

Enough bandwidth

6GHz spectrum can be neatly split for WiFi, fixed wireless

The global debate over the future of the 6 GHz spectrum band has arrived in India. On one side, telecom operators argue that the entire band should be reserved for future 5G and 6G networks, citing the growing popularity of fixed wireless access (FWA) and the need for large, clean blocks of mid-band spectrum. On the other hand, technology majors and device manufacturers such as Apple, HP, and Cisco want the entire band delicensed for Wi-Fi, enabling faster, reliable indoor broadband.



Both sides have credible claims, but an all-or-nothing approach will not serve India's broader connectivity goals. India's broadband landscape remains wireless-dependent due to the limited penetration of wired Internet infrastructure. In this context, FWA has emerged as a major substitute for last-mile fibre, providing high-speed broadband through a mobile network. Operators argue that to scale FWA meaningfully, they need a wide contiguous spectrum, something the 6 GHz band can uniquely provide. For a country with patchy wired broadband and rising data demand, this is a compelling argument. At the same time, the case for high-capacity Wi-Fi is equally strong. As indoor applications, from high-resolution streaming to cloud gaming to enterprise collaboration tools grow, more bandwidth-intensive homes and offices need powerful Wi-Fi systems to handle multi-device loads without congestion. Telecom networks also lean on strong indoor Wi-Fi to offload traffic, improve user experience, and ensure seamless transitions between mobile and Wi-Fi networks. So, India needs both. Fortunately, the 6 GHz band is large enough to accommodate both interests. With 1200 MHz of spectrum available, India can adopt a balanced approach, delicensing the lower end of the band for Wi-Fi while allocating the upper end to operators through auctions.

However, device makers argue that no commercial filter exists that can cleanly separate licensed 6 GHz mobile signals from adjacent unlicensed Wi-Fi channels. Globally, there is no commercial 5G service utilising the 6 GHz band. But this is likely to change as operators begin trials abroad and the remaining mid-band spectrum gets exhausted. Eventually, 6 GHz could become a critical band for future mobile networks. This is precisely why India must keep its options open. Before committing the entire band to one technology, the government should permit operator-led trials to study coexistence. If interference concerns emerge, the Centre can designate a guard band to cleanly separate Wi-Fi and telecom use, or mandate low-power Wi-Fi operations near the telecom portion of the spectrum.

But spectrum allocation is only part of the challenge. Pricing needs urgent reform. Since 2010, high reserve prices recommended by the regulator have resulted in repeated auction failures, with large chunks of spectrum lying unsold. A dynamic, demand-driven spectrum marketplace is needed, where operators can procure airwaves as needed, with transparent norms in place.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



Exercise caution over rate cut

LOOKING AHEAD. A status quo in monetary policy is needed, as independent of base effect, there's a q-o-q price build-up



R GOPALAN
MC SINGHI

Inflation measured in terms of either the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or Wholesale Price Index (WPI) has been moderating since Q1 of 2022-23, for over thirteen quarters. Overall, CPI moderated from over 7 per cent in Q1 of 2022-23 to 1.9 per cent in Q2 of 2025-26. Moderation has been more pronounced for food articles, which turned negative in the most recent quarter (Q2, 2025-26), while non-food items witnessed a slower decline.

WPI based inflation during this period for consumer and non-consumer goods moderated from 12 per cent and 20.1 per cent, respectively in Q1 of 2022-23 to 0.2 per cent and -0.1 per cent in Q2 of 2025-26. Inflation for non-consumer goods has been more volatile and witnessed a sharper moderation.

The low inflation, below the target rate of inflation as mandatorily required under inflation targeting parameters, has been prompting many for a further rate cut in December, for reducing the borrowing cost for capital formation, higher consumption and assets acquisition, facilitating acceleration in growth. However, we hold a contrarian view and suggest status quo in monetary policy for the following reasons.

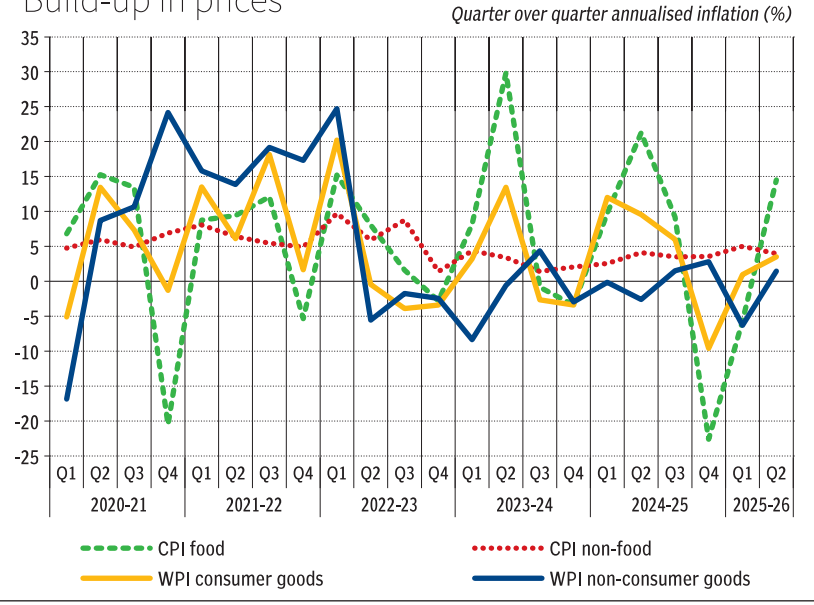
First, the moderation in inflation rate is partly because of the base effect and partly moderation in price increase. However, for a forward looking approach, it is important to look at the price build-up. We look at the four broad sectors of inflation, two each for CPI and WPI. We observe that looking at quarter over quarter inflation, which indicates increase in prices independent of the base effect, in Q2 2025-26 (the most recent quarter), all the four sectors show a build-up. Except for CPI non-food, the build up is significantly higher compared to the previous quarter (see Chart). Given the price build-up, which for CPI food exceeds 10 per cent, despite inflation as measured year-on-year remaining below the threshold, we see pressures building up, necessitating a cautious approach.

RATE CUT TRANSMISSION

Second, the transmission of reduction of 100 basis points in repo rate is almost completed effectively. While lending rates have been recalibrated based on



Build-up in prices



cost of funds, adjustments in deposits rates remain. This has been because the proportion of CASA in deposits is reducing and the term deposit rates are required to be kept aligned to the administered small saving rates, which have been kept higher than the rates required in terms of the framework and linkages with long term government security rates. There has, therefore, been a pressure on margins of

The inflation in India is food dominated and monetary policy has limited impact on the structural issues relating to supply and demand management of food products

institutional lenders, especially on NIMs. However, in absolute terms, Indian banks do comparatively enjoy high NIMs.

Third, the inflation in India is food dominated and monetary policy has limited impact on the structural issues relating to supply and demand management of food products. The moderation in rates has hardly impacted the capital formation and asset acquisition. Corporate investors who are cost sensitive have high internal accruals and cash balances.

For MSMEs, especially for those who have access to institutional funds, they have the advantages of cost set-off because of interest subvention schemes. Interest subvention or tax exemptions are available for agricultural loans, loans for agricultural machinery and house construction. The interest cost adjusted

Flexibility and workers' rights in a platform set-up

The regulation should ensure that flexibility is for real, with no incentive structure that seeks to distort it

Bornali Bhandari
Samarth Gupta
Ajaya K Sahu
KS Urs

What does the word 'flexibility' mean in the context of platform work? The two stakeholders, platforms and the workers, are debating the term. The platforms argue they offer 'flexibility' but workers disagree.

But both the workers and platforms are right because they are talking about different things. The platforms refer to the flexibility between various jobs, i.e., the worker can work across multiple platforms or work partially in a traditional job and partially in a platform.

In contrast, the workers are talking about flexibility at work i.e., the ability to choose how much to work, what hours to work and what locations to work on the platform.

The platforms' concept of 'flexibility' is neither novel, nor driven by the presence of a networking platform. It has always existed in India. There is overwhelming research evidence that workers especially in developing countries like India hold multiple jobs

(Choudhuri, 2021). The Code on Social Security 2020 further recognises non-traditional work.

Beyond pensions and health insurance that the Code on Social Security 2020 promises, the Central and State Governments should develop metrics to assess the flexibility-at-work of platform workers across different sectors and companies. If the platform fails the flexibility test at work, one needs to ask whether workers may be classified as 'partners'.

There should be tests to evaluate whether payments to platform workers distort the incentives to flexibility. In the end, flexibility is just another feature of platform work. There are other features that also need to be evaluated/assessed to get a sense of work conditions of platform workers.

CONCEPT OF 'FLEXIBILITY'

The novel concept of 'flexibility' that a platform offers (for example, a food delivery platform) is allowing the worker to choose the number of days they want to work, the specific days the workers want to work, the shifts they want to work (hours of work), the timing of operations and place of work (zones). A platform typically divides a larger city into various zones and the



WORKERS. Most of them seem satisfied with the flexible work norms

platform worker is free to choose to work in a particular zone when they sign up. Workers have some degree of choice in the time and location where they can work in contrast to a traditional job, where time and space are fixed and non-negotiable.

The test for the policymaker is to determine the actual choice a worker has in any particular platform and the test comes up when the worker wants to change any of the variables. How easy is it to change, if at all? There should be a manifest trade-off between flexibility and wages, without the worker signing up for a traditional job in the garb of flexible work.

In the NCAER Food Delivery

for such tax expenditures tends to be lower to the borrower. Despite all these factors, the gross capital formation as percentage to GDP has remained nearly sticky. There are many other factors that guide investment in India other than interest rate reduction.

Fourth, the quarterly GDP growth indicates a significant recovery in Q1 2025-26. The 7.8 per cent GDP growth is similar to the growth over past nine quarters. The macro indicators reveal that many of these are getting bottomed out, particularly the post GST rate cuts and their pass through to consumers. The fiscal stimulus is likely to keep GDP growth nearly at their current levels. The dual trigger in terms of monetary and fiscal policy may not be warranted at this stage. It may perhaps be more appropriate to wait for the global situation to stabilise before monetary policy becomes a little more accommodative.

CREDIT-DEPOSIT GROWTH

Fifth, with the gap between credit and deposit growth persisting at around 1 per cent now, any rate cut may increase this gap. The liquidity situation, which has moved from deficit earlier to surplus, post reduction in cash reserve ratio, is comfortable now. However, one has to watch the effect of full CRR reduction, government expenditure and reduction in their cash balances, interventions in forex market, increase in consumption, etc. One has to watch to see if froth is building up. The rate cut could, therefore, wait.

Sixth, some inflation is a motivation for investors and producers. While real GDP growth is important, nominal growth is equally important because that is the key factor for assessing fiscal situation, sales growth, business planning, expectation building, etc. The long-term data of inflation and GDP growth indicates that a very low level of implicit deflator is not very conducive for a healthy economy.

Seventh, the intuition of the problem of high current real interest rate. High real interest rate could affect investment and consumption.

However, we are looking at nine months hence when we set the rates because of transmission factor. With forecast of inflation in FY27, and growth remaining what they are forecast to be, the neutral rate may still not go beyond 1-1.5 per cent.

We, therefore, suggest a status quo in monetary policy for nearly a quarter.

Gopalan is former Secretary, Economic Affairs, and Singhi is former Senior Economic Adviser, Ministry of Finance. Views expressed are personal

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Lending after checks

This is with reference to 'Banks mull criminal record check before loan sanction' (November 25). If implemented, it is an excellent move, which has not come too soon. Banks have suffered for too long due to lack of integrity on the part of some borrowers, who raise loans with a criminal intent to not repay the same or to defraud the bank and such loan accounts turn into non-performing assets/bad loans causing considerable loss to the banks. Banks may be given necessary and limited access to the crime data maintained in the national crime record portals such as Digital Police Portal, National Crime Records Bureau and Cyber

Crime Portal, so that they can quickly check for any criminal record of loan applicants and take note of the same while processing the loan application. Apart from the access to the above national portals, banks in various States may be given appropriate access to the digital crime police records of the respective States, as not all States update the national portals regularly. **Kosaraju Chandramouli** Hyderabad

Rein in gold buying

This refers to 'Deceptive glitter' (November 25). India's October trade deficit, which more than doubled to \$21.8 billion, signals

troubling imbalances. Weak exports were anticipated given stalled trade negotiations and US tariffs, but the surge in bullion imports was unexpected. Gold purchases nearly trebled and silver imports rose fivefold despite record prices, driven by festive and wedding demand as well as investment in bars, coins, and digital gold. The sharp rise in gold ETF inflows underscores this shift. While bullion can cushion portfolios against global market volatility, unchecked accumulation risks reversing financialisation of savings and inflating the import bill. Policymakers must consider restoring higher customs duties and regulators

should address the opaque digital gold market to safeguard stability. **K Chidanand Kumar** Bengaluru

Economy absorbs the cost

The surge in gold and silver imports despite a widening trade deficit is worrying, not because households seek safety in uncertain times, but because this rush reflects a deeper loss of confidence in financial markets and policy stability. When families choose bullion over productive investment, the economy quietly absorbs the cost through a bloated import bill and a weakening rupee. The shift from jewellery to bars,

coins and digital gold may look rational for individuals, yet collectively it risks starving industry of capital and pushing India further into consumption-led imbalance. Instead of merely warning investors, the government should urgently strengthen regulatory oversight of digital gold, restore sensible customs duties, and improve public trust in formal savings by ensuring transparency and stable returns. Curbing speculative buying without discouraging legitimate demand is the only way to protect households and the economy from another cycle of glittering but costly illusions. **A Myilsami** Coimbatore

A bank for G-20

This institution can play a key role in funding SDGs

Nilanjan Ghosh
Malancha Chakrabarty
Swati Prabhu

South Africa's G-20 presidency offers a real opportunity to set the agenda and shape global outcomes in a world marred by conflicts, and a massive climate and development crisis.

The pandemic has undone years of progress in poverty and hunger eradication and pushed an additional 93 million people into poverty. South Africa's predecessors, Brazil, and India reoriented the G20's priorities towards development concerns centred on implementing the SDGs, finance for development, prioritising food security, digital public infrastructure, and climate action. It is amply clear that without plugging the massive SDG financing gap, SDGs cannot be redeemed.

Per UN estimates, the SDG financing gap for developing countries currently stands at \$4 trillion. Much of the developing world is reeling under a debt distress not being able to sustain essential social services. Development aid has received a severe beating with most of the big donors notably the US withdrawing from the international development scene. Net bilateral flows to low-income countries has fallen consistently after the initial rise during the pandemic. Also the private sector's investment in SDGs has been lacklustre. Estimates indicate that only 4 per cent of the \$410 trillion in global private assets invested in developing countries have been directed towards SDGs.

The inadequacy of the international financial architecture in financing SDGs in developing countries led to louder calls for reform. Developing countries have long critiqued the multilateral financial institutions due to their structural rigidities, delayed institutional responses to crises, and the dominance of the Global North coupled with the underrepresentation of the Global South.

The G20 Eminent Persons Group on Global Financial Governance highlighted many of these failures of the global financial architecture and provided a roadmap for reform in 2023 under India's presidency. Their report stressed the urgency of stepping up MDB (multilateral development bank) financing of global public goods like SDGs and climate action and also called for a



SDGs. Need for renewed thrust

more inclusive governance structure of international institutions through greater voting rights for India, Brazil, and China.

NEW INSTITUTION NEEDED

Several reasons call for the creation of a new financial institution to finance the SDGs. First, the existing financial order, born in the context of the Second World War, is incapable of financing the SDGs which require major, sustained, and transformative changes across countries and sectors. However, both the World Bank and the IMF have a country-focused operating model which is not in line with SDG financing, which required a broader focus across countries and sectors.

Existing global financial institutions have historically prioritised economic rate of return, neglected environmental and social concerns, and have a poor record in climate finance. The basic tenets of the multilateral development banks are not in line with the SDG agenda for 2030 and the Paris Agreement. Both the World Bank and the IMF have pushed for a growth-based approach to poverty alleviation and climate concerns have never featured prominently in their lending.

SDGs require new, stable, and long-term sources of financing. The G20's Development Bank should strategise finance towards addressing the development and sustainability needs. A dedicated bank to fund the SDGs would not only be instrumental in furthering the SDGs but also ensure that geopolitical conditions don't derail the SDGs.

Without long-term sustained finance from a dedicated development bank, the SDGs will surely fail.

Ghosh is Vice President, Development Studies, Observer Research Foundation; Chakrabarty is Senior Fellow, ORF; and Prabhu is Fellow, ORF

CAPITAL IDEAS.



RICHA MISHRA

The government has set a target to raise the share of natural gas in energy mix to 15 per cent in 2030 from about 6.3 per cent now.

India is among the top liquefied natural gas (LNG) importers in the world. In fact, increasing imports of LNG is part of the trade talks between the US and India too, according to market buzz. Among India's top list of LNG import countries are Qatar, the US and the UAE. Other significant suppliers to India include Angola and Oman.

Domestically the government has set up at various committees to suggest ways of increasing the intake of gas in India's energy basket. But, success has been slow. What could be the reason for the slow progress, when there is complete government backing? Is it infrastructure or the politically sensitive issue of pricing?

Recently, "Vision 2040 - Natural Gas Infrastructure in India" report was submitted to the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB). The PNGRB has been mandated to develop infrastructure to transport natural gas to consumers across the country.

According to DK Sarraf, Chairman of the Committee, "What is important is to have non-discriminatory, transparent and consumer friendly processes for allocation of gas infrastructure enabling the shift to this fuel easier."

"The overarching purpose is to align the growth of natural gas infrastructure with national priorities on sustainability, economic resilience, and global energy leadership, ensuring that natural gas remains an engine of inclusive, clean, and secure energy transition," Sarraf said.

All stakeholders, including the Government and regulator, need to work collectively to ensure adequate regasification infrastructure, pipeline connectivity, and supportive policies to capitalise on lower LNG prices due to the expected glut in global supplies in the coming years, Sarraf added.

According to the report, under the base case scenario, India's natural gas demand is projected to grow from approximately 260-300 MMSCMD in 2030 to 365-500 MMSCMD by 2040. Domestic gas production is expected to reach 120 MMSCMD in the near term,



BIJOY GHOSH

Step on the gas with policy tweaks

Making domestic gas production more economically attractive, tax breaks and improved storage infra are vital

but may settle at a lower level by 2030. This implies a rising dependence on imported regasified liquefied natural gas (R-LNG), necessitating secure long-term contracts, diversified supply sources, and an efficient import and distribution infrastructure.

COMPLEX PRICING

Domestic gas pricing in India is a complex and evolving process, balancing the need for affordable energy will be the key to make this fuel also sought after. Currently, the domestically produced gas price in India is much cheaper than imported gas, thus making it unviable to produce. The current gap between domestically produced gas sold at government decided price — \$6.7/mmBtu and spot LNG price of around \$11.00/mmBtu excluding added costs of taxes and levies, transportation.

There are two aspects to this issue,

The global LNG market is expected to enter a glut phase by 2028-30, pushing down prices. India must seize this opportunity and sew up long-term deals

encouraging domestic production and encouraging easy access to user industry at a time of low cost imports.

"A massive wave of new LNG export capacity, combined with sluggish demand growth, is expected to push global LNG markets into oversupply in the 2028-2030 time period. This impending surplus will likely exert downward pressure on LNG prices, creating a strategic advantage for India. Lower LNG prices will enhance the affordability and accessibility of natural gas, particularly benefiting the fertilizer, power, and CGD sectors. Indian gas marketing companies can capitalise on this supply wave by securing long-term LNG contracts at competitive pricing. Additionally, the availability of cheaper RLNG is expected to boost natural gas consumption in India's price-sensitive market, further supporting the transition toward a gas-based economy," the report said.

Indian stakeholders need to ensure adequate regasification infrastructure, pipeline connectivity, and supportive policies to fully capitalise on lower LNG prices, Sarraf added.

TAX PAIN

Another pain point is the taxation landscape for natural gas in the country.

STATISTALK.

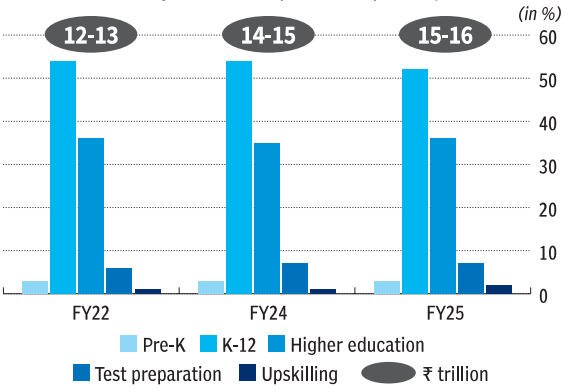
Compiled by Sai Prabhakar | Graphic KS Gunasekar

Snapshot of education market in India

Physicswallah RHP document presents data on the Indian education market, compiled by Redseer Research. The thriving education market is close to \$200 billion led by school and higher education. The market for test preparation and upskilling is also increasing. Within the test preparation market, the sheen of government jobs is dominant and the market for undergraduate studies is also increasing. Joint Entrance Exam (JEE) for engineering, National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for medicine and UPSC services attract most students despite low conversion rates

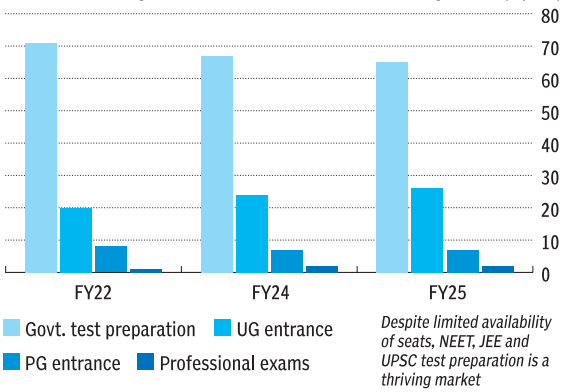
Indian education market

The overall market is worth ₹16 trillion (\$200 billion) with K-12 and higher education accounting for 52 and 36 per cent respectively in FY25



Test preparation market

State and Central government jobs dominate the test preparation market even as the undergraduate market share has increased significantly (in %)



| NEET UG funnel | (in million) |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| Addressable students | 52 |
| Students aspiring for NEET | 16 |
| Students enrolling | 3.6 |
| Students registering | 2.4 |
| Number of seats | 0.1 |

| JEE UG funnel | (in million) |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| Addressable students | 50 |
| Students aspiring for JEE | 14 |
| Students enrolling | 2.6 |
| Students registering | 1.5 |
| Number of seats | 0.06 |

| UPSC funnel | (in million) |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| Addressable students | 100 |
| Students aspiring for UPSC | 6 |
| Students enrolling | 4 |
| Students registering | 1.6 |
| Number of seats (in units) | 1,000 |

Source: Physicswallah RHP

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

November 26, 2005

Professionals make a beeline for ind director posts

Engineers, chartered accountants and graduates from foreign universities seem to be heading the list of professionals vying for independent director slots on the boards of listed companies. A large number of retired civil servants and former CPSU chiefs, lawyers and professors from institutions such as the IITs and IIMs are among those who have made themselves available for directorships for listed firms.

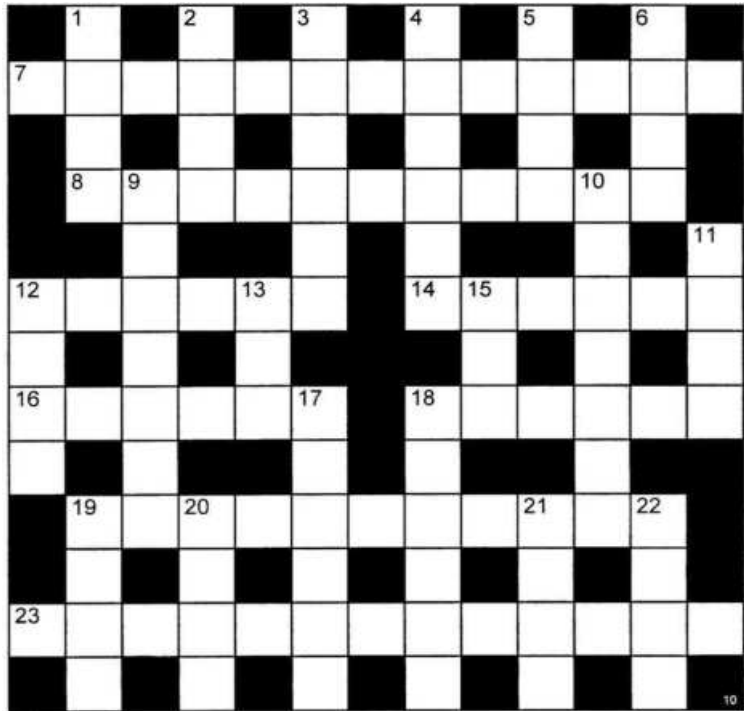
HSBC ready to pump in more capital

Global banking and financial services major, the HSBC Group is bullish about the economic prospects of India. The Group Chairman of HSBC Holdings Plc, Sir John Bond, said HSBC was ready to invest more financial capital in any way that was acceptable to the Indian Government and regulatory authorities.

Performance targets approved by DPE task force: Raha

Throwing the ball into the court of the Petroleum Minister, on the ongoing issue of ONGC not signing an memorandum of understanding with the nodal Ministry, the CMD of ONGC, Mr Subir Raha, said, "we shall make our submission on various issues to the Minister and we are confident that he will take a fair, objective and judicious view on the issues."

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2832



EASY

ACROSS

- They bring up children not their own (6-7)
- In conditions of costly pleasure (3,2,6)
- Fishes with rod and line (6)
- Things which take place (6)
- Bank clerk (6)
- Surrounds with hostile intentions (6)
- Cancelling written words (8,3)
- Something self-contradictory (13)

DOWN

- Slightly cold (4)
- Cease (4)
- Small farms, pieces of arable land (6)
- Bring hand to cap (6)
- An admirer; a dandy (4)
- Remain (4)
- Bony, lean in figure (7)
- Type of poem (7)
- Egyptian deity (4)
- Italian white wine (4)
- Add to, increase (3)
- Stand in rivalry with (3)
- Oppose, withstand (6)
- Condemn to exile (6)
- Speak whiningly (4)
- Double-reed woodwind (4)
- Unlock (4)
- Riding harness, saddles etc (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Mother and father to medical man on his way to Gloucester? (6-7)
- Where the domestic cat may sit and think itself in clover (3,2,6)
- How one fishes ancient people out of the corners (6)
- Happenings that may take place over three days (6)
- How one counts the money and may relate his findings (6)
- Bees swarming on backstreet one surrounds with hostility (6)
- Deletion of Channel voyage from here to there (8,3)
- Tiny, concise movement round Poles doesn't tally (13)

DOWN

- There's nothing in region between anticyclones to get colder (4)
- It won't go on the end of a sentence (4)
- Small farms given credit for turning soft (6)
- A handy form of greeting one can get from a gun (6)
- An admirer of Nash, say (4)
- 2 will turn to windward on 22 (4)
- Full of 12 Across when a lug ran out (7)
- Under a shakeup, a circle may provide a poem (7)
- Is twice seen by an Egyptian deity (4)
- One sat around having wine in Italy (4)
- Deletion of 12 Across to supplement it (3)
- Be in rivalry with life in France (3)
- How a sister may put up some sort of front (6)
- Send one packing in turning up in a party (6)
- One is unable to provide such hypocritical talk (4)
- Decoration includes nothing that's instrumental (4)
- Start with a competition anyone can go in for (4)
- To sail in zigzag fashion may have some point to it (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2831

ACROSS 1. Development 7. Trouble 9. Skin 11. Chino 12. Peddle 14. On the fringe 18. Sugary 20. Oiled 22. Neat 23. Distant 24. Pertinacity

DOWN 2. Erosion 3. Obey 4. Naked 5. Stick 6. Inter 8. Brothers 10. Perilous 13. Aft 15. Gallant 16. Using 17. Edits 19. Grave 21. Eden

Cars are the culprit. Greening them is key

VEHICULAR EMISSIONS were identified as the major constituent of Delhi's toxic air in the late 1990s. In 2001, the Supreme Court nudged the city's public transport to move to CNG. But the gains from the transition to the relatively cleaner fuel were offset in less than a decade by the large increase in private vehicles. Despite near-unanimity on the need to make transport the focal point of Delhi's anti-pollution drive, policy responses have been half-hearted at best. Now, with the national capital in the grip of another spell of noxious air, a high-level meeting chaired by the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister has directed the NCR states to adopt a slew of measures to curb emissions from private cars and two-wheelers. These include penalising owners whose vehicles default on green standards and accelerating the transition to electric vehicles. The crisis should occasion more conversations on syncing the mobility needs of the capital's residents with the imperative of cleaning up the city's air.

Apart from being seen as an aspirational good, personal vehicles are almost unavoidable in an expanding city where public transport is unreliable. The average trip length in the NCR has increased by a staggering 81 per cent in the last two decades. In that period, Delhi's metro network covered close to 400 km. In the past six months, the city has also made impressive additions to its electric bus fleet. However, by all accounts, the expansion of public transport has not kept pace with the urban sprawl. Failure to ensure last-mile connectivity has made the metro a less attractive option for those who can use private vehicles or taxis. And, even today, Delhi's bus fleet doesn't fulfil the target set by the Supreme Court in 1998 — 10,000 buses. These deficits have led to vehicles clogging Delhi's streets — studies show that high congestion can increase emissions up to seven times.

During the ongoing pollution crisis, the Delhi government has reiterated its commitment to improving public transport. Doing so at a scale that would be enough to make a dent in the smog might take time. Governments in the NCR should also consider ways of nudging people to use private transport in a more environment-friendly way — car pools, for instance. Cleaning up Delhi's air will require the government and people to work together. But people make behavioural changes only when they see a matching commitment from the government. The Delhi government needs to convince the city's residents of its sincerity by urgently taking measures that are relatively easier to implement — reducing dust pollution, for instance.

Don't count students by faith, it's wrong, illegal

THE J&K unit of the BJP has joined the disturbing clamour being worked up by Sangh Parivar outfits for scrapping the admission list at the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence in Katra. That 42 of the 50 MBBS seats in its first batch have gone to candidates who are Muslim and belong to Kashmir is a problem, contend the Bajrang Dal and the VHP, because the institute is set up with (Hindu) donations to the Vaishno Devi shrine. They demand that the admissions be put on hold, "corrective" action taken, and admission norms reviewed. The real problem in Katra, however, is this — while the Vaishno Devi Shrine Board has done well to invest its considerable resources in setting up an institute of medical sciences, the new spaces it has opened up for the young in the region are in danger of being narrowed and overtaken by an old and cynical zero-sum politics. It is also a politics that goes against the constitutional letter and spirit.

In an institute that is not classified as a minority institution — the Vaishno Devi Medical Institute is not — and where the admissions have followed the National Medical Council guidelines, there can be no grounds to protest the entry of students of a "particular community". In fact, any attempt to label students as "Hindu" or "Muslim" and to discriminate or exclude on the basis of religion is a violation of the students' constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights. By all accounts, the fact that 90 per cent of the selected students are Muslims from Kashmir only follows a wider prevailing pattern — while there are more seats available in medical colleges in the Jammu region compared to Kashmir, most of these seats have reportedly been taken up by students from Kashmir in the past few years; the reverse is true in the case of engineering seats.

The Vaishno Devi Medical Institute has only just got off the ground. Hopefully, in years to come, it will grow and expand as it provides opportunities for all those who seek to learn and take forward the work of medical science, whatever their religious identity. It must not become a political battlefield. Pulling up the drawbridges now would be a grave injustice to its students, to its institutional possibilities — and flagrantly illegal.

Funny thing about AI: LLM can't LOL

WHAT HAPPENS when the machine tries its hand at stand-up comedy? It crashes. That's what a new study concluded after it studied AI's ability to understand puns. Experts from Cardiff University, in south Wales, and Ca' Foscari University of Venice tested Large Language Models with puns like: "I used to be a comedian, but my life became a joke," and found that even when AI was able to discern the structure of the joke, it didn't grasp the humour in it.

Jokes aside, AI has the ability to do a lot that humans can — and do it well. Since the AI boom in late 2022, there has been panic across industries over the possibility of technology overtaking humans. In creative pursuits, too, AI has been catching up. It has won art competitions, generated feature-length films and carried on lengthy flirtations on dating apps. The 2023 Writers Guild strike in Hollywood explicitly demanded safeguards against the use of AI. In Germany, a court recently ruled that OpenAI violated the country's copyright laws by using artists' songs without permission to train its LLMs. Anthropic had to write a cheque for \$1.5 billion to authors whose work it pirated to train Claude, its AI model. These instances show that anxieties about human skills being undermined by an algorithm's intelligent imitation are not without foundation. As it turns out, though, to tell the fake from the real, all it takes is a punchline.

That even dad jokes are beyond AI should be reassuring. Anyone who has chuckled over a friend's witticism or bonded with someone over everyday tragicomedies can attest to the fact that humour adds texture and flavour to life. For all AI is cracked up to be, cracking up is still strictly human business.

Trump's Ukraine peace plan is audacious. India has a stake in its success



RAJA MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump's new peace plan for Ukraine offers a fresh look at what has long seemed an impossible proposition — a US-Russia partnership. Washington and Moscow have been at odds for nearly two decades, and many capitals have assumed the rivalry is permanent. Trump is challenging that assumption. He appears willing to take the relationship in a different direction.

His Ukraine peace plan contains ideas with sweeping implications — reintegrating Russia into the world economy, inviting Moscow back into the Western G7, and launching a broad US-Russia economic partnership. Trump's 28-point peace formula for Ukraine mirrors key Russian demands — ceding eastern Ukraine and Crimea, keeping Kyiv out of NATO, and limiting its military.

Trump backed the proposals with an ultimatum to Kyiv — decide immediately or face a cutoff of all military aid. The initiative has rattled Europe, angered Ukraine, and generated strong criticism in the US. Washington and Kyiv held talks on Sunday to narrow differences, and both sides reported progress. But the issues remain complex — Ukraine's territorial integrity, its sovereign right to self-defence, and the nature of security guarantees from the US and Europe.

Trump's demand for a quick settlement comes amid war fatigue in Ukraine and the

weakening domestic position of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Europe remains defiant, despite its difficulty in filling the vacuum created by Trump's suspension of military assistance.

In the US, the pushback has been immediate and substantive. Russia has few friends in Washington other than the President. In his first term, Trump defied the bipartisan consensus on Russia and paid a political price — cast as a Kremlin puppet and even impeached. Yet, he has remained insistent through four years out of office and is now back in the White House.

While much of the foreign policy establishment views Trump's peace plan as appeasement, parts of the MAGA movement argue that the US must withdraw from entangling conflicts in Europe, especially Ukraine. For Trump, the challenge is considerable: Overcoming institutional resistance in Washington, persuading Kyiv to accept constraints on its sovereignty, and convincing Europe to support a peace deal with Moscow. Even if he achieves all this, he faces a difficult negotiation with Putin — the more he bends toward Ukraine and Europe, the harder it may be to find common ground with Moscow.

The Kremlin believes time is on its side. It assumes Ukraine's position will weaken the longer the war continues and anticipates deepening divisions within Europe and across the Atlantic.

Whether or not Trump succeeds, his out-of-the-box thinking raises larger questions about Eurasian geopolitics — and their implications for India. Critics call Trump's outreach naive, but the logic echoes an old Western idea: Preventing any single power, or coalition, from dominating Eurasia. Today, that means loosening

For India, the potential shift is consequential. Delhi worries about a 'G2' — a Sino-American condominium over Asia — but has far fewer concerns about an 'E2,' or US-Russia cooperation in Europe. Any accommodation between Washington and Moscow would make it easier for Delhi to sustain its ties with both

Constitution's vision of rights was ahead of its time



ROCHANA BAJPAI AND MANAS RATURI

Indian Constitution-makers were not bound by the limited imagination of Western liberal constitutionalism with its emphasis on state restriction, recognising instead that in society, groups and communities wielded power separate from the state

TODAY MARKS the 76th anniversary of the adoption of the Indian Constitution. Born amidst a bloody partition and transfer of power from colonial rule, it was ahead of its time. It departed in several respects from the Western constitutions that it is often charged with borrowing from. Constitutional rights in India incorporate, but also go beyond, the Western notion of the protection of individual civil and political liberties. These envisage state action to address inequities in social life and recognise group-differentiated rights.

First, the Indian Constitution asserts a right to equality and, unlike Western constitutions, also expands upon its implications in a deeply unequal society. Provisions such as Article 14 — equality before the law and the equal protection of laws for all persons — and Article 15 — prohibitions on discrimination by the state against citizens — marked a new departure. Unlike Western constitutions, its equality provisions identify societal sources of discrimination against individuals, particularly in relation to caste. Thus, under Article 15 (2), citizens are to be protected from discrimination not just from the state but also private citizens in their access to public spaces. Article 17 outlaws the practice of untouchability. Similarly, in response to conditions of debt bondage tied to caste and landlordism, Article 23 prohibits human trafficking and forced labour. Indian Constitution-makers were thus not bound by Western liberal constitutionalism, with its emphasis on state restriction, recognising instead that in society, groups and communities wielded power separate from the state.

Second, the Constitution recognised group-differentiated rights within a broadly egalitarian liberal framework, decades before these were admitted in Western liberal democracies. Heated debates ensued in the Constituent Assembly over protections for religious minorities and historically marginalised groups, which came to be reduced somewhat from the first to the final draft of the Constitution. Notably, legislative quotas for religious minorities were withdrawn in

1949. Nevertheless, at the behest of leaders like B R Ambedkar, the Constitution recognised that differential treatment was needed to address structural inequalities. India was a world leader in the constitutionalisation of affirmative action in 1950, a decade before the US's advances in civil-rights legislation.

The Constitution adopted a nuanced approach to religious diversity. It established a secular state (although the term itself was introduced in 1976), eschewing special status for any religion, prohibiting compulsory taxation for any religion (Article 27), and prohibiting compulsory religious instruction in state-funded educational institutions (Article 28). It offered protections for religious freedoms in the case of individuals (Article 25), as well as groups (Article 26). Minorities such as Muslims, Christians, and Parsis retained their religious family laws. Articles 29 and 30 further guaranteed religious and linguistic minorities the right to preserve their language, script, and culture, and to establish and administer educational institutions.

The Constitution's approach is not without flaws. Protections for individual freedoms and pluralism remained partial, with rights and remedies limited in a range of circumstances, including through emergency provisions carrying over colonial laws. With the exceptions and suspensions of rights to be determined by the government of the day, albeit with the possibility of judicial review, the Constitution created a powerful executive with wide discretionary powers.

Even so, that the Constitution has survived as the normative standard for a colossal, diverse polity for over 75 years, and remains a beacon of hope for its marginalised, is an achievement in global terms. It reminds us that constitutions are not only legal texts but powerful narratives of national aspiration and belonging, that national unity does not require uniformity, and that equality does not require the same treatment in contexts of deep inequality and social difference.

Bajpai is professor of Politics, SOAS, University of London and Raturi is associate professor, OP Jindal Global University



ANURAG MINUS VERMA

The clash between genuine concerns of user safety and the fear of expanding state control will define the next phase of the internet

New Delhi. It became amply clear that the representatives of both the trade unions and the employers were merely reiterating their known stance on almost all issues.

60 die aboard hijacked plane

SIXTY PEOPLE died aboard the Egypt air plane commandeered at Valletta Airport in the world's bloodiest hijacking, Maltese government spokesman Paul Mifsud said. Fifty-eight bodies were found in the burned wreckage of the Boeing 737, stormed by Egyptian commandos, and two were killed aboard the jet before the rescue bid. Mifsud initially said 57 bodies were recovered from the plane, but later added that a baby, who had not been on

● **WORDLY WISE**
Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand.
— Mark Twain

would make it easier for Delhi to sustain its ties with both. India would like to see the conflict between Russia and the West end at the earliest.

Yet, Delhi has never subscribed to the view that Russia and America are permanent adversaries, nor to the belief that Moscow will always support India against the West. India remembers that the US and Soviet Union were military allies during World War II; that the Soviet Union sought a global duopoly with the US in the 1970s; and that post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s was so focused on integrating with the West that it had little time for India. Equally, Delhi cannot ignore the negative consequences of today's Sino-Russian alliance for India's security.

The key for India is to recognise that relations among the US, Russia, and China are in deep flux. Delhi must be open to the possibility of improving US-Russia ties and acknowledge that Moscow could emerge as the swing state in shaping Eurasian geopolitics. There is no reason for India to take sentimental or ideological positions on disputes among the great powers.

Delhi will also note the irony: Even as Trump seeks a rapprochement with Russia, his administration has imposed punitive tariffs on India for buying Russian oil. But such contradictions are inherent to the logic of geopolitics. India's priority must be to avoid getting entangled in great-power jockeying. Enhancing India's national power must remain the sole criterion guiding its great power diplomacy.

The writer is contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express and distinguished professor at the Motwani-Jadeja Institute of American Studies, Jindal Global University. He also holds the Korea Chair on Asian Geopolitics at the Council on Strategic and Defence Research

Beginning of the end of the free-range internet era

FOR A long time, the internet was treated like a playground with no fences. Children wandered through it with the same freedom as adults. Governments did not intervene because they treated it as harmless. That era is closing. Australia adding Twitch to the under-16 ban is not a routine policy update. It is an admission that a long-held fantasy has collapsed. Online life shapes a young mind with more force than any family, classroom, or neighbourhood.

The early cracks in the free-range internet showed up years ago. China tried curfews and identity checks for minors. Europe wrote long laws about data and consent. Brazil pushed for age verification. The reason behind this change is a realisation that platforms are built to chase attention, and care exists only in the symbolic speeches of founders.

What is happening with Twitch sits inside a larger cultural pattern. When something appears risky for teenagers, states step in. It is the same logic behind alcohol rules in many Indian cities, where the legal drinking age is 21 or higher, yet college bars still fill with 19-year-olds sharing *shisha*. Restrictions do not stop behaviour completely. On the internet, this pattern is even stronger. Teenagers will use VPNs, shortcuts, and fake ages.

The internet was not built as a centralised system. Its original structure was meant to survive disruptions. This makes banning anything online a messy affair. At the same time, these platforms are no longer simple entertainment outlets. A large creator economy sits on top, with young people earning through streams, ads and communities built over years. Founders of early internet platforms also behaved with the same philosophy. When governments asked them to remove or block harmful content, they responded with a mix of reluctance and idealism. Some claimed that the internet should remain open. Others said they had no way to control user behaviour.

Internet freedom activists warn that safety-based regulations often become the doorway to state control. The same tools can expand to political speech, journalism, and satire. In Brazil, similar powers were used during elections to restrict critical content. India has already seen several moves in this direction. Measures introduced in the name of safety can slowly shape what people are allowed to say or criticise.

The clash between genuine concerns of user safety and the fear of expanding state control will define the next phase of the internet. It is happening at a time when the border between online life and the physical world has faded, and the internet has become its own republic. In this situation, it becomes difficult to decide what should be banned and who should hold that power. Handling it will be tricky because power over the digital world rarely stays technical, it quickly becomes a set of loopholes that help capture more power.

Anurag Minus Verma is an author, podcaster and multimedia artist

40 YEARS AGO

November 26, 1985



Delay in assent to bills

BOTH CONGRESS-I and Opposition members in the Rajya Sabha criticised the inordinate delay in the grant of the President's assent to the bills passed by the state legislature and reserved by the governors for the consideration of the President. They, however, failed to secure an assurance from the Home Minister that all pending bills would be cleared within a fixed time span.

No consensus at labour meet

NO SIGN of a consensus emerged on important issues of industrial relations like sickness and minimum wages during deliberations of the Indian Labour Conference in

SPECIAL INTENSIVE REVISION OF ELECTORAL ROLLS

2 states, 2 BLOs, 1 day

Across 12 states and UTs where the Election Commission’s Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is on, it’s a race against time for Booth Level Officers, footsoldiers of this exercise. With at least five suicides attributed to stress and stepped-up responsibilities related to the SIR, *The Indian Express* spends a day with two BLOs, both school teachers, to find out how they navigate the logistical challenge of enumeration — from voluminous paper work to voter apathy — as the December 4 deadline looms



● WEST BENGAL

‘It’s the last stretch... have to hurry up’

Atri Mitra

THE SINGLE bedroom of a 600-sqft apartment in Phoolbagan, Kolkata, is taken. “It’s now the BLO (Booth Level Officer) office,” jokes Kaveri Jaiswal, as her daughter Pinki Jaiswal, 45, sits on the bed that’s strewn with enumeration forms. Pinki is one of the 80,681 BLOs in West Bengal, where the second round of the Election Commission’s (EC) Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is on.

“There... the app is stuck again,” she says, after another failed attempt at uploading an enumeration form onto the EC’s BLO app. “This is now our biggest headache. Most of the time the app doesn’t work properly. It works only from 8 pm to midnight and then between 6 am and 8.30 am,” says Pinki, a primary teacher at the city’s Sanskrit Collegiate School.

