiative, other political tendencies were indifferent or even hostile. Since the Akalis spearheaded the effort, it was sometimes perceived as a Sikh cause. However, over two decades after Independence, the movement, which saw enormous sacrifices by volunteers facing imprisonment and even death, gradually attracted widespread public support.

A very prominent change, not adequately acknowledged in the research on the subject, was the championing of the



The most crucial was the emergence of Sant Fateh Singh as Akali leader and Lal Bahadur Shastri becoming the Prime Minister.

demand by leading members of the Punjabi Hindu community. Two names are most noticeable — Seth Ram Nath of Jaito and Surinder Nath Khosla of Patiala. Both were prominent public figures and articulated passionately that the demand for a Punjabi-speaking state was a demand of all Punjabis.

Seth Ram Nath was so highly respected that when a delegation of Akali Dal was invited to meet the then Prime Minister Nehru, he was included in the five-member negotiation team. Pandit Nehru was impressed to hear him argue the case for Punjabi Suba as a secular aspiration of all Punjabis. The first breach in the wall of suspicion against the Akali-led movement was created by the venerable Seth Ram Nath's contribution.

Other notable Punjabi Hindus who supported the cause included Lala Kedar Nath Sehgal, Thakur Naval Kishore, Dr Kali Chaman Sharma, Chowdhry Kartar Singh (Hoshiarpur), Pandit Sunder Lal, Girdhari Lal Gupta (Malerkotla), Ujagar Mall (Kashmir), and Bhai Ram Lal (Ambala).

Leaders from Haryana also played a positive role in reaching a consensus for Punjabi Suba, notably Devi Lal, Hardwari Lal, Prof Sher Singh Kadiyan, and Mani Ram Bagri. In supporting the Punjabi Suba, whose birth also created Haryana, they emerged as the founding fathers of Haryana.

Prof Hardwari Lal had also played a leading role in the establishment of the university in Patiala to promote the Punjabi language. Moving from setting up a university for a language to a state for the language reinforced the legitimacy of a Punjabi-speaking state.

The undivided Communist Party's support further helped secularise the demand. Influential leftist professors at Delhi University, Randhir Singh and Bipin Chandra, significantly shaped public opinion and policy regarding this issue. Over time, influential leaders — C Rajagopalachari, JP Narayan, Acharya Kripalani, Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew and Vinoba Bhave — voiced support.

The successes of the other linguistic-state movements in creating a Telugu-speaking state of Andhra Pradesh in

1956, a Gujarati-speaking state in Gujarat and a Marathi-speaking state in Maharashtra (both in 1960) also created legitimacy for the demand for a Punjabi-speaking state.

The most crucial was the emergence of Sant Fateh Singh as Akali leader and Lal Bahadur Shastri becoming the Prime Minister. The Sant categorically declared that the demand was linguistic, and PM Shastri became convinced of the just nature of the demand and was moved by the sacrifices of Sikh generals, soldiers, farmers, and labourers during the 1965 Indo-Pak war.

The trust between them, unlike the earlier mistrust between Master Tara Singh and Pandit Nehru, became crucial to the movement's success when Shastri established the parliamentary and legal framework for a Punjabi-speaking state.

The hegemonic consensus emerged through the convergence of the mass pressure from below and responsive leadership from above, resulting in the creation of the Punjabi-speaking state on November 1, 1966.

As Punjabis celebrate Punjab Day every year, it is important to remember those thousands of volunteers who made sacrifices and the political leaders — especially Lal Bahadur Shastri, Sant Fateh Singh, Seth Ram Nath, and Chaudhary Devi Lal — who, in diverse ways ensured the success of the movement.

Red Fort blast was a psychological battlefield



LT GEN SYED ATA HASNAIN (RETD)
EX-GOC, 15 CORPS,
SRINAGAR

For 36 years, India has lived with the realities of proxy war — bloodshed, terror and external sponsorship of violence with the singular aim of fracturing the Indian state. Yet, the recent Delhi car blast outside the Red Fort Metro Station marks a psychological inflection point. It signals a shift in intent, capability, and perhaps most worryingly, imagination.

The symbolism could not be starker. Kashmir's meadows have always been the battlefield; Delhi's Red Fort is the idea of India itself — sovereignty, identity and continuity. Mumbai was struck 17 years ago. The Parliament attack failed in December 2001. But now, Ground Zero seems shifted to Delhi, and right at the gates of the Red Fort — the citadel from which the Prime Minister addresses the nation every Independence Day.

The catastrophe was prevented not by chance, but by the alertness of Indian agencies. What began as innocuous Jaish-e-Mohammed posters at Srinagar's Jama Masjid soon

unraveled into a multi-city IED network stretching from Anantnag to Faridabad. The trail exposed encrypted finances, covert travel and a white-collar module of medical professionals. India did not just foil an attack — it disrupted a strategic attempt to rewrite terrorism's urban playbook.

Fidayeen to suicide jihad

For decades, Kashmir's terror paradigm was shaped by militant infiltration, small arms engagements and sporadic fidayeen-style armed assaults. Suicide bombings, where the body becomes the weapon, were exceedingly rare. It was alien to Kashmir's social psyche and doctrinally unsupported by traditional extremists.

Only five suicide attacks occurred in Kashmir over 36 years — and merely two were attempted by Kashmiris. The Red Fort car blast represents a departure. While it may ultimately prove to be an accident, the presence of suicide methodology shows that the doctrine of "suicide as message" has finally reached Indian soil in a planned, operational form. This is not just an escalation in violence, but an escalation in ideology.

This transition holds deeper implications. It marks the movement from the old 'thousand-cuts' strategy to one where India is to be psychologically shaken. The aim is no longer to bleed silently, but to provoke loudly — to sow suspicion, widen communal fractures, and



RESILIENCE: This is the moment for India to reinforce its whole-of-nation approach. PTI

test India's emotional integrity as much as its physical security.

