



## Upgrading shipyards

Incentives for shipbuilding must include long term offtake possibilities

The recently announced package of ₹69,725 crore, to revitalise India's ship-building and maritime ecosystem, is to replace the package of 2015, which is set to expire in March 2026. In the last 10 years, while lucrative defence orders had kept some shipyards busy, only half-a-dozen small merchant ships or so were built in all of India. India's capacity to build large merchant ships remains minuscule, which the package hopes to expand to 4.5 million gross tonnage. The plan is to upgrade shipyards for cutting-edge technology and management principles, promote new yards in clusters housing factories for shipbuilding ancillaries, and support shipowners for financing newbuilds. But key questions remain over how this package will succeed as the earlier one was largely a failure.

Globally, shipbuilding has been honed into a fine art. In Korean, Japanese or even Chinese yards, component blocks of large merchant ships are prefabricated outside the actual dry dock and moved to the dry dock, using cranes of say 1,000 tonnes, where they are welded together. The yards are long enough to be assembly lines. In the past, the metric was keel-laying-to-waterborne. Today that takes just three to four months. It takes just about a year from the process of first steel to sea trials for a large merchant ship. Barring an exception or two, Indian yards are neither long enough nor have the crane capacity and space and capability to do the prefabs. Ancillaries are another bottleneck. A turnaround of about two to three years is the norm in India – or two more years of capital sunk without returns. This is a key reason for Indian shipowners not ordering new shipbuilds even if the subsidies in previous policy addressed the issue of high capex. Shipyard upgrading should address this issue. China, for instance, has thought through shipbuilding in full and set up institutions to train manpower. At this point, India will need to start small, such as ships of 500 gross tonnage and above. The bottleneck is that while terming ship newbuilds as infrastructure has brought down the cost of finance through lower interest rates and extended repayment schedules, this applies only to large vessels. Incentives to promote shipbuilding will need to include long-term offtake possibilities. Indian shipowners do not see long-term demand visibility for them to invest in newbuilds in Indian yards with cost overruns from delays. For instance, India's green fuel production policy has seen projects to make and export green fuels through Kakinada and Kochi but without leveraging them to build green ships and do the offtake as well. Long-term shipping contracts and time charters, for imported coal from State-owned power utilities and imported crude from oil companies, will spur shipbuilding.

## Bloody Sundays

Cricket is getting overshadowed by India-Pakistan political rivalry

Three successive Sundays featuring matches involving India and Pakistan are a broadcaster's windfall dream. This rare cricketing high will be played out when the sub-continental rivals clash in the Asia Cup final at Dubai this Sunday. Interestingly, since its inception from 1984, the continental tournament never featured an India-Pakistan summit clash. However, the latest prelude remains dull as the contests over the last two weekends lacked sporting thrills even if the political tension almost bordered on the 'war minus the shooting' trope. Suryakumar Yadav's men overwhelmingly dominated the jousts, yet dimmed their glory as they remained churlish and refused the customary handshake with the opposition, a tradition innate to the willow game and other sports. The Pahalgam terror strike and the resultant Operation Sindoor are part of the backdrop, but if India felt strongly about playing against its western neighbour, then the protest could have been registered by refusing to turn up for these particular games. But walking into the park, playing the match and still refusing to respect the game's behavioural protocols do not reflect well on the Indian unit. That there is no escaping the nationalism bandwagon and the ensuing domestic pressures was evident in the manner in which some of the Pakistani players gesticulated.

Pakistani stars Sahibzada Farhan and Haris Rauf are in the dock with the former using his bat like a gun and the latter hinting at fighter planes being shot down. Meanwhile, Suryakumar's reference to Pahalgam also came under the scanner. In all this high-strung theatre of anger, India still proved its superior mettle against all rivals, a skill-advantage that was reiterated twice against Pakistan. Opener Abhishek Sharma has been at his riveting best, and his scalding form has forced the opposition bowlers to constantly alter their tactics. His Punjab mate Shubman Gill has also flourished against the men from across the Wagah border. Among the bowlers, even if spearhead Jasprit Bumrah draws attention, spinner Kuldeep Yadav has been in his elements on the dry, abrasive surfaces under West Asian skies. The dip in quality of Indo-Pak tussles is a contrast to the 1980s and 1990s when the games were contested on an even keel. For Indian fans of a certain vintage, Javed Miandad's last-ball six off Chetan Sharma remains a bruise that never heals. The current Asia Cup has revealed how far India has progressed while Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have stagnated. This Sunday, defending champion India will step in as the favourite unless Shaheen Afridi and his fellow pacers spring an ambush.

The Gen Z protests that erupted in Kathmandu on September 8, 2025, snowballed rapidly, taking the Nepal government by surprise. The excessive police reaction led to an explosion of public anger, and the rapidly evolving situation forced Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli to quit the following day, creating a vacuum that even the Gen Z protesters were unprepared for.

Following talks between the Gen Z representatives and Chief of Army Staff General A.R. Sigdel, former Chief Justice Sushila Karki was sworn in as interim Prime Minister on September 12, with the mandate to conduct fresh elections within six months. The parliament was dissolved, an apolitical cabinet of experts is taking shape, and calm has returned to the streets.

Elections have been fixed for March 5, 2026 but questions persist. How will Gen Z organise itself around a political platform? Will the established political parties be ready? Meanwhile, suggestions are afoot for amending the constitution but this may open a Pandora's box in the absence of process legitimacy.

### A turbulent phase in India's neighbourhood

The decade of the 2020s has witnessed political changes in India's neighbourhood – in February 2021, the experiment with democracy in Myanmar collapsed as the military assumed full control; later in 2021, the Taliban returned to Kabul as the U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan; in mid-2022, the Aragalaya movement in Sri Lanka forced President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country; in Pakistan in May 2023, the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan led to widespread protests but the military took charge of the situation; and, in August 2024, protests in Bangladesh gathered momentum forcing Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to quit and leave Dhaka. It is hardly surprising that analysts would look for patterns that can fit their models or conspiracy theories.

However, each of these changes has its own history. Sheikh Hasina had been in power since 2009 and the elections in January 2024 had been disputed even as she cracked down on the opposition. In Sri Lanka, the Rajapaksa family had been ruling since 2004 with a short interregnum.

Myanmar and Pakistan have had long spells of military rule; the military has remained in the driver's seat – openly as in Myanmar or behind the scenes, as in Pakistan. Afghanistan followed the familiar pattern of failed interventions by the United States – since Vietnam in the 1960s, and in 2021, when it had become apparent that continued U.S. presence in Afghanistan would not help matters.

If there are similarities, these are primarily the dominant role played by the youth in the protests and the higher levels of youth unemployment compared to the total unemployment in these



Rakesh Sood

is a former diplomat who served as Ambassador to Nepal and is currently Distinguished Fellow at the Council for Strategic and Defense Research (CSDR)

The goal should be to ensure fair elections so that the political gains of the last two decades towards a more democratic and inclusive Nepal are not squandered

societies. While overall unemployment levels in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka are between 4%-5%, youth unemployment is above 16% and in Nepal, above 20%.

Politically, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have had political stability given the long tenures of the Rajapaksa brothers and Sheikh Hasina, respectively, but this led to nepotism, corruption and increasing disdain for democratic accountability.

### Nepal's political transition

In contrast, Nepal's political trajectory has been different with frequent government changes. Since 2015, when the constitution was adopted, there were seven governments but with the same leaders playing musical chairs, UML leader Oli thrice and both Maoist leader Prachanda and NC leader Sher Bahadur Deuba, each twice. It created a curious internal stability where cronyism, nepotism and corruption flourished, within the outward instability that prevented job growth and economic development.

Nepal's political transition began 35 years ago. The 1990 Jan Aandolan replaced Panchayati Raj with multi-party democracy and circumscribed the monarchy to a constitutional role. However, intra-party rivalries provided a fertile ground for the monarchy to play favourites. A Maoist insurgency surfaced in 1996 and over a decade, gradually engulfed large parts of the country claiming 17,000 lives.

It took 17 years before the political parties came together to work out a peace process that permitted the Maoists to come overground and emerge as a political party. During this period, there were 15 changes of government and one spell of direct rule by King Gyanendra that sparked the second Jan Aandolan in 2006, forcing him to restore parliament and the elected government.

In 2008, an elected Constituent Assembly declared Nepal to be a republic ending the 240-year-old monarchy and began drafting a constitution for a federal republic. Instead of the given two-year deadline, the constitution was promulgated after seven years in 2015. More time was spent on government formations and these seven years witnessed six Prime Ministers. Maoist leaders served twice, UML leaders twice, the NC once and an interim government was created under Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi for electing a second Constituent Assembly in 2013.

The Jan Aandolans, in 1990 and 2006, were spearheaded by political parties to wrest political power from the monarchy. But the 2025 protests reflect a broader frustration with political leaders of all political parties, for misusing coalition politics to amass personal wealth.

President Ramchandra Paudel has reiterated that he will observe the constitution and has sought to justify concerns about the appointment of an Interim Prime Minister by citing Article 61.

# Shaping the next chapter of the Indian story



Hardeep S. Puri

is Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India

the Prime Minister and was struck by the depth and range that he brought to the discussion – micro details and macro linkages that were held together in a single frame. It turned into a 45 minute meeting. Colleagues told me later that he had spent more than two hours preparing, reading through notes, data and counter-arguments. That level of homework is the working norm he sets for himself and expects of the system.

### A focus on the citizen

Much of India's recent progress rests on plumbing and systems which are designed to ensure dignity to our citizens. The triad of digital identity, universal bank accounts and real-time payments has turned inclusion into infrastructure. Benefits move directly to verified citizens, leakages shrink by design, small businesses enjoy predictable cash flow, and policy is tuned by data rather than anecdote. Antodaya – the rise of the last citizen – becomes a standard, not a slogan and remains the litmus test of every scheme, programme and file that makes it to the Prime Minister's Office.

I had the privilege to witness this once again, recently, at Numaligarh, Assam, during the launch of India's first bamboo-based 2G ethanol plant. Standing with engineers, farmers and technical experts, the Prime Minister's queries went straight to the hinge points: how will farmer payments be credited the same day? Can genetic engineering create bamboo that grows faster and increases the length of bamboo stem between nodes? Can critical enzymes be indigenised? Is every component of bamboo, stalk, leaf, residue, being put to economic use, from ethanol to furfural to green acetic acid?

The discussion was not limited to technology. It widened to logistics, the resilience of the supply chain, and the global carbon footprint.

Article 61 merely directs the President to "promote the national unity" and "to abide by and protect the Constitution". Since a state of national emergency was not declared, Gen. Sigdel played a political role in identifying and holding consultations with the Gen Z representatives. The army also moved targeted leaders and Ministers into military cantonments for their security. Clearly, Mr. Paudel depended on the army because it is the only institution that enjoys social respect.

Ms. Karki has identified three priorities for the Interim Government – to ensure elections on March 5; to fix accountability for the use of excessive force by the police and the arson and vandalism; and to expose and prosecute corruption in high political office. The second and third will be difficult as there are reports of politically affiliated gangs infiltrating the Gen Z protests, and fast track prosecutions in Nepal's justice system are unheard of.

There is a growing sentiment that the 2015 constitution that introduced a 275 member House of Representatives with First Past The Post (165 seats) and Proportional Representation (110 seats) somehow prevents the emergence of a majority government. Other ideas doing the rounds are to introduce a directly elected executive and do away with federalism by empowering local bodies. Pushing such ideas through a constitutional commission and national referendums could create more difficulties. Any dilution of federalism or Proportional Representation system is bound to spark protests among the Madhesis, Janjati and Tharu communities.

Such moves into uncharted political territory and questionable legitimacy run contrary to Mr. Paudel's assurance of abiding by the constitution and may jeopardise the election schedule. Established political parties need time for an internal leadership churn that the old timers will resist. New political forces led by youth leaders will emerge and it is likely that some pro-monarchy elements may also sense an opportunity to recover lost ground.

### Focus should be on fair elections

Fortunately, India has escaped criticism in Nepal's media in connection with the political turmoil. The restrained official statements and the phone call by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on September 18, to congratulate Ms. Karki, convey condolences over the loss of life, and assure full support to Nepal, keeps communication channels open.

Peaceful, free and fair elections on March 5 would be the best way forward for Nepal. Any other ambitious moves by vested interests would only increase uncertainties, generating mistrust and insecurity in which the political gains of the last two decades towards a more democratic and inclusive Nepal would be at risk.

There was clarity of brief, precision in detail and insistence that the last person in the chain must be the first beneficiary.

The same clarity animates India's economic statecraft. In energy, a diversified supplier basket and calm, firm purchasing have kept India's interests secure in volatile times. On more than one occasion abroad, I carried a strikingly simple brief: secure supplies, maintain affordability, and keep Indian consumers at the centre. That clarity was respected, and negotiations moved forward more smoothly.

National security, too, has been approached without theatre. Operations that are conducted with resolve and restraint – clear aim, operational freedom to the forces, protection of innocents. The ethic is identical: do the hard work, let outcomes speak.

### The work culture

Behind these choices lies a distinctive working style. Discussions are civil but unsparing; competing views are welcomed, drift is not. After hearing the room, he reduces a thick dossier to the essential alternatives, assigns responsibility and names the metric that will decide success. The best argument, not the loudest, prevails; preparation is rewarded; follow-up is relentless.

It is no accident that the Prime Minister's birthday falls on Vishwakarma Jayanti, the day of the divine architect. The parallel is not literal but instructive: in public life, the most enduring monuments are institutions, platforms and standards. For the citizen, performance is a benefit that arrives on time and a price that stays fair. For the enterprise, it is policy clarity and a credible path to expand. For the state, it is systems that hold under stress and improve with use. That is the measure by which Narendra Modi should be seen, shaping the next chapter of the Indian story.

### Fighting Russia's war

It was not surprising to read the report, "Sri Lankans being trafficked to fight Russia's war in Ukraine: UN expert" ('World' page, September 26). The world is now witness to all kinds of misadventures using unemployed youth in poor countries. What a terrible way to recruit a mercenary army. It deserves to be condemned by one and all.

Unfortunately, the United Nations is a white elephant and unable to resolve conflicts of this nature. It dances to the tunes of major western countries. Russia should see reason and stop the war with Ukraine.

**Govardhana Myneedu,**  
Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

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



# GROUND ZERO



Amit Kirtaniya at a practice session at the National Centre for Divyang Empowerment in Rangareddy district. In June 2023, after stepping on an IED, Kirtaniya lost both legs, sustained 95% physical disability in his right arm, and lost vision in his right eye. NAGARA GOPAL

## Giving warriors a fighting chance

In 2020, the National Centre for Divyang Empowerment was established as an exclusive facility for training CAPF personnel who suffer injuries and become physically challenged in the line of duty. In five years, the centre has trained 219 'Divyang warriors', producing medal-winning para-athletes and IT professionals. **Vijaita Singh** and **Naveen Kumar** report on how the facilities on campus give the injured a new lease of life

Until a year ago, Amit Kirtaniya, 33, would tremble with fear every time he heard the sound of a utensil dropping on the floor. The clatter would disrupt his sleep and bring back traumatic memories.

On June 5, 2023, Kirtaniya, a constable with the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and two of his colleagues were patrolling the hills of Bijapur district in Chhattisgarh after receiving information that Maoists were on the move. Suddenly, there was an explosion. "We were thrown in the air in different directions," Kirtaniya recalls.

The three men lay bleeding on the hill. A few hours later, a rescue team arrived and flew them by chopper to a government hospital nearby.

The area had been filled with Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), Kirtaniya says. Having stepped on one, he lost both legs, sustained 95% physical disability in his right arm, and lost vision in his right eye.

"A day later, I was airlifted by an air ambulance to Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) where I was admitted for 15 days," he says. "I was awake and conscious. The doctors sought my permission to amputate my legs above the knee. I had watched a viral video which gave me hope that I would be able to walk again with artificial limbs. So, I agreed."

The CRPF, one of the seven Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) in India, helped him get artificial limbs last April at the National Centre for Divyang Empowerment (NCDE) in Hyderabad. Divyang, which means divine body part, was a term introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 to refer to persons with disabilities.

Located at the CRPF Group Centre in Hakimpet, on the outskirts of Hyderabad in Telangana's Rangareddy district, the NCDE is the only facility of its kind in the country. Conceived by former CRPF chief, Dr. A.P. Maheshwari, and inaugurated in December 2020, the NCDE is an exclusive facility for training CAPF personnel who suffer injuries and become physically challenged in the line of duty. In just five years, the NCDE has trained over 219 'Divyang warriors', as they are called on campus, producing medal-winning para athletes and skilled IT professionals.

### Infrastructural support

The NCDE has a sprawling campus. It has about 180 barracks, each divided into 10x10 feet cubicles fitted with a table, chair, wardrobe with adjustable handles, a motorised bed, a shoe rack, and a window. Of the barracks, more than 100 are wheelchair-friendly, complete with attendant support. It is common to see Divyang warriors rise from their wheelchairs to salute superiors.

The campus is equipped with wide ramps and elevators, and motorised buggies and vans to ferry trainees across its grounds. A hospital behind its main complex was built to handle emergencies. The Renault Group, a French multinational automobile manufacturer, has pledged motor-



Our goal is to instil confidence in the people here so that they can lead a dignified life even with a physical disability.

DR. K. NAGARJUNA  
Clinical psychologist

ised wheelchairs, sports chairs, and a bus by November 2025, signalling further expansion of mobility support to the personnel on campus.

Kirtaniya says the artificial limbs were uncomfortable at first, but have now become a part of him. "I remove them while resting or sleeping. It takes 5-7 minutes to wear the entire gear, which requires servicing too. In the monsoon season, the equipment retains moisture and needs further maintenance," he says.

The constable, who used to trek for miles in jungles wearing a bulletproof jacket and carrying a gun, has been training to be an archer at the NCDE for the last one and a half years. His batch consists of 20 trainees. Seven of them have already been selected for national games ranging from archery to discus throw. The trainees are also provided skill development classes in IT, which are run in collaboration with BITS Pilani.

Kirtaniya's efforts have resulted in some success. The father of two children won two medals – a bronze and a silver – at the Khelo India Para Games this year. He is happy, but says he misses the jungles. "I trained to be a fighter, but now I am a sportsperson," he says.

The physical training infrastructure at the campus is comprehensive. A ramp leads to a fully equipped gym, tailored for the needs of persons with disabilities, with specially designed machines calibrated to their strengths and requirements. Physiotherapists guide them through sessions that focus on improving gait, strengthening arms, and shedding excess weight gained during recovery. Separate physiotherapy rooms offer focused exercises to restore mobility.

At a meditation hall, two daily sessions of deep relaxation, mindfulness, and progressive muscle relaxation are conducted to reduce stress, anxiety, and minimise trauma. The counselling wing, led by specialists, focuses on post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma care. The wing also often handles cases of candidates who feel suicidal.

"Our goal is to instil confidence in the people here so that they can lead a dignified life even

with a physical disability," says Dr. K. Nagarjuna, a clinical psychologist at the wing.

### The risk of dangerous operations

The CRPF is the main force deployed for anti-Maoist operations. In the 38 districts in India affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE), 15 were located in Chhattisgarh in 2024. Following a directive by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, security forces have intensified operations in LWE-affected States, particularly Chhattisgarh, since 2023. Continuous operations have led to a sharp decline in LWE-affected districts from 126 in 2013 to 18 districts in April 2025. Four of the six most affected districts are in Chhattisgarh, according to data from the Ministry.

However, these operations have also led to many grievous injuries. Since 2016, at least 46 CRPF personnel have lost limbs in IED explosions in LWE-affected areas. In 2023, 10 personnel had to undergo amputations as their limbs were damaged in explosions.

On July 27, Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan said that CAPF personnel who get severely injured during operations and have to undergo amputation will be allowed to continue in service until retirement with all the benefits. Mohan said the government will ensure that the best medical facilities and technology are available for limb replacement surgery for CAPF personnel.

Until July 30 this year, the NCDE had facilitated the fitment of 106 artificial limbs while 135 fitments are under process. Rehabilitation includes personnel who suffer bullet wounds and injuries from road accidents while on their way to duty or on leave.

According to Veer Raju, Deputy Inspector General, CRPF, who is in charge of the NCDE, the affected personnel are screened when they come to the institute. Based on their level of interest, they are assigned jobs. Some opt for sports, while others help gather intelligence through data mining or monitor social media.

The personnel usually stay on campus for one two months, sometimes with their families. Those who are selected for sports stay on campus permanently. Those who leave, after undergoing tests, get clerical or desk jobs.

"The NCDE caters to the rehabilitation of all CAPF personnel who are injured while fighting LWE, terrorists, or insurgency in the Northeast. One of the most difficult tasks for the CRPF is to operate in LWE areas, where Maoists frequently plant bombs to demoralise troops. The injured personnel endure trauma all their lives, so we want to instil hope in them," he says.

The officer adds that injured jawans have the 'phantom limb syndrome', a condition where individuals who have had a limb amputated continue to feel sensations such as pain, as if they still have a limb. "They have to be counselled," he says. "This syndrome has to be managed systematically and scientifically."

Raju adds that unlike para athletes born with physical challenges, CAPF personnel have to adapt to the sudden bodily changes. "Some of the injured personnel are now participating in games at the national level and planning to compete in international games. They are soldiers who are determined and motivated. At one point, they stayed in jungles for 15 days at a stretch, walking 40-50 kilometres with weapons and bags weighing 10-15 kilograms. That kind of survival strategy comes in handy when they switch to sports."

### Winning medals

Toman Kumar, posted as a constable at the CRPF Group Centre in Raipur, is part of the sixth batch of the NCDE. Kumar's life changed on February 12, 2022, when he suffered grievous injuries in an IED blast during operations with the 209 Commando Battalion for Resolute Action, an elite special operations unit of the CRPF. His left leg was amputated above the knee, and he was admitted



I used to rank last in the games. I told myself, 'If others can do it, why not me?' With practice I improved and I have won five medals at the national level.

RAMANUJ KUMAR  
Constable

for extensive rehabilitation.

On October 27, 2023, he received his limb fitment at the NCDE. Under the guidance of his coach, Pankaj, Kumar trained in archery and was inducted into the para archery team at the national level in 2024. Kumar won a silver medal at the 13th All India Police meet, a gold and two silver medals at the 6th Para Nationals 2025, and a silver at the 2nd Khelo India Games 2025. He ranked seventh at the European Para Archery Cup in Rome, eighth at the Asian Para Archery Championships in Beijing, and fourth at the Para Archery World Ranking event in the Czech Republic. Now, all eyes are on him at the ongoing World Archery Para Championships in Gwangju, Korea. The centre has arranged a live link to watch him perform, and anticipation runs high.

A senior government official says CAPF personnel have to be physically fit to be eligible for promotions. After a CAPF personnel is injured in an operation, a medical board is constituted to decide if they are employable with the existing disabilities. "If the board decides that the personnel are not fit to continue in service, they are compulsorily retired but are given full pension and other financial entitlements. However, if the board rules otherwise, they are accommodated in other roles," says the official.

The official says good quality prosthetics are expensive. Often the reimbursement of the cost incurred is according to the rates decided by the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS). The CAPF's welfare fund was used to meet the shortfall, but this was not found to be enough as the CGHS rates for prostheses have not been changed since 2014. In April, the government decided to use the money from the Bharat Ke Veer platform, launched by then Home Minister Rajnath Singh in 2017 to help the families of paramilitary personnel killed in combat operations. It was registered as a trust in 2018 and the donations were exempted from income tax.

### The beginnings

Former CRPF Director General A.P. Maheshwari, who started the NCDE, says, "In 2012 when I was posted as an Inspector General with the CRPF, I met a jawan who lost both his legs in an IED explosion in Jharkhand. When he was offered compensation, he asked me, 'What will I do with the money?' Sometimes they were assigned roles as telephone operators or they were made to sit at a ration shop. That is when I decided that something should be done to give them a dignified life."

Maheshwari says it took another eight years for NCDE to materialise. Now it serves as a single-window system to address the grievances of physically disabled troops. He says it was a matter of concern that an increasing number of personnel were losing limbs on duty. And while the government was providing a financial package for them, the real challenge was to re-employ them as many were being "boarded out" due to the physical disabilities. "That also had an adverse psychological impact on other soldiers who thought that if they lost their limbs, they would also be in a similar position," Maheshwari says.

The officer adds, "While there were efforts by the government, they were decentralised. Depending on the rank, the personnel had to run from one office to another to get medically examined, get the limbs sanctioned. Now, everything is available at one centre. The idea is that they should not feel helpless or worthless."

Sanjit Singh Rawat, who has been training the para-shooting team for the past two years, says, "I used to train able-bodied athletes earlier. I find that para-athletics have stronger willpower. We train them to improve their mental strength and also focus on their wellness."

### Aiming high

Constable Ramanuj Kumar, 33, was a navigator. His job was to lead the team with the help of GPS coordinates. On June 14, 2020, he stepped on an IED in Chhattisgarh and lost his right leg below the knee.

"I saw my leg fly in the air and fall into the bushes. The other leg was badly injured. More than pain, I remember feeling a burning sensation. While one leg was cut below the knee, the other was amputated above the knee. Initially, I fell down multiple times from my bed. I used to wake up at night to go to the bathroom or to fetch water thinking I still have legs," Kumar says.

The constable has embraced shot put and discus throw as part of the "second innings" of his life. The gym and physiotherapy facilities at the NCDE, with specially designed equipment and a separate physiotherapy room, have helped him strengthen his arms and improve his gait. He also attends meditation sessions.

"I do not want friends and family to look at me with pity. I came to the NCDE and took to sports. When they were screening me for eligibility, I used to rank last in the games. I told myself, 'If others can do it, why not me?' With practice I improved and I have won five medals at the national level," Kumar says.

Kumar is also focusing on strength training. "Since I go to the gym regularly, my prostheses require frequent servicing and maintenance. After getting artificial limbs, and due to the uneven structure of my legs, I faced trouble while balancing my walk, but I am used to it now. I want to go international. I know it's a long way but I am working towards it," says Kumar, whose display picture on WhatsApp shows him posing in the forests of Chhattisgarh in a camouflage uniform and ankle-length boots, holding an AK-47 rifle.

vijaita.singh@thehindu.co.in  
naveen.kumar@thehindu.co.in



Rupee tantrums

RBI adopts right approach so far in managing Re fall

The rupee has explored new lows in recent days, and is within touching distance of 90 to a dollar. Yet, it is worth noting that the slide of about 3.5 per cent in the present quarter, comparable to the rupee’s decline soon after the Ukraine war, is no real cause for alarm. With inflation in check (and not acting as a depreciation trigger), forex reserves comfortable and the current account deficit (CAD) under control, the rupee’s fall this time seems largely sentiment-driven.



It is just as well that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has chosen to intervene lightly, rather than furiously inject dollars into the market to stem the decline — marking a departure from its heavy interventions in late 2024, and up to February this year. Apart from forex releases impacting reserves, they also drain domestic liquidity, a situation that India cannot afford when it is trying to promote credit at low interest rates. There could be other motivations for the RBI’s hands-off approach. First, it is allowing the rupee to slide to offset the tariff cost impact as well as the loss of tariff competitiveness vis-a-vis emerging economies. Second, any effort to smoothen out rupee volatility, as was alleged with respect to 2023 and 2024, could once again invite criticism on India managing its currency. The RBI is right in adopting a light-touch approach. Yet, it should not allow the market to speculate on the rupee level itself, and second-guess its actions. In this respect, it needs to reckon with the fact the rupee fall has been a contrast to the appreciation of emerging markets’ currencies against the dollar in 2025, possibly due to skittish capital flows and geo-political uncertainty.

The fall in the rupee has been triggered by two immediate factors: the above 50 per cent penal tariffs imposed by the US and the huge hike in H-1B visa fees. These may hurt goods and services exports, besides remittances. However, even a rise in CAD (trade balance and remittances) from 0.6 per cent to 1.2 per cent of GDP, estimated by economy observers, is unlikely to upset the balance of payments apple-cart. Of course, any geopolitical shock that drives up commodity prices could lead to a different scenario. But as a recent analysis by this newspaper points out, while foreign portfolio investors have pulled out ₹1,38,580 crore (\$15 billion) from equities this calendar year, their net investment in debt has been over ₹50,000 crore (\$5.5 billion). According to the RBI’s September Bulletin, overall net foreign portfolio investment this month, in fact, turned positive up till September 18, sustained by debt inflows on the US Fed rate cut. India’s debt profile has been looking up with the S&P upgrade, as well as inclusion in global bond indices. Besides, net FDI flows reached a 38-month high in July.

There has also been a shift to gold in these turbulent times, even as the US debt situation and overvalued markets have been cause for concern. India should stick to keeping its growth up, notwithstanding these global headwinds.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



BARENDRA KUMAR BHOI

Global growth outlook is weak. Inflation expectations are fairly anchored in large economies, except in the US. Hence, most central banks are pursuing an accommodative monetary policy. Even in the US, where retail inflation was 2.9 per cent in August, the US Fed cut the policy rate by 25 basis points (bps) to 4.0-4.25 per cent on September 17.

Indications suggest that two rate cuts in the US are likely during the remainder of 2025, with the rate-cutting cycle potentially spilling over into 2026. The US Fed weighed labour market weaknesses more seriously than retail inflation, even if it remained above the 2 per cent target.

Despite global headwinds amid geopolitical and tariff-related uncertainties, India’s growth momentum has been resilient so far. India’s June quarter real GDP growth at 7.8 per cent instils hope that India is on track to deliver at least 6.5 per cent GDP growth in FY26, notwithstanding the likely adverse impact of global developments.

A setback to external demand due to prevailing uncertainties may be largely offset by an increase in domestic demand following GST rationalisation that came into from September 22, before the festive season begins. Fitch Ratings recently upgraded India’s GDP growth forecast to 6.9 per cent for FY26.

According to the first advance estimates, India’s foodgrain production in the 2025-26 crop year may be 362.5 million tonnes, 2.4 per cent higher than last year’s record production of 354 million tonnes, due to the above-average south-west monsoon this year so far.

GROWTH CONCERNS

Behind the prospect of India’s resilient growth, a few lurking concerns exist. First, the nominal GDP growth in Q1FY26 at 8.8 per cent was one of the lowest since the Covid crisis. Spectacular real GDP growth in Q1FY26 was largely attributed to the low GDP deflator growth (1 per cent).

Second, at the current rate of nominal GDP growth, if the GDP deflator increases, real GDP growth will decelerate. The composition of India’s GDP deflator roughly corresponds to 25 per cent of CPI inflation and 75 per cent of WPI inflation. The WPI inflation, which was low/negative in the first quarter, has already reached positive territory (0.52 per cent) since August. Although the price outlook remains benign, both CPI and WPI inflation might have bottomed out.

Third, if the nominal GDP growth remains low, it would adversely affect the fiscal arithmetic, particularly the



REUTERS

No excuse for growing below potential

GROWTH PANGS. The IT breaks and GST rate rationalisation would be wasted if India Inc doesn’t invest

Real policy rates: Cross-country experience

(in %)

Country	GDP growth 2024 (A)	GDP growth 2025 (P)	Inflation, August 25	Current policy rate	Real policy rate (Policy rate-inflation)
US	2.8	1.9	2.9	4.00 to 4.25	1.10 – 1.35
UK	1.1	1.2	3.8	4.0	0.2
EU	0.9	1.0	2.0	2.15	0.15
China	5.0	4.8	-0.4	3.0	3.4
India	6.5*	6.4	2.1	5.5	3.4
Malaysia	5.9	4.4	1.2*	2.75	1.5
Japan	0.2	0.7	2.7	0.5	-2.2

Source: WEO, IMF, July 2025 A\* for actual and ‘P’ for projected \*Financial year 2024-25 \*July 2025

GFD-GDP ratio. Additionally, revenue losses due to GST cuts could further strain finances. The government has some fiscal space due to large profit transfer from the RBI, as well as the likely disinvestment/strategic sale of IDBI shares in FY26. However, strict fiscal consolidation is not advisable as it may harm growth.

Fourth, last year’s second-half GDP growth was higher than in the first half. Hence, H2FY26 growth rate will be modest due to the high base effect.

Fifth, in contrast to an average IIP growth of 2 per cent, the manufacturing

gross value-added growth of 7.7 per cent in Q1FY26 was eye-catching. The corporate sector sales growth in India was subdued in Q1FY26. As the discrepancy in GVA data is large, a downward revision of manufacturing growth in Q1FY26 cannot be ruled out.

WEAK TRANSMISSION

The RBI’s 100 bps rate cut in this cycle has not adequately benefited the corporate sector. Monetary policy transmission to lending rates has slowed down due to the neutral policy stance being pursued by the RBI since June 2025.

Some banks have reportedly raised lending rates in certain segments. Big corporates still prefer to borrow from abroad, as evidenced by the rise in external commercial borrowings in Q1FY26.

The 10-year G-sec yield, which has been falling since March 2025, has trended upward since May, making government borrowing costly. The market believes that the RBI may not cut the repo rate further as GDP growth has been robust.

The resilience of the economy has been assiduously built over the last decade by pursuing several structural reforms. This needs to be carried forward with the right mix of both monetary and fiscal policies

Indian tea industry needs a fresh push

Dip in domestic demand, exports and erratic weather have hit the sector. There is an urgent need to set up a ‘Tea Park’

Sujit Patra

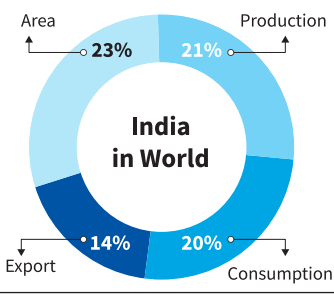
Indian tea industry faces the triple whammy of sluggish domestic demand, uncertain exports and unpredictable weather. In the domestic market, the growth in tea consumption is mainly due to population growth; per capita consumption isn’t rising. It remains below 850 gm a year — in most tea consuming countries it’s over 1 kg. This causes surplus in the market, leading to a dampening of prices. To add to the woes tea is imported from many countries.

Fortunately, the Tea Board’s directive for 100 per cent dust tea auction with simultaneous random testing of samples against FSSAI accredited quality norms is showing positive results. Dust tea prices have moved up on the confidence of getting quality tea.

There is a need to boost demand in the domestic market; around 64 per cent of the population drinks at least one cup of tea a day. Consuming just one more cup will create demand for 25 million kg a year, which will exhaust the entire

Tea: A snapshot

	India	World	India’s position
Area (Th Hec)	635	2,850	2 <sup>nd</sup> after China
Production (Mkg)	1,395	6,604	1 <sup>st</sup> in black tea
Consumption (Mkg)	1,215	6,100	2 <sup>nd</sup> after China
Export (Mkg)	250	1,840	3 <sup>rd</sup> after Kenya and China



surplus. Research shows that tea has many health benefits. The Tea Board may need to take the lead in promoting the beverage.

UNCERTAIN EXPORT DEMAND

India exports 230-250 million kg of tea. Except for some high quality varieties, Indian tea has lost its sheen in the international market. It is seen as a filler and blended with other origin teas. There is fierce competition in the international market. India often needs to wait for competitors’ weakness like less production, price spikes to fill the gap.

Further, there is geopolitical conflict in India’s two major export destinations — Russia and Iran — which make up over 40 per cent of India’s total exports. India’s share in many big markets like Egypt, Turkey, the UK, the US, Pakistan and Morocco are either small or stagnant. Competitors like Kenya and Sri Lanka have well-diversified markets to balance any drop in any market.

Indian exporters face certain other disadvantages like high transportation cost, lack of good export infrastructure, exorbitant ocean freight, scarcity of containers, etc.

A country-wise demand analysis

reveals that India can export another 100 million kg tea to various markets with focused marketing initiatives and good quality teas. For this Tea Board should come forward and help exporters.

There is no unique brand by which overseas consumers can connect with Indian tea. Around 1995, an India brand ‘Nargis’ was developed for the Russian market. But it became commercially unsustainable after five to six years due to lack of funds. There is a strong need to assess the requirements and devise a scheme for an India Tea Brand for the international market.

Erratic weather has also impacted tea production.

There is thus need to establish a tea park with modern warehousing, blending, testing, packaging and banking facilities. Also, continuous engagement with the FSSAI to ensure quality tea is important. These targeted initiatives could put the Indian tea industry on the growth path.

The writer is a tea analyst and former Secretary, Indian Tea Association

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

Digital tweaks

This refers to the report ‘Two-step authentication mandatory for digital payments from April 2026’ (September 26). The much-needed new procedure for conducting digital transfers, which the RBI has planned to enforce from next April, will be a gamechanger in reducing the country’s rising cases of cyber theft, which totalled nearly ₹23,000 crore last year. What makes the initiative notable is that banks may go beyond two-factor authentication and put additional checks if their evaluation of a given transaction demands it. While requiring additional dynamic or biometric authentication for fund transfers can significantly reduce unauthorised access to bank accounts and OTP interceptions,

risk-based checks will allow issuers to flag suspicious transactions, assisting in the identification of mule and fraudulent accounts. Given the enormous size of cyber fraud and scammers’ use of inventive strategies to target their victims, a multifaceted strategy is required to protect accountholders.

Kamal Laddha  
Bengaluru

Pharma pressure

The decision of US President Donald Trump to impose a 100 per cent tariff on branded and patented pharmaceuticals starting October 1, 2025, unless companies set up production in the US has jolted the stocks of Indian pharma majors such as Sun Pharma, Dr Reddy’s and Cipla.

As India is the world’s largest producer of generic drugs and supplies nearly 20 per cent of global demand, the immediate impact on India from the pharma tariffs would be limited. However, top pharma companies that have been attempting to move up the value chain with an increasing focus on patents and novel drugs will bear the brunt of this tariff hike.

M. Jeyaram  
Sholavandan (TN)

Changing rules

The editorial ‘Blame the rules’ (September 26), aptly gauged, the ex-ante induced realisation of new legal provisions, as brought out now; had it been in the place and applied in the Adani issue, the factual position

would have altered the decision of the regulator. As well known, the interpretation of the extant laws always decides the strength of the legal matters towards finality and inadequate and deficient rules, could be a lucky escape for the unmerited in some instances. Like the forbearance of judicial proceedings on the legal provisions in some cases, this issue has now pushed the introduction of much refined and qualitative reforms in the RTP transaction guidelines. There is no more uncertainty centred regarding its applicability only among listed entities. Transactions with unrelated parties of promoters has come under the scanner.

Sitaram Popuri  
Bengaluru

Liquidity trap

It refers to ‘Liquidity trap poses policy challenge’. As RBI has kept the interest rate low, the dangers of a liquidity trap loom as private capex is not increasing. Indian Inc is waiting for its existing capacity to utilise optimally before they take the plunge for the fresh capex investment and for that to happen demand has to increase on a sustainable basis for a decent time period. GST 2.0 has provided a much needed push for consumption, but its sustainability remains to be seen. Till that time government will have to do the heavy lifting.

Bal Govind  
Noida





OPINION

The  
**Hindustan Times**  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Games that nations play

Sport has always mirrored politics. India-Pakistan cricket ties have been no exception

Cricket becomes an extension and expression of nationalism each time India and Pakistan face off on the pitch. That’s been more or less the case ever since the teams first clashed in a Test series in 1952, and is not surprising considering the tense and complicated relations between the neighbours. So, coming in the wake of the Pahalgam attack and Operation Sindoor, the conduct of players during the ongoing Asia Cup was to be expected. It started with the refusal of the Indian captain Suryakumar Yadav to shake hands with his Pakistani counterpart after the toss. And after the game, he dedicated the victory to the Indian armed forces for their role in Operation Sindoor. Pakistan complained about both the match referee’s conduct (alleging that he told the Pakistan captain that there would be no customary handshake with the Indian captain) and Yadav’s comments to the International Cricket Council (ICC). Yadav was fined 30% of his match fee by ICC on Friday, according to reports. India on Wednesday had complained to ICC about the gestures of two Pakistani players, Sahibzada Farhan and Haris Rauf, referencing the Pahalgam terror attack and the downing of Indian jets during Operation Sindoor after the second game between the two sides on Sunday. India won that match too. On Friday, there were reports that ICC has fined Rauf 30% of his match fee and warned Farhan. With both teams set to clash in the final on Sunday, the last word on the matter will have to wait.

For all the talk about sportsmanship, competitive sports has always mirrored politics. The India-Pakistan cricket rivalry is not an exception, but in step with a trend that in the past roiled even the Olympic Games. In the specific case of India and Pakistan, bilateral cricket exchanges were non-existent between 1961 and 1978, a result of the breakdown in political relations and two wars (1965 and ’71), and for a decade between 1989 and 1999, when cross-border terrorism and the Jammu and Kashmir insurgency dominated the headlines. Both countries haven’t played a bilateral series since 2007, the year before the Mumbai terror attack. The cricket rivalry, however, has continued in multilateral forums, including the World Cups. India has won most of these matches. Over the past 17 years (since the Mumbai terror attacks), the bonhomie that once characterised interactions between Indian and Pakistani cricketers has frayed, perhaps normalising a rivalry that, until then, stood in contrast to sporting rivalries that were an extension of bilateral political tensions or global power politics.

There are several reasons for this. The terror attacks of 2008 are one. India’s increasingly muscular response to terror attacks from across the border, and the success of such responses, is another. And the aging and disappearance of the Partition generation — scarred by the division, but still in the grips of nostalgia — is a third. This is a new, young, and more confident India, proud of its history and heritage, but also optimistic about its future. Sports greatness is tied to national prestige and character. Nation-States see in sport a glue to hold their societies together, to inspire their people. At one time, sport may have held the potential to heal, build bridges between people, even defuse political tensions. That sounds horribly old-fashioned today.

How BSNL’s 4G stack embodies swadeshi spirit

India’s entry into the select club of five nations capable of producing this technology is historic. The indigenous 4G stack not only serves domestic demand, but has also been designed for export with several countries already expressing interest

Swadeshi may begin as an idea, but becomes an engine of growth when it is lived. Rooted in self-reliance, it champions domestic production, cultivates indigenous skills, galvanises community enterprise and weaves economic dignity into everyday life. When Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi revived this ethic in 2020 with the Atmanirbhar Bharat vision, the slogan became a clarion call for enhancing capability and developing a moral economy in which Indian makers meet Indian needs and then offer those solutions to the world.

The embodiment of this principle is Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), and the rules it has rewritten for the telecommunications sector pertain to the technological and civic arenas in equal measure.

In the midst of Covid-19 pandemic, with the country demanding resilience and supply-chain autonomy, BSNL resolved to design and build a completely indigenous 4G stack as it prepared itself for its 4G rollout. That resolve turned policy into practice and thereon, into palpable infrastructure, demonstrating swadeshi principles applied to critical national capacity.

A 4G stack is the brain and backbone of modern mobile communication. It is the fusion of hardware and software that ensures calls connect, data flows seamlessly, and internet experiences remain robust.

For decades, these vital systems came from abroad, leaving India dependent on foreign

technology. While global vendors expanded incrementally from 2G and 3G legacies, India began with a blank sheet and sketched its own architecture. With the PM’s vision and BSNL’s determination, the country embarked on building this architecture from scratch, demonstrating that the will to innovate can outpace inherited advantage.

The task required unprecedented collaboration. The Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT) developed the core network with unmatched expertise, Tejas Networks engineered resilient radio access solutions, and Tata Consultancy Services integrated every piece with seamless precision as a systems integrator. The entire architecture took shape in a mere 22 months, at a cadence far swifter than comparable countries that had struggled with similar challenges for decades. India’s entry into the select club of five nations capable of producing this technology was, therefore, historic.

The outcome speaks for itself in metrics and meaning. BSNL has installed more than 92,000 indigenous 4G sites, connecting over 22 million Indians. For two million consumers, this represents their first step into the digital era, a powerful symbol of inclusion giving operational heft to the economy. The network now handles nearly four petabytes of data daily with efficiency and security.

Confidence in homegrown technology also helped BSNL register consecutive profitable quarters after 17 years of fiscal strain, proof of the trust that citizens place in institutions that are aligned with swadeshi values.

The company’s financial turn aligns with PM Modi’s insistence that India build capability at scale and sustain it through industrial partnerships and clear direction.

The indigenous 4G stack also embodies the swadeshi philosophy. Local manufacturing generates employment, fertilises supplier ecosystems and nurtures a skilled workforce that can design, test, and maintain complex technological systems. When artisans of code and metal collaborate inside India’s innovation valleys, the country accrues significant human



Jyotiraditya Scindia

What musician Zubeen Garg meant for Assam

On September 23, four days after Zubeen Garg’s death in a careless water-sports accident in Singapore, his mortal remains were laid to rest. Four days and two post-mortems after, the people of Assam have not found closure. Yet, nobody is really looking for one. Because this is only another beginning, where the phenomenon called Zubeen *da* (as he was popularly known) is being immortalised.

Born in Tura, Meghalaya, in 1972 as Zubeen Borthakur, Zubeen Garg was distinctly more than just a popular singer, let alone just the singer of *Ya Ali*, the immensely popular song from the 2006 movie, *Gangster*. Now, many people outside Assam are surprised by two facts.

The first is that Zubeen sang more than 38,000 songs in about 40 languages. For a man who died at 52, the size of the corpus itself should be a reason for heightened recognition. But, people tend to care less beyond a few hits and popular numbers these days.

In Assam of the 1990s, this was not the case. Zubeen, who grew up in different parts of Assam and belonged to an artistically inclined family, made his way through school and college relying on his musical skills. His first solo album, *Anamika*, released in 1992, turned him into an overnight sensation. By the turn of the millennium, he was an icon for most in Assam.

He began to produce music and films and gave a new lease of life to Assam’s cinema, which was dying at the time. He sang about love, devotion, sorrow and much more. He introduced a new style of humming within his songs, which became immensely popular. Quietly, but surely, Zubeen gave a new voice to Assam, one where insurgency gave way to stability and modernism, casteism to education, and poverty to hope. For each of these shifts, he had a song that touched the soul and slowly transformed the people. But, the people were filled with contradictions. So was Zubeen.

The old, that was reflected in the likes of Bhupen Hazarika and Khagen Mahanta, could not accept a young boy with long hair, don’t-care attitude, and a dangerously free-spirit to be so easily considered an idol. After all, he challenged authorities openly, drank even during shows, and used foul language. What changed and made him the idol that he was? Everything but Zubeen. He went on to gain fame, money, opportunities that can easily corrupt even the noblest. But, Zubeen remained unchanged.

This brings to me to fact number two, the one which has left many surprised, and intrigued today about Zubeen. His funeral procession saw thousands of mourners from all walks of life throng the streets and grieve publicly. Many compared it to Bhupen Hazarika’s



Shrabana Barua



In its 25 years, BSNL has, in a way, mirrored the journey of our Republic itself: It is moving from dependence to confidence, from aspiration to leadership, and demonstrating that India’s technological destiny can be owned, shaped, and celebrated by its own people. SHUTTERSTOCK

capital and supply-chain autonomy.

The Aatmanirbhar Bharat vision framed these steps as strategic investments that yield security and opportunity in the telecom sector. It is also a clear declaration of India’s emergence as a product nation.

India is no longer confined to just consuming technology. We are now a creator, crafting tools that others will use, shaping standards that others will follow. In a way, the stack is the bamboo that bends but never breaks, resilient in structure yet adaptable for future leaps into the 5G era.

The indigenous 4G stack has been designed for export, with several countries already expressing interest. This is where the philosophy of swadeshi gracefully intersects with the ethos of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. India, as *Vishwa Bandhu*, stands ready to share its innovations with the world, much like yoga and Ayurveda were once offered as gifts of tradition blended with modern utility. Our Vocal for Local call is now evolving into Local to Global, a natural progression of confidence and competence.

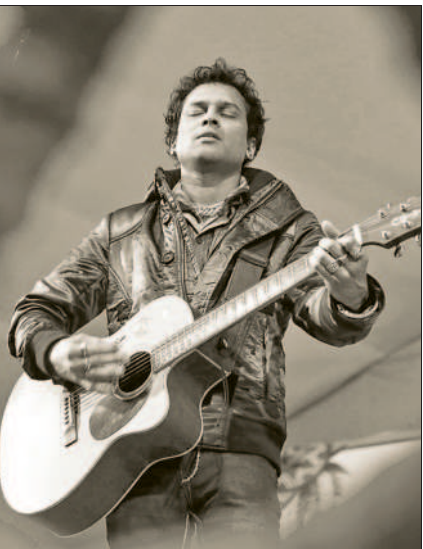
The indigenous 4G stack stands as a modern incarnation of swadeshi, an idea that matured into infrastructure, employment, and

exportable capability. It has yet again vindicated the PM’s faith in Indian capability. From digital payments through UPI to space achievements like Chandrayaan and from defence advancements to telecom independence, a pattern is emerging. India charts its own path, guided by the same conviction that powered swadeshi more than a century ago.

As the world looks toward India, the message is clear that we build in India, build for India, and are ready to serve the world. The indigenous 4G stack is a triumph of philosophy meeting practice. It is a beacon lighting the path to Viskit Bharat 2047, where self-reliance transforms into global leadership. And in every connection made, every village reached, and every citizen empowered, the spirit of swadeshi thrives anew.

In its 25 years, BSNL has, in a way, mirrored the journey of our Republic itself: It is moving from dependence to confidence, from aspiration to leadership, and demonstrating that India’s technological destiny can be owned, shaped, and celebrated by its own people.

Jyotiraditya Scindia is minister of communications and DONER. The views expressed are personal



By the turn of the millennium, Zubeen Garg was an icon for most in Assam. PTI

funeral in 2011. But it is not the size of the crowd that matters, but the depth of grief and outpouring that seems singular.

For millions in Assam, a post-Zubeen world remains incomprehensible. With his death, the world is witnessing a phenomenon unravel in Assam, being moulded by three forces — the people of Assam, the state government and the legacy of the singer himself.

The people of Assam are shocked at his untimely passing. Had Zubeen lived his life to the fullest, perhaps this phenomenon would not have been as marked as now. The people of Assam have shown the world what emotions

tied to land, language, culture, and identity can mean. Zubeen’s famous lines — I have no caste, no religion, I am a human first — saw visual representation when streams of people from all classes and categories poured in and cried together. Mass grieving has deep energy and can change societies. The government of Assam understood this and enabled this through three days of State mourning. Everyone felt included and understood. They found time to absorb the shock and think of the post-Zubeen world — even imagine it together.

After Kalaguru Bishnuprasad Rabha, Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Bhupen Hazarika (all 20th-century cultural icons), Assam has found a new identity through Zubeen. He was loved by the people on the streets and in elite parlours alike. He quit Bollywood at the peak of his career there and came back to Assam because he believed “a king should never leave his kingdom”. He sang Hindi songs during Bihu celebrations despite threats from the ULFA. The same ULFA has now paid him tributes.

Today, Assam has lost a part of itself. Yet, it is more whole than before, given that the singer’s legacy is larger than the simple sum of his life. His songs are going to find new meanings, new listeners as people discover parts of him. There will be research into his body of work, its range, and variety. And this will transcend into fields of art, culture, sociology, psychology, and politics. There will be annual celebrations of his life and work. And who knows what accolades he might win posthumously. But Zubeen *da* would not care.