Pinki is BLO of Block Number 115 of Belegkata Assembly constituency that has 751 electors, according to the 2025 voter list. The last intensive revision of the electoral roll in the state was done in 2002 and Pinki has to help electors refer to this list to fill up their forms.

With the December 4 deadline fast approaching, Pinki has been working to a plan: “For the first 10 days, I distributed forms. Every day, I distributed almost 60-70 forms. For the next 10 days, I collected forms and uploaded them. Now, it’s the last stretch. I’ll have to hurry up.” She says she has uploaded 70% of her forms so far.

Besides problems with the app, what slowed her down, she says, is the indifference among people. “They know they have time until December 4 to submit forms. When we go to their homes, they say, why are you in such a hurry? Then there are people who panic when they have to fill the form, so they bring it and leave it all to me,” she says.

5.30 am to 12.30 pm

“I wake up at 5.30 am and start uploading forms at 6. After 8-8.30 am, the app slows down and then I stop to do some chores at home. Around 10 am, I leave for my field visits,” says Pinki.

But before that, she spends consider-

able time packing her two bags. In the bigger one, a tote bag with the Election Commission’s logo, she neatly arranges enumeration forms, voter lists, a register in which she gets people to sign when they submit their forms and a clip board. The other is a backpack in which she keeps her stationery, cellphone, a water bottle and a tiffin box. “My mother forces me to take a tiffin box. I am not particular about what I eat, especially these days, when there’s so much work — so oats, bread, *luchi-tarkari*... whatever,” she says.

Booth Number 115 of Belegkata constituency, with its mix of Bengali and Hindi-speaking population, has both slums and apartment complexes. It’s a daily 15-minute autorickshaw ride from her home.

Pinki starts the day’s work from 1, Jay Narayan Tarka Panchanan Road, a slum with around 25 households along the railway line. Most of the residents here need help with the forms.

Her first stop is Lalita Das’s home. “*Didi*, I am enrolled in Jahanjha Assembly constituency in Bihar (Jamui). I have asked my brother to send details from the 2002 voter list.”

“Tell him to send the details fast. We don’t have much time,” Pinki says before moving to Lakhnan Das’s house next door. “Why haven’t you filled this part? Don’t you have any information on the 2002 voter list? Did you look for your name, your parents’, your relatives... anybody at all?” The 40-year-old nods, says he is not on the 2002 list. “You keep all your documents ready. You will be called for a hearing,” says Pinki, leaving behind a worried looking Lakhnan.

“Out of 751 electors, I have been able to match details of almost 570 with the 2002 voter list. Around 182 names are of those who are either dead or have shifted to other places. Those who can’t establish any link with the 2002 SIR will be called for a hearing. So, I am keeping those forms aside because my gut feeling is that the BLO will have to be present during the hearing,” she says.

12.30 pm to 8 pm

After visiting some more families, Pinki reaches Jaynarayan Tarka Panchanan Lane. Here, the parking area of an apart-

ment complex has been converted into Pinki’s makeshift office, where she sits from 12.30 pm to 4 pm, helping people fill up their form.

As soon as she settles down, 70-year-old Rajinder Singh submits his form, without filling in any of the details. Pinki tells him to wait till she has finished with a few forms and he snaps: “I have to go to the hospital where my wife is admitted. Yesterday, you told me to come today. And now, you are asking me to wait. You think you can take away my voting rights?”

Pinki smiles and takes Rajinder’s forms, along with that of his wife and son. She finds their names on the 2002 list and fills in the details. It takes her about 15 minutes to fill each form.

She attends to many more people — filling their forms, answering their queries, both in person and on her phone that rings incessantly. “One person called to say that his entire family has misplaced their SIR forms. After consulting with my supervisor, I told them to fill the forms online,” she says.

By 4 pm, Pinki has managed to collect 60 forms. “They should have given us at least two months to do this. I am a strong person, I can overlook my spondylosis or my parents’ illness. But, not everyone can take such pressure. I know many BLOs who are suffering from anxiety,” she says.

After almost eight hours of field work, Jaiswal returns home tired. “I have a couple of hours to myself. After that, from 8 pm, the fight to upload the forms begins. That’s the most tedious job,” says Pinki.

Pinki says she misses her students the most. “I am the class teacher of Class 4 and my students are completely lost now. I am trying to complete my SIR job as soon as I can so that I can go back to them. They have their examinations coming up next month,” she says.

8 pm to midnight

Earlier, this was my personal time when I would read books. But now, I spend all that time uploading forms. I get at least 200 phone calls a day. All that we do for the sake of democracy!” she laughs.

Beside her, mother Kaveri says, “She eats almost nothing the entire day. And she has no time for us — I suffered my teeth ache for a week before she took me to the dentist.”

Pinki agrees. “Yes, I have no time for anything now. In fact, I haven’t even filled up my family’s SIR forms. I will have to do that in the next couple of days,” she says.

Pinki Jaiswal at the parking lot of an apartment building, helping electors fill their enumeration forms. PARTHA PAUL



Laxmi Gupta at a housing complex in Jaipur. PARUL KULSHRESTHA

● RAJASTHAN

‘Most submit blank forms... It takes up most of my time’

Parul Kulshrestha

EVERY DAY for the past 20 days, as a weak winter sun struggles against the chill in Jaipur’s Mansarovar Extension, Laxmi Gupta sets off from her home about noon, slips on her *dupatta*, grabs her files, and heads out on her Scooty.

A government schoolteacher, the 54-year-old is a Booth Level Officer (BLO) appointed for the Election Commission’s ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. She has to verify and update the details of 958 voters in her assigned area, including five high-rise buildings and some rural stretches.

Her days are now taken up, she says, with knocking on doors, cross-checking documents, answering questions, in person and on the phone, filling forms, and then refilling them in case of rejections.

On cue, a resident of Naman Residency, one of the five high-rises assigned to her, calls for help with his form. Patiently, Laxmi says, “First check your name in the 2002 voter list, then fill the SIR form.”

She also places calls requesting that residents of the five high-rises collect in their building lobbies so that she can answer their queries together.

People often come to her with unfilled applications, she says. “We first distributed the forms to electors, and they were supposed to fill it up and take our help if needed. But most of them don’t fill up the forms, and I have to sit with them and guide them. That takes up most of my time.”

The last intensive revision of the electoral roll in Rajasthan was conducted in 2002, and that is the reference point for this exercise, with voters required to check their or their family members’ names against that list.

Laxmi says she had shared the 2002 list with electors via WhatsApp, after she had distributed the forms. Most of the electors in her list figure on the 2002 list, making it easier for her compared to other BLOs, who have the onus of doing the matching. If the applicants have failed to match, or not understood how to do it, Laxmi helps them search with their address (if it has been the same since 2002) or their EPIC number.

An angry elector calls up Laxmi to complain: “Where are you? I have not received any form till now. How am I supposed to get my verification done?” Laxmi puts him on speaker as she sifts through the papers with her. Finding the relevant document, she tells him she visited his house a day earlier, but there was no one at home. The man calls her “irresponsible”, claiming he never got his form, before hanging up.

“What am I supposed to do? People think they can talk to us as they please, without realising how overworked we are,” Laxmi says.

She usually leaves on her rounds in the afternoon and again late evenings, when people are most likely to be home.

It’s easier in rural areas, she says, where people assemble easily. But there are other challenges. “A lot of them need help with filling forms or using smartphones. So, I have to fill every form fully... In urban areas, with some guidance, people usually fill the forms themselves.”

Noon to 5 pm

In the lobby of Naman Residency, as she helps residents fill up forms and matches their names against the 2002 list, the server of the BLO app keeps crashing every 15 minutes. Laxmi has to call up an acquaintance to

complain, before it starts functioning.

Such delays mean that several hours later, Laxmi has only covered two buildings and completed 38 forms. She has also found that 19 names on her list no longer live in Rajasthan — the EC has cited weeding out names such as these as the reason for the SIR.

Laxmi says they have been told to submit forms even for those who live here but may have their votes registered in other booths. That has added to her work.

It’s close to 3 pm now, well past her lunch time. These days, the 54-year-old usually grabs something to eat at the homes of a few acquaintances. It helps that she has been a BLO since 2018 and knows most people here.

As she exits the building, Laxmi again goes through the names in her list and places calls — some are out of town and others are unreachable. She says some of them had assured her they would submit the forms soon but have not been responding now.

The deadline is looming; she has to upload details of all the 958 electors in her booth by December 4. Admitting that the days are long, she says, “We have to complete at least 50 forms per day, which is difficult. I don’t remember when I went to the market last since November 4 (when she began the BLO work). Now, the supervisor will start calling us to know how many forms I filled.”

One of the latest messages on the group is about a show cause notice to a BLO for “not working efficiently”.

5 pm to 8 pm

As the sun goes down, Laxmi heads home. She lives in a fourth-floor flat with her husband and mother-in-law. Her son and daughter, both married and employed in the IT sector, live in Bengaluru. Laxmi’s family doesn’t expect her to help with making dinner these days, so she gets down to work as soon she gets home.

Her husband Sudheer Gupta, who works for a private firm, says he is mostly done by 6 pm and accompanies his wife if she has to head out again in the evening.

The eight-seater dining table is almost entirely covered with electoral forms. The calls on Laxmi’s phone are still on, and this time an elderly woman wants her to talk to her daughter about help with the form.

Laxmi estimates that she must have completed 65% of her work, which includes the 5%-7% of rejected forms, which she will have to be resubmit.

Half an hour later, after tea and biscuits, Laxmi sets off again. Darkness settles rapidly, but she must submit the forms she has filled to her supervisor, a fellow employee at the Government Upper Primary School, Dholai, where she works.

The supervisor, helped by others, uploads the forms that Laxmi and the other BLOs have submitted.

Narayan Sisodia, spokesperson of the Rajasthan Teachers’ and Panchayati Raj Employees’ Union, talks about the long hours required of the BLOs. Calling it “excessive pressure”, he accuses the Bhajan Lal Sharma government of competing to outshine its counterparts in finishing the SIR process.

As of November 22, Rajasthan was among the top performers with 60.54% of its SIR forms digitised, according to data shared by the Election Commission.

8 pm to ...

Laxmi gets back home between 7 and 8 pm. After dinner, the calls begin again. “Be ready with the forms... I’ll be there tomorrow morning,” she tells one of them.

SIR after Bihar: What changed for BLOs, electors

Damini Nath

THE ONGOING Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in nine states and three Union Territories is unfolding differently from the earlier exercise in Bihar. It’s this shift, a procedural one, that’s at the heart of what’s visible on the ground — with reports of alleged stress-related deaths and suicides among Booth Level Officers (BLOs).

In Bihar, anyone not found on the 2003 intensive revision roll had to submit during enumeration one of 11 documents mandated by the Election Commission. The EC altered the process for the rest of the country.

The new form asks electors to provide details of themselves or any adult relative in the last intensive revision roll of their state, but BLOs have been instructed not to collect documents at this stage. Instead, they must physically search the last intensive revision rolls (from any state or UT) to trace electors or their relatives and write the corresponding serial number on the form.

Though BLOs in Bihar were also tasked with searching the 2003 rolls to match the electors, the difference in SIR 2 is that the matching is required for a greater number of electors as all electors or their parents, aunts, uncles or grandparents needed to be

traced to the old rolls.

This makes the first phase lighter for electors, but increases workload for BLOs. And if the section — with details of the elector or her family members on the last intensive role — is left blank, they will get notices after the draft roll is published on December 9, when documents will be sought.

What has also changed this time is the speed and scale of action against BLOs for any dereliction of duty. In the entire three-month Bihar SIR, EC sources say, 39 BLOs were suspended and 42 FIRs filed. In just the past week in Uttar Pradesh, that count has already been exceeded — including 60

FIRs in Noida alone — though EC officials maintain they have issued no specific instructions to states to initiate FIRs.

The EC had ordered a nationwide SIR on June 24, with Bihar going first because of its upcoming polls. After Bihar published its final roll on September 30 — showing a 6% drop in electors — the Commission rolled out the exercise for the 12 states/UTs, with the enumeration phase from November 4 to December 4.

It is in this phase that reports of BLO deaths, including at least five suicides, have surfaced (at least one in West Bengal, another in Rajasthan) with notes pointing to pressure linked to the SIR work.

● DEFENCE

Tejas crash: Need for & risks in high-performance air manoeuvres



EXPERT INTERVIEW

AIR MARSHAL DIPTENDU CHOUDHURY (RETD)

IN THE backdrop of the tragic crash of a Tejas fighter jet at the Dubai Airshow last week, former Commandant of the Gwalior-based Tactics and Air Combat Establishment (TACDE), **Air Marshal Diptendu Choudhury (retd)**, tells **Amrita Nayak Dutta** about the common reasons for air display accidents, and the risks and relevance of high-performance manoeuvres in military aviation. Wing Commander Namansh Syal had performed the negative G manoeuvre with the Tejas aircraft seconds before it crashed.

While a formal inquiry will establish the exact cause of the recent Tejas crash, what are the reasons typically found for such accidents globally?

Display accidents occur for a variety of reasons. There are technical aspects, and weather conditions like hazy visibility and low clouds. Then there are countless pilot-related aspects, including aeromedical, that can occur in sustained high G flying (flying under very high gravitational forces, or G-forces). These include grey-out, black-out, red-out, G LOC, which is G-induced loss of consciousness, etc. This can impair the reflexes, consciousness, and reaction time of the pilot. When you are flying in the high-performance envelope of aircraft performance, while simultaneously and equally pushing the envelope of the human body and mental agility, there are innumerable reasons where things can go wrong.

How different is performing an aerial display in a domestic flypast vis-à-vis flying in a global air show?

The fundamental difference lies in who is running the show. If it is the IAF, there are strict military display benchmarks where safety takes priority over performance.

If it is an air show display, whether international (Paris, Dubai air shows, etc.) or national (Bengaluru air show, Defence Expos, etc.), the dynamics are quite different compared with the Republic Day or Air Force Day flypasts.

Single aircraft fighter displays in commercial air shows are not for showmanship, but an aerial demonstration of the platform's performance envelope, where the envelope is pushed within tight safety margins. Similarly, when formation aerobatics are flown, the challenges of coordination, precision, and timing are critical. So, in a way, all display flying has its inherent dangers.

Having headed TACDE, what would you say are some of the common but most difficult manoeuvres to execute while flying a fighter jet? Are these manoeuvres common in combat, or are more suited for aerial displays?

All high-performance manoeuvres flown have some direct or indirect combat relevance in military aviation. Display manoeuvres are flown with precision, with strict adherence to flight parameters where display is balanced with flight safety. In combat flying, where you are expected to push human and aircraft envelopes to win, the stakes are different. Each manoeuvre involves aerodynamic and structural limits of the aircraft, along with the pilot's physical, spatial, and aeromedical limits. But the difference lies in whether they are being performed at higher altitudes, as is done during training, or executed at low altitudes, where safety and recovery margins are much lower, whether during combat exercises or displays.

Could you speak about the challenges involved in a negative G manoeuvre? How does it differ from a positive G?

Fundamentally, in positive G manoeuvres, pilots feel pushed into their seat due to high gravitational forces. Blood rushes to the feet and one can 'black out'. In a negative G manoeuvre, the pilot feels being thrown out of his seat, and here the blood rushes to the head and he experiences a 'redout'.

One can recover from this easily provided one is at a high altitude. At low levels, the recovery margins are very narrow and can easily prove fatal. Military pilots train relentlessly to deal with G, whether positive or negative, and yet sometimes it may not prove enough. In low-level aerobatic displays, milliseconds matter. On average, the platform is travelling at speeds of around 200 metres per second. At a height of 150 metres, the reaction time to hit the ground can be as low as a second, depending on your downward vector. On the last ill-fated manoeuvre of the Tejas, I would not like to comment till the official enquiry establishes the facts.

Which fighter jets can typically perform a negative G?

All fighters can perform negative G manoeuvres, but the limits vary depending on their role. However, not all fighters display this capability in their performance demos. The Tejas is probably among the very few to do so.

Do such accidents reflect on the aircraft?

No, till established as so. The crash is a tragedy, and its outcome needs to be dealt with separately. The Tejas is a flag bearer of Indian aviation. While the stringent enquiry run by the IAF will establish the cause of the crash, there is a larger strategic issue of the nation's reducing combat air power capacity. The aircraft which flew in the display was the Mk I, not the 180 Mk 1A that the IAF had ordered. In this case, the focus on HAL is inevitable. It needs to recover its credibility and reliability by fulfilling on priority the long-promised pending orders of its primary customer, the IAF.

● AVIATION

Hayli Gubbi: Why volcanic ash is dangerous for aircraft



SUKALP SHARMA

THE ERUPTION of the Hayli Gubbi volcano in Ethiopia on Sunday disrupted airline schedules in various countries, including India. Some flights were cancelled, a number of others faced delays, while a few had to be diverted. India's aviation safety regulator, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), on Monday issued an urgent operational advisory to all Indian airlines asking them to strictly avoid volcanic ash-affected areas and flight altitudes. It also directed carriers to immediately report any suspected ash encounter, "including engine performance anomalies or cabin smoke/odour".

Following the eruption, reported as the first for Hayli Gubbi in around 12,000 years, the ash clouds drifted over various countries, including Yemen, Oman, Pakistan, and parts of India. The ash clouds entered India on Monday from Gujarat and Rajasthan, and then moved towards Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, in the southwest to north-easterly direction. These are expected to move fully into China by Tuesday evening. The eruption had set thick plumes of smoke and volcanic ash up to 14 km into the sky.

But why is volcanic ash such a major concern for the aviation sector?

Volcanic ash particles are extremely abrasive and can clog important sensors, impair pneumatics, make the cockpit windcreens opaque, but more critically, they can damage the turbine blades of the aircraft engine and lead to it stalling or flaming out. Along with abrasive particles, volcanic ash clouds also contain some toxic gases that can potentially enter the aircraft's ventilation system. This could lead to a drop in the cabin's air quality and cause respiratory troubles.

Enemy of the jet engine

From an aviation safety perspective, the most significant threat posed by volcanic ash is to aircraft engines. A jet engine draws in air, compresses it, and ignites it by mixing it with aviation fuel. The resultant high-pressure gases rush backwards, which in turn pushes the engine and the plane forward. Proper balance between airflow and jet fuel is crucial for the jet engine to function, and a disruption in airflow could lead to an engine flameout or shutdown.

AMITABH SINHA

New Delhi, November 25

A high-altitude cloud of volcanic ash from Ethiopia that had entered the Indian region on Monday afternoon is expected to fully cross over to China by Tuesday evening. The volcanic ash emerged from a rare eruption of the Hayli Gubbi volcano in the northeastern part of Ethiopia, near the Red Sea coastline.

The volcanic ash was travelling at the height at which most long-distance airplanes fly. Airline schedules had to be disrupted to avoid it. The India Meteorological Department said the situation would revert to normal from Tuesday evening.

What was it?

The Hayli Gubbi volcano erupted on Sunday, by all accounts for the first time in



Ash billows from the eruption of the Hayli Gubbi volcano in Ethiopia's Afar region on Sunday. AP

The hottest part of a jet engine heats up to over 1,500 degree Celsius, while volcanic ash, which contains a lot of silica, melts at around 1,000 degree. When volcanic ash, which is effectively like powdered glass, enters the engine's combustion chamber, it melts and changes into something very similar to molten glass. This then goes to the turbine blades of the engine, and could easily form a layer of molten glass on them. This layer could effectively prevent the blades from functioning properly, which could result in the engine shutting down. And if all engines shut down, the plane is basically a glider.

If that happens, pilots are required to shut the engines down and glide the aircraft down through cold air. The cold air, as it passes through the engine, shatters the glass layer on the turbine blades. If all goes well, the engines can resume working, at least enough to allow the plane to divert to the nearest airport and land safely. But some of the damage to the engines and their innumerable components from volcanic ash could end up being permanent.

How ash clouds from Ethiopia volcano reached all the way to India

about 12,000 years. There was no lava or magma flow, but large amounts of gas and plume, consisting possibly of small fragments of rocks, glass and some other material, were ejected in an explosive eruption. The heavier among these would have fallen in nearby areas, but the very fine particles, and gases like sulphur dioxide or carbon dioxide, would rise very high in the atmosphere, about 15-40 km above the surface.

This happens mainly because the air around the volcano heats up severely, becomes lighter and rises, taking along with it the finer particles and gases.

At that height, air currents are very strong, and the volcanic plume generally travels in the direction of the air current. This is what happened in the case of the plume coming out of Ethiopian eruptions. Following air currents, the volcanic ash

Key points

If volcanic ash enters the combustion chamber of the aircraft's engine, it can result in the shut-down of the engine.

● Volcanic ash contains toxic gases, which can enter aircrafts' ventilation system, causing a drop in cabin's air quality.



● SCIENCE OF VOLCANO ERUPTIONS

● Volcanoes erupt because of how heat moves beneath Earth's surface. Deep within the planet, it is so hot that rocks slowly melt to become a thick, flowing substance called magma. Since it is lighter than the solid rock around it, magma rises, collecting in chambers near the surface.

● As these chambers fill up, pressure exerted on the surrounding rock increases. Eventually, some of the magma pushes through the cracks in the rock, and vents onto the surface. This is a volcanic eruption; the magma that has erupted is called lava.

In a sector that is laser-focused on safety, it is just not worth the risk.

Past scares

The aviation sector's dread of volcanic ash is not theoretical. There have been incidents in the past that show just how real and present the danger is following a volcanic eruption.

In 1982, a British Airways Boeing 747 aircraft operating a flight from London to New Zealand's Auckland flew into a cloud of volcanic ash caused by the eruption of Mount Galunggung in Indonesia. All four engines of the 747 shut down after encountering the ash. Fortunately, the pilots were able to glide the plane away from the ash cloud and were successful in restarting the engines, after which the plane diverted to Jakarta and landed there. A number of engine parts were found to have been damaged significantly from volcanic ash particles, and the pilots' windscreens were also sandblasted by the ash, impairing their ability to see outside the aircraft as they flew.

Abrasive volcanic ash particles can damage engines, clog sensors, impair pneumatics, and compromise visibility

Then in 1989, all four engines of a KLM Boeing 747 failed when the aircraft, which was less than six months old, flew through a thick volcanic ash cloud from Mount Redoubt in Alaska, which had erupted a day earlier. The pilots of the aircraft, flying to Tokyo from Amsterdam, failed in the first few attempts to restart the engines, but eventually succeeded. The aircraft then diverted to Anchorage in Alaska. All four engines had suffered significant damage and had to be replaced. The incident caused over \$80 million worth of damage to the aircraft.

DGCA's urgent advisory on Hayli Gubbi ash clouds

The DGCA on Monday asked Indian airlines to conduct post-flight engine and airframe inspections for aircraft operating near the affected areas, and suspend or delay operations to impacted airports if conditions worsen. They were also asked to monitor for engine performance fluctuations, cabin smoke or odour events, weather changes affecting ash dispersion, and to ensure compliance with aircraft manufacturer recommendations and volcanic ash guidance material from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

Flight dispatchers were directed to continuously monitor volcanic ash advisories, satellite imagery, meteorological data, and ash movement forecasts.

"If volcanic ash affects an airport, the operators (airlines) may advise immediate inspection of runways, taxiways, and aprons to be conducted," the DGCA advisory read. It added that airport operations "may be restricted or suspended" based on contamination, and cleaning procedures must be completed before resumption of operations.

Airlines are closely monitoring the situation in line with the DGCA advisory. Tata group airline Air India said that it cancelled 11 flights between Monday and Tuesday due to precautionary checks on its aircraft that had flown over certain areas after the Hayli Gubbi eruption. A few IndiGo and Akasa Air flights are also learnt to have been cancelled or delayed.

On Monday night, IndiGo had said, "Our teams are closely tracking the situation in coordination with international aviation bodies. We are fully prepared with all necessary precautions to ensure safe and reliable operations. Our 6E teams are available across all touchpoints to support you with any assistance you may need. We will continue to monitor the developments round the clock and keep you informed of any updates to help minimise inconvenience (if any)."

and gases travelled eastwards towards the Indian region, entering from Gujarat and Rajasthan, and then moving towards Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, in the southwest to northeasterly direction. Following the same trajectory, these are expected to move completely into China by Tuesday evening.

Was it dangerous?

The material coming out of volcanic eruptions is a major health hazard. This plume was moving at very high altitudes, because of which there was no threat to human beings. But they did pose a risk to airplanes. Commercial airlines, mainly on long-distance international routes, usually fly between 10-14 km above the Earth.

There is an international network of centres that track volcanic eruptions all over the world and issue alerts of possible

risks. They are communicated to civil aviation authorities in real time, based on which air traffic is managed.

What next?

The movement of volcanic plumes is a short-term phenomenon. Their impact would most likely cease to exist completely within the next couple of days. Over time, the fine particles in the plume disperse, and spread out in concentrations that are no longer a matter of concern. Clouds and rain wash out a lot of these, significantly mitigating their effects.

The gases in the plume, like sulphur dioxide or carbon dioxide, can remain much longer, but these gases already exist in the atmosphere. Their quantity in the plume is not so high as to make any appreciable difference to their existing concentration in the atmosphere.

{ 2 THINGS TO KNOW }

What helps pigeons navigate long distances back to their home

SCIENTISTS HAVE long known that pigeons navigate using the Earth's magnetic field. Now, a new study has provided clues about how these birds detect magnetic fields and process the information. It has found that pigeons can sense the Earth's magnetic field by detecting tiny electrical currents in their inner ears. The analysis was published in the journal *Science* on November 20.

For the study, the scientists exposed six pigeons to a magnetic field slightly stronger than Earth's. Then, they mapped the brain activity of these pigeons to see which neurons responded to the magnetic field. They subsequently compared the maps of brain activity of pigeons exposed to the magnetic field to those which were not exposed to the magnetic field.

The results showed that the vestibular nuclei — a brainstem area that gets information from the inner ear — are activated by magnetic fields in pigeons.

The scientists also performed a technique called single-cell sequencing in vestibular system cells to look for molecules involved in detecting electric currents. They



Magnetic fields activate vestibular nuclei — a brainstem area — in pigeons. JAIPAL SINGH

found a high prevalence of proteins sensitive to electromagnetic changes, according to a report in *Science*.

This means that when a pigeon bobs its head, its inner-ear loops provide information to the brain about the magnetic field. The process helps them navigate long distances back to the location they identify as home. EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

How a one-week social media break can benefit mental health of young adults

DIALLING DOWN the use of social media for a week reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression and insomnia in young adults, according to a study published on Monday in the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

Researchers followed 295 volunteers, ages 18 to 24, who opted to take a break from social media. Instructed to stay off social media as much as possible, the group, on aver-

age, reduced it to half an hour per day from just less than two hours. Before and after, the participants answered surveys measuring depression, anxiety, insomnia, loneliness and several problematic social media behaviours.

Overall, they reported positive changes: On average, symptoms of anxiety dropped by 16.1%; symptoms of depression by 24.8%; and symptoms of insomnia by 14.5%. The improvement was most pronounced in subjects with more severe depression. There was no change in reported loneliness — perhaps, the authors wrote, because the platforms play a constructive social role.

Dr John Torous, an associate professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and a co-author of the study, said reducing social media "certainly would not be your first-line or your only form of care," but the study showed it could be useful as an adjunct treatment.

The mental health benefit seemed to come from avoiding problematic social media behaviours rather than a change in overall screen time, the authors said. THE NYT



Avoiding social media helped reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression in young adults. THE NYT



Cong democracy turns into drift

Virtues, when stretched without measure, can become vices. The ongoing political slugfest in Karnataka is a prime example of internal democracy mutating into indiscipline, paralysis, and public embarrassment. For several weeks now, two towering Congress leaders—Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar—have been locked in a power struggle that has brought governance to a virtual standstill. The spectacle has not only distracted the government but also diminished its credibility among the people. At the heart of the crisis is an alleged understanding reached during government formation two and a half years ago. According to Shivakumar's supporters, the agreement stipulated that Siddaramaiah would step aside at the halfway mark of the five-year term to enable Shivakumar to take over as Chief Minister. With the government now entering its second half, they argue, the time has come for the transition. Siddaramaiah's camp firmly denies any such pact, asserting instead that he enjoys the support of the majority of Congress MLAs.

One great advantage the grand old party, the Indian National Congress, has always claimed is its tradition of internal democracy. No other political party in the country can boast of this asset with equal conviction. A Congressman can speak his mind, even criticise the leadership openly, without fearing expulsion or retribution. The rise of public intellectual-politicians like Shashi Tharoor is a testament to this culture. In most other parties, such frankness would have resulted in summary dismissal—as the recent experience of former bureaucrat-turned-BJP leader and former Union minister RK Singh from Bihar demonstrates. Yet, the Karnataka crisis illustrates how this very democracy, when left unchecked, can spiral into open defiance and administrative drift.

The controversy has now landed at the doorstep of the Congress high command. But the high command of today is neither sufficiently “high” nor demonstrably capable of commanding. In earlier decades, party presidents enforced discipline with clarity and finality. Today, they seem hesitant, even helpless, as multiple delegations of MLAs shuttle to Delhi to plead their case. Six MLAs backing Shivakumar travelled to the capital on November 23, and more are expected. Some ten legislators had already met Mallikarjun Kharge earlier, pressing for a change of guard. Meanwhile, Siddaramaiah publicly insists that MLAs have the freedom to express their views but adds that the ultimate decision must rest with the high command. True, internal democracy is a strength. But democracy does not mean drift, indecision, or the erosion of governmental authority. The people of Karnataka are watching this tamasha unfold, and the Opposition—especially the BJP—is waiting in the wings, eager to exploit the chaos. The Congress must remember: internal democracy is admirable, but it should never be allowed to come at the cost of the party—or the government it leads.

A star at ease with himself

In a very significant way, Bollywood actor Dharmendra, who died in Mumbai on Monday after being ill for a short time, was multifaceted. He mastered both comedies and tragedies with unimaginable ease. Born Dharmendra Singh Deol in a humble Jat Sikh family in rural Punjab, he pushed his way to the higher echelons of moviedom to sink into characters that were mind-bogglingly varied and enormously captivating. Once a Member of Parliament and the winner of Padma Bhushan in 2012, his private life had masala all right. Despite being married to Prakash Kaur, he tied the knot with “Dream Girl” Hema Malini. Yes, it was not a union Indian law recognised, but Dharmendra seemed not to care. Neither did Hema. Interestingly, he never divorced Prakash, living famously in a bigamous union and brazenly flouting the law which forbade it. Although his private life did not augur well with prevailing social norms, his brilliance on screen just about erased the black clouds which threatened his peace and wellbeing.

Despite this disturbing patch, his movies made money and endeared him to the masses. Two of his films stand out among his innumerable: Sholay and Chupke Chupke. While the first was considered Indian cinema's defining moment with its violent passages and unforgettable characters, with Dharmendra essaying small-time crook Veru, Chupke Chupke was a rib-tickling comedy in which the star, Dharmendra, although a professor, had to “act” as a driver to meet his lady love. Dharmendra may not have reached the heights of Balraj Sahani or Dilip Kumar, but he was as endearing as Dev Anand or Shashi Kapoor and brought rare freshness to his roles. As a principled engineer in Satyakam (moving from hope to disillusionment) and a good-hearted crook in Phool Aur Pathar, he was just superb. And these finally led him to take off his shirt and be dubbed as a “He-Man”, catering to female sexuality. In fact, he was the first Bollywood actor to have clinched this tag. Once he told his biographer, Rajiv Vijayakar, “I only had my dreams...” But they finally got him stardom and the dream girl herself!

Although he dabbled briefly in politics, his heart longed for the simpler ways of life and living, the only exception being acting. He would often go away to his farm, tending to his crops and cows and soaking in the comfort of sunshine and greenery. Power, he never hankered after, nor did he want glory. What caught his fancy was sheer simplicity and a way of life that had this strange cocktail of romance and ruggedness. After all, he came from a farming family and was proud to call himself a farmer's son. In a journey that spanned six decades and over 300 movies, Dharmendra shone like a star, his boyish charm and infectious smile lighting up the lives of all those who swore by his performances.



Bird's Eye View

MANISHA PANDE

Ehsaan-e-mand hoon zabaan-e-Urdu tera / teri zabaan mein bayan-e-ehsaas-e-dil aa gaya...

I am grateful to you O Urdu for I have learnt to express my emotions through you.

—Dharmendra

When I first saw Dharmendra many years ago, I wondered to myself, ‘God, what if you'd made me like him: so handsome with heavenly eyes.’ The praise came from none other than the legend, Dilip Kumar, while presenting the lifetime achievement award to Dharmendra at the 42nd Filmfare Awards way back in 1997. What he said next was perhaps the highest point of Dharmendra's personal and professional lives. “A simple man is great at portraying tragedies, and I thought he will now surge ahead of me,” confessed the thespian to a visibly emotional Dharam.

Dharmendra's almost seven-decade-long career saw many highs and lows, and he battled numerous controversies, but he never lost the love and support of his numerous fans, not even after the widely criticised remark he made during his 2004 election campaign in Bikaner, saying that people should elect him so that he could become a “dictator” and enforce moral discipline in society. Ultimately, the budding politician in him lost out to the seasoned actor, and Dharmendra made a graceful, and grateful, exit from politics.

The ruggedly handsome actor was in love with love itself, and that

showed in his personality—in the way he smiled, in the way he talked, and in the way he looked—and his poetry. It is no surprise then that he became a heartthrob of countless women, both on and off screen, be that his childhood crush Hamida, tragedy queen Meena Kumari, Dream Girl Hema Malini, who became his second wife, actress Anita Raj, or his wife of 70+ years, Prakash Kaur, who remained by his side till the very end.

In his book, Dharmendra: Not Just a He Man, author Rajiv Vijayakar writes about the relationship Dharmendra shared with actress Meena Kumari, “Most of the industry believes—and perhaps, rightly so—that it was the star-crossed actress, bereft of enough love and affection in real life, who took a fancy to the strapping young man she had come to know since the time they began shooting for Purnima... Dharmendra had a very promising box-office track record that had already given him an edge over contemporaries and some seniors, so we must say that the idea that Dharmendra used Meena Kumari for career advancement does not hold water. As for their coincidental big-gest hit together, Phool Aur Pathar, it was Dharmendra's work and physique (strictly in that order) that zoomed his status way up when the film was loved.”

For his part, Dharmendra always maintained that he was not in love with the great actress but was her fan. “If you call the relationship between a fan and a star as love, then consider it as love,” he said in an interview years ago, putting an end to



Garam Dharam: He was the quintessential He Man of Hindi film industry, a tough man with a soft heart which he wore on his sleeve.

the controversy once and for all. But there's no denying that Meena Kumari was crazily in love with the handsome newcomer, a fact corroborated by the famous ‘Maut Mu-barak’ letter Nargis wrote after Meena's death in which she gave a glimpse into Meena Kumari's personal life. “If Meena ever turned crazy in love for someone, it was Dharmendra,” the letter boldly states.

If there was ever a blemish on Dharmendra's impeccable character, it was his relationship with the bottle. The actor loved his drink a tad too much, especially at the peak of his career, so much so that once he grabbed his father by the collar in an inebriated state. For the man steeped in family values and

traditions, such an act was simply unpardonable. And the memory of that incident haunted him for the rest of his life. But his love for the bottle continued unabated. There are many instances of him drinking on the sets or arriving drunk for shooting. But no one can recall him misbehaving. In fact, it was his undeniable charm that made thespian Ashok Kumar break his strict rule of not working on January 1. Despite the warning from the senior actor to stay away from new year celebrations and alcohol, Dharmendra did the opposite, and when a drunk Dharam fell into Dadamoni's lap while shooting a scene and pleaded with folded hands that he was unable to work, the senior actor was magnanimous enough to give him time to recover. Such was his charm. The film was the 1966 blockbuster Mamta.

Unfortunately, in his long career of more than 300 films, spanning six decades, Dharmendra never received a single award for acting despite giving some memorable performances involving different genres from comedy to action to tragedy, a hurt he carried in his heart throughout. Dilip Kumar was not wrong about his remarkable ability to portray tragedies superbly. Anyone who has watched him portray the character of Satyapriya in the movie Satyakam would vouch for that. The sensitivity with which the character has been approached is testament to the underlying genius of the man whose greatness, unfortunately, remained restricted to his physical appearance in an industry besotted with beauty.

With his charismatic personality, unbridled charm, and childlike enthusiasm, no other actor has, perhaps, portrayed romance so beautifully as the He Man of Bollywood did. And he was not averse to experimenting in films either, even if it meant being intimate on screen at the ripe old age of 87. The widely discussed “kiss” in Rocky Aur Rani ki Prem Kahani (2023) that created as much controversy as excitement was brushed aside by the actor as merely a film requirement. One recalls another incident where while enacting a romantic sequence, Dharmendra reached down and planted a kiss on his heroine's back in the flow of the moment. The film was Mamta, and the heroine was none other than the iconic Bengali beauty, Suchitra Sen. The moment was unscripted and left Suchitra feeling embarrassed and displeased. But the spontaneity of the action was so captivating that the act was retained in the final cut. Of course, being a thorough gentleman, he later apologised to his disgruntled leading lady. The one thing that remained unchanged in Dharam's long journey from a humble farmer, Dharminder Singh Deol, to superstar Dharmendra was his connection to the soil. Amid the glam and glitter of the showbiz, here was a man who remained true to himself and his village compatriots. And it was this connection that kept him sane in a world that is as superficial and make-believe as the films it produces.

The writer is in charge of the FPJ edit page and an author.



BRIG BYTES

BRIG SUYASH SHARMA, VSM (RETD)

The recent Tejas crash during the Dubai Air show has been a huge setback for our fledgling aero industry and our efforts at indigenisation in this crucial dimension of modern day warfare. Air shows world over are technology demonstration arenas, where global powers showcase their wares and obviously the best of the systems are put on display. This was by no means a maiden effort by Tejas, as it has already participated in a number of air shows and even joint international exercises. In fact two squadrons have even been deployed for operations. Both the variants of Tejas, Mk I and MkIA were deployed in OP SINDOOR. It was formally named Tejas in 2003 and the name may have been derived from the verse,

“Om Namah Shivaya Gurave Sacchidananda-Murtaye

Nisrapancaya Santaya Niralambaya Tejase”

which means, ‘We respect Shiva who is the supreme guide and who is the embodiment of truth, tranquility and bliss. He is independent, full of peace and is full of spiritual light known as tejas’. Like Shiva, it is capable of inflicting destruction in the adversaries camps at cosmic levels.

It is a 4.5 generation, delta wing, multi role combat aircraft which has been designed by Aeronautical Design Agency and manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. A 4.5 generation differs from the fifth generation fighter as it does not have stealth capability. Stealth essentially implies near invisibility to radars. So barring stealth, Tejas is a highly advanced fighter jet and although it has been more than four decades in making, it has come of age now. Recently with MIG 21s having been phased out finally, Tejas will be



the main stay of the IAF inventory.

We have the expertise to go to the moon or even Mars, build aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, but when it comes to these lean mean fighting machines, the supersonic jets, we are still struggling. Before I go in to the reasons for this huge void in our military capability, a word about the loss of the precious life of the pilot Wing Commander Namansh Syal, our heart goes out to the bereaved family whose son had made them proud by turning into an ace test pilot, a rare distinction bestowed upon the best in business.

While the inquiry committee will no doubt unearth the reasons for this unfortunate crash, one thing is certain, the pilot insured that he lived up to the Chetwodian motto of ‘his own personal safety being the last priority’ and prevented any collateral damage, but in the process laid down his own life. This also reminds me of the Urdu couplet, “Girte hain Shahsawar hi maidan-e-jang mein, Vo tiff kya gire jo ghutno ke bal chale” meaning it is only the brave and valorous fighters who fall, lesser mortals obviously don't.

The reasons for any crash is either failure of the systems themselves, sabotage, or may even be a result of electronic or cyber warfare or, sometimes even pilot error. The aircraft is powered by GE Aerospace F404-IN20 engine, which is the heart of the system itself. This dependence creates a huge vulnerability and exposes our failure at not being able to develop this critical

component ourselves. Isn't it ironic that we have successfully developed and deployed cryogenic engines when we were denied these post Pokharan II in 1998 due to sanctions imposed by the US. But Kaveri engine which was designed for combat aircrafts has not been a successful venture and has taken a back seat with our reliance on the GE engines. Technology denial is the most potent weapon which the world powers have been exploiting over the years. We are acutely aware of the Chinese propensity of installing backdoor malware in their systems, providing them with not only intelligence but also the kill switch to render the systems ineffective when most needed remotely. In modern warfare, these acts are not unheard of and will be used extensively, as PM Modi has been stressing, we have no other option but to rely on just one mantra, “atmanirbharta” or self reliance.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Not a fit captain

It seems the selectors have chosen a real joker to lead the Indian Test team at Guwahati. Though he has been trying to copy legendary wicketkeeper and captain cool MS Dhoni, he has failed miserably both in front and behind the wickets. The less said about his antics and chatter behind the wicket, the better. He is keen to be everywhere and tries to catch balls going towards slip and even forward short leg. God save Indian cricket from such clowns.

N. Mahadevan, Chennai

Vijaya's vision

The launch of actor Vijay's Tamilaga Vетtri Kazhagam's vision to provide every household in Tamil Nadu with a motorcycle, a permanent home and a stable income is both bold and beatifying. However, populist aspirations need the scaffolding of detailed planning—how will this income stability be generated? What timeline ensures the housing promise? What safeguards stop this from becoming just election rhetoric? The vision sounds inclusive, yet the process risks remaining exclusive if youth,

women and marginalised groups are bypassed in implementation.

Gopalaswamy J., Chennai

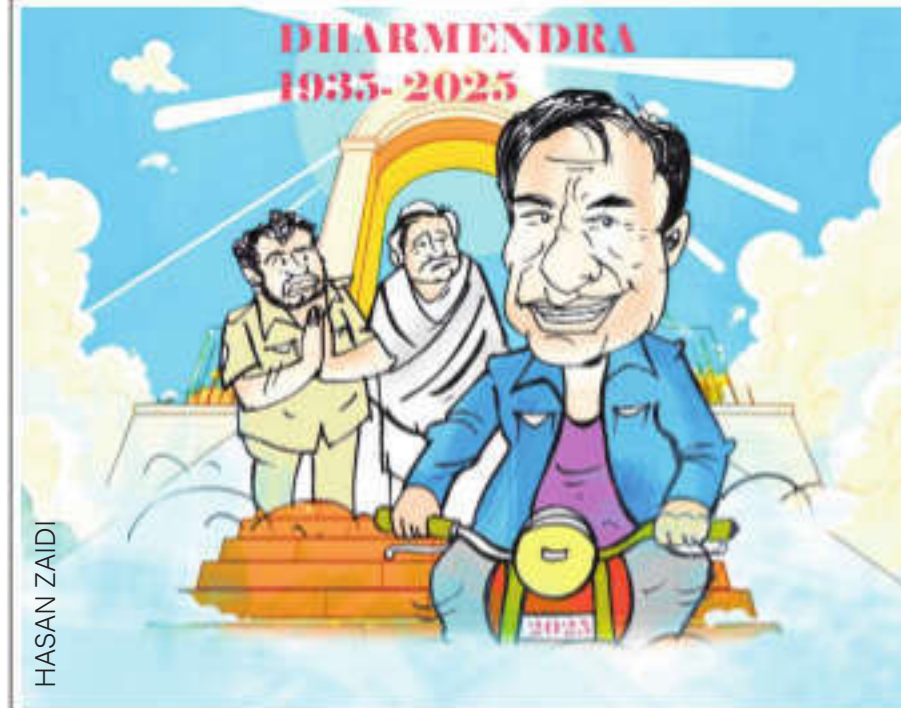
Wrong move

The proposal to appoint a separate lieutenant governor for Chandigarh is preposterous. Chandigarh is not just an administrative space; it embodies Punjab's historical sacrifices and identity, and any unilateral move risks reopening old wounds. The rare unity of Punjab's political leadership against this proposal reflects the depth of sentiment involved. Administrative reforms must never trample emotional and constitutional realities. Dialogue, constitutional clarity, and respect for historical commitments should guide any decision on Chandigarh, not unilateral fiat that risks rekindling distrust and political unrest.

Harsh Pawaria, Rohtak

A rare trait

Former CJI, BR Gavai, displaying an exemplary gesture of humility and institutional respect by leaving the official Mercedes-Benz car for his successor, Justice Surya Kant. After arriving at



Rashtrapati Bhavan in the official vehicle for the swearing-in ceremony, Gavai chose to return in his personal car so that the newly sworn-in CJI could immediately use the official car to reach the Supreme Court. In a judiciary often defined by protocol and hierarchy, this thoughtful act sets a remarkable precedent.

N. Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru

SC report

The SC recently released the Report on Judicial Conceptions of Caste. Published by the Court's Centre for Research and Planning (CRP), this land-

mark document acts as an autopsy of the judicial mind. Scrutinising 75 years of constitutional bench judgements, it reveals how the nation's highest court has defined, described, and adjudicated the complex reality of caste. The findings are candid, oscillating between a “scriptural” view treating caste as a religious accident and a “structural” view of it as an engine of oppression.