Radicalisation of educated

Kashmir has long had an overground worker (OGW) ecosystem — influencers, minor officials, media persons, even academics. But they remained facilitators of logistics and propaganda, not executors of violence. This has now changed.

The Faridabad module revealed a group of young professionals stepping into active operational roles. This is a pivotal shift. These are individuals trained to save life, now studying how to take it. Their transformation speaks of the power of digital radicalisation, encrypted grievance circles, curated theological manipulation and globalised victimhood narratives.

ISIS's model appears to be resurfacing in South Asia — not in form, but in pattern. Digital propaganda that once attracted

engineers from around the world, now appeals to professionals from some urban areas of India. Dabiq and Rumiyaah, ISIS's glossy magazines, once sold jihad as intellectual rebellion. South Asian extremist platforms have borrowed that pitch — offering belonging, purpose and 'heroism' to the confused, educated youth.

It appears that urban radicalisation is a stream, flowing through Indian cities, campuses and digital spaces. The geography of terror has changed. It is not just seeking territory; it is seeking minds.

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Pakistan's justification

In a striking departure from past behaviour, a political figure from PoK — Chaudhry, Anwarul Haq, proclaimed, almost with pride, that the attack was carried out by Jaish-e-Mohammed "in revenge for Balochistan." This is not mere-

ly provocative. It is psychologically strategic. Pakistan is no longer denying terror involvement. It is justifying it. That confidence is dangerous.

It attempts to turn terrorism from crime into retaliation, shifting from covert denial to open rationalisation. It aims to recast Pakistan not as sponsor, but as victim and aims for moral ambiguity. When that happens, global accountability begins to blur.

This shift in narrative must be met with clarity. Kashmir is a bilateral matter with Pakistan, as the Shimla Agreement remains applicable. Any justification of violence, especially by public figures, falls under the international jurisdiction of counterterrorism norms, FATF compliance frameworks, and UN resolutions that prohibit legitimising extremist violence. India must expose this rhetorical strategy — not just condemn it.

Pak's political architecture

The 27th Constitutional Amendment, quietly passed in Pakistan with surprising consensus, has concentrated unprecedented power in the hands of Field Marshal Asim Munir. When military prerogative combines with political vacuums, unaccountable authority grows, without institutional restraint. His proximity with the US, and the mystifying signals from the Trump circle, emboldens this posture.

Pakistan is at risk of falling into a dangerous paradox;

increasingly weak internally, yet emboldened externally. A GenZ-triggered social upheaval in Pakistan — given unresolved ethnic tensions, collapsing economics, and digital polarisation — cannot be ruled out. In such a scenario, exporting instability outward becomes a tempting diversion. Unstable states like Pakistan, remain unpredictable.

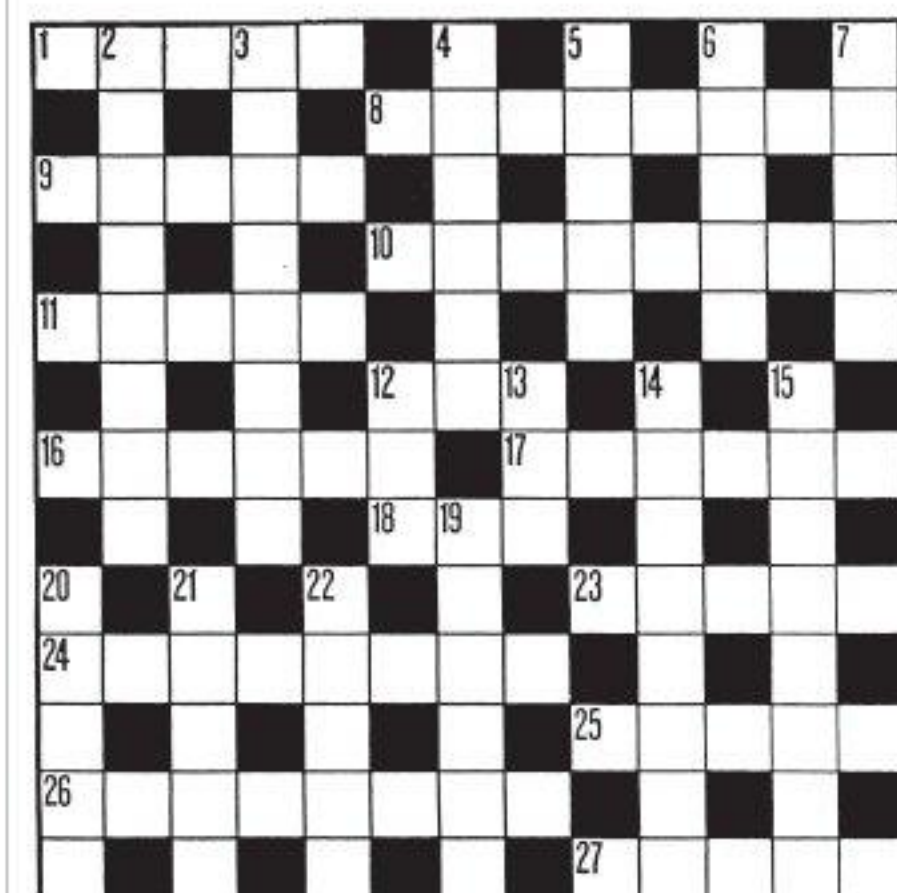
India's answer: Social unity

India's options, in a nuclearised environment and a hyper-mediated world, are necessarily calibrated. But India's strength lies not only in deterrence, but in resilience. This is the moment for India to reinforce its whole-of-nation approach. Every citizen is a soldier, not in arms, but in awareness. Vigilant without being suspicious. Alert without being alarmist.