Shrabana Barua is associate professor and director, NKCSEAS at Jindal School of International Affairs. The views expressed are personal

Chabahar and the change in the West Asian calculus

On September 17, the US announced the end of the sanctions waiver related to Iran’s Chabahar Port. The waiver — in place since 2018 when President Donald Trump (in his first term) unilaterally withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and launched a “maximum pressure” campaign against Tehran — allowed New Delhi to develop and operate the port. In his second presidential term, Trump resumed his coercive diplomacy with Iran.

In February 2025, when he asked for a review of the waivers, India faced tough choices. Having signed a 10-year bilateral contract with Iran in May 2024 to develop and operate the port, India focussed on using Chabahar to enhance its connectivity with Eurasia. Meanwhile, New Delhi also viewed its partnerships with the US, the EU, Saudi Arabia, and Israel in

the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) as crucial to counter China’s growing influence in West Asia. Since then, West Asia’s geopolitical landscape has seen radical shifts and realignments. India must refresh its strategy for the region.

During the 12-day Israel-Iran war, triggered by Israel’s surprise attack on Iran’s strategic sites, the Gulf States found themselves caught in the crossfire. Iran retaliated against the US bombing of Iranian nuclear facilities with missile strikes — though symbolic — on Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. Israel’s war against the Iran-backed “axis of resistance” has reduced Iran’s level as a threat in the region to a point where Saudi Arabia no longer feels compelled to pursue diplomatic normalisation with

Israel. Also, Israel’s unrestrained warfare and its bid to become an unchallenged military power in the region have alarmed the Gulf States. Israel’s air strike on the Hamas leadership in Qatar highlighted the limitations of US security guarantees as a deterrent. Saudi Arabia’s signing of a Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement with Pakistan — which has no diplomatic relations with Israel — has ended hopes of a geopolitical alignment among India, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE as the key US partners and allies.

Since the Pakistan-sponsored terror attack in Pahalgam and the ensuing military conflict between India and Pakistan, Islamabad has sought to strengthen ties with Tehran through two-way high-level visits. Given Iran’s postwar security calculus involves deepening dialogue with neighbours, it is unlikely to be alarmed by the Saudi-Pakistan defence pact. Iran’s longstanding position has been to support region-led security arrangements, while opposing the US-led security architecture. Under its Look East strategy, Teh-



Deepika Saraswat

ran has also downplayed the importance of Chabahar Port as a geopolitical investment involving India. At the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in China, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian noted that Chabahar will soon be linked with Iran’s railway network, creating a vital corridor linking China, Central Asia, and Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean. Tehran has also sought cross-border railway linkages and shipping routes between Chabahar and Gwadar in Pakistan.

India has shown significant resilience in developing Chabahar Port. Earlier this month, on the sidelines of India-Iran Foreign Office consultations in Tehran, the two countries held trilateral meetings with Armenia and Uzbekistan. A key discussion point was the use of Chabahar port to expand trade. As India aims to deepen its strategic and commercial engagement with the Gulf and Central Asia, it must demonstrate an independent posture and the ability to build long-term partnerships.

Deepika Saraswat is an associate fellow at Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. The views expressed are personal

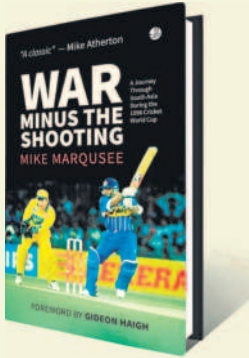
{ EDITOR’S PICK }

HT’s editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

A DIFFERENT PITCH

India is expected to continue its dominance over Pakistan as the arch-rivals will play the Asia Cup final in Dubai on Sunday. India has defeated Pakistan twice in the tournament. There have been no handshakes between Indian and Pakistani players during the tournament against the backdrop of tensions following the military conflict between the two countries in May.

This week, we recommend *War Minus The Shooting: A journey through South Asia during the 1996 Cricket World Cup*. A portrait of the subcontinent during the 1996 Cricket World Cup, the book is based on travels through the region. It chronicles the farcical, tragic, and stirring events of the World Cup, dissecting national identities, racial tensions, cricket board politics, money and power. It captures India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka at a crucial juncture in their histories. The book explores the intersection of cricket, geopolitics, identity, capitalism, and post-colonial politics.



War Minus the Shooting: Mike Marqusee Year: 2021



# The coming made-in-US oil crunch



AJAY SRIVASTAVA

At a Senate hearing on September 12, Sergio Gor, Donald Trump’s nominee for US ambassador to India, said that Washington would push New Delhi to buy more American crude oil, refined products, and LNG as part of ongoing trade talks. This is not new. For the past two years, Mr Trump and his team have pressed India and other nations to stop buying Russian oil and shift to US barrels.

**Energy demands in every deal**  
Washington has embedded energy-purchase pledges into its recent trade deals. The European Union has promised to buy roughly \$750 billion of US oil, gas, and nuclear fuel over three years — about \$250 billion annually. Japan has pledged \$7 billion a year, mainly LNG. Britain has signed a 10-year gas deal for 50,000 MMBtu a day, starting 2028, roughly five LNG cargoes a year. Vietnam is lining up 9 mtpa of LNG imports from the US by 2030, and Thailand has signed a 20-year contract for 2 mtpa of US LNG.

**The supply illusion**  
But there’s a problem. The US is still a net crude importer — the same product it is urging others to buy. Washington wants to block Russian barrels, keep prices low, and somehow become the world’s top oil

supplier. The math doesn’t work. The 2024 trade data are telling. The US exported \$298 billion of petroleum crude and products and imported \$246 billion, thanks to big surpluses in refined products and LNG. But in crude oil, it imported \$174.4 billion and exported \$114.5 billion — leaving a \$60 billion deficit. America remains a net crude buyer. Let’s understand why the US both exports and imports large quantities of crude oil? The reason is structural. Most US crude oil output is light, sweet shale oil, whereas many Gulf Coast refineries — concentrated in Texas and Louisiana — were designed decades ago to process heavier, sour crude from Venezuela, Mexico, and West Asia. To keep those refineries running efficiently, the US keeps importing heavy crude oil while exporting locally produced shale oil, a light crude oil, to Europe and Asia.

**Shale’s fragile future**  
The US shale boom is no bottomless well. Unlike conventional crude pumped from underground reservoirs, shale oil is extracted from rock using fracking — blasting high-pressure water, sand, and chemicals — and horizontal drilling. Wells decline fast, losing 60–70 per cent of output in the first year, and production stays viable only when prices are above roughly \$55 a barrel. Below that, drilling slows and output shrinks. That makes shale a costly, fragile substitute for Russian oil. Building the world’s energy security on US shale could backfire if prices fall, investment dries up, and supply rolls over. Brent crude is currently about \$66.80 a barrel — comfortably above the survival line but not high enough to guarantee a drilling boom.

**A looming energy crunch**  
Washington under Mr Trump has flipped from shunning fossil fuels to a “drill baby drill” strategy, seeking to turn the US into the world’s gas station — even as it remains a major oil importer. Its approach has two pil-

lars: Forcing allies to buy US crude and LNG, and punishing those who buy Russian oil. India has been hit with 50 per cent tariffs for continuing Russian purchases. Europe has pledged to cut Moscow out of its energy mix and replace those barrels with US supply. Washington is threatening sanctions on any country buying Russian crude. But US production cannot grow fast enough to replace the more than 10 per cent of global oil supply that comes from Russia. The result could be a dangerous mismatch — too little oil, too much pressure — pushing the world towards a fresh energy crisis and painful price spikes.

**India’s position**  
India’s oil basket is diversified: Russia supplied \$52.7 billion or 37 per cent in 2024, with Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Nigeria, and the US also key. India imported crude, products, and LNG worth \$7.7 billion from the US, and overall ran a \$3.2 billion deficit. Losing cheaper Russian oil means costlier West Asian or US crude, yet Indian refineries can’t easily

process light US shale without costly upgrades. But, Russian oil is only part of the friction between the two countries. Washington has cranked up the pressure on India with 50 per cent tariffs, a 100-fold H-1B visa fee hike to \$100,000 per worker, sanctions on Chabahar, and a Supreme Court filing naming India’s Russian oil imports — all designed to force India to accept one-sided US demands. While leaders from both sides express optimism for an early deal, the US is making the task ever more difficult as time passes.

**Pragmatism over pressure**  
In the end, global energy security cannot be built on politics or pressure alone. Stability comes from realistic supply commitments, flexible trade, and respect for partners’ choices. If Washington wants to lead responsibly, it must move from coercion to cooperation — or risk turning today’s market strains into tomorrow’s full-blown energy crisis.

The author is the founder of GTRI

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



# Dalits look West



PLAIN POLITICS  
ADITI PHADNIS

Dalits want more. And if they don’t get it in India, they will go abroad to get it. This is the message of the Dalits Quit India Party (DQIP), launched by the public intellectual and a shining light in Dalit political thought, Chandra Bhan Prasad. Not yet registered as a political party, the grouping is nevertheless going to be a powerful force in shaping the trajectory of Dalit thought.

Babasaheb B R Ambedkar’s central message to Dalits was: Education. Indeed, one of his most famous words of advice was “educate, agitate, organise; have faith in yourselves”. Ambedkar was the first untouchable in India to earn a PhD and study abroad, thanks to a scholarship from the Maharaja of Baroda, which enabled him to complete a PhD at both Columbia University and the London School of Economics (LSE), in addition to a law degree.

Mr Prasad’s inspiration is partially drawn from the farmers’ agitation and the support it got from non-resident Indians (NRIs). He says the days when Dalits were content with degrees from nondescript Indian universities are gone. Now, they must be ambitious and confident: Send their children abroad to study, and not just any foreign university but Ivy League institutions like Harvard and Columbia, or the LSE. The children must be able to

speak perfect English, must develop STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) skills, and eventually aim to become part of faculty in foreign universities. Their ambitions must be boundless.

The theoretical underpinning to Mr Prasad’s conviction is that the Dalits suffer from want of elite formation and, as a result, there is no social moderator/agency for them. Kanshiram’s Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) did have that potential. But Kanshiram took the movement towards Periyar rather than Ambedkar, steering focus on the immiserisation of the Dalits, himself living in poverty and deprivation, to strike a chord with his followers. In many parts of India, his Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation turned into individual-centric organisations of blind followers. As a result, when one left, the organisation collapsed. The final blow was the track shift from the Bahujan to Sarva Jan, leading to the rise of militant leaders like Chandrashekhar Azad and his Bhim Army.

Mr Prasad concedes that foreign educational qualifications alone are not a remedy and there is “discrimination everywhere”. A 2016 Equality Labs survey — the only one so far — of 1,200 individuals of South Asian descent in the United States found in a report (released in 2018) that 26 per cent said they had experienced a physical assault because of their caste, while 59 per cent reported caste-based derogatory jokes or remarks directed at them. More than half said they were afraid of being outed as Dalit. Some hid their caste, others confronted or embraced it as a badge of honour. “When I’m at Harvard I actually want to be recognised as an “untouchable” because I want

people to know,” Kanishka Elupula, doctoral student at Harvard University, told researchers from the Pulitzer Centre during a 2019 project on caste in America. Cases of caste discrimination registered in American courts have been reported especially from California, home to the tech industry.

At home in India, various devices have been offered as caste “mediation”. The Maharashtra government — the only state government in India to do so — has instituted scholarships that pay tuition fees, stipend, and living expenses to Dalit students who have secured admission in a foreign university. A National Council for Affirmative Action was instituted by the Confederation of Indian Industry in 2010, headed by the late J J Irani. Progress on this front appears to have been patchy, judging by annual reports. There is still no Dalit in top management at a big company, although Dalit matrimony websites are full of prospective brides and grooms who are employed in “MNCs”. Dalit-led enterprises are flourishing under the rubric of the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and many state governments have tweaked procurement policies to give the balance of advantage to Dalit contractors.

But how much can Dalit NRI mobilisation translate into political — and social — heft in India? Hard to say. After all, diaspora activity has advanced many causes. On the other hand, violence against Dalits is unceasing and the conviction rate, at around 25 per cent (according to the National Crime Records Bureau data), is still very low. In the Dalit context, education — and capitalism — continues to be one way forward. Defiance is another.

# How Pakistan thinks

What Munir has achieved with Trump is a return to normal, ironing out the post-Abbottabad crease. The White House picture gives us insight into how Pakistan survives, occasionally thrives, and thinks

Donald Trump in the middle, flanked by Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to his right and Field Marshal Asim Munir to his left, is the most defining geopolitical image for us in India. As one who often sees the world through the prism of old Indian film music, this might make me instinctively start humming “*duniya badal gayi, meri duniya badal gayi...*” (the world has changed, see how my world has changed) from the 1950 Dilip Kumar-Nargis-Munawar Sultana classic *Babul*.

The reason I won’t do so, or even commend it to you, isn’t just because Shakeel Badayuni’s poetry then took you into a world of self-pitying melancholy and heartbreak. Geopolitics, particularly when it comes to powers as consequential as India and the United States, are more complex than the usual Bollywood love triangle. There are



NATIONAL INTEREST  
SHEKHAR GUPTA

The US never dropped Pakistan from the list of Major Non-Nato allies. India never got on to it, nor would it ever be an applicant for it.

While the US under any President will value India for its size, stature, growth, stability and rising comprehensive national power (CNP), it knows India will never be what the sole super-power always needs: A client state. Pakistan has been one since 1954, when it signed on to US-led Seato (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization). To that extent, what Munir has achieved with Mr Trump is a return to that normal, ironing out the post-Abbottabad crease. That’s why that “*duniya badal gayi...*” metaphor doesn’t apply.

Further, in the subcontinent, another expression has gained strategic currency lately — new normal. What this picture represents is actually the return of the old normal in the US view on the subcontinent. In 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had talked about diplomatically isolating Pakistan. At this point, that project is in abeyance.

If we, in India, shake off this immediate disappointment and start thinking like grown-ups again, this picture will give us a much better insight into how Pakistan survives, occasionally thrives, and thinks.

The fact is, another Pakistani army chief visited the White House with his Prime Minister

not long ago. It was General Qamar Javed Bajwa with Imran Khan in July 2019. But then, it was clear that the Prime Minister was in front and the chief sat back. Now, the elected Prime Minister cannot even go for an official foreign visit without the Field Marshal sitting alongside. We saw this in Tianjin, Riyadh and Doha. This return to the status quo, only being emphasised more visually, proves many of us Pakistan-watchers for decades wrong.

I was wrong, therefore, when writing on Munir’s “fifth star” in this column. I harked back to Nawaz Sharif’s old argument that Pakistan had to choose between being a partridge or a quail (*teetar or batar*) as in being governed by the army or an elected government. You can’t have a bit of this and a bit of that, he had said bravely in 1993 as he took the train back to Lahore from Rawalpindi after being summarily fired by the establishment despite his large majority. The picture of the trio in the White House tells you three things.

● One, that this is the “system” in Pakistan. The Army is in control, with a subservient Prime Minister it would get “elected”. In the past, military dictators have experimented with getting party-less Prime Ministers elected in fixed elections. Think Zia and Junejo, Musharraf and Shaukat Aziz. Even Ayub and Yahya had Bhutto function as their civilian face.

● Two, that Nawaz Sharif was brave, but virtually delusional in hoping that one day, after many trials, Pakistani democracy would take over the country as much as India’s. He also saw a normalisation with India as key to this. He is now in the saddest phase of his life, mourning his dead project, whatever the riches of his Mar-A-Lago-sized home in Raiwind, near Lahore. The fact that his brother is now the Prime Minister and daughter the chief minister of Punjab, where 60 per cent of Pakistanis live, only adds to his humiliation and heartbreak. As melancholy as Bahadur Shah Zafar in Rangoon.

● And third, some of the understandings of many supposed Pakistan experts, this writer included, have been rendered erroneous, even stupid. That’s a confession. In that column on Munir’s fifth star, I had said Nawaz Sharif asked the partridge-versus-quail question, but what Munir had conjured up was an entirely unique creature where nobody knew who had the power or the credibility within Pakistan. I had described this

# Nostalgia, with a side of profit

EYE CULTURE  
ARUSHI BHASKAR

When *Sanam Teri Kasam* released in February 2016, it sank without a trace. The reviews were mixed, and the box office collection was lacklustre. And since there were no big faces attached, it simply vanished, like many mediocre films of its kind do.

Yet, when the film was re-released in February 2025, it reportedly became the highest-grossing Bollywood re-release of all time. Today, it enjoys a cult following, rivalling the likes of *Andaz Apna Apna* (1994) and *Agneepath* (1990).

What changed? Was it the memories of the Covid-induced lockdown, which had people craving to go out? Was it an audience satiated with what Hindi cinema was churning out? War, larger-than-life action, and historical fiction? It was probably both, plus a targeted PR campaign. But one thing is certain: *Sanam Teri Kasam* was no outlier.

If you have asked a movie buff recently about their last enjoyable theatre experience, chances are the answer was a re-release. It’s not just nostalgia — although that is certainly a big factor. Many of these films are remastered, attracting new viewers as well. Consider, for example, the re-release of *The Godfather* trilogy this month — fans won’t want to miss the 4K restoration, and even the uninitiated will seek it out. After all, which

cinophile could resist bragging that their first time watching Al Pacino transform into a cold-blooded gangster was in a theatre?

The re-releases have also become a conduit for families to watch films together again — one can often see grown children taking their parents to screenings of old Hindi classics like *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* (1965), *Deewaar* (1975), and *Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!* (1994).

Capitalising on all this, we have PVR Inox regularly conducting polls on its Instagram page over the next re-release. BookMyShow even has a tab for “re-releases” on its app. In an era where high ticket prices and the easy availability of quality content have eroded profits, re-releases promise a magic that translates to the ever-desirable “houseful”. With audiences unwilling to show up for mediocre, unappealing fare, there is a certain safety in classics, which are bound to draw even non-regular patrons. People singing along and even dancing in the aisles — this experience can simply never be recreated at home.

Although the current decline of Bollywood predates the pandemic, things have deteriorated since 2020. The year saw two other major developments, apart from theatres shutting down: The #BoycottBollywood trend (partly successful for the under-performance of films like *Laal Singh Chaddha*), and the broadening of cinematic horizons due to the proliferation of OTT platforms. Apart from major

ones like Netflix and JioStar, there are now also language-specific services like Aha (Telugu and Tamil) and Hoichoi (Bangla), which ensure easy access to content from the comfort of one’s home.

The only bright spot has been 2023, which saw films like *Pathaan*, *Jawan*, *Gadar 2*, *Rocky aur Rani Kii Prem Kahani* and *Animal* doing well commercially and earning mixed-to-positive reviews. However, it can be argued that four out of these five films rode a massive wave of nostalgia: The first two marked Shah Rukh Khan’s comeback; the third was the sequel to a 2001 hit; and the fourth was publicised as Karan Johar returning to his brand of “family entertainment”. Are we witnessing an Ouroboros Effect (generative AI training on AI-generated content, leading to eventual decline in quality and freshness) in Bollywood, with the nostalgia-laden success of re-releases affecting contemporary movies?

The slog continues for Bollywood, and only one thing seems certain: If audiences are stepping out, they are looking for an experience, a spectacle. The success of “event” films attests to this — sequels, comebacks, and new instalments in cinematic universes inevitably create buzz. But re-releases offer something unique: A potent mixture of nostalgia and the genuine excitement of discovering — or rediscovering — a gem. Looking at the way things are going, it seems they are here to stay.

# Building the right vibes with Gen Alpha



YES, BUT...  
SANDEEP GOYAL

Move over Millennials and Gen Z — there’s a new cohort on the rise, and they’re reshaping the future of marketing even before they have spending power. Meet Generation Alpha.

Born between 2010 and 2025, Gen Alpha represents the first generation fully immersed in digital technology from birth. They are the children of Millennials and early Gen Z parents, growing up with voice assistants, AI, short-form content, and personalised digital experiences being the norm. While many in this group are still in primary school, their influence on purchasing — and future brand loyalty — is already significant. For marketers and brand strategists, the time to understand and prepare for Gen Alpha is now.

Though the oldest Alphas are just turning 15 in 2025, they’re already more digitally fluent than any generation before. They’re growing up in a world shaped by:

- Hyper-personalised content through TikTok, YouTube, and streaming platforms
- Voice-first and AI-enabled devices

- like Alexa, Siri, and ChatGPT
- Gamified digital ecosystems, from Roblox and Minecraft to Fortnite
- Climate awareness and social consciousness, passed down by their Millennial parents
- Education disruption, with remote learning and AI tutors like Khan-migo becoming standard

These experiences aren’t just shaping how Gen Alpha consumes content — they’re defining how they build relationships with brands.

While much of Gen Alpha’s purchasing power is indirect — influencing parents’ buying decisions — they’re shaping brand preferences early and forming habits that will most likely persist into adulthood. A study by Beano Brain globally found that 87 per cent of Gen Alpha children influence their parents’ buying decisions, particularly in categories like food, tech, fashion, entertainment, and travel. Market research platform Kantar’s similar study in India put the number at 70 per cent. For marketers, the long-term game is clear: Build trust, relevance, and emotional connection with Gen Alpha today, and you’re investing in a customer who may stay loyal for decades.

Gen Alpha expects seamless, intuitive, and personalised digital experiences. They are not just comfortable with technology — they are dependent on it. This has profound implications for brand design, UX, and customer engagement strategies in the future. Short-form, snackable content (eg, reels, shorts, TikTok) is their primary media diet. Voice search and conversational AI

are becoming default tools for information and shopping. Brands will have no choice but to optimise for mobile-first and AI-enhanced interfaces — anything less will soon be considered outdated. For Gen Alpha, gaming is not just entertainment — it’s their culture, identity, and community. Platforms like Roblox, Fortnite, and Minecraft aren’t just games; they are social ecosystems and branded experiences. And, Nike’s NIKELAND in Roblox and Gucci’s “Gucci Garden” are early examples of immersive brand activations. Not surprisingly, brands are using gamification to teach finance, health, or sustainability through game mechanics — marketers now know that gamified brand experiences not only build engagement but teach values and behaviour.

Raised by purpose-driven Millennials and influenced by a world of climate crisis, social justice movements, and diversity conversations, Gen Alpha cares deeply about values. But they don’t want empty virtue signalling alone — they want proof and validation. Brands targeting Gen Alpha will need to go beyond slogans. Gen Alpha expects transparent, measurable action on sustainability, inclusion, and ethics. Greenwashing or token efforts could permanently damage brand perception. Brands will, therefore, need to bake ethical values into their product design, supply chain, and customer experience, not just in their advertising campaigns.

One other very important perspective. While Gen Alpha is influential, their parents still hold the wallet.

Therefore, dual-audience marketing is essential. Speak to kids in ways that are fun, empowering, and creative. Speak to parents with messages of safety, quality, value, and positive developmental impact. Brands that can balance both messages without patronising either audience will stand out.

And yes, kidfluencers are gaining popularity across India. YouTube channels like *MyMissAnand*, *Ananyaa Anand*, and *Aayu and Pihu Show* have millions of subscribers and regularly feature brand collaborations. Fast-moving consumer goods brands like Kinder Joy and Horlicks have tapped into these kid-led platforms for authentic storytelling. For Gen Alpha, brands will have to look beyond Bollywood and cricket. Micro-influencers in the 8–14 age range are becoming powerful messengers, especially when campaigns are built around play, learning, and emotion, not just selling.

Brands are learning fast. Startups like Bamboo India (eco-friendly toothbrushes) and Slurrp Farm (healthy kids’ snacks) are using sustainability and wellness as core brand pillars — values that appeal to both children and their parents. Similarly, Amazon’s Future Engineer program offers kids coding skills, building early tech engagement while enhancing the brand’s perception as enablers of growth. India will soon have the largest Gen Alpha population in the world: How many brands are ready?

The author is chairman of Rediffusion



THE ASIAN AGE

27 SEPTEMBER 2025

Will Trump pharma shock make trade pact harder?

United States President Donald Trump's announcement to levy a 100 per cent tariff on branded or patented pharmaceutical imports — unless the maker is actively building a facility in the United States — shows his mercantile thought process and marks yet another turn in global trade tensions.

While the restrictions were presented as an attempt to achieve self-reliance in US pharmaceutical manufacturing, this move threatens to upend the global drug industry, which relies heavily on Indian pharmaceutical companies for unbranded generics. Though the US President did not specifically mention generic drugs in his announcement, the White House refused to provide clarity, sending Indian pharma stocks into a tailspin.

The US is by far the biggest export market for Indian drugmakers. However, India accounts for barely five per cent of global pharma exports to the US. Ireland was the top pharma exporter to the US with a 30 per cent share, followed by Switzerland at 8.8 per cent. India barely made it to the top five with a five per cent market share in the US pharma market.

Though India's share in pharma exports is low, the US market is dominated by low-cost generic medicines, formulations and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs). In fiscal 2024-25, India's global pharma exports exceeded \$30 billion, rising by over nine per cent from the previous year.

Even if the US exempts generic drugmakers from this rule, the danger lies in future creep, as it could later be applied to complex generics and biologics. Margins in generic drug manufacturing are notoriously thin. Any tariff on generics will have a disastrous effect on the US health system, as drugmakers will pass on the burden, ultimately affecting American patients.

Trump offered exemptions from pharma tariffs if a company has started or is constructing its manufacturing facility in the United States. This rule, therefore, could convince cash-rich pharma companies from Europe to build their physical base in America. The infrastructure alone, however, cannot bring back manufacturing to the United States. America can never offer a competitive edge to companies in view of high labour costs and the strong dollar — a logic that the New York real estate mogul in the White House seems to miss.

Coming merely days after a decision to make new H1B visa applications almost impossible through a steep new fee, Trump's move complicates India-US relations, as both measures affect Indian sensibilities and employers.

Both these decisions, coupled with slapping India with the highest 50 per cent tariff, will impair goodwill between the two major democracies and affect growing people-to-people contacts. Unless these decisions harm the interests of common Americans, no future US administration could reverse them.

While an India-US bilateral trade agreement could provide some relief to Indian businesses, it is high time that Indians learn from their past experiences and expand their operations in Africa, Latin America and Asean. To survive in the global market, Indian businesses should focus on innovation and excel in their product offerings, as the era of the famous *jugaad* is over.

Farewell to veteran air warriors

It wasn't just nostalgia that the farewell ceremony was suffused with as the last two squadrons of MiG-21 air force jets — Cobras and Panthers — took a bow Friday. There was a near reverence usually reserved for great soldiers and airmen that was evident for the flying machines as the veteran combat jets of 62-years standing in the Indian Air Force were decommissioned.

Having defined a whole era of warfare and earned plaudits for the victories it endowed the Indian forces with in the 1965, 1971 and 1999 wars, the jets lost their war with obsolescence. They may have become accident-prone to the extent of being termed 'flying coffins' as about 400 crashes were recorded over time but, in combat, they proved superior to far more expensive American jets like the F-16s that our enemies had procured.

The Russian-developed jets, which first came to India in the Soviet era to begin decades-long cooperation in military hardware, symbolised a friendship, which began when the West would not arm India for love or money, that has endured for decades. These flying fortresses which sparked, including in the downing of a Pakistan F-16 jet by Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman in the wake of the Balakot strike, were lovingly called a "family member" by defence minister Rajnath Singh.

Exit MiG-21s and enter upgraded Tejas-Mk1As, of which two squadrons — Flying Daggers and Flying Bullets — are already in operation and huge deals have been signed, recently for 97 more, as these indigenous jets are ready to shine in India colours and made in India for India. Of course, keeping to delivery schedules is vital as the IAF is way short of what should ideally be 42 squadrons for covering the frontiers with all neighbouring nations.

With modern warfare to be fought mostly in the sky, the increasingly important role of the IAF cannot be overstressed. The force is badly in need of more squadrons as well as hi-tech drones to keep its reputation of a stout defender of the country. Never mind if there were losses in the recent engagement with Pakistan. The MiGs may have gone to be replaced by flying machines with modern technology, but the task of keeping the skies over India safe remains.

THE ASIAN AGE

KAUSHIK MITTER

Editor

K. SUDHAKAR

Printer & Publisher

The Asian Age office is located at: New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



Trump taking US towards a new race-cum-civil war?



Abhijit Bhattacharyya

Donald Trump, America's combative sitting President, should be congratulated by supporters and critics alike for his ruthlessly "honest" public confession at the memorial for slain conservative activist Charlie Kirk on September 21 that his philosophy towards opponents was very different from that of his late follower. "Charlie did not hate his opponents. I disagree. I hate my opponents. I don't want the best for them".

Since POTUS has now "honestly" declared that he is a "hate-generating" leader, and he has nearly 40 months to go before demitting office, one shudders to contemplate what awaits the \$30 trillion GDP economic superpower that is America in the 21st century. Take a look at the book *The Next Civil War: Dispatches from the American Future*, written by Stephen Marche, a Canadian, in January 2022. It was a sensational description of the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the US Capitol incited by Mr Trump after he was defeated in the 2020 presidential election, and blindly followed by the foot soldiers of his "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) movement, whose unprecedented ransacking of the US capital set the contours of the tsunami which today has created nasty and endless woes for America and its people.

It would be an understatement to say that America today is in distress internally. Why that matters to people living thousands of miles away, on the other side of the planet, is because this US chaos is inflicting unexpected and unforeseen damage to global connectivity, also known as "globalisation", and India is deeply linked to it through various bilateral and multilateral systems. Also, within the US, there

are five million people of Indian origin, whose notable contribution to and performance in America's economic and technological development is indisputable. And the ambience in America is getting so charged on race and colour factors, mainly due to divisive climate of "hate" generated by the US establishment, that the concern of Indians is wholly justified. There are real fears in responsible quarters that this "hate-filled" racial and colour prejudice may very well lead to a "race war" in the United States.

Someone who is close to POTUS needs to have the courage of conviction to persuade Donald Trump that a campaign driven by hate is unlikely to secure for him the coveted Nobel Prize for Peace, no matter how many bilateral or multilateral summits he may attend towards that end. "Hate" is not "peace", in fact, hate leads to violence and bloodshed, quite the antithesis of peace.

America also needs to confront its own troubled history. More than many other nations, the US internally is still trying to reconcile its racial and ethnic discord and, being a nation built by generations of immigrants, needs harmony at home. One may revisit the words of Stephen Marche: "The unimaginable has become an everyday matter in America... If you read about them in any other country, you would think a civil war has already begun."

What adds to the fears of a possible civil war is the easy availability of guns in America — a nation of 340 million people has over 400 million guns, and more than a trillion rounds of ammunition, and a political system which is totally resistant to any effective controls on gun ownership. It won't take much to light a spark.

Then bring in the race

Since POTUS has now 'honestly' declared he is a 'hate-generating' leader, and has 40 months to go before demitting office, one shudders to think what awaits the \$30tn GDP superpower that is America in the 21st century

factor. Donald Trump's MAGA supporters possibly visualise the United States as an exclusively white nation, having obviously forgotten its shameful history of slavery, where shiploads of black Africans were brought in chains to work in the plantations in Virginia and elsewhere for generations. He must also have forgotten the legacy of another President, Abraham Lincoln, who had declared the US could not continue to remain "half slave and half free". The Civil War that followed established the principle that blacks were as much US citizens as whites, though it would take another century for the Civil Rights Act in the 1960s to take it forward.

However, the ugly face of race is once again resurfacing in Trump's America, and policymakers seem unable to tackle this threat effectively due to their own catastrophic mistakes. Only recently the German-origin Eric Schmitt, junior senator from Missouri, contemptuously warned that the problem of immigration was not the people; but "it's about non-Europeans stealing the birthright of the descendants of America's original Christian settlers". America is clearly heading towards a race war-like situation in near future.

Much of this actually began during Mr Trump's first term. Amy Wax, a law professor at the University of Pennsylvania, had said in 2019: "Our country would be better off with more whites and fewer non-whites". Another US senator, Bernie Moreno, recently proposed a law to "curb outsourcing and promote domestic employment by imposing a 25 per cent levy on payments

made by American companies to foreign workers".

The ongoing all-out assault on Indians and other non-white foreigners by Mr Trump and his coterie must be seen in this light. These non-whites are perceived to be the main economic threat to "America's original Christian settlers". This inherent race-centric psyche had been kept dormant for long (but not dead), and is being deliberately allowed to raise its venomous philosophy by Mr Trump's MAGA and its managers.

The foot soldiers of the Trump-inspired "Make America Great Again" movement, almost all of whom hold extreme rightist views, have opened an irreversible internal front of hatred, divisive polity and reckless gun culture, which has sown the seeds of a potential repeat of the American Civil War, combined with a race war, between whites and non-whites.

The MAGA strategy, with official patronage, is clear: No room for non-whites or non-Christians "creating problems": immigration, industry, imports, tariff, trade, land-owning. The fact that the entry of immigrants, many of them non-white, has helped America to grow and prosper and has been mutually beneficial, counts for little. The clamour of "America for Americans" visualises a white Christian nation, the so-called "original inhabitants of the land". The irony is that the real original inhabitants of the US — the Native Americans — were virtually wiped out by settlers who came from Europe through mass murder. This happened in Australia too, where the original aboriginals are nowhere to be seen.

Understandably such blatant discrimination is unlikely to be acceptable to the non-white, non-American world. Clearly, the US is no longer the egalitarian, enlightened and liberal beacon of freedom to the world that it was till recently. The US still has power, but no goodwill.

The writer is an alumnus of the National Defence College, New Delhi. Views expressed are personal.

LETTERS

TEJAS BOOST TO TECH

The ministry of defence's ₹62,370 crore contract with HAL for 97 Tejas Mk-1A jets reflects India's effort to boost domestic armaments production and reduce dependence on foreign suppliers. With two-thirds of the fighters being indigenous, the deal strengthens strategic autonomy while also fostering growth and tech advancement. But balancing indigenisation with operational readiness remains complex: domestic industry must evolve into a reliable supplier even as imports fill capability gaps in fast-changing warfare technology. The Tejas project illustrates this tension, with delays in earlier orders offset by higher technical standards in the new contract and progress on reducing reliance on foreign parts.

Amarjeet Kumar Hazaribagh

DON'T IGNORE THEM

INDIAN SELECTORS have announced a Test squad for the upcoming series against West Indies. It is heavily loaded with spinners and includes four of them. In all likelihood, a maximum of three spinners may make it to the playing eleven. Nitish Kumar Reddy has been included as a fast bowler-all-rounder. To be fair to Reddy, there is no problem in his inclusion but in the past he has bowled only four or five overs in a match. It was, therefore, desirable that pacers like Akashdeep or Arshdeep were included. It is true that Indian pitches are spin-friendly, but for Akashdeep who can bat, too, and Arshdeep Singh, it would have been a good training to bowl in Indian pitches and conditions.

D.B. Madan New Delhi

RUSSIAN DRONES?

DENMARK faced an unprecedented hybrid attack as drones were spotted near Copenhagen's airport, forcing its closure, alongside Aarborg and Billund airports. Around 20 drones targeted multiple European airports, with Russia suspected of orchestrating the strikes to test Nato's air defences. The incident has prompted discussions on invoking Nato's Article 4, signalling collective defence readiness. For India, the attacks underline the growing global threat of drone warfare and hybrid tactics. We must bolster our air and cyber defences.

R.S. Narula Patiala

Farrukh Dhondy

Cabbages & Kings



"You claim it was a brief fascination My response is that's an insensitive claim It was in fact love's only inclination Denying which has only one to blame."

— From *The Scottish Ballads of Doll McKhanny*

The internationally acclaimed writer and activist Arundhati Roy has written about her relationship with her mother in her latest book. The news previews say she has also written about the campaigns she supported. There may be one which may not feature prominently in this memoir. That was her assiduous attempt to have the film *Bandit Queen* legally banned. And more!

I met Arundhati decades ago when I was a commissioning editor at UK's Channel 4 TV. She brought me her screenplay called *Electric Moon*, which I liked and commissioned. It was produced and broadcast by Channel 4. Through the process of editing it I, perhaps naively, thought we had become firm friends. (But as they say: *Apney munn ki mein jaano aur oonkay munn ki Ram*?).

Years later, I adapted for filming my ex-wife Mala Sen's book about Phoolan Devi, a dalit girl, sold when barely eight years old in a bargain marriage, raped, kidnapped, treated violently by Thakurs and the police and bandit gangs and then rose, through circumstance, to be the leader of a

vengeful gang herself.

Several writers I commissioned attempted the screenplay. It didn't work. I had to clandestinely take on writing it myself or the budget allocated to my department for the film would be cancelled. I worked with Shekhar Kapur and the film *Bandit Queen* resulted.

Bobby Bedi, the producer, invited Arundhati to a preview, after which Arundhati drove to Phoolan Devi's house and proposed that they get the film legally banned as it portrayed her being raped. Shekhar's depiction of these were later internationally acclaimed as truthful, discreet and campaigning!

Phoolan, Arundhati, with veteran lawyer Indira Jaisingh, went to the Delhi high court and pleaded to have the film banned.

As the case continued and was reported, Channel 4's insurance premiums on all its films went up. Disaster!

Bobby had already begun negotiations with Phoolan's husband and I went with a Channel 4 cheque book to Delhi and handed over an agreed sum to him.

That morning Phoolan went to court with one of the affidavit-signing lawyers, walked past Ms Roy and gang, ignoring their questions, went into the court and withdrew the case.

When Phoolan emerged, Ms Roy, in distress, accosted her in Hindi: "You have made *choothiyas* of us!" Phoolan brushed past her saying, "You

were that from birth!"

The film was released and won an official prize at Cannes. Phoolan proudly displayed it in her parliamentary election campaign to demonstrate what dalit women suffer.

It was when I returned to London that I heard that the French publisher Robert Lafont had sent a young writer to India to write a biography of Phoolan, which they could then sell to Hollywood as they had successfully done with Dominique Lapierre's *City of Joy*. I was told this writer was in touch with Ms Roy.

Soon after, Michael Grade, Channel 4's boss, called me to his office and showed me a petition signed by Ms Roy and about ten others asking him to dismiss me from my job. Michael said he could only think of one use for such a piece of paper. He said I should reply, which I did telling the petitioners they had failed and advising them to go some distance and have sex.

I knew two of the signatories — Praful Bidwai was a friend of my late ex-wife Mala. She was in my office, with my translator friend Firdaus Ali, when she, in great distress, said Bidwai had had an accident and his marrow was infected with a fatal, incurable disease. Firdaus overheard the name of the disease and said his cousins were working in Birmingham on precisely that. He called them and they said they had found the cure but couldn't release it until it underwent trials. Somehow, Firdaus persuaded them to give him a

sufficient dose which was sent to Bidwai who was, as a result, cured. There are, of course, no binding ethical rules of gratitude!

Another signatory was one Pankaj Butalia, from whom I had earlier commissioned a documentary about Shakespeare in Mizoram. Now he wanted me sacked??? Curiouser and curiouser! I wrote and published a limerick: *"There once was a man called Bue-Talia/ Who painted his arse in a Dahlia —/ A rupee a smell/ Went down fairly well/ Two rupees a lick was a failure."*

Then a Robert Lafont operative rang from France. Would I suspend the release of *Bandit Queen* for six years? They would "make it worth my while!". What??? A bribe to sabotage a Channel 4 property? I again suggested, repeating myself, that he should immediately traverse some space and have sex. And before I put the phone down, I said: "Remember Agincourt, Waterloo and now Bandit Queen!"

Subsequently, *Bandit Queen* was sent by the Indian Producers' Association to compete for an international Oscar. Did Ms Roy and her friends go to a Delhi judge's home on a Sunday and ask him to instruct the Indian Producers' Association to withdraw it? Won't speculate! A Delhi judge did instruct the IPA and it was vindictively withdrawn!

I look forward to noticing the absence of most of this from Ms Roy's book. No doubt her prose will glisten.



# The coming made-in-US oil crunch



AJAY SRIVASTAVA

At a Senate hearing on September 12, Sergio Gor, Donald Trump’s nominee for US ambassador to India, said that Washington would push New Delhi to buy more American crude oil, refined products, and LNG as part of ongoing trade talks. This is not new. For the past two years, Mr Trump and his team have pressed India and other nations to stop buying Russian oil and shift to US barrels.

**Energy demands in every deal**  
Washington has embedded energy-purchase pledges into its recent trade deals. The European Union has promised to buy roughly \$750 billion of US oil, gas, and nuclear fuel over three years — about \$250 billion annually. Japan has pledged \$7 billion a year, mainly LNG. Britain has signed a 10-year gas deal for 50,000 MMBtu a day, starting 2028, roughly five LNG cargoes a year. Vietnam is lining up 9 mtpa of LNG imports from the US by 2030, and Thailand has signed a 20-year contract for 2 mtpa of US LNG.

**The supply illusion**  
But there’s a problem. The US is still a net crude importer — the same product it is urging others to buy. Washington wants to block Russian barrels, keep prices low, and somehow become the world’s top oil

supplier. The math doesn’t work. The 2024 trade data are telling. The US exported \$298 billion of petroleum crude and products and imported \$246 billion, thanks to big surpluses in refined products and LNG. But in crude oil, it imported \$174.4 billion and exported \$114.5 billion — leaving a \$60 billion deficit. America remains a net crude buyer. Let’s understand why the US both exports and imports large quantities of crude oil? The reason is structural. Most US crude oil output is light, sweet shale oil, whereas many Gulf Coast refineries — concentrated in Texas and Louisiana — were designed decades ago to process heavier, sour crude from Venezuela, Mexico, and West Asia. To keep those refineries running efficiently, the US keeps importing heavy crude oil while exporting locally produced shale oil, a light crude oil, to Europe and Asia.

**Shale’s fragile future**  
The US shale boom is no bottomless well. Unlike conventional crude pumped from underground reservoirs, shale oil is extracted from rock using fracking — blasting high-pressure water, sand, and chemicals — and horizontal drilling. Wells decline fast, losing 60–70 per cent of output in the first year, and production stays viable only when prices are above roughly \$55 a barrel. Below that, drilling slows and output shrinks. That makes shale a costly, fragile substitute for Russian oil. Building the world’s energy security on US shale could backfire if prices fall, investment dries up, and supply rolls over. Brent crude is currently about \$66.80 a barrel — comfortably above the survival line but not high enough to guarantee a drilling boom.

**A looming energy crunch**  
Washington under Mr Trump has flipped from shunning fossil fuels to a “drill baby drill” strategy, seeking to turn the US into the world’s gas station — even as it remains a major oil importer. Its approach has two pil-

lars: Forcing allies to buy US crude and LNG, and punishing those who buy Russian oil. India has been hit with 50 per cent tariffs for continuing Russian purchases. Europe has pledged to cut Moscow out of its energy mix and replace those barrels with US supply. Washington is threatening sanctions on any country buying Russian crude. But US production cannot grow fast enough to replace the more than 10 per cent of global oil supply that comes from Russia. The result could be a dangerous mismatch — too little oil, too much pressure — pushing the world towards a fresh energy crisis and painful price spikes.

**India’s position**  
India’s oil basket is diversified: Russia supplied \$52.7 billion or 37 per cent in 2024, with Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Nigeria, and the US also key. India imported crude, products, and LNG worth \$7.7 billion from the US, and overall ran a \$3.2 billion deficit. Losing cheaper Russian oil means costlier West Asian or US crude, yet Indian refineries can’t easily

process light US shale without costly upgrades. But, Russian oil is only part of the friction between the two countries. Washington has cranked up the pressure on India with 50 per cent tariffs, a 100-fold H-1B visa fee hike to \$100,000 per worker, sanctions on Chabahar, and a Supreme Court filing naming India’s Russian oil imports — all designed to force India to accept one-sided US demands. While leaders from both sides express optimism for an early deal, the US is making the task ever more difficult as time passes.

**Pragmatism over pressure**  
In the end, global energy security cannot be built on politics or pressure alone. Stability comes from realistic supply commitments, flexible trade, and respect for partners’ choices. If Washington wants to lead responsibly, it must move from coercion to cooperation — or risk turning today’s market strains into tomorrow’s full-blown energy crisis.

The author is the founder of GTRI

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



# Dalits look West



PLAIN POLITICS ADITI PHADNIS

Dalits want more. And if they don’t get it in India, they will go abroad to get it. This is the message of the Dalits Quit India Party (DQIP), launched by the public intellectual and a shining light in Dalit political thought, Chandra Bhan Prasad. Not yet registered as a political party, the grouping is nevertheless going to be a powerful force in shaping the trajectory of Dalit thought.

Babasaheb B R Ambedkar’s central message to Dalits was: Education. Indeed, one of his most famous words of advice was “educate, agitate, organise; have faith in yourselves”. Ambedkar was the first untouchable in India to earn a PhD and study abroad, thanks to a scholarship from the Maharaja of Baroda, which enabled him to complete a PhD at both Columbia University and the London School of Economics (LSE), in addition to a law degree.

Mr Prasad’s inspiration is partially drawn from the farmers’ agitation and the support it got from non-resident Indians (NRIs). He says the days when Dalits were content with degrees from nondescript Indian universities are gone. Now, they must be ambitious and confident: Send their children abroad to study, and not just any foreign university but Ivy League institutions like Harvard and Columbia, or the LSE. The children must be able to

speak perfect English, must develop STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) skills, and eventually aim to become part of faculty in foreign universities. Their ambitions must be boundless.

The theoretical underpinning to Mr Prasad’s conviction is that the Dalits suffer from want of elite formation and, as a result, there is no social moderator/agency for them. Kanshiram’s Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) did have that potential. But Kanshiram took the movement towards Periyar rather than Ambedkar, steering focus on the immiseration of the Dalits, himself living in poverty and deprivation, to strike a chord with his followers. In many parts of India, his Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation turned into individual-centric organisations of blind followers. As a result, when one left, the organisation collapsed. The final blow was the track shift from the Bahujan to Sarva Jan, leading to the rise of militant leaders like Chandrashekhar Azad and his Bhim Army.

Mr Prasad concedes that foreign educational qualifications alone are not a remedy and there is “discrimination everywhere”. A 2016 Equality Labs survey — the only one so far — of 1,200 individuals of South Asian descent in the United States found in a report (released in 2018) that 26 per cent said they had experienced a physical assault because of their caste, while 59 per cent reported caste-based derogatory jokes or remarks directed at them. More than half said they were afraid of being outed as Dalit. Some hid their caste, others confronted or embraced it as a badge of honour. “When I’m at Harvard I actually want to be recognised as an “untouchable” because I want

people to know,” Kanishka Elupula, doctoral student at Harvard University, told researchers from the Pulitzer Centre during a 2019 project on caste in America. Cases of caste discrimination registered in American courts have been reported especially from California, home to the tech industry.

At home in India, various devices have been offered as caste “mediation”. The Maharashtra government — the only state government in India to do so — has instituted scholarships that pay tuition fees, stipend, and living expenses to Dalit students who have secured admission in a foreign university. A National Council for Affirmative Action was instituted by the Confederation of Indian Industry in 2010, headed by the late J J Irani. Progress on this front appears to have been patchy, judging by annual reports. There is still no Dalit in top management at a big company, although Dalit matrimony websites are full of prospective brides and grooms who are employed in “MNCs”. Dalit-led enterprises are flourishing under the rubric of the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and many state governments have tweaked procurement policies to give the balance of advantage to Dalit contractors.

But how much can Dalit NRI mobilisation translate into political — and social — heft in India? Hard to say. After all, diaspora activity has advanced many causes. On the other hand, violence against Dalits is unceasing and the conviction rate, at around 25 per cent (according to the National Crime Records Bureau data), is still very low. In the Dalit context, education — and capitalism — continues to be one way forward. Defiance is another.

# How Pakistan thinks

What Munir has achieved with Trump is a return to normal, ironing out the post-Abbottabad crease. The White House picture gives us insight into how Pakistan survives, occasionally thrives, and thinks

Donald Trump in the middle, flanked by Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to his right and Field Marshal Asim Munir to his left, is the most defining geopolitical image for us in India. As one who often sees the world through the prism of old Indian film music, this might make me instinctively start humming “*duniya badal gayi, meri duniya badal gayi...*” (the world has changed, see how my world has changed) from the 1950 Dilip Kumar-Nargis-Munawar Sultana classic *Babul*.

The reason I won’t do so, or even commend it to you, isn’t just because Shakeel Badayuni’s poetry then took you into a world of self-pitying melancholy and heartbreak. Geopolitics, particularly when it comes to powers as consequential as India and the United States, are more complex than the usual Bollywood love triangle. There are many factors at play. One, the US relationship with Pakistan is older and formally tighter than with India. While the US might have cooled off on Pakistan after finding and killing Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, the organic relationship remained.

The US never dropped Pakistan from the list of Major Non-Nato allies. India never got on to it, nor would it ever be an applicant for it.

While the US under any President will value India for its size, stature, growth, stability and rising comprehensive national power (CNP), it knows India will never be what the sole super-power always needs: A client state. Pakistan has been one since 1954, when it signed on to US-led Seato (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization). To that extent, what Munir has achieved with Mr Trump is a return to that normal, ironing out the post-Abbottabad crease. That’s why that “*duniya badal gayi...*” metaphor doesn’t apply.

Further, in the subcontinent, another expression has gained strategic currency lately — new normal. What this picture represents is actually the return of the old normal in the US view on the subcontinent. In 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had talked about diplomatically isolating Pakistan. At this point, that project is in abeyance.

If we, in India, shake off this immediate disappointment and start thinking like grown-ups again, this picture will give us a much better insight into how Pakistan survives, occasionally thrives, and thinks.

The fact is, another Pakistani army chief visited the White House with his Prime Minister

not long ago. It was General Qamar Javed Bajwa with Imran Khan in July 2019. But then, it was clear that the Prime Minister was in front and the chief sat back. Now, the elected Prime Minister cannot even go for an official foreign visit without the Field Marshal sitting alongside. We saw this in Tianjin, Riyadh and Doha. This return to the status quo, only being emphasised more visually, proves many of us Pakistan-watchers for decades wrong. I was wrong, therefore, when writing on Munir’s “fifth star” in this column. I harked back to Nawaz Sharif’s old argument that Pakistan had to choose between being a partridge or a quail (*teetar or batar*) as in being governed by the army or an elected government. You can’t have a bit of this and a bit of that, he had said bravely in 1993 as he took the train back to Lahore from Rawalpindi after being summarily fired by the establishment despite his large majority. The picture of the trio in the White House tells you three things.

● One, that this is the “system” in Pakistan. The Army is in control, with a subservient Prime Minister it would get “elected”. In the past, military dictators have experimented with getting party-less Prime Ministers elected in fixed elections. Think Zia and Junejo, Musharraf and Shaukat Aziz. Even Ayub and Yahya had Bhutto function as their civilian face.

● Two, that Nawaz Sharif was brave, but virtually delusional in hoping that one day, after many trials, Pakistani democracy would take over the country as much as India’s. He also saw a normalisation with India as key to this. He is now in the saddest phase of his life, mourning his dead project, whatever the riches of his Mar-A-Lago-sized home in Raiwind, near Lahore. The fact that his brother is now the Prime Minister and daughter the chief minister of Punjab, where 60 per cent of Pakistanis live, only adds to his humiliation and heartbreak. As melancholy as Bahadur Shah Zafar in Rangoon.