Ramswarth Acharya, Thane

Arogya Andhra

One wonders how a state, which gives newly launched government

Farewell, He Man of Bollywood

On Nov 24, we bid farewell to a titan of Indian cinema—Dharmendra, the beloved “He-Man” whose presence lit up screens for over six decades. His journey from a young man in rural Punjab to one of Bollywood's most iconic stars was nothing short of legendary. Dharmendra possessed a rare combination of raw physical strength and heartwarming warmth, equally convincing in action-packed roles, stirring dramas, and light-hearted comedies. Beyond his acting prowess, he was admired for his humility, simplicity, and generosity—traits that endeared him to peers and fans alike. As Bollywood mourns this irreplaceable loss, we reflect with gratitude on the joy, inspiration, and strength he gave us all.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

medical colleges to private players under the scheme of Private-Public-Partnership due to lack of funds, is planning such an ambitious project as Arogya Andhra? Govt hospitals have insufficient manpower and infrastructure. The plan to make Andhra Pradesh a health hub seems too far-fetched given the lack of funds. It would be better to really understand ground reality and function accordingly.

A.G. Rajmohan, Anantapur

Court backlog

Chief Justice Surya Kant's most pressing challenge as the 53rd CJI is the over-

whelming backlog of over 90,000 cases pending in the SC. His focus on reducing these massive arrears underscores his commitment to ensuring timely justice. The growing pendency is not just a logistical issue but one that undermines public trust in the judicial system. Kant has highlighted the need for more efficient case management and a system that curtails unnecessary delays caused by repeated appeals and miscellaneous applications. His tenure will be judged on how effectively he addresses this concern.

Dr. Vijaykumar H.K., Raichur

Editor's

TAKE

Adieu Dharam Paaji:

The ever-graceful hero

His passing marks the end of a star's journey and the farewell of a true gentleman whose legacy will continue to illuminate Hindi cinema

He made you laugh, he made you cry, he made you think - that was the grace and greatness of the ever-smiling face that ruled six decades of Hindi cinema. Lovingly called Dharam Paaji, the simpleton from Punjab who made it big – in fact, larger than life – in the tinsel town of India will be remembered as much for the roles he played as for the person he was: gentle, humble, gracious, compassionate and radiating confidence and charm.

The iconic Bollywood actor passed away at the age of 89, just two weeks before his 90th birthday on December 8 and a month before the release of his upcoming film *Ikkis* on December 25. The legendary actor leaves behind a rich legacy of memorable movies and evergreen dialogues that will keep him alive in everyone's hearts.

The passing of Dharmendra on November 24 marks the end of an era in Indian cinema. For more than six decades, he embodied a rare blend of charm, humility and versatility – qualities that made him not just a great actor but an adorable human being.

Dharmendra's rise from a small town in Punjab to the heights of Hindi cinema is, in itself, a story of determination and quiet resilience. Beginning his career in the early 1960s, he quickly became the poster boy of a new kind of masculinity – handsome yet gentle, strong yet sensitive. With expressive eyes and effortless dialogue delivery, he brought authenticity to every role he portrayed.

His body of work is a catalogue of Hindi cinema's evolution. *Phool Aur Patthar* established him as the rugged yet compassionate hero; Satyakam remains one of Indian cinema's finest explorations of moral courage; as Veeru in *Sholay*, he created a lasting cultural imprint and became a household name.

In his later years, *Anupama*, *Chupke Chupke* and *Khamoshi* showcased him as a versatile actor who could deliver comedy and romance with the same ease as action. Dharam Paaji, as he was affectionately known, was more than a versatile actor – he was a compassionate and humble human being who welcomed everyone with open arms. He was known for treating everyone – from co-stars and technicians to junior artists – with warmth and respect.

Despite his extraordinary fame, he remained rooted in the soil of his upbringing. Stories abound of how he patiently interacted with fans, protected colleagues during difficult shoots, and kept an open, generous heart for anyone in need. His sensitivity was both his artistic strength and his personal signature.

He often displayed a vulnerability that made him relatable and endearing. Dharam Paaji will also be remembered for his hilarious dialogues and comedy sequences that continue to resonate even after 50 years.

As the curtains fall on his remarkable journey, India bids farewell to a superstar, a pioneer and, above all, a true gentleman. Travel well, Dharam Paaji!

The return of homegrown terror

The Red Fort blast has reopened long-standing questions about homegrown terrorism – intelligence lapses, and rising radicalisation. The sequence of events, arrests, and missed warnings points to deeper structural faults in counter-terrorism



ASHOK K MEHTA

Much has been written about the Red Fort blast. More dots in the terror trail will unearth additional evidence. The terrorist plot must have been incubating for two years, according to reports, for three tonnes of explosives to be collected. The revocation of Article 370, the unprecedented demotion of the J&K state to a Union Territory, and growing alienation led to the emergence of the so-called “white-collar” urban doctors’ terror module. Coupled with the inequitable treatment of Muslims through issues such as Love Jihad, lynching, and the bulldozing of their property, the terror bomb was ticking. The 2020 Delhi riots case, currently before the court, was probably a trailer. With 3,000 kg of explosives, including 350 kg of ammonium nitrate, a spectacular terrorist attack like the 1993 Mumbai blasts following the Babri Masjid demolition could have been pre-empted, but who knows how many more sleeper cells remain buried. As for whether the car blast was accidentally triggered or was a suicide attack, it is reasonable to conclude that it was accidental, as suicide techniques are not part of the culture of Muslims in Kashmir.

The classical suicide attack, or a human bomber who blows himself up in self-attrition, is unknown in these parts. The 1990s Badami Bagh cantonment car bombing in Srinagar was the nearest to a suicide strike. Fidayeen fight to the end, but many have got away in J&K. The government’s claim that there have been no terrorist attacks since 2014 has now been disproved. A wealth of writing on urban terrorist networks, radicalisation, and lone-wolf attacks indicates that terrorism is here to stay. Serious attention to terrorism was given by the United States following the 9/11 convulsions. Acronyms related to terrorism were born sequentially and proliferated.

The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) was the first; since it sounded politically incorrect, it was replaced by Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) by the Bush administration. Obama changed it to Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). The Long War made its debut, but Biden introduced Over-the-Horizon Counter-Terrorism after vacating Afghanistan. Integrated Counter-Terrorism and Strengthening Resistance to Violent Extremism (STRIVE) were accompanied by PREVENT and Far-Right Extremism (FRET). During the ISIS era in the Middle East, other terminology cropped up. Al-Qaeda and ISIS now largely operate in Africa. The Taliban has been tamed after capturing Afghanistan not once but twice by military force. The Department of Homeland Security, established after 9/11 in the US, is active and effective. No obituary can be written for terrorism. In India, the establishment believed domestic



terrorism had been eliminated; it was assumed that only cross-border terrorism infiltrated mainly from Pakistan and sometimes from Sri Lanka and Nepal. Clearly, homegrown terrorism never disappeared. Similarly, counter-terrorism authorities (India does not have offices equivalent to Homeland Security or Internal Security) completely forgot about radicalisation-its antidotes, anti- and counter-radicalisation, as well as de-radicalisation.

J&K Police had set up an organisation for de-radicalisation. Much more was needed across India. Alienation in Kashmir grew, rather than reduced, after the 2019 constitutional transformation. While stone-pelting was stopped, Over-Ground Workers and sleeper cells multiplied, fuelled from across the LoC. A non-elected Governor has ruled the roost while the elected Chief Minister plays second fiddle. All security-related matters are handled by the Governor in consultation with national and state security resources. The Pahalgam attack was a major security lapse, which the Governor acknowledged, but no action was taken. Similarly, the Pulwama bombing was also an intelligence lapse. Clearly, human and intelligence voids exist in Kashmir, which have linked the terror modules in Faridabad, Lucknow, and Saharanpur to Kashmir and enabled abetment by Jaish-e-Mohammad.

The Red Fort blast was avoidable. On 27 October, J&K Police detected terrorist posters in Srinagar, which led to the arrest of Dr Muzammil Gana in Faridabad on 30 October, ten days before the blast. On November 5, Dr Adeel Rather from Kashmir was apprehended in Saharanpur. The police clearly failed to connect the dots and avert the blast by nabbing Umar Nabi before he reached the Red Fort on 10 November. Interestingly, the CCS, which met on 11 November, noted that it was a “terrorist incident” by “anti-national elements.” The MHA had already declared it a terrorist attack, rendering it liable to be deemed an act of war as per the new-normal counter-terrorism doctrine. All India

Radio attributed the arrest in Faridabad to a briefing by Satender Gupta, Police Commissioner of Faridabad. Too many cogs in the wheel precluded a central, focused, and coordinated overwatch.




The second blast at Nowgam, Srinagar, was also avoidable. Transporting 300 kg of highly sensitive ammonium nitrate 50 km to Srinagar was unnecessary. Forensic laboratory tests could have been done in Faridabad by Haryana Police or by Delhi Police nearby. So why was the dangerous explosive shifted to Kashmir? Fifteen lives need not have been lost and colossal collateral damage could have been prevented. In 1994, explosives captured from terrorists were being examined in the Ordnance Depot in Srinagar, resulting in the death of a dozen officers and several soldiers. The policy in J&K to demolish the homes of terrorists is probably unlawful. Just as the pension of a government servant cannot be stopped as it is meant for members of the family, so too is a house a family entity. After Pahalgam and Pulwama, homes of terrorists were blown up. This collective punishment is also illegal. In addition, 650 Kashmiris have been arrested following the Red Fort blast. Of the eight doctors arrested, seven are Kashmiris. According to the South Asia

Terrorism Portal, sixteen doctors have been arrested and fifty-six other doctors are being questioned. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti have urged the Government of India not to treat all Kashmiris as terrorists. Mehbooba added that the government must not stoke the deep-seated distrust and alienation Kashmiris feel, but adopt a humane approach that does not invalidate Kashmiri dignity or ruin their lives. Unfortunately, it is likely that Kashmiri Muslims in India will once again become pariahs. It would help if either PM Modi or Home Minister Shah affirmed that all residents of the Kashmir Valley are not terrorists. Meanwhile, intelligence agencies must get their act together, and it is high time the government took punitive action to curb intelligence lapses.

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

The writer, a retired Major General, served as Commander, IPKF (South), Sri Lanka, and was a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, now the Integrated Defence Staff

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Teachers carry the weight of constant decisions



SAKSHI SETHI

2ND OPINION

THE PIONEER

In a world obsessed with productivity, efficiency and optimisation, one profession has been quietly doing superhuman work long before corporate boardrooms invented terms like “decision fatigue.” That profession is teaching. The humble teacher, often mocked, often blamed and occasionally praised, is expected to make thousands of decisions every day with the accuracy of a neurosurgeon and the patience of a saint. Yet people still say teachers get far too many holidays, which remains one of the biggest myths. Teachers are “off” about as often as the internet is off.

Every morning, long before sunrise, teachers are already dealing with mental chaos: Should today's warm-up change? Why is this student silent today-worry or mischief?

Will some parent accuse me of ruining their child's life because I corrected a spelling mistake? Decisions crowd a teacher like mosquitoes in monsoon season-annoying, nonstop and unavoidable. Still, society pretends teaching is simple. As if managing teenage behaviour, impossible parental expectations, admin micromanagement, syllabus deadlines, moral responsibility and ensuring no child blows something up is a routine task. Teachers are expected to float through all this with a calm smile while their mind feels like a browser with 89 tabs open-half frozen, the rest crashing. Decision fatigue may be a trendy term for productivity experts, but teachers have lived it forever. They feel it before breakfast. While ordinary people decide whether to wear a blue or a white shirt, teachers decide whether the lesson can work without the projector, whether seating needs rearranging to prevent a mini-riot, and whether Rahul is genuinely sick or simply avoiding long division. This isn't multitasking; it's battlefield planning.

And then there's the myth that teaching ends with the bell. The bell simply signals that the teacher is moving from teaching duties to paperwork, counselling, planning lessons for 40 different learners, and responding to parent emails that sound like they come from a parallel universe. After-hours work is not extra-it is normal. Lesson plans, setting question papers, checking notebooks that

multiply like weeds, preparing remedial notes, attending meetings that achieve nothing, worrying about mispronouncing a student's name-teachers are always switched on. More than switched on, they are glowing like a tired neon sign. Despite this, teachers have somehow become villains in public debate. They are always too something-too strict, too soft, too modern, too old-fashioned, too loud, too quiet. Society expects them to create ideal citizens but judges them like reality-show contestants watched by people who haven't entered a classroom in years. Decision

fatigue shapes a teacher's day. Every choice-correcting, calming, pausing-demands emotional energy. They manage a fragile human ecosystem where one sentence can harm or heal, making thousands of decisions daily. Yet they are celebrated once a year and ignored otherwise. Their burnout is dismissed while society still expects endless patience and creativity. Teachers are exhausted because the system is unreasonable. Humans are not built for constant decision-making, yet teachers live it daily. Anyone who thinks teaching is easy should spend one day in a classroom and see how teachers hold society together through every decision.

The writer is and educator

GLOBAL STANDARDS STRENGTHEN

INDIA'S FIGHT AGAINST CRIME

The fight against financial crime has never been as complex or demanding as it is today. Money now moves across borders in seconds; shell companies can be created within minutes, and new digital channels have given criminals fresh avenues to conceal their activities. In this evolving landscape, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plays a crucial role. It sets global standards that countries adopt to safeguard their financial systems from money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation risks.

For professionals in banking, NBFCs, fintech, or compliance, FATF is far from an academic subject. Its standards directly shape the regulations you follow, the risks you assess, and the decisions you make each day. The need to understand FATF norms, beneficial ownership

requirements, and India's tightening AML/CFT expectations has become more urgent than ever.

As financial crime grows more sophisticated, institutions must move beyond basic KYC and accurately identify the true individual behind every account, company, or transaction. With global frameworks becoming stricter and India aligning more closely with FATF recommendations, strong AML compliance is no longer a choice. It is essential to protect the integrity of the financial system, prevent abuse of legitimate channels, and uphold public trust.

India's financial sector can remain resilient only when every institution upholds strong, transparent, and accountable compliance practices.

JAYANTHY SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dharmendra's legacy lives on eternally

Appos the news report “Dharm Leaves Behind Yaadon Ki Baaraat” (November 25): The passing of Dharmendra marks the departure of one of Indian cinema's most enduring and beloved legends. Rising from the fields of rural Punjab to the heights of Bollywood stardom, he earned a permanent place in the hearts of millions through sheer talent, charm, and an unmistakable screen presence.

For over sixty years, across more than 300 films, he portrayed characters that were powerful yet tender, heroic yet deeply human. Whether battling villains, evoking emotion in poignant dramas, or making audiences laugh with effortless ease, he proved time and again that versatility was his defining strength.

Films such as *Sholay*, *Chupke Chupke*, *Mera Gaon Mera Desh*, *Haqeeqat*, *Bandini*, *Anupama*, *Mamta* and *Phool Aur Patthar* showcased the many shades of his artistry. Off screen, his simplicity, warmth, and generosity made him admired far beyond the arc-lights. His dignified conduct and grounded nature reflected the values he carried from his Punjabi roots

Today, as the industry and countless admirers grieve, we also celebrate a life that brought joy, strength, and inspiration across generations.

SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI

AI's quiet rise reshaping economy

The growing use of artificial intelligence in everyday transactions is subtly reshaping India's economic behaviour in ways most citizens scarcely recognise. Routine actions such as ordering food, booking transport, comparing insurance, or applying for small loans are increasingly governed by algorithms that set prices, assess risk, and predict demand within seconds.

This silent shift has created a market that reacts even before people act, often without offering clarity about how these decisions are formed or why certain outcomes appear. Although these systems promise greater convenience, speed, and efficiency, they also risk reducing human experience to a series of data points. When algorithms reflect biased historical patterns, inequalities may deepen, leaving certain groups disadvantaged without ever understanding the reason.

Artificial intelligence should strengthen public trust, not weaken it. Robust policies are needed to ensure fair access, protect consumers, prevent algorithmic discrimination, and make automated decisions explainable. Only through such safeguards can technology enhance, rather than distort, India's economic landscape and ensure that innovation remains aligned with people's rights and dignity.

MALATI DAS | KOLKATA

Dharma Dhvaj ceremony inspires nation

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Dharma Dhvaj flag-hoisting ceremony at the Ayodhya Ram Temple was a profoundly meaningful moment for people across the country. Ayodhya, known as the birthplace of Lord Ram, has long been regarded as a symbol of truth, courage, duty and moral strength in Indian culture. The act of hoisting the Dharma Dhvaj — a sacred flag representing righteousness and divine blessings— added a special spiritual significance to the occasion.

Prime Minister Modi's presence made the event even more emotional for countless devotees who look to Lord Ram as a guiding light for living with honesty, compassion and discipline. The temple complex echoed with peaceful chants, resonant bells and traditional rituals, creating an atmosphere filled with harmony and deep devotion. It felt like a moment in which India's ancient faith and the nation's contemporary pride were beautifully woven together.

The sight of the Dharma Dhvaj flying high above the temple reminded people of the timeless belief that dharma — doing what is right — must guide one's life. The ceremony also fostered unity and collective pride, bringing people together irrespective of region or background.

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

Bihar’s mandate signals a larger political shift

The decisive Bihar verdict, rooted in performance and public trust, is now beginning to influence political thinking far beyond Bihar — most notably in Tamil Nadu, where shifting voter sentiment and growing dissatisfaction with the ruling establishment are setting the stage for a dramatic political reconfiguration

FIRST
Column



The declaration of the Bihar Assembly election results on November 14, 2025 has formally concluded the electoral cycle, and once again the people of Bihar have delivered a historic and extraordinary mandate in favour of the National Democratic Alliance. This mandate is a strong reaffirmation of decisive governance, clean leadership, and development-oriented politics that have been consistently promoted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. Bihar has spoken clearly and firmly. The message from the people is now beginning to echo beyond the State’s boundaries, especially in places like Tamil Nadu, where the political atmosphere is undergoing rapid change.

In the recently concluded Bihar election, the Bharatiya Janata Party contested 101 out of the total 243 seats and secured 89 seats, emerging as the single largest party with a strike rate of 88 per cent. This is an unprecedented performance in the political history of the State. The Janata Dal (United), which contested an equal number of seats, won 85 seats and achieved a strike rate of 84 per cent, becoming the second-largest party in Bihar. The other partners of the National Democratic Alliance, such as Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular), and Rashtriya Lok Morcha, also registered sweeping victories. These results show that every section of society across Bihar has placed its trust in the National Democratic Alliance. The alliance secured a much higher vote share compared to the previous assembly elections, reflecting deep acceptance of its development-oriented vision.


The people of Bihar have shown complete clarity in their political preference. They know that if there is anyone who can transform the State and guide it towards a fully developed future, it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the National Democratic Alliance. This confidence comes from performance and delivery, not from empty promises or political deception. Trust has been earned through consistent, result-oriented governance that has brought visible changes to the lives of millions over the last decade.


During the past eleven years, the Modi gov-




THIS DECADE-LONG COMMITMENT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIHAR IS THE BASIS ON WHICH THIS HISTORIC MANDATE STANDS. PEOPLE HAVE CLEARLY ENDORSED PERFORMANCE OVER PROPAGANDA AND DEVELOPMENT OVER ATTEMPTS AT DIVISION

The writer is Prof (Dr) Aseervatham Achary, National Coordinator for Digital Library, Library & Documentation, BJP

 Aseervatham Achary

 @AseerAchary

 Dr. Aseervatham Achary

ernment at the Centre has taken multiple steps to strengthen Bihar’s foundations. Infrastructure has been upgraded, connectivity has improved, welfare delivery has become more efficient, and new avenues of opportunity have been created for youth across the State.

This decade-long commitment to Bihar’s development is the basis on which this historic mandate stands. People have clearly endorsed performance over propaganda and development over attempts at division. The verdict in Bihar and the collapse of the INDI-Alliance have sent a loud warning to states across India, including Tamil Nadu. In Tamil Nadu, the government run by the DMK, one of the biggest partners in the INDI-Alliance, is facing rising public frustration over issues of law and order, corruption, and appeasement-based politics. The message from Bihar is straightforward: the era of hollow promises and non-performing governance is reaching its end in Tamil Nadu as well. People now want governments that deliver results, not governments that distribute excuses to cover their failures.

In Bihar, the Congress and the Left parties proved to be the weakest components of the RJD-led alliance. Their poor performance became a major factor in the alliance’s collapse. These parties are losing

relevance and have become disconnected from the aspirations of the people. In Maharashtra, the same situation played out when the INDI-Alliance was decisively rejected by the people. Arvind Kejriwal was rejected in Delhi. Rahul Gandhi faced rejection in Maharashtra, Haryana, and Delhi. Bihar has now repeated the same outcome. The Left, too, has lost its political space across the country. A similar situation is visible in Tamil Nadu. MK Stalin’s political partners, with whom he once shared the stage, are now facing collapse one after another. The cracks within the INDI-Alliance are no longer hidden; they have become visible and are widening with every passing day.

The National Democratic Alliance is strategically well-placed to perform strongly in the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the strategic guidance of Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah, widely regarded as the modern-day Chanakya of Indian politics, the NDA is gearing up for a major breakthrough. The Bharatiya Janata Party’s leadership is known for its sharp planning, booth-level organisational strength, and the ability to unite diverse alliance partners while establishing direct contact with

people. This combination of strong leadership, organisational depth, and clear strategy gives the National Democratic Alliance a crucial advantage in Tamil Nadu.

The results of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections indicate the growing presence of the National Democratic Alliance in Tamil Nadu. The NDA partners improved their overall position, and the vote share of the Bharatiya Janata Party increased significantly. The alliance has expanded its influence across several regions of the State. This steady rise in vote share reflects the increasing confidence of Tamil Nadu voters in Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the development-focused approach of the National Democratic Alliance. The momentum is clearly shifting.

The vote share numbers from the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu provide a clearer picture. The ruling DMK secured 26.93 per cent, the Congress secured 10.67 per cent, the Left secured 4.67 per cent, and other INDI-Alliance partners secured 4.67 per cent. Together, the INDI-Alliance received 46.97 per cent of the vote share. In contrast, the National Democratic Alliance partners secured 41.33 per cent, a major improvement compared to their performance in the 2021 Assembly elections. The rise in the BJP vote share alone was notable, going up to 11.24 per cent, almost

nine per cent higher than the previous Assembly election. As seen in Bihar, even a small shift in vote share towards the National Democratic Alliance can bring a major transformation in Tamil Nadu.

In the 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, there were 60 seats where the INDI-Alliance and the National Democratic Alliance were in close contests. More than 60 seats were won by the INDI-Alliance with a margin of less than 15,000 votes. Out of these, 39 seats were decided by margins below 10,000 votes, 21 seats with margins below 5,000 votes, and nine seats with margins under 2,000 votes. If the National Democratic Alliance focuses strongly on these 60 seats in the upcoming Assembly election, it becomes possible for the alliance to win them comfortably. Even a small shift of a few percentage points can create a major change in the seat tally, just as it happened in Bihar. It is likely that the DMK, along with Congress and the Left, will lose ground in Tamil Nadu. The electoral arithmetic is moving in favour of the National Democratic Alliance.

There is a clear reason why the National Democratic Alliance is strongly placed to form the government in Tamil Nadu in 2026. The Congress and the Left have become electoral burdens for the INDI-Alliance. Their political relevance is continuously declining, and voters are losing interest in their agenda. For the DMK, carrying these parties acts like extra weight pulling down its chances of crossing the halfway mark. What happened in Bihar is likely to be repeated in Tamil Nadu. Congress and the Left secured around 15 per cent vote share in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections from Tamil Nadu. If they continue performing poorly, the overall vote share of the INDI-Alliance will take a major hit. With the DMK already facing anti-incumbency, the decline is expected to grow stronger. The INDI-Alliance appears to be heading towards a major electoral setback.

Bihar has once again demonstrated the strength of development-based politics. Tamil Nadu is now witnessing a similar shift. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah, the National Democratic Alliance possesses the vision, strategy, and organisational structure to unite the people and bring about decisive political change in 2026. Tamil Nadu is prepared for a new phase, one marked by development, stability, and effective governance.

India’s carrier fleet at crossroads as China accelerates naval expansion



On 5 November, China commissioned its third aircraft carrier, Fujian, at its home port in Sanya on Hainan Island in the presence of President Xi Jinping. Displacing 80,000 tonnes, the carrier is capable of launching fifth-generation J-35 fighter jets and KJ-600 Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft using the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS). This marks a significant moment in global carrier aviation and shipbuilding.

At the same time, China is rapidly constructing a fourth aircraft carrier—a nuclear-powered supercarrier equipped with an EMALS system. In contrast, India, despite its long history of carrier aviation, inducted its first Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC-I), INS Vikrant, only in September 2022, while the next indigenous carrier is yet to take shape. Until now, the United States was the only country to have deployed EMALS, on the Gerald R Ford-class carrier. However, it has faced major issues with the reliability of both the catapults and the weapons elevators. Commissioned in 2017, the Ford undertook its first combat deployment only in 2023. Three more carriers of this class, intended to replace the ageing Nimitz-class, are under various stages of construction. The Ford currently operates F-18s and not the fifth-generation F-35s. Amid these delays, in late October, US President Donald Trump stated that he intended to sign an executive order requiring steam-powered catapults and hydraulic elevators on future carriers. The order has not been issued, but the remark highlights the continuing teething troubles. China, meanwhile, appears to have resolved similar challenges by directly adopting EMALS and bypassing steam catapults.

China’s pace of shipbuilding is unmatched. The People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is already the world’s largest fleet numerically, with more than 370 platforms, and is projected to field about 435 ships by 2030. China’s first carrier, Liaoning, was commissioned in 2012; the second, Shandong, was launched in 2017 and commissioned in 2019; and Fujian was launched in 2022. In January this year, China also unveiled its first Type 076 amphibious assault ship, displacing more than 40,000 tonnes—roughly the size of a medium carrier — and capable of launching fixed-wing aircraft.

India’s Navy, which has decades of experience in carrier operations, currently operates two mid-sized carriers—INS Vikramaditya and INS Vikrant. However, both carriers face a shortage of fighter jets. This has been a persistent irony: earlier, India had jets but no carrier; now it has two carriers but insufficient aircraft to operate from both simultaneously. Unless urgent decisions are taken, the cycle is likely to continue. Work on the Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC-I) began with design efforts in 1999. The keel was laid in 2009, and the ship was launched in 2013 as Vikrant, named after India’s first aircraft carrier, which was decommissioned in 1997. The project represented a steep learning curve in carrier design and construction.

Speaking aboard INS Vikrant on Diwali, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the ship represents Bharat’s military strength, noting that even its name had caused concern in Pakistan in recent months. Soon after Vikrant entered service, the Navy proposed IAC-II, conceived as a repeat of the current design with modest upgrades, at an estimated cost of ₹40,000 crore. The Defence Procurement Board examined the proposal in September 2023, but no progress has been made since. Cochin Shipyard Limited, which built Vikrant, has stated that a similar carrier would take 8-10 years to construct.

A critical misconception must be corrected: IAC-II will not serve as India’s third operational carrier. By the time it is inducted, INS Vikramaditya will be nearing the end of its service life. Former Navy Chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar acknowledged this during Aero India 2023, stressing that an aircraft carrier is central to command and control of maritime operations and to projecting power on land, at sea, and in the air. A carrier remains the ultimate instrument of power projection. Sea control is essential for India, as sea denial occurs only during wartime. Earlier, the Navy envisioned IAC-II as a larger 65,000-tonne carrier with a steam catapult system and possibly electric propulsion. However, such a design would involve a long developmental timeline and higher technological risks. This was one reason the Navy shifted to the more practical option of repeating the Vikrant design.

The Technology Perspective and Capability Roadmap (TPCR) 2025, released recently, lists several capabilities for future development and procurement, including an aircraft carrier, an Automatic Carrier Landing System, two EMALS systems, restraining and arresting gear, nuclear propulsion for future carriers and large warships, among other technologies. However, most of these systems will not be ready in time for IAC-II and are more appropriate for a future IAC-III.

The Fighter Aircraft Crisis

Both Indian carriers currently operate MiG-29K jets. Fewer than 40 of the 45 aircraft procured from Russia remain in service. Because the refurbishment of Vikramaditya was delayed, the jets operated from shore until 2013. Since induction, the MiG-29K fleet has faced persistent technical issues and low availability rates. Their phase-out is scheduled to begin in 2034. Given these limitations, the Navy issued a tender in 2017 for 54 carrier-borne fighter aircraft. This was later reduced to 26 after DRDO proposed developing the indigenous Twin Engine Deck-Based Fighter (TEDBF), building on experience from the Naval Light Combat Aircraft programme. At DeExpo 2022, officials announced an ambitious schedule aiming for induction around 2035. However, there is still no clarity on the programme, as formal project approval remains pending.

In April, India signed a nearly ₹64,000-crore Inter-Governmental Agreement with France for 26 Rafale-M fighters: 22 single-seat carrier-capable jets and four twin-seat trainers, which cannot operate from carriers. Deliveries are expected between mid-2028 and 2030. However, by the early 2040s, the Navy may again face a shortage of aircraft if the MiG-29K phase-out proceeds on schedule. The alternative would be to retain some ageing jets in service, similar to how the Indian Air Force extended the life of the MiG-21 fleet.

The Navy has long maintained that a three-carrier force is essential—one for each coast and one in refit.

Given the current trajectory, this goal remains distant. Further delays in decision-making could risk India losing the hard-earned capability of designing, constructing, and operating carriers, similar to the setback in submarine building experienced in the 1980s. This situation calls for a three-fold plan. First, accelerate the construction of IAC-II without further delays or procedural hurdles. Second, urgently advance the development of the TEDBF, given the significant time required to design, test, and operationalise a carrier-borne fighter. Third, based on progress in the first two areas, plan and synchronise the development of critical technologies—such as nuclear or electric propulsion and EMALS—for a future larger carrier that can operate indigenous fighters.

The Indo-Pacific region is expected to be crowded with aircraft carriers within a decade. For India to maintain its strategic relevance and maritime edge well into the 2040s, the time to plan, prioritise, and act is now.



MALIKA PANDEY

The modern chapter of India’s dairy journey begins not with a single scheme but with a quiet shift in rural imagination, when millions of small farmers started organising themselves in pursuit of dignity, voice and fairer economic terms. What followed through the 1970s was a national mobilisation that transformed milk from a household activity into a pathway for rural renewal. It is fitting that National Milk Day honours Dr Verghese Kurien, whose conviction placed farmers at the heart of this transformation and whose legacy continues to shape the sector even as its challenges grow more complex.

From producing barely 23 million tonnes of milk in 1970, India today produces more than 239 million tonnes (2023-24). Per capita availability has risen from 130 grams per person per day in 1950-51 to 471 grams today. These achievements reflect patient institution-building and the everyday labour of farmers who turned dairying into a stabilising force in rural life. For many households, milk income is not just a livelihood; it is liquidity, security and a steady anchor in uncertain agricultural environments.

Despite its scale, the sector is constrained by a cluster of structural weaknesses that threaten its long-term viability. Per-animal productivity remains low, making dairying economically unviable for many small farmers already burdened by rising feed costs and shrinking fodder land. Cooperative penetration is uneven, leaving millions of producers dependent on informal buyers and vulnerable to opaque pricing. India still lacks a national-level support system for small dairy farmers, strengthening the case for an MSP for milk to ensure predictable incomes in a perishable commodity economy. Quality concerns—including antibiotic residues, inconsistent veterinary oversight and the persistent challenge of Foot and Mouth Disease—undermine both domestic safety and export potential. These pressures have already pushed many young farmers to reconsider dairying, revealing a sector in urgent need of reform if it is to retain its social and economic centrality.

At the same time, the social depth of dairy remains striking. The sector supports more than eight crore farmers and contributes close to five per cent of the national economy. Its value exceeds ₹11.6 lakh crore—greater than the com-



combined output of paddy and wheat. More than 48,000 women-led cooperatives attest to the steady expansion of women’s economic participation. Milk income sustains households when crops fail, credit is scarce and employment is seasonal. Few sectors distribute opportunity as widely or as intimately as dairying.

To secure the future, India must move from volume to value, from fragmented transactions to integrated supply chains, and from dependence on raw milk sales to a diversified basket of high-value products. Investments in chilling infrastructure, scientific processing, robust cold chains and innovation in cheese, whey, nutrition products and long-shelf-life items can convert India’s milk wealth into real economic strength. Policy vision must now focus on institutional structures that protect farmers, encourage value addition and create clear pathways for small producers to climb up the value chain.

Environmental pressures sharpen the need for reform. As climate variability reshapes fodder availability and disease patterns, India will have to invest in climate-resilient breeds, sustainable feed systems and integrated biogas models. Productivity gains, ecological prudence and animal health must advance together if the sector is to remain viable.

National Milk Day is therefore not only a tribute to past achievements; it is an invitation to reimagine the future with clarity and courage. The dairy sector has grown in scale. It must now grow in fairness, sustainability and institutional depth. India carries the moral legacy of Dr Kurien and the entrepreneurial energy of millions of farmers. The foundations are strong. What remains is the collective resolve to ensure that the world’s largest milk producer becomes the world’s most inclusive and future-ready dairy powerhouse.

The Statesman

Incorporating and directly descended from
the Friends of India -founded 1818

Andhra’s Moment

Andhra Pradesh is suddenly at the centre of India’s investment map. Over the past several months, the state has drawn in a flurry of large industrial commitments, ranging from green energy to solar manufacturing, from artificial intelligence infrastructure to futuristic electric air taxis.

The numbers being quoted are staggering and the political noise from neighbouring states is even louder. But beneath the headline-grabbing announcements lies a deeper shift in India’s competitive federalism.

At the heart of Andhra Pradesh’s pitch is a simple idea: “Speed of Doing Business.” While many states invoke similar slogans, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has tried to turn it into a measurable administrative ethos. Companies relocating from other southern states have highlighted faster approvals, direct engagement with policymakers and land allotment timelines that are unusually short by Indian standards. For firms that operate in rapidly evolving sectors, time is quite literally money.

Cost is the second lever Andhra is pulling with a sense of urgency. Industrial land in the state’s southern belt – particularly Anantapur, Nellore and Kuppam – is not only cheaper but also strategically positioned near established tech and manufacturing hubs like Bengaluru and Chennai. This locational advantage means companies can stay close to supply chains, skilled labour pools, and export gateways, without bearing the real estate premiums that come with the neighbouring metros.

Inevitably, this has sparked political friction. As projects shift from Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Karnataka to Andhra, opposition leaders in those states see an opportunity to paint their governments as inefficient or complacent. Complaints about “unsustainable incentives” are now part of the daily rhetoric. The underlying anxiety is that a race for investment could slip into a race to the bottom, with subsidies, tax breaks and freebies overshadowing industrial fundamentals.

But a sharper critique comes from those who ask whether the celebrated MoUs will translate into factories, jobs and durable value. Indian economic history is littered with high-profile commitments that evaporated before taking physical form. Andhra, too, has seen such cycles in the past. The challenge for Mr Naidu’s administration is to convert excitement into execution and ensure that the fiscal burden of incentives does not outweigh the long-term benefits.

Still, something important is happening. Investors are responding not merely to subsidies but to confidence signals – a government willing to hustle, bureaucrats aligned with a clear mission, and a state that appears hungry to restore its economic standing after the bruising post-bifurcation years. Andhra’s resurgence is not guaranteed, but the intent is unmistakable. And Mr Naidu’s track record as the builder of a modern Hyderabad is an additional factor boosting confidence.

If the state succeeds in delivering on even a significant portion of the promises now on the table, it could trigger a new wave of growth across the region, forcing its neighbours to innovate rather than complain. Andhra Pradesh has raised the bar. The South’s competition has only just begun.

Gentle Giant

The death of Dharmendra at 89 brings with it a wave of nostalgia strong enough to make an entire nation pause. India has lost more than a film star – it has lost a cultural companion who, for decades, made audiences believe in courage, romance, friendship and the goodness of the human spirit. His legacy lies not merely in the 300-plus films he acted in, but in the millions of hearts that beat a little faster when he appeared on screen.

Unlike many stars who chased the idea of “number one”, Dharmendra was content being the hero who smiled generously from the sidelines of competition.

What made him extraordinary was precisely this lack of pretence. His ascent from a humble background in Punjab to the highest echelons of cinema never turned him into an aloof symbol. He remained the accessible hero, the man next door who just happened to possess superhero charm and strength.

His appeal stretched beyond cinema halls, shaping how generations viewed love, friendship, and masculinity – strong, yet tender, confident yet humble. He became the benchmark for a relatable hero.

His timeless appeal was rooted in a rare combination: a breathtaking physicality wrapped in a gentle vulnerability. Films like *Sholay* and *Chupke Chupke* showcased extremes of this range – the brave daredevil willing to risk everything for friendship, and the mischievous charmer whose eyes did half the acting. Long before method and flamboyance became central to stardom, Dharmendra proved that sincerity itself could fill cinema halls.

He was often called the “original He-Man” or compared to Greek gods, but he met such adulation with endearing embarrassment. In an industry that often thrives on vanity, he disarmed his admirers with simplicity and warmth. When he did stunts himself, it was not to boast of invincibility – it was to protect the illusion that films create, the magic that first drew him to the screen as a teenager.

His partnership with Hema Malini, both on and off the screen, added a mythic dimension to his star persona. Their love story fed tabloids, but it also fed a nation’s fascination with romance. His towering on-screen presence continued through decades, later as a proud patriarch watching his sons forge their own paths in cinema.

Dharmendra also experimented with politics, albeit briefly and uneasily. His own acknowledgment of being a “misfit” in the field further demonstrated his honesty. He knew where he truly belonged, among storytellers and audiences, exchanging affection without artifice.

Today, tributes pour in from colleagues, politicians, and generations of fans. But perhaps the most fitting farewell is to simply watch him once again on screen – laughing, loving, fighting, dancing, living.

Because Dharmendra never really acted like a hero; he just lived like one. And as long as Indian cinema continues to thrive, his presence – that hearty smile and unmistakable charm – will remain impossible to forget.

Transformational moment

Justice Surya Kant can consider institutionalising a 25-year vision for the Indian judiciary on the lines of the Viksit Bharat vision. A white paper entitled “Judiciary 2047: A Plan for India at 100” could comprehensively develop the vision for the future of the rule of law in India and what efforts need to be taken towards addressing these challenges

Yesterday was an important and historical moment when the President of India swore in the 53rd Chief Justice of India. As Hon’ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant becomes the Chief Justice of India, he will have the onerous responsibility of reinvigorating the rule of law on the edifice of constitutionalism and democratic governance. The historical context of the judiciary playing the most important and influential role in establishing a rule-of-law society traces its origins to the Constituent Assembly.

Dr. Granville Austin, in his book *The Indian Constitution – Cornerstone of a Nation*, observed, “The members of the Constituent Assembly brought to the framing of the Judicial provision of the Constitution an idealism equalled only by that shown towards Fundamental Rights. Indeed, the Judiciary was seen as an extension of the Rights, for it was the courts that would give the Rights force... The courts were also idealised because, as guardians of the Constitution, they would be the expression of the new law created by Indians for Indians... The courts were, therefore, widely considered one of the most tangible evidences of independence.”

The new CJI may consider focusing on four important aspects that will reinvigorate the rule of law with strong emphasis on institutional capacity building within the judiciary:

Timelines and predictability in adjudication: No efforts to reinvigorate the rule of law can ignore the urgency of addressing the pendency in Indian courts. The backlog of more than 5 crore cases pending across all courts requires both reimagination and technology-driven solutions. NITI Aayog has provided a grim estimate that at the current rate of case disposal, it will take more than 300 years to clear pendency without pathbreaking reforms. This is obviously too long, and we simply cannot accept this as a practicable solution.

India has succeeded in dealing with major



challenges in other sectors, especially in public health. For example, India’s polio-eradication mission is considered one of the greatest public health achievements in history. The reason for this success was a combination of factors, including but not limited to scientific strategy, massive community mobilisation and support, political commitment and consensus, and international collaboration. Justice Surya Kant, along with other judges of the Supreme Court of India, especially including judges who will serve on the Bench for the next decade, could launch a National Backlog Liquidation Drive 2025-2035.

Strengthening judicial independence through institutional architecture: The role of strong and independent institutions is central to the ideal of the rule of law. The 2024 Nobel Laureates in the Economic Sciences – Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson – demonstrated the role and significance of societal institutions for a country’s prosperity and development.

Through their research, they have underscored that societies with a poor rule of law and institutions that exploit the population do not generate growth or change for the better. While the Constitution of India has provided the necessary framework for ensuring independence, there is a need for creating an enabling institutional architecture that will strengthen these mechanisms.

There is a case for establishing a CJI-led National Judicial Financial Commission and a Judicial Infrastructure Mission. Both

these initiatives will have to be deliberated at the highest levels of government, as they require significant political will and resources by the government at the state and central levels.

These two initiatives have a direct correlation to our aspiration to become a US \$7 trillion economy by 2035, as rule of law is indeed a central determinant of trust, investment, contract enforcement, dispute resolution, and institutional credibility.

Enforcing equality before the law through bail and criminal justice reforms: The crisis of undertrial prisoners ought to shake the foundations of India’s criminal justice system. More than 70 per cent of India’s prison population are undertrials (more than 85 per cent in some states), and hence, it is important to have greater legal clarity and jurisprudential consistency in bail jurisprudence.

In a recent judgement in the case, Jagjeet Singh v. Ashish Mishra, Justice Surya Kant held, “...that a Court, while deciding an application for bail, should refrain from evaluating or undertaking a detailed assessment of evidence, as the same is not a relevant consideration at the threshold stage... and

extensive consideration of merits which has the potential to prejudice either the case of the prosecution or the defence, is undesirable...”. The arbitrariness and unpredictability in bail jurisprudence begs a strong case for a judiciary-led National Bail & Bond Guidelines framework that will provide valuable guidance to the High Courts and the District and Subordinate Courts.

Securing access to justice for every citizen: The National Legal Services Authority needs significant empowerment and resources. It has been doing a phenomenal job within its limitations. However, the demands of seeking justice and social expectations generated through its contributions require a reimagination of access to justice for every citizen. Some of the important solutions that could be led by Justice Surya Kant relate to launching a National Legal Literacy Mission in which Panchayat-level legal clinics could be established through the contributions of young lawyers and law schools.

The legal aid framework also requires significant reform. Legal Aid 2.0 should focus on quality metrics for legal aid lawyers, with a stronger emphasis on specialised legal aid mechanisms for women, children, the elderly, and other vulnerable sections of society.

Justice Surya Kant can consider institutionalising a 25-year vision for the Indian judiciary on the lines of the Viksit Bharat vision. A white paper entitled “Judiciary 2047: A Plan for India at 100” could comprehensively develop the vision for the future of the rule of law in India and what efforts need to be taken towards addressing these challenges.



Viet Nam has made ‘structural progress’ in push to lift EU yellow card

Since the EC issued the yellow card in October 2017, Viet Nam has rolled out a series of measures, from tightening the legal framework to overhauling fleet management and upgrading traceability systems. The yellow card has not yet been lifted, but the changes made in recent years are substantial and, more importantly, structural.

Our legal system has been updated with 11 new circulars and two decrees to bring regulations in line with on-the-ground realities. High-level political direction has also been crucial. After earlier guidance from the Secretariat, the Party issued Directive 32 in April 2024 to reinforce national leadership over IUU prevention and sustainable fisheries.

The Government followed up with its own resolution, and the Supreme People’s Court issued guidance on applying criminal penalties for illegal fishing and trading. Together, they form a coherent legal framework that supports enforcement and compliance. One major shift is the

Prime Minister’s direct oversight, including what he has called a ‘declaration of war’ against IUU violations.

Fleet management has tightened significantly. Data from VNFishbase, the police and the military are now fully aligned, covering 79,360 registered vessels. Of these, more than 7000 boats of 15 metres or more and over 4,000 of 24 metres or more are under strict monitoring.

Local authorities have been instructed to prevent unqualified vessels from going to sea, with weekly supervision reports sent to the Government. The backlog of administrative violations has been largely cleared, with only 0.33 per cent yet to be finalised.

Nearly all vessels required to use vessel monitoring systems (VMS) have now installed them, except for those no longer operating or in transfer. VMS data tracks boats from departure to landing, improving transparency and reducing the risk of

violations in foreign waters. Localities have also completed vessel registration, licensing and inspections, effectively ending the long-standing ‘three-no’ fleet. Digitalisation, including electronic logbooks, VNetD vessel identification and fleet data synchronisation, is being expanded nationwide.