Radicalism must be confronted in chat rooms, clinics, campuses and cafeterias, by an empowered set of people who understand Islam well and can explain its powerful message of peace. The establishment needs the services of middle path citizenry driven by the passion of counter radicalisation. Technology can intercept plots. But only social cohesion can prevent them.

Delhi was not just a blast site. It was a psychological battlefield — and India won the first encounter by disrupting the attack. The next victory will be won by denying terror its second and intended target: the Indian mind.

QUICK CROSSWORD

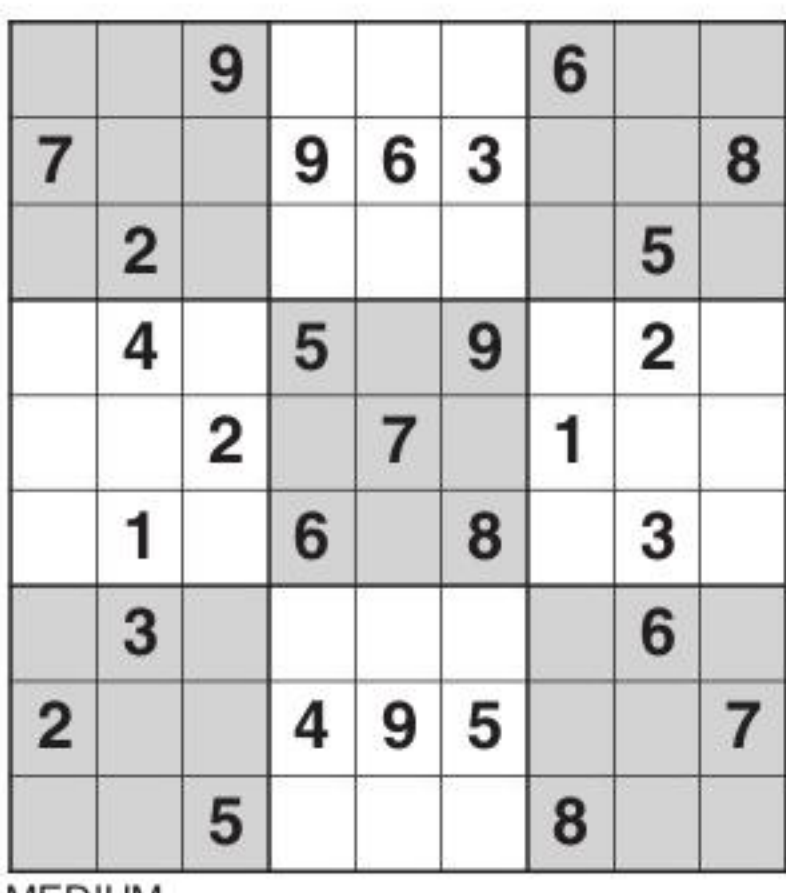


ACROSS
1 To lament (5)
8 Negotiate an agreement (3,1,4)
9 A fixed amount of work (5)
10 Bring to completion (5,3)
11 Violence of feeling (5)
12 Uncooked (3)
16 Capital of Philippines (6)
17 Prolonged public protest (6)
18 Equality of scores (3)
23 Deduce (5)
24 Needless to say (2,6)
25 Area of shallow water (5)
26 Genuine (4,4)
27 Person of griggish modesty (5)

DOWN
2 Coming (2,3,3)
3 Attempt to escape (3,3,2)
4 Small dome on roof (6)
5 To frequent (5)
6 Less than in amount (5)
7 Split (5)
12 Turncoat (3)
13 Distress (3)
14 Moore (2,6)
15 Carte blanche (4,4)
19 From a confidential source (6)
20 Uncertainty (5)
21 Barely sufficient (5)
22 Drink deeply (5)

Saturday's Solution
Across: 1 Do the trick, 6 Able, 10 Cycle, 11 Lend a hand, 12 Initiate, 13 Go off, 15 Require, 17 Earshot, 19 Cleanse, 21 To order, 22 Uncle, 24 Primeval, 27 In bad form, 28 Gogol, 29 Null, 30 At the ready.
Down: 1 Dock, 2 Technique, 3 Elect, 4 Release, 5 Concede, 7 Bravo, 8 End of story, 9 Kangaroo, 14 Precaution, 16 Innuendo, 18 Hydrangea, 20 Exploit, 21 Triumph, 23 Cabal, 25 Elgar, 26 Ploy.

SU DO KU



SATURDAY'S SOLUTION								
9	6	1	5	2	3	8	4	7
5	3	2	8	4	7	9	1	6
4	7	8	6	9	1	2	5	3
1	4	5	7	8	2	6	3	9
6	8	7	1	3	9	4	2	5
2	9	3	4	5	6	7	8	1
8	2	9	3	6	5	1	7	4
3	1	4	9	7	8	5	6	2
7	5	6	2	1	4	3	9	8

CALENDAR								
NOVEMBER 24, 2025, MONDAY								
■ Shaka Samvat	1947							
■ Margshirsh Shaka	3							
■ Margshirsh Parvishle	9							
■ Hijari	1447							
■ Shukla Paksha Tithi 4, up to 9:23 pm								
■ Shoola Yoga Up to 12:37 pm								
■ Purnvashadha Nakshatra up to 9:54 pm								
■ Moon enters Capricorn sign 7.27 am								

FORECAST

CITY	MONDAY TUESDAY		17:23 HRS 06:56 HRS
	MAX	MIN	
Chandigarh	25	09	
New Delhi	25	10	
Amritsar	22	10	
Bathinda	25	07	
Jalandhar	22	10	
Ludhiana	24	07	
Bhiwani	26	09	
Hisar	25	07	
Sirsa	27	10	
Dharamsala	21	08	
Manali	14	02	
Shimla	16	06	
Srinagar	17	-03	
Jammu	24	10	
Kargil	09	-08	
Leh	07	-08	
Dehradun	24	08	
Mussoorie	17	06	