● And third, some of the understandings of many supposed Pakistan experts, this writer included, have been rendered erroneous, even stupid. That’s a confession. In that column on Munir’s fifth star, I had said Nawaz Sharif asked the partridge-versus-quail question, but what Munir had conjured up was an entirely unique creature where nobody knew who had the power or the credibility within Pakistan. I had described this



NATIONAL INTEREST SHEKHAR GUPTA

# Nostalgia, with a side of profit

EYE CULTURE ARUSHI BHASKAR

When *Sanam Teri Kasam* released in February 2016, it sank without a trace. The reviews were mixed, and the box office collection was lacklustre. And since there were no big faces attached, it simply vanished, like many mediocre films of its kind do.

Yet, when the film was re-released in February 2025, it reportedly became the highest-grossing Bollywood re-release of all time. Today, it enjoys a cult following, rivalling the likes of *Andaz Apna Apna* (1994) and *Agneepath* (1990).

What changed? Was it the memories of the Covid-induced lockdown, which had people craving to go out? Was it an audience satiated with what Hindi cinema was churning out: War, larger-than-life action, and historical fiction? It was probably both, plus a targeted PR campaign. But one thing is certain: *Sanam Teri Kasam* was no outlier.

If you have asked a movie buff recently about their last enjoyable theatre experience, chances are the answer was a re-release. It’s not just nostalgia — although that is certainly a big factor. Many of these films are remastered, attracting new viewers as well. Consider, for example, the re-release of *The Godfather* trilogy this month — fans won’t want to miss the 4K restoration, and even the uninitiated will seek it out. After all, which

cinophile could resist bragging that their first time watching Al Pacino transform into a cold-blooded gangster was in a theatre?

The re-releases have also become a conduit for families to watch films together again — one can often see grown children taking their parents to screenings of old Hindi classics like *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* (1965), *Deewaar* (1975), and *Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!* (1994).

Capitalising on all this, we have PVR Inox regularly conducting polls on its Instagram page over the next re-release. BookMyShow even has a tab for “re-releases” on its app. In an era where high ticket prices and the easy availability of quality content have eroded profits, re-releases promise a magic that translates to the ever-desirable “houseful”. With audiences unwilling to show up for mediocre, unappealing fare, there is a certain safety in classics, which are bound to draw even non-regular patrons. People singing along and even dancing in the aisles — this experience can simply never be recreated at home.

Although the current decline of Bollywood predates the pandemic, things have deteriorated since 2020. The year saw two other major developments, apart from theatres shutting down: The #BoycottBollywood trend (partly successful for the under-performance of films like *Laal Singh Chaddha*), and the broadening of cinematic horizons due to the proliferation of OTT platforms. Apart from major

ones like Netflix and JioStar, there are now also language-specific services like Aha (Telugu and Tamil) and Hoichoi (Bangla), which ensure easy access to content from the comfort of one’s home.

The only bright spot has been 2023, which saw films like *Pathaan*, *Jawan*, *Gadar 2*, *Rocky aur Rani Kii Prem Kahani* and *Animal* doing well commercially and earning mixed-to-positive reviews. However, it can be argued that four out of these five films rode a massive wave of nostalgia: The first two marked Shah Rukh Khan’s comeback; the third was the sequel to a 2001 hit; and the fourth was publicised as Karan Johar returning to his brand of “family entertainment”. Are we witnessing an Ouroboros Effect (generative AI training on AI-generated content, leading to eventual decline in quality and freshness) in Bollywood, with the nostalgia-laden success of re-releases affecting contemporary movies?

The slog continues for Bollywood, and only one thing seems certain: If audiences are stepping out, they are looking for an experience, a spectacle. The success of “event” films attests to this — sequels, comebacks, and new instalments in cinematic universes inevitably create buzz. But re-releases offer something unique: A potent mixture of nostalgia and the genuine excitement of discovering — or rediscovering — a gem. Looking at the way things are going, it seems they are here to stay.

# Building the right vibes with Gen Alpha



YES, BUT... SANDEEP GOYAL

Move over Millennials and Gen Z — there’s a new cohort on the rise, and they’re reshaping the future of marketing even before they have spending power. Meet Generation Alpha.

Born between 2010 and 2025, Gen Alpha represents the first generation fully immersed in digital technology from birth. They are the children of Millennials and early Gen Z parents, growing up with voice assistants, AI, short-form content, and personalised digital experiences being the norm. While many in this group are still in primary school, their influence on purchasing — and future brand loyalty — is already significant. For marketers and brand strategists, the time to understand and prepare for Gen Alpha is now.

Though the oldest Alphas are just turning 15 in 2025, they’re already more digitally fluent than any generation before. They’re growing up in a world shaped by:

- Hyper-personalised content through TikTok, YouTube, and streaming platforms
- Voice-first and AI-enabled devices

- Gamified digital ecosystems, from Roblox and Minecraft to Fortnite
- Climate awareness and social consciousness, passed down by their Millennial parents
- Education disruption, with remote learning and AI tutors like Khan-migo becoming standard

These experiences aren’t just shaping how Gen Alpha consumes content — they’re defining how they build relationships with brands.

While much of Gen Alpha’s purchasing power is indirect — influencing parents’ buying decisions — they’re shaping brand preferences early and forming habits that will most likely persist into adulthood. A study by Beano Brain globally found that 87 per cent of Gen Alpha children influence their parents’ buying decisions, particularly in categories like food, tech, fashion, entertainment, and travel. Market research platform Kantar’s similar study in India put the number at 70 per cent. For marketers, the long-term game is clear: Build trust, relevance, and emotional connection with Gen Alpha today, and you’re investing in a customer who may stay loyal for decades.

Gen Alpha expects seamless, intuitive, and personalised digital experiences. They are not just comfortable with technology — they are dependent on it. This has profound implications for brand design, UX, and customer engagement strategies in the future. Short-form, snackable content (eg, reels, shorts, TikTok) is their primary media diet.

Voice search and conversational AI

are becoming default tools for information and shopping. Brands will have no choice but to optimise for mobile-first and AI-enhanced interfaces — anything less will soon be considered outdated. For Gen Alpha, gaming is not just entertainment — it’s their culture, identity, and community. Platforms like Roblox, Fortnite, and Minecraft aren’t just games; they are social ecosystems and branded experiences. And, Nike’s NIKELAND in Roblox and Gucci’s “Gucci Garden” are early examples of immersive brand activations. Not surprisingly, brands are using gamification to teach finance, health, or sustainability through game mechanics — marketers now know that gamified brand experiences not only build engagement but teach values and behaviour.

Raised by purpose-driven Millennials and influenced by a world of climate crisis, social justice movements, and diversity conversations, Gen Alpha cares deeply about values. But they don’t want empty virtue signalling alone — they want proof and validation. Brands targeting Gen Alpha will need to go beyond slogans. Gen Alpha expects transparent, measurable action on sustainability, inclusion, and ethics. Greenwashing or token efforts could permanently damage brand perception. Brands will, therefore, need to bake ethical values into their product design, supply chain, and customer experience, not just in their advertising campaigns.

One other very important perspective. While Gen Alpha is influential, their parents still hold the wallet.

Therefore, dual-audience marketing is essential. Speak to kids in ways that are fun, empowering, and creative. Speak to parents with messages of safety, quality, value, and positive developmental impact. Brands that can balance both messages without patronising either audience will stand out.

And yes, kidfluencers are gaining popularity across India. YouTube channels like *MyMissAnand*, *Ananyaa Anand*, and *Aayu and Pihu Show* have millions of subscribers and regularly feature brand collaborations. Fast-moving consumer goods brands like Kinder Joy and Horlicks have tapped into these kid-led platforms for authentic storytelling. For Gen Alpha, brands will have to look beyond Bollywood and cricket. Micro-influencers in the 8–14 age range are becoming powerful messengers, especially when campaigns are built around play, learning, and emotion, not just selling.

Brands are learning fast. Startups like Bamboo India (eco-friendly toothbrushes) and Slurrp Farm (healthy kids’ snacks) are using sustainability and wellness as core brand pillars — values that appeal to both children and their parents. Similarly, Amazon’s Future Engineer program offers kids coding skills, building early tech engagement while enhancing the brand’s perception as enablers of growth. India will soon have the largest Gen Alpha population in the world: How many brands are ready?

The author is chairman of Reddiffusion



DECCAN Chronicle

27 SEPTEMBER 2025

Will Trump pharma shock make trade pact harder?

United States President Donald Trump's announcement to levy a 100 per cent tariff on branded or patented pharmaceutical imports — unless the maker is actively building a facility in the United States — shows his mercantile thought process and marks yet another turn in global trade tensions.

While the restrictions were presented as an attempt to achieve self-reliance in US pharmaceutical manufacturing, this move threatens to upend the global drug industry, which relies heavily on Indian pharmaceutical companies for unbranded generics. Though the US President did not specifically mention generic drugs in his announcement, the White House refused to provide clarity, sending Indian pharma stocks into a tailspin.

The US is by far the biggest export market for Indian drugmakers. However, India accounts for barely five per cent of global pharma exports to the US. Ireland was the top pharma exporter to the US with a 30 per cent share, followed by Switzerland at 8.8 per cent. India barely made it to the top five with a five per cent market share in the US pharma market.

Though India's share in pharma exports is low, the US market is dominated by low-cost generic medicines, formulations and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs). In fiscal 2024-25, India's global pharma exports exceeded \$30 billion, rising by over nine per cent from the previous year.

Even if the US exempts generic drugmakers from this rule, the danger lies in future creep, as it could later be applied to complex generics and biologics. Margins in generic drug manufacturing are notoriously thin. Any tariff on generics will have a disastrous effect on the US health system, as drug-makers will pass on the burden, ultimately affecting American patients.

Trump offered exemptions from pharma tariffs if a company has started or is constructing its manufacturing facility in the United States. This rule, therefore, could convince cash-rich pharma companies from Europe to build their physical base in America. The infrastructure alone, however, cannot bring back manufacturing to the United States. America can never offer a competitive edge to companies in view of high labour costs and the strong dollar — a logic that the New York real estate mogul in the White House seems to miss.

Coming merely days after a decision to make new H1B visa applications almost impossible through a steep new fee, Trump's move complicates India-US relations, as both measures affect Indian sensibilities and employers.

Both these decisions, coupled with slapping India with the highest 50 per cent tariff, will impair goodwill between the two major democracies and affect growing people-to-people contacts. Unless these decisions harm the interests of common Americans, no future US administration could reverse them.

While an India-US bilateral trade agreement could provide some relief to Indian businesses, it is high time that Indians learn from their past experiences and expand their operations in Africa, Latin America and Asean. To survive in the global market, Indian businesses should focus on innovation and excel in their product offerings, as the era of the famous *jugaad* is over.

Farewell to veteran air warriors

It wasn't just nostalgia that the farewell ceremony was suffused with as the last two squadrons of MiG-21 air force jets — Cobras and Panthers — took a bow Friday. There was a near reverence usually reserved for great soldiers and airmen that was evident for the flying machines as the veteran combat jets of 62-years standing in the Indian Air Force were decommissioned.

Having defined a whole era of warfare and earned plaudits for the victories it endowed the Indian forces with in the 1965, 1971 and 1999 wars, the jets lost their war with obsolescence. They may have become accident-borne to the extent of being termed 'flying coffins' as about 400 crashes were recorded over time but, in combat, they proved superior to far more expensive American jets like the F-16s that our enemies had procured.

The Russian-developed jets, which first came to India in the Soviet era to begin decades-long cooperation in military hardware, symbolised a friendship, which began when the West would not arm India for love or money, that has endured for decades. These flying fortresses which sparkled, including in the downing of a Pakistan F-16 jet by Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman in the wake of the Balakot strike, were lovingly called a "family member" by defence minister Rajnath Singh.

Exit MiG-21s and enter upgraded Tejas-Mk1As, of which two squadrons — Flying Daggers and Flying Bullets — are already in operation and huge deals have been signed, recently for 97 more, as these indigenous jets are ready to shine in India colours and made in India for India. Of course, keeping to delivery schedules is vital as the IAF is way short of what should ideally be 42 squadrons for covering the frontiers with all neighbouring nations.

With modern warfare to be fought mostly in the sky, the increasingly important role of the IAF cannot be overstressed. The force is badly in need of more squadrons as well as hi-tech drones to keep its reputation of a stout defender of the country. Never mind if there were losses in the recent engagement with Pakistan. The MiGs may have gone to be replaced by flying machines with modern technology, but the task of keeping the skies over India safe remains.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER  
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR  
Printer & Publisher

R. MOHAN  
Resident Editor

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:  
**Chennai:** SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254750, 22254751  
**Coimbatore:** No. 2/22 Sengalipalayam Road, N.G.G.O. Colony Post, Kurudampalayam Village, Coimbatore-641022. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256  
**Hyderabad:** 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27803256  
**Visakhapatnam:** Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Roadway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334, Fax (0891) 2755285  
**Vijayawada:** No. C 3 & 4, Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 2555284/ 2555287, Fax (0866) 2555234  
**Rajahmundry:** Vemagiri, Dhawleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618  
**Anantapur:** Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904  
**Nellore:** Survey No. 527/2, Burrampur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2348581/ 82, Telefax (0861) 2348580  
**Karimnagar:** H. No. 1-21/1-12/1, Cheralabhtukur Road, Mugudhumpur Village, Karim Nagar - 505186 Phone : 9121181123

Subhani



Trump taking US towards a new race-cum-civil war?



Abhijit Bhattacharyya

Donald Trump, America's combative sitting President, should be congratulated by supporters and critics alike for his ruthlessly "honest" public confession at the memorial for slain conservative activist Charlie Kirk on September 21 that his philosophy towards opponents was very different from that of his late follower. "Charlie did not hate his opponents. I disagree. I hate my opponents. I don't want the best for them".

Since POTUS has now "honestly" declared that he is a "hate-generating" leader, and he has nearly 40 months to go before demitting office, one shudders to contemplate what awaits the \$30 trillion GDP economic superpower that is America in the 21st century. Take a look at the book *The Next Civil War: Dispatches from the American Future*, written by Stephen Marche, a Canadian, in January 2022. It was a sensational description of the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the US Capitol incited by Mr Trump after he was defeated in the 2020 presidential election, and blindly followed by the foot soldiers of his "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) movement, whose unprecedented ransacking of the US capital set the contours of the tsunami which today has created nasty and endless woes for America and its people.

It would be an understatement to say that America today is in distress internally. Why that matters to people living thousands of miles away, on the other side of the planet, is because this US chaos is inflicting unexpected and unforeseen damage to global connectivity, also known as "globalisation", and India is deeply linked to it through various bilateral and multilateral systems.

Also, within the US, there

are five million people of Indian origin, whose notable contribution to and performance in America's economic and technological development is indisputable. And the ambience in America is getting so charged on race and colour factors, mainly due to divisive climate of "hate" generated by the US establishment, that the concern of Indians is wholly justified. There are real fears in responsible quarters that this "hate-filled" racial and colour prejudice may very well lead to a "race war" in the United States.

Someone who is close to POTUS needs to have the courage of conviction to persuade Donald Trump that a campaign driven by hate is unlikely to secure for him the coveted Nobel Prize for Peace, no matter how many bilateral or multilateral summits he may attend towards that end. "Hate" is not "peace", in fact, hate leads to violence and bloodshed, quite the antithesis of peace.

America also needs to confront its own troubled history. More than many other nations, the US internally is still trying to reconcile its racial and ethnic discord and, being a nation built by generations of immigrants, needs harmony at home. One may revisit the words of Stephen Marche: "The unimaginable has become an everyday matter in America... If you read about them in any other country, you would think a civil war has already begun."

What adds to the fears of a possible civil war is the easy availability of guns in America — a nation of 340 million people has over 400 million guns, and more than a trillion rounds of ammunition, and a political system which is totally resistant to any effective controls on gun ownership. It won't take much to light a spark.

Then bring in the race

Since POTUS has now 'honestly' declared he is a 'hate-generating' leader, and has 40 months to go before demitting office, one shudders to think what awaits the \$30tn GDP superpower that is America in the 21st century

factor. Donald Trump's MAGA supporters possibly visualise the United States as an exclusively white nation, having obviously forgotten its shameful history of slavery, where shiploads of black Africans were brought in chains to work in the plantations in Virginia and elsewhere for generations. He must also have forgotten the legacy of another President, Abraham Lincoln, who had declared the US could not continue to remain "half slave and half free". The Civil War that followed established the principle that blacks were as much US citizens as whites, though it would take another century for the Civil Rights Act in the 1960s to take it forward.

However, the ugly face of race is once again resurfacing in Trump's America, and policymakers seem unable to tackle this threat effectively due to their own catastrophic mistakes. Only recently the German-origin Eric Schmitt, junior senator from Missouri, contemptuously warned that the problem of immigration was not the people; but "it's about non-Europeans stealing the birthright of the descendants of America's original Christian settlers". America is clearly heading towards a race war-like situation in near future.

Much of this actually began during Mr Trump's first term. Amy Wax, a law professor at the University of Pennsylvania, had said in 2019: "Our country would be better off with more whites and fewer non-whites". Another US senator, Bernie Moreno, recently proposed a law to "curb outsourcing and promote domestic employment by imposing a 25 per cent levy on payments

made by American companies to foreign workers".

The ongoing all-out assault on Indians and other non-white foreigners by Mr Trump and his coterie must be seen in this light. These non-whites are perceived to be the main economic threat to "America's original Christian settlers". This inherent race-centric psyche had been kept dormant for long (but not dead), and is being deliberately allowed to raise its venomous philosophy by Mr Trump's MAGA and its managers.

The foot soldiers of the Trump-inspired "Make America Great Again" movement, almost all of whom hold extreme rightist views, have opened an irreversible internal front of hatred, divisive polity and reckless gun culture, which has sown the seeds of a potential repeat of the American Civil War, combined with a race war, between whites and non-whites.

The MAGA strategy, with official patronage, is clear: No room for non-whites or non-Christians "creating problems": immigration, industry, imports, tariff, trade, land-owning. The fact that the entry of immigrants, many of them non-white, has helped America to grow and prosper and has been mutually beneficial, counts for little. The clamour of "America for Americans" visualises a white Christian nation, the so-called "original inhabitants of the land". The irony is that the real original inhabitants of the US — the Native Americans — were virtually wiped out by settlers who came from Europe through mass murder. This happened in Australia too, where the original aborigines are nowhere to be seen.

Understandably such blatant discrimination is unlikely to be acceptable to the non-white, non-American world. Clearly, the US is no longer the egalitarian, enlightened and liberal beacon of freedom to the world that it was till recently. The US still has power, but no goodwill.

The writer is an alumnus of the National Defence College, New Delhi. Views expressed are personal.

LETTERS

DOMESTIC DEMAND

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that India's economy thrives on increase in domestic demand. In a developing country such as ours, the ratio of increase in consumption to increase in income is always high, and the economy is undoubtedly doing good now. People, however, need to think about their future too. Put differently, they need to have reasonable savings or deposits in the money market to lead a decent life in the future. Their savings with banks and financial institutions can help enhance the lending to all the three sectors - primary, secondary and tertiary - and accelerate economic growth. After all, people should think about the short as well as the long run.

S.Ramakrishnasayee  
Chennai

KOLU DOLLS

The news that appeared relating to the Thanjavur Thalayaatti Bommai, which is a must in every Kolu arranged for Dasara, was interesting. There is little doubt that the 10-day festival is an occasion for all artisans, especially doll makers to showcase their inherited skills. Apart from the Thalayatti bommais, dolls crafted from Karungaali mango and teak wood called Marappacchchi bommais are famous and must items in a Kolu. A Chettiyar doll with his 'wife' and an array of grains for 'sale' are an indispensable part of any Kolu.

MuthuSubramanian  
Coimbatore

SUPER SUNDAY?

The lean patch of Team India captain Suryakumar Yadav is a worry, so too the pathetic fielding, especially catching. Shuffling with the batting order is an area which harms the rhythm of our set batsmen. The Pakistan team are peaking at the right time and it would be foolish to be overconfident. Hope the openers continue with their purple patch and lay a firm foundation for a winning total. Men in Blue can make it a Super Sunday.

N.Mahadevan  
Chennai

Mail your letters to [chennaidesk@deccanmail.com](mailto:chennaidesk@deccanmail.com)

Farrukh Dhondy  
Cabbages & Kings



Looking back at Arundhati Roy's role in the saga of Bandit Queen

"You claim it was a brief fascination. My response is that's an insensitive claim. It was in fact love's only inclination. Denying which has only one to blame."

— From The Scottish Ballads of Doll McKhanny

The internationally acclaimed writer and activist Arundhati Roy has written about her relationship with her mother in her latest book. The news previews say she has also written about the campaigns she supported. There may be one which may not feature prominently in this memoir. That was her assiduous attempt to have the film *Bandit Queen* legally banned. And more!

I met Arundhati decades ago when I was a commissioning editor at UK's Channel 4 TV. She brought me her screenplay called *Electric Moon*, which I liked and commissioned. It was produced and broadcast by Channel 4. Through the process of editing it I, perhaps naively, thought we had become firm friends. (But as they say: "*Apney munn ki mein jaanoo aur oonkay munn ki Ram*"?).

Years later, I adapted for filming my ex-wife Mala Sen's book about Phoolan Devi, a dalit girl, sold when barely eight years old in a bargain marriage, raped, kidnapped, treated violently by Thakurs and the police and bandit gangs and then rose, through circumstance, to be the leader of a

vengeful gang herself.

Several writers I commissioned attempted the screenplay. It didn't work. I had to claudestinely take on writing it myself or the budget allocated to my department for the film would be cancelled. I worked with Shekhar Kapur and the film *Bandit Queen* resulted.

Bobby Bedi, the producer, invited Arundhati to a preview, after which Arundhati drove to Phoolan Devi's house and proposed that they get the film legally banned as it portrayed her being raped. Shekhar's depiction of these were later internationally acclaimed as truthful, discreet and campaigning!

Phoolan, Arundhati, with veteran lawyer Indira Jaisingh, went to the Delhi high court and pleaded to have the film banned.

As the case continued and was reported, Channel 4's insurance premiums on all its films went up. Disaster!

Bobby had already begun negotiations with Phoolan's husband and I went with a Channel 4 cheque book to Delhi and handed over an agreed sum to him.

That morning Phoolan went to court with one of the affidavit-signing lawyers, walked past Ms Roy and gang, ignoring their questions, went into the court and withdrew the case.

When Phoolan emerged, Ms Roy, in distress, accosted her in Hindi: "You have made *choothiyas* of us!" Phoolan brushed past her saying, "You

were that from birth!"

The film was released and won an official prize at Cannes. Phoolan proudly displayed it in her parliamentary election campaign to demonstrate what dalit women suffer.

It was when I returned to London that I heard that the French publisher Robert Lafont had sent a young writer to India to write a biography of Phoolan, which they could then sell to Hollywood as they had successfully done with Dominique Lapierre's *City of Joy*. I was told this writer was in touch with Ms Roy.

Soon after, Michael Grade, Channel 4's boss, called me to his office and showed me a petition signed by Ms Roy and about ten others asking him to dismiss me from my job. Michael said he could only think of one use for such a piece of paper. He said I should reply, which I did telling the petitioners they had failed and advising them to go some distance and have sex.

I knew two of the signatories — Praful Bidwai was a friend of my late ex-wife Mala. She was in my office, with my translator friend Firdaus Ali, when she, in great distress, said Bidwai had had an accident and his marrow was infected with a fatal, incurable disease. Firdaus overheard the name of the disease and said his cousins were working in Birmingham on precisely that. He called them and they said they had found the cure but couldn't release it until it underwent trials. Somehow, Firdaus persuaded them to give him a

sufficient dose which was sent to Bidwai who was, as a result, cured. There are, of course, no binding ethical rules of gratitude!

Another signatory was one Pankaj Butalia, from whom I had earlier commissioned a documentary about Shakespeare in Mizoram. Now he wanted me sacked??? Curiouser and curiouser! I wrote and published a limerick: "*There once was a man called Bue-Talia/ Who painted his arse in a Dahlia —/ A rupee a smell/ Went down fairly well/ Two rupees a lick was a failure.*"

Then a Robert Lafont operative rang from France. Would I suspend the release of *Bandit Queen* for six years? They would "make it worth my while!". What??? A bribe to sabotage a Channel 4 property? I again suggested, repeating myself, that he should immediately traverse some space and have sex. And before I put the phone down, I said: "Remember Agincourt, Waterloo and now Bandit Queen!"

Subsequently, *Bandit Queen* was sent by the Indian Producers' Association to compete for an international Oscar. Did Ms Roy and her friends go to a Delhi judge's home on a Sunday and ask him to instruct the Indian Producers' Association to withdraw it? Won't speculate! A Delhi judge did instruct the IPA and it was vindictively withdrawn!

I look forward to noticing the absence of most of this from Ms Roy's book. No doubt her prose will glisten.







# CJI Gavai has unwittingly opened a Pandora's Box

IT may not be a regular happening, but we have come across occasions when an off the cuff remark has snowballed into a major controversy, especially in politics and public life, with the person making the remark drawing flak from diverse sections and subject to a backlash, whose impact is lowered after the individual either apologises or withdraws the statement. This is being learnt the hard way by Justice B R Gavai, the Chief Justice of India (CJI). Ironically, this was triggered by an observation he made on September 16 while heading a Supreme Court bench that was dealing with a petition seeking repair and restoration of a seven-foot beheaded idol of Lord Vishnu at the Javari temple, a UNESCO World Heritage site, which is part of the famed Khajuraho group of monuments in Madhya Pradesh. As part of routine legal proceedings, he stat-

ed that the matter was within the jurisdiction of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the court had nothing to do with the issue. Justice Gavai refused to entertain the PIL on those very grounds. However, on persistent pleas by the petitioner, Justice Gavai made a remark that has sparked a nationwide debate as it seemingly 'hurts' religious sentiments.

Dismissing the plea, the apex court bench contended that it was an out and out 'publicity interest litigation' and added that as it was an archaeological find, it was for the ASI to take a call on the plea. Meanwhile, when petitioner, Rakesh Dalal, claimed that the idol was mutilated during Mughal invasions and has remained in that state despite repeated representations to the government to restore it, the first Buddhist to occupy the country's most exalted judicial position,

remarked "Go and ask the deity himself to do something. If you are saying that you are a strong devotee of Lord Vishnu, then you pray and do some meditation. In the meantime, if you are not averse to Shaivism, you can go and worship there... there is a very big linga of Shiva, one of the biggest in Khajuraho." Perhaps, he may have never reckoned with the kind of backlash that these remarks would whip up and the row they would stir. But then they did, especially on the social media, with many questioning the rationale behind those utterances, howsoever relevant they were to that specific PIL.

In a swift reaction to the outcry, the CJI clarified that his remarks were misrepresented. Even so, one cannot stop people from criticising such 'religiously inclined' remarks, irrespective of who has made them

and in what context. After all, the Chief Justice of India is also a citizen. Even if one can make light of VHP's criticism as its wont, the fact is that he has drawn flak from all over. Some have sought his impeachment, while many from the legal fraternity have urged him to withdraw the comments and come clear on the issue. Justice Gavai has clarified that he was a 'true secularist' and that nothing deeper or beyond should be read into his observations. Taken on a broader canvas, one should understand that if similar comments were made by a political leader, he or she would be scoffed at and hounded by people and not just by religious organisations and political opponents. They won't be able to get away even if they maintain that the remarks were blown out of proportion or misrepresented given that the damage was done.



## LETTERS

### Reduce dependence on H-IB visas

THE article 'It's time for Indian IT firms to reduce dependence on H-IB Visas (THI Sept 26) rightly calls for Indian IT firms to reduce dependence on H-IB visas and adopt more resilient workforce strategies. With global immigration policies becoming increasingly unpredictable, it's time to invest in local hiring, remote delivery models, and cross-border collaborations that strengthen operational autonomy. Equally vital is nurturing domestic STEM talent and innovation ecosystems. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged, we must 'invest in swadeshi and encourage local start-ups' for a self-reliant digital economy. Strategic autonomy will not only safeguard business continuity but also redefine India's global tech leadership. It is time students from the two Telugu states open their talent and showcase them by setting up start-ups locally, and thereby create employment opportunities for Indians and Americans.

Ganti Venkata Sudhir, Secunderabad

### Need to tap entrepreneurial energy

THE whimsical American tariff regime has sent alarm bells ringing in the Indian IT sector, which thrived for more than three decades. However, after the latest proclamation raising the H-IB fee to a staggering sum, the intent is clear-to curtail the flow of high-skilled foreign talent into the US. Notwithstanding, H-IBs have long been the engine of American innovation on account of which half of all US unicorn founders are immigrants who entered initially on H-IBs. US President Donald Trump's latest proclamation is not only a case of self-sabotage but also comes as a rude shock to Indians working in the US on H-UB visas and fresh applicants. By and large, this disruption should serve as a wake-up call to Indian authorities to bring about a transformation from a services hub and bolster the abundant talent and entrepreneurial energy to help dominate tech delivery.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad-3

### Deplorable incident in Chittoor

THIS disturbing incident in Chittoor district, where a police constable and a home guard allegedly raped a 28-year-old woman after spiking her drink, shakes the very foundation of trust in law enforcement. It's a silver lining that the victim's courage and public pressure led to a case being registered, marking a step toward justice. In the meantime, this case highlights the urgent need for swift, impartial handling of complaints. The authorities must ensure thorough investigations, establish safe helplines for victims, and enhance police training with a focus on ethics and sensitivity to prevent such atrocities in the future.

Mohammad Asad, Mumbai

### Breakfast for students

THIS has reference to the news about supplying free breakfast in government schools. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu has implemented it already. Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has also decided to extend the facility from 2026-27. My plea is that he should extend free breakfast to students in government schools from this year itself. It will bring joy for parents and students from poor families in Telangana.

G Murali Mohan Rao, Secunderabad-11

### TGSRTC must regulate festive rush

MAKING moolah from festival rush is one of the worst forms of exploitation. Those into all modes of transport, including road, rail and air, are adept at this art. No Chief Minister has the guts to interfere in this illegal fleeing. It is to be noted that most of the private transport companies are 'owned' by politicians and their benamis. Sadly, even the road transport authorities can't check private operators because of their political clout. Any upright RTA official trying to streamline these operators, will be taken to task. It is unfortunate that even TGSRTC has joined the bandwagon and has started fleeing passengers by capitalising on the festive rush. RTC officials must ensure the regular fare and operate more buses so that passengers flock to it for travel purposes, a step that was adopted by the YSRCP government in Andhra Pradesh from 2019 to 24. TGSRTC must refrain from cashing in on the demand during festivals.

Govardhana Myneedu, Vijayawada

thehansreader@gmail.com

## BENGALURU ONLINE

### AI-powered digital billboard to curb traffic violations

BENGALURU: Bengaluru Traffic Police have introduced a new AI-powered digital billboard at Trinity Circle to create awareness among motorists about traffic violations. The initiative has been launched in collaboration with Cars24's road safety campaign, CrashfreeIndia.

The billboard displays in real-time the details of traffic violations committed by passing vehicles, including registration numbers, pending fines, and PUC (Pollution Under Control) status. While it does not enforce fine collection, it serves as a public awareness tool to nudge violators towards clearing their dues.

Equipped with AI scanners, the system can detect violations such as signal jumping, overspeeding, and failure to wear helmets or seatbelts from as far as 100 meters. The details are cross-verified with the national VAHAN database and projected on the display board for commuters to see.

Interestingly, the system recently displayed as many as ten traffic violations linked to a car belonging to Karnataka BJP president B.Y. Vijayendra. According to Cars24 representatives and Joint Commissioner of Police Karthik Reddy, many vehicle owners are often unaware of their pending challans until they accumulate into a hefty sum. The idea for the billboard came from a Cars24 executive, who compared it to schools where the names of misbehaving students are written on the board to correct behaviour. The move has sparked mixed reactions.

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

# Modi's women card and Rahul's constitution call to decide Bihar poll outcome



WITH less than 60 days to go for Bihar's assembly elections, the contest is shaping into a national test case. It could set the tone for the country's political mindset, cutting through the noise of "Constitution in danger," "no friends for Modi," or "vote chori" slogans reverberating from the INDIA bloc. Bihar remains one of India's most unpredictable states.

Here, pollsters have often been proven wrong. In the last elections, forecasts suggested an RJD-Congress victory, but Congress managed to win only 19 of the 70 seats it contested. RJD won in 75 seats. Bihar's ground realities defy easy arithmetic. A familiar face-off:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi have already opened their campaigns with blistering attacks.

In 2020, Congress focussed primarily on discord within NDA, Chinese incursions in Ladakh, abrogation of Article 370, farm laws, joblessness dominated the discourse.

Incidentally, Ladakh witnessed violence on Wednesday, allegedly led by a Congress councillor, who has now reportedly gone underground. This raises the mute question of whether it is coincidence or conspiracy. Is Ladakh their first laboratory? It is shocking to note there has been no condem-

nation from Congress party or its allies over the violence.

This time also the "vote chori" slogan and efforts to create distrust in institutions does not seem to have cut much ice with the people. His criticism of transparency by CEC rings hollow, given Congress' own past. In 2009, the UPA pushed through Naveen Chawla as CEC despite objections. The Administrative Reforms Commission had suggested a collegium system, but Congress ignored it. Rahul's current tirade risks sounding like the proverbial pot calling the kettle black.

Congress seems to have forgotten that its strike rate in 2020 was pathetic. In this election, Congress faced after a revolt by the group of 23 leaders who questioned the leadership of the Gandhis. Poor selection of candidates was followed a laid-back campaign. Party's star campaigner Rahul Gandhi addressed only two rallies each in the first and second phases. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra did not go to Bihar to campaign. This time, while Rahul risks falling back on "vote chori" narratives if results go against him.

Ground reports indicate that women's silent electoral power could once again prove decisive. The big-ticket announcement by Modi—₹10,000 each for 80 lakh women—is a calculated gamble. Women's voting behaviour in Bihar has defied stereotypes: though absent from political debates, they turn out in higher numbers than men and have consistently tilted towards NDA. In eastern and north Bihar, women outvoted men in 2020. Nitish Kumar had long invested in women's empow-

## BIHAR ASSEMBLY ELECTION, 2025

With less than 60 days to go, Bihar's Assembly elections are shaping into a national test case with ripples being felt far beyond Patna. The eventual verdict could determine whether constitutional rhetoric or development politics defines India's mood ahead of 2029.

erment, offering uniforms and bicycles to girl students. Most of them are now voters in Bihar and JD(U) feels that they could be the potential game changers.

### Caste counts but less than earlier:

Yadavs and Muslims together make up over 35 per cent of the electorate, explaining RJD's reliance on this base. Yet, despite this bloc, RJD has never secured a majority in 25 years. Voter behaviour shows an evolving mindset beyond caste, with development and leadership appeal influencing decisions.

Another factor that can dent Congress is the strained alliance between Congress and RJD. Seat-sharing talks are contentious: RJD wants Congress limited to 25 seats, citing its dismal past performance. Congress resists, unwilling to remain a junior partner. The Tejaswi Yadav question further complicates matters. RJD has pro-

jected him as CM face, while Congress hesitates. This rift could weaken the INDIA bloc's cohesion.

In 2020, BJP contested 110 seats, winning 42.5 per cent votes, while JD(U) lagged at 32.8 per cent in 115 seats. The gap was far wider than in past elections, exposing strains in the partnership. Yet by 2024, Modi and Nitish had reconciled, contesting Lok Sabha polls with the LJP and stunning pollsters with 12 seats each. The chemistry of Modi and the arithmetic of Nitish still deliver. Whether this holds in assembly elections is the big question.

Prashant Kishor has made the wildcard entry this time with his Jan Suraj party. He is a potential spoiler and smaller parties could tilt the balance in tight contests. The INDIA bloc frames the battle as one for the Constitution. Modi frames it as a choice between stability and chaos. Voters must de-

cide which resonates more: constitutional rhetoric, caste solidarity, or women-focused welfare.

Kishor's appeal to youth, his governance rhetoric, and his anti-corruption stance could nibble at RJD's Muslim-Yadav base. Missteps of the Opposition Congress and RJD's biggest blunder were dragging Modi's late mother into campaign rhetoric. A crude meme depicting her scolding Modi backfired, giving Modi the chance to emotionally appeal to women voters. In a state where women's turnout is crucial, such missteps could be costly.

Theatrics also marked Congress' decision to hold a Working Committee meeting in Bihar for the first time in 85 years, citing its 1940 Ramgarh session that paved the way for India's Constituent Assembly.

Rahul hammered home the "protect the Constitution" line, promising quotas for Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs). Yet the contrast is stark. The Congress that once fought for Independence is now reduced to bargaining for one-fourth of Bihar's assembly seats. Even Ramgarh, the symbolic venue, is no longer in Bihar—it belongs to Jharkhand after the 2000 bifurcation.

Another faux pas is the 'Khatakat' decision of Congress party to hike cement

rates in Himachal Pradesh by Rs five soon after GST 2.0 was rolled out. This would give more ammunition to the BJP-JD(U) combine, while shamelessly the cheerleaders of Congress utter "Oh it is just Rs five". This is nothing short of making fun of the common man. It seems like Congress leaders and their supporters, including the so-called intellectuals, have forgotten basic economics.

### History revisited:

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge accuses BJP of communal politics, forgetting his own party's tainted record in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Rahul Gandhi's message of constitutional protection resonates with some, but critics argue it is hollow when coupled with internal contradictions and poor seat-sharing performance. Meanwhile, Modi continues to position himself as a defender of dignity and stability. His attacks focus not just on RJD's "jungle raj" legacy but also on the INDIA bloc's lack of coherence. His women-focused welfare schemes are designed to bypass caste fault lines.

One thing is certain: Bihar will once again test the art of Indian coalition politics. If Congress and RJD underperform, Rahul will decry "vote chori." If BJP-JD(U) secure a majority, Modi will claim it as an endorsement of his leadership.

Either way, Bihar's verdict will have a ripple effect that will be far beyond Patna and tone up the national mood.

(The author is former Chief Editor of The Hans India)

# NIRF Rankings: A wake-up call or a pat on the back for AP and TG?

DR BHASKAR NATH BISWAL

IN an age where data-driven decisions dominate the discourse on higher education, the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2015, has become a benchmark for academic credibility and institutional performance in India. With parameters spanning teaching, learning and resources, research and professional practice, graduation outcomes, outreach, inclusivity, and perception, NIRF endeavours to present a holistic view of the quality of higher education institutions across the country.

Following the release of the 2025 NIRF rankings, states like Andhra Pradesh and Telangana find themselves at a critical juncture. While there are moments of pride, there are also glaring gaps, which should not be overlooked. For the two states that have shown immense ambition in the education sector post-bifurcation, the NIRF results offer both applause and admonition.

Telangana, particularly Hyderabad, a growing hub for technology and education, has seen commendable representation in the NIRF lists, particularly in categories like engineering, pharmacy

and overall university rankings. Institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad (IIT-H), University of Hyderabad and NALSAR University of Law continue to uphold lofty standards, consistently appearing among the top 10 or 20 in their respective domains. Private universities and deemed-to-be institutions such as the International Institute of Information Technology (IIIT-H) and BITS Pilani (Hyderabad campus) also add to the state's intellectual capital.

These results are not accidental; they reflect sustained focus on quality faculty, research culture, and global collaborations.

Andhra Pradesh, meanwhile, presents a more modest picture. Though institutions like Andhra University and Sri Venkateswara University do make it into the rankings, their positions are not particularly competitive. Despite the establishment of state-run universities and development of new institutions post-2014 bifurcation, the State is struggling to create a clear identity in the national academic landscape. The absence of an IIT or IIM in the top tiers from AP should be a concern for policymakers.

Beyond the numbers, NIRF rankings highlight systemic is-



State-funded schemes that promote academic research, university-based startups and interdisciplinary collaboration can go a long way in improving institutional performance. At the same time, stronger ties with industry and greater emphasis on inclusivity and access, especially in tribal and rural areas, can help meet both educational and social goals.

sues. For example, in both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, rural and semi-urban institutions struggle with low perception scores, which is an indicator of reputation among peers and employers.

This points to the need for strategic branding, industry engagement, and alumni involvement, which are areas traditionally

overlooked in state-run institutions. Moreover, research output and citations, major components in the rankings, are dominated by a handful of elite institutions. The rest of them languish due to lack of funding, limited industry tie-ups, and inadequate incentives for faculty to publish quality research.

The way forward for both states lies in improving faculty recruitment and retention, upgrading infrastructure and fostering a culture of research and innovation. State-funded schemes that promote academic research, university-based startups and interdisciplinary collaboration can go a long way in improving institutional performance. At the same time, stronger ties with industry and greater emphasis on inclusivity and access, especially in tribal and rural areas, can help meet both educational and social goals. While Telangana has made some progress in expanding access to education through welfare schemes and residential institutions, Andhra Pradesh must expand its efforts to ensure education becomes truly inclusive.

Equally important is the need for transparency and accountability in the functioning of higher education institutions. Univer-

sities must be granted autonomy, but this must be accompanied by mechanisms that ensure merit-based hiring, efficient administration, and student-centric learning environments. A shift toward outcome-based education and digitized governance will enhance institutional credibility and bring long-term gains.

NIRF rankings, while not belies the final word on institutional quality, are an important diagnostic tool. For Andhra Pradesh and Telangana with young populations, emerging industries and aspirations of becoming knowledge economies, these rankings should serve as both report cards and roadmaps. The message is clear: the potential is vast, but the path forward requires vision, investment, and reform.

It is time for both states to move from competing among themselves to collaborating for academic excellence, setting benchmarks not just for the region, but for the nation. At the end of the day, in the race for educational leadership, good intentions are not enough; only measurable outcomes matter.

(The writer is a former principal and founder of Supporting Shoulders, NGO)





The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## CUT IT OUT

One-man show at CBFC, demand for arbitrary cuts threaten Indian cinema just as it is growing in global reach and resonance

**A**BODY MEANT to function as a collegial institution has been reduced to a “one-man show”, with no official appointments since 2017, no meetings since 2019, long delays in certification and demands for arbitrary cuts. As reported in this newspaper, all is not well at the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). What should have been a panel of voices and perspectives appears to have become a personal fiefdom, with the result that the CBFC may no longer have the autonomy and diversity of views required for credible functioning. Instead, authority seems to have been centralised in lyricist Prasoon Joshi, who was appointed chairperson of the 12-person body in August 2017, with many within the CBFC questioning the “super-censorship raj” run by a handful of functionaries selected by the chairperson.

Exacerbating the situation is the question mark hanging over the legal status of the present board — its tenure was to have ended in 2020 — and repeated instances of over-reach into censorship. *Homebound*, India’s official selection for the Academy Awards this year and which won a People’s Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival earlier this month, was reportedly “destroyed in parts” by the CBFC, which asked for several caste references to be cut out. Films in India have long had to contend with a scissor-happy CBFC — which is tasked with certifying films for release — but what makes the current state of affairs worse is the limited scope for redressal. Until 2021, filmmakers could appeal to the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT) in case they disagreed with the certificate issued by the CBFC or it was denied altogether. This was how, for example, the 2016 film *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, which had been denied certification by the CBFC over being “lady-oriented”, finally made it to the theatres with an ‘A’ certificate. Since the abolition of FCAT in 2021, however, filmmakers without the resources to approach a high court — now the only forum for redressal — have had little choice, as the case of several recent films like *Dhadak 2*, *The Bengal Files* and *Janaki V. Vs. State of Kerala* shows. They can either comply with the CBFC’s demand for arbitrary cuts, or indefinitely delay the release of films — as has happened to Honey Trehan’s film on the life of activist Jaswant Singh Khaira.

Institutions matter because they embody processes larger than individuals. They are meant to outlast chairs, governments, and fashions. The diminishing of the CBFC and the capriciousness with which it functions harm Indian cinema at a time when its cultural resonance and global reach have never been greater. From international festivals to streaming platforms, Indian films are a crucial element of the country’s soft power, as seen when India was chosen as the Country of Honour at the Marche du Cinema at the 2022 Cannes film festival. When a film’s artistic vision is scrubbed and sanitised, it has a chilling effect. And if filmmakers find themselves second-guessing their scripts, trimming their creative choices, or shelving bold ideas for fear of an arbitrary cut or ban, the loss is not merely theirs.

## LOSING SIGHT

Predicament of Delhi’s Institute for the Blind indicates how disability rights falter in the face of institutional neglect

**T**HE IMMINENT CLOSURE of Delhi’s Institute for the Blind, one of the country’s oldest blind schools, founded in Lahore in 1939 and relocated to Delhi after Partition, tells a larger story of institutional neglect and bureaucratic abdication. For over seven decades, the school has provided education, accommodation, and community to visually impaired children from economically precarious families from states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. Now, the institution, with its 115 students, faces the threat of closure in the absence of a government-issued certificate of recognition, denied due to missing land documents dating back to Partition. While the Directorate of Education has claimed the school failed to act on official notices, the administration alleges a lack of meaningful engagement from authorities, including the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), which had previously raised alarms over infrastructural deficiencies and safety lapses, including POCSO-related incidents.

What is unfolding in Delhi is not an isolated failure, but a broader pattern of indifference towards the rights and needs of persons with disabilities. The NFHS-5 pegs the percentage of people with some form of disability, including partial or complete blindness, at 4.5 per cent for the period between 2019 and 2021. Despite a slew of progressive legislation and fund allocation — the 2025 Union Budget allocated Rs 1,275 crore for disability welfare — implementation on the ground remains uneven and performative. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 promises inclusion, accessibility, and equal opportunity. In practice, however, resources remain erratically distributed — data show that in 2023-24, 93 per cent of the budget allocation remained unused — and countless schools for the visually impaired operate without formal recognition. The Scheme for Implementation of the PwD Act (SIPDA), which funds accessibility projects, has seen its allocation progressively slashed, despite a 2024 Supreme Court judgment mandating improved access in public spaces.

These shortcomings converge in the local and immediate crisis faced by institutions such as the Institute for the Blind. The Delhi institution’s crisis demands urgent attention — the closure order should be stayed, provisional recognition granted, and land issues resolved without upending the students’ lives. But the response must extend beyond reactive fixes. Disability should be treated as a core governance priority, requiring sustained investment, transparent oversight, enforceable obligations, and institutional accountability. Schools for the visually impaired — including this institution — should be periodically audited for legal compliance, infrastructure, and safety. Inclusion is a constitutional guarantee. Allowing systemic inertia to undermine that promise amounts to an abandonment of some of the state’s most vulnerable citizens.

## AN INCLUSIVE PATRIOTISM

At a concert in Malaysia, Diljit Dosanjh reminds audience of the power of culture to bring people together

**D**URING A SELL-OUT concert in Kuala Lumpur, when Punjabi pop star Diljit Dosanjh saw the tricolour waving in the audience, he stopped to speak, with characteristic candour, on nationalism. “I am with my country but as for these matches (India-Pakistan Asia Cup matches) that have happened now, there is a massive difference in these and my film. Our film was shot before (the Pahalgam attack)... They exerted much force to show me against the nation,” he said. Dosanjh was contrasting the matches with the brouhaha over his film *Sardaar Ji 3*, co-starring Pakistani actor Hania Aamir, which was not released in India. But the point he was making about nationalism was hard to miss: Culture becomes a soft target when it comes to cross-border ties.

From standing up for farmers during the unrest against the farm laws in 2020-21 to showcasing his roots at the Met Gala this year to weaving the complexities of belonging and identity into his music, Dosanjh has never shied away from speaking his mind. At a concert in Manchester last year, for instance, he gifted a pair of shoes to a Pakistani fan and said, “Borders are made by politicians... our music is common.”

In a world where geopolitics often souars relationships between neighbouring nations, it is culture and sport that have the power to sow seeds of empathy. These connections, though fragile, are invaluable and must be nurtured, especially during times of animosity. The largeness of spirit required to celebrate shared stories is not a betrayal of patriotism. If anything, it is a deeper, more inclusive version of it.



SACHCHIDANAND SHUKLA

In a move that has implications for the corridors of global trade, China has announced during a UN General Assembly event that it will no longer seek Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) in future WTO negotiations. This concession, while preserving China’s self-declared developing country status and all existing perks such as lenient subsidy caps and phased implementation of agreements, is a tactical retreat amid escalating US tariff pressures and long-standing US objections to the practice. While the WTO lauded it as a breakthrough for reform, sceptics see it as symbolic window-dressing, allowing China to deflect criticism without dismantling its agricultural and industrial advantages.

For India, this development is a harbinger of intensified scrutiny. President Donald Trump has just announced a fresh salvo of 100 per cent tariffs on branded and patented pharmaceutical products and also announced broader tariffs on furniture, kitchen cabinets, and trucks. As one of the largest economies in the world, there already are demands for India to shed its developing nation armour. India’s trajectory toward becoming an even larger economy will only amplify this pressure.

Yet, this ascent clashes with India’s reliance on SDT, a cornerstone since its 1995 WTO accession. Rooted in the GATT legacy, SDT grants flexibilities like higher tariffs and extended compliance periods, essential for shielding vulnerable populations in a nation where per capita income ranks 136th globally.

At the heart of the debate lies agriculture, employing around half of India’s workforce and underpinning the food security of 1.4 billion people. Under the WTO’s Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), subsidies are boxed: The trade-distorting Amber Box is capped at 10 per cent of production value for developing countries, versus 5 per cent for developed ones. India leverages Article 6.2 exemptions for input subsidies to low-income farmers, channelling over \$40 billion annually through mechanisms like Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for staples such as rice and wheat. These support the Public Distribution System (PDS), distributing subsidised grains to 800 million beneficiaries. However, the 1986-88 reference prices, critics argue, inflate India’s

China has said it will not seek ‘Special and Differential Treatment’ at WTO. What does this mean for Delhi?

If India faces coerced graduation from developing status, the implications are dire. Phased AMS reductions could slash subsidies by 20-30 per cent over a decade, per AoA timelines, leading to a 10-15 per cent drop in rural incomes and heightened food price volatility. Malnutrition, affecting 35 per cent of children under five, might worsen, undermining the National Food Security Act. Recent WTO disputes, like the 2023 sugar subsidy panel, underscore the vulnerability; India averted penalties via SDT, but future plurilaterals — such as on e-commerce or fisheries — may demand reciprocity.



REKHA KRISHNAN

**OUR BROTHER RAJAN** was a hero in our family. He was six feet tall, handsome, had a way with people, especially women; he could make friends with anyone from a toddler to a senior citizen and was always up to some mischief. He was a rebel, generous, quick-tempered, a charmer, and a nuisance at times.

Confidence was his middle name. Like many boys, he always came out of an examination claiming to have “maxed” the paper, only to be disappointed when the results came out a few weeks later to realise that he had just managed to scrape through. He claimed he could jump a bar that was placed at 3 metres and complete a 100 m race in less than 10 seconds (Usain Bolt was only three years old when we lost Rajan). When he finished school, he applied only to IIT and BITS Pilani. St. Stephen’s College and Hindu College were his safe choices. When none of these colleges thought that he was good enough to be admitted, his educational path had to be recalibrated. With much difficulty, he got admission into Sri Venkateswara College.