For traceability, electronic logbooks and digital systems are in place at designated ports and processing plants. The entire chain, from catch certificates at port to export certificates, is tightly controlled. These steps reflect a shift across all levels of government and help demonstrate to the EC that Viet Nam is building a transparent, accountable and sustainable fisheries management system. We have submitted additional reports to the Government and prepared detailed working scenarios for the EC inspection team. Based on the results so far, Viet Nam is ready – proactive, transparent and fully prepared to engage.

Over the years, IUU prevention has

been a priority for the Government, ministries and localities. Communication campaigns, legal training and outreach to fishermen and businesses have been consistent. We also work closely with international organisations to adopt modern management practices that align with EU standards.

The EC has acknowledged Viet Nam’s efforts, especially improvements in traceability and vessel control. But lifting the yellow card requires maintaining these results without backsliding. With coordinated action and sustained political will, we believe Viet Nam can achieve the goal of removing the IUU warning within a reasonable timeframe and build a fisheries sector that is sustainable and competitive internationally.

Local responsibility is decisive. The Government aims to have the yellow card lifted in 2025, but this depends heavily on enforcement at the grassroots level – the places that directly manage vessels, crews and day-to-day fishing activity.

Letters To The Editor | ✉ editor@thestatesman.com

Foolish

Sir, The Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju’s views expressed before the Supreme Court that “when intellectuals become terrorists, they become more dangerous than those working on the ground” (Nov. 21) are unexceptional. An intellectual is one who is well educated, capable of deep, logical and critical thinking, with the courage to express one’s views fearlessly.

But when intellectuals like doctors, engineers and Ph.D scholars commit acts of terrorism, as in the case of the recent Red Fort bombing, they radicalise impressionable minds that such abhorrent acts are eminently justified.

No doubt, ‘Bail is the rule and jail an exception’ under Indian criminal law. But it does not apply to those accused of murder, rape, or kidnapping.

Nor can it apply to those holding violent protests, making provocative speeches against the nation and advocating secession.

For instance, the denial of bail to the JNU

Ph.D student Umar Khalid, languishing in Tihar jail, since Sep 2020, is being legally contested. Though unfortunate, he is a known serial demonstrator, holding frequent campus protests – against the capital punishment awarded to the 2001 Indian Parliament attack convicts Afzal Guru and Maqbool Bhat, the agitation against the US President Donald Trump’s visit to India in 2020 and so on.

Similarly, Sharjeel Imam, during the anti-CAA protests, advised all Indian Muslims to unite and separate the North East from the rest of India. Demanding bail for such separatist intellectuals is not democratic liberalism, but foolish naiveté!

Yours etc.,
V. Jayaraman,
Chennai, 21 November.

Buying votes

Sir, The editorial ‘Cash politics’ published today should sensitise all politicians to be mindful of the difference between welfare

measures and alluring voters with funds from the government exchequer. The race to capture power knows no ethics and disregards all political, social and financial decencies.

A trend that started with offering small household materials has reached the level of officially depositing a bulk amount like Rs 10,000 to the targetted section.

The timing of such a scheme makes it a visible allurements to trap the targeted voters. The government that did not realise the need for empowering women for two decades and remembers it just before the election is merely buying votes with government funds.

If empowering women is the genuine purpose, the same should have been implemented after studying their needs and the feasibility of investing in ventures that could be viable and promise returns.

Yours, etc.,
A G Rajmohan,
Anantapur, 21 November.

Confused

Sir, We the common voters of West Bengal are in a vortex of confusion. Though the form appears to be simple, the columns leave great scope for confusion. And most ironically one clarification begets another.

In many instances BLOs are adopting a stance different from what we learn from print and electronic media. It was a clear instruction that the BLO is the only authorized person to collect the filled-up forms under acknowledgement.

But we are told by our BLO that the Election Commission has issued latest instructions that in view of the stupendous work load heaped on BLOs, the forms will be collected by the BLA, who is purely a party appointee and has no authority to collect the forms under his signature. Bengal is reeling.

Yours, etc.,
Subir Datta,
Kolkata, 20 November.

Remembering a firebrand Socialist

RUP NARAYAN DAS

It is a coincidence that the birth anniversary of the former Speaker of Lok Sabha Rabi Ray, an eminent parliamentarian, veteran socialist leader and a valiant freedom fighter falls on 26 November which is the Constitution Day. Odisha has produced many political figures who held important positions but Ray will be remembered as the first Speaker of Lok Sabha from Odisha. His simplicity and modesty were awe-inspiring. He upheld values and principles and fought for the downtrodden and the poor. At a time when materialism and showmanship has taken a toll of idealism and values, he held them close to his heart.

Like a moth drawn to fire, Rabi Ray plunged into the vortex of the freedom movement during his college days. A deep sense of love for the motherland and abhorrence for foreign rule were ingrained in him. In early 1947, while in college, he was arrested for unfurling the National Flag in the college. This brave act of Ray forced the British Government to yield to the students' demand for unfurling the Tricolour in educational institutions even though the country was still under colonial rule.

Born on 26 November 1926 in Bhanagarh village, Puri, he graduated in history from the Ravenshaw College and later studied Law at the Madhusudan Law College. The foundation of his political career was laid when he was elected President of the Students Union of Ravenshaw College in 1948-49 and then again as the first President of the Madhusudan Law College Students Union in 1949-50. An avowed socialist, he joined the Socialist Party as a member in 1948. Along with a deep sense of

commitment to the socialist cause, he possessed leadership qualities which enabled him to remain in the forefront of the socialist movement for a long time. During 1953-54, he held the post of Joint Secretary, All India Samajwadi Yuvak Sabha. In 1956, under the leadership of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Ray founded the Socialist Party in Odisha. He was also a member of the National Executive of the party at that time. Later, in 1960, he became the General Secretary of the party for about a year.

His debut in Parliament began in 1967 when he was elected to the Fourth Lok Sabha from the Puri Parliamentary constituency. He was the leader of the Parliamentary Group of the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP). Later, he was elected to the Ninth and Tenth Lok Sabhas from the Kendrapara constituency. He was an outspoken parliamentarian known for his forthright views on several issues confronting the nation at the time and for his constructive opposition when he was in the Opposition.

He was elected as a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1974 and served the House for six years till 1980. The Sixth General Elections brought the Janata Party to power and he found a place in the Union Cabinet as Minister for Health and Family Welfare till January 1980. During this period, he was also the General Secretary of the Janata Party.

The Ninth General Elections in 1989 saw his return to the Lok Sabha from Kendrapara. He was unanimously elected Speaker of the Lok Sabha on 19 December 1989. During a short tenure of about one-and-a-half years, he left an indelible imprint. He regulated the proceedings of Zero Hour for better utilization of time which is appreciated by one and all even today. He

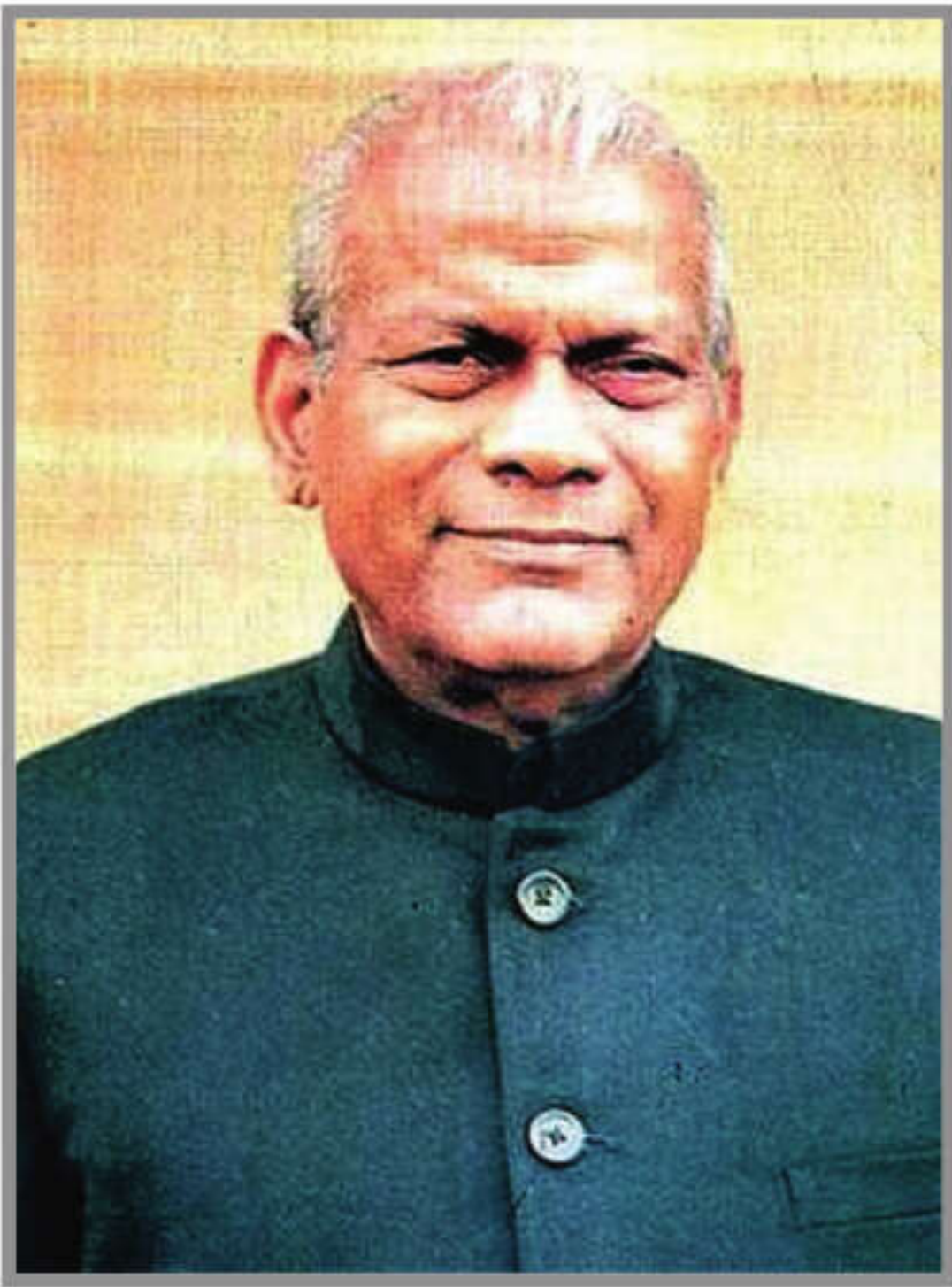
allowed members with prior notice to make brief statements on matters of urgent public importance in the House during 'Zero Hour', the interregnum after the Question Hour before the commencement of routine business.

He will also be remembered for having introduced three 'subject committees' as the precursor of the Departmentally Related Standing Committees to examine the policies and programmers of the Government and to ensure executive accountability. A landmark decision given by Ray as the Speaker in 1991 disqualifying some Members in the context of the Anti-Defection Law demonstrated his unbiased disposition, courage and righteousness, following a split in the Janata Dal on whose ticket he himself was elected to the House.

Another significant decision was about admitting the first ever notice of a motion for presenting an Address to the President of India for the removal of a sitting judge from his office. A Committee was set up to investigate the grounds on which the removal of the judge was sought. The matter was, however, dealt by the Tenth Lok Sabha subsequently.

He also took the initiative for the direct telecast of Parliamentary proceedings. During his Speakership for the first time on 20 December 1989, the President's Address to Parliament in the Central Hall was telecast live. Ray was elected the President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in 1991.

He was keen that the future generation should be made aware of the valuable contributions made by our national leaders. He wanted to recall, remember, and place on record the services of eminent parliamentarians, who played a notable role in the country's freedom struggle and contributed in building modern India as well as for the



development of our parliamentary system. Therefore, during his tenure the Indian Parliamentary Group decided to celebrate the birth anniversaries of eminent parliamentarians by holding meetings, seminars, symposia etc., and bringing out monographs under the "Eminent Parliamentarians Series".

Ray has many literary accomplishments to his credit. He edited Samata, an Odia monthly, and Chaukhamba, a Hindi weekly

brought out by the erstwhile Socialist Party. He breathed his last on 6 March 2017 at the age of 90 while undergoing treatment at the SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack. His mortal remains were consigned to sacred flames in his ancestral village in Puri. The nation mourned his death.

(The writer who worked with Rabi Ray when he was the Speaker of Lok Sabha, is the Consulting Editor of The Journal of Parliamentary Information (JPI) of the Lok Sabha Secretariat.)

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 26 November 1925

OCCASIONAL NOTE

THE Irish Boundary Commission, which was to reconcile Ulster and the Free State, appears not only to have failed but to have further embittered the relations of these antagonistic neighbours. The attempt at a settlement in Ireland has been marked by a succession of stupid blunders, and only a few determined optimists could have felt assured of the success of a commission which Ulster had steadily repudiated and on which it was represented against its will. The Commission's function even was not clearly defined, for the various utterances of the British Government on the subject encouraged different interpretations in the two States; briefly it was charged with readjusting the frontier, but whether that was to cover any re-allocation of territory has been hotly disputed. The Free State hoped to get Fermanagh and Tyrone, Derry City and Newry, as well as other slices. To this Ulster responded with a determined silence. The tangle could only be unravelled by good-will on both sides, but now comes the unwelcome news that the Free State representative has resigned for reasons which commend themselves to President Cosgrave. The other two members are accused of being swayed by threats and political influences, and an anticipatory report of the findings published in one London paper which has not yet reached India has caused great disquiet. Evidently the Free State is to be given little of what it has claimed, and the anger of disappointment is natural; if President Cosgrave's words are to be taken at their face value circumstances are not propitious for an early renewal of the search for a settlement.

News Items

COMMONS HOMAGE

STRIKING TRIBUTES BY PARTY LEADERS

(BRITISH OFFICIAL WIRELESS.)
LEAFIELD, (OXFORD), NOV.

IN the House of Commons to-day the Prime Minister moved the following resolution of condolence on the death of Queen Alexandra: "That a humble address be presented to His Majesty to express the heartfelt sympathy of this House in the great affliction and loss which His Majesty has sustained by the death of Her Majesty Queen Alexandra, and to assure His Majesty that we shall ever remember with grateful affection the love which the late Queen inspired in all classes of the people, and that we shall participate to the utmost in the universal feeling of sympathy with His Majesty in his grievous loss."

Mr. Baldwin said: "I think that perhaps in looking back upon the life of Queen Alexandra nothing is more striking than the way in which, from the moment that she landed on these shores, she identified herself with the country in which, and with the people among whom, she had come to live. "Students of history will realise that what we took for granted in her life is in reality a rare thing; and looking back over the years, were there any of us who did not regard her from the first as one of our very selves?"

ABBEY SERVICE PLANS

LAST TRIBUTES TO QUEEN MOTHER

LONDON, NOV.

Arrangements are now complete for the ceremonies to be held in London on Friday, when the funeral service for the Queen Mother will be held in Westminster Abbey.

The coffin will be conveyed from Saint James's Palace to the Abbey on the naval gun carriage which was used at the funerals of Queen Victoria and King Edward, drawn by 150 bluejackets. Royal mourners will be present from Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Spain.

The service will be conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the public will afterwards be admitted to file past the coffin.

Instructions regarding the observance of the funeral in India have been issued to the military authorities.

AIR CASUALTIES

PARACHUTES FOR BRITISH MACHINES

LONDON, NOV.

IN the House of Commons, replying to questions, Sir Samuel Hoare stated that during the year ended September 30 there had been 42 accidents in the Air Force owing to machines crashing, involving 57 deaths. None of the machines was equipped with parachutes.

Provision was now being made so to equip as speedily as possible the whole Air-Force. — Reuter

Finding dignity in an unkind world

LIM WOONG

It is not difficult to see that online platforms have become the primary spaces where our youth gather, talk, argue, chase trends and figure out how to live with others. For students, social media functions almost like a parallel reality they cannot ignore. We often say that libraries shape their habits of mind, yet it is social media where their sense of right and wrong is tested, where they learn, sometimes painfully, to read situations, protect themselves and form a sense of community and belonging. Digital literacy, in this sense, is not just an academic skill but a foundation for navigating modern society.

Yet the same online spaces that encourage connection can quickly turn hostile. Research on dark personality traits shows that narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy and sadism - often referred to as the dark tetrad - thrive in environments marked by anonymity, low accountability and the instant gratification of provoking a reaction. Social media provides ideal conditions for malice and troubled minds. Trolling, harassment, vanity, scams, fake news and deepfake content are predictable outcomes when empathy thins and attention becomes currency.

Teachers feel these effects acutely. Studies in educational settings describe a small but significant group of children - sometimes as

early as kindergarten- who pressure peers, exploit classmates' goodwill, refuse responsibility, or display striking emotional bluntness. For teachers, these behaviours stop being clinical cases in a textbook the moment they enter the classroom; they become emotional burdens they can't help but face every day.

Many enter the profession driven by a passion for learning and mentorship, only to find themselves face-to-face with students (and often parents as well) whose behaviour resists trust and the very guidance meant to help them. The result is teacher burnout: an erosion of moral confidence and professional identity defined by the painful gap between who teachers hope their students can become and who they sometimes reveal themselves to be.

My own sense of disillusionment deepened recently while watching an SBS documentary titled "Savage Hours" about the serial killer Lee Chun-jae. The programme aired his voice and memories with an oddly poetic tone, as if inviting viewers to empathize with him. It reflected a troublingly romantic view of evil, the belief that darkness is misunderstood trauma or that we owe even the most sadistic individuals sympathy and forgiveness. But darkness is not always a wound; sometimes it is simply darkness. To sentimentalize cruelty is to misread it and, more importantly, to betray the victims whose lives were irreparably harmed.

Moments like these make cynicism feel like the only rational stance. Yet something unexpectedly hopeful often rises in its place. Recently, my graduate students led a seminar discussion on the "Light Triad," a psychological framework emphasizing humanism, compassion and moral clarity. Unlike the dark triad, associated with exploitation, emotional coldness and ruthless greed, the light triad highlights the quieter but equally real dimensions of kindness and empathy that hold together authentic human relationships.

At the end of their presentation, my students shared something more personal: a YouTube music video titled "The Princess Code" - you must watch it for yourself. At first glance, the video appears playful. Yet its lyrics offer a surprisingly resilient worldview. They encourage greeting each day with a smile, finding small joys in the mirror, staying composed amid chaos, accepting hardship as part of one's story, and above all, not giving up. What may initially sound like self-centred positivity emerges as a declaration of self-respect and emotional maturity. It reflects the belief that even in an unkind world, one can still choose dignity.

For many teachers, this mindset becomes Teflon against so-called student "villains." Those who endure difficult students do not rely on duty alone. They draw strength from a quiet, persistent confidence that their work matters, that kindness



is not naive and that spiteful behaviour, online or in person, does not define the limits of what humanity can be. For them, the light triad is not theory but lived experience.

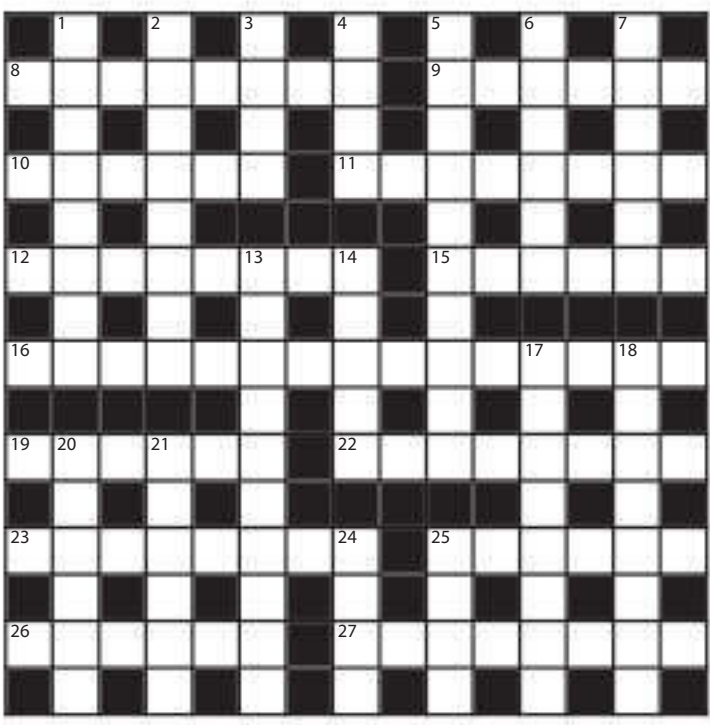
This offers an important reminder: Digital platforms expose us to some of the worst sides of human behaviour, and the same dynamics too easily seep into classrooms, where that darkness plays out with little restraint. We cannot eliminate the internet's darker corners, nor can we fully reform those who take pleasure in cruelty. Yet we can cultivate what is good in the overwhelming majority

of us: humility, compassion and the courage to remain kind and to refuse malice when it would be easier to look away.

As long as we tend to the light within ourselves and recognize that same light in others (as found in my students, who must find their way through a world far more complex and less forgiving than the one I inherited), darkness does not prevail. It becomes only a brief chapter in a much longer and more hopeful story of teachers.

The Korea Herald/ANN.

Crossword | No. 293303



ACROSS

8 One lot (nameless) trained with RAF fliers (8)

9 Puzzle's meaning not essentially obscure (6)

10 Accents of Dutch wearing dated hats (6)

11 Plan raid after serving of meal (8)

12 Disturbing conundrum ultimately leaves cabinet chasing its tail (8)

15 First lady back home welcoming a thousand people from Siberia (6)

16 Possible concessions - getting into pub grub (10,5)

19 Sad way of working out what container may hold? (6)

22 Played tapes to entertain little one in bed (5,3)

23 Hotel chain delayed taking action over that woman inside (8)

25 Old scorer (as Peter Crouch is) (6)

26 Shortly the settler's retiring - one won't reveal his identity (6)

27 A lot of water in room upstairs - get daughter out (8)

DOWN

1 Flag up puzzle feature on the perimeter - snails (8)

2 Being obsequious to American on the way out (8)

3 Schools doctor withdrawing complaints (4)

4 Crowning achievement - emptied flipping chamberpot (4)

5 Member initially gets in two beers - barman here one of the best (5,5)

6 Lord's tenants having relations evicted - that's mean (6)

7 British ship has space on board (6)

13 Beats arrangement from Wet Wet Wet we always dismissed? (6,4)

14 Are inside keeping some measure of control (5)

17 Perennial scheme which involves cycling (3,5)

18 Periods I spent in fort (8)

20 Put up again outside hotel - anger misplaced (6)

21 Though upset, call for dismissal (6)

24 Animal rescuer not finishing early - that's good (4)

25 Mineral - type I twice rejected (4)

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



Weighty matters for cars

CAFE controversy overlooks public-policy objectives

The government's draft norms for the third edition of Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE-III), applicable between FY28 and FY32, have raised afresh the debate in the Indian automobile industry on incentivising small cars over big cars. The contours of the current controversy involve implications that go beyond the question of affordability to often conflicting questions of structural changes in automobile markets, urban pollution, public health as well as safety standards.

CAFE norms, in force since FY18, have set out fleet-wide carbon-dioxide emission targets for all manufacturers of passenger vehicles. They entail cutting fuel consumption on each car. CAFE-III stiffens these targets and will involve higher investment for manufacturers in better-designed parts and components. Since electric vehicles (EVs) will count as "super credits", the Bureau of Energy Efficiency, which has designed the standards, has offered an incentive for carmakers to transition to zero- or low-emission (eg hybrid) vehicles. The controversy has arisen over the disproportionate cost these norms impose on small cars vis-à-vis larger cars and sport utility vehicles (SUVs). The emission-norm reduction for both types of cars is the same in absolute terms, but in percentage terms, lighter cars (of 900 kg) must reduce emission by 27 per cent against 22 per cent for a 1,500-kg car. As a result, a relaxation has been proposed for small cars — which weigh less than 909 kg, with an engine of up to 1,200 cc, and a maximum length of 4,000 mm. No surprise, this exemption has split the industry, with makers of SUVs and larger cars unhappy at this discrimination.

From the point of view of optimal urban-traffic management and, indirectly, urban pollution and public-health objectives, this exemption could, however, be seen as unexceptionable. In the past few years, narrow tax differentials and growing consumer prosperity saw first-time car buyers opting for compact SUVs, which were priced close to small cars. This upscaling may indicate an evolving consumer base but SUVs are generally considered more inefficient in terms of space utilisation on the road. The growing crowds of SUVs, with their limited manoeuvrability and often occupied by just one or two people, on Indian roads, has been a key reason for the acute traffic congestion, which characterises almost every Indian city, large and small. The resulting emission from idling engines of cars stuck for long hours in traffic snarls has contributed significantly to the dangerously toxic urban air quality. The pre-Diwali cut in goods and services tax on small cars from 29-31 per cent to a flat 18 per cent saw a moderate surge in small-car sales after years, suggesting that consumers perceive a favourable price-value equation in hatchbacks and sedans. Upping their price on account of tighter fuel norms may drive consumers back to SUVs.

On the other hand, there are apprehensions that allowing weight-based emission exemption may encourage manufacturers to compromise on the additional safety components that add weight to a vehicle. Indeed, it is no coincidence that cars that meet Indian and global safety standards are mostly SUVs and their compact counterparts. This is, undoubtedly, a valid point for industry regulators to consider, given India's poor road-safety record. Rather than offering a weight-based carve-out under CAFE III, recalibrating the incentives to encourage manufacturers to focus on electric or hybrid hatchbacks and sedans may be a better alternative in achieving multiple public-policy outcomes.

An AI compact

The world needs operational standards

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call at the G20 summit in Johannesburg for a "global compact on artificial intelligence (AI)" comes at a time when nations are trying to keep pace with the rapid expansion of AI and the risks that accompany it. Mr Modi highlighted the need for strong human oversight, safety-by-design systems, transparency, and firm bans on the usage of AI in deepfakes, and criminal and terrorist activities. These concerns are not abstract: There are warnings that by next year, nearly 90 per cent of online content may be AI-generated, vastly increasing the risk of misinformation and making it increasingly difficult for people to distinguish fact from manipulation.

It is, therefore, encouraging that some movement towards multilateral coordination has begun. The United Nations (UN) recently launched a universal platform for a "Global Dialogue on AI Governance" to promote safe, secure, and trustworthy AI systems, strengthen cooperation between fragmented governance frameworks, and encourage open, inclusive innovation. India, too, has released detailed AI governance guidelines this month, emphasising safety, accountability, transparency, and responsible innovation.

Yet the world faces steep hurdles in establishing effective and fair AI rules. Hundreds of guides, frameworks, and principles have been published by governments, corporations, and international organisations, but none is truly global or comprehensive. The UN reports that while seven countries participate in all major AI governance initiatives, over 100 countries, mostly in the Global South, are part of none, leaving much of the world without a voice in decisions that directly affect them. Meanwhile, only a handful of nations control the computing power required to build advanced AI models, deepening inequalities and limiting the ability of developing countries to participate meaningfully in global rule-making.

This scattered landscape creates three core governance challenges: Poor representation, weak coordination, and limited implementation. Many countries and organisations continue to design their own rules, often overlapping or contradicting one another. Without better coordination, the world risks fragmented regulatory regimes or, worse, a "race to the bottom" where safety and rights are compromised for competitiveness. And representation and coordination alone are not enough: Real accountability depends on implementation covering capacity-building, technical support, and systems that help small and medium enterprises adapt responsibly.

To address these gaps, the world needs shared safety standards, coordinated independent audits for high-risk AI systems, transparent data practices, and firm bans on harmful uses. Developing countries must have access to open-source models, affordable computing, and strong digital public infrastructure so that they are not left behind. As India prepares to host the AI Impact Summit in February next year, it has an opportunity to shape an inclusive global approach and translate its national leadership into international influence. India stands to benefit significantly from global standards: Its large pool of engineers, researchers, and technology professionals can contribute solutions not just for India but for the world. But a meaningful compact will materialise only if major powers set aside narrow strategic interests and commit themselves to shared responsibilities. In a world where AI can be weaponised as easily as it can be used for the public good, the cost of inaction could be heavy.

A new phase of policymaking

A committee-based approach has helped the government usher in many reforms

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Economic policymakers in the Union government appear to be on a high. The recent notification of the four Labour Codes, passed by Parliament more than five years ago, is perhaps the most immediate reason for coming to such a conclusion. Of course, the gazetting of the much-awaited Labour Codes, subsuming 29 existing labour laws after their simplification and rationalisation, is a reasonable justification for believing that the Narendra Modi government has become a little more reform-friendly than in the past.

But the change in the government's engagement with the economy's need for reforms is more nuanced than how analysts have so far perceived it. What happened with the Labour Codes last week is also a reflection of a changed equation between India's political economy and the pace of its economic reforms.

This shift has been gradual, beginning soon after the Modi government was formed for its third five-year term in June 2024. Its contours and character were not immediately noticeable. But they are becoming obvious when you look back at the many decisions that the government took over the past 17 months.

About two months after its formation, the Narendra Modi government took a big step to fill several senior positions in different Union ministries with candidates from outside the government system. A notice inviting applications for 45 posts under the government's lateral-entry scheme was issued on August 17 in 2024. But two days later, the notice was withdrawn after political opposition to the idea gained momentum both within and outside the government. That notice was not just withdrawn, but the entire idea of strengthening the civil service by inducting private sector talent was buried. It was a setback for reforms, sending the message that the government did not wish to undertake any reforms that

could upset the civil servants.

Things changed somewhat later in the same month. The Union Cabinet approved a proposal to launch the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) to provide government employees an alternative to the National Pension System, which had come under attack in many states for not offering a guaranteed pension, and the demand for junking it grew roots. UPS, in contrast, offered a guaranteed pension equivalent to 50 per cent of the average monthly salary drawn in the last year of service, but modified many other eligibility terms to reduce its impact on the exchequer.



RAISINA HILL
A K BHATTACHARYA

It was initially feared that the UPS would also face political resistance and would not be able to address the concerns of government employees. But those fears proved to be unfounded. There were many factors at play. The decision on UPS was welcomed by the Congress president and other senior party functionaries. Mr Modi met with a delegation from the Joint Consultative Machinery for Central government employees soon after the Cabinet meeting approving the UPS. That delegation welcomed the move to provide an assured pension for employees. National trade unions kept quiet, and its rollout from April 2025 has so far been smooth.

The option to switch from NPS to UPS was initially available to employees only for three months till the end of June 2025. It has since been extended twice and the last date for exercising that option is now the end of this month. But most central government employees have stayed under the NPS, with only about 100,000 of the 2.3 million employees opting for the UPS as of the end of September 2025. Only Maharashtra as a state opted for the UPS, while most other states on NPS have not made any change. The last

Global climate action, minus the US

The United States' (US') abstention from the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP 30) was only a follow-up to its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. A few months ago, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) decided to undertake a formal review of its "endangerment findings," thereby even questioning the scientific basis of climate change. The EPA action has serious implications for the US government-supported research programmes and will have an adverse impact on the development of corresponding action plans.

Among the major contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the European Union (EU) adopted the "Green Deal" and the "Fit for 55" package in 2019 and 2021, respectively. It plans to reduce its emissions by 55 per cent by 2030 to meet its Paris commitments, eventually achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. However, Donald Trump's second term in the White House has put the EU's plans under severe strain.

According to the "new deal" forced upon it, the EU must take charge of its security, ensure better political integration in the face of new challenges within, and build strong economic and strategic relationships outside to ensure its own sustainability. The severance from cheap Russian gas and oil has already burdened it with seeking costlier energy resources from elsewhere while it transitions to greater use of renewable resources.

The US' demand that North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members increase their defence budgets to 3 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) will make the EU's task of meeting its climate targets tougher. Increasing its defence expenditure from 1.9 per cent (2024) to 3 per cent of GDP would put a significant burden on the EU members' budgets.

Germany has just relaxed its statutory-mandated limit of structural fiscal deficit of 0.35 per cent of GDP to make this defence expenditure possible. Greece, Italy, and France were having unsustainable debt-to-GDP ratios in 2024, indicating severe fiscal stress. Given the volatile geopolitical situation in Europe and the US showing indifference to its NATO commitment with respect to the Ukraine conflict and demanding NATO members share an equal burden of security arrangements, the EU's chances of meeting its climate targets seem uncertain.



RAJEEV KHER &
ANSHUMAN GUPTA

China, (highest GHG emitter), has not given any absolute reduction commitment under the Paris Agreement. China's updated nationally-determined contribution (NDC) targets for 2030 include cutting CO2 emissions per unit of GDP by 65 per cent from 2005 levels, increasing the share of non-fossil-fuel energy to around 25 per cent, raising forest stock volumes by 6 billion cubic metres, and bringing the installed capacity of wind and solar power to more than 1,200 Gw.

It pledges to peak around 2030 and reach net-zero by 2060. By not taking any absolute reduction targets, China can still increase emissions by increasing coal-based power plants while meeting its quantitative pledges. China's leadership in green technologies, enabled by its industrial policy, is helping the world transition to a green economy at a lower cost. The Chinese economy has, however, been under extreme internal stress and will be further impacted externally if a mutually acceptable settlement on the tariff issues raised by Mr Trump's trade policy is not arrived at sooner rather than later. These developments will impact the global economy in a significant way. They will also slow down green transition

date by when employees could switch over from NPS to UPS may be extended again, but what appeared to be a major political issue has been handled with little political resistance and limited fiscal cost.

The last 17 months have also seen a gradual deferment of and pushback against schemes that are protectionist by nature. This is in addition to the finance ministry-led rationalisation of many import duties that has been undertaken as part of what seems to be an ongoing exercise. In August 2023, the government had announced licensing curbs on the import of laptops, personal computers, tablets and computer servers. However, much to the relief of users and industry, the enforcement of these curbs has been deferred at least four times, with the latest extension till the end of December 2025. Given the current mood in the government, it is unlikely that the import management system will be enforced in the coming months. But the fact that such a scheme still exists, even though on paper, is a cause for concern.

The government's approach to the idea of quality control orders (QCO) was a little more reassuring. Till recently, it had issued about 720 QCOs between 2016 and 2025. QCOs were originally conceived as a tool for ensuring quality standards in products that entered the country through imports. However, these became an easy tool for creating non-tariff barriers. Such a move also undermined the competitiveness of the domestic industry when QCOs were enforced on raw materials and intermediate products. Reflecting how the Modi government's approach has changed in the last few months, a high-level official committee has recommended rolling back as many as 208 QCOs, all of which had been enforced on raw materials and intermediate products. Action on the QCO front has been quick. Already 69 QCOs have been suspended, raising the strong possibility that most such QCOs on raw materials and intermediate products would soon be withdrawn.

All these changes are taking place in an environment where the government has also made the taxation system a little more friendly. With annual income up to ₹12 lakh already becoming effectively tax-free and a large-scale rationalisation of the goods and services tax (GST), along with easier registration of taxpayers, the new system has reduced the burden on people and businesses. The government has also succeeded in conveying a message that it is sharply focused on reforms that improve the ease of doing business.

What's more important is that committees are now at work to simplify rules and regulations to make them less cumbersome. This has allowed more consultation before a policy action is announced. If the government has managed to introduce reforms in so many areas and roll back or defer the problematic schemes, it is largely because it has decided to engage with stakeholders through a committee-based approach. It is this aspect of the government's political economy management that has given rise to a series of recent reform measures and raised expectations for more reforms in the coming months.

In the medium term, as major emitters would face financial constraints. Emboldened by the American stance, China might also feel less obliged to phase down coal plants. Assuming the Chinese economy continues to grow at 5 to 6 per cent (with a concomitant increase in energy demand), it can rely both on fossil and non-fossil fuels. The emission levels will continue to rise.

India, being a distant third emitter, has been progressing well in meeting its climate commitments. It is ranked 10th in the Climate Change Performance Index in 2025 (against China's 55th rank). India is well ahead of schedule on all its commitments and is progressing strongly in deploying renewable projects, both grid-based and off-grid. However, it remains heavily dependent on coal for electricity generation.

In such a fluid scenario, the EU, China, and India will have to do the heavy lifting if global targets are to be pursued. The EU must reassert its position as a champion of the climate cause by accommodating the concerns of poor countries in its trade-related climate regulations and increasing financial and technical assistance. China must help the Global South by offering access to green technologies at affordable prices, and India should assist by supporting the development of green projects in these economies while doubling down on efforts within its own economy. It will also make good diplomatic and business sense. They can also continue and bolster evidence-based climate-related research programme on all climate solutions, including carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) technologies, till the US makes a course correction once again, (this time for the good of all). Whether they will be able to do so in the face of rising global headwinds is the big question.

The authors are, respectively, distinguished fellow and consultant, at RIS. The views are personal

Big power in niche markets



AMBI PARAMESWARAN

"Small is Beautiful" is a phrase attributed to the German-born British economist E F Schumacher. He advocated human-centred, decentralised and appropriate technologies in economics.

Can small be beautiful in business as well? In the book *The Niche Code: Building Big Businesses in Small Markets*, author Rajeev Roy tells us, in this mad pursuit of "unicorn" status, bigger may not always be better. There is business success possible through deep specialisation, not just mass appeal.

I was reminded of my friend Ganesh Subramanian and Shashi Bhat's company, Dynatech Furnaces Pvt Ltd. The

company was set up in 1985 and specialised in making world-class vacuum furnaces. They even had a manufacturing outfit in the US. Their specialised furnaces were tailor-made for just two industries: Automotive and aerospace. The company was acquired by a German company in 2011 and now goes by the name ALD-Dynatech Furnaces Pvt Ltd. Right through its 20-plus-year journey under its Indian promoters, the company stayed focused on its chosen niche, vacuum furnaces. The promoters found a niche they could stay in and did not try to chase the mass market for furnaces.

Germany has a breed of companies known globally as "Mittelstand companies". They are Germany's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), forming the backbone of the economy, known for their global market leadership in niche industries, long-term strategic focus, innovation, and high-quality products. They are often family-owned or privately held and thrive through a combination of technical expertise,

commitment to long-term customer and employee relationships, and significant investment in research and development.

In *The Niche Code*, Mr Roy has presented us with an array of Indian startups that focus on niche markets. The author is a management veteran who is now focussed on entrepreneurship education. He has trained over 1,000 entrepreneurs and has played a mentor's role in numerous companies.

The book is presented in four sections. Why? Who? How? What Next? What is a niche? A niche is not just a market subset; it is a focussed intentional space built around specific unmet needs and deep customer understanding. The author takes the pain to warn that, often, entrepreneurs get into a flux because they start believing bigger is better and chasing the illusion of scale (several examples are quoted). The complexity of trying to create a big business kills agility and presents the danger of doing everything moderately well,

instead of doing something very well. More than anything else, the power of restraint is needed. What are these niches? Where do you find them? Niches could be unmet needs, underserved communities, emerging trends, specialised skills, geographic niches, value-based niches, price extreme niches and hybrid niches.

But don't all companies start small, addressing a niche? Yes, but companies become big because a niche itself explodes, or the company branches into multiple niches, or they go mainstream, and finally there are companies that don't leave their niche at all.

What was fascinating to this reviewer was the number of Indian companies that are presented in the book — over 75. While there were a large number of personal care, beauty, fashion, coffee, shoe, travel accessories brands presented, I spotted some interesting niche businesses that have thrived staying in their



The Niche Code: Building Big Businesses in Small Markets
by Rajeev Roy
Published by Macmillan Business
288 pages ₹399

spares for pharmaceutical manufacturing equipment. Remember there are over a few thousand pharma plants in India but the market for spares is definitely a niche.

Makabari is today a globally recognised brand for single-garden Darjeeling teas. I heard the brand story from Rudra Chatterjee, managing director of Luxmi

niche. Let us look at a few. In B School student projects I used to come across Zostel. A hostel for budget students travelling across India. I learnt that the company is focussed on one niche: The independent female traveller.

Capapie was a new brand that I discovered. What do they make? They make specially designed jackets that are worn in shooting competitions. I learnt that they have a global footprint and, in fact, 70 per cent of Olympic medal winners wear a Capapie jacket.

Adinath is focussed on supplying high-quality spares for pharmaceutical manufacturing equipment. Remember there are over a few thousand pharma plants in India but the market for spares is definitely a niche.

Makabari is today a globally recognised brand for single-garden Darjeeling teas. I heard the brand story from Rudra Chatterjee, managing director of Luxmi

Tea, at a recent CII Event where we were fellow panelists.

Jackfruit 365 makes special flour from raw jackfruit that has proven to be highly beneficial for Type 2 diabetes. So before you sign up for that expensive injection to reduce your HbA1c, check out Jackfruit 365.

Stage is a Haryana OTT platform that has built a vibrant viable business model. They have a million-plus paid subscribers and are now taking it to other states.

Have you heard of Stag? They are a company focussed on table tennis. If you have played TT in your club, chances are you played on a Stag TT Table, with Stag nets and Stag rackets.

I could go on, but let me stop and say that this book is a fascinating read that can give a prospective entrepreneur new ideas. Also if I am a venture capitalist looking for an opportunity to invest in a smart company, this book may be a useful place to hunt.

The reviewer is a bestselling author. His latest book, *Marketing Mixology*, presents four essential ingredients for marketing success



CONTRAPUNTO

If your heart is a volcano, how shall you expect flowers to bloom?

- KAHLIL GIBRAN

Free Up Free Speech

The scope has to broaden. Too many courts & much police action do the opposite, as SC has noted

CJI Surya Kant’s observations on free speech put the focus back on twin questions courts often explore – how to protect the right to free speech and protect free speech from ‘abuse’. Free speech, in India, is subject to ‘reasonable restrictions’. But which restrictions are reasonable and what constitutes ‘abuse’ – that’s the nub of it. Courts have not always been consistent, nor have they always defined free speech broadly. Do some social media handles, which viciously target specific groups, stretch free speech rights intolerably, as opposed to caricaturists and standups, who use humour to critique the powerful? The logical answer is yes. But police seem to think the answer is no, given who their FIR targets are.

The point about reasonable restrictions is they need to be clearly *reasonable*. HCs are known to err on the side of ‘excessive caution. Karnataka HC noted in the case of Kamal Haasan – hauled to court



for suggesting Kannada was an offshoot of Tamil – that he could “not hurt sentiments of the masses”. Far too many cartoonists, standups, activists, journalists, artists and poets are arrested only to be punished via the arduous police-court-trial process. Such cases fall apart during appeals in SC, which maintains that for one, standard for free speech cannot rest on “insecurity” of those in power or because certain views are “disliked” by large sections and second, speech in poor taste is not a crime.

SC has said of itself, too, that judges should take criticism on their chin, and politicians be thick-skinned. Mocking religion may be pushing limits in this country, lampooning netas is not.

Morality and decency is another undefinable ‘restriction’ – and therefore ever vulnerable to both litigious moral busybodies and all kinds of court rulings. In podcaster Allahbadia’s case, SC painfully, but not helpfully, separated ‘vulgarity’ from ‘obscenity’. Even more court time is spent on art gallery displays. Even works by modern artists. FN Souza, Akbar Padamsee, MF Husain, have wound up being subjects of litigation. Why? Because someone thought they fell inside the scope of ‘reasonable restrictions’ centered on morality/decency. It took 14 years for Milind Soman-Madhu Sapre’s nudity case to be thrown out. So, yes, the definition of free speech needs work – but the work is to broaden the scope of what we mean by free speech.

Our Lava Affair

Volcanoes don't just disrupt airline schedules. They had a hand in birthing humans & shaping what they did

After at least 12,000 years of silence, Ethiopia’s Hayli Gubbi volcano let out a shout on Sunday, and a day later flight schedules went awry in Delhi, over 4,000km away. Incredible? Well, volcanoes can pack quite a punch. Relatively speaking, Hayli Gubbi, which shot ash 14km into the atmosphere, is a lightweight – the Tonga eruption of Jan 2022 released as much energy as a magnitude 8.4 quake. But it was nothing compared with Krakatoa, whose eruption in 1883 threw 21 cubic km of earth 80km high into the atmosphere, and produced a sound that was heard 5,000km away.



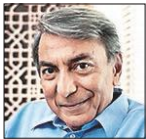
Millions of tonnes of volcanic dust floating in the upper reaches of the atmosphere is kryptonite for plane engines. If too much gets inside them, they can stall. In 1982, all four engines of a British Airways plane shut down as it passed through a volcanic cloud. Luckily, pilots were able to revive three of them after gliding for 15 minutes. That’s why airlines have to be cautious after an eruption. The 2010 aviation nightmare resulting from the eruption of Iceland’s Eyjafjallajökull volcano is a fading memory now, but it cost airlines £130mn a day for a week.

Dwelling over flight delays, however, trivialises the role of volcanoes. We know they had a hand in the creation of continents. Scientists also believe the 600,000-year-long continuous eruption of the Deccan Traps released so much carbon dioxide that Earth warmed up, dinosaurs were wiped out, and other species took over – hence, later, the appearance of humans. They have shaped human history also, as when the eruption of Vesuvius buried Pompeii and its 10,000 residents under ash and rock in 79CE. Modern Europe, and the world, may have looked very different without the 1783 eruption of Laki in Iceland, which disrupted rain patterns across Europe, worsened France’s food poverty, and became the invisible hand behind the French Revolution. Three decades later, the explosion of Tambora in Indonesia changed the world’s climate for years, caused widespread rain in Europe, and was a factor in Napoleon’s final defeat on the rain-soaked field of Waterloo. Our lava affair continues.