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Ramnath Goenka

NITISH KUMAR KNOWS BIHAR'S GAPS, NOW HE MUST CLOSE THEM

EIGHTEEN years at the helm should give any leader clarity about what his state truly needs. Nitish Kumar returns as Bihar's chief minister for the tenth time with that advantage—he knows better than anyone why Bihar has struggled to rise even as the rest of India races ahead. Yet knowledge alone is no longer enough. Bihar's fundamental challenge is not growth itself—its GSDP regularly posts healthy numbers—but the quality and depth of that growth. A per capita income that is roughly one-third of the national average captures the structural imbalance. A state with abundant labour and a young demographic continues to operate like a low-income, low-productivity economy. Three-quarters of households remain tied to agriculture that generates barely a quarter of output. Services dominate but are concentrated in low-value, low-wage activity. Manufacturing is chronically underdeveloped. This imbalance is at the heart of Bihar's 'laggard' image.

The easy political instinct is to reach for cash transfers and quick welfareist wins. However, a state where 74 percent of revenues come from the Centre, and where 42 percent of receipts are swallowed by salaries, pensions and interest, simply cannot fund grand doles without starving investment. Bihar's problem is not just the availability of money—it is the sliver of discretionary funds left each year for development, often squeezed further by populism. Promising ₹10,000 to women repeatedly may mobilise voters, but the expenditure needs to be budgeted for annually without slicing off allocations for job avenues, functioning schools, skilled labour or reliable electricity. Double-engine sarkar doesn't mean perpetual dependence on Delhi to bridge its deficits.

A new mindset is essential: one that treats development as a scientific, rational exercise rather than an electoral offering. That means modernising agriculture through integrated agro-industrial clusters—not merely celebrating makhana, but using it as a symbol of value-addition and export-oriented processing. It means attracting private investment by fixing policing, digitising governance, and insulating projects from corruption. It requires linking migration remittances to local enterprise, modernising skilling, and building an urban-industrial ecosystem capable of harvesting Bihar's demographic dividend.

Nitish Kumar has the political authority, experience and mandate to begin this shift. His test is whether he can move Bihar from a culture of ad hoc measures to a long-term, execution-focused economic strategy. That will decide whether Bihar finally converges with the rest of India.

NO SPARING THE GUILTY IN BLACKBUCK DEATHS IN ZOO

THE deaths of 31 out of 38 blackbucks at the Kittur Rani Chennamma Mini Zoo in Belagavi, Karnataka, are more than an institutional embarrassment. They are a moral failure. These animals—icons of India's grassland heritage and listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972—died not because Hemorrhagic Septicemia (HS) is unstoppable, but because the authorities ignored every early warning they received. HS is notorious for its speed: a three- to five-day incubation window that leaves no time for bureaucratic dithering. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research–National Institute of Veterinary Epidemiology & Disease Informatics (ICAR-NIVEDI) had issued not one but two 'Vet Alerts' through its AI-assisted National Animal Disease Referral Expert System (NADRES), clearly identifying Belagavi as a district at risk. These alerts were not academic memos. They called for surveillance, biosecurity, controlled access, equipment disinfection, quarantine measures, and—crucially—timely vaccinations. The science was clear. The instructions were precise. The responsibility was unmistakable.

The tragedy is even more troubling because these blackbucks were not vulnerable wild wanderers but captive animals living under State supervision. It is impossible not to recall how fiercely the country debated the Salman Khan blackbuck case in 1998, when his alleged actions in the wild dominated national headlines. Here, by contrast, we have protected animals dying within government custody. Although HS outbreaks in zoos are not often talked about, they are not unheard of. In 2022, a study from the Sri Sayajibaug Zoo in Vadodara recorded an HS outbreak among blackbucks. Eight animals recovered after timely treatment, while three died. Tests confirmed HS in their lungs, liver, and kidneys. The episode showed how quickly veterinarians' actions can save lives, but it also highlighted the delicate nature of captive antelopes. Herbivores like blackbucks are easily affected by stress, poor enclosure conditions, and biosecurity measures. Constant vigilance is essential.

Zoos need to be open about any disease outbreaks, even small ones, and keep their wildlife health records updated and accessible. This transparency helps reveal early warning signs and pushes institutions to improve their systems. The Belagavi tragedy is an alarm bell: India's zoos must realise that when early warnings are given, failing to act is a serious breach of duty. Only a culture built on honesty, readiness, and responsibility can stop another preventable loss.

QUICK TAKE

BAFFLING BLISS

TIME Out's City Life Index 2025 ranks Mumbai Asia's happiest city. That sounds almost mischievous when you consider the city's daily realities. This is, after all, a place where a modest 1BHK can cost half a salary, roads vanish in potholes faster than budget announcements, and the freshly minted Coastal Road is already developing leaks. So why, despite the chaos, do people still adore this city? Maybe because Mumbai's joy isn't built on comfort but on incessant momentum that keeps despair at bay. The hustle gives purpose, the crowds offer community, and the madness feels strangely honest. You don't love Mumbai despite its flaws—you love it through them.

THE response of the Supreme Court to the Presidential Reference has raised more questions than it has answered. It is constitutionally flawed and politically troublesome.

Let us first examine what the Constitution Bench has done right. It has held that neither the Governor nor the President can withhold a Bill passed by the State Legislature interminably. That is a no-brainer. The Supreme Court could not have held otherwise. Secondly, it is held that, in the event the Governor or the President, as the case may be, sits over a Bill for an unduly prolonged period, limited judicial review is available, that too only on the question of delay.