College bored him. It is then that he discovered the NCC Air Wing and spent most of his time at Safdarjung Airport flying gliders. From a student pilot licence to a private pilot licence, he soon began enjoying the thrill of flying. It was then that he started talking about joining the Indian Air Force through the NCC route. We thought this was also one of his pipe dreams. The summer of his last year in college, when I was also home to de-

## MY BROTHER AND HIS MiG-21

With aircraft taking its final bow, memories of his death come flooding back

liver my son Srinjoy, I remember watching *Top Gun* at least a dozen times with him on a rented VCR.

And thus began our family’s tryst with the MiG-21.

We were so proud when Rajan was commissioned as an officer; the entire family trudged to the Air Force Academy in Begumpet, Hyderabad, for his passing-out parade. He was proud and possessive about his aircraft, of his uniform, his wings and of the Indian Air Force. Since I couldn’t attend his passing-out parade, he flew in directly from Hyderabad to Calcutta, as it was then called, to surprise me. When he rang the doorbell, my mother-in-law got scared that cops had come to the house. In those days, Air Force officers wore khaki uniforms. The apartment complex where we lived in Calcutta was soon filled with a buzz — children, the elderly, the young, all trooped into our small apartment to see Flying Officer Rajan Krishnan. And all of us basked in reflected glory.

His first posting was in Tezpur in Assam, from where he would often visit me in Calcutta. Though ostensibly his visits were to buy trophies and plaques for retiring officers from the Cooke and Kelvey showroom, in hindsight, I realised the reason for his frequent visits was a few young women in our building. He fit the image of the quintessential Air Force officer — suave, handsome, charming, sporting a Ray-Ban. Tom Cruise paled in comparison to his charm. On his 25th birthday, he threw a party in

our house in Safdarjung Enclave. We were new to the flamboyant ways of young Air Force officers who could party just as hard as they worked. Since it was getting late and the food was getting cold (long before the age of microwave ovens), my mother announced, “*Arre jaldi se tum log ‘up my bottom’ karo aur khana khane ke liye aao.*” Even today, 36 years after his 25th birthday celebrations, in our circle of family and friends, when we want someone to finish their drink quickly and move to the dinner table, this is what is said.

On October 8, 1989, during the 57th Air Force Day Parade, we lost Wing Commander Ramesh Bakshi when his Mirage 2000 fighter jet crashed at Palam Air Force Station in front of our eyes. Rajan, too, was part of this Air Force Day Parade and was shattered to have lost his senior. We were all scared and panic-stricken. That day, he sat us down and told us about the high possibility of this happening to him and the processes that Ma and Pa should be aware of in case it happened.

Five weeks later, two officers came home with the news. We lost him in a MiG-21 crash near Jodhpur on November 16, 1989. With the MiG-21 fleet of aircraft being phased out on September 26, the wounds have been re-opened, as we lose Rajan once again. The hurt is not only ours but of many families who, like us, lost their young sons and brothers.

The writer is former principal, Vasant Valley School

### SEPTEMBER 27, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

#### AKALI VICTORY

BACKED BY A popular wave, the Akali Dal (L) was firmly set for a massive victory in the Punjab elections after capturing 47 of the 72 Vidhan Sabha seats, the which results for which have been declared, and establishing a lead over its rivals in other constituencies. The Congress-I captured 17 seats and the BJP secured two.

#### CONG REACTION

THE CONGRESS (I) has attributed the success of the Akali Dal to the latter having a better programme and better candidates. Asked

about the secret of the Akali Dal’s superior performance, the newly appointed AICC-I general secretary, Jitendra Prasad, who has been made the party’s official spokesman, told newsmen in New Delhi that what was important was that the extremists and the anti-national elements had been defeated.

#### BARNALA ON POLLS

COMMENTING ON THE election results, Surjit Singh Barnala, acting president of the Akali Dal (L), thanked the people of Punjab for “throwing off the yoke of a dark period”. Barnala said Punjabis had paid homage to the late Harchand Singh Longowal by voting

the Akali Dal to power. “A tremendous responsibility has been placed on us at a very sensitive phase. We will work tirelessly.”

#### KOTA CLASH

MORE THAN A dozen people are reported to have died in the Jawar police station area in Jhalawar district on Thursday in a clash between two communities belonging to two villages. According to reports, the clash took place over a dispute about the harvesting of crops. The deputy inspector-general of police, Kota range, Shantanu Kumar, and the collector, Umrao Salodia, along with a strong police force, have rushed to the villages.



# 9 THE IDEAS PAGE

## Happy birthday, Dr Singh

Manmohan Singh gave confidence to private sector.  
It responded by investing in the economy



PRAVEEN CHAKRAVARTY

FOR PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi's 75th birthday recently, there were at least 40 posts by top industrialists and corporate honchos on the social media platform X, praising him. They tripped over each other to post glossy videos and gushing posts with phrases such as "visionary leader", "investor-friendly", "nation builder" in a seemingly coordinated fashion. Given such effusive praise for PM Modi from India Inc, one would have thought that businesses must have made huge investments and grown enormously during Modi's tenure. After all, investing and expanding their business is the real sign of strength and confidence for a business owner. No.

Investment by the private sector fell to 11 per cent of GDP under Modi, from 14 per cent under Manmohan Singh's tenure (Gross Fixed Capital Formation, RBI Handbook). Businesses invested Rs 30 lakh crore less during Modi's tenure than they would have had they shown the same investment enthusiasm as under Manmohan Singh. This has meant fewer jobs and slower income growth for millions of Indians in the last decade than earlier.

While the pandemic may have contributed to the slowdown, it does not fully account for the overall lacklustre private investment under Modi. During Singh's tenure, there was an equally devastating global financial crisis. Private sector investment grew at an annual rate of 22 per cent under Manmohan Singh, while it collapsed to 9 per cent under Modi. In fact, it reached an all-time high of 17 per cent of GDP in 2007-08 just before the 2008 financial crisis, while the highest level of private investment under Modi was only 13 per cent. Whichever way one looks at the data, it is evident that the private sector did not exude the same confidence to invest during Modi's tenure as it did during Singh's.

It is not that the Modi government did not try to woo private investment. It slashed corporate tax rates from 30 per cent to 22 per cent in September 2019, just hours before he left for America to host an 'Ab ki baar Trump *sarkar*' rally. The cost of this huge corporate tax cut was borne by the middle-class and the poor through income taxes and high GST. For the first time in India's history, middle-class citizens paid more income taxes to the government than corporates in Modi's tenure. Despite this huge tax bonanza for corporates, the private sector did not show confidence and increase its investment in India's economy.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has made at least a dozen exhortations to corporate India to invest. It ranged from coaxing to cajoling to veiled threats to fervent pleas. In September 2022, she even mocked the private sector, saying, "I want to hear from the Indian Inc. (sic) What is stopping you from investing? Are you Hanuman



CR Sasikumar

that you don't know your own strength? Do you need someone standing next to you to constantly remind you?" The government's desperation at the lack of private sector investment was blatant.

Yet, industrialists were happy to comply with orders to praise the PM on social media, give 120 marks out of 100 for every budget and even donate some of the money saved from reduced tax rates to the BJP, but were dogmatic in their refusal to take risks and increase investment. The disconnect between rhetorical support and real investment by corporate India seems driven by the larger climate of fear, doubt and uncertainty perpetuated under Modi. While tax rates may have come down under the current regime, business leaders live in fear and doubt. When industrialists are implicitly coerced to sell their business or when they are nudged to set up factories in specific states or when they are deprived of the right to make unfettered business decisions, it is only natural that their appetite for risk will be diminished and hence investments restrained. In this atmosphere, business leaders have responded the way anyone would in an autocratic and uncertain environment — performing loyalty in public while hedging their bets in private.

Under Manmohan Singh, business leaders were neither fearful nor did they need to gush with praise for the government. In 2012, industrialist Rahul Bajaj publicly told Singh, "We do not have the confidence that you will act." Yet, or because of this freedom, private investment boomed. Singh presided over a liberal regime where businesses were free to criticise policy, advocate without fear, and trust that tax notices or enforcement actions will not be weaponised politically. That

The disconnect between rhetorical support and real investment by corporate India seems driven by the larger climate of fear, doubt and uncertainty perpetuated under Modi. While tax rates may have come down under the current regime, business leaders live in fear and doubt. When industrialists are implicitly coerced to sell their business or when they are nudged to set up factories in specific states or when they are deprived of the right to make unfettered business decisions, it is only natural that their appetite for risk will be diminished and hence investments restrained.

freedom bred confidence, and confidence bred investment.

Manmohan Singh warned exactly of this in a 2019 article, 'The fountainhead of India's economic malaise'. He wrote, "There is a palpable climate of fear and distrust in our society today. Mutual trust and self-confidence are the bedrock of social transactions that foster economic growth. This perilous state of fear, distrust and lack of confidence will impede investment and growth". He understood acutely that only if you give industry the freedom to criticise and provide feedback on economic policy, will they have the confidence to invest and expand. Between 2004 and 2014, the Indian industry had the confidence and gumption to take risks, invest and grow in the full knowledge that they would not be vilified, coerced or punished unfairly. Up until 1995, private sector investment hovered around 5 per cent of GDP. Manmohan Singh changed the course of India's economic history by raising private investment to 10 per cent, first as finance minister and then to 14 per cent as Prime Minister. No one has done more for India's private sector than Manmohan Singh.

Manmohan Singh's 93rd birthday on September 26, did not elicit gushing praise and wishes on social media from India's business leaders — perhaps more out of fear. He never sought applause anyway. But I suspect corporate honchos may paraphrase and mutter Simon and Garfunkel in silent breath — "Where have you gone, Dr. Saab? Our nation turns its lonely eyes to you. We love you more than you will ever know".

*The writer is chairman, All India Professionals' Congress*

### WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The test is in the future, not the past. Israel must listen to Abbas and most of the countries of the world, join the international consensus and declare its willingness to establish a Palestinian state in the 1967 territories."

— HAARETZ, ISRAEL

## The hills are speaking — on the street

From protests over exam leak to anger over natural disasters and sand mining, Uttarakhand is rife with discontent



ADVAITA KALA

THE MOUNTAINS ARE not still, and it's not just the rumble of cloudbursts or the hills collapsing into debris — it runs deeper. To the tourist, Uttarakhand is a land of serenity and divinity. Rivers flowing through cedar valleys, glaciers feeding holy shrines, and snow-capped mountains rising into blue skies. But beneath this postcard peace, there is a growing restlessness, a hum of dissatisfaction that is rising to the surface. And it isn't just nature. As yet another protest erupts on the streets, one has to ask: What is happening? This time, it is students who are protesting another exam paper leak — the Uttarakhand Subordinate Service Selection Commission. The UKSSC has seen repeated scandals, undermining the faith in its ability to provide fair employment opportunities for all. On the other hand, teachers have just negotiated a temporary ceasefire after a month-long protest over direct appointments to positions and overdue promotions. In a state created on the promise of dignity and opportunity, these breaches are personal.

Recently, Uttarakhand has likely seen more natural disasters than any other state. Flash floods have been particularly menacing, be it the 2013 Kedarnath floods, which killed over 5,000 people with scores missing, or the dramatic floods of this year that swept away the village of Dharali and its inhabitants. Landslides are now seasonal inevitabilities, and the people have been left to the mercy of climate unpredictability. The pilgrim town of Joshimath has been sinking for years. For locals, especially in the upper reaches, dread lies not only in the spectre of the next natural disaster that will dominate national headlines but in the certainty of its return. If Mother Nature is uncontrollable, then what can be controlled is being ignored — illegal mining.

Illegal sand mining along the Ganga and its tributaries is now an open secret. In areas like Haridwar, Udhham Singh Nagar, Bageshwar, and Nainital, the sand mafia strips riverbeds bare, trucks thunder down village roads in the dead of the night and locals are cowed into silence. The Uttarakhand High Court has intervened on more than one occasion, issuing directives banning mechanised mining in certain areas. But the ban doesn't hold, deepening the flood risk and the ecological cost. The impact on the public and their psyche is worse: When impunity becomes par for the course, the people start to lose faith in

the highest dispenser of justice in the state. In 2024-25, the authorities recorded 2,176 cases of illegal mining. Locals now assume that in Uttarakhand, power and profit often outweigh the law. The unease is sharpened by issues regarding female safety. The NAARI 2025 report released by the NCW Chairperson listed Dehradun as one of the 10 most unsafe cities in India. The state police responded by threatening action against the company that conducted the survey, despite the NCW's endorsement of the report. The debate about figures aside, when cases like Ankita Bhandari and Kashish impact public sentiment and spark protests, the government has to be more prompt in its response.

In 2000, the promise of statehood buoyed the expectations of the people with regard to identity and opportunity. Increasingly, there is disappointment. In 2024, 20,000 people applied for a mere 24 home guard jobs, with over 70 per cent of applicants being post-graduates. Paper leaks like UKSSC shake the confidence of the young in government jobs, a highly aspirational path, given that private investment in the state is low. As recruitment opportunities become more scarce, so does patience and rootedness; migration has become the preferred option. Over 1,200 villages in Uttarakhand are "ghost villages", with families abandoning their ancestral homes in the hills and leaving in search of employment and better facilities. Even in villages connected to more developed areas, people are selling their land to developers of holiday homes. Construction is booming in Dehradun and other urban areas, with billboards of luxury villas being advertised all over Gurugram and Delhi. But the Uttarakhandi is leaving. And with his/her departure, the culture and language are dying.

Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand's twin state, has its own issues with natural disasters and unemployment, but the protests there are linked to pensions, wages or land rights. In Uttarakhand, the disenchantment runs deeper and is tinged with a loss of identity. There is restlessness, but it is not yet revolt. However, the gap between the two is narrowing as disparate groups take to the streets, each for their own cause.

In neighbouring Nepal, with which Uttarakhand shares a border and cultural ties, the recent protests have presented an example. The call for statehood arose because of a yearning for identity and control over land, opportunities and culture. After years of neglect, the quiet and unassuming hill communities were assured rights and dignity, but the focus continues to be on the plains. The hills are speaking again, this time not through nature's fury, but in the streets. The resolve is growing. Will anyone notice?

*Kala is a writer from the village of Sumari in Pauri Garhwal*



RAM RAJYA

BY RAM MADHAV

## Delhi to Beijing, with caveats

China should not see moves to restore normalcy as sign of India's weakness

ARE INDIA-CHINA relations in a state of reset? Strategic circles have been rife with speculation since Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to Tianjin last month to attend the SCO Summit and met with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines. This was the second meeting in less than a year between the two leaders, who were not on eye-contact terms after the incidents at Galwan in Ladakh in early 2020. In October 2024, they met on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit at Kazan in Russia after a gap of four years. The meeting was more than an ice-breaker — the two leaders had agreed to "prioritise" peace along the border.

At Tianjin, Modi and Xi went a step further to declare that India and China were not "rivals" but development partners. Several important changes happened between Kazan and Tianjin. The return of Donald Trump in the US and his subsequent tariff wars with a number of countries, including China and India, have created turmoil. Coming in the wake of the changed global scenario and the unexpected tensions between traditional friends — India and the US — the bonhomie between Modi and Xi is being interpreted variously.

It may be worthwhile to understand that, as a policy, India doesn't look at its ties with any country through the prism of a third country. Efforts to restore normalcy between India and China should be seen from the perspective of India's strategic autonomy. India always strove to build good, neighbourly relations with China. It views the relationship

as stemming from a long history of religious and civilisational contacts — it's much more than a 75-year-old diplomatic engagement.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's overtures after Independence were a result of that thinking. Sadly, what India got in return was a war in 1962, which set the relationship back by several decades and destroyed popular goodwill. Yet, the Indian leadership continued its efforts to engage. Successive prime ministers extended the olive branch to China, ignoring past disappointments, believing that India's gestures of goodwill would help improve bilateral relations. This continued despite China's continued support to Pakistan and its blocking of India's attempts at world forums to dismantle that country's terror infrastructure. Border incursions became an almost everyday reality, with the Indian defence establishment recording over 600 "transgressions" — or border violations — between 2010 and 2013.

When leadership changes happened in both countries in 2013 and 2014, new hopes arose. PM Modi decided to invest in the relationship once again by going out of his way. With Xi, too, responding positively, the two leaders broke protocol during their first-ever meeting in Ahmedabad in 2014. The leaders began a new series of informal meetings — first at Wuhan in 2018 and later at Mamallapuram in India in 2019. Despite these sincere efforts, Galwan happened in June 2020, leading to the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers. In Indian public opinion, Galwan became the 1962 of the 21st century.

Now that Modi has taken the initiative once again, the Chinese leadership should get the message right. It has to decide whether it is willing to build a relationship between sovereign equals, understand and respect India's sensibilities and respond appropriately, or look at ties as a sovereign-vassal relationship.

China prefers not to talk about Galwan. It insists that we should have a "new beginning" based on the Kazan and Tianjin spirit. How can there be a new beginning every time? How can the past incidents be brushed under the carpet in the name of a new beginning? The letter and spirit of Kazan and Tianjin was to manage the border peacefully. That requires greater military-to-military dialogue. After 2001, the militaries of the two countries have not had any such direct engagement, except the occasional commander-level talks at the border. It is time there were higher-level talks between the two.

On the border question, several outstanding issues like a detailed policy on patrolling, a control regime for military exercises, and an overall LAC control mechanism need to be mutually agreed upon. On its part, India has modified its border policy to "proactive diplomacy together with strong ground response preparedness".

On the economic front, China should not make the mistake of assuming that India has become vulnerable after the US sanctions. China, too, faced 150 per cent US tariffs. But a call between Xi and Trump brought it down to 30 per cent. India, too, will resolve the mat-

ter, soon to mutual satisfaction. India's China initiative is not because of any compulsion but based on conviction.

Beyond bilateral matters, there are issues pertaining to the region where the two countries have overlapping interests. In the last five years, China's penetration into South Asia has grown substantially. It supports several countries with military aid. It also faces accusations of debt traps and corrupting leaders in some of those countries. The net result is acute instability in several of these countries. There is a need for some mechanism for the two countries to exchange notes on issues pertaining to the South Asian neighbourhood.

At the global level, India and China work together through platforms like BRICS and the SCO. India desires to build genuine multipolarity in the world, whereas China's effort is seen by many as replacing American exceptionalism with Middle Kingdom supremacy. While India desires that global multilateralism be reformed to accommodate the needs and aspirations of all countries, China is busy with its own brand of multilateralism through initiatives like BRI, GCI, and GSI, offering them as a fait accompli to other nations.

For the new engagement between the two countries to succeed, it is important to address these issues sincerely. Trust can only be built by understanding India's initiatives correctly.

*The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP. Views are personal*



# 17 | E. EXPLAINED

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2025



@ieExplained  
#ExpressExplained

If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@indianexpress.com](mailto:explained@indianexpress.com)

## MiG-21 bows out: road ahead for IAF's dwindling fighter fleet

AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA  
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 26

THE INDIAN Air Force (IAF) has bid farewell to its iconic MiG-21 fighter jets.

The final two MiG-21 squadrons, the No 23 (Panthers) and the No 3 (Cobras), which together operated some 36 jets, retired in Chandigarh at a decommissioning ceremony on Friday.

The retirement further depletes IAF's fighter squadron strength. The fact that the Soviet-era fighter, with its chequered history, remained in service for so long is testimony to the Air Force's enduring challenges.

### MiG-21: IAF's old workhorse

When they entered service in 1963 as IAF's premier interceptors — fighters used for defensive air-to-air combat, to 'intercept' enemy aircraft — MiG-21s were arguably the best fighters on the planet.

Over the decades, and through a number of upgrades, the single-engine, single-seater fighters from the erstwhile Soviet Union's Mikoyan-Gurevich Design Bureau have

proved their mettle in several of India's conflicts, including the 1965 India-Pakistan War, the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, and the 1999 Kargil conflict.

In total, India has procured more than 700 MiG-21s of different variants, with the most recent 'Bison' (BIS) variant boasting modern avionics and radar, and advanced missiles.

The BIS upgrades, however, did not address some key issues, most notably with the aircraft's engines, which have been notorious for flaming out without notice. For a single-engine aircraft, this has been a major flaw. As per government data, more than 500 MiG-21s have crashed in the last 60 years, killing at least 170 pilots. More than 20 aircraft have crashed since 2010.

That said, many senior IAF officers, especially those who have flown the aircraft, say that given the sheer number of flying hours the MiG-21s have seen, their safety record is not as poor as it is made out to be.

### Dwindling squadron strength

With the retirement of the MiG-21s, the IAF is now down to a fighter squadron strength of 29, less than 70% of the sanctioned strength



A MiG-21 taking off at Air Force Station, Chandigarh, on Friday. Kamleshwar Singh

of 42 (this number has never been met).

This means that in case of a two-front conflict with Pakistan and China, India will be woefully short of fighters. Pakistan has an estimated fighter squadron strength of 20-25, whereas the figure for China is over 60. A squadron comprises 16-18 jets.

In addition, many of the older IAF jets, in-

cluding MiG-29s, Jaguars, Mirage 2000s, are set to be phased out by 2035.

Therefore, much of the current focus has been on establishing a robust air defence.

India, despite opposition from the US, has inducted Russian S-400 mobile surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems. It has also developed its own indigenous Akashteer air-de-

fence system. Both performed admirably during Operation Sindoor.

### Plans for rebuild

The IAF has two operational squadrons of the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mk1. It is set to receive an additional 180 Tejas Mk1A jets from the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). This includes an initial order of 83 jets, the Rs 48,000-crore contract for which was signed in February 2021, and an additional order of 97 jets signed Thursday.

HAL is also developing the Tejas Mk2 jets, as well as the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA). The latter, a fifth-generation stealth fighter, is scheduled to be inducted into the Air Force in the next decade.

In the meantime, the IAF has been trying to buy 114 fighters from a global defence major. Recent internal discussions suggest that the Dassault Rafale is the frontrunner.

Under the deal, a few jets may come in a flyaway condition, providing an immediate boost to India's fighter strength. The rest will likely be manufactured in India in collaboration with Indian firms.

India plans to upgrade 84 of its Su-30MKI

fighter jets under the Super-30 program.

### Delays a challenge

The IAF has long been plagued by delays in development and delivery of aircraft.

The LCA program, which eventually led to the development of Tejas, was first conceived in the 1980s. Two orders were placed to procure 40 Tejas Mk1 jets in 2006 and 2010; 38 have been delivered so far.

The delivery of the first two Tejas Mk1A aircraft is likely to take place in October, this time after a two-year delay. The reason: delayed procurement of the F404 engine from US defence major GE Aerospace, as well as issues in weapons and radar integration.

HAL plans to produce 16 Tejas fighters next year onwards, provided engine deliveries from the US are on-schedule. The original plan was to complete all deliveries by 2030; even if HAL is able to keep up with manufacturing 16 aircraft a year, deliveries are now set to run into the mid-2030s.

Negotiations between HAL and GE for co-production of the F414 engines for the Tejas Mk2 jets remain slow. Meanwhile, AMCA is still in the development stage; even a prototype may be a few years away still.

## GDP: GRAPHS, DATA, PERSPECTIVES

### Understanding the Rupee's slide against the US dollar

UDIT MISRA  
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 26

THROUGHOUT SEPTEMBER, the Indian rupee (INR) has been hitting all-time lows in its exchange value relative to the US dollar (USD), dropping to 88.6 on Tuesday. It means that an Indian wanting to buy a US good, or any foreign good whose price is denominated in US dollars (like crude oil), must now shell out more than 88 Indian rupees for each US dollar.

To be sure, this slide hasn't been sudden. However, it comes at a time when the rupee has been losing value against the currencies of almost all the major economies.

### The slide

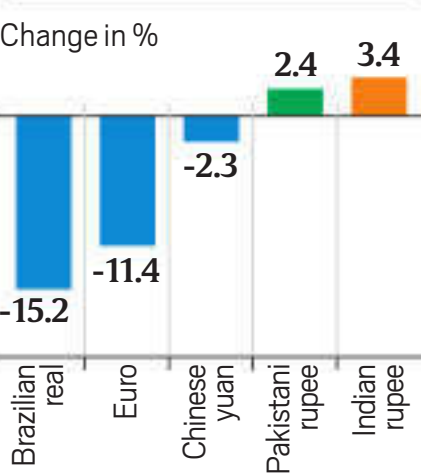
The chart shows how the US dollar performed against other currencies since the beginning of 2025. While INR lost more than 3% of its value against the USD, other competing economies — such as the European Union, China, and Brazil — have become significantly stronger against the dollar.

The INR is in the company of countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan, but has slid further. In fact, the rupee has lost 1.3% of its value over the past month, and weakened against the euro and the pound.

### The impact

While a weaker currency makes imports from the rest of the world costlier, it has a silver lining: it makes India's exports more affordable for consumers in the rest of the world. It is perhaps why the RBI hasn't attempted to support the Indian rupee in foreign exchange markets as aggressively as it has in the past. When the whole world is turning protectionist and unwilling to trade, a weaker rupee may come in handy for India's exporters, who are already facing stiff US tariffs.

### THE USD HAS WEAKENED AGAINST MOST CURRENCIES



Year to date (as of Thursday evening)  
Source: Google Finance

The bigger reasons for INR's slide, however, lie elsewhere. Exchange rates are essentially dependent on the relative demand for currencies. If American demand for rupees outpaces the Indian demand for dollars, then the rupee will gain in value against the dollar.

This can happen either because the world wants to buy India's goods and services or if global investors want to invest money in India — either in the stock markets by buying shares (Foreign Portfolio Investment or FPI) or by directly investing in new companies and factories (Foreign Direct Investment or FDI).

As it turns out, tariffs have damaged India's already stagnant export growth, while FPIs and FDI are falling or even turning negative because global investors are unhappy with India's GDP growth numbers, as well as the earnings of Indian companies.

Beginning today,  
**GDP: Graphs, Data, Perspectives**  
will be a weekly column.

## EXPLAINED DIPLOMACY & FOREIGN POLICY

# India-EU strategic agenda

A document issued by the European Union earlier this month outlines its agenda for ties with India based on five pillars: economy, emerging tech, security, global connectivity, and people-to-people contact



SHUBHAJIT ROY

AT A time when the United States, under President Donald Trump, is upending old and established global alignments, Europe is positioning itself as an all-weather friend of India, a predictable alternative to the unpredictability stemming from the White House.

The India-European Union (EU) leaders' summit, which will build on the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's visit to India earlier this year, is set to take place next February. In the six months leading up to it, the two sides will be meeting roughly once a week to discuss cooperation across the board.

Earlier this month, the EU issued a document which outlines the strategic agenda for India-EU ties ahead of the summit. This vision, based on a commitment to mutual benefit, is based on five pillars.

### 1. Economy & trade

The EU is India's largest trading partner; India is the EU's largest trading partner in the Global South. In 2024, bilateral trade in goods reached EUR 120 billion, an increase of nearly 90% over the last decade. Trade in services adds another EUR 60 billion.

Around 6,000 European companies operate in India. They directly employ 3 million people and support millions more jobs indirectly. EU foreign direct investment in India reached EUR 140 billion in 2023 — almost doubling in five years.

But there is more room for the relationship to grow. India accounts for less than 2.5% of the EU's trade in goods and services, and Indian investment in the EU totals only EUR 10 billion. The EU says that a free trade agreement (FTA) substantially reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers would unlock major trade and investment flows. Both sides aim to conclude negotiations by the end of 2025.

The EU and India are also working towards an investment protection agreement (IPA), a bilateral macroeconomic dialogue, an agreement on Geographical Indications, and a comprehensive air transport agreement.

### 2. Global connectivity

The EU's Global Gateway mobilises EUR



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in New Delhi this February. X/@DrSJaishankar

300 billion globally to support energy, digital and transport infrastructure, while India boasts initiatives such as MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth). In 2021, the two partners concluded the EU-India Connectivity Partnership.

Leveraging these platforms, both partners are well-positioned to cooperate on strengthening connectivity between Europe, India unlocking new commercial opportunities for European and Indian businesses.

A flagship example of this strategic collaboration is the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). This project seeks to revive historical Eurasian trade routes by integrating maritime, rail, digital, energy, and clean hydrogen infrastructure.

In the framework of IMEC, the EU is advancing the EU-Africa-India Digital Corridor, including the 11,700 km Blue Raman submarine cable system connecting Europe to India via the Mediterranean, the Middle East and East Africa. This will provide ultrahigh-speed, secure, and resilient data connectivity.

Additionally, the EU and India are collaborating to develop Green Shipping Corridors, which will strengthen sustainable maritime connectivity and reduce dependency on carbon-intensive routes.

### 3. Emerging technologies

The EU brings world-class research and digital infrastructure, a strong industry, robust regulation, and expertise in green and digital technologies. India offers a skilled workforce, vast datasets, a growing digital economy and electronics sector, a vibrant startup ecosys-

tem, and expertise in frugal innovation. Cooperation on critical emerging technologies will bring tangible benefits to both.

The EU proposes setting up a number of EU-India Innovation Hubs; dedicated platforms on key technologies, bringing together policymakers, industry leaders, startups, investors, and experts to identify shared priorities and catalyse innovation.

It also proposes an EU-India Startup Partnership, in collaboration with the European Innovation Council, Start-up India, and member countries. Cooperation will focus on strategic AI domains, including large language models, multilingual natural language processing datasets, AI training datasets, and AI solutions for public goods such as healthcare, agriculture, and climate action.

The EU and India are working towards robust measures to prevent the unauthorised transfer or misuse of sensitive technologies, ensuring their responsible utilisation in support of global stability and democratic values.

With the Euratom-India agreement for research and development cooperation, both partners will also promote collaboration on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, covering nuclear reactor safety, radioactive waste management, nuclear security, and nuclear fusion, among other things.

### 4. Security & defence

The EU-India security and defence cooperation has recently gained momentum through the Strategic Dialogue on Foreign and Security Policy launched in June 2025. Regular thematic dialogues between India and the EU

address themes of maritime security, cyber-security, counterterrorism, and non proliferation. The creation of an EU-India Security and Defence Partnership is now being explored.

The two sides are also launching negotiations on a Security of Information Agreement that will facilitate the exchange of classified information, and stronger cooperation in security matters. The EU's increasing strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific — especially its support for regional partners in comprehensive security areas — aligns closely with India's role as a key pillar of regional stability. The EU will also seek to conclude arrangements between the EU Naval Force and the Indian Navy to facilitate greater information sharing and cooperation in the western Indian Ocean.

The EU and India are working towards combating terror, terror financing, online propaganda, and the security risks posed by emerging technologies. The EU is committed to further strengthening counterterrorism cooperation through capacity-building efforts, joint projects, and law-enforcement partnerships. This cooperation could be extended to cover the drug trafficking.

Increased cooperation between the EU's and India's defence industries can help strengthen respective production and technological capabilities, bolster the security of supply chains, and stimulate innovation. The EU's expertise in defence research and manufacturing can help India strengthen its defence industrial base and diversify supply chains. An industry-led EU-India Defence Industry Forum, which will bring together businesses from both sides and identify opportunities for cooperation, could be set up.

### 5. People-to-people ties

In 2023, 825,000 Indian citizens lived in the EU, the largest group receiving EU Blue Cards and intra-corporate transfer permits. Travel has become easier, with nearly one million Schengen visas issued in India in 2024.

Both partners aim to manage migration sensibly; tackling illegal flows while supporting balanced talent mobility that serves India's development priorities and the EU's economic needs.

They are also looking towards expanding exchanges of students, academics and researchers. Indians already make up a significant proportion of international students in the world; the effort is to make European education more attractive to top talent. (This is particularly relevant amid Trump's attacks on American universities and institutions).

**LONGER VERSION ON**  
[indianexpress.com/explained](https://www.indianexpress.com/explained)

### IAS GS Foundation Course

Offline & Live Online Batches

Centre	हिंदी माध्यम	English Medium
9 Karol Bagh	एडमिशन आरंभ	6 Oct   6:00 PM
9 Noida	3 अक्टूबर   दोपहर 3:00 बजे	31 Oct   11:30 AM
9 Prayagraj	29 अक्टूबर   सुबह 8:00 बजे	29 Oct   8:00 AM
9 Lucknow	6 अक्टूबर   सुबह 11:30 बजे	8 Oct   11:30 AM
9 Indore	6 अक्टूबर   सुबह 8:00 बजे	9 Oct   6:00 PM
9 Jaipur	27 अक्टूबर   शाम 5:00 बजे	27 Oct   5:00 PM

**Drishti IAS**

Call Us  
**87501 87501**

[@drishtiias.com](https://www.drishtiias.com)

## Chero Archers: Jharkhand archery team pays tribute to legendary warrior clan

SHIVANI NAIK  
MUMBAI, SEPTEMBER 26

THEIR BOWS were basic, just a bent arc. Yet for the Chero (pronounced Chii-ro) archers of Palamau, the weapons were a symbol of defiance that defines their storied, if less-known, past.

The Chero were forever the 'Davids' of their story, prevailing against the 'Goliath' of the time: first the Mughals, and later, the British. The 17th-century folk hero Medini Rai, after whom Jharkhand's Medinagar city is named, is remembered today as 'Chero Napoleon', according to a *Prasari Bharati* documentary on the tribes.

That's why the moniker 'Chero Archers' for the Jharkhand franchise of the upcoming Archery Premier League is apt.

The Archers will join the Prithviraj Yodhas, Kakatiya Knights, Mighty Marathas, Rajputana Royals and Chola Chiefs for the inaugural edition of the APL, set to take place from October 2 to 12.

### Davids of defiance

The Cheros emerged in what is now Bihar and Jharkhand after the fall of the Pala Empire in the 12th-13th century, with the onset of the Sena dynasty. Eventually, they settled in Palamau, in present-day western Jharkhand. The story of their feistiness goes back to Sahbal Rai, a contemporary of Mughal emperor Jahangir, who troubled imperial forces of the Sultanate for years.

According to *The Nagbanshis and Cheros* (1972) by Balmukund Virottam, the retired head of the history department in Ranchi University, Sahbal looted supplies and car-

avans on the Grand Trunk road in 1613, and took some restraining when captured.

"Sahbal Rai impressed Jahangir by his fine physique and was ordered to fight a tiger for the amusement of the Emperor. He died in this fight with the tiger," Virottam wrote.

The Mughals would never subdue the Cheros. While Man Singh (1589), Sha'ista Khan (1641), Zabardast Khan (1643), and Daud Khan (1660) succeeded militarily, the flaming arrows of the Cheros did not stop stinging the Sultanate.

When Sha'ista Khan, a general of Aurangzeb, marched into the forests around Palamau and tried to cut trees to clear a spot for his camp, Chero arrows rained hell.

The most famous Chero warrior was Medini Rai. His troops evoked praise from

19th-century Scottish historian W W Hunter, who described them as "...People with bare heads and bare feet, and carrying bows with one curve and plenty of arrows..."

In 1660, when Daud Khan, another of Aurangzeb's generals, arrived in Palamau, his armies were equipped with intricately forged bows of the Cupid or Apollo shape (lip-curved), while the Cheros carried simple curves.

The tribal warriors were surrounded from all sides as they retreated to the hills and forests. Many were killed or wounded. Medini Rai evacuated women, children, and valuables from his fort, and took to the Mughal forces with his band of archers.

### Famous arrows

According to Virottam, the most lethal

arrows from Chero quivers were fired in 1730, when they scattered an advance party of Muazzam Khan.

"When Muazzam arrived at Derra, the people of Palamau under Jai Krishna Rai had felled trees and stopped his passage by throwing dust and showering arrows from behind the rocks," Virottam wrote.

Muazzam likely died of a wound during such an attack. Fakhruddaula, who was following him, settled for a very unenforceable tributary relationship with the Cheros.

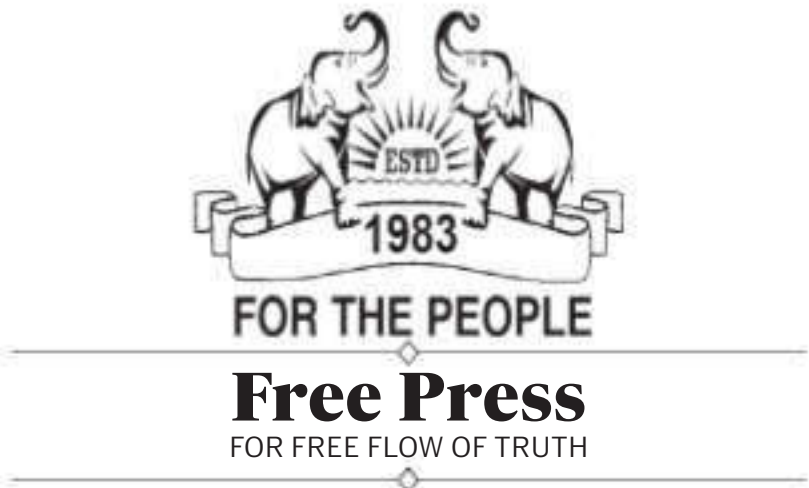
When the British came, it was Cheros of Chitrajit Rai who defied Captain Jacob Camac of the East India Company in 1771. When Camac led a detachment into Silli, the tribespeople used bows and arrows, but "were a very daring people and behaved with greater spirit than any in the Ramgur (Ramgarh) Country," Virottam wrote.

Even after declarations of extirpation (rooting out) of the Chero dynasty, the resistance constantly used the isolation of the thick forests. Mini insurrections took place between 1817 and 1857.

The Santal Revolt of 1855 saw brothers Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu of Tamar village raid British citadels for armaments, with an arrow left embedded serving as a summoning of supporters. Equally renowned are Chero brothers Nilamber and Pitamber, who led the Chero revolt against the British in 1857.

For the Cheros whose women fight alongside men, and who treat hunting, fishing and river diving as entertainment and sport, the bow and arrow was the first underdog story, they imbibed. Fighting, for them, wasn't about the sophistication of their equipment but the spirit of the archer.





# SC on judicial recruitment

The Supreme Court has reserved judgement in a case that will have a deep impact on judicial recruitment and decide on whether greater flexibility should be exercised in appointing district judges instead of the strict compartmentalisation that exists currently. A five-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court, headed by Chief Justice BR Gavai, was presiding over a case on whether serving judicial officers can apply for district judge positions reserved exclusively for lawyers. The bench, also comprising Justices MM Sundresh, Aravind Kumar, SC Sharma and K Vinod Chandran, went into the scope of Article 233 (2) of the Constitution, which concerns direct recruitment of district judges from the Bar. According to the article, “A person not already in the service of the Union or of the State shall only be eligible to be appointed a district judge if he has been for not less than seven years an advocate or a pleader and is recommended by the High Court for appointment.”

The case was filed after Rejanish, a Kerala lawyer, following seven years of legal practice, applied for the district judge's post. In the interim, he was appointed as a Munsiff magistrate. In 2019, he was relieved from that post and subsequently became a district judge. His appointment was challenged by another candidate, K Deepa, who argued that the seven-year eligibility requirement as a lawyer should be continuous, thereby disqualifying Rejanish since he had joined the judicial service. A single-judge bench of the Kerala High Court allowed Deepa's petition, relying on the Supreme Court's decision in 2020 in the Dheeraj Mor v High Court of Delhi case, which held that continuous practice as a lawyer was essential for eligibility under Article 233 (2). However, a division bench of the High Court later referred the matter to the Supreme Court while noting that the Kerala government rules contradicted the Dheeraj Mor judgement. The Constitution bench examined whether a judicial officer who has completed seven years at the Bar would be entitled for appointment as an additional district judge; whether eligibility is assessed at the time of appointment, application, or both; what eligibility exists for those already in judicial service under Article 233 (2); and whether combined experience as both advocate and civil judge for seven or more years qualifies for appointment. While high courts and bar councils maintained that Article 233 (2) restricts appointments exclusively to Bar members, judicial officers opined that the constitutional provision only sets eligibility conditions without barring officers already in service from applying.

The Constitution bench's observations stressed merit-based appointments. It said: “We have to move away from the mindset of either being judge-centric or lawyer-centric. It should be litigant-centric.” The top court's eagerly awaited ruling will have widespread ramifications on appointments in the lower and middle judiciary.

# Duterte to pay for his crimes

The three counts of violent crimes against humanity former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte has been charged with underscore the systemic impunities that shield brutal dictators from accountability for large-scale atrocities. The first former Asian head of state to appear before the International Criminal Court (ICC)—established under the 1998 Rome Statute to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and aggression—he has been serving an arrest warrant at The Hague since March. Among the heinous acts the impugned Duterte has been charged with include his role as a co-perpetrator in 19 killings between 2013 and 2016, when he was mayor of Davao City. Even while in custody in The Hague, Duterte, who had enlisted recruits to the so-called Davao death squad, was, in May, re-elected as the city's mayor. While serving as the country's president between 2016 and 2022, he was implicated in the murder of 14 “high-value targets” and, in a separate charge, in the murder of 43 low-level drug users and dealers. In a country that experts believe was anything but a hotspot for drug-related offences, Duterte's brutal vigilante mobs slaughtered thousands of innocents in cold-blooded extrajudicial executions. He had remained defiant throughout an inquiry, refusing to testify before the House of Representatives last year and taking ownership for his crimes in an appearance in the Senate.

Meanwhile, the Hague Court's mandate to bring to justice individual perpetrators of heinous crimes—when domestic courts are reluctant to act—has invariably met with hostile resistance even from among the signatory states of the Rome Statute. Consequently to a complaint a Philippines lawyer lodged during his presidency in 2018, an initially tough-talking Duterte unilaterally announced the country's withdrawal from the court's founding Rome Statute, a step repeated most recently in June by Hungary's autocratic Premier Viktor Orban. Then, when the ICC turned down Manila's appeal to have the probe against Duterte suspended, the government of incumbent President Ferdinand Marcos Jr barred state agencies from cooperating with the investigation, deeming it an affront to the country's sovereignty. All restrictions were eased once he and Sara Duterte, his vice-president and his predecessor's sister, spectacularly fell out and their alliance collapsed last year. In subsequent months, Duterte's supporters protested that the latter's detention was illegal, as the country had quit the court's jurisdiction. ICC prosecutors were hard put to clarify that the investigations related to the atrocities that were committed during Duterte's presidency. On another front, President Trump reinstated sanctions against the ICC chief prosecutor in the wake of the arrest warrants issued last November against Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for reliance on starvation as a method of warfare in the ongoing conflict with Hamas. As the feud between the Marcos and Duterte families intensifies, the ICC probe may face fewer obstacles.



The world, once again, is in flux. From the skies over Estonia to the streets of Gaza, from the oil markets of the Middle East to the storm-struck provinces of China, disruptions abound. For India, these are not distant tremors. They are currents that will shape our trajectory — either as headwinds that slow us down or as tailwinds that propel us into a future of sustainable abundance.

**Conflict and Diplomacy: Balancing Ties, Building Credibility:** The escalation in Gaza and the growing wave of state recognitions for Palestine have reignited a decades-long fault line. India, with historic sympathy for the Palestinian cause and deepening strategic ties with Israel, must walk a razor's edge. Millions of Indians live and work in the Gulf; our energy security is bound to West Asian stability. Yet, this very balancing act presents an opportunity: India can step forward as a trusted

mediator, leveraging its credibility in multilateral forums, such as the G20 and SCO.

Simultaneously, NATO's sharp responses to Russian airspace violations have rattled Europe. For India, this volatility underscores the urgency of diversifying energy sources. As oil and gas supplies from traditional exporters grow uncertain, our transition to renewables, hydrogen, and biofuels is no longer optional. It is imperative.

**Asia in Motion: New Alignments, New Chances:** Closer home, Saudi Arabia's defence pact with Pakistan signals shifting sands in South Asia's security architecture. While this may raise new complexities for India, it also reinforces the importance of our own Gulf diplomacy. Strengthening economic, defence, and clean energy ties with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman will be critical to ensuring both resilience and influence.

Meanwhile, East Asia's appetite for coal has surged to levels un-

seen in over a year. For India, this creates a short-term cost risk for energy-intensive sectors such as steel and power. But it also shines a spotlight on the prize: building a renewable-plus-storage backbone that insulates our economy from such volatility. And then comes Super Typhoon Ragasa, hurtling toward China's Guangdong manufacturing belt. Every disruption in Shenzhen and Guangzhou creates opportunities for India's MSMEs in electronics, textiles, toys, and auto components. The world is actively searching for “China+1” supply chain options. India must seize this moment with speed and scale.

**Economic Signals: Risks Abroad, Leverage at Home:** On the brighter side, the OECD has revised global growth upwards to 3.2% for 2025, thanks to strong AI-driven investment and trade resilience. For Indian exporters in IT, pharmaceuticals, and engineering goods, this is good news. But we cannot ignore the dark cloud: the

US administration's sudden tariff hikes and the imposition of a staggering \$100,000 annual fee on H-1B visas.

This move strikes at the heart of India's IT services sector. Yet, within it lies the seed of a pivot. If US firms find mobility expensive, India must position itself as the most attractive hub for Global Capability Centres. By offering world-class talent, AI-powered processes, and cost advantages, we can transform the very structure of Indo-US collaboration.

**Climate Imperatives: Scrutiny and Leadership:** Across continents, climate protests are demanding stronger action, even as regulatory rollbacks create uncertainty. India will inevitably face sharper scrutiny on emissions, particularly on coal usage. But here too lies a chance: to lead on green hydrogen, biofuels, circular economy solutions, and climate-resilient agriculture. Few nations combine India's scale, entrepreneurial energy, and policy mo-

mentum. If we act decisively, India can set global standards.

**The Bottom Line: Catapulting Atmanirbhar Bharat:** The world today is volatile, fractured, and uncertain. But volatility is also opportunity in disguise. By insulating ourselves from turbulence—through energy diversification, secure supply chains, and domestic innovation—while grabbing opportunities in AI, clean energy, and manufacturing, India can turn headwinds into tailwinds.

This is our moment to catapult Atmanirbhar Bharat into global supply chains, clean energy leadership, and AI-driven services. The turbulence of today can—with courage, innovation, and foresight—become the abundance of tomorrow.

Shailesh Haribhakti is a Chartered Accountant, Independent Director, and author of Sustainable Abundance and History of the Future.



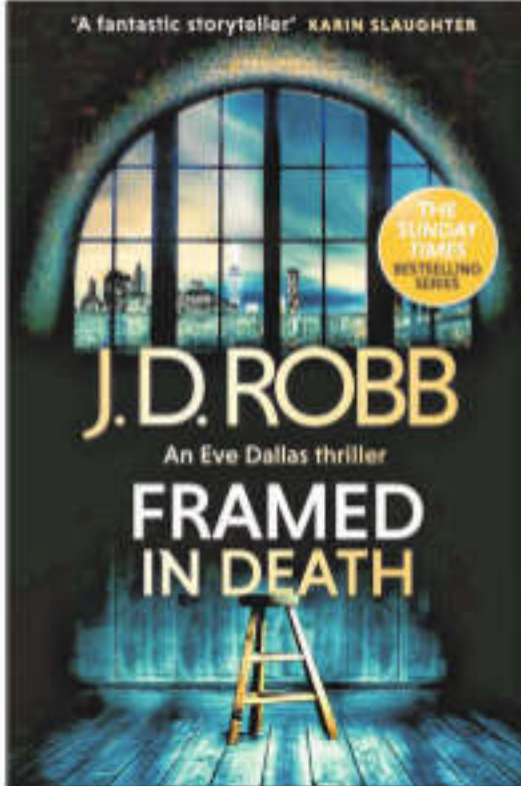
The 61st book in the 'Death' series by JD Robb—Framed in Death—has just come out and shot right into the bestseller charts. The protagonist of these futuristic novels is Eve Dallas, a New York cop, who is among the top female characters in crime fiction who have lasted the longest—30 years.

J.B. Robb is the pseudonym of popular author Nora Roberts, and she launched Eve Dallas in 1995 with the book Naked In Death. Eve is a tough police officer, with a strong sense of justice and unshakeable self-respect. Though she is married to Roarke, one of the richest men in mid-21st-century New York, and lives in his palatial house, she never takes money from him, and if she needs to borrow some, she makes it a point to return it. He does, however, fill her closet with great clothes and takes pride in making sure she goes out well-dressed. Both Eve and Roarke have survived rough, troubled childhoods, and their relationship is marked with deep love and mutual respect. A tech wizard, he often helps Eve with her cases as a civilian consultant to the New York police department while also making sure she eats properly, because in the throes of solving a case, Eve tends to survive on coffee.

Eve's backstory is traumatic, and the abuse she faced in childhood made her strong and determined

# Woman of the future ensures justice is never delayed

What has contributed to the popularity of the books is the portrayal of Eve Dallas, she is complex and compassionate towards victims of crime



**Women Power:** The cover of the latest bestseller in the Death series, Framed in Death. (right) Author Nora Roberts. She has over 225 novels to her credit.



handsome Irishman. At the end of the investigation, when he is cleared, they form a relationship that only grows stronger over time. The victim's cat, Galahad, becomes their pampered pet. By the end of the third book, Immortal in Death, they are married, and the fourth, Rapture in Death, begins with their honeymoon. Somerset, the man whom Roarke treats as a surrogate father, since his own was violent and neglectful, looks after their household.

Roarke is a perfect foil for Eve—while Eve is inflexible and almost spartan in her lifestyle, Roarke is soft-spoken and indulgent. He also respects her boundaries and gives her the sta-

bility she needs, without acknowledging even to herself that she can be vulnerable.

Eve is reserved by nature but treats her team—particularly her partner Delia Peabody—with affection. Because she works so hard and does not care about her own safety in the pursuit of criminals, her team is fiercely loyal, and her bosses are appreciative of her commitment to her work.

She is warm and protective towards the few friends she has and nurtures those bonds, though Roarke is more outgoing and helpful. She hates feminine fripperies and is sure she does not want children. Roarke and she do sup-

port a home for troubled kids, called An Didean. (Roarke also supports a shelter for abused women and children called Dochas).

Over 61 books, and the popularity of Eve Dallas has not faded. Robb/Roberts comes up with exciting plots—in the latest, Framed In Death, Eve goes after a serial killer, who dresses his murder victims like famous paintings and leaves the corpses at the doors of the homes or workplaces of art gallery owners.

What has undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of the books is the portrayal of Eve Dallas—she is fearless and blunt but also complex and compassionate towards victims of crime. Often, the perpetrators leave no trace, but Dallas pulls at the tiniest of threads and persists till the case is solved. Like investigating fabric samples and paints, and in the new book with its art backdrop.

Readers have followed 61 books because the harsh police procedural is softened by a wonderful romance and enhanced by sci-fi details like flying cars and auto chefs. If there is cruelty and murder, there is also love, friendship and the certainty of justice always delivered. Because Eve Dallas makes sure that no killer escapes the law.