Zodiacal mix-up

Whatever you think your birth sign is, you've got it wrong by 2,000 years

Jug Suraiya



Sceptics have long regarded predicting the future, and defining an individual’s personality using the signs of the zodiac as mumbo-jumbo.

Now the mumbo has become more jumbo with the discovery that the positions of the constellations on which the signs of the zodiac are based in western astrology have shifted in relation to the Sun and the Earth in the 2,000 years since the ancient Babylonians observed their positions in the sky.

A reason for this is that, like a spinning top as it loses motion, the Earth ‘wobbles’, causing an ‘axial precession’ that leads to one degree of difference every 72 years in our view of the stars in relation to the Sun.

Moreover, the Babylonians did not, for reasons unknown, include in their calculations the presence of a 13th constellation called Ophiuchus, meaning ‘Snake bearer’.

The result is that western astrology is literally wobbly when it comes to determining your zodiac sign, also known as a Sun sign, based on your date of birth.

So if you were led to believe that your zodiac or Sun sign is Aries, you’re actually a Piscean, and if you think you’re a Piscean you’re really an Aquarian.

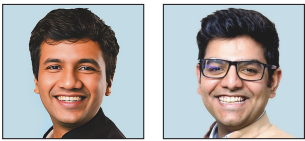
Scorpios are now deemed Librans, and Sagittarians can be either Scorpios (from Nov 23 to Nov 30) or Ophiuchusians (Dec 1 to Dec 18).

These findings throw a major spanner in the works of zodiac-based match-making, which pairs Aries with Leo, Taurus with Capricorn, Gemini with Aquarius as being compatible, with Cancer and Aries deemed incompatible.

If I remain starry-eyed about the future because my Sun sign tells me to be so, I might be headed for a solar eclipse, metaphorically speaking.

“The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves that we are underlings,” says Cassius to Brutus in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. The fault is indeed in us if we continue to remain underlings to the hocus-pocus of the occult art best described as ass-trology.

Aditya Prasanna Bhattacharya and Swapnil Tripathi



As India marks 75 years of its Constitution with Constitution Day being observed today, former CJI BR Gavai’s call for a “swadeshi” approach

to constitutional interpretation – one that draws less reflexively on foreign jurisprudence and more consciously on India’s own experience – is an invitation to reflect. Has Indian constitutionalism, in fact, developed an interpretive tradition of its own? What does a genuinely swadeshi approach to applying the Constitution look like?

Let us start with SC’s latest Presidential Reference on the powers of governors. Although the opinion stresses the need for a homegrown approach, it ironically rests on a familiar Western assumption: that constitutional authorities act in good faith, and therefore, prescribing time limits for a governor’s assent to bills is unnecessary. This mirrors British convention more than Indian reality. In practice, constitutional silences around gubernatorial discretion have been repeatedly exploited, undermining Indian federalism.

If swadeshi interpretation is to mean anything, it must begin with India’s lived constitutional experience – and with the recognition that assumptions drawn from Westminster or Washington often do not survive the test of Indian political life.

But to insist on Indian context is not to reject foreign influence. Rather, it is to recognise that India already possesses a rich tradition of indigenous constitutional reasoning, developed not through rhetoric but through decades of judicial craftsmanship. In fact, some of the Supreme Court’s most significant doctrines emerged from the very insight that Indian constitutional practice requires interpretive choices distinct from those in Western systems.

Creativity over textual formalism | A defining feature of Indian constitutionalism is its willingness to innovate – to read the Constitution in a manner that preserves its spirit even when its text is silent, ambiguous, or vulnerable to distortion.

The basic structure doctrine is the clearest example – an unwritten but strong limit on Parliament’s power to amend the Constitution. In *Kesavananda Bharati* and many subsequent judgments, the court held that certain principles – equality, democracy, secularism, judicial review, free and fair elections – form the Constitution’s unalterable core. This was a solution-oriented response to a uniquely Indian fear: that constitutional amendments

could be used to entrench political power.

The collegium system is another such response. When executive interference threatened judicial independence, the court reinterpreted the text of the Constitution to vest primacy in judicial appointments with the judiciary – a creative, perhaps controversial, but distinctly Indian solution to a distinctly Indian problem.

In these examples, the court refused blind fidelity to the text when the text alone could not protect the Constitution’s deeper values. This is the hallmark of an indigenous method: context-sensitive, solution-oriented, and grounded in constitutional purpose.

PIL as indigenous innovation | The emergence of Public Interest Litigation in the late 1970s marked a radical departure from British common law’s narrow rule of standing. Whereas the English approach assumed that citizens possess the resources and awareness to approach courts, Indian judiciary recognised the barriers created by poverty and illiteracy.

By allowing citizens, activists, and even letters to stand in for formal petitions, the court widened the very gateway to constitutional justice. This was not an imported model; it was born of Indian social reality, and remains one of India’s most distinctive contributions to global constitutionalism.

Another example of judicial innovation is the doctrine of absolute liability, formulated in *MC Mehta vs Union of India* after the Bhopal gas tragedy. Rejecting the English rule of “strict liability” (riddled with exceptions), the court held that enterprises engaged in hazardous industries bear absolute, non-delegable responsibility for harm.

This principle has no real parallel in Western law. It arose from India’s industrial landscape – densely populated cities, weak regulatory systems, and recurring environmental disasters. It reflects a jurisprudence that responds to uniquely Indian risks.

Directive Principles as interpretive tools | Indian courts have long interpreted Fundamental Rights in light of the Directive Principles of State Policy. This method recognises that the Constitution does not divide rights and *rajadharma* – social and moral duties of the state – into separate worlds.

By aligning rights with Directive Principles, the court expanded

Article 21 to include legal aid, education, livelihood, and environmental rights. Western constitutional courts rarely interpret rights through social obligations. The Indian judiciary does – and has done so for decades.

Principles of swadeshi interpretation | Taken together, these strands suggest that a swadeshi interpretive method is neither insular nor ornamental. It does not reject foreign jurisprudence. Nor does it rely solely on appeals to civilisational heritage. Instead, it is defined by four principles:

● *Begin with Indian realities, not foreign assumptions* |

If constitutional practice shows that certain presumptions do not hold, interpretation must respond to reality, not idealise it.

● *Prioritise constitutional purpose over rigid textualism* | Whether through basic structure or the collegium, the court has repeatedly chosen substance over form to preserve the Constitution’s deeper commitments.

● *Draw from India’s own constitutional experience* |

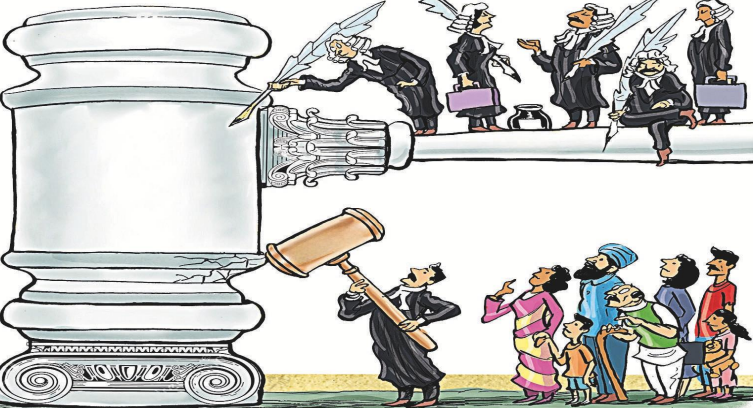
Doctrines such as PIL and absolute liability emerged from uniquely Indian, and hence indigenous, contexts.

● *Recognise Constitution as a moral instrument* |

Ultimately, Indian constitutionalism has always embraced the idea that law carries an ethical responsibility: to protect the vulnerable, extend dignity, and advance justice.

A swadeshi constitutionalism isn’t just about looking inward – it’s about looking inward honestly. And it is a recognition of what has always powered India’s constitutional journey: not borrowed doctrines, but our own experience – conflicts, aspirations, and will to shape law into a force for good.

Bhattacharya is an LL.M candidate at Cambridge University. Tripathi is with Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. Views are personal



India Story/History: What They Spin Is What You'll Get

Tales we tell shape the ‘civilisation’ we become. As India’s institutions get caught in bitter partisan fights, someone’s too-clever political bias, aimed for today’s news headlines, will end up in tomorrow’s textbooks

Ashwin Sanghi



It is often said that history is yesterday’s politics, and politics is tomorrow’s history. I wonder what the narrative will be when present-day politics is read a century later. Who will appear heroic? Who will seem villainous? And which version of events will be narrated in the chronicles?

Stories tend to outlive facts. This notion is confirmed by the fact that we are still debating whether our *Mahabharat* and *Ramayana* are *itihasa* or *katha*. There are 300 versions of *Ramayana*. Similarly, a relatively slim work called *Jaya* morphed into *Vijaya*, then *Bharata*, and finally *Mahabharat*. Does that mean our scribes fabricated fiction? No. Each generation merely injected its own anxieties, morals, perspectives, and politics into the stories. Memory evolves with generational change.

Does generational tweaking take away from the fact that something extraordinary must have happened in antiquity for the event to sear itself into memory? Maybe a great king crossing an ocean to battle another king, a succession dispute, or a great multiclan war? These stories were retold over generations precisely because the event was of such great importance.

Now, if one version of an epic contradicts another, both cannot be the ‘literal’ truth. But, as CS Lewis reminds us, what we call ‘myths’ are deep expressions of truth – often truer than the chronicles themselves.

So, when you log into your favourite social media app and find political opinions that may or may not be in sync with yours, remember this: modern political actors are not only fighting elections but also battling for the right to shape the narrative a century from now. George Santayana famously said, “History is a pack of lies about events that never happened told by people who weren’t there.” And Goebbels, with brutal clarity, declared, “A lie repeated often enough becomes the truth.” Both

understood the same principle: control the narrative today, and you control the history of tomorrow.

The war of narratives is a given. But what particularly concerns us is this: in India, this struggle over narrative has taken an institutional turn. Our democracy – something that we can all be proud of – has delivered mixed results. Our noisy elections, free press, raucous Parliament, and independent judiciary keep power in check. But these elements also come bundled with lethargic municipalities, a creaking justice system, and a bureaucracy that confuses procedure with purpose. More worryingly, the very pillars meant to stabilise the



system are being dragged into political crossfire.

Take the Election Commission. Political leaders have questioned its impartiality over electoral roll revisions, never mind that the same institution oversaw elections when today’s opposition occupied the treasury benches. If EC partisanship is alleged, then logic demands that every seat from every election, regardless of who won, ought to be treated with suspicion. Selective outrage suggests political motive, not moral clarity.

A similar pattern of attacks shadows the Supreme Court. Its decisions are praised as visionary or condemned as partisan, depending on which side benefits. When the

verdict is favourable, the judiciary becomes the last bastion of justice; when it cuts the other way, it becomes an instrument of bias or selective urgency.

Even the armed forces, long regarded as above politics, have not been spared. Military operations are too often woven into partisan narratives. Politicians question the timing or authenticity of military operations, and soldiers are left uncomfortably in the middle. Few things corrode national unity more than turning a nation’s defenders into props.

This is the danger of our moment: political spins aren’t only crafted for the evening’s headlines but also for the history books of 2125. Repeat an accusation often enough, and it becomes the ‘truth’ that future scholars will cite. Delegitimise an institution today, and you diminish not just its present functioning but also its place in the national memory. Political leaders must therefore resist the easy thrill of scoring points by tarnishing the pillars they will one day have to lean on.

Equally, institutions themselves must guard their neutrality by letting their work speak for itself. Judges need not flavour rulings with off-the-cuff observations. Crisp, well-reasoned orders should be the judiciary’s only voice. From reducing pendency to improving transparency in judicial appointments, it must work with the executive to reform without compromising independence.

EC must go the extra mile, even in the face of unfair allegations, to demonstrate that its processes are beyond reproach. Armed forces must protect operational secrecy while mastering narrative clarity. Institutional credibility, like public trust, must be earned every single day; past glory offers no permanent shield.

India’s epics remind us that the stories we tell shape the civilisation we become. Modern politics seeks similar immortality. The question, then, is not whether narratives will be created. Rather, it is: whose version of today will harden into the chapters of tomorrow’s textbooks?

The writer is an author of several works of fiction

Calvin & Hobbes



Narayani Ganesh

As head of the American Federal Bureau of Investigation, Kash Patel has pledged to uphold satya, truth, in running an institution that is basically an intelligence and investigation agency of the US govt. Its job is to uncover truths and uphold the law, but how does one define truth? What is truth? Looking for truth could be as tiring and futile as looking for a needle in a haystack, especially when there is no needle to find in the first place. Because what we perceive as truth, is nothing more than an illusion, or to put it harshly, it is a lie. By citing Vedanta to support and inspire his search for truth as FBI head, Patel is merely succumbing to a huge spiritual lie.

All worldly truths are relative, subjective and amorphous. Hasn’t it been a historical

fact that one country’s hero or martyr is another’s enemy or traitor? Truth and lie depend on which side of the fence you are, what you believe in, who you are loyal to and what your social conditioning is. That is why Jain philosophy expounds on Anekantavada, that there is no one (worldly) truth, but many truths. The oft-quoted story of the seven blind men trying to describe an elephant is illustrative of this. Each one describes part of the elephant he can perceive by touch and concludes that is the whole animal. So, all seven are correct in their description, but these are only seven subjective truths, not the whole truth.

Absolute truth refers to the one truth that is indivisible, infinite, eternal, universal and unchanging, what is known as Brahmn

in Vedanta, universal consciousness. Whereas all worldly truths, including the ones being sought to be uncovered by agencies like FBI, are at best relative truths or if you like, relative lies, that are not truths at all, if one uses the Vedantic yardstick as Patel claims to use.

Let’s take a contemporary example like chatbots that claim to answer all your questions or engage in virtual conversation with you. It has been found that this AI tool tends to blatant sycophancy when catering to queries, much like job applicants beef up their

curriculum vitae with imaginary but well-intentioned attributes and qualifications, rendering all of it to be a pack of lies. *Nature* magazine reports that a study found “AI chatbots – including ChatGPT and Gemini – often cheer users on, give them

Sacredspace



Don't look for any other state than the one you are in now; otherwise, you will set up inner conflict

and unconscious resistance. Forgive yourself for not being at peace. The moment you completely accept your non-peace, your non-peace becomes transmuted into peace.

Eckhart Tolle

Is Kash Patel Looking For Truth In A Haystack?

overly flattering feedback and adjust responses to echo their views, sometimes at the expense of accuracy”.

Advaita Vedanta says there are three kinds of truths, paramarthika satyam, absolute truth, Brahmn; vyavaharika satyam, relative truth as in the empirical world; and a third, pratibhasika satya, which is misconceived truth like a rope being mistaken for a snake in the dark.

If one goes by Vedanta, nations and borders are lies. Nationalism is a lie. Even patriotism to an extent, is a lie, because of its narrow circumscription of loyalty to a specific territory or people. All govts are lies, as are govt-led institutions like FBI. What kind of truth could an institution uncover, that does not comprehend the real meaning of truth? It is like looking for a (non-existent) needle in a huge haystack.

ganeshnarayani@yahoo.com

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

A symbolic slip

PM absent in Anandpur Sahib

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's packed spiritual itinerary this week, marked by high-visibility visits to Ayodhya and Kurukshetra, has triggered an uncomfortable question in Punjab: Why was Anandpur Sahib not worthy of even a brief stop to honour Guru Tegh Bahadur on his 350th martyrdom day? The PM spoke eloquently of the Guru in Haryana, praising his unparalleled sacrifice to defend faith and freedom. Guru Tegh Bahadur gave up his head to protect the religious rights of another community. It is an act of courage and pluralism unmatched in world history. Unfortunately, the PM's decision to skip the Gurus' own land on this sacred occasion does not reflect the universality and inclusiveness of that sentiment.

For weeks, Anandpur Sahib has been transformed: the city glowing white, the 100-year-old *nagara* reverberating, a massive *nagar kirtan* arriving from Srinagar and lakhs of devotees gathering to pay homage. The Punjab government declared the town a "holy city", undertook large-scale preparations and positioned the event as a significant commemoration. In contrast, Modi chose to attend Haryana's observance of the same anniversary while giving Punjab a miss, despite repeatedly invoking Guru Tegh Bahadur's legacy in his speeches. Symbolism matters in politics, and its absence matters just as much.

Punjab has long felt overlooked in the national imagination. Skipping Anandpur Sahib inadvertently reinforces that sentiment. Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom is commemorated across India, transcending politics, geography and ideology. A Prime Minister's presence in Anandpur Sahib would have signalled national unity. Leaders often speak of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat.' Visiting Ayodhya and Kurukshetra but not Anandpur Sahib on this sacred occasion dilutes that message. On his 350th martyrdom day, a visit to the city established by the Guru would have spoken louder than any speech.

Op Pawan braves

Homage by Army Chief fills a gap

ARMY CHIEF Gen Upendra Dwivedi laying a wreath at the National War Memorial to honour Param Vir Chakra awardee Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran on his Balandi Divas marks a significant moment. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, too, posted a message paying homage. Though late in the day, these concerted efforts seek to fill a gap in suitably honouring the 1,171 Indian soldiers who died during Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka. Over 3,000 sustained injuries and several were awarded gallantry medals in what is often labelled as a forgotten war. The veterans of the 1987 Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) harbour lingering resentment that the sacrifices of the soldiers have not been duly recognised. The course correction by the top brass goes beyond symbolism — it is about doing the right thing.

While Colombo has a memorial for the IPKF and Palaly for 10 Para, there is no such memorial in India. IPKF veterans, widows and families have been organising private commemorations at the National War Memorial. They have for a long time been demanding official designation of a day to remember Operation Pawan on the lines of commemoration of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War and the 1999 Kargil conflict. Since the dead were cremated or buried on foreign soil, they have also sought streamlining of a policy on bringing fallen soldiers back home. There have been calls for setting up a 'Graves Commission' tasked with shifting the mortal remains to an IPKF memorial in India. These demands deserve resolution at the earliest.

Memorials are signposts in collective memory. The National War Memorial is a lasting tribute to the sacrifices made by the armed forces — a site of respect and remembrance. Whatever the underlying complications, there is no excuse for minimising the valour and sacrifices of soldiers.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1925

Sir Fazl-i-Hussain again

THE re-appointment of Sir Fazl-i-Hussain as Education Minister in Punjab immediately on his relinquishing the portfolio in the Government of India which he held for three months during the absence on leave of Sir Mahomed Habibulla, though not unexpected, raises more than one question to which an honest answer is called for from those responsible for these appointments. The first question which the public is entitled to ask is, on what principle and for what reason was Sir Fazl-i-Hussain made or permitted to vacate the ministership to assume another office for just three months? It was not as if this could be or was effected without any disturbance of the arrangements in this Province. In order to be able to accept the membership of the Viceroy's Council Sir Fazl-i-Hussain had not only to vacate the ministerial portfolio but to resign his seat in the Legislative Council. A notification had to be issued by the Gazette calling for a by-election in his constituency. A candidate had to be found for the constituency who, if elected, would be ready to resign his seat the moment Sir Fazl-i-Hussain chose to come back, and the farce of an election had to be gone through. As regards the ministership, a person who had only a short time before being elected President of the Legislative Council had to vacate that office and to be pitch-forked into the ministerial office on the distinct understanding that he should hold the office only during the absence of Sir Fazl-i-Hussain and should relinquish it as soon as Sir Fazl-i-Hussain's term of office as an ordinary member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, came to a close.

Why EC was born before the Republic

75 years later, the need for independence, inclusion and credibility is sharper than ever



SY QURAISHI
FORMER CHIEF ELECTION
COMMISSIONER OF INDIA

ON Constitution Day, we rightfully celebrate fundamental rights, federalism, secularism and the audacity of universal adult suffrage. Yet one of the most far-sighted decisions of the Constituent Assembly rarely receives the attention it deserves. When the Constitution was adopted on November 26, 1949, Articles 324 to 329 creating the Election Commission of India (ECI) were brought into force immediately, two months before the rest of the Constitution commenced on January 26, 1950. This sequencing was not a technicality; it was a profound constitutional choice.

The framers knew that once the Constitution began to operate, India would require a government elected under its authority. The ECI, thus, had to be constituted before the Republic was born, so that the first government would derive its legitimacy not from an executive, but from a constitutionally independent referee.

There was another equally significant concern. In a federal system, it would have been natural to let each state conduct its own Assembly elections, as many federations do. But the framers rejected this model.

They feared that state governments might manipulate electoral rolls to exclude "outsiders" — those who migrated for work, study or political activity. As several members warned, a state-run system could become a tool for provincialism. A single, independent national authority was, therefore, essential to guarantee that every Indian, wherever he/she lived, would be



CONSTITUTION DAY: Former PM Jawaharlal Nehru addressing a midnight session of the Constituent Assembly, 1947. ns

included on an equal, non-discriminatory roll. Seventy-five years later, the framers' fears are coming true more aggressively than ever, as controversies over residency, migration and deletion of names from voters' lists re-enter national politics.

Article 324 grants the ECI "superintendence, direction and control" over electoral rolls and elections to Parliament and state legislatures, and to the offices of President and Vice-President. Articles 325 and 326 guarantee a single general roll for all citizens and universal adult suffrage without discrimination. These provisions were not inserted as bureaucratic conveniences; they were designed as the Republic's foundational safeguards. Inclusion, fairness and independence were built into the electoral architecture from day one.

Over the decades, the Supreme Court has expanded and protected this constitutional vision. In *Mohinder Singh Gill* (1978), Justice VR Krishna Iyer described Article 324 as a plenary power enabling the EC to act in "areas left unoccupied by legislation", ensuring the purity of elections. In *AC Jose* (1984), the court clarified that the commissioner's powers supplement rather than supplant statutory law, setting a balanced constitutional rhythm: where law is silent, the commission must act; where

The real test of reform is simple: Will the voter believe the EC can say 'no' to those in power?

law speaks, the ECI must obey.

In *TN Seshan* (1995) case, the court held that free and fair elections are part of the Constitution's basic structure and require an election commission "fully insulated from executive influence." Later decisions such as *ADR* (2002) and *PUCI* (2013) reinforced the voter's right to know and the right to choose NOTA, placing the citizen at the centre of the process.

A nuance often missed deserves emphasis. In *Subramanian Swamy vs Election Commission of*

India (2013), the SC recognised the VVPAT paper trail as an "indispensable requirement" for free and fair elections. But the court did not order an immediate nationwide rollout. It commended the commission's initiative, permitted its proposal for a phased introduction and directed the Union government to ensure funds. This reflected the correct constitutional balance: technological transparency combined with respect for institutional judgement.

The ECI's authority is constitutional, but its credibility flows from practice — millions of acts performed by ordinary officials under extraordinary scrutiny. I learned this early. As an IAS probationer, I was posted as the presiding officer of a single polling booth while my colleagues were given supervisory positions.

We sought to make elections more inclusive, transparent and professional. SVEEP, our voter education programme, treated citizens as partners rather than passive recipients of instructions. National Voters Day, launched in 2011, turned the enrolment of 18-year-olds into a nationwide civic rite. These two reforms have been responsible for record turnouts, the latest being Bihar.

We strengthened expenditure monitoring, tackled paid news

through MCMC (Media Certification and Monitoring Committee) mechanisms and took actions such as covering publicly funded statutes during elections — not because symbolism mattered more than substance, but because neutrality must be practised, and must be seen to be practised.

As India approaches its 18th General Election, the constitutional design faces renewed pressures. Technology must inspire confidence, with EVMs, VVPATs, audits and dashboards working together to assure verifiability. Campaign finance reform must move towards real-time disclosures. Electoral rolls, machine-readable, must maintain a balance: open and accessible for every eligible voter, but protected from manipulation and arbitrary deletion.

Procedural independence remains the bedrock. Appointment processes and tenure security are not privileges; they are structural requirements for neutrality. A referee cannot be dependent on the very executive it must regulate. Whatever reform model Parliament adopts, it must meet a single test: Will the average voter believe that the Election Commission can say "no" to power?

Inclusion remains unfinished business. Migrant workers, persons with disabilities, first-time voters, women and the elderly who face mobility barriers must all find the electoral process welcoming. Prisoners who, ironically, can contest, must be allowed to vote. A democracy's legitimacy depends not just on who wins, but on who is allowed in.

On this Constitution Day, we must remember why our founders activated Part XV ahead of the Republic. They were ensuring that when the people of India voted for the first time, they would do so under the watch of an institution designed to be independent of the government it would help create. That insight remains as vital today as it was 75 years ago.

A democracy succeeds when its referee is trusted. The Election Commission must ensure it upholds the nation's trust.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

If it doesn't reach the last poor man, your constitution is wrong. —Kamal Haasan

Bonding with Dharam over love for Urdu

SUMIT PAUL

ONE balmy morning in March 2011, I chanced upon Dharmendra Singh Deol at a guest house in Lonavala. Dharmendra had a sprawling farmhouse at Lonavala, which had a huge gymnasium. He often came out and chatted with the locals without any air of arrogance. It was one of those casual visits. I was carrying a copy of the Urdu broadsheet '*Inquilab*,' which I had picked up from the local railway station. After an exchange of '*Aadaab*' and '*Sat Sri-Akaal*', he asked me: '*Aap Urdu padhte hain?*' (You read Urdu?). I told him that it was the only tongue I read and wrote fluently. Surprised, he took the paper from my hand and began reading it effortlessly. His childlike innocence floored me. He told me that he preferred to read and write Urdu. He had learnt it at Ramgarhia College, Phagwara, Punjab.

Dharmendra's love for Urdu poetry is a part of Bollywood folklore. He said he had penned many *ghazals* and couplets in Urdu. '*Sachab-e-deewan hain aap?*' (Do you've a compilation of Urdu poetry to your credit?), I asked him. He said, '*Sab muntashir aur betarteeb hai. Lekin ek kitaab ki shakl dene ki soch raha hoon.*' (Everything is scattered and not well organised, but I intend to get it published in the form of a book).

Dharmendra was a very emotional person and a man of gratitude. His words still echo in my consciousness: '*Main aaj jahan kahin pahuncha hoon, sab ki duaon ke sahare.*' (If I've reached a certain position, it's because of the goodwill and wishes of all). He narrated how he left his home in a village in Punjab and came to Bombay to become an actor. Inspired by Dilip Kumar and Suraiya, his sole objective was to appear on the silver screen. He was such a great fan of Suraiya that he had watched her film '*Dilagi*' (1949) 40 times! With tears in his eyes, he said, '*2004 mein jab Suraiya ji Allah ko pyari hui, main unki majyat mein shareek tha.*' (When she breathed her last in 2004, I was there to bid adieu to her). A fine gentleman that he was, he didn't mention that just a few actors attended her last rites.

I asked him, '*Log aap ko garam-Dharam kahte hain*' (people call you angry Dharam). Laughing, he recited his own couplet, '*Lamhe bhar ki berukhi tumhein yaad rahi/Zindagi bharka khu-loos tum bhoole gaye.*' (You remembered my momentary annoyance / But you forgot my lifetime of nicety). Dharmendra regretted having ill-treated journalists like Devyani Chabul and Krishna. '*Main unka gunhagarr hoon.*' (I'm morally answerable, having mistreated them).

When I told him that my favourite song, '*Jaane kya dhoondhti rahi hain ye aankhein mujh mein...*', from '*Shola aur Shabnam*' was pictured on him, he hugged me, saying, '*Barkhurdar, aap toh us waqt paida bhi nahin hue honge*' (my dear, you were not even born at that time).

Hours glided by. He shared innumerable anecdotes with me. We had dinner at his farmhouse. Such a disarmingly simple man! Adieu, Dharam ji. You were indeed a legend.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Loss of faith in the system

Refer to 'Lessons from the Red Fort blast'; the article is an eye-opener for the present day political leadership. Former PM Manmohan Singh's understanding of a 'functioning democracy' in India may be the best antidote to terror incidents like the Red Fort blast. When constitutional bodies like the Election Commission, higher judiciary and government departments (Enforcement Directorate and Income Tax) are perceived as biased by the public at large, it leads to a loss of faith in the system. Let us implement our visionary ex-PM's advice for maintaining peace and harmony in the country.

SS SANGWAN, ROHTAK

Follow Guru's valuable lessons

Refer to 'Modern-day resonance of *Hind di chadar*'; we must reflect on how far today's society has drifted from the Guru's teachings. Guru Tegh Bahadur's message of 'fear none, frighten none', his insistence on moral courage, justice for the weak and resistance against oppression are not merely historical ideals; they are guiding principles for any civilised nation. Yet, instead of internalising these values, both Central and state governments appear content with grand commemorations, public events and political posturing. The essence of the Guru's legacy — protection of civil liberties, respect for lawful dissent and a humane governance — stands ignored. In an age where dissenting voices are labelled, penalised or silenced, hypocrisy becomes stark. Celebrations are plentiful, but adherence to the Guru's values is scarce.

AMARJIT SINGH, MOHALI

Merit, not religion the key

The recent controversy around the admissions in Mata Vaishno Devi medical college in Jammu has exposed the BJP's real face. The party has demanded revocation of the admission list wherein 42 Muslim students out of 50 secured seats in the college based on merit. It is a matter of pride that Kashmiris are joining the mainstream after decades of alienation and hardship foisted on them due to militancy and wrong policies of successive governments. Rather than trying to score political brownie points, the BJP should make sincere

efforts to make the country secular and safe. Religious bigotry and decisions taken against the spirit of the Constitution can have far-reaching consequences on the secular fabric of the nation.

SACHIN KAUSHAL, PATIALA

Lawyers, litigants too at fault

Refer to 'CJI sets agenda'; reducing the backlog of cases is not the CJI's responsibility alone. Litigants and lawyers too have a role to play. People resort to litigation on the smallest pretext while lawyers seek adjournments on flimsy grounds. More number of cases are added than those decided, adding to the backlog. Final verdicts come after years of delay which is a blot on the justice delivery system. The courts, lawyers and litigants — everybody should try to get rid of this anomaly. Also, we should pay heed to the outgoing CJI's suggestion of denying reservation to the creamy layer of the SCs. Merit alone should be the criterion for jobs or admissions to colleges/universities.

WG CDR CL SEHGAL (RETD), JALANDHAR

Long road to justice

It is heartening to note that the new CJI Surya Kant in his first statement after assuming charge has talked about reducing the backlog of court cases, which is a Herculean task. I have been fighting for justice in a service matter since 1984 and got justice only in piecemeal, including from the apex court, with the matter still pending for final adjudication in the high court. My case appears in the list somewhere at the bottom and is never taken up for the final decision. When a case is listed for the final hearing, why is the list not exhausted fully in the following days?

JAGRUP SINGH RANA, PALAMPUR

Will always be remembered

Dharmendrawas an actor par excellence — one who stood alongside strong competitors like the Kapoors, Dev Sahib, Sunil Dutt Sahib, Manoj Kumar and Balraj Sahni — and an equally warm person. I remember watching him interact enthusiastically with his relatives during the shooting of '*Jheel Ke Us Paar*' in Nangal. His dignity, humility and philanthropic spirit will long be remembered along with his iconic films.

SQN LDR KK SHARMA (RETD), NANGAL

The Guru's janeu of compassion



RAKSHANDA JALIL
WRITER, TRANSLATOR &
LITERARY HISTORIAN

THE singular lesson, for me, from Guru Tegh Bahadur's life and martyrdom is the importance he gave to solidarity and concern for people who were, strictly speaking, not part of his *sangat*.

When a group of Kashmiri pandits came to him in Chakk Nanaki and spoke of the oppression they were facing, how they were being forced to remove their janeus (sacred threads), their plight moved the Guru to such an extent that he decided to travel to Delhi, knowing full well what awaited him at the journey's end. The trigger for the sequence of events is the janeu, a token that had been rejected by Guru Nanak himself and the Sikh belief system. As Guru Nanak ji observes in one of his shabads:

*'Let compassion be thy cotton,
Spin it into the yarn of contentment,
Give it knots of continence
and the twist of truth,
Thus wilt thou make a janeu for the soul.'*

*If such a one thou hast,
put it on me,
The thread so made will neither snap,
nor become soiled.'*

These are words spoken by a young Guru Nanak when a priest arrived for his investiture ceremony. It is significant that a little over 200 years later, Guru Tegh Bahadur gave up his life in the defence of a people not his own, being free to wear a *janeu* and a *tilak*, tokens of a religion, again, not his own.

What does this tell us about not just the ninth Guru, but also about the first? To my mind, it speaks of the Sikhs' engagement with the idea of diversity and religious freedom. And what is the well-spring of this idea?

That is nothing else but compassion. Time and again, we have seen compassion as a lived reality for the Sikh community; we saw it during the worst days of the Covid pandemic when groups of Sikh youth organised oxygen *langars*, delivered food and medicines to the needy, irrespective of religion, and rose above the high walls of fear to sanitise the Jama Masjid in Delhi at a time when Muslims were afraid to enter their own mosque.

For us to come to an understanding of this wellspring of compassion, let us briefly look at the life of the first Guru. Since my recent work has been in and around Urdu, I want to view Guru Nanak ji in the mirror of Urdu poetry to present, very



SERVICE: Time and again, we have seen compassion as a lived reality for the Sikh community. PPI

briefly, how the Urdu poet has seen him.

Let us begin with the most famous and most-cited *nazm* by Sir Muhammad Iqbal where he describes Guru Nank ji as '*mard-e kaamil*' (the perfect man):

*'Phir uthi aakhir sada
tauhid ki Punjab se,
Hind ko ik mard-e-kaamil
ne jagaya khwab se.'*

(Once again the call of unitarianism has rung out from Punjab. A perfect man has again awakened Hind from deep slumber.)

In another poem, Iqbal says:

*'Chishti ne jis zamin mein
paigham-e-haq sunaya,
Nanak ne jis chaman mein
wahdat ka geet gaaya...
Mera watan wahi hai, mera
watan wahi hai.'*

(The land in which Chishti

The Sikh tradition shows that diversity rests not on tolerance alone, but on compassion deep enough to defend another's faith.

delivered the message of Truth,

The garden in which Nanak sang the song of Oneness,

That homeland is mine, that homeland is mine.)

The pairing of Chishti and Nanak seems natural to the Urdu poet and occurs in several instances, as here by Afsar Meeruthi in '*Watan ka Raag*':

*'Chishti ne jo di thi mai, woh
ab tak hai paimanon mein/
Nanak ki taalim abhi tak
goonj rahi hai kaanon mein,
Bharut pyara desh hamara,
sab deshon se nyara hai.'*

(The wine that Chishti had poured is still in our goblets,

The teachings of Nanak are still echoing in our ears...Our beloved Bharat, our nation is the loveliest of all nations.)

And here's Arsh Malsiyani singing in the same refrain in '*Mere Pyare Watan*':

*'Sufi tere har daur mein
Karte rahe paighambari,
Chishti o Nanak se mili
Faqir-o-ghina ko bartari.'*

(In every age your sufis Have appeared as prophets, From Chishti and Nanak, we have learnt

The superiority of asceticism and freedom.)

Then there is Tilok Chand Mehroom who paints a luminous portrait of Guru Nanak in '*Tasveere Rehmat*' ('The Portrait of Mercy'):

*'Teri taqir se taqir-e-hasti
hai Guru Nanak,
Teri tanvir har zarre mein
basti hai Guru Nanak,
Teri jagir mein irfan ki
masti hai Guru Nanak,
Teri tahrir auje-haq-
parasti hai Guru Nanak,
Teri tasvir se rahmat
barasti hai Guru Nanak.'*

(To honour you is to honour all existence, Guru Nanak,

Your luminosity illuminates every particle, Guru Nanak,

Your estate endows the intoxication of enlightenment, Guru Nanak,

Your writings are the summit of worshipping Truth, Guru Nanak,

Divine mercy streams down from your portrait, Guru Nanak).

After this sampler of Urdu poetry on Guru Nanak, let us return to Guru Tegh Bahadur on whom the title '*Hind ki Chadar*' was conferred because he spread the *chadar* of compassion and self-sacrifice in upholding freedom of choice.

Here, let us pick up the

strand of compassion, which is one of the five virtues in the Sikh faith, the other four being Sat (truth), Santokh (contentment), Namrata (humility) and Pyaar (love).

Named Tyaag Mal by his parents, there are legendary stories of Guru Tegh Bahadur's kindness towards others. As a four-year-old, he gave away his clothes to a poor naked child whom he met during his elder brother's wedding procession.

It would appear that he instinctively, organically, understood the words of Guru Nanak: '*Dharma*, born of compassion, held steady by the thread of contentment, is the mythical bull that supports the world.' The Sikh concept of '*karuna*' (compassion) is deeply intertwined with '*Sarbat da Bhala*'— the welfare of all — underscoring the belief that true spirituality is incomplete without active kindness and service to others.

Guru Tegh Bahadur composed 116 hymns in 15 ragas, comprising 59 *shabads* and 57 *sloks*; these were included in Guru Granth Sahib by his son, Guru Gobind Singh. I will end with one of his *sloks* which possibly gives a clue to his state of mind when he chose to martyr himself so that Dharma may prevail:

*'The Divine Name in this dark age
Dispels fear and ignorance.
Says Nanak, they who recite it night and day
Triumph in every action.'*

No democracy without dissent, believes CJI Surya Kant



RANBIR SINGH
FORMER VC, NLU, DELHI &
FORMER VC, NALSAR

WITH Justice Surya Kant assuming office as the 53rd Chief Justice of India, many of us in the legal fraternity feel a quiet but profound sense of satisfaction. The appointment of a judge from a modest, middle-class family in Haryana to the highest judicial office captures something essential about the Indian Constitution — its faith that talent and integrity can rise from any corner of the country.

For me, this moment is also deeply personal. As his former teacher, I have seen him first as a serious law student, then as a diligent young advocate, an exacting high court judge and finally as a widely respected judge of the Supreme Court of India. Across these different roles, what has remained constant is his humility, his discipline and his belief that the law exists above all for those who are in dire need of it.

Born in 1962 at Petwar village in Haryana, he graduated from Govern-

ment Post-Graduate College, Hisar, in 1981 and earned his law degree from Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak (1984). He began practice in Hisar district courts, shifted to the Punjab and Haryana High Court, and built a formidable reputation in constitutional, service and civil matters. In 2000, he became the Advocate General of Haryana; in 2001, he was designated Senior Advocate. Elevation to the Punjab and Haryana High Court followed in 2004, and in 2018, he became the Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court before joining the Supreme Court in May 2019.

His judicial record reveals a consistent concern for human dignity. In *Jasvir Singh vs State of Punjab*, while dismissing a particular plea, he recognised conjugal visits and, in suitable cases, procreation as part of Article 21 rights and directed the state to frame a policy on family visits as prison reform. Prisoners, in his view, remain rights-bearing citizens.

As the Chief Justice of Himachal Pradesh High Court, he managed environmental, land acquisition and hydropower disputes in a mountainous, largely rural state, while insisting on punctuality, thorough preparation and courteous hearing even to the youngest lawyers.

At the Supreme Court, he was part of the Bench (headed by then CJI NV Ramana)



AS CJI: Justice Surya Kant signals a justice system that is accessible and empathetic. SANDEEP JOSHI

that, in 2022, effectively suspended the colonial-era sedition law (Section 124A IPC) until the Union re-examines it and protected existing accused persons from fresh prosecution — an order that reaffirmed that dissent is the safety valve of democracy.

Justice Surya Kant has also been an articulate public voice. He has described "democracy without dissent" as a contradiction and silence in the face of injustice as complicity. He has defended the collegium system as an imperfect but vital safeguard of judicial independence. Speaking at Microsoft's global headquarters, he welcomed AI for legal research and drafting but insisted that empathy, moral reasoning and human judgment

The CJI's life reminds young lawyers that excellence comes not from privilege, but from preparation, perseverance and integrity.

remain irreplaceable.

As incoming CJI and ex-officio Chairman of the National Legal Services Authority, he has already signalled two priorities: reducing pendency and promoting mediation and alternative dispute resolution. This is not mere docket-clearing; it reflects his long engagement with legal-aid movements and his conviction that many disputes are better resolved by restoring relationships than by protracted adversarial litigation.

From his tenure, we may reasonably expect a steadfast defence of judicial independence that neither obstructs legitimate governance nor abdicates the court's role as constitutional sentinel; steady, practical reforms that strengthen case manage-

ment, bolster district courts and harness technology to make justice less intimidating and more accessible; a compassionate yet balanced approach to the great social questions of our time — prisoners' dignity, rights of the marginalised and vulnerable groups, gender equality and environmental protection — always aware that the hardest cases demand both heart and restraint; and a warmer, more structured partnership between the higher judiciary and legal academia through internships, research collaborations and shared deliberations that will enrich both the Bench and the classroom.

There will, of course, be challenges and disagreements along the way. That is natural for any Chief Justice who presides over a court where strong minds differ on questions of interpretation and principle. In fact, the health of our judiciary lies in precisely this culture of reasoned dissent, both within and outside the courtroom. Justice Surya Kant himself has not hesitated to take a distinct position where he felt constitutional fidelity demanded it and I hope that under his stewardship, the Supreme Court will remain a forum where competing views are debated with rigour and mutual respect.

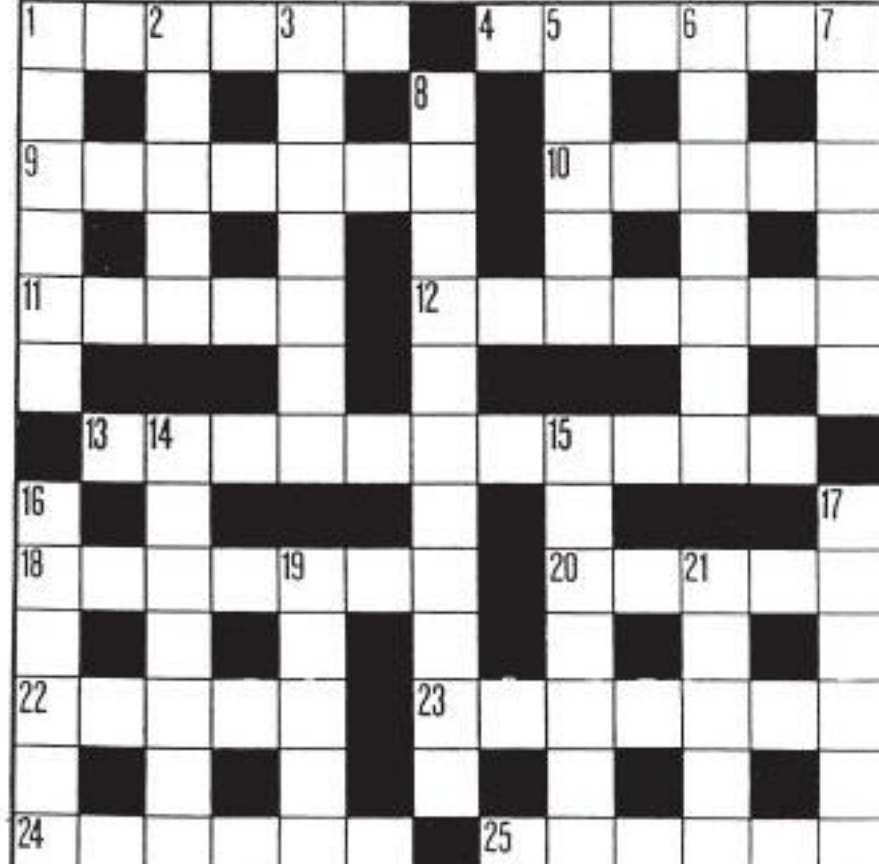
From the point of view of legal education, Justice Surya Kant's elevation also carries a

symbolic message for young students, especially those who come from small towns and non-elite backgrounds. His life story tells them that excellence in the profession does not depend on lineage or privilege, but on preparation, perseverance and ethical commitment. In a time when public discourse around the judiciary is sometimes polarised, it is important to highlight such stories that quietly affirm the seriousness and integrity that still characterise much of Indian judging.

As someone who has spent a lifetime in building institutions such as the NALSAR University of Law and National Law University Delhi, I see Justice Surya Kant's tenure as an opportunity to renew trust in the judiciary as the guardian of the Constitution and the protector of the ordinary citizen. His clarity of thought, his rootedness in the realities of Indian society, and his openness to technology and comparative learning give me confidence that he will lead the court with wisdom and grace.