The advice rendered has both constitutionally and politically problematic consequences. The constitutional consequences are as follows:

(i) The advice negatively impacts the federal structure of the country;

(ii) The subjective satisfaction of the Governor, at the initial stage and later of the President, is immune from judicial challenge; and

(iii) The plenary powers of the State Legislatures can be thwarted by executive fiat, through the Governor or the President, by unduly delaying implementation of the will of the people.

Under our Constitution, the State Legislature has plenary powers to legislate on subjects which are exclusively in its domain, as set out in List-II of the Seventh Schedule. If a Bill is passed by the State Legislature in respect of a subject matter within its exclusive domain, the Governor or the President withholding such a Bill is anathema to the country's federal structure. Take a Bill where the State Legislature seeks to amend a statute by taking away the Governor's power to appoint Vice Chancellors to universities. Since that power is conferred by the Legislature, it has the plenary power to take away that right. The Governor cannot have the discretion to withhold assent to such a Bill. Yet, the advice on the Presidential Reference allows the Governor to do so. The executive power of the Governor cannot, as a matter of law, thwart the people's will reflected in state legislation. In fact, the first proviso to Article 200 stipulates that the Governor may, as soon as possible, after a Bill is presented to him, either assent to the Bill or suggest amendments thereto; and if the House or Houses reconsider the Bill and present it again to the Governor

The Court's advice that the Governor or President's subjective satisfaction is immune from judicial review has no constitutional precedent in the context of legislation that reflects the people's will

COURT'S RULING CLOUDS FEDERAL BALANCE FURTHER

KAPIL SIBAL

Senior lawyer and member of Rajya Sabha



SOURAV ROY

nor with or without amendments, the Governor cannot withhold assent therefrom. There is no constitutional space for the Courts to advise otherwise. However, the Court, in its advice to the President, seems to have held that even if the Legislature returns the Bill, the Governor can still withhold assent, or reserve it for the President's consideration, contrary to the first proviso to Article 200 referred above. This is yet another blow to the country's federal structure.

The Court's advice that the subjective satisfaction of the Governor or the President is immune from judicial review has no constitutional precedent, especially in the context of legislation that reflects the people's will. In other words, the Execu-

tive's opposition to the people's will cannot be the subject matter of a judicial challenge. Even the President's subjective satisfaction in the imposition of the President's Rule in a state and the rejection of a mercy petition are also subject to judicial challenge. Here, the embargo on the judicial challenge is with reference to legislation expressing the people's will. Such an embargo is not only contrary to the federal structure, but also seriously jeopardises the constitutional premise that the will of the people must be respected, and that the executive cannot thwart it on the basis of subjective satisfaction.

There can be only one occasion for the Executive to reserve a Bill for the President's consideration. It is when

LOVE BEYOND TRIALS

RENUKA NARAYANAN

FAITHLINE

have arrived in the flowering forest of Panchavati in a green valley by the Godavari, with mountains all around. They're looking for a place in which to build their little hermitage, as safe as possible from the snakes and wild animals in the forest. Rama notes with satisfaction the ideal location of a woodland glade full of flowering creepers and shrubs. It is conveniently located by the river, on which they see swans and chakravaka birds, just as Rishi Agastya had told them they would.



WIMEDIA COMMONS

What goes in the Indian heart to celebrate Rama and Sita's union is the luminous quality of the love they shared, their mutual loyalty, unflinching acceptance of life's twists and turns, and especially, how they made the best of things

Rama notices that the coppery mineral streaks in the mountains catch the light and gleam like the oval vents in the houses and buildings back in Ayodhya, or like the ceremonially painted hides of the royal elephants in the Ikshvaku stables. There's a lovely lake near the glade, in which deep pink and pure white lotuses bloom. Thick grass grows handily around to perform their daily prayers with the earth connection that is an essential part of their faith.

Sita, who loves gardens and parks, finds the air sweet with the scent of golden champaka flowers. Rama is delighted to see many other kinds of trees too—sal, tamal, jackfruit, mango, date palm, ashok, shami and

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Democratic decay

Ref: *Cavilling oppn perilling democracy* (Nov 23). Democracy rarely dies in spectacle; it decays when those meant to defend it forget how to lead. The Bihar verdict exposes an opposition that offers commentary instead of conviction and unity without purpose. India cannot rely indefinitely on a single dominant narrative. Unless a credible, grounded and morally compelling alternative emerges, the democratic balance will keep sliding toward dangerous complacency.

K Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

States' efficiency

Ref: *States stuck with gov delays* (Nov 22). The Governor's role is to ensure the state's welfare, not to create unnecessary hurdles in legislative flow. Any person with a political background must not be appointed as Governor for effective and fair relations with the state government.

Navneet Seth, Bathinda

Media's duties

Ref: *From chic and chicory to Chikiri Chikiri* (Nov 23). The article effectively conveys regional cinema's vital role. Essential media coverage is needed on issues such as marginalisation of indigenous people who are deprived of climate and riparian justice arising from irrigation projects. Recognition by the media through rigorous reporting is crucial for an informed public discourse.

NR Jagannath, Bengaluru

Implementation goals

Ref: *PM Modi @G20* (Nov 23). The meet underscored the collective push to advance AI for global progress while strengthening efforts to curb terrorism. However, as goals take shape, one must ask: Will nations turn promises into action?

Lestern, Thiruvananthapuram

Reading rut

Ref: *Mind your language, affluent teens*, says CBSE (Nov 23). I am reminded of a proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." Only a reading habit can wean children from additive online media consumption. The education board's aforesaid exhortation could not have come at a better time.

S Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

Testing times

Ref: *Head-lining act* (Nov 23). A five-day encounter ending in under two days with nineteen wickets falling on the first day is a poor augury for Test cricket. The format has been ceding ground. A Test match should go the full distance.