Deepa Gahlot is a Mumbai-based columnist, critic and author.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### MP Tested

A cloudburst in Beed and Dharashiv districts of Maharashtra submerged villages, endangering lives. Dharashiv MP Om Prakash Nimbalkar personally entered floodwaters with NDRF teams and villagers to rescue people — a gesture praised widely. In contrast, during Himachal's disaster, MP Kangana Ranaut focused more on her own struggles than her people's plight. Democracy demands leaders who share citizens' suffering, not crocodile tears. Nimbalkar's spirit deserves gratitude. Regardless of party, all public representatives must emulate such commitment.

Hema Hari Upadhyay, Khacharod

### Typically Modi

Modi's TV address on GST 2.0 began with anticipation but ended with the usual self-congratulation. It took eight years to correct flaws in GST, yet the government now touts it as "next-gen reform." There is still room for improvement. Next time, instead of PR, Modi could be transparent about his educational de-

grees or defence losses in Operation Sindoor.

Avinash Godbole, Dewas

### Strategic Counter Moves

India can counter Donald Trump's provocations with soft power and economic tools. Mobilising the Indian-American diaspora, tightening pharmaceutical exports, and leveraging IT services can demonstrate strength. Coordinated diplomacy with trade allies while preserving U.S. investment flows ensures balance. Such calibrated responses compel Washington to respect India's role in global technology, healthcare, and diaspora-driven influence. Strategic depth lies not in hostility but in resilience and resourceful engagement. India's riposte must be multidimensional, firm, and smart.

Aditya Shekhar, Indore

### GST Relief Limited

The GST cut on Navratri benefits citizens, but real economic boost looks unlikely. Few gain from income tax relief at ₹12 lakh. India needs job-creating infrastruc-



HASAN ZAIDI

structure spending more than tax tweaks. Inflation erodes incomes, making life harder for the majority. GST savings help, but without better wages and employment, consumption won't surge. Modi's bigger goal must be raising incomes. Reforms are welcome, but sustainable growth demands vision beyond temporary tax relief.

SN Kabra

### Cinema Awards Glory

The 2023 National Awards in Delhi crowned

### Bite Worse Than Bark

Whenever action is initiated to rein in stray dogs, playing havoc with human lives, animal activists take up cudgels on behalf of the strays, flaunting animal welfare. Last week, more than five stray dogs entered the shed of a farmer in Ariyalur district in Tamil Nadu and mauled his eight goats to death. Let's see what stand these activists would take, given the victims, in this case, also belong to the animal kingdom.

P.G. Menon, Chennai

tion across languages and regions.

Dimple Wadhawan, Kanpur Nagar

### Success Demands Perseverance

Success respects effort, not age. Persistence, failures, and resilience matter most. Shah Rukh Khan and Rani Mukerji, after three decades in cinema, finally won their first National Awards. Vikrant Massey also triumphed, while Mohanlal earned the Dadasaheb Phalke Award. Their recognition proves dedica-

tion pays despite delays. Awards honour commitment and passion, not timing. These actors inspire dreamers across professions — reminding us perseverance transforms wishes into reality. Recognition comes, but only through relentless pursuit.

Kirti Wadhawan, Kanpur

### H-1B Visa Shock

The Trump administration's \$100,000 H-1B visa fee risks crippling India's IT industry. The move, intended to protect U.S. jobs, may backfire by driving operations offshore, limiting diversity, and weakening innovation. America's tech edge relies on immigrant talent. Restrictive policies could push skilled professionals to friendlier nations, undermining Silicon Valley's dynamism. While nations must protect domestic workers, short-sighted steps erode global competitiveness. Balanced immigration is key for sustainable growth and collaborative technological advancement.

Dr. Vijaykumar H K, Raichur



# Read the signs, make policy that includes people



When my friend was in school in Delhi, his family put him in Russian class rather than Hindi because they thought that it would give him an advantage in a world where the erstwhile USSR was a superpower. He was happy to not do Hindi but sad that he was not in French where the cool kids were. When he was 14, he took the family car for a secret joyride and in a moment of bravado, gave a drunk, middle-aged Russian man a lift. He successfully figured which hotel to pour the man out at—the only time the Russian ever came handy.

Around the same time, I was a high school student in Oman and my classmate was taking private Arabic lessons because her family, which had come up the hard way at home in Assam, thought their impressive daughter had a future in the UN. Back in the 18th century, a nine-year-old Raja Ram Mohan Roy too was sent from Bengal to Patna to study

Arabic and Persian. In more recent times, there has been plenty of overlap in the populations of people being urged to spurn all Chinese products as well as the people taking Mandarin tuitions. Not surprising since China looms large and neon.

Up north in Canada, folks joke that when you quietly put your five-year-old in French immersion school, it is because you want to give her everything she needs to become prime minister someday. The particular game of *teen patti* that parents play with global realpolitik is... global. And just about as reliable. Which brings us to the question of a strange public interest litigation (PIL) filed recently in the Supreme Court by a Mumbai-based activist asking to make American Sign Language (ASL) compulsory in education for the deaf in India.

In late August, the *Free Press Journal* reported that several associations representing the deaf and hard of hearing have raised alarm bells because the PIL was bizarrely asking for compulsory ASL at a time when Indian Sign Language (ISL) is well-established and meaningful for the Indian deaf community. The associations wrote to the Chief Justice of India pointing out that around the world, different nations have their own culturally rooted sign languages.

I have long been fascinated by the



Estimates show India has around 18 million deaf or hard-of-hearing people. ISTOCKPHOTO

varieties of deaf cultures around the world but fascinated is not the same as educated. For instance, I didn't know a superb detail that the National Association for the Deaf (NAD) pointed out. The Indian Sign Language uses two hands unlike ASL, which uses one hand. This perfectly illustrates the statement from the All India Federation of the Deaf that "just as Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, and other spoken Indian languages represent cultural pride, ISL represents the linguistic

dignity of deaf Indians. Allowing ASL to operate alongside ISL poses a dual threat as it risks colonising minds and potentially leads to cultural erasure."

The NAD estimates that India has as many as 18 million deaf and hard-of-hearing people. The gap in census data leaves us at a bit of a loss but again the estimates from 2014 was that one out of five deaf children in India was out of school. Making ISL more popular is a solution promoted by all kinds of activ-

ists and policy nerds. Abhimanyu Sharma, a language scholar, pointed out a while ago that the stigma around sign language and the preference of "oralism" in mainstream schools is harmful for deaf students. Poet Abhishek Anicca, for instance, always has a sign language interpreter present at his live performances and book launches.

During the covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, researchers noted the piercing tragedy that some deaf adults newly stuck in the family home were lonely because their family members had not learnt sign language. Which points to the idea that more folks across the board (hearing and deaf) should learn ISL rather than throw the dice and pray for an America lottery—an America which, I have to point out, is busily connecting paracetamol with autism.

Disabilities studies scholar Shilpa Anand once wrote, "That merit is not accessible to persons with disabilities is not merely the point; what is under-examined is how merit is made up of ableist structures." In their polite interventions, the Indian deaf associations made allowance for possible good intentions in the alarmingly ignorant PIL which aims to "unlock global job potential."

Just weeks later, they could have pointed out the problem with this manner of *teen patti*—no one is really pre-

pared for the moment when a generation of Indians trained from age 12 to make it in California have to suddenly consider H-1B earthquakes.

Meanwhile, if one wants to look at what happens when you thoughtlessly implement policies without including the communities affected, one has to merely look at China which is keen to give its deaf populations better access to information. In 2022, Chinese television began providing sign language translation through digital avatars during live broadcasts. According to Zheng Xuan, a Chinese academic, the country has over 20 million deaf people and sign language is widely used but not widely taught. Sign language reflects spoken and written Chinese differently. As is expected in a large country like China, there are plenty of regional variations too, none of which is reflected in AI-generated translations. The AI sign language avatars were doing the equivalent of your NRI cousin trying to speak Malayalam—causing hilarity and confusion. A perfect moment, as Xuan says, to repeat that classic slogan of the disability rights movement—"nothing about us without us".

Nisha Susan is the author of *The Women Who Forgot To Invent Facebook And Other Stories*. She posts @chasingiamb.

# Behind the electric curtain: What Tesla doesn't want you to know

A new book highlights the gap between Silicon Valley's self-aggrandisement and its actual operational competence

Sundeep Khanna

Elon Musk is the news. He's omnipresent and omniscient. If the legacy news media misses anything about him, there's always his own platform X, to ensure nothing he does, says or even thinks, escapes our attention.

So what else could another book about the company tell us that we don't already know? The answer, as journalists Sonke Iversen and Michael Verfurden demonstrate in *The Tesla Files: The Inside Story of Musk's Empire*, lies not in the subject matter itself but in the rigour and distance that investigative journalism can bring to bear on corporate mythology.

Musk's empire has grown to staggering proportions over the years. Tesla's market capitalisation has at times exceeded that of the next ten automakers combined; SpaceX, a start-up owned by him, has revolutionised space travel while bagging billions in US government contracts. The Boring Company tunnels beneath major cities to ease traffic congestion while Neuralink promises to merge human consciousness with artificial intelligence. His acquisition of Twitter in 2022 for \$44 billion transformed it into X, a personal megaphone to 400 million users. Meanwhile, Musk's net worth fluctuates between \$300-400 billion, depending on Tesla's stock price on any given day. This is not merely a business empire we are talking about; it is a techno-feudal kingdom that spans industries and continents, with Musk as its mercurial sovereign.

For all this, the man isn't quite the masked superhero out to save the world from itself. The authors' perspective reveals something that US media coverage often misses: the profound gap between Silicon Valley's self-aggrandisement and its actual operational competence.

The central revelation of the book is breathtaking in its simplicity and devastating in its implications. Tesla, a company that positions itself at the vanguard of technological sophistication, that spends thousands on surveillance software to monitor data movements of its people, somehow allowed a single disgruntled employee to walk out with virtually everything: employee records, customer data, business partner information, legal documents, banking details, government correspondence, technical specifications, autopilot failure reports, and internal memoranda.

This data breach, orchestrated by whistleblower Lukasz Krupski, forms the spine of the book, though Iversen and Verfurden take their time getting there. The authors, veterans of German business daily *Handelsblatt* that earned international recognition for its role in exposing



Elon Musk at SpaceX in Texas, in May.

the 2020 Wirecard fraud (a series of corrupt practices that led to the insolvency of the German payment financial services provider), bring the methodical approach of old-fashioned journalism to their subject. This is both the book's strength and its occasional weakness. Where most current business writing often favours narrative velocity over analytical depth, the book's approach stresses thoroughness, sometimes at the expense of pacing.

Indeed, its structural choices reflect this tension. Nearly half the book is devoted to familiar territory, including Musk's South African childhood, his early ventures, the founding mythology of Tesla and SpaceX. This ground has been extensively covered, most comprehensively in Walter Isaacson's 2023 biography, a 650-page doorstopper that left few stones unturned in chronicling Musk's rise. While Iversen and Verfurden do add some illuminating anecdotes—the image of Musk delivering an impassioned analyst presentation to a muted microphone while his team and the analysts sit in silent paralysis, afraid to interrupt, is both absurd and revealing—much of this material feels like necessary but insufficient table-setting.

The story comes to life when analyses of the data reveals a company whose internal culture bears little resemblance to its public

image of innovation and progress. Tesla, as depicted through leaked documents and employee testimonials, operates more like a digital-age sweatshop than a revolutionary enterprise.

The contradictions are stark and numerous: Musk publicly smokes marijuana on Joe Rogan's podcast while maintaining strict cannabis prohibition in Tesla factories; he champions Americans' rights to carry arms on X while banning weapons from company premises; he positions himself as a champion of free speech while reportedly maintaining an atmosphere of surveillance and retaliation within his companies. These contradictions extend to Tesla's treatment of its workforce.

Compared to German automotive giants like Volkswagen, where robust labour protections and worker representation are standard, Tesla's employment practices seem almost deliberately punitive. The authors document how employees discover their termination not through human interaction but through technological failure: laptops that won't let them log in, badges that stop working at factory gates. Sadly, this casual dehumanisation has metastasised beyond Silicon Valley, becoming equally commonplace in corporate India over the past five years.

But the most chilling revelations concern

safety. The retractable door handles that Musk insists upon for aesthetic reasons have created deadly consequences in emergency situations. First responders, faced with burning Tesla vehicles, watched helplessly as passengers remained trapped inside, unable to access the concealed door mechanisms. The authors' observation "Because Musk prefers the sleek look of Teslas without handles, he accepts the risk to his customers" cuts to the heart of a philosophy that prioritises one man's whim over human life.

This utilitarian calculus, the authors suggest, reflects Musk's admiration for philosopher William MacAskill's effective altruism, a movement that weighs present suffering against theoretical future benefits. If millions must suffer today so billions can be saved tomorrow, the math seems to justify the sacrifice.

The Christmas anecdote that closes this section crystallises the dynamic. While Musk extracted billions in compensation for his "efforts," 12,000 Tesla employees received socks as their holiday bonus. The image is both pathetic and emblematic of a broader wealth concentration that has reached near-feudal proportions in contemporary American capitalism.

The Musk that emerges from this book is a bundle of contradictions. A tyrant who screams and yells when he wants something done, yet not averse to taking a dig at his own company. When stories broke about a factory director in Tesla's German plant berating employees for the number of coffee mugs that went missing, Musk joined media outlets in capturing the absurdity with a "We were mugged" post. Clearly, he is neither the visionary saviour of his most ardent admirers nor the cartoon villain of his harshest critics. Instead, Iversen and Verfurden present something more unsettling: a figure of genuine capability and innovation whose success has created a bubble of consequence-free decision-making.

What makes *The Tesla Files* particularly valuable is its demonstration that robust

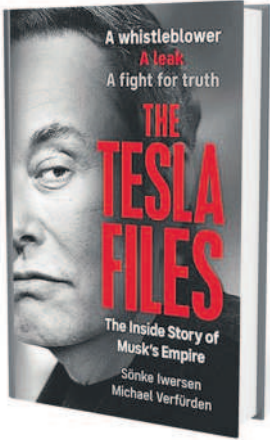
investigative journalism persists if we are willing to look beyond market valuations and maintain the critical distance necessary for genuine accountability reporting. The authors' work recalls the tradition of investigative journalism that produced landmark exposes of corporate malfeasance, from Ida Tarbell's Standard Oil investigation to more recent works like Brad Stone's *The Everything Store* or Emily Chang's *Brotopia*.

The book is not without its limitations. The authors occasionally seem uncertain whether they are writing a corporate expose or a business biography. The background material, while competently handled, lacks the personal insight of Isaacson's work or the narrative drive of Ashlee Vance's earlier Musk biography. Vitaly, the book's conclusion, examining the implications of tech billionaires' increasing control over information flow, feels somewhat underdeveloped given its importance. With Musk's acquisition of Twitter and Jeff Bezos's ownership of *The Washington Post*, the concentration of media power in the hands of tech entrepreneurs represents a fundamental challenge to democratic discourse. This deserves more than the brief treatment it receives here.

Despite these shortcomings, *The Tesla Files* succeeds as both journalism and warning. It reminds us that the distance between mythology and reality in corporate America has grown dangerously wide and that the tradition of sceptical, methodical investigation offers a necessary corrective to Silicon Valley's self-congratulation. In an era when business journalism too often functions as stenography for entrepreneurial ego, Iversen and Verfurden have shown the virtues of accountability reporting.

Perhaps the book's most sobering insight is how little any of this seems to matter. Tesla's stock price remains stratospheric. Musk's influence continues to grow, and the contradictions between rhetoric and reality that *The Tesla Files* so carefully documents appear to have no meaningful impact on the company's trajectory. This raises uncomfortable questions about the relationship between truth and consequence in contemporary capitalism.

Sundeep Khanna is a regular Mint columnist and author of business books.



**The Tesla Files:** By Sonke Iversen and Michael Verfurden, Penguin Random House, 352 pages, ₹999.



## INSURANCE PLATFORM NEEDS SIMPLER RULES, DATA CARE TO SUCCEED

AFTER years of handwringing, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority has finally rolled out a critical reform—Bima Sugam. It's claimed to be the world's first platform bringing insurers, agents, brokers, banks, and aggregators together, making buying, renewing, and claiming all policies easier. Touted as the game-changer, it offers a unique, lifetime digital insurance ID, Bima Pehchaan, which links individuals' various policies under a secure, consent-based framework, eliminating complex paperwork and facilitating claim settlements. The digital platform, backed by the regulator, aims to empower and protect policyholders, and increase reach and affordability to achieve the vision of insurance for all by 2047. Though India was the world's 10th largest insurance market in 2021, and is on course to be the sixth largest by 2032, insurance penetration—at 3.7 percent in 2023-24—remains well below the global average of 6-7 percent.

Although IRDAI has pitched Bima Sugam as the 'UPI moment' for insurance, there are significant challenges to mind. While consumers have the option of comparing and buying policies online even now, a major stumbling block is the confusion caused by intricate clauses and jargon. Policyholders often do not completely understand the coverage terms, ending up with messy claim settlements. This is why consumers rely on agents to assist them through the entire settlement process. The downside, though, is that agents often push specific products based on commission or personal preference. They pocket an estimated 15-40 percent of the first-year premium as commission, depending on the product and insurer, which inflates premiums in the long term. While buying online eliminates this cost and prevents misselling, not all customers are comfortable or satisfied with claim settlement without agents' assistance. It will be interesting to see how Bima Sugam fills the void, particularly in rural areas, where users may need more handholding.

Given India's low premiums-to-GDP ratio, Bima Sugam comes through as a serious reform intended to democratise insurance, empower policyholders, and simplify processes. However, IRDAI must first ensure strict data-sharing protocols and end-to-end protection of sensitive financial data across the entire value chain. The regulator should also place a strong emphasis on protecting privacy and maintaining the integrity of personal information at every stage, whether while collecting, storing, or sharing personally identifiable data. The reform needs trust to make it work.

## SUPERHEROINE HIT POINTS TO A CHANGING SOCIETY

SOMETHING interesting is afoot in the Malayalam film industry. After earning a bad name last year for the complete absence of female leads in hit movies, it has come up with the first ever superheroine film that has become the highest-grossing Malayalam film of all time. The Kalyani Priyadarshan starrer *Lokah: Chapter 1—Chandra* has also been counted as the highest-earning female-centric film in Indian cinema. It has upstaged Mohanlal's *L2: Empuraan* as the biggest blockbuster in Malayalam till date. Its success has travelled far beyond Telugu and Tamil heartlands, into Hindi-speaking territories. In its fourth week on the big screen, *Lokah's* pan-India collection stood at ₹138.65 crore—unprecedented for any film with a female lead.

What's more interesting is that several women worked behind the camera, too. Co-writer Santhy Balachandran, colourist Yashika Routray and rapper Reble were part of the team that created the story of Neeli, a powerful vampire who belongs to a marginalised community. The success of *Lokah* becomes all the more remarkable with hindsight. No Malayalam superhit produced in 2024—from *Manjummel Boys* to *Aavesham*—had any female character except in blink-and-you-miss roles. The industry had faced lots of flak for making women 'invisible', especially considering that Malayalam films had always had strong female characters.

Equally appreciable is the support the film received from women across the Indian film industry. Within its first week, Priyanka Chopra publicly put *Lokah* on her watchlist and Alia Bhatt gave it a rave review. Underlining the importance of sisterhood, actress Nyla Usha shared a striking image featuring Kalyani alongside Parvathy and Darshana—two actors who had voiced their opinion against the "disappearance" of women from Malayalam cinema. As she rightfully put it, Kalyani's victory today is shared with everyone who had questioned the absence of women, especially predecessors who had raised the issue even at the cost of their careers. That a writer got the courage to conceive a powerful woman-centric film, a major production company came forward to produce it, and the audience welcomed the output with standing ovation time and again say a lot about the churn happening in society. It is indeed a welcome change that must be sustained at all costs.

### QUICK TAKE

#### KEEPING THE SKIES SAFE

AFTER six decades of valiant service, a warhorse has been put to pasture. The Russian-designed MiG21 aircraft—which once accounted for two-thirds of India's fighter jets—were retired Friday. They won us wars and the air force procured 872 of them between 1966 and 1980. However, they also became known as 'flying coffins', having been involved in 482 crashes between 1971 and 2012, claiming 171 pilots and 39 civilians. Now that the country's squadron strength has dipped below 70 percent of the sanctioned level, the focus shifts to alternatives. India's neighbourhood has rarely been as volatile in recent years as at present. The government needs to assure the nation that our skies are safe—with home-grown or imported birds.

PROTESTS by students at Kolkata's National University of Juridical Sciences, against their Vice-Chancellor Nirmal Kanti Chakrabarti, recently took the novel form of standing during lectures, for over five hours a day. The protestors allege years of silence, frustration and disappointment at "lack of financial transparency, systematic patterns of administrative failures, persistent apathy and growing disconnect between the administration and its students and faculty members".

These are grave charges, but they should not deflect attention from the extraordinary perturbing observations made by the Supreme Court while dismissing the appeal of a faculty member who had brought charges of sexual harassment against the same vice-chancellor. On September 12, the court noted that the appellant's original complaint, made in December 2023—more than six months after incidents occurring up to April that year—was time-barred and therefore could not be heard or investigated. Nevertheless, they directed that although "the wrong committed against the appellant may not be investigated on technical grounds, it must not be forgotten", and that it should be allowed to "haunt the wrongdoer forever" by being mandatorily included in his résumé.

What is most surprising about this judgement, quite apart from its Shakespearean, even Biblical, invocation of being 'haunted' by a historical crime, is the use of the term 'wrongdoer'. Under the rigid provisions of the POSH Act, 2013, any complaint of sexual harassment must be made within three months of the latest incident, extensible by another three months. Since the original complaint against Chakrabarti was made nearly eight months after the last reported incident of sexual harassment, it was time-barred and never investigated, though the complainant alleged further intimidation and persecution through removal from an administrative post on August 29, 2023.

The Supreme Court concurred with the opinion of the local complaint committee as well as a division bench of the Calcutta High Court that the original complaint was belated and therefore could not be examined on merit, and that the removal of the appellant from a post was not an independent action solely on the vice-chancellor's part.

If the case has never been heard on merit, how is the Supreme Court justified in using the term 'wrongdoer' and directing that the complaint be forever attached

The POSH Act's time limit to file a complaint needs to be expanded. But the Supreme Court's order to include an unproven sexual harassment charge on a vice-chancellor's résumé is baffling

## THE TROUBLE WITH NAILING UNPROVEN OFFENCES TO A NAME

SUPRIYA CHAUDHURI

Professor Emerita, Jadavpur University



MANDAR PARDIKAR

to his résumé? Surely it was the responsibility of the highest court of the land, especially when it was so anxious to adhere strictly to the provisions of the POSH Act, to establish guilt before using a term that really has only one meaning? This is not justice, nor does it help women in their struggle for workplace rights, and a safe and healthy working environment.

As Jhuma Sen, faculty at NUJS, points out in a recent article, the issue here is twofold. On the one hand, there is the extremely disquieting order to include the complaint in the accused person's dossier in perpetuity, though it was never investigated. On the other hand, it is clear that the principal reason for this failure lies in the stringent provisions of the POSH Act, stipulating a window of only 3-6 months within which a complaint must be lodged.

As everyone associated in any capacity with struggles for gender justice knows, survivors often face grave difficulties in bringing cases to light, and sometimes years go by before they are able to speak out against their harassers. This was the rationale behind a Bill introduced in the Rajya Sabha on February 2, 2024 by Sasmit Patra, urging reform of the POSH Act by fixing the basic period for filing complaints at one year, further extendable without any upper limit, by the internal or local committee if they are satisfied that circumstances prevented the complainant from filing earlier. Additionally, the Bill proposed that the provision for 'conciliation' be deleted in its entirety. This proposed reform, 10 years after the original POSH Act, drew attention to its many deficiencies and inadequate enforcement.

## TRAINSPOTTING IN HINTERLAND

MADHAVAN NARAYANAN

Senior journalist

### REVERSE SWING

opportunities are more abundant. The Amrit Bharat Express recognises this by connecting dots on the map that confirm paths of migration connecting high-growth zones with laggard ones. A humble-yet-superfast passport to prosperity.

These trains were commercially launched on New Year's Day 2024. Typically intended to cover journeys of 800 km or more, the Amrit Bharat Express, as the name suggests, is heavenly nectar for seekers. A 4,000-km sleeper coach journey on it may cost as low as ₹1,500, enabling migrants to reach workplaces and travel back home for festivals at a fraction of a month's salary. With promised speeds of 110-130 km per hour, the train can be a catalytic boon featuring LED lights, CCTVs, and access for the disabled.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Amrit Bharat Express trains are enabling a demographic transition by offering low-cost, high-speed travel for job-seeking migrants from the poorer eastern states to the richer ones in south and west. They account for most new non-AC coaches being rolled out

It is socially symbolic of how this revolution has gone largely unnoticed that the Wikipedia page for the Amrit Bharat Express offers bare minimum of information compared to its Vande Bharat counterpart, which links the train's story to railway history going back decades and lists its more than 75 routes.

Official data reveals a lot more about the Amrit Bharat Express's revolutionary character. The government said a few weeks ago that 14 of the 100 approved Am-

rit Bharat trains are operational and as many as 17,000 non-AC coaches are planned to be inducted into the railways over the next five years, the lion's share of which will go to seat Amrit Bharat passengers.

The total number of passengers travelling by general and unreserved coaches across India more than doubled from 275 crore in 2021-22, when the Covid pandemic was in its last throes, to 651 crore in 2024-25, a two-year surge partly powered up by the Amrit Bharat Express. Overall occupancy during the past two years has been near-full, indicating a strong supply-demand match.

The train's destinations tell their own story. The first Amrit Bharat train was between East Delhi's Anand Vihar terminal and Darbhanga in Bihar. Earlier this month, he flagged off one connecting Jogbani on Bihar-Nepal border with Erode near the bustling textile town of Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu, and Saharsa with Chheharta in Amritsar, close to Punjab's wheatfields that routinely employ Bihari migrants.

Malda in West Bengal and Gomti Nagar in Uttar Pradesh are among the other destinations otherwise dominated by Bihar's Gaya, Motihari and Sitamarhi. Mumbai, Bengaluru, Erode, Amritsar, and suburban Delhi stand at the other end, indicating the pattern of jobs-driven migration. Intermediate stations like Nagpur complete the picture. The routes remind me of migrant Siberian cranes seeking agreeable winter habitats in India.

In terms of rail networks, India ranks fourth in the world after the US, China, and Russia. But in passenger travel, India understandably and undeniably holds the top spot. The Amrit Bharat Express may not match the famous 9,289-km trans-Siberian train route, captured in *Doctor Zhivago*, Boris Pasternak's novel made into an Oscar-winning film by David Lean. But as an enabler of the world's most populous nation's demographic transition, Amrit Bharat is the kind of travel that would fascinate historians of the future.

(Views are personal)  
(On X @madversity)

### MAIL BAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

#### Unlike Ladakh

Ref: *Address aspirations* (Sep 26). Ladakh is a most peaceful place. During my two stints in J&K, with a longer duration in Ladakh with Border Roads Organisation, the local residents I encountered were a fine, passive lot ever ready to assist in a contingency. If the demand is for statehood, a violent upsurge is not the answer, which is quite unlike Ladakhis.  
**Lt Col Rajkumar Titus (ret'd), email**

#### Balanced trade

Ref: *Close trade deal with EU on equal footing* (Sep 26). While the EU offers a large and stable market, its strict standards pose significant challenges. Balancing new opportunities with pivoting to domestic policy interests is crucial.  
**Shanila Marakar, Malappuram**

#### Lottery lure

Ref: *How states can parry the thrust of GST rate cuts* (Sep 26). Kerala is exemplary in education, yet its purpose remains hollow. People need to be mindful of spending their income in a useful way. Work is worship. Real life is in working hands and not in buying lotteries.  
**S Kanthimathinathan, Kovilpatti**

#### Gendered roles

Ref: *Don't mother away this crisis* (Sep 26). Counselling programmes should not be confined to women. The capacity for empathy and guidance are universal human traits and men ought to participate in it equally. Genuine progress requires shared responsibility and expert mental health resources, not gendered expectations.  
**Amritha Bimal, Vellore**

#### Coercive action

Ref: *Day after, axe falls on FCRA licence of Wangchuk's NGO* (Sep 26). Doesn't the latest action by the agencies give an impression that any violation is acceptable as long as the recipient remains subservient to the powers that be? Such a quid pro quo attitude of the government does not augur well.  
**Unnikrishnan Nair B C, Alappuzha**

#### Unrest blame

Ref: *Begin talks, don't leave 'void' in Ladakh, oppn tells govt* (Sep 26). The current situation in Ladakh was of the central government's making. The protracted procrastination over deciding on the demands has engendered disaffection and alienation among the people of Ladakh. The government should choose the path of persuasion and accommodation.  
**G David Milton, Thrissur**

### THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Chairman of the Board: **Manoj Kumar Sonthalia** Editor: **Santwana Bhattacharya**

Resident Editor (Tamil Nadu): **Anto T Joseph** \* Printed and Published by **R K Jhunjunwala** on behalf of Express Publications (Madurai) Private Ltd., at Express Press, Old No. 152/New No. 110, Pankaja Mills Road, Coimbatore - 641 045. **Coimbatore:** Vol. 36, No. 231. RNI Reg. No. TNENG/53674/91. Phone: 0422-2317853, Fax: 0422-2311320. \* Responsible to decide the matter under the PRP Act. **Copyright:** Express Publications (Madurai) Private Ltd. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any manner, electronic or otherwise, in whole or in part, without prior written permission is prohibited.





Editor's  
TAKE

## Development is non-negotiable

As India seeks to position itself as a developed nation by 2047, development must remain the non-negotiable foundation of policy and governance

Nelson Mandela's pledge to his nation was to uphold the Constitution, serve the well-being of the people, and liberate all people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, and discrimination. Indeed, that has to be the goal of any nation that wants to call itself great and is developed in the true sense.

India's cherished goal of becoming 'viksit' by 2047 can only be realised if we, as a nation, push forward development and brace the challenges with grit and determination. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inauguration and foundation laying of development projects worth over ₹1.22 lakh crore in Banswara, Rajasthan, is a reminder that development is not a choice but a national necessity.

For any society to remain cohesive and for all sections of the population to feel empowered, development must stand as the Government's foremost priority. It is the only path that ensures dignity, opportunity, and economic strength for all citizens – from farmers in remote villages to entrepreneurs in bustling cities. The Prime Minister's emphasis on clean energy projects, solar initiatives, nuclear power expansion, and modernised infrastructure reflects an understanding of this essential truth.

In today's interconnected world, electricity is not merely about lighting homes; it powers industries, enables education, facilitates healthcare, and connects citizens to the global economy. By investing in energy security – both renewable and nuclear – India is not only addressing present needs but also future-proofing its economy against global challenges. Equally significant is the focus on inclusive growth. Rajasthan's tribal communities, long marginalised, have been placed at the heart of these initiatives. Water supply projects, new rail and road connectivity, healthcare expansion, and employment drives are not just about physical assets – they are about restoring dignity and creating equal opportunities for communities historically left behind. Development, when it reaches the last person in the line, binds society with a sense of shared destiny.

The projects in Banswara are a striking example of this philosophy. From clean drinking water schemes to the PM-KUSUM solar programme for farmers, the Government is signalling that every section of society – whether urban middle class, rural farmer, or tribal villager – must have equal access to the dividends of growth. Development is a social contract between the State and its people. The approach of all-round development recognises that infrastructure, employment, healthcare, and education cannot be separated from one another; they form the ecosystem in which prosperity grows. Banswara's moment is not just Rajasthan's gain but India's promise – that growth will not be confined to metros but will flow into villages, tribal belts, and marginalised regions. In that promise lies the hope of a stronger, fairer, and an egalitarian India.

## Being simple as the route of success

It has not even created, with sufficient vigour, its own school of thought. Yet the truth is that when comparative strategy formulation begins, being simple and direct, succeeds as nothing else can



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

A literature survey on strategy, be it personal, group, or institutional, has been attempted multiple times since the period when such literature was first recognised to exist. Various schools of thought have been marked, debated, and accepted or rejected. This has given rise to various schools of thought, from the passivist approach to the activist approach. Indeed, to have a strategy is considered basic to the act of survival, and everyone practices some strategy at some level, irrespective of the size of the institution or the stature of the individual. This is not the place to get into the lengthy literature survey of what is available, as such an effort would literally take thousands of man-hours.

There are additionally regional differences in the quality of analysis from one region to another, reflecting various schools of thought according to languages, according to regions, and according to times.

An illustration may help. Going by the time dimension, human history is divided into ancient times, medieval times, and modern times. Such distinctions are useful, but once one starts analysing problems, issues can and do arise. Ancient times obviously begin with time immemorial, but it takes on a literature survey only when issues of periodisation are solved. There can be no beginning of history unless some evidence is there to mark the times. The marking of the times can be architectural, linguistic, or indeed any traces which the people of the time left behind for posterity to find and analyse.

Obviously, all human beings spoke, and since time immemorial, there must have been a language; otherwise, no community of Homo sapiens could have survived. They needed to talk to each other and relate to one another. However, spoken language leaves no tracks, and for language to survive, it must have a script; without a script, no traces can be found. One of the oldest languages in the world is the language used by the Egyptians.

They used it in their active commerce, rigorous warfare, running of the state, and commercial activities, and for everything else which human beings need to communicate over to keep the civilization going. The script which they used has been called hieroglyphs. Hieroglyphs have been deciphered, and Egyptian writing on walls, pillars, and elsewhere can be deciphered to know about the times. It was largely pictorial, and later on, the study of languages shows that these scripts evolved; pictures gave way to simplified presentations, and static alphabets evolved into flowing alphabets linked with each



The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

FOR BEING  
SUCCESSFUL IN  
LIFE, BEING  
SIMPLE IS WORTH  
A TRY. THE MATTER  
NEEDS CAREFUL  
THOUGHT AND  
MUST BE  
EXPLORED FOR  
DUE ACTION

The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute

dailypioneer  
 @TheDailyPioneer  
 dailypioneer

other. That is another story.

The number of scripts across the world is huge. There is the Roman, the Devanagari, the Chinese, the Arabic, and the list goes on. Each of these mother scripts had its own dominant language; illustratively, the Roman script was known for its Latin and Greek languages. Devanagari was known for its Sanskrit and Pali texts, and this list also goes on with variations of languages which came to be written in scripts such as Arabic or Chinese. Modern-day Urdu, for example, has a strong influence from the Arabic script, and unlike Roman or Devanagari, which is written from left to right, it follows the right to left flow typical of the Arabic script.

The difference in flow from left to right and right to left is so obvious that it needs no further explanation or elaboration. Similarly, the Chinese script has its own characters, and unlike the Roman or the Devanagari scripts, it has its alphabets in a discrete manner and does not have the flow which the Roman or the Devanagari texts have.

Be that as it may, ultimately, language generated its own typologies, and civilizations were fathered also according to linguistic delimitation or differentiation. The languages and the sub-languages which arose are too many to relate in the limited space of this text. Soon enough, civilizations started communicating on linguistic overtones.

There were authors who saw language as a distinctive force across cultural boundaries, and a noted British author even attempted what he called the "History of English-speaking People." The interesting dimension of this history was that ethnically it included Americans, Africans, Asians, Australians. Even though English was written in Roman script, other languages attained prominence using

the Roman script while having a different identity of their own. Interesting references can be found by going through the narratives in French, Portuguese, German, and the list can be long. The Slavonic script is pervasive in Russian and other similar languages, creating even more varieties in human typology.

Be that as it may, the long and short of the matter is that as the scripts multiplied, so did the languages, and so did the strategies. The quest for success became a subject matter in its own right, and even literature surveys reflected the amount of thought devoted to the concept of success, along with the growing number of strategic options that emerged.

In this medley of competitive success strategies, one thing that has skipped much attention is that it is the urge to be successful has led to all these schools of thought. Indeed, not too much attention has been paid to being simple and straightforward for achieving success.

Since nobody is expected to be simple or straightforward, perhaps being simple and straightforward gives rise to the greatest amount of success stories. This has rarely been studied in sufficient academic depth. It has not even created, with sufficient vigour, its own school of thought. Yet the truth is that when comparative strategy formulation begins, being simple and direct, succeeds as nothing else can.

Perhaps the time has come to take a look at this point of view and realise that not only is honesty the best policy, but being simple and straightforward has the potential of being one of the best strategies. At least, as long as few people see it as a possibility, for being successful in life, being simple is worth a try. The matter needs careful thought and must be explored for due action.

PIC TALK



A potter makes a 'diya' at a workshop ahead of Diwali festival in Prayagraj.

PHOTO: PTI



SADGURU SRI MADHUSUDAN SAI

2 THE PIONEER

ND OPINION

All of us seem to be in a perpetual rush, all the time. There is noise, pressure, endless demands from the external world, and we hardly have a moment to breathe. Many of us try to manage duties, chase desires, and somehow keep up. But often, we end up feeling restless, even a little lost.

At times like this, finding inner peace feels really important. Ancient Indian wisdom has something to say about it. It shows ways to step back, calm the mind, and see things clearly. Spiritual living, built on truth and balance, offers a way forward.

The *Bhagavad Gita* says that peace begins with the mind. In Chapter 6, Verse 6, it mentions: "For one who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best friend;

but for one who has failed to do so, the very mind will be the greatest enemy." It is a simple idea, yet so true. If the mind is restless, even small issues seem huge. But if it is calm, big problems appear small. Spiritual living helps us look inward, away from distractions, and notice what truly matters.

The *Kathopanishad* tells a story that makes this clear. A young seeker, Nachiketa, asks Yama, the lord of death, about life and peace. Yama says: "The good and the pleasant approach the human being.

The wise, examining both, distinguish one from the other. The wise choose the good over the pleasant." It is easy to see why so many of us stay stuck in chaos. Often, we pick what feels easy or nice on the surface, even if it becomes a source of trouble later.

The spiritual path asks something different. It asks us to choose what is good, such as truth, discipline, and compassion. At first, it may seem hard and unattainable, yes, but it leads to ultimate freedom and joy. Inner peace also comes from knowing yourself. The *Kathopanishad* compares the body to a chariot, the senses to horses, and the mind to reins.

The Self, or *Atman*, is the master. If the senses run wild, life gets messy and confusing. But if the mind holds the

reins carefully and listens to the Self, the way forward becomes clearer. In practice, this means taking moments of quiet every day – praying, meditating, or just sitting and watching our mind.

Like a pond settling when the wind stops, the mind can become still if we pay attention. In that quiet, we feel connected to everything. The *Gita* says: "The yogi, uniting the self with the Self, sees the same in all beings." That kind of vision reduces fear, anger, and restlessness.

Spiritual living is also about kindness. Seeing others as part of the same Self makes compassion natural.

Hearts soften, and minds clear. Peace is no longer only personal because it spreads to families, friends, communities, and even the wider world. In the end, clarity is not somewhere out there. It is inside. Following the Self, guided by the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*, shows us how to live in harmony.

The world might stay noisy, chaotic, and messy. But inside, there can be silence, strength, and joy. That is the gift of spiritual living – the kind of peace that stays untouched, unperturbed, and timeless.

The writer is a spiritual leader and founder of the One World One Family mission

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



[www.dailypioneer.com](http://www.dailypioneer.com)

facebook.com/dailypioneer @TheDailyPioneer  
 instagram.com/dailypioneer linkedin.com/in/dailypioneer

## TOURISM TRANSFORMATION MUST PRIORITISE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

World Tourism Day 2025 focuses on inclusive development of local communities and economies through responsible tourism. However, studies estimate that tourism contributes roughly 8 per cent of the world's carbon emissions. It also causes resource degradation, waste pollution, and fragmentation of fragile ecosystems. Uttarakhand's Naini Lake, facing severe degradation and a looming water crisis, is a stark example.

The recent surge of natural disasters in Himalayan states reflects unchecked infrastructure development undertaken in the name of commercial tourism. Landslides, flash floods, and earthquakes have become increasingly common in the Himalayan foothills, Western Ghats, and other ecologically vulnerable regions. The 2024

Wayanad landslide and the Dharali disaster this year serve as tragic reminders. Encouragingly, both travellers and communities are recognising the urgency of sustainability.

A recent report shows that 73 per cent of Indian travellers consider sustainability a top priority while planning trips. Government initiatives such as Travel for LIFE, Swadesh Darshan 2.0, and the Blue Flag Beach Initiative have delivered promising outcomes. Beyond official programmes, community-driven models like Kerala's Responsible Tourism Initiative highlight the importance of grassroots participation. Tourism must evolve into a vehicle of sustainability, strengthening livelihoods while protecting natural and cultural heritage.

PRASUN K DUTTA | WEST BENGAL

Please send your letter to the [info@dailypioneer.com](mailto:info@dailypioneer.com). In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

V JAYARAMAN | CHENNAI

GOPALASWAMY J | CHENNAI

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### IAF could have balanced 1962

CDS General Chauhan's assertion that the use of the IAF in 1962 would have slowed the Chinese offensive considerably is unexceptional.

Many military experts and historians have affirmed this earlier. In 1962, India had clear air superiority in the Himalayan skies. The Chinese Air Force (PLAAF) lacked high-altitude bases near Tibet; its airfields were deep inside mainland China.

By contrast, India had operational bases in Assam, West Bengal, and closer forward locations. Yet the political leadership, especially PM Nehru and Defence Minister Krishna Menon, panicked and chose not to use airpower, fearing retaliatory Chinese strikes.

The Army's plea for air support was denied, leaving ill-equipped Indian soldiers to suffer defeat. Statesman Rajaji observed that not using the IAF was strategically and morally questionable when soldiers were dying.

Had India pressed its air assets, even if not yielding outright victory, the outcome would have been more balanced against a superior force.

Wars cannot be fought with timidity or misplaced faith in non-violence. Timely deployment of the IAF in 1962 could have significantly mitigated India's losses and altered the course of the conflict.

### Ladakh protests reveal trust deficit

The violence in Ladakh highlights a serious trust deficit between the Centre and the people. Though the Government has conceded demands – such as 95 per cent job reservation for locals, recognition of languages, and enhanced representation – local perceptions remain unaddressed.

Civil society bodies and youth in Ladakh feel aspirations for statehood and Sixth Schedule inclusion are being diluted or delayed. Meanwhile, the Centre views protests as politically motivated or externally influenced. Such mistrust in a sensitive border region cannot be allowed to fester.

The Centre must pursue a two-track strategy: reassure Ladakhis through transparent timelines on constitutional safeguards and sustained dialogue with both Leh and Kargil representatives, while firmly isolating violent elements. Only political engagement, not dismissive allegations, can heal divides.

Respecting Ladakh's identity and autonomy within the Union will reinforce national security. Ignoring these aspirations risks alienation in a region of critical geopolitical importance. Addressing Ladakh's concerns through dialogue and safeguards is essential to maintain regional stability and national security.

### Pakistan's aid and dependency

For decades, Pakistan has received international aid yet remains mired in fragility and dependency. The core reason is systematic diversion of funds from development to defence.

Rather than investing in infrastructure, education, or industry, resources are absorbed by the military. The establishment, which dominates the civilian government, ensures defence allocations remain untouchable, citing India as a perpetual threat.

This security-first approach has left Pakistan's economy stagnant, infrastructure underdeveloped, and social indicators among the weakest in South Asia. Ordinary citizens see no benefit from foreign assistance, while political leaders appear powerless against military dominance.

International donors, despite repeated interventions, find their aid failing to create grassroots change. Unless Pakistan realigns its priorities and channels resources towards genuine development, the cycle of debt and dependency will persist. Without bold reform, Pakistan's "begging bowl" image will endure, preventing stability or self-reliance. Without redirecting funds to development, Pakistan's cycle of dependency will continue unabated.



# Sanae Takaichi and Japan’s historic reckoning

For the first time since the war, Japan finds itself on the brink of a political turning point. As the moment of decision nears, Takaichi’s ascent embodies both a historic breakthrough and an uncertain gamble — forcing the nation to confront whether it can balance tradition with the demands of transformation



NILANTHA  
ILANGAMUWA

Japan has never confronted the raw contradiction inherent in its postwar democracy: a nation reconstructed from devastation, yet shackled by entrenched hierarchies that dictate who may wield authority. The first week of next month, however, a singular possibility emerges. Sanae Takaichi, former economic security minister and unflinching conservative, positions herself as the foremost contender to assume the premiership, an office long monopolised by men. Her candidacy is not merely symbolic; it exposes the fissures in Japan’s political system, its gender inequities, and the enduring influence of historical power brokers, while raising profound questions about legitimacy, merit, and risk in governance. Takaichi’s ascent is neither conventional nor superficial. Born in 1961 in Nara Prefecture, she briefly explored entertainment before committing to political life. Her studies at Kobe University were complemented by exposure to American legislative procedures as an aide in the US House of Representatives — an experience that endowed her with strategic insight unusual among Japanese lawmakers.

Entering the Diet in 1993, she quickly manoeuvred the LDP’s factional matrix, becoming a protégé of Shinzo Abe, whose influence and legacy continue to bolster her standing. This mentorship, combined with her skill at coalition-building within the party, positions her as a candidate with both institutional acumen and grassroots resonance. Takaichi is resolute. She is an unapologetic nationalist, frequenting the Yasukuni Shrine and advocating constitutional revision to formally recognise the Self-Defense Forces.

These positions signal loyalty to the LDP’s conservative base while simultaneously provoking unease in China and South Korea, for whom such gestures evoke historical trauma. Yet Takaichi’s platform is not monolithic. Recently, she has articulated policies addressing Japan’s persistent gender inequities: partial tax deductions for child-care, corporate incentives for in-house care, and advocacy around women’s health informed by her personal experience with menopause and caregiving responsibilities. In these measures, she manages the



The Pioneer  
SINCE 1865

TAKAICHI’S  
GENDER  
INTRODUCES AN  
ADDITIONAL  
DIMENSION OF  
SCRUTINY, BOTH  
DOMESTIC AND  
INTERNATIONAL.  
THE HISTORICAL  
RESONANCE OF  
HER CANDIDACY  
IS EQUALLY  
COMPELLING

The writer is a Colombo based columnist

 dailypioneer

 @ilangamuwa1

 dailypioneer

tension between ideological orthodoxy and pragmatic responsiveness.

Takaichi distinguishes herself as a fiscal dove, advocating government expenditure to counter inflationary pressures while signalling the possible necessity of issuing government bonds under exigent circumstances. Her public remarks last week, warning that reliance on tax revenue alone may be insufficient to combat rising consumer prices, reflect a willingness to confront Japan’s entrenched bureaucratic orthodoxy. Historically, such boldness echoes the fiscal interventions of the Abe administration, whose policies were partly facilitated by covert CIA funding and Cold War-era machinations to stabilise Japan against leftist influence.

Takaichi’s political biography is punctuated by moments that reveal both resilience and calculated audacity. In the 2024 LDP leadership contest, she narrowly lost to Shigeru Ishiba in a runoff, illustrating her capacity to command substantial support even in a field dominated by male elders. Her repeated candidacies reflect strategic patience and an understanding of the party’s factional undercurrents, where loyalty networks, not merely public opinion, determine outcomes. Unlike Shinjiro Koizumi, whose political capital derives from dynastic inheritance,

Takaichi’s influence rests on cultivated alliances and personal reputation — a precarious but potentially liberating position in a system long dominated by hereditary claims. The broader context magnifies the stakes. Japan continues to rank dismally on the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index, placing 118th among 148 countries, with women representing only 15.7 per cent of the lower house.

No woman has ever held the prime ministership, the finance ministry, or the governorship of the Bank of Japan. Internationally, a female premier would alter perceptions of Japan’s modernity and commitment to inclusivity, but domestically, her tenure could be precarious. Scholars such as Hiroko Takeda of Nagoya University caution against the “glass cliff” phenomenon, where women ascend to leadership precisely during periods of instability, only to bear disproportionate blame for systemic failures. With the LDP weakened after consecutive electoral setbacks, the next prime minister will face a fractured legislature, rising inflation, and geopolitical tensions that demand deft negotiation with both domestic opposition and international actors. Takaichi’s potential premiership would also engage the unresolved dialectic between conservatism and modernisation. Her hardline

stances on nationalism and security are juxtaposed with nascent advocacy for gender-sensitive economic policies — tax breaks for childcare and protections for caregivers.

This duality challenges simplistic classifications of her as merely reactionary or progressive; she embodies a calculated hybridity, presenting an image palatable to conservative party elders while cautiously courting broader urban and younger constituencies. Such strategic adaptability has precedents in Japan’s political history, where leaders like Hayashi and Moteji addressed factional rivalries and bureaucratic resistance.


Yet Takaichi’s gender introduces an additional dimension of scrutiny, both domestic and international. The historical resonance of her candidacy is equally compelling. Postwar Japan, emerging from the devastation of World War II, was shepherded into democracy under Allied supervision, with American authorities even influencing the structure of political parties and suppressing leftist movements — some through clandestine financial support for conservative actors. The LDP’s early hegemony owes, in part, to these interventions, which entrenched a culture of factionalism and male-dominated hierarchy that persists today. Takaichi’s

rise, therefore, is not simply the ascension of a single politician; it is a confrontation with the enduring legacies of occupation-era manipulation, factional patronage, and institutional gender bias. Furthermore, Takaichi’s personal narrative lends an uncommon dimension to her candidacy. Her experiences juggling professional obligations with caregiving responsibilities resonate with a substantial segment of Japanese society, particularly women who face structural impediments to career advancement. By invoking her struggles with menopause and child-rearing, she frames policy debates in human terms, challenging the traditional detachment of Japanese policymaking from lived experience. In doing so, she redefines what leadership might entail in a society where policy and personal experience are often segregated.

Yet controversy is inseparable from possibility. Takaichi’s unapologetic nationalism and engagement with historically sensitive issues, such as Yasukuni visits and advocacy for Taiwan security partnerships, have drawn criticism from neighbouring states and some domestic moderates. Analysts note that any failure on her part could reinforce misogynistic narratives, portraying her tenure as a deterrent example rather than a step towards inclusivity. Conversely, a successful premiership would not merely be symbolic; it would recalibrate power dynamics within the LDP, potentially encouraging a generation of women to pursue political office in a system historically structured against them. Ultimately, the question of whether Japan is prepared for a female prime minister transcends Takaichi herself. It interrogates the resilience of democratic institutions in a party-dominated polity, the elasticity of entrenched gender norms, and the capacity of voters and politicians alike to reconcile ideological conservatism with the exigencies of modern governance.

Sanae Takaichi’s candidacy is at once emblematic and exceptional: emblematic of the LDP’s enduring factional machinery and exceptional for its potential to disrupt decades of patriarchal orthodoxy. Her rise is simultaneously a challenge to the established order, a reckoning with history, and a speculative exercise in political futurism. Will Japan finally elevate a woman to prime minister, or will entrenched norms keep Takaichi in the realm of “almosts”? We shall know in just a few days.

## Ladakh Unrest: A serious warning Delhi cannot afford to ignore



ANIL  
ANAND

At a time when China is breathing down India’s neck and the Government of India is investing heavily in building strategic infrastructure — roads, bridges, and airstrips — to thwart Beijing’s expansionist designs, internal unrest in Ladakh is the last thing the country can afford. A flare-up along the McMahon Line in Arunachal Pradesh or on the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh weakens India’s defence posture.