It is a proud day for Haryana, for his alma mater and for all those who believe that the Indian judiciary can continue to renew itself from within. I look forward, as many others do, to seeing how his vision for a more accessible, more compassionate and more efficient justice system unfolds in the years to come.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 To lower in status (6)
4 Edible bivalve mollusc (6)
9 Fillips (7)
10 Seize wrongfully (5)
11 Theatrical backer (5)
12 Snobbish (4-3)
13 Psychedelic (4-7)
18 In hiding (5,2)
20 Overture (5)
22 Expertness (5)
23 State approval of (7)
24 A precious metal (6)
25 Adom (6)

DOWN


1 Sombre (6)
2 To result in (5)
3 Filthy (7)
5 Offspring of animals (5)
6 Reinforce (7)
7 Attributed character (6)
8 Reluctant to speak (5-6)
14 Animosity (3,4)
15 Aspiring to become (5-2)
16 Proposition to be proved (6)
17 An element in person's character (6)
19 Make detailed research (5)
21 Suffice (5)

Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Bunting, 5 Basic, 8 Argumentative, 9 Sheen, 10 Related, 11 Settee, 12 Sooner, 15 Athwart, 17 Exist, 19 Take one's leave, 20 Essay, 21 Supreme.

Down: 1 Brass, 2 No great shakes, 3 Immense, 4 Gantry, 5 Brawl, 6 Spitting image, 7 Cheddar, 11 Startle, 13 Overlap, 14 Stress, 16 Agony, 18 Theme.

SU DO KU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 26, 2025, WEDNESDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1947
- Margshirsh Shaka 5
- Margshirsh Pavishte 11
- Hijari 1447
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 6, up to 12:03 am
- Vridha Yoga up to 12:42 pm
- Shravan Nakshatra up to 1:33 am
- Moon in Capricorn sign

FORECAST

| SUNSET: | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | 17:23 HRS |
|------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| SUNRISE: | | | 06:57 HRS |
| CITY | MAX | MIN | |
| Chandigarh | 24 | 07 | |
| New Delhi | 24 | 09 | |
| Amritsar | 22 | 07 | |
| Bathinda | 25 | 06 | |
| Jalandhar | 22 | 07 | |
| Ludhiana | 23 | 07 | |
| Bhiwani | 26 | 08 | |
| Hisar | 25 | 05 | |
| Sirsa | 25 | 08 | |
| Dharamsala | 21 | 07 | |
| Manali | 15 | 01 | |
| Shimla | 16 | 06 | |
| Srinagar | 15 | -03 | |
| Jammu | 23 | 10 | |
| Kargil | 08 | -09 | |
| Leh | 06 | -09 | |
| Dehradun | 24 | 08 | |
| Mussoorie | 18 | 06 | |

TEMPERATURE IN °C

POLLUTION AFFECTS ALL, REDRESS CAN'T BE LEFT TO PRIVATE OPTIONS

ALL it the Gurugram model of urban development. In this familiar pattern, the conurbation grows fast, government action on public goods lags, and citizens fend for themselves. If residents were once used to arranging their own power backup, security and even roads, the degraded common resource most metro dwellers are now trying to clean or avoid is the most plentiful of all—air. It is no longer only about masks and indoor purifiers. Portable purifiers and lotions claiming an ‘anti-pollution factor’ are flying off the shelves—never mind expert advice that these methods are unproven. Even hyperbaric chambers, meant to raise blood oxygen levels for medical purposes, are now marketed as anti-pollution services. None of these innovations make a dent in the public problem.

The angst reached such a level this Sunday that when the Delhi Police tried to remove young protestors demanding cleaner air—the second such remonstrance this month—some protestors allegedly used pepper spray on the policemen. Twenty-two of them were taken into judicial custody and charged with obstructing police work and making ‘assertions prejudicial to national integration’, as some also raised slogans for the killed Maoist leader Madvi Hidma. Even if causes got confusingly coupled in Delhi, the grey-ness over Bengaluru and Mumbai held steady. In recent weeks, the IT capital—especially the densely populated East Bengaluru—has seen unprecedented air-quality index levels of 150–170. The commercial capital’s air has also stayed far above safe limits. It is no longer just a ‘Delhi problem’.

The critical question is: how many Indians can afford these *ad hoc* personal solutions? And what about the public health burden? The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air recently highlighted that young children are the most vulnerable, as they breathe faster and absorb more pollutants. For a fair public discourse, we must first remove the artificial cap of 500 on official AQI counts, as independent monitors often notch far higher. The biggest culprits remain traffic congestion, unclean construction, and open waste or fuel burning. Clearly, mandated measures are falling well short. If governance is about doing the greatest good for the greatest number, the most abundant public good has to be urgently cleaned up in the world’s most populous nation.

ACCOUNTABILITY MUST FOR NEW ODISHA HIRING PANEL

THE Odisha cabinet recently cleared the creation of an umbrella recruitment agency to hire personnel for uniformed services in the state. The proposed Odisha Uniformed Services Staff Selection Commission will be responsible for recruiting staff across ranks for four key departments—home, excise, forest, and commerce & transport. The move follows a string of failed hiring exercises, mostly for the state police. The cancellation of police sub-inspector recruitment twice in eight months proved to be the last straw. Charges of question paper leaks from a compromised system prompted the government to hand the probe to the CBI and seek a dedicated recruitment panel that will reportedly be on the lines of the one for the armed forces. On the face of it, the idea addresses a crisis. But what will another recruitment commission offer?

The immediate challenge will be to set up the agency swiftly, as most of the departments have large workforces and the government has set itself a target to fill 1.5 lakh vacancies in five years. Any delay will undo its own promise. In the past, recruitment for the uniformed services was handled by multiple state agencies, none of which could ensure the integrity of the tests. An increasing number of recruitment drives in the last few years were delayed or cancelled as corruption accusations flew thick and fast, severely eroding public trust. The irony is that even the state police recruitment board came up short while conducting its own test to hire sub-inspectors.

Now, a new dedicated agency under the general administration and public grievances department will have the onerous task of doing things in a fair and transparent manner as the future of lakhs of job seekers is at stake. The national trend shows the paper leak mafia is well entrenched and can go to any length to rig the tests for high-profile government jobs. To take on the complex challenge, the Mohan Majhi government would do well not to make the new agency a post-retirement paradise for bureaucrats. It must be designed as a professional body with a strong enforcement authority and accountability. The use of appropriate technology would be a sound investment, too. The new staff selection commission must not end up being another white elephant.

QUICK TAKE

DODGE THAT BULLET

RONY died a thousand deaths when the Trump administration recently announced the quiet burial of its department of government efficiency. Barely eight months after DOGE tsar Elon Musk held aloft a chainsaw and declared his department would slash the American federal bureaucracy to reduce costs, the ship he abandoned half a year ago has sunk. As this newspaper has stated earlier, India has been there. An Expenditure Reforms Commission set up a quarter century ago examined 36 ministries and submitted 10 reports; but it did not move any needle. Administrative reforms commissions met the same fate. The point to note is that even an unprecedentedly powerful team like DOGE may fail at meaningfully cutting government flab. What’s needed is annual efficiency drives within each department.

W HENEVER I try to balance between the esoteric and the everyday, my mind tends to go back to the memory of my teacher, Ramchandra Gandhi.

He was a remarkable philosopher, an authority on mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. I still remember the way Ramu would come to class and quote Whitehead’s lecture at Harvard. Whitehead had apparently once walked into the classroom, banged his head gently, and said, “Gentlemen, I have disturbed the most distant star,” referring to the interconnectedness of the cosmos.

For Ramu, communication and connectivity were part of everyday life. The way he linked them reminds me of the way he used to talk about nationalism. For Ramchandra Gandhi, nationalism was a filigreed moment—full of nuances, a dissenting imagination that created a pluralistic world.

For him, deep down inside, nationalism was a different way of looking at reality—a dream world that created a sense of alternatives. Within this context, he pointed out that the world of nationalism was not actually an invention of the nation-state. For India, and in fact for many nationalists, the dream of nationalism was a dream of inventing an alternative childhood.

Childhood, in fact, was the focus of many nationalist moments. It’s best captured in Rabindranath Tagore’s statement: “Every child born today is an indication that god is not yet tired of man.” In this sense, Tagore captured the essence of the Indian national movement.

Childhood was a dream of flexibility. Childhood was a dream of freedom. And childhood brought about a sense of playfulness. This sense of play—with the capacity to imagine and inhabit alternatives—is something we have lost today. The dream of playfulness is caught in many ways in how we learn to live with uncertainty and celebrate plurality. It is this sense of play that we have lost in our nationalist movement, which has become more monologic, more uniform. We have created a monopoly of ideas, which now come as dictates rather than dialogues. Playfulness—the politics of play—is something our politics has forgotten.

The first thing we have to understand is that the emphasis on the nation-state is misleading. For many nationalists in India—from Tagore to Patrick Geddes

Nationalism did not begin with the nation-state. Both Tagore and Gandhi underlined the need for playfulness in the national imagination and dreamt of an alternative childhood

BEFORE DISSENT, NEED PLAYFULNESS IN NATIONALISM

SHIV VISVANATHAN

Social scientist associated with the Compost Heap, a group researching alternative imaginations



MANDAR PARDIKAR

to Maria Montessori—it was their childhood that was the basis of the dream world. Childhood, in a way, was an articulation of alternatives. And this is what we must begin by emphasising that the nation-state was not so much a political economy as a pedagogic construct—a new way of understanding reality, teaching it, and communicating it. What marked childhood, and what marked nationalism in particular, was a certain sense of playfulness. This can be brought out by a series of examples.

One of the first things one thinks of is Mahatma Gandhi’s own work on the charkha. The charkha, he said, was not just an instrument; it is a weave of playful ideas. In this context,

he said the charkha could be used to teach Pythagorean ideas and mathematics—a pedagogic tool, an invention to teach through play.

Gandhi emphasised again and again the sense of fun that nationalism and play brought about. I am reminded of the time when industrialist Jammalal Bajaj gave Gandhi a Ford Motor car. It ran in the ashram for a week or two, then broke down. Gandhi had it pulled by a set of oxen, and playfully introduced it to visitors as “my Ox-Ford”.

It is this sense of playfulness, this sense of alternatives, this openness to interpretation that made nationalism not only a dissenting imagination, but a dream of alternatives—

DIPPING INTO THE DPDP REGIME

ATUL N MENON

Lawyer at the Supreme Court of India

NOVEMBER 14 was an important date in India’s digital journey, marking a milestone by bringing to life a comprehensive framework that fundamentally changes how companies handle personal data. One of the major things that changes with the notification of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules, 2025—at least in theory—is the way an individual’s browsing history, e-commerce trail, or social media use can be used by advertisers. We are all used to privacy policies posted on these platforms, though hardly anyone reads them. What’s critical for the layman to note is that the DPDP framework transports privacy from a constitutional promise to enforceable rights and duties.

The good news is that companies can no longer hide behind impenetrable legal jargon. There has to be a clear and understandable request from the person determining the purpose and means of processing personal data (data fiduciary), for consent from the person whose data is being processed (data principal). The request shall be accompanied by a notice informing the principal of the purpose for processing the personal data, the way the principal can withdraw or modify consent, the grievance mechanism available, and the way complaints can be raised against the data fiduciary.

The rules provide timelines for data fiduciaries to maintain records before erasing them from their system. It is also significant to note that the rules apply to processing personal data outside India if it is in connection with offering goods or services within India.

The rules also provide for registration of ‘consent managers’, entities that play the role of a trusted intermediary between data principals and data fiduciaries, by assisting the data principal to manage their consents through a given platform. Consent managers have certain obligations too, such as implementing reasonable technical and organisational measures to prevent personal data breaches, and maintaining detailed records of every consent given, denied, or withdrawn, along with related notices and data sharing.

Ultimately, the consent must be a clear affirmation of an agreement to process personal data for a specific purpose. This shows a fundamental shift in power by placing the individual—data principal—at the centre of the framework. The DPDP rules that convert the framework into day-to-day obligations.

The DPDP framework also takes data breaches seriously. The haunting stories of password leaks, personal photos getting exposed, and bank details stolen cannot be dealt with silently by companies accountable for the breach. There is a mandatory requirement for them to report to the Data Protection Board without delay, and the board will thereafter have to take note of the steps taken by the company to remedy the wrong or mitigate the risk. The board is designed to be entirely digital. This means filings, hearings, and decisions are all expected to be done online.



EXPRESS

Users need to understand how the new Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules affect their online lives. From privacy protection to redress options, much will change in the next 18 months. The efficacy of the new Data Protection Board will be essential in making the framework robust

Another important point to note (especially if you are a parent) is that your children are protected. Data fiduciaries cannot process your child’s data without your verifiable consent. Companies cannot track your child’s behaviour or show them targeted advertisements.

The penalties that the Board can impose range from ₹10,000 (for data principals who provide wrong information or impersonate another person through the data they provide) to ₹250 crore (for violations of the Act by data fiduciaries). These fines are designed for body corporates to take notice. However, not all body corporates are treated the same

way; the central government’s department for promotion of industry and internal trade-recognised startups have lighter compliance mandates. Further, the rules provide softer tools, such as mediation and voluntary undertakings.

There are also certain legitimate uses that are exempted. For example, in case of a medical emergency that poses a threat to life or immediate health of the data principal, or in taking measures to prevent an epidemic. The central government itself has been given a wide range of exemptions. It can process data for ‘security’ or ‘public order’. While the government maintains that public interest overrides privacy concerns to the worry of critics, the exemptions granted to them remain a concern, as they reignite the debate over unchecked surveillance and abuse of power.

Unlike the General Data Protection Regulation, 2018, which is the comprehensive data privacy law enacted by the European Union, which demands strict necessity, proportionality, and independent oversight, India’s DPDP leaves these boundaries unclear, echoing the long-standing constitutional worries.

Importantly, a recent notification states that the law will be rolled out in a staggered manner. While some provisions take effect immediately, the main compliance requirements for companies will take effect after 18 months. While this appears to be extremely practical, the most crucial citizen facing rights, such as informed consent, breach notification, data correction and erasure, and grievance redressal, are deferred for 18 months. The Data Protection Board, scheduled to be set up in the next one year for digitally accessible grievance redress, faces scrutiny for potentially limited independence—appointments and removals are tightly managed by the central government.

In any event, the notification of the DPDP marks a transformative moment and plays a crucial role in India’s growing digital economy. Its success shall inevitably rest on the shoulders of the citizens, corporates and the regulators in creating an ecosystem that is both secure and inclusive. (Views are personal)

something we have lost today.

As Ramu pointed out, nationalism was a dream of childhood, a dream of playfulness. And connecting the two was a deep sense of alternatives.

I still remember my father telling me that during his school days, he worked on vacation with the Raman group in science at Bengaluru. He was still at school, but was invited to the discussions. Because he took part in them, he obtained his first publication in the journal *Nature* while still a schoolboy.

National playfulness, then, was the possibility of the unexpected, the uncertain, the plural—and it is this playfulness that we lack today. Play was not just a rule-bound game. Play was an attempt to create a different kind of creative imagination. One can think of this in two contexts—in the debates between Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi wanted the charkha to be an instrument of daily discipline. He pointed out that merely creating a charkha in an imitative sense was not enough. One needed to create a sense of diversity. And it was in this context that he emphasised that the erotic must be part of the everyday.

Tagore’s critique of Gandhi, then, was about how to bring the erotic—the sensuous and the creative—into the everyday. And this could be done only through a notion of playfulness.

Gandhi went further. He pointed out that colonialism cannot be seen only as a dreary ethic of protest and resistance. Anti-colonialism, he felt, must contain playfulness. In this context, Gandhi said one of the deep tasks of India was to “rescue the West from its dreariness”.

It is here that play becomes central to the Indian national movement.

So what Ramu Gandhi analysed was that the Indian national movement was plural, playful, a dream of childhood—and, in this context, it provided a structure of alternative thought. Ramu pointed out that it is precisely what we miss today. Distinctiveness lies in being playful, serious, plural—in creating an alternative world of imagination.

The Indian national movement was full of different dreams of childhood. One can think of Montessori, of the occult child of whom Jiddu Krishnamurti was an example, or of Tagore’s dream of Shantiniketan, where childhood became an anchor for an alternative world.

It is precisely this that one finds missing today.

(Views are personal)
(svcsds@gmail.com)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Business booster

Ref: *Simpler labour laws must also aim to protect scarce jobs* (Nov 25). Replacement of outdated laws is only a baby step towards uncorking flourishing businesses. Let businesses operate with minimal State intervention and generate jobs. More jobs can minimise unscrupulous labour exploitation, leading to a *laissez-faire* success.

Ullattil Pakiteeri Raghunathan, Thrissur

Tribal oppression

Ref: *Address tribal rights to eradicate Maoism* (Nov 25). Before reaching any conclusions, we must realise that tribal communities often do not differentiate between forms of State authority. To them the oppressive Mughals, the British, and the zamindars were all the same—faces of tyrants.

Anwesha Mishra, Bhadrapur

Deceptive bonhomie

Ref: *An unlikely romance* (Nov 25). Indian politics is full of instances of deceptive bonhomie amid ideological divisions. The outward bonhomie hardly covers instances like the conflicting Karnataka CM aspirants. The JD(U)-BJP alliance, itself, is only for the greed of power.

Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru

Digital addiction

Ref: *Old hobbies give way to new addictions* (Nov 25). The fact that a considerable part of youth, almost addicted to physical prowess, has been devoid of traditions by the ‘digital ally’ disturbs us. It is ironic that innovations are considered to be the imperative to combat physical distance with digital propinquity.

S Madhavan Thampi, Alappuzha

Hisar’s pride

Ref: *53rd CJI* (Nov 25). Hisar is proud of Justice Surya Kant’s appointment as India’s 53rd Chief Justice. Petwar village’s heartfelt festivities show how much his community loves him. His rise from a modest classroom to the highest judicial position in the country is incredibly motivating and truly inspiring.

Shamil Ezhuthumthodi, Kozhikode

Immortal Dharmendra

Ref: *A life lived king-sized* (Nov 25). A star has fallen, but he mesmerised everyone by his ruggedness and cool acting in all of his great hits: *Sholay*, *Chupke Chupke*, and *Phool aur Patthar* among others. His breakthrough performance in *Haqueeqat* was a befitting feat to his evergreen cinematic career. He will continue to live in spirit in our hearts.

K Venkatasubramanian, Chennai

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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RBI upbeat on ‘virtuous cycle’ of pvt investment, commends govt efforts

THE latest monthly ‘State of the Economy’ report of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is quite bullish about the economy: “The fiscal, monetary, and regulatory measures undertaken so far this year should pave the way for a virtuous cycle of higher private investment, productivity, and growth, leading to long-term economic resilience.” The bullishness is not groundless. Global headwinds, including the tariffs imposed by the Donald Trump administration, and domestic challenges have failed to break the country’s economy’s momentum; it remains the fastest-growing economy in the world. It is true that the quality of high growth rate has been challenged by experts; critics have pointed out, not entirely inaccurately, that public

expenditure, especially on infrastructure, has been the main prop of brisk economic expansion (though there have been indications that private investment is picking up). The buoyancy in October can be directly attributed to rejig in goods and services tax (GST) rates, coupled with festival spending. “GST collections improved over the previous month, indicating a strong pickup in consumer demand,” the report states. While technically it is not necessarily the viewpoint of the central bank, but the fact that it was prepared under the guidance of Deputy Governor Poonam Gupta hints Mint Street. Improved macroeconomic frameworks and outcomes have not only enhanced the ability of financial institutions to support the macroeconomy

but also allowed the RBI to better calibrate regulatory measures, to improve the efficiency of financial intermediation and augment the flow of credit to the broader economy, the report said. Further, inflation has moderated to a historic low. Financial conditions remained benign, with the flow of financial resources to the commercial sector increasing significantly, it noted. These glad tidings are not accidental but the result of a variety of decisions taken in this calendar year, not just the rationalisation of GST rates before Diwali but also the big relief in personal income tax in Budget 2025-26. The sentiment is upbeat after the festival season indices, but private-investment cycles need more than sentiment to have a long run. They require an enabling

policy environment that reduces uncertainty, lowers compliance burden, and rewards efficiency and risk-taking. It is here that the government’s reform agenda becomes critical. Though much has been done on this front, a lot more remains to be done. Liberalisation must not be seen as a one-time event or a set of isolated policy reforms, but as a continuous process aimed at deepening market efficiency and facilitating enterprise. Several sectors still remain encumbered by legacy regulations, high transaction costs, and opaque approval processes. Land acquisition remains a persistent challenge for investors. Contract enforcement, despite improvements, is still slow by global standards. The financial system, while stable, needs deeper

credit markets and more vibrant risk-capital ecosystems to support innovation-led growth. India’s labour force participation, especially of women, remains low, limiting the potential for long-term productivity gains. The new labour codes will improve the situation as they will help everyone, including the employees and employers. The government must also ensure that its liberalisation agenda is not diluted by ad hoc interventions that undermine policy predictability. Excessive reliance on import tariffs, frequent policy reversals in certain sectors, and inconsistent enforcement of regulatory norms can deter investors. A transparent, rules-based environment is indispensable for sustaining investor confidence—both domestic and foreign.

LETTERS

Salute to the father of India’s White Revolution

NOVEMBER 26, which marks the birth anniversary of Dr Varghese Kurian, a great visionary and innovator, popularly hailed as India’s Father of White Revolution, is aptly celebrated as ‘National Milk Day’. Famed for his ‘Operation Flood’, the world’s largest agricultural program, he played a key role in the establishment and success of the Amul Brand. Dr Kurian’s relentless ways have helped India emerge as the world’s largest producer of milk in the world. His leadership, initiative, and vision transformed India’s dairy industry, significantly improving the livelihood of millions of farmers from all over. Associated with several top milk-related boards and federations, Dr Kurian served as the Vice-Chancellor of Allahabad Central University and GAU. His pioneering milk cooperative movement is adopted in several developing nations. Winner of the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award, Krishi Ratna, and World Food Prize, he has also been decorated with the Padma Vibhushan, among several other national and global recognitions. The National Milk Day serves as a poignant reminder of Kurian’s enduring legacy and celebrating abundance of nature and appreciates the role of milk in nourishing India’s progress and prosperity.

Dr Burra Madhusudhan Reddy, Karimnagar

CJI raises hopes of speedy disposal of cases

THIS is further to your editorial “Justice Surya Kant has this task cut out” (THI Nov 25). Coming from a humble background possessing rich experience in disposing of a variety of cases, which also includes sensitive ones, reminds us that Justice Surya Kant is a tough man who goes by the law. His 15-month tenure as the 53rd Chief Justice of India will be keenly watched by all. Even as he expressed concern at the increase in pendency of cases, his contention that an innovative method would be devised after taking into confidence all stakeholders to reveal his positive attitude to fast-track justice.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad-3

Addressing court backlog is a good augury

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant’s focus on reducing the massive arrears in the Supreme Court underscores his commitment to ensuring timely justice. The growing pendency is not just a logistical issue, but one that undermines public trust in the judicial system. By prioritising this issue, Justice Kant aims to streamline the court’s operations, offering citizens quicker resolutions while upholding the integrity of the judicial process. His tenure will likely be judged on how effectively he addresses this critical concern.

Dr Vijaykumar H K, Raichur

Justice Surya Kant rings in positive air

THIS refers to your editorial ‘Justice Surya Kant has his task cut out’. The remarkable thing about Justice Surya Kant is his proven track-record at delivering speedy verdicts. His priority to clear the backlog cases (90,000) pending in the Supreme Court is commendable. The effect of the CJI’s advice to litigants not to bypass High Courts and resort to the Supreme Court will be watched closely.

K V Raghuram, Wayanad

Oppn must support new labour laws

APPROPOS ‘New labour codes will boost economic growth in the long run’ (THI Nov 24), the Centre has announced four labour codes that will modernise outdated labour laws. These Codes, besides making appointment letters mandatory, propose to include all workers including gig and platform workers under Social Security Cover, PF and ESIC and other Security benefits. If properly implemented, they will ensure work satisfaction among workers, and enhance productivity and output, impacting the economy positively. The opposition must not stand in the way of implementation of these codes, which have been largely welcomed by businesses.

Dr George Jacob, Kochi

Rahul should end power tussle in K’taka

THE rift between the Karnataka Chief Minister and his Deputy is apparently heading for a public confrontation. Rahul Gandhi and Congress high command have obviously failed to resolve this issue amicably. Managing internal party affairs efficiently and effectively is a prerequisite for the Congress at this point. Rahul Gandhi should display his leadership qualities in tackling the earring factions in Karnataka. After the poor performance in the Bihar elections, he can ill-afford the luxury of procrastination on this matter. It is a real testing time for him and his party.

M V Nagavender Rao, Hyderabad-4

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

Speaker Khader vows issue-based Winter Session; 33 Bills likely in Belagavi

MANGALURU: Assembly Speaker U.T. Khader on Tuesday assured that the upcoming Winter Legislative Session in Belagavi will be conducted strictly as per constitutional norms, ensuring that debates remain focused on governance and public interest rather than political confrontations. The session is scheduled to begin on December 8.

Responding to questions regarding current political speculation over possible power-sharing changes within Karnataka’s ruling establishment, Khader said that as the presiding officer his responsibility is to maintain the dignity of the House. “I will strictly follow constitutional provisions and rules of debate. Political overtones will not be allowed to dominate the proceedings. The session is for the people’s issues and it will remain that way,” he stated. Khader revealed that the government may introduce 33 bills and a set of amendments during the session, of which six draft bills have already reached the Speaker’s office. While refusing to elaborate on their content, he maintained that all proposals coming up for discussion are aimed at strengthening administration and improving public service delivery.

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



RAVULAPATI SEETARAMARAO

Election results in India have rarely been wrong! Survey polls are the ones that have been dramatically off in some elections, causing unnecessary doubts among people before the results are declared. This time the people of the country did not get it wrong—and neither did the survey polls. Looking at the nature of by-elections held across the country, including Bihar, one thing became clear: however the inducements political parties offer and their attempts to bribe, voters have the last laugh and deliver the outcome that they have decided upon. This is a mirror showing how resilient our democracy is in this country.

What more evidence is needed to prove how stable the future of our democracy is? The fact is that mistakes by rulers, opposition parties and the public sometimes give rise to doubts. Seven decades back when the country took its place in the world as an independent nation, elections were held cleanly and people believed the voters were honest. That image

has changed now. The reason can be traced to the erosion of values among political leaders. Service has been replaced by self-interest. Every party’s priority is to win elections. Using the language of service, they seek power and the money that comes with it. Saying that every party’s leaders behave this way would be an overstatement. But because many leaders brazenly display such behaviours, voters—imitating that performance and adopting the life truth “why bother with money?”—succumb to all sorts of temptations without hesitation. Yet in elections, as if echoing the proverb “so long as it’s somewhere good...” voters reveal their true selves and indirectly teach a lesson to the leaders.

This election season, especially in places outside Bihar, it is important to set aside the impressive statistics of the NDA’s victories and clearly explain a few truths about what these elections have revealed. In Bihar, Nitish Kumar once again proved that he is a strong leader. Yet he could not have won on his party’s strength alone—like Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu implied, politics must be played in alliance; victory comes only when you go before voters together with the BJP and other parties.

Mahagathbandhan’s humiliating defeat was not any minor development. These elections have undeniably heightened doubts that the Congress, which once domi-



Every party needs proper leadership. Voters must have faith in the party’s leader — and that is what happened in Bihar: the voters’ trust in Nitish Kumar, matched by their confidence in the national leader Narendra Modi, was decisive. In contrast, the Mahagathbandhan suffered from weak leadership and a lack of trust in Rahul Gandhi and other leaders. The Congress party’s by-election win in Hyderabad’s Jubilee Hills, especially after their heavy defeat in Bihar, has given them a much-needed boost.

nated politics, might be fading away. Even though Lalu Prasad Yadav’s party did not win many seats, it cannot be ignored that it gained more votes than the BJP, which is driving the national political wheel.

Every party needs proper leadership. Voters must have faith in the party’s leader — and that is what happened in Bihar: the voters trust in Nitish Kumar, matched by their confidence in the national leader Narendra Modi, was decisive. In contrast, the Mahagathbandhan suffered from weak leadership and a lack of trust in Rahul Gandhi and other leaders. Unfortunately, caste, religion, and inducements had an outsized impact

in these elections.

Welfare schemes have become obstacles to development — the fear that they are used merely to win power is unsettling serious democrats. States are beginning to adopt the principle that the budget should focus on welfare. No political party currently has the courage to say “no” to the introduction of welfare programs aimed at women, the poor, students, or commuters.

Voters demanding “we want social development” have gone dry! Who can do anything amid such circumstances? In this democracy, where religion, caste and regionalism are taking over, if we don’t prevent the thought that India’s democracy won’t

last long, nothing will change. Only when a real leader steps forward somewhere — with the sort of development plans the people need and a political party committed to building an inclusive society — and wins power by inspiring the public, can this welfare façade be stripped away and governments actually govern for the people’s benefit.

Prime Minister Modi, elected three times in succession, cannot ignore this point — governance must be structured so that welfare and development are distributed equitably. Whether debts are taken on by individuals or by governments, we cannot remain complacent.

If leaders elected by the people act with the conviction that piling up debt over the next five to ten years is acceptable and that people’s welfare and their future are not the priorities, the nation’s future will be sacrificed. It is only when a chief ruler acts as a statesman guided by political ethics and not just as a politician, can real development be achieved. Any leader in power who, with farsightedness, ensures equal progress for all will be remembered by history as a truly meaningful leader.

Representatives must possess vision that is long-term, not short-sighted. The NDA has won big in Bihar! Tough decisions will need to be taken. If other parties in the government that gave support to Nitish Kumar insist on their own agendas, they might win elections again in some way

— but they won’t win people’s hearts. Winning is not what matters; what is more important is achieving development for everyone without discrimination. Let’s hope and expect that this newly elected government will work towards that goal.

There’s nothing surprising about the NDA winning other by-elections (including in Kashmir). Naturally, voters give advantage to the party in power in by-elections — and they did so this time too. The polls were almost spot on.

In Telangana, the survey numbers were also accurate this time. The only thing that was off was BJP’s count! Amid Congress allegations that the BRS and BJP had quietly helped each other, BRS managed 74,259 votes and the loss was not so devastating. Once voters believe that KCR’s leadership still guides the BRS, and irrespective of any further splits, it can still pull off a win at some point.

The Congress party’s by-election win in Hyderabad’s Jubilee Hills, especially after their heavy defeat in Bihar, has given them a much-needed boost. Congress may now be in a position to trust A Revanth Reddy for a few years. Still, there’s also a reputation that Congress is a party that does not live up to expectations; can that really be forgotten?

(The writer is a retired IPS officer, who has served as an Additional DGP of Andhra Pradesh)

Bhogapuram airport: North Andhra’s new economic engine

NOMULA SRINIVAS RAO

NORTH Andhra is on the cusp of a historic transformation. The upcoming Alluri Sitarama Raju international airport at Bhogapuram, being developed by GMR Visakhapatnam International Airport Limited (GVIAL), is emerging as the single most powerful catalyst for economic resurgence across Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, and Srikakulam districts. With construction progressing at remarkable speed and operations set to begin by June, the airport is poised to redefine the region’s future in aviation, tourism, industry, and urban development.

A modern gateway rising ahead of schedule:

As of the last quarter of 2025, Bhogapuram airport has achieved up to 90 per cent overall completion, with the runway nearly 97 per cent finished and the taxiways by 92 per cent. The terminal building, already 79 per cent completed, is taking shape as a modern, energy-efficient structure designed for global standards.

A validation flight in December will mark a major milestone, testing key systems before full-scale operations begin. According to GMR Group’s leadership, the project is running six months ahead of earlier projections, underlining the strong government-market synergy driving this development.

Phase I alone entails an investment of ₹4,592 crore. It will be capable of handling six million passengers annually, with future expansion targeting 18 MPPA.

Tourism: Opening the gates to global footfall:

The region’s immense tourism potential—its serene coastline, Araku’s rolling hills, Buddhist heritage sites, and tribal culture—has long been overshadowed by inadequate international connectivity. Bhogapuram airport will change that perception profoundly.

- Direct international flights will make Visakhapatnam–Araku–Srikakulam a seamless multi-destination circuit for global tourists.
- Hotel chains such as Oberoi and Taj are exploring new properties around the airport zone.
- The greater Vizianagaram–Bheemunipatnam stretch is poised to become a premium hospitality corridor.

Local businesses—from tour operators to artisans—are expected to witness significant demand growth, making tourism one of the biggest beneficiaries of the airport’s operationalisation.

Logistics and aerospace: A new industrial frontier:

With a 5,000 sq. meter cargo terminal and dedicated perishable handling facilities, Bhogapuram is set to become the logistics heart of north Andhra. The region’s export profile—sea-



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food, textiles, cashew, pharmaceuticals—stands to gain exponentially from reduced transit times and direct international cargo connectivity.

The most ambitious component is the world’s largest Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility, planned on a massive 25-acre footprint within a 500-acre aerospace ecosystem. This initiative aims to attract global aviation and defence manufacturers, position-

IT & Electronics: Powering the ‘East California’ vision:

The government’s aspiration to develop Visakhapatnam into an

ing Bhogapuram as a major aerospace hub on India’s East Coast.

The MRO facility alone is expected to generate thousands of skilled jobs, catalysing an aviation ecosystem that has so far been absent in this geography.

“East California”—a technology and innovation hub—is closely linked to world-class air connectivity. Bhogapuram Airport strengthens this vision through:

- Improved access for global IT executives and investors.
- Better integration with proposed Google AI initiatives and new tech clusters.
- Opportunities for manufacturing electronics owing to faster cargo movement and proximity to major national markets.

North Andhra has traditionally been behind Hyderabad and Bengaluru in tech-driven growth. Bhogapuram is expected to narrow that gap meaningfully.

Real estate: The airport-led growth corridor:

Large infrastructure projects invariably create real estate ripples—and Bhogapuram is no exception. Land values along the Anandapuram–Bheemunipatnam–Bhogapuram corridor have already surged, and experts anticipate a 25–40% appreciation post-launch.

VMRDA is complementing this growth with:

- A proposed six-lane beach corridor connecting Vizag city to the airport.
- Enhanced internal road networks across 15 major stretches.
- Plans for metro connectivity, theme-based townships, education hubs, and

wellness zones. The region is rapidly evolving into a multi-modal urban cluster that will support both residential and commercial expansion for decades.

A new era of job opportunities:

Phase I of the airport alone is projected to create around 5,000 direct jobs, with several thousand more in indirect employment spanning hospitality, transportation, retail, and technical services. The aerospace ecosystem, IT parks, and logistics facilities around the airport will significantly expand this number, making Bhogapuram a major livelihood generator.

A regional transformation:

The Bhogapuram international airport is not merely a transport hub; it is the dawn of a new economic geography. Its influence will be felt across sectors—tourism, IT, logistics, aerospace, education, and real estate. It will reposition North Andhra as a vibrant, future-ready region capable of attracting global investments and talent.

As the project races toward completion, Bhogapuram stands as a shining symbol of what visionary infrastructure can achieve. It promises to integrate north Andhra with the world, stimulate balanced regional development, and convert potential into prosperity.

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

DECCAN
Chronicle

26 NOVEMBER 2025

Labour codes need unions,
industry on the same page

The Union government's notification on the implementation of the four new labour codes that consolidated 29 labour laws passed by Parliament in 2019 indeed marks a "historic reform" as the government would call it but it has evoked contrary responses from the industry and labour unions.

The government claims that the introduction of the four codes — the Code on Wages, 2019, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Code on Social Security, 2020, and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 — "streamlines compliance, modernises outdated provisions and creates a simplified, efficient framework that promotes ease of doing business while safeguarding workers' rights and welfare".

It is a fact that the new codes cover the labour scene in India in the aftermath of the economic liberalisation policy of the 1990s which remarkably changed life in India. Employees in the organised sector earned their rights through collective bargaining while those in the unorganised sector, including gig and platform workers, never figured in the scheme of things. The latter are the new kids on the block who have no access to the rights of the workers — they work for a wage and then face all the uncertainties of life on their own — unlike employees in the organised sector where the companies and the government share the burden of stabilising the workers' life.

Gig workers are a new reality and the government has now finally acknowledged it through the new labour codes which offers them provident fund, gratuity after a year of service, coverage under the Employee State Insurance scheme for health-care and insurance. Aggregators are now required to contribute one to two per cent of their annual turnover, capped at five per cent of the amount payable to gig and platform workers, towards a Social Security Fund for the welfare of these workers.

However, while doing so, the government has removed some of the protections employees in the traditional and organised sectors have enjoyed till date. The new code mandates that an enterprise need not take the government's permission to retrench employees if it employs fewer than 300 people, raising the threshold from 100. This would mean that hiring and firing can be an easier option available to many more enterprises. This could introduce a new sense of uncertainty in the minds of lakhs of workers even if it might warm the hearts of investors who have been clamouring for a "hire and fire" policy. The government expects that the new policy would bring in more investments that will create more jobs. Job security and investment protection need not be mutually exclusive but the government appears to be thinking in the opposite direction. This is a political question that will reverberate in the air in the times to come.

Now, the rules for the new codes are yet to be finalised. The government has promised wider consultation before finalising them. Its duty is to walk the talk, engage all stakeholders and arrive at a consensus that will foster more investments and add quality to the life of the working class, including job security. It should also promise labour unions and the investing class a periodic review of the codes.

What will be the key focus area: the unfettered flow of finance capital and guaranteed returns or the human beings at work? That is a political question, and hence the protests organised by trade unions against the introduction of the codes have become all the more important.

Dharam to rule hearts forever

There are many reasons for a sentimental India being driven to such an indefinable sadness on the departure of an iconic actor. Amitabh Bachchan, in a moving tribute to his fellow star who played Veeru to his Jai in *Sholay*, the all-time cult classic of Hindi cinema, ascribes it not only to Dharmendra's renowned physical presence but to the largeness of his heart.

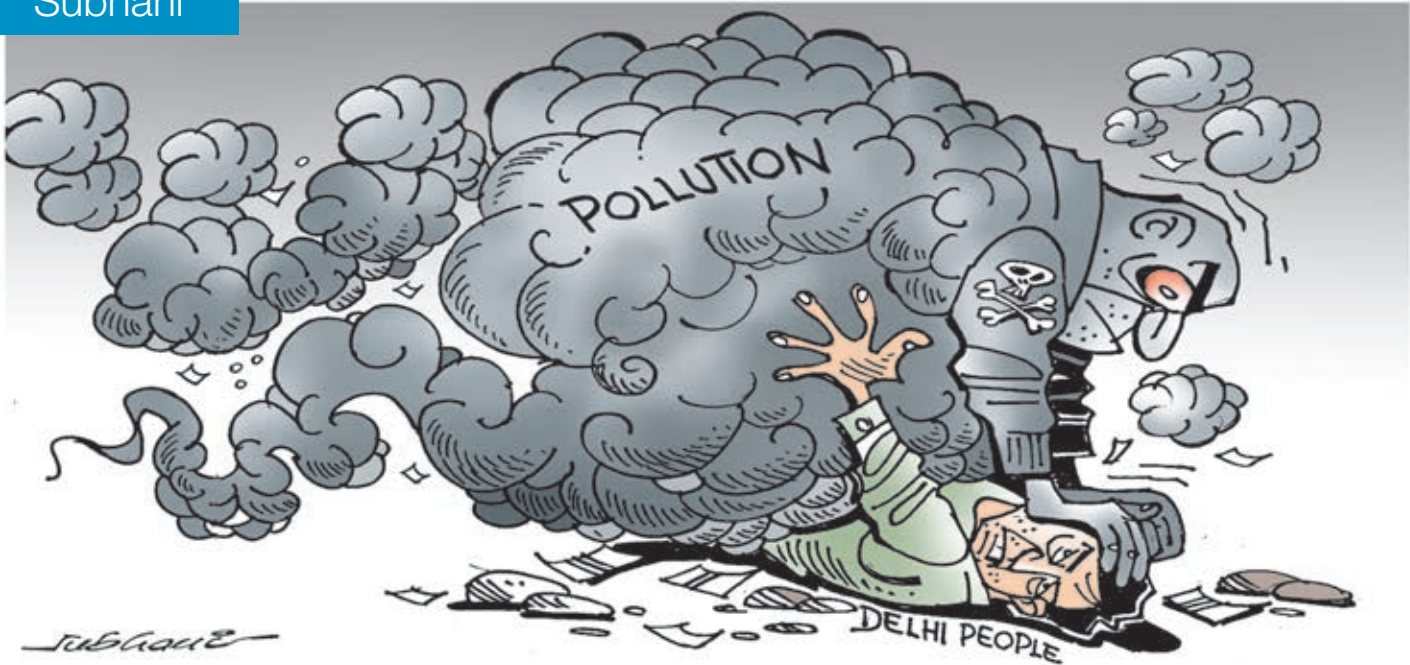
It was his ability to touch hearts that endeared 'Garam-Dharam' to millions as he enchanted theatre-going film audiences in its golden era with his felicitous moves through varied performances as an action hero with rugged good looks, an empathetic lover capable of a grand romance or a comic with a great sense of timing in delivering witticisms.

He played the perfect foil as Veeru to Jai in a great bromance, but it is a little-known fact that Dharmendra had recommended Bachchan's acting abilities and his voice to the filmmaker. A loveable aspect of his personality was said to be his being in a comfort zone as a cinema star who was never jealous of stars around him going to become superstars. The number of films with double male billing in which he starred is a testament to his sporting and professional approach to acting, ideally devoid of jealousies.

His life's calling was to be in front of the camera as a director's actor and hence his universal rating as an all-rounder who remained happy just to be in films, many of which kept the box office busy as delivered a record number of blockbusters in over 300 films. Dharmendra's dedicated adherence to his calling was such that his career spanned 65 years even as a film of his is to get a posthumous release next month.

Declared the heartthrob of the nation, he was nonchalant to the extent of marrying a second time in marriage to his co-star Hema Malini, currently an MP, and managing to give his time generously to the two branches of family, which spawned many a filmstar. To find happiness in any film and any setting was a gift that he enjoyed till the end came when he may even have read his obituary as restless media declared his death days before he breathed his last in one of his homes in Mumbai.

Subhani



From 26/11 to Delhi 10/11:
Terror raises bar in India



Abhijit
Bhattacharyya

It was another November seventeen years ago when terrorists from across the border made mincemeat of India's security system for three whole days, shaking the nation's financial capital to its core, bringing it to a grinding halt for days. Fast forward to another November: The blast near Delhi's Red Fort on November 10, 2025 was terror at a different level: from the direct assault in Mumbai to indirect tactics to massacre people in India's capital. The symbolic gesture and importance of the 2025 terror strike is hard to miss. The suicide mission was undertaken with the detonation of a "chemical weapon" at the Red Fort-Chandni Chowk confluence — the commercial hub of Old Delhi and a stone's throw from the iconic Jama Masjid. This was the heart of Mughal India, which was ruled from the Red Fort across the road, and later the seat of Britain's empire. This is where daily transactions involving crores of rupees take place, enriching the economics and commerce of India.

The shift in the modus operandi was stark. Mumbai 2008 was raw physical penetration by outsiders from across the border in neighbouring Pakistan. Delhi 2025 so far seems an indigenous and home-grown plot through a cocktail of physical-cum-psychological terror to leave a deep scar on the nation's psyche. The location, next to the historic Red Fort, was significant.

The self-driven car suicide bomb detonation on November 10 appears to be the culmination of a long-term plan executed via a sleek, silent and sophisticated chain of command, control and communication centre spanning several Indian states. That is worrisome. While Delhi 2025 seems a sordid reminder of the Pakistan-

sponsored Mumbai blasts of March 1993, as well as the mayhem in our financial capital in November 2008, the Red Fort terror seems something new and more than what meets the eye.

The Red Fort strike appears to manifest the "Strategy Indirect Approach" in its full ferocity to show how to pose a strategic threat to India's sovereignty. Most of Delhi's English media described the gory event with characteristic elan: "Doctors of White-Collar Terror"; "Ammonium nitrate used by blast could be from Gujarat"; "Lens on Pak, Bangladesh MBBS holder" and "Al Falah students, faculty, villagers in grip of anxiety". Could not the media, however, delve deeper to the genesis of terror and come up with independent analyses due to the suicide bombing's location, position, course, direction and impact?

While terror has been broadly defined by the internationally recognised Black's Law Dictionary, yet all of 193 member states of the United Nations have till date failed to come to a single, unanimous legal definition. There has been piecemeal growth of several categories of semantics on terror/terrorism. Thus, "terror is extreme fear; one or more violent acts that cause extreme fear" and "terrorism's use or threat of violence to intimidate as a means of achieving political ends". Then there is "agriterrorism to disrupt/destroy a country food supply", "bioterrorism to intentional release of harmful biological agents, such as bacteria or viruses" (like the Chinese-origin Covid-19), "cyberterrorism, domestic terrorism, eco-terrorism, international terrorism, lone wolf terrorism, narco-terrorism, paper terrorism, state-sponsored terrorism, state terrorism".

Which of these now stands as the most deadly, destructive and demonic? Un-

'Bio-terrorism', if not stamped out in good time, will inevitably lead to the next stage of 'weapons of mass destruction' intended to kill human beings, without discriminating between combatants and non-combatants, on a massive scale'

doubtedly, it is "bio-terrorism", which stands at the top, like nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction. "Bio-terrorism", if not stamped out in good time, will inevitably lead to the next stage of "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD) "intended to kill human beings, without discriminating between combatants and non-combatants, on a massive scale". And apart from nuclear weapons, "the most frequently cited example is chemical weapons".