CV Aravind, Chennai

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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New labour codes will boost economic growth in the long run

The recently implemented four new labour codes—the Code on Wages, 2019, Industrial Relations, 2020, Social Security, 2020, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, 2020—will go a long way in improving the lives of workers. The fact that major business chambers have welcomed the new regime underscores the wide acceptability of the new labour regime. The Congress, not unexpectedly, denounced the codes with its prominent Dalit leader Udit Raj calling them “completely ineffective on the ground, anti-worker and solely corporate-friendly.” The allegation is clearly political, as there are several pro-worker features in the new codes. The old regime had no provision for mandatory

appointment letters, whereas the new one makes appointment letters mandatory for all workers. Further, social security benefits have been extended to include all workers, including gig and platform workers benefits such as provident fund PF, Employees’ State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), and insurance. Meanwhile, minimum wages will now be applicable to all workers. In a good move to boost preventive healthcare, employers are mandated to provide a free annual health check-up to all workers above the age of 40 years. They are now also stipulated to provide timely wages. Hitherto, ESIC coverage was limited to specific areas and industries. Now, it has been made voluntary for establishments with fewer than 10 employees, but mandatory

for establishments with even one employee engaged in hazardous processes. Another provision is aimed at gender parity. Restrictions on women’s employment in night shifts and certain occupations have been lifted. In a major relief to employers, especially those in the MSME sector, the compliance burden has been eased, as multiple registrations, licences, and returns across labour laws have been replaced with a single registration, single licence, and single return. Rarely do the powers that be realise the truth that there need not be a conflict between the interests of wealth creators and those assisting them—that is, employees. The goal any government should aspire to achieve is not the right balance between the interests of the two

supposedly antagonistic groups, but the conditions to make the process of wealth creation easier. This is one of those rare occasions when the decision makers have acknowledged the convergence of interests of both employers and employees.

This is the reason why representatives of India Inc are happy. With the four Labour Codes now effective, FICCI appreciates this significant step in modernising the country’s labour ecosystem. FICCI president-elect Anant Goenka maintained that “The reforms offer clarity and predictability for employers, and bring major worker gains: equal pay, portability of social security, protections for gig/platform workers and expanded inclusion for women and youth across sectors.”

Similarly, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) director general Chandrajit Banerjee said, “It’s a historic milestone for India’s labour landscape. Implementation of the four labour codes marks a transformative leap toward a modern, simplified and future-ready labour ecosystem.” Many in corporate India are eagerly waiting to see how the capital markets react to the new labour codes. Since the impact will be greater on labour-intensive sectors like chemicals and paints, oil, auto, auto ancillaries, and pharmaceuticals, stock market experts will watch the performance of major scrips in these industries. Whatever the response of the share market, it is indisputable that in the long run, the new labour codes will boost economic growth.

LETTERS

Patronage of AI is worrisome

Propos ‘AI singularity is God’ (THI, Nov 21), people are spellbound by the possibility of machines taking over. The possibility of giving human intelligence a ‘much needed’ rest and instead permit something artificial to dictate life by elbowing away all that humans have been rooted on. Everyone seems keen to jump into this bandwagon without bothering about the implications. If human intelligence is advantaged by consciousness, and finer emotions like empathy, guilt, and sympathy, Artificial Intelligence is disadvantaged by their deficiency. Before AI is allowed a fly-by-night growth, it is wise to ensure it’s no Frankenstein’s monster.

Dr George Jacob, Kochi

Cong behaviour has become absurd

This refers to ‘Celebrating those who slam India is Oppn’s new brand of politics’ (THI, Nov 22). The credibility of the Opposition will stand tall, if there is a responsible and conscientious role in their interactions with the government in power. A new fashion has now emerged for the Congress to view the government as its enemy and complain that the government is passing Bills without consultation or debates in Parliament. Since the proceedings in the Parliament are live, there is escaping for the Opposition to assume innocence. People remember this to be a usual trend during all sessions of the Parliament, during which irrelevant and preposterous issues are ridiculously planned to stall the proceedings. This is nothing but sheer rowdy behaviour on part of the INDI Alliance. This attitude of the political groups in the opposition persists, even after the Speaker, makes it a point to call for their cooperation for a discussion on important issues to be legislated. It is high time to impose a stiff fine or forfeiture of the allowance from the irresponsible MPs for creating cacophony in the House, even as the Treasury Benches are answering their queries. No wonder, people are utterly disgusted with the irresponsible and ridiculous behaviour of the Opposition for whom the precious time of the Parliament is not of any consequence. If the Congress and other INDI partners continue their nonsensical behaviour, they will become the nation’s laughing stock.

K V Raghuram, Wayanad

TG women must restrain behaviour in buses

This refers to the news report ‘Mahalakshmi rush sparks seat fight; the men want partitions back’ (THI Nov 21). Ever since the launch of the Mahalakshmi scheme, some women have cut a sorry figure with their bellicose behaviour. There is no denying that this scheme is a blessing for women, girls and transgender persons. If their pugacious attitude continues, then the government might wind up this scheme. Despite paying for tickets, many male passengers are at the receiving end. They must stand all through the journey, which is unfair and unjustified. TGSRIC authorities and the state government must ensure that women must occupy only seats reserved for ladies so that men, senior citizens and the physically challenged can be assured of hassle-free travel.

Zubair Khan, Hyderabad

Put an end to roadside medical frauds

The recent incident involving a Bengaluru IT professional, who lost a huge sum of money and suffered kidney damage after trusting a roadside ‘ayurvedic’ tent is alarming. These illegal setups misuse the name of ayurveda, exploit people’s insecurities, and sell untested and harmful substances without any medical qualification. Their continued presence shows a serious failure of regulation and public safety. The government must take strict action by shutting down such unlicensed practitioners, enforcing proper medical standards, and creating strong awareness campaigns. Citizens should not be left vulnerable to medical fraud that threatens both their health and financial security.