At such a critical juncture, domestic turbulence in Ladakh is neither in the public interest nor in the nation’s security interest. For Ladakhis, preserving their tribal identity has always been paramount. Their history shows that whenever their ethnicity or rights came under threat, they rose in protest. Traditionally, their agitations have been peaceful, deeply rooted in Buddhist and Gandhian values. Yet, the violent turn of events in Leh on September 24, 2025 has shaken the region. As the youth wing of the Leh Apex Body (LAB) stormed the streets, leaving four people dead and dozens injured, shockwaves spread across India. This eruption of violence was all the more unsettling as it came just ahead of the Centre’s much-anticipated talks with the LAB-Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) scheduled for October 6. What was supposed to be a decisive phase in dialogue now stands overshadowed by bloodshed. The discontent is not sudden. When Ladakh was carved into a Union Territory on 5 August 2019, after the abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakhis initially celebrated the move.

Their long-standing demand for UT status had finally been met. But expectations quickly turned into disappointment when promises of safeguarding tribal identity under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution were left unfulfilled. The Sixth Schedule — applicable in certain north-eastern states — protects the land, jobs, and culture of indigenous communities. For Ladakh, whose population is small and vulnerable to demographic change, these guarantees are seen as essential. The Centre’s reluctance to act decisively fuelled frustration. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which had once enjoyed popular support in Ladakh, paid the price in the 2024 general election when it lost its lone Lok Sabha seat. The message from the



electorate was unambiguous: people’s aspirations were not being met. What added weight to this discontent was the historic unity forged between Leh, dominated by Buddhists, and Kargil, dominated by Shia Muslims. Once bitterly opposed, the two regions came together under a common cause — protection of their rights and political empowerment. This rare solidarity strengthened local demands but also posed a challenge to New Delhi’s political calculations. The government, however, appeared to underestimate these warning signs.

Instead of urgently addressing Ladakh’s concerns, it seemed more focused on consolidating political ground. This delay proved costly. The anger of Ladakh’s Gen-Z, already restless due to high unemployment, spilled onto the streets. A bandh call turned violent, government offices and police vehicles were attacked, and the BJP office in Leh was set on fire. The tragic irony was that this happened while educationist and climate activist Sonam Wangchuk was on a 35-day hunger strike demanding protection for Ladakh. Shocked by the turn of events, he suspended his fast, calling it a “Gen-Z revolution.” The immediate provocation behind the youth’s action remains debated. Was it Wangchuk’s fiery rhetoric? Was it the Centre’s dismissive handling of their demands? Or was it the re-entry of veteran BJP leader Chewang Thupstan into the political space, signalling a new twist in the negotiations? Whatever the trigger, the violence was the outcome of long-festering grievances and a communication gap between Delhi and Ladakh.

Instead of calming the waters, the government’s response added fuel to the fire. BJP’s IT cell head Amit Malviya blamed a local Congress councillor for instigating the youth and went further to accuse Rahul Gandhi of being responsible. Soon after, the Home Ministry directly named Wangchuk, accusing him of

inciting violence through his speeches. Such hasty statements only harden positions and make dialogue more difficult. At a time when trust-building is critical, scapegoating activists and political rivals risks derailing the peace process.

The LAB had demanded urgent talks, pointing out that their members had been on hunger strike since 10 September. But the Centre, instead of responding with sensitivity, announced the next meeting for October 6, without consulting the protesters. To the youth, already battling hopelessness and rampant unemployment, this felt like diktat rather than dialogue. Their sense of exclusion boiled over into anger.

The unemployment crisis is indeed central to the unrest. A recent survey revealed that 26.5 per cent of graduates in Ladakh are unemployed, more than double the national average of 13.4 per cent. Only the Andaman and Nicobar Islands reported worse figures. With no Sixth Schedule protection in place, Ladakhi youth fear that outsiders will corner jobs and land, leaving locals marginalised in their own homeland.

This anxiety is not unfounded; it reflects the stark vulnerability of a small tribal population competing against a wider influx. The way forward is clear: politics must take a back seat, and Ladakh’s core demands must be addressed with urgency. Delhi must move beyond optics and political one-upmanship.

Dialogue should not be treated as a mere formality but as a genuine exercise in listening and resolving grievances. The protection of Ladakh’s identity through constitutional safeguards, and the urgent creation of employment opportunities, must be the government’s priority. Any delay only deepens resentment and leaves the ground fertile for unrest. India faces enormous security challenges along the northern frontier. A disturbed Ladakh only emboldens China’s designs to challenge India’s territorial integrity. New Delhi cannot afford to let local discontent turn into instability at the borders.

The message from Leh is loud and clear: Ladakhis are not against the nation, but they want their rightful place within it. Ignoring their voice risks not only alienating the people but also compromising national security.

The events of September 24, should serve as a wake-up call. Ladakh’s youth have signalled that their patience is wearing thin. It is now up to the Centre to show wisdom, restraint, and empathy. Peace in Ladakh is not just a regional necessity; it is a national imperative.

The writer is a political and national affairs analyst

 dailypioneer

 @dhountti

 dailypioneer

## Can India truly sustain its clean power future?

SUPRIYA KAUSHIK

AI’s insatiable appetite for computing power is rapidly reshaping global priorities in energy and infrastructure. A 2024 McKinsey report projects that demand for AI-ready data centre capacity will expand at an annual average rate of 33 per cent between 2023 and 2030, with nearly 70 per cent of this growth geared towards infrastructure capable of handling advanced AI workloads.

This transformation is not confined to the developed world; India too is experiencing a surge in data centre investments. As of April 2025, India’s total capacity stood at 1,263 MW, with projections of more than \$100 billion flowing into the sector by 2027, growing at a CAGR of over 24 per cent between 2023 and 2029. Mumbai, Chennai, and Delhi NCR have emerged as the country’s main AI hubs. But hidden beneath this momentum lies an irony: the very infrastructure that underpins large language models (LLMs) and other AI systems is beginning to complicate global energy transition goals. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), data centres consumed about 415 terawatt hours (TWh) of electricity in 2023, roughly 1.5 per cent of global consumption.

That figure has grown at nearly 12 per cent annually over the past five years. The IEA now projects demand to more than double to 945 TWh by 2030, exceeding Japan’s entire electricity use today. This escalating demand is already straining national grids. Ireland provides an early warning sign. In 2023, data centres accounted for 21 per cent of the country’s electricity consumption, a factor contributing to rising blackouts.

In response, authorities froze approvals for new centres around Dublin until 2028. Elsewhere, the pressure is prompting governments and companies to turn back to fossil fuels as a stopgap. In the US, federal agencies were asked this year to identify retired coal plants that could be repurposed to supply electricity to AI data centres.

Pennsylvania’s former Homer City Generating Station, once the state’s largest coal-fired plant, is being redeveloped with a \$10 billion investment to house seven gas-fired turbines dedicated to powering on-site centres. Similarly, utilities in Georgia have delayed shutting coal-fired plants that were scheduled for closure under earlier decarbonisation commitments, citing the electricity needs of expanding data hubs. The pattern is visible globally. In the UK, demand for AI and cloud facilities is outpacing the grid’s ability to provide stable electricity, pushing developers to explore direct connections to main gas pipelines. Singapore, after imposing a moratorium on new data centre projects in 2019



due to energy concerns, lifted the freeze in 2022. It now hosts over 70 facilities and plans to raise capacity by nearly a third in the coming years. China, with the largest concentration of data centres in Asia, still relies on coal for more than half of its power supply. Most of its facilities remain concentrated in coal-heavy eastern provinces. India’s story is more complex. While the country is racing to establish itself as a hub for AI infrastructure, its coal-heavy energy mix — where fossil fuels still account for over 70 per cent of electricity generation — raises tough questions. The national grid is ageing and already stressed by peak demand surges and transmission losses. Unless carefully managed, the rapid buildout of AI-ready data centres could amplify these vulnerabilities.

At the same time, India has an opportunity to chart a different path. Retired coal plants are already being earmarked for nuclear energy projects, though not yet explicitly linked to AI-related demand. With careful foresight, India could ensure that new AI data centres are built in tandem with renewable energy integration, smart grid upgrades, and strong efficiency standards.

This would prevent the country from locking into carbon-intensive growth patterns and instead position it as a model for balancing digital and energy transitions. The rise of AI does not have to stall global decarbonisation. With proactive policies and open public debate, India and other fast-growing economies can turn a potential energy liability into an asset. By aligning data centre expansion with renewable power and grid modernisation, governments can not only meet the needs of the AI revolution but also accelerate the shift towards resilient, sustainable energy systems. In this sense, the challenge of powering AI could become a catalyst for strengthening the very foundations of the clean energy transition.

The writer is a Research Assistant at the Center for Policy Research and Governance

 dailypioneer

 @TheDailyPioneer

 dailypioneer



## Echo of Freedom

The sudden passing of Zubeen Garg has left Assam and much of India grappling with a loss that goes far beyond the departure of a celebrated musician. His death in Singapore at the age of 52 is not merely the end of a prolific career; it is the silencing of a voice that embodied the restless energy, cultural pride and defiant spirit of an entire region.

Garg's rise was meteoric and deeply rooted in the social soil of Assam. Barely out of his teens when his first album captured public attention, he soon became a household name. At a time when the state was mired in violence and political uncertainty, his melodies offered a counter-narrative of hope. Singing in more than 40 languages and dialects, he blurred boundaries between genres and geographies. His ability to switch from hard rock to Bihu folk, from soulful ballads to spiritual compositions, mirrored the diversity of India itself.

His concerts were more than musical events; they were collective affirmations of identity. College grounds, marketplaces and open-air festivals turned into spaces where thousands of people ~ cutting across caste, creed and age ~ found a shared rhythm.

His fearless honesty made him a rare artist who bridged music and civic duty, proving culture thrives when conscience leads. For many, Garg was not simply a performer but an emotion, a living proof that art can transcend the divides of language and politics.

Yet what sets Garg apart from many contemporaries is not only his musical versatility but his unwavering engagement with society. He was outspoken on issues that most entertainers avoid.

He condemned extremist violence despite threats, lent his presence to protests against discriminatory laws, and even offered his own apartment as a government isolation centre during the pandemic. His generosity was legendary, with countless stories of financial help for medical treatment, education and emergencies flowing quietly through fan clubs that doubled as networks of social support.

Such activism was never about courting headlines. Garg's interventions stemmed from an instinctive belief that fame should serve the public. He refused to be boxed into any political ideology, maintaining independence while remaining firmly on the side of humanity. In an era when celebrity often translates to calculated silence, his fearless candour stands as a moral lesson.

The massive crowds that accompanied his final journey, reminiscent of the multitudes that turned out spontaneously for the legendary Mohammad Rafi, the state honours, gun salutes, and choruses of his songs, reflect a connection far deeper than fandom. Assam mourns him as a cultural guardian who gave the state a national voice, but the resonance of his life's work belongs to all of India. Zubeen Garg's legacy is not only in the songs that will continue to play in markets and festivals. It lies in the courage to sing without fear, to give without calculation, and to remind us that art is most powerful when it becomes the heartbeat of a people.

## Pragmatic pause

For decades, the Korean peninsula has been trapped in a cycle of lofty promises and bitter stalemates. Demands for North Korea to surrender its nuclear arsenal have consistently met with defiance, while each new round of sanctions or military drills has only hardened Pyongyang's resolve. In this context, a proposal to accept a verifiable freeze on nuclear production ~ rather than immediate disarmament ~ represents a rare flash of realism in an otherwise stagnant debate.

The logic is disarmingly simple. North Korea continues to expand its stockpile, reportedly adding dozens of warheads each year. Pretending that this trajectory can be reversed through the same old ultimatums is wishful thinking. Halting the manufacture of new weapons, even temporarily, would at least cap the growth of a threat that now endangers not only Seoul and Tokyo but the wider international order.

A freeze is not a solution, but it is a start ~ a breathing space in which diplomacy can regroup. Even a limited halt in weapons production would send a vital signal that dialogue can still shape events, countering the dangerous perception that nuclear escalation is the only inevitable path.

This approach also reflects a sober reading of the region's shifting power dynamics. China, Russia, and North Korea are drawing closer together, their leaders recently showcasing military camaraderie.

For South Korea, whose prosperity depends on Chinese markets even as its security relies on American military power, this evolving triangle is perilous. Strengthening ties with the United States and Japan remains essential, but outright confrontation with Beijing or Moscow would be reckless. A carefully calibrated policy ~ fortifying alliances while leaving channels open to adversaries ~ offers the best chance of avoiding a new Cold War in Northeast Asia.

A freeze deal would almost certainly require American involvement, and here the unpredictable figure of President Donald Trump looms large.

His previous encounters with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, though inconclusive, established a personal rapport that could be revived. A second attempt at negotiation, shorn of unrealistic expectations of immediate denuclearisation, might yield the kind of limited but meaningful agreement that has so far eluded more conventional diplomacy.

At home, South Korea's leadership is trying to cool the political fever that has followed years of domestic turmoil and military brinkmanship. Steps such as halting inflammatory broadcasts into the North are designed to rebuild trust, even if critics dismiss them as naïve concessions. Yet these gestures are not about appeasement; they are about creating an environment where talks, however modest, are again possible.

Realism is not weakness. Accepting a freeze is not abandoning the goal of denuclearisation, but recognising that progress must be incremental.

By prioritising achievable measures over grandiose but empty objectives, South Korea signals that security can be strengthened one cautious step at a time. In a region where miscalculation can be fatal, this pragmatic pause may be the only path to lasting peace.

# Double-edged sword

*The Greek philosopher, Plato, observing the growing population of Athens, concluded that the ideal city should have no more than 5,040 citizens ~ the size of a large condominium in Mumbai. Not surprisingly, Plato believed in strict population control, and also in moderating consumption ~ both pressing concerns even in the twenty-first century. The question Plato raised is the essence of the population debate of today: Is the human population the issue, or is it the resources it consumes?*

The worldwide economic uncertainty ~ caused by Donald Trump's shenanigans ~ has made Western countries focus on their declining populations, which has seriously eroded their manufacturing and consumer bases. On the other hand, many Emerging Market Economies (EMEs), and poorer countries, face a severe resource crunch brought about by their increasing populations. Thus, successful population management has different connotations for people on different sides of the rich-poor divide.

It would be interesting to go back to 72,000 BC, when the Toba super-volcano erupted in Sumatra (Indonesia). The volcano spewed out 9.5 trillion tons of ash, which billowed up in dark clouds, going up to 47 kms into the atmosphere, covering most of Asia in thick dust. The decades' long volcanic winter that followed, reduced human population to around 10,000 people ~ bringing mankind to the verge of extinction.

Cut to 15 November 2022, when the earth's population touched eight billion, that is 800,000 times of its population in 72,000 BC. Since human population has never been uniformly distributed ~ humans love to live in large communities ~ ancient thinkers could foresee the harmful effects of unbridled population growth. Clay tablets dating back to 1700 BC, discovered in Iraq, talk about the adverse consequences of overpopulation.

The Greek philosopher, Plato, observing the growing population of Athens, concluded that the ideal city should have no more than 5,040 citizens ~ the size of a large condominium in Mumbai. Not surprisingly, Plato believed in strict population control, and also in moderating consumption ~ both pressing concerns even in the twenty-first century. The question Plato raised is the essence of the population debate of today: Is the human population the issue, or is it the resources it consumes?

Many thinkers ~ ancient and medieval ~ raised similar concerns, but it fell on Thomas Malthus, an 18th century English clergyman,



to mathematically explain the relation between population and resources. Malthus wrote: "Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will show the immensity of the first power in comparison of the second" (An Essay on the Principle of Population, 1798). Pessimistic Malthusian predictions have not come true so far, because continuous technological progress has made sufficient resources available for our ever-growing population.

Horrified after passing through a Delhi slum, a Stanford University professor, Paul Ehrlich, and his wife, Anne Ehrlich, co-authored 'The Population Bomb' (1968), which shocked the Western world, and led to the emergence of concerns about global overpopulation. Still, many people hold different views; according to Elon Musk, the world's richest man: "Low birth rates will end civilisation," which could well be true about developed countries. According to the World Population Prospects 2024, published by the Population Division of UN, fertility in all European countries is now below the level required for full replacement of the population (around 2.1 children per woman), and in most European countries, fertility has been below the replacement level for several decades.

China, the country with the world's second-largest population, will experience the largest absolute population loss between 2024 and 2054 (204 million), followed by Japan (21 million) and the Russian Federation (10 million). Due to sustained low level of fertility by the year 2100, Chinese population will decline by 786 million people i.e., by more than a half of its current population. Consequently, in 2100, China will have a population size comparable to what it had in the late 1950s.

However, despite a low population, Western consumerism fuelled by technological progress has led to a plunder of the planet's natural resources, a degraded environment, high GHG emissions, and massive pollution. Moreover, unequal distribution of resources ensures that even today, millions in the Horn of Africa are starving and many in Asia and Africa live in want, while people in Europe and US live lives of extravagance.

In fact, Western interest in curtailling population growth in less developed countries has racist undertones, what with Europe and North America being more densely populated than many poor countries whose population they seek to limit. No wonder, to escape the charge of bias, world bodies decry the use of family planning as a tool for population control. Rather, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development expressly acknowledges that sexual and reproductive health and gender equality are essential for unlocking a more prosperous and sustainable future. The population problem for India is far more complex; unbridled population growth has resulted in hugely overpopulated, dirty cities, falling agricultural land holdings, poverty, unemployment, and rising crime. In April 2023, India's population surpassed that of China, making India the most populous nation on earth. India is projected to have one hundred crore people in the working age group (15 - 64) by 2030, but with an employment rate (percentage of persons employed in working age population) of less than 37 percent, the number of unemployed will only increase in coming years. The comparison with China, which has 90 crore skilled workers, is inescapable; while China has put its population to work, our population hangs like an albatross around our neck.

Because of demographic momentum, despite our fertility rate falling below the replacement rate of 2.1, our population is projected to grow till 2066, peaking at approximately 170 crores. (Demographic momentum: The population of country, with a current fertility rate below replacement level but where fertility rates were previously high, and which has a young population, will continue to grow, because of the presence of a large number of women of childbearing age.) PM Modi, in his Independence Day 2019 speech, called the population explosion a challenge for the nation and exhorted the Centre and States to devise schemes to control population.

The population issue lay dormant till



The writer is a retired Principal Chief Commissioner of Income-Tax



## International community should uphold the foundations of two-state solution

In a landmark shift in position, more Western countries ~ Australia, Canada, France, Portugal and the United Kingdom ~ have announced their recognition of Palestinian statehood. As they are traditional supporters of Israel and key allies of the United States that generally follow its line, this marks a significant moment for the international community's approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately denounced their decision, calling it "a huge reward for terrorism". But that is an attempt to move the goal posts. These nations join a growing list of countries ~ already more than two-thirds of United Nations members ~ that recognize a Palestinian state.

Obviously, the catalyst for the change in position of these countries is Israel's ongoing military operations in Gaza, which have exceeded the bounds of a legitimate response to Hamas' attacks on Israel on Oct 7, 2023.

Their decision is a clear indication that

the international community is no longer willing to stand by as the humanitarian crisis in Gaza continues to worsen.

For decades, Western countries have tended to criticize Palestine while expressing sympathy for Israel. However, the latest round of conflict between Israel and Palestine and the dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza, coupled with accusations that Israel is guilty of genocide and ethnic cleansing, have shifted public opinion.

Calls for recognizing the State of Palestine have grown louder, fueled by large-scale social movements, protests and rallies in support of the Palestinians.

The move by these Western countries highlights a growing rift between the US and its partners on the Palestinian question. This divergence was starkly illustrated on Thursday, when, at the 10,000th meeting of the UN Security Council, the US was the only member of the council to vote against a resolution demanding a

ceasefire in Gaza, using its power of veto to block it. The US is being left high and dry with Israel.

The recognition of the State of Palestine by these Western nations reflects a growing consensus that resolving the Middle East conflict ultimately hinges on the implementation of the two-state solution. On Friday, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution allowing Palestine to participate in its 80th session, despite the US denying visas to some Palestinian representatives.

This decision, supported by a significant majority of members, highlights the international community's commitment to ensuring Palestinian representation.

Israel's aggression, including its military operations in Syria, Lebanon and Iran, as well as recent attacks within Qatar, has left Israel increasingly isolated, and its reliance on the US for support has become ever more salient.

The US administration, which has been Israel's staunchest ally, faces a dilemma

in 2024, when the Finance Minister, in her Interim Budget Speech, announced formation of a high-powered committee to study "fast population growth and demographic changes." No such committee was formed, suggesting that the FM's rhetoric was aimed at the upcoming General Elections.

Again, on 15 August 2025, the Prime Minister announced formation of a High-Power Demography Mission, but lack of any follow-up action suggests that the announcement was for a political purpose. This is understandable; after the disastrous electoral consequences of Sanjay Gandhi's infamous population control experiments during the Emergency era, all Governments have fought shy of population control.

The National Population Policy 2000, which brought about a holistic and target-free approach, limits the role of the Government in family planning to making contraceptive facilities available at Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and Sub Centres (SCs), in rural areas, and at Urban Family Welfare Centres and Postpartum Centres, in urban areas. At present, volunteers called Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) distribute contraceptives and pregnancy testing kits to beneficiaries at their doorsteps.

However, looking at the way PHCs are run, one can well imagine the services that would really be available there. As regards ASHA workers, they are unqualified and minimally trained health workers, who are paid a pittance, for the tasks they perform.

Female empowerment by education and gender parity will help in population management, but people would hardly follow the two-child norm if the female population is not healthy, and if couples are not assured of having two healthy children ~ who have a fair chance of reaching adulthood.

To achieve this, the Government has to provide good healthcare to all, by ensuring that every district has an adequate number of PHCs and CHCs which are properly manned, and have an adequate stock of medicines. Upgradation of our primary health infrastructure and provision of nutritional supplementation to poor children is required, which is not possible at the current abysmal level of expenditure on healthcare ~ barely 1.84 per cent of GDP.

Once a proper health and nutrition infrastructure is in place, a Family Planning Mission can be launched on the lines of Swachh Bharat Mission. By providing incentives and better public healthcare, the Government would be able to persuade people to have only two children, which would spare us the ill-effects of the ticking population bomb ~ should we continue on our wayward trajectory.

The Malthusian spectre is not totally behind us; as Herman E Daly, ecological economist, and an architect of sustainable development, had said: "Malthus has been buried many times, and Malthusian scarcity with him. But as Garrett Hardin (an American ecologist) remarked, anyone who has to be reburied so often cannot be entirely dead" (Steady-State Economics: The Economics of Biophysical Equilibrium and Moral Growth).

now: While it continues to provide substantial military support to Israel, there is a growing number of voices in the country denouncing Israel's actions as being detrimental to US interests and casting Israel as a strategic liability. The US should align its policies with the will of the international community and facilitate a resolution to the crisis that can produce lasting peace and stability.

As the UN marks its 80th anniversary, the upcoming General Assembly session holds extraordinary significance. It offers a crucial platform for addressing the urgent need for justice.

The two-state solution is not an option but a necessity that demands action. The US must reevaluate its Middle East policies, fulfill its international responsibilities, and make decisions that honor both life and history.

China has always firmly supported the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights, and it remains committed to a ceasefire and the two-state solution.



for cigarettes. They are already being used in 34 countries, including Sweden, Norway, the USA, and Denmark. In India, traditional methods used to quit smoking have achieved limited success. Hence, experts believe that if safe, tobacco-free nicotine alternatives are properly regulated, they could help people quit smoking. The annual death toll of 1.35 million citizens remains an extremely serious and concerning issue.

Yours, etc., Dattaprasad Shirodkar, Mumbai, 24 September.





SATURDAY INTERVIEW

‘Shimla needs Central grants’

Shimla Mayor Surinder Chauhan is striving hard to steer the capital city's urban governance after more than a decade of Congress absence in the Corporation. His focus areas include sustainable environment, strengthening the financial health of Shimla Municipal Corporation (SMC), decongesting city traffic and parking facilities, encouraging citizen participation in environmental initiatives such as cleanliness and tree plantation drives.

As a close confidant of Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu, public expectations from him are exceptionally high. Residents look to him not just as a local representative but also as a leader capable of aligning Shimla's needs with state-level priorities.

Balancing heritage preservation with modern infrastructure, he talks to Bhavani Negi of The Statesman on making Shimla more sustainable, liveable, and resilient in the face of rapid urbanization and climate challenges.

**Q. You are an advocate for a sustainable environment - what concrete steps are you taking to make Shimla cleaner and greener?**

A. Apart from solid waste management, the Shimla Municipal Corporation is participating in creating green spaces and conservation efforts. We need to rejuvenate forests to make them robust. We are planting saplings; like last year, this year too we have planted over 5,000 and are taking care of them. This requires funds, but what we are getting in return is nothing. Besides municipal concerns, this is also a state-level issue, as forests are covered by central acts.

Himachal Pradesh spends heavily on maintaining its forest wealth without significant grants from the Centre. I will formally raise this issue with the Chief Minister and the Leader of Opposition, urging them to rise above party lines and jointly

demand that the Centre provide grants and carbon fees. Similar to water and electricity, securing such support is our right.

The Centre must extend grants, especially in view of the Supreme Court raising concerns about the state's environmental issues. Disasters in recent years must be taken seriously, and adequate financial support is essential to safeguard both forests and people. We have e-vehicles for garbage collection and are considering initiatives such as running e-karts on restricted roads and cycling tracks. A bio-methane plant, costing Rs 12 crore, is being established for waste management at the existing waste-to-energy plant in Bharyal on the periphery of Shimla.

**Q. Shimla faced its worst-ever disaster last year. What lessons did you learn to mitigate it?**

A. Other than afforestation efforts, this time I personally focused on proper cleanliness of clogged nallahs and culverts, collaborating with other state and central departments since June. It is always the SMC that faces criticism during disasters over non-maintenance of drains for proper rainwater discharge, even though some drains are maintained by other departments. Illegal dumping is a major concern as it chokes drains and often triggers landslides. Addressing this was also a priority. We are seeking forest clearance for dedicated dumping sites at three locations. Once approved, a mechanism will be devised to provide a service for collecting construction and demolition waste on a single call, which will be chargeable. Zero tolerance will be adopted as illegal dumping poses serious environmental risks.

**Q. In the Swachh Survekshan survey, Shimla city has sharply slipped from 188 in 2024-25 to 347 in 2023-24.**

A. I have my reservations about the evaluation. There is a need for

a different set of criteria for analyzing mountain cities as they face altogether different challenges. The cost of developing infrastructure here is almost four times higher than in cities on flat terrain.

Shimla, being a mountain city, cannot be compared directly with cities in the plains. We need a different set of criteria to reflect these unique challenges. Furthermore, Theog is ranked as the cleanest town in Himachal Pradesh, and we are assisting Theog and other adjoining towns in dry waste disposal. I will raise my concerns with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. Such rankings not only dampen the morale of our workers but also affect Shimla's image as a major tourist destination.

**Q. Over the years, we have seen the Shimla civic body facing significant financial strain. Are you taking steps to improve the situation?**

A. Strengthening the financial health of the municipal corporation is a top priority, and our focus is on resource mobilization to make the body self-sustainable. We are in the process of creating a land bank to identify, secure, and utilize Corporation-owned properties and assets in a purposeful manner to generate steady revenue.

At the same time, as a trusted urban body, we continue to grant permissions for housing projects while ensuring proper regulation. We are also exploring new avenues to participate in housing schemes under an Apartment Act and looking at initiatives such as establishing petrol pumps and other revenue-generating facilities. These steps will help us reduce financial strain and build long-term fiscal resilience for the civic body.

**Q. Any significant achievement so far?**

A. One of our key achievements is the digitalization initiative that

allows access to birth and death certificates online from anywhere in the world. The project is almost complete to digitize records dating back to 1870. This is particularly significant for Shimla, which had once been the erstwhile summer capital of British India, as many British nationals continue to visit the city to trace the history of their ancestors who served here during the pre-independence era.

**Q. Traffic congestion is one of Shimla's biggest challenges. What steps are being taken to address it?**

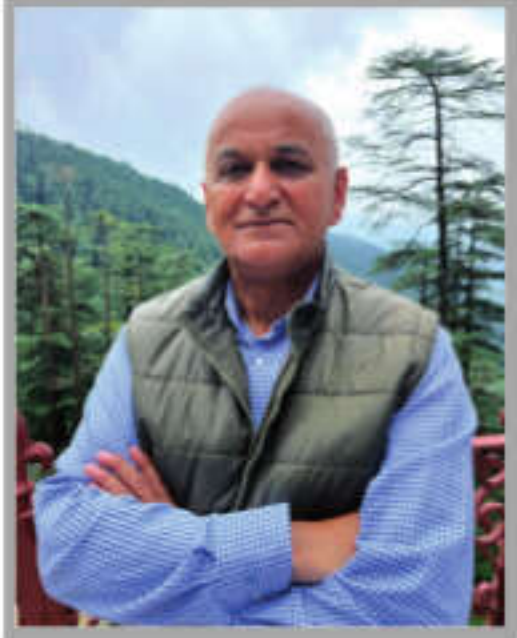
A. Traffic management in a hill city like Shimla is a complex challenge, but we are taking multiple steps to address it. In addition to developing new parking spaces, we are working to decongest the main circular road, which is a critical lifeline as it connects schools, colleges, and hospitals. We are also exploring alternative solutions such as constructing link roads through wards to ease the load on the circular road.

Beyond projects like tunnels and ropeways, we are also considering developing link roads through various wards to ease the burden on the circular road and improve overall traffic flow.

**Q. Shimla is a popular tourist destination. What measures have you taken to promote tourism?**

A. After COVID, the city faced a decline in tourist footfall, and even local engagement with the city center had dwindled. To revive tourism and encourage local participation, we introduced the Winter Carnival in 2024, which turned out to be a success. The event also helps showcase the region's rich culture, through music, dance and handicraft exhibitions enriching the visitor experience while supporting local livelihoods.

To further empower local women's self-help groups and promote local



products, we provide venues free of cost twice a month, allowing them to set up stalls and sell their products directly to tourists. These initiatives strengthen the connection between visitors and the local community while boosting Shimla's cultural and economic vibrancy.

**Q. The previous BJP-led corporation was criticized for turning Shimla into a 'Steel City' rather than a 'Smart City.' In your view, has Shimla truly become smart under the Smart City project?**

A. Much of the steel-focused infrastructure was unnecessary. The only justified project was the walkway between Sanjauli and IGMCRoad, which improves hospital connectivity during winters. Overall, it represented a misallocation of public resources and did not align with Shimla's environment.

Under the Smart City project, Shimla was supposed to receive Rs 3,000 crore, but only Rs 570 crore was provided. Even these funds were not spent according to development priorities, with a spending going into projects and unnecessary infrastructure, instead of addressing the city's unique challenges like transportation, traffic management and tourism that require more focused efforts to achieve desired outcomes.

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 27 September 1925

OCCASIONAL NOTE

APPARENTLY M. Caillaux who is now at Washington has found an atmos-phere in America distinctly chilly towards the proposals for debt re-payment which he is prepared to table. Mr. Mellon, who is one of the Commissioners in charge of the American case, has reminded M. Caillaux publicly that while France has been hard pressed financially that condition is not permanent, and the American newspapers, which can speak with less ambiguity, declare that the French offer is entirely unacceptable. That was to be expected. The American view of war debts, as Great Britain has learned to its cost, is not coloured by sentiment. Americans are business men and they regard these debts as business transactions. M. Caillaux is a fascinating man, and comes fresh from his experience of having cajoled Mr. Winston Churchill into the easiest of terms in London, but it is extremely doubtful whether he will find the way so smooth at Washington as it was at the British Treasury.

News Items

BOMBAY WAGES DISPUTE

SETTLEMENT PLANS REJECTED

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.)

SIMLA, SEPT. 26.

DEWAN CHAMANLAL, M.L.A., states that he has been authorized by Pandit Motilal Nehru to issue the following statement regarding the negotiations carried on by members of the Assembly with representatives of the Millowners' Association :

The negotiations could not be completed owing to the fact that no tan-gible proposition could be agreed upon. It was suggested on behalf of labour that, pending a full inquiry, notices regarding the reduction of wages should be suspended. The Millowners' representatives said that was impossible. It was pointed out that a large number of mills, variously computed from 25 per cent to 50 per cent, were not losing and yet reductions in wages had been effected all round. The Millowners' representatives said the suspension of notices would lead to more mills closing down.

Meanwhile the situation has become serious. It is hoped that efforts to arrive at a settlement will not be relaxed.

Dewan Chaman Lal then adds that the Socialist Party are sending an assistant secretary to Bombay immediately to organize relief for the work-ers and that branches at Lucknow, Cawnpore, Calcutta, Jharia, Raniganj, Patna, Lahore, Khewra, Dandot, Moradabad and Madras are being opened for organizing relief for Bombay unemployed.

BREAD PROFITEERS

10D. LOAF SCANDAL: FOOD COUNCIL REPORT

LONDON, SEPT. 25

THE Food Council has unanimously adopted the report of the Executive Committee recommending a reduction in the price of bread.

It is understood that it is felt that where the price is as high as tenpence a quarter-loaf a reduction of a penny can reasonably be made and still allow a fair trading profit.

It is learned that the London Master Bakers' Association has decided to reduce the price of bread to 9.5 d. per quarter-loaf, from September 28.— Reuter's Special Service.

NEW METHODS

FRENCH “NIBBLING” POLICY OF ADVANCE

As regards the coming offensive, says a Paris message, the newspapers learn that the French will abandon their methods of attacking after me- thodical artillery preparation, in favour of exerting pressure at numerous points, which promises more substantial results.

It is pointed out that while the success of the Spanish landing at Alhuce- mas largely depends on the future of the French operations, the possibility of a rapid French advance northwards towards Adjir must be ruled out owing to the risk of large forces being isolated.

Ghosts of war still haunt Sri Lanka

SMRUTI S PATTANAIK

This week, Sri Lanka faced the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on the accountability process for the alleged war crimes during the last phase of the country's civil war. During the period, thousands perished, including those who were assured security in the state-designated 'no fire zone'. In the 60th regular session of the UNHRC held on September 8 at Geneva, the Human Rights High Commissioner asked Sri Lanka to constitute international accountability mechanisms to look into the violation of human rights to ensure accountability is guaranteed. Sri Lanka's brush with human rights violations continues as the UNHRC is persistently pursuing the matter of rights violations.

The government of Sri Lanka has been insisting that there was "zero civilian casualty" during the military operation in 2009 against the Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Families of many who have been missing, including those who surrendered to the Army to buy safety for their lives, await answers from the State on the whereabouts of their loved ones. In this context, the recent discovery of mass graves in Chemmani, including skeletal remains of less than 10-month-old babies, attests to the brutality of the war. However, this is not the first time mass graves were discovered. Investigations into mass graves discovered in Mannar, Kokkothoduvaai and Thiruketheeswaram have not reached any conclusion on

the identities of the people and how they were killed.

The Ministry of Justice and the Office of Missing Persons (OMP), which was established in 2017, has not been effective. Families of those who disappeared have not been involved in the exhumation process, and the process was not of international standard. The High Commission in the 60th session of the Human Rights Council meeting said, "Impunity can be a second form of violence that perpetuates cycles of harm. The demands of victims and survivors must be addressed. Their voices must guide the Government's policies on accountability, truth, justice and reparation." High Commissioner Volker Turk recommended an independent judicial mechanism with the inclusion of "independent special counsel" to ensure impartiality. The Core Group on Sri Lanka, led by the UK, has been at the forefront of pressuring for the implementation of various UNHRC recommendations.

Post war, Sri Lanka has contested the death figure of the final phase of the war, in which its military pounded on Tamils who had taken refuge in the no fire zone. Celebration of victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) after 25 years of unwinnable civil war and demonisation of the Tamil community as terrorists or their sympathisers reflected an impunity that seeped through the state system. Western countries sponsored a resolution asking for accountability in the human rights violations.

The government of Sri Lanka instituted the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission in 2010 as a domestic mechanism while rejecting Western countries' call for accountability. In 2010, the then Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, appointed the Darusman Panel, which submitted its report in 2011. In 2013, the UN High Commissioner Navi Pillay also accused the Sri Lankan government of intimidating people who came to meet her, recommending an independent international enquiry mechanism as the domestic mechanism has failed. In 2015, the UN passed a resolution to investigate war crimes and appointed a 12-member team, which included two forensic experts to hold an enquiry. Sri Lanka rejected the proposed appointment of foreign judges to the enquiry commission. In 2015, the government, however, decided to co-sponsor the UNHRC resolution 30/1, which drew sharp domestic criticism from the then Sirisena government that such an investigation is an interference in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka.

The government appointed retired judge Maxwell Paranagama to investigate the human rights violations, whose report was submitted to Sri Lanka's Parliament in October 2015. This report, for the first time, acknowledged credible evidence of rights violations as was brought out by international media. It interestingly recommended an internationally backed judicial inquiry. In 2020, after Gotabaya Rajapakse assumed power, Sri Lanka

withdrew from co-sponsoring the UNHRC resolution on accountability, terming the co-sponsorship as 'betrayal' of war heroes. In 2021, as mandated by the UN resolution 46/1, the Office on Sri Lanka and Accountability Project (OSLAP) was established.

The relatives of missing persons formed the Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearances to pressure the government. The government headed by Wickramasinghe established the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation, which was gazetted in September 2023, followed by the bill on the Commission for Truth, Unity and Reconciliation gazetted on 1 January 2024. Most of the Commissions, however, failed to address the grievances of the Tamils. As a result, the Tamils have looked towards international support to make the Sri Lankan government accountable.

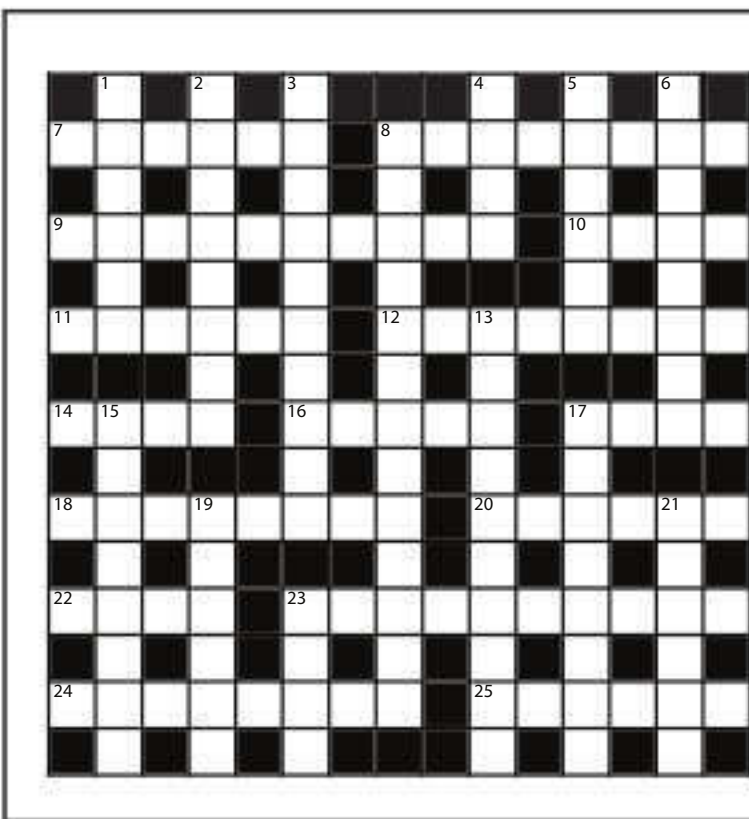
There is an expectation that unlike the previous governments that were reluctant to hold an inquiry and enforce accountability, the National People's Power (NPP) government is committed to ending the culture of impunity and ensuring accountability as pledged in its electoral manifesto. Moreover, the people of northern province also voted for the NPP with the hope that this government would deliver. The government has decided to abolish the draconian law, the 'Prevention of Terrorism Act', that has been misused in the past. Yet, like its predecessors, it has rejected any international accountability mechanism.

The discovery of mass graves only points to the bloody violence that earmarked Sri Lanka's civil war. The end of the war has not resulted in political reconciliation, as the root cause of the conflict has not been addressed. The issues of political devolution, provincial autonomy and accountability for massive human rights violations committed by the Sri Lankan troops continue to dominate the political landscape. Successive governments were reluctant to address the issue of missing persons, adding to the distress of family members of those missing. Though the Rajapakse brothers - Mahinda and Gotabaya - have denied any responsibility for those missing, in 2020, when Gotabaya assumed the Presidency, he acknowledged the long-believed truth that those missing during the last phase of the war are, in fact, dead.

Though human rights issues have been used as a geopolitical instrument by the international community to punish certain countries, in the context of Sri Lanka, failure to establish a credible domestic mechanism has added to its woes. The government continues to shield the armed forces from accountability and also keeps a close watch on the family members of those missing. The discovery of mass graves has not helped the government to bury the truth. It raises more questions on the conduct of war and state accountability to its marginalised citizens.

The Kathmandu Post/ANN.

Crossword | No. 293246



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

FOSSILICK BEAR CUB  
A E C A A L H Y  
T A N G O Z E I T G E I S T  
I A N O L U A T H  
M E T R O P O L I T A N  
A E C W A B  
A E L E A D I N G L A D Y  
S S A N C G T E  
C I T Y S L I C K E R  
R M T M E U S  
A R I D S A C R O S A N C T  
P R E T I T S I T A  
P A R O C H I A L I N T E R  
E E H O E O E  
R U N D O W N D E N U D E D

ACROSS

- 7 Gondola, out of its depth, capsized in lake (6)
- 8 Way of working on part of test in addition (8)
- 9 In possession of intelligence American leaked about men I d compromised (4-6)
- 10 Controversial artist scandalised crowds (4)
- 11 Train group of swimmers (6)
- 12 Runners enlist doctor after training (8)

- 14 Singer s last to join rescue vessel (4)
- 16 Reporter s incapable of producing issue for boss? (5)
- 17 Airs broadcast showing coverage of Indian women (4)
- 18 Curse three different articles by old lady (8)
- 20 Lady wanting boy makes wishes (6)
- 22 Workshipped woman with two lives (4)
- 23 Informer taped doctor after training (8)

- 24 Converse for example with people outside (8)
- 25 Prime minister cutting head of state s hair (6)

DOWN

- 1 Author is writer of particular kind of verse (6)
- 2 College backed up reserve computer (13)
- 3 Novel alibi could be immune to challenge (10)

- 4 Stepped right over naked body (4)
- 5 Carry on deregulating banks over there (6)
- 6 University lecturer buried in vault with separate compartments (8)
- 8 After outlying event, this essentially sees arid remnant transformed (13)
- 13 Controlling regime votes against accepting new head of National Gallery (5,5)

- 15 Henry abandons anguished unorthodox Christian figure (5,3)
- 17 Member of 11 nicking side of face with blade in the morning (3,5)
- 19 Turbulent state revolutionised dated model (6)
- 21 Sister finally separating expert s show from body shows subtlety (6)
- 23 Platform said to have upset extremists (4)

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





# FROM GANDHI TO MODI: THE CONTINUING CALL FOR SWADESHI

OPINION

SHIVPRAKASH



On September 17, the “Swasthy Mahila – Shashakt Parivar” campaign was launched in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh. On this occasion, during a massive public gathering, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi called upon the citizens of the country to adopt Swadeshi. He urged the people, saying, “Whatever you buy should be made in the country, whatever you buy should carry the sweat of an Bhartiya, whatever you buy should have the fragrance of Bhartiya soil.”

He has not made this call for Swadeshi only in Dhar but has emphasised it in numerous public pro-

grams over the past several months. He has described the mantra of Swadeshi and self-reliance as the guarantee of a developed Bharat.

To connect all citizens of the country with the call made by Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, the Bharatiya Janata Party has outlined the “Viksit Bharat” campaign. This campaign will begin on the birth anniversary of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya (25th September) and continue until the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee (25th December), a symbol of Bhartiya pride. It will also include the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi’s birth anniversary (2nd October), celebrated with the purchase of Khadi — Gandhi being a great inspiration for Swadeshi.

Mahatma Gandhi defined Swadeshi as “the spirit that prompts us to use things and services available around us. The essence of Swadeshi is serving what is near with a sense of family.” Pandit Deendayal Upad-

hyaya also emphasized that “policies should prioritize village-based entrepreneurship and local production.”

Former Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee enhanced Bharat’s self-respect manifold not only by his pride in the Hindi language but also through the nuclear tests that established Bharat’s strength on the global stage. This campaign, running during this period, is a meaningful initiative to connect society with the spirit of Swadeshi.

In the name of providing excessive comfort to human beings, the dangers created by all systems — whether capitalist, communist, or socialist — which consider either the individual or the state as the center, are now visible across the world. All these systems advocate centralization and give rise to class conflict. Their foundation is based solely on promoting material indulgence.

By claiming ownership over natural resources, these systems exploit nature, leading to an environmental crisis. Irregular, excessive, or untimely rainfall is a direct result of this exploitation of nature. Due to monopolistic mindsets, tools such as tariffs or even wars are used to dominate opponents — a product of these systems.

By treating the world as a market, these ideologies have fostered conflict rather



Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted with ‘Garv Se Swadeshi’ banner by a retailer, upon his visit to a stall in an exhibition, in Itanagar. (File photo)

than love among humans. After gaining independence, Bharat too, influenced by foreign glamor, began imitating Western and communist models. If this cycle continues for too long, it will pose a serious threat to humanity and global peace.

The Swadeshi philosophy advocates for the development of small, village-centred industries — one that generate employment, promote environmental conservation, require minimal energy and capital, and foster strong social relationships.

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya emphasized this by saying, “*Antyodaya — the welfare of the poorest — means that the benefits of development should reach the lowest levels of society. Therefore, the empowerment of local products is both a moral and economic*

*necessity.*” During British rule, the Swadeshi movement became a means of resisting colonialism and uniting society. At that time, festivals like Ganesh Utsav, the burning of foreign clothes, and the spinning wheel (charkha) became powerful symbols of Swadeshi.

Today, as we reflect on the idea of Swadeshi, our products must reach global standards. We must harness advanced technology and showcase our intellectual strength across all sectors of social life. Bhartiya products must be positioned at the forefront of global market competition.

Building upon the mantra of self-reliance, the Government of Bharat under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has undertaken significant

initiatives across various sectors since 2014. The results of these efforts are now evident — not just in Bharat, but across the world.

Bharat’s “*Make in India*” and “*Make for India*” policies have played a crucial role in promoting Swadeshi and self-reliance, especially in the defence sector. Today, we are manufacturing the BrahMos missile, a testament to our indigenous capabilities. The success of Operation Sindhurakshak is one such result. Our defence exports have now reached nearly 24,000 crore, and we are supplying defence products to around 100 countries.

We have achieved major milestones, including the successful development of semiconductor chips. Our space missions like Chandrayaan and Mangaly-

aan have stunned the world with India’s growing space capabilities.

The MSME sector now contributes 30% to Bharat’s GDP. In the startup ecosystem, Bharat has also set remarkable records. By embracing the “*Vocal for Local*” vision through the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative, we have successfully introduced local products to global markets.

Earlier, we used to import bulletproof jackets for our armed and paramilitary forces; now, we are exporting them to over 100 countries. In the mobile phone manufacturing sector, exports have increased from 1,566 crore in 2014-15 to 1,20,000 crore in 2023-24. The export of generic medicines and vaccines has doubled — from \$11 billion in 2014 to \$24 billion today. In the toy sector, dependence on China has ended, and Bharat has become an exporter.

Bharat is now manufacturing world-class railway coaches, meeting all technical parameters, and exporting them to 10 countries. We are also exporting organic products to over 100 countries. These are just a few examples that reflect the immense potential and talent of Bharat — and they reaffirm our belief that we have the capability to

achieve even more.

Speaking from the ramparts of the Red Fort, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi called upon the nation to free itself from all forms of a colonial mindset. He emphasised that Swadeshi is not limited to the economy alone — we must carry a sense of pride in every aspect of our lives, including our language, attire, traditions, and culture.

In one of his *Mann Ki Baat* addresses, Prime Minister Modi urged the people by saying: “Gifts should be those made in Bharat, clothes should be those woven in Bharat, festival decorations should be with items made in Bharat, and the lights should be Bharat-made too.”

Based on this appeal by the Prime Minister, if adopted in everyday behaviour by the general public, it will lead to increased employment for Bhartiya citizens, reduced dependence on foreign goods, retention of capital within the country, and greater investment in Bharat’s development and the welfare of the poor.

This very way of living will become a pledge for a prosperous and developed Bharat — one that fosters both economic growth and cultural enrichment.

*Shivprakash is the National Jt. General Secretary (Org.) of the Bharatiya Janata Party*

## When you can’t win democratically, do you resort to violence?

OPINION

RAKESH SHARMA



Recent incidents of arson in Leh, protests over “I Love Mohammad” slogans, vandalism at Navratri celebrations, agitations against the Waqf Bill, demonstrations over CAA and NRC, and even attempts to discredit the Election Commission point to a disturbing trend. At one moment one community is provoked, the next moment another. What appears as scattered unrest is, in fact, a coordinated design.

This is no ordinary protest movement. It signals a larger conspiracy where foreign powers, deep state actors, and a frustrated Indian opposition are working hand in glove. Unable to defeat Prime Minister Narendra Modi democratically, they seem intent on destabilising India through chaos and violence. The aim is clear: engineer regime change

to suit anti-India interests abroad. For the opposition, the single objective is power—irrespective of whether the country is weakened or fragmented.

Their greatest irritation is Modi’s progress towards “Viksit Bharat.” If development continues at this pace, the opposition knows it cannot return to power through democratic

veals deliberate planning. In Leh, a Congress councillor has been named for inciting violence, while activist Sonam Wangchuk’s disruptive actions are well documented—whether blocking development projects under the guise of environmentalism, travelling to Pakistan for “green causes,” or even suggesting Gurkha soldiers join the Chinese army. Nepalese elements were also found in the Leh unrest, where agitators demanded statehood for a region with barely three lakh residents. Granting such a demand would result in a farcical assembly with three MLAs and a Chief Minister holding every portfolio. A Centre-led meeting scheduled

juda.” When police acted, agitators nationwide re-framed it as action against peaceful slogans of devotion. Even a Samajwadi Party MLA admitted no such incident occurred. Why then did protests erupt across the country? Clearly, the intent was not faith but fomenting unrest.

Equally troubling is the pattern of violence at Hindu festivals. Attacks on Navratri celebrations expose the dangerous double standards of opposition leaders and community representatives who remain silent in the name of vote-bank politics. Such appeasement only deepens divides.

India’s government must



People staged a massive protest over the statehood demand and the inclusion of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule, in Leh on Wednesday. ANI

means. Meanwhile, foreign adversaries view India’s rising economic and strategic stature with envy. India is already the world’s fourth-largest economy, knocking at the doors of the top three. Its ascent threatens anarchist forces that thrive on instability.

A closer look at events re-

for 7 October was intended to explore peaceful solutions, but violence was deliberately triggered weeks earlier to sabotage dialogue.