The use of chemical weapons could be a prelude to "chemical and biological warfare" (CBW) and the resultant WMD. In fact, as discontentment, race, ethnic and religious hatred are spreading from South America to Asia and the Middle East, the jihadi protagonists of conventional terrorism could broaden their recruitment pool by including highly educated and qualified techies, doctors, scientists and laboratory specialists to inflict mass destruction on as astronomical scale. The base of terror/terrorism is likely to become more secret and thus more difficult to detect, identify and abort in its embryonic state. Any failure to go in for a pre-emptive strike at the root is likely to be more harmful for society and the State at large. The Red Fort terror plot must be seen in this light.

The anti-terrorism strategy of the State needs to undergo a fundamental change: from reactive to proactive. The standard procedure is to investigate fatalities in attacks that have already taken place. But it is infinitely preferable to develop sources of intelligence to detect attacks before they have taken place.

The Red Fort mayhem calls for a fresh look and a re-orienting of the entire spectrum of the security scenario. India is the most populous state of the world. Chemical warfare is a dangerously silent, invisible and undetected form of attack, with a capacity to inflict incalculable harm on unsuspecting people.

The terrorist attacks of 1993 and 2008 — both in Mumbai — were a demonstration of how modern warfare could be waged far from the international border in densely-populated urban India. The Red Fort attack only underlines this threat, which can come silent and undetected, and lead to mass killings. November 10, 2025 is a wake-up call.

It's high time for India to reorient its entire anti-terrorism strategic planning and draw up detailed defensive and offensive methods to tackle chemical and biological terror, with the help of techies, scientists and other specialists. This kind of warfare cannot be fought by the existing lower-rung and middle-level police system as science and technology-based terror must be handled by experts. CBW and terror can be waged at an entirely different level. The command-and-control systems, along with intelligence, communications and coordination, must be placed in charge of officers who are empowered to cut through bureaucratic and other bottlenecks and have access to the highest authorities. The buck stops at the highest political office of the State, not with low-level functionaries like SHOs.

Unlike in the earlier attacks in Mumbai, people perished within minutes in the Red Fort strike of November 10. India is largely unprepared for these new forms of terror, especially involving chemical and biological attacks. The preparedness level in our cities must see a sea change, and the police and emergency services reoriented to face these new threats.

The writer is a member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London. Views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

LEGEND DHARMENDRA

Bollywood actor Dharmendra's demise marks the end of an era in Indian cinema. His journey from a modest village in Punjab to becoming a celebrated star of Bollywood stands as an inspiration to countless aspiring actors.

Over several decades, Dharmendra built an illustrious career defined by his versatility. Beyond his on-screen brilliance, he was admired for his humility, strong work ethic and the warmth he brought to every role. His performances resonated deeply with audiences across generations, making him a cherished and enduring figure in the film industry. Dharmendra's legacy is not merely in the characters he portrayed but in the values he embodied — perseverance, sincerity and passion for the craft. His contribution will continue to inspire future generations of actors and remain etched in the history of Indian cinema.

M. Jeyaram
Sholavandan

LIVING POOR,
DYING RICH

I read the news report 'New labour codes may hurt spending on consumption' with interest. First, what is the need for the new wage policy, which lessens the take-home pay of the people when the consumption is gathering momentum in the Indian economy? Increase in the long-term savings of employees by way of provident funds - one of the explicit objectives of the policy - is akin to 'living poor and dying rich'. Also, it will make the salaried indebted. .

S.Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai

HEALTH PICTURE

IT IS INDEED unsettling to see the incorrect claim often made by the Indian government about the WHO's norm of "one doctor per 1,000 people", which is not a standard officially prescribed by it. The main point of contention, however, is the inclusion of AYUSH practitioners in the total count of doctors. Health experts argue that WHO's norm of 1:1,000 of doctor:people ratio is clearly meant only for allopathic doctors. Factors such as skewed proportion of health workforce across states, rural-urban and public-private sectors and lack of a live register for practising doctors highlight how the numbers shown in Parliament do not represent the full picture.

R. Sivakumar
Chennai

Mail your letters to
chennaidesk@deccanmail.com

Saeed Naqvi
Wide Angle



Creeping cynicism about elections, including the recent Bihar outcome, had begun to seriously afflict me after Assembly polls in Tripura in 2018. Covering elections over decades had caused personal likes and dislikes to fade somewhat. This is why my sudden interest in the Tripura contest deserves an explanation.

One day my neighbour in South Delhi, a former Tripura DGP, B.L. Vohra, dropped in. He was wrapped up in nostalgia about his innings in Agartala, during CM Manik Sarkar's term. A decorated officer, Mr Vohra spoke of Sarkar with some admiration, bordering on reverence.

Turning the pages of Vohra's book on his Tripura years, the following was quite extraordinary: "Manik Sarkar was definitely unlike any CM I had seen, met, worked with or heard about. He was honest personally and that percolated down to all echelons of the government. One cannot find any examples of his ilk unfortunately in the country."

This universal assessment of Sarkar even among the Opposition in Tripura would flatter any politician. It wasn't just that he was himself a gentleman, but he appeared to have instilled his qualities in his Cabinet colleagues and officers across the board. By all accounts his predecessor and guru, Nripen Chakraborty, was even more worthy of emulation. The CM's house staff had never ever dreamt they would serve a boss whose groceries were purchased on a ration card and who never saved enough to open a bank account.

This may be syrupy stuff in an era when an increase in the number of billionaires is a matter of pride.

It is elementary that 25 years of CPI(M) rule could not have lasted only because of the leadership's decency. Despite the economic crunch, the government in Agartala implemented every Central scheme with greater efficiency than any other state: such as 96 per cent literacy. The gender ratio was something of a record. That is how Tripura's middle class was created. True, having created a middle class, the government found itself flat-footed. It couldn't cope with the next stage of aspirations. It produced distributive justice but found itself bereft of ideas to generate wealth to accommodate the educated unemployed. It couldn't promote two-wheel drivers to the four-wheel level.

Upon arrival in Agartala I could find accommodation only in a government guest house. When I asked the CM if the absence of reasonable hotels was state policy, he was frank: "We are not in a position to cope with social imbalances that come with five-star hotels, bars and restaurants."

After Left Front rule ended in West Bengal in 2011, the CPI(M) in Agartala had no structure to lean on. In this friendless era, it was exposed to hostile TV bombardment. Riding the crest of economic liberalisation, market fundamentalism galloped at breakneck speed to accommodate advertising for rampaging consumerism marketed by dream merchants, the architects of plush malls and multiplexes. Hindutva flourishes when ram-

pagging markets determine the pace of life.

CPI(M) chief minister Manik Sarkar's controlled austerities withstood this barrage of televised razzmatazz for 25 years. By this time another generation had risen, torn between a lifestyle of simplicity and the Eldorado on the horizon that metropolitan centres teased and tempted them with.

After the Left defeat, Agartala was in trauma. Before they could recover, the stunned CPI(M) cadres had to adjust to another reality: party loyalists were suddenly not making eye contact with them. Some, with an eye on the main chance, even joined the mobs attacking CPI(M) offices, or pulling down Lenin's statues.

To a considerable extent, the outcome in Tripura and elsewhere was the Congress' gift to the BJP. Himanta Biswa Sarma, who was brilliant in electoral management, quit the Congress as he could not bear Rahul Gandhi's insulting silences. Tarun Gogoi, former Assam CM, was eager to make his son Gaurav CM. This would cut out Mr Sarma, whose political skills underpinned the latter half of the Gogoi years.

This kind of a dynamo, backed by money power and an adversarial Centre controlling the purse strings: this is how the Left was uprooted in Tripura. Just imagine, when state after state was implementing the 7th Pay Commission, Tripura found itself stranded at the 4th Pay Commission. CPI(M) dogma also stood in the way: "7th Pay Commission made some demands which were anti-people."

I have dug up my Tripura files as a metaphor, and

add-on to mull over while the Bihar verdict is being digested.

The state had been ploughing its furrow diligently with some quite extraordinary results on the Human Development Index, which the mainstream media never discussed. Yes, the state with a population of 40 lakhs was small. Only Sikkim and Goa were smaller. Or was the media squeamish about applauding a state that for 32 of the past 37 years was under Left Front rule?

Some of its records are amazing. Its 96 per cent literacy makes it the country's most literate state. Literacy rate in Gujarat is 83 per cent.

Instead of beating its breast and flailing its arms around for being short-changed by the centre, the state government picked up all the Central and state schemes, put its head down, called in officials and party cadres, involved the three-tier panchayat raj system and gave a sense of real participation to the elected Autonomous District Councils, which cover two-thirds of the state and all tribal areas of Tripura.

The impending change of cultures was imminent from the day the BJP planted Tathagata Roy as governor of Tripura. The genteel tone of the Nripen Chakraborty-Manik Sarkar era soon gave way to an inelegant vocabulary. "They should be buried head first in pig's excreta", said the new governor by way of his recommendation on how to tackle terrorists.

The writer is a senior journalist and commentator based in New Delhi



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Slipping in Shanghai

China will have to shelve its Arunachal ambitions for better ties with India

The petty act by immigration authorities at Shanghai airport of detaining an Indian citizen with roots in Arunachal Pradesh for 18 hours may have done immense perceptual harm to India-China ties. This is even more so as Beijing and New Delhi have been working to reset the relationship, which had soured after China’s hostile actions along the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh in 2020. Bilateral relations are back on track: Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting in Tianjin, China, in September, and the countries have resumed direct flights. New Delhi and Beijing have also found common ground in international forums, partly due to President Donald Trump’s unilateral America First policies and partly because China has seemingly abandoned its expansionist approach to its neighbours. However, the Shanghai incident, coming in the wake of the Chinese administration upping the ante against Tokyo over Taiwan and weaponising its stock of critical minerals, casts a shadow over Beijing’s intentions. New Delhi has rightly protested the Chinese action.

Pema Wangiom Thongdok, currently residing in the UK, was on her way to Japan for a vacation, when she was apprehended by immigration authorities who refused to recognise her Indian passport because she hailed from Arunachal Pradesh. This, to say the least, was offensive. She was allowed to fly out only when Indian officials intervened. Beijing had some time ago disputed the status of Arunachal Pradesh by issuing “stapled visas” to Indians from this border state. (A “stapled visa” is a piece of paper attached to the visa that allows China to avoid stamping on the passport.) New Delhi has rightly viewed Beijing’s obsession with Arunachal as a challenge to Indian sovereignty and Beijing would do well to remember that similar actions in the past led to India abandoning all public references to the so-called “One China” policy.

The Shanghai incident has to be seen in the larger context of China trying to reinforce its “claims” by refusing visas to Arunachal residents and renaming places on the Indian map. China’s “ironclad friendship” with Pakistan and Beijing’s backing for Islamabad after the Pahalgam terror incident and Operation Sindoor are fresh in public memory. The Galwan incident resurrected the image of a China uncomfortable with a rising India. At a time when Beijing and New Delhi are betting on improved ties, Shanghai comes as a dampener. Thongdok’s agony is no longer personal, but reflection of a fault line that continues to threaten India-China ties.

Waking up to air pollution in NCR

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) revising the Graded Response Action Plan (Grap) system for the NCR — moving key measures that kicked in under Grap 4 to Grap3 — to tackle the worsening pollution is a welcome step. Pollution in the national Capital and abutting cities is a legacy issue and can be resolved only by adapting a scientific approach and working out a long-term plan.

The first step is to acknowledge the problem with all its accompanying headaches. To that end, the Delhi government must improve the quality of pollution data so that plans and measures can be tweaked according to the seriousness of the situation. There have been several questions over the integrity of the pollution data, which is not good augury for both mapping out solutions and engendering public trust in the seriousness in tackling the problem. Two, the government should not shy away from a free and frank discussion on the issue. In fact, it must view the public protests underway in the national Capital positively, and as a way to draw in public attention to the problem and generate traction for non-populist measures such as restrictions on construction — even as it works out solutions for daily-wagers whose livelihoods depend on such work — and higher parking fees to dissuade private transport. Three, it must build political consensus on addressing the problem. Now that all of Delhi’s neighbouring states and the Centre are governed by the same party, working out a common policy for the NCR and enforcing it should be politically easier than before. There is increased public awareness about pollution, especially air quality, now. This should be leveraged to finetune policies that benefit the greater good.

Safeguarding G20 for the Global South

The only way to protect the grouping’s interests is for each member to embed Johannesburg Declaration’s outcomes into its national policy

The recently concluded summit of the Group of 20 (G20) nations and organisations in Johannesburg, South Africa, marked two special milestones in the evolution of an international institution that is crucial for global governance and world order. First, it ended one full cycle of all G20 member countries hosting a summit each since 2008, when the first gathering of heads of government happened in the United States (US) amid the emergency of the international financial crisis. By rotation, the G20 baton has been passed around and given every host country a sense of visibility, ownership and responsibility to steer the world economy through multiple challenging phases. South Africa’s G20 summit was particularly special as it was the first to happen in Africa and included participants invited from several non-G20 African countries and sub-regional bodies. Host leader president Cyril Ramaphosa’s agenda-setting for the summit, seeking solutions for Africa’s pressing problems, brought the world’s poorest continent to the centrestage. If India’s historic G20

presidency in 2023 gave the African Union (AU) full membership, then South Africa’s presidency ensured that the interests of 1.5 billion African people cannot be ignored. Second, from a broader Global South perspective, the South African G20 summit was the culmination of a four-year stretch of presidencies held by developing countries. The journey from Indonesia (2022), India (2023) and Brazil (2024) to South Africa (2025) was one of cumulative gains for rendering the world economy fairer and more just towards the weakest and most vulnerable. Thanks to the chain mechanism of the troika system, the past four years of the G20 witnessed a progressive and bottom-up turn wherein all members, including the rich G7 group countries, had to accommodate the wishes and concerns of the Global South in their positions and policies. Warts and all, in recent times, no other international body has managed to stabilise and democratise the world order and give hope to people everywhere that some collective action and multilateral cooperation is still possible in a divided and polarised world. The fact that South Africa’s G20 summit yielded a Leaders’ Declaration, in spite of the provocative boycott by the US and open threats from Washington against issuing a joint communiqué in its absence, spoke volumes about the determination of most major economies not to allow

spoilers to sabotage urgently needed reforms and initiatives for the Global South. Only Argentina, a staunch ideological ally of the US, opted out, but the Declaration went through without getting stuck on the principle of all hands on deck and every single member in agreement. South Africa’s assertion that it had “sufficient consensus” as opposed to total consensus for adopting the Leaders’ Declaration was a departure from the G20 norm, but an appropriate one to retain at least some public faith in multilateral entities. Key outcomes of the Johannesburg summit — raising the requirement of climate finance needed by poor nations to \$5.9 trillion, supporting poor nations vulnerable to excessive and unsustainable foreign debt, and ensuring that exploration of critical minerals benefits natural resource-rich but economically poor producer countries — were all anathema to the Right-wing populist vision of US President Donald Trump. But the fact that they figured in the Leaders’ Declaration, thereby making these decisions part of the G20’s history and continuity, was a clear sign that even the most powerful economy in the world cannot hold the rest of the global community hostage and bend it to its ideological preferences and diktats. Of course, there is merit in the argument that multilateral agreements cannot realistically succeed if a hefty player like the US stays out or undermines these. By virtue of its



Sreeram Chaulia



If India’s historic G20 presidency in 2023 gave the African Union full membership, then South Africa’s presidency ensured that the interests of 1.5 billion African people cannot be ignored.

sheer financial might and political influence, the abdication of the US from the South African G20 summit on questionable grounds of alleged genocide of white minorities would imply that implementation of the commitments and resolutions will be harder. Just as the Trump administration’s abandonment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and of the United Nations environmental conferences has thrown up dilemmas about whether multilateralism in trade and the climate crisis is feasible, the lack of American buy-in does not augur well for the success of the G20. Call it poetic injustice or dramatic irony, the fact is that the US is scheduled to host the next G20 summit in 2026. Given the disruptive track record of the Trump administration’s economic nationalism and its pressure tactics aimed at the Global South, can the G20 survive the upcoming US presidency and continue being the beacon of Global North-Global South coordination and joint management of the international economic order? The signs are ominous and there

Sreeram Chaulia is dean, Jindal School of International Affairs. The views expressed are personal

No closure in the state versus governor battle

The presidential reference to the Supreme Court following the latter’s judgment that set deadlines for gubernatorial and presidential action on Bills was not an expression of innocent constitutional curiosity. In *State of Tamil Nadu v. Governor of Tamil Nadu*, a two-judge Bench of the Court, in its adjudicative jurisdiction, essentially did two things: (i) It fixed a time limit for Raj Bhavans and the President in general for acting upon the Bills passed by the state legislatures; and, (ii) it evolved an idea of deemed assent, and invoked it when there was unreasonable and inordinate delay on the part of the governor of Tamil Nadu in acting upon Bills passed by the assembly that had been sent to him. Now, the presidential reference under Article 143 of the Constitution has led to an opinion by a five-judge Constitution Bench, which, in its advisory jurisdiction, overturned both the principles outlined in the two-judge Bench’s judgment. Though the impact of the *Tamil Nadu* judgment will remain intact on the laws so promulgated, its precedential value will be substantially damaged on account of the opinion given by the larger Bench. Henceforth, a state legislature faced with an inexcusable gubernatorial or presidential delay on a Bill may not be able to seek a deemed assent with an element of certainty, based on the *Tamil Nadu* judgment.

With the Court having viewed deliberate inaction on the part of governors as a serious constitutional obstacle in our democracy, it was incumbent upon the Constitution Bench to prescribe concrete solutions. Even its indulgence for “limited judicial review” and “limited mandamus” may not yield any result in the absence of a concept of deemed assent, at least in extreme cases where the gubernatorial or presidential laches are ostensible and unjustifiable. Every adjudication, including constitutional adjudication, happens against the background of realities on the ground and the experience of the litigants, including the State. A reference happens more on the theoretical plane and, therefore, in advisory jurisdiction, the Court is called upon to carry out an exercise that is primarily theoretical. This explains the pragmatism in the two-judge Bench decision and the total lack of it in the five-judge Bench decision. Pertinently, the five-judge Bench’s opinion is vague and self-contradictory on certain aspects. It does not explain how the constitutional scheme, or the discretion of the governor or President is impacted by a generous timeline. It foresees the contradictions between various functionaries, but refuses to resolve them. Many of the questions posed by the President were either answered by the Supreme

Court previously in various cases, including the *Tamil Nadu* case, or were so abstract or irrelevant, that they did not merit any answer. Ideally, the Court should have adopted a realistic and assertive approach and returned the reference. But the Court, instead of doing so, chose to hear the matter extensively and give a detailed opinion. The present judicial opinion reopens issues which were effectively resolved by the *Tamil Nadu* judgment. The Constitution Bench made a textual reading of Articles 200 and 201 of the Constitution dealing with the functions and powers of the governor and the President, respectively. It was unquestioning of the wisdom of constitutional functionaries and took it for granted. It was unanimously euphoric about the “dialogic process” embodied in these provisions, which often remains absent in today’s political realm. Thus, a kind of judicial romanticism emerged, which shared the dream of “an advisory, persuasive, deliberative, mediative and consultative” relation between the states and the authorities representing the Centre. That there is possibility for aberration from this constitutional aspiration is at the root of the issue. The people’s will manifested through the legislative bodies in the states ruled by political entities opposing the dispensation at the Centre needs to be honoured. The constitutional text does not provide a guarantee for the same. This is a deficit in our constitutional scheme that the Court was supposed to deal with.

This was why, under compulsion, the two-judge Bench in the *Tamil Nadu* case synthesised the idea of deemed assent. The Bench, by doing so, has served two purposes: (i) It avoided the embarrassment of holding governors in contempt, which again is not permissible based on the complete immunity provided to them by Article 361 of the Constitution, and; (ii) it ensured the finalisation of the Bills which were legitimately entitled to an assent. The country’s federalism required this shield to protect itself from politically-motivated governors who act as per the diktats from the Centre. The present verdict, which erased the concept of deemed assent, has the effect of empowering the erring Raj Bhavans by magnifying their delusions. The Constitution Bench has adopted a centralist approach that disarms the states even during the exigencies. It strengthens gubernatorial arbitrariness, which, in political terms, can weaken the people’s will.

The *Tamil Nadu* judgment was India’s federalist proclamation that offered a constitutional remedy for political mischief. The apprehension that taking a cue from the present opinion, Raj Bhavans in the Opposition-ruled states might create more hurdles in the process of legislation and governance is well founded. Therefore, a demand for constitutional amendment in tune with the directives in the *Tamil Nadu* case is perfectly justified. One can only recall Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes who opined that the life of the law has not been logic, but experience.

Kaleeswaram Raj is a lawyer at the Supreme Court of India. The views expressed are personal



Kaleeswaram Raj

{ EMMANUEL MACRON } PRESIDENT, FRANCE

We want peace. But not a peace that is in essence a capitulation, which puts Ukraine in an impossible situation, which gives Russia all the freedom to continue to go further... and putting everyone’s security in danger

On the proposed US peace plan for Ukraine

COP30 showed that the climate fight is still on

COP30, which concluded in Brazil on Saturday, was never about what to do to address the climate threat — that is already known. It was about how to make it happen, about turning promises into progress amid wars, trade chaos, and rising self-interest of nations. There are six truths of climate action today. *Momentum has survived the US exit from Paris Agreement:* The US under President Donald Trump walked away from the landmark climate accord and on doing anything on climate. Yet climate action didn’t collapse. Leaders showed up, commitments held, and Brazil’s presidency kept the show on the road. Momentum matters on global issues such as climate — it drives investment and signals resilience. *Transition to clean energy lags, but other long-ignored climate priorities get attention:* A total of 115 nations have already filed Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Commitments to do more have increased on the back of strong deployment of renewables so far. We’re headed for a doubling of renewables by 2030, not the tripling agreed two years ago at COP28. There’s a bright spot here: \$6 billion has been committed for conserving forests and oceans. These natural sinks absorb half our emissions and oceans swallow 90% of excess heat. *Fossil fuel phase-out hits a wall again:* Getting nations to agree to the phase-out of fossil fuels is as hard as doing it. After it took 28 COPs to raise the issue, this summit failed to agree on laying out a road map, despite the Presidency putting it on the negotiating table. Transition must balance dialling down fossil fuels with scaling alternatives and coordinating production-cuts for cash-cow resources. This will be slow and complex, and demands unprecedented cooperation among competing interests. It needs to start now. Future COPs, or even alternative platforms, must tackle this head-on. *Adaptation finally gets a seat, but a small one:* The developed countries promised to triple finance by 2035 for infrastructure and early warning systems communities and developing countries need to deal with climate crisis impacts. This sounds good, but it’s late, vague, and still insufficient. For countries drowning in floods and droughts, this is survival, not charity. Wealthy nations must step up — talking timelines while communities sink is indefensible.



Sumant Sinha

India’s rising influence, and rising risks: Leveraging its excellent performance in putting renewables on ground, India played hardball, calling out weak ambition from developed nations. India also pushed hard for more financing for the developing countries. This stance is vital: The world needs stronger emission reductions and finance in the next five years, not a complacent acceptance of the status quo. This is work in progress and will continue. But risks loom too: COP agreed to a two-year process to discuss trade. But in effect, the EU’s carbon tariffs will hit our exporters in 2026, undermining competitiveness. The trade deal with the EU that is under discussion is now the main platform to tackle this issue. *Geopolitics rules, but business must have a seat at the negotiating table:* With the US out of the picture, COP30 mirrored global power plays — emerging alliances, and thorny issues such as trade, critical minerals, climate finance kicked down the road until the wider trade deals and geopolitical realignments take shape. However, the dynamic between developed and developing nations seemed better balanced. The elephant in the room? Governments can’t deliver alone. As co-chair of the Alliance of CEO Climate Leaders, the world’s largest coalition of corporate leaders on climate, it is clear to me that business isn’t just a financier, it’s the engine for green hydrogen, carbon capture, and resilient infrastructure. But business was largely missing at COP30. The private sector lacks a formal seat at the table. We need business in negotiations to drive action — with accountability, not just applause. The bottom line is COP30 kept climate conversation alive in a fractured world. It has brought forth strategies and stakeholders we have long ignored and kept the doors open to deal with more thorny issues. An agreement on several issues has been reached after intense negotiations, and this is much better than having no agreement at all. One hundred and ninety countries demonstrated that they were still in the climate crisis fight — we may not be winning it yet, but we’re not giving up either. And that’s a win in these times. Judging it just by headline numbers that we are so used to, in terms of emission reductions or climate finance would be a mistake.

Sumant Sinha is founder, CEO and chairman, ReNew. The views expressed are personal

OUR VIEW



Let ‘nowcasts’ precede our economic numbers

‘Nowcasting’ that captures data from early indicators could aid policymaking, especially in the face of high economic uncertainty. But it must supplement existing data, not supplant it

Former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Y. V. Reddy once quipped, “In India, not only the future, but even the past is uncertain.” Reddy was making an important point in his own witty way. RBI governors are not clairvoyant. They need data to make good policy decisions. Whether to raise or lower interest rates, or hold them steady, depends on the economy’s macro fundamentals; in particular, whether GDP growth needs support or not, juxtaposed with RBI’s primary responsibility to ensure price stability. But data needs to be both timely and reasonably accurate—not subject to frequent or wide revisions, i.e.—if it is to serve any meaningful purpose. For RBI governors, tasked with framing policy against a host of macro indicators and criticized at times for their failure to read signals correctly, the importance of clarity on the state of the economy cannot be over-emphasized. Take GDP estimates, a critical input for RBI’s monetary policy panel. Apart from the inherent handicap of these numbers offering a mirror to the past while monetary policy is forward-looking, they arrive after a long lag. In the case of quarterly GDP, data appears two months after the quarter is over. For annual data, the lag is much longer. Admittedly, collecting data on macro variables like GDP in a large and complex economy with a large informal sector is a Herculean task. To give credit where it is due, the wait for final GDP numbers has been reduced from three years to two. But we still have as many as five iterations, with the figures moving in both directions. All this complicates the job of policymakers. India’s first advance estimates, released in January, are followed by second advance estimates a month later, followed in turn by provi-

sional estimates and then by the first revised estimates before the final estimates are released two years down the line. Sure, it is possible to track high-frequency indicators, but these are often in conflict, making it hard to form an accurate assessment of how the economy is doing. This is where ‘nowcasting’ could offer a way out. The idea is to capture information from various recent indicators and then use modelling techniques to roll it all into a composite index. In scenarios of high economic uncertainty, it may prove especially helpful. As a paper by Indrajit Roy and K.M. Neelima in the latest RBI *Monthly Bulletin* points out, “There are many high frequency coincident indicators which are correlated with the targeted macro-economic indicator that are available at much shorter time lags.” However, “separating meaningful information from noise” is a “humongous task.” Done diligently, information extracted from more contemporary data-sets could deliver an early estimate—or ‘nowcast’—of the GDP reference series before it is published by India’s ministry of statistics. Unlike GDP compilation, for which we have well-set modalities, nowcasting is still experimental. Nowcasts need to be tested for how closely they track the actual data before they can be deemed useful. Of several alternative models, the paper’s authors suggest using a “two-step-maximum-information” model for accuracy. While this may be the most robust of the lot, it might be a while before its predictive power gains credibility. Willy-nilly, statistical constructs can have weak links even in the best of hands. What’s beyond doubt is that nowcasts can serve as a valuable aid for monetary policy-making—so long as they supplement existing data-sets and don’t supplant them.

THEIR VIEW

Businesses mustn’t wait for a global climate consensus

SOUMYA SARKAR



is an independent expert based in New Delhi, Kolkata and Odisha. Twitter: @scurve Instagram: @soumya.scurve.

This year’s United Nations climate summit in Belém, Brazil, ended last week. Countries made promises on paper and avoided hard decisions. Having gathered nearly 200 nations to chart out climate action, CoP-30 produced a ‘Belém Political Package’ that deferred questions rather than answer them. We should not pretend that this is progress. The core issue is simple. Countries could not agree on how or when to phase out fossil fuels that are primarily responsible for the climate crisis. They pledged to triple adaptation finance to \$120 billion each year by 2035, but offered no timeline for delivery and no one to hold accountable for it. On trade and finance, the mechanisms that actually move capital, the summit produced nothing. Negotiators at the 2025 Conference of the Parties (CoP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) moved these conversations into so-called ‘presidency consultations,’ which is diplomatic code for ‘later.’

This pattern has worn thin. The 2009 commitment of \$100 billion in annual climate finance was never fully delivered. Now we are told to trust pledges of about \$300 billion annually and a Baku-to-Belém Roadmap to mobilize \$1.3 trillion. Without enforcement, these are merely hopes and not plans. And hope does not move capital, plans do. Business leaders watching from boardrooms have grown tired of this cycle. They have been promised clarity on fossil fuel timelines. But all they got was ambiguity. They have been promised frameworks to manage carbon tariffs and trade. What they got was silence. They have been promised accountability on financial commitments. Instead, they got vague targets and no one to hold responsible. Climate science tells a story that demands urgency. The World Resources Institute’s *State of Climate Action 2025* report found that no sector is moving fast enough to keep planetary warming at safe levels. The Climate Action Tracker estimated that even if every country kept every climate pledge, the world would still warm by 2.3-2.5° Celsius above its pre-industrial level. Current policies point to 2.8° Celsius of global warming. The gap between commitments and out-

comes is growing wider, not narrower. This should inform how businesses respond. Waiting for a consensus among 194 countries is a choice that no company should make. The climate does not negotiate, it acts. Businesses must do the same. Consider what is happening in practice. Private climate finance reached \$1.3 trillion in 2023, driven by corporations, consumers and investors. Governments did not lead this shift; business and industry did. Renewable energy capacity is breaking records despite policy uncertainty. Electric vehicles are being deployed at scale without a globally integrated policy framework. This tells us something. Businesses do not need permission from summits to move. They need permission from their own pragmatic calculations. For India, this matters even more. The country faces a climate crisis that will not wait for global agreement. Heatwaves are intensifying, water is getting scarcer and farm yields are shifting. These are not future

shocks. They are a clear and present danger that’s worsening. India’s renewable capacity exceeds 180 gigawatts. The country has met some of its climate targets five years early. It, however, still needs to build resilience into its economy at scale. Indian businesses cannot wait for the \$310 billion in annual adaptation finance that the United Nations Environment Programme’s *Adaptation Gap Report 2025* estimates developing countries need by 2035. That money may never fully arrive. Instead, companies dependent on agriculture, water or temperature-sensitive operations must invest in resilience themselves. For instance, they must fortify company infrastructure against heat and floods. Second, Indian businesses should act to diversify their supply chains across geographies. Relying on single regions or sectors leaves companies exposed to climate shocks that will worsen over time. Geography matters, supply chains matter and resili-

ience comes from well-spread operations. Third, Indian industry should set standards within its own sectors without waiting for regulation. Industry groups can establish climate metrics and accountability systems. This creates pressure. It builds markets. It demonstrates what is possible. With or without a multilateral consensus, it is time to move ahead. There is nothing but risk in falling behind what science demands. The companies that treat climate adaptation as an operational necessity will gain an advantage over those that wait. Markets are shifting accordingly and supply chains are already forming. CoP-30 proved that summits cannot move at the speed that the climate requires. Businesses must not wait for a grand global agreement. The calculus is simple. Climate impacts will accelerate, regulatory costs will rise and supply chains will fracture. Companies that build resilience now can reduce these costs. They can secure their assets and help protect markets. India’s businesses should read the Belém outcome as a signal of an evolving situation that promises little certainty. The world cannot afford many more missed opportunities at UN climate summits. Businesses cannot afford to wait for agreement either.

India requires a healthkeeper to secure its demographic dividend

Scaling up the use of tech to track health can provide a vital generation the preventive care it’ll need



SHOBANA KAMINENI
is executive chairperson, Apollo HealthCo.

By 2047, Gen Z will dominate India’s workforce. Yet, this is a generation already showing signs of burnout in their twenties. Raised in a digital-first world, they appear to be grappling with a mix of mental and metabolic risks. India’s demographic dividend has long been hailed as our greatest asset: a young, dynamic population poised to fuel innovation, productivity and economic growth. But the picture is fast changing. Fertility rates are declining; in several Indian states, they have fallen below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman. In other words, one man and one woman are no longer replacing themselves with two children. And with less than 25 years left to realize the country’s Viksit Bharat vision, we need to act now. Recently, I met a 27-year-old entrepreneur who was quietly managing pre-diabetes and early signs of hypertension. He wore a fitness band, logged meals and calibrated his routine through device-led data. “I just need a nudge before I slip,” he said. His story stayed with me—not because it was unusual, but because it is now common for youngsters to manage their health without stepping into a hospital. What Gen Z needs is not more doctors or clinics, but a healthkeeper—i.e. a system that monitors, nudges and intervenes before their health breaks down.

We must rethink healthcare not as a system that cures, but as one that preserves. The goal should be to keep young people productive. We can do that by focusing on three levers at our fingertips: accessible technologies that bring care into homes, policy frameworks powered by integrated health data and AI systems that convert this data into timely interventions. *Digital first-aid:* From smart patches that monitor glucose or arrhythmias in real-time to wearables that track sleep, heart rate, stress and oxygen saturation, The Internet of Things (IoT) has shown its power to transform healthcare in terms of where it happens and who controls it. Most diagnostics can already be done at home; even complex radiology is on the horizon. A digital stethoscope, a BP or ECG monitor synced to a smartphone, or a cloud-linked spirometer reviewed remotely by a physician reflects a shift from episodic care to continuous, ambient health monitoring in the places where people live and work. Government initiatives like the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, along with private platforms, are laying the groundwork. What we need is policy support that integrates IoT-based care with public health programmes and brings these technologies within every household’s reach, particularly in rural and underserved regions. *Let data lakes power policy:* India has no shortage of health data. It’s generated in hospitals, community clinics and pharmacies, and by wearables and government schemes. But like most abundant resources, its value lies not in volume, but in how we organize and use it. This data sitting in isolated systems with no shared language is of no help. We must connect these fragments into secure, anonymised ‘data lakes’ that prioritize privacy, consent and interoperability. Initiatives by private players, along with the government’s National Health Stack, if connected to real-world systems, can form the foundation for AI-driven decision-making and com-

munity-level early flagging of health issues. This is how we move from anecdote to architecture, from scattered data points to a health system that sees, predicts and acts. *AI that knows when to whisper:* Once structured, data becomes insight. When layered with AI, it can detect pre-diabetes from eating habits, assess speech for signs of depression, flag sleep debt through wearables and deliver nudges to prevent silent health decline before it demands clinical attention. India has an opportunity to build AI as a companion embedded in apps, wearables and public health systems designed to steer behaviour. In a country where clinical capacity is stretched, this kind of distributed, ambient intelligence can play a vital role as a multiplier. *The healthkeeper:* Beyond hospitals, healthkeeper infrastructure can take the form of an intelligent data-sharing mesh of IoT devices, AI tools and data lakes. It won’t wait for symptoms. It will watch and warn. It’s digital, but humanized. Prototypes are emerging: a home-maker tracking her thyroid level on the phone, a startup offering burnout coaching, a wearable company syncing real-time vitals to clinics. This infrastructure is taking shape; the next step is to scale it on a connected mesh. *Why the next 25 years matter:* By 2047, we will have either aged into complacency or risen into resilience. India’s demographic dividend is perishable. This youth bulge will not come again. The stress they carry, if unaddressed, will show up as illness, economic loss and reduced well-being. But if we act now through the healthkeeper framework, we can change course. We can ensure that a 28-year-old today is a productive, healthy and thriving 50-year-old in 2047. Let’s not miss the opportunity of a generation. Let our youth take charge of their health before illness takes charge of them. It is an infrastructure project that India must invest in. We must organize it before time runs out.



THEIR VIEW

This year’s UN climate talks were a let-down but enterprises must do what’s needed in their own interest



Losing the plot

Air quality issue requires engagement with citizens, not intimidation

In November 24, the Delhi government confronted a small and peaceful crowd near India Gate, that had gathered to express its concern about the city’s air quality index hovering near 400, with a heavy police presence. The question practically wrote itself: was the threat being managed here public safety or political embarrassment? Air quality in North India in winter is often discussed as a Delhi issue, yet monitoring stations have revealed a continuous zone of foul air from around Islamabad to Bihar. Emissions from industry, power generation, transport and agriculture circulate in this shared airshed. This is why the India Gate protests are politically significant. Delhi’s middle class has usually responded with air purifiers, closed windows, vacations and private dissatisfaction – but apparently not anymore. And the state has responded by policing rather than engagement. Deploying Rapid Action Force units shows that the government treats these gatherings as a law-and-order rather than a governance problem. North India’s winter smog is the most visible part of a wider national crisis. Long-term analyses of particulate pollution, such as the Air Quality Life Index, have shown that unsafe air is now the norm for most of India – and that present regulation, monitoring, and enforcement arrangements are insufficient across States and sectors. Treating the problem as a seasonal emergency, in the face of evidence pointing to a permanent condition demanding permanent institutions, has encouraged only bursts of action. The airshed is the primary unit of governance.

Today, authority is split among central ministries, State departments, municipal bodies and specialised regulators, each with partial jurisdiction and mixed incentives. The Commission for Air Quality Management was created to address this fragmentation and is empowered to direct emissions control, coordinate among States and agencies, and impose sanctions. Yet, its interventions have not matched the scale or persistence of the problem. Its task now is to use its mandate to require time-bound sectoral plans from governments and major emitters, track compliance through continuous monitoring, and ensure data is in public. Governments should also abandon technical quick fixes. These measures consume public funds and administrative bandwidth while leaving the main sources of emissions intact. The focus should be on interventions in power, industry, transport, construction and agriculture, with tighter norms and real enforcement, time-bound retirement or retrofitting of polluting plants, support for cleaner fuels and technologies and credible alternatives for farmers burning crop residue. These solutions will take time to manifest but only they will lead to lasting changes. And they need to be backed by a courageous political vision rather than heavy-handedness.

Drop shot in Sydney

Lakshya Sen’s win also draws attention to the gaps in India’s supply line of stars

For Indian badminton, 2025 has been a tough year. Successes have been fleeting, top players’ form has undulated and serious questions have been asked of not just the established but also the young and upcoming. But for Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty’s doubles bronze at the World Championships in Paris in August, there has been precious little. Against this backdrop, Lakshya Sen’s triumph at the Australian Open on Sunday has come like a breath of fresh air. It was not the toughest of fields and the tournament – a BWF Super 500, third in the sport’s hierarchy after Super 1000 and 750 – is not pedigreed. But it was no low-hanging fruit either, for Lakshya had to spend long hours on court, including in the come-from-behind semi-final victory over World No. 6 Chou Tien Chen. The title was the 24-year-old’s first since the Syed Modi International Super 300 last December, and the first outside India since the Canada Open Super 500 in July 2023. Ever since the disappointment of losing the 2024 Paris Olympics bronze medal match from a dominant position, Lakshya has endured difficult times. Injuries and a spate of early exits – 11 in the first round this year alone – had sent him tumbling down. But a trophy in his last act of 2025 should give him the required fillip.

Whether this acts as a springboard for other Indians in 2026 remains to be seen. Apart from Satwiksairaj and Chirag, no other Indian is ranked in the top 10 of any badminton discipline. Since July 2022, P.V. Sindhu has just one Tour title to show – the Syed Modi International last December. H.S. Prannoy, who bagged a men’s singles bronze at the 2023 Worlds and soared to No. 6, is now down to 35. Worryingly, the supply line of stars appears to have undergone a rupture. Ayush Shetty, 20, winning the U.S. Open Super 300, and Tanvi Sharma, 16, finishing with a silver medal in girls’ singles at the World Junior Championships, are noteworthy achievements indeed. But no junior has stormed the scene and plugged the gap seamlessly like how Sindhu once did after Saina Nehwal. The Badminton Association of India appears to be mindful of this, as seen from the setting up of the National Centre of Excellence in Guwahati to train the next generation. India is also betting big on hosting international competitions of repute to burnish its credentials as an elite badminton nation. After the 2025 World Juniors in Guwahati, the 2026 World Championships is scheduled to be held in Delhi. If India can assemble a battery of medal challengers, it would be akin to a resurrection.

As adrenaline-high at the Saudi-American Summit last week demonstrated, the 80-year-old bilateral alliance remains perhaps the oldest transactional deal still going strong. It predates the establishment of post-Second World War global architectures such as the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Bretton Woods Institutions. It was conceived as a secret “oil-for-security” strategic partnership signed on Valentine’s Day 1945 between U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and King Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rehman al-Saud on the USS *Quincy* in the Suez Canal Area. Originally intended to last 60 years, it was renewed in 2005.

Thanks to the exceptional amity between U.S. President Donald Trump and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS), this arrangement is currently being reset to the new domains of strategic cooperation, with the potential to anchor bilateral, regional and global developments in a more consequential manner.

The trajectory of ties

During the past 80 years, U.S.-Saudi ties have not always had smooth sailing. First, thanks to shale technology, the U.S. has become the world’s largest producer of crude and a significant exporter. While this has reduced the commercial content of the relationship, the U.S.’s exports have remained steady, leading to a decline in the bilateral merchandise trade and a balance swinging in America’s favour. As Saudi Arabia’s trading partner, the U.S. now ranks below China and India.

Historically, the ties came under strain during the Ramadan War of 1973, when Saudi Arabia joined an Arab oil embargo. In the mid-1980s, the Saudis surprised the Americans by buying intermediate-range ballistic missiles from China, a country they did not even recognise then. There have been tensions as the American military supplies were staunch during the Yemen war, affecting Saudi offensive and defensive capabilities against the Houthis.

The assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, a prominent Saudi commentator working with *The Washington Post*, in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018 jolted ties, and the Biden presidency initially decided to keep MbS at arm’s-length. The friction pushed the Saudis into diversifying their ties with China and Russia.

In December 2022, China’s President Xi Jinping visited Riyadh and held three separate summits with the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Arab and Muslim countries, respectively. Later, Beijing also facilitated the resumption of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Since late 2023, the U.S. support for Israel’s brutal military campaign in Gaza has also made it difficult for Riyadh to turn a new page in bilateral ties.

The Saudis have resisted U.S. pressure to formally recognise Israel, pre-conditioning it on the creation of a pathway to Palestinian



Mahesh Sachdev

is a retired Indian Ambassador, specialising in the Arab world and oil issues

The exceptional amity heralds new domains of strategic cooperation, with the potential to anchor bilateral, regional and global developments in a more consequential manner

statehood, which Israel has ruled out.

New contours under the Trump presidency

There has been a positive sea change in bilateral ties since Mr. Trump took over the U.S. presidency this year. His first visit of his second term abroad was to Saudi Arabia in May 2025, where an agreement to supply \$142 billion worth of military equipment was secured. The new contours of this new relationship were in evidence at the no-holds-barred state visit. It included a moving guard of honour, a fly-past, a private lunch and a 300-guest banquet, both hosted by Mr. Trump, who also attended the investment forum at which deals worth \$270 billion were signed.

On his part, MbS readily agreed to raise the promised Saudi investments in the U.S. economy from \$600 billion to \$1 trillion without a fixed time frame. The amount is nearly as big as the country’s GDP and the entire corpus of the Kingdom’s Public Investment Fund (PIF), which already has 40% of its foreign investments in the U.S. economy. The groundbreaking Strategic Defence Agreement was signed, formally designating Saudi Arabia as a “major non-NATO ally” and committing the U.S. to actively assist Saudi Arabia if it came under an attack.

The two sides also made tangible progress towards collaboration in civil nuclear energy and the supply of state-of-the-art Artificial Intelligence (AI) chips. Given the Trumpian propensity for “truthful hyperbole” and Saudi economic stringency, observers are sceptical about all key promises made during the visit being fully realised.

Moreover, the bilateral differences on basic issues such as the global oil glut, Riyadh-Tel Aviv reconciliation, Iran, and the Kingdom’s drive towards strategic autonomy were papered over during the Summit, which was conspicuous by the absence of any final communiqué. The visit can, nevertheless, be considered as a qualified bilateral success, particularly as it managed to bury the past ghost issues.

The robust revival of the U.S.-Saudi ties in Trump 2.0 is bound to have a regional impact. Under MbS, Saudi Arabia, the Arab world’s largest economy, has abandoned its low-key diplomatic profile, adopting a more assertive and visible pursuit of national interests. This process has accelerated after the two-year-long Israeli military campaign that has subdued Iran, the Kingdom’s long-standing rival in the region and the Islamic world.

MbS has already persuaded Mr. Trump to drop sanctions against Syria’s new regime and has asked for stronger American intervention to end the Sudanese civil war. Even the Iranian President has sought the MbS facilitation of the resumption of nuclear talks with Washington. The robust endorsement by the White House during the recent visit would further empower MbS, who at 40 years could be around for decades, making

him an indispensable, long-term U.S. interlocutor as the region’s geopolitical architecture gets reconfigured.