Dr Vijaykumar H K, Raichur

Modi’s four initiatives augur well

Propos “PM Modi Proposes 4 Initiatives at G20” (THI Nov 23), the call for a global front against the drug-terror nexus is both timely and necessary. In a world where illicit networks are on the rampage, such a coordinated effort could help nations move from reactive policing to proactive prevention. The emphasis on human-centric development and digital public infrastructure shows a welcome shift from abstract growth metrics to real-world impact. However, the success of these proposals will depend on how inclusive and transparent the frameworks are. Global cooperation often falters when national interests override shared goals. To avoid this, India could lead by example—publishing open benchmarks, inviting civil society input, and ensuring that the digital repository serves both innovation and accountability. Let’s hope that the momentum doesn’t fade after the summit.

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BENGALURU ONLINE

21 acres notified in Anekal for major stadium project

BENGALURU: The Karnataka Housing Board (KHB) has issued an order to acquire 21 acres of land in Anekal for the construction of a large sports stadium with a seating capacity of nearly 80,000 spectators. The decision was officially notified in the state gazette on November 22. According to the notification, over 1.32.05 hectares of land across Hannur and Annemalla villages in Anekal taluk (Survey Nos. 7, 8, 9, 13, etc.) have been identified for acquisition. This includes areas such as Mudukanamole, Muttaalu and Paaluhonda. Additionally, around 2.85.01 hectares of land in Badiga and Attigeri villages (Survey Nos. 142/1, 227, etc.), covering Peruru, Balekad and Kadakambala regions, have also been listed.

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

‘Govt job to every family’ promise seems to have sunk MGB in Bihar

Did Mahagathbandhan leaders forget that they were up against two formidable walls – Modi and Nitish?

P MADHUSUDHAN REDDY

It’s not quite often that the Indian electoral system throws up shocking outcomes for both top contenders in a poll. But we have seen that in the recent Bihar elections. That’s the beauty of Indian democracy. The National Democracy Alliance (NDA) mainly comprising the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Janata Dal (United) and Lok Janshakti Party (RV) secured a massive win by pocketing 202 of the 243 seats up for grabs in the Bihar Assembly. That way, the alliance won four seats in every five seats in the state with a strike rate of a staggering 82 per cent. The Janata Dal (United) has been in power for the last two decades. Its leader Nitish Kumar has stayed put in the Chief Minister’s post for those many years. Despite such a long innings in the power corridors, NDA romped home with such a stupendous victory that its scale must have come as a pleasant shock for its constituents and leaders. For the Mahagathbandhan (MGB), NDA’s principal rival, the margin of defeat was shocking beyond imagination. The MGB, consisting mainly Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and Congress, secured a measly 35 seats with a strike rate that was an abysmal 14 per cent. RJD fell to the third place in party-wise seat list for the first time since 2010. It suffered such an

ignominious loss after being in opposition for nearly 20 years!

But then what was the single biggest factor that led to the humiliating defeat of the opposition alliance. It has been often noticed that at least one key factor leads to the defeat of a political party in every election. Other factors add fuel to the fire triggered by that single factor.

For instance, in Telangana, the Bharat Rashtira Samithi-led by Kalvakuntla Chandrasekhar Rao lost power in Telangana in 2023. The primary reason for that defeat was severe anti-incumbency against sitting MLAs, who were in fray. That was the key factor that led to the defeat of BRS, though several other factors also contributed to the downfall.

In Bihar, the single factor that did the Opposition in was the promise of RJD chief Tejashwi Prasad Yadav to provide one government job to every family in the state. In October, a month before Bihar started voting, he announced that he would bring in what he called ‘Job Act’ within 20 days after coming to power, to ensure that every family in the State would get a government job in 20 months. But can such a promise be implemented? As per the 2023 caste census, Bihar has nearly 2.76 crore families. At present, the state has around 20 lakh government employees. That means an additional



All said and done, the Bihar election outcomes have given a clear signal to the political parties that they can’t take voters for granted and promise the moon in the poll manifestos. To stay in the reckoning, political parties need to tread carefully and make promises that can be delivered without any hassles



2.56 crore government jobs are needed to be created in order to implement the promise that Tejashwi has made. That will be impossible, to say the least. The RJD leader was reduced to a laughing stock, while neutral voters moved away from the opposition alliance, doubting its seriousness on the promises it made.

Interestingly, Congress, being a national party, did not object to that poll promise. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi should have warned the RJD leader about the pitfalls of such ‘foolish’ promises. But that did not happen.

Did Tejashwi and Rahul

forget that they were up against two formidable walls – Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Nitish who did not yield to rivals in more than two decades? It looks so going by the way they behaved. Obviously, the Mahagathbandhan leaders did not do their homework well. Therefore, it’s no surprise that the performance of the Congress was also dismal in the polls. It contested in 61 seats, but won only six, just one more than that of Hyderabad-based All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimen (AIMIM). The strike rate of the Grand Old Party (GOP) was less than 10 per cent. The

Congress is currently in power in Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana. Of these, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka have turned out to be bad examples when it comes to the governance, implementation of poll promises, corruption and what not. The Congress government in Karnataka

is perennially hitting headlines for the collapse of critical infrastructure in Bengaluru, India’s information technology capital. People residing in Bengaluru say that overall governance in the state is in bad shape as internal squabbles are on the rise.

In Telangana too, corruption has become a major issue. Both these states are home to a tech-savvy population, which is vocal on the internet. So, any news about these states spreads fast. Further, these two states are also home to lakhs of migrants from Bihar. When they went to vote in their home state, they would have carried with them the message as to what was happening in Congress-ruled states. The financial troubles that Himachal Pradesh is facing are well known. Without setting its house in order in the states under its rule and showcasing them as the best examples of the governance in the country, there is no way Congress will win elections in any other state. This factor is also important

in those states where the GOP is a junior partner.