The “I Love Mohammad” controversy, too, is rooted in distortion. In Kanpur, an unauthorised procession was taken out with inflammatory chants of “sar tan se

see these designs for what they are—part of a calculated attempt to derail the country’s growth, unity, and sovereignty. Tough, decisive action is needed against those fuelling unrest. Only then can India’s march towards becoming a developed nation remain unbroken.

## Gendered face of India’s rights crisis

True gender equality demands more than laws, it requires changing mindsets across schools, institutions, and homes to include women’s voices in shaping India’s future.

OPINION

HARSHITA GUPTA AND  
UTKARSH YADAV

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that “all humans are born free and equal.” This was not the original phrasing. The initial draft read “all men,” and it was only through the efforts of Hansa Mehta that the wording was made gender-inclusive. Mehta, along with fifteen other women, later played a pivotal role in shaping India’s Constitution to lay the foundation of an egalitarian society.

The Preamble to the Constitution embodies the cherished values of our founding fathers and mothers. Former Chief Justice RC Lahoti called it a solemn promise made by the people to themselves. This promise inspired women-led protests against the CAA-NRC in 2019, where public readings of the Preamble became acts of Constitutional assertion. Yet, recent incidents compel us to ask whether we have remained faithful to this pledge.

**A TALE OF TWO INCIDENTS: SECULARISM AND EQUALITY AT CROSSROADS**

Two recent events reveal

the uneasy intersection of secularism and gender equality. Novelist Banu Mushtaq, despite winning the Booker Prize, faced litigation in the Supreme Court over an invitation to inaugurate the Mysuru dasara Festival. In Delhi, a lecture at Lady Shri Ram College became the site of a public protest when a former diplomat voiced misogynistic remarks.

In both cases, Constitutional values were defended the court dismissed the petition citing the Preamble, and LSR students exercised their free speech to denounce sexism and hate. While the interventions are reassuring, the underlying mindset revealed is deeply troubling and suggests widening fault lines in our society.

**INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION FOR WOMEN?**

Surveys reveal that most Indian men hold at least one bias against women, whether in education or the workplace. These attitudes translate into grim outcomes: low female participation in politics and business, under-represen-

tation in leadership, and continued justification for reservations as a corrective. Adding to this crisis are the everyday realities of violence against women, from rising cases of sexual assault to the silencing of voices that speak for them.

Women from minority groups by caste, religion or community face sharper discrimination in housing, employment, healthcare and education. Denial of such basic entitlements

brace women as equal partners rather than lesser beings. Achieving this begins in childhood progressive policies should cultivate gender-egalitarian attitudes through school curricula designed to challenge stereotypes and encourage mutual respect among boys and girls.

As youth move into higher education, universities can reinforce this cultural change by rolling out compulsory modules and



undermines the right to live with dignity guaranteed under Article 21. The situation is aggravated by the open display of misogyny and religious bigotry by political leaders, not just in rallies but even in Parliament’s halls. Such casual hate speech normalises prejudice at the highest levels of public discourse.

**TOWARDS A MIND-SET SHIFT**

The pervasiveness of gender bias underscores that legislative change, while necessary, is not sufficient to dismantle entrenched inequality. India must pursue a deeper transformation: shifting mindsets to em-

fostering open dialogues about gender norms building communities where respect and inclusivity are the norm. Beyond classrooms, campaigns and programs that promote active fatherhood and shared family roles help reshape attitudes at home, demonstrating the value of gender equality in everyday life.

Unless society invests in these sustained, multi-level efforts from education reform to family engagement women’s voices will remain marginalised in law and policy, and their lived experiences and perspectives, even on critical issues like sexual violence, will largely be overlooked.

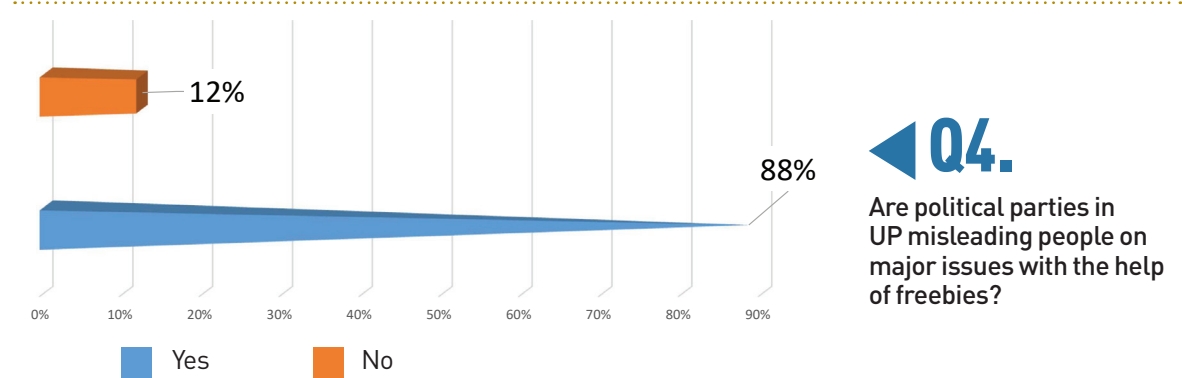
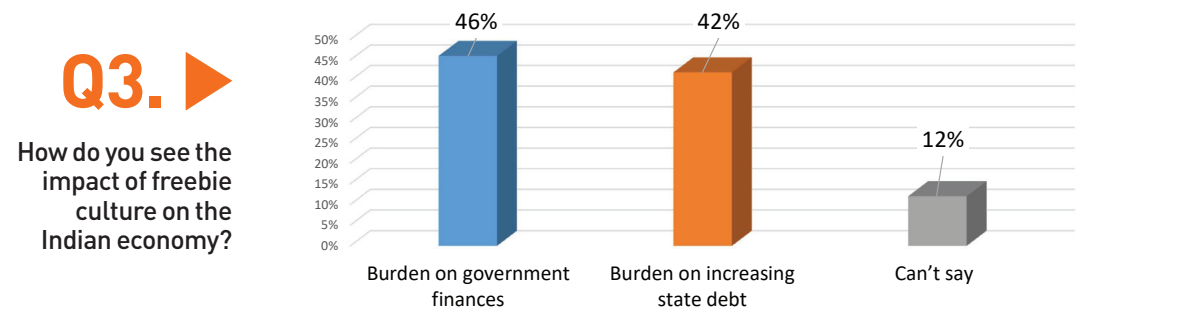
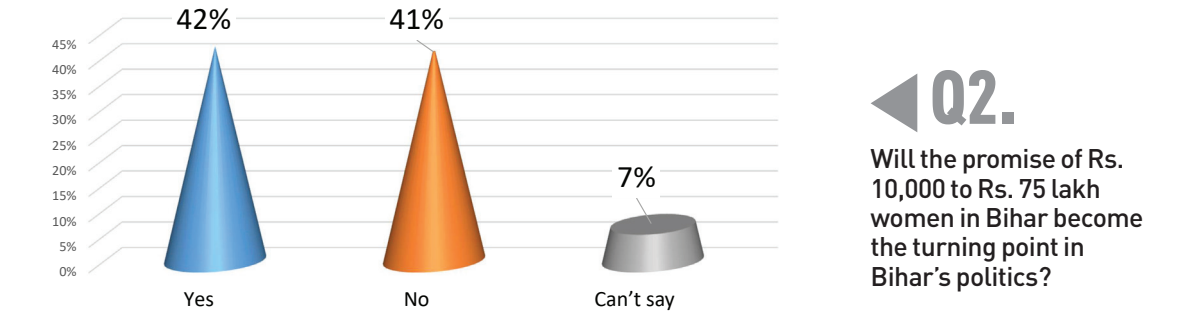
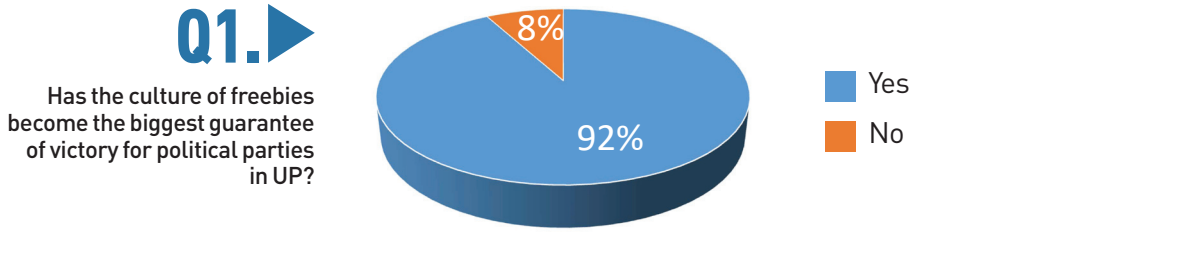


THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON ELECTION TIME FREEBIE CULTURE

46% believe that freebie culture is creating a burden on govt finances in the Indian economy.

According to the survey, 46% of respondents feel that the freebie culture is putting a heavy burden on government finances, while 42% believe it is increasing the debt burden

on states. Another 12% are uncertain. Overall, most people view freebies as harmful to India's economic stability and fiscal health.



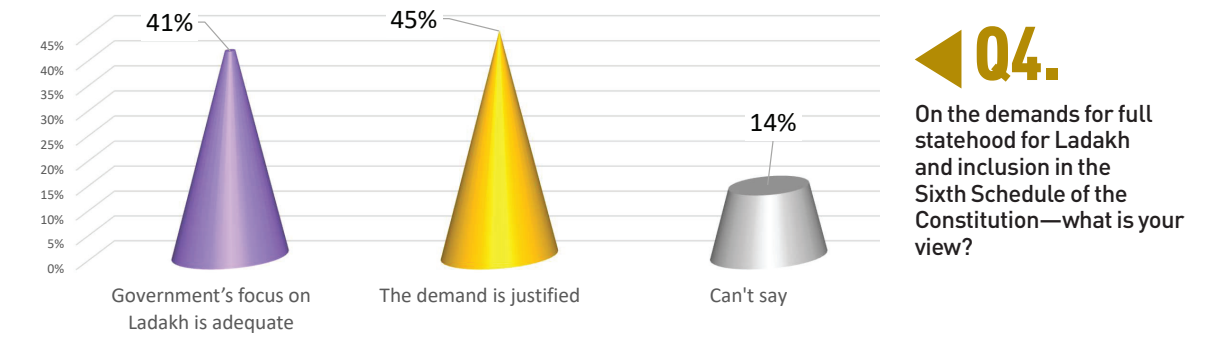
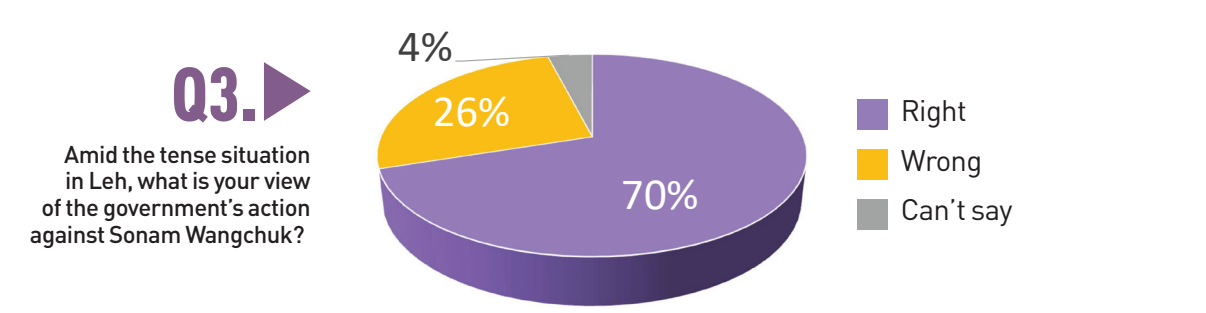
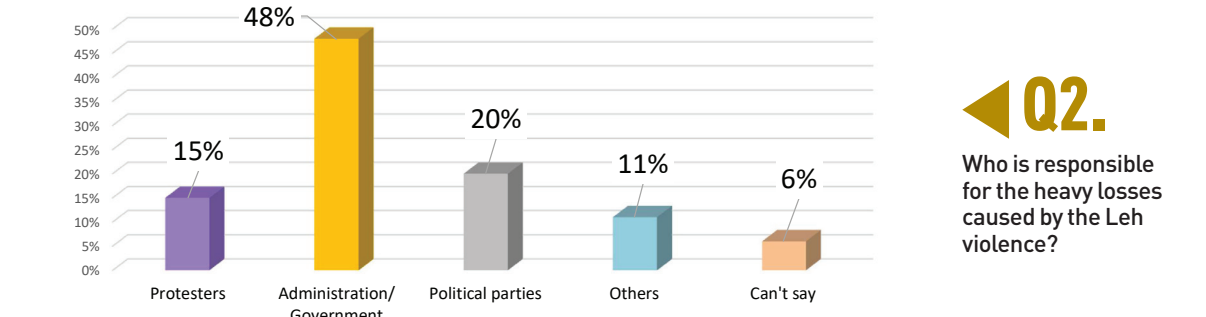
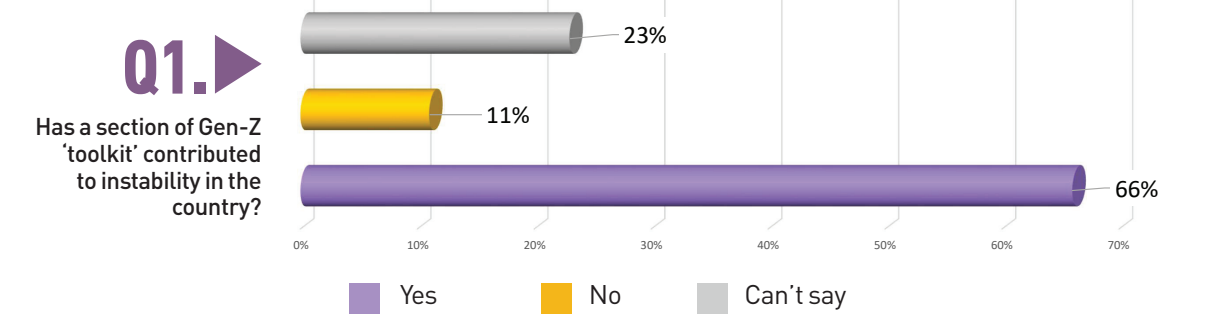
THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON LEH-LADAKH PROTESTS FOR STATEHOOD

Leh public blames Gen-Z for violence

A 152-respondent The Daily Guardian survey on Leh showcases sharp opinions: 66% blame Gen-Z toolkits for

instability, 48% hold administration responsible for losses, and 70% back action against Sonam Wangchuk. On

statehood and Sixth Schedule, views split. Most reject Nepal link. Sample: 93% male, 7% female.



Sonam Wangchuk's arrest sparks...

CONTINUED FROM P1

people have been detained so far, and prohibitory orders banning gatherings remained in effect across both Leh and Kargil. Residents complained of shortages of milk, vegetables and other essentials, while schools, colleges and anganwadi centres were ordered shut for two days by Leh District Magistrate Romil Singh Donk.

A high-level Union Home Ministry team, which arrived on Thursday, met Lieutenant Governor Kavinder Gupta, senior civil and police officials, and

LAB representatives to review the law and order situation. It was agreed that a preparatory meeting with LAB and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) would be held in New Delhi on September 27 or 28, followed by formal talks with a high-powered committee on October 6.

The LAB and KDA have jointly spearheaded the agitation for over four years, demanding statehood, Sixth Schedule protection, separate Lok Sabha seats for Leh and Kargil, and the creation of a Public Service Commission. While previous negotiations yielded

assurances on job guarantees and an additional Lok Sabha seat, the core issues of statehood and Sixth Schedule inclusion remain unresolved.

The Apex Body Leh, distancing itself from the violence, reiterated on Friday that its protest was peaceful and claimed the clashes broke out when an unexpected surge of youth joined the bandh after two activists fell seriously ill.

Shops in Kargil reopened after a day-long shutdown, though heavy security deployment continued in sensitive areas to prevent flare-ups.

BJP bets on women's Rozgar Yojana to sway Bihar polls

CONTINUED FROM P1

many stepping into business for the first time, shared testimonies with the Prime Minister through video link, describing the support as life-changing. Several affectionately addressed Modi as "Bhaiya", underscoring the personal connect he has forged with women voters in Bihar.

From poultry farming in Bhojpur to millet cultivation in Champaran and sweet-making in Purnea, women detailed how the seed capital would help them expand businesses, secure dignity at home, and

inspire self-reliance. "Earlier families opposed us going out. Today, because of self-reliance, they value us," said Noorjahan Khatun from Gaya, drawing applause when she declared, "Earlier we considered husbands our sampatti, now they consider us lakhpatis."

In his address, Modi urged women to spread the word about the scheme in their villages and emphasised holistic development through housing, healthcare, electricity, and livelihoods. NDA strategists believe the scheme's reach — covering nearly every household through women beneficia-

ries — could be decisive in a state where female turnout has consistently outstripped that of men.

*Modi urged women to spread the word about the scheme in their villages*

The Congress, however, sought to puncture the BJP's narrative. Kicking off her Bihar campaign in Patna and Motihari on Friday, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra accused Modi and Chief Minister Nitish Ku-

mar of resorting to pre-poll populism. "Elections are approaching in Bihar and thus Rs. 10,000 were being transferred to women accounts. What were they doing for the last 20 years?" she asked, alleging the move was designed solely to secure votes for the BJP-JD(U) alliance.

She warned women not to be swayed by cash transfers, saying respect and dignity would come only through fair salaries, safe schools for daughters, and genuine opportunities. The Congress leader also pitched the opposition's guarantees — Rs. 2,500 monthly support for

women, free healthcare up to Rs. 25 lakh, and land rights for landless families — while accusing the BJP of "vote theft" and using religion to divert attention from unemployment and migration.

As Bihar gears up for elections, the contrasting images are stark: the BJP-led NDA projecting women as partners in its empowerment story, and the Congress painting the scheme as opportunistic largesse. With 75 lakh women directly touched by the Rozgar Yojana, their verdict could well shape the state's political outcome.

India tracks US pharma tariff move

CONTINUED FROM P1

Jaiswal also addressed migration, revealing that 2,417 Indians have been deported or repatriated from the US since January 2025. He reiterated India's stance against illegal migration, stressing cooperation with Washington on deportation processes and efforts within India to crack down on fraudulent agents. "We want

to promote legal pathways of migration. India stands against illegal migration," he said.

Turning to NATO, the MEA strongly rejected remarks by Secretary-General Mark Rutte suggesting Modi had sought clarifications from Putin on Russia's war strategy. "The statement is factually incorrect and entirely baseless. At no point has Prime Minister

Modi spoken with President Putin in the manner suggested," Jaiswal clarified, urging NATO leadership to exercise "greater responsibility and accuracy" in public statements.

Reaffirming India's position, he added that New Delhi's energy imports remain guided by its commitment to ensuring affordable and predictable costs for Indian consumers.

Amit Shah seeks Durga Maa's blessings for regime change

CONTINUED FROM P1

glad' (Golden Bengal). Bengal should once again become safe, peaceful and prosperous, fulfilling the dream of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore," he said to thunderous applause.

Echoing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision, Shah linked Bengal's revival to India's national resurgence. He also paid homage to victims of recent torrential rains in Kolkata and

lauded reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, whose birth anniversary coincided with the inauguration.

The TMC, however, dismissed his remarks as "political tourism." Party spokesperson Kunal Ghosh quipped: "Earlier also Amit Shah ji came... there was no political impact. During puja season, we welcome tourists from across India and abroad. One additional political tourist makes no

difference."

Education Minister Bratya Basu ridiculed Shah's Sonar Bangla pledge as a recycled slogan, while Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim likened his visit to "migratory birds that come and go," insisting that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had already made Bengal "Sonar Bangla."

Shah's day included inaugurations at the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre in Salt Lake and prayers at the

historic Kalighat Temple. The temple visit sparked controversy after BJP alleged its welcome posters were replaced with banners for Mamata Banerjee, prompting another round of recriminations.

While BJP leaders accused the ruling party of "dirty politics," TMC councillor Prabir Mukherjee countered that Shah was duly welcomed as Home Minister and alleged the

BJP was exploiting internal factionalism for political mileage.

TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee escalated the attack, demanding answers over the Centre's withholding of funds for West Bengal. He questioned whether the BJP had first created "Sonar Gujarat, Sonar Maharashtra and Sonar Uttar Pradesh" before pitching for Sonar Bangla.

Swami Chaitanyanand denied interim bail; Rs 8-cr frozen

CONTINUED FROM P1

tiala House Court.

During the hearing, Chaitanyanand's counsel sought interim protection, arguing that the accused would cooperate with the investigation if granted a few days' time. However, the Delhi Police opposed the request, stating that custodial interrogation was required to carry out recoveries and visits to multiple locations.

The court questioned the defence over Chaitanyanand's reluctance to join

the probe despite claims that all documents were available. After the arguments, ASJ Hardeep Kaur, presiding over Court No. 15, dismissed the anticipatory bail plea.

Following the order, the Delhi Police intensified its probe and froze Rs. 8 crore held in multiple bank accounts of Chaitanyanand.

According to the complaint, Chaitanyanand created a parallel trust and siphoned off at least Rs. 20 crore from the original Shri Sharada Peeth trust into his personal accounts.

Srinagar Police holds 'Run for Unity' to honour...

CONTINUED FROM P1

The "Run for Unity" is part of Srinagar Police's ongoing outreach initiatives aimed at enhancing civic engagement, building public trust, and spreading awareness about national icons and their legacies. With a strong turnout and positive response, the event served as a fitting tribute to Sardar Patel and reaffirmed the ideals of national integration and social harmony.

Pakistan fast-tracks Lashkar terror hub near Afghan border

CONTINUED FROM P1

killing 20 people.

The shift became possible only after June 2025, when the Pakistan Army launched a "clean-up drive" that killed more than two dozen TTP operatives. Within a month, Lashkar began work on Markaz Jihad-e-Aqsa.

Since June, Pakistani forces have killed more than 40 civilians in airstrikes, officially branding them counter-terrorism missions.

In practice, these operations have removed anti-state militants while creating space for groups aligned with Pakistan's interests against India.

This strategy—tolerating "good terrorists" like LeT, JeM and HM while eliminating "bad terrorists" like TTP—was tacitly acknowledged by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Ameen Gandapur in August, when he admitted that donor funds meant for counter-terrorism were be-

ing used to selectively target groups hostile to the state.

For the international community—particularly nations that continue to fund Pakistan's counter-terrorism programmes—the contradiction is glaring: while aid agencies pour millions into Islamabad and the FATF commends its "anti-terror" steps, Lashkar and other UN-designated groups are quietly building sprawling new camps that will, inevitably, be used to spread terror in India.

Rahul Gandhi voices concern over Uttarakhand exam paper leak

CONTINUED FROM P1

circulated it.

Taking note of the uproar, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami announced strict action and constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) on September 24. The SIT will hold public interaction meetings in Haridwar on September 27 and Tehri Garhwal on September 29 to hear concerns from candidates, guardians

and coaching institutes.

Dhami urged youth to remain wary of those "exploiting their interests" and stressed that the government had already ensured 25,000 transparent appointments. "Whatever decision needs to be taken, we will take it in the interest of students, but it is unfortunate that the government is being targeted by taking cover under the students," he said.





HIMANSHU DHULIYA

Dev Anand makes us smile. He makes us recollect sweet memories. What made Dev what he was? He was so many things, giving hope and energy to us all who came in contact with him through cinema. He was a star and acted in more than 100 movies in a career spanning more than 60 years, but when we think of him, his smiling, charming demeanour appears before us, nodding his head in his signature style – singing! Yes; he was an excellent actor also, who delivered memorable performances in ‘Taxi Driver’, ‘Kala Pani’, ‘Hum Dono’, ‘Guide’ and ‘Johnny Mera Naam’, and we also repeat and recollect the dialogues of these films, but he was essentially a singing star! Dev Anand was songs! He was into music! Lyrical!

On 26th Sep this year, Dev Anand, the evergreen star of Hindi cinema, would have been 102 years. This year I shall discuss the ‘Songs’ which made Dev Anand!

The songs of Dev Anand could be placed in three broad categories – the sad and serious, joyful/happy/peppy, and the romantic duets! Among these, the most popular are duets he has sung with numerous heroines. However, his solo renditions are also not far behind. Dev sang about 400 songs. It is extremely difficult to select a few representative songs which make his personality and character on screen. However, it is my personal selection and I stand by it. Another author and admirer may have a completely different song list, as the range and depth of his collection was such.

#### SOLO SAD SONGS

I therefore explore the ‘songs’ which made the great legend and his story. Most of the serious and sad songs were sung by Dev during the initial period of his career. Maybe the subject of his films was such songs. The new nation had emerged from the shackles of slavery. Poverty and unemployment was rampant. I have pinned two songs of this genre. The first sombre song was from the film ‘Taxi Driver’ (1954) sung by Talat Mahmood, penned by Sahir and composed by S. D. Burman – ‘Jayen to jayen kahan, samjhega kaun yahaan dard bhare dil ki zubaan – ... may-uisyon ka majma hai, dil mein kya reh gaya hai is zindagi mein, rooh mein gham dil mein dhuvaan ... jayen to, ... unka bhi gham hai apna bhi gham hai, ab dil ke bachne ki umeed kam hai, ek kashti sau toofaan ... jayen to’. The song is sung by Dev when the heroine of the film, Kalpana Karthik, has separated from him and he is missing her. Sitting on the beach of Bombay under a moonlit night, the setting is perfect and reflects at that time the sentiments of so many busy souls finding a foot and some company in the city. The expressions on Dev’s face are so real! Sachin Dev Burman received his first Filmfare Award for this film. The jubilant joyous Dev was yet to arrive, and we could see the restrained journey. The second song is from the 1965 film ‘Guide’ of ‘Navketan’. It is a classic, directed by Vijay

Anand. Shailendra is the songwriter and music of Sachin da. Dev has come to Waheeda Rehman before going to jail on charges of forgery in which she was a witness and has not held his hand. Their relationship was as such under strain on account of Dev’s gambling, drinking and splurging with her money. His friend, the police inspector, arrives at his residence to arrest him. He asks for a favour to meet Rosy (Waheeda) once before going to jail, which he accords. As she sees him, she breaks into the song ‘Mo se chal kiye jaye hai re hai saiyyan baimaan ...’. On completion of her song, Dev replies by this memorable and poignant song brilliantly juxtaposed and picturised by Vijay Anand: ‘Kya se kya ho gaya, bewafa, tere pyar mein Chaha kya, kya mila, bewafa, tere pyar mein.’

‘Chalo suhana bharam to tuta, jana ke husn kya hai, Kehnte he jisko pyar duniya, kya cheez, kya bala hai, Dil ne kya na saha, bewafa tere pyar mein.’ Following songs were as good to be included: ‘Teri duniya mein jeene se to behtar hai ki mar jayein’ – House No. 44. ‘Dukhi man mere sun mera kehna, jahan nahin chaina wahan nahin rehna’ – ‘Funtoosh’.

‘Din dhal jaye, hai raat na jaye’ – ‘Guide’. ‘Kiska rasta dekhe, e dil-e-saudayi’ – ‘Joshila’.

#### SOLO BREEZY / HAPPY SONGS

Opening a new chapter, Dev’s breezy, peppy and landmark

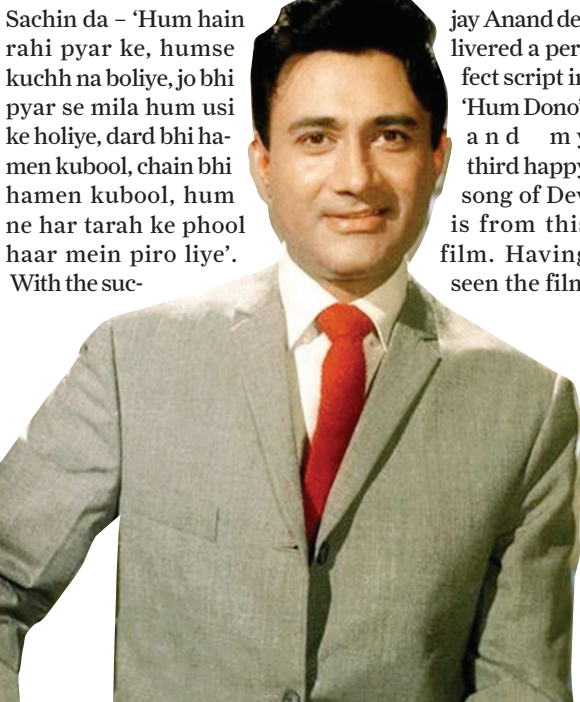


Dev & Suraiya in ‘Sanam’ -1951

songs come to mind. I have selected three songs from a beautiful bouquet of these songs. The first song is from the film ‘Nau Do Gyareh’ of 1957. Dev Anand is directed by his younger brother Vijay Anand, who gives him a new image. It is Vijay Anand’s debut film, who has written the script also. The subject is different from his earlier films; it was a journey film with thrill and romance. Vijay Anand arrives with a bang as a director, story-writer and dialogue writer. He proved soon that he had an immense flair in song picturization. In this film, Dev discovers himself. He disarms himself, and his latent energy, which was there in abundance but was under check, was released. He was so relaxed in the film, and as his younger brother was directing and he was in his company, perhaps this was the reason for him to be completely free and be himself. The song was in the beginning of the film and introduces him and introduces Dev’s ideology in the film, and perhaps his own way of life! Penned by Majrooh Sultanpuri and sung by Kishore Kumar, the music, as always, was by

# SONGS WHICH MADE DEV ANAND

*He was a star and acted in more than 100 movies in a career spanning more than 60 years, but when we think of great Dev Anand, his smiling, charming demeanour appears before us, nodding his head in his signature style – singing!*



Sachin da – ‘Hum hain rahi pyar ke, humse kuchh na boliye, jo bhi pyar se mila hum usi ke holiye, dard bhi hamen kubool, chain bhi hamen kubool, hum ne har tarah ke phool haar mein piro liye’. With the suc-

cess of ‘Nau Do Gyareh’ and testing of the new freedom and movement, their journey on a new happy, colourful route commenced. The 1960 film ‘Kala Bazaar’ was a landmark film, and my second song is from this film. It has the three brothers together and was directed by Goldie. It has music by their camp favourite Sachin Dev Burman

again on its release in colour, I was convinced that this film had a ‘flawless’ screenplay. We cannot identify a single scene in the film which was superfluous. It was set in a war-torn setting, and Dev is in a double role. Sahir returns to ‘Navketan’ under the baton of Jaidev. All the songs of this film are sung till date. However, the song with which Dev identifies himself, as stated by him in many interviews, was: ‘Main zindagi ka saath nibhta chala gaya, har fikr ko dhuein mein udata chala gaya’ – ‘Gham aur khushi mein fark na mehsus ho jahan, main dil ko us mukaam par lata chala gaya’. Dev is in a jungle in an Army setting, gets dressed outdoors with the help of his buddy and sings this song. But before that he pulls out a cigarette, turns on the lighter which his girlfriend Sadhna had presented him. It is a musical one, and as he lights and puffs he sees her image in the water, which makes the situation highly novel and romantic. It sealed his persona in public imagination, and this image is retained forever. As in the case of sad solo songs, so too in these songs it was extremely difficult to identify three best fast/happy/solo songs. The ones in the list below are as good as those which were selected: ‘Jeevan ke safar mein rahi milte hein bichad jane ko’ – ‘Munimji’.

‘Hai apna dil to awaara, na jane kis pe aaye-ga’ – ‘Solvaan Saal’. ‘Jiya ho, dil ka parda khol do, jab pyar kisi se hota hai, ...’ – ‘Jab Pyar Kisi Se Hota Hai’. ‘Kwaab ho tum ya koi haqiqat, kaun ho tum, batlaao’ – ‘Teen Deviyyan’. ‘Ye dil na hota bechhara, kadam na hote awaara’ – ‘Jewel Thief’. ‘Phoolon ke rang se, dil ki kalam se, tuzh ko likhi roz pati’ – ‘Prem Pujari’. ‘Apni to har aah ek toofan



Dev in Guide and Taxi Driver

hai, upar wala jaan kar anjaan hai’ – ‘Kala Bazaar’.

#### ROMANTIC DUETS

Dev’s first big co-star was Suraiya, with whom he did seven films. Suraiya was a singing star and Dev was a newcomer. These were early days of Dev, where he is hesitant and nowhere near the flexible and energetic star he turned out later. Fans of Dev and Suraiya only watch these songs on YouTube. Some cinema history students may also look at them. Therefore, these duets were important to study



Dev in Nau Do Gyareh, Kala Bazaar & Hum -Dono

the growth and development of Dev. There are a few nice songs of Dev and Suraiya: ‘Layi khushi ki duniya ...’ of ‘Vidya’. Also, a peppy and breezy song in ‘Sanam’ – ‘Main keh dun tum ko chor, bolo kya karoge, aur abhi macha dun shor, bolo kya karoge’ – sung by Suraiya and Mohammad Rafi. Suraiya looks very sweet and smart with pants and top. Her open curly hair adds to the charm and song!

I have selected five songs from a long list of lovable duets of Dev with his all charming heroines over the years. These are from the films – ‘Jaal’, ‘Kala Paani’, ‘Hum Dono’, ‘Tere Ghar Ke Samne’ and ‘Tere Mere Sapne’.

In 1952 Guru Dutt directed

han, sunja dil ki dastaan ... Pedon ki shakon mein soyi soyi chandni Tere khayalon mein khoyi khoyi chnadni Aur thodi der mein thak ke laut jayegi Raat ye bahar ki phir kabhi na ayegi Do ek pal aur hai ye sama Sun ja dil ki daastaan ...’ The 1956 film of Dev, ‘Kala Pani’, was directed by Raj Khosla. It has a sweet, taunting duet, depicting love and its many shades. There is all-time freshness and vivaciousness in this duet. The music makes it more endearing. Here the hero is sulking and the heroine is seeking forgiveness. The lovely exchange of musical dialogues with handsome Dev and the most beautiful heroine of that

time, Madhubala, in an evening setting, being surreptitiously watched by their group of friends, adds to the situation a new dimension. Finally, they make up to the smile and happiness of the audience: ‘Accha ji main haari, chalo maan jao na Dekhi sab ki yaari, mera dil jalao na ...’ ‘Hum Dono’ was the most accomplished film in all departments. All songs are remembered till date. The film is unforgettable on account of its landmark duet which begins the film, sung by Rafi and Asha. Dev and Sadhna are lovers, and after a long stay together in the garden, when Sadhna asks to leave, Dev insists that she stays! This is a conversational song between Dev and Sadhna, and both look handsome and pretty. If one was to select just one duet of Dev, it would be this by a large number of his fans! This could be called ‘The Love Song of Dev Anand’: ‘Abhi na jao chhod kar, ke dil abhi bhara nahin Abhi abhi to aayi ho, bahar banke chhayi ho Hawa zara mahak to le, nazar zara bahak to le Main thodi der ji to loon, nashe ke ghoot pi to loon Abhi to kuch kaha nahin, abhi to kuch suna nahin Abhi na jao chhod kar, ke dil abhi bhara nahin’ ‘Tere Ghar Ke Samne’ in 1963 was yet another beautiful film starring Dev and Nutan, which had melodious music by Sachin da, and all songs were so lovingly written by Hasrat Jaipuri. It projected the idea of living in harmony with neighbours. The song which I am listing is when Dev is trying to make up with Nutan, whom he had taken on a ride in his Lambretta scooter in hill station and they fall! Nutan is seemingly angry, and Dev spreads his charm with this unforgettable song, so deftly picturised by Vijay Anand, which was his forte. There was some distant innocence in Nutan, unseen now, and the manner in which she feigns anger creates flutter in hearts! ‘Dekho rootha na karo Baat nazron ki suno – Hum na bolenge kabhi

Yun sataya na karo Dekho rootha na karo’ 1971 was the year when Vijay Anand directed his favourite film under Navketan, casting Dev, himself and Muntaj. The theme was ‘ethics’ in medical profession. Despite great direction and screenplay, the film was not a big success. But remains as a great ‘Navketan’ film, adding to its history and reputation. By now Neeraj was regular in ‘Navketan’ camp, and he wrote some nice songs, put to music by Sachin da. This duet between the doctor Dev and his wife Muntaj was in rural surroundings, in cycle, and was marvellously picturised among mustard fields and scenic setting. This song is sung by many married couples, who revive their ‘vows’ and love with its verses: ‘Han maine kasam li, han maine kasam li Nahin honge juda hum tum, maine kasam li’ ‘... Pa ke tujhe khoya tumhen, kho ke kabhi paya Janam janam tere liye badli hamne kaya’ It was extremely difficult to select among these songs. All are as bright and beautiful as the other: ‘Wo dekhken to unki inayat, na dekhken to rona kya’ – ‘Funtoosh’. ‘Aa gup chup gup chup pyar karen’ – ‘Sazaa’. ‘Aankhon hi aankhon mein ishara ho gaya’ – ‘CID’. ‘Aankhon mein kya ji, ruphela badal’ – ‘Nau Do Gyareh’. ‘Gaata rahe mera dil, tu hi meri manzil’ – ‘Guide’. ‘Kanchi re, Kanchi re, preet meri sanchi’ – ‘Hare Ram Hare Krishna’. ‘Bahut door mujhe chale jaane hai’ – ‘Heera Panna’. ‘Pal bhar ke liye koi hamen pyar kar le’ – ‘Johnny Mera Naam’. ‘Ankhon ankhon mein hum tum ho gaye deewane’ – ‘Mahal’. ‘Chhod do anchal, zamana kya kahega’ – ‘Paying Guest’. ‘Dhire dhire chal, chandagan mein’ – ‘Love Marriage’. ‘Dil ka bhanwar kare pukar’ – ‘Tere Ghar Ke Samne’. ‘Tujhe jeevan ki dor se bandh liya hai’ – ‘Asli Nagli’. ‘Yaad kiya dil ne, kahan ho tum’ – ‘Patita’.

There were contributions of so many artists in making the image of Dev, and the first person was Vijay Anand, who gave an image makeover, confidence and success to continue! The second person was Sachin Dev Burman, who gave his consistent great music to Dev and ‘Navketan’. Lyricists such as Sahir, Shailendra, Majrooh, Hasrat Jaipuri and Neeraj gave variety to the verses. Dev had stated that Kishore Kumar was his voice, but in my opinion Mohammad Rafi has sung the best songs for him. And finally, a ‘bevy of heroines’ completed his romantic image. We shall sing forever, and Dev shall live forever!



# MAHAKAVI BANKIDAS ASIYA: THE FEARLESS VOICE OF RAJASTHAN'S CONSCIENCE

TDG NETWORK

In the golden sands of Rajasthan, where the echo of valor and royalty shaped the culture for centuries, emerged a voice that neither glorified kings blindly nor remained silent against social evils. That voice belonged to Mahakavi Bankidas Asiya, a poet whose sharp intellect, biting satire, and fearless pen made him one of the most celebrated literary figures of pre-independence Rajasthan.

Born in 1771 in Asiya village of Pali district, Bankidas belonged to a Charan family, traditionally known for their poetry and historical chronicles. However, he was no ordinary court poet. While many poets of the time chose to sing praises of rulers for patronage,

Bankidas chose truth over flattery, principles over politics, and justice over personal gain. This boldness not only set him apart but cemented his place as a reformer and moral critic in the history of Rajasthani literature.

## A POET WITH A PURPOSE

Bankidas was deeply rooted in the Dingal language, a literary form of Rajasthani used by Charan poets. He mastered the form, but his content transcended traditional boundaries. Rather than limiting his work to heroic ballads or courtly praise, Bankidas wielded his poetry as a weapon of social and political critique.

He exposed the corruption, hypocrisy, and moral decline of the ruling elite. His works challenged the

greed and misrule of the kings, the exploitation of the poor, and the decay of Rajput values. In a society bound by rigid hierarchy, Bankidas's voice was remarkably egalitarian.

His poetic style combined wit, sarcasm, wisdom, and a deep sense of justice. Through couplets and lyrical satire, he pierced through the facades of power and piety.

## THE VOLTAIRE OF RAJASTHAN

Bankidas is often referred to as the "Voltaire of Rajasthan", and not without reason. Like the French philosopher and writer, he used the power of the written word to question authority, demand accountability, and advocate for moral integrity.

His poetry did not just



entertain; it educated and provoked thought. He was among the first poets in Rajasthan to criticize the British colonial presence, long before full-fledged resistance began. He warned the Rajput kings against becoming puppets of the British and urged them to revive the lost glory of self-rule and virtue.

In one of his powerful verses, he wrote: "Na hove raj reet bina, raj kare jo dharm base, Na hove bhar reet bina, bhar base jo karm base." (There can be no kingdom without righteous conduct; a nation stands only on the foundation of noble deeds.)

These lines reflect not only his poetic brilliance but also his vision for an ethical and self-reliant society.

## A CHRONICLER OF HIS TIMES

Bankidas wasn't just a poet; he was a keen observer and chronicler. His works serve as social documents of 18th and 19th-century Rajasthan. He described wars, droughts, famines, taxation systems, and the changing dynamics between rulers and the ruled.

At a time when oral tradition was strong and written records were scarce, Bankidas's poetry captured real voices and lived experiences. He gave voice to peasants, women, soldiers, and even animals — often mocking the apathy of the powerful toward the powerless.

Mahakavi Bankidas Asiya passed away in 1833, but his words continue to resonate. His fearless critiques, timeless wisdom, and poet-

ic mastery have earned him a revered place in Rajasthani literature and Indian socio-political thought.

Today, in a world still grappling with power imbalances and social injustices, Bankidas's verses remind us of the courage it takes to speak the truth and the power of literature to challenge the status quo. Schools and literary circles in Rajasthan still study and recite his poetry, not just for its linguistic beauty but for the moral clarity it offers.

Bankidas Asiya was more than a poet — he was a moral compass, a social reformer, and a cultural warrior who shaped the conscience of Rajasthan. His pen may have fallen silent, but his words continue to inspire those who seek justice, honesty, and fearless expression.

## Meera Bai: The rebel saint who sang for love, not thrones

TDG NETWORK

In the regal halls of Rajputana, where power, pride, and politics ruled, one woman chose love over lineage, devotion over duty, and song over silence. That woman was Meera Bai — poet, saint, mystic, and perhaps the most iconic female figure in India's Bhakti movement. Centuries after her time, Meera's songs still echo through temples and homes, her name still evokes surrender, and her life still inspires those who choose the inner truth over the outer world.

Born around 1498 CE into the royal Rathore family of Merta, a small kingdom in present-day Rajasthan, Meera Bai was destined for the life of a princess. But even as a child, her heart was captivated not by jewels and palaces, but by a small idol of Krishna, gifted to her in her youth. That idol, she would later say, was not a toy or ornament — it was her beloved, her husband, her lord.

## A DEVOTEE IN A ROYAL CAGE

Though born into luxury, Meera's life was anything but comfortable. Like most



Rajput girls of noble birth, she was married young — to Bhoj Raj, the crown prince of Mewar, one of the most powerful kingdoms of Rajasthan. Udaipur's royal household expected Meera to follow the roles of a dutiful daughter-in-law and queen-to-be.

But Meera's heart was elsewhere. She would spend hours in temples, singing and dancing in devotion to Lord Krishna, composing poetry in Braj and Mewari dialects that overflowed with longing, surrender, and divine love. Her royal in-laws were appalled — how could a princess behave like a wandering minstrel?

Her devotion was seen as madness, even rebellion. Legends speak of multiple attempts to silence her — poison in her food, snakes hidden in flower baskets

— but she remained untouched, protected, as she believed, by her beloved Krishna.

## THE VOICE OF BHAKTI AND DEFIANCE

Meera Bai was a pioneer in many ways. At a time when women were not permitted to speak freely in public, Meera sang boldly in temples, markets, and village squares. At a time when religion was confined to caste and ritual, Meera's poems spoke of a personal, intimate God who did not care for birth or hierarchy.

She defied both patriarchal norms and orthodoxy, insisting that divine love was above all else. In her poems, she called herself the "servant" of Giridhar Gopal (another name for Krishna), rejecting the identities imposed on her by society — wife,



daughter-in-law, queen. She belonged to no one but Krishna.

Her bhajans (devotional songs) are deeply personal, yet universally resonant. They speak of painful separation, sweet surrender, and the ecstasy of union — not just in a spiritual sense, but in a very human, emotional tone that transcends time.

"Mere to Giridhar Gopal, doosro na ko" ("Only Giridhar Gopal is mine, no one else matters.")

This simple yet profound declaration of faith has inspired millions for centuries.

## PILGRIM OF THE SOUL

After the death of her husband and repeated clashes with her in-laws, Meera is believed to have renounced royal life entirely. She wandered from temple to temple, visiting Vrindavan,

the sacred land of Krishna, and Dwarka, his legendary kingdom. Some stories suggest she was refused entry into certain temples because she was a woman — yet her name today is sung louder than those who barred her.

Meera's life became a living pilgrimage, not just across geography, but across inner landscapes of faith and identity. She sang not just for Krishna, but through Krishna, expressing the agony and ecstasy of all human love — the yearning for something eternal, beyond this fleeting world.

## A FEMINIST ICON AHEAD OF HER TIME

Though she never used the language of activism, Meera Bai's life was radically feminist. She broke every boundary expected of a woman — royal or

otherwise — in her time. She chose her path, her god, and her voice, without asking for permission. She suffered abuse, exile, slander — and yet, she never stopped singing.

In a world that demanded silence and submission, Meera answered with song and strength. She gave a new voice to women, to the powerless, to the spiritual seekers who didn't fit into temples or courts. She was one of the earliest Indian

women to use poetry as a means of self-expression, self-liberation, and spiritual revolt.

**LEGACY THAT STILL SINGS**

Meera Bai is not just a historical figure — she is a living presence in India's devotional landscape. Her songs are sung in temples, classical concerts, folk performances, and even in films. They transcend religion, caste, and language.

Her poetry has been translated into dozens of languages. Scholars analyze her metaphors, saints invoke her spirit, and musicians breathe life into her words centuries after her passing — believed to be around 1547 CE, possibly in Dwarka, where legend says she merged into her beloved Krishna's idol in divine union.

In Rajasthan, Meera is revered not just as a poet, but as a symbol of devotion, defiance, and divine love. Temples, towns, and festivals are named in her honor. She is not just remembered — she is felt.

## THE SONG THAT CANNOT BE SILENCED

Meera Bai's life was a paradox — a royal who chose poverty, a woman who chose freedom, a devotee who defied power. Her legacy is not of conquest, but of conviction. Not of building empires, but of building a path between the soul and the divine — a path lined with songs, sacrifice, and sublime love.

In a time when the world still questions women's voices, spiritual freedom, and individual choice, Meera Bai's song remains as relevant, as rebellious, and as radiant as ever.



## Rani Hadirani: The legendary rajput queen of courage and sacrifice

TDG NETWORK

Rani Hadirani is remembered as one of Rajasthan's most valiant and inspiring queens, whose story epitomizes the ideals of bravery, honor, and sacrifice that define Rajput culture. Though much of her life is shrouded in legend, the legacy she left behind continues to inspire generations, particularly in the region of Bundi, where her tale is deeply embedded in local folklore and oral tradition.

Born into a noble Rajput family, Hadirani's life took a dramatic turn shortly after her marriage. On the very night of her wedding, her husband was called to war—a common reality for many Rajput warriors and their families during the turbulent times of medieval Rajasthan. Rather than succumb to despair or helplessness, Hadirani displayed extraordinary courage and resolve. Knowing the dangers her husband faced, she chose to accompany him to

the battlefield, determined to share his fate regardless of the outcome.

Her unwavering commitment to her husband's honor and the Rajput code of valor made her stand apart. It is said that she encouraged her husband and the Rajput soldiers to fight bravely against their enemies, urging them to prefer death over dishonor. Hadirani's bravery was not only personal but emblematic of the Rajput ethos, where women often played pivotal roles in inspiring and upholding the martial spirit of their families and clans.

Tragically, her husband fell in battle. Rather than live without him, Hadirani chose to commit sati, the Rajput tradition of self-immolation on her husband's funeral pyre. While this practice is controversial today, in the context of her time and culture, it was seen as the ultimate act of loyalty and devotion. Her sacrifice was celebrated as a testament to her courage, fidelity, and unyielding spirit.



Beyond the dramatic narrative of her life and death, Rani Hadirani's story had a lasting impact on the cultural fabric of Rajasthan. Her courage became a source of inspiration for Rajput women, demonstrating that valor was not solely a male domain but a shared ideal upheld by women as well. Folklore and ballads sung by Charans and other traditional poets immortalized her name, praising her steadfastness and strength.

Hadirani's legacy also symbol-

izes the complex role of women in Rajput society. While constrained by rigid patriarchal norms, Rajput women like Hadirani exercised influence in preserving their family's honor and motivating warriors. They were custodians of tradition and morale, often seen as embodiments of Rajput pride and resilience. Hadirani's example reinforced the belief that a warrior's valor was inseparable from the support and sacrifice of the women behind him.

Her story is still recounted in villages and towns across Rajasthan, particularly in Bundi, where annual commemorations and cultural events honor her memory. Through these celebrations, the values she stood for—bravery, loyalty, and sacrifice—continue to resonate, inspiring not only women but the entire community to cherish their heritage and uphold principles of courage.

While historical records about Rani Hadirani may be sparse,



the oral traditions and folk songs carry her spirit vividly. These narratives form an essential part of Rajasthan's rich tapestry of veer ras (heroic poetry), where the lives of queens and warriors are chronicled with poetic grandeur. The repeated telling of her story across generations has ensured that her legacy remains alive, transcending the boundaries of time.

In modern Rajasthan, Rani Hadirani is increasingly recognized not just as a symbol of Rajput valor, but also as a figure representing female strength and agency in a traditionally male-dominated society.

Her life invites reflection on the roles women played in historical struggles and the ways their contributions, often understated, shaped the social and cultural landscape.


To sum up, Rani Hadirani's life is a remarkable chapter in Rajasthan's history. From the moment she chose to stand beside her husband against overwhelming odds to her ultimate sacrifice, she exemplified the highest ideals of Rajput womanhood. Her story serves as a beacon of inspiration—reminding us that courage and loyalty know no gender, and that the spirit of sacrifice is timeless.

Her legacy lives on, etched in the hearts of the people of Rajasthan and echoed through the songs and stories that celebrate her indomitable spirit. Rani Hadirani remains not just a historical figure but a legendary personality whose life and sacrifices continue to inspire pride, respect, and a deeper understanding of Rajasthan's rich heritage.









A thought for today

I thought we were friends,  
but now we're enemies

ALEC BENJAMIN, song

Listen To Ladakh

GOI must engage protesters, even if they demand a lot

Explanations for “the bloodiest day” in Ladakh remain sharply divided between govt and protesters. But one thing on which there should be consensus is what BJP leader and former Ladakh MP Jamyang Tsering Namgyal has written in his letter to the Lt Governor, “Ladakh stands at a fragile juncture.” The mood in the Himalayan desert region has darkened a lot since it became a separate Union Territory after the abrogation of Article 370. At the time, Namgyal himself gave such a passionate parliamentary speech welcoming these developments that it went viral. Engineer-innovator Sonam Wangchuk, who inspired *3 Idiots*, also welcomed them heartily. Wangchuk has now been arrested, with govt linking Wednesday’s mob violence and arson to his “provocative” speeches.