While the visit was silent on global issues, there are signs of subterranean bilateral coordination. Although oil has largely disappeared as the driver for bilateral economic synergy, the Saudi economy continues to be highly dependent on oil export revenues. Moreover, as recent U.S. sanctions against the two Russian oil majors demonstrated, Washington intends to continue its dominance of the global oil market. Both Saudis and Americans want the oil price to be at a moderate, sustainable level. The concerted American actions on sanctions against Iran, Venezuela and two Russian oil majors can only help stem the emerging supply-side oil glut, shore up the price and create market space for higher exports by both Saudi Arabia and the U.S. For the U.S., reinforced ties with Saudi Arabia would also stave off the recent encroachments by China and Russia on its turf, and complement its regional Pax Americana.

Impact on India

The Washington Summit does have several implications for India. First, it may provide advanced U.S. military equipment access to Pakistan, with which Riyadh concluded a strategic mutual defence agreement in September 2025, apparently with the U.S. nod-and-wink.

Second, although India, as the world’s third-largest oil importer, would prefer oil prices to be low, moderation and stability in the oil market may still be preferable as it navigates for alternative sources to Russian supplies.

Third, soaring Saudi ambitions for its post-oil Vision-2030, such as AI data centres, may create economic opportunities for India.

Fourth, curbing China’s foray into Saudi Arabia may open the door wider for India. India also needs to prioritise entering into a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with Saudi Arabia.

Lastly, the emerging *modus vivendi* with Israel may also facilitate the work on the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, which transits through Saudi Arabia. At a different level, White House’s differential treatment of MbS shows that its single-minded pursuit of economic transactions continues to trump all previous qualms, such as human rights and proliferation concerns, may light India’s pathway to an economic peace with the Americans.

The evident MbS-Trump bonhomie during the White House Summit signals the U.S. reclaiming primacy in Riyadh. The locus of the relationship has, nevertheless, shifted from the past “oil-for-security” paradigm. As the new, more nebulous drivers congeal and Saudi Arabia asserts its sovereign autonomy, the alliance enters an uncharted territory. While much may remain unaltered, it would, nevertheless, be fascinating to watch its progression.

A landmark law in 2013, it needs a spine in 2025



Mahima Duggal

is a research scholar, Department of Political Science, Panjab University, Chandigarh

what does not, shaping their behaviour to remain in the grey zone of legality. The law, still bound to visible or explicit acts, fails to address this subtle, psychological form of exploitation.

One of the most pressing flaws is the limitation period of three months for filing complaints. For a woman who has survived manipulation or coercion, recognising what happened and gathering courage to report it often takes much longer. In universities, where students spend several years under the same institutional roof, realisation and evidence may emerge much later. Justice should not come with an expiry date. The three-month rule only strengthens the confidence of perpetrators that their acts will fade with time.

Equally troubling is the terminology. The accused is called a “respondent”, and not an “accused.” This small linguistic change dilutes the seriousness of the offence. Outside the workplace, the same conduct would constitute a crime. Why should the context of a college or office make it seem less grave? Language matters. By softening the label, the law normalises a violation that causes deep psychological trauma.

Vague definitions within the Act further shift the burden of proof onto the woman. She must prove harassment within an institutional structure that is often hesitant, ill-equipped, and risk-averse. In most genuine cases, harassment is not a single act but a behavioural pattern. Yet, committees tend to dismiss complaints for lack of direct evidence. There should be ways to assess behavioural conduct through anonymous feedback or corroborative testimony. Since the accused already enjoys protection through a multi-member committee to ensure impartiality, the same faith must extend to the committee’s ability to recognise circumstantial evidence. Reading between the lines and acknowledging informal networks should be part of the process.

No clarity on inter-institutional complaints

The Act is also silent on inter-institutional complaints. In academia, visiting faculty, research collaborations and conferences create

multiple spaces for interaction across institutions. When an accused person’s misconduct spans different campuses, there is no mechanism to connect or pursue those cases jointly. This absence allows repeat offenders to go unchecked.

For a woman, lodging a complaint is itself a battle fought after an intense internal struggle. What follows, however, often turns into another ordeal. Instead of relief, she faces procedural delays, institutional hesitation, and emotional fatigue.

The law also permits disciplinary action against complainants found to have filed “malicious” complaints, which, though meant as a safeguard, ends up intimidating genuine victims. The process, meant to deliver justice, often retraumatises them.

The digital evidence dilemma

With technology reshaping communication, harassment too has evolved. Messages can vanish, photographs appear only once, and chats are encrypted. Expecting Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) members – often without legal or technical training – to interpret such evidence is unrealistic. The law has not adapted to this digital reality. It must include updated definitions, clear protocols for handling digital evidence, and mandatory training for committee members to ensure that technology does not become a shield for offenders.

Women have long relied on informal networks to warn each other about unsafe individuals. These whisper systems exist precisely because the formal mechanisms often failed them. The POSH Act was a milestone when enacted in 2013, but a decade later, needs strengthening. It must incorporate clearer language, longer timelines, recognition of emotional and digital abuse, and stronger investigative tools. Justice should not depend on the victim’s endurance or on the committee’s discretion. It must be built into the structure of the law itself. Until that happens, the protection promised by the POSH Act will remain more symbolic than real.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bills and timelines

The judicial guideline to Governors urging them to refrain from holding on to Bills indefinitely is more in the nature of a pep talk as there is no legal binding on them to heed this advice and clear Bills as soon as

they receive them. The top court has failed to analyse why this ‘phenomenon’ prevails only in States ruled by Opposition parties. It is a pity that no accountability is fixed on Governors who indulge in such unfair practices that torpedo the

principles of federalism.

C.V. Aravind,
Bengaluru

Dharmendra

What differentiated the iconic Dharmendra was his unique way of dialogue delivery and his macho

appeal. He could do emotive roles with ease as well as action-oriented roles. In *Sholay*, his sentimental dialogue with his mother exemplified him. It was unforgettable, which set him apart from others. The Hindi tinsel world has

lost a born actor.
A.V. Narayanan,
Chennai

Dharmendra’s warmth, Asrani’s iconic charm, and Dilip Kumar’s unparalleled depth continue to live on in every frame that we

cherish. They gifted us laughter and stories that shaped our childhoods and remain in our hearts forever.
Jubel D’Cruz,
Mumbai

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

Decoding personality rights in the age of AI

Recently, actors Abhishek Bachchan and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan filed a lawsuit against Google and YouTube in the Delhi High Court. They alleged that AI-generated videos portraying them in fictitious and often explicit scenarios infringe upon their personality rights, resulting in reputational and financial damage. They sought compensation, but also safeguards to prevent such content from being used to train future AI models.

This case highlights how AI blurs the lines between authenticity and deception, prompting us to reassess the legal and ethical frameworks governing personality rights. Personality rights, which include the right to control one's name, image, likeness, voice, and other identifiers of identity, have long been a bulwark against unauthorised exploitation. Rooted in concepts of privacy, dignity, and economic autonomy, these rights evolved from common law principles to address commercial exploitation. However, the emergence of AI, particularly in the form of generative technologies such as deepfakes, has amplified these vulnerabilities. Deepfakes, AI-generated content that swap faces or voices, propagate misinformation, enable extortion, and erode trust. While AI fosters innovation, its unchecked use risks commodifying human identity, demanding legal safeguards.

The legal mosaic
Globally, personality rights differ: Europe adopts a dignity-based model, the U.S. a property-based one, and India a hybrid approach. In India, these rights lack codification and stem from Article 21 of the Constitution, affirmed in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017). Courts have since classified AI infringements as privacy or intellectual property breaches. Landmark cases include *Amitabh Bachchan v. Rajat Nagi*



Madhavi Ravikumar

Assistant Professor,
Department of
Communication
University of
Hyderabad

(2022), which recognised personality rights; *Anil Kapoor v. Simply Life India* (2023), where AI reproductions of Mr. Kapoor's identity and his catchphrase "Jhakaas" were banned for diluting brand value; and *Arijit Singh v. Codible Ventures LLP* (2024), where the Bombay High Court protected Mr. Singh's voice from AI replication. These indicate a judicial shift towards a privacy-property hybrid. Yet, India's framework remains reactive. While the Information Technology Act, 2000, and the 2024 Intermediary Guidelines address impersonation and deepfakes, enforcement is hindered by anonymity and cross-border data sharing.

In the U.S., personality rights are often referred to as the 'right of publicity', a transferable property interest that varies by state. *Haelan Laboratories v. Topps Chewing Gum* (1953) recognised this right as distinct from privacy, allowing celebrities to monetise their identity. AI-related reforms include Tennessee's ELVIS Act, 2024, banning unauthorised AI use of voices or likenesses in response to deepfakes. Lawsuits against Character.AI alleged that its chat bots encouraged self-harm, leading to teen suicides. A 2024 Florida case claims the bot posed as a therapist, fostering detachment from reality. A federal judge dismissed Character.AI's First Amendment defence.

In the EU, personality rights follow a dignity-based model under the General Data Protection Regulation, 2016, which requires consent for processing personal and biometric data. The EU AI Act, 2024, designates deepfake technologies as high-risk, mandating transparency and labelling.

In China, a 2024 Beijing Internet Court ruling held that synthetic voices must not deceive consumers, indicating stricter regulation. In a related case, a voice actor won damages after an AI replica was sold without consent, affirming voice as part of

personality rights. This fragmented global framework exposes how AI's transnational nature surpasses national laws. In 'AI Ethics and Creators' Feelings: Extended Personality Rights as (Property) Rights to Object', published in the *Social Science Research Network* (2025), Guido Westkamp et al advocate expanding rights to encompass style and persona appropriations to protect creators from AI's exploitative data use.

The human-AI nexus
Scholarly discussions on personality rights in AI centre on ethics, dignity, and autonomy. UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of AI, 2021, provides a rights-based framework. Its principles stress that AI must not exploit individuals. In 'Safeguarding identity: A comprehensive survey of anonymization strategies for behavioural data,' Aldrich, S.T., and Smith, K.R. (2024) critique India's fragmented laws, calling for statutory AI definitions and high-risk classifications for deepfakes used in disinformation. They raise ethical issues such as AI recreations of deceased artists, noting that Indian courts deem personality rights non-heritable. Broader scholarship, including 'The Ethics and Challenges of Legal Personhood for AI' by Forrest, K. B. (2023), in *The Yale Law Journal*, warns that granting AI legal status may erode human rights. AI's duality is clear: technologies like ChatGPT expand creativity but also enable harm. However, excessive regulation could stifle innovation.

These controversies expose systemic gaps. India needs legislation that explicitly defines personality rights and enforces AI watermarking, platform liability, and global collaboration. The government's 2024 deepfake advisory is a preliminary step, but stronger measures are essential. International harmonisation through UNESCO principles could avert ethical deterioration.

A farm crisis lost in political cacophony

Farmers in Karnataka need a long-term solution to their woes

STATE OF PLAY

Girish Pattanashetti
girish.s@thehindu.co.in



It has been over 10 days since farmers of Gadag district in north Karnataka began an indefinite agitation demanding Minimum Support Price (MSP) of ₹3,000 per quintal for maize. Farmers in the neighbouring districts too are up in arms against the Central and State governments over the plummeting price of maize.

While the Centre has fixed an MSP at ₹2,400 per quintal for maize, the prevailing price in Karnataka is ₹1,600 to ₹1,800 per quintal. The prices, which began declining in September, have dropped suddenly over the last fortnight.

The plight of the farmers in Karnataka, which is among the top maize-producing States in the country, seems to have been buried under the cacophony over the "power-sharing formula" between the Chief Minister, Siddaramaiah, and the Deputy Chief Minister, D.K. Shivakumar.

The protest by maize farmers comes at a time when the State government is yet to recover from the floods that destroyed crops. That was followed by series of protests by sugarcane farmers seeking a Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of ₹3,500 per tonne for sugarcane. The State government recently managed to convince the farmers to agree to an FRP of ₹3,300 per tonne.

The Opposition BJP has been quick to grab this opportunity to portray the ruling disposition as "anti-farmer", just ahead of the winter session of the State legislature. In response, the Congress has argued that the Union government's intervention is crucial

in resolving both maize and sugarcane issues. It has mocked the opposition MPs of Karnataka for not having the gumption to raise the issue with their own party leaders at the Centre.

Last week, Mr. Siddaramaiah wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his intervention in the procurement of maize and also green gram, which has seen a price drop as well. He said that Mr. Modi should direct the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED), the Food Corporation of India, and the National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India (NCCF) to begin MSP procurement immediately under the Price Support Scheme or another suitable mechanism. Mr. Siddaramaiah contended that increased imports has also added to the crisis.

The Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Pralhad Joshi, responded by lobbing the ball back to the State's court and insisting that the authority on implementing the MSP or FRP rests with the State government. He has also rubbished Mr. Siddaramaiah's claims on imports, stating that it is only 0.5 lakh metric tonnes this fiscal.

Amid the political blame game, one of the basic issues that has gone unaddressed is the rapid expansion of maize cultivation in Karnataka.

Maize in Karnataka has replaced rain-fed crops such as potato, cotton, groundnut, ragi, and sorghum. In 2023, the cultivated area under maize in the State was 10.3 lakh hectares. For the current year, up to July 5, it was 13.98 lakh hectares, up from 12.20 lakh hectares last year in the same period.

According to market experts, this year, multiple factors including supply-demand disparity, reduced exports due to downward trend in global cereal prices, and related factors caused the price drop. Ethanol blending results in the production of large quantities of Distiller's Dried Grains with Solubles, a substitute for conventional feed grains, which is cited as another factor reducing the demand for maize in the livestock sector. Also, while Karnataka has produced over 55 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) of maize during kharif 2025, it has a marketable surplus of 32 lakh tonnes, which far exceeds the absorptive capacity of local industries. Added to the problem is the existing additional stock with the distilleries from the previous year's procurement.

A positive development amid the crisis is Mr. Siddaramaiah's promise about starting procurement under MSP by the State. However, this is yet to translate into a government order. He has also written to the distilleries in the State to sign up with NAFED and NCCF for the production of ethanol using maize.

Farmers who cultivate maize in Karnataka, mostly in the central and northern districts, have demanded action both by the State and the Centre to come up with a long-term solution. This demand currently seems lost on both ruling and Opposition party leaders.

Over 80% nations got loans from China in the last two decades

Chinese banks have lent about \$200 billion to U.S. projects and initiatives, which makes the U.S. the biggest beneficiary

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

China lent more than \$2 trillion in loans and grants to over 80% of countries and regions in the world between 2000 and 2023. The U.S. was the biggest beneficiary, according to data released by AidData, a research institute at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Over the years, Chinese state-owned entities have lent about \$200 billion for nearly 2,500 projects and initiatives – more than 9% of the total amount lent by China – to American companies. Over 95% of this amount was lent by Chinese state-owned banks, enterprises, and the central bank, while the rest was lent by non-state players.

Map 1 shows the amounts lent by China to various countries between 2000 and 2023. Across the world, during that period, 179 out of 217 countries and territories received at least one loan from a Chinese state-owned creditor. China was the world's largest creditor and debt collector in 2023, lending \$140 billion to various countries.

Entities in Russia and Australia were the second and the third biggest beneficiaries in the last two decades, receiving \$172 billion and \$130 billion, respectively, in the period. Firms in the 27 member states of the European Union received \$161 billion for 1,800 projects and activities.

Chart 2 shows the 20 countries that received the highest loan commitments between 2000 and 2023, along with the income bracket under which they fall. Of the countries shown in the chart, six are considered "high-income" countries, which together received more than 20% of the total amount lent by China in the period. About \$943 billion was lent to high-income countries overall.

Beijing is moving away from its

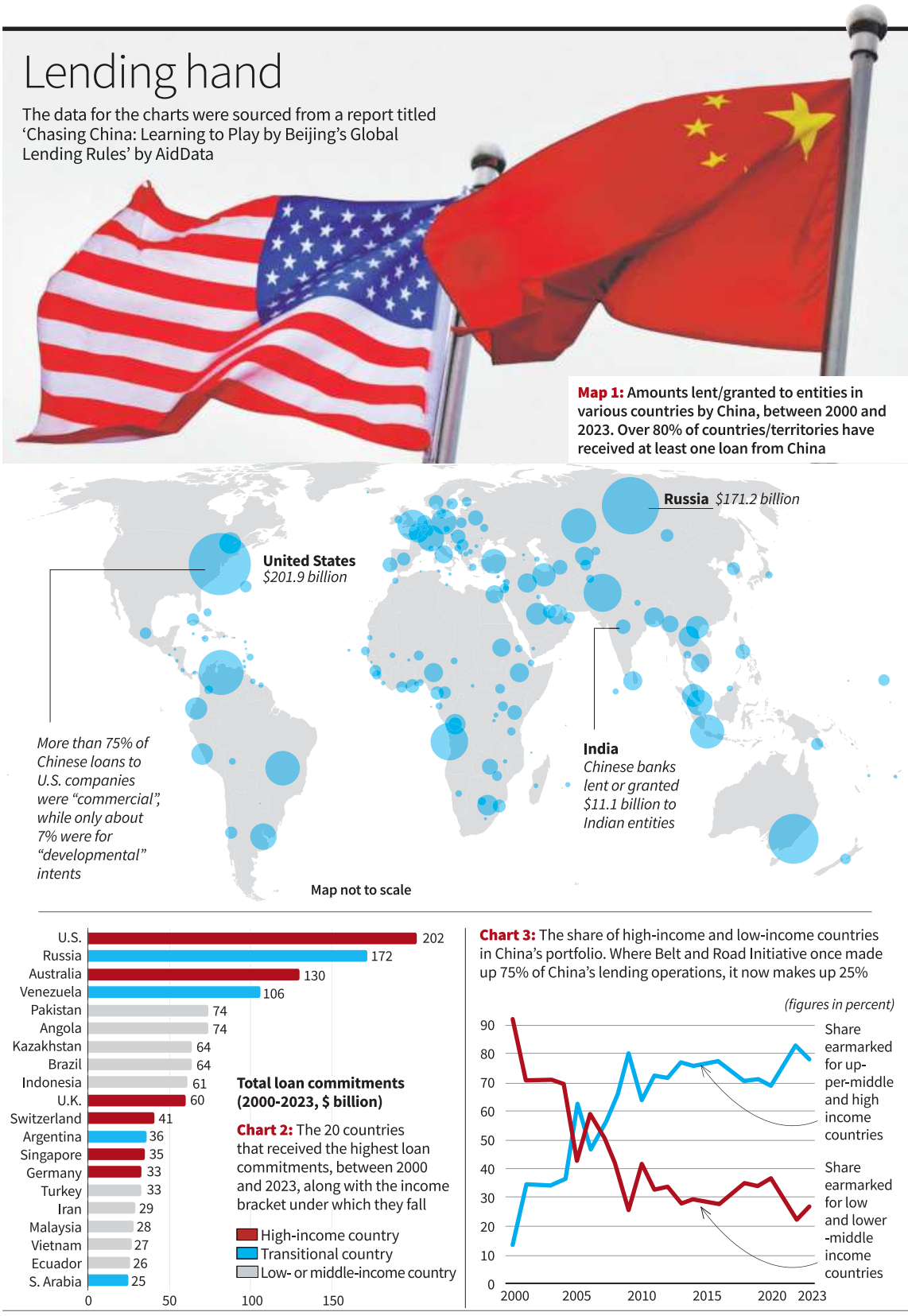
role as an aid provider to relatively poorer nations, as its focus has shifted towards commercial lending for developed countries. For instance, more than 75% of Chinese loan transactions with U.S. companies were "commercial" in nature, while only about 7% were for "developmental" intents, as per the data. China had lent about \$320 million to the U.S. in 2000; this surged to about \$19 billion in 2023, which hints at the "commercial" turn the investments took.

China's initial focus was on infrastructural development projects in economically disadvantaged nations. Chinese President Xi Jinping launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, which helped develop energy, infrastructure, and connectivity projects in Europe and Asia. The AidData report details how China has scaled back on its lending to such projects; where BRI once made up 75% of China's lending operations, it now makes up about 25%.

Chart 3 shows the share of high-income and low-income countries in China's portfolio. The report finds that in a typical year, China spent about \$5.7 billion on what can be classified as aid for official development assistance. However, in 2023, China's global official development assistance commitments fell to \$1.9 billion.

According to the report, China has an 80% success rate for getting overseas mergers and acquisitions approved. This is because of the relatively weak screening mechanisms for foreign capital inflow in most countries that China invested in. The report also alleges that China managed this by channelling funds through off-shore shell companies and international bank syndicates.

As of 2023, Indian entities have borrowed or were granted \$11.1 billion from China, with a large amount of this dedicated to the energy sector and banking and financial services. Most of the funds were borrowed with a mix of commercial and developmental intent.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The **Hindu**

FIFTY YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 26, 1975

Heavy rain for third day in Madras: 5,000 homeless

Madras, Nov. 25: The cyclonic storm in the Bay has intensified and lay centred at 2 a.m. (Nov. 26) at 170 km south-east of Madras. It is likely to intensify further, move in the north-westerly direction and cross the North Tamil Nadu coast near Madras on Wednesday morning.

Squally weather and gales, with wind-speed touching 120 to 140 km per hour, have been forecast for Madras and its environs, Chingleput and South Arcot districts and Puducherry during the next 24 hours.

The storm has brought in its wake widespread rain in the State. Sriperumbudur (Chingleput district) recording the highest rainfall of 13 cm for the 24 hours ending 8:30 a.m. today.

For the third day to-day heavy rain lashed Madras and suburbs, damaging over 1,000 huts and rendering about 5,000 people homeless. Three persons were injured in a house collapse.

The Nungambakkam Observatory recorded seven centimetres of rain and Meenambakkam six cm till 8:30 a.m. today. During the 12 hours ending 8:30 p.m., there was a rainfall of six cm at Nungambakkam. At Meenambakkam the rainfall recorded from 8:30 a.m. (Tuesday) to 1:00 a.m. (Wednesday) was nearly 10 cms. The total rainfall during the almost continuous four-day spell was about 23 cm at Nungambakkam and 25 cm at Meenambakkam.

Many educational institutions remained closed to-day. Judges of the Madras High Court rose at 12:30 p.m. and the Court's office was closed at 2:30 p.m.

Work at the harbour continued to be paralysed to-day on account of the rain.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 26, 1925

Witnessing football match from the air

New York, Nov. 25: Unable to obtain tickets to the annual football match between Army and Navy Cadets, except at high prices demanded by speculators, an enthusiastic New Yorker chartered a transport plane to accommodate 14 persons for the purpose of circling overboard and viewing the game from the air. The officials of the Aeroplane Company said the average cost per passenger was not much in excess of the speculators' prices high ranger from 25 to 35 dollars per seat.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Loans approved for road connectivity in Maharashtra

400 In \$ million. The loan approved by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) will be used to improve road connectivity in 34 districts, particularly in the Marathwada and Vidarbha regions, linking rural communities to healthcare, education, and other essential services. PTI

Solar capacity installed by China in the month of October

12.6 gigawatts (GW). China installed 12.6 GW of new solar capacity in October, 30% more than the previous month, National Energy Administration (NEA) statistics showed, as installations continued to recover from a mid-year drop-off. REUTERS

Number of buildings that have installed anti-smog guns

149 A total of 149 buildings across Delhi have installed anti-smog guns ahead of the November 29 deadline, officials said on Tuesday. These include offices, hotels, commercial complexes, malls, hospitals and other government and private establishments. PTI

The cost of investment proposals received by Chhattisgarh

6,826 In ₹ crore. Chhattisgarh has received industrial investment proposals to the tune of ₹6,321 crore and ₹505 crore, for the development of the tourism sector, which are expected to generate over 3,000 employment opportunities. PTI

Civilians killed in Lebanon by Israeli strikes since ceasefire

127 The UN human rights office said on Tuesday that at least 127 civilians had been killed in Lebanon in strikes by the Israeli military since a ceasefire nearly a year ago, and called for an investigation and for the truce to be respected. REUTERS
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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What does the draft Seeds Bill entail?

Why has the seed industry been demanding a reform of the Seeds Act of 1966? What are the punishments prescribed for flouting provisions under the Bill? Why are farmers' groups worried about the new draft Bill? What will be the roles of the Central and State Seed Committees?

EXPLAINER

A. M. Jigeeesh

The story so far:

The Union Agriculture Ministry released the draft Seeds Bill on November 12, and has invited public comments on it till December 11. The Seeds Bill, seen as a regulatory step to ensure quality of seeds sold and distributed to farmers, promotes “ease of doing business” and reduces compliance burden, while maintaining strong provisions to penalise serious violations, as per the government. The government has been open about its intention to amend the Seeds Act of 1966 and the Seeds (Control) Order of 1983.

What has been the history?

According to the Union Agriculture Ministry, in 2023-24, the country had an overall requirement of 462.31 lakh quintals of seeds for various crops with availability being 508.60 lakh quintals, which then led to a surplus of 46.29 lakh quintals of seeds.

The seed industry has been demanding that the 1966 Act should be amended to accommodate technological and scientific advancements in the sphere of seeds and to address the changes in trade and commerce over the last six decades. In their initial response, the Federation of Seed Industry of India Chairman Ajai Rana said the release of the draft is a timely and much-needed step toward modernising India’s seed regulatory framework. However, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of farmers, said they will continue to oppose moves to bring amendments in the Bill that are “anti-farmer”.

What are the new provisions?

The Bill provides a regulatory mechanism in the area of import, production and supply of quality seeds. The Bill does not restrict the right of the farmer to grow, sow, re-sow, save, use, exchange, share or



New reforms: Women farmers sow maize seeds in a field, in Morigaon on November 10. PTI

sell his farm seeds, except when he sells such seed or planting material under a brand name. The Bill defines farmer, dealer, distributor and producer as separate entities that deal with the production, distribution, trade and use of seeds. It also provides for the establishment of 27-member Central and 15-member State seed committees. The Central seed committee can recommend the minimum limits of germination, genetic and physical purity, traits, seed health and additional standards of seeds to the Union Government. The State Seed Committee can advise the State Government on registration of seed producers, seed processing units, seed dealers, distributors and plant nurseries.

Under the Bill, it is mandatory that all seed processing units must be registered with the State governments based on the

provisions in the proposed legislation. The Bill, however, adds that to promote ease of doing business, the Union government may establish a merit based and transparent Central Accreditation System for companies operating in multiple States.

The Bill suggests the creation of the office of Registrar to keep a National Register on seed varieties under the Central seed committee. The procedure for conducting field trials to assess the Value for Cultivation and Use of any kind or variety is also detailed in the draft Bill.

The Bill also has provisions for the establishment of Central and State seed testing laboratories, where analysis of seed of any kind or variety shall be carried out in the prescribed manner. The Bill also explains the role and powers of seed inspectors, an officer with powers

under the provisions of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita to search or seize. The Bill details the punishment for trivial, minor and major offences for flouting provisions under the Bill. The punishment ranges from a fine of ₹50,000 to ₹30 lakh and up to three years of imprisonment.

What are changes from 2019 draft?

One of the major changes is in the section of offences and punishments. In the previous draft, the offences were covered under consumer protection laws and the penalty ranged between ₹25,000 and ₹5 lakh and an imprisonment up to one year. There are substantial changes with respect to this section in the new draft.

On farmers’ rights, the new draft links the matter with the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Act. On quality norms, the standards have been tightened. The new Bill looks at the import of seeds in a more liberal way.

What are the concerns of farmers?

The All India Kisan Sabha, a constituent of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, said the Bill is poised to increase cost of cultivation by allowing corporates to indulge in the predatory pricing of seeds. They doubt the Bill is part of a larger political project of the RSS-BJP to dispossess small farmers and surrender the country’s seed sovereignty to a handful of multinational and domestic monopolies.

They demanded that the new draft must complement, not conflict with, the progressive legal safeguards already established under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Right Act of 2001, and India’s international commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. The Kisan Sabha pointed out that the draft Seeds Bill introduces a heavily centralised and corporatised regulatory system that risks weakening farmer-centered protection and diluting India’s legal architecture for biodiversity conservation and farmers’ rights.

THE GIST

The seed industry has been demanding that the 1966 Act should be amended to accommodate technological and scientific advancements in the sphere of seeds and to address the changes in trade and commerce over the last six decades.

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What is the row over selecting Head of Police Force in T.N.?

What are the Supreme Court’s guidelines on appointing a Director-General of Police/Head of Police Force?

S. Vijay Kumar

The story so far:

Tamil Nadu has found itself in the middle of a controversy over the appointment of a regular Director-General of Police/Head of Police Force (DGP/HoPF). For the first time in recent years, the State was unable to appoint a regular police chief in time to succeed the outgoing DGP. G. Venkatraman, a 1994-batch IPS officer ranked sixth in seniority, has been appointed as the in-charge DGP.

What has the government said?

Although the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) had finalised a panel of three senior DGP-rank officers from the list forwarded by the State, the Tamil Nadu government rejected the panel, stating that the shortlisted officers were “not acceptable”. Tamil Nadu Law Minister S. Regupathy issued a statement

accusing the Centre and the UPSC of disregarding the State’s views and selecting officers of their choice. Meanwhile, two contempt petitions have been filed against Chief Secretary N. Muruganandam for allegedly violating the Supreme Court’s guidelines.

What are the SC guidelines?

In *Prakash Singh versus Union of India* (2006), the Supreme Court laid down detailed guidelines for the selection of State DGPs/HoPF. The Court mandated that, “The DGP of the State shall be selected by the State Government from amongst the three seniormost officers of the department who have been empanelled for promotion to that rank by the UPSC, on the basis of their length of service, very good record, and range of experience for heading the police force.” It further ruled that the selected officer must be granted a minimum tenure of two years, irrespective of their date of

superannuation. State governments are required to send proposals to the UPSC at least three months before the anticipated vacancy of the DGP, outlining the eligible officers to be considered for the post. However, Tamil Nadu did not follow this timeline. The then incumbent DGP, Shankar Jwal, retired on August 30, 2025, which meant the State should have forwarded its list by June. Instead, the proposal was submitted to the UPSC only on August 29, 2025.

What is the contempt plea about?

After advocate Henri Tiphagne moved the top Court alleging that the State Government had committed contempt by appointing an in-charge DGP, the Chief Secretary informed the Court that a regular appointment was delayed because one of the eligible officers had approached the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) seeking inclusion of his name in the panel. The CAT dismissed his

application on April 30, 2025. While disposing of the contempt plea, a Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India requested the UPSC to consider the matter “expeditiously” and directed that, once the UPSC’s recommendations were received, the State Government must take steps “forthwith” to appoint a DGP.

Following this direction, the UPSC convened an Empanelment Committee Meeting on September 26, 2025, with the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary. It emerged through reliable sources that the State had withdrawn the integrity certificate of one officer and expressed its unwillingness to empanel three other officers for undisclosed reasons. Despite this, the UPSC shortlisted the senior-most DGP-rank officers, and forwarded its recommendations to the State. However, Tamil Nadu raised objections by writing to the UPSC to express its concerns about the inclusion of officers it deemed “unacceptable” and indicating a preference for another meeting. The UPSC responded swiftly, stating that its earlier decision would stand.

What is the current status?

Petitioner Kishore Krishnaswamy filed a case against the State, alleging wilful contempt for appointing an in-charge DGP and withholding the appointment of a candidate from the panel of three IPS officers. The top Court has sought the State’s response within three weeks.

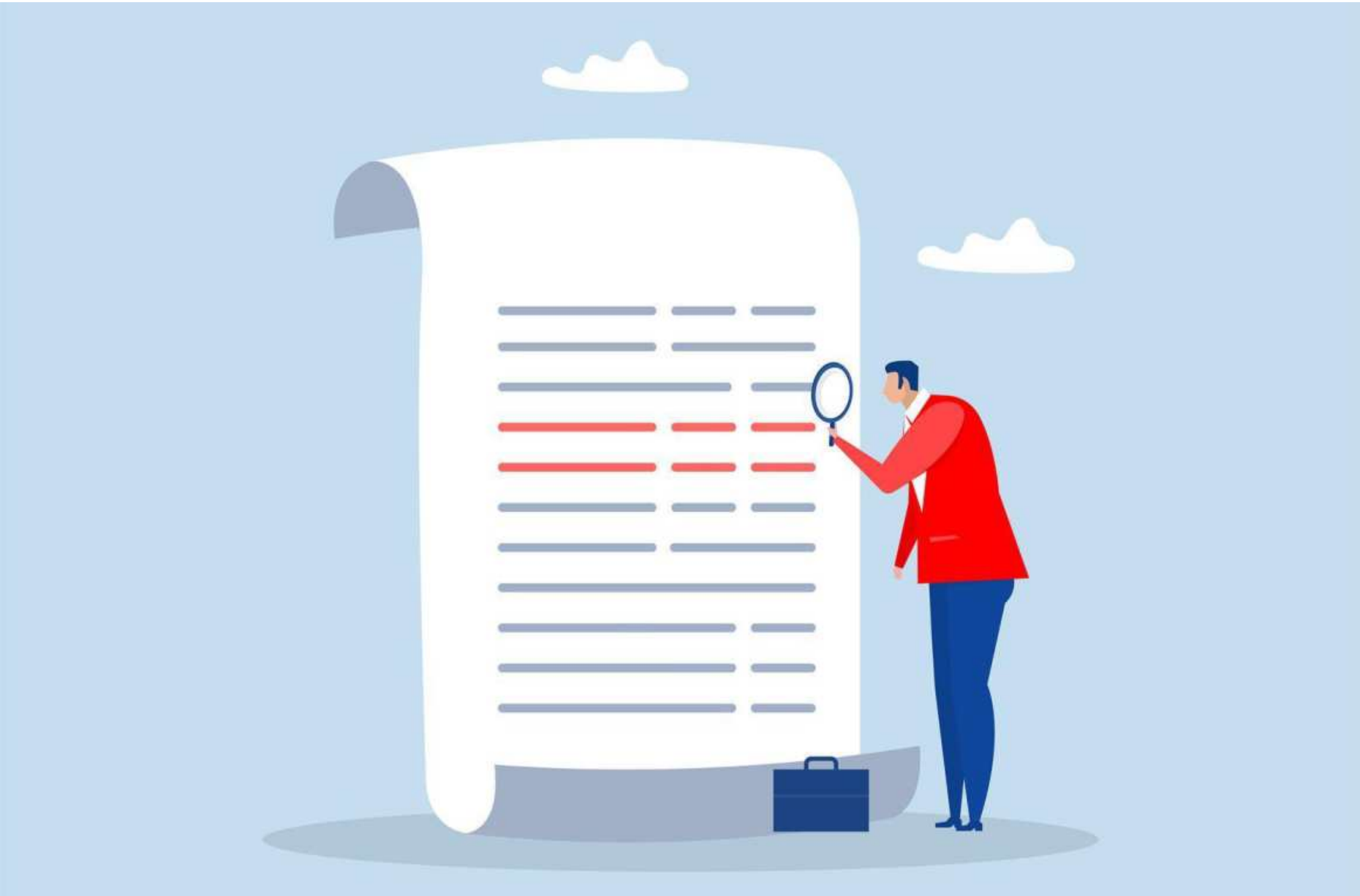
THE GIST

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The UPSC convened an Empanelment Committee Meeting on September 26, 2025, with the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary.

CACHE



GETTY IMAGES

Publish or perish: making sense of India’s research fraud epidemic

India’s higher education sector faces a research fraud crisis due to a ‘publish or perish’ culture. Faculties prioritise publications over teaching, undermining academic integrity and neglecting the needs of the student population

Pushkar

Research fraud is a global problem and has become worse due to the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The problem is even more acute in India’s higher education sector where both the number of journal publications and retractions are growing rapidly. However, journal retractions do not capture the scope of research fraud since it is impossible to know the exact number of fraudulent publications that escape notice.

Publishing over teaching

Most observers blame the ‘publish or perish’ culture for India’s research fraud epidemic. However, a prior issue is the preference that the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) give to publishing – which is different from research – at the expense of teaching for faculty members to advance their careers. This institutional bias drives a preference among faculty members to publish papers and is rewarded by promotions and other benefits at the workplace, whereas there are no significant incentives for better teaching.

The rationale to privilege publishing over teaching comes from two main considerations. The first stems from national and global university rankings,

which have become ubiquitous and are considered to be of great value by the government, the HEIs themselves, and by students. These rankings reward publications but not teaching. HEIs are therefore incentivised to insist that their faculty publish. For private universities, the number of students they admit every year matters a great deal, and achieving higher rankings than their competitors is seen as necessary to attract more and better students. Public institutions do not want to be left behind either.

The second consideration is the widespread belief that faculty members conducting research improves teaching and hence student learning outcomes. However, the evidence does not quite support this belief.

The voluminous research on the research-teaching link has examined a diverse set of issues including the specific mechanisms at work, the fuzziness and diversity of the multiple variables used to understand the relationship, and both quantitative and qualitative research. However, there is no broad consensus that the relationship between them is significant or even that there is one. If there is some sort of soft consensus, it is that the context often matters.

Both these considerations likely contributed to the UGC’s decision to introduce the Academic Performance Indicator (API) in 2010 as part of the Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) for

faculty members’ promotions. The API established a clear bias for publications in assessing faculty members. Despite several amendments over the years, there has been no fundamental change to the API in terms of the emphasis on publications. The 2025 UGC draft regulations for the appointment and promotion of teachers in order to maintain academic standards, it claims, will reduce focus on quantifiable metrics such as publications. But for now, the publishing madness remains ascendant.

A return to teaching

If we turn to context, there are at least two reasons that render the emphasis on research questionable, on ethical and practical grounds.

First, the faculty members at all types of HEIs are expected to publish – whether at colleges devoted to undergraduate teaching, universities that are teaching-cum-research institutions, and specialised research centres which typically run only PhD programmes. There is no thought given to context: whether the university or college has the necessary physical infrastructure (libraries and laboratories for example), human capital (research-capable faculty members), academic environment (a sufficient population of postgraduate students and academics in specific disciplines), sufficient research funding, and a fair or even reasonable balance

between the teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities of faculty members. Most HEIs fall short on many of these parameters. Without considering these issues, the emphasis on research and publishing is meaningless.

The outcome is eventually predictable. Given the limitations of most HEIs, the idea of ‘publish or perish’ is taken quite literally. Rather than carry out actual research, faculty members and even students churn out fraudulent papers for their HEIs to secure university rankings and for them to secure individual benefits. And publishers monetarily benefit from these publications and also participate in the scam.

Second, 80% of students at India’s HEIs are undergraduates who need better teachers rather than competent researchers. Given that the research-teaching link is dubious and that most HEIs do not have the necessary research capabilities, it should follow that those teaching at undergraduate institutions should focus on teaching.

In the end, it appears that the only logic to prefer research over teaching is to help HEIs attain university rankings and to help faculty members secure individual gains, both of which are the main drivers of research fraud, and neither of which contributes in any way to India’s knowledge sector.

Pushkar is director at The International Centre Goa. Views are personal.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Test your knowledge of the making of the Indian Republic with this challenging quiz on the adoption of the Constitution on November 26, 1949

Prathmesh Kher

QUESTION 1

On which date did the Constituent Assembly first meet before finally adopting the Constitution on November 26, 1949?

QUESTION 2

Who was the President of the Constituent Assembly when the Constitution was adopted?

QUESTION 3

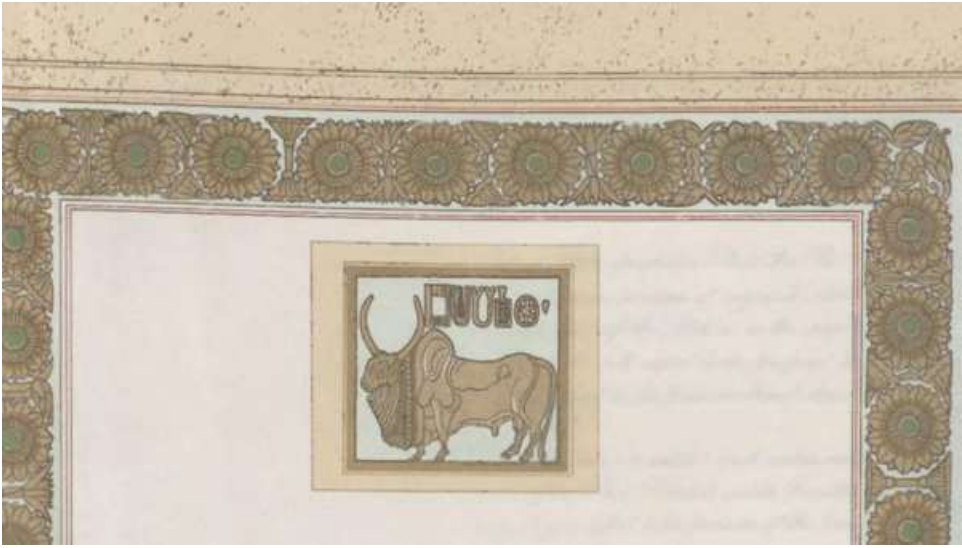
How many members signed the handwritten original of the Constitution of India?

QUESTION 4

How long did the Constituent Assembly take, in total, to draft and adopt the Constitution?

QUESTION 5

Why is January 26, 1950 significant in relation to the Constitution rather than November 26?



Visual question:

Identify the image and its location in the original Constitution.

Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz: 1. Dharmendra was fondly called this. **Ans: He-Man** 2. This 1962 Hindi war-drama film proved to be a major critical and commercial success for Dharmendra. **Ans: Haqeeqat** 3. In this film in 1971, Dharmendra played a supporting role. **Ans: Mera Naam Joker** 4. This song from *Blackmail* featuring Dharmendra and Rakhee was a chartbuster. **Ans: ‘Pal Pal Dil Ke Paas’** 5. This actor remarked, “Whenever I get to meet with God Almighty, I will set before him my only complaint — why did you not make me as handsome as Dharmendra”. **Ans: Dilip Kumar** Visual. Identify this film and the song. **Ans: Sholay, Yeh Dosthi Hum Nahi Todenge** **Early Birds:** Lalchand Bhutani| Prashansa Lohumil| Sulochana Yadav| Saurabh Sinha| Anjani Kumar Srivastava



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

“Did you show your father the marks that you got in Physics?”

“I had to. My teacher asked me to get the test paper signed by him.”

“Did your father go ballistic after reading your answers?”

“Did he what?”
“B...a...l...l...i...s...t...i...c. that ‘a’ in the first syllable is like the ‘a’ in ‘about’. The...”

“...like the ‘a’ in ‘about’! What happened to the ‘a’ in ‘China’?”

“Nothing! I thought you might be getting bored with the ‘China’ example. Anyway the second syllable rhymes with the words ‘mist’ and ‘fist’. And the ic...”

“...I think I know how ‘ic’ is pronounced. The main stress is on the second syllable ‘lis’, I suppose?”

“You’re right! The word is pronounced ‘baLLiStic’. Do you know what the word means?”

“Does it mean ‘to get angry’?”

“Not just angry, extremely angry. When you go ‘ballistic’ you lose your temper. For example, when the union members threatened to go on strike, our Chairman went ballistic.”

“My uncle went ballistic when someone accused him of being a liar.”

“That’s a good example. My boss goes ballistic whenever he doesn’t get his afternoon tea on time.”

“There are a few people like that in my family too! I go ballistic whenever someone drops a catch off my bowling.”

“That will make your fielders even more nervous! By the way, the word ‘ballistic’ is usually used in very informal contexts.”

“I see! What should we do about the garbage problem?”

“Nothing! We’ll let it ride for the time being.”

“Let it ride? On what is the garbage...”
“...when you ‘let something ride’, you let it remain as it is.”

“In other words, you ignore it completely?”

“Not completely. You ignore it for a while. Here’s an example. Don’t worry about making the arrangements for the party right now. Let it ride for another three or four days.”

“Sometimes we let things ride for a week. Our politicians are famous for letting things ride for years.”

“Only when it comes to other people’s problems. Sometimes I don’t agree with what my boss says. But I let it ride.”

“Your plan isn’t the best plan. But I’ll let it ride for now. Can I say that?”

“Certainly! Here’s another example. My scooter has been giving me problems. But it’s not anything serious. I’m going to let it ride for a while.”

“You’re happy with that old scooter of yours, aren’t you?”

“I certainly am. I really lucked out!”

“Lucked out! What does it mean? You got lucky?”

“That’s right! When you ‘luck out’ you get lucky. It’s a slang expression.”

“So it’s used in very informal contexts, I guess...”

“Right! I really lucked out yesterday. I won Rs. 500 in the lottery.”

“Why don’t you take me out then?”
“No chance!”

Published in *The Hindu* on October 13, 1998.

Word of the day

Effulgence:

the quality of being bright and sending out rays of light

Synonyms: radiance, refulgence, shine

Usage: *The new singer’s effulgence shone through the crowd.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/effulgencepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ɪˈfʌl.dʒəns/

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