Further, Rahul Gandhi’s ‘Voter Adhikar Yatra’ also did not create positive vibes in Bihar as the MGB lost all the seats along the route. The Gandhi scion should take up issues that resonate with people at the ground level.

Apart from the government job promise, the Mahagathbandhan’s inability to close the seat sharing deal in advance also hit the political grouping hard. It is a known fact that RJD banks on the Muslim-Yadav combination. But support from the Yadav community came down in the 2025 election. An analysis of a post poll survey revealed that only 74 per cent of Yadavs voted for MGB this time against 84 per cent in the 2020 Assembly polls. Are Yadavs also getting disillusioned with the RJD? No surprise Bihar chanted the Ni-Mo (Nitish-Modi) mantra as MGB scored far too many self-goals.

All said and done, the Bihar election outcome has given a clear signal to the political parties that they can’t take voters for granted by promising the moon in their manifestos. To stay in the reckoning, political parties need to tread carefully and make promises that can be delivered without any hassles. Otherwise, they are certain to face the voters’ wrath. That’s the bottom line.

Non-stop cricket has done the damage to Shubman Gill

S KANNAN

For long, sports fans, by and large, have been obsessed with legacy and longevity of the superstars. Across a gamut of disciplines, one will find a craving for the hero. This is possible in the world of celluloid, where one can hide age, wrinkles and baldness. Certainly not in sports. To cut a long story short, how Shubman Gill, hyped as the best thing to have happened to Indian cricket, needs to be understood. The hype began when the boy from Fazilka, Punjab, made it big and did well. Drum roll, claps and thunder, Gill was the modern-day hero. Yes, he is talented, yes he has the temperament. Add to it with his speaking before TV cameras, Gill, who looks smart as well, became the darling of cricket fans. One must understand that today cricket is not the same sport that was played decades ago, when legends continued for long and did not face fitness issues. Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev Nikhanj



One can pinpoint to the 1997 Independence Cup match between India and Pakistan played in the May heat and humidity of Madras. It was great from a commercial standpoint, but for players to be exposed to such harsh conditions in Madras was sheer madness. Today, it’s the same heat which sees players compete in the lucrative IPL, being held since 2008. Agreed, nobody complains about heat, travel, night matches and jetlag. Franchises ‘own’ players and they must perform. For, they have been bought like cattle, as celebrated cricket writer Peter Roebuck had said

played cricket with passion as true-blue devotees of the willow sport. Alas, down the years, the gentleman’s game has become a commodity, a commercial vehicle, following which it started getting tougher for the players.

One can pinpoint to the 1997 Independence Cup match between India and Pakistan played in the May heat and humidity of Madras. This was conceived by the charismatic IS Bindra. It was great from a commercial standpoint, but for players to be exposed to such harsh conditions in Madras was sheer madness. Today, it’s the same heat which sees players from India and overseas compete in the lucrative IPL – Indian Premier League,

being held from 2008. Agreed, nobody complains about heat, travel, night matches and jetlag. Franchises ‘own’ players and they must perform. For, they have been bought like cattle, as celebrated cricket writer Peter Roebuck had said before the first IPL auction in New Delhi, 17 years ago. Roebuck a former captain of Somerset, must be turning in his grave watching players suffer in present times.

In India, nobody has learnt lessons from overexposure. Imagine, when fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah injured his back in 2022 in Birmingham, it was serious. His return to cricket was good, but when he again collapsed in Australia at the start of 2025, alarm bells started ringing.

It was a sad sight to see Bumrah holding his back and walking away from the Sydney Cricket Ground to the medical centre for an MRI scan. The BCCI remained tight-lipped, as Boom, his nickname, had been over-bowled. The man tasked with managing workload is coach Gautam Gambhir and a large support staff. Sadly, they never monitored how much Bumrah was exerting himself. After all, for someone with a jerky action, Bumrah is injury-prone, say experts. He now plays conservatively, not non-stop cricket.

Sadly, lessons have not been learnt from Bumrah’s injury. The hype and hoopla over Shubman Gill is indeed mindless. And with the BCCI

treating him as someone special, where Gambhir and chairman of selection committee Ajit Agarkar have gone overboard in projecting him as an all-format player, Gill’s travails have begun. At 26, it seems like Gill has been playing cricket for ages. But, at what price?

Today, Gill is injured, and it is not a neck spasm. When he was rendered unfit to continue further against South Africa at the Eden Gardens last week, it was worrying. After all, to be admitted to a private hospital for neck stiffness was not the truth. His MRI report had come into public domain. It became clear, Gill had problems with his back and rest was needed.

No, more drama ensued, after Gill was discharged. Against medical advice, he travelled with the team to Guwahati. Not fit and wearing a ‘hard’ cervical collar, Gill was trying to project himself as a Superman.

Now, the same Gill has seen a “spine” specialist at a private hospital in Mumbai. Don’t even ask when he will play

cricket again. The moot point is, after full recovery, which may take weeks or months, Gill will have to be careful.

Look at England and Australia, players in mid 30s are still fit, even as bowlers. Apparently, an overdose of cricket has led to Gill’s problems. As a hero, the mass hysteria for Gill is madness. People have seen all this, notably, in south movies, where NTR and MGR were worshipped as demigods. When they passed away, there was deep mourning.

Surely, cricket is not like movies and non-stop cricket is a killer. Even the Alpha Male cannot play cricket non-stop, across three formats.

Yes, Gill is on the sick list. This time, it’s a wakeup call for all, players, coaches, teams and the BCCI. Treat cricketers as humans, please. If not, we will have more players appearing like war veterans back from the battlefield. Forget the hype, cricket is just a sport, not war. Does anyone care?

(The writer is a seasoned sports analyst with 38 years of experience)