None of this, of course, explains why four unarmed protesters died with multiple bullet wounds that day. Even those who don’t appreciate how Wangchuk’s been talking up a Gen-Z revolution of the Nepal type in Ladakh, should recognise that over-strong police action is the opposite of a solution in this case. Yes, the big local asks of both statehood and inclusion in the Sixth Schedule are difficult to meet. With its 3L population Ladakh has zero chance of getting statehood when it’s still denied to J&K. As for the Sixth Schedule, no govt, whatever its political stripe, is likely to open this Pandora’s box. If it did, Manipur would be ahead of Ladakh in the line. But GOI has a time and tested way of walking situations back from crisis, which is to really get into engage mode.

Govt told a parliamentary committee this year that none of the 1,275 gazetted posts in Ladakh have been filled since 2019. Wangchuk and others’ talk of Ladakh becoming another Tibet is of course utter nonsense – one is without even a fraction of persecution of the other. But Ladhakis’ fears of becoming climate refugees are connected to real environmental vulnerabilities that need to be taken very seriously. Hearing and calming by the Centre is the need of the hour.

Vitamin T

Trump tariff on pharma is a nudge to diversify markets

It isn’t clear whether Trump’s 100% tariff on imported “branded or patented” drugs will affect India, but markets turned cautious on Friday. Pharma stocks fell between 1% and 5%. The tariff isn’t entirely unexpected – Trump has been talking about imposing it since April. In July, he threatened to tax imported pharmaceuticals at 200%. In Aug, he said the tariff could go up to 250%. What stumped the market was the timing, as he had earlier hinted at starting with a “small tariff” and peaking in 12 to 18 months.

The impact on India will depend on how “branded” is interpreted. US is India’s biggest pharma market, buying roughly \$10bn worth of drugs last year. But these are largely low-cost generics, including drugs for cardiovascular and neurological disorders. Experts believe these off-patent formulations – even if shipped under a brand name – may be exempt from the new tariff. However, clarity on this point will emerge only after US issues enforcement rules.

For Trump, making US *aatmanirbhar* in medicines has been a priority since his first term. According to a White House release, US makes 40% of its finished drugs, but the share of locally made APIs is just 10%. This explains the exemption offered to pharma firms setting up plants in US. But the abruptness of Trump’s decisions – like with H-1B visas last week, and the penal tariff on India in July – is unsettling. Countries like Ireland, Switzerland, and Germany, which supply high-value branded and patented drugs, will clearly bear the brunt of his latest tariff. But if branded generics are also taxed, 40% of India’s pharma exports will be at risk. Even if Indian generics are spared for now, Trump’s sword will hang over them. So, the search for new markets should begin immediately.

Oak Culture And Humans

What the life of tree teaches us on survival strategies

Humans can brag about their ability to control nature, but the reality is we’re powerless in the face of heatwaves, floods, wildfires and natural phenomena. Survival needs collective strategies against threats – and mutual aid goes beyond the species barrier.

That’s what forests show us. Collaborate amid competition. Collaborate across species. But humankind, writes *Laurent Tillon* in *Being An Oak: Life as a Tree*, “resists co-evolution with the microbes that have shaped us into our species, consciously risking gradual decline in collective immunity through isolation and excessive sterilisation.”

But we get ahead of the story – the story of Tillon’s oak, his friend and confidant. Of discovering *who* the tree – at least 240 years old – is, in forest Silva, near Paris. The tree that showed Tillon the nature of nature – challenges in sourcing nutrients, the fight to grow tall, keeping the canopy safe, and competing and coexisting with a million creatures – plant, animal and microbe. It’s never easy. It’s never hopeless either.

An intricate lattice of stories with incredible detail shows the oak’s relationships with other trees, beetles, woodpeckers, salamanders, foragers, lizards, wolves, and humans. “Trees that live in a community make up a super organism whose powers are immeasurable,” Tillon writes.

By the 17th century, oaks provided wood for building boats, to meet maritime ambitions of King Louis XVI, also the first to engage in ‘forest management’. Over centuries, railways, cities, industry – all needed wood from the forest. This oak’s life was at risk from the minute it was born,

around 1780, an acorn, with a plantlet and a radicle inside, organs provided by the parent oak.

A fieldmouse grabs and runs with the acorn as it falls to the ground as winter loots – only to forget about it. A good crop of acorns means fieldmice eat up all the acorns, damaging them, the abundance driving them nuts. So the oaks pull back on producing acorns the next season. Rodents’ population plunges – the plant world, says the book, outwits/fools the animal – a phenomenon called ‘masting’. That’s just one strategy.

Once the acorn strikes root, it is rooted for the rest of its life. Tillon’s oak can’t move at all. “This will be his calling for the rest of his life.” Roots don’t grow randomly – “the tip of each is a veritable homing device. Nothing happens by chance.” It’s not that the oak gives an order, but in chemical and electrical messages still a secret to scientists, stimuli are received for roots to head downwards and a plantlet to vie towards light. Caterpillars time their emergence from eggs when the oak is about to bud. Yet the oak’s branches too appear to hold off on budding – to make it harder for caterpillars to attack.

The young oak knows the approach of fungi is an act of aggression, but local “bacterial diplomacy” ensures all three strike up a relationship of nutrient and information exchange, to signal deficiency and danger, for all time to come. These early “breach in defences” only help the oak mount an efficient immune response against attacks through its life. Collaboration and a perpetual learning of strategies – relationships within competition.

That’s the lesson for humans.

Festival That Invents Its People

Puja is best understood as a carnivalisation of faith, and as an example of a bustling creative economy. It blurs the line between religion and culture so thoroughly that the distinction becomes meaningless. Even atheists celebrate without a trace of irony

Partha Sinha

Every autumn, as the monsoon sighs into retreat, Bengal begins its favourite act of reinvention. For five luminous days the word Bengali stops being a birthmark or a dialect and turns into a mood, something worn like a borrowed fragrance. Durga Puja is not just a festival; it is a thesis in belonging, an annual argument that a people are not merely born but made and remade by the rhythms they choose to keep.

The first signs arrive when the air turns sharp and honeyed with shiuli blossoms. Then the dhak begins its conspiratorial roll, half warning and half welcome, until the city’s own pulse falls into step. Even the conch, when it answers, feels like a summons everyone obeys without thought. These are not simply sounds and scents; they are passwords. One either knows them or does not, and for those who do, something inside stands to attention long before any formal prayer.

Generations have rehearsed this code until it becomes instinct. Grandmothers bend over alpanas that look like galaxies of chalk dust. Fathers light the evening lamp with a gesture that has survived both colonial reform and cheerful irreverence. Children watch without knowing these movements are entering their bones. Years later the same gestures surface unbidden, culture hidden in muscle and memory. Sociologists might call it habitus; to Bengalis it is simply home rehearsed.

And it travels. In a Houston community centre or a Birmingham church hall, the Probasi Puja gathers its exiles like a homing tide. Clay is shipped across continents, bhog recipes coaxed from supermarket shelves, centuries compressed into a weekend. The anjali in a rented gym can cut deeper than the grandest pandal in North Kolkata because it is both faithful and makeshift. The sound of the dhak in those distant halls carries an echo of the Hooghly, travelling across time zones refusing to forget its source.

Meanwhile, the city of origin has turned ritual into theatre. Kolkata’s pandals rise each year like temporary cathedrals of bamboo and papier-mâché. Gates blaze with satire or fantasy, religion and capitalism waltzing

together without embarrassment. Corporate banners flutter beside clay goddesses. Instagram reels jostle with the flicker of oil lamps. The creative economy around Puja now rivals formal industries, keeping potters, electricians, light riggers and dhakis employed



and inspired. Ashis Nandy once called it the carnivalisation of faith, and the phrase remains perfectly tailored.

Here lies one of Puja’s great paradoxes: it blurs the line between religion and culture so thoroughly that the distinction becomes meaningless. The goddess may be sculpted in clay, but she is equally alive in cinema, poetry, politics, cuisine and conversation. To attend Puja is not necessarily to bow before divinity; it is to

acknowledge a grammar of community. Even the self-declared atheist, that favourite archetype of Bengal’s left-liberal imagination, walks the pandal routes with no trace of irony. In a society that has argued itself hoarse over dogma, Durga Puja has quietly escaped the argument by offering something more generous than faith: participation without precondition.

Beneath the neon and the sponsorships, the old codes persist: the smoke of the dhumuchi curling like an improvised raga, the red smudge of sindur on the final evening, the slow immersion procession that carries the goddess to the river’s dark mouth. These are what Roland Barthes might have called mythologies, symbols so deeply shared that their meaning seems carried in the air itself. To miss them is to occupy that uneasy in-between, the insider-outsider who speaks the language but not the subtext.

It is here that the idea of Bengaliness finds its most distilled form. Not merely geography or language, but a way of being in the world that prefers lyric over literal, values adda as much as argument, and insists that joy is a collective duty. Puja stages this Bengaliness in its purest form, turning the city briefly into a utopia it knows it cannot sustain but cannot resist either.

Durga Puja thrives on this tension. It shows how commerce can preserve culture even as it exploits it, how a diaspora can re-create a homeland while reinventing it, how ritual can be both sacred and gently profane. Belonging here is not a static fact but a verb, a choreography of memory and invention, a dream rehearsed until it feels like truth. Each year the festival proves that identity is not a relic of the past but a performance of the present.

Then the last conch sounds. The idol slides into the dark river and the city exhales. Smoke thins, lights dim and streets, so recently a riot of sound and colour, grow almost shy. A final breath of shiuli drifts across the water and the ache is not only for a departing goddess but for the fragile fraternity of those five days. For a moment, the city knows what it means to be Bengali: not a matter of ancestry alone, but of choosing, together, to be reinvented. Next year she will return, as always. But on this night the ache of her leaving feels older than the river itself, like a memory that belongs as much to the future as to the past.

The Cage Of Expectations: Love Mostly Means Forgiveness

When we want our partners to laugh at the same jokes and cry at the same movies, it makes for a poor relationship. The strongest bonds are not between perfectly compatible people but between forgiving ones

Sivakumar.Sundaram@timesofindia.com

The morning after my column about their relationship was published (“The Filter Coffee Of Love”, Aug 23), Anant folded the newspaper, smiled faintly, and looked at Maya. “So,” he asked, “did you see yourself in it?” She laughed. “I saw you, actually. But then again, maybe I also saw me. Strange, isn’t it? A mirror shows both faces, even when we only wish to see one.”

The article had travelled far into homes, WhatsApp groups, and hearts. Some readers wrote that in their lives, the roles were reversed: their wives were the Anant, their husbands the Maya. Others said the story felt so intimate, they wondered if it had been written only about them. But that was the beauty of it, the story wasn’t about a man or a woman, it was about the delicate dance of two human beings trying not to step on each other’s toes.

That evening, Anant brewed their usual coffee. He stirred slowly, then said, “You know, Maya, the hardest part of love isn’t loving. It’s *allowing*. Allowing the other to be silent when you want words. Allowing them to sleep when you want to speak. Allowing them their quirks, their solitude, their stubborn little rituals.”

Maya sipped, her eyes soft. “And not mistaking those silences for rejection,” she added. “Because isn’t that what we do? We measure the other by the scale of our own expectations. We want them to laugh at the same jokes, cry at the same movies, pray in the same way, and call at the same hour. We build a cage out of love, forgetting that love was meant to set free.”

The truth was simple, yet slippery: flaws are inevitable, but acceptance is optional. The strongest bonds are not between perfect people but between forgiving ones. And that’s when Maya whispered a line that lingered long after the coffee cups were cleared: “Forgiving is freedom.”

A *Journal of Health Psychology* study found that in those with a forgiving nature, the link between stress and illness nearly disappeared. This is what the Jain festival of Paryushan or the fast during the current Navratras has emphasised for centuries. It reminds us that forgiveness is a way to release the burdens that weigh on the heart. Unless we forgive, hurt lingers, and impressions carry forward. Most of the hurt we feel begins with misunderstandings. But when emotional residue is cleared, even if the mind recalls, we have risen above it.

A forgiving heart is free, a grateful heart is content, whereas an unforgiving heart carries a burden and is restless. Meditation, cleaning, and prayer support this inner change. With regular practice, the heart becomes simple and pure, filled with humility and sincerity. A heart soaked in gratitude towards the significant other, no longer needs to forgive, for it holds no grudges. In such a heart, there is no pride to be wounded. Forgiveness frees us, but love unites us. It lets the heart become a channel of peace for the world.

“Longevity of life,” Anant mused, “is tied to longevity of relationships. You can walk a hundred years, but it means little if you walk alone. Companionship matters. And when compatibility falters, cooperation must step in. When cooperation weakens, cohesiveness must bind.

And that cohesiveness can only come from empathy, understanding, acceptance and yes, forgiveness.”

Maya placed her hand on his. “So perhaps our task is not to iron out each other’s wrinkles but to learn

to live with them like the creases in a well-worn saree, or the scratches on an old gramophone record. The music still plays.”

As the night grew quiet, Anant poured the last drops of the ‘filtered’ coffee. “Here’s to our flaws, Maya,” he said, raising his cup. “To our flaws,” she echoed. “And to the freedom that makes love last.”

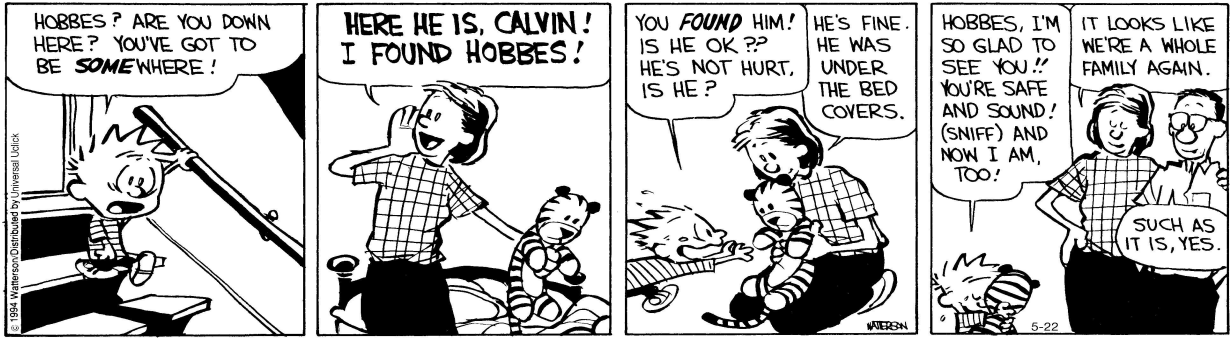
**Reflection |** When I first wrote ‘The Filter Coffee Of Love’, I did not imagine the avalanche of letters, confessions, and reflections it would trigger. What it revealed was universal: every couple, every friendship, every family bond hides within it a tug-of-war between expectations and acceptance. The roles may reverse, sometimes she is Anant, sometimes he is Maya but the principle is timeless.

We cannot perfect each other, but we can preserve each other. We cannot eliminate flaws, but we can embrace them. We cannot cage love, but we can allow it to breathe. And above all, we can forgive, because forgiveness is freedom.

For in the end, relationships are not about winning or yielding, they are about enduring. And endurance is not the absence of friction, but the art of staying together despite it.

After all, the sweetest filter coffee is not the one without bitterness, but the one where bitterness and sweetness blend just enough to keep us coming back for another sip without getting caged, but flowing through our own filters.

Calvin & Hobbes



Law Of Karm: Every Cause Finds Its Effect

Muni Pranamyasagar

In the infinite rhythm of existence, nothing happens without a cause, and nothing disappears without leaving its trace. Karm and rebirth are not two separate truths – they are two pulses of the same eternal heartbeat. Without karm, there can be no rebirth; without rebirth, karma remains incomplete. Birth itself is not an accident. The body may be formed by the union of mother and father, but the light of consciousness that animates it is carried forward from the karmic impressions of past lives. These impressions, sanskars, travel with the soul like a subtle fragrance, unseen yet unmistakable. This is why a newborn instinctively knows to drink milk without being taught. Such instincts are not lessons of this life; they

are the memories of a journey before this beginning. To deny rebirth is to deny the soul and the law that governs it. If fruits of our actions were confined only to the present life, the moral order of the universe would collapse.

Why strive for goodness when evil often seems to bring immediate pleasure, and noble deeds might lead to suffering? Law of karm assures that every cause finds its effect even if it takes lifetimes to unfold.

Look at the world. Differences in skill sets are not random; they are blossoming of seeds sown before. The body is shaped by biology, but the life within it is shaped by karm – by the subtle vibrations created through our thoughts, words, and deeds. Karm works

through what may be called chain and change. The chain preserves continuity of the soul’s journey; change arises through new karmas we create in each moment.

We may not see our past lives or the ones yet to come, but we are in the middle of a long, unbroken sequence, preceded by countless yesterdays and followed by countless tomorrows, until we attain liberation.

To reject karm and rebirth is to invite moral emptiness. Without the knowledge that every action will return, there is no true reason to cultivate patience, compassion, or restraint.

But when this truth is accepted, life becomes more deliberate. One begins to act not for immediate gain, but for the purity and freedom of the soul.

Rebirth is not punishment; it is an opportunity to attain Self-realisation. It is the continuation of our journey towards liberation. Each life is a classroom where old karmas can be burnt and new, nobler ones can be sown like seeds that blossom in future. The cycle ends only when all karmic bonds are dissolved and the soul shines in its original, pure, and blissful state. Thus, karm, rebirth, and the soul form an inseparable triad. Ignore one, and the whole structure collapses. Recognising this truth transforms how we live – making each action conscious, each choice meaningful, and each moment a step towards liberation. Life is not a single page; it is a vast scripture written across lifetimes. And the ink is karm. What we write today will be the story we live tomorrow.



THE SPEAKING TREE

Sacred space

In Devi Mahatmyam, Durga is said to pervade cosmos to create, maintain and periodically destroy it, according to rhythms. When cosmic balance is threatened by enemies of Gods, though she is eternal, the goddess becomes manifest over and over again to protect the world.

Sri M



## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

### After the MiG-21

An urgent call for India's next-gen jets

THE MiG-21's final flight over Chandigarh on September 26 symbolised more than the retirement of an aircraft; it marked a transition in how India must think about air power. For decades, this Soviet-era fighter was more than a machine — it was a statement of intent by a young nation eager to secure its skies. Its endurance reflected India's ability to stretch limited resources, but also the tendency to delay modernisation until crises forced change. The MiG's twilight years exposed those vulnerabilities. The jet's longevity became its weakness. Over 300 crashes and repeated technical snags turned it into the dreaded 'flying coffin'. Though poor training and overstretched airframes often explained the accidents, the risks became unsustainable. These were indicators of an overreliance on imported platforms without sufficient investment in indigenous development.

The farewell ceremony highlighted both continuity and change. Air Chief Marshal AP Singh flew the last sortie, joined by Squadron Leader Priya Sharma, representing the generational and gender shifts within the IAF. The formation flypast featuring Tejas jets and Jaguars was a reminder that symbolism must quickly translate into operational readiness.

The lesson from the MiG's journey is clear: India must not delay modernisation. India's security in the decades ahead will depend on how quickly it can build, deploy and sustain its own fighters. The Rs 624-billion Tejas Mk-1A order is a step forward, but the gap left by the MiG is not easy to fill. Though the Tejas Mk-2, AMCA and TEDBF projects hold promise, delays, supply issues and technological dependencies remain key risks, which is strategically not comforting. With neighbours modernising aggressively, our air power cannot afford to be reactive. As geopolitical pressures mount along multiple borders, having a powerful air force isn't a luxury, it's a necessity.

## Pharma tariffs

Trump keeps Indian drug-makers on tenterhooks

A MID renewed talks between India and the US to finalise a much-delayed trade agreement, President Donald Trump has announced 100 per cent tariffs on branded and patented pharmaceutical products — unless manufacturing firms set up production facilities in America. This move has implications for India, which has established itself as the 'pharmacy of the world' and exports over \$10 billion worth of pharma products to the US out of \$30 billion worldwide. India mainly supplies low-cost generic drugs to the US; fortunately, these are not covered under the new tariff regime. However, there is no clarity so far on active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs). Moreover, major Indian drug-makers are increasingly focusing on complex generics, which largely fall under the branded or patented category. Generic versions of these products, which include inhalers, injectables and ophthalmic solutions, are difficult to develop due to their complex formulations. These items are commercially important for manufacturers as they help them access higher-value markets and reduce dependence on traditional generics.

No wonder the Indian pharma industry is keeping its fingers crossed. The sudden drop in some of the country's biggest pharma stocks might be just a short-term panic reaction, but there is no doubt that uncertainty prevails over Trump's next move. What if he unleashes a tariff onslaught on generics as well? The argument against such a drastic step is that healthcare costs will go up and patients' access to medicines for critical diseases will become restricted. India must drive home this point during the ongoing trade talks.

The prohibitive tariffs might prove to be counter-productive, adversely impacting the American healthcare system that is already at the receiving end of Trump's disruptive decisions. India, a major supplier of affordable medicines to the US, must ensure that the upcoming pact has adequate safeguards for its pharma sector.

#### ON THIS DAY...50 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

CHANDIGARH, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1975

#### Good riddance

The South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) has been a hollow shell for quite some time. And its formal liquidation, therefore, comes as no surprise. No tears need be shed for the end of this anachronistic set-up that was based on wrong assumptions and misguided universalism. The communique issued by the six-nation council after its New York meeting offers no specific reasons for winding up the SEATO, except suggesting that the momentous developments in Indochina have had their traumatic effects on this 'brainchild' of the late John Foster Dulles. Left to itself, the US would have liked continuation of the organisation. It, however, had no choice in view of the mounting opposition to the alliance in the Philippines and Thailand. Britain, New Zealand and Australia also wanted SEATO to continue its services as they thought it to be useful for peace and security of the region. But peace for whom and at what price? SEATO's usefulness had ceased the day US President Nixon landed at Peking airport. The whole thrust of SEATO was supposedly directed against the advance of communism in the region and this surely did not fit in with America's open flirtation with Mao's China. That only made the Asian members of the alliance distrust the American policy in South-East Asia. The Thais and the Filipinos felt perturbed at Washington's new postures. Since they suffered in other ways because of their association with SEATO, their unabashed alignment made them suspect in the eyes of the Third World and the target of uncompromising communist hostility.

# There's something special about Bihar

Manna for poll-bound state is in contrast to PM's parsimonious Punjab flood relief announcement



#### THE GREAT GAME

JYOTI MALHOTRA

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's transfer of Rs 10,000 each to 75 lakh women in Bihar comes on the day a special session of the Punjab Assembly demanded a special package of Rs 20,000 crore from the BJP-ruled Centre, to alleviate the costs that will be needed to help the flood-affected people in the state.

The PM's one-time generous transfer to Bihar's women amounts to Rs 7,500 crore. Contrast this with the Rs 1,600 crore relief package the PM promised Punjab when he came here about three weeks ago. BJP sources say this is just the first tranche and that Punjab needs to do its homework before more can be sent, but no such questions are being asked for the Bihar package.

In fact, no questions are being asked why the PM is sending such a generous sum to Bihar's extraordinary women in the first place. So here are some:

Has there been a flood in Bihar that has damaged a standing paddy crop on around four lakh acres? Have a few hundred animals, both cows and buffaloes, the backbone of the state dairy cooperative as well as of families in the predominantly agrarian state, gone missing? Have homes been washed away, schools damaged beyond recognition, fields silted over with mud and clay which are now being cleared by tractors and JCBs? Has the fencing on the international border — Bihar has one with Nepal, but it's an open one, which means there's no fence — that divides India from Pakistan been swept away?

The reason for the PM's generosity for Bihar, of course, is



WELFARE SCHEMES: The fact is that PM Modi has literally forged a 'women constituency'. ANI

clear — Bihar is going to the polls in November.

The reason for his focus on Bihar's 6.3 crore women — one eligible woman from every family may apply to start an employment of her choice, and if her application is approved, then the amount may go up to Rs 2 lakh — is also clear. The PM is hoping that Bihar's *mahilas*, its 'M' constituency, will vote for the BJP with both their hands, cutting across caste and creed, just as the rest of the country has started doing.

Clearly, there's something special about Bihar. Moreover, *samajhne vaalon ko ishaara kaafi hai*, they say, that smart people only need a signal to understand. Although the BJP is trying really hard to help the flood-affected in Punjab — and is working on new initiatives to help with loans for missing milch animals, especially in the six districts that border Pakistan, as well as in the dairy cooperative sector across the state — the party also knows it will take much more to overcome the Punjabi's accumulating resentments against the Centre.

In many ways, this is a make-or-break moment for Punjab. If you are helping out in small or big ways, then you will be counted. If you aren't, you won't. That's why the Congress better

The BJP has unabashedly tempted women voters with sops in states going to the polls.

watch out. Before the floods, the *aam aadmi* on the streets would tell you that they were fed up with the ruling AAP and would teach it a lesson in the 2027 elections, just as they taught the Congress a lesson in 2022 and swept in 92 AAP MLAs.

In fact, people used to say that if elections were held today in Punjab, the odds would be on the warring Congress — there are at least five chief ministerial candidates in the state party.

After the floods is a whole different story. Some AAP MLAs, like Kuldeep Dhaliwal from Ajnala, have been astonishing in the manner in which they have helped their fellow Punjabis. Some other AAP MLAs have barely stirred a leaf. The

Congress has been staggeringly lax, even though Rahul Gandhi came across for a few hours, rode a tractor over silt-soaked fields and cuddled a little boy who had lost his cycle in the floods. (The party bought the boy a bike.)

It is in this light that PM Modi's parsimonious Punjab flood relief announcement and the clear lack of trust between the state and the Centre should be seen. Compare this with the manna for Bihar.

The unkind would say the PM's Bihar blessing is coming just ahead of the announcement of the state poll, and therefore, before the model code of conduct kicks in. Some others would add that he and the BJP are leaving no stone unturned — Chief Minister and BJP ally Nitish Kumar is unwell, won't be CM again and so the BJP magic has to work. That Prashant Kishor of Jan Suraj may be the joker in Bihar's political pack, but his attack on BJP Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary is nothing short of lethal.

Be that as it may. The fact is that Modi has succeeded in transforming the traditional poll dynamic that has these past many decades rested on caste — he has literally forged a "women constituency" by shaping schemes like Ujjwala Yojana

and Lakhpati Didi Yojana. The BJP has unabashedly tempted women voters with sops in states going to the polls — Lado Lakshmi in Haryana, Ladki Bahin in Maharashtra, Ladli Behna in Madhya Pradesh, Mahila Samridhi Yojana in Delhi and Mahtari Vandana in Chhattisgarh.

In the 2019 General Election, for the first time ever, women edged out men in voter turnout, 67.18% vs 67.02% — in the first poll in 1952, 63% men and 47% women had voted — and an AxisMyIndia poll survey showed that 46% women compared to 44% men voted for Modi.

For tradition-bound politicians, the news has only become worse. First, AxisMyIndia found in Uttar Pradesh (2022) and Madhya Pradesh (2023) polls that more women voted for the BJP than for other political parties. Second, while 73% women said they voted in favour in BJP-aligned homes, astonishingly, even in Congress-aligned homes, 25% women reported aligning themselves in favour.

PM Modi was the first to see this hurricane coming, although it is a moot question what he's doing with the wealth of data coming in — there are only seven women out of 72 in his Council of Ministers, and only two in the Cabinet, Nirmala Sitharaman and Annpurna Devi. (The current Lok Sabha only has 74 women MPs, four short of the previous one.) It is now said that the 2023 law giving 33% quota for women in Parliament will be implemented in the 2029 election, but after a full delimitation exercise which is likely to expand the number of constituencies in the country.

Back to Bihar. The state is astir with the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) poll exercise. Political parties are putting their best foot forward. And PM Modi has launched his *Brahmastra*. Suffice to say that as the rest of the nation watches, Punjab will be watching even more closely.

#### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women. —Kofi Annan

## Myriad hues of Navratras

LT GEN KJ SINGH (RETD)

THE Indian Army believes in celebratory secularism — the troops take part in festivities together. Navratras are special for me as I was commissioned in the Rajput squadron and their religion and festivals became mine. My regiment, 63 Cavalry, has Rajput, Jat and Sikh squadrons. I grew up and studied in Rajasthan and can speak the Marwari dialect.

Navratras started with mandatory fasting on the first and last days. There was the *bali* (sacrifice of goats), executed by a single stroke of the sword. As young officers, we had to do the honours. It was a test of sorts that required mental conditioning. In my first year, I was lucky to be mentored by my senior subaltern, Lt Manbir Hundal, who always volunteered for this activity. Durga Mata was kind and I lived up to the expectations of the troops.

Puja included 'Durga stuti', a more complex form of aarti than 'Om Jai Jagdish Hare'. In a bit of mischief, troops would go silent during recitation in order to test officers. The same drill would be repeated in a gurdwara during *ardas*. *Prasad* included rum served in glasses — it used to be a Patiala peg. Most officers would reduce it to a small peg and pour the rest into a separate glass, which kept getting filled up. It used to be offered to the veteran drinkers, like the towering Gurdeep Bai. There were many Gurdeeps, with nicknames such as Mota and Kaala. This one's nickname was derived from his Army number's last two digits, 22 (*Bai* in Punjabi).

In 1993, when I returned from a UN peacekeeping mission in Angola, I found that my squadron was unhappy that the sacrifice on Durga Puja had been discontinued. Respecting the soldiers' sentiments, we decided to revive the ritual. My challenge was compounded as the only youngster around proceeded on a mandated course. I had no choice but to undertake full nine days of simple fasting. I did not let down my boys and the *bali* was blessed by Durga Mata.

Fasting takes many forms — simple (one meal), abstaining from eating grains, or not even having water. Nowadays, with grain substitutes like *kuttu* flour, the rigour of fasting has been reduced. I call it 'assisted' fasting. Once when I did it a few years ago, I ended up putting on weight.

After 're-attirement' (yes, we only re-attire rather than retire), I keep receiving calls from ex-service-men. Rajputs greet me with "Jai Mata ji ki", Jats say "Ram-Ram" and Sikhs "Sat Sri Akal". There is also "Eid ki Ram-Ram". The one I love the most is by an old head clerk: "Jai Mata ji ki, Ram-Ram, Sat Sri Akal, Jai Hind Sahib and copy to all."

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

##### Nurture vibrant young minds

Refer to 'Beyond placements': The case for social sciences in IITs; it raises a question on the kind of environment that should be provided to young students. IIT Bombay's withdrawal from an international workshop on South Asian Capitalism reminds me of a message from Swami Vivekananda: At the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, Swami Vivekananda used the story of a well-frog and a sea-frog to explain how disagreement arises from narrow-mindedness, where individuals believe their limited experience (the well) is the entirety of reality, rejecting evidence of a larger world (the sea) that contradicts their worldview. Here, IIT is creating an environment of a well for our students. Instead, we should nurture a new generation of vibrant young minds with a passion for bigger learning.

KK GARG, CHANDIGARH

##### Show strength of character

The turmoil in Ladakh is a reminder that dissent, if ignored, can quickly spiral into unrest. The loss of lives and property during the recent protests underlines the urgency for the government to engage sincerely with the representatives of Ladakh's interests. While statehood may not be feasible at present, the government must address the legitimate concerns and provide clarity on the future roadmap. Listening to the voices of dissent and accommodating them within the democratic framework is not a weakness but a strength. Ignoring or branding every protest as politically motivated only widens the trust deficit. The Centre must act with sensitivity and foresight.

NARESH KUMAR NUHAWAN, KARNAL

##### Centre cornering Ladakhis

Apropos of 'Ladakh in turmoil', the Central government must address the real issues. Cancelling the FCRA licence of Wangchuk-led NGO or accusing a political party or foreign agency of involvement will only hurt the cause of the Ladakhis who are voicing their genuine grievances. Instead of cornering the Ladakhis through coercion, the Centre should convince the protesters by spelling out the steps it intends to take. It must concede to some genuine demands that can be accepted immediately.

DV SHARMA, MUKERIAN

##### Trump's short-term optics

With reference to 'Trump at the UN'; the US President prioritises short-term optics over enduring peace. His foreign policy is hollow, self-congratulatory and lacks the nuances required for effective diplomacy. He inflames international tensions, undermines multilateral diplomacy and erodes international empathy and cooperation. Amid a complex geopolitical landscape, India is committed to improve relations with the US and strengthen global partnership. World leaders should promote cooperation among countries for strong action on climate change, peace-building and digital transformation to serve humanity.

DS KANG, HOSHIARPUR

##### Nobel for divisive tactics?

Refer to 'Trump at the UN'; peace is not achieved through self-eulogy or lofty rhetoric but through consistent, visible efforts that the world has witnessed and respects. Denying climate change, vilifying migrants and undermining the UN do not advance peace, they deepen division. True leadership confronts global challenges with dialogue, cooperation and inclusivity. Enduring peace requires humility, foresight and meaningful action. Recognition, when it comes, should be the result of merit, not the pursuit of applause.

K KUMAR, PANCHKULA

##### Pakistan's bid to shed isolation

US President Donald Trump hosted Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir at the White House on Thursday. Pakistan aims to secure US investment in its oil and gas sector, deepen security cooperation, explore a mutual defence pact with Saudi Arabia, besides pursuing business interests linked to crypto deals. For India, this underscores Pakistan's bid to shed isolation and showcase itself as a defender of Muslim nations. India must intensify its diplomatic outreach in Washington, strengthen strategic partnerships with Gulf states, highlight Pakistan's terror record and proactively counter any potential US military or financial aid to Islamabad.

RS NARULA, PATIALA



# To SIR, with love across the country



**ASHOK LAVASA**  
FORMER ELECTION  
COMMISSIONER OF INDIA

THE sense of security comes from the administrator's confidence in his system and his awareness of its vulnerability. The user's sense, however, depends on his faith in the system and a possible lack of awareness of those vulnerabilities. Sensible managers keep tackling vulnerabilities to boost their self-confidence and deal with users' apprehensions when expressed.

The ECI's latest decision of introducing the e-sign feature for online applications for voter deletion/ addition/ correction should be seen as a step in that direction, no matter how small or delayed.

While the full process will be known once it is publicly notified, it is aimed at introducing another authentication layer before such requests are considered. This is welcome, although cynics would argue that it shouldn't have taken the ECI two years to address a malpractice it took cognisance of by registering an FIR after the ECI's system successfully thwarted malicious attempts at deletion in Aland, Karnataka.

Out of 6,018 online Form 7 deletion applications, 24 were found genuine on verification and accepted, and 5,994 found incorrect and rejected.

Shouldn't the ECI have vigorously pursued its FIR and acted on its own findings without waiting to be accused of complicity? It is true that the ECI depends on the state machinery for investigating crimes and has a poor record in following up such cases. It is time the National Crime Records Bureau brought out separate data on election-related offences for the ECI to carry out a regular effective monitoring.

An electoral roll (ER) of nearly a billion people can never be flawless. The spotlight on some of the flaws was glaring, with analytical presentations pointing out irregularities and discrepancies. The ECI has been aware of some and striven to straighten the rolls continuously, pursuing the deduplication exercise for over two decades by using different software systems with some success.

In February 2025, the CEC had committed to dealing with multiple electors with the same epic number when it was pointed out by the Chief Minister of West Bengal. The vulnerability, now in the news, evidently exposed the system to manipulation.

The integrity of the ER, so vital to the right to vote, has never been questioned as much as in the recent past. The EC proclaims its commit-



**CROSS-CHECK:** The ECI should audit the existing electoral rolls thoroughly to identify discrepancies, some of which were made public by the Leader of Opposition. PTI

ment to maintaining its sanctity by removing those 'ineligible' and including those 'eligible', which is the stated intent of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in Bihar amid unprecedented din and doubt. That the notification of June 24 announcing that the SIR cannot be the template for the rest of the country is clear from the many changes made by the ECI, either on its own or due to court orders.

What should the ECI do to ensure that its nationwide SIR exercise is viewed with the sympathy and trust it had painstakingly built up until recent controversies?

Before carrying out its intended all-India SIR, the ECI should audit the existing ERs thoroughly to identify deficiencies or discrepancies,

The ECI must review its systems to identify loopholes and work on plugging them by engaging with complainants and experts.

some of which were made public by the Leader of Opposition, like 'zero' house numbers, garbled parents' names, disproportionate number staying at one address and duplicate entries.

The ECI could be aware of some more. This would give an idea of the extent of contamination and the need for purification, which can be specifically targeted during the SIR.

At the same time, complaints alleging systemic flaws must be responded to promptly by the ECI. First, by ascertaining that no damage was actually caused and then by assuring the people. Secondly, the ECI must continuously review its systems to identify loopholes and work on plugging them by engaging with complainants and experts.

Unlike in the case of Bihar, future SIRs shouldn't be predicated on ascertaining citizenship, the determination of which is clearly outside ECI's jurisdiction. That can be done as per the existing procedure of objections and inquiry as per the applicable Act.

One of the strengths of the ECI has been its well-thought-out procedures and its ability to convert them into standard operating procedures through elaborate documentation and training. The lessons from the Bihar experience, including the directions of the court and feedback of field functionaries, should be incorporated and a draft procedure prepared for future SIRs. The draft should be widely discussed with the political parties and other stakeholders before it is finalised.

This should be followed by an extended outreach, explaining the guidelines to the people through the ECI's robust SVEEP programme. The documents that the electors are expected to submit should be identified on the basis of their easy availability and adequate notice should be given before commencing the exercise in any state. Sufficient time for grievance redress should be provided after the SIR is completed. In no case, should the SIR be done where elections are imminent.

In Bihar, data was downloaded from the ECI's existing database and electors were only to sign prefilled

forms, with no instructions for corrections by the electors or the BLO, except through Form 8. That meant the discrepancies of the existing database would pass on to the new draft electoral roll. The SIR cannot achieve its purpose without a door-to-door survey with a proper record of the findings in case electors are found missing from their existing addresses.

The ECI is too vital an institution for the Indian democracy and should not expose itself to any 'bombing'. Even if such attempts can't destroy an institution built by the toil and dedication of its countless employees and field functionaries, and by the commitment and resolute leadership of some ECs, the faith of the people gets eroded by such repeated onslaughts that expose the chinks in the ECI's armour; that once shone so bright that no one looked at them.

Legendary cricket umpire Dickie Bird, who passed away recently, was known for his fiercely neutral umpiring and friendly manners. Known for keeping lots of chewing gums for players, he also kept 'a pen knife, a spare rag in case the ball gets wet, a spare cricket ball, a spare bale, scissors, plaster in case someone grazes their arm, needle, cotton', as he told *BBC Radio*. Dickie's decisions, even if not always right, were accepted by the players because they never doubted his intent or sense of fairness.

# The true measure of growth is job creation, not just GDP



**ARUN MAIER**  
FORMER MEMBER,  
PLANNING COMMISSION

INDIA ranks the highest in the world in the Innovation Efficiency Index, according to WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organisation). But it ranks a lowly 38th in WIPO's Global Innovation Index, in which the first five countries are Switzerland, Sweden, the US, the Republic of Korea and Singapore (China is tenth). Innovation Efficiency is a measure of the outcomes produced from all the inputs provided for innovation.

The Global Innovation Index is the simple average of two sub-indices: one measuring a country's performance on inputs, i.e. how much inputs it provides for innovation and the second, its performance on outputs. Therefore, a country which provides more inputs can rank high on the Global Innovation Index even if it ranks low on the output side.

Innovation inputs in the WIPO index include R&D expenditure, researchers per capita, quality of top universities, venture capital deals and market capitalisation.

Among the innovation outputs are patent applications, scientific papers published and high-tech exports.

The WIPO's Global Innovation Index uses a resource-intensive model of innovation for ranking countries, with countries that spend more ranking higher.

India must spend more to climb WIPO's innovation rankings. It is already the highest, and has been for 15 years, in the Innovation Efficiency Index, which measures the ability to get more outcomes from fewer resources, which is a better measure of innovativeness.

When I began consulting for automobile companies in the US in 1990, my partners and I made a bet about which automobile companies would survive in the next millennium. Their thesis was that since a diversity of new products would be required to compete in a globalising economy and new product development requires substantial investment, only companies with the most financial resources would survive. Therefore, only the largest companies — GM, Ford, VW, Toyota, and possibly Nissan — would survive.

However, I bet that the small Honda would be a winner because Honda was more innovative, whereas GM would try to spend its way out of trouble. The bets were 10 to one against me. I won: Honda continued to expand in the new millennium while GM teetered on bankruptcy.



Growth, innovation, productivity and efficiency are fundamental concepts in economics and management. Economists and management consultants rank countries and companies by their performances in these parameters to spur others to catch up. More of whatever is being measured is presumed to be better and those behind are advised to adopt the practices of those ahead of them — without analysing what is being measured.

This is the fundamental problem with ranking countries by their GDP. GDP measures the size, not the health of an economy.

The health of any complex system — a human body or a nation's economy — cannot be measured by a single index. If the health of a human body was assessed only by its size and weight, the

India leads the world in innovation efficiency but lags in global rankings that reward resource-heavy spending models.

most obese persons should be the healthiest, whereas they are often the least healthy. The overall health of a human body depends on the health of many sub-systems within it — the cardiovascular, digestive, musculoskeletal and brain systems, etc.

All systems must be sufficiently healthy to keep the body well. If even one fails and the rest are in a perfect condition, the body ceases to function. Therefore, the average of their separate health indices is a dangerously misleading calculation of the system's overall health.

Weak subsystems should be cared for on priority, rather than increasing the size of the whole with the expectation that more growth will take care of everything within.

Productivity and efficiency are similar concepts. They are ratios of the amount of

output from an input. The output (numerator) is what one needs more of at the time — in an economy or a company. The input (denominator) in the ratio should be what is the scarcest resource.

A universal measure applied to measure productivity is the total output produced by the number of human beings in a country or company. Productivity can be increased by innovations in production processes, to get more from the same number of people.

Or, an easier way to increase the measured productivity is to reduce the number of people employed in the production process. The use of more technology (automation and AI) enables replacement of human bodies and minds within the organisation.

Companies have the option of reducing the number of people they employ to improve their productivity by this measure. Those they discharge will find employment in other companies, they hope, or will be taken care of by the government's welfare programmes. At the same time, they don't want to be taxed to provide governments with resources for public welfare.

Compared to other countries, India has more human beings for whom it must provide employment and incomes. The people of India are expected to provide the 'demographic dividend' to its economic growth. Which they can, provided their incomes increase, and with

that, the overall consumption and size of the internal market — which will attract more investments in the economy.

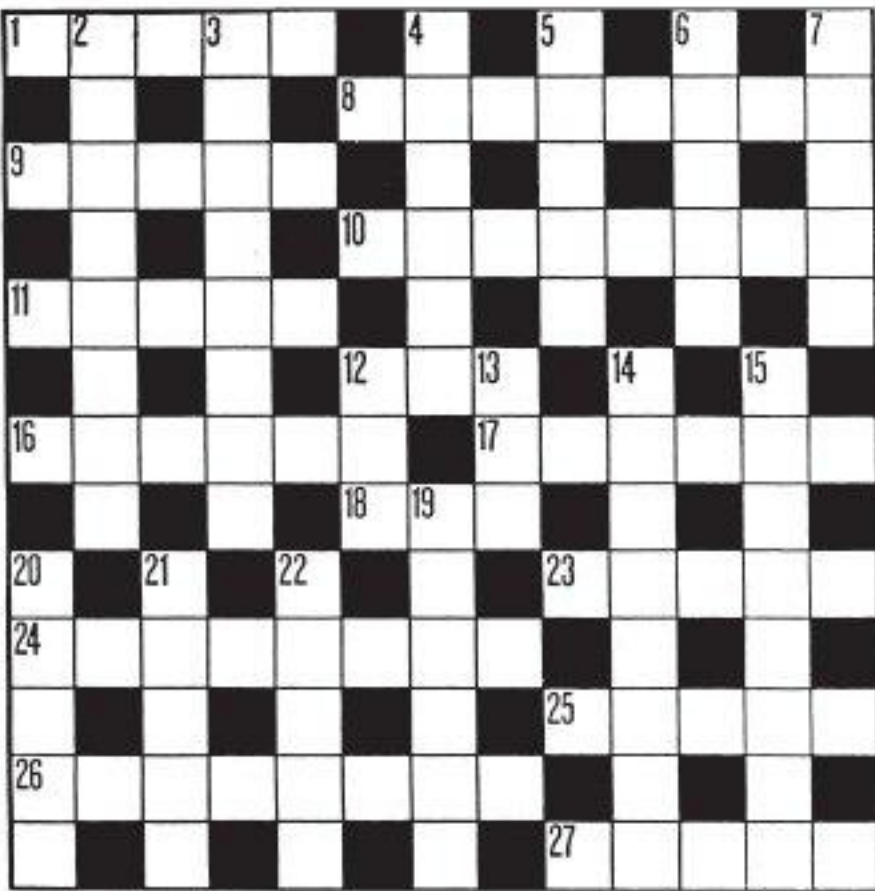
The right measure of productivity of businesses in India should be their output divided by the amount of capital they use. Human beings are aplenty in India; resources of financial capital are relatively scarce. Businesses in India should rely less on capital and employ more people. They must nurture the growth of human beings, not just profits.

India's economic development must be measured by how many good jobs each unit of GDP is creating (in which India is performing badly so far) rather than by the gross size of its GDP.

More wealth must be created at the bottom of India's socioeconomic pyramid rather than more wealth at the top, with the expectation that it will trickle down in the future to improve the lives of the masses below. Wealth and income inequalities are increasing in India. This is not a sustainable model of growth.

Our policymakers must rethink concepts of growth, productivity and innovation. They can learn a lot about low-cost, and less high-tech, healthy growth and also about frugal innovation from within the country instead of slavishly adopting the models of the West. The West must change its ways, too, to make global growth less resource-intensive, more inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

## QUICK CROSSWORD



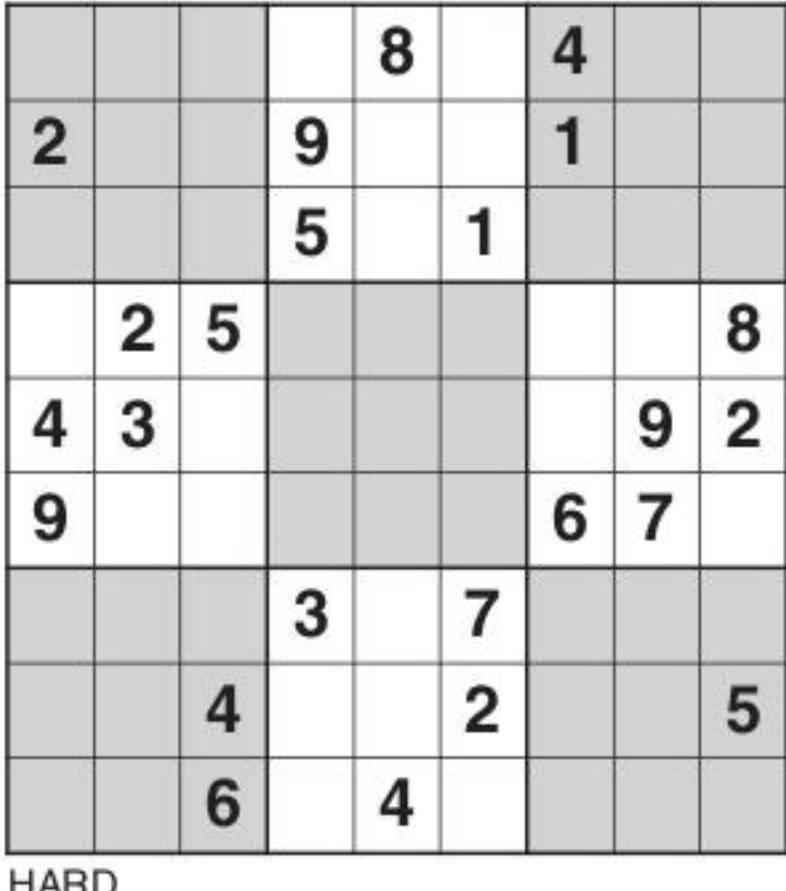
- ACROSS**
- West African country (5)
  - Count for nothing (3,2,3)
  - Motive (5)
  - Get along well (3,2,3)
  - Disreputable (5)
  - Understand (3)
  - Wonderful example (6)
  - Even though (6)
  - Up to now (3)
  - Minor side road (5)
  - Reactionary minority (4,4)
  - Slow-moving person (5)
  - Adjust very precisely (4,4)
  - East African country (5)
- DOWN**
- Expression of agreement (4,4)
  - Sudden plunge (8)
  - Volcanic rock used as abrasive (6)
  - To loose (5)
  - Aviator (5)
  - Treat as a god (5)
  - Wily (3)
  - Take a meal (3)
  - State of temporary disuse (8)
  - Loud laughter (8)
  - Deviating from accepted standard (6)
  - To fret (5)
  - An eccentric (5)
  - Keenly perceptive (5)

**Yesterday's solution**

**Across:** 1 High and dry, 6 Sour, 10 Solid, 11 Off colour, 12 Disprove, 13 Huron, 15 Realist, 17 Torment, 19 Without, 21 Budding, 22 Burma, 24 Insomnia, 27 Advertise, 28 Giant, 29 Kale, 30 On the cheap.

**Down:** 1 Hush, 2 Gallivant, 3 Add up, 4 Drop out, 5 Reflect, 7 Odour, 8 Raring to go, 9 Bothered, 14 Draw a blank, 16 Idolatry, 18 Eliminate, 20 Tuition, 21 Beseech, 23 Revel, 25 Magic, 26 Step.

## SU DO KU



**YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION**

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

**CALENDAR**

**SEPTEMBER 27, 2025, SATURDAY**

■ Shaka Samvat	1947
■ Aashwin Shaka	5
■ Aashwin Parvatisht	12
■ Hijari	1447
■ Shukla Paksha Tithi 5, up to 12:04 pm	
■ Priti Yoga up to 11:46 pm	
■ Anuradha Nakshatra up to 1:08 pm	
■ Moon in Scorpio sign	
■ Gandmoola start 1.08 am	

## FORECAST

SUNSET:	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	18:13 HRS
SUNRISE:	06:14 HRS		
CITY	MAX	MIN	
Chandigarh	35	24	
New Delhi	35	25	
Amritsar	35	24	
Bathinda	35	23	
Jalandhar	35	25	
Ludhiana	36	24	
Bhiwani	37	26	
Hisar	38	23	
Sirsa	36	25	
Dharamsala	—	—	
Manali	—	—	
Shimla	—	—	
Srinagar	30	12	
Jammu	34	23	
Kargil	24	07	
Leh	21	05	
Dehradun	33	23	
Mussoorie	24	17	

TEMPERATURE IN °C